



REAPER

FURY VIPERS MC SERIES BOOK EIGHT

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BROOKE SUMMERS

REAPER

FURY VIPERS MC: NY CHAPTER

BOOK 8

BROOKE SUMMERS

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CONTENT

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY.

T here are elements and themes within this book that some readers might find extremely upsetting.

Please click [here](#) for that list of potentially harmful topics. Please heed these as this book contains some heavy topics that some readers could find damaging.

PROLOGUE

REAPER

Five years ago

I watch as Shadow flirts with Serenity. Those two need to fuck already. Watching them together, it's clear they want one another. I'm the type of man who's impulsive and reckless. I've always been that way. I'll do what I want and then deal with the fallout. Shadow, however, is calculating, always assessing the situation.

"Jesus," Preacher groans. "They need to get a damn room, 'cause that shit's makin' me horny."

I chuckle. It's always good to have Preach around. The man is without a doubt the closest person I have to family. We both joined the Fury Vipers MC not long after we turned eighteen. We both came from different parts of the country but ended up in New York. Back then, Jaws was president, and he sold the two of us on the better life. He wasn't wrong in many aspects. Being a member of the Vipers is what we both needed. It's who we are. The Vipers are home, and this is our family. But Jaws was a fuck head. He was a slimy bastard, and he betrayed us.

"I'm sure there's a bathroom stall with your name on it," I quip.

Preacher's eyes dance with laughter. "Pretty sure there are two. Besides, I've got my gaze firmly on that shithead," he says, his voice growing darker.

I don't need to turn to know that he's talking about Larry Stenson. That fucker is always around. No matter where we are, he's there. It's fucking grating on each and every one of us. He's here for Preacher and I want to know why.

"Any idea what he's doing here?" I ask, hoping he'll tell me.

He sighs, running his hand through his long hair. “Pretty sure I do,” he says thickly. “Got into a bar fight a couple years back. Hurt a guy pretty bad.”

I nod, remembering it happening. It wasn’t as though he set out to get into a fight. The asshole kept coming at him, taunting Preach into fighting him. There’s only so much a man can take before he snaps, and that night, the asshole realized what happens when you fuck with a Fury Viper member. Preach lost his shit and let the asshole have it.

“Did he die?” I ask, not remembering what happened to the fucker.

He shakes his head. “Nope,” he grunts. “He’s still not recovered from the injuries.” He turns his gaze to Larry and glares at him. “Seems his brother wants revenge.”

My jaw clenches. “Preach,” I say low. The man has felt guilty for what he did that night to Larry’s brother. He’s felt as though he needs to atone for it. That’s down to his fucked-up parents and the shit they spewed to him when he was a kid. They’re religious, and they always made sure that whenever one of their kids messed up, they paid for their mistakes. It was cruel and brutal punishment for a young child. It’s hard to forget the lessons we’re taught by our parents, and I know that he thinks about it and his family a lot. He’s a good man, still not as jaded as the rest of us, and I hope to fucking God that he never gets to be.

“Reap,” he replies with a sigh.

“I get it, man, I do, but going over to that asshole isn’t going to help. He’s here for a fight. Why else would he be here? You want that fucker to end up like his brother?” I growl, and he shakes his head. “Then don’t go fucking near him,” I warn.

It’s got to be a set-up. Why else would the bastard be watching us? He’s waiting for Preach to lose it. No doubt so he can send my brother to prison. It’s not going to happen. Preach didn’t go down for protecting himself against the asshole’s brother; he ain’t going to now.

He downs his drink and sighs. “Fuck, you’re right.”

“Go,” I urge him. “Work it off in the bathroom. You know you’ve found a woman you want.”

He chuckles. “Ass,” he says, but without heat.

I was right. He had found the woman he wanted. Within seconds, the two of them are heading toward the back of the club.

A woman slides into Preach’s seat, and I raise a brow.

“Hey,” she says with a smile. She’s gorgeous. Her eyes are beyond beautiful. They’re a mix of green and blue with a hue of brown. I don’t think I’ve seen eyes like that before. “You’re Reaper, right?”

My brows practically hit my hairline. “You know me, little girl?”

I watch as those magnificent eyes of hers narrow. “No, but my girls sure as hell like your guys.”

I chuckle. Preach and Shadow are with her friends. “Why not make it three out of three.”

She sighs. “God, you’re crazy. Sorry, I hate to burst your bubble, but I’m engaged.”

Pain lances through my chest, and I beat it back. What the fuck? Why should I give a fuck if the woman—someone I don’t know—is engaged? I shrug, trying to play it off. “Wouldn’t be the first woman I’ve fucked who’s got a man.”

She shakes her head, disappointment etched on her face. “I’m not like that. I wouldn’t do that to someone.”

“Then leave,” I snap, noticing that fucker Larry heading toward the exit. I watch pain flicker through her eyes. “Now.”

She holds her hands up, scoots out of the seat, and moves away. “I’m sorry for upsetting you,” she says softly. “I hope you have a lovely evening.”

Ms. Prim and Proper walks away with her head held high, and my chest tightens. I’m such a fucking asshole. I hurt her and I didn’t mean to, but the woman’s engaged and there’s nothing I can do about it.

Larry grins as he exits the club. I fucking hate that slimy bastard. He’s definitely up to something. I just wish we knew what it was. I fucking hate being in the dark.

My gaze moves around the club as I try to find Ms. Prim and Proper, but I come up empty. It’s as though she vanished. Fuck, I really should have apologized. It’s too late now. She’s gone.

Walking out of the club, I’m wondering where the fuck Preacher went. After he got his rocks off in the bathroom, he came back and we drank some more, and then he just disappeared. The woman who sat down beside me never resurfaced, and my chest has been tight ever since. I don’t understand my

reaction. I've fucked countless women. I've shot some down and told them to get the fuck gone, but none have left me feeling like this—like she means something. I shake my head. It's fucking stupid. She's getting married and I don't do attachments. I've seen what it's like and I'm not going down that road.

I turn the corner and come to a halt as I see the scene in front of me. The light from a nearby streetlight shines into the alleyway, giving me enough brightness to see what's happening. Preacher's standing over someone with a fucking tire iron. The iron has blood dripping from it, and my brother's breathing hard. I step forward, noting that Preach is standing over someone. Sirens blare in the distance. I have no doubt that they're coming this way.

"What happened?" I demand, needing to know what the fuck went wrong. He left me not even five minutes ago.

"This fuck was waitin' for me," he says, kicking the man on the floor in the ribs, causing him to cry out in pain. "Tried to swing at my head with this," Preach snarls. "Fucker's so damn stupid. He thought I didn't know he was waitin'."

I shake my head. "The fuck, man?" I ask, wondering what the hell is wrong with him. "Preach, brother, I fuckin' told you." I knew this bastard was going to be setting him up. "You hear that, brother?" I snap. "Do you?"

He takes a deep breath and listens. "Shit," he says, his eyes widening with realization. "The cops are comin'."

I move toward him. The fucker on the floor is almost unrecognizable. His face has been bashed in, his head too. By the looks of it, his skull is cracked. Fuck.

"Preach," I hiss. "Give me the iron," I tell him as I reach for the asshole lying on the floor. I need to ensure that he's conscious. My fingers find his pulse and I feel a faint beat of his heart. He's alive, but I'm not sure for how much longer.

"Go," I tell Preach through clenched teeth. "Go back to the clubhouse. Stay the fuck out of the cops' path. Shower and burn your clothes."

His jaw clenches. "The fuck are you doin', man?" he hisses. "You can't do this."

"Preach," I hiss. "You've fucked up. You've got history with this asshole and his family. You and I both know that the moment you're arrested, shit's going to go south. Get the fuck out of here and shower. Then burn those fuckin' clothes."

He hesitates.

“Go,” I snarl. “Fuckin’ go. Now.”

I know what’ll happen if Preach is the one who’s caught. He’ll end up serving a lot of fucking time.

He stumbles backward, moving toward his bike. His eyes are wide, and I can see the pain in them. My brother is pissed. He’s also angry at me for doing what I’ve gotta do. But he’s my brother. I’ll take the fucking hit.

I watch as he climbs onto his bike and takes off. I’m able to breathe a little easier when he does. I reach for my cell and make a call. I need some tapes deleted. No one can know that it was Preach who did this. No fucking way.

CHAPTER 1

REAPER

ONE YEAR AGO

Fuck. It feels so fucking good to be out of that motherfucking hell hole. Four years I served in prison for that fucking night. Four damn years. But it was better than Preacher being inside. From what my attorney said, as I had no prior convictions, I was given a lighter sentence. Four years was light, according to my attorney. They thought I'd be looking at ten years given how serious the assault on that asshole was. But he's alive, and that's why I didn't end up doing life. Had the fucker died, I'd have been fucked. But as it stands, he's alive and doing well. He just can't remember that night.

My feet move me toward the man standing beside an SUV with a big old grin on his face. I'm surprised Preach isn't here. I had expected him to be. Then again, I shouldn't have. The man never once paid me a visit during the four years I was here. I'm pissed, and when I find him, we're going to have words.

"Good to have you home, brother," Shadow says as he pulls me into a one-armed hug. "Been too fuckin' long."

I chuckle. Ain't that the motherfucking truth. Too damn long.

"Where's the booze?" I ask. It's been a long fucking four years, and I'll be damned if I'm not celebrating being home.

Shadow grins. "Don't be an impatient fuck," he snaps. "Gotta wait till you get back to the clubhouse."

I smirk. I've never been one for patience. That's just not me. I climb into the SUV as Shadow slides into the driver's seat.

"Ask me," he says after a few minutes of silence.

"What's goin' on, Shadow? Preach hasn't been to visit and he's not here. What the fuck?"

He shakes his head. "Brother, trust me, we're all pissed at him for that shit, but the truth of the matter is, he's drowning in guilt. Has been for the past four years. You know what happened when he beat Jerry to a pulp, and then he did the same to the man's brother. You took the rap for him, something that we all appreciate. You didn't have to do that. You shouldn't have had to do that."

I lift my shoulders carelessly. "It was that or Preach goin' to jail. Had he gone instead of me, he'd have been serving a fucking long sentence, brother. He'd have gone down for at least ten years, if not more."

Shadow nods. "Know that," he mutters. "Preach is Preach, brother. He's got a bleeding heart. Doesn't mean it's bad, just means he's different."

"What would you have done had it been Storm?"

Storm and Shadow are practically brothers. They joined the Vipers together, and from what I know, they lived together as kids. Not sure what happened. That's not my business. But whatever it was, it brought the two of them together.

"I'd have done the same as you did. I'd have taken the rap. That all being said, Preach knew that asshole wanted a fight, and he gave him one. He should have walked the fuck away."

I nod in agreement. "We would have dealt with it at a different time. That cunt set Preach up, and he fell for it."

I don't give a fuck about doing the time. It's over and done with. What I do give a fuck about is Preacher letting his guilt eat away at him. The man needs to sort his shit out. No one died, but the way he's carrying on, they may as well have.

We arrive at the clubhouse, and I notice there's a fuck of a lot of cars. I grin. The brothers and old ladies went all out and threw me a party. I rub my hands together in glee. Now this is a fucking welcome home.

I enter the clubhouse and cheers ring out, everyone shouting, "Welcome home."

I notice the drinks are already flowing as Shadow claps me on the back. "Welcome home, brother. It's been a fuckin' long time."

I smile. It fucking has. Four years and it's as though nothing has changed. I look around and see the faces of my brothers and their women. They've all been to visit with me, taking it in turns to come.

The women rush at me, all wrapping their arms around me. I grin, my gaze searching for my brothers as I hold them tight. "Now this is a welcome

home,” I say.

“Get the fuck off my woman, Reap,” Mayhem snarls.

The ladies pull back, all grinning at me.

“Welcome home, Reaper,” Andromeda says with that raspy voice of hers. “We’ve got your room ready for you. There’s enough drink to keep you boys going until morning and there’s food to feed the five thousand,” she says with a grin.

Andromeda is Ace’s old lady. Being the old lady of the prez puts her at a higher ranking than the rest of the old ladies, but Andromeda is probably one of the sweetest women you’ll ever meet. She’d never use that rank against anyone. No doubt her and Octavia have been working their asses off getting everything ready for me.

“I appreciate your hard work, ladies,” I murmur as Kinsley presses a kiss against my cheek. “How you doin’, Kins?”

She’s Ace’s sister and a biker brat through and through. She grew up in this club, but unfortunately for Kinsley, her father was a cunt, and she suffered at his hands. Thankfully, she has us and Stag, and she’s now thriving.

“I’m good, Reap. Even better now that you’re home,” she tells me with a smile. The darkness that plagued her for years isn’t present in her eyes anymore. Being home with us is where she belongs, where she’s always belonged.

I glance around the room, my gaze searching for my brother, but to no avail.

“He’s drunk and sleeping it off,” Kinsley whispers quietly to me. “He’s a fucking wreck, Reap.”

I shake my head. Christ, it’s worse than I thought. “I’ll straighten him out.”

She laughs. “You’re the only man who ever could. Go easy on him, though. It’s not easy living with guilt.”

I sigh. “I know, but I also know that the shit he’s got runnin’ through his head is bullshit. If I could get my hands on his parents, I’d fuckin’ kill them.”

She nods in agreement. “I’m right there with you. Those assholes have damaged him far more than he’ll ever let anyone see.” She sighs. “But you’re home, and right now, we’re celebrating that. Go have fun, enjoy your evening.”

I see Pepper sauntering toward me. “I fully intend to,” I tell Kins with a

wicked smile.

She shakes her head. “Careful with that one,” Kins warns. “She’s gone crazy since you’ve been gone.”

“Noted,” I say, knowing that right now, it’s been fucking four years since I’ve had sex, and once I get enough booze in me to party, I’ll be fucking Pepper until I pass out.

She shakes her head. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” she tells me with a laugh. “I’m happy you’re home, Reap.”

Same. It’s so fucking good to be home.

I wake up to a pounding headache and hands roaming my naked torso. I blink at the harsh sunlight that’s spilling into my room and mutter a curse when I see Pepper peering up at me with a needy look in her eyes. I ended up fucking her twice last night and the woman got needy as hell. She clung to me almost as though she belonged to me. It pissed me the fuck off, and I told her to cut it out. She did, and yet somehow, she’s in my room. Naked.

“The fuck?” I snarl as I twist off the bed and reach for my pants. “What the fuck are you doin’ here? Where the fuck are your clothes?”

I don’t do needy bitches, and I certainly don’t want another round. I have shit to do, and that includes reaming out Preacher’s ass. The fucker didn’t come to the party at fucking all last night and I was pissed. Now I’m beyond that.

“Get the fuck out of here, Pepper, and don’t come near me again.”

She pouts at me, her eyes studying my face. Whatever the fuck she sees in my expression is enough for her to nod and pick up her clothes. She scurries out of my room, clutching her clothes to her body.

Christ. I need a fucking shower and some food.

An hour later, I burst into Preacher’s room. I’ve left him long enough. Hell, the brothers have left him long enough to ride this shit out. It stops now. Opening his door, I smell alcohol, along with a mustiness. It’s time for this asshole to get his shit together.

He’s passed out on the bed, an empty bottle of whisky on the floor. I cringe when I see the number of empty cans and bottles of alcohol scattered on the ground. Christ.

I turn on my heel and go in search of some back up. This shit's about to get messy. But it needs to be done. I enter the kitchen and see both Octavia and Andromeda, along with Ace, Digger, and Shadow. "You five got a minute?" I ask.

Ace is already on his feet and Shadow's grinning.

"It's about damn time," Ace mutters. "No matter how many times I speak with him, he shuts me down and tells me he's fine."

"He's far fuckin' from it. Girls, I need your help cleaning his room. It's fuckin' disgustin'."

Octavia nods as she reaches beneath the kitchen sink and grabs the cleaning supplies. "Call us when you have him in the shower," she says softly, a small smile playing on her lips. "He's not going to like it."

I shrug. "Tough shit. The asshole needs to sort his shit out and it's time to do that."

"Good luck," Andromeda says.

Ace, Shadow, Digger, and I walk into Preach's room. Digger mutters a curse when the smell hits him. "Fuckin' hell."

"Dig," Ace says. "Get the shower started. Thankfully, he's in his underpants, so we can throw him into the shower. No doubt he's so fuckin' passed out that he won't even feel us liftin' him."

Ace is right. It takes us ten minutes to lift him and put him into the shower. The girls are already cleaning, throwing the empty bottles into the trash and changing his bedding. I'm not sure when the last time he cleaned his shit was. His room is fucking rancid.

"The fuck?" Preach screams as the water cascades down on him. "Fucking assholes," he snarls. "What the fuck are you doing?"

"You need to get showered," I hiss at him. "Once you've done that, we're goin' to talk. You're done hidin', Preach. It's time enough to talk. Shower first, brother, then we'll have the conversation."

The anger seeps from his face and embarrassment floods his cheeks, but thankfully, he nods, and I know he'll do as I say. I'm pissed that my brothers let him get this bad. They should have known he was sinking. They should have done something.

Forty minutes later, Preach comes into Ace's office. The women are still cleaning his room. It already looks a hundred times better. I'm just hoping they can get the stench out of it.

"I'm sorry," he says, running his hand through his hair. "I fucked up,

brother. I really did.”

I don't say anything. Ace asked me to let him speak first.

“We let you down, brother,” Ace says quietly. “We should have helped you.”

“You couldn't,” Preach says. “I wouldn't have let you. I've got demons that chase me, Prez, and those demons have plagued me for years now.”

I nod. “Time to sort those demons out, brother. You're not who those cunts tell you you are. You're a Viper, Preach. That's exactly who you are. Remember that.”

He pulls in a ragged breath. “I know.”

“Good, 'cause you're an ass,” I hiss. “Did four years and not a fuckin' word, brother. You're my brother, closer than fuckin' blood, and not a fuckin' word.”

Ace grins. “That's fucked up, Preach.”

He holds his hands up. “I know. I'm sorry. I couldn't bring myself to face you. I truly am sorry.”

I nod. “Apology accepted. Now, I'm out. I'm goin' to be ensurin' that you've got your shit sorted. I'm not goin' to let you drown again.”

Preach chuckles. “Wouldn't expect anythin' less from you, man. You're an asshole, but I know you're just doin' it to help.”

I smirk. “Or payback,” I quip, and watch his shoulders shake as he starts to laugh. “Now, how about you tell me what the fuck I've missed. Why is Pepper actin' as though she belongs to me?”

Ace and Preacher share a look.

“We believe that they're jealous,” Ace tells me. “That they want to become an old lady. And they're tryin' to do everythin' they can to achieve that.”

“Fuck,” I snap. “Who's they?”

“Bubbles and Pepper,” Preach hisses. “We're not sure which one of them is worse. Both are drivin' us insane, and I know that a lot of the brothers aren't going anywhere near them 'cause of it.”

I grit my teeth. Fuck. “Someone should have told me before I fucked the crazy bitch last night.”

Ace's lips twitch. “Twice from what I recall.”

I flip him off. “Anythin' else that I've missed?”

They shake their heads. “It's been quiet, brother. A little too quiet,” Ace sighs.

I laugh. “You miss the action. Why not do somethin’ then? Have you thought more about expandin’? I know before I was sent away, we spoke about opening bars and clubs.”

It’s a great way for us to make more money, and a bar is something we can’t go wrong with. We’re known for our parties and how wild they can be. If we opened a bar, we’d have people flocking to it.

“Not yet. Now that you’re back though, it’s a good thing to get back into the mix. It’s gonna be a lot of work, especially with the auto shop bringin’ in more clients than ever before,” Ace tells me. “When you’re ready to get back to work, let me know. I’ve got a few people who need help rebuildin’ their cars.”

I nod. “I’m good to start next week.” I’ve always loved rebuilding shit. Since as far back as I can remember, I would always pull something apart just to see how to put it back together. Cars are no different. I learned from the age of seven upward about cars and how they work. My uncle—the only family member I liked—taught me everything I know, and now it’s something I love doing.

“Good, then we’ll call church tomorrow and put it to the brothers,” Ace says. “Go,” he tells me. “Get out of here. Enjoy your day before work begins.”

I chuckle as Preach and I leave his office. The reason he kicked us out was for Andromeda, who’s standing outside waiting on him. Prez is about to have himself some fun.

CHAPTER 2

ESME

I hear keys jingling in the door, and my body tightens. I hate this time of day. I'm never able to gauge his moods before he walks in the door. He could be the happiest man in the world, and we'd have an amazing night. When he's in a foul mood, it can become one of the worst times of my life.

Four years ago, I was on cloud nine. I was beyond happy. I finally thought I had found my happily ever after. But now, it's become something I dread. The thought of marrying my fiancé turns my stomach and makes me feel claustrophobic. I'm scared for what the future will bring.

The door slams shut, and I release a soft sigh. He's pissed. This is something that happens more often than not.

"Hey," I greet softly, knowing that if I don't, he'll lose his mind and start an argument. "Dinner is about to be served. Would you like to get changed before I serve up?"

I'm not sure when I became this woman, when I turned into a housewife. It's not who I am. I'm messy, chaotic, and free-spirited. Or I was. Now, everything must be in the right place. I haven't dyed my hair a fun color for the past four years, and I used to change it every other month. I'm drowning and there's no way out.

"The fuck?" he snarls as he enters the kitchen. "Seriously, Esmerelda? You're joking with me, right?"

I blink once as I continue to stir the bolognese sauce that I made from scratch. "What?" I ask, wondering what the hell I've done wrong.

"I've been at work all day. I come home and my dinner's not even on the fucking table? Christ, Esmerelda, you're a fucking bitch, you know that?"

Tears sting the back of my eyes. God, why is he always such a dick?

"I was working too," I tell him, trying to keep the anger from my voice. That doesn't do anyone any good. Talking back to him just angers him. It infuriates him.

"Told you already, bitch," he snarls. "You shouldn't be working. Once we're married, you won't be."

My heart starts to pound and my palms become sweaty at the mere thought of having to give up my job. I worked so hard to become a teacher, a job that I've dreamed of doing since I was a little girl. I don't want to become a stay-at-home wife or mom. I want to be able to continue teaching. Harry knows that. We spoke at length over the years about what each of us wanted from our lives, and he used to be so supportive. But the moment I said yes to marrying him, he changed. This shit has become a nightmare, and I'm barely able to breathe around the fear that everything I've worked hard for is going to be destroyed the moment I say, 'I do'.

I pull the sauce off the heat and turn to face him. His once gentle face has a scowl, his eyes narrowed as he looks at me, and not for the first time, I wonder why he wants to marry me when it seems that he despises me. "Dinner is ready," I tell him as I plaster on a fake smile.

His lip curls at the corner. "Christ, Esmerelda, what the fuck are you wearing? Did you leave the house looking like that?"

I glance down at my floral print dress, one that I've had for months and have worn multiple times. "What's wrong with it?"

"It's hideous. You look like you've put on at least fifteen pounds."

I swallow hard. This isn't the first time he's commented on my weight. It also won't be the last.

"Christ, Esmerelda, why can't you be like Natalie? Hmm?"

That sickening feeling in my gut starts to rise. Natalie is his newest co-worker. He has a new 'flavor' of the month every month. He loves to tell me how I'm not like the other women in his office, and he tells me what I'm doing wrong.

"You're so fucking disgusting," he snaps. "I can't bear to look at you." He turns on his heel and walks out of the kitchen.

A lone tear falls as I continue to serve the dinner. I don't sob. I used to, but I'm so used to his words that they don't hurt as much as they once did. I'll never be good enough, never be exactly who he wants.

Some days are the worst, but when the good days come, they're the best I've ever had. He does love me, that I believe. I just feel as though he's

stressed and he's taking it out on the person closest to him.

I bring the dinner plates to the dining room and set them down. I take a seat and wait for him to return. My heart beats wildly as I wait to see if he's calmed down or if he's still as wound up as he was before.

Five minutes later and he's walking into the dining room, his attention on his cell as he types furiously on it. "Good to see that dinner is ready," he says snarkily before taking a seat. He raises his head and looks over at me. "The carbs from the pasta aren't good for you. You need to go on a diet."

I stare at the dinner I made, the one I've spent the past twenty minutes making, and wonder what the fuck happened to the man I fell in love with. Where's the kind-hearted man who used to shower me with compliments and tell me that he loved me more than anything? That man would never tell me that I was overweight or needed to go on a diet. I'm a size twelve. I used to love my body. I was confident in who I was. Now, I hate to look at myself in the mirror.

"The fuck?" he yells, and I shrink back in fear as I turn to face him. His eyes are narrowed and filled with anger, his jaw clenched, and his hands are balled into fists on the table. "Can't you fucking do anything right?" he demands. "Christ, Esmerelda, you really are fucking useless. You can't even make a simple meal properly."

I watch in complete horror as he lifts his plate and throws it at the wall, the porcelain smashing as it connects with the hard surface. The bolognaise sauce splatters against the white paint as the food and broken plate clatter to the floor.

He pushes away from the table and gets to his feet. "I can't even look at you right now," he snaps.

I stay seated, my hands shaking and my heart breaking. Why did he do that?

I hear the front door slam shut and my body jumps in fear. God. What the hell is going on? When did my life become this messed up?

TWO DAYS LATER

"Hey," I greet Harry as I enter the house. He's sitting on the sofa, watching TV while on his cell. The moment I greet him, his gaze turns to me and narrows.

It's been so good to get out and spend some time with my best friend, Serenity. I love that woman. She's the greatest friend a girl could ever ask for, and she's the one who is always here to cheer me up.

"Where the hell have you been?" Harry snaps, getting to his feet.

My entire body slumps forward. He's in one of his moods again. "I had a coffee date with Serenity," I tell him. "I hadn't seen her in a while. It was just a coffee and lunch."

He moves toward me. "How the fuck am I supposed to believe that shit?" he snarls. "Hmm? Tell me, Esmerelda, how? Are you fucking cheating on me?"

I rear backward, shocked and appalled that he'd accuse me of something like that. "No. God, I have never cheated on you."

He reaches for me, his fingers digging into my cheeks. "You had better keep it that way. Don't think I won't find out if you were."

I whimper as his fingers dig deeper into my flesh. I cry out softly as he releases me. "I haven't," I whisper, tears slowly falling down my face.

"Good. Now where's all this money coming from? Hmm? How were you able to pay for coffee and lunch?"

I swallow hard. Shit, I fucked up. I should have never said that.

"You're hiding money from me?" he accuses. "You know that we're saving for our home and the wedding. Why are you spending my money?"

It's not his. It's mine. I earned it. I worked my ass off for it. I put the majority of my earnings into a joint bank account. I never told him that I always keep some behind.

"You stupid bitch," he hisses, spittle flying everywhere. "You really think you're slick spending my money?" He shakes his head. "Mom was right. You're nothing but a fucking gold-digging whore."

"What?" I breathe, unable to believe what I'm hearing.

His chuckle is anything but pleasant. "You heard. Now, I'm warning you,

Esmerelda. You and I both know that you'll never get better than me. If I were you, I'd lose weight and start realizing that I'm the only man who would ever put up with your bullshit. You're worthless. You bring nothing to this relationship. Hell, you're not even that great at sex."

My tears fall harder. I'm barely able to breathe through the sobs that wrack through my body. He's never been this awful before.

"Clean yourself up," he sneers. "You're pathetic." He reaches for his keys on the coffee table and pushes past me. "Don't wait up," he taunts when he reaches the door. "I'm going out."

"Where? With who?" I ask, hating that I'm sounding needy.

His eyes narrow into near slits. "Not this fucking shit again. What the hell, Esmerelda? You never trust me."

"You're leaving again. Every night this week you've spent away from the house. You come home past two a.m. and act as though nothing has happened. If you're not cheating on me, what are you doing?"

His laughter reverberates around the house, and he doesn't answer the question. The door slams behind him and my sobs wrack harder. God, why does he hate me so much? I haven't done anything but be loving and supportive of him and he treats me as though I'm nothing but dirt beneath his feet. He flaunts women in my face, acting as though I'm the one who's crazy.

I don't know if I can do this any longer. He's driving me insane. He's making me feel as though I'm not good enough anymore. I'm losing myself even more every day.

But I'm stuck. I have no savings, no home, nothing. How do I escape when I have nothing at all?

CHAPTER 3

REAPER

SIX MONTHS AGO

I drum my fingers against the table as everyone starts to file into the room. Everyone is wearing an apprehensive look as Prez called church and none of us know what the hell happened to have him gather everyone.

“What the fuck is going on? The old ladies look as though they’re about to kill someone and Prez doesn’t look much better,” Storm says as he strolls into the room.

I roll my eyes. The man is a fucking wild card and always has been. My brother is the fucking heart and soul of this place, always smiling and joking with everyone. But I know it's a show that he puts on, just as the rest of us, our pasts have shaped who we are. They have led us to this club, to this chapter. To become Vipers.

“Sit down, Storm. Once you do, you’ll find out,” Mayhem snarls, and I raise a brow. May is usually easygoing. The only way to piss him off is to go after his family. So now I have my full attention on what the fuck is going on.

“I hear that Pepper’s pregnant,” Ace starts off, and my stomach drops.

What?

“What the fuck?” Cruz growls. “What the hell happened?”

That's something that I would like to fucking know.

“Seems as though Bubbles and Pepper have had enough of being club whores and have taken matters into their own hands. They stopped taking their pills and have started getting the brothers they sleep with drunk so they won’t know whether or not they wore a rubber,” Ace says through gritted teeth.

Shadow’s hands slam down onto the table as he rises to his feet. “That fuckin’ bitch. I’m goin’ to kill her.”

My stomach is fucking churning. That motherfucking bitch. I can't believe she's done this shit. She set about to get pregnant and is now playing every brother she's fucking slept with.

“Sit the fuck down,” Ace hisses. “You can’t off a fuckin’ pregnant woman, especially one who could be carryin’ your baby. Now, both Bubbles and Pepper are no longer allowed to step foot on Viper property. The bullshit they have pulled can, and no doubt will, change lives.”

“What’s the plan?” Pyro asks, looking at Preacher and Shadow. “Either of you could be the dad. What’s goin’ to happen?”

“Get a paternity test, unless she tells us which one it is. She’s not bein’ forthcomin’ with any information,” Preacher sighs. “No matter what Shadow and I say to her, she acts as though she’s in charge. She’s leavin’ us hangin’ on by a thread. Do you know how much I want to strangle the bitch for information?”

I fucking hate that my brothers are going through this shit, but my fucking God, I'm so relieved that it ain't me. I would lose my ever-loving shit if it was. Pepper is already playing my brothers. I have no doubt that she's not even started with her bullshit.

“You two are goin’ to stay here. May, Storm, and Cruz, I want you to go and find Pepper and Bubbles and bring them here. This shit is stoppin’. All club whores are to be tested, and brothers, I’d get tested also,” Ace tells us all.

My jaw is locked as everyone starts to exit the room. I'm rooted to my seat, unable to move just yet. Anger and relief washes through me. I've dodged a fucking bullet for sure, but Christ, it was close.

Six weeks ago

The clubhouse is ablaze with anger and gossip. That fucking bitch Pepper has just given birth, and from what my brothers have said, she was as high as a fucking kite while doing so. Not to mention, that whore Bubbles was there with a bottle of vodka and a bag of cocaine.

Christ... I have no fucking idea what the hell goes through these women's

heads. Why the hell are they so fucked up? Firstly, trapping the brothers by getting pregnant, then the bitch took drugs throughout her entire pregnancy, and now it seems as though the kid has problems at the moment. He's addicted to whatever fucking drugs that bitch took.

That fucking bitch has saddled my brother to her for life. Preacher is the father of the baby, who's currently in the hospital dealing with the effects of the drugs the whore pushed into him while she was pregnant. Once again, I'm fucking grateful that I'm not the one who's tied to that bitch.

There's no way in hell I'd ever be able to keep my calm as Preacher has. I'd have killed Pepper a hell of a long time ago. I learned a fucking long time ago what having a toxic person in your life can be like. Fuck, Pepper reminds me so much of my own mom that I'd break out in hives if that fucking bitch was anywhere near me for more than five seconds.

"Yo, Reap, you good, brother?" Storm asks.

"Countin' my blessings, brother. Fuckin' countin' my blessings."

He releases a deep chuckle. "Ain't we all, brother. Ain't we fuckin' all."

I push away from the table and get to my feet. "I pray, Storm, that this is over soon, for Preacher's sake and for that baby's."

Storm nods. "We all do. But I have a feeling the bitch hasn't stopped fucking with all of us yet."

I hope to fucking God that he's wrong, but knowing Pepper, she's got something up her sleeve.

I just hope she's done fucking with Preach.

CHAPTER 4

ESME

SIX WEEKS AGO

I groan as I pull into the drive. My ribs are still smarting from last week. I grit my teeth as I climb out of the car. It's easing, but Christ, it's sore. Moving is a problem, and the longer the day goes on without pain pills, the worse the pain becomes.

Things between Harry and I are worse than ever. I don't trust him, and I don't think I ever will. I truly believe that he's cheated on me numerous times, but whenever I bring the accusations to him, he turns it around and tells me I'm a crazy jealous bitch, that he's done nothing but love me from the moment we met. He gets angry, shouting and screaming at me until I start to feel bad and apologize.

When I saw messages on his cell from other women, he claimed that I was the one who drove him to it. That I was the reason he was sending those women messages because I was a frigid bitch who drove him to do it. That all my incessant nagging and whining made him search out other women for reassurance.

I've begun doubting who I am and what I'm doing. I'm so damn tired, so downtrodden, I've lost sense of the fun woman I used to be. I no longer have the thrill of life.

Shoving the front door open, I'm met with the sounds of labored moaning. My stomach rolls at the sound. It's as though someone is filming an adult movie here. Whoever the hell it is, is over the top loud.

"Oh, Harry." I hear the familiar high-pitched voice, and my blood runs cold. I'm so fucking stupid. Beyond stupid. I creep through the house, my back ramrod straight, my jaw clenched, and my stomach rolling with every step that I take. The groans and grunts fill the air as I walk toward the

bedroom. The room I have spent the past six years sharing with the man I once loved.

Pushing open the door, I find Julia on top of Harry, her head thrown back and her eyes closed as the two of them fuck. She's naked and soaked from sweat. His hands are exploring her body his lips hungrily covering hers.

I hate him. I knew he was turning the tables on me and making out as though I was crazy and jealous, when the entire time, I was right. I have no doubt in my mind that this isn't the first time he's cheated on me in our eight-year relationship, but it sure as hell is the last.

I release a fake loud cough and watch in amusement as they both still. It's Harry who reacts first. He pushes Julia off him and stares at me with wide eyes.

"Esme, this isn't what—" he says, his words stilted, his chest heaving as he doesn't pull his gaze from me.

"What it looks like," I finish for him. "Funny, it sure as hell looks like you were fucking my friend. Or ex-friend," I spit. "Whatever, I'm done. You two are welcome to each other."

I turn to move, needing to get the hell out of here.

"Esme, please," Harry pleads. The sound of his voice sets my teeth on edge.

I can't believe how foolish I was. I thought I had it all figured out. I loved him with my whole heart, and yet here he is trying to break me. He's taken away the person I used to be. But maybe now, I'll finally see who the real me is.

As I walk out of the bedroom, Julia calls to me.

"Esme, please, let me explain," she begs in a broken voice.

I whirl around, seeing her perched on the edge of my bed, covered by my sheets.

"You want me to listen? What do you have to explain?" I ask with a bitter laugh. "Explain how long you've been sleeping with my fiancé? How long has this been going on?"

"Two years," she says. Tears stream down her face as she silently begs for mercy, something she doesn't deserve. I catch Harry looking at her sternly, and it's enough to make Julia shrink back into herself. Her eyes plead for understanding, but there's no way I could sympathize with her betrayal after everything she's done. She'd been my confidant through it all, listening to me as I expressed my fears and all the while lying about where my fiancé

truly was at night.

“I never meant for this to happen,” she pleads, her voice quivering as tears stream down her face. “But it did. We can get through this. I love him, Esme. Please forgive us.”

Harry moves from the bed and steps toward me, his pleading eyes locked on mine. His cock hangs limp between us, still covered in Julia’s juices, and my stomach churns with both rage and sorrow. How could they do this to me?

He takes another step closer, reaching out to grab my hand. “Please, baby, it was a mistake. It never should have happened. She means nothing to me—I just want you.”

My heart aches at his words. A part of me wants to believe he is sincere in his apology, but then I remember all the times he has said similar things before—all the times he has promised not to hurt me again only to do exactly what he had sworn not to do. And suddenly, my resolve hardens, and I shake my head.

“Don't bother,” I spit out, my voice cold and bitter as I pull my arm from his grasp. “This is over. Get out of my life, out of our house, and out of my bed.”

Julia sobs louder, begging for forgiveness, while Harry stares at me imploringly, but I don't let either of them sway me. With one final glare of disdain, I turn on my heel and march straight out the door.

There's one place I need to be. The only place I can go right now.

My best friend's house. Serenity Michaels is the best friend a girl could ever have. As much as she's hated Harry, she's always stood by my side and has been there for me throughout everything. She's working right now, but I have a key to her house. It's time for me to figure out what happens next.

The one thing I do know is that I'm so done with Harry. I won't be going back. It's time for a fresh start and I plan on doing exactly that.

I need to find myself again. I have to heal from the bullshit.

CHAPTER 5

ESME

PRESENT DAY

“Are you doing okay?” Serenity asks me.

I gingerly nod as I hit reject on the call once again. Harry has been calling me non-stop. You’d think that after six weeks of me telling him that it was over, he’d get the damn picture. I sure as hell did when I walked in on him fucking my friend. That’s something I’ll never forget, nor will I ever forgive. “I just wish he’d leave me alone,” I tell her.

She gives me a wry smile. “Men like him know when they’ve lost something special, something beautiful, and girl, you are all that and so much more. He’s kicking himself and wishing he didn’t fuck around. God, the man’s an asshole. Surely, he didn’t think he could get away with cheating?”

He had for a long time. Whenever I’d get suspicious of his actions, he’d turn it around on me and try to make me believe that I was imagining things, that I was overreacting to something harmless. I hated that I began to doubt myself. That I couldn’t think straight. By the end of our relationship, I truly lost who I was and what I thought was real. Thankfully, Seri was always at my side and brought me back to where I needed to be. I’ve hidden so much from her because I was ashamed, and still am, about what happened when I was with him. I always knew she hated him. I was so deep with him that I couldn’t get free.

Seeing Harry fuck Julia in our bed was the final straw. I finally had evidence and was able to see that I was right the entire time, and he was just lying his ass off. Never again. I’ll never fall for the same shit as I did before. It’s taken me eight years to see straight, and I’ve done it. There’s no going back. I’m finally free from the pain and damage he’s done to me.

“So, are you ready to talk?” Seri asks. I know that I should, but my girl

has been through the wars. Her ex is a douchebag and she got hurt because of him. Right now, I'm trying my hardest to be strong so that she doesn't need to comfort me, especially when she's the one in pain.

"I finally caught him in the act," I tell her with a small smile. "This time, he couldn't talk his way out of it." I laugh bitterly. "He did try though, claiming it was an accident, that he didn't mean to do it."

She scoffs. "How do you accidentally fall and slide your dick into someone's vagina?"

My smile widens. Even though she doesn't realize it, Serenity is the reason I'm able to push through the hurt. I'll come out of this with my head held high, but it stings. I've wasted eight years on someone who didn't deserve it, and I'll be damned if I'll waste any more.

"How are you feeling?" I ask, hating that she's been hurt.

"Better," she admits. "I can't sit around and wait. Everyone's been great, especially Octavia."

When Serenity's house was broken into and the men attacked her for whatever shitty reason they had, she went to stay at the Fury Vipers MC Clubhouse. Her sister, Octavia, lives there with her kids and her man. The Michaels' sisters are beyond the sweetest people ever, and I love them both dearly.

"Trust me, your sister has been worried about you," I tell her. Yesterday, when Seri told me what happened, I broke down after she left. I was devastated that my best friend was so badly hurt, and I wasn't there for her. I'll never forgive myself for not being around for her when she needed me the most. Octavia came by last night and sat with me. The two of us broke down and cried. She was still reeling from the aftermath of what happened to her sister.

Finding out that it happened the day I left her house brought me to my knees. The day I found Harry in bed with Julia was the day that Seri was attacked. I'd been with her only hours before the attack happened. I stopped by her home to say goodbye before I left to go to my parents. Had I stayed instead of running, I could have prevented her from being harmed. God, I feel so much guilt for leaving. I should have stayed. Maybe she wouldn't have been hurt.

"I'm glad you're here, Esme. I missed you so much. I know that Octavia wanted to tell you about what happened, but I begged her not to, Graham agreed. There was nothing you could have done." Graham is also a member

of the Fury Vipers. That night five years ago, she and Graham went home together, and she fell hard for him, but he walked away without a second thought. Thankfully, he saw the light and realized that my girl is the one for him.

My chest clenches when I think about that night in the bar, about that asshole who was a pig. I don't know why what Reaper said hurt my feelings, but it did. I wasn't trying it on with him. Both my friends had gone off with one of his, so for me, I was trying to make conversation so that he wasn't alone. He looked so lost sitting there. His face was a mask of anger, and for some reason, I wanted to soothe him. Turned out, he was a jerk. Thankfully, I haven't seen him since.

I gently pull Serenity into my arms and hold her tight. "I love you, Seri. I'm just so glad that you're okay."

She breathes in a ragged breath, and I know that she's trying not to cry. "Thank you for helping me with the exhibition."

I flash her a grin as we pull back. "You've worked your ass off for this. Me helping you set up the final pieces is the very least that I could do. I have time, and you need the help."

She flashes me a grin. "You rock at organization."

I nod. That I fucking do. It helps that I'm anal about lists, plans, and schedules. I'm a schoolteacher who grew up in a rigid household. My dad was in the military, and I take after him. My mom, on the other hand, is a free spirit, and my brother is just as she is.

"So, let's start getting this show on the road. Will Shadow be coming to the exhibition?" I ask. I've not really spent much time around her man, but from what I have seen, he's besotted with her, and for that I love him.

As long as he treats her well and loves her, that's all I could ever ask. Serenity deserves the world.

"Yes. He and the old ladies will be attending. I'm sure some of the brothers will be also."

I grin at her. "That's good. What about your parents?"

She shakes her head. "No, they're not."

I grit my teeth. I love her parents, but fuck, why won't they be here? I returned home yesterday, having spent six weeks away from home to heal. I've missed a fucking lot. "What's going on?"

She shrugs. "This isn't their thing."

I narrow my eyes. "I doubt it's a biker thing either, but from what you've

just said, you'll have bikers supporting you, so what gives?"

She sighs. "They just won't be here."

I purse my lips. "Well fuck them," I snap. "You'll have me, Shadow, Octavia, and all the other Vipers. Don't worry, Seri, we'll all be here for you."

Her eyes fill with tears. "I love you," she whispers. "I really love you."

I wave my hand, trying to stop my own tears from spilling over. "Come on, let's get this done and then you'll be able to go home to your man. I have a feeling he'll do all sorts of naughty things to you."

She chuckles, and I'm glad the sadness she had when I spoke about her parents is gone. "You have no idea."

I sigh. The love that Seri has for Shadow is something I have only dreamed of. What Harry and I had was normal. Plain and boring. I had a dream. I wanted a life like my parents. I got lost in the dream of having kids and being married. I settled, and that's not something I should have done. I deserve a hell of a lot more than an asshole who can't keep his cock in his pants and would do anything to put me down. I deserve someone who'll love me unconditionally and want me for who I am, not someone who turns to me because they're bored.

