



# SABOTAGE

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
ELIZABETH KNOX

RAIDERS OF VALHALLA MC BOOK EIGHT

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## COMMONLY USED TERMS:

*minn – mine*

*kirkja – church*

*hóra – whore*

*Sváss – Beloved*

*kone – wife*

*skytsengel or hamingja – guardian angel*

*cage – car/vehicle*

## TRIGGER WARNING

This content is intended for mature audiences only. It contains material that may be viewed as offensive to some readers, including graphic language, dangerous and sexual situations, murder, rape, and extreme violence.

Please proceed with caution. This book does entail several scenes that may very well be a trigger to some.

## PROLOGUE

AZIZA

*Three Weeks Ago . . .*

Magnolia called me in hysterics, begging me to make her a wedding cake last minute. I already knew what I told her would happen: someone would let her down.

Every once in a while, she likes to give fresh blood a chance to prove themselves to her. Magnolia is a great woman and loves to give multiple small businesses the opportunity to work with her catering company, but in situations like this, I wonder why she gives anyone a chance at all. Imagine if I wasn't able to fit this cake in. She'd literally be screwed, and she'd be the one getting the bad review from her clients.

She gave me a basic color scheme based on what someone else had told her, and I searched Pinterest for hours until I came up with something unique and beautiful. Magnolia didn't give me any sort of indication of what the groom and bride wanted, a theme, or anything. All I was given was a few colors. In those sorts of situations, I always go with a floral-themed cake. You really can't go wrong, and I've never gotten one complaint about a floral theme.

I brought the cake here three hours ago, and since then, almost everyone has been partying and having a good time. They have a variety of beers on tap, as well as every liquor you could possibly think of to make mixed drinks and have shots, plus a variety of wines. I've had three glasses of chardonnay.

"You know we've barely seen each other these last few weeks, right? I think the last time I saw you was last month when we had another catering job together," Magnolia says as she comes right up beside me.



I turn to face her, noticing the beautiful rust-colored sweater she's wearing with skin-tight dark faded jeans. She has a pair of knee-high boots on, and Kraken's eyes are glued to her from across the main room.

"I know, things have been so nuts. I lost two of my helpers, so I've been working longer hours. Tyler said he was going to help me for a little while, but you know how that panned out." I can't help but let the annoyance slip past my lips. Tyler is my on-again, off-again boyfriend that I've been dating for the last three years.

I've known him for a while because he used to be friends with my older brother, Zain. I always ran to my brother to tell him about any problems the two of us were having, which is why he and Tyler aren't friends anymore. My brother can't stand him, mainly because of how he treats me.

Tyler's never done anything particularly awful, but he has done things that have made my life more difficult than it needed to be. Zain told me after the third time Tyler did that to me how it was bullshit. He told me I should break up with him. I did and thus began the cycle of the two of us being on-again, off-again, more times than I could count.

"Tyler's a waste of space, piece of shit, and you know it. Have you looked into getting an actual bakery location instead of working out of your house?"

I own a small two-bedroom house about five minutes away from the clubhouse. It's actually on the other end of this back road, surrounded by trees. On either side of me, I have neighbors who live in single-wide trailers. Across the street, there's a small farm, and then on the other side of that is the main road. I can't see it from my place because they have pine trees lining the back of their property. I'm going to guess it's for privacy reasons and to reduce some of the noise.

My house is maybe nine hundred square feet, so it is fairly small. The biggest space in my house is my kitchen/living room combination, as well as my master bathroom. My bedroom is okay, and the extra bedroom I have is really small, but it's enough to fit a queen-sized bed. I really don't even use it besides filling the closet up with my bakery boxes and supplies.

I don't know how to reply to Magnolia. She has a fully functional and operational business, whereas I don't have the supply and demand like she does. She told me a few weeks back that she booked up for catering jobs last March through the next month because of wedding season. It's one of the busiest times of the year. Granted, she's managed to hook me up to bake

some items for a few of those catering jobs, but I am in no way on the same level that she is. For goodness' sake, I'm a twenty-two-year-old woman who's doing this all by herself.

"No, I haven't." The truth is I can't afford to rent an outside space, so all I can do is keep working from my small house. It gets the job done, so I'm not complaining in the least bit.

Magnolia presses her lips together and looks me up and down. "Why don't you and I create some sort of deal? I just bought another building next to the club and catering business. I'm using it primarily for a new business venture and to expand the amount of guests we can accommodate for a catering event. You could use one of the kitchens. It has a commercial fridge, freezer, ovens, everything you could possibly imagine. You could give me different dessert options for a specific amount of people, something I could pitch to clients. In return for me letting you use the space, maybe you could give me a thirty percent discount and use the space for free?"

It's a tempting offer, but I don't know if it would be sustainable long-term. "Let's talk business another day. We're here to celebrate Dag and Esperanza's nuptials." I suggest we switch the conversation over to something a bit more personal. The truth is, even thinking about everything Magnolia mentioned to me right now is only going to end up stressing me out. "I will come up with some pricing and see if it could work, so I'm not shooting your idea down." I offer a soft smile, and Magnolia nods.

"All right, as long as you're not giving me a big fat no. But, if you say yes, it will only enhance your career into the very thing you've been dreaming about." Magnolia winks at me, and I know exactly what she's doing. She wants me to be successful, and I know she needs a baker who can maintain the level of catering that she needs. It would really be a win-win, but I have to weigh my options and put some real thought into it before I can say yes.

Vanir walks out with his hand around Vail, who is heavily pregnant. I think she might be due in a couple of days. "Oh, I wonder if she went into labor."

"Maybe. She's due around now, right?"

"Yeah, any day now. She's had Braxton Hicks a couple of times and has been complaining that she's over the pregnancy. She's at the point where everything is uncomfortable."

"Oh, that poor girl."

“Esperanza looks breathtaking. That woman has the best style out of any woman in the clubhouse. You should see some of the showstopper outfits she wears to head into her office in the morning.” Magnolia goes on, and the few times I’ve seen Esperanza in town, she’s always wearing a lot of bright colors. It seems to me like she’s a very positive, outspoken person.

I don’t really wear many bright colors, though I attest that to growing up in Dubai when I was a child. My mother moved my older brother and me here to Tallahassee when I was thirteen. Thankfully, we had both been speaking English since we were seven, since it’s taught in school.

Even now, I’m wearing a long, oversized medium brown sweater with dark skinny jeans and a pair of deep brown leather booties, and I have my purse slung over my shoulder. They said we could dress casually for this, so I was dressing casually, but I spruced up my outfit as much as I thought was necessary. My raven black hair is styled like normal. I’m lucky in that sense. It’s thick as can be, but it’s straight, so I never have to do anything to it unless I want to curl it or style it in another way.

“Oh, shoot. I’m being summoned. I’ll catch back up with you later,” Magnolia tells me. Kraken is waving her over. Everly is in front of him, looking quite emotional. I hope she’s okay, but I’d bet anything it’s some small problem that they’ll be able to fix. Everly is Kraken’s biological niece, but her mother was killed by her father. I believe it was a murder-suicide, but I can’t recall all of the details. I do know that Kraken adopted Everly, and when Magnolia married him, she formally adopted her as well. It was a beautiful end to a tragic story. At least that little girl is surrounded by nothing but love.

I take a sip of my drink, and a heavy feeling comes over me. The music is pumping loudly, and I scan the room, trying to understand why I’m suddenly so uneasy. Then I realize what it is. Aesir has his light hazel eyes glued to me.

Aesir and I . . . that is complicated. Whenever Tyler and I break up, I always run to Aesir. I wouldn’t call him a rebound by any means, but we have low-key sex when I’m single. There’s something comforting about Aesir and how he treats me. I don’t constantly get nagged at, ridiculed, or made to feel like I’m a piece of shit like the way that Tyler treats me. It’s easy.

The complications come whenever I get back with Tyler, and Aesir gets frustrated with me. Aesir doesn’t have a girlfriend, and I’m not sure if he ever

has. He's one of the youngest guys here in the clubhouse, and I think the most action he might get is from the hórás, who are the clubwhores who service the single members.

"Okay, crisis averted. What are you staring at?" Magnolia comes right back and turns, finding my eyes focused on Aesir. "So, care if I ask what's going on with the two of you?"

"Nothing, right now. We haven't hooked up since last month."

"Right before you got back with Tyler?"

"Yeah, but Tyler and I are done."

"You're done?" Magnolia doesn't sound convinced.

"Yeah, for good. I'm done doing this back-and-forth shit with him. If I'm in a relationship, I want it to be a healthy one, not whatever the two of us have been doing for this long. It feels toxic to me, and I think it's the first time I've realized it."

"Good for you. You know I'll always support you, but Tyler is a piece of shit. He makes excuses all the time and drags you down with him. That's the kind of crap that pisses me off."

Magnolia and I have known each other for almost three years now, a little longer than I've been seeing Tyler. She's a damn good friend, and she's never afraid to voice her opinion, yet she does it in the most respectful way ever. "I have to ask you something," Magnolia speaks up again out of nowhere.

"What is it?"

"Is Aesir the reason you're finally calling it quits with Tyler?"

I shake my head. "No, that's just a coincidence." My eyes drifted, and I noticed Kraken waving over in this direction again. "I think he needs backup," I say with a slight laugh.

Magnolia turns to look at her husband and sighs. "Ugh, you're probably right. I'll catch up with you later."

"Sounds good," I say with a laugh.

It's not even ten seconds before Aesir makes his way over to me. He licks his bottom lip and looks me up and down. "You look really damn good."

"Thank you. You look . . . normal." He's wearing a pair of jeans and a black T-shirt, and he has his cut on above that. He even has his typical black combat boots on as well. Most of the brothers dressed up for this party, or at least put a bit of extra effort in, not Aesir.

"They said casual."

“Yeah, they did,” I confirm. I take another sip of my drink before I’m out.

“I’ll go grab you another.” Aesir grabs my drink and walks off to the bar before I can say another word. As he’s walking off, I notice Dag and Esperanza’s eyes are glued on me. They look as happy as can be, and I smile, then wave. They look away like two teenagers caught eavesdropping, and I can only laugh. I do wonder what the two of them are thinking.

I wonder if people in the club know that Aesir and I have hooked up a few times. I’ve never come over here, and he always comes to my place. If they do, they might be thinking the two of us will be the next couple. I don’t know, though. I kind of want to spend some time working on myself after Tyler and I are finally done for good. The last thing I need to do is to go jumping into another relationship.

## CHAPTER ONE

*AESIR*

*Present Day . . .*

It's colder than normal on this mid-November day. I remember riding through Arkansas and Missouri this time of year and it being this cold, but never in Florida. Typically, it doesn't get this chilly until about December, but I guess climate change isn't as big of a joke as I thought it was.

We're all sitting in the room where we hold kirkja. It's long overdue after everything that happened with Mord up in Tennessee, and now we're waiting to develop some sort of game plan to go after Roque. At least, that's my hope. That's why we're in here right now. We're all still waiting for Runes to arrive. Fenrir told me that Fern called him an hour ago, and he left in a hurry. He wasn't too sure why, though.

Over the past couple of weeks, there have been a lot of changes to the club. Vail and Vanir welcomed a baby boy named Gunnar on Halloween. He's the perfect mixture of the two of them, with his dirty blond hair, icy blueish-gray eyes, and the most alabaster skin. Rati and Gwen were right behind them and welcomed a little girl they named Saga on November 4. She has the darkest raven black hair with deep chocolate eyes. Finally, Fenrir and Charm welcomed their first biological child between the two of them on November 8 last week. They named their little girl Ingrid, and I personally think she looks more like Charm and less like Fenrir. She has red hair, just like her mother, and light sage green eyes. As of late, there's been a lot of crying around the clubhouse, and for once, it isn't coming from my brothers.

"Anyone know when Runes will be here?" Logi asks, looking around the room. It's a rarity that we're all here waiting and ready for him. Usually, one

of us is rushing to get into kirkja before we piss him off too bad.

“It shouldn’t be more than a few minutes. Fern had an issue at the spa, and Runes needed to rush over,” Fenrir fills him in, giving us all the details we didn’t know.

Fern owns a spa with Charm not too far away. Both of the ladies are very hands-on. They’re not like some owners who simply hire outside people to run their businesses. Nope, other than their children, the spa is their pride and joy. The last time there was an issue at the spa, I’m pretty sure it was the fire, but I hope it isn’t anything too intense. If it was, Runes probably would have asked for a couple of us to go with him.

We all chatted with each other, and I passed the time looking at my phone. I’m scrolling through social media mindlessly when I get a text message notification.

I pull up my messages app and tap on Aziza’s name.

*Wanna come over to my place in an hour?*

I swallow hard as I weigh my options. I want to go over, but I’m not going to keep screwing around with her if she doesn’t know what she really wants. It can get so complicated between the two of us. She breaks up with her on-again, off-again boyfriend, and we sleep together for a bit, go on a couple of dates, then she’ll get all quiet on me, and I’ll ask what’s up. Eventually, usually after a few days, she’ll text me and let me know she got back together with her boyfriend, Tyler. He obviously doesn’t give her what she needs, so why does she keep going back? It beats me.

*Yeah. I’ll be there in about two.*

I don’t want her to think I’m completely eager to see her or like I can’t possibly wait. I like Aziza, I really do . . . but I don’t like how I’m always cast aside anytime Tyler happens to word things the right way. He’s a piece of shit, and she’s being stupid, giving him the time of day when I know he’s only going to end up hurting her again. I love that Aziza has a big heart, but most of the time, it only ends up getting her hurt. I want to put a stop to it, but she has to be the one who’s willing to give me a chance.

The door to kirkja swings wide open, and Runes comes inside. He shuts the door behind him and takes his seat at the head of the table, slamming the gavel down the second his ass hits the chair. “Apologies for the delay. There was something I needed to handle.” Through his tone, Runes sounds completely aggravated.

I know I’m not the only person wondering what happened, but I do know

I'll be the first to ask. "Everythin' all right, Prez?"

"It will be. Fern had this random man come inside today, someone she'd never seen before. Little did I know that the man wasn't a random person. He was romantically involved with Hillary before her death. Apparently, he went to visit Hillary's sister, and she told him Hillary died unexpectedly and very suddenly. She didn't give him any closure, I guess, and then he started looking into things. Well, he doesn't believe it was a simple, tragic death. He threatened my wife. Fucker thinks we're behind it, and it escalated from there. Fern and the women who work there weren't hurt, but Fern pulled a gun on him and told him to get the fuck out of her and Charm's business. By the time I got there, he was gone. We didn't get a name or anything, but we should have video footage of him." Hillary was Runes's ex-wife and the mother to the son they share, Tor. She was involved in some really messed up shit.

