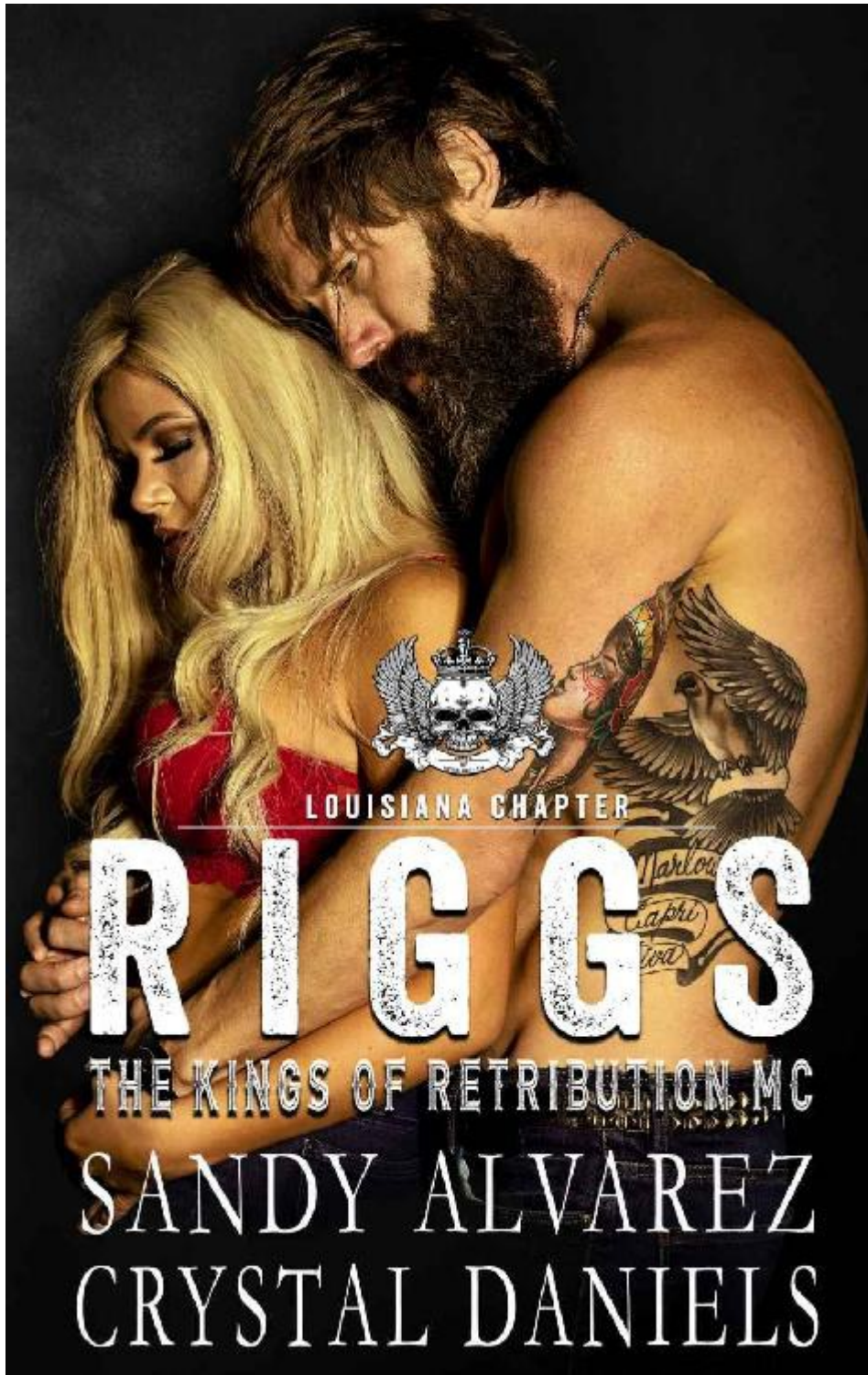


**Riggs (The Kings  
of Retribution MC,  
Louisiana Chapter  
Book 1)**

**Crystal Daniels  
Sandy Alvarez**



**RIGGS**

THE KINGS OF RETRIBUTION MC - LOUISIANA  
CHAPTER

SANDY ALVAREZ

CRYSTAL DANIELS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### RIGGS

Fucking hell, it's hotter than the devil's dick. With the back of my hand, I wipe the sweat from my brow and look through the scope of my rifle to get a better look at the men milling around the campsite we pinpointed by air from one of our drones deployed yesterday. I'm in my element out here in the middle of fucking nowhere in Central America. I've been doing contract work for my country and occasional civilian clients for the better part of ten years now. Once a soldier, always a soldier.

I'm fucking good at what I do though. So, I use my skill to help those who need it.

Glancing over my left shoulder, I watch my brother, Wick pull a couple of protein bars and two bottles of water from his pack. Keeping my weapon at my side, I duck low behind the fallen tree.

Wick tosses my dinner to me. "So, what is the game plan?" he asks. Catching it, I tear open the wrapper taking a bite.

We've been tracking these bastards going on two weeks now and waiting for them to lead us to the women they plan to sell to the highest bidder. Their clientele; rich fucking assholes who get their rocks off on underage children or those who run sex rings.

Wick and I have seen things most people could not fathom and been through situations that the most imaginative minds could not conjure. But I can tell you this, the conditions we have found many victims left in by human traffickers — there are no words. Those are the missions that fuck with my head the most. Those are the images that haunt me. I take great satisfaction in doling out justice to sick fucks like the ones we are trying to take down on this mission. Not one ounce of remorse or one fuck will be given when I take their worthless lives and send their souls straight to purgatory.

I look up at the darkening sky above us. The sun has almost set. I take another bite of my protein bar. "Contact Tequila.

Tell her we found our target and give her our rendezvous coordinates.”

Wick twists the cap off his water bottle and takes a drink, then pours a little water over his face, seeking a little relief from the hot, humid air of the jungle. “The clearing just on the other side of the river — you good with that being our pick up point?” he asks, tearing into his snack bar. I pull out my map and lay it on the forest floor.

“Good choice, brother. Send in the coordinates. We can’t move in until we receive a confirmation on ATA.” Needing no further instructions, Wick retrieves the satellite phone strapped to his side.

Malik Dawson and I have been side by side since SF — Special Forces training. I trust him with my life. Unlike my nickname, Dawson gained his a few years back when we started the Louisiana Chapter. Our MC brothers started calling him John Wick after hearing some of his war stories and getting to see him in action a few times, and the name Wick stuck.

Malik is a 6ft 5in mountain of a black man; who rides a midnight blue custom Fat Bob Harley. His

knowledge of weapons is beyond most. He speaks three foreign languages. His hand to hand combat skills are the best I have ever seen, the sharpest and fastest shooter I know, and he is a fucking mathematical genius. Most of all, Malik is my brother — my friend. No doubt; I would lay down my life for him. And he is the best goddamn VP a club could have.

“The helicopter will rendezvous with us across the river at zero one hundred,” Wick informs me.

“You have the charges ready?” he asks, and I pat my backpack sitting to the side of me and smile.

Getting to blow things up gets my blood pumping. Lifting his hand, Wick looks down at his watch.

“We have six hours until rendezvous.”

Opening my bottle, and tipping my head back, I take a large gulp, downing half the water. Pulling a bandana from the small

side pocket of my gear pack, I wet it with water then use it to wipe my face and the back of my neck. “It’s going to take us at least two hours to gain access into the building they are housing the women, then get them through the clearing over there and across the river.” My eyes lift to look at Wick, whose peering over the log, using his binoculars keeping a check on the enemy.

