



Harley
Wylde

TRUTH

Changeling Press

Truth (Savage Raptors MC 4)
A Dixie Reapers Bad Boys Romance
Harley Wylde

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Table of Contents

Truth (Savage Raptors MC 4)

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Epilogue

Author's Note

Dedication and Acknowledgment

Playlist

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Madison -- My parents died and left me with my older brother. At one time, he'd been a nice guy. Then he let drugs and alcohol destroy his life. Now I walk on eggshells every day, and hope for a way out of this nightmare. Growing up, no one wanted to be friends with the deaf girl, much less date her. Now I'm an adult and haven't been on a single date in my life. I should run from the big biker called Truth... so why does he make me feel so safe?

Truth -- Women are all the same. Can't trust them. I've been screwed over enough times to know better than to fall for the lies that drip from their lips like honey. But Madison doesn't seem to be the same as all the others. It's not just because she's deaf. There's a sweetness to her, a vulnerability that makes me want to protect her. I never thought I'd get the chance, but once I find out what her brother is up to, I'll stop at nothing to make sure no one hurts Madison. Whether she knows it or not, she's mine.

Prologue

Truth

The Past

Church wasn't the place to let my mind drift. I'd struggled to stay focused for the last month, and I knew my brothers were getting irritated with me. Instead of having a good excuse, I'd let some bitch get to me, and now I couldn't stop thinking about her. Didn't matter she'd run out on me. I'd believed her to be different. Then she'd disappeared without a word. Even though Jane hadn't been my official girlfriend, the club had known about her. It wasn't a secret I'd been seeing her. It also didn't mean I'd brought her around my brothers. Our relationship hadn't progressed to that point, and now it never would.

"As I mentioned, Bastard is still alive," Atilla said. "Except he's going by a new name. Garrison West. We have the Devil's Fury to thank for this tip. If it weren't for Outlaw's woman, Elena, we may have never discovered he'd survived. Since Bastard was one of ours, Outlaw reached out to me. They could handle this on their own, but this is our mess and we should lend a hand."

What? All right. *Now* he had my undivided attention. Looked like everyone else felt the same. Discovering one of our previous brothers was still alive, and doing some seriously fucked-up shit, was screwing with my head. There was also a rat amongst us, and the Pres hadn't yet said who it was. It really bothered me. Was the brother beside me the one who'd squealed, or was it someone else? I didn't know who to trust right now. I already knew I couldn't put my faith in women, but now my brothers too?

"How the fuck did he survive?" Rebel asked.

I wondered the same thing. He'd been burned, beaten, cut, and left for dead on the side of the road. By all rights, he should have bled out. We'd all assumed he'd died from his injuries. I hadn't gone to check, and I doubted anyone else had either. Now it was coming back to bite us in the ass.

"No clue, but he's still a piece of work. Now he's scamming churchgoers, with the help of a reverend. From what we've learned, he owns multiple brothels. Bastard is stealing the women, or luring them in with the promise of marriage, then dumping them in his businesses to turn a profit."

Atilla leaned back in his chair and pinched the bridge of his nose. What the hell else had he discovered? The look on his face made it seem like the weight of the world was on his shoulders. Did he blame himself for this fucked-up mess? Sure, if we'd made certain Bastard was good and dead back then, none of this would be happening. But still, it wasn't entirely our fault. Even though we'd known he was rotten, I didn't think any of us realized how bad it really was.

I might not trust women, but it didn't mean I wanted them to be used like that. I could only imagine the horror they'd felt when they'd realized what sort of situation they were in.

"Truth, I don't know how to tell you this, but... I was able to get a list of names from some of the brothels. It's something various hackers have been working on."

"Tell me what?" I asked.

"Jane's name is on the list. She didn't run out on you. Someone snatched her, then dumped her in one of those hell holes."

I stood so fast my chair fell over. "Which one? How far? I can go and..."

Atilla lifted a hand, and it felt like a rock settled in my stomach. No. If he wasn't going to let me go after her, then...

“I’m sorry, brother. Jane’s gone. She’s one of many who committed suicide. She couldn’t handle the things they made her do.” Atilla dropped his gaze to the table. “We wouldn’t even know this much if the brothels hadn’t kept at least somewhat detailed records.”

My chest felt tight, and I struggled to draw a breath. All this time I’d cursed her, thinking she’d left me. My Jane hadn’t gone voluntarily. Someone had stolen her out from under my nose and made her live through hell. And what had I done? Nothing. I’d assumed she’d left of her own free will. I should have dug deeper, not given up on her.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and glanced at Rebel. He guided me back into my chair and I sat, feeling like my entire world had just imploded.

“What happened to her?” I asked, my voice seeming raspier than before.

“I’m not going to tell you that.” Atilla stood and came over, putting his hands on my shoulders. “If you need a minute, we can take a short break. Take a walk. Get a beer. Whatever you need. I know this has to be a hard blow.”

Jesus. If he wouldn’t tell me what they’d done to her, then it had to be more horrific than even I could imagine, and I’d tortured my share of men. How scared had she been? Had she waited for me to come find her? I’d failed her and felt like a complete asshole for assuming she’d left me.

Atilla backed off and I stood, leaving the room. If he was going to give me a minute, I’d take it. I stormed out of the clubhouse and stood in the parking lot, just staring at the ground.

I hadn’t been able to reach Jane for over a month. It had taken me about two weeks before I’d had enough and went to check her apartment, only to discover someone else had moved in. No one seemed to know where she’d gone, or when she’d left. For another two weeks, I’d kept trying to

reach her by phone. I'd thought we had something good going, but when I'd discovered she was gone and she hadn't returned any of my calls, I'd assumed she was like every other woman in my life.

At seventeen, I'd caught my girlfriend cheating on me with my best friend. A few years later, I'd finally decided to give dating a try once more, only to discover the bitch was using me to pay her bills. She'd had multiple boyfriends. It had taken a while for me to give anyone a chance again, and when I did, Jane up and left without a word. I had shit luck with women, and I'd decided they were all traitorous bitches.

Which was why I found my mind wandering at the worst times. The Pres had already given me two warnings, so I'd tried to do better. I wasn't sure I wanted to find out what would happen when I had three strikes. And now, hearing she hadn't run out on me...

I felt so incredibly guilty, and beyond furious at Bastard. Hell, I was angry at myself and the club too. We should have put that fucker in the ground. If we'd hacked him to bits, there wouldn't have been any way for him to survive and go after Jane.

No. It hadn't been him. It was the rat. I needed to know who'd turned on this club and put their hands on Jane. I'd end that fucker, no matter what it took. I couldn't believe we had a traitor in our midst. The fact I knew about it meant the Pres didn't suspect me. I wondered who else he'd told, or had he confronted everyone, hoping the culprit would give themselves away?

Once he gave up a name, I wanted just five minutes alone with the little rat who'd most likely been responsible for Jane disappearing. I'd make them suffer and beg for death. I couldn't imagine how Jane must have felt, or what she'd faced, in order for to take her own life.

Everything I'd known had been wrong.

I'd painted her with the same brush as every other woman I'd known.

And look how it turned out.

I was better off alone. Women couldn't be trusted, but apparently I couldn't be either. I'd automatically assumed she'd proven herself to be like the others instead of realizing something was wrong. If I'd looked into her disappearance, could I have saved her?

I'm so fucking sorry, Jane. It's my fault. I hope you aren't suffering anymore.

I looked up at the sky, and wondered if she was looking down on me right now. Did she see what her death was doing to me? Did she want me to suffer the way she had? Or had she forgiven me in her last moments?

I'd never know, and that alone would haunt me the rest of my life.

Chapter One

Madison

Present Day

The stench from the house nearly made me gag. I'd often thought I couldn't keep living like this, but what other option did I have? I had the world's worst brother. He'd been a good kid, if a bit quiet. Now he was a total wreck. If his friends in high school hadn't convinced him to try drugs in the first place, he might have led a very different life. Would he even live long enough to see thirty? I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen him when he wasn't high or drunk off his ass. Since our parents were gone, it was just the two of us. If they hadn't left the house to him, I'd have thrown him out. As it was, I should be grateful he'd let me keep living at home. Since I'd been underage when they passed, I'd been left in my brother's care.

My brother being a piece of trash wasn't a big secret. Everyone in town knew about his problems. Hard not to when you lived in such a small place. And yet, he'd been granted custody without any issues. I wondered if it had more to do with the social workers having too many cases and not enough homes for all the kids. In their eyes, it was probably better to leave me with family than shove me into a house with four other foster kids and strangers for guardians. From what little I knew about being in the system, this probably had been the better choice. I'd heard some horror stories back in high school. No idea if any of it was true or not, but I hadn't been eager to find out firsthand.

The world could be a cruel place, especially if you weren't perfect. Because of my disability, I could have gotten into Section 8 housing, but the duplexes we had in town weren't any better than our house. In fact, they were

in a much rougher area of Bryson Corners. Dealing with my brother had seemed like the safer option. Although, as I looked at the beer bottles strewn across the living room, the overflowing ashtrays, and his various drugs scattered on the coffee table, I had to wonder if living on the street wouldn't be better than this.

I didn't understand how he could afford his habits. He seldom worked, and when he did, he immediately drank his paycheck, smoked it, or snorted it. If it weren't for my part-time job working in the office of the local bakery, we wouldn't have electricity or water, and I would have certainly starved to death by now. Speaking of work... I looked at the clock on the wall and realized I was going to be late if I didn't leave right this second.

My brother slept on the couch, his mouth open, and one of his legs falling off the cushions. I didn't dare try to cover him with a blanket. Instead, I grabbed my purse and house key, then hurried out the front door. I locked up and started my walk to work. The bakery was nearly ten blocks from my house, but it could have been worse. At least I'd found something relatively close.

The sweltering heat left me sweaty and gross by the time I got to the bakery, but Mrs. Johnson merely waved as I rushed to the back. I could smell the bread she'd baked early in the morning, as well as the Danishes and other goodies. My stomach rumbled, reminding me I hadn't had time to eat breakfast. She allowed me as much coffee as I wanted, and a muffin or Danish each day as part of my employee perks.

I stashed my purse and stepped into the bathroom to freshen up. I splashed water on my face, used a wet paper towel to wipe down my arms and the back of my neck, then cleaned my armpits. Thankfully I kept a small bag stashed here with some deodorant and body spray. I used both before smoothing my hair and went to get a cup of coffee. I poured the strong brew

and peered at the choices in the glass cabinet.

Mrs. Johnson caught my attention and signed her question. *What will it be this morning?*

I signed and spoke my answer, even though I knew my voice could be loud and off-putting to some people. “Blueberry.”

She smiled and gave me a nod. Once she’d plated the muffin for me, I took my breakfast to the office and got started on my work. I paused between tasks to nibble on the muffin and take a swallow or two of coffee before getting back to it. I helped with her bookkeeping, inventory, and organized her files. As Mrs. Johnson once said, she loved the people and baking part of her business, but not so much the rest of it.

I couldn’t call the vendors for her, but I did tackle the emails that came through, and I maintained her store website. In fact, I needed to go snap a few pictures for the shop’s social media accounts. I grabbed my phone and peered out into the front of the shop. Only two men stood at the counter, both wearing the black leather vests of the local motorcycle club.

Even though they made me a little nervous, I pasted a smile on my face and stepped out front. Neither one acknowledged me, even though I did feel someone’s eyes watching me as I took a few pictures. If it hadn’t been for Mrs. Johnson’s frantic waving, which I caught from the corner of my eye, the shouted *hey* would have scared the crap out of me. While it wasn’t as loud to me as it would be for others, I still hadn’t expected to hear someone speaking behind me. And for his voice to come through so clearly, I knew he’d yelled the word.

I paused and turned to face the men. One of them was speaking, but he was talking so fast, I couldn’t catch everything. I had a hearing aid in one ear, which allowed me to hear a small amount. Still, I relied heavily on lip reading and sign language. Except this man’s mouth was covered by a

moustache and beard. I couldn't make out what he was saying. I tried to turn my hearing aid up a little.

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you," I said. The man's eyebrows rose, and he came closer, moving slowly. Had he not realized I was deaf? I'd thought that was what Mrs. Johnson had been so frantic about.

"Why are you taking pictures?" he asked slowly, making sure to enunciate each word, and speaking loudly.

I showed him my phone, where I'd been in the process of loading a few images to Instagram for the Etta Mae's account. I turned so he could watch as I typed, added my hashtags, then posted the images. Next, I did the same for Facebook and Twitter. I'd save TikTok for another time, since I'd need to create a video of the items on display. I never liked doing that when people were present.

The other man came over and started signing. *He didn't mean to scare you. We didn't realize you couldn't hear.*

I signed my response back. *It's okay.*

"Can you say that out loud?" the first man asked. "I don't know how to use sign language."

"I said it's okay." The way Mrs. Johnson winced, I knew my volume had been a little too loud. "Sorry."

"I'm Truth," the man said. "And this is Knuckles."

The one he called Knuckles signed his answer as Truth spoke. So I did the same, both speaking and signing. "I'm Madison."

Knuckles patted Truth on the shoulder. They took their order from Mrs. Johnson and walked out without another word. But I did see the way Truth looked back at me over his shoulder as he approached his motorcycle. Butterflies swarmed in my stomach, and I wondered why they'd stopped to speak with me.

Mrs. Johnson caught my attention and started signing. *That was close. When you didn't respond, the man called Truth nearly lost it. He called you some ugly names and threatened you.*

My brow furrowed. Really? He hadn't seemed like the type to do something like that. Then again, anyone who'd met my brother before he'd become a junkie would have thought he was a sweet kid. As the saying went, you couldn't judge a book by its cover, and you most certainly couldn't judge people based on their looks. Truth's eyes had been intense, yet I hadn't sensed any hostility from him.

He seemed nice, I signed.

Mrs. Johnson shook her head and held her hands up, clearly done with the conversation. I felt the vibration of their motorcycles and watched as they drove down the street. Truth glanced my way one last time, and I'd have sworn he had a smile on his face.

I didn't know what to make of the man. Why had he called out to me? I paused and wondered if I should ask Mrs. Johnson. As much as she seemed to dislike him, I wasn't sure if she'd tell me. Shrugging it off, I went back to the office to finish the rest of my shift. When lunch rolled around, it was time to clock out and head home. I dreaded the idea of walking into the pigsty of a house, especially if my brother had finally woken up.

Mrs. Johnson had several customers, so I waved as I left the bakery. If I'd thought it was hot in the morning, I now felt like I might turn into a puddle before I'd even made it halfway home. Sweat drenched my clothes and plastered my hair to my head by the time I reached my house. I let myself in, and breathed a sigh of relief when I didn't see my brother. Of course, he could have just been elsewhere in the house, so I stayed alert.

He either woke up groggy and somewhat sweet, or mean as hell. There didn't seem to be an in-between with Justin. I went straight to my

bedroom and put away my purse. As much as I wanted a shower, I needed to do something about the house first. I refused to live in a place that smelled like a trash dump.

In the kitchen, I pulled out the box of trash bags and placed it on the counter, knowing I'd need more than one. First, I collected the bottles in the living room and scoured the rest of the house to make sure he hadn't left some anywhere else. I dumped the bag into the outside trash can, before collecting the rest of the garbage around the house. Full ashtrays, food wrappers, a handful of empty soda cans. Every time I thought I was nearly done, I'd find more garbage. By the time I'd filled another two bags and deposited them into the bin outside, I still had to wipe down the coffee table, scrub the kitchen, and give the bathroom a thorough cleaning. We had to share one, and Justin had always been gross.

My back ached, and I felt ready to sleep for a month by the time I'd finished, but at least the house didn't smell awful and looked respectable again. Until he came home and trashed the place once more. Some days, I ignored it and hid in my room, unable to go through the intense cleaning spree every single day.

I checked the freezer and saw we still had some frozen chicken breasts left. I pulled out three and placed them in a pan of warm water to thaw a bit. Setting out a box of pasta, two jars of marinara sauce, a few seasonings, and making sure we had shredded cheese, I at least had figured out dinner for tonight. And possibly lunch tomorrow, if Justin didn't eat everything or bring home friends. More than once, he and his buddies had eaten all our food, leaving me with nothing even though I'd been the one to buy the groceries and cook the meal. I'd recently started keeping a few packs of ramen stashed in my room for emergencies. At least I only needed water to cook it, and since I paid the utility bills, I could guarantee I'd have at least

that much to work with.

My stomach cramped and I knew I needed to eat something between now and then. Grabbing the bread from the cabinet, I slathered two pieces with butter, and quickly ate them, washing them down with a glass of water. It would take the chicken a little bit to thaw, so I went to take a shower.

I didn't plan to leave the house again, but I didn't feel comfortable going around in my pajamas, not when Justin and his friends could come in anytime. I picked out a pair of knit shorts and a soft tee before going into the bathroom and locking the door. When our parents had been alive, I'd enjoyed taking showers and relaxing under the hot spray. Not so much anymore. Now I tried to get clean as quickly as possible and get out. I couldn't trust Justin or the people he let into our house.

More than once, he'd been so high, he hadn't recognized me. I'd been terrified as he groped me, until my struggles and shouts finally got through to him. He'd backed off, like he'd been doused in water. The second time, he'd passed out before he could do much. And the third, I'd thrown beer in his face. Of course, he'd wanted to kill me for wasting his beer, but at least he'd stopped what he was doing. Since then, I didn't feel safe in my own home. Even locking the doors still left me feeling uneasy. It wouldn't take much for a man to break through the flimsy locks. As thankful as I was to Mrs. Johnson for hiring me, the pay wasn't enough for me to move out on my own.

After I got dressed and combed out my hair, I opened the bathroom door and shrieked in surprise. A large figure loomed over me, and I took a hasty step back. My heart calmed its frantic pace when I saw it was Justin's best friend. Not that Ollie was an upstanding guy, but he'd never tried to hurt me. He was the best out of the guys Justin hung out with. Even when he got drunk or high, he still treated me like a kid sister, which was more than I

could say for my own brother.

“Sorry,” he mouthed, exaggerating the word.

“It’s okay,” I said.

He moved out of the way, and I went to the kitchen to check on dinner. Thankfully, I only saw Justin and Ollie in the house. As long as they didn’t invite anyone else over, there would be enough food for me to eat too. I removed the chicken from the water, and realized while they weren’t entirely thawed, it was enough they wouldn’t flood the pan with a ton of water when the ice melted.

I preheated the oven and put the chicken into more hot water. When the oven flashed the correct temperature, I put the chicken breasts into a glass baking dish and slid it into the oven. Using the timer function on my fitness tracker, I set it for twenty minutes.

It had been a gift from Mrs. Johnson. While I didn’t really exercise, I liked the fact it alerted me by vibrating on my wrist which meant I could set a timer to cook, and I’d feel it go off. I also used it for other things, and it was kind of fun to see how many steps I’d taken each day. If I had the money for it, I’d get one of those Apple smartwatches, but those were certainly out of my price range.

Justin stumbled into the kitchen and sloppily signed, *What’s for dinner?*

I responded back in sign, *chicken parmesan. It won’t be ready for about an hour.*

He turned and left, and I noticed Ollie watching from the doorway. “There’s enough for all three of us. You can stay for dinner.”

He flashed me a quick smile before following my brother. I wasn’t sure if Ollie was the one who got my brother into this mess or not, but they were definitely in it together now. I only wished Justin could be more like his

friend. At least Ollie treated me decently.

By the time dinner was done, all I wanted to do was eat and go curl up in bed with a book. We didn't have money to buy any, but I did sometimes go to the thrift store, and I'd catch a few on sale for only fifty cents or a dollar. I'd pick a few new ones and devour them within a day or two. My little shelf in my room had fifteen titles, and I'd read them all. Didn't matter. I'd read them over and over. It was my only escape from the misery of my life.

If the library had been closer, I'd have gone there to borrow books. For that matter, I'd have gladly sat there to read in peace and quiet for an hour or two a day. Unfortunately, it was too far for me to walk, and I couldn't drive there. Bryson Corners might not be the smallest town in the state, but we also didn't have public transportation. The only places I could go had to be close enough for me to walk.

