



WRATH

CALA RILEY

wrath

Lotus MC Book 2

Cala Riley

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content warning:

BEFORE YOU START binge reading Wrath, we wanted to warn you about possible triggers. Like most of our books this one contains cursing, violence, and unaliving. Our heroine is also a SA survivor. The last thing we want to do is trigger you. For a more detailed list of TW please check our [website](#).

If you or anyone you know needs help, please call the National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673

Book girlies, this one's for you. You'll know the scene we mean specifically when you read it.

prologue

TARA

HOW IN THE *hell* did I end up here?

I stare in the mirror at the handprint around my throat. The definition of the fingerprints is impressive. My eyes drop to my bruise-covered arms. Taking a deep breath, I drop the towel onto the floor and see that my left side is different shades of yellow and purple. I feel the tears gathering and squeeze my eyes shut. I can't cry. Not again.

How is this my life?

Growing up, I was Daddy's princess. Then in high school, my mom died. Six months later, my dad married a girl who was only five years older than me. Soon he forgot that I existed, and she made it known I wasn't welcome. As soon as I graduated, I hit the road. I spent a couple months hopping around until I ended up in Vegas.

Next thing I knew, my credit cards were shut off. I had no money and had never worked a day in my life. Then I found Lotus MC, and they took me in. I genuinely enjoyed it in the beginning, but in the last year it's gotten old.

And then he happened.

My throat gets tight as I think about him straddling me, trying to choke the life out of me.

"Fuckin' girl doesn't know when to shut up and take it," he grunts.

"No," I rasp, shaking off the memory.

I can't go there again. I won't.

Then I think about the way Wrath dropped to his knees in front of me and held up his bloody hands, promising me Jug would never hurt me again, and, for some reason, I believe him.

one

TARA

STARING IN THE MIRROR, I take a deep breath as I run my hands over my hips. I have on a white blouse and black dress pants and heels. My brown hair is twisted at the base of my neck into a bun, and I have small studs in my ears. My makeup is flawless and does a killer job covering up the deep circles under my eyes from the lack of sleep. I feel like a completely different person than I was then.

Nonetheless, I look just like her.

Growing up, you never want to hear that you look like your mother, but now that I'm an adult and she's gone, I love it.

My phone vibrates on the bathroom counter, and I grab it.

"It's time," I mumble to myself as I shut off the alarm, reminding me it's time to go. I make my way into Wrath's bedroom that I've taken over and grab my purse and head for the door.

"Good luck!" Natalie yells from her place at the bar as I pass by.

"Thanks!" I yell over my shoulder before I step outside.

Hurrying, I make my way to my car and get in. After putting on my seat belt and turning on the car, I look up into the rearview mirror and look at myself.

I got this.

Or so I thought. As I pull up outside the shop, nerves get the best of me.

I don't got this.

My hands shake as I pull into the parking spot and shut off the car. I look out of the windshield at the brick building in front of me.

Last week, Midnight came up to me and asked if I was still looking for a job. Apparently, he has been wanting to hire a receptionist for a while and hasn't gotten around to it. While I know nothing about tattoos, I jumped on it. Honestly, it sounds way better than working at the auto shop, which Reaper offered me.

I mean, logically, I know they are both throwing me a pity job. The club feels responsible for me after everything that went down with Jug. I shiver at the memory of him. He changed my life and not in a good way. Just thinking about him makes my skin crawl. Gently, I rest my hand on my side where I was stabbed not that long ago. The stitches are gone, but the puckered skin remains.

Still, even if it's a pity job, I hope the experience I learn is enough to translate into another job one day. Then I won't have to depend on the club to get me through.

A slight sadness fills me at the thought of leaving them though. Even though I had a bad experience, I still like it there. I'm still hesitant to leave them.

Taking a deep breath, I get out of the car and make my way toward the door. Today's my first day, and I'm nervous. As soon as I step inside, I'm blown away. There are blown-up pieces of art on the wall that are gorgeous and look like they belong in a gallery. The walls are white, but the back wall

is exposed brick. The enormous desk is made of wood and metal.

I fucking love everything about this.

“Hey, you made it,” Midnight says as he comes around the corner, having heard the bell on the door chime.

“I’m sorry I’m late.” I cringe.

I hate having to apologize, but it’s instinct at this point. One I’ve been working on.

He looks over at the clock on the wall. He raises an eyebrow when he looks back at me. “You’re thirty minutes early. There’s nothing to apologize for.”

I shrug as I bite the inside of my cheek.

Don’t fuck this up.

Midnight has always been one of the kinder men in the club. Never made me feel worthless like some of the other men did.

“Am I dressed okay? We never talked about what I should wear,” I ask.

Midnight’s eyes soften as he crosses his arms. “You look great. Maybe a little too dressed up, but great. You’re allowed to wear whatever you want. What you are wearing now or jeans and a T-shirt. Tomorrow, though, you might want to wear some better shoes. Those are going to kill your feet.”

I look down at my heels and cringe. Why in the hell did I think heels in a tattoo shop were a good idea? I’m already messing up. I’m going to be terrible at this. My thoughts take over before I feel a slight touch on my shoulder.

I flinch away from it. Midnight holds his hands up.

“Hey Tara, relax. It’s going to be okay. Don’t stress so much. This is a laid-back place.”

I nod, but don’t say anything. I hate that I can’t even handle a casual touch from a man anymore. In my head, I know it’s not him. I know that I’m safe. Yet my body still reacts. I hope one day I can work through it. Even though I am not looking for it now, one day I hope to find someone to share my life with.

“How about I show you where you can put your shit and then walk you through the system?” He points toward the computer on the desk.

“Sounds good.”

For the next thirty minutes, Midnight gives me the basics. After a quick tour where he shows me where he keeps all the supplies they use, he then sits me down at the computer. He doesn’t dive into everything, but he shows me

how to schedule appointments and check the email and social media accounts.

“That’s where we will start you. You don’t have to actually make any posts. Just reply to any messages. Once you’ve got that down, we can add in other things, like some of the office work I hate doing. You understand it all?”

“I do. It’s pretty cut and dry,” I say confidently.

It’s a lot easier than I expected. Granted, he did say that this is only part of the job. I feel like this is a trial run. If I do good, then he will give me the keys to the castle.

The idea of disappointing him sends dread into my stomach. I try to ignore it and smile at Midnight.

Midnight chuckles. “It is. I wanted it to be as simple as possible in case any of the employees had to step in in a pinch. They pretty much all make their own appointments right now, but it’ll be helpful to have us all using a central system so we can track everything. This way, you can make appointments for them too or know when we can accept a walk-in.”

I smile. “Makes sense.”

The bell above the door goes off, and I look up and see a man covered in tattoos with a lip piercing step through the door.

“ Sup?” He nods at Midnight before looking at me. “Hey there, little momma.”

The smile on his face can only be explained as sex on a stick. I can see how women can be easily charged by this man. He oozes confidence from his skin.

Midnight’s voice goes hard. “Jerico, this is Tara. She’s one of my buddy’s old ladies. She’s our new receptionist. Tara, this is Jerico, one of my artists.”

Off-limits. That’s what Midnight said without outright saying it.

I bite my lip to stop myself from correcting Midnight. I’m not an old lady and never will be. Everyone knows that sweetbutts don’t get wifed up. While I appreciate Wrath for stepping in and temporarily claiming me, not once has he ever called me his old lady. Honestly, it’s laughable that Midnight would call me that. Still, I can’t help but wonder when the other shoe will drop. Eventually, the charade will end.

The only thing stopping me is that I see the effect it has on Jerico. The suave playboy melts into a more friendly smile. That’s for the best. Dating is

not on the table for me right now, but even if it was, dating a coworker is a terrible idea. If we got together and broke up, I'd be the one without a job. Receptionists are easy to replace, while I'm sure it's a bitch finding an artist.

"It's nice to meet you," Jerico says, pulling me out of my head, offering his hand.

I take it, shaking it without issue.

For a moment, I marvel at that. I didn't flinch away from him. Maybe a casual touch is okay if I'm expecting it. Or maybe it's because he dropped that facade he had up.

Either way, it's something I'm now dying to explore.

"It's nice to meet you too."

"Let me know if you need anything," he tells me.

"Thanks. I will."

Midnight looks over at me a moment before turning back to Jerico.

"You have that back piece today, right?" Midnight asks him.

"Yeah, it's going to be a long one."

Midnight nods in agreement. "Make sure you take breaks when you need to. Don't keep going just because they are good."

Jerico rolls his eyes and starts walking toward the back of the shop. "Yes, Dad."

Midnight mumbles under his breath, "Little shit."

I chuckle quietly.

"How many people work here?" I ask after a moment.

"I have two more artists and a piercer. I think you'll like them. Especially Elle. She's our female tattoo artist."

"I can't wait to meet her."

The bell rings again, and I turn and see a man walking through the door.

"This is my first customer. How about you get him checked in?" Midnight says quietly.

I step toward the computer and wake it up. "Hi, how can I help you today?"

The man eyes me as much as he can with the massive desk hiding me. "I have an appointment with Midnight, name's Oscar."

I pull up Midnight's schedule, and sure enough, he has the man down, and I quickly get him checked in.

"Good job," Midnight tells me before turning back toward the man.

Inside I'm beaming. For once, I feel like I'm doing something right.

“Alright, let’s get to work. We’re doing that cover piece on your forearm, right?”

“Yeah,” the man tells him. “What’s the deal with the new girl?” he asks as he passes by.

I hear Midnight repeat what he said to Jerico regarding me.

I bite back my laugh as I shake my head.

This is going to be interesting.



WRATH

The punching bag violently swings as I hit it.

How did my life end up like this?

Truth is, I know how. I let my emotions get the best of me, and now my whole world has been turned upside down. I liked my life the way it was. I had my brothers and my club. If I was looking for someone to scratch that itch, I paid an escort so I could dive into my darker tastes.

Then she came along.

It wasn’t that long ago, yet it seems like a lifetime. Natalie came looking for me, needing assistance. I knew right away something wasn’t right. As soon as I saw her concern-filled face, I was ready to take on the world for the woman who became something to my best friend and pres. More than that, she was my friend. Only nothing seemed physically wrong with her. Then my gaze moved to the woman she brought in with her, and everything came to a halt. In that moment, it wasn’t Tara I saw, but someone else. I was thrown back into the past. To that little boy who couldn’t do anything. Yet, I’m not that boy. Not anymore. Instead, rage took over, and I was out for blood.

Somehow, I kept my head long enough to get the answers I needed. By the time his blood covered my knuckles, I had started to calm down.

I walk back toward Tara and drop to my knees in front of her.

“He will never touch you again,” I promise her, holding my bloody hands up for her to see.

As if they were some prize to be offered to her. The only proof I could offer that the threat was no longer there. Only she wasn't the woman from my past. This was the woman standing in front of me. The one that had been hurt by a brother in my own damn club. How did I miss it? How could I let him get away with this under my roof?

Tara hesitantly reaches up to cup my cheek before she pulls my head to her stomach, hugging me as tears fall down her face.

No, this wasn't my mother. This was Tara. One of the sweetbutts that had been with us the longest. Someone who was kind to others and respected the rules of the club.

We were supposed to protect her.

We failed her.

“Thank you,” she whispers through a sob.

After a moment, I wrap my arms around her and hold her tight before picking her up.

“You're with me until you're healed,” I tell her, taking off toward the clubhouse.

I dare anyone to contradict me. I failed her once. I won't fail her again.

I don't think Tara really realized what happened that day. I went against club rules and placed a temporary claim on her in front of my brothers. I marked her off-limits, offering her something that no other sweetbutt had ever had before.

Yet, Tara took my protection and ran with it. I watched her from afar, daring one of the brothers to go against me. I had no real claim on her, and if they pushed the issue, I would be up a creek without a paddle, but none of them ever did. Still, every time one would approach Tara, I watched her tense. Then her eyes would seek me out if I was in the room. As if she knew I was watching her.

The men never tried to touch her, but she still kept her distance. Long gone was the sweetbutt I once knew. The one who would gladly follow any brother into their room for a night. In her place is a girl scared of touch. Someone who is coping with her trauma and moving on.

The real turning point for her was when I told her that Jug was dead, and she would never have to worry about him again. Hell, knowing he was never

going to come back around gave me mixed emotions. While I was happy for her, it made me question my place in her life. What good was I to her if the threat was over? Still, I didn't put an end to it all.

As more time passed, her bruises faded and she smiled more often. She put on a hell of a show, but I know the truth. She's still not sleeping through the night. Her shoulders tense up when someone approaches her from behind unexpectedly. You don't just get over something like sexual assault in the blink of an eye. That shit will linger with her forever. If Natalie has taught me anything, though, it's that the most broken person can turn around and become a warrior.

Then last week happened. One of the guys at church pushed back against my claim of Tara. They demanded I release my hold on her and let her go back to living her life as she had. The idea of any of those men touching her drove me mad. Especially knowing that she didn't welcome their touch. Not anymore.

So I opened my big, fat mouth and sealed our fates.

"Fine, then she's my old lady. As of right now."

As soon as the words left my mouth a week ago, I regretted them. Not because there's something wrong with Tara, but because I never saw myself with an old lady. If my old man taught me anything, it was that men like us don't deserve the love of a good woman. I watched him beat my mother night after night. His blood runs through my veins, and I won't risk it. I'd like to say I'd never hurt a woman, but never say never. One bad rage and I could ruin her. That would only lead to one thing. Eating a bullet from my own gun.

"There you are."

I grab the bag and look over my shoulder at Reaper.

"What's up?"

"You good?" he asks as he eyes my bloody knuckles.

I nod. "Ran out of tape."

It's a lie. Whenever I'm working through shit, I crave the pain. It helps ground me. Reminds me of who I am and what I deserve.

He shoots me a look that says I'm full of shit, but changes the subject. "Have you heard from Colt?"

"No. I've tried calling him, but he's not answering."

Colt is another issue I need to work through. He left on a plane to Texas to take care of some chick he knocked up. It was supposed to be something

temporary. Grab the chick and the baby and head back, but he stopped communicating with us. I know we cleared him of being the rat, but I still don't like how easily he abandoned his position. He should be here with us dealing with the fallout of William Danworth's death. There have been no issues with the cartel since, but the Renegades have kicked up their attempts to annoy us. More than once, I've found one in our county.

Reaper rubs his jaw. "Fang left a message last night. All he could tell me was that Colt was looking rough. I attempted to call him back this morning, but he didn't answer."

"Rough, like lack of sleep or rough because he's in trouble?"

My thirst for blood surges forward. I'd love to go knock some heads around down in Texas. Maybe it would help me process this energy in my blood.

"I'm not sure. I left a message for him to call me back, and when he does, I'll find out. Keep an ear to the ground. Maybe call a few contacts down there and see what's up."

I cross my arms as I frown. "Do you want me to go down there?"

Reaper shakes his head. "No, I need you here. We have another run this week that I need your help with. Until he gets back, you're essentially both VP and sergeant at arms."

"The last one went well since dumbass is dead," I say, referring to Jug.

A wave of rage hits me at the thought of that man and what he did to Tara. If I could do it all over again, I would make his pain prolonged. He got out of it easy, if you ask me.

"Yeah, but we both know that the Medina Cartel aren't going to let us fuck up again. We used our one get out of jail free card with them. I'm surprised they even allowed that. We need to be on top of things from now on."

I grunt in agreement.

The Medina Cartel runs a tight ship. While the boss, Javier, looks like a pretty boy, even down to his manicured-looking nails, there's no denying that he has blood on his hands. His pops might run the cartel, but he still had to prove himself to get to where he is. No nepotism in the cartel business.

"Anything I need to know about before church tonight?" Reaper asks.

"No, everything's been pretty quiet. Not another sighting since the one last week," I tell him.

"Better knock on some fucking wood," he mutters.

“No shit.” I chuckle.

“How have you been? It’s been a minute since I’ve caught you alone.”

He’s fishing. He knows Tara’s situation stirred up some old wounds. Hell, he’s been my best friend for as long as I can remember. I don’t need him digging into my shit though.

“I’m good. How about you? Is Queen Bee still keeping you up at night?” I ask, using Natalie’s club name.

Reaper smirks. “Only in the good ways. Don’t be jealous.”

I scoff. “Why would I be jealous?”

“You’ve been spending a lot of time watching a certain brunette.”

“It’s not like that.” I grit my teeth. “She’s under my protection.”

He hums but doesn’t say anything.

I change the subject quickly. I don’t need my dark thoughts heading down the road he’s trying to go down.

“Speaking of, I’m surprised Queen Bee isn’t with you.”

The corners of his lips quirk up. “She’s on a call with her therapist, or I’m sure she would be.” He pauses. “How’s Tara doing?”

I stifle the growl that wants to crawl up my throat. “Fine, as far as I know.”

In this moment, I hate him. I hate that while everyone else would’ve taken my polite fuck off and ran with it, this fucker needles, deepening into my skin. I hate even more that there’s not a single thing I can do about it.

Reaper eyes me like I’m crazy. “As far as you know? She’s your old lady, Wrath. Have you even told her that you claimed her yet? I’ve been careful not to say anything to Natalie until you’ve told her. She needs to hear it from you.”

I start shaking my head before he even finishes the sentence. “You and I both know that’s in name only.”

“You didn’t answer my question. Did you tell her?” He uses his pres tone, making me grimace.

“Not yet, but I will,” I lie.

I’m not sure I ever want her to know. If I can keep the guys away from her, then that’s all that matters.

He shakes his head, looking disappointed, and falls silent.

“You have a week to tell her, Wrath. If you don’t, I will. I don’t know why you seem to think that you can get away with not telling her, but the brothers will bring it up again when she’s not seen with you or with your

patch.”

Fuck. I really was hoping we could get away without doing all of this. Looks like my pres just made it an order. I’m nothing if not a loyal soldier, even to a fault.

When I don’t answer, he continues to talk.

“She started her job with Midnight today. He told me she was doing well so far.”

I feel the corner of my eye twitch. I knew we were going to offer her a club job, but I didn’t know it was already done and she had accepted. I don’t know why it bothers me, but I don’t want her around any of the other brothers. Who has she slept with? Was Midnight one of them? Is he dreaming of eating her pussy on the desk for all to see? Is he imagining taking her on his tattoo table after the shop closes?

Breathing through my nose, I take a few breaths. “Good, although I really can’t picture her at a tattoo shop.”

Reaper chuckles. “Apparently, she showed up dressed like she was going to work at a bank.”

“Seriously?” I let out a small laugh at the image. “It’s a tattoo shop.”

Reaper shrugs with his hands up. “Who the fuck knows. Women are weird.”

His phone pings, and he pulls it out of his pocket. By the way he instantly smiles, I can only assume it’s Natalie.

“Alright, I have somewhere to be. I just wanted to check in.”

“All good.” I smirk. “Tell the Queen hi for me.”

“You can tell her yourself later. Make sure you clean off the bag.” He points at the blood on the bag.

“Of course, sir. Anything else, sir? Want me to do your laundry? Scrub the floors with a toothbrush?” I tease.

He shakes his head as he starts walking toward the door. Before he walks through, he calls over his shoulder. “And Wrath, make sure you buy some more tape. I don’t need you leaving blood on guys because your hands are fucked.”

I look down at my hands and see that they are completely fucked. Shit, I’m going to regret that later.

two

TARA

“HEY! SORRY, I’M LATE,” I say as I rush into the kitchen of the clubhouse.

It’s been an interesting week. Monday, I started at the tattoo shop. It was quite slow, but I’m guessing that’s why Midnight started me then. Tuesday was much the same, but surprisingly, Wednesday was busy as hell. Then today he had some promotion going on where they could get a tattoo from a vending machine for a set price. The people steadily flowed through the door all day long. Thankfully, at nine, Midnight finally told me to go home.

I'm so ready for bed, but I can't miss girls' night. Natalie implemented this two weeks ago. Every Thursday night, the guys clear out of the entertainment room and leave all the sweetbutts and old ladies for girls' night. It's not perfect. A lot of the sweetbutts are still uncomfortable with it, but Natalie's right. There's no way for this club to continue if the sweetbutts are constantly at war with the old ladies. There needs to be mutual respect.

I don't think these girls' nights will last long. The sweetbutts don't want to mix with the old ladies, but for now, it's serving its purpose.

Natalie turns toward me and laughs. "You aren't late. I'm still getting the snacks ready."

"I feel like it though." I sigh as I start setting the bags down on the counter.

"Are there any more bags in the car you need me to get?" Bullet asks, pushing off the counter.

It's still weird calling him Bullet. Natalie still calls him Jacob, but since I met him I've always called him prospect. Now there's new prospects in his place, and he's got himself a road name.

How things change in such a short time is still crazy to me.

"Yeah, I have a couple in the trunk if you don't mind. It's still open," I tell him.

Bullet smiles and starts walking away. "You got it."

"How was your day?" Natalie asks as she starts unloading food from the bags.

"Good. We were pretty busy. My feet are killing me." I've downgraded to flats, but I'm still trying to dress somewhat professionally.

I bought all these business clothes with the hopes of a business job, so I really don't have much else appropriate for outside of the clubhouse. So for now, I wear the slacks and a nice top until I find something else or decide to invest in a suitable wardrobe for a tattoo shop.

"How are you liking the tattoo shop?" Elenore, Honk's wife, asks as she grabs a tray.

"You know, I was kind of hesitant at first. I mean, I wanted a job to get away from the club, and obviously that didn't happen, but I don't know, it doesn't feel like it's part of it if that makes sense?"

"How so?" Natalie grabs another tray.

"I guess I assumed because it's club-owned that guys would be hanging out around there like they do here, but they don't. Really, it's mainly

Midnight, and Lemon pops in from time to time.”

I grab a third tray to help.

Elenore nods. “So it feels separate. I get that. Every time Honk and I have gone in there, no other club member has been there.”

“I mean, I’m sure having a bunch of bikers hanging around isn’t good for business,” Natalie teases, making us all laugh.

“What’s so funny?”

I look over my shoulder and watch Sunny walk in.

“Tara was just telling us how working at the tattoo shop is going,” Natalie tells her.

Sunny looks at me with thinly veiled hostility. “I didn’t know you started working there.”

“I did,” I say, fighting the urge to squirm.

Sunny’s dislike for sweetbutts is well known, and while she’s never been outright mean to me, it’s still awkward. One time she snapped at poor Baby for smiling and saying thank you to Pinky when he changed her tire. When she started coming to girls’ night, I was surprised, but even I can admit, she’s trying.

“Look who I found,” Bullet says, breaking the tension.

“Hello!” Sarah, Evelyn’s mother, says.

Evelyn, Reaper’s sister, walks to the counter and cuts to the chase. “What is there to drink?”

Natalie frowns. “Bad day?”

“You don’t want to fucking know,” Evelyn mutters.

“On that note, I’m going to go. Queen Bee, if you need something, just yell,” Bullet says as he slowly backs out of the room, but we pay him no mind.

“Drinks are in the entertainment room. Follow me.” Natalie leads us all down the hall to the large room with several couches and a large-screen television.

I cringe as I remember some of my nights spent in here with different men. It feels like another life, when in reality it was only a few months ago.

I don’t regret what I did, but I don’t think I can go back to that. That’s why it’s so important I find a real full-time job. As much as the thought of leaving this place pains me, I can’t be the sweetbutt I was before.

Elenore grabs a bottle of tequila and a lime, handing them to Evelyn.

“You are a goddess, you know that, right?” Evelyn tells her as she takes

the alcohol and citrus.

Elenore winks. "Oh, honey, Honk reminds me at least once a day."

All of us laugh.

Evelyn takes a drink straight from the bottle and slams it down as she shoves the lime into her mouth. Once she's done, she shivers.

"Fuck me, I needed that." She points at Elenore. "I always knew Honk was a good man."

Sarah walks over to her daughter and rubs her shoulders. "Don't worry, you'll find yourself one, one day too."

Evelyn scoffs. "Love isn't even on my radar."

Sarah gives her daughter a sad look.

"Well, how about we start a movie?" Natalie says, getting the attention off Evelyn.

Evelyn gives her a small smile and mouths thanks as Sarah moves to start a movie.

Not surprisingly, they choose some rom-com. At first, conversation is stilted, but as always, the alcohol helps ease us into something more comfortable.

We all eat, drink, and talk freely. There's no men around to pull us away, wanting to take our clothes off or to have us fall on our knees before them. No hostility between women because they are competing for the same men.

This is the first time I have felt totally at ease in a long time. I feel some of the walls I've been trying to build fall away. I can be me in this moment. It's freeing.

"I'm just saying, if I had a chance with him, I would take it!" Heather says, throwing up her hands.

Chloe, one of the new girls, leans forward and says very seriously, "Heather...he's a fictional character. Men like him don't exist."

"Chloe, I don't need him to exist in real life when I can picture him while using my vibrator. It's a one-sided relationship that I'm okay with," Heather, a sweetbutt, deadpans, making us all laugh.

"Hey, a win's a win," Lauren, one of the other sweetbutts, says, raising her drink.

"I don't know...there's something about the love of a good man," Sarah muses.

Evelyn groans. "Mom...I don't want to know about your sex life."

I raise my drink and take a sip to hide my smile. Sarah was once a

sweetbutt who got knocked up by Reaper's dad, who was pres at the time. He never claimed her, but I've heard he always had a sweet spot for her. While I've never seen her with a man, I'm sure she hasn't been inactive.

I love watching Sarah and Evelyn's relationship. They get along so well, and I've never seen Sarah get mad at her daughter. I can't help but wonder if my mom would have been the same way.

Would we have always gotten along? Before she died, we went out every two weeks for a girl date. We would get our nails done and grab dinner. After every school dance, she would lay down with me in bed and let me tell her every little detail. I know she didn't care about who danced with whom, but she always patiently listened with a smile on her face.

I remember one time I asked her why she and Dad didn't have so many rules compared to my friend's parents.

"My job as your parent isn't to control you but to guide you now that you're almost an adult. I rather you be wild in a safe environment than do it behind our backs."

"Hey, are you okay?" Natalie asks, gently touching my leg, pulling me into the present.

"I'm good." I smile at her as I push off the wave of sadness.

Now isn't the time to dwell on what I don't have. I'm moving forward. Making better choices.

"Natalie, how's married life treating you?" Sunny asks during a lull in the conversation.

Natalie smiles. "So far so good. I love it. Harr...I mean, Reaper is a godsend. I don't know where I would be without him."

The way she beams is like nothing I've ever seen in this world. I hope one day I can work through my trauma and be as happy as she is. Knowing that she survived an abusive ex and found love with Reaper is an inspiration really. Maybe I can have that someday too.

"Are you going to go on a honeymoon?" Elenore hands her another glass of whatever concoction she's made up now.

"We've talked about it and are looking into places. Nothing set in stone yet." Natalie looks down at her lap.

She's still not used to being the center of attention.

"I vote for somewhere tropical. I could go for a beach about now." Evelyn sighs.

Natalie giggles. "A beach does sound nice. Sorry, though. I don't think

you want to go to the beach with me and your brother.”

“Ew, no. Love you, girl, but not something I want to be around. Maybe I should plan a trip for just me. Maybe find a hot guy and have a fling.” Evelyn’s tone is wistful, almost as if she can picture it in her head.

“You, take time off?” Sarah gasps at her daughter.

Evelyn rolls her eyes. “I’m not that bad.”

We all laugh at that. Evelyn works more than anyone I’ve ever met. Then again, her job is important. She heals people. I wish I had thought ahead enough to get into something like that. Now I’m stuck clinging to the crumbs left behind by others.

“Tara, do you want more?” Ava, a sweetbutt, asks, holding up a bottle of tequila.

“Why not. Fill me up.” I slide my glass toward her.

I know I’ll regret drinking so much and eating so little in the morning, but fuck it.

Why not?



WRATH

Standing next to Reaper, we watch as our guys unload the shipment of drugs into the Devil’s Den’s possession.

The Devil’s Den is a crew from Colorado run by three guys: Levi, Walker, and Hudson. There has been bad blood with them in the past. While they aren’t exactly an MC, they try and act like they are one while also trying to keep a foot in the racing world. These new guys leading it seem better than the last, Zade. He was a real piece of work. I still don’t trust them though.

Walker nods at his brothers and starts heading our way.

“Heads up,” I say under my breath.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Reaper roll his shoulders back.

“You got everything?” Reaper asks as soon as Walker is close enough.

Walker nods and holds out his hand. “We did. Good doing business with you.”

Reaper shakes his hand once and steps back. “We’ll be in touch.”

We watch as the Devil’s Den gets in their cars and drives away before making our way to our bikes and the van.

“What do you think Javier has on them?” I ask Reaper as I get on my bike.

If it weren’t for their connection through the cartel, we would have never done business with them. Instead, they became one of our route runners. Annoys the fuck out of me, but probably for the best. I hated those long runs south.

Reaper shakes his head as he sits on his bike. “No idea, and not my business. The less we know, the better. You ready to roll out?”

“Anxious to get home to the old lady?” Twitch teases.

“Fuck yes, I am. I hate being away from her,” Reaper admits proudly.

I shake my head. He’s completely whipped.

“Isn’t tonight girls’ night?” I ask.

Reaper looks at me and smirks. “Damn right it is, and I can’t wait.”

“What’s so special about girls’ night?” Twitch asks before I can.

“I’m sure Honk will agree with me, but girls’ night is the best. There’s nothing like seeing your woman happy and buzzed.”

The man in question rolls up in the van with the window down.

“You ready?” Honk asks.

Twitch tilts his head and looks at him. “What’s so special about girls’ night?”

Honk laughs and shakes his head. “You know that saying drunk words are sober thoughts? It’s like that, but instead it’s a little liquid courage to try something you’re too scared to do when sober. Elenore’s never been able to keep her hands off me, but with a few drinks in her, it’s game fucking over. We’ve done some freaky shit while she’s buzzed, all of which she initiated.”

Reaper nods in agreement.

“You guys are fucking weird,” Twitch says, and I can’t help but agree.

“Let’s roll out,” Reaper says.

We all start our bikes and get on the road. The nights are starting to get longer and the air is cooler, making the ride a cold one despite the leather.

The drive to the warehouse, where we stash the van, and then back to the clubhouse goes off without a hitch.

“Fuck, I need a hot shower to warm up,” Reaper grumbles as he gets off his bike.

“Me too,” I mumble as I head toward the clubhouse.

“How did it go?” a voice calls from the dark.

Reaper and I turn, finding Trigger on the porch, sitting in the dark.

“Good. No issues,” Reaper tells him.

Trigger stands as we walk up the porch.

“How were things here?” Reaper asks him.

Trigger chuckles. “Liquor was consumed, and there was a lot of laughter.”

I raise a brow. “You didn’t supervise?”

Trigger shakes his head. “Nah, I stayed close though, where I could step in if need be. Bullet and I got some shit done though.”

The three of us walk into the club together. I see two of the old ladies, Elenore and Sunny, over by the bar, and a couple of the sweetbutts hanging out on the couches.

The moment Natalie steps away, the divide between the women becomes clear. As much good as she thinks she’s doing, it’ll never last. Sweetbutts and old ladies were never meant to mix. They aren’t going to be best friends. Sweetbutts are the pieces of ass here for us to enjoy, while the old ladies are the women we come home to at night. The ones that we would give our lives for.

I scan the room looking for Tara and come up short.

I cringe as I realize when I thought about the old ladies, my mind went to her. Almost instinctively. Not seeing her there is driving me crazy.

I don’t let it show though. She’s probably in the bathroom. Nothing to freak out about.

“I’m going to go shower. I’ll catch up with you later.” I tell Reaper.

“I’ll head back with you. I bet Natalie’s already in our room.”

As soon as we turn down the hall, Natalie comes into view. She’s leaning against the wall next to my door.

“Queen Bee, how’s my girl?” Reaper moves toward her quickly.

As soon as she hears him, she turns and a smile covers her face. Natalie pushes off the wall and runs toward us. Reaper catches her as she jumps into his arms and kisses him.

“Hi baby, how was your night?” he asks between kisses.

“Good.” She smiles before turning my way. “Hi, Wrath.”

“Hey, Queen Bee. Have a little fun?” I chuckle.

Her already-rosy cheeks grow darker. “Maybe...”

Movement from my room catches my attention. I turn just to see Bullet stepping out of my room and shutting the door.

The only way he could get in there was if Tara let him in. She’s the only one with a key other than me, and I know I told her ass to keep it locked at all times.

Instantly I see red.

I charge down the hall toward him. Bullet looks up, and his eyes go wide right when I grab him, slamming him into the wall.

“Woah, buddy, calm down,” Bullet chokes out, despite my hand squeezing his neck.

“What were you doing in my room?” I grind out.

“Wrath, back off,” Reaper demands, placing his hand on my shoulder.

“Not until he tells me why we just caught him coming out of my room,” I hiss.

“Oh my god, Wrath, he can’t answer you because you’re choking him!” Natalie snaps. “Tara fell asleep on the couch, and Jacob carried her to bed. I watched him the entire time.”

“Is that true?” I demand.

Bullet barely nods, and I let go. As soon as I step back, he grabs his throat and starts coughing. Natalie rushes around us and comes to a stop at Bullet’s side and rubs his back.

“For fuck’s sake, Wrath, you can’t jump to conclusions. He’s your brother and knows she’s yours,” Reaper reprimands me. “He wouldn’t dare touch her.”

“What do you mean, his? She doesn’t belong to anyone,” Natalie scolds me. “Apologize to him right now.”

The fact that hearing Natalie say Tara isn’t mine makes my blood boil is enough to tell me this whole situation is out of control. I don’t know when, but I did start thinking about Tara as mine. The brothers all know she’s mine since I claimed her in church. Yet, I’ve been dragging my feet on claiming her in public.

Reaper meets my eyes. I haven’t forgotten his ultimatum. Looks like Tara is about to be branded as mine.

Fuck.

“Sorry,” I mumble to Bullet, not really meaning it. “You’d react the same way if you saw another man coming out of your room.”

Bullet gives me a small nod. He gets it. He probably even knows he fucked up taking her in there. He should have left her on the couch and called me. He’s still new though. Still learning the rules.

“Are you okay, Jacob?” Natalie asks him.

“Queen, you know you’re supposed to call him Bullet now,” Reaper tells her.

Natalie rolls her eyes. “He will always be Jacob to me.”

“I’m good.” Bullet coughs as he stands. “I’m going to take off though.”

“We good?” I ask as he passes.

“We’re good,” he calls over his shoulder as he heads down the hall.

Yeah, he gets it.

“Night,” I tell Reaper and Natalie.

“Night,” they say in unison.

As quietly as possible, I walk into my room and shut the door behind me. I make my way to the bed and look down at Tara. Her brown hair looks almost black in the dark, and she looks peaceful.

Gently, I reach down and brush a stray hair off her face. Reluctantly I cross the room and sit down in the recliner I have in the corner. Surely if she drank that much, I can’t leave her alone.

I’ll just watch her for only a little bit. Just to make sure she’s okay, I think to myself as I get comfortable in the chair.

Just for a little bit longer is my last thought as my eyes grow heavy.

three

TARA

THE MORNING LIGHT through the window awakens me from a peaceful slumber.

For the first time since the incident with Jug, I slept through the night. I smile to myself, even through the slight headache from drinking. I don't know if it was the alcohol or something else, but I feel at peace this morning.

As I move to get out of bed, I suck in a breath. Sitting across from me in the recliner is Wrath. He's sound asleep, his neck bent at an odd angle. It

looks so uncomfortable.

This is the first time he's slept in here since he brought me here all those weeks ago.

Could he be the reason I slept so peacefully? Having him in here with me?

Shaking my head, I try to make my way to the bathroom quietly, so I don't wake him. I must fail because, as I pass him, his hand shoots out, grabbing my wrist.

I tense waiting for the blow, but as quick as he touched me, he lets me go.

"Sorry. I'm not used to sleeping in a room with other people," he grumbles.

Why is that low, raspy voice so sexy? It's really too bad that he doesn't mess with club girls. He could have all of them panting in a second if he wanted, me included.

"All good," I murmur.

I move toward the bathroom, but his voice stops me. "I don't like another man bringing you to my bed. In the future, if you plan to drink, please ensure you can either make it to bed on your own or that they know to wait for me to bring you."

I frown. "What are you talking about?"

"You drank so much last night that you passed out on the couch and Bullet had to carry you to bed. I don't want that to happen again."

"I didn't drink that much," I defend myself.

Wrath shoots me a look that says he doesn't believe me.

This frustrating man. His claim on me means no one can touch me, but I always thought it was unless I wanted to be touched. The way he is speaking now is as if he actually likes me, which cannot be true. Wrath doesn't like anyone.

Turning, I lean against the doorjamb to the bathroom. "You want to take me to bed, Wrath? No need for this show of jealousy. You only need ask."

Licking my lips, I look at him from top to bottom.

As I expected, he scoffs. "You're mine in the club's eyes. That means if you are seen with another man, it looks poorly on me. I offered you my protection because you were hurt and no woman should go through what you did, but if you feel the need to spread your legs for my brothers, we can end this right now."

I can feel the blood drain out of me. If he removes his protection, I'll have

to go back to being a regular sweetbutt. That means sex with whichever brother wants some, being smacked on the ass, hands all over my body.

I shiver at the thought.

No.

If he wants to remove his protection, then my time here is done. While I have some money saved from my time in the club, it isn't much, and I haven't worked at the tattoo shop long enough to earn a paycheck, let alone save. I have no idea what I will do, but I will make it work.

Moving back to the dresser, I start grabbing the clothes I had stacked on top of it.

Should I suck it up and try to go back to my dad's? No, that won't work. He cut me off and started a new life with his wife. Besides, I have more now than when he cut me off. If I could make it work then, I can do it now.

"What are you doing?" Wrath growls.

I ignore him. I'm not playing these games with him. I didn't ask for his help. I am beyond grateful for it, but I won't beg any man to keep me.

As I keep gathering my things, Wrath steps into my path, gripping my shoulders. The uncomfortable feeling settles in at the feel of a man touching me, but I will it away. I won't look weak in front of him.

"Why are you packing your things? Do you really want another man?" His face is the picture of anger.

"No. I don't want any man. However, I will not sit here and let you control my life either. You want to threaten to pull your protection? Do it then. I survived before you, and I will survive long after you."

"Stay," he demands.

I pull away, moving to the bed to continue to pack my shit.

He stops me again, this time by wrapping his arms around my upper body, holding me to him.

"Stop packing. Stay."

"I don't need your pity."

"It's not pity." He sighs, "Listen, Tara. I'm not an easy man to get along with. I know that. I won't apologize and I'm going to say shitty things."

"What's your point?" I whisper, my body hyper aware of his body against mine in a bad way.

My hands become clammy, and I feel lightheaded. I start to blink rapidly when I realize my eyes won't focus. Shit, I'm spiraling.

All I can think about is the last man who held me down.

My throat becomes tight, and I start to shake.

Wrath lets me go, raking his hands through his hair as he backs away.

“Dammit. See. I’m already fucking this up. I can’t do much for you. I’m not a normal guy who can fuck you and go on my way. What I can do is protect you. Stay.”

I take a couple of deep breaths to settle my nerves and racing heart. He didn’t hurt me. He let go when he realized that I wasn’t responding well to his touch. He’s not the man who did this to me.

When I finally feel a little more put together, I turn to face him.

“Okay, but I’m not going to deal with your ultimatums. I’m working toward getting my life together. I won’t be here much longer. I promise.”

“Stay as long as you need. This is your room as much as it is mine now.”

He leaves, the door slamming behind him as he goes. Leaving me wondering what the hell just happened.



The shop is starting to wind down for the day, so I start to clean up. As I clean the glass display case of jewelry, my mind wanders.

When I woke up this morning, I was surprised to see Wrath asleep in the chair across from the bed. His laces were untied, but his boots and cut were still on. His head was tilted back, and his mouth was slightly open. He looked peaceful and more relaxed than I’ve ever seen him.

In his sleep, he looked younger and not weighed down by me and his job. Then he woke up, and those demons came out to play. In the moment, I was trying to hang onto my anger, but now that I’ve had time to reflect, I see it for what it was. He lashed out because he was feeling something he didn’t like.

It couldn’t have been jealousy though.

Hell, he’s never shown interest in me, let alone another club girl.

My mind drifts back to when I first started coming around the clubhouse when I was nineteen.

“Who’s that?” I ask Daniela.

“Who? Wrath?” She laughs. “Good luck. He doesn’t touch sweetbutts.”

Thankfully my glass is in front of my face to hide my cringe. I fucking hate that term. Sweetbutts...really who came up with it?

“Why not?”

Daniela hums. “Rumor has it, he likes fucked-up shit when it comes to sex.”

I feel my sex clench at the thought. What is fucked-up? I’m of the opinion you should try something twice before you write it off.

“Like?”

Daniela shrugs. “No clue. All I know is instead of messing with sweetbutts, he pays for high-class escorts.”

“Interesting.”

He must feel my eyes on him because he turns. Quickly, I drop my eyes but peek at him through my lashes as he scans the room.

