

ENTRANCE

K.C. MILLS



WOLF WARRIORS MC

PHARAOH

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NOTE TO READERS:

Hello, beautiful people:

IF YOU'RE RETURNING, welcome back. If you're new... welcome to my crazy world. Wolf Warriors MC are a new group that I will be bringing to life.

Bash was up first and now it's time to meet Pharaoh. Unintentionally he gave his heart to a young love years before either of them were ready. She was also a forbidden love. The walls were up preventing anyone else to truly win his heart. Now she's returned and he has to decide if he's willing to be the man she needs or if he's in too deep being the man he's become while she was out of his life.

Bash's story was the introduction, grazing lightly into their world. Pharaoh's story brings you a more intimate look into who these men are by doing a deep dive into the Wolf Warriors MC lifestyle. You do NOT have to read Bash's story to enjoy Pharaoh's journey. Doing so only helps you enjoy the WWMC experience that much more.

These guys are not connected to any prior series; all characters are brand spanking new and this is their introduction. Please be mindful that the foundation of this story is simply learning how to love and be loved. For those of you that prefer my more Romance/Contemporary stories, this one might not feed your soul.

THESE GUYS HAVE a bit of edge to them and there is language that might not suit your preference. There is no cheating and as with all my work, this one is not void of my signature style with that alpha male who isn't afraid to show his heart. If you're open to falling in love with love, then please proceed!

AS ALWAYS, Crafting Romance with an Edge!

SINCERELY,

K.C. Mills ♥

CHAPTER
ONE

Pharaoh Vaughan.

Damn near every head that wasn't preoccupied with pussy turned in my direction as I walked through Tip N Tail. Normally all eyes were on me when I stepped but given my current location, I stood out more than usual.

Tip N Tail was Knights territory. Knights and Wolves had a long history of setting shit off when our proximity was too close, which meant everyone here was trying to decide what the hell was about to go down. The black leather jacket with my colors on display left no mistake about who I was. Not that they wouldn't have recognized *me* without my patches and the wolf insignia that covered most of my back. My presence as a member of Wolf Warriors MC caught their attention initially, but knowing my position in my club was what had them cautiously watching my movements to ensure they weren't the reason for my impromptu visit to Knights territory.

I had only been to Tip N Tail a handful of times, only for club business, but I hated the fucking place. It smelled like a nauseating combination of pussy, liquor, sweat, and smoke. Not a good mix. Considering I was here to handle business, it definitely wasn't one I favored.

After doing a quick scan, I located my target in what was considered a VIP section. A red vinyl sofa that had seen better days based on the duct tape and cracked armrest. Tip N Tail wasn't the classiest place but the men who came here weren't looking for quality. They were more interested in women that

cared very little about modesty or morals so they would fuck and suck for the right price.

“Find another mark, love. I need to have a word with Bookie.”

The sound of my voice had the woman on his lap crooking her neck to look up at me. A slow smile curved her lips as she pushed back and removed her body from his.

“Where the fuck you going...” he growled, clumsily reaching for the woman who dodged his grasp. He was too damn high to process what was happening so instead of trying again, his head dropped back against the rear of the sofa while she pushed up to me. I took a step back and the woman grinned wider.

“You can take his place after you’re done talking, sexy.”

“Not interested.”

She shrugged and stepped away, giving me enough clearance to get Bookie’s attention. My fist connected hard to his jaw landing the first punch before pulling back and hitting him a second time. I then fisted the front of his shirt, pulling him to his feet. It took the dumb ass a minute to realize who I was and what was going on but as soon as his eyes focused enough to recognize my face, his hands lifted in defense.

“Pharaoh, man what’s good? Why the fuck you rolling up on me?”

“You broke our rules, Bookie.”

“What rules? I ain’t did shit.”

I shoved him, releasing his shirt at the same time. Bookie stumbled back, landing awkwardly onto the sofa behind him. Seconds later he attempted to discreetly swipe his head left to right looking for help but was out of luck. Even if the two other Knights I’d spotted here were bold enough to intervene, which they weren’t, I’d still have the upper hand. They’d have to shoot me to stop me and they wouldn’t dare make that decision without permission from their prez. Shooting me would mean starting a war that the Knights weren’t prepared

to handle. We were deeper, stronger, and definitely with the shits.

“You clipped three cars from Prince Street Apartments this week and before you say it wasn’t you let me be clear; we got your dumb ass on camera.”

“Prince Street don’t have cameras.”

This muthafucker chose that as his argument, which further proved my case. He’d been scouting areas where he thought he wouldn’t get caught and in the past Prince Street had been one of those areas. After a few too many complaints from tenants, Prez had cameras installed. We owned the complex so it was up to us to ensure the residents’ safety. Hence the newly-added cameras to catch whoever was clipping tenants’ vehicles.

“They didn’t but they do now. We had them installed a couple weeks ago when a handful of cars were broken into and two went missing.”

I could see the ‘oh shit’ moment take over his expression as soon as Bookie realized he was fucked and it brought a smile to my face. This dummy wasn’t one to give up easily which I had to give him credit for. He squared his shoulders trying to make himself larger. Wasn’t shit gonna help him though. Before I left, Bookie would have a few broken bones to accompany the message he would be delivering to his prez.

“Nah, Pharaoh, that wasn’t me.”

“It was you but if you need proof, the footage is being sent to Nuck. You can argue your innocence with him. But for now, I’m here to collect a partial payment.”

Bookie’s eyes moved from left to right, trying to map out his escape plan. He’d rather run like a pussy than deal with the consequences, but I couldn’t rightfully blame him. Dealing with me as a Wolf enforcer was never a good thing. Before Bookie could make his move, I swung on him again. The minute my fist made contact and he stumbled back, I lunged forward, wrapped my hand around his wrist, and spun him in the opposite direction, twisting his arm behind his back in the

process. Bookie went forward, crashing face first on the sofa. My knee landed hard to his spine and I yanked his wrist further up his back toward his shoulder blades. Like expected, he screamed like a little bitch while struggling to escape. That wasn't happening. Bookie was barely a hundred and fifty pounds. I could bench his entire weight with one arm.

“Prince Street is Wolf territory, Bookie.”

“I know, which is why it can't be me you saw on camera.”

“You calling me a liar?”

“No. I'm just saying...” I cut him off by yanking his wrist higher which had him crying out again. “Ah fuck...”

“You were just *saying* what?”

“Nothing, I wasn't saying shit.”

“So then you're admitting you broke our rules?”

“Yeah, I did. Fuck, I'm sorry.”

I pressed my knee deeper into his spine, which had him growling in pain through clenched teeth. His shoulder was a whisper away from being dislocated and I was crushing his spine with all my weight.

“Sorry isn't good enough but I'm sure you already know it's not gonna work.” I leaned forward, gripping his fingers and forcing them back until they snapped. Bookie screamed louder from the excruciating pain of his ligaments and tendons ripping from my forced separation of the bones at his knuckles.

“You broke my hand.”

“Not exactly but you're going to have to get some work done.” I smirked before I tugged just a bit harder on his wrist until I felt a bone in his shoulder separate.

Dislocated humerus.

I knew bones and the damage that could be done to them. It was only right since I caused damage in the bodies of people who pissed me off often.

“Oh shit. Muthafuck...” he groaned, twisting enough to glare up at me after I relieved him of the added bonus of my knee bearing down on his spine.

“Tell your prez that we’ll be expecting payment for the cars you stole. I don’t give a fuck who covers it but the price of those cars will be covered. *Understood?*”

“Yeah, yeah...understood.”

“And I shouldn’t have to say this but based on the fact that I’m here I don’t think you’re smart enough to understand simple things. So let me break this down for you, we catch you jacking cars, breaking into businesses, or even fucking jaywalking in our territory and broken bones will be the least of your worries.”

“Got it,” he gritted with his jaw locked tight. I shook my head, noticing the layer of sweat that now misted his skin. With the amount of pain he was in, I’d be surprised if he made it out of here before passing out.

Dumb fuck.

Before leaving I did a quick visual sweep noting the audience I currently had. None of them would be crazy enough to intervene. Bookie wasn’t high enough in rank for any of them to risk going a round or two with me. As I headed toward the door, the Knights that were present only glared while everyone else went back to what they were doing, not concerned about Bookie or his broken bones. I didn’t give a damn. My attention had already shifted to the compound where I was heading since club business was done. If I was lucky there would be an eager mouth waiting to suck my dick before I crashed until morning. I wasn’t looking forward to the five-hour drive to Memphis but I also wouldn’t complain about the opportunity to open my bike on the highway. I’d learned a long time ago to take the good with the bad and there wasn’t a damn thing bad about the power of my bike beneath me and endless stretches of open highway.



MY FOOT MADE contact with my kickstand at the same time I switched off my bike's engine. The front of our clubhouse was lined with bikes and off to the side there were a few trucks—two Ranges, a G Wagon, and a metallic green Bronco. That shit was flawless and belonged to Mint, the only female member of our club. I swung my leg over my bike and rolled my shoulders back hoping to relieve some of the tension that had settled in. Long rides always did a number on me. My boots thudded across the asphalt as I moved with long strides toward the light of the clubhouse which streamed from the two small windows on the left side of the building.

As soon as I stepped inside the organized chaos swarmed around me. Prospects were moving around replacing drinks for members. Women were clinging to those who had their colors, laughing too hard and hanging onto their every word with the hope of impressing someone enough to get chosen for the night.

The energy shifted when they realized I'd stepped in the building and I was already getting lustful stares from a group of Chasers that were clustered by the pool tables. I wasn't a fan of fucking behind my brothers which meant that Chasers—women who were chasing Wolves for dick and clout—weren't my preference. I couldn't count the number of times I'd known these women get fucked in one room then creep into another. I wasn't down with that shit so my norm was a quick nut down their throats. If and when I needed more, it only went down with whoever was new to the clubhouse. I rarely ever circled back but there had been a few times when liquor made the decision for me. Tonight wouldn't be one of those nights. So instead of heading to the pool tables I ended up at the bar and took the spot next to Mint.

This month, her short, cropped hair was dyed a grayish blue with a few of the ringlets highlighted jet black. She kept changing her look because according to Mint, she got bored too easily.

Much like any other night she had a bottle of Sweet Auburn, the whiskey our club barreled, in front of her with a shot glass. I waited until she tossed back a shot then refilled

the glass before I swiped her contraband stopping seconds before it met my lips when she said, “How you know I haven’t been sucking dick?”

Without turning to face her I asked, “Have you?”

“No.”

I smirked behind the glass as I took down the contents then gave her my full attention. “You want to?”

“If you’re offering yours, hell no. You better get you one of them to handle that for you.”

I chuckled and grabbed the bottle, refilling the glass. “You know that’s not my thing. I like mine straight no *Chaser*.”

Mint rolled her eyes and took possession of her bottle and shot glass. “Shit me too, so sounds like we’re both shit out of luck.”

“I’m willing to bet you’d have more luck in here than I would.” Mint had the eye of every man that crossed her path. With a pretty face, tight body, and the added badass appeal of running with the Wolves, she had men constantly trying to fuck. I’d even considered it a time or two but Mint was more like family and I didn’t believe in shitting where I slept. There were a few of our brothers that would gladly travel down that road if she allowed them to, mostly prospects. The ones that had been here for a while felt the same as I did, Mint was our little sister but she was indeed fuckable.

She shrugged and tossed back a shot. “True but I know better than to fuck with the home team so that isn’t happening.”

I wasn’t given a chance to respond because Mint lifted her bottle and shot glass and slipped away. Padre filled her spot but before he could ask, I gave him the answer he was likely looking for.

“It’s done.”

“That isn’t what I wanted.” He cut his eyes my way and turned up the beer he’d brought with him. “I was just coming to make sure you’re good for tomorrow.”

My run to Memphis.

“Yeah, I’m straight.”

He tossed his chin toward the other end of the bar. “You want Bash to ride with you?”

“Nah, I’m good by myself. It’s a quick turn and I plan on stopping in on Jones.”

Padre nodded again. “Figured you would.”

“He’ll have my ass if I cross state lines and don’t show my face.”

Padre nodded before he was on his feet leaving the empty bottle behind. “You gonna play a little tonight?”

“You got anybody new?”

He shook his head, delivering a smirk. “Not sure, ask Pope.”

Pope kept up with all bodies in and out the clubhouse on nights like this. Everyone was accounted for including the women that were allowed on the compound to party for the evening.

With another toss of his chin, Prez rattled off, “be easy” and walked away.

Padre was gone and I was left to decide whether or not I wanted company for the next few hours. The longer I contemplated the more my exhaustion settled in which made the decision for me. A hot shower and my bed seemed more likely than checking with Pope to see who was on roster tonight. That was confirmed by the time my boots hit the floor and my body groaned in protest when I extended to my full height. I had resigned myself to the fact that I was no longer interested in any of the women present when one in particular stepped in front of me.

“You need something?” Arica’s lids lowered giving her a molten look which was further accentuated by the curve of her full lips.

“You offering?” I arched a brow and her smile stretched, growing more defined.

“For you, yes.” She was hopeful. The most she’d gotten from me over the past few months was a quick fuck against the wall or one while she bent over something. Arica had only been in my bed a handful of times but it only took once for her to realize she wasn’t interested in any of the other guys. Because of some twisted sense of loyalty to me that I didn’t request or want, the only thing she would offer them was her mouth. She learned my rules about not sleeping behind my brothers fairly quickly and made a point of not finding her way into their beds.

Arica’s long nails brushed across the front of my jeans but her eyes never left mine. Her intent was getting straight to the point because she knew I hated small talk and pointless promises. I felt the firm grip of her acknowledgment while she waited for me to decide.

Shit might as well...

“Let’s go.”

No other words were spoken. She didn’t care what I was offering as long as I was offering something. I wasn’t going to fuck her but I did plan on making good use of her mouth. After that, I’d send her on her way so that I could get a few hours of sleep before it was time to hit the road in the morning. I had a date with my bike and the open road to deliver forty guns to a club in Memphis. Crossing state lines with stolen firearms wasn’t the smartest but I loved the thrill of the chase and knew the law would have to catch me before they could charge me.

And they never would because I was just that damn good...

CHAPTER
TWO

Yahri Hall.

Twenty-three texts and twelve voicemails.

My eyes lowered to the maroon bedding, then to my phone as I listened to voicemail number eleven.

“Yahri, just call me back. I can fix this but only if you call me back. There’s an expiration date on how long you have before shit gets serious. That stupid ass move you made with the Feds cost us a lot of money and now you’re hiding which doesn’t look good. If you’re smart, you’ll call me back.”

After that one ended I moved on to the last message knowing it wasn’t going to be any better.

“Bitch, don’t think I can’t find you because I can. Time’s up. Someone’s gonna pay and it damn sure won’t be me. If I have to hand deliver you myself then so be it and right now, that seems to be the only option. When I find you, and I will find you, just remember I gave you a chance to make this right.”

Make this right? Was he insane? There was no way to make this right. Men who didn’t think twice about selling young girls to those who wouldn’t give a shit about what happened to them once the money exchanged hands weren’t in the business of bargaining with people like me.

I was no fool. If Jarren knew where I was, his only priority would be handing me over to those same men because all he cared about was covering his ass. If his freedom was on the line, betraying me wouldn’t matter.

As a wave of fear trickled down my spine, I once again paced the floor. My chest tightened as I thought about the mess I'd gotten myself into which had my mind drifting to my parents. I'd lost them both. My mother because of the things my father was into and my father a few years later at the hands of someone he'd pissed off at some point in time. I hated how he'd sent me away but if I ever understood the importance of keeping me disconnected from his life, I did at this very moment. Accepting a drink from a man I thought was cute had landed me right in the middle of the very thing my father had fought so hard to keep me distanced from.

I silently chastised myself for not seeing through the manufactured persona that Jarren presented, but then again there hadn't been any signs. He'd been the perfect boyfriend over the past six months. Not once had he said or done anything that would lead me to believe he was associated with men who trafficked women. Jarren wore suits to his corporate office where he worked as a project developer. During his downtime, he took me to fancy restaurants, splurged on weekend trips to cities I mentioned wanting to explore, and twice we'd spent time at resorts on tropical islands.

Nothing about him fit the image the news had painted of Jarren. A man who not only pushed illegal substances and sold stolen weapons but also a man who took the freedom of unsuspecting women. My stomach felt queasy each time I thought about how open and vulnerable I'd been with this man. How could I have not known who he really was?

Because he was careful not to show you and would have continued to do so had you not heard that conversation about those women.

Jarren talked about marriage and kids. I had imagined my future with him. My stomach flipped several more times as I shook away the thought. Instead I focused my attention on the room I was currently in. A hotel just outside of a town where I would be staying until I figured out what was next.

Next...

Right now I needed to go to the one place my father wanted me furthest from. The only place I knew I'd be safe until I figured out what the hell I was going to do about Jarren. With the type of people I now knew he was connected to, there was no way in hell he'd stop looking for me. At the very least, if he did find me, I'd have the protection I needed to survive whatever he planned.

Like handing me over to a team of killers who think I narked on them to the Feds.

God, I hated the predicament I found myself in. Not only did I have to rely on people who'd turned their backs on me, I also didn't want to go to Sweet Auburn because I knew *he'd* be there. I wasn't ready to face the man who had written me off just as easily as my father had. Sure, I understood why, but that didn't mean I wasn't crushed when they both walked away. It fucking hurt. It still hurt. Unfortunately seeing him was unavoidable. Sweet Auburn was his home, his family.

I raked my fingers mindlessly through my hair while I leveled my emotions, then snatched up my phone and crossbody from the bed. After a few quick swipes I had my ride share app up and a car scheduled to arrive in eight minutes. Stepping out into the hallway from my room I sucked in a deep breath and prepared for the fall out.

"Time to get this over with," I mumbled on my way to the elevator. I wasn't looking forward to facing my past but I had run out of options and I was also running out of time.



THE BAR WAS DIMLY LIT in comparison to the sunlight I'd just been in. I did a quick sweep, scanning the room for familiar faces. When I didn't find any, I singled out the first person I reached, a man sitting at the end of the bar near the door, dressed in jeans and a t-shirt with a leather jacket folded across the back of the stool next to him. I couldn't fully see the patches but the Wolf on the back was clear enough to jar my

mind with memories of the leather jacket my father used to wear. This guy was a club member, not just a prospect.

“Who’s your president?” I asked, moving closer but still allowing myself a safe distance. The guy glanced over his shoulder and frowned at me.

“Who’s asking?”

“Someone who knows that Koda wouldn’t want you questioning me. Is it Cleveland?” The man’s eyes narrowed on my face, frowning at me with curiosity reflecting in his light brown orbs. I had used Padre’s given name and not the one most people knew him by. As a kid, he’d only ever been Uncle Clev to me. He and my father had been close, more like brothers than anything, so it would make sense that he took my father’s place after he passed. I’d be surprised if it was anyone other than Padre.

“What you need with him?” The guy’s tone was now guarded and cautionary. Members of the club were groomed to protect their own, especially their president.

“None of your business. Can you just tell him someone needs to see him? Or I can head there myself?” I glanced to where I knew the offices were and he glared at me but slipped off his stool, causing his heavy boots to thud against the wooden floor.

“Stay here.”

He glanced at the man behind the bar who offered a nod to the unspoken demand.

Keep an eye on her.

I scoffed under my breath. As a kid, I’d always overlooked the natural order of things. As an adult, it was hard not to recognize the authority each of these men held.

The guy disappeared and returned a few minutes later with Padre’s big body following closely behind. I didn’t want to smile at the level of comfort I felt seeing his face after all this time but it couldn’t be helped. This place and the man who now ruled over it were home for me. Padre’s eyes narrowed briefly after acknowledgment of who I was flashed in those

dark pools of brown. He didn't speak, just waved me back and turned toward the hall he'd just stepped out of. The guy who'd retrieved him for me grunted under his breath but returned to his drinking post no longer concerned with me.

Padre was waiting in his office, leaning against the old wooden desk that used to belong to my father, legs spread wide, arms folded across his broad chest and eyes expressing his displeasure for my unannounced visit. He was also the first to speak.

“What are you doing here, Yahri?”

“Good to see you too, Uncle Clev.” I tried for a forced smile but his expression remained the same, unwelcoming. However, a glint of something showed in his eyes.

“I'm always happy to see you, baby girl, but not here and you know why.”

“My father's not here anymore,” I fussed, moving within reach of the man who I'd once considered family. Maybe not anymore though based on how he was receiving me.

“No, he's not but the respect I have for him still is. I'll never go against his wishes, Yahri. So tell me why you're here?”

“I just need some place to be for a little while. I don't have anywhere else to go.” My words were clouded with emotions I'd been trying extremely hard to suppress for the past forty-eight hours. I was failing miserably, which he must have picked up on because he extended an arm in my direction and gently guided me into his massive frame. Uncle Clev gave me a tight hug and a kiss on top of my head before I felt his body exhale a sigh. I stepped back and stared up at him.

“Tell me what you need and I'll take care of it.”

He rounded the desk taking a seat while I slipped into one that faced him. I nervously began to tug at my lip with my teeth while under the intensity of his stare. A stare that made me feel like a little kid versus the grown woman I'd become.

“I need a job. I thought maybe I could work here.”

That was a partial truth. I didn't need a job. I *needed* protection. I had my own business which was doing well but figuring out other people's financials and fixing their poor decisions to shift failing businesses into thriving and running flawlessly wasn't going to keep me alive and well. Being surrounded by the men who fiercely protected their own would. I was, or used to be, one of *their* own.

"No."

"Why not?"

He released another sigh. "You already know the answer to that question, Yahri."

My father.

"It's just a job," I said, which didn't get me any further than a second ago.

"There is no *just a job* when it comes to things tied to the Wolves. Even if you don't know all the ins and outs, you know why it's a bad idea."

He was right but I couldn't allow their dealings to deter me.

"I need somewhere safe to be for a little while."

"Safe?" He frowned hard. His protective nature kicked in. "Safe from what?"

"I'd rather not say right now. Can you just give me time to deal with it and when I'm ready, we can talk?"

"You're gonna have to tell me something or the answer is no. Now either talk about whatever brought you here or leave. I'm good with either so the decision is yours."

I stared at him trying to decide what to do but deep down I knew the answer. I just had to swallow my pride and say the words.

I'd fucked up...bad...

CHAPTER
THREE

Pharaoh.

I had never in my life been so happy to see the Sweet Auburn sign as I was at this moment. As much as I loved taking my bike out on open road my recent ride to Memphis was a bit much. My shoulders were stiff and aching, which wasn't uncommon after a long ride. I was down and back in less than twenty-four hours and the bottle of whiskey I shared hours before my trip home hadn't exactly helped.

It was a gift to Jones, who I was paying a visit to since I was in town on business, but he refused to let me leave without a shot or two. Those shots turned into an entire bottle between us. After the whiskey and the drive, I was ready to shower, climb in bed, and sleep for the next couple hours. *Days* if possible, but I knew better. There was club business waiting on me.

With my helmet tucked under my arm, I stepped into Sweet Auburn and the minute the heady scent of cigar smoke, grease, and liquor filled my lungs my shoulders relaxed. This place was home. Had been for the past ten years which felt more like a lifetime. There was very little I remembered about my life before becoming a prospect with Wolf Warriors. The memories were there, they'd always be, only now tucked away deep since I chose not to revisit that time in my life.

I had a family now. I was a Wolf and one of the most respected members of the club. Before that I was a lost soul searching for my place.

“The prodigal son has returned.” Dedge was the first to acknowledge me and he did so with his typical greeting, a snarky smile, and a shot glass filled until it was spilling over the edge.

“Pass,” I grunted as I took the seat next to him and placed my helmet on the bar.

“You’re coming off the road and passing on this?” He nodded at the shot then turned it up and down his throat, face twisting slightly from the sweet heat. One I was more than familiar with.

“Split a bottle with Jones before I hit the road.”

“Ahh, ol’ Jonesy boy wouldn’t take no for an answer?” Dedge chuckled, pouring himself another shot. “What’s the old man up to these days?”

“Getting pissy drunk and fucking women way too young for him.”

Dedge grinned wide and nodded. Jones was one of our elders. At sixty plus he lived his life with no regrets and by his own rules. Evident by the twenty-something women he kept in his bed. They were legal and consenting so no one had any complaints but his habits always found their way into the conversation.

Not that he cared...

“Much of the same then.” Dedge offered a lazy nod before continuing. “How’d it go?”

“About as well as expected.”

“Sanchez was happy to see you, I take it.”

“No warm welcome but based on the guys that greeted me as soon as I crossed the state line he was smart enough to know how to roll out the red carpet.” I chuckled, brushing a hand over my head remembering the four bikers that pulled onto the road boxing me in until I reached the clubhouse Sanchez claimed as his own.

“Had an escort then did you?”

“Yeah, you know that makes him feel like somebody.”

“You should have dropped the fuckers one-by-one to remind him he isn’t anybody.”

“Should have, but then what’s the fun in that?”

“As much as you like target practice, I’d say it would have been hell of a lot of fun.”

“You have a point.”

My eyes traveled around the bar. It was just after ten in the morning so the place was pretty empty. Later tonight, there would be a crowd of regulars, most of the guys from our club and the women who were trying to stay in their favor. Also, a few prospects and those hopefuls of becoming prospects, but for now, the place was deserted.

“Padre in the back?” I was exhausted and ready to report in so that I could take my ass home. If I was lucky, I’d get enough sleep to recharge so that I could swing through later for a hot meal and a few drinks with the guys. At the moment all I could foresee in my near future was collapsing face first on my bed.

“Yeah, got some woman with him. She came in tossing around Koda’s name and demanding to see him.”

Dedge had only been with the club for a few years now. Unlike most of us, he didn’t know Koda personally, only the stories that had been shared about him. I frowned at the mention of Koda’s name. He’d been killed eight years ago, didn’t have many friends outside the club, and damn sure didn’t have any women that would be stupid enough to use his name as clout. Koda only had one woman that gained his respect and she’d died in his arms when a rival club pulled up on them one night to settle a debt. Koda had a lot of enemies because he just didn’t give a damn about how he lived. As an enforcer turned president he pissed a lot of people off. Same as I had done but that was expected; Koda mentored me. Molded me into his image and I took pride in being just as respected and feared as he had been.

“She gave Koda’s name?”

“Yeah and was adamant about only talking to Padre but she called him Cleveland. That shit was weird.”

I frowned while attempting to wrack my brain to come up with anyone that would be crazy enough to use Koda as leverage. The only person who came to me was...

Within seconds I was on my feet. There was no way in hell she'd be here cashing in on a favor. Koda would be turning over in his grave which meant that if she was really here, I needed to make damn sure Padre didn't agree to whatever nonsense she was demanding. The club helped raised her which meant Padre had a soft spot for the brown-eyed little girl who grew into a woman that managed to have a hold on me.

By the time I reached the back, I could feel it in my bones. She was here. I wasn't sure how I knew but the awareness of her crawled beneath my skin, taunting me with memories of the decision I'd made years ago. One I regretted but understood to be what was best for her, then and hell, even now. We all had our regrets, *she* was mine.

“Do you want the job or not?”

“No,” I barked, stepping into Padre's office. He leaned back forcing the tattered leather chair that held his massive body to tilt toward the wall. His expression was stoic, a huge contrast to the fiery glare I got from Yahri. I wanted to smile at how pissed she looked but she wasn't my concern at the moment. I needed to state my case to Padre because ultimately the decision of whether or not she had access to us would be his to make. I was an enforcer, one hand selected by him to stand at his side. But Padre was Club President so if he made the call there was little I could do about it other than be as pissed as Yahri was now for me interrupting them.

“Pharaoh. I didn't know you were back.”

“Just pulled up, can I have a minute?”

“No.” This no came from Yahri. She was smart, always had been. There was no doubt she knew my minute alone with Padre would be to object to whatever she was asking for.

“Whatever you need to discuss with him can wait until we’re done.” She glared even harder at me before turning to Padre to say, “Yes, I want the job. When can I start?”

A low growl traveled through my chest before I moved deeper into Padre’s office. “You’re not working here or at any Wolf establishments. That was decided years ago or do I need to remind you...”

“No, my memory is crystal clear...” The heated glare she presented hinted at the memories she referenced that didn’t have a damn thing to do with her father banning her access to the club. She was referring to the decision I made to choose Wolves over her. “My father died eight years ago, Pharaoh, and so did his rule over my life.” Her eyes left me and returned to Padre.

“I’m taking the job.”

Padre’s thoughtful expression moved between Yahri and me before he spoke. “Give us a minute...” Her eyes went wide with surprise before settling into anger which prompted him to add a softer, “please”.

Yahri shot to her feet, the motion so aggressive that the chair she’d been in scraped the concrete floor and moved back a few inches. “Fine, but I’m not leaving.”

That was directed at me, further confirmed when she shoved past where I stood, making contact. I watched until she was out of the office, chuckling as I closed the door then settled into the chair she’d just vacated and gave Padre my attention.

“I know what you’re thinking...”

“Oh yeah and what’s that?” I shot back as I spoke the answer in my head.

That her father didn’t want her anywhere near this place or around any of us, not even me.

“She’s in trouble, Pharaoh.”

My brows pinched. “What kind of trouble?”

“The kind that involves Devil Riders MC and puts her life in danger.” Devil Riders was a rival club run by a guy named Chop who was about as morally sound as the devil himself. Not the kind of guy any woman should be caught up with. The guys under him weren’t worth the headache either but women still found their way into their sordid web of bad decisions.

“How the fuck is she caught up with DR?” My voice was low. Anger began thrumming under my skin.

“I didn’t get into all that with her. Once she mentioned their club, all that mattered was doing what was right.”

I quickly shook my head. “There’s nothing *right* about her being connected to us. Koda...”

“Wouldn’t like it. I know but he’d like it even less if something happened to his daughter and his brothers didn’t do everything in their power to keep her safe.”

My jaw tensed with the reality of what he was saying. Koda would expect us to step up. I knew this but having Yahri around wasn’t good for me and would be worse for her. Still I offered a nod.

“She’s under my watch. That’s the only way I agree to this.”

And she’s off limits to any of the brothers.

“You’re making demands like the decision is yours, Pharaoh.” Padre’s expression remained neutral. I understood the underlying threat. If he wanted to pull rank he could and there wasn’t much I could do about it aside from walking away from the only family I had.

And her.

Regardless, I refused to back down. It wasn’t in my nature which Padre counted on under any other circumstance. I wasn’t sure that would fly now but I couldn’t help who I was.

“The decision is mine and only mine,” I ground out, not faltering or leaving room for argument. We remained in a silent standoff for a few more minutes. Padre was the first to

break but only to glance at the door that shielded us from Yahri's prying eyes and ears.

"Fair enough," he eventually said, to which I offered a tight nod then stood and headed to the door. He stopped me seconds before my hand reached the knob.

"We don't need a war, Pharaoh. If you can't take this on with a level head, then I will step in, understood?"

"Yeah," I murmured before walking out of his office to find Yahri leaning against the wall, eyes narrowed on me.

"Let's go."

"I'm not going anywhere with you." She frowned so hard I would bet my ass she chipped her teeth from the pressure keeping her jaw locked.

"It's me or nothing. Your choice."

Her eyes moved past me. I could feel Padre's presence before he spoke up. "Koda wouldn't want you here, but if you have to be, he'd want Pharaoh to be the one keeping after you."

While Padre attempted to squash the situation civilly I took my time admiring the woman that Yahri had become. She was the same but different. Same eyes, lips, and soft feminine features but her body now housed new curves, a roundness to her breasts that pushed against her top and an ass that had my dick trying to get in on the conversation. She'd changed a lot.

"I'm not a got damn kid. I don't need anybody *keeping after me.*"

But that damn mouth was still the same.

I snorted and walked away. "If that were true, you wouldn't be here. Now let's go."

There was no point in worrying about whether or not she'd follow. She would, if only for the possibility of going another round with me and winning an argument. Yahri never had been a gracious loser which was why this little arrangement was about to seriously complicate my life but damn if I wasn't looking forward to it.

CHAPTER
FOUR

Yahri.

Pharaoh Vaughan. The only man who ever pushed every single button for me, good and bad. Only when he was in my life, I was too young to do anything about it. Well other than fantasize about the things he could do but wouldn't because my father would have killed him, painfully and slowly. Pharaoh came into my life when I was fifteen. He wasn't around much then. He only showed his face a few times at our house but I knew for certain he spent most of his time with my father. That next year, after he earned my father's trust, Pharaoh was at our home almost every day. He had become a part of our family but in different ways. My parents treated him like their son, I saw him as forbidden fruit. That bad boy who I wasn't supposed to lust after but did.

And now I was forced to deal with him. I was no longer that sixteen year old who had an innocent crush on a troubled kid. I was now an adult who was lusting after a dangerous man. Make no mistake about it, Pharaoh was all man and ten times more dangerous than he had been when I'd first laid eyes on him as a teen or the last time I'd seen him, eight years ago, two years after my mother was killed and my father had sent me away. The only reason I showed my face was because it was the only way to say goodbye to the last piece of the life I had before.

My father's funeral.

Reality, however, didn't stop me from following behind him through Sweet Auburn at a safe distance because I refused

to enjoy how good he smelled or allow it to cloud my judgement. Those eyes of his, shit they were intense. Eyes that could strip away every one of your layers including the bullshit and lies. Those deep brown orbs pierced through you and peeked at your soul, whether you offered an invitation or not. And damn if they weren't already wreaking havoc on my rational brain.

“Where’s your car?” he barked after snatching up a helmet from the bar on the way to the exit.

“I don’t have one,” I muttered, stealing glances at the customers and staff eyeing us. I didn’t look directly at any of them but I could feel their attention and see a few curious stares in my peripheral. It was possible they weren’t staring at me, more Pharaoh because he was well worth looking at.

Not that I wasn’t, but today I was flying under the radar with my jeans and comfy, worn hoodie. My bob, which I usually wore straight, was in loose curls and tucked behind my ears to keep it from flopping in my face. I’d been told I was easy on the eyes but today there wasn’t much to look at. I didn’t care about how I looked, only getting a job here at Sweet Auburn which came with an added layer of protection that I didn’t have out there on my own. And now I had been handed off to Pharaoh.

“Then how did you get here, Ri?”

My core tightened at the use of those two letters. Coming from him, it felt far more intimate than it should have.

“Don’t worry about it.” I stopped a few steps onto the gravel and dirt lot, folding my arms across my chest. “What’s the deal? Are you going to let me work here or not?”

A million and one thoughts flashed in his eyes. There were so many things he wanted to say. I sensed it; could feel his mind processing the objections one by one but all I got was a single word.

“Depends.”

“On what?” I clenched my jaw hard and that was truly a task because watching his notably handsome face, piercing

eyes, and unfairly sexy body, made it damn near impossible not to fall on smile at how nice the view was.

“On what the hell you got yourself into. Here.” Two long strides brought him back to me where he shoved the matte black helmet into my chest. A warning look to not drop his precious lid followed before he released his fingers and turned away to mount his bike. My stubborn streak kicked in and I wanted to say fuck you but the urge to be on that damn Ducati, with my arms wrapped snugly around his waist and my face flush against his shoulder blades was stronger.

“Where are we going.”

“To wherever you’re staying to get your shit. You’re coming with me.”

“No I’m not.” My protest didn’t hold much merit, especially after the look he gave. If I was being honest, two nights in a hotel alone, worried about whether or not Jarren or any of the other Devils would find me had been enough. I wasn’t thrilled about being with Pharaoh but I knew for sure, I would be safer than I had been since Jarren blew up my cozy little world.

“Hilton off State Road 29.”

“Why the fuck you out there in the middle of nowhere?”

Groaning I moved toward his bike, climbing on the back. “Can we save the interrogation for later?”

Pharaoh wasn’t the arguing type and I sensed that he was already fed up with me. His eyes narrowed while I took my time preparing for the ride that I was more than dreading. Being close to him wasn’t something my mind or body was prepared for.

But it was happening...

After I was comfortable, I yanked the helmet down onto my head, not bothering to mention that he was going without one. Pharaoh was a Wolf. All man. He’d insist he didn’t need it. The man was as intense as ever glaring over his shoulder, keeping a trained focus on me, not so much as blinking until

the massive helmet covered my head and was strapped in place. At least he cared.

Or maybe he's just annoyed with me delaying his departure.

I startled briefly when his large, callused hand caught mine, tugging me forward to ensure my body was securely pressed to his and drawing my arms around his waist. The heat from his body crept through my clothing, slowly penetrating every inch of my skin. I settled into his frame but didn't miss the ways his muscle knotted with tension. There wasn't much time to process what that meant because vibrations rose from beneath us and the roar of his bike's engine demanded my attention. With my palms pressed flat to the hard muscles of his stomach, I braced myself.

"Stay close." His voice elevated over the roaring engine seconds before he was backing out of the lot, gravel and dirt crunching beneath the tires of his bike as we departed.

Neither of us said much after we reached the hotel. While I quickly collected what few things I'd managed to grab before fleeing my apartment, which I never appreciated more than I did now, I shoved everything into my duffle and backpack. While I snatched up my chargers and a few other personal items from the bathroom, Pharaoh watched my every move from across the room. He was propped against the door with his jean clad legs spread shoulder-width apart, arms locked across his massive chest, and a scowl engrained on his face.

Why did he have to be so evil and sexy?

By the time I was done zipping my duffle and sliding my arms through the straps of my backpack, Pharaoh was in my personal space, yanking my duffle from the bed. He led the way out of my room, inspecting the hallway and elevator as we moved to leave the hotel. I tensed at how he moved like a man who had enemies. I knew for certain he did, but that didn't worry me because he had been groomed by the most capable man I knew. *My dad.* The reminder of how one mistake had taken him from me had my chest tightening and

my eyes locking on the man securing my duffle into a side compartment of his bike.

As a kid, I wanted this life but as a woman who understood the dangers associated with it my pulse raced at the thought of losing someone else I cared about.

Unfortunately this is my only option.

Once again, I was on the back of Pharaoh's bike, holding onto his solid frame, the heat from his body balancing the chill from the crisp fall air as he sped through town. It didn't take long before we hit the highway, his bike picking up speed with a calculated ease. The roar of the engine blended into the wind as I held on tight and allowed myself to feel like this was where I belonged.

This was the Pharaoh I knew. The risk taker. He sped up and the bike jolted forward preparing for a bend in the road that came up on us faster than I liked. A clear sign that he was moving far beyond the intended speed limit. Pharaoh's body gracefully leaned into the sharp curve bringing mine with him to the point where the bike was dangerously close to the pavement. As quickly as it began, the bike repositioned pulling up abruptly as the road straightened out into a long stretch and I exhaled the breath I'd been holding.

Fucking show off.

My heart was working overtime in my chest no matter how much I trusted Pharaoh. He was a skilled rider, with years of practice but it had been a long time since I'd been on the back of a bike with him. I had no idea where we were going and truthfully, in the moment, I didn't care as long as I could embrace the present. Us together and me feeling safe for the first time in days.

When we crossed over into a suburb just on the perimeter of Diamond Falls, an area not far from Sweet Auburn, the city faded away. Trees lined the highway between open grassy areas. We reached a small, gated neighborhood where Pharaoh pulled up to the massive wrought iron fence, pausing and revving his engine while he used a black plastic card to grant us access. His bike idled in place until the gate slowly opened.

After lifting his booted feet, he tilted right, gliding through the open passage, hooking the first corner which led us to the back of the community. He pulled into a driveway, then garage, of a small, two-story brick house. It was simple but nice and definitely not what I'd expect from Pharaoh. Far too domesticated.

Inside the garage, we parked next to a Land Rover Defender. If I knew this man the way I assumed I did, it was a 1994 110 in midnight blue. He had always been obsessed with that truck so it made sense that he now had one. To the left of it was another bike; smaller and sleeker but also midnight blue like the one we were on. I climbed off first and went to unfasten the side compartment to get my bag but Pharaoh shut that down.

"I got it," his deep voice rumbled as if I was somehow annoying him. He must have forgotten, I hadn't asked to be here. He demanded it. His long body was off the seat swiftly, exposing his comfortable nature with the beast we'd just been on.

After removing my duffle, he took out a backpack that belonged to him before leading the way into the house through the garage. It smelled clean but I could tell he'd either just moved in recently or didn't spend a lot of time here. As we moved through the kitchen into the living room I realized there wasn't much to the place. The house was cozy and new but sparsely decorated. In the living room, there was only a sofa set and TV. No accents, photos, or any other décor.

Okay so either he lives alone or his woman doesn't care much for comfy living.

"So, what now?"

"I get some sleep and you figure out how to keep yourself busy while I do. *Here*, in my house."

"That sounds like I'm your prisoner?" I tilted my head to the side glaring at him and he coolly chuckled before saying, "No, but until I know why the fuck you're the last place your father ever wanted you to be, asking for favors from the same

people he did his best to keep you distanced from, you're not leaving."

"Then basically I *am* your prisoner," I muttered. He ignored me and moved on.

"There's food in the kitchen. Not much but enough to make do if you're hungry. I have a spare room but there's nothing in it for now, so the sofa is yours. There are towels in the hall closet and I'm guessing you have whatever else you need."

He dropped my duffle on the floor next to the sofa and made his way to his bedroom since he mentioned getting some sleep.

"Wait so that's it?"

"For now, yes. I've been on the road for the past twenty-four hours. I need sleep before I deal with whatever bullshit you brought to my door."

"I didn't ask to be here, *Pharaoh*. I can leave."

"You were always smart, Ri. I can't imagine that has changed since the last time I saw you. You knew exactly what you were doing when you showed up here. Give me a few hours to get some sleep then we'll talk."

"What if I don't want to stay here and be your prisoner? You do know I can leave if I want. This is a free country." I glared at him and my mouth dropped seconds later when I watched him pull out his phone, swipe a few times, then something beeped. My fists clenched.

"What did you just do?"

I knew the answer and wasn't sure why I was asking other than the annoyance that settled in quicker than I knew what to do with.

He didn't bother granting a response other than a door slamming once he traveled up the stairs and disappeared from my line of sight.

Son of a bitch.

I'm locked in.

He set the alarm which meant I wasn't going anywhere. Well at least I couldn't without putting an innocent black male on the radar. I'd have to explain to the neighbors and possibly the police why I came here willingly and was now trying to escape. I also knew there wasn't a place on earth where Pharaoh couldn't find me if that's what he really wanted. If I was being honest, I didn't want to leave.

After Pharaoh made his rude departure, I spent my time alone getting acquainted with his home. Just like the living room, the rest of the house was sparsely decorated. The guest room he'd mentioned only housed a few boxes, no furniture, and the bathroom was just as empty. The bathtub and sink fixtures still had the stickers on them from when they'd been installed by the contractor.

The good thing was that no women had access to his home, unless they only spent time in his bedroom. My stomach twisted as the thought crossed my mind. Regardless of the fact that I hadn't been a part of his life in ten years, there was nothing more between the two of us but a teenage crush on my end for a man that was deemed off limits. I still didn't like the idea of him being with anyone else. My feelings for him had been unrequited or maybe they hadn't considering he'd kissed me...

Once.

After I finished my tour, I decided to fix myself something to eat. Luckily I was resourceful because what he considered food was more or less a combination of random things, most of which had far exceeded their expiration date. I managed to pull together a grilled cheese which I ate while sitting on the counter in the kitchen since there wasn't a dining set nor were there any stools that lined the small bar that made up one side of the kitchen.

Typical man.

I could imagine Pharaoh spent most of his time either sleeping, on the sofa watching TV, or in the garage messing over his bikes. I grinned at the memory of my father doing the

same then a wave of sadness took over as I remembered the last time I'd seen him alive. It had been just after my mother's funeral when he packed me up and sent me to live with his sister.

Exhaling a deep breath, I cleaned the small mess I made and settled in on the sofa where I ended up drifting off to sleep. The past forty-eight hours had been exhausting and it was finally catching up with me. The added bonus of being under the same roof as a man I knew would protect my life with his own, even if only because he loved and respected my father, gave me just enough comfort to allow my mind to drift and before long everything settled and I was out.

I awakened hours later in complete darkness, feeling confused about where I was until I blinked away the grogginess. My neck was stiff from having been awkwardly positioned while I slept. The first thing I did was stand and extend my arms above my head, leaning slightly back to ensure I worked the kinks out of my back. Exhaling a huff, I looked around trying to decide what I was about to do with myself until my stomach growled making the decision for me.

I fumbled through the darkness until I found a light switch that illuminated the living room via a chandelier made of brass squares and Edison bulbs.

Pharaoh has a chandelier.

Such a huge contrast to the ruggedly brusque man that I'd experienced a few hours ago. Speaking of my not so gracious host, I decided it was time to disrupt his beauty rest. He'd said a few hours and by my calculations I'd given him nine. If that wasn't enough, then tough shit. I needed to eat something other than cheese and bread that was inches away from its expiration date. However I supposed the meal was befitting considering I was imprisoned in his home. Weren't cheese and bread staples in a correctional facility?

After I climbed the stairs and posted up outside of Pharaoh's bedroom I leaned in close to the door but didn't hear a peep on the other side. Instead of knocking, I gently pulled

down the lever and peeked inside. The room was dark aside from a light glow that illuminated from the bathroom.

It was just enough light for me to make out Pharaoh's long frame stretched across his massive bed. His upper body was bare and his lower half was covered in navy sweats which sat low enough to expose the waistband of his briefs. My eyes moved up taking in his slim waist and the flanks of muscle that lined his back hidden beneath intricate designs of etched black lines creating skillful designs. Those were new. I'd seen him shirtless before, albeit when I was a kid, but back then the only tattoos he had were on his arms and neck.

"Stop being a creep, Yahri," I mumbled, reprimanding myself for the invasion of his privacy. I rapped on the door hoping that would be enough to wake him. When he didn't so much as flinch, my knuckles made contact with the door again but with a little more force. This time I managed to at least get a shift of his body position. Pharaoh's head flipped from one side to the other and his arm shoved deeper under the pillow that cradled it. Annoyed, I stepped in the room which smelled just like him, stopping just at the foot of the bed.

"Hey, sleeping beauty."

"What," he growled, voice rough and scratchy.

"If you're holding me hostage, the least you can do is feed me."

"Feed yourself, Ri."

"I did earlier but I'm not enthused about trying my luck with another stale bread and out of date grilled cheese sandwich."

He grunted and mumbled under his breath. I couldn't make out what he was saying but I assumed it wasn't very pleasant as the look he gave me when he finally lifted his body from the mattress wasn't friendly.

"Give me a minute," he rasped, positioning himself on the side of the bed, allowing me a better view of him.

I couldn't tear my eyes away as he roughly brushed his large hands over his head then down his face. The muscle of

his arms, shoulders, and chest flexed mirroring a domino effect from the motion.

When his head tilted up again, eyes narrowed with annoyance because I was still there, I shrugged and folded my arms across my chest. His brown eyes settled on me and heat crawled up my neck from the harshness and intensity of his gaze. I didn't falter. He growled under his breath and stood, walking past me toward the bathroom not bothering to shut himself in. I rolled my eyes the minute I heard his steady stream and decided I'd made my point and could now wait in the living room. This living arrangement was going to be fun or kill me slowly.

The longer I waited for Pharaoh the more anxious I got. Through all my lustful gawking I'd temporarily forgotten how I ended up here. I would have to explain how my life had done a one eighty and I'd managed to get myself caught up with the type of man my father had moved me away to avoid. Had I known who Jarren really was when I met him, I would have never accepted that drink he'd sent me six months ago.

But I had and now there was no going back...

CHAPTER
FIVE

Pharaoh.

This isn't going to work.

I keep repeating the same thought over and over in my head, only it was a waste of time. Me and Yahri under the same roof was a horrible idea. I knew it, she knew it, and I would bet my ass that Padre was aware of the same. This was a total disaster I'd placed myself in by taking on the responsibility of being Yahri's personal keeper. But, it was happening regardless of what any of us thought of the idea, good or bad.

If Yahri was back, then she was under my watch until I figured out what the hell she had gotten herself caught up in. Once I was sure she was no longer in the line of fire, then she could go on with her life and I would have mine back. *Another damn lie.* She was here and I wasn't letting go so easily this time around.