Maybe one day things would change. Until then, I'd be content with my fifteen books, and if I was lucky, I'd be able to get another new one with my next paycheck. I mostly loved romances, but I also had a few mysteries and thrillers. Tonight, I wanted to re-read my favorite shifter romance. And if I compared the hero to the biker from before, well... no one but me would ever know.

Then again, with all that hair, he probably wouldn't be a wolf. No, he would be a bear shifter or maybe a lion. I smiled and started devouring every word on the page until my eyes grew too heavy and I had no choice but to sleep.

Chapter Two

Truth

“Glad to see you aren’t always a dick,” Knuckles said. “Good to know even you feel bad after yelling at a deaf woman.”

“I thought she was being a stuck-up bitch and ignoring me. You know the women in this town either hate us or want to fuck us.”

Knuckles winced. “I’d rather not put *all* the women into those two categories. The thought of an eighty-year-old grandma naked in my bed is enough to make me skip a few meals. Well, maybe not someone on par with Raquel Welch. That woman will be sexy no matter her age.”

“Fine, smartass. All women under the age of sixty either hate us or want to fuck us,” I amended.

“Better. Still not accurate, but I can live with it,” Knuckles said. “You know, not all women are like the sluts at the clubhouse. You tend to bite off the head of every woman you meet. Except with Jane. You were different with her.”

“Don’t even go there,” I said. “She wasn’t the same as the others.”

“Maybe the woman at the bakery is one of the good ones too. You won’t know unless you give her a chance. I didn’t see a ring on her finger.”

“What are you? A fucking matchmaker?”

He flipped me off and I grinned at him. He wasn’t entirely wrong, though. I hadn’t given anyone a chance since Jane. The deaf woman wasn’t stunning. In fact, I didn’t know why I’d even noticed her. Her blonde hair was a warm honey color, and she’d been pretty enough, but she wasn’t the type to make a man take a second look. Except... I had. At first, I’d been

pissed, thinking she was a stuck-up bitch and ignoring me because I'm a biker. Then I'd realized she was deaf, and the way she'd looked at me had left me speechless. For the first time in my life, I'd suddenly wanted to protect someone.

Sure, I'd had the same thought about Jane, after I found out what happened to her. Up to that point, though, I had never felt like she needed me to watch over her. Madison might have a disability, but she seemed to do okay on her own. She had a job, and she'd been able to understand... wait. No, she hadn't. Knuckles had signed what I'd been saying.

"Why do you know sign language?" I asked.

"When I was a kid, there was a deaf boy who lived next door. I felt sorry for him because no one would bother to learn sign language, then made fun of him for not understanding when they spoke to him. So I learned how to speak with him."

"Who knew you had such a soft side?" I asked. He punched me in the shoulder, and I laughed at him, even though it hurt like a bitch! We didn't call him Knuckles for no reason.

Sign language, huh? I doubted it would be something I could pick up quickly. "How else could I communicate with someone who can't hear?"

"She has a hearing aid, so I think she can hear a little. Just speak slowly. And maybe trim up the forest on your face. I bet she reads lips, except no one could find yours right now."

I rolled my eyes at him. My beard wasn't *that* wild. Sure, I hadn't bothered grooming it lately. I could admit I did need to trim it a little, especially the hair covering my top lip. "I'll take care of it."

He grinned. "So does this mean you're going to go see her again? Maybe ask her out this time?"

"Let's not be too hasty. You said she wasn't wearing a ring, but we

both know it doesn't mean she's necessarily single. I'll go buy some more muffins or something. Might take a few visits before I can figure out if she'd even be open to me seeing her outside her place of work."

Knuckles stared at me with his brow furrowed. "Where the hell did you put the real Truth? Because there's no way he'd ever say something like that about a woman. He'd just club her over the head and drag her off to his cave or push her against the nearest wall for a quick fuck, then move on."

"Like you said. Not all women are the same. I know the Pres and several others are tired of my shit when it comes to women. I'm sorry I don't immediately trust someone just because they have a pussy. I think we can agree women can be traitorous snakes."

Knuckles shrugged. "Some, but not all. And I think Madison is one of the sweet ones."

I took a swallow of my soda and bit into one of the cookies we'd picked up. Every now and then, someone from the club went by Etta Mae's to buy some sweets for the clubhouse. Today had been mine and Knuckles' turn. Had anyone else met Madison during one of their trips to the bakery? She'd come out from the back, and it looked like she handled things like their social media and maybe their website. Did she only do office work? Was that why I hadn't seen her there before?

"I don't know how old she is, but since Solena has lived here for a while and looks to be close to the same age, you could ask her about Madison," Knuckles said. "Get a little more info before you go back."

A hand slammed down on my shoulder. "What are we asking my wife about?"

I shrugged off Atilla's hand. "Knuckles thought she might know the young woman who works in the office at the bakery."

"Madison," Atilla said.

I turned to face him. What the fuck? “You know her?”

“I’ve seen her there before. Mrs. Johnson explained the girl works in the office and can’t hear. That’s pretty much all I know. But Knuckles is right. Solena may know more about her. Why?” Atilla eyed me. Yeah, I knew I had a bad rep when it came to women. He wouldn’t let me forget it anytime soon either. “If you hurt that girl, I will personally bury your ass where no one will ever find you.”

“Fucking hell, Pres. I’m not a complete asshole.”

“But he did yell at her,” Knuckles said. “And called her a few names.”

I shot him a glare before focusing on Atilla again. “I thought she was ignoring me, until I found out she’s deaf.”

“He’s sweet on her,” Knuckles said, smirking.

I wanted to pound on the fucker to get him to shut up. I shifted on the barstool and couldn’t deny what he said. It was true. I did like Madison, or at least what little I knew so far. One look into her eyes, and I’d wanted to put my arms around her and keep her safe from all the ugliness in the world. Which was something I’d never felt in my entire life before.

“I think she’s nice, and there’s something about her that drew me in,” I admitted. Before the men in our club started settling down with families, I’d have never uttered those words. Things were different now. I knew Atilla would understand. Same for Lynx and Maui. Was that how they’d felt when they’d met their women? “I just wanted to find out more about her. She may not even be single.”

Atilla folded his arms and studied me. I thought he was going to warn me away from her, but his next words shocked the hell out of me.

“Go back to the bakery tomorrow. Get a variety of cookies for the kids and stop by the house. You can ask Solena whatever you want in regard

to Madison. But if she doesn't know anything, leave it at that. Don't pester her, Casey, or Meredith."

"All right, Pres. And thanks."

He grunted and walked off, heading to the back of the clubhouse. I finished my soda and stood, giving Knuckles a slap on the back. I had some work to do before morning came around. For one, I needed to trim my beard and possibly get a haircut. Second, I should come up with a plan, aside from bribing Solena for information on Madison. Something told me if things worked out with her, I'd have to fight the club for the right to keep her. To say I'd been a total dick would be an understatement. If anyone here deserved to find a good woman and settle down, it would be pretty much everyone except me.

Didn't help I still felt guilty as fuck over what happened to Jane. There was a chance she'd have ended up like all the others and proven herself to be a cheater, or to be using me in some way. Since she'd died, I'd never know. I also had to wonder if she'd have ended up in the brothel if I hadn't been dating her. Had they chosen her because of her connection to me? I'd never gotten any answers. As much as I'd wanted to beat the fuck out of Shepherd and get every detail out of him about Jane, he'd never given up his secrets. At least not when it came to Jane.

I got on my bike and headed home. I kept a small, sharp pair of scissors in the bathroom drawer for the times I wanted to keep myself from looking like Grizzly Adams. It had been a long time since I gave a shit about my looks. Women threw themselves at me whether I was an asshole or looked like I'd just crawled out of a cave for the first time in twenty years. The power of a Harley Davidson shouldn't be overlooked. The mere sound of the engine seemed to be enough to make panties drop. If that didn't do it, then my cut did. They liked the thrill of being with someone in a motorcycle

club.

I parked my bike in the carport and went inside. Cleo greeted me with a soft meow and rubbed against my ankles.

“Hey, girl. How’s my sweetheart?” I asked, leaning down to scratch her ear. I picked her up and cradled her against my chest. I’d found her six months ago. Some asshole had beaten her, popped her eyeball, and cut her up pretty bad. The vet hadn’t been sure she’d make it. If I hadn’t heard her pitiful cries, she’d have died amongst the trash in an alley. Now my sweet girl had one eye sewn shut and they’d had to remove one of her front legs.

She purred and cuddled against me as I carried her back to my room. I placed her on the bed, where she immediately curled up and closed her eye. Even after all these months, she still became anxious when I left the house. The vet said that red tabby females weren’t common. They’d called her a boy when I’d first walked in holding her. Once I’d gotten to know her better, I’d named her Cleo, short for Cleopatra, because the girl acted like a queen once she’d settled in a bit.

In the bathroom, I pulled out my beard comb and the scissors. Combing my moustache down, I tightened my upper lip and carefully trimmed the hair. It took a few times of combing and trimming before I had it even and a length I thought would be good for Madison to be able to read my lips. I went ahead and combed out the rest of my beard and realized the entire thing needed to be cleaned up. I kept trimmers under my sink, but if I was going to get a haircut anyway, I might as well ask the barber to handle it.

The next time I saw Madison, I wanted to be able to talk to her without needing someone’s help. Which meant I also needed to look up some videos on basic sign language. Until I knew if this was going to work between us, I wouldn’t entirely immerse myself in it, but it wouldn’t hurt to learn a few things. There was a chance I might need the skill at some point.

“Jesus. I barely spoke to her, so why the hell is my heart racing at the mere thought of seeing her again?” I stared at my reflection. What had she thought about me? She hadn’t seemed scared. Of course, I hadn’t exactly seen desire in her eyes either. More like curiosity. I could live with that, for now.

I stopped long enough to give Cleo a kiss on top of her head, then went back outside to my bike. The barber wasn’t too far away, and he allowed walk-ins. I only had to hope the place wasn’t packed. If there was one thing I hated more than catty ass bitches it was having to wait for an hour or more -- for any reason. I didn’t do long waits for food, haircuts, or even medical appointments. Life was too short to spend it sitting on your ass waiting for something.

By the time I’d gotten my hair and beard trimmed, my stomach was rumbling. I stopped at a burger place before heading home. Cleo would be pissed I didn’t get her anything, but the vet made it clear fast food was bad for her. Instead, I paid a mint for her expensive ass kibble and treats, all approved by her doctor. My little queen had to be the most spoiled kitty in Bryson Corners. She had two cat trees, and so many damn toys I was always stepping on them. At least, I had until I’d figured out how smart she was. Now Cleo had a toy box and she literally picked up her toys and put them away.

Until her, I’d never realized cats were capable of something like that. If my brothers knew I scrolled through TikTok to watch cat videos, they’d give me shit for the rest of my life. It had been the place where I’d gotten the idea for the toy box. Although, I hadn’t expected her to pick them up herself.

My phone rang right as I pulled into my carport, and I turned off the bike before answering.

“This is Truth,” I said when it connected.

“You need to head over to Murphy’s, and I mean right the fuck now,” Knuckles said.

“Why? We have perfectly good beer at the clubhouse. Why would I want to go to that shithole?”

“Because your girl is there, and it looks like she’s in some serious trouble. I’m banned so I can’t go inside. Some guy pulled up in a clunker, hauled her out of the passenger seat, and dragged her inside. I think she’s drugged, Truth.”

“Son of a bitch,” I muttered. “I’m on my way. Don’t let anyone leave with her.”

“I’ll stay and watch the place.”

I backed down the driveway, and flew down the street inside the compound, not even slowing as I approached the gates. If the Prospect hadn’t opened it fast enough, I’d have driven right through the damn thing. The second I hit the main road, I shifted gears and opened up the bike, eating up the pavement at more than thirty miles over the speed limit. I dared a fucker to pull me over right now.

I might not know Madison, but I’d be damned if I’d let anyone hurt her. Whoever had her, they’d better have their affairs in order. By the time I finished with the fucker, he’d be lucky to be alive. Fury filled me at the thought of her being drugged and helpless. Everyone knew what went down at Murphy’s. The cops hadn’t shut the place down due to lack of evidence, but it didn’t mean bad shit didn’t happen. The owner was just good at keeping all the trash hidden from public view. A bouncer at the door wouldn’t let in anyone who didn’t look like they belonged there.

I skidded to a stop in the parking lot, put down the kickstand, and shut off the bike. I saw Knuckles in the shadows but didn’t acknowledge him. The bouncer at the door took one look at me and stepped out of the way. I

barreled inside, ready to slaughter anyone who dared to hurt Madison.

It only took me ten seconds to find her. The greasy motherfucker holding onto her was dangerously close to getting a one-way ticket to hell.

I stomped over toward the table and glared at where he had his arm around her shoulders. The glassy gaze she lifted to mine made me growl. Fisting my hands, I took a breath and tried to rein in the rage I felt.

“Can I help you?” one of the other men at the table asked.

“Yeah. I’m here for my girlfriend, and she better not have so much as a bruise or scratch on her. Otherwise, every man at this table is about to have a very bad night.”

The one with his arm around her frowned. “What the hell are you talking about?”

I held my hand out to Madison. “Come on, honey. Let’s go.”

She gave me a big smile and placed her hand in mine, only for the man to yank her closer to him.

“Look, buddy. My sister doesn’t have a boyfriend. I don’t know what you’re playing at, but you need to leave.”

Sister? My gaze shot from him to her and back again. There were a few similarities. The fact he would do something like this to his own flesh and blood only made matters worse. What had she suffered up to this point?

“I’m not asking you. I’m *telling* you. Madison is coming with me. Now get your hands off my woman before I decide Murphy’s needs new décor.”

“What does that mean?” the brother frowned.

“It means the walls and floors will be covered in the blood of every asshole at this table.” I braced my hands on the scarred wood and leaned in closer to him, making sure to catch the gaze of all three men. “Do you think I’m lying? Think I can’t take out all three of you without breaking a sweat?”

One of them held up his hands. “I don’t care what you do with her. Justin here was just offering her up as partial payment for what he owes us. But honestly, pussy is pussy. Nothing special about the girl.”

“I’m sorry. He was doing what?” I asked.

The guy smirked. “You heard me.”

I felt someone at my back and looked over my shoulder. Rebel gave me a slight nod. I didn’t know when he’d arrived, or how he’d known I’d need help, but I was grateful for the backup. Maybe Knuckles had called him.

I nearly tore Madison away from her brother and thrust her at Rebel before fisting Justin’s shirt. I hauled the fucker out of the booth and slammed my fist into his face. His nose broke and blood ran down over his lips. I didn’t stop with one blow. I pounded the fucker until you couldn’t recognize him anymore, then kicked him in the ribs twice for good measure. My chest heaved with every breath, and still I wanted to keep going. If I didn’t worry about Madison remembering all this later, I’d have killed the bastard right here and now.

I spat on him and glared at the men. “Whatever he owes you, Madison has nothing to do with it. I even hear someone has been sniffing around her, or thinks of taking her as payment, and I will gut every last one of you motherfuckers. Am I clear?”

“Take her. We’ll make other arrangements with Justin. Assuming he survives the beating you just gave him.” I made sure to memorize each man’s face, but especially this one. He seemed to be in charge.

“How much does he owe?” I asked.

“Ten grand, but interest is accruing every day.” The man shrugged. “It’s business, nothing more.”

“If he dies, I’ll pay the debt. Keep Madison out of this shit.”

“You have my word. None of my men will hurt her.”

Something about the way he said that set me on edge. None of *his* men. Did it mean the shitty brother owed money to other people? Would they come for Madison at some point? I'd deal with it later. For now, I needed to get her the fuck out of here.

I turned my back on them, stepped on Justin's nuts on my way to the door where Rebel stood with Madison, and then took my woman in my arms. I carried her out to my bike and wondered what the hell I'd do with her now.

"I don't think she can ride," Knuckles said. "It's why I called Rebel. He brought one of the club trucks."

I hesitated a second, then handed my keys to Rebel. "Take my bike to my house. I'll drive Madison."

Knuckles smirked and I flipped him off. I was only doing it so Madison wouldn't be with a man she'd never met. At least, that's what I told myself. If I'd been honest, I'd have admitted I didn't like the idea of her riding with anyone else.

Something told me things were about to get interesting.

Chapter Three

Madison

My head pounded and I groaned as I pressed my hand to my forehead. What the hell happened? I remembered having dinner with Justin and Ollie, then... nothing. I rubbed my eyes, trying to clear my vision. A quick touch of my ear and I realized I still had my hearing aid in. I quickly removed it, anxious I may have damaged the device. It wasn't the type I really needed, but it had been the only one insurance would cover.

I shrieked when a man's face loomed in front of me. Scrambling back against the headboard, I pressed a hand to my chest as my heart raced out of control. Then I realized who he was. Truth.

"You scared me," I said. He didn't exactly wince, but I could tell from his expression I'd been incredibly loud. I put my hearing aid back in. "Sorry."

"Stop apologizing," he said slowly, and I noticed he'd trimmed his beard so I could read his lips.

"Where am I?"

"My house," he said. He held up a finger and left the room only to return a few minutes later with a notebook and pen. He held it up and I read the message. *Your brother drugged you and took you to a bar last night. Do you remember?*

What? Justin had done that? More importantly, how did Truth know? I shook my head, and he started to write something else.

Are you aware he's a drug addict who owes money to some unsavory people?

Unsavory? I smiled, liking the fact he'd used the word. Most would have called them bad people. Not Truth. Then I immediately sobered. Why had Justin done it? He'd never tried something like that before. Even if I'd been drugged, if he'd let someone hurt me, I'd have felt it the next day. Wouldn't I?

"I know he's an addict. He started using in high school."

He thumped the pen against the notebook before writing again. *He tried to use you as a way to reduce his debt. Do you understand?*

While yes, I did know what he meant, I tried to convince myself he had to be wrong. Justin wouldn't do that to me. Except, I knew my brother wasn't the same person he'd been before the drugs and alcohol. The addict very well might try to sell or trade me to get what he wanted, or to save his own ass.

He started writing again. *You can't go home. It's not safe.*

"You know I live with my brother?" I asked.

His lips pressed into a tight line, and he furiously wrote on the paper. *I do now. You definitely aren't going back there.*

I glared at him. "Why do you get a say in it?"

He smirked. *Because I told everyone in the bar you're mine.*

My cheeks warmed and I couldn't hold his gaze. His? No one had ever wanted to date me in school, or since then. Now this big, sexy biker said I belonged to him? I wasn't sure what to think or how to feel. He'd fascinated me in the bakery, and I'd thought of him even while I'd been reading.

I sucked in a sharp breath. "I'd been reading in bed. That's the last thing I remember."

I'm not sure how he drugged you, or when. I only know you had glassy eyes and looked high when I brought you home.

Justin had really done such a thing to me? Had he injected me with

something while I slept? Or had he slipped something into my food or drink when I wasn't looking? I felt betrayed and violated. As much as I hated to admit it, Truth was right. It wasn't safe for me to go home. Where else could I go? If I'd had any other options, I'd have used them by now.

I felt a gentle touch on my chin and looked at Truth. The concern in his eyes eased some of my tension. When was the last time I'd had someone worry about me? Probably not since my parents died.

"You're going to stay here," he said. "I'm not asking. I'm telling you."

He spoke slowly enough I could read his lips, and my stomach flipped when I realized what he'd said. He couldn't mean he wanted me to move in permanently, right? What sort of insane person would do something like that?

"I don't understand," I said.

He picked up the pad and pen again. *I told them you were my girlfriend. Your brother argued and said you didn't have a boyfriend. We need everyone associated with your brother to believe what I said. What kind of boyfriend would send his sweet girlfriend back into hell with a brother who tried to trade her in order to lessen a debt?*

When I read what he wrote, I understood his reasoning, even if I didn't like it. Even though I'd considered him insane for wanting to keep me here, a stranger he'd just met, I had to admit I felt a little disappointed by his reasoning. Although Mrs. Johnson said he'd called me names, I'd thought he was a good man, and he was proving me right.

But I needed to know what she'd meant. "Mrs. Johnson said you called me names and were angry when we met."

He winced. "I'm sorry."