"Holy fuckin' shit, man!" Rati shakes his head.

"Yeah." Runes looks right at Vanir. "I need you to get over to the spa after church and look at the video footage. I want you to run it through every facial recognition app you can and let me know when you get a hit." There isn't a doubt in Runes's mind that Vanir is going to come up with something. Vanir might have needed a little bit of help lately since Roque hired the Toad to work on his team, but it doesn't mean that Vanir isn't capable or talented.

"You got it, Prez," Vanir instinctively responds.

"All right, on to other things. Since we're bringing up my ex-wife, I think it's a perfect opportunity to talk about my son. He turned eighteen, and he's been dropping hints that he wants to prospect for the club. Now, I doubt we have to bring this to a vote, but for old times' sake, we should."

There's a bout of laughter among the brothers seated around the table. Runes knows damn well not one of us is going to say no to Tor prospecting. It's his birthright, for fuck's sake.

"There's no need for a vote here, brother. Tor is welcome to join the club as a prospect." Fenrir is the first one to speak up, and with nods and grunts of approval coming from the rest of us, this issue is put to bed quickly.

We get off topic for a few minutes and discuss a couple of personal things, like how all the newborns are doing, and we even catch up with Dag to see how things with him and Esperanza are going. Their relationship pretty much came out of nowhere, but we're very happy to know that they're doing well. It seems like they found each other exactly when they needed each



other.

“I hate to cut this short, but we need to stop bullshittin’ and discuss something else. I want to get back to the spa and check on my wife as soon as possible,” Runes starts off.

“We understand, Prez. What else is on your mind?” I ask.

Runes takes in a deep breath and begins to look each of us in the eye as he speaks. “Mord has been handled, but we can’t ignore the threat Roque is pressing against us. He’s said he wants to get back at us and to wipe our club off the face of the earth. We know he’s in Cuba, and I doubt he knows we’re onto him. It’s already the middle of November, so I think right after Thanksgiving, a group of us should head to Cuba. I want your thoughts on this. All of your thoughts.”

The room is silent for a moment until Dag is the first to speak. “I think that sounds like a solid plan. Have you given any thought on who is going with you or who will be staying back?”

We never leave the clubhouse unattended, so I’m sure there will be a few brothers staying here at the very least, especially with all the newborns. “I’ve given it a bit of thought. The prospects will stay back, so Tor, Regnor, and Geirolf. I would appreciate it if two of the full-patched members volunteered to stay home. I’m sure you all know I don’t want the prospects to be in charge of protecting our women and children by themselves.”

There’s a bit of silence in kirkja until Kraken clears his throat. “I’ll stay back with everyone.”

“Okay, I need one more,” Runes states, looking around the room.

“I can too, but y’all better make that fucker pay. I’m gonna be sad to miss out on torturing his ass,” Magnus adds.

Magnus and Kraken are some of the strongest men we have in the club, so anyone who does have a woman or children in their life is undoubtedly going to feel a little better about leaving them behind. “Good. I’m glad we have that settled. The rest of you are coming with me.”

“When will we leave, a couple of days after the holiday?” Logi questions.

“Yes, I’m thinking the Sunday after Thanksgiving.”

“Vanir, have you found the town that Roque is residing in?” Magnus asks.

Vanir has his laptop in front of him. “Yes, I’ve caught him on camera in Havana multiple times, but for the last week, I’ve found him in Nueva Gerona, which is located on a Cuban island called Isla de la Juventud.”

“Okay, so are we going to decide what area of Cuba we’re flying into the day before?” I ask.

A sinister smirk flashes across Runes’s face. “I never said anything about flying.”

“So, how are we getting there?” Ivar asks with a cocked eyebrow.

“I have a friend who owns a large fishing vessel. We’re going to go out with him on Sunday. He has internet, so Vanir will still be able to keep tabs on Roque while we’re traveling,” Runes fills us all in. So far, everything sounds good.

“My guess is we’ll be keeping tabs on him until we’re on the ship and then come up with a more iron-clad plan?” Fenrir questions.

“Yes, it’s too early right now to be making decisions. Roque has a tendency to go from city to city, so I don’t want us heading into Havana if he’s on one of the outer islands. I imagine word will spread quickly when locals see tattooed, bulky, bearded white men coming. I’d like to avoid him being tipped off about our arrival.”

“It’s understandable, and it’s a solid plan,” Magnus comments.

“Do we know what we’re going to do with him when the time comes?” I ask, looking right at Runes.

He stiffens and licks his lips as he ponders what I’m asking him. “I’m not sure, but I do know we’re gonna make him pay for all the bullshit he put our club through.”

“You need some time to think about how fuckin’ sadistic we’re gonna be, is all.” Rati chuckles, and a few of the other brothers are getting a kick out of it, too. Roque might think he’s evaded us, but he’s in for a rude awakening.

“That’s an understatement,” Fenrir adds.

“It is. I need to get back to my wife, so go off and do whatever the fuck it is that’s been keeping you busy all day.” Runes picks up the gavel and slams it down on the table. At the impact of the wooden instrument hitting the table, he stands and prepares to leave, and the rest of us follow his lead.

Aziza wanted me to come over to her place in an hour, but I told her two hours just to throw her off a little bit. So, I head upstairs to my room and strip out of my clothes. I can at least take a quick shower before I go over to her place so I smell fresh as fuck.

I haven’t been this happy since we’ve settled down in Tallahassee. I never minded being on the road, but it’s nice to lay your head down in the same bed every night. The little things like having nice water pressure and hot water,

never having to worry about bed bugs, and an array of other shit humbled us from being on the road for so long.

I wait until I'm five minutes past the two-hour mark and finally leave my room. I walk down the stairwell, and Rayna, Dag's little sister, looks right at me while she's rubbing a rag on the tables. "Where are you heading off to?" Rayna wiggles her eyebrows playfully, and I smirk.

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"I'm dying to, actually. I need a distraction, so if you have something good to say, please do." There's a bit of desperation in her voice, and I want to know more. I want to know what's bothering her so badly.

"Is everything okay? You seem a bit stressed out." I'll give her the details about Aziza and me, but not until I check and make sure she's really okay.

Rayna goes from focusing endlessly on wiping down the table to looking right at me. "Honestly? Not really. I'm trying to not let it show, though. I'm exhausted. I'm tired of being freaked out, tired of constantly looking over my shoulder, waiting for the shoe to drop. My stepfather is a vile, despicable man. A man who somehow tricked the people who had the ability to let him out. He, a fucking psychopath, managed to convince them that he was this reformed man who loved Jesus. It's all a front. All bullshit. I knew that before he was released, but god damn if I didn't see it firsthand when his closed fist collided with my face."

Dag and Rayna's mother was married to a man named Loren. I don't know all the details, but I know that when Dag and Rayna were children, he tried to kill their mother and went to prison. I imagine there were a couple of other charges for him to be in prison for so long, or maybe his DNA was in the system, and they finally pinned that shit on him when they booked him.

"I know it's been a little bit, but we're gonna find him. Loren's good at hiding, and he's gonna pop up eventually. You know?"

Rayna scoffs and shakes her head. "I get what you're saying, and I wish that made me feel better, but it doesn't. I just want all of this to be done and over with."

"It will, sweet cheeks. Just won't be today. Hell, it might not be tomorrow, but you can bet your sweet ass I'm not gonna let that fucker get close to you," Magnus pipes up out of nowhere.

Rayna turns and looks right at him. He's got that typical serious expression on his face while he's scrolling his phone. "If you keep being all sweet to me, Magnus, I might think you like me."

“Likes you? I’d say he like likes you.” I add fuel to the fire burning between the two of them and amuse myself. If I had to place any bets on who’s going to couple up next, it would be Magnus and Rayna. They have this playful chemistry between the two of them.

Magnus doesn’t say another word, but he does grunt.

“Magnus is right. No one here is going to let him get near you. Take a deep breath, ‘cause you’re gonna be fine. You’re safe with us. Your mom is too.”

“I know. It’s just . . . our lives have been turned upside down since I found him in her house. It feels so weird not having any sense of normalcy. It’s throwing me for a loop, honestly.”

“It’ll get back to normal one day. It just might not be the normal you were expecting it to be.”

“Yeah, so, distract me. What’s going on with you?” Rayna continues wiping down the table, bending over slightly, and I notice Magnus’s gaze is off his phone and planted right on her dump truck ass. I’m not even being a dick when I’m saying that. Rayna has a stellar ass for a skinny chick.

“Nothing, really. A friend invited me over, so I’m gonna go see what’s up.”

“By a friend, do you mean a certain beautiful Middle Eastern woman? One who really knows how to make some sweet stuff?”

I snicker. “Yeah, that would be the one.”

“She isn’t your friend, Aesir, and you know that. You two have something real between you, and I’m going to tell you something. Chase that. Fight for it because I would kill to have someone look at me the way you look at her.”

Damn, Rayna’s getting real with me right now. “I’d fight for her more if she could make up her damn mind. She always calls me when she breaks up with her boyfriend, and then she gets back with him and ghosts me. I’m about to tell her tonight I’m done with being the on-call dude in her life. I like her, and if she only wants to fuck that’s cool, but I’m not gonna be doing anything but fucking her. Then when I find the woman I’m supposed to be with, I’ll drop her ass.”

“Why waste your time fuckin’ her in the first place? We have h́oras here.” Magnus is talking about the clubwhores. What I’m saying is pretty much the same thing. I swear on the Gods that I want more with her. I don’t want to treat her like a whore. I want her, and I want her to want me, too. What I

won't do is beg her to want me. Fuck no. I'd rather fuck her and then drop her when someone else who garners my interest comes around.

"Not everyone wants to fuck a whore," Rayna spits out in my defense.

"I need to get going, but I'll chat with you two later." I can feel an argument brewing between Rayna and Magnus, so I leave the clubhouse and go into the attached oversized garage.

I walk right up to my bike, put the kickstand up, take the brake off, and walk over to the bay door. I press the button on my bike, and it opens up. Then I start her up and exit the garage. I click the garage door opener so the door shuts and head down the road.

Aziza lives on the other end of the road, where it's more desolate. Across the street from her is a farmer whose family has been here for generations. On either side of her, she has two mobile homes, and the people who live there are shady as fuck, but whatever.

She lives in a small two-story home. It might be nine hundred square feet, but I'd honestly doubt it's even that much. It's so fucking tiny, but it's cozy as hell. There's a small concrete porch on the front, and there's a small porch on the upper level, too. It's attached to her master bedroom, which isn't as nice as it sounds.

I pull up in her gravel driveway and park my bike, cutting off the engine and dismounting as I take the key out. I always keep my helmet plopped on my handlebars. There's a chill in the air as I walk up to her porch, and I glance up at the sky. I wonder if it's going to rain soon.

I press the white button on the doorbell and wait for Aziza to come to the door. After a couple of minutes, she comes to the door, and she's wearing a pair of jeans that cling to her skin like a second skin, with a skin-tight long-sleeve t-shirt. It comes down in a U shape, giving me a really good look at her breasts.

"Come on in. You want anything to drink?" Aziza exits the frame of the door and heads inside toward her kitchen.

"You got a beer?"

Aziza snickers and nods. "I always make sure to have beer when you're around. You want a beer, or do you want whiskey on the rocks?"

Ah, now she's talking. Aziza knows I love my whiskey. "Yeah, go ahead and give me some whiskey."

I walk over to the kitchen and lean against the wall as she gets a glass from the cupboard and snags her bottle of whiskey from on top of the fridge.

She even grabs a couple of ice cubes and puts them in the glass before she pours the whiskey. “You’re quiet, which can only mean one thing.”

“Mmm, what would that be?”

“You’re overanalyzing something, so spit it out. What is it?” Aziza hands me my drink and crosses her arms, pushing her breasts up in the process. She doesn’t have the biggest tits on the planet, they might be a B or maybe a C on a good day, but damn, does she know how to use them.

“I am curious about something.” I take a sip of the smooth whiskey and wait a few moments before I speak again. Aziza perks up a bit, and her posture stiffens.

“Okay.”

“Are you done with Tyler, or are you calling me like you have every other time before?” I want to know if she’s through with him. I’m not going to keep investing myself emotionally in something that will never go anywhere.

Aziza clicks her tongue against the roof of her mouth and grabs a glass for herself. She pours some whiskey into the glass and takes it back like a shot. “Yes, I am. I’m tired of what he and I have been doing these last few years. After a while, it gets exhausting, and I’m tired of constantly fighting for something that doesn’t make any sense.”

“I thought you were done with him for the last time a few weeks back, but he managed to crawl his way back, and I was cast aside yet again. Women throw themselves at me, Aziza. I ignore every other woman because I want you. All I need to know is if this is just sex or not. If it’s sex, I can fuck the shit outta you and then leave you before morning. If you want something more, then I need to know that.” As much as I’m telling her I could just fuck her and fuck her alone, I don’t know if I can. I’ve gotten so territorial over her during these last few weeks.

That only means one thing.

It means I have feelings for her.

## CHAPTER TWO

*AZIZA*

I'm not going to lie. I'm a little taken aback by Aesir right now. I thought all he wanted was casual sex, but it's the opposite. He wants something real, and he's kind of telling me that right now. I've been on and off with Tyler for so long and want someone who will stand by me. I want the kind of man who would pick up when I called. Aesir is that man. He's the man I've been praying for, but he's here at the worst possible time. I want time for myself after Tyler, but I think if I don't see where things can go with him, I'll end up missing out on a good thing.

He always answers when I call. He texts me back within twenty minutes most days. Hell, he shows interest in my baking and actually gives a damn when we're conversing. There are no 'uh-huhs' or empty 'okays' like Tyler used to do. I would chat with Tyler, and he'd dismiss almost everything I had to say. He didn't give a damn, even if he was pretending he did.

"I'm done with Tyler, and I mean it. He says he's going to change, but he never ends up changing. He always reverts back to his old ways, and I'm not dealing with it anymore."

"All right." I don't think he's convinced.

"I mean it. Don't worry about Tyler because I'm sure as fuck not." I take a couple of steps closer to Aesir until our bodies are almost touching. I lick my lips and look up at him.