Once I finished in the bathroom, I dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and boots. The least I could do was feed her and that wasn't happening here considering most of my meals came from Sweet Auburn. Between my runs and other club business, my time at home was spent sleeping between whatever responsibilities consumed most of my time. Occasionally there were a few women, but never here. I had rules against sharing my personal space. My lifestyle created a list of enemies longer than the open roads I traveled and I'd learned early in life to never give anyone access. Especially

women. They were the quickest way to get caught up and I refused to be another statistic.

Yet another reason I was so fucking pissed that I hadn't so much as flinched about the decision to bring Yahri here. That damn woman scrambled my common sense. Might as well add that to the list of my current trust issues. She and I needed to talk. I'd hate to think that Yahri would cross me, but the mention of the Devils, a longtime rival of ours, meant that she could possibly be here for reasons that would land us on different sides. The decision I made years ago could have easily given her just cause to seek retribution. Women got nasty when it came to a broken heart and I'd certainly damaged hers, even if unintentionally. She felt betrayed, but at the time she was a kid and couldn't understand the life I wanted. The one I pledged my allegiance to not long after she was gone.

True enough, Yahri had been raised by a father who was president of the Wolf Warriors and might have witnessed things that most kids hadn't but Koda did his best to shield both his wife and daughter from who he really was and the life he had been loyal to. The truth of how much he loved Yahri and wanted to keep her out of harm's way became painfully evident with his decision to send her away ten years ago. Koda couldn't change who he was nor could he erase his past. He didn't want to. That same past took his wife and eventually took him from the rest of us.

After his wife was murdered Koda panicked and sent Yahri to the safest place he had access to, his sister's home in Richmond, Virginia. Yahri went to college there and eventually made it her home. That meant she was miles away from the chaos and dangers associated with his life. The same dangers that hovered like a dark cloud plaguing my life.

That was then, this was now. Although I didn't regret the life Koda offered me, I did regret the decision that accepting this life meant losing the one good thing I had. I understood but that didn't negate the fact that losing any chance to have Yahri in my life hurt like a bitch.

But now I had her back...

“We need to talk.”

The sound of my voice had Yahri spinning on her heels to face me. I crossed the living room, pointing to the sofa. A flash of rebellion shifted behind her eyes but she ended the pacing she'd been doing and adhered to my silent demand. While she took a seat in the middle of the sofa, I drug a wooden chair from the corner, positioning it a few feet away, folding my body into it.

After a brief stare down I drilled out my first question. “Who are you running from?”

Another flash of rebellion was swarming in her eyes. Determined and stubborn, her glare remained glued to me. She didn't speak right away, however. After a long silence that was simply to annoy me, she sat up straighter, squaring her shoulders. “I'm not running from anyone.”

I smirked, allowing my gaze to slowly crawl over her body. It was intentional because I knew she was lying and I knew the weight of my observation only made her more nervous. I couldn't help myself because Yahri always liked to play tough, but right now she was scared or at the very least worried.

“For the past ten years, you've obeyed your father's rules about—”

“Obeyed?” she sneered, rolling her eyes. “I'm not a damn puppy.”

I chuckled, nodding. “You *agreed* to his rules about staying away from the Wolves but you're here. That can only mean one thing...” I paused, leaning forward and resting my elbows on my knees so that she and I were eye level. “You've gotten into something that you need protection from. You're running from something and I need to know who or what that is or I can't help you.”

“I didn't ask for your help,” she shot back but I didn't falter. Her little attitude didn't mean shit to me. My only concern was what needed to be done to keep her safe.

“Technically you did the minute you walked your ass up in Sweet Auburn asking for a job.”

“A job that has nothing to do with you. Padre’s president, not you.”

I nodded because she was right, but what she was leaving out, the most important part, was that my relationship with Koda was different than any of the other brothers, including Padre’s. Koda might not have wanted me involved with his daughter but he damn sure would have expected me to be the one standing in his place if she needed protection. This wasn’t a foreign concept to Yahri. She knew the minute she stepped foot in our establishment, she was placing herself in my care, even if by default.

“You want to argue insignificant shit or you want to tell me why you’re here?”

Her eyes narrowed and tension swept over Yahri’s features. Not a good sign which was evident by her next demand.

“You want answers? Fine, you can have them, but you’ll have to give me some too.”

There it is.

“Answers about what?”

“Why you chose my father and the Wolves over me.”

This day was a long time coming and as much as I didn’t owe her a damn thing, she felt as if I did. Yahri was never mine. She was an eighteen year old kid who had a crush on a man who didn’t deserve her light. My world was dark as shit back then, still was today. She could never fully understand how bad I was for her. It was time to enlighten Yahri but first I’d feed her.

“You got a jacket?”

Those chocolate eyes of hers narrowed once more as I stood and crossed the room, my boots thudding against the floor to the small closet just beyond the kitchen. I grabbed two leather jackets, one littered with Wolf markings and the other

just a black, soft leather riding jacket. I walked back to the living room and tossed that one to Yahri. She wasn't mine, so I couldn't rightfully let her wear my patches without disrespecting my club. There were rules I took seriously more than most. Loyalty was important to me and the Wolves were about the only thing I was loyal to.

“What's this for?” She stood gripping the jacket, frowning at me.

“We're taking my bike. Your ass never could take a little breeze.” She'd been on a bike with me plenty of times before, but back then it was one that belonged to her father that he'd allowed me access to. There had been plenty of nights where the temperature dropped dangerously low and I handed off my jacket so that Yahri could brave the cold.

“Just because you're some alien specimen that can ride in the middle of December with only a t-shirt doesn't mean there's anything wrong with me.”

She presented her argument but didn't waste any time slipping her arms through the sleeves. “Where are we going anyway?”

“You demanded answers and food. Figured we'd knock them both out at the same time.”

“Imagine that. Pharaoh being cooperative.”

“It's been a long time, Ri. A lot has changed...” I paused, taking her in once more. Time had been good to her and that body. “With both of us.”

Her lips parted slightly from the way my eyes crawled slowly over her frame. She looked good, damn good. *In my house, wearing my jacket.* The thought of having her on my bike with her arms circling my waist and her legs spread wide for me, wasn't something I needed to be focused on, but at the moment, that was exactly where my thoughts detoured.

“You're right. A lot has changed. I'm not the same naïve teenager whose father sent you to embarrass me in front of my friends.”

I couldn't count the number of times Koda had sent me after Yahri because she was bound and determined to do what she wanted and make his life a living hell.

"If you knew I was coming then you shouldn't have snuck out as much as you did."

Yahri grinned. "Maybe I liked the idea of knowing you were coming for me."

She stepped around the sofa and pushed past me to leave. I chuckled, shaking my head. Yeah this shit was going to be hard but I was up for the challenge.

We took my Icon Sheen instead of my Ducati. It was smaller and had a lot more speed. Smaller also meant having Yahri closer as I navigated through the city. I could get used to the feel of her body pressed against mine, holding onto me like I was hers to hold. The guys always talked shit about me never allowing women on my bikes. They had their rotations. Some had wives, others steady girlfriends. My closest guy, Bash, had just stepped into a serious relationship which granted him an instant family since Cambri had a daughter, but I skipped all that. Although I fucked with a few, my bikes were just as sacred and protected as where I chose to rest my head. I wasn't into giving access to just anybody. So this was new. As I pulled up to our destination with the warmth of Yahri cradling my body I was grateful I hadn't been open to just any woman in my life. This experience was intimate and one that only belonged to one woman I was currently with.

A woman I planned on getting closer to.

After securing my bike and our helmets, Yahri and I walked inside. There wasn't much to it but the food was good and the atmosphere was relaxed. There was always a crowd but one that understood the concept of minding their business. As much as I loved my brothers, I occasionally needed to step away from them. Savory Soul allowed me to do that while still feeling a sense of home. The podium just beyond the doors had a handwritten note stating seat yourself. It was an aged, yellowing piece of paper that had been there since I first stumbled upon the place years ago.

With my hand at the small of Yahri's back, I guided her to a table in the back corner that provided a good view of the entire place and the exits. Albeit small and off the grid, trouble could find you anywhere and I made a point of always being prepared.

"This is nice." The sarcasm in her voice as her eyes swept the building had me grinning.

"Not good enough for you? I didn't think you were the type to want linen tablecloths and polished silverware."

Her eyes shot over to me. "That much hasn't changed." She flashed me a cute smile. "I'm not complaining. I love a good greasy meal and a couple beers to wash it down with."

"Then I made the right call because that's exactly what you'll get here." I winked and she rolled her eyes.

Louise, the owner's wife, approached the table a few minutes later to take our drink orders and to do a little harmless flirting like she did every time I visited. She was in her early sixties and happily married but took pleasure in trying to embarrass me. Yahri insisted I decide what was best on the menu so I ordered for us both. The food was out twenty minutes later. After her first few bites of the chicken and rice, which she raved about, I decided it was time to get down to business.

"You ready to tell me what brought you home?"

"Home?" She scoffed. "Diamond Falls hasn't been home for me since my dad shipped me to my aunt."

"It's still your home, Ri. Regardless of why you left."

"I didn't leave."

Not willingly. He made you go.

"We back to arguing insignificant things?"

She lifted a shoulder in a lazy shrug then wrapped her fingers around the beer she was working on. Her second after finishing off her Arnold Palmer, but I was driving so I didn't care. "What's insignificant to you is important to me..."

“Yahri...” My patience was wavering.

“Fine, I’ll let it go but I already told you. If you want answers from me, then I get some from you first.”

“I’m not sure what you expect me to say...”

“I expect you to tell me the truth about why you kissed me then, a few hours later, helped my dad pack my things in his truck; agreeing that it was best for me to go live with my aunt, states away.”

She was angry. I could hear it in her tone but she was also hurt which I could see in her eyes and feel in my chest. I didn’t like that shit but the decision was best for her then and had I been given the choice all over again, I would have still agreed.

“I shouldn’t have kissed you. Your mom’s funeral was tough...” I paused, raking my hand down my face. “For all of us but especially you and your dad. I wasn’t thinking straight. You were so damn sad and I would have given anything to take that away from you...”

“So you kissed me and decided that me losing one more person who I cared about was the best thing for me.”

“You didn’t care about me, Ri. You didn’t know shit about me and I apologize for kissing you because I had no right...”

“No, you didn’t but it happened and you’re wrong. I knew exactly who you were and I did care about you. *Did*, until you chose my father over me.” Her eyes lowered to my jacket. I could see her focus on the Wolf Warriors patch before she added. “I hope you’re happy. You got what you wanted.”

I snorted, shaking my head before leaning over the table in her direction. “No, I didn’t get what I wanted. I wanted *you*, but I had no business wanting someone so damn right when I was so got damn wrong. And stop saying I chose the Wolves and your father over you because that’s not how it happened. That’s the furthest thing from the truth.”

“Is it?” she challenged.

“Yeah, it is. What I chose was my freedom.”

Her face twisted slightly before she asked, “What does that even mean?”

I laughed lightly, the act laced with sarcasm. “The night before your mother’s funeral I made a huge mistake. One that I didn’t regret back then and I still don’t now...”

Our eyes locked in a heated gaze before I continued. “My uncle wasn’t shit, but you already know that. Everybody can’t handle power. He damn sure couldn’t and in small towns like ours cops are top of the food chain. He didn’t like that I was spending so much time with your father. The man had a hard on for the MCs in town and made it his personal mission to fuck with them as much as humanly possible. As much as he hated me being connected to your father he also saw it as an opportunity. He’d been trying for months to convince me to help him get on the inside. He wanted me to pitch myself as a prospect. If the Wolves accepted me then I could get information on what they had going on with the club...”

Her expression dropped. “You didn’t...” The words came out as a gasp.

“No, I didn’t.”

I could see the tension from my potential betrayal leave her body. “So then what does that have to do with me?”

“The night before your mom’s funeral I told my uncle I wasn’t going to help him. I would never betray your father that way. I had no plans on becoming a Wolf. I wasn’t trying to use him. Hell your pops was good to me when no one else was. That was the only reason I hung around. I wouldn’t mess that up. He had my loyalty. Koda was a good man and I trusted him. That was it. I would never have used your father as an in to become a Wolf for my own gain or anyone else’s. My life was so fucked up back then. Your family was the only good thing I had. *You* were the best part of that.”

I had been around Koda and his family for a few years, back then Yahri was a kid and even though I was only two years older, it felt like twenty. Her life was normal. Two parent home with a mother and father who adored her. Mine wasn’t. I ended up with my uncle after my parents died. Being his

charity case made him look good and as an added bonus he collected a check. My parents made sure I would be taken care of but he spent every dime on anything but me. We weren't close. I spent most of my time avoiding him, doing things that compromised his image. The good ol' Sheriff Vaughan wasn't happy about my decisions or me. I experienced things Yahri never had and didn't need to so I kept things cordial. Although Koda never warned me to stay away from her, I knew he wouldn't have approved.

“So then I don't understand why you agreed with him, that I should leave.”

“That night, when I told my uncle I wasn't prospecting with the Wolves to be his informant he got pissed. We argued and things got physical. Shit was bad, Ri. I was a lot bigger and stronger so when he came at me, I tried my best not to take it there but he started going in on how I was all fucked up and that my pops would be disappointed. I lost it. I don't really know what happened other than I blacked out and when I snapped out of it, my fists and his face were bloody and bruised. My uncle was barely breathing. I panicked and didn't know what to do so I called your pops. He came right away with some of the guys. They didn't ask me any questions, at least not then. Just told me they'd take care of it. I was freaking the fuck out. My uncle was a cop and had just proved he didn't give a fuck about me. Locking me up for assault, possibly even attempted murder, wouldn't have fazed him in the least. I was going to prison. I knew it. So I did what your pops told me to do. I left, went to the clubhouse, and waited. He showed up a few hours later and told me things were handled. I didn't know what that meant at the time. Didn't care. I trusted Koda. The next morning I was at your house for the funeral. Your pops called me into the garage and showed me a story running on the news. It was about my uncle. They said someone broke in, robbed the place, and left him for dead. I couldn't believe it. Again, I didn't ask questions. All I knew was that it was handled and I wasn't going to jail. Your pops didn't ask for shit from me. So yeah, when he decided that the best way to keep you safe was for you not to be around him I didn't say a word. It wasn't my place to anyway. You were

headed to college so it was perfect timing. Who was I to say a damn thing? Your mom got killed because of who he was. He feared the same thing happening to you. *And so did I.* Making you leave was his way of keeping you safe from his life. Me agreeing was my way of keeping you safe from mine. I wasn't what you needed, Ri. Even if you don't understand, you have to at least respect that I was doing what I thought was right."

She stared at me for what felt like an eternity before she whispered, "I didn't know any of that."

"You didn't need to." A different server approached and I ordered us another round. An Arnold Palmer for Yahri, her favorite drink, and a glass of Sweet Auburn for me. Sweet Auburn was how I'd found out about this place. As a prospect I had been tasked with deliveries to the local businesses. When I met Odell and his wife Louise they made me promise to come back at some point to try out the menu. I did and had been coming back ever since.

"There's my truth, now you ready to tell me yours?" Yahri twirled the glass between her fingers before she exhaled a sigh.

"I got involved with the wrong guy."

I tensed at the thought of Yahri being with another man. I understood the reality of it, but that didn't make it any easier to accept. She was a beautiful, smart, funny, and hell, any man would be happy to have her. The thought that one other than me had, wasn't sitting right.

"And?" I gritted.

"And he thinks I did something that I didn't."

"Yahri, stop fuckin' stalling. Padre mentioned the Devils and they're not the type of people someone like *you* should piss off. What happened?"

"They got busted for trafficking young girls and Jarren, who's one of their members, thinks I'm the reason it happened."

I felt a wave of anger bolt through my veins. If that were truly the case then Yahri was a target. She wasn't just in

danger, she had a price on her head.

“Why the fuck would they think you’re the reason they got busted?”

“Timing,” she mumbled and when my eyes fastened with hers, she explained. “I didn’t know who Jarren was when I met him.”

“How could you not?”

“Because he kept it from me. Sure he rode bikes but a lot of people do. He never took me around his club members and he never wore his patches around me.”

“So then why the hell would he think you’re the reason they got caught up?”

“Because one night when he stayed at my place I heard him on a call. He thought I was asleep. I had gotten so used to him being there that when I woke up and realized he wasn’t in bed I crept on him and got pissed thinking he was on the phone with another woman. The longer I listened I realized it was something else completely. The stuff he was saying about getting the girls ready for transport and about how he secured top dollar for them set off alarms in my head. He also mentioned how he and a few of the guys personally tested the *pure and top notch* product and was bragging about how the *girls* were untraceable. I could only hear his end of the call but it wasn’t hard to figure out what he was talking about.”

Devils were known for trafficking women. It wasn’t like the Wolves were saints. We sold illegal firearms, were loan sharks, and often muscle for hire but trafficking women was one line we didn’t cross and never would. Devils didn’t give a damn how they made their money.

“You confronted him?”

“Of course I did. The thought of what he was doing was twisted and sick. He admitted on that call to being with those girls. The idea that I was with a man who would have any parts in that...” She seemed genuinely upset. “We argued, I told him to get out. He tried to convince me that what I heard wasn’t what I was accusing him of. I didn’t want to hear it nor

did I believe him. I told him that if he didn't leave I would call the cops and tell them what I heard.”

“And...” My jaw tensed at the thought of what was potentially coming. My mind was already processing the many painful ways I could make this guy suffer if he hurt Yahri.

“He left.”

“He didn't just leave. Did he put his hands on you?”

She quickly shook her head. “No, but he promised he would if I told anybody, especially the cops, about the call. He left and he never touched me.”

“This still isn't adding up. Why are they blaming you?”

“Because a few days later the Devils were on the news. The warehouse where they were keeping the women got raided by the Feds. It was how I found who he *really* was. They mentioned names of active Devils members and that they were looking for a few others to question. He was one of them. He wasn't there when it happened but they linked him to the women.”

“Still not making sense, Ri. Why would he blame you?”

“The news reported that the raid happened because of an *anonymous* tip.”

Damn it.

“You called the cops?”

“No,” she shot back bluntly looking offended. “But I *would* have. I wanted to. The thought of what they were doing made me sick to my stomach but I know how these things work. I didn't have any factual evidence. I only overheard a conversation which meant no names or locations. I wouldn't have had anything useful to tell the cops other than the call I heard which meant Jarren would have known it was me. The cops wouldn't have found anything solid but had they questioned them—”

“He would have come after you.”

She nodded. “It didn’t matter that I wasn’t the informant because he believed I was. He called me yelling about the money they lost and that I was going to have to pay it back and how a bunch of his guys had been arrested. I got scared, so I left and came here.”

“You did the right thing.”

My mind was already moving past what got her here and focusing on what I was going to do about it. Sending a message that Yahri was under the Wolves protection would only make things worse. Devils weren’t above declaring war or expecting to recoup from us what they lost. They’d also want to kill off a few of our guys to prove a point. Neither was gonna fucking happen. That was my word.

“So what now?”

My eyes fastened with hers when I said, “I make this go away so that you can get back to your life and I can get back to mine. But first I need to know one thing and if you lie I can’t help you because my first priority is to my brothers.”

She stared at me with anger etched into her pretty features. “Why am I not surprised.” Her voice was low and volatile but I couldn’t allow that to get me distracted so I got to the point.

“You’re not a part of this life but you’re also not a stranger to it. You’re aware of the history between Devils and Wolves. Can I trust you?”

I needed her word that she wasn’t here as an ally for them and an enemy to us. Even if asking pissed her off, she had to understand that I would consider the obvious a possibility. They could easily use her against me which meant a weakness to not just me, but my brothers.

“I should be offended, but I guess I really can’t be. Yes, you can trust me. The only side I’m on right now is my own. Even still, I would never in my life travel down that road. I couldn’t.”

Being disloyal to the family her father claimed as his own...

“Then I’ll keep you safe and end this shit you got yourself caught up in. But in order to do so, you’ll have to trust me.”

Her eyes fastened to mine and she didn’t respond verbally but I received all the confirmation I needed in those brown orbs that somehow always had a hold on me whether I wanted to admit it or not.



I TOLD her she was safe.

By the time my third beer and second shot of whiskey settled into the pit of my stomach warming me internally I knew I was in deeper than I needed to be. While my ass was nailed to a stool at the bar of Sweet Auburn, Yahri was at my house leaving reminders that she was temporarily my responsibility in every inch of my space.

Not only was she back in my life but she was no longer the naïve teen who had been crushing on me all those years ago. She was now a woman. Stubborn, defiant, and possessing a light that had me drawn to her in more ways than I cared to acknowledge. Back then, she’d never affected me the way she did now. Sure, I recognized things about her. Yahri had always been pretty, slick-tongued, and frustrating but there had always been a certain level of respect that I had for her father that kept my thoughts of her innocent. Even when I’d kissed her all those years ago because her heart was breaking from the loss of her mother, I managed to restrain myself. My attraction was there but controlled.

Now...

Fuck...

I could barely suppress the reminders from the warmth of her body wrapped around mine, the roaring hum of my bike beneath us while she handed over trust by putting her life in my hands. There was no way to stop the awareness of Yahri creeping through me.

“You want to keep pretending she doesn’t have your mind locked tight or you want to talk it out?” Padre’s voice almost startled me. Another sign that I was totally fucked. I hadn’t noticed him settle beside me.

“The only thing that woman has locked is my annoyance,” I grunted, granting me a low rumble of laughter from Padre.

“How bad is it?”

“Bad,” I responded, knowing that he was asking what brought her into our home. “Devils got hit by the Feds. One of the warehouse where they kept women. They think Yahri is the reason they got pinched.

In my peripheral I could see Padre’s expression stone over. “Why the fuck would they put that on her?”

“Because our little princess was fucking one of the Devils which made her privy to a conversation about a deal that he was brokering.”

“She tipped off the Feds?” The growl in Padre’s voice had me turning to face him. His expression was dark and questioning but I quickly put an end to whatever he was thinking.

“No.”

“How do you know?”

“Because she told me it wasn’t her.”

“And you believe her?”

I frowned hard. “You questioning my morals? I wasn’t the one who brought her in without asking the necessary questions. That was you.”

His anger simmered. “We take care of our own, Pharaoh, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t consequences if I find out that they have some shit to answer to.”

I offered a tight nod understanding his skepticism. We had reason to be concerned. Although, Koda had been a loyal member of the Wolves it didn’t guarantee his daughter would be. It had also been ten years since any of us had been within

arm's reach of her. A lot could have changed. She also had reason for animosity if she felt we, mostly *me*, had turned our backs on her. It was more than possible that she was here for the wrong reasons. If that was the case, we'd all have some tough decisions to make.

"She's scared. It's not an act. Whatever she's gotten herself into has her worried. That's what brought her home."

Not some hidden agenda to set us up and expose the Wolves to the Feds or the Devils.

"I'll pay Chop a visit."

"No." I quickly shook my head. "It has to be me."

His jaw flexed with the annoyance of me digging my heels in on the matter. Padre respected me so he wouldn't give me much pushback, if any, which was proven when he delivered his terms.

"You can do the talking but I will be there." I wasn't given the opportunity to debate him because he moved past the point. "She staying with you?"

I glared at Padre who only smiled smugly. "I take that as a yes." His large hand lifted from his side and his index and pointer finger tapped the bar twice beside my empty shot glass. "You be careful."

I tossed my chin knowing that he wasn't speaking of the liquor in my system affecting my ride home. There was no doubt I was on my bike. It was my chosen method of transportation. Padre was warning me to be cautious of my interaction with Yahri. He knew our history which meant he knew what I was potentially setting myself up for by welcoming her not only into my life but my home.

And as much as I hated it, it was already too late. She had me...



THE HOUSE WAS quiet by the time I made it inside. I half expected Yahri to be waiting up but since it was close to three in the morning, I also wasn't surprised to find her balled up on the sofa tucked beneath a blanket. The living room light was out but the ones in the kitchen were on so there was enough light for me to get a clear view of the woman whose presence felt perfect yet foreign in my home. Mostly because I never allowed myself to believe that Yahri being here was ever a possibility.

Over the years, I hadn't allowed myself to think about her at all. The memories of her were filed away much like my life before I gained my colors. The memories felt like a dream, something I'd imagined but also were familiar at the same time.

She was here now and I stood over her body, resisting the urge to let my fingers graze her whiskey brown skin. Unable to help myself, I crouched down to study her face up close. Those damn lips that protected her slick ass tongue were tempting, slightly puffed as she inhaled slow, shallow breaths and her brows were pinched, setting her expression into a slight frown.

The longer I took in her features the more I noticed that frown deepening like something had her conflicted or angry.

She's probably cursing my ass out in her dreams.

I chuckled, brushing the tip of my finger over her lips with a featherlight touch. Enough to have her shifting but not enough to cause her to wake. She mumbled something and tucked her knees into her stomach, releasing a soft sigh that brought me back to my senses. I stood and took one last look. Her expression was now one of peace which made it easier for me to step away and take my ass to bed.

Sleep peacefully, love. I got you now.

CHAPTER
SIX

Yahri.

I woke up feeling disoriented mostly because it took a minute to remember where I was. After a quick shower I dressed in jeans and a tank top and brushed my hair into a ponytail that sprouted from the back of my head. The short length left loose strands falling over the nape of my neck and my temple which I knew I'd be tucking behind my ears all day.

On bare feet I padded through the house, ending up in the kitchen on a scavenger hunt for coffee. With a sigh of relief I found pods that fit the basic machine tucked in the corner of the counter next to the stove. It was only a one cup gadget but that was fine by me. I located a mug, grabbed the milk from the fridge, which thankfully hadn't expired, and waited for my coffee to finish brewing. Once I had it blended enough to tolerate the strong flavor, I ended up back in the living room to clean up my makeshift bed, stacking my blanket and pillow together before sinking into the cozy cushions.

"What now?" I mumbled not having a clue what to do with myself. I had money in the bank but was afraid to use any of it for fear that Jarren had someone watching my accounts. That was the problem with modern technology. It didn't take much to find information, especially if you were invested enough to pay for it. I also couldn't risk applying for regular jobs that would run background or credit reports which would also be traceable.

I'm fucked.

Pharaoh said that I was safe and I wanted to believe him but I couldn't help but think about how my mother likely felt she was safe with my father. The idea that I'd put myself in the position to suffer the same fate as her caused knots in my stomach. I vowed to never get mixed up with bikers because I refused to love a man whose life could cost me mine. I was so angry with myself for not seeing beyond Jarren's *representative* to know who he truly was.

I also couldn't avoid the obvious. Had Pharaoh chosen me back then I'd have followed in my mother's footsteps a lot sooner. Though he wasn't connected to my father by blood, Pharaoh was my father through and through. They were cut from the same cloth; he would have never walked away from the Wolves. My father hadn't and my mother died because of it. My father was also killed because of his loyalty to them and now I was continuing the cycle because the Wolves were the only people I could trust to fix what I broke by getting involved with Jarren.

Pharaoh was the man who would put his life on the line for mine. That both thrilled and terrified me. My thoughts drifted to the reason I was in this predicament in the first place. *Jarren*. I wanted to hate him but in the six months that I'd spent with him as a part of my life, I'd fallen hard. I couldn't just erase the history we shared and I hated myself for allowing those feelings to consume me.

Maybe I was cursed to love a specific type of man. I was my mother's child after all and history had been proven to repeat itself. My childhood crush on Pharaoh had laid the groundwork for me to fall for Jarren. It was possible that deep down inside I was drawn to him for reasons even I couldn't fathom at the time. Pharaoh wasn't polished and had very little softness to him. He was dark and broody. *And dangerously tempting*. The type to stomp all over your emotions but deliver on the promise of satisfaction of the best kind. Pharaoh wouldn't be gentle with a woman's heart or her body. Jarren had more finesse. He had been the type to wine, dine, and romance me. Regardless of what I now knew about him, with me, he'd been the loving kind.

Until he wasn't.

At least there was no guessing with Pharaoh. What you saw was what you got. I knew what I had in him.

Wait...

I didn't *have* anything. Me being here wasn't about being with Pharaoh. I simply needed someone who could keep me safe and for now, that was the Wolf Warriors. *And him.* That's all this was. I pretended to accept the lie that I was telling myself.

Because I had to...



BY NOON, I was bored out of my mind and grateful that Pharaoh had finally shown his face. Even if said face, albeit handsome, was sporting a scowl. He slumped into the kitchen wearing dark jeans and no shirt. Which was quite a sight but not one I needed at the moment. His smooth brown skin was covered from north to south in a grid of tattoos that appeared chaotic at first glance but the longer you studied them the more intricate the patterns became, exposing each of their unique designs. Although some overlapped and blended into others, even that was intentional.

The more my eyes traveled over every inch of him with the afternoon sunlight peeking through the windows I realized I had been wrong. There was a softness to Pharaoh, but if you weren't careful you'd miss it. The man was ruggedly handsome in a way that overshadowed the soft curve of his lips, the gentleness of his eyes which were shaded by thick, jet black lashes. They weren't long or ridiculously curved but dark and full enough that they stood out. When you focused on the full picture of him, the softness was there, just camouflaged by his rough edges.

Although his presence was consuming and loud. He remained silent, not bothering to acknowledge me. Which I took offense to.

“I would say that you’re not much of a morning person but seeing as how it’s lunchtime...”

His eyes were always so keen and cautious. He didn’t say a word. Not one word, which annoyed the shit out of me until...

“You’re gonna burn a hole through the side of my head if you keep staring at me like that.” His deep, worn, and rugged voice vibrated from the kitchen until it reached me. I lifted from the sofa and crossed the living room, propping up against the counter facing Pharaoh who had a bottle of water in his hand.

“You should work on your manners then.” I shrugged with my eyes fixated on the way his lips hugged the rim of the plastic bottle then traveled lower enjoying the ripple of his throat as he swallowed.

“I probably should but considering you’re crashing uninvited; I don’t feel the need to be hospitable.”

My eyes shot back up to his just in time to catch the slight smile that surfaced then disappeared when he finished what was left of his water.

“You might want to look up the definition of crashing and compare it to being kidnapped.”

He chuckled staring at me with a calm, almost drowsy look, further confirming that he’d just woken up. I felt warmth in every inch of my body that his eyes touched before they locked with mine.

“Get dressed. We’re gonna head out in a few.” I was granted a connection with those dark brown eyes for a few seconds more before he moved away from me. I cautioned a full inspection of his body. The muscles layering his body caused the tattoos that covered them to move fluidly with each step he took. Oh hell. I tore my gaze from his very tempting body, swallowing my lustful state. This man was trouble. Tall, handsome exuding so many different energies that I wasn’t sure which one to latch on to. He held a natural grace that I’d never experienced with any man before.

“Who says I want to go anywhere? Maybe I’m just fine staying here while you go do whatever it is that you do?”

A light rumble which barely classified as a laugh vibrated from his chest but Pharaoh didn’t bother turning to face me. Instead he tossed over his shoulder, “I’m working on my *manners*. Figured we’d do a little shopping so that you could at least feed yourself while you’re here.”

My teeth sank into my lip with a failed attempt to suppress my grin but my eyes still rolled at the notion of him pretending not to care. I’d take what I could get for now because *this* was the Pharaoh I remembered. The one who would push me to tears then tell me to come go for a ride so that he could treat me to my favorite indulges like cupcakes or milkshakes and fries. I hadn’t realized how much I missed those days or *him* because I hadn’t allowed myself the luxury of thinking of Pharaoh. It was easier to pretend he didn’t exist.

We took his Defender which made sense. The goal was to shop and the type of groceries he needed wouldn’t fit on a bike, but I was still slightly disappointed about missing an opportunity to be snuggled up with him. It was already my new favorite thing.

Our first stop, however, wasn’t the grocery store. It was a furniture store with pieces that looked far more expensive than I’d expected Pharaoh to be familiar with. *But he did have a chandelier in his home*. I was instructed to pick whatever I wanted to fill my room, his guest room.

I argued that he should be the one making the decision since my stay was temporary and lost that argument when he grabbed the arm of a saleswoman who was on the floor minding her business until he shoved her toward me and demanded she help me pick stuff. He then walked away and I caught sight of him a few minutes later through the glass-paneled storefront where he leaned against the side of his truck with a phone glued to his ear. My stomach immediately tensed at the thought of him leaving me to call another woman. I didn’t have the right to be jealous.

But I was...

Once we, or rather *I*, was done at the furniture store, with Pharaoh covering the five grand total to purchase a bed, mattress, two nightstands and a dresser, we were off again. Our next destination was Target where he handed me a card and demanded I “get some sheets and shit”. I frowned at him and he lifted his phone mumbling that he had calls to make.

Okay I’m done with this shit.

“If I’m disrupting your day, you can take me back to the house and I can buy what I need online.”

“That’s gonna take too long for you to get the shit you need,” he grunted and I frowned feeling more annoyed.

“I’m guessing you’ve never heard of same day delivery.”

Pharaoh sighed in annoyance and I could see the muscles in his jaw tick before he pointed at the store. “We’re here. Just get it now, Ri.”

“I can...” My rebuttal was cut off by his door flying open and his long body sliding out. He disappeared then reappeared at my door, yanking it open with equal amount of force, before barking out another command. “Let’s go.”

Instead of arguing, I did as he asked and got out, half expecting him to climb back in and lock me out so that he could do as originally planned and send me in the store alone. To my surprise, he moved with long strides beside me which meant I had to double my steps to keep up. Along the way, he made a call but still managed to reach the door before me, grabbing a cart and shoving it in my direction as soon as we were inside.

I rolled my eyes again. However, when I moved, he moved, hanging close but not right up under me while he engaged a call that seemed to be about some sort of club business. He ended the first the call about twenty minutes later and made another where most of what I heard on his end was a lot of uh huhs, and yeahs to the next caller who must have been doing all the talking. While he moved from call to call, I shopped, running up a pretty pricey total getting sheets, household products, and a few kitchen items that I knew he

didn't have. If I was going to be held prisoner then at least I was going to be comfortable on his dime. Apparently money wasn't an issue because Pharaoh was handing over cards without giving spending instructions.

He was right, a lot had changed. His house, his truck, and his bikes were a clear indication. At the very least he was financially stable and to my knowledge he didn't have a job. At least not the type where he collected a W2. There was so much I had to learn about the man he had become. Not that it was any of my business, but I wanted to know because more than anything I simply wanted to know *him*. And I'd be willing to bet, I wasn't the only one wanting more of what neither of us had the right to be curious about.



BY THE TIME we made it back to the house, I was exhausted but still took the time to put everything away then made dinner. I didn't ask Pharaoh if he was hanging around. I just made enough for both of us. Fish tacos with homemade baja sauce, cilantro lime rice, and fresh salsa.

Cooking was sort of my thing. I used stay in the kitchen with my mother. After she passed and I was left under the care of my aunt, she did whatever she could to give me a sense of home. I was eighteen, so technically grown, but truthfully, I was still just a kid who'd lost her mother and father. Even though my dad was still alive, checked in with me, and funded my life by paying for college and making sure my aunt and I lived comfortably, he kept his distance for fear that I'd suffer the same fate as my mother.

It hurt because I missed him. Knowing I wouldn't ever see my mother again and couldn't be close to my father made me angry and resentful. My aunt stepped up and did her best to make our house a home, and cooking was a part of that. I'm still grateful that even though I didn't have my parents I had her.

After setting up our food in the living room, on trays I'd purchased from the store earlier, I was on my way to get Pharaoh but didn't have to go far because he hit the bottom step only seconds after I bent the corner to go searching for him. Whereas I had swapped out my jeans and hoodie for an oversized tee and biker shorts, he was fully dressed in his jeans and pocket tee from earlier. In hand was his club jacket and given that his heavy ass boots thudded on the wood floor, he hadn't planned on staying home for the evening. Watching him move was like watching a lion on the prowl. There was almost too much of him to take in.

"What's up, Ri?" His casual tone after picking up on the frown I sported only pressed my nerves.

"Nothing..."

I turned away but he caught the hem of my shirt gently tugging the cotton until I glared at him over my shoulder.

"What you mad about now?" he teased, with a ghost of a smile on his lips.

"I'm not mad. I cooked but you're leaving so..." I lifted one shoulder with a sharp jerk and his smile grew wider. Instead of entertaining him, I pulled my shirt from his grasp but my escape was short lived, when his long ass fingers quickly wrapped around my wrist.

"You made enough for me?" His expression settled into something a little more somber and I shrugged again.

"Yeah, why wouldn't I? It's a headache to only cook for one person."

That was true, but not why I'd made enough for both of us, which he knew based on the slow smile that surfaced.

"I can hang for a minute. Whatchu make?"

My cheeks warmed a little when I realized I had to admit to preparing one of his favorite things or what used to be one of his favorite things. He'd had a seat at our dinner table plenty of times where my mother served the same meal I'd made. There were times when she'd even made it especially for him, to my annoyance.

“Well?” He arched a brow in challenge causing me to mumble my response.

“Fish tacos.”

Just as I pulled free of his hold, his smile spread wider as he moved behind me. “Word, you know that’s my shit, right? You trying to impress me, Ri?”

“No, it was my favorite first. You just stole it because it’s against one of your personal laws to let me have anything for myself.”

I heard him chuckle behind me. “You swear everybody wanna be like you.”

“Not everybody...” I paused, grabbing the two Coronas I’d already prepped for us by forcing a thin wedge of sliced lime down the neck. “Just you.”

Pharaoh was already seated on the sofa behind the plate that held four tacos to my two. I added one of the beers to his tray and he tossed his chin in thanks. His mouth was already full with the first bite that equaled half of his first taco.

“Damn, these shits taste just like the ones your mom used to make. I see your ass finally learned how to rock in the kitchen without almost burning it down.” He cut his eyes at me grinning like a damn idiot.

“I didn’t almost burn the kitchen down and when it happened it surely wasn’t my fault.”

He turned his head, glaring at me, and I shot him a bird before lifting my first taco. The flour tortilla was still warm making my first bite feel perfect on my tongue and when the flavor hit...

Heaven.

“How is it not your fault that you don’t know top from bottom?”

“I know the difference.”

“Nah, ’cause you almost set that damn box on fire, Ri.”

“And had you and my dad not been sneaking pizza in the middle of the night and trying to hide it from my mother then the box wouldn’t have been in the oven,” I shot back.

That night, he and my dad had been out back in my dad’s shed all night working on his bikes. They’d ordered pizza and hid the remainder in the oven because they’d missed dinner and my mom refused to save it for them. She was pissed at my dad because he had a habit of losing time when it came to working on his bikes.

“But isn’t there some kind of kitchen rule that you’re supposed to do a sweep before you turn shit on? I mean shit you had two ovens, you picked the wrong one. That wasn’t on us.” He shrugged and devoured the second taco then followed it up by shoveling rice into his mouth.

“There’s a rule about working through dinner. You don’t show, you don’t eat.”

He grinned, nodding. “Yeah your mom was serious about that shit.”

“Which is why you and my dad were hiding pizza boxes. He wasn’t trying to catch them hands.”

Pharaoh laughed. “Nah, he wasn’t. Your mom was with the shits.” After a minute he glanced at me and lifted the beer. “You good though?”

Since I lost them both? No, how could I be?

“That was a long time ago. What’s the point in asking now?” I kept my eyes on my plate not wanting to see how he looked at me.

“You never gave me a chance to check on you back then. You wouldn’t even talk to me after your pops passed. Hell you didn’t talk to any of us. It’s not like we didn’t try to make sure you were good.”

“I wasn’t but none of you could do anything about that, right?”

Because the rules were the rules.

“We could have...”

“I’m good, Pharaoh. Like I said, that was a long time ago.” I cleared my throat. “So a chandelier?”

I forced thoughts of my father’s funeral back into the locked box I kept for things I didn’t want to dwell on and glanced up at the chic fixture that hung from the vaulted ceiling above us.

Pharaoh shrugged like it wasn’t a big deal. “I didn’t pick it. The contractor did.”

“Figures.”

“What you saying? I don’t have good taste?” He smirked, keeping his eyes on me as he pinched the neck of the beer between his long fingers. Only his eyes didn’t remain locked in one place, they moved slowly from my face, traveling lower then back up at the same time his smile reappeared. The same damn smile hinted to his underlying thoughts.

“Not sure whose good taste you’re representing. Like that furniture store we went to. One of your lil friends must have hooked you up?”

“My *lil friends*.” The smug grin he sported only annoyed me. “You asking if I’m fucking with anybody?”

“No, not my business.”

“No, it’s not but I’ll tell you anyway.” He lowered the beer and turned his head to meet my stare. “When I bought the house I needed a bed. Padre fucked with a woman who recommended the place. I’m not picky.”

“So one of his lil friends.” I grinned behind my taco and Pharaoh laughed.

“Yeah something like that.” He paused, frowning at something before he added, “And as for my lil friends, I do what I need to keep my head straight.”

Like having sex with women.

Noted!

“What about you and your lil friends?” I flinched at the indication. He was asking me about Jarren.

“I dated people. Nothing serious.” I shrugged off the underlying question.

“You don’t think having a nigga sleeping under your roof and in your bed is serious?” I opened my mouth to respond but he cut me off. “Not that it matters. Like you said, not my business.”

His heated stare contradicted what he was saying. But I refused to travel down that road.

He had no claims to me same as I had no claims to him. I could have had a hundred men in and out of my bed and it wouldn’t be his place to say a damn thing about it. Luckily he left the subject alone and I was grateful.

“You gon’ cook like this every day?”

“No.”

He grinned and narrowed his eyes. “What if I want you to?”

“What do I get in return?”

He chuckled, lifting his beer and speaking with his eyes fastened to mine.

Which I couldn’t seem to stop looking at.

“We negotiating?”

“Maybe?”

His smile loosened into a lopsided grin. “You sure you can handle the kind of negotiations I’m bringing to the table?” The low rasp of his voice crept down my spine and caused my body to tingle.

“Are you sure you can handle the type of negotiations I’m bringing to the table?” I countered and he turned up his beer, finishing the rest.

“Eat your food, Ri.”

“You’re not going to answer me?”

He nodded, lifting another taco. “Yeah I am, just not tonight.” He winked and the act landed right between my

thighs with that damn promise of pleasure. Needing to switch things up I decided to see what else I could pull out of him.

“So why this house? It’s nice but doesn’t fit what I imagined you’d be in.”

“You been thinking about me and where I lay my head, Ri?”

I knew he was teasing but there was something hopeful in his eyes that I chose to ignore.

Me being here was about getting away from Jarren until my little situation was resolved.

“About as much as you’ve been thinking about me.” I rolled my eyes. “I’m just saying, you’re more of the bachelor pad kind of guy. One with a revolving door for your women.”

He laughed, shaking his head. “You seem mighty invested in the type of action my dick is seeing.”

I gasped. “I am not.”

He kept a steady glare on me before stating, “My lil friends, rotating door for my women, and now you’re trying to put me in a bachelor pad like all I do is ride and fuck.”

“Is that all you do?”

“Nah, it’s not but to answer your question, I picked this house because we own the land out here.”

“We?” I frowned and he nodded.

“It belongs to the Wolves, collectively. We own a bunch of shit in Diamond Falls and some stuff in the city too. Mostly North Fulton because the property holds its value which means a good return if we ever want to sell. Dedge, one of our brothers, is a realtor. Once we bought the land out here, he handled building the houses. The community is for us. No outsiders.”

“Wow.” I grinned, staring at Pharaoh who frowned at me.

“What?”

“Nothing, I guess a lot really has changed. You own a house, but not just a house, you own land.”

“Your father owned land too.”

“I know, but it just doesn’t seem like something you would care about.”

“And how would you know what I care about?” His stare was just as heavy as the statement which had me swallowing hard and ignoring the question.

“So, do all the Wolves live out here?”

He shook his head. “Nah, most of the older guys do though. It’s quiet and sometimes you need that because the world gets too loud sometimes. One of my brothers, Bash, and his lady bought one out here because it’s safe and they have a kid to think of.”

“Makes sense.”

“I’m not here a lot though. I mostly crash at the clubhouse.”

I looked around. “Which is why there isn’t any furniture.”

“Pretty much but I also don’t really know shit about making a house a home. Right now it’s just an investment and an escape.”

“You want it to be more?”

“Why, you gon’ hook me up?”

I snorted, lifting my beer but keeping my eyes away from his. “No, that’s something your girl needs to do.”

“Maybe, but since I don’t have one, you can do it.”

“And piss off the future Mrs. Vaughan? Hard pass.”

He laughed at that and finished off the last of his food, standing after he was done. After lifting his plate, he removed his wallet and placed a card on my tray.

“I don’t think you need to worry about pissing off a future *Mrs.* anything. Marriage isn’t in my future.”

The reality sat like a weight in my stomach because not marrying *anybody* meant me by default but I pushed past the disappointment.

“You’re trusting me to decorate your house?”

“Why wouldn’t I? You know me better than anyone else, Ri.”

“Used to.”

“A lot of things might have changed but some are what they are. I trust you.” He carried his plate to the kitchen then came back to get his jacket. “I’mma head out for a while.”

“Where are you going?”

“Out,” he stated bluntly but added, “This shit you got yourself caught up in isn’t just gonna go away. I need to get with Padre so we can let the Devils know you’re with us.”

“Wait, but that means they’ll know where I am.”

“Exactly because then there will be no misunderstandings that they have to go through me to get to you and that shit isn’t happening.”

I felt the color draining from my face when Pharaoh stepped closer and leaned down to press a kiss to my forehead. “You gotta trust me, Ri. Nobody touches you and that’s my word, aight?”

I sucked in a breath and nodded. A few minutes later, I heard the sound of his bike from the garage and tensed as he pulled away from the house. I didn’t like being alone but at least I knew he was coming back.

CHAPTER
SEVEN

Pharaoh.

As I rolled back the massive metal door and stepped inside the clubhouse a melody of familiar sounds assaulted me. A heavy bass vibrating the floors, clinking glasses, and a chaotic blend of voices—both male and female—exerting effort to be heard over the lyrics flowing from the various speakers throughout the clubhouse. A group of wild misfits and the women who desperately wanted to tame them was what greeted me.

Well at least tame them enough to shut down their rotations. The wildness was what women loved the most about this bunch. Any other night I would have settled into the chaos but I was here because Padre demanded my presence with a text.

Church. 1 hour.

Tonight the door leading to the back was closed so after I stepped through it, the sounds from the common area faded only to be replaced by the sound of my boots and Padre's voice.

"You're late."

"Got caught up, but I'm here now. So what are we doing?" I growled, not wanting to get into it but Padre wasn't the type to let shit go. He was a lot like Koda in that they had a thing about dealing with your shit. Something about unloading allowing you the ability to think clearly and with some of the

shit we had our hands in, being distracted was a death sentence.

“Caught up?”

“Ri cooked. It wasn’t right to just bail on her.”

He chuckled as I followed him out the office and headed to our meeting room. I could hear the guys already inside waiting. The two prospects manning the gate at the entrance of the compound must have sent word to Padre that I was here.

“That shit didn’t take long.”

“Care to clarify what the fuck you mean?” I stopped to face him just outside the entrance to our meeting room.

“Been less than a day and you two are already playing house.”

“We’re not playing house. Yahri’s there, not much I can do about that.”

He smirked, raising a brow to deliver a look that I was too damn familiar with. Padre was silently calling me out on my shit. “We have plenty of rooms here at the clubhouse. We also have a shit ton of other properties that are fully furnished. Last I checked there was only one bed in your house. The one in your room. You sharing more than meals?”

“No, but if we were, that’s not any of your damn business, is it?”

“Since her being here brought trouble to our door, yeah it’s my business.”

“You worried?”

Padre snorted. “About the Devils, hell no. About you, maybe a little bit.”

“Well don’t be. I’m good. Soon as we make clear to them that she’s off limits, she and I can both go back to doing whatever the fuck we want, *separately*.”

I stepped away from Padre but he stopped me dead in my tracks. “Look, kid...” *Kid*. I was thirty-one years old but when Koda began calling me kid years ago it stuck with all the OGs.

Wasn't much I could do to change that. I turned toward him, my face growing cold when he said, "I'm not for or against whatever you have going on with Yahri. I just want you to be clear about what that means... for both of you."