“Two of their men are posted at the gate. They seem to be taking turns walking the perimeter of the fence surrounding the property. I watched the other three walk into the smaller building on the far side of camp.” Spinning around, Wick looks at me. “Timeline for extraction is cutting damn close to when they have an extra convoy coming in to pick up those women. We’ll have to get in and out fast.”

“Ain’t nothing to it, brother,” I remark. “We move in four hours. As soon as darkness falls, we make our way to the only other access road leading to their camp. I’ll place one explosive there. Our main objective is getting those women across the water. The bridge we need to cross is old and extremely unstable, but it is the only safe way out for them.”

Wick nods. “The turbulent have to be corrected, the oppressed to be liberated.” We bump fists.

A few hours later, with weapons ready, we make our way to the dirt road leading into camp. I place one of the three explosive devices in my backpack just beneath the makeshift bridge they built for vehicles to cross over the narrow creek that cuts through the middle of the path. It will not completely slow them down should they arrive sooner than expected but it will bide us some time.

Under cover of night and lush, thick brush, Wick and I move through the tree line up the road, becoming one with the shadows.

The campsite is quiet, all but for the two men checking the perimeter. However, they have moved outside the gate. Perfect. Throwing my fist up, I halt our movements. “Let’s handle business. Meet me on the north side of the women’s location,” I whisper.

Going our separate ways, I head toward my target, who happens to stray off along the tree line to take a piss. Not the best way to go, but —. Sneaking up on the unsuspecting man, I place my gloved hand over his mouth. The knife in my other hand finds the mark, sliding effortlessly into his flesh between his ribs. I pull my weapon from his body. A bullet would have been quicker, but no gun is silent enough to have no sound, and we need to remain undetected. I keep hold of him until I start to feel the life leave his body, and he falls limp. Dragging his nearly lifeless body, I hide it amongst the cover of the thick ferns.

When I make it to the north side of the building built of cinder block and tin roof, I find Wick crouched low waiting on me. “There’s a lock on the door. The light overhead is too bright for us to risk picking the lock without being seen by someone, but there happens to be a window on the far side of the building there.” Wick lifts his head in the direction just above ours at the corner of the building.

“My broad ass shoulders won’t clear that opening, but if you take some of your gear off, I think you can squeeze through.”

Dammit. This will slow us down, but he’s right. The locked door is a no go. I start stripping my

gear from my body and lay it against the building on the ground. “Give me a boost, brother.” Placing my booted foot in his clasped hands, I reach for the concrete opening as Wick hoists my body upward.

Head level with the window, I cautiously peer inside. It’s nearly pitch black aside from the moonlight shining through the opening my head is currently halfway blocking. The smell of urine penetrates my nostrils the moment I start dragging my body through the other side. I look for something — anything I can grab a hold of to finish pulling myself inside. Looking around, I spot the cheap wood beams the metal roof panels are poorly fastened to. Reaching my arm in at an awkward angle above my head, I’m able to get a decent grip with just my fingertips. Using my other hand, I push against the concrete under my waist and slide forward, keeping myself from having to freefall head first to the floor below.



Dropping to my feet once I have cleared the window, my eyes quickly adjust to the lack of light in the room. At first, the space appears empty until I hear the slightest movement off to my right. Pulling a small flashlight from my pocket, I shine a light. Several dirty, frightened, and tear-stained faces, stare back at me; all huddled together in the farthest corner of the room. I put my hand out in front of me. I talk low and slow, keeping my voice as gentle as I can without spooking them. "I'm here to help." One of the young women opens her mouth as if to scream the moment I take a step toward them, but luckily another lady quickly covers the poor girl's mouth with the palm of her hand to keep her quiet. I give her a firm nod letting her know she's done well. "How many of you are there?" I ask.

"Twelve," the one who covered the mouth of the woman who tried to scream answers, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I'm going to lift you one by one to the window. My partner is waiting outside to catch you. If you want to make it out alive, no questions. No talking. As soon as everyone is out, you follow orders.

Got it?" Slowly their heads nod in understanding, and they cross the room. The one who has taken the lead for the other women ushers the first girl to the front of the line. My heart sinks when I take in how young she looks. She cannot be any more than twelve years old. "Ready?" I whisper to her, and tears pool in her bright blue eyes. I lift her small frame to the window. Once her feet disappear, I move on to the next. One by one, the women crawl through the window until the only person left is me. Getting a small running jump, I scale the wall enough to grab the windowsill. Pulling my weight up, I poke my head out and find Wick keeping watch as the women squat low against the wall making sure they stay in the shadows.

Knowing I'll need help, Wick quickly slides his gun to his back, reaches up and pulls me the rest of the way. With my feet planted firmly on the ground, I make quick work of putting all my gear on. I turn back toward the women. "Remember what I said?"

They nod. Keeping silent, they move when we move and get low when we get low.

Clearing the security fence surrounding the camp was the easiest part of this entire mission.

Making quick work of cutting the fence, Wick and I hold the two sides apart, allowing the women to shimmy through before getting clear on the other side ourselves. On foot, this trek toward the river would have normally taken no more than thirty minutes to complete. However, with twelve young, brave women, who happen to be weakened from physical abuse and starvation, it will take more time for us to get to our destination. Fifteen minutes in, two women, one of them being the youngest girl, are unable to walk on their own, so Wick and I end up carrying them the rest of the way.

We stop just as the river bridge comes into view.

Unfortunately, it also starts to rain. The bridge is old, but passable by foot, so we continue across. Once we're on the other side, I make the women gather around the base of a large tree and pull a couple of mylar blanket packs from my backpack and use them to shield the ladies from the rain.

"What's our wait time?" I ask Wick.

He looks at his watch. "Three hours."

"I'm doubling back. Now that the women are safely away from those bastards, I want to leave a little wake-up call." I hand him a single small remote detonator from my bag. "I'm strapping a third explosive to the bridge. If something happens before I get back, you blow the bridge and get them out of here," I jerk my head in the direction of the women, "Copy?" Wick clenches his teeth, his jaw ticks with tension. He understands losing our lives is a risk we are willing to take.

"Received."

Shit. God decided to open the flood gates on the rainstorm. It's falling so hard I can hardly see three yards in front of me, yet I manage to make my way back to the camp, through the hole in the fence. With no signs of the other men, I maneuver around the building they are housed in. Pulling my pack off my back, I dig out the remaining bomb. Unlike the building they had the

women in, this one is raised off the dirt ground, leaving about a two-foot clearance; perfect for me to scuttle beneath. About midway, I place the explosive between two floorboard beams and just as fast get my dirty wet ass out. When I slide around the side of the building, I hear the door slam shut, and notice the beam of a flashlight shining bright on the ground. Ducking back, I watch the guy, with a rifle slung over his shoulder, walk across the yard with his light scanning the fence line, most likely looking for his men who haven't reported back to him.

Knowing I need to get across without being seen, I wait for him to make his way a little further out before making a run for it. Halfway between me and the fence, shots ring out, and bullets whiz past my head and ricochet off the ground at my feet. Off in the distance headlights can be seen through the trees, which means their other men are early. Prepared for this scenario, I pull my pack off, throw my body to the ground behind the building we rescued the women from and pull the wireless remote from my bag, flipping the switch cover up and press the button. The bomb explodes lighting the night sky with a cloud of fire. Knowing this will cause the other men to run from the other building, I flick the second switch cover open and blow the motherfucker, sending structural shrapnel in all directions.

