



ANIMAL

ROYAL BASTARDS MC



KER DUKEY

ANIMAL

by
Ker Dukey



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ROYAL BASTARDS MC SERIES

Acknowledgments

Books by Ker Dukey

ANIMAL

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ROYAL BASTARD CODE

PROTECT: The club and your brothers come before anything else and must be protected at all costs. **CLUB** is **FAMILY**.

RESPECT: Earn it and give it. Respect club law. Respect the patch. Respect your brothers. Disrespect a member, and there will be hell to pay.

HONOR: Being patched in is an honor, not a right. Your colors are sacred, not to be left alone, and **NEVER** let them touch the ground.

OL' LADIES: Never disrespect a member or brother's ol' lady. **PERIOD**.

CHURCH is **MANDATORY**.

LOYALTY: Takes precedence over all, including well-being.

HONESTY: Never **LIE**, **CHEAT**, or **STEAL** from a brother or the club.

TERRITORY: You are to respect your brothers' property and follow their chapter's club rules.

TRUST: Years to earn it...seconds to lose it.

NEVER RIDE OFF: Brothers do not abandon their family.

AUTHOR NOTE:

This is an MC title with dark themes.

These men are raw, alpha assholes. If you get easily offended, stop now, turn back, this isn't for you!!!

If you like your stories, gritty, real, and dirty, strap in, beautiful, I'm going to take you on the ride of your life.

*For all my girls who like to ride motorbikes, bikers, and their
faces. Get yours, girl.*

Some Animals can't be tamed.



PROLOGUE

Alec Walker...

My father always said to find a bitch who keeps your mind calm, belly full, and balls empty. Save your love for the road. If you give it to a woman, she'll use it to control you, even after she's left you.

The thing is, I didn't give my love to a woman; I gave it to a girl who happened to turn into a woman, and this is our story...

ONE



ALEC

ELEVEN YEARS OLD.

“She will kick your ass,” I warn Mason, who’s picking up a toad, hoping to put it down Drew’s shirt. I’ve known Drew since she was six years old. I was on the cusp of turning eight and she caught my attention when a kid at a family cookout tried teasing her about her pigtails. She took a pair of scissors and cut them off, putting them in his lap, like a badass. From that day on she’s been my best friend.

Not two seconds later, a scream rings out, and Mason is lying on the ground, cradling his junk. “Told ya,” I snort, kicking off my sneakers and wading into the dirty water of the pond Mason’s old man calls a pool.

“You bitch,” Mason wheezes, trying to get his breath back.

“A bitch who kicked your ass.” Drew smirks, sauntering to where my sneakers lay on the grass. “Did you know he was going to do that?”

“I knew you were going to drop him,” I tell her honestly, grinning.

“My daddy said I shouldn’t be hanging out here. I got sick last time we played in this pool.” She scrunches up her nose, her freckles more noticeable in the summer sun.

“What’s wrong with the pool?” I hold out my hand, gesturing to the murky water swimming with wildlife. I don’t think they use the proper stuff to keep it clean like the pools at hotels.

“You think this is clean?” She places a hand on her hip, her mop of curls whipping around in the wind. It’s grown longer than usual.

“Clean enough.” I shrug. Since when has she cared about getting mucky?

She picks up my sneakers. “Clean enough for these?”

“Put them down, Drew,” I warn, and she teases by dangling them near the edge of the water. Before she can do anything with them, she’s shoved hard from behind and hurtles toward the pool face first. “Boom, bitch!” Mason hoots, hands in the air like he just won a wrestling match. Her body splashes against the water, but it’s too shallow, she was too close to the steps. She floats there, facedown, motionless. My stomach twists.

Racing to her, I pull her against me, turning her body and swiping her hair from her face. A ghastly crimson slit traveling from her hairline to the top of her eyebrow seeps blood. “Shit,” Mason calls out, running his hand through his hair.

“Go get your dad,” I bellow, dragging her out of the water and grabbing a towel holding it against her cut. “Drew, don’t do this to me. You’re my best friend, wake up.” I don’t know what to do. Panic blurs my eyes.

“Is she dead?” Mason asks, coming back outside.

“Did you get your dad?”

“Yeah. He’s on the crapper. Is she dead?”

If she is, I’m going to kill him. “Don’t be dead,” I plead.

“What the fuck did you do, you little asshole?” Mason’s dad roars, coming out through the back of the house, buckling his belt, a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, wearing his cut with no shirt.

“Let me get a look, kid,” he tells me, removing the towel to look at the wound. He stinks of motor grease and ash. “Fuck, that’s going to leave a nasty fucking scar, and she’ll have a shiner for a couple weeks, but she’ll live.” He pats my

shoulder and places my hand holding the towel back to her head.

Getting to his feet, he pulls out his phone and calls her dad. “Mitch, your girl’s banged up. Cut her head in the pool. Yeah, meet me there.” He ends the call, scoops Drew up, and puts her in the back of his dirty truck, gesturing for us to get in with her. I place her head on my lap and keep the towel against her wound, the gray fabric nearly completely red with her blood.

Ten minute trip to the hospital and she still hasn’t woken up. My gut hurts.

They rush her off on a gurney as soon as we get there, asking a thousand questions. *She needs to be okay. She needs to be okay. She needs to be okay.*

We’re sitting in the waiting room when her old man comes barreling through the doors like a bull in a china shop, nearly shattering the glass windows. “Where’s my baby girl?” he demands to any and everyone. Mason’s dad steps up, pulling him to the side and gesturing to her room. I stand, then sit, stand, pace, waiting. Two seconds later, my old man comes through the doors, looking pissed as all hell.

“What the fuck happened? You injured?” he growls. He’s a beast of a man. Everyone shrinks around his intimidating size, but not to me. To me, he’s my dad, and I need him right now. I throw my arms around his middle. “It’s Drew,” I gasp.

Pushing me back, he holds me by the shoulders. He sees affection as weakness, and his rejection leaves a little notch of scar tissue on my heart.

It’s a weird thing being his son. By all rights, I should be a tough, asshole like him, and I am in a lot of ways. I can hold my own. I like to box, and I can look after myself if I need to be on my own for periods of time while Mom is on a bender and he’s doing club business. But when it comes to emotions, I have them—unlike him. I’m sick at the thought of something happening to Drew. She isn’t just some girl; she’s my best friend.

Mason gets to his feet, coming to stand by my side. “We were messing around. She kicked me in the balls, and I pushed her into the pool. It was a nudge, a joke.” He shrugs.

“It wasn’t nudging.” I turn on him, placing my hands on his shoulder and pushing forward. “That’s a nudge,” I bark. Then I shove him as hard as he did her. “That’s a shove.”

“Hey,” he snaps, coming at me. I rear my fist back and clock him right on the nose, making him stumble. Blood streams out of his nostrils. “If she’s gonna be walking around with black eyes, so are you,” I growl.

Mason’s dad steps up, tipping Mason’s chin, looking at the small cut across the bridge of his nose. “Saves me doing it. We square, Prez?” he asks my dad.

“You’ll be covering the medical bill,” my dad informs him.

Mason’s dad grabs Mason by the scruff of his collar and marches him out with a nod of his head. “Come on, you little shit. Let’s leave them to it.”

“We can’t have violence in here,” a nurse walking the corridors tells my dad, frowning.

“Mind your damn business, woman,” he snarls. Her eyes grow wide, and her lip trembles. A couple minutes later, Drew’s dad comes out of her room, shaking his head. “She’s going to be fine. Stitches and a tetanus shot,” he tells us. “She’s asking for you, kid.”

I look up at my old man. He lifts his chin giving permission, and I rush to her room. As I walk up to her bedside, I wince at the Frankenstein line down her forehead.

She’s awake and smiling at me. “Always breaking the rules. You were determined to get me in that pool.”

I want to laugh, but my chest hurts. “I thought he killed you.” I shrug, feeling relief so intense my eyes water.

“I wouldn’t let ginger Mason Roily kill me.” She scoffs, then cringes, reaching up to touch her wound.

“Don’t,” I tell her, stretching for her hand and taking it in mine. She looks to where I’m holding her palm and curls her

fingers between mine, gripping my hand in hers. The strangest part is I like it...

TWO



DREW

THIRTEEN YEARS OLD.

Heidi is being so obvious that she has a thing for Alec, it's almost embarrassing. Her skirt is too short and top too tight, yet Alec barely looks at her. I don't know how I'd feel if he did. *Yes, you do.*

"Hey." I waltz toward them, whistling at the chrome and leather Harley Alec's propped against in front of the clubhouse. His face lights up when he sees me, and my stomach flip-flops.

"What'd you think?"

"It's a beauty, but you're not old enough to drive it yet." His dad giving him a motorcycle for his fifteenth birthday is crazy town. I got new sneakers for my last birthday.

"Oh God, who called the no-fun police?" Heidi rolls her eyes, folding her arms across her chest. "You can take me for a ride on it, Alec."

"Nah, no girls are riding on the back of my bike." He cocks his leg over to straddle the bike and pulls his helmet on. "You coming, Drew, or what?"

A smirk hooks my lip, and Heidi snorts. "He doesn't see you as a girl."

She's such a bitch.

I climb on the back and wrap my arms around his waist. Before he pulls away, he pulls off his helmet and slides it on my head.

"We need to get you one."

I flip Heidi the bird.

Yeah, we do.

We manage two laps around the grounds of the club compound before my daddy comes out, hollering at us. “You’re too young to be riding, and you, sweetheart, are never going to be on the back of any club member’s bike,” he barks at me.

Hypocrite.

“Well, that’s the stupidest shit I’ve ever heard,” Alec scoffs.

“What did you say, boy?” my dad warns.

We both smirk, then burst out laughing. Kicking the kickstand, we jump off and run inside to the bellowing tirade of my daddy.



“Your dad’s nuts if he thinks after raising you in a club, you’re not going to end up with a biker,” Alec scoffs, throwing a ton of snacks on his bed he stole from the club bar.

“I might not.” I shrug, opening a packet of chips while he kicks off his boots and grabs the TV remote.

He’s staring at me like I just told him the sky’s not blue.

“Do you want to be a biker like our dads?” I scrunch my nose. “It’s bullets and blood, chaos and constant mayhem.”

“You sound like you’re reciting the first page of the rule book,” he teases. “You do remember I’m Alec Walker, right?”

Rolling my eyes, I play with the seam of a packet of chips. “You’re just Alec to me, and I want to see the world.” I sigh, thinking of the pictures Riley showed me from her trip to Hawaii over the summer.

“Being a biker is all about the open road—nothing but freedom to go wherever you want.” He chuckles, moving up the bed and laying on the pillow next to me.

“Bikers aren’t about traveling. They go out on business. Daddy never just says, ‘Oh, I’m going on an adventure.’” I pull his covers across my legs, a chill coming in from the open window.

“So, you want an adventure?” He raises his eyebrow, and it’s so cute, I want to die. “How about we go nomad and just live on the road?” The fact that he’s seeing us as a pair causes my heart to beat hard in my chest. I’m terrified of the day he realizes I’m a girl with stupid girl feelings. No matter how hard I try not to have them, they’re there, formulating misery and happiness at the same time. It sucks being a girl.

“We?” I ask, needing to hear his answer.

“Yeah, we.” He scoffs, looking at me with squinted eyes.

“What if I want to go to college and stuff?”

“Do you?”

“Yeah. Maybe. I don’t know.” I shrug, popping a chip in my mouth.

“When you do know, let me know.” He nudges my arm with his elbow.

“And if I do want to go?”

“Then I’ll go too. That’s what best friends do, right?” He shrugs, emptying a bag of M&Ms down his throat.

“What if I want to date college guys? You going to do that with me too?”

He almost chokes on his candy, coughing and spluttering. “Shut up, Drew. You’re not dating college boys.”

“You know I’m a girl, right?” I narrow my eyes on him.

He laughs so loud, I’m sure the entire clubhouse hears him. My cheeks flame. I want to burrow beneath the covers and never come out. Jumping to his feet, triggering the mattress dip and jolt, he begins a tirade of tickling. “You’re a girl, is that what you are?” he teases, making me screech and giggle as I slap at his hands.

“Stop it!” I yell,

“All this time, I thought you had a dong,” he torments.

I kick out my legs until I knock him off balance. He lands haphazardly on top of me, almost head-butting me in the face.

We’re both breathing heavily, our chests rising rapidly from exertion. Snacks crushed and littered around us, long forgotten. The heat from his body soaks into mine as his dark eyes explores my face.

“I know you’re a girl,” he breathes. He’s so close; the air from his words heats my skin as my heart races wildly beneath my ribs. He opens his mouth again, and I wait to hear what he’s going to say, my insides twisting into goo. “You scream like one.” He grins, then begins to tickle me again, and I scream...like a girl.

THREE



ALEC

Mason's sister, Penny, twirls her hair as I glare at her. She's six-years older than me and cornered me in the clubhouse's hall asking for the key to my room. I'm the only biker brat with a room because my old man is the club president and we live here when Mom decides she's had enough of being his wife.

Our clubhouse used to be a huge ass clothing factory. When my old man bought the land, they renovated it. He built his auto repair shop, Rider's and Hellmade, a custom helmet design business out front, then installed a huge wired fence, creating a perimeter. The auto repair was a legitimate trade to hide the not so legit business that went on around here. It's easy to wash money when you own your own companies. Hellmade, though, that was a passion project that took off, gaining customers from all across the country, bikers and motorbike enthusiasts on backlist all wanting their domes custom.

"Why the fuck would I let you bump uglies in my room?" I scoff, pushing past her. Sighing, she grabs for my shoulder, but I lurch away, sending her a warning glare.

"I'll show you my tits." She lifts a brow, folding her arms and smirking.

She's all right looking, but nothing special. She thinks she is, though. I laugh, full-on belly laugh. "Bitch, look where you are. I've seen more titties than a milk farmer. I don't need to see your small ass titties."

“Fuck you,” she hisses.

“No thanks,” I mock.

I get to the end of the hallway when she calls, “I got some weed.”

Now she’s talking.

I find my dad’s club whore in the kitchen talking to Jimmy, my old man’s VP. No doubt he’s warning her to stay out of the way while the wives are around. “Jackie, will you change my sheets for me later?” I ask, scratching the back of my neck. I hate asking her for shit. She turns to me, a huge, lipsticked smile on her face.

“Sure thing, sweetie. Anything for you,” she coos, hoping being up my ass will score points with my dad giving her status that’s more than his whore.

When you’re raised in a clubhouse, you grow up real quick. Most days, I feel more put together and mature than half these bitches hopeful if they linger long enough, they’ll be put on the back of a bike. No biker wants club ass as an ol’ lady, no matter how good that ass is—or so Uncle Joe tells me, aka Crazy Joe.

I steer my way through the packed club. All the families are here for my sixteenth birthday barbecue. A weird vibe always accompanies these get-togethers. Despite club sluts not being allowed on family days—bar a few who work here—there’s still the off chance one will show up to cause drama. Drew and I live for those moments. I don’t know why they have ol’ ladies and a girl on the side too. That’s just more work, but what do I know? I just turned sixteen, and the only girl in my life is Drew—and she’s basically a dude.

“Why do I have to be here? This place is like a zoo. And it smells like one,” Riley moans to anyone who will listen. Her old man was her mother’s dirty little fling while in college. Little did she know that weekend of rebellion would tie her to him for the rest of her life. Every weekend, Riley’s forced to leave her mansion and private school ass hats to slum it with us

lower beings. She's a couple years older than me, but acts like a pre-teen diva. I hang back when I spot Drew with her in the circle of girls.

Drew has always been a tomboy. She fucking hates those bitches.

"That gross boy is staring at you again, Drew." Riley places a finger in her mouth, pretending to gag. When she doesn't gesture with her eyes to me, I follow her gaze with a frown.

A prospect named Kai smirks at them, his eyes on Drew. He tips his beer at her when she turns to look, her cheeks flaming bright red. Kai's nineteen, maybe twenty. He's only been around a few months. From what I can tell, the brothers like him, but the prick keeps sniffing around fourteen-year-olds, they won't for long.

Drew doesn't even dress for attention. She's got on a white baggy tee—which I'm pretty sure is mine—under overalls. Her hair is longer these days, hanging past her shoulders, but she doesn't do anything with it. It's a mass of curls. She's not like Riley and the other girls who plaster their faces with makeup. Drew doesn't need that shit.

"Dare you to go over there and talk to him." Riley pushes, and the other girls giggle. "No way she would. She's practically dating Alec."

"Ewww. Alec would not date her," Heidi sneers, and Drew flips her the bird.

Heidi's been trying to get in my pants since she was twelve. She's pretty—too pretty. Blonde hair, blue eyes, sleeps with teddy bears on her fucking bed. No thanks.

"I'll talk to him," Drew says, shocking the hell out of everyone.

I dodge some brothers trying to buy me a beer and move to the hall with a better view of where Kai is propped against the bar.

Riley fluffs Drew's hair, getting her hands smacked away for her efforts.

Placing her hands in her pockets, Drew walks toward him. A few other brothers loiter, but most people are out back with their families getting food.

I can't hear what she says, but I can see the nervous blinking. She looks over her shoulder at Riley, who bobs her head and mouths, "Go on."

Rolling her eyes, Drew bends down to tie her Doc. Martens that don't need tying. Kai eyeballs her ass, then his hand comes down, grabbing a handful—and I want to break it off at his wrist. She's not some bitch who comes here looking to be mauled by a big bad biker; she's a brother's kid. Kai lacks respect, and respect is everything.

Drew's nose scrunches up. Slipping her hand into her boot, she rises, grabs his hand, and jams her little hunting knife through it, right in the center, pinning him to the bar. I bought her that knife for her fourteenth birthday some months back.

The girls' screech, running in all directions, horrified looks on their faces.

Kai hollers a thousand curse words in under a minute. A couple of brothers jump up and race over, moving Drew away. "What the fuck?" Crazy Joe mumbles. He's missing a few teeth and sounds like a homeless drunk you'd see holding up one of those "End of the World" signs.

"He grabbed my butt," she defends, and I smirk from where I still stand. I learned a long time ago Drew doesn't need me running to her rescue. I've given a few black eyes to assholes on her behalf, but she doesn't know about it.

"What the fuck, Kai? She's a kid!" Jackie scorns, sauntering from the kitchen.

It doesn't take long for Riley's dad to come careening through the place. "Oh shit. What happened?"

"Kai got handsy," Uncle Joe drawls.

"Is someone going to pull this fucking thing outta me?" Kai bellows.

I push my way through them and pluck the handle. “It’s four inches, asshole. I bet you’ve taken more up the ass.” I yank the blade out, relishing the squelching sound it produces. His eyes flare with pain and anger, but he knows who I am. His mouth opens, then closes. Gripping his wrist, I hold his bleeding hand away from his body. He smiles tightly at me. “I didn’t know her age,” he mutters.

“She ain’t even got any titties, you fucking pervert,” Joe tuts, taking Kai’s beer off the bar and tipping it back as he walks away.

“You better get that looked at. Best you’re not around when Mitch hears about this shit. Prez will kick everyone’s ass if we ruin his kid’s birthday. He’s becoming a man.” A few cheers ring out, and Riley’s dad grabs my shoulders, squeezing.

“Fine,” Kai grunts. “Thanks for this.” He flicks his wrist at Drew, painting her shirt in crimson splashes. “Now I’m gonna have an ugly scar just like you.”

Jolting forward, I launch toward him, but Riley’s dad keeps a firm grip on me, only releasing me once he’s escorted out. I gesture with a jerk of my head for Drew to follow me, we get outside before she asks, “You going to give that back? It was a gift.”

Grinning, I grab the hem of my band tee. I clean the blade and hand it back to her.

“You love that shirt. Blood stains, Alec.”

“And now I’ll love it more. That was awesome.” I nudge her with a shoulder. She smiles, and we both break into a full out laugh.

“Come on. I scored some weed.”

I dig in my pocket, holding it up like a prize. Her mouth pops open, and she reaches for it, giving chase when I dart off running.



“Why is the fence cutting off the lake? It’s a waste of a view,” Drew asks, sitting on the bench in front of a small lake. It’s on my old man’s property line, but he doesn’t own it.

“Could you imagine how many drunk fucks would end up floating facedown if it wasn’t preventing the dumb assholes from wandering off for a piss or a swim.” I snort, taking the blunt from her. The toxic shit fills my lungs, loosening my limbs.

“Oh, man, you’re right.” She dips her head, her curls bouncing.

“The prick was wrong, you know,” I tell her, looking out across the lake. It’s so secluded, it feels like our own little world away from the madness of the club.

“Wrong about what?” She blinks rapidly, like she does when she’s uncomfortable or nervous.

“Your scar.” I tip my head to the jagged skin down her forehead. It’s faded so much, though it’s still noticeable. It isn’t ugly, though. There’s nothing ugly about Drew. She’s actually kinda beautiful. Her features are big and so animated. Huge oval eyes, thick lashes, a dusting of freckles she hates sprinkle her petite nose. I’ve always kinda liked them. It’s Drew.

“Like I give a shit what a pervert thinks.” She shrugs, getting to her feet. Picking up a stone, she skims it across the water. I taught her how to do that.

“You have his blood on you.” I gesture to her white tee.

“Yeah, sorry. I’ll get you a new shirt.” I knew that was mine.

“I don’t want a new one. You’ll just steal it anyway.” I catch the smirk on her lips. Brat.

“Well, I don’t want this one now.” She pulls one arm out, then the other, jerking the shirt this way and that, then over her head. Balling it up, she tosses it into the water.

I follow the shirt and laugh. “Someone will find that and think a body is at the bottom of the lake.”

She scoffs and gestures behind her, making her overalls shift, drawing my eyes to her bare skin and some bra thing. “Alec, did you hear what I said?”

“Sorry, what?”

“I said with the life we live there probably are bodies down there.” She huffs, placing a hand on her hip. “What the hell are you looking at?” She wrinkles her nose, following my gaze. “It’s a training bra. Gross, right?”

No, it isn’t gross. Crazy Joe was wrong. She does have tits, and the fact that I’m noticing them is going to change everything...

FOUR



DREW

One month later...

“My dad said I’m not allowed to spend time in your room with the door shut anymore,” I groan, embarrassment burning my cheeks.

“And you listen to your dad since when?” Alec frowns, holding a bunch of slasher movies up, wagging his brow. The club’s quiet tonight, nearly everyone out on club business. It’s eerie when nobody’s around. Noise carries. The walls creak and talk like the place is alive. The brothers who are here are all sleeping off long runs or busy getting reacquainted with the club sluts.

Usually, I wouldn’t care what my dad says—he can’t raise me in mayhem and expect me to follow stupid rules—but being around Alec lately is almost unbearable. My stupid hormones are driving me crazy, and I don’t think I can control them. What if I tell him how I feel and ruin everything between us? I can’t risk it.

“I’ll leave the door open. What, does he think I’m going to do, corrupt you?” He snorts.

“More like deflower me,” I retort, immediately wanting to stuff the words back into my mouth. I did not just say that.

My cheeks burn. My eyes widen in humiliation. I think I’ve shocked him into silence. His eyes bore into mine, making the whole situation ten times worse.

“How does he know I haven’t already?” He grins, compelling me to release the breath trapped in my lungs. Throwing the DVDs on his dresser, he comes at me, bending at the waist swooping me up on his shoulder in a firemen’s hold. His strong hands grip the back of my thighs, my ass prone up in the air. I grab his hips to keep my face from smacking into his back, while screeching, “Alec!”

He carries me farther inside his room and tosses me on the bed, making me bounce a couple times before he jumps on it. “We could have been doing the nasty for years.”

“Stop,” I warn.

“The beast with two backs,” he torments.

“Stop.” I giggle, his bouncing relentless.

“Knocking boots.” He thrusts his pelvis, and I bite my damn lip like a stupid girl.

“Stop!”

“Hiding the salami.”

“Ewww! Enough.” I slap his legs. He picks up a pillow and hits me with it.

“Watch a movie with me. I promise to keep my dick in my pants until you leave.”

Oh my God.

He grins down at me, a full, white-toothed, dimpled-cheek grin, and all I want to do is beg him to kiss me.

His movements have stilled, the smile replaced with curiosity, his brows tugging down. “Drew? Why are you looking at me like that?”

Thud. Thud. Thud.

“Like what?” Why the hell am I breathless?