I offered a tight nod, then stepped into the meeting room deciding not to put too much thought into what he was saying at the moment. There were five other bodies waiting. Mint, who was treasurer because she ran an accounting firm and was good with money. Delroy, or Del, who was club secretary which never felt right saying out loud because to look at the guy you would think he boxed with buildings in his spare time. Del was six foot six and almost three hundred pounds. Seeing him on a bike was always funny as shit because he was so damn large, but Del was one of the smartest guys I knew. He was the type that was naturally intelligent and knew random shit that no one else did like the human body had sixty thousand miles of blood vessels if you laid them all out. He actually told me that one day. Del was also quiet as hell and didn't fuck with anybody unless you pissed him off and pissing Del off wasn't a good thing because a hit from Del was like getting plowed over by wrecking ball. I knew this from experience.

The other three bodies in the room belonged to Clutch, our VP who also held the role back when Koda had been President. Then Dedge who didn't have an official title but he was equally important considering he handled inventory and distribution for the club's less than honorable activities. He was also a contractor and realtor so Dedge handled all the paperwork for the properties we had around the city. Lastly there was Bash who was the person I considered to be my brother more than any of the others. Considering that we'd met with guns drawn and him thinking he would cash in on the price that had been placed on my head, it only made sense. We were damn near one in the same and the club's enforcers. Shit went left, he and I made it right.

They were all seated in their designated positions. Some talking amongst themselves and others focused on their phones. Mint was the first one to say something because she

always had something to say. She circled her finger in the air motioning to my face.

“I thought in-house pussy would help fix all that but you’re still walking around looking like you’re ready to set shit off ’cause somebody stole your fucking bike.”

Clutch and Dedge, who were sitting next to each other, shared a look before they erupted with laughter.

“Cut the shit and let’s get down to business,” Padre said, heading to the front of the room but I heard the shift in his voice and didn’t miss the smirk on his face.

“Aight, so why are we here?”

Padre crossed his arms over his chest and lowered his chin, looking over the room. “Most of you didn’t have the pleasure of being under Koda’s rule back in the day but you’ve all heard the stories to know what he means to this club. His daughter Yahri showed up yesterday needing a safe place to stay and we’re welcoming her into our house.”

“*Our* house or *Pharaoh’s* house?” Mint smirked and cut her eyes my way.

“Mint...” Padre warned, which had her grinning but leaning back in her chair and allowing him to continue.

“Yahri got herself caught up in a situation with the Devils.”

“Then why the hell are we opening our doors to her?” Dedge argued which had me glaring his way with a warning not to fucking push this.

“Because she’s Koda’s daughter which makes her one of us. We protect our own.” Padre paused, looking at everyone in the room individually before adding, “Anybody got a problem with that?”

No one objected so he continued. “You’ll treat her with respect and make sure she’s comfortable. She’ll be working at Sweet Auburn.”

“The lounge?” Bash asked with a smug grin. He managed the lounge which was really a strip club and he’d only asked to

fuck with me.

“You asking about another woman when you got your own and a kid at home?” I cut my eyes his way in a warning and Bash was every bit of the asshole I was so he only chuckled and shrugged.

“I’m just saying, we can always use quality dancers. Is she quality, Ro?”

“She’s none of your concern. Challenge that and see how it works out for you.”

Bash chuckled, shaking his head and Padre took over again. He glanced at me before clarifying. “Same rules apply to her as they do to the rest of us.”

“And if the Devils come looking for her, then what?”

“Then we fucking handle it,” I ground out and Dedge smirked looking at me.

“Right, *we* handle it.”

Padre cleared his throat to get our attention. “We’re gonna pay them a visit, just to make sure they’re clear on our warning that Yahri is protected.”

“Bet, when we pulling up?” Mint said, looking a little too excited. She was always ready to start some shit and had a personal vendetta with the Devils ever since one of their members started a rumor that she was a lesbian just because she wouldn’t let him fuck. Not that she really cared. Mint was the last person with esteem issues but with her it was about the principle.

“Not *we*, just me and Pharaoh for now.”

“Just him?” Dedge frowned.

“For now, yes. If they don’t seem agreeable to our terms then we’ll revisit this at another time. The rest of you be on alert. Devils don’t like being told what to do, no more than we do. Either way, she’s ours to protect and I expect everyone to be on board with that, understood?”

“I’m with whatever.” Bash shrugged. He and I would always see eye to eye even if we disagreed about the process or the reasoning. If I ride, he rides and vice versa. Everyone else agreed but I didn’t expect anything less. Our brotherhood was strong and came first. Personal issues didn’t get in the way of protecting our own.

“Do we at least get to know what situation she got herself into? I get that she’s Koda’s daughter but anybody who willingly fucks with the Devils doesn’t give me a warm and fuzzy feeling.” Dedge was the one speaking up this time.

“Yeah, I agree. I hate to state the obvious but protecting her could mean compromising us. Especially if she’s tied in with them,” Mint added.

“She’s not,” I growled, glaring around the room before I felt Padre’s eyes on me. When I looked his way, he sent a warning for me to chill the fuck out.

“So you say, but we don’t know shit about her,” Dedge said.

“But you know me, don’t you?” I argued.

“Look, it’s my decision. One I stand by which means that all of you stand by it as well. She’s not tied in with them but there’s a bounty on her head because they’re blaming her for something she didn’t do. You don’t have to like the decision and I certainly can’t demand that you trust her, but I will demand that you follow my leadership. Until I say different, you protect her same as you would any other member of our family. Unless there’s anything else...”

Padre surveyed the room and when no one voiced any other concerns or objections, he closed out. “Meeting adjourned.”

All the members filed out the room, one by one. Leaving just me, Clutch, and Padre.

“You sure I don’t need to ride on this one?” Clutch was sergeant-at-arms for the club which meant that he held the role of keeping order and ensuring our security at the compound and with the club in general was in order.

“No, we got it covered.” Padre spoke to him but kept his eyes on me which had Clutch shifting his focus as well.

“What?” I frowned at the smug ass look on Clutch’s face. I already knew what he was thinking. Clutch was an old head who knew my history with Yahri and had been there the night that I gained my colors. I got drunk off my ass and said a lot of dumb shit. None of it was relevant other than how I was patched and man enough to step to Yahri. Koda laughed it off until I wouldn’t let it go then he knocked me out to shut me up. I woke up the next morning with a black eye and everyone whispering about how I’d pissed Koda off.

We never discussed that night after it happened. He just moved on like I’d never admitted to wanting Yahri, at least for a while. A few months after I earned my patch our club got into it with another club. We lost one of our guys. They lost two of theirs and I ended up with a bullet in my chest that could have ended me had it been a few inches to the left. After I got stitched up at the clubhouse, Koda appeared in the doorway frowning at me. I could tell he had something heavy on his mind but he didn’t speak for a long time. When he did, his message was clear. After staring at the bandage on my chest he finally spoke.

“That could have been you tonight.”

“But it wasn’t,” I defended, thinking he was questioning his decision to hand over my patch, only that wasn’t where his thoughts were focused.

“Not this time but let tonight be a reminder of why you will never be with Yahri. I don’t want her crying over you the way her mother cried over me. Her mother deserved better and so does Yahri.”

“You don’t think I’m good enough?”

“You are but a lot of good you can do my daughter if you’re six feet deep. You want her, you walk away from this. Otherwise, it can’t happen.”

He didn’t bother waiting on me to say a damn word. He didn’t care how I felt on the matter. Koda simply made the

decision about our lives and I was too damn loyal to the man to disagree.

“Nothing, Kid. Just make sure you know what you’re getting yourself into.”

I groaned. “Y’all acting like I never had pussy before. I know you call me kid but I haven’t been one in a really long time.”

Clutch laughed hard and when Padre chuckled also, I wanted to punch both their asses. “If she was *just* pussy then I wouldn’t be warning you to be careful, Pharaoh. That girl is someone you’ve wanted in your life for a long time but you respected Koda enough to keep your distance. Things are different now, that’s all I’m saying,” Clutch clarified.

My eyes bounced between the two of them, not liking how it felt as if they were in my head which had me lying to myself and them when I said, “Ain’t shit changed.” I steadied my focus on Padre. “We done here?”

“Yeah, I’ll get with you tomorrow about pulling up on Chop.”

I nodded and left things at that. When I walked away, I felt just how much of a lie I’d told because instead of sitting at the bar where I usually would have, I bypassed it and pushed through the door, mounting my bike in the parking lot.

Nothing else interested me other than heading home to the woman I was lying about...



MY GOAL WAS to head straight to the house but after being forced to acknowledge that Padre and Clutch were right, I decided to go for a ride. There was something about the vibration of my bike beneath me, jolting through my muscles from head to toe that gave me a sense of calm. More than anything it was comforting because it was familiar and consistent. Nothing else in my life had ever been as reliable as the feel of my bike, the way I controlled her and the way she

controlled me. To completely open her up with no expectations other than to just ride was a feeling like no other and *she* never disappointed. That was the true definition of freedom. One that gave me peace and settled most of the conflict that always seemed to be plaguing my mind.

Unfortunately for me, this time I couldn't seem to find the answers I'd been searching for. A few hours later, I pulled into my garage with no more clarity than I had before I hit the highway.

Walking into my house felt different, but in a good way. I'd always been the type to enjoy my seclusion but the awareness that she was at my home, comfortable in my space, hadn't bothered me as much as I assumed it would.

"You waiting up for me?" I shed my jacket and laid it over the rear of the sofa before settling down next to Yahri who was laid out, with her back against the arm on the opposite end, knees bent to the ceiling.

"I know better than to wait up." She didn't bother looking at me and instead kept her eyes glued to the screen of her phone.

"Why you say that?" I frowned, not liking that she was so invested in whatever had her attention.

Better not be another nigga.

"You said club business and I know what that's about." She blessed me with those pretty brown eyes for a brief moment before they lowered back to her phone. I decided I wanted her full attention so I leaned across the sofa and stashed it from her possession, glancing at the screen to find that she was on some social media app before I locked and placed the phone beside me, out of her reach.

"You could have just asked me what I was doing." Yahri extended a leg, attempting to kick me, but I caught her ankle and lowered her foot to my thigh smirking at the bright yellow, fuzzy socks that covered her feet and crawled up her ankles.

"I didn't care what you were doing. I just wanted your attention. It's disrespectful not to give someone your eyes

when they're talking to you."

"It's also disrespectful to demand someone's attention when they're perfectly content minding their own business."

I chuckled, brushing my fingers over the soft, fuzzy material of her socks, wanting to move higher and enjoy the feel of her skin which I knew would be equally pleasing under the pads of my fingers. "What you mean by you know what club business is about?"

"I know what you do, Pharaoh. Did you forget who my dad was?"

"Nah, I didn't but I also know that Koda didn't tell you shit about his *club* business. It defeats the purpose of keeping you away from it if he turned around and ran down everything he had his hands in."

She narrowed her eyes at me. "I'm not stupid and people talk."

"Word?" I was amused. "And what do these *people* say?"

"A lot." She shrugged.

"Such as?"

"What does it matter?"

"It doesn't. I don't give a damn what *people* think about me. I'm just curious about what you think I do, since you claim to be so informed."

"You're an enforcer." Her eyes moved to where my jacket was then back up to mine. "Which means you piss a lot of people off because you bully them."

My eyes danced with amusement at how simple she made that sound. I didn't bully people. Strongly urging them to make different decisions, which sometimes included personal injuries was a better explanation for what being an enforcer was about.

"You think that's funny?"

"Nah, not really, but you being misinformed is funny as shit."

“How am I misinformed?”

“I don’t bully people, Ri. My job is to keep order with the club, make sure they’re following the rules, but mostly to handle incidentals that are connected to people who don’t follow club rules.”

“By any means necessary, right?”

“In a general sense, yes.” Our eyes remained in a heated stare before she spoke again. “I didn’t have to know all the details to know my father came home with blood on him more times than I can count. Sometimes his, sometimes others. I also know that my mom was nervous every time he left the house because she didn’t know if he was coming back and if he did, what state he’d be in when he got there. You wanted to be just like him back then. Now, you are...”

“Does who I am bother you?”

My club was my family, an extension of me, and anyone who couldn’t accept that part of my life, couldn’t accept me.

“No.”

“Then why bring it up?”

“Because...” She caught herself but I could tell from the way her eyes traveled across my body, quietly inspecting me, telling what she was holding back.

“*Because* you’re worried about me?”

“No.”

“Good. You don’t need to be. I know what I’m doing.”

“My dad did too, Pharaoh, and you know how that worked out for him and my mom.”

I felt as if a ten pound stone dropped into the pit of my stomach but I managed to keep my cool as I lifted her foot from my thigh and stood. After I had her phone in hand, I leaned over Yahri and placed it in hers, pressing a kiss to her forehead, briefly closing my eyes as I allowed the moment to linger longer than I should have.

“Get some rest. I’ll take you to Sweet Auburn tomorrow to get familiar with the place.”

I walked away, but the heaviness of our conversation settled in. I had no doubt the same weight settled in on her.

CHAPTER
EIGHT

Yahri.

“I said get things organized, not create an entirely new system.”

My head shot up from the stack of papers I had been working with for the past few hours and frowned at the frown that was waiting for me. Girly, the life timer who managed Sweet Auburn and the person whose care I had been left in, hadn't said much to me all morning, but I sensed that he wasn't thrilled with what had kept me occupied and out of his way.

“This isn't a new system. It was already in here.” Mindlessly, I pointed to the iPad not understanding what I had done wrong.

“Doesn't matter. Nobody uses it. *That* does the job just fine.” He pointed to the stack of stapled papers, wrinkled and frayed from too much handling. A lot of the printed lines were faded to the point where others had handwritten what they were on top of the faded ink.

“Oh well I was just thinking it might help to have an electronic log of all the inventory.” Easier access and not so stone aged. It would certainly help alleviate the issue of over and under ordering inventory because people couldn't decipher what the items truly were. Which apparently was a problem since there were three cases of olives in the back and a scarce supply of olive oil because someone confused the two line items on the last order.

“You plan on making this a permanent thing?”

“This?” I frowned not understanding what he was asking.

“You being here to keep up with that? Padre said this was a temporary gig which is the only reason I agreed to it in the first place.”

He pointed to the iPad and I hesitated, not truly sure how to respond because I hadn't given much thought to how long I would be here, in town or at Sweet Auburn. Girly snorted, turned on his heels and walked off, but not before muttering, “Exactly what I thought. A got damn waste of time.”

I grinned not really offended because from what I'd seen since I'd been here Girly— whose appearance physically contradicted his club name—treated everyone he encountered with the same lovely disposition, like we annoyed the shit out of him and he was secretly cursing our mere existence. Girly had to be in his late sixties with a bald head and salt and pepper beard that reached his chest. He was wide through the shoulders and chest but housed an expanded midsection from all the ribs, beer, and whiskey he consumed daily, a perk of managing the bar. His gruff and scratchy baritone didn't create the illusion that he had a soft bone in his body but I also knew that everyone here loved and revered him.

“Girly may not appreciate you updating the electronic inventory system, but I sure as hell do.” Nic, a prospect who had been working the bar since I arrived, walked up behind me peering over my shoulder. I was greatly aware of how close he was from the heat of his body and the spicy clean scent of his cologne. Nic was handsome in a clean cut kind of way. He seemed like a vast contradiction to what you would expect a biker to look like. His vibe was easy to be around but I hadn't missed his attraction to me. The easy smiles, the being overly helpful, and the way he hovered all morning finding ways to be in my space.

“Well you're about the only one.” I slipped off the side of the stool, careful not to make contact with Nic, and dipped around his massive body. I crouched down and removed a bottle of water from the cooler under the bar, untwisting the

cap as I extended to my full height. Instead of going back to my original post, I leaned against the bar, drinking my water while Nic retrieved empties from the two customers we'd had in the past hour.

"I'm the only one who matters since I'm the one calling in orders." He set a few empty glasses in the plastic bin that held others. It was nowhere near full so instead of taking it to the kitchen, he leaned against the bar opposite of where I stood, facing me with a boyish grin in place. "I'm sure you noticed the excessive amount of olives back there."

I smirked behind my water. "I did. So that was you?"

"Yeah but in my defense, you've seen what I was working with. You can barely make sense of that thing and I was kinda in a hurry. Having the inventory listed electronically will help."

"It will more than help. You'll be able to populate items you need and create order lists instead of having to handwrite them out."

"I know. I kinda played around with it a little but it's not my place to change things around here."

I wrinkled my nose, staring back at him. "But you run the bar. You should be allowed to implement changes that make your job easier."

"That's not how things work." He lifted a hand and pointed over a shoulder to his back where I knew the word prospect was printed on his Sweet Auburn t-shirt.

"Oh, right." I nodded. "But that's just dumb. Kinda like some high school or college hazing thing. I understand having that type of environment at the clubhouse but this is a business. *Their* business. Makes sense to do whatever keeps the customers happy and the money flowing."

Nic chuckled and shrugged. "Things work different in our world."

"*Their* world," I countered and he frowned until I pointed to his back then nodded with understanding.

“I’m a part of it. Even if unofficially right now.”

“Another thing I don’t understand. How old are you?”

“Twenty-eight.”

“So you’re cool with them telling you what you can and can’t do? Doesn’t that conflict with the whole, I am man hear me roar thing?”

He laughed hard, offering me his beautiful smile before saying, “Yeah it does but it’s temporary and what I gain in return is worth the temporary abuse to my ego. These guys will be my brothers. They will stand with me same as I’ll stand with them. You can’t put a price on that so if I have to deal with a little hazing and check my ego for a while, then so be it. Once I gain my colors, I’ll have a permanent family who I will always be able to rely on.”

“And what about the family you have now? Your parents and siblings. *If* you have any?”

“I do. Two sisters and a brother and I love them more than anything but I could never count on them the way I know I can count on my brothers. It’s different. Maybe because the Wolves will be the family I choose and not who I was born to. When you make a choice one way or another you’re committing to a certain type of loyalty. I will be loyal to my brothers which means they’ll be loyal to me.”

“Not if you don’t quit grinning up in her face.” A feminine voice sounded from the end of the bar, which had both Nic and me turning our heads in her direction. The woman had an amused expression on her face as she surveyed me and Nic before adding. “Pharaoh is not the sharing type. That muthafucker is as selfish as they come so be careful, *Prospect*.”

Nic grinned, glancing at me, then the woman. “I didn’t know she was property.”

Property?

What the fuck?

“I’m not.”

Nic winked at the woman then turned to me. “I’ll be in the back if you need me. We just finished lunch so it won’t get busy again until later tonight.”

“I’ll be fine.”

He gave her one last cocky smile before leaving me with whoever this woman was. She smiled at me for a moment then pointed to the cooler. “Let me get a beer.”

I turned and grabbed one. Although the bar was fully stocked, with any liquor and beer you could imagine, everyone that came here mostly asked for two things, one of the Sweet Auburn whiskies or an imported beer, which they kept in bottles and on tap.

I used the counter to remove the cap and pushed it across the bar in her direction. She tipped her head, smiling as she turned it up, watching me while I watched her. She was pretty, with short, cropped hair tapered into a curly Mohawk in the back but was longer up front. It was dyed a bluish gray with black highlights which, by the way, looked killer on her. She was also wearing a tapered leather jacket similar to the one Pharaoh wore which now caught my eye so I took the time to pay attention to the member patch and the one below it reading Mint.

“You’re Koda’s daughter?”

“*Yahri*, yes.”

She matched my smile with one of her own, only hers held a smugness that I didn’t like. She’d mentioned Pharaoh not liking to share.

Does she know from personal experience?

“Mint, but you saw that.” I snapped out of my head and focused on her face before she added, “Nice to meet you.”

“Same.”

“You sure?” Her expression held too much amusement which I didn’t like. Yeah, she’d been with him.

“Yes, why wouldn’t it be?” I turned my back to dispose of the water bottle I’d just finished.

“Because you look like you want to punch me in my face because you think we share something in common.”

I turned to face her again and offered a pleasant smile. “And what would that be?”

“Knowledge of Ro’s dick.”

It took everything in me not to react but she laughed shortly after. “His dick has been a lot of places I’m sure, but never in me and it won’t ever. You can relax.”

“I’m not concerned with where his dick goes or has been.”

“Then you might want to communicate that to your face because clearly the two of you aren’t on the same page, but it’s cool. I can see why you would feel that way. I’m not blind to what he brings to the table, I just choose not to share those type of meals with my brothers.”

“Good to know,” I muttered and went back to manually importing the data from the printouts I prayed would become a thing of the past.

“I take it from the way you wanted to sever Nic’s balls when he used the term property that you weren’t feeling it.”

“No, I wasn’t. I’m not anyone’s property, especially not Pharaoh’s.”

“I have to disagree. I’ve known Ro for years and he’s pretty consistent with most things in his life. The most notable is how he never attaches himself to anyone outside the club but the minute you showed up he made sure that *our* family became *your* family.”

“That’s only because of my dad,” I argued. She grinned, staring at me in a snarky kind of way that had my fingers curling into my palms.

“I know you know better than that, *but* either way, it’s not my business according to Pharaoh, you are only his business. Another reason why everybody knows who you belong to.”

“I don’t *belong* to anyone.”

She lifted her beer and drained what was left before sliding the empty bottle across the bar to me. “It’s a compliment not an insult, Yahri. One that you might want to give some thought to because belonging to a man like Pharaoh isn’t anything to take lightly. Especially since I’ve never seen it happen before and I’ve been around for a little while. I’ve only been with this club for a few months but I’ve known Pharaoh for a long time and damn sure didn’t see this coming. I guess miracles do happen.”

She left and I stood there for a minute frowning at the door not sure if she was giving me advice or a warning.

CHAPTER
NINE

Pharaoh.

As we bent the corner I slowed my bike and eased up to the curb followed by Newbie, a prospect who Padre wanted me to prep to handle some of the assignments I'd been tasked with. Normally Bash would have been riding with me but he had to handle an exchange for one of our smaller clients. People paid us for muscle. Newbie was close to earning his colors which meant it was time for him to start his rotations in the field. I liked Newbie, mostly because he did more listening than talking which meant I rarely had to repeat myself with him.

I dropped my kickstand, balancing my bike between my legs as I looked around, taking note of the houses that lined the street. Castle Ridge Heights was a middle class neighborhood with residents that were blue collar and service people. A lot of the men worked down at the factory that manufactured car parts which meant long hours, decent pay, and the income to provide a decent lifestyle for their families. The community was quiet and safe, where kids rode their bikes to the local parks and walked home from school with their friends. Parents weren't concerned with their kids coming in contact with people meaning them harm.

Diamond Falls was a small quiet town north of the city and although crime existed, it rarely reared its ugly head here. Mostly because of the invisible layer of protection we provided. Even though we were only a forty minute drive from Downtown Atlanta, Diamond Falls felt like it was worlds

apart. Just like any major city, the areas were divided by income levels so Diamond Falls had its less than favorable areas but issues rarely ever existed because no one wanted to deal with the Wolves. Everyone existed in their own space, keeping our little town as peaceful as possible.

“Which house?” Newbie pulled off his gloves and tucked them into the pocket of his leather jacket, waiting for me to dismount my bike.

“Yellow one, across the street.” I pointed with my forehead as I removed my helmet first then my gloves, tucking them inside before I got off my bike and set my lid on it.

“You think he’ll fight back?”

“Not if he’s smart.”

Newbie fell in step with me as we headed toward the house that was recently rented to Gregory Washington also known as Bick.

Stupid fucking name.

I took the stairs two at a time, centered myself in front of the door, and motioned for Newbie to enter from the back. Based on the intel we received from the prospects we had watching the house over the past week, our good friend Bick’s schedule was pretty consistent. He left the house around the same time every day around two forty-five so that he could be posted up near the middle school by three o’clock to catch the kids as their day ended and still make it to the high school by three twenty to finish his rotation. It pissed me off that he thought it was okay to come into our town pushing pills to the kids that lived here. We didn’t allow that shit. Not in city limits and not to kids. Adults had the maturity and rationale to understand the choices they made so if they made the decision to do dumb shit, it wasn’t because they didn’t know better. And sure kids were taught to not do drugs and drilled with the side effects but their brains weren’t fully developed. More often than not, their decisions were based on the weight they felt from peers.

Outside of that, it was just fucking wrong to be pushing manufactured drugs to kids and bottom line we didn't allow that shit. People were dropping dead from fentanyl. Wolf Warriors did our share of dirt but we did our best to protect the people in our community and keeping deadly drugs out of the hands of the people who lived here was part of that.

I knocked several times and didn't get an answer which annoyed the shit out of me so I made an executive decision to grant us access by driving my foot into the wooden door that splintered from its cheap construction and the force of my foot.

When I stepped inside I was greeted with the barrel of a .45 aimed at my head and a scowl of the man pissed off from the disruption to his day.

"It would be smart of you to put that gun down." I spoke calmly hiding my amusement that he thought the gun was enough to prevent the ass whopping that was in his near future.

But in his defense, he had no clue what was coming or who I was.

"And it would be smart for you to get the fuck outta my ___"

Before he could finish I drove my fist into his jaw and the second his head snapped left, my fist dipped low and curved up into his gut, knocking the wind out of him. The gun he held crashed to the floor as he doubled over, grunting and gasping for air.

I kicked the weapon out the way and fisted his shirt, dragging *Bick* to the living room where I pushed him into the sofa. After a few moments he finally caught his breath and sneered at me then Newbie who finally made an appearance.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"Neighborhood watch." I moved closer to where he sat and lowered my chin. "We've been watching you, *Bick*."

"The fuck you watching me for?" he growled, carefully keeping an eye on me but being mindful that Newbie was also

nearby. Possibly because Newbie had a beretta aimed at him.

“Because a little birdie told us that you’ve been breaking our rules.”

“Again. Who. The. Fuck. Are. You.”

“I didn’t figure you for a smart guy based on all the stupid shit you’ve been doing but I at least assumed you could read. Maybe I’ve given you too much credit.” His jaw went tight but his eyes followed as I tapped the patch on my sleeve that had our insignia with Wolf Warriors MC embroidered below it. His eyes narrowed with awareness and I didn’t miss the way he swallowed thickly.

“Is that supposed to mean something to me?”

“Based on what you’ve been up to, yeah, it should damn sure mean something to you.” I smirked and extended an arm pointing to the coffee table littered with little white pills and tiny plastic bags. We’d interrupted his packaging process.

“Newbie, bag that up so we can take it with us.”

Bick didn’t like that. He bolted to his feet the minute Newbie lowered his gun. “You’re not taking my shit.”

“Yeah we are and you’re gonna sit your ass down and watch us do it. Then you’re going to pack your shit and be out of this house before the sun comes up in the morning or I’ll be back to physically remove you and that’s not gonna make me happy. What I can promise you, *Bick*, is that it’s in your best interest not to piss me off any more than you already have.”

“I don’t give a fuck about you or your happiness but what I do give a fuck about is my shit which you’re not taking unless you plan on compensating me for it.”

“Dumbass,” Newbie mumbled under his breath. He’d been out with me a few times and knew how I worked. Unfortunately our good friend Bick didn’t, which meant that the back to back lefts I hit him with caught him completely off guard and Bick dropped. As soon as he landed, my boot crashed against the upper part of his chest before I positioned it at his neck, cutting off his ability to take in oxygen.

“Okay now that you’re more focused, let me say this again, Diamond Falls belongs to the Wolf Warriors. We decide what goes on here and selling drugs within city limits is not allowed, but not only are you selling drugs, Bick, you’re selling them to kids which is just plain stupid. If I didn’t know any better I’d say you were on a suicide mission. Pack your shit and leave quietly or deal with the repercussions and trust me muthafucker, you don’t want to deal with the repercussions.”

At this point the color had drained from his face and I was pretty sure there would be considerable damage to his sternum, but if he was smart he’d still be alive by the time the sun came up.

I lifted my foot and he turned onto his side taking in large gulps of air while he struggled to refill his lungs.

I glanced at Newbie who’d just finished collecting the pills on the table and I circled my finger in the air. “Let’s go.”

“We’re not searching the house?” He scowled shoving the pills into his pockets.

“No, he can keep whatever’s left, but I’m sure it’s not much. That’s about ten grand and he’s low level. They wouldn’t credit him much more than that.”

I started to the door collecting the gun Bick had drawn when we first arrived. I dropped the clip and pushed it into my pocket before tucking the gun behind my back. When I turned to face Bick he was still curled up on the floor gasping for air but glaring at me and Newbie as we stood by the door.

I glanced at my wrist realizing it was just after two. “I suggest you get moving. You’ve got less than eighteen hours to get your shit packed and get the fuck out of Diamond Falls. This is your one and only warning, I suggest you use it wisely.”

I could see the defiance in his eyes. Bick wasn’t too happy but either way he was leaving. Whether that be of his own free will or by way of force, he wouldn’t be selling that shit in our town moving forward.



BY THE TIME we made it back to Sweet Auburn, I realized I had been anticipating the moment. When I walked through the door and Yahri smiled, my fucking heart did some strange shit. That smile was one reserved for me. Even if I didn't know that for sure, it was what I told myself.

“I thought you weren't coming back until later.”

“Got done early. Come take a ride with me.”

She glanced around the restaurant and glared at the handful of customers scattered about. “I have a few more hours left on my shift.”

Newbie picked that exact moment to walk through the door. “Ay, take her place.”

He probably wanted to complain but knew better and instead removed his leather jacket and tossed it behind the bar.

“Problem solved, let's go.”

“Ro, this is my job. I can't...”

“You're not working for money, you're working so that we can keep an eye on you. Ain't nobody worried about you cutting a shift short, let's go.”

When she didn't move right away I walked up to the counter and stepped between two stools to get right in her face. “What's the problem, Ri?”

“You just insulted me.”

“How the fuck did I insult you?”

“I'm not working for money. I'm working so you can keep an eye on me. I'm not a child and I do need money. I have bills and a whole life that isn't connected to any of this.”

For some reason the reference to her life not being connected to this hit different because *this* basically meant me.

“Which is exactly my point. The faster I figure out how to fix whatever you’ve gotten yourself tied up in, the faster you can get back to *your* life.”

Her body tensed and I could see the minute she felt slighted but hell she either wanted to be here or not and I was leaning more toward not based on her reaction.

“Valid point.” She groaned, tugging at the apron strings that circled her waist. When it gave way, she tossed it on the counter then squatted behind the bar. Once she was upright again, I noticed she had a purse and a tight ass expression on her face. I chuckled at how fucking stubborn Yahri could be...

I could be...

But that was just us. We both wanted something we would never ask for and maybe that was best.



EVERY TIME YAHRI was on the back of my bike I could kick my own ass for allowing it to happen. I was reminded of how right she felt, how right *we* felt and that had me thinking maybe...

As I dipped left to make another turn, she hugged me tighter. Her hands moved from my abs up my chest while she leaned into me. I reached back and placed my hand on her thigh further pushing the feeling. If things with us were temporary then I was going to take full advantage and enjoy the moments for what they were worth.

We pulled down the gravel road that led us to a spot off the grid, just outside the city. One that held history for both of us. My plans weren't intentional but that was just how I functioned.

Once Yahri was off the bike and removed her helmet, I removed mine and followed but elected to lean against my bike while she did a little exploring. Not much had changed. Old picnic tables weathered from the years. A fire pit and a small, manmade lake that separated income statuses. On one

side there were beautiful, high-end houses while the side we were on was lined with trailers and shotgun houses that should have been condemned years ago.

“Why are we here?”

“This is your shit, isn’t it?” I smirked and she rolled her eyes.

“Used to be. That was a long time ago.”

“But not much changed.”

She faced the lake, a little too close to the edge for my liking, but I was enjoying the view. This place felt like home, mostly because it was connected to Yahri. The skyline of silver, denuded trees, and subtle staleness that lifted from the water. Those memories stayed with me because they reminded me of *us here*. Reminded me of *her*.

“A lot has changed...” She glanced over her shoulder bringing my attention to what she considered different, *me*. “...for both of us.”

“Maybe.”

I pushed off my bike and walked over to the picnic tables, taking a seat on the top while my feet rested on the bench. I’d done this a million times before, watching Yahri while she got lost in her thoughts, staring blankly at the lake.

“We need to figure out what’s next.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have to make sure Devils know not to fuck with you but they’re going to take that as a challenge. There are rules to this, Ri, and if you’re not claimed by one of us then you’re fair game. If they touch you and I touch them, because I will, then there will be consequences. I can only defend what’s mine. Any unwarranted retaliation starts a war. They know the rules just as well as I do.”

Yahri squared her shoulders and gave me a dark look while walking over to me, placing her clenched fist on her hips. “That’s stupid.”

“That’s this life, Ri. There have to be rules or shit gets out of hand. When it comes to women, you’re either property or fair game.”

“But I’m not yours and I’m damn sure not *property*. That’s so disrespectful. God, I hate the way that sounds. Who the hell thought calling women property was a good idea?”

“Your pops most likely. Shit I don’t know. The reference was around long before I ever was but it sounds worse than it really is.”

“*Property* means ownership. Why the hell would any woman want that? To belong to someone, to be theirs to control.”

I moved off the bench, crowding Yahri. Our bodies were so close that I could feel her heart thumping in her chest. “You’re saying that like being mine is a bad thing. Like I don’t take care of what’s mine.” My hand landed on her hip and I pulled her into me. I moved in closer to her, dropping my face enough to speak at her temple. “Being mine, comes with benefits.”

She sucked in a sharp breath but shoved me away. I stepped back and planted my ass on the bench, leaning back against the table, grinning at how flustered she was. Hell I couldn’t lie, my dick was thick and hard against my thigh because my ass was feeling every bit of what just happened between us too.

“I don’t want to be anyone’s property. There has to be another way.” She tensed but I could see through the lie. She not only wanted to be mine. She wanted the benefits that came with that and I would gladly hand them over, as often as she liked. What Yahri’s stubborn ass didn’t want was to feel like someone had control over her life. In a loose sense that was what the label meant but only as far as making decisions that would keep her safe. There would be times when I’d have to put my foot down or demand certain things but only because I was putting her safety first. I didn’t want a woman I could control. There wasn’t a damn thing intriguing about that which was why club pussy was so unappealing to me.

“There isn’t any other way. At least not one that will ensure I don’t have to wipe out an entire club to get the same results. That’s how things work.”

Her brows crowded closer and she worried her bottom lip with her teeth. “So what does that mean. We have to pretend to be together? Act like a couple?”

“Something like that. Everyone needs to believe things between us are real. Once I put the word out there, we’ll have to play the part.”

“Which means?”

I chuckled at how quickly her mind went left. “We’ll make some appearances. You’ll rock my shit and I’ll make sure it’s believable.”

“I’m sure you will,” she mumbled. I leaned forward, grabbing her at the hip—something I was beginning to like a little too much—and worked Yahri’s body between my legs.

“I know you don’t fuck with me like that and it’s cool but I’m not about to let anyone put their hands on you and I’m also not about put the club at risk. It has to be like this.”

“Then what you’re saying is that I don’t have a choice,” she whispered lowly.

“Nah, you don’t but it’s temporary remember? Soon as we handle things between you and the Devils you get your life back.”

“And so do you. I can only imagine the fallout I’m about to get stuck in the middle of because some woman is annoyed believing that we’re really a thing.”

I clenched my jaw at the way she referenced this being all for show. It was in a sense but I could easily accept more.

“You’re going to be straight. That’s not how I operate, which I thought I already made clear.”

“You danced around the subject but I’m not stupid. You have women. Even if they only serve one purpose.”

I smiled, angling my head to one side and peering up at Yahri. Her between my legs, while my hand was tight at her hip spoke volumes for how real this could be. Everything about the moment felt right. “I move how I move without anyone’s opinions getting in the way.”

“Which means?”

“If I see a woman I want to fuck, I tell her. If she’s down we make that happen if not then I move around. That’s all it has ever been or will ever be.”

“Just out here doing your civic duty tossing around dick, right?”

I laughed and pulled her down onto my lap. She pretended she wanted to break free but exerted very little effort toward making that happen. “I’m not very free with any parts of me, Yahri. My dick included. I won’t lie and say that I don’t move around a little if and when I feel like it. I’m single, have needs, and handle them accordingly. Either way, what I do doesn’t touch you because no one is confused about who or what I am to them.”

“And who and what are you to them?”

“A guarantee that their time and effort will be well worth the investment.”

“Asshole.” She shoved her shoulder into my chest and I shrugged lazily.

“No point in lying. I can’t say I’ve ever gotten any complaints.”

“I can’t with you.”

Can and will.

After a deep calming breath. Yahri slumped a little. “I’m sorry about all this.”

“Don’t be sorry. It’s not like you did this shit on purpose.”

“No, but still, I should have known.”

“Maybe, maybe not, but too late for what ifs. We deal with where we are but you have to follow my rules and you have to

make this believable.”

“I can do that...”

“Bet, let’s test that theory.” I brought my hand to the back of her neck and tilted her face closer to mine with no warning before I kissed her. I half expected that she would push me away and punch me in the face as a knee jerk reaction or reminder that the last kiss we shared was followed by her father shipping her out of state with me helping.

But she didn’t.

That was ten years ago, this was now. Yahri actually settled into the kiss, taking the lead. This wasn’t the timid teen I kissed years ago. Nah, this was a grown woman who understood how to take and receive pleasure. I vowed not to disappoint. My fingers gripped tighter at her neck and my other hand moved to the arch in her back bringing her deeper into my lap. Close enough for her to know this wasn’t a performance for me. She moaned into my mouth and I was fucking done for but Yahri found enough sense to end things. I still held her neck and felt her pulse speeding under my fingertips.

“I...we...how was that?”

I felt my jaw clench from the annoyance swarming in my gut because she pulled away but I quickly got my shit together. “Straight. You’ll get better with time.”

“Fuck you,” she bellowed through a laugh.

Whenever you’re ready.

“That comes with the real thing. We’re just playing roles remember.” I winked and she shoved away from me, adjusting her jacket when she found her footing.

“I’m hungry. You feeding me?”

“Yeah, later. We’ll be making an appearance tonight. We can grab a shake and some fries on the way home though. That should hold you over.”

Her happy ass grinned like she used to years ago and I ate that shit up. Yahri was gonna be a problem, a really big

fucking problem, because after that kiss I could no longer pretend. If I were a better man, I would have left things as they were but I wasn't and had never claimed to be. Truthfully, I was the worst kind of man that existed. One who put my needs above anyone else's just because I could and that was exactly what I planned on doing when it came to Yahri, but my plans meant we'd both benefit from this partnership.

CHAPTER
TEN

Yahri.

“Are you going to tell me where we’re going?”

“No. Put this on.”

After our trip down memory lane Pharaoh dropped me off at the house but didn’t bother coming in. He was gone for a few hours telling me to be ready to head out when he got back. As soon as he walked in the door, he showered and dressed and now handed me a hoodie with Property of Pharaoh printed across the back and on the upper left breast.

I accepted the hoodie and flipped it in my hands frowning at what I knew it meant. “I’m not wearing this.”

“You are unless you want to stop by Candid Creations.”

“For what?”

Pharaoh shrugged one shoulder out of his jacket and extended his arm straight in front of him putting the wolf insignia inked with thick black lines on display. The tattoo was very detailed and skillfully done but had me frowning hard.

“I don’t get what you’re saying.”

“I told you, Ri. This isn’t a game. Every member of the club who’s patched is also inked. That includes our women. The mark guarantees that no one fucks with anyone under our shield. There are...”

“*Rules*. I get that but why can’t you just tell them I’m with you or hell they’ll see us together. Shouldn’t our presence

together be enough?"

"Years ago, maybe but things are different now. There aren't just clubs who pose problems. There are gangs and clubs that function like gangs."

Devils.

"Too many to keep up with and too many members claiming sanctions for people who don't deserve them. To be fair you're untouchable you're patched, inked, or both. Anybody who touches a patched or inked member of any organizations gets what's coming to them. It's the only way to keep order and hold people accountable."

"And what about families," I whispered lowly thinking about my mother.

Pharaoh must have sensed where my thoughts shifted because he was on me quick, his hand cuffing the side of my face, warm rough fingers pressed into my skin. "Families have always been off limits. Women and kids especially but that doesn't always happen, especially with people who don't value life. The rules are stricter now because of things that have happened in the past." His eyes fastened to mine. "But it's not a perfect world. This world, *my* world, is a risk with very high stakes." The warmth of his breath just before his lips gently pressed against my forehead forced a shiver through my body. "Wear the hoodie, Ri. *Please.*"

He stepped back and I nodded, deciding to push back the emotions that were creeping to the surface.

"I...can I have a few minutes? I need to do something first."

"You good?" The scowl on his face could scare the toughest of men but it gave me comfort because it was his protective instincts settling in.

"Yeah, I just need to make a few adjustments." I inhaled the reality of my life and huffed a sigh before walking off toward the kitchen.

"Five minutes, Ri. We're already late."

“Okay. I’ll make it quick.”

“I’ll be in the garage waiting.”

I pulled open several drawers searching for scissors and coming up empty, so I pulled my lip between my teeth mindlessly searching the kitchen until my eyes landed on the wood block that held the brand new knife set. I optimistically lifted one saying a silent prayer. The blades were sharp because the knives were new.

I started with the bottom, cutting the side enough to get past the seam then used my hands to separate the rest of the material. The line across wasn’t anything close to even and was slightly slanted but it worked. Next I cut around the hood, just outside of where it was stitched on, to make a wide loop of the neckline and remove it. I had to force the knife through the material to make sure I got a clean line and when I finished, I pulled off the long sleeved graphic tee I wore and tried on my new creation, lowering my eyes to get a good visual.

Okay, cute.

It stopped just at the waistband of my jeans and the neck was wide enough to hang off one or both shoulders if I tugged enough. *Now* I was ready.

When I made it to the garage, Pharaoh was astride his bike, with a phone at his ear and his helmet resting on the seat between his legs. He lifted his head and engaged in a slow examination of what I’d done to the hoodie before a grin tugged at the corner of his lips and he shook his head amusedly.

“Ay, we’re heading out now. Aight, bet.” He rattled off to whoever he had been talking to.

Once he ended the call, the phone disappeared somewhere inside his jacket before he motioned to the wall where my helmet was waiting on a small metal shelf. I lifted it and neared him slowly but left some space that he decided wasn’t appropriate. His finger gripped the hem of my now *hoodless* hoodie and yanked me forward.

“You had to hack my shit up?”

“I thought it was mine. It says *property of Pharaoh*. You can’t be your own property, right?”

Not that I’m admitting to being yours either.

He nodded. “Right, at least you didn’t cut a hole right here.” His fingers smoothly brushed across where his name was, which just happened to fall right at my breast. The pad of his finger grazed my left nipple that was at attention and begging for the contact.

“You said making a statement is important. I trust you.” I pulled my helmet over my head and settled myself on the back of his bike just in time to hear Pharaoh mutter, “Yo’ ass is making a statement alright.”

I grinned behind the tinted lid and wrapped my arms around his waist as the garage pulled up behind us. Riding on the back of Pharaoh’s bike was like a slow build to an orgasm. The vibration of the engine and the way the tires gripped the road allowed us to maintain a steady rhythm was sensual and erotic. Every dip and turn was like hitting *that* spot just right.

Orgasmic.

Riding was easily becoming an obsession to the point where I was disappointed each time we reached our destination. Tonight I was yet again thoroughly enjoying the experience. I’d noticed about half an hour back that we’d left Diamond Falls so I wasn’t all that surprised when we reached the city. We were on the South Side of Atlanta just off Old National Highway in a lot where an old warehouse sat deep into the darkness of the night. I could see a long stretch of road lined with jeeps, trucks, and bikes but the lot was also full of the same. Engines roared and music blasted from speakers as tall as me sitting next to a small box truck.

I hugged his torso tighter while Pharaoh lowered his feet to the ground to balance us. He occasionally twisted the throttle before pulling forward, lining up with a group of bikes that were near one corner of the lot. I immediately noticed the patches and wolf insignias littered on this group of guys. A sea

of black clothing and different shades of brown faces, a mixture of men and women but regardless of the chaotic blend, you sensed that everyone here belonged.

After Pharaoh walked his bike to a complete stop, twisted the throttle several more times, then killed the engine, I removed my helmet and absorbed more of the scene. Someone was heading our way. A tall bulky body with a hat pulled down low on his head. He had a woman tucked under one of his massive arms and she hugged his waist. They moved in sync like their steps were practiced which was odd considering his stride was much longer than hers. She wore a huge smile with her gaze affixed on me while the guy she was with focused on Pharaoh.

“Well damn. The world must be coming to an end. Never thought I’d see the day when Ro had a woman on the back of his bike and not a Chaser either.”

“You’ve been waiting a long time for this shit, so I’mma let you have that.” Pharaoh’s tone was light as he pulled his helmet from his head and tapped my thigh. He wanted me to get down so that he could.

I climbed off the back of the bike and set my helmet the seat when Pharaoh was standing.

“Hell yeah I have. Do you remember how much shit you gave me about this one?” He nodded toward the woman he held close before Pharaoh did official introductions.

“Ri, this is Bash. Most days I tolerate his ass but I’m feeling like this might not be one of those days.”

“Ro and Ri. How fucking nauseatingly cute is that?” Bash shook his head offering up a smile that was very appealing. The guy was handsome and charming but very much taken based on the way the woman protectively tucked under him had her arms around his waist. She let go long enough to approach me.

“I like it but it should be Ri and Ro. That flows better and well, you already know *we* are the priority.” She grinned at

Pharaoh before pulling me into a hug which I wasn't expecting.

"I'm Cambri."

"Yahri, or Ri is fine."

"Okay sis, come through with the unique name and this is cute. I wish I would have thought about adding a lil something to mine." She tugged the hem of my shirt.

"Nah, don't be getting no ideas. Leave that shit just like it is," Bash warned but she rolled her eyes.

"You act like anybody cares about me showing skin..."

His face tensed and he walked up on her. "I care. Glacier is still grinning and shit whenever he sees you."

"Boy..."

"*All* man, baby, but you know that, don't you?" He dropped his head and buried his face in her neck, hooking an arm around her waist to hold her in place until she shoved him away, blushing.

"Can you behave, we have company. Let her get used to us first."

"Yeah, aight. I can do that." Bash stepped back but lifted her wrist and kissed the inside of it.

"Come on. Let me get you a drink to loosen you up a bit. Then maybe you'll tell me all Ro's secrets. He keeps them close to the chest but I feel like I officially have an in."

Cambri cut her eyes at Pharaoh who chuckled shaking his head. "She don't know shit so good luck with that and where's my lil baby with her pretty ass?"

"Home where she needs to be."

"Stay close," Bash yelled behind us as she pulled me away. When we had a little distance she looped her arm through mine.

"His lil baby is my daughter, Leigh. She loves her Uncle Ro."

“You have a daughter?”

“Yeah I do and you really like Ro because your whole face did a thing when he asked about her.” Her smile was smugly radiant and I couldn’t deny that she was right.

“I like him, but not like that. We’re just *familiar*. I guess that’s the best way to explain things with us.”

“Familiar, that’s interesting and deceptively *vague*.”

“Complicated is more like it,” I groaned without meaning to say it out loud.

“Oh do tell.” We stopped at the back of a truck where the bed was down. There were several guys near it and she pointed them out one by one.

“That’s Newbie.” He tossed a chin in acknowledgment.

“You work at Sweet Auburn right?”

He scowled, shaking his head. “Nah, I was just filling in ’cause Ro asked me too.”

So that I could leave.

“Oh, well thanks for that.”

“You don’t have to thank him. Prospects do as they’re told.” Cambri stuck her tongue out at Newbie who grinned. They had a friendly rapport because it wasn’t delivered in a derogatory way.

“Which won’t be me for much longer so chill with that. When I’m patched...”

“You’re still gonna do as you’re told,” a guy with a tall, slim frame and baby face said as he walked up and draped his arm around my shoulder. He was handsome with his wild wiry hair sprouting out of a caesar cut and he smelled like a mixture of fabric softener and a hint of smoke. Low set, diamond-shaped eyes peered down at me the same time his full lips lifted slightly at the corners.

“Who’s this, Cambri?”