“Trust me, kid, you’re better off with someone else. Just stay away from Reaper. He’s mine,” Daniela says, full of venom.

“I didn’t realize he had an old lady.”

Daniela’s jaw tics. “He hasn’t claimed me yet, but he will. It’s only a matter of time. Just stay the fuck away.”

There’s no way I’m touching another woman’s man, so she has nothing to worry about.

“Will do.”

“Hey Tara, you okay?” Jerico’s voice, paired with the light touch on my shoulder, brings me out of my head.

I try not to tense up, but I do. He removes his touch immediately.

“I’m good. What’s up?”

He crosses his arms as he studies me. “You sure? I said your name three times.”

“Sorry. My mind must be somewhere else today. Were you needing something?”

Jerico shakes his head. “No, I just saw you staring off into space and thought I’d check on you.”

“That’s sweet, but I’m good. How did today go?” I ask as I stash the cleaner under the counter.

Jerico leans against the counter, close but not crowding me. “Outside of that group of college girls here on vacation, it was good.”

“That Medusa tattoo you did was stunning.”

The tattoo was gorgeous. It was a side profile of a woman’s face. She had a flower behind her ear and jewelry on her head and neck. What really took the show though was her hair. It started as luscious locks on top, but as it cascaded down and wrapped around her body, it turned into snakes.

“Do you do a lot of Medusa tattoos?” I ask.

I watch as something dark flashes across Jerico’s face. “Unfortunately, I do. You know what the tattoo means, right?”

“No.”

“It’s a symbol of survival and strength. Most people who get the tat have been assaulted in some form. Medusa is seen as a protector to women who have experienced assault.”

“I never knew that. That’s beautiful,” I say softly.

While I can’t picture myself with a tattoo, I love the idea of getting one to reclaim a part of myself that was stolen.

“And now you know why I hate doing them.”

“Hate doing what?” Midnight asks as he walks up.

“Doing Medusa tattoos,” Jerico tells him.

Midnight grunts. “Fucking same. Whenever I do one of those or a scar cover-up, I just want to go home and drink.”

I perk up. “Scar cover-up? I didn’t know you could cover scars.”

Jerico laughs. “Yeah, our boy here”—he nods toward Midnight—“does free tats for women who have lost their breasts to breast cancer and covers the scars. Turns something some see as ugly into something beautiful.”

I gasp. “Midnight...that’s amazing.”

Midnight shakes his head as he rubs his hands together. “It’s nothing.”

“But to them, it’s not,” I point out.

“Did anyone pay in cash today?” Midnight asks, changing the subject.

I shake my head. “No. Everyone paid by card.”

“Awesome, I don’t have to run by the bank on my way home then. Are you done for the day?” Midnight asks Jerico.

“Yeah, I was getting ready to head out. You?”

Midnight’s eyes flash to me, but he quickly looks away before I can question it.

“I have one more.”

“Have fun with that.” Jerico chuckles as he pushes off the counter. “Hey, Tara, when are you going to let one of us tat you?”

I can’t help but cringe. “I don’t think tattoos are for me. While I think they are beautiful, I hate needles.”

Midnight makes a noise in the back of his throat.

“You good, buddy?” Jerico asks.

“I’m good. Sorry,” Midnight rasps.

The bell above the door dings, and we all turn and look.

“Hey, what are you doing here?” I ask as Wrath steps through the door.

He’s dressed in his normal outfit of biker boots, jeans, and a T-shirt, his cut layering over it. In his hand, he holds something else that looks like leather, but I don’t focus on it long. Instead, I take in his face.

Wrath looks at the two men standing next to me before turning toward me. “I need to talk to you. Somewhere private.”

I don’t miss how his eyes go back to Jericho. He really doesn’t like him. It’s weird how I went from not wanting to meet Wrath’s eyes to knowing what his facial expressions mean.

He’s no longer the worst thing in the room.

No. My mind will always come up with something or someone worse.

“You can use my office.” Midnight directs his response to Wrath.

“Alright, you guys have fun. I’ll catch you tomorrow,” Jerico says as he walks away.

Wrath watches him until he’s out of the door.

“Back this way.” I wave for Wrath to follow me.

As we walk down the hall, all I can do is worry. After this morning, that sense of safety I had started to give in to was ripped away. If he could so callously tell me we could end this protection detail he insisted on, then who is to say that he is to be trusted?

Taking a deep breath, I try and push my growing anxiety away as we step into the office.

Only one way to find out what the man wants.



WRATH

I try to calm down as I step into the office. When I walked into the shop and

saw how close Jerico was standing to Tara and how comfortable she looked, I wanted to fucking hit someone.

I hate how this one woman has torn me up. At first I thought it was just because of my past, but when she was packing this morning, I realized I didn't want her there for the noble reasons I claimed. I wanted her there because it was nice to have a companion.

I don't deserve her.

My heart clenches as guilt floods me at the thought. Hell, I proved that when she was stabbed while under my protection.

Next time, because there is always a next time, I'm likely to hurt her myself, and I would never forgive myself if I did that.

Yet, we're stuck. I can't let her go. Not only because I don't want to, but because she's my old lady now. Still, I know I should empty my bank account and give her every dime to get as far away from me as she can.

Tara turns and leans against the desk, crossing her arms. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine," I rasp, trying to hide my anger.

Her brows furrow. "If everything is okay, then why are you here?"

"I need to talk to you," I repeat.

"And it couldn't wait until I got back to the clubhouse?" Some of her earlier sass is showing up.

My mind flashes to an image of her bent over the desk as I use my belt to whip her ass for that sass. Her creamy cheeks would turn a beautiful shade of red. I shake my head, trying to get the image out of there.

"No." I squeeze the cut in my hand before tossing it toward her.

Tara isn't fast enough, and it smacks her in the face.

"What the hell?" she mumbles as she grabs it. "What is this?"

"It's yours," I mumble.

Tara looks at me with wide eyes before she reluctantly looks at the cut. It hasn't hit her yet. That's the only explanation I have as to why she hasn't hit me yet. I'd deserve it.

I took the decision out of her hands. I opened my mouth and doomed her to be linked with me for as long as both of us live.

"Wrath...what is this?" she asks, looking pale.

Yeah. She knows what it is.

"It's yours. I'm claiming you," I tell her as I squeeze my fists.

The urge to hit something is strong. I hate this feeling of not being in

control.

Tara shakes her head. “No, you don’t want an old lady. This wasn’t the deal.”

I cut her off. “The deal’s changed, and there’s nothing to discuss. If you want to keep my protection and stay with the club, you’re going to put that on then march your happy ass out there and let Midnight put my mark on you.”

She shakes her head as tears gather in her eyes. “You realize this means we will be stuck together for life, right? That if you claim me, you’ll never be able to claim another woman when you fall in love for real.”

“I won’t fall in love. Ever. I don’t have it in me.” I rub my hand down my face.

Fuck, why is this so hard?

“Look, I never planned on claiming someone. You need the protection, so just take it.”

“Jug is dead. He’s not a threat anymore,” she points out.

I watch as her body shivers as his name leaves her mouth. Jug may be dead, but he is still haunting her. She’s still scared of the brothers at the clubhouse. Hell, she can’t even stand my touch, and I’m the one who saved her.

That solidifies my decision. She needs this. She needs me.

“Do you want to go back to being fucked by every guy in the club at the drop of a hat?” I grit out through my teeth.

Tara flinches at my words. It’s harsh, but she needs to hear it.

“No.”

“Then put the fucking cut on and go get your ass tattooed.”

“Tattoos are optional,” she murmurs as she looks down at the cut.

“Not for my old lady,” I growl.

Her eyes fly up to mine. “I need a fucking minute to think. You just threw this at me randomly, Wrath. Does Reaper or Natalie know?”

“Reaper, yes. Natalie, no clue. It’s club business.” I shrug.

Tara nods as a tear falls down her face. I have to force myself to stop from reaching out and wiping it away.

What the fuck is she doing to me?

“Can you give me a minute alone, please?” Her tone is soft now.

Almost sad. I want to take it all back. Tell her she doesn’t have to do this, but then I remember the meeting. If I didn’t claim her, they were putting her back on the floor. I couldn’t have that.

“I’ll give you five minutes,” I tell her as I reach for the door handle.

I step out of the office and shut the door behind me. Midnight pushes off the wall and shoves his phone into his pocket. “Everything okay?”

I hate that he feels like he can question me. He’s my brother, but that doesn’t mean I owe him any of my thoughts. So instead of confiding in him, I throw a dagger of my own.

“I should be asking you that. Everything okay with Miranda?” I ask, referring to his baby momma.

When Midnight was nineteen, he knocked up his fuck buddy. While he’s never regretted the twins, he regrets her. She’s made his life a living hell. She’s a shit mom, but since most judges side with the mother, his hands are tied. We’ve offered to step in, but he wants to handle it on his own.

His teeth clench. “Same as usual. How’s Tara?”

He looks to the office with worry.

Shit, was he hoping I wouldn’t follow through with this? Is he hoping she turns me down? Hell, does he want her for himself?

This entire line of thinking makes my skin crawl.

I grit my teeth. “She’s fine.”

Midnight shoots me a look that says I’m full of shit. “Are you sure this is what you want?”

“It’s what she needs.” I glance over at the door, wishing she would come out.

“That’s not what I asked. I asked about you.” He taps my chest.

I push him back from me, glaring at him.

“Just show me the fucking tattoo while she makes her choice.”

Midnight sighs heavily but walks back toward his workstation. He grabs a sketch pad and flicks through it until he finds what he’s looking for and hands it over.

I take the sketch pad and study the drawing. In the middle is a motorcycle with the lotus in the headlight, curved above the bike it says, Property of, then below it says my name. It’s kind of surreal seeing my name attached to a property patch.

Heels clicking makes me look over my shoulder. Tara walks out of the office with her shoulders back and the cut clutched in her right hand. Her face is red and splotchy, but she isn’t crying anymore. She stares right at me and doesn’t break eye contact.

“So, are we doing this?” I ask after a moment of silence.

“Yes,” she rasps.

“Are you sure?” Midnight asks.

“She just said yes,” I snap at him.

Midnight gives me a hard look. “And I’m asking her again. I’m not about to tattoo a woman who feels pressured into something she doesn’t want. This is permanent.”

“Is it though? I heard tattoo removal is all the rage,” she quips, walking toward us.

I glare over at her. “Not fucking funny.”

Tara rolls her eyes as she comes to a stop next to me. “Relax, it was just a joke.” She points at the drawing in my hands. “Is that it?”

“What do you think? Want to make any changes?” Midnight asks her.

“It looks good.”

Midnight nods. “Take a seat and tell me where you want it.”

“Wrist.”

At the same time, Tara says, “Forearm. Right below my elbow.”

I grit my teeth. “Wrist, so that way everyone can always see it.”

“Forearm, so that way I can cover it if I ever need to,” she says sweetly as she gets situated on the table.

I want to argue with her, but I’ve already taken so much from her. So instead, I nod once.

“Forearm it is,” Midnight says as he gets to work.

I stand over her and watch as he transfers the drawing onto her pretty skin right below the crease of her elbow. The entire time, Tara keeps her eyes closed, hiding from me.

When he starts up the tattoo machine, I can see the way her body is shaking. Moving to her side, I slip my hand into hers. Her eyes pop open and meet mine.

For once, there’s no anger in them. Or sadness.

She looks grateful as she squeezes my hand in hers before closing her eyes again.

I think in that moment she accepted this for what it is. She accepted me.

I don’t move an inch the entire time she’s in the chair, even though standing in one spot is uncomfortable as fuck.

An hour later and Midnight finishes.

“Done. What do you think?” he asks as he wipes it one last time.

Tara crawls off the chair and walks toward the mirror and studies her arm.

I walk up behind her. My eyes keep drifting between her face and the tattoo.

“Do you like it?”

“It’s nice,” she says quietly.

“Good.”

Her eyes meet mine in the mirror. “Are you happy now?”

“Yes,” I lie.

I’ll never be happy knowing that I condemned her to a life with me. I can’t even get my own shit together. I don’t want her because I know I’m not good for her, but now she will never have anyone else.

That brings me delight. How fucked up is that?

“This changes everything,” she whispers.

“It does,” I admit as I feel the weight of the situation bear down onto our shoulders.

What the fuck did I just get myself into?

four

TARA

TODAY IS A SHIT SHOW. It's like a series of unfortunate events, one after another.

After my tattoo was finished last night, Wrath followed me back to the clubhouse on his bike. Then he walked me to his room and asked me to stay in for the night.

I agreed, but only because I was dead on my feet, both emotionally and physically, and I knew that I had another shift today.

Then he went off to do God knows what. He wasn't there when I woke up either. He basically disappeared.

So I took my time getting ready and avoided everyone else in the clubhouse. I wasn't ready to let everyone know what happened.

I'm an old lady now. That's not going to go over well.

The sweetbutts are going to get their hopes up, while the old ladies are going to most likely hate me for changing the status quo. Well, Natalie won't. Probably not Elenore either. Honestly, Sunny is the one I'm most worried about.

So I avoided them all and headed into work. It was going fine until I got a text message on the way. Wrath had put his number in my phone a long time ago, but this was the first time he texted. All it said was tonight, 7 p.m. Announcing you as my old lady.

I didn't respond, but I know he saw that I read it. Instead, I took several minutes to calm myself down.

Then I walked into work, and all hell broke loose.

That's how I ended up here, inputting invoices into the computer. That should be safe, right?

"Goddammit!" I yell before sticking my bleeding finger into my mouth.

Why in the hell are paper cuts so painful?

"Tara, are you okay?"

I look over my shoulder and see Midnight and Elle looking at me with concern.

Quickly I remove my finger from my mouth and cringe. I don't know why I did that. It's so gross.

"I'm fine," I mumble.

"Honey, that's like the third time you've hurt yourself today. Do you want to talk about it?" Elle asks.

She's not wrong. It is the third time I've hurt myself today. When I walked in this morning, I tripped over air and spilled my coffee down the front of my shirt. Now I'm wearing one of the T-shirts we sell. Then I slammed my funny bone into the corner of the door. I don't know why we call it a funny bone when there is nothing fucking funny about hitting it. And now a goddamn papercut.

"There's nothing to talk about. I'm good. Promise." I smile weakly.

She wouldn't understand anyway. She's not club. Instead, she's this badass tattoo artist who can hang with the guys. Seriously. I've heard her get

hit on no less than a dozen times, and each time she somehow insults the men while turning them down, which only makes them laugh. She's magical.

"Right..." she drawls.

"Tara, why don't you take the rest of the day off?" Midnight butts in.

"No, it's okay. Besides, I have to finish entering these invoices," I say, raising the offending pieces of paper in the air.

"I insist, those can wait for Monday. Why don't you go shopping or something before going home? You know we have a long night ahead of us."

I bite my lip and look away.

Should I? It's been a while since I've done anything for myself. What would I even do? The longer I think about it, the more tempting it sounds.

I look back at Midnight. "Are you sure?"

Midnight's shoulders relax, and he smiles. "I'm positive. Just be careful. You're having shit luck today."

Both Elle and I laugh.

"Ain't that the truth. Fine, I'll leave." I sigh dramatically.

"Don't have too much fun," Elle says before walking away.

As soon as the room is clear, Midnight steps closer and asks quietly, "Are you sure you don't want to talk about anything?"

He's the only one who knows about my situation. I mean, Wrath said Reaper knows too, but I'm too scared to speak with him. Midnight has become a friend of sorts. It no longer makes me jump when he accidentally touches me. I don't miss the way that he makes sure those accidents don't happen often.

Still, I don't know what is really bothering me, so I can't even talk about it if I wanted to.

"I'm good. Promise. I just woke up on the wrong side of the bed apparently."

Midnight hums but doesn't say anything.

I reach under the counter and grab my purse. "Hey, question. You always carry a book with you."

"Is that a question or a statement?" he teases.

I roll my eyes. "I was wondering if you could recommend a bookstore. The other night during girls' night, the topic of book boyfriends came up, and I want to see what they are all about."

Midnight smirks. "I go to the bookstore next door, and I know for a fact Ralph keeps the place stocked with dirty romance books for his

granddaughter, much to his dismay.”

I laugh. “Sounds like my kind of man. Alright, I’m going to go check it out. I’ll see you tonight.”

“Later,” he says as I walk out the door.

As soon as I step outside, I take a deep breath and let the sunshine hit me in the face. It feels good. Maybe I’ll run inside the bookstore real quick and then go back to the clubhouse and read out back. Or maybe I’ll go find a park and read where no one can bother me.

I do have a blanket in the trunk of my car.

With a plan set, I head a few steps down the street and walk into the bookstore. As soon as I step inside, I take a deep breath. The place smells like books, and I love it.

“Well hello,” an old man says from behind the counter.

His face and hands are wrinkled, but his dress shirt is crisp. He even has suspenders on.

“You must be Ralph.” I smile at him, instantly feeling at ease.

He chuckles. “My mind must be going because I don’t remember you, my dear.”

I shake my head. “Oh, we’ve never met. My friend Midnight just mentioned your store to me.”

“Ah, Midnight’s a good boy. Stops in here several times a week.”

The last thing I would call Midnight is a boy. That guy is all man, and I would know, since we got together twice when I first joined the club.

“He’s the best,” I say with laughter in my voice.

“Well, are you looking for anything in particular?”

“I was wanting to try my hand at romance books.”

Ralph nods as he gets off his chair. “Follow me.”

He makes his way out from behind the counter and walks toward the back of the store. He raises his arms wide and smiles. “Take your pick.”

My eyes widen as I take in shelf after shelf that takes up the entire back half of the building. “These can’t all be romance.”

“But they are. I have them broken up too. You have your clean romance over there”—he points to the far left—“followed by the fade to black. In the middle, you have contemporary romance. Then on the right, you have dark romance.”

“Dark romance?”

Ralph nods. “Yes, according to my granddaughter, that’s a popular

subgenre. Think morally gray characters, violence, dark themes, and content. She's a fan of forbidden romances.”

My heart beats faster at the idea of what's in that section.

“I don't even know where to start.”

“Well if you go over there”—he points toward the right side—“make sure you check the trigger warnings attached to the books. My Katy has taken time to label them all so no one picks up something that might upset them.”

“That's really sweet of her.”

Ralph winks. “She's a good girl. Now make yourself at home. I'll be up front if you need me.”

For the next hour, I wander through the stacks, adding book after book to my pile. I grabbed one about a girl who is a social media influencer and falls in love with four men. The note next to it said the sex was hot, so I couldn't say no. The dark romance section though, pulled me in. Katy did me and everyone else a solid and wrote what kinks each book has.

I've grabbed ones with breath play, voyeurism, blood play, and more. I can't wait to dive into them.

“Looks like you found some.” Ralph claps as I approach the register.

“I did. I had to cut myself off even,” I tell him as I set the books down.

“That's alright. They will be here when you finish these.”

“Very true,” I tell him as I pay.

“You have a great day, and come back soon.”

I smile as I take my bag. “You too.”

I've got a date with a book in the park to forget about the shitshow that's my life, and I can't wait.



WRATH

“Are you almost ready yet?” I grumble.

“Yeah, one sec!” Her sweet voice flows through the bathroom door.

I huff and run my hand through my hair. How long does it take for a woman to get ready? This is why I never wanted an old lady. Shit like this annoys me. She is already gorgeous. Why does she need to take forever to dress herself up even more? Doesn't she know she is perfect as she is?

“Okay, how do I look?”

I turn toward her and stop dead in my tracks.

The first thing I see are her black boots that hit right at her ankles. They have studs all over them.

I wonder how those would feel digging into my back as I fuck her against the wall.

Quickly I shake the thought away and trail my eyes up her long, thick legs, until I finally reach her short denim shorts. I'm almost a hundred percent sure that if she turns around, half of her ass will be hanging out. I keep going up until I see that she's wearing a black fishnet top with a red bra underneath, putting those fucking perfect tits on display.

“Well?” She huffs, shifting her weight from one leg to another.

I keep quiet as I admire her. Tara put her hair up in a ponytail that brushes her shoulders.

“You look good,” I manage.

It's a damn understatement. She looks fucking edible. If it wasn't for the tattoo marking her as mine on her arm, I would be tempted to make her change into a nun's outfit.

Then again, that could be fun too.

I wonder if I could convince her to break into a church with me and let me worship her on the altar...

Fuck, my mind is so far in the gutter. Especially when it's not like that between us.

I clear my throat. “Here. Put this on.”

I hold out her cut to her.

“I wasn't going for good, but thanks,” she mutters as she grabs the cut, putting it on.

As she turns, I see my name on her back. It gives me this thrill knowing that every single man out there will know she belongs to me. I mean, the tattoo says that too, but it's small. Unnoticeable from afar. That cut though? That's like a blinking billboard stating that this goddess is off-limits to all but

me. Not that I will go there, but still. It's a heady feeling knowing I am the only one who could.

"Ready to head out there?" she asks after a moment of silence.

"Sure," I grunt.

Tara moves to walk past me but I grab her arm, holding her in place. She tenses but relaxes before I can remove my hand.

She eyes my hand. "Yes?"

"After tonight, everyone is going to know you're my old lady."

Tara rolls her eyes. "I know how it works. I've seen a couple members claim old ladies before."

I ignore her sass and continue. "I want you to stay next to me all night, got it?"

"Yes, daddy," she quips, making my cock fucking twitch.

Goddamn that red-rimmed mouth.

A flash of her helpless on her knees, my cock being shoved down her throat hits me like a ton of bricks. My half-hard cock is at full attention now.

I can't be like that with her. I doubt she'd ever want something rough again. After what she went through, she deserves soft, caring touches.

I can't do soft or caring. All I can do is rough.

My hand moves down her arm until I hold her hand in mine. "Let's go."

I smile again when she doesn't flinch or tense at my touch. Maybe she's getting better. Or maybe it's just me that she's comfortable with. That makes me ridiculously happy to think about. It's unnerving. Before her, I couldn't recall a time I felt happiness.

Pulling her from the room, I turn and lock the door behind us.

"Let's get this over with," she mutters under her breath, but not quiet enough for me not to hear as we walk down the hall.

Once in the main room, everyone comes into view.

Bullet's behind the bar, making a couple of the girls drinks. Natalie is perched on Reaper's lap as she talks to Bullet.

All of a sudden, it's like I don't know what to do. I've been to hundreds of these parties and it's always the same, but for some reason, walking into the room with Tara feels different, and I don't know why.

It's almost as if I'm a fumbling teenager again.

I clear my throat. "Want a drink?"

"God yes." Tara pulls my hand this time, dragging me toward the bar.

As we approach, Reaper looks up from his phone and sees us.

“Wrath. Tara.” He nods as he puts his phone away.

Natalie turns and smiles when she sees us, jumping off Reaper’s lap.

Natalie smiles. “Hey you two. Tara, you look fantastic!” she says before hugging her.

When Natalie pulls away, Tara looks at me out of the corner of her eye. “Thanks. See, Wrath, that’s how you compliment a woman.”

“Smartass,” I mutter as Reaper laughs at my expense.

The girls start talking, Natalie commenting on her property cut and Tara shyly admitting that she’s my old lady.

I hate that she’s not screaming it out, but I can’t offer her the type of relationship Reaper gives Natalie. I’ll never be that man.

“Get me a drink,” I grunt at Bullet.

“You want a beer?”

“Yeah.”

He nods and looks at Tara. “You want a margarita? Natalie convinced Reaper to break out the machine earlier.”

“Yes, please.”

“Come on, let’s move over to the couch,” Reaper says as soon as we all have our drinks.

Tara and I follow behind him and Natalie.

“Hey Honk, Hi Elenore,” Tara greets the other two occupants of the area, filled with two loveseats and a couch.

I sit down on one end of the couch. Tara moves to sit beside me.

That won’t fucking do. At the last moment, I pull her into my lap.

“Jesus. You could have asked, you fucking caveman,” she whispers harshly, but I don’t miss the slight tremble.

It makes me want to punch myself. I know I should apologize, but I won’t. Still, she stays in my lap.

Elenore laughs. “You wouldn’t be wearing his patch if you didn’t like his caveman ways. Congratulations, by the way.”

“Thanks,” Tara says hesitantly.

“Hey, how’s Harlee? Honk tore out of here yesterday and only said that he had to deal with her,” Natalie asks, taking the attention off us.

That helps ease Tara. Slowly, she begins to relax into me. I keep one hand on my beer on the arm of the couch while the other sits on the side of her legs. I’m careful not to move too much. Anything to make the woman in my lap more comfortable.

Honk grunts, "That child."

Elenore rolls her eyes. "She's your child. What did you expect?"

"What happened?" Tara asks as she raises her drink.

Elenore elbows her husband. "You tell them."

"Those goddamn elbows, woman," Honk mumbles before looking at us. "Turns out my little girl was caught smoking in the bathroom."

"That's it?" I chuckle.

Elenore glares at me. "Smoking on campus is prohibited."

"Shit, we used to light up under the bleachers," Reaper muses, looking over at me.

I know the smirk on my face tells him I'm thinking about other things we used to do under those same bleachers. Hell, high school was fun. It was before we knew death and the stresses of the clubs.

Natalie scrunches up her nose. "You used to smoke?"

"From time to time, but I don't anymore." He kisses her forehead.

Yeah, fucker is whipped. He stopped smoking after he overheard Natalie talking about how the smell bothered her once.

"Thank God. Cigarette breath is the worst." Natalie shivers in disgust.

"That's not all though," Elenore says, bringing the attention back to them. "Apparently she thought it would be a good idea to go into her Chemistry teacher's room while they were at lunch and change an entire class period's grades."

I snort, burying my head in Tara's neck to hide my amusement. It drops as soon as I feel her tense beneath me. I pull back quickly.

"Fuck, you have your hands full with her," Reaper says, making everyone else laugh.

I'm focused on Tara though. How do I make her less afraid of touch? I need to figure out a way to help her. Not only do I hate this for her, but I can't have her freezing every time I touch her. It would be like waving a red flag in front of everyone, and they would know something was up.

"She's only seventeen. Who knows what else she will pull in the next year," Honk grumbles, taking a drink. "One thing is for sure. I gotta keep her away from here, or who knows what kind of mayhem she would cause."

"We're not that bad." Natalie slaps her hand on her chest.

Honk's eyes soften as he looks at Natalie. "Maybe you and the rest of the girls, Queen Bee, but us men? The only good thing about us is you women."

"Amen," Reaper says, raising a glass.

I murmur in agreement and raise mine as well. I might not truly have Tara in a traditional way, but she is the only bright part of this whole situation.

“Looks like everyone is here. Ready to announce that you’ve claimed Tara?” Reaper asks me.

I feel Tara freeze on my lap and grit my teeth. She had just started to relax again. Now she’s on edge again, and I know it’s because she wasn’t fully accepting of this situation.

I want to whisper in her ear that it will be okay, but how can I make that promise? How can I promise her anything when my own promises to my mother fell on deaf ears?

“Sure,” I grit, tapping her hip. Tara gets up and moves to the side.

I stand as everyone else does and pull Tara into my side. For a split second, she flinches from my touch, but I don’t let her go. She’s got to get used to my hands on her, at least when we’re around everyone. As much as it kills me to force my touch on her, this is for her protection. No one will believe that I’ve claimed her if we don’t show some affection.

Honestly, this is all new to me too. Having her hands on me is like fire on my skin. Part of me wants to shy away from it, but the other part wants to burn in the flames if only to have her for a little longer.

Reaper whistles. “Can I get everyone’s attention?”

Everyone stops what they are doing and looks our way.

“Tonight we have an announcement.”

He turns to me, glee in his eyes. He knows I hate being the center of attention.

Still, I clear my throat.

“Tara has agreed to be my old lady.”

It’s silent a moment before the room explodes in cheers. All except for one person. I notice Sunny frowning at the announcement, but she quickly smooths her face when Pinky leans down and whispers in her ear.

I wonder what that’s all about.

“Quiet down!” Reaper waits until they do before continuing. “That means Tara is no longer a sweetbutt but an official old lady and off-limits.” He raises his glass toward us. “To Wrath and Tara. We wish you a life of happiness.”

“To Wrath and Tara,” everyone says in unison.

I look down at Tara and see the forced smile on her face.

She glances up at me. “Smile.”

Instead, I press my lips against the side of her head.
This is going to be a new kind of hell.

five

TARA

THERE'S a slight chill hanging in the air as I wrap the blanket around me. I've always liked the early morning atmosphere here. Everyone is usually sleeping, so it's easy enough to slip outside and enjoy the sun rising on your own. Well, as long as the party from the night before has ended.

Taking a seat on one of the outdoor chairs, I settle in. The sun has already mostly risen, but I needed the quiet. Tipping my head back, I shut my eyes and let the sun hit my face.

I didn't get much sleep last night.

After the party, Wrath drug me back to his room. He promptly settled into the old recliner to fall asleep. I guess it would have looked bad for him to leave me after announcing me as his old lady.

That's part of what kept me up all night. Overanalyzing everything from the party. From the stares I received from an unhappy wife to the way my body felt whenever Wrath would touch me.

What started as discomfort slowly started to turn into something else entirely. I'm not sure if it's the whole exposure therapy thing, but suddenly the idea of his touch isn't as repulsive as it has been in the past.

Maybe I'm finally healing.

The hope I feel is dashed when I remember that I wanted to accept touch again so I could find a good man and leave my more wild days behind, but I can't do that now. Even if I were to leave and find someone not associated with the club, I'd still be his. His name is on my body for goodness' sake. How could I explain that?

This is why I couldn't sleep last night. My mind simply won't stop.

"Time to escape..." I whisper to myself as I open the book I brought out with me.

I'm sitting on his lap, and he places my legs on the outside of his. He spreads his legs as far as he can while his friend falls to his knees.

"You smell phenomenal. Is this all for us?" the one on the floor growls as he runs his nose along the inside of my thigh.

The one I'm sitting on pinches my nipples, making me gasp.

"I think she loves this. What do you think?"

"She's fucking soaked." His eyes move to me, and he smirks. "I'm going to devour this pussy while he holds you still. If you're a good girl, we'll let you come before we fuck you together."

My heart races with desire.

He leans forward, licking my pussy. Hissing, I arch my back and grab onto his hair. Pulling him to where I really want him.

Fuck, that feels good.

"Tara..."

"Ah!" I screech, slamming my book shut.

I don't know if I'm breathing hard from the scene in the book or Natalie scaring me.

"Are you okay?" She looks concerned.

“I’m good,” I rasp as I rub my hand over my racing heart.

“I’m sorry for scaring you. I saw you out here and wanted to check in.”

Natalie is a good friend. She’s so caring. That’s why I didn’t tell her the truth about my arrangement with Wrath. I let her believe it’s for real. I think she has her suspicions though.

I give her a small smile. “All good. Just reading.”

My cheeks pinken as I think about the book I’m reading.

“Good book?”

“Eh, it’s alright,” I lie.

It’s fucking hot.

The two heroes have a thing about pinning the heroine down and edging her before fucking her six ways from Sunday. I swear to God my vibrator is getting more action than it has in years since I’ve started reading.

The only downfall to this morning is Wrath being in the room. Hard to use it with him right there.

Natalie hums but doesn’t call me out as she sits down next to me.

“How did you sleep?” I ask after a moment of silence.

A pretty blush covers her cheeks, and I bite my lip to stop myself from laughing. If I had to guess, I bet she didn’t get much either, only for an entirely different reason.

Lucky bitch.

“Good. You?”

“Same. I’m surprised you’re back here so early.”

Natalie bobs her head. “Yeah, I don’t know why Reaper took us home when he had to be back here first thing this morning. How’s the tattoo shop? Still enjoying it?”

“I am. The staff is awesome, and the customers are nice for the most part. Midnight is a fantastic boss.”

“I can see that.” She is watching me awfully close.

Does she think I have a thing for Midnight? I mean, he’s been nice, but absolutely not. We have history, but that’s firmly in the past and well before she came along. Hell, I don’t even know if Wrath realizes it. It doesn’t matter though, there is nothing between Midnight and me. He acts like I’m glass. Always trying to help me when I wish he’d just let me be.

Besides, Wrath just claimed me. I’m pretty sure interbrother mingling is forbidden. I mean, but if they did it together, like in the book, maybe?

No. Bad thoughts. As hot as Midnight is, I will never go there again.

Especially with Wrath as my old man now.

Old man.

What a weird thing to think.

“What’s new with you?” I try to change the subject.

I cannot fall back into the dark hole of never-ending thoughts.

She smiles like she knows what I just did, but she lets me get away with it. “Nothing much. Just busy making sure everything runs smoothly around here and trying out new hobbies.”

“What is it this week?”

“Candle making.” She laughs. “I don’t think I’m very good though.”

“You’ll get better with time.”

About once a week, Natalie tries something new, and Reaper is all about it. That man will do anything to make sure his woman is happy. Even if it means taking her to a craft store once a week.

“Maybe.” She shrugs.

“What are you trying next?”

Natalie gives me a naughty grin. “Who knows, I might try reading after seeing how engrossed you were in that book.”

“I’m sure Reaper would love it if you did.” I wink, making her laugh.

“How’s therapy?” she asks after a moment of silence.

After everything went down with Jug, Trigger hooked me up with a false identity, and Natalie got me in with her therapist. Once a week, we have a video call to discuss how I’m doing that week.

“It’s a walk, not a marathon,” the therapist told me when I confessed that I hate the idea of a man touching me intimately.

“It’s going alright. I have an appointment scheduled tomorrow.”

Natalie hums. “I bet you’ll have a lot to talk about this week.”

“Why do you say that?”

Natalie raises a brow. “Because last week you were single as a Pringle, and now you’re a claimed old lady. That’s a big jump.”

“You’re not wrong,” I admit reluctantly.

Honestly, I don’t want to tell the therapist about Wrath. Especially since I want her to sign off on me stopping therapy. I know therapy helps some people, like Natalie, but I’m coping well. I’m not burying anything deep down. I am acknowledging my feelings and working through them. I don’t want to talk with someone else about them too. I might freeze when a man touches me, but I’m working on it, and honestly, that’s not something she can

help with.

If I tell her about Wrath, she is likely to think I've lost my mind and recommend more sessions.

No, I'll keep him to myself for now.

"You know, when Reaper first told me that Wrath was claiming you, I thought it was a joke. Not because I don't think you are perfect together or anything, but just because I thought you would have told me yourself. You nor Wrath had hinted that things had taken a turn between you two."

"It just happened. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner."

"That's alright. I am happy for you though. I think you guys are exactly what the other needs."

I hum, pretending like I agree.

"How are you handling being claimed?" Natalie asks.

"Okay, I think." I shrug. "I mean, it's not like anything has changed."

Natalie tilts her head to the side. "Hasn't it though?"

I frown. "What do you mean?"

"You are the only woman that Wrath has ever let in. He touches you freely, and you don't shy away from him, but if one of the other guys tried, I bet you would inch away."

Score one for me if I'm really hiding it that well.

I shake my head. "That's not entirely true. I mean, I think it's like exposure therapy. At first, his touch was as bad as the rest, but he kept touching me, and I don't know. It's kind of nice now. I think it would have happened with anyone else."

"I think you're wrong. I don't think it's the exposure. I think it's because it's Wrath. It's because somewhere inside, you trust him. I bet if you tried it with another guy, it wouldn't work."

"I'm telling you it would. I'll prove it. It took one night for me to become more comfortable with Wrath's touch. I'll just try it with someone else."

The thought makes me feel sick to my stomach, but I'd give it the good ol' college try in the name of science.

She sobers quickly. "That is a terrible idea. Do you want a murder on your hands? Wrath will kill him."

I swallow hard. I forgot about my whole let-her-believe-this-is-real thing.

"I don't think he would. I mean, he claimed me, but it's not like he wants to be exclusive. I'm sure he's still seeing those hookers since we haven't, you know."

She shakes her head. “You don’t understand. These guys are territorial. Wrath is the worst. He never wanted to claim anyone, and I think it’s because he knows if he did that, he wouldn’t be able to control the alpha male lurking beneath his skin. I’m warning you now. Do not test that man. I would hate for there to be a civil war within the club.”

“It’s not like that with Wrath.”

“Mark my words. If you decide to go through with this, someone will end up dead.”

I don’t know how to respond, so I don’t. I let her words sit in the silence.

After several moments, I speak again. “How’s your therapy going?”

“Great. I mean, I still have bad days just like you but I think it’s helping. We’ve talked about going down to once-a-month sessions instead of every other week. She feels like I’ve been improving in strides.”

“That’s amazing. I’m happy for you,” I tell her sincerely.

“Thank you.”

Someone yells her name, and she looks over her shoulder. She raises up a finger, telling them to hold on for a minute before turning back to me.

“I’ll talk to you later?”

“Yep.”

Natalie stands and smooths down her shirt. “Don’t have too much fun reading.”

I laugh and wink at her. “I won’t. Later.”

As I watch her walk away, I think more on my idea.

Wrath isn’t my man for real. He really wouldn’t kill someone for touching me, right?

I think back to yesterday morning when he was angry that I might leave.

Maybe I won’t test that theory after all.



WRATH

It's been a long fucking day, and I'm dead tired. I spent all day working at the auto shop, and it was one cluster fuck after another. All I want to do is face plant onto my bed and not wake up until my alarm goes off in the morning.

Opening the door to my room, I let myself in and shut it behind me.

"Hi," Tara whispers behind me.

"Hey," I say gruffly.

I hang my head between my shoulders. I was hoping that she would be asleep by the time I let myself in.

Fuck, I really don't want to make small talk.

Taking a deep breath, I roll my shoulders and turn around. Tara is lying in my bed with her hair braided away from her face. She has on some kind of top with tiny ass straps that disappear under the blankets, and she's got a book clutched in her hand.

"I'm going to go shower."

"Okay," she says quietly.

Walking across the room, I make a pitstop at my dresser and grab a pair of gym shorts before heading into the bathroom. I shut the door behind me and turn on the shower. Tossing the shorts on the counter, I strip. The icy water hits me as soon as I step inside, making me hiss, but I don't care.

Sleep. All I want is sleep.

Rushing through the shower, I get out and dry off. After putting on the shorts, I run my hand through my hair. As I brush my teeth, I study myself in the mirror. My dark hair looks darker because it's wet, and my skin is lighter from the cold water. The bags under my eyes show the lack of sleep I've been getting recently.

I look like a bag of dicks, but I can't find it in me to care.

After dropping my toothbrush in the cup, I exit the bathroom and head into the bedroom. I pause in the doorway and look at Tara. She's so engrossed in her book that she doesn't realize I'm in the room.

"Good book?" I ask as I pad across the room.

Her head jerks up, and her eyes go wide. "Yeah."

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you," I tell her as I sink down into the chair.

"It's okay."

I grunt as I tilt my head back and close my eyes.

"What are you doing?" Tara asks after a few moments of silence.

I open one eye and raise a brow. "I'm going to sleep. What does it look

like?”

I mean, I thought I made it clear to her last night that for as long as she stays here, we will be sharing a room. It's what will be expected.

“I-in here?”

“Is that a problem?”

Before I even finish the question, she starts shaking her head. “No, no problem. I'm just surprised is all.”

I sigh heavily. Looks like sleep will be put off for a bit.

Sitting up, I level with her. “I've claimed you.”

“I was there,” she sasses back.

“Since you're my old lady now, it would look weird as fuck if we didn't share a room,” I point out. “The last thing I want to do is listen to people asking if we're okay.”

“Right...” she drawls.

“So I'm going to lean back and go to sleep. I'll stay on my side of the room, and you stay on yours. Sound good?”

I take Tara's silence as a yes and nod.

Thank fuck, that was easier than I thought, I think to myself as I go to lean back and get comfortable in this uncomfortable as fuck chair. I'd probably be better off sleeping on the floor.

Note to self: Tomorrow, stop by the sporting goods store and buy one of those foam mattresses for under a sleeping bag and a sleeping bag.

“Wait...”

I stop and look back at Tara.

She's gnawing on her bottom lip.

“That chair is uncomfortable.”

“It is.”

She doesn't look at me when she speaks. “The bed is big enough for the both of us. We could put a pillow or two in the middle of the bed and create a barrier.”

“You want me to sleep next to you,” I say slowly, making sure I heard her right.

Her little head bobs up and down twice. “It's your bed. You should sleep in it. If anything, I should be sleeping in the chair and not you. I could even make a pallet on the floor...”

“Absolutely not,” I say adamantly. “You aren't sleeping in this thing, let alone on the floor.”

We both fall silent as the offer hangs in the air between us.

My bed would be a hell of a lot more comfortable, but could I lie next to her all night without it affecting her? I don't want her to feel uncomfortable. Fuck, we are in this situation because of my need to take care of her.

Finally, I clear my throat. "Are you sure?"

Tara licks her bottom lip but looks me in the eye. "I'm sure."

Slowly, I get up from the chair and walk to the bed. I watch as Tara pushes herself as far against the wall as possible as she grabs one of the million pillows she's brought in and shoves it into the middle of the bed.

She's fucking crazy if she thinks that will keep us apart. If I truly move toward her in the night, that pillow will flatten like a pancake. I just hope I can keep my hands to myself.