I waited. Clearly, it was an admission he'd done that very thing, but I didn't understand why. We'd never met before. What could I have possibly

done to make him so angry? Or was he like that with everyone?

He started writing again. *I thought you were ignoring me when I was speaking to you. Mrs. Johnson said you hadn't heard me, so I shouted louder, not realizing you were deaf. I'm sorry for doing that.*

I nodded, accepting his apology. I couldn't imagine what would make him react in such a way, simply because he thought someone wasn't paying attention to him. Did he have some sort of trauma in his past? I had a physical disability, but I knew sometimes emotional scars ran much deeper than ones you could see. For now, I'd give him the benefit of the doubt. Until he proved he deserved me to be upset with him or feel offended by his actions, I'd put my faith in him. As of right now, the man was my savior. He'd rescued me last night, even though it wasn't his job to do so. He may have told everyone I was his girlfriend, but we both knew the truth. We'd met one time, and very briefly.

"I need my things," I said.

"I'll ask Knuckles to go with us. You can pack anything you want to keep. We'll take one of the club trucks." He ran the backs of his fingers down my cheek. "We'll keep you safe."

Did he have room for all my things? The only items that truly belonged to me were in my bedroom, and my bathroom items. Everything else went with the house, which meant they technically were my brother's property. My stomach knotted at the thought of him keeping all our parents' belongings. I didn't think he'd miss a few pictures, though. I could at least keep those to remember the times when things were better.

"Why are you helping me?" I asked. "You don't know me."

He smiled faintly, then picked up the pen once more. *Because I'd hoped we'd get a chance to know one another better. I'd planned to visit the bakery again this morning so we could talk more.*

Really? I held his gaze and saw he meant what he'd said, or rather written. It felt like butterflies were swooping around in my stomach, and I knew this man would be far more dangerous to me than my brother. For the first time in my life, he was giving me hope. I'd always thought no one would want a defective woman like me. Truth was proving me wrong.

Oh no! The bakery! My eyes widened and I frantically searched for my phone. Even though I couldn't call Mrs. Johnson, I could at least text her.

"What's wrong?" Truth asked.

"I'm late for work."

He shook his head, smiling again. Pulling out his phone, he showed me he was calling the bakery. I couldn't catch everything he said to Mrs. Johnson. It didn't really matter. The fact I had someone helping me, trying to support me, left me feeling a bit like the world was shifting under me. I'd never felt so off-balance before. Where had this man been all my life? Then again, he looked quite a bit older than me. Maybe I hadn't noticed him before because he'd never made his presence known to me. If he hadn't yelled behind me in the bakery yesterday, we'd have never spoken.

Mrs. Johnson might have been upset over what he'd said, but it had led to a conversation between us. Without that interaction, would he have run off to rescue me last night? Probably not. I wasn't sure anyone would have even bothered calling him. Knuckles wouldn't have had any idea who I was, so he wouldn't have noticed me at the bar. I firmly believed things happened for a reason, even my deafness. I'd been born with total hearing loss in one ear, and what they considered profound hearing loss in the other. My hearing aid enabled me to manage better than someone who was completely deaf, but not enough to communicate like a hearing person.

When he ended the call, he reached over to take my hand. I linked our fingers together, holding onto him like a lifeline. And I realized he was, at

least for me right now. Without Truth, something horrible would have happened to me. I might very well have disappeared without a trace. I owed him so much.

“Thank you,” I said. “For everything.”

“I’ve done a lot of fucked-up shit in my life, Madison. But one thing I will never condone is someone hurting an innocent woman.”

I smiled a little. “Only the bad women?”

He shrugged and didn’t respond. I wasn’t an idiot. I knew women could be every bit as deadly or mean as a man could. While it wasn’t common for a serial killer to be a woman, there was a reason that percentage wasn’t a big fat goose egg. Because there were some. At least I knew he considered me to be one of the good women, and it also gave me another clue about why he’d yelled at me. Someone had hurt Truth at some point. Might have been more than one woman. Before I could second-guess myself, I reached out and hugged him. I felt the steady *thump* of his heart against me, and the warmth of his hand where it pressed against my back.

Drawing back, I swallowed hard as I held his gaze. Why did this man make me feel so many things, and so strongly? I’d never met anyone like him before. Was this what people meant when they said they’d fallen in love at first sight? I didn’t consider myself in love with him. I might like reading books with happy endings, but even I didn’t believe in fairy tales anymore. Still... there was certainly something about him. A pull that made me want to stay by his side as long as he’d allow it.

Yeah... this man was definitely more dangerous than my brother. At least with Justin, I had a chance of escaping unscathed. But Truth? He had the ability to completely wreck me, and I didn’t think he even realized it.

“Come on. I’ll make some breakfast for us, then I’ll call Knuckles and we’ll go pack your things. Mrs. Johnson said not to worry about coming in

today, tomorrow, or the day after.”

Even though he'd spoken slowly, I'd only caught bits and pieces, but enough to put it all together. So I had some time off? While I should be excited, I could only think about how much money I'd be losing. I didn't make much to begin with. Of course, if I wasn't living with Justin anymore, I didn't have to worry about stocking the kitchen or paying the utilities. Then again, I didn't think Truth was going to let me live here for free either. We'd have to sort everything out.

I followed him to the kitchen and sat at the table while he started pulling things out of the fridge. Looked like he was going to make biscuits with bacon. No one had cooked for me since my mom died. It was nice getting to sit and not worry about feeding myself or my brother. While everything cooked, I remained silent. There wasn't much point in talking to him, when I wouldn't be able to read his lips, and he couldn't very well write out what he was saying while he flipped bacon.

I took the time to look around his kitchen. The walls were the color of butter, which brightened up the room. The table wasn't overly large but would seat four people. Did he have company over often? I wondered if he sat at this table to play cards with his friends, or if he'd brought girlfriends here and cooked for them like he was doing for me now.

Something brushed against my ankle, startling me. I looked down and saw an orange cat weaving around my legs. Truth didn't seem like the sort of man to own a cat. Bending down, I scratched behind its ear. Poor thing was missing an eye and a leg. Maybe Truth had a soft spot for anyone in trouble, be they human or animal.

He slid a plate in front of me with three biscuits and way too much bacon on it, then placed some juice beside it. I smiled my thanks and immediately pulled the biscuits open. Before he'd had a chance to put butter

and jelly on the table, I'd broken up my bacon and stuffed it inside the biscuits. I'd done this so many times when I'd been younger.

"That's Cleo," he said. "As you've seen, she's very friendly."

I took a bite of food, "It's good. Thank you for breakfast."

He winked and dug into his food. I noticed he was texting as he ate and wondered if he was talking to Knuckles. He'd mentioned asking him to come along with us. Probably because I already knew him, and the man could sign. Would Truth be willing to learn? It would certainly make it easier to speak with him. Then again, this was probably just a temporary thing. He might have said he was interested in learning more about me, but that didn't mean we'd get a happy ending.

I needed to keep myself grounded in reality. If I started daydreaming about a wedding and kids, then I'd most likely end up disappointed. Besides, did guys like him even get married? I knew a few had women and kids, but that didn't mean they believed in saying their vows and making it legal. I had so many questions. Would he be offended if I asked them? *Slow down, Madison. You can ask him stuff without blurting it all out at once.*

Right. I'd take my time. He wanted us to get to know one another, so that would be a good way to do it. I'd answer his questions, and he could answer mine. I smiled, feeling excited about the thought of having a boyfriend. We were only pretending. I knew that. It didn't mean things couldn't change, though. There was a chance I'd be his girlfriend for real one day.

"Knuckles will be here soon," he said. "I have a toothbrush you can use."

I stood and followed him back to his room and into the bathroom. He opened a drawer filled with new toothbrushes. My eyebrows rose as I stared at them. He tapped me on the shoulder to get my attention before speaking.

“I tend to buy necessities in bulk. This doesn’t mean I’ve had a ton of women in my house. In fact, you’re the first in a long time.”

I nodded, oddly pleased with that knowledge. I selected a toothbrush, and quickly cleaned my teeth. When we went outside, Truth helped me into a truck parked in the driveway, and I saw Knuckles on his motorcycle out on the street. The biker joined us, getting into the back seat next to a biker I didn’t know. His patch said his name was Rebel. I hadn’t even realized someone was already inside the vehicle.

Part of me really hoped Justin wasn’t home. And the other part... well, it would be nice for him to see I had people protecting me now. Of course, he’d already know that if Truth took me away from him last night.

I told him my address and watched the scenery pass as Truth drove. When we got to the only place I’d ever called home, my throat grew tight. Would I ever come back here again? Or would this be the last time I ever stepped foot inside my childhood home?

It was a bittersweet feeling. This place had been hell on earth since my parents died, and yet, it was still home.

Whether I was ready or not, it was time to face a new chapter in my life. I only hoped it went better than the last one. I wasn’t sure how much more I could handle.

Chapter Four

Truth

I stared at the house. The neighborhood wasn't terrible. In fact, every other house on the street seemed to be in good shape. This one, however, hadn't received proper care for a while. The lawn looked wild and had weeds growing everywhere, sections of the paint had chipped off the house, and the concrete pad in front of the door had many cracks. Weeds even sprouted along the walkway, sticking up through the center of the cement path.

Madison's hand trembled as she reached out to turn the knob. It gave easily, which meant her brother hadn't bothered to lock it. I didn't see a car in the driveway or out in front of the house on the street, so I didn't think her brother was here. Considering the sorts of men he'd been with last night, I didn't like the idea of Madison entering the house first. I placed my hand on her arm and gave Knuckles a nod to sign as I spoke.

"Honey, you need to wait a minute and let me clear the house. What if someone is hiding inside, just waiting for you to come home? You could get hurt."

She bit down on her lip and gave a slight nod before taking a step back. Knuckles placed himself in front of Madison, while Rebel stood behind her. I pulled a gun from the holster at the small of my back and entered the house, weapon outstretched in front of me as I went room by room. After every closet, underneath each bed, and any other potential hiding spots had been checked, I put my gun away and went back to the front door.

"House is clear," I said. I didn't mention the mess inside. Something told me Madison hadn't left it like this.

Knuckles entered with Madison behind him, and Rebel bringing up the rear. The resignation in Madison's eyes told me it wasn't the first time she'd walked into this particular sight. Did her brother always trash the place?

I lightly touched Madison's hand to get her attention. Knuckles moved beside me and signed for me. "What do you need to pack? Just your room, or do you need things from the rest of the house?"

"Everything belongs to my brother. My parents left him everything," she said.

Stubborn girl. "Not what I asked. You can take anything you want, Madison. Your brother isn't going to stop you, and he can't very well call the police. If he did, he'd risk getting arrested for possession. Now, tell me what needs to go with us."

The tension left her, and she gave me a slight smile. "I want some pictures, my mother's favorite baking dish, and the recipe book she inherited from my grandmother. And everything in my room except the furniture."

"You can bring that too, if you want," I said. "We'll find a spot for it."

She shifted from one foot to another. "There's a desk. The front folds down. It belonged to my great-great grandmother. I think it's called a secretary? I'd like to keep it if I can."

"Clean anything out of it and Rebel will put it in the truck for you."

"I'll grab some boxes," Rebel said. He'd had the foresight to grab some this morning before coming over. We'd all ridden here in the truck, which meant everything she took needed to fit into the bed of the vehicle.

I took Madison's hand and went with her to the bedroom. I needed to see exactly what we'd be packing. If we needed a second truck, better to find out now. I could ask someone to bring one over. Hell. I hadn't even spoken to

Atilla. He had no clue I'd told Madison to move in with me. Of course, I also hadn't cleared things up with her either. She didn't realize I planned for her to sleep in my bed. Even if all I got to do was lie next to her, it would be enough for now.

I scanned Madison's room, noting the bookshelf with well-worn paperbacks. Looked like my woman enjoyed reading. I'd have to take her shopping for some new books later. Aside from those, she had clothes, three pairs of shoes, and a handful of knickknacks on her dresser. It wouldn't take much to pack everything and get it loaded. At least we wouldn't need a second truck. On the other hand, I felt bad for how little she owned. I couldn't imagine what her life must have been like living with an addict.

"Rebel is getting the boxes. Why don't you start in here with anything you don't want the rest of us to touch? I need to make a quick call." I kissed her temple and walked out, but not before I saw her cheeks turn pink and heard her soft gasp. I smiled, enjoying her reaction.

"Did we bring enough?" Rebel asked in the hallway, holding an armful of flat boxes and a roll of tape.

"I think we'll be okay. Set up a few boxes for her, then ask what she needs you to do. I'm going to call Atilla."

His eyes went wide. "Holy shit. You didn't talk to him about her moving in with you?"

I shrugged and kept going, not stopping until I'd reached the truck. I leaned against the side and called the Pres, wondering how much he was going to chew me out. Even he would agree Madison couldn't stay here. Didn't mean he'd like the thought of her living with me, though. I'd fucked up too many times.

"This better be important," he said when the call connected. "Like the reason you needed two of your brothers and a truck this morning. Or why

someone saw a woman leaving your house.”

Well, fucking hell. Someone already ratted me out. Bastards!

“Morning, Pres.”

“Seriously, Truth. What the hell is going on?” he asked.

I wished I had a beer right about now. This wouldn't be a fun conversation, and as much as I didn't want to have it out here in the open, I didn't want to risk Madison finding out either. The last thing she needed was the stress over worrying if she really did have a place to stay.

“Remember me asking you about Madison yesterday?”

“Boy, I'm not that fucking old yet. My memory works just fine.”

“Sorry, Pres. Look, Knuckles gave me a call last night. He knew Madison piqued my interest, and he thought she might be in trouble. So I went to check things out. Found her drugged and about to be traded. Her brother wanted to use her to knock down the debt he owed to someone rather questionable. But it's what the guy said that set me on edge. He swore *his* men wouldn't accept her as payment going forward. Meaning, the shithead brother probably owes multiple people money. She's not safe in her own home, Pres.”

Atila sighed. “Goddamnit, Truth. I can't very well tell you no. Not without being an asshole. The club isn't going to like this. Not after everything you've said and done since...”

“Since Jane,” I said. “I'm aware. Can you let the club know she'll be living with me, and that she's deaf?”

“I'll call Church. Clearly you, Knuckles, and Rebel will be exempt this time. Give me an hour and everyone will be up to speed, and I'll knock some sense into anyone who decides to start shit over you having a woman. I'm assuming you're claiming her.”

I smiled. “Yeah. She doesn't realize it, though. We only met

yesterday. I need time. She's not the sort to just accept that she's mine. I told her she needs to pretend to be my girlfriend in order to stay safe, but I think I can win her over during that time."

"You fucking better. For now, I'll tell them she's staying with you. We'll talk about her being your old lady another time."

He hung up without another word and I went back inside to help Madison. By the time I got back to her bedroom, she'd already filled a box with clothes and struggled to tape it closed. I took the roll from her.

"Press the flaps down," I said. She followed my instructions, and I taped the box shut before loading her books into one of the smaller boxes. Pulling out my phone, I checked the hours for the local bookstore. It looked like we'd have sufficient time. Even though she'd have plenty of things to put away when we got home, I wanted to get her some new books to read.

It didn't take long to pack up everything she wanted to take. Rebel loaded most of it into the truck, then Madison did one last walk-through, saying goodbye to her childhood home. As much as I wished things had been different for her, I wondered if she'd have ever given a guy like me a chance if she hadn't needed my protection. Probably not.

Once we reached the compound, Rebel and Knuckles helped us unload. I hadn't thought to ask Atilla if I could hold onto the truck a little longer, but I didn't think he'd mind. I wanted Madison on the back of my bike, but I didn't think she would be ready for that just yet. Plus, I didn't want to limit how much she bought while we were out. I wondered if she knew how to drive. Was it even possible for her to, or would it be too dangerous if she couldn't hear things like a car horn or a siren? I'd have to ask her or look into the requirements. Either way, I'd need a vehicle other than my bike. One I'd fit into, and not some tiny-ass car.

Then again, if she could drive, I'd want something she felt

comfortable in. Would she be okay with an SUV or truck? First I'd talk to her about it, then I'd research some vehicles. It wasn't like we were rushing out to buy something today. I had a feeling I'd have to fight her to accept something as expensive as a vehicle anyway.

Rebel placed the last box in my bedroom and waved as he walked out. Which left Knuckles. He and Madison were having a conversation in sign language, but both were speaking as they signed so I could follow along. I really did need to learn how to communicate with her. I'd never done well in school with foreign languages, but maybe this time would be different. Something involving my hands instead of my tongue might be easier for me.

"Madison, I'd like to take you somewhere. I know today had to be stressful for you, and I want to make it better," I said, facing her and letting Knuckles sign what I said.

"Where?" she asked.

"Bookstore."

Her eyes lit up and she clapped her hands together, then she immediately sobered. "But it's expensive."

"Then what if I give you a limit? Ten new books?"

Her mouth dropped open. "Ten? Do you know how much that costs?"

Not really. I read on occasion. Manga counted, right? No one in my club knew about my secret addiction. Then again, more than half probably didn't even know what it was. I doubted anyone else read Japanese comics or graphic novels. I had three apps on my phone dedicated to reading those stories. If I'd had any of the paperbacks in my house, my brothers would have given me shit about it. I figured if I dropped a hundred dollars a month on my reading habit, then there wasn't any reason I couldn't do the same for Madison.

"Then what if I said you could buy one hundred dollars worth of

books?” She stared at me. Not saying a word. I wondered if I’d just broken her. “Is that too much?”

“Of course, it is!” She shouted the words, and I fought not to wince. I knew she could be sensitive about her volume when speaking.

“Well, we can discuss it more when we get there. I’m sure they have some on sale if you’re worried about the cost. Do you ever read on your phone?”

Her cheeks turned pink. “I couldn’t buy them. I don’t have a credit card. When I bought our groceries or paid the utilities, I always used cash.”

Right. Working part time at the bakery probably didn’t line her pockets with extra cash. Not when she had to be responsible for so much at home. Things were going to change for her. Not only would I keep her safe, but she wouldn’t have to worry about paying bills any longer. I wouldn’t stop her from working, if it was something she enjoyed, but I wanted her to use that money for things she wanted and not what she needed. It was my job to handle all necessities. Of course, I still had to convince her of that.

“We can talk about it more later. Right now, do you want to shower and change? I think we’re all sweaty from packing and moving your stuff.”

Knuckles turned to me. “Even though I’ve been signing for you, I’m going to let the two of you go out on your own. You seemed to communicate just fine before I got here today.”

“I need to learn how to sign.”

He patted my shoulder. “Ask her to teach you. But I’m willing to help too. It’s nice, seeing these changes in you. I think everyone will be pleased with this new side of Truth.”

“Fuck off, asshole,” I grumbled.

Knuckles told Madison bye, and then the two of us were left alone. I offered her the shower first, and then quickly washed up and changed. Before

we left, I took a second to send a text to Atilla to let him know I'd need to hold onto the truck for another few days, then I drove Madison to the bookstore. I'd noticed the books on her shelf had price stickers from the thrift store on them, except for a few that she must have bought brand new.

The cool air felt great when we entered the store. Madison stared at everything, cheeks pink from her excitement. I followed behind as she checked out all the displays up front before wandering through each section. Since she didn't seem to like just one genre, I hoped she would pick a variety of books. No matter how many books she picked up, she always put them back down and didn't select anything.

"Nothing you want to read?" I asked.

"They're expensive," she said.

I picked up the last one she'd shown interest in, noting it was less than fifteen dollars. Handing it to her, I grabbed another title I remembered out of the ones she'd looked enthusiastic about.

"Now, that's a start. I want you to pick at least two more. If you aren't comfortable buying more than that, then we'll check out and leave. But I was dead serious when I gave you a hundred-dollar limit. Four books isn't going to bankrupt me, Madison. After everything you've been through, you need a way to escape reality for a bit."

Her brow furrowed, and I knew I'd said too much too fast, so I repeated it at a much slower pace so she could read my lips. She gave me a bashful smile and an awkward hug before selecting two more books. The woman was far too sweet for someone like me. Too bad. I never planned to let her go. Her asshole brother had given me the perfect opening. Now I had her in my home, and I'd show her how good I could be to her. I'd make sure she never wanted to leave.