Crashing sounds, and raised voices echo down the hall, drawing both our attention. Leaping off the bed, he helps me up, and we race to the main room. A few brothers have returned. Ash is laid out on one of the tables, a blood-soaked

cloth at his neck, while Ice holds a bundled shirt to a wound on his own arm. “Why the fuck didn’t you drive him to the hospital?” Jimmy barks, pulling out his phone. “We need the doc,” he says into the receiver, then ends the call.

“It’s too late for that. He wouldn’t have made it to the hospital.” Kai jerks his head, putting pressure on the wound.

“Fuck,” Jimmy bellows, storming out of the room.

“Drew.” Kai calls my name, and I startle. “Come hold this for me.” Alec puts his arm across my waist, stopping me from moving. I don’t think my legs can anyway. They feel like Jell-O. He’s bleeding out. Just last night, he was sitting at this very table, drinking beers, laughing, living—and now he’s dying. Alec stalks forward, replacing Kai’s hands with his. Kai is covered in crimson gore, a wild, untamed look in his eyes. He moves past me to the bar. Snatching a bottle of Jack, he swallows a couple hearty gulps. “Fucking bastards ambushed us, tried to steal our merchandise. They fucked with the wrong motherfuckers,” he mumbles, leaving the room, only to return a minute later with an automatic weapon.

“Tell Jimmy I’m taking care of this shit.”

“Wait!” Alec demands. “You can’t go alone. Wait for backup.”

“Fuck that.”

Ice stands up. “I’ll come.”

“You can’t. You’re injured.” Alec waves his hands around pointing to the arm he’s bleeding from and Ash’s body.

Finding my composure, I run to the kitchen and grab the first aid kit. As soon as I return, Alec moves his hands away from Ash’s neck, sighing and shaking his head in defeat. I race to put the pressure back on, but blood rushes from his wound like a tapped faucet. His skin is pale, his eyes staring into nothingness. He’s gone. I move to Ice and gently lift his hand away. There’s a nasty hole in his arm. “The bullet has to come out,” he tells me, and my eyes expand. I can’t do that.

“We don’t have time for this,” Kai steams, pacing the floor.

“I’ll come with you,” Alec announces, and acid races up my throat.

“N-No,” I stutter, blood coating my shaking hands. “You can’t go. You’re just a kid.” I laugh, but there’s no humor to it. It’s a frantic, fearful plea.

“Alec, I respect the hell out of you for offering, but your old man would take me to ground if I took you anywhere. Stay with your girl. I don’t need back up.”

“The hell you don’t, killer,” Jimmy growls as he walks into the room holding a shotgun. “But you have it. Alec, wake the place up. And tell Jackie and Barb to get this shit cleaned up. These motherfuckers will sleep through anything.”



It took twenty minutes for the doctor to arrive, and another fifty to dig the bullet out of Ice’s arm, stitch him up, and leave.

As soon as my dad and the rest of the brothers arrived back, I was sent to my dad’s room, and I’ve been here ever since. Showering the blood from my skin made me feel ill. Ash is gone. He was young, and now he’s bug feed. It physically hurts my heart to think of Alec patching in, leaving one night on a run, and coming back riddled with bullets. A sob catches in my throat. Grabbing a pillow from the bed, I hold it to my face so no one can hear me cry.

A light rap on the door sends my heart stammering. Shit. Throwing the pillow down, I swipe at my face and inhale a couple deep breaths before opening the door to see Alec freshly showered, a look of exhaustion on his beautiful face.

“Hey,” I say, limply, lifting a shoulder and tucking a strand of hair behind my ear.

“Hey.” He tries to smile, but it falls before ever finding purchase. “If I leave the door open, you want to sit with me for a bit and watch a movie? I can’t sleep.”

I lunge at him, wrapping my arms around his waist and burrowing my face in his chest. His hands stroke through my

hair for a few silent moments. “Can we not do the slasher flick?” I mumble. “I can’t handle more blood tonight.”

“We can do whatever you want.”

This...holding each other...I want to do this forever...

FIVE



ALEC

SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD

My stomach feels queasy from the beers being shoved at me all night. “Cheers,” another brother bellows, and a chorus rings out.

“Another drink, kid?”

“No thanks.” I shudder, and Jimmy roars with laughter, patting his meaty hand on my chest, rattling my ribcage. How the hell do they drink all day and night? My old man pulls Jackie onto his lap, slipping his hand up her skirt, gaining him a squeal, then a moan. He’s getting married to my mother again tomorrow. This will be the third time. They break up, divorce, and then get back together more than they have hot dinners. Even though she knows he’s a cheating asshole, she constantly forgives and forgets—until she doesn’t. Women are crazy.

“Smell that, boy.” My old man groans, sticking his fingers under my nose. The brothers explode in amusement. Smells like I could catch something from inhaling that. She’s probably got half the brothers’ cum inside her. Whenever my dad gets back with my mom, for the first few weeks, he tells Jackie to fuck off, and she offers her pussy around his brothers to try to spark jealousy. All it does is brand her less worthy of the ol’ lady title.

“That’s club pussy,” he jeers, slapping her ass and grabbing a handful of her tits. “Come with me.” He pushes her off his knee, and she slips into a new prospect’s lap. They call him Rage, a miserable, barely-contained mountain of fury. He frowns at her and pushes her ass to the floor, causing her spill

a couple beers, which leaves her extremely unpopular to the brothers who are all intoxicated and want to stay that way.

“Bitch, you better get your fat ass to the bar.”

“My ass isn’t a fat, asshole,” she snaps.

“You fucking broke Rage’s leg.”

They carry on, throwing jabs back and forth, while my father walks me down the hall to my room, his hand on the back of my neck.

“Remember what I told you about women?”

“Yeah, Dad.”

“Your mother fucked me up years ago and continues to torment me, making me pay for fucking weddings whenever she decides I’m good enough,” he grunts. “Fucking bitches, all of ’em. Get in your head and play fucking games. They use their pussy to trap you.” He turns me to face him and taps my chest. I catch a glimpse of Drew over his shoulder, her eyes popping wide when she sees the wall of my old man’s back. Her dad’s room is opposite mine. Rules are she stays in the room while they party, but Drew’s a rule-breaker. It’s that wild streak that makes her so fun to be around. She slowly closes the door, only leaving it open a sliver to watch us through the gap.

“Pussy is sweet, but you can get it free. You don’t need to sell your fucking soul for it. Find a bitch who keeps your mind calm, your belly full, and...?” he urges.

“Your balls empty,” I mutter, knowing Drew’s got to be laughing her ass off at me behind that door.

“Save your love for the road. If you give it to a woman, she’ll use it to control you—even after she’s left you. Look at your mother.”

I want to ask why the hell he’s bothering to marry her again then, but I asked him that the second time, and he said it’s cheaper to be married to her than not. Whatever the hell that means.

“Now, I said I had a gift for you.” He grins, which looks weird on him. He never smiles. He’s a six-foot-six, scar-battered, bearded monster.

He raps his knuckles on my bedroom door, which was empty when I left it a couple hours ago. Two seconds later, the handle drops, and the door opens.

What the fuck?

A young girl is standing there, finger in her mouth, tits on display, and black lace panties. “Don’t tell your mother. Have fun.” He shoves me inside and saunters off the way we came. My heart races a mile a minute. This naked chick is in my room looking at me like I’m her lunch after she skipped breakfast.

I don’t look like a teen. I know that. Like my old man, I am tall and broad. Unlike him, I have a pretty face. Girls like me, and although I’ve had plenty of offers, I’d never done anything with any of them. I had urges like most teenage boys, I just took care of them with my right hand. People assumed Drew was my girl, and neither of us discouraged that. If I did anything with someone else, I feel like we’d lose that bubble I like being in. No one asks Drew out because of that, and it makes me happy—real fucking happy.

I turn around, my eyes landing on Drew’s. She opened the door farther and is looking up at me through her lashes. She blinks rapidly and bites her lip, waiting to see what I’m going to do.

Fuck, what am I going to do?

She shrugs her shoulder and rolls her eyes like it’s a no brainer. The woman wraps her arms across my shoulder and whispers, “You want me to make you a man, baby?”

I laugh, ducking my head and giving it a shake. Fucking her won’t make me a man; it will make me a fool. Of course I know what to do. No one comes close to Drew. It’s always been Drew.

“Nah. Feel free to stick around in here for a bit and tell my old man you did a good job, though,” I tell her, walking out

and closing the door, grinning when Drew opens hers wide, letting me inside.

The moment she closes the door and turns around, I back her up against it and crash my lips down on hers, tasting the cherry lemonade she's been drinking. We're clumsy and nervous, our movements inexperienced and messy, but it's us, and that's all that fucking matters...

SIX



DREW

SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD

The ground trembles beneath me. Goosebumps spout across my skin. “Why did we have to ride here?” I sulk, shivering as he comes to a stop. Pulling off my helmet, a matte black dome with crusted jewels in the shape of a skull. A gift from Alec, which he designed himself and gave to me for my birthday. My dad finally realized there was no way he could keep me off the back of Alec’s bike or out of his room.

I shake out my bush people call hair. I cut it short, and it still drives me freaking crazy. Alec loves it, though...

“Baby, you know I like to show you off on the back of my bike.” Alec groans, rubbing my thighs to warm me up. He kicks the stand out and climbs off, then helps me do the same. I should have worn more than these jean shorts, but the weather was nice when I left the house this morning. Now, it’s dark and freezing.

“Your dad’s going to freak out when he realizes you left.” I pull my jacket tight around me and light a blunt. Taking a long drag, I grin up at him through the exhale of smoke.

“Fuck it. I’d rather celebrate with you than those assholes.”

“Those assholes are going to be your brothers,” I remind him, passing him the joint.

“Got to earn my patch first, baby.” He sits next to me on the bench overlooking our lake, wearing his cut, the word “prospect” sewn on the chest above his left pocket, “You sure you want to patch in? You could go to college. You’re

intelligent as shit, Alec.” I’m not blowing smoke up his ass either. He could go anywhere, do anything.

“This is in my blood, Drew. My dad would fucking die inside if his only son—only child—didn’t patch in and take the baton when the time comes.” He slips the blunt from my hand and chases the high.

“What about me?”

“What about you, baby?” he croaks through another inhale.

“You once told me you’d go to college if that’s what I wanted to do.” I nudge his leg with my knee.

“I said I’d go with *you*, and I will, if that’s what you want, but it’ll be as a Royal Bastard. I’ll go nomad until you’re done.” An orange glow moves through the air as he flicks the blunt into the water.

“And what if I don’t want this life when I’m done?” I test him. I’m not sure what I want yet, but I do know it’s with him.

He snorts, dragging me into his lap. “You’re already in this life, Drew. And you’re mine. I don’t even know who I am without you. We’re part of each other. I’ll go wherever you go and vice versa.” Damn him and his beautiful words and soul. I couldn’t imagine a life where we’re not together. The very thought makes me feel sick. People always joke about us being too young and not knowing what love is yet. I say fuck them all. We know what love is. It’s this: friendship, loyalty, laughter, love, touch, emotion—it’s being wherever the other is because they’re your air. Without them, you can’t breathe, and more importantly, you don’t want to.

“So, I don’t have a choice?” I push, grinning into his kiss as he captures my lips with his. He moves down to my neck, making me moan. “You want a life without me?” he asks, squeezing my butt and slipping his fingers beneath the hem of my shorts.

“I don’t know what a life without you looks like.”

“It looks bleak, baby.” He bites down on my shoulder and sucks, leaving a little love bruise.

“I should stay then?”

“I think it’s best.” He smirks, grabbing a fistful of my hair and tugging my head back, sweeping my neck with wet kisses.

“Damn. I don’t think I could drag myself away even if I wanted to,” I groan, moving my hips.

“I don’t think I could let you even if you wanted to.” He tips his hips up, brushing against the apex of my thighs.

“We could have done this in your room.” I moan, loving the feel of his touch.

“I let Mason use it. He’s got a thing for Heidi.”

Laughing hard, I push against his shoulders to stop his movements. “Mason and Heidi?”

“Yeah, what?” He leans back in, but I tilt backwards.

“Well, for one, Mason’s gross, and Heidi’s a princess. Two, Heidi has a major thing for you.”

Just thinking about her pining for him causes my to blood boil. She knows we’re together and still tries to get in his pants. She’s a cunt. The only reason I haven’t torn her hair out is because fighting over a guy is tacky club slut shit.

“Heidi knows I’m not interested. And Mason is gross to you. She might not think so.”

“Everyone thinks so,” I correct him, thinking of his ruddy face and fat tongue he tried to stick down my throat when he cornered me at a party. I broke his toe with the heel of my boot. I never told Alec about that night. Alec likes to bare knuckle box and takes on some of the club brothers. He’d destroy Mason, and no one needs that drama.

“He’s not the same kid who did this.” He strokes his finger down my scar and curls his hand around the back of my neck. Pulling me down to his lips, he kisses me so gently, a stark contrast to how he usually is with me.

Alec is hungry—that’s the only word for it when it comes to me. He always wants to kiss me, touch me, stroke, devour. Where I see an awkward teenage girl with wild, untamed hair,

an ugly scarred face, skinny legs and arms, but boobs and hips that make me look ridiculous, Alec sees beauty—love—his best friend.

“Wait.” I pull away. “How does Heidi know you’re not interested?”

Licking his lips, his eyes on mine, he says, “Babe, she’d have to be blind not to see how fucking crazy I am about you. I want you. Only you. Anyone with two eyes can see that.” Grabbing me more aggressively, he pulls me back to his lips.

“She’s only going to have one eye if she keeps throwing herself at you,” I grumble between kisses. His chest rumbles with laughter against mine.

“Jealousy is not a pretty color, baby. But damn does it make my cock hard when you get all fired up.” He slips his hands up the shirt I stole from his room. His fingers fondle my breasts through my bra. His lips move down to mine, nudging them open with his tongue. I move my legs to straddle him at a better angle, getting lost in his taste. Our tongues duel, while the pad of his thumb gropes and explores. I push down, grinding on the bulge in his pants. “Fuck, Drew. You drive me crazy, girl.”

He drives me crazy too. My heart pounds. My skin ignites under the flames of his caress. I pivot my hips, getting a better angle and pushing down hard on him, breathing each other’s air. “Fuck,” we both say in unison.

“You’re going to make me nut in my pants,” he groans as I chase the feeling, my bundle of nerves rubbing on the button of his jeans through our clothing. “Oh shit, Alec,” I cry out, and he pins me to him, his lips devouring mine.

We pull apart when footfalls pound the pavement toward us. Alec moves me off him, straightening my top and standing in front of me “Who the fuck is that?” he calls out, bending down and pulling a gun from his boot. “You’re carrying?” I gasp as Mason’s ginger mop of hair glows under the moonlight. He bends at the waist to catch his breath, and Alec slips his gun away.

“Alec,” Mason pants. “You need to get back to the club. It’s your old man. He’s going crazy.”

“Why?”

“Your mom—shit. Alec, just come to the club.”



The quiet swallows us as we walk through the club doors. The atmosphere is dense, a dark weight lingering like a storm cloud.

“Ambulance is here,” Rage tells Jimmy, his cut no longer branded with “Prospect,” but a diamond-shaped 1% patch sitting proudly above his club name.

“She can’t be here, son,” Jimmy tells Alec, his tone cautious, soft.

“What the fuck is going on?” Alec asks, all eyes on him.

“Go to Alec’s room, sweetheart. Wait there for him.” I’m hesitant, but Alec nods for me to go. I move a few steps before Jackie comes running out. “Ambulance and police at the gate,” she tells Jimmy, her voice shaking. “Jameson, you get shit sorted?”

“Everything’s clean,” the brother tells Jimmy.

“Open the gates.”

“Why is there an ambulance? Where is my old man?” Alec asks, getting agitated. His eyes dart toward the hall leading to his dad’s office.

“Alec, wait!” Jimmy barks as Alec dashes off, running toward the door.

“Fucking grab him, you dumb fucks,” Jimmy bellows as everyone jumps at once. My stomach turns, acid burning up my throat. Something terrible has happened. I can feel it in the air. It’s toxic with death, despair...

“Arghhh!” a growl mixed with a heavy, loud rumble comes from the office.

“Fuck,” Jimmy hollers, pushing his hand through his hair. The door opens, and police and medics flood in. My legs almost buckle beneath me. What the hell is happening, and where is my dad? Is he back there?

I back against a wall so I don’t fall down. Police carry out Alec’s dad, kicking and roaring. “It’s just until you calm down, Mr. Walker,” they assure him.

Minutes feel like hours as my stomach eats away at itself. I move around the room, sticking to the outskirts, staying unnoticed in all the commotion.

I reach the door of Alec’s dad’s office when Jameson places his hand on my shoulder. “You don’t want to do that, kid. It’s not good.”

He has a beautiful face and warming aura, unusual for a brother of the Royal Bastards. “I’m not a kid, and if it’s not good, Alec is going to need me. I’m going in there one way or another.”

“One way or another?” He frowns

“Around you or through you.” I shrug.

Holding his hands up, he raises a brow. “Don’t lose that spark, kid.”

Pushing open the door, my heart stops. Alec stands looming above the paramedics doing CPR on his mother. Blood coats his shirt and jeans. His hair is sticking up in all directions. “Don’t stop! Do it again!” he roars down at them. They keep looking at each other, shaking their heads no. “Again! Again!” he orders.

I move toward him. As if he senses me, he turns, his eyes made of glass, his heart crumbling like paper. “Drew...” he calls out in a broken voice, making my soul ache. I run to him and wrap him in my arms, letting all his sorrow bleed through his tears into me...

SEVEN



ALEC

A week later...

Whispers creep around me, making me angry. I hate this fucking feeling.

The fury inside me needs an outlet. It's weird seeing these assholes in suits, but out of respect for my father, they all made an effort for my mom's funeral. She was way too young to die. I'm so fucking bitter. The good memories now mix with the bloody images of her final moments. Anger and disappointment sear through my brain. Did she not think about how this would fuck me up!? Was I not enough for her?

Rain coats the fabric of my black jacket. Drew's dainty hand squeezes mine.

"You ready?" she asks, gesturing toward my dad's retreating form. I stare down the hole they lowered my mother into, her coffin littered with single red roses. "Yeah. You coming back to the club?" Her dad went on a run. Left her a note telling her to go to her aunt's and stay away from the club, but didn't give a reason why. She doesn't even like her aunt. She's a stuck up bitch.

"Of course." Her brow creases, and she leans into me. I wrap an arm around her and sigh into the top of her head, breathing her in.

The place is packed, members from chapters all across the country coming to pay their respects for my father. It's not

about my mother. There's an atmosphere in here, and it's not death—it's simmering anger, unrest. A lot of hushed conversations and shifty fucking eyes. Something's going on. There's more to this, I can feel it in my bones...there has to be more.

"I need a drink," I grunt, wading through the brothers.

"Hey, darling, you okay?" Barb asks.

"That's a stupid fucking question. Just get the man a drink," Joe barks, then tips his own glass back. She pours me a whiskey and places a Bud Light on the bar for Drew, ignoring Joe's continued efforts to get a top-up.

"Woman, fill my glass," he warns, and I let out a bark of laughter when Barb gives him the finger.

"Come on. Let's go out back," I tell Drew, my head pounding with a headache that hasn't left me since I came back here to find Mom dead. Self-inflicted stab wound to the stomach. How the fuck does someone do that? I didn't believe she would be capable of it and thought my old man must have hurt her. It killed me to jump to that conclusion, but I know his temper and in a heated argument maybe... but I watched the video footage she entered his office already bleeding, the knife protruding from her stomach, her telling him she was sorry. It made me feel like a bad son for even thinking Dad could have done that to her. Shit, my head feels so muddled. "Watch it." Rage growls as I barge into him coming out the back door.

"Fuck you, asshole," I sneer, dropping Drew's hand and smacking the bottle out of Rage's. It's fucking suicide to fuck with this dude, but I'm in all kinds of a giving no shits mood.

"Alec," Drew breathes in a warning.

"Listen to the girl, kid."

Fucking kid? He's like eight years older than me—fucking nothing. He's got a couple inches on me in height and a shit load in weight. Where I'm lean, boxing muscle, he's brute force. I shove his chest. "I ain't no kid, dickhead."

He growls low in his chest, like a fucking grizzly bear.

Fuck it, I need to feel something other than this dark energy coursing through my veins. My mother's image, bloody and fucking dead, is constant on my mind.

I swing and land a hit to his jaw. His head jars to the side, but his body doesn't move. Motherfucker.

"You only get one," he warns. Drew darts off running, no doubt to get my old man to rein me in before this fucker kills me.

I let loose a flurry of jabs to his ribs, all my boxing training coming out to play—powerful, precise, and fucking dying inside. Tears blur my eyes as I scream my pain with every punch. My knuckles hurt, and my arms tire. Pain explodes across my cheek, and all the lights go out.



Fuck, my head is still pounding and my jaw is throbbing. I blink my eyes open and groan at the intrusion of light.

I sit up and squint, trying to bring a furious looking Drew into focus.

"You fucking dipshit. What the hell were you thinking?" she scorns.

Damn, she's never mad at me, and I don't like it.

"I'm sorry," I grunt.

"Are you?" she fumes, her arms crossed over her chest. She's wearing a long black dress down to her ankles and Doc Martens. It suits her. It's rare for her to wear anything other than jeans or shorts. "I love you. You know that, right?" I tell her, catching her off guard. Why the fuck haven't I told her this a thousand times already? This shouldn't be the first time she's hearing the words, I'm such a dick.

Her breath catches on a gasp. Her arms drop, her body sighing. "Alec." She sobs, throwing herself at me. It hurts my face, but I catch her and I hold onto her for dear life. Fuck, I'd

die without her. Her palms cup my face, the pad of her thumbs stroking the bruise forming there.

“Rage’s hits are fucking lethal,” I grunt. She shakes her head, her pretty curls bouncing around her face.

“It was actually Jameson who hit you.”

“What?”

She shrugs. “Rage took everything you had to give. He let you get all that anger out on his face and body.”

Shit. I’m a fucking asshole. Lost in darkness, wading through murky waters that won’t clear, no matter how hard I wish they would.

“My old man?”

“He didn’t see. Doesn’t know.” She frowns. That’s one saving grace, I suppose.

“Alec?” She kisses my lips, gentle and attentive. “Tell me how to help you. I feel so helpless, baby.”

I pull her against me, inhaling her scent. “You are helping me. Just stay with me, yeah? Lay with me for a little while. It’s nearly midnight—a new day. Your birthday.” Eighteen, and she’s stuck here looking after me.

She nods and slips off my lap to turn out the light. I hear her shucking off her boots, and when my eyes adjust to the light, my breath leaves my lungs. She pulls her dress up and over her head—no bra, just a pair of cotton panties. She climbs into the bed, lying down next to me. She’s done this a million times before, but never naked. I’ve touched, kissed, seen every inch of this girl, but we’ve never gone all the way. I hated the thought of her not being ready or regretting it, so we did everything else over and fucking over again. I’m mad about this girl and crave her like a drug. “You going to sit up all night?” she teases. My head is foggy. We’ve been in here many fucking nights and messed around, but this feels like more...

EIGHT



DREW

Thirty minutes later...

Breathing in deep, I wrap myself around Alec, soaking in the moment, memorizing every second of it to revisit when my mind isn't spinning. I've always known I loved him, ever since I was six years old and he called me a badass for cutting my hair off after a kid mocked me for my pigtails.

No one could possibly love him more. His eyes have been reflecting that back to me since our first kiss...maybe even before that.

He's my soul mate, and it's a miracle in this twisted, fucked-up world we live in that we found each other so early on. But we did, and here we are, living through the pain and sorrow of him losing his mother. My mother died when I was a baby—a hit and run. My dad doesn't think I know why he became a member of the Royal Bastards, but I know it involved tracking and dealing with her killer.

I was a sneaky kid and heard a lot of conversations I probably shouldn't have.

“You're killing me, baby. Fuck, I love the way you smell.” He inhales my scent, tasting my skin.

His kiss burns through me, lighting every nerve ending. “Drew...” He says my name so pained, I weep a little, feeling all his hurt, his love. “I want to show you how much I love you, Alec,” I tell him, kissing his lips, cheeks, and eyelids.

“I love you so damn much.”

“Then show me,” I tell him, the weight of his body falling on top of mine.

“Are you sure?”

“More sure than anything.” And it’s the truth. He’s never pressured me for more than I’ve been ready for, and if I’m honest, I’ve been ready for this for a long time. “You going to marry me?” Kiss.

“Yeah.”

“Have my babies?” Caress.

“Not babies, baby—one.” I gasp, feeling skin on skin.