I lift the blanket and find another sheet under it.

That's new. Last time I slept in the bed, all I had was a heavy blanket and the bottom sheet.

Grabbing the sheet, I slide between the covers and lay down on my back.

"Could you put this on the nightstand, please?" Tara asks, handing me her book.

Silently, I grab it and eye the cover. It has two shirtless men on it with a woman standing between them in just a bra.

Interesting.

I do as she asks before flicking off the light.

I stare up at the ceiling and wonder how in the hell I ended up here. I have never shared a bed with a woman overnight while sleeping. Usually I fuck her and leave, and that's it. I've never even had a woman in this bed with me until her.

After Tara shifts for the third time, I look over at her.

"Are you good? I really don't mind the chair." I feel ready to bolt from the bed at any moment.

"Yeah," she squeaks out. "I'm fine. Stay. Please."

It's the shy "please" that convinces me to stay.

"Good," I grunt.

Closing my eyes, I listen to her breathe and feel mine start to slow down. Somehow, I fall asleep a lot faster than I thought I would.

six

TARA

SITTING DOWN, I turn on the computer in front of me. I hate, absolutely hate, having to do online therapy sessions. Any therapy sessions actually. Trusting people is hard for me.

After I was assaulted, therapy was something both Reaper and Natalie were adamant that I do, even though I didn't think it was needed. I know what happened wasn't my fault. It was strictly Jug's. There was nothing I could have done to change that night but put up a fight on going into that

room to start with.

I know I have things to work on, but talking it out with a stranger isn't helping that any. All the skills she recommends? I'm already doing them. I get that some people don't know how to take care of their mental health, but my mom taught me many tricks to help manage my emotions as I grew up. She was one of those progressive parents who believed in helping your children understand their emotions instead of suppressing them. I thank her every day for that blessing.

So, until the therapist gives me the all-clear to quit, I come to these sessions weekly. Only to appease Natalie and Reaper.

I enter the waiting room for the call and wait. Thankfully the therapist doesn't leave me waiting long.

"Evening, Miss Reid." The therapist smiles.

I have to stop myself from snorting. She thinks my name is Tara Reid, like the actress. I'll give Trigger credit, he came up with fantastic fake names for Natalie and me.

"Hi." I wave awkwardly at the camera.

"How have you been this week?"

"Really good."

It's not a total lie. I do feel really good about most of the week. There are just some small portions of it that sucked.

"That's wonderful. How is the new job? Do you like it?" She's writing in her notebook as she speaks.

"I love it. My coworkers are awesome, and it's a great work environment." I smile as I think about it.

I thought working at the tattoo shop would be weird and uncomfortable. It's the complete opposite. Midnight always makes sure I'm taken care of. When he knows he has a particularly flirty customer coming, he comes to the front to greet them himself. It annoys me a little that he feels he has to do that, but the other part of me is grateful for it. It saves me from having to find a way to make sure the men don't touch me.

The therapist smiles. "That's rare. It is still new though, so don't flip a one-eighty when you settle in and all the shine has worn off."

"I know," I say, even though I wouldn't know since this is my first real job.

I hope this comforting feeling I feel working there never stops. I feel like they are accepting me into this mini family they created. I want to be part of

that. I haven't had a family in quite some time.

Then again, now that I'm Wrath's old lady, I technically have a whole club at my back now. That still feels so surreal to me. I feel like I don't belong there anymore. Like my identity has changed.

"Have you had any nightmares this week? Any setbacks?" she says, drawing me out of my negative thoughts.

"If I have, I don't remember them. I haven't woken up in the middle of the night in a couple weeks."

"That's great to hear. It seems like your mind is mending well." She smiles at me.

"Thanks." I smile back awkwardly.

I mean, what do you really say to that?

"What have you done in your free time? Have you found ways to get out of your shell?" she asks.

I shrug. "I've started reading. A friend recommended a bookstore, so I checked it out. I wouldn't say it's getting me out of my shell, per se, but it does give me something to talk about with some of the girls I know."

"Reading is a great hobby. It can help you make connections with others by sharing what you love. What have you been reading?"

"Romance..." I pause for a moment. "Dark romance."

A look I can't quite decipher crosses her face as she smiles lightly. "Dark romance is wonderful for some."

"Honestly, I wasn't sure I would like it, but I didn't want to pass it up out of fear, so I grabbed it. Then I started reading it, and I realized that I really enjoyed it. I don't know. I kind of feel guilty about liking it when some of the descriptive scenes depict rough sex, and that's what got me into this."

"Rough sex didn't get you into anything. It was someone taking something against your will."

"I get that, but like when they talk about choking the character during sex, I'm not repulsed by it. It actually turns me on. I don't know, I feel like it should send me into a painful flashback, not get my panties wet, you know?"

She's quiet a moment, so I sit in silence with her. She does this sometimes. It's like she's going through a catalog in her head for what she should say in this situation.

"Did you know a lot of women in your situation have turned to dark romance?" she mentions after a moment.

For once, she has my complete attention. "How so?"

“They find comfort in reading stories about women who have gone through similar situations and come out on the other side. I know someone who enjoys it because it lets her explore what sex could look like for her now if she seeks it out. Try and remember that you are living your life for yourself. It’s okay to like things that others may not understand. All that matters is that you are being safe, and the partner you choose to explore those darker desires with is someone you trust. Safety is key.”

One of the books I read this week was about a girl who was assaulted and sought out a sex club. Her attacker ruined gentle sex for her, and she needed someone with a firmer hand. I really felt like I connected with that character because I’ve never been one for the softer sex. It has always bored me. Then Jug did what he did, and I thought that sex was ruined for good. Maybe I can reclaim that part of me. I just need to find someone to help me do it.

Laughing, I admit, “They can be kinky. That makes sense though. I don’t think I like them because of what happened, but because I’ve always leaned into darker movies and whatnot. I’ve been told I have a dark sense of humor once or twice.”

“As long as you feel like you are healing and you are being safe, then I say you embrace this side of yourself.”

“Thanks. I think I will.” I smile, finally feeling a little better than I have lately.

The therapist looks down at something on her desk. “So, Miss Reid. When we started this whole thing, you admitted that you didn’t want to come see me. That you were only doing so at the urging of your friends. Now that we have been meeting for a couple of months, how are you feeling?”

“Honestly? I appreciate you taking your time to talk to me. I have enjoyed our conversations as much as one can when in therapy, but I still feel like it was a waste of resources. I know I went through something traumatic. I was able to step back and evaluate my feelings and process them. As much as I know that some people need therapy to help them cope, I feel like I have a lot of skills to help me process, along with the friends I have in my corner to help me as well. So while I do see the benefits of these sessions, I think there is someone else out there who could really use you a lot more than I do.”

She smiles sadly. “Therapy only works if we want it to. I have to give you credit for trying though.”

“Thanks.”

“I assume this will be our last session then?”

“I would prefer it that way,” I tell her honestly.

“Very well. I think you are handling everything as well as someone can in your situation. You seem to have a good grip on reality. Keep my number in case you ever need to talk in the future. Remember, therapy doesn’t have to be a regular thing. You can call and make an appointment at any time for any reason. Even if it’s just a short session.”

“I appreciate that. I will keep it in mind.”

She smiles. “It was a pleasure working with you, Miss Reid.”

I smile back. “The feeling is mutual.”

I hang up the video call and shut the computer.

I’m so glad I never have to do that again. I meant every word I said. Therapy is great for some, but I’m doing okay. As soon as I am able to save enough money to get my own place, I’ll feel much better.

I should probably go find Trigger and give him back the computer, I think after a moment.

Standing, I grab the computer to do just that.

Heading down the hall, I look at the closed doors as I pass. This place is so familiar. It has been my home for the past two years. Could I really leave it?

I could stay. I am an old lady now. I have a right here. I don’t want to wear out my welcome though. No. It’s best to stay with the plan.

“Hey, Tara,” Lauren says from her spot on the couch in the main room as I pass through.

I forgot I told her we could hang out after my call. “I’ll be back in one second.”

She smiles. “Cool.”

I knock on the door next to the chapel, where the guys hold their meetings.

“Come in,” Trigger says from the other side.

I open the door and step into the dark room.

“How can I help you?” Trigger asks from behind his desk without looking up.

“I just came to return this.” I hold the laptop out.

“You can keep it, you know. You don’t have to give it back. We gave it to you,” he tells me.

I shake my head. “I appreciate the gesture, but I don’t like taking handouts.”

“It’s not a handout Tara. You’re part of this club now. What is ours is yours.”

I shift uneasily. I hate that everyone believes that Wrath and I are something real. I wish we were. I could learn to love a man like him. He’s fiercely protective. I would never have to worry about being hurt again. I would have his family at my back, so when I feel lonely I would always have someone to hang out with. Then again, could I be with someone who may never love me?

“I know that. I just have to do this my way,” I tell him.

He nods solemnly. “I hope you learn to trust us again.”

“Me too.” I give him a small smile before leaving the room.

He’s right though. I used to trust them wholeheartedly. Enough to give them my body on the regular, and now I can barely handle someone brushing against me. I hope I learn to trust again too. Not just them, but myself.

Shaking off my thoughts, I head to the main room.

“Okay, what’s new? Tell me the latest gossip,” I say to Lauren as I fall onto the couch.

“You’ll never believe it!” she exclaims.

As she rattles on, peace settles over me.

This.

This is what I need.



WRATH

Kick. Punch. Punch. Kick.

Over and over, I hit the bag, repeating the same sequence of hits as sweat pours down my face.

“Started without me I see,” I hear from behind me.

Huffing, out of breath, I grab the bag and look over my shoulder. Natalie stands next to the door in workout gear. My eyes flash to the clock.

Shit.

“Sorry, lost track of time,” I grumble.

Natalie pushes off the wall and heads toward me. “All good. I’m just hopeful you wore yourself out so much I’ll be able to take you down.”

I scoff. “You wish.”

Natalie grabs a bottle of water from the mini fridge and hands it to me.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

I finish the bottle and toss it toward the trash can, making it in without trying.

Natalie’s eyebrows go up. “Impressive.”

“Are you ready to get started?”

“Not one for small talk today, cool, cool. I get it.” She bobs her head.

I put my hands on my hips and face her. “Are you here to work out or chit chat?”

Natalie raises her hands. “Here to work out.”

“Are you sure?”

She rolls her eyes and moves away from me. Natalie goes to the bench and grabs the tape.

“Will you help me tape my hands, please? I haven’t quite mastered it yet.”

“So polite,” I tease, making her laugh.

Natalie laughs. “Right? I went down to the shelter the other day to donate some stuff and the person I met with commented on it.” Natalie’s voice goes all high, and she places her hand on her chest. “My, I would never suspect your part of the riffraff on the other side of town with the way you talk. You seem like such a good girl.”

I chuckle at her impersonation as I start to tape her hands. “What did you say?”

“I told her that she shouldn’t judge a book by its cover and that it was Queen of the Riffraff, thank you very much.”

I shake my head and smile. “I bet Reaper loved that.”

Natalie shrugs. “He didn’t know until I got home. Jacob went with me because Reaper was busy with club business.”

“Bullet,” I gently remind her of Jacob’s road name.

“I’ll get it right eventually,” she mumbles as I finish up with her hands.

She won’t though. She knows him as Jacob, and she politely refuses to call him anything else unless forced. She always pretends to forget, but I know it’s because he’s more than a brother to her. He’s her friend. One that took a literal bullet to save her life, which is how he got his name.

“Stretch. Did you already do your run?” I ask.

It’s the workout I put together for her when we started this. Some warm-ups, then a run before she stretches, and we get into the ring together. There, I continue to teach her how to never be a victim again.

Natalie nods as she pulls her arm behind her head. “Yep.”

“Good. When you’re done, move to the bag and warm up.”

Really, I should be monitoring her, but my head is not in it. Instead, it’s on this little brunette who has taken over my life. I wish I knew how she so easily embedded herself under my skin.

“Yes, sir.” She salutes me before passing me.

God, she’s such a shithead. When I met her months ago, I would have never suspected that she would be as sassy as she is. Over time, her bruises faded, and she found her voice with Reaper at her side.

I want to say I hate it, but truth is, I don’t. I love watching her gain her strength back. I have always respected women, but my respect for her only grows with time. I can’t wait to see how she keeps evolving until she is the best version of herself.

Hell, Lord knows the changes she will bring to this club and Reaper. It’s going to be an adventure.

Thinking about all the ways Natalie has changed makes me think of Tara. The women are so similar yet different. I can only hope that Tara follows Natalie’s lead. My only worry is that where Natalie had Reaper, Tara has no one. Technically, she has me, but I don’t know if I can give her what she needs.

I don’t know if I’m what she needs.

After several minutes of her warming up on the bag, I finally make my way over. I know what today’s session is going to be about. I didn’t warn her about Tara and me. Not that there is really an us to warn her about, but still. She is going to have questions.

I know I’m right as soon as she opens her mouth.

“So how’s having an old lady?” she asks between punches.

“So how’s being married?” I toss back.

“Great. Ten out of ten, would recommend.”

“I’m sure Reaper would be glad to hear it,” I deadpan.

Natalie kicks the bag and starts punching it again. “You didn’t answer my question though.”

“Shouldn’t you be asking Tara this shit?” I huff.

Isn’t girl talk a thing? Don’t they share all the dirty details? Hell, Natalie should know this whole thing is fake and leave me alone about it, yet here she is.

Natalie pauses and looks at me, eyebrow raised. “And who’s saying I didn’t? Maybe I know about everything.”

I frown. “Everything?”

If she knew everything, then why is she asking me? Is it because Tara didn’t tell her anything or because she lied about it?

“Every-thing,” she says slowly.

Then I see it. The uncertainty in her face. I almost want to snort, but then I think better of it.

It’s clear that she’s fishing and doesn’t know shit. So why not fuck with her a bit?

I cross my arms.

“So you know I gave her three orgasms last night after edging her while she was tied to our bed,” I say, fucking with her.

That’s just a little bit of what I want to do to Tara. Fuck, if she’d let me, I would tie her up until she’s completely dependent on me. Then I would lick and bite every inch of her skin until her pretty skin was marked up with my claim.

My dick is hard as fuck at the thought, which isn’t a good thing. I can’t do that to Tara. She’s been through enough. Maybe had I gotten to her before Jug did, she would’ve been down, but she wasn’t even on my radar then.

I’ve never regretted much in my life, but that’s one of them. Not protecting her when I had the chance.

Natalie whips around so fast her ponytail hits her in the face as the bag slams into her side, making her stumble. She doesn’t even notice. It’s enough to bring me back to the present.

“You did?” she asks, completely shocked.

“No, and if I did, I sure as hell wouldn’t tell you,” I tell her.

Natalie groans. “Dammit, I can’t believe I fell for that.”

“Can’t you though?” I smirk.

Natalie glares at me and gets back to hitting the bag.

I walk back and grab the punch mitts off the bench, and at the same time, I grab a bottle of water from the fridge.

“Stop,” I call out as I approach. “Here.”

Natalie wipes her forehead with the back of her hand before taking the bottle.

“Thanks,” she pants.

I give her a nod as acknowledgment as I put the gloves on.

When she sets the bottle down, she nods. “Ready.”

We move into the ring and get to work.

Sometimes I push forward, making her stumble back, and other times I retreat, making her come to me. The entire time she hits and kicks me, I watch her and correct her when I need to. By the end of the hour, Natalie’s face is as red as a tomato, and she looks like she could take a nap.

“We’re done. Good job today,” I tell her.

Natalie groans and falls onto the mat. “I can’t feel my arms or my legs.

I laugh. “Your stamina is getting better, and you’re starting to move on instinct.”

“Reaper doesn’t complain about my stamina,” she says under her breath, but still loud enough for me to hear.

I cringe. “I don’t want to know about your sex life, remember?”

“Yeah, yeah.” She waves her hand in the air. “You don’t want to tell me anything fun. Who would have thought you would be such a stick-in-the-mud?”

The door opens, and we both look over in time to see Reaper step inside.

“Hey, baby. How was your workout?”

“Good. I can’t feel my legs.”

Reaper hums. “I thought it was my job to make that happen...”

“For fuck’s sake, I’m right here.” I groan.

Reaper smirks. “Hey, if you aren’t making your old lady’s legs go numb, then you’re doing something wrong.”

I grunt as Natalie laughs.

“Come on Nat, get off the floor.”

“I might need you to carry me.”

“Done,” he says as he holds out his hand.

Natalie stands on shaky legs and goes to him. As soon as she’s within reach, he picks her up and she wraps her legs around his waist.

“Don’t have too much fun,” I call out as they walk away.
“You should try it sometime!” Natalie hollers as they walk out.
I shake my head as a feeling hits me in the chest that I can’t quite name.
Maybe it’s time to make a call and have a little fun on my own.
No, that would be disrespectful to Tara.
Looks like it’s just me and my hand for the foreseeable future.

seven

TARA

I FEEL SO out of place.

I used to spend a lot of time in the main area of the clubhouse during one of their adult-only parties. It was one of my favorite parts about being a sweetbutt. The freedom to be who I wanted to be without the judgment from others. If I wanted to fuck some guy in the corner, no one blinked an eye.

It's different now. Old ladies aren't seen like that. In some sense, it's like royalty. They are seen above the other women. They might dress sexy, but

they would never be caught doing naughty things in the corner. They are too prim and proper for that. Us sweetbutts used to joke about it.

Well, the sweetbutts. I can't say us anymore. Since I'm no longer one of them.

I glance over to the corner where Lauren is sucking face with Bullet.

Sighing, I turn back to the bar.

Jordan, one of the prospects, is tending bar tonight. Not that I will ever call him by his name. He's been keeping my glass full. Thank God for that. I need it. Sunny and Elenore are chatting near the kitchen at one of the high-tops. Natalie isn't here tonight. The rest of the girls I know are busy being of use, like sweetbutts are supposed to.

Then there's me.

Sure, I could go over to Elenore and Sunny. Elenore would welcome me with open arms. Sunny would probably be uncomfortable though. She never liked being around the sweetbutts before. Even with all of Natalie's meddling, she hasn't warmed up to them.

I know she's got to hate me. I'm the one girl who went and changed the status quo. Before me, the sweetbutts might have dreams of becoming an old lady, but it was known that the men wouldn't want someone who had fucked his brothers.

Wrath changed that. Not that he cares. He's not fucking me. That's not what this was about for him.

Still, I almost wish I could go climb into a brother's lap and scratch that itch. I couldn't do that to Wrath though. He'd lose the respect of his brothers. I mean, that's if my new phobia of touch didn't stop me first.

Gosh, I'm so fucked up.

I hear some moans from the corner Lauren is in. Peeking over at Sunny, I watch as she sneers with disgust. Then she and Elenore exit the main room, heading outside.

She might have better luck out there. Or maybe she won't. These parties are known to turn into big orgies.

Glancing over my shoulder at Lauren, I watch as Bullet thrusts against her, his pants at his knees.

Fuck, that's hot.

My mind replaces Lauren with myself, my body growing warm. I can almost feel him inside me as my core clenches against nothing. My cheeks grow warm as my eyes fall closed.

Only when they do, it's not Bullet I see in front of me.

It's Wrath.

He's growling at me as he fucks me hard against the wall. I can almost feel the sting of his fingers on my ass as he pulls me closer.

He'd leave bruises, but ones that I want. Ones that would bring me good memories.

"Do you want me to fill it again?"

My eyes snap open as I look at the prospect. He nods to my glass.

I shake my head no. Jesus, how long has he been standing there?

"I think I should go to bed," I whisper.

"Do you want me to let Wrath know where you went when he gets here?" he asks.

"Um no. It's okay. He will know where to find me."

I honestly forgot that Wrath is the whole reason I'm out here. He messaged me earlier, asking me to meet him here. He said seven though, and it's now ten. I'm not waiting any longer.

Not when my pussy is aching. I need to go take care of some business and fall into a blissful sleep. If Wrath wanted me here, he should have been on time.

Leaving the bar, I head down the hall to my room. I pull my key out and unlock the door. Shutting it, I flip the lock.

I should go to the shower like I have been to get off, but Wrath isn't here. Something about getting off in his bed is exciting. It feels forbidden. Dirty.

Pulling my shirt off, I run my hand across my clavicle. My gentle touch makes me catch my breath. I haven't been this turned on in a long time.

Quickly, I strip off the rest of my clothes. Going to my bag in the closet, I dig until I find it.

My trusted vibrator. I have a few other toys, but I don't want plastic inside me tonight. I need skin against skin, so my fingers will have to do.

Moving to the bed, I consider lying on the side that I've claimed as my own. I should keep to my side, but something about the fact that he might sleep in any mess I make has me moving to his side. Pulling back the blankets, I settle against his pillow. Then I turn the vibrator on. I trail it down my body with my eyes closed, imagining it's him. I circle each nipple before continuing lower.

I already know I'm wet as fuck. I can feel myself tingling and twitching in anticipation. I needed it. Maybe I'll have more than a mini-orgasm. I need

one that's mind-blowing. One that will make me pass out.

I let my mind wander back to the party. To that dark corner. To the two people there. Only, it's me and Wrath. He's dark and dangerous. Two things I should shy away from, but I crave them. I crave him.

I gasp as I pass the vibrator against my clit, before pulling it back. A little tease. Just like I imagine Wrath would do. He wouldn't give me my pleasure easy. He would want me to earn it. He would want to toy with me until I'm begging for release, and even then, he might deny me.

Holding the vibrator with one hand, I use the other to slide into my pussy, happy to finally have something to clench against. I imagine him sliding my panties aside, me against the wall, where anyone could see. Not just anyone. All of his brothers. Our friends. Watching us fuck.

My body shivers at the thought as my nipples tighten. Fuck, I want that. I want to be laid out on a table, bare, and devoured by a man with all eyes on me. I don't need a gangbang or anything. In fact, I would prefer only one man, but I don't mind the attention.

Knowing someone is watching me get fucked is the ultimate turn-on for me.

"Wrath," I moan, thrusting my fingers faster.

I'm almost there. I'm going to come, and the whole room is going to watch.

Then I hear it.

The lock clicks, and the door opens.

My eyes pop open and meet his right as my body convulses, my lips calling his name.

It's the most explosive orgasm I've ever had, and Wrath just witnessed it. Oh fuck.



WRATH

Pulling up to the clubhouse, I let out a sigh. I was supposed to be here hours ago. In fact, I'm surprised Tara hasn't texted me a million times wondering where I am.

Other women would have.

Tara isn't like other women though. She never nags me when I leave the toilet seat up or towels on the floor. She simply puts it down or picks up the offending fabric. She doesn't call and text me at all hours. In fact, I don't think she has ever texted me. I've texted her a few times, but I only get a thumbs-up back.

Why does that make me want her even more? I can't have her though. Not the way I truly want.

Walking in the door, my eyes immediately search for her. For half a second, I think I see her being fucked in the corner by Bullet. It makes me see red until he shifts, and I see one of the sweetbutts moaning against him.

My fists clench. I would have killed him. I know I would have. It's the problem I have. I can't have her, but I don't want her to have anyone else. She is slowly becoming this obsession of mine. I want to save her, but I also don't want her to go on with her life without me.

I have no idea how to resolve the two sides of myself. How to bridge that gap and let her go. I'll have to figure it out though. I know that at some point she is going to want better than me. I won't hold her back from that.

Moving to the bar, I nod at the prospect.

"Where's my old lady?" I grunt at him.

He stops cleaning the glass in his hand. "She said you would know where she was."

I tilt my head in confusion. What the fuck would that mean? How would I know where she is when she doesn't tell me shit? Hell, I only know her work schedule because Midnight keeps texting it to me.

I don't say anything else to the kid. Instead, I head down the hall to our room. I need a shower after the night I had. Then I'll figure out what the fuck she meant by "I'll know."

Stopping outside the door, I hear heavy breathing from inside. Then a small moan.

I swear to fuck I'll murder whoever thought they could fuck my old lady in my bed. I won't hurt her. I never would, but no man will be touching my woman again.

Unlocking the door, I throw it open expecting to find Tara with a man.

Instead, she's lying on her back, completely naked, with her fingers buried in her pussy. The whole room smells like her sex. Her eyes pop open and meet mine. Then they glaze over as she screams my name, an orgasm ripping through her body.

I'm frozen a moment watching her fall apart. The way her cheeks turn a rosy red. Her lips parted as she stops breathing. For half a second, the world is suspended in time.

Then I hear laughter from down the hall, making me slam the door shut, locking it behind me.

My fists clench with the need to cross the room to her, but I can't touch her. I obviously wasn't supposed to see this.

Or was I?

The prospect did tell me she said I would know. Did she set this up?

No. She couldn't have known I would come in just then. This was private time for her. I should leave. Give her time to herself.

I should.

I don't.

I find myself moving closer to her. Stepping over her discarded clothes until I'm at the side of the bed. Her fingers are still buried in her pussy as she calms down, but the vibrator she had been holding against her clit buzzes next to her, covered in her juices.

Fuck, she looks like a goddamn centerfold. Her nipples are pebbled, begging to be sucked. I lick my lips as I check her out. Her hips are flared and perfect for grabbing onto. Tara's skin is flawless, with the exception of the small scar on her side that's still pink and angry from when she was stabbed in the stomach.

Goddamn, I want to reach down, flip her over, and fuck her into oblivion, but I won't.

Reaching down, I grab it, turning it off. Her eyes pop open as she looks up at me. I don't hesitate. I press the toy into my mouth, savoring the sweet taste of her release.

Fuck if it isn't the best thing I've ever tasted.

The urge to hold her down and fuck her into oblivion rides me hard, but I don't. I don't dare even touch her. I know if I do, I won't stop. I won't be gentle. I'll be the monster she doesn't need.

So I don't touch her. Instead, I turn to head toward the bathroom, her vibrator still in my hand.

Before I get two steps away, she reaches out to grab my arm.

“Don’t,” she whispers.

Turning, I look at her.

She looks so sexy lying in my bed without a stitch of clothes on.

“Let go,” I growl.

The feel of her hand touching me is almost too much.

She drops her hand, but stays sitting up.

“What are you going to do with it?” She eyes the vibrator.

Well, I was going to suck on it while I jacked off, but I can’t say that to her.

Or can I?

“I’m going to the bathroom with it.”

I don’t say anything else. Instead, I study her eyes. They flash with something that looks a lot like lust.

“Are you going to use it?” She quirks an eyebrow.

“Maybe.”

She smirks at me. “Can I watch?”

Wait. Did she just ask if she could watch me?

“What?”

She bites her bottom lip. “I’d like to watch you if you don’t mind. I mean, you did get a bit of a show.”

“That was accidental. You should have warned me or something.”

She snorts. “With what? A sock on the handle? Are we in college now?”

“Not what I meant. You have a cell phone. Use it. You could have told me you wanted some alone time.”

“Are you really complaining right now? Look at that flagpole you got in your pants. Tell me that you didn’t like what you saw.”

I hate that she’s right. That my dick is twitching just knowing that she noticed him. He’s weeping for her. I can feel the precum coating the inside of my pants.

I should deny her. Walk into the bathroom and beat off to the taste of her on my tongue. I’m curious though. I never imagined Tara to be so upfront about this shit. I thought after everything she went through that she would be meek. Quiet as a mouse and unwilling to give in to her desires out of fear.

I don’t see a hint of fear on her face.

Stepping closer to the bed, I press her shoulder gently to lay her back on the bed. The fear that was missing jumps to the forefront with my touch.

Ah, so my sweet girl can ask to watch me jack off, but she can't handle my touch. That's okay. It's for the best if I keep my hands to myself.

Pulling my hand back, I hand her back her vibrator.

Then I unbutton my pants, letting them fall to the floor. She gasps as I spring free. I went commando today. I had no idea it would benefit me so much.

When Tara licks her lips, I nearly growl. My dick jumps, wanting those beautiful pink lips wrapped around him. The way I would hold Tara still as I fucked her until her throat was raw. She would gag around me, and I wouldn't stop. I would go until she's nearly blue in the face.

Snapping out of my depraved vision, I look down at her.

"I'll do it, but only if you give me another orgasm."

Her eyes shoot from my dick to my eyes. She's surprised.

"I might not be able to. I've never been a multiples girl."

Yeah, because you've been fucking men who don't really care about your pleasure. If you had me, you wouldn't sleep until you've had at least two.

I don't say that outloud though. Instead, I nod to her vibrator.

"One more. You can do it."

She nods slowly, turning back on her vibrator. The first touch to her clit must be sensitive because she pulls it back as quickly as she touches it to her. She does it again, but slowly this time.

I spit into my hand before wrapping it around my cock. Her eyes heat at the act. I think my sweet girl isn't as sweet as I thought she was.

I start to stroke myself as she starts breathing heavier.

"Fingers in your pussy. Set my pace," I demand.

She shivers at my tone but does as I ask. She starts slow, her eyes watching me. As she begins to pick up the pace, so do I.

That's when her moan breaks free. It's almost angelic. My eyes close, but I force them back open. I don't want to miss a moment of this. This might be the only chance I have to see her like this.

Fuck, it has to be. I can't let us go any further. It would ruin her.

Forcing those thoughts away, I watch as her chest heaves with her impending orgasm. She said she couldn't come again, but she's already at the cusp.

She just needs a little help.

"Finger that pussy as if it's my dick. Feel the way I would stretch you. The burn of being invaded. I wouldn't take it slow for you." I grunt, my own

orgasm growing closer at my words. I might be painting her a picture, but it's filling my mind as well. "So warm and wet. I would fuck you so hard. I would make you scream so loud, then I would cut it all off, gripping your neck until you see stars."

"Wrath."

My name. On her tongue.

It falls off on a whisper before her body grows taut. Her back arches as she squirts all over my bed. Fuck, I wanna lap that up so bad. If she were really mine, I would drop to my knees and suck all of that from her center before sucking it off the bed.

I can't though. I have to have some self-control.

Still, I need a taste.

"Tara, give me your vibrator. Now. I want a taste," I hiss.

She doesn't. Instead, she pulls her fingers out, offering them to me. I don't hesitate. I suck them into my mouth, loving her sweet taste. It's enough to send me over the edge. I come all over her, painting her white. God, the sight is beautiful. So beautiful that it makes me jerk once more, leaving even more.

I swear it's the hardest I've ever come. My mind is a little foggy even. I'm still sucking on her fingers, stealing every little flavor from her skin.

When I finally have my fill, I gently pull her fingers from my mouth before kissing the ends of them.

"So sweet, T. You're so damn sweet." I kiss once more. "My Sweet T."

If she hears me, she doesn't comment. She's still blissed out.

Pulling my shirt over my head, I hand it to her.

"Clean up. I'm going to take a quick shower, then you can."

She doesn't respond. Just lies there, lost in her own world.

Fuck, I hope I didn't break her.

Maybe this was a bad idea.

But then why does it feel so good?

eight

TARA

“HEY, TARA,” Lauren calls out as I walk in the front door.

“Hi,” I say as I pass by.

All of the club girls are cleaning up the main part of the clubhouse. It’s part of the requirements to live there rent-free as a sweetbutt. A couple of weeks ago, I would have been hungover and cleaning with them. With every perk, there comes a downfall after all.

It feels weird to walk by them and not help. I could still stop and help.

There's no one stopping me, but I don't feel right doing it.

Besides, my period started two days early today, and I feel gross as hell. On top of that, I got hit on while I was buying tampons.

Who fucking hits on someone when they have tampons in their hand?

A guy named Chuck apparently with a horrible mustache that he couldn't stop touching.

I shiver at the thought as I let myself into Wrath's and my room.

I drop my bag on the bed and kick off my shoes. I start stripping as I walk into the bathroom, leaving a trail of clothes behind me. Thankfully my hair is already up in a messy bun, so I don't have to worry about dealing with it.

Once the shower is warm, I get in. The water pounding on my lower back feels glorious. I lean against the wall as the water hits me where I hurt most and relax.

When the water starts to chill, I hurry up and wash my body before getting out.

After taking care of my business, I head into the bedroom to get dressed. Usually I would put on jeans and some sort of top to go hang out in the main room, but I honestly don't feel like it tonight.

You aren't a sweetbutt anymore. You don't have to dress to impress. A little voice in my head reminds me.

It didn't matter what you were going through as a sweetbutt. You had to show your face and be available. Hell, some of the men were into period play.

I'm an old lady now though. I don't have to go out there if I don't want to. I feel like I need to for Wrath though. I have to play the part of his perfect old lady. We still haven't really talked since he walked in on me masturbating in his bed. I thought we would at least acknowledge it, but instead he comes to bed long after I've been asleep and leaves before I wake. The only reason I know he has been there is the blankets being messed up and his head indentation on his pillow. When I see him around the others, I'm too scared to say anything to him.

I really should go for him. I know some of the others will be waiting for them to get out of church.

Do I have to do that looking like a smokeshow though?

Fuck it.

I reach into the dresser and pull out a pair of sweatpants, a sweatshirt, and a thick pair of socks. I take a look in the mirror and sigh. It's obvious that I

don't feel good, but at least I'm showing up.

Leaving the room, I head right to the kitchen. I grab a coffee cup and a raspberry leaf tea bag and set it under the coffee maker. Double-checking there isn't any coffee in the machine, I run the water through, filling the cup. Once it's done, I place a small plate on top and let it steep for fifteen minutes. While it does its thing, I wait in misery.

Maybe I should take something.

I don't know why, but this period pain is worse than normal.

When the tea is done steeping, I add a little honey and head out to the main room.

"Hey, are you okay?" Lauren asks, full of concern as I curl up into the corner of the couch.

"Cramps."

Lauren cringes in sympathy. "I'm sorry."

"I've heard orgasms help with that." Baby winks as she passes by.

I cringe. Even if I was getting orgasms from Wrath, they don't even sound appealing right now.

"I'll pass."

"Hey, what did I miss?" Natalie asks as she comes into the room.

"You look fantastic," I tell her as I take in her light-washed jeans with holes and her cropped biker shirt.

"Thanks, but what are you passing on?" she asks as she sits down next to me.

I blow on my tea and take a sip.

"I told the girls cramps are getting me today, and Baby said orgasms help. I told her I'd pass."

Natalie blushes. "Understandable."

"Wait, have you never had sex during your period?" Baby asks. "It's awesome. Yeah, it's messy, but shit is extra sensitive. Totally recommend trying it."

"I'll think about it." I lie.

Truth is, my cramps are usually so bad that even the thought of someone touching me is agony.

Natalie leans forward once Baby is out of earshot. "I never know what's going to come out of her mouth."

I nod. "Yeah, it took me a minute to get used to her brand of humor. I used to think she did it for shock value, but I figured out that's just her."

“Makes sense.” Natalie nods. “Are you good though? You look miserable.”

“Thanks,” I deadpan.

“I didn’t mean it like that.” Natalie quickly backtracks, making me laugh.

“Nah, I know what you meant. I’m okay. I just need to get through today and tomorrow, and I’ll be fine.”

“Why don’t you go get in bed and read? You don’t need to wait for the guys to get out of church.”

I hum as I think about it. It does sound tempting. Would Wrath mind if I dipped out this once?

“Maybe after I’m done with my tea. Curling up with my heating pad and a book does sound nice.”

Natalie nods. “Good.”

“Hey, girls,” Elenore says as she walks up.

“Hi.”

Natalie smiles. “Hey, I’m surprised to see you here tonight. I figured you would be home with Harlee.”

Elenore rolls her eyes as she sits down. “If I spent one more minute at home with that girl, I might have strangled her.”

I bite back a chuckle. I couldn’t imagine Elenore hurting a fly, let alone her daughter. “That bad?”

“You have no idea,” Elenore deadpans.

Natalie curls up next to me and settles in. “What did she do this time?”

“She snuck out, which wouldn’t be such a bad thing. Only she thought it would be a good idea to take Honk’s bike.”

“Wait, what?” Natalie and I say at once.

You don’t touch a man’s bike without permission. That’s just asking for trouble, no matter who you are.

Elenore nods. “You heard me. Thankfully, Honk was passed out hard, and he never noticed. Scared the shit out of me.”

“I don’t blame you,” I mutter.

“Dang, Elenore. You’re making me second guess my stance on kids,” Natalie teases.

Elenore points at her. “Don’t let Reaper hear you say that, or he will have my head.”

Natalie rolls her eyes and smiles. As the two of them talk, I drink my tea as the pain gets worse.

Closing my eyes, I lick my lips. I can't feel them. The fatigue has set in now. Do I really want to try and push through this?

Fuck, I'm over this.

I stand, and Natalie looks over at me.

"Going to bed?"

"Yeah. I'm just not feeling well. Let Wrath know?" I ask.

I could text him, but I still haven't found the nerve to be the one who reaches out first. I have been trying to give him more than an emoji response though.

Baby steps, right?

"Bye," they say in unison.

I drop off my coffee cup before heading to my room. Once inside, I grab my heating pad, doing my best to get comfortable on the bed. When I'm finally settled, I grab my book.

Maybe, just maybe, I can tune out the pain for just a little while.



WRATH

Reaper bangs the gavel, and everyone falls silent.

"Church is in session," he says. "Who wants to start?"

Everyone stays silent as we look at each other. Waiting to see who speaks first.

Reaper sighs, making everyone chuckle.

"Midnight, how's business?" Reaper asks.

Midnight smirks. "Can't complain. Had another steady week."

"Tara settling in?" Reaper asks the question I'm dying to ask.

Midnight nods at Reaper. "She's killing it. Fits in with the staff, is good with the customers, and is always working on something." Midnight looks at

me. "You have a good woman."

I nod in agreement. I do, even if she doesn't feel like mine. Not really.

"Spider, how's the shop?" Reaper asks.

Spider shrugs. "It's a shop. Business is steady. Cars are going in and out."

Poker nods. "We haven't had any issues with guys showing up or customers with outstanding bills this month."

"Good." Reaper turns. "Trigger, what do you got for me?"

"Reno Renegades have been quiet, but I don't think the threat is over. I've been running searches on Dansworth and nothing has popped. His family put out a missing person's report on him."

I cross my arms over my chest. "So if he is alive, then he hasn't reached out to anyone."

Reaper turns his head slightly toward me. "We need to assume he's alive since his body was never recovered." He looks back at Trigger. "Are you sure he hasn't reached out to his family? Maybe they put out a missing person's report to throw us off."

Trigger starts shaking his head before Reaper even finishes his sentence. "I have their phones, security cameras, and doorbells all tapped. I have a guy at the post office going through their mail and nothing."

"Have they talked about him at all?"

Trigger nods. "His mom has spent a lot of time crying and his dad consoling her. It looks genuine."

Reaper sighs quietly. "Keep watching."

Trigger nods.

"Does anyone have any concerns or anything they want to bring to the table?"

"Anyone talk to Colt or Fang?" Twitch asks.

Reaper nods. "Fang's checked in, but Colt's a little harder to nail down. His main concern right now is the baby and Katie."

Honk shakes his head. "I can't believe he knocked up Killer's only kid."

Midnight smirks. "Just imagine if someone knocked up Harlee."

Honk glares. "Shut your fucking mouth. There's a reason I don't bring her around."

Everyone laughs. He's not wrong. The only time he and Elenore let Harlee come around is when we have a family barbecue.

"We haven't had a barbecue in a while," I muse.

Trigger points at me. "Or a club ride."

Reaper nods. "We haven't. When do you guys want to do one?"

"This weekend?" Twitch throws out.

Everyone nods in agreement.

Reaper hums. "It would be short notice to throw together, but I think we can make it work. Anyone opposed?"

Everyone shakes their heads. "Done. We have a club ride and a family barbecue after on Sunday."

Twitch rubs his hands together. "I can't wait." He turns toward Honk. "Do you think your old lady would make that potato salad?" He turns toward Pinky. "Oh, would Sunny make those peanut butter cookies?"

Honk chuckles. "I'm sure she will."

Pinky shrugs. "Ask her."

Twitch nods. "I will."

Reaper smiles and shakes his head. "Alright. Are we done?"

Everyone nods.

"Meeting adjourned," Reaper declares.

All at once, we stand and make our way out of the chapel. As I walk into the main room, I look around for Tara and don't see her.

Weird. Even though we barely talk, she is sure to portray the perfect old lady. She comes to every party, staying by my side. She's always bringing me beers and shit too, so none of the sweetbutts have to do it. Usually when we have church, she waits outside for me. Her not being here is odd. I know she's not working. Midnight said she got off at noon today.

I shake my head, pushing thoughts of her aside for now, and make my way to the bar.

"Beer?" Bullet asks.

"Yeah."

He slides one toward me, and I grab it. "Thanks."

"Hey Wrath, want to play a game of darts?" Twitch asks.

"Sure."

I follow him over to the dartboard and see Midnight and Spider already there.

"Midnight, I want another tat," Spider tells him as he throws a dart.

"Then schedule an appointment with Tara."

Spider huffs. "What's the point of having a brother who tats if I have to schedule?"

"You know the rules. Tattoos aren't free unless they are for the club,"

Midnight says plainly.

“What are you too cheap to pay?” Twitch teases.

Spider scoffs. “No, I just don’t want to come by the shop.”