He has the most gorgeous light hazel eyes I've ever seen. They have a bursting green near the iris while the outside fades into a light brown with a bit of gold. Aesir is beautiful for a man. Sure, he's rough around the edges, but he's the pretty boy of that entire club.

I place my glass down on the kitchen counter and slither my hand up his torso, feeling every ridge of his abs through his thin t-shirt. I take it all the way up to his neck and flutter my fingertips against him. “I mean it, Aesir. I’m done with him. He’s not going to weasel his way back into my life. I’m not letting him.”

“You have a soft spot for him. He’ll say somethin’, and you’ll end up changing your mind again. Just like the last few times.” Aesir lowers his tone a bit, and I’m convinced what he’s saying is true. He really is done with me if I can’t choose.

Tyler only ever hurts me. It’s been a long, tumultuous road with him, but I do have a soft spot. It’s a soft spot that I’m going to have to ignore from now on. Why would it make any sense for me to keep this cycle going on and on with Tyler when I have a great man like Aesir standing before me? It would be dumb.

“No, not anymore.”

“I hope you’re not bullshitting me right now. I wanna explore this, go out on a few dates, or whatever. We have a good time whenever we’re around each other. At least I do.”

I smile so big when Aesir says that. “I do, too. I always have fun with you, regardless of what we’re doing. There are some things I enjoy doing more than others.” I wink at him, and he chuckles.

“I can’t imagine what that might be.” Aesir plays along, licking his bottom lip.

I lean up on my tippy toes and press my lips to Aesir’s. Every time our lips collide, it’s like the entire world around us stops moving. I only focus on him. I have tunnel vision, and I hope he has the same experience.

I kiss him softly at first, tasting the remnants of whiskey on his lips. We always start out slow and sensual, and it always gets more intense right before we have sex. Aesir drifts his hand over my hip and pulls me closer to him. He slides his hand around my waist and plants it on the small of my back, practically crushing me against him.

I push my tongue into his mouth until he willingly opens it. Our tongues unite, and we deepen our kiss. I’ve never really liked French kissing, but like a lot of other things, Aesir has changed my mind. “Fuck, you taste good,” Aesir groans as he breaks our kiss for a moment.

“Mmm, you do, too,” I murmur against his lips.

Aesir slides his hand under my legs and scoops me up in his arms. I yelp



in surprise, and he chuckles as he takes me up the stairs and into my bedroom. He tosses me down on the bed so hard that I roll onto my stomach. By the time I'm rolling onto my back, he's tossed his cut on the back of my office chair and is taking his shirt off.

Now, this is my favorite part. I love it when he strips for me. I love seeing every inch of his body. He's one of those guys who doesn't have to do anything. He just blinks, and women are fawning over him. I'm one of those women.

I lie on the bed watching the show until Aesir's standing in only his boxers and socks. He grabs me by my belt and pulls me over the edge of the bed, fiercely unbuckling my belt and taking off every article of my clothing until I'm in the matching neon green bra and panty set I thought he'd like.

"Gods, this is new." He licks his lips again.

"I bought it just for you." I gnaw on my bottom lip and watch his eyes glimmer. The fact I bought something and thought of him is making him happy.

"Too bad it's not staying on for too long." Aesir yanks down my panties, and I rise a bit to take off my bra, but he playfully slaps my hands away. With one hand, he unclasps my bra and tosses it somewhere in the room.

"You're a little eager tonight."

"It might have somethin' to do with you telling me you're done with Tyler. It's celebration sex. I'm not holdin' back anymore with you, Ziza." Aesir has never once called me Ziza, but I like it. It's a really cute nickname.

My heart flutters in my chest as he presses his lips to the inside of my thigh. He presses soft, chaste kisses until he's above my navel, and warmth pools in the pit of my stomach. Anytime we're together, Aesir distracts me from whatever's on my mind. I don't think about anything. I'm simply in the moment with him, focusing on whatever he's doing to my body.

He glides his calloused hands over my silky skin, and there's something about his mere touch that turns me on so much. Maybe it's because we come from two different lives, or maybe it's the undeniable chemistry the two of us have.

"Fuck, you smell so good," Aesir grumbles against my skin. The vibration of his voice causes goosebumps to spread across me.

"You do, too." He has this earthy musk about him. Sandalwood and cedar mixed with whiskey tonight.

Aesir slowly comes up the rest of my body, trailing kisses from my

stomach, between my breasts, until he stops at the nape of my neck. I suck in a deep breath, and my nipples grow hard from the chill in the air.

He brings his lips back against mine, and I kiss him with such passion. It's different from any other kiss we've ever shared. There's more emotion behind it. This isn't just sex anymore. It's a confirmation that I'm done with Tyler, and he won't be weaseling his way back into my life.

I'm giving this with Aesir a shot.

I've been fucking him on and off for months, and even with just fucking him, he's treated me better than Tyler ever has.

Aesir pulls away suddenly and goes for my bedside table. He knows exactly where the condoms are and pulls the drawer open. I rise up and grab onto his wrist, pulling him back against me.

He furrows his brows in confusion. "What?"

"Don't. I'm on birth control, and we're giving this a shot. I don't know what to call us, if we're dating, in a relationship, or whatever . . . but I'm considering myself monogamous with you, and I don't want a barrier between us. As long as you're clean."

Aesir nods. "Yeah, I've never fucked a woman without a condom. Not tryin' to put you out of the mood or whatever, but did you fuck Tyler without —?"

I don't even let him finish. "No. We were on and off so much that I didn't trust him. Who knows where he was sticking his dick, and I wasn't about to catch something because he wasn't being careful."

"And you trust me?" Aesir almost seems surprised by this, but I do. Sure, he's part of a biker club, but he isn't a whore. He's a good guy, even if others don't think he is.

I nod my head without a second thought. "Yeah, now get back here." I lick my bottom lip, and Aesir towers himself back over me with a satisfied smirk.

"I believe you, you know," he murmurs against my ear.

"About?" I turn my head to the side to look him in the eyes.

"That you're done with Tyler."

"I am, and I think we should stop talking about him. I'm focused on you right now, Aesir. I'm focused on us." I don't let him say another word. I press my lips against his and taste the whiskey. God, he's great.

Aesir pulls one of my legs up over his hip and slowly positions himself between my legs. He goes in slowly and fills me up. I gasp at his intrusion

and close my eyes as he eases in and out of me. Fuck, this feels so good. This is so much different from fucking with a condom on.

Aesir takes his lips from mine and kisses my neck as passionately as he has been to my lips. I wouldn't call this fucking. I'd say this is making love, and I've never done this before. I've only had a small taste, and all I want is more.

Aesir wraps his arm around me, pulling me in closer to him while we continue to move as one. It's like he can read my mind. He moves in and out at a speed that has my toes curling and heart rate spiking with every movement.

After a bit, there's a warmth growing deep inside of me, and soon enough, I'm ready to explode. My body begins to tremble as I moan out his name, "Aesir!"

He craves more of my mouth, claiming it once again with his lips. My hands roam up his back, gripping him tightly as he continues to pound into me.

"Gods, you feel so good," Aesir speaks to my lips as he continues to fill me up. I'm on the heels of another orgasm, ready for it to rock through my entire body. My breathing is erratic as I hold on tightly to Aesir for dear life. Aesir grunts and bucks hard before collapsing on top of me. We both lie here, trying to catch our breath, and I revel in the feeling of his sweaty body against mine.

He rolls onto his side, taking me with him, never separating from me. A cool breeze blows through my hair as a tear escapes from my eye with all the emotions I've felt this past week. I have been trying so hard not to jump into anything, but this feels right. Being with Aesir calms me down. There's no anxiety, no fear, nothing negative when it comes to him.

All I know is that I want to give this a shot. I want to know what it can be like being with him, and I'm damn certain he'll treat me better than Tyler ever has.

\* \* \*

I wake to the sound of birds chirping outside of my window. It's not even daylight yet, but that isn't unusual. I'm up before the sun most days. Being a baker, I have to be up early to get my orders ready and delivered.

Aesir's arm is wrapped around me snugly, so I'm very careful moving it. I don't want to wake him up. We were up pretty late last night. We had sex once, and then cuddled for a while, and then came round two. It was great and just as sensual as our first round. By the time we were done with the second round, I was about to head downstairs to get us a muffin, but I was so tired that I fell asleep right in his arms.

I push down the comforter and wiggle my way out of bed quietly. It's the first time he's ever spent the night. Every other time, he's left right after we've done the deed. It was super casual, and there weren't any expectations between either of us.

I grab my robe off the back of my bedroom door and slide it on, wrapping a knot in the front as I head down the stairs. I walk right into my kitchen and get a pot of coffee brewing. I left my phone down here on the counter, which isn't like me at all. I'm lucky I woke up around my usual time.

I yawn as I press the 'brew now' button, and the fresh scent of coffee grounds wafts through the air. The pot of coffee isn't even halfway made when my phone starts ringing. I furrow my brows and groan, wondering who the hell it could be.

It's a relief when I see it's Magnolia calling me. "Morning."

"Oh, so it's not a good morning, huh?" Magnolia chuckles on the other end of the line.

"I haven't even had a sip of coffee yet, so it's just morning," I explain.

"Oh, okay. I thought you were normally up by now?"

"I am, but I didn't get great sleep last night, so I need my coffee fix."

"Oh shoot, well, sorry. I was just wondering if we could meet up sometime today and talk about what I brought up at Dag and Esperanza's wedding celebration."

"Yeah, what time are you thinking?" Magnolia totally could have texted me to set this meeting up.

"Mmm, maybe around lunch? Can you meet me at the club?"

I scroll on my phone and look at my calendar. I should be able to meet her since there isn't anything too pressing. "Yeah, I can do that. I'll text you about an hour before I'll be there just to make sure your day is going according to plan." There have been a couple of times when I've agreed to meet up with Magnolia, and then she's been late or too overwhelmed to actually have the meeting.

"That's perfect. I'll see you in a few hours." Magnolia and I say our

goodbyes, and then we hang up the phone.

My pot of coffee isn't finished brewing yet, so I go ahead and gather some of the materials I need to make a few batches of pumpkin muffins. That's the first thing on my to-do list, and then I need to decorate three cakes that are set for delivery today. My fridge is so filled with customer orders that I barely have any room for actual groceries. I end up going to the store every day just to get the ingredients I need to make myself dinner.

I manage to get everything I need out by the time my coffee is brewed, and then I take a couple of minutes to make myself a cup. I have to make six dozen muffins this morning and deliver them before ten. The first six I'm going to make will be for Aesir and me to munch on, so I waste no time getting them in the oven and preparing the rest of my muffin tins.

By the time I'm putting the fourth dozen in, the wood floors upstairs are creaking, which only tells me that Aesir is up. I have one of the cakes already decorated, and I'm working on the second one as he comes down the stairs.

"Good morning!" I practically sing it to him as he rounds the corner, groggy, wiping away the crusties in the corners of his eyes.

"Morning," Aesir grumbles.

I take it upon myself to get a coffee mug out of the cupboard and pour him a cup. I don't know how he takes it, so I hand it off to him. "Sugar is over here, and milk options are in the fridge."

"Mmm," he grunts and goes for the fridge. He grabs my half a gallon of whole milk and pours a little bit into the mug. He doesn't even mix it with a spoon. He just takes a huge sip and moans as the coffee takes hold.

I grab a couple of my muffin boxes and begin putting some of the cooled-down muffins in the boxes, packaging them up, and taking them over to the small three-person dining room table that I have.

"Smells good in here."

"Yeah, I love the smell of pumpkins. Fall is my favorite time of year. All of the apple cider, pumpkin-spiced lattes, apple picking! It just means the holiday season is right around the corner." I can't stop smiling.

It's prime time for me right now as far as productivity goes, so I grab my *Post-Its* and put them on each box, writing my clients' names and addresses in *Sharpie*, so I don't get anyone mixed up. When I go to make the deliveries, I'll pull the notes off the top and take them inside their businesses. Luckily, most of them are right in downtown Tallahassee.

I feel Aesir's eyes on me as I work, and sure enough, I glance upward,

and his eyes are pinned on me. “See something you like?”

“I sure as fuck do, but that’s not why I’m staring.”

“Why are you then?” I ask as I pop another box open.

“I’ve never seen you at work before. It’s cool to watch you in your element.” I walk over and snag a muffin for me and one for Aesir. I hand him his, and he takes a bite from it.

“Fuck, this is . . . it’s fuckin’ awesome.” He pauses to chew up his bite and continues, “I knew you were good, but I didn’t know you were this damn good.”

Aesir and I spend the next hour eating our breakfast and chatting while I get more baking done. He chips in as much as he can, helping me put the muffins in boxes and even helping me finish decorating the cakes I have to deliver today. Tyler could never be bothered to help me do anything with my business. He kept telling me I was going to fail at it while Aesir was doing whatever he could to help me.

“Thank you so much for all of your help,” I say to Aesir as we’re walking to my front door.

“Don’t sweat it. Oddly enough, I had fun. You can pay me in extra goodies.” Aesir winks at me, and I giggle like a schoolgirl with a crush.

“I can definitely arrange that.” I open the front door, and Aesir walks out onto my small porch. He turns around, wraps a hand around my waist, and pulls me against him.

“I’ll text you later, but until then, I want you to have a good day.” Aesir barely gets his words out before he’s planting his lips on mine.

Just like last night, our kiss is slow and passionate.

He has no problem taking his time with me to prove he’s serious about this.

I’m only left wondering why I never gave him a real chance before? I feel so foolish for it now. When I’m around Aesir, I feel at peace, and I want to keep feeling this.

I want this to work, and if anything, I know I deserve to be happy.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *AESIR*

I release a deep sigh and yearn for the days I don't have to leave Aziza. I want to spend more time with her, but I'll only do it if she really shows me she's done with him. Sure, she said she is, but talk is cheap. Her actions will prove if she really wants this to work between us, and Gods I hope she does.

I walk in through the front door of the clubhouse, and the second I do, everyone's eyes are on me. "Well, well, would you look what the cat dragged in?" Fenrir chuckles from his seat on the couch.

Ivar snickers. "I wonder what hole you've crawled out of, brother."

"I'd bet it's Aziza's," Magnus quickly chimes in, and every brother in the main area starts chuckling.

"Fuck, there's no reason to be so vulgar," I snap at the group of them. There's something about them even remotely mentioning Aziza's hole that rubs me the wrong way. I want to shield her from men talking about her that way, not encourage it.