Before she could respond, Pharaoh's voice traveled across the lot. "It's gonna be complicated as fuck for you to ride with one arm, Mello. Create some space if you want to keep both."

I glanced at Pharaoh and Bash who were joined by two other guys I didn't know. Pharaoh's expression was easy, like he was unbothered but Mello obviously didn't want to challenge him. He stepped away from me seconds after a laugh vibrated through his chest.

"These muthafuckers get their first taste of real pussy and start acting up."

"Always the gentleman, aren't you?" Cambri shook her head and Mello's smile expanded.

"Of course." He then lowered his eyes to me. "I'm harmless until I don't have to be. You get tired of him, hit me up and I got you." He winked, turned and shoved his hand into the nearest cooler pulling out a beer, then walked away.

"That was interesting."

"Trust me, you've barely scratched the surface of interesting with this bunch. But they're family and you're here so that means you are too."

I tensed a little wondering how much people knew about why I was here. Eventually they would find out but I wasn't sure what I was supposed to share. I decided to keep things vague.

"By default. My dad used to be president before Padre."

"You're Koda's daughter. Well shit. Now it makes sense. I was really confused about how Ro just showed up with someone wearing a property shirt and nobody has ever seen you before. Even Bash was confused as hell and the two of them are damn near brothers."

"You knew my father?" I tensed and she shook her head.

"No, I've only heard about him. Bash and I are kinda new in the relationship department but everyone knows Koda had a daughter. I thought you lived in Virginia. Did you move back here?"

“I...” My brows furrowed a bit thinking of what I would say and she cut in.

“If it’s none of my business then that’s cool. I promise I won’t be offended because everyone has a story and until you’re willing to share...”

I liked her already. Most people would have pushed regardless of how I felt. “No, it’s not that. I just kinda got caught up in something that I’m not sure how to explain or if Ro wants me to. We’re not a couple. Just...”

“Familiar.” She grinned. “Right, but whatever you are, you’re wearing that, which means you’re something. These guys are very protective of their circle and don’t let just anyone in. Either way, like I said, share what you want when you’re ready. For now, we enjoy the night. As much as I love Leigh, I appreciate every minute I’m allowed to pretend I don’t have a whole little human at home who is my whole world.”

“How old is she?”

“Five going on fifty. If you’ll be around you’ll meet her.”

I nodded my approval of wanting to meet her daughter. “So what’s all this?”

“Races. This is only my second time but it gets pretty intense. The Wolves kinda have something like this but when it’s theirs, it’s only them. This one is some of the other local clubs and they compete. Pretty much a testosterone overload. That’s why everyone is at a safe distance and why they have this on neutral ground. They race for money and egos.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“That’s also why they want us to stay close even though I have this and you’re wearing that. These guys still act stupid but our guys get *ignorant*. The last time they had one of these, one of the guys from the Shadow Dragons tried to get my attention and Bash broke his arm. The guy didn’t even touch me, was just doing the whole, ‘ay yo’ sexy’ from across the lot. I got inked that night.”

She pointed to her wrist, extending it my way and I noticed the tattoo there. It was a small circle with a wolf in the center and Bash inked around it in all caps. Cute but very significant.

“And you were cool with that?”

“I’m cool with anything that keeps my man from having to put himself in the line of fire. It’s bad enough who he is and what he does. I’m not trying to make that worse. The rules are the rules and this...” She motioned to her wrist again. “... keeps them from crossing lines.”

“So I’ve heard.”

My eyes drifted over to where the guys were and attempting to be discreet was an entire waste of energy because Pharaoh was already watching me.

“You get to choose where you want it, but it’s best to make sure it’s somewhere noticeable.”

“Where you put what?” My eyes circled back to Cambri who smiled smugly.

“Your tattoo.”

I quickly shook my head. “I won’t be getting a tattoo. This is temporary.”

“Mmhmm, girl. Sure is.”

I could tell from the way she said it, she didn’t believe me. Hell I didn’t believe me.

“Beer or shot?”

“Shot.”

I need it.

Being here was heavy but being here with the attention of what it meant to belong to Pharaoh added another layer of intensity I hadn’t been prepared for.

She handed me a solo cup with amber liquid swishing around the bottom. I quickly tossed it back and pushed the cup toward her for a refill.

“Okay, champ. You might want to slow down a little bit. This is whiskey and it’s strong as hell.”

I flashed a smile and nodded. “I know. My dad kept plenty of bottles around the house.”

“No judgment but is that a cry for help?” She was in the process of handing over my second fill but then curled her arm back into her chest to keep the cup from me.

I laughed hard and quickly took possession. “No, not a cry for help. I didn’t say I drank it back then. I’m just familiar with the brand and how strong it is.” I tossed back the second serving and cringed from the sweet but potent burn of that added to the first shot that hadn’t dissipated yet. “And I kinda need it, right now.”

“I guess you do because the way that man is tracking you like you’re his prey is giving say a little prayer that you survive the fallout, sis.”

My eyes quickly found Pharaoh whose expression was hard, but intense. He *was* watching me like I was his prey, and God, I wanted to be, but that was a terrible idea, so I looked away.

“Avoiding the obvious doesn’t make it go away. I’m living proof. I tried that and you see how it ended.” She held up her wrist and I groaned.

“One more.” I shoved the cup her way and she laughed, arching a brow.

“You sure that’s a good idea. This shit scrambles your common sense and lowers your inhibitions. If you’re trying to play things safe, you might want to rethink a third shot, not that I believe it will matter.”

Her eyes moved to the left of me and I knew exactly what or rather *who* she was looking at based on the cocky grin that eased onto her face. “On second thought.”

She tipped the bottle over my cup and poured a little more than the last one which I gladly took down.

She poured her own, drinking two back to back before tossing both our cups into the trash bag that sat near the cooler.

“Come on, the races are about to start.”

“Does everyone race?”

“No, usually the best from each club. For us that’s Ro.”

I managed to keep my smile controlled at the thought of seeing Pharaoh race. So much had changed in his life. So much about him had changed.

“What about Bash?”

She shook her head. “He doesn’t race. Well he does but only against Ro. The two of them are like feuding little children. Egos bigger than the state of Texas. But it’s worth it. Come on, you don’t want to miss this.”

And she was right. I didn’t want to miss it. I had no idea what to expect but a different type of energy pulsed through me with the building anticipation of watching Pharaoh compete.

No matter how temporary I knew this was, I wanted every minute of it while I was here and that was dangerous because I wasn’t sure I’d have the strength to walk away when it was all over.

Or if he would let me...

CHAPTER
ELEVEN

Pharaoh.

“It’s cool, Ri. Just be honest. I got them panties wet after watching me win that money, don’t I?”

Bash looked between me and Yahri and barked out a laugh. “Bro, you really gonna embarrass her like that.”

I smirked but kept my eyes on Yahri. Her cheeks were flaming because she was embarrassed but that was intentional. She had been trying to play tough all night like she wasn’t feeling me but the minute I crossed that finish line and she damn near tackled my ass, I knew what it was. “She cool, isn’t that right, Ri? Just answer the question.”

“You’re an asshole and for the record my panties are just fine.”

“Lying ass.” I chuckled and snatched the menu she had been pretending to care about from her hand.

“I was looking at that.”

“Yeah and you were taking too damn long. Let me figure out what I’m ordering then you can have it back because we both know you’re gonna do all that back and forth just to order a burger and fries.”

“I am not.” I glared at her and she rolled those pretty ass eyes but didn’t argue the point because she was as predictable as me winning the races tonight had been.

“You two are *familiar* as hell,” Cambri added, grinning like she had all of our secrets.

“I don’t know what she told you but if I don’t approve then whatever she said was a lie.”

“The fuck, man? How are you gonna call this girl a liar just because you might not like what she said.”

“All I’m saying is, women are extra as hell. You know how that goes.”

“Bash doesn’t know shit. Don’t put him in this.” Cambri cut her eyes my way then rolled them up to her man.

“Damn baby, can you let a grown man be grown?” He kissed the top of her head but she had his ass wrapped around not just her finger but her entire body. I fucked with it though because he was happy.

“Nah don’t back down, son his ass, Cambri.”

“Mind your business, Ro, this doesn’t have anything to do with you.” She was quick to jump to his defense like always.

“Yeah, bruh, pick a struggle.”

I chuckled and slid the menu back in front of Yahri and placed my hand on her thigh watching her tense from the contact.

“Hurry up and decide, she’s on her way back now.”

I already knew what she was getting and Yahri was last to order because she didn’t want me to be right but sure as shit she asked for a burger and fries. I didn’t call her out though. Her stubborn ass would have said something dumb like she only ordered it to let me be great since I think know everything. The thought had me smiling.

“So Ri, you knew my man back when. What can you tell me that I can hold against him when that fucking ego of his gets overinflated?”

“I tried already but she’s being secretive about their past,” Cambri said, delivering Yahri some silent communication that had me lowering my eyes to her. I could fuck with the two of them being cool because Bash was my nigga. The Wolves were my family, my brothers, but Bash may as well have been blood. Considering things with us started pretty fucked up, the

trust and loyalty between us was unmatched. There wasn't a damn thing either of us needed that the other wouldn't be willing to put their life on the line for.

"She's not being secretive. She doesn't know shit about the *man* I am. The *boy* she remembers grew the fuck up. But don't worry I'mma get the two of them acquainted in the near future." Yahri's eyes shot up to mine and I winked, noticing the blush settling into her expression but just like I expected that stubbornness over shadowed it.

"What I *know* is that he couldn't ride for shit so seeing him win that race tonight was surprising."

"Damn." Bash chuckled, pointing at me. "I always knew you had something to prove. You're always trying too damn hard to impress."

"Fuck you. This comes easy."

"Maybe now, but not back then." Yahri grinned like she was about to put all my business out there and I knew exactly what she was about to say. "My dad taught him..."

"Koda, right? That's your old man?" Bash's expression was firm but respectful. He'd never met Koda but understood what he meant to our club and to me.

Yahri nodded slowly but didn't linger there. I knew she wouldn't. She still had mixed emotions about her family but she also refused to be honest about how she truly felt. *Angry. Abandoned.* "Ro was terrible but he wanted to ride so bad. My dad kept telling him the relationship between a man and his bike took time and patience but *patience* is not a quality he had back then."

"Or *now*. Ro is impatient as fuck." Bash shot me a look that had me laughing. Yahri might have known my secrets from back then but he had all the dirt on me now. The two of them running their mouths was a dangerous combination.

"He rode a few times with my dad trying to teach him but of course that wasn't enough. One day Ro decided he was gonna take my dad's bike out without his permission. My dad was at the club so Ro took one of his classics, a Harley

Screamin' Eagle, out the garage and was riding up and down the block trying to prove he knew better than anyone else. The takeoff was fine but he hadn't quite nailed how to land or *stop*."

"Ah shit, what'd you do, Ro?"

"He turned the throttle too hard when he was supposed to be working the brakes, went flying off the back of the back, and the bike—my father's *favorite* bike—landed in our pool."

"Oh shit." Bash and Cambri both laughed a little too hard for my liking but they could get that. Crashing that bike damn sure wasn't funny back then but revisiting one of my worst memories now had me laughing too.

"I'll own that but you left out the most important part..." I leaned in close to Yahri, my hand moving further up her thigh and she tried her best not to react but failed miserably.

"Which is?" Cambri asked, watching us like a hawk. Out the corner of my eye I could see her grinning like a damn child while I stared Yahri down knowing she felt every bit of the intensity.

"She's the reason that bike landed in the pool. I knew how to stop, I just got a little distracted."

"And the plot thickens," Cambri chimed in animatedly.

"It wasn't my fault. I just walked outside."

"Wearing that little ass blue bikini." My mouth was dangerously close to hers with the reminder of the kiss we shared earlier. "How the hell was I supposed to focus on stopping your dad's bike while you were walking around half naked checking for me the way you were."

"I was *not* checking for you, so don't put that on me."

"You sure about that?" My hand moved higher and she pushed out a short breath that had me grinning.

That's what the fuck I thought.

"Positive."

“Y’all can finish the debate later, *in private*. Can we get back to the bike in the pool?” I kept my eyes on Yahri and shot Bash a bird.

“I thought my dad was going to kill him when he got home. That was an interesting day.”

“But he didn’t. He *did* tell me that distractions can get you killed and that if I ever got *distracted* with you again, he would make that happen.”

“And here you are breaking that promise. Just disrespectful as fuck.” Bash would be the one to point that out. Koda wasn’t here but I still held a level of respect for him that not many people would ever get from me.

I chuckled, leaning back and putting some space between us but my hand remained where it was. “Nah, we’re just chilling for now, isn’t that right, Ri?”

“Ye-yeah... we are.” She fumbled those words hard as hell which let me know where her head was at. No matter how much she was trying to downplay this, or *us*, we had some things to figure out. Regardless of what brought her back, I had to decide what would keep her here. Tonight only further confirmed that I wasn’t willing to let her go again.

Not long after our food came, as expected, we had company once word got out that we were somewhere we shouldn’t have been. Everyone had their territories and for the most part, we all respected boundaries but tonight wasn’t about that. Tonight I wanted to send a very specific message to the Devils. The best way to get that done was being here.

“Your GPS not working, Pharaoh.” Mouse and Jet, two of the Devils enforcers, walked up to the table but were smart enough to keep a safe distance. About ten more of their guys entered the place but stood just inside the door blocking our exit. Purposely making a statement. I felt Yahri shift next to me but Bash and I had expected this pop up so I blocked her in the booth where we were sitting same as he had Cambri blocked in. He and I always erred on the side of caution which was why I glanced at him and offered a nod. A signal to send a text as a precautionary measure.

“I know exactly where I am and you know why I’m here.”

“No, actually, I don’t. Care to enlighten me?”

“We extended an invitation to sit down with Chop. He declined. Figured I’d give him a little incentive to rethink having a conversation.”

“If Prez declined then there ain’t shit to discuss. But I’m pretty sure he’d love to know that some of Padre’s *pups* are having a problem following the rules.”

“As your prez’s bitch, I would be inclined to say that you would be well versed on the *rules* but here we are, you and this ugly ass nigga in my face like you don’t know that’s hazardous to your health. If I recall, Chop has rules about you dumbasses creating messes that he has to clean up.”

Anger flashed in Mouse’s eyes at the recognition of what I was referencing. As a prospect he thought it would be a good idea to come into Sweet Auburn Lounge and fuck with one of our dancers. I personally made sure he left with a few reminders that landed him a trip to the emergency room while Chop had to send an apology by way of cash as a peace offering or risk starting a war that he wouldn’t win. We’d outnumbered them back then, but now the field was more level. There had been an influx of men who had no issue compromising their morals and even more that lacked a moral compass altogether. The increase in numbers for the Devils was why being here on their turf was taking a risk.

“I’m not a prospect anymore. I’m more than willing to show you what has changed. Now you can get the fuck off our turf or we can personally escort you. Looks like you’re outnumbered and considering your *company*, you might want to think long and hard about what your next move will be.”

His eyes moved past me toward Yahri which had me pushing up from the table extending to my full height. Bash was beside me before I opened my mouth to make sure Mouse knew that threat was the *wrong* threat. “The thought you just had about her will get you killed, Mouse. If I were *you*, I’d think long and hard about what *your* next move will be.”

The roar of bikes had me smiling smugly. *Right on time.* “Sounds like those numbers just became a little more balanced.”

He glanced over his shoulder just as a gang of our guys came through the door led by Clutch.

“Never took you for a pussy but maybe I should have.”

“I don’t need them to handle you. They’re here to ensure this stays between us. I know that Devils like to fight dirty.”

As much as Mouse wanted to push this, he wouldn’t. Even if they felt they had a chance, Chop wouldn’t appreciate him starting a war between our clubs. They needed access through our town to avoid being put on the radar by traveling the larger highways with all the illegal shit they transported. Diamond Falls was an unguarded territory off the grid. If we wanted to, we could make things difficult for them which in turn would hit their pockets.

“Get the fuck off our turf. This is your only warning.”

“Everything good, Ro?” Clutch asked from near the door. The Devils were only a foot away from them but no one made a move.

“Yeah, we’re heading out. Just need to make sure our good friend Mouse here understands his position.” My eyes remained on Mouse when I said, “Tell Chop to accept our invitation to talk or your club loses access through Diamond Falls. This is your only warning.”

I stepped aside, leaving enough room for Yahri to leave the booth but made sure to stay between her and Mouse. She stepped into me and as much as I appreciated the closeness, I didn’t like why it was happening. Her fingers wrapped into the side of my shirt and when she looked up her eyes expressed how nervous she was.

“Let’s go.”

I turned my back, making sure neither Mouse nor Jet had access to Yahri. Bash protectively hovered over Cambri as we left the building. Our guys would be behind us but not until they were sure nothing was about to go down.

When we were outside, Bash whispered something to Cambri and she nodded heading to his bike. He tossed his chin to me and I lifted a finger requesting a moment.

“Ay. Go over there with Cambri so I can holla at Bash for a minute then we can leave.”

I half expected her to argue with me. Instead she did as I asked and as Bash made his way to me, I kept my eyes on Yahri while she leaned against my bike and began whispering to Cambri.

“Padre know about this?”

“Do you care?”

“Fuck no...” He grinned. “You stand I stand. That’s how we do shit. I’m just trying to figure out if I need to go home and fuck my lady with an apology or if I need to head to the clubhouse to make sure he doesn’t take your patch over this shit.”

I smirked, glancing at the ladies. “We’re good. Take care of home. We can deal with this shit tomorrow. I have a feeling he already knows.”

I pointed to Clutch’s bike. He hadn’t been at the races, that wasn’t really his thing, but he was here, which meant that my plans for tonight had already reached Padre.

“Yeah you know he only rides for shit like this when he thinks his presence makes us behave more sensibly.”

“Good fucking luck with that.”

Bash tossed his chin and extended a closed fist my way. “I’m out. Let me go make good use of the rest of the night before we have to get my baby from Marian’s house in the morning.”

“Y’all trying give my lil baby a sibling?”

Bash’s face went hard with lightning speed. “Fuck no. At least not right now. Leigh is enough. Her little ass is already running me. Between her and her mama I have to let them do what the hell they want because I can’t tell either of them no.”

“Weak ass.” He smirked and shrugged.

“When you love somebody like that you don’t mind being weak for them because *they* are your strength. It keeps you balanced. I have a feeling you already understand what that’s like.” He glanced at the ladies, specifically Yahri. I wanted to deny what he was insinuating but argument would have been pointless. He was about the only one who could see through my bullshit with little to no effort.

“We’re gonna see how things play out, but for now, my priority is getting this target off her back.”

He got serious. “Listen, it’s whatever. If we need to handle it we do. They want her, they have to get through us and that shit is never gonna happen.”

My eyes moved to Yahri and hers were already on me. She was about to be on my ass and unlike Bash, I couldn’t use my dick to fix the situation which meant I was gonna have to figure out something else or just let her get this shit off her chest.

“I’ll hit you tomorrow when I assess the damage.” We walked back to the ladies and I used my fist to gently tap Cambri’s chin. “Be easy on him. This was all me.”

“As if that would matter. He rides, you ride. You ride, he rides. I know the drill.” She rolled her eyes but smiled at Yahri. “Maybe we can get together soon. We’re in the same neighborhood. Tell Ro to send you my number.”

Yahri glanced at me and nodded. “I will.”

The ride home was long as fuck, mentally that is. Yahri held tight keeping close and she didn’t deny me when I made a point of keeping my hand on her thigh or when I switched up and placed my hand over hers while she held it firmly against my body. My mind was going fucking crazy with how wrong things could have gone this evening. My role was to protect Yahri and I dragged her right into the line of fire. It was necessary for me to make my point. Yahri was off limits and if anyone decided to be stupid enough to ignore the warning, the consequences would be severe.

By the time we made it back to the house, the tension between us was thick as hell. Yahri still hadn't said a word and I couldn't read her to figure out where her head was. We both stood in the hallway outside of her room when she finally spoke, telling me she was about to shower and go to bed. I decided it was best to get this over with.

"We need to talk about tonight."

"Can it wait until tomorrow?"

I searched her from head to toe. Physically she looked fine but emotionally she was unraveling.

"Nah, it can't wait." I stepped to her and placed my palm on the side of her face. She leaned into the touch and closed her eyes briefly before exhaling a sigh.

"Can I at least shower and change first?"

"Yeah, do that. I'mma do the same. When you're done, meet me downstairs." I stepped closer, kissed her forehead, then watched as she left me and disappeared behind the guest bedroom door. I stared at it for a long moment before I drug my body across the hall and into my room knowing things had already changed. As much as I hated the obvious I wasn't going to let her leave even after this thing with the Devils was resolved.

CHAPTER
TWELVE

Yahri.

There were defining moments in life. Moments that sealed your fate with who you were and what you believed. The first time I experienced one of those defining moments was when I lost my mother. It was devastating back then but I hadn't truly understood what her life meant. She loved my father and no matter who he was, she chose him. She died because she *loved* him.

Another defining moment in my life was when my father sent me away. He lost my mother because of the choices he made in life and didn't want to lose me too. Back then I was so angry. I felt like I'd lost both of them long before I truly had. I couldn't really be rational about the decision my father made because it hurt and I felt abandoned.

He sent me away to keep me safe and there were two things I now realized. Regardless of whether or not he made the right choice back then his life still touched me. My father didn't want to lose me so instead I was forced to lose him and all for what? His life choices still controlled *my* life. Even if in an abstract sense. The Devils had a price on my head which brought me back to the same dangers my father wanted to protect me from and now years later I am protected...

By Pharaoh.

That brought me to the last defining moment. When he'd kissed me years ago. He was mine and I was his, only our timing wasn't right. Regardless of what brought us back

together, it was inevitable that we would *be* together, his life choices be damned. Just like my mother stayed with my father, I would stay with Pharaoh.

With him is where I belong.

By the time I had showered and changed, I felt a little better but my mind was still spiraling. Pharaoh's door was closed so I made that my first stop, peeking my head in after knocking and not getting a response. I caught sight of Pharaoh the minute he stepped out of the bathroom, dressed in lounge pants and no shirt. I visually traced the lines of defined muscle in his chest and abs before exploring the ink that covered them, getting temporally lost until his voice cut through the silence.

"Sit, so we can talk."

His voice was deep but his tone was serious which quickly erased the lustful thoughts that had just been circling in my head. I looked around trying to decide where to sit and he must have read my mind because a slow smile eased onto his face.

"You can sit on the bed, Ri. You're safe... *for now.*"

I sat on the edge and Pharaoh eventually occupied the space beside me. "What's on your mind?"

You.

Us.

How much I now understand the decisions you and my dad made all those years ago.

"This is real for you. Your life."

"It's always been real."

I nodded, frowning harder. "I know but it hadn't always been real to me. Being on the outside you know what this world is like but once you cross the line and it touches you, things are very real."

"You scared?"

"For you, yes but not for me. I know that you will never let anything happen to me."

“I won’t but now you see why your dad wanted to keep you from this.”

“I do and I also understand my mother better.”

I understand what made her stay.

“What do you mean?” He watched me with an intense curiosity.

“She knew the risk but she loved him.”

Pharaoh’s brows moved in closer, his expression grew even more intense like he was trying to understand what I was saying. “You’re not mad about tonight?”

“No, I didn’t like how things could have ended, but I know who you are. I know what this life is. The risk involved.”

“And?”

I didn’t think, I just acted because if I didn’t I would have changed my mind. I climbed onto Pharaoh’s lap. He let me but only moved to put his hands beside him like he needed to keep them away from me.

“Tonight could have gone two ways.” I roped my arms around his neck, scooting forward. “I was either going to make the decision to stay or leave...”

“You leaving?”

“Do you want me to?”

“Why are you asking questions you already know the answer to?”

“Why are you avoiding the question?”

The battle of wills began and the two of us remained locked in a heated stare until I felt his hands slide underneath my shirt followed by the warmth of his palm and a slight pressure from his fingers pressing into my skin.

“Stay.”

“For how long.”

“We’ll figure that out later, just say yes.”

My body inched closer and relaxed against his. I locked my arms tighter, bringing my mouth a hair away from his. The temperature in the room spiked and the air thickened around us.

“Yes.”

His eyes lowered in a heavily hooded manner and before I could inhale my next breath, I was sharing his. Our lips crashed with force, our tongues warred, and I was lost trying to find balance between the breathy draws of oxygen I needed to prevent me from passing out. I rocked forward needing more of the swell that was happening beneath me.

The way his tongue took control had me imagining the feel of his mouth exploring other parts of my body and had a steady pulse throbbing between my thighs. I deepened the kiss, pushing forward, rocking my hips against him but eventually managing to find some common sense.

“We should stop.”

His eyes found mine, fixated with intensity, and a deep scowl took over his expression.

“Yeah...” A kiss landed just under my chin, then my neck. His hands were rough, strong and eager as they worked beneath my shirt, then dipped past the elastic waist of my shorts.

“Ro, you’re not stopping,” I groaned, knowing this wasn’t smart. We were both on an emotional high from the rush of adrenaline from a few hours ago and from being honest about what we wanted.

This.

But we still had so much more to figure out and I didn’t need sex clouding our rational minds.

“Ro...”

“I’m not gonna fuck you, Ri. Not tonight. Just give me a minute. I have to convince my dick that he’s not getting any action and that muthafucker is as selfish as it is big.”

I laughed hard and Pharaoh peppered kisses across my cheek, down the curve of my jaw before his teeth grazed my lower lip. He bit down harder, then allowed his tongue to glide across the same spot before he pulled back.

“I want this. I also don’t want to fuck it up. You’re saying you know the risk, but I don’t really think you do. Let’s just step back for a minute and deal with you and the Devils and we’ll work out the rest, aight?”

“Okay.”

I pushed away but didn’t get far. “Where you going?”

“To bed.”

He grinned in that sexy way that I knew had enticed more women than I was comfortable with. “I said I’m not gonna fuck you tonight but I didn’t say you weren’t sleeping in my bed.” He stood and lifted me with ease, placing me on my feet while he pulled the covers back.

“Get in.”

I should have declined, but I didn’t. He wouldn’t have let me. I shifted myself into his king sized bed, settling onto the mattress. There was also the lingering scent of him that felt like comfort and safety, followed by his body which caused the mattress to dip before he settled behind me. I tried to do the right thing and ease over to the opposite side but that was cut short when his hand slid across my belly and he snuggled behind me. Since I was lower in the bed, Pharaoh’s chin rested gently at the top of my head and I relaxed deeper into his frame.

It was strange how familiar this felt. I had never once shared space with Pharaoh like this but my heart and mind were conflicted because I would swear to this being my safe space.

Home.



“WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED?”

I tensed at the sharpness of Pharaoh’s voice but my mind hadn’t quite registered what was going on. I shifted a little and realized that the spot next to me was empty so I forced my eyes open to find the room still dark.

“Fuck. How bad?”

Pause.

“They alive?”

The weariness and anger in his voice had me shifting again but this time to sit up. I blinked several times trying to bring my eyes into focus and realized why the spot next to me was empty. Pharaoh was sitting on the edge of the bed, giving me a visual of his back and shoulders which were just as tight with tension as his voice sounded.

“Ro...”

He didn’t move or acknowledge me but I could feel the weight of whatever was happening. The air around us was tense. His fist landed hard on the nightstand causing me to jump. Whatever was going on wasn’t good.

“Aight, I’m on my way.”

The call ended and Pharaoh was up. He didn’t say a word to me as he moved around the room tugging on clothes then headed to the bathroom, slamming the door with far too much force.

I crawled out of bed and sat at the foot of it, jumping again after I heard something crash then loud banging. Three times back to back. *A fist hitting the wall.* Water went on and off and I could hear things being tossed around before Pharaoh showed his face again. The light from the bathroom gave enough for me to take in the frustration and anger settled into his features. He refused to look at me as he moved around the room again, shoving his feet into his boots. Cellphone and keys were collected dropped into his pocket before he finally gave me his voice.

“I’m heading out. I don’t know how long I’ll be. Stay here until...”

“I have a shift at ten.”

“Not today. If you need me, call. I’ll answer when I can.” He turned to leave and my feet hit the floor before he could get too far.

“Ro...” The look he gave when I caught his arm was close to death and had me releasing the hold I had on him. “What’s going on?”

“Club business.” His voice was low, detached but laced with anger.

“Clearly, but you’re upset. What happened?”

His jaw flexed like he was struggling with something but all I got was, “Don’t leave the house. I’ll tell Bash to send Cambri over so you don’t have to be here alone.”

Whatever was going on, he didn’t want to tell me because he was out the room, thudding down the stairs and the roar of his bike followed shortly after. I walked back to my room, grabbed my phone, then found my way back into his room and bed. Tucking myself beneath the bedding, the wait began.

Three forty-two a.m.

Considering the time and the way he’d rushed out of here, nothing good was happening and that had my stomach flipping and twisting in knots. Something was terribly wrong. I could feel it flooding my veins because like it or not, the unknown was so much worse.

After tossing and turning long enough for the sun to come up, I decided to stop trying for sleep that wouldn’t come. I climbed out of bed and crossed the hall to hit the bathroom. After preparing for a day that I had no expectations for, I decided to make breakfast that I ended up playing over before it landed in the trash.

By lunch I had checked my phone at least a million times only to feel even more anxiety and stress because I had no calls or message from Pharaoh, but at least he kept his word

and made sure I wouldn't stress alone. By six that evening Cambri showed up with takeout from some taco place and a miniature version of herself who I immediately fell in love with.

Her daughter Leigh.

We ate while Leigh talked a mile a minute about everything she loved and it seemed that her uncle Pharaoh was at the top of that list because he always, always brought her *super good snacks*. It seemed that Leigh had a bit of a crush on her Uncle Pharaoh, which was absolutely adorable and well, I couldn't blame the kid because he was well worth crushing over.

"Mommy, I'm finished with my food. Can I go get my toys now?"

"Leigh, you didn't finish your food. You barely ate half of it."

Her little fist balled up and she pulled her lip between her teeth like she was deep in thought before she presented her argument. It was the most adorable thing ever.

"But I did because you gave me way more than I usually eat. I had three and some rice and I ate one and *all* my rice. So that means I ate all of it. You just gave me way too much this time."

I tried really hard not to laugh and lost the battle because this little girl was a whole mess and dead serious. When I laughed she turned to me and smiled wide then shrugged before she narrowed her eyes at her mother.

"So can I go get my toys now?"

"You know what..." Cambri shook her head clearly not prepared to argue. I had a feeling she wouldn't win anyway. "Yes, you can get your toys. Take them in the living room."

"Okay..." she sang, sliding off the chair and darting through the house into the garage, returning a few minutes later with a plastic crate that she struggled with. It had coloring books, boxes of puzzles, crayons, markers, and paint. Cambri jumped up to help but Leigh shot her down.

“I got it, Mommy. I’m big now.”

Cambri threw her hands up in defense, rolling her eyes at the incredibly stubborn little person. “Okay but be careful, Leigh and no paint. You can use your markers and crayons if you want to color.”

“I’m gonna do a puzzle first. There’s a new one in here.”

“Of course there is,” Cambri mumbled as she sat down again.

“Leigh keeps toys here?”

She nodded with a grin. “Ro has her sometimes.”

“Ro, *babysitting*?”

“I’m not a baby,” Leigh called from the living room and I chuckled at how nosy she was.

“Leigh,” Cambri warned and she flashed her mother a big smile.

“I wasn’t listening, Mommy. I promise. I’m just doing my puzzle.”

“Right,” Cambri mumbled. “He’s actually really good with her, but then again that child has every single one of those grown ass men wrapped round her tiny little fingers. Bash more than anybody. He can’t tell her no to save his life which means I end up having to be the bad guy.”

“But you love it don’t you?”

Cambri blushed. “Yeah I do. She’s more his than she is her own father’s.”

“You two not cool?”

“Hell no, long story short, if he ever comes near me or my baby again, Bash is going to lose his shit.”

“Wow, that bad?”

“He shot up my house when I was inside asleep kind of bad. Picture the worst father in history and he’s ten times worse, but I don’t have to worry about him anymore so that’s the past.”

“He seriously shot up your house?”

“Yep, knowing his own child was in there. I don’t care what issues he had with me, placing Leigh in harm’s way was a bitch move.”

I glanced at Leigh who was paying us no mind and singing some song she clearly made up because it was about pretty puzzles. I couldn’t imagine a father not loving his child and actually firing a gun into a house that she was sleeping in. He had to be a real piece of shit.

“I’m happy though. Being with Bash I know what it feels like to have a man love not just me but my child too. I don’t know that her father ever did and I’m okay with knowing he didn’t because we both deserve so much more than he was ever willing to give. I only hate that she wasn’t enough for him. Even if I wasn’t, she should have been. The reality makes me hate him that much more, but she and I are both doing great without him.”

When I turned away from Leigh to look at Cambri she was watching her daughter with a huge smile on her face, giving me her attention moments after.

“We have a new family, even if us being here means you’re competing with my five-year-old for Ro’s attention.”

I laughed at the thought. “Yeah well, I don’t think I can compete with Leigh. She’s too damn cute and apparently knows how to play people to get what she wants.”

“You have no idea,” she groaned. “She’s so much like me it’s scary.”

I raised a brow. “So what I’m hearing is that you are skilled at the art of manipulation.”

Cambri grinned and lifted one shoulder in a lazy shrug. “I’m going to plead the fifth until I know I can completely trust you with all my secrets.”

“Speaking of secrets.” I replayed the memory of how Ro left this morning. “Do you know what’s going on? He didn’t tell me anything but told me not to leave the house and that you would come keep me company.”

Cambri glanced at Leigh which made me do the same. She seemed to be well occupied, leaning over the puzzle she was working on.

“I don’t know all of it because Bash tries to keep me disconnected with most of that stuff, but he said something about two prospects getting caught up. It was pretty bad too because he mentioned the hospital and their guys never go to the hospital. They have people that patch them up so I’m guessing it was worse than usual.”

“I could tell from the call and how angry he was that things were pretty serious. But he looked more worried than angry.”

She nodded and stared at my way like she was thinking way too hard which had me frowning too. “What?”

“You know about Ro, right? Like what he does for the club?”

I exhaled a sigh. “Yeah, enforcer.”

She nodded again, brows pinched. “It’s mostly just him and Bash but Ro is like the one who makes all the calls about how they handle things. He takes all this stuff personally because he feels like it’s his job to keep all the guys safe. One of the guys who ended up in the hospital is Newton. Ro kind of took him under his wing because Newton wanted to be an enforcer. If it goes bad, Ro is going to take it hard because of who it was that landed them in the hospital.”

“What do you mean who it was?”

She looked me dead in my eyes. “Devils.”

“This is about me?”

She quickly shook her head. “You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do. That’s what last night was about. You can’t tell me that after their little performance those guys weren’t pissed.”

“I’m sure last night might have something to do with it, but not all of it. I’m new to this but not so new that I don’t know the rivalry between all the clubs. They have bad blood

between them. Bash has told me certain things so that I would be aware but he doesn't tell me everything so that I'm not panicked all the time or looking over my shoulder."

"Did he tell you why I was here?"

She frowned, shaking her head. "No not really but I'm guessing it had something to do with the Devils?"

"I was with one..."

Her eyes went wide and I quickly cleared up her misconception. "I didn't know. He kept all that from me."

"You seriously didn't know?"

I could sense from her tone and the way she looked that she didn't believe me.

"No, I didn't. He never wore his colors around me, never took me around any of his club members, and hell the guy was in finance, wore suits, and took me to all-inclusive resorts and high-end restaurants. Nothing about him said MC and it damn sure didn't say *Devil*."

She nodded. "So how did you find out?"

As much as I hated telling this story, because it also placed me right in the middle of what was going on, I handed over every detail of why I was here. The last place my father wanted me to be which gave her more insight on my past with Pharaoh.

"Now it makes sense. This is crazy, and shit, you have a whole MC after you."

"Yeah."

"You know you're good right?" My eyes shot up to hers and she smiled softly. "One thing I know for sure is that Wolves take care of their own. No matter what happened before, you're here now and you can bet your life that Ro and all of the other guys won't let anything happen to you."

I did know, but I also knew that if whatever happened tonight was about me or what I'd brought to their door, neither

of them would be thrilled about Pharaoh and Padre's decision to put their club in the middle of my problems.

"Ri, you know that don't you?"

I snapped out of my thoughts and nodded.

"I do."

She smiled. "Good because this is a family and it looks like you're a part of it." She glanced around slowly before her eyes landed on me again.

"Things are already changing."

His place.

My presence was known but this could also be temporary. Pharaoh was now placed in the position to choose the club over me.

"It doesn't mean anything," I mumbled, not wanting to get too invested in something that might never happen.

"Girl, you're here. It means something because Ro doesn't do this." My brows pinched and she added, "At all. He might play a little but he damn sure doesn't *play* house. Which clearly you two are doing."

"Mommy, I need help. This one is way hard." Leigh's little voice cut through the assumptions and I was partially grateful because I didn't have to dive deeper about what I wanted or how I felt. If we continued down this road my feelings would eventually take center stage. While I cleaned up our dinner, Cambri joined Leigh in the living room and once I was done, I decided to keep myself occupied by joining them too. By ten they were gone, with Cambri insisting that she needed to get Leigh home and in the bed. I decided to shower and change, settling onto the sofa to watch TV. Eventually the lack of sleep got to me and I dozed off waking just after midnight. The house was still empty and there were no calls or messages from Pharaoh.

By two a.m., I made my way back to his bed because being on the sofa felt too lonely. I crawled under the sheets, hugging

my phone to my chest. After what felt like hours had passed, sleep visited me again.

CHAPTER
THIRTEEN

Pharaoh.

“You think you’re being loyal but what you’re doing is signing your own death certificate,” I growled seconds before my fist collided with the guy’s face once more. My knuckles were swollen, the skin broken and clotted with blood to the point where I no longer knew if it was mine or not. I didn’t care.

“I don’t know shit,” the guy groaned as his head dipped low, hanging between his shoulders. His face was a battered bloody mess but all I saw was the ugly fucker who played a role in taking one of our members.

He was gonna die. That had already been decided. The lingering question was how and by who?

If he didn’t give me what I wanted, I would be the one to end him. If he did, then I would kindly deliver him to Chop or his people and let it be known that he and I had a really good networking session about their club. They would kill him for being disloyal or being stupid enough to get caught by us. Either way, death was inevitable.

“You see how this ends if you decide your loyalty to the Devils is worth more than your life. Now I’m going to ask you this one more time.” I pointed to the three bodies that were bleeding out a few feet from us. One at my hands, the other at Bash’s. The third, we took turns allowing him the privilege of our angry fists so I wasn’t sure which one of us caused the fatal blow.

The reminder had me delivering another painfully solid blow to my newest punching bag. There were already broken bones in his face, mostly the guy's jaw and eye sockets, the additional blows meant an insanelly abnormal amount of pain for him.

I gripped his chin, squeezing so tightly that my fingers ached as I lifted his face so that he had no choice but to look at me. The guy was too weak and in far too much pain to struggle.

“Why the fuck did you pull up on our guys tonight? Was it an order from Chop or just you being stupid?”

“How many times I have to tell you I don't know shit.”

My patience was unraveling. I respected loyalty because my loyalty for my brothers ran ocean deep. I would die before I betrayed any of them but this little fucker wasn't being loyal. He was afraid. Fear of what Chop and his guys would do to him had Kip choosing what he thought was the lesser of two evils. *Me*. He chose wrong because the way I was feeling right now meant I could break every bone in his body one-by-one and the glorious sounds of his agony and pain would only motivate me more. I was so close to losing my shit, the only thing that saved him, *for now*, was Bash walking in with the one thing I knew would change this fucker's mind.

Neither of us would lay a finger on her but that didn't mean we were above convincing this asshole that we wouldn't. One of the first lessons I learned being under Koda's watch was to use what you had to get the job done.

By any means necessary.

“Bring her over here.”

She was scared and I hated that. The first thought that went through my mind was Yahri. Being with me meant that she could potentially end up being someone else's means to get to me. I had to push that thought to the back of my mind because right now the only thing that mattered was the life we'd lost and the one still fighting but barely hanging on.

The minute Bash shoved her to me, Kip's demeanor changed. Every heartless bastard had a weakness and she was his. Devils didn't respect boundaries. Anyone that meant something to these guys had to be kept secret. He kept *her* away from his club members because in order for their women to be inked and protected, they had to survive one night with all the high ranking officers. They could do whatever they wanted. The reward for the woman was being protected and untouchable by any other clubs or gangs. How fucked up was that and how was being passed around a reward? That was the type of sick shit the Devils believed in.

"Why the fuck is she here?"

I yanked down the bandana that covered her eyes and they doubled in size when she realized what was going on. I held her against my chest, hating the way her body trembled with fear of the unknown but I continued smiling smugly at Kip.

"You're not cooperating and that's not working for me." I kept my eyes on him while I gripped her neck. Not enough to do any damage but with enough force to make my point.

"You check her?" My eyes leveled with Bash.

"Yeah, she isn't marked."

He was hiding her, so I knew she wouldn't be.

Kip now understood what was happening. We could do whatever we wanted to her and there wasn't a damn thing his club could do to us in retaliation. The difference between Devils and Wolves was that we stood by our own. If I said Yahri was off limits they would trade their lives for hers. Inked or not. Their loyalty to me extended to whomever I was loyal to.

Devils didn't give a damn about their *brothers*. They would be pissed that Kip was keeping something from them. *Someone* they could share. The look on his face was proof enough he now understood what I was proposing.

"She doesn't have anything to do with this." He was panicked which meant I would get what I wanted.

“The only way she doesn’t have anything to do with this is if you give me what I want. Where the fuck is your president hiding?”

“Aight, fuck. I’ll tell you.”

“Nah fuck telling me. You’re gonna show me.”

He shook his head so fast that if he didn’t already have a concussion from me knocking his ugly ass around, he was gonna have one now. “I can’t do that. If they see me with you...”

“If you want her to be returned home in the same condition she was in when we dragged her out that roach infested house she lives in, you’re gonna do what the fuck I tell you to.”

I tightened my hold on her neck, tilted her head up to mine, and kissed the corner of her mouth. It was all for show. One thing I would never in my fucking life do was force myself on a woman but the fact that she wasn’t doing much to deny me was proof that I wouldn’t have to.

“Let her go, muthafucker.”

A slow smile eased across my face. “We have a deal?”

“Yeah, now let her go.” Keeping her against my chest, I leaned forward and tapped his forehead with my index and pointer finger. “Good boy.”

“Take her to the back,” I growled to Monk. Seeing him only reminded me of why Newbie wasn’t with me and Bash. I lost my shit and started hitting Kip again. Once, twice, a third time...

“Pharaoh, that’s enough.”

My fist froze mid-air before I landed the fourth hit. My chest was heavy, muscles tight as I glanced at Padre over my shoulder.

“You know why we’re here. This isn’t close to being enough,” I growled, feeling the tension in my jaw.

“You told me that you could keep your head straight with this. Looks like I need to pull you back.”

“I’m good, Prez. Just having a heart to heart with this piece of shit.” I hit him one last time before I backed away.

“You need to go home, get some sleep, and come back when you can use your brain not your fists.”

His eyes lowered to my bruised and bloodied knuckles before they lifted to mine again delivering a warning that I had every intention of ignoring.

“I’m good, Prez. He gave us what we need. We’re about to pull up on Chop and get this face to face over with. Isn’t that right, Kip?”

He didn’t speak but Padre did and I knew before he opened his mouth, he was gonna pull rank.

“Not tonight.”

“The fuck you mean not tonight? We either move now or risk him running and we know that muthafucker is not beyond running.”

“If we know where he is, we put some guys on him to watch his moves. We don’t let him run but right now, you’re not being smart. You’re moving off emotions and that shit will get you killed. Possibly get more of our guys killed walking into some shit that we’re not prepared for. Is that what you want?”

I balled my fists at my side and Padre walked up on me, pushing into my chest. “I said is that what you want?”

“No.”

“Then we’ll move when I say we fucking move, understood?”

“Yeah.” I went to step around him but he cut off my path and got in my face again. It took everything in me not to swing on his ass but he wasn’t the reason I was so fucking angry. He was just the one pushing at the moment.

“I mean it, Pharaoh.” The warning was received. I didn’t like it but didn’t have a choice but to respect that he was pulling rank.

“I heard what the fuck you said, now get out of my way.”

He stepped aside and I moved once again.

“Bash, make sure he gets home. I’ll take care of things here and no vigilante shit from you two. I muthafuckin’ mean it. I lost one guy tonight, I’m not losing any more.”

Lost one.

Newbie is dead.

And I have to carry this.

“We’re good, Prez.” I ground my back teeth as I left the building. As soon as I was outside, I punched the hood of the club’s truck enough times to do some real damage but still didn’t feel any better.

“You know he’s gonna make you pay for that shit.” Bash leaned against the truck’s grill, arms folded across his chest while he stared at me.

“You think I give a shit?”

“No, I don’t. I also know you don’t give a shit about him sitting you down so make the call. We can go fuck some shit up or you can take your ass home like he wants you to. I’m with whatever you decide, but just know, I think he’s right. Your head isn’t in this right now. You’re not thinking smart which means you’re gonna get yourself killed or worse, someone else.”

“I know what the fuck I’m doing.”

“Never said you didn’t.”

“Then what the fuck are you saying?”

“That you need to take your ass home and get some rest. We have three bodies between us tonight. How many more do you need to realize it isn’t gonna change a damn thing and that this is not on you.”

“Fuck you mean it’s not on me?” My shoulders felt heavy and my chest was tight like someone had a vise grip tightening around me, squeezing a little more with every breath I took in.

Bash pushed away from the front of the truck and got in my face, his expression mirroring how I felt. So fucking angry.

“Get the fuck back, Bash. I’m not in the mood.”

“I don’t give a shit what you’re in the mood for. You need to hear me right now.”

“The fuck is with y’all trying to tell me what the hell I need.” I shoved forward to get around Bash and before I could get where I needed, he caught me with a damn left. I was a little thrown off and I swung but was too slow because he caught me twice in the ribs. Once from the front and the other landed solid at my side sending me stumbling back.

“The fuck you doing?” I growled after I had my footing.

“Proving my point. If I can get to you that easily then what the fuck you think someone who really wants to take you down can do? I barely even fucking tried.”

We both moved at the same time and the end result was two guns aimed at each other.

“Been here before, Ro, but last time, you had a little help. This time it’s just you and me.” His cocky ass smirked when I spit blood from my mouth because of the left he landed moments before.

“I wasn’t scared then and I’m not scared now.” I shrugged, turning my gun sideways. He laughed arrogantly and lowered his. Neither of us would pull the trigger. I was just tripping because I felt out of control and didn’t like that shit.

“Neither was I but this isn’t it, Ro. You need to get your head right. You need to sleep this shit off and we’ll deal with it tomorrow.”

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” I yelled, lowering the gun but tightening my grip on the handle while I balled my other fist with the need to hit something again.

Bash tucked his gun behind his back and walked up to me, placing a hand on my shoulder.

“This isn’t on you, Ro. If you think it is, then blame me too because I’m just as much at fault as you are. They knew

the risk when they signed on for this shit. We all did. They were somewhere they shouldn't have been..."

"That might be true but if I hadn't pulled that shit tonight..."

"It still would have happened and if that's where you want to place the blame then that means you're not just putting this on us, you're putting it on Ri too. You were there tonight because of her. You wanted to send a message. You gonna put this on her shoulders too?"

The look I gave him had Bash nodding. "That's what the fuck I thought."

"He's right, Ro," Padre said from behind me. I didn't bother to look over my shoulder because I didn't have to. He was in front of me a few moments later. "You two live and breathe this shit. I trust you both to do whatever's necessary because I know your loyalty is to this club. What I don't expect is that you can prevent everything from happening. It's not possible. No one can. We'll make it right as best we can but not tonight. Go home, both of you, so that I don't have one more problem to worry about."

Padre didn't wait for an answer. He stepped to the truck, lowering his eyes to the dents my fists had made. "And whichever one of you did this shit, you're gonna pay to fix it," he grumbled before yanking open the door and sliding into the driver's seat. I could hear the roar of bikes approaching that meant Padre had called in back up to keep an eye on Kip and make sure I didn't find my way back out here. I wouldn't. He and Bash were both right. I needed to get my head together.