“You’re just scared of Elle,” Midnight says as he tosses the dart.

“Scared of a woman?” I tease as I step forward for my turn.

“She’s a bitch,” Spider sneers. “I don’t know why you keep her around.”

Midnight pins Spider with a glare. “She isn’t a bitch, she just isn’t interested in what you have to offer. There’s a difference, and I keep her around because her work is top-tier.”

Spider raises his hands in defeat, letting the subject drop.

“Hey guys, can I play?”

We all turn and see Natalie walk up.

“What’s up, Queen Bee?” Midnight asks.

“Not too much.”

They start talking, and I stay quiet, just drinking my beer and playing when it’s my turn. Every so often I scan the room.

Where the hell is Tara? It’s not like her not to show.

“Are you looking for Tara?” Natalie asks, making me look at her.

“No,” I lie.

She rolls her eyes. “My bad. I thought you were looking for her.”

“Now that you mention it, do you know where she is?”

Natalie smiles. “She wasn’t feeling good, so she went to go lay down.”

I nod and set my beer down, trying to fight off my concern. In all of the years I’ve known Tara, she’s never skipped something because she doesn’t feel well, outside of that one time she was sick with the stomach flu.

“I’m out,” I say as I set down my darts.

“Later.” Natalie laughs as I walk away.

I head down the hall and let myself into our room. Right away, Tara comes into view. She’s curled up in a ball on her right side, under the covers, with a book in her hand. She looks up at me as I step inside, and it’s evident something is wrong. Her eyes scream that she’s in pain, and her skin is paler than normal.

“Are you okay?” I rasp.

She smiles weakly. “I’ve been better.”

I nod. “You okay if I join you?”

Tara doesn’t say anything but pulls the covers down.

I should walk away, but seeing her in pain is my Achilles. I just can’t do

it.

So instead, I take my cut off, folding it to lie on the dresser. Then I strip out of my jeans, grabbing a pair of sweats. I can feel her eyes on me as she sees me bare once more, but I ignore it. She's in no condition for anything like that.

Once my sweats are on, I climb into bed with her. She closes her book, setting it on the nightstand I bought her. Then she turns back to face me.

"What's wrong? How can I help?" I whisper.

"It's nothing you can help with unless you'd like to take a knife and carve my uterus from my body. The pain of that would be better than what I'm currently feeling." She huffs.

Shit. PMS? Give me an opponent I can kill. Or an illness I can cure. Knowing that it's nature hurting your girl and you are helpless to make her feel better is a special kind of hell. That and the fact she mentions carving into her so nonchalantly as if someone didn't try not that long ago. If I were a lesser man, I'd flinch at the idea of someone taking a blade to my girl.

Fuck, my girl. My Sweet T.

"Tell me about it. How it feels. Maybe I can help somehow."

She gives me a small smile, looking tired.

"This is worse than normal. For some reason, I feel almost anemic. My lips are numb, and my cramps are extra bad. I skipped last month's period because of all the stress, so it must be because of that."

"Where is the pain?" I look down at her, my hand coming out to brush her hair back.

She really is beautiful.

"Lower back and ovaries," she murmurs, her eyes falling closed at my touch.

"Turn over. I'll massage your back." I sit up, moving to help her switch positions.

"You don't have to."

"No, but I want to," I admit.

She hesitates but then moves. Once on her stomach, she positions her heating pad on her ovaries. Then she sighs.

I pull her shirt up a little so I can reach her lower back. Then I reach over and grab her lotion from the nightstand.

Squirting some in my hands, I make sure it's warm before I begin to knead her lower back.

She grunts but then moans.

“Is it helping?” I keep my tone low, comforting.

“Surprisingly, yes. Like it hurts a little, but it also is relieving the pain, if that makes sense.”

It doesn't really, but she's not asking me to stop, so I keep going.

“Can I ask you something?” she asks after a moment.

I grunt a little, letting her know I'm listening.

“You act so indifferent to me all the time, but then you do something that shows that you care.”

“Is there a question there?” I mumble.

“Why? Why me?”

I almost don't answer her. I don't owe anyone anything. Least of all her. If anything, I've done her more favors than she's done me.

Then I remember her bruised and battered face.

I can give her this. Just a little.

“You reminded me of my mom. That's why I caved Jug's face in. That's why I brought you back here and cared for you and let you stay since then. I don't ever want to see you hurt again.”

“Where is your mom?”

I clear my throat a little. “Dead.”

“Oh shit. I'm so sorry.” She tries to turn, but I press between her shoulders, holding her down. My cock jerks to life at the action. This is my preferred position with women. Only they are usually tied so tight they aren't able to move.

“It's fine,” I manage to grit out as I go back to work on her back.

“Is what they say about you true?” she asks after a moment.

“I'm not sure what they say about me.”

It's not a complete lie. I have no idea which piece of gossip she's heard.

“That you don't mess with the sweetbutts because you don't think they can handle you.”

I snort. “They can't.”

“I could,” she says, her voice low.

My heart stops for a moment. She has no idea what she's saying.

“You are so sweet, Tara, that it makes my teeth hurt. My Sweet T. I like you that way. If I were to even try to show you a sliver of what I like in bed, you would run screaming. I have demons, baby. I don't want you to get too close to them. You've been hurt enough.”

“Demons are meant to be slayed, Wrath. I’m not scared of them.”

Moving back to my spot next to her, I rub my hand down my face.

How did we get here?

I feel her turn to face me.

“What are you afraid of then, Sweet T?” I say mockingly.

“I’m afraid that I will never find someone to share my life with. That I will always find myself in the bottom of a hole with no way out. That the darkness will creep in, leaving me with no lifeline to pull myself out of it.”

“You’ll never be alone. You have the club,” I mumble.

“For now. Do you think I want to live like this forever?”

“No, I don’t. I don’t know how you ended up here in the first place.”

“You dense idiot. I’m not talking about the club. I’m talking about with you. I would love to be your old lady, for real. Have the club at my back without feeling guilty for spitting at their traditions. That’s basically what you’ve done. You claimed me with no real intent to make me yours, so now I’m in limbo. I can’t stay here because I can never be a sweetbutt again, yet I can’t truly be your old lady either. Doing so would mean living the rest of my life alone with no affection or physical touch. I won’t do that.”

“You want touch? Is that it? You want me to touch you?”

Turning, I pull her into my arms, wincing at the way she scrunches her nose up in pain at the movement. Then I hold her in my arms, her arms caught between us.

She’s quiet a moment.

“I didn’t mean to upset you, Wrath. I’m just trying to figure out what we are doing. If you don’t want me, that’s fine. I’ll leave and find somewhere else to live, but if there is even a slight chance that you might want to make this more than what it is, I’m willing to take the chance. Are you?”

I press a chaste kiss to the top of her head. “Rest now. Enough talking.”

She scoffs but settles against me a little more. When the tension fades from her body, I finally take a breath.

I’m not sure I can take the chance with her. If I hurt her, I would never forgive myself.

I can’t let her go either though.

nine

TARA

LAST NIGHT WAS the weirdest night of my life. After talking with Wrath, I let myself fall asleep in his arms. It was the best sleep I've ever gotten, and that was even with the cramps. When I awoke a while later, he was still beside me, my head on his chest. He was breathing deeply.

I have no idea if my talk did anything to him, but PMSing Tara says a lot of shit she wouldn't normally say. Like practically giving Wrath an ultimatum. I still have no clue what he's into, but he says he has demons. So

what? We all do. He can't close himself off because he's scared of his trauma. If we all did that, then we would all be fucked.

I only hope this push sticks. He stayed in bed with me all night and even kissed me on the forehead before he left early this morning for club business. That's already a drastic change from the man who was avoiding me.

Maybe I got through to him?

I'm still lost in thoughts of him when Elle walks from the back of the shop.

"Hey, you getting ready to leave for the day?" Elle asks.

"I am." Or I should be, rather than daydreaming about my old man. "You? Any plans for tonight?"

"Same." Her nose wrinkles. "I was thinking about popping into the Mexican restaurant down the street and getting some food, but I hate eating alone. So I guess I'll just go back to my apartment and maybe order something or make some ramen."

"Do you want company? I'd be down for some chips and salsa," I admit quickly.

Truth is, even with the cramps, I'm not willing to go home yet. I'm scared Wrath will have reverted to his old self, and I'll have lost the glimpse I've had of what could have been.

Elle's eyes light up. "Really?"

I shrug. "Sure. Why not? I don't have anything going on."

"Awesome. Let me grab my stuff."

I laugh lightly as Elle hurries away, like she's afraid I'll change my mind.

"Hey, I thought you were leaving," Midnight says as he walks up.

"I'm waiting for Elle."

Midnight nods. "Don't get into too much trouble."

Elle scoffs as she walks up behind him. "Trouble is my middle name."

Midnight turns toward her and says, straight-faced, "That's what I'm worried about."

Elle rolls her eyes and walks up to me.

"Come on, let's go." She weaves her arm through mine and pulls me to the door.

"Do you want to walk or drive?" she asks as we step outside.

"Walk. It's only six stores down," I say as I pull her down the street.

We make it to the restaurant and are seated within minutes.

"I don't even need to look at the menu," Elle mumbles, pushing it to the

side.

I laugh. “I take it you eat here a lot then and that the food is good?”

“It’s the best.”

The waitress comes up and takes our drink and food orders all at once.

“So tell me more about you. I feel like we never actually get to talk at work,” Elle says once the waitress steps away.

“Not much to talk about really. I grew up with parents who appeared to be deeply in love. Mom died when I was seventeen. When she died, Dad grieved by finding a new, younger wife just a couple of months later.”

“That had to be hard. Were you close with your mom?”

“Very close. She was my best friend. I kind of went on a spiral after her death, and my dad remarried. I couldn’t see the meaning in life anymore. I traveled for a while, and then when I got to Vegas, my dad finally cut me off, and I had nothing. That’s how I found my way to the club. I liked how free everyone was. They didn’t look down on you for being exactly who you wanted to be. I guess it kind of stuck.”

She gives me a knowing smile. “Then you snagged you the unobtainable brother.”

I roll my eyes. “I guess so. I didn’t know you knew much about the MC.”

“I don’t really. I just remember hearing Midnight bitch about Wrath and how he needed to get laid more. Guess he wasn’t into the free pussy like the others.”

“He never even looked at me before...” I trail off.

I am not ready to dive into the Jug shit with her.

She must sense my discomfort because she changes the subject. “Well, as for me, I’m from Colorado. I came out here to apprentice under this hotshot artist. He turned into a complete douchebag. I learned a lot from him, and not all of it was good. When I was looking for a new place, I happened upon this one. At first, Midnight didn’t want to let me in. He thought some of his rougher clientele would push me around, but I convinced him to give me a shot.” She chuckles.

“What?” I ask her.

She shakes her head. “My first client from the club was Cueball. He wanted a tattoo right away, but Midnight was working on someone already, so Midnight told him to wait or use me. Cueball took one look at me and laughed. Then he tried to flirt with me. I ended up putting him on the ground with a knife to his balls. Cueball fell in love with me that night. Too bad for

him, I don't feel the same. Still, he only comes to me to get tatted now. It showed Midnight that he had nothing to worry about."

"Oh, Christ. Cueball isn't always the brightest. I'm glad you left him unmaimed."

Elle winks at me. "Who's to say I didn't shed a little blood before it was done?"

We burst out laughing as the drinks come.

The rest of the evening is lighter. We avoid all talk of the MC, focusing on our own crazy stories. It's the most fun I've had in a long time. For a brief moment, I even forgot all my troubles as I laughed so hard my stomach hurt.

This is what it could be like. I could have a carefree life. I want that so bad.

As dinner comes to an end, we walk back to the shop together.

"Later." I wave to her as she gets into her car.

I slip into mine and lock the doors before starting it. Seat belt in place, I take off and turn up the radio as I drive. I sing at the top of my lungs to some folksy song that I've been playing on repeat lately. It talks about how the family isn't angry that their loved one has left and made a life elsewhere.

I wonder if Dad thinks I'm the greatest thing he's lost...

I'm pulled out of my head when my wheel jerks to the right, and it feels like I'm being pulled off the road.

"Fuck!" I say as I quickly slow down and pull off to the side.

Once to the side, I put the car in park and try to catch my breath.

Shit, that was scary.

I look down at my dash and see that the tire pressure light for my front passenger tire is on.

"Shit," I mutter to myself.

I check the mirror and make sure that no traffic is coming before getting out. As soon as I round the hood, I see that my tire is flatter than a doornail.

"Awesome." I nod to myself. "Okay, you've got this. You can change your own tire. You're a strong, independent woman who doesn't need any man."

I move to my trunk. Thankfully, I've seen the little drawing of where my spare tire is.

Only it isn't. The tire compartment is empty, and the same goes for the place the tools are supposed to be to change the tire.

I could have sworn there was a spare in here when I bought it. Then

again, I do vaguely remember using it a couple of years ago. I assumed the tire shop put it back in the trunk, but I guess not.

“Goddammit,” I hiss right as it starts to rain.

Of fucking course. When it rains, it fucking pours.

I make my way back to the driver’s side and get in. Grabbing my purse, I search for my phone. I could call Natalie. She would send someone to come get me. I could avoid bothering Wrath and finding out the status of our relationship a little bit longer.

Then again, if I did that, it would look suspicious.

An old lady would call her man.

Clicking his number, I close my eyes.

“What’s wrong?” Wrath asks as soon as he answers.

“Hey, I’m sorry to bother you, but I just got a flat tire. I was going to try to change it, but I realized my car doesn’t have a spare or any of the tools. I was wondering if you could send someone out.”

“Where are you?”

“About halfway back to the clubhouse from the shop.”

“Sit tight,” he tells me before hanging up.

Sighing, I toss my phone into the cupholder and lock the doors.

This is just great. Being stranded on the side of the road as the sun goes down is every female’s worst nightmare.

Think about something else, I chastise myself.

For some reason, my mind wanders to the night before when Wrath joined me in bed.

It was weird the way he came in there, but even odder that he wanted to join me. I didn’t have the energy in me to argue with him though.

Then he surprised me even more. The gentle tone he had as he asked me how to help. The way he massaged my back, easing some of my discomfort.

His mom. He said I reminded him of his mom. The same one who is dead.

That should weird me out, but it doesn’t. It means I invoke some of the same feelings in him as his mother did. All I can hope is that they’re the good ones.

I meant what I said to him though. He has pushed me into a corner. I either stay with him and keep the club or I leave. There’s no other option for me now.

I won’t stay if we are going to be in this weird sort of limbo where I am

isolated and alone while he goes out and does God knows what. I wouldn't be able to handle him with other women. Even if they are paid escorts that he uses discreetly.

If he's mine, then he is going to be mine in every sense of the word. If not, then he needs to let me know now so I can keep planning my escape.



When my phone rang, I almost didn't check it. Everyone who would call me was at the clubhouse with me, but for some reason I did. When I saw "Sweet T" pop up, I knew something was wrong. The girl has never called me before. Hell, getting more than a two-word answer by text was like wrangling horses.

Then I heard that angelic voice on the other end. She could have asked me to come down to hell to rescue her, and I would have been there in a heartbeat.

Instead, she just needs a tire. That I can do easily.

Grabbing the communal truck keys, I make sure it's loaded with all the tools I'll need. Then I grab a spare that will fit her shitty car. I really should buy her a new one. I have the money.

Twenty minutes later, I roll up on Tara. She didn't even look my way when I pulled up in front of her. It makes me wanna punish her. How dare she not be aware of her surroundings? I could be someone here to hurt her.

I get out and approach her car. She doesn't even look my way until I tap on her window.

Disappointing.

Tara screams and jumps in her seat.

Her eyes are full of heat when she looks my way, but I don't miss the way

she clutches a tiny canister in her hand.

Fucking pepper spray. That's all she had to defend herself.

Shaking my head, I make a mental note to myself to get her out to the range. Girl needs a gun. Hell, I need to get her ass back in the gym with me. She came once or twice after her attack but quickly decided that it wasn't for her, and I didn't push.

"You scared the shit out of me!" she yells from inside the car.

I ignore her dramatics and open her door as soon as she unlocks it.

"You need to pay attention to your surroundings. You could have been killed or kidnapped."

Tara rolls her eyes as she gets out of the car. "Thank you for coming."

"I'm serious, Tara, I could have been any Tom, Dick, or Harry."

"I wouldn't have opened the door for them, Wrath."

I fight the urge to pull her into me.

Why do I want to kiss her forehead?

I push away my crazy thoughts. "I brought a tire with me that should get you home. Why don't you go sit in the truck and wait."

"I want to help." She huffs.

"Trust me, you'll be helping me by sitting your pretty little ass in the truck, staying dry."

Tara throws up her hands. "How is that helping?"

As she argues with me, her shirt is getting soaked through, and it takes all I have to stop myself from staring at her hardening nipples.

Just get her in the fucking truck and turn the heater on high, I think to myself.

"It's helping because then I won't be worried about some asshole not paying attention and going off the road and turning you into roadkill."

Tara crosses her arms. "That wouldn't happen."

I raise a brow and put my hands on my hips. "Really? Do you know how many tow truck drivers die a year by drivers not paying attention and not getting over?"

"Come on, Wrath, this is something I should know how to do."

"You're right." Her eyes light up and she thinks she's gotten her way, but she couldn't be more wrong. "If you want to learn basic car maintenance, I'll be glad to teach you back at the compound in a safe and controlled environment out of the goddamn rain."

"Wrath..." she whines, the only thing missing is her stomping her foot.

“I’m not caving on this, Tara. Get in the fucking truck.” I point at the truck.

“God, you’re such an asshole.”

“That shouldn’t be a surprise, Sweet T.”

“This is ridiculous,” she mutters as she brushes by me.

I let her walk in front of me, but as soon as we reach the truck, I push her hand away and open the truck door for her.

Tara glares at me over her shoulder but jumps in.

“Good girl,” I murmur before shutting the door, but I didn’t miss the way her eyes flared in surprise.

She likes being called a good girl, interesting.

I move to the bed of the truck and grab what I need. Thirty minutes later, one car speeding by, and ten curse words later, her tire is changed. I take the flat and tools and toss them into the bed of the truck. Rounding the side of the truck, Tara jumps out before I can open the door for her.

“Can’t you just wait, woman?”

“No, my patience is almost nonexistent,” she says sweetly.

“I could teach you some fucking patience,” I mumble under my breath.

Grunting, I place my hand on her lower back and walk her back to her car, making sure to keep her closest to the side of the road. That way if any asshole comes too close, I can push her out of the way.

I open her car door, and she steps behind it, putting it between us.

“I’ll meet you back at the clubhouse.” I go to turn around, but Tara reaches out, freezing me in place.

“Hey, Wrath...”

First, I look at where her hand is touching mine.

God, it’s so small and delicate compared to mine. I clear my throat and look up at her.

“Yeah?”

She smiles softly. “Thank you for doing this for me. I really appreciate it.”

“It’s not a big deal.”

Tara cuts me off. “But it is. You could have sent someone else, but you came.”

Her tongue slips out, and she licks her bottom lip. Fuck. That little move makes my cock twitch. I look up in time to see her eyeing my lips.

I clear my throat and step back, breaking the spell she has on me.

“I heard what you said last night.” I rub the back of my head, looking down the road. “This is me trying.”

“Oh.” Tara bobs her head. “Okay, I’ll meet you back at the club then.”

“Tara,” I say, making her pause.

“Yeah?”

“Next time you decide to have dinner with Elle, text me telling me you’re going to be late or I’ll put you over my knee quicker than you can say sweetbutt.”

Tara’s eyes flare as she bites the corner of her lip. “Were you worried about me, Wrath?”

I grunt. “You’re my old lady now, I should know what your plans are. Now get in the car before you catch a cold.”

She rolls her eyes but does as I say. As soon as she gets in and shuts her door, I move back to the truck. She honks as she takes off down the road. Groaning, I lean my head back and shut my eyes. Last night really wore me down. I realized that I couldn’t ever let her go.

She feels backed into a corner? Well, I’m sharing the same fucking corner because I have no idea what to do. I don’t want to hurt her, but I’m in too deep now.

I won’t let anyone else have her.

Can I be gentle for her?

We will see. No matter what she says, she can’t handle my truly dark side.

Still, I can’t help but want her.

She is constantly on my mind. The first thing I think about in the morning and the last thing I think about before I go to bed. I don’t know when it happened, but I’ve started to crave her little touches. Every little morsel she gives me, I eat up like a starved man, and I don’t know what to think.

Fuck, just this morning when I woke up, she was curled against my side, with her leg tossed over my hips and her head placed on my shoulder. My arm was wrapped around her, and my hand was on her ass, holding her in place. I was so fucking tempted to roll her over and bury my head between her thighs to wake her up. Who the fuck cares if she’s bleeding? A little blood never hurts anyone.

It can’t happen. If I did that, I would lose control. Then who knows what I’d end up doing to her.

It can never fucking happen.

But that doesn't mean I don't wish that it could.

ten

TARA

THE AIR IS ELECTRIC.

Everyone is excited, in a good mood, and on their best behavior. The clubhouse was cleaned from top to bottom in preparation for today.

Not only that, but the old ladies have been cooking up a storm. The kitchen looks like we are going to serve hundreds. Cookies, cakes, casseroles, dips. You name it, it's in there.

It's infectious.

"Looks great, doesn't it?" Natalie says as she comes to a stop next to me.

“It does. I’m sorry I couldn’t pitch in to help.” I frown.

I used to be one of the ones cleaning for these events. Instead, Midnight had me watching the shop while he helped the guys out.

Natalie shrugs. “We had it under control. Besides, you were working.”

“Still, I feel bad.”

Natalie opens her mouth to say something, but a sharp whistle sounds through the air.

“Come on,” she says quietly, pulling me outside.

“Ah ha ah,” Reaper says, grabbing Natalie and pulling her into his side. “Stay up here with me, Queen Bee.”

I slip down the porch steps and walk toward Wrath.

“Hi,” I whisper.

Wrath nods and pulls me to stand in front of him, resting his hand on my hip. I close my eyes as his warmth seeps through my jeans.

It hasn’t escaped my notice that ever since the night he massaged my cramps away, that I haven’t felt that tension I normally feel with a man’s touch. It’s almost like that night took down that wall for me.

I’m still scared to try it with anyone else, but I’m happy I can enjoy Wrath’s touch now.

Jesus, I’m pathetic and in desperate need of getting laid if him barely touching me does something to me.

“Can I get everyone’s attention?” Reaper yells, making me look toward him.

“We’ve gone through a lot of shit in the last few months, and there’s been a lot of changes during that time. So today we celebrate our wins and mourn our losses. Then tonight, we party,” Reaper says, and everyone hoots and hollers.

“Let’s roll out!” Reaper cheers, pulling Natalie down the steps with him.

“Come on,” Wrath murmurs, pulling me behind him.

We make our way to his bike.

This part is new to me. The sweetbutts will stay here under the supervision of a volunteer brother. They will continue to prep for the party tonight while the rest go on the ride.

I’ve never been on a ride, but now I’m expected to be here.

Wrath pulls us to a stop right next to his bike and grabs a helmet. “I’ve never asked, but have you ever ridden before?”

I shake my head. “No.”

“Well then, you’re in for a real treat. Put this on.” He hands me the helmet.

I smile when I see the words “Sweet T” written in bright blue script.

Last night when he came to bed, he asked me my favorite color. I had no clue why. Now I do.

“Where’s yours?” I ask as I take it from him.

Wrath scoffs. “I don’t need one.”

I set the helmet on my head.

“And I do? What are you too good for one?”

Wrath grabs the straps and tightens the helmet down on my head before looking me in the eye.

“Damn right, you do, and no, I’m not, but I’ve never worn one, and I’m not about to start today. You, though, have to, because your safety is more important to me than my own.”

I suck in a breath at his confession. Holy shit, talk about being honest.

“Have you ever had someone ride on the back of your bike?”

He raises a brow. “You know I haven’t. That spot is meant for old ladies only. The cut looks good on you, by the way.”

His eyes drop to the cut I rarely wear around the club. Only when he asks me to.

“Thanks,” I say, completely thrown off by how sweet he’s being.

Don’t get me wrong, he’s never an outright dick to me, but it’s weird.

While I’m replaying the conversation in my head, Wrath gets on his bike and holds his hand out to me.

“Get on.”

I place my hand on his and slide on behind him.

“Make sure you don’t touch that pipe.”

I look down and see where he’s pointing. “Got it.”

As he starts the bike, I struggle over where to put my hands. Do I just hold on to his cut, or do I wrap my arms around his stomach?

Before I can question it anymore, Wrath reaches back and pulls me flush against him and places my arms around his stomach, right over his belt.

“Guess that answers that then,” I mutter to myself.

“What was that?” he hollers over the sound of revving bikes.

“Nothing!” I say loud enough for him to hear.

“Hold on tight.” As soon as the words leave his mouth, he takes off.

I squeal in delight as I rock back against him and adjust my grip.

As we take off down the driveway, I look down at the space between us. Or lack of space. His hips look fantastic between mine, and the vibration from the bike is giving me all sorts of ideas.

Laid. Definitely need to get laid.

The whole MC club book binge I went on last week isn't helping at all. It was fun to read, considering the books are nothing like real life, but that's what I liked.

We get on the main road and assume a formation. Some guys ride in the front, with Reaper and Natalie in the middle. Wrath and I fall in behind them and to the right as Trigger falls on their left.

Natalie looks behind her shoulder and gives me a thumbs-up, making me shake my head.

That girl is ridiculous, and I fucking love her.

As we ride, I watch the world pass by in a blur. It's exhilarating in a way I didn't know possible. I feel like I'm flying.

A hand on my thigh startles me, and I look down. Wrath has his hand on my thigh, holding me. I look between his hand and his profile in shock. He's touching me when he doesn't have to. I don't know what to think about it, but I love it.

In all of the books I've read, the girls talk about how fucking hot it is when guys do this. I thought they were crazy and playing it up because it was fiction, but I can safely say they weren't. Between the vibration of the bike and his hand possessively holding onto my thigh, my panties are soaked.

I close my eyes and groan. I hope he can't feel how hot I am. Jesus, this is obscene, and I don't even want to think about how drenched I'm going to be by the time this ride ends.

"You okay?" Wrath asks over his shoulder.

"I'm good."

I bite my cheek at the huskiness in my voice. Maybe, just maybe, he missed it.

If only I could get that lucky.

Wrath's hand flexes on my thigh, and I bite my lip.

Is it possible to get off just by riding on a bike and a simple touch? I guess we're about to find out.

All I know though, is by the time we get back tonight, I'm going to need a date with my vibrator and maybe a cold shower.



WRATH

Having Tara pressed up against me for several hours was the sweetest kind of torture. I felt the way her breath hitched every time I moved my hand on her thigh. Every so often, her thighs would clench behind me, driving me mad.

Goddamn that little temptress.

She has me feeling like a teenage boy all over again.

“You look like you need this,” Honk says as he walks up to me.

“Thanks,” I say as I take the offered beer from his hand. “How was the ride?”

Honk smiles. “Elenore loved it. If it was up to her, we would have group rides weekly.”

“There’s an idea,” Reaper says as he walks up.

“Where is she?” I ask, looking around for Elenore.

Honk takes a swig of his beer. “She went to grab Harlee.”

Reaper and I look at each other, eyebrows raised, before looking back at Honk.

“I thought she wasn’t allowed to come around here?” I tease.

Honk rolls his eyes and grumbles. “She overheard us talking about how it’s family day, and we couldn’t really say no.”

“Makes sense.” Reaper chuckles.

“Besides, she’s too young for all of these fools, and you two are taken.”

“Uh-huh,” I murmur.

My eyes lock onto Tara, and I can’t look away. She’s got black leather boots on her feet and light blue jeans that look like they’ve been painted on her. She has on a blood-red top that has cuts on the front, showing off her cleavage that peeks out from behind her cut. Her hair is pulled up with a bandana around her head, looking like a pinup, leaving her neck bare. For some reason, I want to walk up behind her and bury my face in the spot her

neck meets her shoulder.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

“You good?” Reaper asks, pulling me out of my head.

“I’m fine.”

He grunts but doesn’t call me out on my lie.

Laughter catches my attention, and I look over at Tara and see her head tossed back as she laughs. Bullet is standing next to her with a smile on his face.

I step forward. Fuck this. No man is going to make my woman smile like that unless it’s me.

“Chill,” Reaper says, grabbing my arm. “Natalie is right there, and I can promise you he’s not putting moves on your woman.”

I look over and see that he’s right. Natalie is right there along with Lauren, another one of the sweetbutts.

What the hell is wrong with me? She’s not really my woman, not that any of these guys know that, but she’s not. Tara can do whatever the fuck she pleases. My inner caveman scoffs.

Yeah, I don’t want anyone else touching her either, my guy.

“How about we start a fire while Pinky and Honk manage the grill?” Reaper says.

“Sounds good,” I say roughly as I try to rein myself in.

As the night goes on, the louder we become. I’m sitting next to the fire when Tara hobbles up to me.

“What are you doing?” I ask as she drops down in my lap.

“My feet hurt from standing in these boots,” she groans, sounding completely sober.

With the way she was walking and how she dropped into my lap, I would have guessed she was drunk.

“Then take them off.”

Tara glares. “I’m not going barefoot out here. Who knows what I would catch.”

“Then go inside and get another pair of shoes. Our room is maybe five hundred feet that way.” I point.

Tara rolls her eyes but relaxes against me.

“It’s a nice night.”

“It is.”

“Thank you for taking me with you today,” she says, sounding

completely sincere.

“You’re welcome. Did you enjoy it?”

She turns her face and smiles. “I loved it.”

Her face is so close I could lean forward half an inch and kiss her. It’s tempting, but I won’t.

I haven’t ever kissed a woman on the mouth. It’s always been my rule. No kissing. Still, I want to kiss her, and that spells trouble.

I clear my throat and look away. Out of the corner of my eye, I watch her face fall from my rejection.

It’s for her own good. Don’t cave now, I think to myself.

Tara shifts to get up, but I wrap my arm around her, holding her in place.

I’m not ready for her to go just yet. This I can do, but that’s all. Nothing more.

“Who’s that?” she asks, pointing to the other side of the fire.

I squint and see Bullet talking to a female whose back is to me.

“I can’t tell.”

Tara hums but lets the topic drop. She leans farther back and rests her head on my shoulder.

“You tired?”

“Yeah, but I’m not ready to call it a night yet though.”

She grabs my beer from my hand. I watch as she pulls it up to her mouth and takes a sip. My eyes drop to her throat as she swallows. Fuck, I have the biggest urge to grab her throat and squeeze as she does that again.

She’d be disgusted if she knew what you were thinking, a tiny voice whispers in the back of my mind.

Ever so slightly, I shift, trying to find some relief for my dick.

I hope she can’t feel how hard I am.

“Oh look, she shifted. Do you recognize her?” Tara says.

I look up and see Bullet watching Harlee as she walks away from him.

“Oh fuck,” I mutter.

“What, who is that? Is she someone’s old lady?”

“Worse. That’s Honk’s seventeen-year-old daughter.”

Tara’s head whips toward me, and her eyes are wide.

“That’s Harlee? Harlee, who got in trouble for stealing her dad’s bike and smoking in the girl’s bathroom?”

I raise my eyebrows. “She stole her dad’s bike? How did I not hear about that?”

“Because he doesn’t know,” she says dismissively. “Seriously, though, do we need to warn Bullet away from her? I don’t want Honk to kill him.”

“Honk’s not going to kill him as long as Bullet keeps his hands to himself. It was just a simple conversation.”

Tara looks at me like I’m full of shit. “I hope you’re right.”

“Trust me, just relax and drink.”

“Yes, sir,” she sasses.

I squeeze her hip. “Watch it.”

“Why?”

“Because you couldn’t handle what I’ll do.”

Tara’s eyes flare. “Maybe, just maybe, I’d prove you wrong, Wrath. Have you thought about that?”

Every single day. Every single fucking day.

eleven

TARA

SITTING in Wrath's lap is somewhere I never thought I would be.

I have to admit that I like it though. I feel powerful.

I see the way the other women look at us. Like I am some witch who has bewitched the man who never let anyone close.

The sweetbutts all study us as if they can figure out how to snag their own old man. They can look all they want though. Even I'm not sure how I ended up here.

Wrath runs his hand up my leg, resting it on the inside of my thigh. My body shivers at the gentle caress.

I've had a few too many drinks, but not enough to cloud my thinking. My body wants Wrath.

If I'm being completely honest, I want him too. Especially after the little taste he gave me when we watched each other get off and he covered me in his cum.

I used to be afraid of him. Not because of the rumors. No, those intrigued me.

I was afraid because I thought if I gave into the curiosity of those rumors that he might ruin me. I think one night with him unleashed, and I'd be fully ruined for any other man.

That's why, when the other club girls would make games of who could get him in bed, I stayed on the sidelines.

I wasn't sure I could seduce him, but on the off chance I did, I didn't want to be tossed aside afterward.

Now I'm sitting in his lap, already sure that if I were to leave right now, I would never find a life as great as this one. It would all pale in comparison.

It's much later in the evening now. All the old ladies have retired to their rooms with their men. All except me.

I'm used to the scene before me. The brothers become raunchier as they flip the sweetbutts' skirts up, slapping their asses. The way the same girls pull their shirts lower until their breasts are on display.

This is the orgy atmosphere that the old ladies hate. The same reason they will never truly accept any of the sweetbutts into their circle.

It's the same one that helped awaken this kinkier side of me. I never minded dropping to my knees in front of everyone. Nor did I mind watching others. It only turned me on.

For example, right now, across from the fire, Cueball has Rachel nearly naked, pawing at her body. Her skirt is hiked to her waist with her leg over his hip while her tube top is pulled down, her breasts on full display.

My breathing grows heavier as they turn a little, Rachel's ass out for the world to see. Cueball's fingers are rubbing up and down between them as his lips suck in a nipple. Her head falls back. I can imagine what she's feeling.

Rubbing my legs together, I attempt to relieve some of the pressure.

"If you keep squirming, I'm going to have to do something about it," Wrath growls into my ear.

I squeeze my legs together, his hand still between my thighs at the thought.

“Are you imagining being with him?”

I shake my head, my eyes not straying from them.

“Is it her then? You want her?” His hand trails up between my legs until he presses a finger into my pussy.

Damn I wish I hadn't worn jeans. I'd give just about anything to have him knuckle deep in me right now.

“No,” I breathe out, my body tingling from both the sight before us and his touch on me.

“Do you like watching them?”

“Yes,” I admit softly.

His lips meet my neck, making me shiver.

“You dirty girl. You like watching others have sex? Is that your kink?”

It's more than that. So much more, but I'm still ashamed about it. So I only nod to his question.

Then I feel it. His fingers undoing my jeans, pulling the zipper down. It's a tight fit, but his hand finds its way into them beneath my panties.

Then he is right there.

Right where I need him most.

“You're soaked, Sweet T. So fucking wet. This turns you on this much?”

I risk a glance over my shoulder at him. His eyes are glazed, looking down at his hand disappearing into my pants.

His eyes flash to mine.

“Yes.”

“Mmm. So dirty. You like watching.” His finger dips inside me, making me quiver. “Do you like being watched?”

I clench around him involuntarily, making him chuckle.

“That's what I thought. So my Sweet T is a little voyeur and an exhibitionist. You want me to finger fuck you in front of all of these people?”

I moan, my head falling back against his shoulder.

“I can keep your secret.” He kisses my cheek before pulling his hand from my pants. “How about we give them a real show?”

Before I can question what he means, he helps me stand before pushing me back into his seat. Then he drops to his knees. He begins pulling my jeans off, making my cheeks redden.

This will be the first time I've been exposed like this since he made me an

old lady. I should feel embarrassed, but I don't.

Not with that heat in his eyes as he stares up at me, as if he's waiting for me to stop him. I won't though.

When he has me bare from the waist down, he spreads my legs, settling in between them.

Then he leans forward, his tongue tasting me.

"Oh fuck." I moan at the sensation.

"That's right," he mumbles before taking another swipe. "Let them know how your old man makes you feel."

He bites my inner thigh softly, then a little harder, making me arch out at him. He glances up at me, a smirk on his face. Then he goes back to licking me. Only he's not in any rush. It's more like he's enjoying an ice cream.

I nearly growl in frustration until I look up and see that we have become the center of attention. Everyone is watching us. Watching him.

"You like that, don't you?" he asks, sitting back to trace his fingers through my wetness.

His face is covered in me. He doesn't move to wipe it off though. Instead, he watches my face as he trails his fingers to my ass, circling the hole.

I don't know what he thought I was going to do, but when he presses against it, I don't shy away. No, I press against it harder, making it slip in deeper.

His eyes flash in surprise before they darken.

"Oh, my sweet, sweet girl, you are not so innocent, are you?"

"I never said I was," I sass back.

He slowly fingers my ass, smirking at me.

"Keep running that mouth, and I'll make better use of it."

I lick my lips. "Bring it."

He narrows his eyes for a moment. Then he pulls away from me and stands.

"Stand up," he demands.

I do as he asks, my body nearly shaking with need. This whole situation is driving me closer to an orgasm. I might not even need him to touch me again.

"Remember you asked for this."

I don't have a chance to ask him what this is.



WRATH

Damn girl doesn't know how to not be a fucking tease.

After wiggling on my lap all night, she had to go and get turned on by some fucked-up shit that I would have never imagined.

I'm not usually into public displays. I prefer to keep my fucked-up shit behind closed doors. My girl here likes to be on display though. Fuck if I can't give a little here.

It doesn't really bother me that others are looking at her. She's fucking gorgeous. Of course they want to look. I know she's messed with brothers before me, but even that doesn't bother me as much. It's almost like that wasn't really her. Now though? They can all look, but not one better touch.

"Put me down, you Neanderthal," she snarks, which earns her a smack on the ass.

As soon as I had her stand, I put her over my shoulder, intent on making her the star of this show. She wants eyes on her? She's going to have the whole club watching her.

She's bare from the waist down, making everyone we pass look back at us. I smirk when I see some of the brothers following.

None of them have ever seen me like this. I'm the cold, detached one. At least until it's time to kill a motherfucker. Then all the anger I lock down comes out to play.

So I know we are getting attention. We will see how much Tara actually likes it.

I won't lie, she's surprised me tonight. I didn't think she'd like anything up her ass, but she pushed on me as if she craved it. I'm going to fuck her there one day.

No. You can't. You'll hurt her. I growl.

I can't actually fuck her. That's when I lose control. That's when I hurt people. I won't hurt her.

Pushing the thoughts to the side, I stride toward the pool table.

Poker and Twitch are in the middle of a game, but stop to look at me as I move closer.

“Clear it,” I grunt out.

They both jump to do as I ask. One perk of being the sergeant at arms.

Once the table is clear, Twitch grabs the board we made to cover the table after Reaper complained about jizz staining the table one too many times. It also makes the table flat, which will work well for what I have in mind. I nod my head in thanks.

They back off but stay to watch the show. Good. The more, the merrier.

I set Tara on her feet, then pull her shirt off. She doesn't stop me, but she does huff at me.

“Got something to say, Sweet T? We are all listening.” I spread my arms to the room around us.

She glances around, her eyes widening at all the people.

That's right, baby. We're about to put on a real show.

She swallows hard but turns back to me. “You didn't have to go all caveman on me.”

I grin at her. “I'll show you caveman.”

Grabbing her again, I put her on the table. Then I push her back.

“Stay put,” I growl, moving around the table.

“Yes, master,” she says sarcastically, but she does as I say.

Maybe she does have a little bit of submissiveness in her. A little brat too.

When I get to the other side of the table, I pull her until her head is hanging off the side, her body on full display.

She looks like a fucking centerfold.

All of the men around us are salivating. Some of them have sweetbutts on their arms, but everyone's attention is on us.

Unzipping my pants, I pull my dick out, stroking it a few times. Then I press it against her lips. She acts like she might not open for me, but after a moment, she does.

Her warm, wet mouth is heaven. I let her take me down once before I pull out and kneel next to her.

“I'm going to fuck your face hard and fast. You're going to dig your nails into my skin. Scratch me. Hit me. Do whatever you want, but I'm not going to stop until I'm done. Do you understand?” I whisper.

She nods.

Good enough for me. More than I usually give the escorts I pay.

Standing back up, I position myself back at her lips and let her suck me at her own pace as I lean over her. I grip her legs and pull her until her pussy is right at my mouth.

Yeah, I hope she's ready for this.

I suck her clit into my mouth, loving the way she hums against my dick. Then I press two fingers into her ass while my other hand fingers her pussy. My girl is airtight, each hole being filled.

She loves it too. She is practically gushing all over my face and fingers.

I keep fingering her and sucking until she comes on my tongue. She swallows on my dick as she attempts to scream, but there's no way for her to pull away from me.

Standing, I grab her neck, loving the way my dick looks lodged in it.

For a moment, I think about what it would be like to squeeze until she's no longer breathing. It's only a brief moment, but it's enough to make me pull back. She doesn't let me though. She digs her nails in, giving me that bite of pain that makes my dick twitch.

