



RAVAGE MC BOOK SEVENTEEN

BOUND

BY *Redemption*

WALL STREET JOURNAL & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

RYAN MICHELE

**BOUND BY
REDEMPTION (BOUND
#8) (RAVAGE MC #17)**

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BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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Bound by Redemption: A Motorcycle Club Romance (Bound #8) (Ravage MC #17) ©2021 Wicked Words Publishing, LLC – Ryan Michele

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This work of fiction is intended for mature audiences only. All sexually active characters portrayed in this book are eighteen years of age or older. Please do not buy if strong sexual situations, violence, explicit language and dark romance offends you.

This is not meant to be an exact depiction of life in a motorcycle club, but rather a work of fiction meant to entertain.

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To my mom

The strongest and bravest woman I know

You will beat this

I love you

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BLURB

Micah and Ensley's story continues...

Redemption.

Micah thought he was on the right path, making amends with the Ravage MC and taking responsibility for his daughter Remy.

Suddenly everything turned on its head.

Now he along with the brothers of the Ravage MC have a serious task.

Figure out who is responsible for the chaos surrounding them.

Can he do this, keep his woman and child safe and prove to the brothers of the MC that he is ready to be a part of their family?

****This book is not a standalone. You must read Bound by Consequences before this book.****

MICAH

THE NOISE. RUMBLING. ROARING. LOUD. BOISTEROUS.

Everywhere.

Right before the sound there was a tingle in the air, like the Heavens telling us that something big was about to happen, but not directing us until it was too late. It was all the warning we received—a feeling.

One second I was chasing Remy and Ensley, playing tag that made all of us laugh, and the next my Marine training kicked in so naturally it was seamless.

Danger. Threat.

Grabbing Remy around her belly and picking her up, we charged to Ensley. I thrust Remy into Ensley's protective arms and pushed them both to the ground, not knowing what the fuck was going on, but they needed to be covered.

Remy cried hysterically beneath us as I watched one by one as explosions erupted at Austyn and Emery's houses. Another boom quaked the ground, and I curled around my two girls with my body protecting them as the leaves from the tree above shook.

What in the fuck was going on here? Homes in Sumner didn't just randomly blow up. Hell, homes in America didn't just blow up.

That shit was a declaration of war.

Trust me, I'd been there—in the middle of the madness, exactly like what was happening in front of me in my hometown.

Fear struck bold and hit me hard. It wasn't for me. No, it was for the two girls beneath me. Very few times I felt fear. This time, I could feel it all around me. It was this tangible thing I felt as though I could grab it and hold on to it. As if it were waiting in the air, ready to take all of us down.

Nothing could happen to these two.

Nothing.

I wouldn't allow it.

In that split second, they were the only thing that mattered. Everything inside of me had shifted. Priorities, emotions, everything was intensified as I took in the scene around us, looking for the threats.

“Oh my God. Austyn is in there!” Ensley cried, and I could feel her body shaking along with Remy's.

I had to get them out of here.

Had to get them away.

Far away from the danger.

They needed to be safe, and that was away from here. Then I could focus on getting Austyn out.

Huge fireballs lifted into the sky, shaped like one large mushroom. My mind went back momentarily to the desert. My guys around me while everything burst into flames. Engulfing. Consuming.

Rapidly, I shook it off. This was not the time, nor the place for that shit. Focus.

Quickly and efficiently, I picked up both of my girls and moved toward Ensley's car all the while taking charge and commanding directives. “Ensley. Get in your car and drive directly to the clubhouse. No stops for any reason. You get there as fast and safe as possible. You do not leave until I get there.”

In the position I held Ensley, I couldn't see her face to gauge her reaction. Shock had certainly set in, but I needed her to focus on my instructions and for them to get to the safety of the clubhouse. I set them down. Ensley picked up Remy and clutched onto her, fear stark in her gaze as she nodded. Okay, she was with me. Good.

Her face was white as a sheet, but I had to continue. "You call 911 on the way and give them the address," I ordered, needing them gone. "I'm going in for Austyn. When you get to the clubhouse, let my mom help with Remy."

Safe. Away from here.

"Okay." The word had some shakes to it, but I needed her to pull it together and get Remy out of here. Whatever this was, it was big, and nothing could happen to them. I'd just found them and wasn't letting them go.

"Go!" I ordered, but she stayed still for a moment. Why the hell wasn't she going? "What?" It came out as a bark, but she had to get the hell out of here and get to the clubhouse.

"What are you going to do? Why won't you come with us? What about Austyn?" she pleaded, tears falling from her eyes.

I gripped Ensley on each shoulder and looked deep into her eyes, needing her to see the desperation for them to get far away from danger. "Please, Ensley. I need to focus without worrying about my girls. Take Remy and go. Now."

Remy's cries got louder, killing me inside. Seconds ticked by feeling like hours. Ensley reached over, brushed her lips against mine, and dashed into her car.

Fuck, that was nice. That small touch. I didn't know I needed it, but I did. She felt like comfort.

I pulled out my phone and called my father as I took off in a mad sprint to the house, hearing Ensley's car leaving the area and feeling that partial bit of relief.

"Son." Thankfully, he answered right away.

I didn't waste any time. "Explosions at Austyn and Emery's. Need to get here now. Everything's on fire, and I

know Austyn is home. Don't know about Emery or the others. I gotta get Austyn out!"

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" he yelled, hanging up the phone. I shoved my phone in my back pocket, forging ahead to the mission in front of me.

Making it to the fire at Austyn's home, the red, yellow, and orange flames lit up the sky while smoke billowed from everywhere. It was taller than the trees around us.

How many bombs had detonated? The questions ran rampant in my mind. In the military, I was trained to identify the source of my problem and work out the solution.

The only solution here was getting Austyn out and finding out if anyone was in Emery's home.

Heat. The closer I got the more it enclosed around me, sucking me in, and wanting me to enter it. Fire was a dangerous element. It needed fuel to survive. If you were in the path of it, it would eat you whole and not think twice about it. Hell, it would laugh and find something else to set ablaze.

Pressure. Every breath became harder to hold onto the deeper I got to the house as the air was tinged in smoke. Being trained, I paced my mind to steady each inhale and exhale.

Repeat.

Focus.

The mission in front of me—get to Austyn and get her out. It was all that mattered.

"Austyn! You in here?" I yelled, hoping like hell she could give me a clue as to where she was. Going into fire was difficult, but not having any clue where you were headed was worse.

"Help!" I heard from the inside. Fuck, it was Austyn, and she sounded scared. Something I hadn't heard from her since we were little kids. This meant whatever was in there was bad, and I needed to prepare myself for what I was about to see.

Fuck.

Stepping nearer, the flames were hotter than hell, but I made it through the fog to the house. I tapped the door handle a few times to check the temperature. Hot. Scorching. Luckily, I hadn't gripped the handle, or my hand would've been burned to shit.

This also meant that the fire was right on the other side of the door just waiting for me like a temptress.

But I had to get in.

I used my arm to cover my face, knowing flames would be on the other side, as I kicked the door down with my booted foot. Fire came out in a flash as I bent down to evade the flames, then its anger receded back inside. Milliseconds was all it took, and if I hadn't had the quick reflex to go down, I'd be burned and unable to try to get to Austyn. Once again, I had to be thankful for my training.

Fuck, I hoped like hell there weren't any more explosions, or we were both fucked. If something else went off when we were both in here, that would be the end.

Risk or not, I was getting Austyn out of here.

She was not burning.

I was not burning.

We had families to get to.

No fucking way.

Whoever did this would not win by ending Austyn or me. Since I wasn't sure the target, I wasn't sure the enemy. Whoever they were, though, outside of the loss of the homes, they weren't getting any lives. I would make sure of it.

The smoke was thick and causing my eyes to water, but I pushed through knowing Austyn was counting on me. I was her only hope.

It had been years since I'd been in Austyn's house, but I still remembered the layout. Looking through the living room and kitchen, there was no sign of anyone. Lifting my shirt to cover my nose and mouth didn't help much. The air sucked in was purely dirt clogging my lungs.

It wasn't until I reached the bathroom in the hallway on my way to the bedroom that I heard it again screaming with the added bonus of banging on the door like someone was kicking it, trying to break out.

Unfortunately, there were fallen debris in the way blocking the door, and she wouldn't be able to get out this way unless it was moved or if she busted through the door. She was utterly trapped alive in her own damn bathroom.

"Austyn. Hang on!" I yelled, picking up the cabinet that blocked the doorway. Luckily, it wasn't licked with fire just yet. The fragmented wood seemed to create a wedge in the door. It was stuck between the door and what was left of the wall. I pulled, kicked, anything else I could do, and I was able to get it out of the way, barely. It was wedged in there good and tight, almost as a sign or warning. It was ominous.

I tried turning the handle, touching it quickly. Luckily, it wasn't hot, but like I'd thought, the door wouldn't budge. There must've been too big of a shift in the house. She was utterly trapped.

"Move back!" I yelled in warning, needing to bust through the wood.

"What? Get me out!" she screamed, and I hoped she listened. Not hearing any pounding on the door, I took a chance and hoped like hell I wouldn't hit Austyn and cause more damage.

I lifted my boot and nailed the door hard, my foot going through on the third kick and shattering the wood into pieces. She was standing by the wall watching, then when I stopped, she darted to the door.

She pulled the wood to make a hole for herself to get out. Each second ticking by was a second we lost trying to get the fuck out of here.

I tore at the wood on my end too, grasping and pulling with everything I had inside me.

We were fast and efficient and didn't stop until the hole was big enough for Austyn to get through.

“Come on!” I reached in and grabbed her arm as she climbed over the pieces of her house that had fallen into the bathroom. She started to go down when her foot went through something, but I captured her under her arm, so she didn’t fall completely.

Pulling her free, we moved quickly through the raging inferno of a house. Holding her hand the entire time, I led her as best as possible, even shielding her body with mine when the fire came at us, flaring up then receding down. Beams were starting to fall from the ceiling, causing loud pops and cracks, each worse than the next.

Flames were around us and encompassing us in a hurry. Fire may take some time getting started, but once it ignited, it had no mercy. That was the stage we were in. No mercy. If we didn’t get a move on, we weren’t going to make it out of here alive.

And today was not our day to die.

The anger of the blaze around us was palpable, threatening to take us over. There was no time to talk. Instead, I tugged Austyn this way and that to get through.

The door I came into the house was now covered in rippling flames, foiling that exit strategy.

Smoke filled my lungs, and it wasn’t the kind from cigarettes. No, this was filled with soot that wanted to take over your lungs and suffocate you to death. The coughing came with a vengeance as the smoke burned my eyes.

Austyn was doing the same, her other arm on her face trying to keep the bad out.

Neither of us were having much luck.

Time was running out, and if we didn’t find a way out, we were both going down. If the smoke had its way, our breaths would be no more.

Blinking my eyes rapidly as tears streamed down them, I pointed to the window off to the left. “Over there.” It seemed to be the only place where the force of nature hadn’t made its path yet.

We made our way to the window and even with the dark film covering the glass, I could see the blue sky and fresh air just at our fingertips through a small corner. Never had I craved air like this before, but there was a first time for everything. Even in the desert, it was nothing like this.

My chest tightened, and breaths were becoming harder and harder, but somehow, I was able to push through.

Seeing a chair, I dropped Austyn's hand, picked it up, and threw it through the glass, shattering it everywhere. The fresh air mingled with the dirty, tempting and teasing. We were so close. So fucking close to clean.

"Be careful," I said, wrapping my hand in my shirt and clearing the glass from around the frame as best as possible.

"Fuck," Austyn cried, lifting her knee to the frame. I held her ass and pushed her out of the window, grabbing her arm to steady her. Her feet landed on the ground.

While I wanted to feel some relief that she got out, a loud boom shook the floor under my feet and threw me to the ground like I weighed nothing. Luckily, I'd released Austyn because I'd fallen to my back and landed on something hard and unforgiving. My arm touched one of the nearby flames, and I flinched away trying to roll to my side, but there wasn't much room. Everything was spinning as each breath became harder to take than the last.

Fuck me. Fought for our country, and this was going to take me out? My entire body hurt, but I figured it was from the smoke inhalation.

Blinking a couple of times to get my faculties together, I heard Austyn.

"Micah! Get your ass out here!" she yelled, snapping me out of my thoughts.

I rolled to my side and tried to make my way up, watching where I placed my hands and knees. Shit was everywhere.

The fire was all around me, looming like a snake ready to go in for the kill. On hands and knees I shook my head. Carefully, I got up, moved to the window and tossed myself

out, falling to the ground even as Austyn tried to help break my fall.

“Go! Austyn, go! Go!” I ordered on several coughs, but Austyn didn’t listen to me.

Instead, she grabbed my arm as I unsteadily got up. I didn’t say anything else as it wasn’t worth the breath. I grabbed her hand, pushed every bit of pain down, and ran with her away from the house.

“Is Emery home?” I asked in our departure, hacking through the words.

Austyn’s head shook. “Her car’s not here.”

“You’re sure?”

“Fuck!” Austyn yelled over the raging fire. She was struggling to catch her breath as was I. The burn on every inhale only made me want to fall to the ground as exhaustion consumed me. It felt as though my insides were fried and wouldn’t allow air inside.

I pulled out my phone and handed it to her as I gasped in the clean air. “Call her. Now.”

Austyn dialed the number, fear written all over her. “Answer, dammit,” she grumbled on a gasp as I kept her moving further away from the heat. It felt like hours, but only took seconds before I heard, “Thank God. Where are you?” Silence, but Austyn nodded as I listened to the one-sided conversation.

“Our houses just exploded. Jacks is with Nox, right?”

“Good.”

Once we got far enough away, I stopped. Bent over, hands on my knees, I coughed the tar of the soot out of my lungs, or at least tried too. I listened to Austyn’s side of the conversation and was relieved to know Emery wasn’t inside.

“Fuck. I don’t know. It’s bad, Emery.” Austyn’s hand went through her hair. “Gotta get help.”

“Okay. Bye.”

Austyn hung up and dialed another number. “Our house just blew the fuck up!” she yelled into it. My guess was she was talking to Ryker and she was pissed, but it came out a bit jaded as she coughed her way through the conversation.

I watched as the two homes went up in a blaze of glory, not having the first clue how to stop the raging inferno. Really there was nothing Austyn or I could do at this point but watch everything she and Ryker had worked for go up in flames.

Fuck, I hated this shit. Not being able to fix something. It would take a fuck of a lot of water to douse these flames and a damn garden hose, even if I knew where one was, wouldn’t touch this place. There was nothing. My hands were tied. All I could do was listen to her talk with her husband.

“Micah’s here with me.”

“Shut it.”

“Okay. Okay.”

“I’ll meet you there.”

“Love you.” Her voice cracked on that phrase, and I felt it in my gut. Austyn was a tough cookie, but this would shake the toughest of people. It appeared it did her.

“Let’s go to the clubhouse. Everyone’s meeting there.” She coughed through the words.

“Got it.” I grabbed her hand once again, not wanting anything else to happen to the woman, and we ran to the other side of the pond where my SUV was parked. We got in and peeled off, not looking back at the ball of smoke and flames we’d left behind.

“Call Ensley. Make sure she and Remy got to the clubhouse, and tell her you’re okay.”

Austyn followed my direction for probably the first time in her life. And probably the last.

Air. We needed air. I rolled down the windows hoping it would cleanse my insides that burned.

My shirt was covered in dirt, but I tugged it on feeling some pains in my body as I did.

The ride to the clubhouse was fast. Pedal down was the only way to go in this situation. Sirens were heard in the distance, but even if the firetrucks got there, they wouldn't be able to save much at either place. They'd just have a ton of questions that we wouldn't have answers to. I was sure the Ravage men would be on their way there, and they were the ones to answer anything that came up.

Austyn jumped out of the SUV before I came to a complete stop in the clubhouse parking lot, running into Ryker's arms who was waiting for her. After fully parking I jumped out too, but my destination was Remy and Ensley's whose eyes were on me.

Remy's eyes were red, but her tears had dried up a bit. The streaks down her cheeks had not. I kneeled to her level, my body crying out. "Hey, kiddo, you doin' okay?" Even clearing my throat didn't help the hoarse way my voice came out. I knew I looked like shit. Even trying to brush the ash and soot off of me, it was still there. It wouldn't disappear until I showered. I hated she saw me like this, but on the other hand I just wanted to know she was okay.

"Housssss goes Boom!" she yelled, throwing her arms out wide to show how big she thought the sound was. Her face was in surprise with eyes wide and mouth in the shape of an oval. Fucking hated my little girl had to see that shit.

"Yeah, that was a big boom, but you, your mom, and Austyn are safe."

Her little head nodded as she leaned into her mom's leg.

"You don't need to be scared, okay." I wanted to tell her that no booms would go on here, but I also didn't want to lie to my kid. At this point anything could happen, but this was the safest place for the both of them.

Her head nodded again, and I rose to meet Ensley's penetrating gaze. "You okay?" I asked her, reaching out and

touching her arm, just needing to feel her and make sure she was safe.

“No. What the hell was that? Who bombs someone’s home? Let alone two homes. What’s going on?” Ensley’s fear and panic were written all over her face and in the tone of her words. She lifted Remy into her arms and held her close to her body.

If she didn’t calm down, she was going to lose her shit, and I needed her to hang in there. I needed her to be strong, so I didn’t have to worry about her or Remy.

“Don’t know, babe, but I’ll figure it out.”

“You?” she asked, stunned, terror in the back of her eyes.

“I’ll help the guys any way I can. You’re safe here, and I need you to stay. Do not leave these gates.”

Just then the bikes roared to life as the guys headed out the gate. Ryker lifted a finger to me and pointed to the gate, giving me the sign to get my ass moving. “I’ve gotta go back to Austyn’s. You stay here. Call Katie and have her pack you and Remy a bag for a few days. You’re moving in the clubhouse or with me until we can sort out what this was.”

She began to speak, but I was gone, hopping back in the SUV and making my way back to Austyn’s house, hoping she’d listen. This was too important.

Whoever did this could’ve hurt people I cared about, and it was unacceptable.

The brothers were already at Austyn and Emery’s along with firefighters, police, and EMT’s. Cars, trucks, bikes and emergency vehicles scattered around the large expanse of a yard as I pulled up. Parking off to the side where the bikes were, the flames were still burning bright even as the fire department doused water on it. Stepping out of my SUV, my dad came right over to me along with Cruz. Ryker was talking to the cops closer to the fire.

My dad was the first to arrive, and he pulled me in his arms and slapped me on the back. “You okay son.”

“Yeah.”

“Clothes. You have extra?” Dad asked as I looked down at myself. Anyone would be able to tell I’d been inside that fire.

“Yeah.” I raced to my duffel in the back seat and pulled off my shirt, replacing it with a black one. My hands, arms, and face were covered too according to my reflection in the window.

Luckily, I had a small cooler built in to my SUV. I reached in grabbed a bottle of water and a rag and began to wash myself up quickly. I wouldn’t be able to get it all off, nor the smell, but everyone here would have the stench of fire on them before they left.

Coming back up, my dad asked, “What did you see?” GT, Deke and Cooper joined us. Cruz eyed me, waiting for my explanation.

“That’s the thing. Nothin’ out of the ordinary. Austyn’s car was parked at the house, and nothing was at Emery’s. I was over there”—I pointed to the tall tree by the playhouse on the other side of the pond—“with Ensley and Remy. One minute we’re playing tag, and I’m chasing Remy, and the next, four huge explosions that were only off sync by maybe a second or two lit up the sky and shook the ground.” Being in the Marine’s, I knew bombs. Probably more than I ever wanted to know about them in my life. “Since they were off of one another, my first assumption would be that someone manually hit the button to blow them. If they would’ve been in sync, then I’d say they were on a timer. Given the way they hit in succession, I think detonation was remotely.” Just that fraction of a second was all it took for that small clue.

“How far away does someone have to be to set it off?” my father asked.

“Depends how it was made and what the remote was made of. It could be feet, or it could be thousands of miles. Goin’ that direction will be a long road.” And not get us close to the culprits fast.

“Any idea what type of bomb it was?” Cruz questioned.

“Hard to say on that one, but it packed a huge punch. I’d rule out chemical just because of the intensity. Definitely an IED made with C4. It’s easy to prep, place, and blow. Other components of it, unknown.” True I knew a lot about them.

Cruz’s brow quirked. “You a specialist?”

“Technically no, but I know my shit. Didn’t stay in a sandbox for years and not pick up shit. Plus, I didn’t smell an abundance of chemicals when I went in to get Austyn.”

“And that type can be detonated from anywhere?” Deke asked.

“Yeah. All they’d need is a cell, but my question is did they intend on Austyn being home and setting it off, or did they just blow it randomly and hope someone was there?”

“Keep goin’,” Cruz demanded, listening to my theory.

“Cameras. Those things are so fuckin’ easy these days. If it was intent on Austyn being there, then they have cameras or tapped into their home security. Assuming it has video feed.”

Cooper nodded. “Yeah, it does. All Ravage properties have it. Too bad it probably burned up in this fuckin’ mess.”

Acting quick, I moved to the back of my SUV, opening the hatch. My Tahoe was a mobile computer and communication station. One never knew in my line of work if I’d need it or not when I didn’t have my computer at my fingertips. This way I did. Therefore, I had my ride customized for instances just like this one.

The back end looked like any other vehicle’s trunk area. Empty for the most part, but a touch higher than the normal one. I could store anything up there, and no one would be none the wiser. Pushing a button on the side, the back of the SUV moved and transformed.

The bottom flipped up to reveal my computer equipment that rose to a level I could use while I stood. Two laptops and all the mobile equipment needed for me to do any kind of job. This SUV was locked and loaded when it came to equipment and artillery.

“Holy fuck. What are you Batman?” Cooper asked, staring at my setup with wide eyes as things changed and moved to reveal my set up. I didn’t plan to have any secrets from the club anymore, so I wasn’t trying to hide shit about my SUV either.

To them, I’d be an open book.

“Fuck no. Just prepared.”

“For a fuckin’ nuclear war?” GT asked, staring at everything including the antenna I’d pulled out and set on the ground next to me, pointing it up to the sky. It would need to be adjusted, but that would come later. There was also a satellite, but being with all the trees I didn’t know if I could get a clean shot.

“If it happens,” I said on a shrug, booting up my shit. “You have the same surveillance equipment as before when I left?”

“Fuck no. You broke into that shit, so we had to change it all up,” Deke responded with menace in his tone. It was fine. I’d take whatever they dished out. Their shit before was too easy to break into anyway. They needed an upgrade four years ago. Surely, they’d need another now.

“Wanna tell me the system type so I don’t waste twenty minutes finding it, or do you want me to waste the time searching?” I asked the group.

It was true. I’d have everything on the house in less than that actually. Only I was older, wiser, and didn’t need to be the smartass to shove it all in their faces. I could hack into it all again, if I so chose. Being in the military, I had access to more shit than they probably should’ve let me have. It was a great learning experience, that was for damn sure. It also made my current job a bit easier as long as it stayed under the radar.

Two bikes were heard before we saw Jacks and Nox coming up the road. They came right to us and parked their bikes, Jacks’ gaze on the burning buildings. I could see the disgust and anger in his eyes. If I’d just lost my home in such a fashion, my emotions would be easy to read too.

Even the strongest of men couldn’t hide that shit.

“What the fuck is goin’ on here?” Jacks’ raged, and I couldn’t blame him. Everything he owned was gone.

Every piece.

Even if they got the fire completely out, the water damage alone would be too severe to keep much. Long-term smoke damage was another thing altogether too. Unless they had something in a fire safe box, it would be the only thing that saved it.

“About four bombs. Micah here is gonna tap into shit and see what he can find,” Cruz explained.

“Again? Thought you learned your fuckin’ lesson,” Jacks ground out, stepping up to me and getting in my space. I didn’t back down.

“I did. That’s why y’all are with me. Not doin’ it behind anyone’s back. We’re all here lookin’ for answers.” My tone was calm, even with the smoke still in my lungs. If the man was going to punch me again, he would, and I’d deal. But the only way this would work was for me to be one-hundred percent me, and they either accepted me or they didn’t.

“And why the fuck are you even here?” Jacks clipped, obviously not happy with my presence one little bit. He didn’t want me anywhere near Emery, and I couldn’t blame him on that one.

I went to say something, but it was Cooper who stepped in, put his arm out and broke us apart. “Brother, it’s cool. Shit had nothing to do with Emery. He was here with his kid, and he got Austyn out because she was stuck inside. He saved her fuckin’ life.”

Some of the venom went out of Jacks, but not much. He stepped back a few paces and turned to the blaze. With no one telling me the system and my computers ready to go, I started typing in the codes I needed to get my answers. While I wasn’t thrilled with going this route, time was a factor, and frankly we were wasting too much of it.

Hell, if Jacks was going to attack, he was going to attack. I would defend myself. This wasn’t the time for that shit, so he

needed to stand-down.

Answers needed to be found.

Now.

“What the ever-lovin’ fuck?” Nox clipped, staring at the smoke billowing from the home. The firefighters still hadn’t gotten it out, but they were making progress as more smoke than flames were there. Four large trucks and one small were on site. It had a pump truck since there wasn’t a hydrant near. The attached hose in the pond helped supply water, which was good, because their water truck didn’t hold much.

“We’ll get to the bottom of it,” Cruz told his son and clapped him on the shoulder.

“But Austyn’s safe. Right?” Nox asked of his twin. Sure, they’d had their ups and downs, but they were damn close.

“She’s good. Micah got her out,” Cruz answered and turned to Jacks. “Micah needs to know what security system you have so he can figure it out.”

“It’s a...” Jacks started, but I cut him off. Granted, it probably wasn’t my best move, but I already knew. I couldn’t wait around for him to stop mentally sizing me up. The time to compare dicks and ball sacks would come, but today wasn’t the day for this shit.

“POS 528777 with infa-red, right?”

“How the fuck you know that?” Jacks asked, his glare turning to me intently.

I pointed to the computer, showing him exactly how I got it. The company’s data system with their millions of homes were listed in alphabetical order, making finding the personal information easy to find.

“Fuckin’ hell,” he grumbled, his hate for me growing. Just when I thought it couldn’t be any deeper, he proved me wrong. “Find out what ya can on them. Ryker has the same one,” he ordered, and I nodded in acknowledgment because I was already on it. While I wanted to be a smartass and tell him,

what do you think I'm doin'? I kept quiet and focused on my task. If it made him feel better to boss me around, so be it.

The coughs came and went. I sucked in clean air as much as possible, wanting the sting to clear my lungs. I grabbed the bottle of water from earlier and took huge gulps. It helped my throat a bit.

The brothers came and went as the fire started to go out. All the while, I was on my computers and phone trying to access the burnt as hell system. Unfortunately, it wasn't hooked up to the main Ravage server. Why? I had no fucking clue, and it would have to be fixed ASAP. Along with firewalls and Fort Knox protection as well.

Buzz was the computer guy when I left. I'd assumed he still was.

The cloud access was difficult only because I had to hack into the cloud company's system and search for their specific machine. They were more tech conscious and had a ton of security blocks which was good for them, but not perfect.

Technology was just a bunch of electronics all beamed off of one another, trying to tell you your information was safe. Oh, how wrong it was.

Nothing was safe.

Nothing.

There was always a way. It might take time, but it was always possible.

When this was over, the Ravage MC was getting set up with better shit. State of the art programs that only the military used. If they allowed me to do it. At this point in the game, it was better to ask than just do it off the bat.

It took some time to crack through, so much so the flames were completely out by the time I was able to pull it up and began watching the tapes on fast forward of Austyn and Ryker's place first.

Today's recording didn't show anything out of the ordinary. No one around the property, planting anything or

inside the house.

Austyn in the house doing dishes, then Ensley and Remy in the house visiting. My heart stopped at that one, and for the first time in a long damn time I found it even harder to breathe. The thought that they could've been in there when it blew rocked me to the core. Maybe it was being a father now or having Ensley back in my life. Whatever it was, I didn't like it. I had to shake that off, or it was going to eat me inside. Nothing could happen to Remy and Ensley. Nothing. It was not an option. Ever.

Ryker came up at the entirely wrong time because the video showed the exact time the explosion happened, and Austyn was thrown into the bathroom cabinet by the force, hitting her back and head on the wall then falling to the ground as if she were a rag doll. Then the tape went dead.

"Fuck. She seemed to be alright when I saw her at the clubhouse," Ryker groaned, rubbing his hand over his face. "Fuck. She might be puttin' on a show of being fine. Damn woman. I'm callin' Doc to come and check her out." He pulled out his phone and did that.

Then I saw it and rewound the tape back thirty seconds and examined the screen. "This is the site of the explosion." I pointed to the closet on the other side of the wall from the bathroom Austyn was in. "See how it flashes on this angle?" I showed the guys. "The way it blew, did you see that it was two flashes? One for each explosive? And then look at the flame pattern."

Ryker took a closer look as did some of the other brothers, taking in everything I'd said.

Buzz came up for the first time, looking at my setup. I knew he was the tech guy for the club, so this should be interesting.

"Do you live in your car?" he asked, and I chuckled, something I didn't think would be happening in this moment. This was anything but a laughing matter, but it was funny. Technically it could be a possibility.

“Nah, just gotta have my shit when I need it.”

“I need one of these fuckers,” Buzz grumbled.

“At least we know its point of origin. That’ll help to figure out how it got there because we can focus on that area. I’ll do Emery’s and see if we can get the same,” I interrupted, breaking up the conversation and getting us back on track.

“Is that gonna help?” Ryker asked.

“Yeah, I’ll also go backward through the days one at a time and see when it was planted.” I turned to Ryker and Jacks. “Anyone out of the ordinary been in your house? Plumber, cable guy, the fuckin’ Pope?”

Jacks shook his head. “No not mine.”

“We had a fuckin’ lady claiming to be with the US census, but we didn’t let her in the house.” Ryker answered.

“Thought that shit was over with,” Deke added out of the blue.

“They extended the date supposedly, but I wasn’t in the mood to deal with her considering Austyn sent that fuckin’ shit in already,” Ryker explained. This was not helping the situation at all. Answers. We needed to focus, and I had to steer them back again.

“Then someone broke into your houses and were undetected. You have a bigger problem here than just your houses blowing up,” I told them, moving to my second computer, finding Emery and Jacks’ information. I looked through the day to find its point of origin.

Buzz came up next to me. “Why don’t I look at Jacks’, and you focus on findin’ out who was in Ryker’s house.”

I moved over to the first computer, making room for us both. My arm screamed at me, but I pushed it down. “Sounds like a plan.”

Buzz started running through the day at Emery and Jacks’ place, while I was on Austyn and Ryker’s. Someone was in that damn house. That I was positive of. Who and how were the questions now.

The smoke was heavy around us all of the sudden, like the had wind changed directions and was aiming right at us. Not being totally over the smoke inhalation, I coughed a bit more, feeling my lungs burn and shook it off.

Looking up, the firefighters were snuffing out the last bit of embers from the other side, causing the smoke to come our way. If I smelled smoke any time soon, it would be too soon.

Buzz and I kept going on our task, searching and watching until out of the corner of my eye, I saw two uniforms coming our way. Their faces were intent, making me think they did not care for the Ravage MC much.

I reached over and hit the F4 button on Buzz's computer and then mine. "What the fuck?" Buzz yelled a bit too loudly.

"Cops," I answered low.

Buzz looked up, seeing the two uniforms making their way to us. "Fuck," he grumbled.

"What'cha doin' there?" the cop on the right asked, bending his neck to see the screens. He was lean and appeared to be a runner. He also had his hand on the butt of his gun, ready to draw on at a moment's notice.

"Just mapping out the area," I lied, face blank and giving nothing away. Years of torture training did that to a man.

Sure enough the cops stepped around to take a closer look at our screens. On them was a wide aerial map of the entire area in a one-hundred-mile radius with a couple of red circles and arrows on it.

It was something I'd cooked up just in case, but never thought I'd use it. Today was that day. To be frank, I should've spent more time on it because the circles and arrows went to nothing in particular. They were only there for show. Hopefully these two wouldn't see it that way.

There was one for the clubhouse too.

"Any of you know who did this?" the cop to the left asked. He had a potbelly that went over his buckle and hung down.

No doubt this one couldn't chase someone if he tried. Guess that was what the other guy was for.

Cruz stepped forward and in front of them, blocking them from Buzz and me. "No. But this is my kid's house, and we want to know who it was. Do you know? Do you know how it started? How did it happen?" He kept firing question after question to the two officers and didn't let them get a word in edgewise at first.

I let out a burst of coughing and turned to try to get it under control, then back to the men.

The pudgy man took a step back, and I held in my smirk. Cruz was an intimidating man. He was solid, and there was no doubt he could throw both of these cops out of his way. The uniform would shit his pants in front of us if Rhys was in his face. Made me want to call him over just to watch the man squirm, but I didn't. It wasn't the time for fun.

"We got no clue who woulda done this. Was hopin' you could give us some information for the investigation. Who was here?" Pudgy cop asked, his eyes sweeping over all of us.

While I could speak up that I was, I didn't. My mouth stayed shut. We hadn't discussed how any of this would be handled, and I wasn't going to be the one to fuck whatever the plan was up. Not only that, I didn't want Ensley and Remy involved with anything.

"We got a call sayin' the place was on fire and raced here," Cruz answered for me.

"Who made that call to you?" the lean cop questioned.

My eyes were lasered on Cruz, wanting to know exactly what he said because Ensley was the one who called 911. She couldn't be involved in any of this shit. And I was the one to make the call to my dad.

"No clue. It came up private. They just said there was a fire, and we came as fast as we could," Cruz responded, and only then did I feel myself breathe.

Both cops eyed us warily which was normal. We were lying, of course, but face cleared of emotion I paid attention to

everyone and everything around us. Every detail committed to memory. The breaths the one officer was inhaling and exhaling. The bead of sweat running down the other's forehead. The way the lean cop tapped the butt of his gun as if he didn't like what was said to him. All of it.

I made a mental note to go in and swipe Ensley's phone then switch it out. Hopefully she had a burner phone so it wouldn't be a problem. If not, I'd have to hack the phone company and get all that data erased. Either way, I made a mental note to handle this shit because I wouldn't put her on anyone's radar, cop or not.

"You mean to tell me, you don't know how it started, no one was here, and you got some anonymous call that there was a fire? Bullshit," the lean cop announced as he crossed his arms over his chest.

Cruz shrugged like he had all the time in the world, not giving a single inch to the men.

"Do we need to haul all of you down to the station?" Pudgy cop asked, his eyes narrowed. I looked on his name plate, and it read Brooks. Might have to look him up when he left and see what skeletons he had in his closet.

Cruz looked around at all the men around him and held his arms out wide. "We had nothin' to do with this shit and want to know who it was more than you fuckin' do. You wanna waste your time bringin' us in, that's up to you. But we got no more information to give ya."

The two cops looked at each other in this goofy ass way, then to Cruz. "I want all your names in case we have more questions," Pudgy Brooks ordered.

"Just look up the Ravage MC in your database," Deke grumbled out, obviously way over these two. Hell, we all were. They knew who the MC was and were just taking up our time when they could be looking for the assholes who did this. Instead, they were dragging their feet just trying to stir up trouble in hopes of nailing one of us or all of us. They'd prefer the latter.

Don't get me wrong, we needed cops to help when issues arose. Just like we needed military to do the hard shit many people couldn't even comprehend. What we didn't need were two cops trying to make a name for themselves and getting in the way of something the Ravage MC could and would handle on their own.

The cops took their sweet time going around and asking all of our names, even having some spell it out, pissing them off royally. Were these two fuckers new on the force or something, because they were dumber than a box of rocks.

When the lean one took mine, I noticed his badge read Corey. Another name to look up.

After giving mine, the cops took off to talk to the fire department, who was able to get the flames down to a smolder. Not enough water could get it to go out completely.

Buzz and I got back to work, flipping the screens back to the video tapes. Hopefully something would come up in these damn tapings.

It had too. Too many lives I cared about were at risk.

This mission was too important to fuck up because that was what it felt like. A mission. Something I excelled at.

A sting of pain hit my arm, and I knew I'd done something to it. Not to mention my lungs. Fuck, it was going to be a long day.

ENSLEY

FEAR. TREMBLING UNCONTROLLABLY, TERRIFIED, FEAR RACED through every inch of my body, my hands especially. Holding Remy close to me and feeling her little baby warmth didn't help quell that emotion one bit. Instead, it kept growing, my insides cold and unforgiving. My ears were ringing from the blast no matter how many times I'd tried to pop them, and if I moved too quickly dizziness grabbed me momentarily. I wasn't even near the fire, at least not like Austyn was.

All the what-ifs came on repeat into my head, giving me a headache, or maybe that was the blast. Hell, it could've been all the emotions hitting me at once and my brain telling me to calm down.

Austyn almost burned alive, and Micah had to fight his way in and out to get her to safety. Not to mention Remy and I were just in that house talking to Austyn. It could've blown when Remy was there.

My baby girl.

The emotions were too much. I had to clench my jaw to stop the scream that wanted to come from my lips at just the thought.

There were no words to describe the utter terror in the thought of losing my baby. It could never happen. Ever. I'd never recover from that. The hole inside of me would never heal.

Everyone is okay...

Even knowing we were fine, just the fact of living through the experience had me rattled. Who in this world would set two homes to explode like that? Why? I couldn't seem to wrap my head around the bombardment of questions that no one seemed to have any answers for.

Thinking about what Micah had to do to get Austyn out made me sick to my stomach. I listened when she told the story of her rescue. The thought of him in danger was almost too much to bear. We'd only spent a short amount of time with him, but he was Remy's dad, and it pained my heart that he almost got hurt.

He could've died. Remy just met him, and I couldn't imagine a life where they wouldn't see each other again. I'd planned on raising Remy by myself, but Micah wanted to be a father and, in my gut, call it instinct, Remy would miss out on a great man.

The way he covered us with his body. Tears pricked my eyes. Yeah, he was a good man.

Not to mention, he wasn't here, and the brief moment of seeing him after dropping Austyn off at the clubhouse didn't feel like enough. Part of me wanted him here just so I could wrap my arms around him and know that he was safe.

"Did you call your sister?" Austyn asked, sitting next to me on the picnic table. It amazed me how she was handling all of this. Everything she owned blew up, and here she was worried about me. The moment Austyn and I met, she had made herself my go-to person.

Never once did she push me to the side, saying she didn't have time for me. Never had she treated Remy like less than her own. She had become a huge staple in my life, and if anything would've happened to her today, life wouldn't be the same.

Her strength was impenetrable, and I admired that so much. The thought of any of these people getting hurt didn't sit well.

"I left a message. She's at work."

“Gimme,” she said, holding her hands out to Remy who leaped into her arms. Austyn held her tightly, closing her eyes and kissing the top of her head. “Sorry this happened.”

“Did you decide to blow up your and Emery’s houses? No? Then it’s not your fault.”

Austyn shrugged. Yes, she shrugged like it was an everyday occurrence, but I’d been here for two years and could guarantee that it wasn’t the same old same old. Never once had anything exploded. That I’d remember.

“Once I find out who did this, I’ll...” She paused, then covered Remy’s ears. “Tear their fucking hearts out and feed them to the wolves.”

I would’ve chuckled, but she was serious. She had an edge to her that you didn’t cross. Once you did, heaven help you. She was so much like her mother, Princess, it was uncanny. Both strong women and both loved their family down to the marrow in their bones.

They loved hard, protected hard, and cared hard. Nothing like what I grew up with. I admired them for that.

“I’ll help ya.” Normally, I wasn’t a violent person, but for this I’d do it. No one put my friends and baby girl that close to danger. I’d never held a weapon before, but there was a first time for everything.

“No one fucks with the Ravage MC, Ensley. No one. We’ll find out who the hell did it and make them pay.” This sounded scary and good at the same time. She was speaking the truth.

“Would you put some damn clothes on!” A deep voice came from the left, and both our focuses went there.

Booker, tall, lean with dark unruly hair, was chasing a very scantily clad Mazie into the courtyard of the clubhouse. These two were trouble with a capital T. Mazie was Rhys and Tanner’s girl and pushed them to the limits. Booker was Breaker and Shaina’s kid and wanted to be a member of the MC.

