



When the past
won't let go...

Savage

SATAN'S FURY MC

SG

NYT AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

L. WILDER

Savage

SATAN'S FURY MC- SG

L. WILDER

Savage: Satan's Fury MC- SG
Satan's Fury Second Generation
L. Wilder- 2023

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication or any part of this series may be reproduced without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

This book is a work of fiction. Some of the places named in the book are actual places found in Washington. The names, characters, brands, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and owners of various products and locations referenced in this work of fiction, which have been used without permission. The publication or use of these trademarks is not authorized, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

This e-book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This e-book may not be re-sold or given away to other people. *All Rights Reserved.*

Book Cover Details:

Model:

Photographer: Wander

Cover Design: Mayhem Cover Creations

Editor: Marie Peyton

Personal Assistant: Natalie Weston

Catch up with the entire Satan's Fury MC Series today!

All books are FREE with Kindle Unlimited!

Ties That Bind (Ruthless Sinners #1)

Holding On (Ruthless Sinners #2)

Secrets We Keep (Ruthless Sinners #3)

Widow's Undoing (Ruthless Sinners #4)

Claiming Menace (Ruthless Sinners #5)

Tempting Country (Ruthless Sinners #6)

Jagger's Choice (Ruthless Sinners #7)

Viper's Demands (Ruthless Sinners #8)

Lynch's Rule (Ruthless Sinners #9)

The Butcher (Ruthless Sinners #10)

Summer Storm (Satan's Fury MC Novella)

Maverick (Satan's Fury MC #1)

Stitch (Satan's Fury MC #2)

Cotton (Satan's Fury MC #3)

Clutch (Satan's Fury MC #4)

Smokey (Satan's Fury MC #5)

Big (Satan's Fury #6)
Two Bit (Satan's Fury #7)
Diesel (Satan's Fury #8)
Falling for the President's Daughter (Satan's Fury #9)
Q (Satan's Fury #10)
Blaze (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 1)
Shadow (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 2)
Riggs (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 3)
Murphy (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 4)
Gunner (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 5)
Gus (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 6)
Rider (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 7)
Prospect (Satan's Fury MC- Memphis Book 8)
T-Bone (Satan's Fury MC-Memphis Book 9)
Day Three (What Bad Boys Do Book 1)
Damaged Goods- (The Redemption Series Book 1- Nitro)
Max's Redemption (The Redemption Series Book 2- Max)
Inferno (Devil Chasers #1)
Smolder (Devil Chaser #2)
Ignite (Devil Chasers #3)
Consumed (Devil Chasers #4)
Combust (Devil Chasers #5)
The Long Road Home (Devil Chasers #6)
Naughty or Nice (Mistletoe, Montana Collaboration)
My Temptation (The Happy Endings Collection #1)
Bring the Heat (The Happy Endings Collection #2)
His Promise (The Happy Endings Collection #3)

✿ Created with Vellum

Sign up for L. Wilder's Newsletter: <https://lwilderbooks.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=a2c4c211615b2d7b3dd46289a&id=7f8e916141>

Social media Links:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AuthorLeslieWilder>

TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@lwilderauthor?lang=en>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/wilder_leslie

Instagram: <http://instagram.com/LWilderbooks>

Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/L-Wilder/e/B00NDKCCMI/>

Bookbub: <https://www.bookbub.com/authors/l-wilder>

Contents

Brothers Catalogue

Prologue

1. Savage
2. Londyn
3. Savage
4. Londyn
5. Savage
6. Londyn
7. Savage
8. Londyn
9. Savage
10. Londyn
11. Savage
12. Londyn
13. Savage
14. Londyn
15. Savage
16. Londyn
17. Savage
18. Londyn
19. Savage
20. Londyn
21. Savage
22. Londyn
23. Savage
24. Londyn
25. Savage

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

Excerpt from Wrath: Satan's Fury MC- SG

Wrath's Blurb

Prologue

1. Wrath

Brothers Catalogue

The Brothers of Satan's Fury:

Maverick- Sergeant at Arms

Surname- Logan

Married to Henley

Son- Thomas (Torch)

Daughter- Lexie

Stitch- Enforcer

Surname- Griffin

Married to Wren

Stepson- Wyatt (Bones)

Daughter- Mia

Sister- Emerson

Cotton: President

Surname-

Married to Cassidy

Daughters- Susana and Darby (Twins)

Son- Malcomb (Savage)

Adopted- Lauren

Lauren married their neighbor Flynn

Guardrail: Vice President

Married to Allie

Joelle- daughter

Clutch: Road Captain

Surname: Thomas

Married Olivia

Olivia's siblings- Hadley and Charlie (Wrath)

Daughter- Casey

Smokey-

Surname- Evan

Married MJ

Daughter- Addie

Son- Hayes

Big- Computer Hacker

Surname- Mike

Married to Josie

Son- Davis

Daughter- Beck

Two Bit:

Surname- Seth

Married to Zoe (Diesel's sister)

Son- Jonas

Daughter Chelsea

Diesel-

Surname Scotty

Married Ellie

Son Clayton

Q-

Surname Quinton

Married Jules

Daughter- Bella

Bones- New Computer Hacker

Wyatt- Stitch's son

Married- Elsie

Wrath- New Enforcer

Surname Charlie

Olivia's brother (Clutch)

Savage- New Vice-President

Surname- Malcomb

Cotton's son

Torch-

Surname Thomas

Maverick's Son

Rooster-

Surname and future position coming soon

Prologue

“**Y**ou got a minute?”

“Yes, sure.” Completely unaware that he was about to turn my world upside down, I got off my bike and headed over to him. “Whatcha got on your mind?”

“She told you about the scholarship, right?”

“Yeah, she did.” I smiled as I told him, “It’s awesome. I’m real proud of her.”

“I’m proud of her, too. She’s worked damn hard for that scholarship.” He ran his hand through his salt and pepper hair. “It’d be a shame if she passed it up.”

“Why would she pass on it?”

“You know why.” He shook his head. “She loves you. There’s no way she’s gonna be away from you. Hell, you haven’t been apart for more than a couple of days since you two started dating.”

“Yeah, but college is different.”

“You’re right. It is... *It’s completely different.*”

His harsh tone was unexpected. I’d always thought a lot of him, and I thought he felt the same about me. Clearly, I was wrong. “I’m not sure what you’re getting at.”

“She needs to take this scholarship.”

“Never said she shouldn’t.” He seemed rattled, so I tried to calm him down by saying, “I care about Londyn. I want the best for her.”

“Yeah, as long as it goes along with what you want.”

“I’m not following.”

“It’s not like it’s hard... Everything has always been about you. Your family. Your brothers. Your club. Your rules,” he snapped. “She’s young. Her path hasn’t been set like yours. She has options. She has a chance at a different life... *One that doesn’t include the dangers she’d face being associated with Fury.*”

“You never had a problem with us being together before.”

“I never thought it would go anywhere. Thought it was just a phase and you’d both grow out of it. But that never happened.”

“It’s never gonna happen. I love her... I always will.”

“You say that now, but in time, things will change.” His eyes locked on mine as he told me, “You’re a good kid. She’s always thought a lot of you and your folks, but you’re not the right guy for her.”

I wanted to respond, but I couldn’t.

His words hit me like a sledgehammer. I’d always felt like I wasn’t good enough and hearing it from her father only reinforced that feeling. I was doing everything I could to keep from completely losing it when he poured salt on my wounds. “You two are on two different paths. You have the club. That’s set. It’s who you are and who you wanna be, and that’s great. I’m glad you have that. But Londyn’s door is wide open. She can go anywhere. Do anything. And if you love her as much you say you do, you’ll let her find her own way.”

“I don’t know if I can do that.”

“You can, and if you’re the man I think you are, you will.” He reached over and gave my bicep a fatherly squeeze. “Let her have the life she deserves. Convince her to take that scholarship.”

Without saying anything more, he turned and went back into the house, and I was left feeling like my heart had been ripped from my chest. I’d wanted to believe that he was wrong

and that I could give her the life she deserved, but deep down, I knew he was right.

He was right about everything.

I just had to figure out what I was going to do about it.

CHAPTER 1

Savage

“I give up,” Torch grumbled, his gaze fixated on Wrath and Mia sitting alone in the back corner. “It’s just not gonna happen.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Me finding an ol’ lady.” Torch shook his head. “It’s not gonna happen. At least not for me. Hell, Beauty and the Beast over there seem as happy as they can be, all cozied up, happy and fancy fucking free, and I can’t even find a date for Friday night.”

“Ah, you just gotta keep at it. Someone will come along,” Hayes answered, trying his best to be supportive.

“Nah, you’re not getting it. They have come along,” Torch shook his head. “I’ve gone out with the good girl, the bad girl, single women, married women, and every single time, things seem to be going good, and then, in a blink, it all goes to shit.”

“And when it goes, it goes fast.”

After a week that seemed like it would never end, we all gathered at the bar for a round of drinks. Like most nights, the air was thick with the scent of booze and cigarettes, and there was a low hum of music and idle conversations. It was the perfect setting to wind down.

Cotton, my father and the president of the club, was sitting at one of the front tables with Stitch, Maverick, and several of the older brothers while the younger crew sat at the bar. I was sitting sandwiched between Rooster and Torch, and we were

shooting the shit about this and that when Torch started whining about his romantic woes.

“You’re not wrong there.” Rooster, with his disheveled hair and mischievous eyes, leaned in closer, and his voice tinged with humor as he told us, “I hooked up with a chick last week that had a snake for a pet, and I’m not talking about any snake. I’m talking about a fucking python, and this thing was a beast. Longer than my goddamn leg.”

“No shit?”

“Nooo shit.” Rooster’s face was animated as he told us, “I tried to be cool about it. Figured it wasn’t a big deal until we were going at it, and she noticed that the fucking thing had gotten out of his cage. She didn’t think nothing of it. Thought it was no big deal that the damn thing was just roaming around her apartment, but I wasn’t having it. No damn way I was gonna let that fucking thing slither into bed with us. I didn’t need that kind of competition, so I grabbed my shit and got the hell out of there.”

“You didn’t even get your nut off?”

“Fuck nah. I got the hell out of there and never looked back.”

“Can’t say I blame ya. If I had a chode like yours, I would’ve done the same fucking thing.”

“You must not know who you’re talking to. I’d blow the bottom out of the well.”

“Okay, buddy. You keep telling yourself that.”

Torch gave his perpetual five o’clock shadow a quick scratch, then reached over and grabbed a cold beer from the cooler as he said, “Kind of reminds me of that time Hayes convinced me to go out with that cute, little librarian. I thought I’d stumbled into something pretty good with her until I found out she had a thing for cats. And I’m not talking about one or two. This girl had a house full of them.”

“Ah, hell naw.”

“Yeah, it was pretty bad, but she was cute and pretty eager. I figured I’d still try and make a go of it. I hooked up with her and woke up the next morning with thirty beady cat eyes staring me down like I was a piece of fucking roast beef. Creepy as shit. I knew right then and there that it didn’t matter how good she was in the sack. It just wasn’t going to work out.”

“Cat chicks are as crazy as those rock chicks.”

“Rock chicks?”

“You know, those bitches who make spells and shit and sleep with rocks. They’ll burn sage in your house and talk about your aurora and shit. That mess scares the hell out of me.”

“Says the man who’s killed a guy with his bare hands.”

“Dude, I’m telling ya, these chicks are next level. If a chick asks about your birth month or sign, run.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Rooster chuckled as he said, “What about that chick with the whip? You still see her?”

“Not since the night she cost me my manhood.” Torch reached down and adjusted his crotch. “I got a spot on my left nut that still ain’t right.”

Rooster immediately snickered, “Guess you could say she left a lasting impression.”

“No more than the redhead you went out with a couple of months back.” Torch exhaled a couple of smoke rings and cocked his brow as he said, “Way I remember it, you’re lucky your ass doesn’t whistle when you fart.”

“Touché.” Rooster shifted uncomfortably in his seat. “I really need to start looking into the women before I take ‘em out.”

We continued to bare our souls, exchanging tales of heartbreak, missed connections, and the search for the woman who would set our world on fire. I listened for a while but eventually grew tired of the nonsense and tuned them out. My mind started to wander as I ran my hand over the wooden

counter, the tips of my fingers trailing the worn grooves carved by my brothers, and it wasn't long before my thoughts drifted to Londyn.

It had been just almost five years since the day I ended things with her, and I still hadn't forgotten the pained expression on her face when she got in her car and drove away. It had haunted me, so much so that I feared I might never put it behind me.

There were times when I considered checking in on her to see how she was doing, but I just didn't have it in me. I couldn't stomach the idea of her moving on or being with some other dude, so I didn't chance it. I told myself it was the best thing for both of us, but there were times—like tonight—when I wasn't so sure.

I was still contemplating what could've been when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned and found my father standing behind me with a serious expression on his face. "You got a minute?"

"Yeah, what's up."

"Let's step outside."

"Ah, hell," I grumbled under my breath and stood. "That doesn't sound good."

Dad didn't respond. He simply turned and started towards the door. I followed him through the crowd of brothers, and the second we were outside, Dad looked at me and asked, "You making it okay tonight?"

"I got no complaints." I wasn't in the mood to beat around the bush, so I asked, "Whatcha got on your mind, Pop?"

"You." Worry etched his face as he said, "You know the vote is coming up."

"I'm aware."

I wasn't exactly shocked when I first heard that my father was stepping down as president. He'd held the position for as long as I could remember—long before I was even born, and the years had taken their toll. And rightly so. He was known

for his unwavering dedication to the club and his brothers. And because of that dedication, he was both feared and respected by all who knew him.

As much as we all hated to see him step down, I knew we would find a way to carry on. I wasn't sure the same held true for him, so I asked, "You sure you're ready for this?"

"I'm not leaving the club. I'm just stepping down and giving some fresh blood a chance to lead. A serious expression marked his face as Dad continued, "That being said, I know you are hoping that the fresh blood will be you, but I don't think you're ready."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I know you don't agree, but I think you need more time. You still have some growing up to do."

"Oh, for fuck's sake. What do you want from me?" I huffed. "I've proven myself time and time again, and it's never enough for you."

"Being president isn't just about being tough or fearless. It's about making decisions that can affect not only your life but the lives of our brothers and the reputation of this club."

"You don't think I get that?" I argued. "Hell, I've been watching you do it since I was able to walk."

"Watching and doing it for yourself are two different things. You can't just slap that president's patch on your chest and that be the end of it. It's about leading and listening, honing your instincts, and everything in between."

"Never thought otherwise."

He reached over and placed his hand on my shoulder. "You have to trust me when I say experience is the best teacher. You'll see that this role is a heavy responsibility—one that will weigh on you in ways you can't begin to imagine."

He wasn't just speaking as my father. He was also there as the revered President of Fury—a role he hadn't taken lightly. His weathered face carried the marks of the countless battles he'd fought and the lessons he'd learned from them. He was a

pillar of strength in both the brotherhood and as my father. He was respected by all, especially me—which is why it hurt so deeply to hear him say, “I’ve been through it all. I’ve been through the good and the bad. I’ve seen the highs and the lows, and I don’t want you to rush into something you’re not ready for.”

“How can you think I’m not ready?” I tried my best to keep my voice low and steady as I told him, “I’ve been preparing for this day since I was born. You’re talking to me like I’m clueless about this shit.”

Beneath my father’s rugged exterior, there lay a compassionate heart that beat fiercely for his club and the values it upheld. His leadership was unwavering, guided by a deep sense of honor and unwritten codes of loyalty. Like a seasoned oak in a storm, he anchored the club and its brothers, providing guidance and protection, and I’d always hoped to follow in his footsteps.

It pained me to hear him say, “I know you’re not clueless. I also know you aren’t ready. The day will come when you are, but for now, you still have some learning to do. Let the road teach you its lessons, and when the time comes, you’ll be the president this club truly needs.”

“But you don’t think that time is now.”

“No, son. I don’t.”

“Then, that’s all that needs to be said.”

Without saying anything more, I pushed past him and headed back inside the clubhouse. I didn’t bother going back to the bar. I was in no mood to deal with the guys, so I headed straight to my room and crashed down on my bed. As I stared up at the ceiling, I thought over everything my father had said, and it was impossible not to feel disappointed and hurt.

I’d dedicated my life to the club, proving my loyalty, and I honestly believed I’d earned my place among the ranks. Hearing my father’s lack of faith in me gutted me, but that lack of faith also stirred something inside of me.

I was more determined than ever to prove my father wrong.

Not only to him but to myself.

CHAPTER 2

Londyn

Growing up, I always imagined myself living in a small house on the Washington coast with a beautiful view of the North Pacific. I would have a career in law, saving the world one case at a time, with a loving, doting husband and two precious children. It was a wonderful dream, but it was just that.

A dream.

I actually lived in Seattle in the Belltown area. It was a bustling area that was growing by the minute, and while I liked it there, I worried that it wasn't the best place to raise Dalton, my four-year-old son. He was energetic, curious, and often rebellious, and there were times when I wondered if I'd made a mistake when I chose to move to such a busy part of the city—especially when I had to rise an extra forty-five minutes early just to get him to preschool in time for his graduation.

I was sleeping so soundly when the warm sun started to peek through the curtains, announcing that it was time for me to get out of bed. I tossed back the covers and was hit with a mix of nostalgia and excitement. I couldn't believe that it was Dalton's last day of preschool. It was a day that would mark the beginning of a new chapter in our lives. While Dalton was thrilled, I was a bit apprehensive.

I felt like time was flying by, and I was just standing alone in the wind.

I shook the feelings off and went to Dalton's room to wake him. When I walked in, he was still sound asleep, his little

chest rising and falling ever so softly. I walked over to the edge of his bed and brushed a strand of hair away from his face as I whispered, “Hey, buddy. It’s time to get up.”

“Hmm-hmmm,” he fussed with a groan.

“Come on, sweetheart.” I leaned down and kissed him on the forehead. “We gotta get ready for your big day.”

Dalton stirred, slowly opening his eyes, and a sleepy smile formed on his face. “Graduation?”

“That’s right. It’s your last day of preschool.”

“Really?” he mumbled, rubbing his eyes.

“Yep. You better get moving or we’re gonna be late.”

Dalton sat up and stretched, then reached over and gave me a long hug. Once he’d given me my morning love, he got up and waited as I placed his clothes on the foot of the bed. As soon as he was dressed, I combed his hair, and he brushed his teeth. After a quick breakfast, we both rushed out of the house and to my car.

When we pulled up at the school, I turned to look at him in the backseat, and my heart swelled when I found him smiling back at me. “You look nice, Momma.”

“Thank you, sweetheart.”

As I helped him out of the car, I couldn’t help but think about how much my little boy had grown. It felt like just yesterday he was a tiny baby in my arms, so sweet and vulnerable, and now, he was about to graduate from preschool. It seemed so surreal.

Dalton’s excitement was palpable as he raced to the door, eager to start his big day. I watched him run ahead, a smile on my face as I followed behind. I took him down to his class, then headed to the gymnasium. When I walked in, I found the room filled with parents and children, all dressed in their best clothes for the occasion. I was searching for a place to sit when I spotted a few other mothers from Dalton’s class. Cassie, one of the nicer moms, gave me a wave and mouthed, “Come sit with us.”

“That’s okay.” Like the other mothers, she was sitting with her husband and the rest of their families. I didn’t want to intrude, so I pointed at a couple of empty seats up front and told her, “I’ll just sit here.”

I feigned a smile, then quickly rushed up front. I couldn’t help but feel a little jealous as I claimed my seat. My family couldn’t make it, so I was there alone, which wasn’t something new. My folks had to work, so they couldn’t make it to his special day.

I was waiting for the program to start when I felt someone sit down next to me. I turned and gasped when I saw that it was Jackson, my best friend and supporter. His lips curled into a smirk as he snickered, “Hey there, Tinkerbelle. How’s it hanging?”

“Jackson!” I didn’t remember telling him that today was Dalton’s graduation, so I asked, “What in the world are you doing here?”

“I couldn’t miss seeing our boy graduate from preschool.”

“But how did...”

“He mentioned something about it this past weekend, and I told him I’d be here.”

“That’s very sweet of you.”

“Well, I’m a sweet person.”

“You definitely have your moments.”

His grin grew wider, then immediately faded when he saw what I was wearing. “So, what’s with the getup?”

“What?” I looked down at my black knee-length skirt and a white blouse, feeling suddenly self-conscious. “There’s nothing wrong with what I’m wearing.”

“That depends... Are you *trying* to look like a high school principal?” he asked, his eyes gleaming with mischief. “You should unbutton the top a bit, and you know, it wouldn’t hurt for you to try using some conditioner. Your hair is an absolute mess.”

“My hair is fine.”

There were definite pros and cons to having a gay best friend like Jackson—one of them being the fact that they don’t hold back, especially when they don’t approve of something. I wasn’t sure what was wrong with my hair, but I had no doubt that Jackson would fill me in. His nose crinkled with disapproval as he questioned, “When’s the last time you had that mop trimmed?”

“I’ll admit it’s been a minute, but it’s not that bad.” I rolled my eyes, fighting the blush that threatened to rise to my cheeks as I quickly tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear. “And to think I was actually happy to see you.”

“Oh, come on.” He gave me a playful nudge with his shoulder. “You’re still happy to see me.”

“Yeah, maybe just a little.”

“So, where’s our boy?”

“He should be out in a minute.”

And just like that, the music started to play, and Dalton and his classmates appeared on the makeshift stage. My heart swelled with pride as I watched my son take his place with the other children, and two hours later, my son had officially graduated from preschool.

As soon as the graduation ceremony ended, Dalton ran towards me with his tiny arms outstretched, and I scooped him up in a bear hug. His face lit up with a huge smile when I told him that Jackson and I were taking him to his favorite pizza place for lunch, and he immediately started talking about which pizza he wanted and the arcade games he wanted to play.

We spent a couple of hours at the pizza place, then went to the theatre to see the latest kid-friendly movie before heading home. When we finally made it back to the house, Dalton went to his room to change clothes while Jackson and I went into the kitchen for a drink.

I was pouring us both a glass of tea when I heard Jackson ask, “What’s this?”

“Hmmm?” I glanced over my shoulder and found him pointing to the envelope that was clipped to the refrigerator door. “Oh... That’s the invitation to Skylar’s wedding.”

“Your friend from high school?”

I nodded. “I’m actually kind of surprised that she invited me. I haven’t spoken to her in months.”

“Are you going to go?”

“I’m not sure.” The thought of going back home and revisiting my past wasn’t something I was looking forward to. In fact, I absolutely despised the idea. “I have a lot going on at work, and ...”

“You don’t have to make up excuses for me.” He cocked his brow. “I know Malcomb is the real reason you don’t want to go.”

He was right.

I hadn’t seen Malcomb since the night he ended things, and I was in no hurry to remedy that. “I’m just not ready to face him.”

“It’s been five years. I think the time has come for you to get over this guy.”

“I would love to get over him and move on, but every time I look at Dalton, I see Malcomb staring back at me.”

I wasn’t exaggerating. It had been like that since the day he was born and was one of the many reasons I’d had such a hard time letting Malcomb go. I loved him. I loved him hard. And even though I was young and naïve, I knew I’d never love anyone the way I loved him. That notion was confirmed the day our son was born, and I held him for the very first time.

He looked up at me, and in his eyes, I found unconditional love. I found forgiveness, but most of all, I found hope. That hope gave me the strength to keep pushing forward. I didn’t give up. I finished college and found a job—I did what had to be done for my son.

I tried to put Malcomb behind me. I honestly did, but living with his miniature twin made that difficult. If anything,

it made me love him even more.

I was trying to explain that to Jackson when I said, “They have the same eyes, the same smile, and freckles. They even walk the same. It’s like they were forged out of the same damn mold or something.”

“But he broke things off with you.”

“Yeah, he did.”

“And he basically told you he was with other chicks.”

“He did that, too.” I shrugged. “What can I say? I’m a glutton for punishment. Regardless, I’m just not in the right mindset to see him. I’m not sure I’ll ever be.”

“Then tell her that. I’m sure she will understand.”

“You don’t know Skylar.” I handed him a glass of tea as I told him, “She’ll kill me if I don’t come to her wedding.”

“Well, maybe she had the good sense not to invite him.”

“That’s unlikely. His mother and her mother are tight, so I’m pretty sure the whole family will be invited.” I let out a sigh as I added, “And her parents and mine are close, too. They’ll all expect me to be there.”

“That’s a tough one.” Jackson sat down at the kitchen table and shrugged. “You could always skip it.”

“I could... or you could come with me.” I was half-teasing, half-serious as I snickered, “You could pretend to be my better half. That way, I wouldn’t have to talk to anyone, and...”

“No one’s going to buy that I’m your boyfriend, Londyn.”

“Why not?” I walked over and sat down across from him. “You’re handsome and smart, and you have a...”

“So help me, if you say I have a great personality, I’ll get up from this table, and that will be the end of this conversation.”

“Actually, I was going to say you have a good job.” A smirk crossed my lips as I told him, “Your personality is hit or

miss.”

“Talk like that isn’t going to help your case.”

“Come on, Jackson. It could be fun.” I leaned in as I told him, “There’s an open bar, and I’m sure Dan-o’s will be catering, so the food will be amazing.”

Jackson frowned as he took a sip of his tea, contemplating my proposal before answering, “But I hate weddings.”

“I know, but I really don’t want to go alone. Plus, it’s not like we have to stay long. Just a few hours, and then we can leave.”

“I don’t know.” He raised an eyebrow at me. “What am I supposed to do while you’re schmoozing with your family?”

“The open bar, Jackson. Need I say more?”

I gave him a light-hearted shrug, then took a sip of my drink, waiting eagerly for him to respond. After a few moments, he finally sighed, “Alright, I’ll go.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, but I’m going as your friend. Not your boyfriend.”

“Okay, but what ‘bout a really good, *close friend*?”

“Fine, but no showing out. There will be no PDA or fake shenanigans in the coat closet.”

“You watch entirely too much TV.”

“I mean it, Londyn.”

“I got it. No PDA or shenanigans in the closet.”

“Damn. I’m so gonna regret this.”

“Oh, hush. It’ll be fun.”

We talked a little longer, and then Jackson made himself scarce, leaving me to get Dalton ready for bed. After his bath, I wrapped him up in a fluffy towel and carried him to his bedroom. I helped him into his pajamas and tucked him into bed.

I sat beside Dalton and ran my fingers through his hair watching as he drifted off to sleep. Once I was certain he wasn't going to wake, I got up and went to my room. After a long day of running around, I was exhausted, so I threw on my pajamas and crawled into bed. My head had barely hit the pillow when my mind drifted to Malcomb.

I shouldn't have been surprised. All the talk about Skylar's wedding and going home brought up a lot of old memories that I'd worked hard to forget—like the night he ripped my heart from my chest, and he did it with a smile.

He was right.

I should've seen it coming.

Malcomb and I were an unlikely match. Malcomb was outgoing and loved by everyone. He was tall and devastatingly handsome with dark, shaggy hair and gorgeous blue eyes. The second he smiled one of his dashing smiles, the girls would flock around him, doing everything they could to win him over.

I still have no idea why I was the one who'd caught his attention.

I was average height with dirty blonde hair and a figure that wasn't worth mentioning, and in my oversized plain tees and baggy jeans, I was basically invisible to everyone around me.

But Malcomb not only saw me, he wanted to date me.

We were together for just over two years, and I thought everything was wonderful. I adored him, and I thought he adored me. When he broke it off with me, it nearly destroyed me. I'd worked hard to put him and the hurt he'd caused behind me. It had taken me years, and there were still times when I missed him desperately.

I often wondered what our lives would've been like if Malcomb had answered my letters and decided to be in Dalton's life. I might've pushed him to be involved or asked one of the brothers to do it, but I just couldn't—not after being turned away so many times.

Call it pride or whatever you want, but I simply couldn't continue to reach out.

I thought it was the right thing for both of us.

But on nights like this, when Dalton was growing with every breath, and I felt so bitterly alone, I wasn't so sure.

CHAPTER 3

Savage

I stood with my ear close to the conference room door, nervously tapping my fingers against my thigh as I tried to eavesdrop on my brothers in the next room. I couldn't help but feel a mix of anticipation and trepidation as I listened to them discuss my future with the club. I couldn't hear everything—just a few random statements here and there, and it was making me a fucking mess.

“Savage is smart. He's got good instincts, just like his ol' man.” My pulse quickened as I listened to Guardrail say, “But I'm not sure he's ready to take on such a demanding role. He's just so damn young.”

“Yeah, I've mentioned that to him,” I heard my father grumble. “He didn't agree.”

“I don't either,” I heard Clutch interject. “You all saw him the night we went after the Demarco brothers. He was everything you'd expect a leader to be.”

“Clutch is right,” Smokey concurred. “He was on point. He always is, but we have no idea what the future holds for us. The whole new venture with Bruton could bring us a kind of heat that none of us have ever seen before. Are we sure he's got the experience to...”

The walls felt like they were closing in on me. Their decision could make or break me, and that wasn't a good feeling. All the sacrifices I'd made flashed through my mind, increasing the knot of tension in my shoulders. As eager as I was to learn my fate, I couldn't stand there for a second longer.

It was just too damn hard, so I stepped away from the door and headed out to my bike.

I kicked my leg over the seat and started the engine. It roared to life beneath me, and after a cleansing deep breath, I pulled through the gate and out onto the open road. As I leaned into the curves, the rhythmic hum of the engine helped to drown out the storm of thoughts that were raging inside my head.

I hadn't been riding long when I found myself parked at the lookout—a place I always went whenever I needed to clear my head. I got off my bike and looked out at the ocean, taking in the salty breeze and the sound of the waves crashing against the rocks below.

I looked over my shoulder, and just like that, I could almost see my old pickup parked next to the rocks.

Londyn was sitting there with her long legs crossed. They were swinging back and forth as she sat next to me on the tailgate. We talked and laughed as we watched the light of the moon flicker over the waves.

It was something we'd done a million times.

The point was our special place.

It was where we'd fallen for one another and where we'd made love for the first time. It wasn't planned. We'd just stopped by on our way home from the movies. The stars were shining bright, and there was a cool breeze as she nestled into the crook of my arm. I loved having her so close, but it was hard to keep my hands off her.

I wanted her.

Hell, I'd been wanting her for months—since the night I took her to Prom, but the timing never seemed right.

I stood up, and after taking a few steps, I found myself standing in front of her, staring into those beautiful eyes of hers. I wanted her so bad it hurt—literally. My growing erection was throbbing against the zipper of my jeans—just

another sign of how much I burned for her, and seeing the way she was looking at me added fuel to the flame.

Londyn brought her hands up to my face and smiled. "I want to."

"What?"

"I want to," she pushed. "I've been wanting to, but I've been too nervous to say anything."

"You never have to be nervous with me, Twinkles. It's you and me against the world, remember?"

I lowered my mouth to hers, savoring the softness of her lips as they parted to welcome me in. She tasted like strawberries and sweet cream, and I couldn't help but moan into the kiss as our tongues tangled together. Her sweet taste was like a drug to me.

I couldn't get enough, and I wanted more.

I could feel the hunger radiating off her as I slipped my arm around her waist and pulled her closer. A light moan vibrated through her chest as I deepened the kiss, my tongue tracing the seam of her lips before tangling with hers. Her hands roamed eagerly over my chest, pulling me closer as we lost ourselves in the sensation.

We were both getting lost in the moment, and it was clear that we were both ready to take the next step. Before things went too far, I broke the kiss, my breath coming in ragged gasps as I asked, "You sure about this?"

"Yes, Malcomb." There was a fierce hunger burning in her eyes as she told me, "I want this. I want you."

Without another word, I guided her into the bed of the truck, where we'd put down several blankets and pillows. I lay down next to her, feeling her shiver in anticipation. I leaned in to kiss her again, slow and deep, savoring the feel of her lips against mine. She moaned into the kiss, her body arching up against me.

I moved my hand down to the hem of her shirt, pulling it up slowly, revealing her soft skin inch by inch. She lifted her

arms up, and I broke the kiss, carefully pulling it over her head. My eyes devoured the sight of her bare torso, the curve of her waist, the swell of her breasts. I leaned in to kiss her again, my hands roaming over her body, memorizing every curve and contour.

She whimpered softly as I kneaded her breasts through the fabric of her bra, her fingers digging into my back. I could feel the hunger and desire building between us, and at that moment, I knew I'd never forget the feeling.

And I hadn't.

Not for one second.

It had haunted me for the past five years, making me wonder if I would ever find someone who made me feel the way she did. I knew deep down that I never would, and that only added to my frustration. I was really working myself up when my burner rang. I pulled it out of my pocket, and my chest tightened when I saw that it was my father calling.

I let out a breath, then answered, "Yeah?"

"Where are you?"

"Out at the point."

"Well, I'm gonna need you to get your ass back here ASAP."

Even though I already knew the answer, I asked, "Why? What's going on?"

"Just need you here."

"Okay. I'll be there in twenty."

"Make it fifteen."

With that, Dad ended the call, and my time at the point had come to an end. I started the engine, and without wasting any time, I made my way back to the clubhouse. As soon as I pulled through the gate, Riley came over to me and said, "They're waiting for you in the conference room."

I nodded, then got off my bike and headed to the back door. As I started down the hall, I was hit with a mix of anxiety and dread. I wanted to know what the brothers had decided, but then again, I didn't. For the time being, I still had hope that they'd voted me in as the new Satan's Fury president, but once I walked through that door, I would no longer have that hope to hold onto.

Either way, I had to know what was waiting for me on the other side of that door. When I walked in, all eyes were on me as I made my way over to my father. His eyes met mine, and I knew right then and there that I hadn't gotten the vote. My heart sank to the pit of my stomach as the silence in the room grew heavier by the second. I could feel the heavy weight of disappointment looming over me, threatening to consume my whole being.

"We had the vote," he said, placing a hand on my shoulder. "Maverick has been named president."

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak.

I wasn't surprised by their decision, and while it was impossible not to feel somewhat disappointed, deep down, I knew they'd made the right decision. Maverick was a good man. He had an unmatched determination when it came to protecting the brotherhood, and the fact that he'd been my father's right-hand man for years made him the natural successor for the presidency. He would lead the club with honor and would protect our interests, ensuring the brotherhood remained strong against any adversity that might come our way.

After taking a moment to let the news sink in, I turned to our new president and said, "Congratulations, brother. It comes well-deserved."

"Glad to hear you say that, Savage, 'cause I couldn't do it without you."

I wasn't sure what he meant until Dad placed his hand on my shoulder and said, "The brothers have chosen you as his VP."

“Come again?”

“You’re my VP, brother.” I turned to Maverick, the club’s new president, and found him smiling like the Cheshire cat. “And I can’t think of anyone I’d rather have at my side.”

“Right back at ya, brother... And what about your sergeant at arms?”

“That’d be Torch.”

“Well, alright then.” I couldn’t hold back my smile as I told them, “I’d say we’re set.”

“That we are.”

As I stood there with my brothers, I felt the weight of honor settling on my shoulders. These fierce, powerful men had chosen me as their VP, and that meant more to me than I could’ve ever imagined. Fury was more than just some club. It was a way of life. A brotherhood. Their vote was a testament to their trust and respect, and I’d never felt such a sense of belonging and camaraderie as I did at that moment—even more so than the day I’d first earned my patch.

It was that feeling that would fuel me to be the best VP I could possibly be.

Once I’d collected myself, I looked to my brothers and said, “I’m honored, and I give you my word that I won’t let you down.”

“We know you won’t. It’s why we chose you.”

Dad placed his hand on my shoulder, and his voice was strained as he said, “I’m proud of you, son.”

“Thanks, Pop.”

He gave me a nod, then turned to the others and said, “Boys, I’d say we have some celebrating to do.”

“Hell yeah, we do.”

The brothers came over to congratulate me, then, one by one, they slowly filed out of the room and headed down to the bar. I held back, waiting to have a word with Maverick, Torch, and Wrath. Once the room had cleared out, I stepped over to

them and said, “I just wanted to tell you that I’m honored to have the opportunity to stand by your sides. I’m here for you any way that you might need me.”

“We feel equally honored,” Wrath, the club’s enforcer, chimed in. “You’ve got a good head on your shoulders, good instincts, just like your ol’ man. We know you’ll make the tough calls when they need to be made.”

These men, my brothers, had my back.

And I had theirs.

I meant it when I replied, “Ab-so-fucking-lute-ly.”

“That’s what I wanted to hear.” Maverick clapped his hand on my back. “Now, I’d say it’s time for us all to partake in a celebratory beverage, don’t ya think?”

“I couldn’t agree more.”

Torch and I followed Wrath and Maverick into the bar, and just as I expected, they were already celebrating. I’d just grabbed a beer when I spotted Dad sitting in his spot next to Guardrail and Stitch. I walked over and sat down across from him as I said, “Is it just me, or does all this feel a little surreal?”

“It’s not just you,” Dad answered. “We’re all feeling a bit dazed, but in a good way.”

“Agreed,” Stitch interjected. “The brothers chose well today.”

“That they did.” Guardrail lifted his beer in my direction as he said, “It’s not easy to step away from being VP, but knowing you’re the one they chose to fill my shoes makes it a bit easier.”

“Glad you feel that way.” I took a sip of my beer before adding, “I hope that means you’ll be willing to give me some advice from time to time.”

“You know I will.” Guardrail motioned his hand over to my father and Stitch. “We all will.”

“Good. I’m glad to hear it.” I looked over to my father as I said, “You didn’t think I was ready for president. Do you feel the same about VP?”

“No. Quite the opposite.” He sounded confident as he continued, “Being VP will give you the experience you’ll need for the day you take the reins. And before you ask, yes. I still believe that day will come.”

“No doubt about it,” Guardrail chimed in. “I just hope I’m still around to see it.”

“You and me both.”

Stitch stood as he announced, “I don’t know about you boys, but I need another beer.”

“I could use two,” Dad chuckled.

“You got it.”

Stitch headed over to the bar, and moments later, he returned with another round for all of us. As the night wore on, the drinks kept flowing, and I found myself feeling better and better about my new role. And as I looked around the bar, watching the chaos unfold, I thought I had it all.

I thought my future was set, and I couldn’t imagine wanting anything more.

I couldn’t have been more wrong.

CHAPTER 4

Landyn

I'd always loved driving through Port Angeles. I'd roll down my windows, letting the cool breeze whip around me, and the second I smelled the salty air, I would be overcome with the need to put my toes in the ocean. Doing my best to dismiss the urge, I'd continue through town and up into the lush forests where towering evergreen trees created a beautiful makeshift tunnel. The sun would filter through the branches, casting dappled shadows and flickering light on the pavement below, and then, without warning, I'd catch a glimpse of the sparkling blue waters of the Strait, teasing me from between the gaps in the buildings.

