

Patch



West Virginia

BOOK #1

MHAIRI O'REILLY

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CHAPTER ONE



I KNEW THE minute I saw her that she couldn't be mine. But that didn't stop me from coming into The Devil's Den Bar every night she worked for the last four months. The Devil's House MC owned this bar, so it wasn't unusual for me to be here. After all, I was the President of the club, and we had a reserved booth near the back wall.

So, no reason for her to suspect she had become my obsession.

Katherine Byrn— thirty-eight-year-old mother of one daughter—has been divorced for three years—rents a townhome with her daughter Bethany on the other side of town. I know her phone number—date of birth, and even her favorite color.

Katherine is the most beautiful woman I have ever laid my one good eye on with thick, long auburn hair, the color of my favorite bourbon—almond-shaped eyes the exact same shade—framed by the longest natural lashes I have ever seen. A

cute button nose, bow lips, and a smile as warm as sunlight. She was five-foot-five, curvy—always walked with a bounce in her step that was hot as fuck for some reason.

Yep, I knew a lot about the woman I could never have. Katherine was too good for a forty-four-year-old one-eyed, scarred outlaw biker like me. Katherine was as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside, and I couldn't bring myself to dirty her with hands like mine. Hands stained with blood and death. She deserved better. Not that she would ever look at me that way.

I looked around the room, my eye never leaving Katherine as she worked. It was Friday night, so the bar was busy. The Devil's Den wasn't a dive, but it wasn't real classy either. It catered to a rougher crowd, but the club controlled things. Hillbilly managed the club and didn't put up with any shit. The Devil's Den has been around for going on twenty years. The building is a converted auto body shop, and in the warmer months, we roll the doors up and allow customers to overflow the deck outside. The bar has twenty wooden tables, a long wooden bar with fifteen stools, two pool tables, and a small dance floor with a stage for live bands occasionally on the weekend. The walls are covered in bike memorabilia collected over the years—stamping it the biker bar that it was.

“Hey, Old Man,” Hillbilly greeted me, shouting over Led Zeppelin, blaring from the speakers, taking a seat in the booth. Hillbilly was one of my Enforcers; he was thirty-five, built like a wall at six-four, body bulging with muscle swirling with Celtic cross and knot tattoos, shoulder-length-blond curly hair, mustache, long beard, and blue eyes that drove the bitches crazy.

I was about to tell Hillbilly to fuck off, but it would have to wait. Katherine was headed my way and had my full attention. I watched her approach wearing the bar uniform of daisy dukes and a white t-shirt with The Devil's Den printed on the front that stretched across her luscious tits. Katherine wore white tennis shoes instead of heels like the other girls, but she was still just as sexy. Her auburn eyes met mine, and

her usual warm smile appeared as she got closer and stopped in front of me, her soft floral perfume teasing my nose.

The music was loud, so she leaned closer to me, testing me not to haul her onto my lap. “Can I get you another beer, Patch?” she asked, pointing to my empty glass.

“Sure thing, Darlin’,” I replied, giving her a gentle smile reserved only for her.

“Be right back,” Katherine said, turning and making a beeline for the bar, my eyes glued to her plump ass until the crowd blocked my view. I turned my attention to Hillbilly, who was watching me with a sly grin.

“Why don’t you just stake your claim on Katherine and be done with it?” Hillbilly asked. My brothers knew it wasn’t normal for me to spend so much time here—even if Katherine didn’t. I normally divided my time between here, our strip club, the Twisted Heat, and the clubhouse.

“I’m not ever having an ol’ lady, so let it be,” I answered with my best don’t fuck with me voice.

“Then fuck her, but do something instead of sitting here night after night watching Katherine,” Hillbilly grumbled, shaking his head.

I clenched my jaw in anger and snarled, “I told you to mind your own fucking business, Hillbilly.” I didn’t like him implying Katherine could be an easy fuck. She wasn’t like that, and he knew it. Katherine didn’t even date, as far as I knew, and I made it my business to know.

“Fine, Patch, have it your way,” Hillbilly answered, throwing his hands up in surrender as Katherine stood in front of me again, setting my beer on the table.

“Signal me if you need anything else, Patch,” she informed me before strolling away to wait at other tables.

Hillbilly looked at his watch, saying, “It’s that time. I better get up front.”

“Don’t be so goddamned feely this time,” I glowered, getting only a mocking smile as he walked away. He wouldn’t be smiling when I broke his hands. A minute later, Cherry Pie by Warrant started to play, and the servers made their way to the front and started to dance. It was something Hillbilly had come up with, and it drew in customers like free beer. One of the girls was a dancer, and once a week, the waitresses practiced a sexy performance.

I snarled as I watched Hillbilly put his hands on Katherine’s waist and lift her onto the top of the bar. I watched Katherine dance, her hips and hair swinging with her movements, and I got hard as stone. The first time I saw her dance, I almost came in my pants like a schoolboy. Katherine had the sweetest disposition, and seeing her dance added that naughty vibe making her the whole package, and I couldn’t get enough.

I didn’t want her to dance, but Hillbilly said she wanted to do it even though he exempted her from performing. I hated the men watching her and gripped the table to keep from tearing them apart. But then, one man reached up and grabbed Katherine by her ass cheeks, causing me to see red. The bouncer, Snipe, quickly dislodged the man pulling him toward the exit. I stood stomping to the same door. I may not be breaking Hillbilly’s hands tonight, but the asshole currently being thrown out won’t be so lucky.

I may not let myself touch Katherine, but I sure as fuck won’t let anyone else lay hands on her, either.



THE MAN STARTLED me when he grabbed me, causing me almost to fall off the bar. Hillbilly quickly steadied me, and I was able to finish the dance. I loved dancing—it was so exhilarating and made me feel sexy and attractive at my age—that was something. Plus, I tried to stay in shape, and dancing helped me with that. My ex-husband made it his mission to tear me down, and for the last three years, I have been working to build myself back up one step at a time. I will never be that broken woman ever again.

“You okay?” Hillbilly questioned me as he lifted me off the bar.

“Yeah, I’m good—no worries,” I replied confidently before heading back to the front of the bar. I liked Hillbilly; he looked scary but as long as you didn’t get on his bad side, he was an easy man to work for. I loved this job. When I started, I wasn’t so sure, but the customers that frequent this bar are great tippers and Hillbilly, and the bouncers make sure the women are protected when it comes to aggressive patrons who get too handsy or belligerent.

And then there’s Patch.

I looked to where he was sitting, sighing with disappointment noticing he had left. I was crazy attracted to Patch even though he was dark and brooding and gave off a dangerous, ruthless air. Patch was six-three with a muscled frame, olive skin, long black hair, eyepatch, dark blue eye, a nose that looked to have been broken a few times, and thin lips that always seemed to smirk. The exposed areas of his body were covered in tattoos, including his hands. He always wore

the same thing, tight black jeans that hugged *everything*, a black t-shirt under a vest that was covered in patches, and black biker boots. He reminded me of a modern-day pirate.

And that deep gravelly voice of his gave me shivers.

The good kind.

I should have run the other way after what Michael put me through, but I didn't. Instead, I gravitated toward Patch and loved the way he watched me with a possessiveness that should scare me, but it didn't because I also felt protected, and when he gave me a smile that I know is rare for him, my heart sped up. Patch made me feel attractive and sexy. When you worked with women in their twenties with hot young bodies, it was a confidence booster.

“Hey, you wanna go with us to the party at the clubhouse tonight?” Erin, one of the other servers, asked me. Erin was one of the friendlier waitresses I worked with; she was twenty-five, thin, and had long brown hair, green eyes, and a sincere smile. She always asked, and I always said no. Before I could get my usual reply out, we were interrupted.

“Don't embarrass her, Erin. Katherine realizes she isn't in the same category of women the bikers are looking for— young and hot is the flavor of the night at their parties,” Tina said flippantly. Tina has had a problem with me ever since Patch showed an interest in me, and she never missed a chance to refer to me as old. Tina was twenty-three, with short spiky blond hair, hard blue eyes, and lips filled with botox. Tina had Double DD breast implants that on her small frame I wondered how she stayed upright.

“Get the fuck out, Tina; Katherine is smoking hot, and it's no wonder she caught the attention of Patch,” Erin snarked. But, of course, she knew Tina was just being catty, and I appreciated her defense of me. After being bullied and beaten down most of my life—I'm cautious and slow to defend myself.

Tina gave a huff saying, “Sure, Erin, that’s why Patch has the hot young women hanging all over him at the parties and has never made a move on old Katherine here.” Tina had hit her point home, so she walked away—ending the conversation. I don’t know why it hurt to hear Patch had other women. Tina is right—Patch hasn’t so much as touched me, let alone asked me out.

Erin touched my shoulder, getting my attention. “Don’t listen to Tina; she doesn’t know what she’s talking about; she’s just jealous. Come with us tonight?”

After hearing Patch had other women, there was no way I was going to that clubhouse. “No, I have too many things to do tomorrow and need to get some sleep,” I said, trying not to let the defeated emotion I was feeling blend into my voice. I was better than this.

Erin gave me a sympathetic smile, “Maybe next time.” Erin returned to work, and I shook myself and did the same. I wasn’t going to make tips standing here feeling sorry for myself. And I did have things to do tomorrow. My daughter Bethany and I were going shopping. It was Saturday, and Bethany had the day off. Bethany was an art teacher at an elementary school here in Morgantown, West Virginia. It’s why I moved here four months ago—to be closer to her. After she graduated from The University of Pittsburgh last year, she was hired right away for the job, and I was so proud of Bethany. She was an artist with a love for painting, but she also loved teaching, so she combined the two.

I had Bethany when I was seventeen, and it wasn’t always easy for me being such a young mother and married to Michael, but I did it and raised a great young woman. And we have always been close so moving here was a no-brainer. We share an apartment and expenses, making both our lives easier. I absently adjusted the wide boho-style layered beaded bracelets that I wore on each wrist, hiding the scars that are a constant reminder of my previous life with my ex-husband. I can’t let women like Tina get to me; it’s not worth it. And if Patch was a womanizing manwhore I didn’t need him.

From here on out, I would not let my mind go there with Patch. Obviously, what I saw in Patch wasn't real—and that really saddened me.

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CHAPTER TWO



I STROLLED INTO the clubhouse after following Katherine home. I always waited outside until she left, following her at a distance, making sure she got inside her place safely. The party looked to be a wild one tonight. Our parties are one of the reasons our clubhouse is out in the middle of nowhere—it can't disturb anything but wildlife. I made my way through the bodies toward the bar. “Hey—Baby,” a female voice purred behind me, snaking her arms around me. “I’ve been waiting on you.”

I turned, seeing Jessie smiling up at me. Jessie was one of the club women I used to fuck regularly. She was around thirty, with shoulder-length chestnut hair, green eyes that right now were glassy since she was high as fuck, and lips plumped by botox that honestly looked ridiculous—It seemed to be a new thing among the women. Jessie was topless, her tits pressing against my arm, and in a skirt so short I don't even know why she bothered. And at one time, I would have pushed her against the wall and fucked her hard. But that was before

Katherine, and this bitch didn't do anything for me. As a result, my cock is flacid and not showing any signs of life.

I removed her arms, saying, "Not tonight, Jessie. Go find another brother." She gave me a hurt expression but knew I meant what I said and didn't argue, sashaying away. I let the sweet butts and other bitches who hung around the club hang on me sometimes—trying to keep an image that I no longer wanted. Where most men at my age were hitting that bump where they went in search of younger pussy I had lived a life of fucking strange every night of the week, and I was in search of something more.

I'm going to ignore the fact that most of these feelings all started four months ago with my first look at Katherine.

I took a stool at the bar, and the young blond-haired prospect Adam, a big boy at six-four but thin and would need to bulk up if he was going to make it—sat my beer down. I looked around the common room of the clubhouse with disgust.

The room was big, with ten tables, three pool tables, a poker table, and a small area to dance; couches lined the back wall that wouldn't be seeing my ass. All sorts of posters and club memorabilia hung on the dingy white walls while music blared from the speakers. The sweet butts and prospects have been slacking on the cleaning for a while now. I would have to put my foot down; I've just been so damn busy with my duties as President of this chapter and Regional President of seven chapters that ran along the East Coast. And now I was dealing with a club war involving the Fire Dragons.

Of course, Player, my Vice-President, should be taking care of this shit for me. I looked for the man in question seeing him on one of the couches, a blonde bitch riding his cock. Player was my best friend, and we both grew up in the club together. Player was forty-four, six-two, muscled, had blond hair, brown eyes, and a smile that never left his face even while he gutted you; the man had Demons—too many to count. He finished with the woman catching my eye. He

pushed the blonde off his lap and stood zipping his jeans, then came to take a stool next to me.

“You should try the new girl, Penny; she rides like she’s on a bull,” Player informed me, our eyes going to Penny as she had already moved on to Valley and was indeed riding him like he was a large bull. I’m sure Valley was enjoying the ride, but from this angle, it looked like she was having a massive seizure and making an annoying squeal so loud it could be heard around the room. And she looked young—too young.

“No, thanks. How old is she? Penny better not be jail bait!” I demanded, giving Player my full attention.

“Fuck no, Patch! You know I have Scotch do background checks on all the new sweet butts. Penny is twenty-one. I’m not a goddamn creep,” Player answered defensively. I guess as I get older, the women start to look younger and younger. That’s another thing I love about Katherine—she is around my age with a woman’s body and maturity. The women hanging around lately are no bigger than my arm, with no real curves or softness. A man needs to feel the woman’s soft body underneath him, not bones.

And the goddamned giggling that always accompanied a young bitch—drove me nuts.

“What’s with you lately, Brother? You haven’t been yourself; shit, at one time, you would have been all over a new bitch.”

“The club has a lot going on, and you, of all people, should know this, I haven’t been in the mood to play around. And speaking of shit going on, this place is no better than a pig sty. Get on the prospects and sweet butts to get the place cleaned up—It fucking stinks like stale beer and dirty ass,” I barked, irritated that I had to tell him to do something he should already be on top of since he was my right-hand man.

I could tell by Player’s expression he was going to say something to piss me off, but before he could spit it out, we

were interrupted by Scotch. “Hey, Patch—Player,” he greeted, taking a stool.

Scotch was our tech guy and was in charge of our security around the clubhouse and our businesses. Scotch didn’t fit the profile of a computer geek. He was six-seven, had a blue mohawk—with muscles bigger than any other man in my club, and had one mean mug of a face with a scar that ran from his forehead across his face to his neck. But Scotch was actually one hell of a nice guy and had a soft spot for animals—I swear we might as well open an animal shelter with all the strays we have on the property.

“Heard there was a problem at The Devil’s Den tonight,” Scotch smirked, apparently already talking to Hillbilly.

“Asshole got handsy and won’t be making that mistake again,” I growled, getting angry again thinking about his hands on Katherine.

“Since when do you take care of handsy customers?” Player asked eyebrow raised.

A deep laugh came from the other side of Scotch belonging to one of the old timers named Lucky before he said, “Since the asshole touched sweet Katherine. Our Prez here don’t like that.” Lucky was the most senior member of our chapter at sixty-five; he was silver-haired with a matching mustache, long beard, and one hell of a beer gut.

And he loved to start shit.

Lucky had been in the bar this evening and stood outside smoking a cigarette and watching when I took care of the man whose name I didn’t even know and had no doubt would never see again.

I looked at Player, who was studying me with a half smile, “I think I’m getting it now. Things are making a hell of a lot more sense. I’ll take care of what we talked about.” Player slapped my back and wandered to the card table to take everyone’s money. Player got his road name because he couldn’t be beaten at cards.

I returned my attention back to Scotch. “I’m gonna turn in—my ass is dragging,” I told him, standing.

“Yeah, I’m gonna go check on the animals, and then I’m going down,” Scotch replied as he stood, and we parted ways. Scotch would rather spend time with all those damn animals than a warm, willing woman.

As I pushed my way through the room, multiple warm hands touched me, trying to get my attention to stop and have some fun, but I continued until I was in front of the door to my room. I took my key out and, for the millionth time, wished Katherine was on the other side of the door waiting on me, stretched out naked on my bed. But as the door swung inward and I saw the cold, empty bed—It wasn’t happening.

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CHAPTER THREE



BETHANY SAT AT her easel as I walked into the living room of our townhome. Between the two of us, we made the place comfortable with a blue plush couch and matching chair, a round glass center table that sat on a white shag rug. We've added pillows and other accents around the room—with Bethany's abstract art adorning our walls. We chose this place because it was well taken care of and in one of the nicer areas of town.

I watched Bethany as she painted. She sat in front of the window, the sun shining on her golden hair. The only feature Bethany got of mine were my reddish-brown eyes; the rest was her father. Even though I had no love for Michael, he was a handsome man, and Bethany had grown into a striking young woman with his features; she was tall and willowy with an Audrey Hepburn quality. Lucky for Bethany and me, she has my personality and not Michael's.

Michael is a monster, cruel and terrifying.

The day I got away from him was the most freeing day of my life. Finally, after eighteen years of abuse at his hands, I could live again. The road out wasn't an easy one—Michael being a Police Captain—there was too much on his side, but I did it, and even though I know he still keeps tabs on me through Bethany, he has left me alone.

Grudgingly—giving up the power he had over me drives him crazy.

Bethany still has a relationship with her father, and I don't interfere with that. Michael always made sure to keep his abuse from Bethany—he was quite creative that way, and I knew she loved her father, and for all his many faults, he loved Bethany, so I never said anything, even though I think she suspected it. As far as Bethany knew, Michael and I divorced because we had grown apart.

And Michael has already remarried to a younger version of me. And I pity her, and what I know she is going through right now. I tried to warn Marcie—his new wife, after all, she was only twenty-one, but she laughed and said I was jealous that Michael had found someone younger and prettier. The last time I caught a glimpse of Marcie—she wasn't laughing anymore.

And I take no joy in being right.

“It's a shame you have to go to work. We could have extended our day to include a movie this evening,” Bethany said, interrupting my thoughts—having turned to see me standing there.

“I do too, Honey, but Friday and Saturday nights are when I make the most tips,” I replied, walking further into the room and looking at what she was painting. “If you get bored, come down to the bar later, and we can have a drink on my break.”

Bethany scrunched her nose, saying, “I don't know, Mom. The Devil's Den doesn't seem like my kind of place.”

“It's not that bad, and you'll be perfectly safe, or I wouldn't ask you to come,” I assured her. I've found the men

that frequented The Devil's Den to have more manners than many men I've come in contact with, and I feel lucky that I found a job where I feel safe and make decent money. I didn't even have a high school diploma, so waitressing jobs were about the only options open to me, but I didn't mind. I was good at it and enjoyed meeting new people. After being isolated for so long, I enjoyed being around others.

"I'll think about it, but Josh said he may stop by." Josh was a friend of Bethany's she met at work, and I had a feeling he wanted more, but Bethany didn't seem to want more than friendship.

"You can always bring Josh with you," I suggested while slinging my purse on my shoulder and preparing to leave, and kissing Bethany on top of the head.

"We'll see; if not, I'll see you when you get home. Love you."

"Okay, Love you too, baby girl," I said as I walked out. I got in my car—a 2015 white Honda Accord; it had 180,000 miles on it but was still in great shape and ran well. And it was paid for. I pulled into traffic, heading toward the other side of town. My shift started at five, and I always gave myself a half hour to get there. With this being a college town, traffic could get heavy at times.

I pulled into the parking lot and double-checked my appearance. Even though I told myself to forget Patch, I still couldn't help but want to look attractive to him. He was the only man in three years that I was attracted to. Hell, make that twenty years—I quit being into Michael after our first year together. I sighed, getting out of my car and going inside. The bar was already busy. Since, The Devil's Den served a simple food menu of burgers, fries, and nachos along with some other items, it tended to get busy around dinner time.

I waved to Snipe and Hillbilly as I made my way to the breakroom in the back. I put my purse in my locker, grabbed my apron, and slammed the locker shut. I turned as Tina walked into the room. "Hey, Katherine, how about we switch

sections tonight?” Tina asked, brushing by me and putting her stuff in her locker. I almost coughed from the heavy perfume she was wearing; it was overkill.

“Why?” I wanted to know. I always worked the same section—which included waiting on Patch.

“Well, I think Patch may want me waiting on him tonight —If you know what I mean,” Tina purred with a wink, reapplying her lipstick and adjusting her breasts in her push-up bra. My stomach sank at her words. Had she and Patch hooked up last night? I suddenly felt like the unattractive old lady Tina made me out to be. I mean, heck, why wouldn’t he go for Tina?

“It’s fine with me if Hillbilly is okay with it,” I mumbled. Maybe it was for the best if I switched sections.

“Hillbilly already okayed it. He even agrees the change is a good one,” Tina smirked, hips swaying as she left the room. I followed, my spirits low. But, as soon as I hit the bar area, I plastered a smile on my face and got to work. I needed to cheer up, so what if Patch preferred younger women? I had several good men interested in me and had asked me out several times; maybe it was time for me to accept and go on a date and forget about Patch. It wasn’t going to happen, and I was tired of feeling like an old shoe.

My mind made up; I decided the next decent man that asked me out I would accept and have a good time. It was time to move on.



FRESHLY SHOWERED AND shaved, I walked into The Devil’s Den and took my usual seat. My good eye scanned the room for Katherine and didn’t see her—she must be in the back picking up a food order. I tried to talk myself out of coming tonight. I needed to get over my obsession with Katherine, but my inner talk wasn’t successful, and here I sit, practically salivating, waiting to see her.

“Hiya Patch, what can I bring you?” Tina, another server, asked, standing where Katherine should be—giving me the usual I wanna fuck you eyes. This one never gave up and tried pushing herself on me here and at the clubhouse. But, I wasn’t now or have ever been interested in Tina.

I scowled, “Where is Katherine?”

Tina put her hand on her jutted-out hip and simpered, “We switched sections. It was time for a change—don’t ya think?”

What the fuck? Hillbilly knew I preferred Katherine and only Katherine to wait on me. “No, I don’t think!” I barked, watching her face pale as she backed away—now unsure. I stood, moving away from Tina without another word. I was gonna find Hillbilly and light his ass for moving Katherine out of my section. I didn’t see Hillbilly behind the bar. Dana, another bartender, was there. He must be in the office. I turned and spotted Katherine, and as usual, her beauty stopped me in my tracks. Everything else forgotten.

Her eyes captured mine, and she gave me a small smile—her normally bright eyes dim. What was wrong? Was someone bothering Katherine? I felt my fists clench, thinking of who I needed to kill. “Sit down, boy,” I heard Lucky say from beside

me, where he sat at a table. “Sweet Katherine is workin’ this here section tonight.”

I took the offered chair and watched as Katherine came to my side. She was a damn good waitress, always on top of her tables. “What can I get you, Patch—the usual?” she asked, but her sunny smile was nowhere to be seen. Instead, the smile she graced me with was tight and small.

I didn’t like what I was seeing. Something isn’t right. Something or someone had dimmed Katherine’s warm glow. What happened between yesterday and today?

I itched to drag her to the back and press her against the wall until she confessed what was wrong, but instead, I said, “Yeah, the usual darlin’.” I grew even more concerned when she turned on her heel and immediately left the table without a reply.

“Katherine has a jealous bitch puttin’ shit in her ear,” Lucky told me, looking riled up.

“What do you mean putting shit in her ear? What are you yapping about, Lucky?”

Narrowing his eyes at me, Lucky sneered, “Some of the girls here have noticed your not-so-subtle interest in sweet Katherine. I’ve overheard some nasty remarks about Katherine being too old for a man like yourself—who has always shown interest in the younger female variety. And those young hags told her so. Heard it myself last night.”

“I don’t fucking seek out young pussy, never have, and you know it. But Katherine has no interest in me, so I don’t know why those bitches said that shit to her, but I won’t let it stand, that’s for damn sure. My personal life is none of their goddamned business.”

Lucky and I got quiet while Katherine put my beer down. “Your burger will be out in about ten minutes, Patch,” Katherine said again with a tight smile and avoided my eyes before leaving the table. I needed that big smile and her eyes on me—I lived for it, and it was missing.

Lucky slapped his hand on the table, getting my attention. “Are you blind? Or is your one good eye not enough to see what is right in front of you?”

“What?” Lucky was starting to grate on my already bad mood. I tolerated his mouth because he was a senior member, but I would only allow so much.

“That girl wants you, you dumb fuck. It’s written all over her face, and everyone sees it but you.”

My eyes snapped to Katherine, wondering if what Lucky said was true. Katherine watched me back under lowered lashes as she played with those wide-beaded bracelets she always wore. Could someone as good and beautiful as Katherine want someone like me? And did it matter? I couldn’t have her. I wasn’t a good man. I was a man who always did what needed to be done—no matter what it took. My old man taught me well. Shit, I was a 22 in the club. I had spent three years in the state penitentiary when I was twenty for running drugs—the least of my crimes. My sins were countless, and Heaven wasn’t opening its gate for me.

And I was scarred—the worst, my missing eye. I got shanked in prison; I moved at the last minute, the blade going through my right eye. The socket is completely closed. I always wear my eye patch, never allowing anyone to see me without it. I haven’t spent the night with a woman since I was twenty years old, not wanting to see the disgust I knew would come if I removed the patch. I didn’t miss having a woman in my bed—I hadn’t even taken a woman to my room at the clubhouse. Every time I fucked a woman, it was impersonal, with no kissing or much touching.

But Katherine was different, and I wanted it all with her, and now that I know she wants the same, I don’t know if she will be safe from me. Katherine brought my burger, sat it down, and asked Lucky if he needed anything before moving away and walking toward the hallway that led to the office and breakroom. I stood moving in the same direction, laser-

focused on her retreating back, that special something that only Katherine had pulling me like a chain.

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CHAPTER FOUR



I WENT INTO the breakroom needing a minute alone.

I couldn't believe Patch had moved from his usual booth to a table in my section. I wasn't expecting that based on what Tina had said. Had she lied to me about her and Patch? I am so confused right now. I still want Patch, and it's hard not to show it. Exhausting, actually.

I heard the door click shut and turned, my breath catching in my throat. Patch was stalking toward me, his face intense, and I felt myself backing up until I hit the wall. When he got close to me, he caged me in with his muscled arms, his spicy scent surrounding me. His coal-black hair that hung wild around his face tickled my neck. My heart was beating so fast with how close he was to me.

And I wanted to rub against him like a cat in heat.

He didn't say anything for a full minute; he just looked at me with a raw intensity that my body felt. Then, finally, he spoke, "What's wrong, Katherine?"

“I-I don’t know what you mean...” I murmured, unsure of what he meant.

“Yes—you do, darlin’. You moved from my section and have been avoiding looking at me since I got here,” he rumbled, still staring at me intently. God, he smelled good; I had to force myself to concentrate on his words. It took me a minute to absorb what he had said.