Clearing my head, I grip her harder, thrusting into her mouth wildly. I don't give her a chance to breathe, using her as if she's my own personal pocket pussy. She doesn't try to stop me though. If anything, her nails dig in deeper, urging me on.

It's enough to have me sailing toward release. I come down her throat, holding her in place, as I feel my dick through her throat twitching. When I'm done, I pull out, dropping to my knees next to her.

She's breathing heavily, her face red and full of tears, but it's the small smile that does me in. She enjoyed it.

Could she really handle me at my worst?

It's a thought that comes unbidden. I can't risk it.

As I stand, putting my dick in my pants, one of the newer brothers, Rocket, calls out to me.

"Can I get a turn next?"

My blood turns to ice at his comment.

It's not like it's unheard of. A few brothers in the other chapters enjoy sharing their women. It's something that is mutually agreed upon.

I won't ever be that man though.

In two strides, I have his throat in my hand, lifting him from the ground.

"What the fuck did you just say to me?"

He's sputtering, not able to speak.

Twitch steps up, putting one hand on my shoulder. It only makes me more pissed.

“Wrath.” It’s her light voice that pulls me back.

I glance over at her. She shakes her head no. She doesn’t want me to hurt my brother.

I look back to him, then the room.

“I might have let you enjoy the show, but that is my old lady. *Mine*. Do you understand? No one will touch her but me. Understood?”

Everyone nods, so I drop Rocket to the ground.

“Don’t disrespect me again.” I spit on him before turning away.

Tara is now sitting on the edge of the pool table, still completely naked. Fuck, I want her again.

Striding over to her, I cup her face, wiping some of the leftover tears away.

Then I do what I always said I would never do.

I press my lips against hers and lose myself in her kiss.

twelve

TARA

SNUGGLING CLOSER TO THE WARMTH, I keep my eyes closed. I know I need to get up. I have a shift today, and Natalie wanted to talk to me about the sweetbutts. I guess her little social experiments aren't going well.

I can't find it in me to care right now though.

Who would have thought Wrath would be a cuddler? It's always him too. I feel him pull me closer to him each night. Almost like he needs me there as much as I want to be there. It's almost sweet.

Not that I will tell him that. He's like a wild stallion. Sudden movements would scare him off.

After last night, I feel like I might actually have a shot at making this whole thing real with us. He said he was trying, and I can see the difference.

A knock on the door ruins the bliss I'm living in. Wrath grunts before pulling away from me. After a moment, he turns back, pressing a kiss to my lips.

Another shocker for me. The way he kissed me last night after he almost killed one of his brothers was the hottest kiss I've ever had. When he picked me up and brought me back here, I thought we would fuck, but no. The big guy just wanted to hold me for a while.

No matter what I tried to initiate, he would tell me to go to sleep.

Teasing asshole.

I watch him now as he stands, going to the door in his sweatpants. When he put them on, I don't know. He was in jeans when he crawled into bed with me last night.

"What?" he barks as he opens the door.

"Don't you what me. I need to talk to Tara." I hear Natalie tell him.

"She's sleeping. Come back later."

He goes to close the door, but her hand slaps on it, stopping it. I smile as I watch irritation run through Wrath.

He hates when people don't listen to him. Maybe that's why I felt so good sassing him last night. It seemed he got off on it as much as I did.

"I mean, if you'd like to stay for the conversation, I'd be happy. I mean, I want to hear about this orgasm you gave my girl on the pool table with the club watching before trying to choke out a brother."

He growls, turning to me. "Your friend wants to talk to you. I'm going to the gym."

He doesn't even change. He just stalks from the room, leaving the door open.

I sit up, taking the blankets with me. I'm still as naked as the day I was born. Natalie steps in, my jeans and shirt in her hand.

"I hope you weren't wearing any underwear, because if you were, some perv is jacking off on them now," she tells me, a smile on her face.

"Um no. I wasn't. Can you give me a second to put clothes on?"

She laughs. "All shy now? I heard the whole club watched you get off last night."

She closes the door though, staying on the outside.

I hurry to throw some clothes on before going back to the door. When I open it, she's standing there with her arms crossed.

"Want to tell me what's going on now?"

I take my clothes from her hands and invite her in. She considers the bed before sitting on the chair. I sit on the edge of the bed, facing her.

"Things may have gotten a little crazy," I admit softly.

"A little? From what I hear, you got the impenetrable Wrath to lose his cool and fuck your throat in front of the whole club."

I look away, my cheeks red as hell. I don't regret what we did, but I didn't think about the fact that people would have something to say about it.

"I wouldn't say he lost his cool. He was in control the whole time," I defend him.

"Tell me this, who's idea was it?"

She doesn't look like she's judging, but I know the other old ladies will. They are so high on their pedestals that they can't be touched. This will be perceived as another attack against their way of life.

"I know it's not the image an old lady is supposed to portray, but I'm pretty sure it was my idea."

"Pretty sure?"

"Yeah. We were watching Rachel and Cueball getting intimate, and well, one thing led to another, and the pool table happened."

Her eyes bug out. "What? I really thought it was an exaggeration. You really let him throat fuck you on the pool table?"

"Shh." I look at the door at her heightened voice. "Yes. Don't worry, he ate my pussy too. It was mutually beneficial."

"Oh. My. God. That is..."

I nibble my lip as she trails off. Is this where she tells me I'm fucked up? That I need to see a therapist again, this time for my dark desires? Fuck, that isn't even the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what I want him to do to me.

"That is so fucking hot," she finally finishes. "I mean, is it weird if I say I kind of wish I was there to see it?"

I let out a relieved sigh. "I mean, kind of. I really didn't think about having to see anyone today. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing. Having all those eyes on me? Yeah, I liked that."

Natalie chuckles. "I mean, I wouldn't be surprised if most of the club saw

last night. Only the ones who had old ladies turned in early last night. Well, except you apparently.”

I think about what she just said a moment. Then I groan.

“Midnight probably saw it.”

“So what?” she asks.

“He’s my boss. He shouldn’t have to see me that way. Oh god. How am I supposed to go into work tonight?”

She laughs. “It’ll be fine. He won’t say anything. He’s one of the classier guys. Plus, he takes his business seriously.”

I flop back on the mattress.

“Kill me now.”

“No thanks. This is the most entertainment I’ve had in years.”

I roll my eyes before sitting back up.

“Let’s talk about what you really came here for. Sweetbutts. What’s the issue?”

“Ever since you’ve been claimed, it’s like things changed again. All that goodwill we were working toward has vanished. No one is coming to girls’ night anymore.” She groans, burying her face in her hands. “I think I failed.”

“Hey.” I tap her knee. She looks up at me. “Stop being so hard on yourself. You had an idea and went for it. Sure, it didn’t work out how you planned, but maybe that’s for the best. Sweetbutts were never supposed to be a permanent thing. They shouldn’t be like me and stay for years. They should be here for a season and then move on. We shouldn’t be making friends with them.”

“How can you say that? You used to be one of them.”

I nod. “That’s why I’m saying it. Each one of them have their own motives for being here. For me, I was lost and looking for a place to kill some time before the next thing. It ended up being that I liked it here and they liked me, so I stayed longer. Most of the girls are here because they want something that’s fun and easy. Some just want to make extra money for something. Others have nowhere else to go. Very few of them actually want to stay.”

“That’s not true. The girls have been eyeing the men more now that you’ve been claimed.”

“I mean, they now see it as a possibility, so that’s why. It will die back down. Especially since we got some new girls in here and cycled the old ones out. You’ve done good for them though. You set them up with doctor’s visits

and birth control. Honestly, that is the best thing you could have done. I think you need to just let it go now. Let nature take its course.”

It’s true, only a couple of us are still around from before Natalie. After shit went down with Daniela, Reaper pretty much cleaned house and got a new batch of girls.

She frowns. “I guess you’re right. I can keep trying, but if they don’t want to make a change, I can’t force it.”

“I think that’s for the best. Be an old lady. Lead with Reaper. Make them know they can come to you with issues, but otherwise take a step back. Don’t force them with the old ladies. I can say, being on both sides, that they don’t have much in common. Forcing them together will only breed resentment toward each other and you.”

“This is why I came to you. I knew you would have some wise words.”

“I’ll be here all week.” I wink at her.

She gives me a wicked smile. “Now that we are done, can I go torture your old man? I feel like a training session would be good.”

I snort. “Go for it.”

She laughs. “Later girl.”

I shake my head as she shuts the door behind her.

Poor Wrath.



WRATH

I'm slowly losing it. That tenuous control I once held is fading with each day I spend with Tara.

There's no longer a question in my mind of whether or not I will keep her. She doesn't have a choice.

Waking up with her in my arms cemented it. I will never be able to allow her to leave me for another. The only option I have is to give her the best life I can.

Not that it will be much. I'm fucked up. My demons haunt me even now. The need to see bruises on her skin. To make her gasp for air as I empty my balls into her.

It rides me hard.

I can be better though. For her, I will be. I won't hurt her like my father hurt my mother.

I'll keep my anger away from her.

"Wrath, no middle name, um, no last name." Natalie's voice echoes in the gym.

I didn't put any music on in the background today. Hell, I left so quickly I don't even think I have my phone on me.

"I thought you wanted to talk to your friend," I mutter, continuing to punch on the bag.

At least I taped up my hands today. Reaper won't bitch as much.

"Oh, I did. She told me about your little tryst in the clubhouse last night."

I grunt, but don't face her. I'm not surprised Tara told her all about it. That's what females do, from what I can tell. Still, part of me wants to know what she said.

I won't ask Natalie though. No way will I show that weakness.

"You didn't force her, did you?"

I spin toward her, the bag bouncing against my back.

"What did she say?" I growl.

Natalie's eyes widen as she holds up her hands.

"Whoa there. I didn't say she said anything. I'm asking you a question because I'm concerned for my friend. All of this with you two seems so sudden. Then I hear that you had her naked on a pool table? She's not a sweetbutt, Wrath," she chastises me.

"I'm well aware that she's not, but she is my old lady. I am going to give my old lady what she wants. Instead of judging us for last night, how about you run back and ask her how it made her feel? If she enjoyed it?"

She smiles at me. "I don't need to. She already said she did. That it was her idea. I'm not judging you guys. I wanted to see your reaction. To see if this was as real for you as it is for her."

I want to deny it, but didn't I just decide I was keeping her for good?

Instead, I don't say anything. I turn and begin to punch the bag again.

I can hear Natalie wrapping her hands as she prepares to join me. I want to tell her to go away. I need this time to think.

I don't though. Instead, I focus on the bag.

I should have changed. Wearing nothing but sweats is making me hot, but I won't go back there now. I'm not sure I'm ready for the conversation Tara and I need to have.

"So, you like her then?"

Natalie makes her way to stand next to me, watching me rain punches onto the bag.

I don't give her a verbal response. I don't want to engage her.

"She likes you. More than I think she wants to admit. Be careful with her though. You tend to self-destruct. She won't survive the blast."

"Are we talking or fighting?" I grunt out at her.

"Both."

I stop the bag, turning to Natalie.

"Fine. Let's spar then. See how much you can run your mouth while I'm kicking your ass."

She shrugs, moving toward the makeshift ring. We begin our routine of getting her into the rhythm. I block her effectively.

At least until she starts talking again.

"I think Tara is going to be the best of both worlds. She has a little old lady and sweetbutt in her. I never would have imagined she actually liked being watched."

My dick stiffens at her words and the memories they invoke. I never

imagined that my sweet little Tara would like having eyes on her either. There was no denying it though. She loved every second of it. I could feel it in the way her pussy clamped around my fingers. I could have fucked her right then and there, and she would have let me, without question.

A fist to the side of my head knocks me back into the present.

“Ha, finally got you.” Natalie smirks.

I lost focus. She’s using some of the skills I taught her. I want to be mad, but I can’t. It’s proving her lessons are beneficial.

“That’s the only one you’ll get.”

She nods, going back to our rhythm.

“I wonder what other kinds of crazy things she’s into. I bet she’d be into all that bondage stuff too. She seems the type.”

“Shut up about her sex life. It’s none of your business.” I strike out, barely tapping the inside of her arm where she left herself open.

She hisses but gains her focus back.

“I’m just saying. A little choking between lovers isn’t always a bad thing. For some.” She blushes a little, making me think she and Reaper do that shit.

“How could you think that after what happened to her? She probably needs candles and flowers and gentle. She sure as fuck deserves it,” I blurt out.

Natalie smiles, throwing another jab. One that I barely miss.

“She’s not a vase, Wrath. She’s not going to break. You need to give her more credit than that. Tara is strong. If you tried something she didn’t like, she would tell you.”

“She didn’t before,” I murmur.

“She didn’t on Jug because she didn’t know she could. We’ve changed that now. Plus, she’s your old lady. She has more power over you than anyone in this place. Trust me, she will tell you if you go too far.”

I consider her words a minute. Tara has been telling me to not underestimate her. Could I give into a small portion of my desires and still keep her? Is it really possible?

“Enough talking. Throw some real punches at me. Your little arms are pathetic right now.”

She narrows her eyes at me and starts working harder.

It does the trick. She stops talking and starts panting with exertion.

My mind isn’t with it though. It’s still back in my room.

With a brunette beauty who has stolen my attention.

thirteen

TARA

THE WATER RUSHES OVER ME, and I let it soothe my tender muscles. When I got back to the clubhouse after work today, I thought it would be a bright idea to try and go for a run. When I was younger and needed to escape my dad and stepmom, I hit the pavement. It's been years since I've done it, and I can already feel the effects settling in.

Once the water starts to cool, I get out of the shower, dry off, and get ready for bed.

I can't wait to crawl under the covers and read until I fall asleep.

As soon as I step out of the bathroom, I see him. Wrath is reclined on the edge of the bed. His back propped up by the pillows, and his ankles are crossed, with his boots hanging off the edge of the bed.

"Hey."

He looks up and eyes me. "Hey, want me to move so you can get in?" he rasps.

I shake my head. "You're good."

I move to the edge of the bed and start to crawl into my spot.

"Thanks." I smile at Wrath when he pulls back the covers for me.

"You're welcome."

I settle into bed and sigh.

If I can give Wrath credit for one thing, it's for having a fantastic bed. It's probably the most comfortable one I've ever slept in.

"How was your day?"

"Busy but good. How was yours?"

"Can't complain."

"Are you going somewhere?"

Wrath's eyebrows furrow. "I wasn't planning on it. Why?"

I shrug. "You're still dressed, and your boots are still on."

He looks down and grunts.

We fall silent, and I shut my eyes, just enjoying his presence.

"I meant to tell you the other day, your tat has healed nicely."

I turn my arm and look down at it. "Thanks."

He reaches out and runs his finger over it. The simple touch makes me break out in goose bumps.

"Have you thought about getting any more?"

"Maybe someday. It wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be, honestly."

"That's smart to sit on it for a bit before you randomly get anything."

I nod toward his arm. "What about that? Did you think about it for long before you got it?"

His arms are covered in tattoos, but the one in question is a clock with a face that's melting on his forearm.

"I did."

"Will you tell me about it?"

Wrath doesn't say anything for a moment, and I can't help but squirm in

the silence.

“You don’t have to answer. Sorry for overstepping. You don’t have to tell me.”

As I ramble, Wrath reaches out and grabs my hand, making me stop talking.

“It’s fine. Besides, you’re my old lady. You should know.” He takes a deep breath. “The time on the clock is when everything in my life changed. I set fire and walked away from the life I knew and started this one.”

“Do you regret it? Walking away, I mean.”

“Never.” He shakes his head adamantly.

“I don’t either.”

Wrath’s eyebrows furrow. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t regret walking away from the life I had before I came here.”

“What happened?”

I bite my lip, how much do I tell him?

While I think about it, Wrath pulls me into his side. His arm wraps around my back, and his hand rests on my hip.

Very slowly, I rest my head on his chest, afraid I’m going to scare him off.

If he was under the covers, I would throw my leg over his again.

“Talk,” he demands.

I sigh heavily. “So pushy.”

“You like it,” he says as he squeezes my hip.

“Honestly, it’s a story as old as time. I had a happy childhood with two loving parents. I was their only child, and they spoiled me rotten. Then my mom died and everything changed.” I let out a humorless laugh. “Dad remarried quickly to a woman who was only a couple years older than me and had no interest in playing mommy. In less than a year, I lost not one but both parents. When I turned eighteen, I took off and never looked back. When I finally made it to Vegas, he cut me off. I haven’t heard from him since before I left.”

“He’s an idiot.”

I frown. “Who is?”

“Your old man. I can’t imagine abandoning my child. His blood runs through your veins, and that should mean something.”

“Blood isn’t always thicker than water,” I say gently. “Just because you share some DNA, it doesn’t mean you’re alike.”

“Agree to disagree,” he grunts.

“Why do you say that?”

Wrath freezes, and I can't help but look up at him. He looks as if he's battling something internally.

“My old man was a wife beater,” he says after a few beats of silence. “He would get drunk and beat on my mother. He beat on me too when I was small, but once I outgrew him, he learned to leave me alone. I would try to stop him, but it would only make it worse. I fucking hate him and go out of my way to be the opposite of him.”

“So that's why you never dated or wanted an old lady,” I say as the pieces start to fall into place.

He nods. “That's one of the reasons. I killed him on my sixteenth birthday. He was wailing on my mother, and she ended up dying from a brain bleed. I had just had enough. Spent two years in juvie for it. They claimed I did it in self-defense, but still locked me up to reform me. I had promised myself that I would save her, and I failed. If I couldn't even save my mother, then why do I deserve the type of love she never got to experience?”

“Wrath, the sins of your father shouldn't fall on your shoulders. If I've learned anything over the years, it's that our fucked-up upbringings have taught us what we don't want to be. Do you have a violent streak? Sure.” I shrug. “You're the sergeant in arms of an MC for crying out loud, but I've never seen you hurt someone who doesn't deserve it. I've never seen you hurt a woman or a child, and that says something. Don't think I don't notice that you are always holding a beer, yet you never actually drink it. You are doing everything you can not to be him. And yeah, you might not have been able to save her, but you were still a kid when she died. That wasn't your job, and you shouldn't be denying yourself love out of some sort of misplaced guilt.”

“You don't know what I've done. What I can do if I lose control,” he says quietly.

I tip my head up so he can see my eyes.

“Are you talking about what you're into sexually?”

“What do you know?” he says carefully.

“There are rumors you like it rough. I had a little taste of it the other night, and I'm still here. I still want more.”

He shakes his head. “That was child's play compared to what I really like. If you knew, you wouldn't be here with me. I can't do soft and gentle like you deserve.”

“Seriously, Wrath, have you ever thought that maybe I don’t want soft and gentle? That maybe the idea of you tying me up, chasing me through the woods, or even dripping candle wax onto me while I dig my nails into your back until you bleed turns me on? Don’t underestimate me, Wrath. Who knows, maybe I would surprise you. Don’t write me off just yet. Let me decide if it’s too much.”

Desire flashes through his eyes, and his nostrils flare, but quickly he pushes it away.

“You like the sound of that, don’t you?” I taunt.

He opens his mouth to say something, but his phone rings, cutting him off.

I pull back, giving him space. I’ve been around the club long enough to know that if your phone rings this late, something has happened. “Answer it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Answer it, Wrath. We’re good. Club first, remember?”

Why do I feel like I would rather be his priority though?



WRATH

“Yeah?” I answer the phone without taking my eyes off Tara.

“I’m sorry to bother you, I know you are with Sweet T, but I need you to meet me in my office,” Trigger says.

I almost sigh at the use of her road name. I didn’t even realize I had given her one until everyone else started calling her it.

“Be right there.”

“Hey, Wrath?” Trigger says before I can hang up.

“Yeah?”

“You might want to tell her not to stay up waiting for you.”

“Got it,” I say and then hang up.

“You have to go,” Tara says.

She’s so understanding about all the club shit, but I can see the underlying sadness in her eyes. She doesn’t want me to leave.

Hell, I don’t want to leave.

The club needs me though.

“I’m sorry.”

Tara looks up at me. “Why?”

“Because we were in the middle of talking.”

Tara smiles lightly. “It’s not a big deal. I promise. I’ve been around long enough that I know sometimes you have to take off at a moment’s notice. I’m not going to hold it against you.”

I don’t know what to think. Back when Reaper’s old man ran the club, the old guys used to bitch that their old ladies would throw temper tantrums when they had to leave in the middle of the night.

Tara isn’t like them though. I’m not sure I like that. Is it because she’s a chill girl, or is it because she’s still not sure she’s staying? I told her I was going to try, and I am. I have been trying to be around more for her. I talk even though I fucking hate it. I’m still not sure she can handle all my shit, but I realize now that I want her to.

I want her to be strong enough to stay.

“If you say so.” I reluctantly get off the bed.

Standing, I look down at Tara. She is so pretty. Prettier than someone like me deserves, but she’s mine. At least for now.

I want her to be mine forever.

Leaning down, I press a chaste kiss to her forehead.

I clear my throat and head toward the door. “I’ll see you later.”

“Wrath,” Tara says, making me pause.

I look over my shoulder. “Yeah?”

She nibbles on her bottom lip for a minute before looking back at me. “Be safe, yeah?”

We are at such a weird point in our relationship. We each have things we want to say to the other, but neither of us wants to upset this fragile balance we’ve found.

Still, I hear her words for what she means. She wants me to come back to her, and I will.

I nod. “Will do.”

I shut the door quietly behind me and lean against it for a minute. I don't know what the fuck is happening to me. All I want to do is go back into our room, lock the door, and hide away from the world.

Pushing off the door, I make my way across the building to Trigger's office. As soon as I step inside, I see Reaper and Poker already there.

"What's going on?" I ask as I join the circle around Trigger's computer.

"He was waiting for you to tell us," Reaper says before turning toward Trigger. "Fill us in."

"Facial recognition picked up on a possible match for Danworth," Trigger says bluntly.

William fucking Danworth.

He dated and abused Natalie for a year before she found us. We gave her our protection and went to war against him. Reaper already had a vendetta against him before Natalie, so it was no question that when she showed up, she was in.

We thought we killed him months ago when we lit his hidey hole on fire, but his body was never recovered from the rubble.

Jug, the man who betrayed us all and attacked Tara, his body was found though.

"Where?" Reaper demands, pulling me out of my head.

"Up north in Spring Creek."

"Of course he would run with his tail between his legs," Poker says, trying to defuse the building tension in the room.

"How long ago did you get the hit?" Reaper demands, ignoring Poker.

"Thirty minutes ago. He was coming out of a grocery store, and I followed him through the cameras to an extended-stay hotel. I've hacked into all the cameras around the building. If he steps outside, I'll know. Currently, I'm working on breaking into the hotel's system to run names to see what he's there under," Trigger tells him.

"Good job." Reaper turns toward me, and I know what he's about to say.

I cut him off. "Consider me gone. Any preferences on what I do?"

"Alive. If anyone's going to take his life after the hell he put my woman through, it's going to be me," Reaper tells me.

"Understood."

"Don't bring him back here though. Find somewhere to hole up and call me. Natalie doesn't need to know he lived." Reaper turns toward Poker. "Go with him. Make sure he doesn't take it too far."

“Consider it done.” Poker nods and turns toward me. “Ten minutes?”

“Yeah, I just need to fill up my bike and grab my other saddlebag from the garage,” I tell him.

“Sounds good,” Poker says, heading toward the door.

As soon as he steps out, I turn toward Reaper and Trigger. “Anything I need to know?”

Trigger shakes his head. “I have nothing. I’ll track you as you go and keep you updated on if I see anything.”

“Sounds good.” I turn toward Reaper and see the need for vengeance in his eyes.

“Just fucking find him. I’d do it myself, but I can’t exactly leave on a wild goose chase right now,” Reaper says darkly.

“I’ll call when I can.” I nod before leaving the room.

As I walk through the main room, I look down the hall that leads to my room. I want to go tell Tara I’m leaving. I have the urge to kiss her long and hard so she doesn’t forget me while I’m gone. I don’t though. Instead, I pull out my phone and shoot her a text letting her know I’ll be gone a few days. She responds back with a thumbs-up. I’ve never hated emojis more than when I got with her.

Ignoring my annoyance, I head out and get on my bike and drive it around the building to the shop. I pull up next to the pump. While it fills, I remove my everyday saddlebag.

“Here, I grabbed this for you,” Poker says as he approaches with my travel saddlebag.

“Thanks,” I tell him as I take it.

“Here, I’ll put your bag in your locker,” Midnight says as he approaches.

“I’d appreciate it.”

Once ready, I get back on my bike and look at Poker. “You ready?”

He nods. “Let’s roll out.”

Tara’s still on my mind, and I hesitate. I need to leave, but I don’t know if I can.

I look over at Midnight, and he must see my struggle and the question I don’t know how to ask on my face. I open my mouth, but nothing comes out.

Midnight smirks. “Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on your girl. You just go get that bastard so Queen Bee can continue to sleep well at night.”

I smirk. “I’m pretty sure she sleeps just fine next to Reaper.” I sober, looking him in the eye, “I’d appreciate you watching her though.”

He nods once.
Before he can say anything else, I take off.
I have a soul I need to catch.

fourteen

TARA

FOUR DAYS.

Four fucking days since I've seen or heard from Wrath.

I don't expect for him to call or text me letting me know what's going on, but with how tight-lipped the guys are being, I can't help but be worried.

Is it a new threat?

Is something going on we don't know about?

Over and over again, I remind myself that everything is okay, and if I really needed to know anything, Reaper would pull me aside. Still, it's taken

everything in me not to ask Natalie what she knows.

Instead, I've thrown myself into work and spent more time at the shop than I have at the clubhouse. I've redone everyone's portfolios, updated the website, and taken over our social media accounts.

"What are you doing now?" Midnight asks as he walks up beside me.

"Scheduling social media posts," I tell him absentmindedly as I add hashtags.

"You can do that?"

"Yeah, I hope you don't mind. I bought a subscription for a scheduler. It was cheap, but I can do several months out all at once, and they let me schedule multiple platforms at once."

Midnight grunts and I look over at him as soon as I hit save.

"What's wrong?"

Midnight crosses his arms and leans against the counter. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, why?"

"You've done more work in the last three days than you did all of last week. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining, but you get here every day thirty minutes before we open, and you stay until we close."

"Is that wrong?" I ask defensively. "If it's the money, you don't have to pay me outside the hours I'm scheduled."

"It's not about the money. The problem is when I tell you to head out, you don't. Instead, you stick around. Why are you avoiding the clubhouse? Did something happen with one of the sweetbutts or something? Did one of the guys hit on you? Talk to me. I can't solve an issue that I'm not told about."

Huffing, I mumble, "It's nothing. I never asked you to solve my issues."

Understanding crosses his face. "You've been off ever since Wrath took off."

"Psh, no I haven't," I lie.

Midnight points at me. "Your voice just went three octaves higher."

"I don't want to talk about it," I tell him as I straighten a stack of papers, avoiding looking at him.

"Has he not called you? He's fine, you know. He's just away on club business. I'm sure he will be home sooner than you think."

"Good to know." Even I hear the irritation in my voice.

I hate it. I'm not supposed to be this girl. I'm supposed to be the ride-or-die chick that can wait at home for her man without needing to know where

he is. Trusting that he will be back for me the first chance he gets.

For the most part, I am, but when he left, things were in limbo. I felt like we had taken a few steps forward only to end up several back. If we were solid, I wouldn't feel this way, but we aren't. What if something happens to him and we never get to finish that conversation?

"Look, I've never had an old lady, so I don't know how it works, but it's clear you're pissed. This is new to both of you, and I'm sure if you told him that no contact bothers you when he's gone, he would try to fix that, but you can't expect him to read your mind, especially when he's gone. Men are idiots. We don't always pick up on the cues and shit women like to lay down for us. The best thing to do is be upfront with him and speak your mind. What's the worst that can happen?"

He's right. I can't expect Wrath to know that I want him to text me, letting me know he's alive. At the same time though, we don't have that type of relationship. Have things started to change between us? Sure, but he doesn't owe me anything. Still, that doesn't mean I can make demands. The man has made more concessions for me in the last several months than is appropriate.

Midnight wants to know the worst that can happen? I can lose this little thread of hope I have that this will work out. That I might actually have something I want to keep.

"It's fine, Midnight, I promise," I whisper, not wanting to admit his advice got to me.

"Women are fucking confusing," he says under his breath as he pushes off the counter. "Take the rest of the day off and get out of here."

"Are you asking me or telling me?" I ask sarcastically.

"Telling, and if you don't, I'll tell Wrath that you aren't taking care of yourself."

"Dick," I mutter as he walks away.

"Never denied it," he hollers over his shoulder.

I close out of what I was working on and grab my stuff.

"Later," I yell as I walk out the door.

Instead of heading toward my car, I walk over to the bookstore.

As soon as I step inside, Ralph's eyes light up. "How are you dollface?"

"I'm alright. How have you been?"

"I woke up this morning, so it's a good day." He chuckles. "You head on back and find some books. Holler if you need anything."

“Thanks.” I smile and walk toward the back of the store.

For the next thirty minutes, I pick out a stack of books before heading back to the cash register.

“Find everything okay?”

“I did.”

Ralph smiles as he rings out my books. “Good. Now, tell me, what have you been up to?”

“Just working. You know how it is.” I shrug.

“And your man?”

I frown. “My man?”

Ralph nods toward my arm, and I look down and see Wrath’s name is showing. I pull down my sleeve and smile awkwardly.

“I don’t have a man.”

Ralph’s eyebrows wing up. “Dollface, are you lying to me or yourself? I’ve lived in this town long enough to recognize that type of tattoo.”

“It’s complicated,” I confess as I hand him my card.

Ralph hums. “The best love stories are often complicated. Paris and Helen, Cleopatra and Mark Antony, Johnny and June. They all had their obstacles to overcome, but in the end, it all worked out.”

“I’m pretty sure at least two of those examples died because of love.” I quirk an eyebrow.

“Yes, but they had an epic love that brought them joy and transcended time. The real question is, would you relive all these complications you claim to have to spend another moment with him?”

He lets me marinate on that as he runs my card. The truth is, I would. I would suffer from Jug and go through all the trauma just to see this side of Wrath I’ve never seen before. I don’t think he shows very many people the person he is under all that anger and hate.

The problem is, he doesn’t really hate the world around him as he would like people to believe. His hate runs deeper inside himself.

When he hands me back my card, he tilts his head. “What do you have planned for this afternoon?”

“Nothing,” I admit softly.

Midnight was right. I was working so much because the room feels colder without him in it. Even when he wasn’t inside with me, knowing he was close made me feel safe. Now that he’s gone, that safety is gone too.

“How about I put on some tea, and you can tell me all about him.” He

nods to my tattoo, which is showing again.

Could I?

“I’d like that,” I say quietly, surprising myself.

Next thing I know is I’m sitting behind the counter with Ralph and spilling my life story. How my dad sucks and how I essentially ran away to how I’ve found myself in the situation I’m currently in. Of course, I left out the public sex and such, but he has the CliffsNotes version of our relationship thus far.

“I want him, but I can’t admit it to anyone. I feel like I’m on thin ice, and one wrong move will have it crumbling underneath me.”

“Have you told the boy how you feel?”

I frown, shaking my head. “I mean, I wouldn’t call him a boy. He’s all man, that’s for sure.”

He snorts. “Child, anyone younger than me is a boy. Glad to know he’s packing though.”

He winks at me, making me blush.

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Isn’t it though?” he asks lightly before changing the subject. “Sounds like to me he’s fighting his feelings as hard as you are. If a man doesn’t care, he doesn’t do the things this man has done for you. You need to speak with him and communicate.”

“I don’t know. What if it’s out of pity? I don’t want him to stay with me because it’s the right thing to do in his head.”

Ralph looks at me seriously. “Dollface, no man who isn’t interested in a woman would lay in bed with her every night and talk about how their day was and whatnot. Nor would he do it because it’s the right thing. He spends time with you because he cares for you.”

I bite my lip as I think about it.

Is he right? He could be. Part of my problem is that my insecurities run deep. After my mother died and my father remarried, I started wondering if anyone truly wanted me. My own father abandoned me when I needed him the most. So if he could do that, someone whose blood runs through my veins, how could I ever believe that Wrath wants me for me?

“You think so?” I ask tentatively.

As much as I’m not sure, it feels good to be reassured by an outsider.

Ralph nods. “I do.”

“I guess I have some things to think about then, huh?”

Ralph smiles. “And I can’t wait to hear what happens next.”

“You are a saint, Ralph.”

“Just consider me your fairy godfather.” He winks. “Now get out of here. I need to close up so I can go watch my nightly game show.”

I laugh as I stand. “Don’t have too much fun.”

“You either, dollface, and remember what I said. Use your words and tell the man what you want.”

I smile as his words echo those Midnight gave me. Why is it easier to hear from Ralph?

“I will.”

Leaving the shop, I pull out my phone and send one text.

Please let me know you are okay.

Then I wait.



WRATH

Coming to a stop outside of the clubhouse, I shut off the bike.

I’m fucking exhausted, both mentally and physically. As soon as we rolled out, Danworth went MIA again. We stalked the extended-stay hotel, Poker flirted with the girl behind the desk and nothing. She had no idea who he was talking about, and we didn’t see anything. It was like he disappeared into thin air.

If it really was him.

Trigger was no help. He had his eyes on the feeds the entire time, but they never showed the man leaving. Seems they may have their own tech wizard on their side as well. That doesn’t bode well for us.

Between the long ride, coming up empty, and the text from Tara, I am

ready to be home.

It surprised me hearing from her. She's never the one to initiate a text, so when I received one from her asking me to let her know I was okay, I almost dropped the phone.

Instead, I shot her back a quick text letting her know we were good and would head home soon.

It only made the urgency to get back that much worse. She's slowly becoming something I can't live without. I live to see her smile. To smell her shampoo as I bury my head into her hair in the morning. Feel her body pressed against mine.

I've never been into cuddling, but I never had Tara either. She makes me want things I never imagined before.

Reaper and Trigger walk outside as Poker and I get off our bikes. My thoughts of going inside to curl up by my girl vanish as I see the hard look on Reaper's face.

Poker groans as he stretches. "I'm getting too old for this shit."

"Tell me about it. I can't feel my ass," I mutter as my back snaps, crackles, and pops.

"Done bitching?" Reaper asks as Trigger and him come to a stop in front of us.

"I'm sure I could find something to complain about," Poker jokes.

"Take it up with management." Trigger points at Reaper.

Reaper glares at Trigger before turning back to us. "Church, now."

We nod, following him inside. We drop our phones at the door before settling inside.

"Fill us in," Reaper demands.

"It was a dead end." I shake my head. "I don't know what Trigger's system caught, but it wasn't Danworth."

"Monica, the girl I hooked up with," Poker says. "She had no recollection of who I was asking about, and she's the one who checks everyone in and out. They don't have an overnight person, so anyone who checks in after eleven has to call her, and she meets them at the desk. While she was sleeping one night, I logged into her computer and searched for single males. Nothing popped."

Trigger raises a brow. "Are you sure you weren't distracted by getting your cock wet?"

Poker's jaw clenches. "I was doing my job. Besides, Wrath was keeping

watch when I was trying to get information out of the staff.”

“He’s right.” I yawn. “We took turns keeping an eye out.”

Reaper runs his hands through his hair. “He had to have spotted you.”

I scoff. “Trust me, we hid. It’s not like we were sitting out in the open, taunting him. Besides, Trigger’s cameras didn’t catch shit as far as I know.”

Regret crosses Reaper’s face. “You’re right. I’m sorry. Tensions are just high right now. I was just so fucking hopeful that this shit would come to an end.”

“And it will, just not today,” I say.

“There was a hit on one of our outer warehouses two nights ago. It was the Renegades. They didn’t get anything, but I think they were testing us.”

My face grows grim. “You think we were sent on a decoy mission?”

He shrugs. “I can’t say anything for certain, but keep your eye out for anything suspicious.”

“Will do.”

Reaper nods. “You look fucking beat. Go take a nap or something.”

“Don’t tease me with a good time,” Poker murmurs as he walks past, heading out of church.

Trigger nods at both of us and leaves as well. When we’re alone, Reaper turns toward me.

“We good?”

I nod. “Yeah, we’re good. How was shit here?”

“Fine. Didn’t see much of your girl though.”

“Really?” I ask, trying not to sound too interested.

Where the fuck would she be if she wasn’t here?

Midnight said she had been working, but they aren’t open twenty-four hours a day. Where was she spending her time?

“Midnight said she was burning the candle by both ends of the stick at the shop.” A smile teases Reaper’s face. “If you ask me, it almost sounds like she missed you.”

“Whatever.” I roll my eyes as I push past him. “I’m going to bed.”

“Night, sleeping beauty,” Reaper calls out from behind me.

I raise my hand and raise my middle finger.

Fucker.

As soon as I’m in my room, I kick off my boots and face plant onto my bed.

Five minutes. I’ll just lay here for five minutes, and then I’ll take a

shower and find my girl.

The rustling of keys wakes me up some time later. As soon as I open my eyes, I see Tara slip inside the room, only to come to a stop when she sees me.

“You’re alive,” she whispers.

“I am,” I rasp, my voice still thick with sleep. “I told you I was.”

She nods but doesn’t say anything as she sets down her bag.

“Have a good time?” She keeps her back to me as she starts kicking off her shoes.

“Hardly.” I scoff.

Tara hums, and I start to study her. Her shoulders are stiff, and she’s refusing to make eye contact.

It’s almost as if she’s mad at me.

But why?

“Did something happen?” I ask as I rub my face.

Tara turns and leans against the wall, crossing her arms and ankles. “Not that I know of. Why?”

“You seem mad.”

The corner of her eye twitches. “Mad? No. Unless you did something I don’t know about.”

“Not that I’m aware of,” I say slowly.

“Good. Then I’m not mad.” She grabs a book from the bag at her feet. “I’m going to let you rest and go read in the backyard.”

“You can stay. I’m up now.”

She raises her hand and waves me off. “No, you look like you need it.”

“Okay...” I say slowly.

I’m not sure what’s happening here.

Tara pauses with her back to me, hand on the door. “I want you to think about something though, Wrath.”

“What’s that?”

“I want you to think about how you would feel if I went away and didn’t tell you where I was going or for how long. Then, while I’m gone, I reach out once and update you, and only after you message me first. Then, while I’m gone, people ask me about you. How would that make you feel?”

“Tara...”

She makes a noise in the back of her throat and shakes her head. “It’s fine. I covered for you. I get it, you were away on club business, and you

can't tell me about it, but I talked to a friend and he told me I needed to tell you how I feel and when something isn't working for me. You leaving for almost a week and not sending me a simple text doesn't work for me. Leaving me completely in the dark is disrespectful to me as your old lady. I shouldn't have to text you for an update. You should want me to know you're okay so I'm not worried."

I open my mouth to say something, but she continues on. "I just want you to think about how you would feel if the roles were reversed."

She walks out before I can say anything.

Fuck.

She's not wrong.

I've gone on trips with Honk and Pinky and seen them message their women just to let them know they were alive. It's something so simple but foreign. I've never had anyone waiting at home for me before, and I wasn't sure where we were at in our relationship. I didn't think she would want to hear from me, but I was wrong.

One thing she said caught my attention.

He.

Who the fuck is this man, and what interest does he have in what's mine?

fifteen

TARA

AFTER LAST NIGHT, I haven't talked much to Wrath. I expected him to follow me outside and argue with me, but he didn't. Instead, he left me to my thoughts, which aren't always good. So when I went back to the room, fully expecting it to be empty, I was surprised.

Wrath was there, sleeping. He had showered, leaving him in only boxers. Part of me wanted to climb him like a tree, but I didn't. Instead, I quietly got ready for bed, sliding into my side.

I hated going to bed angry at one another, but I couldn't wake him. I've never seen him sleep so much.

As soon as I settled into bed though, his body migrated toward mine. His arms reached for me, pulling me into his body as he does every night. Then he gently kissed the side of my head with a whispered "sorry."

That's how I fell asleep, waking only briefly as he left the room this morning.

Jerico's laughter brings me out of my thoughts and into the present.

Taking the payment from the girl he is obviously flirting with, I run it, handing her the receipt.

"Thanks for coming in. Have a great day," I tell Jerico's client.

The woman smiles and walks out the door.

"Another satisfied customer," Jerico boasts from somewhere behind me.

I bite my lip to stop myself from laughing when I hear Midnight scoff over the sound of his tattoo gun.

"Did you get her number too?" Elle quips.

"Maybe I did," Jerico shoots back.

I turn around and lean against the counter. "Wait, did she really give you her number?"

Jerico smirks. "Why? Don't want me to use it?"

I roll my eyes. "You can use it if you want. I was only going to say that's so weird."

Elle cuts in. "Yeah, like imagine you take her out, and shit goes sideways. Now you're without a client, and she's without a tattoo artist. That's no bueno."

"You ladies are overthinking it," Jerico says.

"No, they're not," Midnight says.

"Finding a new artist is a bitch. I wouldn't do it," the woman Midnight's tattooing chimes in.