Picking myself up, I start running, toss my pack over the fence, and crawl back through the hole in the fence, then tear off through the trees. I don't bother looking back, I know they will find the girls missing, so I need to put as much distance between myself and them as possible. The tree line comes into view just as gun power rings out behind me. Bullets tear at the trees splintering the bark.

I push myself harder.

The moment my foot hits the first bridge plank a searing pain bursts through my left thigh. I know I've been hit, but I keep going. Wick begins to return fire. My leg burns and the pain radiates upward with every step I take. Another round of rapid-fire echoes around me. I can hear the bullets as they hit the water and bounce off the ground as I clear the bridge.

I hear it before I feel it.

The explosion.

Then the heat on my back.

The force propels my body forward, slamming me to the ground, knocking the air from my lungs. I cover my head, protecting it from falling debris. Sucking in a breath of air, I push myself up. I take a second once I've gotten to a kneeling position and clear my senses. An arm wraps around my waist, hoisting my heavy limbs to my feet. Wick helps me to the other side of the clearing.

Lowering me to the ground, he immediately tends to the bullet wound on my leg. Wick rips open the tear in my pant leg left by the bullet, exposing the weeping hole in my thigh. "Blood loss is minimal. Looks to be a clean shot." He takes his pack from his back and retrieves the first aid kit. He packs both entrance and exit wounds with gauze then wraps a firm tourniquet around my thigh. It hurts

like a motherfucker, but the pain reminds me I'm alive, and death did not want me today.

"You are one lucky motherfucker," Wick plops down on the ground beside me. We watch the remains of the bridge burn.

"Thanks for having my six, man." We sit in silence for a short time.

It's not long before the roar of the transport helicopter can be heard off in the distance. Once the pilot lands, we usher the women onboard. As we are climbing in behind them, the youngest girl throws her arms around my neck. She doesn't speak. She doesn't have to. Taking her seat next to the others, Wick counts heads, making sure they are all accounted for before strapping ourselves in. I place the headphones over my ears so I can communicate with the pilot.

Without looking back, Tequila lifts us off the ground. "Job well done, sir." She tells me.

"Received." Leaning my head back, I close my eyes, trying to relieve the building pressure behind my tired eyes. "Take us home."

## CHAPTER TWO

### LUNA

The world around me is silent. I hear nothing but can feel everything. And right now, my body is on fire. My body screams in pain as I'm jolted around by the jerking movements of the car I'm currently in.

The trunk to be more specific.

Several minutes pass before I feel the car come to a stop. The vehicle vibrates as the door is opened and slammed shut. A moment later, the cold night air hits my face. My body goes weightless as someone lifts me from the trunk of the car and carries my limp body off somewhere.

I count ten steps — 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.

The person carrying me tosses my body like a rag doll; followed by what feels like thousands of tiny needles stabbing me all over my body as I hit the cold damp ground. It's a struggle to breathe, and I am so weak I can't seem to open my eyes. I let out a groan, and though I can't hear it, I know the noise that just escaped my mouth has drawn attention to me. I crack my eyes open to slits to find my boyfriend's brother Pike staring down at me and I read his lips.

"Shit, man. She's still alive."

I cut my eyes over to the car to see Rex climb out of the passenger seat and stride in my direction.

His advance and the look on his face causes my heart to jump into my throat. I watch his lips as he speaks.

"Not for long." His face carries an expression I have not seen before. He's looking at me as though I am a bug that needs to be squashed. He is not the same man who has been sweet and tender with me for the past few months — the man who has doted on me and made me feel special. "You should have minded your own business, Luna. Such a fuckin' shame," Rex sneers crouching down close to my face; making sure I can understand what he's saying. Then without hesitation, he stands to his full height, and the next thing I feel is the heavy

weight of his boot coming down on my head. Fiery pain explodes through my skull, sending me into darkness.

I feel as though I'm trapped in a dark tunnel with no way out. With a considerable amount of strength and determination, I opened my eyes. The light that surrounds me is so bright I squeeze them shut then open them once again; this time, my vision clears. I notice an IV bag hanging above my head to my right, and I'm reasonably sure I am in a moving vehicle. Suddenly, a man appears in my line of sight, hovering over my body. I focus on his face as he speaks to me. "Ma'am, can you tell me your name?" he asks. My hands feel like dead weight. I don't have the strength to lift them, and I don't get the chance to answer the stranger. With the excruciating pain that has consumed my entire being, I welcome the darkness that claims me once again.

I don't know how much time has passed when I jolt awake. I'm greeted by that damn blinding white light again. I struggle to move as I'm taken over with panic. I don't think there is a part of my body that doesn't hurt. A pair of strong hands press against my shoulders, holding me down. The person restraining me is unaware I am deaf and need my hands to sign because they grab hold of my arms in another attempt to calm me. "Miss, you're at the hospital. Everything is going to be okay." I focus on the man's mouth. Blinking my eyes several times, the blurry figure in front of me becomes clearer as I try to clear the fog from my brain to make sense of what is happening.

The man in front of me is wearing a white coat, and I have concluded that I am at a hospital.

Standing next to him is a nurse with a gray bob wearing blue scrubs. I relax my body a bit, and the doctor releases his hold. A wave of nausea suddenly washes over me, and I begin to vomit. The nurse swiftly rolls my body sideways, where I proceed to lose the contents of my stomach all over the floor.

The strain of vomiting causes my head to feel like it's about to burst. I have never felt pain like this in my life. My vision starts to blur once again as I'm thrust back into the dark tunnel and the world around me slowly fades away.

My eyes flutter open, and for a moment, I'm confused as to where I am. I look around the hospital room I'm currently in, and my memory quickly returns.

*I wake in the middle of the night to an empty bed. Sitting, my eyes adjust to the darkness, and I find myself alone. Pulling the blanket back, I climb out of bed, grab my sleep shorts from the floor beside me and tug them on followed by a shirt.*

*Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I stroll toward the bedroom door. Opening it, I peer down the hallway and see nothing. The parties here can last well into the early morning hours, but right now it appears everyone has turned in. When I walk into the common room, I see a few of the club members asleep in various spots. One on the sofa, one on the pool table and a couple of men and women are passed out on the floor.*

*Bypassing them, I make my way past the bar and down the hall toward the kitchen. Just as I am about to enter the kitchen, I spot the light on at the end of the hall where Rex's office is.*

*With a smile on my face, I head in that direction. When I reach his office, I notice the door is cracked open and what I see wipes the smile from my face. I cannot hear the words spoken, but I see a man dressed in a suit, on his knees in front of my boyfriend with his hands tied behind his back.*

*I notice the man's lips moving, but from this angle, I can't make out what he is saying. All while my boyfriend has a gun aimed at his head. Without warning, Rex smiles and pulls the trigger. I have never in my life seen so much blood. Oh my God! My boyfriend just killed a man. I cover my mouth with my hand, but it must not stifle the sob I so desperately try to choke back. Rex cuts his eyes over to the door to see me standing there. I'm temporarily stunned, but when Rex goes to advance in my direction, I turn and run. My effort to escape is fruitless. I don't make it ten feet before my hair is grabbed from behind and I am thrown to the floor. He then continues to kick me several times in my stomach and ribs. Turning my face up to meet Rex, I'm met by my boyfriend's enraged face as he brings his fist down on my cheek. Rex begins to land blow after blow until I finally pass out.*

I'm brought back to the present when a nurse walks into my room. The woman looks to be in her thirties with brown hair

and a kind smile. I study her as she begins to talk. "It's good to see you awake." I read her lips.