I wet my lips with my tongue, not sure how to answer. His eye followed the movement of my tongue, and I was old enough to know what he was thinking, and heaven help me; I wish I could use my tongue to lick Patch right now. “I’m not sure what you mean; I was asked to switch sections and told it would be appreciated. And that Hillbilly okayed it,” I answered softly.

He grunted his disapproval at my answer. “Next time, it will need to be okayed by me because it was not appreciated. Now tell me why you have been giving me the cold shoulder.” I felt him push his lower body into mine, and I was getting so hot I feared I might pass out. I would have done it weeks ago if I knew giving him the cold shoulder would get Patch to make a move.

Before I had time to form an answer that wouldn’t make me sound stupid and insecure, his phone started going off. “Shit,” he mumbled, pulling back from me and pulling it out of his pocket. “I have to take this. What?” he growled into the phone, his back to me as he listened. “I’m on my way.” And he hung up, turning back to me and cupping my chin in his big hand, his thumb caressing my cheek. “I have to leave, but we aren’t finished with this conversation. Be in your usual section from now on—no switching.” With one last penetrating gaze, he released my face and walked out the door.

I slumped against the wall, my heart still beating erratically from my encounter with Patch. I was turned on so much right now. Patch was all man—dominant with a hard edge I never knew I craved, especially after Michael. But my panties were so wet right now, evidence of that craving. I

pushed away from the wall. I needed to get back on the floor. I only had a fifteen-minute break, and I knew it had to be over.

As I entered the bar, my eyes caught Tina's, and she glared at me with narrowed eyes, a sneer on her lips. I had a bad feeling Tina was going to cause me problems. Tina wanted Patch for herself, and I would have to watch my back.

"Watch out for that one, sweet Katherine," Lucky warned from behind me as if reading my thoughts.

I turned to the kind older man who was always so sweet to me, "Don't worry, Lucky, I will," I assured him with a smile. "Do you need anything before I move on?"

"Nah, I'm heading out. Have a good night, and remember what I told you," Lucky cautioned once more before leaving.

Oh, I'll remember. Unfortunately, I don't think Tina will let me forget.



LEAVING KATHERINE WAS one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Being that close to her—smelling her arousal damn near made me lose my mind. I wanted to tear her shorts off and shove my face in her pussy to have a taste, something I hadn't had the urge to do in god knows how many years. The club girls turned me off from giving head; my mouth wasn't going anywhere near where my brother's dicks had been. But Katherine, I bet she tasted sweet, like pure

honey on the tongue. I reached down to adjust my cock, which had yet to deflate from the encounter with Katherine.

But, club business called, and I can't ignore it. "Looks like the first shots in this war were just fired," Hillbilly said, falling into step beside me as I left the bar.

"And it won't go unanswered," I snarled, forcing my mind to focus on retaliation against the Fire Dragons. The sons of bitches fired shots into our strip club Twisted Heat tonight. Luckily nobody was hurt. I straddled my Harley and rode out of the parking lot, heading to the strip club, Hillbilly beside me. I knew Papa Bear—the President of the Fire Dragons would eventually strike but firing shots into a building, possibly hurting innocent people, was not what I expected. Civilians were kept out of our club wars; it was a code most clubs followed. I pulled into Twisted Heat parking in the rear of the building and entered the back door with Hillbilly.

The club was quiet since Jonesy shut the place down for the night. Jonesy was waiting on me in the lounge area by the bar. The Twisted Heat was an upscale strip club with a vintage fifties feel, the décor black and red velvet that screamed sex kitten. "Did the cops show up?" I asked Jonesy. Jonesy was my Sergeant at Arms—at thirty-three, he was six-seven, muscled, with wavy brown hair, closed cropped beard and mustache, and sky blue eyes, and looked like he should be on the cover of some magazine. Women loved him.

Not that he gave a shit—Jonesy was a man scorned and didn't trust women. What happened in his life to cause that I don't know and consider it his business. That's why he is in charge of Twisted Heat. Jonesy can't be played and had a mean side if you tried. The strippers learned the hard way not to test him.

"No, I think most of the men here tonight were married and high-tailed it outta here, so as far as I can tell, no one called the cops," Jonesy answered, taking a swallow of whiskey. "I sent the girls home and called it a night. The damage was minimal, but one of the bullets came through the

front door, grazing Vain's arm; the bastard was lucky he moved when he did—or I'd be telling you a different story.”

“Papa Bear isn't holding back, and neither are we. I'm calling Church in one hour. Contact Scotch and have him pull the security footage. I'll see you back at the clubhouse,” I told him, heading for the door. I didn't like talking club business outside our meeting room or my office, which was both soundproofed and regularly checked for bugs and cameras. Unfortunately, the feds have stepped up their game over the last decade, and the days of taking chances are over. One of our sister clubs just got taken down because the feds planted an undercover agent for ten fucking years. It changed the way The Devil's House conducts our business, that's for damn sure.

I looked at Hillbilly, remembering the situation with Katherine. “Why the fuck would you move Katherine out of my section?” I snapped.

Hillbilly looked confused. “I didn't move Katherine. I was asked by Tina and told her it was a no-go. I was doing office work, so I didn't know they had switched. I'll be taking care of it.”

“I already talked to Katherine and told her a switch would have to be okayed by me in the future,” I replied, considering firing Tina for ignoring Hillbilly.

Hillbilly chuckled, “Talked to her, did ya?”

I ignored Hillbilly and left, hurrying back to the clubhouse, sighing at the sight of the wild party going on—the loud music scraping on my brain. I ran my hands down my face and lifted myself off my bike, going inside and cursing when thin arms wrapped around me from behind. “Patch—baby, let me take care of you tonight; I can tell you're all tensed up,” Jesse purred into my ear, her hand snaking toward my jean-covered cock.

“No, I'm good,” I replied, pulling her arms away from me and walking away without even turning around. I had a taste for one woman and one woman only.

“Hey Patch, Papa Bear has made his move—yeah?” Player noted, following me into the room we had meetings.

“That he did, Brother.” I took my seat at the head of the worn brown wooden table that has sat here for the last sixty years; the club colors painted in the center faded over the years. I leaned back in my chair and waited for the twelve seats to fill. My thoughts were torn between club business and my sweet obsession. I had my own personal war going on inside my head.

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CHAPTER FIVE



I WOKE UP Sunday morning after having way too many thoughts about Patch throughout the night. I climbed out of bed, took a quick shower, put my hair in a messy bun, and threw on some jeans, a blue floral blouse, and low-heeled sandals before going into the kitchen to start a pot of coffee.

Sunday was my day off, so I usually spent the day running errands, cleaning, and washing clothes. “Morning, Mom,” Bethany greeted, coming into the kitchen and kissing my cheek.

“Morning, Honey. What time are you meeting your Dad?” Bethany spent every Sunday afternoon with Michael.

“He’s going to pick me up at eleven,” Bethany replied, grabbing a coffee mug from the cabinet.

My back stiffened at her answer. “What do you mean picking you up?” I asked casually, schooling my features and sipping my coffee. They usually met at another location, but Michael never came here.

“Dad decided he wanted to take a drive—so he’s coming to me this time.”

Dread climbed my spine, Michael never did anything without a reason, and if he was coming here, he was up to something. My hands automatically when to my wrists as the memories came front and center. I’m ashamed to say that Michael still scares me and always will. My scars are too deep. He only let me go and left me alone because he values his career above all else, and I have the power to end that for him.

“Mom, did you hear me?” Bethany asked, touching my shoulder.

“I’m sorry, I was daydreaming. What did you say?”

“I asked if you were okay. You look a little pale,” Bethany worried, her eyes concerned.

I gave myself an inward shake and replied, “I’m fine, just a little tired. It was busy last night.” So what if he was coming here to pick her up? I didn’t have to see him. I would make sure I was gone before Michael got here.

“You know you could join us. Dad has said many times that he would love for you to at least have lunch with us.” I almost snorted at that. I just bet he would. A chance to try to charm me back into his life so he could break me all over again; he probably jerked off at the thought. But I’m not the naïve seventeen year old anymore.

“I don’t think so, Bethany. I’m sure Marci wouldn’t appreciate it either,” I argued. There would be no way in hell I would ever voluntarily have anything to do with Michael.

Bethany gave a heavy sigh, “I wish you and dad would communicate, but I won’t push you.”

I gave Bethany a soft smile, “Thank you. We have both moved on, and I just don’t think it’s wise.” I looked at the clock. It was now ten I needed to get moving. I put my mug in the sink and started toward my bedroom; when the doorbell rang, I stopped and went to answer the door. Sometimes our seventy-year-old neighbor lady needs to borrow something. I

opened the door, and there stood Michael, a mocking grin on his handsome face.

“Hello, Katherine, been a long time,” Michael leered at me, his gaze raking down my body. Michael was wearing his usual style of casual tan pants, a button-down white shirt, and expensive leather loafers. His short blond hair styled every hair in place, and at forty-five, not a gray hair in sight.

“Dad, you’re early,” Bethany accused, coming up behind me. I moved aside so she could hug her father. His hard blue eyes never left me as he hugged her. I was now more sure than ever that Michael had an agenda.

“I made better time than I thought I would; I hope it’s okay that I’m early.” Michael gave one of his fake-as-shit smiles, his eyes raking over me again. He came early, knowing I would leave as soon as Bethany said he was coming here.

“Of course, it’s fine,” Bethany assured him. “Let me go finish getting ready; I’ll only be a minute.”

“Take your time; your mom and I can catch up while I wait,” Michael said, keeping the same smile until Bethany disappeared down the hall, and then his face turned into the Michael I knew all too well. “So, Katherine, Bethany tells me you’re working at a biker bar. Seems fitting for an uneducated woman like yourself. It must be hard for someone your age to garner good tips to make a decent living. And you can’t live off Bethany forever.” Michael tapped his chin as if thinking. “But you know what, I’m a forgiving man, and I’m willing to take you back—as a side piece, of course-.”

I cut him off. “I would sooner live as a beggar on the streets than ever let you touch me again. I’m doing just fine without you, and I *do not* live off Bethany—I do very well on my own,” I whispered vehemently. He moved closer, his expensive cologne nauseating, as he looked down his nose at me.

“Really, Katherine? Keep kidding yourself. One day you will beg me to take you back. But you’ve already been used,

and you're dried up; my offer is the best a woman like you will ever receive. No education, an aging waitress—who in their right mind would ever want you?" Michael said; his expression was so mocking and cruel—and I was used to seeing it.

I glared at Michael refusing to be affected by his harsh words even though they stung. I couldn't show Michael any fear—even if it existed. "Your opinion means nothing to me, just like you mean nothing to me. Trust me; I have plenty of offers; you're already forgotten—a discarded awful memory," I sneered, turning on my heel to leave the room.

Michael grabbed my arm, jerking me back around. "I bet you love spreading your legs for all those biker thugs. Do they fuck you hard, Katherine? Do they treat you like the trash you are?" he whispered furiously, his nostrils flaring with anger. His outburst told me he still wasn't over the fact I left him.

I kept my breathing even; I was afraid because I knew what Michael was capable of, but I also didn't think he would do anything with Bethany in the next room. I jerked my arm out of his hand. "Don't you dare touch me! Don't forget I can let the world know what an abusive asshole you are!" I hissed. I hated this man so much.

"Why would I want to touch you when I have Marci? She's younger, educated, and unlike you, she knows how to be a good wife and do whatever it takes to please me," Michael scoffed, looking me over with disdain.

"Good, then we don't have a problem," I glowered, defiant. Then Bethany came back out, ready to leave. I turned my back to Bethany so she couldn't see how shaken I was and questioned me.

"Ready to go. Mom, are you sure you don't want to come?" Bethany asked again.

"No, I have a lot to get done today. Have fun," I replied, giving her a forced smile that I hoped didn't appear that way.

“Okay, I’ll see you later this afternoon.” Bethany walked out the door ahead of Michael, who looked over his shoulder, fury in his eyes, but he didn’t say anything more his face said everything. Michael wasn’t used to the new me, the Katherine that had grown confident and defended herself, the young woman who used to cower and bend for him no longer exists. His showing up here today made me very nervous. I haven’t spoken with Micheal in about three years since our divorce was finalized, and wanted to keep it that way, but apparently, he had other ideas.

I went into my bedroom, opened the closet door, and pulled a locked box from the shelf. I picked up my keys, finding the correct one. I opened it looking inside at the contents, a jump-drive, a packet of pictures, and a letter. The things in this box gained me my freedom from Michael. I closed, locked the box, and placed it back in the closet. This box wasn’t the only one. I wasn’t stupid and made sure Michael knew so he didn’t get any ideas.

But something was up with him, and I would have to be on guard. I grabbed my keys and my purse. I needed to get on with my day and push Michael out of my thoughts. He couldn’t hurt me anymore, and I needed to remember that.

CHAPTER SIX



I CLOSED MY laptop, and then put in my desk drawer and locked it. I took no chances with club business and security, especially after little Jaycee hacked into our club. I still wasn't sure it was a good idea to let her leave my clubhouse after rescuing her from the Fire Dragons; the fact that she is Papa Bear's niece still bothers me. So I have Shadow keeping extra tabs on her for a while. I trust Kickstand, but a man in love may not see what's in front of him.

I leaned back in my leather chair, looking around my office. This office was my personal space; the walls were painted a deep blue, and photographs hung on the wall with memories from the sixty years the club had been around. Two comfortable leather chairs sat in front of my brown wooden desk with the club colors burned into the center, and blue curtains hung on a long window that overlooked the forest. I spent the majority of my time here and made it comfortable. A knock sounded on the door. "Enter," I called, knowing it was

one of my brothers. The Sweet Butts weren't allowed in my office; it was a personal rule I enforced. My privacy was sacred to me.

Player walked in, took a seat, stretching his long legs out in front of him. "You going to the bar tonight?"

"In a bit; why?" Katherine didn't start until six, so I usually rolled in around seven.

"I figured I'd tag along tonight. I haven't been to the Devil's Den in a while," Player explained, but I could see there was more to this than that. Player and I had been friends since we were both in diapers.

"You usually stick with the strip club; what's the real reason you want to tag along?"

Player gave me a sly grin, "Why does there have to be a reason? Can't a brother just hang out with his best friend?"

I raised an eyebrow in disbelief, "Sure, they can, but that's not what you're doing, and you know it. But who gives a shit if you want to tag along? Let's go," I told him, standing and heading for the door. Player wanted to be a nosey asshole about Katherine. As long as my brothers understand she is off limits, everything will be good. I can understand Player being curious; I've never shown a marked interest in any woman before in all the years we've known each other until Katherine. We grew up in a world where women had one use, and that was between their legs, and before I saw the vision that is Katherine, I didn't see it any other way, no matter how much I tried.

Player followed, waiting while I locked my office door. I heard him chuckle and then give a big sniff in the air. "Woo boy, do you smell good, Brother? I may not be able to keep my hands off you," Player joked with a broad smile, slapping me on the back.

"Shut the hell up before I shut you up," I muttered, shouldering past him. It was true, though; I took extra care with my appearance when I was going to see Katherine. I've

never worried about what a woman thought of my looks before her, pussy was always available and easy around the clubhouse and anywhere I went. Bitches loved getting a taste of a biker; no charm needed.

Once outside, we hopped on our Harley's and rode the half hour to The Devil's Den. It was Monday, so it wasn't crazy busy. Inside, rock music blared from the speakers, along with the sounds of customers talking and laughing around the room. I led the way to our reserved booth, passing Katherine as she spoke to a man at one of the tables. I didn't like how he looked at her, and when I heard him say, "How about it, Katherine, go out with me on your next day off."

I stopped in my tracks. My spine stiffened with anger. Who was this preppy asshole hitting on my woman? I ignored the fact that she wasn't technically mine. I clenched my fists, getting ready to turn around and beat the shit out of the prick, but before I could, Player grabbed my arm, pulling me forward. "She ain't yours yet, man. You can't beat the shit out of the guy for asking," Player hissed. "You don't want to end up in jail, do you? Besides, she turned him down."

Did she? I was so damn mad I didn't think to wait to hear how she responded. I took a seat, and my anger dissipated when Katherine noticed me and gave me that sweet smile of hers that lit her face up and made my dark soul lighter, and then came to the table, the sway of her hips mesmerizing me, making my cock twitch with need. "Hi, Patch, and hey, Player; I haven't seen you in months!" Katherine greeted us.

Player gave her a big smile, his eyes raking over her body just to piss me off. "Well, pretty lady, I've been busy. How've you been?"

"I've been good—thanks for asking. What can I get you, Player?"

"A beer is fine," he answered with a wink. He was pushing his luck. My gun was never far from my hand.

“Sure thing. Patch, the usual—yes?” Her eyes once more were on me where they belonged.

“Just the beer tonight, Darlin’.”

“Gotcha, be right back with your drinks,” she said, moving toward the bar where Hillbilly was watching a smirk on his face.

“When did you become a pussy?”

I turned my head, glaring at Player. “What the hell did you say?”

Player leaned forward, bracing his arms on the table. “You’ve been living in this booth like a creeper for four damn months, and you ain’t made a move on Katherine. So what’s up with that shit? That’s not the Patch I know. And if you don’t claim her, someone else will.” Not true; dead men can’t claim shit, and they would be dead the minute they touched Katherine.

“You know why-.” I didn’t get to finish because Katherine brought our drinks and set the cold mugs on the table.

“Here you go; anything else?” Katherine asked, her eyes locking on me, and I don’t know if it was wishful thinking, but interest and arousal were blazing out of those amber orbs. Maybe like me, she remembered what it felt like when I had her against the wall.

“Actually, pretty Katherine-.” Player felt my gun push into his side beneath the table. “Uh, never mind.”

Katherine gave us a confused look, “Oh—okay—well, I’ll be back to check on you.” She gave me a soft smile that I knew she didn’t give to anyone else because I watched. Fuck me; maybe I am acting like a creeper. The music stopped, and an upbeat song started. It was time for the servers to dance. I pushed deeper into the cushioned seat, getting comfortable for the show. There wasn’t one damn thing in this world that would take my attention from Katherine as she shook that hot body on the bar.

Maybe Player was right. It's time to do what has always been my nature, which was to take what I wanted, no fucks given. And I wanted Katherine Byrn, and it was about damn time I had her.



THE SONG ENDED, and I was lifted off the bar, only this time, it wasn't Hillbilly whose hands held me around the waist. That cologne belonged to one man.

Patch.

My body trembled as Patch pulled me back against his hard chest and whispered in my ear, "We need to talk, Darlin'." His voice alone did something to me, deep and gravelly even when he spoke low. Then, without waiting for an answer, he pulled me along behind him, taking me to the office, not letting go until we were inside, where he shut and locked the door. I had only been in here a few times; it was a standard office wood desk, chairs, and a couch with security monitors on the wall above it.

I turned, facing Patch, who leaned his back against the door, watching me with a hunger that had me fidgeting nervously from where I stood in front of the desk. Then, finally, he moved to stalk toward me, looking every bit the wild pirate I imagined him to be until my butt hit the desk, and he leaned into me, muscled arms caging me. "I want you, Katherine," he murmured, watching me closely, his face inches from mine. "I don't deserve you, but I'm a selfish bastard."

I could feel how much he wanted me, and there was no denying I wanted the same. “Patch, I want you too,” I breathed. My whole body flushed with heat at his nearness. This sexual arousal I only had for Patch was new to me, and I wanted nothing more than to explore it. I moved my hands up over his leather vest, the numerous patches catching my hands as his lips came crashing down on mine. Patch kissed me like he could never get enough of the taste of my lips. He clamped my face in his strong hands and pushed his tongue past my lips, and my tongue eagerly played with his as our kiss got wilder and hotter, our lower bodies joining together, his jean-covered erection pressed into me as he pushed me against the desk. A moan escaped my mouth from deep within my body. Patch hardly let me catch my breath, but I found I didn’t want him to. I wanted him to take away my need for air and everything but him, and with every sizzling thrust into my mouth, he promised to fulfill that need.

I was shocked at how much I wanted this, *wanted him*. Michael had made sex such a horrifying experience after he showed his true colors once we married, but it felt so right and natural how Patch touched me and made me feel.

Cherished. Protected. Wanted. Deeply satisfied.

And hot as hell.

Suddenly he broke the kiss with a growl, his forehead touching mine, our breathing heavy and seeming loud to my ears in the quiet room. “As much as I want you right now, I’m not gonna fuck you against this desk like a cheap lay,” he grated, his hands still cupping my face. “You’re off tomorrow. Take a ride with me.”

I ignored the fact that he knew my schedule and gazed into his handsome face so close to mine as he waited for my answer. Finally, I raised my hand to touch his smooth jaw. “I would love to go on a ride with you,” I said softly.

Patch looked relieved, letting my face go, and slowly moved back from me, releasing my body. The loss of his body heat made me chilled. “I will be at your place at noon. Dress

comfortably but remember you'll be on the back of my bike, so jeans and sneakers would be best. I will let you know if anything changes," he informed me, tucking a stray hair behind my ear and caressing my cheek.

"Okay, do you need my address....phone number?"

What looked like amusement passed over his features. "No, Darlin', I have what I need," he answered vaguely. Patch ran his finger over my kiss-roughened lips; his gaze was still filled with heat. "I better let you get back to work. You go ahead. I need to make a call real quick," he said, moving to the side so I could leave.

I walked past him to the door on shaky legs, fumbling with the lock, finally getting the knob to turn, and exiting the office, the door clicking closed behind me. I went into the breakroom and looked in the mirror. My face was flushed, and my lips were red and swollen; the faint outline of Patch's fingers was still imprinted on my cheeks. I traced over the prints with my finger thoughtfully before shaking myself back to reality.

I was at work, for heaven's sake.

I grabbed my purse, touched my face up with light makeup, and returned to the floor. I noticed right away that Patch hadn't returned to his seat. Player sat there with a brunette on his lap and, catching my eyes, gave me a smile and a wink. I didn't know Player well, but I always got the feeling that the image he put out wasn't the real man. But, again, I didn't know him well enough to be sure.

"I covered your tables the best I could," Erin said as she passed me on her way to the bar.

"You're a lifesaver. I owe you," I answered to her retreating back. Erin gave me a smile over her shoulder to say she heard me. Then, putting my personal life on the shelf, I returned to work.

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CHAPTER SEVEN



I STAYED BEHIND to let my body cool down. I have never gotten so hard so fast like I do with Katherine. I swear she's cast a spell over me or something because the way I want Katherine, this obsession, this *need* for her borders on dangerous. My old man would have my head for letting a woman distract me this way. I can't tell you how often he kicked my ass for allowing a woman to distract me when I was younger and had just discovered sex.

'Just fuck the bitches and leave em' where you finished.' My old man's words ran through my head. So it's no wonder my mom ran off with some random hook-up when I was twelve taking my younger brother Sammy, who was five, and leaving me behind. That stung for a few years, but then I blew it off, letting my old man mold me into the man I am today. I never heard from mom or Sammy again, and I haven't tried to find them either.

'Cut em' loose, Wyatt; the past will drag you down.' My old man pushed that into my head for years until I realized he

was right, and Wyatt Streets, the boy who silently wished for his mom and brother, died, and a more hardened kid emerged. I paid my dues and followed in his footsteps, taking his place at the head of the table when he died of lung cancer over fifteen years ago. The Devil's House MC is all I've ever known, wanted, or needed in my life.

Until Katherine.

Sweet, beautiful Katherine.

Hillbilly walked through the door, interrupting my thoughts. "I saw Katherine come out looking freshly accosted, so I figured it was safe to come into my office," he joked, taking his seat and propping his boots on his desk. "So, you old dog, you finally made a move."

"You're not much younger than me, asshole, so stop with the old man shit," I snapped as my phone vibrated in my pocket. "Yeah," I barked into the phone.

"We got a problem," Jonesy said on the other end.

"What kind of problem."

"The Fire Dragons got Leather, knocked him out, and shoved him in a van. Nobody saw it, and I didn't figure it out until I saw his bike still sitting outside the strip club when we closed and looked at the security feed." Leather was my Lieutenant, and those fuckers were gonna pay.

"Church in thirty," I snarled and ended the call, sending a group text calling Church.

"What's going on?" Hillbilly asked, already on his feet preparing to leave.

"I'll fill you in with everybody else back at the clubhouse," I replied, entering the bar area and seeing Player heading toward the entrance, having gotten my text. I spotted Katherine also toward the back. I grabbed Snipe and ordered, "Have one of the Prospects follow Katherine home, so I know she made it safely. And for their sake, she better." With one

last glance at Katherine, I left the bar, straddled my bike, and rode out of the parking lot.

My mind spun with how bold the Fire Dragons were in taking my Lieutenant. Papa Bear was going to learn that I didn't wear this 1% patch for decoration. The Devil's House MC didn't become the club it was by letting shitty rival clubs like the Fire Dragons roll over us. We may have been lying lower since the Feds started getting more innovative, technology has come into play, and laws like the Rico Act keep popping up. But Papa Bear better fuckin' believe he's a dead man.

I don't fucking play.

I parked in front of the clubhouse and wasted no time getting inside, the fury on my face letting the Sweet Butts and Hang Arounds know not to approach me as I headed straight for the room our meetings were held in, taking my seat and waiting until the eleven members of the council were present including me, the twelfth seat belonging to Leather. I had no doubt he would be back in that seat. Vain, Harker, Teach, Slayer, Jonesy, Hillbilly, Scotch, Snipe, Player, and Midnight were all seated.

I banged the gavel.

“The Fire Dragons made a bold fucking move this evening and took Leather from the parking lot of Twisted Heat.” I waited for the calls of outrage around the table to quiet before continuing, “I don't know their goal since the club has not contacted me. So they could torture him for information or use him as a hostage for leverage. Scotch, let me see the security feed.”

We had a big screen on the wall where Scotch streamed the feed so we could all see it clearly. We sat in silence as the feed played, and we watched two men sneak up behind Leather as he walked to his bike. They used something to hit him on the head that I hope only knocked him cold. Leather wasn't a big man; he was the smallest guy in my club at five-ten, and he wasn't overly muscled either; Leather didn't need to be the

man himself was a weapon. Brother knew Martial Arts and was deadly with a Red Belt. He must have been distracted to have let those assholes sneak up on him. He was thrown into a black van. The whole thing took minutes.

“Have you tracked his phone yet?” Player asked Scotch when the feed shut off.

“Yep, it was thrown out at the state line heading into Pennsylvania. The idiots must have forgotten to get rid of it before they left the parking lot.”

“At least we have a direction that they went. Shadow might be of help with this,” Jonesy noted.

“I think so too, plus we could use Kickstand and Jaycee to help Scotch search for possible locations they could be hiding Leather,” I said. “I think it might be best to ride to Shadow’s clubhouse, so Jonesy, we head out when Church is over,” I added. One thing was for sure Kickstand, the computer whiz in the Pennsylvania chapter was damn good at what he does, and I think I’m going to start having him teach the other chapter clubs some shit.