The charming downtown area was filled with quaint shops, inviting cafes, and local boutiques, and the people were laid-back and welcoming, adding a charm to the town. It was one of the many reasons why my parents refused to leave. They'd set their roots there right after they married, and it wasn't long after when Joseph and I were born.

Feeling the same nostalgia about our small hometown, my brother, Joseph, and his wife decided to buy a place a few blocks over, so when I finally arrived at my parents' house, I wasn't surprised to find his car parked in the driveway. I pulled in behind them, then turned to the backseat and gave Dalton a little nudge, waking him from his nap. "Hey, sweetie. We're here."

"Um-hmm."

"Grangran and Papa are going to be so happy to see you."

He nodded, then stretched before unbuckling his seatbelt. He wiped the sleep from his eyes, then stretched once more as he said, “Maybe they have ice cream.”

“I’m sure they do.”

I opened my door, then walked around to the back and opened his. Once he was out, I closed the door, and we started up the front steps. We hadn’t gotten far when my mother appeared with a big smile.

“There you two are!” Mom scooped Dalton up into a big hug. “Look how much you’ve grown since the last time I saw you.”

“I’m four now.” He giggled as he hugged her back. “I missed you, Grangran.”

“I missed you too, sweetie. And guess what? We have a surprise for you.”

His eyes widened. “Ice cream?”

“No, something even better.” She motioned us forward as she said, “Come on inside and see for yourself.”

Curious, we followed her into the house.

It was familiar, with the same old furniture, the same pictures on the walls, and blankets laid across the recliners. While I still smelled the comforting scent of my childhood, there was something new about it, too. I couldn’t put my finger on it until I spotted her—a beautiful golden retriever puppy with a pink collar and wagging tail. “Mom, what did you do?”

“We have a new member of the family.”

My mother had always been a remarkable woman. She was in her late fifties but always managed to look much younger. She was beautiful and tall, strong inside and out, and she was my best friend. We talked every day, sharing the tidbits of our day, and I took great comfort in the fact that she was just a phone call away. It made me feel closer to home, and with the craziness in my life, I needed that. I needed it more than I could describe.

I looked over at her, noting the smile on her face, and my heart swelled in my chest. It never failed to amaze me how she always knew exactly what our family needed. She was practically beaming as she told us, “Meet Daisy.”

Dalton’s face lit up as he sat down on the floor next to Daisy, hugging and loving on her like she was his new best friend. Clearly pleased with the attention, Daisy wagged her tail even harder and started licking Dalton in the face, making him giggle with delight.

Seeing them together made me realize how much I’d missed having a dog around. Daisy was just a puppy, but I could already see the potential for a lifetime of love and companionship. I looked over to Mom and smiled as I told her, “Mom, she’s beautiful.”

As if on cue, my father entered the room just as Mom said, “She was your father’s idea.”

“I thought she might tempt you two into coming to see us more often.” A smile swept across his face as he walked over and wrapped his arms around me, hugging me tightly. “What can I say? I miss my daughter and only grandson.”

“Only grandson for now,” Joseph interjected. “That might change very soon.”

“What? Kate is pregnant?”

“Yeah, about six months along now.”

“Oh, Joseph!” I rushed over and gave him a hug. Joseph and Katie had been trying to conceive for years, and after several heartbreaking failed attempts, they’d all but stopped trying. Needless to say, I was shocked to hear that Katie was not only pregnant but six months along. “Congratulations! I had no idea!”

“Katie wanted to keep it kind of quiet until we knew the baby was okay.”

“And everything’s good?”

“So far so good.” Joseph couldn’t have looked more pleased as he said, “We had an ultrasound last week, and he

looks perfect. His heartbeat is strong, and he has all his little fingers and toes.”

“Oh, Joe. That’s so good to hear. I know you both must be thrilled.”

“We really are. Even though it came as a surprise. I just took a big promotion at work, and Katie has two huge projects that she’ll be working on for the next year or so.” He looked over to Mom as he said, “Thankfully, we’ll have the best sitter in town.”

“Mom’s going to babysit for you?”

“That’s the plan.”

My throat tightened with an unwelcomed jealousy. I hadn’t wanted anyone in town to see that I was pregnant and tell Malcomb, so I left soon after we broke up. I took the scholarship and went off to college, but after one very long semester, I decided to move to Seattle where I would be closer to my folks.

I found an apartment near campus and started the summer session, thinking it would give me a jump on things. And it did. I was able to get settled and prepare for Dalton’s arrival, but I did that all alone.

Mom was there when he was born. Dad, too. But they were only able to stay for a week or so, and then, they had to get back to work. They came and visited as often as they could, but as time passed, those visits became less and less frequent. Dalton spent his days at the campus daycare, and when he got old enough, he started at the local preschool. While that was fine and he was well taken care of, it wasn’t Mom.

“That’s great... really, really great.” I let out a breath, trying my best to shake my mindset. When that didn’t work, I told him, “I ah, I need to get our things out of the car. I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll come and give you a hand.”

“No, that’s okay. I got it.”

With that, I stepped outside and started over to my car. I'd just opened the trunk when I heard the low rumble of a motorcycle off in the distance, and my heart stopped. I held my breath, trying to brace myself for what I might see when I turned and looked down the road.

But no one was there.

Soon, the rumble faded, but the tightness in my chest remained.

There was something about that familiar sound that had me stepping back in time,

And just like that, I found myself bombarded with memories of Malcomb.

The way he always held my hand when we were out.

The way his eyes darkened when he was about to kiss me.

But most of all, I loved the way he made me feel like I was the only person in the world who mattered. He would whisper my name, and that was all it took. The heartbreak started to creep back in, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

I felt a tear trickle down my cheek, and it was enough to pull me back into reality. I was done crying, so I quickly wiped the tear away. Unfortunately, my mother caught me in the act. "Honey? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm good."

"You don't look good." She stepped closer, trying to get a better look at me. "Is this about Joseph and the baby? You know I would've loved to keep Dalton..."

"It's not about that." I motioned my head towards the road. "I just thought I heard a motorcycle."

"Oh, I'm sure that was just one of the boys. They've been working on a big renovation project downtown. They're redoing the bank and coffee shop." She sounded almost excited as she told me, "They've done an amazing job. You should go see it."

"I don't think so."

“So, you’re going to do like you usually do and hide out the entire time you’re here?”

“If by hiding out you mean hanging out here and spending time with you and Dad, then yes. That’s exactly what I’m planning to do.”

“And what about the wedding?”

“What about it?”

I grabbed our bags from the trunk, then started towards the house. I hadn’t made it to the front steps when she said, “You know, he will be there.”

“Who?”

“*Londyn.*”

“Okay... And what if he is?”

“Are you going to talk to him?”

“I don’t know, Mom.” I wasn’t a complete idiot. I knew the time would come when I would have to face Malcomb and hash things out, but the wedding wasn’t the time or the place. “I haven’t really thought about it.”

“Well, I think the time has come for you to start thinking about it, because sooner or later, you’re going to have to face this thing with him.”

“You’re acting like I’ve never tried to talk to him. You know I have.” I knew it wasn’t enough, but I’d gone to the clubhouse three separate times to talk to him. Each time, there was something—a run or an issue with the brothers that prevented me from seeing him. I’d written to him countless times, but never got a response. I could only assume that he didn’t care about me or our son, so I gave up. “Besides, it’s not like he’s made any effort to see me.”

“Malcomb has made his fair share of mistakes. You both have... Maybe it’s time you both faced those mistakes and moved on with your lives.”

Mom had always been a very level-headed and understanding person. Even when I was completely irrational

and downright stupid, she never judged me. She never told me I was wrong or that I was making a huge mistake. Instead, she always waited and listened to me, and once I'd said everything I had to say, she'd help guide me to find my own answers—and tonight was no different.

“You make it sound so easy.”

“Nothing about this is easy, sweetheart.”

Without saying anything more, she stepped over to me and took Dalton's bag from my hand, then started back up the front porch steps. I followed her inside and put our things away. By the time I was done, Joseph had gone, and Mom and Dad were in the kitchen getting things ready for dinner.

I joined in, and while we took turns chopping vegetables, we caught each other up on all the things that had been going on in our lives. It wasn't long before we'd put together quite a meal. We gathered in the dining room and continued talking as we ate.

After dinner, Mom followed Dalton into his room and helped him get ready for bed. Once he was settled, we each gave him a kiss goodnight and turned out the lights. I took that as my cue to turn to Mom and say, “I think I'm going to call it a night.”

“So soon?”

“I'm sorry. I'm just wiped out.” I gave her a hug as I asked, “Why don't we take Dalton to the beach tomorrow? We could take a picnic and spend the day there.”

“Oh, I would love that.”

“Then, it's a plan.” I stuck my head into the hall as I shouted, “Night, Dad.”

“Night, Lou.”

With a smile on my face, I slipped into the bathroom, brushed my teeth, and washed my face, attempting to wash away the worries of the day. Sadly, it didn't help. As soon as I crawled into bed, my mind went straight to Malcomb, and the

memories started playing over and over in my head like a broken record.

It wasn't anything new.

It happened every time I came home.

All those feelings would come creeping back in, and I'd find myself missing him. I missed the way he would smile the second he spotted me in a crowded room. I missed him reaching for my hand when we walked across the street or into a busy place. I missed being the one he told his secrets to.

I'd held onto those secrets, just like I'd held on to our box of memories I had hidden under my bed. I cherished all the little mementos—just like I cherished the first time he told me that he loved me.

It was late, and it had been snowing for hours. We were in his bedroom. Malcomb was on his phone talking to one of the brothers while I was over by the window, watching the flakes as they collected on the pine trees. I had no idea Malcomb was behind me until I heard him say, "You're really something, you know that?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're smart. You're beautiful. You get along with everybody, and you put up with me." He stepped closer. "I have no idea what the hell I did to get so lucky."

"I think I'm the lucky one."

His eyes locked on mine as he leaned forward, but just as his lips were about to touch mine, he paused. My lips parted and our breaths mingled, making my entire body hum. "I love you, Twinkles."

Without saying another word, he slipped his hand behind my neck and pulled me forward, crashing his mouth against mine. His lips were soft and full as they covered mine. It was like they were made just for me. His warm, wet tongue ran across my bottom lip as his hands snaked down my back. They were strong and assured as he pulled me closer to him.

I'd thought about this moment for months.

I loved Malcomb, but I didn't know how or when to tell him.

So, I kept my feelings to myself and waited, praying that one day he would feel the same about me. Feeling both relieved and elated, I leaned back, breaking from our embrace and whispered, "I love you, too, Malcomb."

I watched in wonder as he lowered his mouth down to mine, kissing me softly, so gentle and sweet. His hands were strong and self-assured as they drifted over my back and waist, his scent circling around me. Goosebumps swept across my flesh when he delved further into my mouth, exploring every inch with his tongue. His fingers dug into my hips as he pulled me closer to him, forcing a light moan to vibrate through my chest.

We were both lost in the moment when his door flew open and Torch announced, "Alright, enough of that shit. We're going sledding."

"In the dark?"

"Well, hell yeah! It's the best time to go." Torch started out the door as he told us, "Now, quit pawing all over each other and grab your fucking coats. We have a race to win."

And with that, our little romantic moment was over.

It wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

I had a blast sledding with Malcomb and his brothers. The thought had me smiling, but it didn't last long. Those times had come and gone, and deep down, I knew they were nothing more than distant memories.

And that's all they would ever be.

CHAPTER 5

Savage

The time had finally come.

After a great deal of deliberation, the club decided to move forward with our partnership with Bruton. We'd gone back and forth about working with him, but after he'd stepped up and helped out when we needed it most, we'd all decided that he'd proven himself trustworthy—which was no easy feat.

From the beginning, we'd had our doubts about him, and rightly so. He'd lied about his identity and basically stalked us, having us followed and acquiring intel on all the brothers and their families. And if that wasn't enough, a couple of his men beat the shit out of Q and Rooster and caused a fire at the clubhouse.

He was willing to do whatever it took to convince us to work with him and become his new distributor. He had excuses for everything he'd done, but we saw them for what they were.

Excuses.

They were enough to make us consider walking away.

But then, trouble came knocking at our doors.

Shit hit the fan, and when we needed it most, Bruton was there to give us a hand. He helped us take down the Demarco brothers, and if that wasn't enough, he made sure that the women they'd taken were returned to their homes, safe and sound. It had taken a great deal of finagling, much more than we were capable of, but he'd done it and he'd done it well.

We notified him of our intentions of moving forward, and he couldn't have been more pleased. His buyers were biting at the bit to get their shipment, so he wasted no time making preparations for our first meet. We had the weapons we'd swiped from the Demarco brothers, so it was just a matter of getting them from point A to point B.

Once he had everything settled, he called Maverick, and a couple of hours later, I was pulling up to his place with Wrath, Torch, and Rooster. We'd all been there before. It wasn't anything out of the ordinary—just your typical portside warehouse with a small office upstairs, but his security was topnotch. Every inch of the place was covered with motion sensors and cameras.

Nobody was going to step on his property without him knowing it, and that gave me an unexpected peace of mind as we got out of our SUV and started inside. When we got up to the door, Torch gave it a hard knock, then we all followed as he stepped inside. Bruton was standing on the loading dock with a faint glimmer of a smile, waiting patiently as we approached.

Bruton wasn't a tall man. He wasn't gruff or intimidating—just the opposite. He was an older gentleman with thinning gray hair and horn-rimmed glasses. He had on his usual pair of freshly pressed khakis and a white button-down with a sweater vest. His smile widened as he said, "Good to see you, boys."

"Hello, Bruton." I continued towards him as I said, "Maverick said your buyers are ready to meet."

"That they are." He gestured to the corner of the room where various crates were stacked, each filled with various handguns, shotguns, and assault rifles. "They've all been searched, tested, and are ready to be moved."

"Are we still on for the location you gave Maverick?"

"We are." He shook his head. "You know, when I approached you boys about going into business together, I thought I would be dealing with Cotton. Nothing against Maverick, but I have to say, I have my concerns."

“We can end this thing right here and now, then you won’t have to worry about your concerns.” Wrath motioned his hand towards the take, then added, “But then, you’ll be left finding someone else to move your goods.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Bruton replied. “I’m sure, in time, Maverick will grow on me just as he has you, but Cotton has experience.”

“I assure you, Maverick wouldn’t have been chosen as president if he wasn’t the right man for the role.” I did my best to keep my composure as I told him, “He’s a good man with good instincts. He’ll do us well, and you, too. You’d do good to remember that.”

“You think quite highly of your new president. I hope, in time, I will feel the same.”

“I have no doubt that you will,” I assured him.

Growing impatient, Wrath stepped forward and growled, “So, are we good or what?”

“We’re good.”

“Have you made arrangements for the payment?”

“It’s been handled.” Bruton smiled, his eyes never leaving Wrath. “I do believe that today’s exchange will go much more smoothly than the last.”

Wrath and Torch exchanged a silent glance, and even before he spoke, I knew exactly what he was thinking. “If it doesn’t, it’ll be on your head.”

Bruton kept his collected composure as he replied, “Understood.”

Without saying anything more, we loaded the crates into the back of the SUV and made our exit. We typically went with eight or more brothers, and each had their own responsibility to ensure everything went smoothly. It felt odd to be going on a run with just Wrath and Torch, but that’s the way Bruton wanted it. I didn’t argue.

I trusted my brothers and knew they would do whatever it took to get the job done.

I followed the GPS to the address Maverick had given us, and after a bit of a haul, we made it to an area of Seattle that was known for its criminal activity. The streets were empty, and for several minutes, the only sound was Wrath's heavy breathing and wind whipping against the windows.

We drove by one abandoned building after the next, and each was marked by threatening gang graffiti. It set us all on edge, especially Wrath. His reaction didn't come as a surprise. He was the club's enforcer. It was his job to do everything in his power to ensure his brothers' safety, and seeing those gang signs so close to our destination didn't make that job any easier.

"I don't like the looks of this." Wrath kept his eyes on the road ahead as he ordered, "Keep your guard up."

I kept my eyes trained on the road ahead as I nodded in agreement. We continued driving, and just as we were getting close to the location, Torch leaned up from the backseat and pointed at an old brick factory in the distance. "Hey, look. I bet that's the place."

I nodded and drove towards the building.

Trash and debris scattered all over the parking lot, and with more broken windows than not, it was clear that the place had been abandoned years ago. Its darkness gave me an uneasy feeling as I pulled around back and parked. Wrath looked around the empty lot, checking for any signs of trouble, as he grumbled, "Gotta wonder how Bruton came across a place like this."

"The man is full of surprises."

"Yeah, and I don't like that shit one fucking bit."

The words had barely left his mouth when a red pickup truck pulled up next to us. Wrath immediately turned to us and said, "Let's do this."

With that, we got out and watched as the buyers emerged from their truck. The first was an older, grizzled man wearing a black leather coat. His face was hidden in darkness, and his eyes held a hint of menace. The second was a younger man,

and there was something about the way he carried himself that gave the impression he was new to all this.

The older man stepped forward and asked, “You got the goods?”

“They’re in the back.”

The man nodded, then we all followed Wrath to the back of the SUV.

He opened the hatch, and without any hesitation, they reached for the crates and started sifting through them, checking the inventory. “Looks like it’s all here.”

“You sure?” The younger man sounded concerned as he asked, “What about the AR15’s?”

“I said they’re all here.” Annoyance marked his face as the older man turned to Wrath and handed him an envelope. “Tell Bruton the next shipment better be on time, or we’re done.”

Wrath didn’t respond. He simply took the money, then stepped back, giving the two men some room to start moving the crates from our vehicle to theirs. As soon as they were done, Wrath gave him a nod and said, “That should do it.”

He closed the hatch, then we each got in our vehicles and started out of the parking lot. We were just about to pull out on the main road when two Camaros, one red and one black—both with dark tinted windows, came inching by. Even though none of us could see who was inside, they were obviously checking us out.

Wrath pulled his gun from his holster and held it by his side as he growled, “What the fuck are these assholes up to?”

“Checking to see who’s in their territory.” I kept my eyes trained on the tinted windows as I said, “Just another reason we don’t do business in places like this.”

“Agreed.”

Once they drove past, I whipped out onto the road and sped off in the opposite direction. As soon as I knew we were in the clear, I called Maverick to let him know that the drop had been made and that we were on our way back. I’d barely

hung up the phone when Torch leaned forward and said, “I gotta say... Minus our little drive-byers, that went better than I thought it would.”

“Yeah, but it just as easily could’ve gone to shit. Next time, we’re gonna do things our way. Fuck this three-man bullshit,” I grumbled. “We take who we wanna take, and we meet where we wanna meet.”

“And if Bruton doesn’t agree?”

“I don’t give a fuck if he agrees or not. He’s not going to have a choice. We move it our way or not at all.”

“I like your way of thinking, VP.” Wrath had a faint smile as he said, “I like it a lot.”

Runs are usually pretty intense and leave us needing to decompress. We usually hit the bar, down a couple of beers, and share our triumphs and fuck ups.

And tonight was no different.

Everyone was there, including my father.

I was actually kind of surprised that he stuck around. It was the first run where he wasn’t calling all the shots, and even though he’d never admit it, I knew that had to be hard for him. I grabbed a couple of cold ones from the cooler, then carried them over to his table and said, “How ya making it?”

“I was just about to ask you the same.”

“I’m hanging in.” I placed his fresh beer on the table as I said, “Things went well today.”

“I knew they would.”

“I’m glad you did because I certainly had my doubts.” I took a pull from my beer, then added, “Bruton’s location was sketchy as hell, and whether he likes it or not, we need more men there to make sure we’re covered.”

“I’m sure you’ll work it out.”

“You sound confident.”

“Because I am... I wouldn’t have stepped down if I didn’t think you boys could handle things, and I was right. You’re handling it just fine.” He leaned back in his chair and smiled. “And for the first time *in a very long time*, I can sit back and let the stress of it all fall on someone else’s shoulders.”

“Like you wouldn’t be the first one to lose it if something went wrong,” I scoffed.

“I’m just a brother now, son. I can lose it all I want, but it’s not gonna change anything.”

My father couldn’t have been more wrong.

He had led the men of Fury for over thirty years.

There wasn’t a brother around who didn’t look up to him and respect him like a father, and because of that, he would always have a say.

I chuckled as I told him, “Yeah, whatever you say, Pop.”

I gave him a pat on the shoulder, then turned and made my way back over to Rooster and the rest of the guys. I was just about to sit down when I spotted Torch talking with Candy. He whispered something in her ear, then took her by the hand and led her out of the bar and down the hall. I wasn’t surprised that he’d dipped out. After a few rounds, most of the guys would go home to their ol’ ladies, and the unattached hook up with one of the club hang-arounds. I, on the other hand, tended to have a beer or two, then I’d head to the house.

Don’t get me wrong. I spent time with the club girls, and I had no complaints. But like most nights, I wanted nothing more than to land in my own bed and to land in it alone.

I stood up and tossed my empty beer bottle in the trash as I announced, “You boys have a good one. I’m heading to the house.”

“Seriously?” Roosted fussed. “It’s still early.”

“I’ve had my fill, brother. Besides, I need my beauty sleep.” I gave the rest of the brothers a nonchalant wave as I said, “See ya when I see ya.”

I walked out of the bar and out to my bike. Half an hour later, I was home, showered, and in my bed. The day had taken its toll on me, and I was beat. I thought I'd be asleep in no time, but sadly, that wasn't the case. The longer I laid there, the quieter my house became and the more alone I felt.

It wasn't the feeling I was hoping for.

I tried to shake it off, but the silence was suffocating. I couldn't take it, so I grabbed my phone and started scrolling through social media. I hadn't been at it long when my eyes began to feel heavy, and I felt myself starting to drift off. But just as I was about to give in to sleep, a message from my mother caught my eye.

Mom:

Don't forget to get fitted for your suit. Skylar's wedding will be here before you know it.

Damn.

I hated fucking weddings. I hated everything about them. They were a big, lavish, heart-wrenching reminder of what I had given up, and I would never have again. I hated to break it to my mother, but there was no way in hell I was going to that wedding.

CHAPTER 6

Londyn

We couldn't have picked a better day to take Dalton to the beach. The sun was shining brightly, and the waves were rolling high. I grabbed the picnic basket and blankets from the back, then followed Mom and Dalton down to the beach. A cool breeze blew in from the ocean as Dalton ran towards the shoreline. I didn't want him to get too far from us, so I shouted, "Woah! Stay close, Buddy!"

"Okay, Momma," Dalton answered, excitedly kicking up the water with his tiny feet. "It's so cold!"

"I'm sure it is!" I dropped the picnic basket down on the sand as I told him, "Don't go any deeper!"

Mom skirted past me and towards Dalton as she said, "I'll go keep an eye on him."

"Okay. I'll be there in a minute."

My heart swelled with joy as I stood there watching as Dalton ran around with a big smile on his face. Laughter filled the air as he rooted his feet in the sand and wiggled his toes. He darted over and grabbed a seashell, proudly holding it up in the air as he shouted, "It's a sea swell, Momma!"

"It's beautiful!"

He shoved it in his pocket, then raced over and picked up another. I laid out our blankets, making the perfect spot for our picnic, then went over and joined Mom and Dalton. We strolled around the water's edge searching for shells and rocks, and we'd gathered ourselves quite a collection when Dalton announced, "I'm hungry."

“Well, that’s an easy fix.” I took his little hand in mine and led him back over to the blankets. “Let’s find you something to eat.”

We each sat down, and Mom and Dalton waited as I started unpacking the picnic basket. I laid out all the chips and snacks, then handed them each a sandwich and a drink. They both dove in while I unwrapped my PB&J. I was just about to take my first bite when Mom leaned over to me and whispered, “Have you gone out on any dates recently?”

“Not unless you count an early morning run to Target where I spent twenty minutes talking to the janitor in the bathroom.”

“Oh, Londyn.” Mom shook her head. “I don’t know what I’m going to do with you.”

“What? He was a really nice guy, and he gave me some really great advice on how to get the stains out of my tile.”

My dating life was a topic that I’d been trying to avoid since I got there. Not because I didn’t want to discuss it with her. I didn’t care about that. I knew I could talk to her about anything. I just didn’t know how to tell her that I wasn’t interested in getting back out there and dating again, so I tried playing it off. Sadly, it didn’t work.

“This isn’t a joke, Londyn.” She glanced over at Dalton as she fussed, “You have your son to consider.”

“I do consider him. I consider him every day. You know that.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I do, but it doesn’t matter. I’m not interested in dating right now,” I replied firmly, trying to make her understand.

“How long are you going to let Malcomb keep this hold over you?”

“This isn’t about Malcomb,” I fussed. “It’s about me and what I want.”

“Exactly... Don’t you want someone to share your life with?” Mom persisted. “You are still young. You have your

whole life in front of you. I hate the thought of you living it alone.”

“I’m not alone. I have my friends, you and Dad, and Dalton,” I said, gesturing towards him. “That’s all I need right now.”

Dalton looked up from his sandwich and stared at me intently. I knew he was taking everything in, even though he was only four. He was a smart kid, and I didn’t want him growing up thinking that he needed a man in his life to be happy.

Mom seemed to sense my hesitance and softened her tone.

“Okay, fine. I won’t say any more,” Mom sighed, looking defeated. “I just want you to be happy.”

“I know, and you’re sweet for worrying. But I’m good.” I motioned my head towards Dalton as I added, “We both are.”

Right on cue, Dalton looked up at Mom and gave her the biggest, cheesiest smile possible. I gave him a quick fist bump, then got busy eating my sandwich and chips. Once we were done with lunch, we cleaned up and took one last stroll. Dalton added a few shells to his collection, and then we headed back to the house.

Dalton was exhausted, so I put him in his room and turned on his favorite TV show. I made sure he was settled, then I went to my room and changed clothes. I was about to go put away everything from our picnic when my phone chimed with a message. I quickly grabbed it from my purse, and a smile crossed my face when I glanced down at the screen and saw that Skylar had messaged me.

Skylar:

Hey, stranger.

Me:

Hey! How’s the bride-to-be?

Skylar:

I'm good. Crazy busy with wedding stuff, but good.

I wanted to see when you were planning to come into town.

Me:

I'm already here.

I'm between cases, so I came a few days early to visit with the folks.

Skylar:

Perfect!

Some of the old crew is getting together on Friday, and it wouldn't be the same without you.

Me:

I'll be there.

Just let me know when and where.

Skylar:

Yay!

I can't wait to see you.

Me:

You too!

See ya Friday!

I collapsed on the bed and immediately dialed Jackson's number. It rang a couple of times and then he answered, "Hello there, Tinkerbell. How you making it over there in the big city?"

"I'm making it."

"That didn't sound very convincing."

"Skylar just messaged me about going out Friday night."

"And that's a problem?"

"Not exactly." I let out an exaggerated sigh, then explained, "I want to see her, but I'm not exactly thrilled about catching up with her in a crowded bar with a bunch of our old high school friends."

"It might do you some good to get out and have a little fun. Lord knows you never have any fun around here."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," I replied with a shrug.

"Who knows... you might actually meet someone."

"Like that will ever happen."

"You never know."

"When was the last time I met someone at a bar?"

"When was the last time you actually went to a bar?" he scoffed. "You're always too busy working or writing or whatever to actually get out and meet people."

"I have a son, Jackson."

"Yeah, but there are these things called babysitters. You might try it once and a while."

"I know. It's just..."

"It's just what?"

"The last time I was in a bar I was with Malcomb."

I closed my eyes and smiled as I thought back on that night. It was the night of my senior prom, and I was itching to get into a little trouble, so I suggested sneaking into the Fury bar for a couple of drinks. To my surprise, Malcomb agreed,

and the whole crew snuck in. I had no doubt that Cotton and the brothers knew we were there, but they didn't say a word. They trusted Malcomb to make sure that we didn't get too carried away and let us have our good time.

And that we did.

We spent the entire night dancing and drinking like there was no tomorrow. I couldn't remember ever having so much fun.

I was pulled from my thoughts when Jackson asked, "Is that the night you puked on his dad?"

"Afraid so."

We'd all made plans to stay at the hotel in town, but when it came time for us all to leave, Cotton miraculously appeared and demanded that we stay there in their guest quarters. I was about to thank him when the room started spinning, and my tongue got thick. Before I knew what was happening, I'd gotten sick all over his jeans and boots. Poor Malcomb spent the remainder of the night holding my hair back while I hugged the commode, and he never complained about it. Not once.

"I thought so," he scoffed. "I'd say it's time for you to make some new memories, doll."

"I think you might be right."

"I know I am. It's time you cut loose and lived a little."

"That's easy for you to say. You cut loose all the time." Just thinking about all the times he'd talked about going out had me sitting up in bed. "Wait! You should come with me!"

"Woah... what?"

"Come up this weekend and go to the bar with me."

"*As much as I would love to...*" he grumbled like I was asking him to pick the scales of a snake. "I can't. I have to work this weekend."

"Since when do you work weekends?"

“Since now. We have some potential clients coming in, and the boss wants me to schmooze them a little.”

“Well, you’re good at that.”

“Yeah, but so are you. You just go to that bar with your friends and turn on the charm. And before you know it, you’ll have them eating out of your hand.”

“I’m not worried about that.”

“Then, what exactly are you worried about?”

“What if he’s there?”

“You’re gonna have to face him sometime.”

“Yeah, I know. I just wish it wasn’t so hard.”

“Maybe it won’t be.” Jackson sounded almost hopeful as he said, “Maybe, just maybe, it will be good, and you can finally put this guy behind you.”

“If only...”

As much as I would love some closure with Malcomb, I knew I would never be able to put him behind me—at least, not completely. He was my son’s father, and whether he wanted it or not, he still held my heart in his hand and always would.

CHAPTER 7

Savage

A great deal of money passed through our hands on a monthly basis, most of which had come to us illegally.

We had to launder that money, so we started a construction company. It was just supposed to be a front, but in less than a year, Guardrail had turned it into quite a business. It not only provided us with the means to launder our ill-gotten gains but also provided us with a legitimate company that made us a good bit of money on its own.

So, when we weren't off doing runs or having church, we were out at the construction site, working on our latest project, and today, that project was installing a swimming pool in a luxurious mansion that belonged to one of our clients, a wealthy businessman with a taste for the finer things in life.

My brothers and I were working tirelessly under the scorching sun when I heard Rooster complain, "Fuck. It's hot as balls out here."

"It's not as bad as it was yesterday."

"Are you on crack? It's only noon, and I've already soaked through my clothes, and I'm pretty sure I've chaffed my taint." Rooster wiped the sweat from his brow as he whined, "I won't walk right for a week."

"Like you ever did." Torch gave him a smirk as he teased, "Hell, that chaffing might be the best thing that ever happened to ya."

"Gotta wonder how you know about my walk." Rooster cocked his brow. "You been looking at my ass?"

“Fuck no.”

“You sure about that?” Rooster reached behind him and grabbed an ass cheek. “I mean, it’s a good ass. I can see why you’d wanna stare at it.”

They would’ve kept at it all afternoon if I hadn’t stepped between them and said, “Alright, you two. Enough of the bullshit. We’ve got work to do.”

And just like that, they both shook it off and got back to work.

My father was always the one who kept the guys on track, and it never took much. Just a quick look or commanding statement and the goofing came to a halt. It felt odd having them react similarly to me, but at the same time, it felt good.

Damn good.

I glanced over at my father and found him staring back at me with a proud smile on his face. He gave me a quick nod, then went back to his conversation with Guardrail. We still had a lot to do to get the plumbing and electrical ready for the shotcrete, so I did a recheck of the layout and got busy prepping the plumbing for the deck jets.

One task led to the next, and before I knew it, the guys were starting to disperse. I finished up what I was doing and started gathering up my things. I was preparing to head out when Dad came up to me and said, “Your mother wants to know if you picked up your suit.”

“I haven’t gotten around to it.”

“And why’s that?”

“Because I’m not going.” Dad gave me one of his looks, and I knew I was about to get blowback. “I’ve got a lot of shit going on. I don’t have time nor the desire to go to some stupid wedding.”

“It’s important to your mother.”

“I know.” My throat tightened as I told him, “But Londyn will be there.”

“And what if she is.”

“I haven’t seen her in almost five years. I didn’t see her when she came asking for me at the clubhouse. I didn’t see her when she came home to see her folks. I didn’t read her fucking letters or answer her calls. It damn near killed me, and now, because of some fucking wedding, I’m supposed to just forget about all that and pretend like it never happened.”

“Maybe it’s time.”

“I can’t, Dad. It would be too hard.” I grabbed my cooler and started towards the parking lot. “I would think you, above anyone else, would get that.”

I hoped that would be the end of our conversation, but no such luck. Dad stormed up behind me and asked, “Tell me this... Why’d you do it? Why’d you turn her away?”

“I did it for her.” I stopped and faced him as I added, “I wanted her to have a chance to have the life she deserved, and she couldn’t have that with me.”

“And you know, without a doubt, that she felt the same way.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Then, maybe it’s time you found out.” He put his hand on my shoulder as he told me, “I get why you did what you did, son. It was an admirable thing, but you’ve given her time to do her thing. So, if she still means something to you, it’s time you did something about it.”

“And what if she’s moved on?”

“Then, you’ll have to find a way to accept it, but there’s always the chance that she hasn’t.”

He gave me a fatherly pop on the bicep, then turned and got in his truck. I was still mulling over what he’d said when he pulled out of the drive. I was pulled from my thoughts when Rooster came up behind me and announced, “Torch and I are heading over to Danvers for dinner and a cold one. You wanna come with?”

“Gonna have to pass tonight, brother. I’ve got some things I need to tend to.”

“Need a hand?”

“Nah, I’ve got it.”

“You know where we’ll be if you change your mind.”

I nodded, then walked over to my pickup. Seconds later, I was on the road driving towards town. I still had my hesitations about going to the wedding, but if I did decide to go, I would need my suit. So, I drove over to Hagley’s and parked right at the front door of the store, then got out and rushed up to the front door.

I was about to dart inside when I felt a small body slam into mine.

I looked down and found a pair of crystal blue eyes staring up at me. The kid was four or five with whitish-blond hair that reminded me of the pictures I’d seen of my dad when he was a kid. He was holding an ice cream cone that was now smeared into my jeans. “Whoa! Easy there, kid!”

The boy’s lopsided grin faltered as he looked at the mess he had made. “Oh, I’m swo-ry.”

“It’s all good.” I’d never laid eyes on him before, but there was something familiar about him—like I should’ve known him. But I didn’t. I had no idea who he was. “You got a name, kid?”

“Dalton.”

“Good to meet ya, Dalton. I’m Malcomb.”

“You’re wer-weally tall.”

“Compared to you, I am.” I glanced down at the cone in his hand and was surprised when I noticed that the ice cream was green. It wasn’t a common flavor, especially for kids, so I had to ask, “Is that pistachio?”

“Hm-hmm,” he answered. “It’s my fav-rit.”

“It’s my favorite, too.” I motioned my hand over to the front door of the ice cream shop as I told him, “Why don’t I

grab us both another one?"

The boy's face lit up, and he nodded eagerly, taking my hand as we started over to the ice cream shop. We didn't get far when the door flew open and Londyn's mother came rushing out. "Dalton?"

"Here I am."

"Oh, my heavens! You scared me to death!" She rushed over and took the kid's hand as she scolded, "I told you to wait beside me!"

"Hello, Mrs. Hollings."

"Hi, Malcomb." She looked a bit shaken as she said, "It's nice to see you."

"Good to see you, too. It's been a while." I glanced down at the kid and chuckled. "Looks like you've got your hands full."

"I certainly do." She brushed the kid's hair out of his face, then looked over at his cone and gasped when she noticed that the top of it was gone. "What did you do?"

I pointed to my jeans and chuckled. "We had a bit of a mishap."

"Oh, no!" An embarrassed blush crept over her cheeks. "I'm so sorry, Malcomb."

"Don't be. It was just a fluke." I pointed over to the ice cream shop as I told her, "I was just about to buy him another."

"Oh, that won't be necessary."

"But..." the boy protested.

"We have to get back home." Mrs. Hollings started tugging him towards her car as she told him, "We're already late."

"Maybe next time, kid."

"Thank you, Malcomb!" Mrs. Hollings continued towards her car as she shouted, "Tell your mother I said hello!"

"Will do."

I watched as she helped him into the backseat, then rushed around to get into the driver's seat. After a quick wave, she whipped out of the parking spot and sped away. I found our interaction a bit odd, but with Hagley's closing soon, I didn't have time to think much about it. I brushed off the remaining ice cream, then turned and rushed inside the men's clothing store.

Mr. Hagley was sitting in his favorite chair with his feet propped up and a cigarette dangling from his mouth. He was at least ninety, frail and wrinkled, but he still had his wits about him. He knew me the second I walked in. "Well, there's a face I haven't seen in a while."

"Hey there, Mr. Hagley. How's it going?"

"I can't complain." He leaned forward, using his own weight to help pull himself from the chair, then wobbled over to me. "I take it you're here to try on the suit your mother picked out."

"Afraid so."

"This is for the Daniels wedding, right?"

I nodded, feeling a bit sheepish. Mr. Hagley was the only tailor in town, and I had to admit, I wasn't thrilled about having to wear a suit. But it was a wedding and my mother insisted, so there was no getting out of it.

Mr. Hagley shuffled over to a rack of suits and began pulling them out, holding each one up for inspection. "Your mother said you're a size 40 long," he said, squinting at me through his thick glasses.

"That's right."

He handed me a navy-blue suit and gestured for me to try it. I stepped behind the curtain and pulled it closed, then quickly slipped out of my work clothes. I put on the suit and checked myself out in the mirror. It was a little snug in the shoulders but otherwise fit well.

When I stepped out from behind the curtain, Mr. Hagley was waiting for me with a measuring tape tucked between his lips. He slowly circled me, toying with the fabric and

muttering measurements under his breath. He sounded pleased as he mumbled, “Okay, okay. Looks good. How does that feel?”

“It’s a little tight around the shoulders, but not too bad.”

“We could always go up a size, but this is the right fit.”

“Yeah, I think you’re right.”

“Of course, I am.” He slipped the measuring tape around my neck as he asked, “Now, what about a shirt?”

I considered refusing, but I knew there was no point. Mr. Hagley wasn’t going to let me out of there until I had everything I needed. After spending a small fortune, I said my goodbyes to Mr. Hagley and headed home. Once I got to the house, I put away my new duds and called my mother. I could hear the smile in her voice as she said, “Hey, sweetheart. I was hoping to hear from you today.”

“I just wanted to let you know that I picked up my suit.”