He’s gentle, caring, beautiful. Taking his time, he kisses every part of me, reassuring me, loving me.

“I’ll show you the world as you’ve always dreamed of.” Bite. “And then you’ll have my babies.” Tease.

“One...baby, single.”

“Yeah, we’ll see.” A swipe of his tongue.

We stroke, caress, talk each other through it, and when he enters my body, I feel an overwhelming rush of blissful happiness, completeness—I’m whole. Emotions stir inside me so intense, they steal my breath and bring tears to my eyes.

“Did I hurt you?”

“No,” I assure him. It did hurt, but only briefly, and it’s a bearable pain that dissipates with his movements.

“I love you so damn much.” Thrust.

“I love you too...”



I wake up cocooned in Alec, his entire body wrapped around mine.

“Don’t go,” he groans in my ear, making me giggle.

“I need to pee and get a drink.” Releasing my body, he sighs, laying flat on his back, a lazy smile hooking his lips.

“You know we’re never leaving this bed now, right?”

“Horn dog.”

“Hey, I’m not the one molesting people when they’re trying to go to sleep.”

I sit up and stretch, then dart from the bed when Alec makes a grab for me. “Now who’s the molester?” I cock a brow and pick my dress up, pulling it down over my body.

“I’ll never get that image of you taking your dress off out of my head. You replace the bad ones. You’re the light in the haze of darkness consuming me.”

Sighing, I go to him, taking him in my arms and holding him. Within ten seconds, he’s removing my dress and owning my body once again, showing me all the ways he loves me.



Sneaking out of Alec’s room, I get to almost to the end of the hall, coming up short when Kai’s door opens and Riley sneaks out. Her eyes flare wide as she sees me. Behind her, I have a perfect view of a naked Kai...with...is that blood smeared across his body?

Riley quickly shuts the door, her clothes bunched in her arms. “You’re bleeding.” I gasp, absorbing the sight of her body as she rushes to dress herself. She has cuts and bruises everywhere.

“Did Kai do that to you?” I urge.

She halts her movements, her eyes narrowing to slits. “Mind your fucking business, Drew. Not everyone wants some sappy love story like you and Alec.”

What a bitch. Holding up my hands, I move past her. “Just making sure you were okay. No need to be a bitch.”

“Drew,” she calls after me, slipping on her boots that cost more than every piece of clothing I own. “Kai helps me... don’t think bad of him.”

“Whatever. Forget you even saw me,” I tell her.

“I will, and you do the same, yeah?”

Yeah, sure. What the fuck ever.

“Hey, you.” Jackie smiles at me when I enter the kitchen, a nasty bruise around her neck. “You okay?” I lift my chin to her throat.

Laughing awkwardly, she rubs her hand there. “Oh...yeah. One of the boys likes to roleplay and gets a bit rough.” She shrugs. Barb comes out of the pantry, carrying an armful of breakfast stuff.

“Drew?” She looks surprised to see me, her face losing some of its color.

She places her haul down and grabs me by the arm. “You shouldn’t be here, darling.”

“I was just getting a drink.” I point to the kitchen sink.

She ushers me out into the hallway.

“Listen, sweetheart, I want you to go out the back exit and head straight for the gate. I’m going to open it for you, and I want you to go straight to your aunt’s.”

“Why? What’s going on?” She looks worried, her words coming out too fast, her eyes darting all around, watching who’s nearby.

“Just trust me, okay? Be a good girl now.” She pushes me toward the back exit and rushes off to presumably open the gates from the security room.

Voices, raised and aggressive, come from the main room as I sneak past it. Looking through the window, I see a smartly dressed man talking with Viking. His fist slams down on the table. Standing abruptly, Viking orders the brothers, “Go collect this traitor bastard.”

A burst of movement sounds as his army marches to his beat. He turns to the door I'm standing behind, and I quickly duck out of view, almost screeching when Kai's hand comes down to cover my mouth, his body pushing against mine. "Shhh," he whispers, then tugs me down the hall to his room. He pins me against the wall of his bedroom, holding his finger to his lips, pointing to the door. I bob my head, trying to stop my racing heart. I don't know how I know, but I just do. This is about my dad.

Feet pound outside Kai's room, the banging on another door close by, sending alarm bells ringing in my head, fear trickling through my bloodstream. What the hell is happening?

"What the fuck?" Alec bellows. *It was his bedroom door...*

"You got Drew in here?"

"No. She went to get food and get drinks. Why?"

"You don't let her leave this place, understood?"

Thud.

"Why? What the fuck's going on?" Alec calls out down the hall.

"Don't fucking question me, boy. Just do as I fucking say."

My heart races in my chest. Sweat coats my skin as nausea stirs my stomach. When I hear Alec's door slam and footfalls fade, I close my eyes and swallow down the stone lodged in my throat.

"Why is Prez looking for you?" Kai asks. He's shirtless and still covered in smeared blood one hand on the wall next to my shoulder. "Is that Riley's blood?" I ask instead. I have no fucking clue why Viking wants me, but it scares the hell out of me.

"Not important. That man in the other room is a fed. He's Jeremy Koynakov. You been a bad girl?"

"Fuck off, Kai," I spit out. It only causes him to grin. He holds up his hand, showing me the scar I created years ago. "I've never forgotten this."

“Hard to when you have to live with seeing it every day,” I scoff, smacking his hand away when he moves my hair to look at my scar.

“I was an asshole back then, but I’m different now. And this doesn’t make you ugly—quite the opposite.”

“I don’t have time for scar bonding, Kai. You going to turn me over to Prez or let me go?”

Holding his hands up in surrender, he backs away.

“Would be a waste to let him have you. He wouldn’t let me watch.”

Swallowing my disgust, I turn slowly and open the door, peering out. “You were wrong too,” I tell him over my shoulder.

“How so?”

“You haven’t changed, you’re still an asshole.” When I see the coast is clear, I count to three in my head and chance a run for the back exit not risking returning to Alec’s room in case his dad comes back. Bursting through the doors, I get two feet and smack into the meaty wall of Viking and fall back onto my ass with a grunt of pain.

“Sorry, sweetheart,” he drawls as I get to my feet. “I see everything in my club.” He reaches out, snatching me up by the throat, making me gasp and choke for breath. I hit my fists down on his arms, struggling and failing. I know now where Jackie’s bruises came from.

“Sins of the father,” he growls in my face, and darkness creeps in from the corners of my eyes, my lungs ablaze desperate for air, then Viking jolts sideways, and suddenly I’m released and falling to the ground in a heap. My lungs gobble down much needed air as Alec rams his dad, wrapping his arms around his waist and taking him to the asphalt. They grapple and shout, and I scramble to my feet and dart off running. Tears bleeding from my eyes, blurring everything around me. I push my legs forward, heaving from exhaustion, my feet burning and sore, my boots still in Alec’s room. *Alec...*

Nothing feels real. Thoughts plague me, splintering into shards of pain. I should be floating on a cloud of bliss right now. Instead, my kingdom is falling to ash around me, suffocating me in the dust.

The club house gets farther from view, but in the back of my mind, I know Viking could easily be on his bike looking for me by now. Sorrow soaks my heart. I've known this man almost my entire life. Felt like we were a family, and so quickly, he attacks me...for what?

Hiccups jolt my body as sobs consume me. Every molecule inside me wants to turn around and run back to Alec, to the safety of his embrace. Instead, terror has me sticking out a thumb until someone eventually pulls over. It's a truck with a young guy inside. Nerves eat away at me. "Hey. You okay?" he asks, rolling down his window, giving me a once over. "You need a ride?"

This is dangerous, and I don't have my knife on me. Shit. "If you try anything, I'll gouge your eyeballs out with my thumbs," I warn. His eyes widen. Taking off his cap, he uses his forearm to wipe the sweat there. "Sounds fair." He bows his head, slipping it back on.

How did everything turn so bad so fast?

NINE



ALEC

A few minutes later...

Animalistic growls rumble from my chest as I rain down blows on my old man. The cold barrel of a gun pinned against my temple brings my movements to a halt. I'm shoved from straddling my old man's waist, Jimmy's weapon still pointed at me.

My old man gets to his feet and taps Jimmy's hand, making him lower his weapon. "Damn, kid, you have bigger balls than most." He swipes, smearing off the blood from his nose, grinning like a crazy fucker. "You've grown strong, tough. I'm proud of you." He offers his hand out to me and pulls me to my feet.

Pulling me in close, he spins me until I'm in a chokehold. His laughter and praise was only meant to knock me off-kilter. I batter his arm, trying to get him to let me go. "If you attack another brother, you get to wear his scar," he growls in my ear. Un-sheaving his blade, he slices through my eyebrow. It stings like a bitch, but I endure it. I know the rules: son or not, brotherhood comes first.

I'm released from his hold, gagging, trying to pull air into my lungs.

"We need to talk."

Every instinct tells me to go after Drew, to check she's okay. When I saw the way he treated her, I saw red. I heard a

bedroom door slam closed and her mass of curls flying behind her like a cape as she darted through the back exit with enough steam anyone would think she was running from a murderer.

“What about Drew?” I ask, still pissed and out of breath, blood dripping down my face and off my chin.

Cranking his neck, he strokes a hand through his beard. “I won’t pursue her.”

“Why the fuck would you? What the fuck did she do?”

“Not her.” He grabs me by the shoulder. “And not out here. Inside.”

I follow him back inside to his office, eyeballing Jimmy over my shoulder. “No offense, kid, but he’s my Prez,” he defends.

Yeah, I know, but it still fucking stings. Jimmy is like a second dad. Pointing the barrel of a gun at my temple is some fucked up shit.

“You need to see this, then you’ll understand.” My old man sits behind his desk and swivels his computer monitor sideways, clicking on a video.

“The hall and kitchen cameras were knocked out the day your mother...was murdered,” he says, the word “mother” a tone deeper than the rest.

Wait. Murdered? My chest constricts. “What did you say?” I ask, my ribs cracking open.

“Look for yourself.”

A camera from outside the back entrance of the kitchen leading to the yard shows the kitchen door and Mitch, Drew’s dad, barreling through it. Pulling his phone from his pocket, he says, “You need to get me outta here today. Things have changed. I’ve given you more than enough evidence to buy my freedom.”

Boom. Boom. Boom.

Blood roars in my ears, my hands clenching.

“Why are you just telling me this?”

“Because I needed to be sure. I called in a contact of mine, a dirty fed.”

Boom. Boom. Boom.

“Seconds later, your mother stumbled into my office, the last name on her lips—”

“Mitch,” I choke out.

“He’s a rat. Talking to the feds, she must have heard him, or...I don’t fucking know, but he’s a traitor. The boys have found him and are bringing him in. He’s—”

“Fucking dead!” I roar.

TEN



DREW

Two days later...

Two days, and no contact from my dad or Alec. What if his dad really hurt him? Sickness stirs my stomach. I just ran away and left him.

“You heard anything from my dad?” I ask my aunt, who rolls her eyes at me.

“He’s doing illegal crap. When he wants to come for you, he will.”

She’s such a fucking bitch. I don’t understand why he would leave me with her. Where the hell is he?

My mind continues to replay everything that happened.

“Sins of the father.”

My dad loved being a member of the Royal Bastards. I can’t figure out what he could have done to piss Walker off to this extreme. My hands rub over the bruises on my neck.

My cell chirps, making me startle and rush over to the bed.

Alec: Hey. Meet me at our spot. 10 pm.

Nervous bubbles fizzle and pop in my gut. He’s never been distant. It’s just a text, but it feels...cold.

Drew: How do I know this is you?

Irrational? I don’t give a shit. His dad tried to strangle me.

Alec: Baby, just meet me. I need to feel you.

Tears blur my vision as I read and re-read the message. I need to feel him too, but I can't escape the pit in my stomach telling me to run.

I text Mason, asking him to meet me ten minutes before I have to meet Alec, he replies agreeing, which settles me a little. I've never felt afraid of him before, but there's crawling under my skin—a warning I need to take heed of.



I stick to the shadows, cautious, every sound sending my pulse skipping. Music from the clubhouse hums, vibrating the air around me. The silhouette standing by our bench is unmistakable. I want to weep with relief. My feet sprint off running and the weight of my body barrels into him, my arms wrapping around his neck, legs around his waist. “God, I missed you,” he whispers against my cheek. It's only been a couple days, but it feels like more, so much more.

“What the hell is happening? I can't get ahold of my dad. My aunt is freaking out,” I say, my voice broken. I slip down his body, my eyes looking up to see a slit through his brow, raised and bloody, stitches holding the skin together.

My mouth pops open. “Oh my God, did your dad do that?” I reach up, running my fingers along the cut.

Shaking his head, he shrugs. “It's nothing.”

“It's not nothing, Alec. That's going to scar.”

“So we'll match.” He smiles, staring at my face like he's trying to memorize it.

A gasp leaves my lips as my eyes drop to his cut.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

“You got patched in?” I breathe disbelief, staring at the space where it used to say “prospect.” How...when? Stabbing pain sears through me.

“Yeah, babe. I’m a Bastard by blood and leather now.” He looks guilty of the fact.

“When? Is this why you haven’t been in touch?”

“Yeah...you know how my old man gets.”

My face flinches at the mention of his dad. “How? And so soon? It’s unheard of.”

“Babe, I’ve been a prospect since leaving the womb. I’m Alec Walker.”

“No. You’re just Alec to me,” I exhale. Everything is changing. There’s been a shift. It’s palpable in the air between us. “So, that means no running away with me, huh?” I smile meekly, kicking dirt around with the tip of my tennis shoe.

“You don’t need to run anywhere. My old man was pissed, but he didn’t mean to hurt you.” He strokes hair from my face, his eyes unfocused, glassy. Acid burns my throat.

“You’re so full of shit. Since when did we start lying to each other, Alec?” I tug down the neck of my sweater, showing him the bruising there.

“Motherfucker,” he grinds out.

“Didn’t mean to fucking hurt me, why the hell did you attack him then?”

“Fuck,” he grinds out, running his hands through his hair and pacing. “It’s complicated. Can you just trust me when I say you’re safe? You’re my ol’ lady, no one, including my old man, will touch you now. I’m patched in.”

God, does he really believe his dad will allow that after the way he attacked me? Something big has gone down. There’s no sweeping this under the rug. How could I ever feel safe here after this?

“Ol’ lady? Alec, we’re fucking kids to them. They’re not going to take us seriously.”

“Of course they will. We’ll get married, and you’ll live with me here.”

No. No. No. I don't even recognize the man before me. Why would he risk me going back there? "You really believe we should get married and live at the club? What about school and our plans to travel?"

He reaches for my hands, stroking the pads of his thumbs over the backs.

"Things change, Drew. We can travel when the time is right."

"Why is now not the right time?" *Run away with me, Alec*, I want to scream, but I need him to want that, to choose me.

"Because I'm newly patched in. It comes with responsibilities." He drops my hands, closing his eyes for a second.

"Is this really what you want?" I ask, desperate for him to tell me what's really going on his mind. I've known this boy since he was eight years old. He's hiding something. He's frowning like it's physically paining him to say the words. "What the hell did your dad mean when he said 'sins of the father'? What did my dad do? Do you know?" I outright ask him. If he lies, he erases everything we are, were. Setting my soul on fire. I need him to be honest, to show me he's got my back.

"Drew," he says my name on a shallow breath.

No. No. No. What is he keeping from me?

"Just tell me if you know. Do you know where he is?"

He just stares at me, begging me to drop it with his intense glare. It's too late to go back. It's too late for us. I feel it in the marrow of my bones. A frantic rush of fear and anxiety forces my blood screaming through my veins. My hands begin to tremble. "Your silence is destroying me."

Sickness stirs inside me. I lower my face to the ground. Looking at him hurts. "Just tell me..." I plead.

"Drew..."

My soul aches with how brokenly he says my name. "Stop saying my name for fuck's sake!" I screech. His eyes flit to the

fence separating us from the club.

“I...” he starts, but my phone rings, stopping him.

“My aunt.” I roll my eyes, unlocking the phone, trying to fill my lungs so I can breathe.

“What is it?” I ask down the receiver. My aunt’s frantic mumbles bellow through the line. “He’s dead. They killed him. Dumped on the lawn.”

“What? Who?” I ask in a daze, already knowing the answer. My head becomes foggy as my legs weaken beneath me.

“Mitch. He’s dead on my lawn. Oh God...oh God.”

“No...no...no....” My stomach knots, twisting. I gaze up at Alec. His face loses all color, and my eyes fill with rivets of tears. My phone drops to the grass as my legs give way and my knees hit the ground.

“Drew...” He rushes toward me, and I can’t hold my hand up to stop his approach.

“Don’t come near me!” I scream. “Oh God. Oh God. Oh God,” I weep, gasping for air. Why can’t I breathe? My body convulses, heaving up bile. They killed him. The club, where I spent more than half my life growing up, killed him.

“Drew...baby, please.” His words are meaningless. What can he possibly say to make this okay?

“Who did it?” I look up at him, wiping my mouth clean.

“Did what?” he asks, and rage washes through me, the world becoming red.

ELEVEN



ALEC

A second later...

Fuck! How is this happening? Moments ago, she was in my arms. I was breathing her in, forgetting how much has changed in the last couple days. I'm different now, and she is too.

I don't know what to say. I fucking hate Mitch for what he did, but he was still her dad, and now she's going to hate me. I can't bear for that to happen, but there's no getting away from it. What the fuck am I supposed to do? The body was never supposed to be found. My old man told me he would be buried and just go down as missing. How has his body already been found?

"Who did it?" She looks up at me, wiping her mouth clean.

"Did what?" I ask, knowing I'm a cunt. She's on her feet in an instant, pummeling her fists against my chest.

"How dare you! How fucking dare you! Who did it? Who killed him?" she bellows, hysterical, tears leaking from her eyes, her palm slapping me across the cheek with such force, my head whips to the side. I grab her hand as she goes in for another slap and pull her against my chest.

"He was talking to the feds," I whisper against her hair. I don't add that he fucking killed my mom. She doesn't need to know he was capable of that.

Hiccupping, she pulls away, utter destruction pouring off her in waves. I know what it feels like. I've been where she is.

The agony of losing my mom is raw, and learning she was murdered was like having salt poured into the wound. She stares at my patch, shaking her head. “Oh my God, it was you, wasn’t it?” She stumbles away from me, her eyes wide.

“Drew,” I say, edging forward.

Her arms wrap around her waist as she bends over, retching, a horrific sob ripping from her body. My fucking heart breaks. I’ve never seen her like this before. She’s tough—my rock. Fuck. I want to help her, but I don’t know how.

“We’re done,” she states so calmly, it’s haunting. She rises to stand, her hands dropping to her sides. Every emotion wipes clean from her face. She’s morphing right in front of me, turning it all off, numbing the pain. “We’re so fucking done,” she adds, turning away from me.

“Drew, don’t! Let me explain shit.”

She ignores me and begins walking away. I grab her phone and follow behind her.

“It’s not what you think. Let me explain.”

Her strides become faster and faster, until she’s at a flat-out run.

“I have your phone. Please wait, let me explain.”

When she passes the entrance, Mason’s waiting there. He watches her run past him and jumps out to stop me. “Let her go, man.”

“Get the fuck off me.” I shove him to the ground.

“Alec, let her have tonight to deal. Go see her tomorrow. You owe her that much,” he barks up at me from where he landed.

My heart races. Her conviction when saying we were done was like being hit with a sledgehammer. “What the fuck are you even doing here?” I spit out, pain and anger coursing through me, conflicting with each other, leaving me exhausted.

“She called me. Asked me to be here in case it was a setup.”

“What the fuck?” She didn’t trust me.

“She didn’t know if your dad sent the text.”

She doesn’t even like Mason, that’s how desperate she felt.

“What the hell would you have been able to do if it was him?” I throw my arms in the air, fuming.

“Tell you what happened if it was him and she ended up in the lake.” He gets to his feet, brushing off his legs. “Dick,” he adds.

“I can’t leave it like this...leave her the way she was.” I run my hands through my hair. “Fuck.”

“Just give her some time.”

“How the fuck did this happen?”

“I only know what I heard and saw from you two.” Mason shrugs.



Blazing through the clubhouse, I barge into my old man’s office. All eyes look over at me, Jimmy’s hand on his weapon.

“What the hell?” I bark.

“Start again,” my old man growls.

“Drew’s aunt called her. They found the body.”

“Wasn’t hard. We left it on her lawn.” Kai smirks.

Motherfucker. I fly at him, catching him with a closed fist to his jaw. His chair falls back, knocking him to the floor. Jimmy has me in an arm lock within seconds, face planting me on my old man’s desk.

“You have a nasty temper, boy.”

Kai is on his feet, his knife unsheathed. “Fucker.” He glares.

“Let him up,” my old man instructs. I’m pulled up and shoved away.

“Mitch was a fucking rat. A message has to be received when a brother betrays his own. He deserved more than what he got. He killed your fucking mother—the woman who brought you into this world. His Prez’s fucking wife.”

“But Drew...you said...”

“Fuck Drew. She’s lucky she got her claws in you young. It’s only because you love her that she isn’t naked and leashed to my fucking desk. Anyone else would have been.” He points his meaty finger at me. “I’m giving you her. Don’t ask me for more. There’s nothing to give.”

I turn and leave without another word. I get three feet out the club’s front door when a burning sting crosses my neck. My palm goes there automatically, wetness oozing on my fingers. Blood. I twist my head to see Kai standing behind me. “You wear my mark now, fucker.”

I want to challenge him to a bare-knuckle match, but I need to get to Drew.

“This isn’t over,” I warn him, and he grins like the senseless fool he is.

“Trying to turn me on, little Walker?” he taunts. A couple prospects nearby snigger, and repeat his jab. “Little Walker, I like it.”

Fuck them all.

Climbing on my bike, I ride off to find the only person who matters. If she wants us to travel, we’ll go. Fuck the promise I gave my old man, agreeing to patch in and stick around for Drew’s free pass. She shouldn’t need one anyway, it’s bullshit.

I pull up and park a couple houses down from her aunt’s. Police tape blocks off the perimeter. There’s a tent set up on the lawn, cops covering the premises. Shit. Pulling out my phone, I shoot Heidi a text and wait. Forty minutes later, her stupid pink Camaro pulls up. What a waste of a machine.

Pulling over, she winds her window down and looks over at me. “What do you want me to do?”

“Go down there, tell them you’re a friend of Drew’s and she asked you to come over.”

“What’s going on down there? It looks bad, Alec.”

“You going to keep asking questions or you going to do me this favor? I need this, Di.” Using her nickname seems to soften her up. Stepping out the car, she smiles up at me.

“Of course I’m going to do it. We’re friends, right?” She bats her fake lashes.

“Yeah.” I lift my chin, gesturing with my hand for her to go.

Ten long minutes later, she walks back across the yard, wiggling on stupid heels. Why the hell she’s wearing a full face of makeup and heels is beyond me. I got her out of bed for this shit. “She’s gone.” She shrugs.

“What?”

“She’s not here. Her aunt said she came home, packed a bag, and took off. Told me not to look for her here anymore.” She grimaces, stroking my arm. “Alec, are you okay?”

No. I’ll never be okay again. She fucking left me.



I drive back to the club in a haze of disbelief. She’s hurting now. She’ll come to her senses and reach out to me. She has to. She needs me the same way I need her. Fuck, why is it so hard to breathe?

As soon as I pull up to the club, I jump off my bike, dropping my helmet to the ground. This isn’t happening. This *can’t* be happening.

The bar is busy tonight. I march straight out back. The fire pit is in full blaze, the brothers sitting around it, drinking and having a good time. I spot Kai and make a beeline for him. “You,” I bark, pointing at him. “Two hundred I knock you out in under two minutes,” I wager.

This gets the interest of the brothers. Whistles and jeers ring out as a crowd forms. I throw my t-shirt over my head entering the circle drawn in the mud surrounded by bloodthirsty brothers.

“Remember, you asked for this.” Kai spits phlegm to the ground and rolls his shoulders. He comes at me, fists raised.

I jab out—one, two—hitting him in the ribs. He drops his elbow to protect them, and I spring off my back foot. Using all the power in my back leg, hip, and shoulder, I crack him in the temple. He staggers a few steps, and I hit out again, relentless. Bam—bam! He collapses to the grass without ever getting a hit in. They call him “Killer” because he is one, but he needs a weapon to do it. Me? I *am* a weapon.

My brothers boom in appreciation.

“Who’s next?” I bark.

“Me!” an older brother shouts, guzzling down his beer before crunching his knuckles. “Go easy on me, little Walker. I’m not as agile as I used to be.” He chuckles, gaining slaps on the back as he enters the circle.