“I’ll be ready,” Jonesy answered.

Church lasted another hour before we finished, finding Leather and revenge on all our minds. I looked at my watch and thought of my ride with Katherine tomorrow. Unfortunately, it wasn’t going to happen. There was no way I could take time away from the club right now. I reluctantly pulled up her name on my phone and sent her a text canceling with the promise that it would still happen on another day and that I would be away for a few days on club business. I would put a Prospect on Katherine to make sure she was safe since I couldn’t do it myself. It was late, so I didn’t expect a response until morning, but her reply came minutes later: ***I understand; Another day is fine. I’ll see you when you get back. Be careful.***

I went to pack an overnight bag, thinking how good it felt that Katherine was worried about me. I liked that feeling of

having a woman to come back to that cared about me. Really cared about me, not my club status and becoming my Ol' Lady. *Never had anyone in my life like that.* I slung my backpack over my shoulder and went out front to meet Jonesy to head to Pennsylvania.

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CHAPTER EIGHT



I WATCHED KELSEY show us the new dance moves we would be doing next week. Kelsey was a pretty brunette with a dancer's body. She taught dance classes part-time and worked as a waitress at The Devil's Den. Once a week, we meet at the studio she teaches and practice dance. Hillbilly pays us for being here, ensuring all seven servers show up.

My mind isn't focusing today. I was so excited to go on that ride with Patch yesterday, but he canceled. I know something happened by the way Patch and the other guys hurried out of the bar that night. So I spent the day moping around, having dinner with Bethany, and going to bed early. "Katherine?" I heard someone say, knocking my brain back to the present.

I looked up to see the other girls looking at me. "I'm sorry, I zoned out," I replied to Kelsey, who had called my name and felt embarrassed that I hadn't been paying attention.

I heard a loud snort and a mumbled, “Old age will do that.” I knew it was Tina, and I really wasn’t in the mood for her today, so I turned to look at her.

“Give it a rest, Tina. Your act is getting old,” I glared at her, so sick of dealing with her jealousy. I still had a hard time standing up for myself. Michael made me pay every time I tried, constantly beating me back down, but I’m getting better at it.

Tina’s lips thinned into a snarl, and her eyes got hard. “You think because you gave Patch a quick fuck in the office that you’re big shit or something? Well, news flash, *Katherine*, you’re just another mile on his dick, nothing more,” she spat, pointing her finger at me.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” I responded, staying calm because I knew Tina wanted to upset me.

“That’s enough, Tina. We’re here to practice, so let’s get it done,” Kelsey interjected.

Ignoring Kelsey, Tina smirked, “Is that so? Then how about you come to their clubhouse tonight and see for yourself just how much you mean to Patch? Or are you afraid I’ll be proven right? See for yourself what kind of women they prefer to have around. The kind of women Patch *keeps* at his clubhouse. Hint: not one of them has the years on them like you do.”

Okay, now what she’s saying is hitting a nerve. I mean, what do I really know about Patch? I’m going with my gut and feelings when it comes to a relationship with him. What if I’m wrong? I mean, I thought Michael was the guy for me at one time too.

And look how that turned out.

“Enough, Tina!” Kelsey snapped. “Let’s get this done.” Tina didn’t say anymore, and we practiced for the next half hour without incident. But my mood and confidence in what I meant to Patch were shot to hell. Erin touched my arm on the

way out, “Don’t let her get to you. Patch is crazy about you, we all see it, and that’s why Tina is being a vicious bitch.”

I gave her a small smile, “I know, but you’ve been to the clubhouse. Is what Tina says true?”

I watched as Erin hesitated to respond, “Look, Katherine, why don’t you talk to Patch about your concerns? Get everything out in the open.”

I forced a smile, “You’re right, and I will. Thanks, Erin.” I gave her a quick hug and then walked to my car. The way Erin evaded the question tells me there is some truth to what Tina said. It’s not like I don’t know that Patch and his club are not always on the right side of the law. I’m not stupid. But, after dealing with Michael and his crooked cop cronies, I knew a good man wasn’t determined by which side of the law you were on, so that side of Patch didn’t bother me.

But other women. That’s a hell no!

I had to work this evening. I hope Patch shows up so I can talk to him about what’s bothering me, and if not, I may just make a trip out to the clubhouse after work. I need to know before I move any further into this relationship. I already like Patch so much, and it will hurt if I’m wrong about him. But I have to find out. I pulled out of the parking lot so distracted I didn’t even notice the man standing by his car watching me or when he got in his car following me out of the parking lot.

CHAPTER NINE



“I THINK WE may have something,” Kickstand said, pushing his glasses on top of his head and looking at me. Kickstand looked every bit the tech nerd he was with his mousy brown hair, eyes, and black-rimmed glasses. “There’s a warehouse near Carnegie that’s under the name of Papa Bears dead wife.”

“There is also a bar in the same area under her name,” Scotch added. After investigating traffic cameras, we knew Leather was in this area, so my brothers made the trip here to Shadow’s clubhouse and set up our headquarters.

“What’s the address? We’ll head there and check it out,” I said, getting angrier every minute that went by that we hadn’t rescued Leather. A whole day had passed, and it was already afternoon today, and I had only got a couple of hours of sleep. And I missed seeing Katherine making me one grumpy asshole.

“Vans are ready to go. Doc is coming along in case we need him along with ten of my men,” Shadow informed me

from where he sat at the table. It still amazed me how much Shadow looked like his old man Jax, same dark looks and a quiet danger that gave you pause when you first met him. I miss Jax. We were good friends until his Ol' Lady died, and then Jax wasn't the same man anymore. Shadow's done one hell of a job as President, turning his club around.

"Then let's move," I ordered. I had fifteen of my men, and with Shadow's ten, we should easily handle anything we encountered. I hate going in blind, but there isn't any time to waste staking out the place.

We were on the road within minutes and in the area of the warehouse in thirty-five minutes. We stopped a few blocks from the warehouse and sent Player and Viking—Shadow's Vice President, ahead to scout it out the best they could and be our eyes when we rushed the place. The rest of us, except a couple of prospects who would watch our bikes, loaded into the vans to ride the last few blocks.

"It looks abandoned, no signs of life anywhere, the whole area seems deserted," Player came through my headpiece.

"We'll be there in five. Keep watch for movement as we make our way in," I replied. I'm sure Shadow got the same information in the van behind us. One van would go in front, the other the back. My blood started pumping with adrenaline when the van stopped in front of the old warehouse, the van door flew open, and as a group, we rushed inside, guns drawn after kicking the door down.

Spreading out, we searched the warehouse, and just when I thought this was a dead end, Harker said, "Listen! Hear that?" Then I heard it, a woman calling for help.

"This way," I instructed, heading toward the sound. Shadow and his men met us as we headed down a long hallway with a door at the end. Reaching the door, I stopped to listen and could hear a woman pleading for someone to help. "Let's go in easy; this could be a trap," I said, turning the knob, shoving the door open, and moving inside the room, my finger on the trigger prepared.

“What the fuck?” Jonesy thundered as our eyes took in the scene in front of us. There in a cage was a woman and Leather. The small, blonde woman was beaten, dirty, and looked starved, and she was sitting in the cage with Leather’s head on her lap. Leather was beaten and bloody, his body not moving.

“You have to help him; he’s been shot!” The woman cried as we rushed to open the cage. It was locked. “The guard has the key and will be back in about an hour. He keeps the same schedule,” she supplied, her voice weak and scratchy

“We need bolt cutters,” I demanded. Then, a pair hit my hands before I could blink. I cut the padlock off, opening the door. The cage was small, with barely enough room for Leather and the woman and no room to stand. “Where is he shot?” I asked the woman.

“In his left side. It happened this morning when he tried to stop the guard from hurting me. I’ve kept pressure on the wound, but he is so weak and isn’t responding to me anymore,” she worried, tears streaking down her dirty face.

“Let’s get Leather out of the cage so I can look at him and her, too,” Doc ordered from my side. Having an actual surgical doctor with an active license in the club came in fucking handy; the best move Jax ever made was recruiting Doc.

“What’s your name?” Player asked the woman as we eased Leather out of the cage and onto a cot that had been brought inside.

“Aislynn,” she answered softly, suddenly looking hesitant and, if possible, even smaller.

“It’s okay, Aislynn; we won’t hurt you. We’re going to help you. Come out of the cage, so we can get you out of here,” Player coaxed the scared woman whose face was so beaten I couldn’t determine her age or much of her features. She had on a ratty floral dress covered in blood. The other men stood back, not wanting to overwhelm her. Player was holding his rage inside at the condition of Aislynn. Player may be a lot

of things, but abusing women crossed the line for him, and he's set more than a few men straight over the years.

Aislynn crawled out of the cage, wincing with every move. She was in a bad way and would need care. Shadow's clubhouse would be the best place for her. The Ol' Ladies there would take good care of her along with Doc. Aislynn started to stumble, her legs weak; Player scooped her up in his arms, startling her. "I'm fine, really," she said, shaken.

"You're not fine, Aislynn. Let me help you," Player said gently. "I'm going to carry you to the van outside, where you'll be safe, and Doc can look at you when he's done with Leather."

"Okay," Aislynn answered faintly. I knew without a doubt the poor girl had been sexually assaulted, and I would guess Leather got shot trying to prevent it from happening again. The Fire Dragons were pieces of shit.

I walked over to where Doc was working on Leather. "How is he?" I asked. Doc was hooking what looked like an IV to Leather's hand.

Doc stood running his hands through his thick black hair. "Bullet went all the way through. I don't think anything vital was hit, but I won't know for sure until I get him back to the clubhouse, where I can examine him closer. He's weak from blood loss. So I've stabilized him for the trip back," Doc advised me. "Where's the girl?"

"Player took her outside. Her name is Aislynn, and she's been worked over pretty hard."

Doc's green eyes narrowed, "I'll check her out on the way back. I can only imagine what those men did to her. I'll call ahead and have Summer and Grace waiting to help with Aislynn. Having women there will make her more comfortable."

"Okay, let's load up and get out of here. Snipe, you and Slayer stay here and watch for the guard. If he comes back, grab him," I ordered the men.

“Sure thing Prez,” Snipe replied, going to find Slayer.

I gave a weary sigh and went outside, climbing in the van to ride the few blocks back to my bike. I needed to get back to West Virginia. I wanted to see Katherine and then get some sleep. At least, I hope I make it back in time to see Katherine. I need to see her for my mind to settle. Katherine is my drug, and I need my fix.

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CHAPTER TEN



I LEFT THE bar after work with what Tina said earlier today still heavy on my mind. I drove to my home but sat in the parking lot—not going inside. Patch didn't come into the bar tonight so that I could talk to him. I was uncomfortable calling him since he said he would touch base with me. I felt like I would be bothering him if I reached out.

On the other hand, what would it hurt to drive out to the clubhouse? I have to know if Patch is only using me for an itch. After Michael, I need to be sure before I jump into a relationship. If I had gotten my head out of the clouds and looked into Michael, I would have seen who Michael really was and run away. But no—I was so happy and felt so damn lucky that this good-looking older guy, a cop no less, wanted me, a seventeen-year-old nobody. I was working as a waitress in an all-night diner when Michael came in on his break and started paying attention to me. He didn't care that I lived in a rundown neighborhood or that my mom was a drug addict and my dad left when I was small. I thought Michael Sinclair was my Knight in shining armor, sweeping me off my feet,

marrying me, and moving me into a better life when I got pregnant.

I was so wrong. Michael was mentally and physically abusive and possessive, making me a prisoner in my home, a cheater, and an all-around horrible man. After years of planning my escape from Michael in a way that didn't require me to fight in a system that was rigged against me because Michael was a respected Police Captain and I was a High School dropout who Michael led everyone to believe had bouts of hysteria.

I did it. I got away from Michael.

And I don't intend to be that foolish ever again.

I backed the car out of the parking space decision made. I was going to drive out and just have a peek. I don't even think Patch is there since he said he would be away for a few days. Although I knew where their clubhouse was located—I got curious one day and drove out that way, but I didn't take the final step by going down the side road that led to the clubhouse.

Tonight I did. It was late, almost midnight, and when I turned on the isolated side road, everything seemed even darker. I started second-guessing my choice to come out here tonight. But, it's too late to turn back since it's so dark I can't see my surroundings and the road is narrow.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, I saw lights up ahead of me. As I got closer, I saw a small building, realizing I would have to stop there since there was a gate blocking entry. Once I reached the entrance, a man came out, and I rolled my window down. I recognized the man as Collin; he went into the bar frequently. He leaned down, looking inside, recognition in his eyes. "Hey, Katherine, first time I've seen you here," Collin greeted me.

I tried not to appear as nervous as I felt. "Yeah—I know. The girls from the bar kept trying to get me out here, so

tonight I decided, why not,” I said with as much nonchalance as I could muster.

Collin gave me an unsure look but said, “Well then, I won’t keep you. Once I open the gate, follow the road that turns right and park out front of the clubhouse and go on in.” He went inside the building, and the gates slowly opened. I forced my foot on the gas pedal, driving through the gates. I gave myself a pep talk as I followed Collin’s instructions and parked in front of the clubhouse.

At least thirty bikes were sitting out front, along with about fifteen cars. I could hear loud music and laughter flowing from the sizeable warehouse-like structure. I could do this. I only need to walk in and have a quick look around and leave. Maybe no one would even notice me. I got out of my car, stiffened my spine, and tried to look confident and like I belonged there. I stopped at the door with a giant sign painted with the club’s logo above it, took a deep breath, and went inside.

The first thing that hit me was the smell; it wasn’t pleasant and hard to describe. The second thing was the place was crowded with wall-to-wall people, and my heart sank when I saw all the half-naked or completely naked younger women hanging all over the men, some having sex. The third was Patch by the bar, a young brunette hanging on him, whispering in his ear. I looked away, so hurt I trembled with the emotion, only to have my eyes land on a couple having sex. The burly man I didn’t recognize was riding the woman from behind, and the look on his face struck me. He was giving me a mocking smile, his eyes hard and mean. He licked his lips at me, his gaze leering as he pounded into the woman, and just like that, I was back in that room, reliving the most horrid night of my life.

My ears started to buzz, the noise from the room fading as I was taken back in time to the one place I never wanted to be again. I felt faint and knew I had to get out of this place. I turned, going out the first door I saw, praying it was the same door I entered, but I was walking in a fog—panic and anxiety

swirling through my body. I heard my name being called, but I kept walking, taking deep gulps of air as I made my way to my car.

Arms suddenly wrapped around me from behind, caging me to a hard chest. “Dammit, Katherine, stop!” Patch ordered, holding my wrists still so I couldn’t move, causing my bracelets to pop off and hit the ground.

“Let me go, Patch!” I snarled, fighting him. I needed to get as far away from here as I could.

Patch kept a firm hold. “Katherine, tell me, what’s wrong? Why did you come out here?” Patch seemed genuinely concerned. I could hear it in his voice. But he was using me, and I can’t forget that or what I just witnessed inside that clubhouse.

“I need to leave. Please let me go,” I begged, tears starting to drip down my face. “I mean it, Patch, let me leave.” I could feel his breath on my hair, and his hands rubbed my wrists, and I was glad it was too dark out here for him to see my scars. Patch didn’t loosen his hold or say anything for several minutes.

Finally, he spoke, “I’m going to let you go, Katherine, but this isn’t finished. I want to know what’s wrong and what happened to cause you to react this way. I’ll give you tonight to calm down and talk to you tomorrow.” Patch released his hold, and I jumped in my car and wasted no time pulling out and heading toward the gate.

Once the gate opened and I was heading toward the main road, I felt like I could breathe again. But I was still shaking from the memories triggered by that horrible man, and Tina was right. All the women at the clubhouse were young and sexy, and they lived there. So, whatever game Patch played with me wouldn’t happen any longer because I just flipped the playing board over and knocked it to the floor.

Game over.



I BENT PICKING up Katherine's bracelets off the ground.

What in the fuck just happened?

"I'll follow Katherine home to make sure she's safe," Lucky scowled at me, straddling his bike, powering it to life, and roaring out of the parking lot.

I just returned from Pennsylvania and walked to the bar for a drink before bed. I wanted to see Katherine first, but it was too late by the time we got back.

Or so I thought.

I sat down at the bar, and of course, Jesse made her move like every night. And got the same answer as every night. That's when Scotch got my attention, pointing at something by the door. When I turned, I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me since Katherine was on my mind, but she stood there looking distressed and pale. I immediately stood to go to her, already in protective mode, thinking someone had hurt her. Why else would Katherine come out here this late? It was out of character for her.

But before I could reach her, she turned tail and practically ran out the door. And when I called her, she ignored me until I forced her to stop. I had never seen Katherine be anything other than smiling, sweet, and kind, so seeing her so upset brought out the monster in me to tear apart whoever upset her and uneasy that I was that person.

Why else would she run from me?

“Katherine’s carrying some trauma, Brother.” I looked toward the voice, seeing Scotch leaning against the building, smoking. He threw his cigarette down and came to stand beside me. “I’ve seen that look she had in her eyes when I was in the service. Katherine was somewhere else. Something triggered her tonight and took her to a bad place.”

That’s when I remembered the raised scars I felt on her wrists. I know now that’s why she always wears these big bracelets. Someone dared to hurt Katherine, and I won’t rest until I find out who. “But what would trigger her? And why run from me? She knows I would never hurt her.” I would die before I hurt one hair on Katherine’s beautiful head.

Scotch exhaled, “Listen, Patch, I know this is hard for you to understand since it’s all you’ve ever known—growing up in the club and all. But look at what Katherine saw when she walked into the clubhouse tonight. A big drunken party, naked women, and fucking. And to top it off, a topless Jesse is hanging all over you. Katherine is a civilian. She don’t see this shit every day like we do to become numb to it. I saw how hurt she got seeing you with Jesse, but then she looked away toward the corner, and that’s when she saw something that sent her over the edge to someplace in her head.”

I inhaled a deep breath and let it out slowly. Fuck, Scotch is right. I can only imagine what Katherine is thinking right now. I’ll have to explain shit to her and hope she understands because I’m not letting her go, especially now that I’ve had a taste of her. Fuck no. She’s mine! And then something else occurred to me. “But, why did she come out here in the first place? What if she needed help?” Thank god Lucky is following her. This leads me to wonder where the fuck was the prospect who was supposed to be watching Katherine.

“I don’t know, man. But she was still in her work clothes,” Scotch replied. I turned, hearing giggling, and saw a couple of girls I recognized as waitresses leaving the clubhouse that worked with Katherine. But, unfortunately, I couldn’t remember their names.

“Hey, come here a minute,” I called to the girls. They both stopped looking unsure but then slowly moved toward Scotch and me.

“Katherine showed up here tonight. Do either of you know why?” I questioned. They looked at each other, looking uncomfortable. “You know something? Tell me,” I growled low, startling the women.

The dark-haired girl gave me a fearful look, and though she hesitated, she answered, “Someone said some shit to Katherine about you only using her for a quick one-night stand and that she was too old for you, and that’s why you kept younger women here at the clubhouse for your personal use.” She stopped talking, seeing my body stiffen and my fist clench at her words.

“Continue,” I demanded. I know I can be a scary fucker, and right now, it’s showing loud and clear.

She visibly gulped but continued, “The girl dared Katherine to come out here and see for herself what you liked. Of course, Katherine was upset, and I talked with her and encouraged Katherine to talk to you before making any decisions. But, I guess she finally decided to check it out for herself.”

“That it?”

“Yes, that’s all I know,” she responded, wringing her hands.

“Thanks for the information.” I stomped away from the women, so angry and frustrated now that I knew what Katherine thought of me.

Scotch caught up with me. “Don’t you want to know who told Katherine that shit?”

“I fucking already know who the bitch is,” I snarled, slamming the door into the clubhouse and sending a text to Hillbilly on the way, telling him to fire that meddling bitch Tina. I turned to Scotch. “Find out everything you can about

Katherine's past, especially her ex-husband." I knew in my gut he was the one who hurt her.

"I'm on it. Just let me go get this little girl something to eat," Scotch answered, pulling a tiny gray kitten out of his jacket.

"Why the hell are you carrying a kitten around?"

"Found the poor thing at the warehouse and brought her back with me," he explained, cuddling the kitten as he shouldered past me on his way to the kitchen.

I ran my fingers through my hair in frustration and decided to head to the weight room and work out to release some of my anger. Unfortunately, I only got a few steps when familiar arms snaked around me. "Are you sure you don't need me tonight, baby? You look so tense," Jesse cooed in a pouty voice.

That's the punch that broke my night. I threw her hands off and exploded, "Don't fucking touch me! Got me? If you want to touch something so bad, how about a damn broom? This place stinks like stale ass, and I'm goddamned tired of it." The music stopped, and I looked around the room at the shocked faces and continued, "That goes for all you Sweet Butts and Prospects. You've been slacking in the cleaning, and that shit stops tonight! When I come out in the morning, this place better shine like a new dime if not all your asses are out the door!"

"I didn't sign up to clean." I heard, and my eye zeroed in on the girl who muttered the sentence pinning her with my angry gaze, her eyes widening. It was the new girl Player had pointed out to me the other night.

"Pack your shit and get out!" I thundered. She let out a cry and ran from the room. "Anybody else got something to say?" I asked, my angry gaze sweeping the room. Then, seeing my point made, I stomped out of the room, not hearing the music start again. Before Katherine came along, I was doing runs all the time, trying to fill the void I was feeling, and that meant I

was out of the clubhouse a lot, and now that I'm around, I see things have been let go, including the discipline of my club brothers. So it's time for a club-wide meeting and straighten some shit out.

Player's lucky he stayed behind at Shadow's clubhouse with Leather, or I'd be beating the shit out of him right now. I went into the weight room, taking off my cut and t-shirt. My mood was dark; if everyone were smart, they wouldn't come anywhere near me for a while.

Except for Katherine.

Katherine will always be the exception.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN



I SAT IN the kitchen, nursing a cup of coffee, last night playing over and over again in my mind. I was exhausted from lack of sleep and feeling somewhat foolish for running away like a child instead of confronting Patch. But I was so upset, more so from the unwanted memories of that horrible night and days that followed. The night Michael surprised *even me* with just how evil he could be.

I gave an exhausted sigh, cupping my head in my hands. I thought I had gotten over that night. It had taken years, but I finally moved past anything related to Michael's abuse. I was happy and content with my newfound independence and freedom from my ex-husband. Thrilled that I was moving on with my life. And when Patch grabbed my attention and finally made a move, I was ready to take a chance on a relationship again.

Until last night.

Now I feel like a fool. I mean, how could I have seriously thought a man as gorgeous as Patch would want something serious with me when he had his pick of women? Young, pretty women with perfect bodies. Seeing Patch with that topless brunette with her perky breasts hurt so much and reminded me of all the awful things Michael had said to me about my aging body.

“Having a baby really fucked up your body, Katherine, and now you’re getting old on top of it. I have to imagine a hot bitch to even fuck you.” Michael’s words replayed in my mind. I used to curse him in my mind when he said those hurtful words—wanting nothing more than to scream that I didn’t want his filthy hands to touch me. Instead, he was the one who insisted on having sex. But, to say those words meant a backhand across the face, so I stayed silent. And once Bethany went away to college, things got worse.

So much worse.

“Are you okay, Mom?” Bethany’s question startled me, interrupting my thoughts. Bethany was dressed for work in a long blue skirt and a white blouse, her beautiful blonde hair in a high ponytail.

I straightened in my chair, giving Bethany a forced smile, “I’m fine, just a little tired today. I didn’t sleep well.” I was still in the old Metallica t-shirt I slept in with bed hair, which wasn’t normal for me.

Bethany took the chair across from me, giving me a concerned look, “You look pale. Are you sure you’re not getting sick? You should probably take the night off in case you’re coming down with something.”

“No, I’m fine, really. I’m simply tired and plan on taking a nap before work,” I lied.

Bethany looked at me, her brow creased, “Mom, don’t feel like you have to work when you don’t feel good. We don’t need to worry about money; we’re doing fine. I know you like your job at the bar, but have you thought about going back to

school? If you did, you could find a better job, one that doesn't have you working nights and waiting tables."

Those words smacked of her father and rubbed me the wrong way. My back went ramrod straight, my pride taking a hit. "Are you ashamed of me?" I questioned, hurt.

Bethany's face fell; seeing she upset me, she grabbed my hand and quickly exclaimed, "No, Mom, of course not! Why would you think that? I'm only worried that this job is hard on you. And you deserve more out of life than waiting tables in some bar."

I took a deep breath and exhaled before speaking, "Bethany, I know what I'm going to say will be hard for you to understand, but it's how I feel. I don't want to go back to school, and I honestly believe it was never in the cards for me anyway. I was never any good at school and have no desire to try again. I love waitressing, and most of the people I work with at the bar have become like family to me." My mind went to seeing Lucky outside my home last night. He had followed me to make sure I got home okay. I was sure of it. "I'm happy—really," I finished, squeezing her hand.

Bethany gave me a skeptical look that said she *didn't* understand but let it drop by saying, "If you're sure. I only want you to be happy. Make sure you take that nap because you look like crap."

"Well, when you say it like that, I'll be sure to get that nap," I chuckled. "I love you, baby," I said as we both stood, and she hugged me.

"Love you too, Mom," Bethany replied and headed out the door. When the door shut, I slumped back down into my chair, feeling more drained after the encounter with my daughter. But I didn't lie. I did love my job and most of the people I worked with, and that's why I'm not going to let what happened with Patch run me away from The Devil's Den.

I've had years of practice hiding my feelings and faking it to make it. So I'll use those strengths when seeing Patch.

Who am I kidding?



I WASN'T IN a better mood the following day. Still pissed off that Katherine thought I was just using her for a quick fuck and supposedly kept a harem of younger bitches at the clubhouse for my use like I was a King or some shit. Sweet Butts exist in my world; it's part of the lifestyle. It doesn't mean I use them. I have in the past—yes. But no more. I'm not even tempted.

I chuckled to myself, thinking how I used to wonder and question my chapter brothers, who couldn't see past one woman, me thinking all women were the same. Sure, their looks may vary, but in the end, tits, pussy, and ass nothing special; they all did the same thing. I have been around thousands of women, and not one ever changed my mind.

And then I looked up and saw Katherine that night, and I understood.

A fist pounded on my office door; a second later, the door opened, and Lucky strolled in and took a seat, a severe expression on his wrinkled face. "Someone's after Katherine," he announced, crossing his arms over his chest.

My mood turned even darker as I leaned forward in my chair, sure I didn't hear him correctly. "What did you just say?"

“You losin’ your hearin’, Patch? Someone is creepin’ on sweet Katherine. I noticed him lurkin’ around her house last night, and when he saw me, he ran off.”

“Did you get a good look at the man? Explain exactly what you saw.”