Lifting my hands, I begin to sign. She looks shocked for a moment. I then make a gesture for a paper and pen. The nurse quickly walks over to the table next to the bed, opens the drawer, and produces a notepad with the hospital logo, and gives me a pen. I scribble on the paper. *I am deaf but can read lips.* I turn the notebook over for the nurse to read. She scans the paper and smiles.

"We happen to have an interpreter on staff. How about I page her. I know the doctor would like to go over your injuries with you as well," she finishes, and I nod in agreement.

About ten minutes later, the nurse returns with the doctor who is an older gentleman with gray hair, and with him is a short woman with red hair who I am assuming is the interpreter. She immediately begins to sign. "Hello. My name is Marie, and I'll be your interpreter while you are here."

"Thank you, Marie. My name is Luna Novak," I tell her.

"Okay, Luna. If it's alright with you, Dr. Cates would like to go over your injuries. Also, a detective is waiting outside your room, and she would like for you to answer some questions."

Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath. Do I want to talk to the police? Deciding Rex does not deserve to get away with killing that man or what he has done to me, I open my eyes and nod.

Over the next fifteen minutes, Dr. Cates recaps what has happened in the last twenty-four hours. I was brought in by ambulance. Lucky for me a passerby spotted my lifeless body on the side of the road, and he called 911. I have a concussion, a black eye, busted lip, and bruised ribs. I am thankful, and a little surprised nothing else is broken. "I'd like to keep you here for at least another day for observation, Miss Novak," Dr. Cates informs.

I sign, "okay." At this point, I don't have the energy to argue. Maybe being here is what is best, at least until Rex is caught.



Once the nurse checks my vitals, she, and the doctor leave. After they are gone, a woman dressed in a pantsuit with a badge clipped to her belt steps into the room, she motions to the chair sitting beside the bed, and I nod. She takes a seat and begins to speak. She acknowledges the interpreter then introduces herself to me. “Hi, Miss Novak. I’m Detective Brooks. Are you feeling well enough for me to ask you some questions?”

“Yes,” I sign.

“Can you tell me how you ended up on the side of the road. Do you remember who hurt you?”

I take a deep breath. “It was my boyfriend.”

“What’s his name?”

“Rex Sullivan.”

Detective Brooks is taking notes, but the moment I say Rex’s name, her head snaps up. “Rex Sullivan? As in the President of Savage Outlaw?” she questions. And by the expression on her face, he is well known and not in a good way.

“Yes,” I answer.

“I see,” she purses her lips. “And are you aware of the kind of person your boyfriend and his club are, Miss Novak?”

I can tell right away the detective is judging me. “No, Detective. Up until twenty-four hours ago, I had no idea Rex was capable of doing what he did to me.” I close my eyes as a tear escapes down my cheek. I feel foolish. I was so desperate for affection; I put blinders on to who he really was. Granted Rex never let me see that side of him before, I still should have known better. The next time Detective Brooks speaks her face has softened a little.

“Can you start from the beginning? What led you here?”

Swiping the tears from my eyes, my hands move quickly. “I had stayed the night at his clubhouse like I had done so many times in the months we have seen each other. I woke in the middle of the night and went looking for him when he wasn’t in bed. I saw the light was on in his office. The door was

cracked when I approached it. I saw a man on his knees in front of Rex. I couldn't make out anything they were saying. A couple of seconds went by with them talking; then Rex shot the man in the head. I

must have made a noise because he saw me. I tried to run, but he caught me. Rex beat me right then and there. I passed out. When I woke up, I was in the trunk of a car. Rex and his brother Pike dumped me on the side of the road. Where; I don't know; the last thing I remember was Rex telling me I should have minded my own business. He then kicked me in the head, knocking me out. The next thing I know I'm in the hospital," I finish my body trembling.

"How long were you and Rex seeing each other?"

"About three months."

"In those three months you were seeing the President of Savage Outlaw, you not once saw a side to him you saw last night? You never witnessed any of his illegal activity?" the detective lifts a brow.

I shake my head and continue to sign. "No. I know that is hard for you to believe, but Rex had never shown his true colors until I witnessed him kill that man in his office. He had always been nice to me. He was a good boyfriend, or so I thought." Feeling utterly exhausted, I let my arms fall limp to the bed, and sigh.

Detective Brooks stands. "I'll leave you to rest. The information you gave me is enough for us to arrest Rex Sullivan. I'll stop back by again in the morning with an update. I will be posting an officer outside your door. Once Rex is picked up, his club may retaliate."

Suddenly, fear takes over. I force myself to sit up. "Do you think that is necessary?" I sign in a panic.

"Yes, Miss Novak, I do. Your boyfriend has been our main suspect in at least a dozen homicides over the past five years. None of the charges have ever stuck. Either due to lack of evidence or the witnesses come up missing." Detective Brooks lets her statement hang. My breathing picks up, and I'm sure

my panic is written all over my face. Detective Brooks takes a step closer to the bed, meeting my eyes. “I assure you none of his men will get to you. For now, the hospital is the safest place for you.

You will be guarded twenty-four seven. Once Rex is in custody, I’ll come back here, and we’ll figure out our next move. For now, Miss Novak, you need to concentrate on getting better.” With that, Detective Brooks walks out of the hospital room, and I am left with no choice but to believe her. I have to. My life is literally in her hands.

Turning to the interpreter, she gives me a look of worry and sadness before she too takes her leave. But before she goes, she has assured me she will let the nurses know she will remain on call around the clock in case I need anything. Once I’m left alone with my thoughts, I have no choice but to reflect on how I got here.

I’ve lived in Arizona my whole life. I grew up in the system being shuffled around from one foster home to the next. It didn’t take the foster parent long to realize they didn’t want the hassle of a special needs child and having to learn sign language. I was born with a genetic disorder that causes hearing loss over time. I had gone completely deaf by the age of four. Learning sign language had been frustrating, but I was eager to communicate. Not once did I pity myself or give up. That sort of thing is just not in me. I don’t see myself as having a disability. I simply speak a different language.

By the time I was ten, I had been in my fifth foster home. I learned it was easier to keep a notebook and pen on hand because not one of the families I lived with knew how to communicate with me any other way. Sooner or later, having to talk that way became too much for them. I was an inconvenience my whole childhood. It didn’t matter that I was a straight A student, or that I never got in trouble. Any issue the foster families had always came down to one thing.

By the time I was a teenager, I had gotten good at reading lips and only used my notebook when necessary. It was easier to fade into the shadows and not act needy. Doing so allowed me

to stay in each home longer. I think sometimes my foster parents forgot I even existed. I think that has something to do with why I ate up Rex's attention.

I was deprived of affection my whole life. It felt good to have someone finally noticed me. To have someone treat me as if I was the most important person in the world. I met Rex at a gas station three months ago. I was pumping gas, and with all the pumps occupied, he pulled up on his bike behind my car and waited for me to finish. I felt his eyes on me for a minute before he finally approached. I was so nervous, and the first thought that came to mind was how handsome he was. I will admit the first time he took me to his clubhouse and introduced me to his brothers I was nervous.

A few of the members leered at me in a way that, at times, made me uncomfortable. Rex never noticed the seedy eyes of some of his friends. With his true colors exposed, I'm starting to think he did notice but didn't genuinely care.