I want what everyone around me has. I want that all-consuming love. I just hope that one day, I'll find a man who will love me that way. Until then, I'm going to live my life to the fullest and enjoy every second of it. I rushed into a relationship before, jumped in with both feet. I thought I loved Harry, but the truth of the matter is, I loved what being with him represented, what I could have when I was with him. I wasn't healing from his betrayal. I was mourning the loss of eight years, and a precious dream I had.



It's late by the time Seri and I finish in the museum. She's nervous for tomorrow, but I have no doubt that she'll be fine. She's amazing and loves her job. Tomorrow evening is going to be a hit, and everyone is going to love it.

My cell rings, and I hit answer on my Bluetooth. "Hello?" I answer.

"Esme." I hear the deep voice of Harry and internally curse myself. I should have checked my cell to see who the hell was calling me. I don't have

the time nor the patience to speak with him. “Please don’t hang up.”

I grit my teeth. “What do you want, Harry? I’ve told you more times than I can count to leave me the hell alone and you won’t. What is it that you want?”

“You,” he says thickly, and I roll my eyes. “Please, baby, give me another chance.”

“I did,” I hiss at him. “I gave you more than one chance. You think that I’m stupid. I gave you a chance after Tiffany, I gave you a chance after Rebecca, and I gave you a chance after Michelle. I’m all out of chances, Harry, and you’re shit out of luck. I don’t want to speak with you, and I don’t want to see you.”

He’s stunned into silence. “You knew about those women?”

No, not really. Those were the women I saw message him, and he acted as though I was delusional, that I was overreacting and jealous. That I was trying to seclude him from his friends and work colleagues. He made me believe I was a crazy bitch who was jealous, when the truth was, I was right to be wary of those women, because he was sleeping with them.

“I knew. You know what I hate the most about you?” I say to him. “That you are so fucking slick and good at lying and manipulating everything that you made me think I was paranoid, that there was something wrong with me. That I wasn’t good enough for you.”

“Oh, baby,” he whispers, his voice soft and caring. It’s the same tone he used when I asked him about those women. He’s good, but I’m not buying into his bullshit any longer.

“But the truth is, Harry, I’m too fucking good for you. I deserve better than a man who lies and cheats constantly. I’m a forgiving person. I’d do anything for the people I love. But that’s no longer you.”

It feels so fucking good to finally get that off my chest.

“Please don’t throw away what we had, Esme. Please,” he pleads with me.

I’m done with this conversation. “It wasn’t me who threw it away, Harry. You did that all on your own. Maybe you’ll learn from this and the next girl you date won’t have to go through the same bullshit that I did.” I take a deep breath. “It’s over, Harry. I don’t trust you, I don’t love you, and I no longer want to see you. Don’t call me again.” I hit end on the call and release a shaky breath.

It needed to be said. It was harsh, but it was true. I just hope that he

listens to me and leaves me alone. But there's a feeling in my gut that says this is far from over.

Damn.

CHAPTER 6

ESME

I wring my hands together as I sit in the corner of the clubhouse. My heart is pounding, and I feel disorientated. This wasn't supposed to happen. My girl had the best night of her life and now she's in the hospital. I hate that those assholes hurt her again. But she's on her way home and she's okay. That's all I can think about right now. She's okay and she's on her way home.

"Hey," Storm says as he comes to take a seat beside me. "She's okay," he assures me. "She's with Shadow."

I nod, unable to say anything right now. I'm not sure if I could. My mouth feels dry and heavy.

"I'm sorry. I owe you an apology," he tells me, and I raise my gaze to his. "I shouldn't have said what I did."

I can't help the smile that forms at his words. Does he remember what he said, or did someone tell him? "What did you say?"

He shakes his head. "I called you a bitch. I also said you were an ugly bitch." His lips twist, and shame pours into his eyes. "I shouldn't have said it."

"Storm, it's okay. I get it." I truly do. While yes, he hurt my feelings, the day that I saw him wasn't exactly the best day for any of us. It was the night after Octavia had gotten shot. We were letting off some steam and Storm was there, glaring at Serenity. She needed to let her hair down, and he was angry, so I stepped in between them, pushing Seri behind me, and Storm turned his anger on me. I get why he did it. I just hate the words that he said.

"No, it ain't," he says thickly. "You've changed a lot since the last time I saw you," he says with a snarl. "Dropped at least thirty pounds."

Ah, now I get why he's angry. He's not angry at me, but at himself. He thinks I lost weight because of his words? No, I did so for me. "I also dropped two hundred pounds," I say with a grin.

He chuckles, just as I knew he would. "Heard you and that douche had broken up. What did he do to you?"

"He was a cheating asshole, but at least I found out before the wedding."

He nods, still smiling. "Want me to teach him some manners?"

"Why waste your time?" I ask. "I'm done with him and I'm not wasting more energy on him. I don't want anyone else to either."

"You're too damn good for him, Esme."

"It took me eight years to figure that out, but I got there in the end. What about you, Storm? Any woman in your life?"

His eyes glass over, and he shakes his head. "No, not anymore."

I reach for his hand and give it a squeeze. "I'm sorry," I whisper. I can tell that it's a subject he doesn't want to discuss, and I respect that. Everyone is entitled to their own secrets, and when they're ready, they'll share. Until then, you just pray that they have someone safe they can talk them through with.

"What about you and Reaper?" he asks me, and I release his hand and sit back.

Ah, Reaper. The man is an enigma. He's watching me like a hawk. He did the same at the exhibition last night. I have a feeling that Storm has noted that. I'm still hurt by the way he treated me in the club five years ago, though I shouldn't be. And I'm not sure why, but I'm drawn to him.

"What about us?" I reply, batting my eyelids and feigning innocence.

The blinding smile Storm has lights up his entire face. He's gorgeous, but somehow, he doesn't do anything for me. Not the way Reaper does, and that infuriates me. I don't want a man. I don't need one. But damn, why does Reaper make my heart go pitter-patter whenever I see him?

"You know that man hasn't taken his eyes off you since you sat down? Or that when you touched me, he wanted to kill me?"

I shake my head. "You're full of shit, Storm. Look, you and Reaper both have something in common. You both were assholes to me when we first met. You took it one step further and pissed me off yesterday, but you apologized, and all is forgiven."

His eyes dance with humor. "What did Reap do to you, Esme?"

I sit back and fold my arms over my chest. "None of your business," I say

low. It's stupid to feel hurt by what happened. I shouldn't have taken it to heart, but I did, and it still stings today.

Storm's expression sobers instantly. "Look, Esme, I get that you're comin' out of a relationship. I'm not sure what else went down when you were in it, but it must have been bad for you to run away. Don't let that asshole of an ex dictate the rest of your life." His smile is tight, but his words sound as though he's speaking from experience. "He's taken enough from you, Es. You deserve to be happy and so does Reaper."

"I don't know him, though, Storm. We've met once and it didn't go well."

Storm shakes his head. "Trust me, girl, my brother wants you. He's one of the best men I know, and if you let him in, you'll see that too."

I sigh. He's right. I've been closed off for so long, it's time to let people in. Taking a chance on someone doesn't make me foolish. It makes me human. And Storm's right, Harry has taken enough from me. It's time to move on.

"Thank you," I say softly. "I hope you can find peace, Storm. Whatever happened with your lady, I truly hope that you can find peace with it and move on. You deserve happiness."

He flashes me a grin, but it doesn't reach his eyes. "I'm glad you think so, Es. I'm sure there are a lot of people who'd disagree with you."

"Those people aren't the ones you want in your life. It may be time for you to drop some pounds too."

He chuckles, and I smile. This is what I wanted. The seriousness of the way our conversation had turned was bringing us both down. Whatever happened with Storm and his woman is in the past, and everyone deserves a second chance, just not with the people they've hurt.

"I'll leave you be," he tells me as he gets to his feet. "You ever need anything, Es, call me."

I nod, knowing I've made a friend. "Same goes for you, Storm."

He knocks his knuckles on the table and smirks. "I may just do that." The sexual implication hangs in the air.

I can't help but laugh. The man is crazy. I wouldn't go there with him. I'm comfortable around Storm and feel at ease with him, but I don't see a sexual connection. The only thing I do see is friendship.

His cell buzzes. He pulls it from his pocket, and his gaze darkens. "Gotta go. Be good, yeah?"

I roll my eyes. “Yeah,” I say softly. “You too.”

His chuckle is heavy as he walks toward the exit, putting his cell to his ear as he does.

Not even ten minutes later, the doors open as Serenity and Shadow walk in. She’s banged up. She’ll have even more bruises to go with the ones she’s just managed to get rid of.

“You’re okay?” I ask as she sits down next to me. I want to hug her but I’m unsure if I’ll hurt her.

“I’m fine,” she assures me, pulling me into her embrace. “Trust me, I’m good.”

“This shit needs to stop,” I hiss. “How many times are you going to get hurt because your ex is an asshole?”

“Don’t worry, Esme,” Shadow says, grinning. “It’s goin’ to stop. Every cunt who’s touched her is goin’ to die.”

I nod. “Make it hurt,” I tell him.

I used to be all about love and acceptance, but there’s certain people who deserve to die in the seventh circle of Hell. Anyone who hurts my friend deserves to feel the pain that Shadow will bring to them.

Shadow chuckles. “Trust me, Esme, he’s goin’ to hurt.”

“Go,” I tell him. “I’ve got Seri,” I assure him. I need him to know that my girl has me and she’ll be fine. He needs to do what he needs to do. The sooner it’s done, the safer Serenity will feel. I’m not stupid. The pain and suffering she’s been dealt, she’s going to feel for a long time. I just wish that I was able to take it from her, that I could help her. The only thing I can do is be here for her.

Shadow presses a kiss to Serenity’s lips and then moves away. He’s pissed. Every step he takes is filled with anger.

“Get ready,” I whisper to Serenity as I see Octavia rushing toward us.

Seri groans. I get it, she’s had a lot of people fussing over her for the past few weeks and she’s not the type of person who enjoys that.

“Let her,” I say, keeping my voice low. “Let her fuss and make sure you’re okay. It’s what she needs to do.”

Seri nods and then braces herself as Octavia rushes toward her and throws her arms around her. “I’m so glad you’re okay,” she cries. “So glad that you’re home.”

“I’m fine,” Seri says, trying to calm her down. “I promise you, Tavia, I’m fine. I want to know what’s happening between Esme and Storm. Esme?”

I glare at her. “Nothing. Honestly, nothing. He apologized for what he said. He felt guilty for calling me an ugly bitch, especially when I lost weight afterward.”

Octavia gasps. “He called you that?”

“It’s fine,” I assure her. “Trust me, it’s okay. He apologized, and I wasn’t truly hurt by what he said. Just disappointed.”

Octavia watches me carefully, almost as though she’s trying to check that I’m okay. “You know that you’re not ugly, don’t you?”

I nod, my heart beating faster. I used to be okay with my body. I loved how I looked. But with everything that happened with Harry, I began to hate everything about myself. It’s why I lost weight and changed my clothes. Nothing I did made me feel better.

“Oh, Es,” Seri whispers. “What did that asshole do to you?”

I shake my head. “I’m fine,” I lie. “He’s gone and I don’t have to deal with the bullshit any longer.”

The memories of what happened and what he said have stuck with me. I’m trying to forget them, to not let them fester within me. It’s hard. It’s been eight years of constant pain, not to mention the remarks and insults about the way I look and how I act. When I was with Harry, I changed everything about myself to make him happy. In the end, I only ended up hating myself. I lost every bit of self-confidence that I had.

The past six weeks have brought some healing, and I’m managing to slowly rebuild what I lost, but it’s going to take some time.

Seri tuts. “You’re a bad liar, Esme Greene.”

I laugh. She has no idea how good I am at lying. I’ve had years of practice. “I’m dealing,” I tell her honestly.

“You’re not alone,” she whispers.

She’s wrong. I am. I love and adore Seri too much to lay all my bullshit at her feet, especially when she’s got enough going on. I’ve been dealing with everything alone for years. The shame and fear kept me from speaking out against Harry, now it’s the determination and grit that’s keeping me from asking for help. I want to prove to myself that I can heal all by myself.

It may be foolish, but it’s all that keeps me going.

CHAPTER 7

REAPER

Watching Esme interact with Storm has pissed me the fuck off. I'm not sure why the tiny, beautiful woman has me so affected, but seeing her smiling and touching another man pisses me off. It's taken every single restraint I have not to kill my own brother. I can't deal with this shit. The grin Storm has every time he's around Esme lets me know that he knows what he's doing.

"What's wrong with you?" Preach asks, his brows narrowed as he holds his baby boy in his arms.

The boy is doing much better. He's overcome the addiction that he was born with and there's no longer any of the drugs in his system. The poor kid was fucked with that cunt of a mother of his. Thankfully, he doesn't have to deal with her brand of bullshit. The bitch got what was coming to her. She died a painful death thanks to Preach. His boy was in hospital for a week or so, and he's just got home. He needed to get away after Tyson's birth. I'm fuckin' glad that he's back. He returned today, and I can finally see that getting away was what he needed. The guilt and pain is finally gone. Good.

I never thought I'd see my brother with a child. Hell, the life that he lived, I didn't think he'd ever settle down. But having Tyson has changed him. He's no longer drowning in the crap his parents pushed on him.

Finding out that bitch Pepper was pregnant scared the fucking life out of me. Especially when she wouldn't tell anyone who the father was for months. I thought it was me. I thought I was a goner. The last thing anyone needed was to be stuck with that bitch as the mother of their child. As much as it pains me, I was beyond fucking relieved when we found out Preach was the father. I couldn't deal with Pepper and the bullshit she put Preach through.

She kept taking drugs while pregnant and didn't give a fuck about the baby.

"Nothin'," I snap as I look at Esme. She's sitting with her girls, and they're all smiling. She's happy that Serenity's home. She's got a soft smile on her face, but the moment she sees me, her eyes narrow and she glares at me. Christ. What the fuck?

"Best find out if Storm's tryin' to get in there, brother. If he is, he's got a better chance than you do," Preach says with a fucking chuckle.

I ignore his laughter and move toward Storm. "What's goin' on with you and the girl?" I demand, wondering why the hell the itty-bitty thing is full of venom.

He releases a heavy sigh. "I pissed her off. I met her a while back and was an ass to her, then I was the same again last night when we were at the museum."

Last night was a complete fucking shit show. When Shadow's woman was closing up, she was attacked yet again. The men tried to drag her out of the museum through the back. Thankfully, my brothers heard her scream and were able to stop it before anything nefarious happened to her. She ended up spending the night in the hospital for observation. But she's home now and being tended to by her sister and friend. The little woman has positioned herself on Serenity's left. She's ensuring that anyone who means harm will come to her first.

I fucking love that. She's protective of her girl.

I turn to Storm and grin. "You were bein' an ass?"

He flips me off and a slow smile forms on his face. "The woman's gorgeous, but she's not my type. She's got too much sass for me. I apologized for bein' an ass. What did you do to her, Reap?" he asks me, still wearing that damn smile on his face. "She looks as though she wants to go for your balls."

I shrug. "I don't know. I'm not sure what the fuck I'm supposed to have done."

"Yo, Esme," he shouts, and I see the gorgeous woman turn to him. "What did Reaper do that pissed you off?"

She narrows her eyes. "What is it with you men? Neither of you can remember when you're assholes?"

Storm laughs. "Christ, Reap, what did you do to her?"

I stare at the beautiful woman in surprise. I don't remember her. What the fuck? Surely I'd remember her?

I'm moving toward her before I can even think straight. "Come," I tell her as I wrap my fingers around her arm and pull her to her feet. She comes willingly even though Serenity's glaring at me.

"What's wrong?" she asks, as I take her outside. "What happened?"

"I don't remember you," I tell her as I release her. I turn to face her, and my breath catches as I get a look at her eyes. They're a mix of blue and green, with a hue of brown. "Fuck," I whisper. "The night at the club?" I ask, and she gives me a wry smile and a small nod. It was the night everything went to shit.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I shouldn't have spoken to you the way I did."

"It's okay. I accept your apology. I truly never meant to upset you that night. I just thought you looked a little angry and lost. I should have left you alone."

Holy fuck. What woman would come up to a man like me and sit with me because she thought I was angry and lost? Christ. I fucked up. I was a dick. I just hope she'll forgive me. I don't know why I want her to. I just need her to.

I shake my head. "No, you shouldn't have."

Her smile widens. "You still have that anger in your eyes, Reaper. I hate that for you."

I scan her face, my chest heavy and tight. "You get married yet?" I ask her.

That smile dies on her face, and she shakes her head. "No," she whispers. "I didn't." She looks down at the ground and shifts on her feet.

I reach for her chin and lift her face so that I can see those eyes. "Why not?"

"He cheated," she tells me. "I walked in on him and my friend."

The fuck. "What a fuckin' asshole. You done with him?"

She nods. "Yep. I've been telling him for the past six weeks that it's over. The truth is, it was over long before that. I was just too stupid to see it."

"He not takin' no for an answer?" I ask, my chest vibrating with anger. I'll kill him if he hurts her.

"I'm pretty sure he heard me last night." She sighs and looks up at me with big eyes that are filled with sorrow. "I hurt him with what I said."

"Was it the truth?" I ask, and she nods. "Then he needed to hear it. He contacts you again, you tell me."

She blinks. "Why would I do that?"

"Because I said so," I say. It's as simple as that. "You've seen the shit

your girl's gone through. If that asshole of an ex of yours isn't takin' no for an answer, then the next time he calls or turns up at your place, you call me, and I'll deal with him."

She laughs. "Why would you do that? I could call Mayhem, Digger, or Shadow. You don't have to do that."

"You call me," I say as I pull her close to me. "Please."

She stares at me for a beat and then slowly nods. "Okay, Reaper. If Harry comes back around, I'll call you. I don't have your cell number," she says as she reaches for her phone. "Here," she says, handing it to me.

I quickly input my number and hit dial using her cell. My phone vibrates in my pocket. "Now I've got your number," I tell her. "You good?"

She nods quickly. A little too quickly.

"Esme," I say softly. "You were with him for a while, right?"

"Yeah, eight years."

Fuck, that's a long fucking time.

"So I'm goin' to guess that you're not okay. You loved the dick, and he hurt you."

She places her hands on my chest. "Listen, Reaper, I was hurt. Being with Harry was..." she pauses. "Awful. I've realized that I hadn't loved him for a long time, if I ever did. I grew up wanting what my parents had: a loving marriage with kids. I always knew that was what I wanted. Harry wanted that too." She releases a sigh. "Being with him was okay at the beginning. We were both young and busy with school. Then the years just seemed to pass by, and I started to get suspicious. He'd started to put a pin number on his cell, and he'd be taking calls late at night and leaving the room when he did so."

"He was cheating," I say. The guy's a fucking douche. Esme is fucking gorgeous. I have no doubt that her ex is a fucking coward who was out of her league to begin with. I take her hand and lead her to the bench at the side of the clubhouse where she sits down. "What did he say when you confronted him?"

She blinks, noticing that her hand is still in mine. I'm not letting it go. For some reason, I'm drawn to her. I want her, but she's guarded.

"He twisted it. He made me believe that I was paranoid, that I was crazy. Time after time he'd manipulate it and twist it all back onto me. By the end, I thought I was crazy."

Fucking asshole. I'd love to get my hands on the bastard. I'd kill him.

“That was until I walked into my house and saw him fucking my friend in our bed.”

“Classy,” I snarl. “He couldn’t lie to you anymore. You had the proof you needed.”

She nods. “Yep, it was exactly what I needed. I wasn’t angry. I wasn’t mad. I was disappointed that it had taken me this long to finally find the evidence that I needed. I was hurt that my friend was sleeping with him. But I felt relief more than anything. I left, all while Julia cried and pleaded with me to forgive her for the mistake. Harry was on his knees, begging me to give him another chance. He said it was an accident, a one-time thing.”

“You left though.”

She nods. “I was done. I had mentally checked out a long time ago. I just hadn’t realized it. I went to Seri’s house and let her know that I was leaving. I went home to my parents for a while and healed. It sounds so stupid, but I was healing from the loss of my dream rather than the actual relationship.”

I squeeze her hand. “I get it. Trust me, I get it.”

She closes her eyes and bites her lip. “I’m sorry,” she whispers. “I shouldn’t have told you all of that. You probably think I’m crazy. I haven’t even told Seri all of it. Thank you for listening.”

“Trust me, honey, I’m a lucky guy. Thank you for trustin’ me.” No one has ever confided in me before. Knowing that she hasn’t told Serenity everything just further proves that there’s something between us, and I’m wanting to find out what it is. But she’s just out of a relationship and I’m not going to push her.

“What do you want from me, Reaper?” she whispers. “I don’t understand what you could possibly want from me.”

My brows knit together. “What do you mean?” Because if she’s thinking what I think she is, I’m going to tan her ass.

“Look at you, you’re gorgeous,” she breathes. “You’re just wow and I’m —”

“Don’t,” I snarl. “Don’t fuckin’ say that shit, Esme.”

She stares at me with wide eyes and parted lips. “What?”

“You were goin’ to put yourself down. You were gonna say some stupid shit about how there’s somethin’ wrong with you.”

“How?” she whispers. “How do you know that?”

“Your asshole of an ex is a piece of shit. He broke you down and made you doubt how beautiful you are.”

She glances away, still not releasing my hand. “How did you know that?”

I don’t answer her. I watched it happen. My father was an abusive asshole who loved to beat the shit out of my mom. He wanted her to respect him. Whenever she did anything he deemed wrong, he’d beat her into submission. I fucking hate him for the shit he did. I just wish I had killed him when I had the chance.

“You don’t believe me, do you?” I ask her. She still hasn’t turned back to me.

She shakes her head. “I’m sorry,” she whispers. “I don’t want to upset you.”

So fucking sweet. “Trust me, honey, this isn’t you makin’ me upset. When you go home tonight, I’m comin’ with you, and I’m goin’ to spend the night showin’ you just how fucking beautiful you are.”

She turns to me, her cheeks filled with heat. “But —”

I shake my head. “Do you want me?” I ask her, and she grins, her cheeks heating even more. “Do you?” I need to hear the words.

“Yes,” she says.

“Then don’t think of anythin’ else.” By morning, I’ll have fucked every memory of her ex out of her mind.

It’s been a month since I’ve fucked anyone. Once I got out of prison, I fucked every one of the club girls and then some. But watching my brothers all settle down and find their old lady has left me wanting more. I want what they have, and I know that Esme doesn’t want a relationship. She’s nowhere near ready.

But I want her, and she wants me. Whatever happens, happens.

My cock thickens as she leans in close to me. “Please don’t hurt me, Reaper,” she pleads with me.

“Never,” I vow. I may be a bastard, but never to a woman, and never to her.

“Then yes, I want you.”

I grin. She has no idea what she’s letting herself in for. She may not be ready for what I want, but she’ll get there.

CHAPTER 8

ESME

My mind's in overdrive as I drive to my house. Am I being stupid? I don't know what came over me. I've never slept with someone I haven't dated. Then again, the only person I've slept with is Harry. I'm nervous. God, what have I got myself into?

I hit the button on my garage door opener and drive right in. I hear the rumble of pipes and smile. Reaper. He drives into the garage and parks his bike beside my car.

"Hey," I whisper once I slide out of the driver's side.

"You good?" he asks, his gorgeous silverish eyes scanning me from head to toe.

"Yeah," I reply, my heart still beating a mile a minute. I'm surprised I haven't had a heart attack yet.

His grin is soft and languid. I love how sweet he gets. He moves toward me and pulls me into his body. I go easily, loving the way he holds me. "Close the garage door, honey, then come back to me."

I don't even hesitate. I do as he asks, smiling the whole time. I love the way he called me honey in that rough voice of his.

When I return, I'm pulled back into his arms and his lips descend on mine. I open for him, letting him deepen the kiss. My hands slide up his back and I cling to him, needing more.

"Fuck," he snarls as he tears his lips away from mine. "I'm goin' to be fuckin' addicted to you, Esme, so fuckin' addicted."

I blink at his words, my heart stopping. He can't be serious. What? I stare up at him and see that his eyes are darkened with lust and his gaze is focused solely on me.

“Reaper,” I whisper, wondering what he’s thinking.

“What did that asshole do to you?” he asks, his voice rough but with an edge of sweetness. “Hmm? You’re so fuckin’ beautiful it hurts my eyes and yet you’re looking at me as though I’m fuckin’ crazy.”

I pull in a ragged breath. “You think I’m beautiful?” I ask without thinking.

His eyes harden, and I instinctively take a step backward. “Don’t,” he says roughly. “Fuck, don’t be scared. I’m not goin’ to hurt you.” He steps forward and takes my face between his hands. “I’m tryin’ real hard not to go track down your ex. That asshole is a fuckin’ dick, and I’d love to lay hands on him for hurtin’ you.”

I blink, trying not to let the tears that are threatening to fall do so. “He’s not worth it.”

“But you are,” he says instantly. “Trust me, Esme, you’re fuckin’ beautiful, and the fact that you don’t know you are is a fuckin’ travesty, baby.”

I shake my head. “Please don’t call me baby,” I ask him. That’s what Harry called me, and I hate it.

He flashes a grin at me. “I won’t do so again. Now, let’s get you somethin’ to eat.” I open my mouth to protest but he silences me with a kiss. “We’re gonna eat and watch TV, then we’re goin’ to bed, and honey, I’m goin’ to fuckin’ show you just how beautiful you are.”

I stare at Reaper, wondering how this has happened. It was only meant to be sex. Something that I know I’m capable of giving someone. I don’t know if I can handle anything else, but Reaper’s pushing into my life, and he’s made me feel wanted and pretty within minutes. I haven’t felt this way in years, and I don’t know how to handle it.

“Come on, Es, let’s go.” He takes my hand and interlocks our fingers. How can I be so at ease with him?

I open the door to my kitchen and let him in. I purchased this home about four years ago. My granny died and left me and my brother a substantial amount of money. I always knew that I wanted to own a home. The moment I saw this, I fell in love. I couldn’t hold back. I put a bid in, and it was accepted. It needed a major overhaul, but thankfully, both my dad and brother are great with their hands and they did as much of the work as they could and hired others when they couldn’t.

I have rented out the house for the past three years, bringing in extra

income. I never told Harry that I had purchased a house, nor did I tell him that my granny left me some money. Thankfully, the renters that I had for the past three years left about six months ago, so I started to redecorate and didn't put the house back up for rent again. It meant once I came home from my parents, I had a fresh start in my own home. It was perfect and everything that I needed.

"Your house is nice," Reaper says, and I turn to see him taking everything in.

"It took a while to get it to where I wanted it, but I love everything about it. It's exactly as I imagined."

"You own this?" he asks, his brows raised.

I nod. "I do. My granny died and left me some money. I've been renting it out for the past three years."

He nods, his gaze still roaming around my sitting room. "It doesn't seem like a house you'd live in."

I frown. "What do you mean?"

He turns to face me, a smirk etched on his lips. "This is homely, a place where you kick back and relax." He steps forward. "You are fuckin' classy. Every inch of you is sexy and class."

I feel the heat rising through my cheeks. "That's clothes and makeup," I say softly. "I grew up with two parents who worked their asses off to give us what we needed and to keep a roof over our heads. I watched my parents work countless days and nights to make ends meet. They gave me everything so that I could do better."

He nods. "Isn't that what all parents want?"

"Yes, of course. Though it's not easy for everyone. Some don't have the means to do it and it's heartbreaking. I was one of the lucky ones who was able to get a full ride to college and be able to get my degree."

"You're a teacher, right?"

I smile. "Yeah, I teach first grade." I adore my students. Being able to teach them at such a young age always makes me smile. I love being able to play with them. It's always fun to come up with creative ways to help them retain information.

Reaper watches me intently. "I have a feelin' there's a fuck of a lot hiding behind the sweet smiles and those gorgeous eyes."

I lift my shoulders and shrug. I'm not used to compliments and heated looks. It's been a long time since I've felt so wanted, but it's hard to accept

what he's saying. Eight years I've been made to feel anything but beautiful. Reaper was right. Harry broke my self-confidence, stole my self-worth, and made me hate my body. It's going to take a long time before I'll be able to get any of that back.

"What the fuck did that asshole do to you?" he murmurs as he reaches for me. His hand slides along my jaw and he cups the back of my neck, his breath hot against my face. Goosebumps form on my body. "You have no fuckin' idea just how beautiful you are, do you?"

I swipe my tongue across my lips and stare up at him. Those deep silverish eyes of his are so intense. It makes it hard to breathe, to think. I'm so drawn to him and I'm not sure why.

His lips slant across mine and he slides his hand into my hair. His grip is tight and pain bites into my scalp. I gasp as heat rushes through my body. He takes me by surprise when he uses it to his advantage, sweeping his tongue between my lips as he kisses me.

The kiss is beyond anything I could ever imagine. It's consuming. My toes curl and I press my breasts against his chest, loving the way he slides his hand down my back, resting his palm on my ass.

I wind my arms around his neck, reaching up on my tiptoes so the kiss gets deeper. I want more. I want him. I've never felt such a feverish need in my life. Yet with Reaper, he seems to be the man my body reacts to. I've been drawn to him since the moment I met him.

"You want this?" he growls, his lips brushing against mine as he grinds his cock against my stomach. I whimper against him, wishing our clothes weren't in the way. "Tell me no and I'll walk away."

God no. I don't want him to walk away. My body is burning for him.

"I want this," I say breathlessly. "I want you." I whimper as I tangle my hands into his hair and press my lips to his.

I don't think I've ever felt so needy before. I've never wanted someone as much as I want Reaper. It's crazy. I barely know the man, but for some reason, I feel as though I'd cry if he walked away.

The kiss changes. It becomes harder, more brutal, and it makes my blood burn. Heat pools between my legs. I need him. I don't think I can wait any longer. I really need release.

"Reaper," I whimper, and it comes out as a plea. I need him to do something.

It's as though my plea snaps his control. His fingers release my hair and

he tears at my clothes. The buttons to my shirt go flying, and it just adds fuel to the fire. That look of absolute raw desire he has makes my knees go weak and my heart stutter.

“Gonna fuck you now, Esme,” he growls, his voice thick and raspy.

I nod. Hearing him say those words sets off an inferno inside of me. The air between us crackles and I smile up at him. “That would be good.”

He chuckles deeply. “Needy, little one?”

I blink. “Little one?”

“Honey,” he says thickly, and heat pools between my thighs. My panties are drenched, and he’s not even done anything other than kiss me. “You’re fuckin’ tiny. Believe me, you’re little. I feel as though I could break you.”

I grin at him as I slide my hand along his thick erection that’s hidden behind his jeans. “Want to try it out?”

He shakes his head and chuckles harder. “Trust me, Esme, the moment I get inside you, I’m going to fuck you until you’re raw.”

My breathing deepens and I look up at him through hooded eyes. “Then what are you waiting for?”

“Where do you want me to fuck you?”

I swallow hard. The way he’s looking at me, I want him to do it here and now. That look of need and want, it’s unlike anything I’ve ever seen. I want him to keep it as he fucks me. I want to know what it feels like to have someone take me who actually wants me.

“Oh, little one,” he breathes. “We’re going to have so much fun. Now strip.”

I don’t hesitate. I strip out of my pants and underwear, and all the while he’s watching me as he does the same. The moment he takes off his pants, I swallow hard.

God, he’s fucking huge.

I have a feeling that tonight is going to be amazing.

CHAPTER 9

REAPER

I'm harder than stone. I've been wanting Esme since the moment I saw her again. Hell, before that. This woman has me tied up in knots and I have no idea how to get out of them.

She's staring at my cock as though she wants to suck it. Her chest is rising and falling rapidly as she stares at me, those gorgeous eyes of hers at half-mast and filled with lust. If she wraps her lips around my cock, I'll explode in her mouth. I'm so fucking close to the edge that I can't let her do it. I want to fuck her. I want to take her so fucking hard that she has no reminders of her douche of an ex.

I move toward her, my hand sliding into her thick, glossy hair. I slightly pull it, and her head snaps up, and I take advantage of her shock. My lips slam against hers, and I take everything from her as I taste her. Christ, it's better than I could have ever expected. She releases a moan into my mouth and her fingers clutch my tee. I sweep my tongue into her mouth, and the air turns static as the kiss becomes frenzied, filled with passion and want.

I slide my hands down her body, caressing her silky-smooth skin, until I reach her ass. She has no fucking idea just how beautiful she is. Her ex is a piece of shit who has put her down to a point where she no longer sees the beauty she is.

That fucking tiny little moan she releases yet again has my cock thickening. Christ, I need her. I can't hold on any longer. I lift her into the air, and her legs wrap around my waist as her arms encircle my neck. I line my cock up at her entrance, the heat of her pussy enticing me, urging me to thrust deeply. And I do. I thrust hard and fast, burying myself inside of her. She groans against my mouth, and I tighten my grip on her, my movements

methodical as I thrust in and out of her, my cock hitting deep inside of her.

Never have I wanted anyone the way I want Esme. I can't go deep enough, can't take her hard enough. I want to consume her. Even when I was released from prison, having not had pussy in years, I was never this obsessed with anyone.

She throws her head back, a long groan spilling from her lips. "God," she moans, her arms tightening around my neck. "Please, Reap," she whimpers.

"Fuckin' love the feel of your pussy," I snarl as I hammer into her. "Look at you, so fuckin' beautiful."

She's so lost in pleasure that she's not tensing up at my words like she did earlier.

My pace is unrelenting as I fuck her hard and fast. Never did I think it would feel so damn good, her pussy so hot and tight. Every time I withdraw, her pussy sucks me right back in. It won't take me long to get addicted to her. Fuck, I never thought I'd find a woman I'd want more than one night with, but there's something about Esme that's different. She's intoxicating. She's the drug that will have you wanting more; get you hooked and never let you go.

"Mmm," she moans, her pussy contracting around my cock. "More, please," she begs. "I'm so close."

My fingers tighten on her, and I have no doubt that they're going to leave a mark. My cock thickens at the thought of me branding her. Fuck. I hammer into her, searching for my release. Christ, this woman is going to kill me.

I rotate my hips. My control long ago snapped, and my strokes are brutal and fast. My spine tingles and my balls tighten. Fuck, I'm close too. I grit my teeth, my hands gripping her hips tighter as I pull her down onto my cock as I thrust into her.

"Yes," she cries, her pussy spasming as her orgasm washes over her. "Oh, Reap," she whimpers.

Fuck, I'm lost. The way her pussy squeezes around my cock, suffocating it... I'm gone. I hammer into her once more, burying myself to the hilt and releasing inside of her, groaning her name.

We're both breathing hard, and neither of us speak. My knees are shaking, but I keep a hold of her while we both come down from our orgasms.

Christ... This is without a doubt something I plan on repeating.

"Woah," she says, breathing hard.

I sink to the floor with her in my arms, my cock softening inside of her

pussy, but I'm nowhere near finished with her yet. "Woah is right," I say thickly. "Next time, we're doin' that in a bed. I want to be able to take you harder."

Her cheeks flush with heat. "Harder?" she breathes.

I chuckle, loving the fact that she blushes.

"Oh yeah," I say roughly. "This was just the beginnin'."

Her expression is soft, but the smile she wears is blinding. Her cheeks are still flushed. She's so fucking beautiful.

"I'm intrigued," she says breathlessly. "I have a feeling you'll be true to your word and break me."

I slant my lips over hers, taking everything yet again. I can't get enough of her. "That, honey, is without a fuckin' doubt. I'm goin' to ruin you."

I'm going to ensure that she can't think straight. I'm fucking hooked, and I'm not walking away. I've watched my brothers find their old ladies, and I know that it's rare to find a woman you want to be with. Right now, Esme has me hooked. I've never felt this way, and I'm not going to let her go, not until whatever the fuck I'm feeling has passed.

I watch as she tiptoes around the room. She's trying to be quiet and not wake me. I'm usually all for that. I fucking hate waking up to a woman in my bed. But I'm beyond pissed that Esme is trying to sneak out of her own damn bed.

"Esme," I say, my voice rough with sleep.

She stills, clutching her clothes to her body. "You're awake," she says softly. "I didn't mean to disturb you."

I sit up, hitting the lamp beside the bed. The room illuminates and I keep my gaze focused solely on her. "What's goin' on? You thinkin' of sneakin' out?"

Heat works its way up her cheeks. "Not at all," she lies. "I was going to get dressed and make some coffee."

I stare at her, my lips twitching as she looks anywhere but at me. "Esme," I say, this time unable to keep the humor from my voice.

She releases a heavy sigh. "Okay, I don't know what to do. I've never done this?" She places her hand over her eyes and snarls. "Can you cover up? Christ, Reaper, it's too damn early to see that beast."

I chuckle. "Beast?"

She glares at me, her eyes narrowed into slits. "Reaper," she cries. "For the love of God, cover your cock up."

"I'd much rather you covered it with your mouth," I quip as I reach for my jeans. "What's got you so uptight this mornin'?"

"I'm not uptight," she says, her voice once again soft. She ducks her head, though not before I see her cheeks heat once again.

"Sure," I say as I step closer to her. "Now, what do you mean you've never done this before?"

She shakes her head, releasing a frustrated sigh before pulling on her clothes. I don't move back from her. I have an idea as to what she's talking about, and if it's what I think, she's in for a surprise.

"Let's go have coffee," she tells me, her stance softening. She's no longer tense as a fucking bow.

I leave her be, knowing that no matter what, we're going to be having this conversation.

"Okay," she whispers as she takes a seat at the table a few minutes later. I take a sip of the water she handed me while she drinks her coffee. "This is beyond embarrassing. I've only ever been with Harry. I don't do one-night stands, Reaper. I don't know what to expect from them, nor do I even know how to feel."

"This ain't a one-night stand," I tell her. "Far fuckin' from it."

Her lips part and her eyes widen. "But —"

"You're fuckin' fantastic in bed, honey. I know you're nowhere near ready for anything more than sex, and truth be told, I ain't either. I've got a fuckin' lot of baggage, Esme, a fuckin' ton of that shit. But I like you. You're sexy, cute, and phenomenal in bed. I'm goin' to need a repeat of last night."

Her cheeks tinge red, and she grins. "I'd like that. But I honestly can't do anything more than just sex, Reaper. I'm trying to find my feet after a long relationship."

"To an asshole," I state. "That fucker calls you or shows up, I expect you to call me, Esme. For as long as this lasts between us, you're mine, and I don't want that fuck to be around you."

She stares at me, her face slack and her mouth open. "Why?" she whispers. "Why would you want me to call you? Surely you'd want to be kept out of the drama. Hell, I want to be kept out of it."

I chuckle. She's so fucking cute. "Because that asshole has caused you to doubt everythin' you are. Not to mention, he's a fucking bastard. If he gets near you, he'll start spoutin' his bullshit again, and it's not somethin' I'll tolerate. So if he calls or stops by, you call me."

"Okay," she says, and I feel my chest settle. I hadn't realized it was tight until she said she'd call. Fuck, what is this woman doing to me?

"You ever need me, Es, just call."

She blinks, tears filling her eyes. "You make no sense to me," she confesses. "My entire life, only Seri has been at my side. No one would ask me to call them if I needed them."

I shake my head and get to my feet. "Then they're assholes, honey. I don't know what it is that we have but it's more than just a fuck. You understand that, right?"

She nods, seemingly a little shocked by it all. She stands, lifting her coffee cup with her.

"Good. Now, I've gotta go. I've got work to do. But I'll be back this evenin'."

She opens her mouth and then closes it, almost as if she wants to say something but can't. I get closer to her and slant my mouth against hers, cutting off any thought she had. She sinks against me. The kiss is chaste, but hard and filled with promise of what's to come later. I pull back, and she's still clinging to me, her breathing labored and her eyes filled with lust.

"I'll see you tonight," I tell her, and she nods. I fucking love how soft she gets. "Lock up behind me, honey," I instruct her. Right now, I don't know what that fucker of an ex is like, and I don't trust that he won't show up.

"Okay," she says, the lust-filled fog lifting from her eyes.

I take her hand and lead her toward the garage door. It's time to leave and a part of me doesn't want to. What fucked up shit is going on? I've never felt this need before. It's all down to Esme. She's got a hold on me and has no idea she does.

"Do you want dinner when you come?" she asks as I step into the garage.

I fucking love that she's blushing. I've never been one to care about stuff like that, but with Esme, it's endearing.

"You cookin'?" I ask with a raised brow.

Her smile is wide and lights up her eyes. "I will be. What do you want?"

I press a kiss to her lips once again, loving the way she sinks into me. "Surprise me. I'll be back later."

"Bye," she whispers, her cheeks flaming with heat and her lips spread into a wide smile.

I walk toward my bike as she opens the garage door, and I feel her eyes on me as I walk away. I climb onto my motorcycle and start the engine. It purrs to life, and I feel it between my legs. While in jail, this was one of the things that I missed. I don't need much to make me happy. Give me my brothers, an open road, and my motorcycle. That's all it takes. Being in prison took that away, and for four years I didn't have much of anything. I was locked up and had to follow the rules. Thankfully, I wasn't alone as a few older members of the Vipers were inside, but it's a fucking place I never intend on returning to.

I pull out of the garage and out of the drive. I turn back and see that Esme's closed the garage door. Then why the fuck can I feel eyes on me? I know someone's watching me. I glance around the street and spot a guy watching me as he sits in his Mercedes Benz C-Class. I pull up at the curb and watch the fucker, not taking my gaze off him. Who the fuck is he? I glare at the fucker and watch as he starts his car and pulls away from the curb. I don't pull away from the curb until the asshole is gone. I glance back at Esme's house before pulling out of the drive. I'll be back tonight, and if that fucker is too, I'll be having words.

CHAPTER 10

ESME

"Tell me everything!" Serenity demands as she sinks down onto my sofa. "You left with him last night and then I didn't see him again until this morning. Seriously, Es, you have to tell me everything."

I laugh at her giddiness. She's like a child. "It was a great night."

Hell, it was so much more than that. I've never been so turned on by a man. Reaper is unlike anything I've ever known. Then again, Harry is all that I have known. It's stupid. I spent eight years with a man, and I felt more spending hours with Reaper.

"You're no fun," she whines. "God, Es, you sure don't give anything away, do you?"

I can feel my cheeks heat as she stares intensely at me. "I don't know what you want me to say, Seri. Being with Reaper was more than I could have ever hoped. I'm not ready for anything other than just fun. It's all I can give him."

I hate that I'm still so broken. My heart took one too many beatings thanks to Harry, and I know it's going to take more than six weeks to heal from it all. Hell, sleeping with Reaper right now probably isn't the best idea, but it was fun, and it was the best time I have had in years.

"I wish I could kill Harry. He's a bastard and you deserve so much better, Es. You really do."

I lift my shoulders and shrug. "He is a bastard, but I'm hoping after the call we had, he'll leave me the hell alone. Between him and Julia, I'm tired of it all."

Her brows knit together. "Julia?" she asks. "What's she doing?"

I release a heavy sigh. I forgot I never did tell her who I found Harry in

bed with. "The day that I ended it with Harry, I came home and found him in bed with Julia."

She blinks, her eyes burning with rage. "Tell me you're fucking joking?" she breathes. "The hell?"

I shake my head. "It had been going on for two years, Seri. For two fucking years she listened to me complain about how I thought he was cheating on me and how he'd always twist it so that I started to doubt myself. All the while, it was her he was fucking."

Tears pool in her eyes. "I'll kill her. Fuck, I'll kill them both."

"They're not worth it," I tell her, not wanting her to get into trouble, because I know my girl. She's got a fiery temper and she'll do whatever it takes to make sure I'm okay, and that includes going after the people who hurt me.