“Naw, he was wearin’ dark clothes and a hat. I had stopped my bike on the curb, not wantin’ Katherine to see me. That’s when I noticed the man lurkin’ in the shadows of the parkin’ lot, and he started toward Katherine like he was gonna grab her; with her back to the slimy fucker she wouldn’t have stood a chance. That’s when I showed myself to him, and he took off like the coward he was. Katherine got inside, none the wiser. I hung around the rest of the night keepin’ watch.”

“Why the hell didn’t you call me last night?” I bit out, angry I hadn’t been informed right away.

Lucky huffed, “Katherine needed time to herself, and you’d have gone in hot like a junkie who just spotted free blow. I made sure she was safe and called a prospect in to follow her around until I talked to you.”

“A prospect! Hell no! This is Katherine, and if some crazy ass is after her, I want a brother on her tail. Not an inexperienced prospect!” I fumed, slamming my fist down on the hardwood of my desk.

“Cool your ass down, Patch. I put Davie on Katherine; that boy is as good as patched.” Lucky stood to leave. “You best be claimin’ sweet Katherine sooner than later so’s she’ll always be protected,” Lucky advised on his way out, the door slamming behind him.

I picked up my phone sending a text to Scotch. I wanted a tracker put on Katherine’s car, and a security system put in her townhouse. I wish I could figure out how to put a tracker on her person or, better yet, lock Katherine away in my room until the threat was over. I was giving this deeper thought when another knock interrupted my thoughts, and I yelled,

“It’s open.” Already knowing it was Player who I had been waiting on.

Player entered the office looking tired and dropping his big body into a chair. “Leather is awake, and Doc says he should recover fine,” Player updated me, his voice sounding as exhausted as he looked.

“Did Leather have any information?”

“That’s the thing that’s odd. Leather said they knocked him unconscious, and when he came to, he was in that cage in the warehouse with that chick Aislynn and the one guy guarding them. And that guy wasn’t even a Fire Dragon. Just some random guy they paid to do the job.”

“I think the Fire Dragons knew we would track their men and figured this was the best way to hide Leather until they needed to use him. How’d he get shot?”

“The guy guarding them had been beating and forcing himself on Aislynn,” Player snarled, “Even though Leather was drugged and weak, he still tried to protect Aislynn, and that fucker shot him.”

I remembered how small the woman had looked, and I understood Player’s anger. Only low-life cowards do that kinda shit. “What’s with this, Aislynn? Who is she, and why did they have her?” I questioned.

Player gave a humorless laugh, “That Prez is a mystery. We’re pretty sure her name is really Aislynn, but she ain’t giving up anything else. And with her face so beat up, we can’t get a clear picture of her to do some searching. Aislynn insists she will be fine in a few days and is only asking for a bus ticket so she can leave the area.”

I leaned back in my chair and thought for a minute before speaking again, “What do you think she’s hiding?”

“Don’t have a clue. But she comes from money, and even with all the bruising, she can’t hide it. Aislynn was the first thing Leather asked about when he came back awake. Leather seems to think she was taken as leverage just like he was, and

doesn't want her leaving Shadow's clubhouse without him. I have to say, Patch, for being beaten and raped, that girl is keeping it together. I get the feeling this wasn't her first rodeo with that kind of treatment."

I rubbed my chin, thinking. "I want to talk to Aislynn. I will make a run to Shadow's clubhouse tomorrow to do that and check in with Leather. My gut says we need to keep this girl close."

"Yeah, well, be warned. Leather doesn't want anyone upsetting her, and the ol' ladies are acting like mama bears protecting their cub. Stonewall's woman bared her teeth, practically growling at me when I tried to press Aislynn," Player chuckled at the memory. "I need some sleep. We done here?"

"Yeah, you can go. But I'm not happy about the way shits been handled around the clubhouse, and I'm calling Church in a few days to settle some things," I warned, giving him a hard look.

"I've already been warned what went down last night. I'm prepared to take my ass beating—*after* I sleep." Player pushed himself out of the chair and started for the door before turning around again. "I'll make that run to Shadow's with you tomorrow," he added and left.

I looked at the time. I had hours yet before I could see Katherine. I picked up my phone and found Davie's number. I needed to check in with the prospect and make sure he understood that if anything happened to Katherine on his watch, I'd kill him. *Slowly*.

CHAPTER TWELVE



I MANAGED TO get myself together and show up at work looking like I didn't have a care in the world. I was glad to see Tina wasn't around, that's all I needed was her smirking face saying I told you so. "Hey girl, you doing okay?" Erin asked, coming up beside me.

"Sure, why wouldn't I be?"

"Because..." Erin paused a second, biting her lip, "I heard you went to the clubhouse last night, and it didn't go so well. So I wanted to make sure you're okay."

I felt my face burn red with embarrassment, knowing that others were talking about my unpleasant experience. I hadn't thought much about what I looked like as I escaped the clubhouse. "I'm fine," I answered stiffly.

"Please, Katherine, don't think I'm judging you or anything. I'm not. I know seeing how those guys party can be a shock. I walked in and walked right back out the first time I

attempted to hang out there. But I learned not everything is as it seems, even though it looks bad.” Erin hesitated again and then continued, “ I consider you a friend, and that’s why I have to confess that Patch cornered me asking some things, and I had to tell him about what went down with Tina. I didn’t use her name, though. I’m sorry if I broke your confidence, but Patch scares the shit out of me,” Erin confessed, looking genuinely sorry.

“It’s okay, and I appreciate your concern. I honestly just want to forget about last night,” I answered, giving Amber a warm smile. I know she cares and is only trying to help. And Patch can be intimidating at times.

Erin leaned forward, looking around before whispering, “I heard Tina got fired. At least that catty witch won’t be around anymore. I better get back to work before *I* get fired.” Erin turned, going to the bar.

Tina was fired. I should feel bad, but I don’t. Tina took every chance she could to tear me down. The fact that she was right about Patch didn’t matter to me. I hated bullies and had been a victim of them my entire life. So I loved when karma found them to say hello. “Evening, Katherine,” Hillbilly greeted as he came around the bar.

“Hey, Hillbilly,” I replied. “Same section as always?”

Hillbilly knocked his fist on the bar and said, “You know it.” I smiled, acknowledging that I heard him, before turning away.

I was hoping I would get moved; I really didn’t want to talk to Patch. I had only taken a few steps when Chris—one of my regular customers, stopped me with a big smile and his usual question. “Hey, pretty lady, you know I’m going to ask, so here goes. Will you go out with me on your next day off?” Chris Barnes wasn’t bad looking with his golden good looks and toothy smile; his body was fit and lean on his six-foot frame. He looked to be my age. Chris worked in sales of some sort and seemed nice enough. I just never felt so much as a flutter of excitement when I was around him.

But maybe I should give him a chance. It's not like Patch is serious about me, so I need to move on, and going out with someone might just be the thing this lonely heart needs. So I looked into Chris's hopeful blue eyes and smiled, "Sure, I'm off on Sunday."

Chris's eyes widened in surprise, not expecting me to say yes. But then he recovered with a confident smile, "What's your number, Katherine? I will plan something and let you know the details." So I rambled off my number, watching as he put it in his phone. He again told me he would call me before taking his usual seat in my section. I turned, seeing Hillbilly giving me a concerned look and then raising an eyebrow in question. I gave him a slight shrug and went to work. I never accepted dates with customers, and Hillbilly knew this, having witnessed me turning down men all the time. I'm sure he was curious why I took Chris up on his offer.

I felt Patch before I saw him. I was so attuned to the man that I literally vibrated with the sensation as my body came alive with his nearness. I peeked at Patch from the corner of my eyes as he strode to his usual booth with Harker, the club Chaplain. At least that's what his vest told me. He sure didn't look like any man of God I had seen before with his tattooed bald head, face piercings, heavily muscled frame, and steel gray eyes, but he was always friendly enough, just not very talkative.

Patch looked over at me, and I quickly averted my eyes and went about my business. I knew I would have to wait on Patch and Harker, but I needed a minute to talk myself up before going to the table. Patch had said we would talk, and I don't want to talk and need to be firm with Patch. I don't know what he could possibly think would explain what I saw last night and make it okay. I know in his world, plenty of women might turn a blind eye to their man entertaining other women, but I'm not one of them.

Even when it got me beat, I wasn't one of them.



I CLOCKED KATHERINE as soon as Harker and I entered the bar. Katherine was watching me under her lowered lashes but trying hard not to, and when I caught her eyes—she turned away, dismissing me.

That hit me in the gut. Hard.

Katherine always had a warm smile for me, and I needed her warmth like I needed the sun. I craved it. Wanted to get lost in it. Katherine's glowing warmth was something that had never been a part of my dark life, and now that I had experienced it, I couldn't go without it or *her*; and I didn't plan on trying. So I followed her movements as she worked. I noticed she had another set of bracelets on—covering her wrists.

That reminded me, and I searched the room until I saw Davie sitting at the bar and sent him a text message relieving him for the night. I was taking over Katherine's watch. Ten minutes passed before she came to the table.

"Hey guys, what can I get you?" I felt my eye start to twitch at her casual greeting and question as she kept her eyes focused on Harker. Katherine knew what I always wanted.

"I'll take a beer, Katherine," Harker answered, looking back and forth between Katherine and me, sensing something was off.

Katherine moved her eyes to me, and I studied her intently until she started to fidget and gave me the words I wanted to hear, "The usual, Patch?" Her voice was unsteady.

“Yes, Darlin’, the usual.”

“Be right back,” she said with a shaky smile. I don’t play games, and I don’t intend to start now. Katherine wants me as much as I want her, and we will be together.

“What was that all about?” Harker asked.

“Just a misunderstanding we have to work out.”

“You know I like Katherine, but she may be too soft for our life. You’re a hard man, Patch, and club life isn’t for everyone. And she’ll expect fidelity. Are you ready for that? Because if not, you’ll break her, and that would be a shame.” Harker was our Chaplain, and for a good reason. The man always listened more than he talked and shoveled out advice when needed. Harker was also an ordained minister who once resided over his own congregation. What changed a man of the cloth to become the toughened one-percenter biker Harker became is not something I know and something he has never brought to light.

“I’m hard enough for the both of us, I’ll never let the darker side touch her, and my dick already belongs to Katherine and only Katherine. So I won’t be steppin’ out on her, ever!”

“As long as you’re sure, Patch, that’s all I’m saying,” Harker advised saying no more as Katherine set two mugs of beer down.

“I’ll be back around,” she said, quickly moving away. Fuck this; we need to talk and straighten this out. I was about to get up when Hillbilly took a seat.

“I take it you and Katherine didn’t work out?” Hillbilly said.

“It was a fucking misunderstanding. I was about to talk with her before you sat down.”

Hillbilly gave me an odd look. “I don’t think Katherine thinks it was a misunderstanding, Patch. She agreed to go out with another guy this evening.”

Okay, maybe Lucky's right, and I'm losing my hearing. "What did you fucking say?" I snarled.

"I said she agreed to go out with a regular who kept asking her out, she never accepts, but tonight she did."

"Who?" I growled through gritted teeth. But then my eyes landed on the asswipe who had asked Katherine out the other night, and I knew it was him. He sat there looking smug, his eyes on my woman. I started to rise and beat the shit out of the man who thought he would touch my Katherine. Hillbilly placed a hand on my shoulder, stopping me.

"Easy Patch. Do you want to start shit in front of Katherine and witnesses who could get your hot-headed ass thrown in jail?" Hillbilly tried to reason. And I knew he was right.

"Then create a distraction and have Snipe escort the asshole outside where I can teach him the error of his ways." It sounded like a suggestion, though we both knew it was an order.

Letting out a breath, Hillbilly said, "I will start the girl's dance early and get Snipe to show him the door. But for the love of god, just warn him away with the fear of death and don't actually kill him. I just got the cops off my back from the last fight. I don't want them sniffin' around again—Hillbilly pointed to Harker—keep an eye on our Prez, yeah?"

"I'll keep his ass out of jail," Harker replied to Hillbilly with a smirk. Like either one of them could stop me. I forced myself to sit still while Hillbilly started the song that would get the servers to the front and watched as Snipe escorted the man I wanted to kill out of the exit. It rankled me that Katherine agreed to go out with him, but I would address that with her later.

I stood, making my way toward the door, watching Katherine dance to Def Leppard on the way. I chuckled, thinking: *I was gonna pour more than sugar on her.* When she was completely mine, she would only be dancing for me—

that's for damn sure. And when she looked at me as I walked by, I conveyed that thought in the look I gave her.

Along with lust, because damn, she was sexy.

But first, I needed to take care of business. “What’s this all about?” I heard the man say to Snipe as I walked over, facing him and feeling satisfied at how his face paled seeing mine. “W-What’s going on?” he stammered, sweat breaking out on his forehead. I’m sure seeing Harker behind me isn’t helping. Harker looked like he had just walked out of a horror film with his bald head—tattooed face and piercings.

“What’s your name?” I demanded.

“C-Chris B-Barnes,” he sputtered. What a weakling. I’m half expecting him to piss himself before I’m done explaining things.

“Alright, Chris Barnes, I want you to listen good to what I have to say. Do you know how to listen Chris Barnes?”

“Y-Yes.” He looked ready to pass out, so I needed to get on with it. I don’t think I need to get too aggressive since this guy’s a pussy.

“That’s real good to hear,” I said, patting his cheek. “Here’s what’s gonna happen if you want to continue to walk this earth. You’re gonna leave here tonight—forget everything about Katherine.”

“Forget her name.”

“Forget what she looks like.”

“Forget every single thought you’ve ever had about Katherine. *Everything*. She doesn’t exist to you anymore. So you’re gonna walk to your car, drive away from this bar, and never step foot inside it again. And if I see or hear that you didn’t listen to what I just told you, you’ll be eating dirt, got me?”

“Yeah—yes. I won’t be b-back. I-I swear it,” he promised, fear etching his face.

I moved out of his way so he could pass. “Good, now get the hell out of here,” I commanded, trying not to chuckle as he ran past me, heading for his car.

“Well, that was easy,” Harker commented with a laugh.

“Guy will probably leave town, didn’t even try to stand up for himself,” Snipe sniggered as we moved toward the entrance. In our world, you went down fighting. We had no respect for a coward like Chris. Once back inside, I went straight to the breakroom—grabbed Katherine’s purse, and went to retrieve my woman.

Katherine was coming with me.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN



I WATCHED PATCH come back into the bar and head to the back. I chastised myself for being happy he hadn't left like I initially thought when I saw him and Harker go. The memory of the look Patch had given me on his way out flooded my mind—possession—heat, and promise.

I almost swooned right there on top of the bar.

I had no problem with any of those things—as long as I was the *only* recipient of Patch's attention—which I was not.

Patch came from the back and spoke to Hillbilly before turning his gaze on me and stomping toward me with a determined look that gave me pause. And was that my purse in his hand? Finally, Patch reached me and took hold of my arm, pulling me with him. “Wait! What are you doing?!” I exclaimed, startled, my hand trying to remove his from my arm—where he held on like a vise.

Patch didn't stop until we were outside, standing by his big black Harley. “You're coming with me, Katherine, and we're

gonna talk,” he informed me, handing me a helmet. “Put this on.”

I crossed my arms over my chest, refusing to take the helmet. “I’m not going anywhere, Patch! I’m in the middle of my shift at a job I need! You can’t just drag me out like property! You have no right!” I said heatedly.

Patch gave me a lustful look saying, “Sweet and sour—you really are the whole package, aren’t you, Darlin’? Now put the helmet on.”

I stood my ground, giving him a defiant stare. “Did you hear me, Patch? I’m working, and we don’t have anything to talk about anyway. I saw all I needed to know last night when you had that naked brunette all over you,” I hissed, trying not to let the hurt show—after all, we weren’t in a committed relationship.

Patch growled, “It wasn’t what it looked like. You would know if you let me explain last night and not run away. You misunderstood!”

I gave a bitter laugh, “You’re kidding, right? So that’s what you’re going with, Patch? Do you know how many scars I carry from a man who couldn’t just tell the truth and laid it on my shoulders as the one at fault when questioned?” I felt tears starting to bubble up and quickly looked away, hoping Patch wouldn’t notice. But, unfortunately, I already said more than I intended. In the early part of my marriage, I used to suspect Michael of cheating, and when I questioned him, he would turn it back on me.

Every. Single. Time.

And I always ended up with some bruises for my trouble.

A dark expression came across Patch’s face as he reached for me pulling me to him—holding me gently by the shoulders as he looked into my eyes and spoke softly, “Darlin’, I don’t know who hurt you or how, but I would put a bullet in my head before harming a hair on your precious head. And something you will learn about me is—*I don’t fucking lie!*

That sweet butt propositioned me, and I turned her down. I haven't been with anyone since I first saw your beautiful face—not even tempted.”

I searched his face—wanting to believe him. Patch, reading my expression, sighed, “Come with me, Darlin’ and let’s talk. Hillbilly has you covered, and you won’t lose any pay, including tips. I’ll make sure of it.”

What did I have to lose? I wiped the tear that had escaped and nodded slightly, “Okay, Patch.”

Patch gave a relieved smile handing me the sky blue helmet—my favorite color—and this time, I took it, strapping it on my head. “Have you ever been on a motorcycle?” he questioned, strapping his black dome helmet on.

“No, never,” I answered nervously. The bike looked even bigger up close, intimidating me.

Patch gave me a reassuring grin, “The first thing is don’t let your legs touch the pipes—he indicated to the side of the bike—those will burn the shit out of you. The second thing is to hang on tight to me and lean when I do, follow my body—don’t jerk and trust me to keep you safe.” Patch straddled the bike and looked back over his shoulder. “Now hop on, Darlin’.”

I carefully climbed on behind Patch and gasped in surprise when his hands took my legs, arranging them on the bike’s spokes and then taking my arms and pulling them around his midsection, flattening my front to his leather-covered back—his scent surrounding me. *Seriously what was that cologne he wore?* The spicy scent never failed to make me horny enough to climb my dark pirate.

The bike came to life with a roar, and I shrieked as the big machine started forward—speeding out of the parking lot. I felt Patch’s chest rumble with laughter as I held on for dear life as the bike sped down the dark highway.



BY THE TIME the bike slowed down and turned onto the road that led to the clubhouse—I was plastered to Patch like a starving leech. I loosened my hold now that we had slowed. Dread crawled through my spine the closer we got to the clubhouse gates. The images of last night’s visit invaded my vision. Patch’s hand touched my leg in a comforting caress as if he sensed my anxiety. But, I worried I would shame myself again by what I saw. My mind couldn’t seem to separate the past from the present.

The gates opened without Patch even stopping, and he rode up to the front of the building parking. I hopped off, standing on shaky legs, removing my helmet. Patch got off the bike, looked at me with concern, and took me into his arms. “You okay, Darlin’?” he asked gruffly.

“Yeah, my legs feel a little rubbery,” I answered, my face lying on his chest. I wish we could stay like this instead of going inside. I could hear the loud music and happy laughter spilling from the inside, where a party was in full swing. It was disheartening that this was apparently a nightly occurrence. It brought to mind the fact that I don’t know if I can be in a relationship in this toxic environment.

“Katherine, I know you’re nervous about going inside. But I want you to trust me—keep an open mind about what you see, and be honest with me about what bothers you and doesn’t—and then we’ll talk. Remember, you’re safe with me, and nobody will dare touch you.” Patch put his arm around my shoulders, guiding me inside.

The first thing I noticed was the nasty smell—it was gone. There was still an odor of cigarette smoke and the usual smell

you get in a crush of people. As we moved into the room, I tried to keep my eyes straight ahead—the rock music thumping in my head. Suddenly someone bumped into Patch, startling me—it was the brunette wearing skimpy stretchy shorts that hid nothing and no top. She shoved her naked breasts against Patch as she grabbed him like an anchor.

“Oh—God, I’m so sorry, baby. I don’t know what I tripped over,” she purred, her eyes raking over me with barely concealed contempt. I knew she was faking the fall.

And so did Patch.

If the furious look on his face was any indication.

Patch moved us to the side, forcing the woman to stand on her own. “Get gone, Jesse,” he growled low, rage underlining those three simple words. Jesse took his words seriously and darted away without a glance back. I wasn’t sure what she hoped to gain with that display. But the one thing I positively knew about Patch was that he was no fool—and didn’t tolerate those who thought he was. I saw enough of that working at the bar.

Patch sat at a table—pulling me to sit on his lap and wrapping his arms around my waist. I watched as he signaled to the man behind the bar, and a minute later, two glasses were sitting in front of us—a beer, and was that a root beer? I looked at Patch inquiringly, “Yes, Darlin’, I know you like root beer.”

Like is an understatement—I love root beer! I love it so much; it’s like a hobby trying all the different brands. “How did you know I love root beer?”

“I overheard you mention it to Hillbilly; you were outraged that he didn’t have it as an option,” Patch informed me with a sly smirk. I do remember that, and the very next week, the bar offered the soda.

I took a drink of the root beer and moaned my approval. The root beer was micro-brewery quality, for sure. “You keep moaning like that, and I won’t be responsible for what

happens,” Patch whispered in my ear, adjusting me so I could feel his hardness. God, the man was packing down there—my thighs clenched together with my arousal. Patch noticed, chuckling.

I needed to focus on something else, so I glanced around the crowded room, which was much the same as last night. There were the half-naked women—and, like last night, some sex going on toward the back on the couches that sat against the wall. But there were also people just hanging out, laughing, and talking. I started to relax, but then my eyes caught that same man from last night, and he was sneering at me while the brunette from earlier was kneeling, sucking him off.

It was eerie how he reminded me of Michael—and that look of contempt he was throwing my way scared me. I dropped my head, breaking the stare before I ran from the room like the scared girl I used to be. That man hated me. It was in his eyes—but why? It reminded me I didn’t belong here. I will never fit in. I’m still broken in so many ways. I just hadn’t realized it until last night.

“Hey—what’s going on in that pretty head of yours?” Patch asked me, pulling back far enough to see my face. I gave him a grim expression looking away, unsure how to answer.

Finally, I looked at him, saying, “I don’t like what goes on at these parties, Patch. Open sex and naked women prancing around entertaining aren’t something I want to deal with in my life. My past won’t allow me to. It’s poison and temptation that I don’t believe any couple could survive.”

A frown marred his forehead as he lifted me to my feet and stood, taking my hand. “It’s time to talk,” he said gruffly.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



I LED KATHERINE out of the common room, leading her down the hallway until stopping at my bedroom door. It was time for us to have that talk I promised. I deliberately sat us in the common room to watch the party. I needed Katherine to determine what bothered her and didn't, so I could make changes if possible. I wanted Katherine in my life, *needed her*, and if I had to change a few things to make it happen—so be it. I now realize why Shadow and Demon run their clubhouses like they do, and it keeps situations like what Jesse tried to pull non-existent. I will be sending Jesse packing first thing tomorrow.

But—fuck, Scotch is right—Katherine has trauma she is burying, and the open sex triggers that pain. I saw it again tonight in her eyes; she had hinted at past abuse when she was pissed at me earlier. I need to see where Scotch is at on her history search. I have no doubt I will be killing someone—possibly slow torture depending on what I find out.

I unlocked the door, letting it swing inward and standing back to let Katherine enter and follow behind, shutting the door—flipping the lock. I watched as Katherine’s eyes scanned my room. I never allowed anyone in here. This bedroom with the attached bath had been mine since I was twelve years old. When my mom took off, my dad moved me to the clubhouse, and it’s been my home ever since. I looked at the room with its dark blue walls, posters, and framed pictures of biker life and cars. The king bed with its blue comforter I had only ever slept in—the simple wood dresser and stands with my model cars displayed on their surfaces. Building model cars was a hobby of mine that relaxed me. I had hundreds displayed between this room and my office.

Katherine moved to the black recliner in front of the television running her hand down the arm and looked at me thoughtfully. Damn, I would never get tired of having her eyes on me—I swear I could feel her gaze like the caress of a hand. My cock had been at attention since she climbed on the back of my bike, and it didn’t look like it would get bored anytime soon. “Patch-,” she started.

I cut her off, saying, “Call me Wyatt when we’re alone.” I wasn’t sure why I wanted her to use my civilian name—except for the need to hear Katherine say it.

“Wyatt,” she repeated, testing the name. And—fuck yeah—I liked my name on her lips. “It fits you. What’s your last name?”

“Streets, my full civilian name is Wyatt Lee Streets.” No one besides my dad or mom knew my full name.

“Civilian name?” she questioned, confused.

“My legal given name. In the club, I go by my road name, Patch. But in private, I always want you to use Wyatt.” I moved to the chair and sat down, patting my lap. “Have a seat, Darlin’.” Katherine gave me a hesitant look, so my arms circled her waist—pulling her onto my lap—a gasp escaping her lips. “We’re gonna talk.”

‘Pa-Wyatt, I want more than anything to move forward and be with you—but I can’t be around what is happening outside of this room. The sex and women are a hard limit for me. I can’t do it—watching women hang on you—enticing you. *I won’t do it*, I will never be that woman, and you need to know that upfront.’”

“Whoa—back up...no women will be hanging on me. *Ever*. And as far as enticing me, Darlin’, there isn’t a woman in this world that’s got anything on you. *Not one*. Now about the sex, I may be able to fix that, but it has to be the club’s decision, so I won’t promise anything right now—but I can be pretty damn persuasive when need be.”

Katherine looked at me skeptically, “How can you say they don’t entice you? The women are naked—everything god gave them is on display! Men have natural reactions to things like that, Wyatt. I may not be the most educated woman in this world, but I’m not stupid! Those women are here for sex—they *live* here! And how am I supposed to trust what’s happening when I’m not around? I know you’ve slept with those women, and they will always be in my face—and yours. I can’t live like that, I left a relationship that was shit, and I won’t jump into another one,” she finished, her face flushed with frustrated anger, tears welling up in those pretty eyes.

I hugged her against my chest, my hands rubbing up and down her back. Her ex-husband must have been a real piece of shit. I pulled her legs up and over the arm of the chair, and that’s when I noticed scars on her ankles. They were light, and you wouldn’t see them if you weren’t looking. Rope burns caused the scars, and I’m gonna take a huge guess and say the scars on her wrists are also rope burns.

Someone had tied Katherine up—not in a kinky way.

Katherine left an abusive marriage, and it’s clear as the light of day. I wanted to push her for answers, but there was no need to press her right now. I was going to find out everything I needed to know, and then I was going to kill her ex-husband. Right now, I needed to try to explain to Katherine how I

operated. I turned her face to look at me. The hurt and sadness I saw there gutted me, and I vowed to call in every favor I was owed to make the clubhouse a place Katherine could be comfortable.

Looking at her right now, I realize I love this woman. I marked my need for her as an obsession—but it's so much more. "Katherine, I need you to listen and try to understand. I'm a complicated man and, at times—not a good one. But the one thing you can always be sure of is that I keep my word. And if I say I won't screw around—I won't. If I say I will never hurt you—I won't. As for getting a hard-on for the sweet butts because there showing their goods. It doesn't work like that for me." Katherine screwed her mouth up, ready to argue. "Just let me explain," I said, stopping her.