"Since when have you been a prude?" Magnus questions, then takes a sip of his hot coffee.

"I haven't. Just don't think you should disrespect her, is all."

"Ain't nobody here disrespecting her. But we're not gonna sit back and act like you don't violate her on the regular, brother." Fenrir sticks up for the other guys, and I grow aggravated by the moment. If someone was talking about his ol' lady like this, he'd be annoyed too.

"Yeah, if anyone disrespects her, it's probably you," Ivar speaks up.

"What in the fuck are you talking about, man? Gods, you sound as stupid as you look," I snap, not caring if my words hurt Ivar's precious feelings.

“Shit, man.” Logi starts cracking up, obviously enjoying the show.

“I’m gonna head up and shower. I’ll talk to you guys later,” I say as I get the hell away from them. It’s too early to be dealing with this shit, and a shower will do me some good right now.

I make my way up the stairs and head to the floor where our rooms are. I walk all the way down the hall to my room and punch in the key code to get my door unlocked.

Every time I walk in here, there’s a rush of comfort. There are so many shared spaces within the club that sometimes it’s relaxing to be in your own area where no one else can bother you.

I head into my bathroom and strip out of my day-old clothes, tossing them in the tall white hamper I have next to my sink. I push back the black shower curtain and turn on the water to a medium-hot temperature. We have a damn good water heater here, so I hop right in and get down to business.

As I lather shampoo through my hair, my thoughts drift back to Aziza. I’m trying my damndest to not get too attached to her, but who the hell am I kidding? I’m already attached. I suppose I’ve been attached to her since we started sleeping together. Even knowing she got back with Tyler a couple of times, I’ve still had residual feelings.

I know we could be great together, and watching my brothers find their happiness makes me want to find my own. Everyone around here is settling down, and I mean everyone. Hell, if Kraken can settle down, then I think I can, too.

I’ve had my fair share of pussy over the years, but Aziza is something else entirely. I don’t know if it’s her will and determination or if it’s her beauty and kindness. She’s special, and I feel lucky that I even get to know her.

One thing I can’t understand is how she gives Tyler opportunity after opportunity to shit all over her. He doesn’t care about her at all, and if he did, he wouldn’t be treating her like crap all the damn time.

She deserves someone who gives a damn about her, and I’m that man. I’m the kind of man who would break into Hell to save her. The kind of man who would do anything for her if she asked.

I’ve never understood how good women continue to go back to their toxic exes. It’s exactly what she does, and for what? Does she think something will change? Because I can guarantee it won’t. People like that don’t change. They only get worse over time.



Tyler might be her first love. It's the only understandable reason I can think that she'd give him so many chances, even though he's proven that he's still the same jackass as before.

All I can do is hope and pray that she's finally done with him. Every time she gets close to me, he weasels his way back in and ruins what she and I are creating. I'm sick and tired of it. I want Aziza to truly give up on the thing that's holding her down—Tyler.

All I can do is proceed with caution. I'll give her my all, but I don't want to let myself fall for her when she could end up hurting me. It's a shitty situation to be in, but she's had a specific way of handling herself in the past.

I do know something, though. Tyler always makes some big ploy and tries to prove himself to her. I've already decided that if he starts sniffing back around Aziza, I will sabotage any effort he has to get back with her.

Tyler had his chance with her. He had multiple chances, and he somehow always found a way to fuck them up. His time is long gone. It's my time to be with her now.

I might not even tell him that face-to-face. I might be like a snake in the grass striking without him even knowing I'm the one doing it.

I want her, and I'm not going to stop until she's mine, no matter the cost.

Over the course of the day, I chill upstairs and play some video games. That's my biggest form of stress relief besides sex. Right now, I'm obsessed with an older game called Dragon Age. It's an inquisitor sort of storyline where you can choose to be a number of species. The storyline changes with every choice you make, and it always keeps you on your toes. Sometimes, playing games distracts me from my own life. It distracts me from everything I'm constantly thinking about.

After a few hours of hardcore gaming, I head downstairs to make myself a late lunch. I head right into the kitchen and find Rati sitting at the oversized island, eating what appears to be a chicken salad sandwich.

"You've crawled out of your den, huh?"

"Yeah, for a little bit. No one's given me any orders, so I'm chilling while I have the opportunity."

"Fair enough. You know we were bustin' your balls earlier, right?"

"Yeah, I do. Just don't like it when people suggest such vulgar shit about her." I have this newfound defensiveness about her. Sure, I cared before, but it's hard to keep my protectiveness under control.

"I get that. We were just messin' around. Don't let them rile you up like

that again, or they're just gonna keep doin' it. They live for the reaction you'll undoubtedly give them."

Rati is my oldest friend in the club. We've known each other for a few years, linking up right before my parents were killed. I was just about to graduate from high school when their lives were taken too suddenly. All through high school, I'd taken part in my local fire department, began volunteering, and took courses to get certified as a medic. My dream job was to work for the department, helping people in need.

Rati and the club were in my hometown for a span of three months. I didn't know anything about the club or what it meant, but I knew he was a decent guy. He was volunteering at the fire department, and we got close, especially after my parents were killed.

He saw something in me that I never saw in myself--potential.

He plucked me from my sorrows and gave me something to believe in. He made me feel like the club could be my family since my parents were gone and I was an only child. I had no one else, and while I was reluctant at first, I gave it a shot.

Luckily, it worked out, and here I am.

"I get that but fuck if it didn't irritate me."

I head over to the fridge and pull out some diced chicken, provolone cheese, and sliced ham. I can make some chicken cordon bleu in no time. It won't be the exact way most people make it, but it'll still taste damn good.

"I'm sure it did, and like I said, if they keep seeing that it irritates you, they're going to keep it up." I opened up the packet of chicken, dumped them into a strainer, and put the strainer in the sink. I pour cold water over the chicken for a couple of minutes until all of the slime is washed off them.

I'm the kind of guy who wants seasoning all over his meat, so while the chicken continues to strain, I get some onion powder, garlic powder, smoked paprika, and other seasoning out of the cabinets.

I get a pan and place it on the stove, putting it to medium-high heat, and toss a few tablespoons of oil in there. "You'd think they'd cut it out of respect for me and Aziza." I can't help but get irritated every time I talk about it.

"You really like her, don't you?"

I transfer the diced chicken to a bowl and begin putting the seasoning all over the chicken, tossing it with a spoon until everything is evenly covered. With a quick glance at the pot, the oil is perfect, so I toss the chicken in and

watch it closely while Rati and I continue our conversation.

“I do. I like her more than I want to admit.”

Rati chuckles lightly. “That sounds familiar. I didn’t want to like Gwen, but I craved her like a drug.”

“I just wish I knew what it meant.”

“If you ask me, it means she might be the one you’ve been waitin’ for.”

“Who says I’ve been waiting for anyone?”

Rati snickers. “Man, don’t try and fool me. You want to play it off like you’re some tough guy, but you want what we all have. I see it clear as day. Gods, I know you better than anyone in this damn club. You want a family. A real one. Sure, the club is your family, but it’s not the same as havin’ a woman by your side.”

“You know why I want a family.” I don’t have one. I lost the two most important people in my life. They died trying to make it to my high school graduation ceremony. It fucking killed me when I saw my chief from the fire department show up after the ceremony was over. I saw it all over his face. I’d witnessed family members getting horrible news so many times. I just never thought I was going to be the one getting the news.

“Is Aziza still jumping back and forth with her ex?”

I shrugged as I flipped the chicken over. Once both sides are cooked through, I’ll throw in the ham to get it crispy, and then I’ll put the provolone cheese on top. “She says she’s done, but time will tell.”

“I hope she is. I haven’t seen the two of you together too much, but I know what you’re like whenever you come back to the club. You seem happier. You’re like my little brother, and that’s all I want for you. I want you to be happy.”

Rati isn’t wrong. Aziza does make me happy. She makes me happier than I’ve been in a really long time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

*AZIZA*

I've been running around like a complete lunatic making these deliveries. I didn't think they were much of a disruption to my day, but I failed to remember how bad the traffic can be here in Tallahassee. I've just finished making my last delivery, and I'm finally on my way to meet up with Magnolia.

We agreed to meet up at the bakery location. I park my car outside and walk up to the entrance. It's conveniently located next door to Magnolia's club.

I walk up to the door, noticing how elegant it is. Her catering business' name is on the door, and when you walk inside, there's a directory for the floors above. Surprisingly, on the third floor is the name of my business, Zizi's Treats.

I can't help but smile immediately. I haven't even fully accepted this, but it isn't surprising in the least bit that Magnolia is jumping the gun.

Magnolia didn't text me with where we'd be meeting specifically, but I can almost guarantee she's going to be on the floor that has the bakery's name on it.

I head down the hall to the elevator and tap on the white button. I'm finally starting to get anxious. My heart is beating so fast in my chest, and my hands are starting to get sweaty.

The elevator doors open, and I step inside, tapping on the button for the third floor. The music playing in the background is of a newer age. It's nothing like the instrumental music you constantly hear in upscale hotels.

In what feels like a few short moments, the elevator doors are opening,

and I'm stepping off the elevator onto the third floor. There's a small seating area to the left with a coffee table in between two couches. On the right are a few circular white tables with matching chairs. Meanwhile, directly ahead of me is a reception area. There's about a twelve-foot-wide wall directly behind the reception area, and on either side is clear glass that you can see straight through.

Through the glass is a massive kitchen, prepping area, fridges, and freezers. I can't see all the way in there, but I'm sure Magnolia has industrial ovens and storage areas as well.

"Like what you see so far?" Magnolia's voice comes out of nowhere, and I turn to the left, seeing her come out of the conference room door.

"Yeah. It's a lot to take in, though."

"I know, it looks a lot bigger in person."

"Probably because it is a lot bigger," I point out.

I don't know how she thinks that we're going to make this work by me just giving her a discount on services. I understand she wants me to make a profit with my business, but she's essentially renting me out an industrial kitchen with all the nines.

"Whatever you say, but bigger is better. It means you can grow your business to the size you want it to be. Plus, you're going to be getting a lot more orders once you give me some dessert options. I know my clients will extend their services to desserts as well."

"Please don't take anything I say as being ungrateful. It's just so much to take in."

Magnolia throws her head back and laughs. "I'm sure it is. Follow me and let me show you around the place."

Magnolia takes me around the reception area, down a large hallway, and pushes open a swinging door. We're in the heart of the expansive kitchen, and if I wasn't overwhelmed before, I am now.

There is absolutely nothing that needs to be added here. It is the best of the best and is completely ready for me to start tomorrow.

"And you just want discounted dessert options for me to use this?"

"Yeah. Discounted at first, and eventually, we can either bump you up to paying a small rent, or I can go in with you financially to put a small shop next door near the club. If people wanted to, they could order anything from your menu. We could even have people come in and buy cupcakes every day, cakes, cake pops, cookies, or whatever else you decide to offer."

It really sounds like Magnolia has given this a lot of thought. I'm not opposed to what she's saying at all, and I know if I don't accept, I'm going to miss out on the deal of a lifetime.

She isn't wrong. If I move my baking to this location, I'll, for one, be able to have a normal house like everyone else. The days of constantly having baking items thrown around are going to be long gone. I try to keep it as tidy as I can, but like everything else in life, sometimes it's not possible.

I'll also have the option to grow and have more products readily available every day. This is the next step in my career, and I'm not going to make a mistake and miss out on this opportunity.

Over the past couple of weeks, things have been looking up. Not only am I done with the draining relationship I had with Tyler, but there's never been more promise than I have right now with expanding Zizi's Treats.

I don't think anything could ruin what I have going right now. If anything, I only see things getting better.

"Okay, I'll do it, but after a couple of months, we should figure out another arrangement. I don't like the idea of getting a handout being here rent-free."

"It isn't a handout. You're going to offer certain desserts at a lower price for me. That will help me make a higher profit."

"Okay, fine, whatever you say." I roll my eyes in a joking manner and accept everything she's saying. I can't hide the fact I'm so excited for this new journey. I have always wanted to expand my business and haven't had the resources to do so. Now I do. All I need to do for Magnolia is come up with some dessert packages. "How many dessert packages do you want, four or five?"

"Mmm, how about we have four and then have a dessert bar option? I have this charcuterie bar that my clients love. I bet if we had a dessert option, they'd eat it up, quite literally."

"Yeah, we could do something like that. Right off the bat, I'm thinking about banana pudding cakes, fudge brownies, s'mores pops, and peach cobbler cups. I can change them every season to reflect the current time of year. Actually, that'd probably be a better summer menu. For the fall into the winter, we should have chocolate peppermint cake pops, gingerbread cupcakes with cream cheese icing, winter wonderland white cake, peppermint bark cheesecake, or an option of a sticky toffee pudding."

"You're making me hungry talking about them."

I can't blame her. Each and every one of them is a great option. "They're absolutely delicious. You have no idea."

"Would you mind making me a sampler box of all those desserts? I'd love to use them for a PR stunt. I can send some out to my top hundred biggest clients. It might entice them to try your baked goods, and it'll help spread the word."

"I'd love to. Before Thanksgiving or after?"

"Go ahead and make me ten boxes beforehand. Then, the week after, move up to twenty a week, and I'll hand deliver them with you so I can introduce you as well. It'll kill two birds with one stone."

"I really like the idea." I take in a deep breath and release it quickly. "Thank you for suggesting all of this to me. I don't think I deserve it, but I'm excited that you're giving me a chance."

"That's the most preposterous thing I've heard. If anyone deserves a chance like this, it's you. Since I've known you, I could tell how hardworking you are. All you need is for someone to help you out a little bit."

"Thank you. I appreciate that so much. When do you want me to start moving my things over here?"

Magnolia takes a few moments to think about it. "You could honestly start tomorrow if you want. Oh!" Magnolia digs in her pocket and hands me a key. "This is for the front of the building. This way, you can get in whenever you need to. I've heard rumors that bakers have crazy early hours."

I chuckle and smile. "Yeah, four is usually when I start."

"Wow. God bless you." Magnolia cracks up, and the two of us say our goodbyes. I thank her again for helping me out like this, and then I'm on my way out of the building, heading up to my car.

My phone started ringing, and I checked the caller ID. Surprisingly, it's my brother, Zain. "Hey there, stranger," I say as soon as I answer it.

"Hey, how's it going?"

"Good. I've been pretty busy, but I just left a really awesome meeting."

"You can't just leave me hanging. What happened?"

Zain has always been one of my biggest supporters. He even bought me my first ingredients when I didn't have the cash to.