“Oh, good,” she replied happily. “Did you like it?”

“It’s fine... It’s a suit.”

“Well, I bet you look very handsome in it.”

My cut was the only jacket I ever wore, and I had no desire to change that. Unfortunately, I didn’t have a choice in the matter. “If you say so.”

“I do say so. I can’t wait to see you in it.”

“You got Dad wearing one, too?”

“Yes, dear.” She sighed. “He will be wearing one, and like you, he won’t be thrilled about it. But the wedding won’t last long, so maybe you two can find a way to suffer through.”

“We’ll be fine.” My encounter with Mrs. Hollings was still fresh on my mind, so I said, “I saw Mrs. Hollings today.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, she was at Marvin’s getting ice cream with some kid.”

“Really? Wonder who that could’ve been?”

“No idea. I would’ve asked her, but she was in a pretty big rush and bolted before I could ask.”

“I’m sure he was just a relative or a neighbor kid. Jane is always helping folks out.”

“That’s what I figured.” Even as I said the words, something didn’t feel right. There was something about that kid that got under my skin, so I told her, “But he looked like someone we should know.”

“Well, I’ll have to ask her about him.”

“Nah, it’s not a big deal. I was just curious.” I glanced up at the clock, and my stomach sank when I saw that it was already after eight. “I better get going. We’ve got a long one coming tomorrow.”

“Okay, sweetheart. Have a good night.”

“I’m gonna do my best.”

I hung up the phone, and after a long, hot shower, I hit the sack. Unlike the night before, I had no problem falling asleep, and I slept well. I woke up the next morning feeling pretty damn good, but that good feeling was shot to hell with a text from Maverick.

Maverick:

We got trouble.

Need you at the club now.

CHAPTER 8

Landyn

I was on the brink of having a nervous breakdown.

I was supposed to meet Skylar at the bar in half an hour, and I had absolutely nothing to wear. I'd gone through my suitcase at least a hundred times, but nothing worked. Desperate, I rushed to my mother's room and dove into her closet, searching for anything that might work. I was becoming desperate when Mom appeared with a large plastic tote in her hand.

"Maybe you can find something in here."

"What is that?" I stepped over to her and opened the lid, and to my pleasant surprise, it was filled with some of my favorite clothes from high school. "I can't believe you kept all of this!"

"I thought about taking it down to the goodwill, but I just couldn't make myself part with it." She smiled as she said, "There are a lot of good memories in that box."

"Yes, there are." I grabbed one of my favorite sweaters and held it up to my chest as I asked, "Do you think any of this will fit?"

Mom gave me a once-over before answering, "I don't see why not. You haven't changed that much since high school."

"But I've had a child since then."

"Well, there's only one way to find out."

"This is true."

I grabbed a few things from the tote, then made a beeline for the bathroom to try them on. I slipped on a pair of skinny jeans with a black knit top and was hit with a sudden pang of nostalgia. It was strange being back in my old clothes. It felt like a lifetime ago that I had worn them—back when life was simpler, and my biggest worries were getting good grades and making plans for the weekend.

“Lonny, you better hurry up. Malcomb will be here in 5 minutes.”

“I’m coming!”

My room looked like a tornado had come through. Every dresser drawer was pulled out, clothes were strewn everywhere, and I still couldn’t find what I was looking for. Out of pure desperation, I shouted, “Hey, Mom! Do you know where my black shirt it?”

“Which black shirt?”

“The one Malcomb gave me for my birthday... the one with the little blue flowers on it.”

We were going to the club house for Cotton’s birthday. I knew it was important to Malcomb and wanted to look extra nice. I’d curled my hair, put on some makeup, and even painted my nails. If I could just find the shirt, I would be set.

I dashed back into my closet and was checking to see if it had fallen on the floor when I heard my mom come into the room. She walked right over to the closet and pulled it right off the rack. “You mean this one?”

“Yes!”

I whipped it out of her hand and slipped it on just as the doorbell rang. “I’ll go get that so you can finish getting ready.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

That girl had it made.

She was young and carefree and had the world at her fingertips.

But now, as I stared at my reflection in the mirror, I could no longer see her. Now, I had dark circles under my eyes and frazzled hair—the mark of being a struggling single mother.

But maybe, just maybe, wearing my old clothes might help me remember what it felt like to be young and free. It certainly couldn't hurt. I toyed with my hair and freshened up my makeup, then stepped out of the bathroom and asked my mother, "Well? What do you think?"

"Oh, Lonny! You look marvelous."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely." A warm smile swept across her face as she said, "Now, get out of here and go have a good time."

"I should go say goodbye to Dalton."

"Dalton is fine. We're about to pop some popcorn and watch a movie, so stop procrastinating and get going."

"Okay." I stepped over and gave her a quick hug. "Thanks, Mom."

I grabbed my things and slipped out the back door. When I got to the bar, I was disappointed to see that the parking lot was completely packed. I wasn't exactly surprised. There were only two bars in town—Danvers and Puckett's. Danvers was more of a sports bar with pool tables and flat screens, whereas Puckett's was an old-school bar with a juke box and dart boards. Both were usually packed on Friday nights, and tonight was no different.

I opened the door and was immediately hit with the smell of stale cigarettes and alcohol—a scent that reminded you of the frat party you weren't invited to. The crowd was already in full swing, and the music was blaring so loud that I could feel the bass vibrating in my chest. I was tempted to turn around and dart back to my car, but I forced myself to continue inside.

I'd only taken a couple of steps when I spotted Skylar at a table close to the bar. Carefully weaving through the thick

swarm of people, I made my way over to her. As soon as she saw me, she leaped out of her chair and opened her arms, wrapping them tightly around me as she shouted, “You made it!”

“Of course!” I hugged her back as I shouted, “I wouldn’t miss it!”

“You look fabulous!”

“Thanks! You do, too.” I stepped back and gave her a quick once over. “I love the new hair color.”

“Thanks, I thought I’d switch it up a bit.”

“Hey there, stranger.” Lucas, Skylar’s long-time boyfriend and now fiancé, stepped over and gave me a big hug. “Really glad you were able to make it.”

“Me, too.”

Lucas grinned, then motioned for me to sit down next to Skylar. Once I was settled, he looked over to the tall, dark-haired man sitting next to him. “You remember Danny, don’t you?”

“Of course,” I replied, eyeing him up and down. He had a strong jawline and piercing blue eyes that seemed to be staring straight through me. I extended my hand as I told him, “Hi, Danny. It’s good to see you again.”

“Right back at ya,” he said, taking my hand in his and shaking firmly. His touch sent shivers down my spine, and I couldn’t help but feel a little bit intimidated. “It’s been a long time.”

“Yes, it has.”

“So, what have you been up to?” Skylar asked, taking a quick sip of her drink. “Tell me all about your life in the big city. I know it has to be absolutely amazing.”

I didn’t know how to tell her that my life hadn’t been all that spectacular. Everyone thought I’d taken the scholarship and had gotten my degree, and I was too embarrassed to let anyone know that I’d dropped out of my big fancy college and

moved closer to home. I'd also failed to mention that I'd had a four-year-old son who was the light of my world.

That wasn't the kind of thing you just blurted out at a bar, so I shrugged and told her, "If you consider going to work and coming straight home every day amazing, then yes. It's the best."

"Please tell me that's not all you do."

"I shop a little."

"Londyn!" she fussed. "Please tell me you've..."

Before she could finish her thought, Josie and Tarah, two of our friends from high school, came up behind us and squealed, "The party has arrived!"

Skylar and I jumped up and gave each of them a hug. We were taking a quick moment to catch up when Thomas and Brandon showed up with Kinley and Mark. We each greeted them and claimed our spots at the table. We'd barely had a chance to get settled when Tarah asked, "Who's ready for a round?"

And that's all it took for things to get interesting.

Brandon called one of the waitresses over and ordered a round of shots for everyone. As we waited for them to arrive, I looked around the table and felt a mix of gratitude and sadness. While it was great to see my old friends again, it didn't feel the same without Malcomb being there with us.

Tonight wasn't the night to be thinking about him.

I finally had a night out, and I was going to make the best of it—even if it killed me. When the shots finally arrived, we each grabbed one, and Skylar lifted hers up in a toast. "To best friends."

We all lifted our glasses and repeated, "To best friends."

The liquid burned all the way down my throat, but I didn't care. I was alive, and I was with the people who made me feel that way.

As the night wore on, the drinks kept flowing. They were watered-down and overpriced, but they helped me relax—which was both good and bad. I kept downing them as I listened to the various conversations in the group. I was starting to get a buzz as they each caught me up on what they were doing now and who they were dating or married to.

While they were talking, I couldn't help but notice that Danny kept looking over in my direction. At first, it was just a few quick glances, but gradually, those glances turned into longing stares that made butterflies flutter in my stomach. I could feel the blush on my face growing redder by the minute and was relieved when I heard Kinley tell the others, "The twins have been driving us up the wall."

"You have twins?"

"Um-hmm. Caleb and Gabe. They just turned two."

She had always said she wanted a career and had no plans to have kids, but I could tell by the way she spoke that she didn't feel like she was missing anything. "That's awesome. I'm so happy for you guys."

"Thanks, but these terrible twos are no joke, especially when there are two of them. I'm going to need you guys to pray for us. I don't know if we're going to make it."

She went on to tell us all how crazy things had been, but she said it all with a loving smile. She was happy. Really happy. It was more of the same with Josie and Tarah. Like Kinley, they'd wanted to get out of our small town and make it somewhere big. But neither of them seemed all that bothered that it never happened.

In fact, all of them seemed quite content and happy, and I envied them for that. I couldn't remember the last time I felt truly happy.

Until tonight.

I was about to take a sip of my drink when Skylar took me by the hand and ordered, "Let's go dance."

Before I had a chance to argue, she'd pulled me out on the dance floor, and we were engulfed by the crowd. It had been

ages since I'd danced, but the second I saw the smile on my friend's face, I knew there was no backing out. I started swaying my hips, and it wasn't long before the rest of the crew came over to join us.

My heart skipped a beat when Danny came up behind me and placed his hands on my hips. I leaned back into him, feeling the heat of his body against mine as we moved in sync with the music. His breath was hot and heavy against my ear, and I could feel his chest rising and falling with each deep breath.

I don't know if it was the alcohol or just my head playing tricks on me, but it seemed like he was more than a little interested.

He was very popular in high school, especially with the girls, and I couldn't help but feel a little flattered that he'd taken an interest in me. It felt good. Really good, and I didn't want it to end.

When the song ended, Danny leaned in and whispered in my ear, "Let's go get some fresh air."

I nodded, and he took my hand into his, leading me through the throngs of people and outside onto the dark parking lot. I was feeling a little lightheaded, so I leaned against the brick building, hoping it would help me keep my balance. Danny stepped in front of me with a concerned look on his face. "You okay?"

"Hmm-Hmm." I nodded. "I think I got a little too hot."

"Well, you're definitely hot," he replied with a sexy smirk. "You always have been."

"You're sweet."

"I'm just being honest." He rested the palm of his hand on the wall behind me, and his eyes skirted over me as he said, "And if I'm being completely honest, I would've asked you out in high school, but you were always taken."

I was both flattered and intrigued. I couldn't remember the last time a guy had made a move on me, so I told him, "Maybe it's time we rectified that."

“Maybe so.” He remained there, hovering over me as he asked, “When are you available?”

The words had barely left his mouth when his phone vibrated with a message. He pulled it from his back pocket as he said, “Hold on a second.”

He looked down at the screen, and the blood drained from his face as he read the message. I had no idea what was said in that text message, but there was a notable shift in the air, so I asked, “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, everything’s cool.” He raked his teeth nervously over his bottom lip, then said, “We better get back inside.”

“Oh... Okay.”

Unlike earlier, he didn’t take my hand and help me through the crowd. Instead, he took off and didn’t even bother to see if I was behind him. I would like to say that his demeanor improved once we were back inside, but it didn’t. He wouldn’t even look at me, much less talk to me, and after a few minutes, he stood and said, “I’m sorry, guys. I’ve got a work meeting early in the morning, so I’m gonna have to bolt.”

“But it’s still early,” Skylar protested.

“Sorry, kiddo. Duty calls.”

Without even glancing in my direction, he kissed her on the forehead and bolted, and I won’t deny that it stung a little. Thankfully, I had Skylar and plenty of booze to help me forget the sting, and I used them both to the fullest—something I would soon regret.

CHAPTER 9

Savage

I knew it was fucked up when I did it, but I couldn't help myself. I was on my way home from the clubhouse when I spotted Londyn standing outside of Puckett's, and the sight of her took my breath away. Her long blonde hair was curled and cascading down her delicate shoulders, and she was wearing a pair of jeans and a black blouse that hugged her curves. She looked just as beautiful as she did the last time I'd seen her.

The sight of her had my pulse racing and my palms sweating.

I knew it was crazy, but I still wanted her as much as I did all those years ago. And seeing that Danny was with her and looking at her like his next conquest had rage boiling up inside of me. I had to do something to get that asshole away from her. It was the only way I could keep from completely losing it, so I sent him a text.

I told him I'd cut off his balls and shove them down his throat if he didn't walk away right then and there. I stood there and watched as he read the message, and a wave of satisfaction washed over me when he stepped away from Londyn and looked around with a panicked expression. Danny lived in town.

He knew me well enough to know that I meant what I'd said.

After saying something to Londyn, he turned and walked back inside. Disappointment marked her face as Londyn

followed him back inside. It was done. He'd taken heed to my warning.

That should've been it. I should've gotten back in my truck and left.

I didn't.

Instead, I walked right up to the front door and stepped inside. I was taking a huge risk. Londyn could've spotted me walking through the crowd, but I didn't care. I had to get another look at her. Just one look. So, I made my way to the back of the bar and stood in a dark corner, being careful not to be noticed.

I took a quick glance around the room and found her sitting at a table with Skylar and a couple of our other friends from high school. She was toying with her straw as she listened to whatever crazy thing Skylar was saying.

And damn, she looked absolutely beautiful.

I couldn't tear my eyes away from her.

She was like a magnet, drawing me—just like she'd always done. I knew I was fucking up. I had no business being so close to her, but I couldn't help it. It had been too long since I'd last seen her.

I watched as Danny stood and said his goodbyes. Once again, Londyn looked disappointed, but her expression changed the second the waitress brought over another round of drinks.

I wanted nothing more than to go over and talk to her, but I couldn't.

Not now. Not when there was so much that needed to be said.

Being careful to stay out of her line of view, I slipped over to the bar, ordered a whiskey neat, and took a long sip, hoping the burn of the alcohol would distract me from the ache in my chest.

But it did little to help. My eyes drifted back over to her, and the ache grew even more intense as I watched the way she

feigned a smile and took another long sip of her drink. And then another. Londyn had always been a lightweight, and if her droopy eyelids and wobbly posture were any indication, that hadn't changed. I was becoming concerned when she stood and said something to the group. She held onto the table until she got her footing, then wobbled back and forth as she started walking towards the bathroom.

The chick was soused.

She stumbled a couple times, but to my amazement, she managed to make it without any major catastrophes. I stepped over and guarded the door, making sure no one disturbed her while she was inside. I waited, and I waited. And I waited some more. It was clear something was up, so I eased the door open and asked, "Everything alright in here?"

I got no answer.

Just silence.

I eased the door open a little further, and that's when I spotted a set of feet beneath the stall. They were curled to the side like she was leaning over, so I walked over and tapped on the door. It crept open, and my fears were confirmed when I found Londyn passed out with her head propped against the wall.

"Dammit, woman," I hissed. "What the hell were you thinking?"

I stepped over to her and lifted her into my arms, and I was hit with the familiar scent of her perfume. Damn. She was killing me.

I carried her out of the bathroom and started walking towards the back exit. I hadn't gotten far when I came up on one of the waitresses. I stopped and told her, "She was with the big group up front. Make sure they knew she got a ride home."

"Will do."

I continued towards the back door and carefully carried Londyn out to my truck.

I was buckling her seatbelt when she suddenly started to stir and mumbled, “Malcomb.”

“I got ya. Just hang tight.”

She sank back in her seat and immediately passed back out. Fuck. Seeing her so fucking vulnerable both gutted me and pissed me off. I got in next to her and leaned over to her as I whispered, “You got any idea what it’s doing to me to see you like this? Fuck, Londyn. You’re too smart for this shit.”

I let out a grumbled breath, then started the truck and pulled out of the parking lot. As I drove, I kept glancing over at her, making sure that she was okay, and I had to fight the urge to touch her, to pull her into my arms and tell her that I should’ve never broken things off with her. I wanted to tell her that I still wanted her.

Unfortunately, she was too far gone to hear anything I had to say, so I kept my mouth shut. By the time we got out to her folks’ place, it was well after midnight, and everyone had gone to bed. I didn’t want to wake them, so I got out and started hunting the spare key. Her mother was notorious for locking herself out of the house and kept an extra key hidden in a stowaway rock.

It took me a minute, but I managed to find it and opened the back door. I went back to the truck and retrieved Londyn, and just like earlier, she was out cold. I lifted her into my arms and carried her up the front steps. As I entered the darkened house, I couldn’t help but feel a sense of Deja vu. I’d been in this house many times, but back then, I was a guest and welcomed there. Now, I was breaking and entering with their passed-out daughter in my arms.

I continued down the hallway, trying to remember which room was hers, when her head fell to my shoulder, and a light sigh escaped her lips.

Damn.

She was so fucking beautiful.

She didn’t make it easy, but I got her to her room and into her bed. As I pulled the covers over her, she muttered,

“Malcomb.”

Hearing her say my name again tugged at me, making it that much harder to leave her. I shook my head as I muttered, “It shouldn’t be this damn hard.”

I watched her for a moment longer, and once I knew she was good and settled, I forced myself to head back out to my truck. I sat there for a minute, letting the memories and mixed emotions settle a bit before I backed out of the drive and started home.

I turned on some music and tried my best to clear my head.

The drive to the house helped, but my head was still spinning after my encounter with Londyn. Desperate for a reprieve, I went inside and grabbed a bottle of whiskey from the liquor cabinet, then headed straight for the bathroom. I turned on the hot water, then opened the bottle and tilted it back, taking a long pull. I welcomed the burn as it slid down my throat. I placed the bottle on the counter, then undressed and got in the shower.

The hot water cascading down my tense muscles felt good. I scrubbed my body until I was just about raw, but it didn’t help clear my head. I lifted my face and let the water fall into my mouth, the taste of whiskey on my tongue. I closed my eyes and pictured Londyn’s beautiful face in my mind, her soft, full lips, her velvet skin. She was absolutely stunning.

Even as I got out and dried off, my mind was still swirling with thoughts, but they were all racing back to Londyn. I threw on some fresh boxers and got into bed, quickly tossing my comforter over to the opposite side of the bed. I settled my head against the pillow, and I’d barely closed my eyes when she came crashing through my thoughts.

How beautiful she looked.

The sparkle in her eyes when she smiled.

The way each and every one of her curves were accentuated by the thin, black fabric of her sweater.

Damn.

I felt like I was coming apart at the seams. I needed to get her out of my system, and I needed to do it fast. Hoping it would knock the edge off, I reached into my boxers and took my throbbing dick in my hand, gripping my fingers tightly around my pulsing shaft.

I needed to feel the bite as I started to move my hand up and down my thick cock. I envisioned her in my bed next to me, my hand trailing across her perfect, round breast. I could almost feel her soft, smooth skin against my fingertips as I imagined reaching for her pert nipple, twisting it gently between the tips of my fingers.

My breath quickened as I thought about her writhing against the soft cotton sheets as I touched her. Her little whimpers echoing through the room as I continued to tease her with my touch. With each vision, my hand moved faster, gripped tighter and every stroke brought me closer to the edge.

My dick pulsed in my hand when I imagined the expression on her face as I raked my tongue against her clit, tasting her, tormenting her until the moment when her orgasm surged through her body only to continue teasing, licking and sucking until her back arched off of the bed.

Fuck.

I stroked harder, faster, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't come.

I was becoming more and more frustrated by the second, so I grabbed my phone from the side of the bed and pulled up an old picture of Londyn. Looking at those gorgeous eyes did something to me, and I finally felt like I was getting somewhere when my phone started ringing and Candace's name flashed across my screen.

She never called me, especially at this hour, so I quickly removed my hand from my boxer and answered, "Yeah?"

"Hey... um... Is this a bad time?"

"Not the greatest."

"Oh, okay. I'll call back later."

I could tell by the sound of her voice that something was wrong, so I told her, “No, no. it’s fine. What’s going on?”

“I need some advice.”

I took a deep breath, hoping to clear my mind of any lingering thoughts. “Okay, what’s on your mind?”

“Well, I’m kind of in a tight spot,” she said, her voice shaking slightly. “I think I might be pregnant.”

Her news took me by surprise. Candace might’ve been a hang around and made a habit of being with various men, but she was a smart girl. She’d always been careful and knew what was what. It just wasn’t something I’d expect from her, so I asked, “Are you sure?”

“I took a test, and it came back positive,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Well, damn.”

“I know.” I could tell she was on the brink of tears when she said, “I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“Alright, now. Enough of that. We’ll figure this thing out.” I’d always considered Candace a friend, but we weren’t exactly close, which led me to wonder why she thought I was the one to turn to about this. “Have you told any of the girls about this?”

“No way,” she scoffed. “I mean, I love ‘em. I really do, but they don’t know how to keep their mouths shut. Everyone would know, and I really don’t want that. Not until I know what’s really going on.”

“Understood. I’ll keep it quiet.”

“Thank you, Malcomb.” I could tell she was on the verge of crying when she asked, “What am I going to do? I can’t have a baby right now.”

“Look, you don’t have to make any decisions right now. I’ll come by Monday morning, and we’ll go see a doctor and figure out everything from there.”

“Okay. Thanks, Malcomb.”

“That’s what I’m here for,” I assured her. “Now, get some sleep, and I’ll see you in a couple of days.”

After a quick goodbye, she ended the call. It wasn’t exactly the distraction I was hoping for, but it was enough to get my mind off of Londyn—at least for the time being. I tossed my phone down on the bed beside me, and it wasn’t long until I finally put my long night behind me and I dozed off.

I spent the rest of the weekend trying to keep myself busy with various projects around the house. I mowed, caught up on some laundry, and washed my bike and truck—anything to keep my mind off of things I didn’t want to think about.

And for the most part, it worked.

I made it through the entire weekend without getting stuck in my head about Londyn. When Monday finally rolled around, I got up an hour earlier than usual and drove over to Candace’s place. When I pulled up, I found her sitting on her front porch swing, and I could tell from the driveway that she’d been crying.

As soon as she spotted me, she gathered her things and started down the steps. Once she was in the truck, she feigned a smile and said, “Thanks for doing this, Savage. I owe you one.”

“You’ve come in clutch for me a time or two. It’s only fair for me to return the favor.”

She nodded, then settled back in her seat.

I could tell by the tension radiating off of her that she didn’t want to talk, and I was good with that. It wasn’t like I had any great words of wisdom for her. In fact, I had no idea what to say and feared I might make matters worse by saying something she didn’t want to hear.

When we got to the doctor’s office, I parked and was about to get out when I noticed that Candace hadn’t moved. Realizing she needed a moment, I settled back in my seat and waited. After several moments, she finally whispered, “I barely knew the guy... We met at Puckett’s a few weeks back. We’d only gone out a couple of times, but I really liked him.”

“You know, you don’t have to tell me this.”

“I know, but I’d like to explain.” A tear trickled down her cheek as she said, “We’d gone to dinner and had a few drinks... one thing led to another.”

“Yeah, I get the picture.”

“He left the next morning, and I never heard from him again.” She turned to face me, her eyes red and puffy, lips trembling. “I’m always careful. I don’t just get mixed up with anybody, but there was something about this guy...”

“Yeah, he was a dick. Plain and simple.”

“Yeah, he was,” she agreed. “I usually pick up on that sort of thing. I don’t know how I missed it.”

“Things happen. It’s not your fault.”

“Well, it certainly feels like it is.” She sighed, then added, “I tried calling him and left a couple of messages, but I never could get him to return my calls.”

“Fuck him. If he doesn’t know a good thing when he has it, then he doesn’t deserve you.” I motioned my head towards the clinic. “Now, let’s just get this thing done so we can figure out the next move.”

She nodded, then grabbed her purse and got out. I followed her to the doctor’s front door and into the waiting room. As luck would have it, the place was fucking packed. As soon as Candace signed in, we made our way to the back and sat down in the only empty spot we could find.

I won’t deny that it was pretty brutal being there. I knew it was just in my head, but I felt the whole room was staring at us, casting judgments about why we were there. I knew they were thinking I’d knocked her up, and I wanted nothing more than to tell them all that they could stick it. But I forced my head down and tried my best to ignore them.

After what felt like an eternity, the nurse called Candace’s name. She immediately turned to me and said, “I’ll go do the test and stuff, then come back out here and wait with you. That way you can be with me when I get the results.”

“Sounds good.”

She took her purse and zig-zagged her way through the crowd, then disappeared down the hall. Twenty minutes later, she returned looking even more nervous than before.

Damn.

It had already been a long one, and it was only noon.

And it was about to get longer.

Much longer.

CHAPTER 10

Londyn

I was already pretty toasted when the group decided to move the party to Skylar's place, so I opted out. I made a quick stop in the bathroom, then Skylar or one of the others in the group helped me get home—or at least, I think they did. I didn't remember the ride to the house or paying the driver. It was like I blinked, and I was in my parents' house and curled up in bed.

I woke up the next morning feeling like absolute death.

I couldn't remember the last time I had a hangover quite like this one.

My head hurt, my eyes ached, and my tongue felt like sandpaper.

In hopes of blocking out the sun, I pulled my comforter over my head and thought back over my night with Skylar and the crew. We'd laughed and talked for hours, and I'd had a really great time—even with the whole Danny debacle. I still had no idea how I'd got it so wrong. I guess my mind was playing tricks on me.

Just like it was playing tricks when I thought I saw Malcomb.

Actually, I felt him before I saw him. I could feel the heat of his stare on my skin. I immediately turned and quickly glanced around the room. My heart skipped a beat when I spotted a set of blue eyes staring back at me. Certain it was him, I leaned to the left in hopes of getting a better look.

But in a blink, those beautiful baby blues were gone.

I looked around the entire bar, but there was no sign of him. It was as if he'd vanished in thin air, and it bothered me more than I cared to admit. In fact, his not being there disappointed me more than when Danny turned cold on me.

I wanted to see him.

I wanted him to look at me the way he used.

I wanted him to hold me, kiss me, and make love to me—just like he used to. But those feelings of want and need were laced with hurt and anger.

As much as I wanted to forget, the day he ended things haunted me. Being turned away felt like a stab in the back. Malcomb completely ignoring my letters only deepened the wound.

It was those memories that turned my heart cold and gave me the strength to force the longings I had for him out of my head.

And then, only then, was I finally able to drift back off to sleep.

I planned to sleep the day away, but Mom dashed those plans when she came into my room and hissed, “Are you going to answer that?”

“Answer what?” I grumbled.

“Your phone,” she fussed. “The stupid thing has been vibrating off and on for over an hour.”

“I’ll get it in a minute.”

I heard her footsteps grow closer, then a shuffle at my bedside table. The phone landed next to me as she fussed, “It could be important.”

“Okay. Okay. I’ve got it.”

I rolled over with a huff and grabbed my phone. I squinted my eyes as I looked at the screen and groaned when I saw that it was Jackson calling. I threw my arm over my head, covering my eyes as I answered, “What?”

“I’ve been calling for over an hour.”

“So I’ve heard.”

“Where the hell have you been?”

“In bed.”

“Ooohhh, so you had a big time last night.”

“I did. In fact, I had a great time.”

“Oh, really?”

“It was one of the best nights I’ve had in a while.”

I went on to tell him everything about my night, both the good and the bad, and once I was done, he chuckled and said, “Damn. I hate I missed it.”

“Me, too. I think you would’ve enjoyed it.”

“I’m glad you had a good time. You deserve it.”

I giggled as I told him, “You sound like my mother.”

“Well, your mother’s a smart lady, just like me.”

“Gotta love your confidence.”

He laughed as he said, “It’s part of my charm.”

“Yes, it most certainly is.”

There was a moment of comfortable silence before Jackson spoke up again. “So, I umm... I have some bad news.”

“Oh, God. What is it?”

“You gotta promise not to get mad.”

“Just tell me.”

“Michael’s wife went into labor last night, so he’s not going to be able to go to the conference tomorrow.”

“Okay. How is that bad news?”

“I have to go in his place.” There was a long pause before he added, “I’m sorry, but I won’t be able to make it to the wedding.”

“What?” I sat up and immediately regretted it when my head started throbbing. With a dramatic groan, I fell right back on my pillow and whined, “I can’t believe you’re going to bail on me like this.”

“I’m not bailing, Londyn. I’ve gotta work,” Jackson defended himself.

“But you promised me you’d go with me.” I felt bad for giving him a hard time, but I really didn’t want to go to Skylar’s wedding alone. “Can’t you do something?”

“I wish there was, but I’ve got no choice here. I’ve gotta go.” I could hear the sincerity in his voice as he said, “You have to know that I’d never intentionally disappoint you, but this is a career opportunity that I can’t pass up,” Jackson explained.

“I know... I know.” I was disappointed that Jackson couldn’t come, but it wasn’t the end of the world. I’d had a good time with Skylar and the girls. I had no reason to think the wedding wouldn’t be more of the same. “And I understand. I really do.”

“I’ll make it up to you,” Jackson assured me.

“No need. It’s really not a big deal,” I mumbled. “I’ll tag along with my parents and try to slip out early.”

“And if he’s there?”

“Then, he’s there. I’ll figure it out.”

“Or you could try talking to the guy.”

“Maybe. We’ll just have to wait and see how the night plays out.”

“Okay, but you better keep me posted. I don’t want to spend the whole weekend worrying about how you’re doing.”

“You know I will.”

We said our goodbyes, and I immediately rolled over and closed my eyes with a groan, trying my best to ignore the knot in my stomach. Like she could read my mind, my mother

walked in with a glass of iced tea and a bottle of Tylenol. “I thought you might need a couple of these.”

“Oh, you are a lifesaver.” I sat up in bed and took the Tylenol from her hand. “I’m too old for this.”

“Oh, hush.” She sat my tea down on the bedside table. “You’re still plenty young for nights out. You just had one too many.”

“I had more than one too many.” I grabbed my tea and took the Tylenol, then told her, “And I’m going to pay for it for the rest of the day.”

“You just need to sleep it off.” She gave me one of her motherly pats, then started out of the room. “I’ll be back in a bit with some soup and crackers.”

“What about Dalton?”

“He’s with your father.” She stopped and turned to face me with a smile. “They’re off having some guy time. Now, stop worrying and get some rest.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

With that, she walked out of my room and closed the door.

I slept off and on for another couple of hours, then eventually got up and took a long, hot shower—which did wonders for what was left of my hangover. I helped Mom with a little laundry, then we all piled up in the living room and watched one of Dalton’s favorite Disney movies.

The next morning, Mom came into my room and asked if I wanted to go into town with her to do a little shopping. I wasn’t really in the mood. I was still a little tired and feeling a little off from the weekend festivities, but Mom insisted. She wanted to help me find a new outfit for the wedding, so I agreed to tag along. We drove into town and parked in front of a small boutique I’d never been to before. Nestled between a bank and a bookstore, it had a quaint sign hanging above the door that read *Franny’s Dress Boutique*. I was looking at the clothes in the window as I told Mom, “This place looks cute.”

“Oh, you’re going to love it.” She turned off the engine and slipped her keys into her purse. “She has the best sales.”

Feeling hopeful, I followed her up to the front door, and as we stepped inside, a bell chimed, announcing our arrival. The store was filled with a variety of clothing items, ranging from dresses to skirts to blouses, and Mom was right. She had some really great sales.

I started browsing through the racks, and it wasn’t long before a cute little black dress caught my eye. It was made of a soft material and had a flowy skirt that would be perfect for the wedding. I held it up to my body, admiring it in the mirror, and I was about to get Mom’s opinion when I spotted her talking to a man near the back of the store.

He was older with a kind smile and perfectly styled gray hair, wearing a cute little sweater vest, and my mother was yammering on like they were old friends. After a minute or so, Mom nodded her head, then turned and headed over to me.

As soon as she was within earshot, I whispered, “Who was that?”

“Oh, that’s Mr. Bruton. He’s on the town council, and he’s getting a petition together for a new caution light in town.”

“Another caution light?” I rolled my eyes. “That’s the last thing we need. We already have three, and no one knows how to use them.”

“*Londyn.*”

“Well, they don’t.”

“I happen to think it’s a splendid idea.” She shook her head as she reached for the dress in my hand. “This is cute.”

“You think so?”

“I do.” She held it up to my chest and smiled. “I think you should try it on.”

“You think?”

“Absolutely. I think it will be perfect for the wedding.”

“I was thinking the same thing.”

I slipped into the dressing room, and just as I'd hoped, it fit like a glove. I stepped out and did a quick spin, and Mom gasped. "It's perfect. We have to get it."

"I think so, too."

I darted back into the dressing room and changed back into my clothes. I took the dress up to the counter and reached into my purse only to discover that my wallet wasn't there. "One second. I need to run out to my car."

Mom immediately stepped over and said, "I can get it for you."

"No, I've got it."

I didn't want to get into a debate with my mother, so I quickly turned and rushed out the door. I went to my car and grabbed my wallet from the console. I was about to head back inside when my attention was drawn to the coffee shop across the street.

My heart jumped in my chest when I saw that it was him.

Malcomb.

He was walking towards his truck with a cup of coffee in each hand. He was taller, broader, and more muscular than I remembered. He was a man now, all tough and gruff, but I could still see remnants of the Malcomb I once knew. He was lurking behind that fierce exterior, and I found myself wishing I could talk to him.

Just for a second.

With a little fancy maneuvering, he managed to open the door to his SUV. My breath caught when he suddenly stopped and glanced over his shoulder, looking around the parking lot. I didn't move. I just stood there next to my car, watching intently as he eventually got inside his truck.

I felt compelled to rush over and speak to him.

But the thought terrified me.

I was going back and forth in my head when I noticed that he wasn't alone. There was a blonde sitting in the passenger

seat. Her head was down, making it difficult to see her face, but it didn't matter.

He wasn't alone.

I'd held on for years, but it was clear he hadn't done the same.

That was all I needed to know.

CHAPTER 11

Savage

We waited for over an hour for the nurse to call Candace back.

She looked like a nervous wreck as we made our way back to the doctor's office and sat down. Her eyes darted around the room as if she was trying to find an escape, but there was none to be had. She was stuck there until we got our answer.

The minutes ticked by slowly, each passing second carrying a mix of anxiety and hope. When the doctor finally came into the office, he seemed like a nice enough guy. He sat down in front of us, and I held my breath as he looked down and reviewed her chart. Seconds later, he looked up at Candace and said, "So, I'll get right to it... You're not pregnant. It looks like you must've had a faulty test."

"Really?"

"Really."

I could see a glimmer of relief in Candace's eyes as she asked, "So, I'm good?"

"Yes, you're all good," he assured her. "I'll need you to come back in six weeks to make sure your cycle returns to normal."

"Okay. Thank you, Dr. Stevens."

Candace looked beyond relieved as we made it back out to the truck. We got inside, and she turned to me with a smile. "I'm okay. I'm really okay."

"Yes, you are."

“We should celebrate.”

“Oh? And what do you have in mind?”

“How about a Mocha Frap from *The Stir*?”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

I pulled out of the parking lot and dove over to the coffee shop. Candace stayed in the truck while I went inside. I ordered our drinks, then took them back out to the truck. I opened my door and was about to get back in when I got the feeling that someone was watching me. I glanced around, but when I didn't see anyone or anything unusual, I got in and drove Candace out to her house.

I pulled up in the driveaway and waited as she gathered her things. She was just about to get out when she turned to me and said, “Thank you for today. I don't know how I'll ever repay you.”

“You're all good. It's not a big deal.”

“It was a very big deal,” she argued. “There aren't many guys who'd be as cool as you were today, and it means a lot.”

“Glad I could help.”

She smiled, then opened the door and started up the steps. Once she'd gone inside, I backed out and started driving back towards town, and it wasn't long before my mind drifted to the other night at the bar. Things would've gone so differently if Londyn and I had still been together.

I would've been right by her side all night making sure that nothing happened to her. But those days had come and gone. I'd made damn sure of that the day I broke things off with her.

I'll never forget the look in her eyes when I said, “*This isn't working.*”

“*What are you talking about?*”

“*Us... You and me.*”

I had to look away.

I needed a moment to muster the courage to say what had to be said.

It wasn't going to be easy. I loved Londyn with my heart and soul. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt her, but I didn't have a choice. It had to be done.

Her eyes, once filled with warmth and adoration, now glistened with a mix of confusion and hurt as I told her, "I think it's time for us to call it quits."

"Where is this coming from?" She took a step back and studied me for a moment. "Is this because I went to the graduation party with Misty and Carol instead of coming here to hang with the guys?"

"No, it has nothing to do with the party or anything like that."

From the moment I laid eyes on her, I knew she was the one for me. She was a natural beauty with long, dirty blonde hair and light freckles dappled across the bridge of her nose and cheeks.

When she was younger, she was a bit of a tomboy, always opting for rough-and-tumble over tea parties and Barbies. Seemed like she was always climbing trees or playing some sport, getting her hands dirty and showing what she was made of, but as she grew older, things started to change.

She slowly started wearing makeup and clothes that complimented her figure, but that untamed tomboy was always there lurking beneath the surface, just waiting for a new adventure. It was what I liked most about her and what led me to ask her to my senior prom.

She agreed, and we spent the next two and half years glued at the hip.

We were into everything from spontaneous road trips to late-night dancing by the ocean. My days with her were a whirlwind of adrenaline, mischief, and teenage mayhem. In my eyes, Londyn and I were unstoppable, a force of nature, and nothing could stand in our way.

I loved her.

And she loved me.

The last thing I wanted to do was hurt her, but her father was right.

There was no way around it and trust me when I say I considered all the possibilities. I thought about the long-distance thing. U of O was only ten hours away. We could've seen each other on weekends and holidays. It would've been fine with me, but Londyn wouldn't want us to be that far away from one another.

I could've just gone with her. And I would've, but again, she'd never ask me to give up my life with the club. So, I was left with one choice.

I had to end things.

It was the only way to make sure she didn't pass on her big scholarship to the University of Oregon and give up her dream to get a degree in environmental law.

Londyn crossed her arms with a huff. "What the hell is this all about?"