"I have lived in this clubhouse—this room since I was twelve, been hanging around it since I could walk. I have seen shit I wasn't nearly old enough to understand or should have been seeing. One of those things was the sweet butts and hang arounds. And not to be crude, but I've seen so many tits, ass, and pussy and sex in all forms it doesn't phase me anymore." The skeptical look still hadn't left her face. "Let me explain it this way. Say you see the ocean for the first time, and it's so amazing you just stare and stare. But then you move by the ocean, and you see it all the time, and eventually, it's not exciting anymore, and you hardly even notice it, barely glance at it as you pass by. That's what it's like for me seeing the shit that goes on here at the clubhouse. It takes a hell of a lot more than that to get me going—been that way for a while now.

Sure, I've fucked because it was offered—but I was never in a committed relationship—never wanted one. But then, one night, I walked into The Devil's Den, and the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life walked up to my table. And from that day on, you were the only woman to exist to me." I watched her face soften with understanding and pleasure. I was making headway, now not to blow it.



AN INVOLUNTARY RIPPLE of pleasure went through my body, hearing his words. And part of me hated that he had to explain himself to me because I was letting the past haunt me making me insecure and distrusting. But the other part of me needed to be sure this wasn't some passing fling for Patch because that same past was traumatic, and I wasn't about to repeat the same mistake. Michael would take great pleasure knowing he was in my head: *Slap—"You're such a pathetic woman, Katherine. I don't know why I keep you around. Don't ever question me again."* I shuddered at the memory.

"Katherine?" Patch's voice broke through my fog, and I focused on his concerned face. "Where did you just go?"

"I'm sorry I'm such a mess," I said sadly, thinking about how confident the women were around here and how I must appear—insecure and prudish.

Patch growled low, "Don't do that, Darlin'! Don't apologize for asking questions and being honest. Club life is hard for any civilian to understand, and us talking about what bothers you before we jump into this is a damn good thing. Shit, Vain's ol' lady took off and left last month, leaving him a fucking letter talking about how she couldn't handle what went on here and accused him of cheating—*which he wasn't*. Lana leaving has torn Vain up. If she had only talked to him like we're doing, they might have worked shit out. So never say you're sorry for being honest. Now, where did your mind wander off to a minute ago?" That intense gaze was back, demanding me to tell the truth. How he managed that with one eye, I don't understand. He cupped my jaw, "Tell me."

How to answer that? “My—my marriage was not a happy one. It was honestly a sentence in hell. It took me eighteen long years to free myself. I had thought I was healed; I mean, it’s been three years, for heaven’s sake. But in the last few days, I realize that’s not true. And I’m ashamed of myself for letting Michael into my life in any form, including my thoughts,” I confessed, shame washing over me for being weak.

“What did the bastard do to you?” Patch asked, clenching his jaw.

I reached out, running my fingers along his strong jawline, “I don’t know if I’m ready to talk about it right now. It doesn’t matter anyway. I’d much rather enjoy being here with you,” I said, moving to change the subject. Patch continued to stare at me for what seemed like an ungodly amount of time; his expression told me he wasn’t satisfied with my answer. Finally, he brushed my hair away from my face releasing me from that unrelenting gaze, his face softening.

“You’re with me now, Katherine, and nobody will ever dare hurt you—not if they know what’s good for them,” Patch promised, and I knew enough about Patch and his club not to doubt what he said. I touched his lips, fascinated that they were indeed as hard as they looked. He kissed my fingers, that violet eye darkening with arousal.

Patch’s lips met mine, and with a moan of satisfaction, Patch deepened the kiss, his tongue thrust into my mouth, his lips rough and demanding. His iron-hard arms held me tight against him as I returned his kiss with the same passion. He suddenly groaned and stiffened, and I could feel his cock hard beneath me as he paused the kiss to say, “Stay with me tonight, Darlin’.” Our heavy breathing mingled with the sound of my heartbeat.

I nodded, “Yes, I want to be with you.” I went to resume the kiss, but Patch put his finger on my lips, stopping me.

“I need you to understand, Katherine. Once you’re in my bed, I’m *never* letting you go. You’ve been mine from that

first smile you aimed my way, and I'm too damn selfish ever to give you up." His words, as well as his face, were filled with an almost violent possession and need. But it didn't scare me like it probably should. No. Instead, I felt truly wanted and protected for the first time in my life. "You get what I'm saying, Darlin'? I need to hear you say it," he demanded.

I smiled softly, "I understand, Patch. I'm not going anywhere."

"Wyatt—call me Wyatt. I want my name on your lips when you moan and scream underneath me," he ordered, standing with me in his strong arms and turning us toward the bed. I wasn't a virgin by a long stretch, but I had the feeling that this night with Patch would make me feel pleasure like I had never felt before, and my body hummed with the need to experience all of it.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN



I LAID KATHERINE on my bed, removed my cut, and drug my t-shirt over my head. Smirking in satisfaction as her eyes drank me in like a good scotch. I took care of myself, especially as I got older. I quit smoking, and no more excessive drinking. My body couldn't handle that shit anymore.

I reached down, making quick work of removing my boots and socks. I would leave my jeans on for a while longer; the barrier would keep me from taking her hard like my body was demanding. I wanted to take my time with Katherine and lick every square inch of her before I thrust my cock inside her beautiful body.

I sat on the bed, took Katherine's legs, and pulled her tennis shoes off, throwing them aside. "Stand up, Darlin'," I directed, waiting as she climbed off the bed and stood before me, suddenly looking nervous. I wrapped my arms around her waist, pulled her between my legs, and looked into those bright auburn eyes. "I'm gonna make you feel so damn good

that you won't remember another man even existed before me," I swore, my voice gruff, "And no man will exist after me."

Katherine touched my face, palming my cheek and saying softly, "I already feel like that in all the ways that matter."

I released a deep, throaty growl of satisfaction at her admission. I leaned forward, dragging my mouth down her throat, kissing the swells of her tits peeping over the top of the thin t-shirt she wore. "I want you naked," I grated, forcing myself to go slow and not rip her clothes from her body.

Katherine lifted her t-shirt over her head, revealing a sexy white lace bra to my gaze. I hungrily watched as she reached behind her back, unfastened the bra, and let it drop to the floor. Fuck me—I was staring at the most delicious tits I had ever seen; more than a handful, and those nipples, the same color as her hair, my mouth watered for a taste. So, I dived right in, my mouth latching onto one nipple, licking and sucking before giving the other the same attention. I felt Katherine's hands running through my hair, holding me close, her breathy sighs floating in the air.

Anxious to go further, I unbuttoned her shorts, tugged the zipper down, and, swallowing a groan, I released her sweet nipple, pulling back. "Take them off," I ordered, looking pointedly at her shorts. Katherine lowered her eyes, shyness taking over, but that didn't stop her from shimmying the shorts and panties down her legs and kicking them aside, her arms moving to cover herself as my eyes roved over her naked body—those colorful bracelets catching my eye. I would deal with them at another time.

I took hold of her arms, pulling them away from her body, my gaze staring at her perfect head, then lingering on those luscious tits, moving down to her pussy topped with a strip of auburn hair and continuing down to her cute toenails painted blue. Finally, my eyes returned to her pink face, and I looked into her eyes. "Keep this beautiful body hidden from every other man, but never hide it from me," I demanded,

possessiveness lacing my voice, my hand skimming up her waist and moving upward to cup her breast.

Katherine moved closer, putting her arms around my neck and looking down at me. “I love how you make me feel so beautiful,” she whispered, lowering herself onto my lap, her lips taking mine in a deep kiss that had my cock twitching. Enough of this—I need to be inside her. I can go slow next round.

I held onto her as I moved us so we were lying on the bed, my body covering hers. Her fingers reached out to touch the patch covering my eye. “Remove this,” she whispered.

“Not tonight,” I answered, taking her mouth in another kiss and shutting down any response she may have given. I wasn’t ready for her to see me without it. Not yet. I bit her lip, ending the kiss and pushing away to stand so I could remove my jeans, never taking my gaze off Katherine. Her eyes were heavy, and I swear I heard a breathy sigh when my cock came into view. Throwing my jeans aside, I rejoined her on the bed, her body soft underneath me. I spread her legs, so I lay between them, my cock rubbing against her pussy. I reached my hand down, letting my fingers glide over the wetness there and then bringing my fingers to my mouth. “I knew you’d taste like the sweetest honey,” I rasped, moving down her body and ignoring my screaming cock as I buried my face where I’d been dreaming about for months—in Katherine’s sweet pussy. I licked and sucked like a starving man. Her loud moans and breathy words, and fingers clawing my head, encouraging me not to hold anything back, as my tongue fucked Katherine taking her where she wanted to go with a high-pitched scream I didn’t think her capable of making.

“I’m gonna die if I don’t get inside your pussy,” I growled. I grabbed the condom from the nightstand and moved over Katherine and looking into her eyes as my cock entered her body. I dropped my head into the curve of her neck with a moan. She felt unbelievable. My whole body rippled with pleasure so hot I burned with it. “Fucking hell, Katherine,” I

growled as I started to move slowly, trying to prolong this feeling, afraid I would never feel anything like it again.

But, when her body and hands started to move along with mine, I lost it, and like a wild animal, I rode Katherine thrusting hard in and out of her beautiful body, telling her all the filthy things I wanted to do to her and how she only belonged to me, no one else. My body was glistening with a sheen of sweat as I worked hard to prolong the pleasure. I looked into her wild eyes, glazed over and on the brink of cumming, slowing down even though it was killing me. “Promise me you won’t ever leave me, Katherine,” I rasped, words difficult as my body demanded I continue.

Katherine moaned, her hands running down my back. “I promise—I swear—I won’t leave.” Her body moved under mine, trying to get me to continue, her fingernails clawing my back.

Like a man possessed, I gave her what we both wanted, finally giving one last hard thrust. I shuddered inside Katherine, her satisfied scream mingling with my deep bellow.

I moved to her side, pulling her into my arms, our breathing still heavy and the sweat on our bodies damp, causing us to be chilled. I covered us with the blankets, and we just held each other, content. But then, a knock sounded on the door. What the hell? It was the middle of the night. “What!” I shouted to the closed door.

“Sorry, Patch, but have Katherine let her daughter know she’s okay. I sent a text to you both but didn’t get an answer,” Hillbilly said from the other side of the door.

“Oh—Bethany! I totally forgot to let her know I wouldn’t be home. I bet she is worried,” Katherine exclaimed, going for her phone.

“She stopped by the bar, and I told her you were here, not to worry. Have a good night.” I could hear Hillbilly laughing through the door. How long had he been standing there? We weren’t exactly quiet.

“There, I let her know I’m fine. I feel terrible for making her worry,” Katherine fretted.

“It’s all good now,” I said, kissing the top of her head and pulling her back down beside me. “You need to rest; we’ve only begun. I’m not even close to being done with you.”

And I spent the rest of the night proving it to her.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN



I SLOWLY CAME awake, the morning sun shining through the only window in the room. The delicious heat of the naked man at my back kept me warm; his heavy arm and leg were thrown over my body like he felt I might run away. It was odd waking up next to a man after being alone for so long, but the well-satisfied ache between my legs reminded me that it was well worth the wait. Last night was the most amazing night of sex I had ever experienced. Michael was a one-and-done kind of guy; I thought that was how it was supposed to be.

But Patch put that notion to rest.

Two times he took me to heaven and back with his cock, two more times with his mouth and hands. I blushed at how shameless I was last night, remembering my hands and mouth roving over his body, something I had never done before. I had never felt that uninhibited. But every hard twist of my hair and groan I drug from his lips fueled me to be more brazen—and

the dirty words that came out of Patch's mouth, *holy hell*, it turned me on.

I took a minute to look over the tattoos that colored his arm and leg. There were so many, everything, from money shaped into a rose to a fanged mouth holding a cross—making me wonder what these symbolized for him. Last night I got a glimpse of the large tattoo that took up his entire back. It was a replica of the back of the vest that he wore and must have taken hours upon hours to finish. Patch was a fascinating man who, I'm sure, had so many stories to tell, and his tattoos were a way for him to do that.

The arm that I was admiring tightened around me, and Patch murmured, "Morning, Darlin'."

"Morning, Wyatt." The urge to call him Patch is still on my lips. It was hard getting used to calling him anything else.

"I want you to ride with me today."

I turned in his arms so I could face him. "I have to work tonight, and I skipped out early last night."

He stroked my face with his fingers. "I'll take care of it. One of the prospects can work your shift. I want to spend the day with you, and your riding with me to our club chapter in Pennsylvania will give me more time with you."

I gave him a skeptical look, "I don't think one of your guys will want to dance." The image of that happening was rather funny, though.

"They'll do whatever the fuck they're told to do," Patch grumbled, his face deadly serious. "Say you'll spend the day with me."

I played with the hair on his chest while I debated. I really wanted to go; I wasn't ready to end our time together. "Sure, I'll ride with you today," I answered, patting his muscled chest. "I'm going to have to run home and shower and change. Will I have time?"

“No need to run home. You can shower with me, and a change of clothes is sitting outside the door.” Patch chuckled at the look of surprise I was giving him.

“How do I have clothes already here?”

“I don’t like to waste time, so I had Hillbilly run by your place last night, and your daughter packed you a bag. Now, let’s get moving; we need to leave in an hour, and if I stay in this bed another minute with you, we won’t be leaving today. So let’s hit the shower, beautiful.” Patch moved away, rising from the bed, my eyes taking in all that mouth-watering body on display.

I crawled out of bed, wrapping a sheet around me—only to have it ripped from my hands. “What did I say about hiding that hot body from me?” Patch chastised, pinching my nipple before slapping me on the ass.

I pushed down any insecurities I might have about my body. After last night, there was no mistaking the fact that Patch thought I was attractive. I followed him into his small bathroom, turning around quickly when I realized he was getting ready to pee, hearing him laugh behind me. “You can watch, Darlin’. It’s a normal bodily function, nothing to be embarrassed about.” I listened to the toilet flush and turned back around when the water in the sink started to flow. “Your turn,” he said, gesturing toward the commode with his head while washing his hands.

My face heated, “I can’t go with you watching.” My pee wasn’t going anywhere until I had privacy.

Patch gave me a placating smile before starting out of the bathroom. “I’ll grab your bag and give you a minute.”

I went to the bathroom in record time and only just finished when he came strolling back into the small room. Patch leaned against the sink counter, his usual confidence seeming to disappear. “Katherine, I’m gonna take my patch off. I wanted to warn you because it’s not a pretty site. I’ve never let anyone see me with it off.” I watched as he slowly

removed the patch that covered his eye. I kept my gaze on his face as the scarred tissue was revealed where an eye should be. Patch watched me closely for any signs of disgust.

I smiled, wrapped my arms around his waist, and looked up at him. “Shame on you for making me worry that I was going to see something horrible. It’s only a scar; we all have them.” And that’s when I decided to take my own advice and remove the bracelets from my wrists. “See, I have some too.” I showed him my scarred wrists.

“Tell me about these,” Patch demanded, lifting my wrist to his lips and letting his tongue glide over the raised skin.

That I didn’t want to do. “Another time, I don’t want those memories taking away my happiness from this time with you. I promise I’ll tell you one day, just not right now.”

Patch looked like he would argue but then gave a resolved grunt before turning on the water inside the stand-alone shower. I had no idea how we would both get inside that small stall. But, by the time we were done, I found out there was enough room for more than getting clean. Being shoved against the shower wall while Patch took me from behind hard and demanding had climbed up my list of the most erotic experiences of my life.

That list only started last night, and I’m sure it will grow longer as the days and nights pass. *Oh—yeah*, I was one lucky lady.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



THE SCENERY FLEW past as my Harley barreled down the highway, Katherine warming my back and Player flanking my right. Katherine's arms tightened around me—plastering herself to me as the motorcycle sped faster the more open the road became. I inhaled a deep breath of contentment, my hand caressing her jean-clad leg. Right at this moment—for the first time in my life I felt like I had everything I ever wanted for myself.

Last night sealed Katherine's fate. But, as I promised her, I will never be able to let her go. I had never fucked like that before. I wanted to absorb Katherine into my body—possess her—own every inch of her mind and body. When I'm with her, every demon I have riding my back fucks off, leaving me in peace.

And I plan on ridding Katherine of her demon. That fuck named Michael is a walking dead man. *No one, past, present, or future*, will raise a hand to Katherine and continue to

breathe. Scotch sent a text saying he had something for me regarding Katherine. I'll get with him this evening.

Our bikes started to slow as we came to the turn-off that would take us to Shadow's clubhouse. I was curious what Katherine would make of this clubhouse—so different from mine. I had plans for the same improvements Shadow has made to his compound to renovate mine. I'm not so arrogant that I can't learn from the young guns who better understand technology and shit. But, he also had different rules for the sweet butts and open sex—take it to a private room. What amazed me was that his whole club voted to change the rules. I suppose it was a good move, with so many of the brothers settling down. The problem with my club is we didn't have but a few ol' ladies, and it showed. The atmosphere was different here, and I hope to replicate it so Katherine doesn't have to experience more of those flashbacks.

We drove past the gates that opened without us even slowing down—we were well-known here. After we parked, Katherine hopped off the bike, her eyes taking in her surroundings. “Is that playground equipment,” she asked in surprise.

“Yep, this club has a lot of ol' ladies, and that equals kids,” I told her, watching her closely.

“And ol' ladies are wives or like wives?” she questioned.

“Correct. I'm gonna lay it out straight, this clubhouse is more family oriented than mine, which will be easy to see. But, like we talked about, I want the same for mine, but it has to go before the club for a vote.”

“No matter what, we'll work it out,” Katherine said softly, smiling at me.

Player cleared his throat, reminding me that he was listening. I hadn't talked to him about the changes I wanted and wasn't sure what he would think. But I didn't have time to dwell on it before the front door clicked open, and Shadow walked out—his little girl in his arms. The blonde, blue-eyed

baby was the spitting image of her mother. Katherine's eyes widened in shock at seeing Shadow with Marilyn.

"Come on inside. Leather is doing much better today," Shadow invited, leading us into the common room where Mary, Lettie, and Brooke sat, their curious eyes going straight to Katherine. I didn't worry about Mary or Brooke, but Lettie, damn, that woman was nosey as shit.

Shadow handed Marilyn to Mary and raised a questioning brow as if just noticing Katherine. "Everybody, this is Katherine; she's with me." I took Katherine's hand and pointed out each person. "That's Mary, Brooke, Lettie, and this is Shadow, the President of this chapter."

"Nice to meet everyone," Katherine greeted, looking nervous.

"Nice to meet you too, Katherine; come have a seat, and we'll talk while Patch does what he needs to do," Mary replied with a warm smile, gesturing to the seat beside her.

"Yes, Katherine, have a seat. Let's talk," Lettie said, curling her red lips into a sly smile, her hand patting her blonde hair.

Brooke stayed silent, her eyes on Player. Brooke grew up in club life and wasn't intimidated by any of the brothers. She and Stonewall made a good match. "Don't be upsetting, Aislynn," Brooke ordered, then moved her blue eyes to me. "Either of you. She's fragile right now."

I'll humor her, but I don't take orders from anyone. So I'll be lenient because I know she's only looking out for the abused girl. "We don't plan on it, Brooke," I told her, giving her a severe look before returning a much softer gaze to Katherine.

"Go ahead. I'll be about an hour," I encouraged Katherine, kissing her on the lips, feeling five sets of eyes watching us, confirming it when I turned around to catch their gazes. I shook my head at the nosey bunch and started from the room toward the infirmary where Leather was being taken care of,

Player and Shadow behind me—time to get my mind on club business. Papa Bear had to pay for messing with us. Finding him was the problem. Maybe the girl Aislynn knew something. They had taken her for a reason. Was she somehow connected to the Fire Dragons? As I walked the hallway to see Leather, I hoped he had some answers to my questions; if not, I would question Aislynn. I'll go easy, but I will talk to her. I didn't get where I was with The Devil's House by being soft; that will get you killed in my world.

Only one person would ever see a softer side of me, and I prayed that was the only side my sweet Katherine would ever witness.



I WAS DEFINITELY not expecting what I found when Patch said we were riding to a chapter clubhouse. I braced myself to see what I had witnessed at Patch's clubhouse and was pleasantly surprised to see that wasn't the case.

This clubhouse was clean and well-maintained. The bar area I'm sitting in could be a bar on any main street with a modern and comfortable feel to the room. And when Shadow walked out with that baby in his arms, I didn't know what to think. Shadow had the look of a hardened biker and seeing him hold a small girl was an odd sight. "So, are you and Patch a thing?" The beautiful blonde name Lettie asked; she was tall and thin, reminding me of a model.

"We're new to our relationship, but yes, I suppose we're a thing," I answered her.

“I’m glad he finally found someone, but honestly, Patch scares me,” Mary confessed while bouncing the little girl on her leg.

Brooke snickered at Mary, “You’re kidding. Right? The woman who is married to the block of ice named Shadow?”

“He isn’t that way with Marilyn or me,” Mary argued.

“Shush, you two,” Lettie commanded, turning her eyes to me. “We have more important things to discuss, like how is the big guy in the sack? Intense, I bet, probably kind of feral and likes to slap and pull hair.”

I felt my cheeks heat at Lettie’s question. Was she seriously asking me about sex with Patch? And how was she spot on? I had no idea how to answer her. “Um—I—well...,” I stuttered, no words coming.

“I’m sorry, Katherine, but Lettie has no filter and can’t seem to understand that everyone doesn’t want to talk about their private moments,” Mary said, saving me from answering and giving Lettie a let-it-go look. “How did you and Patch meet?”

Bless Mary’s heart for changing the subject. “I waitress at a bar owned by the club, and we met there,” I answered.

Brooke laughed, “We have that in common. I was waitressing at a bar and met Lenny.” Brooke was so pretty, with eyes so blue they didn’t look natural, and they seemed to shine paired with her dark hair.

Mary’s little girl squealed, waving her arms, her blonde curls bouncing—gaining our attention. “How old is she?” I asked, smiling at the happy baby and touching her pink ruffled dress.

“Marilyn is six months old,” Mary replied, snuggling her daughter close.

I heard female giggling before two women walked into the room, causing Lettie to scowl and glare daggers their way. They were dressed provocatively in tiny shorts and small tops.

They kept walking and exiting the room through a side door, never looking our way. “Are those-?”

“Club bitches—yeah,” Lettie finished for me. I was disappointed I had formed an opinion of this clubhouse and club women weren’t part of it.

Brooke patted my hand and said, “It’s not what you’re thinking. I’ve heard about Patch’s clubhouse, and it’s not like that here. Our men don’t touch the club women; they value their lives and families, and those who do get a room.”

“We only have a few left, and when they’re gone, they’ll be no more,” Mary supplied, seeming pleased by this. “They’ve caused tons of trouble in the past few years and for me especially.”

I decided to be honest with these women since they understood. “I was upset with what I saw in Patch’s clubhouse, and it was a huge hard limit for me. I’m embarrassed to admit I rushed out in tears. I left a bad relationship and told Patch I couldn’t be in one with him under those circumstances.”

“Good for you!” Lettie praised. “You have to be firm and do what’s best for you. Is Patch using any of the women? I assume not since you’re here with him.”

“He says he’s not, and I believe him. Patch told me he is going to make some changes, so I’ll be comfortable.”

“That’s wonderful. Jay won’t take me with him when he goes there because of how wild it is. Jaycee was there and told us it was a free for all. So, I’m happy to see Patch make some changes,” Mary said. I wondered who Jaycee was but didn’t ask since Patch, Player, and Shadow entered the room. They were talking low, and Patch seemed frustrated. When the men reached us, they ended their discussion.

Shadow reached for the baby girl—taking her in his arms once more and reaching for Mary’s hand as she stood. “There’s lunch in the kitchen, so help yourself before you head out. We’re heading that way,” Shadow offered.

“I wouldn’t pass up Jane’s food, and we ate light this morning,” Patch said, turning to me and taking my hand. “You’re in for a treat, Darlin’. Jane is one hell of a cook and does a good spread.”

“Amen to that,” Player agreed as we followed Shadow out of the room. I assumed to the kitchen.

By the time we ate lunch, and I met some more of the members and ladies of this club—I left hoping Patch could pull off the changes in his. But I know that may not happen, and I need to be ready for that outcome. I’m in too deep with Patch.

I’ve fallen in love with my pirate biker.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



I DROPPED KATHERINE off at her car and followed her home. I then waited for the prospect to show up and keep watch. I wanted to keep her with me, but she insisted on going home for a while. I know a lot of the reason for that is she doesn't like it at the clubhouse. And I can't say I blame her—but I want her with me, and the club is my home. So, I need to get busy with some of the changes I want to make.

I walked into the clubhouse, deciding to use this time to see Scotch. First, I wanted the information on Katherine, and now I needed him to look into that girl Aislynn. I questioned Aislynn; she swore she was a runaway and unimportant to the Fire Dragons. Of course, she was lying, and the more I stared her down, the more I was sure of it, but why was something I couldn't figure out. And I couldn't go hard on Aislynn, knowing what happened to her and her condition because of it. She was like a fragile bird that had its wings broken.

Scotch was sitting at the bar, his laptop in front of him, tapping at the keys. Then, I saw something move on his lap—

that tiny kitten. He turned, saw me, his eyes going behind me, and looked relieved I was alone. “What did you have for me?” I asked, getting ready to take the stool beside him.

Scotch put up a hand, stopping me. “This is better discussed in private—preferably in your office,” he advised, an odd look on his face I found disturbing. So what did he find out? Scotch closed his laptop and handed the kitten to the prospect behind the bar. “Watch Ollie for me.” I started toward my office and heard Scotch stop and say something to Player and Hillbilly, who then got up and followed.

“What’s going on?” I demanded of Scotch.

Scotch looked troubled, sighing heavily, “Patch, I need them outside the door to stop you from leaving the clubhouse. When I show you what I found, you’ll go insane and try to tear out of here to commit murder. Katherine’s not even mine, and I felt the urge.”

I pushed past him into my office, snarling, “Show me what you found.” I was already getting worked up and hadn’t even seen what he had. I dropped into my chair and waited for Scotch as he pulled a chair around and opened his laptop, placing it so we could both view the screen, and he inserted a jump drive.

“I was installing a security system like you wanted at Katherine’s place. I noticed her laptop while putting alarms on Katherine’s bedroom window. So, I figured I would put some spyware on it; you never know when it might be helpful in an emergency. While doing that, I accidentally clicked a file called Freedom. I’m gonna be straight up with you and tell you it’s bad what I found in that folder.” Scotch rubbed his hand down his face, looking suddenly unsure. “I know Katherine wouldn’t want you to see what I’m gonna show you and will feel humiliated if she finds out. You need to keep your cool and think of her.”