“No,” Mazie smarted, who was wearing something I’d kill Remy for. Tight shorts that went up her ass cheeks, showing a

good amount of them, and a crop top that displayed way too much midriff skin and even a hint of boob action. If she lifted her arms, there would be a show.

Mazie was only fifteen for God's sake. And Rhys... I couldn't believe he was allowing this one bit. He didn't seem like a man who would ever let his little girl go out like that. Nor did he seem like a man who would let other men see his daughter like that.

"You want me to get my ass kicked?" Booker responded, reaching out and grabbing her arm in which she yanked away but turned to face him.

"It would serve you good." Her stare was venomous as she growled out the words. When her hands went to her hips, I cringed as her shirt moved.

"Great, Maz. Thanks..." Booker retorted.

"What's goin' on there?" I leaned over and asked Austyn who let out a little chuckle.

"Well, Rhys has had it with the way Mazie has been cutting up all her clothes and making herself look like a club momma. So, since good ol' Booker there is prospecting to become part of the Ravage MC, he gets to keep Mazie in line with her appearance. If he doesn't, then Rhys punches him in the face until he feels better."

I sucked in a breath. "Holy shit." Now that sounded more like Rhys, and something told me he'd like to pound Booker into the ground by the side looks I'd seen him give Mazie. That would be a tangled web and a match made in hell.

Mazie took off with Booker following her like a little lost puppy. It was probably in fear, though.

"Yeah, and word is Mazie caught him with some chick the other day behind the garage, and she's pissed at him. Therefore, she wants her dad to beat the shit out him for her. So, we'll have a bit of a show later because she won't change. She's damn stubborn and has the patience of a saint. Like a snake, she'll strike when it's least expected."

“Great. Just what I want to see.” While it would break up the day, if I were Rhys, I’d be locking Mazie up for going out like that and wouldn’t be surprised after the beat down was over if he did just that. No way in hell would she come out until she was twenty.

Austyn laughed. Actually laughed, on the same day she almost kicked the bucket. “Mazie’s had a thing for him since they were kids. Now that Booker is nineteen and prospecting, his options have opened up immensely with the ladies. Mazie isn’t stupid even at fifteen. She knows the club life, grew up with all of us around, and doesn’t so much like his outside activities. Mark my words, it’ll all come to a head and you’ll see fireworks.”

“Seems like she has a bit of growin’ up to do,” I responded watching them go into the clubhouse.

“A lot of growin’ up. But give it a few more years, and Mazie’ll get him back.”

I was about to ask her what she meant when Blaze, Remy’s now grandmother, came running through the parking lot to the table where we were sitting. Her eyes glistened with tears, and my heart stopped for a moment.

Did Micah have time to talk to his parents about not telling Remy quite yet? Was she going to spill the beans right then and there? What would I say to Remy, especially with all the drama that had happened today? Questions upon questions piled up. The anxiety inside of me continued to climb as my gut twisted, threatening to explode. With everything going on, I couldn’t deal with this too.

Maybe it was irrational to fear Remy being told she had a father and grandparents. Who was I kidding... It was my hang up. It had nothing to do with Remy. It was all me, and I needed to work that out.

Remy jumped into my lap. She must’ve felt my panic of everything coming at me like a flood.

Blaze surprised me, though. She first went to Austyn, wrapping her arms around her tightly. She mumbled

something into Austyn's ear, but I couldn't hear it.

Blaze then turned to us, eyes bright. "How are you doin'?" Her tone was one that I'd wished my mother had, had for me but never got. It was concerned, kind, and caring. Three things my own mother was not. It made me happy that Micah had that.

"We're okay."

Blaze nodded, then bent down to get closer to Remy. "How ya doin', Remy banannee?" The nickname made me smile. I'd forgot about that. Blaze donned her with it one of the first times that we'd met her.

"Housssss boom," Remy blurted, sitting up and arms going out in a large arc. Kids were little sponges, and I hated that this would be a memory for her. But it wasn't any different than a car accident. I preferred to see it as a teachable moment. That was once I got my shit together and was able to explain it right or in a way that didn't scare the hell out of her or me. Not to mention to have the answers to give Remy in the first place that I did not have.

"Yeah. I heard. That had to be scary," she replied, getting close to my little girl.

"Gou ... nd 'ent boom," Remy continued, and I was pretty sure she meant ground. Her use of words was getting better and better every day.

"Yeah. We had to go to the ground, but we were safe," I said, hugging her.

Remy nodded. "Mmmmmk dare." That one was new, but Blaze caught onto it quicker than I did because she smiled wide.

"Micah was there? He kept you and Mommy safe?"

Remy's head bobbed, then her thumb went in her mouth, and she laid her head against my chest.

"He ran in to get Austyn," I told her, not knowing if she had heard everything.

“That boy. Or man. Hell, it’s all so different. It’s a good thing, don’t get me wrong. It’s just an adjustment to the man he’s become. He’d never allow someone to be hurt if he could help it, and running into a burning building sounds like something the man in him would do.” The pride in her words was evident.

“Better than the pissant he used to be,” Austyn started, and my head turned to her. She’d told me some things about Micah, but not the pissant stuff in detail. Austyn looked to me. “He used to say bad shit about the club. It seems he’s over it now, and the brothers seem to be over it for the most part, so we’re letting it go.”

Blaze shook her head, giving Austyn the mother glare to end all mother glares. “Yes. Let it go.” It came out more as a mother’s demand than a statement. The Ravage MC respected their women, and the women respected each other. The elder generation held even more respect, leading up to Ma who was the matriarch of the MC. It was amazing watching them all together.

In this instance, Blaze was showing her rank in the system and expected Austyn to follow it. I had to admit I was curious if she would or not. The woman had, had a traumatic day and all.

“Right.” Austyn conceded, but there was a big story there that I’d need to hear at some point. Micah was the father of my child, after all, and I wanted to know everything about him. Before we hadn’t really spoken about him. It never came up, and I never put two and two together. Now, I wanted to know.

“I think we have ice cream inside,” Blaze said, looking at me, and I smiled, catching on to her game. She loved Remy, and she didn’t have to play anything to get to spend time with her. Even bribing her with ice cream. It made me overjoyed that Blaze wanted to spend time with her at all. She then directed her attention to Remy. “You wanna come and see if we can get some, Remy?”

My little girl looked up at me, silently seeking a feeler for what she should do. “Go ahead, baby. Eat some for me.”

Remy appeared to not want to go, warring with staying with me or getting a yummy treat, but then she reconsidered, reached out and took Blaze's hand. Watching them walk away, it was confirmation that my little girl had a grandparent, and it hit me hard in the chest, threatening to knock the wind out of me.

That would've been a great picture to take, but before I could pull out my phone, they were gone inside the building. The feeling still remained, though, and I clung onto it with both hands. I loved that for Remy.

"So, she knows?" Austyn asked.

"Yeah, but I don't know if Micah told her that we weren't introducing them as grandparents yet. I'm assuming yes because she didn't say anything."

"She would've if he hadn't said somethin', so I think you're good."

Austyn was right. The way Blaze was so smooth with Remy, she knew and was keeping it to herself for now. It made me want to tell Remy all the more. Remy could trust these people and have a strong family unit. One that I could never give her back in our old life. The emotions whirled around me, and it might sound selfish, but I really wanted to see Micah.

"Any word from Ryker or the guys?"

Austyn bumped my shoulder with hers, knowing exactly what I was really asking. Not that I didn't love my cousin ... but... "Or Micah?"

"Well, yeah." My phone hadn't rung yet, so I had no updates. Not that he owed them to me, but it would be nice to know he was safe.

"Nothin' yet. I'm sure they'll be here in a while and give us directions. More than likely we'll go on lockdown for a while."

That started my pulse going. "What is a lockdown? At least in Ravage terms?"

“It means we all come to the clubhouse, find a place to sleep, and live here for however long it takes to figure out who the hell is trying to kill us.”

This did not sound fun. “I thought when Micah said to pack a bag he was talking about just for a night or two and maybe at his house.”

Her brow quirked. “You’d be good with stayin’ with him?”

My head shook. “I don’t know. Everything happened so damn quick. I haven’t had a chance to really think about the situation.” I just knew that with him I felt safe, and right now I needed that.

“You’re family, Ensley. Like it or not. That means if the club goes on lockdown you will too.” I was family. We were family. That felt damn good. Scary because we needed to go on lockdown, though.

“What about work?”

Austyn clicked her tongue, and I didn’t know if that was a good thing or bad. “That we’ll have to work out, but let’s just take it step by step.”

The sound of pipes came from the parking lot, and Raiden and Axel pulled in, parked, shut their machines down, got off and took off their helmets, putting them on the handlebars of their ride.

I didn’t know much about Harley’s, and couldn’t tell you the first thing about them. All I did know was their rides looked awesome. I’d never been on a motorcycle before.

They approached as Austyn accused, “Where the fuck have you been?”

Raid and Ax, their names shortened, were the newest members of the Ravage MC. I was here for the party they threw for the two of them getting patched in. They were still low men on the totem pole, according to Ryker. He’d tried to give me a biker 101 crash course, but if there was a grade, I would’ve failed it.

They were twins, Buzz and Bella's kids. At twenty-years-old, they took hot biker to a whole new level. Both had dark chocolate hair that curved around their ears, except Ax had these natural lighter brown highlights around his face. They both had striking blue eyes, and the only physical difference I could make out was Raid had a scar next to his eye on the right side. It was like having two identical turtles and putting nail polish on one to tell them apart. If Raid didn't have the scar, no way could I tell them apart. They were that close in looks.

Not that I was interested in them or anything. Just making an observation as a single woman with eyes in my head.

"Busy. They told us to come here. We're here," Raid said.

"Glad you're not dead," Ax responded to Austyn, who growled at him.

"You're an ass."

Ax held out his arms. "Yep. Always have been. Always will be."

I didn't know a whole lot about these two. Sure, we'd crossed paths over the years, but I'd never sat down and had a conversation with them before.

Ax turned his attention on me. "Got Micah's kid, huh?" He didn't wait for a response. "Sorry about that. Sucks to be Remy."

"Hey!" I started, and Ax held out his hand for me to stop.

"Don't even wanna hear it, woman. I know you're gonna defend your man and all that shit," Ax threw back.

I got defensive. "He's not my man."

Raid's eye quirked. "Really? So, you're available then?"

Austyn began laughing once again. One day I was going to keep track of how many times she laughed in one day. I'd bet it was tons. It seemed Ryker was good for her even if my cousin was a bit crazy.

“Sorry, but no. You have to mature before that would even be a possibility,” I retaliated.

Raid clutched his hand to his heart. “You wound me. I could show ya a good time.”

I looked up to the sky for a moment, then back to him. “I’m not into the ‘good time’ crap. I have a kid and won’t parade anyone in front of her for a quick lay.”

Austyn jumped in. “You just want her because she’s Micah’s. Don’t you have somethin’ you should be doin’ right now? Like, I don’t know, finding out who the fuck bombed my damn house!”

“As you wish, my queen,” Ax joked, taking an overexaggerated bow, turning on his booted foot and making his way into the clubhouse.

“The offer stands,” Raid smiled at me, then followed his brother.

“Ignore them. They have more testosterone than the defensive line of the Baltimore Ravens. They are young and full of come, spreading it around to any woman who will take it.”

“Lord. We’re gonna have more kids running around here then.”

Austyn burst out laughing.

Her smile died as an older man came walking up to us. He had on round glasses and had a long gray beard. I hadn’t seen him before here, but that didn’t mean he didn’t belong here.

“He called you, didn’t he?” she asked the man.

“Let me check you out, and I’ll be on my way.” His voice was deep and had a bit of wisdom behind it.

“Doc, I’m okay. Promise.”

“You were thrown against a wall and cracked your back and head. Then you had to go through the fire to get out. Checkin’ you will only take a minute, young lady,” he retorted.

“How did you know that?”

“Ryker told me when he called. Now let’s get inside, little missy.”

Austyn groaned but hopped down from the table. “You do realize I’m not a little kid anymore, right?”

Doc smiled. “You listen about as good as you did then.” He brushed his arm out for Austyn to go in front of him.

A chuckle escaped me as Austyn turned. “Ryker is gonna get it.” And then she was gone.

Personally, I was happy she was getting looked at.

I was just hoping that Micah was okay.

What was taking so long?

MICAH

“THERE,” I SAID, POINTING TO THE SCREEN. THE FIGURE WAS blurry, almost as if they had on clothes that would distort the image on the screen. Add in they wore black, hoodie, mask and glasses—this wasn’t going to be an easy find. They were giving us nothing to go on.

Was I angry? Fuck yeah. My little girl and her mom were in that house not an hour before the blasts. Just the thought of losing them made something inside me crack. Now that I had them, I’d protect them until my dying day.

“Fuck, I can’t tell shit,” Ryker groused over my shoulder as I tried blowing it up only to have it pixelate and distort more.

“Me either. Let me go back and see if I can freshen it up a bit. Buzz, can you go to here,” I gave him the number to the location I was at on the tape and kept going. “See if you can get any images from the outside.”

“On it.” Buzz started his task.

There were a ton of people still here even hours after the explosions had happened. The fire inspector and police chief were in attendance, mostly to see what we were doing in my opinion as they were watching us more than the rubble. I was all for authority, but this was different. This needed to be figured out by us first.

I scaled the image to as perfect as I could get it. Moving the damn mouse sent a twinge of pain through my arm. That just wouldn’t do. “I’ll run this through facial recognition and

see if there's a match, but it's highly unlikely with all this shit on their face."

"You have facial recognition software?" Cooper asked from behind me.

"Of course. It's the state-of-the-art newest model out there. But you didn't hear that from me." Sure, I could get into a shit load of trouble for having it, but it was a good tool to have in my box.

"Right..." my father said, putting his hand on my shoulder.

"I'm headin' back to the clubhouse to check on everyone. Meet ya there?" His tone was a little hopeful.

"Yeah. Remy and Ensley are there. Once we figure out if any of this'll help, I'll be on my way."

He gave me a squeeze, a soft smile, and then he was gone. It felt good to be able to help, but it felt better to have my father's approval and see that glint in his eye. It had been a long damn time since I'd seen it.

The scan was over on the face in the picture and it came up with nothing. "Nothin'. Too much shit on his face. You got anything?" I asked Buzz who gave me two different location numbers.

I went to them and tried to pull photos and plates from the car. A cough escaped me, and I could feel my lungs not happy about the smoke. The pain in my body was present, but I turned my mind off to it and pressed on. Finding who did this was more important.

Running the plates, the car was reported stolen about a week ago and was found yesterday abandoned on the side of the road. Who knew when exactly it was ditched, so that was a clusterfuck. The only thing we could do with that was try to get fingerprints, but that didn't mean that we'd get anything. Who knew who was in that car, but it might be the only option to start the process of elimination.

One of the photos, though, gave me promise. It was a male, I could tell by the hard jawline since his mask had fallen down just on one side.

“This.” I pointed, showing those around me. “Half a face. If I duplicate it and flip it over, that should give us an idea of the lower half of the face. That might get some hits.”

“Try it,” Cruz responded, coming to stand next to me. Had to hand it to the man, he was big as fuck for his age. One would never guess he was up there. He could tear my head off right now if he wanted to. How did I know this? Because I could do it too. It was part of our training and something we had in common.

“We’re goin’ on lockdown. Get your families to the clubhouse if you haven’t already. Prepare to stay for a while ’til we figure this shit out.” He looked directly at me. “You too, Ensley, the baby, and the sister.”

I really couldn’t explain the emotion coming through me at that moment in time. They were all over the place, and the fact that Cruz was giving me a shot, even as small as it was, I was going to grab on to it with two hands. This was my life, and I wanted it.

“Yes, sir.” Came from my lips automatically. No one around us said anything, though, which surprised me.

“There ain’t gonna be shit left...” Ryker sighed, putting his hands on top of his head and looking over the smoldering embers. He wasn’t wrong. The yard was littered with *stuff*. There was no other word to describe it because it was all pieces. If it wasn’t in pieces, it was destroyed by fire or water. There would be no mementos left.

“You got anything in a fireproof box?” Cruz asked him. Yes, Ryker and Cruz were brothers, but they were also father-in-law, son-in-law. Practically blood, and it showed in the way they were with each other.

“Yeah. It’ll have some of the important papers, guns, ammo and cash, but fuck there ain’t enough cash to rebuild this shit.”

While I knew Ryker was just pissed about the fire, he nor the Ravage MC had any problems with money. Back in my days, when I was looking into the MC, everyone was very

comfortable. It'd be my assumption from the nice rides they all had that this was still the same.

“Get the insurance adjuster out here and get this shit figured out,” Cruz ordered, turning to some of the brothers. “Go over and see if they'll let ya look for anything in the rubble. They probably won't, but may let you at least close enough to see if anything can be saved.”

Cruz had some serious wishful thinking.

“Fuck man, what happened to your arm?” I heard Nox ask. Not thinking he was talking to me, I continued using photoshop to manipulate the image to run through the program. A punch came to my arm. As I turned to it, ready to lay someone out for punching me, Nox just smiled. “Talkin' to you, man.”

Arm. Oh fuck. Yeah. I totally forgot about it. I tilted it, getting a good look. “Just a little burn from the fire. No big deal.” It really was. Yes, there was pain, and if I thought about it or moved just right, it would get worse, but I'd learned how to keep my emotions in check for whatever task lay ahead of me. My arm could be completely burned to hell, and I'd still be here typing on this computer. The job came first. Always. The arm could wait.

“Um ... fucker, that thing has boils on it and is red as fuck. Your fuckin' skin is gone in some places. You need to get that shit taken care of.”

I shrugged, still contorting the image so we could catch this asshole, and then I could beat the daylights out of them. That would be sooner rather than later.

“It'll be fine. Once we figure this shit out, I'll deal with it,” I answered, focused.

“Seriously?” Ryker questioned, coming up to me and grabbing my arm. It had burned from the back of my elbow almost up to my shoulder. I knew it had happened when Austyn and I drove to the clubhouse. I just chose to keep my mouth shut. “You need to stop and get this looked at.”

I fully stopped and turned to Ryker. “I need to do this. My arm is an arm, flesh and bone. Ensley, Remy, Austyn—that is life. This is more important.” I needed him to understand what I was feeling at that moment.

Ryker said nothing for quite some time, and I’d thought I’d stunned the man. He said nothing, but I responded, “Yeah. Let’s get this.”

Finishing the image, it looked about right, and I ran it through the program.

“What about you?” I asked Buzz. “Anything of them comin’ up or from the road?”

“It seems they came from the west side onto the lane. I’m tryin’ to track backward, but the cameras in this town need to be fuckin’ updated.”

“Want me to try?” Deke asked, and Buzz sneered.

“I got it.”

I had no idea what the hell that was about. A question for another time. Not talking about the club the past few years, I really didn’t know the dynamic between everyone. If some didn’t like others. If some were pissed at others. I had no clue.

Getting to know all of that would take time. That was all I had these days.

Looking back at the program, it said one hour forty-five minutes to complete. This was typical. The first one didn’t have much, so it didn’t pull up many options. This one had more to go on, so there would be more possibilities.

“This is gonna take about two hours to run,” I told them.

“Fuck,” Cruz responded, but didn’t ask why, trusting my word. “Let’s pack it up and head to the clubhouse. We’ll get back on it there. There ain’t nothin’ else we can do here anyway. Besides, damn cops keep tryin’ to find out what we’re doin’. Better to do it on our turf.”

With a nod, several of the brothers headed out. What was awesome about my equipment was I could just push it back into the SUV, and it would still do its thing while I drove.

“Meet ya back there,” Buzz said, moving to his bike.

The brothers all pulled out and I drove behind them. It was a respect thing. A small thing I could do to show it to them. Also I’d be back here if anything should happen.

Grabbing my phone, I hit the green button and called Ensley. She answered on the first ring with, “Are you okay?”

This made me smile. I liked that a fuck of a lot. Unfortunately, coughing started, and I had to get through it to talk. “Yeah. On my way to the clubhouse now. You get ahold of your sister?”

“No. I left a message, but she’s at work and hasn’t called back.” Damn, it was great hearing her voice, but not that she hadn’t nailed down her sister.

“Call the store. Get her to get her stuff too.”

“Okay. I can do that.” She sounded a bit scared over the line.

“It’ll be fine. We’ll take care of it. Just need you to take care of yourself and our baby girl. That’s all ya gotta do. We’ll handle the rest.”

There was some rustling on the other end of the phone like she was moving somewhere. “Micah. Someone blew up Austyn and Emery’s houses. This is crazy. Who does this?”

“Some asshole with a beef with the MC. Who knows? Just know that I’ve got your back. No one will touch either you or Remy. That I can guarantee.” Because I would do anything to protect them with my fucking life.

“Are we safe here?”

I smirked. “Yeah. You are. Wouldn’t have my girls there if you weren’t.”

She didn’t say anything, so I asked, “Ens?”

“You said ‘your girls’?”

Shit. I hadn’t realized that, but yeah, I did. “Yeah. I’m on my way. Be there soon.”

“Okay. Bye.”

We disconnected, and I dialed Dryerson who answered on the second ring. “Yeah.”

“Need you to pack me a bag and bring it to the clubhouse.” Dryerson and I had been together for years, and he knew exactly what I’d need for any kind of stay. He was good like that.

“Why?”

“You’ll see it on the news. A couple of houses blew up today that belonged to the MC. So we’re here.”

“Bombs? In Sumner, Georgia?”

He didn’t know the half of it. This was nothing from what it could be. Before I’d left Sumner, I’d had my fair share of crazy shit happen in this small town.

“Yeah. Pack yours too. I’m gonna see if you can crash here. Before you come, though, I need you to go to the grocery store.”

“Bro. Seriously? I do not shop,” he said before I could finish.

“Shut the fuck up and listen.” Silence came from the other end. “Ensley’s sister works there. Her name’s Katie. I got no fuckin’ clue what she looks like, but need you to follow her to her place and then to the clubhouse. Can you do that?”

“She gonna know I’m tailin’ her because I do not want to be arrested any time soon?”

I chuckled. “I’ll talk to Ensley here in a few and make sure she tells Katie you’re comin’.”

“Alright. I’ll play babysitter,” he joked. Dryerson had a very easy-going nature about him. Not a lot ruffled his feathers. It was one of the main reasons he was great to work with out in the field. There was a problem, he compartmentalized it and figured out the solution. Calm. Cool. And Collected.

“Good. See you at the clubhouse.”

“Do I even know where this clubhouse is?”

Fuck me. How the hell would he know? After giving him the directions, I pulled into the clubhouse behind the brothers who went left to their parking spots as I went right to park in the spare spaces that were becoming few and far between.

MICAH

I SAW BUZZ COMING UP TO MY SUV, SO I ROLLED MY WINDOW down. “Need those computers. Park this behemoth under the shade tree by the new buildings for now.

The clubhouse had changed a bit from what I’d remembered. The other day, I didn’t think really to look with other things on my mind, but now pulling my SUV out and parking it next to the building Buzz said, I noticed changes everywhere.

One of the main changes was the large structure off to the right of the clubhouse. When I was a kid, it was a wide-opened grassy area. Now the grassy area was cut to about half, and in its place stood a two-story concrete brick building. It was about as wide as the clubhouse, but it was damn long.

It went almost to the pit which was pretty far out on the property. There were several windows spread throughout and it was painted in a light gray. It wasn’t anything fancy, but it appeared strong and sturdy.

There were three roll-up garage doors spread throughout. What the thinking was behind them, I had no clue. But something told me I’d find out as Buzz led me to one of them.

Buzz came up to me again after leaving Cruz’s side. “Back it in. I’ll pull the door up and need you to drive it down the ramp and into the basement.”

My brow quirked. “Huh?” I’d thought I was parking.

Buzz smirked. “Trust me. You’re one of the few who will appreciate what’s down there. Now head on down.” Buzz left me and hit something on his phone. The white doors began to roll open.

I looked to the left and saw Ensley standing next to a picnic table with Austyn by her. No matter what was down here, my ass was going to her as soon as possible.

Pulling in, a large contraption lifted, and underneath it was a tunnel. Wondering what the hell I was getting myself into, I pulled my SUV through the opening and down the ramp.

Bright lights shone from the ceiling, and what awaited me was something I’d only seen in my Marine days.

It was a fucking bunker. Full out something I’d be in if we were in the desert, but here it was in Sumner. Darkness fell behind me as the ramp and doors began to shut with Buzz following me down.

I pulled the SUV into an open space, not going in to far, throwing it in park, shutting it off and jumping out. “What the fuck is this?”

Looking around, banks of computers and equipment littered one wall. There were several chairs at a long desk that housed all the equipment.

“My paradise,” Buzz said, slapping my shoulder. “This shit is *the* shit.”

“It seems so. Do you have any feeds of Austyn and Emery’s houses?”

Buzz clicked his tongue. “I’ve been thinking of that on the ride here. The other day we had a disconnect, but it was only for a brief time, and going through and checking everything, we didn’t find anything amiss. I’m wondering if that was the time this shit was done. I’m gonna go through and check it out.”

“Sounds good. I’ll come help, but I gotta go check on my girls.”

“Congratulations. A baby girl. Keep a tight fuckin’ leash on all the guys around her ass.”

I chuckled. “It’s very new, but fuck no. No guy is every comin’ near my baby.”

“Rhys said that too. Get a load of Mazie, and you’ll be wanting to run for the hills at his torment.” Buzz pointed in the opposite direction. “Head through there and up the stairs; you’ll come out the door to the play area. Come back when you’re done.”

“I’ll need to get them settled in here, and my buddy is comin’ with Ensley’s sister.”

“Fuck, we’re gonna have a full house. Hope the fridges are stocked.”

“If not, I’ll make a run.”

“Yeah, you will. And get that fuckin’ burn looked at,” Buzz ordered, lifted his chin then sat at the bank of computers. I took off and headed outside. There were two girls who needed me.

The bright light hit me as I scoped out the last place I saw Ensley. She was still there, but her eyes were focused on the door my SUV went down, and she didn’t see me.

Her arm was around her middle, thumbnail in her mouth, chewing on it, and worry written all over her face. With quick strides I made it to her as she turned. Not thinking twice about it, I grabbed her and pulled her into my body.

She didn’t resist wrapping me up just the same. I breathed her in, smelling some of the leftover smoke which was strange, considering I had her and Remy leave right away. It must’ve been just how powerful the explosion was. Or it was me because I reeked of it and was dirty as fuck.

I found myself kissing the top of her head as she let out a shuddering breath. “Are you okay?” she asked me first.

“I’m fine. Are you and Remy good?”

She pulled away, and I hated it instantly. It wasn’t far from me as she was still in my arms, but it wasn’t close enough.

This part of me needed to hold her, know she was safe, know that no one touched her in any way.

“We’re fine. She’s with your mom in the clubhouse.”

“She’s safe with her,” I told her unnecessarily.

“I know that. Your mom didn’t say anything about the grandparent thing.”

I gave her a soft smile. “Knew she wouldn’t. Not until you feel that Remy’s ready for that.”

“Thanks.”

“Anything, Ensley. Absolutely anything.”

Her smile was utterly breathtaking and something I took for granted the one night we had together. It lit up her entire face, brightening everything around her.

Business, Micah... I chided myself, wanting nothing but to kiss her lips. “Need you to call Katie. Tell her a buddy of mine, Dryerson, will be following her from the store to your apartment and then to here. He’s a solid guy, and I trust him with my life. I told him to stay back and will only be there to keep an eye if something goes wrong. Knowing him, though, he’ll go right up to her and introduce himself as soon as he sees her.”

“Shit,” Ensley said, pulling away from me then taking her phone out of her pocket. She dialed numbers, then started talking as she stepped to the side.

“Thanks,” Austyn said, moving up to stand next to me and bumping my shoulder. Luckily it wasn’t the one that got burned because I was really starting to feel that shit, and it wasn’t good.

“No problem. Glad you’re alright.”

“Fuckin’ trapped in my bathroom. What the fuck is up with that shit?” Austyn shook her head.

“Coulda happened to anyone. It was just you this time.”

Austyn chuckled just a bit. It was nice to see that she was in good spirits. “Yeah. Fuck if I don’t wanna rip someone’s

dick off for this shit. You find anything out while you were there?”

Ouch. Just the thought had my balls shrinking. “First, you’re not rippin’ my cock off, sorry. I need that shit.” This made Austyn smile. “Second, nothin’ solid. Everything is shit.”

“Ryker texted me to tell me he was on his way. I know he’s pissed, and there’s not much to calm his ass down until he finds out who did this.”

“Right.”

Austyn’s head nodded to Ensley. “You take care of that one. Leavin’ her and Remy in your hands. You fuckin’ hurt her, it will be your dick off.”

Austyn was very good with the big sister act, and it made me feel good that Ensley and Remy had someone in their corner while I wasn’t here.

“Never. Just wanna get to know my kid and Ensley better. Got no plans on hurtin’ shit. I’d rather cut off my arm.”

“Speakin’ of your arm.” Cruz’s deep voice came from behind us as we all turned to him. Austyn didn’t stop. She went right to him and wrapped her arms around his middle, just like she did when she was little. “Get the first aid kit.” Cruz nodded to me. “He’s got a serious burn on his arm.”

I heard Ensley gasp as Austyn jumped out of her father’s arms and came at me like a bull seeing red. She grabbed my arm. “Fucking hell, Micah!” she yelled loud enough for the people in the courtyard to turn and look at us.

Austyn ran into the clubhouse as Ensley came up to me. “Shit. Are you in pain? It looks horrible.”

I shrugged. “Nothin’ I haven’t been through before.”

“Come sit,” Ensley said, moving to the picnic table and patting the wood, the lights above shining. I didn’t sit.

“I’ll be just fine. It needs a bandage, and it’ll heal.”

“It’s between a second and third-degree burn, Micah. We may have to take you to the ER,” Ensley chastised, examining the wound.

Austyn came out with Remy on her heels, holding my mom’s hand. A smile lit my face at seeing Remy. Add in being with her grandma and it was perfect.

Remy didn’t think anything of it as she raced to me and wrapped her little arms around my leg squeezing it tight. So many emotions ran through me, and I could hear those around me speaking, but my focus was on the little human wrapped around me like a monkey does with its momma.

Not caring about my arm, I bent down and picked her up. Her little arms then went around my neck, her hair brushing the side of my face as she laid her head on my shoulder. Only with her in my arms did I finally feel like I could breathe for a split second. The adrenaline was still coursing through my body, but there was something about having Remy in my arms that gave me a comfort I had never experienced before.

I held her in my arms, closing my eyes and just enjoying this moment in time. A moment that wouldn’t seem like much to some but meant the fucking world to me. My baby girl. Mine. It was still hard for me to believe, but I did with my whole heart. One of her little hands started rubbing my neck, and she had no idea that her small touch made everything I’d gone through fade in the background. Every choice I’d ever made, good or bad, completely and totally worth it.

“Remy honey. I need to fix Micah’s owie,” Austyn said, approaching.

Part of me was pissed that Austyn fucked up the moment, but when Remy’s head popped up, her hand came to the side of my face, and sadness filled her eyes, my damn heart constricted so tightly I thought it might stop.

“Owie?” Remy asked with all the sorrow I wanted to wipe away from her.

“I’ll be just fine.”

“Big boom!” Remy blurted loudly, giving me a start. Damn sure wasn’t expecting that one. Fuck, been through a lot of shit, but my little girl making that noise did not sit right with me.

“Yeah. There was a boom. But you’re safe. Mommy’s safe, and Austyn’s safe.”

“Owee, Mikeeee. Itits otay...”

I heard a hiccup coming from my mother, telling me she was crying. Now I had three women to make sure were alright. “I’m gonna have Austyn and your mommy take a look at it and see what the damage is.”

“Gimmie tand,” Remy demanded, and I looked to Ensley. I didn’t know Remy speak and didn’t know exactly what she wanted.

“She wants to hold your hand,” Ensley translated. “It’s what Katie does when we fix Remy’s boo boos.”

I gave Remy a huge smile. “I’d love for you to hold my hand. It’ll be even better if you sit on my leg while they fix me up.”

Remy nodded and her thumb went into her mouth. It was fucking cute as hell. I sat on the bench and put Remy on my leg, wrapping my good arm around her.

After angling a bit, I heard a few gasps telling me it was pretty bad. Of course, I could feel that fact, but when you were conditioned to withstand serious pain, stuff like this was just a drop in the bucket. I still had feeling in the arm, so it couldn’t be a fourth-degree burn. I could feel blisters, so what Austyn had said earlier about it being between a two and three was right.

That shit was gonna take a while to heal, and I’d need antibiotics if it was too bad.

As the girls looked, I started talking to Remy. “Wanna have a sleepover?”

Remy’s eyes grew wide as she nodded her head.

“Well, we get to have one tonight. Everyone here is gonna sleep at the clubhouse. Doesn’t that sound like fun?”

“Tandler pay me,” she stated with finality, but this time it was my mom to translated.

“Chandler is Deke and Riley’s little one. I don’t know if you’ve met her quite yet.”

Deke was a brute, and Riley met him while she was fighting. Their little girl had to be around four or five if I remembered right.

“I’m sure she’ll be here too.”

“Riley’s on her way here with her,” my mom shared, staring at me and my daughter. She probably never thought this would come to life, or at least it would be a while before it did. The joy in her face was something I’d never get tired of seeing.

“See. She’s gonna be here too. Maybe we can get the fire pit goin’ and roast some marshmallows later. Would you like that?”

Remy’s finger went back into her mouth as her head nodded, then she laid her head on my chest.

Austyn and Ensley were working on cleaning up the burn. There was no doubt to have a bunch of gunk in it and probably a black or white color. As long as there weren’t bones showing, I should be fine.

I made an effort not to flinch when it felt like one of the blisters popped. No, this did not feel good.

“Are you really okay?” my mom asked, coming to sit next to Remy and me. It was a bit awkward because of the way I was sitting to get worked on, but we made it happen.

“Yeah. I’m good. Got my girl in my arms. That’s all that matters.”

“And one standing behind ya,” Mom teased with raised brows.

A smile crept my lips. “Yeah. The one behind me too.”

“Not me,” Austyn declared adamantly as I heard a piece of tape coming off a roll.

“No. Not you,” I answered, giving Ensley a small wink. All I knew was when I saw her and Remy in danger, the instinct to protect them rode me hard. What that meant as of now, who knew. But nothing would happen to them on my watch.

“Are you sure we shouldn’t take you to the ER?” Ensley tried again. “You need antibiotics and probably from an IV.”

Austyn pulled out a large pill bottle, shaking it loudly. “That’s what these are for. Hospital grade.”

“I don’t want to know how you got those,” Ensley mumbled.

“I just robbed the hospital,” Austyn teased as Ensley gasped. I smiled, and Mom chuckled.

“What?” Austyn shrugged. “I’m kidding, relax. We have our ways. You know this,” Austyn said, raising her brow at Ensley. “Roll with it. You’re one of us now.”

Ensley blew out a breath. “I know. I just don’t want it to get infected and have him lose his arm.”

Austyn stuck gauze over the wound, then put tape on it. She then handed Ensley some materials stating, “That’s what your job is. You gotta keep it clean and make sure he takes these pills. If it starts to change colors, then we’ll reevaluate.”

“I work at the hospital, people. That’s what you’re supposed to do. Go. To. A. Hospital,” Ensley started, but I reached over and touched her hand.

“I’m not goin’ to the ER. Appreciate ya wantin’ to do that for me. But there are things that I need to do here. You check it, and if at any point we see it’s doin’ worse, then we’ll go. But right now, we don’t need to.”

Ensley came up to stand between legs, Remy still on one side of me. “Promise me, Micah. Promise that you’ll go if I tell you to.”

A small smile came to my lips. “We’ll see.”

Ensley started, but Austyn touched her arm. “Just be happy that he’s not throwin’ a fit about not listenin’ and doin’ what he wants. Take the ‘we’ll see’ as a good sign.”

Ensley huffed out a breath. “Right.”

ENSLEY

MY LITTLE GIRL WAS CUDDLING UP TO HER DADDY, AND SHE had no idea. Or maybe she did the way she attached to him so quickly.

Even when they were playing at the pond, she laughed, allowing him into her little heart. It was like this instant connection for them. Like they knew from day one they were related. There was so much ease to it, and happiness didn't even come close to what I was feeling about these prospects.

When I was pregnant with Remy, never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be here watching Remy with her dad. That was the furthest thing from my mind. Mostly because I was trying to survive and keep my baby alive.

It was also the nail in the coffin to tell me that I wasn't like the people around me. If it had been any other girl pregnant, her parents would make her do the same as what mine wanted. That wasn't the world I wanted my baby to grow up in.

Never did I want her to have that choice ripped from her and be forced to end the pregnancy. And I definitely didn't want my baby to have to grow up and be married off at a young age to become some baby making factory. At the time, I had no idea the baby was a girl, but I feared she would be. This life would dictate the roll she had in it. I wanted more for my little girl.

Younger boys were groomed from a young age that having as many wives as possible was God's will. Girls were groomed

to accept this and live with their sister wives, raising the children. Stay quiet and do their jobs.

At first, it was all I knew, and I, of course, had to follow the rules. Where else would I go? What else would I do? There wasn't anything at that point in my life.

Hell, I didn't know there was any escape until I had something to fight for.

Remy.

And now she had a family. One I couldn't give her. It was just Katie and me, and I'd thought it would be that way forever. With Ryker's help, he brought me into a fold where the dynamic was so different than what I'd grown up with. We were part of this family, and I loved it.

"Ens. You okay?" Micah's deep voice asked, pulling me out of the past.

My eyes blinked. "Yeah. I'm okay."

His chocolate eyes stared at me, drawing me in, wanting me to be closer to the man as if he could take everything that happened today and make it disappear. Selfishly, I wanted that.

"MaMa, you otay?" Remy said, my eyes going to hers. I brightened mine up and plastered a smile on my lips.

"I'm good. Just a lot has happened today."

"Big boom!" Remy exclaimed loudly. I wondered how long it would take her to stop doing that every five seconds. Would this be a memory of her childhood or would she forget it? I hoped it was the latter. So many things I've tried to protect her from. This was one of them. The more she brought it up, the more concerned I was getting.

Remy would always be first in my book. For me, though, how I was feeling with all of these people surrounding me, caring for my little girl, I didn't want to flee or run. As scared as I was about what was going on here, I felt strong around everyone, and instead of running, I wanted to stand up and help fight.

It was a strange realization for me because it was the first time that I really wanted to protect the Ravage MC the way they'd protected Remy, Katie, and me over these last few years.

"Yeah. But mostly I'm worried about Micah and his owie. I need your help." Remy looked up at me with a twinkle in her eye. She loved to be my helper. "We have to keep an eye on Micah and make sure he doesn't hurt it anymore. Can you help me with that?"

"Essss, I elp." Remy responded adamantly.

"Looks like I have a couple of girls to prove I'm just fine," Micah said, reaching for Remy's tummy and tickling her. She giggled, and I smiled.

"Good jooob," Remy told Micah with a stern face, and I had to hold the chuckle in at Micah's expression, reminding myself he just met Remy and would need to learn her language.

"Yes. Micah needs to be good."

"Pop! Needs Pop!" Remy demanded, jumping off of Micah's lap and making me step back. Remy grabbed on to my jeans and pulled on them.

Micah's brow lifted.

"A sucker. She calls them pops. When she does good things, I treat her with it. So if you're good, I'll find you one." Mentally, I had to shake my head because fuck me I was flirting with him. Seriously?

Get your head in the game, Ensley!

"I do love my sweets." Butterflies danced in my stomach. Where the hell did that come from? But he said those words so sexy.

Remy continued to pull my jeans. "I don't know if I have one in the car, but I'll look in a bit. Aunt Katie is comin', and we need to be ready for her."

My little girl's face lit up bright as it always did when I mentioned Katie.

Micah stood, and I had to look up at him. Damn, he was tall. I didn't remember him being this tall before, but that was a long time ago.