"You ready?"

"Yeah." I walked to my bike and snatched up my helmet, throwing my leg over it and landing harder than I should have. I was still fucking pissed but I'd have to let this go, for now.

"And for the record, you look like shit so be prepared to play twenty questions when you get to the house. How you decide to answer them is on you but I advise you to tell the truth if she's gonna be around for a while."

Bash yanked his helmet down on his head, started his bike, then twisted the throttle a few times before he tossed his chin toward me asking if I was ready. I damn sure wasn't after the point he'd just made but it was valid, if Yahri was gonna be around there was no way I could lie about any of what was going on. It was time to head home.

When I pulled into the garage, it was just after five in the morning. I was exhausted and mentally worn out. I felt an overbearing tension in every inch of my body that I needed to release sooner rather than later. The house was quiet when I made it inside and Yahri wasn't in her room when I checked on her which only meant one thing.

She's in my bed.

As much as I wanted to join her, I needed to focus on the reason I was here instead of in the streets knocking off as many Devils as I could get my hands on.

"I need a fucking drink," I mumbled into the darkness, going back down to the kitchen. After I had a bottle of Sweet Auburn, I skipped the glass and decided my fate for the next few hours.

There was no point in turning on lights, the sun would be rising soon enough so I sank into the sofa, removed the cork from the bottle, and held it up for as long as I could manage before my throat felt like it was blazing.

I repeated the act that twice more then threw my head back and closed my eyes. A little over twenty-four hours had passed since I'd had any decent rest and my world shifted into a space that would never be the same. One of our guys was dead, another was barely hanging on, and Yahri was in my bed. So many fucking moving pieces that I couldn't make sense of at the moment. My mind was slowing down from the lack of sleep, the whiskey was already warming my veins which meant I wouldn't be making sense of anything for next few hours. Sleep. I needed to go to fucking sleep.

So I did.

CHAPTER
FOURTEEN

Yahri.

“What happened?”

I looked at my dad and could see the devastation on his face. He was soaked in blood when he stumbled into the house with the help of Padre and two younger members I wasn't familiar with. I didn't spend much time at the club and my mother was careful about who she allowed at the house. As far back as I remembered, it had only ever been Padre and Clutch.

I rushed into the living room and reached for my father. Panic settled into my bones because of the blood. And where was my mother? They'd left together. Where was she?

“Dad...”

“Get her out of here...”

“Where's Mom?” Fat heavy tears were already streaming down my face. I could feel it in his silence. Something was terribly wrong.

“Get her the fuck out of here,” he roared, glaring at me. His voice was loud, but his eyes, they weren't angry, they were...

Sad.

My pulse picked up as Padre stepped in front of me. When I attempted to move around him, he grabbed my arms firmer than I expected.

“What happened? Where’s my...my...mom?” I choked on the last word because she wasn’t here and there was no way my father would leave her. Ever. He wouldn’t.

“Ri, give us a minute.”

“No,” I yelled, yanking away from him but before I could get around Padre, he had my arms again. “Ri, give us a minute to sort this out...”

“Fuck your minute. Tell me where my mother is.” I yelled so loud my throat felt the strain.

“I said get her out of here. One of you do what the fuck I said, now,.” my father yelled and I realized his voice was slurred. He’d been drinking.

“Dad, where is she? Where is Mom?”

“I got her.”

An arm snaked around my waist and I knew it was him. Pharaoh. He spoke low, his voice controlled, his cheek against mine.

“Ri, come with me.”

“But...”

“Not now, come with me.”

A sob jerked through me and I felt my body give out. This wasn’t right. Something wasn’t right but I never hit the floor. I was floating or at least that was what it felt like. I buried my face in his chest and cried harder because I knew.

I felt it.

I knew.

She was gone.

My eyes shot open and I gasped like I couldn’t breathe. It felt like a lead weight had been resting on my chest and I blinked frantically looking around the room trying to make sense of where I was. In Pharaoh’s room, in his bed. And he still wasn’t here. I’d been dreaming. I hadn’t dreamed about

the night my mother died in forever but it felt just as real as it had all those years ago.

I began patting the bedding searching for my phone and when I had it in hand, I checked the time. It was just after eight in the morning. Still no calls or messages from Pharaoh and he wasn't here. Or at least not in the bed with me.

I threw the covers back and shifted from beneath them feeling a slight chill. I crossed the room, heading to the bathroom, not bothering to turn on the heat so my body trembled and shivered while it tried to adjust. I quickly moved to the bathroom, with the pressure from my bladder screaming at me. When I was done, I flushed, washed my hands, then grabbed a washcloth and soaked it with cold water to further help me shake the grogginess lingering from lack of sleep. After I brushed my teeth, I padded back into the room and ventured into the closet, yanking a hoodie from the drawer which I pulled on followed by a pair of Pharaoh's socks before heading to the door.

Coffee. I need coffee.

I froze as soon as my foot hit the last step and I caught the sight of a jean clad leg and boot extending from the sofa. My pulse spiked and settled as I crossed the room knowing that it could only be Pharaoh.

When I stepped in front of him, I noticed he was out cold with his hand loosely wrapped around a bottle of Sweet Auburn. There was barely any left but at least it wasn't completely empty. What concerned me more than the whiskey was the condition of his hands. Broken skin and dried blood on both. Just above his beard, at the peak of his cheek, was a bruise but otherwise he looked okay.

Judging from his hands and the splatters of blood that stained the gray t-shirt beneath his leather jacket he had been pretty busy. My stomach clenched with the reality of who this man was. Who my father had been because Pharaoh was now a younger version of him.

I stepped between his legs and reached for the bottle but as soon as I pulled it from his hand, his eyes slowly opened and

his arm shot toward me in a defensive manner.

“It’s just me.”

“Fuck,” he mumbled, brushing a palm down his face, giving me a better visual of the damage to his hands.

“Sorry.” His voice was a murmured deep rasp and I had his eyes again. They were red from lack of sleep or the whiskey. Most likely a combination of both. An entire day had passed since he’d left out of here in a blur of rage.

“You good?” was the next thing out his mouth which had me hugging the bottle to my core.

“I’m the last thing you need to be worried about right now. What did you do, fight a brick wall?”

“Maybe.” His lips curled into the slightest smile as he lifted both hands assessing the damage like he wasn’t aware of what they looked like. “It’s not that bad,” he muttered, reaching for the bottle which I pulled behind my back.

“I think you’ve had enough of this.” I stepped away, taking the bottle with me and placing it on the counter in the kitchen, swapping the whiskey for a bottle of water from the refrigerator.

“Drink this.”

“I don’t want it.”

“Ro, drink the damn water,” I demanded and he smirked as he took it from me, twisted the cap and turned it up. He didn’t lower the bottle until it was empty and I found myself annoyed and disappointed that I no longer had the visual of the way his throat moved while he did as I demanded. He kept his eyes on me the entire time, tossing the empty bottle on the sofa next to him when he was done.

“Happy?”

“No, but it’s a start. You wanna tell me about that wall you fought.”

“No.”

“Then tell me where you’ve been.”

“No. Excuse me.” He stood and was so close that I stumbled back when he was on his feet. He kept going so I was right behind him.

“Ro...”

“What, Ri? The fuck you want me to say?” He turned so quick I almost stumbled again but I managed to keep my balance.

“It’s not what I want you to say, but more about what you need to say. *This...*” I looked him over from head to toe. “Is something.”

“*This* is me, but you said you understood.”

“I do...”

“Then leave it the fuck alone. I need to get some sleep.”

He moved again but I moved quicker, cutting in front of him. Whatever happened was weighing heavy on him emotionally. It also had his hands bloody and bruised and his mind traveling to dark places. I wanted, no, *needed* to help.

“I agree, you need sleep but that’s not all you need.” He stared at me for a moment like his brain was pausing to process what I was saying. When my fingers brushed across his hand, his eyes lowered and a frown surfaced on his face.

“I’ve had worse, don’t worry about it,” he muttered, stepping away from me.

“Ro, let me help.”

His head fell back and his face tilted to the ceiling like he was losing patience with the conversation and me...

“Let me take a shower first. I need to get out of these clothes.”

“Okay.”

I watched his back as the distance grew between us and he climbed the stairs, his boots heavy against the wood echoing through the silence then the sound of his door slamming.

Twenty minutes later, he hadn't returned so I climbed the stairs and walked into his bedroom. The room was empty and the bathroom door was still closed so that was the first place I went. I didn't bother knocking. Pharaoh wasn't thrilled about my need to help but I didn't care.

"Do you have a first aid kit?"

He lifted his eyes to me then glanced down at his hands. The dried blood was gone from the shower but they were now raw and swollen.

"I'm good, Ri."

I snorted and moved into the bathroom, looking under the cabinet on the side he used coming up empty and moving to the other side but as soon as I kneeled down to search he gave in.

"It's in the kitchen. Cabinets above the refrigerator."

"Stay here." I issued a warning look and he chuckled, shaking his head. I found the first aid kit exactly where he said it was. I had to use the wooden chair from the living room to get to it but at least he had one. He also stayed put like I demanded because he was still seated on the closed lid of the toilet, eyes on me the minute I entered the bathroom again. I placed the blue plastic box on the counter and began digging through the contents until I located antibacterial ointment and peroxide.

"You know what you're doing?" He eyed what I had in my hands skeptically as I stepped between his legs again.

"No."

"Then why the fuck you think I'm about to let you touch me."

"Because you don't have a choice." I lifted the hand towel from the wall to my left and placed it in his lap.

"Hand." He scowled as I poured the peroxide on clean gauze and when he didn't move, I leaned into him placing the small plastic bottle of peroxide on the back of the commode

then grabbed his wrist, covering his knuckles in a not so delicate manner.

“Fuck, that shit hurts.”

“Of course it does. You decided to make friends with a brick wall.” I lowered my eyes and he looked up while I continued pressing the gauze against his skin. I wasn’t exactly gentle but a little less aggressive than when I started.

“I thought nurses were supposed to have a caring touch.”

“They might. I’m not a nurse.” I shrugged and he chuckled as I leaned past him and lifted the peroxide. After I doused the gauze for a second time I reached for his other hand.

“You’re sure as shit not even gonna try are you?”

“No.”

He laughed again watching me as I swapped the peroxide for the antibacterial cream. I brushed it across the back of both hands and placed everything on the counter when I was done.

“You should be good for now but I’ll reapply it when you wake up.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” His gaze remained on me, so many emotions were there. I could see them and would swear to feeling them just as potently which had me stopping between his legs again. “You want to talk about it.?”

“No.”

“I think you should.”

“Why?”

“Because you need to.”

He lowered his chin slowly before his fingers were at the back of my thighs bringing me deeper between his legs. Talking was the last thing on my mind. Far beyond the heat of his body, the warmth of his hands on my skin, and the clean woody scent that clung to him.

He didn't speak until his forehead rested against my stomach. "We lost one of our guys tonight. Might lose another."

I cleared my throat and tried my best to keep my tone even. "How? What happened?"

"After the races they were supposed to head back but ended up at a club they had no business being at outnumbered by the Devils. I don't know all the details but a fight broke out and our guys took the worst of it. Ten on two, wasn't much they could do."

I swallowed the reality of why it happened. "Is this about me?"

"No. There's been bad blood between us for years. It's been escalating over the past couple years because they've gotten into shit that we don't approve of."

Heavy drugs and trafficking women.

He didn't have to say out loud what those things were but I knew. One of them was what brought me here needing his help.

"That might be true but you can't say for sure that it wasn't about me. About what happened..."

"Ri, this isn't on you so let that shit go."

My mind traveled through so many possibilities. Maybe it wasn't *just* about me but my situation didn't help. Tonight didn't help...

"Ay, I'm serious, Ri. Let that shit go. If anyone is at fault it's me."

His grip on the back of my legs tightened like he didn't want me to leave or was fearful that I would. "I fucked up tonight."

There was so much strain and torture in his voice. When he spoke, it was so low I barely made out what he was saying.

"I really fucked this up."

"How?"

“It’s my job to prevent shit like this from happening. I’m the one who’s supposed to make sure we all make it home safe. Tonight that didn’t happen and...”

I failed.

He didn’t say it out loud but I could almost read his thoughts.

“You’re one man, Ro. They can’t possibly blame you...”

He grunted his displeasure at my response. “They don’t, but I blame myself.”

“Is that fair?”

“Fair is irrelevant. This is the role I’m in. This is who I am.”

As his gaze locked on me and the air thickened around us, I understood the unspoken question lingering in his silence.

Can you accept this part of me?

“I know who you are, Ro,” I whispered.

His eyes remained fixed to mine and his fingers flexed and pressed harder against the back of my thighs.

“I killed tonight. Three people and there would have been more but Padre sent me home.”

The challenge had been presented. Tell me you can accept that or walk away.

“Was it necessary?”

Why did I ask the question?

When is killing necessary?

When you live the type of life that Pharaoh does.

“Actions have consequences,” he breathed resigned and tired.

I nodded because that was the only answer I would get.

“You need to get some rest.”

He slowly shook his head. “That isn’t what I need right now.”

“Then tell me what you need.”

If I had any second thoughts it was too late. This was happening. What Pharaoh needed was to get lost in something that would be a temporary escape from the past twenty-four hours. I was that escape, but I didn’t mind. The way he peered at me. A dark expressing clouding his face was a warning. No words followed but behind his brown eyes was proof of the internal conflict that raged out of control.

He stood and his large, rough hands were at the side of my face, followed by a hard kiss, full of tension he needed to release. While he stroked my mouth with his tongue, I stumbled clumsily as he guided us from the bathroom into the bedroom until the backs of my legs met the side of the bed. The way he broke our kiss, his hands landing at my waist as I was tossed on the mattress, was a clear warning about how this was going to happen. If that wasn’t enough the intensity that consumed him sealed the deal.

“I need *you*.” He rasped into my ear and added in an even lower voice, “You keep saying you know who I am, Ri. I need you to be sure about this because once we take it there I can’t promise I’ll be able to walk away.” The mood shifted so quickly his face was almost angry. My stomach tightened at the dark undercurrent in his voice.

From me.

“I’m sure.”

He reached down and stroked a finger over my neck, further down. He kissed me again, leaning over while he pressed his body between my legs, spreading them painfully wide, giving me a preview of what was to come. When he pulled back and his hand replaced the pressure of his body, Pharaoh groaned low and deep in the back of his throat as his fingers glided across the dampness of my panties.

“You’re gonna have to let me have this one.”

A warning that he wouldn’t take his time.

My teeth sank into my lip and I nodded slowly. Slow wasn't what I needed right now. Fast and hard would be perfect.

“Condom.”

His brows pinched but he stepped back enough to reach into the nightstand. Once he had what he needed, he slammed the drawer closed and all but one of the foil packets landed on the top.

While I worked my way out of my shorts, he shoved his sweats and briefs down just enough to sheath himself. Before I could toss my shorts to the side, he was stretched out above me. Between my legs again, his hips jutted forward. I sucked in a sharp breath when he entered me with one hard thrust. I felt myself stretch around him, tensing from the dull ache of how full I felt. Relief and satisfaction. He pulled back and held my gaze as he pushed forward and I tensed. My breath caught in my throat.

His mouth was on mine again, swallowing my protests against how deep I felt him when he pulled back and landed in me again with more motivation. By the third time he hit home I was done for. He drove into me over and over again, taking my breath with every thrust. They came hard and fast with no recovery time between and my body relented then fully submitted. I unraveled and didn't bother fighting the descent. I fell into the blissfully satisfied abyss.

“Oh...” slipped from my mouth seconds before his crashed and collided with mine. With one last push, he was seated incredibly deep and his own climax ignited. His body went rigid, muscles locked tight and he pushed into me to the point of pain, allowing my body to be his retreat. There we remained until every last bit of tension escaped.

“You good?” His expression was tense so I nodded and was granted another kiss.

“Bet, ‘cause that was me being selfish. Now it's time for me to take care of you.”

He slowly pulled out of me and before I could process what was next, the warmth of his palms pressed into my inner thighs, his head was between my legs, and his mouth was on me. I groaned and rocked my hips, desperate for more, regardless of how my core was still contracting from the aftershock of my dwindling orgasm.

I groaned when his tongue swept the length of my pussy, slow and calculated. The muscles from my waist to my toes fluttered and clenched with need and it was pure, unadulterated torture and bliss of the best kind.

“Fuck...”

“We did that already. It’s time to slow things down.” The cockiness in his tone and the absence of his lips had me and my pussy groaning in protest. But I was rewarded shortly after with the swipe of his tongue that had my body responding, opening more and he took full advantage.

I sucked in a ragged breath when I felt the pressure of his fingers nudging their way inside of me. Nothing could compare to him, but this was a close second. He pushed them slowly against me, deeper, twisting and turning before they hooked at the perfect angle, edging me toward another climax.

“More...” I was so close. He pushed deep, retracting, then back again. One finger, then another and another sank into me over and over again. Then came his lips and tongue...

“Oh shit...oh shit....*more*....”

I got more. Harder, deeper thrusts which had my back arching and my hips lifting into him until my legs grew weak and the rush of perfection flooded like a raging tide, taking me down.

I came, trembling uncontrollably while soft, warm kisses moved down both sides of my thighs across the slickness of my skin and up my stomach. I felt him moving but couldn’t open my eyes. There was the rip of the condom followed by the pressure of him sinking into me, filling me once again. His movements were slow and controlled but deep as he pressed

into me that time. When I managed to peel my eyes open, his were waiting. Set low and paired with a cocky smile.

“I had mine, you had yours, we can share this one.”

If I survive...

CHAPTER
FIFTEEN

Pharaoh.

“You get any sleep?”

I glanced over my shoulder then nodded. “Some, did you?”

“Same.”

“Anybody check on Nic?”

“Yeah, Clutch. Said he’s still out but doing better. They got him pretty doped up to help with the pain. They think he’s gonna pull through but his body’s banged up pretty bad so recovery will be slow.”

I closed my eyes and pressed the heel of my hand into both of them one by one trying to erase the reminder of what Nic looked like when we made it to the hospital. His face was so damn swollen I hardly recognized him. Then there were fractured ribs and broken bones and internal bleeding.

“That’s good.”

“Yeah, it is. You talked to Padre?”

“He hit my line right before you did. Got a few of our guys posted up to try and figure out who’s inside. He sent word to Chop demanding a face to face...”

“And...”

“He hasn’t responded. I’m sure he feels safe since he assumes we don’t know how to find him. He won’t accept until he’s ready to defend his position. I’m sure he’s trying to

figure out how to put this on someone else so that we're not on his ass."

"He can't talk his way out of this shit. Not this time."

"I'm sure he knows that, which is why he's stalling. You heading out?"

"Nah, I'm chilling for a minute and you need to be too."

I glanced over my shoulder again. "I am. I have some personal shit to take care of but I'll get with you later."

Bash chuckled like he knew my personal shit involved the woman who was buried beneath the bedding behind me. "Bet, tell her I said be easy on you. You're new to this side of things."

I frowned hard. "New to what?"

"Managing that thin line that divides being what you need for the club and being what you need for your old lady."

"You've been in committed pussy for five minutes. Don't act like you got this shit all figured out."

"I'm not but I'm five minutes more experienced with this shit than you are and every minute counts, Ro. Trust that shit. Hit me later."

I ended the call, tossed my phone on the bed, and stretched my arms out in front of me, glancing down at my hands. I'd joked about fighting a brick wall but that's exactly what the damage looked like. I dropped my hands and pressed my palms into the mattress, rolling my neck from side to side until the bones cracked relieving some of the pent up tension that wouldn't seem to completely dissipate. I lifted from the bed, found a t-shirt which I yanked over my head then did a quick run in the bathroom.

I decided to let Yahri sleep while I made a few adjustments to my bikes. I hadn't showed them much love since Yahri showed up, so I was well overdue. Once I was in the garage, I started with my Icon Sheen working my way to my Ducati. Dealing with my babies was mindless work which meant that I

had plenty of time to think about everything that had changed since Yahri showed up at Sweet Auburn.

Starting with this morning. I used her body to escape all the heavy shit that was clouding my head, but technically I couldn't really say I used her because she was a willing participant. Regardless, for that short period of time, I managed to forget about everything except the way she made me feel.

Maybe it was wrong and possibly even selfish because there was so much more we had to figure out but she was what I needed. Something about that woman settled the chaos inside me. The anger and violence that had been spinning out of control faded with every touch, further convincing me that she wasn't leaving. She couldn't because in all my years of spiraling, no one had ever been able to quiet and balance the darkness that always seemed to be looming in the back of my mind. What I felt for Yahri all those years ago was ten times more potent and I wasn't ready to let that go. I wasn't sure if I would ever be ready but Yahri leaving damn sure wasn't an option right now.

"You didn't wake me?" I grinned at how my entire body reacted to just hearing her voice.

"You was drooling and shit, growling like a bear so I decided to let you have that."

"Cute but definitely not true. I was going to cook. You hungry?"

"Yeah, I could eat."

"Any request?"

"Nah, I'm good with whatever, long as you're making it." I lifted my head allowing my eyes to trail over her body. She was back in my hoodie, with her legs bare piquing my curiosity of what she had on under it.

"You might want to put some pants on though or I'm going to come up with a request."

She grinned and looked down her body. "I have on shorts..."

“Ri...” I growled. “Put some damn pants on.”

“I’ll think about it,” she tossed over her shoulder and stepped back into the house. I finished wiping down my bike then put everything back on the shelf because my bikes no longer held my attention. A pair of legs that I’d gotten far too comfortable between and the woman they belonged to were at the top of my priority list.

I washed my hands and leaned against the counter while Yahri moved around the kitchen setting up what she was about to feed us. I watched the ease with which she navigated and decided I liked the way she looked in my space.

“You’ve been here a minute. Your job cool with that?” I had not a damn clue what she did to pay her bills. When I promised to keep my distance all those years ago, that was exactly what I’d done. Completely cut ties. I didn’t need the temptation of having bits and pieces of her life because I would have wanted more.

And taken it.

“I work under contract and mostly remotely.”

“Doing what?”

“As long as I’ve been here and you’re just now asking?”

I shrugged. “It never came up and you didn’t offer any details.”

“Or you didn’t care.” She smiled smugly and so did I.

“I thought that was how you wanted things. You living your life and me not getting involved.”

“That’s how my father wanted things. I didn’t have a say in any of that or did you forget.”

I didn’t want to travel down that road because it never ended in a happy place.

“You gonna tell me what you do or not?”

“Financial analyst.”

“That makes sense.”

She froze, frowning at me. “You know what that is?”

“Why would you think I wouldn’t?”

“I don’t know.” She went back to chopping basil. “Why did you say that made sense?”

“Because that’s kind of what your mom used to do for the club. She kept up with all the money shit, made sure all the bills were paid and that the accounts never went negative. Most of the guys didn’t really give a shit about the financial part but the club is actually a business. More now than it was back then, though.”

“How?”

“We have properties, investments accounts, shit like that. Everyone makes money.”

“Is it all legal money?” she challenged with a slight lift of her brow.

“You know the answer to that, Ri. That much is still the same.”

“It’s good that you do both though.”

“And if we didn’t?”

“Then you just didn’t.”

I nodded. “Why’d you want to be at the bar if you had your own thing going on?”

“Being there feels safe.”

“You been working on your shit since you been here?”

“I finished out a contract with a client who owns a bike shop. He’s really good at customization but terrible with the business side of things. I haven’t accepted any new jobs since he signed on.”

“Bike shop?” I smirked and she cut her eyes my way.

“Don’t read too deep into it. He reached out to me. I don’t pick and choose who comes to my company. It’s mostly word of mouth and recommendations.”

“So you want me to believe that you were fucking with a biker and doing financial reports for a guy who customizes bikes and it’s a coincidence?”

“Yes, because it is,” she muttered, turning her back to me so I couldn’t see her face and call bullshit on the lie she just told.

“Nah, that was your way of staying connected.”

“To what?”

“Me.”

“You overestimate your relevance in my life.”

I pushed away from the counter, caging Yahri against the opposite one. She was held hostage between my body and the sleek surface with my arms at her side while I firmly gripped the edge. “You really believe that?”

“Yes...” Her voice was confident but her body betrayed her by settling into me. I kissed the spot below her ear and backed away.

“I’ll let you have that.”

“Because it’s the truth.”

“Possibly used to be but what’s your truth now, Yahri?”

She stared at me for a minute before shrugging off my question. “Sex is just sex, Ro.”

I laughed hard. “Damn, so you’re putting me in a box like that? Sex with me is some basic ass shit you can get from anyone?”

“That hurt your little ego?”

“Fuck no because I know better and so do you. Want me to prove it?”

“No.”

She said that shit so damn quick I had my answer.

“Aight then stop dancing around the subject. You know what I’m asking and it isn’t how much you love the new alliance between my dick and your pussy.”

Those pretty brown eyes rolled fast and hard.
“Commingling doesn’t mean alliance.”

“Bruh, are you really trying to downplay how I had you begging for *more*.”

“No, I’m just saying don’t overestimate what you bring to the table.”

“I’m not overstating a got damn thing.” Her eyes moved slowly down my body and I chuckled because she hadn’t realized how she’d become sidetracked. “*And* you just proved my point now. As much as I appreciate reminiscing about our alliance it might be more productive to talk about what’s next.”

“Can we let things be what they are for now?”

“Which is?”

“Letting things *be* what they are.”

“Yeah, I can do that.”

She finished making sandwiches with tomatoes, feta cheese, and basil which she piled together and pressed into a miniature grill I didn’t have before she showed up. After plating everything we ended up in the living room on opposite ends of the sofa and I was in food heaven with whatever she made. It was simple as hell but tasted like it should be on a menu somewhere. It probably was if I had to bet.

“You cook for your man?”

Her eyes shot across to mine and the sandwich she held pinched between her dainty little fingers lingered midair in front of her mouth. She smiled behind it before pulling it back to her lips and taking a bite.

“Sometimes.”

That pissed me off.

“This?” I pointed to my plate and her smile expanded.

“If I say yes are you not going to finish it?”

“Did you think about him when you made it?”

She rolled her eyes taking another bite of her food. I refused to touch mine until she answered the damn question.

Yeah I'm jealous but so the fuck what.

“No.”

I lifted what was left of my food and shoved it in my mouth. She shot me an annoyed look and groaned.

“Never pictured you as the jealous type. Your girlfriends appreciate that?”

“I don't have girlfriends.”

“Okay the woman you date?”

“I don't date.”

She narrowed her eyes at me. “You're grown, I'm grown. You don't have to lie.”

“I'm not lying. I don't date. I fuck, occasionally entertain, but I don't date.”

“That's dating.”

“Nah, that's fucking and entertaining.”

“Well do you do a lot of that?”

“If I say yes are you going to stop sleeping in my bed?”

“Maybe.” Her smug grin gave a more definite answer to the question so I decided to keep digging. There was so much I didn't know about her. Things that had always bothered me because I didn't have the answers.

“Were you happy, Ri?”

I always wondered what her life was like in those rare moments when I allowed myself to remember. Back when Koda was alive, he never volunteered the information and I never wanted to cross boundaries and ask.

She shifted and looked at everything but at me and that had my jaw tensing. “Ri...”

“What?”

“I asked were you happy?”

“I was lonely.”

“But life was good, right?”

“Yeah.” She was lying and that had me annoyed.

“You don’t have to lie...”

“I’m not lying. It wasn’t bad. My aunt was cool and life was decent but it wasn’t like having my parents or...”

Or me.

She didn’t have to say it because I could read her thoughts.

“I’m sorry.”

“Why, it wasn’t your decision, right?”

No.

“Nah, it wasn’t but I know what lonely feels like.”

She knew how I felt after my parents died. How I hated being left with a man who didn’t give a damn about me and how much I appreciated having her family in my life.

A little less lonely.

And I had her dad in my life when she wanted him in hers but couldn’t because he sent her away, thinking it was the right decision to keep her safe. Yahri cleared her throat seconds later.

“Okay so no girlfriends. What about any crazy stalkerish kind of women?”

Arica was the first person that came to mind. She wasn’t exactly mine but she was, for lack of better words, exclusive to me. As soon as she and Yahri landed in the same space, it would be a problem. More for Arica than me because again, she wasn’t *my* anything but in her mind, I was her *something*.

“I’ve already admitted that I haven’t exactly been celibate.”

“So that’s a yes. Noted.”

I laughed grabbing my plate then hers after she finished the last of her food. “I’m not saying yes. What I’m saying is

that no one has claims to me but that doesn't mean there won't potentially be someone who feels they have the right to."

She followed behind me with both of our empty water bottles, tossing them in the trash. "It's not like it really matters. *I don't have a claim to you.*"

I was on her before she could drop that nonchalantly and walk away without any accountability.

"*You* have whatever you want when it comes to me but be sure you're ready to accept the responsibility of what that means." My hand landed at her face which I tilted back lifting her eyes to meet mine. I brushed a soft, slow kiss to her mouth. "And you also need to understand that whatever you expect from me, I get from you in return."

I winked and stepped around her. As much as I loved this space that we were in, I had to face the reality that there was an entire shitstorm brewing in the streets and I planned on being right in the eye of the tornado.

CHAPTER
SIXTEEN

Yahri.
“Morning Theo, sorry for the all the missed calls but
—”

“Are you okay?” he rushed out after cutting me off.

The insistence of his tone had me sighing heavily. I had more or less disconnected from my life without any notice. Since Theo and I were in the process of doing an overhaul for his business, he would have surely been concerned with my disappearing act. “I’m fine. Just had a few things come up that I had to get settled.”

“Those things involve a guy named Gears?”

Gears?

My brows pinched and my nose wrinkled as I tried to do a quick deep dive to figure out who Theo was referencing. “Am I supposed to know who that is?”

“I would think so since he came by my shop asking questions about you. Wanted to know when the last time was I’d talked to you and if I knew where you were. He also didn’t come alone and didn’t ask nicely. Had two other guys with him who tossed a few things around in my shop. I really hope you’re not tied up with DR, Yahri. Those guys are trouble.”

Jarren.

Devil Riders.

“I didn’t know that he was DR and by the time I found out, I was already in the middle of something. I’m handling it.”

“Is there anything I can do to help? I’m connected with a lot of these guys.”

His affiliation made sense. Theo customized a lot of their bikes. He would know things about the local clubs and their members, but I refused to bring yet another person into this mess that was now my life.

“Oh God, no. How can you even ask after what you just told me?”

They destroyed his shop because of me.

“I can handle them a lot better than you probably can. If you need...”

“I don’t but thank you. They didn’t damage anything, did they? I can pay...”

“Nothing major and I don’t want your money, Yahri. That’s not why I mentioned them coming around. I only wanted to let you know that they’re not the type of guys you need to be dealing with. I was concerned. Are you somewhere safe?”

My shoulders slumped a little. “Yes, I’m with family.”

“Good and I mean it, if you need anything at all you let me know. DR are into some pretty bad stuff. They’ve been all over the news lately because of it.”

And they think that’s my fault.

“I appreciate the offer but you don’t have to worry about me. In fact, I called just to let you know I emailed your final reports and my suggestions for this next quarter. If you can stick to the budget I’ve outlined you’ll have most of your debt paid and should be out the red and expanding your profit margins by twenty percent by the end of first quarter next year.”

“Twenty? You originally estimated ten max.”

I grinned, nodding. “I didn’t want to overshoot the expectations but I really feel you have the potential to hit a twenty percent increase.”

“Because of *you*.”

“I’m good at what I do, Theo. I told you if you trusted me, I could get your shop out the red.”

“You did. I’m impressed.”

“Impressed enough to recommend me to all your friends?”

“Shit yeah,” he stated through a laugh.

“Then that’s all I need. Once you look over everything I set up for you give me a call if you have any questions.”

“I will and you’re sure you’re okay?”

“I am. I’ll be out of town for a few weeks so we’ll have to do video calls instead of in-house meetings and I apologize for that.”

“Don’t. As long as you’re safe.”

“I am.”

“Then that’s all that matters. You take care of yourself, Yahri.”

After I ended the call, I swallowed the reality of what was happening in my life. Theo had given me yet another reminder that my normal was flipped upside down in ways that I couldn’t control but that disruption brought me back to the one place I’d been longing to have a connection to for years. Now that I was back, I didn’t know if I’d be able to leave again, regardless of whether my invitation to be here was temporary or not.

Before I could travel too far down that road, a knock at the front door had me lifting from my spot on the sofa and cautiously checking to see who was there. Regardless of the gated community that Pharaoh lived in, which was secured like a fortress versus an upscale neighborhood, I still felt uneasy about every little thing. My call with Theo had only reinforced the reminder that there were people out there who

felt like I owed them something and those people were willing to take whatever they could from me in order to settle that debt.

I released the tension that shot through my body when I realized my unexpected guest was indeed a member of a MC but not one I had to be concerned with. Her affiliation was by default of the man who she'd recently fallen head over heels for.

Cambri smiled wide when I unlocked the door and pulled it toward me. "You busy?"

"Not really. Just finished a call with a client." I waved her in locking the door behind us. "You solo today?"

"Yep, I dropped Leigh off this morning and she has an after school program until six which means that you and I can hang out."

"You're not working today?" When she was here before, she'd filled me in on how she and Bash met. Cambri had applied to strip at Sweet Auburn Lounge and after watching her audition for the spot, Bash shut that down and gave her a spot behind the bar which eventually led to a position at the bar and grill so she could work days and be home with Leigh at night.

"Nope and neither are you. At least not at Sweet Auburn."

"What makes you say that?"

"Bash. He drilled out all type of instructions about my day and if we go out then we have to have one of the prospects with us which I hate but I didn't argue because they're dealing with a lot right now. And don't you dare travel down that 'this is all my fault' road because it's not."

I rolled my eyes as I settled onto the sofa across from her. "I wasn't going to, even if I still feel like this is my fault by association."

She shook her head. "It's not. You being here is one in a million on the list of issues they have with DR."

“You know about what’s going on with them?” I frowned a little, hating that she had an in that I didn’t have because of her relationship with Bash.

“Not much because Bash does his best to keep me out of it but I do know that in the past few months the Wolves have taken over the responsibility of playing peacekeeper and that means everything goes through them and the Devils aren’t happy about it.”

“Peacekeeper?”

“Yeah, because the Wolves don’t really do a lot of the dirt the other clubs and gangs are involved in, they’re like the neutral party. They don’t have an invested interest in most of what goes on so years ago Padre set up an agreement with the local dealers offering paid services of protection and neutral spaces for people to do business. *Illegal business*. They pay for the security and the guarantee that their exchanges will actually take place as planned. A lot of clubs were losing money *and* members because of deals gone bad. Those with no intent to do good business would set something up and ambush the other person, walking away with the money and the product. Wolves make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“I still don’t get what that has to do with the Devils.”

“They were the main ones doing shady business. A few months ago, the Knights hired the Wolves to set up a location for a drop they were doing. The plan was to sell guns to the Devils. The Devils never planned on paying for the guns. They were going to take them but Pharaoh, Bash, and a few of their other guys were there to make sure the deal went down like it was supposed to. Caused a whole shit load of problems when the Devils realized the deal was organized and protected by the Wolves. Bash said they were pissed because no one trusts DR anymore and won’t deal with them directly. If they get business it has to be handled by a trusted source.”

“The Wolves.”

“Yep, so they’re losing money and respect. Not that they had any respect in the first place. Most of the stuff the clubs and gangs do isn’t great but it’s expected. DR started

trafficking woman and young girls and that crossed lines that the rest of them don't cross. Bash said that he's not surprised that someone tipped the Feds off. Nobody likes what they're doing."

My brows pinched when I considered everything she was saying. "Bash told you all that?"

She shrugged. "Yeah but he kinda didn't have a choice. That night they did the deal for the Knights he came home with blood all over him and I freaked out. He told me what they were doing, not that it made it any better because neutral or not, if things went bad, it was up to them to handle whatever *bad* was. I'm still getting used to who he is and it's a lot but I'm in this with him, no matter what it means. Safe isn't always safe. Leigh's father was *safe* and look how that turned out. Bash isn't perfect but he'll put our lives before his when my ex didn't blink twice with putting our lives in danger."

"My mom used to tell me all the time that you can't help who you love. Back then it meant something completely different to me but now..." I slipped into thoughts about what my life would look like being with Pharaoh and how much I truly wanted him.

"Now what?" She frowned waiting.

"Now, I understand how something so simple could be so complicated."

Cambri's smile surfaced slowly. "There is not a damn thing simple about loving a rider."

"I don't..."

"Girl, save that lie for another day or another fool because I can see straight through your bullshit." She flicked her wrist in my direction. "This might have been a front in the beginning but it's definitely something deeper now. Like he made you cum kinda deeper once the D had been delivered. I'm here for it. I could use another ally."

"Ro and I—"

"Are in *denial*." She waved me off. "That's cool and I won't push so for now, go get dressed. I feel like being

pampered today and those nails need a little TLC.”

She pointed to my nails and I cringed at the new growth and chipped top coat.

“I would say I feel attacked but you’re right, so I’m going to just get dressed so we can handle this.”



“I FEEL BRAND NEW.” I sighed sinking into the soft vinyl bench of the booth we were in. After a mani-pedi, facial, and getting my brows threaded, I really felt like myself again. Even if my life was still complicated. Monk, our chaperone, was seated in the booth next to us which gave him an optimal view of the door as well as us.

“Then my job is done.” Cambri flashed a wicked smile.

“I feel slightly attacked.” I narrowed my eyes after lifting my drink.

“Don’t. You’ve been a little preoccupied. It’s kind of hard to focus on the essentials when you have Devil Riders on your ass.”

“Just come for me then. Speaking of, you know my story but I really don’t know yours.”

“So now I’m in the hot seat.” She leaned forward to snag two of my sweet potato fries, shoving them in her mouth. “What do you want to know?”

“It’s just you and Leigh. What about family?”

“Just us. No siblings and my parents weren’t really parents. I was raised by my grandmother. Neither of my mom nor dad have ever seen Leigh and truthfully, I wouldn’t want them to. *Bash* is my family. The *Wolves* are my family. When things went bad between me and Leigh’s father, his mom and sister chose his side. I really hate that they couldn’t be mature enough to make things work so that she at least had them but I’m not mad about it either. We’re good and we’ll be good.”

Her eyes lowered to the tattoo on her wrist and I nodded with understanding before asking, “You want more kids?”

“One day yes, but there’s still a part of me that wonders if that’s a good idea. I’m not confused about what comes with loving Bash, but I also know that he’s proven to me enough times that we don’t have anything to fear. What about you?”

“What about me?”

“Little Ris and Ros?” She smiled smugly.

Did I want kids?

With Pharaoh?

“I think that’s a little overzealous at the moment. I probably need to focus on whatever the hell is currently going on before I even take it there.”

Cambri’s smile widened at a slow pace as she stared me down.

“What?”

“You didn’t say no. You just said, you need to figure things out first. So that, my love, is confirmation that there is something going on between the two of you.” She quickly rolled her eyes. “Not that I hadn’t already figured that out.”

“I’m not saying there isn’t. I just don’t know what that something is. He asked me to stay and I told him I would.”

“And the plot thickens.” She leaned forward on with her elbows on the table and her chin resting on closed hands. “Which means...”

“I don’t know what it means. Ever since I’ve known Ro, we’ve had this thing. It wasn’t like I didn’t feel it. I just didn’t know what it truly was. He was older and someone my dad threatened to murder if he ever crossed that line. I was a kid with a crush. We were what we were which was nothing.”

“Just because someone says you can’t doesn’t shut off how you feel.”

“I also spent years hating him. After my mom died and my dad sent me to live with my aunt, I felt like they both just

walked away from me but they still had each other. I lost both my parents.”

And Ro.

“I understand why you were upset with your dad but why be mad at Ro?”

“Because I was a stupid teen with a crush on a man who I thought owed me something when he really didn’t. He owed my father more than anything but I only had pieces of his story. Small parts of Ro’s life that I didn’t understand.”

Finding out about the night before my mother’s funeral gave me a new perspective. Knowing back then probably wouldn’t have made much of a difference but now, being older and more rational, I understood Pharaoh better. I understood his loyalty to my father and also that there wasn’t a damn thing he could have done to keep me here nor would my father have allowed him to.

“And you can see yourself being with him now?”

I pulled my lip between my teeth considering the obvious. I was already with him. There wasn’t much thought I needed to put into the answer but I still hesitated before answering.

“We work in an abstract way.”

“And knowing your parents’ history doesn’t bother you?” I frowned hard but she quickly added. “I’m only asking because I think about that sometimes. Am I crazy for being with a man like Bash?”

“Is the woman that loves a cop, a firefighter, or a member of the armed services crazy?”

Cambri laughed hard. “Girl, not the same thing.”

I smiled slyly and shrugged. “Not *exactly* the same thing but you can’t overlook the fact that their lives are in danger every day when they put on their uniforms. Bash and Ro, every day they wear their patches, right?”

“Yes but again, not the damn same, but I get it.”

“Then you know you’re not crazy for loving who you love.”

“And neither are you?”

“I never said I was in love with Ro.”

“Maybe your mouth didn’t but your face damn sure did.” She swiped a few more of my sweet potato fries and I decided to choose silence as my rebuttal. I did love Pharaoh but in a different way than she was insinuating, but I knew the longer I stayed the more that would change.

“I’m going to the bathroom since we’re done. I know you have to get Leigh by six, right?”

“Girl yeah and she is going to take one look at my nails and throw a whole ass tantrum because she didn’t get to come.”

I grinned. “Looks like you’ll be making another visit for mani-pedis.” I yanked my shirt when I stood to adjust the fit.

“Not today I won’t.”

“That’s what your mouth is saying but damn sure not what your face is communicating.” She scrunched her nose which caused a hard line to appear between her newly threaded brows. If I had to guess she was mentally debating how strong she could be denying Leigh. My money was on them heading straight to the nail shop after Cambri got her from the after school program.

“You don’t know me. Mind yo’ business, Ri.”

I threw my hands up in surrender but kept the confirming smile I wore as I headed to the bathroom.

After a quick squat in the bathroom, I headed to the sink. While washing my hands I zoned out about the reality that I couldn’t actually deny. I wanted to be with Pharaoh. We just had to figure out what us being together looked like. Even after everything was settled, there was no way for me to pack my things and go back to Virginia like everything between us had never happened.

The minute I yanked two paper towels from the dispenser and began drying my hands, the bathroom door open, sending a gush of air through the open space. The woman that walked in did a quick sweep of me, then stood a few feet behind me. Something about her and the way she was watching me felt off. I kept my eyes on her through the mirror until I turned and tossed the balled up paper towels into the trash.

When I attempted to bypass her, she cut off my path which had me sliding my hand into my back pocket inching the razor I kept there closer to the top seam.

“Excuse me.” I angled my head to the side and the way she smiled told me everything I needed to know. I quickly took in the black jeans and long sleeved black tee she was wearing, searching until I located confirmation of what I could sense in my gut. *Trouble*. The red DR with a black pitchfork running horizontally through the letters inked on her neck meant she didn’t just happen to end up in the bathroom with me.

She stepped closer and I cautiously moved back carefully easing the razor from the cardboard cover that protected it.

“You’ve seen mine, now show me yours?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She wanted me to show her a tattoo that she probably already knew I didn’t have.

The woman was my height and size so if I had to fight her, I could likely take her but she was a Devil and wouldn’t fight fair.

Neither would I.

“From what I *hear*, you’re property. But from what I *see*, you’re fair game. Care to prove me wrong?”

“I’m not proving a damn thing to you...”

“Then you can prove it to Chop. He said you owe him for that Fed bust and if you can’t pay up, he’ll negotiate some other options.” The way her eyes crawled over my body caused vomit to burn up the back of my throat. I knew exactly what those *negotiations* would be if he got to me. That wasn’t

happening. Years of self-defense classes taught me one valuable lesson, the best way to gain the advantage and survive an attack was to strike first. When she made a move forward with her hand behind her back, I made my decision.

“I’m not negotiating a damn thing with Chop or anyone else because I don’t owe the Devils shit.”

She was temporarily focused with getting her hands on whatever weapon she had that she neglected to consider the possibility that I had one too. I threw my left arm out to the side and just like I expected, she fumbled, following the motion and leaving her distracted long enough for me to swing with my right. The razor cut smoothly down her cheek and a trail of red surfaced.

“Muthafuck. You cut me.” She lifted a hand to her face reaching behind her back with the other but I dropped the blade and punched her in the throat hard as I could before she had a chance to get her hands on it.

Another easy way to immobilize someone.

The minute she leaned over gasping for air, I threw my body toward the door, pushing through it.

As soon as I cleared the hallway where the bathrooms were, Monk was on his feet, swinging his head from left to right after he noticed how afraid I was.

“The fuck is going on,” he grunted, pulling Cambri harshly by the arm, until she almost fell out the booth, and shoved her behind him. I didn’t have to respond because GI Jane came bolting around the corner with blood still spilling down her face and a gun in hand.

“If you plan on using that, you better not fucking miss because you’re only getting one shot before I light this shit up.”

Her face tensed in pure anger when her eyes left Monk and moved to me. Monk kept talking. “You got permission to kill, Prospect? Because I do. My instructions were very clear, these two get a scratch on them, you die. I’m rather fond of living so you might want to think real carefully about your next move.”

“Is somebody gonna call the cops?” I heard whispered from a table near us. Apparently she heard it as well, or maybe she understood just how serious Monk was, because she looked past him again at me and smiled.

“Watch your back, bitch. They’re getting tired of chasing you. I might not have permission to kill because Chop wants you to pay up, but eventually somebody will and being Ro’s club pussy won’t save you.”

She tucked her gun and left out a side entrance to the café but I wasn’t given time to consider the warrant she just issued. Monk shoved me and Cambri toward the door only stopping us to search the parking lot before he barked out a command.

“Let’s go.”

As soon as we reached Cambri’s truck, he blocked the driver’s door. “Keys.”

“For what?” She looked at him like he was crazy and my focus jumped between the café and the parking lot.

“I’m driving.”

“No the fuck you’re not. You have your bike.”

“I had very strict instructions. Under no circumstances am I to let either of you receive so much as an insult while you were under my watch. She somehow slashed a DR’s face which ended up with a gun being pulled on us. Give me the god damn keys, Cambri, because if you don’t I’m going to get my ass handed to me far worse than it’s already about to be.”

My eyes shot over to him and I could see the anger and fear that drove his actions.

“Cambri, give him the keys,” I said lowly and she huffed and yanked them from her purse.

“Fine, where are we going?”

“Clubhouse.”

“I have to get...”

“Leigh. I know. I’ll take care of it.”

“You’re not picking up my baby. She doesn’t know you.”

“I didn’t say I was picking her up. I said I would take care of it. Get in the fucking car, Cambri.”

She angled her head to the side ready to argue but I grabbed her hand and guided her to the back of the vehicle.

“We’ll get her on the way to the clubhouse,” I offered as a compromise.

“No...”

“Do you want me to call Ro and Bash and tell them we almost got shot so they have the next hour to think about how they’re going to make you pay for that misstep or would you rather we tell them when they get to the clubhouse so soften the blow? I’m sure the longer they have to think about it the worse it’s going to be for you.” I shot him a warning look that had him grunting under his breath.

“Get in the fucking car. We’ll get the kid on the way to the clubhouse.”

“My daughter’s name is Leigh.”

“What the fuck ever,” he muttered before opening the door. Cambri rolled her eyes and caught my hand when I tried to pull the back door open.

“So you wanna tell me why you slashed her face.”

“She threatened me.”

“You know her?”

“No, but does it matter. She’s DR.”

“Right.” She frowned. “You sure you weren’t raised around them because who the fuck slashes someone’s face.”

I shrugged. “Nope, self-defense classes and me if I feel threatened, which I did.”

“Since when do self-defense instructors use razors?” She smirked with a brow lifted.

I shrugged again, opening the door.

“They don’t but I needed something to defend myself with other than my hands. More people get killed with their own weapons than harm those that are attacking them.”

“Girl, she needs stitches. A lot of them. That razor was a *weapon*. Wait, do you still have it?”