“Open the goddamned folder,” I ordered, impatient. The bottom line was that someone would die for what I was about

to see, and nothing would ever touch Katherine's ears about it when it happened.

Scotch reluctantly clicked something on his laptop, and a screen that looked like a bedroom appeared. "From what I gathered, Katherine put a camera in the bedroom of her and her ex-husbands to have evidence of his abuse. There are several incidents. The last one is brutal, so be warned." Scotch hit play.

I snarled and growled as I watched my beautiful Katherine be beaten and degraded repeatedly by her ex-husband. But Scotch was right. The last recording had me breathing fire; my fists clenched so tight I drew blood.

Michael entered the bedroom with another woman—an apparent prostitute and ordered Katherine into the bed with her. She refused. Michael asked the other woman to step out and backhanded Katherine to the floor, and after rummaging around in the nightstand, he tore her nightgown off and picked her up by her hair, throwing her into a wooden chair and tying her to it naked. I watched as he gagged her, shoving a sex toy inside her so roughly that she screamed against the gag, tears running down her face.

I jumped up, unable to watch anymore, and headed to the door, swinging it open. Michael needed to die tonight. Player and Hillbilly pushed me back inside the room, entering and locking the door behind them. "Get the fuck out of my way!" I thundered, punching Player in the face to move him. Hillbilly and Scotch struggled to restrain me as I fought to get loose.

"I knew you would do this, Patch," Scotch grunted, breathing heavily. "You need to finish watching, or let me tell you the rest. It explains why Katherine reacted the way she did that night and will help you understand her. So calm the fuck down. That asshole will get his we'll make sure of it, but we have to be smart."

"Listen to him, Brother. I don't know what is happening, but think of Katherine and be rational. If it's about retribution, you can trust you'll get it with us at your back. You can't do

that sitting in a jail cell,” Player reasoned, wiping the blood from his face.

I stopped struggling and took deep breaths, trying to calm myself down. I know my brothers are correct, and I need a cool head. After all, I want Michael to suffer; there will be no quick death for him.

Not for the abuse he inflicted on Katherine. I never imagined it would be this bad. My chest is hurting with the pain she suffered—the humiliation.

“You can let me go. I’m in control.” Scotch and Hillbilly slowly released me but blocked the door until I had returned to my seat.

“Do you want us to leave?” Player asked.

“No, just don’t look at the screen. I don’t want you to see Katherine that way,” I told them and waited until they were seated to begin again. “Start it.” Scotch hit the play button.

The video started, and Michael brought the whore back into the bedroom, ordering her to strip and explaining that Katherine being tied up was a fetish they enjoyed. He then fucked the prostitute doggie style in front of Katherine, his eyes never leaving her—slinging demeaning insults her way and ordering her to watch when Katherine closed her eyes.

But Katherine refused, keeping her eyes closed, and it pissed Michael off, and he jumped off the bed, not finishing. He tossed money at the prostitute and ordered her to leave—pacing the floor until she was gone. Then he turned his rage on a defenseless Katherine, hitting her repeatedly until she was bloody. I gripped the arms of my chair to keep myself from barreling out of my office, reminding myself that Katherine was safe and mine. Michael finally finished screaming that she could stay tied to that chair until she learned how to obey.

Scotch hit pause, the click of the keyboard seeming loud in the quiet room. “I’ll save us some time by telling you what happened next. It’s not pretty to watch, and honestly, Patch, you don’t need to see it—you’ll go over the edge.” I gave

Scotch a tight nod of my head to continue. “Long story short, he left her tied to that chair for two days. No food. No water. No bathroom. Micheal came in the first day to humiliate her but refused to untie her despite her suffering. So the second day, he didn’t come at all, and Katherine was desperate, and she...” Scotch stopped for a few seconds, choosing his words. “She escaped by breaking her arm and using a knife she found to saw the ropes. Katherine kept jerking her arm up until the arm of the chair broke off, and she was able to reach the knife. I don’t know how she did it or what happened after escaping. Katherine didn’t return to that room.”

I let out a roar of rage, punching my desk, “That sorry motherfucker will die slowly, the worst torture I can think of.”

“My god,” Player mumbled. “How could he leave her to suffer like that?”

“How are we going to handle this?” Hillbilly hissed, standing and pacing my office.

“Here’s the tricky part. Michael Sinclair is a Police Captain in a precinct in Pittsburgh. That’s how Katherine was able to blackmail him. She got crafty and installed that camera he knew nothing about until she showed him the proof of his abuse. From what I could find out, he has aspirations to move up in the ranks, which this would ruin him. Katherine got her divorce, and he has already remarried. I got a friend inside the police department who is nosing around for me,” Scotch informed us.

I stood up. I needed to get some wind and calm down before seeing Katherine later. “I want you to find out every little thing about that dead man, including where he’s been this last week. Someone has been watching Katherine, and my money is on him. I’m gonna take a ride,” I declared, heading out the door. As I walked from the clubhouse, I rubbed at the ache in my chest as the images of what I had seen played in my head. Her pain was my pain, and I knew it wouldn’t ease until I had killed Michael.

Slowly. Brutally. Painfully.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN



I ENTERED MY apartment and was startled to see a new security keypad mounted by the front door.

What in the world?

There was a note taped to the keypad. I took it and started to read—it was from Scotch. The note explained the steps I needed to take to use the alarms and his number if I had any questions about the security system. And at the bottom was a notation stating that any other questions should go to Patch.

I smiled—even though I should be angry. Patch worried about me, and I couldn't get mad. But how did Scotch get inside? I would advise Patch to talk with me first next time. I put the instructions down on the table. I will figure it out later. Right now, I wanted a shower. I love riding on the back of Patch's bike, but I could do without the road dust.

I started for my bedroom and heard the door open. I turned to see Bethany. "Mom, you're home," she said, rushing over to hug me. "You scared me to death last night when you didn't come home from work. Don't do that again!" I laughed at

Bethany scolding me like a child. “It’s not funny. Luckily that guy from your work knew where you were going. I was about to call dad,” she scolded, giving me a stern look.

“That will never be necessary, and I would appreciate it if you didn’t do that,” I replied sternly.

Bethany gave me a thoughtful look before saying, “Whatever you want, Mom. So, you got lucky with this guy named Patch?”

“Bethany!”

“What? You don’t come home, and your boss Hillbilly follows me home so I can pack an overnight bag for you. You had a good time, and it’s long overdue. I only wish you had confided in me about this guy.” Hurt crossed her features.

I took both Bethany’s hands in mine. “I’m sorry, Bethany, it wasn’t intentional. Everything happened so fast that my head was still spinning. I’ve had my eye on Patch but wasn’t sure if he was interested in me—to the degree I was interested in him. But, last night, he made it clear he is serious about me.”

Bethany suddenly looked troubled and appeared to be choosing her words carefully before she spoke, “Mom, I don’t want you to take this the wrong way but isn’t Patch in a biker gang? I mean, having fun is one thing but a relationship? I’ve heard that those guys aren’t into long-term but one-nighters. And I’ve heard about the parties at their clubhouse, and I don’t want that for you—to see you hurt.”

“How would you know any of that?” I questioned, keeping my face blank.

“Mom, people talk. Some teachers have been to the parties a few times and like to tell stories. I don’t want to judge this guy; maybe right now, he is serious—you’re amazing and beautiful. But men tend to forget that and promises made when partying, and I hear they are into strippers—even have their own club.” Bethany got a faraway look on her face, and I

wondered if a man had hurt her in the past, possibly while at college.

I sighed heavily, “Bethany, I understand your worries; they were mine too. But Patch and I have talked, and I believe he does care about me, and I can trust him. I won’t say that those parties you heard about aren’t happening and that I’m okay with them. That would be a lie. But I think we can work it out and compromise, and I’m going to take the chance. I care about Patch and believe he is a good man.”

“I really hope so. You deserve to be happy and have a great guy in your life,” Bethany smiled and pointed to the security keypad. “And I’m guessing Patch is responsible for installing that system—I read the note last night.”

“Yep. He can be a bit protective,” I answered, and inside I loved that he was since I had never had anyone look out for me in my life other than my daughter.

Bethany smiled, embracing me. “Mom, I am happy for you and will be here for you no matter what happens.” Then, she released me, adding, “I’m going to dinner with Josh tonight, so I need to get ready. Will you be home?”

I shrugged, “I’m not sure. Patch just said he would pick me up at six. I will let you know if I’m not.”

“Okay, I’ll see you before I leave.” Bethany headed into her bedroom, and I went into mine. I dropped onto the bed, thinking about what Bethany said about Patch and his club. I did trust Patch, but Bethany planted that tiny seed of doubt, and if I weren’t careful would sprout and grow. I would have to make sure not to give it water by putting any doubts to rest.

I sighed, thinking if only it were just that easy.



I PARKED IN front of Katherine's and gave Davie a wave indicating he could leave. I was glad it was a warm evening. I wanted to take Katherine to a small restaurant downtown on the water and maybe take a walk afterward. Unfortunately, I was new at this relationship stuff and had no idea what the hell I was doing. I had never once taken a woman on a date or had so much as a conversation with one that wasn't about sex. I hoped to god I didn't mess this up.

I got off my bike and walked to the front door. I stopped feeling eyes on me. I learned to have eyes in the back of my head a long time ago—I was being watched. I turned to stroll slowly back to my bike, making it look like I had forgotten something. I discreetly cased my surroundings. A black Nissan with dark-tinted windows sat in the back of the parking lot. The car pulled forward, and I put my hand on the gun tucked in a holster under my cut. The car sped up, leaving, and no tags either.

My gut is still on Michael, but I have to consider whether this could have something to do with the Fire Dragons. One thing was for sure; I wasn't leaving Katherine alone so she could find out.

I returned to the front door, ringing the bell. The door opened, and Katherine stood there smiling and so fucking beautiful. I couldn't understand how Michael could lay his hands on her like he did—*hands he would lose*. I felt the rage I had tamped down earlier start to burn, and I changed the direction of my thoughts.

“Come on in,” Katherine said, moving aside so I could pass. Instead, I circled her waist, pulling her close and

covering her mouth with a thorough kiss. I bit her lip and patted her ass before releasing her, chuckling at her flushed face.

I moved inside to the living room, “Evening, Darlin’,” I greeted as I looked around. The place was warm and cozy, like Katherine herself.

“I wasn’t sure what to wear, so I hope this is okay,” she said, standing beside me, gesturing down her front, indicating her clothing. She wore tight blue jeans, a floral top that flowed with her movements, and blue sandals strapped to her ankles. Her hair was in what looked to be a complicated braid.

“It’s perfect,” I answered, my fingers stroking her face.

“Mom, I’m heading out...,” her daughter’s words trailed off, seeing me as she entered the room. Bethany stopped, her eyes glancing between Katherine and me before giving a hesitant smile—moving further into the room. The look she gave me left no doubt that this girl had never been exposed to anyone like me.

And she disapproved.

“Bethany, this is Patch,” Katherine introduced me. “Patch, this is my daughter Bethany.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Patch,” Bethany said with a tight smile, her fingers nervously fiddling with her purse strap.

I gave a stiff nod mumbling, “Same.”

“Well—Um, I’m heading out to meet Josh. Remember to text me,” Bethany told her mom before giving her a quick kiss and hurrying out the door.

“She doesn’t like me,” I stated, looking at Katherine.

“It’s not that. Bethany is just not used to seeing me with a man other than her dad. Plus, she tends to worry too much.”

I held back a growl at the mention of the dead man and said, “She better get used to seeing me because I’m not going anywhere.”

Katherine smile softly, “I hope not.”

I had the urge to pick her up and find a bed, but instead, I said, “Grab a sweater to wear on the bike. I’m about ready to drag you to bed, so we better get moving. I wanna feed you first—get that energy up.”

I watched her eyes cloud with arousal, and her voice was thick when she answered, “I’ll be right back.” Katherine turned, going down the hallway.

I looked toward the window and saw an easel set up with a painting on it. I walked over, taking a peek. My brow furrowed in confusion as I studied the man Bethany had painted. I knew the face of the smiling man sitting by the riverfront.

Katherine came into the room carrying a white sweater. “Katherine, does Bethany know any of the men in my club?” I asked, turning my eyes to the painting.

She looked at me confused, “No, not that I know of, and I think she would have mentioned something like that to me when we talked. She has only met Hillbilly and you.” Then, Katherine came over to look at the painting. “I’m sure it’s just a resemblance. Bethany sometimes sees a face, and it comes out when she paints,” Katherine reasoned.

I wasn’t so sure. “That has to be what happened. You ready to go?” I asked, letting the subject drop but deciding to bring the man in question and Bethany together in the same room at some point to see if I was right.

“Yeah, I’m ready.” She picked up a piece of paper from the table and walked over to the keypad on the wall. “Just let me figure out how to work this thing. By the way, thanks for having Scotch install it.”

“You’re welcome. I want you safe. Here let me show you how to program it. First, you need to download an app to your phone,” I instructed and spent the next twenty minutes explaining how to use the security system. Katherine sent a text to Bethany with the code and instructions for the system.

My eyes scanned the parking lot behind my sunglasses as we walked to my bike. And I continued to watch after she was settled behind me, and we got on our way. We had only gotten a few miles down the road when I spotted the tail. Fuck, I hated to do this, but I was changing our plans. The last place I wanted to take Katherine was to the clubhouse on a Saturday night. But I wasn't going to drag her around town without some backup. So I patted Katherine's leg, getting her attention, and yelled, "Change of plans, Darlin'." Then I turned onto a side road, switching directions, and cursed when the car followed.

I hit the throttle and let the bike loose. Katherine gasped in my ear, holding on tight. I would be back at the clubhouse in record time, and the car tailing us would never feel our wind.

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CHAPTER TWENTY



I HAD NO clue what was happening when Patch suddenly switched directions and worked his bike to a breakneck speed. I held on for dear life, breathing a sigh of relief when we came to the clubhouse, slowing down as the gate opened. I loosened my hold on Patch, which had been tight like a coiled snake. But I have to admit the way Patch handled his motorcycle was such a turn-on—all that power between his hard thighs.

I could hear the music thumping even before we parked among the many vehicles and bikes surrounding the building. The place had been quiet this morning when we left, with only a few people roaming around the bar area and kitchen. I dreaded walking inside tonight. But as Patch parked and we got off the bike, I willed myself to be strong instead of the weak woman I had become again over the last few days.

I was better than that, and it was time I acted like it.

“Sorry about the change of plans, but some sketchy shit is happening. We’ll go inside to the kitchen and grab a bite, and I’ll explain,” Patch said, throwing his arm over my shoulder and leading me to the entrance. Inside, the party was in full swing and, if possible, seemed even wilder. Patch held me close, his arm tightening around me protectively to shield me from what was happening around us.

I saw Player come into view with a woman hanging on him, noticing us, he pushed the woman away, moving toward us. Player gave me a smile, and I recognized it as almost pitying before he turned his attention to Patch. “I thought you weren’t going to be around tonight?” Player asked Patch, giving him a pointed look, making me wonder what was going on.

“That was my plan, but there was a problem. Meet me in my office in twenty,” Patch answered, leading us toward the kitchen again.

I felt the tension leave my body when we entered the kitchen. It was quieter in here. The long table was only occupied by a few people, with Cook in front of the stove like he hadn’t left since I saw him this morning. Cook—his road name—was older with a round body, long greying hair, mustache, and beard he kept in a braid like his hair. I learned this morning that he was the sole cook at the clubhouse and liked it that way.

He was also a sweet man with rough edges, and I liked him immediately.

Patch led me to a seat at the end of the long table that seated twenty, pulling out a chair for me to sit. “What do we have tonight?” Patch shouted to Cook.

“Roast beef and some fixins’ and apple pie for dessert,” Cook replied over his shoulder.

“That okay with you, Katherine?” Patch asked me. “This isn’t what I had planned by a long shot, and I’m sorry for that.”

“There’s no need to be sorry. This is fine. I would like to know what’s going on, though.”

Patch took the seat next to mine, taking my hand in his. “Katherine, we were being followed, and this evening, when I got to your house, I spotted someone watching your place.”

“What—why?!” I exclaimed, shocked.

“This isn’t the first time. Lucky spotted someone approaching you the other night and stepped in. Do you have any idea who would do this?”

I looked into Patch’s troubled eyes, stunned that I didn’t know I was being stalked, so unaware of my surroundings. And wondering if it could be the work of Michael. “No... maybe....” I was starting to feel panicked.

Patch cupped my face in his hands, his thumbs caressing my cheeks, and he said, “Don’t worry about it right now; we’ll talk in private. I’m going to talk to Player. I want you to grab something to eat while I’m gone.”

He looked around the room and called, “Mia, can you come over here?” I watched as the pretty, petite blonde with a voluptuous body for someone so small, her big blue eyes covered with glasses. She was dressed conservatively in jeans and a t-shirt with a vest that matched the men in the club. “Katherine, this is Mia—Slayer’s ol’ lady,” he introduced. I had seen Slayer a few times, but he didn’t come into the bar that much. “Can you keep Katherine company until I get back?” he asked Mia.

“Of course, you go do what you need to,” Mia answered in the sweetest voice I had ever heard, taking Patch’s vacated seat. Patch went over, saying something to Cook before leaving the kitchen.

“So you’re here with Patch. I heard he was taking an ol’ lady. I swear to you, I thought this day would never come,” Mia declared. She was older than I first thought and looked to be in her early thirties.

“I don’t know about the old lady,” I replied.”

“Not officially, but everyone here already sees it that way, and it’s about time we got some ol’ ladies around here. After Lana left Vain, I’m the only one, and it gets lonely,” she confided.

I gave her a surprised look, saying, “Why aren’t there any others?”

“They usually only last a few years before taking off; club life is hard to take if your man isn’t giving you the same attention as the club. And well—you see what goes on out there,” she said, pointing to the door that led to the bar area. “It strains things, and most women can’t handle it.”

“But, it doesn’t bother you?”

“It used to, but Slayer and I have been together fifteen years, and he never used to bring me here very much at first; it wasn’t acceptable. And I let all kinds of things run through my head about what was happening here and finally told him I was leaving, going back home to my parents.” Mia’s eyes took a faraway look before she continued, “Slayer lost his shit and said he couldn’t live without me. I was his life. And that day, he started defying traditions and bringing me with him to the clubhouse.”

“And everyone was fine with it?”

“Yep, no one said a word. I make sure I wear my property cut; that way, none of the men mess with me.” Okay, now I get why she’s wearing the vest. “Slayer had to run and do a tow for the club’s garage, so I’m hanging out in here until he gets back.”

Two glasses of tea were placed in front of us. “You gal’s go get something to eat before the drunkards start and eat everything,” Cook ordered, turning and returning to the stove.

“I guess we better eat,” I chuckled at Mia, and I took Cook’s advice. I liked Mia and hoped we could become good friends. It appeared the club needed some women, almost desperately from what I’ve seen.



I HATED LEAVING Katherine in the kitchen but trusted Mia and Cook to look out for her. I walked into my office, dropped heavily into my chair, and looked across my desk at Player. “I had a tail this evening—the same description as a car I saw hanging around Katherine’s place when I got there.”

“Who do you think it is?”

I believe it has to do with her ex-husband, but I can’t be sure until I get her to open up about what went down with him. It could also be Papa Bear; maybe he wants to use Katherine against me.”

“What do you want to do about this? I don’t think it’s a good idea for Katherine to be left alone; when they strike, it’ll be fast, like with Leather.”

“I agree. I’m going to stay with Katherine either here or at her place. I want Bethany tailed in case this is about her. I don’t think it is, but I’m not taking chances,” I said, knowing it would kill Katherine if something happened to Bethany. My phone buzzed; I dug it out of my pocket, answering, “What’s up, Shadow?”

“Aislynn’s gone,” Shadow informed me.

“What do you mean, gone?” I growled, standing and starting to pace.

“Doc went to check on her, and she wasn’t in her room. We checked our security, but it was like she was a ghost, no

signs of her anywhere. We've searched the entire compound."

"Someone had to help her! It had to be someone inside!" I snarled, angry that Shadow let this happen—which was unusual.

"Could be, but no one is admitting shit, but I don't think any of our ol' ladies would have let her leave in the condition she was in," Shadow argued.

He had a point, but I also knew Doc's ol' lady Grace had connections to help abused women—and a kind heart. "Search for her in surrounding towns," I commanded, still not believing that Aislynn managed to leave without being seen.

"Already happening. We have another problem. When Leather finds out, he's gonna lose his shit. He's been asking for Aislynn and wants to see her. What the hell am I gonna do when he figures it out? I know he'll try and leave to find her."

Shadow was right; Leather was a hard head. "I'm sending Harker and Snipe your way; they know how to handle Leather. Keep me updated," I ordered.

"You can count on it. I'll be in touch," Shadow said before ending the call.

"Aislynn ran, didn't she?" Player asked.

"She sure as hell did," I answered, dropping my phone on the desk and running my hands through my hair in frustration. "Why would she leave the safety of the clubhouse in that condition?"

"I told you, Patch, this isn't this girl's first time dealing with this kind of shit. Aislynn's been to hell and back a few times—it's in her eyes," Player explained, his expression thoughtful and a look I've seen a lot on Player recently. "Why are Harker and Snipe heading out?"

"Shadow is afraid Leather will try and leave to find her, and those two know how to handle his temper." I picked up my phone again, sending a message to both men with instructions. "I want you to get a prospect on Bethany; tell him

to keep his distance so she won't notice. Hopefully, at Church, tomorrow Scotch will have more information for me. My hands are itching to end Michael Sinclair."

"I don't doubt it, Brother. I know you and the control it's taking not to gun him down and be done with it."

"Only the fact that I want to torture him slowly is why he still breathes," I swore with clenched fists. "I need to get back to Katherine, do what I asked, and we'll discuss more tomorrow."

"I'll do it now," Player said, getting up and heading out the door. "I'll see you tomorrow."

I followed Player out, locking the door behind me and making my way back to the kitchen. I would eat and then take Katherine to my room. After seeing what happened to her, I understand her better and won't force Katherine to witness what's going on at the party. Also, it won't bother me not to be around that shit. I've been bored with it for a long time now. As a kid raising myself, I started partying in my early teens, and the excitement isn't there anymore. And I don't want to end up like my old man hitting the grave early. He never knew when to stop, letting his body and health go—and it caught up with him. Watching my old man wither away to nothing but a sack of bones woke my ass up real fast.

I work out, only drink to a buzz, and quit my pack-a-day smoking habit. I'd be solid if I could only learn to control my temper—but nobody's perfect. So I let Doc look over me twice a year, and as long as things are fine, I'm not worrying about it.

I rounded the corner and came face to face with Jesse; her face twisted with anger. "How could you send me away? I'm your favorite—been fucking you good for years, and this is how you treat me?!" Jesse hissed with narrowed eyes.

I crossed my arms over my chest, glaring at her, "I can do whatever the fuck I want, this is my clubhouse, and you crossed the line when I warned you not to. I won't have a

venomous snake around Katherine to poison her mind when I'm not looking."

Jesse let out a humorless laugh, "I can't believe you're throwing me away for boring, dried-up pussy. You remember how good my pussy was, you stuck your fat cock in it enough, and you'll be begging me back when the novelty of that bitch wears off, and you want a real woman riding your dick," she spat, with an evil smile that told me she really believed the shit spouting out of her mouth.

I uncrossed my arms, ready to throw this bitch out with my own hands; no one, not even another woman, slandered Katherine in front of me. I went to reach for her when I heard a throat clear and turned my head to see Slayer, Mia, and, unfortunately, Katherine.

What shit luck is this?

Jesse gave me a victorious smile before looking smugly at Katherine, "Enjoy him while you can," she sneered, flipping her hair and trying to move past me.

I stopped Jesse. "You better be out of my clubhouse within the next ten minutes. I don't want to see your face here ever again," I warned, my face hard, my gaze letting her know what I couldn't say in front of Katherine—*she better never cross my path again if she knew what was good for her*. I saw the flash of fear cross her eyes and knew she understood. So, I moved aside to let her hurry past me and down the hall.

Then I turned my gaze to Katherine's shocked face, her face red with the embarrassment I knew she felt from hearing that bitch's tantrum. Slayer grabbed Mia's hand, saying, "We'll leave you two alone." The pair walked away from the uncomfortable situation heading toward the common room, leaving me alone with Katherine.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



MIA AND I had finished eating by the time Slayer got back. Mia introduced the tall, muscled man with black hair and hazel eyes, his rough features such a contrast to Mia's softness. But, the way he looked at Mia, I could tell they had a true, once-in-a-lifetime type of love.

It had been over an hour since Patch left, and I really needed to pee. I mentioned it to Mia, and she and Slayer offered to escort me to a bathroom. But, when we rounded the corner, we walked upon the scene between Patch and the club girl name Jesse. I didn't hear the whole exchange, but what I did hear had my face burning. Boring. Dried up. Why women felt the need to age-shame, I couldn't understand.

Youth fades, and no one escapes the hands of time. So it will be a hard lesson for some who believe they are immune.

I looked at Patch and knew he was angry that I had heard what Jesse said; the look he gave her before letting her leave was chilling. And by the uncertain gaze he directed my way, I

knew he wasn't sure how I would react to what I heard. "I'm sorry you had to witness that-" he began.

I cut him off with the wave of my hand, saying, "It's fine, Patch. You don't need to apologize for someone else's words; she's hurt, and insulting me makes her feel better." I moved closer, wrapping my arms around his waist and holding him close. "She lost a good man, and I hope I never feel what she is feeling."

Patch tugged my hair, arching my neck to see his face. "That bitch never had me to lose, Darlin'. I've only belonged to one woman, and I'm holding her. And I don't care what Jesse's feeling; no one is allowed to insult you," Patch growled, letting my hair go to wrap me in his arms tighter.

I'm not going to lie—I liked hearing what he said. After a lifetime of thinking I wasn't special to anyone other than Bethany, my heart skipped a beat as it filled with the warmth and protection I got from being with Patch. I loosened the embrace and said, "You better go eat something. Cook says there will be nothing left once the drunk people start."

Patch chuckled, "I've got my meal right here." His hand cupped the back of my head, bringing his head down and kissing me, a long and lingering kiss that made me forget everything but the two of us—until a couple of giggling women turned down the hall interrupting the moment. Finally, Patch released me with a groan, "I'll eat, and then we'll continue this in private."

We went back to the kitchen, and Patch quickly filled and then ate a plate of food. The kitchen had gotten busier but was still quiet compared to the rest of the clubhouse. As we got up to leave, I once again caught the eyes of the man who shot daggers through me every time he saw me. His eyes held an angry promise, and I wondered if I should talk to Patch about it. But what if I only imagine it, and he looks at everyone like that?

I would play it by ear; if he keeps doing it, I will have a word with Patch. We went back to Patch's room, and I was

expecting—no hoping to be thrown on the bed and ravaged like in a bodice-ripper romance novel only for Patch to sit in his recliner, pulling me to sit on his lap. “Let’s talk a bit,” He said, angling me so I faced him.