Closing my eyes, I let out a deep breath. I've come too far in my life to have been so stupid to fall for the first man to ask me out. I am twenty-six years old and have had one boyfriend. I have spent my entire adult life, keeping myself closed off. I was comfortable being alone in my own bubble. When Rex approached me, I thought 'what the hell' and took a chance. That chance nearly killed me. Never again will I trust another man. I'm better off alone.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RIGGS**

The low rhythmic tunes of Jazz music rouses me from sleep as it fills my room with the warm soulful voice of Nina Simone. I lay stretched out in bed for a few moments keeping my eyes closed, listening to her sing before tossing the covers to the foot of my king-sized bed. Sitting on the side of the mattress, I reach for the T.V. remote and turn on the local news, muting the sound, opting to listen to the music instead of hearing about the latest shooting here in New Orleans. Not that I prefer to be kept in the dark about my city and the crime in it, just

that, right now, my mind needs a recharge from the past few weeks I have had.

Last night was my first night home since our last operation. Once the women we rescued were looked after, and I knew the process of identifying each young lady was underway, to notify their next of kin, I finally allowed the doctor to take care of my leg. Luckily my wound only required a good flush, a few stitches and a round of antibiotics to take home with me.

Standing, I stride across the room. I walk out of my bedroom door, into my living room and head for the kitchen. Dragging a mug from the cabinet, I power on the coffee maker, pop a coffee pod into the machine and push the button. While I wait for my coffee to brew, I fill a glass with water. Twisting the top off the medicine bottle sitting on the counter, I pop a pill in my mouth, then wash it down.

When my coffee is ready, I carry it with me and walked outside onto the terrace. The warm, muggy Louisiana morning air immediately hits me. Leaning against the railing, I look out on the city of New Orleans. It's early, and for the moment, quiet. I've lived here all my life. It's where I was born and raised. My roots here run deeper than the Mississippi River.

Down on the street below, I watch a couple of birds fight over a piece of trash laying in the gutter.

I live in the French Quarter in a small apartment above mine, and Wick's bar, Twisted Throttle on Bourbon Street. We bought the historical building a couple of years after leaving the service. At one point in my life, right after retiring from regular military duty, I felt a little lost. Kind of out of my element — I didn't quite know where I belonged. Being a part of a team infrastructure had been solidified — became a part of how I ran my day to day life. I traveled a lot during my military career.

Took on any and every mission I could be a part of. When it came time for me to hang my boots and slow down, I couldn't settle, so I traveled — riding across the country on my Harley. One day, I found myself riding through North Montana, and remembered an old buddy from the service who once

mentioned living out that way. That is when I tracked down Jake Delane. I had met him a few times overseas during our years serving our country. After meeting up with him in Polson, he talked about the MC life. I stayed in the service a few years longer than he did, and afterward, we lost touch, but the way he talked about the brotherhood stuck with me. When I found myself struggling with what I

wanted to do with my life, I remembered that conversation we had. It wasn't long before I found myself staying in Polson, Montana.

Club life was everything Jake said it would be and everything I wanted to be a part of. Just before I decided to make The Kings of Retribution a permanent part of my life, fate had other plans for me.

My grandad fell ill. The most important man in my life needed me, and there was no way in hell, no matter what I wanted in my life at that moment, was I going to let him down. Once my grandad was well and back on his feet again, I knew I needed to stay home and look after him, yet I still wanted what was waiting for me back in Montana. After several phone conversations, Jake proposed starting a second chapter and wanted me to head it up — become the Louisiana chapter's President.

Recruiting members became another mission of mine. Before long, I obtained property for a clubhouse, and within two years, we had three members, Wick, my brother Cain, and myself. We had ourselves a couple hang arounds, who, at first, appeared to be decent guys who had the potential to prospect for us. Those men, over time, had to go. They started getting mixed up in bullshit the club needed no part of. I don't tolerate addicts and trying to peddle street drugs under the falsehood that they were protected by the club caused problems, so they were dealt with and never heard from again.

Eventually, Fender, our SGT. At Arms came along. We'd known who he was for some time before he expressed interest in our brotherhood. He moved here from Nashville and made his living playing his guitar and singing at all the local bars and street corners. Kiwi, well, he's the youngest member, mid-

twenties. We met him on a Vegas trip. He'd been living out there for a little over a year. Told us he was looking for a change of scenery and asked if he could ride along with the club back to Louisiana. The rest is history; better left told some other day. The club is now twelve strong with two prospects. The chapter may be small, but we have become a prominent fixture in the community.

Hearing my cell phone ring, I turn and walk back inside. Going into my bedroom, I look down at the image of my grandad holding a big ass catfish displayed on the screen. Picking it up, I swipe my thumb across the glass surface, answering his call. "Hey, Pop."

"Son, how's the leg?"

"Nothing worth complainin' about. How'd your doctor appointment go yesterday?" I ask knowing he had his six months check up with the heart specialist.

"Ticker looks good. The pacemaker is doing its job."

I nod. "What are your plans for today?"

"Oh, I think me, and Buck will take ourselves down to the lake and do a little fishing before that storm moves in." Meaning him and his best friend plans on having themselves a few beers and talk about who they hope our local NFL team will pick in the draft this season. "Come by and have an early dinner with me today. The ladies from church sent over enough food to feed a damn army," he laughs. "I have plenty, so why don't you invite the guys as well."

"I can do that."

"Good — good. I'll see you later, then." There's a short pause on the line before he tells me, "love ya, Son. I'm glad you're home."

I clear my throat. "Love you too, Pop," and he disconnects the call.

Abraham LeBlanc. Born right here in Louisiana in 1933. My great grandparents made a living fishing; surviving off the land. My grandad grew up on the waters of the Mississippi River and Louisiana bayous. Same place he raised me and my

brother Cain. Life wasn't easy, but he helped shape us into the men we are today. We never lacked for love. Our mom ran off a couple of years after she gave birth to us. Abel and Cain LeBlanc; twin boys born on a Sunday morning to Eve LeBlanc.

Not that our mother didn't love us, because, in her own way, I believe she does, but she is a wanderer

— a gypsy you could say. It's probably how Cain and I would have grown up as well, living a nomadic lifestyle if it wasn't for our grandparents stepping in. I could not imagine my life any other way than how it turned out. Our grandparents raised us by themselves since we were two years old.

Sure, Eve would show up out of the blue from time to time over the years; we always knew who she was to us, but there was never that mother-son connection between us. She gave birth to us, but in the end, that was the only gift she gave my brother and me.

My grandma passed away a little over ten years ago. The strongest woman I knew. It was hard enough she lived in a world she couldn't hear, she also raised two young boys full of piss and vinegar, who were always getting into mischief of some sorts. I chuckle at the memory of my brother, and I covered in mud, and small patches of tobacco stuck all over our bodies after we had gotten the bright idea to destroy a hornet's nest; tearing it apart with our slingshots. How the fuck were we to know the bastards would retaliate against us? Aside from several painful welts left on our bodies, Cain and I were okay. But after she tended to the stings, our grandma felt horrible about the situation for a short time. She couldn't hear what was going on, because she was deaf. From an early age, my brother and I were taught ASL, and we learned to communicate well with her. Our grandmother carried the kind of determination in life that I try to take with me through life. Regardless of the hardships, she faced, she adapted and was always kind hearted toward every person she met.

My granddad, on the other hand, is a stern, hardcore military man. He ran his household with an iron fist, and he is the reason I enlisted right out of high school. While in basic



training, I learned about Special Forces training. After three years of service, I decided I wanted to push myself further — become part of an elite force — the best of the best. That is where I found my niche. My purpose; until I became part of The Kings of Retribution family.