“No, I dropped it before I punched her in the throat.”

“What the hell?” she yelled with a laugh. “There’s so much I need to learn about you.”

“Yeah, you do but in my defense, the throat punch was something I learned in class.”

“You’re right where you need to be.” I frowned at her and she grinned. “With Ro’s crazy ass.”

CHAPTER
SEVENTEEN

Pharaoh.

“You there?”

“Yeah, just waiting on the handoff. You have confirmation yet?”

“Email just came through. Got photos and voice recordings. No way to deny who tipped the Feds off.”

I wanted to feel complete relief but that was impossible. We still had to deal with Chop. Being presented with the truth didn't mean he would accept it, proof or not. And that certainty didn't mean he would back down. This thing with us was now personal. He killed one of our guys, injured another severely, and we'd killed ten of his in retaliation.

“That doesn't mean that he'll take the deal.”

“No it doesn't, but a free walk versus running from the Feds for the rest of his life is a pretty good compromise.”

“I hate this shit.”

“Yeah, me too but this is the best we have and at least we get to prevent more casualties. Those women will go home to their families.”

“And he walks which means he'll find someone else to back him and be out there doing the same shit again.”

“Not much we can do about that.”

“You know that's not true.”

I could put bullets in Chop's head.

“There has to be some level of respect and loyalty or there is no order. And not to Chop but to the organization as a whole. Taking down members is understood but to end a president without a legitimate reason means we're sayin' fuck the rules. Are you prepared for what that means?”

No longer having the support of other clubs because they'll feel like they could be next if the wind blew the wrong way and we felt like being vigilantes.

“We have a got damn reason. Chop is a piece of shit.”

“He is, but he hasn't done anything that warrants us taking his life. At least not according to the bylaws. Trafficking women is not something most agree upon but the rules don't police what clubs choose to earn a living. We can't start allowing others to make those decisions or it gets tricky. People may not like how DR makes money but they can't get in the middle of it. At least not by way of taking down their president. We start making exceptions that aren't sanctioned and we risk having the same done to us. You know how this works, Ro. We take the temporary win.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean it, Ro. You go against my orders and *you* force *my* hand. We do this by the book, understood?”

“Yeah.” I ended the call and slipped my phone into my pocket watching as Loot stepped off his bike, removed his helmet, and walked over to Metz. I moved closer but made sure I wasn't visible to them. Metz knew I was here, Loot didn't.

“Money.”

I kept my eyes on Loot as he removed the backpack from his shoulder and tossed it at Metz's feet. That didn't earn him any brownie points but Metz would not react. He agreed to this because he owed us a favor and would also come up from the deal. We were going to allow the Death Vultures to keep the money Loot thought he was exchanging for guns that they couldn't otherwise get their hands on.

Over the past two days, we'd hit every stash house that we could locate where they kept artillery and product, cutting DR off at the knees. We'd confiscated over a half mil in cash, another quarter of a mil in weapons, and another half mil in fentanyl patches. The Devils were losing their shit and confused about how we figured out where their stash houses were but it wasn't hard. DR was notorious for treating their guys like shit. The pay was subpar, never enough to get any significant status, just enough to eat and remain dependent on Chop and the respect was even worse.

Most of the time fear was what kept their guys loyal but when you treated your people like shit, it was a lot easier to offer up the right amount to get them to flip. We were lucky enough to get the right guys. We paid up as promised when they handed over the information we needed and as a bonus they walked away breathing. The ones who refused to flip, hadn't.

There were only two outcomes from leaving snitches alive and well. They would either run for their fucking lives or be stupid enough to deliver our names as the reason the Devils were losing product and money. If that was the case, Chop would do the dirty work of ending them. Either way. It was a win and we were slowly breaking the Devils. Chop would eventually have to make a decision to come out of hiding or keep losing money and men.

The only resource he had at the moment was the women he trafficked. Unfortunately for us, he was smart enough to keep their locations from his low levels and it would take a little more than a promise of money to flip his tenured and ranked members. Which led us to the present situation. Desperation was what had Chop brokering a deal with a gang that he'd fucked over more than enough times to get them to side with us.

"Guns." Loot slid a hand beneath his hoodie thinking that was supposed to mean something. He felt overly confident knowing that the Devils had two guys tucked away on the side of the building and two more on the roof. Only problem was, those guys weren't there anymore. Our people had handled

them quietly and efficiently. Their bodies were now piled in a van. It was time for me to show face and totally fuck up Loot's day.

"Ah damn. Did they forget to tell you about the change in plans?" I stepped out from the narrow alley that separated the two buildings that blocked their transaction from any potential witnesses. This hadn't been one of our neutral locations used to broker deals for other clubs until this morning. The transfer of property was made by Dedge hours before we showed up to ensure Chop was kept in the dark. The street running parallel to the abandoned buildings where we were didn't have much traffic which made the place ideal for the type of transaction that was taking place. Dedge was never one to pass an opportunity to give us the advantage and grow our net worth.

"The fuck are you doing here?"

He had his gun on me seconds before Bash had a red dot on his forehead.

"I thought my reasoning would be self-explanatory but I'll humor you because I've heard you're not that bright."

"I'm the one with the gun, muthafucker. Seems that you're the one who's not too bright."

A bullet whizzed past me and Loot's gun crashed to the ground when the blazing metal pierced through his shoulder."

"Ahh, shit. What the hell..."

"Look at your chest." I motioned to the red dot on Loot's chest. When Bash made it dance, Loot's eyes nervously jumped around the empty lot and the surrounding buildings. He was expecting help from his backup.

"They're not there, but our guys are."

The way he ground his teeth together was a clear indication that my good friend Loot wasn't happy.

And knew he was fucked.

"Okay so you proved your point. What do you want?"

I moved closer and locked my arms over my chest. “We have what we want. Your money and product. Based on the way you’re sweating bullets and shit, I’d chance a guess that this hundred grand is the last of your expendable cash which means Chop isn’t going to be too happy with you. *If* that’s even how much you brought because we know the Devils are notorious for fucking people over.”

“You don’t know shit.”

“I know enough and since we’ve been hitting all your stash houses taking your money, guns, and product over the past couple days, I’d be inclined to say that Chop needs to make some decisions about how he wants to move forward. He can either face this shit like a man and agree to the negotiations we’re asking for or he can keep hiding like a bitch. We know who tipped the Feds off and it wasn’t my girl.”

My girl...

I wanted to laugh at how effortlessly I claimed Yahri and it didn’t have a damn thing to do with putting on a show for Loot.

She. Is. Mine.

“You expect me to believe that shit? You’ll say anything to take the heat off that bitc...”

My fist met his face so quickly he didn’t have a chance at protecting his ugly ass mug. “You be respectful or I’ll choose someone else to send this message to Chop.”

Loot turned his face and spit blood on the ground. “She’s Koda’s daughter. That means you’ll say whatever the fuck to protect her. You don’t think we know that?”

“Yeah I will but that doesn’t change the truth. She wasn’t the one who tipped off the Feds and put the heat on your club.”

“You want me to believe you, then give me a name?”

I smirked and stepped closer. “I’m gonna hold onto that until Chop accepts our offer to talk but you can tell him we’re the only chance he has of showing his face again and returning

to the slums that raised him. But first, we have some shit to settle. We lost one of our own...”

“Be glad it was just one and not both of them. They weren’t inked or patched which made both of them fair game. Wrong place wrong time.” He smiled arrogantly. “They should have known better.”

I had my gun in hand and under his chin before he could think to defend himself. Not that he could.

Loot trembled with anger and fear as he locked his jaw so damn hard I would bet he was in danger of cracking his back teeth.

“Don’t try to manipulate the rules, muthafucker. Coming for our guys was unwarranted. There was no threat to you or your team because we don’t move like that. You mind your business and we mind ours. That’s how things have always been. You started this shit, but we will finish it. The number of casualties is on you. Tell Chop this is our last time asking. He either accepts or we keep dropping bodies until there’s nothing left of the Devils but a sad ass memory of the pussy bitches you were. Today is proof that you have no allies. No one respects what you do. There are lines that we refuse to cross and that means if a side has to be chosen, it will never be yours. We will be the last ones standing if you want to start a war. Last warning.”

I stepped away and kneeled to pick up his gun, dropping the clip out before I hurled it across the parking lot. Turning to Metz I pointed to the backpack of money. “Take that and tell Cobra we appreciate his assistance with this. His debt is officially paid.”

Metz nodded and smirked at Loot before turning to leave.

“Bring them out,” I yelled. Mint stepped around the building and threw her hand up to signal our driver. A passenger van pulled around her and parked. Mint unlatched the back door and Grainger hopped off the back. He and Mint put four dead bodies in a pile on the ground.

“That’s four more down. They’re not patched or inked, so it’s fair game, right?” I smiled arrogantly before adding, “Tell Chop the longer he waits, the more men he’s putting at risk. Not that he cares.”

I walked away hoping he understood just how serious we were about this shit. It would only end one way and that was with Wolves eliminating the Devils’ existence. When I reached my bike, Bash was already waiting on his. Mint and Grainger would hang back to until they heard us pull away, then they wouldn’t be far behind.

“We keep killing their guys and taking their shit. Chop is going to start playing dirty. You think this is gonna work?”

“Got the call from Padre. He has confirmation. Feds are looking for him so he’s hiding but he can’t keep taking Ls like this if he plans on surviving this shit. He owes some people a lot worse than us a large amount of money. He needs what we have to clear his name. If he can hand over who actually made the deal with the Feds, he has a chance at walking away from this alive.”

“Which means that once we handle this shit, you no longer have an excuse to play house with *your* girl. You’re gonna have to really make her yours or step out of the way so that someone else can.”

“That shit isn’t happening.”

I lifted my helmet and settled onto my bike a lot harder than I needed to. The thought of Ri fucking with another nigga wasn’t sitting right with me and it never would.

“Yeah, that’s what the fuck I thought. Let’s ride.”

Bash was too fucking happy about my current dilemma but I chose to keep my thoughts to myself because he was damn sure right. If I didn’t make the call to make things official with Yahri, she was going to be fair game. That also meant every nigga that thought they had a chance would have a target on their backs and I didn’t muthafuckin’ miss, so bodies would drop.



AS SOON AS Bash and I parked, I tugged off my helmet and eased off my bike doing a quick sweep of our surroundings. Even though the ten acres our clubhouse sat on was surrounded with twenty-foot, high gates wired with cameras and guarded by prospects at the front and back entrances you could never be too damn careful. Shit happened and we had been running up a tab with the Devils by cleaning out their warehouse. Everything seemed on point except for one thing which had my eyes narrowing toward the corner of the building.

I tossed my head in the direction of the all black Range parked on the side of the clubhouse.

“Ay, isn’t that yours?”

“Yeah. Why the hell is Cambri at the clubhouse?”

“She was supposed to be with Ri and Monk was on their security today.” I did another sweep and didn’t see his bike which had me moving with long quick strides toward the entrance of the clubhouse. When I rolled the heavy ass metal door back and heard Yahri laughing I got heated as fuck.

“Why you out here and where the hell is Monk? He didn’t tell me shit about bringing you here,” I growled walking up on Yahri who was at the bar next to Padre.

“They had a situation...” Padre was the first to try and explain but I cut that off.

“The fuck you mean they had a situation? Where’s—”

“Bash...” Leigh came barreling from the kitchen with Cambri not far behind. Baby girl leapt and took flight about a foot from Bash, arms wide, but like always, he was prepared and caught her. “Mommy gave me a big girl drink.”

“Word, what kind of drink was that?” His ass couldn’t stay mad for shit when Leigh had his attention. I wanted to laugh but I needed to know what fucking situation they had that ended with them at the clubhouse.

“The kind Mommy drinks in the big beer bottle like you drink.”

“I know like hell you didn’t give her wine, Cambri.”

The look she shot him had me flinching. “It was Welch’s sparkling grape juice.”

“And it was sooooo, good. But Mommy wouldn’t let me have it in the pretty glass.” Leigh pouted and Bash was already promising her something to make up for the loss, but I let them have that shit and focused on why the hell the three of them were at the clubhouse in the first place.

“Monk, speak, *now*.”

He was nervous as hell, looking anywhere but at me and that only heightened my irritation. “I said muthafucking speak.”

“We uh, had a small situation but as you can see, everyone’s fine.”

“If you say situation one more muthafucking time Padre is gonna need a new prospect to replace your ass.”

“One of the Devils came after me...”

“Ay, take baby girl to the back,” I growled and could already see Bash handing her off to Cambri.

“Bash...” Leigh whined but she wouldn’t get that win this time.

“Not now, baby. Take her to my room,” he told Cambri.

“But I want to...”

“Not now, Leigh Bear.” Bash gave his final warning and Cambri moved with her toward the back.

I felt people around me moving and could see Padre heading my way but the minute Cambri and Leigh were no longer in sight, I had both my fists full of the t-shirt Monk was wearing and dragged him toward me.

“Ro...” Yahri tried and Padre was behind Monk attempting to pry my hands from the vise grip I held on his clothing.

“How the fuck did a Devil get to my lady, Monk? Whatever answer you have isn’t going to be good enough to stop me from beating your ass.”

“She caught her in the bathroom. How the fuck was I supposed to stop that? If I had gone in the bathroom with her this would have been a very different conversation.”

“You’re damn right it would be.”

“Ro, let him go. I’m fine.”

I swung my head to where Yahri stood with pleading eyes and that only further pissed me off because she was pleading for me not to hurt *him*. That had me wanting to snap his god damn neck.

“You didn’t have to go in there with her. You could have checked first to make sure the bathroom was empty and guarded the door.”

“You’re right...”

“Damn straight I’m right.” I let go of his shirt and my fist landed in his face, dislocating his nose.

“Ah fuck.” He buckled, cupping his face with both hands but that didn’t stop the blood from spilling.

“Feel better now?” Padre grunted in annoyance.

“No.”

“Well that’s the only shot you get. He did his job. Both Cambri and Yahri are fine but the Devil who attacked your lady is likely somewhere getting her face stitched up.”

“What?”

“She sliced the girl’s face with a razor then punched her in the throat. I see why she’s yours,” Monk mumbled through bloody hands.

My head swung left again. “You cut somebody’s face.”

“Yeah why?” Her stubborn ass had the nerve to defiantly lock her arms over her chest, titling her head to the side like she was pissed about me asking.

“Because what the hell? And why did you have a razor in the first place?”

“I don’t know how to shoot a gun and more people are killed with their own knives and guns than their assaulters. A razor is small, easy to use, and harder to take from the person using it. I’m not helpless, Ro.”

I hated that my first thought was teaching her how to use a gun because she needed to be able to protect herself when I wasn’t around. Things with us would never be normal and that’s why her father hadn’t wanted her living this life.

“Never said you were but I also didn’t expect to hear you’ve been out here playing Edward Scissorhands.” I was mad as hell that somebody managed to get that close to Yahri but couldn’t deny that a small part of me was happy she could hold her own. What I didn’t like was that defending herself had been necessary.

“Why didn’t you call me?” I pointed at Monk who shifted his eyes to Padre.

“He called me and I told him not to. You were busy and they were fine.”

“Why the hell is Monk bleeding all over the damn floor?” We all turned to the entrance of the clubhouse to find Mint striding in with her helmet tucked under her arm. She placed it on the bar then walked over to us.

“Ro punched him,” Bash drilled out with humor laced in his voice.

Mint grinned. “The fuck he do?”

“It’s what he *didn’t* do,” I growled, glaring at Monk.

“One of the Devils got to Yahri in the bathroom at a restaurant and Monk was supposed to be her shadow.”

“How the fuck you let one of their guys get to her?” Mint glared at him, knowing the severity of the situation.

“Same thing I want to know.” I shot him another look and Monk yanked at the hem of his shirt, dragging it up his chest so that he could wipe his nose.

“The guy was a *female*. I wasn’t about to go in the bathroom with her.”

“What does she look like?” Mint asked.

“Frankenstein right now but before Edward Scissorhands razored her face, kinda short, braids up top, shaved on the sides,” Cambri said joining us again, but this time without Leigh.

“Dez,” Mint mumbled more to herself than to us.

“You know her?” I had my eyes on Mint within seconds. Dez would have more than a few stitches to see about in the near future.

“Yeah, she’s fucking one of his tops. She’s not patched.”

“She has the DR tattoo on her neck,” Yahri clarified.

“They probably inked her so that she could fuck with you and we couldn’t do anything about it.”

“Too got damn bad,” I growled. I was doing something about it.

“Not happening, Ro. Mint. You take care of it.”

“Fuck that.” I shot my eyes over to Padre who lowered his chin glaring my way, daring me to challenge him.

“Chill, I got this. You can’t be out here putting your hands on women, Ro. At least not like that.” Mint smirked at me and winked at Yahri. I wanted to put my hands on her stupid ass for turning this into a joke, but she was right. Harming women wasn’t my vibe and it would never happen unless I was put in the position where I didn’t have a choice.

“We’re about to head out.” Bash shook his head pointing at Cambri. “Let’s go get baby girl.”

“Yeah, we’re gonna head out too,” I mumbled, needing to take my ass home and let this day go.

“Hold on.” Mint was at our sides again but this time holding two shot glasses. One of which she shoved at Yahri. “Here.”

“Why the fuck you giving her a shot?”

“Because she held her own against a Devil and she gave me a legitimate cause to fuck Dez up. That’s reason to celebrate. I’ve been waiting on this day.”

“Yo’ ass.” I chuckled but Yahri grinned and took the shot from Mint. They clinked glasses then tossed them back.

“You done now?”

“Maybe not. She seems more fun than you are at the moment.”

“Bring your ass,” I grunted and headed toward the door, but Padre called my name before I could get too far.

“Church, now. I need an update.”

“Can it wait?” I shot my eyes his way and he shook his head.

“No, let’s go.” Bash and Cambri stepped back into the common area just as he made the demand, so Padre’s eyes left me and landed on him. “You too.”

“Ay, I’ll be right back.” I pointed to Mint. “Keep her away from all the sharp objects.”

Cambri and Yahri looked at each other and burst out laughing. I chuckled to myself and followed Bash and Padre to the back to get this over with then take my ass home.

CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN

Yahri.
“Feel better?”

I nodded, tucking my hair behind my ear as I folded my body into the corner of the sofa, tucking my feet beneath me. After a long hot shower my mind was slowly easing back into a space where I fully processed what happened today. The adrenaline high had worn off, allowing me to make sense of what I’d done.

“Let’s talk about it.”

“There’s nothing to talk about.”

Pharaoh gave me a pointed look before he sat up enough to get his hands on me, dragging me toward him. When his back sank into the cushions again, I was hoisted onto his chest, squirming until I found a comfortable space. My head rested on his shoulder so I had a good visual of his profile. Pharaoh folded one arm behind his head where it rested against the arm of the sofa, elevating him slightly.

“Okay, let’s try this again, Talk to me.”

I laughed lightly, rolling my eyes and tilting my head back to give me more of a visual. “You think a change of position changes my need to talk?”

He smirked and lowered his eyes to mine. “Yeah it does but that’s not the topic I want to discuss. We can get to that once I’m good.” His hand that rested on my thigh dug into my

skin and hiked my leg toward his waist in an effort to express what the change in our positions did for him.

“What happened today...”

“Was nothing, I handled it.”

I felt the muscles in his body tense and the pads of his fingers pressed deeper into my thigh. “It wasn’t nothing, Ri. You don’t have to be tough.”

“I’m not being tough.”

“So you using razors and shit is just another day for you?”

“You know it’s not.”

“Aight then, let’s run that shit down. You had to act on a situation that you’re not used to dealing with. There’s nothing wrong with you having feelings about that.”

“But I don’t.”

“Ri..”

“I said I’m fine. Can we let it go?”

When he dipped his chin so that his eyes lowered and fastened with mine I knew he was about to argue.

“Yeah we can let it go for now, but trust, if you feel like you need to talk this shit out then we talk it out.”

“I do want to talk about what’s happening. I don’t like the feeling of having to look over my shoulder or have someone with me with every move I make. I know I don’t have a right to demand anything, and I’m not, but can you at least tell me what the plan is?”

“We’ve been making moves to get Chop to have a sit down with us.”

“What’s that going to fix?”

“We know who tipped the Feds off.”

“Who?” I frowned up at Pharaoh. And I could tell from the way his jaw flexed that he didn’t want to tell me. “You said that we could discuss whatever I needed to talk about. This is

what I need to talk about. The sooner you get things resolved...”

“You’re not leaving.” The grit and confidence in his tone let me had me smiling. I didn’t want to leave and he wanted me to stay.

“I wasn’t going to say leave. I was going to say that the sooner you get this resolved, the sooner we can figure this thing out with us.”

“I thought me and you cumming was proof that we had things figured out.”

“So you’re saying that all we are is sex?”

He groaned and I felt the rumble of it though his chest. “Stop with that shit. You know good and damn well that’s not what I’m saying. “We work. Physically and emotionally.”

“Emotionally?”

“Yeah, nigga. That’s what I said,” he teased.

“Pharaoh Vaughan and emotions in the same thought seems like aliens at an amusement park. Nonexistent.”

He barked a laugh. “Bruh, how the fuck you say some foul ass shit like that? I got emotions.”

“Maybe you do, but they’re a rare occurrence.”

“So you really don’t remember me caring about you back then or the way I’ve been rocking with you now?”

I smiled but bit down on my lip to hide it because he was right, I always knew he cared. The little things mattered. And now...

“That’s not what I’m saying. Only that you used to be so closed off back then. You would get close then shut down.”

“I respected your father, Ri. No matter what I wanted, I wouldn’t cross that line because he didn’t want us to take it there.”

As much as I knew that was the case, it still hurt sometimes. Stupid teenage crush.

“But you would have wanted this...” I paused, frowning at the idea. “Me if things had been different.”

“You already know that answer, Ri. I shut down the idea of us, but I never closed myself off from you. You got the best parts of me. Back then, there wasn’t much good I had to offer but whatever that was, I gave it to you.”

A rush of warmth flooded my system. A lot of time we spent together was actually forced by my father. Because he knew the loyalty they shared meant Pharaoh wouldn’t cross certain lines my dad trusted him with me. Giving me the best of him was the special trips to the lake because he knew that it was one of my favorite spots or sliding through a drive-thru to grab me a late night burger and fries to give me time before I had to face the firing squad, my parents, after I snuck out with friends. The little things.

“So you weren’t playing rescuer for all club kids who snuck out and broke their parents’ rules.”

He snorted and gripped my thigh tighter. “Fuck no. I barely wanted to do that shit with you but Koda wasn’t trying to let me do shit else.”

“And there’s the pin in my theoretical balloon.”

I felt his eyes on me and peeked up to catch the smug grin. “It wasn’t about not wanting to be around you. That was the only plus, more about me wanting to be a part of the club but he wasn’t trying to let me. Koda knew what this life was about. He understood better than anyone what you had to sacrifice when you made the commitment and he treated me like his son. Shit, you couldn’t tell him I wasn’t.”

“Which more or less makes me your sister so can we not...”

He chuckled. “Nah fuck that. *Son-in-law.*”

“But he didn’t want us together.”

“Only because he wanted better for you. I always felt like had I really pushed hard enough he would have accepted me being in your life.”

I turned. “Then why didn’t you?”

“Because I wanted better for you back then same as he did.”

“And you don’t now?” I sat up and shifted until I was straddling his waist. He moved his hand to rest on his chest, narrowing his eyes up at me.

“I always want the best for you, Ri. Even if that wasn’t going to be me. It would hurt like hell to accept you being with someone else and *they* would hurt like hell. Now that you’re here and I know what it means to have you, what it *feels* like to have you, I couldn’t accept you being with anyone else.”

I rolled my eyes and he shrugged with one shoulder.

“What’s so different from then and now?”

“I’m different.”

My brows pinched as I stared at him but Pharaoh kept talking. “I didn’t have shit to offer you or anyone else for that matter back then. What I came from, where I was in life, the person I used to be wasn’t anything compared to who I am now. I had a lot to learn about life, being a man, how to show up for myself and my brothers. Your father was a big part of me learning and growing.”

“He saw something in you even back then.”

“Things I didn’t see in myself, Ri. He gave me the family I never had and they opened my eyes to shit I never thought possible. What it means to really have someone in your corner who stands for you, no matter what. You can’t give what you’ve never had and I didn’t understand how to be a man back then. You can’t love when you’ve never truly experienced love to recognize that you’re doing that shit right. That’s not on some soft shit because I don’t give a damn about how that makes me look. It’s reality. One I had to learn. I’ve seen the way your father loved your mother. How he loved you and back then, I wasn’t prepared to stand up for you the same way because I didn’t know how to.”

“And you do now?”

“I’m not going to say I have it all figured out because I don’t. But I know that I can be your safe space, I can be home for you and I want you to be home for me.” He untucked the arm behind his head and put both hands on my ass, guiding me forward so that I was conveniently positioned over the thickness in his jeans. “And I work your body with a skill and expertise that I’m sure you more than appreciate.”

I released a laugh. “All roads lead to your dick.”

“I mean, it is one of my best qualities.”

“Which might be a problem if that’s all I can count on.”

“Nah, it’s not an issue, I got other stuff that will keep you happy.”

“Like.”

“When I’m in, I’m all in. There’s nothing you will ever want or need that I won’t provide or die trying and most of all, you can trust yourself with me. *Always.*”

“Good dick and willingness to give me whatever I want. I might just see the benefit in hanging around for a while.”

He chuckled and gripped the back of my neck, pulling me into his chest. Our lips were a breath apart. “You show up for me, I show up for you. That’s a promise I will never break, Ri.”

“I can do that.”

“Good because I wasn’t giving yo’ ass any other options.”

My argument was caught behind a kiss when his tongue began to explore. I moaned, pressing deeper into him and was fully prepared to enjoy one of my perks of being with Ro when we were interrupted by the doorbell.

“You expecting company?” I frowned at Pharaoh, who shook his head and sent a scowl toward the door like he would magically be able to see through the custom wood seconds before his unexpected visitor hit the doorbell once more. Pharaoh maneuvered a hand between us digging his phone from the pocket of his jeans. Once he had the security app up, he grunted something under his breath.

“The hell she want?”

She?

I snatched the phone from his hand, seeing a short, curvy, brown-skinned woman in a fitted black pantsuit, heels, and flawless bob. Her perfectly-laid, jet-black tresses were styled with a center part and swayed with the slightest movement like she was a fresh out of a stylist’s chair.

“Who is this?”

Pharaoh gently lifted me from his body, smiling smugly. “So maybe I lied about the crazy ex thing.”

“You better not have. I have more razors.”

The anger swept through me like a bolt of lightning. He had a life same as I did, but mine wasn’t showing up interrupting the prologue to an orgasm.

He glanced at me, his lip curling into a sexy grin. “Chill. I’m just fucking with you. That’s Melinda Oliver.”

“Okay and...”

“She’s the club’s attorney. Man, calm the fuck down.” I watched as he made his way towards the door, his gait elegant and lithe with far too much confidence.

“You ever had sex with her?” I jumped up and rounded the sofa cutting off his path, arching a brow in challenge. He was too damn casual about this. If his answer was yes, I was punching him in the throat and she wasn’t stepping foot in this house.

“No. I probably owe her some good dick considering the number of times she’s saved my ass but we aren’t like that. *She* isn’t like that. Mel doesn’t fuck with any of us. Now move.”

He gripped my chin, lifted my face, and placed a kiss before attempting to step around me but I fisted his shirt and brushed my other hand down the front of his jeans gripping his dick. “Fix this before you answer the door.”

The way he smirked, attempting a quick adjustment which didn't help much, had me rolling my eyes only for him to say, "You're demanding the impossible, Ri."

He opened the door. "You doing house calls now?"

"For this yes and since you're only one street over it wasn't out of my way."

"Ah hell, what I do now?"

"The better question is what haven't you done? I think you singlehandedly paid for an entire shelf of purses that I now own and they're not cheap."

Pharaoh laughed lazily. I could tell from their banter they were familiar. "I've been chill lately thought. You can't honestly say I've been the one causing you problems."

"That's true. In fact all of you have been more or less quiet. Most of my work has been coming from contracts that I've been reviewing for Dedge."

"You must be bored as shit." Pharaoh laughed as the two of them stepped around the sofa into my view.

"Ri, this is Melinda Oliver, club attorney and pain in my ass."

"Uh, you mispronounced *savior*, Ro." She cut her eyes at him and extended a hand to me. "You're Koda's daughter, right?"

"Yes."

"It's nice to finally meet you. I feel like we're old friends from the way he talked about you."

I can't say the same.

I accepted her hand but cut my eyes at Pharaoh and I could see the way he briefly flinched which didn't sit right with me.

"You knew my dad?"

She smiled softly in a way that expressed how she knew him.

Intimately. What the fuck?

“I’ve been the club attorney for about fifteen years, so yes, I knew Koda. He was a good guy and he spoke very highly of you.”

“You knew my mother too then?”

I watched her like a hawk and she didn’t react other than to smile in a comforting manner. “I did. Not well because she wasn’t around the clubhouse much but I knew her.”

Pharaoh smoothly intervened which was another sign that this woman had something with my father. “What did you need, Mel?”

Yeah this isn’t right. I could tell from the shift in energy in the room.

“I uh...” She cut her eyes at me. “Can we speak privately for a moment?”

“Is that necessary?” He frowned at her and she nodded.

“Club business. After you hear what I have to say you can decide what you want to share.”

“Ri, give us a minute.”

I left with all intention of respecting their privacy but something tugged at my gut, the minute I rounded the corner and had my first foot on the stair. Something was off about this entire situation and it was deeper than her potentially sleeping with my father. That feeling had me doing something I was likely going to regret.

“I wanted to personally hand this over to you.” Something shifted in her voice, like she was empathetic and also nervous.

“Hand me what?”

“Once you start digging, you’ll find things that would otherwise stay buried. Gears had hours of intel that he provided the Feds. I only asked for the ones associated with the Devils trafficking women but my contact added one that I wasn’t expecting. It was about the night Koda died.”

My chest tensed like a large rubber band was being looped around me. No one talked about the night my father died. Only

that he was shot in an exchange with another club. The more details I begged for the more they shut me down, which was another reason why I walked away and never looked back. It felt like a repeat of my mother all over again. No one would tell me the truth, like I couldn't handle it or didn't deserve to know.

"The Feds were watching us?"

"No, at least not on the record but years ago, they tried to use Koda as in informant."

"He wouldn't do that shit, ever."

My dad? An informant?

"No, he wouldn't."

"You knew about this?"

"No, he never told me. I only know what they have on file."

"And what the fuck do they have?"

"Not much. The initial meeting. What they wanted from him and..."

"Information on us?"

"No, Ro. You guys aren't worth the paperwork. Your hands are pretty much clean."

"We're not clean, Mel. Almost every one of us has bodies on them."

"The Feds don't know that. You're smarter than to lead them to those bodies."

"Then what the fuck did they want from him?"

"Information on the Sinners."

"He don't know shit about them. Why would they ask him about their club?"

"I don't know. I don't have access to all the details."

"Yo, I'm confused as hell about what we're talking about then. Koda wasn't a got damn informant. He would never put

himself in that position. I don't know why you're bringing this to me."

"This is why..."

I held my breath waiting and heard another male voice. It was faint and I had to move closer to make out what he was saying.

"You're not giving me shit, Scar. You either give me something I can use or this is a waste of our time and you know what happens when you waste my time, don't you?"

"I'm not wasting your time. I'm telling you I saw them that night. They were arguing. It was heated too. The last thing I know was they both walked in the warehouse but only Pharaoh walked out. It had to be him."

"You're telling me Pharaoh, who was damn near raised by Koda, is the one the killed him? Did you see him fire the shot?"

"No, but I heard it and I saw Pharaoh leave. He was there, don't you have cameras or some shit?"

"I know like hell you're not saying I killed Koda," Pharaoh growled, overtalking what was left of the audio.

I froze. My hand clutched my chest because there was no way. No way in the world would Pharaoh have killed my father.

"No, because it wasn't you. You loved him just as much as I did. You more than anyone loved Koda, Ro. I know this to be a fact. He was your family."

"You're damn right I did and it wasn't me."

"Then w-who was it? Who killed my father?"

Both their heads swung in my direction before her eyes left me and landed on Pharaoh. "I should go."

"Not until you tell me who killed my father." I frowned, moving deeper into the living room toward her but Pharaoh got between us within a matter of seconds.

"Ri..."

“No...” I glared at him. “Don’t you dare give me some bullshit about *this* being club business. This is family business. *My* family. *My* father.”

Melinda was really pissing me off. She looked at me then Pharaoh but didn’t speak until he nodded giving her permission.

“They don’t know who actually killed him. Only that the informant lied.”

“What do you mean he lied.”

“We both walked out of that warehouse together, *alive*.” Pharaoh’s voice was low and angry directed toward Melinda. She nodded his confirmation.

“They watched the cameras and saw your father and Pharaoh went in and came out together but Pharaoh left before your father. Koda stayed back to take a call. He then walked back inside the warehouse alone, but the second time he went in...”

“Is when someone followed and shot him,” Pharaoh said it so low that I had to look at him for confirmation that it was really his words I was hearing.

“Yes. They don’t know who followed Koda into the warehouse. He had a hood over his head and managed to avoid the cameras for the most part. Whoever it was had been waiting, probably would have killed them both. It’s likely he was supposed to.”

“And nobody knows who it was?”

“No. The only thing they could come up with from the video was a tattoo on the person’s neck when they left the warehouse. There was one brief moment the cameras caught his profile and the side of his neck when he paused, tossed the hood from his head, then slipped into the shadows again. That’s all they know which led them to a dead end and they never investigated further.” Her eyes were on me again before she lowered them. “I should go.”

“Wait...” I stepped around Pharaoh and he didn’t stop me. “I heard Ro say that you loved my dad. *How* did you love

him? As a member of the club or was there something else between you?"

"I...I'm close to all the guys. They're family."

"You're lying," I argued. She sucked in a sharp breath and her eyes shot over to Pharaoh.

"I'm gonna leave now. If you need anything..."

He nodded, never removing his eyes from me, watching carefully like I was going to explode. Maybe I was and the minute she was out the door I walked up on him. "She was sleeping with my father, wasn't she?"

"Ri..."

"Don't you fucking dare. Just answer the question."

"It wasn't my business."

"But it *is* mine isn't it. And I'm yours or so you say. So tell me, was my father cheating on my mother with her?" I pointed out the door that Melinda had just walked out of.

"No, he wouldn't cheat on your mother. She was the *only* woman that man ever loved. *Ever.*"

"Then what was their deal?"

"After she passed. Mel and your father had a thing. It wasn't serious because I promise you, he loved your mother. Nobody could ever replace Teresa."

"But *she* wanted to."

He nodded. "She never pushed though. She understood her position. He would have never allowed it to happen."

"You don't know that."

"Yeah Ri, I do."

I shook my head, feeling a rush of emotions. "But I can't trust what you say, can I? You might not lie, but you will damn sure keep things from me. You were there the night he died. You were the last person..." I swallowed the sob that was crawling up my throat. "The last...last person with him and

you never said a word about it. I asked and you never told me. Maybe you're keeping things from me now too.”

I walked away and he didn't stop me. By the time I slammed the door of the guest room I heard his bike then the garage which meant that he left. Maybe that was best because I needed time to decide if I was staying.

CHAPTER
NINETEEN

Pharaoh.

I pushed through the door of the office Padre kept at Sweet Auburn, slamming it behind me. He was on the phone so I walked around his desk, ended the call with whoever the fuck he was talking to, and tossed his phone on the sleek wood surface.

“I didn’t have shit to do with Koda’s death.”

He calmly leaned back, brushed a hand down his face which I expected but what I didn’t expect was him extending to his full height and catching me in the chin. I deserved that shit so instead of reacting, I turned my head slowly back in his direction and waited for Padre to take a seat again. He reached for a bottle of Sweet Auburn and pushed it across the desk in my direction.

“Sit down.”

“I don’t need to sit,” I murmured through clenched teeth.

“Ro, sit your ass down and take that.” He nodded to the whiskey with a motion of his head, so I grabbed the bottle and folded my body into the chair in front of his desk. The impact caused the metal legs to scrape the concrete floor. I pulled the cork from the bottle and turned it up then lowered it to my lap, balancing the bottle on my knee.

“Do you think that you would still be breathing if any of your brothers believed you had something to do with Koda’s death? If *I* thought you had something to do with it?”

“No.”

“Then let’s talk about why you’re really here?”

I turned the bottle up once more and tilted my head back, embracing the smooth burn before I lowered it again. “Why was he on record as an informant?”

Padre stared at me for a long moment before he brushed his palm down his face again. He was stalling. What the fuck?

“Was he...”

“No, fuck no! Koda lived and would die for our club.”

“But it wasn’t our club they were coming for.”

“Melinda told you?”

“As much as she could get access to. I still don’t know what the fuck was going on. Is that why he was trying to leave?”

Padre offered a tight nod and extended his arm in my direction, hand open requesting the bottle. I leaned forward and gave it to him, waiting while he turned it up back to back.

“This shit is so fucked up.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Feds had something on him. They were trying to use the information they had to get him to flip on the Sinners.”

“Sons of Sinners?”

Padre nodded his confirmation.

“That doesn’t make sense because he wouldn’t have known shit about them. Sinners are too West. They don’t have a chapter on the East coast. How could he know anything about them?”

“Because he was a Sinner before he was a Wolf.”

“No the fuck he wasn’t.”

“Yes, he was.” I was granted a stern look. “When Koda showed up in Diamond Falls he was desperate and in need of a place to start over. He had blood on his hands and a pregnant

woman who he couldn't protect on his own. Not when he had an entire club that he was hiding from because he killed one of his brothers."

"If that's true, why the fuck would you take him, allow him into our house to be a part of our club? He was the got damn president before you. This isn't adding up."

"It wasn't my decision. I was road captain back then but I had a vote and gave my support. The *brother* he killed was beating his pregnant wife. A woman that Koda fell in love with when he shouldn't have."

That didn't make sense because that would mean that Yahri had a sibling or...

"He killed Ri's father."

"Yeah."

"Fuck."

"The man you knew is the man he was. A loyal brother, a mentor, a husband, and a father. He took a life to protect two then he walked away from the only family he knew because of it and raised a child that wasn't his. He loved Yahri's mother and her child that much. Koda was a good man."

He damn sure was.

"She doesn't know?"

Padre shook his head. "There was no reason for her to, she was his. He loved Yahri as if they shared the same blood."

"Is killing her father what the Feds had on him?"

"That amongst other things."

"What else?"

"*You.*"

My uncle.

"How the fuck they find out?"

"Don't know but he killed for you and knew you would kill for him. He didn't want you getting caught up in that shit so he made the decision to leave and start over somewhere

new. It wasn't like he hadn't done it before. Teresa was gone, Yahri was gone. He didn't have anything left."

"He had us," I yelled.

"He did, which is what I told him. You think I wanted him to run, to be out there on his own? Fuck no. He was my brother. We would have figured this out but he refused to get us, *you*, tied up in his shit. *He* made the decision to leave."

"We argued when he told me. That night. He said he was leaving but wouldn't tell me why."

"It was either disappear or allow the Feds to use him. There wasn't a damn thing he could give them on us but they knew he had inside information about the Sinners. They somehow found out he killed one of their members and threatened to use that against him. Koda refused to play along so he decided to disappear. He would have..."

"*If* he hadn't died that night."

"Yeah."

"He died and that was it. They let it go?"

"They didn't want us. They wanted the Hades who was president of the Sinners. The guy's got a pretty long history of some dark shit. Feds planned to send Koda back in to get reacquainted with their club, their dealings, and report back to them. After he died I suppose they found another plan."

"That shit would have never worked in the first place. He wouldn't have turned for the Feds."

"No because that's not who he is. He would have never flipped on us or them."

"Fuck. She's gonna be so messed up behind this."

"I'm not worried about Yahri. I'm more concerned with how you're taking all this."

"This isn't about me."

"Koda was going to leave to protect you. He refused to allow them to use him to connect you to your uncle's murder."

This is about you, Ro. Even if by default. That has to weigh on your mind and if not now, it will.”

“But he died before any of that could happen. Melinda said the Feds have photos of a tattoo on the guy who killed Koda. What are we gonna do about that?”

“You know what we’re gonna do. We find him the guy and if he’s alive we handle it.”

I leaned forward and took the bottle from Padre, turning it up once before slamming it on his desk. “He should have told me.”

“And what would you have done?”

“Killed anyone that was a problem for him. Fed or not.”

When our eyes met he shook his head. “Exactly. He did what he needed to do. Even if I didn’t agree, I respected the loyalty he had for us, for this club. Go home, take care of your girl. She’s gonna have a lot of shit to deal with when she finds out. *If* she finds out.”

“I have to tell her.”

“Figured you would.” He grabbed the bottle. “Go home.”

My eyes narrowed on him and he shook his head. “We’ll deal with it. Now that we have something, we use it to find who took our brother. But one more day won’t change anything. Go home to your lady, Ro.”

My lady.

She was mine.



I WALKED into a quiet house feeling the weight of everything I found out tonight. Normally when I needed to clear my head, a long ride was my first option, but not tonight. The only thing I wanted, the only thing that made sense, was home.

Yahri was home for me even if I was about to destroy everything she knew and believed to be her home. I was all

she had left and she was right about a lot of things. I wouldn't lie to her, but I had also kept secrets in the past that meant she questioned whether or not she could trust me. I hadn't realized how much that would hurt. The idea that she didn't see me as her safe space, her home.

I have to fix that.

I received a gut punch after my first stop, which was my room. It was empty. I crossed the hall and knocked but didn't wait for permission to enter. When I stepped inside, Yahri was sitting with her back pushed against a pile of pillows and the headboard. Her head was low, faced tucked into folded arms that rested on the top of her bent knees.

"I don't want to talk." Her voice was low, damn near a whisper and laced with hurt.

"Then let me talk. There are things I need to say, things I probably should have said a long time ago but didn't."

When her head tipped up and I had her eyes, I could see the betrayal she felt. I felt that shit in my chest and that wasn't a feeling I wanted to embrace but had to. Even if what she felt wasn't all on me, I had to take accountability for some of it.

"You're only doing this because she let your secrets slip. It's not like you care enough to be honest or you would have done that years ago."

My jaw set with tension so damn quick that I had to force my body to relax before I could get the words out. I cared too damn much which was why I never told her the truth.

"You don't think I care about you?"

Her eyes remained fastened to mine but I could see the truth. She knew better.

"You do but you still kept things from me. I don't know what happened to either of my parents. Not the truth. He sent me away and everyone shut me out. He didn't clamor see me, barely called to check on me."

"Ask me whatever you want. I'll tell you. I can't change the past but I can give you what you think you're missing."

What little I know.”

“Why were you arguing with him the night he died?” Her body was trembling and when I saw the first tear fall I crossed the room, landing on the bed and pulling her into my lap, closing her in my arms. It was really fucking hard to concentrate on the issue with her in just a t-shirt and panties but she was more important. When I hesitated, she lifted her eyes to mine and pulled back. I inhaled and released it slowly. “He was leaving.”

“Leaving?” She frowned hard.

“Yeah. I didn’t know why back then. He kept things from me too, Ri. Based on what I learned from Mel tonight, I went to see Padre and found out the real reason.”

“Which was?”

“I wanna tell you, but it’s gonna change things for you and I don’t know if you’re ready for that type of raw truth.”

Her body went rigid and anger flashed in her eyes when she pushed away from me again, but I was quick enough to stop her from getting too far and pulled her back into my lap.

“Don’t baby me, Ro. If you’re going to continue keeping things from me then whatever this is between us won’t work.”

“It’s not about keeping things from you but making sure you can handle the truth.”

“And so what if I can’t. You think lies are better?” Her eyes locked on mine in challenge.

“Nah, they’re not.”

“Then tell me.” She pushed back again and this time I allowed her to create some space. With what I was about to say we needed it.

“Did you know that your father was part of another club before he moved to Diamond Falls?”

She frowned and shook her head. “No. When?”

“Before you were born. He was connected to Sons of Sinners. They’re out west.”

“My mom was born in San Diego.”

I knew that so I only nodded but kept going. “Koda made plans to leave because the Feds were trying to get him to flip.”

“He wouldn’t have done that.”

“Which is why he thought it was best to leave. They knew things...”

“What things?” Yahri took a step closer.

“They knew about my uncle. If they knew Koda was involved they would be able to dig deep enough to find out why he was involved. He covered for me. They also knew that he killed a man who was a member of his old club. The Feds tried to use that to control him and that’s not who Koda was. He thought it would be best to just disappear because there was no way he would ever do what they wanted. Leaving meant protecting *me*. Protecting *us*.” My steady gaze bore into hers until the question surfaced.

“Us?”

I closed my eyes briefly before I admitting the one thing that was going to shatter her world. “The man he killed from his old club was your father, Ri.”

“My...no that doesn’t make sense.”

“But it does. Your mom was already pregnant with you when they met. Your father was abusive. I don’t know the whole story. Didn’t ask after Padre told me how Koda ended up here. He killed your father, left with your mother, and moved to Diamond Falls. He raised you as his. If he would have done what the Feds wanted, that meant you potentially finding out about your father. If he left, no one would have ever known nor could they have used him to get to me. Koda was the only connection to what happened with my uncle. He was going to leave to protect me and keep you from the possibility of finding out you weren’t his. I didn’t know any of this back then. We argued that night because I thought it was bullshit that he was leaving. He wouldn’t tell me why. I was so fucking angry that night. It’s why I left before he did. If I hadn’t...”

“You might not be here telling me this. You might have...”

Died.

I was on my feet, walking to Yahri. I wasn't sure what she wanted or needed only that I would give anything to make this right.

“I'm sorry, baby. I'm sorry that I kept things from you but I only did it to give you some kind of happiness. I'm sorry that you felt alone and that we abandoned you and I'm sorry that things are so fucked up right now. Tell me what to do. Whatever it is, it's done. Just tell me what you need and I'll make sure you have it.”

“He wasn't...” She swallowed hard and I lowered my face to hers, cuffing her cheeks.

“Blood doesn't make you family, baby. Love and loyalty do and he gave you both. You were his daughter and he was your father, okay?”

“Okay.” She whispered the word, just before I kissed her.

“And please understand that I'm yours and you're mine, Ri. Tell me you know that too.”

“I do.”

“Then fuck everything else. We're gonna be alright. Tell me you believe that too.”

“I believe in us, Ro.”

I loved the confidence in her eyes when she responded.

It meant she truly trusted that I would never hurt her and that was all that fucking mattered. That she trusted herself with me.

I expanded my fingers allowing my hand to rest on her stomach for a brief moment before I dragged it lower until my fingers dipped into her panties. The heel of my palm moved with a slight amount of pressure.

“I think we need a distraction.”

Her head dropped back. “Me too.”

My fingers took over teasing her entrance and fuck she was aroused. My dick was already hard, but this had to be different. This had to be about her. I slipped a finger inside, pulled it out, and circled her clit, determined to take this slow. She curved into me and I added another finger, repeating the motion, massaging her pussy, circling her clit before each dip.

When her hand covered mine. I chuckled, feeling the vibration of her throaty moan against my chest.

“You distracted enough or do you need more?”

“More...”

I smirked and kissed her neck. “Nah, I think you’re good now.”

“Ro, don’t fucking play with me.”

Would never do that, baby.

I shifted us until she was on the bed and I hovered over her. With a skilled intent, I had her out of those panties and my body between her legs. I groaned when I filled her, nice and slow. Her hands lifted to my face, bringing hers to mine. As I pulled back and thrust forward again, slowly and carefully, she worked her tongue against mine.

A few strokes later, our eyes were intensely connected and the way hers burned with need, for whatever I was willing to give, was my undoing because I wanted to give her the world. She trusted me. Not just with her body but with her heart, her wellbeing, her entire being. It was all there in the beautiful depths of her gaze.

She lifted her hips allowing me to drive deeper and I delivered, bringing us both to our climaxes.

“Fuck, Ri, fuck.”

Nothing in my life would ever compare to this, to her. At this very moment with her completely open, giving me her all, I was ruined.

Completely and utterly ruined.