"I'm moving to a commercial kitchen so I can provide desserts for a friend of mine who has a catering company. I can work on my other client's orders while I'm here, and there's talk about expanding later down the line."

"That's amazing, sis! Look at you go."

“Thanks. I’m really excited. So, why were you calling? You usually don’t just call for no reason.” There’s always some reason for Zain calling me, whether it’s him needing me to help clean his place, him telling me about a recent date, or something else.

“I was letting you know what my plans were for Thanksgiving next week in case you were thinking about cooking this big dinner or anything. You already know Mom booked that cruise, and I figure since she’s going to be gone, I’d do something a little adventurous, too.” Okay, now I get it. Zain’s leaving me to be by myself for Thanksgiving. How nice.

“Did you have anything planned with friends?”

I’m not going to tell my brother the truth. I’m going to lie and make sure he enjoys his time away and doesn’t worry about me. “Yeah, there’s going to be so many people. My first Friendsgiving ever.”

“Good. I was worried you wouldn’t be spending it with anyone.”

As of right now, I don’t think I will be.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### *AESIR*

It's been a few days since I was at Aziza's. We met up for a dinner date the day before yesterday, and she told me all of the good news. I couldn't be more excited for all of the good things coming her way. If anyone deserves it, it's her.

She's poured every ounce and fiber of her being into making sure Zizi's Treats is a successful business, and I'm glad everything is finally starting to pay off. I think Magnolia is a damn good friend for giving her this opportunity, too. She told me that she'd never be able to afford rent on a place like that until she grew her clientele, and since she'll be working with Magnolia directly, her client list will naturally grow.

Yesterday, I helped her take over a lot of her ingredients, some packaging boxes, packing material, decorating tools, and whatever else she had prepared in boxes. I stayed at her new kitchen with her for a couple of hours, helping her organize everything and even helping her make some of the desserts. She said she was grateful for the help and dropped a bomb on me that I didn't expect—Tyler never helped her with her business.

That blew my mind completely. When you're in a relationship with someone, you should want to help them in any way you can. It sounds to me like Tyler never really supported Aziza's dream. That not only pisses me off, but it's pretty fucking pathetic on his part. If she asked me to go to a bridal event with her to give out samples and advertise the business, I'd sure as fuck do it. I want her to succeed, and having a solid support system is the best way to do it.

My alarm clock begins going off, and I grab my phone, silencing it. I've

been up for the last thirty minutes, staring at the ceiling, thinking about anything and everything.

My stomach is grumbling, but I don't know if I want to make any food. I kind of want to stop in town and get something good. Maybe I'll take Aziza a coffee and a sandwich. She's probably already at the building.

I get out of bed, tossing my duvet off my legs, and throw my legs over the side. I take a couple of minutes to stretch and yawn before I get up and get dressed.

My attire never really changes too much. There are always the same few things. Jeans, boxers, socks, wife beater, t-shirt or tank top, depending on the season, and my cut. I grab a few things out of my dressers and throw them all on, sliding my cut on as I grab my phone and leave my room.

I head downstairs, where it's oddly quiet. It's still pretty early, and a lot of my brothers are night owls. They'd prefer to stay up later and party versus getting up early. I used to be like that, too, but I'd drink a few beers and then go game. Now, I find myself wanting to wake up earlier because Aziza is up very early.

I spot Magnolia with Everly, sitting on the lip of a pool table with an open first-aid box next to her. "Everything okay?" It seems kind of redundant to ask, but I have to.

"Yeah, it will be."

"I got a boo-boo!" Everly tells me, pointing to her bloody knee.

"Hmm, well, what happened, Princess?"

Magnolia lifts both her brows and looks right into Everly's eyes, surely curious about what she's going to tell me.

"I, uh . . . I ran when mommy told me not to and got hurt."

The second Everly calls Magnolia mommy, everything shifts. She stops opening the alcohol pads and is in awe. Magnolia and Kraken adopted Everly. Kraken's brother is her biological father, and he killed her mother in a murder-suicide. He stepped up to the plate afterward so social services wouldn't get involved.

"Mmm, it's probably best you listen to your mommy then, huh?"

"Yeah!" Everly smiles brightly, and Magnolia is fighting back tears. I think they're good ones. She really stepped up when she got into her relationship with Kraken. Most women would run in the other direction when they find out you have a kid, but not Mags. She accepted Everly like her own from the very beginning.

Magnolia proceeds to wipe the alcohol pad against Everly's knee, and she hisses. "Ow! That hurts!"

Magnolia nods, acknowledging her pain. "I know it does, but it'll help kill all the yucky germs so your knee can heal. I'm gonna put some antibiotic ointment on it, and then you can pick a band-aid out. Okay?"

"Okay."

"So, how are things with you and Aziza going?" Magnolia asks as she puts the used alcohol pad to the side.

"I think they're going well. Why, what has she said to you?" I'm anxious for her answer.

"Good, that's what I wanted to hear. I do need to say something to you, though." Magnolia grabs a packet of antibiotic ointment from the first-aid kit and puts some on a piece of gauze she already has ready.

"All right, hit me with it."

Magnolia tears her eyes away from Everly's scraped knee and looks at me for a moment. "Aziza, she's been through so much already. Tyler treated her like crap, and I think somehow she felt like that's what she deserved. She's a great woman. She deserves so much better than what Tyler put her through, so promise me you won't hurt her, and if you feel like you don't want to be with her, then don't drag her down a long road. Cut it off early."

Magnolia returns her attention to Everly's knee and rubs the ointment on it delicately.

"I assure you, I have no intentions of hurting her. If anyone is going to throw away what we have, I think it'll be her. She's cast me aside in the past for Tyler. Sure, we didn't have a label or anything then, but it still felt shitty. I told her I'm not doing this with her if she's going to end up running back to him the first time he says anything. So, I hope he doesn't try to weasel his way back in."

"That's comforting to know. I don't think that she has any plans to repeat the past. I've tried to convince her that Tyler isn't what's good for her. I'm trying to help her see her self-worth, but I really think the reason she keeps making the same choices is because of how long she's known him. But she does know he's not going to change. He's just going to keep doing the same shit over and over again."

I narrow my eyes, curious about something. I don't know if Magnolia will tell me, but it doesn't hurt to ask. "What did he do besides treat her like shit?"

Magnolia huffs and rolls her eyes, showing Everly the box of band-aids to choose from. “What didn’t he do is more like it. He did what he could to upset her. He compared her to other women. You know, the ones on Instagram with the big boobs, fillers, botox. He said he wished she was as pretty as them. That’s one of the big things. Other times, he’d be condescending, rude, give her attitude. Typically shitty things that she didn’t deserve.”

I shake my head. One thing I’ll never be able to understand is why women stay in relationships with people who treat them like that. It doesn’t make sense to me.

“I’m glad she has a friend like you to help her see her worth.”

Everly picks a bright pink band-aid, and Magnolia puts it over the scrape on her knee. “Women are supposed to lift each other up, not put each other down.”

“Very true.”

The truth is Aziza is the kind of woman I want to be with. She has a vision for her life and is kind, respectful, and beautiful, not to mention that she has a big heart.

I think she could be the love of my life if we really give this a shot.

When I think about her, I think I could love her the way my father loved my mother. It was pure, and I know there was never a doubt in their minds that there was someone else better out there for them. They knew the treasure they had in each other.

“We’re gonna head out and go get some breakfast, but we’ll see you later.”

“Sure, see ya.”

I walk away and head into the garage, grab the keys to my bike, and click the button for the garage door. I start my bike up, and the thundering sound of the motor wakes me right up. Putting the kickstand up, I drive out of the garage bay and tap the button to close it, sending a quick text to Aziza before I drive. I ask if she wants any coffee or if she likes a specific breakfast sandwich.

I get on the road and head to a local coffee shop a few miles away from her new business location. By the time I arrived, I had a text back from her letting me know what she’d like. So, I order for both of us and get two drinks in a cupholder, slide it on an addition I have for my bike that’ll hold the cupholder perfectly, and put the food in one of my saddlebags. When I’m

done with all of that, I head over to where she is.

The building was unlocked, so I headed right up to the third floor where she was and found her in the kitchen. “Gosh, I needed a pick me up so bad. Thanks so much!” Aziza says as she rushes over to me and then plants a sweet kiss on my lips.

“No problem, Ziza.”

For the next twenty minutes, we ate our breakfast together and made some idle chitchat. It’s so hard to believe the holiday is coming up next week, and I noticed she hasn’t mentioned it to me once. I wonder if there’s a reason for that.

“What are your plans for Thanksgiving?” I ask her.

She finishes taking a sip of her latte and chuckles lightly. “Nothing, now. My mom’s going on a cruise, and my brother is going somewhere. So, I’ll be all by myself.”

“Why don’t you come and spend it with us at the club? We have plenty of room, and that way, you won’t have to be alone.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to impose.” I appreciate her being polite, but if I’m inviting her, then she’s welcome.

“You’re not imposing at all. Spend Thanksgiving with me. I’d love that. Just bring some of the desserts you’ve been making.”

Aziza throws her head back and laughs. “Okay, I think I can manage that.”

## CHAPTER SIX

*AZIZA*

I might have outdone myself a little. Not only did I bake chocolate peppermint cake pops, gingerbread cupcakes with cream cheese icing, winter wonderland white cake, peppermint bark cheesecake, and sticky toffee pudding. I went overboard and also made a pumpkin cheesecake, pumpkin pie, pecan pie, and Norwegian Cardamom-Almond tart.

Aesir will probably think I've gone crazy, but I wanted to make sure I had something that everyone would like, and from what he said, there are about twenty-eight people in attendance, not including myself. Sure, some of them are little ones, and if they're able to have some goodies, I didn't want to have anything too crazy. Kids like the simple stuff, so the white cake, cake pops, and gingerbread cupcakes should be a big hit with them.

I drove my car over here to the clubhouse and texted Aesir to let him know I was on the way. I told him yesterday I'd probably need help carrying everything in, and just as I'm getting out of my car, Aesir is coming out of the clubhouse.

They live in an absolutely massive, restored warehouse. There are multiple floors, and I don't even want to guess the square footage. I'd say anywhere between six and ten thousand square feet.

"Hey there, baby girl." Aesir's been laying on the pet names pretty thick over the last week. His favorite nickname for me is Ziza, which I like. Most people call me by my full name, or it's Zizi at the bakery.

"Hey," I reply back.

He comes right up to me and plants a sweet and passionate kiss on my lips, sliding his hands around my waist and holding me here for a few

moments.

Aesir smiles as he pulls away, and I can already feel the heat rushing to my cheeks. He takes a step back and looks me up and down, taking everything in.

“You look amazing,” he says. I didn’t do anything overly crazy. I’m in a pair of suede brown leather boots, with black skin-tight leggings and an oversized cream sweater with studs on the shoulders. I did make my make-up a little flashier today, though. I wanted to not only impress Aesir but make a good impression on everyone at the club. Sure, my appearance is one thing, but I’m trying anything that could help me right now.

I laugh nervously as I fiddle with my hands. “Thanks.”

We both grab one dessert and start to walk toward the entrance of the clubhouse.

“I can’t wait for everyone to take a bite of the stuff you made. I told them you can bake, but I doubt any of them know how well you do.” He snickers with a smile on his face.

We make our way inside the clubhouse, and as we enter, all eyes are on us. Everyone stops what they’re doing to watch us walk through the main area. I follow Aesir’s lead because I don’t know where the hell I’m going. Aesir briefly and proudly introduces me to everyone as his girl as we pass them, and they all give a warm welcome in response.

We make our way into the kitchen, where Aesir helps me unload all of my desserts onto the countertops, showing them off to everyone around us. Magnolia’s in the kitchen and unwraps the peppermint bark cheesecake while Aesir takes the foil off the gingerbread cupcakes. Everly is in here and runs right up to the side of the counter. “Ooh! Those look yummy.”

“Yes, they do, but you can’t have any until after dinner, okay?”

“Okay,” Everly whines, and it instantly causes me to smile. She reminds me of my little sister, who passed away. So innocent and sweet. I shut my eyes briefly to shove away the memories of her that come crashing in like deadly waves. I’ve never been able to handle her loss well, and truthfully, I don’t know if I’ve ever fully processed it.

Aesir and I continue to go get the rest of the desserts while Dag and Esperanza help us get the last couple out. As we unwrap them in the kitchen, Esperanza’s eyes are practically growing twice their size. “I don’t even want the turkey after looking at these.”

Dag cracks up. “I’ve decided I’m eating one plate of food, and my second

plate will be trying every one of these.”

“I was thinkin’ the same damn thing,” Aesir adds with a chuckle.

Aesir takes me around to meet every club member and their ol’ lady that I haven’t met while I greet the ones I’ve met in the past. Everyone has their kids here, and there are so many babies.

I’m so glad he decided to invite me. I couldn’t imagine being stuck at home by myself today. It would’ve sucked so bad.

Once we have the desserts out on the counter, a woman whistles from the other end of the kitchen. “The turkey’s done, so if I could get one of you muscular men to take it out and cut it for me, then we’re good to go,” Gwendolyn, Rati’s woman, says.

Rati walks right over and grabs some oven mitts, then takes the turkey out and places it on the counter. He grabs a knife and begins slicing the turkey up evenly. It’s a massive turkey. I don’t think I’ve ever seen one this big before, but goodness, it smells so good.

Everyone begins piling in the kitchen, and we each grab a thick white Chinet plate, then go down the lineup. There’s the turkey, a sweet ham, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, sweet potato casserole, homemade stuffing, cranberry sauce, green bean casserole, bacon, green beans, garlic roasted carrots, and creamed Brussel sprouts. There’s so much that I don’t know if I’ll be able to hold myself back from eating two heaping plates full of food.

We make our way out of the kitchen and go down the hall, and there’s a huge dining area. I don’t want to call it a room because it’s more like a hall. It is something you’d see in a firehouse or in a cafeteria, but I guess that makes sense, considering this used to be a functioning warehouse. It also makes sense because of the size of their kitchen, too.

I follow Aesir’s lead as he picks a seat, and I sit directly beside him. Every single person takes a seat, and Runes, the president of the club, rises. He has a beer, and I notice a couple of ladies coming around the table either handing out beers or pouring wine. I opt for a sweet white wine while a couple of the other ladies are drinking wine as well, although Mags has a bottle of ginger ale in front of her.