Since we don't open the bar until tonight, I decide to head down to the clubhouse. Walking into the bathroom, I flip the switch on the wall and stare at my reflection in the mirror, considering whether to shave my beard. I've never let it grow to this length before. Deciding to keep it as is, I run a comb through it and my hair along with some beard oil. Once dressed, I lace up my boots, throw my cut on, and holster my weapon on my side. Grabbing my phone, I slide it into the inside pocket of my cut and walk out into the living room, pluck my keys off the hook hanging on the wall next to the front door.

There are two ways into my apartment — one is from downstairs, on the backside of the bar where the staircase is located. That staircase is connected to a hallway and at the other end is a separate door that leads outside.

Locking the door behind me, I walk around the corner of the building to where my bike is parked in front of the bar — a custom Harley Softail. Straddling my bike, I strap on my helmet, turn the key, and rev the engine a few times to warm her up, before taking off toward the industrial side of town near the river. The sun is rising, but the city never sleeps, so I decided to stop by Pat's, an eclectic doughnut shop one block over. As soon as I walk through the front door, he greets me.

“Riggs,” Pat looks over his shoulder as he stands in front of the deep fryer flipping doughnuts over with giant chopsticks. “Haven't seen you in a couple of weeks.”

“I've been out of town. How's it going?”

Pat takes the cookie sheet full of hot pastries to the counter, coats them in his signature lemon glaze, before turning to face me. “I can't complain. I'm here another day. That's all any of us can ask for.” I nod in agreement. “So,” he pulls a box from

beneath the counter, “You want the usual two dozen this morning?” he asks.

I sidle up to the counter near the register. “Yeah, and throw in a couple of those apple fritters,” I

tell him. As he places my order inside the box, I pull my wallet from my back pocket, and pull out some cash, and pay for breakfast. “I’ll catch ya later, Pat.”

“Stay safe.” Pat waves as I walk out the door.

Our clubhouse is a small warehouse right on the river. This part of the industrial parkway is all but abandoned aside from the small paper mill located next door. Stopping at the gate, I punch in the security code and wait for it to slide open. In the distance, I can see my brother’s bike sitting out front.

When I walk inside, I find him asleep, stretched out on one of the couches downstairs. Setting the box of doughnuts on the bar top, I flip the lid open, pull out an apple fritter, biting into it as I stroll across the room toward the back of the building that was once the breakroom, but we had converted into a small galley kitchen. I find both prospects plus Payton, one of two club girls.

“Hey, Riggs, when did you get back in town?” Payton asks.

“Last night. You got coffee made?”

“Sure, have a seat, and I’ll fix you a cup.”

At the far end of the kitchen, I take a seat at the square table next to Track, sitting across from me and Everest. “I have a liquor delivery scheduled to arrive in an hour over at the bar. I need you two to head on over there and help unload the truck. Take inventory and stock the bar. Two boxes of whiskey should be sitting in the back of the room marked clubhouse. Bring them back with you.” I get right into what needs to be taken care of today. The two of them nod, get up from the table, and leave. Payton places my coffee on the table in front of me. “Thanks.”

“Can’t be bothered to call your only brother to let him know you’re alive?” Cain strolls into the kitchen with a box of

doughnuts and shoves half of one into his mouth. He chucks the box on the table and plops down in one of the chairs.

“My ass was draggin’ when I landed. The only thing on my mind was sleepin’ in my own bed,” I tell him.

Payton places a fresh cup of coffee, prepared the way he likes it, in front of my brother. Cain winks at her. “Thanks, sugar,” he flirts. That’s why we call him Nova. He’s a flirt — a manslut. He’s been this way his entire life — Casanova on an iron horse.

“Pop wants us to visit this evening,” I let him know.

“Ann, from church fix him dinner again?” Cain smiles because we both know the lady is sweet on Pop. “He should go for it. She’s a widow, and Grandma has been gone for years now. You only live once,” Cain says making a valid point.

“I can tell he has taken a liking to her, but I’m thinking his feelings for Grandma is the reason he’s holdin’ back.”

Fender walks into the kitchen, grinnin’ with Kiwi right behind him. “Prez, good to see you, brother.” Fender extends his right hand and shakes mine. “Just get in?” he asks.

“Naw, brother. I rolled in around midnight last night.”

“My ass would still be in bed,” Kiwi mentions as he plucks a doughnut from the box.

“Old habits die hard. I can’t seem to sleep past 5:00 am.” Standing, I take my cup to the sink. “Pop is feeding us later, so make sure you two clear your schedule so you can come to get some grub. Let’s say around, 4:00 pm?”

“You got it,” Fender answers.

“By the way. Jake called while you were out of town. He was able to get his hands on those handguns we were lookin’ for. They should arrive in another week.” Kiwi says with excitement. “I can’t wait to test them out.”

With having the only indoor shooting range near the city, Kings Tactical makes the club a decent

amount of money. Fender and Kiwi run the storefront and range. With Jake having direct access to pretty much whatever weapon he desires, thanks to Demetri Volkov, he's also able to get us things clients are looking for, but most places don't sell because getting through all the red tape to obtain them would take months.

"Where is Wick?" Cain questions.

"Spending some time with his family," I tell them and make my way toward the kitchen door. "I'm about to head back to the bar, pay some bills, and take care of some paperwork. I'll see you guys later."

"Heads up. Lexi was out by the bar when we arrived, and she asked about you, Prez. That woman has it bad for you," Kiwi warns me knowing the reason I've been avoiding her for some time now.

She's becoming much too clingy for my liking. No matter how many times I've made it clear I'm not interested, she keeps trying. I've never shared my bed with her, but because some of the other members seem to like her, I've kept her around. If she doesn't cause trouble, she'll be allowed to stay.

The moment she crosses a line, she's gone.

Walking into the common area, Lexi immediately spots me as I make my way toward the front door to leave.

"Hey, Riggs." She greets me dressed in her usual attire — a mini denim skirt and barely there top, that does nothing to hold her paid for breasts. My pop didn't raise me to be rude to women, so I respond.

"Lexi." She steps in front of me, stopping me mid-stride, and presses her chest against my body. I look down at her, trying my best to contain my annoyance. "You need somethin'?"

Her fingertips travel along with my biceps, and she licks her overly glossed lips. "I could think of a few things." She tries her best to flirt, but it does nothing for me.

"I don't have time, Lexi."

“Come on, Riggs. I promise you won’t regret it.” She goes to grab my cock, and I wrap my hand around her wrist, stopping her.

“Show the same respect given to you. The brothers don’t touch you if you don’t want them to, and the same goes for you. Don’t go grabbing a man’s dick without being invited to do so. Are we clear?”

She doesn’t say a word. Nodding her understanding, Lexi turns around and walks toward the kitchen where the others have gathered. Lifting my hand, I look at my watch. With a full day ahead of me, I head out.

HOURS LATER, WE ARE ALL SITTING AROUND THE TABLE AT MY POP’S DRINKING A BEER AFTER STUFFING

our faces with pot roast, creamy mashed potatoes, smothered cabbage, and some cornbread. “Thanks for the invite, Pop, but we’re about to head out. Bar opens soon.”

“Glad you boys came by to see an old man.” He stands, and the rest of the men follow. “I’ll be checking the cages this weekend. Which means we need ourselves a crawfish boil.” He walks with us to the front door of my childhood home.

“How about I help you with the traps, then we get the whole club family together. We’ll have some mudbugs and fire up the grill. You can cook those famous baby back ribs.” I smile at him. Whenever we have a big gathering, with all the members and their families, I use my Pop’s property, because the clubhouse isn’t the place for kids to play. He lives on five acres of flat open land. On the backside of the property, are water inlets that branch off Wood Lake. The land has been in the family for three

generations. I fished these waters growing up just as he did, and his father and grandfather did before him.