"I don't know how much clearer I can be. It's over, Londyn." The lines of worry creased her forehead, casting a shadow over her usually vibrant features. "We aren't good together. It's best to end things now before they get any worse."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Things between us are good... really good. They always have been." My heart sank when the corners of her mouth started quivering. It's what she did whenever she was trying to keep herself from crying. "I love you, Malcomb. I want to spend my life with you. You know that."

"Sorry, but that's not gonna happen."

Disbelief etched her face as she screeched, "Why are you doing this?"

"We've run our course, babe. It's time to cut our losses."

"Cut our losses? Are you kidding me?" She shook her head, then froze. "Oh, God... This is all because of that stupid

scholarship.”

“It’s got nothing to do with that.”

“Bullshit. It has everything to do with it,” she argued. “It means nothing to me, Malcomb. I don’t even want to go to school there, so you can stop with this nonsense.”

“I wish it was that simple.”

I ran my hand through my hair, signaling to Candace that it was time to put our plan into play. Taking my cue, she opened the back door and sauntered over to us. Candace was one of the younger hang arounds, and she played the part well. Even in the dead of winter, she’d wear short skirts and low-cut tops, leaving nothing to the imagination.

Londyn didn’t care for her.

She never did.

She hated the way Candace looked at me and made it clear that she wanted me to keep my distance—which is why I knew she’d be the perfect choice.

Londyn kept her eyes trained on Candace as she placed her hand on my shoulder and leaned in with a seductive grin. “Hey there, handsome. You ready to finish what we started?”

“Absolutely.” I gave her a wink. “Just give me a minute.”

“Sure thing, baby.” Candace glanced over at Londyn, then leaned in a little closer, her lips brushing against my ear as she whispered, “Don’t keep me waiting too long.”

She ran the tips of her fingers across my collarbone as she turned and started back inside the clubhouse. Londyn glared at me a moment, then asked, “So, this is the way you’re going to end things? You think I deserve this?”

The sound of her voice, once filled with joy and laughter, was filled with pain and disappointment. It gutted me. I wanted to reach for her, take her into my arms, and tell her that it was all a big mistake, but I loved her too much to do that. I couldn’t be the reason why she didn’t follow her dream. “I’m just doing what I should’ve done months ago.”

Tears streamed down her beautiful face as she spat, "Fuck you, Malcomb."

"We could always have one last go if that'd make ya feel better." My voice cracked, and I feared that was all it would take for her to see through my bluff. I needed to make sure she left there and never looked back, so I added, "I'm sure Candace wouldn't mind if you joined in."

"I'll pass."

"You sure?" The knot in my stomach grew even tighter when her breath caught. "I bet we could have a real good time."

"It didn't have to be like this." She quickly wiped the tears from her cheek as she stood and started for her car. "You did this. You were the one who walked away. Remember that!"

Without saying anything more, she got in her car and raced out of the parking lot.

As I sat there watching her headlights disappear into the darkness, I felt like a piece of me left with her, and I couldn't help but wonder if I'd made a terrible mistake. I was still sitting at the picnic table, staring off into the distance, when Candace came walking over to me. "Looks like your plan worked."

"Looks that way."

"She seemed really upset."

"Yeah, she did." I glanced up at her as I asked, "Did I do the right thing?"

"I don't know, but I hope for your sake that it was because there's no coming back from that."

At the time, I thought Candace was right.

I thought what was done was done, but as I looked at my suit hanging on the back of the door, I wasn't so sure.

CHAPTER 12

Londyn

I 'd spent the better part of the week running here and there with my mother, and it seemed like the wedding was mentioned with every errand or friendly visit. I'd gone back and forth about going. I wanted to be there for Skylar, but knowing Jackson wasn't coming put a real damper on things. I tried to think of an excuse to get out of going, but nothing came to mind. At least, nothing that sounded like a truly good reason. I was stuck.

When the big day arrived, I put on the dress I'd bought, and I studied my reflection in the mirror. I didn't look half bad. My hair was curled down on my shoulders. I'd done my makeup and was wearing my favorite pearl earrings, and the black dress hugged my curves in a way that didn't make me cringe.

I considered that a bonus.

I was trying to decide on which heels to wear when I heard Dalton say, "You look so prew-ty, Momma."

I turned and found my precious son standing in the doorway with a bright smile on his face. "Thank you, sweetheart."

"When is Cici coming?"

"It won't be long now." Cici was a neighbor's daughter. She was seventeen and absolutely adored Dalton, so I felt good about leaving him with her, especially since it was only for a couple of hours. "Are you excited to see her?"

Dalton nodded eagerly, his eyes sparkling with anticipation. “We’re gonna have pizza!”

I chuckled. “Oh, lucky you. I wish I could have pizza.”

I ruffled his hair and leaned down to give him a kiss on the forehead. “You be good for her tonight, okay?”

“Um-hmm. I prom-mise.”

I gave myself one last look in the mirror, then grabbed my purse and said, “Let’s go find your grandmother and see what’s taking her so long.”

Dalton and I made our way into the living room, and it wasn’t long before Cici came knocking at the door. After we got them situated, we said our goodbyes to them both and headed to the wedding. As expected, the church parking lot was slammed, and it took my father some time and effort to get us parked. Eventually, we made our way inside and found a seat in the back.

The decorations were breathtaking—white and gold flowers adorning the pews, an elegant chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and a red carpet leading up to the altar. Soft music played as we waited for the ceremony to begin.

It wasn’t long before the music began, and Skylar started down the aisle, her dress flowing behind her. I was watching her make her way towards Lucas when I spotted Malcomb. He was sitting on the groom’s side with Cotton and Cass, and to my surprise, there wasn’t a woman sitting with him. He was alone, and he couldn’t have looked more handsome.

He was wearing a suit, which was something I hadn’t seen him wear since Prom, and the same held true for his father. They rarely ever went anywhere without their Fury jackets and motorcycles, but I must say they both cleaned up nicely. I didn’t want to stare, but I couldn’t help myself. It seemed like a lifetime since we’d been in the same room together.

After several long moments, I managed to tear my eyes away from him and back over to the actual ceremony. Skylar’s eyes were full of love and hope as she said her vows, and Lucas seemed humbled by the fact that she was about to be

his. It was beautiful, and it wasn't long before my emotions started to get the best of me. So much so my mother leaned over to me and whispered, "Are you okay?"

"Um-hmm," I mumbled.

"Your day will come, sweetie. You'll see."

"I know."

She didn't get it. I knew I would never have what Skylar had. That chance had come and gone, but I didn't bother arguing. I knew she would start doing that thing where she tried to make me feel better, so I kept my thoughts to myself and simply nodded.

When the ceremony was over, the preacher announced the couple as husband and wife and invited us all to join them in the reception hall. I felt a mix of apprehension and excitement as I followed my parents out of the church and across the street to the reception hall. We were about to go in when I heard Kinley call out, "Hey, Londyn. Wait up!"

Mom and Dad continued inside while I walked over to Kinley and Mark and said, "Hey, guys! I was wondering if you were going to make it."

"We almost didn't." Kinley's eyes skirted over to Mark as she said, "The twins were in rare form today. I think they're both teething."

"Oh, that's no fun."

"No, it isn't." Kinley looked around at all the people going into the hall as she said, "She had quite a turnout."

"Yes, she did. I had no idea this many people were coming." I knew Malcomb was close. I could feel him, so I suggested, "We should probably get inside and find a spot."

"Yeah, you're probably right." Kinley leaned towards me as she whispered, "We need to find a table close to the back so we can slip out early."

"Only if I can slip out with you."

"Absolutely."

I followed them both inside, and just as we suspected, the place was already packed. Mark led us to an empty table in the back, and we all sat down.

As we settled in, I looked around the room. It was simply decorated with little white lights hanging from the ceiling and bouquets of flowers on every table. There was a small dance floor and an open bar that already had a long line. The guests were mingling, laughing, and seemed to be having a great time.

I, on the other hand, felt out of sorts. I was anxious and hot, and my heels were pinching my toes. A waiter came over with a tray of wine glasses. I grabbed one and quickly drank it, then immediately swiped another.

Hoping it would help ease the knot in my stomach, I drank it, too. Kinley giggled as she asked, “You okay over there?”

“Better now.”

“I guess it’s kind of hard being here with him.” She leaned in a little closer. “Especially when he’s constantly staring at you.”

“Who?”

“Malcomb.” She nodded her head to the left as she whispered, “He’s been over there staring at you since we sat down.”

Like a reflex, I turned, and my heart leapt to my throat when my eyes met Malcomb’s. He was standing in the corner with his father, and just like Kinley said, he was staring right at me.

Despite everything that had happened between us, I couldn’t deny that I was still attracted to him—very much so, and I silently cursed myself for it. The man had ripped my heart right out of my chest and stomped on it multiple times. I would be a fool to let him do it again. Kinley sounded amused as she snickered, “See. He can’t take his eyes off of you.”

“He can look all he wants.” I tried to avoid his gaze, quickly turning and looking back at Kinley. I took another sip of my drink, then added, “It’s not going to change anything.”

“Really? I always thought you two were good together.”

“*Were* is the key word there.” I shrugged. “I think it’s safe to say that our time has come and gone.”

“I don’t know about that.”

Kinley’s eyes drifted up, signaling that he was walking towards us. My whole body tensed as I glanced over my shoulder, and just as I feared, he was right behind me. I managed to feign a smile as I said, “Hey, Malcomb.”

“Hey.” His eyes were locked on mine as he asked, “Can we talk?”

“Yeah... I guess,” I stammered, trying to keep my voice steady as I motioned to the empty seat across the table. “You can sit.”

“No.” His eyes bored into mine as he replied, “In private.”

“Oh.” I glanced over at Kinley, then back to him. “Okay.”

I stood, then followed him through the crowd and out of the front door. He didn’t say a word as we made our way over to the bottom of the steps. Malcolm finally stopped, turning to face me his tousled hair falling over those familiar, irresistible eyes. They were dark and intense, and they were fixed on mine.

I could feel the tension building inside me as I waited for him to speak. His eyes skirted seductively over me as he said, “You look good. Real good.”

“You look good, too.”

A cool breeze whipped around, carrying Malcomb’s scent, and the second it reached me, I was hit with a sense of *Deja vu*. I’d smelled this scent before, and not a long time ago. I’d smelled it recently. I just couldn’t place where it had been. My stance faltered as I was hit with a rush of conflicting emotions. I’d promised myself I wouldn’t let him affect me this way anymore—especially after seeing him with someone. “Please tell me you didn’t bring me out here to tell me that.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Then, what are we doing here?”

“I wanted to tell you that I’m sorry,” he said, his voice low and rough. “I shouldn’t have ended things the way I did.”

“No reason to apologize now... It was a long time ago.”

“Yeah, and I think about it all the time.” He brushed a strand of hair from my face as he added, “I think about you all the time.”

He was standing right there in front of me, looking as handsome as I’d ever seen him, and he was saying exactly what I’d always wanted him to say. But for reasons I couldn’t understand, I was angered by the fact that he was just now saying them to me. I took a step back, trying to put some distance between us. “Why are you saying this now?”

“It’s what I’ve always wanted to say. I miss you, Londyn.” I could hear the sincerity in his voice as he said, “I’ll make it right if you just give me the chance.”

I shuddered involuntarily, my body betraying me. I silently cursed myself for still being so drawn to him and not being able to let go of what we once had. It was another painful reminder of the power he still held over me, and I couldn’t help but wonder if I would ever truly be free from his spell. I cleared my throat, then told him, “But you’re with someone.”

“I haven’t been serious with anyone since you left. I’ve tried, but...”

His words suddenly trailed off, and his eyes grew wide just as a pair of hands slipped around my waist and pulled me back. I had no idea who had come up behind me until I heard Jackson say, “Hey, sweetheart. I’m sorry I’m late.”

“Jackson?” I whipped around. “What are you doing here?”

“I was able to get out of my meeting early, so I thought I’d come by and surprise you.”

“But how...”

“I went by your house, and Cici told me where to find you.”

Jackson had gone all out. He was wearing his best black suit with a royal blue tie, and he looked fabulous. I appreciated him coming, but his timing couldn't have been worse. "You could've called and told me you were coming."

"Yeah, but then, it wouldn't have been a surprise." Jackson turned to Malcomb and extended his hand as he said, "Hey, I'm Jackson."

"So, I heard." Malcomb shook his hand as he added, "I'm Malcomb."

"Good to meet ya, Malcomb." Jackson's eyes knowingly skirted over to me, then back to Malcomb. "I believe I've heard Londyn mention your name... You guys went to high school together, right?"

"Something like that." Malcomb turned his attention to me, then said, "I'm gonna head back inside. You two have a nice evening."

"You too."

When he turned to leave, Jackson called out to him, "It was nice to meet you, Malcomb."

Malcomb didn't respond.

He just kept walking and disappeared inside the reception hall. As soon as the door closed, I gave Jackson a light shove. "I can't believe you came."

"I felt bad about leaving my girl in the lurch."

"I appreciate that, but your timing wasn't the best."

"I saw that." A smirk crossed his face as he said, "So, that was Malcomb."

"The one and only."

"He's a handsome guy. I can see why you were so hung up on the guy."

"Yeah, I knew it was going to be hard to see him, but I had no idea it would be this hard."

“I’m pretty sure he felt the same.” He chuckled as he said, “The poor guy looked like I’d kicked him in the balls when I called you sweetheart.”

“I imagine so.”

“Serves the guy right.”

“Actually, he’d brought me out here to tell me how sorry he was for everything.”

“Is that so?” He crossed his arms. “Well, I say we go in there and make him even more sorry.”

“*Jackson.*”

“Don’t Jackson me. This asshole has it coming.” He took me by the hand and tugged me up the steps. “By the time I’m done, he’ll regret ever letting you go. Just wait and see.”

CHAPTER 13

Savage

There wasn't enough booze in the world to distract me from the little show Londyn and her new boyfriend were putting on. I couldn't seem to stop watching them as they drank and hung out with our old friends from high school. It was even harder watching them dance. Every twirl was like a twist of the knife, reminding me of what was no longer mine.

I wanted nothing more than to pull her into my arms and rekindle what we once had, and the fact that some asshole was standing in my way consumed me with frustration. I was considering putting my foot in his ass when my father nudged me and said, "Looks like Londyn is having a good time."

"Looks that way."

"Who's the new guy?"

"Fuck if I know," I grumbled as I watched him twirl her around the dance floor. "She said his name was Jackson."

"Looks nice enough."

"He looks like a fucking douchebag." I shook my head and muttered, "Doesn't matter. I don't wanna talk about it."

He nodded, then gave me a fatherly pat and turned his attention back to my mother. I took another swig of my whiskey, hoping it would help ease the burning jealousy in my gut. It was crazy, especially since I was the one who'd broken it off with her, but in my mind, Londyn had always been mine. Seeing her wrapped up in the arms of another man had my blood boiling. I wanted nothing more than to go over there and

punch the guy's lights out. Unfortunately, I knew that wouldn't solve anything. If anything, it'd just make matters worse.

So, I decided I would just drown my sorrows.

I would drink until I forgot all about her and her little lap dog.

As the night wore on, the crowd started to thin out, and I couldn't help but notice that Londyn and her buddy were no longer dancing. I quickly scanned the room and spotted Londyn talking to Skylar and Lucas, but Jackson wasn't with her. He was busy chatting it up with the bartender, and it looked like they were having quite the conversation.

Jackson was smiling and leaning towards him, and the more they talked, the closer he got. If I didn't know better, I'd say he was hitting on the guy. I was so focused on watching them that I hadn't noticed that Danny had come up behind me. He leaned down and snickered in my ear, "Guess you didn't need to worry about me after all. Looks like Londyn's already got herself a new fella."

"Fuck off, Danny."

"Hey, there's no reason to get pissed at me. It's not my fault that you fucked it up with your girl."

"I'm only going to say it one more time," I warned. "Fuck off."

He lingered a moment longer, and I was about to jump up and punch the asshole in the throat when he finally walked off. I turned my focus back to Jackson and the bartender, and again, they were still chatting it up. I just didn't get it. Most guys would've gotten their drinks and headed straight back to their date.

And then, it hit me like a ton of bricks.

Londyn wasn't the cheating kind. It just wasn't in her, and nothing could change that—not even the bullshit I put her through. There was no fucking way she'd be in Puckett's chatting it up with Danny if she had a guy waiting for her back at home, much less go outside with him.

It was all a ruse.

Jackson wasn't her boyfriend. He was just playing the part, making everyone, including me, think she'd moved on.

I was about to go over and call Londyn on her bullshit when she walked over to Jackson and slipped her arm around his. She whispered something in his ear. He nodded, then gave a quick wave to the crew before they both headed for the back door. They were just about to walk out when Londyn glanced over her shoulder, and her eyes locked on mine.

It was for only a second, but it was long enough for me to know that what we had wasn't over—far from it.

I stood to go after them but stopped dead in my tracks when I spotted Bruton. I had no idea how long he'd been there. He was hard to recognize without his khakis and sweater vest. I gave my father a nudge with my elbow and asked, "What the fuck is he doing here?"

"Who?"

"Bruton?"

I motioned my hand over to the back corner where he was talking with a small group of older ladies, and from the looks of it, he was schmoozing it up pretty good with them. "If I had to guess, I'd say he's still working on that damn petition."

"What petition?"

"He wants another caution light downtown, and the council is bucking him on it."

"He kills me with this whole council man by day gunslinger by night bullshit."

"Yeah, but he does it, and he does it well."

"Maybe, but I don't like it." My eyes were fixed on Bruton as I added, "He seems a little too chummy with the ladies."

"What can I say?" Dad scoffed, "The man's a player."

"Damn. I just threw up in my mouth."

“Oh, it’s not that bad. He’s just making his rounds.” His smile faded as he asked, “So, what’s your plan?”

“Plan for...?”

“Getting this thing with Londyn sorted.”

“Don’t really have a plan, but I’m going to go over to her folks’ place and talk to her.”

He glanced down at my empty glass as he asked, “You sure that’s a good idea?”

“Got no choice... I don’t know when she’s planning to head back.”

“Then call Rooster or Torch and have them drive you over.”

“Yeah.” I nodded. “I can do that.”

“And don’t lose your cool. You gotta play this...”

“I’ve got it, Dad.”

“I know you do.” He gave me another pat, then said, “Go get your girl.”

“Gonna do my best.”

I sent Rooster a text, then headed outside to wait for him. I felt like a bottle of nerves as I paced up and down the sidewalk. I couldn’t stop thinking about Londyn and the way she looked at me before she walked out. Something was there. I knew it in my gut. This was my one and only chance to make things right, to make her understand why I’d done the things I’d done.

I was thinking about what I would say to her when the sound of Rooster’s pickup pulled me from my thoughts. A smirk crossed his face as he said, “Your carriage awaits.”

“Appreciate you coming, brother.”

“Anytime.”

I climbed inside and closed the door, then Rooster hammered down on the accelerator, squealing tires as we took off towards Londyn’s parents’ house. He had the windows

down, letting the wind whip around us both as he drove. Sadly, I couldn't enjoy it. I was too focused on the conversation I needed to have with Londyn.

When we pulled up, I spotted two cars in the drive and hoped one of them was Londyn's. I took a deep breath, then opened the door. Before I got out, Rooster gave me a chin lift and said, "You got this, brother."

"Let's hope so."

I closed the door and made my way to the front porch. I knocked and immediately heard footsteps as they approached the door. It flew open, and Dalton greeted me with a big smile. "I know you."

"Hey, Dalton. How's it going?"

"Okay." His smile faltered as he told me, "Cici had to go home."

"Oh?" I had no idea what he was talking about, but I just went with it. "Well, maybe she'll come back soon."

He shook his head. "We 'weave tomorrow."

"Dalton!" Londyn called out. "Who's at the door?"

Before he could answer, she stumbled into the room with one heel still on her foot and the other in her hand. Her jaw dropped when she saw me standing in the doorway. "Malcomb... what are you doing here?"

"We have a conversation to finish."

"I'm sorry, but now isn't a good time." She stepped over to Dalton and ran her hand over the top of his head as she said, "Why don't you go up to your room and finish packing?"

"But I don't wanna go."

"I know, sweetie, but we need to leave early in the morning. I've got work on Monday."

It was clear Dalton was her kid. Maybe it was the familiar whitish-blond hair or the lopsided grin, but I couldn't stop myself from asking, "Hey, Dalton. How old are you?"

“Fw-ore.”

“Go, Dalton,” she pushed. “I’ll be up in a minute to help.”

“Ugh,” he grumbled as he turned and started walking away. “See ya la-er, Mal-come.”

Once I was certain he was gone, I crossed my arms and asked, “So, he’s four, huh?”

“He is.”

“And he’s yours?”

“I know what you’re getting at, but this isn’t the time or the place.”

“Hold up.” I could feel the anger rising in my gut as I pushed, “Are you saying he’s mine?”

I felt like my world was shattering at my feet. I loved Londyn. I couldn’t believe that she would keep my son from me. The thought had me feeling a tumultuous mix of anger, sadness, and confusion, leaving me questioning not only Londyn’s actions but the trust I’d placed in our relationship.

Sensing that I was about to lose it, she stepped out onto the porch and closed the door behind her. Her cheeks were flushed as she explained, “I tried to tell you so many times.”

“And when was that?” I roared.

“I was going to tell you that day, but I didn’t want to interrupt your good time with Candace.” She crossed her arms as she sassed, “And all those times I came to the clubhouse but got turned away because you didn’t want to see me. Or how about the letters? Did you even bother to read them?”

The knowledge that we had a four-year-old son, a piece of our shared existence that had been hidden from me, was like a dagger to the heart. The fact that I’d had a part to play in this information being kept from me made it hurt that much more, but I wasn’t about to let her know that. I wasn’t a fool. There were other ways she could’ve gotten the news to me.

My tone was angrier than I intended as I spat, “So, this is all my fault. I’m the reason you didn’t tell me that we had a

son!”

“Well?”

“That’s bullshit, Londyn!”

The words had barely left my mouth when the front door opened, and Jackson peeked his head out. “Is everything okay out here?”

“It’s fine, Jackson.”

“Are you sure? Cause there are some pretty big ears in here, and they’re getting a little worried.”

“I won’t be much longer.”

“Okay. Holler if you need me.”

Once he’d closed the door, Londyn turned her attention back to me. “Look, I know you’re angry, and you have every right to be. But you have to understand my situation. I was in a really bad spot. I didn’t want to ruin your life or make things harder on myself. I had to do what I had to do.”

I just stared at her, still trying to process what she was saying, then muttered, “You did what you had to do, huh?”

“You know how I felt about you, Malcomb. I told you over and over that I loved you, and I wanted to be with you. But you didn’t feel the same.”

I clenched my fists, trying to control my anger. “You don’t get to blame me for the decisions you made. This isn’t all on me. You’re the one who chose to keep our son a secret from me. You could’ve told me at any point in the last five years.”

“I did tell you. Did you even read my letters?” When I didn’t immediately answer, she grumbled, “Of course, you didn’t!”

“Would it have really mattered?”

“I don’t know.” Rage filled her eyes as she snapped, “Why don’t you read them and find out.”

She turned and started up the steps, and when she reached for the doorknob, I shouted, “Londyn, wait! This conversation

isn't over.”

“Oh, it's over. Just like we're over! It just took me until now to see it.” She opened the door, and as she stepped inside, she said, “Goodbye, Malcomb.”

With that, she closed the door and disappeared into the house, leaving me completely dumbfounded.

Fuck.

There was no way around it.

I was absolutely, positively screwed, and I'd done it to myself.

Now, I had to figure out what the hell I was going to do about it.

CHAPTER 14

Londyn

“Well, that just went about as bad as it could go.” I went over to my bed and opened my suitcase, quickly shoving my things inside. “I mean, I knew it would be bad when we finally talked, but I wasn’t expecting it to be that bad.”

“Yeah, it sounded like it got pretty heated.”

“It did.” I dropped my head into my hands and sighed. “And I was stupid to think it would go any other way.”

“You weren’t stupid, Londyn.” Jackson came over and sat on the edge of the bed. “You were hopeful that you two could work things out. No one can blame you for that.”

“It doesn’t matter now.” I started unzipping my dress as I told him, “I’m pretty sure he hates me and will never forgive me for keeping Dalton from him.”

“Don’t get where he gets off being mad at you about that. It’s not like you didn’t try to tell him.”

“I did.” I slipped off my dress and tossed it into the bag. “But it wasn’t enough. I should’ve had someone go to him and tell him, or I should’ve tried talking to one of his brothers or his folks.” I pulled my t-shirt over my head as I continued, “But I was too embarrassed and didn’t want anyone to know that he wouldn’t see me or talk to me.”

“Just hearing you say that makes me hate this guy even more.”

“Dalton is his son.”

“And he would’ve known that if he wasn’t such a fucking dick.”

“You’ve got a point there.”

I slipped on my shorts and shoes, and when I started collecting the rest of my things, Jackson asked, “So, what’s the plan here?”

“We’re going home.”

“Now?”

“I don’t want to take a chance on him coming back.”

“And what about your parents?”

“We’ll wait until they get home, and then, we’ll go.”

“Whatever you say, boss.”

I finished getting my things together, then went down the hall to help Dalton. He wasn’t happy about packing to leave and was putting on quite the pouting show—which only got worse when my parents arrived. Mom walked into the living room, and she looked like her world was coming to an end when she saw our bags sitting by the front door. “What’s all this?”

“We’ve decided to head back.”

“But it’s so late. Why not wait until morning?”

“It’s not that late. Besides, I think it’s best if we go.”

“Why? Did something happen?”

“Malcomb came by, and things didn’t go so well.”

“Oh, honey. I’m so sorry.”

Her eyes skirted over to Dalton, and before she could ask, I said, “He knows, and he wasn’t exactly happy about it.”

“I see.” I could see the worry in her eyes, but she did her best to keep a brave front. “Just give it some time. It’ll all sort itself out.”

“I don’t know, Mom. It was pretty bad. I’m not sure Malcomb will be able to forgive me.” Dalton was standing in

the corner, and I couldn't help but notice that he seemed to be slightly intrigued by the mention of Malcomb. I didn't want to say something I shouldn't, so I told her, "Regardless, I think it's best if we go."

Dad nodded, then said, "I'll help you get your bags in the car."

"That's okay. Jackson can..."

"I'll do it," he insisted. "It'll give us a minute to talk."

"Okay." I turned to Jackson and Dalton as I said, "You guys do a quick walk-through and make sure we got everything."

"Sure thing."

Dad grabbed what bags he could, and I got the rest, then followed him out to the car. Once we had everything in the trunk, he turned to me with a serious expression on his face. "I want you to know that I really thought I was doing the right thing. I thought you would eventually get over him and put all this behind you."

"I don't know what you're saying, Dad."

"I'm the reason Malcomb broke things off with you."

"What?"

"It was me." He let out a breath before adding, "I told him if he really loved you, he'd let you go."

"But why would you do that?"

"I knew you'd never take that scholarship if he was around, so I told him to break it off with you."

"You didn't!" I stepped back in horror. "You knew how I felt about him. You wouldn't have done that to me."

"I did," he admitted. "You earned that scholarship! You deserved a chance at a good life."

"But I loved him!" I screeched. "And he loved me!"

"You were just kids. You didn't know what love really was."

“I can’t believe you’re saying this!”

“I know you’re upset, but I still think it was the right thing to do.”

“And what about when you found out I was pregnant with his child? You watched me spend all those days and nights heartbroken and crying. You watched me struggle when Dalton was born. I could’ve had someone there to help. Maybe then, I could’ve kept that scholarship. Did you ever think of that?”

“You could do so much better than that boy.” He sounded utterly defeated as he admitted, “I’ve always thought a lot of Cotton and Cass, but everyone knows what that club is all about. Those men are dangerous criminals who have no regard for anyone but themselves. I know you don’t want to hear it, but I didn’t want you or my grandchild involved in that. I still don’t.”

“That’s not your choice to make. It never was.”

“Of course, it is. I’m your father,” he spat. “It’s my job to protect you.”

“But you didn’t!” I argued. “You hurt me, and you hurt my son!”

“Malcomb isn’t the man for you. He never was. You need to let him go and move on. For your sake and for Dalton’s.”

“I can’t let him go! I love him! I always have.”

“Then, you’re a fool!”

“Just stop!” I ordered. “I don’t want to hear another word.”

I felt like my world was crumbling beneath my feet. I couldn’t believe that my father had done such a cruel thing. His actions cost me more than he could fathom. Not only had I lost Malcomb, but I’d also lost my trust in him, and I wasn’t sure if I’d ever get that back. Infuriated by it all, I turned and shouted towards the house, “Jackson! Dalton! Let’s go!”

“Don’t leave like this.” Dad reached over and took hold of my arm. “You know I love you and only want what’s best for you.”

Before I could answer, Dalton and Jackson came rushing out with Mom. Having no idea what was going on, Jackson smiled at my father and said, “It was good to see you, Mr. Hollings. I appreciate you letting me hang out with you for a couple of hours.”

“The pleasure was all ours.”

Mom helped Dalton into his car seat and then hugged him one last time. After she closed the door, she walked over to me and wrapped her arms around me, hugging me tightly. “Are you okay, sweetheart?”

“No, Mom. I’m not.” I was overcome with emotion—a mix of betrayal, anger, and devastation. I had to know if my mother was a part of it all, so I took a step back, looking her right in the eye as I asked, “Did you know?”

“Know about what, sweetheart?”

“About Dad’s conversation with Malcomb.”

“He talked to Malcomb?” She glanced over at Dad with anger in her eyes, “What did you do?”

“He broke my heart. That’s what he did.”

Without saying anything more, I got in my car and pulled out of the drive. I was an absolute wreck. I felt like my entire world had been turned upside down, and I had no idea what I was going to do about it. Noting my unease, Dalton whispered, “Momma... you okay?”

“Yes, sweetheart. Momma is fine.”

I continued down the road, and it wasn’t long before tears started streaming down my face. I tried to hold them back. I didn’t want Dalton to see that I was so upset, but the realization of what my father had done was too much for me to bear. I couldn’t believe he would do something so cruel, especially after everything I had been through.

I was lost in thought until I heard Dalton’s voice again. “Momma, are you ‘qi-ying?’”

I quickly wiped away my tears and put on a brave face for my son. “No, sweetheart. Momma is fine. Just a little tired.

That's all."

But Dalton wasn't convinced. "I w'ove you, Momma... Don't be sad."

His innocent words warmed my heart, and I knew I had to try and put my own feelings aside for his sake. I smiled at him and said, "I love you too, Dalton. Everything will be okay. I promise."

But I wasn't sure if I could keep that promise. Everything seemed to be falling apart, and I had no idea what I was going to do about it. I glanced up in my rearview mirror and was relieved to see that Jackson was trailing close behind. I prayed that he would be able to help me make sense of it because my mind was racing with questions and doubts about everything in my life.

When we got home, Jackson helped us get our things out of the car and into the apartment. Dalton was exhausted, so I helped him into his pjs and put him straight to bed. Once he was settled, I went back into the living room, where Jackson was waiting with a bottle of wine and two glasses. "Okay, let's hear it."

"It's so bad, Jackson. I honestly don't know where to start."

"How 'bout you tell me what happened with you and Malcomb first?"

"Okay, but it isn't pretty." I sat down and took a sip of my wine. "I got the feeling that he'd come there to try and mend things, but the second he saw Dalton..."

"Well, you knew that was going to be a tough conversation."

"That's just it." I tilted the glass back and took another long sip. "He was too mad to really talk about it. He wouldn't even listen when I tried to explain. He just kept saying I should've tried harder, and honestly, he was right."

"I don't know about that. I think you did your part. You can't help that he was an asshole who broke it off with you."

“About that...”

I spent the next half-hour telling him about the argument with my father, and when I was done, he looked positively stunned. “You gotta be kidding me.”

“Afraid not.”

“Damn, Londyn. That changes a lot.” Anguish marked his face as he said, “I actually feel bad for the guy.”

“It explains why he refused to see me.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he knew it would only make things harder for you both. That had to be tough.”

“I know.” I tried to push back the tears as I muttered, “What am I going to do?”

“You’re going to give it some time. Eventually, the anger will fade, and you two can figure this thing out.”

“I don’t know.”

“I saw the way he looked at you, Londyn.” He shook his head and smiled. “There’s no doubt that he’s still into you. Hell, it was all he could to keep from snatching you up right then and there.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“I am.” He placed his glass on the table, then stood and said, “It’s late. You need to get some rest, and I’ll swing back by tomorrow and check on you guys.”

“Thank you, Jackson.” I stood and gave him a hug. “I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“You would be a mess... a complete and utter mess.” He gave me a quick wink. “But you’d manage. You always do.”

Once he was gone, I locked up and turned out the lights, then headed to my room. I crawled into bed and pulled the covers over me. My room was cloaked in dark stillness, but my mind was anything but quiet.

I tossed and turned, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t escape the relentless whirlwind of thoughts that raged

through my mind. My argument with Malcomb replayed in my head over and over like a broken record, his harsh words echoing in my head.

Each accusation, every hurtful remark, seemed to claw at my conscience.

My only distraction was the argument I'd had with my father, but that only made my heart ache even more. I tried desperately to push it all from my mind and sleep, but it was no use. I simply couldn't sleep, so I turned on my TV and tried to find something to watch. I was flipping through the channels when I spotted a shadow in the doorway.

I sat up, and my chest swelled when I saw my precious son standing there with his pillow. "I can't sleep."

"I can't either." I eased the covers back and waited as he curled up next to me. Knowing it wouldn't be long before he drifted off, I asked, "You want to watch a movie with me?"

He nodded, and I continued flipping through the channels until I found an older kids' movie that I knew he wouldn't care for. As the movie continued, I watched Dalton's eyes slowly droop and his breathing even out. I was grateful for the quiet moment and the feeling of his small body against mine. It was a reminder that despite everything that was happening in my life, I was still a mother, and that was something to hold on to.

Midway through the movie, I glanced down and saw that Dalton had fallen asleep. I turned off the TV and rolled to my side, closing my eyes and willing myself to finally fall asleep. But just as I was beginning to drift off, I heard the sound of my phone buzzing on the nightstand.

I groaned as I reached over and picked it up, quickly looking down at the screen. My stomach sank as I read:

Unknown Number:

I read the letters.

We need to talk.

CHAPTER 15

“That didn’t sound good.”

“Cause it wasn’t. It wasn’t good at all.” I ran my hand down my clenched jaw. “I’ve got a kid.”

“Do what?”

“You heard me... I got a fucking kid.” Rooster looked as stunned as I felt. Hell, after hearing the news from Londyn, my head was all over the place. I didn’t know what to think or do. I leaned my head back against the seat. “He’s four years old, and I never even knew he existed. I wouldn’t know now if I hadn’t come here tonight.”

“Is that what all the fussing was about?”

“You could say that.”

“Damn, brother. What are you gonna do?”

“I wish I knew.” I turned and looked out the window as I told him, “Just take me to the clubhouse.”

“You got it, brother.”

Knowing I needed a minute to collect myself, Rooster kept quiet as he drove me to the clubhouse. As soon as we got there, I went straight to my room and started rummaging through all of my drawers, searching everywhere until I found the letters that she’d written me. I sat down on my bed and opened the last one she’d sent.

Dear Malcomb,

I hope you are doing well, or at least better than I am these days. It's been almost a year since we last spoke, and I'm still dealing with a heavy heart and a head full of questions. I've tried to make sense of what happened between us, but I keep coming up at a complete loss.

When you ended things, it felt like the ground was pulled from beneath me. I still feel that way. I know it might seem stupid to you, but I never saw it coming. I thought things were good between us. I've replayed our last conversation over and over, searching for clues or hints as to why you decided to break things off. But I've come up empty-handed.

I really wanted to talk to you—not just about the breakup, but something else important. I tried calling and coming by the clubhouse, but I was always turned away. I've written letter after letter. I have no idea if you knew I was pregnant or not. I tried to tell you. Countless times.

Anyway, I had him. His name is Dalton, and he's beautiful, Malcomb. He's the most beautiful baby. He's got my lips and rounded nose, but he has your eyes and lopsided grin. He's strong and healthy, and he has such a soft temperament—I think he gets that from me. I wish so much that you could see him and hold him.

I just know you would love him the way I do.

I still don't know how we got here. I don't know how to fix it, but I do know that you've never lied to me, Malcomb. Never once. I have no reason to believe that you lied to me that day, but I do. I think you lied about everything. I think you still love me, and if that is the case, please answer me.

If I'm wrong and you really meant all those things you said, then I'll find a way to move on. If I don't hear back from you, I will consider that your answer. I will stop trying to reach out and let you live your life.

But please know, my heart is still yours.

I fear it always will be.

Sincerely,

Londyn

Fuck me.

I'd been such a goddamn fool. She knew me better than anyone. Of course, she knew I still loved her and wanted her—even when I did everything in my power to prove otherwise. My silence had made her think I'd turned my back on her and our kid.

But that wasn't the case.

Not even close.

Londyn had always been the one for me. I knew that. Hell, everyone knew it. It wasn't that I didn't want to see her or talk to her or read her letters. I couldn't. I knew it would only make it that much harder to keep myself from trying to get her back.

But she didn't know that.

She just knew I wouldn't talk to her.

The thought made me think of Candace and the asshole who'd left her in the lurch. She barely knew the guy, but it still fucked her up that he'd cut her off. And I blamed him one hundred percent. I didn't know him. I didn't know his story. Didn't care to know. I just knew he'd fucked over my friend and left her to deal with a pregnancy scare on her own.

And without even knowing what I was doing, I'd done the same to Londyn.

Damn.

I swallowed hard, feeling the lump in my throat grow as I read another letter. Each one left me engulfed with emotion. I'd missed so much, years with her and time with Dalton, and I only had myself to blame. I had to fix it, and I have to fix it now. And there was only one way to do that.

I needed to see her.

There was just one problem.

I had no idea where she lived.

I needed Bones—the club’s hacker. I would’ve just gone down to his room, but it was late. He was more than likely with Elsie, so I grabbed my phone from my back pocket and dialed his number. After a couple of rings, he answered, “You got Bones.”

“Hey, brother. I hate to call so late, but I need you to do something for me.”

“Yeah, no problem.” He cleared his throat, then asked, “What do ya need?”

“I need you to find some information on someone.”

“Okay. Give me a second.” I could hear him shuffling around, and moments later, he was back. “What’s the name?”

“Londyn Hollings. She lives in the city, but I have no idea where.”

“Okay. Shouldn’t be too hard to track her down.”

“I need everything you can find on her, brother. And I mean everything, especially over the last five years.”

“I’m on it,” Bones replied, his fingers already clacking away on his keyboard.