“I can’t tell you how grateful I am that we can all be sitting around this table with our families and loved ones. Even more so since we’re all here together. I remember a time when we were cooking in motel rooms or going to McDonalds. This is such a step up from what we used to do. There have



been so many additions over the years, especially over this last year. It makes me happy to see all of you happy, starting families of your own and furthering the familial bond the club has. I'm not really one for toasts, but I'd like to say one now. To love, to family, and to loyalty. I love and appreciate every one of you, brothers and sisters, and thank you for riding this road with me." Runes lifts up his beer, and everyone else lifts their beers, wine glasses, and ginger ale.

We clink glasses, and all take a drink. I'm just coming into this whole situation, but it's so interesting to me that they have such a strong family dynamic here. I suppose in life, you don't just call your blood your family. Hell, sometimes your blood can be the worst people in your life.

We all proceeded to eat the delicious meal everyone pitched in to make, and after a while, everyone began going crazy about the dessert items I brought. Everyone was so impressed by how much work I put into making everything. I even got some compliments on the presentation, and it really humbled me. I'm just so glad everyone loved it.

The peppermint cheesecake and the almond tart was my favorite. It just makes me think about what I'm going to do for the seasonal catering menu in the spring.

Kraken stands up out of nowhere and clears his throat. "I know there's already been one speech tonight, but I have something to share with you all. Well, we do." Kraken looks down at his wife, and a few of the ladies around the table start smiling. "We're having a baby."

The whole table starts giving their congratulations, and then the ladies pull Magnolia off to the side and start chatting with her. I end up going with them, and they want to know how long they've been trying, why she didn't tell anyone, and essentially everything. The reason she didn't tell anyone is because she is a little older, and her risk of miscarriage is higher because of her age. She didn't want anyone to know until she at least got through the first trimester, which was yesterday.

The night continued, and after a few drinks, Aesir took me upstairs. We only ever stay at my place, but this is a welcome change. I'm so excited that our relationship is blossoming.

We walk down a long hallway, and finally, he stops in front of his door. He types in a key code, and a few moments later, the door beeps, and he's pushing it open.

I walk into a room that I think I'd see in a frat house. There are a couple

of dressers, the bed is unmade, magazines are on his computer desk, and he has clothes thrown around everywhere. It's giving me a good laugh right about now.

"I love this." I giggle with a smile spreading across my face.

"You love how unorganized and unprepared I am, huh?"

"Yeah, I do." I nod and then look right at him.

He shuts the door behind him and locks it as he takes off his cut and places it on the back of his desk chair. As soon as he has his cut off, I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him in close for a kiss.

He kisses me deeply, softer than he's ever kissed me before, and it makes me feel like I am the only woman on the face of the earth for him. He's sweet and kind and is what I've always deserved.

I hate that I ever gave Tyler the time of day, especially when Aesir treats me so much differently. I spent too much time on someone who never really valued me. I don't feel that way with Aesir, though.

He wraps a hand around the back of my neck and takes me to the bed, slowly peeling off layer after layer, pressing soft kisses down my body in the process.

I pull at his shirt and help him get every article of clothing off, and we continue kissing like two passionate teenagers. Before I know it, we're tangled with one another on his bed, doing the one thing we love most.

I end up falling asleep next to him and wake up after a couple of hours to go pee. I grab my phone and look around the room, hoping he has an attached bathroom since I'm in my birthday suit. Luckily, he has a bathroom right here. I push the door open slightly, head inside, shut it behind me, and pop a squat on the toilet.

While I pee, I check my text messages to see if my mom or brother sent me anything, but they didn't. However, someone else did.

**From: Tyler**

*Happy Thanksgiving, baby. I missed you today.*

Without even thinking about it, I sent a response.

**To: Tyler**

*Save that shit for someone who can be fooled by you. I'm not your baby anymore. Go fuck yourself.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *AESIR*

The group of us that are leaving are heading down to the port. Runes' friend is supposed to be taking us out within the hour. We don't know how long we're going to be here, but I'm hoping that it's only for a few days. We all brought a couple changes of clothes, essentials, and nothing else.

I'm following Runes on my bike, and the rest of the guys are scattered behind me. For it being close to the end of November, it's overly warm. That's all right, though. I'm not really a big fan of the cold.

We arrive at the port in no time and park under a covered awning. Runes' friend's truck is parked there, and there are cameras that watch over this part of the parking lot. I like the additional layer of security.

We all get off our bikes, grab our duffel bags, and follow Runes' lead. He walks toward a massive fishing vessel called Skip's Explorer. An older man who's probably in his late fifties smirks at the group of us. "Here, I thought you were gonna stand me up."

"I'd never stand ya up, Skip. I do appreciate you helpin' us like this," Runes tells him.

"I'm glad I can. Now, come aboard, and I'll show you the boat."

We all get on the boat and follow Skip as he tells us which is the bow and stern, which are the different floors of the boat, and finally shows us the below deck. There are some bunkbeds in one area, and tells us we can sleep in them whenever we need to catch some z's. He also shows us where his quarters are and tells us not to bother him if he's getting sleep unless they're in the middle of a storm or something is wrong with the boat.

We go through everything pretty quickly, and I think Skip is going to be a

good captain. We all toss our duffel bags below deck near the bunkbeds in cabinets on the end of them. Each bunk bed has a cabinet, and our bags fit in them perfectly.

“I’m gonna head upstairs and get ready to leave the dock,” Skip says, heading for the stairs.

“Do you need any help?” Runes asks.

“No, I’m good. I’ve got my crew.” Skip heads up the stairs, and the door to the upper deck shuts.

Vanir sits down at the U-shaped kitchen table and pulls his laptop from his backpack. He powers it up and gives it a few moments to load, then starts typing away. He pulls a small black box from his backpack, too, and sets it up. I don’t know what the hell it is, but as long as he does, it doesn’t matter.

“We have a plan for Cuba yet, or what?” Rati asks, looking right at Runes.

Runes shakes his head. “No, not yet. We have a bit more to do. Vanir is going to keep watching Roque’s location to see how it’s shifting. Once we get an idea of what his day-to-day is like, we can set a plan. That won’t be until we’re close to Cuba.”

“There’s so much time and resources in this. We don’t want anythin’ to fuck it up,” Fenrir adds.

I give a nod of understanding, and the other brothers are quiet. “Regardless, it won’t matter. Roque is going to be finished once we set foot in Cuba.”

“Damn straight. He’s gotten away with way too much,” Dag comments.

“No, he hasn’t. Him paying now might be overdue, but he hasn’t gotten away with it,” Logi comments. There’s so much anger behind his words, and I can almost guarantee Logi is going to be the one who takes Roque’s life. Sure, Mord was a big part of his issues with Skadi, but Roque had a small hand in it, too. Not to mention the child trafficking. None of us can stand that.

When Roque dies, the world isn’t going to miss him for any sort of shining light. The world will be better with him gone, but none of us are fools. Killing him will only mean someone else takes his power at some point, and there are men just like Roque. We’d stop them, too, if we knew who they were.

“What are we going to do when Roque is dead and someone takes his power?” I ask, wondering if anyone has given it any thought.

Runes takes in a deep breath and sighs heavily. “It’s inevitable,

unfortunately. But we'll face that bridge when we come to it. As of right now, Roque is our priority, and we'll handle him."

I nod, understanding.

"The Cubans won't be happy with it. Once we do this and leave, they'll know where to look. We could be opening up another can of worms," Vanir speaks up for the first time. "I'm not saying we should put any of this to a halt, but I'm serious. They have the Toad working with them, which means they have an unlimited amount of cash. I worked my ass off with our ally's hacker to get this far. The Cubans *will* know it was us."

"I have no doubt about it. There's nothing we can do to stop that. It's a risk we have to be willing to take. We all want revenge for what Roque did to us, and it's long overdue, isn't it?" Runes looks at every brother who's here, and we all nod, give a grunt of approval, or some other confirmation.

"Nothing is being changed. We already voted on this a couple of weeks ago. Roque is dead meat," Fenrir grits out.

This is the first day of our trip, and I hope we're out of here within a few days. I want this shit with Roque to be done and over with. When he's dealt with, it'll mean there's one less thing for us to worry about.

We've been keeping an eye out for Dag and Rayna's stepfather to be showing up around the club. His mom and sister are still staying with us because no one knows where he is. We know he's not going to give up until he can get his hands on the girls. They're safer with us than if they went back home.

Thinking of keeping women safe, my mind drifts back to my woman. The one I left at home. It feels odd to be so far away from her, and I'm sure I'll be thinking about Aziza as much as I can. There's something about her that always stays with me.

The more time we spend together, the more I know I could be with her long-term.

Gods, I didn't want to admit it, but I grew attached to her months ago when we were just fucking. I'm latched on, and I don't want to let go. I will just pray to the Gods that she doesn't give me a reason to.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

*AZIZA*

I've been busting my ass left and right since Black Friday getting everything ready for this wedding. Who on Earth gets married on the Sunday after Thanksgiving? They have to be borderline insane between preparing for Thanksgiving festivities, shopping on Black Friday, and trying to fit in family time, too. Plus, having wedding events? You couldn't pay me enough to have a wedding on a holiday weekend.

I've already finished decorating the cake, and I'm waiting for Magnolia's team to come pick it up. It's a four-tier system, and I will help them secure it in their vehicle. I've already told them they'll need a cart to take it into the venue and they have to be very careful while they're driving. Mags assured me everything would be fine. However, I have reservations about their ability to transport a cake of this caliber properly.

I'm putting the finishing touches on the cupcakes the bride and groom requested. They're a mixture of gingerbread, pumpkin, chocolate devil, red velvet, and a snickerdoodle. All of them have a sweet cream cheese icing, and I'm sure the clients are going to love them. I naturally kept a few for myself since I overestimated how much batter I'd need for each. I figure the people at the club won't mind eating some extras, and I know Everly loves cupcakes.

I grab a few of my black cupcake boxes with my Zizi's Treats logo on the top. My logo is a combination of gold, pink, and white with flowers around my name and a couple of flares.

Each box fits twenty-four cupcakes, and I pack them quickly yet carefully. Magnolia's team is going to be here within the hour, and I want everything perfect for when they arrive. I decided to put the cupcakes in one

of the large fridges so the icing stays nice and firm, plus the fridge will preserve the freshness.

I continue keeping myself busy by packing the twenty boxes of desserts for Magnolia's top clients. We've been chopping away at the bits to get them done as soon as possible. She's very eager to make the deliveries and has verified twenty of her clients will be at their businesses or homes this weekend. Magnolia wants me to succeed, and I'm glad to have such a great friend like her.

We've already made deliveries to ten of her clients last week before the holiday, and they all seemed eager to try the desserts. She had a great idea to do these boxes, and I know word is already spreading quickly. One client has already booked me for custom orders for their personal Christmas party, and they referred me to a friend who booked the catering company for the company's Christmas party.

Things are finally starting to look up, and I think it's because of the dead weight I cut off. Rather, I finally cut off the dead weight. I should have never stayed with Tyler after what he did to me. The way he demeaned me. The way he'd toss me aside like I was nothing after I'd literally give him the last of my money to pay his bills.

He was ungrateful, and I only ever felt like a cash cow to him. It's a cash cow that wasn't even loaded in the first place.

I take in a deep breath and shut my eyes, trying not to remember everything he put me through. It was all so unnecessary. There was absolutely no reason for 90 percent of what happened in our relationship, and yet I thought it was acceptable.

I blame myself, honestly. If I really dig deep down, I stayed with Tyler because I didn't want to be alone. I felt an obligation and loyalty to him because we'd known each other for so long. In the beginning, I felt that fealty because he was best friends with my brother, but he even managed to fuck that up.

My father left my mother when we were in Dubai. It was after our little sister, Yasmin, died. She was diagnosed with leukemia when she was two and didn't even make it to her fourth birthday. My father couldn't handle the pain of losing her, and I think at the time, he wanted to start over.

I'm the kind of person who wants to find logic behind the choices people make. I never realized that, subconsciously, I didn't want to be alone. That's why I stayed. I didn't want to be in a position like my mother, where she

invested so much in her partner, and they abandoned her like she was nothing.

That's what my father did. He abandoned us. He started a new life with a new family. My mother started the process of obtaining visas for us so we could start the journey to become United States citizens, and we started a new life.

The whooshing sound of the swinging door leading into the kitchen pulls me from my thoughts. I figure it's Magnolia or her employees coming to pick up the cake and cupcakes, but it's someone else entirely.

"How did you know where I was?" I come to a complete stop packing up these desserts and stare Tyler down.

He smirks smugly, and it immediately pisses me off. He's always been a cocky bastard, and not in a good way. "I'm always going to know where you are, Aziza. I love you. Do you really think I'm not going to keep tabs on you?"

I raise my brows and scoff. "Do you realize how creepy you sound right now? I broke up with you, Tyler. I ended our relationship because it wasn't working. Why do you think you have a right to keep tabs on me? You don't. You don't even have a right to be texting me and surely no right to show up here unannounced."

His smile grows bigger, and I can see he's completely unaffected by this. "Sure, we've broken up a few times, but we always find our way back to each other. The same thing is going to happen, even if you keep telling me it won't."

God, this guy is unbelievable.

"You're delusional if you think I'm ever going to come back to you. I told you I was done, and I mean it. I'm done. I don't want to hear from you. I don't want to see you. I don't even think about you anymore. You're dead to me, Tyler. What is so hard to understand about that?"

He shakes his head, almost as if he's denying everything I'm saying. "You don't mean any of it. You can't live without me, Aziza. I'm your rock. I keep you grounded. I make you happy. You acting like you don't care is adorable, but I'm not buying it."

I huff in aggravation, and my words start spilling out of me faster than I anticipated. "It's anything but an act. It's the cold, hard truth you're trying so hard to deny. I was a fool for ever falling for you in the first place. All you did was degrade me and compare me to women who were made of plastic.



You put unobtainable standards in front of me and shit on me anytime you could because I wasn't the perfect bimbo Barbie bitch you wanted me to be."

I was a fool for ever loving him. I see what I deserve now, and I will never go running back to him whenever he calls. I was loyal to Tyler but knowing him for so long doesn't mean I should get treated like shit.

"I like it when you're mad. Please, keep going." Tyler leans up against the counter and bites his bottom lip. It's the same thing he would do whenever he wanted to fuck me. Nausea flutters through me at the sight of it. He makes me fucking sick.

"Get the fuck out and don't ever come back," I snarl at him while I get back to boxing up these desserts.