"I wouldn't do it," she says with a grin. "But I know people who would."

I can't help but laugh. I have no doubt she'd get Shadow and the rest of the Fury Vipers on side to do whatever the hell she wants. Seri's great at making friends and she's made a home with the brothers of the Fury Vipers. She's so easygoing and gets along with everyone. It was something I used to be like, but that fun-loving extrovert died within me a long time ago. When you're mentally beaten, you lose everything about you. It's hard to think about who I used to be. I want her back, but I'm not sure if it's possible.

"You know, that bitch has been calling me for weeks, checking up on you, wanting to ensure that you're okay."

I shake my head. I have no doubt that Julia's got a guilty conscience and is hoping I'll somewhat ease it for her. She really doesn't know me at all if she thinks that will ever happen.

"I know she's your friend too, Seri," I say softly. "I don't want you to stop speaking to her because of me."

She looks at me with wide eyes and parted lips. "You're serious, aren't you?"

I nod. "I don't want you to lose your friend because of me."

"That bitch isn't a friend, Es. If she was, she would have never slept with your fiancé. Fuck, she no longer exists for us. If she calls, she's in for a rude awakening. I'll make sure she knows exactly what I think of the fucking whore."

I press my lips together, trying not to let the laughter spill out. Serenity never fails to make me smile. She's always here to cheer me up when I'm at

my lowest.

"Seri," I say, but there's no admonishment in my voice, and I can't hold back the laughter any longer.

"What?" she asks, feigning innocence. "Look, Esme, what those fuckers put you through was awful. I watched my best friend become a shell of the girl that I knew. There was nothing I could do but be here for you, but no matter what I said or did, it was never enough. That asshole mentally and emotionally abused you. You think I didn't notice how much weight you've lost? How unhappy you became while you were with him? I saw it all. You were never fat. You were sexy, beautiful, confident, and vibrant. But with that penciled-dick fucker, you became withdrawn, you hid your curves, and you hated everything about yourself."

Tears stream down my face. I had no idea that she'd noticed all of that. I thought I hid it well. I thought I was able to hide everything I was feeling.

"He beat you down and made you lose love for yourself. He made you think you were crazy, and I'll never forgive him for that. As for that goddamn bitch, she listened to you vent about the doubt and fears you had. She must have seen the same as I did. She was supposed to be your friend. Anyone who loved you saw that you were hurting, and she did nothing except betray you. That's something I'll never forgive her for. I couldn't give a fuck if she was fucking him, something I'm sure you'd agree to, but it's the fact that she knew what that bastard was doing, how he was twisting everything and making you feel as though you were losing your mind. That's not something a friend would ever do to you. So fuck her and fuck him."

I press my lips together, hiding my smile as my tears continue to flow. This is why I love Serenity. She's always so fiercely protective of me. She's got my back just as I have hers. Nothing and no one could ever break the bond we have.

"Now, back to Reaper," she says with a gleeful smile. "Please tell me you're going to see him again?"

I roll my eyes. She's so damn nosy. "Yes, I'll be seeing him again," I tell her. "In fact, I need to go to the store. I'm cooking him dinner tonight."

The smile she has is huge, and it lights up her entire face. She releases a squeal, clapping her hands together as she bounces on her seat. "Oh, Es, that's amazing."

I hold up my hand. "It's just dinner, Seri. I'm not jumping into anything. I can't."

The thought of being in a relationship has my stomach sinking and my heart racing. I can't do it again. I don't think I'll ever be ready for it. Harry broke me in so many ways, I'm not sure if there's any coming back for me. Having sex and fun with Reaper may be all that I can ever offer him.

Her smile dies as she watches me carefully. "No matter what," she whispers, her eyes filling with tears. "You're going to be okay. I don't care how long it takes; we're going to get you back to where you're happy again. Where you love yourself again."

I nod. That's all I want. I wish it was easy, but there's so much hatred and self-loathing inside of me that I'm not sure it's doable. But I know that if I can, I will. Having Seri by my side means the world. I'm not alone, and I never was. I forgot that for a while. I let Harry pollute my mind with his words, and I forgot that I had people who truly loved me for who I am, not who they wanted me to be.

"I love you, Seri."

She moves over to me, wrapping her arms around my shoulders and pulling me close to her. "I love you too, Es. Always. Never ever doubt that. You're my sister, and I'm always going to be here."

"You're the best," I whisper to her. "What would I do without you?"

She grins. "You'll never have to find out. But I'm telling you that if I see that bitch, I'm not biting my tongue."

I laugh. I can't expect her to do so. "That's fine. Just try not to get arrested. Orange is not your color."

She pushes my shoulder, chuckling as she does. "You're so right. It is, however, your color."

She's not wrong. I look good in orange, but a jumpsuit is an entirely different situation. "They're not worth it. In her eyes, she was with the man she loved, and she never meant to hurt me."

"She's delusional. Fuck, Harry must be hung like a fucking stallion."

I shake my head. "Nope. Nowhere even close."

Her lip curls in disgust. "Please tell me he's at least somewhat good in bed?"

Once again, I shake my head. "Nope. Not even close."

"I have nothing," she tells me. "I'm just glad you're no longer with him. I swear, I was close to killing him to get you freed from his toxicity. I couldn't bear to see you that way."

"I finally saw the light. It took me way too long, but I'm free of him and

I'm never going back."

She beams at me. "That's good, because I'd have to kidnap you if you ever thought of doing so."

I laugh. God, I truly lucked out finding Seri. I really did. "No kidnapping. I'm good. I promise."

She gets to her feet and pulls me up from the sofa. "That you are, Es. But you'll be even better if you consider having a fuck-fest with Reaper a lot more often. He made you smile yesterday. I saw him. I watched the way your eyes lit up when he was talking with you. That's something I hadn't seen in a while, and I want it back. I want my best friend back."

I wrap my arms around her. "I do too, but Seri, she may never come back, and I don't want you to get your hopes up for nothing. Be happy that I'm here and I'm getting better." I would hate to constantly see the disappointment in her eyes if the real me never lived up to the memory of who I used to be. "I'm happier than I have been in a while. Don't be sad that I'm not who I used to be. Be happy that I'm here and growing from my mistakes."

"You're amazing," she says softly. "I'm in awe of you, Esme." She tightens her grip around me before releasing me. "Go to the store and get the ingredients you need to cook a kickass meal for Reap, and don't forget to make your brownies, girl. He'll be falling in love in no time with those."

I laugh. "As long as he doesn't tell Octavia. I don't want it to become a challenge for her."

The last time someone complimented my baking in front of Tavia, she took it as a personal insult that they didn't like hers and spent the next month baking way too many baked goods. Of course, her brothers reaped the rewards of her efforts and ate whatever she cooked. But it's not something I'd like to see a repeat of.

"Don't worry," she says with a chuckle. "I'll ensure that she won't ever find out."

I walk her to the front door. When I open it for her, she stops and turns to face me. "Oh, we need to have a pow-wow soon. Cruz is driving me insane. I'm going to need something to get him to back down for a while. Something that doesn't involve the twins."

I chuckle. Little do people know that Seri and I have been the masterminds behind getting Cruz back on many of his stupid pranks that he's been teaching Andromeda and Ace's twins. The man taught the boys to reach for women's boobs every chance he got. The way we found out? We saw him

teaching them to make grabby hands at the doll that once belonged to Ruby, Octavia's daughter. So to get our own back, we made the twins realize that not only women have boobs, and Cruz was their target. Watching as they tried to breastfeed from him was so damn funny, I think I almost peed myself.

"Whatever you need, you know I'm here."

She grins. "Good. That asshole put hair removal product into Preacher's shower gel last night," she tells me while laughing. "Poor Preach is losing his hair everywhere."

My laughter bubbles up from my chest. "Oh God," I cry. "He's an evil genius, but the man is definitely getting tips from someone."

She nods. "When I find out who, they're going to regret going up against me. So think of some ideas and we'll make sure we get him back."

"Without collateral damage, right?" I ask a little warily. I would hate for some innocent person to get caught in the crosshairs.

She lifts her shoulders and shrugs. "Preach got caught. It's every man and woman for themselves right now."

I shake my head. The clubhouse sounds like it's going to be descending into chaos soon. "I'll have a think and get back to you."

I wave goodbye to her, all the while chuckling to myself at the thought of Preacher realizing his hair is falling out while in the shower. Damn, Cruz is a sneaky prankster. I have my suspicions that it's Octavia who's helping him. Both Serenity and Tavia's best friend, Effiemia, play pranks on Octavia a lot. It would make sense for the woman to help get back at everyone.

Once Seri pulls out of my drive, my stomach starts to flip as butterflies swarm. Reaper will be here later and I'm actually excited. I want to see him again, but I'm nervous that he'll want more than I could ever give him.

I can only do sex. That's all I'm emotionally able to give.

I just hope it's enough. I like him, and I'd hate for him to walk away because I can't give him what he wants.

CHAPTER 11

REAPER

"So, you and Esme seemed close," Storm says with a grin.

I'm sitting in the clubhouse chilling while I count down the fucking minutes until I can leave and go see Esme. She promised me dinner and I'm looking forward to it. Storm is a shit stirrer, and I know he's going to piss me the fuck off.

"Stay the fuck away from her," I say through clenched teeth.

His laughter grates on me. I know he's pushing me, trying to get a reaction. Well, he's fucking got one. Ass. "Trust me, brother, I don't want Esme, and she definitely doesn't want me. That woman only had eyes for you. Be careful though, yeah?"

I raise a brow. "You warnin' me off?" I ask, a little shocked.

He shakes his head. "No. Fuck no. Never seen you chase a woman before, but there's somethin' between you and Esme, and I have a feelin' the woman will be good for you, brother. But she's been through shit, and she's still dealin' with it. Don't wanna see either of you get hurt."

"I appreciate the concern, Storm. I truly do. But I know what she's been through, and right now, she's only capable of givin' me a little of herself, and I'm okay with that."

His grin widens. "I bet you are. Christ, another brother down."

"Shut it," I hiss. "Esme will run if she thinks I want anything more than she can offer." I'm not stupid. The woman has a lot of fucking baggage thanks to that asshole of an ex of hers. He's a fucking bastard for what he put her through. I don't know it all. I doubt anyone will ever know. But I'm not him, and I'm sure as shit not going to let her slip through my fingers. I knew the moment I saw her five years ago that she was different. I've been given

another shot and I'm taking it with both fucking hands.

Preach saunters into the room, his jaw clenched and his eyes hard as he glares at Cruz, who's sitting in the back with his feet up on one of the round tables, grinning like a fucking cat who got the cream. "I'm gonna kill him," Preach growls as he takes a seat beside me. "Thankfully, I didn't have the cream on all that long so I've not lost all of the hair on my body."

I chuckle. Christ, Cruz is an ass. He's forever playing pranks on people, and he needs to back the fuck off. He does anything to me and we'll be having words.

"What I want to know," Storm says as he leans forward onto the table. "Who's helpin' him?"

Now that's the million-dollar question. Cruz is my brother. I'd lay my life on the line for him. But he's not got the smarts for this. There's someone in this clubhouse who's teaching the fucker what to do, and for some reason, they've decided to target Preach.

"Who did you piss off?" I ask. "They're getting revenge, giving you bald spots. I'm shocked they didn't put it in the shampoo, get rid of your mane," I say with a grin.

He flips me off. "Fuck you," he says without heat. "But I haven't pissed anyone off. I've not been around."

Now that's the truth. "You've done somethin'," I tell him. "But until we find out who it is, we won't know what you did to have them wanting revenge."

"The pranks need to stop," Storm huffs. "It was fun when Cruz was the only one getting this shit done to him, but it's movin' through the clubhouse like the fuckin' plague. I ain't dealin' with it. They come for me, I don't give a fuck if it's a man or woman, I'll be dealin' with them."

I chuckle as I shake my head. There's no way in hell he's going after a woman, who I suspect is doing this. The ladies are cunning, and there's no doubt in my mind that Preach has pissed one of them off and this is their way of revenge.

"So, you and Esme," Preach says with a grin, changing the subject. "It's about fuckin' time, brother. You know the women love her, and the brothers do too. She's Vipers, which means that when it comes time to claim her, you'll have everyone's backin'."

I raise a brow. "You're crazy, you know that?" I say as I rise to my feet. "Esme and I are havin' fun. You all need to back off."

Christ, having my brothers talk like this around Esme will for sure send her running. That's not something I want to happen. So I need them to back the fuck off. "I'm headin' out," I say to them both.

Storm chuckles. "We won't wait up."

I flip him off. "Ass," I say with a shake of my head.

Preach rises to his feet and follows me outside. "You know I'm happy for you, brother. You deserve some happiness in your life."

"Preach, you and I both know that what happens between Esme and I is only goin' to be fun."

He gives me a knowing smirk. "You're a damned liar, Reap. You know that, right? Your parents are fuckheads. They've always been that way. You are not them."

"You know that, do you? As far as I can see, I'm just like my old man."

His face twists into anger. "The fuck you are," he snarls. "Your dad was a drunken asshole who loved to belittle not only your ma but you too. You aren't your father. That asshole wouldn't be part of this club. He's a selfish prick who only cares about himself."

Ah, little does Preach know just how alike me and my dad really are. I did a lot of shit while I was in prison. It was the only way to survive. But I still fucked up doing so. I became someone I swore I'd never become.

"Trust me, Reap, your old man would have let me fuckin' fry rather than takin' the blame for me. I owe you more than you could ever know. I'll repay my debt, brother. Before we leave this earth, I'll repay my debt."

I roll my eyes. "You're my brother, Preach, have been for fuckin' years. I'd take a bullet for you. Goin' to prison for a few years was nothin'," I lie. There's no fucking way that I'd ever tell him the truth that went down inside. There's nothing in this world that would ever make me lay that hurt on him. He's feeling the guilt of me taking his place enough. Knowing the shit I had to do to survive would kill him. I would never do that to him.

"Go," he says, swallowing hard. "Tell Esme that I said hi. The sooner she comes around again the fuckin' better. You know the women love her. Besides, the women gettin' drunk is fuckin' funny as hell, and it's been a fuckin' long time since they let their hair down."

That's because there's been a fucking lot of shit going on lately. But Preach is right. It's time to ensure that Esme is around the clubhouse more. She's hurting, and the more she's around the girls, the more she'll start to come out of her shell.

"Talk to you later," I say as I stride toward my motorcycle. I climb on and let the engine purr. My thoughts turn to the fucker who was parked out front of Esme's home earlier today. If he's there when I return, we'll be having words.

It takes me almost an hour to make it to Esme's house with the fucking New York traffic. Christ. Rush hour is always the fucking worst. I pull into her street, and my gaze is immediately drawn to the Mercedes that's once again parked outside of her house across the street. I decide to park a bit down the street and make my way toward the car. The fucker doesn't even notice me making my way toward him.

I pull open the passenger's side door and slide into the seat. "Name," I rumble.

The fucker splutters, his eyes wide and his face heating. "Get out," he shouts. "Who are you?"

I shake my head. "That's not how this is gonna work. I asked you a fuckin' question. What's your name?"

"I'm Milo," he says, his body trembling. "I'm a photographer. I need the money, man. I owe a debt that I have to pay and watching the lady was easy money."

"Who's paying you?" I demand.

He shakes his head, his eyes still wide and filled with fear. "No, I can't. I'm sorry."

"Do you know who I am?"

"N-N-No," he stammers.

"I'm a patched member of the Fury Vipers. You know who we are?"

His face pales to a gray color, and his body stills, trembles running through his hands as he stares at me. The disbelief and fear in his eyes make me give him a shark's grin. Oh, this fucker knows exactly who we are.

The stench of piss spreads through the vehicle. "I'm sorry, man," he stutters. "I'm sorry. He paid me to keep tabs on her."

"Who did?" I demand yet again. "I'm only going to ask this once. Next time you ignore me, you're in for a world of hurt. Do you understand?"

He nods. "Harry," he splutters. "Harry Jacobson. He said that she's his

fiancée and he thinks she's cheating on him. I was paid to follow her and report back."

"How fuckin' long have you been following her?"

"I started yesterday. I didn't know she was yours. I thought she was cheating on him like he said."

"Did you take pictures of us?" I snap, my temper rising the more this fucker speaks.

He nods. "I'm sorry," he says, his eyes filling with tears.

"Did you show them to him?"

"I did. I met with him an hour ago. I brought him all the pictures that I took. Including her at the grocery store this afternoon."

"You make it a fuckin' mission to stalk women? You know that's a criminal offense, right?" I ask, interlocking my fingers and pushing on them, making them crack. The sound is loud and vibrates throughout the vehicle.

"I wasn't stalking her," he whispers. "I owe him and his dad money. This was a way to wipe off my debt. They had their henchmen break my partner's legs."

"What the fuck do you think I'm goin' to do if you continue to stalk my woman?"

He shakes his head. "I won't," he promises me. "I swear, I didn't know she was yours. I never would have agreed to this if I knew." He continues to tremble, his entire body shivering as he does. I also notice the dark stain that's appeared on his cream-coloured pants. "I promise, I'll leave her alone. I'm so sorry."

"If I see you around her again, it won't be your partner having broken legs. The two of you will be six feet under."

He nods. "I swear," he says, lifting his hands in surrender. "I'll leave her alone. She seems real sweet. I wondered why she was with that jackass, Harry."

"Tell me about him and his old man."

His brows knit together. "You don't know the Jacobson's?"

"Wouldn't be askin' you about them if I did. So tell me, what's the deal with them?"

"Mr. Jacobson Senior owns a multi-billion dollar company here in New York—Levitation Ltd. He has businesses all over the world. He's an asshole. He thinks that with all the money he has, he's able to do whatever the hell he likes."

"How did you get to owe him money then?" The disdain he has for the old man tells me he's not friends with the fucker, so how does someone owe money to someone they hate?

"I had a fender bender with his son, who blamed me for the accident, but I had a dash cam and it showed that Harry Junior was to blame. That night, my home was broken into and all evidence of the incident was gone. Next thing I know, I owe them almost fifteen thousand dollars to pay for the repairs to his car."

Christ. The man sounds like a fucking asshole. "What's goin' to happen now? If you leave Esme alone, are they gonna come for you again?"

He nods. "According to them, yesterday and today's work only accounts for a portion of paying them back."

"You leave those assholes to me," I tell him. There's no fucking way I'm going to allow him to continue following Esme, but I'm also not going to let those fuckers get away with this fucking bullshit. "Stay the fuck away from Esme, and you and your partner will be fine."

He nods. "I promise I will." He's still trembling. Christ. He's a nervous fucker, and I'm not entirely sure that I can trust him. But there's no way I'm letting him stay around Esme.

I reach forward for his wallet that's on the center console and see his driver's license. I pull out my cell and snap a picture of it. "I know where you live now. You fuck around, Milo, and we'll have problems."

"I promise, we won't. I'm really sorry. I was just trying to survive this clusterfuck."

I grip his shoulder and press tightly. "Expect a call from me tonight. Once I've spoken to my brothers, I'll call you."

He swallows hard, his throat constricting with the movement. "Okay. Please can you tell Esme that I never meant to scare her."

I narrow my eyes. "Does she know you're following her?"

He nods. "I scared her when she was in the grocery store. I never intended to do so."

I slide out of the car. "Go home, Milo, and wait for my call."

I don't wait for him to acknowledge me. I slam the car door shut and move back to my bike. I climb on and start the engine, driving it until I reach Esme's house. I park it outside, not willing to put it into the garage tonight. I want people to know that her house is protected by the Vipers. I'll be fucking damned if anyone else fucking tries to stalk her.

I knock on the door, and it takes her a little while to open it. When she does, I see that she's pale and shaken, and her eyes are red and puffy. She's been crying. I know that everything about her says stay back and hands off, but I can't. I pull her into my arms, and she freezes, but eventually starts to relax. "You good, babe?"

She nods against my chest. "I'm running a little behind," she says sheepishly, not raising her head from my chest. "Are you okay to wait? It should be around forty minutes."

"No problem, babe. You cook. I gotta talk to you about somethin', then I gotta call my brothers."

She raises her head, and I see those gorgeous eyes of hers fill with fear. Christ, that motherfucker has frightened her. "Okay," she says, her words shaky.

"Whatever goes down, honey, you're goin' to be fine."

She pulls in a shaky breath. "Okay," she says, and this time, it's much stronger. I pull her into the house and close the door behind me.

I take a seat at her kitchen table and wait as she grabs me a beer and takes a seat opposite me.

"That asshole who was following you around today is gone," I tell her, needing to get it out of the way. "He won't be back."

She blinks. Her mouth falls open, and she closes it quickly, reminding me of a fish. "You killed him?" she asks in a whisper.

I chuckle. "No, honey, I didn't. Though seeing you've been cryin', no doubt 'cause of him followin' you, I should have. But no, I didn't. I sent him on his way. But he comes near you again, I will."

"Why was he following me?" she asks, her eyes wide still. "He wouldn't tell me. He kept close behind me as I walked around the grocery store. I couldn't escape him."

Fucking bastard.

"He owes money to the Jacobson's, and to pay his debt off, he was to follow you."

Her breathing begins to deepen as she glances down at the table, her fingers curled into a fist. "I'm sorry," she says through her breathing. "You've been dragged into my mess. Harry is an asshole. I thought after the conversation I had with him he'd leave me alone." She shakes her head. "He's never going to leave me alone, is he?"

No, he's not. "Don't worry, Es. I'm not goin' to let that fucker anywhere

near you again."

She nods. "I hate that he won't leave me alone. It's over. Why can't he accept that?"

"I'm goin' to call my brothers. No doubt your girl will be here the moment she finds out. You got enough food to feed everyone?"

She laughs just as I intended. "Yeah," she says softly. "I always cook more than I should. I was planning on freezing it for dinners, but there's more than enough to go around."

"Go on, honey, go clean up. I'll make the call."

She gets to her feet. Her movements seem to be at ease. I'm watching her carefully. The fear she has is still present but it doesn't seem to be overwhelming as it once was. She walks around the table and presses a kiss to my lips. It's sweet and soft. I slide my hand around her waist and pull her onto my lap, slanting my lips against hers and deepening the kiss.

She moans against me as our tongues touch. I fucking love how responsive she is. When I pull back, she's breathless, her eyes half-cast as she smiles.

"Thank you for being here." She slides off my lap and walks away, leaving me with a raging hard-on.

She's so fucking sweet. There's no way I'm walking away from her. Preach and Storm were right. I want to claim her. But we've both got a fuck of a lot to get through before that can happen.

I reach for my cell. It's time to call in reinforcements. I want that bastard Harry to stay the fuck away from my woman. I have a feeling that his father is going to be a problem.

CHAPTER 12

REAPER

The rumble of pipes tells me that my brothers are here. I glance at Esme, who's sitting at the kitchen table, nibbling on her bottom lip. My plans for this evening have gone out the window. Instead, I'm trying to calm her ass down. She's worried about what's going to happen. She thinks one of us could end up in prison. Which has reminded me that I need to have a discussion with her about where I've spent four of the last five years. I'm just fucking hoping that it's not a deal breaker.

"Your brothers are here," she tells me as she drums her fingers against the table.

I rise from the sofa, bottle of beer in my hand, and move toward her. "You need to calm down, honey. You're going to give yourself a fuckin' aneurysm with the way you're goin'."

She narrows her eyes at me. "What do you expect me to do?"

"Relax, know that we've got this. That fuckhead has done more than enough to you. He's not getting a chance to do anything else."

She chuckles, and I know that she's going to be okay. It's going to take a while to get her to a place where she's not scared about what that cunt has in store for her, especially when she's had eight fucking years of his bullshit to heal from. But she'll realize soon enough that she's not alone and that bastard can't and won't get to her.

The front door opens and in barrels Serenity, Shadow, Effiemia, Mayhem, Preacher, Tyson, Storm, and Ace.

"You're okay?" Serenity asks her the moment she's through the door. "I was worried."

"I'm fine," Esme lies. "Reaper scared the guy off."

"Here," Preach says as he hands the baby to Esme. Then he turns to me. "What the fuck happened?"

I grit my teeth as I watch Esme hold Tyson close, her brows furrowed as she stares between the baby in her hands and Preacher.

"What the hell, Preach?" Seri hisses. "You can't just hand off your son to women. What's wrong with you?"

"The girl looks like she could be blown over by a fuckin' feather. She's panicking, no doubt pissed at the amount of people that are in her house. Her holdin' Tyson will calm her down."

He inhales deeply. There's no mistaking the smell of home-cooked food. The steak and onion pie that she cooked, along with the freshly cut fries, was beyond anything I ever expected. She's a fantastic cook, and I'll be making sure that I'll be here more nights to enjoy the food.

"Any leftovers?" he asks.

"Um," Esme begins. "Sure. I'll get you some."

"I'll do it," Serenity says. "You go sit on the sofa. Reaper, make her sit down."

I chuckle at the glare Esme throws at her best friend. "Come on," I tell her as I slide my arm around her shoulders and steer her toward the sofa. I'm surprised at how calm Tyson is with her. Usually, he's only that way around Serenity. Then again, she's been with him since he was born. He's used to her. Preach trusts her implicitly with his boy.

Seeing Esme with him doesn't scare me off as I thought it would. She looks good holding the baby. She's used to children. She's a teacher, and from what little I do know of her, she adores children.

"Explain what's happened," Ace says as he takes a seat opposite us. Mayhem, Storm and Preach take a seat at the table and Effie begins to fill plates of food for them. I shake my head. Fucking animals.

"This mornin' when I left here, I noticed a Mercedes parked out front. His gaze was on the house. He left before I did, and he was back when I arrived this evening. I had a talk with him. The asshole is in with the Jacobson's. They fucked with the evidence he had about the minor crash he and Jacobson Junior had. They've now put pressure on him, claimin' that he owes them around fifteen grand. They had their henchmen break his partner's legs to make him compliant. He had no idea that Esme wasn't with that fuckin' ass any longer."

"Jacobson? I didn't know you were with that fuckin' ass, Esme," Mayhem

says, and Effie elbows him to shut up. "What?" he says, glaring at her. "Those Jacobson's are fucking bastards. They're buying up properties over the city and hiking the rent on them, and when people can't pay, they're evicting them onto the streets. They're also getting deep into debt with the fuckers, they're that destitute."

"That's not Esme's fault, Benji," Effie says softly.

"Never said it was, but surely you knew who he was and who his father was?" he says pointedly.

My anger whips through me. The fuck is wrong with him?

"No, I didn't," Esme says, keeping her head held high. "Tell me, Mayhem, do you know everything about Effie? About her family?"

Silence spreads throughout Esme's home. All my brothers are glaring at Mayhem. I get it, he's hyper protective of his woman and kids, but fuck, he needs to watch who he's talking to. I'm not letting him get away with talking to her like she's in the fucking wrong.

"What about this home? You own it, right? You're a schoolteacher. This is a good neighborhood. How are you able to afford somethin' like this?"

"Enough," I snap. "I'm warnin' you, May, keep your fuckin' mouth closed," I snarl as I glare at the fucking asshole.

A soft hand reaches out and grips my arm. I glance down and see Esme watching me, her eyes focused solely on me. "It's okay," she whispers. She releases me and starts to rock Tyson in her arms. "My granny died. She was rich, and she left my brother and I money. I had enough money to purchase this home and have it renovated. I rented it out to a couple for three years and was able to restore some of my savings from it. Anything else you'd like to know that you have no entitlement to knowing?"

Serenity laughs. "There's my girl," she praises. "Also, May, you don't ever talk to her like that again. I've watched my best friend be emotionally and mentally abused by that asshole for the past eight years. I won't allow anyone else to treat her like that."

His brows knit together. "What?" he snarls. "What the fuck?"

"You're so fuckin' quick to judge everyone, May, you never take a look at what's actually happenin'. Had you actually looked at the girl, you'd have seen how broken she is," Preach hisses. "I'm with Seri. You don't ever fuckin' talk to her like that again. You do, we're gonna have problems."

"Same," Shadow rumbles, while Storm nods his head in agreement.

"Judging the way Reaper's looking at you, May, you'd do best to keep

clear of him. You fucked up and that's on you. Now, back to the matter at hand," Ace says as he turns to Esme. "Do you know much about the business Harry and his father are in?"

She shakes her head, her eyes wide as saucers. "No. He always told me that his father worked in a corporate job but never what it was. I never cared to ask, to be honest. I knew he was rich, but I didn't need his money. I worked my ass off to get through school and become a teacher."

Ace nods. "You did work your ass off," he says with a grin.

"How do you know?" she asks with a raised brow.

"Esme, you've been around my woman and kids. Eda loves you —"

"You had my background checked," she surmises. "I understand that. Maybe you should have let Mayhem look at the file. It would have helped him not put his foot in his mouth."

I can't help but chuckle. I love that she's not afraid to speak her mind. That asshole Jacobson hasn't completely destroyed her. I slide my arm around her waist and pull her into me. "So, what's goin' to happen now?" I ask, wondering how we're gonna go about this. That fucker isn't getting anywhere near Esme again. I'll break the fucker's jaw before he even gets close.

"I'm goin' to give Makenna a call, find out what she knows about the fuckers. If anyone knows the ins and outs of the businessmen in New York, it's her and her husband. Once we have all the intel, we'll be able to go from there. You are under the protection of the Fury Vipers, Esme. That means anyone comes near you, they'll have us to deal with," Ace promises.

She shakes her head. "No, you don't have to do that. Please, I don't want anyone to get into trouble."

"Don't worry yourself about that. Focus on healing from that motherfucker. I'm sure Reaper has that covered though."

"You make this?" Preacher asks before Esme can respond to the prez. "Es, this is the fuckin' shit. You cook like this all the time?"

I watch as she blushes, her cheeks bright pink. She lifts her shoulders and shrugs, all the while keeping her focus on the little boy in her arms. She's fucking shy. It's cute as hell.

"She's a great cook, and she's an even better baker. Although, don't tell Octavia that. We're still reeling from the last time someone told her that."

Esme's shoulders begin to shake. "Poor Tavia," she says through her laughter. "She seemed to take it as a personal challenge. I love Tavia's baking."

"You got any baked goods?" Storm asks, his eyes bright with glee. "I'll be able to judge who's better."

"That ain't a lie. The man eats everythin' Octavia bakes," Shadow says with a grin. "Storm has a fuckin' sweet tooth."

"Girlie, do you?" Storm asks.

"Of course I do, but you do realize that I'm not a girl, right? I'm twenty-six years old."

Storm waves her away. "You're tiny. You're what, four-foot-six?"

Esme gets to her feet, her eyes sparking with rage. "I'm five-foot-three," she snaps. "And for that comment, there's nothing for you." She moves toward Seri and hands Tyson to her. "I'd better feed them all," she mutters as she moves around her kitchen.

Storm looks at her with horror as she reaches for multiple Tupperware boxes, all of which are filled with different baked goods. I watch as she places them all on a plate and moves around the room, handing them around to everyone.

"Relax," Ace tells me, keeping his voice low. "We're going to ensure that she's protected. Nothin' will happen to her. These rich fuckers have no idea what's about to happen to them. Once I've spoken to Makenna, we'll sort out the Milo guy and his partner, ensuring that they're secure somewhere those fuckers can't touch them."

I nod, feeling at ease. I know that Ace isn't going to let this slide. He'll do whatever it takes to get answers for me and for Esme.

"Please, Esme," Storm pleads. "Just one?"

I chuckle at his pathetic attempts to get around her. He's staring at the plate of baked goods with big puppy dog eyes. Esme walks past him and places the plate in front of me to choose something. There are cookies, brownies, snickerdoodles, and something that looks like a baked smore. I reach for that, and she grins at me. She continues to move around the open plan room and hand out the baked treats, before she goes back to the table and lets Storm have one.

Seri laughs. "I wouldn't have given him anything."

"Shadow, sort your woman out," Storm grumbles as he reaches for a snickerdoodle. The man loves his sugar.

Esme retakes her seat beside me as I take a bite of my cake, and it takes everything not to moan at how fucking good it tastes. Christ, she needs to make more of these. They're fucking amazing.

"Yeah, I ain't even gonna lie," Ace says, popping the last bit of his cookie in his mouth. "These are a hundred times better than Octavia's. I expect more of them. Drop them by the shop and Tavia will never know."

Esme's laughter rings out through the room. Her head's thrown back and happiness radiates off her. "I can do that."

"And these," Shadow says, holding up the tiny bit of brownie he has left.

"All of them," Storm says, and I notice the fucker has the plate in his hands and is eating everything he can get his hands on.

"Christ, Storm," Preach says, shaking his head. "We can't bring you anywhere. Make sure you all leave Esme money so she can buy more ingredients for your asses."

"There's no need, honestly," she says. "I'll make some next week for you all."

Ace gets to his feet. "It's time to go," he tells them all. "I want to get home to my woman and kids before they're in bed, and I've got a call with Makenna. Esme, I'll see you soon," he says to her as he passes by her.

"Thank you," she says softly. "Safe travels home."

She's so fucking sweet. Christ. So fucking sweet.

I'm going to enjoy my time with her tonight. She's not going to get much sleep, that's for sure.

CHAPTER 13

ESME

Reaper's lips trail along my skin, leaving goosebumps in their wake. The man is driving me insane. I glance at the clock on my dresser and see that it's almost six am. I don't think we had more than an hour's sleep. Every time I started to hit that deep part of my sleep, Reaper was touching me, igniting my body like a damn inferno.

"You're crazy," I tell him thickly, my voice hoarse from our sexcapades. I think we're on round five at the moment.

His hand slides along my stomach, and I tense slightly. I have a slight pouch on my stomach. I've lost a lot of weight, and my skin is slightly stretchy. It's something I despise, and having Reaper touch it makes me cringe. I don't want him to see it, touch it, or feel it.

He doesn't say anything. His hand moves lower until it reaches my pussy. "You're insatiable, Es. You're always ready for me."

He's not wrong. The moment he touches me, I light up like it's the fourth of July. It's not just once, but every damn time. Reaper knows how to please a woman, and damn, I'm reaping the rewards for it.

The moment he pushes his finger inside of me, I mewl with pleasure. God, it feels so fucking good. I close my eyes, grinding down against his finger. I feel the bed shift beneath me, but he doesn't stop fingerfucking me, his breath hot against my thigh. I open my eyes and see him staring at me. He's positioned himself between my thighs, that hungry look in his gray eyes making my heart race.

He dips his head, and I groan at the first swipe of his tongue against my folds. "Reaper," I whimper. God, he's way too fucking good at this. He'll have me coming within minutes. I grip his hair tight with my fingers as I

grind down against his mouth. His tongue swipes at my folds, giving me immeasurable amounts of pleasure.

"You love when I eat you, don't you, honey?" he asks, his voice rough.

"Yes," I hiss, grinding down against his mouth. God, I can feel my pleasure rising.

"Nothin' tastes better than you," he growls, his tongue sweeping against my folds over and over again.

My movements are frantic. I'm close to the edge. I can feel my orgasm starting to rise.

He pulls back as my orgasm rushes to the surface. I glare at him, breathing hard. His grin tells me that he knows exactly what the hell he is doing.

Over and over again, he brings me to the edge, and when I feel as though I'm about to release, he pulls back, denying me an orgasm. I could scream at him right now.

"Please," I plead with him.

"What do you want, Es?"

"I want to come, please," I plead with him, dying for release. I'm so sexually frustrated right now, I feel as though I could cry. I've never felt this way before. Then again, Harry was always into instant gratification. He barely paid attention to me. I can count on one finger the number of times he went down on me. He hated it. But Reaper, he loves it. I feel as though he gets off on it. Not only does he like going down on me, but I love going down on him.

"I can feel how close you are." He pushes a finger deep inside of me. He's not going to stop. He's going to make me a crying mess before he finishes.

"You're torturing me," I cry as he fingerfucks me. He has no idea just how close I am. There's no way I'll be able to hold on any longer.

He withdraws his finger and I whimper. Not again. God, I'm a mess. I'm panting, my body is burning with desire, and he won't give me the relief that I seek. I feel like anything could set my orgasm off right now. A single touch could trigger it. I need relief. I need him to let me come.

The cheeky grin on his face does nothing to quell my frustration. But when he towers over me, lining his thick cock up against my entrance, I know that he's going to finally let me come.

"You want to come, honey? Then fucking come," he snarls as he slams into me.

I cry out as my orgasm shatters through me. My entire body shakes with the force of it. It takes my breath away, pulling the oxygen from my lungs, washing over me like a damn tsunami. I've never had such an all-consuming orgasm.

"Fuck," he grunts as he pulls out before slamming back inside. Over and over again he continues to fuck me until I'm clawing at his back, groaning with every thrust.

"Never felt anythin' as good as you," he snarls, punching his hips into me. I gasp at the sheer power behind his thrusts. He's like a wild animal rutting. I fucking love it. I wind my hands around his neck and fuck him back, grinding down on his cock with every move I make.

His lips slant against mine and I cling to him, loving the way his tongue slides into my mouth as he possesses me, not only my body, but my heart. I'm completely screwed when it comes to this man. This was supposed to be fun, but it's turning into a whole lot more. I don't think I'll ever be able to do just sex. Not with Reaper. The way he treats me is something special. I just pray that I'll be able to get out of whatever we have with my heart intact.

There's nothing in this world that can get my toes curling like his kisses. The first time we kissed, it was as though I lost every train of thought. It was just him and me, and the world around us had stopped. Every kiss since then is just as amazing. But having him kiss me so passionately while he's fucking me... There's nothing better. I get so lost in him, so caught up in just us, that I lose every semblance of what's going on around us.

I moan into his mouth as his cock drives into me. I love how he fucks me. It's beyond anything I could have ever dreamed of.

"Fuck," he snarls. "I'm goin' to come," he growls, rotating his hips and pounding into me.

"Ugh," I cry as he hammers into me over and over again. I can feel an orgasm rising once again. "Oh God, Reaper," I gasp.

"Not God, honey. Now fuckin' come," he grunts, his thrusts becoming unrelenting. My body tenses as pleasure rises through me. "Fuckin' come, honey. I want to feel you come on my cock."

It's as though his words are magic, and he can pull my orgasm from me with just words. My back arches, and I claw at his neck as I come, every inch of my body trembling as my orgasm washes through me.

He grunts as my pussy spasms around his cock, and he plunges into me once more. I feel the warm liquid of his cum fill me. "Fuck, Es, I'll never get

enough," he growls as he pushes his head into the crook of my neck.

My breathing is hard as we both lie here, trying to regain our breath. That was beyond anything we've done before, and I'll definitely be wanting to have another round. Just not today, or even tomorrow. My body is sore, and I need time to recover. Reaper is going to kill me if we have another night like we had last night. I don't think I would survive it.

He pulls out of me and lies on the bed beside me. "Are you working today?" he asks.

I nod. "Yep. Monday through Friday," I tell him. "What about you? Are you working in the shop?"

The Fury Vipers own a custom ride store, it's also a motor repair shop. From the little I do know, the men are amazing at what they do, and their custom rides are sought out throughout the country if not the world. I think that's amazing. I know the Vipers have a bad reputation among some people, but having known them for the past five years, and seeing how the men are, especially with women and children, I don't believe what the rumors say. They're not animals. They're men who work hard and party harder. There's nothing wrong with that.

"I've got a custom that needs finishin'. It's gonna take me a few days, but I'll be back once it's done," he tells me, his hand running through his short brown hair.

"That's okay. I'll be setting up the rest of the week's work this evening. I didn't get a chance to do it over the weekend." I feel a twinge of pain in my heart at the thought that this could be it. It sure sounds like a brush-off. I pull in a deep breath and smile at him. "I need a shower and to get ready. Do you want breakfast before you go?"

He sits up in bed, his back to me. "No, honey, I'm good. I'm going to head back to the clubhouse, have a shower, and then get somethin' there. You good to stay here alone?"

I blink back the tears. That's definitely a brush-off. "Yeah, I'll be fine. I'm a big girl, Reap. I can take care of myself. If you want coffee before you go, the pot should be ready," I tell him as I get to my feet, grabbing my robe from the floor and quickly tying it around me. "I'll see you soon," I say with a bright, fake smile. I press a quick kiss to the corner of his mouth and carry on moving toward the bathroom. I lock the door and turn on the water. Tears sting the backs of my eyes.

Damn, I'm so stupid. It was only supposed to be fun. I should never have

gotten attached. Now look where we are. I'm on the verge of tears because it's over.

I strip out of my robe and climb into the shower. Never again. Not ever again will I let my heart be involved. I don't think I'm ready for anything. I'm not strong enough, not yet. I need to focus on me.

CHAPTER 14

REAPER

Leaving Esme this morning was hard, but I needed to get to the clubhouse and see if Ace had spoken with Makenna and uncovered anything about the fucking Jacobson's. The way she said goodbye, it sounded final. She's got another think coming if she believes we're done. Hell fucking no. Last night sealed her fate. She's mine. I'm goin' to have to take a leaf out of Wrath's book and bide my time, get so fucking deep that she doesn't even notice how close I am until it's too late.

"You good, brother?" Preach asks as I enter the clubhouse. He's holding Tyson in his arms, who's just as wide awake as his father.

"Yeah. What the fuck you doin' up at this time?" It's not even eight a.m. and my brother is wide awake. Preach usually doesn't see the fucking afternoon, let alone morning.

"Tyson had a bad night," he says through a yawn. "Didn't get much sleep. Then I heard your bike pull up. Everythin' good with Esme?"

I nod. "Yeah, brother, everythin' is good. Why don't you get some sleep. I'll take care of him for an hour or so," I say to him, knowing that if I don't take Ty, Preach isn't getting any sleep today at all.

Preach's brows practically rise to his hairline. "You?"

I scoff, offended by the shock in his voice. "You don't want my help, that's fine. I got other shit to do."

He shakes his head. "No, you've offered. I'm takin' you up on that. I'll only sleep for an hour," he says. The big grin on his face as he hands me his son is enough to make me glare at him. That fucker is loving this. But Preach is my brother, my best friend. I would do anything to help him. And taking care of a baby isn't that hard. Right?

"Call me if you need me," Preach says as he walks toward the back of the clubhouse. "He's been fed and changed, so he should be good for a while."

"We'll be fine. Sleep, before you fall on your face. You're no fuckin' good to any of us like that." It's true. He'll get himself or someone else hurt by being so sleep deprived.

Tyson looks up at me. Thankfully, he looks nothing like his mom. But those gray eyes of his look so familiar and nothing at all like Preacher's. A cold chill chases down my spine. The fuck?

"Yo, you good?" Ace asks as he moves toward me, his brows knitted together as he watches me with Tyson. "Where's Preach?"

"He needed sleep," I tell him. "You got a sec?" I ask, knowing that I need to ask him about Makenna, but looking down at Tyson and those familiar eyes, I'm wondering if I should mention the weird gut feeling that I have.

I could kick myself. The kid is months old and I'm only noticing now that he looks nothing like Preacher. Fuck.

"Of course," he says, nodding his head in the direction of his office. "I'm taking it that you're here to find out if I've spoken to Makenna?"

"Yeah," I say as I cradle Tyson in my arms. "I just wanted to check in and see if you have any updates." I'm still beyond pissed that he had someone watching her, that he's trying to scare her into going back to him. That's not going to fucking happen.

"I did. I got back to the clubhouse and called her. She had an awful lot to say about Jacobson and none of it pleasant. The old man has been money laundering for the Albanians for years. He believes he's untouchable, that because he's tied to so many high-ranking officials, most of which are judges and politicians, he's able to get away with whatever the fuck he wants."