Bets go around, money exchanging hands. He’s easily got eighty pounds on me, but it’s fat, not muscle. He moves, but he’s slow, swiping out and missing me. “It takes twice as much effort to swing and miss than it does to connect,” I taunt.

Coming at me again, he tries kicking at my shin like a cheating bastard. “Slippery little fucker, aren’t ya, kid?” he growls.

“I’m fast. There’s a difference.” I punch out, catching his jaw. It pisses him off. He attempts to ram me, his shoulder aiming at my waist. He gains contact, almost knocking me off my feet as I skid on the grass. If he can play dirty, so can I. I bring my elbow down on his skull and punch the side of his face with the other hand, my rage fueling me. He releases my waist, dropping to a knee. I let loose a flurry of hits—bam, bam, bam! Blood spatters from his nose, spraying me like a shaken can of beer. “Arghhh,” I roar, pounding until he falls

unconscious. White noise buzzes in my ears. A haze clouds my mind. I need this—to block it all out.

“Fuck. He’s not a kid, he’s an animal,” someone rumbles, and then they all chant, “Animal! Animal! Animal!”

TWELVE



DREW

An hour earlier...

The police are all over the house and lawn by the time I get home. They won't let me pass at first, until my aunt begins shouting for me. I don't want to see what they did to him, but I can't look away from the white sheet placed over his body.

Thud.

“They killed him,” she cries. “Dumped him on my lawn.”

Shit, is that all she cares about—the inconvenience of where they disposed of his body? “Do you think they’ll be coming for you—me?” she wails.

“No. Calm down. You’re safe.” I don’t know if that’s entirely true. I do know if they wanted her, they’d already have her.

“Ma’am, we need you to go inside so we can ask you a few questions,” an officer tells my aunt.

“What’s going to happen?” I ask him, tears bleeding from my eyes.

“I’m sorry. I can’t tell you anything right now.”

Racing inside, I pull a backpack from under the bed and stuff in the few pieces of clothing I have here.

“What are you doing?” she asks, her red-rimmed eyes matching mine.

“I’m leaving and never coming back,” I tell her honestly.

“Where will you go? Back to those criminal, murdering thugs?” If she didn’t have such an ugly personality, she would be an attractive woman. A decade younger than my dad and bitter as all hell, it kept men away. Her selfishness kept friends away. Her lack of empathy and love will keep me—the only family she has left—away.

“No.” My soul aches. How will I survive this life without Alec? Visions of his cut, the club colors, and the absence of the prospect patch overcome me. It takes proving your loyalty to the club to earn your patch. More tears burn my eyes.

“I think it’s best you’re leaving. They’ll come here looking for you if you don’t, and I’ve suffered enough.”

Snatching up my bag, I hook it over my shoulder. “Good riddance to them and you.”

“That’s not fair.” She gasps in horror. Forever the drama queen.

“What’s not fair is both my mother and father being murdered and all my aunt gives a shit about is her fucking lawn. Now, give me the key to his safe deposit box.” Her eyes expand. She didn’t think I’d know he kept one for this very scenario.

“I don’t have it on me. He makes me keep it in its own deposit box. He planned to have it all changed into your name once you turned eighteen, but it was all too late by then.” She jerks her head, placing her hands on her hips.

“Ma’am?” a police officer calls out.

“Meet me in town tomorrow at noon to get the key,” I tell her.

“Fine,” she scoffs.

As I move through the house, I see Heidi outside talking to one of the police officers. “Oh, there!” She begins bouncing on her toes, pointing to me. I gesture to the side of the house away from the mayhem, and he waves for her to come to me.

“Oh God, Drew, they wouldn’t let me through.”

“It’s a crime scene,” I deadpan.

“What happened?” She feigns concern.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” I grind out. She’s never once just swung by here, so her showing up is suspicious.

“Alec is up the street. He asked me to come here.”

My heart drops, and my breathing accelerates. “Please don’t tell him you saw me,” I plead.

“What, why? What’s going on?” She keeps picking her feet up, her stupid heels sinking into the mud.

“Heidi, please just tell him I left and I’m not coming back.”

She stares at me, a crease in her perfectly plucked brow. “Okay. Whatever gets me out of this freak show.” She turns to leave, but I reach out for her arm.

“I could use a place to crash tonight.” I shrug.

“My condo?” She looks like her head is about to combust. When I don’t say anything, she huffs. “Fine. Wait here. When Alec leaves, I’ll meet you a couple houses down.”



Heidi’s place is like a Barbie dream house: fluffy pillows, rugs everywhere, glitter, sparkle. “I can sense the judgment.” She narrows her pretty eyes on me. Holding up my hands, I slip off my backpack and dust my fingers over the stationary littering her table.

“Can I use some of this?”

“You going to write a suicide note?”

What the fuck? “No. What the hell?”

She smirks, kicking off her heels. “Just checking. I don’t want to find you in my bathtub later.”

What an insensitive bitch. “Suicide’s not a fucking joke, Heidi.”

Rolling her eyes, she slings her purse down and pulls out her cellphone as it pings, making her smile. “Looks like Alec is already getting lonely.” She smirks, sauntering off to her room, and I have to fight the urge to grab a kitchen knife and follow her. Instead, I sit and write.



“So, you’re really leaving?” Heidi asks, tapping her nails on the steering wheel of her car. Her eyes shift to the note I asked her to pass on to Alec. It was risky asking her, and may never get in his hands, but that’s out of my control now.

“Yep. Thanks for the ride.”

“So I can hit on Alec?” she calls after me.

Lowering myself to look through the window at her, I snort. “Like it mattered whether I was here or not. You’ve been throwing yourself at him since puberty like a desperate slut.” I smile, give her a one-finger salute, and scamper off in the direction of the bank.

“Who’s that?” my aunt asks as I approach.

“Doesn’t matter.” I hold my hand out, and she squints her beady eyes at me.

“I went ahead and got the box. It was under my name anyway.”

“You mean you wanted to see what was in it.” I laugh without humor.

“I only took half the cash—nothing else. I didn’t even open the envelope.”

Unbelievable.

She rummages through her purse, handing me a large envelope, then leans in to whisper, “I moved half the money into your account. It should set you up for some time.”

I shove the envelope in my backpack, tracking our surroundings just in case.

“Where will you go that he won’t find you?”

“He?”

“Yeah, the guy on the bike who was parked outside my house all night. He knocked on the door this morning asking if you came home yet.”

That place was never my home...*he was my home.*

“He won’t find me.” I swallow past the stone caught in my throat.

“He had bloody knuckles and bruises on his face,” she rushes out.

“I don’t care,” I lie. Why the hell do I care? How do I turn this shit off?

“Drew, I’m sorry about Mitch,” my aunt finally says, looking at her feet.

I turn, heading for the bus station, whispering under my breath, “Yeah, me too.”

THIRTEEN



ALEC "THE ANIMAL" WALKER

Six years later...

“Damn, looking good.” Hog whistles as three bitches walk into the bar wiggling their asses like overexcited dogs.

“Dude, she’s your sister. This isn’t Alabama motherfucker.” Glen grimaces, swiping up his beer and taking a gulp.

Stealer jabs Glen in the arm, spilling the beer he’s holding all down his face, and growls, “I’m from Alabama, asshole.”

“Yeah, don’t we know it, you ugly imbred fuck. Look what you did. You don’t waste good beer, that’s some imbred shit for ya.”

“It’s imbred, you dumb fucks. Shut the hell up and go get another round in,” I snap, kicking his chair leg, sending Glen skidding backward.

“What’s eating you?”

“Your bitch if you don’t shut the fuck up,” I snap, sick of these motherfuckers. Why did I get lumbered with the new prospects? I earned my patch, and *it cost me everything*. Six years it’s been without Drew. She just poofed out of fucking existence, searched everywhere for that bitch. Nothing. Time hasn’t erased the ache from missing her.

My old man swears on his patch he didn’t do anything to her, and I think I’d know if he was lying. I’d feel it if she

wasn't living, breathing. I'd know.

“That bitch behind the bar has a juicy fucking ass so I told her to bring the drinks over.” Glen grins and then leans over to me. “You nervous about this or something?”

I've known Glen for four years, took him under my wing when he referred to the club as a gang and got the ever-loving hell kicked out of him by my old man. He spent eight weeks in a coma, and when he was released, he came straight back to the club. I respected him for having the balls to do that. He's been a prospect longer than anyone else, but refuses to give up on becoming a brother. If your bike breaks down at four a.m., Glen's the first one out the door coming to pick your ass up. First one in the club door in the morning, last to leave at night. This fucker would lick your boots clean if he thought it would help the club. I'm going to be putting in my nomination for him at the next club meeting.

I don't answer him, because he shouldn't be asking stupid fucking questions.

Jimmy finally comes out of the back room he disappeared into an hour ago with some suited motherfucker. This place is on the outskirts of town, used for meetings when high profile members of society need something from us but don't want the world seeing them with outlaws. There's a back entrance and room designed to camouflage what really goes on here. By the looks of the women conjugating, word had gotten out that we've been spending time here. I look over to Hog, then to his sister batting her eyelashes over at us from the bar.

If he's the big mouth who ratted out that we were here, I'm going to break his jaw. I store this away for later as Jimmy approaches.

“You ready?” he asks me, pulling me away from the others. “This is an easy job that's going lead to a hefty fucking paycheck for us all. I want everyone on their game.” He pats my shoulder.

“A-fucking-men to that.”

When we get outside, Kai and Halo are waiting. Halo is a newly patched in brother. Got the name because he was almost killed by a rival gang. While torturing him, they tried to scalp him, leaving him with a white, circular scar through his black skin, stretching the full width around his forehead. Poor bastard. He's tough as all hell and loyal. I like knowing he has my back.

"We're not leaving these idiots?" I ask when the three prospects follow us out.

"Stealer, you ride with us." Jimmy nods. "You two, go clean something," he adds, looking at Hog and Glen.

"What does he want us to clean?" Hog grumbles.

"I'm going to clean out my pipes inside your sister," Glen retorts.

I chuckle as I mount my bike. Glen is an ugly bastard. No one's sister will fuck him.

We ride out, Jimmy taking lead, followed by me, Kai, Halo, and the prospect taking up the back.

A lot has changed in six years. I spent six months in a state of disbelief and agony, going between the two like a fucking ping-pong ball, until I reached acceptance and put everything into my duty as a brother of the Royal Bastards MC.

I always knew this was my path. I was born for this, and I liked it. My heart hardened, making it easier to become a ruthless motherfucker. My road name, Animal, was earned through blood in the ring and brutality wherever the fuck it was needed. The Alec Drew knew was snuffed out the moment she left me. Six years, and I'm still fucking bitter. Bitch is inside me, under the skin and she ain't ever leaving.

We pull into a parking lot near the house we'll be 'visiting'.

"Intel says he lives alone and will be home tonight. Probably rubbing one out to kiddie porn. What kind of freak lives alone at his age?" Jimmy scoffs.

"You live alone?" Stealer pipes up.

Grabbing him by the jaw Jimmy drags his face toward him. "I live at the club asshole, balls deep in every slut there."

"My bad," Stealer mumbles, holding his hands up in surrender. This motherfucker has a death wish.

Pushing him away Jimmy continues. "He's a corrupt piece of shit, club owner who likes to get his customers on camera to blackmail high profile clients."

"He on our books?" I ask. We own all the club owners in our town. It's easier to keep other suppliers out and trouble contained when everyone pays a tax for the privilege of our supply and protection.

"No. His club is in Demon territory outta town. We all know those fuckers don't know how to run shit or keep people in line, so it falls to us."

"Who'd he get?" I ask, slipping off my helmet.

"The mayor. Hence the hefty pay. He would rather pay us to clean up the mess than have this cunt alive."

"Plan?" Kai asks, checking his weapons strapped all over him. He looks like a fucking GI Joe.

"Go in and get him to open the safe *before* we kill him." Jimmy points at Kai as he emphasizes the word, making the rest of us chuckle.

"What?" Kai asks defensively.

"Halo, cut the security camera and do your thing, then wait outside. Keep your eyes open. The four of us will go in from the back entrance. This job should be a piece of fucking cake, so don't fuck it up and end up on my badside."

"He's talking to you, Kai," I tease, a grin hooking my lips when he pulls a couple knives from his jacket, storing them back in his saddlebag.

"Everyone good?"

A chorus of, "Good," rings out before we move through the brush.



Halo's a mastermind when it comes to security—or disabling it, in this case. He disengages the lock within thirty seconds of us approaching the rear door of the detached house. As we creep through the house, a shadow of movement catches my eye. The guy who lives here is halfway down the stairs, almost tripping and falling down the rest of them when he sees us. Kai is on him a heartbeat.

“You brought this on yourself. You fucked with the wrong person this time, asshole,” Kai sneers, pulling him the rest of the way down the stairs.

“Please don't hurt me. You can have everything in the safe,” he pleads, his voice high pitched like a bitch, giving it all up without a fight.

“Keep squealing like a piggy and I'll stuff you like one,” Kai sneers.

“Bring him in here,” Jimmy instructs.

Kai drags him into a living space and pushes him toward the couch. The man tumbles over, landing wedged between the couch and a table.

“Seriously?” I grind out.

“He's breathing.” Kai shrugs.

“You two, check for weapons. Stealer, check the house. Make sure he's alone,” I tell them.

“Shouldn't I stay with you guys?” He looks nervous. Why the hell did Jimmy have to bring this pussy ass prick? We should have brought Glen. It's not my place to correct the VP, though, so here we fucking are.

“No, dipshit, do as you're fucking told.” Kai slaps him around the head.

“We'll be taking what's in the safe—the pictures you're using to blackmail the mayor, and anything else we like the look of,” Jimmy informs the now panting piece of shit.

“No one should be kink shamed.” Kai tsks, licking his lips. Tugging the guy to his feet, he pats down his body.

“Where the fuck do you think he’s keeping a weapon, in his man panties?” Jimmy scoffs, looking at the sweaty fuck in a t-shirt, briefs, and a pair of socks.

“Animal said to check for weapons.”

“He meant the house, idiot.”

It’s painful working with these fuckers sometimes. We’re going to kill this asshole with his own gun to make it look like suicide, but in order to do that, we need a weapon.

“Safe code?” I growl, unsheathing my knife and taking a couple menacing steps toward the man. “Easy way, or the bloody way,” I offer.

“It’s on the fridge,” he rushes out.

“What?” we all say in unison.

“The code, I keep it on a card on the fridge.”

We look between ourselves, not sure we heard him correctly.

“Is this motherfucker for real?” Kai asks, shaking his head.

“I have cameras all over my house. As soon as you entered, it triggered my alarm system. The police are on their way. I don’t need to hide it because this would never happen.”

But this *is* happening.

“You arrogant prick,” Jimmy bellows, slapping his thigh with mirth. “You think cameras equals safe? We disabled them and your alarm system. When you try to blackmail powerful, wealthy, ball gag wearing fetish freaks, you leave yourself very fucking vulnerable. Five grand was all it took for the guard on shift to turn the other way, could have easily been settled with a bullet in his skull but we’re not savages.”

The color drains from his face. He could build a fortress wired up to the hilt and it still wouldn’t save his ass if we wanted in. Our club is brimming with talented motherfuckers, and our pockets are so deep, our reach is endless, our influence

far and wide. We like our shit to stay under the radar to keep relationships clean, and fewer payouts means our own pockets are stacked.

“Keep both eyes on him and tie his fucking hands,” I warn Kai before going through to the kitchen. Low and behold, he really is a dumb fuck. I tug the card from a magnet rubbing the back of my head, being around these idiots is giving me brain ache. “Got it,” I say, entering the living space.

“Safe is there. Grab what you need and get out,” the pussy begs, his eyes darting to the hall Stealer vanished down.

“Why you acting shifty?” I growl.

“I’m not.”

A sound echoes from the back of the house. “What the fuck was that? What’s taking Stealer so long? Is someone else here?”

“No,” the guy in the chair says urgently.

“You’re supposed to be here alone,” Jimmy growls, jerking his head for Kai to go check it out.

“I am! I am!” He moves to stand, and I pull out my gun, pointing it at his head.

“Who told you you could move?” I fume. “I told Kai to tie this fucker down.”

“He’s a pussy ass bitch. He doesn’t need to be restrained. He doesn’t want to eat lead, right?” Jimmy asks, smacking him across the face.

A commotion suddenly sounds out in the hallway. A woman screams as the front door crashes open, bouncing off the wall. “Go,” Jimmy yells at me.

I get three steps before Kai comes through, dragging a woman profusely bleeding from a slit throat. Stealer lags behind them, holding a hand to his bleeding head. “Bitch came out of nowhere and hit me with a plant pot,” he groans.

“No!” the guy supposed to be in the chair calls out, seeing the dead woman being dragged in by Kai. Knocking Jimmy

into the wall, he runs toward us. Lifting my gun, I shoot off twice. The bullets burrow into his skull, finding their target, but my gun wasn't the only one to fire. Four shots rang out.

“Fuck!” I roar as Jimmy groans, sliding down the wall, a crimson spot expanding over his tee.

His hands drop beside him. “You shot me, dumbass,” he croaks out, eyes unfocused on Stealer standing just behind me.

Stealer is still holding his weapon up, his hand shaking like a drying out alcoholic. “You fucking idiot.” Taking his gun, I slip it into the back of my jeans before holstering my own, and rush over to Jimmy. Kai drops the woman and is at my side.

“We need to get out of here. Half the fucking neighborhood heard this shit,” Stealer panics. I'm half tempted to put a bullet between his eyes, but there are enough bodies piling up.

“Call the doc,” I bark to Kai, who's checking Jimmy's wound. Jimmy breathes in gasps, his face ashen.

“It's...not...I'm...not...going...to...make...it.”

My blood roars in my ears. I don't know how to fucking help him.

“Fuck that. Stop trying to speak,” I tell him. Kai gives a curt bounce of his head, a severe look morphing his face. No. He's going to make it. This asshole has had plenty of bullet holes.

“Shit, shit, I shot him by accident. There's blood in my eyes, because of that stupid bitch,” Stealer cries out.

“Shut the hell up,” Kai growls.

“Stay with me, Jimmy, you asshole, you do not get to die on me.” I hold my hand to his stomach, blood, warm and sticky, seeping out, coating me in the last of his life. I grasp his fist with my other hand. “It's okay,” I tell him, my chest constricting. “I've got you, brother.”

His eyes gloss over as he gasps for air. “Loved...you...like...my...own.” He dips his head. “Proud...of...the...brother...you...became...”

“Shhh, don’t speak,” I choke out, squeezing his hand in mine. The strength in his hold wanes, his head lolling to the side as his chest rattles, then deflates.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck,” I grind out. My head is pounding.

“He’s fucking gone. He’s dead.” Kai frowns.

I want to smash this place to bits using Stealer’s face, but I can’t lose my shit.

Halo joins us, his eyes taking in the fucking shitshow.

“What the fuck happened?”

“Get the shit out of the safe,” I bark out, giving him the card with the combination. My bloody finger smears across it, ruining the white.

When I look around, Stealer’s gone. Motherfucker. That pussy assed, little cunt. He’s getting Jimmy’s name carved into his dumb un-loyal fucking skull when I get my hands on him, piece of worthless shit.

“We can’t leave Jimmy here,” I tell Kai.

“His blood is already here, brother. This is all fucked.”

I look to the dead woman. The fucker was supposed to be here alone. “Bitch was screaming like a cunt, her dumb ass trying to run.” Kai shrugs.

“We can’t leave Jimmy here,” I say again. “Look for some keys to that fucker’s car. We need to get the fuck outta here.”

I pull out my cell to call my old man.



My old man is pacing in front of the clubhouse when we pull up. Darting forward, he opens the back door of the Range Rover before we come to a complete stop. Seeing Jimmy’s body, he slams the door and punches his fist into the panel until his knuckles bleed and hand looks deformed. Jimmy wasn’t just his VP, he was his oldest friend.

“Tell me again what happened.” He turns to Kai and me, his eyes wild with fury. “Bad information. Situation went bad. Jimmy got hit with a bullet from a prospect,” I grind out. I feel like I’ve popped a thousand uppers. My blood vibrates through my veins. Adrenaline is fucking crazy.

“Who!?” he roars.

“Stealer. He fucking took off while we contained the situation,” I try to explain, but there’s no excuse. I should have shot out his kneecaps. The dried blood all over me gains flared tempers from my brothers. *I feel it too, brothers*, the need for retribution.

“He what?” His tone is deadly.

“He fucking ran. I’ll go find him and bring him to you in pieces, Prez.” Kai pipes up, fisting his knife. Body shuddering with the violent need to punish.

“Fuck that. I’ll go to him. Get me an address. He dies tonight by my bare hands.” He’s not my old man in this moment, he’s Viking, Royal Bastard President. A merciless killer.

“I’ll come,” I tell him, the dried blood flaking off my trembling hands. He rattles his head no, placing his palms on my shoulders. “Get Jimmy inside, then send Rage and Jameson out to burn that fucking car so there’s no trace of it.”

“You don’t want me with you?”

“I need you here. You’re VP now.”

I look around the brothers who have gathered outside, all nodding their heads in agreement.

I’m VP now.

FOURTEEN



DREW

One year later...

I've heard the saying "of all the bars, why did you have to walk into mine," but I never thought I'd be thinking it until this moment. My eyes clash with Kai's, and my feet halt.

Shit.

"You okay?" Willa, my boss and friend, asks.

She's also running from something, but hasn't told me what. I think it's her teen son's father. When I rolled into this town, I hadn't planned on staying, but she recognized the broken parts inside me and took me in—gave me a job and a room to rent. Now, my head is exploding looking over at the familiar face. "It's fine," I lie. She grabs her purse and waves goodbye, off to the suppliers.

This is a hick town in the middle of nowhere. How the hell does this shit happen? "Been a long time," Kai drawls, peering around the small bar before slipping onto a stool.

"Not long enough." I smile tightly. My heart races, causing my hands to tremor, I busy myself by wiping down the bar so he can't see how unnerved I am.

He gazes down at my hand, a tilt to his crooked smile. "So, this is where you ran away to, huh?"

"Here..." I shrug. "There," I add, picking up a glass from the bar. I fill it, then slide it across the bar to a regular. He

looks between Kai and me, frowning. His eyes drop to Kai's cut, and for the first time since the doors opened four hours ago, he gets up and moves to another stool.

"Something I said?" Kai quirks a brow.

"Something you wear." I glare at his patch.

"Bitch, that's ignorant."

"No, it's cautious," I correct.

"I'm just here meeting an old friend. I don't want trouble."

My guts churn, my eyes tracking the door and the windows to see if he's alone. "He's not here," he informs me, placing his arms on the bar.

"Why are you?"

"Like I said, I'm meeting someone." The moment the words leave his lips, Riley waltzes in. Oversized sunglasses cover half her face, but I recognize her immediately. She hasn't changed a bit. "Speaking of, she's here. I'll tell Prez you said hi." He winks, the side of his mouth curling into a sinister smirk. Bastard.

Thud.

"Drew?" Riley gasps, slipping her glasses off and gaping at me. "It is you. You work here?" she asks dumbly.

"Nah, just pouring drinks for something to do," I say, expressionless.

Sneering, she says, "Still a little bitch, I see."

"Ouch," Kai barks. "I can stick around if you girls want to fuck that aggression out? Pay a pretty penny to see you fist each other's cunts."

"Over my dead body," I hiss. His eyes ignite with fire, his tongue swiping out to lick his lips. My eyes flash to his road name patch above his right pocket: **Killer**. His steel gaze follows my eyes, a smirk creeping up his face.

"I told you it was her. Can't believe I drove four hours for this," Riley huffs.

“What? How did you know I was here?” I ask, confused to see them both so far from home. I’ve only been in this town a few months. Dad left money to keep me going for a while, but money runs out. Especially when your bitch aunt steals half of it.

Riley pulls her cellphone out of the large purse slung over her arm.

Holding the phone out, she shows me the bar’s website. In the banner, there’s a picture of me slinging drinks. Shit. That’s sloppy of me. I didn’t even know they had a website.

“I’m looking for an investment property. This one is for sale. Not that I’d put my money anywhere near this dump.” She wrinkles her nose.

“Still the snobby princess I see,” I remark.

“Satisfied?” Riley asks Kai. He offers her a curt chin lift and a dismissive flick of his wrist to get rid of her. What a fucking bitch. What does she get from giving up my location? Does Willa know this place is for sale?