Jerico rolls his eyes. "I'm not going to call her alright? But I won't stop flirting with the ladies as long as they like it. If I can make them feel good for a little while with a few words, then why not?"

"Men." Elle huffs as she walks toward me.

"It's amazing how long they survive without us," I tell her, making her laugh.

Elle hops up on the counter and starts swinging her legs. "I'm bored."

"I'm Tara, nice to meet you, bored."

Elle rolls her eyes. "You're so funny."

I smile brightly. "Thanks."

"Seriously though, I don't have a tattoo until later, and my next client canceled."

"That sucks. Do you have enough time to go home?"

Elle shakes her head. "Do I? Yes. Would it be worth it? No."

"I'm sorry."

"You know what I think?"

"No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me," I say sarcastically.

"You should let me pierce you."

I raise my eyebrows. "You want to pierce me?"

She nods rapidly. "Yeah, you could let me pierce your clit or your nipples. Your man would love it."

Would Wrath love it though? I shake off the thought.

"Absolutely not," I say, feeling my cheeks heat.

"You're no fun." She huffs. "What about your tongue?"

I shake my head. "Nope. Hard pass. Thanks for offering though."

Elle sighs. "Fine. What about your nose, or maybe your ears? Give me something. I'll be gentle, promise."

I pause and think about it. Another ear piercing is harmless enough, but the nose is the one that catches my attention.

"Hey, Mom, I have a question."

"What's up, honey?"

"Do you think I could get my nose pierced?"

Mom tilts her head to the side. "Are you sure you want it pierced?"

I nod. "Yeah. I've thought about it for a while. I just want a small one."

"I'm surprised you don't want a hoop," she teases.

I reach up and finger the tiny hoops in my ear. "I love hoops, but I think a stud would be more my speed. Plus, they are easy to remove if you need to. They even make clear studs now so you can have something in, and no one can tell."

Mom hums as she wipes off the counter. I wait her out because I know this is her way of thinking.

"Okay." She nods as she folds the towel. "Let's get our noses pierced."

"We?" I clarify, making sure I heard her right.

"You don't mind getting your nose pierced with your mother, do you?" she teases.

“Not at all,” I tell her, loving the idea of us doing it together.

Mom nods. “Good, I’ll research and see who the best piercer is in our area and get it set up.”

I walk around the counter and pull her into a hug. “Thanks, Mom.”

“You’re welcome, honey.”

Two days later, she was killed, and we never got our noses pierced.

“Nose,” I whisper hoarsely. “I want my nose done. Just a stud though.”

Elle frowns and sets her hand on my shoulder. “Are you okay? You don’t have to get anything done if you don’t want to. I was just messing with you.”

I nod, choking back my emotions. “I know, but I really do want my nose done.”

“Okay, do you want to pick out a stud or do you want me to do it for you?”

“You can.”

Elle runs off to get set up while I try to get myself under control.

“Are you okay?” Jerico asks quietly.

“I’m good.”

“Are you sure?” he pushes.

I smile. “I appreciate your concern, but really, I’m fine. She just made me think of someone I haven’t thought about in a long time.”

“If you say so.”

“Watch the front for me?”

“You got it.”

I leave Jerico to man the desk and head to the back of the shop.

“You ready for me?”

Elle looks up from her station and nods. “I pulled two options for studs for you. I couldn’t decide.”

“This one.” I point to the one with a dark green gem on the end.

It reminds me of Wrath. He’s always wearing forest green clothing, so I think it might be his favorite color.

“Awesome. Get on up here,” she says as she pats her chair.

I do as she asks and make myself comfortable.

“I’m just going to mark your nose where I think it should go and get your opinion.”

I shake my head. “Just do it. I trust you.”

“Okay...”

I close my eyes and let her do her thing. A few minutes later, I’m looking

in a handheld mirror, staring at the little stud in my nose.

“What do you think?” Elle asks nervously.

“I love it.”

Her shoulders relax. “I’m glad. I was worried that I pressured you into it.”

I shake my head. “No. I had planned on getting one years ago, but that fell through.”

“I’m glad I could be the one to do it. Thanks for letting me pierce you.”

“Thank you.”

Elle winks. “Who knows, maybe next time you’ll let me pierce something else.”

I laugh and shake my head. “I wouldn’t get my hopes up if I were you.”

“Damn,” she teases.

I look in the mirror again and catch the gem’s reflection on the side of my nose.

This one’s for you, Mom.



WRATH

“Keep going,” I demand.

Natalie grunts but keeps hitting the pads on my hands and legs. It’s obvious that she’s running out of steam. I’ve worked with her enough to know that she won’t call it quits until Reaper or I make her.

“Time,” I call out. “Good job today.”

Natalie nods as she pants.

“I need to get better. I need to be ready,” she says as she sucks in air.

I frown. “Ready for what?”

Natalie looks at me like I’m stupid and speaks slowly. “In case someone comes for me.”

I shut my eyes. Shit, I should have seen that coming.

“Nat, no one is coming for you. You’re safe now.”

“You can’t promise that, and even if you could, you shouldn’t. You can’t promise someone will never get hurt.”

I hate that she’s right. I can promise to do everything in my power to stop her from getting hurt, but that doesn’t mean she never will be hurt again.

“We will keep you safe, Queen Bee.”

She gives me a small smile. “How are you and Tara?”

I raise a brow. “You know my relationship is off-limits.”

I had to make that a rule of working out with me after last time. Talking about Tara distracts me too much. She likes me being distracted, or she did until I pointed out that I can’t work her the way she needs to be if I’m distracted.

That’s where the rule came into play.

“You’re no fun.” She pouts right as Reaper walks in.

“Who’s no fun?”

“Wrath,” Natalie says as she bounds over to Reaper.

He pulls her into his arms and kisses her.

“Okay, you two, knock it the fuck off,” I snap.

“Someone needs to get laid,” Reaper mumbles, making Natalie giggle.

“Asshole,” I mutter as I pass by them.

“Thanks for the workout, Wrath!” Natalie hollers.

I wave over my shoulder as I step out of the building.

Reaper isn’t wrong though. The more I do with Tara, the more I want her. I’ve been trying to hold back, but that demon inside demanding the chase is calling to me. If I don’t do something soon, I might snap.

Yet an escort does not sound appealing to me. My dick doesn’t want anyone but her.

I can’t do what I want to do to her though. She’s not anywhere near ready for that, nor will she probably ever be.

Then again, she did say she wanted me to stop underestimating her. Not only that, but she missed me while I was gone.

Walking into the clubhouse, I bypass the main room and head straight to my room. I let myself in and head straight for the shower. Quickly, I wash off and then fall onto the bed. My head hits something hard under the pillow.

“What the fuck?” I mutter as I grab a hard object.

I pull it out and see that it’s a book. Of fucking course it is.

Tara has practically lived with a book in her hand since she started working at the tattoo shop.

She's spending too much time with Midnight.

A shirtless man is on the cover and covered in tattoos.

Is this the shit she's into?

I open it randomly and start reading what's on the page.

"You've been a bad girl," I tell Callie as I slap the flogger into my palm.

Callie jumps, and her breathing picks up. "Please forgive me, sir."

She's blindfolded and leaning over the bench.

"I can't wait to turn this beautiful ass red," I tell her as I trail the flogger lightly over her skin.

Callie shifts ever so slightly, spreading her legs just a little farther apart.

Fucking beautiful. I lick my lips as I stare at her pussy. She's dripping already, and I can't fucking wait.

"No moving," I say harshly as my cock hardens.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"So many sorrys. Are you ready for your punishment?"

"Yes, sir."

I bring the flogger down once, twice, and then three times. With every hit, Callie doesn't make a sound.

I rub her ass with my hand, soothing the sting. "I want to hear you, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir." She nods, panting.

Fuck, is this the shit she's into? I think as I adjust my hardening cock.

If this is the type of sex Tara wants, then sign me up. What are the chances that my dream girl has been just down the hall this entire time?

I flip halfway through the book and find another scene.

My heart races as he places the blindfold over my eyes. I'm naked, with my arms cuffed to the headboard and my feet tied to the footboard. The cool air on my pussy makes me whimper as my nipples harden. Shit, I'm already turned the fuck on, and he hasn't even done anything to me yet.

Sex with Ares is always intense in the best kind of way. Every time he does something new that I didn't know I would like.

I hiss at the cold object that trails down my pussy to my ass.

"Relax, it's just a butt plug," he demands.

I take a deep breath and slowly breathe it out as he pushes it in.

"Good girl."

God, why does that saying make my pussy quiver?

“Ah!” I shout as the plug starts to vibrate.

“Did I say you could speak?” Ares says.

“I’m sorry, sir.”

“Fuck me sideways,” I murmur as I read the rest of the scene.

I can picture the scene between Tara and me playing out in real time. There are a few things that I would do differently if she would let me.

I close the book and set it to the side. Standing, I walk across the room and open another one of her books that she left on the dresser. I flip through until I find what I’m looking for. In this one, the girl is chased until the man catches her and takes her on the forest floor while she fights him.

Holy shit.

My demon is screaming at me to take her now. To hunt her down and fuck her right where we find her. It wants to leave our marks all over her body so no one will ever question who she belongs to.

I check book after book, and they just keep getting dirtier as I go.

Leaning against the wall, I run my hand over my mouth. Goddamn, I wasn’t expecting this. Sweet, sweet Tara looks so innocent, when in reality she’s just as dirty as me.

One thing is for sure: I’m sick of holding back. I didn’t think she could handle it, but these books prove that she’s more into it than I realized.

If she gets off on reading these, I can’t wait to show her what it’s like to experience them in real life. I’ll show her what it’s like to be treated like a queen in the streets but a slut in the sheets.

“Game fucking on, baby.” I smile to myself. “Ready or not, Tara, I’m coming for you.”

sixteen

TARA

STORMING INTO MY ROOM, I slam the door behind me and drop my purse on the floor. I'm so annoyed that I don't even hear the shower running when I walk in.

Wrath texted me earlier, demanding my presence tonight. He literally said that he demands I be presentable for a date tonight.

As if I have to just fall into his lap because he texted. It pissed me off so much that I broke a pencil at work as I was writing.

Then I had a rude customer. For some reason, the fact we have a last-minute cancelation fee and that we keep their deposit pissed them off. They thought it was perfectly acceptable being a no-show and that they could just come whenever it fit their schedule.

Wrong.

Then, when I went to get lunch, I got hit on by a creepy guy. At first, I was cool with the compliment, but then he took it a step too far. The fucker tried to grab my ass, and I wasn't having it. He got kicked out of the café, and on his way out, he called me every swear word under the sun.

On my way home, my check engine light came on, so now I have to figure that out. I don't get why, after several years, this car has decided to give me so much trouble.

I just want to curl up in a ball and maybe practice a little self-love before I have to deal with the man who is driving me insane. I know just the book to get me there quickly too.

I grab the book on the dresser and notice something feels off. I turn the book in my hand and see that there are several pages dog-eared.

What the ever-loving fuck?

I sure as hell didn't desecrate a book like that.

Reaching forward, I grab another one and see that it too has been abused. Surely, I didn't buy them from Ralph like this.

Growling, I drop both books and check a couple more. Book after book has bent corners, and I start to feel the vein in my forehead throb.

Someone's going to die for messing with my shit.

I'm so busy checking all of my books that I don't even hear the bathroom door open.

"Hey."

I whirl around and come face-to-face with Wrath. His short hair looks darker because it's wet, and instinctively my eyes drop. I watch as water drips down his chest and lower until it hits the towel that's sitting low on his hips.

Mother. Fucker.

He has that goddamn V. How is that even fair?

A man shouldn't be tall, have a sharp jawline, tattoos, abs, and the holy grail, also known as a V, and be as off-limits as he is. He's my old man, for Christ's sake, and I can't even jump him if I want to.

"Like what you see?"

I look up and glare when I see him smirking.

“I’ve seen better,” I lie.

Dude looks like a walking wet dream, and unfortunately for me, he’s exactly my type.

“Someone broke into our room,” I say, changing the subject.

Wrath goes still, his body becoming tense. “How do you know?”

I hold up my book. “Someone fucked up all of my books.”

He tilts his head to the side. “What do you mean?”

“Someone folded corners in all of these books.” I point to the stack, still holding the one up.

“Oh, that was me.”

“That was you?” I say slowly.

Surely, I heard him wrong, right?

He shrugs. “Yeah, what’s the big deal?”

“Only sadists dog-ear pages,” I say through gritted teeth. “Why in the hell were you touching my books?”

He lets go of the towel and folds his arms across his chest. “I wanted to see what they were about since you’re always reading. Is that a problem?”

I pinch the bridge of my nose and breathe deeply. “No, it’s not a problem. The problem is that you bent the fucking corners.”

“You seem tense,” he points out.

I throw my hands up, making the book I forgot was in my hand hit the wall. “Of course, I’m fucking tense. I’ve had a day from hell. On top of that, I haven’t had sex in months.” I widen my eyes and say it again slowly. “Months, Wrath. I’m going through the drought of all droughts over here. Sure you’ve given me a few O’s, but you refuse to actually fuck me, and half the time, I’m not even sure you want me. All I wanted to do was come back here, curl up with a book and my vibrator, and maybe if I’m lucky, make myself have a half-assed orgasm. But no…” I drawl. “I came home to find my books had been assaulted!”

Wrath’s eyes darken. “You were going to get off while reading?”

“Yes, do you have a problem with that?” I snap, putting my hands on my hips.

He shifts, and I can’t help but groan when his towel drops a little lower.

“Can you cover up or something? It’s fucking rude to tease me right now.”

Wrath smirks. “I don’t think I will.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see his cock twitch.

Dear Jesus, he's hard. It's so fucking tempting to fall to my knees and beg him to fuck me.

"Strip, then sit in the chair," he demands, pulling me back from my dirty thoughts.

I shake my head. "What?"

"Strip, Tara."

"Why?"

He raises a brow. "The way I look at it is I'm your old man, and it's my job to take care of you. You want an orgasm, and I'll give you one."

My heart races. "You can't be serious."

My body is already heating up for him. I can feel my desire pool in my panties. I need this bad.

"Do you want to be?"

I bite my lip and nod.

"Good. Now strip and sit down. Once we're done, we'll talk."

Without breaking eye contact, I pull my shirt over my head, dropping it to the floor. As I unhook my bra, Wrath wraps his hand around his cock, through the towel, and strokes himself, making me groan.

I want to do that.

"Faster," he demands.

"Yes, sir," I quip, trying to break the growing tension.

I spin on my heels, giving him my back as I slowly undo my jeans. I push down my jeans and panties all at once.

"Fuck me," Wrath groans.

"Yes, please," I practically beg as I turn around to face him once more.

Instinctively, my hand goes to my side, trying to cover up my scar without being obvious.

Wrath frowns. "Don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Don't play dumb when we both know you aren't. That scar is nothing to be ashamed of, so stop trying to hide it from me."

I bite the inside of my cheek and move my hand, letting him fully see me.

He nods. "Sit."

Taking a deep breath, I walk over to the chair and sit.

"Sit back. I want you to rest your legs over the arm of the chair."

The cool air hitting my already wet pussy makes me whimper as the

anticipation builds.

“What now?”

I watch as Wrath walks over to my books and starts going through them.

I frown. Why is he messing with my books when I’m naked and right in front of him? “What are you doing?”



WRATH

“Tell me, what is it you like about these books?” I ask, ignoring her question.

I grab the one with the chasing. I’m still having a hard time believing she’s into it. I need to know for sure before I take her out tonight.

“The romance,” she says quickly.

I raise a brow. “Explain.”

She squirms and starts to put her legs down.

“Did I tell you to move?”

Her eyes widen, and she puts her legs back where they were.

“Good girl.”

Tara sucks in a breath, and her eyes dilate.

“Now explain.”

“I like the dynamic. He always respects her but not in a soft way. The heroine might submit to him but in reality she’s the one calling the shots while he listens. The heroes are never afraid to give the female what they both want.”

I nod. “I agree.”

“You do?”

Holding up the book I want, I walk back over to her and hand it to her.

“I do. Now open it to one of the, what did you call it? Dog-eared pages.”

Reluctantly, Tara does as I ask.

A range of emotions fly over her face. “Did you mark all of the sex scenes?”

“I did. Now pick one,” I tell her as I rip off my towel.

She looks away from the book and eyes my cock. She looks fucking starved, I think, as she licks her lips.

“Pick a scene, Tara,” I demand as I drop to my knees in front of her.

Breathing hard, she tears her eyes away from my body and does as I ask.

“Okay, I got one.”

“Good girl, now start reading.”

She shakes her head. “Wait, what?”

I place my hands on her thighs and squeeze. “I want you to read out loud while I devour your pussy until you come all over my tongue.”

“Are you serious?” she asks, wide-eyed.

“Deadly.”

She nods and whispers to herself, “Okay, I can do this.”

I bite back a chuckle as she moves the book to one hand and rests her arm on the arm of the chair, giving her a clear view of what I’m about to do to her.

I move my hands higher, almost touching where she wants me most.

“Oh, and Sweet T, the minute you stop reading, I’ll stop fucking you with my tongue and fingers, understand?”

“Yes, sir,” she rasps.

I kneel at her feet, looking up at her.

She’s a goddess. I swear I would fuck her like an animal then treat her like the goddess she is. If only she would stay with me.

When I don’t move, she looks down at her book and clears her throat.

“I can’t keep my excitement inside. I know tonight is the night. It’s the night that he will finally claim me as his own. As I dress in my white cotton gown, I watch myself in the mirror...”

As she continues to read, I begin to nip, kiss, and lick between her legs, making her squirm, but she never takes them down. She leaves herself wide open for me. I can see every quiver as she clenches around air, begging for my cock.

“It’s time, Charlene. Time for the hunt.” She continues, laying out the scene that caught my attention the most.

Charlene is the mate of Jason. This particular scene, Jason has to chase Charlene through the woods. Once he catches her, he can claim her as his

own.

I shiver in anticipation of what she has yet to read.

As she gets into the run itself, I run my tongue up her center. She moans, her head falling back as she stops reading.

So I freeze in place, my tongue on her clit. She tries to move, but I pinch her inner thigh to keep her still.

She huffs but starts reading once more.

I tongue her clit, my fingers moving to her entrance. At first, I only trace the opening.

I can hear the frustration in her voice as she continues to read. I wait to thrust in until the chase ends, with Jason tackling Charlene to the ground.

Tara gasps as I invade her suddenly, scissoring my fingers as I set a relentless pace.

She pants, but manages to continue to read.

I can't have that though. So as Jason fucks Charlene into the dirt, I nip at Tara's clit, making her voice stutter. Then I curl my fingers up, rubbing that G-spot inside of her.

She comes all over my face, her juices squirting from her like I love. I lap it all up, enjoying her after-tremors.

"That was..." She gasps, trying to catch her breath.

I slowly remove my fingers from her, kissing her clit.

When I stand, she looks up at me, dazed. I wouldn't have her any other way.

"Let's get dinner."

Her eyes drop to my cock. "Don't you want me to take care of you?"

I shake my head. "This was about you."

"But you didn't..."

"Get off?" I ask, making her blush. "Trust me, I want nothing more, but you aren't touching my dick again until we discuss where we go from here." I stand. "Now get dressed so we can go eat and figure this shit out."

seventeen

TARA

I WANT to try to keep my anger at Wrath from before. The anger of finding out he was perfectly safe and that it took reaching out myself to find out. I can't though.

After that perfect orgasm, I cannot find it in me to be mad about anything.

I did not expect that from Wrath. I never thought he would pick up one of my books and actually read it. I want to be pissed about the dog-ears, but now knowing what they mark? Every time I see one, I will only think of one thing.

That moment on that chair with me reading one of the dirtier scenes out loud.

I shiver as I think about it now.

Wrath left me only ten minutes ago with the demand that I get ready and wear something easily accessible. Whatever that means. Without much more to go on, I hustled into the shower to get ready. I wonder where we are going.

I feel giddy though. I feel like a teenage girl again. It's been so long since I was that carefree girl. I'm still not carefree, but I feel like I'm getting a piece of her back.

Flipping through my dresses in the closet, I smile when I see the white dress with a short skirt that I wore under my graduation gown. By the time I graduated, I had already gone off the deep end. I was partying and doing whatever I could to forget my grief.

It's not making me sad today though. Instead, it's making me think of Charlene with Jason. The way she ran through the woods to escape him. The way he took her on the ground when he caught her.

I wonder what it would be like to be chased like that. To have the adrenaline flowing through you as you try to escape your predator. To play prey.

My pussy practically weeps at the idea. God, I'm going to hell for these thoughts, but I can't help it. I want that.

Even more, I want it to be Wrath who chases me down. He would be rough with me, but I know he would never actually hurt me.

When I'm finally dressed, I open the door, almost screaming when Wrath is waiting on the other side. He's still dressed as he was before, with a simple dark green shirt and jeans.

He takes me in from head to toe, then back up. The tiny smirk tells me that he likes what he sees.

"Normally, I would want you in pants when we take the bike, but I'll take it slow today. You in that dress is worth being extra careful."

I blush, tucking my hair behind my ear.

He reaches out, grabbing my hand. As we make our way through the main clubhouse, I don't miss the knowing smirks at us as we move through. Many of these people have seen me naked.

I should feel embarrassed, but it only makes my blood heat all over again.

I feel like an addict. I want to do it all over again.

Wrath squeezes my hand before leading me to his bike. He hands me my helmet, making me smile at the Sweet T on the side with a glass of what I

assume is supposed to be sweet tea next to it.

I hadn't even realized it until this point that he had given me a road name. I mean, I heard him call me it a few times, and sure, some of the guys started calling me it, but until this moment, I didn't connect the dots.

He gave me a road name.

My heart starts beating harder in my chest. I'm afraid for what this means, yet I'm here for it too. It's been a rough road, but maybe Ralph was right. Maybe the great loves aren't without their own complications.

I think I'm falling in love with this man.

When I don't move fast enough, Wrath reaches out, grabbing the helmet. He sets it on his bike a moment before pulling a hair tie from his wrist. I recognize the yellow pattern on the scrunchie. It's one of mine.

When did he start carrying one around with him?

He turns me away from him, pulling my hair in a low pony. Then he turns me back and puts the helmet on, clasping it under my chin. Before he steps away, he wraps me in his leather jacket. Then he presses a kiss to my forehead.

Then he climbs onto his bike, holding his hand out for me to climb on. I do, wrapping my arms around him tightly. He squeezes my hand before turning on the bike. Then he starts moving, much slower than he has before.

He meant what he said. He took the entire drive slowly, his hand touching my legs or hands throughout the ride.

Last time, I was turned on.

I am this time too, but it's different. It's like this ride is the start of something new. Like we are making the commitment we should have been making when I tattooed his name on my skin.

It feels monumental.

So when he finally pulls into some mom-and-pop diner, I jump off the bike. As soon as he has the bike stable, I leap at him.

He catches me, chuckling.

I cut the sound off with my lips on his. He growls, turning me away from the restaurant as he kisses me back.

I don't know how long we stand there making out, but a wolf whistle finally pulls me from my lust-filled bubble.

My cheeks heat, but I don't mind giving a little show.

Wrath's wink at me tells me he doesn't mind either.

I go to lower my legs, smiling as his hands stay planted on my ass as he

puts me down.

Oh yeah. Whoever whistled probably saw my whole ass.

I can't find it in me to think about them one more second though, because Wrath is staring into my eyes, and for the first time, he doesn't look guarded. He looks excited. As if he cannot wait for something.

I wonder what could bring him that much joy. I really hope it has to do with me. If he's not feeling even a sliver of what I'm feeling, then this is going to end bad for me.

He grabs my hand, pulling me inside. It's not until we sit down that I realize we haven't said a word since I stepped out of the room.

"You look beautiful," Wrath says as he slides into the booth next to me instead of across.

"Thank you. You are very handsome yourself." I smile up at him.

"I only look as good as I do because I have you on my arm, sweet girl." He presses a kiss to the side of my head.

"Keep all this sweet talking, and I'll have to go back to the clubhouse to find where you put my real old man." I wink at him.

He chuckles.

It's all so innocent. So normal. It feels good.

I stare up into his eyes, and I know I've got to have hearts in mine. I feel like I'm floating. I go to say something, but the waitress walks up then.

"What can I get you love birds?" she teases.

After the waitress takes our orders, we sit close together, his hand on my inner thigh.

"When did you pierce your nose?"

"The other day. Do you like it?"

"It looks good. I like that shade of green too."

"Thanks," I say shyly.

"Tell me about work. Do you like it there?" Wrath asks.

"It's busy work and I enjoy it, but it's not my end goal. I'm appreciative of Midnight, but I don't see it being my forever job."

He leans close, kissing my cheek. It's like, since he found me in the room, he can't keep his hands off me.

Not going to lie. I love it.

"What do you want to do then?" he asks.

I consider his question before answering, "I think if you had asked me six months ago, I wouldn't have had an answer. I was just floating through life.

Now? I think everything I went through showed me that I'm not meant to be that woman. That I needed to figure my life out. I'm not one hundred percent sure what I'd like to do, but it's not working for someone else. I think maybe I'd like to start my own thing."

"I'm sorry you had to go through the shit you did. If I could have stopped it, you know I would've, right?"

I smile up at him before patting his cheek.

"I know you would, but I wouldn't. I hate that I was violated that way, but it's what I needed to realize I wasn't living my life. Not the way I needed to be. It gave me the focus I needed to get out of the rut I was in. If it never happened, I would still be out in the club, fucking whoever asked, willingly. I wouldn't have you. How can I wish that away?"

He gives me a soft smile. "I still would like to kill him all over again. He didn't suffer near enough."

I shake my head, laughing. "Enough of that."

He kisses the back of my hand. "What would you like to do then? Run a library?"

He gives me a wicked smirk, making me shiver. He would bring up my books.

Although...

"You know there is a bookstore next to the tattoo shop. I could open my own bookstore. Ralph would probably let me shadow him a bit to get the hang of it."

He narrows his eyes at me. "Who is this Ralph?"

Then it hits me. He's jealous. Wrath, who let the whole club see me naked and fucked my throat while he ate out my pussy with an audience, is jealous of another man.

"You confuse me," I admit.

"How? Don't think I don't see how you changed the subject either." He huffs.

"You had no problem with me being on display for the club, but an old shopkeeper makes you jealous?"

His hand cups my throat, squeezing a little. It causes my heartbeat to speed up. I love the feel of his skin against mine.

"Get one thing through your head, Sweet T. You. Are. Mine. That means that if I decide to make you strip right here in this shitty diner, you will do it. If I want to put your body on display like the fine piece of art it is? I will. No

one will ever touch you though. Not a single other person. I might be willing to let them watch. I love the way you blossom under the audience, but I will never share you. You understand?”

I nod, my mouth falling open a little at his declaration. Shit, my panties are soaked. I think I love this caveman thing he has going on. Something about the way he takes control and orders me around makes me hot. Like in that moment, I can forget all my worries and be in the moment with him.

Wrath grips my chin, pressing his lips to mine.

A throat clears a moment later, breaking us apart.

“As hot as you two are, maybe keep it PG for the kids in the corner,” the waitress says as she leaves our plates.

“Sorry,” I murmur, blushing.

She winks at me. “Oh, no need. You enjoy that man of yours. He’s a keeper.”

I glance up at Wrath to find his eyes still on me. He hasn’t looked away once.

The waitress walks away, leaving us with our meal.

I can’t look at it though. I’m lost in Wrath’s eyes.

After a moment, he smiles.

“Eat your food. I think you’re going to like what we do next.”



WRATH

Dinner was a special kind of torture.

Tara is perfect. The way she is so responsive to me. I'm not sure she even realized it, but I pinched and pulled at the skin on her legs several times during our meal. Every time, she would clench her legs together.

I don't have to make her enjoy pain. I think she already does. I thought after what Jug put her through, she would never want anything like that.

I think I was wrong. I think that maybe it has more to do with the fact that she wasn't willing. Jug truly wanted to hurt her with no concern for her pleasure.

I'm still concerned about losing control, but I think that I might be able to keep her. She can be what I need, and I can be what she needs.

Now we are back on my bike, headed to a place I've never brought another person.

Even when I used escorts, I never truly let myself have them the way I wanted. I only indulged in certain portions of my depravity. Just enough to push off the urges for a bit longer.

For the first time, I'm bringing someone I care about to a place that has been my place for as long as I've had it. My special place.

It feels so right though. Bringing her to the property that has brought me so much comfort in the past. Somewhere I have spent countless hours mapping out as I walked through it.

I never planned on using it for real, but having her here now? I think that maybe subconsciously I always hoped for it.

As I turn off the engine, I hold my hand out for Tara to get off. She does it easily, making me smile.

Girl looks sexy as fuck in my jacket with her helmet on. She's the perfect old lady.

She undoes the helmet, holding it out for me to take.

"What is this place?"

I smile at the awe on her face. It does look out of place. All the land leading to my property is desert. Little to no vegetation on it.

Then we get to my land, and that changes.

“When I bought this property ten years ago, I had them clear it completely. I didn’t want anything that might hurt me while walking through it,” I tell her.

Truth is, I always hoped deep down to find someone to share it with. I didn’t want anything on the land that may hurt them. Or her.

She’s the one I’ve been waiting for.

“What kind of trees are these?”

“Those red ones are Chinese Pistache. There’s also Raywood Ash, Crape Myrtles, Flowering Pear, Shumard Oaks, and Arizona Ash. I wanted to make a place that would transport me from the desert for a bit and into a different world.”

She looks back at me, wonder in her eyes. “You made yourself your own forest.”

I nod, stepping closer to her. I pull on my jacket, bringing her front to my own.

“I have a confession to make.”

She smiles up at me. “Okay. Tell me.”

I swallow hard. “I will tell you, but I need you to know that if it makes you uncomfortable, I will have someone come pick you up.”

She doesn’t know it, but I already have a prospect a few miles away waiting for my call.

“No. You’ll take me home. No matter what. I don’t want to be on anyone’s bike, but yours.”

I want to smile at her admission. It also shows that she doesn’t know me quite yet. The prospect is in a cage. I’d never let her ride on the back of another man’s bike. Not unless the situation is dire.

“Glad to hear it, Sweet T.”

“Are you going to confess now?” she whispers, moving her face closer to mine.

“You once hinted that you knew about my tastes in bed. You think you have a clue, but you don’t.”

She falls back onto her feet off her tiptoes. “So you don’t like to dominate me? Manipulate my body where you want it, then use it as if I’m your own personal toy?”

I shake my head no, slowly.

“What is it then?” she asks.

“I like to dominate, but it’s more than that. I like to cause pain, then turn that pain into pleasure. What I really like is hunting a woman as if she’s my prey. Chasing her until I catch her, then having my way with her.”

She gasps a little before a smile fills her face. “Like the book.”

“Yes, like the book. We aren’t wolves though.”

She looks back at the forest before smiling back at me. “How many times have you done this? Is that why you made this place?”

“Yes, that’s why I made this place, but I’ve never done this before. Not with anyone. I’ve imagined it countless times, but I’ve never told anyone my true desires.”

“The escorts though...” She trails off.

“I explored certain aspects. Tying them up and spanking them. Chasing them around a hotel room. Causing some minor pain before making it pleasurable. It was never enough though.”

“Why wouldn’t you bring them here?”

I cup her face. “I never wanted to bring anyone here. No one until you.”

She’s breathing heavier now. I’m hoping it’s from excitement and not fear.

Still, I drop my hands, taking a step back.

When she strips out of my jacket, my heart falls. I really thought she would be the one.

I try to withhold my disappointment as I take the jacket from her. I don’t want to send her away with a prospect, but I will. For her.

As I go to pull my cell phone out, Tara calls my name.

“Wrath.”

I look up and see she has moved several steps back.

“What are you up to?” I ask her.

She smiles. “Catch me if you can.”

Then she turns and takes off, running.

It takes a moment for it to sink in.

She’s running.

She’s running from me.

For me.

Game on, sweet girl. Game on.

eighteen

TARA

TREES FLY by me as I run into the woods.

I barely withhold a giggle as I glance over my shoulder.

He hasn't come after me yet, but I bet he's giving me a head start.

I don't want to give in too easily. I want to put up a fight. Make this good for him. As good as he has made it for me.

The desire to please him consumes me.

Almost as much as the thrill running through me thinking about him

chasing me right now.

I run so far into the trees that I don't think he can see me. Then I slow down and try to plan my next move.

I could try and climb one of these trees, but I'm likely to hurt myself.

Besides, I like the idea of him tackling me to the ground like the man in my book.

Who says book boyfriends can't be real? I think I found myself the perfect one.

I hear a twig snap in the distance, but it's in front of me, not behind me.

I frown.

How could he have gotten over there? It's dark, and I can't see for shit in the woods, but it adds to the thrill.

He could be right behind me, and I wouldn't even know it until he grabs me, I think, as my heart races in anticipation.

Determined to not get caught so quick, I head in the opposite direction of where I think I heard him. I keep it slow, being conscientious of the noise I'm making.

Another noise comes from the same direction I came from originally.

I feel like every single move I make, I'm being watched. Hunted.

My breaths come a little faster at the thought. He's going to catch me. I have no doubt about it. In fact, I want him to.

I don't want it to end too soon though. I want this feeling to stretch on. The anticipation for what's to come. I can feel it crawling under my skin.

"I can hear you, sweet girl," Wrath taunts from somewhere in the distance.

He's nowhere as close as I thought. All those noises before must have been an animal, or maybe something in my head.

I take off at a sprint, moving further from his voice.

Then I hear it. The rustling of leaves.

I push myself harder. I need to go faster. Escape him for a little while longer.

Glancing behind me, I see a dark figure running at me.

I know it's Wrath, but it doesn't stop that bit of fear that seeps in.

What if it's not him?

I keep pressing on until I feel it. He's hot on my heels.

A second later, arms wrap around me, and the smell of leather lets me know it's him as he picks me up swinging me around.

I scream out, thrashing against him. Not because I'm scared, but to keep up the game.

He doesn't let me thrash long. He drops to his knees on the ground, pressing my front into the dirt.

I keep struggling to get away from him as he flips up the skirt of my dress. Then I hear the rip as he tears my panties from my body.

I shiver at the sudden burst of air across my pussy. My body is primed and ready, even as I hold on to my determination to fight him.

He still hasn't said a word to me, but he doesn't need to.

I feel the press of his bare skin against my ass as he lines up his cock at my entrance. Then he thrusts into me, pulling my stomach up as he thrusts down.

I gasp, my fight leaving me at the sudden burst of sensation. It hurts, but it's such a good burn.

I'm still panting from the run, but the feel of him inside of me makes my breath catch. This is better than I ever imagined.

The bite of his fingers on my skin only heightens the pleasure as he begins to rut into me. I turn my head in an attempt to look at him, but he growls at me.

"No. Stay down."

I want to fight him so bad, but the pleasure I'm getting from him fucking me like a wild animal is enough to distract me from his demand.

I can feel myself clenching around him as he continues his relentless pace. Then it happens. My eyes squeeze closed as this sound escapes me that I've never heard before.

I've had an orgasm before, but never one that feels like this.

Wrath fucks me through it all though. He never gives me a single break as he presses me harder and harder into the ground. When I try to lift my head to reposition, his hand pushes the back of it, his hands tangling in my hair.

Then he pulls my head back, my back against his front. I'm moaning wantonly as he continues to thrust.

Then I feel it.

His teeth into my neck. He bites down hard. Hard enough that I'm afraid he's split my skin.

He doesn't stop though. Even when I let out a whimper. The stinging pain takes over for a brief moment before a second orgasm hits me, stealing it away.

His name must fall from my lips because one moment he's this mindless creature fucking me without abandon, then the next, he's whispering into my ear, telling me how good I'm doing. How much he appreciates me.

My mind can't decipher all his words though. I'm in a constant state of bliss as one orgasm rolls into another.

He uses my body like I knew he would, but it's different. This isn't some emotionless fuck that will lead to us never seeing each other ever again.

It's more than that. There are emotions behind it. Wrath may be in control, but in this moment, he is the vulnerable one. He's sharing a part of himself with me that he has never shared with anyone else before.

He trusts me. That's more potent than anything else that he's done to me.

I scream out, my brain going fuzzy with yet another orgasm. The need to bring him as much pleasure as he is bringing me rides me hard. I squeeze against him harder, determined to make him fall over the edge with me.

Then I feel the warmth fill me as Wrath's thrusts slow even more.

Then he stops completely, holding me tightly.

"My sweet girl. Sweet T. You are so perfect. So beautiful."

With his cock buried in me and his arms around me, I give into my need to close my eyes, trusting him to keep me safe.

In this moment, all I can feel is loved.



WRATH

I never imagined that she would be this perfect.

Chasing her through the woods I built was a heady feeling. I have never felt more alive than I did in that moment. It was better than I ever imagined.

She loved it too. I could see the glee on her face as she ran. I stalked her. Watching as she moved from area to area.

I held off as long as I could. My will to watch her run a bit longer outweighed the need riding me.

Then I snapped. That animalistic urge in me that I always deny took over as I chased her through the woods, thriving on her dedication to getting away.

When I captured her, I thought she would grow limp, but she surprised me. She fought tooth and nail until I claimed her as my own. As soon as I entered her, my vision grew dim as I let the instinct take me over.

I fucked her over and over until I tasted her blood on my tongue. That only made me want to fuck her harder.

Then I heard it. Her breathy moan. One word.

“Wrath.”

That’s all it took to bring me back to the real world and out of the fantasy.

Then I saw the teeth mark on her neck.

I felt a twinge of guilt, but she didn’t let me dwell on it. She squeezed me, begging for my release.

I whispered against her ear, telling her how perfect she is. How much I care about her. How much I want her. Anything I could think of to make this okay for her.

She didn’t respond with words, but her body gave me another orgasm, telling me that she was liking what I did.

When I finally came, coating her insides with my cum, I felt that tension I always feel release.

For the first time in my life, I truly let go.

I never thought I would be able to do that without killing someone.

Yet here she is.

My angel.

Slowly sliding out of her, I turn her in my arms, kissing her cheeks, her eyes, then her lips.

She mumbles something, but she's not coherent. Right now, she is so lost to pleasure.

"Come on, Sweet T. Let's get you home."

Picking her up, I carry her to my bike. When we get there, I tap her cheeks a bit to get her to open her eyes.

"I need you to stay alert with me for a little bit longer. Can you do that?"

She nods, letting me stand her on her own two feet. I keep an eye on her as I quickly dress in the clothes I left by the bike. I knew once I caught her, any clothing would only infuriate me.

Once dressed, I put her helmet on her, then my jacket. Then I climb on the bike, holding my hand out for her. She climbs on behind me, holding me even tighter than before.

"Twenty minutes and we will be at the clubhouse. Can you hold on that long?"

"Mm yes. I can hold on forever if you'd let me."

My heart skips a beat. That sounds too perfect.

I don't respond. Instead, I crank up the bike and head home.

She keeps a hold of me the entire time. I squeeze her hand every so often, with her always squeezing back.

It feels amazing to have her with me.

When we finally get back to the clubhouse, I help her off the bike before picking her up in my arms. I smile down at the mess she made of my seat. My cum, mixed with hers, glistens against the black leather.

I should be mad. It's likely to mess up the leather, but fuck if I can care about that right now.

My bike might have been my first baby, but Tara is going to be my last.

Ignoring the party raging around us, I press Tara's head into my neck as I walk through the clubhouse straight to our room. I don't stop until I have her in the bathroom, propped on the sink.

Pulling off her once-white dress, I smirk at her.

"God, this was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life," she says wistfully.

"Me too, T." I lean in, pressing a kiss to her lips.

Then I take a look at the mess I made of her neck. It's not as bad as I thought. My teeth marks are there, but only a small little bit of skin actually broke.

I rub my finger over the spot, making her shiver and wince.

"I'm sorry."

She looks me dead in the eye as she says, "I'm not. I want to do it again."

"I shouldn't have broken the skin. That was a bit far. I lost control." I try to look down, but she pulls my face to hers.

"Stop that. Everything we did, I enjoyed. In fact, I want to do it again, biting and all."

"Don't be saying shit to spare my feelings. I know I went a bit far."

"You're not listening to me. I enjoyed it. All of it. Stop trying to convince yourself my words are lies. I've never lied to you, Wrath. I won't start now."

I swallow hard and nod at her.

"Can I clean you up?" I ask.

"Of course. I'd like nothing better."

Turning, I flip on the shower before pulling a first aid kit from under the sink. Then I go to work, cleaning out the bite mark I left.

She hisses as the alcohol burns her skin.

I want to apologize again, but when I go to, the look on her face says I shouldn't.

After cleaning her wound, I pull her into the shower and wash every inch of her body. I do so gently, cataloging every bruise I made on her body.

Then I get to work kissing every single one of them. I loved that experience, but if she ever lets me touch her again like that, I will always be sure to take care of her afterward.

When we are finally bathed, I wrap her in a towel before taking her to bed.

Then I lie down, moving so her head is on my chest.

"Thank you for tonight," she whispers.

"Why are you thanking me? You are the one who let me live out my fantasy."