"Just 'cause he thinks he's untouchable, it doesn't mean he actually is," I say with a grin. "Look at that fucker, Judge Temple." The asshole realized what happens when you fuck with a Viper. He and his wife paid the price for going after Pyro's sister and niece. Although it was Wrath who ended the old man. We'll do whatever it takes to protect our women. The lengths we'll go to in order to protect those we hold close define who we are. No one targets an old lady and lives to tell the tale.

Ace nods in agreement, a smirk on his face. "That he fuckin' did. But this time, those fuckers have a lot of backin'. Not only do they have the cops and prosecutors, they also have the fuckin' Albanians. This could mean a fuckin' war."

I grin. "Then fuckin' bring it," I snarl. "That asshole isn't goin' to target Esme again, Prez. It's not fuckin' happenin'. I'll put a damn bullet in his head before he gets near her."

"You seem to be protective of her. You claimin' her, Reap?"

My smile tells him everything he needs to know. "She may not want it right now, but I'm not lettin' her go. Trust me, Prez, I'll take out anyone who fuckin' gets close."

"We've got your back. As I said yesterday, she's under the Viper's protection. No one touches what's ours. But you know that if we do this, and we get caught or leave any evidence behind, we're fucked and lookin' at servin' hard time."

I nod. "I know, but she's had eight years of her life tainted by that fuckin' asshole. She's not havin' any more."

"Alright then," he says. "We'll make sure Harry Jacobson knows that Esme is off fucking limits."

"Good. Now, there's somethin' else I want to talk to you about," I say, looking down at the baby that's fast asleep in my arms.

"I have a feelin' I know what you're gonna say, Reap, and while I don't want it to be true, I've seen the boy. He sure as fuck don't look like Preach, but he sure does look like you."

My gut sinks at his words. Fuck. I had hoped that he'd say he wasn't seeing what I was, that my mind was playing tricks on me. But fuck. This isn't good. This is not fucking good.

"What are you goin' to do?" Ace asks, his voice low and even. I see the war in his eyes. "Are you goin' to voice your concerns to Preach?"

I swallow hard. "Would you?" I ask. "Fuck, man, he's dealin' with enough as it is. I mean, he's still strugglin' with me takin' the fall for him and doin' time. What do you think he's goin' to say when I tell him I think that cunt Pepper lied to him and the boy ain't his? That guilt, the fear, the fuckin' pain?"

I shake my head. I can't do that to my brother. There's no way in hell I'd ever be able to hurt him that way. To take his son from him. But fuck. If he's mine, I want to know. I've never been one to want kids, but with the thought he could be mine, I want to see. I'm torn. Do I do what's best for Preach and Tyson or do I see if what Ace and I are thinking is true?

Fuck.

I knock on the door, waiting for it to open. I know she's here. Her car is parked in the drive. It's late, almost ten in the evening. I should leave her alone, but right now, she's the only person I can go to. It's fucked up. Everything in my world has tilted in the blink of an eye. It was beyond hard to act as though everything was normal when Preach woke up and came to get Tyson. I didn't want to let the boy go. I didn't want to walk away, but I had to. I had shit to do, and I've spent the entire day losing my mind on what to do about it all.

The door opens, and she stands before me in a tight pink tank that stretches across her breasts. She's wearing tatty fucking sweatpants and her feet are bare, yet she's never looked more fucking beautiful.

"Is everything okay?" she asks, her brows knitted together as she glances me over. "What's happened?" Even though her voice is filled with concern, her body is wound up tight, almost as though she's shocked I'm standing before her.

"You look surprised to see me," I say as I step into the house.

"Well yeah," she replies with a slow blink. "I mean, this morning it sounded as though you were done. I assumed that was the case. I didn't think I'd see you again. I thought you had a custom bike that needed finishing?"

I run a hand over my head. "Yeah, I did, but that didn't mean I was fuckin' done with you, Es. Christ. You have no fuckin' idea just how intoxicatin' you are. I couldn't walk away if I tried."

I watch as her entire body sags in relief. Her shoulders slump forward, the pain I hadn't realized was in her eyes slowly ebbs away, and she gives me that gorgeous smile of hers. "Okay," she says softly, opening the door wider for me to enter the house. "I was going to order takeout and have a glass of wine. Want a beer?"

I step close to her, sliding my hands along her back and pulling her into me. I slant my lips against hers, savoring the taste of her. Christ, never will I ever get enough of her.

"You good, honey?" I ask as I pull back and look into her eyes.

She gives me that soft as fuck smile. "Yeah," she says. "Just finished with work, so you have great timing."

I grin at her. I fucking love that she wants me here, that she wants to have dinner with me. "I'll order the takeout."

"We can get it delivered or you can take my car and get it," she says as she walks into the living room. Papers are scattered on top of the coffee table, her laptop sitting on the sofa, and an empty wine glass sits among the chaos of papers.

"You good with me drivin' your car?" I ask, knowing that her car isn't a heap of junk. In fact, it's new and must have set her back a good amount of money.

There's that sweet as fuck smile again. "Of course," she says as she moves to her purse. "I'm happy with any pizza. I love meat, but no pineapple, olives, or mushrooms," she says a little distractedly as she roots through her huge purse. I'm not sure if she's even able to see in it, it's so fucking big.

"Here," she says, handing me her car keys and some money. "I only have a couple of beers in the fridge. I'll stock up the next time I'm at the grocery store, but if you could grab some when you're out, that would be good."

"Es," I say, pleased as fuck that she wants me to get them. It means she wants me here. "I ain't takin' your money. You're my woman, and I pay for dinner and any fuckin' booze I want."

She blinks. "Reaper," she whispers. "This isn't —"

I pull her into my body once again. "I know, this isn't what you wanted. You're still dealin' with what that fuckhead did to you," I say. "But that doesn't mean that I'm him. What we have, we're goin' to enjoy, and you are my woman."

She doesn't argue with me. Instead, she pushes up on her tiptoes and presses a quick kiss to my lips. "Go. I'll have a shower while you're gone."

"Sounds good. Lock up after me, Es. I've got your keys, so I can let myself in when I'm back." I don't want something happening to her while I'm gone. Not fucking happening.

She nods. "I will, and when you're back, we'll talk about what's bothering you. And don't say nothing."

Fuck, I should have known. She's far from fucking stupid. She's smart as hell as well as beautiful.

"See you soon," I promise her.

She grins. "No pineapple, olives, or mushrooms," she reminds me as I'm walking out the door.

"I got it, babe," I tell her as I close the door behind me. "I won't be long."

I hear the locks engage and smile, glad she listened to me.

Now I have to decide whether I'm going to tell her about my suspicions or

not.

Fuck, it could ruin everything that we've started to build.

CHAPTER 15

ESME

I smile as Reaper pours me another glass of wine. Having him turn up on my doorstep wasn't something I had expected. Hell, I thought for sure he was done. But he proved me wrong, and I'm happy. I'm beyond that. I may have inwardly squealed when he called me his woman, but along with that happiness came a deep-seated fear. I don't trust myself right now. Look at what happened the last time I let myself fall for someone. I lost everything about who I truly am and I'm only starting to gain back some of what I lost.

"Thank you," I say softly as I curl my feet up on the sofa. When he went out for the takeout, he stopped at the store, not only picking up beers for himself, but also a new bottle of wine for me, along with some candy. The man knows the way to my heart already. I have a feeling that I could fall for Reaper. Hell, I think I already have.

"So," I begin as I face him. "What happened today? You look stressed." He looks gutted, but there's no nice way of saying it and I don't want to offend him.

He runs a hand through his hair, looking agitated as hell. "I don't even know where to fuckin' start."

My stomach drops. Oh God, what's happened? "Start at the beginning," I say gently.

He grabs his beer bottle off the coffee table and brings it to his lips, taking a long drink. "Preacher is closer to me than any of the other brothers. He's closer than my own family, Es. He practically is my family."

"That's good. I'm glad you have him and the rest of the Vipers."

He doesn't seem to hear me. It's as though he's locked in his mind and focused on getting his words out.

"He had some trouble with a guy a few years ago. He ended up hurting the guy pretty badly. The night I met you and fucked up with you by bein' a dick, that asshole's brother was in the club. He was baiting Preacher."

Bile rises through my stomach. "What happened?" I ask, wondering just how bad things ended up being. I can tell by his face that it was awful.

"I left the club and found Preach and the asshole in the alleyway outside. Preach had beaten him badly and the cops were on their way. I could hear the sirens in the distance. That fucker tried to set Preacher up."

I reach for his hand. God, what an asshole.

"I made him run, told him to get the fuck out of there."

His words hit me. "Oh, Reaper," I whisper. "You took the fall?"

He nods. "Did four years in prison. It saved my brother the pain of doing a fuckin' lot more time than that. He was looking at doin' hard time, Es. I couldn't sit back and let him do that."

"I'd do the same for Seri," I whisper. I'd do whatever it took to ensure my girl was safe and out of trouble.

"I served my four years, Es. I came home, and my brothers lives had moved on. They had kids, and they were fuckin' happy. But not Preach. He was stuck in Hell. He felt so much guilt for what happened and where I was, that he was drownin' in it."

Tears spill from my eyes. The pain in his voice hurts my heart. I feel for Reaper, that everyone's life moved forward while he was stuck doing time for a crime he didn't commit. And my heart hurts for Preacher, a man who's dealing with the pain of his brother losing that time in his life. I can understand the guilt. I can understand why they're both hurting. It's a situation that must be difficult for them both.

"I came home, and I was pissed, though I never told anyone that. I was beyond pissed that Preach was drownin'. That everyone's life had carried on while I was stuck behind bars. I fucked up," he grunts. His lips twist into a scowl. "I fucked up badly when I came home."

"What happened?" I ask, wondering how he could have.

"I fucked Pepper. God, she was a fuckin' bitch. When I left, she was one of the club whores that was fun to be with. She knew the score. She knew she was there to have fun with the brothers and nothin' more."

My stomach churns at his words.

"Turns out, Pepper had a plan to trap a brother. She wanted to get pregnant and become an ol' lady."

The churning turns to acid. God, why would anyone do that? Why would she do that?

"She'd been with more than one brother. She'd been with a few. I was so fuckin' relieved when she announced the baby she was carryin' was Preacher's. God fuckin' forgive me, but I was so fuckin' happy that I wasn't saddled with that bitch for the rest of my life. But Pepper hadn't finished fuckin' up people's lives. She had only just started."

How much more could happen? How bad could that woman be? "What happened?"

"Throughout her pregnancy, she was fuckin' as many people as she could without protection, and she was takin' drugs and drinkin' alcohol. When Tyson was born, babe, he was born addicted to the shit the bitch took. That tiny boy was fuckin' addicted to drugs the moment he took his first breath."

"Oh my god," I breathe, my tears falling thicker and faster.

"I was happy for my brother. I truly was. He got rid of that bitch and was able to focus on gettin' my nephew better. Tyson's fightin' fit. He's a fuckin' fighter."

"I'm so glad," I whisper. "That poor baby boy."

He doesn't look at me, his gaze focused on the beer he's holding in his hands. "Fucked up as it is, babe, today I had a look at that boy. Finally had a good look at him. I held him in my arms and looked at him. Saw those gray eyes of his —"

I gasp. Preacher doesn't have gray eyes. No, he has these dark, intense brown eyes that look as though he's searing through your soul. The only person I know with gray eyes is Reaper.

"Is—" I pause, swiping my tongue over my bottom lip. "Is Tyson yours, Reaper?" I ask, wondering if that's what he's been trying to tell me.

He places the bottle onto the coffee table and runs both hands through his hair. "I don't know," he says thickly. "I swear," he says. "I looked at that boy and it was like lookin' in the fuckin' mirror when I was a kid. No fuckin' lie. It was like a spittin' image of me."

I stare at him in shock. "Have you spoken to Preacher?" I ask.

He shakes his head. Now I know why he looks gutted. He could have a kid, and if he does, it means that his brother, his best friend, is losing his baby. It's beyond fucked up. God, I hate Pepper. I hate her so damn much. How the fuck could someone be so cruel as to let this happen?

"What happens now?"

"I've no fuckin' idea. What the fuck am I supposed to do? Hmm? Do I break my best friend's fuckin' heart, Es? Do I break him until he's nothin'? 'Cause if Tyson's mine, that's exactly what's goin' to happen. He's goin' to have nothin'. Tyson is his lifeline, babe. He was fuckin' drownin' 'til that boy came along. What am I supposed to do, break him?"

I slide across the sofa, hating that there's distance between us. "I'm so sorry," I whisper. "I'm so very sorry, Reaper. I don't have any advice for you. It's a situation that's put you in an impossible position. Ultimately, you need to decide if you can live with telling him your suspicions, or do you let him be happy and watch what could be your son grow up thinking that another man's his dad?" I pull in a deep breath and wind my arms around his neck, holding him close to me. "I'm so sorry, Reaper. I can't tell you what to do. I wish I could take this pain from you."

He slides his arms around my waist and holds me tight. A shudder runs through his body, and I let him be, knowing he needs this right now. I can't imagine the pain and heartbreak he's going through right now. He's dealing with a lot, and he's the only one who gets to make this decision. "Whatever you decide, you're not alone."

"I never wanted a family," he says, not releasing me. "My family is fucked up. My parents never gave a fuck about anyone but themselves. They hated each other. They got married because they had to. She got pregnant, and my grandparents demanded that they marry. It was like livin' in a fuckin' constant argument between them. Every day there was screamin' and fightin'. I swore I'd never do that, that I'd never end up like that."

"We're not our parents, Reaper. We're not destined to be them. We make our own paths, and we learn from their mistakes. You're not them. You're sweet, gentle, amazing. You have no idea just how at ease I feel when I'm around you. It's hard to believe that I could find someone I could feel this way about. You're not them."

He releases a harsh breath. "I know. The moment I met you again, I realized that pushin' everyone aside wasn't workin', and I didn't want to do that. Not with you."

My heart starts to race. God, he says the sweetest things.

"I can't do that to him," he says as he pulls back to look at me. "I wouldn't do that to my brother. To any of them. Tyson's happy. He's with Preach."

"Okay," I say gently. "I love that you're so selfless, but is that something you're able to do? I mean, seeing Tyson all the time, is that something you're

able to separate yourself from?"

He shakes his head. "I have to. I won't let my brother fall. I can't."

"Okay," I repeat. "Okay, then we do everything to make this easier for you. You're not alone, Reaper."

"Grayson," he says, and I blink. "My name, honey, is Grayson."

I swallow hard as I look up at those gorgeous gray eyes. "Gray," I whisper. "I love that you told me," I say, honored that he did. "Can I call you that? It suits you better than Reaper. You're not that man with me."

He frames my face with his hands. "Told you my name, babe, so you would call me that. You're the only one, ever, who's allowed to call me that."

I want to squeal. I want to smile. I love that he's given me this piece of himself. But he's going through so much that it doesn't feel like the time to celebrate.

I rise to my feet. It's been a hard day for him. "Come," I whisper, holding out my hand for him. "Let's go to bed. You need sleep, Gray, and you're safe here."

He doesn't hesitate. He rises and holds my hand. His grip is tight but perfect. "I'm fuckin' wrecked, honey," he says, and I know that he's opening up to me even more.

"Then we'll sleep. Tomorrow is a new day. We'll go from there."

This situation is awful, and it's not going to be easy for Grayson. It's going to be far from it. I can tell by the seriousness in his eyes that this isn't him just thinking that Tyson's his. He's adamant, and my gut tells me that if he were to have a DNA test, it would come back positive that Grayson is the dad. It's going to be impossible for him to see Tyson and not feel fatherly toward him. It could end up tearing him apart.

I just pray that he's able to find a way through this.

CHAPTER 16

REAPER

"You good, brother?" Preacher asks. It's been a few days since I realized I could be Tyson's father.

I've not been around the clubhouse much, staying every night at Esme's house, needing to have the distance between me and my brothers. It's fucked up, but it's the only way I can deal right now. Seeing Tyson every day I'm here is hard, especially as every time I look at him, I see myself looking back at me. But I need to do this. I need to ensure that Preach doesn't find out.

"Yeah," I reply with a grin. "Prez called. Makenna wants a meeting."

His gaze narrows. "They've uncovered shit about those dick Jacobson's?"

"Seems so," I reply, shoving my hands into my pockets. "I need to find out how bad these fuckers are. Money doesn't buy everything and I want to know their weaknesses."

"You're really into Esme, aren't you?"

I stare at him. "What do you think?"

He grins. "You've never been this way about another woman. Hell, anyone. Fuck, brother, I thought you were destined to be a fuckin' asshole who's alone and miserable all his life."

I flip him off, pissed that we're having this discussion. "Whatever. Right now, Es and I are takin' things slow and seein' how things go. She's been through hell and she's finally comin' out the other side. We're not rushin' it."

"I'm pleased for you, brother. I like Esme. She's good for you. She makes you happy, and that's all we could ever want."

I hear Tyson crying, and my heart feels as though it's encased in a fist that's squeezing hard. It feels as though it's about to explode in my chest. Fuck, it's harder to be around him than I thought it would be.

The door to Prez's office opens, and I glance over and see him standing in the doorway with his arms closed. "Reap, you ready?" he asks.

"Talk to you later," I mutter to Preach and move toward Ace.

Entering his office, I see Makenna seated, her head bowed, her blonde hair falling over her face as she types on her cell.

"Makenna has information for us," Ace says as he closes the door behind us. "You're not going to be happy, brother. That asshole Jacobson is far from finished with Esme."

"What?" I hiss through clenched teeth. "The fuck does that mean?"

"Harry Jacobson Senior," Makenna says, her Irish accent soft and lyrical, "has made it known that having a first grade teacher who looks as sweet as Esme does, and is as well-loved as Esme, would be a great look for his business. He's beyond pissed that his son fucked up everything he worked hard to organize."

"He can get fucked," I snap. "She's not his, not any-fucking-more."

"We know that, but the Jacobson's aren't prepared to lose their dream of their happy family," Makenna says, pursing her lips. "Seems as though Harry Senior wants to dip his toes into politics."

"He goes near her, Makenna, and he won't make it to see a fuckin' election." I'm so fucking angry. I can't and won't let that bastard near her. He's done enough damage to her, and I won't sit back and see him do more. I'll kill him before he gets the chance.

Her pursed lips spread into a bright, wicked smile. "Now, Reaper, you should know me better than that. I don't like the Jacobson's. They're thick as thieves with the Albanians, which means if those assholes rise to power, they'll interfere with my business, and that's not something I'll ever allow to happen. The fact that he's also targeting Esme just adds fuel to the fire."

"So, it's time to pay those assholes a visit," I announce. "Make it known that this shit isn't going to fly."

She nods. "Exactly," she breathes. "I like you, Reaper, and I have a feeling having you on side for this endeavor is going to be fun. However," she says, and I brace, knowing whatever is going to come out of her mouth next isn't going to be good, "you have a criminal record, and the last thing we need is for you to go back to prison or even get put on the cops' radar."

"Don't give a fuck," I say simply.

Her laughter is loud and husky. "Alright then." She turns to Ace. "We have a meeting set for this afternoon. Dante is coming with me. I'm guessing

it'll be you and Reaper joining us?"

Ace nods. "Yep. Bringing too many men will cause suspicion."

I chuckle. "Those fucking Albanians get word that Jacobson is sitting down to talk to not only us, but the head of the Irish and Italian mafia, they're going to start shitting themselves."

"That, my friend, is precisely why we're meeting him for lunch in a very high scale restaurant. So make sure you dress for the occasion. By the time our lunch is over, everyone is going to know that Jacobson is talking to us."

She's vindictive, and I fucking like that. Makenna Gallagher Bianchi is not a woman you mess with. She'll gut you where you stand if you ever even try. She'll never let anyone get one over on her. She's far too clever for that shit.

"So, you're telling me that I'm going to have to wear a fuckin' suit to this fuckin' lunch?" I hiss. The mere thought is making me want to itch. The last time I wore a damn suit was when I stood trial, and I don't have any intention of wearing one again.

The smile on her face is answer enough. I glance at Ace, who looks just as fucking happy about the situation as I do. Makenna laughs. "It's not going to kill you. It's a fucking lunch, not a funeral."

"Whatever," I sigh. "I'll wear the damn suit. But at least tell me we can bring weapons. I'm not goin' in blind."

"No, we won't be going in blind. We'll all be carrying." She gets to her feet. "Gentlemen, as always, this has been a pleasure. And I have no doubt this lunch will be immensely fun. Do try and keep your cool, though, Reaper. We'll be in public, and the last thing we need to do is cause a scene."

I raise my hand, pointing my two fingers out. "Scout's honor," I say with a grin.

She shakes her head. "You weren't a scout, were you?"

I shrug. "Doesn't matter, does it? I mean, the sentiment's the same."

She's still shaking her head as she leaves the office. "I'll see you both soon."

"Be alert when we're there. I have a feelin' this is all goin' to go south," Ace says as he reaches for his cell. "But havin' Makenna and Dante on side is good. It gives us the manpower to take out everyone if needed." He looks up at me, and I see the anger in his eyes. "This could seriously blow back on us. You ready for that?"

"Are you?" I fire back. "If it does, it puts this club and family at risk. Is it

somethin' you're willin' to do?"

"You claimin' Esme?" I nod. I know there's no one out there for me except her. She's the only woman I'd ever want to claim. He doesn't even hesitate. "Then yes, I'm willin'. If shit goes south, the club goes on lockdown. We'll make sure they're safe."

I release a breath, and my entire body starts to lose some of the tension it had. "Okay, then let's hope these bastards listen to what we tell them, because if they don't, then there's a war coming. There's no way Makenna and Dante are goin' to allow the Albanians to get a foothold in their empire."

Ace shakes his head. "This meetin' doesn't go to plan then God fuckin' help anyone who's against us all."

I grin. We tend to stay out of shit unless it directly involves us. We've helped Makenna a few times and she's repaid the favor. Our alliance with the Irish Mafia is something that was built over the years. Makenna is Ace's little sister's best friend. The girls have been thick as thieves since, and their bond has helped our club over the years and vice versa.

"I'd best get ready for this meetin'," I say with disdain.

Ace laughs. "As Makenna said, it's not goin' to be for long. You can deal with that."

I ignore the ass as he continues to laugh. I exit his office and make my way toward my room. Wearing a suit is restricting. It'll take me back to a place where I was at my lowest. Somewhere I don't want to be again.

A knock at my door thirty minutes later has me pausing fixing my tie. I open the door, and I'm shocked to see Preacher standing before me with Tyson in his arms. My heart twinges as I see the little guy smiling at me. "Prez told us the plan. I'm pissed that you're goin' alone, as are the other brothers."

I get that. I'd feel the same if the tables were turned. We don't know if it's a set-up, if those assholes will have the Albanians waiting on us.

"It'll be fine," I assure him. "If it isn't, then we'll go from there. But I doubt anyone is stupid enough to go against us, the Irish, and the Italians. I mean, that's just a fuckin' death wish right there."

He chuckles and my gaze slides to Tyson, who's not taken his eyes off me. He's watching me carefully, all the while smiling so brightly.

It's a complete mind-fuck thinking that your son lives across the hall from you and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it. As much as I want to see if my suspicions are right—and every day that goes by, that feeling gets

stronger—I can't do that to Preach. I wouldn't tear him away from the boy. So I'm keeping quiet and praying this feeling is only temporary.

"If you get a feelin', call me. You know me and the brothers will be there as soon as we can. Fuck, I think we should be on standby at the very least."

I shake my head. "You need to calm the fuck down, Preach. It's goin' to be fine. Relax, man. You're goin' to give yourself a fuckin' stroke or somethin'."

He flips me off, his arm tightening around Tyson. "You're an ass, you know that, brother?"

I grin. "Never claimed I wasn't. Now, you good?"

He nods. "I'm good. But as I said, you need us, just call."

"I get your concern. This could go fucking wrong in so many different ways. But I have a feeling the meeting itself will be uneventful. It's the aftermath that's going to be the problem."

His eyes narrow. "You think those cunts will make a play at some later stage?"

I nod. "Jacobson Senior is lookin' to get into politics. He's not goin' to want a fuckin' shootout between major players, where he's at the forefront. That's a bad image, Preach. No, this fucker is goin' to be nice as fuckin' pie and try to worm his way into our good graces. It's what the snake does after that will determine what goes down next."

He nods. "I get that. It makes sense. Fuck, if this isn't the most fucked-up situation. How's Esme takin' it?"

"She's at work. I'm not disruptin' her for somethin' that could lead to nothin'. She's dealt with the Jacobson's brand of bullshit for years. I'm not subjectin' her to any more."

Fuck that. My woman has been hurt enough, and I know if anything goes down after this meet, she's going to blame herself, and that shit's whacked. We're not to blame for others' actions. But I can guarantee if those assholes come for us, I'm going to enjoy killing each and every single one of them. No one targets the club and gets to walk away.

I enjoy unleashing what I have inside. The thirst for vengeance is something I crave. When someone does me or my club wrong, they pay the price.

CHAPTER 17

REAPER

The young server weaves through the restaurant with ease as she leads us toward one of the bigger tables in this place. There's enough room for twelve people to sit at that table and yet there are only six of us here. I see the asshole seated, his gaze on us. The old man is exactly that. Old as fuck. He's got short gray hair, and his face is weathered and wrinkled. He's wearing a navy-blue suit and sits smugly, almost as though he's the biggest player in this room. Little does he know, he's not even fucking close.

His son is sitting beside him, watching his father like a lost puppy. They're wearing matching suits, and I have to question what the fuck Esme saw in this dipshit. He's a joke of a man who's hanging onto his father, trying to make a name for himself.

"Ah, Ms. Gallagher," Harry Jacobson Senior greets with an outstretched hand as we reach his table.

The restaurant is busy. There's a fucking lot of assholes here. Politicians, cops, judges. I'm on guard, my gaze moving through them all. Makenna was right, the place is fucking upscale. The who's who of the corporate world are here. It goes to show that it's not just criminal organizations that have these fuckers in their pockets. The business world does too.

"Bianchi," Makenna snaps as she takes a seat, ignoring the old man's hand. "Then again, you knew that," she hisses. "I'm surprised this is how you want to start the meeting, Harry." The disdain in Makenna's voice is hard to miss. This asshole has pissed her off with just three words. Stupid man.

"You wanted the meeting, Ms. Bianchi, not I," the asshole says as he retakes his seat.

Dante sits beside his wife on her right and Ace takes the seat on her left.

I'm the last to take my seat, glaring at Harry Junior. The asshole's eyes narrow. Ah, I think he realizes who I am now. I smirk at him and watch as heat rises through his cheeks and he puffs out his chest. Fucking sap.

"That is correct. I did want this meeting, Harry. I've heard a lot of rumblings and I wanted to see if those rumors were true." She smiles at him, and the man seems to soften under it.

Makenna is gorgeous. She's young, still in her twenties, and she has a look of innocence about her. The sweet smile she has makes her look like a vulnerable woman. You'd be crazy to think that though. She is without a doubt one of the most powerful players in America, if not the world.

"What rumors would those be?" he asks, his brows raising as he leans forward.

Before Makenna can answer, the server returns to give us menus. I'm in no mood to eat, and I certainly don't want to share a meal with these fucks.

"Have whatever you'd like. It's on me," the asshole says with a grin. "Now, as I was saying, what rumors have you heard, Mrs. Bianchi?"

Makenna places her menu down, not once looking at it. "That you're running for office," she says sweetly. "I'll have a cup of tea, please," she says. "None of the sweet stuff. A proper cup of tea with boiling water from a kettle and not a microwave."

The server nods as the Jacobson's put in an order for themselves. Once the server leaves, Harry Senior turns his attention back to Makenna. "My dear, whomever your sources are, they're very well informed."

Christ. How fucking stupid is he? You never give information to your opponent. Surely he should know that. If he's playing us, then what's his game? What's he trying to achieve from it?

"You plan to run for office?" Makenna asks as she sits back in her chair and crosses her arms over her chest. "That's very..." she pauses as if trying to find the right word. "Obvious, wouldn't you say? I mean, what's running for Mayor going to do for you?"

His brows knit together as he stares at her. "As opposed to what, may I ask?"

"You want power, I take it, Mr. Jacobson. That's why you're wanting to throw your hat into the race for Mayoral candidacy. But what if you could get that power elsewhere?"

Oh, now Makenna is toying with him.

"What do you have in mind?"

"I mean, if you ran for actual politics, Mr. Jacobson, it would give you a prime position to run for presidency, wouldn't you say?"

The man balks at her words. "What?"

"You want power. What better power than becoming the leader of a free state? I mean, isn't that your dream, to become the most powerful man in New York?"

He pauses for a moment and purses his lips, watching us all. "And what would you get out of this deal?"

Makenna blinks innocently, but no one is buying that, not anymore.

"Mrs. Bianchi, you are not here to give me advice. You're here for a reason. I think now is the time to make it known what you want. What is it that you are to gain from this?"

She laughs. "Oh, Harry." She tuts. "You aren't ever going to become President, nor will you become Mayor. You are blinded by your dreams. You can buy as many votes as you'd like from the politicians and judges, but it's not them who'll get you the votes. It's the people on the street, and they do not like you. They don't like your family, and there's no fucking way in hell you'd ever change their view."

Harry Junior pipes up, his laughter grating on me. He's fucking loving this. He thinks he's sitting on top. He's far fucking from it. "We have everything," he says smugly. "Every fucking thing we need."

"You sure about that?" I ask with a raised brow.

"Your fiancée left you because you're a fuckin' asshole who couldn't keep his dick in his pants," Ace taunts.

Makenna tuts. "What's everyone going to think when it comes time to run for office? Hmm? Your sleazy son cheated on his sweet fiancée who teaches first grade. Or the fact that you're in bed with the Albanians, who are known for sex trafficking. You think that's going to be a good look for you, Jacobson?"

Harry Junior pales at her words, his gaze sliding to his father, who's staring at us all with disdain. "What is it that you want," the old man hisses.

"Your association with the Albanians is now over. You are no longer in business with them," Makenna says, and gone is the sweet tone. She's beyond pissed now. "And Esme Greene no longer exists for you. The both of you."

It's as though a switch flips, and the old man sits up straighter. Gone is the fragility he had. Instead, I can see why he's amassed millions. He's ruthless. I can see it in the depths of his green eyes.

"You cunt," he snarls low. "You think you can waltz in here and I'll give into your demands? That I'll allow you to dictate what I'm going to do? No. That's never going to happen, you stupid bitch. I'm going to run as mayor, I'm going to win, and there's nothing you can do about that." His smirk is patronizing. "Everything is set in motion, whore. Everything is ready to go ahead. I'm not backing out just because you say so. I have plans."

"You're coming for us," Makenna says, and there's no emotion in her voice. "That's why you're in bed with the Albanians. You're trying to get a foothold on the drug trade in America." Her lips curve into a smile. "Good luck with that," she taunts. "You truly believe you're going to be our downfall?"

The old man smirks. "The best thing about the Albanians is that they're not scared of you. They know that going into business with me will bring them everything they desire."

"You need to think about what you're doing, old man," Ace snarls. "Goin' against all of us isn't goin' to work in your favor."

"You people have such confidence. I get it. You believe you can't be touched. You're wrong. We're going to enjoy bringing you all down."

I can't help but laugh. Fuck, these assholes are completely fucking deluded.

Harry Junior stays quiet, his fists clenched, his eyes narrowed and filled with hatred, his gaze solely on me. "Esme's had her fun. She got down and dirty with you," he grunts at me, spittle flying from the corners of his mouth. "She's had her rough and fun. Now it's time to come back home and settle down."

I glance at Ace. I'm done with this fucking asshole. There's no way I'm going to allow that to happen. He can think again if he believes Esme is going back to him.

The server comes to the table with Makenna's tea. I watch the blonde smirk as she brings the cup to her lips, inhales deeply, and then puts the cup down. "Yeah, I'm not going to drink that. It tastes like piss." She rises to her feet, a scowl on her face. "Gentlemen, you have been thoroughly entertaining."

Old man Jacobson's eyes narrow as he watches her. "Be wise, Mrs. Bianchi. You do not want another enemy. You have lost a lot of loved ones due to your family's ignorance. You wouldn't want to lose more."

Makenna bristles at his words. "Oh, Harry boy, you have no idea who the

fuck you're dealing with."

"I'll be seeing *you* real soon, Jacobson," Dante snarls. "If I were you, I'd keep *your* loved ones close." The man is pissed that the asshole threatened his wife.

Dante and Makenna move from the table. Both have their heads held high. This meeting went the way we knew it would. There was no way the fucker was ever going to give up what his plans were, but instead, we got to know that he's planning. We were all his targets from the beginning.

"Stay the fuck away from Esme," I hiss at Harry Junior as I rise to my feet.

He grins at me. "What are you going to do about it if I don't?"

I turn to his father. "If you want to have a son, old man, I'd advise him to stay the fuck away from her."

"You dare threaten me?" he snarls. "You dare?"

I glance at Ace, who's trying not to laugh his ass off. "Not a threat, old man. It's a motherfuckin' promise."

Ace slaps my back as I move away from the table, following Dante and Makenna out of the restaurant.

"Those fucks," Makenna hisses. "I'm going to enjoy killing them. I'm going to enjoy taking everything those fuckers have. I'm going to destroy everything he's built."

Dante grins. "My wife's a little vengeful."

"A little?" I ask with a raised brow. "Those assholes are wantin' a war."

"That's exactly what they're going to get," Dante replies. "Things are about to get fucking bloody in this city."

Makenna preens with glee. "Oh, it's going to get so bloody. I'd advise you guys to ensure that your families are safe. Make sure you're diligent when leaving the clubhouse. We don't know when these fuckers plan to strike or who they'll strike first."

"We'll be on guard," Ace assures her. "Same for you. The man's fucking crazy and he's got something planned. The man despises you, Makenna."

The woman's unbothered by it. "He can get in line. There have been plenty of people who've hated me. They're all dead and that fucker will be too." She shakes her head. "You need to keep Esme away from them, Reap. They're determined to get their hands on her. In their eyes, she's their link to growing their empire and getting them everything they want. They're not men who'll ever back down."

"They touch Esme," Ace snarls, "they'll die. Esme is Viper property."

I nod in agreement. She's so fucking much more than that.

"She'll be safe," Makenna says, and I know she'll do whatever we need to ensure that she is.

"Give us a week," Dante says. "We're going to have our men dig deep and uncover everything these fuckers are doing. There's not a detail we won't have."

Ace nods. "We'll be doing the same. I take it you'll be using Holly to track the money?"

Makenna sighs. "As much as I hate dragging her into this war, she's the best and we're going to need her. She's the only one I trust."

Holly Bianchi is Makenna's niece. She's also married to Dante's brother, Romero. She's the money woman for the Irish Mafia. She's smart as fuck and has helped the Fury Vipers invest and expand. We're richer than we could have ever imagined. In the past five years, she's quadrupled the money we invested. She's good at what she does. If there's anyone who can track the Jacobson's money trail, it's her.

"Call me if you find anythin'," Ace says. "I'll do the same. There's goin' to be a lot of bloodshed."

"Let's just pray it's none of our own," Dante says thickly, his brown eyes darkening with rage.

"Go," Makenna says. "It's time to tell our men. They'll want answers."

We say our goodbyes, and Ace and I move toward the truck.

"What are you goin' to tell Esme?" Ace asks once we're driving back to the clubhouse. "Will you let her know everythin'?"

"That's somethin' I'm not sure about." I sigh. "She's goin' to think it's her fault."

"It's not. You gotta tell her somethin'. Let her know that if shit goes south, her ass is in the clubhouse and she's stayin' there while on lockdown."

I clench my jaw. I'm not sure how she'll take it. I guess I'll find out this evening.

CHAPTER 18

ESME

I hurry as I tidy the classroom. It's the end of the school week, and I'm glad it's the weekend. It's been a long week and I'm tired, but I'm excited that I get to spend the entire weekend with Grayson. I'm falling deeper and deeper for him. It's funny how love comes when you least expect it. I certainly didn't expect Grayson. I had planned to stay single and just have fun while I regrouped from the pain of being with Harry.

"Have fun this weekend, Esme," Daisy Creek, my friend who's also a teacher here at the school, says with a wicked grin as she stands in the doorway of my classroom. "If I had the hunk you do warming my bed, I certainly wouldn't be coming up for air."

I laugh as I shake my head. God, I should never have told her about Grayson or showed her a picture. She waves goodbye as she passes by my classroom. "See you on Monday," she shouts behind her.

I'm still smiling as I finish tidying up. I grab my keys and purse before I head toward the door. It's good to be going home.

Once I'm outside, I notice my car is one of only three left in the parking lot. This happens a lot. I try to get everything set up for the next school day. By the time I end up leaving for the day, I'm usually one of the last to leave.

"Esmerelda." I hear the deep growl that sets my skin on edge. I grit my teeth and turn to see Harry striding toward me.

"Harry, what are you doing here?" I ask. "This is my workplace. You can't just show up here."

He invades my space, pushing me against the car door, his words dripping with menace. "Had a visit from your boyfriend today. You like it rough now, baby?"

I shudder with revulsion at him calling me baby. "Don't call me that," I seethe. "Back off, Harry. You shouldn't be here."

His lips form a vicious sneer. "You pushed me too far, Esmerelda," he growls as he clamps his fingers around my wrist. "I gave you the chance to cry and get over yourself, but you didn't listen. A man like me needs respect and you haven't shown any of that."

I wrench against his unyielding grasp. "Respect? What kind of sick game are you playing this time, Harry?"

"You and me, we're getting married," he spits out. "Just as you agreed to when you said yes all those years ago."

My mind reels at his declaration. "You're insane," I choke out. "God, Harry, no way am I marrying you. I hate you. You cheated on me. There's no way that I'd ever marry you." He pulls on my wrist, causing me to slam into him, his face only inches from mine. His fingers dig deeper into my wrist until tears burn in my eyes from the pain. "Let go of me!" I scream at him.

"No," he snarls. "You had your chance to cry and get over what happened. Now it's time to come back home."

"Never!" I yell as I pull against him with all my strength. "Let go of me! You can't possibly think I'd want to be with you after everything that happened."

The color drains from his face as rage pools in his dark eyes. "That was a mistake," he rasps through clenched teeth. "I told you already; let it go."

"A mistake is once," I shriek as I struggle against him with all my might. "Let go of me! You're hurting me."

He releases my wrist and shoves me away. I collapse to the ground, holding my wrist as tears burn my eyes. I scramble away from him, pressing myself against the car door, my nostrils flaring as I try to catch my breath.

"I gave you a chance to get over yourself," Harry hisses as he leans down, picking up my purse and tossing it to me. "We belong together, Esmerelda. We're starting over."

I shake my head as tears cascade down my face. "No," I cry. "That's never going to happen."

"I've warned you before about how you should be." There's a sharp pain in my side as he delivers an abrupt kick, causing me to cry out.

"Get up, Esmerelda," he commands in that low growl that sends chills up my spine. "We're going home."

I shake my head. "No," I rasp as I draw my trembling knees up to my

chest. "Get away from me, Harry."

He snarls as he grabs my arm, trying to drag me to my feet. "I'm not going to ask you again, Esmerelda," he growls as he grabs my other arm and hauls me to my feet. "You're coming with me."

"You fucking bastard!" I scream at the top of my lungs as I try wrenching away from him. "I hate you! I'll never go anywhere with you!" I can't bear the thought of being anywhere near him. Not ever again.

He yanks me back and slams my body into his own. "Don't make me hurt you, Esmerelda," he snarls with warning in his eyes. "Just come home with me. I won't ask you again."

"No," I cry out in defiance as I try to wrench out of his grasp. "Let me go, you bastard! I'm not going anywhere with you!" The pain that rips through me when I yell almost has me doubling over. It's so sore.

"I warned you," he hisses as he smashes his fist into the side of my face, causing me to scream out in pain. Tears blind me as the sky spins around me. He pauses, glancing behind him. He leans forward, his lips pulled into a snarl. "This is a warning," he growls as I hear footsteps hurrying toward us. "You'll be home with me soon. End this bullshit with that biker, Esmeralda. I'm warning you." He pushes me to the ground once again. This time, he walks away, moving toward his car in a rush.

"Esme," someone calls as I hear the sound of a car peeling out of the parking lot. I manage to pull myself to my feet, blinking rapidly to keep the darkness that's creeping in at bay.

"I'm okay," I assure Mr. Routledge, the principal. My tears are still falling thickly. "Honestly, I'm a little shaken, but I'm okay."

He gently reaches for me, checking me over. "Shall I call the police?"

I shake my head. "No, it's okay. Honestly. He's not taking our break-up well and I'm hoping that he's finally listened. I'm so sorry for bringing this to school grounds."

He shakes his head. "Please don't apologize. It's not your fault. Are you sure you're okay? Should I call someone for you?"

"No," I say quickly, a little too fast. "I'll be okay. I just want to get home."

He purses his lips. I can see that he's struggling with my words. "You let me know as soon as you're home. If you're in need of medical attention, please seek it out."

"I promise, I will, but I'm okay. I'll be fine once I'm home."

He nods as he steps backward. "Please, Esme, ensure that you let me

know when you're home safely. I'm not entirely sure that I should let you go home alone."

My heart restricts at his words. "Thank you for caring, but I assure you, I'm okay."

"Alright," he says with reservation. "But if you need it, please seek help."

"I will," I promise. "Thank you."

I slip into my car and pull out of the parking lot. My entire body aches as I drive toward home.

I'm angry. Harry's up to his shit again. Everything is always about him, always about what he wants and what's best for him. I'm done. I won't do it. Not after everything he's done to me. I'd rather die.

I pull into my driveway and glance nervously over my shoulder. I hate what he's done to me. I'm broken and I'm scared. I have no idea what's going to happen to me. I know that Harry's not finished. He's not a man who takes no for an answer, and if today's anything to go by, he's only just getting started.

I sit in my car for a long time, trying to figure out what I should do next. Tears form and my vision becomes blurry as I try to push back the emotions I don't want to feel. I was so stupid to believe that I was finally free of him, that I was able to start my life again, to grow from everything that happened. I was wrong. Boy, was I wrong.

My body trembles as I slide out of my vehicle. Pain erupts from my side, and I release a low moan. God, I fucking hate Harry.

Once I'm inside, I glance in the mirror behind my front door and see a bruise is already forming on my temple. My fingers tremble as they reach up to touch the spot on my face where he hit me the hardest. Anger boils in my chest and tears fill my eyes. How could this happen? He'll never learn. He's always going to be an asshole.

It takes me about twenty minutes before I'm able to climb into the shower. The moment the hot water cascades down my back, I can't control my emotions anymore. I sink to the floor of the shower and begin to sob.

God, what the hell is he going to do next?

CHAPTER 19

REAPER

Pulling up outside Esme's house, I note that the lights are on. She's home. I ignore the way my pulse races at the knowledge I'm going to see her again. This woman has gotten me sunk. It's crazy to believe that someone can change your entire fucking outlook on life. That's exactly what Esme's done.

The anger from today's meeting is still coursing through me. Those fucking Jacobson's have made enemies out of all of us and they're going to live to regret it. Going up against the Italians, Irish, and us is fucking crazy. There's no one who's gone against us and lived to tell the tale, and I can fucking guarantee that those asshole Jacobson's won't be the first to do it.

Raising my hand, I knock on her door. I hear her shuffling toward the door, and I grin. Fuck, seeing her brightens my day, and the moment she opens the door, I'll have her in my arms. But my world fucking tilts when the door opens and I see her. There's a bruise forming on her temple. Her eyes are red and puffy, tears spilling down her face, and she's trembling.

What the fuck?

I step into the house, closing the door behind me and pulling her into my arms. She doesn't hesitate. She sinks against me, sobs wracking through her body. "I'm sorry," she cries. "I didn't want to be crying when you came. I just can't stop."