“What now?” I fold my arms over my chest, staring at him as Riley disappears the same way she came in. “You going to drag me home kicking and screaming or just take me out back like a dog and put me down?”

“I’m going to have a drink.” He taps the bar.

Narrowing my eyes on him, I grab a shot glass, fill it, slide it over to him, then fill one for myself. “He hasn’t mentioned you in a long time, but you’re a hard girl to forget.”

“Stop playing fucking games with me, Kai. Are you going to tell Viking where I am or not?” He pauses his movements, the glass mid-air toward his mouth. “Shit. You don’t know, do you?”

“Know what?” My insides churn.

“Prez died six months ago.”

Thud. Thud. Thud.

He's dead? My thoughts flicker to Alec. Pain accompanies the memory of him.

“How?”

“Fucking heart attack, of all things. Mid-fuck, if you can believe it. What a way to go. Jackie was stuck under his body for two hours before someone went looking for him.” He shudders.

“So, Jimmy is Prez now?” I breathe, my thoughts racing.

He grimaces. “Jimmy died last year. Fucking gunshot to the stomach perforated something important—lights out.” He clicks his fingers so nonchalant, it causes me to flinch. I liked Jimmy...

“Prospect, Stealer, I don't think you knew him. He was a little bitch, fuck knows how he made it to prospect.”

“Was?”

Tilting his head his lips thinning as frowns at me with amusement in his eyes. “Come on Drew, you know how it works. They were picking his brain matter outta the carpets for weeks after Viking got his hands on him.”

Gross.

“I'll give you one guess who took over as Prez once Vikings heart went pop!” He taps his now empty glass on the bar, signaling for a refill.

Oh my God. Alec?

“Your face says it all.” He winks at me.

A shiver snakes up my spine as the floor beneath me tilts, my legs feeling numb.

“He's not the same guy who used to want to cuddle with the awkward girl. You leaving did something to him. Trans-fucking-formed him. It's been the evolution of Alec Walker.” He points to a scar across the bridge of his nose. “He gave me this.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

Shrugging, he says, “Just catching up. I thought you’d want to know.”

“I don’t. He killed my dad, I couldn’t give two fucks about him.”

“Did he?” he says sarcastically.

The air squeezes from my lungs in a slow torture. “What does that mean?” I choke out.

“Nothing. Everything.” He stands, pulling a money clip from his pocket. Peeling out two twenties, he drops them on the bar.

“I need to take a piss. Then we can go home.”

It’s a ruse. He’s trying to confuse me. Wants me to question everything so I go back with him. My head spins. Grabbing the keys from beneath the bar, I rush to the bathroom, lock it from the outside, then sneak out the back. My entire pitiful life stays packed in the trunk of my little car. I jump in, bring the engine to life, and stomp the gas, getting onto the highway in under five minutes. Pulling off the first turn, I drive back roads out of town and send Willa a sorry text.

FIFTEEN



ANIMAL

One year later...

We move a shit ton of product through this town. Keeping out the shit that sends more people to the morgue than their happy place became important to me when I took over as president. My old man's lifeless body pinning Jackie to his bed will forever be etched in my brain. He was a respected Prez and liked by many, but he thought like a lawless asshole, more about making money over allies and building trust.

We may be bikers who get the law to bend to our whims, but that doesn't mean we have to fuck over our customers. Dealing good product is good business. People travel from all over to buy our shit because I have zero tolerance for bad merchandise. So, when some kid ODs in my territory from bad fucking ecstasy, it pisses me the hell off.

My brothers pile in for church, taking their seats while making jabs at each other like teenagers. I lift my chin to Hog's empty chair. "Where the fuck is he?" I grind out. Placing both hands on the table, I lean in, my mood apparent. Everyone stops fucking around and pulls their chairs in.

I don't have time for this shit. "I fucking told that little prick to be here," Halo growls. He's our secretary, in charge of letting brothers know when they have to attend church or meetings.

"I'll go get him, Prez," Glen pipes up.

“Kiss ass,” someone hollers, causing a round of chuckles.

“When you assholes are finished, we have shit to discuss. First order of business: money was light this month from half our club dealers.” Mason, our treasurer, fucks around with his laptop. Despite his old man being a purebred, old-school biker, Mason didn’t get the same rough biker genes. His dad beat that out of him, instilling fear and anxiety instead. He’s clever, though—good with numbers. He keeps our books in order, deals with money and payout, and loves this club and the brothers within it. His old man still wears his patch, but lives mostly from a bottle these days.

“There’s someone pushing new product. We’re aware of it and narrowing down on where it’s coming from,” Jameson tells them.

“Someone selling product in our territory is unacceptable. Once one gets big enough balls, others will follow. Kai, Rage, put an end to this—send a message.”

“On it, Prez.” Kai grins. That fucker lived for these orders.

“Anyone have anything they want to discuss?”

“I just want to remind everyone about the cookout next weekend. Keep the ol’ ladies at home. It’s not a family affair.” Halo grins, and is rewarded with a round of cheers as Glen pushes through the door with Hog. Hog stumbles, eyes unfocused, limbs look too heavy for his fucking body. He’s high. Glen throws a baggy on the table, shaking his head.

“That ours?” I ask, picking it up and examining it.

“Yeah, Prez.”

“I only use it when I need it,” Hog slurs. There’s no way he’s this buzzed from snow. He’s sweating like a pig, swaying in his seat about to pass out.

“What the fuck else you taking?” I bark, and he slumps in the chair. Glen gestures to his arm, picking it up and showing the track marks. Hog pushes him away. “Don’t fucking touch me. I’m fine, Prez. Honest.”

“Honest?” I bellow. Rounding the table, I grab his head and bounce it off the wood. His nose explodes on impact, blood squirting everywhere. “I have a strong tolerance for your fucking bullshit considering what a fuck up you are, but I won’t have you getting high on club supply. I sure as shit know you didn’t pay for that shit. And the last thing I’ll tolerate in my club is a fucking junkie. You’re useless to your brothers like this.”

“I’m sorry, Prez. I can’t stop. I fucking need it.”

“Get this fucker out of here and into rehab before I take him to ground.”

“Boss.” Jameson signals for me to follow him to my office.

“We done?” I ask my brothers, who all grunt an affirmative. “Church’s over,” I snap, chucking the gavel across the table. Hog fucked on dope is unacceptable. His brothers should have noticed this shit and brought it to me long before it got this outta hand.

“What is it?” I ask Jameson as I sink down in my chair behind my father’s desk. It’ll be one year next weekend. His death came outta nowhere. If he had warning, he didn’t tell anyone. It rocked the club, but we bounced back and came together tighter than ever. We patched Glen in, long overdue. Hog earned his colors, taking the rap for a bust while out of state doing a job for another chapter, that’s the kind of loyalty you want from a brother. Now he’s next to useless high as a kite on drugs.

“Drew’s aunt died,” Jameson announces, jarring me from my thoughts.

Fuck. Just hearing Drew’s name sends a wave of nostalgia coursing through me. Her taste, smile, devastation. “Make sure her funeral is paid for and put an announcement out so her relatives know.” I rub a hand across the back of my neck, trying not to show the way her name leaves me in ruin.

“On it, Prez. But you should know...her death...”

“What?” I ask, not liking his confounded expression.

“It was messy. Murdered in her house—tied up, assaulted, slit throat.”

What the fuck? “Do the police know who did it?”

“Nah. Apparently she’s the second victim over the last couple months.”

I sit forward, steepling my fingers on the desk. “Someone in our city is killing women?” Of all the women, Drew’s aunt?

He shrugs. “Looks that way. You want us on this?”

“Put the word out. Everyone keeps an ear to the ground, we let our presence be felt.”

“On it, Prez.”

Will Drew even see an announcement? How the fuck will she react to her aunt being murdered? Will she think it was the club? How much more does this girl have to lose? We’re a fucked up pair, both parentless. That’s some fucked up fate. My head swims with visions of her, bringing versions of her life swirling.

Wherever the fuck she is, I hope she’s happy. I searched for her—shit, I’m still searching for her. I need to know she’s out there living her life. Visions of kids running around looking just like her and some smart asshole wearing a wedding ring causes a fiery rage inside me. I’m on my feet, my fist burrowed into the plaster of the wall before I realize I punched it.

Wringing my hand to alleviate the burning of my knuckles, I go through to the bar to find Gracie working. She’s been a regular here for a few years and eventually took over what Barb struggled to keep up with. Good woman, biker bitch through and through, with a soft spot for both Rage and Jameson.

Her eyes flick to me, her brow crooking, and a beer is placed out for me in the next breath.

“You okay, son?” Uncle Joe croaks from where he’s polishing the bar.

“Usual shit. Why the fuck you playing maid?” I scoff.

“Just earning my keep like the rest.”

“You can come sit on my dick if you wanna act like a bitch,” some prospect bellows from across the room, earning himself an elbow to the temple from Rage, knocking him out cold. “Respect is lacking all around lately,” I growl.

“You want to talk, son?” Joe asks, ignoring the shit going on behind him.

“If I do, I’ll let you know, Uncle Joe.”

Rage gets to his feet, coming to stand beside me. I made him VP once I took over as president. He’s loyal, and a good brother. I never forgot him taking my grief when my mother passed. This club needs brothers like him.

“Jameson said someone’s out there butchering women.” His tone is always low and deadly.

I take a swig from my beer. “Not sure what the hell is going on, but I don’t like it. Too close to home.”

“I’ll get Ice to see what our inside cops know.” Ice is our sergeant at arms. He protects the club’s interest and monitors our laws, making sure the brothers uphold them. He’ll be the one stripping Hog of his patch if he doesn’t clean up. He’s also the nephew of the chief of police.

“Good,” I Jerk my head. “Let me know when you’ve dealt with dealers fucking around our territory too. Let Kai loose to make a statement.”

“On it.” He rubs his hands together, then looks to Gracie. “Meet me in my room. I have an assignment for you.”

Her eyes go wide as she sinks her teeth into her bottom lip. “What is it?”

“It’s in his pants,” Joe snorts, shaking his head.

“I’m not here for you to pick up and put down whenever you get a tingle in your winkle.” She scowls, her hand on her hip, attitude for days. I miss that fire. Drew had that fire. A redhead, Amy, spits her drink all over Halo’s chest as he approaches, her eyes dropping to Rage’s junk.

“Bitch, what the fuck?” Halo howls, wiping his shirt down.

“Winkle?” Rage growls. “You can’t call the monster a winkle.”

Monster?

Fuck this. I’m out.

SIXTEEN



DREW

A couple weeks later...

Aunt Maureen was a horrible witch, but even witches deserve better than what she got. Raped and murdered in her own bed. I want to believe there's no way the Royal Bastards had anything to do with this—it's not their style—but can it be a coincidence that my dad was murdered and now this shit?

There are all of five people at her wake. Two are her neighbors, me, my friend, and her distant sister I didn't even know existed. She only came because she said the house was left to her in the will. My aunt wouldn't write a will, and her termite-infested home would cost more to renovate than it's worth. The chick is welcome to it. "You look tense." Remy rubs his hand over my shoulders.

Tense is an understatement. I haven't been in this town since the night my father's body was dumped like trash on my aunt's front lawn—yet another reason this woman is welcome to the house. A stabbing pain throbs in my chest thinking about him and the aftermath of his murder. Alec's guilty expression seared into my brain, eating away all the good memories we shared.

"Babe, you okay?" Remy asks, making my muscles turn rigid.

"I told you not to call me that." I push his hand off my shoulder and go to the bar. I need to get out of this place. I'm not afraid like I used to be to come here. Kai telling me about

Viking's death lifted a weight off my shoulders. I know Alec had to struggle with his passing, but why should I care how he feels? He took my dad from me, knowing he was the only family I had. It's been years, and my mind and heart are still at war over my love and hate for that man.

"Hit me," I tell the bartender, holding up my shot glass. I down the amber liquor he pours in my glass and exhale hard.

I was a dick to Remy. He dropped everything to drive me down here, and the anxiety and old memories are making me act like a bitch. He doesn't deserve that. We aren't a real couple. We fooled around a little with the unspoken promise of maybe more. I haven't been ready for more with anyone. Touch...taste, intimacy—nothing heals what's broken inside me. Nothing compares to Alec, and it makes the act pointless, painful, and unsatisfying.

Remy's a Demon nomad, a biker club that isn't far from Little Rock. Purely coincidental I met him. There's something about his demeanor, though—his bike, cut—that's all too familiar to my soul. Despite running from it, wanting to be away from the club life, my soul longed for it. But Remy wanted more than I was willing to give. Bringing him here was a mistake, but I didn't want to do it on my own. I'm a coward. Dammit, there's not enough alcohol in the world to settle my nerves.

This place has always been like a magnet, drawing me in. Fuck that, it's not this place, it's the man in it. Brains are funny things. They try to rationalize, they lie to you when you're in a state of despair to try to heal you, but how can I forgive what Alec did? How is there anything he could say or do that will ever make killing my dad okay?

Disgust cloaks me in shame, for wishing there was something—anything that could erase that part of our past so I could be in his arms. What a mess of a woman I am, pining over my dad's killer. He's probably married by now, got an ol' lady popping out his kids. A sharp pain sparks in my chest. No, no, no, I can't think about that.

“Everything all right?” the bartender asks, and I realize I’m holding my hand to my heart, a harsh grimace on my face.

“Yeah, fine. Give me a round for the table.” I slip off the bar stool and go back to the others. The bartender places drinks down for everyone a couple minutes later. “A peace offering.” I try to smile, and drop a peck to Remy’s cheek.

“Shit,” he mumbles, his face losing color as he looks over at whoever’s entered the bar behind me. The atmosphere shifts, and I don’t have to look. I’ve always felt his presence without ever having to see him. *Alec.*

A shadow descends over me, sending a wave of goosebumps over my flesh. The pounding of my heart roars in my ears, forcing me into a woozy haze. It could be the shots. *No, it’s him.*

“Can we help you? This is a wake,” someone informs the Royal Bastards invading our little corner.

Remy shifts uncomfortably in his seat, his cut declaring him a Demon like a neon sign. Shit, this is the exact situation I wanted to avoid. This place isn’t even popular. The only reason he’s here is because he knew I would be.

I close my eyes breathing, my lungs seizing. Trying to gain some control, I gulp down the jittering nerves as they begin taking seats around us. “We’re here for the wake.” I recognize that voice. My eyes open to find Jameson. Wow. He let his facial hair grow in. It suits him. My eyes flick to his patch. Enforcer. “Hey, kid.” He grins over at me, and for no reason, tears build in my eyes.

“Excuse me,” I choke out, standing and turning my back on them. I can’t see Alec’s face. I don’t think I’m strong enough. Why the hell did I come here? I burned these bridges to ash. I can’t just walk back over them. My aunt wasn’t worth this kind of torture. She hated me and was an evil, thieving asshole.

Rushing into the bathroom, I splash my face with cold water and swallow down much needed breaths. “Just leave. Go

out the back, call Remy, tell him to meet me back at the motel, grab our shit, and leave this place.”

A toilet flushes, and an older looking lady steps out of one of the stalls. She looks over at me, then scanning our surroundings. Seeing I’m alone, she says, “You okay, darling?”

No. I haven’t been okay since I left here—left him. I’ve bounced from place to place, seeing the world, but nothing ever felt right—nothing ever felt like home. *Alec is your home.*

When I don’t offer an answer, she leaves without washing her hands. Gross.

Inhaling a deep breath, I swipe beneath my eyes and tell myself to stop being a coward. As soon as I pull open the door to leave, a meaty hand wraps around my upper arm, making me squeak in surprise. Before I can grasp what’s happening, I’m pinned against the wall, a tall body stalking over me. *Is he sniffing my hair?*

“Fuck, Drew, you’ve been gone too long, baby.” The words awake all the places that have been dormant since I left him. A stone lodges in my throat, a burning inferno setting my eyes ablaze.

He’s bigger, voice deeper, but his scent? It’s the same. Fresh-cut grass, chrome, and leather. My heart dies a thousand times over. Every fiber of my being wants to dissolve into him and be the carefree kids we once were, but too much has happened. Although years have passed, the pain is still raw. It will always be raw.

I place my hands on his stomach. His muscles jump at the contact. The natural arousal of being this close to him is still as severe, sending a wave of need through me. No one has ever met the intensity of Alec for me. Every touch, kiss, moment with him was a high I’ve been chasing for years.

“Don’t touch me,” I breathe, attempting to push him away.

“You just ran away. You broke me, Drew—destroyed me inside,” he mumbles against my ear, his head bowed, trying to nuzzle into me.

“No.” I shove him away, and this time, he allows it. I don’t know what’s worse: feeling him around me, his scent invading all my senses, or seeing his remarkable face for the first time in so long. He’s so devastatingly beautiful. My heart weeps at the sight of him.

Tears drip to my cheeks. I can’t catch my breath. My legs won’t move. I need to run. Dark eyes bleed into mine, telling me a thousand unspoken words. He looks the same, but also different. I see my Alec looking back at me, but someone new too—someone hardened by life.

Why can't I stop loving him?

SEVENTEEN



ANIMAL

Moments before...

At the sight of her, my fucking heart almost burst through my ribcage and splattered at her feet. Heat flooded my body. The urge to shake the shit out of her for fucking leaving me nearly buckled me. How could she leave me? Fuck, it still aches. My heart froze over when she left, and now it feels like mush in my chest.

She's got her back to me, and she's still the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. Shit, look at her.

I march straight over to the table, my shadow claiming her. Her rigid shoulders tell me she knows I'm here. My brothers make themselves at home around the table. Did she really think she could roll into my town and I wouldn't know?

She stands abruptly and rushes for the bathroom.

I follow, waiting outside like a ravenous wolf. An old lady comes out the door, startling when she sees me and rushing away. Drew opens the door a minute later, and my muscles flex with the need to crush her to me.

Her mouth pops open when I grab her arm and move her to the wall. I close in around her, soaking her in. It's been too long. My body sags over hers, her pretty peach scent bleeding into me. "Fuck, Drew, you've been gone too long, baby," I mumble. Her hands push at my stomach, but I can't move. I

need to feed on her for a second. I've been starved of her for too long.

"Don't touch me," she exhales, shoving a little harder.

"You just ran away. You broke me, Drew—destroyed me inside." The words fall from my lips without preamble. I haven't felt this vulnerable in so long—this consumed by any feeling other than anger. The pit in my soul that screams for violence and chaos to quiet the constant agony of her absence is now ash because she's here.

"No," she barks more urgently, and I move away. Our eyes clash. Salty rivers run from her eyes, creating an almost glow. She's heartbreakingly beautiful, natural and classic. The dusting of freckles a reminder of the girl I used to know, but the fullness of her lips, her toned jaw, the defined apples of her cheeks remind me she's not her. She's a woman now—a stunning one. The curls she used to hack off flow down her back, blonde shades mixing with the brown strands.

"I missed you," I tell her, aching to touch her mouth with mine.

"I can't do this," she pants, shaking her head like she can't believe this is happening.

"Where have you been? I looked everywhere for you."

"You shouldn't have. I told you not to."

Is she serious? Did she not fucking love me the way I loved her? I lived for her. She was my everything—fuck...she *is* my everything.

"You shattered my fucking soul and sanity when you ghosted—not one fucking word from you." I feel the anger coming back.

"Why the hell did I leave, Alec? Huh? Don't tell me how fucking hard it was on you. You have no idea how it was for me! *Is* for me. To be so completely in love with someone, devoted to them, and learn they can betray you in such a brutal way."

One arm wraps around her waist, the other outstretched to stop me advancing.

“You never let me explain anything,” I plead, desperation and anger colliding.

“You didn’t have to tell me the details,” she spits out. “You already lit the match, you think I’d stick around so you could watch me burn?”

“You didn’t let me explain!” I roar, my fists clenching. Spinning, I punch a hole through the wall. This is fucking devastating. It’s been years, and I still have this hunger—this need for her. It’s so intense, I can’t think or fucking breathe. And now, she’s so close, yet still so far away.

“I’ve got to go.” She jolts her head, sending her curls dancing. Fuck her. I grab for her wrist, dragging her to me, spinning and pushing her back into the wall, letting my full weight trap her there.

“You’re not going anywhere without me,” I tell her, crushing my lips down on hers. The world disappears around us as we fall down the rabbit hole—two kids, besotted—best friends who would do anything for the other—lovers separated for too long.

Our tongues duel, teeth bite, hands roam. She claws at me, savagely consuming, hungry. My mind splinters. Am I dreaming?

“Wait!” She gasps. “No. No. God no,” she cries out, pounding her tiny fists against my chest. I can practically hear the war drums booming in her head. Old memories are haunting her, but she doesn’t know the facts.

“I’m leaving,” she hiccups on a sob.

“I’ll follow you.”

“Don’t make me kill you,” she growls, the emotion turning to rage. It’s adorable.

“You already fucking did,” I spit.

“Why can’t you just let me mourn my aunt and leave?”

“Because you fucking hated that cunt. You came here for this,” I tell her, waving my finger between us.

“No, I *dreaded* this happening.”

“Keep telling yourself that, Drew.”

“Don’t call me that. I go by Wren now.”

“Nope.” I jolt my head.

Her eyes narrow. “What the hell do you mean ‘nope’?”

“You heard me, Drewwww.” I drag her name across my tongue.

“I’m not here alone.” She folds her arms in defiance.

Like I don’t already know. She had the fucking audacity to ride into my home on the back of another man’s bike. I’m going to turn the metal into liquid and him into fertilizer. “He has a death wish. That’s on him.”

“Fuck off, Alec. You’re not going to do anything to him.” She says the words with conviction, but there’s fear in her eyes. I hate seeing it there. “Prez, you good?” Kai comes back to check on us.

“Yeah. We’re good.”

“No, we’re not,” Drew bites out.

“You want us to deal with this Demon?”

“No!” Drew calls out, her voice hitching.

“Mmmm, you’ve grown into that skin of yours, Drew.” Kai grins.

“Killer,” I growl in warning. Holding his hands up, he backs away. “I’ll keep people out your way, Prez. Take your time.”

She swivels her full body to face me once again. “Prez?” she breathes. “So, it’s true.”

“Lot’s happened since you ran away.”

“You can’t run away if you have nowhere you belong,” she snaps.

“Fuck that. You belong by my side, on the back of my bike, in my bed. We are it for each other—always have been, always will be.”

“No.” She rubs her palms over her face. I let my gaze travel down her body. Tight shorts. More meat on her hips. Long, tan legs disappearing into a bright red pair of Doc Martens. Her tits hiding beneath a black T-shirt. If that’s that Demon’s shirt, I’m going to rip it off her.

“You ruined that for us both. I can’t ever be with you after what you did. Why don’t you get that?”

“Because it’s bullshit,” I state.

“You probably have a ton of different women warming your bed now. You’re the president of the Royal Bastards. Who did you have to fucking kill for that title?” she sneers, poison spilling from her hyped-up mouth. She flinches at her own outburst, knowing my old man must have died for me to be in this position. I decide to ignore it and answer her first statement.

“Women aren’t you.” I watch closely as she winces. She hates the thought of me fucking another woman, still, after all this time, just like I hate that she’s here with someone else. I want to cut the mouth-breather into dog chow for even getting a second with her.

I close in on her once more. Her breath hitches at our proximity. Her face drops so she doesn’t have to look at me. I’m not letting her get away with that. I lift her chin, trapping it between my forefinger and thumb. “I could have a million women, but none of them are you, Drew.” I nip her lips. “You’re irreplaceable. Been missing you, baby. You’re inescapable, and being with you again is inevitable. I refuse for it to be any other fucking way, so you better get used to it.” I lean my forehead against hers and breathe her in before I kiss the tip of her nose “I won’t let you run again. I can’t. I won’t survive it. You can’t see it, but it’s there, our souls—they thrive when we’re together. We need each other.” And then I leave her to soak in the fact that she’s back for good.

Marching through the bar, I gesture with a head tilt for my brothers to follow me. We slip out into the parking lot, our bikes lined up, getting shifty eyes from passersby.

“We dealing with the Demon or what?” Kai asks.

“You’re like a fucking bloodhound,” Jameson scoffs.

“Bloodhounds sniff out blood. I want to bleed them. There’s a difference.”

“I thought a bloodhound was a dog who sniffed out prey,” Jameson grunts.

“You calling me a dog?”

“What’s wrong with dogs?”

“Shut up,” I groan, eyeballing the bike the Demon rode in on. “I want you to find out what you can about this guy. See if he’ll be missed.”