CHAPTER
TWENTY

Yahri.

The next morning I woke up feeling a cocktail of emotions. Sadness because my father was gone and I never got to have the conversation with him about who he really was to me. He never wanted me to know that I wasn't truly his because in reality I was. He raised me, loved me, and never once treated me as anything less than his daughter. I wonder if he ever questioned whether he loved me enough, if deep down inside I knew that I didn't come from him. I felt the weight of thinking that maybe he struggled with any of those things but kept them locked away to protect me.

Protect me.

My father always protected me, even when I didn't appreciate or understand the ways he thought it best to do so. Sending me away hurt and caused me years of feeling unloved and unwanted but I knew he loved me. I knew he did what he thought was best, but it still hurt to lose my mother then him.

And Pharaoh.

The other feelings that wrapped around me like a familiar blanket was the man I had fallen in love with. I had always loved Pharaoh in ways that didn't make sense to me, but now I fully understood who he was to me.

Home.

My safe space.

Things with us weren't perfect and we had a lot to sort through, but just like he said last night, he was mine and I was his. I could hate him for leaving me all those years ago, but I loved him more. Loved him for being what I needed now, for protecting me. Maybe he wasn't the man I needed back then, but he certainly was now. I had my father to thank for the man Pharaoh had become. Even with his flaws, he was a better man than any I had ever experienced.

By the time I had showered and dressed, I realized it was almost one in the afternoon. I'd slept late and the reason why had me smiling as I stepped into the living room to find Pharaoh slipping into his club jacket. He had a phone to his ear but smiled when he noticed me and closed the space between us as he spoke to whoever was on the line.

"Nah, that's cool. I was heading out anyway. I can swing by there to make sure everything looks good." When he was close enough, he used his knuckles to tilt my head back so that he could reach my mouth. The kiss was quick, not nearly long enough but I blushed at the sexy grin he gave when he winked and stepped back. "I trust you, Bella but I still want to see the place before they move in. Aight bet. We'll be there in like an hour. You can lock up and head out."

He ended the call and dropped the phone into the inside pocket of his jacket before he was on me again. The kiss that followed was not short and sweet this time. I was obsessed with the talents of his tongue which had me lifting onto my toes and leaning into him.

"Good morning." He smirked when he pulled back. "Or should I say afternoon. I thought your ass was gonna sleep all day."

"Is that why you're leaving me?"

He stepped into me again but lifted me from the floor and I instinctively locked my legs around his waist as he moved toward the stairs. "I was about to go grab some food. You know I don't cook and it would have been rude for me to wake you up and demand that you cook for me."

"Demand, yes rude. Asking would have been appropriate."

He smiled after we reached the top of the stairs then carried me into his guest room. “After the dick I gave you last night, demanding food wouldn’t have been rude, baby. More like an even trade considering how demanding you were last night.”

My mouth fell open but he kissed me before I could respond then slowly lowered me to the floor. “Get dressed. I want you to take a ride with me.”

Pharaoh settled onto he bed and leaned back, grabbing a pillow from near the headboard and tucking it under his head. “You’ll see when we get there, just get dressed.”

“Do I need to be *property of*...”

He grinned and his eyes traveled from the top of my head down the length of my body. “Yeah but the way you’re glowing and shit is good enough. They’re gonna know you’re mine.”

I rolled my eyes walking into the closet but backtracked and stuck my head out the door. “And for the record, I wasn’t demanding anything last night. That was all you.”

Pharaoh chuckled. “I’m not even gonna front, I was demanding as a muthafucker so you can get that. Now hurry up and get dressed. We got shit to do.”

After I was dressed in jeans and a long sleeved tee, I slipped into one of Pharaoh’s leather jackets, which was beginning to be one of my favorite things. They felt and smelled like him.

We took his bike across town and it felt like freedom. I learned years ago riding with my dad that being on the back of a bike gave a sense of belonging. You became a part of the world as you moved through it, becoming more engaged. The world around you settled into your bones and you became a part of the tapestry. Riding with Ro was that feeling magnified a million times. It was an addictive emotional high that I wanted more and more.

Eventually we made it to a neighborhood that I wasn’t familiar with. It was cozy with cookie cutter houses that varied

in shades but basically had the same floor plans. I followed him to the door, then inside realizing the place was fully furnished.

“Whose house is this?”

“Mine.” Really wasn’t feeling the smugness in his expression so I tilted my head to the side and narrowed my eyes, silently demanding that he explain.

“You know how I told you we have properties?”

“Yeah.”

“This is the first one I ever owned thanks to your father.”

“He bought this for you?”

“No, but he hooked me up with his connect at the bank. They owed him a favor and he used it on me. They finished the house and I didn’t have a dime to my name.” Pharaoh shrugged and stared blankly at open space for a minute then gave me his attention. “This used to be my uncle’s house. I didn’t want this shit. Too many bad memories but Koda wouldn’t let me say no. He knew what I dealt with, the things that went down here. He told me to turn the bad into something good. I knew I would never live here but I did what he said and purchased the property. The brothers helped me renovate since it had been sitting for a few years after my uncle died. Once it was in decent shape, I rented it out. Been renting it for years. Mostly to families that can’t really afford high ass rent but need a nice place. A *safe* place. Feels good too. Your pop was right. Turn the bad into good.”

I walked over to him and slipped my arms around his waist, tilting my head back to see him. “You’re really killing my theory that you don’t have a heart.”

He chuckled and planted a kiss on my temple. “I’m no saint or anyone’s hero because I damn sure have blood on my hands but I have a heart, Ri. I just don’t share it with too many people.”

“How many *people* are we talking?”

“Why, are you jealous?” He lowered his face over mine and I nodded.

“Very few and even fewer women. You, however, are the only woman I’ve given access to my heart who I have had the pleasure of making cum.”

“What about women that have made you cum?”

He laughed, *hard*. “Nobody but you, baby. That’s my word.”

“Liar.”

I pushed away but he pulled me right back into his chest. “I’ve cared about a few women but I’m a decent guy so that’s to be expected. I’m not an asshole. But, caring for someone and loving someone are two *very* different things. You’re the only woman who can claim that, Ri.”

My entire body radiated with warmth.

“Now let’s do this walkthrough so that I can feed your greedy ass.”

We moved from room to room and he pointed out renovations, noting to himself the fresh coats of paint in each room and the new carpet. The house was three bedrooms and an office. The main bedroom was set up with a king bed and matching furniture while the other two were set up with queen beds. One had a crib in it which Pharaoh explained was new. The family renting had three kids, a teen, a five year old, and a newborn. She was a single mom who left a cheating husband who turned out to be a drunk. He hadn’t been abusive but the signs were there. She decided to get out before it got to that point.

He also explained how the Wolves were keeping an eye on things with her and the kids to make sure her ex-husband kept his distance. Seeing him in this light was new. Pharaoh never lied when he said that the man he had become I didn’t know. The person I remembered wasn’t anything like who he was now. A balance of dark and light. Rough and gentle, callous and caring. All of which was wrapped beautifully in the sexiest package a girl could ever imagine. Pharaoh had so

many layers that I wasn't sure which part of him I loved the most, but today, seeing this side of him was definitely at the top of that list.

Once we were done with our walkthrough and back on his bike, I leaned into him, loving my arms around his waist. "I'm proud of the man you are, Pharaoh. I hope you are too."

He glanced at me over his shoulder and winked before pulling his helmet down. When the engine roared to life I felt at home. I could easily live the rest of my life just like this. With Pharaoh, on the back of his bike, knowing that he was mine.



AFTER LEAVING THE RENTAL HOUSE, Pharaoh and I ended up at the clubhouse. He mentioned that the Newbie's family had his body shipped to Florida to bury him there and requested that the guys not show up. His parents weren't happy about him being a part of an MC, considering his father was retired military and a cop. Newton left home after high school, dropped out of college after his first year, and got caught up in a few things until he landed with the Wolves.

They guys were taking things hard because they already felt guilty for his death but knowing his family refused to let them pay their respects made things worse. Especially for Pharaoh and Bash. They didn't send Newbie or Nic to that strip club, had even warned them to head back to Diamond Falls after the races, but regardless Pharaoh and Bash were taking the blame. Confronting Mouse that night was their idea, to send a message about me. That made it impossible for me not to feel somewhat responsible as well but tonight was about celebrating. They were sending Newbie off the best way they knew how with a clubhouse party, good food, and plenty of Sweet Auburn.

"Is it always like this?" My eyes floated around the clubhouse. It was packed with bodies. Club members, their spouses or girlfriends, and of course Chasers—club ass. Both

Sweet Auburn Bar and Grill and the Lounge were shut down for the evening, so everyone was in the house. Even the DJ for the Lounge, Glacier, was there so the music was loud, bass vibrating through the floor. Most of the guys had their hands wrapped around a bottle of Sweet Auburn or a beer.

“When we lose one of our own, yeah. Everyone comes out to show respect. We grieve but then we celebrate because it’s dangerous for any of these guys to sit in a dark place for too long.”

Dangerous for those that caused it.

“This happen a lot?” *This*...celebrating the life of a member they lost. I wasn’t sure why I asked because I didn’t truly want to know but a part of me held my breath waiting.

Pharaoh leaned into me, closing his arms around my body before he kissed my neck. “No and calm your crazy ass mind. I’m good, Ri. Nothing’s gonna happen to me.”

“I wasn’t...”

“Yes you were, but I get it. Just don’t let any of this put those thoughts in your head.”

He buried his face in the curve of my neck then lifted his head. “You good? I need to go holla at Padre for a minute.”

“You don’t have to babysit me, Ro.”

He flashed a charming smile. “Considering it protecting what’s mine, not babysitting. These muthafuckers in here get a little alcohol in their systems and get stupid. I’m not trying to fight tonight.”

“I think I can handle a little extra attention.”

“Yeah but I can’t. They’re my brothers, but you’re my lady. I choose you every time, Ri. Don’t be the reason I have to choose.”

I grinned over my shoulder to find his eyes sparkling and a cocky smile below those dark brown orbs.

“Go, I’m fine.”

I watched Pharaoh weave his way through the sea of bodies then turned back to the bar, focusing on my drink until I felt a presence next to me.

Nic.

He looked like shit. Bruising healed but still visible. There were stitches above his left eye and dark shadows around both of them. The slow movement and the way he cradled his arm at his chest was proof that he likely had broken ribs.

“You’re staring. I know I’m sexy and everything but you might want to get that under control.” His smile brightened the gloominess of his appearance because it was genuine.

“Sexy is a stretch given your current state.” Nic wasn’t patched yet, although Pharaoh told me they were doing it soon. He was still a Wolf and I couldn’t imagine he would appreciate being coddled so I decided treating him like normal was the best route.

“Damn, four broken ribs and having my face rearranged and I still can’t get shit from the ladies. I really need to work on that.”

I smiled wide. “Or maybe try something different. Ladies’ man is not in the cards for everyone.”

He chuckled and nodded. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“You look like shit, Nic. Are you supposed to be here or even out of the hospital yet?”

He shook his head. “Had to sign myself out against doctor’s orders but I wouldn’t miss this. Tonight’s important.”

His jaw clenched and eyes turned dark but only for a brief moment. When his hand that rested on the bar clenched into a fist, I covered it with mine. “You okay?”

“You’re never okay after a loss like that. I was there. I lost my brother. That could have been me. You don’t forget shit like that. You just learn how to manage but you’re never okay.”

After a minute he pulled his hand from beneath mine and grabbed the bottle of whiskey that Pharaoh had left behind. He

turned it up then flashed me a charming smile.

“Tonight’s not about that. Tonight I honor my brother.” He turned the bottle up and winked at me as he swallowed large gulps of the amber liquid.

“Nic, you hitting on my lady?”

Pharaoh appeared at my side again so that I was between them both. Pharaoh on my right, Nic to my left.

“Is she really yours though? You’d be surprised at what a few broken ribs and a handful of stitches can get you.”

I felt the deep vibration of Pharaoh’s laugh.

“Fuck that shit. You keep flirting with my lady and you’re gonna need more than a few stitches.”

Nic’s smile took over his entire expression before he leaned into me. “Let me go find something to keep me busy. Ro’s insecurities are showing.”

I tilted my head back and grinned at Pharaoh as Nic grabbed the bottle of whiskey again and did his best to hide the discomfort from moving again. “Yeah, he’s bit of a crybaby too. Don’t want to embarrass him in front of the entire club.”

Pharaoh laughed again and stepped around me cutting off Nic’s path. He placed his hand on Nic’s shoulder, lowering his voice to speak to Nic who nodded tightly before Pharaoh pulled him into his chest and clasped his fist against Nic’s back. Nic slowly walked away and found a spot in one of the armchairs. Two women immediately made their way to him, but he shook his head and they left him alone.

“This is hard for him.”

“Yeah, it is. He feels responsible. I just told him to let that go. There wasn’t much he could have done to change the situation.”

“You all feel responsible. You need to take your own advice.”

He leaned into me, brushing his lips across mine. “What I know and what I feel are two completely different things. Shit like this is never okay, but we learn how to manage and keep it pushing.”

When Pharaoh kissed me and pulled back, I glanced at Nic then him. “He said the same thing. The never being okay part.”

“That’s my muthafuckin’ brother, Ri. We live and breathe this shit. One mind, one heart. We believe in the creed.”

“My girl.” An arm dropped around my shoulders and I pulled my eyes away from Pharaoh to find Mint next to me with low eyes and newly dyed hair. Today it was an emerald green that matched the fitted tank top she wore under her club jacket. “We need to have shots. I swear I love you, Ri.”

She smiled lazily looking past me. “Ro, I fucking love her.”

“How the fuck you love her and don’t like me?”

“Because she’s bad ass and not an asshole. You need to get her patched, Ro.” Mint flashed me a smug grin. “You drinking with me, Ri?”

“Take yo’ drunk ass somewhere.” Pharaoh chuckled and tossed Mint’s arm off my shoulder.

“I’mma stay my ass right here. Ain’t shit to do in this place. At least not for me. Why is it that all we have is club pussy? We need club dick too. This shit is biased as hell. Let me go holla at Padre about club equality.”

I threw my hand over my mouth to capture my laugh but Pharaoh let his go before pointing at Mint. “First of all, that shit is never happening and if you bring that to Prez he’s gonna curse you the fuck out so damn fast you won’t know what hit you.”

“You see this shit, Ri. You’re on my side right? We should have club dick if they get club...”

“No the fuck she isn’t on your side. The only dick she’s voting for is attached to me.” I swung my head in Pharaoh’s

direction to find him glaring down at me as if daring me to disagree. It was cute and funny as shit.

“I don’t want a vote nor do I want to be a part of this discussion.” I slipped off the stool and stepped around Mint. When Pharaoh glared and at me I quickly added, “Bathroom, I’ll be right back.”

“Ah shit. Is Doc here tonight?” Mint smirked and I narrowed my eyes while her smile expanded. “What, I’m just saying?” She threw her hands up and Pharaoh pulled me to him, smoothing his hands down my back and over my ass before he grinned at Mint.

“She’s not armed.”

“Fuck you and fuck you.”

I stepped away but collided with a body that appeared out of nowhere. Before I could apologize for the collision she squared up and shoved me back but it didn’t take long for me to figure out that her issue wasn’t with me specifically as much as it was about who I was with.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-ONE

Pharaoh.

“Excuse you.”

“No bitch, excuse you.” Yahri lunged first but I caught her around the waist and yanked her into my chest, giving her a minute to gain her footing before I maneuvered her behind me.

“The fuck is your problem?” I frowned at Arica who had the nerve to look offended.

“Are you really asking me what my problem is, Pharaoh?” she shot back, lowering her eyes to Yahri who was still blocked by me. There was no way in hell I was about to let her get into with club pussy.

“Ay, Arica. Come holla at me for a minute.” Bash and Cambri pushed through the crowd but when he reached for Arica’s arm. Cambri pushed him out the way.

“I wish you fucking would touch her.” When Cambri glared at Bash, he smirked and threw his hands up.

Ol’ whipped ass.

“You’re on your own, fam.”

“All of you can kiss my ass. I’m talking to Pharaoh.” Arica kept her eyes on me and all I could think was, *is she fucking serious*. This was the exact reason I hardly ever fucked with women at the club. The minute they got some dick, they got really confused about their positions.

“Nah, you aren’t talking to me. Not like that and damn sure not after putting your hands on my lady. Move the fuck on, Arica.”

“Why because of her? Last I checked this was a Wolf party. There aren’t any Devils here so there’s no need for you to pretend she matters.”

“If you like that pretty little face of yours I suggest you do what Ro said and move around.” Mint’s tone was laced with amusement but there wasn’t a damn thing funny about this situation. For her to be so specific meant someone was pillow talking or Arica was listening to conversations she had no business listening to. The main rule with club pussy was you don’t hear shit, you don’t know shit.

“You think I’m worried about a bitch carrying a razor. She isn’t gonna do shit to me, trust.”

“Ro, handle that before I have to because if one more bitch comes out of her mouth, then she’s gonna get these hands and I put that on God.”

“Shit, mine too, sis.” Cambri moved next to Yahri who managed to get around me.

“Bruh, you aren’t fighting anybody and neither is she.” Bash yanked Cambri into his chest with one arm and pulled Yahri into his side with the other.

“But I’m not an old lady or a prospect. I’m patched, bitch, so I *will* fight you. Now you wanna move around or try your luck with me.” Mint walked up on Arica and smirked. I swear on God I saw Arica flinch like she realized she didn’t want to go toe to toe with either of these ladies.

“Yo’ ass ain’t fighting either. She’s about to move the fuck around and stop acting like she doesn’t know her place.” I glared at Arica who looked like she was on the verge of tears. Which I did *not* understand.

“My place. Oh so I’m just club pussy now that you want to try to flex in front of her. But since we’re talking about knowing places, make sure you put it all out there. I didn’t get

passed around, like the rest of them.” She pointed to a group of females. “I was here for *you*, Pharaoh. *Only* you.”

“*Was*. Pay attention to the tenses, sweetie. He *is* mine.”

“Oh, excuse me, for not respecting the rules. I didn’t know *she* was inked. If she’s yours Ro, that’s the rule, right?” Arica smirked at me then lowered her eyes to Yahri. “But then again from what I hear, you’re not which means *this* is temporary and will eventually be past tense too. Enjoy.”

I chuckled arrogantly shaking my head just as Mello dropped his arm around Arica. “So you sucking my dick doesn’t count me as part of the rotation, A? Come on, seems like you need an ally and you’re not gonna find that over here.”

“Fuck you and that little ass dick.” She shoved Mello away, glared at me, then Yahri before storming off. There was never any miscommunication about what we were so as much as she was in her feelings, that wasn’t my problem. Like it or not, she had always known her role with the club and me.

“Well that was a little too much information for me.” Bash shook his head tucking Cambri underneath him before guiding them away from the bar.

“For the record, my dick is very much above average. She’s just mad and lashing out. Hurt people hurt people.” Mello had a smug grin like he’d really proved something.

“No the fuck you didn’t...” Mint’s hooded eyes shot up to Mello and a round of laughs surfaced from those around the bar close enough to be privy to the conversation.

After Mello walked away arguing with Mint about the size of his dick I cornered Yahri against the bar. “You mad?”

“Are you mad about the men I’ve been with before you?”

Men?

The use of plural damn sure didn’t sit right with me but there wasn’t anything I could do about it.

“No because they aren’t me, but you know that don’t you?” I leaned in more, placing my hands on the bar on either

side of her, so that my body was holding her in place.

“I’m not mad that you’ve been with her. She isn’t me, but I am pissed that she called me a bitch and I didn’t get to punch her in the face.” She looked past me across the clubhouse to where I could feel Arica glaring at both of us.

I gently pinched Yahri’s chin with two fingers making sure her focus stayed on me. “Good because you don’t fight over guarantees.”

“And *you* won’t fight over guarantees, either.”

“Nah, I won’t because again, they aren’t me but I am gonna beat the shit out of your ex for getting you caught up in his shit as soon as I see his ass.”

She smiled smugly. “That’s the only reason.”

“One reason, yes.” My eyes remained pinned on Yahri’s communicating what that other reason was. He got to experience what should have always been mine and I didn’t like that so he wouldn’t like how I was going to express my dislike.

“I’m pretty sure it will be more about me than what he got me caught up in.”

I allowed the grin on my face to expand as I nodded but before I could respond, the music lowered and Padre’s voice filled the room.

“We all know why we’re here tonight.”

“Fuck yeah, we do. To honor our brother,” Clutch said and several of the guys echoed a rumble of approval. I noticed several of the ladies moving around shoving shots into empty hands.

“We lost one of our own and that shit hurts...” Padre’s voice was rough with emotion and my eyes drifted to Nic who was standing in the corner, body rigid and face tight. “As much as we all know what we signed on for to be a part of this brotherhood, we pray each day that we all make it home safely. That didn’t happen this time so tonight, we drink up and remember that our fallen brother will forever be with us.

He has his wings now but he also earned his colors.” Padre motioned to the wall that held a duplicate patch framed for each member of our club dating back to the inception. Newbie’s was now there. Even though he never got to see it on his leather, we would always honor and respect him as a member of our club.

“And considering tonight we officially celebrate for not just him but for Nic...” Padre nodded at Clutch who moved from behind the bar with a brand new leather jacket, patched with Nic’s name. When he tried to hand it to Nic, he shoved it away.

“I don’t want if I didn’t earn it.”

“You earned it, Brother. Don’t disrespect me or any of us in here by insinuating otherwise. We don’t give this away. If you’re wearing our colors, that means you earned them.” Clutch didn’t offer any room for argument and Nic gave a tight nod accepting the jacket. With a lot of effort and groans, he worked his way into it. Nobody offered to assist out of respect. Once he had it on, a shot was shoved into his hand.

“Congratulations, Brother.” Padre placed his hand on Nic’s shoulder and lifted his glass.

“Put them drinks up. Tonight we honor our two newest patched members, Newbie and Nic.”

Everyone erupted in a rumble of shots and approval. Glasses met, liquor tumbled over and bottles were turned up. The music blasted again moments later and things went back to their chaotic state.

“You about ready to get out of here?”

Yahri shot me a sarcastic look. “You worried about being called out again?”

“I don’t get around like that at the club. In the city I might think twice about taking you certain places, but not here.”

She punched me in my chest before I could catch her little ass hand but our moment was interrupted by Padre who had Clutch, Dedge, and Bash flanking him.

“We need to borrow your punching bag for a minute, if you don’t mind.”

Yahri’s face eased into a smug expression. “You can have him.” She cut her eyes at me and tried to dip under my arm but I pulled her back into me stealing a kiss before I let her go. Like always I followed her movements as she crossed the club and parked her ass on the arm of the chair that Cambri sat in. There were several other wives and girlfriends grouped around smiling and laughing, while stealing glances to various corners of the room which meant they were likely talking shit about their men. Yahri didn’t miss a beat easing her way into the conversation and I appreciated the way she was comfortably at ease in this element. This place and the people in it were an extension of me. She didn’t have this growing up but she had it now because my family was her family.

“What’s up?”

“We gonna have a problem with that?” Padre pointed near the pool tables where Arica was and I glared at him.

“I know you didn’t come over here to address no stupid shit like that?”

Clutch and Bash both chuckled and Padre grinned. “I’m just trying to make sure we keep the peace around here. Let’s not forget, your girl has a nasty little habit with blades that might cause problems. I paid a lot for these custom floors. I don’t want blood staining them.”

“Fuck you,” I barked through a laugh.

“And no, that’s not what I wanted to talk to you about.” His eyes left me shifting over to Clutch before he continued. “We have word that Chop is ready to talk.”

“When?”

“Soon. I’m putting something together. We also know that Yahri’s ex is in town. Looks like he’s trying to get ahead of this.”

“Chop doesn’t know.”

“Apparently not. Feds raided another one of their spots down in Florida a few days after the bust in Virginia. The transportation was brokered by the same person.”

Yahri's ex.

“Not a chance in hell it wasn't him,” Clutch added. “Did a little digging and found out he was trying to make a side deal with some of the women. His thing was personally testing the women and reporting back that they weren't quality. He would then broker the side deal. One of these deals was with an undercover which is why he ended up flipping.”

“We're handling it, right?”

“Chop, yeah. You and Bash get to do that but the ex, no.”

“Why the fuck not?” I growled.

“Because it's personal for you. We stick to business.”

“You're damn right it's personal.”

My eyes bounced between Clutch and Padre. “He's an informant for the Feds, Ro. You go after him, you run the risk of landing on their radar. If we can figure out a way around that then maybe but we're already risking enough by handing over what we have to Chop in exchange for him to call off his yard dogs. What's your priority, getting the heat off her or putting hands on the man who she used to share a bed with?”

My eyes narrowed and landed on Clutch then shifted to Bash when he added, “He's right, Ro. Not a smart move. Him being here is probably a got damn set up. Meeting with Chop might be one too but at the very least we know he needs us to clear his name.”

“And I've made it very clear to him that this deal is a one and done. If I think for one moment that it's a set up, we end things like they are. We really don't need him, but it works in our favor if he ends this and shifts the direction of blame. Why go to war when we don't have to?”

I didn't like it but they were right. This couldn't be personal it had to be smart. “You said soon. When?”

“Let’s get through tonight. Let Nic have his time and celebrate Newton. Then we move forward.”

We all agreed. Padre headed toward the back likely to shut himself in his office. Clutch moved near the pool tables and draped his arm around one of the ladies watching a game between two prospects.

Bash hung back with me. “You gonna be able to follow the rules on this?” I smirked and glanced at him but didn’t respond. “I didn’t fucking think so.”

He extended a closed fist which I met with mine before we were both heading toward our women. I stepped up beside Yahri who peered at me over her shoulder. A partial smirk was already in place when she asked, “We leaving?”

“Unless you want to stay.”

She quickly shook her head and began a round of goodbyes to the rest of the ladies, hugging Cambri who was already on her feet preparing to head out with Bash. All I could think about after we were on my bike and pulling off the compound was the calm before the storm. She was my calm and the storm brewing would be the end to this shit and the official beginning to a new life that I was building...

With her.



WE MADE it to the house but not past the living room. I ate Yahri’s pussy up against the door and she was currently riding my dick reverse cowgirl like a pro. My hands were on her hips guiding her movements while she arched her back fucking me in the most pleasurable way possible. She wanted to be in control so I let her. I gave a split second of thought to this being about Arica. Yahri being faced with a woman who I’d been intimate with couldn’t have been easy to embrace. But she didn’t have a damn thing to worry about with any woman past or future.

I was hers and she was mine.

I did, however, appreciate that she was riding my dick like she needed to prove that to me.

Damn she's beautiful.

Everything about this woman excited me and felt right. *She* felt good as fuck. Normally I would contribute my thoughts to a pre-orgasmic high. Good pussy could make the sanest man crazy but this wasn't that. This was me realizing the woman I was balls deep in completely owned *me* not just my dick.

"Fuck I'm seconds away from putting a baby in your pretty ass."

She tensed for all of two seconds and began riding me harder. The way she clenched around me had all my common sense fading. My fingers pushed deeper into her skin while her movements grew wilder and more aggressive. It didn't take long before she no longer had control and I was doing most of the work, moving her up and down my dick until I felt her muscles lock tight. It started with her pussy then moved throughout the rest of Yahri's body. Her head fell back as her mouth hung open and the orgasm took what little control she was holding onto. She gasped, breathing labored and body pulsed wildly.

I lifted her one last time, bringing her down with more force than necessary at the same time my teeth pierced her shoulder to muffle my own appreciation for my orgasm. I held her tighter as I came inside of her. Once my mind cleared and the fog settled, I wrapped my arms round her, planting a trail of kisses up and down her neck until the pulsing of her muscles around my dick slowed then ceased.

"You joked about a baby..." Her voice sounded slightly hoarse, possibly from overexertion, but if I had to guess I would say from emotions. "But you don't have to worry about that. I'm on birth control." She gave me her eyes and the clung to me with trust and something a little more dangerous.

"And that shit isn't one hundred percent. If I was worried, I would have made sure we strapped up."

“You want kids?” I hated the way her voice was laced with uncertainty.

“Do you?” Why the fuck was I getting angry with the thought that she didn’t and even more irritated when it occurred that she might want kids, but not with *me*.

“I do.”

“You sure? Because you damn sure don’t sound real confident right now.”

She exhaled a sigh and leaned deeper into me, lifting her chin so that her eyes met mine. Her eyes were soft and so damn emotional. I was trying really hard to control my feelings but fuck, what if she didn’t want to have my baby, *ever*.

“I’m sure. I was just being sure that you weren’t saying that for my benefit.”

Everything in me relaxed knowing that she was trying to tiptoe around my feelings but I never wanted her to do that shit either. I needed her to understand that she could always be honest with her feelings because I would always give her the space to be herself even if it was in regard to topics I didn’t necessarily agree with.

“Never discount your wants or needs to protect what you think I want or need. Also understand there’s not a damn thing I would ever deny you, including carrying my child but I do want you to understand what that means. I’m not some typical ass nigga who works a nine to five and comes home every night talking about how my boss pissed me the fuck off. I’m never gonna be that.”

Her smile expanded quick. “If that was you or ever going to be you, then I wouldn’t want this.”

“Good girls and bad boys always ends tragically, Ri. That shit never has a smooth ride or a happy ending.”

“Then I guess we have nothing to worry about because I never said I was good.”

I chuckled and stole a kiss before tapping her thigh. I felt my dick rising again and if that happened, she would definitely end up pregnant before the night was over.

“Let’s go shower then you can cook for me.”

“Or we can order.”

“Nah, I want yo’ shit.”

She groaned at the thought and I chuckled, kissing her neck. “Let me get some food in my stomach then you can put your pussy on my face.”

“Nigga....” She busted out laughing and lifted off my lap.

Once she was on her feet and turned to face me, I gripped the back of her thighs, bringing her to me and sending my tongue from her navel further south. “Don’t act like that’s not what you were thinking when I said I want yo’ shit.”

“It wasn’t.”

“They why is your pussy still vibrating?”

She mused me in the head and walked out the living room. I watched her go thinking how grateful I was that she planned to stay.

In my house and in my life.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-TWO

Yahri.

I made burgers and home fries and after we ate, Pharaoh had his head between my legs doing as promised and he did not disappoint. I came twice. Once by way of his tongue and the second time on my hands and knees while he tried to shift the position of my uterus into my lungs. After our final round we showered and ended up in his bed where we'd been for the past hour, me flipping through channels not focused on anything while Pharaoh was lying on his stomach between my legs, cheek pressed into my stomach with his arms shoved under my thighs.

“Can I tell you something?”

“Don't ask me that shit, Ri. You always have an open invitation to say whatever's on your mind.”

“What if what I want to tell you is I changed my mind about us?” That got his attention quick and based on the nasty look he shot me I guess that conversation was not welcomed.

“You can say whatever you want but that doesn't mean I'mma roll with it.”

“Don't I get a say in what I want for my life?”

“Always as long as what you want is me.”

“Whatever.” I shoved his head back down and he kissed my stomach and returned to his previous position, eyes closed.

“What's on your mind?” His deep voice rumbled against my stomach sending awareness to my pussy but I decided to

ignore the returning need for him.

“When you told me about my father, the first thought that came into my head was that had to be the reason why it was so easy for him to send me away. Because I wasn’t his.”

I felt his arms tighten under my thighs. “You know that’s bullshit right? There’s no way you can believe that’s how he felt, Ri.”

I shook my head before I spoke my answer. “No, I don’t. I know he loved me. I just couldn’t stop that thought from creeping into my head. He never treated me like I wasn’t his...”

“Because you *were* his.”

“I know,” I whispered before I asked, “If we did have a kid and something happened to me...”

“Nothing will ever happen to you. Not like that so don’t even put any fucking energy into those type of thoughts.”

I smiled at how definitive his words were. “I know, but if that was our situation. Would you make the same decisions my father did?”

“Sending our child somewhere safe?” He lifted his head and his stormy eyes collided with mine. “Truthfully, I would do anything to keep our child safe so yes, I would but like I said, not a damn thing will ever happen to you so that won’t be our situation.”

For the second time his response was definitive. Silence fell around us until I asked my next question. The other thing bothered me just as much. “So my dad had a relationship with that lawyer?”

“I don’t know what they had because it wasn’t my business.”

“But they were sleeping together?” The words felt heavy on my tongue. I had only ever known my father to love one woman, my mother. Even if I understood the reality that he had the right to be with someone else the idea of him with a woman other than my mother else felt...

Disrespectful.

“Yeah they were but...”

“He *didn't* love her. I know that. It just doesn't feel right.”

“People have a million and one reasons why they need people. With your father and Mel, I'd say it was more of a physical need. I do believe he cared about her because that's the type of man he was. The type of man he groomed me to be, but that was all it would have ever been. And before you ask me some dumb shit about me fucking with another woman if anything happened to you the answer is no because again, nothing will happen to you. I'm not allowing that and if I do fuck that up, I'm not gonna be around much longer. I could never forgive myself.”

I tensed at what he was confessing. “Ro...”

“There's not a damn thing you can say, Ri. I put that on God. I let you go once before and even though it wasn't my decision to make it happened. We lost years. I'm never letting that happen again. Wherever you are is where I'm gonna be. Even if you're six feet deep. That's my word and my word will never change.”

I left it alone because he meant what he was saying and there wasn't a damn thing I could say to change his mind. That also gave me comfort that Pharaoh would keep his promises that as long as he was breathing he would never allow anything to happen to me. I decided to switch gears.

“So if we do have a kid which do you want, son or daughter?”

“Both.”

“Which one first?”

“Our son so he can kick the ass of any little fools that think they have a chance with my baby girl.”

“So you're saying she can't be the oldest and kick ass of any of them little trifling hoes that think they have a chance with *my* son.”

“She can but you know my little G is gonna be a player like his daddy.”

“And what about the little Gs that try to kick it to your daughter?”

“Not happening. I’m shutting that shit down.”

“You do realize that’s a double standard, right?”

“Nah it’s not. A female fucking around is on some hoe shit. A dude fucking around is pimp shit.”

“Ro?!”

I shoved his head and he laughed, kissing my stomach. “I’m just fucking with you. I’mma raise our son to respect women. Same as his father respects his mother. He’ll know better.”

“You better mean that.”

“I do because I’m not a hoe.”

“Tell that to your little club pussy.”

He chuckled. “She wasn’t mine.”

“But you slept with her?!”

Obviously.

Not sure why I wanted him to admit the truth but I did. We women loved to torture ourselves.

“No.”

“What happened to not lying to me?”

“I’m not lying. You are the only woman I have ever slept with, as in, shared a bed with anything beyond orgasms. I don’t sleep with women, Ri. Barely even fucked them in beds.”

“Seriously?”

“Dead ass and don’t ask me how many woman I’ve fucked unless you’re sure you can handle the answer because I damn sure won’t be asking you that shit.” I smiled at the vexed way he rattled off the last part. “I might not be the smartest person

in the world but I'm damn sure not stupid enough to travel down that road. You can keep your numbers and I'll keep mine."

He grunted something under his breath that I didn't bother asking for clarity on because I would bet my life whatever he said involved some type of threat of physical violence against the men in my past.

"Do you think about our first kiss?"

"Not anymore because I know what your pussy taste like and I love that more."

"Ro..." My face heated and my pussy reacted with memories of him actually tasting it.

"What, I'm dead ass."

He was.

"I mean, did you think about it back then? Like after I left?"

"At first, yeah but after the first few times I let myself believe that kissing you could be my future, I had to let that shit go. I knew better and thinking about it would have turned me into the type of man I promised I would never be."

"And what kind of man is that?"

"A liar. I made promises to myself and your father. I wasn't ready to be what you needed back then and if I had allowed myself to think about things I wasn't ready for, I would have fucked it all up."

He lifted and yanked me down the mattress then covered my body with his. "Did you think about me, Ri? Were there nights when you closed your eyes and let your hands slip into them panties, wishing it was me?"

"No."

His smile was so damn cocky. "You know your eyes get shifty as hell when you lie, right?"

"They do not."

“Nah, they don’t but the way they got big as hell when you thought they did, proved my point. Now take your ass to sleep.”

He rolled over onto his side and I scooted closer, forcing one of my legs between his. The heat from his body and the swell of his dick should have been a distraction but the comfort of Pharaoh wrapped around me was like a natural sedative. My body relaxed and so did my mind.

This was my new normal...



“CAN I get you guys anything else?” Louise stood next to Pharaoh, with her hand lovingly placed on his shoulder. Because I understood their bond, I smiled at the way she catered to him. She was never short of flirty banter but she genuinely cared about Pharaoh and he cared about her as well.

“I’m good.” His response ended with his eyes on me. I smiled, shaking my head.

“I’m good too.” My hand drifted to my stomach where I smoothed my palm back and forth before tugging at the hem of the t-shirt I was in. It was one that Pharaoh had given me. Property was printed across the front in thick bold letters and their wolf insignia was stretched across the back. I’d covered it with a jean jacket which was off and draped across the back of my chair. “I’m stuffed and could use a good nap.”

“It’s bed time, sweetheart. Maybe you should just let this handsome thing take you home and put you to bed.”

I hadn’t expected to hear those words leaving her mouth seconds after I swallowed a large gulp of my Arnold Palmer which I came dangerously close to spraying the table with. I managed to keep it in but didn’t escape choking on the bittersweet beverage.

“Look at that. The idea of you putting this one to bed has her speechless.” Louise winked at Pharaoh, lifted the cash he’d

used to pay our tab and more than generous tip, then left us with that very awkward exchange.

“She’s...”

Interesting.

“Yeah, very.” Pharaoh chuckled and leaned back in his chair. The table that hovered over us was fairly small so it barely managed to cover his widespread legs. My eyes drifted down his chest until his voice stopped me from journeying lower.

“Ay, up here, wit’ yo’ nasty ass.”

“She just basically suggested that you fuck me to sleep and I’m nasty.”

His smile was devilish. “Yeah, you are but don’t worry. I plan on doing just that. Right now, I want to look at your pretty ass because I swear everything about you has me needing a little more each time I get to experience any part of you.”

I blushed hard, lowering my eyes for a quick second before they found his. “You’re full of shit.”

His head dropped slightly to the side and his eyes searched mine. His brows lowered to form a deep V. “Nah baby. I’m full of you. Those beautiful ass eyes, those lips, that smile, your voice, your skin, shit the way you breathe. Every part of you makes me whole and that’s some humbling shit because I thought I had life all figured out. I thought I understood who I was but that clarity damn sure didn’t happen until I realized the man I am *with* you.”

“What am I supposed to say to that?” My smile was soft, my soul felt lifted.

“That you love me too and if not now, then at least promise me you’ll catch up with me because I’m gonna be lonelier than a muthafucker if I have to stay here by myself for much longer.”

“I...”

“Pharaoh.” The woman’s voice was too sultry and the way his name rolled off her tongue was too intimate. He turned his head slightly to the left where she stood. Her eyes bounced between us before settling on him. I shifted intently watching their exchange because I swear if this woman said the wrong thing, I was going to lose my shit. I was still inches from being on go and not having my needs met by handing over a beat down to Arica last night. So whoever this was could get it. She had better tread lightly.

“Hey, it’s been awhile.”

“And you know why.” His tone and expression were both unwelcoming.

What is happening?

She swallowed thickly and her eyes did the bouncy thing between him and me before she opened her mouth to talk. I kicked him under the table and narrowed my eyes on her. “Yahri, and *you* are?”

Not subtle at all nor did I fucking care.

“Marlow. A *friend*.”

Cute, not fucking hearing it though. They’d slept together which was confirmed when...

“We’re not friends, Marlow. You got in a situation. I tried to help. You wasted my time.”

She opened her mouth to challenge what he said but the look he gave had Marlow deciding against whatever she planned to say.

That was when I really got a good look at her. She was pretty, had a nice body but was dressed modestly. Jeans, hoodie, running shoes. Her hair was pulled back into a messy bun at the nape of her neck but her body language and demeanor was off. She was too damn timid.

“I’m going to go.” Her eyes darted over to me one last time before they landed on Pharaoh. He lifted from his chair and cut off her path.

“Offer still stands. When you’re ready, you call me and when you do, someone will be there. It can’t be me, but I’ll make sure it’s someone you can trust.”

She nodded and looked past him at me. “Thank you.”

“I mean it, Marlow. We got you, but only when you’re ready. This time be sure because if you go back again, that’s it, understood?”

“Yeah, I understand.”

Pharaoh stepped out the way and she left. When he was in his chair again, I glanced at the door then him. My nice way of giving him the chance to explain.

“She got a job at the Lounge. Her dude wasn’t feeling it and got physical with her. I pulled up on him to make sure he understood that he needed to communicate without his hands.”

“And?”

“After me and Bash rolled up on him at the shop where he worked, he decided his dick wasn’t big enough to square up with a real man and instead decided to take it out on her. He beat her pretty bad. She ended up in the hospital and asked for help. We helped her out with a safe place to stay and the club kept eyes on her to make sure she was good.”

“We or you helped her out.”

“We as in the club, we have properties that are furnished. We rent some, some we use as safe houses.”

“But I ended up at your house. Why not one of those for me?”

He smiled smugly. “There isn’t a damn place safer for *you* than my house.”

My body betrayed me because it went left when I was trying to go right and my nipples went hard.

“Right, so what’s the rest?”

“I told you the rest. She went back to her dude. We still check in occasionally to make sure she’s good. None of us are okay with men putting their hands on women. A real man

never needs to use his hands in any way that doesn't guarantee women pleasure. Her dude isn't a real man." Pharaoh smiled and added, "And yes, I slept with her, *once*. Then I found out about her situation and that didn't work for me. I don't share."

"I didn't ask."

"No, you didn't but you wanted to know."

"Actually I didn't."

Small lie.

He chuckled and stood, extending a hand to me. I bypassed it and stood without his help. The minute I was on my feet, his arm hooked my waist and he dragged me into him.

"My dick has been to war more times than I care to recall but my heart has never been on the battlefield. The only thing you need to feel is superior because it's only ever been yours."

For a brief moment, I allowed my eyes to slip closed while I leaned into the familiarity of him. "You don't fight fair."

"Fair doesn't exist when it's about my heart, Ri. There's only one option. It belongs to you." My head lifted and his gaze held mine. His smile was genuine and beautiful in its truth. I had no fight for his honesty.

"I'm not sure what to do with you." My response was just as honest as his because being with Pharaoh felt like an overload of so many things.

"If I'm lucky, some pretty dirty things and a lot of them."

I choked on a laugh that I hadn't expected to release and he kissed my temple, digging out his phone. I felt the shift before his expression turned flat so I grabbed my jacket and slipped it on.

"Yeah. Now." His gaze shifted to mine and the iciness of his stare sent a shiver through me. "Aight, let me get Ri situated then I'm on my way."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing you need to worry about. Come on. I need to get you home."

And for the second time tonight, our perfect moment was ruined with a reality check.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-THREE

Pharaoh.

“We need to end this shit,” I muttered as I waited astride my bike. The diamond shape we formed placed Clutch at the front, me to the left of Padre, Bash to his right and Dedge had his back. The natural flow of things was to protect prez at all costs. That wasn’t and would never be an issue.

“That’s why we’re here. If he has any god damn sense, he’ll make the right decision.”

Clutch grunted.

“Then prepare for the bullshit.”

Behind us, the low rumble of Dedge’s voice had me glancing over my shoulder. “Everyone in place? Good. We’re heading that way.”

He tossed his chin in acknowledgment letting us know we were all set. This was a potential ambush. Chop couldn’t be trusted. He was desperate and desperation made for stupid decisions. The only positive was that his ego wouldn’t allow him to be taken out without a fight. What we were offering was his fight. Without us, he would have to stay in hiding because the minute Chop showed his face, he was done for. That was the problem with doing business with men who had less morals than you. It was kill or be killed and sometimes the outcome meant ending your entire existence. Not just you but everyone you loved.

My mind drifted to Yahri. She was my existence.

“Let’s go.”

We were out in the middle of nowhere. A location off Route 29 with the only structure being an abandoned café. Our guys were on the roof, on each side of the building, and in a pickup truck. Mint was the driver, with Nic in the passenger seat. His body was still healing from his injuries. Broken ribs, lacerations, and fractured bones made it uncomfortable to be on a bike. That was killing him more than the damage done to his body. He wasn’t supposed to be here but argued with Padre for a spot tonight promising to stay out the way. Nic understood his current state meant he would be a liability if things went bad. I understood his need to be here. We all did. Chop was the one who gave the order for the attack he and Newbie suffered. The ones who executed the orders were long gone thanks to me and Bash, but Chop was alive.

The four of us dismounted our bikes and approached the SUV that supposedly held Chop. We all had guns on us but not drawn. Our guys would have that covered. It was still a risk but one we were confident enough to take.

When Chop stepped out of the back seat, the two front doors opened and men flanked his sides. Chop, only being just over five feet, looked like a kid between his muscle, both well over six feet and built like tanks. Chop was an ugly little fucker with bright skin and dark circles under his eyes. With a half-million dollar debt for women he couldn’t deliver because the Feds had them I could imagine he wasn’t sleeping much. He was inked on his neck, face, and bald head not helping his appearance but making him look much harder than he was. Chop was the type of man who used threats to broker loyalty, which I never understood because there wasn’t a damn thing threatening about him.

“We’re here.” One of his guys stepped forward, narrowing his beady eyes. I snorted while Padre stepped to him.

“Here to see him. Not you. Get the fuck out the way.”

This mammoth looking fucker growled, but Chop decided to man up. “You ain’t saying shit that interesting to me yet.”

Bash chuckled arrogantly shaking his head, clearly not amused by the flex. Chop's eyes shot over to him and he seethed with irritation. I would bet my ass he considered the reality that we had the upper hand.

"We doing this or not?" His jaw clenched and he widened his stance sticking his chest out as his chin lifted slightly.

Me, Clutch, Bash, and Dedge stepped forward and Chop's guys moved their hands to their waists. Padre didn't move.

"Stand the fuck down," he said to us then pointed at Chop. "You shut the fuck up or this ends badly."

Again, Chop's jaw flexed but he understood his position.

"You bring him," Padre asked.

Chop motioned to the SUV and one of his guys moved to the back, returning with a guy, hands bound, in front of him. He looked like someone had gone a few rounds with his face.

"Who the fuck is that?" Dedge was the first to speak.

"We'll get to him in a minute. Here are my terms. Devils pack up and leave. You can take your chapter wherever the fuck you want, as long as you're no longer in my state. Understood?"

Chop offered Padre a sharp nod.

"If we catch word of you moving anything through my state, deal's off and we come for you and your entire club. No women, no drugs, no guns pass through my state by your hands. You don't move anything not even a god damn piece of candy, is that understood?"

"I can agree to that but you have to agree to stay the fuck out of our business anywhere else. No matter what that *business* is."

Chop was agreeing not to traffic women south, but that didn't mean he was promising to stop altogether. There really wasn't much we could do about that but if I knew Padre as well as I thought I did, he had already reached out to other clubs hoping to intervene. We couldn't personally handle it but

Chop would find it difficult to continue doing the things that he was doing.

“Agreed.”

“Make the call.” Chop offered a sly smile which didn’t sit right with me but I had to trust prez on this.

Padre removed a burner phone which he flipped open and pressed a button to make a call, placing it on speaker once it connected.

“We’re here. Did you get what I sent over?” Padre asked.

“I did. Can he hear me?”

“Yeah...”

“Carlton Alexander Mayfield.”

Is this nigga’s name really Carlton Mayfield? I glanced at Bash who smirked and nodded. The guy continued talking. “You cost me a lot of money...”

“It wasn’t—”

“Shut the fuck up,” the guy growled. “You don’t speak until I say you can speak.”

This dude couldn’t buy respect.

“You cost me a lot of money, Carlton, or rather your poor leadership did. Lucky for you, someone cares enough about the young lady you wrongly accused of your guys’ mishap with the Feds. *Unfortunately* that means you are now my bitch. You get to live because I don’t like losing money. You will pay me back every penny I lost when the Feds raided that warehouse and then some but working it off doing whatever I need.”

“That wasn’t my—”

“Didn’t I tell you not to fucking talk?”

Chop clenched his teeth.