I didn’t want to waste time, so I changed out of my suit and put on a T-shirt and jeans I had stashed in my dresser. I grabbed my spare boots from the closet, and I’d just slipped them on when Bones announced, “Okay. I think I found it.”

“Good. What’d you find?”

“Looks like she’s been living in an apartment on 5th Street for almost a year. Before that, she lived near campus. Looks like she’s working as a legal aid or something at the Richland firm on South. Other than that, there’s not much else on her, but I can keep digging.”

“Thanks, brother. Text me her number and address and email me the rest.”

“You got it.”

I hung up the phone, and in a blink, a message came through from Bones. I got the number and used it to send

Londyn a message, then shoved my phone in my back pocket and started out the door. I was just about to reach the back door when I heard Rooster call out to me, “Where ya headed, brother?”

“I gotta go talk to her.”

“Figured that was coming... You need a ride?”

“Nah, I’ll just take Betty.”

I had two bikes—a newer Street Glide Harley and Betty. Betty was my ol’ man’s Tour Glide. He’d gotten right after he and my mother married, and I’d been working for the past couple of years to get her back in pristine shape. And I’d done it. She was up and running, and I was eager to get rolling.

Rooster must’ve sensed my impatience and didn’t bother arguing. He simply nodded and said, “Just let me know if you need me.”

“You know I will.”

I headed out to the parking lot, and once I got over to my bike, I kicked my leg over the seat and slipped on my helmet. Seconds later, I was through the gate and driving towards the address Bones had sent me. I had so many things I wanted to say to her, but I had to be careful with my words. I couldn’t just show up on her doorstep and expect her to just forget the past and welcome me with open arms.

It was going to take time—for both of us.

When I got to her place, I took a deep breath and got off my bike, then made my way up to Londyn’s front door. I took a deep breath and raised my hand to knock, hesitating only for a moment before finally making contact with the door. After what felt like an eternity, Londyn opened the door, and she looked absolutely stunning. She was wearing a simple white nightgown that hugged her curves in all the right places, and her hair was pulled back in a messy bun.

“Malcomb.” Her brows furrowed with a mix of anger and confusion. “What are you doing here.”

“I told you. We need to talk.”

“It’s three in the morning.”

“I know what time it is, Londyn, and I don’t care. I’m not waiting another second.”

On impulse, I stepped forward, closing the distance between us, then slipped my arms around her, pulling her close. She didn’t resist as I lowered my mouth to hers, kissing her with a passion that words could never express. As our lips parted, Londyn let out a soft moan, giving me all the encouragement I needed. I ran my hands down the sides of her body, feeling the curves of her hips and the softness of her thighs. She pressed herself against me, her body molding perfectly to mine. I could feel her heat even through the fabric of her nightgown.

I released her mouth as I stepped forward, pinning her back against the wall. “Fuck, I’ve missed you.”

She looked up at me with a look of longing in her eyes as she muttered, “I’ve missed you, too but...”

“Before you say anything, I need to tell you that I’m sorry. I’m sorry about it all.”

“But it’s not that simple.” She took a step back, breaking our embrace. “I know about Dad and what he said to you.”

“What?” I gasped, unable to hide my surprise.

“He finally broke down and told me tonight.” I could see the anguish in her eyes as she told me, “He should’ve never said those things to you, Malcomb. They weren’t true... I wasn’t better off without you. Please tell me you know that.”

“I don’t know. Maybe you were... maybe you still are, but it doesn’t matter.” I placed my hands on her hips, pulling her close once again. “Not anymore.”

Tears filled her eyes as she said, “There’s so much, Malcomb.”

“I know... We’ll get through it. We have to.” Her eyes remained locked on mine as I told her, “I’m not losing you, Londyn. Not again.”

I lowered my mouth to hers, kissing her with passion and hunger as I pulled her even closer. I closed my eyes, losing myself in the sensation of her touch. Having her in my arms again made me forget about everything else. It was just her and me.

Her arms wrapped around my neck, her fingers tangled in my hair as I delved deeper into her mouth, and when she inched closer, pressing her warm body against mine, I could feel the blood rushing to my already throbbing erection. My need for her consumed me, making it impossible to think.

“Dalton.”

And just like that, I felt like I’d been doused with ice water.

I took a step back, leaving her in a flustered daze. Her eyes were filled with hunger, leaving no doubt that she didn’t want me to stop, and in all honesty, I didn’t want to either. But we weren’t alone, and there was no way in hell I was going to take a chance on him walking in on us. “Damn, I wasn’t fucking thinking.”

A soft smile slipped across her face. “We were both caught up in the moment. Besides, he’s sound asleep.”

It was still hard to believe that I had a four-year-old son. It was even harder to believe that he was just in the next room. “Can I see him?”

She hesitated for a moment, then sighed and told me, “He had a hard time getting to sleep. We both did.”

“I’ll be careful not to wake him.”

She nodded, then led me down the hall and into her bedroom. A nightlight illuminated the space, casting a warm glow over the room. In the center of the bed, nestled under the covers, was a small figure nestled in the bed, his chest rising and falling with each breath.

I couldn’t help but feel a pang of regret and guilt as I looked at my son. I hadn’t been there for him, hadn’t been there for his mother when she needed me the most. But now I

was here, and I was going to do everything in my power to make it up to him and to Londyn.

I sat down on the edge of the bed and studied my son's face. He had curly blond hair and a nose that was too big for his face, but he was still the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I reached out and brushed a loose strand of hair from his forehead, and he stirred slightly in his sleep. My emotions were starting to get the best of me as I whispered, "Is he really mine?"

"Yes, he's most definitely yours."

Even as I heard her say the words, I couldn't believe it.

He was beautiful and healthy, and he was mine.

Five years earlier, my world had been turned upside down, and tonight, I'd been given the chance to right it once again. It wouldn't be easy, but for him, I would move mountains.

CHAPTER 16

Londyn

I'd imagined this moment a million times over the past five years, but in my mind, it was just a fantasy. I never thought it would really happen, so I hadn't really considered how I would handle it if Malcomb came back into the picture.

I was both angry and hurt that he'd listened to my father and turned me away without really talking to me, and the fact that he hadn't answered my calls or read my letters only added fuel to the fire. But I wasn't exactly innocent in all this. We'd each shared our own guilt, and fighting over who was more right or wrong wasn't going to solve anything. I had to make a choice.

Hold onto the anger and hurt, or let it go and have the life I'd always wanted.

But it wasn't just about me.

I had Dalton to consider, and that made choice a bit more complicated.

I had no way of knowing whether Malcomb would come back into our lives, so I'd always tried to be vague when he asked about his father. I had no idea what I was going to tell him now. Whatever I told him, it was going to be tough to make him understand. I realized Malcomb was having the same concern when he asked, "What have you told him about me?"

"Not a lot," I whispered.

He stood and made his way back over to me as he whispered, "What's not a lot?"

“I told him that you were away, and I hadn’t had a chance to tell you about him... I told him that he was a lot like you, handsome and funny, and that you two had the same smile. I told him that you had a kind heart and were a fierce protector. I told him a little about the club and that you rode—which he was very intrigued about. And I told him you would be here if you could.”

Malcomb nodded, and I could see the pain in his eyes as he whispered, “Thank you for not telling him anything bad about me. You had every right to.”

“I would never do that. It wouldn’t be fair to him or to you... I would’ve told him more, but I didn’t want to make any promises that I couldn’t keep.”

“I get it,” Malcomb said, his voice filled with regret. “I just hope that he can forgive me for not being here.”

“He will... He’ll just need a little time.”

Malcomb nodded, and we both fell into an uncomfortable silence as we made our way back into the living room. We sat down on the sofa, nervously glancing around the room. I could feel the tension in the air, and I knew exactly why it was there. We had so much that needed to be said, but I had no idea where to start.

After several moments, I finally said, “He was eight pounds six ounces and twenty-one inches long when he was born, and he was the sweetest baby I’ve ever seen. He hardly ever cried... He loved his swing and bouncy seat, but he seemed happiest when I was holding him—which was one of the reasons it was so hard to keep up with my classes. I felt guilty leaving him, and I felt guilty when I wasn’t in class. So, I dropped out and started school here.”

He didn’t respond.

He just sat there listening as I went on to say, “He was crawling at nine months and walking just before his first birthday. He’s crazy about playing ball and loves animals. I’ve even considered getting him a puppy, but I just couldn’t afford it, which is probably for the best.”

Again, he didn't respond.

I got the impression that he wanted to hear anything I was willing to tell him about Dalton, so I continued, "He graduated from preschool a couple of weeks ago. His teachers adored him and hated to see him go. I wish you could've seen him in his little outfit. He looked so precious... Wait. I've got one on my phone."

I grabbed my phone and pulled up the image, then showed it to Malcomb. He studied it for a moment, then nodded. "Good looking kid."

"Yeah, he is." I smiled and turned off my phone. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't go on and on like that."

"No, no. I want to hear it. I want to hear everything." I could hear the anguish in his voice as he said, "I want to know everything there is to know about you both."

"I'll tell you whatever you want to know... Mind if I ask you something first?"

"You can ask me anything."

Nervous to hear his response, I swallowed and looked to the ground. "Was Dad the only reason you broke things off with me?"

"Yes and no." He looked utterly defeated as he admitted, "There was a lot of truth to what your father said. You had a lot going for you, Londyn. You were way too good for the likes of me, and it wasn't fair for me to hold you back."

"You never held me back, Malcomb. If anything, you pushed me to be better." My voice trembled as I told him, "I was so shy and withdrawn when we first started talking. You gave me the courage to step out and try new things. I'm who I am because of you."

"You would've found your way with or without me... Hell, look at this place. You made a home for a kid, and you did it on your own."

"No, I had a lot of help along the way."

"Maybe, but on the day to day, it was you."

“You’re sweet to say that.”

“I mean it, Londyn.” Regret laced his words as he muttered, “I never stopped loving you, Londyn. Never once. Day in and day out, you were always on my mind. Had I known...”

“I know,” I assured him. “But you’re here now, and that’s what matters.”

We spent the next hour or so talking and looking at old photographs, and it was nice catching up with him—so nice that I hadn’t noticed the time. I also hadn’t noticed that we weren’t alone until I heard him ask, “Do you tell funny jokes?”

Malcomb and I both whipped around and gasped at the sight of Dalton standing in the doorway. Malcomb glanced over at me, then immediately back to Dalton as he answered, “Now and then.”

“You ride motorcycles?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a motorcycle.”

“Do you like pancakes?”

“Yeah.” Malcomb smiled. “I like them just fine.”

Dalton studied him for a moment, then turned to me with a soul-searching stare. He knew. I could see it in his eyes. He let out a breath, then muttered, “It’s him.”

“Yes, sweetie. It’s him.” I walked over and knelt in front of him as I said, “Malcomb is your father.”

He had been waiting for this moment for years, and now that it had finally arrived, he was at a loss for words. We all were. I took Dalton by the hand and led him over to the sofa. Once we were seated, I looked down at Dalton and said, “Dalton, this is Malcomb.”

“You’re back.”

Following along with the story I’d told him, Malcomb nodded and said, “Yeah, I’m back, and I’d really like to spend some time with you and your mom. If that’s okay with you.”

Dalton looked up at me with that same soul-searching stare, and I nodded. “I’d like that. What about you?”

I could see the flood of emotions flowing through him. Part of him was overjoyed to finally meet his father, but another part was scared and unsure of what this would mean for his life. I reached out and took his hand, giving it a gentle squeeze to let him know that everything would be okay.

After a moment, Dalton finally answered, “Okay.”

“Okay, great,” Malcomb replied, sounding relieved. “So, what do you guys wanna do?”

“I’m open for anything.” I stood and started for the kitchen. “I just need some coffee first.”

“You and me both.”

“On it.”

I slipped into the kitchen and started a pot of coffee. While it brewed, I slipped over to the doorway, and my heart swelled as I watched Dalton go over to his toy box and start pulling out his blocks. His voice was riddled with excitement as he suggested, “We could build some’ting.”

“Oh? Like what?”

“A castle... A really tall one!”

“Yeah, we could definitely do that.”

I was a bit surprised at how freely Dalton spoke. He was normally very standoffish with strangers, but their banter came so easily—like they weren’t strangers at all. It felt so good to see them together. It was something I thought I’d never see.

I smiled as I watched them start to build their little castle. Malcomb’s eyes twinkled with a mixture of pride and absolute adoration as he helped Dalton stack the blocks into a wobbly tower. He was so good—so calm and patient. He lowered himself down to Dalton’s level and spoke to him like he was an adult, not just a toddler speaking baby talk.

They both erupted into laughter when the blocks fell down. I thought that would be the end of their tower building, but

they weren't ready to give up and started all over again. I couldn't help but smile as Dalton encouraged Malcomb to keep a steady hand. It was a heart-warming moment—one that gave me hope.

I knew it was early, and we had many obstacles to overcome, but I liked the idea of thinking our family could be whole again. When the coffee was ready, I poured two cups and then carried them into the living room. I placed one on the table next to Malcomb as I announced, "If it's okay, I'm going to take a quick shower and change."

"Sure. We're good."

"I won't be long."

"Take your time," Malcomb answered as he placed the next block on the tower.

I would've double-checked with Dalton to make sure he was okay with me leaving, but he was too busy with his blocks to care if I was there or not. I wasn't sure how long the moment would last, so I carried my coffee to the bathroom and took a quick shower. As soon as I was done, I slipped on one of my more casual short summer dresses, then fixed my hair and makeup. When I made it back to the living room, Dalton had changed out of his pjs and into a pair of his favorite shorts.

His eyes sparkled with excitement as he announced, "We're going to the park."

"If that's okay with you," Malcomb added. "Dalton said there was one close by."

"There is... It's just around the corner." I turned and started for the kitchen as I told him, "Just let me grab a few things, and we can go."

If I'd learned anything over the past few years, it was to be prepared—for *anything*. Sometimes, I took the notion a little overboard, but always felt it was better to be safe than sorry. With that in mind, I grabbed my day bag and started filling it with snacks, Band-Aids, and various other necessities.

Clearly amused by all the stuff I was shoving into the bag, Malcomb snickered, "We're just going for a couple of hours."

“Just covering all our bases,” I shrugged. “You never know. We might get hungry or get a scraped knee.”

“You get many scraped knees at the park?”

“I don’t.” I motioned my head over to Dalton. “But I know someone who does.”

“Got it.”

Dalton bounced up and down, eager to get going. “Let’s go!” he exclaimed, tugging on Malcomb’s sleeve.

“Alright, alright.” Malcomb chuckled. “Let’s go.”

It was a perfect day for the park. The sun was shining bright, birds were chirping, and there was a hint a cool breeze whipping about. Dalton skipped ahead while Malcomb and I walked side by side. The sun was bright and warm as we settled onto a bench. Dalton’s laughter echoed through the air as he darted off to the playground. Malcomb and I found a nearby bench to sit on, watching as Dalton climbed and played.

As we sat there, I couldn’t help but notice the way Malcomb was looking at me. “What?”

“You’re amazing.” He shook his head. “You’re a natural with all this stuff. I don’t know how you do it.”

“Dalton made it easy.”

“He’s an awesome kid, but it’s more than that.” There was a sadness in his eyes as he said, “I know you had to make a lot of sacrifices along the way, and not just the scholarship. I know it had to be tough.”

“I did what I had to do.”

“I know, and it’s appreciated more than you know.”

Silence fell over us as we turned our attention back to Dalton. He was playing in the sand with a couple of other kids. They had sand buckets and shovels, but he looked perfectly content to build with his hands and a plastic cup he’d gotten out of my bag. Malcomb and I had been watching him for

several minutes when I turned to him and said, “So, I have a question for ya.”

“Oh, yeah?” His brows furrowed. “What’s that?”

“Were you at Puckett’s last weekend?”

He looked down and sighed, and without him saying a word, I had my answer. “Yeah, I was there.”

“Did you see me?”

“I did.”

“And you didn’t say anything?”

“Didn’t figure it was a good time.” He glanced up at me as he admitted, “But I did stick around awhile to make sure you were okay.”

“I thought I saw you there.” I shrugged. “I’d had a little too much to drink and wasn’t sure if I’d really seen you or if I was just...”

“Oh, you definitely saw me.” He cocked his brow. “I was your ride home.”

“What?”

“You got up to go to the bathroom, and it was obvious you were wasted. I stood by the door to make sure no one fucked with you, and when you didn’t come out, I went in after you.”

“You did?” I thought for a moment, trying to recollect what happened that night and how I’d gotten home. But I couldn’t piece it all together. “I don’t remember.”

“Because you were passed out.” His eyes grew fierce as he explained, “I picked you up and carried you home. I used the spare key to get into the house, and then, I took you up to your room.”

“Oh, God. That’s it. I’m never drinking again.” I knew I’d had too much to drink, but the fact that I couldn’t remember being with Malcomb was concerning. “But thank you for making sure I got home.”

“No need to thank me. I was just...”

“Looking out for me, and I really appreciate it.” The words had barely left my mouth when I was hit with a thought that had me wondering if I’d been too quick with my gratitude. “So, you were there for a bit, right?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Did you happen to see me talking to Danny?”

“I saw you talking to a lot of people.”

“I wasn’t asking about all of them... just Danny.”

“Yeah, I saw you talking to him.”

“And?”

I glared at him for a moment, and when he didn’t respond, I asked, “Did you say something to him?”

“Not sure what you mean.”

“Did you say something to him?” I repeated.

“I might’ve told him to walk away, or I’d stuff his balls down his throat.”

“You didn’t!”

“He was trying to get in your pants.”

“He was being nice.” He gave me one of his looks. “I knew something happened to turn him so cold. I just had no clue it was you.”

“He was trying to take what was mine.”

“Yours, huh?”

“I didn’t stutter.”

“Well, if that’s how you feel...” I shifted in my seat so I was facing him as I asked, “How do you see things working out with Dalton and me? Or do you even want to try?”

“Of course, I want to try. Hell, I’ve wanted it all along.” His brows furrowed. “The how and when will depend on you.”

Dread washed over me as I asked, “How so?”

He kept his voice calm and steady as he explained, “I know you have your life here. I don’t know what that all entails, but I want to be a part of it. I want to be with you both as much as possible.”

“I’d like that.”

“Good, ‘cause I mean it when I say I want to be with you as much as I can. And I want Dalton to spend some time with my folks, if that’s okay.”

“It would be more than okay.”

“And down the road, I’d like him to come to the clubhouse and meet the brothers.”

“Oh, he’d definitely love that.” I giggled as I told him, “He thinks you biker guys are the coolest.”

“There have been a lot of changes since you’ve been around. Dad stepped down as president, and Guardrail gave up VP. Hell, even Stitch decided to step down.”

“I can’t believe that. I thought Cotton would be president forever.”

“We all did, at least to some extent, but I think the brothers did well when they voted in their replacements.”

“Oh? And who was that?”

“Maverick is president, and I’m the new VP.”

“Wow, Malcomb. That’s amazing. I know you must be proud.”

I knew being voted into a role like that was a huge deal in the MC. It brought a level of honor and prestige, but it also a great responsibility—one that would be difficult to do effectively when trying to balance obligations at home and at the club. It would be an adjustment for Malcomb, but he was bullheaded enough to make it happen.

“I am...”

His thought was cut short when Dalton suddenly came over to us and announced, “I wanna swing.”

“You got it, kiddo.”

With that, Malcomb stood and followed Dalton over to the swings. He helped him up into the seat and started pushing. As Dalton got higher and higher, he looked like he was on cloud nine as he giggled and squealed. Sadly, the thrill didn't last long, and Dalton grew tired of swinging. “I need a snack.”

“Let's see what your mom has in that bag of hers.”

Dalton nodded, then raced over to me and asked, “You got any gol-fish?”

“Sure do.”

I reached in and grabbed two packs, then handed one to Dalton and the other to Malcomb. They both scarfed them down, then asked for more. As soon as they had their fill, they headed over to the pond to feed the leftovers to the ducks.

We spent a little more time walking around before heading back to my apartment. We watched a little TV, and Malcomb made us pancakes and eggs for dinner. Once we were done eating, I cleaned up the kitchen, and Malcomb helped Dalton get ready for bed.

It was wonderful.

But later that night, when Malcomb and I were finally alone, and he kissed me like I'd never been kissed before, things took an interesting turn...

CHAPTER 17

Savage

It was late, and she had to go to work the following day. I needed to get the hell out of there, but I couldn't seem to make myself walk out that door. It didn't help matters that Londyn was giving me one of those longing looks she used to give when she wanted to be kissed.

I must have been staring at her for too long because she started to blush and looked away. I cleared my throat and stood up from the couch, grabbing my jacket as I started for the door. "I should probably get going."

Londyn followed me into the kitchen, and when I turned, her eyes fixed on mine. "Do you have to?"

I knew where this was going. I should've bolted, but I couldn't resist. I slipped my arms around her waist and pulled her close. "You want me to stay?"

She nodded.

"Then, I'll stay."

"You should know... I'm not the same girl that I once was."

"And I'm not the same man." I held her gaze as I told her, "I've grown up. I'm no longer afraid to fight for what I want, and I want you, Londyn. Not just the girl you once were, but the woman you are now."

With that, I lowered my mouth to hers, and as soon as our lips touched, I knew it was a mistake. I was moving too fast, but I couldn't help myself. I wanted her, and the second she let out one of her little whimpers, I was done holding back.

My hands roamed across her body, familiarizing myself with her new curves, and damn, she felt fucking incredible. I was holding on by a thread when I pulled back, quickly breaking our embrace. Her dark eyes grew wide as I growled, “How many?”

“What?”

“How many?” I knew it wasn’t right, but the thought of another man touching her had me spiraling. I took a step forward, pinning her back against the wall. I could feel the heat of her breath against my neck as I growled, “How many others were there?”

“There were no others,” she answered adamantly.

“Seriously?” I lowered my mouth to her ear as I whispered, “You’re telling me that not a single man has touched you? Not a single one?”

Without a second’s hesitation, she replied, “No one.”

She tilted her head slightly, just enough to give me full access to her neck and shoulder, as she whispered, “There’s only ever been you, Malcomb.”

I brushed my lips ever so softly against that sensitive spot below her earlobe and ran my tongue along that spot that always got to her. She inhaled a quick breath, then leaned into me, urging me on.

I lowered my hand to her thigh, and instead of pushing me away, she shifted her step, giving me access to glide my hand even higher. “You’ve always been mine, Londyn.”

I eased her lace panties to the side, letting the tips of my fingers rake against her wet center. “So fucking wet.”

I teased her for a moment, then looked down at her and whispered, “Tell me to stop.”

“I don’t want you to stop.”

That’s all I needed to hear. I wound my fingers around the hem of her panties, and with one quick tug, I ripped them from her hips. Without giving her time to react, I lifted her up onto the counter and stepped closer. I reached for the hem of her

dress and slipped it over her head, revealing her perfect round breasts. I cupped one in my hand, and her head fell back as I began swirling my tongue around her nipple.

She muttered my name incoherently as I nipped and sucked her sensitive flesh. “Oh, God... Malcomb.”

I relished those little sounds.

I’d missed them more than I cared to admit. I reached behind me and grabbed hold of my shirt, quickly pulling it over my head and tossing it to the floor. Her eyes dropped to my chest, and there was no missing the spark of desire that flashed through her eyes as they roamed over my bare skin.

She reached out and used the tip of her finger to trace the lines of my newer tattoos. “You’ve changed so much... It’s just been so long.”

“Too long.”

I eased her back on the counter, then lowered my mouth down between her legs before I placed them over my shoulders. She inhaled a deep breath as soon as my beard brushed the inside of both thighs, and my tongue skimmed across her center. Just as I hoped, she tasted just as intoxicating as she used to, and I was hooked all over again.

I teased back and forth in a gentle rhythm against her sensitive flesh, loving the way her body instantly reacted to my touch. “I’ve missed having you like this... Always so eager.”

Her breath became uneven and hitched as I thrust my finger deep inside her, rubbing against her G-spot slow and steady. When I added a second finger, she tensed around me, and goosebumps prickled across her skin. I continued to tease her, staying just inches away from where she wanted me. Her hips lifted up from the counter, begging for me to give her more.

I eased my fingers deeper inside her while my mouth clamped around her clit and sucked hard, giving her exactly what she needed.

“Malcomb!” she gasped as her head thrashed back.

“That’s right. Come for me, baby.”

I continued teasing that spot that was driving her to the edge as I tormented her with my tongue. She whispered my name over and over as she spasmed around my fingers. While she was still in the throes of her release, I quickly pulled my wallet out of my back pocket and grabbed a condom.

I’d just started to unbuckle my belt when Londyn sat up and whispered, “Whoa. Whoa. Easy there, killer. No more of that.”

She slid down from the counter as she muttered something about Dalton and us asking for trouble. She reached for my hand and led me into the bedroom. Once we were at the foot of the bed, Londyn reached for my waistband and began unbuckling my belt. I could tell by the look in her eyes that she had something on her mind, so I asked, “What are you up to there, beautiful?”

“It’s my turn to have a little fun.”

She inched my jeans down my hips and thighs, and a light hiss slipped across my teeth when she reached down and took me in her hand, teasing me with soft, easy strokes. A wicked smile spread across her lips as she watched my body grow more tense with every flick of her wrist.

After several moments, she dropped to her knees, and a tortured moan echoed through the room when I felt the warmth of her tongue rake against me. I reached down, taking her hair in my hands, silently begging for more as she finally took me in her mouth, lowering her wet lips over my shaft.

Damn.

I couldn’t imagine a better fucking feeling.

Her mouth was soft, warm and wet, and I had to fight the urge to pull back on her hair and force her to take me deeper. Her tongue twirled around the head of my dick, and then her movements changed. Her strokes became firmer and quicker with a slight twist of her wrist, and she sucked harder as she took me deeper.

The change was subtle but damn near sent me right over the edge. When I took a step back and pulled myself free from her grasp, she looked up at me with a mix of surprise and disappointment. I reached down, and as I lifted her to her feet, I said, “You got a real talent with that mouth of yours, but you gotta stop. A man can only take so much.”

I lowered Londyn down onto the mattress, then removed my boots and jeans. I stood there for a moment, letting my eyes roam over every inch of her gorgeous body. Her chest rose and fell as she tried to steady her breath, each gasp of air sounding more desperate than the last. Londyn’s smile went right through me when I said, “You’re so damn beautiful.”

“Malcomb.”

Her eyes were trained on mine as I slid the condom on and settled between her legs. Damn. She looked so fucking beautiful with her long dark hair flowing around her shoulders and that wanton look in her eyes. Like a moth drawn to a flame, I inched towards her, raking my cock across her center.

She was warm and wet, and I ached to be inside her. Clearly feeling the same, she arched her back towards me and moaned while her legs wrapped around my hips to pull me forward.

“You ready for me?”

With her cheek flushed with desire, she gave me a slight nod, then gently shifted her hips, forcing me inside. And I froze. I had to. She felt too fucking good. I needed a second to get my act together before I fucked up and ended this thing before it got started.

I regained my focus, then worked myself in deeper until I’d given her every inch. Relishing the sensation, my tortured growl echoed through the room as I slowly withdrew. “Fuck, baby. You feel so damn good.”

A slight hiss slipped through her teeth as I drove into her again and again—each time a bit faster and unforgiving. Her heels dug into my back, and she moaned, “Better than I remembered.”

She was right.

It was better, and it was all because of her. I was consumed by her, every inch of me, and as I drove deeper inside her, I only yearned for more. I could feel her muscles contracting all around me as her second orgasm started to take hold. My body grew rigid as I struggled to hold back my own release, and it only became more difficult when she clamped down around me as her body writhed in pleasure. “Oh my God, Malcomb! *Fuckkkk.*”

I looked down at her sprawled out on the bed in an orgasmic daze and smiled. I’d missed seeing that blissful look on her face. I’d done my job and I’d done it well, but I was far from done. With her body still trembling, I lowered my hands to her hips and pulled out. She gasped when I rolled her over onto her knees.

Before she had time to react, I’d plunged inside her once again. Fuck. It just kept getting better. Unable to control myself, I slowly drew back and slammed into her again and again, giving her everything I had. Being with her felt so right like she was made just for me.

“Fuckkk!” I shouted out as my throbbing cock demanded its release too fucking soon. I continued to drive into her in a feverish rhythm until she finally twisted the sheets with her hands and let out a tortured groan.

Her body clamped down around me like a vice as my hips collided with her ass, and I was done. I recklessly drove once more, then finally came deep inside of her. I kept my hands planted on her hips until my breath steadied, then withdrew and did away with the condom. I dropped down on the bed next to her, and my heart was still pounding when Londyn curled up next to me.

We were lying there in the dark as she whispered, “Is this really happening, or am I in a really good dream?”

“Oh, it’s happening, babe, and if I have anything to say about it, it’ll be happening again real soon.”

“I wish you knew how much I’ve missed you.”

“I missed you, too. More than you’ll ever know.”

“It seems strange. It’s been so long, but being here with you feels so right, like I just stepped back into the place I was meant to be.”

“Because that’s exactly what we just did. I just wish it would’ve happened a hell of a lot sooner, but not much I can do about that now.”

“I’m really sorry. It shouldn’t have been this way.” Her voice trembled as she said, “I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive my father for saying what he said to you.”

The mere mention of her father had me wanting to go over to his place and kick his ass. And, if he had been anyone else, I would’ve done that and more. Hell, I’d kill a man for less, but in the end, he was Londyn’s dad and Dalton’s grandfather. Hurting him would only end up hurting them.

Like it or not, I would have to find a way to come to terms with my anger. “I’m not exactly happy with him myself, but he’s your father, Londyn. He loves you and at the time, he thought he was doing what was best for you.”

“Maybe at first, but all those months after....” She looked up at me with anguish in her eyes as she said, “You don’t know how distraught I was after the breakup. It took me months to be able to get through a day without breaking down into a crying, hysterical mess. And Dad knew that. He saw. He heard, and yet, he did nothing to rectify what he’d done. How can I forgive him for that?”

“I don’t know, babe.” I leaned down and kissed her on the forehead. “But holding onto that kind of anger is only going to make things harder for you.”

“Stop being nice about it, Malcomb. He took five years from us. I can’t just forgive and forget that.”

“Okay. What do you wanna do? Go burn his house down? I’ll bring the fucking matches.”

“No, but I might wanna yell at him and give him the cold shoulder for a while. Make him think about what he’s done.”

“And you think that’ll change anything?”

“No, but it’ll make me feel better.”

“Okay, babe.” I smiled. “You do whatever you gotta do. I’ve got your back.”

“You really think I’m wrong about being mad?”

“No, I never said that. Your dad did a shit thing to the both of us. I thought a lot of him and knew he wouldn’t say what he did unless he meant it.” I let out a breath, then added, “Him saying it is on him. My believing it and acting on it is on me. I should’ve trusted you. More than that, I should’ve trusted us, and I didn’t.”

“You really thought you were doing the right thing? No question about it?”

“Oh, I questioned it. Hell, I questioned it every fucking day, but I always believed you should take the scholarship. You’d worked hard for it, and I didn’t want anything to stand in your way of getting it, especially me.”

“But why not check in to see if you’d made the right choice?”

“I did. I had Big look it up, and he saw that you’d taken the scholarship.” My chest tightened as I told her, “I should’ve been happy that my plan worked, but I wasn’t. There was a piece of me that hoped you would’ve stuck around and gone to school closer to home. When I found out that didn’t happen, it fucked me up. That’s when I decided to shut it down. I couldn’t see you. I couldn’t talk to you. I couldn’t even talk about you. I had to put you behind me. It was the only way I could get through the day.”

“I get it.”

“It was a stupid move. I get that now, but back then, I was a fucking mess.”

“You weren’t the only one.” Her voice trembled as she said, “I just kept thinking if I could talk to you then...”

“I’m sorry. If I could go back and change things, I would.”

“You don’t have to keep apologizing, Malcomb.” She eased up on her elbow. “We both made some ‘*not so great*’ decisions that ended up hurting us both, but we’re here now. The question is... do you think we’ll be able to put these past five years behind us?”

“We have to because I’m not losing you again.”

I leaned down and pressed my mouth against hers, kissing her in a possessive, demanding kiss that left me wanting her once again. And if the way she was writhing beneath me was any indication, she wanted me just as much.

I spent the entire night making love to her, taking my time to burn every inch of her body into my memory.

I wanted to remember every moment, every touch, so I’d have something to hold onto when I had to head back home. Once we were both sated, we gave in to our exhaustion and fell asleep. The next morning, I awoke to Londyn rushing about the room, picking up clothes off the floor. Her hair was wet, and she was wearing a camisole with slacks, and she looked a little frantic.

When she laid my clothes across the bed, I sat up and whispered, “Morning.”

“Good morning.” She stepped over to me and gave me a quick kiss. “I was just picking up a bit.”

“How long before you gotta leave for work?”

“Half an hour or so.” She stepped over to her closet and pulled out a top. “I wish I could stay.” She turned around and gave me a half-smile. “But I’ve got a meeting that I can’t miss.”

“It’s all good. I need to head back and take care of a few things anyway.”

“Are you sure?” She arched an eyebrow and stepped closer to me. “I could call in sick.”

“No, no. It’s fine.” I laughed and shook my head. “I’d rather you not get in trouble for me.”

“It’d be fun though.”

“You bet your ass it would, but duty calls.” I got up and started getting dressed. “You remember our conversation at the park?”

She gave me a puzzled look, so I added, “*The one about me wanting to be with you and Dalton as much as possible?*”

“Yes, of course I remember.”

I buckled my jeans as I stepped over to her. “Well, I’ve been thinking that it’d be easier to do that if you and Dalton were back in Port Angeles with me.”

“Oh...”

“It would be even easier if you both moved in with me.”

“Move in with you?” she gasped. “You can’t say something like that out of the blue.”

“Why not? It’s true.”

“Because Dalton and I have a life here.”

I understood her hesitation, but I wanted them both with me. “I get that, but it’s something to consider. We could finally have the life we’ve always wanted.”

“But what about work?” she asked.

“You could find a job back at home... or find something remote.”

“I don’t know. It’s not that I don’t want to. I do...” She looked at me, her eyes full of uncertainty. “There’s so much to consider.”

“I don’t need an answer right now.” I took her hand and squeezed it gently. “I just want you to think about it. You and Dalton could come for a visit this weekend and get a feel for things.”

“Okay. We could do that.”

“That’s my girl.” I leaned in and kissed her temple. “I best get going before Dalton wakes up.”

“I’ll walk you out.”

Londyn grabbed her keys then followed me out the front door. When we got to the parking lot, she stopped and gasped, “Is that Betty?”

Londyn used to hang out in the garage with me while I worked on piecing Betty back together. We’d spent hours on end out there, talking and listening to music, and every time I got frustrated and thought about giving up, she’d be there to get me back on track. It wasn’t until after we broke up that I actually got her up and running.

I smiled with pride as I told her, “The one and only.”

“You did it!” She walked over and ran her hand across the handlebars. “You actually got her running.”

“It took some time, but yeah. She purrs like a kitten.”

“That’s so awesome, Malcomb. I know she was always special to you.”

“It’s just a bike, Londyn.” I brought my hand up to her face and brushed her cheek with the pad of my thumb. “You and Dalton are what’s special to me.”

I leaned down and kissed her, then got on my bike. I started the engine, revving it a couple of times before I gave Londyn a quick nod goodbye. My heart felt heavy as I pulled out of the parking lot. I didn’t want to go, but I didn’t have a choice. I had to get back to the club and check in with the brothers. But I had every intention of seeing her again very soon.

And when I did, I would make sure Londyn understood that she was mine.

All mine...

CHAPTER 18

London

“I can’t believe you left me hanging all night.”

“I didn’t really have a choice.” I started flipping through my files as I explained, “He didn’t leave until this morning.”

“So things went well?”

“Yeah, they went really well.” I looked up at Jackson and smiled, “It went better than I could’ve ever hoped for.”

He sat down on the edge of my desk and took a sip of coffee. “Do tell...”

“He read my letters.” I glanced around to make sure no one was within earshot. “He knows I tried to tell him about Dalton, and he felt terrible about not reading them sooner.”

“As he should.”

“It wasn’t his fault. He was trying to do what Dad told him to.” He gave me one of his disapproving looks—which I ignored. “*Any-way*, he was wonderful with Dalton. He was a natural.”

“Dalton makes it easy.”

“Yes, he does.” I placed the files on my desk and sighed. “I’ve got so much work to do.”

“Work can wait. Tell me the rest.”

“Well, we spent the afternoon at the park. Dalton played while Malcomb and I talked about things. Found out he was at the bar the other night.”

“Oh really?”

“Um-hmm.” I cleared my throat. “He’s the one who brought me home.”

“Do what?”

“Oh, yeah.”

I told him all about my drinking escapades and how Malcomb had made sure I’d gotten home safe and sound. I also told him about Danny and the text Malcomb sent. Judging by his expression he didn’t approve, but he didn’t say a word. He just sat there and listened as I told him, “And I was too hungover to remember any of it.”

“I didn’t realize you’d drank that much.”

“Neither did I,” I shrugged. “Guess it was good he was there.”

“Yeah, it was.” I needed to get some work done, so I rushed to tell him, “After the park, we went back to the apartment, and Malcomb made us pancakes. It was a really great night.”

“And that was it?”

“Yep.”

“Bullshit,” he argued. “You just said he didn’t leave until this morning, which means he stayed with you last night. Now, quit stalling and tell me.”

“Well, he was going to head home, but he kissed me and umm...” I leaned in closer. “You know.”

“You dirty little whore.” He gave me a playful shove. “You banged him, didn’t you?”

“Jackson,” I hissed. “Keep your voice down.”

He leaned in with a smirk as he whispered, “You banged him, didn’t you?”

“We had a lovely night together.”

“You. Dirty. Whore.”

“Jackson!” I giggled. “*Stop.*”

“Well, I’m proud of you. It’s about time you two started figuring things out.”

“About that...” I shifted in my seat, preparing myself for his reaction when I told him, “He’s asked me to move in with him.”

“Whoa. That was fast.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Jackson’s voice was laced with concern as he asked, “Are you sure you’re ready for that kind of commitment?”

I nodded, feeling my heart swell as I answered, “I think so. I mean, I’ve been hoping for it, right?”

“Yeah, but this is a big step,” Jackson pointed out. “It’s been a long time since you two spent any real time together. You do this, and you two will be seeing each other day in and day out, and that can be tough right out the gate.”

“I know.” I bit my lip, feeling a surge of anxiety wash over me. “But isn’t that the point?”

“Sounds like you’ve already made up your mind.”

“I guess I have.”

Jackson studied me for a moment before adding, “Just be careful. I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

“I will. You don’t have to worry.”