“Does it matter?” Kai grins.

“Yeah, it fucking matters. He doesn’t want to bring a war on his club over killing someone to appease his fucking ego. It’s why he’s the Prez and you’re not,” Halo growls.

“Fuck you, asshole.”

“You’re not my type. I prefer more meat on my bones.”

“I’ll give you meat.” Kai holds up his arm, clenching his hand into a fist.

“Is it my birthday?” Halo taunts.

“Shut the fuck up, both of you. Be ready to move out when Drew does.”

EIGHTEEN



DREW

An hour later...

It was reckless bringing Remy here. I shove his bag toward him and pick up my own. “It’s okay, Drew.” Remy stretches, kicking his legs out and leaning back on the rickety chair in the corner of our motel room.

“He’ll be coming here for me, Rem—and you can’t be here when he does. *I* can’t be here.”

“We can go to my club. You’ll be safe there.”

“No. I just want to get my car fixed back home and find somewhere else to be.”

“What happened with you and them?” he asks, coming over to me and grabbing my arm. When I drop my chin, he lifts it. “Well?”

“It’s a long story. We don’t have time.”

“If they were going to do shit, it would have already happened.” He jerks his head and walks over, picking up a bottle of Jack he took from the bar.

“Remy,” I warn. “You need to be coherent to drive.”

“Let’s just stay the night and leave tomorrow—”

The unmistakable roaring of bike engines split the air outside the window, sending my nerves bouncing around inside my body.

“Fuck,” Remy growls, pulling his cellphone out of his pocket.

“What are you doing?”

“I need to call in my brothers.”

“And cause a war?” I screech, running over to him and taking his phone.

“Wren,” he warns, calling me by the name I gave myself after Kai discovered where I was a year ago. It’s a bird, and that’s how I feel most of the time—always in flight.

“I’ll talk to him, get him to give you safe passage out of here.”

“I can’t fucking believe you didn’t tell me you ran with the Royal Bastards. Do you know what fucking one of their bitches could get me?” he sneers.

“I’m not one of their bitches, and we ain’t fucking,” I snap, chucking his cell against the wall and smashing the screen.

“Wren!” he roars, grabbing me by the throat, much like Viking once did. I raise my leg, bringing the heel of my boot down on his knee, and jerk him backward, forcing his hand to release me. I’m quick, grabbing my knife from my boot. It has a serrated edge and is only three inches long, but it will hurt like a motherfucker plunged into his groin if he attacks. “Don’t ever fucking touch me again.” I hold the knife out, moving around him, grabbing the handle of the door.

“I’m sorry, Wren. I’m fucking dead if they come for me,” he pleads. Fuck him.

I slip through the door, closing it behind me and hitting a barricade in the form of Alec.

“Good choice,” he tells me, flicking out his tongue to wet his bottom lip.

“Let Remy leave,” I tell him, bending to slip my knife away.

“You been in his bed?”

My eyes narrow on him. “Is that your business?”

“Simple question.” I look around him to see the wall of bikers waiting for orders. “No, and we’re not like that. He’s a friend of a friend doing me a favor. My car broke down. I needed a ride,” I lie...kind of.

“You know you have a tell when you’re nervous or lying, right?”

“Alec, I haven’t slept with him, and I can’t have blood on my hands. Please let him go.”

“Why did you have a knife in your hands when you came out of the room?” His eyes track down to my boots.

“I’ll go with you if that’s what it takes,” I beg, ignoring his question.

“Fine,” he growls, jerking a thumb toward where he parked his bike.

I trail behind him like a naughty puppy, my tail tucked between my legs. When we reach his bike, I stare at my helmet attached to the back. He grabs it and hands it to me like the last eight years didn’t happen. How does he still have this? Tears spring in my eyes. My internal war has ravaged me, leaving me exhausted. “Before I get on, I need to ask...”

“I said I’d let the fucking Demon go.” He folds his arms, his biceps straining the fabric of his shirt. I don’t remember them being so big.

“It’s about my aunt,” I whisper.

“It wasn’t us.” His brows draw down, marring his features. “I looked into it. The police said it was a break-in gone wrong. Opportunist.”

“I heard there was a similar death to another woman...”

“Turned out to be domestic.” A breath flees my lungs. I bow my head and accept the helmet. My body quakes as I watch him straddle the machine, waiting for me to do the same. “It’s okay, Drew.” He assures me with a nudge of his head, and it shouldn’t matter. His words shouldn’t incite warmth and comfort inside me, but dammit, they do.

I latch onto his waist and shift onto the bike behind him. My thighs rest against his, my body leaning into him for safety, the helmet he gave me so long ago once again on my head like it never left. The engine roars to life and just like that I'm once again the girl on the back of Alec Walker's bike.

NINETEEN



ANIMAL

A couple of hours later...

Thirty minutes I've been standing outside the clubhouse with Drew while she has a panic attack. She's on her ass, head between her legs, heaving.

"No one will fucking dare touch you, Drew," I remind her again—and a fucking again. "You spent half your life inside these walls."

Her head whips up, her eyes glaring at me. "Didn't stop me from becoming a target, did it?"

"My old man is fucking dead. What do you think he's going to do—come back and haunt you?"

She gets to her feet and slaps me around the face, the sound ringing out through the courtyard. I grab her wrist, my teeth gritting, jaw ticking. "Drew," I warn.

"Tell me what happened to my dad." She closes her eyes briefly. When she opens them, they're coated in tears.

"He was talking to a fed," I remind her.

"Do you know why he would do that?"

"I don't." I shrug.

"You're lying." She shakes her head, her lips pulling in tight. "It's because of your mother, right?" she accuses.

My mouth loosens. "What do you know about that?"

A shadow falls over her features, her head lowering. “They were having an affair. He loved her...”

What the fuck? No. “Wrong,” I grind out.

Her head springs up. “He left me a letter—an insurance policy. They were in love, Alec.”

“You’re wrong. He fucking killed her when she overheard him talking to his fed contact,” I bark out. She stumbles backward, a phantom slap rattling her foundation. She places a hand to her heart. “What did you say?”

Fuck, I didn’t want her ever knowing that detail. I run my hand across the back of my neck, tension building there.

“She walked in on him in the kitchen. Her last words were his name.”

“No, no, no.” She shakes her head, her hair swaying around her shoulders.

“There’s a video, Drew.”

This stops her pacing. Pain etches across her beautiful face. A sob catches in her throat. “He wouldn’t...he said he was in love with her.” She bends over, gasping for air. This scene is all too familiar. My blood roars in my veins, desperate for the outcome to be different this time. “His letter said your dad would kill them both if he found out, so he needed a way out.”

“Drew,” I say her name softly. “You know the club law—you lived it. He was dirty.”

“Was it you? Is that how you got your patch?”

Memories of that day flood in, suffocating.

Eight years ago

“It’s time to make a choice, boy. Are you royalty or mundane?” My father’s deep baritone carries through the club as his heavy footfalls announce his arrival. The brothers part like the red sea, giving him a clear path to where I stand

looming over the man who fucked over his club—my father—my mother.

Mitch Wells, Drew's old man, someone I once respected and thought of as family. My father hands me a gun, the weight heavy in my palm. I've held many guns, shot targets and bottles for shits and giggles, but this time is different—this time will change everything.

The brothers close in around our Prez as he reaches for the cowering fool on his knees, begging for his life. All the brothers tilt their chin to their Prez, showing loyalty, respect, and glee in finding this traitor so fast.

I wanted that respect, that allegiance. My father was a fucking king to these men, and treason came with a death sentence.

"I just needed an out," the rat pleads, reaching out to grasp my father's jean-clad leg. As quick as lightening, my father brings his knee up, connecting with Mitch's jaw. Teeth chip and break on a crunch.

He falls to his back, gurgling blood. "You're a fucking traitor. After everything this club did for you, for your fucking kid..."

"She has nothing to do with this, Prez. Please," he chokes out, spitting blood and one of his teeth to the ground.

"I'm not your fucking Prez. You forfeited that when you sold out your club, your brothers—me!" Another boot to the face. A couple more teeth fly from his mouth.

"If she wasn't my son's girl, I'd pass her around the brothers like a club whore and force you to watch while they defiled every hole on her body." My blood runs cold at his words, my fists clenching. No one is going near Drew. They'd have to get me eat a bullet first. My teeth grind together with the effort to keep my mouth shut. He's just letting off steam and trying to scare her father.

"Feeding feds information about our club—what's the punishment for that, son?"

"Death," I spit out.

“What?” My father holds a hand to his ear.

“Death!” I roar, gaining a round of cheering from my soon-to-be brothers. Rolling his head over his shoulders, my father pulls a knife from the sheath inside his jacket. “Death, but not a clean one,” he growls, grabbing Mitch by the scruff of his hair. Kai steps up, restraining Mitch’s arms, holding his body still against his own.

“And for killing my boy’s mother—my fucking wife?” My father grits his teeth.

“Death!” I holler, aiming the gun and pulling the trigger over and over.

Click. Click. Click.

Nothing happens. My old man turns to me, taking the gun from my trembling hand, a look of shock and pride overcoming him. “You make me proud—and your brothers proud. But this kill isn’t yours, boy.” He was testing me? Gave me an unloaded weapon...

“Joslyn...” Mitch cries out, breaking free from Kai’s hold, a gun in his hand. My eyes track the empty holster on Kai’s hip. Fuck! He turns the gun on himself and—bang!—blows his own brains out before anyone can blink. Brain matter and blood spray Rage’s face, who was standing a couple feet behind him.

Every nerve ending inside my body fires off, coiling my muscles and sending a spike of adrenaline through my veins.

“Motherfucker!” my old man snarls, stamping his boot down on the carcass.

Present

“He shot himself, Drew. He was surrounded by brothers all wanting a piece and knew it was either end it himself or suffer a painful death.”

“You’re lying to protect me from the truth. You got your patch. I know what it takes to earn a patch.” She waves her arms around, animated and hysterical.

I grab her arms, pinning them to her side, and stare her straight in the eyes. “I was willing to kill him. I was hurting about my mother and saw the video of him on the phone with the feds while she was fucking dying. The memories of her blood coating my hands...” I squeeze my eyes shut, trying to clear the flash of images assaulting me. “I was willing to kill him, and that was enough to get my patch. But I promise you, Drew, he grabbed the gun out of Kai’s holster and shot himself under the chin.”

Tears leak to her cheeks, trailing down like raindrops. “I’m sorry. I’m so fucking sorry this happened, that we were ever put in that fucking circumstance, but why should we lose each other on top of everything we’ve already fucking lost?”

My hard breathing and her sobbing plays around us like the soundtrack to our lives.

“I need time,” she snuffles. “Just let me get some sleep, please. I need to just digest everything.”

“You can have my old room.” I tuck her hair behind her ear, letting the pad of my thumb stroke her cheek.

“Old room?” she croaks, her voice broken.

“I moved rooms. I couldn’t sleep in that room. It was consumed with memories of us.” I hold my hand out for her, sighing when she slips her palm into it. I open the door to the back hall—the one she ran down eight years ago—and lead her to my old room, unlatching the bolt I placed on it.

I couldn’t sleep in there, didn’t mean I wanted anyone else in there.

Pushing open the door is like stepping into the past. Nothing has been touched since we made love in the bed. Her boots still lay haphazardly on the rug.

“It’s like a museum.” She snuffles a laugh, swiping at her eyes.

“I can have clean sheets put on the bed. It’s probably dusty as all hell.”

“No, it will be fine.” She gives a dismissive wave of her hand. “If only we could rewind time with the knowledge we have now.” She moves inside, swiping her fingers over the dresser to collect the dust there.

“Would you save him knowing he killed my mother?” I ask, making her wince.

“I just don’t know why he would write the letters claiming she already knew about him talking to the feds and them planning to run away together.” She shrugs. “If your mom knew and was talking to them, would you have been able to let your dad kill her?”

My hands clench. “I don’t think so,” I tell her honestly.

“He was my dad.” Her shoulders slump as she sits on the bed, her eyes tracing over the rumpled sheets.

“When you told me back then I was safe, was it true?”

How can she ask that? I drop to my knees in front of her, taking her hands in mine. “Yes. God, I would have killed everyone to protect you. How can you not know that? My old man knew we had plans to travel, that you wanted to go to school and see the world. He knew wherever you went, I’d go, so he made me promise we’d stay here—that I’d patch in and become a full, dedicated brother.”

I fucking hate the tears streaming down her face. They’re breaking my fucking heart. I want to pick up all the pieces of our broken story and stitch them back together.

Reaching up, I swipe the water from her skin, almost toppling over when she launches into my arms. Her face burrows into my neck, her body shaking with her sobs. Her petite arms clasp onto me for dear life as I wrap my arms around her, stroking up and down her back. It’s like taking the first gasp of air after nearly drowning. I pick her up and lay down on the bed, keeping her pinned against me. We’re fighting our demons, our mistakes and darkness, to get to the light again.

We could never do that alone. We need each other.

TWENTY



DREW

Emotions drained me last night. Being in Alec's arms, this room, hearing the truth about my dad... There are things missing, puzzle pieces we may never get to find the truth, but I'm so damn tired of running, being in pain, missing him, missing my life. It's time to heal, forgive, and learn how to move past all the hurt.

I stretch my arms out, patting the bed beside me, knowing it's empty. "I'm here." His voice carries across the room from a chair in the corner.

"What are you doing?" I ask, drinking him in. He grew into a pure alpha male. I knew he would, but seeing it in the flesh causes my insides to squeeze in appreciation. *I missed so much.*

"Watching you sleep...I'm pinching myself to make sure I ain't dreaming."

"I didn't realize how bad I needed that sleep," I say, unsure where we go from here. "Do you have things you need to be doing?"

"I'm doing them." He lifts his chin toward me.

Rolling my eyes, I pick up a pillow and throw it at him. He catches it and smiles over at me. "I don't want you out of my sight. I'm scared you'll run." He frowns, vulnerability bleeding from his pores. Right now, he's not Animal, the club president. He's just Alec, the boy who lost too much.

I climb out of bed and go to him, taking the pillow and dropping it to the floor. Wrapping my arms around his head, I

bring him to my stomach, stroking my hands through his hair. Strong arms squeeze around my waist. The sound of him inhaling me causes a tear to leak from my eye. I'm so sick of crying.

"Promise me you're not going anywhere," he pleads.

"I promise," I assure him, and I mean it. Gently urging his head back, I lean down and kiss his lips, sighing on contact. "Show me around the place. It's been so long since I've been here."

Nodding his head, he gets to his feet, gripping my hand in his and heading for the door. "Wait." Stopping where my old boots lay on his rug, I search them for the blade he bought me for my thirteenth birthday. It's not there.

"My blade is gone."

He drops down to help me search, but there's nothing. "You must have left it somewhere else." He clasps my hand and pulls me up. "I'll get you a new one."

I don't want a new one. I want that one.

Pushing through the kitchen, he jerks his chin to a brother I don't recognize. "Glen, Drew. Drew, Glen."

"Hey." I limply wave.

"Hey. I'm making bacon, you hungry?" I look up at Alec, who shakes his head no, lines crinkling his forehead.

"Sure," I say, before poking my tongue out at Alec. I slip onto a stool just as Jackie rounds the corner, almost dropping a tray of mugs.

"Oh my God, little Drew!" she squeals, placing them down and embracing me from behind, her perfume almost making me gag.

"When did you get home?"

Home... The word comforts me more than I can comprehend.

“Last night. How are you?”

“Same old, same old. Still running around after these bastards.” She winks up at Alec. Jameson enters the room next, groaning when he sees Glen cooking. Is he limping? “You okay?” Alec asks Jameson. Stealing a piece of bacon, he grimaces as he chews it. How can bacon be cooked wrong? I reach for the piece snatching it out of his hand and bite into it. It’s rubbery and flavorless.

“Yeah. Phantom pain is a bitch. Why the fuck is he cooking again? I thought we banned him.”

“Rage is keeping Gracie busy,” Jackie calls out, messing around with a coffee machine.

“There’s nothing wrong with my food. You can’t even tell it’s meat free,” the Glen guy claims.

“It’s disgusting. It should be against the law to sell that shit,” I inform him, dusting the residue off my hands. A chuckle resonates from Jameson’s chest as he nudges my arm. “It’s good to have you home. You haven’t lost that fire.”

“What’s with the leg?” I gesture to his other hand rubbing his thigh.

“Prospect being an idiot at a cookout. Got excited and fired off his load. A stray bullet caught me. It’s been five fucking months and it still aches,” he grunts.

“Jackie, come take over for Glen before my brothers decide to hog roast him.”

“Sure thing, sweetie.” She puts an apron on, looking ridiculous in her short skirt and stilettos. Kudos to her for surviving in that footwear.

“Prez, my sisters are with me this weekend,” Jameson tells Alec.

“You want time with them?” Alec lifts a brow.

“No. They argue like cats and dogs and bitch me out sending me fucking crazy. I was just going to say I’d prefer not to go on any runs outta town so I can get back there if I need to, but I’m around if you need me.”

“You have sisters?” I ask, watching light spark in his eyes.

“Yeah, two. They’re a fucking headache.” I grin. It’s clear he loves the shit out of those lucky girls. He pulls out his cell, brings up a picture, and shows it to me. It’s the three of them smiling on a beach. Nothing like the leather-wearing, long-bearded man before me.

“Who’re the chicks?” Kai cuts in, slinking up behind Jameson.

“None of your damn business. They’re. Not. For. You,” he states in a warning, making Kai snigger. “I hear you loud and clear.” He backs away hands high in surrender before disappearing through the door he snuck in from.

“We have Bruiser coming into town next weekend. I want everyone here unless it’s essential for them to be outta town to be here for the party,” Alec informs Jameson.

“Riley’s dad?” I query.

“Yeah. He went nomad a few years back and is now retiring his patch. Wants to go live out his days in the mountains.”

“He’s dying?”

“Cancer. Terrible fucking disease,” Jameson chimes in.

That’s horrible. “Does Riley still come around here?” Alec hasn’t mentioned Kai and Riley seeking me out over a year ago.

“No. She owns a shit ton of businesses all over the US. Doesn’t want anything to do with the club,” Jackie adds her two cents. “Pretty and brains, that one.”

“Always thought she was too good for us,” Jameson grunts.

“Jackie, bring some grub to my office, yeah.” Alec tells her.

“Sure thing.”

As we walk through the clubhouse, I recognize many faces and become overwhelmed when they all make a point to

welcome me home. There's new faces too, a girl called Amy behind the bar, bright red hair to match a flirty personality. She comes around the bar to throw her arms around me like she's known me forever. Alec jerks his chin to a couple of prospects, "That's PB and Idiot, if you need anything send those assholes to get it." He doesn't even have to tell me what PB stands for, the boy has golden hair and crystal blue eyes. Pretty boy through and through, he looks like a Hemsworth brother, not a club brother.

"Why do you call the small one Idiot?" I wrinkle my nose.

"Because he is one, shot his gun at a cookout trying to impress a club slut. Bullet hit Jameson in the leg." I cover my mouth as the gasp flees it. "Rage wanted his head on a stick, but Jameson is a forgiving bastard."

"So no punishment?" I rush out, mouth wide.

Grunting, Alec wraps his arm around the back of my shoulders, "Rage cut the boy's trigger finger off, no shooting for him."

I chance a look down at the boy's hand and sure enough he's missing his index finger. Alec guides me down the hall to his office squeezing my shoulder when we enter. The last time I was in here was when Alec found his mother. It's changed. There's a bed against the back wall now, and a panel of the wall is now a glass window. My feet carry me over to it. Looking out, I see our lake in the distance, beyond the fence separating his place from the outside world.

"A lot has changed." I sigh.

"And a lot hasn't," he replies. "Want to hear something funny?"

"Always." I smile over at him.

"Mason is married. Has a kid on the way."

"Wow." I wander over to his bed. "Why is that funny, though?"

"Guess who he married." He quirks a brow, and my mind searches all the people it could possibly be. *Heidi*.

“No way!” I exclaim.

“Yes way.” Damn, Alec was right about them.

“Did she give you my letter?” It shouldn’t matter now, but I’m curious.

His arms drop down, gripping the end of the table. “What letter?”

That fucking skanky bitch. I should have known better.

“It doesn’t matter. You sleep here?” I change the subject as I walk around, looking at all the things that make up the guy he’s become.

“Couldn’t sleep in that room without you.”

“Why do they call you Animal?” I peek at him over my shoulder. He’s leaning his ass against his desk, legs outstretched and crossed at the ankle, arms folded, the veins bulging.

“I was angry when you left. Took it out in the fight pit.”

I move to his bed, wanting to know how many women have been in it. It’s not my right to ask, but fuck, I want to know. *No, you don’t.*

What if he’s had that bar girl Amy in here? Or the Gracie woman occupying Rage? Jackie? I want to change it all—click my fingers and just go back...start again, rewrite the mistakes.

“What are you thinking about?” His gaze so intense, it incites a ripple of longing through me.

“I was wondering why Glen doesn’t have a road name.”
Lies.

He stands, taking a few steps toward me. “He was a prospect for a long time. Nothing stuck, so he’s Glen.” Reaching out, he strokes a stray hair from my cheek. My hand grabs his wrist, holding it to my face, warmth saturating me.

I lived so long in the dust of our relationship, I’m starved of affection, human contact that means something. Every follicle on my body rises in welcome to his touch.

“What were you really thinking about, Drew?” My name on his lips causes a mewling sound to purr out of me. Fucking hell, I’m pathetic.

“I was wondering...”

“Wondering...?” The pad of his thumb caresses my bottom lip, and my eyes close without permission.

“How many women you’ve fucked in that bed,” I word vomit, my eyes darting open to see his reaction.

That Alec smirk steals my breath. “I don’t have women in here.”

“Where do you have them?” I worry my lip.

“I don’t fuck with women at the club, Drew. You know I’ve never been into fucking club sluts.”

“Is there a girlfriend I should be worried about coming to pull my hair out?”

A chuckle rumbles his chest.

“She’d have to be fucking brave to take your ass on.”

“So there is a girlfriend?” A pit opens up in my gut.

“You’re my ol’ lady, Drew. That never changed for me.” A sigh of happiness causes my body sag. I know he wasn’t celibate for eight years, but he didn’t fuck around at the club and he didn’t have anyone serious—that means everything to me. He was broken without me too. No one replaced me for him.

“It’s always been you for me too,” I tell him. And then I’m in his arms, crashing down on the mattress, our bodies entangled, lips kissing, exploring the new bodies we inhabit. The atmosphere ignites the fire roaring between us. Relieved tears soak down my cheeks washing away the years of being apart.

We’ve been to hell and back, chewed up, spit out, and have bled for each other, but now we’re here breathing, living, loving—we’re back where we belong, woken from a bad dream.

Desperate hands tug and tear at each other's clothing stripping bare, until we're skin to skin.

Lips consuming.

The spark flickering to a flame burning us up into a ravenous inferno.

There are no clumsy touches like the first time, there's only rough, hungry, skilled desperation for each other. He enters me urgently forcing my back to arch. "Alec," I cry out. His hard cock filling me up, stretching me with every delicious inch of him.

Wrapping my legs around his back, I give him everything he's giving me, thrust for thrust. We move in sync, fucking hard. Hands squeezing, scratching, pinching. Teeth biting, consuming. All the anger, desire, adoration bringing out the animal in both of us.

TWENTY-ONE



ALEC

Hours later...

Having her in my arms, sweaty and sated from my cock, quenches the thirst I've been living with for years. When soul mates untether, you're left with a gaping hole inside your chest, eating away everything you thought you were. I didn't fuck women in this club because I always knew this would happen. I never stopped searching for her, but sometimes, when the loneliness overwhelmed me, I'd search for her in other women. I regret that now. Nothing ever came close to being with her.

Her fingers drum on my chest. "When did Jackie bring food in?" She grimaces, then begins to giggle. Damn, I've missed that sound. The tray of now cold food sits discarded on my desk.

I roll her onto her back and suck on her neck. "Between your third and fourth orgasm, I think. I could be wrong, though. I was a little busy," I tease, nipping with my teeth.

"I'll allow the cockiness this time." She sighs, stretching her limbs beneath me.

"You tired?"

"If I weren't, it would be disappointing." She bites her lip, wrapping herself around me. My cock hardens from the heat of her pussy rubbing on it. I tilt my hips and sink back inside her body, sighing when her swollen walls squeeze me in

welcome. Nothing fucking compares to Drew or her tight little pussy.