“Now, you have twenty-four hours to have your ass in New York. If you’re not there by the time I get there, then there’s a new price on your head. One that I don’t think

anyone will be able to resist. And once that happens and you can no longer personally handle the debt you owe me, I get what I want another way. NYU's campus is beautiful this time of year. My guys tell me the scenery is breathtaking with its big brown eyes and cute little ass."

"Don't you even think about touching her..." Chop's eyes flared with awareness and anger.

I frowned at Padre who didn't show any emotion.

"Seems you now understand the severity of the situation and what your cooperation means to your family. Twenty-four hours, Carlton."

Padre switched the phone from speaker turning his back to Chop, facing us as he spoke. "I'm trusting you to keep your word. She's no longer an issue for you."

She? Yahri. His eyes were on me as he waited.

"It's as good as done. We'll personally deliver what's left of him." Padre nodded and ended the call.

"What was that about?" I asked but he ignored me and turned back to Chop.

"You might want to get going. Time's ticking, asshole."

While Padre dealt with Chop, I turned to Clutch. "What the fuck is happening. Who's at NYU?"

"Chop's sister. Freshman."

If he doesn't make it to New York to deal with the consequences of his actions then she will pay the price.

Clutch likely read my mind because he continued. "That was the deal. Hand over Chop and Yahri is no longer a part of this."

"But that's putting another innocent woman in danger," I gritted. No matter how fucked up Chop was, his sister didn't deserve to be caught up in his shit. If he ran...

"We do what's necessary for the people we love. *We* are not putting her life in danger. If he makes the decision to run, he's putting her life in danger. Not us. We had to choose. The

decision was easy. We did make some calls to try and protect her as best we can. It's all we can do. It's what you would have done, the decision *you* would have made, Ro."

Keeping Yahri safe at all costs.

He was right.

I didn't have to agree with every detail and could only accept that she was no longer at risk.

"Get him in the truck," Padre grunted when I looked up to see Chop and his team getting back into the SUV they'd arrived in.

"Why the fuck we taking him?" Bash questioned pointing at the guy who was now being dragged to the truck that Mint and Nic were in.

"A present for Ro." The sardonic smile that stretched across Padre's face had me glaring at the guy then back at Padre when he added, "Gears."

Yahri's ex.

"Figured you'd appreciate me adding him as a term to the agreement."

At that very moment, I didn't give a damn about anything other than getting him to court. The place we used when we wanted to be judge and jury. "Good looking out, Prez."

"I asked to let us handle ending the fucker but they have to be able to identify, Ro. Keep that in mind."

He gave me a pointed look and I offered him a cocky grin. "I'll try to remember that but no promises on the outcome."

Bash laughed, shaking his head. Being an enforcer granted me the pleasure of beating the shit out of plenty of people over the years. That was sometimes a better release than sex but this fucker was going to be my favorite of all time. I just had to make one stop before it was time to play because she deserved to bear witness.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-FOUR

Yahri.

I was anxious. My stomach felt queasy and my nerves were frayed, but I wanted to be here. I wasn't sure why or if I could truly handle what I was about to witness but the desire to see him suffer was much stronger than my hesitation. When given the option to come here tonight, I took it. Dressed in sweats and running shoes, I pulled my hair into a ponytail and got on the back of Pharaoh's bike preparing myself for the worst.

Now it was time.

Seeing Jarren flooded me with anger. This man took from me. Not anything physical but something that still held value, my sense of peace and safety. I was afraid. I ran and although I was fortunate enough to land in the arms of a man who gave me back that peace and safety I'd lost because of Jarren, he still needed to understand the consequences of his actions. And then there were those women. The ones whose lives had been ruined. He played a role in them losing something that could never be returned. He took from them, too. I made a decision to give myself to him, not knowing the monster he was and he made the decision to take from those women. I felt sick to my stomach and I was working hard to keep my cool.

Jarren looked terrible. He was spread-eagled against one of the walls. Wrists cuffed to metal chains that held his arms in a v above his head. His ankles were the same, secured shoulder width apart. He watched my every move but didn't make a sound. There was black tape over his mouth to prevent him

from saying anything. My eyes left him and moved around the room. We were in a basement that resembled a jail cell. Cinderblock walls, concrete floors, and the place had a pungent musty and stale odor. I felt a chill crawl down my spine from the visual.

“You sure you’re okay with this?” Pharaoh’s palm was on my face and he gently turned my head away from the reason we were here so that I was forced to look at him. “I can take you home...”

“No. I’m fine. I’m staying. I deserve this.”

His expression darkened with worry and I lifted onto my toes and leaned into Pharaoh, delivering a kiss. “I’m fine.” With a nod, he and I both walked over to the man I used to care about but now loathed with every fiber of my being.

Sick bastard.

“He’s secure. Can’t touch you. If he does, he’ll regret it.” Something about Pharaoh changed. He was dark, shut down and closed off from the man I had been getting to know since I’d gotten here.

I squared my shoulders and inhaled a sharp breath, stepped close to Jarren.

Gears.

The man I knew would have never done those things to women. But he had. I shook away the thought. This was Gears. The monster.

“You’re good, you know.” His eyes were on me the minute I addressed him. I had his undivided attention. “I never had a clue who you were and I hate myself for that.”

He grunted something which had me stepping forward, snatching the tape from his mouth. At my side, I felt Pharaoh tense and move with me. He didn’t relax even after he realized I was only removing the tape.

Gears snarled at Pharaoh before his eyes were on me again. “I would have treated you different had I known you

were, *club* royalty. Maybe would have been a little rougher. You would have loved that, I bet.”

My fist clenched to strike but Pharaoh beat me to it. Gears’s head snapped to the side then back against the cinderblock wall behind him. He sneered as blood stained his teeth then smiled sardonically.

“Be respectful or this ends more painfully than I already planned,” Pharaoh growled.

“Right, she’s your pussy now.”

Without a second wasted on thinking about my actions, I clenched my fist again and made contact with his face. The first time felt good so I did it again. Over and over I hit him in the face until I was yanked back into a wall of hard muscle.

“Ri...”

“I’m fine,” I growled and snatched away from Pharaoh, moving back toward Gears. “Was it a game to you? Did you rape those women and crawl into my bed or did you leave my bed to violate them?”

“Sometimes both.” He smiled so damn evilly it made my stomach turn again. “I even thought about them from time to time when I was with yo—”

Before he could finish I was yanked back but this time shoved behind Pharaoh and not against him.

What happened next was a blur. Movement. A gun. Blood. Then nothing but heavy breathing. Pharaoh’s heavy breathing. His chest heaved as he stood with his arms tight at his sides. Pharaoh and I were the *only* two breathing. When I touched his back Pharaoh tensed, his head swung to the left and his hard stare landed on me. He wasn’t himself, but hell neither was I. After what I witnessed, how could I be?

I moved my hand into his and took the gun. Those dead eyes snapped to mine over his shoulder when he realized what I was doing but I kept going, slipping the cold metal from his hand and placing it on the floor.

“What now?” I whispered, keeping my eyes on his.

“We go home.”

He removed his phone, rattled off some commands after making a call, then linked his hand with mine. “They’re on the way to handle this. Let’s go.”

We left. Neither of us said a word about what happened which I didn’t mind. I needed time. I’d just watched Pharaoh kill a man. A man who violated women. A man would have hurt me or at the very least handed me over to someone who would have done terrible things to me if he hadn’t.

I didn’t feel bad.

Maybe I should have but I couldn’t find the ability to care about his life no longer existing. Maybe I was a monster too.



I STEPPED out of the bathroom to find Pharaoh sitting on the side of the bed. His back was to me, an expanse of hard lines, defined muscles, and ink. His head was lowered between his shoulders with his hand wrapped around a phone. Padre’s voice was flowing through the room.

“We delivered the body. That was the last of our obligations with this shit. It’s done.”

“Good.”

“You did a pretty good job on him. She was there for that?”

I stepped in front of Pharaoh who lifted his eyes to me, leaned forward and hooked an arm around my waist to move me between his legs.

“Yeah she was there.” His eyes remained on mine.

“How’s she doing?”

“Better than I expected.”

“That good or bad, Kid?”

“Don’t know yet but I’ll let you know.”

“If she didn’t leave your ass after witnessing what you did, she must be okay. Take that as a win.”

Pharaoh’s hold on me tightened like the thought of me leaving concerned him. I wasn’t leaving.

“Take a couple days, take care of your lady but make sure she takes care of you too. This has been a rough ride for all of us.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean it, Kid.”

“I hear ya, Prez.”

“No the fuck you don’t but I’ll check in with you in a few days.”

The call ended and Pharaoh tossed his phone on the bed then pulled me closer, resting his forehead on my stomach. I moved my hands over his head exhaling a sigh.

“You okay?”

“No.”

“What can I do?”

“This.” He closed his arms around me, but still didn’t lift his head. “I hate how fucked up things can be sometimes.” His voice was a strained murmur of anger and weariness.

When he lifted his eyes his jaw flexed and his throat tensed as he swallowed. His eyes remained fixated on mine and I felt the heaviness and severity of the night building while I struggled for the patience to give him time to express whatever he needed to.

“Tonight ended this but no matter how much of a good thing that is, we still lost one of our guys. That’s on me.”

“But it’s not.”

“It is, Ri. That’s how that shit works. We all hold some accountability as brothers to make sure we all make it home safely. That didn’t happen this time...”

Those words were like a sharp, cold knife against my neck.

“Because of me.”

“No...”

“Yes. If I hadn’t come home, you wouldn’t have been parading me around. They wouldn’t have ended up where they’d been that night. If you get to carry this so do I.”

Pharaoh growled as I climbed into his lap, allowing my knees to sink into the mattress. “You want to know what’s even more fucked up?”

His hands flattened against my thighs, moving up slowly to my back, under my shirt. When they kept going and his fingers curled over my shoulders I leaned into his chest allowing my lips to graze his.

“You’re built for this shit.” He chuckled bitterly. “And I don’t know if that’s good or bad.”

“I’ve been trying to decide the same thing and can’t so let’s go with both.”

He laughed again and exhaled his frustrations. “You sure you’re okay after what happened tonight?”

“I’m fine. Not that I’ll be volunteering to be in that position again, but I needed to be there. I just...”

“I get it and that doesn’t make you a terrible person.”

“You either,” I whispered.

The energy shift was palpable. “I’m who I was groomed to be. Are you sure you can handle that, Ri? Tonight you’ve seen a part of what that means but not even close to the worst that I’ve done. I wish I could promise to be a better man for you but...”

I quickly cut him off. “You are the best man for me and I think my father knew that too and it scared him because he knew that I would choose to stay the same as my mother chose to stay with him. I get that now.”

He leaned forward and his mouth met mine. Soft, but reassuring. “Let’s get some rest.”



THE NEXT AFTERNOON, we walked into Candid Creations, a tattoo shop. The woman who greeted us smiled hard at Pharaoh but not in a “I’ve fucked you and want to do it again” way. This was more of a friend zone type of connection which I appreciated after the past couple days. I didn’t think I could handle crash landing into another one of Pharaoh’s fuck buddies.

“You’re not on the schedule...” She frowned and began flipping through pages attached to the clipboard beside her keyboard. “Unless I missed something.”

“I’m not. This is a walk-in. Silver busy?”

She lifted her eyes and smiled again. “Nope, just finished up. Got an hour before her next appointment. You can go on back.”

Her eyes left Pharaoh and landed on me. “I’m Meena. Yahri, right?”

“Who the fuck has been running their mouth over here?” Pharaoh grumbled and she smiled wider.

“When you have a woman on the back of your bike, word travels. When that woman is Koda’s daughter it travels hella fast.”

He chuckled shaking his head. “Yeah I bet. Ri, this is Meena. She works here part time and dances at the lounge part time.”

“Candy Rain. You should come see me dance.” She winked.

“Oh...” I was a little thrown. “I will.”

She flashed another smile, this time a smug one. “I’ll be looking for you.”

“I bet you will,” Pharaoh grumbled.

The way she looked me over had me blushing as Pharaoh gently nudged me to the back.

“She was hitting on me.”

“She doesn’t discriminate,” he muttered taking me down a short hall and navigating us into the last room.

“Interesting. She’s cute though.”

“Who’s cute?” A tall, slim chick with waist-length, red goddess locs lifted her head from the drawing she was working on, peering at Pharaoh and me.

“Meena,” he muttered and the woman grinned.

“She flirting with your girl, Ro?”

I lifted my eyes to him and he smiled arrogantly. “Yeah but you already know. She can’t fuck like I can. I’m not worried about that.”

“You sure?” She arched a brow and glanced at me.

“Yeah fool, now stop looking at my lady like *you* want her to sit on your face.”

“I mean, I wouldn’t mind.” She checked me out again and he shot her a warning look.

“She doesn’t like women.”

“I *do* like women but he’s right. Not in that way. I do, however, admire them all the time. I just don’t want any sitting on my face. But if I did, you would certainly get an invite.” She winked at me.

“Silver, chill the fuck out.”

She laughed and leaned back in her chair. The cropped top she wore barely covered her breasts which left her midsection exposed down to the tight leather pants she wore. She was incredibly slim but not skinny.

“You’re in my house. I can do what I want, Ro. Why are you here anyway? You’re not on my schedule.”

“I need a favor.”

“I only have an hour before my next client. Depends on what you want.”

“It will be quick and not for me, for her.”

“Me?”

My eyes went wide and he nodded taking possession of my hand. His thumb brushed over the inside of my wrist and I instantly knew why we were here. He wanted me wearing the Wolves mark.

“What you getting?” Silver asked but Pharaoh answered.

“She needs a mark.”

Silver’s face lit up. “Oh shit. This just got interesting. Where do you want it?”

“I...uhh, not sure.” I lifted my eyes to Pharaoh and for a brief moment he seemed concerned.

“You’re staying, right?” His gaze was intense, searching me as if he was anticipating the worst and when I nodded he relaxed. We hadn’t talked about last night. Maybe he thought I changed my mind. I hadn’t.

“It should be visible.”

“Neck or wrist is best,” Silver said with a smug grin, clearly amused that I was here with Pharaoh getting a mark. Yet another reminder that this man didn’t attach himself to anyone so me being here was a big deal.

“Both,” I said confidently. He smiled, kissing my neck, then the inside of my wrist.

“Well damn. He’s trying to make sure you don’t get away. You can sit there.” She pointed to the black leather chair and I slid into it while she lifted her eyes to Pharaoh. “Property?”

“No, absolute not.” My eyes narrowed on her then Pharaoh. She smiled, a little too amused.

“It doesn’t *say* property. Just a two WW’s with his name beneath it or some version of that. It’s significant and will let people know you’re connected to not just the club but one of their ranked members *intimately*.”

“Oh...” I nodded.

“You cool with that?” he asked as if daring me to say no. I wouldn’t.

“Yes, that’s fine. But how big is it? If it’s on my neck I mean.”

“Small. I can make it cute. You can do nape of your neck or behind the ear.”

I looked at Pharaoh and he smirked. “You decide. It’s your body, Ri.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” Silver murmured.

“Nape of my neck.”

“I got you. I’ll hook you up. You ever been inked before?” I cringed because no.

“No, does it hurt?”

Her eyes lit up. “Oh my favorite. *Virgin* skin. Sometimes, what’s your pain tolerance?”

“She can handle it.” He cut in and the way his eyes crawled down my body, I knew exactly what he was thinking. Rough sex was not the gauge for how I would react to having a needle piercing my skin.

“I won’t even ask why he thinks you can handle this. I’ll go slow. If it’s too much let me know.”

I nodded and she began gathering what she needed to get started. Forty minutes later I had my first tattoo. Two actually. After she showed me both, I thanked her, Pharaoh paid, and we were on our way. Once we were in the parking lot, he walked me back to his bike, locking me between it and his body, leaning into me.

“You know my dick has been hard since you sat in her chair. That was sexy as fuck.”

I smiled. “Me getting a tattoo?”

“That but not just *any* tattoo. My name, Ri. In two places.” His hand found mine and he lifted my wrist into sight. The

word Pharaoh with Wolf Warriors MC above it. Both were tiny but visible and of course Pharaoh's name was the largest. Silver did as promised and made it cute. The Wolf Warriors was in a serif and Pharaoh was in a script. I had the same one on the back of my neck but smaller.

“I can't wait to fuck you from the back while focusing on my name printed on your skin.”

“We could go do that now, if you want.”

He chuckled. “We could but it will have to wait. I have a surprise for you.”

“What kind of surprise?”

This man's surprises were questionable at best.

“You have to wait until we get there. Let's ride.” He lifted my helmet and handed it to me. After we were both geared up and on his bike, I circled his torso with my arms and smiled when the bike roared to life causing my body to hum. He twisted the throttle twice before we backed out of the spot we were in and began navigating through the lot.

After about twenty minutes later, things began to look familiar. My chest grew tight when I understood exactly where he was taking me. The question was why. Why was he taking me to my parents' house? I didn't know if I was ready for this but it felt like I didn't have much choice because our destination was confirmed when he made a sharp left into the neighborhood that held so many memories for me and not all of them were good.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-FIVE

Pharaoh.

I could really be fucking up. The thought moved through my mind but was then chased away by the reminder that she was wearing my name. She wouldn't run, not now. No matter how this turned out, she promised me she would stay and I believed her.

After we parked, I didn't move and neither did she. I was almost afraid to for fear of what I would find when that helmet came off her head but fuck being a pussy. This was my lady and I was doing what I knew was best for her. She needed this.

I removed my helmet and glanced over my shoulder waiting. Eventually she removed hers too and stared blankly at the house. One we both knew well. The house that held our past and hopefully our future by default. I had no plans on living here. My house was safe behind gates not allowing access to anyone who we couldn't trust but Yahri finally taking ownership of this house, the one that was rightfully hers, meant that she was setting down roots.

"Why are we here?" she whispered without looking at me.

I eased off the bike and stepped near her placing my helmet where I had sat.

"Come inside and I'll tell you." I reached for her helmet and she mindlessly let it slip from her hands. Seeing her now, such a contrast from the woman who attacked a man last night with no fear, had my chest tight. She was uncertain and I didn't like that.

“Ri, you trust me, right?”

Her eyes shot up to mine and she nodded. “Yes, I trust you.”

“Then come on.”

She followed me off the bike, around the side of the house to the door that entered the kitchen. I used the keys I’d been holding onto for years to let us in. Once inside, she stalled, allowing her eyes to roam the open space. Bright yellow walls, gray and white tiled floors, and stainless steel appliances. The house was cozy with a country feel to it but warm and loving with the memories it held.

“It looks the same.”

I walked up behind her, draping one arm over her chest and leaning into her enough to rest my chin on top of her head. “Because it is. Nobody has touched it other than regular maintenance and upkeep. I made sure of it.”

“Why?” She stilled and turned to face me, taking a step back to leave a window of space. “Did my dad buy this house for you too?”

“No, he didn’t buy it for me. He owned it. He bought it for you and your mother. For his family but when he died...” I stepped closer. “He made sure it belonged to you. This is your house, Ri.”

“Mine.” Her brows pinched. “Why? Why would he give it to me when he didn’t want me here?”

I clipped her chin and lifted it so our eyes met. “He wanted you here. Don’t ever say that shit. He just wanted you safe more and didn’t believe that would be the case if you stayed.”

“So why make sure this house stayed the same?”

“Because it belongs to you. This house is a part of him. The only part he could protect enough to leave to you. He knew you’d come back one day. Or hell maybe he hoped you would. I think for him, knowing that if he was gone then maybe you *could* come home. He wanted you to have a place to return to.”

Her lip trembled and she stared at me glassy eyed. Her arms dangled at her side. I could see her breaking down but before her body gave out I was on her. I jerked her from the floor grateful that she wrapped around me. She allowed me to carry her without thought and that was a sign of how emotionally overloaded she truly was and how much she trusted me. Yahri wasn't weak. Hell if anything she proved that time and time again since she'd been here but right now, she was vulnerable and needed me. She allowed me to hold her up. We moved a few feet until I could let her down on the island remaining between her legs when I cupped her face.

“Hey, talk to me.”

She sobbed, choking on her words which came out choppy. “I was so angry with him, with you, with everybody.”

“I know baby and that's okay.”

“No, it's not.” She shook her head. “After what I've seen. After what happened last night. I get it now. I know why he didn't want me here but I was so angry with him when he made me leave and cut me off.” She was teetering on hysteria and I didn't want her to shut down or shut me out.

“Shhh, baby relax.” My eyes met hers. “That was the only way he could make it right. The only way he could breathe every day and not feel like the worst was gonna happen. He lost your mom. He didn't want to lose you too, baby. You can be angry. He wouldn't care. He loved you, Ri and knowing you're here would be worth the anger you felt for him.”

“I know.” She sobbed again and that shit was breaking me. Seeing her like this hurt more than any punch, knife, or bullet I'd survived. This shit was the worst type of torture.

“Fuck, Ri. Maybe I shouldn't have brought you here but I thought...”

“No. I'm glad you did. I'm happy.” She sobbed again and I smiled.

“You aren't happy, baby. Not crying like this.”

She choked out a laugh. “I am.” I brushed my thumbs under her eyes wiping away tears before I leaned in and kissed

her.

“You sure?”

She nodded slowly.

“He saved this for me. My house. Our *family* house.”

“He did. He wanted you home, Ri. He only wanted you safe if you were here.”

“Am I?”

Her eyes fastened to mine.

“Always. And don’t let the past make you think otherwise. Circumstances were different back then and as much as I hate that, I give you my word that you’re safe with me. You believe me?”

She nodded and leaned into me, resting her face in the curve of my neck. “You sure you’re okay?”

“I’m sure.”

“No more tears then.”

“No more tears.” I could hear the smile in her voice. It was barely there, but still existed.

“So you still gonna let me hit it from the back later so I can see my name on you when I cum?”

She laughed hard and lifted her head from my shoulder. “I never said you could.”

“I mean shit, I thought that was understood.”

“Of course you did.” She snaked her arms around my neck and moved me closer.

“So is that a yes?” I asked, pressing my hips into her so that she understood the urgency of my need for a yes.

“That’s a maybe.”

“Nah fuck that. I need a definite *yes*.”

“Sorry that’s all you get. Right now, let’s go see the pool so I can remember just how pissed my dad was when his favorite bike landed in it.”

“Here you go with that shit. How about we skip the pool and we head to your bedroom that I never got to eat your pussy in.”

“Ro.” She shot me a dirty look and I shrugged.

“I’m just fucking with you. You never know until you try.” I lifted her off the counter and she slid down my body until she was standing. “Unless you’re game.”

The look she hit me with was my answer. “Aight, we can go see the pool.”

That’s what she wanted, that’s what she was getting. Yahri could have whatever she wanted from me.

Any-fucking-thing.



BASH LEANED against the bar next to where I watched my lady. I needed her to always remain in view. There was a stool separating us. I had my arms folded across my chest and Bash had his propped up on the rim of the bar leaning back.

I smirked watching Yahri cross one leg over the other. She had on a black fitted dress that exposed skin from where it clasped at her shoulders down to the small of her back. No fucking bra. The stretchy material hugged her curves and stopped mid-thigh exposing skin down to the black leather boots that extended up her calves. They had a thick heel giving her some height which had me thinking of bending her over something. She looked like the perfect visual of what my lady needed to represent. Sexy, bad as fuck from head to toe and capable of not only standing by me but for me. The best part was she had my name on her body. My eyes traveled north to where her hair was pinned up, falling over her face in curls so that my name was visible.

She thought I asked her to wear her hair up so that everyone else could see my name on her skin. That was partially true, but it was more about me seeing it while I executed the plan I had for tonight.

“So it’s official then?”

“Very fucking official since he made her get marked twice.” Dedge settled onto the stool to my right and tapped the bar. When Kali tossed her chin to him he turned to face the stage same as we were.

“Two, shit. I heard she got marked but two. Damn, Ro. Your insecurities are loud as fuck.”

I smirked watching Mint and Yahri both tilting their heads to the side as Candy Rain did some trick that defied gravity all while looking flawlessly beautiful rocking a seductive smile like her performance was easy. To her, I guess it was. She was damn good on the stage and made the most money on any given night.

“I didn’t make her do shit. She agreed with no coercion.”

“Not my woman. There’s no fucking way she agreed to put your name on her without some coercion.” Nic took the spot to the left of Bash. He had a smile on his face and his eyes remained on Candy Rain.

“How them ribs healing, *Nicolas*? Can’t imagine you’d want a setback.” His smile expanded when I looked his way but his eyes never left the stage. “I’m good. Not a hundred percent but healed enough to take you on.”

“Don’t do it, Nic. Not behind her.” Dedge pointed at Yahri with the beer Kali had just dropped off. “I have a feeling the Kid will fight to the death for that one.”

Damn sure will.

“You guys are under strict orders from Prez to kiss my ass until I’m fully healed.”

Dedge snorted at the thought. Padre would never say anything like that because whoever it was in reference to would likely try to beat his ass for telling the guys to coddle them.

“If that were the case, which it’s not, I’d be willing to bet you wouldn’t hide behind his order, now would you, *Nicolas*?”

“Fuck no.” He glared at Bash who smiled smugly. “Then stay away from Ro’s lady or he’s going to send your ass back to the hospital.”

I turned to face Nic. “I’d take their advice if I were you, *Nicolas*.”

He chuckled and nodded. “One day I’m going to find the woman of my dreams.”

“You might have a chance now that Bash and I are no longer options.” I pushed away from the bar turning to Bash. “You staying?”

“Nah, heading out now. Promised baby girl I’d be home early.”

“Which one?” I questioned with a lifted brow.

“Both, but I’m hoping Leigh is already asleep because I have plans for her mother.”

I extended a fist to Bash which he met with his. “Strap up.”

“You too, muthafucker.”

“You buying?” A soft voice spoke causing my eyes to shift over to Dedge. A woman now had his attention which left only me and Nic who lifted his beer tipping it my way. “Let me go see which one of these fine young women I’m going to give my money to tonight.”

“Damn it’s that bad?”

He shrugged. “Never that bad. This is just the best option to fuck without expectation.”

“Good point.”

Not all the ladies that danced here offered extras. Some were only about the stage and their money. We made sure they could get their money in peace. Those that wanted to cater to our members with extras were also protected, but it was understood that no one did anything they weren’t willing to do. We never really had issues, at least not in house. The problems mostly came from outsiders we allowed to enjoy the

perks of the lounge. Tonight I would be enjoying the lounge but the perks belonged to me.

Yahri.

“Ro...” Kali caught my attention before I could get away from the bar. She leaned over the top on her elbows grinning at me.

“What’s up, Kali?”

“Is Yahri going back to work next door?”

I hadn’t thought about it but she likely wouldn’t. Not that I cared, but she had her own business which had me proud as fuck. She didn’t need to work for us.

“Not sure, why?”

“Word on the street is she fucked up Girly’s inventory according to *him*.”

“And according to everyone else?” Girly was a surly son of a bitch. He didn’t like people and he damn sure didn’t like change. If Yahri changed anything with his system he would be grumpier than usual. If that were possible.

“She’s everyone else’s hero. Implementing the electronic inventory system they’ve been sitting on for years is a surefire win with all the employees, *except* Girly. No one wanted to piss him off so they stuck with the printed copies. She either didn’t know or didn’t care because she spent her entire first day setting up the new system.”

I chuckled, imagining how annoyed Girly had to be. Not that he ever touched anything there but the whiskey he drank and the food he shoveled in his mouth all day. But Girly was a life timer. Nobody fucked with him. He had a good heart even if he was an incessant asshole to everyone.

“I can see how that might pose a problem.”

“You bet your ass it did. But either way, I like her for you. You did good, *kid*.”

I shook my head at her. “How the fuck you calling me kid and I’m older than you?”

“Because I can. It’s what Clutch and Prez call you.”

“You’re not them. Respect your elders, Kali.” I winked and walked off to her shooting me a bird. When I reached Yahri I leaned over the back of the small sofa she was sharing with Mint just in time to catch Mint opening a text from somebody, which I peeped before she realized I was behind her.

“Why the hell are you creeping?”

“I’m not but why the hell do you care? You got a man we don’t know about, Mint?”

“Mind the business that pays you or fucks you, Pharaoh. Neither of which are me.”

I’m about to do just that.

“Damn must really be your man asking you to pull up if you’re in your feelings like that. Just know we vet anybody you think you’re gonna be with.”

“You fucking wish.” Mint stood and cut her eyes at me before addressing Yahri. “Good luck with him. I don’t see how you tolerate his annoying ass.”

Yahri grinned up at me. “He’s not that bad, most days.”

“Remember you said that,” I warned just as Mint walked away. “Come with me.”

“Where?”

“Over there.”

She glanced at the area I motioned to when she stood and made her way to me. “Why are we going to the corner?”

“Because I want to give you something.”

She arched a brow when I draped an arm over her shoulder. “In the corner?”

“Yeah, in the corner.”

We made our way to the section that Bash and I had more or less claimed as our own. It was the darkest corner of the club with a section of four arm chairs. I sat in one, slouched down to get comfortable and pointed to my lap. “Up here.”

“I’m wearing a dress.” She glared at me and I nodded.

“I know, nobody can see you back here and if they could, they wouldn’t say shit because they don’t want to deal with me.”

“So everyone just bows down to you?”

“Nah...” I shook my head. “Not everyone, but those that don’t get knocked the fuck down.”

She rolled her eyes, hiked her dress, then straddled my lap. As soon as she was comfortable, I eased my hands up her thighs enjoying the feel of her soft skin as they glided between her legs, allowing my fingers to graze the thin material keeping me from what I had planned.

“Ro...” she groaned. “There are people in here.”

“I already told you they can’t see you.” That was partially true. It was dark but they would be able to make out our bodies. They just wouldn’t be able to see our faces and that was good enough for me. Yahri’s back was currently to the crowd but she’d be switching up soon.

“We can take this home,” was what her mouth said but my lady was already working her hips to the rhythm of my fingers stroking her panties. They were damp, clinging to her skin and had my dick rising insanely fast.

“We will but first, I’m gonna fuck you here.”

She stilled. “What! No you’re not. You said you wanted to give me something.”

I moved both hands to her hip and yanked the thin lace from her skin, ripping it free. “And I do, my dick.”

“Ro, I’m not having sex with you in here.”

“You sure? Because you had to know wearing that dress was a guarantee that you were getting fucked tonight.”

“I agree, but not here.”

“Definitely here.”

“Why?”

“Because you fucked me thinking about *her* but I get it. You thought it was necessary and that you had something to prove. It wasn’t necessary, baby, and you don’t have anything to prove to her, me, or anyone else. I never want you second guessing anything with us. So tonight, I’m going to make you cum in here while she’s watching.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Welcome to the stage, Angel Eyes. She promises something special for you tonight. I can’t wait to see what she’s about to bring,” DJ Glacier announced through the microphone.

What I was doing was fucked up. I knew that. Arica had cornered me when I was leaving Bash’s office. She offered me a special dance. I declined. She refused to give up and insisted that she would give me a preview of what she would do for me during her performance on stage and let me decide. I told her that was cool that I would be in my corner. She didn’t know Yahri would be there with me. I wanted Arica to see me fucking my lady, knowing she would never have me again. Twisted maybe, but necessary. Sometimes people had to see to believe. Tonight I was making a believer out of Arica.

“That’s...” *Arica*. I cut her off.

“Yeah, it is, but this isn’t about her. It’s about *you*. Me proving that *you* are the *only* woman that matters.”

“I don’t care what she thinks.”

I gripped the back of her neck and brought my lady into a kiss, biting down on her lip. “Yes you do. So turn around and let her know who owns me.”

You.

She smirked and lifted, sliding off my lap. Her thong slipped down her leg to the floor and I picked it before she leaned over me, reached for my jeans, unbuckling my belt, dragging my zipper down slowly. Her hands were on my dick possessively and I was so damn hard if she handled me this way for too long I was going to explode in her hands and not in her pussy.

“Sit down.”

She didn't hesitate and this time when she straddled my legs, I gripped the base of my dick while she sank down on me.

“Fuck,” I groaned, placing my hands on her thighs and slowly moving them up her stomach, allowing them a temporary resting place. This was heaven on earth. Maybe it was the rush of having her in a lounge full of people, the heat of her pussy or the connection I felt as she pulsed around me. I nearly fucking passed out from sensory overload.

After she took me completely in and arched her back away from me, I got my shit together. I pulled Yahri back, placing my right hand over her left breast and my left found its way between her legs. My fingers brushed her clit several times, granting me a sultry moan that had Yahri rolling her damn hips more aggressively.

“This is some otherworldly shit, Ri. *Different*. So fucking different,” I whispered in her ear before I bit down on her lobe. I lifted my hips and she moaned louder, grinding harder on me.

“You feel that?”

She sucked in a sharp breath when I thrust up into her with more motivation.

“Ri, baby I asked if you feel that.” I gripped her hips and held her down while I thrust my hips upward again.

“Yes.” The music was thumping so I barely heard her but a smile crossed my face when I looked toward the stage. Sure enough we had eyes on us.

“Good, now look at the stage.”

“No.”

“Ri, look at the fucking stage. Let her see how good I'm making *you* feel. Let her see who *I* belong too. Let her see what she wants but knows she'll *never* have again.”

I knew the exact moment when Yahri did as I asked because she began moving faster and with more purpose. I

matched her efforts pushing up into her with stabbing thrusts, kissing her neck, massaging her breast. While she bounced on my dick, my fingers worked her clit and Yahri's head fell back to my shoulder. Her mouth dropped open and her eyes slammed shut. Arica no longer existed. It was just us.

Yahri might have been on top but I was in control. I didn't look at the stage. Didn't give a damn what Arica saw, what she was thinking because she didn't matter. My point was made. Moving both my hands to Yahri's hips, I lifted and slammed her down hard on my dick. Again and again, setting the rhythm to her escalating release.

And mine.

When her hands landed hard against her stomach, I knew she felt me. I kept up the pace until the point where she crashed and shattered into a million pieces. My name left her mouth muffled by the heavy bass of the song that was playing but I knew. So fucking close. My eyes locked on my name inked at the nape of her neck and my dick expanded a little more.

I lifted her one last time and when she landed, Ri resisted my attempt to bring her up again, instead grinding into me, so I let go too. While her pussy spasmed, I buried my face in her neck and raked my teeth across it, biting down just in time to keep my voice muffled. Everything about this moment was so damn intense all I could do was allow it to happen. Didn't give a damn if anyone was watching. The only thing that mattered was how good she felt, how good I felt. The way I knew I was never letting her go. We remained silent and still until the next song played. I glanced at the stage just in time to catch Arica stomping down the stairs off to the side. Yahri laughed hard which meant she caught her exit too.

"I guess you proved your point."

"To you or her." I smiled into my lady's neck.

"Both, now can we go. I'd much rather do this in private. I had fun but this is not my thing."

I nodded in agreement. This wasn't my thing either, but it could be. "Yeah we can go."

She lifted off my lap and hissed as my dick landed against my stomach. Once she was on her feet and had her dress down, she leaned over me and tucked me back into my jeans.

"I'm glad we took your Jeep and not your bike."

Shit me too but the thought of her bare ass on my bike wasn't so terrible.

"Why you wanna fuck in there too?"

She smiled and stepped back, allowing me room to stand and hitting me with a teasing, "Maybe."

I'd take a maybe and she damn sure wouldn't have to tell me twice. Her wish was my command and if it involved me making her cum then it was my priority.

EPILOGUE

Five Months and some change.
Yahri.

I left the bathroom and settled at the bar only to be interrupted by the last person I wanted to see or talk to.

Melinda.

She smiled cautiously as she approached but didn't take a seat. "You mind if we talk for a minute?"

Yeah, actually I do.

I couldn't really be upset with her because she had a thing with my father but I still didn't like the idea of *them*, which she must have noticed.

"I know you probably don't care for me..."

"I don't dislike *you*. Just the idea of *you* and *my* father."

She nodded. "I can respect why you would feel that way."

I decided to extend an olive branch because I truly didn't dislike the woman and she was by default a part of the club. "But, I also understand that he had the right to be with you." She nodded and I exhaled a sigh. "Can I ask you something though?"

"Anything."

"Whatever you had, it was *after* my mom, right?"

"Yes, oh God yes. He never cheated on her. I wouldn't have allowed him to. Not with me I mean because that's not

who I am.”

“Thank you for clarifying because you don’t owe me anything. Not even an explanation.”

She smiled brightly this time. “And just so you know, Koda loved you, Yahri. It killed him to send you away. He wasn’t whole after your mom died and you were gone. He managed to push forward, but he wasn’t whole. You two were his world and as much as it hurt him sending you away, he knew that it would have killed him more if anything happened to you. He was already carrying the huge burden.”

Of losing my mother.

“I know. I didn’t back then, but I do now.” My eyes shifted over to Pharaoh.

“And I hope that we can be cordial. I’m around and you’re obviously not going anywhere.” She glanced at my stomach before adding, “Congratulations, by the way. I’m so happy for the two of you. You’re good for him. He’s been floating for a while. Existing, but not truly living.”

“Thank you and *we’re* good for each other.”

“I agree. Well I’ll see you around.”

I nodded and she walked away. I turned to find a face I didn’t expect since he was now patched.

“Why are you behind the bar? I thought that was a prospect duty.”

“It was and I’m back here because I like it back here. Is there something wrong with a man who takes pride in honest work?” Nic pushed a drink that I hadn’t asked for across the sleek wood surface.

“Honest work is a stretch and what’s that?”

“Arnold Palmer.”

I lowered my eyes to the glass then lifted them to Nic who chuckled and pointed with his forehead to where Pharaoh was in a deep conversation with Mello and Monk. Monk who had

just recently managed to get back into Pharaoh's good graces after the bathroom incident.

"He made sure we stocked tea and lemonade for you."

"I'm never here."

Nic smirked. "But you *might* be."

My cheeks warmed at the thought. This man was always making sure I was good and it was subtle yet overwhelming. The little things that most people wouldn't care about or take notice of, he obsessed over, like forcing the Bar and Grill to keep inventory to make my favorite drink.

"You're turning him into a pussy, you know that right?"

I rolled my eyes. "I am not and if you say that to him, I bet you'd find out how wrong that was."

Nic chuckled. "Yeah you're right which is why I'm saying it to you and if you care about me at all, then you won't repeat that to *him*."

"Who says I care about you?" I arched a brow and he blessed me with that charming smile of his.

"I do. I'm your favorite out of everyone and you're mine."

"This shit feels like déjà vu. I see you haven't learned shit about fucking with Ro's woman." Mint filled the space next to me.

"I'm serving a customer."

"And professing your love for her which is going to get your ass seriously injured. You see that don't you?"

She pointed to my stomach and I looked down with a smile stretched across my face.

"I love kids. I would be an amazing stepfather."

"I bet you love breathing more though, *Nicolas*." Mint angled her head to the side and Nic nodded.

"Yeah I do, so don't repeat that either." He winked at me and walked to the end of the bar to service another customer.

I turned to Mint who was no longer smiling but angrily typing on her phone. I waited until she tossed it on the bar before I spoke up.

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah, why.”

“Uh, you were just giving somebody hell.”

“It’s nothing.”

“You sure?”

“I see you’ve been here too long. All up in my business like your nosy ass man.” Her tone was light and friendly so I didn’t take offense. I liked Mint and considered her not just club family but also a friend. However I could sense that she had something going on.

“Maybe or *maybe* I just care.”

She chuckled and pointed to my stomach. “You have enough to worry about. I’m good, Ri.”

No sooner than the words left her mouth was her phone vibrating. She snatched it up, glared at the screen, then answered, slipping off the stool, heading to the door. I caught a small part of her conversation.

“Stop fucking stressing me. It’s not that easy. They don’t trust nobody and damn sure not an outsider who...”

I didn’t catch the rest because she pushed through the door to leave but I had a feeling that her nothing was something. Either way, it wasn’t my business until she wanted it to be so I wouldn’t push. She had been anxious lately and also not around the club as much as she had been when I first got here. There was something going on and if I had to bet, it was about a man because if anyone could disrupt your life, a man definitely could.

“Look at you.” Elaine, Girly’s wife, walked up to me smiling. She placed her hands on her cheeks smiling down at my stomach. “May I?”

I nodded and she moved both hands to my stomach as her smile expanded. It was still incredibly hard for me to believe that this sweet woman was married to Girly and for thirty-two years so she really loved him. Mind blown. They didn't have kids because she couldn't carry them, or so I was told, so I didn't mind sharing this moment with her. I was loving my tiny little bump but I still had a long way to go. "This will be our first club baby in years."

"We have Leigh?"

"We do and she's a handful but that little angel was gifted to us already full of sass and sweetness but this baby will be the first one born into the club in gosh..." She wrinkled her nose. "Years. The last was Tutt's son and hell, he's only a few years younger than you. We haven't seen them since he was off to college when Tutt and his wife moved to Tennessee."

"But there are kids around." I frowned and she nodded.

"Mostly from the ladies that work next door at the lounge but they come through and leave so much we barely have a chance to get attached. These guys around here act like they're allergic to commitment and families. Things used to be different back in my day. It was an honor to have an old lady or to be an old lady."

"Maybe it's the old lady part." I grinned. "Can't say I like that much better than being referred to as property."

Elaine, Ms. Lanie as she preferred to be called, laughed lightly. "The name isn't what's important. It's the meaning that holds all the value. No matter what you call us being loved by a man who honors his family, protects fiercely, and loves wholeheartedly is what matters and you have that. Maybe since Ro and Bash are traveling down different roads they're setting things right with the club. Hopefully the rest of these stubborn young men will follow their leads. We need a few more sweet little things around here to balance these guys."

Her hand was on my stomach again. "Congratulations, sweetheart. I can't wait to welcome this little one into the family."

“Thank you.” She walked away just as Bash and Cambri walked in the door. Bash dropped a kiss on my cheek before heading to over to where Pharaoh, Mello, and Monk were, while Cambri filled the seat next to me.

“Ms. Lanie putting in her bid for your baby?” She grinned placing a hand over my stomach.

“Yep and also putting in bids for all the other guys around here to get their women knocked up.”

Cambri frowned. “None of the other guys have women. At least not ones they’re claiming during daylight hours.” She rolled her eyes and I smiled.

“Right, so that leaves you, sis.”

Her head swung toward me with lightning speed. “I’m not having a baby anytime soon so she can cancel that. In fact, just erase that energy from the universe altogether, because no.”

“You don’t want a little Bash or Bri.”

She scrunched her nose. “Not right now. I’m still trying to figure out my life.”

“You have a life.”

“No, I have *Bash’s* life.”

“Wait, what’s wrong? Are you guys...”

“No, hell no.” She frowned then smiled, peeking at the guys. “We’re perfect. More than perfect, but I need to figure out what I want to do. At least you have your business. I want that, well not your business, but something and I don’t know what that something is. Bash will support whatever I want to do. He’s made that more than clear, I just don’t know what the hell I want.”

“What did you do before working here?”

“Creative dancer.”

“Stripper?”

“Yep and I was damn good too.”

“Interesting? I know you applied at the lounge but didn’t know it had been a whole thing before that.” She shrugged.

“Yeah for years. That’s how I met my ex. He wanted me to stop so he took care of us and as much as I didn’t like not having my own, it worked. Then we had Leigh and I got comfortable with letting him take care of us. Until he starting acting like paying bills meant he didn’t have to be a father. I left, met Bash, and kinda just fit into his life after that. I know things are different with us. He will never treat me like my ex but I still want my own thing.”

“That makes sense.”

“But, I don’t have a damn clue what I want to do, so here we are.” She huffed a sigh.

“No ideas at all?”

“Nope, but I’m not rushing things. I have time. I’ll figure it out.”

“Oh before I forget, here.”

I shoved my hand into my pocket and placed the black foil packet on the bar. Cambri looked down then squinted at me confusedly.

“Uhh what is that?”

“A condom.”

“Okay smart ass I know *what* it is but I meant why are you giving me one?”

I smirked. “Because it’s my gender reveal.”

“Bitch.” Cambri lifted the condom and flipped it in her hands before she pinched the foil pack between her fingers. “This is not a gender reveal.”

“Yes it is, open it.” My smile grew.

“No, it’s not. Maybe I should do party planning. I’m still pissed you didn’t let me throw you an official gender reveal because this is bullshit.” She lifted the condom higher.

“Can you see a clubhouse full of muscled, tattooed bikers eating pink and blue cupcakes while we wait for Ro to stick a pin in a giant balloon to spill colored confetti all over the clubhouse floor?”

She cringed. “No, not really, so you have a point.”

“And you and Mint are pretty much my only friends. I can’t imagine she would be overly excited about being at a gender reveal.”

“Okay another valid point and the *old ladies* would think the gender reveal was too extra. Those hoes that stay chasing dick at the club would not be on the guest list so I guess this works.”

I smiled, feeling accomplished. “Good, then open it.”

“But, let me just add that I could have pulled together a very aesthetically pleasing, small event just for photo ops for the gram.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, now open...” I pointed at the condom and she rolled her eyes ripping through the foil package then gushing as she pinched the sides with both fingers shifting it left and right so that it did a little happy dance.

“Awwww, you’re going to be a boy mom.” Her eyes rolled seconds after. “And Ro’s big headed ass got what he wanted.”

“I damn sure did because I fucked with intention.”

“Nigga...” Bash threw his head back and laughed.

Like always they appeared out of nowhere. Pharaoh walked up behind me, cradling my body with his while he lowered his chin to my shoulder and Bash stopped between me and Cambri, leaning back into her, while she loosely draped her arms around his neck.

“What? I believe in manifestation and I manifested my son with a very intentional deep stroke.”

“Bruh, you’re wild for that.” Bash chuckled, shaking his head.

“My soldiers follow orders so they did that shit. Our baby girl is up next.”

“Next as in after this baby is off bottles and fully potty trained, possibly in college.”

Pharaoh frowned. “How long that take?”

“With a boy, by the time he’s ready for college, if you’re lucky,” Cambri said with a smug grin.

“Nah, fuck that. We’re gonna have a girl before then.” Pharaoh chuckled, shrugging lazily.

“No the hell we’re not. Let *them* have next.”

“Hell no.” Cambri was quick to say and Bash nodded, agreeing.

But he added, “If it happens it happens but we’re not trying and besides his ass needs the spotlight for a minute. He’s always trying to compete with me and shit.”

“Bruh, what the fuck?” Pharaoh laughed.

“I got with Cambri. You got with Ri. I gave her my mark, you made Ri get two. Not to mention taking it the extra mile and getting her pregnant.”

“My man has a point.” Cambri grinned at Pharaoh who chuckled.

“Nah, this isn’t about him or anybody else. This is about how good her p...”

“Ro...”

I cut him off quick and he grinned and kissed my cheek. “I’m just saying.”

“Say less, Ro.” Cambri shot him a pointed look.

“So we riding or what?”

“Yeah, let’s do this shit.”

The four of us had planned a long ride because there was nothing like an open stretch of road and me on the back of Pharaoh’s bike, my arms locked around him and his hand on my thigh. I would never tire of the way riding with him gave

me life. I didn't have much time left because of the baby and Pharaoh already didn't want me riding as it was. I was taking advantage of every opportunity.

"I'm surprised you haven't shut that down yet," Bash said and I shot him a warning look to shut up.

"I've been trying but her stubborn ass won't listen. Trust though, she doesn't have long."

"You're taking my favorite thing?"

He helped me off the stool and pulled me into him. "I thought I was your favorite thing."

I grinned. "Let's compromise. Me on your bike with *you* is my favorite thing."

"Good save." He kissed me hard and when I pulled back he added. "But it's only temporary. Get my little shorty here happy and healthy and you get your privileges back."

"Oh, lucky me." I rolled my eyes and he laughed.

"You already know I'm not taking chances with either of you. That's love, baby. I made you a promise and I'm gonna keep it."

Nothing will ever happen to me.

I smiled and nodded, he planted another kiss, this one was soft and reassuring as well as confirmation that his love for us was bigger than anything else.

"Now, let's ride."

He didn't have to tell me twice. This man could take me anywhere he wanted and I would gladly follow. I trusted him. I trusted us. And more than anything I knew he was my safe space.

I was finally home.