After the bookstore, we stopped at the grocery store, where I had to

battle with her again. The woman didn't like to spend my money and checked the price tag on every single item she touched. This wasn't going to be easy. Short of showing her the balance on my account, I didn't know how to make her understand I could afford to take care of her. At the same time, I worried if she knew exactly how much money I had, it might scare her off.

One day at a time. I'd call this a victory for now.

Tomorrow would most likely present an entirely different set of issues.

I smiled. No. Tonight would, when she realized we were sleeping in the same bed. Anticipation hummed in my veins. I'd knock down her walls, one by one. Sure, I knew I was moving too fast for the average person. Nothing about our situation was remotely normal. I only needed her to see it that way too.

You're mine, little angel, whether you realize it yet or not.

* * *

Madison

He'd taken me to a bookstore, and insisted I get several new books to read. I still couldn't believe it. Even when my parents had been alive, they hadn't let me splurge like he had today. Then again, no one else in my family had loved reading as much as I did. The fact he'd asked if I read on an app made me wonder if he read frequently on his phone. If we read the same things, we could have discussions about our favorite titles and characters. I felt giddy at the prospect of having someone to talk to about my favorite subject.

Truth had put the groceries away while I unpacked. When he'd cleared out room in his closet and dresser for me, I'd hesitated. It didn't make sense for us to share a room in his house. He'd taken me in when I had

nowhere else to go, had saved me at the risk of his own life, and I knew he was a good man. He'd proven it to me several times over in the short amount of time we'd known one another.

I eyed the bed. The same one I'd woken up in this morning, and I realized Truth slept on the opposite side. Had he been next to me last night and I hadn't realized it? Were we supposed to share the bed tonight? I didn't know what he expected from me. Not once had he mentioned sex.

You can sit here and worry about it, or go ask him. Right. No point in giving myself an ulcer over something that might not even be an issue. I could be inventing problems where there weren't any.

I called out his name so he'd know I was looking for him and searched each room. The last thing I'd expected was to find him in the second bedroom putting a bookshelf together. Cleo sat nearby, watching his every move. It surprised me that she wasn't trying to play with the loose screws or tools.

Two bookshelves already sat against the walls. He had three more huge boxes he hadn't even opened, and according to the writing or pictures on them, two contained chairs and the third had a small table. What was he doing?

"What's all this?" I asked.

"I'm making a library for you. Your books can go on the shelves, and you can sit in here to read whenever you want some alone time." He held my gaze. "If you're wondering why I didn't order bedroom furniture instead, we'll discuss it later. But I want you to know I will never hurt you, and I won't take anything you don't offer, so please don't think I'm going to force myself on you or something."

I held up a hand. "Speak slower. You sometimes go so fast it's hard for me to catch everything when I read your lips."

His gaze shot to my ear and he nodded, realizing I didn't have my hearing aid in. The battery had been low since I hadn't turned it off last night. I'd been amazed it lasted as long as it did. One of these days, I'd get the one I really needed, but it was roughly two thousand dollars, and I certainly couldn't afford it. Insurance refused to cover the cost, which was why I had some that were only a fourth of the price.

"I can't wear my hearing aid again until tomorrow," I said.

"Can you hear anything at all without it?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Even with it, I can barely hear out of that ear. I'm completely deaf in the other one. Am I yelling right now?"

He smirked and nodded. My cheeks warmed, but he hadn't said anything until I'd asked, so it clearly didn't bother him. I couldn't ever remember feeling so comfortable around someone before. Especially a stranger. Even my parents had made me feel self-conscious about my hearing loss. Although, could you call it a loss if you'd never had it to begin with? I'd been born deaf.

I sat on the floor, crossed my legs, and leaned back against the wall. Even if we couldn't talk right now, I could at least watch him work. Cleo ambled over and plopped down next to me. I petted her soft fur while we waited for Truth to finish. It only took him a moment to get back to putting the bookshelf together. Once he'd assembled it, he placed it alongside the other two. Even though he'd centered them on the wall, I could tell there would be space for at least one more. Not that I needed all those shelves with my meager collection. Why had he gone to so much trouble for someone only living with him temporarily? His thoughtfulness warmed my heart.

It didn't take much to put the chairs together, and he only had to screw the legs into the table. He placed it between the chairs in the center of the room. Truth folded his arms and stared at them before shifting them over

to a wall. When he faced me again, he started speaking once he had my attention.

“I’ll get a lamp for the table. Or maybe a floor lamp.”

“Thank you. I love it.” I didn’t get a chance to stand up before he’d left and returned with my box of books, as well as my sack of new ones. I eagerly placed them on the shelves. “It’s perfect.”

Truth placed his hands on my hips and tugged me back against his chest. I tipped my head to look up at him and saw him staring at my books. The look on his face seemed... I couldn’t quite put it into words. But something told me he was pleased with the way the room turned out. Or perhaps it was more that he liked having my things here? I might not be experienced when it came to men, but even I could feel there was something between us. It had been an instant spark of attraction, and the more time I spent with him, the more I wanted to stay by his side. I wanted to know everything about him.

He stepped back and took my hand, leading me to the kitchen. A pad and pen sat in the middle of the table. He grabbed both and quickly wrote something, then showed it to me.

*It’s still too early for dinner, but do you want to eat here or go out?
I’m fine with either.*

He’d already spent so much on me today! I hated to ask for more, but was it really any better asking him to cook? I could do it. Would he even let me? I’d discovered most people equated my deafness to be completely helpless, or stupid.

“I can cook dinner for us,” I said.

He reached over to cup my cheek before writing again. *I’d rather you rest tonight. You’ve had a long day with a lot of changes. Why don’t I order something? Pizza? Chinese?*

I'd never had Chinese food before. I wouldn't even know what to order. And pizza... It reminded me of Justin. When our parents first died, he ordered a pizza nearly every night for dinner, since he couldn't cook. Truth seemed to sense my hesitation with either option. He started writing again.

Or I could get someone to run out and grab some burgers for us. They won't mind.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

What do you want to order? Ever been to Big Bob's?

I hadn't, but I'd heard they were really good. I wrote down an order for a cheeseburger, fries, and soda. I didn't know if I could eat it all. My stomach had shrunk due to the lack of food at the house. My check only went so far.

Truth texted someone from his phone, then sat down at the table. He pushed out the chair beside him and I took a seat.

Is this easier than trying to read my lips? I read his message and nodded.

Can you teach me to sign?

Wow. Mrs. Johnson had learned a little. My brother had learned it along with my parents when I was just a baby. Except for them, no one had bothered to even try. It wasn't like they could use sign language as often as Spanish. To me, it was not only a useful skill, but a required one. To everyone else, not so much.

"I'd love to teach you." I signed as I spoke.

We spent the next half hour going over some basic words and phrases. By the time our food arrived, he'd picked up enough that I thought he might be fluent within a month. I didn't even make it all the way through dinner before I started yawning. It looked like Truth had been right about me having a long day. I'd woken up in a strange place, discovered my brother betrayed

me in one of the worst ways, and had my life turned upside down.

By all rights, I should be freaking out. Instead, I felt oddly calm. For most people, a big guy like Truth would be scary. Instead of intimidating, I found his size to be comforting. When he'd put his arms around me earlier, I'd known no one would hurt me. Not as long as he stood by my side.

"Ready for bed?" he asked, signing the word *bed*.

"Yes. I'm sorry. I didn't realize I was so tired."

He put our dishes in the sink, rinsed them, then came to take my hand. He led me to the bedroom.

"You change. I'll make sure the doors are locked."

He left, shutting the bedroom door behind him, and I quickly changed into my pajamas. I'd already brushed my teeth and washed my face by the time Truth returned. He grabbed a pair of basketball shorts from the dresser and went into the bathroom. While I waited for him, I got into bed on the same side I'd woken up on this morning. My heart pounded in my chest. I still didn't know if we'd slept beside each other last night. Even if we had, this was my first time knowingly sleeping next to a man. I found it both nerve-racking and thrilling.

Truth came out, turning off the bathroom light, then the bedroom light. He got into bed and reached over, lacing our hands together. I watched as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath before releasing it. Within a few minutes, I felt the vibrations of snoring and realized he'd fallen asleep already.

Any tension I'd felt up to that point, immediately went away. I turned onto my side, still holding his hand. A little moonlight filtered through the blinds, bathing his face in the silvery light. When we'd first met, his beard had been so wild I couldn't read his lips. He'd not only trimmed it, but it looked like he'd gotten a haircut too. Had all that been for me?

You treat me like I'm normal. No one's done that before.

I watched him for another few minutes before closing my eyes and going to sleep.

Chapter Five

Truth

The moment she fell asleep, I opened my eyes. I couldn't believe she'd thought I was actually asleep. Communicating with Madison wasn't easy. Of course, all the good things in life were usually hard to obtain, or you had to fight for them. I'd go to hell and back for the woman lying beside me. When Lynx said he'd known Meredith was it for him within minutes of meeting her, I'd thought he was fucking crazy. Same for Atilla and Maui. Then I'd met Madison. Now I understood all too well.

She took my breath away. It wasn't her looks, although I found her to be quite pretty. No, it was her spirit, and her sweetness. Despite everything dumped on her, she still found a reason to smile every day. She'd been kind to me, even when I'd yelled at her in the bakery.

Most women would have woken up screaming or losing their shit over being in a stranger's house. Not her. She'd taken it all in stride. Although, I had to wonder how much of that had to do with living with an addict all these years. How much had he put her through for her to be able to just roll with the punches? Cleo jumped onto the bed and curled up by our feet. She'd already accepted Madison as part of our family. The fact my two girls got along made me smile. No matter how much I wanted Madison to be mine, if she'd hated Cleo, I wasn't sure what I'd have done. There was no way I'd throw out my sweet cat.

“You're an incredible woman, Madison. I hope you know that. If you don't, I'll make sure you realize it. Whatever it takes, I want you to feel pride in who you are, because I've never met anyone like you before.”

I knew she couldn't hear me, and since she was asleep, she wasn't reading my lips. Still, I felt better saying those words. One day, I'd tell them to her while she was awake. No, I'd sign them to her. She needed to see how invested I was in making this work between us. She might think I was only helping her right now, but it was more than that. Telling her was one thing. I wanted to *show* her. Something told me no one had ever done that before.

* * *

A fist pounding on my front door woke me. I eased out from under Madison, who'd curled into me during the night. As much as I'd have preferred to cuddle with her more, it was probably best for her not to discover how much she'd shifted in her sleep. Even if I hadn't been the one to drag her against me, it still might have freaked her out to wake up like that.

I shut the bedroom door and went to see who the hell was so impatient first thing in the morning. The Pres smirked at me when I yanked the door open, and I had a feeling I'd need to down a pot of coffee while listening to whatever he had to say.

"Isn't it a little early for a visit?" I asked.

"If it makes a difference, I have a Prospect bringing over some donuts. All you have to do is brew the coffee."

"Does Solena know you're eating donuts over here?" His silence told me enough. If she found out, he'd get in trouble for one of two things. Either for eating donuts without her and the kids, or because donuts were bad for him. "Just make sure she knows it wasn't my idea."

I started a pot of coffee in the kitchen and sat at the table while it brewed. The fact the Pres had come over so early didn't bode well. He already knew about Madison being here. Had Church gone so poorly yesterday that he'd decided she couldn't stay with me?

"How pissed is everyone?" I asked.

“They weren’t happy, but I wouldn’t exactly use that word to describe them either. However, if Madison weren’t in danger, they’d have voted for you not to have a woman at your place. I spoke with Knuckles and Rebel this morning. They’re going to talk to a few of our brothers and tell them what they’ve witnessed with you and Madison.”

“Meaning the way I act like an idiot around her?” I asked.

He smiled. “Something like that. Knuckles said he’d noticed a big change just in the last twenty-four hours. Hell, he said the moment you spoke to her at the bakery something seemed different. Sometimes you just know when you’ve found your one and only.”

“I haven’t told her. She thinks she has to pretend to be my girlfriend in order to stay out of her brother’s hands. Not my finest moment, but I thought if I outright claimed her, she’d take off running. This way I have time to win her over.”

The coffeepot stopped percolating, so I got up to pour us each a cup. I knew Atilla took his black like I did, so I placed the full cups on the table and sat down again. In the past, I wouldn’t have batted an eye at deceiving a woman. With Madison, it made me feel awful. Didn’t matter if this was the only way to keep her safe right now and give me the chance to make her mine completely. She deserved my honesty. I only hoped it didn’t come back to bite me in the ass later.

“The two of you need anything?” he asked.

“I picked up some groceries last night and took her to the bookstore. It’s really fucking hard to get her to spend any of my money. She fights me every step of the way. After seeing her house and how very little she owns, I can understand. A few new books were an extravagance she couldn’t afford. To me, it was nothing.”

Atilla nodded. “I think Meredith likes to read too. So do Casey and

Solena. Maybe the ladies could get together and discuss books at some point. Might be a good way for them to bond.”

“Well, I did make a library for Madison last night. It only has two chairs, though.”

Atilla choked on his swallow of coffee. He gasped and wheezed until he’d caught his breath. “Excuse the fuck out of me? What the hell did you just say?”

“I made her a library?” I asked, wondering what seemed so odd about it.

“Show me.”

I shrugged, took another swallow of coffee, then stood and led the way to the spare room. It had already been empty, so filling it with some shelves and other furniture wasn’t a big deal. I still needed to order a lamp for the room. No reason I couldn’t get her two more chairs and another small table. It would be a good place for her to host a book club, or something similar.

Atilla let out a low whistle. “Still a bit bare, but I’m impressed.”

“I’ll get more shelves after we increase her collection. I thought three was a good start. You see how little she has, even with the ones we purchased yesterday. And yes, I’m trying to bribe her with a damn library.”

“I bet she’d like some nice curtains in here,” he said. “Maybe a picture or two. Although, I’d imagine you’re trying to save the wall space for future bookshelves.”

“I am, but there’s no reason she couldn’t hang something between the windows. I’m going to order a lamp today so she won’t have to use the overhead light in here at night.”

“What else do you have planned?” he asked, heading back to the kitchen and his cup of coffee.

Before I even had a chance to sit down, someone else knocked on the door. I hoped it was the donuts, since my stomach was now growling. Lucas was outside the front door and didn't say a word. He just offered me a large box of donuts and rushed off. Since I didn't think he had an issue with me, I was going to assume he had other orders to follow this morning.

I carried the donuts to the kitchen and grabbed a chocolate glazed before Atilla could snatch it. He glowered as I bit into it, and I didn't feel the least bit remorseful. Fucker had pulled me out of bed before I was ready this morning.

"I asked her to teach me sign language. I learned a little last night. It also made me curious about her hearing aid. If the one she has now doesn't allow her to hear very well, there has to be a better one, right?"

"I'd say ask her, but if she thinks you're going to buy it for her, she may not tell you." Atilla finished off his donut and reached for another. "Do you have plans with her today?"

"Nothing concrete, but she only has today and tomorrow off work. After that, she goes back to working at the bakery in the mornings. I'll have to speak with the owner. I can drop Madison off and pick her back up, but I need to know she'll be safe while she's in the shop."

"I can ask Officer Benson to keep an eye on the place, at least for this first week. Maybe if people see police patrol the area each day, they'll leave her alone while she's there. Besides, you aren't one hundred percent certain anyone will come for her. She could be out of danger already."

"I'm not willing to risk it," I said.

"Understandable. I'll ask Solena and Casey to drop by the bakery her first day back. They can introduce themselves. Might be best for them to meet away from the compound."

"Why?" I asked.

“Meredith and Casey can both be very protective of this club. Solena is to some extent as well, but I think she’d be less likely to intimidate your woman. And I’m not saying my daughter or Meredith would do it on purpose. You know they can both be sweethearts.”

“Fine. I’ll spend today finding out more about what Madison likes and needs. Once the women meet her at the bakery, ask them to drop by the house sometime. Tell them Madison has a library and likes to read. That should light a fire under them.”

He chuckled. “You’re not wrong. Although once they see all those empty shelves, they may very well bring her any books they don’t want to keep.”

“I’m sure it would thrill her to have more new things to read. It won’t offend her to receive books someone already read. More than half of hers came from the thrift store.”

Atilla finished his coffee and stood. “Let me know if there’s anything the two of you need, or if your brothers act like assholes. Otherwise, I’ll give the two of you some space for a few days. We don’t have anything urgent on the books right now, so you don’t have to worry about rushing off to handle any jobs for at least the next week.”

“Thanks, Pres. And sorry for bringing her here without asking first. I didn’t really have time to run it by anyone. She needed me.”

“I’m not angry about it, and once I explained what happened, the other officers were fine too. It helped that Knuckles was the one who called you. It meant you already had permission from one of the club officers.”

Another knock at the door had me wondering who the fuck else was going to drop by this morning. I walked Atilla out and stared at Knuckles, General, Maui, and Spade. If Atilla had stayed, I would have had every officer in the club at my house. What the hell?

Knuckles handed me a large gift bag with a balloon attached to it, right as Rebel came up behind him. Was the entire club going to show up? “We put together a welcome package for Madison.”

“She’s still asleep,” I said as I reached out to accept the bag. “But I’ll let her know this is from the club when she wakes up.”

“There’s one more gift,” Rebel said, handing me a box wrapped in pink paper. “I know you ordered bookshelves and chairs last night. Took a gamble on what you might need for the room.”

I eyed the package. “Is it a lamp?”

He nodded. “One of those floor ones that has button you push with your foot to turn it off and on. It’s kind of plain, but she can replace it later if she finds one she likes better. There’s also a gift card inside the bag.”

“For what?” I asked.

“Whatever she might want for the room. A rug? Hell if I know.” Rebel smiled. “Madison is a sweet woman. I just wanted her to feel at home and let her know she’s welcome here.”

“I appreciate it.” I eyed each man, especially Maui and Spade. If anyone would give me shit about having a woman in my house, it would be those two. Neither man said anything negative. “I’d invite you inside, but like I said, she’s still sleeping.”

“It’s fine. We all have shit to do anyway.” Knuckles waved and was the first to leave with Rebel right behind him. Maui lingered until the others had gone.

“Casey knows about Madison. I’m sure she’ll want to meet her, but I’ll ask her to wait a day or two.”

“Atilla was going to speak to the ladies, I think. He suggested Solena and Casey go to the bakery where Madison works and meet her there for the first time.”

Maui nodded. “Sounds like a good idea, and it will keep their first interaction short. I’m happy for you, but I have to admit I’m skeptical too. You don’t exactly have a good track record when it comes to women.”

“I know. I’ll have to prove that she’s different from the others and show you I’m not the same man when I’m with her. I’m not expecting everyone to be happy about this. Not right away.”

Maui left, and I shut the door. Since I knew Madison would want to eat when she woke up, I took the gifts to the kitchen and sat them in one of the chairs. While the gesture was nice, I hoped it didn’t make her feel overwhelmed. If she’d been hesitant to accept some books from me, how would she feel about an entire bag of gifts from people she hadn’t even met yet? As curious as I was about the contents, I didn’t look inside it. The present wasn’t for me. It was only right to let Madison open it.

I rinsed Atilla’s coffee mug and placed it in the dishwasher before pouring another cup for myself. While I waited for Madison to wake up, I opened up the Tapas app on my phone and opened the comic I’d started reading the other day. I paid for six episodes before Madison wandered into the kitchen. She squinted at my phone screen, and I realized I’d been caught.

“Yeah, I read comics and manga.” I folded my arms. “Doesn’t really fit my overall image, does it?”

She sat down and reached for my phone. After scrolling through part of the episode, she got up and rushed out of the room, only to return with her own phone clutched in her hand. She held it out to me.

“Can you download the app for me?”

Seriously? I’d known she liked to read, but this certainly surprised me. In a good way. “I’d be happy to.”

“How does it work?” she asked.

I tapped my ear. “Did you put your hearing aid back in? Should I get

the notebook?”

“I’m okay. It’s charged again,” she said. “Just speak slowly.”