“I’ll always worry, but you do what you think is best. And I’ll support you all the way.”

I let out a relieved breath, feeling a weight lift off my shoulders. I had been so worried about telling Jackson, afraid that he would judge me or try to talk me out of it. But he was being surprisingly supportive.

“So, when are you guys moving in?” he asked.

“Oh, we’re a long way from that.” I looked over to the large stack of files I still had to go through and let out a grumble. “I’ve gotta put in my notice here and figure out things with my apartment. But before I start any of that,

Dalton and I are going to go spend the weekend with him at his place in Port Angeles.”

“Oooh, that should be interesting.” Concern marked his face as he asked, “Wonder if that means he’ll be taking you by to see his folks because that should be an interesting conversation.”

He was right. It would be a very interesting conversation, and I wasn’t looking forward to it. I knew what kind of man Cotton was. He hated secrets. Even with all the extenuating circumstances, he wouldn’t be happy when he discovered that I’d kept his grandson from him. I just hoped that Malcomb would be able to help me smooth things over.

I sighed as I told him, “It will be a tough one for sure, but it has to be done. They should have a chance to get to know their grandson.”

“Yeah, they do. But if they cause you any trouble, they’ll have to answer to me.”

“Is that right?” I giggled.

“Yeah, no body messes with my girl.”

I felt a warm feeling spread through my chest. Jackson was such a good friend, always there for me when I needed him. “Thank you, Jackson. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Right back at ya kid.” He smiled at me and squeezed my hand. “I’m not going to lose you. So, go move in with your little boy toy, but you better be prepared to see me as often as possible.”

“Absolutely.” I stood and reached over, hugging him tightly as I said, “Now, get out of here. I’ve got a ton of work to do.”

“Okay. Okay. I’ll go.” He turned, and as he headed down the hall, he shouted, “See ya in a couple of hours. Lunch is on me today!”

“I want Italian!”

“You got it.”

With that, he continued down the hall and left me to tackle the work I'd been putting off all morning. Unfortunately, my head was all over the place, and I was struggling to keep my focus. I couldn't seem to stop thinking about my night with Malcomb. A smile slipped across my face as I thought about him lifting me up onto the counter and the things he did after.

It was memorable, to say the least. I was fighting back the tingles when I heard my cell phone chime with a message. I grabbed it out of my purse, and my smile grew even wider when I saw that it was a message from Malcomb.

Malcomb:

I need a shower.

But I don't want to wash away your scent.

I've missed it.

Me:

Boy, you really know how to flatter a girl.

Malcomb:

Just telling it like it is.

Me:

Well, I've missed it, too.

Malcomb:

That mean you're going to move in with me?

Me:

I've been thinking about it.

Malcomb:

I'll let you get back to it.

Have a good one.

Me:

You too.

Before I had a chance to type anything further, my phone started ringing, and my mother's name popped up on the screen. I quickly answered, "Hey, Mom. This isn't a good time."

"I know you're at work, but I wanted to check on you. I've been so worried about you." She paused for a moment, then added, "I called and messaged you several times yesterday, but I didn't hear back from you."

I'd seen her messages and all the voicemails, but I'd avoided them all. I knew she wanted to talk about Dad and the horrible thing he'd done, but I wasn't ready to talk to her about it.

The wounds were still fresh, and I was afraid I'd say something I would regret. "I'm sorry. I had a lot going on yesterday."

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"So, you talked to Dad? He told you what he did?"

"Yes, sweetheart. He told me everything, and I'm so sorry. I can't believe he did that."

"Me either."

"I'm just so mad at him. I don't know what the man was thinking! He had no business saying the things he said."

"I can't disagree with you there." I got up and closed my office door before saying, "I get why he did it. I think he really

did want what was best for me and all that, but I don't understand how he could stand by and watch me fall apart day after day and never say a word about what he'd done. Not even when he found out I was pregnant. Not even when I lost the scholarship. It makes no sense to me."

"It doesn't make any sense to me either." She let out a deep sigh before saying, "I always knew he had his hesitations about you seeing Malcomb. I had them, too. I still do, but I never dreamed he'd do something like this."

"You have hesitations?"

"I had the same concerns that any mother would have about their daughter seeing a man in a biker club, especially one with a reputation like Satan's Fury, but I saw the way he looked at you. That boy loved you. He would've moved heaven and earth for you. I knew in my heart that he would never let anything happen to you."

I'd been so angry at my father that I hadn't even stopped to think about how my mother felt about Malcomb and everything that had happened. It was tough to hear that she had her doubts, but I couldn't deny that her concerns were understandable. Satan's Fury did have a reputation, and it wasn't a good one.

And Malcomb was no angel himself. He'd gotten himself into a pickle a time or two, but he always managed to come out unscathed. And Mom was right. He did love me and would do anything to make me happy. He proved that the day he sacrificed his own happiness for mine.

"I love him, Mom," I said, surprising even myself. "I know that might sound crazy after everything that's happened, but I do. I love him, and I want to be with him."

"I know you do, honey." She sighed. "I've always known that."

"He's asked me to move back to Port Angeles with Dalton."

"I can't say that I'm surprised. I can't blame him for wanting you two to be closer, but is that what you really want,

sweetie? I mean, you have your job and your apartment, and Dalton's school is—”

“I know, Mom. But we've already lost so much time.” I could feel the tears welling in my eyes as I told her, “Malcomb missed seeing his son being born. He missed him saying his first words and walking for the first time. Those are moments he will never get back.”

“I know, sweetie. And I am so very sorry for that, but there are many more moments to come.”

“And I want those moments to be with him.”

“It sounds like you've already made up your mind.”

“No, but I'm definitely leaning in that direction,” I admitted.

“Okay. Well, I'll support whatever you decide. Just promise me one thing.” Her voice was strained as she said, “Promise me that you'll be careful and listen to your instincts. I don't want you to get hurt again.”

“I promise, Mom. Don't worry.”

“I'm your mother, dear. I'll always worry.”

I talked to her for a moment longer, then ended the call and finally got to work. Surprisingly, I was able to keep my focus, and by the time lunch rolled around, I was feeling pretty good about what I'd accomplished. I went to grab a bite with Jackson, then returned and got back at it. By the end of the day, I'd finished everything I needed to do and was feeling pretty good about things.

I grabbed my things and headed to the daycare to pick up Dalton. On the way home, we stopped for a quick bite of dinner, then we both got ready for bed. I kept expecting a call or text from Malcomb, but I received neither. And the following day was more of the same.

And just like that, I was back to questioning everything.

And I'd questioned things for long enough.

CHAPTER 19

Savage

“I was beginning to think you weren’t gonna show today.”
“You know better than that.” Rooster gave me a questioning look, so I added, “Come on. I’m late, but I’m not that late.”

I opened the back door, and Rooster followed me inside. “Not what I meant.”

“So, what did you mean?”

He knew about Dalton and the argument I’d had with Londyn, so I wasn’t surprised when he said, “Figure you had a long night.”

“I did.”

“Well, how was it?”

“It wasn’t too bad. Actually, it went pretty well.” I shrugged. “We’re still trying to sort things out.”

“And the kid?”

“The kid is something. Really something.” I couldn’t help but smile as I told him, “You’ve gotta meet him, Roost. Kid will melt your heart.”

“So, you’re really a dad, huh?”

Before he could respond, Torch and Chains came charging through the door, and they both looked like they were ready to throw down. Something was clearly wrong, so I asked, “What’s going on?”

“Ah, nothing,” Chains grumbled. “We just spent the past half hour trying to lose a fucking tail, and I damn near wiped out twice.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Torch was quick to reply, “You remember the two Camaros that drove by right after we did the drop for Bruton?”

“Yeah, what about ‘em?”

“They’re here, and they were hot on our asses all through town.”

“Damn. You sure it was them?”

“Yeah, no doubt about it. The red one had the same fucking rims and that stupid Panama Jack sticker on the back window.”

Rooster turned to me with a scowl. “What do you think that was all about?”

“If I had to guess, I’d say they’re making it clear that they weren’t happy we were in their territory.”

“But how’d they know where to find us?”

“Same way we’re gonna find them.” Chains and Torch followed as I started down the hall. “We’re gonna get Bones to track down their license plate numbers and figure out who these assholes are.”

Bones was the club’s hacker, and he was damn good at his job. I’d seen him do some pretty amazing stuff, and I had no doubt that he’d be able to find out who these assholes were. When we got down to his room, Bones was sitting at his desk, tapping away at his keyboard.

“Yo, Bones,” I said, walking into his makeshift office. “I need you to do a little digging for me.”

“Oh, yeah?” He looked intrigued as he asked, “Whatcha got?”

“Need to find the license plate numbers for two Camaros that were in town earlier.”

“Okay. Any particular reason why?”

“They’re the guys we saw the day of the drop.”

“So, they decided to track you guys down?”

“Apparently so. Now, it’s our turn to do the same,” I explained. “If we can figure out who these guys are, then we can bring them in and find out what they’re up to.”

“Got it.” He turned back to his computer as he said, “Just give me a few minutes, and I’ll see what I can find.”

“That’s what I wanted to hear.” I turned, and as I started out the door, I told him, “I’m gonna go fill in Prez. Let me know what you find out.”

“You got it.”

Rooster followed as I started down the hall. I hadn’t gotten far when he inched up beside me and asked, “So, what about Cotton?”

“What about him?”

“You told him about the kid yet?” he pressed.

“Haven’t gotten around to it.”

“How you reckon he’s gonna take the news?”

I stopped and faced him as I told him, “Probably about as well as I did.”

“So, when are you planning to talk to him and Cass?”

“I don’t know. Soon, I guess.”

A smirk slipped across his face as he asked, “Can I be there when you do?”

“What?”

“Cotton’s gonna have your ass in a sling, brother, and I kind of wanna be there to watch when it happens.”

“What the fuck makes you think he’s gonna have my ass?”

“I don’t know. Maybe the fact that he’s been on you from the start to talk to Londyn, and you always had some fucked-up reason not to.”

“I had my reasons.”

“Yeah, and like I said, they were fucked up.”

“Thanks for the support, brother.” I shook my head and continued towards the office. “We’ve got bigger things to deal with than my ass in a sling, don’t ya think?”

He didn’t respond.

But then again, I didn’t expect him to.

Rooster had good intentions, but the fact that I had a kid wasn’t going to be something that I could just drop in my ol’ man’s lap. I’d have to break it down and explain how things played out; otherwise, he’d never be able to forgive me or Londyn for missing out on the past four years of his grandson’s life.

When we got to Maverick’s office, I had to do a double-take. That room had always been my father’s, and it was tough to picture anyone but him sitting behind that desk. But Maverick had claimed that spot, and it was well deserved. He’d proven himself time and time again, and we all knew he would handle whatever problems came his way—including this one.

I inhaled a deep breath, then tapped on the door and walked inside.

Maverick was at his desk reading a message on his cellphone. When he looked up and saw that it was me and Rooster coming through the door, he leaned back in his chair and said, “Morning.”

“Morning, Prez.” I stepped up to the desk and told him, “I think we might have a situation.”

“Does it have something to do with the two Camaros that have been lurking around town?”

“How’d you know about that?”

“I just got a call from Joelle,” Maverick answered. “Two guys just stopped by Puckett’s and were asking questions about us.”

“What kind of questions?”

“Wanted to know what we were into and where they could find the clubhouse.”

Joelle was one of the bartenders and Guardrail’s youngest daughter. She was a smart girl who knew how to play the game without crossing any lines. I knew she wouldn’t tell them anything about us. But I didn’t know what she’d found out about them, so I asked, “Was she able to get anything out of ‘em?”

“Not much. They were pretty tight-lipped, but she said they had the gangbanger look. Both were tall and were wearing dark clothing. One of them had a scorpion tattoo on his hand, and the other had one on his neck. She also said they have cameras covering the parking lot. Hopefully, we can use them to find their license plate numbers.”

“Bones is working on it now.”

I took out my phone and was just about to message him when it started ringing in my hand. I accepted the call, and before I could answer, Bones announced, “I got ‘em.”

“We’re on our way down.” I hung up and shoved my phone back in my pocket. “He’s got ‘em.”

“Already?” Rooster asked, sounding surprised.

“It’s Bones. What did you expect?”

Maverick followed me and Rooster as we made our way back down the hall. As soon as we walked into the computer room, Bones offered Maverick a stack of papers and announced, “The red Camaro is registered to Keshawn Michaels. He’s got quite a rap sheet. Distribution and armed robbery are just the start. His buddy, Franklin Mosier, has more of the same, including rape and domestic assault.”

“Any gang involvement?”

“I’m still working on that, but they both have scorpion tattoos, which led me to believe they’re members of the *East-end Stingers*.”

The Stingers were one of the larger gangs in Seattle. They were one of the more dangerous ones, too. I didn't like the idea of them poking around our town, much less following our boys. "We need to deal with this before it gets out of hand."

"I couldn't agree more." Maverick turned to Bones as he asked, "Any idea where these guys are now?"

"I got no idea how long they'll be there, but when we last checked Puckett's cameras, I could see them parked across the street at the Station, and they seemed to be the only ones there."

"Good," Maverick answered, already making his way to the door. "Time to see what these assholes are up to."

As we walked out of the clubhouse, I couldn't help but be a little pumped. We'd done a couple of runs and whatnot, but it had been a minute since we had any real action. And after an intense weekend, I needed to blow off some steam.

Torch and Chains were the first to pull out, with me, Rooster, and Maverick following close behind. The Station was an old sports bar, but unlike the others in town, it was rundown and rarely ever open. I had no idea what these guys were doing there, but we were about to find out.

When we got close, Torch signaled us to follow him over to Puckett's. We parked and then made our way across the street. We didn't want to draw any unwanted attention, so we played it cool, acting like we were actually going into the old shithole for a drink. But as soon as we got close to the front door, gunfire erupted, and bullets started splintering through the old wood.

For a split second, I thought the shots were coming from inside the bar, but when a bullet buzzed past my ear and into the brick wall, I knew better. I immediately ducked down and shouted, "Behind us!"

We drew our weapons and started firing back at the two cars, but after a couple of shots, both sped out of the parking lot, sending gravel and dust hurling through the air. We raced

back to our bikes and tried to follow after them, but it was too late. They'd already ditched us.

Clearly pissed, Maverick shook his head, then gave us the signal to head back to the clubhouse. We all followed suit, and as soon as we were parked, Maverick got off his bike and said, "Call the others in. It's time we let them know what's going on."

"You got it, Prez."

Torch and I started the call chain, then headed inside to join Maverick and Rooster in the conference room. We'd barely gotten seated when the guys started rolling in. It was our first church with Maverick as president and me as VP, and again, it felt a little strange. At the same time, it felt pretty fucking good. I was finally making my way.

Dad walked in and took his seat at the opposite end of the table. He looked over to me and gave me an approving nod, then turned his attention to Maverick as he said, "Seems our last run for Bruton has brought us some blowback."

He spent the next few minutes explaining the situation to the others, and as soon as he was done, the room erupted in various side conversations. After a few moments, Wrath looked over to him and asked, "What do you want us to do?"

"The Stingers aren't a small gang. Going up against them would be a hell of an undertaking. I'm hoping it's not going to come down to that." He glanced over at me and Torch, then back to the others. "We encroached on their territory, and we all know how we'd handle it if they'd done that shit to us."

"Their asses would be done."

"Exactly." Maverick ran his hand over his beard, then added, "We need to put this fire out, or we're gonna have a war on our hands."

"How are we supposed to do that?"

"We send them a peace offering. It's a sign of respect, and hopefully, it will squelch things, and we can put all this behind us."

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Then, we’ll show them what it means to fuck with Fury.”

“Sounds good,” Torch answered. “Just tell us what you need us to do.”

“These guys are slingers, and from what I hear, they’re running hard stuff. Let’s get them a duffle bag full of whatever we can get, and I’ll make sure it gets into the right hands.”

“Consider it done,” Rooster volunteered.

“It’s gonna take some time to get this done, and until we do, I want you to be on high alert. Don’t let these guys tail you to a place they have no business being.”

“Understood.”

With that, church was dismissed, and the guys quickly dispersed. Once the room was cleared, I stepped over to Maverick and asked, “How are you planning to get this bag of goods into the right hands?”

“I’m not sure. I’m gonna have to make some calls.”

“Call Mason Hicks. He owes the club a favor.” Dad announced from the doorway. “His son is a Stinger. If he can manage it, Mason will get him to help you get the offering into the right hands.”

“Thanks, brother. Appreciate it.”

“No problem.”

Without saying anything more, he disappeared down the hall. Maverick pulled out his phone as he asked, “You think this is the right way to go?”

“I think it’s worth a shot.”

He nodded, then dialed Hick’s number. I figured he wanted some privacy, so I stepped out of the room and let him make the call alone. After a few minutes, he stepped out into the hall and announced, “Got it.”

“Good deal. What do you need me to do?”

“Check in with Rooster and make sure he’s got the goods.”

“Will do.”

I did as Maverick asked, and just as he'd promised, Rooster had gathered quite a hefty package for our disgruntled friends. I just hoped it would be enough to smooth things over and put an end to this thing with the Stingers once and for all.

Rooster and Torch carried the duffle bag over to Mason Hick's place, where they met up with his son. He took the bag with the promise of getting it to his gang's leader. And that was that.

Now we had to wait.

And that was something none of us were good at.

But we did it.

We waited for days, and there was nothing. No Camaros. No assholes asking questions. Nothing. I wanted to believe that we were done with the Stingers, but my gut told me otherwise. Men like these didn't send out scouts for nothing, but I wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Londyn and Dalton were coming to my place for the weekend, and while the timing wasn't exactly the best, I was ready to see them both. But I wasn't going to let my guard down, not when so much was at stake. The time had come for me to find out if I could find a balance between life at the club and life at home.

It wouldn't be easy.

Hell, it was going to be the hardest thing I'd ever done.

But I'd do it.

For them, I would do anything.

CHAPTER 20

London

“**W**hat do you think?”

“About?”

“Today? Tonight? All of it.” Concern marked Malcomb’s face as he asked, “Did it go okay? Do you think Dalton had fun?”

“It couldn’t have gone better.” Malcomb had taken us down to the marina for several hours, and after, we went back to his place for dinner. “Dalton had such a great time fishing and seeing all the boats and then grilling burgers with you. It couldn’t have been more perfect.”

“So, you think he enjoyed it?”

“He loved it, Malcomb. *All of it.*” I reached over and placed the palm of my hand on his chest. “You did good.”

“I just want him to like me, you know?”

“Of course, he likes you, Malcomb. He thinks you’re some kind of hero.”

“Well, we both know that’s not the case.”

“I don’t know. You can be pretty heroic when you wanna be.” I smiled as I told him, “I can still remember those late nights when you would go help the brothers out and all those times when you were there for your mom and sisters when your dad couldn’t be.”

“That doesn’t make me a hero, babe.”

“Maybe not to you, but it does to me. And I bet your mother would say the same.”

“Have I mentioned that I’m glad you’re here?”

“A time or two.” I laid my head back on the pillow as I whispered, “But just so you know, I’m glad I’m here, too.”

“Does that mean you’ll stay?”

“Maybe... I’m still thinking about it. But before I make any final decisions, I have a question for you.”

“Oh? And what’s that?”

“How many?”

“How many what?”

I inched up on my elbow, looking down at him as I asked, “How many women have been in this bed?”

“None. Not a single one.”

“Oh, come on. I know better than that.”

“It’s the truth.” He brought his hand to my face, gently brushing my cheek with his knuckles. “I’m no saint. Never claimed to be one, but believe me when I say, no other woman has been in this bed. This spot has always been yours, and it always will be.”

“You’re gonna have to stop with the sweet stuff.”

“Just stating the facts.”

“How’s this for a fact.” I eased my leg over his waist, straddling him at the hips. “I’ve missed you. You’re here right now, and I still miss you. I’m afraid I’ll never stop missing you.”

“I know the feeling. You were gone so long.... too long.” He reached up and slipped his hand around the nape of my neck, gently pulling me towards him. “And now, I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of you.”

His mouth landed on mine with a hard, demanding kiss. He kissed like he was in complete control, like he had no doubts about what he was doing or how he was doing it. I needed that. I didn’t want to think. I didn’t want a chance for

my insecurities or doubts to creep in. I simply wanted to be in the moment, and he did that for me.

His hands began to roam, and it wasn't long before we both were lost in the moment. He quickly maneuvered my cotton nightgown over my head and let it fall to the floor. His hands immediately dropped to my waist as he pulled me in for another kiss. I could feel the heat of his body pressing against my bare skin as he delved deeper into my mouth.

His deft fingers made their way up my back to my bra. Once he'd released the clasp, he slipped it down my arms, and his gaze fixated on my breasts. I could feel the scorching heat of his stare on my flesh, and the hungry look in his eyes had me squirming against him. "Damn. You're incredible...so damn beautiful."

As I sat, straddling him, I felt so wanted, so desired, which only made me want him more. Malcomb could see what I wanted, and he spent the better part of the night making sure all my needs were fulfilled. We fell asleep tangled in each other's arms, and I couldn't remember a night when I'd slept so well.

The next morning, I woke just after sunrise. Being careful not to wake Malcomb, I eased out of bed and made my way into the kitchen. I put on a pot of coffee and cleaned up a bit while it brewed. As soon as it was ready, I poured a cup of coffee and carried it out to the front porch.

The weather couldn't have been more perfect.

As I sat there watching the sunlight dancing across the water, I couldn't believe how beautiful it was. Malcomb's home was a gorgeous four-bedroom house that was surrounded by forest and had an amazing view of the ocean. There wasn't another house around for miles, and it was the perfect place to raise a family. While the idea of moving here gave me a bit of a thrill, it also terrified me.

I already had my heart broken once, and I wasn't sure I could survive going through it again. And it wasn't just my heart I had to consider. Dalton was my world. From the time I found out I was pregnant, I'd been watching over him,

protecting him, and making sacrifices so he would have everything he could possibly need. I wanted to believe that Malcomb would make the same kind of sacrifices, but there was no way to be sure—especially when so much had changed.

It was a thought that had me distracted, and I hadn't noticed that Malcomb had come up behind me until I heard him say, "Hey, you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm good. Why?"

"Just seem quiet. That's all."

I glanced over at him with a smile. "There something wrong with being *quiet*?"

"Not at all. I'm just not used to it."

"Well, trust me when I say quiet can be good. Very good, in fact." I giggled as I told him, "I have a four-year-old, remember?"

"We have a four-year-old, and I'm looking forward to the loud and the quiet. Whatever comes our way." He lowered his mouth to my neck, lightly trailing kisses below my ear. "You know what else I'm looking forward to?"

"I have a pretty good idea." I giggled as I inched away from him. "And that sounds great and all, but I was thinking we might get out and do something today."

"What did you have in mind?"

"I don't know. I was hoping you would come up with something."

"Yeah, I can come up with something, but first..."

Malcomb reached for me, pulling me towards him, and pressed his lips against mine. The kiss was soft and tender and filled with promise. I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him closer until there was no space left between us. Being with him felt like home, and my entire body melted into his.

A low moan escaped through my parted lips as he kissed me deeper, and suddenly, everything changed. We both became frantic and full of need. Just as we were getting carried away, Malcomb suddenly broke the kiss. “Get dressed and meet me out back.”

“And Dalton?”

“He might need to stay inside for this one.” He noticed my hesitation and added, “We won’t be long. Maybe he can watch a movie or play one of his games?”

“We’ll be close, right?”

“Yep. Just out back.”

“Okay. I’ll get him sorted.”

I went back inside and went to Dalton’s room, and to my surprise, he was still sleeping soundly. I used the opportunity to tiptoe down to Malcomb’s room and change out of my gown and into a pair of denim shorts and a T-shirt. I pulled my hair up into a ponytail, and I was about to put on a little makeup when I heard Dalton ask, “Where’s Mal-come?”

“He’s outside.” I walked over and knelt in front of him. “How’d you sleep?”

“O-kay.” He rubbed his eyes, then said, “I’m hun-gry.”

“Okay, sweetie. Let’s go to the kitchen and find you a bite to eat.”

He nodded, then followed me down the hall. When we made it to the kitchen, Dalton climbed up on one of the stools and watched as I made him a bowl of cereal. Once I had it ready, I asked, “Do you want to eat it here or over by the TV?”

“In ‘dare wit’ TV.”

“Okay.”

I led him into the living room, and he sat on his knees in front of the coffee table—something he’d done many times before. I turned on the TV and put it on one of his favorite shows, then leaned down and said, “Malcomb wants me to come outside and do something with him for a few minutes.”

“What ya gonna do?”

“I don’t know. He hasn’t told me.”

“I wanna go.”

Before I could respond, a man’s voice echoed through the room, “Holy shit. It’s true. Savage really does have a fucking kid.”

“*Whoa*. Language, please.”

I whipped around, and my mouth dropped when I found Thomas standing there. The last time I’d seen him, he was just a kid—tall and thin with acne and bad hair. But over the past five years, he’d grown into a man. He was broad-shouldered and handsome as could be. It took me a second, but I finally managed to respond, “Thomas? Is that really you?”

“The one and only, but folks call me Torch now.”

“Torch? That’s an interesting road name.”

“What can I say? I’m an interesting guy.”

I laughed, then walked over and gave him a hug. “It’s really good to see you, *Torch*.”

“Good to see you, too.” He hugged me back, then leaned to look over my shoulder at Dalton. “He looks just like him.”

“Yeah, he does.” I agreed with him.

“What’s his name?”

“Dalton.”

“Dalton’s a good name. It suits him.” Torch motioned his head towards the door as he said, “Ah, Malcomb’s out there waiting for ya. I’ll hang with him while you two do whatever it is you were gonna do.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.”

I nodded, then went over and knelt down next to Dalton. “Hey, this is Torch. He’s one of Malcomb’s friends. If it’s okay, he’s gonna watch TV with you for a bit.”

Dalton glanced over at Torch and then back to me. He thought for a moment, then nodded. "It's o-kay."

"I'll be right outside if you need me." I stood, then hurried over to the door. Before I walked out, I shouted, "I won't be long."

"Take your time."

As soon as I started down the steps, I spotted Malcomb in the backyard. He was talking with a brother I'd never met before. He was tall like Malcomb, but he was a bit broader in the shoulders and had a much thicker beard. He was also a bit older than Malcomb, and there was clearly something going on between them.

I walked slowly, hoping to give them a minute to finish talking, and as I got closer, I heard the man say, "I know it looks bad, but I'm telling you. I didn't tell him."

"Then, how the fuck did he know?"

"You know Torch. He's a smart guy. He figured the shit out on his own. I swear it." The man sounded sincere as he said, "You gotta know I'd never run my mouth about you having a kid unless it was something you wanted me to do."

Malcomb was about to respond when he noticed that I was walking towards them. I looked over to his brother as I asked, "Hey, is everything alright?"

"Yeah, yeah. I was just having a word with Rooster."

Rooster extended his hand as he said, "I don't believe we've had the pleasure."

"No, we haven't. I'm Londyn. Nice to meet you."

"Right back at ya." He released my hand as he said, "I've heard a lot about you."

"I wish I could say the same."

"Oh, give it time. You'll hear plenty." He chuckled as he started towards the house. He didn't get far when he stopped and turned back to Malcomb. "Did you know we're getting that new light at the square?"

“He actually got them to pass that shit?”

“Apparently so. I saw them putting it up earlier this morning. That man never ceases to amaze me.” Rooster chuckled then continued up the porch steps. “You two have fun. We’ll be waiting inside when you’re done.”

“Stay out of the fridge!”

“I can’t make any promises.”

Rooster continued up the porch steps, and seconds later, he’d disappeared into the house. I immediately turned to Malcomb and said, “He seems like an interesting guy.”

“You have no idea.” He reached down and grabbed his duffle bag. “I thought we’d do a little target practice.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“Have you shot lately?”

“No. I haven’t really had any reason to.”

“Yeah, I didn’t think so.” He nailed a target to a nearby tree and then started digging around in his bag. He pulled out a small handgun, quickly loaded it with ammunition, then offered it to me as he said, “This is just like the 9mm you’ve used before. It’s light and doesn’t have much kick.”

“Okay.” I took the gun from his hand and studied it for a moment, then pointed to the button on the side and asked, “This is the safety, right?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

He took a moment to remind me how to push the safety button on and off and how to load the clip. Once he’d gone through the basics, he showed me how to align the front and back sights to mark the target. As soon as I was in position, he said, “Don’t forget to use your left hand for support.”

“And breathe out as I pull the trigger.”

“She does remember,” he chuckled. “Now, let’s see what ya got.”

I looked at the target and tried to do all the things Malcomb had told me. I released the safety, inhaled a deep breath, and as I exhaled, I pulled the trigger. The sound was louder than I expected, making me flinch and clamp my eyes shut. When I opened my eyes, I wasn't surprised to see that I hadn't hit the center of the target, but I was close. "Wait, I can still do it."

"I know you can," Malcomb replied, sounding a little too confident. I prepared myself to take another shot, going through the same steps all over again, but this time I kept my eyes open. Just as I'd hoped, I came even closer to the center. I didn't have a chance to boast before he ordered, "Again."

I nodded as I lifted my hand and prepared to take another shot, letting out a deep breath before pulling back the trigger. I repeated the same steps over and over until I'd run out of ammunition. I looked at the target and was pleased to see that I'd improved with every shot, and I even hit it several times. "So, how'd I do?"

"Pretty damn good."

"Great!"

"If the time comes, you just have to keep a level head and remember everything I taught ya."

There was something about his tone that worried me, so I asked, "Is there a reason why we're doing this today?"

"I just want you to be able to protect yourself. And Dalton, if it's necessary." He took the gun from my hand and holstered it before putting it back in the duffle bag. "We should probably head back inside and see about Dalton and the boys."

"Yeah, you're probably right." I followed him up to the steps, but stopped when we reached the porch. "How long are you planning to keep Dalton a secret?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You seemed pretty upset at Rooster for telling Torch about Dalton. I was just wondering when you were planning to let the cat out of the bag."

“It’s not like that. I’m not trying to keep him a secret. I want all the brothers to know. I want my folks to know, too. But you know how they can be. They’ll be all over us. Just like today with Torch and Rooster. They can’t help themselves.” He stepped over to me as he said, “And I’m selfish. I wanted some time with just us this weekend. Is that okay with you?”

“That’s more than okay.”

“Good. Now, let’s get inside and check in on our boy.”

He leaned down and gave me a quick kiss, then took my hand and led me into the house.

Little by little, we were finding our way.

I knew getting back into the club life was going to be hard, but I had no idea how hard it could be until I went to drop off a simple box of cookies.

CHAPTER 21

Savage

There is nothing hotter than having your woman in the kitchen making your favorite cookies, especially when she's wearing nothing but one of your T-shirts and a pair of your white socks. It was a discovery I made when I walked into my kitchen and found Londyn standing at the counter with a variety of ingredients spread out in front of her.

While I was curious about what she was making, the thought quickly vanished the second I saw her bare legs, long and lean, and my white socks scrunched around her ankles. My T-shirt fell just below her hips, revealing just a hint of her ass, and damn. She looked smoking hot.

I stepped behind and slipped my hands around her waist, pulling her close as I asked, "What are you up to in here?"

Londyn leaned back into me, and I could feel the warmth of her body through the thin fabric of my shirt. "I was thinking of making your favorite chocolate chip cookies."

Her breath hitched as I pressed a soft kiss to the nape of her neck, and I felt her body shudder in response. "I'm sorry, babe, but you're gonna have to change."

"I do?" Confusion marked her face as she glanced down at my T-shirt. "Why?"

"I have things I need to get done around here, and I can't do that when you're wearing something that's so... *distracting*."

"It's just a T-shirt, Malcomb," she argued, smiling at me seductively.

“A T-shirt and socks,” I corrected. “And you look smoking hot.”

I placed my hands on her hips and turned her to face me. Her smile quickly faded when I wrapped my arms around her, holding her tightly against my chest. I liked having her there in my kitchen. I liked it more than I ever thought I could. She had me wanting things I’d never imagined I’d ever want or need.

She watched me with those beautiful dark eyes as I lowered my head and claimed her mouth. The kiss quickly became heated, and a slight whimper escaped her lips when I stepped forward, pressing her back against the counter. Her arms wound around my neck, and just as we were starting to lose ourselves in the moment, my burner started ringing in my pocket. “Damnit.”

I stepped back and released her from our embrace, then took my phone out and answered, “Yeah?”

“They didn’t accept the offering.” Torch quickly added, “I mean, they took it, but they didn’t accept it.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Someone tossed the duffle bag at the gate. The damn thing was fucking empty. They took everything.”

“So, that’s it?”

“No, they left a note. It basically said, ‘too little too late’.”

“Damn.”

“Yeah, I know you got a lot going on there...”

I glanced over at Londyn, and just as I expected, she was listening intently as I told him, “I’ll be there in twenty.”

I hung up the phone, then turned to her and said, “I’ve gotta go.”

“Will you be back?”

“Probably not. At least, not before you head back.”

“Oh.” Disappointment marked her face as she said, “That’s okay. I have a few things I need to get done at the apartment

anyway.”

I brushed her long, blonde hair from her shoulder, then leaned down and kissed her on the neck as I whispered, “Tell me that you’ll come back.”

“I’ll come back.”

“And you’ll stay?” She didn’t immediately answer, so I removed my mouth from her neck and looked her in the eye. “Tell me you’ll stay, Londyn.”

“Yes, we’ll stay,” she answered as she lifted herself up on her tiptoes and wrapped her arms around my neck.

I slammed my mouth against hers, and within seconds, the kiss became heated. Damn. This woman had me spiraling out of control. My hands slid down to her ass, lifting her up onto the counter. Her legs instinctively made their way around my waist, and the heat of her body set me on fire, giving me an overwhelming need to extinguish the burn.

Sadly, I didn’t have that option. I had to get to the clubhouse, so I stepped back and shook my head. “You’re killing me, woman.”

Her eyes skirted down to my bulging erection as she smiled and said, “Just giving you something to remember me by.”

“Evil. Pure evil.” I gave her one last quick kiss, then promised, “We will finish this conversation later.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

It was tough, but I forced myself out of the kitchen and into the bedroom. I grabbed my keys and wallet, put on my cut and boots, and on my way out, I yelled, “Bye Dalton!”

“Bye!”

“I’ll be back soon.”

“Okay!”

I couldn’t help but smile as I closed the door and headed out to my bike. Before pulling out, I glanced up at the house, and I was surprised at how different it seemed. It was no

longer just brick and mortar. Having Londyn and Dalton there made it so much more—*they made it feel like home*.

It didn't feel right leaving them, but I knew it was only a matter of time before I'd see them again. And when they came back, they would be staying—indefinitely. That gave me the peace I needed to pull out of the drive and head over to the clubhouse.

I wasn't looking forward to dealing with this whole mess with the Stingers. We'd gone up against gangs before, and it never ended well—mainly because they lived by a different code. They are all about survival, even if that means putting their loved ones in imminent danger.

I had a difficult time even imagining putting our women and children in harm's way. I would rip my own heart out if it meant protecting my family, and there wasn't a Fury brother who didn't feel the same.

When I got to the clubhouse, Maverick and Torch were in the computer room with Bones and Wrath, and they were all leaning over Bones' shoulder as he hammered away at his laptop. "What are you looking at?"

"Going through last night's security feed," Maverick answered. "Trying to see who dropped off the bag."

"There wasn't anyone at the gate?"

"Riley and Levi," Torch answered. "Riley was doing rounds, and Levi was taking a piss. His back was only turned for a minute, but it was the opportunity they needed to make the drop."

"Damn." Riley and Levi were prospects, and they'd both been doing well. They'd busted their ass and did everything we asked them to do and more. Until last night, they were proving themselves to be a real asset to the club, and I had no doubt that this fuckup was hitting them hard. "Where are they now?"

"I sent them out back to check artillery. Figured it would keep them busy for a while."

"Good idea."

Bones found the drop on the feed, and we could clearly see Keshawn's car inch by the front gate. The tinted window rolled down, and seconds later, the duffle bag went flying through the air.

We didn't need to see it to know that the Stingers were the ones who'd tossed the bag. We were simply hoping we might be able to see something we could use. Unfortunately, there was nothing new—just the same stupid red Camaro and gang member with bad aim.

At this point, we had more questions than answers, so Maverick told Bones, "Get me everything you can find on the Stingers. I want a list of their members and where they live, their hangout, and what shit they're into. I want it all."

"On it, Prez."

"Let me know when you've got it."

"Will do."

Maverick and several of the others walked out, but I stayed to see if I could do anything to help. I sat there for a while, watching as he plowed away at that keyboard, and never once did he ask me for help. Hell, he didn't even glance in my direction. It was clear he didn't need me there, so I leaned over to him and said, "I'll get out of your hair. If you need me, I'm just a..."

"Hmm-hmm," he interrupted. "I know."

He continued to type away, and I knew it was only a matter of time before he had everything Maverick asked for and more. I'd just stepped out into the hall when my cellphone started to ring. I grabbed it out of my pocket and smiled when I saw that it was Londyn calling. "Hey, beautiful."

"Hey. I wanted to let you know that Dalton and I are on our way back home. I just stopped by the clubhouse and dropped off some cookies at the gate."

"You didn't have to do that."

"I know, and I probably would've just kept driving if I hadn't seen Rooster." She giggled as she told me, "I told him

to get them to you, but he didn't look that eager to give them up."

"I'm sure he didn't. Hell, knowing him, they're already gone."

"Well, I hope not. I made them special... Oh, shit!"

"Londyn? You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Some stupid car just pulled out and almost hit me."

"But you're okay?"

She hesitated, then answered, "Yes, but... He's right on my bumper and kind of swerving back and forth."

"What kind of car?"

"I don't know. You know how I am with cars... Maybe an old Mustang or a Camaro. It's red with dark-tinted windows." A knot formed in my throat when I heard her say, "He's flashing his lights. I think he wants me to pull over."

"Don't pull over." Something didn't feel right, so I told her, "Speed up and see if you can get rid of him."

"Okay." I could hear her engine whine as she accelerated. I was hoping she'd be able to get the speed she needed to ditch him until I heard her say, "He's staying right behind me... It's like he's trying to hit me."

"You gotta turn around."

"I can't." Her voice was riddled with fear as she explained, "It's a one-lane road. There's nowhere to turn around... And if I pull over, they could block me in."

"Where are you?"

"Out on Tate's drive."

The words had barely left her mouth when the line went silent. I called out her name over and over but got no response. Seconds later, the call ended. "God damnit!"

I was on my way out the door when Dad stepped in front of me and asked, "What's going on?"

“Someone’s tailing Londyn. I’m pretty sure it’s one of the Stingers.”