"Honey," I say thickly, trying my hardest to tamper down my rage. "What happened?"

She stiffens in my arms. "I'm okay," she says, a tremor running through her body.

I don't think I'm going to get an answer out of her. I lift her in my arms

and walk with her to the sofa. She wraps her arms around my neck and buries her head into me, her tears soaking into my skin. Her sobs are like a fucking cut to the heart. Each one is like someone's slicing through me. It's without a doubt one of the worst sounds I've ever heard.

"Baby," I say softly.

She shakes her head, her cries growing louder. "Don't—call—me—that," she cries. "Please, Gray—don't call me that."

Fuck. I tighten my arms around her, rocking her, hoping and fucking praying that she'll calm down. But fuck, I don't think she will. I slide my hand into my pocket and reach for my cell. I hit dial on Prez's number.

"Reap, you good?" he asks the second he answers.

"Need you and Seri to come to Esme's," I say through clenched teeth.

"What's goin' on?"

"I have no idea, but she's sobbin' and she's been hurt. I need Seri to help me calm her the fuck down." Right now, the way that I'm feeling, I'm about ready to go find whoever the fuck hurt her and gut them. I don't give a fuck who they are.

"We're on our way. You thinkin' those fuckin' assholes got to her?" he asks.

I shake my head, my jaw ticking. "They had better not," I snarl.

"We'll be there soon, brother. Hang tight." He ends the call, and I know he'll be here within the hour. I'm just fucking praying that I can get Esme to calm down so I can get answers. Right now, I need her to stop crying. The sound is breaking my fucking heart. I feel useless. There's nothing I can do, and I hate it.

"Honey, you've got to talk to me. Tell me what happened. I'm about ready to lose my mind."

She presses further into me, her arms tightening around my neck. "He was there," she whispers. "He must have been waiting for me after I finished work."

Everything in me goes solid. Ice runs through my veins. The fuck?

"He told me that you visited him today. He's crazy, Gray. He's so damn crazy. He told me that we were getting married," she cries, her sobs starting up again and wracking through her body. "I tried to get him off me," she weeps. "He wouldn't let go."

I palm the back of her head and hold her to me. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. That motherfucker. He hurt her. I'm going to enjoy killing him. I'm going to take

my fucking time and ensure that he knows what it means to fuck with us. No one touches Esme. No one fucking lays a hand on her head.

"Es," I breathe. The anger I feel is palpable. I want to go find that cunt right now. The only reason I'm not is because Esme needs me. I'd be gone otherwise.

"I'm okay," she whispers. "I promise, Grayson, I'm okay." She lifts her head and looks at me. Her beautiful face is red and splotchy from where she's been crying, damp with tears and snot. She's still so fucking gorgeous. Still the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

I reach for the bruise on her temple and watch as she winces as I gingerly run my finger over it. "Tell me what happened," I ask, needing to know everything that cunt did and said to her.

She does. She recounts everything that motherfucker said to her, everything he did. It takes a while for her to get everything out as she sobs through it, but I continue to hold her, letting her know that I'm here, giving her support and comfort. All the while my anger continues to grow with each word she says. He shouldn't have touched her. He shouldn't have been anywhere fucking near her. The warning he got at the restaurant didn't sink in. That's fine. I'll make sure that it does. He's not going to get away with what he's done to her. No fucking way.

"My head isn't the worst," she says softly. "I'll be okay. Everything will heal."

Her words have my heart restricting. It's as though she knows from experience. "He hit you before, didn't he?"

She bites her lip, her eyes widening in horror, like she's just realized she's said too much. "Gray."

I shake my head. "Please don't lie to me, Es. Has that cunt hit you before?"

She glances away and nods. "Twice," she says low. "He always apologized and told me he never meant it."

"He's a piece of shit. You know that, right?"

"I know," she whispers. "I was so stupid when I was with him. I felt lost, like I had nowhere to run. I was broken, Gray, so damn broken that I didn't think I could leave, and he knew it."

"He's an abusive manipulator, honey. He knew exactly what he was doin'. He knew what to do to you to ensure that you never left. I'm proud as fuck that you found the strength to do so. So fuckin' proud that you stood up to

that cunt."

"But I was weak for so long," she says, dropping her head in defeat. "You know, when all that drama went down with Octavia, when River was hurting her, when he almost killed her, I swore to myself that I'd never let a man do that to me, and that's exactly what happened."

"You are not to blame for what that asshole did to you. Men like him and River aren't men at all. They're boys who are lacking, and the only way to make up for it is to hurt women and children. There's no other reason. You aren't to blame for what that bastard did."

"I'm so sorry," she says.

"The fuck are you apologizing for?" I ask, wondering why she's doing it.

"You don't deserve this drama. You're going through so much already. I'm so sorry. I completely understand if my shit is too much for you. You don't need it —"

"You are all that I fuckin' need," I snarl, pissed that she's even saying this shit. "You don't ever fuckin' apologize for what other's cause. Trust me, Es, there's nowhere in this world I'd rather be than here, with you."

She rests her head against mine. "I'm falling so hard for you, Gray. I never meant to. I never thought I'd ever feel safe with anyone. Then you came into my life and changed everything."

I can't help but grin at her words. I'm not afraid to admit to myself that I'm half in love with her. "Trust me, honey, the feelin' is entirely mutual."

"Will you stay here tonight?" she asks, her gaze searching mine.

"You don't even have to ask. My ass is here every fuckin' night, Es. I ain't sleepin' anywhere but with you. But we gotta talk. You need to know what went down today."

She bites her lip. "You did see Harry today?"

"Don't say that fucker's name," I snarl, pissed that he was close to her today.

"Okay," she says softly. "What happened?"

I explain to her without going into all the details. That's club business, and what goes on with the club isn't told anywhere. I give her as much information as I can without giving her anything that could get her hurt. "I warned that cunt to leave you alone. He didn't heed my warning."

"He doesn't like being told what to do. I'm just so happy that Mr. Routledge was there today. I don't think he would have left otherwise."

Yeah, I have no doubt that had the principal of the school not stumbled

upon what was happening in his damn parking lot, that asshole Jacobson would have taken her into his car, and I wouldn't have seen her again.

"Ace is on his way. Seri will stay with you while we're gone, but I'll be back once I'm done."

I watch as the color drains from her face. "No," she whispers. "Please, Gray, please don't go to him. I can't see you being hurt or getting into trouble. Not for me."

"He's not goin' to get away with hurtin' you, Es. Christ, have you seen your face? There's a fuckin' bruise. One that he put there." My words are harsh, I know, but I can't hide my anger any longer. It's consuming me, and I need a fucking release for it.

She grabs my face, her hands framing it. "Please," she weeps. "I can't lose you, Gray. He's an asshole and he'll call the cops."

My gaze moves to her right wrist, and I bite back a curse when I see his fingermarks. She told me how he grabbed her, how he dug his fucking fingers into her flesh. She never told me he'd left marks on her from it. "Where else did he hurt you?" I ask, my voice coming out as a rumble.

She pulls in a sharp breath, her gaze assessing me.

"Esme, please," I say hoarsely. "Where else did he hurt you?"

She shifts her weight on my lap, then reaches for the hem of her t-shirt and lifts it up. My heart stutters when I see the red mark on her ribs. I trace the bruise, noting that she keeps her jaw locked and her eyes on me. I see the pain shining in them. She doesn't want me to see how much that cunt has hurt her, so she won't let me in.

"Okay, Es," I say. "Why didn't you tell me that you had bruises other than on your head?"

"I've been around the club long enough to know what happens when someone they care about gets hurt, and I know how much you care about me, Gray. I can feel it," she says with tears in her eyes. "You've been to prison. You've served time for a crime you didn't commit. I can't be the reason you go back. I care about you too much to have you do something that'll make you end up back inside."

It's my turn to frame her face. "Esme, I'd fuckin' go to war for you. Don't you understand that? You're mine, honey, and some motherfucker hurt you. That's not somethin' I'll ever let slide. This is who I am. You know what the men in the club are like. You knew what I'd be like. You knew from the moment we met. I'm never goin' to change."

She nods. "I know," she whispers. "But I can't lose you. I just can't."

Before I'm able to answer her, the front door opens and Serenity storms into the house, her eyes wild and filled with tears. She's followed by Shadow, Ace, Eda, Rush, Cage, and Preacher. "Christ," she cries. "Oh, Es, what happened?"

I lift Es off my lap and sit her on the sofa. "You're goin' to stay here with her," I tell Seri and Eda. "You're lockin' the door and you're not to open it 'til we're back. You understand?"

"Wait," Eda says, her gaze searching between me and her man, Ace. "What's goin' on?"

"If Es is feelin' up to it, she'll tell you. Right now, we've got somewhere to be."

Esme jumps to her feet. "Please, Gray, don't —"

"That cunt hit you, Es," I say, cutting her off. "I told you, honey, I'm not lettin' that slide."

She crosses her arms over her chest, tears filling her eyes. "Please," she cries. "Be careful."

I pull her into my arms and press a kiss to her lips. "I'm goin' to be fine, but, honey, when I get home, we'll be talkin' about what that cunt did to you. Everythin' he did."

She presses her lips together. "Okay," she says softly. "But please be safe, Gray."

"I will," I assure her as I kiss her once again. "Gotta go, but I'll be back later."

She gives me a soft smile. "I'll order us food when you get back."

My heart warms at her words. This is everything and so fucking much more than I could have ever expected. "You do that, honey. I'll be back," I promise her.

She steps backward, letting me go, and I know it was hard for her. But fuck, I'm proud of her. This isn't what she's used to, I get it, but she's accepted everything about me, and this is just another part that she's accepted. Yeah, I've made the right choice. She's mine, and I'm going to do everything I can to keep her safe.

We leave the women in Esme's house, not leaving until we hear the locks engage. Once we do, I'm moving toward my bike.

It's time for Harry Jacobson to realize that he fucked up. This war has just begun.

CHAPTER 20

REAPER

"Brother," Preacher says once we're parked in the parking lot. "You've got to give us somethin'."

"Today, after Esme finished work, she was accosted in the parking lot. That motherfucker Jacobson put his hands on her. He's left bruises on her body."

Rush nods, creaking his neck, anger entering his eyes. He's pissed. "Then he dies," he says simply, and it's as fucking simple as that.

I never thought I'd ever consider him to be a brother, especially as he's the reason Digger's woman, Octavia, was shot. But I get it. He had no choice. His sister, Ruby, was in danger and he did what he had to do in order to save her. He went to juvie and grew into a man that we not only respect but consider a brother. He became a patched member only weeks ago. He was a prospect before that, and when it came time to vote to have him patched, every brother agreed.

He has a great relationship with Serenity and Esme. In fact, he's closer to those women than Octavia and Digger, the people he came home to when he left juvie. Seri treated him like family the moment he was brought home to the clubhouse and that never changed. I know that he's been with both Es and Seri a lot, talkin' to the women. Whatever the fuck they've said to him has helped him grow into the man he is today.

"This fucker has caused Aunt Es more than enough pain," Cage growls. Much like Rush, he's close to Es. "This ends tonight."

Ace's grin is sadistic. "Fuckin' A. This asshole was told today that Esme Greene was off fucking limits, and he didn't heed our warnin'. The fucker only has himself to blame. I'm goin' to make a call," he says, reaching into his

pocket and pulling out his cell. He steps backward and makes the call away from us.

We all know he's calling Makenna. He's giving her the heads up about what's about to go down. She deserves to know as they could be the ones to be hit with the repercussions.

"Kenna's sortin' out the security feeds in and around this buildin'. No one is goin' to know we were here."

"Then let's get it done," Preacher grunts. "We end this cunt tonight, and you know the war is startin', right?"

"The war started the moment that cunt went at my woman," I snap.

"Reap's right, Preach. They went after Esme despite knowing she's ours. They started this war. I get it, we've all got families, brother. We've all got kids. My woman's fuckin' pregnant, so I get it. You're worried. But we fight for our families and Esme is family."

Shadow, Cage, and Rush are nodding in agreement. They're closest to Esme, the younger brothers more so than Shadow. But Seri is Shadow's, and that means Esme's his too. We're not going to walk away without getting our revenge.

"You're right," Preach says with a sigh. "I didn't mean it like that. Just thinkin' about what's goin' to come next."

Ace slaps him on his back. "We get it. Now, we goin' to get this fucker?"

I nod, slidin' on my gloves. There's no fucking way that I'm going to leave fingerprints. What I'm about to do is going to cause Harry Junior a fucking world of pain, and it's going to be horrendous. I can't fucking wait.

It doesn't take us long to enter the building from the parking lot, especially when we have a whizz kid who's good at all things electronic. I guess it was somethin' he picked up in juvie. Rush is without a doubt one of the best at cracking codes and breaking into places. He manages to get into the electronic keypad that works the elevator within a minute, and all the while he's grinning as praise is heaped on him.

"You did good, brother," I tell him, and he gives me a chin lift. "Don't go tellin' anyone about what happens tonight."

He glares at me. "Don't tell me that," he snaps. "You should probably tell Preach. That man boasts about everythin'."

I laugh because the boy ain't wrong.

"True. No one is to repeat what happens here," Ace tells them. "That includes your women. Club business is exactly that."

"Ready?" Shadow asks as the elevator doors open into the penthouse apartment.

"So fuckin' ready," I hiss.

I hear shitty pop music playing through the speakers, and I shake my head. Christ, the man needs to get better taste in music. But at least he's fucking here. He's going to die tonight. I stalk through the apartment, my brothers doing the same.

It's Cage's voice that I hear ring out through the open-plan home. "Found the weasel," he snarls. "Hidin' in the fuckin' closet. Pussy-ass bitch."

I chuckle. If Octavia were to hear him, she'd be pissed. I watch in amusement as Rush lifts Harry by his collar through the apartment and throws him to the floor at my feet.

"You," he hisses.

"Warned you, asshole," I snarl. "Warned you what would happen if you went near her."

He scrambles to his feet. "She's mine," he hisses. "Was mine first and she'll always be mine. She's coming home."

"The fuck she is," Rush growls. "Esme is comin' nowhere near you. Not fuckin' ever."

"You put your hands on her," I say, my voice vibrating with anger. "You kicked her. You fucking hit her. There are bruises on her body from you."

He pales as I edge closer to him. He seems to realize that he fucked up. He should have heeded my warning. "W-w-w-what are you going to do?" he stammers.

"I'm goin' to enjoy killin' you," I say with a smile. "It's goin' to be fun listenin' to your screams."

He shakes his head. "No," he cries. "You can't. My father won't allow it."

Ace chuckles. "You should have realized, fucker, that your father has no fuckin' say in what we do. Your father is goin' to lose everythin' he's worked for and we're goin' to enjoy the rewards. You should have taken Makenna up on her deal today. Had you have done, you'd be alive come mornin'."

"Your death isn't goin' to be easy," I tell him. "It's goin' to hurt and it's goin' to be horrendous. There's nowhere for you to run. There's no escape."

"What are you going to do?" he cries, tears streaming down his face, much like Esme's were.

"Ah, now that would be tellin'. I don't want to ruin the surprise. Rush, find something to shove in his mouth so his cries are muffled. We don't want to

alert the neighbors as to what's goin' on in here." The last thing I want is for my fun to be spoiled. No fucking way. This asshole is going to feel the full effects of his actions.

It doesn't take Rush long to find a tie and a belt. I laugh. He couldn't pick one? Preach, who knows me better than anyone, grabs Harry and frog marches him out onto the balcony. The best thing about living in the penthouse of an obnoxiously tall building? There's no one around who can see you, especially when you have tall fucking walls blocking the view up.

Rush and Preacher tie the fucker to the chair, rush shoving the tie into his mouth and using the belt to secure it.

"What happens now?" Rush asks. This will be the first time he's seen any of us kill someone. He chose the wrong time to join us. This isn't going to be pretty, and it's not something he's going to ever forget. Then again, you always remember watching your first death.

"Sit down, kid, and watch," Shadow tells him as he pushes him onto the metal chair that's out here. Seems Harry does a lot of entertaining out here. There are eight chairs around a big-ass fucking table. It's proof that money can't buy you class. The design is fucking ugly as shit and looks cheap as fuck.

Everyone takes a seat except me. I walk back into the apartment in search of something. It doesn't take me long to find it. In fact, what I find is more than enough to get me started. I walk back out onto the balcony with three bottles of spirits and a vegetable oil container.

Harry's eyes widen as he sees what I have in my hands. He begins to move, trying to escape his bindings, his words muffled behind the tie that's shoved into his mouth. I take my time in pouring the vegetable oil over him, making sure I douse him properly. Once I'm satisfied with it, I reach for a paper towel and my lighter. The fucker's still trying to call for help, his words muffled, though there's no way in hell that anyone could hear him.

I light the paper towel and watch as it goes up in flames. I throw it at Harry's feet, then stand back and watch as the oil he's doused in goes up like an inferno. His screams are louder, but still extremely muffled. There's no escaping the fire that engulfs his body.

The smell of burning flesh is rancid when it hits me. It's worth the price to ensure that this fuck is out of my woman's life. He'll never be able to hurt her again. The heat of the flames is like a furnace. I take the cap of the whisky bottle, step closer to the flames, and pour the whisky over him. It sets plumes

of smoke bellowing from him. There's no fucking way in hell that he's going to be alive after this. Hell, I'd be surprised if he's still alive now.

I cough as the smoke filters up my nostrils and into my lungs. I'm not the only one. The smoke is thick and black, and there's no getting away from it. Just a little longer and we're done.

"Christ," Preach says, getting to his feet. "A little warnin' next time," he says through a cough.

Ace laughs. "Fuck, it's time to get the hell out of here."

Shadow rises from his chair. "May need to rethink your nickname," he says with a laugh.

"How did you get the name Reaper, anyway?" Cage asks as he unscrews the vodka bottle cap while Rush uncaps the other bottle of Whisky.

"The man's like the Grim Reaper. When Reap comes for you, it's over. The man can get close to anyone without bein' seen, the same as Shadow. Reaper is just more ruthless with his kills. As you can see," Ace tells them. "People are goin' to see the smoke and call the emergency services. It's time to go."

Cage and Rush pour the alcohol bottles over Harry. The flames burn brighter and the smoke bellows higher. They smash the bottles on the ground at Harry's feet, and one by one we exit the balcony, heading back into the apartment. All of us are coughing as we go. It'll take some time for the smoke to get out of our lungs, but fuck, it was worth it. That cunt is dead, and Esme is safe.

I leave the door to the balcony open, and the smoke from Harry's burning body fills the apartment within seconds. I'm hoping it'll take some time before the firefighters get here and the apartment itself will catch fire.

"Let's meet back at Esme's," Ace says. "She'll want to ensure that everyone is safe, as will Eda and Seri."

The drive to Esme's home takes a while. I watch the smoke plume from Harry's apartment in my mirrors as I drive away, the satisfaction eating at me. My woman's safe and there's one less person we have to worry about in this fucking war. Harry Junior was a wild card. He was someone we had no idea of knowing how he'd react or what he'd do. He was close to his father, and him being killed is going to infuriate Harry Senior like nothing else will.

Tomorrow brings a new day. It's going to be fun to see what that Jacobson asshole does in retaliation.

CHAPTER 21

ESME

I'm pacing the floor as time ticks by. I should have never answered the door this evening. I knew Grayson would be pissed when he saw that I was hurt, that he'd do something to Harry, but I can't stop thinking about what could happen to Grayson. What if he's hurt or if Harry calls the cops?

"Es, sweetie," Eda rasps, her voice husky. "Please sit down. You're making me dizzy."

"I'm sorry," I say softly. "I hate this."

She rises to her feet and moves toward me. She's pregnant, a few months along, but you'd never know that. She's glowing and isn't showing yet. I also know that Serenity's pregnant and hasn't announced it yet. The stress is something neither of these women need right now.

"We all hate this, but this is who they are, sweetie. They're never going to stand by and watch as one of their women is hurt. What that bastard did to you today wasn't okay and this isn't your fault."

Serenity pulls me into her arms. "He's taken enough from you, Es. Don't let him put this on you too. You did nothing wrong."

I sigh. She's right, but the mindset of always being blamed for things is hard to escape.

"Undoing all the conditioning that he's done to you takes time," Eda tells me. "It's been years for me, and I still relapse. It's okay to do so, especially when you have people around you who love and support you. You're not alone, Esme. You're ours, and we're here for you no matter what." She steps forward, and together with Seri, holds me tightly. "Trust me, Es, those men aren't going to let anything happen to Reaper. They'll make sure that he's safe."

I take a steadying breath. Having the reassurance from them both is helping immensely.

"How do you get past all the pain?" I ask Eda. I know some of her story. She was abused by her father from a young age, and her mom was an evil bitch, but thankfully, Eda managed to survive the atrocities that happened to her and was able to heal from the trauma. She's found her happiness with Ace and her three beautiful children.

"It takes time," she replies with a soft smile. "But don't be afraid to let people in. We're all here to be a shoulder to cry on whenever you need one."

"Exactly," Seri says as she runs her hand along my shoulder. "You're never alone. No matter what, you've got us, and you've got Reaper."

I smile at her. "I really like him."

"Oh, honey, he really likes you too," Seri says. "Trust me."

"How do you know?" I ask, but I feel it. I can feel how much Reaper wants me and how much he cares. He's sweet and attentive with me.

"You can see by the way he looks at you," Eda says. "He watches you like you're the reason he breathes. To him, you walk on water. It's beautiful to see the tenderness he has with you. But most of all, he gave you his name, Esme. That's fucking huge."

I blink, surprised by that. "Why?"

Eda pulls me to the sofa, and we sit. Seri takes a seat beside me, and I notice that Eda hasn't released my hand. "The men don't let anyone call them by their given name. To them, that's only for the women they'll claim and their family. He's given you his name—something I didn't know, by the way. It means he cares a lot about you, Esme, that he's going to claim you."

My heart races. Claim me? What? Why? I turn to Seri.

"It's a good thing, Es. Trust me, it's the best thing ever. It doesn't mean he'll control you. It means that you're his and everyone knows it. Reaper's made it known now that no matter what, you're his woman. Don't be afraid of that, embrace it. You both deserve happiness."

I hear the rumble of pipes and my heart pounds uncontrollably. They're back.

"It's going to be fine," Eda promises me. "It's all going to be okay. You're safe now, Es. You don't have to worry about Harry again."

I pull in a shaky breath. God, the thought of Harry coming for me again took my breath away. It's a scary thought and one I'm praying I won't have again. Today was the scariest that I have ever seen him, and it showed me yet

again that it doesn't matter how long you know someone, you may not always know them fully. People are good at disguising who they truly are, and if they don't want you to see a certain side to them, they'll make sure you never see it. It's so easy for manipulative, narcissistic people to gain the trust of others because they only show you what you want to see. They only tell you what you want to hear. You'll never see their deceit coming until it's too late.

I hear the locks of the door go, and I turn to see my front door opening and Shadow walking in. I take a deep breath, realizing that Seri gave Shadow her key before he left. Christ, I'm jumpy as hell. I wait on bated breath for Grayson to enter. Of course he's the last one.

The smell of smoke filters into the house and I wrinkle my nose. God, that's strong. My gaze moves over Grayson, taking in every inch of him. Relief washes through me and my shoulders slump forward as the knowledge that he's okay hits me. My feet move toward him, and the second I'm within touching distance, he pulls me into his arms.

"You're okay," I breathe.

"I'm fine, honey. I told you everything would be okay."

I sink into him, my breath catching as the stench of smoke fills my lungs. "Why do you smell like smoke?" I ask him as I lean back and look up at him.

He gives me a serious look, his eyes filled with love but his face void of emotion. "Es, there's some things you'll never know, and this is one of them. I need a shower, and I don't have spare clothes here. You wanna spend the night at the clubhouse with me?"

I grin as excitement runs through me. "Yeah?"

His lips curve into a grin. "Fuck yeah, you're comin' home with me. You good to drive?"

"Yep. I'll drive the girls," I tell him. "They're pregnant and shouldn't be breathing in the smoke."

"Seri too?" he asks, his lips twitching.

Fuck. "Please don't tell her I told you."

He chuckles. "Trust me, honey, I won't say a fuckin' word. Now go pack a bag. You're spendin' the weekend with me."

I love that he wants that. Maybe the girls are right about him wanting to claim me. What Grayson and I have is so different from what I had with Harry. I wasn't allowed around Harry's friends, and he didn't want me to hang out with them, whereas Gray wants me with him and he's had his brothers around me a lot. Even though there are no labels and I have no idea what's

actually happening between us, I feel more secure in whatever we have than what Harry and I had. I'm just scared. I don't know if I'm able to trust what I feel. The last person I thought I fell for turned out to be a monster.

"Come, Es, I'll help you pack," Eda says with a smile. "I'm glad you're staying with us for the weekend. It'll be fun to have you around."

"Yeah," Seri says. "You're always fun when you're drunk. Kins needs someone to party with, and with Effie and Eda pregnant, she's lacking women these days."

I can't help but laugh at her feeble attempt to hide the fact that she's pregnant too.

"What's your excuse then, Seri?" Eda asks with a raised brow.

"I'm still dealing with my injuries. It's going to take a while," she says distractedly as she starts to rummage through my wardrobe.

"Yeah, like nine months long," Eda says under her breath, but I still hear her. I press my lips together to stop the laughter from bursting out. "What do you need help with?" Eda asks.

"My bathroom stuff?" I ask, really glad that she came over tonight. She's one of the sweetest women I've ever met, and I know that while I spend the weekend in the clubhouse, we'll get to know each other a lot better. "If you don't mind."

"Not at all. I'll pack these up and you and Seri pack your clothes and anything else you need."

An hour later and I'm sitting in the clubhouse surrounded by the girls while the men shower. There were a lot of weird looks from the other brothers, along with the old ladies, when we walked in, but a look from Ace had everyone focusing on something else.

"So, Esme," Cruz says as he sinks down into the seat beside me. "Is that short for somethin'?"

I nod. "It is," I reply with a smile.

"You goin' to leave me hangin'?" he asks, and the sound of confusion in his voice makes my smile grow wider.

"Yep," I reply sweetly.

"So, you and Reap. Are you sure you want him? I'm free and all the women love me," he says, raising his brows and grinning.

"I'm good, but thank you."

His gaze runs over me, the lust clear to see, but I know it's just Cruz. He does the same with all the other women. I don't think he's popular with the

ladies at all. "Come on, Esme, we'll have fun. We can go to my room. Reap can join if you'd prefer."

"I don't share and Gray's the only man I want, but thank you for the offer," I tell him, scooting away from him.

"Alright, alright, I get it. But tell me, what's Esme short for?"

"Here," Seri says, handing me a glass. "Drink up. And Cruz, her name is Esmerelda," she tells him.

"Seriously?" Mayhem asks. "The fuck is wrong with the names?"

"Hey," I say, outraged. "What's wrong with my name?"

Seri places a drink in front of Cruz while smiling at me. I press my lips together. I guess she's chosen tonight to try out the newest prank.

I feel the air in the room change and glance over to the door to see Gray striding toward me. My stomach flips and butterflies swarm it as my heart races. He watches me with every step that he takes.

"You good, Es?" he asks as he pulls Cruz up from his seat and moves him out of the way. "Find your own damn woman."

"I'm good," I assure him. I want him to know that I'm comfortable here with his brothers, with his family.

"You hear this shit?" Mayhem grunts. "Her name's Esmerelda. What's with all the names? No one has a normal one among them."

"Shut it," Gray growls. "Like you're one to talk. Your woman's called Effiemia, brother. Never heard of that 'cept for your woman."

"You took my seat," Cruz whines as he sinks onto the seat beside Grayson. "Me and Es were gettin' to know one another."

"Ain't ever happenin', Cruz. My woman's too damn sweet for your brand of bullshit," Gray snarls as he slides his arm around my shoulders. "You sure you're good?"

I nod. "I am, honestly."

"Christ," I hear Cruz growl, and turn to see him clutching his stomach. "What the hell was in that drink?" He hurriedly gets up from his seat, knocking the chair over in his haste to rush out of the room. He groans as he runs toward the bathroom.

"What the hell just happened?" Mayhem asks.

"That's Cruz's payback. He should really leave me the hell alone."

Mayhem grins. "What did you do?"

"I put laxatives in his drink. It was Esme's idea. She has the best ideas." Seri beams as she nudges me. "The hair dye was Esme's idea too."

"Yes, but you got the wrong one," I say. She was supposed to get the wash-out hair dye, but instead got the permanent one. Now Cruz has a pinkish beard.

I feel Grayson's chuckle against my side and lean into him. "Fuckin' love that, honey. Cruz gets a little over the top and needs to be reigned in."

I grin at him. "What's the plan for this evening?" I ask. I'm hungry, but I don't want to be rude and take time away from his brothers.

"I've got one of the prospects gettin' us dinner. Once it arrives, we're goin' to bed," he says thickly.

Shivers run through my body. God, I love the sound of that. I can't wait!

CHAPTER 22

REAPER

She's tipsy, and her smile hasn't left her face all night. The bruise on her temple has darkened as the night has gone on, and every time my gaze moves to it, fury burns inside of me. I should have made that asshole suffer more. It's fucked up that Esme is going to feel the guilt of that asshole dying. She's already feeling as though it's her fault. We are not responsible for other people's actions. I'll make sure she knows that. I won't let her carry on thinking she's at all at fault for what went down.

"You good, honey?" I ask once we're in our room. The plan of having dinner went out the window when everyone joined us and Eda ordered everyone food. With Esme happy and content, I didn't press the issue to carry on our night alone.

She looks up at me, her eyes bright with happiness. "I'm good, Gray. I promise." Since I returned from burning that asshole, the fear has slowly started to ebb away from her eyes. I have no doubt that in her knowing he's dead, it means she doesn't have to worry about him coming for her again. The pain he caused her will stay, but she can be relieved that he won't do it again.

I slide my hand around her nape, loving the feel of her soft body pressed against mine. I slant my mouth against hers and take everything that is mine, and she sinks against me. The kiss is impatient, frenzied, and filled with need. I'll never have enough of her. Esme is all I think of now. She's in my every waking thought.

There's no doubt left in my mind. I'm fucking in love with her. That's crazy to me, but it's true. I love her with every fucking beat of my heart.

"You're mine," I growl as I reach for the hem of her tee. "All fuckin' mine."

She looks up at me with those gorgeous greenish-blue eyes and gives me a blinding smile. "Yours," she breathes.

She's no longer fighting against what we have. We haven't put a label on it, but fuck, everyone knows that Esme's mine. I made it clear from the get-go. No one has ever captured me the way she has, and no one ever will.

Our lips touch once again, and she releases a low moan as her fingers go to my pants. I fucking love that she's not shy, that she'll take what she wants. I sweep my tongue into her mouth and the kiss turns passionate and frenzied. We're pulling off each other's clothes, neither of us careful about it. We both want the same thing and we're going to get it.

The moment I have her stripped naked for me, I run my hands along her body. The softness of her skin is like silk. She sighs against my lips. "Please," she whines. "I need you, Gray."

Hearing my name come from her lips is fucking magical. I love that she calls me that. I've been Reaper for so damned long. So fucking long that I thought Grayson was gone, but being with Es has brought him back. With her, I'm not a monster. I'm not a fuck up. I'm able to be who I used to be before the darkness swept in and claimed me.

I love being part of my club. The brothers are my family. I'd do anything to ensure that they're safe and vice versa. But the shit that I've seen and done, it's made that darkness hit me even more. I've gone to the depths of Hell and back. I've watched people I care about be killed, and it's fucked up that I watched without a bat of an eye. But that's what you do when those you care about betray you. You cut them out like cancer. You get rid before it infects the rest of the group. But Esme brings peace to my chaos. She brings the softness to my hard, and she brings the love when I thought there was none.

"You never have to beg, honey," I tell her as I lift her onto the bed and lie her down. She looks at me with that sexy as fuck grin. "I'm goin' to take care of you." She knows what's coming and opens her legs for me. Her pussy is glistening already. She's told me before that whenever I kiss her and make her breathless, it's her biggest turn on. My woman is ready to get down and dirty whenever I do that to her, and you can't bet your ass that I do it a lot.

I run my fingers along her inner thighs, grinning as she clutches the sheets beneath her.

"Gray," she breathes. "No teasing." There's no heat or admonishment in her voice. She knows I'll always let her come. I may hold off on letting her do it, but in the end, she's always going to come—multiple times in fact.

The first swipe of my tongue against her slick folds has her back bowing as she releases a low moan. I feast on her, licking, sucking, and fucking her with my mouth and tongue. She's crying out with every swipe, with every thrust. She's writhing on the bed as she claws her way toward the orgasm that's building. But she should know better. She should know that I'm not going to let her come that easily. Hell fucking no. I want her screaming my name, crying out with pleasure when she does.

Sliding a finger into her tight, hot channel, I practically groan as the walls are snug around my digit. She's close to the edge. It's not going to take much before she detonates. "Don't you dare come, Esme."

Her gaze flies to mine and she watches me with wide eyes and parted lips. "What?" she breathes. "Gray?"

"You don't come yet. Hold it off."

A whimper escapes her lips as I pull my finger from her heat. "Gray," she cries.

I slide my finger into her, and the sound of her heavy breathing is music to my ears. "Tell me, honey, you want to come with my mouth, finger, or cock?"

A low moan comes from her mouth. "All—any. Please?" she says, unable to form coherent sentences.

I chuckle as I bring my finger and thumb to that sensitive nub she has, my tongue swiping at her folds once again. I don't go gentle. I know that she's close and it's only a matter of time before she detonates. I want to taste her when she does. There's nothing sweeter than her juices.

I pluck at her clit while I swipe at her folds, rotating between sucking, fucking, and licking at her pussy, all the while I'm playing with her clit. She's writhing beneath me, her breathing labored and her body tight as she grinds her pussy against my mouth. Oh, she's so fucking close.

"Come for me, Esme. Fuckin' come."

She doesn't have to be told twice. The moment the word 'come' leaves my lips, her back bows, her breath catches, and she cries out my name as her orgasm washes over her. I lap up her juices, making sure I get every bit of it.

Her orgasm rocks through her, and I fucking love the way she has that hitch every time she tries to catch her breath.

I position myself at her entrance, my cock running along her soaked folds. I groan as I sink into her tight heat. Fuck, no matter how many times I take her, I'll never get enough of her.

"You're so fuckin' perfect," I snarl as I grip her hips tight. "So fuckin' beautiful, Esmerelda, that I can't see anyone but you."

"Grayson," she breathes as I bottom out inside her.

"Look at you," I grunt as I punch my hips, driving my cock deeper and deeper inside of her. "Look at how perfectly you fit me."

Her eyes are shining bright with love and tears. "Oh, Gray," she cries. "Please," she begs.

"Told you, honey, don't ever beg me." I know she was broken down by that fucker. I never want her to feel that with me. I'll never make her beg for it. I'll give her what she needs. I'll burn the world down for her.

"Yes," she hisses out as I thrust harder into her. My pace is unrelenting, my grip on her hips punishing. I can't seem to get enough. No matter how much we have sex, it's never enough. She's so fucking perfect for me. She meets me thrust for thrust, her breasts bouncing as she does.

I lean down and capture her nipple between my teeth, and her hands slide into my hair as she continues to move. Her breathing once again becomes labored—her tell-tell sign that she's close. She watches me, her eyes focused solely on mine as I continue to fuck her hard all while pulling at her nipple with my teeth.

I rotate my hips, driving harder into her. She releases that hitched moan that I love and her body begins to tighten. She's about to come. I want to feel her detonate on my cock. There's no better feeling than her pussy suffocating my cock, forcing the cum from me.

"You gonna give it to me?" I ask her, and she nods, not once taking her gaze from me. "Then fuckin' come, Es. Come on my cock."

"Harder," she gasps.

Oh, she's in the mood to play. Fuck. So damn fucking perfect.

I tighten my grip on her hips, tilting her ass so I can get deeper inside of her. I slam into her with each thrust. I grit my teeth as I pound into her. Every last piece of restraint has gone. I can't hold back.

"Yes," she cries out, her words shrill as they fill the room. She releases her hands from my hair and clenches the sheets beneath her. The walls of her pussy constrict around my cock and the tell-tale tingles start at the base of my back. Christ, I'm fucking done. I tilt her hips once again and drive into her once—twice—thrice more before I come, groaning her name as I do.

I press my face into her neck, managing to keep my weight off her. The alcohol she drank has given her a buzz and dampened the pain of what

happened today. I don't want to add any more to her. No doubt, tomorrow morning she'll feel the effects of what happened as well as how rough we were.

"Gray?" she says softly, her voice a little hesitant.

"Yeah, honey. You okay?"

She's silent, and I lift my head to look at her. "Am I hurtin' you?" I ask as I start to pull out of her, ready to drop to the bed beside her and pull her into me. Her hands on my ass cheeks pull me back into her, and I groan as her pussy convulses around my cock again.

"You're not hurting me," she says, and I look at her. The fear is back in her eyes and I fucking hate it. "I'm good."

"What's goin' on?" I ask. "What are you scared about?" She glances away and I reach for her face, bringing her gaze back to me. "What is it, Es?" She's fucking scaring me. What the fuck?

"I love you," she whispers, tears falling down her face. "I'm scared because I love you."

I grin. "Fuck," I snarl as I slam my lips against hers. "Don't you know, baby? I fuckin' love you too. You're the only woman I've ever loved. Only one that I'll ever fuckin' love. You're mine, Esme, and I swear to fuck, I'm gonna love you till my dyin' breath."

Her tears fall thicker and faster, but she's smiling. "I was so scared. I love you, Gray, but I didn't know if you felt the same. I told you it was only supposed to be fun."

I can't help but chuckle. "The night I first had you, honey, there was no way it was just fun. I knew from that night that I was goin' to claim you."

She stares at me in shock. "God, you make me so happy, Gray. I never thought it was possible."

I slant my lips against hers and she sinks against me, her arms sliding up my body and wrapping around my neck. "Gonna fuck you again."

She smiles. "I'm not stopping you," she tells me as she grinds down against my semi-hard cock that's growing thicker by the second. "I have a feeling that tonight is going to be an all-nighter."

Oh, she has no fucking idea. The woman isn't going to get any sleep. I fully intend to have her screaming my name all night long.

CHAPTER 23

REAPER

"Ah, the person I was looking for." I hear the dulcet Irish tones and turn to my left and see Makenna Gallagher-Bianchi waiting for me in Prez's office.

I dropped Esme off at work this morning and went to the auto shop to get work done, but Prez called me twenty minutes ago telling me to meet him at the clubhouse. I didn't expect to see Makenna here.

"What's going on?" I ask, glancing between both Ace and Makenna.

"Harry Jacobson Senior has made his move," Makenna tells me. "He's taken out one of my crack houses and the fucker is going to pay."

Fuck. It's been a month since I took out his son and there was nothing mentioned. Hell, the entire city knew that he was murdered, that he wasn't able to be identified. The news reported that it was gang related. They weren't entirely wrong. But Harry Senior himself never came out and made a statement. Hell, he's kept to himself this entire time.

"What happened?" I ask, wanting to know what went down.

"The fucking Albanians. They shot the place up. It's completely fucked. All the drugs gone, all my staff dead," she hisses. "Don't worry, we'll be getting our own back. I'm not stupid. My facilities are heavily secured, meaning I have more security cameras than the pentagon. They were the stupid ones. They didn't change their van and it lead me directly to their hideout. Right now, Dante, Finn, Romero, and my men are on their way to ensure those fuckers get payback."

She's pissed and I don't blame her. They fucked with her business. But those assholes are fucking deluded if they thought there wouldn't be repercussions for their actions.

"And you didn't go with them because?" Ace says with a grin. "Let me guess, baby number three is on the way?"

She flips him off and huffs. "Yes. My husband doesn't want me around the bullets that are going to fly."

"So what do you need?" Ace asks her. "Want us to meet up with them?"

Makenna laughs. "No. God, they're more than capable of doing it themselves. But I wanted you to know what happened and be on alert. I have no doubt that this is just the beginning. I'm thinking that another meeting could be on the menu soon. I want to get under that fucker's skin and watch what he does."

I shake my head. "You mean you want to taunt the fucker into losing his shit?"

She grins. "Exactly. I want to know why the fuck he's hidden for the past month. What was the reason?"

"Maybe he was grieving?" Ace says, sitting back in his chair. "The fucker hasn't mentioned it at all. The press has had a field day about the death of his son. He's not made a comment about it at all."

He's right, and it's fucking suspicious as fuck. "He's been plannin'," I conclude. "He must have been plannin' ways to get revenge and takin' out Makenna's coke house was only one way. He's got somethin' else planned. This is goin' to be for us."

Ace's eyes harden. "Then we need to fuckin' find out what."

"I agree with Reaper. This man is dealing with the loss of his child, his only child, his fucking replica. There's no way he's going to fade into the background and act as though nothing happened. He's going to come back at us with vengeance."

"Then we make sure that anyone who does come at us, dies," Ace says simply. "He's not goin' to be able to gain more followers when those that did follow the cunt are dyin' because of him. Besides, no one is fuckin' stupid enough to go up against us."

Makenna nods. "No one in their right mind would. So tell me, Ace, what would make you trust a billionaire asshole who wants to work with you? What would make you try to take out the biggest crime families in New York—hell, in the United States?"

"Me? Nothin'. I ain't stupid, Kenna. I wouldn't put my brothers through that. Unless it directly involved us and those families targeted us, I wouldn't be gettin' involved in someone else's problems."

She laughs. "Of course you wouldn't, but I meant what would make someone do that?"

"Money and power," I say. "That fucker had to have promised the Albanians that they'd be paid handsomely for their manpower, and that when they took us all down, they'd reign supreme at the top."

Once again, Makenna laughs. "I agree, but I seriously wonder about those Albanians. If they did somehow manage to take us down, do they believe that they'd get away with it?" She glances between Ace and I with a raised brow. "I mean, not only do I have family in Chicago and Indiana, but also in Spain, England, and Ireland. If I'm taken out, the entire force of the Gallagher's would come down on them. Not to mention, if they take out this chapter, you have four other chapters that would come for revenge." She sighs. "I don't get their motives."

"It's fuckin' annoyin'," Ace grumbles. "Nothin' is makin' sense."

"We're never goin' to find out. That asshole Jacobson isn't goin' to come out and tell us why he's doin' this and what he's told those fucking Albanians to get them onside," I snarl. "There's only one way to do that," I say with a hiss. "Capture one of them and let us at them."

Makenna giggles. "You do realize that I have a brother who is proficient in extracting information, right?"

I smirk. "Yeah, I heard he loves rats."

Her laughter rings out loud through the office. "Oh, that story made the rounds more times than I can count."

"It's true though, isn't it?" Ace says, smiling. "He shoved a rat up a snitch's ass and plugged it closed so the rat couldn't escape."

Makenna nods. "Yep. He also sliced the face off his own brother. That's what happens when you fuck with a Gallagher. We'll fucking come at you a hundred times harder."

"Fucking psycho," Ace mutters.

"Not sure that it's just Finn who's crazy, brother," I say. "This one and her niece scalped someone, her cousin is a fuckin' serial killer, and Makenna will take anyone out who'll even try to come for her or her family."

"Exactly," she says sweetly. "You, however, are safe from us. We are family, and there's no one besides my own family that I trust more than you."

It's a fucking huge compliment coming from her. The woman has been betrayed by a fucking lot of people and she's always come out on top. I think the worst thing for her was when her brother Patrick betrayed her. He

deserved Finn taking his skin from his face. I'd have done the same if it were my family.