“You pick which comics you want to read. Click the ribbon at the top right to save it in your library, and you can typically read the first three episodes for free. But they have special events so sometimes you can read more than that without paying anything. They also have some that unlock a new free episode every three hours.”

I hadn’t been this excited to talk to someone about something in a while. And no one knew I liked reading comics and manga. Now Madison knew something about me that I’d kept secret from everyone else. Although, I should probably let her know before she said something in front of my brothers.

“No one knows I read these,” I said. “My club would give me shit for it.”

“I won’t tell,” she promised.

I noticed she had the cheapest iPhone available, and it was several years old. How much of a fight would she put up if I tried to buy her a new one? This might be one of those times I should just do it and coax her into accepting the gift after it was paid for. Otherwise, she might refuse to take it. Stubborn-ass woman.

“What’s your passcode and password? There are some other apps I can download for you.”

She told me and I quickly unlocked her wallet. When she wasn’t paying attention to me, I quickly added my card information to her phone, then bought enough ink for her to read on Tapas for quite a while. After I downloaded the other two apps I used, and added the coins and points for each, I removed my card so she wouldn’t realize what I’d done. Shit. She’d get an email.

I didn't like the thought of invading her privacy, but I opened her email long enough to remove the Apple receipt emails. Once I'd finished, I handed the phone back to her, then took a few minutes showing her how each app worked.

"The bag and box on the chair beside you were delivered this morning. My club wanted to give you a welcome present." I nudged the box of donuts toward her. "And my club President brought these."

She grabbed a donut and stared at the packages. I could clearly see she wanted to refuse, and at the same time there was a look of yearning in her eyes.

"You'll hurt their feelings if you don't open them," I said. Then I flat-out lied. "I told them I'd text to let them know what you thought of the gifts."

She grabbed the bag and started pulling out items. They'd included a Harley Davidson T-shirt, a package of hair ties, a few tinted lip balms, and gift cards that would allow her to not only decorate her library but also buy more books. By the time she'd opened the lamp as well, she seemed stunned. My club had given her a generous amount of gifts, and I could tell at least one of the ladies helped. Possibly both Solena and Casey.

"It's too much," she said.

"No, it's not. You need to stop. I don't know why you feel you don't deserve to have these things, but you're precious, Madison. You've done something no one else has ever been able to accomplish."

"What's that?" she asked.

I grinned. "You tamed the beast. I'm not exactly known as a nice guy around here. Knuckles told me yesterday he could already see changes in me, for the better I might add. He thought it was good for me to spend time with you."

"So... this is more of a tribute for conquering the monster at the

center of the maze?”

I threw my head back and laughed, not having expected that answer from her. And yet, it was rather accurate. The more time I spent with her, the more I wanted to hold on and never let go. There wasn't another woman like her in all the world. If ever someone was perfect for me, it was Madison.

Chapter Six

Madison

Why had Truth's club given me so many things? I hadn't met anyone except Knuckles and Rebel. Was Truth really acting different from how he normally would? I didn't understand why it was such a big deal. I felt confused on the best of days, but right now I was reeling.

Truth set up the lamp in my new library and said something about ordering more furniture for the space. He acted like I was going to live here permanently. The idea both terrified me and excited me. I didn't know why he wanted me to stick around. Did he get that butterfly feeling around me like I did every time I thought of him? I didn't think that was the sort of thing I should ask a guy.

Being at the compound, or going out with Truth, I hadn't had to deal with my brother. As much as I loved Justin, I now felt afraid of him. I hadn't trusted him before now, however knowing he'd wanted to trade me to settle a debt made me want to throw up. How could someone do such a thing to another human being? It didn't make any sense to me.

From watching the news, I understood there were monsters in the world. Murderers and rapists, among other bad people. Not once had I ever thought any of it would touch my life. Even when I realized my brother was using drugs and drinking too much, I'd never considered I needed to fear for my life just because we were related. What would have happened to me if Truth hadn't come to save me? It was a thought that kept pounding inside my skull. He'd saved my life. Of that I had no doubt whatsoever.

He'd left me in the library reading and said he needed to take a

shower. It wasn't until he'd been gone fifteen minutes I realized I needed the phone charger from the bedroom. I wished I could hear well enough to tell if the water was still running. I pressed my hand to the bedroom door, debating whether I should go in. What if he was changing? Knocking wouldn't do me any good. If he forgot about my hearing loss and simply called out to me, I probably wouldn't hear anything.

Slowly, I turned the knob and opened the door. I quickly scanned the room and didn't see him. The bathroom door hadn't shut completely, and I tried really hard not to look. I made it all of two steps toward the bed when I found myself gazing in that direction. And froze.

Truth had his head tipped back, eyes closed, and his hand wrapped around his cock. Every stroke, he said something. I couldn't hear him, but I'd have sworn I read my name on his lips. My cheeks went hot, and I felt an odd fluttery sensation inside me. I'd never watched porn, and while I'd read romances with sex in them, seeing something like this in person was vastly different.

I inched closer to the bathroom, spellbound. His hand moved faster, and after a few more strokes, he came all over the tiled wall. I must have gasped or made a noise because his eyes snapped open and focused on me. Stumbling back a step, my heart slammed against my ribs, and I wondered if I should run... but would I run *to* Truth or away from him?

His cock twitched and started getting hard again. Truth shut off the water and opened the shower door. Stepping out onto the mat, he held my gaze as he dried off. As he came closer, I found myself rooted to the floor. I couldn't have moved if I'd wanted to. Part of me felt like prey, while some other side wanted to preen like a peacock. The heat in his eyes told me he had indeed said my name while he'd done... *that*. It made me feel powerful.

The big biker was handsome as sin, had a body that could rival a

god's, and yet he wanted *me*. I don't know why. I'd assume he could have anyone he wanted. Women had to throw themselves at him. I knew I wanted to, and I'd not once been tempted to do such a thing in my entire life. What was it about him that made me feel this way? Why was he so different?

He didn't stop until we were nearly toe to toe. Truth reached out and took my hand, then placed it in the center of his chest. I felt the hard *thump* of his heartbeat. I stared up at him, feeling a bit breathless.

"This is what you do to me," he said slowly so I could read his lips. Then the words he signed had my eyes burning with unshed tears, and any resistance I'd maintained crumbled to dust. *You're amazing. I can't stop thinking about you. I've never wanted anyone the way I want you.*

I didn't know how or when he'd learned that. The fact he'd even bothered made me even more emotional. That was the moment I knew without a doubt I was going to fall for Truth. It wasn't going to be a gentle glide, but a hard crash because he completely turned my world upside down, tore down every belief I'd held about myself, and ripped away all the doubts that men would ever find me desirable.

"I'm not going to rush you. We can go as slow as you want. You're in control, Madison."

I let my hand slide down his abdomen. When my fingers brushed against his cock, I felt the vibration in my throat letting me know I'd moaned out loud and not just inside my head. This was my first time to touch a man intimately. His skin felt smoother than I'd anticipated. He'd trimmed the hair and while I didn't understand why, it did give me a rather nice view of my fingers wrapped around him.

He reached out and lightly touched my chin, forcing me to look up at him again. "I don't have a lot of control right now, Madison. If you aren't ready for what comes next, I need you to leave the room while I finish getting

dressed.”

“What happens next?” I asked.

His eyes darkened. “I’ll kiss you. Strip you. And make you scream my name.”

I didn’t have to be experienced to know what he meant. My only concern was how we’d communicate during sex. I didn’t want to have to focus on reading his lips. Stupid hearing aid! If I had the better one, I might be able to hear him well enough that I wouldn’t even have to keep my eyes open when he spoke to me. I’d never know until I tried it.

“What if that’s what I want?” I asked.

“Oh, sweetheart. You shouldn’t have said that. I was holding back. Now you’ve unleashed the beast inside me.”

I shivered and my nipples hardened at his words and the fierce look on his face. He looked ready to devour me, and I eagerly anticipated what it would feel like. Did I need to tell him this was my first time? Did he already know? Despite having an addict for a brother, I’d led a relatively sheltered life. At least where men were concerned.

His mouth crashed against mine, and he kissed me breathless. I clung to him, wrapping my hands around his biceps. Truth picked me up, banding one arm around the small of my back. I dangled in the air and felt him working my shorts down my legs. He’d completely bared the lower part of my body before he eased me down onto the bed. Truth made short work of removing my pajama shirt and his gaze burned a path across my skin. I felt the heat of it all the way to my soul.

His lips closed over one nipple and I arched into him, my fingers sliding into his hair. I held him to me, never wanting to let go. No number of romance novels could have prepared me for the sensations flooding me right now. It was so intense it almost felt like too much all at once. He moved to

the other nipple, licking and sucking it until my toes curled. The rasp of his whiskers against my skin only heightened everything. I'd never felt anything like it before.

He worked his way down my body, kneeling beside the bed. He kissed my thighs as he spread them wide. As much as I wanted to slam them shut, I forced myself to hold still and see what he would do next, and how it would feel. The moment he spread the lips of my pussy open, I felt a wave of heat wash over me, and I knew my cheeks had to be bright red. A single flick of his tongue was enough to make my brain shut down. Every thought I had flew away, leaving me unable to do anything except feel and respond physically. It was like a primitive side of myself had been unleashed, one I'd never realized I had.

He sucked and licked my clit, and as the pleasure built, I found my hips seeming to move of their own volition. I pressed closer to his mouth, never wanting him to stop. The pressure inside me built and built, until it finally erupted, and I screamed out his name. He didn't even give me time to catch my breath before he was over me and sliding into me. My eyes went wide at the pinch of pain, and the slight burn as I stretched to accept him.

Since I was looking up at his face, I caught the words *so fucking perfect* on his lips. And then he was driving into me, chasing his own orgasm as I still came down from the euphoric feelings of my first climax. I felt the heat of his release inside me and thought my heart might explode when I realized it meant he hadn't used protection. Not once had we discussed our past experiences, or whether or not I was on the pill. Which I wasn't. There was a good chance we'd just created a baby.

"Truth, I... I'm not..." I swallowed hard, wondering if I should even say something right now. Would I ruin the mood? Would he get angry? No. This wasn't my fault, and he wasn't the type to blame me.

He pressed his forehead to mine before kissing me again. When he pulled out, he hurried to the bathroom and returned with a wet cloth. He cleaned me gently before lying beside me and pulling me into his arms. Whatever I wanted to say would have to wait. I couldn't read his lips like this, so talking wasn't possible.

Most women would probably be terrified or furious right now. I didn't know what I felt. All my emotions were all over the place. I felt happy, sad, scared, excited, and so much more. He'd made a library for me. Brought everything I owned from my house. Why did it feel like none of this was temporary like he'd made it seem yesterday morning? Had Truth just tried to get me pregnant on purpose?

I didn't know how I felt about it. There were plenty of deaf women who had children. I knew it was possible for a child of mine to have a safe and happy life, especially with a dad like Truth. The way he took care of me told me he'd be an amazing dad. But it didn't mean I'd been ready for that step right this second.

Wait. Step. He'd said something about... what comes next. Was this what he meant and not necessarily the sex itself?

Suddenly, I realized I didn't know as much about this man as I'd thought. I'd felt like I was getting to know him rather well, and now it seemed I'd taken a few steps back. He'd called himself an asshole. Said he wasn't a nice guy. I'd not listened, deciding I knew better. But did nice guys try to get a woman pregnant on purpose?

Only one way to find out.

"Truth, can I ask you something?" He drew back so I could see his face. "You didn't use protection. I'm not on birth control. Were you trying to get me pregnant?"

He gave me an unrepentant smile. "And if I was?"

My breath caught as I tried to process his words. “But why?”

“Because it means I get to keep you, and there’s nothing I want more, Madison. I told those men at the bar you were mine... and realized that’s exactly what I wanted. Not for one night. Not as a temporary ruse. I wanted you to completely belong to me for the rest of your life.”

He was insane. There was no other explanation. And yet, for some reason, I was finding this crazy side of him charming too. Maybe he wasn’t the one who was nuts. It might be me who wasn’t acting rationally. Who the hell wanted a man to do something like that?

Apparently, me.

* * *

Truth

Well, that hadn’t been in my plans. I couldn’t say I regretted it. In fact, knowing I’d been her first, and would be her only, felt pretty fucking amazing. All right, so I’d been a dick. I hadn’t used a condom or talked to her beforehand to let her know I was clean, or ask if she wanted kids right now. Or ever.

I knew it would be more difficult for her to chase a toddler or small child around, since she didn’t hear like most people. Didn’t make it impossible. Besides, I’d be here to help her, and so would the rest of the club. She’d never be alone. Even now, the brothers took turns watching the kids. Well, except me. Only Casey had trusted me with her daughter, Becca. I’d said some shit I shouldn’t have, and pissed off Maui, but in the end Casey decided to give me a chance. I’d never understood why. Meredith and Lynx weren’t happy with me, and even Atilla had glared at me when I’d gone near his children. Things would change now. My brothers could see I was becoming someone different.

“Can I ask you something?” She nodded. “Your hearing aid... you said you can’t hear completely with it. Is there one that would give you that ability, or at least work better than the one you have now?”

“Yes, but they’re really expensive. Around two thousand dollars. Some even cost more.”

“I’m not worried about the cost, Madison. It kills me that you miss out on things because you don’t have the equipment you need. If you’d lost the ability to walk, you’d need a wheelchair, right? Or if you didn’t see very well, you’d need glasses. Your hearing aid isn’t any different. It’s something required to help you live an easier life.”

She pressed her fingers to my lips. “Slower. When you get excited or passionate about something, you talk too fast for me to follow along.”

“This is what I mean. If you had a better hearing aid, that wouldn’t happen as often, right?”

She shrugged. “I’ve never used one, so I don’t know.”

I’d find out what kind she needed, and I’d get her one. In the event that she needed a prescription, I’d go with her to the doctor and request the best hearing aid available. If I didn’t have enough cash on hand, I’d hit up Atilla for some extra jobs until I had enough to cover it. I knew he wouldn’t have a problem with me requesting it if he knew the money was to help Madison.

“Sorry I skipped the part of us discussing things in more depth before I took our relationship to the next level. I can only imagine how it made you feel.”

“I was a little anxious at first and didn’t understand why you’d done it. Hearing you say you’d wanted to keep me forever changed things. I didn’t think anyone would ever want a life with me.”

“For the record, I get tested regularly, and I’m clean. Haven’t been

with a woman since my last test, and you're now my one and only. I'll never cheat on you. I'd sooner rip off my nuts and bleed out."

She winced. "I could do without the visual, thank you."

"I didn't want you to think I did something like that without putting any thought into it. In fact, since the night I brought you home, I've thought of little else. Even before Knuckles called and said you needed help, I'd been making plans for meeting you again and asking you out."

"What happens now?" she asked.

"Well, I need to let Atilla know you're officially mine. I'm supposed to ask permission from the club and let everyone vote. He knows you're here, but officially making you mine is different. Since the club hasn't met you yet, and there's already a chance you could be pregnant, I'm going to request we skip that step. You'll get a property cut. It will be a smaller version of mine but will say *Property of Truth*. And before you ask -- no, I don't think I own you. It's just how things are done around here."

"So I'm officially your girlfriend? For real this time?" she asked.

"Think of it more like you being my wife. Other bikers will refer to you as my old lady. Doesn't have anything to do with your actual age. Which is..."

"Twenty-three. Isn't it a little late to ask?"

"Very true. In case you're wondering, I'm thirty-seven."

Her jaw dropped. "You're lying! There's no way. Maybe thirty, but thirty-seven?"

"Are you saying I've aged well?" I laughed softly. She was good for my ego. Not that it needed any stroking, but if she wanted to stroke something else... Nope. I wasn't going to go there. I knew she had to be sore. I might be an ass, but it didn't mean I'd treat her poorly. Perhaps I could have been gentler for her first time. Only Madison could make me lose control the

way I had.

“We have the entire day to ourselves,” I said. “Although, we’ve already used over half of it. Is there anything you’d like to do? Go out to dinner? A store you’d like to visit?”

“You don’t have to take me somewhere all the time. If you turn the closed captions on, I can watch TV with you. While I can’t hear the show, I can read along with it.”

I gave her a slow smile. “Or we could watch some anime and turn on the English subtitles. There’s a few in the original Japanese I’ve been dying to see. Want to give it a try?”

“It’s something I haven’t done before,” she said. “But sure, I’ll watch it with you.”

She followed me to the living room, and after scrolling through the options under my various subscriptions, we finally selected something. It took less than one full episode before Madison was hooked. We binge-watched five episodes before we took a break. I wasn’t sure how often she watched TV and worried it would strain her eyes or give her a headache, trying to constantly read the screen. Even if it did bother her, she’d never complain. I’d already learned that much about her.

I’d never spent so much time with someone. With Jane, I’d taken her out on dates, and we’d often gone to her place after dinner. Not once had she come to my house, and I’d never considered letting her move in with me. Madison wasn’t a guest. It wasn’t like I needed to entertain her. I didn’t have an obligation to stay glued to her side, but until she knew the club better and had met the other ladies, I didn’t feel comfortable leaving her alone in the house.

Since her brother was an alcoholic as well as a drug addict, I didn’t want to drink a beer in front of her. What if it brought up bad memories? Or

scared her into thinking I might become just like Justin? I'd talk to her about it at some point.

“Did you ever come up with a list of things you'd like to do when you had a boyfriend?” I asked. Her cheeks flushed and she looked away. All right. So she did have a list, but for some reason it embarrassed her. Now I really wanted to know what was on it. “You can tell me anything, Madison.”

“There are a few things,” she admitted.

I went to get the notebook and a pen, then handed them to her. “Write down your list. We'll pick one thing to do today and save the rest for another time. Keep the list handy and you can add to it whenever you want.”

“What if some of the things are expensive?” she asked.

“Don't worry about cost. Like I said, some we may not be able to do right now. Doesn't mean we won't ever check those off the list.” I ran my finger down her cheek. “Think long term, Madison. I told you. This is forever for me.”

She sat down with the notebook in her lap and stared at the blank page. Lifting her face to mine, she remained quiet for a moment before finally voicing the question I saw in her eyes. “It doesn't bother you? The fact we struggle to communicate?”

I kneeled in front of her. “Honey, does it seem like we can't talk to one another? It might not be perfect, but guess what? Two individuals without any hearing issues can still have trouble. Being able to hear what someone says, doesn't mean there won't be a miscommunication. I'm going to keep learning to sign, and we'll get you a better hearing aid.”

“I'm not too much trouble?” she asked.

“Of course not. Why would you ever think that? Do you think I'm perfect? I'm not. There isn't a damn person at this compound who is.” I paused. “Well, maybe Casey's daughter Becca. That little angel is as close to

perfect as any of us will ever be. Until she becomes a teenager. Then all bets are off.”

Madison shook her head. Humor flashed in her eyes, and I wondered what she'd been like as a teenager. Deaf kids were still exactly that... children. If anything, I'd think it would have made high school even more frustrating for her. Since she'd said her parents left the house to her brother, I wondered if they'd passed while she was still a minor. She hadn't brought it up, and I didn't want to open a wound that might not have yet healed. Life had a tendency to pile shit on people layer after layer. All of us struggled to fight our way through. Then there were people like Madison who had to do the same thing, except with fewer tools.

“Make the list, honey. Then we'll pick something together. We can call it our first official date.”

She lit up, smiling widely, before she started writing. I left the room, but paused outside the door when I heard her talking to herself.

“A date. My first date ever!”

Shit. I hadn't even considered that. It had been clear she didn't have experience with men, but it never occurred to me she'd never had a boyfriend in her entire life. What the fuck was wrong with the guys in this town? Had they really let something like being deaf scare them off? Idiots. Their loss was certainly my gain.

While I gave her time to create her wish list of dates, I called Atilla. He needed to know Madison wasn't going anywhere. We'd only talked over coffee this morning. How had so much changed in less than a day? With Madison, things seemed to be going at warp speed. Instead of being scared shitless, I couldn't wait to see what tomorrow would bring.

The phone rang a few times before Atilla answered.

“Now what?” he asked when the call connected.

“Hello to you too, Pres.”

“Seriously, Truth. What the fuck do you want? Didn’t we use up our quota of bonding time this morning?”