She presses a kiss to the tattoo on my pec. "Yeah, but I think it was a fantasy I didn't know I had. That was the most intense sex I've ever had."

"For me too," I admit.

She's quiet a moment. So long that I think she's fallen asleep.

Then she speaks up. "Can I ask you something?"

“Anything,” I tell her, meaning it.

This woman owns my heart and soul, whatever of it is left. I would give her anything.

“What is your real name?”

I chuckle. I thought she was going to ask me why I wanted to chase her. Or where I got the idea from.

Instead, she just wants to know my name.

“Terry. Terry Brooks.”

She snuggles closer to me. “I like it. Wrath fits you better though.”

With that, she falls asleep on me.

In that moment, my life couldn’t get any better.

nineteen

TARA

YESTERDAY WAS SO PERFECT. With everything that happened between me and Wrath, I finally feel like we made it over that hump that we needed to in order to make this real for us.

I couldn't imagine anything better.

I loved each and every bit of what we did last night. So much so that when I awoke this morning, I wanted to do more.

Only Wrath was already gone.

That should have been my clue to go back to bed.

Instead, I pulled my shit together and got ready for work. Once there, things didn't settle down. They had a busy day, which meant a lot of running around for me. Between answering the phones, dealing with walk-ins, and taking payments, I barely had a moment to breathe.

So when it was time to quit, I was excited. I wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. I barely waited for Midnight to tell me to go, making him laugh.

I hightailed it to the bookstore next door, only to find it closed. Ralph never closes early. Not without a note.

I wish I knew how to contact him to check in. It's so unlike him.

Instead of dwelling on it, I decided to head home, excited to see Wrath.

Only instead of making it home, that damn check engine light I forgot to get checked out mocked me from the side of the road.

"Why me?" I cry out to the empty car.

I pick up my phone, dialing Wrath, only he doesn't answer.

I leave him a quick message and consider my next move.

Before I can think on it too long, a knock at my window startles me.

Immediately, I'm on edge.

Nothing is wrong with the man, per se, but something makes me uncomfortable.

"Can I help you?" he asks through the window.

"No thank you. My boyfriend is on the way," I lie to the man.

I don't know why, but something about him is off.

"Are you sure? I can take a look. Might be an easy fix."

"No, thank you," I tell the man.

He looks like he might argue when I hear the roar of a bike. My stomach tightens, hoping it's Wrath.

I'm not that lucky though. The bike rides by without slowing.

My stomach drops.

"I insist on you allowing me to help you. This section of road is deserted. No one for miles. I would feel guilty if something bad happened to you."

I try to dial Wrath again on my phone as discreetly as possible. I need the man to answer. This guy doesn't seem like he's going to take no for an answer. I don't like it.

"Really, you should let me take a look at it. It could be done for. You don't want to be caught out on these roads late at night alone. All kinds of

terrible things happen when the sun sets.”

I force a smile. “Listen, I really appreciate it, but like I said, my boyfriend is on the way.”

“I don’t see him.” The man looks up and down the road.

I try and take in as much of his appearance as I can. I really hope I’m not staring at my murderer.

Then I hear it. The roar of the bike coming back. It pulls in behind me, the man getting off the bike, striding to my door.

“Sweet T, girl. What are you doing on the side of the road?”

I let out a relieved breath. Cueball. He was always one of my favorite men to hang out with.

Now he’s here to rescue me again.

“Yeah, my car broke down. I called Wrath,” I tell him, not mentioning that he didn’t answer.

“What about this guy?” He points at the man who hasn’t moved from his spot by my door.

“A Good Samaritan,” the man offers. “Seems you have help now. I’ll let you get on with your day.”

Once his car pulls off, I step out and give Cueball a hug.

“Whoa, girl. I don’t wanna lose my dick. You said Wrath’s on his way?”

“No. I called him, but he didn’t answer. That guy wouldn’t leave though, so I told him he was on the way. I didn’t want to let on that I lied.”

He nods in understanding. “What’s wrong with the car?”

“No idea. Check engine light came on last week, and I never got it checked out.”

He snorts. “Your old man is a mechanic. Why didn’t you have him look at it? In fact, get him to buy you a new car. This thing is a junker.”

“Come on. Betsy here has done me well. Up until the past few months, she hadn’t given me an issue.”

He laughs again. “Well, I can’t put you on the bike, but I’m not leaving you alone. How about we call the guys for a tow and play a game of cards while we wait?”

He pulls out a deck of cards from his pocket.

“Sure. Sounds like a plan.”

Ten won hands of cards later, and the tow truck pulls up, Poker hanging out the side.

“Heard we had a damsel in distress. Let’s get this thing back to the yard.”

I smile at him. “Thank you for coming to rescue me. Really. I don’t know what I would have done without you guys.”

“Why didn’t you call?” Cueball asks.

“I did. Wrath didn’t answer.”

He shakes his head. “Not him. The shop. Or any one of us guys. We would have come.”

I shrug. “I didn’t want to be a bother.”

He shakes his head at me. “You’re not a bother. You’re family. I’m telling Wrath tonight to make sure you have each and every phone number of every member. Next time you call.”

I give him a small smile. “Yes, Dad.”

He snorts. “Hey now. That’s a little weird, seeing our past. Dad is a bit much, but Daddy might be okay.”

Poker punches his arm. “Shut it unless you want to be six feet under. Wrath would kill you without a second thought for propositioning his woman.”

Cueball winks at me. “What a way to go though.”

“Enough,” I say, rolling my eyes. “Aren’t you going to get me home?”

I smile as they load up my car, bickering back and forth. By the time we make it back to the clubhouse, I have laughed more than I have in a long time.

It’s then I realize what I’m feeling.

I feel like I did when my mother was still alive.

I feel like I finally have a family again.

With Wrath as my home.



WRATH

“We all know what his goal is, now we just need to find him,” Reaper growls.

We have been in church for over an hour now discussing our Danworth issue. Fucker is slippery as fuck.

Trigger keeps getting hits on him, but every time we send someone out, there is nothing to be found. Reaper has been cycling through brothers so that not the same one goes each time.

It’s making Reaper anxious. Especially because the sightings are getting closer and closer to us.

“Chill out, man. We will protect Queen Bee,” I tell him.

He shakes his head. “We said that last time, and she was taken right here from this clubhouse. Now we are staying at my house and that makes us more vulnerable.”

“Bring her back here then,” Trigger says.

“She would want to know why. I’m not ready to go back to nightly nightmares of that man. She’s been getting so much better. I won’t put her through that again.”

“Then we need to stop being on the defensive. We need to go on the offense. Let me go rough up some Renegades and get some information,” I growl.

“We can’t start a war.”

“When the fuck is Colt coming back? I think even he would agree with me,” I grumble.

Reaper sighs, rubbing his eyes. “He’s got himself into a mess down in Texas. I guess there was some issues with our charter down there. He’s trying to straighten it out. He still hasn’t convinced that girl of his to come back either. I would just plan on him being on extended leave for now.”

“Jesus fuck. We can’t be taking on another charter’s issues. We have enough of our own. I know he knocked some chick up, but fuck, we need him

here.” I push back from the table, standing to pace.

“Chill out, bro,” Trigger warns me.

“How would you feel if someone said Tara was just some girl you knocked up?” Reaper asks.

I clench my fists. Yeah, I would cave in someone’s face.

“That’s what I thought. Colt cared enough about this woman to fly down to Texas for her. We have to expect she will be coming back as his old lady.”

“You are making a lot of assumptions. Midnight didn’t make his baby mama an old lady. What makes you think Colt will? He could be down there for the kid.”

Reaper nods. “You’re right. Except if it was the kid, he would have already figured out a way to get back here to us with the child. He’s still down there because she won’t leave. He cares for the girl.”

Stopping in my tracks, I turn and face him. “Do you think the issues he has run into are related to us?”

Reaper considers me a moment. “I don’t think so, but it’s worth checking out. I’ll reach out to Colt tonight and see what he thinks.”

“I still think we need to do something. Sitting and waiting is not a good plan,” I tell him.

He nods. “Very well. Take a few guys and ride through their territory. See if you can instigate them into starting something. You let them get that first punch though.”

“Got it, boss.” I knock on the table twice before hightailing it toward the door.

I stop, grabbing my phone. I see two missed calls from Tara, along with two messages.

I dial her immediately, but she doesn’t answer. Growling, I listen to the messages.

Hey, Wrath. I’m, um, stuck on the side of the road. I don’t know, the car kind of just stopped working. Can you come get me or send someone? Thanks.

I smile at how unsure she sounds. I’ve already grabbed my keys as I listen to the second one.

“Really, you should let me take a look at it. It could be done for. You don’t want to be caught out on these roads late at night alone. All kinds of terrible things happen when the sun sets.”

The male voice has me on edge. I don’t like hearing another man talking

to my woman, especially when the things he's saying sound like thinly veiled threats.

"Listen, I really appreciate it, but like I said, my boyfriend is on the way."

I wouldn't have been able to tell before, but now I can. She's afraid of this man.

"I don't see him."

The male says before I hear the roar of a bike on the other end. Then the call ends.

I curse, hustling out the front door only to see the woman I'm rushing to save.

She's laughing with Cueball and Poker as they unload her car from the wrecker.

"What's going on?" I call out, moving closer.

Tara moves over to me, lifting on her toes to press a kiss to my lips. It startles me, as I've never been into PDA. Then again, Tara has me doing all kinds of things I would have never done before.

"My car broke down. Cueball happened to be passing by and helped me out."

"Who was the man?" I ask her.

She looks up at me wide-eyed. "How did you know?"

"You left me a message. Did he touch you?" I reach out, brushing my fingers against her cheek.

"No. I stayed locked in my car."

"Good girl." Looking past her, I address Cueball. "Tell me what happened."

"I was driving by and noticed the car. At first I couldn't tell who it was, but I decided to swing back around to check it out. Glad I did. This business-suit-looking guy was trying to get your girl to let him check out the car."

Pulling Tara under my arm, I hug her to me. "No tats? Nothing that would indicate he was suspicious?"

"None. He even drove a BMW. I think he saw a pretty girl on the side of the road and thought he would shoot his shot."

"He creeped me out." Tara shivers in my arms.

"You need to make sure your girl has all our numbers. Seems she was going to wait for you to rescue her," Poker adds.

I frown down at her. "Phone. Now."

Holding out my hand, I wait for her to place the phone in it. When I try to turn it on, it's blank.

"It died on the way here. It's been a shitty day. Nothing seemed to go my way," she murmurs.

I press a kiss to the top of her head. "I'm sorry, Sweet T. Do you want to go relax? I'm going to take a look at your car."

"Can I come with?" She looks up at me, her eyes bright.

Fuck if I didn't want this girl with me everywhere.

"Of course you can. I'm going to help the guys get your car in the garage. Can you run and get your charger? You really do need the guys' numbers. I was in church, which is why I didn't answer. You need to have a backup and then a backup to that backup. I don't want you out there on your own."

Her eyes grow wet as she stares up at me. "You want to keep me safe?"

Leaning down, I capture her lips with mine, embracing this PDA thing.

"You're my number one priority, sweet girl. Now get going."

I turn her away from me, smacking her ass. She blushes, but runs off to do as I ask.

Moving toward her car, I tip my head at Poker and Cueball to follow.

"Where was the prospect I had on her?" I grunt to them.

"I've tried calling him. He hasn't answered. I sent a few brothers out to check it out. I didn't want to concern your old lady," Cueball says.

"She doesn't know she's being followed, does she?" Poker asks.

"No. I didn't want her to think I didn't trust her."

We start to move her car into the garage, getting it up on the lift. Before lifting it, I run a diagnostic test.

"Electrical wire failure," I mumble.

It happens sometimes, but it's rare. Especially since I know for a fact this car was good a month ago. I looked it over from head to toe while Tara slept. I needed to be sure she was safe.

"You think it's him?" Poker asks.

"Who?" Tara's voice comes from behind us.

I wince at the realization that she's going to have a ton of questions. Questions I'm not sure I should answer.

"No one. What do you have there?" I indicate the arm full of beer she is carrying.

"Drinks. Tell me what you meant." She glares at me.

"You know I can't talk club business with you," I say instead.

She crosses her arms to try and hide her shaking hands. “I’m not an idiot. You said it all ominously like it’s some big villain. It’s Natalie’s ex, isn’t it? He’s not as dead as Reaper is letting Natalie believe, is he?”

I shouldn’t be surprised. Tara was never an idiot. She has intelligence and good looks. She only chose to play dumb with the brothers.

“Sweet T,” I say, using her road name.

“No. Don’t try and soften me up. What are you hiding? Did someone mess with my car?”

“I can’t say for sure, but I think so,” I tell her.

“And the flat tire?”

I had forgotten about that.

“Cue, go get the tire in the back of the pickup and bring it here.”

As he goes to do what I ask, Poker pretends to be entertained by his phone while I move closer to Tara.

“Reaper doesn’t want her being set back. That’s why we are keeping it quiet,” I whisper to her.

“I’m not her though. All you have to do is tell me to keep my mouth shut, and I will. I don’t want to be out there blind. If there is a threat, even if you can’t tell me about it, at least give me the heads up to watch my back.” She reaches up, her arms going around my neck.

“You should always be watching your back.” I place my arms around her lower back.

“You know what I mean.”

I nod. “I do. How about this? If I think you need to be extra careful, I’ll tell you to make me an apple pie.”

She laughs, “Really?”

I shrug. “You’ve never made me one before, so you should know what it means.”

“And if I decide to start baking?”

“Then we pick something else. Anything to make you feel safer.”

“What about Natalie? She thinks she’s safe, but if he’s out there, she’s not.”

“I know. We want to keep her here, but that would mean telling her.”

She’s quiet a moment. “I could probably get her to stay here.”

“How?”

She cringes. “Things are still so new with us. Maybe I need a friend around. One to help me navigate it?”

I frown. "You're okay though, right?"

She smiles. "I'm perfect. Especially now that I have you. She doesn't need to know that though."

"As long as you promise to tell me if you ever aren't perfect."

She nods, leaning up to kiss me. I meet her, pressing my lips to hers.

"We have a problem," Cueball says, breaking us apart.

I turn and see what he means.

The tire I pulled from Tara's car looks fine. Nothing suspicious. That is, until you inspect the sidewall. It wasn't a nail that punctured it. It was a knife.

"You better start making me some apple pies, Tara."

She swallows hard. "I think I need to talk to Nat."

I pull her into me, holding her tight. "Reaper will appreciate that. I'll be in soon."

As she walks away, I watch her leave.

"They are targeting her, but why?"

"I think we need to ask everyone if anything weird has been going on. I don't think it's just her."

They both look at me solemnly.

Reaper didn't want a war, but I think we have been fighting one without realizing it.

twenty

TARA

I RAN from the garage so quickly that I didn't even think about my phone. I still have my charger in my hand even.

How can I get a hold of Natalie now?

Then I see Elenore.

Perfect.

"Hey Elenore." I smile as I move closer to the stove where she's cooking.

"Hey, honey. What are you up to?"

“I was watching the boys work on my car.”

“You too? Evelyn had car trouble last week.”

I make a mental note to mention it to Wrath.

“Yeah. Seems to be a bad time. Can I use your phone? I wanted to call Natalie and ask her to come over, but mine’s dead. I left it with Wrath, and to be honest, I couldn’t take their guy talk.” I lie easily.

She gives me a knowing look. “Have they started comparing breast sizes of famous actresses yet? That one always starts an argument.”

I laugh. “No, not quite yet. Seems I got out in time.”

She wipes off her hands before reaching into her pocket. She unlocks the phone, handing it to me.

“Thanks.”

“Anytime.”

I click on Natalie’s name and wait as it rings.

“Hey, Elenore.” Her voice fills the line.

“Actually, it’s Tara. My phone is dead. Can you come to the clubhouse for a bit? Maybe stay a couple of days with me?”

“Of course. Is something wrong?”

“Nothing.” I catch Elenore looking at me too. Fuck. I need to sell this. “I think I might be in love with Wrath and we did some stuff and I’m going to be honest I might be panicking a bit and I think I could just use a friend.”

Elenore drops her spoon at my verbal diarrhea while Natalie makes a cooing noise.

“Aww, Tara. I’m so glad you called. I’ll let Reaper know we are staying at the clubhouse for a few days. I’ll be there soon.”

My cheeks heat as Elenore continues to watch me.

“Thanks. Bye.”

Handing her back her phone, she takes it before crossing her arms.

“We have some talking to do, I think.”

“Maybe?” I squeak.

She is looking at me like she knows something. Something she shouldn’t know. Something I’m not supposed to tell anyone.

Fuck. This is bad. So bad.

“You think you are in love with Wrath? Isn’t that why you tied yourself to him?”

Thank God. I forgot that we sold it to the club like we were in love. This I can handle.

“I mean yes. I don’t know. Maybe we rushed that part a bit? All I know is that the way I feel about him now is nowhere near what I felt for him before, and it’s scaring the hell out of me.”

Not a single word of that is false. I really do feel that way, but I wouldn’t be telling anyone that. Not if I didn’t need to help keep this secret.

“Oh, honey. That’s love. Each day you will grow to love him more and more. In twenty years, you will look back and think about these early days and wonder how you could grow to love someone so much.”

I smile at her, knowing she is thinking about her relationship with Honk. They really are the couple goals of the club. They are so cute together.

“How do you deal with the insecurities?” I ask her, invested in the conversation now.

“Nothing you can do with them really. Just live each day. Every day, he will do things to help show you that you have no reason to be insecure. With time, they grow smaller and smaller until you barely think about them anymore.”

“Honk did that for you?”

She snorts. “I married a man who is named after squeezing tits. God knows I had all kinds of reservations about being with him. We had some rough times when I thought he might be cheating on me. He went out of his way to help make me feel better. Then we had Harlee, and I had issues with my body. I thought I was ugly. He loved me every single day until I remembered that I was beautiful. If you have a good man, he will do that for you.”

“Do you think I have a good one?”

“Wrath is a special case. He has kept his distance from most of the club. Sure, he participates and would die for a brother, but he has attachment aversion. You’re the first person I have seen him connect with other than Reaper and Natalie. I think if you are patient and forgiving, he will show you that he is worthy of you.”

“I’m not worried about his worthiness. It’s mine that concerns me. I was a sweetbutt. I fucked his brothers. How can he want me?”

“That’s a question for him. Ask it, and I promise you will be surprised by the answer. The best advice I can give any couple is to not hold anything inside. Holding shit inside only creates toxicity, which will poison the relationship until it dies.”

“That’s solid advice.”

“I’ve seen a thing or two.” She winks at me.

“Thank you. For this and for not treating me like less because of what I once did. You have been very kind to me.”

“No need being upset about it. Sunny will come around too. She’s just nervous because of her history with Cheryl. He messed around on her once, so she doesn’t like sweetbutts or anyone that may be a threat to her. She’s an example of what happens when a man feeds the insecurities instead of alleviating them.”

“That’s sad, but Cheryl’s gone. If it still bothers her that much, why does she stay?” I ask, thinking I would be stronger than that.

“Love. It’s the most amazing thing in the world, but it can also cripple you. Plus, now they have the baby to think about. If I had to guess, her hormones aren’t helping anything either.”

I forgot that right before Natalie came around, they had a baby.

“That’s sad,” I murmur softly.

“It is, but that’s life. Not every fairy tale is one size fits all.”

I only hope my love for Wrath builds me higher instead of tearing me down.



WRATH

After checking over Tara’s car, I called all the other old ladies in for a tune-up. They didn’t question it.

I’m glad I did. Evelyn, Sunny, and Tara all had things on their car messed with. The others were clean.

While we were busy, Trigger looked back through the security footage. It took him two days, but he finally found where Tara’s car was messed with. It was right outside of the tattoo shop. It also appeared to be the same man who

Cueball described as trying to help her that day.

It's all connected, and I don't like it.

They aren't going for Natalie this time. No, they are going for the other old ladies. The ones they feel are the weakest.

Elenore is always with a brother. If she's not with Honk, she's at the clubhouse making food or at her part-time job helping at the women's shelter. All places that we have eyes on.

Sunny goes out on her own though. She gets pissed off at Pinky and takes off, throwing a fit. He always chases but often gives her too much time to cool down.

Evelyn is at the hospital most days, so it's easy to watch her car, but she also runs an off-the-books clinic. Sometimes she's in the clinic, but she also does at-home visits for patients who can't make it down to her. She's a bleeding heart, and I'm afraid it's going to get her hurt.

Then you have my girl. The only places she goes outside the clubhouse are the tattoo shop and the bookstore next door. She's a homebody and often finds her way back here. She was the easiest to track.

That's how we found him.

My blood boiled seeing him touch my girl's stuff.

She won't be using that car again. I already have a new one on order for her. Not that I've told her. I've driven her to and from work the past two days. Not knowing where the threat is is making me itchy.

At least Reaper is in a better mood. Tara's plan to get Natalie to the clubhouse worked. Too bad it means I'm enduring endless teasing from the woman. She's asked me no less than twenty times if I'm in love with Tara.

Like I would tell her.

The only person who will hear those words from me is Tara herself. She's not ready for that yet.

Or maybe I'm not ready.

I'm not sure.

Either way, the woman is pestering me, which is only amplified when Tara is around, which with how worried I am about her being a target, means that she's always around.

That's how I ended up playing darts with them as the brothers mill around us.

"You have to tell me if he grunts in bed like he does when he works out," Natalie teases.

Tara only smiles, not answering her.

That's my girl.

Sure, we might do shit in front of others, but we keep the personal shit in private.

I like that she gets that and agrees with it too.

"Why are you so concerned with how Wrath sounds?" Bullet asks as he joins us.

He nods his head at me.

I nod back.

I haven't forgotten that he got shot protecting Natalie and Tara.

"That's not why I asked. You know that," she hisses at him.

"I'm just thinking that Pres probably won't like hearing about you thinking about how another man sounds when he nuts. That's kind of fucked up. I mean, I know these two don't mind some exhibitionism, but I have a feeling Pres will not be cool with voyeurism."

"Dammit, Jacob. That's not what I meant." Natalie is turning red as she sputters at him.

He shrugs as I reprimand her for the millionth time.

"Bullet."

"Shut up, Wrath. Otherwise I'll figure out your real name and use it every chance I can get."

Tara snorts. "Honestly, his name doesn't fit him. He's Wrath through and through."

I smirk at her. "No way you'll be calling my government name while I rail you."

She shakes her head. "I know it's a privilege of being an old lady, but if it's all the same to you, I prefer Wrath."

I stare her in the eye as she says it. It's more than that. She knows that my name isn't something that I like. It's a memory of who I once was.

She gets me.

Fuck, I think I really do love the girl.

"Whatever you say. I'm just saying I'm allowed to tease you both." Natalie huffs.

"Tease away, Queen Bee. Just be careful. People might start wondering why you wanna know things," Bullet adds.

She glares at him. "I swear I am going to beat your ass. Wrath is teaching me how."

Tara moves closer to me, leaning against my chest. I press a kiss to the top of her hand. She discreetly takes my beer, drinking a bit of it before handing it back.

Ever since she admitted she knows I don't drink, she always drinks my shit to keep up appearances. She doesn't have to, but I love that she does.

"You don't want this smoke, Queen Bee," Bullet taunts.

He's going to get his ass handed to him. I don't think Natalie is ready to take him on, but Reaper will when he hears him shit talking.

"Wrath," Reaper calls from across the room.

I glance over, seeing the serious look on his face.

Fuck.

"I'll be back," I whisper in Tara's ear. "Love you."

I freeze.

What the fuck just came out of my mouth?

She freezes too. Then, slowly, she looks up at me, her eyes wide.

I want to say something, but I can't. What can I say?

I could take it back, but the more it sits there, the more I don't want to.

Instead, I just press a kiss to her lips before striding away without another word.

That was stupid. So stupid.

I should have waited.

It's too soon.

She probably thinks I'm an idiot.

Shaking off my idiocy, I step into church, closing the door behind me.

"What's up?"

"Sunny went to the store but ended up at a bar. One in Vegas. We have Rick, one of the prospects on her. I can't get a hold of Pinky. I need you to take Bullet and ride out there. We are aiming for stealth here. We don't want to start a war over some bullshit."

"Fucking woman. She is getting worse," I curse.

"All we can do is support our brother and his old lady. That means dragging her ass back here and explaining again that going to Vegas is a no-go right now."

"She's going to get herself killed."

"It's possible. Elenore says she started sliding deeper into a depression when you claimed Tara. The idea that a sweetbutt is now one of them got to her."

I rub my face. “I’m not apologizing for claiming my woman. She’s going to have to nut up. She’s making shit harder for herself than she has to. If she keeps accusing him of cheating, one day he is going to have enough. I don’t think he will cheat again, but he will fucking leave. A man can only take so much.”

Reaper gives me a sad smile. “Like I said. All we can do is support them the best we can. Go get the girl before she runs into someone she shouldn’t.”

“Yes, sir. Watch my girl.”

“Of course.”

Leaving the office, I head back over to our little group. Tara peeks over at me, her cheeks heating.

Yeah, we are going to have to talk about my slipup, but not now.

“Bullet, you’re with me,” I tell him.

He straightens up, losing the humor he had in him before.

Tara moves closer, hugging me around my center. I wrap her in my arms.

“No apple pies?” she whispers.

I smirk at her. “No apple pies. Sunny ran off to a bar. We just got to go get her.”

She frowns. “Can I go with you then?”

“It’s not a good idea,” I tell her immediately.

“If she’s at a bar, I assume she drove herself. How are you going to get her home? Besides, I think she will listen more to a woman.”

I think back to what Reaper said about us being the cause.

“I’m not sure that’s true. I don’t think she likes that I claimed you, Sweet T.”

“She doesn’t. She’s insecure. I get it. That’s why I should go. I can help.”

I look over at Bullet. If we run into trouble, we would have two women to watch out for, but if Sunny is drunk, it wouldn’t hurt to have some extra help.

Against my better judgment, I nod. “Fine. Go put jeans and a long-sleeved shirt on. And leave your cut on.”

She smiles. “Yes, sir.”

I smack her ass as she walks away.

twenty-one

TARA

HEARING Sunny is at a bar alone tugged at my heart strings. Before, I would have probably not thought twice about it, but after my discussion with Elenore, I see her in a different light.

She's struggling and no one is even trying to help her. They all just let her indulge in her behavior and bail her out when shit hits the fan.

She needs a friend.

She isn't going to want it to be me, but that's too bad.

Climbing off the back of Wrath's bike, I wait for him to lead the way.

That was one of the stipulations of coming. I had to let him be my human shield in the event something bad happens. Bullet walks behind me, effectively closing me in.

The bar Sunny chose isn't one I would have thought. It's not some biker bar. It's actually pretty classy. I see more business suits than jeans. We stick out like a sore thumb.

"There she is." Wrath points to Sunny at the end of the bar, sipping on a drink while some man watches her from two stools down.

Wrath makes a beeline for her. When she notices him, her eyes grow wide.

"Of course he sent the scary one," she mumbles to herself.

Wrath only folds his arms as he stares at her.

"Jesus, do you have to look like a serial killer? Go sit over there." I wave at a stool a bit away.

He doesn't move.

"Great. He brought his bitch," she slurs.

Wrath tenses, but I pat his chest.

"Down, boy. We need to have a chat. If you are going to stay for it, sit down and chill out."

He grunts at me, but pulls out the stool beside Sunny. He indicates that I should sit before taking the seat next to me.

"Why are you here?" Sunny whines.

"I thought you'd prefer to deal with me than the brute here. Want to tell me why we are at a bar in Renegade territory?"

She scoffs. "Why would I want to talk to you? You're part of the problem."

"How is that? I have never once flirted with your old man. I kept my distance and showed you respect."

She waves toward Wrath. "He claimed you. That means the other girls will be rabid. They all think they can claim a brother and be spoiled the rest of their lives. I can hardly even go to the clubhouse anymore. The girls have gotten out of control."

Sighing, I shake my head. "I had nothing to do with that. Wrath claimed me, but that doesn't mean that we are at fault for how others act." Turning, I flag down the bartender. "Two shots of whatever she's having."

Wrath growls behind me, but I only look at him and quirk an eyebrow.

“Got something to say, big guy?”

He wisely stays silent.

Turning back to Sunny, I nod to the shots.

“Take one, then tell me what the real issue is. We both know that it’s not the females. It’s your man. So hurry up and take the shot so we can go.”

She frowns at me a moment before taking the shot.

“Good. Now talk.”

Her eyes tear up. “I can’t handle the pressure. It’s too much. When we got together, I was the hot little mama he wanted to score with. I made him work for it though. When he finally got me, I thought that was it. He made me his old lady and it would be happily ever after. Then the sweetbutts would flirt with him right in front of me. I wanted to say something, but I didn’t grow up in this life. So I let it go. The more I did, the more they would do it. Now it’s like no matter where I look, he’s always flirting with someone.”

“Have you told him how you feel?” I ask.

She lets out a humorless laugh. “Whenever I try to explain myself, he gets defensive. He stepped out on me once, back before I was his old lady. He feels like every time I bring up the women around him, I’m accusing him of doing it again.”

“Do you think he has done it again?” I ask.

She bites her lip, thinking it over. “I want to believe he hasn’t.”

I nod once. “So the issue is that your trust in him was broken. Instead of having open communication, you both are acting like this is a war and you are on opposite sides.”

She looks up at me. “Yeah. I think that’s exactly it. I don’t think he’s listening to me.”

“You aren’t listening to him either though. Let me ask you this, what do you want?”

She’s quiet for several moments before taking the second shot.

“I want him. I love him, but I need something to change. I can’t keep going on the way we are. It’s killing me.”

“I know you don’t like me, or at least what I represent in your head, but if you are willing, I would like to talk about this some more tomorrow when you are sober. Maybe I can help you figure out what to do next?”

She hiccups. “I’m sorry. You are being so nice to me, and I’ve been such a bitch to you.”

“It’s okay. You have been bottling a lot up inside. I get it. Sometimes it’s

easier to make someone else the villain instead of looking at what is going on inside.”

“You are so smart. Where did you learn all of this?”

My heart pangs at the memory of my mother. She was my best friend. My guidance.

I can’t believe she’s been gone for so long. I’m so grateful I’m finally out of the bottomless pit and onto a better life.

“My mom. She taught me how to process my emotions and the importance of communication.”

“That’s great. I wish I had a mother like that,” she says wistfully.

Changing the subject to alleviate the pain in my chest, I ask her, “Why did you choose to come to a bar way over here?”

“I thought that it might make him come find me. Instead he sent you,” she murmurs.

I flag down the bartender as she sways in her seat. “Water.”

He nods.

“He didn’t send us,” Wrath says.

I glare at him. She doesn’t need to know that.

Just as I expected, she starts crying.

“He didn’t? See, he doesn’t even care enough to come for me. You should just leave me here.”

“Shh.” I pull her in for a hug. “Of course he cares. He’s probably out there looking for you as we speak. He just doesn’t know where you went.”

“Well…” Wrath starts, but I shoot him a glare.

He wisely shuts his fucking mouth.

“Let’s get you home. Where are your keys? I’ll drive you,” I tell her.

She pulls her keys out of her purse, handing them to me.

I turn to the bartender. “Did she have a tab open?”

He nods.

“Good. Give her the card back. He is paying.” I point at Wrath.

He only shakes his head at me but pulls out his wallet.

As he settles the tab, I help Sunny stand. When Wrath is ready, we make our way toward the door, Sunny using me as a crutch.

In the parking lot, I see one of the prospects waiting for us on his bike.

“All quiet so far,” he tells Wrath.

Wrath only nods, guiding us to Sunny’s car.

We get Sunny in and buckled before he leads me to the driver’s door.

He's about to speak when the sound of motorcycle engines in the distance cuts in.

"Fuck. Get in the car and go. Fast. Do not stop until you get to the clubhouse. Understood?"

I nod.

He presses a chaste kiss to my lips.

He goes to turn, but I grab his hand. "Wrath."

He looks over at me. "You need to hurry. I don't want them seeing you."

"I know. Just...apple pies."

He cups my cheek. "You too, Sweet T. You too."

After one last kiss, he helps me into the car.

My last view of him is him standing there, watching me drive away.

I have this rock in my stomach telling me something isn't right.

Please come home to me.



WRATH

Watching my girl drive off without me is one of the worst feelings in the world. I hate that I can't be there to make sure she gets home safe.

I nod to the prospect.

He hops on his bike, following the retreating car.

At least they will have a head start.

Typing out a quick message to Reaper, I pocket my phone.

Only a minute after they leave, the bikes start pouring into the parking lot. At least fifteen of them.

All Renegades.

I curse as I see a few peel off to head the way Tara went. She better be safe.

This isn't going to be fun.

I look over to Bullet.

He looks as solemn as I do.

"What do we have here, boys?" one of the men calls out.

As he stands, taking his helmet off, I recognize him.

Pry, the vice president of the Renegades.

"Thought we would come see what it's like in the slums. Not surprised to find you here," I spout off.

He only laughs. "I forgot how arrogant you are, Wrath. What's it been? Five years since we last saw each other?"

I grit my teeth. I once faced him in the cage back when I was doing underground fighting. I won, but he didn't like that. He found a pipe lying on the ground and attacked me while my back was turned. He got kicked out of the ring.

The concussion that followed ensured I wouldn't be able to get into the ring again. Not unless I wanted to risk my life.

"Hear you got you an old lady now. A fine piece of ass from what I've been told. She's fucked practically all your brothers too. Seems like little Wrath wanted himself a carbon copy of his mommy," he taunts.

My fists clench harder.

He can say what he wants, but he best leave my woman out of it.

"If you wanted a rematch, all you had to do was ask. I wouldn't mind kicking your ass again."

He snorts. "You think you could take me? You only won back then because the crowd interfered. They threw shit in the ring while we were going at it."

"That's part of the underground atmosphere. Can't handle the heat, stay out of the kitchen, Pry boy."

I feel my phone vibrating in my pocket. I hope it's Reaper saying he's almost here. If not, then Bullet and I are likely dead men walking right now.

"So cocky. We aren't here for a walk down memory lane though. My boss has a message for your boss. Seems he took something that doesn't belong to him, then tried to kill him. Mr. Danworth doesn't take kindly to that."

I tilt my head at him. "I thought the only man you answered to was your pres. I haven't seen him in a while, come to think of it. Did you let a snake-oil salesman in a suit take over your club? How weak of you."

“You have no idea what you are even talking about. The Lotus have infected this area for long enough. When we are finished with you, it will be like you never existed,” Pry spews.

“If you say so, buddy. I get it. You can’t make a decision on your own. Always a lap dog. Makes sense.”

He takes a step forward. “Keep it up, and I’ll just put a bullet between your eyes.”

“Isn’t that the plan anyway? The weak man’s way out? Hey, I’m not afraid of death. If you want to look weak in front of your men by shooting me instead of facing me like a man, why not?”

I’m lying through my teeth. I am afraid, but not of death. I’m afraid of leaving Tara behind on her own. If I had the chance to reach for my gun right now, I would. I would end this so swiftly that no one saw it coming.

My words are meaningless to me, but they hold weight with the men around Pry. I can see how they are all looking at him now. I’m sure letting a man like Danworth take over wasn’t an easy pill to swallow. Why would it be? The man has barely been in their lives and now they hand him the club?

Add in the fact that I know at least one of the men standing in front of me witnessed Pry losing that fight several years ago, and I’ve rocked their trust in their leader.

“I have nothing to prove to you.”

I shrug and hold out my arms. “You’re right. I’m not anything to you. Them though?” I nod at his men. “They are different.”

He looks over at his men. He can see the same thing I do. They are losing respect for the man standing before them.

Pry looks back at me, anger in his eyes. “Alright. We will fight then. To the death this time.”

I let a smirk fill my face. “My fucking pleasure.”

This isn’t the fair fight we attempted underground.

This is a street fight. All rules are off.

I don’t need to win it though. I only need to stall for enough time for Reaper and the guys to get here.

I throw the first punch, hitting him in the side of the head. Then I throw my second, barely missing his throat.

He spins, landing his own fist against my kidney.

Fuck, that hurt, but I can’t focus on it. I kick out, attempting to take him to the ground. He jumps in time to miss it, but it brings him closer to me.

I wrap him up in one arm and start wailing on his head. His hands come up to protect him a moment. Then he takes advantage of the position, elbowing me in the gut hard enough to make me gag.

I let go of him, jumping back.

If I were truly trying to get this over with quickly, I would have held on. I would have hit him until he is no longer breathing.

I need time though. Time before his guys jump me.

I catch Bullet out of the corner of my eye. A couple guys took to beating up on him as our fight continues. He is trying to hold his own, but I know he won't last forever.

No one can.

Growling, I duck before Pry can land another hit on me.

We keep exchanging hit after hit until the sweat gathers on my brow.

Pry looks as if he's starting to lose some gas. His hits become sloppier. It's obvious he doesn't take his workouts seriously.

Not like me. I practically lived in the gym before Tara.

Momentarily, my mind drifts to her. I hope she's okay.

It gives Pry the opening he needs. He lands a hit directly to my nose. I hear the crunch as the blood starts pouring.

Fucker broke my nose.

It almost makes me lose control. I hate the taste of my own blood.

I hold it together though. Just long enough to return the favor.

Pry takes a few steps back as he holds his nose. I spit blood on the ground as I move toward him.

"You're going to fucking pay for that. I'm going to kill you," he yells at me.

"Are we talking or are we fighting?" I taunt him. "If you need a break, I'd be happy to let you have one."

He goes feral. He comes at me throwing wild punches, barely making any connecting hits with the way he is moving.

Poor fool. You can't fight with emotions. You have to do it with focus.

It only takes one well-landed hit to his sternum to have him gasping for air as he steps back.

He glares at me as he sucks in a breath. This is usually when I would end the fight. Take the KO.

I can't end it yet though.

So instead, I let him move toward me once again, not ducking when he

throws his next punch.

I get him with one of my own, smiling as he grunts.

The rumble of motorcycles has me smiling wider. Reinforcements are here.

Pry stumbles a little as he moves to attack me again. I barely see it. The glint of silver in his hand.

He punches at me again, hitting my side. I ignore the burn of pain, laying his ass out on the ground.

Chaos breaks out around me as I punch Pry over and over again. It's not until I feel a hand on my shoulder that I stop.

"He's dead, brother. We need to go. Tara ran into some issues on the way to the clubhouse."

Tara. I need to get to Tara.

I stand and take a few steps, but I'm weak.

Shaky.

"Wrath." Reaper's voice sounds farther away.

I drop to my knees.

Why is it so hard to breathe?

I struggle to suck in air as I fall face-first into the dirt.

I'm going to die.

I can feel it.

In that moment, all I can think about is her.

Tara.

I hope she forgives me for leaving her alone.

twenty-two

TARA

I'M JITTERY AS FUCK.

It doesn't help that Sunny is crying in the passenger seat talking gibberish. She is not a very good drunk. She's actually annoying as fuck.

She has no idea what's going on though.

I do.

Wrath is back there fighting those men to protect us.

I glare over at Sunny.

This is her fault. Her dumbass had to pick a bar in the Renegades'

territory. She better figure out her issues with her man, or I might end up ripping some hair out of her head.

We are almost back to Nye County when several bikes come up from behind us.

My heart races.

Please be our guys.

The prospect speeds up until he's next to me.

"Keep driving. No matter what. Get somewhere safe," he yells over the wind.

Fuck.

He slows back down to get behind me.

Then all hell breaks loose. Several of the bikers come up beside my car as shots begin to ring out. Sunny is still hunched down in the seat, so I don't have to worry about her, but I duck my own head, hoping to not get hit by a stray bullet.

The roads are dark, so it's hard to see, but I manage to stay on the road.

Metal meeting pavement hits my ears, and I'm too afraid to see who it was. I have to hope the prospect is still with us.

Picking up my phone, I dial Wrath. He doesn't answer.

I curse, dialing Reaper.

I curse when he doesn't answer either.

Dialing Natalie, I let out a relieved breath when she finally answers.

"Hey, T, what's up?"

"I'm in trouble, and I need you to let whoever is available know that I need help. At least five Renegades are chasing me in Sunny's car. The prospect was following, but I have no clue if he's still back there. I'm going to head toward Midnight's shop. It's the closest place."

"I'll get them there. Hang tight and be safe."

Hanging up with her, I focus on the road. Another shot rings out, but this time, it hits my tire.

The car swerves, but I'm able to get it back on track.

Please let me make it there in one piece.

"What's going on?" Sunny slurs.

Then she throws up on the floorboard.

The smell of vomit makes me gag, but I choke it down.

I can't worry about her right now.

As we get closer to the tattoo shop, the bikes back off.

Rolling right up onto the sidewalk, I rush around the car to get Sunny. I curse when I see the tattoo shop locked up.

The bookshop is open though. Pulling her through the door, I lock it behind me. Then I turn, finding a startled Ralph.

“What’s going on, Tara?”

I can feel the tears streaming down my face. “Some bad guys are after us.”

He nods once. “In the back you go. Lock yourself in the closet. Don’t worry about me.”