"So, gentlemen, I'd advise that you think of places that are easily hit that aren't going to be hard to get to," she says, and the mood sobers. "These fuckers can't come here as they'll never get past the gates. So the question is, where will they go?"

"The shop," I say through gritted teeth. "They'll target the auto shop. Fuck."

"Go," Makenna says as she rises to her feet. "Go and kill every single one of those assholes."

Both Ace and I pause. We can't leave her alone. Fuck, neither of us would ever forgive ourselves if anything happened to her.

"I have a few men with me right now. I'll be safe," she tells us as she watches us carefully. "Go, I'll be fine. Unfortunately, I don't have any men I can spare to send to you. They'll never get to you in time."

"We'll go," Ace says. "We'll make sure that you are safely gone before we leave."

Makenna is right about having men with her, though I have a feeling the five men she has guarding her aren't her idea. She no doubt balked at the thought of having that many men protect her while the rest of them are going off to kill someone.

Ace and I ensure that the clubhouse is locked down and the prospects make sure the women and children who are inside are safe and that they know to not let anyone past the gates unless it's a patched member. I make sure Serenity—who has today off work—has Tyson before I leave. I can't leave without ensuring the boy is safe.

It takes us twenty minutes to get to the auto store, and when we arrive, it's quiet. Some of the brothers are here working, others are running errands for the prez.

"What you doin' back here?" Preach asks as we stride through the forecourt. "Thought you went to the clubhouse?"

"I did. Now I'm here," I say with a smirk. "But, brother, be on alert. Jacobson has started his revenge and he's targeted Makenna. We're next."

Preach's eyebrows furrow together. "You think they're gonna come here?" he asks.

"Yeah. We have the clubhouse locked down. No one goes in unless they're a patched member. Seri has Tyson, brother. She's goin' to ensure that

he's safe. You know that."

I watch as he releases a hard breath. "Fuck," he says, running his hands over his face. "Thanks, brother."

I shake my head. "Don't worry about it. It's now a fuckin' waitin' game. We don't know when they'll come, but we know they will."

He nods. "Thank fuck the majority of the custom rides have been collected. We only have two left to be picked up, both of which are due to be done today."

Ace strolls over to us. "They done, Preach? They ready for collectin'?"

"Yeah, Prez, they're ready to go. Want me to call their owners and get them to collect them?"

"Call them, but don't have them collect them here. Have Cage and Rush make the drop offs. If we can get them off our property and then there's a shootout, we're not liable for payin' out thousands of dollars to fix bikes again."

"On it," he says as he moves toward the office.

"You got that feelin'?" he asks me.

I don't have to ask which feeling he's talking about. I know. "Yep." They're coming. Those assholes are on their way. I feel that in my fucking gut. "I need to make a call. I won't be long."

I move away from Ace and dial a number I never thought I'd have to use.

"Yo, what's up, man? You good?" Malice answers.

"Need a favor, bud. Are you busy?" It's a lot easier to ask that than I had anticipated. Over the past five years, Malice has proven that he's all about helping us and the women of this club. While it started off with us wanting to kill the cunt for what went down with Kinsley, in the end, he was the reason she was alive, and since then, he's been an ally for this club.

"Not right now. What's up?"

"Some shit's gone down and my woman's at work. I need you to make sure she's safe there, Malice. No one fuckin' touches her." I can't help but feel that she's also going to be someone that Jacobson is going to target. If he does, he'd better fucking run and hide, because I'll do even worse to him than I did to his son.

"You know I will. Everythin' good? You need some brothers sent to help?" he asks. He's the president of the Devil Falcons MC, and while the Fury Vipers used to have a close relationship with the club, it changed when the truth about what went down with Kinsley and our previous president

came out. Since then, with Malice at the helm, our relationship has once again strengthened.

"If you can spare some brothers, send them to the clubhouse to stand guard. The prospects have it shut down and no one is allowed in other than a patched Viper."

"Is Effie there, brother?" he asks, his voice tight. Effie is his sister. She's also Mayhem's old lady.

"She's not. She's at the hospital workin' today. But Eda, Tavia, Kins, and Seri are."

"Fuck," he growls. "I'm bringin' two brothers with me to keep an eye on your woman and the rest will be at the clubhouse. I'll let them know not to approach or go through the gates but to stay outside and be on guard. Once this is done, you're gonna fuckin' tell me what's goin' on."

"You know it. Thanks, Malice, I appreciate it."

"Call me when you can," he says. I know that he means to call him when this shit is over.

"Will do," I reply and end the call. I turn around and see Ace and Preach loading two trucks with the custom rides. "Need a hand?" I ask.

"No, we're good," Ace says, his voice tight. The air is static. There are four brothers here and I have no doubt there are more on the way. "Call Dig, see where the fuck he is."

"I'm right here," the man in question says as he strides into the forecourt. "Got a call from Tavia. She told me the clubhouse is locked down. Someone want to tell me what the fuck is goin' on?"

I see the bikes of Mayhem, Stag, Storm, Shadow, and Raptor approach. Fucking A. Finally.

Ace informs them of what's going down, and just as both he and I were, they're beyond pissed. They're all informed that the women are safe and the clubhouse is on lockdown.

"Malice is sending his brothers to the clubhouse to stand guard," I tell them all. "No one is goin' to get to them." They'll be dead before they even get to the gates.

My brothers nod, all of them grateful that their women are safe and secure.

"Any idea how many will be comin'?" May asks, moving toward the bay closest to the office. He opens up the flooring, where we have our stash of guns. There's something similar at the clubhouse in the basement. It's easier

for us to conceal them underground than it is in the clubhouse. We don't want a kid to stumble across a gun and think it's a toy, although they all know not to mess with weapons.

We all reach for the weapons.

"No idea," Ace snarls. "We can't be sure that this is where they'll hit, but from what they did to Makenna, going for the business as well as people, it makes sense."

Dig nods. "They're targetin' the businesses as a way of stopping cash flow. They're smart in that aspect. It's a great plan."

"Incomin'," Storm shouts as we notice three black SUV's approaching. "We're looking at about fifteen, maybe sixteen people."

That's easy. There are more than enough of these bastards to go around. Preach and I move to the left, guns raised, waiting for those fucks to make the first move. It doesn't take long. The fuckers jump out of their vehicles, their guns raised as they begin shooting. Their shots are wild. It's like giving a fucking gun to a teenager and saying, 'have at it'. It's fucking stupidity.

I line up my gun and start to pick them off, some shots hitting them in their chests, others missing and sinking into their vehicle. I don't stop. There's no time to think about anything but making sure these fuckers don't get to our women and children.

My mind flashes with thoughts of Esme and Tyson, my gut twisting at the thought of the boy. I can't shake the feeling that he's mine, and it's fucked up. I need to push the thoughts away and refocus on what's happening in front of me.

Tires squeal, letting us know even more of those assholes have arrived. Fuck.

"Fuckin' cunts," Preach snarls as he too fires at the bastards.

The Albanians are shouting instructions. One of them—who I assume is the leader—is urging them forward. The hail of gunfire toward us is relentless, but we're not giving up. We're firing back, taking them down.

I continue to shoot, lining up my shoots and taking them out. I'm not great with a gun. I know how to use one. I know how to aim and shoot. I can kill anyone with a gun, but I prefer to use my hands or a knife. I like to get personal with my prey, but today, this will do.

They start to fall quickly. My brothers are taking them down one by one. Storm is his usual crazy self as he shoots while laughing. Crazy fuck.

Preacher rises to his feet and moves along the forecourt, shooting the

fucker who's getting close to Mayhem. I follow him, making sure there's no one coming toward us. But it's too late. The asshole who's in charge of the Albanians shoots toward us. I drag Preacher backward, pulling him out of the line of fire, but it's not enough. The bullet sinks into Preach's arm. I don't hesitate. I fire round after round into the fucker's body. It's almost like slow motion, the way his body jolts and he crumples to the floor. He's dead.

I glance down at Preach and see he's on the floor, bleeding like a stuck pig. He'll need to see a doctor, but he'll survive. I drag him over to the wall and then go back to helping my brothers. There are four men left. The other Albanians litter the floor, blood coating the ground beneath them. They're all dead.

"I want one alive," Ace snarls. "Everyone else dies."

Mayhem, Storm, and Raptor don't hesitate. They lift their guns and kill three of the remaining four men while Dig and Stag move from behind the last remaining one and capture him.

"Preach needs the doctor. He's losin' a lot of blood," I yell as I move toward Preacher. He's lost the color in his face. He's sweating, his face contorted in pain. "Anyone else hurt?"

"Everyone else is fine," Ace says a few minutes later as he joins us. "We're goin' to get him to the doctor."

"May need the hospital. He's lost a fuck ton of blood." The fucking thing won't stop bleeding.

"Then we'll take him to Effie. She'll sort it out," Ace says. "This shit needs to be cleaned and the bodies dealt with."

I nod. "I'll sort it. Have Cage and Rush come and help."

He slaps my back as Mayhem comes over to us. "Thanks, brother," Ace mutters. "May, let's bring Preach to Effie. He needs to be patched up."

CHAPTER 24

ESME

I'm pacing the bedroom. It's been hours since I was brought to the clubhouse, and I haven't seen Grayson since this morning.

Walking out of school, I was greeted by three burly bikers. I knew instantly something was wrong. I had no text or missed call from Grayson, and when I called him there was no answer. The biggest of the bikers came up to me. He had a smile that made him seem less scary but it didn't stop the panic clawing at my insides. He told me what had happened and that he was there to ensure I was safe.

He and his friends followed me to my home. It was horrendous. I don't know why I trusted him, but there was an urgency in his voice that made me do so. Thankfully, while I was driving home, I called Kinsley, and she stayed on the call with me as I drove home. She explained who Malice was and that he was safe to be around. I was grateful to her for letting me know. Once I did, I was able to breathe easier.

When I arrived home, Malice told me I could go to the clubhouse and that it was safe to do so. He'd gotten a call and had the go ahead.

I've been here ever since, pacing Gray's room like a crazed woman. The brothers returned a while ago, all but Grayson, Ace, Mayhem, and Preacher. No one was able to tell me where Grayson was, although they did let me know that he's safe. It still hasn't helped my anxiousness. I need to see him. I need to be sure that he's okay.

"Hey," Seri whispers as she enters the bedroom. "You okay?"

I nod, pressing my hand against my chest, hoping it'll calm my heartrate. "I'm okay. Are you?"

She grins at me. "I'm good. I'm wondering if you could watch Tyson?"

I laugh, knowing exactly what she and Shadow are going to do next. "Sure, give him here. Having cuddles with him will ease my worry. Go," I tell her as I reach for the precious boy in her arms. "Have fun."

"Oh, I will," she says, blowing me a kiss as she leaves the room.

I glance down at the most adorable boy in my arms and smile at him. He's so damn sweet. He reaches for my nose, and I press a kiss to his fingertips, which causes him to laugh. I do it again and again, loving the smile and laughter he has for me.

My heart breaks at the thought of Grayson missing out on the chance of having his son. I understand and respect his decision to have Preacher not know what his suspicions are. I'd hate to hurt my friend that way too. But it worries me that as time goes on and Tyson grows older, the what ifs will still remain and Grayson is going to pull away from his club. This is who he is. Being a member of the Fury Vipers is his life. I know it is. It's who he is to the core. He was destined to become a patched member and I don't want anything to come between that for him.

Tyson coos at me, those gray eyes of his so bright and filled with joy. It's a shit situation. The only thing I can do about it is be there for Grayson and let him know that he's not alone. That no matter what, we're a team and we can get through the roughest of waters together.

"Hey, handsome," I coo back at him as I press a kiss to his fingertips. "How are you?" I ask as I rock him in my arms.

Tyson has lost his mom, his father may not be his father, and he was born addicted to drugs. That's so much pain for such a young child. My heart breaks for everyone involved in this entire situation. I just wish there was something I could do to ease everyone's pain.

I sit on the bed, lying him down on his back so he's looking up at me. He smiles widely as I begin to play peek-a-boo with him. "Boo," I say, and giggle as that sweet laugh rings out.

A knock at the door has me wondering who it could be. "Yeah?" I shout while tickling Tyson's tummy.

"Hey, Es, I have a bottle ready for Tyson," Tavia says as she hands me the bottle. "I'll leave you two be. If you need anything, just shout. I'm putting the kids to bed."

I give her a grateful smile. "Thanks, Tavia. You're the best."

"You're good with him. You know that?" she asks with a glint in her eyes.

"I love kids. Isn't that why we became teachers?" I ask her, and she nods.

"The best thing about being a teacher and an auntie is that I can give them back whenever I want."

"That's true." She grins. "I wish I could do the same with my own sometimes."

"You should do what Seri did to me, just hand them off for a while."

She shakes her head. "Unlike you, Seri would just hand them back. Especially when mine are so loud and love to argue. I swear, Ruby's at an age now where everything turns into an argument and Serafina loves to push her sister's buttons."

"They're kids and they're testing their boundaries, Tav. You know that if they didn't feel safe and loved, they wouldn't have the confidence to do that."

She sighs. "You're right. Sometimes I feel that what I do isn't good enough."

My heart breaks at the defeat in her voice. "Oh, honey. You have raised four amazing children. Each one of them loves and adores you. You are more than enough, and you do what's best for you, Digger, and those children."

Tears spring to her eyes and she slumps forward. "Thank you. I needed to hear that."

"Hey," I say as I reach for Tyson and begin to feed him his bottle. "What's going on?" This isn't Tavia. She's one of the strongest women I know.

She glances at the door and closes it. "A few months ago, I had a miscarriage. We weren't trying for a baby. It was a happy accident."

I swallow hard as tears fall from my eyes. "Oh, Tavia, I'm so sorry, honey."

She gives me a soft, watery smile. "Thanks. We didn't tell anyone because both Eda and Effie are pregnant and we didn't want to spoil their pregnancies. I wanted them to enjoy it. Then all the stuff with Seri happened. I missed my period, and I got my hopes up, but today my period came."

God, my heart breaks for her. This woman has been a rock through everything that's happened to her. She needs some time to grieve. "Why don't you go run a bath. I'll put Serafina to bed for you. She'll enjoy having me read her a bedtime story with Tyson."

She shakes her head. "It's okay —"

"Go," I tell her. "Go and have some time to grieve and to yourself. In the morning, Seri and I will make sure the girls are ready for school while you and Digger have some alone time."

She blinks back the tears. "I don't want to put that responsibility on you."

"You're not. I am. You're just as much of a sister to me as Seri is, Tavia. I want you to go and take some time to yourself. Sera and Ruby will be fine. If they need something, there are plenty of adults here who'll help them."

She pulls in a shaky breath and nods. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it. Send Sera in to me while I feed Tyson," I say. "Then we'll put her to bed with a story. She'll be fine."



It took me over an hour to settle Serafina down for bed. She was so excited that it was me bringing her that she had to explain what every little thing in her room was. I smiled and laughed while she told me all about her day.

Both she and Tyson fell asleep as I was reading the story to them, and as the crib for Tyson is in Preacher's room, I'm lying down on the bed beside him, praying he doesn't fall out.

God, the worry of being a parent. I'd be full of anxiousness all the time.

With the soft snores coming from Tyson, it doesn't take long until I'm falling asleep right with him.

CHAPTER 25

REAPER

"How's Preach?" I ask Ace as I enter the clubhouse. It's been a fucking long night and I'm glad to finally be home. All I want to do is climb into bed with Esme and sleep. I'm beyond tired.

"He's good. The bullet didn't do much damage. He's home and in his room. He's pissed and he's drinkin'."

Fuck. He's not drunk much since we kicked his ass into gear. He's had a few drinks here and there, but nothing like he used to be. "I'll check in on him."

Ace nods. "You do that after we talk. Stag's waitin' on us."

I follow him to his office, wondering what the fuck could have happened now. Shit. This day has been fucking shit. There's nothing else that could go fucking wrong, is there?

"You good, brother?" Stag asks as Ace and I enter the office.

"I will be once I see my woman. What's up?" It's been fucking hours since I saw her. I haven't spoken to her since she left for work this morning. Having a chat with these two isn't high on my list of to-dos, but I know they wouldn't call me in here if it weren't important.

"While you were dealing with the crap of getting rid of the dead bodies, Mayhem and Storm had a go at the captive we brought back," Ace begins. Now I'm intrigued. "Turns out, our suspicions were right. That fucker Jacobson promised them five million dollars, along with them being able to take the place at the head of New York."

I shake my head. Those fucking assholes. Stupid, stupid, assholes.

"Did you find out what that fucker Jacobson has planned?" I ask, needing to know if Esme is on his target list.

Ace smirks. "Oh, better than that," he says. "Tomorrow, we're going to have a sit down with him."

I raise a brow. "We are?" The fuck? Why on earth would we do that?

"See, Bujar—the guy we captured—his wife is smart. She works for Jacobson. She's his secretary, and when she found out that her husband was now working with her boss, she knew things could go south pretty quickly. She has details about all the transactions between Jacobson and Amar Berisha, the head of the Albanian mob. Which means Bujar and his wife have proof of Jacobson dealing in criminal activities. Bujar's wife has agreed to give us the evidence in exchange for her husband."

"Did you agree to it?" I ask, knowing that if the tables were turned, I would have agreed to the deal.

Ace nods. "The Albanians lost the majority of their men today. Not only did we take out around twenty of them today, but the Italians and Irish took out the rest. Fucking Dante and Finn went a little crazy and blew up their property, killing everyone inside. Anyone who managed to escape was gunned down as they did."

I chuckle. "So we're only up against Jacobson?"

Ace nods. "Yep, and he's going to find that out tomorrow at the meeting."

"Which also means the women are safe," Stag adds. "The women were worried as they had no idea what was going on and it scared them. Thankfully, coming home and telling them it's over relieved a lot of them."

"Except Esme," Ace says. "I think she needs to see you."

Stag nods. "The others have been through this shit. She hasn't. This isn't a life she knows, Reap. But she's here and she's waitin' on you."

That thought alone is what keeps me going. She's waiting for me. Fuck. I love that woman so fucking much.

"First, I have to ream Preach's ass out," I tell them both with a smile. "Once I've done that, I'm goin' to see my woman."

A knock on the office door has Ace calling out for them to come in. I'm surprised to see Digger strolling in. "You three got a minute?" he asks, his voice gruff.

"Yeah, of course. We've just finished. What's up?" Ace asks.

Dig turns to me. "Your woman's the shit, Reap. You know that?"

I grin. "Of course I do, but what did she do?"

He sighs as he leans against the wall, crossing his arms over his chest. "This doesn't go any further and this doesn't get told to any of the women," he

says thickly. "I mean it, Prez. You can't even tell Eda."

"I won't say a word. You know that, Dig. You know I won't tell a fuckin' soul unless told to by you."

Dig nods. "When the shit went down with Chloe, Tavia suffered a miscarriage."

Fuck. "Brother," I say low. "I'm sorry, man."

He nods. "Thanks," he replies, swallowing back the emotion. "Then everythin' with Seri went down and she's just not been able to deal with everything. Then she was late, and she got her hopes up, but her period came today. She's not doin' okay."

I don't know what to say. What the fuck do you say to make someone feel better when they've gone through that?

"Esme is the only woman who knows what happened. My woman would take on the fuckin' world with a smile on her face while she's having her worst day. But somehow, Esme knew she was struggling, and she and Tavia spoke about what happened. Not only did your woman make her go take some time to herself; she also put my daughter to bed and made sure the kids would leave us alone tonight so we could be together."

I smile. That sounds like Esme. My woman is the fucking sweetest and she cares deeply for those she loves. Octavia is like a sister to her, so she'll do whatever it takes to make sure she's doing okay.

"What do you need from us?" I ask. "What can we do to help?"

He shakes his head. "Nothin'. We're doin' okay. After havin' a long discussion with Tavia, we're just goin' to see what happens. She needs time to heal from what happened. I'm not goin' to push her. It's not that easy to get over the loss of a baby."

I nod. "No matter what you need, bro, I'm here. You just gotta let me know."

"Exactly," Ace says roughly. "It can't be easy for either of you, especially when both Ef and Eda being pregnant. But whatever you need, Dig, you just gotta tell us. We'll do whatever we can for you both."

He bows his head, taking in a deep breath. "Appreciate that," he says roughly. "I'm goin' to go back to bed now. Just wanted to thank your woman, Reap, but she's fast asleep. I'll see you all tomorrow," he tells us as he leaves the office.

Damn. I don't want to wake her, but I'm not sleeping without her.

"Alright," Ace says, his gaze on the doorway Digger just went through.

"I'll see you both tomorrow. Be ready for the meet."

I grin. "Oh, I will. Don't worry about that." It's going to be fun taunting that asshole.

I move out of the office and make my way upstairs. Preach is going to be in for a rude awakening if he thinks I'm going to let him sink back into the drink. Fuck that. He's fought too hard for that shit. And it's not just him anymore. He's got Tyson to think about too.

I don't knock. None of the club whores are in the clubhouse tonight, not after the club was put on lockdown. Tomorrow, they'll return, and the single brothers will have fun. If one of the brothers needs an itch scratched, they can go and find someone to do it. I push the door open, surprised to find Preacher sitting on the bed, a bottle of whisky in his hands, unopened and full.

"You good?" I ask, my gaze moving over his face, checking that he is, in fact, good.

"Took this bottle and came up to bed. I was goin' to drink it until I passed out," he says without looking at me. "Then I came in here and saw the crib. Man, I fuckin' forgot about my kid. How fucked up is that?"

"You get a pass, man. You were fuckin' shot. Besides, it's not like you left him outside alone. He's in the fuckin' clubhouse surrounded by people."

He shakes his head. "I freaked the fuck out. I couldn't help but remember what it was like to numb out the pain. How good drownin' in a bottle felt. But then that crib was like a punch to the gut. I knew I couldn't go back to that asshole who didn't give a fuck about anyone but himself."

"Good. None of us want you to go back to that place."

"Went to Shadow and Seri's room lookin' for Tyson and they told me to leave him be and go to bed. The fuck am I doin', Reap? I mean, look at me. I'm a fuckin' mess."

I shake my head. "Nah, you're not a mess. You're just tryin' to find out who you are besides bein' a dad. That'll come. You just gotta take it a step at a time. Now, I'm glad I don't have to ream your ass out, 'cause my woman's fast asleep and I'm not with her."

He grins at me. "Happy for you, brother. She's fuckin' perfect for you."

"She's too good for me."

He nods. "That she is, but she's still perfect for you."

I turn on my heel and leave his room. "Proud of you, brother," I say, hovering in his doorway. "So fuckin' proud."

"Fuck," I hear him whisper as I carry on walking.

Opening my bedroom door, I'm shocked to find Esme lying on the bed with a tiny boy snuggled up to her. Fuck, seeing her with Tyson, her arm around him as she holds him, both of them fast asleep and so fucking peaceful, it makes me want this. I shouldn't. I made the decision to not let Preacher know what I thought, but it's so fucking hard to pretend. It's so fucking hard to act as though he's not the spitting fucking image of me.

Es and I have spoken about the future. Having kids is something she wants, but not yet. She's not ready, and I fully support her decision. We've only just gotten together, and the timing isn't right. But seeing her with Tyson lets me know that it's exactly what I want. Her round with my baby. The image of her pregnant pops into my head and my cock thickens. Fuck. There's something wrong with me.

I reach for the boy, careful not to jostle Esme. Tyson doesn't budge as I bring him close to my chest. He releases a soft sigh as he continues to sleep soundly in my arms. That twinge in my chest hits me as I walk toward Preacher's room.

Using my foot, I kick against his door, trying to keep from jostling Tyson in my arms. Within seconds, the door opens, and Preacher stands there with a furrow between his brow as he sees me with Tyson. "Thought he was in with Seri and Shadow, brother. Had I known he was with Es, I'd have taken him."

"It's fine. He's fast asleep. The kid can sleep through anythin'."

Preach chuckles. "You have no idea. Thanks, man. I'll see you tomorrow."

Handing Tyson over to Preacher has a pain spreading in my chest. It's fucking shit having to hand him over. But there's nothing I can do about it. Tyson's Preach's son and I've got to make peace with that somehow.

I walk back into my room and see Esme's staring at me, her eyes soft and filled with sleep. "You're okay," she whispers.

"Yeah, honey, I'm good. Just had some work to do. How are you?" I ask as I move toward her, pulling my tee off as I do. "Did you have a good day?"

"Yeah," she says through a yawn. "Although, next time you're going to have burly bikers, I don't know, meet me outside of school, can you let me know?"

I strip her of her clothes as I chuckle. "Yeah, Es, I can certainly try. Although, I'm hopin' that won't ever happen again."

"I'm glad you're okay," she says, her eyes drooping. "I was worried about you."

I help her into my tee and lie her down on the bed. I strip out of my clothes and climb into the bed beside her, pulling her against my chest. "I'm sorry I worried you. I'm glad you're here though."

She presses a kiss against my chest. "Wherever you are, Gray, I'll be. I love you."

I kiss the top of her head. "I love you too, honey. Sleep."

She sighs as she snuggles against me. "Night, Gray. Sweet dreams."

She has no idea just how fucking sweet my dreams are now that I'm with her.

Her breathing evens out as she falls back to sleep. I keep her close to me, trying to find my own sleep, but it's hard. My mind is whirling as thoughts about Tyson chase me. I just wish I hadn't made the connection to our looks. If I hadn't, I wouldn't be stuck in this fucking limbo.

CHAPTER 26

ESME

"E sme," Octavia says as I exit mine and Gray's bedroom. She doesn't look as upset as she did last night. I'm glad she took some time alone. She truly needed it.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" I ask as I get close to her. "Did you manage to get some sleep?"

She nods as she links her arm through mine. "I did, thank you. You have no idea just how much I needed it. Thank you, Es."

"You're welcome. It was fun. I think Sera had a great time too. She showed me everything in her room and then crashed while I was, like, a third of the way through the story."

Tavia grins. "Yeah, she's always like that. The moment anyone starts to read to her, she falls to sleep before the end of the story."

"What's your plan for today?" I ask her. "I've got the girls this morning, so what do you have planned?"

Her grin widens. "I'm going to kiss the girls goodbye and then I'm going back to bed with Tate."

I laugh. "That sounds like an amazing morning. If Digger is anything like Gray, you're going to be exhausted come the evening."

Her eyes widen comically, and it makes me laugh harder. "No," she says, shaking her head. "I'm not as young as I used to be. Besides, we have sleep to catch up on."

I frown. "How do you manage to catch up on five years' worth?"

She shakes her head. "No idea, but I'm sure going to try." We walk into the kitchen, where Eda has breakfast cooking and Sera is already dressed and ready for school. I'm shocked. I hadn't realized the girl was eager to go to

school.

"Sera," Tavia says sweetly. "Who got you dressed this morning?"

"Ruby," Sera replies. "She woke me up this morning and helped me get dressed."

Kids always know when things aren't right, and Ruby's probably feeling her mom's pain. It's sweet that she's trying to help out, but I don't want her to feel left out.

"Awesome," I say with a grin. "You have the best sister."

"Auntie Es, do you have any sisters?"

"Nope. But I do have a smelly brother," I reply as I take a seat opposite the sweet girl.

"Okay, baby, give me a kiss and do exactly as Auntie Es says, okay?"

Sera nods. "Okay, Mama. I hope you feel better," she says softly, pressing a big kiss to her mom's cheek. "Have Daddy sing to you. That's what you do when I'm sick."

I press my lips together to stop the laughter from bubbling up. I can imagine Digger serenading Octavia to cheer her up.

"I'll say it to him, baby," Octavia says through her laugh. "But be good for Auntie Es."

"I will. I promise," she replies sweetly.

"See you tonight," Tavia says, running her hand over her head and leaving the kitchen. My heart hurts for her. She's hurting and she's alone. I don't know how to help her. I wish there was something I could do for her.

"Sweetie, do you need anything?" I ask Sera once she's finished her breakfast.

"No, I'm okay, Auntie Es. I just have to get my bag. Auntie Effie is taking me and Ruby to school."

"Excellent," I breathe. I watch as she dances out of the kitchen to get her school bag.

"I've got her now, Es," Ef says. "You get off to work. I'll see you this evening."

I say goodbye to everyone, promising Serafina that I'll be back tonight and will read another story to her. She gives me a toothy grin and follows me to the door.

"Bye, Auntie Es," she calls out.

"Bye, sweetie. Be good for Effie. I'll see you this evening."

She nods, her head bobbing up and down as she does. "Bye," she says

again, waving goodbye as I climb into my car.

I turn on the car radio as I make my way through the clubhouse gates. The prospect smiles at me as I pass by him.

The traffic isn't as bad as it usually is this time of day, and I'm glad. There's nothing worse than having to sit in standstill traffic. I sing along to the music, a smile on my face. I'm happy. I don't think I've felt truly content like this in a long time. Being with Grayson was unexpected. It was never meant to be anything other than sex. But I'm so glad it evolved into what it has. I love him. It's crazy to think that I've fallen in love with him in such a short space of time, but the man made it easy. He never held anything back. He's always made me feel loved and beautiful.

I stop at a red light and take the time to check my cell. I undo my seat belt, reach over into my purse, and quickly send Gray a text message. He was in the shower when I was leaving. I let him know that I'm almost at the school and I'll call him during lunch. I grin when he responds.

Grayson: Talk to you later, honey.

There's nothing better than him calling me honey. The way his rough voice says it never fails to send shivers down my spine. I throw my cell back into my purse. As I reach for my seatbelt, my door opens. I release a startled gasp and turn, my pulse racing as I stare at a man in a black hoodie. He's got dark brown eyes, and he's glaring at me.

"Get out," he snarls. "Get the fuck out."

I'm frozen with fear, the seatbelt falling from my hand. "W—What?" I stutter. "Please," I whisper. "Leave me alone."

He reaches behind him, and I release a scream as he holds a gun in front of me. "Get the fuck out of the car," he snaps.

My entire body begins to tremble. The fear I have has me in a chokehold. I can't move. I can't speak. I'm numb and scared. I want to call Grayson, but I can't. My cell's in my purse.

Think, Esme. Think!

I reach for the steering wheel, my foot moving to the gas pedal. I need to get out of here.

His face contorts with anger as he reaches for me. His fingers curl into my hair and he pulls me, his grip strong as he drags me from my car. I land on my back with a thud. Pain radiates from the spot I landed on, but the fucker hasn't finished with me. He drags me across the ground, and I cry out as the hem of my blouse rises and my back grazes along the asphalt. I twist

and kick against his hold on me, but fuck, his fingers have such a deft grip that I'm unable to get him to release me.

"What do you want?" I scream at him.

I'm angry. Cars are zipping by us, none of them stopping to help. No one gives a shit. They're so wrapped up in themselves, needing to get to work. I thought this was a carjacking. I thought he wanted my car. But if he did, he'd have taken it by now. Instead, he's dragging me to the truck that's behind us. I continue to kick and twist, doing everything I can to try and get away from him, but it's no use. He's too damn strong for me. I can't get free of his hold.

"Fuck," he snarls as I reach up and start to claw at his hand that has my hair in a vice-like grip. I manage to get his arm, where the gloves don't cover. I do it over and over again until he can no longer hold me. He releases me with such force my head snaps backward and slams against the ground. Stars dance along my vision as darkness crowds in. My breath is taken from me in one fell swoop. God, it's so fucking painful.

"You stupid cunt," he snarls as he twists the gun in his hand. He lifts it up and brings it down on my temple. I slump to the ground, unable to keep my eyes open any longer as the abyss takes me.

My temples pound with a throbbing pain. I wince as I try to open my eyes, then instantly close them as brightness coming through a window hits me. I try to lift an arm but notice they're tied behind my back. I pull against the bindings but it's no use. They just tighten against my skin, causing it to chafe as I twist my wrist. Fuck.

What the hell is going on and where the hell am I?

"You're awake," I hear a low voice say. "It's good to see you again, Esmerelda."

I blink through the pain as my eyes adjust to the sunlight and stare at the frail man who's aged a lot since the last time I saw him. He's lost a lot of weight too. So much so, his face is gaunt-looking and his eyes are sunk into their sockets. He's got a cane that seems to be helping him stand.

"Mr. Jacobson," I say, my words a little slurred. "What have you done?"

"You," he hisses as he steps forward. The anger that flashes through his eyes has my stomach churning. "You are the reason my son is dead."

"I'm sorry," I say. I'm starting to worry. My words are still slurred, and there's so much pain on my face that I'm wondering if something is seriously wrong with me. With all the pain, I should feel some movement, but I don't. It's as though my nose, mouth, and eyes are frozen in place. Fear creeps up my throat. I have no fucking idea what happened. I can't remember much except for that man who dragged me from my car.

"Sorry?" he growls, raising his arm with the cane and bringing it down on my thighs.

I choke out a pained cry as the tops of my thighs begin to smart. God, why is he hurting me?

"You're fucking sorry?" Over and over again he uses his cane as though it's a whip, bringing it down on my legs, rotating between my upper thighs and my knees. "You stupid whore. You should have just stayed with Harry. You would have been set for life."

I shake my head, my body trembling, tears falling thick and fast. "He cheated on me," I croak. "He was awful. I couldn't stay with him."

"You bitch," he snaps. "You fucking bitch. He had needs. Needs that you couldn't satisfy. Had you lost the weight, he may have been satisfied instead of being sympathetic. You fucked that biker, and because of you, they killed my boy."

I cry out as he continues to hit me. "I'm so sorry. I didn't want them to."

"Do you have any idea what that animal did to him?" he seethes. "Do you?"

I bow my head. I'm in too much pain and there's no way he's going to stop. He's going to kill me. I know that in my gut. He's going to seek revenge for his son's death.

"They burned him alive," he yells. "They fucking burned him while he was alive. I couldn't identify him. They had to use his dental records."

I swallow back bile. I had no idea Gray did that. I didn't ask. I knew he'd never tell me.

"Look at me, you fucking whore," he screams, and I raise my head. Through my tears, I can see he's beyond angry. His face is red, his lips pulled into a harsh snarl. I pull in a sharp breath as he once again raises his cane. This time, he doesn't hit my legs. No, he slashes his hand out and smashes me in the face.

Once again, the darkness pulls me under, thankfully taking the pain away as it does.

CHAPTER 27

REAPER

"He's late," Makenna snaps as she taps her foot against the white tiled floor. "I fucking despise lateness."

We're in the waiting area of Jacobson's office. It reminds me of a doctor's office. It's white and sterile.

"The fuck is he?" Ace snarls. "I'm not going to wait around while this fucker has us running through hoops. He agreed to this meet, so where the fuck is he?"

Makenna turns on her heel and marches up to the receptionist, who is Bujar's wife. She's still here. She's been pleasant as can be, especially considering she knows we had her husband held hostage for a few hours. She's lucky he's alive.

"Mrs. Muka," Makenna says politely, although you can hear the impatience in her voice. "Where is he?"

The woman glances around. "I do not know," she tells us. "He was supposed to be here for your meeting, but he did not show up. I have been calling and calling him, but there's no answer."

"Where do you think he is?" Dante asks, flashing her a smile, much to his wife's annoyance.

She lifts her shoulders and shrugs. "I do not know," she repeats again. "If I did, I'd tell you."

Now I'm all for giving people the benefit of the doubt, but there's something about this woman that has me on edge.

"So, if I were to call my brothers and have them pay Bujar a visit, that wouldn't change your mind?" I say, and Ace smirks. "See, from what your husband told us, you know everything there is to know about Harry Jacobson

and his business."

The woman's entire demeanor changes. Gone is the fake friendly façade. In its place is a scowl as she glares at us all. "You think I don't know what you have done?" she hisses. "That you are all to blame for the death of my family, for the death of my friends and their families."

Makenna's not one to beat around the bush. "Had they not come for me and my family, we wouldn't have come for them. It's a two-way street, lady. You don't fuck with us, and we won't fuck with you. You come at me, I come back at you a hundred times harder. Your friends and family learned the hard way."

I grin at the venom in Makenna's voice. She doesn't play around when it comes to her family or her business.

"As someone who is so deep in the world of Harry Jacobson, it's convenient that he decided to work with the Albanians, wouldn't you say?"

"Not really. He knew I had connections, that my father was the right-hand man to Amar Berisha. Harry thought it was best to keep things in house, so to speak."

"I bet you're all regretting going up against us now, aren't you?" Makenna snarls. "So, here's how this is going to work," she says, smiling sweetly at her.

Ace's cell starts to ring, and he steps away to answer it.

"You're going to tell me where the fuck that asshole is, and if you don't, I'm going to have fifteen men at your front door, where your husband and children are, and they're not going to be as nice as I am."

I chuckle as the woman's face pales. "My children," she breathes.

"Are safe, as long as you tell me where the hell Harry Jacobson is."

"Do you know where she was taken?" Ace growls. "You've gotta give me somethin' more than that, May."

I turn to him, my brows knitting together. Who was taken?

"Send me the images you have. You and I both know we're not goin' to be able to keep him contained." He glances at me, and I see the anger and worry shining in his eyes.

My gut tightens and pain slices through my chest. I reach for my cell, my fingers moving over the screen as I hit dial on Esme's number. It rings out, so I continue to call, over and over again, but there's no fucking answer.

"Where is she?" I snap. "Ace, where the fuck is Esme?"

He shakes his head. "I dunno, brother, but we're goin' to find out. Seri got

a call from the school. Esme didn't show up for work. Then May got a call from his friend in the police, who told him they found Esme's car. The door was open, and it had been abandoned."

Anger whips through me. "Do they have any idea where the fuck she is or who's taken her?"

Ace shakes his head. "There was a dark blue truck parked behind her in the security footage the cops pulled, but the plates are fake, and they have no more leads."

Fuck!

I can't fucking lose her. There's no fucking way that I'm losing her.

I spin on my heel and stalk toward the fucking bitch who's watching with wide eyes. I move around her desk and wrap my fingers around her throat. "Do you want to live?" I hiss.

She doesn't answer me. Her eyes are wide and filled with tears as she struggles against my hold, but she's not strong enough to hold me off. "Answer me," I yell. "Do you want to live?"

"Yes," she wheezes, trying to pull in some oxygen.

"Then where the fuck is she? Where is that cunt? I know he has her, so where the fuck is he?"

She pulls at my hand that's wrapped around her throat. "Can't," she wheezes. "Breathe."

My hand tightens even more, and her eyes widen as I cut off her oxygen supply. "Oh, bitch, I haven't even fuckin' started yet. You have three seconds to tell me where the fuck they are, or I snap your fuckin' neck and then I'm goin' after your husband and kids."

"Please," she cries.

"Where are they?" I snap, ready to kill her if she doesn't answer me this time.

"Upstairs," she breathes.

I drop her to the floor, and she immediately reaches for her throat, sucking in much needed air. Her body shakes as she cries. I have no fucking sympathy for the bitch. None whatsoever. And I know that she's going to die. We were way too lenient with her and her fucking husband. That shit stops now.

I turn to Ace. He's got fury burning in his eyes. "That bitch comes with us. Get her keycard. She has access to every room in this building and I have no doubt she can get us upstairs."

"I'm making some calls," Makenna says, her gaze on the bitch who's lying on the floor. "I hope you said goodbye to your family when you left home today."

The bitch starts to cry. "No, please," she shrieks. "I'm sorry. Please don't hurt them."

I chuckle. I guess I wasn't the only one thinking about killing them. Makenna will ensure the husband dies and the children will be left alone. We don't fuck with kids. They'll be given to a family member or placed in the care of someone else. They'll live, they just won't have their parents.

Dante empties out the bitch's purse, finding the keycard to the building. "Let's go," he says, walking past the bitch who's still struggling to breathe. She's fucking dramatic. She should be glad she's not dead yet.

Ace reaches for the whore and lifts her into his arms while Dante, Makenna, and I follow him to the elevator. The anger I have has risen to the surface. There's no fucking way I can push it down. I'm going to enjoy killing everyone who's touched a hair on her head. I'm praying that Esme isn't hurt, that she's fine, but that gnawing in my gut is telling me she's not okay, that she is, in fact, hurt, and I'm going to enjoy punishing whoever the fuck hurt her.

Harry Jacobson is first on my list. I'm going to make him bleed. What happened to his son was just a taster for what he's about to feel.

Dante swipes the keycard in the elevator and punches the button for the penthouse suite. The ride up to the top floor is quiet, the air in the elevator static, everyone waiting for the doors to open so we can get Esme. I reach behind me and pull out my gun, ready for the moment they slide open.

"You good, brother?" Ace asks.

I don't answer him. I'm far fucking from it.

The elevator doors slide open and it's like time stands still. Esme's bound to a chair. She's trembling in fear, and her face is smothered in blood. My heart batters against my chest as I watch that cunt Jacobson smash his cane across her face. A rumble rattles in my throat as I stalk toward him, more than fucking aware that my woman is now slumped in the chair, unmoving.

The fucking bastard raises his cane at me, but I raise my gun, pressing my finger on the trigger. The gun recoils as the bullet flies toward the cunt. It sinks into his arm, causing him to drop the motherfucking cane and howl in pain.

"I've got him," Ace says, his voice low and filled with rage as he takes the

gun from my hand. "Go to Esme."

I don't have to be told twice. My feet move quickly as I stride toward her. She's still unmoving, so much fucking blood, so fucking much. Both Dante and Makenna are checking on her. "Makenna," I rasp, unable to take my gaze off the woman I love.

She's so fucking still. Why isn't she moving?

My gaze moves to her chest, and I focus on that. But nothing. I can't see it rise and fall. Is she breathing?

Fuck no.

"She's alive," she says, her Irish accent thicker than it usually is. "God, Reaper, she's got a broken jaw, her knee looks broken, and I think her nose is too."

"We're takin' her to the hospital," I growl, pushing my anger aside. Right now, I need to focus on getting Esme to a doctor. There's so fucking much blood, I can't see her skin anymore.

Dante has cut the bindings from her hands and I'm able to slide my hands beneath her body and lift her into my arms.

"I'll drive," Makenna rasps. "Ace, you got men coming here to bring this asshole away?"

"Yeah. The guys should be arrivin' any minute, and this fucker here is goin' to watch as his place goes up in flames. This shit is gettin' burned to the fuckin' ground, and I'm drivin'. I've got my truck outside."

I nod. "Let's get this shit done," I snap, not wanting to hang around any longer.

"Kenna, make sure you have everythin' you need from the asshole's office. Dante, Mrs. Muka stays here. When this place goes up, she'll be burning to the fuckin' ground with it," Ace says through clenched teeth. "We warned these fuckers what was goin' to happen if they came for us, and today, they finally understand what the fuck happens."

Dante nods and moves toward the bitch who's whimpering in the corner of the room. Makenna and I head toward the elevator, Ace right behind us with a bleeding fucking asshole slung over his shoulder.

Makenna stops off at the offices while Ace and I continue down to the parking lot level, where my brothers are waiting for us.

"Fuck, man," Shadow snarls as he watches me prowl to the truck with a still unconscious Esme in my hands.

"Take this cunt," Ace tells them as he throws Jacobson onto the ground.

"When Makenna and Dante are finished, this place is getting torched. Make sure this asshole sees his pride and joy burnin'."

I watch as my brothers all share a wicked grin. It's perfect. It's going to kill Jacobson to watch his precious building fall to the ground. He's not only losing his building, but the money is going to be siphoned out of his account. He's going to lose everything before he dies, and I'm going to enjoy watching as he does.

Ace helps me put Esme into the truck. Thankfully, she's still unconscious. I have a feeling if she weren't, she'd be in a fucking lot of pain. I keep her head on my lap, my fingers on her pulse at her neck. I need to feel the beat of her heart. I need the reassurance that she's alive.