I couldn’t hold back my laughter. “All right. I get your point. I needed to tell you Madison is mine. Officially. I’m not asking. Not taking it to a vote. You said we’d discuss her stats later. Well, now’s the time.”

“Boy, better watch it. I’m still the President of this club. Last time I checked, none of your patches denote you as an officer.”

“I wasn’t trying to be disrespectful. I, uh... We slept together a little while ago. I didn’t use protection, and she’s not on anything, so...”

Atila sighed. “You really are a dumbass. So you could have knocked her up already. Fine. I’ll push it through. Make it seem like my idea. Can’t have anyone thinking I’ve gone soft. You say this happened any other way than me telling you to claim her, and you and I are going to go a few rounds. And I don’t mean verbal ones. This wasn’t what I had in mind when I said we’d talk about it later. I’d planned to make you work for it a bit more.”

“Got it, Pres. And thanks. I really appreciate this.” I didn’t want to push my luck. At the same time, I wanted Madison to feel welcome here. She needed to understand we were a family. Instead of being alone, she’d not only gained my support, but she now had a lot of brothers, and some women to call sisters or friends. “I think it would be good to do something for Madison as a way to introduce her to everyone. Not a party. I’m worried it would be too much for her. Something more low-key like a picnic or barbeque?”

“I’ll talk to Solena. I think it’s best we let the women take the lead on that one, but I’ll make sure she’s aware of your concerns with a party. I agree anything with that many people crammed into the clubhouse might make things difficult for your girl. That’s the last thing we want.”

I ended the call and went to check on Madison. What sorts of dates had she looked forward to all these years? Had she dreamed of having a boyfriend like a lot of other girls and young women? Since I hadn't had a sister, I didn't know much about females. Well, I knew how to get them out of their clothes, but not much else. Probably shouldn't tell Madison that. Not unless I wanted her to kick me out of my own bed.

She hadn't budged from her spot and had filled over half the page. With her hair tucked behind her ear, and a look of intense concentration on her face, she was too fucking adorable.

I sat beside her and waited until I had her attention before I spoke. "Did you pick something for today?"

She pointed to three different options. Getting ice cream at Sundae Breeze. Holding hands and walking in the park. Attending a festival. The first two were easy enough. As for a festival, I couldn't think of one going on right now. Did she know something I didn't?

"Festival?" I asked.

"There's a summer festival starting tomorrow in Parker Creek," she said. "We can't do that one today, but I've always wanted to go."

"Then we'll do that tomorrow. It's your last day before going back to work." I wanted to tell her she didn't have to go to the bakery anymore. Something told me it would be a bad idea. As independent as she was, it would blow up in my face. "Want to get some ice cream? We can always walk in the park afterward."

"We can really do both today?" she asked.

"Of course, we can. Let's shower and get ready. While we're out, you can decide if you want to eat dinner at a restaurant or we can make something at home."

She jumped to her feet and dashed out of the room. I liked seeing her

acting so cute and carefree. It seemed like she was adjusting well to her new home, and to me. Still, I wouldn't breathe easy until I knew her brother wouldn't be an issue, or the men he owed. I needed to look into it, but I'd wait until Madison went back to work.

Right now, I only wanted to create lots of good memories with her.

Chapter Seven

Madison

Walking around the park last night, we hadn't garnered much attention. Or rather, I hadn't. I'd noticed women had a tendency to watch Truth. He hadn't paid them any mind. At first, I'd thought he didn't even realize they were staring. Was it something he dealt with all the time?

Being at the festival in Parker Creek wasn't nearly the same. I'd watched no less than four mothers grab the hands of their children and move far from Truth when they saw us coming. My heart ached for him. How could people be so cruel? I didn't understand. Was it his size? The fact he was a biker? It bothered me, knowing people judged him without making an effort to get to know him, same as they did with me. What a pair we made.

I held tight to his hand as he led me past the different vendors. Before we'd entered the main area, he'd told me to squeeze his hand whenever I wanted to stop. After stopping at just three tables, it became apparent Truth would purchase anything I showed even a little bit of interest in, making me more hesitant to pay attention to anything. He might not be hurting for money, but it didn't mean I wanted him to buy everything I liked.

Truth stopped and tipped my chin up so I'd focus on him. "Are you hungry?"

I looked around and saw a food truck with tacos. Pointing it out to him, I gave his hand a slight tug. Truth grinned and followed me. I hated speaking in crowded places, since I couldn't tell how loud my voice was. When we reached the truck, I pointed to the items I wanted and let Truth place our order. He found us a picnic table under a pavilion.

He reached out and ran his finger down my nose. “I’m worried you’ll burn.”

I signed back, *I’m okay*. It was one of the phrases I’d taught him already.

We ate in silence, but I could tell Truth had something on his mind. He kept scanning the crowd and watching me from the corner of his eye. Did he worry the men after my brother might be lurking nearby? I doubted they were the type to attend a town festival. I felt the table shake and looked sharply to the seats across from us. Knuckles smiled and gave me a little wave.

He slid a small package over me.

What’s this? I signed.

From the club. Although, it was Truth’s idea. Open it. Knuckles folded his arms and leaned them on the table, anticipation lighting up his face. What the heck had the crazy Savage Raptors done now?

I opened the bag and pulled out a box. When I realized what it was, my breath caught, and my heart skipped a beat. They hadn’t. Had they? I looked at Truth, but he wasn’t giving anything away. I opened the lid and saw one of the top-of-the-line hearing aids inside. One I’d never hoped to afford. How had they known exactly what I needed? I hadn’t told them. But down to the very last detail, it was the hearing aid the doctor recommended.

It’s already charged and ready for use. Knuckles pointed to it, clearly wanting me to try it out.

I removed the one in my ear and slipped in the new one. When I turned it on and adjusted the volume, tears sprang to my eyes. I could hear the crowd around us much clearer than before. While I’d been able to hear the overall noise, now I could pick up individual voices and bits of conversation.

I grabbed hold of Truth, staring up at him. “Say something. Anything.”

His lips twitched like he fought not to smile. “Does it work?”

I nodded and couldn’t hold back my tears. They slipped down my cheeks, and Truth wrapped me in his arms. I’d never been able to hear this well in my entire life, and I felt overwhelmed. Why had his club done such a thing? I hadn’t even met most of them yet.

“Welcome to the family,” Knuckles said. It was my first time hearing his voice so well, and I started crying again.

Truth leaned in closer, placing his lips near my ear. “Can you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“You no longer have to struggle on your own, Madison. I will always take care of you, and any children we may have. You may have lost a brother, but you’ve gained many more. No arguments about the cost of the hearing aid. You needed it. This is only the beginning, honey.”

I dried my tears and nodded. As much as I didn’t like the thought of relying on other people, at the same time, it was nice to know I wouldn’t be responsible for so many things anymore. It felt like I could finally breathe. Instead of fighting to survive every day, I could stop and enjoy myself, like today at the festival.

“A few of us are here. We’ll stay out of your way since the two of you are on a date, but I wanted to get the hearing aid to you,” Knuckles said. “If you need anything, give us a shout.”

He stood and walked off. I saw him join three other men with the Savage Raptors cuts on. I didn’t recognize them, so they were members I hadn’t met yet. Truth had mentioned a picnic. He wanted me to meet everyone. While I could admit to being excited about it, the thought also

scared me a little. What if they didn't like me?

“Finished?” Truth asked, motioning to my mostly empty food basket.

“Yeah. Can we look around some more?”

“Of course. I told you. Today is *your* day. We can do anything you want.” He stood and threw our trash away before taking my hand once more. “Now you don't have to squeeze my hand to make me stop.”

This was the closest I'd ever felt to being like everyone else. My hearing wasn't perfect in that ear, even with the expensive hearing aid. It was still the best I'd ever been able to hear anyone. I liked Truth's voice.

We wandered the festival for another hour. I selected two more small things and had some candied almonds. Truth stopped a few times and took a selfie with me, and always made sure to text a copy to me. They were our first pictures together, and I couldn't wait to take many more. On our way to the parking area, I froze mid-step. Near one of the booths stood a small child, crying so hard his shoulders shook. The expression on his face told me enough. A man stood in front of him, screaming, but the child only seemed confused and scared.

“Truth, I think something is wrong,” I said, pointing to them. “Can we help?”

Truth led me over to the angry man and scared child. While he spoke to the adult, I kneeled in front of the boy. He had scarring that led me to believe he'd had a cochlear implant at some point. Was he deaf like me? The only reason to remove something like that would be if they would never work again. He might have lost all hearing now.

I signed as I spoke to him. “Are you all right?”

He took a shuddering breath, his eyes going wide as he nodded. When he signed and didn't speak, I knew he'd felt the same fears as me. He didn't want to talk in case people made fun of him.

My dad left.

Left? As in he'd gone somewhere and would be right back? Or had he abandoned his child?

“My name is Madison. What's yours?”

Liam.

I stood and faced Truth. “His name is Liam, and he said his father left.”

He glared at the man. “Are you proud of yourself? You were screaming at a deaf child.”

I didn't point out he'd apparently done the same to me when we'd first met, even if I hadn't realized it. The fact he was angry on the boy's behalf was enough. I felt small fingers close around mine and knew it was Liam. I held tight to his hand, hoping to give him whatever comfort I could. How long had he stood here, unable to communicate with anyone around him? My heart ached for him. I'd known that same pain many times in my life, and I'd never wish it on another person.

“What do we do?” I asked Truth.

“Did he say where his dad went?” Truth asked.

“No. He only said he was gone. You don't think he abandoned him here, do you? Could they just have gotten separated?” I scanned the area, but it didn't seem like anyone was frantically looking for their child. If my son got lost, I'd be losing my mind until I had him in my arms again.

Truth closed his eyes and tipped his head back. The tightness around his eyes, and the way he clenched his jaw, said it was likely the boy no longer had anyone. I knew we weren't going to walk off and leave little Liam here. Would the state be able to place him in a home where someone knew sign language? What if he didn't get the special care he needed?

“Can he come with us? Or should we find security and see if someone

is searching for him?” I asked.

Truth looked at the little boy and kneeled down. He signed, *My name is Truth.*

I'm Liam.

More of the tension eased in the little boy and he pressed against my leg. I couldn't leave him here. It would kill me, walking away and never knowing if he was all right. How different would my life have been if someone had bothered to ask if I needed help, or not seen me as a hindrance? Part of me knew no one was looking for him. In my gut, something said this child had been left behind on purpose.

“Ask if he wants to go home with us,” Truth said.

I signed the question and Liam nodded eagerly. It looked like he wasn't afraid, even though we were strangers. How could anyone leave such a sweet little boy? Was it the fact we could sign that made him so accepting of us? I hoped he wouldn't walk off with just anyone. What if a bad person got their hands on him?

“Come on. I'll call Wire on the way home. He's a hacker friend. Ask Liam if he knows his father's name, or what his last name is at the very least, and his age.”

I quickly signed the questions Truth had asked.

My last name is Nance. I don't know my dad's name. I'm five.

I translated for Truth, and we followed him to the truck. Even though Liam was small enough he probably needed a car seat or something, I buckled him into the back seat and Truth drove carefully on the way home. He placed the call he'd mentioned, and it connected through the speakers in the vehicle.

I'd expected Wire to be a man, but a woman answered. Truth had said *he*, so maybe it was the man's wife?

“Wire is busy. Who is this?” the woman asked.

“What is it with no one giving a proper greeting when a call connects?” Truth asked.

“Truth?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s me, Lavender. I’d called to ask Wire for a favor, but it’s something you could do just as easily.”

She snorted. “If it requires my computer skills, I may very well do it better than him.”

It amazed me I could hear the call as well as I did. I lightly touched my new hearing aid. It had to be the greatest gift I’d ever received.

“There was a deaf boy at the festival in Parker Creek, Oklahoma. He doesn’t know his father’s name and says he’s five. Kid’s name is Liam Nance. See what you can find? The boy said his father left him. We think he may have been abandoned.”

“We?” Lavender asked. “Who else is there?”

Truth smiled. “My woman. Her name is Madison, and she’s also deaf, but she can hear a little with the new hearing aid the club gave her.”

“You’ve been busy,” Lavender said. “Give me... I don’t know. At least twenty minutes. Might take longer. I’ll call or text if I find something. You didn’t really give me a lot to go on.”

“Thanks, Lavender.”

The call ended and I reached over to take Truth’s hand. I couldn’t thank him enough for helping Liam. Was it wrong I felt torn over finding Liam’s father? If the man really did abandon the little boy, I didn’t want to give him back. He didn’t deserve to have a kid as sweet as Liam.

At the house, I helped Liam inside and took him to the kitchen. I had no idea if he had food allergies, and when I asked, he didn’t seem to know either. Deciding to play it safe, I stayed away from dairy and nuts when I

made him a snack. I could hear Truth on the phone in the other room, as he paced back and forth, but couldn't make out what he was saying. He popped his head into the kitchen a few times to check on us as the minutes ticked by and turned into hours.

By dinner, I realized Liam was most likely staying the night with us. I didn't have anything for him to wear, or a place for him to sleep. Someone pounding on the front door startled me and I rushed to answer it when I realized Truth wouldn't.

A woman stood on the other side with a sleeping bag in her arms, as well as a large gift bag. "I'm Solena. You must be Madison."

I nodded. If she was here, it meant she was allowed inside the compound. Truth had mentioned there being a few other women. She must be one of them. Stepping back, I let her into the house, and she dropped everything in the living room.

"I brought the sleeping bag since I knew Truth didn't have another bedroom set up for the little boy, and even though I don't know his size, I brought a few things over for him to wear, as well as some toys." She blew out a breath, swiped her hair back from her face, and smiled at me. "I forgot to mention I'm married to Atilla."

"It's nice to meet you. Did they tell you Liam is completely deaf? He only knows sign language and hasn't spoken verbally."

"Truth told Atilla when he called. The clothes in the bag might not fit. You can exchange whatever is too big or too small. Unless you want to peek at his clothing size real quick? I could run take care of it now."

I stared at the bag, then the woman. "You went and bought him things?"

She shrugged. "Atilla's orders. No idea what's going on, but I was told he'd be staying here for now and would need the basics."

Leading the way to the kitchen, I introduced Liam to Solena, then asked what size clothes he wore. He didn't know but said I could check inside his shirt for a tag. Once I told Solena, she gave me a nod.

"That works. I bought a few things in that size. The ones that are bigger I can go exchange. At least he'll have some stuff for tonight and the morning. I don't want to overstay my welcome tonight, so I'll come by after breakfast."

Crap! Breakfast. I was supposed to return to the bakery tomorrow. I quickly texted Mrs. Johnson and told her I had an emergency come up and asked if I could have more time off. When she didn't respond right away, I had a bad feeling I was about to lose my job. Normally she answered within a minute or two.

Truth came back into the kitchen, looking more stressed than before.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Solena, Atilla wants you to go back home. I'm sure he'll tell you what's happening right now. I need to speak with Madison."

Solena hurried out the door, leaving me alone with Truth and Liam. I didn't know if the little boy could read lips, or could read at all. I showed him the sack with the clothes and toys, then left him in the living room to play for a little bit.

"Is everything okay?" I asked once Truth and I were alone.

"We think Liam was actually bait," Truth said. "His father is Luca Nance. While there's no criminal record for the dad, the uncle is another matter. Luca has one brother. Angelo Nance. Their mother was Italian. Father was American."

"I'm confused," I said.

"Angelo works for one of the men running drugs in Bryson Corners. Your brother owes them a lot of money. While Lavender couldn't find

anything concrete, she believes they used Liam as a way to lure you out. I think they wanted to snatch you and use you as leverage to get their hands on Justin. I'm betting they have eyes on the compound and followed you, hoping for an opportunity to grab you."

A chill went down my spine. Was someone watching me? Did they want to hurt me all because of my brother's stupid choices? But even worse, how could someone use a child as bait? "And Luca allowed this to happen to his son?"

Truth rubbed his eyes, and I could tell whatever he said next was something weighing on him. "The boy hasn't been treated well since his mother died six months ago. I'd imagine it was hard taking care of him, and the dad wanted a way out."

That poor little boy. What would happen to him now? And what the hell had Justin been thinking? How could he owe so many awful people money? I now knew there was no way to save my brother. I didn't see how anyone could get him out of this mess.

"What happens now?" I asked.

"Well, we have a few options. Let's figure out how to handle Liam's situation first. The woman I spoke to earlier is crazy talented. There's not much she can't do with a computer. Do you want to keep Liam?"

"You mean... adopt him?" I asked.

"Sort of."

I didn't know what that meant. "Yes, I want him to be our son. Are you okay with that?"

"More than." Truth smiled. "I'll let you tell Liam about it. Right now, I need to make some calls and I need to run an errand. Stay in the house with Liam, all right? You'll both be safe here."

He kissed my forehead, and it wasn't long before he left the house

and I felt the rumble of his bike. Except this time, I could hear it too.

Chapter Eight

Truth

On my way to Officer Benson's house, I called Wire and Lavender back. When the call connected, I didn't even give them a chance to speak.

"Do it. She wants Liam to be our son. So whatever it takes, make sure no one can take him away from Madison."

"Weren't you the one complaining about my phone etiquette earlier?" Lavender asked.

"I'm running out of time. Have a cop to speak with, and I want to make sure that boy is safe. I also need you to forward me everything you've found so far on Justin and the men who want his head. If there's even a chance I can save Madison's brother, I'm going to do it. I personally want to bury the fucker, but he's her family."

"You should have everything now," Wire said. "And yes, you're on speaker. It's just the two of us home right now."

"Anything I need to know about Liam? I get the feeling you didn't tell me everything."

"Damn it, Lavender." I heard Wire harshly whispering to her, even though I didn't know what the hell he was saying. Clearly, she'd kept something from me. "Look, the kid hasn't had an easy life. From what we could find, he had cochlear implants until a year ago. He's now completely deaf, and nothing will ever make him hear again. The mom died in an accident six months ago. Since then, the father has left him with random people."

"When you say left him, you mean overnight or for a few days?" I

asked.

“A mix of one night and as long as a week. He doesn’t seem concerned whether or not the people actually care for his kid. Did you have any trouble getting him to go with you?”

“No. But Madison used sign language to speak with him. I’d thought knowing they were similar had set him at ease.”

“It could have. I’m sure all the chaos in his life helped him go with the flow,” Wire said. “By tomorrow morning, the boy will be yours. So I don’t have to go digging into your past, give me your actual name so I can put you and Madison on the papers. Do you know her last name?”

I heard more whispering. Then Lavender said something that nearly had me stomping on the brakes. “We only need your name. After all, it’s best for a family to all share the same surname, right? So we’ll just make Madison your wife while we’re at it.”

What the fuck? I knew they did this shit all the time, but it still took me a bit by surprise. I wasn’t sure how Madison would feel about it. Then again, she might prefer a marriage over what I’d offered so far.

Shit. He wanted my name. I haven’t even told Madison yet. The thought hadn’t occurred to me until just now. How long had it been since anyone called me something other than Truth? Hell. I’d need to talk to Madison about more than Liam and her brother when I got home.

“My name is Xander Hundley,” I said.

“All right. By morning, you’ll have paperwork for Liam Hundley and Madison Hundley. Does your wife have a driver’s license?”

“I haven’t had a chance to talk to her about that yet. I’d considered buying her an SUV, but I’m not sure what requirements need to be met for a deaf person to drive.”

“It differs from state to state,” Wire said. “I’ll check the guidelines for

Oklahoma, and I'll include that in an email I'm sending you later tonight. If she already has a license on file, we can update her name and have a new one sent to your house."

"And if she doesn't, then you'll have all the papers you need in order for her to obtain one," Lavender said.

"Thanks. Now about Justin. I'm going to see if I can strike a deal with Officer Benson, or maybe he can get me in touch with someone who can. Either way, I want him out of Madison's life, but I know it would set her mind at ease if she knew he was safe somewhere."

"The files I've sent should help broker a deal with the DEA," Wire said. "They'll probably put him into protective custody. Considering the drug cartels involved the higher up the chain you go, he'll have to move and change his name when all this is over. As far as the smaller fish go, we'll handle it. Scare them. Do whatever is necessary to make sure they leave Madison alone. You have enough to deal with already. This is something small we can handle without having to even leave the comfort of our home."