“Okay, okay. I know you’re worried, but she’s a smart girl.” Dad kept his tone steady as he said, “She’ll make it out of this.”

“You don’t get it,” I snapped back. “It’s not just her in that car. Dalton is with her!”

“Who the hell is Dalton?”

Dad’s eyes were locked on mine as he waited for me to answer. “He’s my son.”

“Your son? What the hell are you talking about?”

“I can’t get into it right now.”

“The hell you can’t!” he roared. “Since when do you have a son?”

I turned to face him, but I didn’t respond. I was too busy trying to dial Londyn’s number again. The phone started to ring, and it wasn’t long before I heard her say, “Hey.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. The call just dropped. The reception... out...” The line was filled with static, but I was able to hear her say, “This car is still following me.”

“Give me the phone,” Dad ordered.

I was hesitant but knew better than to argue. “Hey, Londyn. I’m giving the phone to Dad.”

Without waiting for her to respond, I placed the phone in Dad’s hand, then listened as he told her, “Londyn, it’s Cotton. Can you give me your exact location?”

“I just passed the Grave’s farm.”

“Okay. Here’s what I’m gonna need you to do...” Dad’s steady tone never wavered as he told her, “The Johnsons live right up the road.”

He paused, then nodded, “Yeah, that’s it. I’m going to need you to turn left there. That’ll put you on Elm. Stay on that until

you get to a fork and take another left.”

I'd been through some pretty rough spots, but nothing had ever gotten to me like this. I'd never felt as powerless as when I listened to Dad tell her which turns to take. It wasn't fair. I'd just gotten them back, and the thought of losing them terrified me.

I was drawn back to the conversation when Dad said, “Yeah, that's exactly what we're doing. You take another left on Mason, and that will put you on the road back here, and me and the boys will be waiting for you up by the Shell station.”

She replied, and then he answered, “No. You just keep driving, and we'll take care of the rest. I'm giving the phone back to Malcomb. If you need anything, you tell him, and he'll relay it back to me.”

He seemed so chill, so confident, as he handed the phone back to me. I, on the other hand, was hanging by a string when I asked him, “What are you gonna do?”

“I'm gonna go get your girl and your kid back.”

“Then I'm going with you.”

“No, you need to stay here so you can be with her when she gets back. Keep her on the phone and help her stay calm.”

Without waiting for a response, he started for the door and said, “Rooster. Chains. Let's go.”

He stormed out after Londyn, not as the ex-president of Fury, but as my father. I had no doubt that he would do everything in his power to bring her back. I brought the phone back up to my ear and asked, “Hey. How ya making it?”

“Okay.” Her voice trembled as she asked, “Do you know who this guy is or why he is following me?”

“I can't say for sure, but it's going to be okay. Dad and the boys are coming.”

“Dalton's scared.”

“I know, baby, but everything's gonna be okay. I just need you to focus on the road and try not to worry.”

“He’s backing off.”

“I bet he’s figured out that you’re heading back to us. How far are you from the Shell station?”

“I don’t know. A mile or so.”

“That’s good. You’re getting close... Dad will be there any minute.”

“I’m sorry about this.”

“Why in the hell would you be sorry?”

“Well, this isn’t the re-introduction I was hoping for. I would guess you feel the same.”

“No, but none of that matters. I just want you and Dalton back here safe.”

“I know, and... Oh, my God!”

“What?”

Relief washed over me as she said, “Someone just wrecked into the guy who’s been following me. I mean, really wrecked. They plowed right into him, and now they’re over on the shoulder. Should I go and...”

“No, no. That’s Dad. Just keep driving to the clubhouse.”

“Okay. I’ll be there in a second.” I listened as she said, “It’s okay, sweetie. Everything’s okay. We’re going to see Malcomb now.”

I heard him reply, but I couldn’t make what he’d said. I didn’t bother asking. I knew it wouldn’t be long before she and Dalton were here, and I could see for myself that they were both okay. I rushed outside, and my heart swelled with relief as I watched Londyn’s car pull through the gate.

As soon as she was parked, I rushed over and opened her door. I helped her out, then wrapped my arms around her, hugging her tightly. “Are you guys okay?”

“We’re okay.” She tucked her head against my chest as she hugged me back. “A little shaken up, but we’re okay.”

“I know, but you’re safe now. Let’s get you two inside and settle.”

“About that...” Her eyes skirted around the parking lot full of bikes. “Do we really have to stay or can...”

“I know this isn’t what you were planning, but I’m gonna need you to stay here until we figure out what’s going on with all this.”

“Why are you trying to figure it out? Isn’t that something the police should be doing?” her brows furrowed.

“You know how we feel about the cops.”

“But this is different!” she argued. “This guy tried to run me and Dalton off the road.”

“I get that, but you’re gonna have to trust that we’re gonna handle it.”

The words had barely left my mouth when Dad pulled back through the gate. The front end of his SUV was crumpled all to hell, and the grill was all but shattered. But it was still rolling strong as he drove around back and parked. Concerned, Londyn leaned to the side for a better look. “Are they okay?”

“They’re fine.”

I knew it was only a matter of time before Dad got out of the truck with the driver, so I opened the back door and quickly pulled Dalton out of his car seat. “Come on, buddy. I’ll show you the clubhouse.”

“It looks sca-ree.”

“Maybe out here, but inside is super cool.” I started for the door as I told him, “You’ll see.”

As I’d hoped, Londyn followed close behind. I led them down the hall and showed them my room before taking them down to the family room. It wasn’t as private, but with the large flatscreen and pool tables, there were things to help keep them both distracted for a bit. The second Dalton spotted the pool table, he muttered, “Yes!”

Without waiting for permission, he bolted over to one of the tables and started pulling out the different balls. I smiled as I told her, “I think he will be entertained for a bit.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he will.” She crossed her arms as she asked, “So, what’s gonna happen with the guy?”

“That’s not for you to worry about.” I placed my hand on her shoulders as I told her, “It’s gonna take some time to get used to being back in this world, Londyn. It’s not easy. You just gotta remember, there’s nothing we won’t do to protect the ones we love.”

“I remember.”

“I need to go check in with the others. Are you two going to be good for a bit?”

She looked over to Dalton and smiled when she saw him running after one of the balls. “Yeah, I think we’ll be just fine.”

“Good.” I leaned down and gave her a quick kiss. “I’ll be back when I can.”

“Okay. Take your time.”

I hated to leave them, especially under the circumstances, but I needed to find out who had tried to run them off the road and why. I hesitated for a moment longer, then turned and headed out to find the others. I’d barely started down the hall when I heard my father ask, “How long have you known?”

I didn’t want to have this conversation now, especially with Londyn and Dalton so close, but I could tell by the look in his eye that he wasn’t going to be put off again. Damn. I inhaled a deep breath before saying, “Let me explain...”

CHAPTER 22

Londyn

There was a time when I loved being at the Fury clubhouse.

The guys were great. I loved hanging out with them, listening to the teasing and the crazy stories. They always made me feel like I was a part of their rowdy clan, and I adored them for it. I felt safe there like it was a second home, but a lot had happened since those days.

Now, I felt like an intruder who had no business being in their clubhouse, much less their family room. I thought my imagination was screwing with me until I heard Cotton shouting in the hallway, “Answer the damn question, Malcomb!”

Out of pure curiosity, I stepped over to the doorway and listened as he answered, “A few days. Maybe a week.”

“And you didn’t think to mention anything to me or your mother?”

“Of course, I thought about it! I was going to tell you, but I just found out about him. I wanted a chance for him to get to know me before I unloaded the whole family on him.”

“It’s always been about you and what you want.”

“It’s what Londyn wanted, too.”

“So, this is Londyn’s kid?”

“He’s *our kid*.”

Dalton glanced over at me when Cotton shouted, “And she’s kept him from us for five years!”

“It’s not like that.”

“The hell it isn’t! She could’ve come to you and told you what was going on. *Hell, she could’ve come to me!* But she chose to keep him a secret!” Cotton roared. “Who does that? Who keeps a child from his family for five goddamn years?”

Before I realized what I was doing, I’d stepped out into the hall. My stomach was in knots as I muttered, “I tried to tell him. I tried so many times.”

Cotton whipped around, and I was a little startled when I saw the fierce expression on his face. I knew he had a reputation for being tough as nails, but Cotton had always been so sweet and kind to me. Today, he looked anything but sweet and kind. I could literally feel the rage and hurt radiating off him.

My heart was racing as I tried to explain, “I called, but I never got an answer. I came by here, but I was always turned away. I even tried writing letters.”

Cotton turned his attention to Malcomb as he barked, “Is this true?”

“Yeah, it’s all true,” Malcomb answered. “I would’ve told you that if you’d given me a chance to explain.”

“Damn it.” Cotton shook his head, still clearly angered. “I told you. I told you time and time again, but you were too damn stubborn to listen. *You were always so fucking stubborn.*”

“Yeah, I wonder where I got that.”

“Don’t you try turning this on me,” Cotton snapped back.

I knew he was hurt. I also knew I played a part in causing that hurt, so I was compelled to try and fix it. There was only one way I knew how to do that, so I asked, “Would you like to meet him?”

Cotton nodded, and then he and Malcomb followed me into the family room. I could tell that Cotton was a little uneasy as we made our way over to the pool table, but it was

Cotton. He had a way about him that could set people at ease. I had a feeling Dalton would love him.

Cotton watched silently as I crouched down next to Dalton and said, “Hey, sweetie. I have someone who I’d like you to meet.”

Dalton’s eyes widened as he looked up at Cotton, and I could only imagine what he was thinking. Cotton didn’t look like any man he’d ever been around before. He was about the same age as my father and had the same salt and pepper hair, but he was covered in tattoos and he was much, much bigger than my father. And in his Satan’s Fury cut, he looked quite intimidating.

Hoping to ease his mind, I told him, “This is Cotton. He’s Malcomb’s father, and your grandfather.”

“Oh, hey,” Dalton replied in barely a whisper.

“Hey there, buddy.” Cotton knelt next to me as he said, “It’s really nice to finally meet you.”

Dalton didn’t respond.

He was nervous, and rightly so. He was in a strange place with strange people, and after our eventful ride, I couldn’t blame him for being worried. Cotton picked up on his unease and smiled as he motioned his head towards the pool table. “I heard you’re quite the pool shark. You wanna play a round?”

Dalton’s eyes lit up, and I knew he had him. He nodded eagerly, then scampered over to the table and started collecting all the balls. Cotton gathered them up in the triangle then slid them into the correct position. He removed the triangle and smiled. “I think we’re all set.”

Dalton nodded with a bright smile.

I was concerned that Dalton wouldn’t be able to hold a pool stick, much less aim one, but Cotton was one step ahead of me. “Let’s skip the pool sticks and play a round of ball slam.”

Cotton took the white ball and rolled it towards the triangle. It hit, and all the balls started rolling in various

directions. Dalton hopped with excitement. “Cool!”

“You wanna go?”

Dalton nodded, then took the ball from Cotton and placed it on the table. He rolled it towards one of the stripes, causing it to smack the ball into the pocket. A big smile crossed Cotton’s face as he cheered, “There you go!”

“Can I do it again?”

“Absolutely!”

When Dalton reached for the ball, Cotton turned to Malcomb and said, “Call your mother.”

“Dad, we’ve got other things to deal with first.”

“Call her.”

Malcomb didn’t argue.

He simply took out his phone and stepped out into the hall to call his mother. I didn’t move. I was too engrossed with the way my sweet boy was looking at his grandfather. It was instant adoration, and I could tell that Dalton was having a similar effect on Cotton. I don’t think I’ve ever seen the man smile so much. They took turns rolling the ball, and each time the balls crashed, they would both cheer like they’d won the World Championship.

They were about to start a second game when Malcomb came up behind me and slipped his arms around my waist. “They seem to be hitting it off.”

“Yeah, they do.”

“Thanks for helping me out with him. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to make him understand.”

“He just needs some time.”

“I hope you’re right.” He let out a deep breath before saying, “Mom’s on the way over.”

I could tell he was anxious—not just because of his mother. He was eager to check in with the guys and see what they’d found out about the man who’d tried to run me off the

road. I wanted to do my part to help, so I offered, “I can handle things with your mother if you want to go check in with the guys.”

“I couldn’t let you do that.”

“You could and you should.” I shrugged. “They might need you, and your father will do most of the talking with Cass. I’ll just be here to fill in the gaps.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.”

“You’re the best.”

He leaned in and gave me a quick kiss before going over and talking to his father. They spoke for a moment, and Cotton nodded. They exchanged a few more words, then Malcomb leaned down and told Dalton, “I’ve gotta go take care of something, but I’ll be back when I can. And my mom’s going to come by and say hi if that’s okay?”

Dalton nodded with a smile. “O-kay.”

“You guys have fun, and when I get back, I’m playing the winner.”

Malcomb walked out of the family room, leaving me alone with Cotton and Dalton. They were still playing their game, laughing and talking, and it was nice. Really nice. Dalton was gathering the balls for a new game when Cotton stepped over to me and whispered, “He couldn’t look more like Malcomb if he tried.”

“I know. They have the same smile. The same walk. It’s kind of crazy.”

“I’m trying real hard not to be mad at you, but it isn’t easy.” Cotton’s eyes met mine, and they were riddled with anguish. “I always thought a lot of you.”

“And I’ve always felt the same about you.”

“Then, why didn’t you come to me and tell me what was going on?”

“I thought if he didn’t want to talk to me then you wouldn’t either. And I didn’t want you to think I was trying to trap him or anything.”

“I would’ve known better than that.”

“I couldn’t have been sure. Besides, I wasn’t thinking straight. I was so heartbroken and embarrassed and stupid. I didn’t know what to do.”

“And what about your folks?”

“They did their best to support me and my decisions—even when they didn’t agree with them.” My chest tightened as I told him, “I asked them not to say anything. I didn’t want anyone to know. That’s why I never came back to visit.”

“You should know, I’m going to have a word with your father. A lengthy word.”

“I wouldn’t blame you for that. In fact, while you’re at it, throw in a couple of words for me.

Our conversation came to an immediate halt when Cass appeared in the doorway and muttered, “*Oh, my God.*”

Neither of us said a word.

We let her take a moment to put the pieces together on her own. She looked at me, and then back at Dalton. Then, back to me. “Oh, my God.”

“Babe, why don’t you come over and meet Dalton?”

Dalton looked up from his game, and the second he smiled, tears started streaming down Cass’s face. “He’s Malcomb’s, isn’t he?”

“Hey, babe. He is.”

“He’s so beautiful.” Cass looked over to me and asked, “How did... when did?”

“We’ll explain all that later,” Cotton answered. “For now, come over and meet your grandson.”

Cass nodded, then slowly walked over to Dalton. Like his father, Dalton had a way with the ladies, so I wasn’t surprised

when he flashed her a big smile and asked, “You wanna play a game wit’ us?”

“I would love to.”

Cass quickly wiped the tears from her eyes and joined in the game. I stood back and watched as Dalton swept Cass right off her feet. They were laughing and playing like they’d known each other for years, and I couldn’t help but feel a sense of relief wash over me. As much as I had been dreading this moment, it was clear that everything was going to be okay.

They all seemed to be having such a good time, but the party stopped the second Cotton’s phone started to ring. He stepped away from Cass and Dalton as he took out his phone and answered it. He spoke for a moment, then turned to us and announced, “Sorry, guys, but I’ve gotta go.”

“Ah, man,” Dalton complained.

“I know.” Cotton patted Dalton on the shoulder. “It sucks, but I’ll be back when I can.”

Dalton looked like his world was coming to an end as he placed the balls back on the table and sighed. I could see that Cotton was bothered by his pouting, so I tried to ease his mind by saying, “It’s fine. We’ll watch a movie or something until you get back.”

Cotton nodded, then stepped over to me and said, “Thank you, Londyn. This meant a lot.”

“It meant a lot to me, too.”

He started to walk away but stopped when I said, “Cotton?”

“Yeah?”

“What’s going on with the man who was following me? Was he really trying to hurt me?”

“You don’t have to worry about him anymore. It’s been taken care of.”

“But what does that mean?”

“It means that you can stay here and enjoy your son and not worry about the likes of him.” He motioned over at Dalton and smiled. “You’ve got better things to worry about.”

He walked over to Cass and gave her a quick kiss goodbye, then made his way out of the room. As soon as he was gone, I looked over to Dalton and asked, “You wanna see if we can find a movie or something?”

“O-kay.” Dalton followed me over to the sofa and sat down, watching patiently as I started flipping through the kids’ channels. When I came across one of his favorite cartoons, he smiled and shouted, “This one!”

“You got it.”

Thankfully, it didn’t take him long to get enthralled in the show, so I could talk to Cass without worrying about him eavesdropping. I stepped over to her, and before I had a chance to say a word, she reached out and took me into her arms, hugging me tightly. “It’s really good to see you, Londyn.”

“It’s really good to see you, too.”

She released me, then looked me in the eye as she said, “I so hated it when you and Malcomb broke up. I know you were young, but I always thought you two really had something special.”

“I did, too. *I still do.*” My voice was strained as I told her, “I love Malcomb. I always have.”

She studied me for a moment, then said, “Okay, enough of the chit-chat. I want to know everything.”

She took my hand and led me over to a couple of chairs in the corner. We sat down, and I told her everything—from the breakup to getting the wedding invitation and everything in between. She asked a few questions here and there, but for the most part, she just listened.

When I was done going through it all, she leaned back in her chair and said, “I can understand why you didn’t want to tell Cotton or the brothers, but I don’t get why you wouldn’t have called me or had your mother reach out to me.”

My voice trembled as I told her, “I sent those letters to Malcomb, so I thought you knew. I thought your silence meant you didn’t want to be a part of Dalton’s life.”

“How could you think that?” Cass asked, sounding truly offended. “We loved you.”

“I don’t know. I was in a bad, vulnerable place.” My chest ached as I told her, “Malcomb wouldn’t answer my calls or see me, and that hurt more than you can imagine. It broke my heart to think that he didn’t want me and to think he didn’t want Dalton hurt even more. It made me question everything I’d ever known, and it was just easier to believe that you didn’t want me around, either. I see now just how wrong I was.”

“Oh, honey. I can’t imagine how hard all of this was on you.”

“It wasn’t easy, but I had Dalton to help me through it.”

Cass reached over and placed her hand on mine. “He’s amazing, Londyn. You’ve done an incredible job with him.”

“Thank you.” I felt myself blush at the compliment. “He’s my whole world.”

“I remember that feeling.” She glanced over at Dalton as she asked, “So, what now?”

“Malcomb and I are still figuring that out, but I’m thinking I’ll be moving back here in the next couple of weeks—*if not sooner.*”

“Really?” A big smile swept across her face. “So, things are going good between you two?”

“Yeah, you could say that.”

“That’s wonderful. I’m so glad things are working out.”

“Me, too.”

“I bet your parents are excited about you and Dalton being closer.”

“Mom seems pleased, but I have no idea what my father thinks.”

“Why not?”

“I’m still furious with him.” I leaned back in my seat and sighed. “I just can’t believe that he would do that to me. I mean, it was one thing to say all those things to Malcomb. That was so messed up and wrong, but to make matters worse, he kept it all a secret—even when he could see how devastated I was. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive him.”

“That’s understandable.”

“Well, my mother doesn’t see it that way. I can’t talk to her without her pleading with me to forgive him, and I’m not ready for that. And I’m not sure I ever will be.”

“You will.” Cass smiled as she told me, “He’s your father. I know it was wrong, but he did what he did because he loves you and wants the best for you.”

“Well, it was selfish and wrong. He stole five years from us, and that’s time we will never get back.”

“I’m not very pleased about that either. In fact, I’m just as mad as you are.” She reached over and placed her hand on mine, giving it a gentle squeeze. “But in the end, being angry with him is going to hurt you just as much as it hurts him.”

“Forgive him or not, it’s going to hurt no matter what I do.” I forced a smile as I told her, “But enough about all that. How are things with you and Malcomb’s sisters?”

“Busy as always.” She rolled her eyes and sighed. “Susana and Darby are officially done with school and are now working in the city. They don’t come home as much as they used to, but I go see them when I can, especially when the house starts to feel too quiet.”

“I’m glad they live close enough for you to go visit.”

“Me, too.” A bright smile crossed her face as she said, “I’m glad you and Dalton are going to move closer, too. I hope that means I’ll get to spend some time with you, too.”

“I would love that.”

Little by little, I was getting my family back.

It was what I always wanted.

I should've been ecstatic, but I was far from it. Maybe it was the guy who ran me off the road or the expression on Cotton's face when he got that phone call, but I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong—very, very wrong.

CHAPTER 23

“Dad knows about Dalton.”

“I heard. Hell, I heard every word. *We all did.*” We were standing at the two-way mirror, watching as Wrath tortured Keshawn. He’d been at it for a while, but so far, Keshawn had been pretty tight-lipped. Rooster, on the other hand, had plenty to say. “I’ll admit it—I was wrong about wanting to be there when he found out about the kid. That shit was too fucking intense for my liking. Hell, I thought Cotton was about to lose it.”

“He was, but thankfully, Londyn was able to get him to settle down and actually listen.”

“So, everything’s good now?”

“No, but we’re getting there.” I ran my hand through my hair and sighed. “Mom’s on her way over. I’m sure she’s gonna have a lot to say about it, too, but I figured it was best to rip the band-aid all at once.”

“Probably right about that. I’m sure Cass is gonna freak out at first, but she’ll be fine. Your sisters are another story.”

“Ugh,” I groaned. “I don’t even wanna think about them right now.”

“Ah, I wouldn’t think it’d be all that bad. Darby will be cool about it, but I’m not so sure about Susana. She liked Londyn a lot, so she’s liable to kick your ass.” A smirk crossed his face as she said, “Now, that would be a sight to see.”

“What is it with you wanting me to get my ass kicked?” I asked, sounding and feeling a bit wounded. “I don’t get it.”

What the fuck did I ever do to you?”

“Nothing.” He chuckled under his breath. “I just think it would be fun to watch.”

“Fuck you, Roost.”

“Ah, come on, brother. You know I’m just fucking with you.”

I didn’t respond.

There was no point. Rooster was just being Rooster, so I turned my attention back to the two-way mirror. Wrath was still going at it and was giving Keshawn all kinds of hell. He’d even broken out a fucking Skil Saw and was using it to slice lines into his bicep and thigh—each cut a little deeper than the last. Between cries, Keshawn shouted, “You’re gonna regret this shit. They’re coming for you, and all you motherfuckers are gonna burn.”

“Then, where are they? They gotta know you’re here.”

“They’re already here. They’re just waiting for the right time.”

“I think you’re full of shit. I think they’ve left you to the wolves, and now, you’re the one who’s gonna pay.”

Wrath pressed the saw into his thigh, causing him to bellow out in pain once again. Clearly bothered by the display, Rooster stepped away from the mirror and shook his head. “You gotta give it to him. The motherfucker has got some balls.”

“Yeah,” Q agreed. “He certainly does.”

Keshawn’s tortured cries were penetrating the hallway as Wrath continued to work him over, and a mischievous smile crossed his face as Rooster motioned his head towards the door. “Well, he had some. Now, I’m not so sure.”

“He’s been at it for hours.” Q shook his head. “I can’t believe he hasn’t gotten more out of him.”

“I got a feeling it won’t be long before he’s singing like a canary. I mean, come on. He looks like he’s been through a

fucking meat grinder.” A pained expression crossed Rooster’s face as he continued, “Hell, I would’ve started spilling it the second I saw Wrath coming at me with a that Skil Saw, but this guy’s trying to play hero and isn’t giving up his crew.”

Q was quick to reply, “He doesn’t want to be the rat.”

“I was thinking the same fucking thing, and I can’t blame him. I wouldn’t talk either.”

The screams continued as Maverick and Torch walked up. Maverick stared through the two-way glass as he asked, “Is he getting anywhere?”

“Not really. He’s just confirming shit we already knew.”

Bones had been gathering intel on the Stingers and had already compiled a great deal of information. He’d found the names of over half of their members and located their hangout. We were hoping that Wrath could help us find out when and where the gang met. He was asking all the right questions, and then he took a turn I wasn’t expecting. “Why were you following the girl?”

“I was doing what I was told to do. That’s it.”

“And what were you told to do?”

“I was supposed to find someone you cared about so we could use ‘em against you.”

“And how were you planning to do that with the girl?”

“Probably beat her up and give her a good fucking... Give the kid one, too.” Keshawn looked directly into the two-way glass as he said, “Then, we’d send her back to ya with a cunt full of come and...”

Overcome with rage, I withdrew my weapon and charged past my brothers. I opened the door and stalked over to Keshawn, placing the barrel of my gun at the center of his head, “Shut your goddamn mouth, you piece of shit motherfucker! I’ll kill you for even thinking about touching her.”

“Oh, I thought about it,” he snickered, taunting me. “I’m still thinking about it. Nothing better than some tight, white

puss...”

That was it.

I couldn't listen to another word, so I pulled the trigger, sending blood and skull fragments across the back wall. I was still standing there, glaring down at Keshawn's lifeless body, when Wrath approached me and roared, “What the fuck, brother? I still hadn't gotten the information I needed to get out of him.”

“We'll have to get what you need from Bones.”

“But we got no way of knowing if he's got the means to find it.”

“Then, we'll have to figure it out,” I argued.

I'd fucked up. I knew that. Hell, all the brothers knew. Outraged with myself, I stormed back out into the hall and slammed the door behind me. I took a step forward, and with all the rage I had boiling up inside me, I drew a fist and slammed it into the fucking wall. It wasn't one of my finer moments. It hurt like a sonofabitch, but it wasn't broken.

But thankfully, it helped distract me from all the foul things Keshawn had said about Londyn—at least, for a brief moment. Concerned, Torch stepped over to me and said, “You best get some ice on that.”

“I'm fine.”

“Suit yourself, but in a couple of hours, that's gonna hurt like a bitch.”

“I'm good.”

I was doing my best to shake it off when Maverick stepped over to me. I could tell by his expression that he wasn't pleased with me, and I couldn't blame him. I'd lost my cool, and it could cost the club. “I'm sorry, Prez. I shouldn't have gone in there.”

“No, you shouldn't have.”

“I know, and that shit's on me. But fuck. Him saying all that shit got under my skin.”

“Which was exactly what he was trying to do. You let him win today. Don’t let that shit happen again.”

“I won’t.”

“This isn’t all on him, Prez,” Rooster interrupted. “We shouldn’t even be dealing with this asshole! He’s here because of fucking Bruton. He’s the one who should be dealing with this bullshit. Not us!”

“You’ve got a point there.” Maverick took out his phone and started dialing. Seconds later, he said, “We need you at the clubhouse.”

There was a brief pause, then Maverick snapped, “You’ve got an hour. Not a minute more.”

He hung up the phone then turned his attention to me. “He’s coming. Go take a few minutes to cool off and get some ice on that hand.”

Maverick wasn’t asking. He was telling, so I nodded and started down the hall. I tried not to think of Keshawn and all the shit he’d said about Londyn, but with each step, I found myself getting more and more riled. I couldn’t help myself. I loved Londyn. I loved her more than I ever thought possible, and the mere thought of something happening to her had me tangled up in knots.

It was the knot in my stomach that had me charging down to the family room to find her. I needed to hold her, to touch her, and see for myself that she was really okay. When I walked in, she was sitting in one of the recliners, talking to my mother. She looked happy, which made that knot wrench even tighter. I took a step inside, then asked, “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, everything’s fine. I just need a minute.”

When she got up and started towards me, I turned to Mom and said, “We won’t be long.”

“It’s fine. Take your time, but when you get back, I want a word with you.”

“I figured you would.”

When Londyn made it over to me, I reached out and took her hand. I led her down the hall to the bar, and as I'd hoped, the place was empty. I could've taken her to my room, but it was getting late, and it wouldn't be long before Dalton would need to get to bed. Besides, most of the guys were either out in the shop with Maverick, keeping an eye on things with Wrath and our guest, or were waiting on standby at home or in their rooms.

At that moment, I didn't care where they were as long as they were out of sight. I walked over and locked the back door, then made my way back over to her. I took her hand again and led her over to a dark corner. Confusion marked her face as she asked, “Is everything okay?”

“No, but it will be soon enough.”

“What's going on? Why are you being like this?”

“I need something from you.”

“Alright, I'll bite.” Her eyes locked on mine as she asked, “What do you need from me?”

I lowered my mouth to her ear and whispered, “I need to fuck you, Londyn. I need to fuck you right here and right now.” A spark of desire flashed through her eyes as I whispered, “Tell me you need it, too.”

“Yes, Malcomb.”

“Yes, what?”

“I need it, too.”

“That's my girl.”

Before giving her a chance to reply, I lowered my mouth to hers, kissing her deeply. Her lips parted in surprise as I backed her up against the counter. My tongue swept across her open lips before delving deeper into her mouth.

The kiss was urgent, and I was consumed with need. She gasped into my mouth when my hands grabbed her ass, pulling her hips closer to mine. There was no doubt that she could feel

my throbbing erection through my jeans. My mouth trailed down the curve of her neck while my hands roamed urgently over her body.

“Every inch of you is mine. Your mouth. Your breasts. Your ass.” I let my free hand drift down her abdomen and between her legs. I raked the tips of my fingers along her clit as I repeated, “Every fucking inch, and I take care of what’s mine.”

“Malcomb,” she breathed as she turned and glanced over at the door.

“It’s good,” I murmured between kisses. My hand greedily moved under her shirt, caressing her breast over her bra. “No one’s coming in here.”

With that, she let her inhibitions fall away as her desire took over. She reached for my cotton t-shirt, gently pulled it from my body, and watched it fall to the floor. Knowing it was her turn, she bit her lip and raised her arms over her head. My hands immediately dropped to the hem of her t-shirt and eased it over her head before tossing it quickly to the floor.

My hands roamed over her bare skin, only stopping when I reached her breasts. My fingers slipped inside the cups of her bra, pulling her breasts free. She licked her lips in anticipation as she leaned back and waited for me to devour her.

A low growl rumbled in my throat as my head lowered to her nipple, my tongue flicking across the tip before my lips surrounded it and began sucking with gentle pressure. Her breath quickened as I moved to her other breast, her entire body shivering with my touch. I released her breast from my mouth and took a step back, eagerly grabbing her waist as I turned her to face the counter. I twirled my hand around the long length of her hair, gently tugging it as I warned her, “Hold on.”

A rush of anticipation surged through my body as she placed her palms on the smooth counter and waited. Goosebumps prickled against her skin when I stepped forward and placed my hands on her outer thighs. A small moan echoed through the room when I slid her skirt up her thighs.

My thumbs hooked in the waist of her lace panties as I dragged them slowly down her long, lean legs. As soon as she stepped out of them, I trailed the tips of my fingers up the inside of her thighs. Her breath caught as my fingers slipped between her legs, circling her clit.

I unbuckled my belt before easing down my zipper. She groaned with anticipation as I continued to torment her with my fingers. Even though we knew the door was locked, there was an extra thrill to being out in the open like we were, and the thought of getting caught only excited me more.

After sliding on a condom, I positioned myself between her legs and thrust deep inside with one hard, smooth stroke. A deep hiss escaped my lips as she immediately started pulsing around me, adjusting to the fullness. She moaned in pleasure, relishing the feeling of my cock buried inside of her.

I began moving with shallow thrusts, readying her for what was to come. Her hands grasped at the counter, bracing herself as I increased my pace to an anguishing rhythm. My hands moved down to her hips, holding her in place as I began driving into her with harder, deeper strokes.

Her body trembled, and her breathing became ragged as her climax approached. She gasped as one of my hands reached around to tease her clit. The gentle pressure of my finger was what she needed to send her over the edge. "Oh God, Malcomb," she cried as the waves of ecstasy rolled through her.

"Easy, babe, or the boys are gonna hear us."

Her breath was ragged as she urged, "Don't stop."

She didn't have to worry. There was no way I was going to stop, not when we were both so close. When she started to contract around my cock, my thrusts became relentless, and I quickened my pace, chasing my own release. Seconds later, I leaned my head back, and my growl echoed through the room as I came deep inside her.

"Fuck, I'll never get enough of you," I whispered in her ear.

“I certainly hope not,” she purred as I tossed my condom in the trash, and she cleaned up a bit. When we started to get dressed, she looked over at me and asked, “You wanna tell me what that was about?”

“Just wanted to spend some quality time with my girl.”

“Um-hmmm.” She pulled her shirt over her head as she said, “If you say so.”

“I mean it.” I stepped over to her and slipped my arm around her waist, pulling her over to me. “You’re what keeps me going. That’s why I want you around as much as possible.”

“Well, I like having you around, too.”

“Then, stay.”

I was about to give her a big spiel about quitting her job and just moving in with me right then and there when Torch peeked his head around the corner and called out, “Savage?”

“Yeah.” Londyn stepped back into the shadows and quickly fixed her skirt as I answered, “Yeah, I’m over here.”

“Hate to interrupt, but ah, Prez wants you in his office.”

“I’ll be right there.” I finished buckling my belt as I looked over to Londyn and said, “Sorry, babe, but I gotta get going.”

“I know. It’s okay.”

“It’s getting late. You and Dalton can crash in my room, and I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Okay. I’ll see you in a bit.”

I gave her a quick kiss, then walked out of the bar and made my way to Maverick’s office. When I walked in, Bruton was sitting across from Prez’s desk with Torch and Q. As soon as Bruton saw that I’d walked in, he smiled and said, “Looks like everyone who’s anyone is here. So, why don’t you boys tell me why I’m here?”

“We’ve had some blowback from our last drop.”

“Blowback?” he asked, looking and sounding unconcerned. “What kind of blowback?”

“The kind that almost got my girl and my son killed,” I snapped.

“I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“The Stingers are pissed that we did that drop in their territory,” Maverick explained. “We tried a peace offering, but that didn’t go over. Now, they’re embarking on a war.”

“To hell with them,” Bruton spat. “They have no say over territory. I own that lot. Hell, I own the whole fucking street.”

“They clearly don’t care who owns what. They see it as their territory.”

“Um-hmm.” Bruton stood and adjusted his sweater vest. “I’ll take care of it.”

“And how are you going to do that?”

“That’s no concern of yours. I said I’d take care of it, and I will.” He started out the door as he announced, “We have another drop at the end of the month. We will discuss the location at a later date.”

“You handle the goods,” Maverick interjected. “We’ll take care of the location and the manpower.”

Bruton stopped and thought for a moment, then gave a simple nod. “Fair enough. Until next time.”

Without any further discussion, Bruton walked out of the room. Q was the first to ask, “What the hell was that? Are we actually gonna trust him to handle this?”

“We’ve got no reason not to,” Maverick answered.

“So, what now?”

“We gotta stay vigilant.” Maverick looked over to me as he said, “Our guest made it pretty clear that he wasn’t alone. There are others out there, and once they realize that he’s missing, there will be more to come. We need all hands on deck. We gotta be ready in case they pull anything tonight.”

“Understood.”

Protecting the family had always been our number one priority. We lived or died by the brotherhood. We always had, and we always would. If Bruton didn't handle the Stingers, we would, and we would handle them in ways they couldn't imagine. And there was a piece of me that hoped we would get to do just that, especially after hearing their plans for Londyn and Dalton.

The Stingers had it coming, and they were going to get it one way or another.

CHAPTER 24

Londyn

After a whirlwind of a day, I took Dalton to Macomb's room and put him to bed. I waited several hours, but Malcomb never showed. My exhaustion caught up with me, and I eventually drifted off to sleep. I woke up the next morning and was disappointed to find that there was still no sign of Malcomb. Being careful not to wake Dalton, I eased out of bed and went to the bathroom.

I took a moment to fix my hair and wash my face, then went back into the bedroom to check on Dalton. When I walked in, I found him sitting up on the bed with a smile on his face. "Hey there, buddy. Did you sleep okay?"

"Um-hmm." His smile grew wider as he said, "I like it here."

"I like it here, too." I brushed his hair out of his eyes as I asked, "Are you hungry? We could go get some breakfast or maybe some juice."

He nodded and pushed the covers back before hopping out of bed. He picked up his shorts from the floor and slipped them on, then looked up at me and said, "Oo-kay. I'm ready."

"Alright, let's go see what we can find."

I took his hand and led him out the door, and to my surprise, there wasn't a soul in sight as we started down the hall.

As we made our way to the kitchen, I couldn't shake the feeling that something seemed off. It was quiet—too quiet for a clubhouse full of rowdy men. The silence played with my

anxiety, making me wonder if we should turn around and go back to Malcomb's room. Dalton, on the other hand, seemed oblivious to it all and hummed a tune to himself as he looked around the long, narrow hall. He seemed so enthralled by it all.

I couldn't blame him. I felt the same way the first few times I came to the clubhouse. It felt like a different world. It still felt like a different world, only now, it seemed a bit more daunting. I tried to ignore the feeling as I led Dalton into the kitchen and over to the fridge. "What are you thinking? Some cereal or some scrambled eggs?"

"Eggs!" he answered excitedly.

"I can make them," a voice interjected from the doorway.

I turned, and I felt like I'd been punched in the gut when I found Candace standing there with an awkward smile on her face. I couldn't hide my distaste for her as I muttered, "Hey, Candace. Thanks, but I can scramble his eggs on my own."

"Of course." After grabbing the eggs from the fridge, I started looking for a skillet, and when I didn't find it right away, she said, "Bottom left corner."

"Thanks."

I bent down and opened the bottom left cabinet, then took out a small skillet. "Hey, sweetie. Why don't you grab a drink from the fridge and have a seat at the table? I'll bring your eggs over when they're read."

"O-kay, Momma."

Dalton stepped over to the fridge and grabbed a box of juice, then went over to the table and sat down. Doing my best to ignore the fact that she was still standing there, I placed it on the stove, then grabbed a bowl and started cracking the eggs. I'd hoped that she would eventually get the hint and leave.

She didn't.

Instead, she walked over to me and said, "I know you hate me, but I wanted to tell you that I'm sorry about that day. I only did what Malcomb asked me to."

“It’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“That’s just it. I do worry about it.” She actually sounded sincere when she said, “I think about that day a lot, and if I could go back, I would tell Malcomb not to do it.”

“Why would you do that?” I glanced over my shoulder as I said, “I would’ve thought you’d be happy that we broke up.”

“You weren’t here. You didn’t see how messed up he was. He was devastated over losing you, and I hate I had a part to play in it.” She looked over at Dalton, then back to me. “And now, seeing how happy he is that you’re back and that he has a kid, that makes that feeling even worse.”

“It’s not your fault.” I turned my attention back to Dalton’s eggs. “Like you said, you were just doing what Malcomb asked.”

“So, you’re going to stay mad at me.”