Just as Ace slides into the front seat of the truck, Makenna and Dante emerge from the elevator. "Everything's set," she tells us. "Let's burn this motherfucking place to the ground."

Ace nods and turns to Shadow. "You know what to do. Make sure that cunt is watchin'."

He grins. He's learned a lot from both Pyro and Raptor about how to make things go boom. "Oh, he'll be a fuckin' sobbin' mess when I'm finished with this place."

Ace pulls out of the parking lot, and I glance down at my woman. I've just found her. I'm not fucking losing her. No fucking way. I can't.

Ace's cell rings about ten minutes later. "Get ready," he says to me. "This shit's about to end."

The sound of a loud boom fills the air. I turn and see Jacobson's tower start to fall, flames flickering along the outer walls. The truck rocks forward with the force.

"Christ," I groan as I try to keep Esme still. "What the fuck did he use? All the fuckin' C4 we have?"

Ace chuckles. "Knowin' Shadow, probably." He sobers immediately. "How is she?"

"She's still unconscious, but she's alive. I'm goin' to tear that cunt apart, Ace. I'm goin' to make him scream for mercy."

He nods. "You won't give it to him, brother. I know you. I know you have somethin' ruthless planned for him and I can't wait to see what the fuck it is. That asshole deserves what's comin' to him and so fuckin' much more."

"Is Ef workin'?" I ask, hoping she is. She can help.

"Not today, but her friend, Sarah, is. She's waitin' for us."

"Good." I close my eyes, feeling the soft beat of Esme's pulse against my finger.

I love her. I can't lose her.

I understand why people lose themselves when someone they love dies. I get it. I fucking get it. I'd be a shell of who I am. I wouldn't survive without her. Without her, I'm in perpetual darkness. She's my sun. My happiness. My fucking everything.

CHAPTER 28

REAPER

"Mr. Duggan," the doctor says as he approaches us, his gaze sweeping over every brother and old lady here. He doesn't have an outward reaction, unlike most people when they see over twenty people crowding their waiting room, most of them big, burly bikers.

I get to my feet. "Is she awake?" I ask, needing to know that she's finally conscious, that she's doing okay.

"She was briefly, but the pain she's in is substantial. She needs time to heal. We need to do surgery on her jaw as well as her kneecap."

"What's wrong with her, Doc?" I ask, needing him to fucking spell it out to me.

"Ms. Greene has a broken jaw and nose, her kneecap is completely shattered, and she's got lacerations on the top of her thighs. From what you've said about her injuries, along with what we've found, it seems she was beaten with a cane."

Fucking cunt. I'm going to fucking make him bleed.

"Her back is bruised, as is her tailbone. She has deep cuts and grazes on her back from where she was dragged from her car. It's going to take a while for Esme to recover from the injuries she's sustained. We're talking months, Mr. Duggan. It's not going to be easy for her."

"Whatever it takes, we'll make sure that she's okay and heals."

I won't let her go through it alone. Fuck that. I'll be holding her hand the entire time.

"Having a strong support system is what's going to help her."

I nod. She has that in abundance. "Can I see her before she goes into surgery?" I ask. I need to see her once before she goes into surgery. Once I've

seen her, I'm going to go visit with Jacobson. I want that cunt dead before she wakes up.

"Of course," the doctor replies with a sharp nod. "But it'll have to be brief."

I follow the doctor to the room where they were working on Esme, and the moment the doctor opens the door, my breath is taken from me. Christ, she's so fucking bruised. She's still by far the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes on, but fuck... The rage that is burning inside of me intensifies. I'm going to enjoy making that cunt bleed. I'm going to enjoy watching as he suffers in the most horrific ways possible.

She's so still, just as she was in the car. She's not moving. I fucking hate it. My woman's smile is bright and can light up even the darkest of places. She's full of vibrance without even trying. To see her so fucking still kills me. The machine shows her steady heartrate. It's the only way I know that she's alive. I need her to be okay. I need her healed and home with me. I can't fucking deal with this.

My feet move toward her bed. It's like I'm walking in a daze, my mind on autopilot. I can't fucking function properly.

"Honey," I whisper as I press a kiss to the cheek the fucker didn't hurt. "You're goin' to be okay. I promise you, Es, you're goin' to be okay. When you come out of surgery, you're never goin' to have to worry about a fuckin' Jacobson hurtin' you ever again."

I press a kiss to her cheek once more. "Love you, Es. I fuckin' love you so much." I turn from the bed, hating how fucking silent the room is, how she's not moving. I'd love nothing more than for her to speak, just to say something. But nothing comes out. I leave her room, hating that I won't be here when she's having her surgery, but I'm doing what needs to be done.

"I'll be here," Seri promises me as I enter the waiting room again. "The moment she's out of surgery, I'll let you know. You'll be back before she wakes up from the anesthesia."

"Thanks," I reply gruffly. I turn to Ace, who's already on his feet waiting on me. "Ready?"

His grin is sinister. "So fuckin' ready. Makenna and Dante have everythin' ready. Preach is with them and he's been tauntin' the fucker, promisin' the cunt a world of hurt."

I roll my neck. "He won't be disappointed."

Shadow slaps my back as we move toward the exit. "If the last time is

anything to go by, this is goin' to be spectacular."

"Just no fuckin' eyes," May grouses. "That shit was enough when Shadow did it."

I hear the chuckles sound from behind me. I get that laughter is a release for them, but it's not their woman who's lying on a fucking hospital bed, bandaged up, and awaiting surgery to fix their kneecap and wire their fucking jaw shut. It's mine. I ain't in the mood to be laughing and shooting the shit. I'm focused on what's about to happen, and I can't fucking wait.

Ace and I climb into the truck and pipes rumble behind us as our brothers follow. The drive to the clubhouse is quiet. He leaves me be, not saying a word. There's nothing to fucking say. Right now, my focus should be on Es and making sure she recovers from the injuries. Instead, it's on the asshole who laid hurt on her.

I slide out of the truck when Ace pulls into the drive. Gravel crunches beneath my feet as I stalk toward the outbuilding. This place has seen many deaths, and tonight, it's going to have one more to add to the tally.

"How is she?" Makenna asks as I enter the building. I don't answer her, my focus on the cunt who's smirking at me. Fucking cunt.

"She's alive," Ace answers from behind me. "She needs surgery, but she's goin' to be okay."

"Thank God," Makenna breathes.

"Kenna," I say as I step closer to Jacobson. "Do you have your laptop set up to show this asshole just what we have planned?"

"Yes," she laughs. "I have everything ready. Would you like to explain or should I?"

"You should. Jacobson here has a real problem with women. Findin' out a woman has bested him is goin' to make his heartbreak even worse."

Her laughter rings out louder. "I love that idea." She grins at me.

"So, Jacobson," Dante taunts. "Your building is rubble and the insurance won't pay out because the evidence will point to an inside job." His grin turns into a full blown smile. "Mrs. Muka is dead, as are the rest of the Albanians you hired. We warned you, old man. You shouldn't have fucked with us. You should have learned from the ones who came before you. You should never have come for my wife," he snarls, his eyes flashing with the darkness he keeps so controlled.

Makenna shakes her head. "You should have stayed in your fucking lane, old man. Had you done, you would never have lost your son, and you'd still

have your building." She pauses as she reaches for the laptop, turning it around so he can see the screen. "You would still have your money."

"What are you doing?" he hisses, speaking for the first time since I entered.

"This," Makenna says, pointing at the balance on the screen. Two-point-six-billion dollars is currently sitting in his bank account. "Is no longer yours." She types in a few numbers, and within seconds, Jacobson's account balance starts to go down.

"No," he screams. "You can't fucking do this. That's my money."

Makenna tuts. "Haven't you learned anything from this, Jacobson? You sure as hell have underestimated us. We can do whatever the hell we like. I'm taking this money for damages. Having to spend time around you is more than enough to piss anyone off."

Ace grins. "Hazard pay," he says. "Oh, would you look at that, you're down to your last hundred grand."

The old man's face is contorted with rage, his cheeks redder than the blood staining the bandage on his arm, where he was shot. I wonder who the fuck bandaged the fucker up? They should have left him to bleed out. His eyes narrow as he watches his money go down to zero.

"You're done, Harry boy," Makenna laughs. "You've nothing left to your name. You're fucking broke. You have no one left to love and everything you held dear is gone."

"Now you die," I hiss as I reach for my knife that's sheathed at my back. I don't worry about making this look fancy. This isn't how I'm going to kill him. No, this is just the beginning. I slam the blade into his knee, causing him to howl out in pain. He sounds like a fucking wounded animal.

I pull the knife out. The sound of his pain isn't enough to settle the beast within me. He did so fucking much more to Esme. There's no fucking way I'm just letting him off with a stab to his knee.

"What's next?" Makenna asks as she stands back against Dante and watches. She's got bright eyes and a wide smile. Dante's standing behind her, his arm around her waist. Both of them are happy to let me take the lead. They're psychopaths and love the blood and gore of everything that has to do with death and torture.

"Just enjoy it, Kenna," Ace says as he too watches. "The van's ready whenever you want it."

"We're leavin' in a minute. I just have one more thing to do." I slam the

bloody blade into his cheek, and he once again cries out, but it's muffled due to the blood that pools in his mouth. Makenna's laughter is loud, and I watch as Dante chuckles. "Okay, let's go." I pull out my knife and wipe it on the asshole's fancy shirt.

"Oh, hell no," Makenna says, stepping out of her husband's arms and crossing her arms over her chest. "I wanted death, Reaper. I wanted you to live up to your name. I heard about what you did to his son. I wanted something just as epically torturous."

I shake my head. "Jesus, Makenna, have some patience, would you? I'm nowhere near finished with him. What I have planned is goin' to bring this cunt a world of pain."

She nods, seemingly in approval. "Alrighty then. Lead the way."

I glance at her husband, who's watching her with a smile. "How the fuck do you sleep beside that? You're not worried she'll kill you in your sleep?"

His smile widens even more. "Every time I piss her off."

Christ. There's something wrong with the two of them.

"I've got the asshole," Ace says. "Shadow and May are driving the van. The rest of us are on our bikes. Makenna, are you good to follow us?"

"Absolutely," she replies. She's like a kid in a candy store at the moment. She's fucking crazy.

It takes us around fifty minutes to get out of the bustling city and into a secluded part of the city. The road is empty. It's one that's not often traveled as it's a dirt road. Only those who are locals tend to use it, and at this time of night, there's hardly anyone around.

"Let him out," I say once I'm off my bike.

Shadow and Mayhem exit the van and lift the cunt out. The bastard is still bleeding and whimpering like a fucking baby. They throw him to the ground and stand back. Ace hands me a rope, and the asshole on the ground starts to plead his case, begging for me to leave him alone and let him live. He's deluded, completely fucking deluded if he thinks I'm going to let him get away with what he's done to my woman.

I reach for his wrist and tie the rope around it, then I attach the rope to the back of my bike. I do the same with the other one. The asshole's on his back, just as Esme was when that motherfucking cunt pulled her from her car.

"Who took her for you?" I hiss as I crouch down in front of him. "If you don't tell me, it's your wife I'm goin' after next."

"Bujar," he cries out, both tears and snot falling from his eyes and nose.

It's fucking disgusting as it mixes in with his blood and slides into his mouth.

My gaze slides to Makenna, who gives me a sharp nod. "He was taken care of while we were in the office. He's dead and no longer a problem. He won't touch her again."

"Thanks," I reply as I turn back to the asshole on the ground. "Now, this is where I'm going to have my fun," I tell him as I rise to my feet.

"No," he cries. It's still muffled from his injuries, but we can all hear what the fucker is saying. "Please," he cries. "I won't come for you again."

I laugh. "You never were goin' to anyway. You're done, asshole."

I climb onto my bike and rev the engine. The fucker's sobs are drowned out by the sound of my engine. I take off, driving along the dirt road, that asshole being pulled along behind me. Cheers sound as the speedometer rises and my speed increases. This should quench Makenna's thirst for death.

I drag his body behind my bike for a mile. I know he's dead. He would have died not long after I took off. There's no way he would have survived being dragged along the dirt road, especially with the injuries he had. I stop the bike and get off, then crouch next to his body. Blood soaks through his shirt, which is torn to shreds, as are his pants.

I smile. I fucking grin as I stare down at his dead body. My woman's safe and doesn't have to worry about him any longer, nor does she have to worry about his asshole son. The Jacobson's won't fucking touch her again.

"Holy shit, Reaper," Makenna says from behind me. I glance over at them and see they drove up behind me. "That was awesome. Wait until I tell Finn. He's going to love this."

I shake my head. "You and your brother are fuckin' crazy."

She stares at me dead in the eyes. "That's funny coming from you. We just watched as you dragged a man to his death. He's gone now, Reaper. You should go and be with Esme. She'll want you there when she wakes up."

She's right. She will want me there. I turn to my brothers. "You good sortin' this out?" I ask.

"Like you even have to ask," Ace replies. "Makenna, will you give Reaper a ride to the hospital? We'll ensure that your bike's clean."

"Of course," she says as she smiles. "Tonight was a great night, gentlemen. That two billion dollars is currently in one of my offshore accounts that's connected to about six dozen shell corporations. Once it's been filtered through them all and there's no way it can be traced back to us. I'll ensure that a third of the money is deposited into your account."

Ace nods. "Appreciate it, Kenna. Now go. We're goin' to sort this out and then we're goin' home to our women."

"Come on, Reaper, let's get you to the hospital," Makenna says as she moves to her vehicle.

Before I reach her car, Ace pulls me aside. "It's done, brother. You've done what you promised her. She's free of this shit. Your woman's goin' to be in pain, but you can assure her that it'll never happen again."

I swallow back bile. "It shouldn't have fuckin' happened in the first place."

"It shouldn't have," he agrees. "Our world shouldn't touch our women. But it's always them who get hurt. This wasn't on you, Reaper. This wasn't on you at fuckin' all. This asshole had her set in his sights from the get-go. She was always part of their plan. You saved her. Remember that."

"Thanks, brother," I rasp. His words mean a fucking lot, but it doesn't ease the pain of her being hurt. She deserves to be cherished. She should be treasured. But instead, those fuckers have caused her nothing but pain. The fact that they're dead doesn't change what they've done. It doesn't ease the anger I have. There's no one to take the rage out on anymore. Everyone who hurt her is dead. So what do I do to rid myself of the anger and pain?

I slide into the back of Makenna's car and close my eyes. How the fuck do I convince Esme that she's safe? What can I do to let her know that she won't be hurt again? She was on her fucking way to work when she was taken. She was doing what she does every fucking day. It was a normal morning for her and it turned into one of the worst.

What can I do to make the memories of today vanish?

CHAPTER 29

ESME

I feel as though I'm floating. My mind is a little fuzzy. I feel weird, not at all like myself. Opening my eyes, I realize that I'm not at home, but in hospital. The sound of a machine beeping is to my left. I swallow hard, but panic rises up my throat when I realize I can't open my mouth.

"Es, honey." I hear that rough voice, the one that I love so much, and my heartrate starts to settle. Gray's here. "It's okay, I promise you. It's going to be okay. You're in the hospital." He comes to stand in my line of vision. God, he looks so beautiful. I try to smile but can't. It feels as though my mouth is sewed up shut.

I glance down and see my leg is in a cast and is up on a stirrup of sorts. I can't see much else, but from the corner of my eyes, I can see white around my nose. Is that a bandage?

"You have a broken jaw, honey. They've had to wire it shut. It's going to take around six to eight weeks before it heals. I'm sorry, baby. I'm so fuckin' sorry."

I reach out, glad I'm able to use my arms. I grasp a hold of his hand. I want him to know that it's not his fault. Everything that happened rushes back and hits me at full force. The man who took me, then Harry's father being wild and full of rage as he beat me. I shiver as fear creeps up my spine. What's going to happen now? Will they come for me again?

"You've got a shattered kneecap that needed surgery. It's goin' to be a rough road to recovery, Es, but you're not alone. We're goin' to help you through it."

I nod, my hand squeezing his. I love that he's offering me support, but I feel so withdrawn, so numb from it all. I hate that I can't talk, that I can't do

anything but lie here.

"The men who hurt you," he says low, and I freeze at his words. My blood runs cold. "They're gone. They won't hurt you again." It's a promise. I know he's telling me they're dead, and while I shouldn't feel relief, I do. I'm so damn happy that they're gone, I could cry.

I bring my hand to his face. I can't kiss him. I can't hug him. I have to lie here. But I need some way of letting him know that I heard him. His lips curve into a tight smile and he presses a soft kiss to my hand. "Sleep, Es, let your body heal. I'll be here when you wake up. I ain't goin' anywhere."

I move my hand and point to my eye, then to my heart, then to him.

I hear his chuckle. "Fuck, Es, I fuckin' love you too. Now sleep."

If I could, I'd laugh. He's so damn bossy, but I love that he's taking care of me.

I close my eyes, hearing him take a seat beside me. His hand takes mine and he holds tight. It doesn't take long for me to fall asleep.

I know that as long as I have Grayson with me, I'm going to be fine.

CHAPTER 30

REAPER

TWO WEEKS LATER

"Reaper, is Auntie Es going to be okay?" Serafina asks as she watches my woman sleep.

Today, I was finally able to bring her home from the hospital. As much as her parents wanted her to return home with them, it wasn't happening. There are more than enough people in this clubhouse who can help take care of her. She'll never be alone. Not to mention, we have Effiemia, so if anything goes wrong, we have a nurse who can help. Thankfully, her parents didn't put up much of a fight and agreed.

"She's goin' to be fine, Sera. She needs lots of rest and some company."

Sera grins. She's got that impish smile that's much like her mom's. "And hugs. Make sure you give her loads of hugs, Reaper. Mama says that makes everyone feel better."

I nod. "Then we'll make sure that's what she'll get. Now, have you done your homework?" I ask, knowing that if she hasn't, she won't be allowed to play.

She crosses her arms over her chest and glares at me. The kid is sassy as fuck. She's going to give us all gray hair before she hits the age of sixteen. "I'm going," she sneers at me. "I'll do my homework and then I'll come back and sit with Auntie Es."

I shake my head as I watch her walk out of the room. Christ, she's so fucking sassy. The kid is without a doubt one of the funniest kids I've met.

I hear commotion downstairs—raised voices, angry fucking voices. As much as I want to go down and see what the fuck is going on, I'm not going to leave Esme. She can't leave this room. She can't even use the bathroom unaided.

Footsteps pound up the stairs and I turn to see Preach prowling toward me. "You good?" I ask, watching him carefully. His eyes are wild, his face red. I don't think I've ever seen him look so fucking angry before. "Brother?"

He shakes his head. "Fuck," he snarls, lifting his hand and driving his fist into the wall. "Fuck."

I move toward him. This isn't Preach. My brother never loses his shit. Not fucking ever. "Tell me what's happened."

"Tyson," he says through gritted teeth, and my heart fucking stops. "He's not mine."

"What?" I hiss, pulling in a deep breath. Fuck. Fuck. I thought something had happened to the boy. I thought he was hurt or worse. Christ... I run a hand through my hair. "How did you find out?"

His eyes narrow. "Effie realized that my blood type couldn't be a parent of Tyson. Mayhem just told us all."

I stare at him, confused. How the fuck does someone uncover that shit? "Preacher," I say low, unsure what the fuck I'm supposed to say.

"My fuckin' son," he says, his eyes filling with tears. "How am I supposed to give him up?"

"Who said you have to?" I ask. "Look, Preach, you're Tyson's dad, man. No one can fuckin' deny that."

He shakes his head. "I'll talk to you later," he says, choking on his words. He's close to crying and I can't blame him. This is completely fucked up.

I glance back at my room and see that Esme is fast asleep. I move quickly, pushing hard as I run down the stairs. I see Mayhem talking with Ace and Stag, but I'm fucking pissed. Beyond that. "You just had to open your fuckin' mouth," I hiss as I glare at Mayhem.

"Brother, what?" he says, his brows raised in surprise.

"Shit," Ace says. "Reap, brother, I get that you're pissed, but you need to calm down."

"What the fuck is goin' on?" Mayhem asks, his gaze moving between Ace and me.

I notice the women aren't down here. No doubt finding out that Tyson isn't Preacher's has made them upset. I can't fucking believe this.

"A while ago, it became clear that Tyson wasn't Preacher's," Ace says, and everyone's silent. "All you had to do was look at the kid and you could tell who his father is. Fuck, man, have you not seen the boy?"

"What are you sayin'?" Mayhem asks. "It sounds like you knew that

Preacher was raisin' someone else's kid."

Ace nods. "We didn't know for definite, but we were ninety percent sure that Reaper's the father. Fuck, Tyson's the spittin' image of him."

"Why?" Stag asks. "Why the fuck didn't you say it to him?"

"You saw him, brother. You saw the fuckin' guilt that ate away at him. You saw how he was when I went to prison for takin' the fall for him. What do you think he's goin' to be like when he finds out his son is mine?" I shake my head. "Fuck, Mayhem. Why the fuck would you even fuckin' tell him that shit?"

He bows his head. "If it were me, I'd want to know. I don't get it. Do you not want your kid?"

Pain slices through my chest. "Of fuckin' course I do. But Preach is my brother. The fuck am I goin' to do—take the boy off him?"

"Look," Ace says, raising his hand. "The situation is fucked up. But right now, Preach's world has been fuckin' blasted open and we need to make sure he's doin' okay. 'Cause if it were me, I'd be gone, brother. There's no comin' back from findin' out that the kid you loved and have raised for the past few months isn't yours."

May runs his hands over his face. "Fuck," he growls. "What's goin' to happen now?"

Ace sighs. "He's goin' to have a paternity test done, somethin' that should have been done from the start, and we'll go from there."

I don't have anything to say. What can I? I mean, it's fucked up. I never intended for Preacher to find out. My brother should have kept his fucking nose out of other people's business. I get that he was trying to help, but he's opened a fucking can of worms and there's no way to escape the heartache that's about to be exposed from this.

I turn on my heel and make my way upstairs. It's fucking shit. The one person I want to talk to, I can't. I can't put this on Esme. She's dealing with enough trying to recover from the injuries those animals inflicted on her. She's just home from the hospital and there's a long road to recovery in front of her.

I get to the top of the stairs and see my bedroom door is open. I have no doubt that Sera's back, and if Esme's awake, she's talking her ear off.

"You," Preach says, his words thick with emotion. "Why didn't you tell me?"

I pause as I turn to his room. He's standing in the doorway with his arms

crossed over his chest. I look past him and see that he's got a bag on the bed and he's packing clothes into it. Fuck. "You leavin'?"

He glances behind him and then turns back to face me. "You never answered my question," he hisses. "Why the fuck didn't you tell me?"

"You were listenin'?"

"You looked beyond pissed leavin' here. I wanted to make sure you didn't get yourself into a fight."

I chuckle. "I came close to it." I wanted nothing more than to knock Mayhem out. Fucking ass. He never thought about the ramifications of unearthing that secret. Had he done so, we wouldn't be in this situation.

"Why didn't you tell me that you thought Tyson was yours?" he asks once again.

I sigh. "I didn't want to take away the one thing you had. Since that cunt told you he was yours when she was pregnant, you've changed. You're no longer doubtin' who you are, and you don't care about the past. You're focused on the future and bein' the best dad to Tyson. What did you want me to do, man? Tell you what I thought and fuck up everythin' you've worked hard for? You're my brother, Preach. I'd do anythin' to protect you."

"Includin' not gettin' to know your son. It makes sense now. You'd always spend more time at Esme's. It's 'cause bein' around Tyson is too much."

I don't deny it. There's no fucking point. Everything is out in the open now. "Yeah," I say a little roughly. "Seein' the kid is hard. Knowin' that he could be mine and I can't be his dad fuckin' sucks, but I made that choice, Preach. I did. I knew what it meant to you to have him, and I knew what it would do to you if you didn't. So I knew that keepin' my mouth fuckin' shut about what I suspected was the right thing to do."

"So what happens now? Hmm? Everyone knows he's not mine. Are we expected to pretend that he is? What about you and Es? Hmm? What's goin' to happen when you have kids and you decide that bein' a dad is the most important thing to you? What happens then? You're goin' to want Tyson, brother. You're goin' to want him to know that you're his father."

I grit my teeth. I know deep in my heart that he's not wrong. That's exactly what I have dreaded. It's fucked up but I can't deny his words.

"Fuckin' Mayhem," he snarls. "What the fuck are we goin' to do now, brother? I know that he's not mine. There's no fuckin' comin' back from it."

"We don't know for definite that he's mine," I sigh. "Look, as I've said, I had no intention of ever takin' Tyson from you. That's not somethin' I ever

wanted to do. If the results come back that Tyson's mine, I'll stick to my promise."

His jaw tightens as he stares at me. "You think it's that easy? You think we can all forget that this bomb hasn't been fuckin' dropped on us?"

"What do you want me to fuckin' do?" I snarl, getting pissed. I have no idea what he wants from me.

"Fuck off, Reap. You're so fuckin' deluded if you think this is just goin' to be as easy as you say," he growls. He turns on his heel and storms into his room, slamming the door as he does.

I stand there, staring at his door, wondering what the fuck I'm going to do now. How do we come back from this?

Walking into my room, I see Es sitting up and watching me. I'm surprised to see she's alone. How the fuck did she get up? She'd best not have done it herself. She knows that if she needs to move, she's to call someone to help her. I close the door behind me and lock it. I want to block everyone out tonight. I notice that her cell is in her hand. I feel my own cell buzz in my pocket and pull it out. She texted me. Once she was able to move in hospital and I gave her cell back to her, she began communicating with everyone through text messages.

I'm sorry, Gray. I know you didn't want it all to come out. Are you okay?

I sigh as I take a seat on the bed next to her, pulling off my boots. "No," I reply honestly. "What the fuck is goin' to happen now?"

She reaches out for my hand and pulls on it. She's letting me know that she wants me to come closer to her. I turn so that I'm lying on my side and throw my arm around her stomach. She releases me and types something on her cell.

We just have to take it day by day. Right now, you and Preacher are both hurting. I'm sorry that it all came out. I know you didn't want it to. What do you want to happen?

"If Tyson's my son, I fully intend on doin' what I set out to do. I can't hurt my brother that way."

I know, but do you think Preacher will let you do that?

"That's just it, the anger he has right now, I wouldn't be surprised if he runs. I'd do the same."

She nods. **Me too.**

Everyone would. It's fucked up. I don't want to lose Tyson, especially if

the kid is mine. But that's a selfish way of thinking.

"I fuckin' hate this shit," I grumble.

I know, but no matter what, you're not alone.

She repeats the words I've been telling her for the past two weeks. I needed her to know that she's not going through her pain alone. I'm going to be with her every step of the way.

"I love you, Es. Fuck, I'd be so fuckin' lost without you." I can't imagine goin' through this shit without having her by my side.

I love you too. Please don't stress. It's not going to help anyone. Once you take the paternity test, we can go from there.

"You're right. It's just fucked up."

She nods, resting her head against mine.

I have no fucking idea what the hell I'm going to do, but I do know that everything has now changed and there's no going back.

CHAPTER 31

ESME

The entire clubhouse feels as though it's a ticking time bomb. Preacher isn't speaking with anyone except for me and Seri. He's been holed up in his room with Tyson. My heart hurts for him, but I understand why. He's protecting the last moments he has before the truth unfolds. Today is the day we're supposed to have the results from the paternity test. Grayson wasn't the only one who took the test. Shadow, Rush, and Cruz did also. The rest of the guys were adamant that the kid couldn't be theirs.

Seri and I have spent a lot of time together. She's still not announced that she's pregnant, and I know that she's worried that Graham could be Tyson's father and what that would mean for her, especially as she herself is pregnant. But I know that Gray is the father. There's absolutely no doubt in my mind that he is. Just looking at Tyson proves that. We're both worried about Preacher and Tyson. No matter the outcome, their lives are going to change. My heart is broken for them both and for Grayson.

The sound of pipes rings out and I tense, my gaze moving to Seri, who's sitting beside me. I reach out and grasp her hand. I want her to know that I'm with her no matter what.

"It's going to be okay," she whispers. "No matter what, we're all going to be okay."

I really wish that were true. I look at Preacher and see the pain in his eyes. Over the past two days, he's been quiet and reclusive. He's unkempt and has become a stranger to his brothers. The man has always been a huge part of this club, but in the blink of an eye, it came crashing down around him.

The door opens and in walks the men. Grayson, Shadow, Cruz, and Rush. That was a huge shock to people. Rush had been with Pepper just once, and it

would have coincided with the dates around which Pepper became pregnant. To say Octavia and Digger were pissed was an understatement. Thankfully, they were angry at Pepper and not at Rush.

"So, which one of you is the father?" Mayhem asks, and Effie pushes her elbow into his side. "What?" he asks, looking at her with a furrow between his brow.

"Be quiet," she hisses at him. "This isn't anything to do with you, so stay out of it."

I adore Mayhem. He's fun, loving, and always up for joking. But he always seems to put his foot in it. Right now isn't the time to be joking around. He's trying to break the ice and be funny, but there are so many feelings and emotions involved that it's not the time or place to do this.

"We haven't opened them yet," Cruz sighs. "I don't wanna fuckin' know. I don't want a kid. I'm happy bein' an uncle."

I watch as Preacher's jaw locks. I get the anger. Here he is on the verge of losing his son and Cruz is saying he could be the father but he doesn't want it.

"Look," Seri says, her voice soft and gentle. "The longer you all wait to open the results, the harder it's going to be. Everyone deserves answers, Preacher more so than anyone. Can we not drag it out any longer?"

I watch as the men tear into the results, my gaze firmly on my man. I watch him carefully. He's good at keeping his emotions in check. You wouldn't know what the results said by just looking at him. But the moment he slides his gaze to me, I know. He was right. The moment he saw the boy, he knew. I guess people see different things when they look at children. They'll pinpoint one feature that they say resembles them or someone else and they'll run with it. That's what's happened here. But if you're not doing that and you look at Tyson, there's no denying how closely he resembles Grayson.

I give him a nod, letting him know that I understand. I squeeze Seri's hand and she glances at me. I give her a look, trying to convey the results to her.

"Reap?" she says softly, her voice low so only I can hear her. "He was right all along?"

I nod once more. I fucking hate that I can't speak.

"He's not Graham's?" The relief in her voice is clear to hear. "God, I'm a bitch. I shouldn't be so relieved."

I squeeze her hand once again. She's far from being a bitch. It's a hard

situation, and while I get that she would have stuck with Shadow had it come out Tyson was his, it's normal to be relieved that you're not tearing apart a family.

"He's not mine," Cruz says. "I need a fuckin' drink."

He needs another dose of laxatives. He's so inconsiderate.

"Nor mine," Shadow says, grinning at Seri. "Sorry, brother," he says to Preach as he moves over to him and pulls him into a sideways hug. "It's a fuckin' hard situation. You gotta know that we all got love for you, brother, and we'll do whatever the fuck it takes to make this better for you."

"Rush?" Octavia asks, her hand gripping Digger's tightly.

The boy shakes his head. "Tyson's not mine either."

Octavia releases a deep breath, her shoulders slumping forward as she presses close to Digger.

"Reap, man?" May says, and in return, he gets the coldest glare I've ever seen from Grayson. "What?" he asks. "We all want to know."

"Had you kept your fuckin' mouth shut, May, we wouldn't be in this fuckin' position."

I press my hands down onto the table and try to push myself up so I can stand.

"Don't even try it, Esme," Gray growls as he pins me with a stare. "Sit your ass down. You wanna move, you ask someone to help you. There's no fuckin' way I'm goin' to let you walk on that leg. It needs to fuckin' heal."

I sit back and stare at him. The anger in his voice is unlike anything I've heard before, especially directed at me. I close my eyes and press my hands together.

I feel arms around me, and I know that it's Seri. I shouldn't be surprised. My girl is always here to protect me and shield me.

"It's okay," she whispers. "He's dealing with the results, and he also wants to keep you safe."

I nod, trying my hardest not to cry. I keep my eyes closed and breathe deeply through my nose. I wish I could speak and ask someone to take me upstairs.

"Reaper, why don't you and Preach follow me into my office," Ace says, and just like that, the tension in the air vanishes and chatter starts up.

"Yo, Es," I hear Rush say. I open my eyes and give him a small smile. "You want a hand gettin' upstairs?"

God, he's the fucking shit. I nod, relief washing through me.

Seri moves away and Rush comes over to me and effortlessly lifts me up. I wrap my arms around his neck and hold on tight as we move away from the throngs of people. He doesn't say anything to me until we're upstairs. "I've never met a better man than Reaper, Es. He loves you, but right now he's dealing with the fact that his best friend is goin' through hell. He's pissed as hell at Mayhem, and he's worried about you. Snappin' at you wasn't intended. He's just got no outlet for his anger."

He places me down on the bed and I quickly type out a message.

I know. I'm not angry at him, just a little hurt. I'm worried about him. How are you dealing with this?

Rush chuckles. "You and Seri are the shit, you know that?"

I grin at him. **Of course I do.**

He sits down at the end of the bed and sighs. "When it came out that I could be the father as I'd been with Pepper, both Digger and Octavia were pissed. I get that they were, but you and Seri weren't. You haven't treated me differently for being with her, nor have you treated me differently than the other kids."

My heart breaks for him. He's been through a fucking lot in his young life. His childhood was shit, so fucked up that it would break most people. Rush did everything he could to protect his sister, Ruby, and he made a few wrong choices and hurt Octavia, but he's made amends and served time for what he did. He's my nephew, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

I love you just as I love Cage, Ruby, and Sera. You're my nephew, Rush.

He grins at my words. "As I said, you're the shit."

Don't make me laugh. I can't.

He chuckles. "Sorry. I bet you can't wait to get that shit off?"

I nod as my fingers swipe along my cell, typing out another message.

Four more weeks, hopefully. The sooner the better.

"It'll be fine. The way Reaper's actin' you'd think you'd shatter if you stood up."

I smile. He's not wrong. That's exactly how it feels. Sometimes I wonder if he thinks I'm fragile. I'm far from it. I don't want to have to live a life of always being cautious. I did that already. I had to live on eggshells and it drove me crazy. I became a shell of who I am. With Grayson, I'm finally able to come out of that shell and he's knocked down all the walls I've built. I'm finally feeling like myself again. I don't want to go back.

You know that everyone loves you, don't you?

He shakes his head. "I don't know, Es. Sometimes I feel as though I'll always be that punk-ass kid who shot Octavia. It's hard to shake the reputation you built for yourself."

Oh God, this kid is killing me.

Don't ever think that. People change, Rush. You have changed. You've grown up and become the man you were destined to be. We all understand the reasons behind you hurting Octavia. Had you not have done it, Ruby might not be here. Never doubt yourself. You're not a punk-ass kid. You're Rush. You're a patched member of the Fury Vipers. You have a home, Rush, and it's right here. Remember that, yeah? If they saw you as that kid, they'd have never brought you here. You are loved and you're going to be an amazing man. I know you are.

He doesn't reply to what I've written, but he rises to his feet and presses a kiss to my cheek. "You were always too good for that penciled-dick asshole, Es. You deserve to be cherished. Never doubt just how much you're loved."

With that parting comment, he walks out of the room. Tears spring to my eyes as I watch him leave. He truly is going to be an amazing man. He's already well on the way to being there. Being part of this club has given him a purpose. I just hate that he's not able to see just how much he belongs here.

I stare at my leg that's in an ugly cast and wish that I could heal faster. It's a pain in the ass not being able to do anything for myself. I've never felt so helpless in my life.

I hear footsteps entering the bedroom, but I don't look up from where my gaze is. I know it's Grayson.

"I'm sorry," he says. His voice has a rough edge to it. "I fucked up and shouldn't have snapped at you. I saw you getting to your feet, and I panicked. I'm sorry."

I lift my head and look at him. He looks as though he's been crying. "I love you, Es. I fuckin' love everythin' there is about you."

My heart pounds as he moves toward me. I point to my eye, then my chest, and then to him. He laughs as he always does whenever I do it to him. "I'm sorry."

I shake my head. He doesn't have to apologize again. I was hurt by his tone, but he apologized already.

"You look tired, honey. Sleep, Es. I'll wake you up in a while. You're still recoverin'."

I pout. God, I have so many questions and this damn wired jaw isn't making it easy at all. But he's right, I'm so tired. I can't seem to be awake longer than a few hours lately and it's pissing me off.

Grayson helps me to lie down, and the moment my head hits the pillow, I'm unable to keep my eyes open any longer.

"I'll wake you soon, honey. Don't worry about anythin'. It'll all work out."

I squeeze his hand and feel his lips against my cheek. God, I love him so much. It doesn't take long until I fall into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER 32

REAPER

I hear footsteps stop outside my door and frown. Esme's asleep and my brothers tend not to interrupt us. If the door's closed, they know not to come in or disrupt us as it means she's sleeping. I'm worried about her. She's fatigued a lot more, and as much as I understand that the doctor told us this would happen, it's fucking worrying. I know that Es hates it too.

I reach for her cell, wanting to charge it for her. She's using it a lot more as she's typing on it to speak with people. I know she can't wait to get the wire off her jaw so she's able to speak. I'm looking forward to the day I hear her voice again. It's been almost three weeks since I've heard her say a word.

Her cell lights up the moment I pick it up and I see there's a message typed out on it. I can't help but read it. It's to Rush. The kid helped her to bed when I went to speak with Ace and Preacher. My woman is fucking sweet as hell, and she always shows her sweetness to everyone. She'll always make sure to make people feel as though they're important to her, and they are. That's just who she is.

I hear footsteps again. It sounds as though someone is hovering outside. I climb out of bed and move to the door. Opening it, I see I was wrong. Someone's not outside, but Preacher's in his room, which is opposite mine, and he's moving around, packing up his shit once again.

While speaking with Ace, Preach never said a word. He let Ace speak and then me. I wanted him to know that Tyson will remain his if that's what he wants. Ace also said the same, but Preach never replied. He never made a comment, nor did he look as though he was interested in the conversation at all. He waited until he was dismissed by Ace and then left the room.

"You goin' somewhere, brother?" I ask, watching as he shoves clothes

into his duffle bag.

"Can't stay here any longer," he says, his voice void of emotion.

"Where you goin'?" There's panic in my voice. I can't hide it. What if he takes Tyson with him?

"Ireland. I'm a Viper, Reap. This is who I am. But I can't stay here. I can't act as though it's all goin' to be fine. You're Tyson's dad. You're who he should be with. Not me."

I shove a hand through my hair. "You don't have to do this. You belong here. We started out together, Preach. This is our home. The fuck are you goin' to do in Ireland?"

"Pyro's growin' the club. Raptor flew over last week. He's got Wrath out there, and they're recruitin'. It's goin' to be fine."

I swallow back my anger. "What about Tyson?" I ask, wondering what the fuck he's going to do about the boy.

"He's yours, Reap. What do you expect me to do? Take him with me?"

I release a breath. Fuck. I thought that's exactly what he was going to do. I wouldn't have blamed him had he done.

"I thought about it," he admits. "I thought about running away with him. Packin' up his shit along with mine and runnin'. But I couldn't do that to you. Had it been any other brother who it came back was his father, I would've taken him and ran. Not you, Reap. I couldn't do that to you. You've done too much for me. You're my brother, man. I'd fuckin' die for you. I couldn't take your kid."

I stare at my boots. The fuck am I supposed to say to that? His words are the way I feel. It's why I never planned on letting him know that I thought Tyson was mine. Christ, this is fucked up beyond repair. "You don't have to leave," I say to him. "This is your home, your club."

He nods. "It is, you're right, but this is also yours. You've found your woman, Reap. She has her life here. She has her job. Together, I know you're goin' to be the best parents Tyson could ever have."

"Nah, brother, that's bull and you know it. You've been his dad since the get-go. You protected him from that cunt. You did everythin' you could to have him survive the bullshit that bitch reaped on him."

He smiles at me, and the devastation in his eyes makes my heart fucking crumble. "I did, but I did it for my nephew, brother. I did it because no kid deserves to have that bullshit in their lives. I owe you, brother —"

"Fuck that," I snarl. "I went to prison so you wouldn't be servin' a fuckin'

life sentence. I didn't do it for you to pay penance."

He sighs. "This is probably the hardest thing I'm ever goin' to do. Don't make it worse. I trust you, Reap. More than anyone in this world, I trust you. I know that no matter what, Tyson's goin' to have an amazin' life."

The finality of his words lets me know there's no way I'll ever manage to change his mind. He's dead set on leaving. I wish there was a way for him to stay, but I get it. He wants a fresh start, one where he doesn't have to see other people playing happy families with the kid he once had.

"When are you goin'?" I ask, wondering how long we've got before he leaves.

"Tonight," he says. "I'm booked on the next flight out. It's soon, I know, but it's better for everyone to do this. As much as I'd love to stay, leavin' now is better for us all."

"You know that everyone's goin' to be pissed, brother. They're goin' to want to have a fuckin' goin' away party and everythin'."

He nods. "I know, but I don't want that shit, Reap. The fuck is there to celebrate?"

I sigh. "You goin' to talk to Prez before you leave?"

"Yeah," he says. "He's next on my list. You were first, but you always were a nosey fucker who couldn't wait."

I chuckle. "True. Are you goin' to say goodbye to Tyson?"

He shakes his head. "No. It's hard enough leavin'. I ain't goin' to make it worse by sayin' goodbye. The best thing about it is that he's so small, he won't remember me."

I call bullshit on that. The kid's going to know, and he's going to miss the fuck out of him. He's been his dad, his only source of love and support for the past few months. There's no way he's going to forget him.

"I have everythin' set up for you. His crib is moveable. Do you need a hand movin' it to your room?"

"You good doin' that? I can get Rush to help me. The kid's around here somewhere."

He nods. "That works better," he says. "I have everythin' you need in the crib ready for you. Tyson's with Eda at the moment. She's watchin' all the kids. She tends to want to help out a lot."

My throat is lodged with emotion. I can't fucking believe that this is happening. What the fuck am I supposed to do? What if Tyson doesn't settle with us? What if he just wants Preacher? He finishes packing and turns to me.

He holds out his hand for me to shake, and I glare at the fucker. "Come here, asshole," I growl as I open my arms.

He chuckles but we hug. "I'll call you in a few days. I need some time," he tells me.

Why the fuck do I feel guilty? I feel so much fucking guilt that my stomach is in knots. I fucking hate this shit. "You'd better. It's not too fuckin' far to come and whoop your ass if you don't."

"I will. You just gotta give me time."

I nod. "That I can do."

He slaps my back and pulls backward. "Your parents are assholes, man. They shouldn't have stayed together for as long as they did. That was on them. Not you. Reap, you're nothin' like them. Remember that. You love Esme. Everyone can fuckin' see that shit. You aren't your parents."

"I know, brother, and you're not yours."

We shake hands, and I watch as he reaches for his bag. "See you around, Reap."

"Keep your head up, Preach. Don't fall back into old ways. You're better than that."

He nods as he walks out of the room with his bag slung over his shoulder. I know this is probably the last time I'm going to see him.

Fuck.

"You good, Reap?" Rush says as he walks up to me. "Couldn't help but hear some of what you were sayin'. You know that man is fuckin' gutted. He did what he thought was right, but he deserves to have a fresh start, as do you and Es with Tyson. You didn't cause this, man, and you did everythin' you could to protect him."

"I know. It's just fucked up that it went down this way. I never intended for him to find out."

He gives me a grim smile. "Know that, brother. Fuckin' respect that too. You were willin' to give up your chance with your kid to protect your brother. That shows the type of man you are."

"Will you give me a hand movin' Tyson's things into mine and Es' room?"

"Sure," he says, moving into Preach's room and helping me lift the crib. "Are you worried about what the reaction is goin' to be when everyone finds out that he's gone?"