"Thanks. I appreciate it. I'm pulling up to the house now. Let me know if anything else comes up," I said, then ended the call. I got out and walked up to the front door and rang the bell.

A sweet-looking woman answered, smiling up at me. If my cut bothered her, she didn't show it.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"I was hoping your husband was home. I'd like to discuss something with Officer Benson," I said. "Please tell him Truth with the Savage Raptors has some information for him related to the drug problem in Bryson Corners."

She nodded. "You want to come inside and wait?"

I followed her into the house and waited in the front entry. Looking

around, I could tell they had kids. Did his wife always let strangers into their home? What if I'd been a bad man? I could have hurt her. Killed her. Taken their children. She seemed a little too trusting. Or maybe she was just that confident her husband would keep her safe.

Officer Benson came from the back of the house and gave me a hard look. I held up my hands. "I'm unarmed. I really do have information for you, but I need to give you some background first."

"My kids are out back. We can sit in the kitchen."

He pulled out a chair at their table and pointed to it. I sat and he took the spot across from me. I noticed he'd put himself between me and the back door.

"My wife has a brother named Justin. He's an addict, and he owes a lot of money to some big players in town. A friend compiled some papers for me, drawing the connection between the mess Justin is in, and some major cartels. Interested?" I asked.

"First, what do you want? I know this can't be free."

"My wife will worry about her brother. I want him out of her life. I thought maybe the DEA could offer him a deal, get him away from Madison in exchange for him testifying in what could be one of the biggest cases of this decade."

"All right. Second, why me? You could have called the precinct or gone to the DEA directly. Yet you're in my house."

"I've heard you're trustworthy. I know you're friends with Outlaw. So, do we have a deal?" I asked.

"I can't speak for the DEA but give me what you have and I'll see what I can do. I'll have to come up with some explanation as to how I obtained the information." Officer Benson ran his hand down his face. "Jesus. You didn't come with a small ask, did you?"

“Sorry about that.”

He waved me off. Officer Benson pulled a business card from his wallet and slid it over to me. “Get the information to me at this email address. Find a way to send it anonymously. I mean, in a way even someone like Outlaw couldn’t trace, you get me?”

I knew exactly what he meant. I took the card and then stood. Even though I didn’t have anything concrete in place, I’d at least gotten the ball rolling. Now the issue with Justin was out of my hands. One less problem to deal with.

I didn’t know what to expect when I got home. Walking into the house, I found Liam in his sleeping bag in the living room, and Madison curled up on the couch with a book. It looked like our new son had fallen asleep before dinner, and little Cleo had cuddled up beside him. Then again, Madison had given him some snacks. He may still be full. The poor kid had such a rough day. From what Wire said, Liam’s life had been hard since his mom died.

“You’re home,” Madison said.

“Yeah. We need to talk. Are you hungry? We could make dinner together.”

Her cheeks flushed. “Knuckles came by to check on us. I wasn’t sure how long you’d be gone, so I asked him to order pizza. He said he’d get two in case you were hungry when you came home. It’s due to arrive any minute.”

“All right. I know us talking won’t wake up Liam since he can’t hear. Anything I should watch for?”

“Vibrations,” she said. “He can feel your motorcycle when you come and go. The door slamming. Things like that.”

“I’ll make sure to be careful in the future.” I sat beside her and

reached for her hand. I needed to tell her we were married and try to explain how. She'd need a ring. "Remember the woman I spoke to earlier? Lavender?"

"Yes. She seemed nice. You said she's good with computers, right?"

"Ever heard of hackers?" I asked.

"Who hasn't? They're popular in movies and books. Are you saying that's what she does?"

"Both her and her husband. I called them when I left here. By the morning, Liam will be our son, and you'll be my wife."

She tensed. "What? Wife? I don't understand."

"They're most likely going to hack into whatever government offices handle marriage licenses and such. When I was talking to them, I realized I never told you something important. My name." I laced our fingers together. "I go by Truth now, which is my road name. The name on my birth certificate is Xander Hundley. When it's just us at home, you can call me Xander. Only you get to call me that."

"What if I accidentally use that name when we're around other people?" she asked.

"It would be a problem, especially around my brothers or another club. Why?"

"Then it would be better for me to keep calling you Truth. It's not like I mind. It's the only name I've known until now. The fact you told me your real name is enough."

I didn't know what I'd done to deserve such an incredible woman. I knew I was a lucky bastard. Hell, every man in this club would say she was too good for me. They'd be right, but it didn't mean I'd ever let her go.

"Officer Benson is going to see what he can do to help Justin," I said. "But it's going to depend on your brother. Wire and Lavender found some

information not only on the men your brother owes money to, but their bosses, and their bosses' bosses. This goes all the way up to some big cartels. It's like a wet dream for the DEA to possibly take those fuckers down."

"How is that going to help Justin?" she asked.

"If he agrees to testify, they might be willing to help him get clean, and give him a fresh start. It would mean you'll never see him again, and he'll have to move elsewhere. Possibly even out of the state."

"So I won't see him again, but he'll be alive and I'll be safe?"

"Right. At least, that's my hope. I have no idea how this will play. It may blow up in our faces, or Justin could refuse to cooperate. It's also possible the people after him could take him out before the DEA gets its hands on him."

She sighed and leaned her head against my shoulder. It was a lot for her to handle. While she may have lived with an addict, in many ways she'd lived an innocent life. Now that she was part of my world, things would be different. She couldn't wear rose-colored glasses and survive. If Madison thought she'd seen the darkness in the world already, she'd be wrong. All she'd done was play in the shadows a bit. I knew the horrors that were really out there, and I'd do anything to keep her safe. Even if it meant painting her some ugly pictures. Ignorance wasn't always bliss... it could get you killed.

"Once all this is over, things will settle down a bit. I can't promise it will remain peaceful. There's always something going on. Solena's son ended up with human traffickers. Meredith had a miscarriage. Now we're dealing with your brother's problems in order to keep you, and now Liam, safe."

She looked over at the boy sleeping soundly. "Our son. We're really a family, aren't we?"

"Yes, we are. The two of you are now the most important people to

me. I will always have my club's back, but you're my top priority. Both of you."

"I'll be meeting everyone in the club soon, right? And so will Liam. I'm a little worried. Since he only knows how to communicate with sign language, it won't be easy for people to talk to him. Except Knuckles. Is there anyone else here who knows sign language?"

"I don't think so." Honestly, I'd never asked. Hell, until Knuckles started signing at the bakery that morning, I'd never known he could do that. Who knew what knowledge my brothers had? We each had things people didn't know about us. "Are you going in to work tomorrow?"

"No. I told Mrs. Johnson I had an emergency. She never responded, which makes me think I may not have a job anymore."

"Well, I wasn't going to bring it up, since you seemed to enjoy working, but things have changed now. There's no reason for you to have a job unless you want one. I have plenty of money to take care of us. We don't have to pay rent on the house. The utilities are paid by the club as well. Only thing I pay for, other than groceries and gas for my bike, are my movie channels and stuff like books, parts for the bike, and other non-essentials."

"How can the club afford to pay for everyone's electricity and water?" she asked.

"Before Atilla pays any of us, each month he takes the full amount of the utility bill, then divides it evenly among all of us. Well, not the Prospects. Only patched members."

"I feel like there's so much I don't know," she said.

"There's plenty of time. This is your home now, Madison. No one expects you jump right in and know everything about our club or how things work around here. There's a learning curve. At least you can hear well enough now that you'll be able to speak with everyone, and you seem less

anxious than before.”

She reached up and touched her hearing aid. Best investment I’d ever made. While everyone chipped in, I’d covered the bulk of the cost. Knowing she felt self-conscious about speaking in front of people, and struggled to have conversations without sign language, had bothered me.

Things would be different now. In so many ways.

I stood and held my hand out to her. Closing my fingers around hers, I helped her off the couch and led her to our bedroom. Since Liam was asleep, I hoped it meant we had a little time to ourselves. Once hadn’t been enough, and this time, she’d be able to hear me.

Shutting the door, I twisted the lock and removed my cut. Madison’s eyes went wide when she realized what was about to happen. She licked her lips and watched as I removed my boots and clothes. The heat in her gaze made my cock twitch in anticipation. I reached for her, and slowly undressed my beautiful woman, kissing every inch of skin from her collarbones to her knees.

“Truth, I... I need...”

I ran my fingers over her slit, and realized she was already wet and eager. As badly as I wanted to romance her, take my time worshipping her, I knew there was a little boy in the other room who could wake up at any moment.

“This is going to be quick,” I said. “Liam could come looking for us.”

“It’s okay. I feel empty and need you inside me.”

“Not yet. You’re going to come at least once before then.” I toppled her to the bed and spread her thighs. The second my tongue swiped across her clit, she gasped and arched into me. I traced circles around the hard little bud, then flicked across it twice before teasing her some more. Madison whimpered and I felt her body trembling. “Can you hear me?”

“Yes. Please, Truth. Don’t stop.”

“I’m going to make you come, then I’m going to flip you over and take you from behind.” Since she was still new to this, I hadn’t wanted to startle her. Best to let her know ahead of time what to expect, at least for now.

I went back to licking and sucking her clit until she writhed beneath me, begging me to let her come. Easing a finger inside her, I pumped it in and out while sucking on her harder. Madison cried out, her pussy clamping down on my finger. Before the orgasm had even faded, I had her face down over the side of the bed and slid in balls deep.

“You’re so fucking tight. Wet. Complete perfection.” I nipped her shoulder. “You’re mine, Madison. No other cock will ever enter this sweet pussy. You’ll only be filled with *my* cum. Tell me you want it.”

“Yes! Yes, I want you to fill me up.”

I growled and felt my balls draw up. I wasn’t going to last much longer. “Tell me you want my baby.”

“Please give me a baby. Truth, I’m so close. I need... need...”

I felt her pussy clench, then the heat of her release. Unable to hold back another second, I fucked her so hard the bed started to scoot sideways. I let out a roar like some savage beast when I came, pumping my hips until I had nothing left to give.

Collapsing onto the bed, I dragged her into my arms. We’d need to clean up, but right now, I just wanted to catch my breath and hold her close.

“Will it always be like this?” she asked.

“No. Sometimes it will be better.” I kissed her softly, thanking whoever had placed this woman in my path. I knew without the slightest doubt she’d been made for me. There was no one more perfect in all the world.

* * *

Madison

Liam missed dinner and slept until the sun came up this morning. To make up for it, I made him a big breakfast with eggs, bacon, and toast. As much as I'd have preferred to know for certain if he had a food allergy, I also didn't want to deny him yummy things if it wasn't necessary. I'd watch him carefully the next few days in case he had an allergic reaction to anything.

Liam, I have something to tell you. He kept chewing his food and stared at me, waiting for me to continue. I kept signing, hoping he wouldn't be upset by the news. *Truth and I have adopted you. You're going to live here with us from now on.*

He set his toast down and seemed to shut down before my very eyes. It was like a mask slid into place. I'd never seen a small child do such a thing before. What had the poor boy been through since his mother died? Then it hit me. When I'd said we'd adopted him, had he thought we were trying to replace his family?

You can still call us by our names, Liam. We aren't trying to take the place of your family, but this will be your home now. You'll be safe here, and we'll set up a bedroom for you. In fact, I bet Truth is already working on it.

Still nothing. I reached out and lightly ran my fingers through his hair. I wanted to hug him, to tell him I'd love him forever. Something told me it wouldn't be well received. He clearly missed his mother, and I couldn't blame him. All these years later, I still wished I could see my parents one more time.

Eat your breakfast. We can talk more later.

I started cleaning up the kitchen, trying to take the pressure off Liam. He didn't need me clinging to him or watching him eat. I'd thought we'd

connected last night. He'd trusted me, came with me willingly. Why had he done that if he was going to put up walls today? Was it learning that we'd adopted him? I could imagine discovering something like that might be scary for a small boy.

Truth and I hadn't discussed this part. We'd thought he might be happy about the adoption. I should have known better. Even if Liam's father was a piece of shit who hadn't wanted him, he was *still* the little boy's dad. Small children were often like puppies. You could kick them, and they'd still want your affection. How could I reach Liam and make him understand? No, not just understand but accept the direction his life had taken.

Would the picnic interest him? Truth had asked the club to move it up to today since I wasn't going in to work. Actually, I'd never be going in again. When I still hadn't heard from Mrs. Johnson this morning, I'd told her it would be best if I put in my notice. *That* had gotten a reaction from her, and she'd accepted my resignation effective immediately. It made me wonder if she'd ever liked me working there. I'd thought she'd been nice. She'd offered me a job when no one else in town would. Why had she done it if she was so eager for me to leave?

I'd never understand people.

Knuckles came into the kitchen, startling me. If he'd knocked on the door, I hadn't heard him. Behind him, I saw three more members of the club walk past, each carrying furniture. It seemed Truth had called in reinforcements to get Liam's room ready.

The biker sat beside Liam and introduced himself.

Hi, Liam. My name is Knuckles.

The boy giggled. *That's a funny name.*

Yeah, I guess it is. Knuckles looked over and winked at me. Had he known I was going to have trouble with Liam this morning? I didn't know

how, unless he'd been around a lot of small children and assumed Liam wouldn't react well to the adoption news. *What kind of things do you like to do? Do you have a favorite color? Mine is green.*

Cars and trains, Liam signed. My mom bought me a big train set for Christmas one year. But my dad broke it after she died.

I clenched my hands, wanting to rush over and wrap my arms around him. It took a lot to hold myself back. I filed away the information on the cars and trains. Maybe I could find out what kind of set his mother had bought him. If we got him the same one, we could tell him it was a way of keeping his mother with him. He might like that.

Knuckles continued to talk with Liam. While he occupied my new son, I went to check on Truth. He and the other three men were in the process of shifting the furniture and spreading a throw rug. When had they even brought one inside? I realized it wasn't a rug. Not exactly. It had roads, trees, and homes on it. Liam would be able to play on it with his cars. Solena had brought a handful last night, and I saw two more packages of them on the new dresser.

“Madison, this is Stinger, Ravager, and Maui. Guys, this is my wife, Madison.”

I gave them a small wave. “It's nice to meet you. Thank you for the hearing aid, and for helping with Liam's room.”

The one he called Ravager came over to shake my hand. “It's nice to meet you, Madison. I already had this furniture made, but no one had bought it yet. I was glad to be of help.”

I studied the pieces again. “You made these?”

Ravager nodded. “It's something I enjoy doing.”

“My wife is eager to meet you,” Maui said. “She's home with our daughter right now. Becca is a bit of a handful.”

“Will they be at the picnic?” I asked.

“You bet. The entire club will be there. Kids too. None of us thought Truth would ever settle down. He’s not exactly known for trusting women. The opposite in fact,” Maui said.

“Are you trying to start shit?” Truth asked.

“Only speaking the truth,” Maui said.

“Give it a rest,” Stinger said. “Atilla obviously approved of them being together. You really want to piss off your father-in-law?”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m more worried about Casey than Atilla,” he muttered.

“Liam said he likes trains. His mother bought one for him as a Christmas present. Do you think there’s a way to find out which one she’d bought? I thought we could get the same one, so he’d have something to keep her memory alive. I know it won’t be the one his mom gave him, but if it’s the same model maybe that would be enough. Do you think that will matter?” I asked.

“I’m not sure we could find out which train he had,” Ravager said. “I’m assuming you can’t get the original because something happened to it? But we could give him something better.”

“Like what?” Truth asked.

“A train table with a built-in track. I’ve never made one before. It would be a challenge, and one I’d enjoy,” Ravager said.

“If you’re up for it, I think it would be great. It might be just what Liam needs right now,” Truth said.

I backed out of the room, letting the men plan the train table and work on Liam’s room. I’d wait and see it once they had it finished. Knuckles and Liam had moved to the living room, and the TV was on. I hadn’t thought to ask Liam if he wanted to watch anything. I’d even forgotten to ask if he knew how to read. Most five-year-olds couldn’t read well enough to follow along

with closed captions. I was sure there were exceptions, though.

“What are the two of you watching?” I asked and signed.

Paw Patrol, Liam answered.

“Can he read?” I asked Knuckles. “I didn’t put the TV on last night because I wasn’t sure, and I worried asking him might upset him.”

“A little. Mostly, he likes watching. Even without hearing or reading what’s going on, he’s able to follow along enough to enjoy it.”

“All right. I’ll make sure he gets TV time each day, then.” I joined them on the couch. “I heard the picnic would be today.”

Knuckles nodded. “In about another hour. Don’t worry about bringing anything. Since the picnic is for you and Liam, everyone else is taking care of the food and drinks. Atilla had one of the Prospects go out and get some of those pop-up canopies. He wanted to make sure there’d be plenty of shade for the kids.”

I’d finally meet everyone. Although, the more people who dropped by the house, the more it felt like I’d already said hi to everyone. Were there still more bikers to meet? I knew there were two other women, and I hadn’t met any of the children. Would Liam enjoy playing with the kids?

Chapter Nine

Madison

I'd changed into a pair of shorts and a tank and put one of Liam's new outfits on him. Even Truth had changed before we left to meet everyone for the picnic. When Knuckles mentioned a few canopies, I'd thought of the small ones I'd seen the one time my parents had taken me to the lake. That wasn't close to what Knuckles meant. The giant canvas sunshades covered a large enough area everyone could sit under them comfortably, and the kids had space to play.

Along the edge of one area, they'd set up long tables and filled them with food and drinks. There were multiple folding tables and chairs, and I made my way over to the one where the women were sitting. Solena saw me and waved. I was glad I'd at least met her once. I felt a little more comfortable.

Solena stood when I got closer. "Madison, it's good to see you again. I wish we could have spoken a bit more last time."

"Hi, Solena."

"I'm Casey," the younger woman said with a bright smile.

"And I'm Meredith." The other woman stood and held out her hand. I gave it a quick shake. "Welcome to the Savage Raptors family."

"Thanks. My son, Liam, is like me. He can't hear. Except even a hearing aid won't help him. Right now, only Knuckles and I can speak with him. Truth is learning sign language, but he isn't proficient yet."

Solena patted my arm. "Don't worry about it. The kids will encourage him to play. I already told them he can't hear, so they won't be surprised."

“You should grab a plate of food,” Casey said. “Then come talk to us. It’s nice to have another woman here. Not that I don’t love spending time with Solena and Meredith.”

“I did tell Atilla the other men needed to find women and settle down. It never occurred to me Truth would be one of the first ones to fall.” Meredith shrugged. “Honestly, he’s kind of an asshole to women. I didn’t think anyone would want him.”

I frowned and tried not to be offended by her words. And I failed. How could she say such a thing about the sweetest man I’d ever met? He’d been so gentle and kind to me. We’d been strangers when he’d rushed out to save me. Was this why he’d called himself an asshole? Did people actually say it to his face? He might be rough around the edges, but the man had a heart of gold as far as I was concerned.

“Do any of you know how I ended up living with Truth?” I asked.

Meredith and Casey shared a look before they both shook their heads. Solena chewed on her lip and sat down again, making me think she’d at least heard something. She might not know the entire story, but it was enough for her to know Meredith’s words would have upset me.

“He saved my life. I’d met him and Knuckles earlier in the day at the bakery where I worked in the office. At the time, I couldn’t hear as well as I do now, thanks to the new hearing aid the club bought for me. Knuckles had to sign as Truth spoke to me. We only met briefly.”

“What does that have to do with you being here?” Casey asked. “I’m not being mean. I’m genuinely curious.”

“Knuckles recognized me later that night. My brother had drugged me and taken me to Murphy’s, where he tried to trade me to his dealer in order to lessen the debt he owed him. Knuckles called and told Truth.” I held each of their gazes. “That man, the one you call an asshole, rushed to come save me.

He threatened those men, brought me here, and kept me safe. He's done so much for me. I know I'm the new person here, but if anyone disrespects Truth in front of me again, I'm going to lose my shit."