Pulling a handkerchief from his pocket, Pop takes his cap off his head, then wipes the sweat from his forehead. “Sounds like a plan to me.”

Bending, I hug him. Cain does the same, and so do the rest of my men. One final wave, I wait for him to walk back into the house before we pull away.

A few hours later, business starts picking up. About an hour ago the cops closed the street off for the evening, and people lookin' to party began filling the streets and the bar. After walking outside for a breather, I step back through the bar door and sidle up to the bar.

“Prez,” Fender stops beside me, he has his guitar in his hand.

“Getting ready for a set?”

“Yeah, but the guy across the room just caught my attention.” Fender mentions.

“Who?”

“Tattooed dude, near the men’s bathroom.” Fender tells me. Looking in that direction, I notice the guy Fender is referring to. After cutting his eyes around the bar, the man passes a plastic bag under the table to the person sitting across from him.

“Shit. I’m tired of these ass wipes comin’ in my bar selling dope.” I sneer. Weaving through the crowd, I cross the bar and stop right behind the dipshit. The dumbass he just sold his shit to panics and trips over the chair he was sitting in as he rushes away. The dealer goes to stand.

“Yo, give me the rest of my fucking money,” he yells at the guy’s back as he flees the scene.

Gripping his shoulder, I pull him from the table. “What the fuck?” he sneers as I begin leading him past people who have started to stare and shove his ass inside the men’s bathroom. He stumbles into the wall near the urinals. “What’s your problem, dickhead?” he spins, and the moment his eyes land on me, his eyes widen.

“You, coming in here, in my establishment, and selling drugs is my problem, motherfucker.” I get a better look at him. “I believe I’ve warned you in the past not to bring your ass around here with that shit.” I glare at him.

He straightens the collar of his shirt and gets a smug look on his face. “Fuck you, man. I don’t answer to you.” He takes a swing at me. Dodging his blow, I grab his wrist. Fisting his hair with my other hand, I slam his face against the brick wall. He falls to his knees.

“Need a hand?” I turn and see Fender standing in the doorway.

“Yeah, take this piece of shit, and throw his ass in the street,” I tell Fender, then kneel next to the little fucker, who wipes the blood from the cut on his forehead with the back of his hand.

“I catch you near my bar again, I’ll kill you.” I warn him.

Fender strolls over, pulls the guy to his feet and escorts him out of the building. Walking back to the bar, I take my seat, drink my beer, and wait for closing time.

WITH THE BAR CLOSED, I HEAD UPSTAIRS. NO SOONER DOES MY HEAD HIT THE PILLOW, MY PHONE

rings. Sighing, I cast my blanket to the side, and swing my legs over the edge of the bed. *What the hell would Jake need at 2:00 am?* “Hey, brother, how’s it going?” I yawn and roll my neck a few times until it cracks.

“I need a favor.”

“Name it.” Leaning forward, I rest my elbows on my knees and listen to what he has to say.

“We have ourselves a little problem. His name is William McGregor. He’s a prominent lawyer and political figure in Texas. The asshole is stirring up shit for the club.” Over the next thirty minutes, Jake fills me in on all the bullshit him, and his men have gone through over the past 48 hours.

“Any specific way you’d like us to handle him?”

“Do whatever it is you need to do. Let me know if you run into any problems,” Jake finishes.

“I’ll be in touch.” Setting the phone on the nightstand, I slide back into bed, close my eyes, and try to sleep.

RUNNING ON A FEW HOURS OF SLEEP AND AN ENTIRE POT OF COFFEE, I’M SITTING HERE IN THE

clubhouse, at the bar waiting for my men to arrive. One by one they drag their asses in. Fender and Kiwi are the first through the door. I know the moment Wick is on the property when the unmistakable rumble of his Harley reverberates the glass windows. The man is not subtle about anything. He revs the engine a few more times before the sound goes silent and his big ass walks through the entrance.

“When did you get in, brother?” Leaving my seat, I stride across the room, meeting him halfway, greeting him with a handshake.

“Drove in this morning.”

“How’s your momma?” I inquire as we head back to the bar area.

“She’s good. Helped the old man get her home and settled a couple of hours ago.” Wick eyes me, his eyebrow raised.

“How’s the leg healing?”

“Good.” I turn my head when the clubhouse door opens. The last person to arrive — my brother.

He’s late often, but I try not to ride his ass about it under the circumstances. Heading toward the stairs, I announce, “the girls cooked this morning. Grab your asses some grub. Church in ten.”

Not bothering to eat, Wick, and my brother follow behind me. The space we hold church is in the back of the building opposite the converted kitchen. Opening the door, I walk inside. Windows span the entire back wall giving us the perfect view of the muddy Mississippi River. Stopping, I gaze out at the murky water and watch one of two barges slowly float downstream and think about the shit that went down last night, and what we need to do about it.

Turning around, I pull my chair from the table and sit. The other men file in, and Fender closes the door behind him.

“Now, let’s get down to the reason we are all here. Jake called this morning. He has a little problem he’d like us to handle for him. Some fucker is stickin’ his nose where it doesn’t belong, so some of us are takin’ a trip to Texas.



“When?” Cain asks.

“Today. Jake’s man, Reid, emailed some interesting information on the guy we’re after. Before I left home, I did some diggin’ of my own, and if we play our cards right, and make good timing, we might catch the bastard with his pants down.”

Wick folds his arms over his chest. “Is this a clean favor, or do we need to get our hands dirty on this one?”

“More like blackmail, but that is not to say he will not go unharmed,” I fight off a grin. “The dirty fucker deserves to tote an ass woopin’. And I plan to give it to him. But I’m leaving you here along with Cain.” Wick slumps in his chair. I know he lives for these things. “I need you two here to handle the businesses. I also need the two of you to see what you can do about these street dealers. They keep comin’ around the bar pushin’ drugs when they’ve been warned more than once not to come back.

Kiwi, Fender, you two are riding out with me at noon,” I inform them. Looking around the table, I ask,

“anyone have anything else to add?” Looks exchange across the table and no one adds to the meeting.

“Alright, we all have things to do, so let’s get them done.” Knocking my knuckles on the table, I end church.

A few hours later, Fender, Kiwi and I are on the road heading west. Thankful for good weather, we make it to our destination. By the time we pull into the parking lot of the hotel we are staying in, our asses are dragging. Not having time to make a reservation anywhere, I dismount my bike. “Wait here,” I tell my men and stride across the parking lot. Once inside, I walk to the check-in counter —

the receptionist stares. “Need a couple of rooms.” I pull my wallet from my pocket, take my bank card out, and toss it on the counter. She blinks a few times and blushes slightly.

“Sorry.” Fumbling with the keyboard in front of her, she does her best to focus on the computer screen. Amused by her reaction to me, I grin.

“Um, we only have one queen double available.” Her eyes lift to mine, and she bites her lower lip.

“That will have to do darlin’.”

She smiles. “And how many guests are staying?”

“Three.” I wait for her to enter my information, then she hands me the key card.

“You’re in room 45. You’ll find it on the back side near the pool.”

Putting my wallet away, I take the card from her, nod, and walk out. “Room is around back.” I swing my leg over my bike. Firing them up again, we roll around back, past the pool she mentioned where a couple of ladies are lying next to the pool in lounge chairs.