"We need to get you two settled in a room," Micah stated, turning to his mom, who I must say was absolutely gorgeous. There was something in the cosmos because that woman had to be in her fifties but looked like her thirties. One could only hope to be that awesome.

"I'll get it," Blaze answered and moved to the large block building where Micah's truck mysteriously disappeared into. It felt very Batman like.

"And I need your phone, Ens. Do you have a prepaid or a plan?"

What in the world? "I have a prepaid. Remy dropped my good one down the toilet so I had to make do."

"Good. Need you to give it to me. Gotta get you a new one."

"Why?" I was confused.

"You called 9-1-1, and the police are lookin' into that shit. We just need to be as clean as possible."

"Why can't they know?"

"This is Ravage business. We handle it in house."

While I really had no idea what that meant, I trusted Micah, so I handed him my phone. "I'll need another one."

"I'll get ya one."

"What happened to your car?" I asked, leaning down to pick up Remy who laid her head on my shoulder. She was ready for her nap. Hell, I was ready for one after all this shit.

"There's a basement down there. They wanted me to park it there."

"Why?"

Micah's intense eyes didn't leave mine as he said, "Don't know how much I can tell ya, but just know that I'm gonna

help find the assholes who did this.” Micah’s gaze went to Remy, doubt clouding them.

“Don’t worry. She hears a lot more than that when I burn dinner.”

Micah smirked. “Not the best cook, huh? I’ll have to remember that.”

I playfully smacked him on the shoulder. So subtly I almost missed the small flinch. “Shit, I’m so sorry. That’s your burned arm.” Sometimes I was seriously stupid.

“It’s fine. I’m fine,” he said, but I saw that little twinge. It was the only thing he showed during the entire cleaning and bandaging of his burn. The man was pretty damn stoic, and I wasn’t sure how I felt about that because he would be hard to read.

Micah put his arm around my shoulders, pulling Remy and me into his embrace. He leaned down into my ear. “Just know that even if I have to sleep on the damn floor, I’ll be in whatever room you and Remy are in.”

My heart picked up speed and started thumping so hard I could hear it in my ears.

He was going to sleep with us?

“What?” I breathed as I felt Remy’s hand on my cheek. I loved it when my girl did that, but I was too puzzled by Micah’s words.

“Not lettin’ you or Remy out of my sight until we figure out what’s goin’ on. I’m not takin’ any chances.”

The flutter flopped as disappointment clouded my thoughts. He was going to protect his daughter, and with that came me. Great. Why in the hell did I feel like a consolation prize. That wasn’t what I was going for here. I was crazy to think the man had feelings for me.

Micah pulled away, and I nodded. He hadn’t been with his kid for over two years. If he wanted to do this, I wasn’t going to stop him.

I heard a car engine pull into the clubhouse and turned to see Katie parking in one of the very few parking spots available.

“I need to go to her,” I told Micah, making my escape. It wasn’t nice, but I needed a moment from the hit he just gave me, that he had no idea he’d inflicted. I needed time to put my shields up to get through these next few days. Protecting myself would be key to not getting hurt when it was all said and done.

Micah kept quiet as Remy, and I made our way to Katie. A very large blue truck came barreling in, and I had to step back. What the hell? It almost hit Remy and me.

Micah was right there and waited for the tall man with blond hair to step out of the truck. Micah gripped the man’s shirt as he said something and nodded over to Remy and me.

There wasn’t a doubt in my mind that it had to do with him almost running us over. I hadn’t seen Micah this pissed before, and it was a sight. A little bit of fear, but then a bit of excitement because it was on Remy’s and my behalf. *Stop it. You’re doing it again.*

“What the hell is goin’ on, Ens?” Katie asked, slamming her car door and coming up to us. Remy immediately went into Katie’s outstretched arms.

“A mess. Austyn and Emery’s houses blew up, and the MC wants all of us here while they figure out what’s goin’ on.”

“You’re joking,” Katie said on a gasp.

“Boom! Kaatee,” Remy told her, and Katie’s eyes widened. Mine did too, but probably for a different reason. Remy hadn’t really said Katie’s name. I knew it had been coming, but it burst through.

“What? She saw it?”

“Yeah. We were still with Micah when everything went to hell in a handbasket.”

“Lucy—you got some splanin’ to do,” Katie mocked in her best Ricky Ricardo voice. This made me smile. Even with

everything going on around us, Katie brought us back to the times we stayed up late watching *I Love Lucy*.

“Yeah. I do.”

Katie looked over to the large truck, where Micah was still giving the man what-fore.

“And what the hell? That guy.” She pointed to the blond. “Came right up to me when I was leaving the store, saying he was my bodyguard. I know you called me, but I didn’t think he’d be so in your face.”

“I’ve never met him, but Micah’s about ready to beat the shit out of him.”

Katie’s eyes went round once again in shock. “No freaking way.”

“Yep. That’s him.”

Katie checked Micah out for a bit longer than I liked. He was Remy’s dad, after all. That was all it was. Just me being protective. It had absolutely nothing to do with jealousy. Screw that.

“You have to get with him,” Katie said.

“Shut up.” My eyes shifted to Remy. “Remy,” I scolded.

“Shit. Okay you need to have sex with that.”

“Sex with who?” Austyn and Bristyl, Cooper’s woman, came up.

Katie smiled mischievously saying, “She needs to sl...” She bobbed her head toward Micah.

“Lord. Are we in high school or something?” I clipped.

“No. Because if we were, I wouldn’t have to spell out words for the little one here,” Katie retorted.

“Just let it go. It’s not gonna happen,” I demanded, turning my back to the two men in a heated exchange. “Let it lay. He’s being cool because of R-E-M-Y.”

“You do know that she’ll be spelling her name soon and that shit won’t work anymore.” Katie commented.

“Would you shut up?” I asked her, but it was more like telling her.

“Nope. And you should really watch your language. You’ve got a mouth on you,” she teased and she wasn’t wrong. Ever since hanging out with the Ravage MC, the words that I never used to say, just kept popping out of my mouth.

I let out a heavy sigh. “Great. Now this is gonna be a thing. I can do without it, just so ya know.”

“This is like watchin’ a sitcom,” Bristyl chuckled, and she wasn’t wrong. Katie and I had this about us.

But we loved each other, and that was all that mattered.

“Oh shit.” Turning my head, a fist flew. Micah’s, that is, right into blond guy’s gut. The blond guy hunched over, but it wasn’t much. The punch was pretty strong, but the blond guy just laughed, wrapped his hand around the back of Micah’s head, and pulled him into that man hug thing.

Maybe Micah liked men?

Wouldn’t that be my luck?

MICAH

“YOU FUCKER.” DRYERSON SAID IN MY EAR AS HE PULLED ME to him slapping me on the back twice. Pissed wasn’t even it. Livid was more like it.

“You’re lucky you aren’t breathin’ through a fuckin’ tube for that shit. Slow the fuck down,” I told him pulling back and glaring at him, letting him know how serious I was about this. “That was my fuckin’ kid and her momma. You hit them. I end you.”

Dryerson pulled away, smiling. “Sorry, man. It’s dark, and Katie tried to fuckin’ ditch me. Me. Of all fuckin’ people. I was pissed and didn’t think. I just wanted to ring her damn neck.”

Even pissed, a chuckle escaped as we separated. “Don’t do it again.”

“Won’t, man.” Dryerson’s eyes went over to Ensley, Austyn, Bristyl and Katie. Mine followed. “Damn. That’s your woman?”

“That’s my kid and her mom,” I countered, not really knowing what Ensley and I were, but I didn’t have time to dwell on it.

“So if I go over and ...”

Without a single thought, I stepped into Dryerson’s space, getting nose to nose with the man. “Stay the fuck away from her.”

Dryerson chuckled, putting his hands up and stepping back. “Just checkin’. Introduce me.” Whatever in the fuck that meant.

It wasn’t until that moment that I felt the red hot burning in my arm. Fuck, that hurt. Shouldn’t have held him like that.

We walked over to the girls, and to my surprise Remy leapt from Katie’s arms and into mine. She laid her head on my shoulder, her forehead touching my chin as her thumb went to her mouth.

“This pretty little thing is Remy,” I said to Dryerson and couldn’t hide the grin. It felt damn good to have my girl jump into my arms like that. That I was her safety in all this chaos.

“Well, hello. You look just like your momma.”

For a moment I thought he was going to say something stupid like *you look like your daddy* but thankfully he remembered our short conversation about not telling Remy quite yet.

Remy snuggled in closer to me. “Big hit with this one,” I teased him. Dryerson was a hell of a ladies man. Had a woman every chance he got. He’d love it here.

“She’ll warm up to me.” Dryerson held out his hand to Ensley. “And you must be the beautiful Ensley Tugger keeps talkin’ about.”

A small blush came to Ensley’s cheeks as she reached over and took his hand. “Tugger? Hi. You must be Dryerson?”

Dryerson looked to me. “Awe. You told her about me? Aren’t you just so sweet. And yeah. We call him Tugger.”

My eyes rolled. He was a player and always had woman eating out of the palm of his hands. Hopefully he didn’t end up getting his ass kicked from flirting too much. Men around here didn’t allow anyone to mess with their women.

“He called me and told me you were gonna follow my sister here. Don’t get all sappy.”

Her teasing tone and small smile had me taking a small step back. Please, for the love of God, tell me she wasn’t

flirting with him. I really didn't want them beat the shit out of the man, but if this shit kept up, it was going to happen.

“Oh honey. You haven't seen anything yet,” Dryerson teased back.

“Ben...” I warned, using his first name. He knew when I pulled that shit out, I meant business.

Dryerson stepped back and shrugged. “He's a bit territorial.”

“Fucker,” I muttered as Dryerson began to introduce himself to everyone around.

“She's taken,” I divulged when he met Bristyl. Then repeated myself when he met Austyn. Then again repeated myself as I made introductions to everyone around.

It took a while, and not once did Remy want to leave my arms which was fine with me. Having her close was the best feeling ever.

“Well, hello Mrs. Tugger,” Dryerson beckoned to my mom as she came up to the group as we sat around the picnic tables. He knew all about my mom and how she used to be a stripper at Studio X, a strip club the MC still owned.

He'd also met her at a couple of our meets over the years. He didn't have much family, but he had me.

He reached out and took my mom's hand and kissed it softly then stepped back. As he did, I slapped him upside the head. “Stop that shit right now.”

My mom rolled her eyes. “He's just tryin' to get under your skin, and you know it. That's what brothers do, ya know?”

She had no idea how true those words were. I wasn't in the mood for him coming on to my mother. If my dad saw it, Dryerson would meet an early grave. And he knew it too, but like Mom said, he loved to raze me.

“I know. Don't like that shit.”

“Man, can’t touch Ensley. All these chicks are taken. And this one’s your mom.” He turned to Katie. “Guess you’re stuck with me.” He winked.

Katie’s eyes turned into slits. “In your dreams, surfer boy. Keep on lookin’.”

Dryerson burst out laughing. Sure, his blond hair had grown out a bit, but it wasn’t long enough to be considered a surfer look, but it was funny as hell, and I joined him.

“Micah. Need you to bring your group with me, and I’ll show ya where you’re stayin’,” Mom jumped in.

“Can someone please tell me the details of what’s goin’ on?” Katie asked, crossing her arms over her chest and pushing her breasts up. Dryerson caught it, and I elbowed him to stop. He just shrugged.

“Come on.” Since I held Remy, I grabbed Ensley’s hand, hearing her tell her sister they’d talk later. Katie and Dryerson followed behind us. He had yet to meet all the brothers which needed to be done soon.

Ensley didn’t pull away from my grasp as we followed my mom into the brick building. I took a moment to memorize this flood of happiness. Holding both my girls to me. It was a beautiful thing.

The inside looked much better than the plain outside. The interior was bright with skylights and windows letting in the sun.

I wondered if it was bulletproof and made a mental note to ask my dad.

Mom led us through a door and up a flight of stairs, then down a hall and began pointing. “These rooms will be occupied by some of the brothers. This one”—Mom stopped, opening the door to a room on the right—“is perfect for you guys.”

Walking in, the space appeared huge compared to what I’d thought, judging from the outside of the building. There was a small kitchenette off to the right with two doors. One looked

like it led to a bathroom. The other I had no idea. A large bed sat in the middle with a small crib off to the side of it.

There were dressers, a place where a desk could be, and a television on the opposite side of the bed. There were also a set of tables and chairs off the far left with a recliner next to it.

“Holy shit, Ma. You just put this together.”

She shook her head. “Nonsense. We’ve had these set up for a while. I just cleaned up and put fresh linens on the beds. You’ll need to go down to the kitchen and grab a few things if you want to put them in the kitchen.”

Mom stepped over to one of the doors I didn’t know where it led to. “In here is another bedroom. It has access through here and has a door on its own to the outside hall. There’s another one on the other side. Everything should be stacked with towels, toilet paper, and paper towels. Whatever you need that’s not in here, just let me or one of the other ol’ ladies know, and we’ll get it for you.”

“Ol’ lady. I still have a hard time with that one.” Katie told Ensley who elbowed her. “What? Why do people keep wanting to shut me up?”

“Chill,” Ensley growled.

“Whatever.” Katie turned to my mom. “Thank you so much for all of this.” She then pointed to the room on the left. “I’ll take that one.”

“I’ll take that one too,” Dryerson repeated to Katie who ignored him and instead asked my mom, “There are locks on all these doors. Right?” The hopeful tone had me smiling. Knowing the Ravage MC, there were a shit ton of high-grade locks installed.

“Of course. And if anyone gives you problems”—Mom stared at Dryerson—“tell me, and I’ll have it handled.”

Dryerson put his arms out. “What’d I do?”

“You live,” Katie said, going into the room, closing the door behind her. The click told me she’d locked it.

Ensley shook her head. “I’m sorry. She gets this way when she doesn’t know what’s goin’ on. It’s a defense mechanism from our childhood. I’ll get her sorted.” Ensley knocked on Katie’s door.

“What?”

“Katie, open up.” The lock flipped, and Ensley slipped in. The distinct click of the lock connecting had me grinning at Dryerson.

“Got your hands full with that one,” I teased.

“Whatever.”

“I’m gonna need you to make sure my girls get settled in. Get them whatever they need, and if they forgot something write it down. We’ll probably have a lot of it,” my mom responded as she walked up to me and Remy. “I have to admit, this is one of the happiest moments of my life. Thank you.” She got up on her toes and kissed my cheek.

My heart squeezed. Yeah. I loved my mom. When everything went to shit with my father all those years ago, she’d always have my back. Even when I was a shit.

“I brought up stuff for sandwiches. Eat and get some sleep,” my mom said, holding out her arms to Remy who didn’t move at first. Her actions warmed me from top to toe. My little girl was holding on to me. Mine.

Damn. It still seemed surreal.

“Thanks, Mom.” She gave me her brilliant smile, gave Remy a kiss, and then was gone.

Dryerson turned to me after watching her go, and if he said anything about her ass I’d kick his. “Alright, what’s the lowdown. Hit me and I’ll see what I can do.”

I sucked in a breath not knowing exactly what I could share with him and wouldn’t until I talked to the brothers and saw what my role was in this situation.

“All I can tell ya is what I said on the phone. Two houses exploded, and we don’t know who did it. We’re all staying here until we figure it out.”

“Can I help?”

My head shook. “I’ll ask. The MC is like us in the field.”

“You told me that before.”

“Yeah. This is one of those operations where only core people know what’s gonna happen. In truth, I’m just barely scraping the surface of helping and could get kicked out at any time.”

“I get it, brother. Just let me know what I can do. I’ve got guns in my bag in the truck.”

“Good. Let’s eat and hit it. Tomorrow’s gonna be a busy day, and I’m fuckin’ wiped.” That was the understatement of the year. It must be the chest compression that was making me so tired. In the field I could go days without sleep.

But tonight, I was throwing in the towel.

ENSLEY

“TELL ME RIGHT NOW WHY I’M LIVING AT THE CLUBHOUSE, Ens, or I swear...” Katie started as soon as the lock clicked on her door. Sucking in a deep breath didn’t help the situation one bit. For some reason, I just needed a moment. A moment to put everything together. Life kept throwing hit after hit, and it was hard to make sense of. And her life was throwing Katie’s life in an upheaval as well. I hated feeling like I was screwing up her life.

It had been a hell of a few hours, and she needed answers. Hell, I needed answers, but in actuality neither one of us would get them.

We’d been with the Ravage MC for two and a half years, and I’d learned many things. One was the brothers didn’t talk to outsiders. As much as I was a part of this, I also wasn’t.

I moved to Katie and put my hands on her shoulders to get her focus on me. “Calm down, Katie. What has you so jammed up? I know this is a lot, but you don’t get worked up like this.”

Katie sighed as I released her. “Everything is just crazy, Ensley. I feel like we’re running away from home again.” Katie had tears brimming her eyes. That was my sister. She got pissed fast, but came down quick. I hated that she had these feelings. It cut me deep in my core, and all I wanted to do was fix it.

Even though she was older than I me, I’d always been the one to handle things. That time in our life was chaotic and

scary. She wanted to turn around so many times and just go back, but we couldn't. Or I couldn't. I told her she could go if she really wanted to, but she didn't want to leave me.

Even though it was hard, she ended up happy. That didn't mean, though, that there weren't plenty of challenging times. There would always be ups and downs, but the fear always remained in some way, shape, or form.

Katie let out a heavy breath as she walked over to the huge bed and plopped down on it. "It's just the call at work had me freaked, and then that big doofus over there." She pointed to the other room. "He's just ..." She didn't finish.

"He's Micah's friend from the Marines. Micah trusts him."

"Do you trust him, Ensley? You don't really know Micah."

I sat next to her on the bed, feeling the plushness depress with my weight. "You should've seen him, Katie. He shielded us with his body from the explosion. Not knowing what was going on, his focus was on Remy and me, getting us out of there quickly. Even before that, he's so understanding about everything going on. Not to mention, he's Blaze and Tug's kid. They are awesome people."

Katie fell to her back. "So really. Two houses blew up right in front of you?"

"Yeah. One second Remy was playing on the playground, the next we're down on the ground with Micah on top of us. I was terrified, and Micah was so damn calm. It was unreal."

"Wow. Why?"

"That I have no idea. Micah wanted us to be here safe. He trusts it here. And no offense, sister, if we're safe here, then you'll be safe here, and that's all I care about right now. Ryker is here, and you know he wouldn't let anything happen to us. You may not know Micah, but trust Ryker."

She sighed, conceding my point. "How long will we be here? I have work, Ens."

"I know, and I have no answers. Can we just take this moment by moment please? When I have answers, I'll let you

know. Try to be nice to Dryerson.” Her head turned to me and her brows raised. Before she could say anything, I did. “I know. I’m not saying he has to be your new BFF. Just chill out and take all of this as it comes. Really there isn’t a whole lot else we can do.”

Katie sat up and looked around the room. “This place is nicer than ours.” And this was my sister, up in arms one second, and mellow as they come the next.

She wasn’t wrong. The place kicked ass and had to be fairly new. Everything looked like it had just come from the store.

This room was like the middle one except the kitchenette was a bit smaller. Other than that and the crib, it was the same.

“It is. Let’s just roll with it right now and do the best we can.”

“Isn’t it crazy that only a few years ago we were living a life so different than this one? Could you imagine explosions back home? Everyone would lose their minds and not know how to handle it. These ladies and gents just talk like it’s another day at the office. Don’t you find that strange?”

I gave her a shrug. “Different, yes. But you’ve been around here. It’s just their way.”

Katie loved Ryker and the help he gave us. She was just a little more fearful of the club. I blamed her watching every season of Sons of Anarchy in a week. She had this idea in her head, but if she stopped and really got to know the club, not just on a hi and bye way, she’d know that they were a very close family.

We were lucky for them to take us in with such open arms. Not everyone would do that. Our old family would have never ever taken in two people, one pregnant, and do what the Ravage MC had done for us. Our family was super strict with the rules, and nothing or no one stepped out of line with those rules.

The men had all the power. While the women had zero but had it all when it came to the children.

They didn't accept outsiders. Ever. It would taint the bloodline, and we wouldn't make it to Heaven. Or so we were told.

A cult. That was what we grew up in. I didn't realize that at the time, but watching Netflix and Hulu there were some kickass documentaries where I learned what the outside thought of us. See when you were in it deep, that was life. I never questioned it. I thought this was how it was for everyone.

Until Remy.

When it came to her life, or staying in place with what I knew as home, there was no hesitation for me in knowing what I had to do. Now, understanding what the world was like, I saw everything differently.

Life has a strange way of happening.

"Get some sleep, and we'll tackle everything tomorrow."

Katie smiled up at me. "Yeah. Go sleep with your man."

I laughed. "Something like that." I stood and wrapped Katie in my arms, giving her a tight hug. "We'll get through this just like we've gotten through life. Together."

A tear formed in the corner of her eye. I asked, "You gonna be okay here tonight?"

"Yeah, as long as my door stays locked."

I smiled. "You have to admit the man is handsome."

"And a player. No thank you."

We said our goodnights, and as soon as I stepped through the door, I heard the lock click.

It would've made me giggle, but the sight before me took my breath away.

Micah was sound asleep on the bed with Remy in his arms. She was passed out too. I desperately wanted to take a picture of them, but Micah took my phone. Seeing his across the room, I grabbed it.

Of course it had some password that I'd never figure out, but it had the icon to take pictures on the home screen. I clicked it, and sure enough the camera came up. Moving quietly, I started snapping the pictures. One of them would turn out good. It had too.

Instead of putting Remy in the playpen, I just crawled in bed so we sandwiched Remy in and promptly fell asleep.

ENSLEY

JOLTING. THAT WAS HOW I WOKE UP, AND I WAS PRETTY SURE that under no circumstances was jolting a good thing.

Remy was jumping on the bed, then jumping on me.

Opening my eyes, it took me a bit to place where we were.

Clubhouse.

Explosions.

Micah.

Turning my head to his pillow, he was gone, and his spot was ice cold. He'd been gone for a while. Damn. I didn't even get to check his bandages. The damn stubborn man.

“What are you doin' up, bug?” I asked Remy as I grabbed her around the waist and pulled her down on the bed, tickling her senseless.

Her laughter was beautiful first thing in the morning. Loved hearing it.

Katie came over an hour later, and the three of us had turkey and swiss sandwiches. Food was food. We didn't complain one bit.

The afternoon started closing down, and still no word from Micah. I couldn't keep Remy in this room any longer. Like a guardian angel, Blaze came to the door wanting to take Remy.

She was all smiles for my little girl.

“Come on. I have some things to do that are way more fun than any grownup stuff.”

“Meee coookkkk,” Remy said.

“Cookie?” I interpreted, and Remy nodded.

“Oh, I’m sure we can find lots of those. Ma loves to bake for large crowds, and this sure is gonna be a big one.”

“Thanks, Blaze.” She gave me her brilliant smile then took my little girl out of the room.

It didn’t take long before I needed out too.

“Come on. Let’s see if they need any help with anything.”

Katie looked at me funny. “How can you help with an explosion?”

A chuckle escaped. “No. With food or whatever for all these people. According to Austyn, the entire club will be here with their families.”

Katie stood. “Better than hangin’ out in here wonderin’ when He-man over there will come over.”

She was so full of shit, but I let it pass. “Right.”

We left the room noting that when we did the doors locked behind us. Shit. I’d have to find Blaze and get that straightened out. She probably just forgot to give us the key.

We walked down the corridor, down the stairs, and out into the bright light. The day was beautiful, the sun shining like a beacon. One would never think something so tragic had happened yesterday, rocking an entire group of people to their core.

It was strange how the world worked like that. One moment everything was perfect. The next a complete mess. The kicker was if it didn’t affect you, you never noticed it being a mess.

As we walked, I couldn’t help but look for Micah. I hadn’t heard from him all day, and I was anxious to know if he was here or not.

Looking through the crowds of people, my heart stopped, and all the air left my lungs. It felt as if my world tilted for a moment, and it took me double that to get my bearings together.

Micah was standing in the courtyard with his arms around Emery, GT and Casey's girl. The familiarity of it rubbed me strangely. Never once had Emery made me feel this way. But seeing her in Micah's arms, his wrapped around her, her head tucked into his chest and eyes closed didn't sit right at all.

"What's wrong?" Katie asked, but I ignored her, not able to talk. The damn cat ran away with my tongue.

Micah kissed the top of Emery's head just like he did mine earlier. Kick to the gut again. Emery pulled out of Micah's arms, as she beamed up at him with her megawatt smile. Did I mention that Emery was absolutely beautiful? Beautiful blonde hair and a body to die for.

Jealousy was a bitter pill, and even though I knew she was married to Jacks, there was something in her eyes that I didn't like. It set me on edge. An edge I'd fought desperately not to fall off of.

But it was Micah. He was the one who really hit me. The wide smile on his face was so big it was as if he'd won a damn prize or something. Like he was holding something precious. Something he cared deeply for. Something he loved.

"Earth to Ensley. Come in, Ensley," my sister urged, studying me.

Not tearing my eyes away from the scene, I answered her. "Nothing. Let's go see what needs to be done."

"Nothing my ass. Are you gonna go all psycho killer on Emery or something?"

Killer... What? This pulled me out of my stupor as I turned to Katie. "What the hell? Have you been watching all that real crime drama shit on Netflix again?"

Katie smiled. "Yes, I have and happy to have you back. You know that Emery is Jacks'. No need for the long look, sis."

More than anything I wanted to turn around and look, but I didn't. Nothing would change what I'd seen seconds ago. Nothing would erase it from my brain.

“Let's go see what needs to be done in the clubhouse.” I grabbed Katie's arm and led her to the clubhouse. Hopefully they were cooking, and I could get lost in it. Lord knew I needed to get lost in something before I lost my damn mind.

MICAH

“YOU DO REALIZE THAT JACKS IS GONNA KICK MY ASS WHEN he finds out you hugged me, right?” I said smiling down at Emery, knowing for damn sure her man would give me shit for this moment, but when she ran in my arms and wrapped hers around me, I couldn’t resist.

This was Emery. My friend. At one point in time, my only friend.

One that I’d missed for a long time. One that I’d cared about and was thankful wasn’t around the houses when the explosion happened.

“I’ll talk to him because I don’t care. You saved Austyn!” she scream cried in my chest, and I blew out a heavy breath. The moment was over.

I lowered my arms and took a step away, not pressing my luck. There was a lot of respect to earn here, and touching Emery was not the way to get it. My father’s lessons came a bit late for me in that respect, but I knew now they would be followed.

“I’m just glad everyone’s alright.”

A tear slithered down Emery’s cheek. I had to hold myself back from swiping it away from her face. That wasn’t my place and hadn’t been for a long damn time, but it hit me that it was just out of friendship and comfort that I wanted to do this action. “I can’t believe everything’s gone. Everything.”

“Sorry. Remember, they’re just things. They can be replaced.”

She blew out a deep breath and wrapped her arms around herself. I hated seeing her so insecure and hurt. “Luckily, all my pictures are on the cloud. Those are the main things I’d hate to lose. Memories.”

“Understandable.”

A whistle came from the brick building, and I looked over to see Buzz and Cruz there. Cruz lifted his chin, telling me to get my ass moving.

“Gotta run. Take care of yourself.”

“See you soon,” she said on a soft smile as I moved away, heading to them. It was strange as I walked away from the woman I’d thought I’d loved once. That feeling wasn’t there. In fact, I wasn’t sure that feeling was ever really there. It was more of an entitlement, if that made any sense at all.

Especially after feeling what it was like to have Ensley in my arms. That unconditional ‘she could do anything in the world, and I’d love her no matter what’ feeling. I knew I never had that with Emery. It was a very harsh slap in the face that woke me up in a different way.

Because when I had Ensley in my arms, it was completely different. It was easy, comfortable, and just damn nice having her there. It was a piece of a puzzle I didn’t know I was looking for.

But it was a revelation I’d have to ponder at another time. There was shit to do, and the brothers needed me.

“I’m not pullin’ Jacks off when he finds out about that shit,” Cruz quipped as I made my way to him and Buzz.

“That’s fine. I can hold my own.” Not that I’d want to, but if push came to shove, I wasn’t a lightweight.

Cruz looked me up and down, assessing. There was so much going on in that head of his. More than I’d ever know. “Bet you could.” He clasped his hand on my shoulder and squeezed pretty fucking hard, but I didn’t flinch or move. “We

need your help,” he insisted, leading me into the underground lair.

“This place is the shit.” I told them both as we made the walk.

Entering, several of the brothers were in the space. Some looking at pictures on monitors. Some at keyboards tapping away. Some drinking a beer, waiting for orders. Some staring at me as I walked in, including my dad.

The outsider. That was me. In this world I was the outcast, and while I had some damn good tech shit, that didn't mean they were going to accept me into their fold. It wasn't something I'd expected either. Ravage was a closed-up network who kept their shit tight, not letting anyone in who wasn't a member or prospecting for the club.

The fact I broke into their systems wasn't going to be in my favor here.

Being back such a short period of time, I hadn't earned that yet. I knew it. They knew it. That didn't mean I wasn't very curious to know what the hell was about to happen.

Would they let me in enough to help find these assholes who blew up two houses? Or would they tell me to get the fuck out, and I'd be heading back up to see Ensley, which in the grand scheme of things I'd love to do. She'd only been out of my sight for a few minutes, and I was already feeling twitchy to see her and make sure she and Remy were good.

My father broke from the group and came toward us, a wide smile on his face for some reason. He held his hand out, and I took it. He pulled me into a hug, slapping me on the back several times, then took a step back.

Not sure what that was for, but I rolled with it.

“Proud of you, son.” That hit me in the heart in a damn good way. Loved my dad and loved thinking I did something right in his eyes. Some men would say what the fuck, you're a pussy for caring. I'd tell them that they didn't grow up the way I did. They didn't know the dynamic of this life. And they shouldn't judge someone or think they are pussies for it. If I

wanted to, I could kill someone in one move so fast they wouldn't know it was coming. Would they call me a pussy then?

My guess would be no.

“What's up?” I asked him when the smile didn't leave his face.

“Got somethin' for ya,” he said, holding his hand out. Breaker, another one of the brothers and Buzz's twin, who by the way they looked way too much alike, handed my father a piece of leather.

My heart started thumping, and mind started spinning. This wasn't what I thought it was. Was it? No. There was no way they'd give this to me so soon. They'd have me proving myself over and over again before handing me this.

Wouldn't they?

Leather meant being a prospect, something my father and I hadn't talked about, but I guessed he knew I wanted. But this couldn't be happening right now. It was too fast. We'd just gotten over a hurdle. I still had many more to navigate before they could see me as one of them, right?

Cruz came to stand by my side. “You've started to prove yourself to this club.” He emphasized the word ‘started’, and damn wasn't that true. “If you hadn't put aside your feelings and been selfless after the explosions, we don't know where Austyn would be. That says a lot to all of us about the man you've grown to become. In the next few hours you will learn things about Ravage that no outsider would know. You're also blood. Therefore, you get your prospect leather, but know this—you have a lot of shit to prove to this club, and all members of the club have to vote you in.”

“Don't count on it,” Jacks growled, stepping into the room. “My vote is to kick your ass out now.”

“Noted,” Cruz responded to Jacks. “He's got the equipment to figure this shit out. We need him in the fold. Like it or not. When the time comes, your vote and every brothers' vote will count. For now, this is Micah's shot at redemption.”

“Get that. Doesn’t mean that I’ll be voting his ass into the club,” Jacks grumbled low. Yeah, the time I’d been gone hadn’t taken a single tick off of the anger he felt toward me. This was going to be a huge challenge, but I could do it.

If a man wanted something enough, they’d do whatever it took to get it.

“I understand, Jacks,” I told him flat out. “If I were you, I wouldn’t like me either. But this is about more than who you like. We’re not fuckin’ kids on a playground. This is about trust. I fucked that up. I own it. Just know that I have absolutely zero interest in your woman. What I did before was a shit move. I know it now and acknowledge it.”

“Bout time you manned up,” Jacks advised, moving away from the huddle. “Actions. Your words are shit unless you put the work behind them. Know this, you can prospect forever and never get your leather. Remember that.”

The leather touched my arm, and I looked down to see my father handing it to me. “Put it on,” he ordered, locking his eyes to mine, and I smiled. This was my dad silently directing me away from the negativity and into the light. He knew what shit haunted me in the recesses of my mind. He knew the demons I battled. This pissing contest with Jacks wasn’t something I wanted nor needed to be part of, and my dad reminded me of that with a simple look.

An understanding between a father and a son.

This moment, like many in recent years, was everything I never imagined I could have with him. Yet, here we were.

Things felt right in the world, if only for a moment as I pulled on the leather. When I grew up, I never thought I’d want to be in this exact position. I thought running from the club and everyone around it would be my life.

After being in the Marines and learning what I had about life and the important things in it, my perspective did a complete one-eighty. Those feelings from before were completely gone.

Now, I wanted to be part of this club like I needed air to breathe. It was my family. It was my destiny. It was my life. And I was damn proud of that fact.

My father was the first to pull me into him, hugging me tightly and slapping me on the back a few times. “Fuckin’ proud of you, son.”

“You know you keep tellin’ me that shit, I’m gonna start to believe ya,” I teased.

He pulled back and looked deep into my eyes, full of seriousness. “Believe it. Always fuckin’ believe it.”

That meant the world to me.

Congratulations came from almost everyone. Jacks just ignored me. Yeah. It would be a huge challenge to get him on board with me being in the club. He would fight me until the bitter end, and no matter where that road led, I’d be there to meet every challenge. He had to know I wasn’t the same man. I didn’t want his woman. Nor would I ever poach. Fuck that shit.

One day he would see. It may be the day I was lying in a coffin, but he would.

When I fully stepped into the room, there were several things that I hadn’t noticed before. One of the biggest was the huge table in the center that lit up. It was completely computerized, and Deke was showing a few of the brothers different approaches that could’ve been made to plant the bombs.

Then off to the right next to the wall of screens were several televisions, each one fairly large with images of the clubhouse flashing up there from different angles. Each screen had four different angles. It looked like not one inch inside or out wasn’t covered by them.

“Look at this,” Cooper said, smiling as the moment Emery and I started to hug, but it wasn’t focused on that exactly. No it was focused on Ensley. It was as if a physical blow came to her chest as she watched our exchange. Ensley’s face completely shut down. There was no other word for it. Just

one minute happy. The next completely closed off to everyone around her. Even her sister trying to get her attention didn't pull her out of her daze.

“You fucker,” Jacks seethed, his fist connecting with my cheekbone. It hurt like a motherfucker, but I held my ground. “Told you to keep your hands off of her.”

He made to connect again, but I reached out and clutched his fist in my hand and squeezed. My muscles clenched, letting him feel what I could do.

“Fucker, let go,” he growled. With him being a brother, this action was on shaky ground. One, I didn't want to disrespect anyone. Two, there was a lot I had to prove to these people. Three, I wasn't a pushover. They got their licks in before, and the time to be someone's punching bag was over and done with. Cruz even ordered it so, at least for those sins.

“She was happy that I saved Austyn from the fire. It was innocent. Did you want me to treat her like glass and run, hurting her feelings more?” Had to admit the man was strong as he tried his damndest to fight back. It took all I had to hold his fist strong in front of us. But I kept my eyes focused on his.

“You want her. You've always fuckin' wanted her,” he growled, starting to put his weight into getting free of my grasp.

“That was true then, but you got her, Jacks. She chose you. I'm over it and have moved on. I have more on the line than ever before. I have one hundred percent left that shit in my rearview. Can you say the same?” The anger in Jacks' face deepened because he knew I scored a direct hit. He wasn't over it. Not a little bit.

Jacks wrenched his arm out of my grasp, then lifted his finger and put it in my face. “This shit ain't over,” he hissed, turning and storming off.

I watched him go, saying to Cooper, “Thanks for that, asshole,” to which Cooper full out laughed.

ENSLEY

“WHAT THE FUCK DID THAT CARROT DO TO YOU?” PRINCESS asked me while I stood in the kitchen at the cutting board. Beef stew was on the menu for all these men, and I hoped they had enough meat. They looked like enormous meat eaters. Hell, they looked like huge everything. It was going to be a giant pot.

Me, I was taking out my frustrations at seeing Micah with Emery on this poor, innocent carrot. The cuts weren't precise, instead looking like I was decimating the veggie into juice. Damn, I'd lost my mind, or at least part of it, but they looked so good together. Then there was frumpy mother of one me.

Stop it!

“I'm good,” I lied, not wanting to discuss any of the raging thoughts trying to pin me down.

“Bullshit,” Princess objected, grabbing one of the knives from the huge butcher block and coming to stand by me. She gave my hip a little check, and I moved over for her. “You look like someone kicked your puppy.”

“I don't have a puppy,” I retorted.

“Smartass. Seriously, talk to me.” She grabbed a carrot and started slicing. She had this fast way of doing it like I'd only seen on cooking shows before. Like she was a world-renowned chef or something.

Was there anything Princess couldn't do? I was thinking the answer was no.

I never had a mother like Princess to push me or cared. No one to stand up for me or ask me if I was feeling like shit and why. This was what being a part of Ravage was. Family. Love. Community. This place was really growing on me.

“It’s just been a crazy day.” While I wanted to ask about Micah and Emery, I didn’t want to talk to her about it. She was great, don’t get me wrong. She was very direct, and most of the time I loved that. Got a band aid, rip it off. Done. This, though, this for me needed a bit more finesse.

My heart could rip with the damn band-aid at this rate, and I needed to protect it as much as possible.

“We’ll get to the bottom of it, Ensley. So fuckin’ sorry Remy saw that shit.” She scooped up her cut carrot and put it into a large bowl.

“Me too. She’s goin’ around sayin’ ‘boom’ to everyone who asks her how she’s doing. She’ll forget that, right?” At least that was my hope, that the explosion memory wouldn’t last long and I’d be able to wipe it clean from her small little brain.

“Not gonna sugar coat it. There’s a chance that she’ll always remember it. You’ll have to watch her and see if she cries or jumps at loud noises. See how she is around fireworks. Hell, how she is around fires. It could turn out that she’s completely fine and that’s what I’m hoping for, but if she’s not, then we work together to help her out of that shit.”

I stopped chopping, my mind whirling. House bombs wasn’t something that any of my mothers talked about when I was young. Hell, they didn’t even talk about trauma for a child. Google was going to be my friend for a while it seemed.

Being a mother was damn hard work. And I had a feeling the work never stopped. It didn’t matter how old Remy got, I’d always be working my ass off to give her what she needed physically and emotionally.

“I see you’re freakin’ out,” Princess said as I shook my head and got back to cutting. At least putting my focus on the orange veggie helped. “That’s normal for a momma. I want

you to look at this situation like this. What can you teach Remy? What can she learn from it? If you answer those questions, the rest of it will fall into place.”

I began to cut again. “This parenting stuff is hard.” While I was all for teachable moments, finding a good reason why wasn’t working in my brain.

“Try having twins who are hellions,” she grumbled to me, nudging my shoulder.

“I heard that!” Austyn called out from the other end of the kitchen. She was at the stove dumping cubes of roast meat into a large pot filled with beef broth.

“Good! You two damn near kill me every day!” Princess smiled. Her kids were her life. No matter what hell they’d put her through, she’d fight and die for them.

There were times when I thought back to my childhood and how different it would’ve been if Princess was my mother instead of my own. How different growing up here with her instead of in the horrible environment that was put upon me?

I had to admit there was a tiny bit of jealousy seeing her interact with her children. But I put that jealousy inside and made it a goal to give my daughter better. My little one wouldn’t feel any of the things bestowed to me. She would be loved. She wouldn’t be forced to do anything she didn’t want to do. She would grow up happy, safe, and loved.

Sometimes I wondered if Austyn realized how lucky she was to be born into this family and not one like mine. Would she have rebelled? Or would she go with the status quo?

The biggest thing that people didn’t realize was when you were born into a life, it was all you knew. There was no outside. There were no what-ifs. Life was XYZ and there wasn’t anything to be done about it. You followed those rules, no questions asked.