"Stop saying things you don't mean."

That's it. I shoot him a death stare that should convince him I'm not playing around. "Get the fuck out, Tyler! The fact you keep tabs on me like this is freaky as fuck, and I'm over it! Do you hear me? I'm fucking over it!" I'm screaming at the top of my lungs and don't even notice Magnolia pushing the door to the kitchen open.

"I'm pretty sure it's your cue to go," Magnolia speaks up, glaring at Tyler like he's the devil himself.

He stops leaning on the counter and shifts his eyes over to Magnolia. "People like you are the reason she's not coming back to me. Always meddling and putting idiotic ideas in her head. She was happy with me until she started doing more work with you. Dumb bitch."

"You've got one thing right. I'm a bitch, but I'm sure as fuck not a dumb one. Now, get the fuck out before I pop off on you." Magnolia pulls a gun from her purse and points it right at Tyler. He doesn't even look afraid. He smiles and grazes his eyes up and down her body.

"You wouldn't dare."

"Don't test me right now. I'm feeling a little trigger-happy."

Tyler scoffs and turns to meet my gaze. "You're going to regret this, Aziza. It would've been better for you if you just came back to me, but if you want to do it this way, we can."

He doesn't give me time to respond and finally leaves the kitchen. Magnolia follows him, and I move so I can see through the glass. I want to make sure nothing bad happens to her. She locks the door behind him once he leaves, and she comes right back into the kitchen.

"Holy shit. How did he know you were here?"

“I don’t know. He said he was keeping tabs on me, but I don’t know how. It’s not like any of my friends are on his side, so no one could be tipping him off.” Every single one of my friends always told me one thing: I deserved better.

He might have one of his buddies tailing me, but I feel like I would’ve noticed someone by now.

“God. Why is he such a creep?”

“I don’t know. I think he’s a narcissist who’s getting annoyed that I’m not playing his game anymore.”

“That sounds about right. Don’t let him make you feel like you’re doing something you shouldn’t. You left him, and I’m so proud of you for that. But you have the right to be happy. Tyler never made you happy. He only muted your happiness.”

Magnolia is right. Tyler didn’t make me happy. My world was full of color until he came into my life, and then he made it black and white. I found the color again, and I will never let that change ever again.

## CHAPTER NINE

*AESIR*

“We good to get this thing docked, or do you want me sitting pretty out here for a while?” Skip asks Runes the second he gets to the bottom of the stairs.

Runes looks over at Vanir, who’s been typing away on his laptop for the last forty minutes. Gods knows what he’s doing, but I imagine it’s something to do with getting to Roque.

“Give me two minutes, and I’ll—ah! Okay, he’s stayin’ consistent. He’s only going to a few places every day, but he does the same thing every night. He’s in bed by ten and stays there until nine the following morning. We can grab him easily if you want to, Prez.”

“Yeah, I don’t want any fuss. The less of a scene we can make, the better,” Runes confirms before looking over at Skip. “Go ahead and dock the boat. We’ll make sure we’re fast with what we need to get done, okay?”

“Sounds good. I don’t plan on staying here for long. As soon as you boys are done with your business, we’ll get the hell out of here. I’ll make it seem like I’m heading into town for some supplies, food, and whatnot.” I’m sure if Skip gets off the boat and makes it seem like he’s docking for a specific reason, it won’t cause anyone to pay too much attention to us.

Skip heads back up the stairwell to the upper deck to make his call while the group of us stay below deck. We’re trying to keep a low profile, and that means we need to not be seen until we’re ready to strike.

“So, what’s the plan, Prez?” Logi’s the one to ask it, but we’re all wondering how he wants to pull this off.

“Skip’s calling so he can put the boat in the port, so I think we let him get

off and go get his supplies. We don't want to draw too much attention, so I'd say at nightfall we go," Runes answers, looking around to each brother who's scattered around the galley.

"Sounds solid. Do we know if he has security with him?" Fenrir asks.

Vanir's the first one to chime in. "I don't have confirmation on it, but I wouldn't be surprised if he did."

Fenrir nods and sucks in a sharp breath. "We all need to be careful then. Do your jobs and do it swiftly."

"Fenrir is right. It's going to happen very quickly once we get there, but this is where I want you guys. Aesir and Dag, I want the two of you with me. We're going into the house, and we'll deal with Roque. Fenrir and Vanir, keep an eye out out front and make sure no one comes inside. Logi and Rati, I want you two doing the same out back. I don't want any surprises."

"What about the sides?" Rati asks.

I know there's no possible way we're not going to clear those out before we head inside. "We'll circle the home before we head inside and make sure there aren't any surprises. Once we're done with that, you can all go to your positions."

A couple of us grunt while the rest nod. It's silent for a few moments, and Runes clears his throat. "Get some rest and do whatever you need to do. We're going to be busy tonight, and I need all of you ready for what's about to go down tonight."

A couple of the guys go back to the sleeping quarters where the bunks are, but I sit down at the U-shaped table and pull out my cell. The rest of the guys scatter until it's just me and Vanir. He's continuing to type away on his laptop while I call Aziza and put my phone to my ear.

It took a few rings, but she finally answered. "Hey, I wasn't expecting to hear from you."

"Well, you should've known better than that. Whenever I can call when I'm away, I will. How are things back home, Ziza?"

There's a brief moment of silence before she answers. "They're okay. I'm just . . . something happened at the bakery."

"Like what?" I immediately ask.

"Tyler showed up."

"Sorry, what?" I'm seeing red right now. Why would he think it's appropriate for him to show up at her place of work? How did he even know where she worked to begin with? It's not like she made a public

announcement about the new business location yet. She told me she hasn't been doing that for a while because she wants to get up and running before she gets people showing up there for catering order appointments or pickups.

"Yeah, he walked straight into the kitchen. I didn't even know how he knew where I was working, and then I asked him. He responded back, creepy as hell. Basically, he asked if I really expected him not to keep tabs on me."

"What happened after that?" I'm trying not to let my anger show through my voice so evidently, but it's hard. All I want to do is have the bastard right in front of me and rip his head off. He has no respect. None. Aziza ended things. You think he'd understand that means he can't bother her anymore.

"It was a combination of a sob story and bullshit, telling me that we're meant to be together, that I'm his girl, all this other crap. I told him I broke up with him for a reason, and I'm not getting back together with him this time. He's fucking crazy if he thinks I am. He told me that he was my rock and I can't live without him, but it's a bunch of bullshit. I *can* live without him, and I'm happily doing so with a great man by my side instead of him."

Warmth spreads through my body, hearing the last part of what she's saying. It's confirmation she's happy with me, and I don't think Tyler will end up being successful in weaseling his way back into her life. She sees his true colors, and he isn't a decent guy.

"I'm glad I'm makin' you happy. Anything else happen with him?"

"He was persistent and wouldn't leave, kept telling me how my act was adorable. He's so delusional that he thought I was faking not wanting anything to do with him. Ridiculous, completely ridiculous. I told him to get the fuck out and never come back, and instead of listening to me, he told me not to say something I didn't mean. One thing led to another, and Magnolia came in. She ended up pulling her gun out on him to convince him leaving was in his best interests."

Damn, Magnolia has zero fear. I snicker to myself, thinking how savage she can be. She's kind of the female version of Kraken.

"I'm glad she was there to ruin that asshole's day. Hopefully, he got the message." If anything, I know Tyler is a persistent son of a bitch. He's had Aziza in his life for so long that I doubt he knows what life is without her anymore. It makes sense that he's struggling now and wants to get back with her. It's getting to the point where he comes crawling back and makes false promises he has no intention of keeping.

"She made it very clear that it was a bad idea for him to stay. Crystal

clear.” Her voice gets a little more serious, and I’m glad Magnolia was there for her. There’s no telling what would’ve happened if she wasn’t there.

“You have no idea how relieved I am to know that she was there when I couldn’t be. Now, I don’t know if you’ve thought about it, but I don’t think you should stay at your place. I’d really appreciate it if you stayed in my room at the club. Kraken and a couple of my other brothers are there. Until I’m back, I’d feel good if you’re there.”

“I don’t think Tyler is going to cause any more trouble. I’ll be fine back at my place, and I don’t want to impose on you.”

“Ziza, you couldn’t impose on me even if you tried. The code for my room is 4739. You type in the number and then click the button in the center.”

“Okay, fine, I’ll stay in your room.”

Honestly, I’m pissed that I’m here. Aziza needs me there, and I don’t trust Tyler as far as I can throw him. But the club needs me here. It’s hard being torn between two different places. I want to be there, but the club needs me here too.

“Thank you, I appreciate that, Ziza. I’ll let Kraken know to expect you at the club.”

“Okay, sounds good. I’ll text you in a little while. Stay safe, okay?” Aziza sounds a little worried, so I do my best to reassure her I’m okay.

“I will, and I’ll see you as soon as I can when I get back home.”

“Okay, bye.”

“Bye.”

Vanir turns his head my way once he sees that Aziza and I have gotten off the phone. He shrugs with a smirk on his face before going back to his laptop. “So, what did Tyler do now?”

“Showed up at Aziza’s new bakery talking a whole bunch of nonsense, then acted like Aziza didn’t mean a word she said when she told him to get out, that she didn’t care, or anything else.”

“Gods, man. What the fuck is wrong with him?” I wish I knew.

“Who knows.”

I shoot a quick text over to Kraken, letting him know Aziza will be staying at the club for the next couple of nights. I didn’t give him all the details, but I let him know that Tyler showed up at her bakery. He told me he’d keep her safe until I returned, which lifted a lot of weight off my shoulders.

I need to focus on what's going on in the present moment, not worry about things going on back home. If I can't focus on what's going on, I could end up getting hurt, or one of my brothers could end up getting hurt in the process.

My brothers and I wait for nightfall, and once it's dark out and Skip is back, we go above deck and get off the boat. Roque's home is only about a mile away from the dock, so we should be able to work quickly.

We arrive at his home and sneak onto his property, all of us being careful not to draw too much attention. We have a job to do, but first, we have to make sure Roque doesn't have any security lurking around. I'm certain he must have some. He's the head of the Culebra cartel, which means he's always going to be protected.

Everyone takes their positions and checks the property, but as we make a turn down the stone path, I spot a dark figure standing off to the right. It looks like he's staring at the house and not away from it.

I sneak up as quietly as I can and go up behind him. I grab the man by the neck and tackle him to the ground. He begins struggling, and I slam my head against his. He's trying to gather his bearings and overpower me, but he won't.

While I might not be the strongest man in the club, I know how to fight. I slam my head against his again, and he grows still for a few moments.

I think I knocked him out, but he shifts slightly, which only proves he's still awake. My heart beats intensely in my chest, and he reaches for something. Before he can make a move on me, I grab my knife from my pocket, flip it open, and jam it right into his neck. The last thing any of us need is for him to make a fuss and draw attention to us.

I keep the pressure on my knife and look around. Luckily, the moonlight gives us enough illumination to see where everyone is. Honestly, that's how I saw this guy.

"Come on, let's circle around the place and see if this guy has any more buddies," Runes says lowly.

I twist the knife in this guy's throat and wait for any other movement, but there isn't any. I remove it from his neck, wipe the blade on the ground, and rise, following the rest of the guys as we make our way around the place.

Both Rati and Logi end up taking down two other men, and Fenrir finds another one on the other corner of the property. We all take them out quietly so Roque doesn't get awoken by us.

Once the outside perimeter is secured, Runes, Dag, and I head for the front door, and surprisingly, we don't have to break in. The door is unlocked, and we walk right into the house. Everyone else takes their positions outside, making sure nothing will go wrong for us.

The entire home is as luxurious as the outside. Chandeliers hang in almost every room. There are rich rugs and ornate art pieces hanging on every wall. The entire place bleeds money, and blood is what's gotten him this far. Roque is the head of the Culebra cartel and one of the most sinister sons of bitches on the planet.

We walk through the home quietly, trying to locate which bedroom he's in. Vanir's really good at what he does, but we can't pinpoint exactly where he is in the home, just that he's in the home every night.

I find it funny that he's the leader of a cartel, yet he's running from us and hiding. He knows we're not the kind of people you can fuck with and get away with it. There will always be consequences for what you do to us or the people we care about.

Finally, I push open a door, and there's an obvious body in the middle of the bed. I walk over to the person who's lightly snoring. As I tower over them, I realize this is Roque. Sleeping peacefully, but he won't be for long.

I keep my eyes on him while briefly glancing around to make sure there are no weapons. I spot a gun on his bedside table, so I pick it up and tuck it in the back of my pants. I wait for Dag and Runes to come near the door so I can wave them in. A couple of minutes pass when Dag comes by, and then Runes.

They both walk into the room just as quietly as I did. Runes points to him, and I give a firm nod. This is him.

Runes and Dag grab him by either leg and yank him out. Roque tries to reach for the gun by his bedside table, but I have already moved it.

He begins speaking Spanish, but none of us understand what he's saying. "What the fuck!" Now that we understand.

Dag and Roque drag him into the hallway. The next thing I know, the light is turned on. They drop his feet simultaneously, and Dag pulls a gun out on him.

Roque reels his head back in shock. "Are you surprised to see us here?" Runes questions him, slight amusement lacing his tone.

"Let me go before my men kill each and every one of you." He doesn't know all of his men are dead, and I can't wait to see his face when he finds



out.

Runes takes a step forward, towering over him. “You think you’re invincible because you’re the leader of a cartel? Did you think you could hide from us forever? You fucked with the wrong people, Roque.”

Roque’s eyes dart around the hallway, searching for an escape route, but there isn’t one. He’s trapped, and he won’t make it out. Vengeance has finally come for him.

“I didn’t do anything to you! Why are you so dead set on coming after me? Huh? Nothing I did directly affected you, Runes.” Roque is grasping for straws, but it won’t work.

Runes kneels down and grabs Roque by the back of his greasy hair, holding it firmly. “If it affects my club, it affects me. You wouldn’t understand that because you don’t care about anyone other than yourself. You tried to get one of my brother’s ol’ lady killed. You hired someone we kicked out to work with you, who had a vendetta against the club. Dare I even mention your involvement in the child trafficking ring. You acted like our ally, yet all you were was a snake in the grass.”

“We’re all drudging through this shit pile called life. Don’t act like every choice you’ve made is a good one. It wasn’t. I do what needs to be done.”