It's been a week since Drew's been home, and you'd never know she left. She's fit right back in, offering to help out behind the bar. Apparently, it's how she made a living while she was traveling the country. Traveling is what she calls it; I call it running. But running is over now. No matter how much she didn't want me to patch in when we were young, she belongs here. Her soul is at home amongst the mayhem and carnage.

My cell rings. Koyn, Prez of our Tulsa chapter, flashes up on the screen. I don't even get out a hello before he says, "I'm going to kill Magna and every motherfucker in that club, you with me or not?"

Hello to him too. What the fuck has Magna done to rile up this ruthless bastard? "My man, Koyn. Good talking to you, brother. Let's see...Magna beat the shit out of my friend's little sister and put her in the hospital last month. No proof, but her word's good enough for me. I've been looking for a way to bury that motherfucker that won't land me in the pen." It's a white lie. Magna is the Demon President, he stays the fuck outta my way, but I've been sick of that cunt being too close to home, bonus is that Demon prick, Remy won't have a club to return home either if we burn it to rubble.

"My brother's a fed. Ain't nobody getting locked up over that piece of shit. You feel me?"

"Hell yeah." I feel him. His brother, Copper, was an old friend of this club. He was the one who confirmed Mitch being a rat.

"We're headed your way. Give me four and a half hours."

"See you soon, man. About time we take out the motherfucking trash around here." I grin as I slip my phone into my pocket and crack my knuckles. "Rage," I call out. The brooding motherfucker is watching Gracie flirt up a storm with

any and everyone. He should just claim her as his ol' lady if he doesn't want to share her with his brothers. Jameson told me Rage's issues ran deep, rooted in pain and heartbreak. Something to do with his ex-wife who was killed in a house fire while pregnant with his kid. Feels like he's cheating on her memory if he moves forward with someone else. We're a bunch of fucked up assholes with dark pasts that turned us into who we are. He takes his time dragging his ass over to me.

“What's up, Prez?”

“Get the brothers together. We got company coming and a job to do.”

TWENTY-TWO



DREW

Six hours later

“Have you seen that one?” Amy groans, biting her lip. I track the path to the brothers of the Tulsa chapter. “Even his scar is all kinds of sexy.” She plays around with her top, pushing her tits up. “He’s mine tonight.” The man in question is tall and broad with intense eyes and a nasty scar in the shape of a cross on his forehead. Alec said he has club business to handle tonight. The energy coming off the new arrivals guarantees blood is going to be spilled.

My guts are queasy. “I’m just going to the bathroom.”

“Sure thing, doll. You don’t have to work, you know?” She pops her gum, winking at me. Rounding the bar, I creep down the corridor to use Alec’s office bathroom. I sense the body following closely behind me without having to turn around. I bend down to slip my knife from my boot, but before I can, Kai growls, “Don’t fucking cut me again, little girl.” I smile despite myself as I stand. “What do you want, Killer?”

“Been meaning to talk to you about the time we saw each other.”

Turning, I cross my arms and narrow my gaze on him. “You mean the time you sought me out?” He looks around the hall, making sure we’re not overheard, then shrugs with a sly hook of his lip.

“You haven’t told Animal about it.”

“Neither have you.”

“Can we keep it that way?”

“Why didn’t you tell him?” I ask, curious.

“You didn’t want to be found.” Silence falls between us. There’s more to it than that, but I don’t think I want to hear his reasons, so I just bow my head and say, “Fair enough. Let’s just not talk about it anymore.”

He slinks off back the way he came, and I remember Riley was there too. She may show up here for her dad’s send off. “Kai,” I call out. He doesn’t turn around, just tilts his head a little.

“Riley…”

“She won’t say anything,” he says confidently before disappearing around the corner.

Pushing into Alec’s office, I startle when I find it occupied by him and a man I recognize. He’s the fed from years ago—the one I saw with Alec’s dad the day he throttled me. “Sorry. I didn’t realize you were in here.”

“Drew,” he says my name with so much love, it settles the nerves eating away at me. He summons me with a crook of his finger, and I walk over to him, getting pulled onto his lap. “Don’t ever apologize for coming in here, baby. It’s your home.” There are photos laid out across his desk. The sight knotting my stomach. “Who is that?” I gasp.

“Oh, sorry. You shouldn’t see those,” the man says. Scowling, he scoops them up and puts them inside his jacket.

“Copper, this is Drew. Drew, Copper.”

“I know who he is,” I state, straightening my back.

“I’ll leave you two alone, but, Animal, this needs to end tonight—for me, for my brother, for everything he lost.”

“It will,” Alec agrees, his hand curling into a fist. When the door closes behind his exit, I sag into the crook of Alec’s

neck. “I’m sorry, baby, I should have warned you Copper was coming.”

“What were those pictures?”

“Copper’s brother, Koyn, is a friend I met a while back—darkness and pain seek out each other. We bonded over the darkness living inside us, understood it. That was his wife and child.”

A wisp of air flees my lungs as the image of the bloodied, abused bodies flashes through my mind. My heart accelerates. “Who would do that? Why?” I think of my aunt and the new body discovered this morning. Someone evil.

“A vile cunt who will no longer walk the earth after tonight.”

“That’s the club business you’re going to deal with?”

“It is. I want to be completely transparent, Drew.”

Thud. Thud. Thud.

“What is it? Is he the one who killed my aunt and that other woman?”

“We’re not sure, baby. The man who killed Koyn’s family is Magna, the president of Demon MC.”

My stomach drops, a cold sweat breaking over me. “Remy,” I breathe, closing my eyes.

“He’s not there. He left town the day you came home with me.”

Standing, I walk around his desk, my mind racing. “Is it dangerous going there?”

“We have the numbers on our side.”

“I need to pee,” I choke out, heading toward the bathroom door.

“Drew,” he calls out. My palm hovers on the handle. “I promise Remy isn’t there. He’s in California.”

“I believe you.” I turn to look at him over my shoulder. “I trust you.” My words appear to bring him a little peace. His

muscles relax, but a tight smile stretches his lips.



“Baby,” Alec calls me over, slipping his arms around me and pinning me to his chest. “Can you have Jackie and the girls sort a couple rooms and some food for when we get back? Don’t wait up for me, okay?”

“Should I be worried?” I ask, nausea stirring my stomach.

“No.” He almost laughs. A beautiful tilt of his lips puts me at ease. His lips claim mine, his tongue plundering my mouth like a starving man. “Mmmm, you taste so fucking good.”

“Prez, we’re rolling out,” Kai interrupts. He’s strapped to the nines, a wild gleam in his eyes.

“Be safe.”

“Don’t worry, Princess. I’ve got his back.”

TWENTY-THREE



ALEC

Two hours later...

Carnage everywhere. The fuckers had no clue we were coming. Halo shut their camera down, and we infiltrated their shithole club. Half of them didn't even have time to reach for their weapons. Kai went in with AK-47, lighting the place up like a warzone. Lucky for us, their club is way out in the sticks—not a lot of people around to hear their pleas for life. Koyn went in with a knife slicing and fucking dicing causing pain turning the place into a bloodbath. Motherfucker had cause and the devil riding his back. But Magna is a slippery fuck. There was no sign of him.

Koyn comes marching from the back rooms, a naked female over his shoulder, ass in the air, pussy on display for all to fucking see.

“Spoils of war?” Kai asks, eyes wide, tongue almost dropping to his chin.

My blade is under his chin in a heartbeat, the vein in his neck jumping. “We ain't about that shit. Never let a thought like that cross your perverted fucking mind again or I'll drain you and dump you with the rest of the filth.”

When we get outside, Koyn loads the girl into a truck and peels out of the lot.

“The girl?” I ask Copper, watching his taillights fade from sight.

“She looks like Blaire, his kid.”

Well...shit. I point to the massacre behind us. “You want the bodies to leave a message?”

“No. Burn it to ash.” Good fucking choice.



After showering the blood from my skin, I find Drew working the bar, the place buzzing with adrenaline-filled bastards wanting to party into the early hours. It's late, and although we didn't get Magna, I feel good about putting down the Demon club. They were rapists and murdering filth. My hands aren't clean of blood, but I don't rape and kill women for sport.

“Thanks for hosting us tonight. Your loyalty and backup tonight won't be forgotten.” Copper pats my shoulder, handing me a bottle of beer. “She your ol' lady?” he asks, watching me watch Drew.

“She's my everything.” I smirk, clinking my bottle with his and taking a mouthful. My hand strangles the neck when one of the visitors grabs Drew's ass as she attempts to walk past him. Copper tenses beside me, feeding off my energy. “Let me deal with that,” he says. I grab his arm, stopping him from moving, and jerk my chin for him to keep watching. Spinning around, Drew raises her leg and kicks out with her foot, crushing straight into his junk. He howls, falling forward, cupping his junk, and she grabs his head and slams it down on her knee. “Don't fucking touch me, asshole,” she barks. Loud roars of laughter ring out. My muscles loosen, the rage pumping through my veins easing with every step she gets closer toward me. “I like her,” Copper announces with pride. Yeah, buddy, me fucking too.



The night fades to morning. Everyone's either passed out or fucking in their rooms, the halls, bathrooms. I sit at my desk, watching Drew undress. “Did you find out if it was a Demon

committing the murders?” she yawns, utterly unaware of how fucking stunning she is in her cotton panties and nothing else. My cock is rock hard, gagging to be buried balls deep inside her.

“Come here,” I tell her, crooking my finger. She bites her lip, eyes dipping to the bulge in my jeans.

She saunters across the room, standing between my spread legs. I splay my hand up her stomach, feeling her breath as it hitches from my contact.

“You’re so fucking perfect. You know that, right?”

“I’m perfect for you.” She rolls her eyes.

“You’re perfect to me, for me. I fucking love you so much, it makes my chest ache.” Her pretty mouth parts, her palm skating over my forearm, holding on. “I love you too.” She swallows, her glassy eyes shining. I move my hand down her body, hooking my fingers into her panties and slipping them down her thighs. “Step out, baby,” I urge her, then drink her in before propping her ass on the edge of my desk.

Lifting her foot, I place it on the arm of my chair and grip her thighs, spreading her open for me. Her scent is intoxicating, sending me fucking wild. I kiss the delicate skin there, then drag my tongue up the seam of her pussy, separating her pretty lips, tasting her. Moaning, she arches her back, her hand gripping my hair, guiding me.

Flicking my tongue over her clit, I suck, kiss, massage with my tongue, until she’s writhing, panting for more. “I need more,” she pleads. I push her chest down until she’s flat on her back, my tongue still lapping her pussy. Unbuttoning my jeans, my cock springs free, seeking out her heat. Replacing my tongue with the pad of my thumb working her clit, I line my cock up with her wet hole and push in deep.

“Oh, fuck,” she cries out. Her hands move to her tits. She kneads them, sweat coating her skin as pure fucking lust and need override everything else. Tight walls contract around my dick, demanding more. I thrust hard, rocking the table, gripping her hip, forcing her down on me as I push forward.

Teeth gritted, jaw clenched, I fuck her raw, feeling everything she is. I circle her clit until she's sobbing, shaking, her toes curling. "Alec, I'm coming. Fuck yes, I'm coming," she cries, her pussy pulsing, milking my release with hers. When my legs gain their blood back I scoop her up and take her to our bed to draw a few more orgasms from her.

TWENTY-FOUR



DREW

My mouth is so dry, it feels gross closing it. Pulling on one of Alec's T-shirts and my panties, I creep from the room, dodging a couple of passed out bikers in the lounge. Pushing into the kitchen, I gasp, my heart thundering. "What the hell are you doing in the dark?" I wince, flicking the light on, and stare open-mouthed at Heidi bent over the counter, her round belly hanging over the edge, her elbows propping her up, panties around her ankles, and the beautiful biker Halo behind her, his dick buried deep. I didn't even know she was here. Mason left before anyone even got back. Silence falls over the room. My mouth unhinged at the sight of them. This is awkward as hell. "Don't you have a room?" I rush out. *And a husband?*

"Drew," she breathes, eyes expanding, lips forming an O. She seems stunned to see me.

"You wanna pull out or just keep going?" I ask the man staring over at me, his jaw clenched. Moving away from her, his dick slaps his fucking thigh as he pulls out, drawing my eyes to it. Oh my fucking God. It's a stereotype to say black men have big cocks, but, in this case, holy-mother-of-fucking-God. It looks like an eggplant. "What are you doing here?" Heidi asks, pulling up her panties with difficulty, her protruding stomach causing her grief. Surely Mason mentioned me being home.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?"

"It's not what it looks like," she rushes out.

“Well...” Halo holds his hands up, which screams, “*Kinda is.*” He tucks his cock away, and I sigh in relief. I’m going to be walking bowlegged just from seeing his manhood.

“Shut up,” Heidi growls at him.

“She has fucking eyes, Di.”

“Are you going to tell Mason?” God, am I dreaming this shit? Since when do we tattletale? This can’t be real life.

“You should fucking tell Mason,” Halo growls, walking over to the sink to pour himself a glass of water. I need one of those. I move to the fridge, feeling like I scored when I find a carton of OJ.

“I can’t tell him. I’m fucking pregnant, in case you forgot,” she snaps.

“Bitch, there’s a fifty percent chance that baby is coming out with brown skin,” he scoffs in disbelief.

“I wouldn’t be so quick to be telling people you’re fucking another brother’s wife,” I remind him. “Aren’t there rules about that shit?” I slam the fridge shut and gulp down the nectar straight from the carton. I don’t want to be touching glasses left around with these two assholes in here fucking. “He fucks anything with a pulse,” she scoffs, then adds, “What the fuck are you doing here?” like I’m the one in the wrong.

“I came home.” I narrow my eyes on her stupid pretty face and point between the two of them while backing out the room. “Good luck with whatever the hell this is,” I grunt. “And, Di, I know you kept my letter. If you still have it, I suggest it finds its way to the rightful owner.”

Her skin loses its color, her palm rubbing over her stomach. “Understood,” she murmurs with a clenched jaw.

“You going to keep your mouth shut with the Prez?” Halo asks, looking like a naughty schoolboy caught by the teacher threatening to call his parents. This isn’t my mess or my place to be telling people shit. “I got up for a drink. I got a drink.” I hold my hands up and disappear back to bed. When I get into the room, the bed is empty. My pulse jumps when Alec’s naked body cloaks mine from behind. His hand grabs my

messy ponytail, tugging my head backward, his lips chasing the pulse in my neck with kisses. “Where did you go?”

“Drink,” I pant. He pushes me against the wall, keeping a firm grip on my ponytail as the other hand wraps around my throat. Tipping my head back further, he steals my lips in a kiss. My pussy floods with arousal, my nipples tenting the fabric of his shirt.

“You taste of fresh oranges on a hot summer day.”

“You taste of me,” I whimper, my legs wanting to buckle.

Dropping his hand from my throat to my panties, he tugs and pulls until they rip from my body, scattering to my ankles, his foot kicking my legs apart. A strong forearm clutches me around the waist, jerking my hips back. “Wanna fuck you, Drew.”

“Then fucking do it,” I almost beg. His chuckle vibrates through me, and then he’s fucking me, relentless, unforgiving, fucking delicious.

TWENTY-FIVE



ALEC

When I walk out into the bar, Gracie and Jackie are huddled together, watching something on the news. “What’s going on?”

“Another woman was killed. They’re saying it’s a serial killer.” Jackie dips her head, her stupid fake hair wobbling around on her skull.

Rage signals for me to follow him into the other room and slaps down a folder on the table. I flick the cover open, a grimace overcoming me at the pictures of butchered women, including Drew’s aunt, stacked inside. “Copper said you asked for any and all information on these killings,” he rumbles.

“Some fucker thinks he can run around our city and sneak into women’s houses, raping, killing,” I growl. “I want this fucker’s head on a platter.”

“They don’t have any suspects. If anything, they’re looking our way,” Rage seethes.

“They should fucking know this isn’t our style.”

“Look through the files. In some fucked up way, all those women can be traced to us.”

My teeth clash. “What the fuck?”

“It’s reaching, but it is there, Prez.”

Jameson raps his knuckles on the door, opening it and joining us. “Looks like a storm is approaching. We’re going to have to postpone Bruiser’s party this weekend.” He grimaces.

“It’s fine. Get everyone prepped for the worst situation.”

He looks between Rage and me, frowning. “Everything okay?”

“Not sure. I’ll let you know if it isn’t.” I snatch up the folder and find my woman. She’s not leaving my sight.



Drew’s laughing with Joe when I find her back behind the bar keeping everyone fucking happy. Our eyes clash, and a knowing smile lifts her lips. “Hey,” she mouths. I join Joe, slipping onto a stool, watching Drew pour a drink. “Another murder.” She scrunches her nose.

“I’m looking into it,” I assure her.

Mason waltzes in, throwing himself on the stool next to mine. “You good?” I lift a questioning brow.

“Heidi’s driving me fucking crazy. No pussy is worth the nagging.” He exhales, holding a thumb up in thanks when Drew places a beer in front of him.

“She’s pregnant. Kind of gets her a pass for bitchtude,” Joe tells him.

“Dunno how the fuck she’s pregnant. She avoids my cock like the plague.” Drew splutters, choking on her mouthful of water. I jump up, leaning over to pat her back.

“Babe, drink much? What the hell?”

“I’m sorry.” She coughs, rubbing her chest.

“Why did you let me marry her? She drives me fucking crazy,” Mason groans, swiping a hand through his hair.

“If you remember correctly, I told you not to marry her when she tried to crawl in my bed the night before your wedding.” Alec snorts.

She fucking what?

“She’s always had a thing for you. I’d gotten used to that shit.”

“Mas, you wanted her because she had a pretty face and nice ass. You needed to prove to yourself you could have that, but when it comes down to it, that’s all she is—and that gets old quick. Fucking divorce her instead of wasting another five years in misery,” I tell him.

“She’s pregnant.”

“So? If it’s yours, raise it. You don’t need to be in an unhappy marriage to raise a kid. It’s not healthy.”

“If it’s mine?”

“I’m just saying.” Drew shrugs, shifting her eyes to me. Mason looks over at me, the accusation clear in his eyes.

Holding up my hands, I shudder. “Not a fucking chance. I’ve never been near her pussy.”

The front door slams open, the wind howling outside. “It’s fucking crazy out there.” PB shakes rain from his long blond hair, looking like a fucking Barbie.

“Get the place boarded up,” I instruct. “Drew, let’s go catch a nap, baby.”

Joe grunts. “He ain’t wanting no nap.”

Drew grins. She places another beer in front of him, then hops over the bar straight into my arms.

“He’ll need one once I’m done with him.”

Fuck yeah.

TWENTY-SIX



DREW

Screams rattle around my brain. Blood. Gore. Gasps. I jolt upright, my heart racing. Nightmares have plagued me the last two nights, causing me to dread closing my eyes. Alec's large arm tightens across my waist, keeping me trapped in the bed. Rain batters the huge window, the sky flashing bright, then booming with thunder. The sudden wailing of the tornado warnings causes my chest hollow out.

Alec squints one eye open. "Fuck," he grumbles.

Footfalls sound from the hall from people shuffling around.

"Babe, we need to go underground. Grab anything you need."

I grip his arm, trying to lighten the mood even though my insides churn. He grins and pecks my lips. "Come on."

A lot of the brothers went home to their families, leaving mostly prospects and the younger brothers here. We all huddle down to the cellar where there are rows of cots set up with pillows and blankets.

I envy Alec being able to immediately fall a sleep down here without a worry about Mother Nature tearing everything apart outside.

Hours pass without any message saying it's safe to come up. Will we even get signals? I pace the cellar, biting my nails. When noise settles around us, my nerves finally calm. A text pings on my phone.

Gracie: You alone?

Me: No, but I can be. What's up?

Gracie: Go somewhere private.

My eyes dart to Alec, who's still snoring on the tiny cot mattress. When a call comes in, I stare at the screen, nerves bubbling in my guts. One of the prospects groans, "Answer or mute it, woman."

I leap up and haul ass up the stairs two at a time, clicking the green icon.

"Hello?"

TWENTY-SEVEN



ALEC

Three hours later

“I’ve searched every room, Prez. She’s not anywhere.” Rage frowns. “Could she have run again?”

Boom. Boom. Boom.

My head pounds. I can’t focus. Where the fuck is she? I woke up an hour ago to Rage hollering out, “Lunchtime,” to everyone in the cellar. We slept through the storm and the morning. Drew was no where to be seen. I assumed she must have gone back to our room. When I found it empty, a million scenarios went through my mind. Her running was at the forefront. But why would she? Everything is good—so fucking good.

“Maybe she went for groceries?” Glen chimes in.

“She isn’t picking up her cell,” I growl. “You can shop and answer your phone at the same time.”

“She got a call earlier.” PB raises his hand like we’re in a classroom.

“Elaborate,” Rage orders, saving me the effort.

“Someone called. She ran up the stairs to get it.” He shrugs.

All eyes turn to the front door as it blasts open. Jameson walks in like a horsemen of the apocalypse carrying a black

bag, a timid woman trailing behind him. She looks familiar. “We have a problem,” Jameson seethes.

“Doc,” Rage nods toward the woman, and it hits me where I know her from. She’s the doctor who took care of Jameson’s bullet wound a few months back. “What’s in the bag?” Rage looks around me to the duffel.

“A fucking kill kit.” My head swivels to Jameson. Stomping over to the bag, I unzip it. “The storm knocked a tree through Monroe’s house. She called me thinking someone had broken in, and I brought her to stay with me.”

“Wait, what?”

“We’re neighbors,” the doc offers.

“Coincidental.” Jameson half shrugs, looking anywhere but at me.

Rage snorts, and Jameson shoots him the bird. There’s nothing coincidental about him buying that house if she’s his neighbor.

“Anyway, when we were clearing shit up, we found this—and blood.”

“So someone did break in?” PB asks.

“I’m thinking the tree coming through the fucking window wasn’t part of his plan.”

Jameson holds up a clear bag, a shard of glass smeared with blood inside. “You think Copper can get this analyzed for us, find out who it belongs to?”

Rage seizes the bag, looking it over. “If the owner of this blood is on file.”

“Do it,” I bark. “Tell Copper we’ll be in his debt if he gets a rush on this. And call everyone home. Drew’s missing.”

“What?” Jameson freezes.

I nod, pinching the bridge of my nose. “Could be nothing, could be everything.”



I try her cell again—nothing. Where the fuck are you, Drew? I rode to every fucking grocery store in a twenty-mile radius, checked hospitals, police stations—nothing. She wouldn't leave me again. *Would she?*

“Any word?” I ask Rage, who shakes his head no.

“Half the brothers haven't shown. You want to get someone to chase the motherfuckers down?” I ask, barely containing the fire raging inside me.

“A lot of property damage from the storm. Trees blocking roads and shit. They'll be here, Prez.”

The contents of the bag splayed out on the church table forces blood to roar in my head.

“Ice took prints. He's with his uncle for access to the database.”

I run my gaze over the contents: zip ties, gags, an array of knives. Sick bastard. A small hunting knife draws my attention. I pick up the small blade I gave Drew on her thirteenth birthday. My jaw flexes. Every muscle ripples under my skin. “It's one of us,” I choke out, the room spinning.

“What?” Rage jerks his head forward like he didn't hear me right.

“This bastard is one of us.” I hold up the knife up. “This is Drew's. She left it here eight years ago. In my room.”

Boom. Boom. Boom.

“No way. I know every one of these guys. They're our brothers.”

“So was Mitch,” I growl. *Drew, Drew, Drew.* “What if whoever it is took her?” I exhale, the realization of that being a possibility hitting me like a ton of bricks.

“Who was here last night?”

“Just stragglers—mostly prospects at the club when the sirens went off.”

“We need to call everyone in. This motherfucker was injured—we look for a fucking injury.” Rage slams his fist on the table. “If it is one of ours...”

“He has to go to ground,” I finish for him.



“She will come home, sweetie,” Jackie coos when I walk into the bar, staring at the packed room full of brothers all waiting for their leader to give them some fucking news. I have none. Drew isn’t home, and everyone who showed was checked for injury—nothing. The few brothers who haven’t made it in were sent out on business or dealing with personal shit. Mason called to say Heidi’s waters broke. Halo was with him for some reason. Kai was doing a job for me and said he got stuck outta town because of the storm. That left Hog—who was supposed to be in rehab.

“Prez, what’s going on?” someone calls out.

“It’s looking likely that the serial killer terrorizing our city is closer to home. Broke into Jameson’s ol lady’s house last night,” I tell the brothers gathered together awaiting instruction.