It wasn’t until I started breaking free from the clutches around me, watching television in town or getting a magazine to read that I realized the outside world was so much bigger

than the one my parents had created for me. And their parents for them.

Then I kicked myself because I wouldn't wish that life on anyone. How one lived this time on earth should be their decision, not the decision of everyone around them. Thinking of the what could've, would've, should've didn't get anyone anywhere. It turned into a vicious circle, spinning around and never escaping its clutches.

"You mean Nox and Cooper drive you crazy. Not me. I'm a perfect little angel," Austyn replied, tossing more meat into the pot. The smells were starting to fill the space, and it made my stomach rumble.

Princess said to me under her breath, "Just hope that Remy doesn't turn out like her."

She was completely joking, and I knew that, but I still had to say, "I'd be happy if she turned out like Austyn, Princess. It would make me damn proud."

Princess shocked the shit out of me because there was a small bit of wet in the corner of her eye at my words. She, of course, fought it back and didn't let it fall, but I saw it there for the briefest of moments then vanished like a ghost.

She lowered her voice again. "Don't tell her, but she's damn awesome."

"I heard that!" Austyn yelled, and I laughed. Their banter was amazing, and I hoped to feel this way with Remy one day.

"What? She said I was damn awesome. Can you blame her?" I yelled back at Austyn who burst out laughing.

"Sorry to break up the fun." A catty voice came through the small window that was opened into the bar area of the clubhouse. Turning to the sound, a bleach blonde woman with enormous tits practically hanging out of her shirt because it was so damn low stood there. Her face was made up to perfection. Hell, I'd only seen people on television do makeup as good as hers.

She was beautiful in her own way. She was new, though, and I'd never seen her before. She was a sight to behold.

“What the fuck you need, Spice?” Princess clipped, and Spice’s smirk went to Princess. And what the hell kind of name was Spice anyway? This Spice chick seemed to have a death wish when it came to Princess.

“Boys are gettin’ randy and need somethin’ to tide them over.”

Princess rolled her eyes. “Go away,” she ordered, shaking her head, moving back to the cutting board and dismissing her completely.

“Surprised you didn’t offer yourself,” Carsyn, Nox’s woman, said coming into the kitchen, grabbing an apron and tossing it on over her clothes.

“Oh, don’t worry. That’ll be next,” Spice murmured coyly.

Carsyn’s back went ramrod straight as she turned to Spice, taking a step closer. “You stay the fuck away from Nox or any of our men. Bitch, we will wipe your ass out.”

Spice put her hands up, placating. “Oh, I don’t want yours. I want the new hunk of muscle around here. He’s been in the service for so long, he needs a good fuck.”

It was my turn to have my back go straight as red seemed to fill my vision. It was the next words that hit me in the gut, knocking the wind out of me.

“Besides, Emery’s done with him. The girls all talk about how much Micah loved Emery and was so devastated when she chose Jacks that he went into the Marines just to get away from them. I can help him work through all of that and put a smile on his face.” Spice’s smile had me wanting to rip it off of her damn face.

I clenched the knife in my hand, turning my knuckles white.

Not only was she going to go after the father of my child, Micah was in love with Emery. So in love he couldn’t take her rejection and went away. The second hurt more than I thought I could hurt.

He loved her. He loved Emery. I mean, what wasn't to love. She was absolutely beautiful and had everything going for her. My guess was that they grew up together, so there was a lot of history there.

And for Emery to choose someone else to be with and not him, it had to hurt him. To be in love with someone wasn't something one let go of easily. He still loved her if the look on his face when he saw her earlier had anything to go by.

He was never mine in the first place. We had one night and made a kid. That was all there was. He belonged to her.

"Shut the fuck up," Princess growled, setting down the knife, which I thought was a good idea by how pissed she was. Princess stormed out the door, grabbed Spice by the arm, and dragged her away.

I never thought I was a violent person, but one punch didn't mean I was a horrible person, did it? Hell, this place was rubbing off on me.

"Ignore her," Austyn said, coming to stand next to Carsyn and me.

"Who exactly is she?"

Carsyn huffed, "A club momma. They hang around here for the single guys, but that doesn't mean they don't try for the ones who are taken too."

Austyn explained the concept of club mommas to me around the third or fourth time of me hanging out here with them. These were women who provided sex or whatever else one of the guys needed and in return they got protection from the outside world from the club. At times there were one or two I'd met. For the most part they seemed fine. This was the first actual run-in I'd had with one, and she was a bitch.

And I could've skipped ever meeting the woman.

"So Micah is in love with Emery?" I asked, wanting to be off the topic of club mommas because the thought of Spice fucking Micah was going to have my head exploding.

Austyn's face softened from the Spice conversation, and I didn't take that as a good sign. "That was a long time ago, and tons has changed since then. Micah's not the same scared, cocky as fuck kid he was when he left."

"That's true. I've heard some good things so far. Nox still wants to beat the shit out of him, but he says the time's over for that," Carsyn put in.

"I saw them outside hugging. Micah and Emery, I mean," I announced, feeling the words rush out from between my lips.

"They've known each other since they were kids, Ensley, and her house is gone. She's my best friend. I know she was grateful Micah was able to get to me."

My head shook. "I know... I just..." I couldn't finish the sentence, feeling like a petulant child not getting what she wanted and what wasn't hers in the first damn place.

"Emery is one hundred percent in love with Jacks. They've been married for two years, and nothing and no one will come between them," Carsyn said, and it made me gasp as all these thoughts started clouding around me.

Therefore my mouth went for a run. "You think Micah is so in love with Emery that he'll try to split Emery and Jacks up?"

Austyn burst out laughing, but I didn't find anything funny with the conversation whatsoever. I felt as though I couldn't breathe, as if there was a rope around my neck pulling tighter and tighter.

"Lord no, Ens. Don't take what Carsyn said like that. It wasn't the intent to make you think that Micah would do that. You'd be best to focus on the way he looks at you instead."

"Huh?" He didn't look at me like anything. "I'm his kid's mom. That's it."

Austyn chuckled again. "You're in for a wild ride."

"What does that mean?"

Austyn came to stand in front of me, putting her hands on my shoulders. "Eyes open, Ensley. Instead of focusing on how

others interact with him, focus on how he interacts with you. That's the Ravage man way. Take it from us—it's not about anyone else with these men. Their focus becomes laser sharp. You blink, and you may miss it."

I bit my lip feeling ten times more insecure, which I didn't like.

"Mommmeeee," Remy cried, coming through the door and jumping up in my arms. She had ice cream all over her face and hands. She put her hand in my hair, adding the ice cream to it. Gotta love having a kid. Yeah. I did.

"Looks like you had fun."

Blaze came storming in. "Damn, she's fast."

I smiled. "Yeah, she is. Thanks for that." I motioned to my hair, teasing her.

"Just save it for later."

I burst out laughing.

"Let's get you cleaned up." Hopefully cleaning my little girl would get my mind off of Micah and the women in his life. Lord, watch over me and not make me want to hurt a club momma who can't keep her hands to herself.

This was going to be a long couple of days.

MICAH

“FUCK. WE GOT NOTHIN’. PRINCESS JUST TEXTED, AND THE grub is up. Let’s take a break and eat,” Cruz announced to the room. The morale was so far in the shitter, it may just die there at this rate.

Nothing. Been at this all day, and no matches on the person’s face. No information on the specifics of the bomb. No answered questions led to a bunch of pissed off men, but who could blame them. We were not the type of men to sit on our hands and be patient. We wanted action.

The tension in the space kept growing, and Ryker smashed his hand through one of the television screens in anger and frustration.

The men we were, we wanted to get to the bottom of this. To have some assholes overpower and outsmart us at every turn kept the room at a high simmer. Anything could set the men off.

Fuck, someone could drop something on the floor, and the fucking place would erupt.

We were all feeling the unease and helplessness in protecting our people.

It hadn’t been a productive few hours. I tried everything I could think of to get some kind of ID or info. Every turn I made, the information wasn’t there. Ryker wasn’t the only one pissed off.

All any of us wanted was to catch these fuckers and make them pay, and each second that ticked by only added to the tension.

There were only a few things I could think of to possibly help here, and I was running out of options. “Cruz,” I called out, and the man’s eyes came to mine as he lifted his chin in acknowledgment. “Two things. One, I think we should try to get to that car and pull off prints if we can.”

“It’s in the police impound lot,” he replied.

I shrugged. “Give me the okay, and I’ll get it done.”

“You that confident?” Cruz’s brow quirked in challenge.

“I’m confident there’s a job that needs to be done by whatever means necessary. I’ve lived through many missions just like that. Not bein’ a smartass here. Just statin’ facts.”

Cruz nodded. “Alright. What’s next?”

“My buddy Dryerson. He’s here at the clubhouse. We are Marines, and his specialty is enemy targets. You don’t want him involved. I totally get it. But he would be a good asset to this.”

“Right now, it stays between us. I’ll meet this kid, but I’m not makin’ any promises.”

“Understood.” Cruz shook his head like he was having a hard time believing something, but I kept quiet.

“Right. Let’s eat. Then you, Jacks, and Nox will go get the prints,” Cruz ordered.

“Fuck no,” Jacks barked, standing up from the keyboard and coming our way. “I don’t wanna work with that fucker.”

Cruz was setting us up. Literally to see if we could hack it together on a job, and Nox was supposed to be the referee if needed. Lovely. It sucked because Jacks would give me shit the entire time, but it was what it was. If I wanted in Ravage, he was going to be my biggest hurdle.

“You wanna find out who bombed your house?” Cruz challenged.

“That doesn’t mean I want to spend time with him.” Jacks angled his thumb to me. “My gun is liable to go off, and he won’t be back.”

Threats were threats. If he really wanted to take me out and put me six feet under, he could find a way. He knew my family. Some of my past. Knew I loved my mother. Knew I’d lay down my life for my little girl and her momma. He also had access to me from every angle.

If he pulled out a gun now, he could kill me. Not that I’d let him. Disarming him would be a given, but I truly didn’t want to hurt the man. However, I would defend myself.

Nox came up behind Jacks and put his hand on Jacks’ shoulder, giving it a squeeze. “I’ll help ya hide the body.”

Several chuckles went through the room.

“Enough,” Cruz ordered loudly. It was his father tone he didn’t pull out very often, but when he did everyone listened. “Micah’s paid for what he’s done to the club. That is not an issue anymore. As far as Emery is concerned...” He stared at me pointedly. “You totally over her?”

Without missing a beat, I answered, “Yep. Have been for a few years now.”

“You gonna do anything stupid and be an ass around her?” He asked to more chuckles around.

“No, sir. Can’t really guarantee doin’ anything stupid, but I have enough shit on my plate right now that it could tip. Remy, Ensley, and this club are my priorities. Does that mean if Emery’s in trouble I won’t help her? Fuck no. Anyone here that would be in trouble, and I’d be there. Doesn’t mean I want anything more from the woman.”

Jacks didn’t say a word but checked my shoulder with his as he walked by. It wasn’t much, but it was something. Shoulder instead of a fist, it was slight progress.

“Good luck with that one.” Cruz walked through the room and out the door. Brothers followed behind him, but my father waited for me.

“Prospect, huh?”

I smiled as we began to move. “What’cha think about that one?”

“Fuckin’ happy. Proud. All that.”

“It was meant to be this way. Whether I get in or not is another story, but I’ll do my bit to show I want to be here. That’s all I can do right now.”

“You got this, Micah. I have all the confidence in the world you can hack this.”

“Thanks, old man.”

His arm went around my shoulder, giving it a squeeze before letting go.

“Need to find my girls,” I told him and started to move through the door, leading us to the courtyard.

“*Your* girls, huh?”

I turned to him. “Damn right. My girls.”

“Sounds good to me. I’m comin’ to see my grandbaby.”

“Dad...” I warned.

“I know. Not tellin’ the kiddo yet. But ya gotta speed that shit up. Around here information flies about something as big as this.”

“I’ll talk to Ensley.”

“Good.”

We walked through the door, the sun almost blinding us for a moment. Damn, down there was dark compared to the beautiful light above.

After blinking a few times, I scanned my eyes and landed on Ensley setting down what looked like a huge salad in a bowl bigger than her. She darted back into the clubhouse only to come out a few minutes later with every type of dressing known to man stacked in her arms. One misstep and it’d all fall down.

She set each bottle down without a single one falling to the ground until a little body rammed into her from the side. Ensley had to juggle but was able to keep the bottles from falling. The woman was good. Damn she was beautiful, and the way she smiled down at our little girl made her even more so.

Remy. My Remy looked up at her mother with unconditional love. The way she smiled at her had my heart pounding. That right there was what I hoped to have one day with Remy. Hope that she'd see me as someone she could depend on. One that she could trust. One that she could love just as much as I loved her. One she could count on for anything and everything.

Remy's head turned, and I saw the instant she saw me because her face lit up, beautiful brown eyes wide, and her small little mouth falling open. She detached herself from her momma and came around the tables, barreling in my direction.

Bending down on one knee, she jumped into my arms and wrapped her little ones around my neck. "Mikeeeee!" she yelled, putting her little face in my neck.

"It's like she already knows," my father said, coming up beside me, and I agreed. Somewhere inside my little girl, she knew. She may not understand it, but one day she would. One day I'd remind her of this time. That was another thing about being a parent. Memories. They were so damn important to carry with you.

"Hey, bug, do you know my dad?"

Remy's little head came up as she looked at my father. "Dats thhhhuu...." The amount of spit used to make that sound was crazy and funny. It being all over the side of my face, not so much.

"Yep. That's me. How are ya?" My father's finger lightly traced the little hand still clutched to me. It was reverent, and I hated that he'd missed out on her earlier years. Hell, I hated it that I did.

"Me elp cooookkkkkk!"

“Did you help cook?” I asked her while she nodded her head, her little thumb going into her mouth.

Was it normal for a two-and-a-half-year-old to suck on their thumb? As smart as I was in the tech world, in kid world, I needed a lot of help. Maybe audiobooks or something. They had to have Parents for Dummies, right? They had that book for everything else.

“Come and get it!” Princess yelled, and everyone swarmed to the four tables set up under the pavilion next to the clubhouse entrance. It would be a while before we got up there.

“Eat. Mes hungee,” Remy told me, pointing to the tables.

“Yep. We gotta wait for the line to calm down just a bit.”

Remy’s little lip quivered like she was going to cry. Oh no. No crying. It was one of those moments that I wanted to hold her at a distance from me and hand her off to someone who could handle kids crying. Not that I would, but that was how indecision plagued me.

“Um...” My father laughed, moving away from us. He had the right idea. Abort!

Remy started crying, full-out tears running down her face, and I stood there momentarily, not knowing what to do. Bouncing her didn’t help. Telling her to shhhhh did nothing. What did someone do to stop a little girl from crying?

“Here,” Ensley said at my side. She had a tray in her hand, and I blew out a sigh of relief. Food. “Come on.” Ensley led us over to a picnic table that was empty. In about five minutes all of the tables would be completely filled as more and more people arrived.

Ensley set the tray down, and miraculously Remy’s tears dried up as we sat on the bench, Remy on my knee.

On the tray were three bowls, two filled to the brim and one with only a few pieces in it. There were pieces of cornbread cut into rectangles and what looked like baked apples. My stomach growled at that moment. Remy was right. Eating sounded like a great idea.

“For me?” I asked with a brow raised to Ensley.

“Hell no. It’s all mine. I just got one extra because I love food.”

It took me a few beats to catch on, and once I did, I laughed. We really didn’t know each other that well, and picking up her sarcastic tendencies, I found that I liked them. Liked them a lot.

Ensley passed out the food, giving me a bowl as well.

“Holy shit, what happened to your face?” She cried out a bit loud as all eyes came our way. It took me a beat to know what she was talking about. Then it dawned. The punch to the face. Yeah, it had time to bruise up good, considering I didn’t put ice on it. That was a stupid move.

“He ran into Jacks’ fist,” Deke answered helpfully, walking past us to the line of food.

“Why would he...” Ensley asked and then trailed off. She knew. She knew about my past with Emery. Or, at least, she knew some of it. The image of her face on the camera was seared into my memory.

Better to nip this shit in the bud now. I didn’t want Emery, and Ensley needed to know that.

“Babe,” I called to Ensley and waited for her to make eye contact with me from across the table. It took her a few beats before she did. “Emery and I have a past that one day I’ll tell ya all about. What came out of everything was a good friendship. Nothing more.”

“Not sure Jacks thinks that way,” she grumbled low.

“He’s a man, Ens. We handle shit our own ways.”

Ensley was hesitant for a beat before asking. “You don’t want to be with Emery?”

With Remy on my left, I reached out my right hand to her. When she didn’t take it, I reached over and grabbed it myself. “We have a lot to talk about, Ens. Once we get this shit settled, we will talk. Just know, I only have three girls here.”

I felt Ensley stiffen through her hand link. She didn't get it.

“Remy, you, and my mom. Those are my girls. Those are who are number one on my list. Know that, Ens. This situation is fucked up, but we'll get through it and come out better on the other side.”

Ensley sat there for the longest time, then she pulled away and reached for her spoon. “It'll get cold. I broke up Remy's so the meat wasn't too big.”

“You do realize I know nothing about children, and you're gonna have to teach me as we make this journey.” I told her, watching Remy pick up her spoon and put it in the stew. She had trouble getting the carrot on the utensil, so I helped her, and she smiled up at me chomping on her carrot.

“It's hard, Micah. Half the time, I don't know what I'm doin' at all. The main thing I've learned is to always listen to your gut. With kids you have so many different paths that they could follow down, and your job is to guide them. To do that, you follow your gut. It's like something inside of you says, don't let her play on the monkey bars today, and you're thinkin' what the hell was that. Listen to it. It could be that if she gets on those bars, she'll break her arm.”

“No broken bones,” I ordered Remy, and Ensley burst out laughing with Remy on her heels. “I'm not kidding. My heart wouldn't be able to take it.”

Just the thought of seeing my baby with a cast on her arm, or worse—going into surgery. Yeah. I was too new to all of this.

“We'll do our best. As much as I'd love for there to be an instruction manual, there isn't, and no you can't count Parenting for Dummies.”

The bite I'd just put into my mouth came out and fell back into my bowl. I shielded Remy from any splatter as I burst out laughing. “You do know that was gonna be the first book I bought when I got to a store.”

She finished chewing and swallowed. “Let me save you some time. Use common sense. Bam.” Her hands came out,

and she moved her fingers like they were bursting. “See, I should be the one making the millions instead.”

Laughter. It felt so damn good to laugh. What was even better was the natural way Ensley and I did it. It wasn't forced. It was meant to be.

Commotion happened behind us, and I turned to see Booker facedown on the ground and Rhys standing over him. Mazie was there too, and she was dressed in something I'd never let Remy wear. She was looking down at Booker and smiling.

“And you get your ass inside that building and cover yourself,” Rhys ordered, pointing in the direction of the clubhouse. Mazie's smile fled from her face.

“Dad!” she tried, and Rhys got right up in her face, finger pointed out.

“You do not wear this shit. Get changed, and you bring it to me,” he growled.

“What are you gonna....” Her words cut off, and as angry as the man looked, she'd be better off running to the clubhouse.

“Burn them. Go!”

Mazie scurried off, finally coming to her senses.

Rhys looked down at Booker. “She's playin' your ass like a fiddle.” He chuckled and walked away from Booker who lay on the ground.

Welcome home.

ENSLEY

EASY. THAT WAS WHAT I'D DESCRIBE SITTING, TALKING, AND eating with Micah was like. The conversation flowed, and he got my sarcastic nature. At times it took him a moment to understand me, then after that everything came so naturally. We were falling into this oddly comfortable way with each other.

The deal with Emery was still there, and even though he'd said that he didn't want to be with her, that still didn't give me any rights to the man.

I'd never been a jealous woman. Our upbringing didn't allow that emotion. We were forced to get along with one another. If you were married and had sister wives, you never, not ever said anything about how much time the husband had spent with each of the wives. He decided who he slept with. He decided if he'd grace your bed.

If he didn't want to, you couldn't say anything.

Therefore, my jealousy at seeing Emery and Micah was new, and I didn't like it.

This jealousy needed to end. It was killing me on the inside.

But this entire time right here, I could have over and over in my life and never get tired of it. Ever. It would be the perfect life I never knew I wanted.

He might say he was clueless when it came to kids, but he had no idea how good he was with Remy. Gentle and so

patient. Just in the span of the time we'd sat here, he'd taken the time to show Remy how to cut up her carrot and get it into her mouth.

Me, I babied her and knew it. But Micah seemed to be teaching her how to do things on her own. I wasn't ready for that, but it would make me a very selfish person if I didn't want what was best for my little girl.

Remy. The way she looked at Micah was like she knew he was hers. She'd gazed at him like he'd hung the moon and stars in the sky. She clung to him, feeling so safe in his arms, something I'd always wanted for her. Not that she didn't in mine. It was that she had someone else to put that shroud around her.

It was beauty at its finest.

I hoped down to my soul that no matter what happened between Micah and me, he'd always be there for Remy.

She giggled, pulling me out of my thoughts. I looked up, across the table at Micah and Remy and burst out laughing, unable to stop myself. Micah had a large pile of lettuce on top of his head, some of the pieces falling down around him and onto Remy. Remy thought it was a hoot, picking up the pieces that fell and putting them back on her dad's head.

"Oh my god! I'm so sorry!!" Katie cried, putting her food down on the table, grabbing the fallen bowl from the ground, and picking the greens off of Micah's head.

"You could've just brought me one. I didn't need to wear it," Micah told her, grabbing the lettuce and helping Katie.

Katie was hastily getting all the leaves, cabbage, and sticks of carrots off of Micah's head. Remy found a small carrot and put it in her mouth, crunching away.

"Good job," Dryerson chuckled, coming next to me and sitting. "Too bad it didn't have dressing on it."

"Shut up." Micah's joking tone had me knowing he wasn't mad. Thank goodness. We had enough people being pissed for the time being. Easy. Laidback. That was how it felt being with Micah.

“Yeah, shut it.” Katie snipped back at Dryerson. “You seriously have to walk so damn close to me? What is your problem?” She put the final pieces of the salad in the bowl and sat next to Micah in a huff.

“Looks like there’s trouble in paradise,” Micah clipped, winking at me, and I laughed. Yes, he definitely got my sense of humor.

“You shut it too,” Katie ordered, her focus coming to me. She sat across from me next to Micah. It was the perfect place to give me shit. “Seriously. If you leave me with him as my shadow, I’m hopping in my damn car and taking my chances at the apartment.”

I rolled my eyes. “Stop being so dramatic. Throw the dude a bone so he’ll back off.”

“Did you just call me dude?” Dryerson asked me, brows raised in puzzlement.

I shrugged. “Yep. Dude. You look like a surfer dude. Be lucky I didn’t name you surfer. What kind of name is that?”

Dryerson ran his hands through his shaggy length hair. “Not everyone can look this damn good.”

“How is it your hair is long, and Micah’s over here is so damn short I can see his scalp on the sides?” Katie asked him.

Dryerson had to make a big show of it, putting his hand on his heart like this was his very joy in life. “You talked to me!” It was Katie’s turn to roll her eyes, and I jabbed Dryerson in the side. The idiot was ruining this moment. Katie was giving him a damn olive branch, and he needed to take ahold of it. “Ouch.” He looked to me but kept talking. “After I got out, I didn’t cut it.”

“Well, that’s a given,” I replied. “But if you two got out at the same time, would you have time to let it get that long?”

“I was out about a month earlier than Tugger here, and I was over the short cut.” Dryerson picked up his fork and started eating. Was he dismissing us? I thought he was. Looking over to Katie, I gave her a short shake of the head,

telling her to let it go. Something was there, but it wasn't our place to know.

Neither of us could pretend to know the first thing about being in the Marines or any service branch. No one in our family was allowed to enlist because they were set to work to earn money for the family. Considering how many of us there were, we worked a lot.

"Hey there. Come see me." Katie held out her arms to Remy, but Remy didn't move. Instead, she burrowed herself into Micah's chest. I couldn't help but remember what it felt like to be in his arms. "Damn," was the only word from Katie's lips as she started to eat her food. I hoped she didn't feel that Micah was trying to replace her. No one could do what Aunt Katie had done for our little girl. If she wanted to talk about it, she'd come to me.

"What's on the agenda for tonight?" Katie asked.

"You're going to help us clean up this mess and do the dishes. After that, I have no idea," I answered, shoveling the stew in my mouth. It was damn good.

"I've got some shit to do for a while, but I'll be back," Micah said then shoved the rest of his stew in his mouth and started chewing.

"Where are you going?" I asked, tilting my head. "Wait. You have leather on. Are you in the club now?"

How I hadn't noticed it earlier, I had no clue. But he had on a black leather vest like all the other brothers wore. His didn't have any patches on it, though. Just plain black.

When Ryker and Austyn brought me here, they gave me a Bikers 101 crash course, but it was more in etiquette than the patches they wore on their cuts. Or so I'd heard them called.

"Prospecting," Micah replied, eyes penetrating me down to my soul. "I have club shit to do, but I won't be gone long."

"You need help?" Dryerson asked.

Micah shook his head. "Nah, man. Goin' with Jacks and Nox. It's club shit."

“Guess you three ladies get to entertain me tonight,” Dryerson declared just as Spice sauntered up to our table. When I say sauntered, I mean shaking her hips side to side, one-heeled sandal in front of the other. Did she have some kind of dick radar or something? My anger boiled. This was one too many times with Spice.

It was then her entire wardrobe hit me hard. Not only were her tits falling out of her barely there shirt, it was cut showing a good amount of skin at the cleavage and midriff. The skirt though... There was no way she could bend down in it and not give everyone around her a show. It was so short, the jean pockets were hanging down—far.

This wasn't going to be good. Down to my bones I could feel it. I already had a deep dislike for this woman, and this wasn't helping.

“Well, hey there, handsome. This your little girl?” Spice asked, sitting very close to Micah and Remy on the bench.

My teeth grinded. No. Just fucking no. She needed to keep her greedy little eyes off Micah and Remy.

“What do ya need?” Micah asked, knowing we hadn't told Remy yet, ignoring her question.

“Some lovin’,” Dryerson said, smiling. I couldn't tell if he was serious or joking. His face was a blank mask of the smile.

Spice looked Dryerson up and down. “No leather. Sorry. I don't get any lovin' from anyone not wearing leather.”

This comment had me thinking. Earlier she said in the kitchen that she wanted to get with Micah, but he didn't have leather then. It only confirmed that she was full of shit.

Spice lifted her hand and ran a finger over Remy's forearm, and I lost my shit. Full out tiger or momma bear or who the fuck ever took over my body, and I became someone I didn't know I could be. I didn't know what came over me, I just felt this need to protect and followed that feeling.

Jumping up from my spot, I marched my ass to the other side of the picnic table and grabbed Spice's hand, pulling it away from my little girl.

“What the fuck?” Spice cried as she pushed herself up, eyes full of fury.

“There is no what the fuck. You do not touch my child. End of discussion.”

“I wasn’t hurtin’ her,” she countered, crossing her arms over her chest and pushing her boobs practically out of her top. One millimeter and we were all seeing nipples. No thank you.

“I don’t give a shit if you were giving her a million dollars. I don’t know you. Therefore, you do not touch my child.”

“You don’t have to be such a bitch. I just wanted to talk to Micah.” I’d figured as much, and it was right there on the tip of my tongue. So close to the surface it wanted to be let loose and out there into the world. *He’s mine. Keep your fucking hands and eyes off of him.* But I held it in, barely.

He wasn’t mine to claim, and it certainly wasn’t my place to tell him who he could or couldn’t be with. If he wanted this, whatever she was, there was nothing I could do about it. It killed thinking that fact, but it didn’t change it, and I needed to get it through my thick skull.

I felt heat at my back, and as I inhaled, I knew it was Micah, but I kept my focus on Spice.

“Well, he’s behind me. Talk.”

Spice smiled coyly. “I don’t want to talk.”

I looked up to the Heavens. The woman just said she wanted to talk to the man, and now she wanted to fuck him. Big surprise there.

With nothing left to do or say, I turned around and held out my hands to Remy who had her head laying on her father’s shoulders. I didn’t want to look at Micah. I didn’t want to see him looking at Spice. She was a sure thing after all. And I had to share a room, a bed with this man.

The thought of him being with Spice and then coming to bed with me made me want to throw up. I could actually feel

the fantastic beef stew starting to come up, and it took effort to swallow it down.

This couldn't be happening. I'd need to find Blaze and get Remy out of there, away from that mess. There was already too much shit going on in my life. I sure as hell didn't want to add more to it.

A nightmare. That was what I was living.

Remy didn't come to me, and the feeling of defeat hit me hard. My own kid didn't want to be with me. Inside my gut twisted as all the feelings throughout this entire situation came over me hitting every nerve ending.

Part of me wanted to scream. Part of me wanted to cry. Part of me wanted to fight. Part of me wanted to find a dark place, curl up in a ball, and get away from all the craziness that was my life.

Neither of these were options for me.

"Ens," Micah called to me, and I didn't want to look at him. Spice was still talking, but I zoned her out. I didn't want to see something in his eyes that would kill me, so I shook my head.

His hand came to my chin and physically lifted it. Since it was completely childish for me to keep my eyes closed like I really wanted to do, I met his gaze.

Micah's hand went to the back of my neck as he pulled me to him. His head lowered and then his lips were on mine. They were hot and powerful. I tried to stay strong and hold my ground, but the way his lips worked did me in.

Soon he'd be able to pick me up off the ground because we both got lost in the kiss. Micah could kiss. How much practice he had, I'd never want to know, but he'd learned a lot over the years. It was like taking me to another world because everything and everyone melted away.

Sounds came from all around us, but it was the little mouth that came to the sides of our joined lips that stopped us. Only then did I see Spice walking away. She was mumbling something, but I couldn't hear it clearly. *Bitch.*

Remy wanted to be included in the kiss, which was awkward, but then not. It was then we pulled away from each other, Remy starting to laugh.

All I could do was look into Micah's chocolate eyes and wonder what danced behind them because after that kiss, I needed to know.

He said he was mine, but I needed to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was telling the truth.

Because if he wasn't, I was going down in flames.

MICAH

“WHY THE FUCK ARE WE OUT HERE?” JACKS GRUMBLED AS WE stopped on the side of the road about three blocks from the impound lot. All we needed from this vehicle was the damn prints if there were any.

We needed eyes, though.

Not answering him, I got out and opened up the trunk, making sure to shut off the interior lights. My computers had a dark screen on them that wouldn't show up in the night.

Tapping into the police cameras at the impound lot was seriously easier than it should've been. A good thing for me to remember. Hopefully I'd never need that skill again, but who the hell knew when Ravage was concerned.

“Alright, Mr. Robot. What the fuck you got?” Jacks jabbed, and Nox chuckled. This was going to be a long night if this what I had in store for me.

“Do you want to alert everyone that we're fuckin' here?” I said back to him, scanning the lot to find the damn car. It was a black Impala, so it shouldn't be that hard to find. Said no one ever.

“Dick. Figure it out,” Jacks ordered.

Ignoring him, my heart dropped when the car appeared on the screen. “Fuck,” I growled low.

“What?” Nox asked as I pointed to the screen to show them what we were up against.

“Back lot, behind the main lot’s fence.”

“Shit. We gotta get through two,” Jacks observed.

This wouldn’t be easy. My mind raced with how we could get this done without getting caught. Spending the night in jail wasn’t the plan for me tonight. I had a beautiful woman and my kid to get to. Staying with these two in a cell wasn’t on the menu.

Pulling up all angles of the lots, the front of the lot had an armed officer who upon zooming in looked like he was watching *Wheel of Fortune*. To each their own. It also meant he wasn’t paying attention to things around him. That would be on our side at least.

“Cop here distracted with the TV. Don’t see anyone else. You?”

Nox answered, “One patrolling the back.” I looked at what he saw on the screen. The man was smoking a cigarette and looking at something on his phone.

I pulled out the small box from underneath the seat and opened it up, pulling out a bottle and a syringe.

“What the fuck, man?” Jacks accused.

“It’s ketamine. It’ll knock the guy in the back out for about an hour. He’ll wake up and be none the wiser.”

“How the fuck we gonna do that so he doesn’t see us?” Jacks had a serious stick up his ass.

“I’ll come up behind him and put the puncture to the back of his head. He’ll never see the pin prick when he wakes and won’t know what the hell happened.”

“Jesus. Who the fuck are you?” Jacks asked. While I wanted to smirk, there wasn’t time for that shit. We had a short window for this mission, and we couldn’t fuck it up.

“A man who knows how to get shit done in the shortest amount of time. You good?”

Jacks said nothing.

“And the TV guy?” Nox asked, surprisingly not questioning my use of the drug.

Pointing to the screen and enlarging the images, I told them, “One of you’ll need to come around the west side. It’s his blind spot. All you’ll have to do is reach through that small window, put the needle in back of the neck, and he’ll be asleep before you get to us in the back.”

“This shit won’t work,” Jacks chastised. “What if they don’t report in? Or say shit about bein’ knocked out. What the fuck then?”

“We worry about that shit after we get what we need. I’m gonna set the cameras on a continuous loop until we get done. It won’t alert anyone, and it’ll show the feed still going. We can go in and get out without anyone the wiser.”

They did not appear convinced one little bit.

“So this shit will for sure knock them out?” Jacks asked, looking to Nox for answers.

“Fuck if I know. Hittin’ the butt of my gun on his head would do the same thing,” Nox answered as if I weren’t standing right here.

Patience. I needed it at the moment. “You hit him with your gun, they have proof that someone was there because it will leave marks. We give them the tranquilizer, and when they wake up they’ll think that they fell asleep. Then they won’t question it. Done. Mess cleaned up.”

“This shit won’t show up in their system?” Jacks challenged once again. I’d be proving myself a lot to this man.

“Yeah. But seriously. Neither one of them will want the other to know they fell asleep. They won’t talk, and they won’t have reason to be tested. The shit will be out of their system in a few hours.”

“This goes to shit, it’s on you,” Jacks growled low.

“It’ll fuckin’ work. Trust me.”

“You see.” Jacks took a step closer to me, our eyes connecting. “I don’t trust you. Don’t think I’ll ever will trust

you.”

“Then that’s on you. You wanna do this or not? Not, we’ll leave. You wanna do it, let’s get this shit done.” It was my turn to throw down the gauntlet. I was only a prospect, therefore if they said no, we’d go. I wouldn’t fucking like it and might have to bring Dryerson back to get the job done later, but I’d find out who was in that fucking car.

Nox and Jacks exchanged looks. “Let’s do this shit and get back.”

At least that battle was over. I pulled out the small vials, calculated the correct dosage, and filled each of the syringes.

“You’ve done this before, I see,” Jacks said, arms across his chest.

“One learns a bunch of shit they never thought they’d use again.”

“How did you get this shit?” Nox asked.

“My stash,” was all I responded. The less they knew about that the better. If they were ever questioned, they’d have no idea. It would keep them clean.

“Whatever. You ready?” Jacks said, holding out his hand for the syringe.

Interesting. I thought Nox would take it and Jacks would come with me, if nothing else but to give me shit. Maybe I was getting somewhere. If we weren’t in this situation, I’d probably laugh at that thought.

“Aim for the back of the neck.”

“Why?” Jacks asked.

“Because when they look in the mirror, they won’t think to look there. They’ll search the front and sides of their neck, but not their backs. People only believe what they see.”

Jacks lifted his chin as I started the cameras on a loop. “We have about thirty minutes. You all know the plan?” That probably should’ve been the question I’d asked before we even left the clubhouse. It was too fucking late now.

“Yeah.” They both flipped me off. Guess that was their way of telling me yes. Good.

“Hop in, Nox. We’ll pull around to the back about a block down. Jacks, you’re up here. Ready.”

We took off, and I parked the SUV down a side street. While I wanted to check the computer once more, there wasn’t any time. The clock was ticking.

Holding the syringe in my hand, Nox walked in front of me, gun at the ready, but also had the fingerprint kit. My weapon was strapped to my side, but I needed my hands for the shot and to hold the guy up until I got him down slowly.

We wouldn’t know if Jacks had his end taken care of until we saw him.

Here went nothing and everything.

The cop was inhaling his smoke, savoring it, then blowing it out. It reminded me of my dependence of those things. It also brought up the fire and the smoke inhalation. Would those two things be forever connected in my mind? If so, quitting should be a lot easier now.

Today it was easier to breathe, but the tightness was still there along with the coughing. Not to mention my damn arm, but I stayed focused on the task at hand.

We stood in the shadows as the cop walked back and forth at the gate, not paying attention to his surroundings. Once he turned his back, I gave a sign to Nox. His gun was still up as I looked once more, seeing him still in the same spot.

Blowing out a deep breath, I moved on quiet feet right behind the man, stuck the needle in his neck, and released the meds.

Instantly, the cop started to fall. I was able to catch him and lay him down gently.

“Let’s lean him up against the gate,” Nox suggested, and I nodded.

Nox picked up the man’s legs, and I carried his torso. We propped him up, and it really did look like he was taking a

nap.

Taking the lead, we made our way through the gate and into the lot. Weaving in and out of cars wasn't helping. On the screen they looked a little further apart, but the cops sure liked to pack them in.

There didn't appear to be anyone around. All was silent. The only thing that could give us away were if anyone saw us under the lights. I hoped like hell that shit didn't happen.

Making it to the Impala, Nox and I bent down at the trunk and grabbed the kit Nox had brought in. Opening it, I pulled out the small flashlights, powder, duster and lift pads, handing Nox a set. He took off around the side of the car.

A shiver went down my spine and senses pricked in awareness. Someone was here. I grabbed my gun and turned around, pointing it right in Jacks' face.

"What are ya gonna do? Shoot me?" Jacks was a cocky motherfucker. I put the gun away, bent down, and gave him a set. With all three of us doing it, it wouldn't take long.

"Move quick. We have twenty-three minutes now," I replied, looking at my watch.

Time was our enemy. Once the minutes were up, the officers could wake up at any time. Some people digested the tranquilizer differently, and since I didn't want to overdose them, I went on the light side just in case.

I wanted to give us enough time to get shit done and get out, but not give them enough tranq to kill the fuckers.

Jacks took it and moved to the driver's side, while Nox worked on the passenger. I started at the trunk. The damn thing had a shit ton of prints, and I started dusting and lifting as fast as possible.

The time flew by, and as I checked my watch, we had three minutes to get out. "Now. Let's go," I said, packing up all the shit and waiting for Jacks and Nox to put theirs in the box too. Judging from the number lifting pads, there were a ton of prints everywhere and not just the back.

There'd be a ton of scanning to do just to run them through the database.

“Move,” Jacks ordered. This time I carried the kit in one hand, gun in the other. Jacks and Nox were ready too. We were bent at the waist, eyes alert, and kept to the shadows. Lights were the enemy in that moment.

We made it outside the gate and stopped dead when we heard voices. *Two of them*, I thought as I listened harder. Nox motioned for us to stand out of view, but we were already on the move.

Looking to the left, the cop was still out, sitting up with his foot propped and back against the gate. The other one was surely out as well. So who the fuck were these two?

We listened.

“Can't believe you let the fuckin' cops get the car, dickhead.” The first voice was deep and had a small scratchiness to it with certain words. Almost like he wanted to roll his 'r's' but couldn't quite commit to it.

“The guy said he'd be by to get it and take it to the crusher. How the fuck would I know he'd bail on us?”

Two flashlights could be seen through the slots of the wooden gate we were hiding behind. With a nod from Nox, I figured I was the one who would be watching them.

The two men wasted no time finding the car. They opened the door and looked around to see if anyone was there. They had to have seen the guy in the front shed asleep because they weren't being quiet. Which was seriously odd. Anyone trying to steal something or do something illegal was always quiet. If not, they were a moron, plain and simple.

“Shut the fuck up,” the first guy spoke as they opened the car door.

“They're throwing something in the car,” I warned the two beside me. “Can't see what, but if these two were the ones who set the...”

There was no finishing that sentence because the car exploded. Sharp lights surrounded us as we threw ourselves to the ground, covering our heads and closing our eyes tight. Parts of cars flew everywhere. A tire landed next to Jacks then rolled down the street.