I watch as he moves back to the front door, unlocking it.

It makes sense. It’s all glass. There is no way that lock is going to keep them away. Maybe this will at least save his store a little.

I pull Sunny down the hall into the back room. I find the closet, pressing her inside it. Then I stack some boxes in front of it. She will be safe at least.

Then I head back toward the opening, just in time for two men in Renegades cuts to enter the store.

From the back storage room, I have a direct line of sight to the register.

“Hey, old man. Where did they go?”

“Do you gentlemen want to purchase a book?” Ralph asks, ignoring their question.

I cringe when I see one pull out a gun and point it at him.

“I’m going to ask you one more time. Where did the girls go? We can do this the easy way or the hard way. Your choice.”

I dart from the backroom behind one of the bookcases. Then I pick my way down the aisle until I’m at the encyclopedias. I grab the biggest hard copy and circle around to the front.

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” Ralph says, not showing a shred of emotion.

He knows they saw us run in here, but he is still lying for us. Still covering so that we don’t get caught.

My heart aches at the loyalty he is showing right now.

Not that I think he would turn over a stranger to these men, but I know he cares about me. He’s the grandfather I never had.

“Wrong answer.”

Before the man can fire a shot, I sprint at him, swinging the encyclopedia wildly. I hit him over the head, stunning him enough to drop his gun to protect it. The other man grabs me, making me drop the book.

Ralph jumps into action, grabbing the gun from the floor. I expect him to use it on the men, but he doesn't. Instead he pistol-whips the one on the floor still holding his head. He crumples to the floor.

"Bad move, old man," the one holding me says.

Then he holds out his hand, the black metal shining under the fluorescent lights.

I scream out as the loud bang echoes through the store.

Ralph's eyes widen as he looks down, the red already blossoming on his white button-down shirt.

He falls to the floor, his eyes growing vacant.

There's this shrill sound clouding my ears. It's not until the man behind me covers my mouth that I realize that it's me. My screams. My heart breaks as I watch a man I have grown to love and care for fade before my eyes.

Tears pour freely down my face as the man behind me puts his gun away, pulling out his cell phone.

"I found one of them. The one with their sergeant. Okay. Yeah. I'm coming out."

When he hangs up, I put all my effort into getting out of his arms. I scratch. Bite. Headbutt. Anything I can do to get out of his hold, but he is strong. Stronger than I am.

I regret not taking more classes with Wrath and Natalie. Maybe I could have gotten out of this.

Wrath is going to lose it when he realizes they've taken me. He's going to burn the world to get to me. He's likely going to die because of it too.

That is just the icing on the shit cake. We are all going to die because of these men.

Then the body behind me grunts before falling, taking me with him.

I squeak out a noise before looking up.

The prospect who followed me from the bar stands above me, blood covering his torn-up arm.

He nods at me once. "Where is Sunny?"

I point to the back of the store.

"Go get her. I took care of the other two behind the store, and I shot one on the road. We need to get going before they send someone else."

I stand, moving toward the back, stopping when I find Ralph's body. I collapse next to him, cupping his face.

"I'm so sorry. So, so sorry. This is my fault. I loved you, Ralph." I lean

down, pressing a kiss to his forehead before closing his eyes.

If we make it out of this, I am going to make sure Ralph gets the best send-off ever. He deserves it for the way he selflessly gave his life for my own.

When we make it back to the closet, Sunny is snoring inside.

“You’re going to need to take her. If I touch her right now, I might strangle her,” I tell the prospect.

He nods, moving to pick her up. I end up helping though, when I see him wince.

I can suck it up for him.

Sunny begins to wake up, taking some of her weight off us.

“What happened?”

I want to kill her, but I take a deep breath instead.

When we step outside, I hear the rumbling of a motorcycle. It used to be a comfort, but today it isn’t. Today it’s causing me anxiety.

Then I see him.

Midnight.

“I got here as soon as I could,” he tells us as he makes his way over to grab Sunny from us.

I lean into his side, my tears flowing freely.

“Ralph is dead. He’s gone. They killed him.”

He uses one hand to cup the back of my head as he holds Sunny against him.

“Ralph was a good man. He died honorably. We will make sure he gets a full brother send-off.”

I suck in a sob and nod.

Ralph would have never joined the club, but dying for me made him an honorary member. He might not have wanted a member send-off, but it helps ease some of that pain inside me to know he will get it.

Midnight pulls away as he moves Sunny to the prospect’s bike.

“Sunny. I need you to get on the bike with this prospect. He’s going to take you home.”

She nods. “Okay. I can do that. Give Pinky a taste of his own medicine. It’s going to piss him off so much. Let’s go.”

I grit my teeth as I watch her get on behind the prospect before they drive off.

It pisses me off that she’s excited about the prospect of pissing off her old

man and not upset over what just went down.

“Is he going to hurt the prospect?” I ask Midnight. “He’s hurt enough.”

He shakes his head. “He knows what happened tonight. He’s pissed off at her for running off and causing this, but he won’t be mad at a member for following an order.”

“Good.” I turn to him finally. “Where’s Wrath?”

Midnight grimaces, making my heart drop.

“Where is he, Midnight? Where is my old man?”

He’s quiet a moment.

“He’s on the way to the hospital.”

My heart starts beating wildly.

“Take me to him.” I move toward his bike.

He nods, handing me his helmet before getting on. Once I’m behind him, he turns to speak to me over his shoulder.

“Prepare yourself, Sweet T. It’s bad.”

“Is he still breathing?” I manage to say.

He only gives me a tight smile, turning on the motorcycle.

You better still be alive, Wrath, I think to myself.

I never even got to tell him I loved him.



WRATH

“Put pressure on it. I’m doing the best I can.”

“I’m going to have to pinch off the artery. He’s losing too much blood.”

“Stop moving so erratically. You’re going to kill him.”

“Out of the way. He needs surgery.”

“Now we wait and see. He has to want to live.”

It’s the oddest feeling being aware of your surroundings but not being able to interact with them. I can hear the voices float around me. I know they are talking about me, but I can’t speak.

I want to open my eyes, but they are refusing to cooperate.

In fact, I can’t feel anything.

I try to move my toes, fingers, anything. Not a thing moves.

All I can do is listen to the people around me.

Especially her.

My Sweet T.

She’s crying. Ever since I tuned into the real world again, that’s all I could hear. Her sobbing. It makes me want to claw right out of my skin.

I hate knowing she’s hurting, and I can’t do anything about it.

“Thank goodness Dr. Moore was there. He saved your friend’s life. It’s going to be a long road, but he is healthy. If he has something worth fighting for, he will be okay.”

“He does. That’s his old lady right there. He won’t leave her alone.”
Reaper’s voice finds its way to my ear.

The voice I assume belongs to the doctor doesn’t speak again.

The room grows quiet as my mind tries to hold on to the present.

I have no idea how time is passing. One minute I can hear sounds in the room, then the next there is a void. It’s jarring.

Tara’s voice is always the one I hear when I come back though. Always talking to me. I imagine she hasn’t left my side.

I hope she’s taking care of herself. I don’t want her pining for me and forgetting to eat or sleep.

Still, her voice is a comfort.

“Today is the funeral for Ralph. I don’t want to leave you, but I need to be there for him. Sunny agreed to sit with you. I know she caused all of this, but she’s gotten herself sober. Or it seems that way. She’s going to let me know if you wake up. I hope you wake up. I need you too much. If you die before I get to tell you that I love you, I’m going to come into the afterlife and murder your ass all over again.” She loses some of the sass as the sadness

creeps back into her voice. “I miss you. Please come back to me.”

I must float off for a bit because, the next time I’m aware, Tara is here again. She’s talking, but not necessarily to me. It takes me a moment to realize what she’s doing.

She’s reading to me.

“Jason realizes then that he misses her. He needs Charlene in his life. He rushes from the room, desperate to catch up to her before she’s gone for good. ‘Charlene,’ he bellows out into the woods. When he receives no response, he runs faster, harder.”

I recognize the names. This is the book I had her read to me once. I try to speak to her. I beg my body to work.

I’m here. Baby, I’m right here.

“It’s silly that they fought it for so long. Life is so short. They shouldn’t be running from one another. I’m glad you got your head out of your ass and claimed me for real.” Her voice rings in my ears.

I didn’t try to run from her, did I? I held myself back, but I never had a chance to run from her. Once she came into my life front and center, she quickly became my everything.

“How is he?” Reaper’s voice breaks through my thoughts.

“Same. No change. I thought his heart would start to race if I started reading the spicier scenes, but nothing.”

Damn. I missed the spicy scenes. I must have still been out. I think it’s these drugs in my system. Each time I become aware, I can feel a little bit more of my body, but it feels like something is holding me back. Something is keeping me from really being present.

“Do you think he can hear us?” Tara whispers so quietly I barely hear it.

“The doctors seem to think so,” Reaper replies.

“What do you think?”

“Wrath is my best friend. I know him better than anyone, with the exception of maybe you. He is in there right now fighting like hell to get back to you, Sweet T. He loves you even if he hasn’t been able to say it.”

“He did say it.”

“What?”

“Before we left to get Sunny. He said it, and I didn’t say it back. I was too shocked to reply to him.”

“He knows. Trust me, he knows. If he doesn’t, tell him now. I don’t know if he can hear you, but if he can, he deserves to know. We love him like a

brother in the club, but he has never had the kind of love you give him. Tell him about it until you are blue in the face. Make sure he knows what he is fighting for.”

“Thank you, Reaper.” Tara sniffles. “I think I needed to hear that. Where’s Natalie?”

“She wanted to come, but I have her on lockdown. I’ll bring her by later. I wanted to stop in after doing my rounds.”

“Okay. Thank you. I’m sure he appreciates it.”

“We are here for you too, you know. You’re family. I’ll have one of the prospects bring you some food in a bit.”

Tara doesn’t say another word for several minutes.

Then I feel it. A slight tingle in my hand. I try to move toward it, but I can’t. I want to scream.

“I’m here, Wrath. I love you. If you need something to fight for, let it be me. Fight for me. Don’t leave me alone. I only just got you. I haven’t had near enough time to love you.”

As her voice begins to fade, I fight tooth and nail to get back to her.

It’s no use though.

The void awaits me.

This is my punishment for all my wrongdoings. The torture I must endure.

I only hope I can last long enough to find my way back to her.

My entire world.

My Sweet T.

twenty-three

TARA

IT'S BEEN two weeks since Wrath has been in a coma.

Coma.

What a weird word. I never thought about it much before, but now I can't help but hear it in my head.

At first, he was in a medically induced coma. They explained that they were keeping him asleep because he had extensive damage inside that needed to heal. It would heal faster if he stayed under, according to them.

I wanted him to get better, so I didn't question it.

Then they started weaning him off the medicine. He's now breathing on his own, which they say is good, but he hasn't so much as twitched.

Each day he isn't awake is another day I imagine him never coming back to me.

It's driving me crazy. I need him here with me.

"I brought you a burger from that diner you like. I figured the guys are probably only picking you up fast food," Sunny tells me.

She's been here every single day checking on me.

At first, I was angry with her. So angry that I slapped her straight across the face. She didn't attack me back though.

She only cried as she apologized to me.

She has been apologizing to me ever since.

She said as soon as she woke up the next day, she remembered bits and pieces of the night before. Then someone told her about Wrath. She rushed to the hospital because of her guilt.

When she saw me, she broke down. I broke down with her.

I can hold on to the anger I had for her, but that wouldn't do either of us any good. Was she the reason that we were on the wrong side of town? Yes, but she's not the one who did this to Wrath.

That filthy Renegade is the one to blame. I wish I could find him and slowly cut his heart out, like I feel mine is being torn from me.

Unfortunately for me, Reaper told me Wrath took him from this world.

Good.

He didn't win.

My Wrath did.

"Thank you. I appreciate you checking in on me."

I told her after her second visit she didn't have to keep coming. She said it's what friends do.

Somehow, through all of this trauma, she has decided we are going to be friends.

I hope she sticks to it. She looks much prettier now that she's getting more sleep and laying off the alcohol.

"He's still not moving?" she asks, moving around the bed to sit in the empty chair.

I don't move from my spot at his side.

I've pretty much moved into his room. They tried to kick me out once,

but then Reaper had a talk with someone and they wheeled me in a cot to sleep on.

Not that I've slept on it. I usually sleep right here in this chair. My hand in his with my head next to him on the bed.

I don't want him waking up without me here.

"Not yet." I force a smile on my face.

I'm barely holding on.

"He will. I know it." She looks down, playing with a string on her T-shirt. "I'm going to go to a rehabilitation center."

"You are?"

She nods, looking at me. "You were right. I know I was drunk that night, but I still remember what we talked about. We are stuck in this cycle. I've been having withdrawals from alcohol. I have to take a shot in the morning just to function normally. I don't want to be this way anymore."

"I'm proud of you. I'll come visit you as often as they let me."

She gives me a genuine smile. "I'm going to wait until Wrath wakes up. I want to be here for you until then. I'm managing right now. I'm not going to fall off the deep end again."

"How does Pinky feel about it?"

"He doesn't want me being away from him and the baby, but I told him I need this. Well, I wrote it to him in a letter. Elenore suggested it."

"That was a good idea. I think that you two need to learn to communicate a bit before you try talking again. Nobody wins when you're screaming over one another. Besides, the baby will be in safe hands. We'll all help out."

"I wish I would have seen that sooner." She looks over at Wrath.

I know she feels immense guilt for what happened to him. I wish I could erase that for her, but I can't. No matter how many times I tell her that it's not her fault, she doesn't believe it.

"Don't be so hard on yourself all the time. Everything will work out. Wrath wouldn't leave me alone. I know it. He's going to wake up." I force cheer into my tone.

It's hard to be strong though.

"He will. I'm going to run by the clubhouse and check on things there. Bullet is finally walking normal again."

Bullet was hurt pretty badly, from what I'm told. I haven't seen him since he doesn't come visit. I heard they sprained his ankle while they beat him to a pulp. He's lucky to be alive.

So is Wrath.

“Tell him I said hi.”

She nods before leaving.

Once the door shuts, I turn to Wrath, kissing his hand.

“Well, maybe this means we won’t be picking Sunny up from any bars from now on. I think they can do it. What do you think?”

I don’t expect a response. I just like talking to him. It makes me feel like he is here with me.

“Do you want to watch TV? Or would you rather I read to you? I bet you want me to read all the dirty parts, don’t you?” I tease.

That’s when I feel it. A twitch in his hand.

My heart skips a beat.

“Wrath? Can you hear me?”

It twitches more.

I jump out of my chair, pressing the nurse’s button. Then I lean over him.

“I’m right here. Right next to you.”

Then his eyes flutter.

Once.

Twice.

Then I’m staring into them as he opens them wide.

A smile covers his face.

“Sweet T.”



WRATH

“Sweet T,” I manage to rasp.

It’s hard to understand, but she must hear me. She starts to cry.

I want to wipe her tears away, but I feel so weak.

“I’m right here.” She sobs, her lips kissing mine.

I try to kiss her back, but I don’t have the energy.

Why the fuck am I still in this bed? I should have my girl in my arms. Instead, I’m barely able to move.

“Shh. Stay still. The nurse will be here any minute.”

As if she summoned her, the nurse strides through the door.

“He’s awake. That’s amazing news. Let me page the doctor.” She messes with something before placing it back in her scrubs. “Here, how about we sit you up?”

She moves to the side of the bed. After a moment, the bed begins to move, propping me up.

I lick my lips, trying to speak again.

“Tara.”

“Oh goodness. You need some water. I’ll go grab you some ice chips.” The nurse leaves the room.

I haven’t taken my eyes off my girl though. She’s still holding my hand, tears falling freely down her face.

I try to lift my hand. She must know what I want because she cups my hand to her face.

“I love you. I’m sorry I didn’t say it before, but I need you to know I love you,” she manages between her sobs.

“Shh,” I try to tell her.

That only makes her cry harder. All I can do is hold her face, watching as my girl breaks.

When the nurse finally comes back, she hands the ice chips to Tara.

“Feed him a little at a time while I check his vitals.”

Tara does as she asks. The ice against my lips sends a chill down my spine. I eat several before trying to speak again.

“Tara.”

I sound much better this time.

“There he is,” the nurse pipes in. “Your wife here hasn’t left your side once. You’ve got you a good one. The doctor will be in here in a minute. He will talk to you about what’s been going on and what your recovery will be like.”

I ignore her. The only thing I care about is what she said about Tara.

Your wife.

Tara is my wife in all senses of the word.

The door clicks softly behind the nurse.

“Come closer,” I tell Tara.

She climbs onto the edge of the bed, resting her head carefully on my chest.

“Where am I hurt?” I ask her.

My entire body aches, so it’s hard to tell.

“Left side. We have matching scars now.”

I grunt.

“Too soon?”

“Too fucking soon. Now fill in the blanks for me, Sweet T.”

“That guy stabbed you. I guess he hit an artery or vein or something. I’m not really sure. Thankfully, Reaper had called Travis, Evelyn’s doctor buddy. He was only minutes behind the guys. He was able to stop the bleeding. He saved your life.”

I slowly pet her head as she stays on my chest.

“Pry?” I ask.

“What?” She lifts her head.

I push her back down.

“The man who stabbed me.”

She’s quiet a moment. “You killed him. With your bare fists. Is that why you are called Wrath?”

I chuckle, which turns into a cough. She sits up, giving me some more ice chips. When she’s done, I smile up at her.

“I’m called Wrath because when you cross me, you will feel my wrath. I’m ruthless when I fight. At least that’s what most of the brothers think. Truth is, Reaper named me Wrath after I killed my father. He said my wrath

against the man who hurt me and my mom was so powerful it practically burned that house down on its own.”

“Well, it fits you. That wrath kept you alive. Kept you coming back to me,” she whispers.

Leaning forward, I struggle, but she moves toward me, helping me out. I press my lips to hers before pulling back.

“No, Sweet T. You are what kept me alive. My love for you. Your love for me. The entire time I was under, the only thing I remember is hearing your voice.”

She tears up at my words.

“Don’t cry. I hate when you cry.” I lift my arm, feeling a little stronger the longer I’m awake.

“I just love you so much. I’m so happy you are here.”

“Be happy without tears. You’re breaking my heart, sweet girl,” I demand.

She giggles. “Ordering me around even injured. What am I going to do with you?”

“Keep me? Forever?” I tease.

She pretends to think about it. “I suppose I have to. Your name is already on my body.”

She holds up her arm. I grab it, pressing my lips over my name.

“My one and only old lady. Now lie down here with me and tell me what I’ve missed.”

As she settles into my side, I ignore the twinges of pain. I know I could ask for something, but I want to be alert. I need to be here for my girl.

So as she fills me in on everything going on, I focus on her voice. On the feel of her hair under my fingers. Of the way she breathes against me.

I took this for granted. I waited so long to open up to her, and then I almost lost this.

I won’t do that again. From this moment on, my whole life is Tara. If there’s room for the brothers, then so be it, but she is my priority. From this day until the day I die.

“What are you thinking about?” she asks suddenly, telling me I must have zoned out.

“How lucky I am to have you. What are you thinking about?”

She presses her head closer to my chest. “How grateful I am to hear your heartbeat.”

We sit like that in silence for several minutes before the door opens again. In steps the prospect that must be on guard duty and my doctor.

I nod at the prospect. His arm is in a sling. I wonder what happened to him.

He steps back out before I can ask.

The doctor looks at me and smiles.

“So what’s the verdict, doc?”

twenty-four

TARA

WRATH IS one of the manliest men I have ever met.

Until he's stuck in a hospital bed.

I swear, the man is driving me insane.

"Terry Brooks. If you do not get your behind back in this room in the next ten seconds, I am not going to let you touch me for a fucking year," I yell through the hall from the opening of his room.

I shake my head as his wheelchair comes around the corner. He

convinced the prospect to race them around the halls. This is the second time I've caught him doing it. The look on the nurse's face tells me that it's been more than that.

When he finally stops in front of me, he smiles big.

I want to stay mad at him, but seeing him smile like that reminds me that he almost never had the chance to smile again.

Not that he smiled much before.

He's different now. He still is standoffish with others, but when it comes to me, he always has one ready.

It makes me feel special.

"Sorry, Sweet T. Had to get one last win in before we head off."

"Wrath, I swear I love you, but you are going to give me a heart attack. Do you know how it feels to come into your room and find you gone?"

He frowns before pulling me into his lap. "Sorry, sweet girl. I didn't mean to worry you."

He kisses my cheek, making me melt.

The doctor made him stay in the hospital until he could walk the halls without huffing. He estimated it would take him three weeks. It took him one. Wrath was determined to get home.

The only reason the doctor allowed him to discharge today is because Travis, Evelyn's doctor friend who also works at the hospital, told him that he would personally check on Wrath daily.

Wrath didn't like that very much, but after some puppy dog eyes from me, he relented.

He said he would do anything to make me happy.

He sent me home today to get some clothes for him to wear. I didn't want to go and insisted he send someone else, but he told me he wanted it to be me. He didn't want anyone else in our space.

So I went. When I got there, Natalie handed me Wrath's cut. She told me that he would want it, but there was still a hole where he was stabbed. Natalie cleaned the blood away, but no one stitched it up.

So I took the extra few minutes to do it for him.

I guess I took too long. Seems he decided to terrorize the hospital in my absence.

"Here is the discharge paperwork. There is a list of things to look for to bring him back, but I'm sure your personal doctor will see to it you get the best care." She huffs.

I narrow my eyes at her. “Do you have a problem?”

She looks like she wants to say something, but she shakes her head.

“I don’t appreciate your tone. Be kinder to others,” I tell her, standing from Wrath’s lap.

He’s smirking but trying to hide it.

The woman sneers at me but turns around and leaves.

Bitch will be lucky if I don’t get her fired.

In fact, where’s Evelyn?

I look around, spotting her at the nurses’ station.

“Be right back,” I tell Wrath.

When I walk up to her, she smiles, opening her arms for a hug.

“He all ready to go?”

Evelyn is another person who checked on us often. Considering they grew up in the club together, I wasn’t surprised.

“He is. Who is that nurse over there?” I look over at the woman.

She snorts. “Helen. She’s a bitch. She hasn’t liked Wrath causing issues here.”

I hum. “Keep her away from me. I’m itching to pull out those extensions.”

“You and me both. Do you need help out to the car?” She looks back at Wrath, with the prospect now standing at his side.

“We’ve got it. You coming to his party tonight?”

“You know it. I have a few things to finish here. How big is it going to be?”

“Well, Reaper called in some friends. You know since everything...” I trail off.

She nods. “I get it. So some nomads are going to be there? Maybe some other chapters?”

“I think he said the Billings chapter and a few nomads who were in the area.”

“Good. Don’t let Wrath drink. The drugs he’s on shouldn’t mix. Try not to let him do anything too strenuous. He’s still healing.”

“Oh, I know. The doctor already told him that he can’t have sex. Or at least I think he meant he can’t exert himself too much.”

Evelyn laughs. “A blow job might be okay though.”

I blush looking back at the man in question.

“I think he’s earned one.”

Wrath starts to wheel his way down the hall.

“I better go.”

“See you later.”

I rush after him, grabbing his wheelchair to stop him.

“Seriously?” I ask him.

“I want to get you home, Sweet T. Let’s go.”

I roll my eyes, but I wheel him to the elevator. He bickers with me the entire way down. First it’s about the no sex. Then it’s about the no working out.

The prospect stands next to me, keeping his face blank. I don’t know how he’s doing it. I want to smack Wrath.

When we get outside, Wrath growls at me.

“Enough of that. What is it now?”

He stares at my car at the curb.

“What the fuck is this?”

“A car. You didn’t think you’d be able to ride home on your bike, did you?”

“Is this even safe? Did no one give you the keys to the car I bought you?”

I stop, moving around in front of him.

“Excuse me?”

“I bought you a car. Back when yours was tampered with. I thought I told them to get rid of this.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose, trying to ward off the headache I feel coming on. We haven’t even left the hospital yet, and he’s already being a pain in my ass.

“We are going to talk about you making decisions for me later, but no. No one told me about the car. When I asked for my keys, Cueball handed them to me and promised me that he made sure it was safe.”

“Fine. You’re getting the new one when we get home.” He starts to get out of his chair to walk.

“We will see about that,” I mumble.

He bitches the entire time we get him in the car, but I can’t help the smile on my face.

He’s coming home.

Finally.



WRATH

The noise in here is too much. After being stuck in a hospital room for so long, all the music and chatter is grating on my nerves.

Tara went to take a shower. Her first real one since I went to the hospital, from what I understand. I wanted to take one with her, but she turned me down. Something about exerting myself.

So instead, I'm out here with all these fools as they drink, celebrating my homecoming. Two of the guys have already tried handing me a beer.

I turned them both down. Even though I wouldn't drink them anyway, Tara warned me that I shouldn't even be seen with them. Guess Evelyn told her I'm not supposed to drink. She threatened to withhold sex from me indefinitely if I even grabbed a bottle.

So here I am with a water, watching the party around me.

Reaper slips into church at the other side of the room, so I make my way over there. Once inside, I close the door, sighing at the silence.

"I never thought I would want silence so much," I tell him.

He laughs. "That bad?"

I shrug. "What are you doing in here?"

"I still can't find that prospect. I think they killed him," he says, meaning the prospect that went missing while trailing Tara.

"Not a single sign?"

He shakes his head.

I take a seat at the table, leaning back. "Fuck."

"Colt is MIA down in Texas. I mean, he checks in, but he's not coming back anytime soon. We keep losing members here. I called in for reinforcements, but Billings and three nomads are the only ones to answer the call."

"Put it out again?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "Something's brewing, and it's not good. I think Danworth has been in the area much longer than we were aware of. I think

he's been slowly recruiting people to his side. People from rival MCs and from our own."

"Pry made a comment. He said that Danworth was their new leader. I think he took out their pres and took the job on his own."

Reaper nods. "Bullet said as much. He relayed everything Pry told you. Enough of that though. You okay, man? This is your celebration. You greeted the devil and came back to tell us about it."

"The doctor said I only died once on the table."

Reaper winces. "Once was enough. I wasn't sure Sweet T was going to make it."

"She is one hell of a woman though. I knew my baby would be okay," I tell him.

"You should go join her."

"She's in the shower. Said I couldn't come."

"When have you ever followed instructions you didn't agree with?" He quirks his eyebrow.

I laugh, moving to stand.

"Good point."

I start to head for the door, but Reaper calls out to me.

"Hey, Wrath?"

"Yeah?"

"You have that new doctor taking care of you, yeah?"

"He starts tomorrow."

"Keep an eye on him. Tell me what you think," he tells me.

"Are we suspicious of him?" I ask.

I don't want him near Tara if we are.

"No. I'm thinking how lucky we are he was able to ride out there so quickly. It would be much better if he had been with us to begin with. As a brother."

My eyes widen. "You want to prospect him?"

He nods. "I think we should. I think we need to fast-track him and the ones we have. Our numbers are decreasing. We need to do a recruitment event. Get some interest."

I nod. "I'll work with Twitch to see what we can do."

"Good. Now go love your old lady."

Leaving him in church, I sneak down the hall to my room. Tara is still in the shower. I undress slowly before sitting on the edge of the bed.

When she finally steps out of the bathroom, steam swirls around her.
God, I love her.

“What are you doing in here? You have a party.”

“Fuck that party.”

“Wrath, they all came to celebrate you. They are your brothers.”

“They came to drink and have a good time. They can do that without me.
The only one I want to celebrate with is you.”

She walks closer to me, her towel still wrapped around her body.

“I think your stay in the hospital knocked something loose in your brain.
You’re being awfully sweet.”

I smirk at her, pulling her into me as soon as she is close enough to me.
Then I rip her towel away.

“Not all sweet. Now let me eat that pussy. I’ve been dying to taste it since
I woke up.”

“You heard the doctor,” she hisses, trying to pull away.

“He said I can’t exert myself. Having you sit on my face while I eat that
pretty little pussy is just like eating ice cream. You let me have ice cream in
the hospital.”

She sighs but relaxes into me. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“It hurts me to not have you. Please?”

It’s the please that breaks her. I never use the word for anything. I’d get
on my knees and beg if she’d let me.

Stepping back from me, she drops the towel.

“Lay back on the bed. I do all the work. If you hurt at all, you tell me.
Deal?”

“Deal,” I lie.

I could be bleeding out, and I wouldn’t say a word.

She shakes her head as if she heard my thought, but she helps me lie back
on the bed. Then she crawls onto the bed. When she gets into position over
me, I smirk at her. Of course my girl wouldn’t take the free mustache ride.
No, she wants to give pleasure as much as she wants to receive it.

I don’t let her settle in before I pull against my face, licking at her center.
She tastes clean. Too clean. I need my girl messy.

As I focus on eating her pussy like it’s my last meal, she grips my cock,
licking the tip. God, it feels amazing.

She’s going to make me come before I want to.

Knowing this, I stop messing around. I slide my fingers into her center as

I lick and nip at her clit. She moans around me, only making my body react even more.

It's as if we are reactive to each other. I curl my finger, making her suck harder, which makes me nuzzle into her more, which makes her gag on me. It's a revolving circle of pleasure. It's almost too much for me to handle.

Burying three fingers in her pussy, I set a relentless pace. Swirling my tongue against her clit, I keep at it until she squirts all over me. Her body is shaking with explosive pleasure.

That's enough for me to give her the reward she's been working toward. My hips thrust up, burying my cock in the back of her throat as I release my cum into her.

She grows limp over me as I finish my release. Then I lift her off me, wincing at the move. She's so far in bliss she doesn't even yell at me.

I rearrange her around me until she's lying on my chest. Then I press a kiss to her head.

"I love you, Sweet T."

She presses a kiss over my heart. "I love you more, Wrath."

"That's not even possible."

"You say that now, but I'll grow to love you more with each breath I take until the day I die, and even then, I will still love you."

I shake my head. "I can't wait to fight this out with you for the rest of our lives."

"Me either."

Just like that, I finally have everything I never knew I needed in my life.

My club and my old lady.

Can life get any better than this?

epilogue

TWO MONTHS LATER

TARA

“ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS? It’s going to hurt,” Midnight warns.

I nod at him. I don’t care how much it hurts. It’s for him.

Wrath.

The love of my life. I would do anything for him.

Even endure a needle stabbing me in the neck over and over.

“I think it’s oddly sweet,” Elle calls out from her station.

She’s tattooing this bear of a man who wanted a kitten on his bicep. Talk about weird.

“Why his teeth marks? How did you get him to do this to you anyway?” Midnight asks, looking at the bruises on my skin.

Wrath has been a bit overprotective of me lately. If I even stub a toe, he wants to shoot something. I can see why Midnight would assume he wouldn’t want to bite me until I bruise.

He doesn’t know what we get up to behind closed doors though.

Then again, he has seen a few performances we have put on at the club.

Wrath really is perfect for me. He feeds my desires while making sure I’m always being pleased.

He actually has talked to the club about opening a sex club so we can explore even more.

“It’s an inside thing. Just do it and hurry. He will be here soon.”

I asked Wrath if we could play tonight. He knows what that means as much as I do. It’ll only be the second time we have been there, but I want to make it a regular thing. I want him to have his pleasure as much as he makes sure I get mine.

“Alright. Hold still then.”

I zone out as he gets to work. It doesn’t take too long. He’s able to make it look beautiful in spite of it being teeth marks. It looks so artistic.

It’s perfect.

“Thank you.”

“Yeah. Don’t come asking me to do shit on any private parts though. I do have some lines when it comes to the old ladies.”

“I don’t think that will be an issue. My man doesn’t like other men touching me there anyway.”

Really, he doesn’t like them touching me at all, but I think he will forgive me for this one.

Midnight covers the tattoo, giving me the cream to put on it. Then he sends me on my way.

Wrath is almost here, so I stand on the sidewalk, looking up at the bookstore.

It sold.

I really wished I had the chance to buy it from Ralph’s daughter. I would have kept it running the way he did. Carrying on his legacy.

I’ll never be able to repay what he did for me that day. He truly was an amazing man.

The sound of a motorcycle pulls me from my thoughts. Turning, I smile at Wrath.

He’s as gorgeous as he has always been.

He holds out my helmet and the leather jacket that was once his, but I’m the only one who seems to wear it anymore.

I put them on, climbing on behind him. Then I hold on tight.

He presses a kiss to the back of my hand before setting it on my other hand. Then he takes off.

I smile into his back as we cruise down the road. I thought he would be speeding to get there, but he’s going the speed limit. Enjoying the ride.

It only makes my heart grow larger for him.

I love this man.

Thinking about what Elenore once told me, my eyes tear up.

Each day you will grow to love him more and more. In twenty years, you will look back and think about these early days and wonder how you could grow to love someone so much.

In that moment, I didn't realize how much her words would ring true. I wish she was still here for me to tell her that she was right. That even months later I am still so in love with Wrath and it's only growing deeper.

When Wrath finally pulls up outside the property, I climb off the bike, handing him the helmet and jacket back.

"What are you up to, sweet girl?"

I shrug, pulling off my top.

He eyes the white wrapping on my neck. I know I should keep it covered, but I won't. Not tonight. It needs to serve a purpose. To show this man how much I love him.

Pulling off my bra, I toss it on the ground as I continue to move back toward the woods, never taking my eyes off Wrath.

He hasn't moved, but I see the way his hands are clenching. He wants to chase, but he knows the wait is worth it.

My pants go next. Then my panties. The only thing I leave on my feet are the sneakers I wore for this moment.

Reaching up, I pull the white bandage off. His eyes track it, widening as he makes out the tattoo. He can't see what it is from the distance though. Only that there is ink.

"What did you ink my pretty skin with?" he asks, deceptively calm.

He's holding on by a thread.

"Why don't you come find out?"

Then I take off at a run.

I smile as I hear him behind me. There was no waiting or stalking like last time.

He needs this too much.

I keep running even as I hear his steps thundering behind me.

I'm not trying to run forever though.

No. I only want to get far enough into the tree line that no one will be able to hear or see us.

This moment is ours.

Turning suddenly, I brace myself for impact.

He doesn't disappoint.

He crashes into me, pulling me on top of him as we fall to the ground.

Then he pulls my hair over as his eyes take in the tattoo.

"Are those my teeth?" His voice is huskier than I have ever heard.

If I wasn't sure werewolves didn't exist, I might believe he was one.

"Yes. You have a permanent hold on me. I wanted the world to know I belong to you."

"The tattoo on your forearm says that," he says, tracing said tattoo.

"When we got that, I felt I had no choice. It took some of the meaning away from it. This is my way of giving that meaning back. I'm yours, Wrath. Now and forever."

He growls, flipping me so I'm on my back with him hovering over me.

"Forever. I love you."

Then he leans down, kissing my lips. Then he nips them.

It doesn't take long for him to strip out of his clothes while worshipping my body with his lips. Every inch gets its own kiss and nibble. A promise from him to love me for the rest of our lives.

When he is finally naked, he looks me right in the eye.

"This is going to be rough and fast. I can't hold back."

Reaching up, I press my palm to his cheek. "I don't want you to go easy. Look at this mark you left on me. It makes me so hot. Show me the animal."

His body shudders at my words as his eyes fall closed. When they open, I know I achieved my desired effect. He's going to go rabid on me.

I can't hardly wait.



WRATH

How did I get so lucky to find a woman like Tara? She is everything I have ever wanted in a woman and didn't realize I needed.

My eyes catch on the tattoo on her neck once more.

She put my teeth there forever. To prove to me that she's all in.

I didn't need any tangible proof. I can feel it each time we are in a room together.

I can't say I hate it though. Seeing it makes me want to rut into her until she's begging me to stop.

Pressing my cock at her entrance, I grip the side of her neck not tatted up in my hand. I squeeze, watching as her breaths come harder. Then I slide home. I don't give her time to adjust to me. She's already fluttering around my cock on the edge of an orgasm. Instead, I go full force, fucking her like the animal she asked me to be. I fuck her until she screams out my name.

Then I flip her over, pulling her ass in the air as I fuck her again.

My fingers pinch into her skin as I thrust into her over and over until she's liquid in my arms.

Still, I don't stop. I only go harder. When I finally come, I hold her to me, loving the feel of her warmth around my cock.

This woman is mine. It transcends the past, present, and future. She is mine in a universal way that will still be there long after our souls leave the earth.

When I finally pull out, I turn her over in my arms. She's passed out. Kissing her cheeks, I whisper to her.

"Sweet T. Sweetheart. Are you okay?"

Her eyes flutter open. "I'm perfect. Just need a minute." She lets her eyes fall closed again.

"I'll be right back. Are you going to be okay?" I whisper.

She nods but doesn't open her eyes again.

Taking my pants, I fold them before gently lifting her head and placing them underneath her. Then I lay my shirt over her upper half.

Then I head back toward the bike. We didn't run far. Only several hundred yards past the tree line. Back at the bike, I grab the two blankets I rolled up onto my saddleback. Then I grab the papers I picked up earlier.

I hope she loves it.

Then I head back.

My girl looks so peaceful sleeping in the dirt. I love seeing her like this. So natural.

Laying out one of the blankets beside her, I set the rest of the items on it. Then I pick her up, placing her on the blanket. Unfolding the second blanket, I cover her before sliding in next to her.

She immediately moves closer to me, cuddling into me.

Then she lets out this little sigh. It's so adorable. It's the kind of sigh that says she is completely content with life.

I let her doze as I think about all the plans I've made for us. I want to give her the life she deserves. I won't be able to be the clean-cut man who works some office job to provide for her. I will be the one who will go out of his way to eliminate any threat to her though. I will keep her safe and love her with every single breath I have.

"What are you thinking so hard about? Your heart keeps changing beats," she murmurs against my skin.

"You. Our future."

"That makes you nervous?" she asks.

"Your reaction does."

She leans up, looking down at me. "What do you mean?"

"You said it before. I never truly asked you to be my old lady. I forced it. I'm not going to take it back, but I will give you a choice on what comes next."

She smiles at me. "As long as I have you, I'm down for whatever."

Sitting up, I grab the papers I set aside.

"I want you to quit the tattoo shop," I tell her.

"Okay. Can I ask why?" She settles in next to me, facing me with her legs crossed beneath her.

I don't answer her. Instead, I hand her the papers.

She takes a moment, reading each word. Her eyes start tearing up, making me even more nervous.

What if I got it wrong?

"Is this what I think it is?" she whispers.

"I bought it when it went up for sale. I knew it meant a lot to you. You once said you might want to own a bookshop. Now you do."

She looks up at me, tears freely falling. "This is...."

She is at a loss for words.

So I pull her in closer.

"I promised Ralph's daughter that you would keep his memory alive. She was happy to sell it to me when I explained what he meant to you."

She nods. "He was like a grandfather that I never had."

"I know."

"It's mine?" she asks again.

"Yes."

"Thank you." She climbs into my lap, kissing me.

I grip her hair, pulling her head back.

"There's one other thing," I whisper.

"What?"

I grab the second set of papers, handing them to her, keeping her in my arms.

"Floor plans for a house? Are you buying a house?"

"Not quite. Building one. You haven't had a chance to explore this piece of land yet. In the middle, I left it bare so one day I could build a house. Now that I have you, I want that. With you."

"So you want me to live with you? What would our parents say?" She gasps dramatically.

I get what she's saying. We have been living together in our small room for months.

This is different though. This would be our house that we would make into a home together.

"I want your input. I want this to be our home. Say you'll move in with me once it's done."

She giggles. "Don't you know? I would follow you anywhere."

I press a kiss against her lips. "Good. I wouldn't have taken no for an answer."

She smirks at me. "Does this mean I can run from you whenever I want?"

"As long as you know I will always catch you, and when I do, I will punish you."

"Just how I like it," she admits, dropping the papers as she kisses me deeper.

Before we can get too far, a phone rings in the distance.

"Not mine," she says as she continues to kiss me.

I groan but lay her next to me on the blanket.

"Hold that thought." I boop her nose before looking for my phone in the dirt.

When I find it, I frown.

I missed the call, but it's Colt's name that has me worried.

Calling him back, he answers right away.

“Reaper didn’t answer. Shit is going sideways. I need reinforcements as soon as possible,” he barks into the phone.

I look over at Tara.

I’m not ready to leave her yet.

I might have to though.

“What’s going on?”

“Rogue is dead. Fend is missing. The charter has been betraying the code. It’s a shitshow. I can’t leave it like this.”

I absorb the information that he’s just given. If the pres is dead and the VP is missing, the San Antonio charter is in peril.

Fuck.

The end.



Want more Wrath and Tara? Download the bonus epilogue [HERE](#).

Thank you for reading Wrath. We hope you loved this story as much as we do. Want more Lotus MC? Check out Colt, available now on Amazon and Kindle Unlimited.

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author bio

Cala Riley, better known as Cala and Riley, are a pair of friends with a deep-seated love of books and writing. Both Cala and Riley are happily married and each have children, Cala with the four-legged kind while Riley has a mixture of both two-legged and four. While they live apart, that does not affect their connection. They are the true definition of family. What started as an idea that quickly turned into a full-length book and a bond that will never end.

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