Runes grabs him by the collar and pulls him up to eye level. “Is that how you condone selling children as sex slaves?” There’s a cold, hard edge to his voice. “You thought you could get away with this? Fuckin’ pathetic. You aren’t. Not anymore. You might have hired the Toad to hide all of your disgusting business ventures, but you would have never escaped us. We’re the Raiders of Valhalla, and we slaughter every enemy in front of us.”

Runes releases Roque, and he falls back, his head hitting the floor. Dag walks off, and the next thing I know, he’s coming back with Logi.

A sickening smirk is dragged across his lips, and he marches right over to us. “What’re we doin’? Clean? Dirty? Quick?” If anyone has built up rage, it’s him. Skadi was almost killed because of Roque.

“Quick and painful,” Runes grumbles. I haven’t seen my Prez with so much anger in a really long time. He rises and makes room for Logi, who quickly goes into action.

He pulls his leg back and slams it into Roque’s ribs. Roque coughs loudly and groans. He tries to get away, stumbling in the process, but Logi doesn’t allow him to make another move.

He jumps on his ribs with all of his body weight, and there’s a large

crackling sound. There's no doubt Logi just broke multiple ribs. It sounded so bad that it almost caused me physical pain.

I stay back and watch, letting Logi take Roque's life. Logi gets down on the ground and grabs Roque by the head. Roque tries to struggle, moving his head to the right and the left, desperately trying to get Logi's grip off him. It's no use.

Logi pulls his head back and slams it on the marble floor in the hallway, once, twice, three, and then four times. After the fourth time, there's a steady stream of blood pouring out of the back.

Roque stops struggling, and Logi goes to grab something, but there's nothing there. "Fuck, I lost my knife."

"Here." I hand him mine, and he flips it open, jamming the knife in Roque's eye sockets.

There's no way Roque is coming back from this, and Gods, does it feel good.

He's finally dealt with.

## CHAPTER TEN

*AZIZA*

Aesir called me this morning to let me know they arrived home from Cuba. I thought they were going to be gone a lot longer than they were, but I'm not disappointed at all.

In fact, I'm elated. I've missed him more than I thought I would since he's been gone. I can't wait to have his arms wrapped around my body, holding me tight.

But that will have to wait until later. I'm so busy here at the bakery, preparing boxes of treats for some of Magnolia's top catering clients.

Every client we've visited thus far has been happy to receive the boxes, and I've made good impressions. I'm really glad we came up with the idea to do this. I knew it would be good for my business, but I didn't anticipate so many orders coming in so soon.

I'm currently putting the finishing touches on each box before we head out to deliver them in person. I make sure every dessert looks nice and has tissue paper placed beautifully around them so none of them rub together. I want every person to be able to see how much pride I take in my work.

Magnolia's going to be here any minute. She texted me not too long ago and said she'd be on her way soon, that she was finishing up some things at the club next door.

I don't know why, but every time we get ready to go out and give these to clients, I get so nervous. I think it's a combination of excitement and anxiety. I want everyone to love what I'm making for them, and if someone doesn't like it, it could very well cost me business.

I'm very meticulous with each and every box, making sure every single

one of them is perfect. I know all of my hard work will be worth it when I see the looks of joy and gratitude on our clients' faces when they receive them.

The bakery smells heavenly, a mix of sweet and savory aromas that make my mouth water. It doesn't help that I haven't had any breakfast this morning, but I've been so busy. Sometimes, I'm lucky if I get in a protein shake after my coffee fix.

The shelves are lined with freshly baked goods like croissants, cupcakes, and muffins just waiting to be packaged up and sent off on their way. I've had an influx of orders, and Magnolia needed two hundred croissants for a catering order tomorrow. It's some sort of brunch deal where they requested a variety of cold salads. I'm excited to get feedback on that. Usually, she gets her bread from a wholesale company.

If she keeps me busy like this, I'm going to end up needing to hire some help soon. The crazy thing is I think I'll be able to afford it!

I take a moment to appreciate how beautiful they look, all arranged in neat rows, before I turn back to my task at hand. It makes me think about the small store she has discussed with me. She wants me to put it in the building next door so anyone who orders from the club can get whatever's being offered that day. Plus, customers could stop in and order whatever is available that day in the display case.

Everything I've ever wanted is being displayed in front of me, and I'm in complete awe. Sometimes it doesn't even feel real.

I shake away my internal thoughts and continue filling the boxes.

I carefully pick up each item and place it inside one of the boxes before tying it closed with twine and a pink bow. Each box is unique in its own way yet still follows the same color scheme.

Once all ten boxes have been filled with delicious treats, Magnolia makes her way into the kitchen. "Hey there."

"Hey, sorry I'm late. I thought I'd be here sooner."

"It's okay. You didn't tell me a time, so I wasn't pressed. I knew you'd get here as soon as you could."

"Okay, whew. What do you still need help with?"

I take a quick look around and see that we're all good to go. "We just need to load the boxes up in your car and get going."

"Awesome. You got a lot done this morning. How's it going with the croissant order?"

"All done and cooling off."

“Man, you’re the best,” Magnolia says as she begins grabbing a few boxes. I grab the rest, and we make our way out of the kitchen and go to the elevator. It only took us a couple of minutes to get downstairs, and then we headed straight to Magnolia’s car.

It’s an absolutely beautiful day with a slight chill. It’s almost like the chill you experience when you place your hand on a cast-iron bathtub, shocking but manageable. Luckily, I have a light jacket on.

Magnolia and I proceed to load the boxes into her car and quickly get to action making deliveries. A couple of clients weren’t where they were supposed to be, so we handed them off to their wives, partners, or assistants. We’re pulling up to the last client now, which is one of the biggest attorney offices in Tallahassee.

It isn’t something small like Dag and Esperanza have. They have attorney after attorney who specializes in various types of law.

We make our way up to the reception desk, and Magnolia asks for Sal, who is her client. The receptionist is a nice older woman who warmly greets us. She makes a call to see if Sal is available, and once she gets the go-ahead, she personally escorts us back to his office. He’s looking over some paperwork with glasses perched on top of his nose.

Magnolia greets him warmly and introduces me to him, then hands him the box with all of the desserts I made. He smiles wide as he opens the box and grabs a chocolate peppermint cake pop. His face lights up as he takes his first bite. “This is amazing. You’re the one who made them?”

I nod and lightly smile. “Yes, I am. I’m glad you like it.”

“I do. I don’t think I’ve ever tasted a dessert this good before. Are you doing catering events or personal orders?”

“Both. I can honestly do whatever you need me to as long as I have notice.” My business has been growing and growing since I became partners, in a sense, with Magnolia.

Let’s face it. If she had never given me the ability to start working from the new kitchen, I would never be getting all of this done.

“I have board meetings every month. I’d love for you to make a few options of sweets for them. Magnolia’s company usually provides our food, so can you deliver everything all at once, or how does that work?” Sal looks right at Magnolia.

“Zizi’s Treats is an extension of my catering company. For any catering events, we can deliver everything at once, and as far as individual orders and

delivery for cakes, cookies, those sorts of things, that's something you'd have to speak directly to Aziza about."

"Okay, I see. Well, I want desserts for the monthly board meetings, and I think we might as well add desserts to our yearly Christmas, Halloween, and 4th of July parties. My youngest daughter is turning sixteen next week. Is that enough notice to have you bake a cake for her?"

"That's plenty of notice. I just need you to email me with the flavor of cake and icing that she'd like. If you have any idea on how she wants the cake to look, send me some inspirational photos." I dig into my pocket and hand him one of my business cards. It has my phone number and email, so he'll be able to reach me.

"I will chat with her this evening and send you an email sometime tomorrow."

"That's perfect. I'm glad you like the desserts, and I look forward to hearing from you."

"It was lovely meeting you," Sal says and then turns to look at Magnolia. "Thank you so much for bringing her by. It was a pleasure as always."

"The pleasure is mine. Have a great day, and we'll chat soon." Magnolia and I both took our leave and walked down the hallway, went into the main lobby, and then left the building.

As we're walking up to Magnolia's car, we both begin chatting. "These boxes for the clients are working out really well. Even if we only have one like Sal every day we do this, that's a consistent job you'll have."

"Yeah, you're right. This client outreach was really smart. I'm so glad we're doing this. I . . . I also want to tell you how appreciative I am that you're giving me these opportunities, Magnolia. Seriously, it's starting to change my life." I was astonished to receive my first check from her a couple of days ago for the desserts I've been providing her with. It was triple what I normally bring in for one week's worth of work.

"I know. It's why I decided to invest time and energy into you and not someone who was going to fuck me over. We've worked on so many catering jobs that I trust you, Aziza. You're a good girl, and you're a great friend."

"Thank you."

We get into her car, and both buckle up before she takes off. There's a couple minutes of silence, and it'll take us almost fifteen minutes to get back to the bakery, so I might as well chat with her.

"So, this club stuff. I need you to explain that to me. I'm new to all this,

right? But things are so hush-hush.”

Magnolia giggles lightly. “You’re talking about some of the guys leaving for Cuba, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I just don’t understand why Aesir isn’t telling me what he’s doing.”

“It’s because it’s club business. I’m Kraken’s ol’ lady, and I don’t even know everything that’s going on. He pulls me into some things, and I do know why they went to Cuba. It was for a good reason and made sense, so I assure you there’s nothing to worry about.”

“Oh, no. I’m not really worried about anything. The secrecy was just getting to me a bit. I don’t really know much about the club either, except the fact that they have a brotherly bond sort of thing.”

Magnolia nods, “You’re right, they do. When people are patched into a motorcycle club, they become your family. If you’re married to someone, dating them, they become the club’s family too.”

“So, how do they make money and stuff? I don’t really see many of the guys having outside jobs except Dag,” Dag’s an attorney, but do the other guys even work? I know a couple of them volunteer at the local fire department.”

“I can’t speak on that. There are some things I’m not able to tell you, even if we are friends. In time, you’ll find out everything you need to know, Aziza, especially if you plan on being with Aesir for a long time.”

I think we could be together for a while, but I don’t know if we’re going to be together for the rest of our lives. It’s still so new, and I’m taking it slow with him. What I don’t want to do is have a repeat of everything I’ve been through with Tyler. I jumped in way too fast in that relationship.

Magnolia continued to drive, and we eventually arrived at the building. I’m done work for the day, so I say my goodbyes and then get in my car, heading straight home. I’m so beat, and I’m craving a shower more than anything.

I get behind the wheel, start my car up, and then buckle up. With one quick glance, I make sure I have my purse and head home.

It starts pouring out of nowhere, and every time this happens, people suddenly forget how to drive. I swear, everyone wants to drop from going fifty to thirty just because water is falling from the sky. There’s no reason for it. It’s not even like it’s been raining for a long time, and we have to worry about sitting water and hydroplaning.

I shake my head and continue driving when, suddenly, my low-pressure sensor goes off on my dash. This couldn't be worse timing. The light just came on, so I'm sure I can make it home and put some air in it in the morning.

At least, that's what I think. I don't make it very far until I feel like I'm driving on my rim, so I pull off to the shoulder and wait for cars to pass. I'm on a back road at this point, so at least I can be thankful for that.

I get out of the car and shield myself from the rain as much as I can. One quick glance at the tire, and I know I'm fucked. It's completely on the rim. There probably isn't one pound of pressure in there at all.

Fuck.

"Hey, I thought that was your car. You okay?"

I know that voice. It's one I don't want to hear.

"Tyler?" I turn, and sure enough, there he is in the flesh.

He's wearing the same baseball jacket he wore on our first date, and his hair is still sleeked back like it usually is.

"What are you doing here?" My heart is racing as I'm trying to figure out how he happened to be here, just as my tire went flat.

He shrugs and looks right into my eyes. "I went out to get a bite to eat and saw your car pulled off to the side. Figured I'd see if it was actually you and if you were okay."

My stomach dropped, and I had to hold back my frustration. I'm so mad and confused. What is he doing here? It seems like too much of a coincidence for him to magically be here right now.

It finally clicks. Tyler must have been following me. His excuse of going out to get food is total bullshit. He hated wasting money like that when we were together, so why would he start going out now that he's single?

He somehow knew I had a flat tire, and that's why he's here right now. He wanted to be the hero and swoop in to save me, just like old times.

"I appreciate that, but I'm okay," I tell him as I go around to my trunk and get out my spare tire. All I need now is my jack, but I look everywhere, and it's gone.

What in the actual fuck?

I take a step back and look right at him. This is too weird. I need some distance between us before things escalate. "That's kind and all," I say, trying my best not to snap at him. I know Tyler. I know what he's capable of, and he would do this. He's the type who plays games to gain the upper hand, "But



it looks like you already know what happened, so there's *no* need for you to change the tire. I have roadside assistance, so I'll call them."

He steps forward and starts explaining himself, but I don't want to hear it. "It'll be hours before someone can come out and help you. Come on, Aziza, just let me help you out."

"No. Get lost. I'll call someone from the club to come help me if you really think roadside assistance will take that long."

"The club?"

"Yeah, the Raiders of Valhalla MC. My boyfriend is a member there."

Tyler raises both of his brows in pure and utter shock. His eye twitches, and I know he's about half a second from going postal. "You won't give us another chance, but you'll be with some lowlife scum like that?"

I scoff and glare right at him. "Leave me the fuck alone, Tyler."

Tyler cusses under his breath and walks back over to his vehicle. Meanwhile, I get in my car and call Aesir, praying he's available to come help me. Sure enough, he answers on the second ring.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

As you've probably guessed Magnus' story is up next and I am pairing him with Rayna. I've had a few hints here and there and I hope you guys are excited for their story.

I also wanted to say if any of you are having difficulty downloading the full file of this book, please email me at [author@elizabethknoxbooks.com](mailto:author@elizabethknoxbooks.com). The last couple of books I've uploaded, some of you have only gotten partial versions of the story. In Sabotage there is a Prologue, twenty chapters between that, and an epilogue at the end.

I can't wait to hear what you guys thought about Aesir and Aziza's story.

Xoxo,  
Elizabeth

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth is a romantic suspense author most popular for her motorcycle club and mafia books. While Elizabeth loves to write she is an avid reader as well who reads a mixture of genres. She lives in the North-Eastern United States on a farm with her rescue animals. When she isn't working you can find her spending time with her family, camping, or binge watching the latest trending show on Netflix.

Make sure you join Elizabeth's [newsletter](#) so you can get special news, announcements, and sneak peeks into incoming books.

If you're not already part of her exclusive reader's group on Facebook, join [Knox's Book Babes](#).



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