A rearview mirror came at me, and Nox got the fun of the rats from the yard scurrying to get away from the mess.

Smoke billowed up, reminding me of when Austyn and Emery's homes blew. I could feel my lungs wanting to seize up again, and fighting it was hard. Especially when my ears started ringing, forcing me to remember being in the desert.

Instead, I pushed that down and thought. The thing was, those two idiots didn't set off the bomb because they were in small pieces all over the other cars. They obviously thought they'd be the ones to set it off because of the cavalier way they were throwing the bombs into the car.

They thought they'd have tons of time.

Someone else detonated those when the time was right. Same as Austyn and Emery's places.

"Go!" Nox ordered as we took off like shots, racing down the block to get to the SUV. I wasn't sure how the other two felt, but my ears were ringing like a sonvabitch. We were way too close to that blast, and my ears were feeling the pain.

Jacks stopped and rubbed his eyes. "Fuck. Shake it off and let's go!" I yelled, grabbing Jacks' arm and leading him to the SUV. "Let the adrenaline fuel you, and stop fighting it. Move!"

"Fuck you," Jacks clipped, still rubbing his face, then moving to pop his ears.

Seeing the SUV, I bleeped the locks, and tossed Jacks into the back. Getting in the front, we took off fast, trying to get as far away from the scene as possible.

The place would be a madhouse in the matter of minutes.

What in the fuck had just happened?

MICAH

“TALK,” CRUZ ORDERED, PISSED AS HELL ABOUT THE explosion. Jacks made the call to him on the way back to the clubhouse. He did what I’d said and shook off the effects of the blast. Except for the headaches. That couldn’t be shook off as easily.

Driving in, I saw no sign of Remy or Ensley, but immediately drove down into the bottom of the cave. That was what I’d named it anyway.

We were covered with ash, soot, and debris from top to toe. While we weren’t hurt, my ears were ringing. It would go away soon enough. Being used to it, it was just a way of life.

“Drugged the two cops, went in, got the prints and headed out. Heard two voices,” Jacks relayed what they’d said. “Then shit hit the fan. Those two did not make it, so whoever detonated the bombs didn’t want any witnesses.”

“You didn’t see any cars or who those fuckers were?”

“Nothin’. They must’ve parked on the other side,” Nox responded, crossing his arms over his chest then nodded to me. “He saw ’em.”

I started to relay everything I could remember as Cooper wrote it all down. One guy glasses, goatee, dark brown hair balding with that rimmed around from ear to ear. Black hoodie, jeans, black gloves, carried the boxes. The other was in his forties, dark brown hair, a bit shaggy, dark hoodie and pants. He had a small lip on his left side, and a tattoo of a symbol on the right side of his head.

Grabbing a piece of paper, I drew what I could remember of the ink. Closing my eyes and focusing, the tat came into view clear as day. It was two triangles with an octagon surrounding it. At the very top there was an unusual flag with criss-crossed stripes and a square in the middle. And that was it. It was only maybe the size of a half dollar.

“Please tell me you got fuckin’ prints before all this shit,” GT barked to all three of us.

“Ton of ’em.”

Buzz came up. “Give ’em here. I’ll get Ax and Raid to pull their dicks out of whoever they’re in and get them running on our system.”

Jacks held out the kit, and Buzz took it, turning around and moving to the bank of computers that had a very high-end scanner.

“The good news is they’ll pin it on the two guys there instead of us.”

“Right. That’s the good news,” Nox huffed.

“Think about it. Cops come to, find the two bodies, bam. Done. And we got what we wanted. It was pretty smooth if you ask me,” I reply.

Jacks shoulder checked me as he walked by. “Nobody fuckin’ asked you, prospect.” Then he was gone. Considering he’d acknowledged I was a prospect, I would consider this progress.

“Get cleaned up,” Cruz called on a chuckle as he moved to Buzz.

“You do know you’ll never get in while Jacks is here, right?” GT asked me, a small smirk on his lips. Inside it pissed me off to feel like he was finding the situation with Jacks as a way to keep me out. I’d never let him know it, or anyone for that matter.

“Challenge accepted.” I smiled, turned and made my way above ground, through the door and stared out at the courtyard of the clubhouse. Still my girls weren’t there, but it was late.

Heading back in, I took the stairs two at a time, making it to our floor. Arriving at our door, I turned the handle, but it was locked.

“Shit.” I never got the key from my mom. Or was it a code? Fuck, I didn’t remember. Lightly, I tapped the door, not knowing if Remy was asleep yet. She probably was.

“Who is it?” Ensley asked very quietly, telling me that Remy was asleep.

“Micah.”

The locks instantly disengaged, and the door swung open. Ensley took one look at me, her eyes going as round as saucers as she stood immobile for a moment. Gently, I pressed her stomach, causing her to take a few steps back. Shutting the door and locking it, Ensley still hadn’t said anything.

“I’m okay, Ensley.” While I wanted to wrap her in my arms, I was filthy. It would have to wait until I showered.

“You...” She paused. “Your...” She paused again. “I...”

A smile played at the corner of my lip. “Promise you, I’m fine. Just a little dirt. I’ll jump in the shower and be out quick.”

“Are you sure? How’s your arm?”

To tell you the truth, I’d forgotten about my arm. There were more pressing matters to attend to. Unfortunately, since she’d brought it up, I could feel it. “I’m good, Ens.” I’d looked over to the play pen, seeing Remy fast asleep. It was the first time I was able to stand and watch her sleeping. She looked like an angel hugging on to a blanky and her thumb in her mouth.

So peaceful. So innocent. A clean slate of life to live and grow.

Never thought a tiny human would make me feel so complete.

“She just went out,” Ensley said, pulling me back to her.

“She’s beautiful. You did a great job with her.”

Ensley's cheeks blushed. "Not gonna lie. It's hard as hell."

"Let me shower, and we'll talk."

Ensley nodded as I took off into the bathroom that was attached to the room. Ravage sure as hell thought of everything when they designed these rooms. My bet was the ol' ladies had a lot to do with the design. Lord knows my dad would stay away from it like the plague.

The warm water was nice, but there was no lingering, not with my two girls in the other room. Doing what needed to be done, I got out, toweled off, and wrapped the towel around my waist.

Stepping out of the bathroom, Ensley was sitting on the bed, ankles crossed and back against the wooden headboard. Her head popped up as soon as the door opened, our eyes connecting.

This pulse hit me square in the chest like nothing I'd ever felt before. It was poignant and filled the room, causing the air to throb, almost as if it were a tangible thing one could touch.

Ensley sat up like she felt it too, but she remained on the bed. "Hey." Her voice was almost timid like she didn't know what to expect. Hell, I didn't know what to expect at this point, except that she was absolutely beautiful. Her red hair hung down and gorgeous eyes called to me.

"Hey." I felt the towel start to tent. On a smirk I moved over to my bag and tossed on a pair of shorts, letting the towel fall to the floor. I joined her on the bed, laying on my side and propping my head on my hand.

"You can't tell me what happened, can you?" The resign was plain as day, but I couldn't tell if it was something she could live with or if she was steadfast against it.

"No. You okay with that?"

She inhaled deep then let it out. "I don't like secrets, Micah. Grew up with them all around me, and it was hard knowing when the other shoe would drop. I don't want to live my life walking on eggshells."

I moved wrapping my arms around her waist and pulling her down to lay next to me, but not letting her go. Our faces were only inches apart.

“I understand that. Our lives will not have secrets. You will know exactly how I feel every moment of everyday. But the club stuff I can’t tell you. Just know that everything I do is to protect you, Remy, and this club. I always think about the consequences of my actions before engaging.”

She said nothing but swallowed deep. “Our lives?”

“Yeah. Our lives. You, me, and Remy. The only shit I won’t tell you is club business. Everything else is on the table.”

“We don’t even know each other, Micah.”

“Then we take the time to learn. Day by day. Step by step.”

Tears shimmered in her eyes. “Why the tears?”

“Really, I don’t know. It’s a mix of emotions that I can’t quite put my finger on. It’s like all of this is going so fast, and my head is spinning.”

Reaching up, I cupped her face. “Love how you are with Remy. Admire how you saved our daughter and yourself. Respect how you are with the members of this club. The way you are with your sister is something you should be proud of. What’s more to know? Been through hell and back, babe. I’ve seen war, I’ve seen death in ways that only taught me life is precious and every minute counts. You said trust my instincts with Remy as a dad. Well, I try to trust my instincts in life in general. My instincts say this could be the best thing that’s ever happened for both of us.”

Ensley surprised me by moving in fast and pressing her lips to mine. That was all the invitation I needed as I rolled her onto her back, taking over the kiss and deepening it. Fuck, she tasted good. The memories of our first night together came flooding back, pulling me and driving me to grow the connection between us. To make it solid and unbreakable.

It was true. I didn’t want secrets. I didn’t want anything between the two of us. Nothing. She was mine, and I was hers.

And it wasn't because she was the mother of my child. So much more was there with Ensley. Compassion, fierceness, fire, caring, loving, I could go on and on with all the ways she turned me on.

Pulling away, we peered in each other's eyes, something inside clicking between the both of us. Like the snap of that final puzzle piece you didn't know was missing but found it all the same.

Needing to taste her again, I lowered my lips to her, taking then giving. Her breathing became heavy, and I broke away, looking over at where Remy slept. "Will she wake up?"

"I don't know," she replied breathlessly. "I've never done this with her in the room."

"Is that weird?"

Ensley smiled. "Not if we get under the covers and don't make too much noise."

Quickly we were both under the covers, and Ensley was in my arms. "You think you can be quiet?" I asked her teasingly. The last time we were together she was not quiet one bit.

"Don't know that either. It's been over two and a half years, so I'll probably explode with a touch."

My chest hurt. It was as if someone had wrapped barbed wire around it and squeezed. It was an emotion I hadn't felt before. It was good, yet painful in the same beat. "You haven't been with anyone since me?"

She shook her head. "No. No one."

She really was mine. Since that night, not a single person had touched her.

My cock pressed against my shorts, itching to find its home. Yes. Inside Ensley was its home and where it would be for all the years to come.

"You undo me," I whispered, kissing her hard. We didn't move too much, afraid we'd get wrapped up in the covers and make too much noise, trying to get out.

Ensley's hand came to my cheek as we pulled apart. "I don't want to undo you, Micah. I want to make you whole."

My tightly wound heart exploded, allowing Ensley fully inside where she would stay. "I need to feel the connection between us, Ensley. I can't do everything I want to you right now, but I need to be inside of you."

Ensley reached down, and I could feel her shimmying out of her pajama bottoms. Fuck, this was not the way I wanted our first time to go. I wanted to take my time and discover every inch of her again. It just wasn't possible in our current scenario.

I reached down and tugged off my boxers, my hard cock headed right for Ensley. Condom. I didn't have a fucking condom. "Condom?"

Ensley shook her head. "No, but I'm on the pill."

That was all I needed. Kissing her, I maneuvered my body on top of hers. We gazed into each other's eyes as I slid inside of Ensley. Her warm heat wrapped around me like a glove, and I entered painfully slow, wanting to feel every single inch of her.

She closed her eyes, and I leaned down, connecting our mouths as I drowned out her moans. Making it all the way to the hilt, I stopped, lifted my head, and stared into Ensley's eyes. "This means you're mine. Mine to protect. Mine to care for. Mine to love. Do you understand, Ensley?"

She let out a deep breath. "I think so, but I'm scared."

With my cock hard inside her, I asked, "Why?"

"I don't want to get hurt."

"Can't guarantee I won't be a dick because that's a given. I'm a man. But I will never intentionally hurt you. Ever."

She lifted up and connected our lips, and her hips bucked, telling me she was ready to go. I did not disappoint. I moved in rhythm with her, in and out.

So wet I glided with no effort at all. She wanted me just as much as I wanted her.

Her pussy clenched around mine, my lips covering up her sounds. As much as I wanted to hold back, I couldn't. Not this time. It had been too long since I'd been inside Ensley, and she drove me to the edge.

My come burst from my cock as I felt noises wanting to escape my lips. Ensley took over the kiss, this time keeping me from waking up our daughter.

After I was spent, I rolled us to our sides, my cock still inside her. "Wanna fall asleep like this. Connected."

Tears pricked in her eyes.

"Don't cry." I pulled her to me, her leg still over mine.

In no time, we both fell asleep, and it was the best night of sleep I'd ever had.

ENSLEY

“UP. MOMMMMMEEEE,” REMY WAS CALLING, AND IT TOOK ME A bit to rouse. Micah kept me up late, and being quiet while having sex took a lot out of a person. It was hard enough with just the sex part. My entire body ached in a very good way. Tingles raced over the spots where Micah touched me and made me come alive. The man was magic.

I reached over, feeling an empty bed. My hand felt a piece of paper. Grabbing it, I wiped the sleep from my eyes and sat up. “Hey, baby girl. I’m comin’.”

Tossing my legs over the bed, the paper in my hand, I read it. “With the club. Will be back later. Call me or text me when you get up.”

A smile grew on my face as the feeling from last night came back in a flood. My fears that he didn’t want anything with me were crushed. It was true we didn’t know each other well, but I wanted to. I wanted him to know the both of us. Better yet, he wanted the same thing.

We’d take that time and build something. Hope. It was something I didn’t have a lot of growing up. It kind of died long before I knew I’d miss it. Now, it was back. Hope that we could be a family. Hope that we’d work whatever this was out between us. Hope that we would be happy in our lives.

It also scared the loving shit out of me. Putting yourself out there to someone was hard. The heart was a fragile thing, and pieces of it could get chipped away every day. I was trying hard to keep it in tact, liking all the pieces where they were.

Arms up, Remy was ready to be on the move. Luckily, she couldn't climb out of the contraption. Her little legs were a bit too small to get up and over. It wouldn't be long, though, before she figured out what needed to be done to get out of her trap. Those days would be crazy. "Come here."

She jumped up, and I swung her in my arms. "Did you sleep good?"

Her little head nodded.

"Let's get dressed, find Aunt Katie, and get some food. Sound good?"

Remy's little head fell to my shoulder, her little arms going around my neck. Morning cuddles. This was our thing every morning. Some mornings I was exhausted from working, but that didn't matter. The cuddles first thing in the morning made all the sleepiness disappear.

"Love you, bug."

She snuggled deeper, and I held her tighter. There might be days coming up where she wouldn't do this, and I wanted to suck up every second of it now while I could.

After getting ourselves together, Remy started pounding her little fists on Katie's door. She didn't make much sound, but I helped her.

There was some rustling on the other side of the door and some murmurs. I tried the door handle, but it was locked. Being the nosy sister I was, I pressed my ear to the door.

"Get out!" Katie whisper yelled to someone who was shuffling in the room. Then the outside door to the hallway opened and closed. A few minutes later the inside door swung open, and a very disheveled Katie stood on the other side.

She ran her hands through her hair, and her lips were puffy as if she'd been kissing all night long. Looking to the bed, the covers were mussed to hell, and the pillows were laying on the floor.

"Looks like you had a good night."

"Shut it." She pierced me with a glare.

“Hey, Remy. Good morning.”

Remy ran to her, and Katie picked her up and snuggled with her.

“Do you think you should take a shower before you touch my kid? I mean, whoever was here...”

Katie gave me a scathing look. It made me more curious to know who she’d spent the night with. “Shut it, Ens. It’s too early in the morning.”

“Get ready. We’re gonna go rustle up some food.”

Katie kissed the top of Remy’s head and set her down. “I’ll be over in a minute.”

Testing the waters, I asked, “Should I knock on Dryerson’s door and see if he wants to come?”

Katie’s breath caught, and I burst out laughing. “You didn’t!”

Katie shook her head. “Be there in a minute.” She then shut the door on us as I continued to laugh.

This was an interesting morning. That was for sure.

“Let’s call Micah while we wait.”

“Esssss! Mes talk.” Remy said, jumping up and down and clapping. Yes, she really loved Micah.

I dialed his number and put him on speakerphone.

“Hey,” he answered, and it sounded as if he was on the move. “You sleep good?”

“Mikkkkeeeeee! Hi!” Remy yelled, and Micah’s chuckle could be heard through the line.

“Hey there, nugget. How’s my girls doin’ this morning?” Nugget. He called Remy nugget. Love, love, loved that for her. She had bug from Katie and me. Now nugget for her father. It made me practically giddy.

“Eat! Mes hungeee.” Remy told him.

“Come on down to the clubhouse. Princess and some of the ol’ ladies have a spread goin’ on.”

“Are you down there?” I asked, wanting to see him desperately.

“No, I’m with the guys. I may be around later, though. Just promise me you’ll stay in the clubhouse today. Do not leave for anything.”

Not only did my heart stop for a moment at his adamance, but it also reminded me of something. “We forgot Remy’s favorite book we read before bed. I did my best last night to remember it, but no matter how many times I’d read it, my memorization sucked. I was hoping to get that, her Trolls movie, and her extra blanky.”

“Tell Dryerson what you need, give him the key, and he’ll get it. I’ll text him and tell him.”

While I wanted to say something about him and Katie, little ears were sucking up everything like a sponge. “Okay. How long do you think we’ll be here? I’m off the next two days. I only do three twelves a week, and I can try and change my schedule next.”

“Day by day, babe. Just stick with me day by day.”

A smile came to my lips remembering last night. “Yeah.” It came out breathless, but that was exactly how he made me feel.

“Gotta run. You have fun today. Remy, I heard Chandler is gonna be there in about an hour.”

Remy’s eyes grew big as she started jumping up and down, strange sounds coming out of her mouth. She loved Chandler who was a little over a year or so older than Remy. They played together like they were sisters, and I loved that for my little girl.

“Well, that’ll have her riled up. Thanks for that.”

Micah chuckled. “See you later.”

“Byeeeeee! Mikeeeee,” Remy said, putting her hand over her mouth, pretending to kiss it, then throwing it out to Micah. Damn, I wish he could’ve seen it.

“Later.” The phone disconnected.

It was time to find Katie, give her as much shit as I could, and eat. Hopefully today, nothing would blow up, but the day was just beginning.

MICAH

“YOU GOT ANY OF YOUR FANCY SHIT THAT CAN FIND A match?” Buzz asked as Deke kept going through all of the fingerprints. Ax and Raid spent the night uploading all of the prints, and it literally took them all night to do so.

When I got here at five, they were just finishing up. Buzz and Breaker ran the prints through their system until Deke got here and took over for Breaker. Something about he needed to be with Shaina, his wife.

“I can run them through mine and see. What do you have?”

Buzz started talking to me about the program, and I knew I had one better.

“Let’s use mine.”

Buzz pulled off a flash drive from one of the computers and handed it to me. “Let me know if you get anything.”

It didn’t take too long before I was able to pull seven distinct prints from the samples. I printed off each of their rap sheets with pictures, then handed them over to Buzz.

The brothers were making a plan to narrow down if any of the prints had connections to the club. Since I didn’t know the connections, Jacks was nice enough to have me clean the cave’s bathroom where the toilet, he’d just left, was stopped up and overflowing all over the floor.

All I did was lift my chin and get to work, not flinching at the smell. It was a job that needed to get done, and I did it.

Sure, there were some chuckles, but that was part of this. If I wanted to be a part of this brotherhood, I'd suck it up and do what I was told.

My cell rang as I made my way up the stairs to head out to the courtyard to find Remy and Ensley.

It said *Dryerson calling*. I picked up. "What's goin' on, man?"

"We have a problem. Can you get to Ensley and Katie's place?"

I took the stairs two at a time back down to where my SUV was parked in the cave. I didn't stop to think. I didn't say a word to anyone. Instincts drove me, and this carnal need to protect took over.

"Talk to me," I ordered, making my way to the SUV and opening the door.

"Place is torn up. Just get here."

"Fuck."

"Where are ya goin'?" my father asked as I paused to give him a second, just realizing he had followed me.

"Dryerson went to Ensley's place to get some of Remy's stuff. He just called tellin' me to get there quick."

Dad nodded, swinging up into the truck too. It surprised the shit out of me when the two back doors opened and Jacks and Ryker jumped in without hesitation. I was so caught off guard by Dryerson's situation, I didn't see who was around.

There was no time for questions. I needed to get there and find out what the hell was going on.

Booker raised the door as we made our way to it, and we burst through. I wasn't going to tell Ensley anything until I found out what was going on. My two girls were my priority.

My father rolled down his window, and yelled to my mom, "Be back. Got shit to do."

Glancing over, Ensley's eyes met mine, and I lifted my chin and gave her a small smile. She didn't need to worry. It

wasn't like I was going to keep it from her. We'd already talked about that shit last night, but I would soften the blow for her. That was for damn sure.

We made it to the apartment complex in record time, coming to a halt, and all of us jumped out of the SUV, going to the stairs and taking them two at a time.

Dryerson stood in the doorway, his face stony. The front door was kicked in, falling off the hinges, and I could see how by the piece of shit bolts not doing their job.

"The entire place is fucked up, man," Dryerson said as I moved in first, my father after, then Jacks and Ryker.

"Who the fuck would do this shit?" my father asked.

"Look," Ryker said, pointing to the far living room wall. On it was spray painted, 'Cyrus my virus.' That's what her father called her.

"How the hell did he find her?" I asked Ryker, knowing that he'd got her all new paperwork and away from that mess.

"Who?" my father asked.

"Ensley's father called her Cyrus the virus. How the hell did he find her?"

"Fuck if I know. The fuckin' church people don't like to lose their pussy. More pussy means more kids. More kids meant a higher status in their community," Ryker bit off. "It's all on their path to Heaven."

Dryerson wasn't wrong. The cushions on the couch were sliced with a knife, the stuffing going everywhere. Pictures that were hanging on the walls were now on the ground, the glass shattered into a million pieces. The oldish television looked as though someone had taken a sledgehammer to it.

The small dining table was busted to the floor. In the kitchen, it was more of the same except this time it was food. Remy's sippy cups were scattered on the floor next to the forks and knives.

"Fuck, man," I heard my dad say. He went further into the space that was more than likely Ensley's room.

Moving there, I paused in the doorway, my heart thumping so hard it felt like it was coming out of my chest.

Ensley's bed was completely destroyed, the mattress having springs come out and the blankets in tatters. It didn't appear that Ensley had a lot of things, but Remy sure did.

My blood boiled when I saw Remy's annihilated crib. There was no other word for it. Rage. That was what it looked like. Someone who had a ton of rage inside him and wanted to take it out on my little girl. Fuck that and fuck him.

"Fucking hell," Ryker barked out. "Katie's room's the same. Says 'whore' on its wall too."

Whoever these fuckers were seemed to only know one word.

Remy's toys were thrown around the room. I had no idea if they were broken or not. My guess would be yes at this rate. Both Ensley and Remy's clothes were pulled out of every drawer and off every hanger.

Whore was written on the wall above Ensley's bed.

Red film started to cloud my vision as the rage inside me burned bright. I wanted to hurt someone. Destroy them and annihilate them just like they did to this place. It was their home, and now it was gone.

They were coming to live with me anyway after everything settled down and we could leave the clubhouse. Of course, she didn't know that she was moving in with me yet, but she would.

She really didn't need to see this mess of her apartment, but she'd have to if for some reason the cops showed up.

With long strides, I made my way through the apartment, down the stairs, and to my truck. Dad was on my heels. "Son?"

"Gotta see if this was called into the cops. If it wasn't, then we'll pull out what we can and take it to the clubhouse. I'll pay to get them out of their lease and for the damages."

Making it to my SUV, I opened the back end and got to work. Luckily, there were no calls. With the number of cars here, it was a surprise, but it was one stroke of luck, and at this point I'd take what I could get.

“Do you think you can get the box truck here, and get some of the guys to help pack what's not broken up?” I asked my father who pulled out his phone and began dialing.

Within an hour, half of the Ravage MC were here helping pack up my family.

I knew I needed to talk to Ensley about all of this, but first, I wanted to know she couldn't be touched by any of it.

A lot of Remy's toys were broken, but there were several that were not. Those I packed into a plastic bag to take to the room at the clubhouse. The book Ensley wanted for Remy wasn't damaged, but her blanky had a cut in it. Even if I had to sew the damn thing myself, my girl would have her blanket.

The Trolls movie was snapped in two.

We were able to save the clothes as they weren't cut, just thrown all over the place.

“Micah,” Jacks called out, pulling out a box from under the bed. I moved to it as he handed me the box.

“Thanks.”

Opening it, there were only a few things inside, and strangely nothing was disturbed it appeared. A couple of pictures and what looked like a few mementos from her previous life. Putting the lid back on, I put it in the bag as well. This was all going to the clubhouse for now, along with a couple of books and photos that were scattered on the floor.

There was so much shit going on that I needed my girls to be in one place and not going from here to there trying to find things.

“What the hell?” Nox picked up a box of diapers and lifted them to me. A huge turd that had to have come from a man rested on the top.

“Isn’t that shit-tastic,” Nox said, laughing. “Perfect for a shithead!”

“See, he’s in deep shit,” Jacks teased.

“Brings a new meaning to eat shit and die,” Ryker jumped in.

“Or a shitty present,” my father added.

“Fuck me.” I left the room, my blood boiling. Between someone tearing up Ensley’s place to everyone giving me shit about the shit, it was enough. “Keep it there. I’m gonna get a sample and see if this fucker is in the system.”

“You have a shit identifier?” Nox asked with a raised brow.

“No. DNA. I can pull it and run it.”

I ran out to my truck and then got the sample. The box of ruined diapers was tossed to the side of the room with the garbage. The landlord would be getting a big payout for this mess.

It took a couple of hours, even considering most of it was broken and left there. With the last bag in the truck, I pulled the tailgate down and locked it.

“Thanks, everyone,” I said to the group of men surrounding me. They were under no obligation to help me, yet they came and did it anyway. Now it could’ve been for Ensley’s sake, but so be it. They came, helped, and we got all this shit in record time.

The SUV came to a stop right in front of the apartment office. “Gotta pay this out. Only take a few.”

“You need anything, son?” my father asked as I lifted the console and placed my finger on the lock. It turned yellow and clicked open. Inside I pulled out two stacks of cash each, containing ten thousand dollars. My computer business was very lucrative.

I tucked the cash on the inside of my jeans. “Nah, I’m good.”

“Fuck, how much do ya have in there?” Ryker asked, leaning forward in the seat as I slammed down the console, hearing it click.

“Enough to get by.”

“Right. Twenty grand just in your fuckin’ truck,” Jacks clipped.

“Never know when shit’ll happen.” Swinging out of the SUV, I made my way to the door and through it.

“How may I help you?” The woman sitting at the small desk was filing her nails, but stopped at the sight of me. “I can help you...” she said breathlessly.

“Apartment Seven-o-three. Need to know how much to get them out of their lease.”

Her brow quirked. “You’re cute, honey, and I’m sure I’d know if you lived in seven-o-three.”

“My girlfriend, her sister, and my kid lived there. They’re not comin’ back. Need to know how much to get them out of their lease.”

“You know there’s a clause in the lease that it’s an extra grand just for leaving early.” The woman grabbed a pen, putting the cap in her mouth and trying her damndest to be seductive. Maybe once upon a time, it would get me. Now. Not a fucking chance.

“Don’t care. How much?”

She eyed me for several long minutes, clicked on her computer, and gave me the price. I added on five grand. Pointing to it, I said, “That’s for any damages and for you not to contact the police.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

I set another five grand down. “That’s just for you.”

Her eyes widened at the money.

“All you have to do is make sure it gets cleaned up and no questions are asked. Can you do that?”

Her hand darted out to the money, covering it. “You got it.”

“You see anyone suspicious around there?”

There were no video cameras so I was thinking the answer was no, but it was worth a shot.

“Nope.”

“Thanks.” I turned and left, knowing that my girls would never be returning to this place again. Now, the hard part would be telling Ensley.

Since the box truck already had a jump on us, I jumped in the SUV and headed to the clubhouse.

ENSLEY

A LARGE WHITE BOX TRUCK PULLED INTO THE CLUBHOUSE, moving close to the block building we were staying in. It pulled out about thirty minutes after Micah had left. For some strange reason, I thought it was for him, but I shook my head. My instincts were telling me something wasn't right. Only I couldn't figure the purpose for it out.

They didn't have to be connected. There were so many weird things going on that each item was appearing to get jumbled in my brain.

Remy was over playing with Chandler. Those two were inseparable, and I could hear her laughing from the playground. I loved that for her, having a playmate. It reminded me of when Katie and I were young. Playing with our siblings, but we were also in charge of the younger ones.

Made me wonder if I really had a childhood or was I a mom when I was still a child?

Katie had it worse, being the oldest. She started cooking at age five, and I remembered her feeding our younger siblings. She did it stoically, almost like rote each and every day.

Ten minutes later, Micah's SUV pulled in, and my heart stopped. Instead of driving his truck into the basement of where we were staying, he parked it in the lot. That should've been my first clue that something wasn't right. He'd parked in the basement every time he was here.

The second was when Nox, Jacks, and Tug jumped out of said SUV and slammed the doors. Jacks hated Micah. Why

would he be with him?

What was happening?

Micah got out, his eyes connecting with mine instantly as he moved quickly to me. His hurried pace and stony face had me taking notice. He prowled toward me like a man on a mission, and he didn't look happy.

It made my insides tighten, and my heart picked up speed. The thump, thump, thump of it could be heard, I swore it. With each step he took to me, the nerves elevated. What had happened? What was wrong? Because I knew it was something. Had to be.

"Hey," I greeted when he got close.

He said nothing. Instead, he pulled me into his body and wrapped me up in his warmth. My arms went around him as he hugged me tightly, his cheek resting on the top of my head.

Fear snaked around inside of me. Something was really wrong. While it wasn't abnormal for Micah to hug me, it was when it came to adding the look on his face.

"Is Remy good?" he asked.

"Yeah." The word came out a bit shakier than I'd anticipated.

"Good, come with me," he ordered, pulling away. He grabbed my hand and led me into the block building, up the stairs and into our room. His big legs moved so quickly, I had a hard time keeping up at first.

My body trembled as the slither of fear ran up my spine and all over my body. I couldn't explain it. I simply felt it all. Tension, trepidation, unease, it all radiated off of Micah and ran right through me. I didn't believe two people could have a bond that was unspeakable, but truly everything I'd ever felt from a single look from him had proven me wrong. We were that connected. In this instance it scared the shit out of me.

"What's wrong?" I asked as soon as the door closed, and he locked it.

He pulled me into him, then leaned down and kissed me, hard and deep. Small pieces of my emotions fell away as I got lost in Micah. It was over all too soon, though, and when he pulled away, there was something in his eyes that freaked me out once again.

Anger. Mixed with regret. Mixed with sadness. So many ways to take it.

“Micah?” I questioned, needing an answer. Needing him to talk.

He held me close as he looked down into my eyes as if he were gazing deep into my soul.

“Dryerson went to your place. When he got there, the door was busted in. A lot of your shit was damaged.”

I gasped, hand going over my mouth in shock. “We were robbed?” While not unheard of, I’d thought my place was pretty secure.

His head shook, denying the claim. “Doesn’t look like it. Whoever did this, it was personal. Even rage-driven.”

“Oh my God.” My knees threatened to give way as every emotion came to the surface, threatening to take me down to the floor. Somehow, I stayed upright. “Who?”

He closed his eyes briefly, then set them back on me. “Babe, don’t know, but there were some things written on the walls.”

Written on the walls? Like in crayon? That would be Remy’s doing. See how my mind couldn’t stay on this topic. It was fear overriding me, trying to make this not real and putting a different spin on it. I knew it, but I was helpless to stop it. “What?”

“Whore and Cyrus my virus were in spray paint. Ryker thinks it could be your father.”

My body full-out trembled as the fear of my father finding us threatened to take me completely out. The abuse he’d inflicted rushed around me, and all I could see was Remy getting that same treatment. No...

Tears rolled down my cheeks as the memories came back to me, but in my place was Remy. Remy sitting in the cold basement with no food or water as punishment for dropping the large bowl of mashed potatoes, and my father not having them for dinner. Remy catching the impact of my father's open palm across her face with asking a question about our religion. Remy lying in bed at night scared to death someone was going to come in the room and get her.

This wasn't fear. No, it was terror. Utter, undiluted, unease.

I couldn't breathe as every bit of air was taken from my lungs.

"He can't know where we are." The words came out in a whisper as Micah pulled me closer to him. I needed his warmth more than I needed my next breath in that moment. My entire body convulsed, almost as if I were having a seizure. I felt myself falling apart piece by piece.

The walls were closing in, inch by dreadful inch. The world was crashing around me, and my legs gave out because all I wanted to do was sit on the floor, hide my head, and cry. The only thing holding me up was Micah, though. He wasn't going to let me fall.

"He won't find you," he declared, and I wanted to believe him with every cell in my body, but the fear was riding me hard.

"How can you be sure it was him?" I asked, my head resting on his chest.

One of Micah's arms left me as he reached around to his back and produced a piece of paper. I stayed in his arms but gave us only a bit of space to see.

"Do you recognize this handwriting?"

My head shook. "No." The paper read, 'You little slut. You will come home.' A panic attack hit me like a freight train. I couldn't breathe. My throat was constricting. My lungs were seizing. Hands to my throat, I looked at Micah for help. How much fear could one person feel?

He grabbed me by the arms. "Look at me." I did as instructed. "I need you to take a deep breath. I've got you. You

are safe. Remy is safe.”

I tried to suck it in, but it came in a gasp. And it didn't work like he wanted it to.

“Close your eyes, Ens.” I did, fighting to breathe. His voice was steady, calm. “Picture you and Remy on a beach with me. We're playing in the ocean and watching the dolphins jump up in the water. The sand beneath your feet is slipping through your toes.” He continued with his scenario, and I felt as though I could breathe again, imagining we were there together.

Hand on my chest, I sucked in deep gulps of air and looked around the room fiercely.

“Where's Remy?” My head moved back and forth, looking to see if she was in the room with us. She had to be with us. We would keep her safe. I'd give my life for it. If she wasn't here, I couldn't guarantee her safety.

“Remember, she's playing,” he cooed, slow and smooth as if I were a wild beast and he was trying to settle me down.

My head continued to shake, and the few breaths and thoughts from only moments ago disappeared as the panic emerged once again. “I need her.” I made a move to get away from Micah because I needed to find her. Needed my little girl in my arms to know that she was okay. Now. Immediately.

“We'll get her in a minute,” Micah said, trying to pull me into him.

Anger boiled. No one kept me from my kid. Who the hell did he think he was talking to? My child would never be kept from me. I stared Micah in the face. “Now. I need her now.” The order was clean and clear, almost as if all the emotions weren't threatening to take me under.

He took a beat to look deep into my soul it felt like, but whatever it was he saw, he understood that I meant business.

“Let's go.”

We made our way quickly down to the playground. Remy was just coming down from the slide when I grabbed her at the

bottom, held her in my arms, and closed my eyes smelling her little girl scent. She was fine. She was safe. They wouldn't touch her.

Her little arms came around me, squeezing tight. Her reassurance was exactly what I needed.

“What the fuck is goin' on?” Katie came storming up to us with Blaze and Austyn on her heels.

With everything inside of me I didn't want to tell Katie this. She would worry just like I was doing now. If I was a torn up mess, she would be the same. I hated that for her, but there was no getting around it. We were in a pile of shit that I had no idea what to do about yet.

“Our place is trashed. They think it could be D-a-d.” I spelled it out, not wanting Remy to figure anything out. This conversation needed to happen without her ears, but fuck, I didn't want to let my girl go right now. I needed to hold her and love on her.

Katie's eyes widened as she took a step back right into Dryerson who seemed to appear out of thin air. She was in such shock she looked like a statue; not to mention her face took on a paleness that I hadn't seen in years.

“He found us,” she whispered as tears welled in her eyes, and her lip quivered. “No, Ens. No.” The fear was all over her.

Remy and I moved to Katie, wrapping our arms around her as she started to full-out cry. A few tears left me too that I wiped up so Remy didn't see. It was good for her to see me cry and know that sadness was an emotion, but about this... She didn't have a clue about our past life. She had no idea that this situation was so horrible. And if I had anything to do about it, she never would.

“We'll figure it out,” I said, pulling away and staring at my beautiful sister whose eyes were now red and puffy.

“Our stuff?” Katie questioned, a new batch of tears falling down her cheeks. Katie liked her ‘stuff’. Whereas I played everything simple, she loved to have nice things around her. It

was strange; we were complete opposites in that area. She'd worked hard for all of it.

"Everything that wasn't damaged is in the back of that truck." Micah pointed to the box truck from not moments ago. I'd hated that I was right when it came to that damn truck. I hoped like hell Remy's things weren't damaged. I didn't want that for my little girl. "We grabbed as much as we could," he concluded.

Katie and I broke apart as I spoke, "Shit, our landlord is gonna be pissed. We don't have the money to break the lease or pay for repairs."

"We took care of it," Micah said. "You're squared away and not goin' back there. It's not safe."

He said 'we' but he meant 'he'. I could so fall in love with this man, but he didn't need to be doing that. Pride was just like jealousy. Each one had its limits, and this one was mine.

As much as I appreciated it, I couldn't do it. "I can pay for the place. I'll handle the bills."

Micah's brow raised. "It's already taken care of. You don't need to go back for any reason now."

"I don't know how I feel about that, Micah," I told him honestly. I'd worked hard for everything we had. When you start from nothing and make yourself into something, it was hard to let that pride get bruised.

While he was being wonderful, to just relinquish control wasn't something I was used to. Once I got it back from my parents, I'd held onto it for dear life. One never knew what it was to have control over your life, until it was gone.

"You're a strong woman, Ensley. You've worked your ass off for Remy and yourself. I wasn't there. Know you can do it. Know how dedicated you are to our little girl. Proud of you for that. This is my way of helping. Please let me do this."

Tears pricked my eyes again. Micah was something I'd never planned on. He was something I'd never dreamed would be in my future. The only man in my life who had shown me

he cared was Ryker. He was the first and only until Micah stepped into my life.

Now, he seemed to be embedded in every part of it, but it didn't feel as though he was trying to take over. It felt as though he wanted to help us.

That he was here for us for whatever the world threw at us. To stand by my side, not to consume; which meant more to me than I could ever express to him.

He was strong and assured. It felt comforting to have a man who wanted to be there and fight the fight with me.

He was too much, more than a woman could hope or dream. Yes, I was in love with this man. "Thank you." I moved to him and wrapped my empty arm around him as he wrapped both of us girls in his strength. There weren't words to tell him how much this meant to me. "Did you find Remy's baby book?"

"Dad said he found it in the living room. Had some pages torn out of it... I'd like to see it."

I burrowed my head in Micah's chest, finding myself doing it more often these days. Remy squealed, her hands on her daddy. "Of course. It's really the only thing that I care about."

"Really?" he asked me as I pulled away and looked up at him, brushing my face as I did. It felt like there were tear tracks down my face, but there was nothing to wipe away.

"Yeah. Everything else is stuff and can be replaced. The baby book, sure I could redo it, but there are things in there that can't be replaced like her baby bracelet from the hospital. In the grand scheme of life it's little, but to have it would mean a lot." It was something I started when Remy was just a little one in my belly. I'd marked everything down as I grew and with each doctor visit. To me it was hers more than mine, and I wanted to give it to her one day.

"We'll get it out and you can look through it," Micah commented.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Katie cried out, her arms waving out to her sides like a mad woman, her face pinched. It appeared she was ready to let all her emotions fly, and it wouldn’t be good. I loved my sister, but she could be over the top. If there was any time for it, this would be it. Hands on her hips she almost yelled, “Everything we worked for, Ens.”

“And we’ll get it back. We’ll see what we have in the truck and go from there. Everything is replaceable, Katie. We are not.”

This seemed to deflate Katie as she crossed her arms over her middle as if she were going to throw up. “Shit.”

This might be an intense moment, but I didn’t miss Dryerson wrapping his arm around Katie and pulling her closer to him. Nor did I miss the fact that she didn’t move and, in fact, melted into him.