“No, I’m not mad.” I sighed. “I just want to put all this mess behind us and move on.”

“Do you think you can really do that?”

“I don’t know, but I certainly want to try.” I took Dalton’s eggs and scooped them onto a plate, then carried them over to him. “Here you go, sweetheart.”

“T’anks, Momma.”

“You’re welcome, sweetie.”

I walked back over to the stove and started cleaning up, and it wasn’t long before Candace joined in. She started washing the dishes while I wiped down the counters. We were just about to finish up when I asked, “Have you seen Malcomb or any of the guys this morning?”

“I’ve seen a couple of them here and there. Pretty sure they’ve got something going on.”

“What makes you say that?”

“There was a commotion last night, and after that, they’re all pretty wound tight.” She shrugged. “I’m not sure what was

going on or is going on, but they'll handle whatever it is. They always do.”

The words had barely left her mouth when there was a loud click, and the back door opened. Seconds later, several of the guys walked past the kitchen and down the hall. Curious, I stepped over to the doorway and watched as they all filed into the family room. I glanced back at Candace and asked, “What was that all about?”

“No idea. Let's go find out.”

“But...”

Before I had a chance to protest, Candace was out the door. As I started after her out, I told Dalton, “Wait here, sweetie. I'll be right back.”

I quietly followed Candace down the hall, and when we reached the family room, Candace and I peeked inside and found all the guys standing in front of the TV. I stepped closer and saw that they were watching the news. There was some kind of explosion in the city, and it wasn't just any explosion. This took out an entire block. There was debris everywhere like a bomb had gone off.

I stood there in shock as I listened to the reporter say, “A massive explosion occurred in Yesler Terrace late last night. The explosion took out an entire block, including an abandoned warehouse and an apartment complex. The twenty-two acres is well known for its gang activity, but officials are saying that the explosion appears to be the result of a major gas leak. The investigation is ongoing.”

I was shocked.

Yesler Terrace wasn't all that far from my apartment, and I knew it well. It was a place many avoided at all costs. Everyone did—which led me to wonder why the guys were so invested in the news of the explosion. It just seemed so odd to me, but they were glued to that TV and looked truly disturbed by what they were witnessing. After several minutes, Cotton asked, “Is that what I think it is?”

“Yeah, it is,” Rooster answered. “He did it. *He really fucking did it.*”

“There was no way this was him.”

“Who else could it have been?” Rooster argued.

“You really think that was Br...” Torch’s words trailed off when he spotted me and Candance in the doorway. “Heads up. We got company.”

And just like that, everyone in the room turned and looked at us. I knew then that I’d screwed up and wanted nothing more than to crawl into a dark hole and hide. Malcomb stepped out of the pack and said, “Londyn, what are you doing here?”

“I was just getting Dalton some breakfast when I heard you guys come by.” I suddenly felt morbidly embarrassed and took a step back. “I’m sorry if I was intruding on something.”

“It’s just the news, babe. Nothing to intrude on.”

“Either way, I think I’ll get back to the kitchen and check on Dalton.”

“Okay, I’ll be there in a minute.”

I nodded, then darted out of the room and down the hall. I could hear Candace following after. “Oh, I can’t believe I did that.”

“Did what?” Candace asked. “You were just watching the news.”

“We clearly interrupted something.”

“Yeah, but there was no way you could know that. They were in the family room, and it was the news,” she tried to reassure me. “Don’t worry about it. Things like that are gonna happen.”

“*If you say so.*” I walked over to Dalton and picked up his empty plate. “Are you ready to roll?”

“Um-hmm.”

“Okay, then let’s go grab our stuff, and then we can head on home.”

“But I don’t wanna go home.”

“I know, but Momma’s got some things she needs to take care of. Besides, we’ve been here long enough. Malcomb has things going on, and we don’t want to get in the way.”

Dalton sighed, but he didn’t argue. Before walking out of the kitchen, I looked over to Candace and said, “Thank you for the apology. It means a lot.”

I didn’t wait for a response. I was afraid she might try to convince us not to leave, so I rushed down the hall to Malcomb’s room and started packing our things. I’d just finished putting everything into my bag when the door opened and Malcomb asked, “Woah, where are you two going?”

“It’s time for us to be getting back.”

“What?”

“I just don’t want to get in the way. Besides, I need to get back to work.”

“You’re not in the way. Far from it.” Malcomb stepped over to me and slipped his arms around my waist, pulling me close. “I want you here.”

“It’s just too much right now.”

“Doesn’t have to be. You just skip the two-week notice thing and stay.”

“Malcomb!” I gasped. “I can’t do that!”

“Sure, you can. You get in your car, and you and Dalton follow me over to my place. Easy as that.”

“And what about my apartment?”

“I’ll send the boys over to pack it and move everything over to my place. Easy as that.”

“But it’s not that easy,” I argued. “You can’t just snap your fingers and make my life in Seattle disappear.”

“Not trying to make it disappear, babe. I just want you here with me. Is that so bad?”

“No, you’re not being fair.” I stepped back, pulling myself free from his embrace. I don’t know why I was resisting. It made zero sense. I had everything I’d ever wanted right there at my fingertips, but I couldn’t stop myself from saying, “This is a lot all at once, and I’m not sure Dalton and I are ready for all this.”

“Okay. I get it.” Malcomb looked down at Dalton and smiled. “You two take the time you need, and when you’re ready, I’ll be waiting.”

I nodded, then reached down and took Dalton’s hand in mine. Without giving Malcomb a kiss or even saying goodbye, I grabbed our bag and rushed out to my car. There was a dull ache in my chest as I put Dalton in his car seat. A part of me wished that Malcomb would’ve come after us and demanded that we stay. But that wasn’t Malcomb. He wasn’t going to force either of us to do something we weren’t ready to do.

Heavy-hearted, I got in the car, and as I drove through the gate, I spotted Malcomb in the corner of my eye. He was standing by the backdoor with a solemn look on his face as he watched us drive away.

Damn.

What the hell was I doing?

I should’ve turned that car around and gone right back to him, but I didn’t.

I just kept driving and driving, and before I even realized where I was going, I pulled into my parents’ driveway. It was still early, so there was a good chance that I could catch my mother before she went to work. I quickly parked, and after I helped Dalton out of his seat, we both headed up the front steps.

I was just about to knock when the door flew open, and my mother greeted us with a big smile. “What in the world?”

Dalton rushed up to her with arms wide open as he shouted, “Grangran!”

“Oh, my goodness! What are you two doing here?”

“I really need to talk to you.”

“Of course!” She picked Dalton up and started back inside as she said, “Come on in, and I’ll make us some coffee.”

“Do you have time? I know you need to get to work.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that.” Mom turned on the TV and found one of Dalton’s favorite shows. “Work can wait.”

She let Daisy out of her kennel, and she and Dalton started playing in the living room while Mom and I headed into the kitchen. Mom started up a fresh pot of coffee as she said, “I thought you were going home last night.”

“That was the plan, but then some guy tried to run us off the road, and we ended up at the clubhouse.”

“What?”

“It’s nothing. We’re fine. It was just a little scare, but Cotton and the guys took care of it.”

“Well, it’s good you had them to turn to, I guess.”

“It was.”

She walked over and motioned for me to sit down at the table with her. “Okay. Get over here and tell me what’s going on with you.”

“It’s Malcomb.” I pulled the chair out and sat down. “He’s wanting us to move in with him.”

“Yeah, you told me about that a couple of days ago. I thought you were excited about it.”

“I thought I was, too.” I shrugged. “Now, I’m not so sure.”

“Why? Did something happen?”

“No, nothing like that. I just...” Tears started to pool in my eyes as I told her, “I’m just so confused and scared.”

“Scared of what, honey?”

“Of getting lost in him only to lose him again. I just don’t think my heart could take it if something happened.”

Mom placed her hand on my shoulder, squeezing it gently. “I understand why you’re scared, but you can’t live your life in fear. You have to be willing to take chances.”

“And if things don’t work out, and I get my heart ripped out again?”

“Then, you’ll handle it, but I don’t think you’re going to have to worry about that. Malcomb loves you. He’s not going anywhere.”

“I know, but...” My voice trailed off as the tears flowed freely down my face. “I just don’t know.”

Mom and I went back and forth for quite some time. We finished one cup of coffee, and we were about to have another when Mom said something to me that I would never forget:

“There are two kinds of love, Londyn. The one that burns bright and can warm you inside and out. It’s beautiful, wild, and free, but it burns hot and fast, and then it’s gone. Then there is the one that’s like a river. It changes and flows, twists and turns, but it is steady and strong. It meanders, but it always finds its way home.”

She reached over and placed her hand on mine. “Only you can tell if the love you have with Malcomb is one that burns or one that flows, but if it flows like that river, you should hold onto it because those are the hardest to find.”

“It’s been five years since we were together, and I still love him like I did back then. And I think he feels the same way about me.”

“Then, I’d say you have your answer.”

“I’m moving in with him, Mom. I’m moving in with today. Like now.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure.” My eyes drifted to the ground as I added, “*I’m sure Dad will be thrilled.*”

“Your dad just wants you to be happy.”

“Yeah, that’s what I’d always thought until he broke my heart and then did nothing to help fix it.” I shrugged as I told her, “He’s my dad. I will always love him, but I’m not sure I will ever forgive him.”

“And that’s okay. You don’t have to forgive him, but I hope, in time, you will.”

“I do, too,” Dad whispered from the doorway.

“Dad,” I gasped. “I didn’t realize you were here.”

“I wasn’t. I just came back to grab my laptop. I left it here by mistake.”

I didn’t respond.

I couldn’t.

I didn’t know what to say to him.

He stepped into the kitchen, his eyes on mine as he said, “I really do hope that one day you will be able to forgive me, sweetheart. I love you so much, and I can’t bear the thought of losing you. I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“You’re not going to lose *me*, Dad. You did lose my trust, and I’m not sure that you will ever get it back.”

“That doesn’t mean I’m going to stop trying. I’ll do whatever I have to do, and not just for you and Dalton, but for your mother, too.” He walked over to me and gave me a kiss on my forehead. “I’ve got to get to work. I hope I’ll be seeing you again soon.”

He kissed my mother, and after a quick word with Dalton, he was gone. I felt indifferent about his departure, and I could tell from my mother’s expression that she felt the same way, which led me to ask, “Is everything okay with you two?”

“No, it’s not, but that’s nothing for you to worry about.”

“But I do worry. I don’t want what happened with me and Dad to affect you two.”

“How can it not? He lied to us both. But we will get through this. We always do.” She reached over and patted my

hand. “Now stop fretting over your father and me and go see about Malcomb.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, now skedaddle.”

“Okay, okay.” We both stood, and I gave Mom a big hug. “Thanks, Mom. You’re the best.”

“Anytime, sweet girl.”

She helped me get Dalton in the car, then stood at the end of the driveway and waved as I backed out into the street. It was crazy how a brief conversation with my mother could put everything into perspective, but that’s exactly what it had done. I knew I wanted a life with Malcomb, and I wasn’t going to wait another second to have it.

He said he would be waiting for us, but when we pulled up to his house, I wasn’t sure if he was even home. There was no sign of his truck or his bike, but I took a chance and got Dalton and our bag from the car. I was about to start up the steps when the front door opened, and Malcomb stepped out. “You came.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry about earlier. I just needed a minute to think.”

“And you’re good now?”

“I am.” I smiled as I told him, “We’re a river.”

“Come again?”

“We’re like a river.” I walked up the steps and smiled. “It can take a little time, but we always find our way home.”

“It’s a little philosophical, but I like it.” He slipped his arms around my waist and pulled me close. “Welcome home, baby.”

He leaned down and kissed me, and for the first time in a very long time, I knew that everything was going to be okay. Dalton and I were home, and that was where we were going to stay.

CHAPTER 25

Savage

It had been days, and we were all still reeling from the explosion at Yesler Terrace. When Bruton told us he would take care of the Stingers, we thought he would take them out and only them—not innocent women and children. It was a fucked-up move, but the fact that he had the means to do it was even more concerning. We had no idea how he'd done it. It would take a man with a great deal of power and influence to pull off a stunt like that. It would also take one with a cold fucking heart to kill innocents.

We knew Bruton had some questionable dealings, but this left us wondering if we'd made a mistake going into business with him. It was time for us to have a chat with him. Unfortunately, the timing couldn't be worse. We had just gotten Londyn's stuff moved from her apartment, and she was busy scurrying around trying to find the perfect place for everything.

I hated to leave her when she was working so hard, but I didn't have a choice. She was in the living room, moving around picture frames, when I walked up behind her and said, "I've gotta run to the clubhouse for a bit."

"Okay."

She picked up a frame and moved it across the room. "I'll be gone for a couple of hours."

"Okay."

"I'll help you finish up this stuff when I get back."

"Okay."

I wasn't sure if she was really hearing me, so I said her name a little louder, "Londyn!"

"What?" She whipped around and looked at me like I had three heads. "I thought you were leaving."

"I am, but I wanted to make sure you were good before I left."

"I'm good." A soft smile slipped across her lips. "No offense, but I'll get this done a lot faster without you here."

"You saying I'm not good help?"

"I'm saying I have a lot to get done, and you're a distraction."

"Is that right?"

"Yep." Her smile grew wider as she teased, "I mean, it's not your fault that you're so freakishly sexy."

"Freakishly?"

"You heard me." With a glimmer of mischief in her eyes, she stepped closer and slipped her arms around my neck. "You're so unbelievably hot that it's hard for a woman to contain herself whenever you're around."

"Ah, you're bull-shitin' me, right?"

"Maybe just a little." She giggled. "But you are distracting, and I could get this done much quicker if you were gone."

"So, you're okay with me leaving."

"Absolutely." She inched up on her tiptoes and pressed her lips to mine before saying, "Now, go and do what you need to do."

"If you insist." I kissed her once more, then grabbed my keys and started out the door. "I'll grill us some burgers when I get back."

"Sounds great. Have a good time."

I didn't bother telling her that today would be anything but a good time. I didn't want to worry her and become an even bigger distraction. That was the last thing I wanted to do. I got

on my bike and used the ride to the clubhouse to mentally prepare for our meet with Bruton. When I got there, Maverick and Torch were already in the bar waiting with Bones and Wrath.

As soon as I sat down, Maverick handed me a folder and said, "You're gonna wanna see this."

I opened it up, and it was filled with images of during and after the explosion. It looked like something out of a war movie. "Holy shit."

"Keep going," Maverick pushed.

I continued to flip through the different pictures, and my stomach turned when I came across the list of names of the people who lived in the apartment complex. Over twenty were women and children, which brought bile to the back of my throat. "This is all kinds of fucked up."

"Yeah, it is."

"How did he do this?"

Bones shook his head. "I don't care who he knows or how skilled he is. This wasn't something he could do without some major help."

"It doesn't matter how he fucking did it!" Maverick roared. "It should've never happened."

"It seems everything this dude touches is a fucking disaster these days." Torch shook his head. "You hear about the big wreck this morning?"

"Nah, what are you talking about?"

"Little old lady got confused about the new light and sped up instead of slowing down. She plowed right into the side of a truck. Killed her and him."

"No way."

"Yeah, her husband is all torn up about it."

"Any idea who it was?"

“Last name Graves or something like that. They have that farm out by the Shell station.”

“Ah damn. I hate to hear that. They’re good folks.”

The news only seemed to intensify Maverick’s foul mood, and it didn’t do much for mine, either. I was ready to lay into Bruton when our attention was drawn to the back door when it opened, and he and Rooster stepped inside. We all remained silent as Rooster led him over to the back table, and they both sat down.

Bruton seemed a bit annoyed as he announced, “My time is valuable, boys. So, tell me why I’m here so I can get on with my day.”

I took the folder Maverick had given me and tossed it onto the table in front of him. He picked it up and opened it, and as soon as he saw the images, he shook his head. “That explosion took out a whole damn block, Bruton,” I grumbled.

“I told you I was going to take care of the Stingers, and I did.”

“That’s not how we do things.”

“Are you seriously questioning how I dealt with your mess?” There was no missing the anger in Bruton’s voice as he said, “I’ve done drops at that location for years and never once had an issue, but you roll in there one time, and all hell breaks loose. Why is that?”

“Are you seriously trying to turn this around on us?” Maverick barked.

“I’m just stating the facts,” Bruton replied calmly. “You rolled into the Terrace with your big fancy SUV and thought no one would notice?”

“You never questioned what we were driving,” I growled. “You just gave us the address and never said shit.”

“It wasn’t the first time you’d done a run. You’re the one and only Satan’s Fury.” Bruton had a superior look on his face as he told us, “Who was I to question what you were driving?”

Torch sounded like he was on the verge of losing it when he asked, “Are you fucking serious with this shit?”

“Absolutely. I provided the load, and it was your job to deliver it. Plain and simple.” I wanted to reach across the table and punch him in the throat when he said, “Consider this a lesson. Next time, you might want to consider a less flashy vehicle. Maybe a delivery truck or perhaps a U-Haul. I’m sure you will think of something.”

We were all stunned by his response, so much so none of us said a word. We just sat there staring daggers at him. After several moments, he let out a breath and said, “If that’s all, boys, I will see myself out.”

“*Sit your ass down, Bruton,*” Maverick ordered.

Bruton hesitated for a moment, then eventually complied.

Maverick’s face showed zero emotion as he leaned forward and said, “We have a way of doing business, and killing innocents isn’t part of it. You either get on board and do things our way, or this partnership is done.”

“I’ve never been good about playing by the rules.”

“There’s no gray area here, Bruton. You’re either in, or you’re out.”

“Fine, we’ll do it your way. But when shit hits the fan, don’t come crying to me.” He stood and grumbled, “I’m too old for this shit.”

Without saying anything more, he turned and walked out the door. As soon as the door closed behind him, I turned to Maverick and asked, “You think he meant it?”

“Only time will tell.”

We talked for a while longer, and it wasn’t long before I was ready to get out of there. I wanted to get home to Londyn and Dalton. I wanted to spend some time with them before the day was done, but when I finally got to the house, I discovered they were both already in bed.

I grabbed a quick bite to eat, then went upstairs and took a hot shower. After I dried off, I threw on some boxers and

crawled into bed. I thought Londyn was asleep until I heard her whisper, “How did things go with the guys?”

“It went.” I eased over and gave her a kiss. “Sorry I didn’t get back in time for dinner.”

“It’s fine. We made do.”

“The house looks great, babe.”

“I’m glad you like it.” She rested her head on my chest and started tracing the lines of my tattoo with the tip of her finger. “I talked to Jackson today.”

“How’d that go?”

“He’s still pretty upset with me for not coming back, but we talked it out and I think he’s going to come here one day next week for a visit.”

“That’s great. I’m glad you two sorted things out.”

“I called into work and got things sorted there, too. They said I could try working remotely and could come in once a week for a few hours to handle things like paperwork and such. I really think it’s going to work out.”

“You were on top of things today.”

“I had to do something to keep myself busy.” She looked up at me with puppy dog eyes. “I got a little lonesome without you here today.”

“You’re bullshitting me again, aren’t ya?”

“No, not at all.” Her fingertips slowly started to drift south as she told me, “I missed having you around... even when you were getting in my way.”

“Hmph,” I scoffed. “There it is.”

“I’m being serious.” Her hand slipped under the waistband of my boxers and continued down my abdomen as she whispered, “I like having you close.”

“Hm-mmm. I like having you close, too.”

A little hiss slipped through my lips when she wrapped her fingers around my cock and slowly started gliding her hand up

and down. She glanced up at me, and the second I saw that lust-filled look in her eye, I had to have her.

I reached for her hips, carefully lifting her as she straddled herself over my cock and brushed her center across my already throbbing erection. “Fuck. You’re killing me.”

“I can’t help myself when I’m with you.”

I thought I’d lose my mind if I had to wait another minute to be inside her. Feeling the same need burning inside of her, she centered herself on top of me. The heat of our breaths mingled between us until the anticipation became too much. My hand snaked down to the waistband of her G-string and gave it a firm tug, pulling it from her body. “Don’t keep me waiting, babe. I need to be inside you.”

My breath became strained as she immediately lowered her hand between us and started stroking me. A fevered hiss slipped through her lips as she slowly inched down, taking me deep inside. She was so fucking tight, warm, and wet. I had to fight the temptation to take over.

She felt unbelievable riding my cock. It was like heaven, absolute heaven; I wanted to savor every second, feel every sensation. A deep growl resonated through my chest as she quickened her pace, and even though it felt incredible, I needed more. Unable to control myself, I brought my hands up to her hips and guided her up and down.

Her nails dug into my chest as she bucked against me, meeting every thrust with more force, more intensity. Each drive became more frantic as she took me deeper and deeper. My body was wound tight as I struggled to hold back my climax, and I could feel the pressure building as her walls constricted around me.

Teetering close to the edge, I dug my fingertips into her hips and held on as her orgasm approached. Her hips rocked against mine in a feverish rhythm until she let out a muffled groan. With one last, deep thrust, Londyn’s body tensed, and her breath stilled as her head fell back. Her orgasm exploded as she clamped down around me, making it impossible for me to hold back as she continued to buck against me. The fire that

raged within me reached its breaking point as I came deep inside her. My voice was low and strained as I growled, “Fuck.”

I held on to her hips, holding her in place as I caught my breath. Still trembling, she collapsed on top of me, her heart beating wildly next to mine; neither of us moved as we tried to catch our breaths. After several moments passed, Londyn eased off of me and slipped off to the bathroom. When she came back, she was smiling like the Cheshire cat.

“What’s that smile about?”

“You.” She crawled in next to me as she said, “You make me happy.”

“You make me happy, too.” I leaned down and kissed her on her forehead. “I love you, Londyn.”

“I love you more.”

She closed her eyes, and in a matter of minutes, she’d drifted off to sleep. Having her snuggled up next to me felt so fucking good, and hearing the soothing sounds of her breathing made it impossible to stay awake. The next morning, I woke early and decided to go to the local diner to grab us all some breakfast. It was just a small Mom and Pop place, but it had the best breakfast burritos in a hundred-mile radius. When I got there, Maverick and Dad were sitting in the back having coffee with Bones and Wrath.

I wasn’t exactly surprised. The diner was just around the corner from my folks’ place, and he ate there all the time. I walked over and said, “Morning.”

“Morning.” Cotton smirked as he teased, “Mighty early for you to be up and at ‘em.”

“Just grabbing some breakfast and then heading back home. Gonna be another busy day of unpacking.” I pulled a chair over and sat down at the end of the table. “What about you guys? What do you have going on?”

“We’re about to head over to your sister’s place. We’re gonna help paint her new apartment.”

“That sounds like loads of fun.”

“Yeah, it should be loads. You should...”

Before he could finish his thought, the front door flew open, and Mr. Graves stepped inside. His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked like he hadn't slept in days, which wasn't exactly surprising. The man had just lost his wife, but what was surprising was the fact that he was carrying his old shotgun.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Graves shouted, “Where is he?”

The diner fell eerily silent.

“Where is he?” Graves repeated.

He started scanning the room, and his eyes widened with rage when he looked over at the group in the corner. It wasn't until that moment that I realized that Bruton was there. He was sitting with the mayor and a local lawyer, and he looked like a deer in headlights when Graves lifted his shotgun and aimed it at his chest. “It was you! You're the reason she's gone!”

“Easy there, Bill. It was an accident.”

“An accident that never would've happened if you hadn't petitioned for that goddamn light!”

“It was for the safety of the town.”

“The safety of the town!” Graves took a charging step towards Bruton as he roared, “You killed my wife.”

Customers started to get skittish and eased away from Graves, slowly inching for the door. Dad, being Dad, stood and started making his way over to Graves. Wrath and I tried our best not to spook him as we followed slowly behind. Dad kept his voice calm and steady as he said, “Bill, you don't want to do this. There are kids in here. You're scaring 'em.”

“I'm sorry about that, Cotton, but I can't let this go.” Graves kept the gun trained on Bruton. “He stole my Bec from me.”

“Now, you know that’s not how it happened.” Bruton stood and held his hands in surrender. “I’m sorry about your wife, but you gotta know that killing me isn’t going to change anything.”

“He’s right. Put the gun down, Bill.”

“I can’t go on without her. I just can’t.”

“Bill, this is crazy. Just put the...”

Bruton didn’t get to finish that sentence. Graves pulled the trigger and sent him flailing back before words ever had a chance to leave his mouth. We charged forward. Dad and Wrath tackled Graves to the ground and rid him of his shotgun while Bones and I went to see about Bruton.

It was bad. He got hit right in the chest, and he was bleeding out fast. One of the waitresses came over with some towels and said, “I’ve called for an ambulance.”

I nodded, then took the towels and pressed them against his chest, hoping to suppress the bleeding. Bruton’s eyes were fluttering, and he was struggling to hold on. I couldn’t believe it. The man had worked with some of the most dangerous men in the world, and now, he was going to be taken out because of a fucking traffic light.

I tried to encourage him by saying, “Hold on. Help is coming.”

Bruton reached for Bones, grabbing the collar of his T-shirt and pulling him close as he muttered, “Sawyer 247.”

“What?”

“Sawyer.... 2... 4... 7.”

“Is that supposed to mean something?”

“2... 4....”

And that was it.

Those were the last words he spoke.

Bruton was gone, and we were left to pick up the pieces.

There was just one problem—we had no clue just how many pieces there were, but we would soon find out and it would change Fury forever.

Epilogue

Three weeks later....

“I always thought you were a few fries short of a Happy Meal.”

“Yeah, says the man who still counts with his fingers and toes.”

“I don’t know what your problem is, but I guarantee it’s hard to pronounce.”

“Awe,” Londyn feigned a smile. “You’re so cute when you try to talk about things you don’t understand.”

Once again, the entire bar erupted into laughter.

It had been quite the afternoon.

We’d had a long couple of weeks and were in need of a brief reprieve, so we all gathered at the bar. We’d had a couple of rounds and were sitting around shooting the shit. Darby and Susana stopped by for a visit and decided to join in on the fun—but only after they’d given me the fifth degree over Londyn and Dalton.

Rooster was right. Darby was pretty understanding, but Susana gave me nine shades of hell for not reaching out to Londyn sooner. I agreed and assured them both that I would make it up to her and to Dalton, which seemed to appease them—at least for the time being. In hopes of distracting them, I got us another round, and since then, they’d turned their

attention to Roost and Torch. And with Londyn's help, they were giving them a bit of much-deserved hell.

Londyn was feeling a little feisty as she leaned over to Rooster and teased, "Yeah, yeah. The wheel is spinning, but the hamster's dead."

"Does your ass get jealous of all the shit that comes out of your mouth?"

"It has to." Torch chuckled as he said, "She's so full of shit."

"I bet you were conceived on the highway." Darby had to fight back her smile as she continued, "That's where most accidents happen."

"If I wanted to hear from an asshole, I'd just fart. "

"Oh, wait! I forgot I have something for you." Londyn slipped her hand into her pocket and pretended to dig around for a moment before pulling it out with her middle finger extended. "Sorry. I didn't get a chance to put a bow on it."

"Your gene pool could use a bit more chlorine."

"Okay, kids," I interjected. "Best stop before I have to hurt someone's feelings."

"Ooohhh, scary boss man is gonna hurt someone's feelings," Torch taunted.

"Or I'll just punch you in the face. Whichever is fine with me."

"Okay, okay. We'll stop pickin' on the little girlies."

"The girls aren't who I'm looking out for." I shook my head. "They're making asses out of you two."

"Ah, hell nah," Rooster argued. "We had them running scared."

"There you go trying to show off your intelligence again." Susana smiled as she said, "Should I break out the crayons and try to explain it to you?"

The room erupted into laughter. Even I had a chuckle or two. Rooster and Torch continued to carry on with the girls, and it wasn't long before Darby leaned over to me and whispered, "I'd forgotten how much I loved her."

"She's a good one."

"Yes, she is. You best hold onto her."

"Oh, I'm planning on it. I've already picked out the ring. Just waiting on the right time."

"While you're at it, I think Dalton needs a little brother or sister."

"Hey, slow down. We're just settling in. It's a little early to be talking about another kid, but when she's ready, I'm ready."

"Good." She gave me a little nudge with her elbow. "It's good to see you happy."

"Thanks, sis."

We finished off our drinks, and I was about to go grab another when Londyn came up behind me and grabbed my hand. She led me out of the bar, and as soon as we were in the hall, she inched up on her tiptoes and pressed her lips to mine, kissing me long and hard. It was urgent, full of need, and all her little whimpers and moans spurred me on even more. As usual, it wasn't long before I started to get lost in the moment.

I couldn't help it.

There was just something about her that got to me in a way that no one else could. I loved her wholeheartedly, and I couldn't wait a minute longer to say, "Marry me."

"What?"

"*Marry me.*" Her eyes locked on mine as I told her, "You make the good days even better, and you give me the strength to get through the bad ones... You're my everything, and I want the whole world to know it."

"Yes, Malcomb. I'll marry you."

And just like that, I had my girl, my son, and my brothers.

A man couldn't ask for more than that.

The End

More from the Satan's Fury MC- SG coming soon!

Excerpt from Wrath follows acknowledgements. Be sure to check it out. Thanks for reading! Be sure to join my newsletter for all the latest news and chances to win giveaways!

Sign up for L. Wilder's Newsletter: <https://lwilderbooks.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=a2c4c211615b2d7b3dd46289a&id=7f8e916141>

Acknowledgments

I am blessed to have so many wonderful people who are willing to give their time and effort to making my books the best they can be. Without them, I wouldn't be able to breathe life into my characters and share their stories with you. To the people I've listed below and so many others, I want to say thank you for taking this journey with me. Your support means the world to me, and I truly mean it when I say I appreciate everything you do. I love you all!

PA: Natalie Weston

Editing/Proofing: Lisa Marie

Promoting: Amy Jones, Veronica Ines Garcia,

BETAS/Early Readers: Tawyna Rae, Amanda Quiles

Street Team: All the wonderful members of Wilder's Women
(You rock!)

Best Friend and biggest supporter: My mother (Love you to the moon and back.)

*Excerpt from Wrath: Satan's
Fury MC- SG*

Wrath's Blurb

Every man has a weakness, and she was mine.

Stitch was stepping down.

And he was preparing me to take his place.

He'd seen the darkness in me.

He knew I could use my demons the way he'd used his.

And he was right.

I used them, and I used them well.

They'd helped me keep everyone at a distance—including her.

She was beautiful, smart, and sexy as hell...

She was every man's temptation.

She was also Stitch's daughter.

She was off limits.

I tried.

I tried damn hard.

But when she looked at me with those lust-filled eyes...

I had to have her.

No matter what the cost.

Prologue

I heard them before I saw them.

At first, it was just a whimper, but then, it was a deep-seated moan.

While I hadn't actually experienced it for myself, I knew there was only one thing that could cause a moan like that—someone was having sex. And they were clearly enjoying it.

It didn't bother me that someone was going at it.

More power to them.

It was the fact that they were having it during my high school graduation party—a party that had literally just started fifteen minutes prior. When the moans persisted, I became curious to see who was behind them, so I followed the sounds down the hallway.

As I reached the family room, the whimpering grew louder, so I stopped and peered inside. It was dark, but I could see the faint outline of a couple over at the pool table. I took a step forward, trying to get a better look, and that's when I saw that it was Wrath and Jasmine.

Jasmine was sitting on the edge of the table with her legs hooked around Wrath's waist. Her skirt was hiked up, and her breasts were billowing out of her tank top, bouncing up and down with each and every forceful thrust.

It was a sight to behold.

It was wrong to watch them, but I couldn't help myself. Not that it mattered. They were so engrossed in the moment that they didn't even notice that I was standing there. I was in

awe. I'd never seen two people in the throes of such carnal desire. It was intense and sexy. And oh, how I wished it was me he was with instead of her.

I wasn't exactly surprised to see that Wrath had chosen to hook up with Jasmine. She was one of the club's hangarounds, and she was always eager to please when it came to the guys.

She leaned in to kiss him, but to my surprise, he turned his head, refusing her advance. Before she had a chance to protest, he slipped his hands under her ass and gave her a forceful tug, pulling her forward. As soon as her feet hit the floor, he twirled her around and bent her over.

With her cheek resting on the green felt, Jasmine grasped the edge of the pool table, bracing herself as Wrath started taking her from behind. Her moans and whimpers filled the room as he fisted her hair in his hand, giving it a hard tug. His pace became hard and demanding, but she didn't complain. Instead, she seemed to love it.

I couldn't blame her.

Just seeing the way he was dominating her had every nerve in my body tingling in ecstasy. I'd never felt so turned on, and I had to fight the temptation to inch closer for a better look. When he raised his hand and gave her ass a firm slap, she gasped, and I gasped right along with her.

At first, I didn't think he'd heard me, and then he turned his head to face me. Our eyes met, and I thought for sure he'd stop or yell at me to leave.

He didn't.

He kept driving into her, again and again, all while staring directly at me. My entire body started throbbing with need. I pressed my thighs together, hoping it would ease the ache. Sadly, it did little to help. When I couldn't stand it a moment longer, I turned and ran back down the hall.

I went back to my party and never told anyone what I'd seen. I wanted to keep the moment to myself, and apparently, Wrath felt the same. He never said a word to me about it.

There were times when I wondered if the whole thing was just a figment of my imagination.

And then, I'd spot him staring at me—just like he had that night.

I knew then it wasn't my imagination.

Far from it.

CHAPTER 1

Wrath

“**Y**ou never make promises you can’t keep.” Stitch removed his cut and draped it over the back of a chair as he told me, “They’ll know if you lie to them, and that’ll just make your job harder.”

“Yeah, I got it.”

I glanced over at Ben—the kid Stitch and I had brought in for questioning, and I felt nothing. No pity. No remorse. As far as I was concerned, he had it coming.

He’d pretended to be interested in Elsie and managed to get close to her. It took some time, but he managed to convince her to go out with him. She told him to pick her up at the clubhouse, and he used the opportunity to plant a spy cam in our entryway.

As soon as it was discovered, Bones and Big started looking into him and found that he was David Bruton’s grandson—a man who’d had the entire club running in circles for weeks. He’d not only had two of our brothers beaten, but he’d also emailed Bones a disturbing amount of intel that he’d gathered on all the brothers and our families—and we had no idea why.

While we had no clue what the guy was up to, we all knew it wasn’t good. The second Cotton discovered there was a connection between Bruton and Ben, he ordered Stitch and me to track him down. We started at the address Bones had given us, but he wasn’t there.

He was with Elsie.

At her college campus.

In a supply closet.

With a gun.

He intended to kidnap her, but we were there to stop him dead in his tracks. We brought him to Stitch's playroom, and things were not looking good for the guy.

Stitch had secured Ben's hands over his head with his feet barely touching the floor, and the guy couldn't have looked more freaked out—as he should be. The asshole was about to experience an unimaginable hell, and as far as I was concerned, he had it coming for fucking with Fury.

He could see Stitch's tools sprawled out on the table. It was clear what was in store for him, which is why he started shouting, "I wasn't gonna hurt her. I would never hurt her."

"I'm gonna give you a piece of advice here, kid." Stitch stepped closer to him. "Don't speak until spoken to. You got that?"

Ben nodded. "Yeah, I got it."

"Good." Stitch stepped back over to the table and grabbed a pair of brass knuckles. As he slipped them on, he leaned over to me and said, "Remember, sometimes less is more. Start off simple and see where it takes you."

I nodded, then watched as he stepped back over to Ben. "Tell me what you wanted with the girl."

"Nothing. I was just..."

Before he could finish his thought, Stitch drew his hand into a fist, tightly clutching his brass knuckles, and slammed it into Ben's ribs. He immediately started gasping and wailing out in agony. Ignoring his cries, Stitch growled, "A second piece of advice... Don't try to bullshit me. You lie, you pay."

"I got nothing to do with all this. I swear it."

"We both know that isn't completely true."

"It is!" Ben wailed. "Come on, man. What do you want from me?"

“Last piece of advice.” Stitch punched him again, causing the air to rush from Ben’s lungs, “Don’t make me repeat myself.”

I stood there watching their exchange, waiting for the moment when I would feel something—guilt, pity, or even some sort of inspiration, but I felt nothing. It was like I was numb to it all, and I had my folks and my stint in the military to thank for that. Seeing Ben in such a rough state took me back to that day in Afghanistan—the one I tried so desperately to forget.

It was a day that I lost over half of my platoon and my faith in humanity. I knew what would happen if I let myself get lost in the memory, so I quickly shook it off and stepped over to Cotton. I kept my eyes trained on Stitch as I asked, “You buying this innocent victim bullshit?”

“Not for a second.” Cotton glanced over at me as he assured me, “Stitch will get him talking. Just gotta give him time.”

We both watched as Stitch punched him again, this time with his other hand and square in Ben’s jaw, momentarily knocking him out. Stitch took a bottle of ice-cold water and dumped it over Ben’s head, bringing him out of his haze. Cotton leaned over to me as he said, “You know, I was concerned when Stitch announced he was thinking about stepping down. As you know, he’s gotten us through some pretty tight spots over the years, and we all hate to see him go. That being said, I’m not sure that you’ve got what it takes to completely fill his shoes, but you’re damn close.”

“I appreciate that, Prez.” It meant a great deal to me that our president had put his faith in me, so I quickly added, “I’ll do my best to make you proud.”

“I have no doubt that you will.”

With that, Cotton turned his attention back to Stitch, and we both watched as he slammed his fist into his side. Brass knuckles to the ribs hurt like a motherfucker. It took him a moment to collect himself, but once he was able to catch his breath, Ben muttered, “I don’t know how I got pulled into this.

I was just supposed to show up in one of her classes and ask her out.”

“And why were you supposed to do that?”

“So I could get closer to her and earn her trust.” Stitch’s eyes skirted over to me, giving me a look that signaled the vault had officially been opened. His attention was drawn back to Ben when he added, “I was supposed to get her to talk about you guys and see if I could find out stuff.”

“What were you supposed to find out?”

“Anything. Everything. I wasn’t given any parameters. He just wanted me to get her talking, but she never did. And that was it. I swear it.”

Damn.

Stitch was made for this shit.

It was in his blood.

He’d been the club’s enforcer for as long as I’d known him. He was good at it and it would be hard to see him go, but I understood why he was ready to step down. This shit was tough. It took a toll on a man, and I wasn’t sure I had what it took to take his place. When Stitch stepped back over to me, I decided to voice my concern. “I don’t get it.”

“Get what?”

“Why you guys think I’m the one for this.” I shook my head. “I mean, why not Chains? He’s a fucking beast or what about Torch or...”

“We had our reasons for choosing you.” Stitch placed his hand on my shoulder. “Now, it’s time for you to prove that we were right.”