I felt an arm come around my waist, and Truth's scent teased my nose. He tugged me against him, and I felt some of my anger and frustration drain away. How often did he hear stuff like that? Had they treated him like garbage all this time because he didn't automatically trust women? He hadn't told me about his past, but I had no doubt someone, if not multiple someones, had hurt him badly.

"Easy, Madison. I appreciate you sticking up for me, but it's okay. I've been pretty damn mean to most of the women I've come across. I warned you I wasn't a nice man."

I turned to look up at him. "But you are. Why can't everyone else see that?"

A man came over and I saw the word *President* on his cut. Had I gone too far? Was he going to be angry with me? If I got in trouble, would Truth have to pay the price for bringing me here?

"I see it," he said. "Truth has issues when it comes to women, but I also know he's changed since meeting you, Madison. You're right. He's a good man. Always has been, even if he's a bit rough around the edges."

"What's going on?" someone else asked.

"Your woman said Truth was an asshole to women and that she didn't think anyone would want him. It upset Madison," Casey said. "Can't really blame her. If someone said that about Maui, I'd have probably taken a swing at them."

"Well, so much for a fun family gathering," the man said. "It's nice to meet you, Madison. My name is Lynx, and I'm sorry for what Meredith said. She's mine and tends to have strong opinions. Once you get to know her

better, you'll see that even when what she says sounds cruel, she doesn't mean it in a malicious way."

It felt like they were giving her a free pass, and I didn't understand. It didn't seem fair. I wanted them to see Truth the same way I did.

He kissed the top of my head and hugged me tight. "It's okay, Madison. I'm not bothered by what she said. The entire world can hate me, as long as you don't."

"Of course, I don't!" I reached up and placed my hand on his cheek. "I love you. I could never hate you."

His eyes darkened, and I realized I'd just confessed my feelings for him. I hadn't meant to. It just came out. My cheeks heated and I buried my face against his chest. Even worse. I'd done it in front of everyone. I wished the earth would open up and swallow me whole. How embarrassing!

"On that note, everyone grab a plate and get something to eat." I looked up in time to see Atilla reach for Solena and drag her off behind him. A few of the other men smirked at me, or even winked. I had a feeling they'd never let me forget this moment.

"Come on, honey. We'll get Liam and help him fix a plate too," Truth said, taking my hand. Then he leaned in close. "And for the record, I love you too."

What? I tripped over my feet with the shock of his words as he tugged me along in his wake.

Well, I certainly hadn't expected any of this to happen when I'd woken up this morning. But Truth loved me... I couldn't remember a time I'd ever been happier.

* * *

Truth

The picnic hadn't gone as well as I'd hoped. I knew Meredith could be a bitch, but I thought Lynx had fixed her issues, or was helping her through them. She'd seemed to settle down and even started smiling more after they adopted the kids. Now I had to wonder if something else was going on that sent her spiraling again. Lynx had told us she didn't adjust well to changes. Was that all it was? Had me bringing Madison here tipped her over the edge? Or perhaps adding both Madison and Liam, and then not having a way to communicate with the little boy, had been too stressful and triggered an episode?

Both Madison and Liam were still asleep. The sun was barely up, and I had my first cup of coffee in my hand. My son's room wouldn't be completed for a little while, especially since Ravager had to handmake the train table we'd talked about. It did bother me that Liam didn't seem overly excited about being adopted. I'd stayed up last night watching videos after Madison went to sleep, trying to learn more sign language. Since it was the only way I could talk to my son, it was essential I learn as much as I could as quickly as possible. I wanted to show him I was trying to do what was necessary to take care of him.

My phone rang and I quickly answered, then realized no one in my family would have woken from the sound anyway. It was a bittersweet feeling. I couldn't believe I had a family of my own now, and yet, my wife could only partially hear with a hearing aid and my son couldn't hear at all. I wanted to give them the world, and it bothered me there was something I could never do for them -- give them both perfect hearing.

"Hello," I said, pressing the phone to my ear.

"It's Benson. Thought it would be best to call and not come by the compound."

"Yeah, might not be the best idea for you to show up at the gates.

Although, it might be fun to watch the Prospect start to sweat as he figured out what to do. No way he'd call Atilla this early in the morning."

Benson laughed. "I have some good news for you. We passed over everything to the DEA. After answering some rather uncomfortable questions about the evidence we provided, they took Justin into custody. Got a call a few minutes ago saying he'd agreed to testify. They're going to have him under twenty-four-hour surveillance, and even have a private doctor who's going to help him get clean."

"That is awesome news. Thank you, Officer Benson."

"You can tell your woman her brother is going to be fine. Even I don't know where they're going to take him, but I know he's officially out of Bryson Corners. And there's one more thing."

"What's that?" I asked.

"While the DEA was doing some digging, they noticed the house was in his name. They did a bit of coaxing, and since Justin won't have the same identity when all this is over and can never return to the state of Oklahoma after the trial, he signed the house over to your wife."

I knew Madison would be overjoyed to own her family home. However, she couldn't live there. I didn't know what she'd want to do with the place. The neighborhood was decent. Maybe I could convince her to rent the property once we had it cleaned out and we'd done any repairs on the place. Something told me she wouldn't want to sell it.

"I appreciate that, and I know Madison will too."

"Her brother did write a note for her. I'll leave it, along with the papers for the house, with whatever man you have standing guard at the gate. You can give it to her when you think she's ready."

Before we hung up, maybe there was one more thing he could help me with. "Do you know anything about a little boy named Liam Nance? His

father is Luca and his uncle is Angelo.”

“Are you asking about his mother?” Benson asked softly. “That was seriously fucked up. We never could prove it was murder, but I’m almost certain it was. They claim a car jumped the curb and hit Liam’s mother before crashing into a utility pole. Driver died on impact and his alcohol blood count was through the roof. Judge closed the case as a drunk driving accident.”

“You think it was something more?”

“Yeah. I think Angelo Nance set it up, so he could lure his brother into helping him. It didn’t take long after the mom died before Luca Nance went off the rails. On paper, he’s a law-abiding citizen. We don’t have anything that will stick in order to even bother arresting him. But I’m convinced he has his hands in his brother’s business by now. Why do you ask?”

“Liam is our son now, but he didn’t seem thrilled about the adoption. I was trying to figure out why.”

Officer Benson grew quiet and when he finally spoke, I knew his thoughts were right about Liam’s resistance to being here. “Take him to the cemetery. Visit his mother’s grave, and make sure he understands you’re trying to give him a safe and happy home, just the way his mother would have wanted.”

“He knows she’s dead, though, right? So why would he want to stay with Luca?” I asked. “It sounds like he’s been a shitty father.”

“I didn’t give up on my dad until I was in my teens. It’s possible if Liam had been with Luca that long, he’d have realized what sort of man he is. Right now, that little boy just wants his father’s love, no matter what he suffers through to get it.”

To some extent, I could understand. All boys looked up to their dads.

Too bad for Liam he'd drawn the short straw. It didn't sound like his birth father gave a shit about him. But me? I did. I'd do whatever it took to prove it too.

"I'll take the family to visit Liam's mother. Madison can talk to him about her while we're there. What was her name?"

"Sonja Nance. Liam looks quite a bit like her. Thankfully, that boy won't look in the mirror one day and see Luca."

"Thanks, Officer Benson. I appreciate everything you've done. I can't speak for the club, but me personally, I owe you one."

He laughed. "Dangerous thing to say to a police officer."

We ended the call and I started on breakfast. By the time Madison and Liam woke up, I had omelets ready for all of us. They dug into their food, and I told Madison about the call I'd received. Although, I didn't tell her about the house or the note from her brother. Right now, we needed to focus on our son.

Cemeteries weren't places I opted to go. I'd always thought I'd avoid the place until I died. Looked like I was wrong. I stood behind Madison and Liam as they kneeled in front of Sonja's grave. Tears trickled down Liam's cheeks, and I wanted to wrap my arms around him and hold on tight. Instead, I stood back and gave the two of them some space. He trusted Madison already. With me, he remained a bit reserved.

She signed as she spoke, so I could hear what was being said.

"Your mother loved you very much, Liam. It made her sad when your dad didn't take care of you the way she'd wanted him to."

Liam signed something back. I thought he'd said he missed her.

"The only thing your mother wants is for you to be happy, safe, and loved. Your dad can't give you those things, Liam. When your mom died, it hurt him. You were both in pain, but he couldn't hug you the way you

needed.”

Liam said something else, and I didn’t catch a word of what he’d signed. Whatever it was, it made Madison pause, and the look she shot my way was full of pain. She gave me a subtle tip of her head to come closer. I kneeled down behind the two of them.

“Truth isn’t trying to replace your father, just like I’m not trying to replace your mother. They will always be your parents, but sometimes, bad things happen and we end up with more than one mother and father. Do you understand?”

Liam stayed quiet and still, but eventually gave a slight nod.

“Tell him that I’ll be here to support him for as long as he needs me. I’m not asking for anything in return, except for him to follow the rules, do well in school, and live the kind of life that would have made his mother proud of him.” She gave me a quick smile and signed what I’d said. Liam glanced at me over his shoulder. Slowly the boy turned and put his arms around my neck. I hugged him, and saw Madison was now crying as well.

“Everything is going to be fine,” she said. “It may take him some time to adjust, but he’s a good boy, Truth. Once he sees that he has a home with us, and that we won’t push to replace the family he already had, then he’ll come around.”

* * *

Madison

It felt like everything wrapped up a little too neatly. Truth said my brother was going to get the help he needed, as well as a fresh start on life, and now I had the family I’d always wanted. Liam had even gone on a walk with Truth, leaving me behind. I hoped the two of them could bond. Truth might not be fluent in sign language, but he was learning, and I knew Liam

appreciated it as much as I did.

I stood on the porch, waiting for them to return, and enjoying the sunlight. For the first time in years, I could breathe. I didn't have to look over my shoulder, sleep with one eye open, or worry about someone busting into the bathroom while I showered. All right, so Truth did tend to come in while I was showering, but it wasn't the same. I actually liked it when he joined me.

Movement to the right caught my attention. My joy dimmed a little when I saw Meredith coming toward me. She wasn't going to start something again, was she? Round two didn't sound like much fun.

“Morning,” she said, stopped at the foot of the steps. “Can we talk?”

“Mind if we stay out here? I'm waiting for Truth and Liam to come back from their walk.”

“They're at my house right now, playing with the kids. But sure, we can talk out here.” She shoved her hands into her pockets. “About the picnic... I was out of line. It's common knowledge around here that I have a mental illness. Certain things can be a trigger for me. Not in a PTSD kind of way, but more like a mental meltdown. Sometimes that means I snap at people, say things I shouldn't, or go full out and act reckless. This has been a bad week for me. My dad died not too long ago. The pain has been unbearable, but usually I do okay. For whatever reason, I've felt his loss the most this week, and it sent me in a downward spiral. I was wrong to lash out at you about Truth, and I'm sorry. I already apologized to him too.”

A mental illness? It amazed me she'd admit to having a problem. I also appreciated the fact she'd come to talk to me and apologized. At least she realized what she'd done was wrong.

“Thank you for coming to talk to me and putting your trust in me. I know it couldn't have been easy to say all that.”

“Friends?” Meredith asked.

“I’d like that. You said Truth and Liam were at your house. We can walk there together, if you want?”

Meredith smiled and started walking. I remained at her side, and we talked a little more, until the sight in front of me stopped me in my tracks. Truth and Liam were sitting side by side while Meredith’s kids were across from them. I watched as my husband helped Liam play with the children, using his limited sign language. It also broke my heart a little, knowing Liam would never be able to hear their voices or talk to them the way other children could. I’d been lucky, having at least partial hearing in one ear. Liam would never have that again. What would it be like to completely lose my hearing? I thought it would be rather terrifying, and lonely.

“Your son is rather remarkable,” Meredith said. “Lynx and I spoke with Knuckles last night. He’s going to offer sign language lessons to the children, and several of the adults are going to sit in too. Including me and Lynx.”

“Thank you. It means a lot that everyone is willing to learn a new language in order to make Liam feel at home here.”

“He’s family. You both are.”

Meredith put her arm around my shoulders, and I hugged her. I’d never had a friend before. In school, people were either downright rude, or overly polite. None had wanted to be a true friend to the deaf girl. It looked like Liam wasn’t the only one getting a new life. I was too, all thanks to Truth.

I knew I’d never meet another man like him, no matter how long I lived. Truth was one of a kind, and I knew I was lucky to call him mine. All the women who’d treated him badly were idiots. As we’d lain in bed last night, he’d told me about the women who’d cheated on him, and we’d even

talked about Jane. It wasn't any wonder he'd not trusted women for so long. He'd even said that he didn't think Jane would have stayed by him. I could tell her death weighed on him, but I'd do my best to help him move past it.

The road before us wouldn't always be smooth. We'd have bumps along the way, but together I knew we could get through anything.

Epilogue

Truth

I'd been gone all day, handling club business. Walking into a quiet house felt unsettling, especially since my wife and son were supposed to be here. I found Liam in his room, quietly playing with the train Ravager brought over a month ago. My boy had been here for five months, and we now had a good relationship.

He saw me in the doorway and smiled.

I'm back. Do you know where your mom is?

He quickly signed back, and his words made my stomach drop. *She's sick.*

I raced down the hall and into our bedroom. The sound of retching in the bathroom led me to Madison, where she hunched over the toilet. She'd been a little off the past week. No fever, but she'd felt queasy and certain smells made her run from the room. I'd begged her to see the doctor, but she'd been refusing.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Is it the flu? Did you call the doctor?" I asked, reaching down to hold her hair back. I rubbed her back and waited while she caught her breath.

She pointed to the counter and I saw a stick on the surface. When I realized what it was, my heart nearly stopped. I picked it up and stared at the little display window. *Pregnant. We were having a baby?*

"Are you serious? You're pregnant?" I asked.

"I'll call the doctor tomorrow, but between my symptoms and that test, I'm going to say that yes, I'm definitely going to have a baby. I don't

know how to tell Liam.”

“We can figure that out later. Right now, what do you need from me?”

“Something to keep me from throwing up would be nice,” she said.

“I think we have some crackers in the kitchen. I’ll get them and a glass of water. Go lie down and I’ll bring them to you.”

She closed her eyes and let out a soft laugh. “Truth, I’m pregnant not dying. I’ll come to the kitchen after I clean up.”

On my way to get the crackers and water, I stopped to watch Liam for a moment. This house only had three bedrooms. I didn’t want Madison to give up her library, and I couldn’t ask Liam to share his room. Only thing I could think to do was add on to the house. And what if Madison wanted more children later?

It was a discussion we could have another time. In the kitchen, I grabbed the box of crackers, got her a glass of ice water, and sat to wait for her. When she came in and sat down, she had a little more color in her cheeks and looked better. She nibbled on the saltines and sipped the water.

“Are you happy?” she asked. “You’d wanted us to have a baby. Now we are.”

Why did I feel like her question might be a trap? “Um. You and Liam were enough, but I can’t lie. I’m excited about the baby. Worried about the changes we’ll have to make, and how it will affect Liam. Concerned something could go wrong and we could lose the baby, or I could lose both of you. So... I guess I’m feeling a little bit of everything.”

She reached over and took my hand. “Me too. But we’ll get through it together. Nothing is impossible when we face it as a family, right?”

“Right.” I leaned over the table to kiss her. “Love you, Madison. You, Liam, and now the baby are the best things that ever happened to me. I know

I'm lucky to have you in my life, and I will do whatever it takes to give all of you the lives you deserve. All I want is for you to never regret coming here with me."

"That will never happen... Xander." I smiled at the use of my real name. It wasn't something she'd ever done until now. "I love you, and I'm right where I'm supposed to be."

She was right. No matter what happened, as long as we were together, everything would be fine. Madison was my one and only, and I'd give up my life for her if it came down to it. I finally had a family, and I was going to hold onto them with both hands and never let go.

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Thank you for purchasing a copy of *Truth (Savage Raptors MC)*. I hope you enjoyed the story. If you have a moment, I would be super grateful if you could leave a rating or review at the bookseller of your choice, Goodreads, or BookBub.

Curious about what happened with Bastard, aka Garrison West, and the issue mentioned in the opening scene? It's the main storyline for *Outlaw (Devil's Fury MC)*. You can find it at Changeling Press or your favorite bookseller. While it's book two in the series, it can be read as a standalone romance.

I'm sure a few of you are wondering about Cleo. She's actually inspired by my very own rescue baby, also a red tabby named Cleo who is missing an eye. Although, mine has all four legs. She's extremely mischievous and likes to climb into the fridge when I open the door and sit on the bottom shelf (which is why that's the one shelf where I don't place food). And yes, she's accidentally been closed in there before. Thankfully, I felt something was off and immediately opened the door and found her. Now I know to check before shutting it.

I did a lot of research into hearing aids, and the different types needed for various levels of hearing loss. The idea for Madison's character came from a girl I knew in high school. She had cochlear implants, but in most instances still needed to read lips as they didn't restore her hearing fully. With hearing loss, sometimes it's a matter of not being able to hear a certain tone or pitch. For instance, a person may struggle to hear what someone says

if they have a higher voice than someone with a deeper tone. However, I'm not a doctor and I'm not an expert, so those aspects may not be one hundred percent factual. While I usually run medical questions past a few nurses, in this case, I needed a specialist and couldn't find one. So please forgive any inaccuracies in regard to Madison's hearing aid.

When I started this series, I hadn't planned for things to take a darker turn. I'd wanted to focus more on drama and building family connections. But each set of characters comes with their own stories and personalities, so I just go with the flow.

If you know someone battling addiction or alcoholism, my heart goes out to you. Neither disease is easy on the person suffering through it, nor their family and friends. Ready to seek treatment, or have a loved one who's ready? SAMHSA offers confidential assistance (in the US). You can call them at 1-800-662-4357.

Until next time...

Harley

Dedication and Acknowledgment

For anyone who's ever felt "less than" -- I hope you know you *are* enough, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Thank you to...

The Wyldlings for your continued support, not just when it comes to my books, but also when I'm struggling with life in general.

My Betas -- Tami, Dawn, Shelby, and Jen (in no particular order) -- you ladies are amazing and I'm so very grateful to you for all the feedback. Special shout out to Shelby for assistance with the Oklahoma law questions I had!

The staff at Changeling Press who help polish every book during content edits, line edits, cover art, formatting, and everything else that goes into producing one of my books. All of you are rock stars!

My readers -- I can't tell you how much I appreciate you buying my books, or borrowing them through libraries, or other legal lending programs. Out of the millions of books, you chose mine, and I'm truly honored.

My family -- though you drive me crazy (and it's admittedly not a far trip), I love each of you. While there are times you make it impossible to get any work done, you also inspire me in so many ways. (And if my husband is reading this, I know his mind just went straight in the gutter -- no, that wasn't the inspiration I was talking about!)

Nadiya and Ladybug for all the cuddles, nose boops, and cheek rubs when I start to stress over my impending deadlines, getting a scene right, and everything else that has the potential to send me spiraling. Gotta have my kitty love! Those two girls are almost always beside me.

And huge thanks to everyone who keeps me supplied with Starbucks, because everyone who's spoken to me even for a few minutes knows that's my drug of choice, and my brain doesn't function without it.

Playlist

Don't Believe Her by Scorpions
Lust or Love by Scorpions
Courage by P!nk
Bet U Wish U Had Me Back by Halestorm
Better Sorry Than Safe by Halestorm
Fuel by Metallica
Party Up by DMX
Where Them Girls At by David Guetta
Kings & Queens by Ava Max
To the Bone by JT Machinima
What Ya Gonna Do by Hinder
Waking Up the Devil by Hinder

[Harley Wylde](#)

Harley Wylde is an accomplished author known for her captivating MC Romances. With an unwavering commitment to sensual storytelling, Wylde immerses her readers in an exciting world of fierce men and irresistible women. Her works exude passion, danger, and gritty realism, while still managing to end on a satisfying note each time.

When not crafting her tales, Wylde spends her time brainstorming new plotlines, indulging in a hot cup of Starbucks, or delving into a good book. She has a particular affinity for supernatural horror literature and movies. Visit Wylde's website to learn more about her works and upcoming events, and don't forget to sign up for her newsletter to receive exclusive discounts and other exciting perks.

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