“Well, we’re officially homeless, my f-a-t-h-e-r is trying to get at us, you were almost blown’ up, and two houses from people I care about exploded. Whatever ride this is we’re on, I’m ready to get off,” I announced, setting Remy down, then leaning to kiss her.

“Mes payyyy!” she ordered, not getting all the drama around her. This was a good thing.

The innocence and naivety of childhood. She was untouched and untainted by the chaos. I called over to Riley and asked her if she could watch Remy. There was a ton of shit to be done, and while I wanted her near, I knew she’d be safe with Riley. Hell, she’d be safe anywhere on this compound with the Ravage MC. They’d been so kind to all three of us, but in the here and now, I felt as though I could really trust them to have my back.

As fucked up a situation as it was, it was a good feeling to have.

“We’ll get it all out of the truck,” I said to the boys who started to chuckle.

“We got this. Go up to the room, and when we put the boxes and bags in, you can go through them if you want. If you don’t, just direct the guys on where to put shit. Alright?” Micah kissed the top of my head and was gone.

It only took an hour to get everything into our room, and it didn’t look like much was saved.

How did my father find us? We were so careful with our fake IDs. I tried so hard to make us invisible and build a good life for my baby girl. The stability and safety I wrapped us in was falling down around us so fast there wasn’t time to pick up the pieces.

Alarm bells were ringing everywhere as the panic rose higher and higher. My chest was clutched tight, and breathing was becoming harder and harder.

What the hell were we going to do now?

MICAH

MAKING MY WAY BACK UP TO MY ROOM TO SEE ENSLEY, MY heart felt for her, and all I wanted to do was wipe all of her pain away. I commended her for not being attached to the things in her house, but it still had to feel like a violation to her.

That someone would come into her place, trash it, and write such foul things on the walls. I didn't want her blindsided, though. She had to hear it from me and no one else.

Anger hadn't left me the entire time we unloaded. With each box or bag we'd brought up, I could feel the rage growing by leaps and bounds.

I'd been trained for years to control myself, to be a statue for whatever came my way. This, though ... this was something else. Ensley could've been home with Remy. They could've been hurt.

No fucking way. No one fucked with what was mine. To keep a handle on the anger, rage, and need for revenge was getting harder by the second.

I wanted these assholes to pay. Wanted to watch them burn. Wanted to be the one to put a stake through their hearts. No one touched what was mine. They were mine, and I would wring them dry.

After moving all the things into our room, I wanted to see if there were cameras set on her place.

There were. A navy blue minivan was seen by her place. The reason I singled it out was because I'd watched the comings and goings of the complex for a few days on fast forward. The van was the only vehicle that had appeared out of place because it only came once. It ended up more difficult than we'd thought, considering the registration was a dead end. Yes it was rented, but the name on that rental was of a man who'd died two and half years ago.

I wasn't able to get a clear picture of the man that went inside. A bit stocky with black cargo pants and an oversized hoodie up and over his head. If that damn building would've had a front view up the stairs, I would've gotten the bastard.

Just like with Ravage's shit, I was nowhere. Nowhere but here with my girls and there was no other place I'd rather be.

Pulling out my key, I unlocked and opened the door. Ensley was sitting on the bed criss-crossed with papers spread out over the bed. When she looked up at me, tears rolled down her face.

"What's wrong?" I asked, moving to her quickly after locking the door. Sitting on the bed and wrapping myself around her, she trembled from the tears.

On the bed lay several sheets of multi-designed and colored papers. Some had pictures of a baby, and my eyes were attached to them. Remy. My little girl. I hadn't seen any pictures of her growing up.

My heart expanded at how beautiful the little girl was that we had created. Chubby little cheeks and all. She barely had any hair on her head and the way her mouth was opened one would think she was mighty pissed off and screaming.

"It's gone," Ensley choked out, pulling up from me. "The hospital bracelet. It's gone. So is her birth certificate. The certificate I can get again, but the bracelet." She broke down in tears once again, and I held her.

Part of me felt robbed in missing all of these things in the book. The other part angry. The other part sad. Remy's entire babyhood, I'd missed. There was no going back in time for a

redo. I had to lock down those emotions because Ensley was on the edge, and I didn't want her to tip over again.

“Sorry, baby. Anything else missing in here?”

“Haven't made it all the way through. The bracelet got me.” She swiped at her face, pulling away and staring down at the piles on the bed. “I've never been materialistic, Micah. Growing up, we didn't have much, and I can't really remember anything ever being 'mine,' so I had no interest in acquiring things. Katie went the complete opposite and loves her 'stuff'.”

She paused, looking up at me. “When Remy was born, her things started to mean a lot, so I'd keep them as memories. When I brought her home, she had that little bitty bracelet on her ankle, and I was so happy she was mine. She was this precious being that no one would take from me. No one would touch her. The stuff I'd dealt with growing up, it wouldn't be this shadow over her. She was not from that world. That part of me was gone. That bracelet was a symbol to me that we got out. We got away from them, and now we'd live our lives the way we wanted to.”

My hand went to her back, rubbing up and down to hopefully soothe her. “I get that, babe.”

“It's not like it's a big deal. I mean, I have those memories, but I always thought that one day I'd show Remy along with some pictures. Let her know that she's loved more than life itself. I never had that, Micah. My mother kept nothing.”

“You're a great mom, Ensley.” I meant that down to my bones. Remy couldn't have anyone better.

“I wanted Remy to have more, be more, dream more. And I don't know but this bracelet not being in here just struck a blow that I didn't know one small object could do.”

I pulled Ensley into me and wrapped her tight in my arms, kissing the top of her head. I may not be able to take the pain away, but I could at least give her all the comfort she needed.

“That's normal, Ensley. You feel the way you want to feel. If you're upset about a rock in your shoe, then be upset.”

She chuckled. “Not sure what that has to do with a bracelet, Micah.”

“It doesn’t, but it does. You wanted to do things different with your little girl, and you built a life with her on that principal. Someone tried taking that away from you, and it’s okay to be sad or angry. It means something to you. Hell, it means something to me, and I’ve never even see it. Feelings are feelings, Ens, and they are valid.”

Before being discharged we had to go through counseling and debriefing. It was a time to talk and reflect. I’d learned a great deal about myself during this time. It also cemented the idea that I wanted to be a part of the Ravage MC family. It seemed so long ago, but really it wasn’t.

“I’m so sorry.” Ensley started crying more. Obviously, my words were making it worse for her.

“For what?” I asked curiously. There was so much going on, it could be anything at this point.

“That you didn’t get to see Remy be born or be around. Hell, you’re not even on the birth certificate, Micah. That was all I had from you, a first name.” She looked at me, pleading for me to understand where she was coming from. The thing was, I did. Always had. There was nothing else that she could’ve done. A first name nowadays got you nothing but more questions.

I grabbed her hand and clutched it to me. “All of that is in the past, Ens. And the certificate is fixable. The bracelet, I’ll do my damndest to find.” And I would. No matter what it took, I’d search until it was located.

She sighed, squeezing my hands. “My life was so jacked up, Micah. My father is not a nice man and if he got that close to me and Remy, he won’t stop until he gets what he wants.”

The fear in her words cut me to the quick. I’d never get used to hearing terror in her voice. She would never have to feel this again. Or I’d do anything and everything to prevent it.

“Over my cold, dead body will he get you or Remy. That will not happen.”

She sniffled, pulling away briefly to rub her face with her arm, then she came back to me. “I’m so sorry this is all coming back up. Ryker doesn’t need this now, nor do anyone else. Everyone’s plate is so full as it is.”

My heart broke for her and it was time for me to let it out. Everything inside of me. She needed to hear of my past here within the Ravage MC, and I needed to give it. Let it out and release it into the world. Pulling away, I picked up all the papers from the book and piled them together, setting them on the floor by the bed.

Laying down, I pulled Ensley’s body into mine, her cheek resting on my chest. She fell into me without a question.

Time to lay it all out.

“While my childhood wasn’t like yours by any stretch of the imagination, to me mine was difficult. I was born into this club, but it’s not just a club—it’s a way of life. My mom and dad got together when my mom was a stripper at Studio X.”

She said nothing, her hand coming to rest on my chest. I covered her hand with my own, giving it a soft squeeze. I loved feeling her warmth on me.

“My father knew the moment he saw my mother that she was the one. When they had me, from what they’ve told me, they were over the moon ecstatic. My father could already see the leather on my back while I rode side by side with him on a Harley down the freeway. It would be his legacy living on to have me join the club and be a part of this brotherhood.”

I breathed in the smell of Ensley’s hair, my hand going to it and playing with the silky strands. Not having talked about all of this to anyone before, I was opening myself wide to her, letting her see all of me. Even for a man like me that shit was scary. No man wanted his woman to even for a second think they couldn’t handle their shit, but for me back then, I couldn’t. I was a fucking kid who had everything but didn’t see it.

“My parents would bring me from the moment I entered into this world to every party, get together, birthday. Anything

and everything we were there at the club. My Mom has the pictures to prove it. Me sitting in a baby carrier, kicking my little feet or some of the ol' ladies cooing over me." I gave Ensley a squeeze, just needing her. I always gave strength to others. This time I took it from her, hoping she'd understand. "As I grew up, the kids in my school were assholes. I was picked on like crazy. I'm a nerd, Ensley. You should know that by now."

Her body started shaking as she looked up at me, a smile spread on her face. "Now that I don't believe."

Returning her smile, I took the opportunity to lean down and give her a soft kiss on the lips.

"Seriously. I've always been a wiz when it comes to computers, electronics, games; really anything digital, and I never hid it. I can remember at age eleven, taking apart my parents' computer and putting it back together, updating all of their issues with it. It only took me a day or so to do."

"Smarty pants, huh?" she teased, and I loved it.

"Wouldn't go that far, but I know my shit when it comes to that world. I found my place, my calling in a world that was not my father's. And I felt as though I needed that. I'm good at it. It's my job, Ensley. I take on work from clients, do what they need to have done, and get paid big." She needed to understand my job or at least what it was.

She sighed heavily, snuggling into my chest. "Good to know my kid's dad isn't a deadbeat."

It was my turn to smile and give a small chuckle. "Not at all."

"Go on," she encouraged.

"While we came to all the club events, I never felt like I fit in. Cooper and Nox were already in the inner circle because of their father. Emery and Austyn were thick as thieves. Deke was distant. Rylynn came along and hooked up with Emery and Austyn's crew, and then there was me. Computer geek to the max. I always felt like the odd man out, and as the years ticked by, that feeling built and built. I started trying to get out

of coming to the clubhouse to no avail. So much shit was said at school between the club and my computer skills that I didn't feel like anyone understood me. I had no real connection to them. I'd separate myself from everyone and work on my laptop or just hide somewhere, playing video games. Emery was the only one who would find me and try to bring me into the fold."

Ensley's body stiffened, and I gave her a squeeze. "I'll tell you all about that one in a bit. Promise, no secrets. Stay with me."

Only then did her body begin to settle and her hand in mine relaxed.

"My father was all about the club. It felt as if he was always gone with them and never home. At the time, my mother was having a hard time with my father being gone. At least that was what I'd seen with her crying at times when he was gone. In truth, I took her crying and only saw what I wanted to see, if that makes sense. Meaning I turned it into another thing I hated about the club. Add in my dislike for the club already, and I began to despise this club and everything it stood for. I was an outsider anyway, so what did it matter if I hated this place. I'd never become a part of it. I'd live my life away from it. Once the seed was planted inside my head that I didn't belong here, it took root. Deep. The more outside world experience I got, the more confident I became that this life was the furthest thing from what I wanted my life to be."

"I can see that turned out well for you," Ensley teased, making me smile.

"Yeah. Really well. I was a little shit about it, though. Okay, a big shit about it. My mouth ran away from me, talking bad about the club and how much it took away from our family. How I hated it. How it made my mom cry at night. How they were all criminals. How they pretended to love their families, but it was all a lie. You name it, I said it and didn't care one bit."

"You hated it that much?" she asked, and I sighed.

“Yeah. In my eyes then, the club was taking everything away from my mother and me. I didn’t belong, and I resented everyone that did. Looking back now, I was a very misguided child and have no idea why I went on that path. To this day I can’t figure it out. Because what I failed to acknowledge was that because we attended the activities and spent so much time with the club, we were a family. I didn’t focus on the laughter like you heard last night at dinner. I didn’t focus on everyone stepping up when Emery’s mom had cancer. I didn’t focus on the time and love that Ma and Princess put into running a home with all of these crazy asses. I didn’t focus on the reason my father was gone was because his brothers needed someone at their backs, and he was there.”

“Sounds like you’ve grown up, Micah.” This warmed me.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves now,” I teased, but it was the truth.

Ensley laughed, catching my sarcasm. Yes, I loved that she got me. I loved how easy it was to talk to her and know she would be by my side through all of it.

“Why did you go off to the Marines?” she asked me, and part of me dreaded this because Emery was involved, and I didn’t want Ensley to think that Emery was anywhere on my mind anymore.

“Bear with me.”

Her head bolted up, eyes connecting with mine. “That doesn’t sound good.”

I sucked in a breath but didn’t respond to that because I had no idea how she’d take what I was about to say. There were already enough fires burning, and one more could make it out of control. “While I was an outcast to many around here, I never was to Emery. She would come and talk to me, seeing what I was up to. She’d break away from her pack and go take a walk with me. Pretty much, she was my only friend. Somewhere in all of that it got twisted, and I thought Emery was mine.”

Ensley stiffened which was to be expected. I maneuvered us so we were laying on our sides, facing one another. I wanted to look deep in her eyes while I told this part. She didn't put up a fight and even smiled, liking us being close. Which was good, considering I wasn't letting this woman go.

“Emery's mom and dad, GT and Casey, grew up together in the club. They had a rough road but ended up together. For some reason, I thought that would be us. That long standing expectation that she was to be my destiny. The push and pull along the way was part of our story. And being the cocky little shit I was, I never thought she'd go for another man. Jacks. I'd always thought she was my future just like her mother was GT's. I got in the way of Jacks and Emery. All for some misconstrued fairy tale in my head. I tried hard to get her to choose me. Too hard considering if I would have stopped for a second and got my head outta my ass, I would have seen clearly the connection they shared. But she didn't, and I realized I needed to get away from here. Away from the club. Away from my parents. Away from Emery. Away from it all. It was the reality check I needed. I didn't belong. Not as the man I was back then. I needed some clarity. More than anything, I needed maturity. So I joined the Marines.”

Ensley's gaze didn't leave mine, and I could see all the questions rolling around inside of them. “Did you love her?”

“Thought I did, but in retrospect she was something I wanted to covet and take as my own. There was a friendship type of love there, but that was all. It took me a year or so into the Marines to really get my head on straight about her and the entire situation.”

“So if she walked up to you right now and said she wanted to divorce Jacks and be with you, you wouldn't go?” The vulnerability in her question had my heart squeezing painfully. This was what she feared, and I needed to comfort her and show her that she was my future.

I pulled her tight to me, leaned down, and kissed her lips softly. “Absolutely not. I have all I want and need right here.” Her cheeks turned pink as she smiled. “I know you're still waiting for an answer to your question, and I'm gettin' to it.”

Her brows creased.

“The one earlier about bringing your baggage into Ravage and them being pissed at you.” A light dawned as she nodded slightly. “Now this is the kicker. Are you ready?”

“There’s more?” she asked with a raised brow. She didn’t quite know what she was getting herself into.

“Yeah.”

“Hit me with it,” she said on a smile.

“Before I left for the Marines, I wanted Ravage to pay for Emery not choosing me. Honestly, I was a man with a broken ego. I wanted the world to be brought to its knees the way I was. It was twisted; I’m well aware of it. But I hacked into the Ravage MC computer systems and went snooping anywhere I could find a little bit of dirt on the club. What I was going to do with it, I didn’t know. I wanted to have the power. My life was out of control and I needed to feel like I had an upper hand in something, anything. I just wanted them to feel like I did in that moment ... weak.”

“You were a bit of a pain in the ass. Please tell me that you’re not like that anymore.” She rolled her eyes at me.

The corner of my lip tipped. “No. I’m not. I promise you that all the way down to my core.”

She leaned in and touched my lips. It was nice, and while I wanted to deepen it, there was still more to be said. My cock didn’t agree, but he’d have to wait.

“What I found changed Cruz and his family’s lives. Literally, I turned everything upside down, and I didn’t care about the carnage I’d left in my wake. I found out that Cruz had a son he didn’t know about, Crow. In a fucked up twist of fate, he’s actually the president of the Ravage MC Rebellion chapter out of Alabama. I don’t know if you’ve met him.”

Her face scrunched up as she thought. “I don’t think so.”

“Neither have I, except on paper. My downfall was not telling Cruz, my father, or the brothers when I learned of the paternity. It took me a bit to make sure that everything was

concrete and fact. Even once I did, I waited until I was in the Marines. I basically covered my own ass, got out of dodge, and sent the information to my father. It was a pussy move to make.”

“Wow. I bet Cruz was pissed.”

She didn’t know the half of it.

“Remember my face the first time you saw me at the clubhouse?”

She gasped at my question, eyes wide with fright. It was cute that she felt this protective. “They hit you?”

“I wouldn’t have expected anything else, Ens. I’d fucked up. I’d crossed lines I knew better than to cross. Respect is a big thing here in the club, and I’d shit on that. Here, they don’t play by the rules that you would on the outside of those walls. They have their own sense of justice and dish it out regularly. I earned every hit I was given and honestly, more.”

She pulled her hand out from mine and held it up, halting my words. “Not sure I want to know more about that one.”

It was my turn to kiss her. “Okay, but my point is, if the people in this club could let go of all the shit I did in my past, to put this leather on my back to prospect for them, they don’t give a shit about your baggage. They will fight for you, hands-down no questions asked. That’s what the club is. They stick together and take each other’s backs through thick and thin. Happy times and sad. That’s the family you have now, Ensley. That’s the shit I took for granted for far too long. I see it clearly, and I give you my word. There’s no need to worry about the club. They love you. They love Remy. This is a family of their choosing. We all may not be blood, but we’re even closer than it.”

She sighed loud. “You really think they’d go that far for me? I mean, Ryker helped us out a lot, but this is ... so much more.”

I held her tightly. “Yeah. I do.”

“Do you really think it’s my father?” she asked, her tone holding a bit of a tremor in it. She was still scared.

“Ryker did, and since I don’t know your father well, I’d have to go with his assumption.”

She shot up onto her elbow. “He can’t have Remy, Micah. I’ll kill him before he gets his hands on her.”

Loved hearing how she’d protect our girl. “Now who’s being threatening.”

“I’m not kidding.”

I pulled her in tighter to my body. “And that right there. You protecting our little girl with everything inside of you is one of the reasons I’m laying here next to you. Fuckin’ love that about you, Ensley. So damn proud you’re my kid’s momma.”

Rolling her over, my lips connected with hers as her body felt warm under me. Her lips were so damn good, I could kiss them forever.

Bang, bang came to the door. Fuck me. This was not the time for anyone. We finally had some time alone, and now someone was banging on the damn door.

“Remy wants to see you!” Riley yelled from the other side of the door. Loved my kid, but she could’ve given us at least twenty minutes. Hell, I’d take what I could get at this point.

My cock was rock hard, and Ensley smiled at me. “Welcome to being a father.”

She leapt off the bed and went to the door.

I laid on the bed for long moments, feeling lighter than I had in years. Getting all of that shit out felt amazing. Like I was letting it go into the universe and was now ready to move on. Move on with Ensley.

Remy ran into the room, and I sat up, willing my cock down as she jumped into my arms. As soon as she did it was like a pin deflating my dick. Thank Christ.

“What do ya say, you show me your baby book?” I asked Remy who nodded, and we spent the next hour together, the three of us looking at Remy growing up little by little.

I'd find that fucking bracelet and get it added to the book.
Come hell or high water.

MICAH

TWO DAYS HAD PASSED IN A WHIRLWIND, SPENDING TIME WITH Ensley and Remy and then working with the brothers. Staying at the clubhouse was a challenge at times. While I loved having everyone around, something I didn't back when I was younger, part of me wanted to lock Ensley, Remy, and I into a room so we could really get to know one another and block out the outside world.

I wanted Remy to finally know that I was her father, but it wasn't the right time. I hoped like hell it would soon. Telling Remy she had grandparents was also weighing on me. I wanted everything to be out in the open.

Since locking us up wasn't happening, we were making the most of our time together. Ensley laid on my chest, her hand resting lightly on my pec. With my arm around her body, I felt each breath she took.

Here in my arms, she was safe.

Lifting my head just a bit, I looked over to Remy who was laying on her tummy with her thumb in her mouth. She didn't appear to be sucking on it. It must be a comfort thing because she was out like a light.

This father 101 on the job study was the hardest damn thing I'd ever had to learn. Which was saying something, because we had to learn a lot of shit in the Marines.

Ensley's head moved, our eyes connecting. "You're up early."

I smiled and leaned down, kissing her quiet. We didn't want to wake up Remy, after all.

She was warm and soft as the sleepiness still had ahold of her. Her lips tangled with mine in a rhythmic dance as if we'd known each other our entire lives. It was a connection like no other, and it was just from the kiss alone. Everything else we had was building on that foundation.

Kissing her was euphoric, and with my hands tangled in her hair, my cock hardened, searching for Ensley's body.

Her tongue stroked against mine, and our bodies melded together. We were a perfect fit for one another.

Reaching down, I cupped her ass hard, taking her gasp in my mouth. Lifting her leg up and over my hip, my cock rubbed against her heat.

"Fuckin' need you baby," I whispered into the darkened room, the dawn slowly approaching. My need was evident in my body and words. I needed her like I needed my next breath.

"Take me," she mouthed, making me smile. Yes, she wanted this just as much as I did.

One day very soon, we were going to do this without our daughter in the room, so I could hear Ensley scream my fucking name while she came. Today was not that day, unfortunately, but it didn't matter. I had her, and I only wanted her.

Making sure the blankets were covering us, we maneuvered out of our bottoms. I pulled Ensley on top of me, her heat resting right on my cock, so fucking ready for me. As she rocked her slickness coated me, just begging for me to come in and take her.

Ensley slid down on my length. Each inch she fell down, my balls drew tighter and tighter.

Fuck, this woman undid me.

She lay, her breasts touching my chest while her thighs clenched and hips began rocking, moving up and down. It

started off at a leisurely pace as if she had all the time in the world to feel every second.

Feet flat on the bed, I bucked inside of her, going straight up. My lips crashed on hers when mews came from her lips. There was no stopping, my hips going hard while my arms around her body held her in place.

Fuck, she was beautiful.

Her nails dug into my shoulders as she held on with everything she had, but she was cracking, and so was I.

Flipping her over, I pulled the covers over us and rammed into Ensley. The bed frame rocked, so I had to slow down. This quiet shit was going to end soon. I wanted to fuck my woman the way I wanted with no damn restrictions.

I gave her just enough that the bed didn't bang, and I could feel her pussy clamp around me tight.

Taking her lips again, I bucked several times, catching her orgasm as I came as well.

Spent, I collapsed on the side of her, pulling Ensley into my arms, her head resting on my chest. I kissed the top of her head as we lay there breathing, saying nothing. There was nothing to say. What we'd just experienced was beyond beautiful, and we both knew it.

"I want to tell Remy you're her daddy." Ensley instantly snapped me out of my post orgasmic bliss.

"What?"

We lay face to face, her breaths tickling my lips. They were a bit swollen from our kisses. It was a damn good look on her.

My heart thumped wildly in my chest as this pivotal moment in my life was going to take place. Did she really mean this? Was this reality? Was my thoughts of earlier coming true? Impatience wasn't like me, but with Remy it was different.

"Really, Micah. Remy needs to know you're her father. No matter what happens with us, she's yours too, and it's time I

share.” While it felt as though Ensley was talking from the heart, I could also see a slight bit of trepidation in her eyes.

It made me think that she was still unsure about us. That she didn’t believe this could be. I needed her to have confidence in where we stood outside of having a child. While I wanted nothing more than to be a dad for Remy, I was in deep with Ensley.

“You’re mine, Ensley. You and Remy from now until we take our last breaths on this earth. There isn’t a damn thing I wouldn’t do for her, but also for you. Don’t ever think otherwise.” Tears welled in her eyes. “And yes. I’ve been ready since you told me I had a daughter, Ensley. I won’t break her trust or yours. I’m in this for the long haul.”

Tears rolled down her eyes and onto the pillow beneath her.

“Please tell me these are happy tears, right?”

Her head nodded as more water fell from her eyes. I pulled her into my arms and held her tightly. “You’ve given me two of the most precious gifts a man could have. My daughter and you. You’re mine. Both of you.”

“Maaaaa.” We heard from Remy as I lifted my head to make eye contact with my girl.

“Mikkkkkkeeeeeee,” she yelled now, wanting me. This little girl didn’t know me from anyone, and yet she wanted me. Fuck, that was a damn good feeling.

Giving Ensley a squeeze, I said, “Need to go see to our girl. You okay?”

She hiccupped, saying, “Yeah.”

I kissed the top of her head, scooted to the edge of the bed, grabbed my boxers and pulled them on, then my shorts. Yes, having a child most definitely changed a lot.

Remy’s arms were already up in the air for me to pick her up. I lifted her and proceeded to blow raspberries in her neck. Her giggle was one of the best sounds in the world. She

continued laughing as we made our way to the bed and fell on it.

Ensley had already put her shorts and top on. She was stealthy, had to give her that.

“Good morning!” Ensley cried to Remy who jumped from me to her mother, wrapping her up tight in a hug. If the kid was any stronger, she could’ve hurt Ensley she hugged so hard.

“Sleep good?” Ensley asked her, and Remy nodded. She may not have a lot of words yet, but she knew what was going on and the appropriate responses. I’d say my daughter was one smart cookie.

We played around on the bed for a while. Giggles and laughter reigned throughout the space.

“Mommy has something important to tell you,” Ensley told Remy who was sitting between Ensley and me. Remy held her hand.

“Uuutt,” Remy said. Yes, the little thing was smart.

“Do you know how Deke is Chandler’s daddy?”

“Yethhhhhhh.”

Her ‘yes’ made me smile, reminding me of Elmer Fudd. The anticipation was killing me. I’d never been so excited about something in my life.

I watched Remy’s every movement as she stared into her mother’s eyes, just waiting to hear what she had to say. Our little girl was beautiful. I put it all in my memories, never wanting to forget this moment.

“You have a daddy too.” Remy’s eyes lit with a small spark as her hand came out and took mine.

My brow quirked at Ensley. Surely a two-year-old had no idea the level of impact she was showing at that moment. As if she wanted me and only me to be her daddy.

“Yes. Your daddy is Micah.”

Remy smiled and launched herself at me. Happiness wasn't grand enough to express my feelings. Remy loved me. She was happy I was her father. And fuck, I was happy to be her father. Never thought about the days when I'd be a dad, but this right here was one of the best moments of my life.

MICAH

“YOU’RE SHITTIN’ ME,” I ANSWERED, NOT BELIEVING WHAT Ryker was showing the few of us who were down in the cave. The symbol I saw tattooed on one of the men was being held in the air by Ryker.

“No, I’m not fuckin’ shittin’ you,” Ryker fired back, moving to the large dry erase board along the wall. He yanked open the pen, drawing the two triangles. “Stay with me, guys.”

We all nodded, giving Ryker our attention. The information was nonexistent, and we needed something. Maybe this was that something.

Ryker pointed to the triangles. “They overlap in the center with the tips meeting.” He drew them, and I thought back at what I saw, and yeah, they did overlap, but it was very minutely. So barely there I missed it.

“The overlapping points stand for a male and a female fucking to have kids.”

I went to say something, but Cruz had beat me to it. “That’s what you got from that? Ryker, what the fuck man?”

That didn’t look anything like a woman and man fucking.

“Right. The octagon around it is the community. The family locking everyone in.” Ryker shook his head. “Fuckin’ didn’t pick it up the first time I’d heard it. It wasn’t until I’d seen it that it hit me.”

“Get on with it, fucker,” GT threw in, and I was with him. This shit had to get figured out.

“The flag represents the union of religious beliefs. This fucking symbol is from my biological family.” He looked right at me. “Ensley’s family. They’re behind this fuckin’ shit. The bombs. Ensley’s place. All of it. Those pieces of shit are the ones doing all of it.”

“Why blow the shit up?” Nox asked.

The pieces of the puzzle started falling together, so I answered. “Because Ryker and Austyn helped Ensley, Katie, and Remy get away from them. They are considered the enemy. The group wanted them to pay.”

“Time we go kick some fuckin’ ass,” Ryker said. “But we have to find out where they moved. After my last visit with my mother, she picked up and moved. Haven’t seen or heard from anyone except Ensley since.”

“Fucking hell.” That wasn’t a good sign.

Cruz barked out orders, and I was on the team with Buzz to find the location.

I’d find them. And I’d end them.

ENSLEY

THE SUN WAS BEAUTIFUL SHINING DOWN AND GIVING US SOME serious heat for the day. While I hadn't seen Micah, I was thoroughly enjoying watching everyone around the courtyard.

Remy was over with Blaze playing on the swing set. Her Grandma was pushing her very softly on the swing, the kind with built-in back support. Remy was only two, after all.

Blaze was treating Remy like breakable glass. It warmed me to have my daughter get this from Blaze.

The swing would come forward, and Blaze would pretend to reach out and tickle her. Remy laughed so loudly, and it was a beautiful sound.

Blaze made funny faces at Remy, and my little girl would try to make them back.

It was time for Remy to know that this was her family. While she just found out about her 'daddy', she needed to know her grandparents as well. I was looking forward to telling her, which would be very soon.

Micah and I hadn't talked about how we'd tell Remy, and I wanted to hear his opinions before launching in. We were a team now, and while different, it was a beautiful thing.

Music was playing outside, not loud, but it could still be heard. With all the people gathered around it was uplifting. Fun. I didn't worry about anyone getting to Remy, my sister, or myself. We were protected. Safe. That was all I wanted for my family. Safety and happiness.

And that was the best feeling ever. It took a lot for me to feel fully safe and with these men and women, I did.

“Alright. Let’s go get lunch sorted.” Austyn called out, getting our attention. Cooking. I’d never been an ace at it, but I’d been learning so much from these women. Not saying that whenever I tried on my own I wouldn’t burn it. I was more used to the boxed mac n’ cheese. These ladies made it from scratch, and it was damn good. It had three different kinds of cheese. Cheddar, parmesan, and Velveeta. Cheese made everything better. One day I’d make it on my own just to give it a shot.

Some of the women moved from their spots with their men, while others didn’t. I didn’t understand that dynamic, but I didn’t ask. It didn’t affect me so why would I meddle in someone else’s business. Learning the intricacies of club life was on the to-do list, but it didn’t need to happen this very moment.

I hopped off the picnic table and brushed my butt, unknowing if there was dirt on it. This action was more of a habit than anything.

A loud whistle came from the other end of the courtyard, and I turned swiftly to it. Cruz stood there, arm up in the air, and waving for someone to come. Did he want me? I was a bit confused until he called out, “Brothers.”

While I wanted to breathe out a sigh of relief, I couldn’t. It had been hours since I’d seen Micah, and it wasn’t as if I expected him to check in or anything, but it would have been nice to know that he was okay.

With all the brothers now meeting, I had this worry in the pit of my gut just hoping that whatever called them together had nothing to do with me, Remy, or my sister.

Turning back around to make my way into the clubhouse, my phone rang, and I pulled it out of the back pocket of my jeans seeing ‘Sis Calling’ on the screen.

I answered with a, “You need to come to the clubhouse and help with the food,” in greeting.

“Cyrus.” My real name came out, scared and broken. My back went instantly straight at her tone, and I made my way to where we were staying, thinking that would be where I would find Katie and see what was happening. She didn’t call me Cyrus, so something had to be wrong.

“What’s wrong?” I barked a bit harsh into the phone.

I ran, threw open the door to the large building, and made it to the flight of stairs, but when she spoke again I stilled in my tracks.

Her voice trembled. “I need...” Katie’s voice was ripped away, and I cried out her name several times.

Then I heard it. A tone that was very vague in my memory banks, but one thing was for certain—he was from our past. A past I wanted dead and buried. One I’d thought we wouldn’t ever have in our lives again.

And no it wasn’t my father, but someone from our home.

“Cyrus. I’m gonna make this simple.” A scream could be heard in the background, followed by a cry out in pain. Katie. Damn him. He was hurting her. My sister. “Come to 7732 Bryer. You tell your boyfriend,” he spat the word, “and I’ll fuck good old Sybil with a glass bottle. You tell anyone else, and I’ll kill her after. Don’t test me.”

My blood ran cold as shivers cascaded up and down my arms. This wasn’t happening. How the hell did Katie even get out of the clubhouse? Why was she with him? How did he get his hands on her? Those were all questions for later because of his next words.

“You have ten minutes to get here and it takes twelve, from where you are. Yeah, bitch. I know where you are. Better hurry. One second late and playtime begins.”

Anger took over the fear. “Don’t touch her,” I growled low running, reaching my room, and grabbing the keys to my car.

“Oh, I’m just getting started, Cyrus. Better get here.” Katie screamed again, and the line went dead.

Turning on a heel, I raced down the stairs. One thing I wasn't was a fool. He might have said not to get in contact with Micah, but fuck that. Both Katie and I would be better with backup. My palms were sweaty, and I almost dropped the damn phone. Anger and fear wrapped into one as I fumbled with my phone.

I dialed Micah's number, taking the steps several at a time. On the fourth ring, I was out the door. It continued ringing and after the tenth, I hung up. It wasn't like him not to have his phone near him let alone not to have the voicemail pick up.

Even knowing he was down in the basement, I didn't have time to go down there and find him. The clock was ticking, and I'd already wasted precious time making my way to get my keys. There was no time to alert anyone.

Shit, shit, shit!

Hopping in the car, I turned on the ignition and made my way out of the parking lot. The large gate was open, allowing a large truck to come inside for a delivery. I took it as a blessing and pressed down the peddle, taking the opening. Punching the address into my phone, I got the directions.

The area wasn't far away, but I had no idea what the fastest route to it would be. And I needed fast. The faster the better. Gas pedal down, I followed the directions.

After the first few turns, I knew where I was going, therefore I picked up my phone and tried to call Micah again.

"Shit!" I yelled out into the car. My gut twisted and turned as I dialed Ryker's number, getting the same damn response as Micah. They must be together.

That damn basement needed better reception. I tried them both again, hoping and getting nowhere. My driving was a bit erratic as I tried to beat the clock.

My turn was only moments away, and I had exactly fifty-nine seconds to get there. With trembling hands, I dialed Austyn.

"Where are you?" she answered, and I felt as though I could breathe again.

“A man from back at my parents has Katie, and I’m on my way there.” I gave her the address. “Micah’s not answering his phone, and neither is Ryker. I need you to tell them where I am.”

“Don’t go in there!” she warned, and I heard the other end of the phone rustling around.

“He told me he’d hurt Katie, and that can’t happen.” There was a bunch of commotion in the background. “Put your phone on mute. I’ll keep it on,” I said, stuffing the phone in my back pocket. Please, send help.”

It was a mayday. I had nowhere else to turn. But my instincts had gotten me this far. My gut told me Micah and Ravage would somehow find me and my sister. I just had to hold onto faith in them and my abilities I’d learned over the years.

The navigation told me that I’d reached my destination, and my mouth went dry. The old building was three floors and very run down. Windows were missing and others shattered out completely. There was graffiti on the blocked walls, but nothing I could make sense of.

With everything I am, I wanted to listen to Austyn and not go in. I wanted to wait for Micah, but nothing could happen to Katie. She’d saved me when I was alone and risking everything. I would not let her be hurt or left alone in this. She would not die at the hands of this man because I didn’t show up on time.

Nothing could happen to my sister.

I wished I’d given Remy just one more hug and kiss before I’d left. Wished I could’ve told Micah that I loved him. Wished that everything I’d worked so hard for wasn’t a big clusterfuck.

Twenty-seven seconds. My heart leapt from my chest, and I exited the car and raced to the front door, finding it locked. Even yanking on it didn’t loosen its grasp. A scream from Katie came through the walls, and I ran like hell to find another way in.

Time was ticking by so damn fast. With every step another moment was lost. I just needed a few more seconds to find a way inside. Seeing a double door up ahead, I darted and pumped my body as hard as it would go. My breaths were ragged, and my adrenaline was off the charts. I pulled hard on one of the doors. It was unlocked, making me lose my footing and stumble a bit on the way in. Why I expected it to be locked was a mistake that cost me. Just how much, I wouldn't know until later.

Katie was across the room strapped to rickety chair as she yelled, "Ensley, watch...."

Then everything went black.

MICAH

“IF WE CROSS REFERENCE ...”

“Stop!” Austyn blurted, bursting through the doors of the cave and barreling right to me. Everyone’s attention went to her. I felt it down in my gut that Ensley was in trouble. The way Austyn’s eyes pinned me, her mouth tight, and the fact she was on a hell of a mission.

Cruz boomed, “What the fuck are you doing in here?”

She completely ignored her father, staying on course. “We need to go to 7732 Bryer. Ensley said some man has Katie, and Ensley went there to get her. She sounded scared. We have to go now. She’s in trouble,” Austyn ordered.

My worst fear had come true in the matter of seconds. The walls around me felt as though they’d sucked me in whole. The floor started to fall beneath my feet. I’d just found her. This couldn’t be happening. We’d been doing everything to keep her protected and safe.

“Why the fuck did she go there?” I barked as everyone in the cave made their way to the door. Me, I hopped in my SUV that was still parked down here, cranked it, and was pulling out not hearing Austyn’s answer.

The roll up door took ages to open. So much so I wanted to barrel through it. If I didn’t need my vehicle to get to my woman, I would’ve.

Remy. Fucking shit. Remy. I yanked out my phone and dialed Austyn who answered on the second ring. “Where’s

Remy?”

“With your mom. She’s good.”

The relief from that was short-lived considering Ensley was still in trouble. “What do I need to know?” Stark fear ran through my veins.

“First, I only have a second. Her line is open on my other line. She called and told me where she was and that I needed to tell you and the boys. There was something about a time limit, but it was all over the place.”

Why in the fuck did she go? “Fucking hell.”

“Do you want help?” she asked.

The door finally went up all the way as I saw bike after bike rolling out. “We have it covered.”

“Bring her home safe.”

“I will.” I clicked off the phone, each turn of the tires feeling like it was taking ages. It wasn’t far, but with all the tension flowing around me it felt like forever. The building was vacant on the other end of Sumner. Once upon a time it was a steel mill, but the company sold out, leaving the structure in its place. My woman didn’t need to be anywhere near this shitty ass place.

Ensley’s car was parked by the front door with her driver’s side door wide open as if she’d rushed to get inside. Loved her determination as much as I hated it.

Motorcycles parked all around me as I hopped out to find Ensley’s car still running. Fuck me. She didn’t even take the time to turn it off. This told me she was scared out of her mind that she wasn’t going to make it in time for her sister.

She wasn’t trained for this kind of shit. No, she was blind going into a situation, and fuck if that didn’t piss me right the hell off.

I touched my thumb to the center console, hating the seconds it took to open. I pulled out handguns and extra clips for both. Stuffing the guns into my jeans, I got out of the SUV.

“Son,” my father said as I moved to the building’s door, finding it locked.

“No fuckin’ clue. While I want to look at the cameras, I can’t wait to get in there,” I responded.

Buzz and Deke came up to my right. “Keys. We’ll pull it while you go in.”

I tossed my keys to the men as they took off to the back of my SUV.

My training kicked in, and I was on a mission to find my woman.

Every breath is heavy. He’s been through combat, but nothing compares to what is on the line with Ensley in danger.

“Cell communication.”

“Right,” Buzz answered. All the brothers were there. Cruz, GT, Ryker, Jacks, Nox, Green, Cooper, fuck even Rhys and that man didn’t much like me. It reinforced with steel beams that this was family. This was what they did for those they considered their own.

I’d almost fucked everything up and lost it all. I wasn’t losing my woman either.

“Ryker, call Austyn and see if she still has Ensley on the line.” Ryker took off as we made it to the side doors.