“What do you want to talk about?”

“These,” he answered, removing my bracelets and touching my scars. “Tell me how it happened.”

I went deathly still, “I don’t like to talk about it.”

Patch grew silent for a minute before finally asking, “Do you trust me, Katherine?”

I was quick to answer, “Of course I do. I’m just uncomfortable talking about it; the memories aren’t pleasant to revisit.” I shifted nervously on his lap, suddenly feeling the need to run and hide—answers and lies on the tip of my tongue.

“Katherine, I will never judge you or feel differently about you—I’m in no position to do that with the life I’ve led. However, someone is watching you with the intent to harm you, and I can’t allow that, so I need to know about your past. I want to keep you safe, and I have a feeling your ex-husband is involved, and I want to know why he would still want to hurt you.”

I made a horrified gasp, feeling faint. I whispered, “I don’t know why Michael would after all this time. I kept my end of the bargain we made.”

Patch caressed my cheek, “What bargain, Katherine?”

I lowered my eyes, looking at the scars on my wrists and debating being honest with Patch. I knew without a doubt that I could trust this man, but to open up myself completely was not something I had ever done—and I didn’t know how. I took a deep breath, slowly letting it out before raising my eyes to his face. “I’ve never talked about this before to anyone; I’m so ashamed I let Michael hurt me the way he did for so many years—weak for not getting out. But, you have to understand, I had no one or a place to go; I was only seventeen when I met

Michael, and he isolated me over the years. The police were in his pocket since he was one of them. I learned that the hard way.” I swallowed the tears that threatened to fall, forcing them back.

“You listen to me, Darlin’, you have nothing to be ashamed about; only a pussy beats on a woman—a *coward*. And you got out and started your life again, no matter how long it took or *what* it took. That takes strength, Katherine, don’t say your weak ever again! And you never have to worry about him ever laying his hands on you again; you have me.”

I looked into his face as he watched me intently, patiently waiting to speak. Then, finally, I let out a ragged breath and blurted, “I blackmailed Michael so he would let me go.”



“IT WAS THE only way,” Katherine continued, “I tried leaving a few times when Bethany was a baby. But he found us each time and convinced everyone that I had issues with depression and became manic. He convinced them I needed care, and they believed him. Then, in private, Michael told me he would take Bethany, and I would never see her again. I got afraid and returned home with Michael, not wanting to lose my daughter. I reasoned that I could handle anything as long as he never hurt Bethany.” Katherine stopped, laying her head on my shoulder.

“When did you decide to blackmail him?” I asked, holding her tighter, trying to ease the sadness flowing off her in waves.

I hated making her talk about this, but it needed doing. I needed to know everything.

Katherine took a shuddering breath, “As long as Bethany was around, Michael kept his abuse low-key and only a few times a month. His image was everything, and he wanted his little girl to adore him, so her being around kept his abuse somewhat in check.” Katherine stopped once more, giving herself a minute, and started speaking again, “But once she left for college, it was like Michael took that as he had free rein to abuse me at will and to become even crueler in his punishments.”

I pushed the images out of my mind of the punishment I had witnessed, so I wouldn't become angry and make Katherine think it was because of her. She could never know I had seen what was in that file. I wouldn't humiliate her like that.

“I decided I couldn't continue letting him abuse me. I knew one day he would go too far and kill me. So, I devised a plan to record him abusing me and watched YouTube videos on secretly installing cameras and recording. Sure, I could just leave now that Bethany was grown, but I knew he would kill me somehow—someday. The recordings would guarantee my safety. So, I started recording and figured I would get a month's worth of abuse and then leave, but it turns out I only needed a few weeks of recordings. Michael went too far one night, and I knew I had him.” I felt a shudder run through her body and knew what had caused it to happen.

“What did he do?” I pressed, trying to calm my voice when I wanted to rage.

Katherine started to trace the tattoos on my arm with her finger while she took a few minutes carefully choosing her words before saying, “I can't go into everything that happened—it's too hard. But long story short, Michael tied me to a chair, gagged me, and left me there. I figured he would release me after a few hours, but he didn't. No, this time, he kept me tied to that chair, only coming back once to harass me, not

even giving me some water. By the end of the second day, I was weak and more scared than I had ever been in my life. I truly thought he was leaving me to die.”

I thought about how long I could keep Michael alive to torture him. Vampire from Shadow’s clubhouse could help me out on this one; I would call him for advice. Michael’s death would not be an easy one. “How did you get out of the chair?” I questioned, again knowing the answer but needing her to tell me.

Katherine unconsciously touched her arm as she spoke, “I was desperate, and Michael had left a knife lying on the floor. I only needed to reach it to cut myself loose. The chair was wooden, and I knew if I could just break the arm loose, I could reach down and get the knife.” Katherine took a deep breath and exhaled, “I broke my arm doing it, but I got it done. I was in survival mode, and pain didn’t mean anything at the time.”

I’m glad I already know most of what she’s telling me because had I only been hearing this now, nothing would have stopped me from hunting Michael down and killing that bastard with my bare hands—and landing my ass in jail. “What did you do next?” I prodded through gritted teeth.

“I ran out of the room, grabbed my laptop that the camera feed was going to, picked up my purse with the cash I had been putting away for the last year, and left. I was too afraid he would come home. I didn’t even bother to clean up, leaving my phone behind so he couldn’t track me. I drove three towns over, bought some clothes, and got a hotel room.

I cleaned up and went to the hospital, giving my mother’s name to get my arm treated. Of course, they wanted me to call the police, but I refused. I hid for a few weeks while I got the evidence together and copies made. Then I contacted Michael with my demands, showing him what I had and threatening to release the footage if he didn’t give me a divorce—letting him know I had a way of it getting released if something happened to me. And I told him I would show it to Bethany, letting her know who he really was.”

“And you got your divorce, and he didn’t fight it?”

“No, the timing was perfect; he had just gotten his promotion to Captain and wouldn’t chance to call my bluff. So, we agreed he would give me half the money in our savings account, so I could rent a place to live; I didn’t want any part of Michael, including the house. So, we divorced amicably, everyone thinking we had grown apart. And we never spoke after that day....until last Sunday.”

My body stiffened with anger, and I growled, “What the fuck did he want? And where did he approach you?”

Kathrine turned in my arms, giving me a worried expression, “Don’t do anything crazy, Patch. He can’t hurt me anymore.”

“Answer me, Katherine,” I demanded, unable to stand the thought of that dead man being close enough to her to breathe the same air. He had no fucking right!

Sighing in resignation, she answered, “Michael spends every Sunday afternoon with Bethany—she usually goes to him. But last week, he volunteered to come to Morgantown and pick her up at our house. It caught me off guard, and we had words.”

“What did he say to you?”

“Does it really matter?”

I took Katherine’s face and said, “Yeah, it matters. That man has no right to look, touch or speak to you. Now, tell me what he said.”

“Fine, but don’t get angry. Michael started out making negative comments about where I was working, and then he offered to make me his side piece, acting like I should appreciate the offer-.”

“The fuck he did,” I snarled, cutting her off and lifting Katherine to her feet so I could stand up.

Katherine put her hand on my chest, stopping me with only her touch. “Patch, I knew you would do this; that’s why I

didn't want to tell you. Michael would love nothing more than to be attacked by you so he could press charges. I need you to calm down," she pleaded, "Don't make me regret telling you."

I looked into her beautiful face, saw the worry there, and reminded myself that I would take care of Michael in good time, and Katherine would be none the wiser about how it happened. So, I schooled my features, pretending to let the anger go. "I'm sorry, Darlin'. You're right, but the thought of what that man did to you makes me crazy. But, I've got my temper controlled, I promise you."

"Let's not talk about Michael anymore. I thought you brought me into your room for a whole different reason, Patch," Katherine said softly, her eyes hooded.

I lifted her, throwing her on the bed. "I thought I told you to call me Wyatt when we're alone," I scolded, falling on top of her, careful to keep my weight from crushing her.

She ran her fingers through my hair, her gaze soft, "I like Patch; it fits you. I know you want me to call you Wyatt, and they'll be times I do, but to me, you'll always be my dark pirate name Patch."

"You, my sweet Katherine, are the only person on this earth I will ever allow to call me a pirate," I declared, my lips coming down on hers, giving her a kiss filled with possession and need. And as the kiss deepened and the heat spread, I vowed she wasn't leaving my bed until she felt everything I felt for her that raged inside me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



I WALKED BACK into the clubhouse after dropping **Katherine** off at her home. I warned Davie about watching his surroundings and sent another prospect Sean to keep him company. I reminded them how important Katherine was to me and what would happen to them if they failed to protect her. “Hey, Brother,” Player greeted from his stool at the bar and looked surprisingly not hungover, which is his usual Sunday look.

“Player, I almost didn’t recognize you without a hangover,” I joked, taking a stool next to him. “What’d you get into last night?”

“He came and sat at the strip club all night, nursing a beer in the corner, like a lonely monk,” Jonesy answered as he walked up to us, having overheard my question.

“Mind your own damn business, Jonesy, and worry about your own sorry love life,” Player barked, giving him a warning glare.

Jonesy laughed humorlessly, “That’s the difference between you and me. I don’t want or need a woman in my life.”

“Words that will bite you in the ass someday. I would know,” I smirked, standing. “Let’s start Church; I don’t like leaving Katherine alone.” I led the way to the room we had our meetings in, entering and taking my seat at the head of the table. I tapped my fingers on the smooth wood, waiting for everyone to show up and take their seats. I raised a questioning eyebrow at Lucky when he entered the room and sat down.

“What?” Lucky grunted, “I’m still allowed in here, ain’t I?”

“You know you are; I was surprised to see you, is all,” I answered. Lucky wasn’t an officer but a lifetime member who had privileges.

“I had nothin’ else to do,” Lucky scowled, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms over his round stomach.

I didn’t say anymore. I know Lucky has his reasons, and he’s welcome, so I looked around and saw everyone seated except Harker and Snipe, who went to Pennsylvania, and Leather—who is recovering. So I brought the meeting to order with a pound of the gavel. “Harker and Snipe went to help Shadow with Leather. Seems the girl Aislynn took off, and she can’t be found. Leather is protective of Aislynn and won’t be easy to handle when he finds out.”

“Aislynn had help. She was in no shape to pull this off on her own,” Player noted, frowning.

“I ran her first name in every database out there; believe it or not, hundreds of girls have that name. So I’m starting to narrow the names down by physical description,” Scotch informed us.

“Anything on the Fire Dragons. I’m not sure what Papa Bear’s goal is—he shoots up our club, takes Leather hostage,

and goes off the grid without a trace. What the fuck is his motive?" I asked, confused as to what he was trying to prove.

Scotch spoke, "That's another thing I want to talk to you about. It seems there is chatter on the dark web that Papa Bear got mixed up with the American Mafia out of New York, and he screwed them over. I haven't confirmed this yet, but I'm working on it to find out if it's true."

Jonesy let out a whistle, "Is he crazy?"

"That may explain why he's suddenly laying low," Player added, "Or laying dead."

"Keep me informed. What about the dead man that was married to Katherine? Anything on him?" I snarled. Even the thought of that guy makes me see red.

"What are we talking about?" Jonesy asked, confused, and I took a minute to give some details to the rest of my brothers and then waved my hand for Scotch to continue.

"Yeah, my contact came back with loads of info. Michael Sinclair is a Police Captain in Pittsburgh, for the most part, well-liked. But, my source found a few men who don't care for Michael. They admit they've heard rumors that he abused Katherine, and she reported it a few times only to have Michael and his buddies on the force write reports putting Katherine in a bad light."

"They knew he was a pussy who abused his wife and falsified police reports?" I growled.

Player laughed sarcastically, "And they think we're the bad guys. I've done a lot of shit in my day, but I've never laid hands on a woman—or stood by while another man did."

"Amen to that, brother," Lucky agreed, slamming his fist on the table. "Cowardly pussies afraid to face a real man."

"It's rumored he abuses his new wife, twenty years his junior, and looks almost identical to Katherine. From what I heard, the guy apparently had it bad for your ol' lady—probably still does." Scotch said.

“I think you’re right. Katherine admitted Michael wanted her back, on the side, since he’s married. She also confided to me all the details of what happened when she escaped. And how she blackmailed him for a divorce. So, how do I kill him without anyone connecting me to him?” I wondered aloud, wanting to get it done as soon as possible.

“Well, my guy told me something odd. Michael suddenly took an emergency leave for two weeks concerning his daughter. Has Katherine said anything?” Scotch asked, looking at me expectantly.

Cold dread spread through my body as I answered, “Bethany is fine. I saw her yesterday when I picked up Katherine. Michael only sees Bethany on Sundays. That fucker is the one watching her, and he has something planned.” I needed to end the meeting and go watch over Katherine. “Find out where the dead man is staying; it has to be close. His lie could turn into a boon for us.”

“I’ll take precautions at the bar while she’s working. We don’t want Michael anywhere close to her. It only takes a minute to grab someone and hit the road,” Hillbilly said.

I thought about what Katherine said about Michael coming to her home and, with a sinking feeling, realized today being Sunday, he’ll stop by. And I left her there—fuck! “Today is Sunday, and that son of a bitch may show up to get Bethany. I need to leave. Meeting over,” I announced, slamming the gavel and standing to leave.

“Do you need us?” Player asked behind my back as I stomped toward the exit.

“I’m not sure, but keep alert in case,” I replied, exiting the clubhouse.

I straddled my bike, praying I hadn’t made a huge mistake, and played into the dead man’s hands. But, if something happened, the prospects would have contacted me. But I wouldn’t feel better until I saw Katherine for myself. So I revved my bike and peeled out of the compound.



I SHOWERED, PUT on some comfortable shorts and a pink t-shirt settled onto the sofa to relax and catch up on some of my tv shows until Patch returned. Patch has a lot of stamina for a guy his age, and I don't get much rest in his bed. As a result, my body ached in places I didn't know I had. *And I'm not complaining.* I had only turned on the tv when the doorbell rang. Sighing, I got back up and went to answer the door. I looked through the peephole and gasped, seeing Michael standing on the other side.

What was he doing here?

But, as soon as the thought entered my head, Bethany came strolling from the hallway in a pretty floral summer dress. "Is that dad?" she asked. I thought she had already left.

"Yeah," I answered, opening the door and walking away without glancing at Michael. "I'll see you when you get back," I told Bethany kissing her cheek and moving toward the hallway.

"Wait for a second, Katherine," Micheal said to my retreating back, stopping me.

I looked back over my shoulder. "What?" I kept my voice neutral instead of snarling the word like my lips begged me to do.

"It's a nice day. You should come to have lunch with us today and enjoy the nice weather," Micheal stated, his voice

sugary smooth, but his eyes showed his deception. Micheal was playing a game.

“No, I’m waiting on someone and taking a motorcycle ride later, so I can enjoy the weather then,” I disclosed and for a second, his mask dropped, and the Michael I knew was showing his face, and I wondered if I should have provoked him in front of Bethany. But he quickly put the mask back on, and I let out a small breath of relief.

“Ahh—yes. Your new biker boyfriend. I’ve cautioned Bethany to be careful around him and his club thugs. It’s not safe-.”

“Dad, I told you he seems nice,” Bethany cut in, stopping him from saying more and giving me an embarrassed look. I should have known she would tell her father I was seeing Patch.

“I’m sure he does, sweetheart, and I’m just advising your mother that who she brings into a home you share could be dangerous, and she should be cautious. I know she doesn’t have a ton of options and gets lonely, but she still needs to think of you,” Michael spoke like he was concerned but sneered at me over Bethany’s head.

“Dad!” Bethany exclaimed, giving Micheal a reproachful look. “I think we better go. I’ll see you this evening, Mom; I love you.” Bethany moved toward me, giving me a hug and whispering, “I’m sorry. I can’t believe dad said that.”

I returned her hug, replying, “It’s okay. No worries, go and have a nice visit.” I wouldn’t let Michael have the satisfaction of getting a reaction out of me. And I let my eyes do the talking when they met his over Bethany’s shoulder.

Bethany pulled away and moved back toward the door, taking Michael’s arm and leading him outside. Suddenly the roar of a motorcycle could be heard, and I walked over, looking out to see Patch flying into the parking lot on his big Harley. I didn’t expect Patch back for a few more hours. I leaned on the porch railing and watched as Patch parked,

jumped off his bike, and came to stand beside me, sending murderous glares toward Micheal as he got into his car. Micheal was returning his own glare, and his hatred of Patch was evident on his face.

“Hello, Darlin’,” Patch murmured, embracing me and taking my mouth in his for a deep kiss. He let me go and smiled smugly as Micheal and Bethany pulled out of the parking lot. I had no doubt Michael was fuming.

“You should have told me that asshole was showing up today,” Patch growled, leading me inside and shutting the door.

“I didn’t know he was coming here again. I thought Bethany had already left for the day and was as surprised as you to see Michael.”

“I don’t want you alone with him; he’s up to no good sniffing around you. And it’s still a possibility that he’s the one watching you.” Patch took me in his arms once again. “I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“I’ll be fine. I know those men sitting at the edge of the parking lot belong to you,” I told him, leaning back to look into his face. Even though the young men tried to blend in, they just couldn’t pull it off. “I thought you wouldn’t be back until later?” I asked.

“That was the plan, but I realized that Michael may show up here and hurried back in case that bastard tried something.”

“Michael will never do anything in front of Bethany, so I was fine. But I’m glad you’re back, or do you need to go back to the clubhouse?”

“No. I’m expecting some phone calls, but nothing I have to go back for,” he explained. “Why don’t you go get changed, and we’ll go on a long ride up into the mountains,” Patch said, swatting me on the butt.

“Okay, but you may have to rub some of these aches out of my body when we get back,” I kidded him with a smile.

“Oh—Darlin’, I’ll rub every inch of your luscious body using my hands followed by my tongue soothing that ache in your sweet pussy,” Patch rumbled, his eyes raking over me suggestively. “In fact, why don’t I take care of that right now.” Patch moved forward, lifting me over his shoulder and drawing a startled laugh from my mouth.

It was two hours later before we pulled out to take that ride. But what Patch did to me in my bed was worth every second of the delay. *Every. Single. Second.*

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



I SAT AT the bar in the clubhouse, my mind on Katherine. The party tonight was relatively tame and not too crowded. I had left Katherine at her house; she wanted to spend some time with Bethany this evening. I pushed that selfish part of me that wanted Katherine all to myself to the side and gave her up for the night. I still had two prospects watching her, and I also had the dead man followed and knew he had headed back to Pittsburgh.

I wanted to kill him so bad this morning. When I saw his soon-to-be-dead ass walking out of Katherine's, I wanted to take him by the neck, tie him to the back of my bike and drag him down the interstate until there was nothing left of him. But the timing had to be right so that I could avenge Katherine properly—and not end up in the slammer.

I still won't sleep peacefully without her by my side, where I can protect her. "Katherine dump your sorry ass already?" Player joked, sitting beside me, signaling for a beer.

“Like I would ever allow that to happen,” I responded. “Where’d you disappear to today?” When I returned to the clubhouse, I had looked for Player, and no one knew where he went.

“I took a ride up to Deep Creek Lake. I was feeling the need for some wind.” Player was once again acting strangely and out of character for him, but I wasn’t one to pry into other people’s business, and I wasn’t starting now. He would tell me when he wanted to.

“With what happened to Leather, you need to let someone know where you were headed,” I cautioned him.

“I’m careful, and my nine isn’t far from my hand,” Player said, tapping his cut where his pistol lay underneath. “So, where is our dear Katherine this evening?”

“Spending the evening with her daughter.”

“And you’re okay with that? What about Michael?”

“I had him followed out of town, and I have Davie and Sean watching her place,” I informed Player, who chugged his beer, signaling for another one.

“Any news on Leather?” Player asked.

I sighed heavily, “He went fucking crazy just like Shadow predicted, lashing out and trying to beat the shit out of Shadow, blaming him. Harker and Snipe calmed him down, but he wants to leave, so they are bringing him back here with Doc riding along to help and get him settled.”

“Leather must have bonded with the girl in the short time they were together,” Player said thoughtfully, playing with the handle of his beer mug.

“Seems that way. That’s why I don’t understand why she ran. Leather would have taken care of her and protected Aislynn with his life.”

“Something has her scared to death, and trusting is probably not easy for her—so she ran,” Player reasoned.

“Look at you two lonely men in need of some company.” I turned to see two young blonde bitches standing there in tiny shorts and tops. I had not seen either of them before and didn’t care to see them now.

“Not interested,” I dismissed them, turning my back. Only to have one rub up against my back, her hands on my shoulders. “Get the fuck off me!” I snarled, jerking forward.

Player stood. “Why don’t you girls go find someone else? There are plenty of men here lookin’ for company,” Player said calmly. “Patch here is taken, and we’re talkin’, so move along.”

“Sorry, we were told you were looking for some fun,” One said, turning to leave, the other following.

“Wait!” I barked, “Who told you that?” I watched as they looked around the room, searching for the culprit.

The blonde, that seemed to do all the talking said, “I don’t see him now. He was over in the corner.”

“You can go,” I ordered, dismissing the girls once again and watching them scurry to the other side of the room.

“Why would one of our brothers do something like that?” Player wondered.

“I don’t know, but I don’t like it! I’ll have Scotch check the security feed to see who dared pull shit like that knowing I’m with Katherine. Something about it doesn’t sit right in my gut.”

“And always trust your gut; that’s what your old man taught us,” Player remembered with a smirk.

“And it’s never failed me,” I replied.

“On another note, what kind of changes are you planning around here?”

I knew this question was coming. “The main thing is keeping the open sex out of this room and putting it behind closed doors—like Shadow and Demon do in their clubhouses.

You saw what happened to Katherine. I won't have her around that shit knowing what it does to her," I explained, worried that Player was not gonna go for it since he had a wild side that loved to party.

"You know you have my vote." He saw the surprise on my face and chuckled, "What? You think I gotta fuck in the open? I only do it because I can."

"I just know you like to party and hard. And you like trying out all the bitches that come around."

"Patch—you and me, we grew up in this place, so you'll understand. It's not that I have to do all the stupid shit I do. It's just that, as they say when in Rome, do what the fucking Romans do."

"I hope all the brothers feel that way. It's about time we got this clubhouse back in order. I still need to deliver your beating for not keeping shit up in my absence," I said, taking a drink of my beer.

"Whenever you're ready, I'll take it. I know I slacked. I don't know why I did, except I wasn't feelin' like me there for a while, kinda lost—you know. I feel like a pussy just admitting that shit."

"If you're a pussy, then so am I because that's why I took all those runs trying to figure my shit out in my head. And it wasn't until I saw Katherine that I figured out what the hell I was missing."

"You may not believe me, but I'm happy for you, brother. Katherine is a great woman," Player said, slapping me on the shoulder. "Now, I'm gonna go wash the road dirt off me and get something to eat." Player stood and left without another word, leaving me to my beer.

I pushed my glass aside and stood. A new model car I was waiting on had come in the mail earlier this week. I would spend the rest of the evening putting it together to get my mind off things. And tomorrow I will see Katherine again. I'm worried because I can't shake the feeling something is about to

go down. As I entered my room, I thought I should have had Scotch install cameras in her place. But, in the end, she will be living with me, so there will be no need for them. I would be her protection.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



I ANSWERED A text from Patch telling him I had made it to work—the one of many since last night. Patch is worried; he got called away on club business this morning, so I haven't seen him since last night. I walked into the bar going to the breakroom. When I opened the door, I was surprised to see Tina standing by the lockers with a smug expression.

“Surprised to see me since you're the reason I got fired?” Tina alleged her tone was mocking.

“As usual, you don't know what you're talking about and spouting off rumors. I had nothing to do with it,” I replied, preparing to turn and leave. Instead, there was a vicious gleam in her eyes that told me Tina was up to no good.

Tina noticing I was about to leave, moved forward, saying, “Wait, Katherine, I have something I want to show you, and I think you'll find it interesting...I know I did.”

“Nothing you have is any interest to me,” I told her once again, turning to leave.

“Where was Patch last night?” Tina hurried to say, stopping me with a knowing smirk plastered on her face. “Everyone ragged on me for being truthful with you, and where’d it get me? Fired! Well, Katherine, who makes everyone think her shit don’t stink, have a look at the pictures I sent to your phone before you walked in here. I want to see your face when I’m proven right.”

I pulled my phone out and saw a text from an unknown number that must be Tina’s. I opened the pictures with shaky fingers to see Patch and Player at the clubhouse bar with two young blonde women, one plastered to Patch’s back. “How do I know this wasn’t before I started seeing Patch?” I countered, sure it had to have been. Patch wouldn’t betray me.

“Oh—poor pathetic Katherine. Look closer; the pictures are time-stamped; it was last night. My friend took these pictures so I could prove to you Patch isn’t serious about you. You should be thanking me,” Tina said, a triumphant smile on her face.

I didn’t like that smile, nor did I trust anything this woman had to say or show me. “I’ll talk to Patch about this; I’ll believe it when he tells me it happened,” I informed the troublemaker.

The evil gleam in her eyes dimmed at my reply, telling me the pictures were not telling the whole story. “Whatever, you’re so fucking desperate,” she snarled, elbowing past me and out the door.

I was deciding whether or not to forward the pictures to Patch or wait until he came in later to show him and get an explanation when another text popped up. I read the text from Bethany saying I needed to come home; it was an emergency. I immediately started for the exit dialing her number, and when I ran into Erin on my way out, I said, “I have an emergency. Can you let Hillbilly know?”

“Sure thing,” Erin said, looking concerned as I rushed out of the bar.

Bethany wasn't answering—now I was really worried. I unlocked my car and got in, and thought of Patch. I should let him know. I started the vehicle figuring the men following me would alert Patch. I pulled out of the parking lot when I heard the click of a gun, causing my heart to skip a beat. “Looks like we're back together again, Katherine,” Michael stated from where he sat in the back seat, a gun in his hand. “You keep driving until I tell you to stop, or I'll kill you so fucking fast and walk away like nothing happened. You listen, and you'll live.”

Michael climbed into the front seat, jerking my phone off the seat, deleting something, and throwing it out the window. “Why are you doing this?” I asked, terrified of the answer.

“Turn here,” he ordered, waiting until I took the turn to answer, “Why am I doing this? Because you are not allowed to leave me. I stood back and let you have your way thinking you would come crawling back. I waited patiently using Marci as a replacement, but it's not working—*she is not you*. And now you dare start seeing another man. LETTING HIM FUCK YOU!” Michael fumed, his face red with rage. I concentrated on the road listening to him take deep breaths that I knew meant he was ready to lose control.

My hands started to shake as my fear intensified. I looked into my rearview mirror, not seeing the two bikes that had been my shadow. Where were they? We were headed to a remote area that was nothing but forest. “What are you planning?” I braved to ask, but I had to know.