I shrug. "I guess we'll find out. Right now, my main concern is makin' sure that both Esme and Tyson are doin' okay. Everyone else is on the

backburner, bro."

"I get that. I'd be the same. Still, it sucks that it's got to happen this way. But Preacher was right, man. There's no one besides you and Es who could give that boy a happy home. I've seen the way the two of you are with him, how you love him. You were both willing to love him from afar to ensure that he was happy with Preacher. That shows your protectiveness. You're goin' to do a great job."

Rush had a fucked up childhood and he knows what shit parents are. I think that's why he's so aloof. He's been through hell and back and I doubt any of us know the full truth. "Proud of you, Rush. You've become a great man. A brother that I trust implicitly."

His eyes widen, and I watch as he swallows hard, but he nods. "Appreciate it, man. Do you need anythin' else?"

I shake my head. "Nah, I'm good. I'm gonna get Tyson, and then when he's asleep, I'll grab some food for Es."

"Auntie Seri's already on that, man. She's determined to ensure that Es heals properly. She's making her some high iron shit. It looks fuckin' gross. But she's also cooked for you too."

I chuckle. "Esme's goin' to love that. She hates spinach and Seri always puts that in her food. Thanks for your help, Rush. I appreciate it."

He gives me a smile before leaving the room. I empty out the crib and plug in the monitor, setting it up on the bedside table. I also make the crib up so that when Tyson's ready for bed, he'll be comfortable. There are so many clothes and teddies. I don't have a big enough room here for that. Thankfully, Es has a home that has three bedrooms. We're going to need one room alone for all the shit Tyson has.

"I'm sorry, man," Mayhem says a while later as I'm grabbing food for Esme.

She's awake and has Tyson in her arms. He's cooing at her. Thankfully, her having her jaw wired shut hasn't scared him.

I look at my brother. "You shouldn't have said anythin', May. He's fuckin' gone now."

He nods. "I know. Christ, I never thought it would end up like this."

Storm laughs, and it's bitter and filled with anger. "The fuck did you think

was goin' to happen, May? You ripped the ground from under his feet. There was no way he could stay here without havin' Tyson and there was no way he was goin' to keep him from Reaper."

"You think I shouldn't have told him? That I should have kept it to myself?"

I pin him with a glare. "Why did it matter? Hmm? Why did you go snoopin'? There was no fuckin' need. Both Tyson and Preacher were happy. They were a family and you ripped that apart. And for what? Your morbid curiosity?"

"I thought I was helpin'. I would have wanted to know. There's no way I could live with myself if I knew that someone else had my child or if I was raisin' someone else's child."

"It wasn't you though, May. It had nothin' to do with you," Storm snaps. "Now Preach is gone and he's not goin' to come back. How do we know he's actually goin' to Ireland? Hmm?"

Fuck. That thought never crossed my mind. Shit, they're right though. How the fuck are we to know if he does go to Ireland? If he doesn't, we'll never find him. He'll be living as a nomad and that ain't an easy life.

"We have to have faith that he'll be okay. Tomorrow, we'll call Pyro or Raptor and see if he's turned up. If he hasn't, well, we'll start looking for him," Serenity says. "Reaper, here's food for Esme and for yourself. Go spend the night with Tyson and bond with him. If you need help, just ask. We're all here for you."

Mayhem nods. "She's right. No matter what, we're here for you. Congrats, man. No one has said it yet, but congrats on bein' a dad. It's the best fuckin' feelin' in the world."

I nod my thanks, take the tray Seri made up, and walk to my room. I stop in the doorway when I see Esme feeding Tyson. He's content in her arms, his fingers curled around her little one as she holds the bottle to his mouth. Seeing this, it's more than I could have ever hoped. This is what I have wanted, but I never fully gave myself the chance to dream. This is everything. I have my woman and my son.

Fuck. I'm a dad.

CHAPTER 33

ESME

Tyson's cries ring out through the room. The darkness from outside is unsettling him and I'm wondering if Preacher had a nightlight for him in their room. It's been two days since Preacher left and Tyson is missing him. My heart hurts for the boy. I hate that he's hurting, and I wish there was something I could do to help him.

Grayson cuddles Tyson in his arms, trying to calm him down, but it doesn't seem to be working. I reach for my cell and hit the flashlight on it. I turn my cell over and lie it face down on the bedside table, letting the light shine onto the roof. It's a bit brighter than I thought it would be, but hopefully it will do the trick.

It takes another ten minutes before Tyson falls back to sleep. This time when Grayson puts him down in his crib, there's no fuss. He's fast asleep and doesn't seem to be tossing and turning as he has done the last two nights.

"Fuck, Es, how did you think of the light?" Gray asks as he slides back into bed with me. "You're a fuckin' genius."

I smile. I wish. Gray hands me his cellphone and I quickly type out a message.

He's fine sleeping in here during the day when he naps, so it got me thinking about what's different, and the only thing is that there's no light. Maybe tomorrow we can get a nightlight for him?

"Definitely," he replies. "God, I fucking love you, honey. I swear, I don't know what I'd do without you."

He's struggling. We both are. But I'm trying not to show it. It's hard to go from being just us to having a baby to take care of also. But we're doing the best we can, and I know Gray is feeling pretty awful that he's unable to calm

Tyson quickly like Preacher did.

You'd be doing this all by yourself and you'd be thriving. You're amazing with him, Gray. It's hard to adjust to having a child and I think he's missing Preacher.

"Yeah, he's not the only one," he murmurs.

Preacher arrived in Ireland and has seemingly spoken to every one of the brothers except for Gray. It's devastating to know that a man you trusted, someone you considered your brother, has cut you out. While I get that Preacher's hurting, Grayson is too. Calling Gray and speaking to him would benefit them all. Not to mention, it would also help Tyson. But we have to do as Preacher wants. He needs space and that's okay. I just wish he was here so we could all help him.

My mind is whirling as I think about all the things I need to buy to make this room comfortable for Tyson. It's beyond annoying that I'm still in my cast and have my jaw wired. It's not the best time for me to be down and out while we have Tyson to care for. Gray and I need to be a team and I feel useless. I'm not contributing to helping him as I can't move or talk. The only thing I'm able to do is hold, feed, and play with Tyson. I don't feel it's enough. It hurts that I'm unable to offer more, especially when I see Gray struggling.

I hear Grayson's soft snores and sigh. He needs to sleep, and I need to find a way to let him. I may not be able to walk, but I sure as fuck can use all my other limbs. I glance at the time and see that it's almost two a.m. I think about who'll still be awake and quickly send a text message to Rush. It doesn't even take him two minutes to reply, and when he does, he makes me smile.

Rush: It'll be with you in the morning. Go to sleep, Auntie Es. You need to rest.

If I could laugh, I would, but boy, I love that kid. He's so damn sweet and he's so damn bossy. He's taking his cues from Grayson, that's for sure.

Thank you. Goodnight.

I close my eyes, all the while smiling. Tomorrow, hopefully things will change.

"Hey, Auntie Es, you ready for your ride?" Rush says, and I laugh as I see him push the wheelchair into the room. "I've managed to get a few other bits that you'll need. So this is one that supports you keeping your leg outstretched. That way, Reap won't lose his mind. I have this baby carrier thing for you. Tavia said it's the best one the shop had."

He holds up the baby carrier and my heart melts. God, he went all out. I read over the instructions for the baby carrier.

"I think it goes like this," Rush says, demonstrating the exact way it goes, which tells me he's already practiced so he could show me. God, he's one of the sweetest guys ever. I'm lucky to have him in my life.

"You good to get in it yourself or do you need help?" he asks.

I wave him away. I need to start doing shit myself. He stands back and watches. I know that he's on hand if I need him. I use my good leg to balance as I grip my hands on the wheelchair. I'm able to pull myself off the bed and onto the wheelchair seat.

"Nicely done. Now what about Tyson? You able to lift him off the bed?" He's not asking to be an asshole. He wants to help and I appreciate that.

I reach for the carrier and place it on my lap, then I reach for Tyson, who giggles the moment I pick him up. Putting him into the baby carrier is a lot easier said than done. It takes me a few minutes to be able to sort it out, but when I do, it feels secure. Tyson rests his head on my chest.

"Look at you, you're a natural. What about wheeling yourself around?"

I once again wave him off as I reach for my cell and place it into the pocket of my shorts. I check to make sure Tyson is secure before I start to wheel myself out of the room. All the while Rush chuckles at me. "You know he's goin' to fuckin' kill me, don't you?"

I shrug. I needed to finally be able to do something. Being stuck in bed and only being able to go somewhere when someone is around is draining. I had to find a way around being off my feet, and thankfully, Rush is resourceful at getting things. I don't want to ask where he found this wheelchair because I have a feeling that it's stolen from a hospital or someplace similar.

"Well now, look at you." Seri grins as I enter the kitchen. "I was just coming to find you. I have a bottle for Tyson and some food for you."

I glare at her. A fucking food smoothie isn't food. It's vile. Until I'm able to get my jaw unwired, I'm having to drink my food through a straw. It's beyond rank and I can't wait to be back to normal.

I park the wheelchair at the end of the table and take Tyson out of his carrier. I hold him against my chest as I reach for the bottle Seri made. Tyson guzzles the bottle down like he hasn't been fed in hours. He's always like that, and there's nothing wrong with him. He's just a healthy baby who loves his food. I can't blame him. I love food too.

I hear footsteps pound on the floor from the hall and turn to glance at Rush, who's grinning. "He's comin' and he knows you're not in bed. He's goin' to be pissed."

I glare at him. He's no help whatsoever.

Grayson enters the kitchen, his gaze moving over everyone until he stops at me. I watch as he visibly sighs. "Christ, Es, the fuck?"

"She's got a set of wheels," Seri supplies. "She's able to get around up here unaided which I think is fucking cool. She's been stuck in bed for almost three weeks, Reaper. You have to understand how hard that is on anyone. She's not broken any of your rules. She's staying off her feet and she's able to help Tyson more this way. She's mobile—well, as much as she's able to be."

He moves toward me. "You good in that?" I nod and watch as he smiles. "Then fine, you can keep it. You need help, then you call one of us, okay?"

I nod, trying to ensure that I continue feeding Tyson.

"Okay," he whispers, pressing a kiss to my lips. "I got the nightlight and I'm thinkin' that maybe stayin' at your house for a while could help. You have no stairs in your house, which means you can get around the entire house without worry."

I grin. That's exactly what I want. I love the clubhouse, but since Preacher left, things have been a little tense, especially whenever we're with Tyson. I think everyone's finding it hard to deal with, especially with Preacher gone.

"I'll set it up," he promises me. "We'll go home tonight."

"You need a hand?" Rush asks Grayson.

"You busy?" Gray says to him, and Rush shakes his head. "Then yeah, man, that would be good. We're goin' to take the crib and everythin' Tyson has from my room and bring it to Esme's house. That way, we'll have everythin' we need when we get home."

Rush glances at me and smiles. "On it. I'll get Cage to help too."

Both Cage and Rush are the only ones who aren't tiptoeing around us, and I get it, they're closer to Grayson because they're closer to me. Everyone else just needs time.

"I'll come over every day," Seri promises. "I'll make sure you have

everything you need."

"I will too," Tavia says with a bright smile. "It'll be fun."

I shake my head. They're crazy but they're family. Those girls have been with me through everything. Seri and I have been best friends since we were kids, the same way that Tavia and Effiemia have been. Without the girls, I'd be alone while Gray would be working. I love them both so much and owe them everything.

"We'll help you get settled today," Octavia continues. "Make sure the house is set up for you and Tyson while the men build whatever they have too."

"Which means they'll need beer. When have you ever seen a man build without drinking?" Effie asks.

"Well, it's only Reaper, Cage, and Rush, Ef, so I doubt they'll be drinking much," Seri answers her.

Effie's brows knit together. "Why isn't anyone else helping? What's going on?"

I turn to Seri. I can't answer, and I know Grayson won't say anything.

"Esme, you eat up. When you're finished, we'll get going," Gray says, giving me that gorgeous smile of his.

Rush and Grayson leave the kitchen and Octavia and Effie sit down beside me. "Okay, spill," Effie says to Seri. "What's going on?"

"Since Preacher left, the guys have kind of been a little off with both Esme and Preacher. So him taking her home is his way of protecting her. I'm glad he's doing something. The tension in the air isn't great for anyone," Seri says.

Both Octavia and Effie share a look, and I know Tavia well enough to know that she's mad and poor Digger is going to have to deal with her wrath.

"Okay, is there anything you need us to get for the house?"

I shake my head as I hand Tyson to Seri and reach for my cell. He's finished his bottle, so he just needs to be burped. I quickly type out a message.

No, I'm fine. I'll be putting an order online. When it comes, I'll call you so you can help me decorate Tyson's nursery.

"Okay," Octavia says softly. "Let's get you ready for going home."

I can't wait. I'm hoping it'll make us unwind a little, that we'll be able to be at ease. I know that having it just be the three of us is going to be tough, but it's going to be worth it. We'll be able to bond more and Grayson will be

able to hold Tyson without tension.

I just pray that we're able to help Tyson adjust. I don't want him to be uprooted and for it to affect him negatively.

I want him to feel loved and cherished. I hope we can give him the security he needs to thrive with us.

CHAPTER 34

REAPER

Watching the way Esme's able to move around her home in the wheelchair while carrying Tyson in the carrier Rush got for her makes the pain in my chest ease. It's been three days since Preacher left and my chest has been fucking aching. I know it's from stress and worry. I've never had to be responsible for anyone but myself. Now I have a kid who relies on me, and with Es still recovering from her injuries, it's hard to keep my head above water. But today, Es has once again showed how fucking amazing she is.

"Honey, you good?" I ask, trying to ease off a bit. I know she's been struggling with being confined in the clubhouse. Hopefully now that we're home, she'll be able to unwind a bit. We'll go back to the clubhouse, just not for a while. Everyone needs time to adjust to what's happened. My brothers are feeling the loss of Preacher. It's like he died, the way the clubhouse is so quiet. But I get it. It's a fucked up situation. Though I can't lie; having Tyson in my life is my greatest achievement. I've fallen in love with the little guy and I'm so fucking happy that I'm able to be his dad.

Esme turns to smile at me, and I know that she's more than good. I haven't seen her look so at peace as she does right now. I should have brought her here the moment she was released from the hospital. It's been one fucking thing after another, and she's not been able to heal properly. Hell, we haven't even spoken at length about it. I've neglected her, and I'm a fucking asshole for doing so.

I move toward her, crouching down in front of her. "I fuckin' love you, Es. You're my entire world. You and Tyson are my everythin'. I couldn't fuckin' do this without you."

Her eyes fill with tears as she reaches up to caress my face.

"We're all goin' to be okay," I promise her. She nods, giving me a soft smile. "I'm makin' you your food tonight." She rolls her eyes. "It won't have spinach," I assure her.

The front door opens, and I rise to my feet, glaring at Seri as she bounces into the house.

"So," she says in lieu of greeting. "Tomorrow, Graham's dropping me off before he goes to work so we can spend the day together."

"Seri, you need to knock," Shadow tells her. "You can't just barge in anymore."

She turns to him. "Why? Es is my best friend. She does the same at our house."

"I'm not arguing with you, Peach. I'm just tellin' you to be a bit more considerate seein' as they've got a kid now."

She waves him off. "My nephew. Give me," she says as she moves toward Esme, her arms outstretched for Tyson.

I chuckle. "Dude, you've got this to look forward to when your baby comes." Seri and Shadow are having a girl. They announced it the day Mayhem announced that Tyson wasn't Preacher's.

"Isn't that what families are for?" Shadow says, shoving his hands in his pocket.

I don't answer him. Right now, I'm not wanting to talk about that. I turn, watching Seri rock Tyson. My gaze moves to my woman, and I can't help but grin when I see Esme is staring at me, her eyes heated and her face soft.

"It's the grin, isn't it, Es?" Seri smirks as she continues to rock Tyson. "It's that sexy grin that makes you weak at the knees, right?"

"Seri," Shadow growls.

I chuckle when Esme nods at her question.

"Reap, bro, you got a minute?" Shadow asks, and I nod, directing him out to the back deck. "Seri spoke to me about what's been goin' on. We've been focusin' on the baby while she's workin'. I hadn't noticed that things were tense. I'm sorry, brother. You know I don't blame you for what's happened, right? Preach left, but that's not on you. Pepper played not only him but you too. If there's anyone to blame, it's that fuckin' bitch."

I nod. "I know that, but unfortunately, she's dead, and now Preacher's gone, so the only person to blame is me, especially when I've got Tyson."

He sighs. "That's still fucked up, bro. The women lost their shit when you

left. It was only the second time that I've heard Octavia curse, and boy, she sure as hell gets people to shut the hell up when she does."

I chuckle. There's no way Tavia swore. That woman has the weirdest words to use instead of cursing. "Who did she curse at?"

"Digger," he laughs. "She called him an asshole. She was ragin' mad. All the women are. They're beyond pissed. So don't be surprised if you have a slew of visitors over the next few days. They've had their asses reamed out and that'll be the kick up the ass they need. Ace is pissed that you're gone. He's not angry at you. No, he's beyond pissed at the brothers for causin' you to leave. As Seri said to them, why would you stay when those fuckers are makin' your woman and child feel unwelcome? That's not somethin' any brother would ever put up with and they shouldn't have expected you to."

This is why Seri is the fucking shit. She has everyone's backs, and she doesn't care who she reams out.

"I get it, Shadow, I fuckin' do. Everyone's still reelin' from Preach leavin' and they're tryin' to figure out how to deal with it all."

"I know, but it's still fucked up. You need anythin'?"

I shake my head. "Nah, I'm all good. Tonight, I'm chillin' at home. Hopefully, we'll get through the night without Tyson wakin' every fuckin' hour."

He winces. "He still at that? Thought he settled last night?"

I nod. "Once Es put her light on, he did. Hence why I picked up a nightlight for him today. I'm hopin' he'll settle with it."

"Here's hopin', brother, but if you need anythin' just let me know."

"Will do. Go get Seri home. That woman would stay here if she could."

He laughs. "You're not wrong there. She wants to make sure that both Esme and Tyson are okay, and that's not a bad thing. She cares."

"Es will no doubt repay the favor when Seri gives birth." Those two are thick as thieves. If I thought Octavia and Effiemia were tight, they have nothing on Seri and Esme. Those two are practically inseparable.

"Peach, give Es back her baby and let's go home," Shadow says as we walk back into the house. "If you hurry, we may be able to stop off at the restaurant you like and bring some takeout home."

I grin as Esme flips Shadow off, causing Seri to laugh. "Oh, you've done it now, Graham. Esme's pissed. She can't eat anything except if it's through a straw. You talking about food is making her hungry."

"How the fuck do you know that? She can't speak," Shadow growls.

"I just do. Es is my best friend. We don't have to talk to know what the other's thinking."

Esme nods as she types on her cell.

Like I know that Seri wants to smack you upside the head for asking stupid questions.

Christ, these women are crazy. But I know better than to say that out loud.

"Okay, okay." Shadow grins as he holds up his hands in surrender. "I forgot how protective the two of you are with one another. Now, Peach, hand Tyson over and let's get goin'. Reaper wants some alone time with his family. Let's give the man what he wants."

That's exactly what I want. Time with my family.

We say goodbye to Serenity and Shadow, and I help Esme onto the sofa, where she's able to stretch her foot out. The cast is annoying her, but she's got to wait until she gets the all clear from the doctor to take it off. I know she can't wait until she does. I know I can't either. It's been weeks since I've had her, and while I'm not going to fuck her until she's fully healed, I can give her pleasure, and that's exactly what I plan on doing tonight.

Tyson sits on my lap as Es tickles him. The two of them are a lot more at ease right now, and I can't lie, I am too. I watch with a smile as Esme continues to play with him, playing peek-a-boo and tickling him. All the while Tyson laughs at her, batting at her hand when she goes to tap his nose.

This feeling that I have, it's fucking peace. I finally know what it feels like. I have everything I could ever want right here in this house, and I'm so fucking happy. I never hoped for much. My parents were always fucking arguing and fighting. It was like living in a war zone. I never wanted much, knowing that I'm my parents' child, but the moment I met Esme, everything changed, and now I have more than I could have ever hoped.

It came at a price though, and that fucking hurts. Preacher is my brother, the man I was closest to. I'd die for him. But sometimes, things don't pan out. It guts me that my peace and happiness came at the expense of his. He's in pain, and there's not a thing I can do to rectify that.

I just pray that my brother finds his peace and happiness and can find a way to be at ease with the past.

CHAPTER 35

ESME

FOUR MONTHS LATER

Hands slide around my waist as I stand at the stove. I'm cooking, and it feels so fucking good to be able to stand here and do it. While I still have a little twinge here and there when I move weirdly, I'm more than capable of being back at work and doing my everyday normal things. I've gone back to work full-time. It was hard to be away from Tyson at first, but we all needed to get back to normal and set a routine for us.

While I'm at work, Octavia takes care of Tyson. She never went back to work after having Serafina and became the de facto babysitter with Eda, which they both love. There are six children under the age of two that they watch—well, five on most days and six when Seri brings my niece, Emerald, which I think is a beautiful name. They call her Emy for short. Tyson gets to spend the day with his cousins and his aunts and uncles, and then when I finish work, I pick him up and bring him home. Some nights we spend at the clubhouse, though I still find it hard, especially with our room being opposite to what used to be Preacher's. I feel so much guilt for being happy and in love with my family, and I know Grayson does too.

Gray has only spoken to Preacher twice since he moved to Ireland. As much as it sucks that he's not able to speak with him more, he knows it's what Preacher needs to heal, and that's all we want.

"You feelin' okay, honey?" Gray asks.

I sink back into his embrace. "Yeah," I reply softly. "I haven't had any pain today."

"That's good. How's your jaw?"

Even though I'm fully healed, and the doctors have given me the all-clear, he still checks in and makes sure I'm doing okay. I love that so much. I love

how much he cares for me.

"It's perfect. So much so that I'll show you just how good it is tonight."

The feel of his cock thickening against my back has my heart racing and heat pooling between my legs. "Is Tyson asleep?"

His lips press against my neck. "Yep. He fell asleep the moment I put him down."

I reach for the pot that's simmering on the stove top and push it to the back so it's off the burner. I turn off the heat and take a hold of Grayson's hand. "I've missed you," I whisper as I reach up onto my tiptoes and press a kiss to his lips.

He gives me that gorgeous smirk of his. "Oh, honey, you have no fuckin' idea how much I've missed you."

We haven't had sex since I was hurt, and it's been driving me crazy. Yes, I've jerked him off and he's gone down on me, but I miss him being inside of me. I need that connection with him.

He tangles his hand in my hair and slants his lips over mine. I cling to him, my arms twisting around his neck as I press against him. He deepens the kiss, and I feel my toes curl as he releases my hair and slides his hands down along my body. When he reaches my ass, he lifts me into the air and I hold on to him for dear life. The kiss doesn't break, his tongue sliding into my mouth as he takes the breath from me.

He walks us to the bedroom, his cock thick against my stomach. I grind against it, releasing a little moan as it gives the best friction against my pussy. I wish we weren't dressed. Our clothes are in the way. He sits me on the bed, and I watch him strip out of his clothes. I swallow hard as his cock springs free the second he unsnaps the button on his jeans.

I get a swarm of butterflies in my stomach as he watches me, his hand gripping his cock as he gives it a few tugs before moving toward me. His lips press against mine, and once again I'm lost in the kiss. Lost in him. Everything I feel is pushed into this kiss. I'm letting him know just how much I love him; just how much I need him. I've missed this connection so much.

The kiss leaves me breathless and wanting more. I'm panting with need as he slowly peels my clothes from my body. He steps back, his beautiful eyes zeroed in on my face. Not my body, my face. And I'm struck by the fierce look in his eyes. Then he does a slow scan of my body.

"So beautiful," he whispers as he positions himself over me. I can't help

but stare at him in anticipation. God, I've missed this. I've wanted it for so long.

I release a low groan when he runs his cock along my pussy. "I want you so fuckin' much, Esme. You have no idea just how much I want to fuck you until we're both coming. I want everything with you. I love everything about you, but most of all, I love how you are with my boy. Honey, I want more kids. I want Tyson to have siblings."

I nod. Over the past four months, I've thought about what I want in my life, and I want kids. I want at least two more. I love Tyson and that's never going to change, but I want more, and I want them with Grayson. It's crazy to think of what it would mean, but it's what I want, and knowing that Gray wants it too just makes me want it so much more. Watching him with Tyson is something beautiful. He's an amazing dad. He's so sweet with him. It's truly a journey we're on together and I want more. I want so much more with him.

"I want that too," I whisper.

His eyes burn bright. "You sure? I swear to fuck, honey, you give me the go-ahead, I'm going to breed you right now."

I laugh. "I don't think it works that way, handsome."

He gives me that gorgeous smirk. "You think I give a fuck how long it takes?"

I shake my head. No, I don't think he cares.

"I get to fuck you bare and as many times as you want. That's all I want."

I smile wider. "Okay then, handsome. Breed me."

"Oh, honey, you've unleashed a fuckin' monster now."

My breath hitches at his words. Good. There's nothing better than having Grayson lose control when he's fucking me. I love that he gives me everything and doesn't hold back.

He slides into me, slowly pushing his cock into me, filling me up inch by inch. Stretching me with his thick length. I cry out as he bottoms out inside of me. God, I've missed this so much.

"Gray," I gasp, wrapping my arms around his shoulders and my legs around his waist, pulling him even further into me.

His gaze hasn't once wavered from my face, his expression soft and filled with love. His movements are slow, languid, and precise.

"More, please," I beg. I need it harder. I need him to give me everything. I don't want slow. I don't want him to hold back. Grinding down on his cock, I cry out as I push him further into me. Moaning as I pick up my pace, grinding

down on him over and over again.

His hands grip my hips, bringing me to a stop. "I fuck you the way I want," he snarls.

I grin at the darkness in his eyes. I love that we're here and that we're finally able to connect. "Please," I plead with him. "Please, Gray."

"Fuck," he snarls as he twists his hips and drives into me.

"Yes," I hiss. "Oh God, yes," I cry out as he continues to drive into me. His movements hard, brutal, and so fucking good.

Over and over again he punches his hips, fucking me harder and deeper. I grind down against him, my body responding to his.

"That's it," he urges as I match his pace, our thrusts in sync. I can't stop grinding against his cock, loving the thrill that hits me as my clit presses against his pubic bone. "Fuck, Es, that's it, honey. Take my cock."

"Yes," I hiss, his hands tightening around my hips as he continues to fuck me into oblivion.

"Good girl, honey. Take what I give you," he says through clenched teeth. He rotates his hips and drives into me over and over again.

My orgasm creeps up on me, building as quickly as his pace, and I can't hold back. I can't push it away. It hits me like a tornado.

"Come for me, honey. Soak my cock with your juices. I want your pussy to ripple around my cock." His teeth bared, he thrusts deeper, harder, more crazed than before. "Give it to me, Es. Give it all to me."

My body tightens. I'm gasping for breath as my orgasm washes over me, and I'm crying out his name, my world shattering as I come long and hard.

He doesn't stop, not relenting on the pace nor the brutality. I love it. Every thrust elicits a low moan from me. I can't get enough. I don't think I'll ever have enough of him.

"Christ, Es. Fuck," he snarls, and I know he's close.

"Your turn," I breathe, still trying to regain my breath from my orgasm.

He slants his lips against mine, taking the oxygen from my lungs with his kiss. He slams into me over and over again. I feel him still, his cock pulsing inside of me. He pulls back and grunts as he releases inside of me. The feel of his warm cum sets off yet another orgasm, and I'm crying out once again.

He holds me tight as we both recover from the amazing sex.

"I'm going to want that again," I laugh. "But first, we need food."

He shakes his head. "I've created a nympho," he says, dipping his head and pressing a kiss to my lips. I pout as he pulls out of me. God, it's been so

long since we've had sex that I feel deliciously sore. It'll take a while to recover, but once I do, we'll be back for round two.

I can't wait.

I hear a low murmur coming from Tyson's room. He woke up twenty minutes ago and Gray pressed a kiss to my head and got up to take care of him. We take turns each day so we both have a full night of sleep. But tonight, neither Gray nor I are getting sleep. It's just as it was at the beginning of our relationship. Neither of us can get enough of the other. It's four in the morning and we've gone four rounds since Tyson first went down to bed. We're both going to feel it tomorrow, but it's been worth it.

I slide out of bed, pulling on my robe, and pad out of my bedroom, moving to Tyson's nursery. I spot Grayson, who's sitting in the rocking chair, the one that belongs to Effie. She got a new one and gave this to us. It's perfect for when Tyson wakes in the night or when we're putting him to bed. It's a great way to comfort him. He loves the motion, and it usually sends him to sleep.

Watching Gray cradle our son makes my heart melt. He's so gentle and sweet with him. I love this side of him. It's a side he only shows me and Tyson. His voice is low as he speaks to him. I can't make out the words, but I know it's private between him and his son.

"I know you're there, honey. You should have stayed in bed. You need to rest."

I smile as I enter the room. "I couldn't sleep without you," I say softly as I run my hand over Tyson's head, loving the little sigh he releases.

"He's a little fussy tonight," he says, pressing a kiss to my lips. "But he's settling down."

"He's growing so quickly," I murmur. "He's going to be running around in no time."

"Tell me about it. Next thing I know, he'll be back chattin' and havin' sass like Sera."

I grin. "That little girl is going to rule this world. Mark my words, she's going to be amazing when she's older."

He nods. "Of that I have no doubt."

"Do you think Preacher's okay?" I ask as I perch on the edge of the rocking chair. "I hate the thought of him hurting, Gray. I hate that we're so happy and he's not."

He slides his hand around my waist and presses a kiss to my arm. "That, honey, is something we can't control. We tried to keep it in. I fuckin' tried to make sure he never found out the truth 'cause I knew it could destroy him. But we've done what he wanted. We've given Tyson a happy home. Our son is happy, protected, and loved."

I nod. "He is. I didn't think I could love someone so purely, but I do. He's amazing, Gray, and I'm honored that I get to be his mom. I really am. I just hate that you lost your best friend to gain something so special."

"Trust me, honey, I know what I gained, and it's so fuckin' much more than I could have ever dreamed. Not only do I have my son, but I have you, and that's somethin' that is priceless. While I understand that Preach needs space and I'm givin' it to him, I'm hopeful that one day, we can fix the rift that's now grown between us."

I love that he's hopeful, but I'm not sure if there's a way back from this. I truly wish there was because I know that would make Grayson so damn happy.

I glance down at Tyson and see that he's fast asleep, his tiny chest rising and falling. I brush my hand along his head, so damn grateful to have him in my life. "He's asleep, handsome," I whisper. "Come on, let's put him to bed and we'll try and get some sleep." I rise to my feet and watch as he puts our son to bed.

"If you wanted to sleep, you shouldn't have put that damn robe on," he growls low against my ear as he wraps his arms around my waist. "You should know better than to flaunt your sexy body in front of me, honey."

I shiver at his words. God, he makes me so damn horny. It never changes. With just words, he can have me begging for more. It's crazy how in tune my body is to him.

Once we reach our bedroom, I turn in his arms and smile. "Then I get to be on top this time."

His eyes flash. "Fuck yeah," he growls as he unties my robe. "Fuckin' love you, Es, so fuckin' much."

I press against him. "I love you too, Gray. With all my heart."

He slams his lips over mine and I cling to him. Round five here we come.

I pray that this love we have never ends. That no matter what, I'll always

have my family. I'll always have Gray.

EPILOGUE

REAPER

One year later

"Yo, Reap," Mayhem yells as I cross the forecourt.

After the shooting that injured Preach last year, we managed to have the shop repaired and re-opened within a few weeks. We didn't lose any clients as we continued working on the custom rides at the clubhouse. Once we fixed up the shop, we ended up expanding. It's finally finished, and it's doubled in size. It gives us a lot more room to play with and we can have more customers. It has only helped us earn more money and gain more clients.

"What's up?" I ask. Things settled down after we moved back to Esme's home. The brothers were indeed reamed out by the women, who were pissed, and they apologized, which I accepted. I didn't want to return to full-time living at the clubhouse. Both Tyson and Esme were happier at the house, and I know that's because it's quieter. For Es, while she was recovering, it was having home comforts, and Tyson was happy to be with Esme. My brothers and I are fine. We're just like a normal family. Shit happens and you argue but it's nothing serious and it's sorted out in a few days.

"You heard from Esme today? Ef's not answerin' her cell."

I lift my shoulders and shrug. "Nope. I dropped her off at the clubhouse about forty minutes ago and Effie wasn't around. Why? What's up?"

"She's playin' matchmaker with Malice and I'm havin' my cell constantly

blown up by him tryin' to make me get her to quit."

I chuckle. "Man, you know what Ef's like. Once she has her mind set on somethin', she's not goin' to stop until she gets what she wants, and right now, she wants her brother to settle down. Can't blame the woman, especially when he's bringin' random women around your kids."

That's something that has pissed Effie off more than anything. She detests the women he brings around, and whenever she complains, he assures her that it's not a random woman. Yet the next time he's around, it's a new woman again. Ef's had enough and she's on a mission to find him a nice woman to settle down with. I'm not going to inform him that it's not just Effie, but all the women. They're determined, and I doubt anything is going to get them to stop.

He sighs. "How's Esme gettin' on?"

My woman's six months pregnant. I swear, seeing her carry my child has made me want to keep her knocked up permanently. She's fucking glowing. Pregnancy suits her, and she's loving it too. She's an amazing mom. Tyson fucking adores her. We're having another boy, and Tyson's excited. He can't wait to meet his brother, and he keeps touching Esme's belly, hoping it'll help the baby come quicker.

"She's good. Sexy as hell," I say with a grin.

He shakes his head. "You're an ass. Now, are you here to do work or to annoy me?"

"Well, I'm not workin' today, so you can work that out," I say with a grin. "I'm here to have a meeting with Ace. Is he in the office?"

He nods. "Everythin' okay?"

"Yep. Now you'd better get back to work or you're goin' to miss out on all the fun of Malice finding a woman."

He flips me off. "Christ, they're all at it, aren't they?"

I don't answer him. Instead, I push toward Ace's office. I knock on the door and wait.

"Come in," he shouts.

I open the door and lift my chin in greeting.

"Reap, wasn't expectin' you here today. Everythin' okay?"

"I needed to talk to you. I got a call last night," I say and watch as he raises a brow. "Preacher. He's on his way to the clubhouse. He's in a bad way and he needs his ass kicked, brother. He's asked for me, you, and Stag. I don't know what the fuck happened, bro, but it's gotta be bad if he's reachin' out to

me."

Since he moved to Ireland, I've spoken to Preacher three times, and all those times were due to him needing me to answer a question about Tyson. Since then, he hasn't asked about him. I don't know if he's getting information from one of the other brothers or if he's just not asking at all. But he's coming home today and he's in a bad way. Something I thought had been happening from the few snippets I'd heard from the brothers. He's back drinking and he's partying hard.

"Fuck. Okay, what time is he due at the clubhouse?"

"About thirty minutes. Tried callin' you, brother, but your cell's been switched off. Called the office and got no answer. Only way to get a hold of you was to come down and get you in person."

He rises to his feet. "Okay then, let's go find out what the fuck's happened."

It takes us around thirty-five minutes to get back to the clubhouse. Esme's waiting for me as I climb off my bike. "He's here," she says, her eyes filled with tears. "Oh Gray, he looks so broken."

I pull her into my arms and hold her tight. Fuck. My stomach is in knots. What the fuck? How did this happen? "He's here to get his ass kicked into gear. Has he seen Tyson?"

She shakes her head. "Eda and Tavia have him upstairs. He gave me a hug when he arrived." She turns to Ace. "Is it okay that I let him into your office? He's in a bad way and I didn't want him to be bombarded with questions."

"That's fine, Es. Trust me, it's better that you did. Come on, Reap, let's go talk with him. Es, do you know where Stag is?"

"He's waiting outside your office. I kind of told him that he'd be talking with you when you arrived." She gives him a sheepish smile. "Storm has called a few of the brothers and told them that Preacher is here. I didn't know what to say. From the way Preacher was, he didn't seem to want to see anyone. Not today at least."

"It's fine, honey. We'll sort this out. Go on upstairs and stay with Tyson." I press a kiss to her lips and watch as she moves through the clubhouse toward the stairs.

"Are you ready for this?" Ace asks.

"Doubt it, but it's goin' to have to be done."

I follow him to the office, where Stag's waiting outside. "What's goin'

on?" he questions.

"We're about to find out," Ace replies as he opens the office door.

Fuck. Esme wasn't wrong, he looks fucking broken. His beard is longer than I've ever seen him have it. His face is gaunt and pale, his eyes sunk into their sockets, and he reeks of booze. There's so much fucking pain in his eyes that it's hard to look at. He glances at Ace and then at Stag, before he settles on me.

I'm shocked when he rises to his feet and pulls me into a hug. "Fuckin' good to see you, brother."

"You too, man. What the fuck is goin' on?"

He pulls back and runs a hand through his hair. "I fucked up. I'm an asshole. I met a woman, Ailbhe." (Al-Vuh)

Ace takes a breath, and I can see that he's relieved that he's not killed someone and it's women troubles. "Okay, sit down and tell me what the fuck happened. Christ, man, you fuckin' scared us. We thought you were on the run like Wrath."

A smile cracks at the corners of his mouth. "No. Ailbhe is a stripper in the club we own. She's sweet and fuckin' gorgeous. One thing led to another and we ended up fuckin'. As I said, she's sweet and too fuckin' good for me. Well, about six weeks ago, she told me she's pregnant."

I wince. "Fuck. What did you say?" I know my brother. With the shit that went down with us and Pepper lying to him, he wouldn't have taken that well.

"I called her a liar and told her to get the fuck away from me." The anger and self-loathing in his voice has me closing my eyes. Fuck. "Then a month ago, she collapsed when she was on stage and was rushed to hospital. She's pregnant alright. She's also gettin' sick all the time and isn't gettin' enough water. She's dehydrated."

"So what happened then?" Ace asks. "Did you speak with her?"

He shakes his head. "No, she told me to fuck off, that she doesn't need me to raise her baby and that I need to go sit on a giant cactus and fuck myself."

I chuckle. This woman sounds fucking awesome and exactly like what Preach needs.

"Okay, so the question is, is the baby yours?" Stag asks. "Did you explain what happened with Tyson, man?"

"No, I haven't spoken about Tyson, and Ailbhe was a virgin when I fucked her."

I blink. Shit. That complicates things a lot. "So talk to her, make her

understand that you're an asshole and explain what happened. I'm sure she'll understand," I tell him.

His lips twist into a scowl. "She came to see me, and when she did, one of the club whores was sitting on my lap."

"Christ," Ace growls. "Tell me you weren't fuckin' her?"

"No," he snarls. "I haven't fucked anyone since I got with Ailbhe."

"So you like her," I say pointedly and wait for him to nod. "Then clean yourself up. You said this girl is sweet and that she was a virgin when you got together. Go fuckin' talk to her, man, explain everythin' you've just said to us and pray that she listens to you."

"From what you've said, this is your child, Preach, but I'd still get a paternity test," Ace cautions him. "If she's as sweet as you say, then she'll understand. But bein' here isn't goin' to help you. In fact, it's goin' to make things harder."

He scrubs his hand over his face. "I've really fucked up with her."

"We've all fucked up somehow," Stag tells him. "Fuck, Kins walked in on me fuckin' a club whore. You got to work at makin' amends."

"Fuck," he snarls. "Fine."

"But first, you need to get sober, clean up, and start takin' care of yourself," I say. "Come on, man, let's get you upstairs so you can start doin' that."

He nods and follows me up the stairs. I lead him into his old room. It's been redecorated since he left, and while it may hold bad memories, hopefully he'll be able to push past them.

"Daddy," Tyson calls out as he sees me in the hallway.

Preacher stops in his tracks and looks down at my boy. "Fuck, man, he's your double."

I chuckle. "Yeah, he's even into bikes. He's goin' to give Esme gray hairs."

"I heard that," she sighs as she walks toward us, a cup in her hands. "Here, Preach, I made you a coffee. It may help."

He winks at her. "Thanks, Es. Still as gorgeous as ever."

"Brother," I warn. "I will gut you where you stand. Take your eyes off her."

His chuckle eases the worry I've had. "Thanks for the coffee, Es. I'm goin' to shower and get some sleep."

Her eyes widen. "So soon? You've just got here."

"It's been a fuckin' long day, Es. I'll see you in the mornin'." He enters his room and closes the door behind him.

"Is he okay?" Es asks.

"Yeah, he's fine," I promise her as I lead her into our room. Tyson runs into Seri's arms and she carries him into the kitchen. No doubt to feed him candy. I quickly explain to Esme what's happened with Preach and watch as tears shine in her eyes. "Trust me, honey, he's goin' to be fine. He's in love with Ailbhe, and I can guarantee you that he'll be on his knees grovelin' for her to take him back."

She releases a sigh. "I hope you're right. I want him to be happy, and Ailbhe sounds like she's the one who can give that to him. I hope he can see that he loves her soon. I don't want him to be sad anymore."

So fucking sweet. "He's not, honey. He's far from fuckin' sad. He's goin' to be happy and he's goin' to have a baby. Today, I saw the old Preacher comin' back and it's thanks to her."

"Good."

I pull her into my arms. "Think Seri will keep Tyson preoccupied for a while?" I ask as I run my hands along her body.

Her breath hitches as she looks up at me through her lashes. "She owes us," she whispers, making my cock thicken. "Lock the door, handsome," she purrs.

My cock jumps and I grin. Fuck yes. My life is fucking complete. I have everything I need right here in this building. This is my family.

Three months later, William Graham Duggan came into this world screaming.

BOOKS BY BROOKE:

The Kingpin Series:

Forbidden Lust

Dangerous Secrets

Forever Love

The Made Series:

Bloody Union

Unexpected Union

Fragile Union

Shattered Union

Hateful Union

Vengeful Union

Explosive Union

Cherished Union

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Gallo Famiglia:

Ruthless Arrangement

Ruthless Betrayal

Ruthless Passion

The Houlihan Gang:

The Eraser

The Cleaner

The Fury Vipers MC NY Chapter:

Stag

Mayhem

Digger

Ace

Pyro

Shadow

Wrath

Reaper

The Fury Vipers MC Dublin Chapter:

Preacher

Raptor

Standalones:

Saving Reli

Taken By Nikolai

A Love So Wrong

OTHER PEN NAMES

Stella Bella

(A forbidden Steamy Pen name)

Taboo Temptations:

Wicked With the Professor

Snowed in with Daddy

Wooed by Daddy

Loving Daddy's Best Friend

Brother's Glory

Daddy's Curvy Girl

Daddy's Intern

His Curvy Brat

His Curvy Temptress

Daddy's Devilish Girl

Twisted Daddy

Taboo Teachings:

Royally Taught

Extra Curricular with Mr. Abbot

Private Seduction:

Seduced by Daddy's Best Friend

Stepbrother Seduction

Forbidden Bosses:

Conveniently Yours

Bred by Daddy

ABOUT BROOKE SUMMERS:

USA Today Bestselling Author Brooke Summers is a Mafia Romance author and is best known for her Made Series.

Brooke Summers was born and raised in South London. She lives with her daughter and hubby.

Brooke has been an avid read for many years. She's a huge fan of Colleen Hoover and Kristen Ashley.

Brooke has been dreaming of writing for such a long time. When she was little, she would make up stories just for fun. Seems as though she was destined to become an author.

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