My father was behind me while the brothers were behind him. Cruz made his way up to me. “This is your rodeo. Don’t fuck it up,” he demanded, falling back just a touch.

Using hand motions, Cooper, Nox, and Jacks moved to the other side of the doors, so we’d have a view of everything. Not hearing anything from Buzz or Deke, I nodded.

Reaching out, I turned the handle, and it gave way. The door made no noise as it swung open.

Gun up, I was ready for anything.

What I wasn’t ready for ... was nothing.

There was absolutely nothing inside the building.

Empty.

Where the fuck did they go?

They had to be hiding somewhere. Off to the right there were three doors. They had to be behind those. Pointing and mouthing to the brothers, we made our way to the side door.

Just then my cell rang.

“Fuck,” I whispered, pulling it out and seeing Deke’s name on the screen. “Yeah.”

“Get the fuck out of there. Now. She’s gone, and the place is rigged.”

“Out! Move!!” I ordered as all the brothers took off to the door. After getting to the door myself, I waited for the last man to get out then followed at the end just in time for the bone-jarring explosion to hit.

ENSLEY

VOICES. THERE WERE SEVERAL OF THEM. MALE ONES. I thought, but my brain was foggy.

My body ached all over, and for some reason I couldn't move it. It was as if I were floating outside my body. Hell, the more I tried to pry my eyes open, the more they refused to follow the command. What did they do to me?

Unable to move, but damn could I feel. There was something scratchy around my wrists and feet. A cool breeze fluttered over my skin, telling me I was naked. Shit. Naked? No. Just no.

Everything came back in a rush.

Daniel. Fear like no other gripped me.

I'd heard him on the phone, but until our eyes connected in the warehouse, I didn't know for sure if it was him. It had been a long time since I'd heard him. But I knew now. Seeing him and my sister was all I remembered upon entering the building.

Now, all I heard was voices. Several of them, but I couldn't count them.

What I didn't hear was Katie, and that terrified me more than anything. She had to be okay.

My eyelids felt like sandpaper as I slowly was able to open my left one just a bit. Everything was blurry, but I tried my damndest to focus which wasn't easy.

Several grayish blurred figures came in and out of view. They were so damn fuzzy, even as I continued to work my eyes, trying to take in our surroundings.

“These bitches will get what’s coming to them, and then we’ll take over,” Daniel spoke from somewhere in the room. He wasn’t that far away but wasn’t standing right next to me either.

Several agreements came from the others. I wondered what they were planning to take over and why we had to be part of it.

Tingles formed in my fingertips and toes as I tried moving them. The more I tried the more frustrated I got. It took a few goes, but I was able to move them even if it were a tiny bit. At this point I’d take what I could get. But I needed my faculties.

Footsteps came closer, my stomach tightening, and a finger touched my chin. The man’s breath smelled like stale garbage, making me want to vomit as he spoke. “Been waiting a long time for this, Cyrus.”

The hard slap had my head swinging to the right. While I hated the fact that Daniel had hit me, the burst of pain associated with it was the key to getting my eyes to open and feeling to come to my body. That was what mattered at the moment.

It wasn’t an all at once thing. It was gradual, but it was the catalyst for my alertness. I needed my wits about me.

Blood pooled in my mouth, and it took everything I had to swallow it down as my throat refused to work. What the hell did they do to me? Why was I so lethargic?

Righting my head with effort, I stared into the eyes that at one time were going to be my future. The man that my father had promised me too. I was to marry him and become his tenth wife, give him babies, and shut up, doing what I was told when I was told.

He was only nine years my senior, but that meant when I was ten, he was nineteen, the year I was promised to him. The shit that went on in this ‘religion’ was exactly that—shit. It

was detestable. If anyone told me that Remy had to be married to someone at the age of ten, I'd gut them. Or, at least, ask Austyn how to. She'd help. I knew it.

To make matters worse, Daniel was a cousin of mine. My father's brother's son. Yes. You read that right. He was my first cousin.

Sure, there were laws about such things, but the people didn't follow any laws but their own. After all, to them this was a pure bloodline. All the way around it was gross.

Daniel still looked the same as before, maybe a bit more worn. His skin had seen the sun for long hours. Wrinkles clogged his forehead and between his eyes. More than likely from yelling at his wives. From the gossip, yes we still had gossip, Daniel wasn't a nice man to the women in his care, nor the children.

Rumors were he liked to use his fists on them. Judging from the slap he'd given me, he'd had a lot of practice hitting that perfect spot.

He was ranked high in the system, though, and got what he wanted. His brown eyes were nothing like Micah's. No, Daniel's were evil, cruel, and mean. One glance at them and one knew they were in trouble, no matter what they did. He was going to dish out some kind of punishment.

"The little bitch is finally home," his garbage breath spat at me, grabbing my hair and pulling it back so hard I swore my neck was going to snap in two. The strain radiated down my spine as I pulled on my ropes. They didn't give way.

Home?

Even in pain, I looked around the space, my stomach plummeting to the ground as stark fear and terror came over me. Not only was I with Daniel and many other men, but I was back home in the large sanctuary. It was underground and only used on special occasions.

It had always creeped me out, making me feel as though I was buried alive.

But the kicker was, Ryker had told me that the family had moved. Seeing this, they hadn't gone anywhere.

I seriously wanted to throw up. This was the one place I never wanted to return to. Never wanted to see ever again. And here I was with Katie, tied up like a Thanksgiving turkey with these dicks of men.

Movement came from the corner of my eye, seeing Katie in the same position as me. Wrists tied together above her head and ankles tied to wooden beams very far apart.

The cool breeze was from what I feared, we were both naked. This wasn't good.

Remy and Micah flashed through my head as the fear clutched around my insides so tight it threatened to take me under.

You have to stall. Micah and Ravage will come. My inner voice kept screaming at me. If I kept him talking, then hopefully neither of us would get hurt. Well, anymore.

“What do you want?” My words came out with a lot more bravado than I had inside. If that was a good thing or not, I didn't know.

Daniel's grip loosened in my hair just enough for our eyes to meet. His were filled with hate and menace. I hated him with every fiber of my being. This rage came over me. I'd never been a violent person, but staring into his eyes, I wanted to gouge them out with my fingernails.

“You were promised to me, but you ran away. Then I found out you had a little brat inside of you. That kid is mine!” he roared, spittle coming from his lips and coating my face. There was no wiping it off, even though I desperately wanted to.

No way in hell he was getting his hands on Remy. He might kill me, but he would never hurt my little girl. Micah and the Ravage MC wouldn't allow it. She was safe at the compound with Blaze. She'd kill anyone who came near Remy.

“Now, I’ll have you until you are pregnant. Then every man here will have you while you’re with my child. You and your sister will produce an heir of mine every year until you’re no longer able to bear them. When you’re no longer of use to me, I have a nice big hole dug for you and your sister.”

My stomach felt as though I was going to puke, but somehow I held my shit together.

This man was crazy. Full out unbelievable crazy.

Even though I was trying to stay calm while we ‘talked’, inside I was raging. I detested everyone in this room and hated that my sister was caught up in this nightmare. But I had to remain calm on the outside.

Keep asking questions. Micah will be coming, my brain kept screaming, but would he know where I was? The address I gave them was to the warehouse, not here.

No. He had to find us. There wasn’t any alternative. No way in hell I was going to be some animal used and abused to carry Daniel’s spawn to life. That was a fate worse than death.

“Did my father put you up to this?”

He laughed full out, making his body shake and my head since he still had a grasp on me.

Daniel yanked my head to the left, holding my chin roughly with his other hand. It took me a moment to comprehend what I was seeing.

Along the wall there was a row of nine chairs. In those chairs were men, their hands and feet tied to the wooden frame of the chair. Then it hit me who they were. All nine of the elders. The elders who ran the community here. The elders who decided what happened and when. The elders who decided what girls would be married to whom.

And one of those men ... was my father, Jeremiah.

His face was bloodied and bruised. I could swear he was looking right at me, but I didn’t care. IVs were plugged into all of their arms, and instead of giving them blood, it looked as though they were being drained of their blood.

“What are you doing to them?” I asked, seeing every elder in different states of distress. One looked as though he would take his last breath at any moment, while another appeared to just have a few cuts and scrapes.

“Draining them, of course. We may need their blood for something.” He responded so nonchalantly that my insides quivered. Daniel had no soul. He had nothing good inside of him. What scared me the most about that was Katie and I were at his will.

He said that he wanted us to bear his children, so that didn’t mean death. As long as we were alive we could fight. How, I had no idea.

“Why are you killing the elders? Your father is over there too?” It was true. Even though he looked like he was the better of the nine, he still had a busted lip and swollen eye. While I didn’t like the man, still, who could drain their own father of blood and watch them die?

“He’s the worst of the lot. Once I get rid of them, then I become the next prophet.”

He really was insane.

Keep asking questions. That little voice nagged at me.

“The prophet is still alive.” I took another look at the nine men, not seeing the head man around here, Johnathan

Daniel jerked my head in another direction, and there the prophet lay on his back, hands crossed over his chest. Still. Unmoving.

“Is he dead?” We’d been raised that the prophet would only die when it was his time. It would not be at the hands of another. A higher being would come and take him. This right here did not feel like natural causes.

When I lived here, we followed the prophet’s every word. If he didn’t want families to eat green beans, we didn’t. If he called for us to give all of our shoes to the nine families, we did. There was nothing that he was denied.

Looking back on it, I didn't see it for what it was. A cult. A religious cult that was based around control and not any type of religion. No, that was used to cover up what was really going on.

I hated knowing that, but at the same time I was glad that I had got my sister and Remy away from this. Whatever this religion was, I wanted no part of it ever again.

“Yes. Been that way for about an hour. You woke up just in time to see him burn.”

It was so cold my toes were starting to go numb along with my fingers. I kept moving them, trying to get the blood moving.

“Burn?” I asked, trying to hold my shit together.

Daniel took a step back from me and snapped his fingers like he was a king or something. Men, most of whom I knew from my time here, grabbed the handles of a white fabric and picked up Johnathan's body.

I watched each step they took, and with each one it filled me with fear. As if I wasn't already scared enough. Not for Johnathan, not for Katie or myself.

One of the men, Tim I thought, opened a large circle that was carved into the wall, and flames came pouring out of it. It was a crematory. We were in the crematory.

Not realizing that, my body started shaking. We'd been raised that being burned sends you to the Devil instantly. Whether it was in a fire by accident or being cremated. It was not something we ever did. Therefore, why we had a crematory on the property was a mystery.

If these men were throwing their prophet into the flames, they'd have no reservations about doing the same with us. While I still didn't believe a lot of our teachings, just the thought of getting burned and never making it to Heaven where I'd see Remy had fear racing over my skin.

But it was there, and right now, it was illuminating. Johnathan's body was put onto a roller and slowly put into the

fire. The flames flashed out, appearing to grab the body and pull it in.

It was like a horror movie with the ghost grabbing onto your body, pulling you under, and there was nothing one could do about it. Fire was like that.

All the men stepped away, and the one who opened the circle closed the lid.

“And that is what will happen to all of these men.” He pointed to the men along the wall. “And you. You will rot in Hell for your indiscretions.”

Katie was crying beside me, but there was nothing I could do to help her. I was stuck. Helpless. And I hated every second of it. Katie didn't deserve this. It was my idea to leave, not hers. She shouldn't be punished for my actions. My heart broke at hearing her cries.

“Now...” Daniel paused dramatically. “All these men are going to stand here and watch me fuck the both of you.”

Tears began to roll down my cheeks. This couldn't be happening. There had to be another question I could ask to stall, but suddenly my mouth was dry like the desert, and no words would come out. Utter terror consumed me.

As I heard his belt unlatch, terror gripped me. This couldn't happen. Please don't let this happen.

MICAH

“WHERE THE FUCK IS SHE?” I RAGED, MY EARS RINGING AS I tried looking around.

Getting up from the explosion and examining all the brothers, I didn't see that anyone was hurt.

“We'll find her,” my father assured as I grabbed his hand and pulled him to his feet. “Everyone good?” he called out.

“Yeah.” Other grunts were heard, but I was making my way to my SUV. I had nothing. No clue. No idea. I wanted to get to the only thing I knew, my computers. They had to have the answers.

I'd been trained by the best in the world, but this, my girl being in danger, was tearing me up, and pushing that down was difficult. It was eating me to my core.

I needed to do something. What that something was, I didn't know.

“Get over here,” Deke yelled, and I full out ran to the back of my SUV. “Listen.” He handed me a set of headphones, and I put them on.

Ensley's voice was faint, but the males voice was loud and clear.

“Daniel.” I heard so softly. Pulling my laptop to me, I typed in where Ensley used to live and the name Daniel to see if anything would pop up.

“She’s saying the name Daniel,” I relayed to the brothers as I kept on searching. “Where’s Ryker?”

The problem with these groups was they didn’t have much of a digital footprint.

“He got knocked by the blast, I’ll get him.” Cooper said, moving to find Ryker. He’d know. He had to know.

“Where’s it coming from?” I asked Deke as I scoured.

“Ensley’s phone.”

“Fuck.” Anticipation hit hard. “GPS that fucker.”

“Already on it,” Buzz replied, typing on another laptop.

We had to find her. We had to get her back. Failing was not an option.

My cell vibrated in my pocket. I reached in, looked at the display and it read ‘Dryerson calling’.

I accepted the call. “Man, I can’t...”

“I know where they are,” he said in a hushed tone. “Get to the church where Ensley and Katie grew up, now. I’m not waitin’. I’ve heard screamin’, so hurry your asses here for backup.”

“On it. Out.”

“Ryker!” I called as he rushed over to me. “Do you know the church Ensley went to?”

“Motherfuckers took her there? They were supposed to be moved out of that fuckin’ place. Yeah. I know where that is. Let’s fuckin’ go.” Ryker whistled loudly as we all got into vehicles.

“Can you ride in the back and listen?” I asked Deke who lifted his chin. Handing him the headphones, I darted to the driver’s seat and took off to get to my woman.

Ryker sat in the passenger seat, and every so often he would yell, “Fuck!” He was pissed, and I couldn’t blame him. I was livid.

“Talk to me, Ryker,” I urged, taking a turn.

“Last time I went to go find one of my sisters, they were all gone except my mother, who told me they were all moving. She wouldn’t tell me where, which I expected. Fuckers didn’t move at all. Or they did but probably closer to the damn compound.” His breaths were coming in strained pants.

“Don’t focus on that shit. Makes no damn difference. We need to find Ensley and Katie and get them home safe. That’s the mission. Come hell or fuckin’ high water we’re gettin’ them out of there.”

“I’ll take out any and all of those fuckers,” Ryker clipped.

I couldn’t agree more. Fuckers had to die.

DRYERSON

THOSE MOTHERFUCKERS HAD MY KATIE. WELL, FUCK THEM.
They weren't keeping her. She's mine.

ENSLEY

“PLEASE NO...” KATIE CRIED AS DANIEL MADE HIS WAY TO her.

Daniel ran his hand over her breast. Even straining in the ropes, I couldn't get to Katie. “I think I'll take you first to take the edge off. That'll give me time to really play with Cyrus.”

My throat filled with bile. He wasn't hurting Katie anymore. If I could get him to focus on me, maybe I could keep him occupied so he wouldn't touch her. She'd already been through too much.

Her face was black and blue along with parts of her body. I didn't know what they did to her in that warehouse, but whatever it was, she was in agony from it. Me leaving got us into this mess.

Hating what I was about to do, I sucked in a deep breath and hoped like hell I'd come out on the other end. I went for it.

Clearing my throat, I tried to sound sultry, but probably sounded like an idiot as I cooed, “Hey, Daniel. I've been waiting for you to come rescue me.” His head turned toward me as he stilled, his hand on Katie. *Please, for the love of Pete, let him buy this shit because it was about to get deep. And please don't lose your lunch; it'll blow the whole seduction thing.* “See when I left, I always regretted not spending time with you. How you'd be in bed. I know girls aren't supposed to think that way, but you were so strong. Come over here,” I taunted, fighting down the revolt inside my stomach as it flipped and flopped.

His eyes narrowed, and my heart thundered. “You’re a lying bitch.”

This one was going to be a doozy of a lie, but I had to roll with it. Everything inside me screamed for me not to go there. With no real choice, I did. “Feel how wet I am for you.”

Knowing I wasn’t wet, I had to think on my feet and only came up with one solution. I released a little bit of pee. It wasn’t enough for him to smell it, I’d hoped, but enough that when he felt me, he’d know I wasn’t lying. The one plus side of having a kid, peeing on command was no longer an obstacle.

Please work. Please work.

My knees knocked, and it took my willpower to get them to stop. Either way this ended up would be bad. Either he’d figure out it was pee, or he’d take it as an open invitation to have me whatever way he wanted.

The only win was he was focused on me and not Katie.

Worry and dread filled me. I didn’t feel the pee trickle down my leg which was a good sign. While having his hands on me was the last thing I wanted in my entire life, I had to do this to protect Katie. If that meant having sex with Daniel, I’d hate every second of it, but so be it.

I would find a way for us to get out of here. That was for damn sure. No way in hell would I go down without a fight. The Ravage MC had taught me that.

Having my limbs tied was a big problem, and I needed to get them loose. Even with all these men around, there had to be something I could do.

I prayed that Micah had found out where we were, but since he wasn’t here, I had to protect us as best as possible.

Daniel stepped closer to me, eyeing me wirily. “So, I touch you, you’ll be wet for me?”

I felt the slickness from the urine and answered boldly, “Of course. Try me.”

“Ens...” Katie started, but I gave her a scathing look to shut the hell up. This was not the time for her to be talking. Her lips clamped shut.

“You’re dry as a bone. You won’t like the consequences,” Daniel fired back, obviously knowing my play but too damn curious to let it go. This was too big of a challenge for him.

Plastering on a fake smile, I tried to give him a sultry look. He was utterly repulsive, and the only way I was able to do it was by picturing Micah in his place.

Micah.

We’d finally become a family, and here I was tied up and about to be touched by a mad man. This was not how it was supposed to go.

Micah would hate me for what I was about to do, but I didn’t see any other option. It seemed as though buying time wasn’t going to help, so this had to work.

“Come try,” I seduced, being repulsed by him.

He stepped up, lifted his hand, and clutched my vagina hard, his finger penetrating inside of me. It was unyielding and abrasive, not to mention seriously uncomfortable. All I could think about was cutting it off and ramming it up his ass. Instead, I gave a breathy gasp as if he was turning me on. I wasn’t an actress, but today had to be my best performance.

“You are fuckin’ wet. Inside and out.”

This only made me want to yack more, but it was what I wanted, for him to think he’d turned me on. I could and would use my body to save my sister. She’d given up everything for me, and I would do the same for her. We would get out of here.

“Told you.” I shook at the ropes, trying to push my naked body closer to him. The feel of his shirt on my nipples was anything but nice, more like sandpaper. I played it up, though, trying to get my crotch close to him. It was what he wanted from me anyway, to be his breeding factory.

Pulling on the ropes, I maneuvered myself as close to him as I could. I just needed him to untie me. Maybe if I played it up that I wanted to touch him, he would.

Inside I just wanted to scream at the top of my lungs, letting all the rage, frustration, and sadness out of my body. Currently it was threatening to have a mind of its own and take me down with it.

Do it!

While the men around us watched with avid fascination, I darted my focus away from them, peering over Daniel's shoulder. If I got loose, I'd need something to protect us with. A knife would be preferable, but there was nothing sharp I could see. One of these assholes had to have something sharp!

His hand came to my chin and held it tight, our eyes meeting. I had no idea what he saw in mine. I just hoped it wasn't my true feelings. His lips touched mine, and I had to hold in my tears as his garbage mouth kissed me. Trying to kiss him back, I felt repulsed with myself. How could I be doing this shit? How could I even attempt this seduction?

Survival, plain and simple.

"Knew you wanted it," he growled, wiggling his digit inside of me. It hurt like a mother. He was not gentle by any means, but I wiggled my body as though it was the best feeling on the planet. It made me pause and wonder if this was how he was with all of his women. Why I'd think of this at this time, I had no clue.

"Of course."

His lips started at my neck and moved down to my breasts. He took a tip in his mouth and sucked painfully hard. While I wanted to cry out in pain, somehow I was able to hold it in and make some sort of pleasure sound. At least I hoped it was.

I maneuvered my body once again, hoping that he'd take the hint to untie me. It wasn't happening, and with his hands roaming over my naked body, I wanted to kill this man.

How dare he touch me... That was all the men here thought about. Getting a wife and knocking them up. Over and

over again. He was the same as all the rest.

A bastard fuck who thought the world revolved around him, his wants, and needs.

Frustration started to boil up as he moved from one breast to the other, then he stuck his fingers back inside me. This time it was two, and it felt as though he was rubbing an SOS pad inside of me.

Not enough piss in the world would lube me up enough to deal with this asshole.

I kept tugging on the ropes this time with my legs as well. And again, nothing. He was either blind or didn't give a fuck. I was going with both.

There it was, sitting on a tray off to the right. It was sharp, and I hoped like hell it would do what needed to be done.

I said words I never thought would come from my lips to Daniel. "I want to wrap my limbs around you when you plant your seed."

Do not throw up, Ens. Do not. Keep that shit down. Plant his seed. Seriously, Ens?

He lifted his head and studied me, brow knit. "This another trick of yours?"

"I didn't lie about being wet. A woman can only get wet if they were turned on. I'm therefore turned on and want this to be good." Liar ... liar ... liar... *I do not want your filthy paws on me or anywhere near me. You nasty piece of shit!*

"Legs only," he ordered, stepping away and motioning with his hand for some of his minions to come forward. He barked orders at them, and my legs were freed, feet standing on the cold cement floor. It was a start, not where I needed it to be, but a start. We needed to celebrate the small miracles. It was the only way to keep going.

Daniel stepped forward. "Now you can wrap those luscious legs around me while I fuck you."

He began to pull his belt fully out of his dress pants, the strap falling to the ground. I needed to stall. Stall. Stall. Stall.

Think, woman. Think!

His lips touched mine again as he picked my legs up by my thighs, all the weight of my body going into my shoulders. While it did hurt, I might have overexaggerated when I broke away from the kiss and cried out loudly in pain.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, looking at me up and down like he actually cared.

“My shoulder. I think I pulled it out of place. Help me.” I really did not have this damsel in distress thing down and hoped he wouldn’t catch on. Living on my own and protecting Remy, I’d had to grow a thick skin. The damsel thing was not me.

Manipulation. Hell, whatever worked. *Please let this work, dammit.*

I needed to get him to release me and over to that small table. I’d worry about everyone else around me later. They were all following Daniel’s orders, and I didn’t think they’d interfere. At least not yet.

“Arms,” Daniel barked, and as my wrists were untangled, I cried out in real pain. Who knew how long I’d been hanging there, and pins and needles pricked at my skin hard and fierce. The limbs fell in front of me as I tried to rub them and wake them up.

Body, do not fail me now.

Daniel touched my shoulder, and I cried out again, this time for pretend. If he thought I was hurt, it would give me a small advantage.

“Can I lay down please?” I asked it demurely as if I’d completely given into him and what he wanted. That I just wanted to be comfortable.

“Of course. We need you well to carry our child.”

Idiot. Stupid fucking idiot. He’d already told me he would have all his buddies take their turns with me. That my friend, would not be keeping me well.

My mind raced back to all those true crime stories Katie had listened to from this Bailey Sarin chick. Katie listened to her every Monday and had roped me into it on several occasions. The woman did her makeup while telling a true-life crime story, and some of that shit was wacked. Interesting, but there were some seriously fucked up people out there.

There were so many different stories she told, but one that stuck out was a stabbing.

I babied my shoulder, making him and everyone else, hopefully think I was wounded and wouldn't be able to fight back.

Carotid artery. That was what I needed to find. It was in the neck, if I remembered correctly. It grossed me out, but I was going to do it. This wasn't about me as a person or how I'd feel about doing anything and everything to protect us.

No, this was survival. To stay among the living, I had to do whatever it took, even if the consequences of it kept me up at night. At least I'd still be alive for my little girl.

Sucking in a deep breath, I went for it, pure adrenaline taking over and guiding my actions.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye. One moment Daniel was carrying me, and the next I was on my feet, and gunshots rang out. Not looking to see where they'd come from, I grabbed the needle from the IV bag off the small table just as Daniel put his arm around my chest and pulled me to him.

My heart beat out of my chest as I looked over to Dryerson, but he was alone. Sure, he had a gun, but there were twenty or so men down here. He couldn't take them all on.

"Who the fuck are you?" Daniel barked, jostling me around and using me as a human shield. I clutched the needle in my hand, waiting. He had to give me an opening. As he jostled me around, I feared I'd drop the damn needle. It was my last hope.

You've got one shot at this. Aim for the center of the neck, between the front and back. Do it hard, and pull the needle

down. If you have to, keep stabbing in and out of the same spot to make the hole bigger.

Never in my wildest imagination did I ever think those words would come from my brain. I was actually planning on taking another human's life.

Could I do it?

One look at Katie who was crying and pleading with Dryerson, and I learned I could. I banished every thought from my head except the task in front of me. Therefore, I took my shot.

Stomping on Daniel's foot as hard as I could with bare feet, unaware, he grunted and loosened me just a bit. I turned, the look of surprise on the man as I took the needle and plunged it into his throat, yanking down hard. Not once. Not twice. No, I didn't count the number of times I'd stuck him, and I didn't stop until the man had rivers of blood coming from his neck. Nothing else mattered in that moment besides making sure Daniel was incapacitated.

Daniel fell to the ground, his hands around his neck trying to stop the blood flow and not having much luck considering it was flowing through his fingers.

As I looked down at him, I felt as though I was out of my body, hovering over him in some crazy way. Like I didn't just do that, someone else did, and I had watched. That my hands were clean of what had just happened.

Logically I knew I did, but illogically, no.

My hand was covered in Daniel's blood, the reality of what I'd just done hitting me hard. I'd really done it. I'd killed a man.

"What the hell!" I heard a couple of Daniel's minions say, snapping me out of my thoughts and putting me to action. One threat was dealt with, but the others were not.

Quickly, I moved to Katie and stood behind Dryerson who was shielding her. Undoing her restraints, she fell to the ground, and I tried grabbing her to cushion the fall, but I didn't get there in time. She hit her knees hard on the floor.

“Where’s Micah!” I screamed at Dryerson as the men in the room advanced on us. They were like a swarm of bees ready to attack. This was going to be bad. Really, really bad.

There was no way Dryerson had enough bullets in his gun to take all of these men down.

What the hell were we going to do now?

Picking up Katie under her arms didn’t go as planned. I wasn’t the superwoman I thought I was and had to drag her feet a bit on the ground because I couldn’t pick her all the way up. But I didn’t want Dryerson to take his eyes off the men coming our way, so I started dragging her away.

“Down!” I heard from behind me as loud pops rang out in the room. Micah stood there, gun in hand and smoke billowing from the barrel as I fell on top of a screaming Katie.

I wanted to feel relief, but the fear and my actions today completely took me over, and my body began to convulse.
What have I done?

MICAH

ONE BY ONE, I STARTED DOWN THE LINE PLUCKING THE assholes off, a bullet right through their frontal lobe. There was no need to prolong any of this shit. They needed to be dead. They needed to be annihilated. Each one of these assholes had touched what was mine. Fuck them. This was war.

In times of war, you protected those you cared about and took out those threats.

As the Ravage MC men filed in, more gunshots went off. They were covering me. Only then did I move to the floor where Ensley was huddled over her sister. She was completely naked and covered in blood.

All I did was pray it wasn't her blood.

"Are you okay?" I asked, touching her back, and she flinched at my touch. What had these fuckers done to her?

Those fucking motherfuckers.

"Sorry," she apologized, turning her head and looking up at me. Tears rolled down her face, eyes red and puffy along with dirt smudging her everywhere. "I'm okay. We need to get out of here."

She was absolutely right on that one. Fuck, she was brave.

"Come on." I nodded to Dryerson as the gunfire completely stilled. "Get Katie, and let's go." I turned to my father. "I'll come back."

While I wanted to stay and take every one of them down, Ensley needed to be safe, and the only way to do that now was to remove her from the situation. Scooping Ensley into my arms, I hauled ass back the way we'd come into this dreadful place.

The only way we found the basement was because of Ryker. Once he knew where the women were, he knew exactly the place they would take them.

Passing pictures on the walls that had the name 'prophet' written on them, I darted up the stairs and out of the building, not giving two shits about any of it. The light blinded me for a moment as Ensley burrowed into my neck, her body trembling.

Holding her tighter, I cooed softly, "I've got you, baby. You're okay." My words did nothing to reassure her body.

I only paused for a moment when I saw people coming toward us in the distance, walking in a straight line like some kind of defense team.

If I had to pluck every single one of them off, I fucking would not give that first fuck who any of them were. These people kidnapped my woman and her sister. Protecting them was my only objective.

"Hang on, Ens. You're safe. I've got you," I repeated, needing her to feel me and take some of my strength.

"Katie ... is she okay?" Her words were stammered, the first words since coming out of that hellhole.

"She's okay. Dryerson has her on the other side of the SUV getting ready to put her in. You'll be together in a second." I opened the Tahoe door and set her as gently as I could on the seat. She moaned at the movement but was able to sit. "Are you hurt anywhere? The blood? Is it yours?"

My hands cautiously roamed her body, checking for cuts, bullet wounds, or anything that would cause that much blood to be on her. She had black and blue marks in several different places on her body.

“It’s not mine. It’s Daniel’s,” she whispered, wrapping her arms around her body, trying to cover herself up. Those fuckers had her naked.

I reached into the back of the SUV and grabbed two emergency blankets, handing one to Dryerson who set Katie on the seat opposite of Ensley, then giving one to Ensley and wrapping her up tight. She clutched on to it like a lifeline.

“Talk to me.”

She said nothing at first, the shock overwhelming, but I needed to know what was going on. I kept an eye out in the distance, and ever so slowly those people were still coming our way.

Ensley had difficulty meeting my eyes at first when she started talking. “Daniel blew up Austyn and Emery’s houses. He wanted Katie, Remy, and me. Said Katie and I owed him children. Said he was going to impregnate both of us until we couldn’t have children anymore. He’s killing the elders by draining their blood, and he called himself the next prophet.”

I cut down what she’d laid out. “Bottom line—he was planning a takeover. Where’d the blood come from?”

“I...” She stopped, dropped her head, and shook it.

I reached around her and pulled her into my body. She didn’t flinch this time. I hoped the shock was coming around. “Baby. Tell me.”

Her words were broken with her sobs. “I stabbed him in the neck until he bled out.”

A smile came to my lips. “Good girl. Proud of you.”

Her head popped up as she looked into my eyes, her words quivering. “You don’t understand ... I...”

She was having a hard time coming to terms with killing that asshole, and I needed her to feel off the hook. He was an asshole who deserved it.

I leaned in, kissing her forehead. “Whatever you did. However, you did it does not matter. It came down to either you and Katie or him. You chose the two of you. Don’t give

two shits how you did it or what you had to do. Just proud you had the courage inside of you to get it done.”

The tears continued to roll down her face as she held the blanket tight around her body. She said that she wasn't hurt, but I didn't know if I could trust that. She was in such a state that anything could be happening. Shock was a terrible thing, and it wasn't the time to press. She was holding on by a thread.

A white Tahoe pulled onto the lane and parked near the bikes. Knowing who was inside, I lifted my chin. “I'm gonna take you to Austyn and Princess' SUV. They're gonna get you and Katie sorted at the clubhouse while I deal with this.”

“Okay...” She paused. “But what are you gonna do to them?”

“End them and make sure they never come after you again.”

I lifted her as her watery eyes pleaded with me. “My sisters are here. Please don't let anything happen to them. It's not their fault. They were born into this...”

I made sure the blanket was covering her as I pulled her body close to mine. “I know you're scared as shit right now, but you gotta know that shit would never happen. We just have to take out the trash.”

She snuggled into my body, her face in my neck as we reached the Tahoe. I swore she was smelling me. “Everything'll be good. Promise you. You get yourself cleaned up, and see to our baby girl. I'll handle the rest.”

Her head nodded as we reached Austyn. “Take care of her.”

“Absolutely,” Austyn replied, opening the back door and climbing in. Ensley was put on one side of her while Katie was on the other, Dryerson standing there with his hand on top of his head. He was probably thinking the same as me. What the fuck had they done to them?

Austyn wrapped her arms around them both, and they melted into her.

Hated leaving her like this with tears and shock surrounding her, but if I wanted to make sure the threat was completely gone forever, I had to get back down there.

“You got this?” I asked Princess, shutting the back door.

“Shut it,” she said through the rolled down passenger side window, shifting and taking off away from this hellhole of a place. Yeah, she had them.

Turning, a mob of people were still coming our way, now close enough to see them. Many of them were in pastel colored dresses from neck to feet, only a few were in pants, and they appeared young. Not that it made a bit of difference because we didn’t know these people. Therefore, these people were threats.

I pulled out my cell and called my father who answered on the second ring. “Yeah.”

“Got a lot of people making their way over here. You got shit down there good?” My gun came out of its holster as I held it, waiting for the new arrivals. No sense in pretending that I thought they were enemies.

“I’ll send some up for you to get your ass down here and see this shit,” he replied and hung up. Whatever he needed my ass down there for wasn’t going to be pretty, but there was no doubt I wanted to be a part of it. As long as they all ended up dead, I didn’t give a fuck. I just wanted to set my eyes on it because I knew the Ravage MC would do what was necessary.

Ravage brothers filtered out of the building, guns at the ready and eyes scanning.

“There.” I pointed to the people, to which they had to turn around to see.

“On it,” Nox said.

I turned to Dryerson. “Have his back.”

Dryerson’s angry eyes turned to me. “No fuckin’ shit.”

He never liked being told something that was a given. It was the man he was.

I nodded, moving quickly through the building and back down to the dank basement. My heart kept thundering, but on the outside I was calm as could be. Training. Plain and simple.

Entering the room, bodies littered the floor along with puddles of blood. The crimson road was on fire, and I didn't give two shits. I'd learned long ago that when you were in war, the casualties you took out were enemies of the state. At first, I had difficulty. I still remembered the first man I'd killed, but it made me stronger.

The Ravage MC men were scattered around the space. Deke, Ryker, and Jacks had three men surrounded and were taking in the room, while Ryker and GT were next to the nine men attached at the wall. They appeared to be on their last leg.

My father approached me, coming to my side. "You get anything from the girls?"

I relayed what Ensley had said then looked to the floor to seeing a man in a huge puddle of blood. "My guess is that one is Daniel."

"According to those assholes over there, yeah, it is. Daniel is a piece of fucking work." My father pointed to the wall. "Those old fuckers are the elders, and Daniel was draining their blood. Figured we'd just put 'em out of their misery and be done with 'em."

"Sounds good to me. What do we do with the ones alive?" I asked, walking to where Ryker stood with his gun pointed at the three men who were still alive while my father took off in the other direction.

"Well, funny thing is..." Ryker pointed his gun at the one on the left. "That one is my brother." Then he pointed to another. "And so is that one." Then he pointed to the final. "And low and behold, that's another. One big, happy fuckin' family."

"You know you don't want to kill us," the one on the right pleaded.

Ryker's wild gaze turned to the man. "You don't know shit." Ryker fired a shot into the man's foot. He jumped up and

down out of pain, screaming at the same time.

Ryker looked to me. “We gotta burn all these fuckers.” Ryker nodded to a large circle affixed to the wall. “Cremator. In these fuckers’ eyes it’s the worst punishment they could get. Saying they’ll go straight to the Devil or what the fuck ever.”

“Alright. I’m down,” I replied.

Ryker laughed. “I’ll see ya there, motherfuckers, and when I get there, I’ll do this a-fucking-gain.”

“You mean shootin’ them in the head isn’t enough?” Deke asked.

Ryker shook his head. “Fuck no. However, they die on earth, and we’ll send them straight to the pearly gates, unless they burn. In fire, they don’t ever make it.”

Cruz came up. He was the end all be all of what would happen here. Personally, I’d like to just throw them all in the fire and let ’em burn. Dead or alive. That might be wrong, but to me they had hurt Ensley or stood by and watched it happen. To me, that was instant death.

Sooner they were all dead, sooner I could get back to Ensley and Remy.

“Ryker,” Cruz called, and Ryker approached. “Which one of those fuckers is Ensley’s father.”

Ryker pointed. “He’s on his last leg, the fourth from the right.”

Cruz turned to me. “You wanna do it?”

“Fuck yeah.” Loved how he singled that man out for me to finish off. Might only be a prospect, but I truly felt like the Ravage MC family.

Cruz swept his arm out, and I went right to the man.

Pathetic. That wasn’t even strong enough for this pussy. He thought himself the man, but he was far from it. A man didn’t hurt his family. Didn’t try to murder babies. Didn’t keep women locked up. He was absolutely no man.

He was haggard, pale, and looked as though his last breath would be any moment. “This is for Remy. The little girl you wanted to murder. My fuckin’ little girl. Now she’ll never know you were a worthless piece of shit,” I spat, lifted the gun, and shot him in the temple.

He did nothing but slump over. He probably didn’t hear a word I’d said, but it was necessary.

“Hey, idiot one, two, and three,” Ryker called out, pointing to his brothers. “Start puttin’ these bodies in the fire.”

“We can’t,” they said in unison.

Ryker held his gun up, silencing them. “You fuckin’ do it or I kill you now. Your choice.”

The pussy-ass bitches were obviously scared out of their minds because they began to carry their fallen over to the fire.

“You want me to do these?” I asked Cruz, pointing to the other eight assholes.

“Go for it. Won’t make you any less pissed, but suspect you already know that.”

Yeah, I did. “Ryker, which one is your father?”

Ryker nodded to the furthest one from the left. “Just fuckin’ do it,” he responded.

Not thinking or taking a moment, all eight were gone. There were only the three left who carried the bodies into the cremator.

Ax came running into the room. “We might have a problem out here. I really don’t want to kill a bunch of bitches, but that might be what happens.”

Cruz turned on a dime, and I followed him, Cooper, Deke, Rhys, Buzz and Breaker topside.

I really wanted to laugh at the sight, but it was so very wrong, and I couldn’t. More gunshots were heard in the building, but I kept my attention on the women and children who were approaching. Absolutely fuckin’ hated that the

children would hear things they shouldn't, but there wasn't another option.

"It's best you turn around and go to your homes now," Cruz ordered, and they stopped, almost as if they were stuck in quicksand momentarily. Cruz had that effect on people.

Two older women with their hair done up in buns and clothes that looked like colored potato sacks took two small steps forward. I was no expert on fashion, but the damn things didn't look comfortable. To each their own.

"We want to know where our husbands are," the one on the right in light blue stated with a bit of unease in her tone.

"Dead," Rhys said, stepping next to Cruz. "So, go home." Had to admit, Rhys had a way with words and I could hear Dryerson give a little chuckle.

Sobs broke out in the crowd as they all became distraught. Sucked for them, but what was done was done.

"Here's the deal. They're gone. You have the right to stay here on the property and live your life. Or you have the right to get the fuck as far away from here as you can," Cruz announced to the crowd. "Don't give a shit which you choose, but none of you are going down in the basement."

The devastation on some of their faces was immense. I couldn't imagine being in their shoes, but they chose this life. They chose to follow Daniel. These were the consequences of that choice.

We all had consequences for our actions. This was theirs.

Smoke billowed out of the pipe on top of the building. With one smell, the women in front of me knew they'd never see their loved ones again.

Three more gunshots rang out, and more smoke billowed. The brothers started coming out one at a time, my father the second one out. Ryker was the last to exit. He pulled a canister out of his back pocket, lit it with a lighter, and threw it in the doorway.

Thirty seconds later, the entire building exploded in a ball of fire. We all had to duck at the intensity.

“Damn. Warn a man before you do that shit,” Cooper reamed Ryker who smiled.

“You get all the fun,” Raid complained. “Next time, I get the bomb.”

Ryker went up to Raid and put him in a playful headlock, not paying any attention to the mob of people standing before us upset.

“Stop.” GT boomed, and they pulled away laughing.