An array of whispers and grunts fill the air. “He got injured and left a blood trail, which is being followed. In the meantime, Drew vanished off the face of the earth. Cameras were knocked out by the storm. All we know is she was here—then she wasn’t. I want everyone out on the streets, clubs, every corner of this city. I need her found.”

The room thins out as motorcycles roar to life outside. I want to be out there with them, but what if she comes back and I’m not here?

“You want a drink?” Amy calls from behind the bar.

“No. I need to keep my head clear.”

My cell lights up with a call from Copper. “Talk to me.”

“I’m ten minutes away. You at the club?”

“Yeah.”

“See you in ten. Prepare yourself a stiff fucking drink.”

Great.



Jameson and Rage sit beside me, waiting for Copper to arrive and spill his guts. “Where’s Gracie?” Rage pipes up, looking over to the bar where she usually is.

“Was she not with you last night?” I ask.

He pulls out his phone, shooting off a text to her. “Nah. She went to check on her mother’s house.”

“He’s here.” Rage lifts his head to Copper walking across the room. He’s suited and booted, carrying a fucking computer bag—nothing like the rough biker here the other night.

He slips into the seat opposite me, a grimace on his face.

“So?” I ask.

“The blood lab is taking too long, but I got Drew’s phone records sent over and pulled some surveillance tapes from a store on the corner of Ms. Monroe’s street, taken before the storm interfered with the signal.”

Thick saliva coats the back of my throat, making it difficult to swallow. My eyes train on his lips, waiting for the words to come out. He slides over a sheet of paper with numbers and times, and Rage snatches it up. “Gracie was who called her.”

“Maybe she was in trouble?” Jameson offers. Rage brings his phone to his ear, calling Gracie. No answer.

“Fuck.”

Copper pulls a laptop out and starts it up. “You need to see this.”

“Is it one of mine?” I ask, wanting to bring the world down around the motherfuckers feet if it is. We’re a fucking brotherhood. How dare whoever the fuck betray that.

“I recognized him right away. He came with us to take out the Demons.”

I want to claw at my skin and roar until the foundations tremble and my girl is back in my arms.

“Who is it?” we all ask in union.

He flips the screen of his laptop around for us to see, and I want to put my fist through it.

Despair cuts into my heart. If he has Drew, she’s probably dead.

“I pinged your girl’s cell phone. Got a hit from a cell tower and sent someone I trust to check it out.”

“Where?!” I choke out, almost turning over the table as I get to my feet.

“Prez, let us go just in case...”

In case she’s fucking dead...

“WHERE?!”

TWENTY-EIGHT



DREW

Hours earlier...

“I need you to come meet me.”

“Why the hell would I do that? And why do you have Gracie’s phone?” I scoff, checking out the windows to see the damage of the storm. Debris lays scattered, but everything looks intact.

“Gracie’s with me. And because I have the man who killed your aunt here.”

My heart skips a beat. “You know who killed her?”

“Drew, I got injured taking him out. I need your fucking help.”

I pull on a pair of jeans and a tee, then slip on one of Gracie’s coats she left here and grab the keys to one of the trucks used for runs.

I type the address into the navigation, and it only takes fifteen minutes to get there. I pull up to what looks like an abandoned building with a chained fence and graffiti painted over the walls. “I should have burrowed a gun.” I sag in the seat.

Gracie: I see you. Come inside.

I check my boot for the knife I sheathed there and think about texting Alec so he doesn’t wonder where I am, but another text comes through, urging me to move inside.

Gracie: Bleeding out in here.

Walking around the building to find an entrance point leaves me uneasy. Why the fuck would he come here? There's a car parked outside the building. A basic sedan. Pink fluffy steering wheel. Gracie.

I push at the door on the side of the building, and it creaks open. *This is fucking crazy*, I repeat over in my head.

I get one step inside before I'm shoved from behind, a hand grabbing my phone from my grip.

My hands rush out in front of me as I brace to fall, almost face-planting an old table with a rusted sewing machine bolted to it.

"What the fuck?" I bark, swirling on him.

"Had to make sure you weren't followed."

"By pushing me? Dickhead," I bark.

He's cradling his left arm, blood saturating the sleeve of his hoodie.

"Kai, what's going on?" I ask, raising my hand, holding out my palm for my phone.

"Can't let you have this. Sorry, princess." His breathing is staggered.

"Kai!" I screech when he chucks my phone out a window.

"Why are you here? What is this place?"

"Doesn't matter..." He inhales a deep breath. "I fucked up and need to leave town."

"What? Why? Who did that to you? Where's Gracie?" I look around, seeing nothing but trash and dust.

"You started my need for blood, you know." He tries to smile over at me, but pain slices through his features.

"What are you talking about?" I move toward him, and he balks a little.

"You're not afraid of me, asshole. Let me see your arm."

Sliding down the wall, his ass thuds when it hits the dirty floor.

Carefully, I lift his hoodie, tugging it over his head and then delicately down his arm, wincing when it sticks to the blood congealing there. “You need a doctor.” I grimace. A coughing laugh rattles from his chest. “If only you knew how ironic that is.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I was at a doctor’s house when this happened.” Frowning from his cryptic shit, I pull the sleeve the rest of the way off his arm, and wince at the gash in his upper arm. It’s sliced so deep, I can see bone. Acid burns up my gullet with the need to gag. “You really need to get to the hospital.”

“Just tie something around the top of my arm to stop the bleeding.”

I look around for a rope or ties. I cannot use anything from here, an infection is guaranteed. Pulling my knife from my boot, I cut through his hoodie to use for a bandage.

“You’re the only bitch I know who carries a knife in her shoes.” He smiles, sweat coating his brow.

“Well, you never know when you’re going to need one,” I counter, wrapping the fabric around his arm.

“Argh! Fuck!” he growls, kicking out in pain.

“Sorry. It has to be tight.” I go to move, freezing when the blade of my knife gets pushed against the delicate skin of my throat. “What the fuck are you doing?” I breathe. I could risk tackling him, plunging my fingers into his injury, but he could kill me if he nicks my artery...

“You’re so fucking pretty, do you even notice it? You’ll look so pretty wearing my scars.”

“Kai,” I implore, holding up my hands. “I came here to help you.”

“You came here because I told you I had your aunt’s killer.”

“I came here because you said you were hurt. I didn’t even like my aunt, what do I care about who killed her?” I lie, feeling guilty for even saying the words.

His brow furrows, the hand at my throat wavering.

“She was a cunt, probably pissed off the wrong person.”

He closes his eyes, briefly licking his lips. “I’m thirsty.”

“I have water in the truck,” I implore, trying my luck, but he knows better than that.

“Your aunt was just unfortunate to be related to you,” he states, ignoring my comment.

“What?” My knees are starting to hurt kneeling on this crusty ass floor.

“I wanted to see if her death would draw you out—and it did.”

No. No. He didn’t—wouldn’t...

“Your face is so animated. It tells me everything you’re thinking. Like how much you try to hate me but can’t help feeling attracted to me. Compelled to keep my secrets and share them with me. Does Animal know how bad you have it for me?”

He’s delusional...

“I liked it,” he admits, shifting to sit up more. His arm is shaky, the distance between my flesh and the blade widening. I take my shot, pushing at his arm while moving my body backward out of reach, my ass skidding along with the dirt when I fall.

Jolting forward, he attempts to reach me, but I throw an old broken chair toward him, hitting him in the injured arm, halting his progress. “Fuck!” he roars, swallowing the pain.

I get to my feet the same time he does, our gazes holding, intense, terrifying. “Did you bring me here to kill me?” I ask, my own lungs squeezing, making it hard to breathe.

His eyebrows draw in. “No! God, no! You don’t get it, do you? I fucking love you.”

He's crazy. Anxiety chews its way up my spine, making every hair stand at attention. "I like fucking killing." He waves the knife around like he's talking about a hobby. "The crimson swell of the first cut, the fear in their eyes, the power surge—it all gives me a rush. But that's just a little part of who I am."

"You're fucking sick, Kai. You need professional help."

"You, though..." He points the tip in my direction, his eyes dancing with madness. "You've never been scared of me. You're a fighter, and damn, princess, I've never been able to get you outta my head."

"Because you're insane." I grit my teeth.

"It wasn't supposed to go down like this. I got sloppy, wanted a taste of Jameson's sister. He was flaunting her pictures that day..." his head bounces up and down. "You remember."

My heart stammers, bringing my hand up to cover my mouth.

"Didn't realize she wouldn't be there. They're usually both alone at the house, but he was home, and they weren't, so I took the next best option: the pretty doctor bitch he's so sweet on next door."

"You hurt someone else?" I choke out.

Anger washes over his face as he aims the tip of the knife toward his arm. "I'm the one who got hurt."

"Did Jameson do that?"

"No," he sneers like that's an insult. "Tree came through the window and the glass sliced through my arm. It could have fucking killed me."

It's a shame it didn't.

"Let me out of here, Kai. If you love me like you say you do, let me leave."

He ponders that for a moment, and when he steps aside, air fills my lungs. I step forward, and he doesn't move, so I edge advancing another step, and another. I don't want to turn my

back on him. Blood rushes in my veins, making my head woozy.

“Actually,” he says, thrusting toward me. I attempt to race past him, but his fist grabs a handful on my hair, the sharp blade he has clenched in the same fist scraping over my scalp. I kick out, flaying. I reach up to loosen his hold, and the blade cuts into my skin, setting the flesh ablaze. “Stop fucking fighting!” he booms. With unnatural strength, he tosses me forward. My feet tangle up in a sheet of plastic, and before I can control it, I’m sailing through the air, my head crashing down against the table. My body lands in a mess of limbs. Everything hurts. Shadows seep out from the corners, swallowing me whole.



A breeze hums over my skin, making me shiver. My eyelids feel heavy and weighted. Throbbing marches in my skull. Where am I? Memories come flooding in, stiffening my posture. I crack open my eyes farther, taking in the surroundings of the derelict building Kai lured me too. Alec has to be going out of his damn mind. My chest cavity aches. I move my limbs to find my hands won’t budge. Yanking my arms harder tightens fabric tied around my wrists. Tracking the path to the sewing machine my nerves fray, I’m bound to it with my own shirt.

No, no, no...please. I check the rest of my body, almost weeping in relief to find my jeans still on.

Relaxing my limbs loosen the fabric slightly, the binding not as secure as he could have been if he had two good arms. I could try and work my wrists free...

“Sorry about your shirt. Didn’t want you fighting me again. Not while I’m fucked up anyway. You hurt yourself.” Kai’s voice carries across from beside the door. I feel the stinging cuts on my hands and the throbbing lump on my head.

“Shhh,” he warns, placing a finger to his mouth, his eyes tracking something through the sliver of the window visible

between a couple panels of wood.

Is someone out there?

“How long was I out?” I ask, trying to distract him.

“Hours. I managed to get some sleep and grabbed the water out of your truck. You weren’t lying about that.” I was. If he found water, it was coincidental. Hours? Christ. *Alec, Alec, Alec.*

“Kai, if you’re not going to kill me, why am I here?”

His back goes flat against the wall, his eyes expanding teeth gritting. A creaking of the door draws my eyes, as it slowly opens.

Oh God.

“Watch out!” I scream out, but it’s too late. Kai jumps on the man who’s entered my nightmare. The small, three-inch blade he holds pierces the man’s neck, overtaking him by surprise. He didn’t stand a chance. His gun drops to the floor with a clang. As Kai opens up his artery, crimson sprays, decorating Kai’s hands and face. The man collapses to the floor in front of me, eyes open, glaring at me as blood expands around him. Vomit chases guilt up my gullet, dispelling bile from my lips.

I kick my foot out to try to get the gun, but Kai beats me to it. Tsking and waving the weapon like a finger, he chastises me.

“Who is that?” I ask, my voice raw.

“Fuck knows.” He digs into the man’s pockets, kicking his body over onto his back and rummaging through the suit jacket pocket. He pulls out a badge, flashing it to me. “A fed. Shit.”

What? I scan the Special Agent writing, my head spinning.

“Alec must have called in favors. We need to go.”

“No.” I huddle my limbs up, trying to force myself as small as possible while flexing and twisting my wrists to take advantage of his poor tying skills.

“We can’t stay here.”

“There is no we. I’m not in love with you, and I’m not going anywhere with you,” I cry out.

“You’re just upset.”

God, he’s so fucking insane. I can’t believe we lived under the same roof. He could have killed us all in his sleep.

“If I untie you, are you going to be a bitch or do as your told?”

“What do you think?” I spit out, screwing up my face to show him just how much I hate him.

Unmistakable rumblings of motorcycles crack the air, sending Kai into a panic. He dashes over to me, tugging at the binds to release me. Raising my foot up, I kick between his parted legs with all my might, connecting with his balls. He almost falls over me, but I yank my hands free and scramble toward the front door, crawling over the dead man in my path. A shot rings out, whizzing past my ear, making me cower. I hold my hands up in surrender. Engines cut out, and feet march in our direction. Kai curls around my back, dragging me to my feet, the barrel of the gun digging into the side of my skull. “Don’t move, princess,” he murmurs into my ear. The door swings open, but no one is there.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

“Drew?”

“Alec!” I cry out, tears forming and falling.

His head pokes around the doorframe, his arm stretching out, a gun in his hand. “Come on in, Prez,” Kai taunts, pressing the weapon farther into my skin.

“What the fuck, Killer?” Alec exhales, letting his gun swing around his finger, hanging in submission. He steps into the doorway, his other hand up in the air to show he has no more weapons. “Just let her come to me.”

Taking the gun away from my head to tap it against his own, he says, “Uh, I don’t think so. And you can tell all the

motherfuckers surrounding this place to back the hell off unless you want to scrape her brains out of your cut.”

Alec’s jaw ticks, his beautiful dark orbs keeping me in his sights.

“No need to threaten her, just tell me what you want.”

“I want her.” Kai laughs, like it’s obvious.

“You know it was my fault that she left in the first place, right?” Kai announces.

“What does that mean?” Alec asks, taking in every inch of Kai and me, his brain ticking over, working through every scenario of how to get me out of this.

“I overheard your mother telling Mitch she was pregnant with his kid and they’d have to up the timeframe of their plan.”

He’s lying. A hole opens in my chest, sorrow bleeding out.

“She was the Prez’s ol’ lady and acting like a club slut. Fucking another brother—and Mitch of all people? Your old man loved him.”

Viking only loved himself—and maybe Alec. He’s the reason my dad’s dead.

Alec’s chest heaves, Kai’s confession changing everything he thought he knew.

“When Mitch went outside to get his call, I stuck a knife in her belly—no kid for those traitors.” He grins against my hair, inhaling, stroking his cheek down to my neck. Alec edges a step forward, his fists clenched.

“Uh-uh-uh,” Kai warns, aiming the gun over my shoulder at Alec. My soul flees my body as fear drowns me. “Don’t,” I gasp. Turning in his hold, I flatten the front of my body against his, wrapping my arms around him in a hug. His body tenses for a moment, then sags against mine, his good arm with the gun clutching me to him.

“Princess,” he exclaims.

Counting to three in my head, I lower my hand and plunge it into his wound as hard as I can, sliding my body to the side to give Alec the clear shot he needs. Kai bellows in agony. A bang explodes from Alec's gun. The splat as it hits Kai's shoulder forces him back a couple steps. Another blow, and Kai hits the floor. "Arghhhh!" I scream out, releasing everything left in me.

Brothers flood the room, dragging Alec outside and scooping me up, taking me to him. He snatches me from Jameson's arms and collapses to his knees, holding me against him. "I'm so sorry, baby. I'm so fucking sorry."

Sobs wretch from my body as I grip onto as much of him as possible.

I knew my dad didn't kill his mom. I don't agree with him betraying the men who took us in, gave us a family, but when it comes to love, people doing crazy shit. I'd do anything for Alec. Love is dangerous, powerful, and sometimes deadly. But we're alive. Living. Breathing. Together.

Thank God we're together.

"No sign of Gracie?" Rage asks me over Alec's shoulder.

"She wasn't here, but her car is." I point to the silver sedan parked between two other buildings about twenty feet away.

I watch him approach her car, open the door without the key, and checking inside. Kai probably just stole it from her... I hope. She's fine. *Please let her be fine.*

"Animal, you need to get everyone out of here. He killed a fed. I need to get this cleaned up," Copper says.

Pulling away from Alec, I get to my feet and slowly walk toward Rage as he rounds the car toward the trunk. Time slows, one foot, two...three. The trunk pops open...four steps. Flesh coated red...five...six.

"C...a...l...l...an...am...bu...lance!" Rage's voice distorts, the world spinning.

Seven...eight...nine... I drop to my knees, my hands reaching out toward the body he pulls free.

Gracie.



EPILOGUE

ANIMAL

Things around here have been unsettled since Kai's killing spree. Gracie was laid to rest with a proper ol' lady burial. She was a good woman. She didn't deserve what he did to her. Rage is in a state of mourning that's terrifying. He hit the road, and from what information I got, is dishing out his own kind of justice on anyone he deems deserving. Jameson's lost. He has no idea how to help his brother, his best friend. Doc has been keeping him from following Rage right off the deep end.

"You sure you want this cookout?" Drew asks, sliding her body against mine, sighing from the contact.

"We need to bring the family back together. They need this."

Nodding, her curls bouncing around her shoulders, she plants a kiss to my chest. "I love you," she tells me, going to the bar to help Amy get things set up. "I love you too, baby." Drew said we couldn't not remind each other of that fact—not after everything that went down. You never know how long you have left on this earth. Life's too short.

The club fills with brothers and their families, lifting the atmosphere. We have a tainted history, but a few bad apples can't destroy a brotherhood built on friendship, solidarity, loyalty, and trust. We will overcome this and become stronger for it.

Mason slaps me on the back, squeezing my shoulder. "Prez, I'd like you to meet your goddaughter, Penny Simone Grimsby."

Heidi hands me a newborn I have no choice but to hold in my arms. I don't know how to hold a baby. "She's...errr, cute," I grumble, handing her back.

"Cute? She's not a puppy." Heidi chuckles. I look the kid over, her dark hair and apparent skin color not matching Mason's. She may not be a puppy, but she's not his either. Fuck, that's a conversation for another day.

Mason walks over to get some food, leaving Heidi standing here, looking guilty of something. "I don't want to know. Not tonight anyway," I warn her.

"Know what?" she exclaims, eyes expanding.

"Who the daddy is." I nod down to the baby.

"It was an accident. Please don't tell him."

Accident? Is she fucking kidding?

"I ain't telling him shit, but you will—and soon."

Rolling her eyes, she grits out, "Fine." Her hand disappears into her bra and she pulls out a letter, handing it to me. It's warm from being on her tit.

"This is yours. It's a little late." She shrugs, sauntering off.

I stare down at the worn, folded paper. Stuffing it in my pocket, I go to the bar to get my fill of Drew.

"You looked like a fish out of the water holding that baby." Drew chuckles, sliding a beer across the bar.

"I've never held one. Not to say I don't want to hold one, or two, three," I add, flicking my eyes to her stomach. She picks up a napkin and chucks it at me.

Laughter and celebrations lifts the atmosphere as the night rolls on. Jameson's ol' lady seeming to handle the brothers and club with ease helps him relax.

Leaving them all to it, I go collect the gift I have for Drew and creep out of the compound, texting her to come meet me.



EPILOGUE

DREW

Breathing in the fresh air, my heart settles, finding peace in our special place. The water ripples as Alec skips stones across the surface.

“You wanted me?” I ask, folding my arms and raising a brow.

“Always.” He chuckles, smiling his panty-melting, heart-shattering, soul-pleasing smile.

“So, I got your letter,” he says, pulling a piece of paper from his pocket.

My lips hook, smiling over at him. “Better late than never.”

“I should throttle her for keeping this from me.” He flicks it open, and begins to read.

Alec,

Every molecule of my being exists to love you. I believe that more than anything else in this world. I gave you every part of me, and you will own that for eternity. We're soulmates, best friends.

But I can't stay. It all hurts too much right now.

Just know you were my first love.

My only love.

My forever love.

- *Drew*

“There was never anyone else for me. I fell for you when you were six years old and kept falling every day since.” He drops to a knee, pulling a ring from his pocket.

“Alec?” I breathe.

“You’re my best friend, my soulmate, my ol’ lady. Now, let’s make it official. Be my wife?”

I run into his arms, happy tears streaming down my face. “Yes! Yes! Always yes!”

Slipping the ring onto my finger, I let out a mixture of sobs and laughter, looking at the diamond-encrusted skull sitting on a band of white gold. “It’s perfect.”

“You’re perfect.”

“Perfect for you.”

“To me—for me.” His lips crush to mine, swooping me up and walking us to our bench. I straddle his lap, grinding my pussy down on the bulge in his jeans.

The wreckage of our past being rebuilt piece by piece. We’re stronger now. We reclaimed our love from the center of our pain.

He worked himself inside me—into my soul—nineteen years ago. Every smile that hooks his lips slips through the cracks of my flawed soul, changing me from within—healing me.

“I love you, baby.” He kisses my neck, tasting, owning.

“I love you.” I move my hips, my hands buried in his hair.

“You going to be my wife?”

“Yeah, baby.”

“Have my babies?”

“One baby.”

“We’ll see.”



“Hey.” I nudge Rage’s shoulder. It’s been a while since he’s been home. He took Gracie’s murder the hardest. Guilt for not being able to save her eats away at him even though it’s not his fault. I hand him the photo he asked for: a small square picture of Gracie I took one day when we were fooling around behind the bar. I had it pinned on the corkboard along with lots of others. When he saw it, the pain was evident in his eyes. He stares down at the picture, stroking his finger over her face.

I reach over and grasp his arms, squeezing. “You’re a good man, Rage. Don’t let the evil act of another destroy that.”

Pulling out his wallet, he slips the photo inside, and an old image falls out.

He quickly picks it up, almost frantic.

My lips part at the flash I see of the image. The woman is someone I know. “Can I see that?”

“No,” he grunts.

“But I know her.”

“Impossible. She’s dead.”

“No...”

“Drew,” he snaps, slapping his hand on the counter. “She was my wife, and she’s fucking dead.” He glares at me for a few silent seconds, then leaves, slamming the front door behind him.

Jameson approaches me, coming back from the bathroom. We started calling him Grim after hearing Melanie, his girlfriend, tease him with it at one of our family cookouts.

“What happened?”

“I know his wife.”

Jameson looks toward the door Rage disappeared behind.
“Knew her?”

“No. *Know*, Grim.” I stare up at him. “I *know* her.”

“But she’s dead.”

She was very much alive the last time I saw her. I run to Alec’s office, grabbing my cellphone. It was recovered from the chip after Kai chucked it out a window. Returning to Jameson, I bring up her name and call her on FaceTime. It chimes a couple times, and she answers. “Drew, darling, where are you?”

“Hey, Willa. I’m at home with the Royal Bastard brothers.”

“Shit.”

Jameson grabs my phone, his body wobbling. He grips the bar to gain his equilibrium. “Willa?” he says, his voice broken.

CALL ENDED...

The end.

That’s all for now! Join me for [RAGE!](#) Coming September. Click now to [pre-order](#).

ROYAL BASTARDS MC SERIES

(These do not need to be read in order. Each title has it's own characters and stories.)

Erin Trejo: Blood Lust

Chelle C Craze & Eli Abbott: Bad Like Me

K Webster: Koyn

Esther E. Schmidt: Petros

Elizabeth Knox: Bet On Me

Glenna Maynard: Lady & the Biker

Madison Faye: Filthy Bastard

CM Genovese: Frozen Rain

J. Lynn Lombard: Blayze's Inferno

Crimson Syn: Inked In Vengeance

B.B. Blaque: Rotten Apple

Addison Jane: Her Ransom

Izzy Sweet * Sean Moriarty: Broken Wings

Nikki Landis: Ridin' For Hell

KL Ramsey: Savage Heat

M.Merin: Axel

Sapphire Knight: Bastard

Bink Cummings: Switch Burn

Winter Travers: Playboy

Linny Lawless: The Heavy Crown

Jax Hart: Desert King

Elle Boon: Royally Broken

Kristine Allen: Voodoo

Ker Dukey: Animal

KE Osborn: Defining Darkness

Shannon Youngblood: Silver & Lace

Royal Bastards MC Facebook Group - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/royalbastardsmc/>

Website- <https://www.royalbastardsmc.com/>

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Desolate

Vacant – Novella

Deadly – Novella

The Broken Series:

The Broken

The Broken Parts of Us

The Broken Tethers That Bind Us – Novella

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Drawn to You

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