“As I said, we are going to be together again. I bought a remote cabin that I will keep you all to myself. It won't be the same as when we were married, but it will have to do. I can't trust you not to run your mouth and slander me. I'll keep you locked up when I can't be there to keep an eye on you. You belong to me and always will. No other man will have you; I'll kill you first.”

“I'll be missed, Michael. You can't just take me away and not expect someone to look for me. What about Bethany?” I

tried to reason with him. I had no idea he would go to this extreme.

Michael laughed, “Oh—they’ll look, but according to a witness, you saw photos of your biker thug with another woman and became so distraught you left work upset and panicked. So you—Katherine, are going to go missing, but when they find your car, it will be at the bottom of a lake where it will be presumed you drove it, whether on purpose or by accident. It will never be known. And your sweet body will never be found.” So Tina was in on this? I never thought she hated me to this extreme.

“You’re insane! It’s not like I was the only woman in your life during our marriage. Why do this? I can’t mean that much to you, especially the way you treated me!” I shouted, desperate to get through to him that this was not going to work.

“Those women were prostitutes, Katherine, doing for me what you wouldn’t do, but even then, it was your face I saw while I fucked them raw and dirty. But it got to the point it wasn’t enough, and I tried to get you involved, but you had to be a bitch! You made me punish you by not fucking listening! But you’ll listen now because you have no choice but to obey me. Slow down and pull into those trees,” he demanded, pointing to a gap between a densely wooded area.

As I slowly pulled into the area he indicated, my mind worked furiously, trying to figure out how to get away before he took me any further. I noticed his black Ford F150 was parked inside the concealed area. I was going to have to take a risk and try to escape when he attempted to move me to his truck.

I put the car in park, turning it off. I glanced over at Michael, who was watching me—victory in his eyes, the gun pointed at me. “You will walk to my truck and get in without giving me any problems. Trust me; I will make you regret it if you try,” he threatened, taking the keys in his hand and opening his door, never taking his eyes from me. Once

Michael was standing, he demanded, “Crawl over the seat and come out this door.”

I took a shaky breath, trying to gain the courage I knew it would take to try and run. Micheal may kill me, but I was as good as dead anyway. I need to take a chance. I would rather die than let him hurt me again. So, I crawled over the seat, got out, and stood by the car, and when Michael reached his hand to take my arm, I took off into a sprint heading into the dense forest. “YOU STUPID BITCH!” I heard Michael bellow behind me, his footsteps heavy on the ground as he gave chase.

I ran as fast as my feet would take me, my breathing heavy as I pushed through the dense brush that scratched and pricked my body. I heard the shot at the same time as I felt the painful burning in my calf. Michael had shot me, and I felt myself falling to the ground as my leg gave out. Ignoring the pain, I pushed myself back up—only to be shoved back down. Michael had caught me, and when the first hit landed along with his angry curses. I knew I was going to die, Michael was out of control with his rage, and he would kill me before he even realized he had done it.



WHAT A FUCKING day! I sat down in my office, irritated that I had spent the better part of the day on a wild goose chase. Pipe, one of our older members, had got a tip that Papa Bear had returned and was seen out past Masontown. I

took five men a scouted the area, not finding shit. I was going to get a shower and go see Katherine.

An urgent knock sounded on the door. “Yeah, it’s open,” I shouted and watched as Hillbilly hurried inside with a grim expression.

“Patch, don’t lose your shit; it won’t help. Katherine is missing,” he informed me, already wincing at what he knew was coming.

“WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU MEAN MISSING?!” I thundered, standing so quickly that my chair went flying into the wall. “I had two prospects on her, and she said she made it to work, so she had you. Explain!” I slammed my fist down on the desk, ready to commit murder.

“It happened before she started her shift. No one knows exactly what was wrong. Katherine came from the back and told Erin she had an emergency and had to leave. Davie and Sean were approached by the police saying a complaint had been called in against them for stalking a young woman and wouldn’t let them use their phones while they were questioning them. By the time I got involved, she was gone. I sent a brother to her house, but she wasn’t there either.”

I grabbed my phone, texting Scotch to get a location on Katherine’s car. Thank god we had placed a tracker on her car. I sent another group text out, telling everyone to be ready to ride immediately. “We were all fucking set up today, and I will get to the bottom of it, but first, I’m finding Katherine. So let’s get ready to ride. As soon as Scotch gives me a location, we leave,” I ordered, my heart thumping so hard I thought it would beat out of my chest. I was so fucking scared right now, thinking of what Michael was doing to Katherine.

I sat with twenty of my brothers in front of the clubhouse on our bikes, and one van was loaded and ready to ride. When the text came with the coordinance that put Katherine in a remote area outside Morgantown, I raised my hand, and we rode out. I knew Scotch had sent the directions to my brothers, and he would stay behind to monitor the situation in case the

car moved. I was looking at thirty minutes to reach Katherine, and I prayed she was in the car and unharmed. This was one of those moments when I knew I didn't deserve God's favor, but I was begging for it anyway.

We made record time by breaking a few traffic laws, but I wasn't stopping for nobody—not even the cops. We slowed down in the area her car should be, not seeing anything, but then I saw it a spot of white in the trees. I signaled to stop and was off my bike racing into the trees. Her car sat there along with a black truck that must be Michaels. But where were they?

“Spread out, and let's search the area,” I commanded. At the same time, a gunshot echoed through the trees making my heart stop.

“This way!” Jonesy shouted from the edge of a dense treeline. “The shot came from in there.”

I tore through the thick brush looking for Katherine, and it wasn't long before I heard a man's voice yelling and the sounds of fist meeting flesh—I knew that sound well. “Don't let me kill him!” I ordered as I rushed forward, livid. “Take him to the cave!” I knew I wouldn't stop, and I wanted him to suffer, not die quickly.

Finally, the pair came into view, and Michael was straddling a bloody Katherine beating on her. I let out an unholy roar and barreled toward them. I grabbed that motherfucker my fists in motion, and started to give him a beating meant to end his life. “Patch! Stop! Remember, you don't want to kill him!” Player shouted, trying to pull me back by wrapping his arms around me. “Katherine needs you! She's in a bad way!”

Those words penetrated my skull, and I let the unconscious Michael drop to the ground and let my men drag him away. I moved to Katherine, dropping down beside her lifeless body. “Is she?” I looked at Jonesy—who was kneeling beside her. I took my hand, touching her battered face, and felt like my

world was ending—finding it hard to breathe. I promised to protect her, and I failed—it gutted me.

“She’s not dead, Patch, just unconscious,” Jonesy assured me as he continued to look her over. Jonesy had been a Marine Corpsman and knew what he was doing. “She has a gunshot in her right calf, and I see an exit wound. I feel a bump on the back of her head that probably caused the unconsciousness. The damage from his fists seems limited to her poor face. I think it’s safe to move her.”

I gathered Katherine in my arms—holding her tight. “Doc is on his way with Leather, call ahead and tell them to punch the gas and be ready when we get back to the clubhouse,” I told Jonesy and started walking. I had to get Katherine to Doc so he could treat her. I wasn’t going near a hospital because in order to kill Michael; there couldn’t be anything tying any of us to him.

As we got back to the road, I looked at the three prospects standing there. “Davie,” I barked, ride my bike back to the clubhouse. Sean—you and Tyler drive the truck and car back to the clubhouse. Don’t stop anywhere and move the truck into the garage.” I looked for Player and didn’t see him or Vain. They must be dealing with Michael.

Thank god this was a remote location that didn’t see much traffic. I didn’t need any nosey civilians calling the cops. I climbed into the van, careful not to jostle Katherine too much, and signaled to Teach to drive. I looked down at Katherine and took in the damage his fists had done to her face. “I promise you, Katherine, he will pay for this with his life,” I whispered next to her ear.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



I HURT ALL over. That was my first thought as I started to wake up; my body ached and throbbed, especially my leg—it felt like it was on fire. I searched my brain for why I would feel this way, and then I remembered.

Michael had kidnapped me and shot me. I don't remember anything after falling to the ground. I heard myself whimper with fear as I realized I hadn't got away and my hell was only beginning.

“Katherine? Darlin’, can you hear me?” Patch’s voice came from above me, his hand caressing my cheek. But it couldn’t be Patch. I must be dreaming, only imagining his voice and touch. “I need you to wake up, so I know you’re okay.”

Could it be? I tried to open my eyes, but they felt heavy. I finally managed to open one eye, the other not cooperating. And slowly, Patch came into view as my eye focused. He looked tired and Pale. I tried to lift my arm to touch him, but I

didn't have the strength. "Don't try and move, Katherine," Patch ordered softly, sitting beside me on the bed and taking my hand. "You need to rest until you're recovered."

"Katherine, can you remember what happened to you?" I searched for the voice and found a man I didn't know standing by the bed. Seeing my confusion, he said, "I'm Doc, from the Pennsylvania club. I'm a doctor and have been taking care of you. Do you remember?" Doc asked gently.

"Yes," I rasped through what I recognized as swollen lips—I had had enough of them in my lifetime.

"That's good, even if it doesn't seem like it. You got a pretty good concussion, and no memory loss is a good sign. You're going to be sore for a few weeks until the injuries start to heal. The bullet made a clean exit, and no permanent damage was done to your leg or face, so with rest, you'll be good as new," Doc informed me with a kind smile. "How is your pain level right now on a scale of one to ten, one being the worst."

I took stock of my body and my pain and answered, "Three." I heard Patch growl, and I gave his hand a soft squeeze. "I'll be fine, Patch. Don't worry," I mumbled, wanting to comfort him. I know seeing me this way is hurting him.

Doc gave me a sympathetic look and said, "I'll up your pain medication for the first week and then lower it to something milder as you recover. I'm leaving instructions for Patch on your care. I will be back tomorrow evening to check on you to make sure there are no complications. But, lucky for you, Patch arrived before any real damage was done." Doc gave a parting smile before walking out of the room.

I turned my head to look at Patch, still only able to use one eye—the other must be swollen shut. "How did you find me? And where is Michael?" I asked, my voice sounding rough, my throat scratchy.

Before Patch answered, he grabbed a glass of water from the nightstand and dropped a straw in the cup. He held it to my mouth so I could drink and help relieve my dry throat. “Don’t worry about how; it’s not important. And Michael isn’t a problem any longer. The important thing is I found you before it was too fucking late. I failed you, Katherine...I failed to protect you like I promised, and it’s killing me to see you like this,” he said, remorse on his guilt-ridden face.

I took his hand in mine. “This is my fault; I let Tina get to me, and then when that fake text from Bethany came in, I didn’t stop to think before rushing out.”

Patch moved to kneel beside the bed so he could see me better. “What do you mean Tina upset you? How?”

“Tina showed me pictures of you and some women from last night; she implied you were cheating.” I watched Patch’s face turn red with anger. “I didn’t believe her,” I hurried to add, my voice breaking. My throat hurt. I’m guessing Michael tried to choke me—he was good for that.

“You were right not to believe her. Those girls were a setup, and that’s why you got pictures and not video because I told them to take a hike. No more talking. You need to rest.” He grabbed the glass of water again. “Here are some painkillers Doc left; they’ll help you rest.” Patch put two pills in my mouth, followed by the straw so I could wash them down. He then lay beside me on the bed, pulling me close and holding me. “I’m never letting you leave this clubhouse again. I thought I had lost you, and I can’t go through that ever again. I love you, Darlin’—you’re my life, and without you, I can’t breathe.”

My heart fluttered hearing his words. I knew Patch cared for me, but hearing him say he loved me meant everything to me. “I love you too, Patch, my dark pirate,” I whispered before closing my eyes and letting sleep take over.



I HELD KATHERINE until her even breathing told me the medication had worked and she was sleeping. I gently pulled away from her and moved from the bed. I looked down at Katherine as she slept, her beautiful face swollen and bruised, and let the anger burn to the surface. I thought about what Katherine said about Tina, and I knew someone in my clubhouse was a traitor. I know for a fact Tina isn't allowed past the gate. Someone else took those pictures, and I was going to find out.

I heard a knock and went over, opening the door to Mia. I asked her to sit with Katherine while I took care of some business. Mia gasped, seeing Katherine's condition. "Oh—my, how could someone do that to her?" Mia asked sadly.

"Some people are just shit," I answered. "I just gave her some medication for her pain, and she should sleep for hours, according to Doc. The big thing is to keep an eye on her and be here in case she wakes up and needs something. I'm hoping to be back before she wakes up." I walked back to the bed and kissed Katherine before turning back to Mia. "Let me know immediately if there is a problem," I instructed, opening the door to leave.

"Don't worry, Patch. I will take good care of Katherine and won't hesitate to call you if I need to," Mia assured me. I gave her a nod and closed the door behind me. I was going to contact Bethany, but I'm going to wait and let Katherine make the call on whether she wants her daughter to see her in this condition. My gut says no.

I took off down the hall to find Player, finding him sitting in the common room. “We got a traitor among our ranks,” I told him, keeping my voice low.

Player raised an eyebrow in surprise, “You serious, Patch?”

“Dead. Those two young bitches that hit on us the other night it was a setup, and Tina showed Katherine pictures that someone in this clubhouse took. I’m gonna have Scotch review the security footage like I planned but forgot.”

“Wow, that’s some crazy shit. Who would do that and to you?” Player pondered, looking around the room.

“Don’t know, but I’m gonna find out, and they’re gonna pay when I’m done dealing with that piece of shit sitting in the cave. You secured him good?” I asked, impatient to get my hands on Michael. I wanted to make sure Katherine would be alright before I headed out to clean the world of that filth.

“You bet. Got him tied all nice and tight to a chair just like you wanted,” Player assured me with a wicked smile. That bastard was going to feel everything Katherine felt and so much more. “Jonesy has Midnight watching the cave until you get there.”

“Let’s ride,” I said, striding toward the exit, Player at my heels.

The cave we use for some of our *problems* is in a remote area in the mountains on the West Virginia/Maryland border. We have to park and walk a couple of miles to reach the cave. I liked keeping these things as far away from my clubhouse as possible since eyes and ears are everywhere. The location is only known to officers and our most trusted members.

An hour later, Player and I reached the cave and found Midnight—named because of his pitch-black hair, eyes, and love of the dark—sitting with his back against the grey rock near the cave’s opening. “Thank hell you finally got here. Asshole woke up a half hour ago and won’t shut the fuck up. I

finally stuffed his sock in his mouth,” Midnight complained, standing to greet us.

“Good, I want him lucid, so he understands and feels every single thing I’m gonna do to him. Remember, I don’t want to kill him. I want to make him suffer,” I snarled, rubbing my hands together in anticipation and walking into the cave to see Michael struggling to escape, jerking the chair, almost toppling over with his effort to get loose. “How you doin’, Michael?” I asked with a satisfied smirk at seeing him so helpless—just like he made Katherine. I pulled the sock out of his mouth so he could answer.

Michael licked his dry lips, trying but failing to hide how scared he was, but finally braved to say, “Do you know who I am? You think you can do this to me and nobody will find out? They’ll find out it was you and your gang; you can count on that.”

I laughed, “I know who you are—a fucking dead man. And I’ll do to you everything you did to Katherine; only you won’t survive. Let them look for you because they won’t be anything to find.” I looked down at Michael, showing him all the hatred I felt for him. “You hurt my woman, did things to her when she couldn’t fight back—*disgusting things*, left her to die and suffer AFTER YOU BEAT HER WHILE SHE WAS TIED TO A FUCKING CHAIR!” I bellowed, my voice bouncing off the stone walls. I paced back and forth before him, watching the coward shake with fear, not even begging for his life.

I turned my back on Michael, took a deep breath, took off my cut, and handed it to Player before spinning around and punching him in the face. “YOU WILL FEEL EXACTLY WHAT SHE FELT!” I thundered, hitting him repeatedly until Player grabbed me around the waist, stopping me.

“He’s unconscious. Remember, you want him to suffer for a few days like Katherine,” Player reminded me of my promise.

I looked at Michael, who was slumped in the chair, bloody and beaten, and stomped down the urge to finish him off. He didn't deserve to continue breathing. I wish I could put a bullet in his leg like he did Katherine, but he only has one shell left in his gun, and I'm gonna need it to finish him off in a few days.

“Do you want me to keep watch tonight?” Midnight asked.

“No, we'll block the cave off so no animals can get inside, and you come to check on him in the morning and evening. If nothing is disturbed, leave him, and I'll return the day after tomorrow to finish him off if he's not already dead,” I instructed as we walked out of the cave. Michael would never be found, and his truck was being destroyed as I stood here. People went missing every day, and now he was one of them.

After blocking the cave off, we hiked back to our bikes. I felt lighter knowing I was getting revenge for Katherine. Of course, she will never know about it—suspect maybe. But ignorance is bliss, as they say, and my lips are sealed.

Now to find the traitor in my ranks.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



EPILOGUE

TWO MONTHS Later

It's been two months since Michael tried kidnapping me, and nobody has seen him since. His wife Marci told police she suspected him of having an affair and figured he had run off with another woman. Bethany is upset and worried for her father. The police questioned us, but we didn't have any information to provide, and the case went cold without any clues.

I know it was Patch, even though he has never mentioned Michael again to me since the day he rescued me. But I'll never tell. My suspicions will go with me to the grave.

I am completely healed from that day, only a scar where the bullet went through my leg. I told Bethany someone had attacked me behind the bar, and I didn't remember anything shutting down any questions. Bethany will never know what an abusive asshole her father was; there was nothing to benefit from telling her.

I sighed, getting out of the chair I had been sitting in while thinking about things. I was living with Patch at the clubhouse; he was insistent after the incident with Michael. I was worried about leaving Bethany, but the timing was right. A friend of hers was going through a rough time and needed somewhere to live, and she took my room and share of expenses. And Patch managed to get some changes here at the clubhouse. They renovated a room off the bar area for those that wanted *private moments*. The parties still get wild, but nothing that bothers me.

And the strange guy that always glared at me had disappeared from the clubhouse. I found out his name was Pipe. I overheard Patch and Player talking one day, and they said he was a traitor. He had tried to break me and Patch up because Pipe thought I was changing Patch, making him a pussy. I'm not going to question that and count it as good fortune.

I was still working at The Devil's Den and dancing even though Patch didn't want me working. He gifted me a property vest and said he would always care for me, including financially. But I needed something to do, I wasn't going to sit around, but now things are about to change.

The door opened, and Patch came strolling inside with a wicked smile on his face. I knew all too well. "Miss me, Darlin'?" he asked, wrapping me in his arms.

"You've only been gone eight hours," I answered flippantly.

"Eight hours too long," he said, picking me up, tossing me on the bed, and removing his clothes.

"Patch, we need to talk," I said, stopping him.

"Why?" Patch looked concerned as he sat on the bed, taking my hand.

I wasn't sure how he would take the news, with everything he had confided in me about his family and being abandoned by his mom. Not to mention our ages. Finally, I decided just to rip the band-aid off. "I'm pregnant."



“PREGNANT,” I REPEATED in shock. My ears not believing what I heard. With all the bad shit I’ve done in my life. I was confident God wouldn’t ever give me such a gift with Katherine. “Are you sure?” We had gotten carried away several times, not using protection. But we never worried about the consequences.

“Yeah, I’ve had all the signs, so I took a pregnancy test—it was positive. So, I made an appointment with the doctor and got it confirmed. I’m eight weeks along.” Katherine watched me nervously as my mind wrapped my head around the fact that I would be a dad. “Are you happy?” She finally asked.

I realized Katherine was taking my silence as a disappointment. I cupped her face in my hands and said, “I am beyond happy. I never dreamed I would ever find someone I love as much as you, let alone be given the opportunity to be a dad. But, I’m not gonna lie, it scares the fuck out of me.”

“Me too. I’m almost thirty-nine and having a baby. I’m excited but, like you, scared at the same time,” she admitted as I pulled her onto my lap, holding her close.

“I guess there is only one thing left to do,” Patch announced, giving me a squeeze.

“And what’s that?”

“We gotta get married and soon. I want us hitched before my kid is born. So get to planning; whatever you want to do, I’m on board.” There wasn’t anything I wouldn’t do for Katherine—*except give her up*. I needed to buy her a ring for her finger. I had already had her name put across my heart, and at the same time, Katherine had gotten my name on the inside of her thigh, right below the gates to my heaven.

And heaven was where I wanted to go right now. I lay Katherine back on the bed and stood again, removing my clothes. “Strip,” I commanded and chuckled as she hurried to do as I asked, my eyes

going to her stomach where she carried my baby. I can't believe how much that turns me on—knowing my baby is inside her makes her even more beautiful.

Within minutes we were both naked, my cock hard and dripping for Katherine as she lay there spread out, waiting. Finally, tired of waiting, Katherine moved so she could take my cock in her mouth. I grunted as she took me deep, her mouth and tongue working hard to take me to the brink of losing control and succeeding. I gripped Katherine's hair pulling her head away from my aching cock. "I want in your sweet pussy; I'll fuck your mouth later," I grated. "Hands and knees," I directed, and Katherine moved into position, one we had done many times over the last few months.

I positioned myself behind Katherine, running my hands over her perfect round ass—god, I loved this ass—making this my favorite position. I squeezed her ass cheeks before slapping each pale globe to a beautiful pink. I heard Katherine whimpering with need, her fingers gripping the blankets. I took two fingers, running them through the lips of her pussy, and groaned at how wet she was for me.

I covered her with my body, my arm going around her waist to keep her steady, and thrust inside her, going straight for the gold, never slowing down. I rode Katherine hard and fast, desperate for her, addicted to this woman who was my obsession, my love.

I knew she was close; Katherine's moans and short screams got louder. I reached around and rubbed her sweet clit, pushing her toward her release. My balls were tight, my spine tingled, and I wasn't going to last much longer. Her pussy was too damn good. I felt her pussy spasm around my cock and leaned back, fisting her hair until her neck arched, and I could see the pleasure my cock brought her. I started thrusting faster, pounding into her pussy, my groans and heavy breathing loud to my ears. Finally, I gave one long, hard thrust and came so fucking hard my body shook.

I let Katherine go, and she slumped onto the bed, sweaty, breathing heavily. I dropped down beside her, pulling her close. "You drive me insane," I whispered to her, pushing her damp hair out of her face.

"The feeling is mutual," came her breathy response.

“Let’s get some rest, and we’ll shower later,” I said, my hand finding her belly and staying there, imagining my baby growing, swelling her stomach. “I love you so damn much.”

“I love you too, Patch, so very much,” Katherine replied before her breathing slowed as she fell asleep.

I snuggled her close with a contented sigh, knowing I was one lucky bastard and would spend the rest of my life never forgetting it and making sure Katherine never regretted taking a chance on her pirate biker.

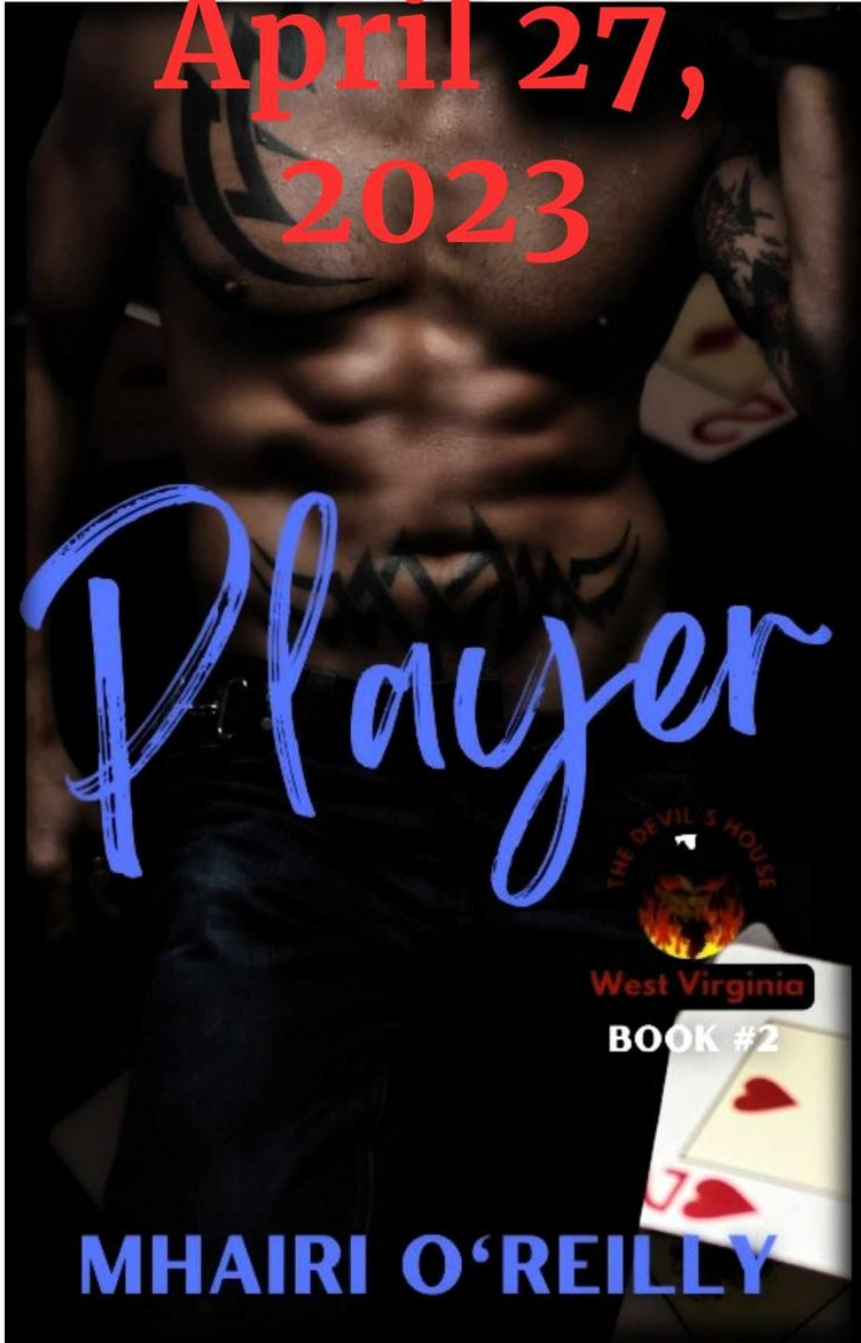
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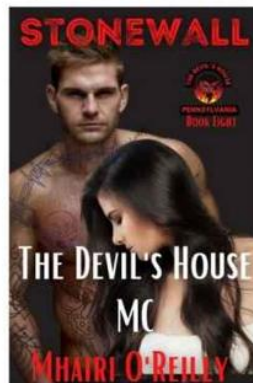


THE DEVIL'S HOUSE



PENNSYLVANIA

MC



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Mhairi O'Reilly lives in Upstate, South Carolina. A native of West Virginia, Mhairi loves to read. Devoting many hours of her life to it. She always dreamed of writing her own stories; when the time arrived that she had the time, she jumped into it, not looking back.