Ryker looked to the group and pinpointed one of the ladies that had stepped forward, this one in pink. “Hey there, Mom. Dad’s dead. How the hell are ya?”

“What have you done?” she yelled loudly, eyes narrowing at Ryker.

Ryker’s mood turned, and in a flash he was standing next his mother. “Fuckin’ took care of what none of you dumbasses would. You came after me and mine. Blew up my fuckin’ house almost killin’ my woman. Now they all burn. You wanna join them? Be my fuckin’ guest.” His arm swooped out to the building ablaze daring the woman to step into the fire. “Walk right on in.”

When she didn’t move Ryker looked at the crowd spotting something. “Ya’ll want out. Say the word and I’ll have a truck here in five minutes. You wanna stay here and live this life, that’s on you. But you want out. I’ll get ya out.”

“Who are they?” I asked my father.

“His brothers and sisters.” Oh fuck. He’d already killed three.

“No takers?” He yelled out. “Well you know where to find me when you buy a fuckin’ clue and learn this isn’t a life and it’s far from healthy or a way to get to some eternal peace. When a so called prophet blows up peoples home just because his dick didn’t get wet, that isn’t the man you want to follow.”

Ryker stepped back and I asked him. “Who is Ensley’s mom?”

“Fuck me. Let me see if I can pick her out. It’s been years since I’ve seen her.” His eyes scanned the crowd some turning and walking back towards the homes. They knew there was nothing they could do here, except burn with their loved ones.

Ryker whistled. “Margert!” He yelled out. A woman in a yellow dress turned to her name. “Yeah you. We got Cyrus, in case you gave a shit.”

The woman’s face turned red and just as she was about to say something I started. “Thank you for having her. You gave me my woman and my child. But that’s all you did. You were a bitch to her and I hope to God you live with that every day. You’re a terrible mother, but Ensley is a great one.”

Margert said nothing, just turned on a heel and walked away.

“I gotta check on Ensley.” I told Cruz who was standing next to my father. “She was a fuckin’ mess. Now that this is cleaned up, it good I go?”

“Meet ya at the clubhouse,” he responded. I nodded to Dryerson to come with me and didn’t waste another moment, hopping into my SUV and heading straight to my woman.

It was time to leave this nightmare behind us and move the fuck on. That was all I wanted. Me and my family.

ENSLEY

I LAY IN BED, MY LITTLE GIRL BETWEEN ME AND HER FATHER. Having her even just across the room was too much for me to bear. I needed her right by me. Needed to make sure those assholes wouldn't come back and take my little girl.

Sleep wasn't coming, but that would be expected after the ordeal today.

Talking was out of the question because I hadn't processed what was going on nor what I'd done. I just wanted to block it all out.

Now, as I lay here in the clubhouse surrounded by the people I loved, I felt it growing. The burning that started in my heart like part of it was shriveling up and hardening. Like a part of me was lost with my actions that I could never get back.

I'd taken another life. Another human being on this planet, I ended him. What kind of person did that make me? Was my soul damned to hell for eternity too because of my actions? Guilt racked me. Everything I was taught growing up slammed into my head like battering rams and I couldn't get them to stop.

The teachings of killing another human being. How one would go directly to hell. How one would never see anyone they loved again. How I'd be all alone in the afterlife.

It might be irrational, but some things from childhood were hard to break.

Rolling from the bed carefully I went into the bathroom shutting the door behind me as quietly as I could. I stood in front of the tall mirror staring at the woman inside it and knew I was a murderer. Daniel's blood was literally on my hands. Hell, I was bathed in it.

Even watching it flow down the drain earlier when I showered, didn't make the feeling of it disappear.

Everything was twisting inside making me confused.

What kind of role model was I for Remy? She didn't deserve a killer for a mother.

Tears fell from my eyes as I closed them and hung my head, my hair falling all around me.

I hated the man. Detested him. I didn't cry because he was dead. No, I had the emotion because I'd done something I never thought I'd do in this lifetime.

My head popped up when the door swung open.

Micah stood there tall and proud. One look at me and it was as if he knew. As if he could feel the guilt rolling off of me in waves.

He came up behind me and wrapped me in his arms. I stared at us in the mirror. He was a beautiful man. No one else compared to him in my eyes. His tanned skin went well with my light. With his arms around me, I grabbed onto his arms clutching them in front of me. They were strong. Comforting. Knowing.

"Stop with those thoughts right now." He demanded and I felt my spine straighten. It was one thing for him to know what I was thinking, it was another to demand I stop thinking. If he hadn't figured it out yet, I wasn't a fan of being ordered around.

"And you're in my head now?" I countered with every drop of sarcasm I could muster. It was a way to cover up my thoughts. I knew it but couldn't help myself either.

Hey gaze intensified on me. "You're thinkin' you're a shit person for killin' that asshole. But baby, you are not. You're a

fuckin' hero. You did what you had to do to survive because babe, I had no doubt he was going to breed you like a fuckin' cow and then throw you in the fire when he was done with ya. You want to live your life that way and away from Remy and me?"

My head shook. "No. Absolutely not. It's just hard knowing that these hands." I held them out. "Took the life of another. That they are stained with Daniel's blood forever. How do I deal with that?"

"Day by day. Each day'll get a bit better than the last. Whenever you feel yourself goin' down that path you say to yourself 'it was him or Remy.' And I want you to really think about that because that was the only option."

He was right. Not that I was going to tell him that. Instead I hit his arm teasingly. "Stop being logical."

He burst out laughing just as we heard little feet pitter-pattering into the room. "Daaa ... dee...." Remy yelled running right to Micah who picked her up in his arms.

They stood behind me and I couldn't stop looking at the reflection. Family. This was my family.

Yeah. My actions were a tough pill to swallow, but there was no doubt in my mind that I would've killed him again just so I could get this picture forever. This was what mattered.

MICAH

“WHERE DID YOU GET THIS?” MY STUNNED VOICE TO MY father rang through the room. I swore my heart stopped as I looked at the object he was holding in his palm out to me.

It was so small, yet absolutely perfect. Remy’s little name was printed along with her birthday. Never thought white plastic with a little bit of writing on it would be so damn special.

“Overheard Ensley talkin’ to Austyn about it the other day. She was broken up ‘bout it. Yesterday, while you were out dealin’ with shit, I checked shit out. Won’t get into everything, just know that I found this and wanted to make sure you got it.”

My father handed me Remy’s hospital bracelet. It was so light in weight, but it felt like everything. This one little piece of Remy’s history that meant everything to Ensley. Therefore, it meant something to me as well. I held it like breakable glass. A precious memory I wanted to share with my woman.

“Thank you.” I said on a deep breath. “She was so upset when this was missing from Remy’s baby book. She will be over the damn moon to have it back.”

My fist clutched over the bracelet as I held it tightly.

“Go on, son. Give it your woman. And be happy.”

I grabbed my father and gave him a tight hug. “Means the fuckin’ world to me that you’re by my side. So proud to be your son.”

My father slapped me on the back repeatedly, each one I felt in my heart. He pulled away. “Go before you cry and shit.”

This made me chuckle. “Marines don’t cry.”

“You wait until you walk that little girl down the aisle then tell me Marines don’t fuckin’ cry.”

We did, but just thinkin’ about walkin’ Remy down the aisle wasn’t going to happen. No man would ever be good enough for her. “That shit ain’t ever happenin’.”

“You cryin’ or Remy?”

“Neither.”

We both walked away chuckling saying, “see you at dinner.”

“Be there.” I made my way to the room Ensley and I were still staying in while we made sure this mess was all cleaned up. Opening the door, she was playing with Remy on the bed, their laughter filling the room.

“Daaadeeeeeee....” Remy called out. Every time she said my name it was just a bit different. As long as she knew who I was, I didn’t give a fuck.

Remy hopped off the bed and came running to me. I picked her up and swung her around, then blew raspberries in her neck. She giggled more.

We made our way over to the bed, where I sat and looked at Ensley. “Hold out your hand.”

Her brow quirked, but she did as I asked. I set the bracelet in her hand. Her eyes welled up with tears as she took it and inspected it. “Where did you...how did you...?” Ensley’s words were mumbled in disbelief.

“My father found it. The rest doesn’t matter.”

She clutched it to her heart, leaned in and wrapped Remy and I in a tight hug.

My family. Both small and big. I had them both and it felt fucking great.

“LOVE YOUR COOKIN’, mom.” I kissed the top of my mother’s head after pulling her into a hug.

“I’m just happy to have you three all to myself for a while. Love bein’ at the clubhouse, but havin’ this small get together was what I needed.” We’d gotten the all clear to move out of the compound and back to our homes.

Ensley and I were taking it slow allowing her and Katie to recover a bit more.

“Me too.”

“So proud of you.”

I pulled my mom in and hugged her tightly then whispered in her ear, “We’re telling Remy about you and dad being her grandparents while we’re here.”

That was when the waterworks started because I could feel them through my shirt along with her body shaking.

“Mom, settle down.”

Her head shook. “You don’t tell me to settle down, Micah Tugger. It’s not every day you officially get a grandbaby. If I wanna cry I will.”

To this I chuckled. When did my mother ever do something she didn’t want to? That I couldn’t remember. She was a tough cookie.

“Come on.” I grabbed her hand and moved her into the living room. It was the same spot where I told them they would be grandparents. Now, it would be official.

I sat next to Ensley on the couch. Remy sitting in Ensley’s lap flung over into mine, latching her arms around my neck holding me tightly. No way in hell I’d ever get tired of this.

I started to talk, but Ensley beat me to it.

“Tug, I just want to thank you for finding the bracelet. It means the world to me.”

“What bracelet?” My mother asked before my father could explain, but he did have a wide smile on his face.

Ensley turned to my mom. “Remy’s hospital bracelet. I know it’s small and in the grand scheme of life doesn’t matter. But it was a moment in my life when I knew everything was changing. I knew that this little girl would never have to grow up in what I did. It represented her future. It may sound silly...”

My mom held out her hand. “I don’t think it’s silly at all.”

“You don’t?”

My mom shook her head. “Absolutely not. It’s the small things in life that are usually the most precious. You, Remy and Micah coming to dinner, may not mean much to someone who’s seen their child every day for the past four years. But for me, it’s my entire world rolled up in one. I have the four people in this world that mean everything to me. I appreciate it so much more than I would’ve before Micah left. You take the good anywhere you can get it and hold on to it with both hands. That’s what life is. Memories. Always make them. Little things. Making cookies. You’ll never regret it.”

I wrapped my arm around Ensley and pulled her into me, her body shaking with sobs. I felt my mom’s words as well, right down to my core. Never would I take anything for granted. Never would I go to bed without saying goodnight to my girls.

The small things.

“Mommmeeee...no sad.” Remy said putting her hand on Ensley’s cheek.

“She’s talking so much,” Ensley choked out.

Ensley covered Remy’s hand with her and replied, “I’m not sad baby. Sometimes when we cry it’s because we’re so happy that we have to let a little of it out and it comes in the form of tears.”

The puzzled look on Remy’s face had me smile. She was so much fun. Watching her learn new things was like me learning them through another’s eyes.

Small things.

Yes.

“Baby.” Ensley said to Remy whose gaze hadn’t left her. “Remember when I told you about your Daddy?”

“Dadddeeeeeeee,” she giggled falling back into my arms. I kissed her forehead.

“Chandler has a daddy too.”

Remy’s head shook.

“Chandler also has a grandma and grandpa as well. And you do too.”

“Pa Ma?” It was adorable. I fucking loved how Ensley was able to talk to Remy on a level she’d understand. She was the best mother.

“Yes.” Ensley pointed to my mom. “That’s grandma.” Then pointed to my dad. “That’s grandpa.”

Remy looked at them for a moment, but in her two-and-a-half-year-old brain, something clicked, and she jumped out of my arms and ran to my mother who scooped her up and started hugging her tightly. My father didn’t wait, getting up and moving to them.

He kneeled on the ground next to them and pulled them both into his arms.

Ensley was sniffing then started moving. “Where are you goin’?”

She pulled out her phone and snapped a picture of Remy with her grandparents. “Small things.”

“Small things.” I repeated kissing my woman.

MICAH

TWO AND A HALF WEEKS LATER

“USE THOSE MUSCLES.” ENSLEY CHEERED ON REMY AS THEY were kneading dough at the kitchen island. Our kitchen island. In our home.

A home I moved my family into two days after Ensley came back to me. The first time I carried Remy into this home and Ensley saw it, I knew this was what my future entailed.

I’d always wanted a family and here it was laid out for me.

My two girls were my everything. Of course, Katie moved in as well, but says she’s going to get a place of her own. I was in no rush to see her go. At least I could keep an eye on her under this roof.

Katie didn’t handle what happened to her well and Ensley’s been trying to reel her in ever since. It hasn’t worked. Her and Dryerson both lived here and they had something going on, but I was staying out of it.

Whatever it was, I hoped like hell it would help Katie get through the mess she went through.

For us, we were solid, Ensley and me. She let all of her skeletons out and so did I. The foundation we developed was strong. It was an honest friendship. Everything else just built off of it.

Now watching my two girls cook dinner together put everything that happened in perspective. The one night we had together when we made Remy. Us connecting again. Us coming into the fold of the Ravage MC. All of it.

The destination was this moment. Hearing my woman cheer on my girl and hearing both of their laughter.

“Har, Mommee. Elp,” Remy said, pushing the dough down with all of her might.

“It’s hard because it’s about ready to roll out. Just a couple more kneads, and we’ll be there.” Ensley was absolutely the best at teaching Remy. So damn patient with her. And trust me, Remy could be a handful.

They’ve taught me the meaning of unconditional love. No way in hell was I ever going to lose that.

“Daaaadeeee, tome elp.” Remy called seeing me in the doorway of the kitchen. I loved just watching the two of them when they didn’t know I was. It warmed me inside to no end.

I made a move to the island. “Hey bug. Whatcha makin’?”

“Eeezzzzaaa. Mes hungeee.” Remy smiled up, dough covering her little fingers.

“I’ve been wanting pizza.”

“Tome elp,” Remy told me pushing the dough to me.

“You go ahead. I have to wash my hands.”

A little pout came to her lips as I moved to the kitchen sink, washed my hands and continued to make pizza with my family.

Small things.

ANOTHER ONE of the thousands of reasons having my girls under this roof was Remy had her own room. Yes, we had a video monitor in it and could hear her if she needed us. But Ensley and I finally had our alone time.

Fucking in the clubhouse under the covers with Remy sound asleep was a pain in the ass.

Now though. Now I could do what I wanted to my woman, when she wanted it. She had a sexual appetite that rivaled mine. It was as if the can of worms was opened and I loved every second of it.

Ensley came in the bedroom closing the door behind her. “Remy’s down. I love her. I really do, but some days like today, I just want to sleep for days at a time. Who’d of thought a kid had so much energy?”

Laying in bed, the sheets were at my waist as I watched Ensley come to the bed, take off her small robe and toss it to a nearby chair. Fuck she looked sexy in her little top with straps and very, very short shorts.

My cock was always hard for Ensley, today it was almost painful. No matter how many times we’ve made love, I couldn’t get enough of her. My body ached for her every moment of every day. Never had a woman put that kind of spell on me, but damn she had.

She slid into bed and instantly I snaked my arm around her waist and pulled her under me, kissing her senseless. It only took seconds for Ensley’s warm lips to meet mine feverishly. Sliding my tongue into her mouth, unable to stop myself, I went deeper. Her taste was my one of a kind.

Hand traveling down her body, her smooth skin was soft and inviting. Small little goosebumps started rising following my hands path.

Her back arched, pressing her tits into my chest. Skin to skin was how I liked her and her damn tank was blocking my path.

Breaking the kiss only for a moment, my hands went under her top and flung it off of her, tossing it to the floor. Her breasts were pert and voluptuous, perfectly made for my hands and mouth.

One hand moved down to her ass while the other went to her breast kneading. When her back arched again and her breathing became labored, I smiled inside.

Ensley had a killer sexual appetite and kept up with me at every turn.

Leaving her lips, I reigned kisses to her jaw, neck and slowly made my way to between her breasts. Pressing them together, my head found its purchase as I sucked in her scent deeply.

Fingertips at the ready, her nipples were at tight peaks, but I wanted more. Taking my time, my lips found one nipple and sucked and sucked and sucked, feeling her body begin to squirm beneath me.

The only thing keeping her in one place was my partial body covering hers. Her fingers were gripping my head, reflexively giving away her enjoyment.

Moving to the other nipple, I gave it the same attention, but as I did, my other hand traveled down swiping off her ass hugging shorts. She lifted for me which was a help. The clothing fell by her top on the floor.

I could smell her arousal. Knowing that I was the one who put it there. That I did this to her, had my cock in agony.

Kissing a trail down to her stomach and to the small patch of hair, I inhaled deeply. This woman was mine. Now and forever. This pussy was mine.

My nose lightly brushed over her pussy, barely touching her clit. So close, yet so far away at the same time. With that one move, her grip tightened on my head as she tried to pull me to her to get more contact.

I didn't let her move me much. Instead, I blew a small puff of air on her sensitive folds. Each one plumper than the other. She was ripe and ready for the picking. Her inner thighs trembled.

“Would you touch me already?” She growled lifting her head briefly then letting it fall to the ground overcome with pleasure.

I made a tisking sound. “You know I'll do what I want.”

She groaned. “You're torturing me. You know that, right?”

Blowing again, I replied, “yes, that’s the point.”

“Grrr...” she growled making me smile.

Only after a few seconds more did I give her what she wanted. I wanted it too, so it was a win-win situation. My tongue darted out starting at the bottom of her lips and moving so very slowly all the way to her clit.

Then I stopped and listened to her groan, take one hand away from my head and smack it on the bed in frustration. Fuck yeah, I loved this.

Not wasting any more time, I devoured her pussy. Licking, sucking, nibbling. Each movement taking her higher and higher. With two fingers inside her tight channel and my lips around her clit, she was getting close. So very close.

Moving my fingers, I nibbled hard on her clit. Two seconds later, her back arched off the bed, hands gripped my shoulders and she screamed out as her orgasm overtook her.

As soon as she heard her own voice though, she stuck her hand in her mouth to muffle the sound. We did not want to wake Remy up right now.

She rode through her climax, her body completely taking her over.

I gave her no time to recover. Instead, I climbed up her body and thrust my cock deep inside her pussy. She groaned, her hand having left her mouth.

Being inside my woman was the only place I wanted to be. Leaning down I kissed her hard and deep letting her taste herself on me.

This turned her on as her legs came around my body and her hands came to my neck.

It was go time. Giving not a single solitary second, my hips began to thrust. And thrust. And thrust. Pounding into my woman with a passion and desire unlike any other. The more noises she made, the faster my pace picked up.

Sweat beaded down my brow as my breathing became erratic. Ensley was right behind me moving her body this way

and that to get herself where she needed to be.

Her walls clamped down on me tightly the pleasure unbelievable. Two more thrusts and I spilled myself inside Ensley.

She was mine until my last breath.

ENSLEY

MY HANDS WERE SHAKING AS WE ENTERED THE ASSISTED living home. It had been way to long since I'd visited, and Gladys probably thought Remy and I were dead at this rate.

But that wasn't why I was nervous. No, it was the big, tall, sexy man at my side. I wanted so badly for Gladys to like him.

Then I was nervous on the other end that Gladys would like him so much she'd ask for a massage. The coin could go either way with Gladys. She was a stickler when it came to Remy and I.

We made our way up to the reception desk. A woman with dark hair was there that I hadn't met before. "Hi. We're here to see Gladys Withendal."

"Hey Ensley!" Reba came from the back room ignoring the receptionist completely. She had a tendency to do that.

"Hey Reba. How's things?"

"Good! And you brought Remy today! Gladys is going to be so happy." Reba clapped her hands excitedly. I swore she said the same thing every time we came here. "And who is this hunk of burnin' love?"

I giggled. That was a description I didn't think Micah had ever been called before. But I had to admit it fit him well. He sure as shit was a hunk and hell I burned for him.

"Dis is Daaaadeeeeeee." Remy said explaining who Micah was. She did it with such pride, it warmed my heart.

“This is Remy’s dad, Micah.” I introduced with a smile spreading my face.

“Well look at you gettin’ your hands on that. Girl you did good. Let me buzz you in.” Reba sounded very impressed on my selection.

I felt Micah’s body shake with silent laughter next to me. He was getting a kick out of this and had no idea what was coming for him. Reba was nothing compared to Gladys. As long as she liked him, he should be okay. Get on her bad side and not so much.

“She’s down in the bowling alley.” Yes, it even had its own alley and Gladys was an avid bowler. Hell, Gladys could do about anything.

We made our way through the door, Micah and Remy right behind me. “Thanks.”

“This place has a bowling alley?” Micah asked leaning into my ear and I couldn’t help but chuckle.

“This place has a bowling alley, casino, bar, cigar lounge, massage spa, a playground and so much more.”

“Fuck, when we get old, we need to come live here.” My heart warmed at the prospects of Micah and I spending our lives together and that he was thinking that far ahead. That was what I wanted, to be with him and Remy for the rest of our days.

“Gladys has a massage boy who gives really good...”

“Stop,” Micah ordered as he stood next to me and we walked down the hall towards the alley. My smile was so wide it felt as though it would split my face in half.

“Massages was all I was going to say.”

“Right. Don’t believe that for a minute.” Micah commented low.

“Come on. Little ears.”

It was his turn to chuckle.

We passed several rooms as Remy pointed at the pictures on the walls.

My hands were clammy as we made it to the end. “I’m so nervous.” I commented stopping in front of the alley door.

“It’ll be fine. There’s no need for the nerves.” Micah wrapped his empty arm around my shoulders and pulled me in tight. His warmth was such a comfort. He was the only man that I’d ever felt so safe with.

I loved him. There I finally said it. It was true though. I needed to tell him, soon.

“She has to like you, Micah. She’s the only mom I’ve ever known. Sure, I haven’t known her but a couple of years, but she’s the closest thing I have ever had to one. If she...”

“She will. Look at me. I’m a hunk of burnin’ love.” He teased and I burst out laughing, the tension being stripped from me in a rush. Yes, he could do that with one joke, take all the bad shit away.

Safe. Comfort. Peace. That was what Micah gave me.

“You are.”

“Daaadeeeeeee. Geeeeeee!” Remy yelled taking her little hands, putting them on either side of Micah’s cheek and turning him to her. She meant business.

“Guess we’re gonin’ to see Gladys then.”

Remy smiled, then something happened that I wanted to capture and keep it close to my heart never to let it go. If I’d have known, I would’ve had my camera ready to snap a picture to never forget it.

Remy pulled her father’s face to hers and gave him a big smackaroo then pulled away smiling. The corner of Micah’s lip tipped up and he felt the moment just as I had. It was beautiful. Perfect.

A gesture that I would never forget until the day I died. While she loved to play around with Micah, hug him and use him as jungle gym, she hadn’t ever done that before. It was a first.

Since Micah missed so many of her firsts, I was so damn happy he got this and he would get more in the future.

Micah pulled Remy in hugging her tight. He kissed the top of her head and I swore I heard him clear his throat. But looking at him I saw no tears. Not that he would be a macho man badass.

He looked up at me. "Let's go."

I said nothing just nodded as Micah opened the door and I went in first. That was something else I was getting used to. Micah opening the doors for me. Every time, even if I were putting Remy in her car seat, he would wait for me to get to the door, then open it for me. He'd wait until I was safely in and shut it.

Personally, I'd only seen this done in movies. While I didn't say anything to him about it, I absolutely loved it.

The noise was deafening with rolling balls, striking pins and cheers all around. There was even music playing.

"They're havin' a party here." Micah said looking around the space. He wasn't wrong. The light was dimmed just enough to give the illusion of darkness. Lights of different colors swirled around the ceiling. Off to the left was a bar and off to the right were the alleys.

Searching for Gladys, I finally spotted her four lanes down. "Number four." I told Micah as we started making our way.

Gladys had her ball in hand, standing and peering down at the pins as if they were the devil's spawn and she wanted to kill them all. She was a bit competitive. Who was I kidding? She was very competitive.

Gladys took two steps, swung her arm back then forward releasing it down the lane. We stood behind the small wall that was blocking the walking area from the actual place the bowlers sat. There were even chairs up there for people to hang out and watch.

Yes, this place was awesome.

We waited on bated breath watching the ball roll. The ball connected, knocking all the pins down. Gladys turned around, arms in the air, hands opened wide, “Strikey, Strikey, Whoohoo!” She yelled then started this dancing as the other women and two men got up and did the same thing.

It took a moment before she saw us standing smiling at her. Her eyes went wide as she stared at the man beside me holding our little girl. When her eyes came back to me, she was already on the move stomping her little self our way.

There was something about height when you got older. It was like you shrank the more years you tacked on. Micah appeared like a giant next to all these people.

“Down. Gee!!!” Remy yelled, kicking her feet and Micah bent over, putting her little feet onto the floor. She instantly took off right to Gladys and wrapped her little arms around her legs. Not much longer and Remy would be at the woman’s waist for sure.

“There’s my girl!” Gladys cooed bending down and kissing Remy on the top of her head.

“And who do we have here?” Gladys asked coming to stand in front of Micah who towered over her.

This was it. The moment of truth. The one I’d been sweating bullets about.

Remy grabbed hand saying, “Dis is Daaadeeeeeee.”

Gladys’s eyes shot to me and I gave her a soft smile. “Gladys, this is Micah. Remy’s dad.”

Gladys stood there for a moment unable to say anything. When she turned around and went back down to where the balls were, I was seriously stunned. Gladys never shunned anyone. She said what she needed to say no matter what.

This wasn’t going good.

Gladys went straight up to a man with a golf cap on. She said some things to him and he nodded. Gladys then turned and marched to us. When she got to Remy she said, “Let’s go play!”

“Me pay now!!!” Remy yelled over all the commotion and eyes came to us.

We paid no mind to it, because we were following Gladys out the door. Micah grabbed my hands and squeezed it. When I looked into his eyes, there was so much question there. Questions that I didn't have answers to. I had no idea what was going on so I shrugged my shoulders.

During the small walk, Gladys talked to Remy like she always did and when we arrived at the playground, Remy took off like a shot.

Gladys moved to a table that had four chairs around it. “Come on. You got some explainin’ to do. And you’re holdin’ her hand.” Her words were accusatory.

This was not like the Gladys I knew. This was the hard exterior. Was it wrong to love it and hate it at the same time?

Loved it because she was looking out for Remy and I. Hated it because I really wanted her to like Micah.

Micah pulled out two chairs and Gladys moved to one, I moved to the other and we sat. “Manners. That’s somethin’.”

Micah sat between us, his eyes scanning the playground for Remy. Once he saw her, his body lost a bit of the tension.

“Gladys. This is Micah. Micah this is Gladys.”

“Nice to meet ya ma’am.” My heart melted. Yes, I really loved this man.

“Where’d you come from?” Gladys asked then turned to me without letting Micah answer. “You pick him up at Hot Boys R Us?”

Laughter bubbled up. “Not sure that place exists. If it does, wish I would’ve known sooner.”

“No you don’t.” Micah said. “Then I’d have to take the guy out. You don’t want that on your conscious.” He teased making me laugh harder.

Once regaining my composure, I started. “Micah is Remy’s father. We had a night together and Remy came from

that. He's been in the Marines and we ran into each other by chance. He didn't know anything about Remy because I had no way of telling him. Now, we're together."

"There seems to me to be a hell of a lot you're missin' in this story of yours." Gladys clucked her tongue.

There was. So much, but no way I was telling her about the explosion. Remy had finally let it go for the most part. And being kidnapped? No, she wasn't learning any of that.

Micah answered. "Yes ma'am. There's a lot she's not tellin' ya, but it's for the best. Just know that I love these two girls with everything inside of me and I'll protect them until my dyin' day."

He'd proved that several times over, but one thing got caught in my thoughts. He loved me. Just as I loved him. While he didn't come out and say it to me, it still meant the world to me.

Yes. I loved him. No doubt about it.

"I don't know if you're good enough for my girls." Gladys said shocking me.

"Gladys." I gasped and Micah reached over and grabbed my hand giving me a soft squeeze.

"I'm not good enough. No one would ever be. But I'll do my damndest every day to show them both how much it means to me that they took a chance on me. I'm the first to admit that I've made some fucked up choices. Some that had dire consequences but know this I've learned from them. Grown from them and am now the man I am because of them. Only been a father for what feels like minutes. I'll make mistakes. I'll fuck up. But I'll always put the pieces back together."

The tension went thick as I listened to what Micah said, my heart beating so hard I swore if you looked at my chest, you'd see its imprint there.

Yes. This man was mine and we would be together forever.

Gladys slapped her hand on the table, and I jumped back not expecting it. Micah's brow quirked at her and surprisingly he didn't jump. It was strange how things like that didn't shock him, but if Remy was in any danger at all, he'd be off in a flash.

"Alright. I like you." Gladys said on a smile. "But know this. You hurt my girl, I'll cut your wiener off. Don't think just because I live here, I don't have friends because I do. One word and you're chopped."

"No one is gettin' near my dick but Ensley."

To this Gladys laughed and it wasn't until that moment that the air I didn't know needed to be expelled fell from my lips.

She liked him. That was what I wanted no needed from her. She may have given him shit, but in the end, it turned out just as I'd hoped.

My family was growing by the second. They were of my choosing and I loved all of them.

MICAH

REMY'S EYES WERE STARTING TO DROOP. SHE WAS TUCKERED out from the day's activities.

Gladys. That woman was a ball buster, and I thought she was one of the best people I'd met. Loved that my girls had her and the Ravage MC while I wasn't around.

"We'd better go," Ensley said, standing from the table and picking up Remy in her arms. Normally, I'd reach over and grab Remy so Ensley wouldn't have to carry her, but today was different. Ensley just didn't know it yet.

I rose from the table and leaned into Ensley. "Need a word with Gladys alone."

Ensley had a sharp intake of breath. "What? Why?"

"You trust me?"

"With everything." That meant the fucking world to me.

"Take Remy to the entrance, but don't go out. Wait for me."

"Please." She looked at me wide-eyed, and I smiled. "Babe."

She huffed out a breath. "Looks like she likes you. Don't mess it up." Ensley leaned over and gave Gladys a hug, Remy kissed her cheek, and they were off.

I took my seat once more.

“So, what do you need to tell me that you haven’t already?” It was true, we had a very long conversation, but this was something I had to ask without my woman here.

“I’m gonna ask Ensley to marry me. I’d like your blessing.”

She folded her hands, set them on the table, and leaned forward a bit. “Why do you need that from me?”

“Ensley loves you. Can’t ask her biological parents because her mom’s an asshole and dad’s dead. Anyway, they don’t deserve my girls in their lives in any way. You, though. You are the one who deserves the respect as her parent.”

A tear welled up in her eye, and it rolled down her cheek. She sucked in a deep breath. “Yeah. I like you. But still I’ll cut it off. Remember that.”

To this I laughed. “I’m pretty sure a woman telling me she was going to cut my junk isn’t gonna slip my mind anytime soon.”

I rose from my chair and pulled out Gladys’, who stood up. “Thank you. Means the world to me that you entrust me with Ensley and Remy. I’ll always be there for them. Always. And you’re comin’ to the wedding.”

Gladys wrapped me in her arms surprising me, which wasn’t like me because of my training. In response, I wrapped my arms around her too. Her little head came up to my lower chest. Damn, the woman was small.

She pulled away and tapped my chest. “Go get your girls.”

To this I smiled. She gave me her approval.

Now to ask Ensley...

THE NIGHT WAS BEAUTIFUL, the heat going out of the day and leaving a rather tolerable Georgia evening. I hadn’t planned on it being this nice, considering how used to the weather I’d become, but I’d take it.

I'd never seen myself as a romantic man. Even when I was younger it was nonexistent. Sure, there were a few times I got flowers for a lady or something like that, but it was never like this.

This—this had to be perfect.

Remy was sleeping over at my parents' house, giving Ensley and me some much needed privacy. Loved my little girl, but I wanted just Ensley for this.

Lifting the outside furniture, I maneuvered it this way and that creating one large area of cushions with pillows all around. It was almost like a cocoon having only one area open for us to climb into.

The other small opening had a table where I had a bottle of red wine, a glass, a bottle of beer in ice and some snacks. I was not a wine drinker at all, but I'd found that Ensley loved a glass every now and then.

Every day we were learning more and more about each other. I could say with certainty that every part I came to know I loved. This woman was everything to me, and tonight she'd know it.

The twinkling lights above the furniture were a pain in the ass to put up. Dryerson helped me get them up. We zigzagged them across the space, connecting them to beams used as an arbor. The tricky part was the mechanism to move the lights took a bit to get done because it was a brand new program on my laptop I had to create.

After getting the electrical sorted and having to put a new GFI outlet in, it was done. Everything was ready for Ensley to get home.

She'd gone out with Katie and Austyn to get their "toes done." I assumed it meant getting them polished, but whatever; it was the perfect excuse to get her out of the house, call Mom and Dad, take Remy over there and get back to create this.

Looking at my phone, Ensley wrote me a text saying she'd be home in ten minutes. Killing the lights outside, I made my

way inside and shut the sliding glass door behind me.

I loved this home, but what I loved more were the touches that Ensley put into the space. Now, don't get me wrong, I couldn't give two shits about the pillows or blankets around. What I loved was her stamp. It was her saying that she lived here.

The pictures she started putting into frames and putting them on the walls was priceless as well. The three of us. Yes, Ensley was making this a home for the three of us.

There wasn't a single nervousness in my body. I was happy for this. Excited even.

The door opened, and Ensley walked in saying, "I'm home." Fucking loved that too.

"Hey, babe. You have a good time?" I asked while she shut the door and tossed her purse onto the side table, looking around the space.

"Yeah. Where's Remy?" she asked, puzzled. Our little girl was with us most of the time, so I expected this question.

"My parents are keeping her for the night."

Her brows lifted. "Really?"

"Yeah." I moved to her and pulled her into my arms, kissing her hard. She fell into me, and I took what I wanted, giving her everything in return. I'd give her my everything for as long as I walked this earth.

Reluctantly pulling away, I grabbed her hand and moved. "Come with me."

"Where are we going?" she asked when we passed the hallway to our bedroom, thinking that was where we were going. Which we were, later.

Opening the sliding glass door, the backyard was dark. We stepped out, and I pulled her into my arms, pulled out my phone, and hit the buttons to turn on the lights.

Her eyes widened as all the twinkling lights came to life. She gasped as she took it all in, saying, "It's beautiful."

I kissed the top of her head and led her to the couches I'd pulled together. "Hop in."

She did, moving to the corner where she gazed at the lights and then at me. "This is really awesome, Micah."

I climbed in and pulled her body into mine, holding her tight. "Worked on it today while you were out. Thought you'd like it."

It was true. Even the smallest thing I did for Ensley, she loved it. A note on the counter telling her where I was, she loved. Me changing the toilet paper roll, she loved. She was one of a kind and all mine.

Reaching in my pocket, I pulled out the ring that had been burning me all day, ready to go on my girl's finger. Lifting her left hand with my right, I slid the ring down Ensley's finger.

"Love you, Ensley. Want you with me forever. You are everything to me and so much more. You're my past, present, and future."

I heard Ensley hiccupping like she was crying, but it was confirmed when she looked up at me. "I love you. Yes. I'll be your forever."

Somehow in a rush, I had Ensley on her back with me on top of her, kissing the life out of her. It was a frenzy, and we couldn't get close enough. The lights were bright, though, and I pulled away just a second. "Hold that thought." I pushed the button on my phone, and the lights shut off, then started to move. This was the tricky part of the installation. It only took a few moments, and I was back with my girl who was looking up at the night sky.

"The stars are beautiful."

"Not as beautiful as you."

Then and there I made love to my future. My everything. My Ensley.

EPILOGUE

1 YEAR LATER

Micah

DRYERSON SLAPPED ME ON THE SHOULDER AND LEANED IN close. “Bet you didn’t think you’d be gettin’ hitched while we were in that sand pit.”

He was right. No, this wasn’t what I’d planned, but it was everything to me.

We were in our backyard. Everything had been moved around to create more space. I’d put in a huge concrete patio where all the chairs sat. We didn’t have a bride or groom’s side. We were all family, and I didn’t give a fuck where anyone sat. I just wanted my woman to legally be mine forever.

The entire Ravage MC family was here. True, I hadn’t gotten my official cut yet, and I was still prospecting. The time would come for me to be a member, but Jacks, who was sitting with Emery curled into him, wasn’t going to just let me slide in. I knew it. And I was fine with waiting. I’d prove it to him and one day I’d be in.

The twinkling lights were lit above as the sun was going down. I had to add a shit ton more, but it was worth it. The space glowed.

My father and I worked on the gazebo that was directly in line with the back door but a ways away, giving enough room for everyone to sit and still see us.

There were lights wrapped around the gazebo too. It was nice to do this with my father and spend days together reconnecting. It had been a hard road we'd traveled, but it was one I'd cherished. My dad and I were tight. Tighter than we'd ever been.

Dressed in a black suit, light blue button-down shirt with the first few buttons opened, I stood waiting for my woman to meet me at the end of the aisle, ready to do this. Fuck, I'd never been more ready to do anything in my life. I had left the Marines behind. Not that I wouldn't always be a Marine, but this was about the man I was now. This was about the life I wanted going forward.

Comfortable.

Family.

So today was casual.

The music started, and my attention went to the end of the aisle where my little girl was standing, a basket in her hand in a beautiful white dress.

"Daddy!" she yelled, running down the aisle to me, forgetting totally to spread the petals down on the walk. It didn't matter. She was speaking so much better now, and every time I heard 'daddy', my heart almost burst from my chest.

Leaning down, I picked up a running Remy and tossed her in the air, then tickling her. "You were supposed to put the flowers down. Remember?" I said on a smile.

She dug her tiny little hand in the basket, grabbed some of the dark red petals, and threw them to the ground.

"Odeer dare," she said, meaning over there. On a smile, she grabbed my cheeks in her hand and kissed me on the lips with a huge smack. Loved it when my little girl did that.

Laughter could be heard all around, and I joined in.

I held my girl as Katie walked down the aisle, her eyes straight forward as if she were afraid she'd fall. Once making it down, her gaze came to me. "Make her happy."

I nodded and looked into the audience, reminded of a little old lady saying those words to me. Gladys sat next to my mother with a wide smile on her face.

She nodded at me in acknowledgment. Yeah, I liked the lady as if she were my own blood.

The music changed, grabbing my attention, eyes flying to the opened door.

There she was.

She took my breath away.

Completely vanished.

Ensley was always beautiful. But this ... seeing her... I didn't know why I was so lucky, but I was so fucking glad I was.

Her dress sparkled from the twinkling lights' glow. It had straps and came down to a V at her breasts. It hugged her in all the right places and poofed out at the bottom. Her dark hair was in curls that were partially up and partially down. She had a small lily in the side of her hair.

Perfection. Absolute and total perfection.

My father stood next to her. Ensley's hand was on the inside of his arm, and I watched as she breathed in deep and then let it out.

As she made her way down, my gut tightened. Yes. She was mine. This beautiful woman would be mine forever.

When she made it to me, with Remy in my arms, I leaned in and kissed Ensley hard, only stopping when the catcalls became obnoxiously loud.

"You're not supposed to kiss me until after," she whispered on a smile.

"Before ... after. Doesn't matter. I'm going to kiss you until the end of time. Love you, Ensley."

"Love you too."

Then and there, with Remy now standing beside us, we pledged our love to one another.

We were in this together ... forever. My redemption.

THE END.. for now.

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Thank you so much for reading Bound by Redemption. I hope you enjoyed their story as much as I do.

If you could please leave a review I'd appreciate it!

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Ryan Michele is the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* Bestselling author of over 40 romantic suspense novels. She found her passion bringing fictional characters to life, being in an imaginative world where anything is possible. Her knack for the **unexpected twists and turns** will have you on the edge of your seat with each page. She is best known for **her alpha, bad boy bikers and strong, independent heroines who refuse to back down**. When she's not writing, you can find her on her swing, watching the water ripple in the pond and daydreaming about her next book.

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