“God damn. Do you see her titties?” Kiwi ogles the women as we walk up to the motel room door. The women take notice to Kiwi checking them out, and big tits exposes herself. “Holy shit, man.

It’s true what they say — everything’s bigger in Texas.” Kiwi nods in her direction, giving her a wink.

“We’re not here to get our dicks wet, brother.” Walking into the outdated, but clean room, I sit down in a chair beside the bed nearest the door, lean back, and stretch my legs out in front of me.

“Do we have an extra room, or is this it?” Fender takes a final drag from the cigarette in his hand before flicking it to the ground, snubbing it out with the toe of his boot, before stepping into the room.

“This is it,” I confirm as Fender closes the door.

“I’m not sleepin’ in the same bed with dipshit here.” Fender plops down on the bed near the bathroom. “The last time we had to bunk together in the same damn bed, I woke up with his arms wrapped around me.”

“What? I’m a cuddler.” Kiwi starts laughing, and I chuckled along with him because I know the story.

“Your morning wood was pressed against my ass, dickhead.” Fender tries to keep a straight face about it but loses it. It was some funny ass shit. Kiwi fucked with him all day about it.

“So, what’s the game plan, Prez?” Kiwi gets serious.

I check my watch. “From what I’ve been told, he gives his staff the day off every Tuesday, and I want to take advantage of no one being present during our little visit.”

“Go in, midday?” Kiwi looks confused. Usually, I wouldn’t risk it, but timing is everything. “He lives in a more rural area, located on several acres of land, so I don’t think the time of day will be an issue.”

After getting a quick bite to eat at the small diner next to the motel, we ride out to the other side of town. We case the property a few times, shocked to find this guy has no security posted anywhere; we formulated our entry plan. The only vehicle in sight, a black Bentley. You would think a high-profile

attorney, looking to run for office, would have better security. Something to protect his blackmailing ass from retaliation. Instead he has a high-end piece of shit home security system between my men and himself. To the average person looking to break into his home the system would be intimidating, but for Kiwi, it’s nothing. He was able to bypass the access code in under two minutes.

Once inside, we split up, making sure the house is empty except for our guest of honor. Making my way up the staircase, I hear muffled voices coming from the room down the hall. Fender and Kiwi find their way upstairs.

“The house is clear.” Kiwi raises one hand, holding up a piece of fried chicken, “Found the kitchen,” he grins and bites into the leg. I roll my eyes.

“His office is downstairs. Could be something useful in there,” Kiwi tells me. We hear a high pitched giggle come from behind the bedroom door, followed by a deep throated moan. “We’re about to set this motherfucker off.”

“Get your phone ready,” I inform Kiwi, who promptly retrieves it from his pocket.

Just outside the door, I turn the handle and walk right in like I own the place. In front of us, a king-sized bed and bodies moving beneath the bed sheets. I slam the door behind us. McGregor’s head emerges, clearly stunned before anger replaces the shock written all over his face seeing three grown men standing in his love den.

“What the hell is going on! Get out of my house before I call the police!” he bellows. At the sound of his panicked voice, a young woman scurries from his bed, quickly covering her naked body with a robe draped across the arm of the chair next to the bed. When I say young, I mean she barely looks legal.

McGregor moves, and I shake my head, warning him his actions are a bad idea. “You sure you want to call the police?” I taunt him, then turn toward the girl. “How old are you, sweetheart?”

“Hey! What are you doing over there?” McGregor looks past my shoulder in Kiwi’s direction. His face turns a nice shade of white. “Is he recording me? Turn the camera off,” his voice breaks with nerves.

“No. I don’t think we will.” Stepping further to the side, I look at my brother. “Kiwi, you keep that camera rollin’.” McGregor makes a motion and reaches for his nightstand. Fender advances toward him, and the lawyer throws his hands up.

“Look, I’ll pay. I have the money. Just take what it is you want and leave.” His voice cracks knowing he’s in some deep shit, with no shovel.

I loathe men like him — powerful, influential men with money, who abuse it. “How do you think the great citizens of Texas would react knowin’ their potential Governor likes dippin’ his wick in barely legal pussy?”

McGregor sticks out his chin, defiant against my words. “She’s twenty. Still, you can’t show that video.”

Taking my time, I stroll across the room, take a seat in his high-priced leather chair, spread my legs, pull a cigarette from

my cut, strike a match on the bottom of my boot, and light a smoke. Cocking my head, I eye him for a beat. "It's not your little girlfriend's age that has you shittin' your pants right now, is it?" I take a pull from the cigarette. "You don't want people knowin' you're fuckin' a judge's daughter." I flick some ashes to the floor. "You seem to have gotten yourself into a hole you can't dig out of." His face falls, and his eyes dart across the room to where the young girl is standing, her face cast down looking at the floor.

"What is it you want?" McGregor asks nervously.

"Word is, you've been fuckin' with my brothers. I'm gonna assume you weren't bankin' on how far

of a reach The Kings have." Giving him a pointed stare, I warn him. "Know this motherfucker; there ain't a place on earth The Kings can't touch." My cold words reach their mark as I watch McGregor gulp. Standing, I drop my cigarette to the floor, snubbing it out with my boot. "Besides ATF, you got any more surprises for my friends?" I question him. He nods.

"Yeah, I reported my piece of shit son's girlfriend to immigration. Sam is nothing but a fuck up and a disappointment to his family." The moment the last word leaves his mouth, I'm across the room, knocking him unconscious with a single blow to the side of his head.

"Shit, Prez," Fender moves up beside me; we stare down on McGregor. Fender shakes his head.

"Damn shame to have an old man as cold as him."

"That's not a man. That right, there is a spineless pig, who hides behind his money." My attention shifts to the young girl left standing on the opposite side of the bed, softly sobbing. "Go on and get dressed. We'll walk you out." I go easy on her. She has seen enough, more than she should have. She picks up her things and heads toward the en-suite bathroom. "And just so we're clear on a couple of things," The young lady stops and her eyes slowly lift to mine. "One; you're better than this." I point to McGregor, who moans a few times as he starts to come around. "Better than this asshole. Two; I wouldn't go talkin' about what happened here today. You go on with your

life as if you never knew this piece of shit, and you never saw us.” I warn her, and tears start streaming down her face. She nods, then disappears into the bathroom.

“What do we do about him?” Kiwi asks.

“Fender, cuff his ass to the bed. Kiwi, I want you downstairs seeing what dirt you can find in his office.” The young girl walks back out fully clothed. “Take her with you. Babysit her. I don’t want her leaving the property until we leave with her.” I turn and look back at McGregor. “We’ll be down just as soon as we finish with our new lawyer friend here. And send the video and those pictures to Jake’s man, Reid.”

“Already sent.”

“Good.”

Without questioning my motives, Kiwi guides the young woman out of the room. “What are you thinking?” Fender waits for my next move. Grabbing a pair of handcuffs, I noticed laying on the nightstand, and I use them to cuff McGregor to the bedpost. McGregor starts to wake; his eyes roll back in his head a few times before they finally settle on me.

“I’ll make sure you and the rest of that club of yours rot in prison,” he spits.

“You won’t do shit. This is what is going to happen. You’ll leave The Kings, and anyone associated with us alone, or that little video my man recorded earlier will find its way to the inbox of every local news station in Texas. We’ve got much more shit on you, so just in case you think you can sweep something under the rug remember that little fact. I got a guy down in your office as we speak.

Pretty sure he’ll find a little more dirt while he’s in there.” McGregor’s eyes widen, telling me I’m right. He yanks on his cuffed wrists, and I turn to leave.

“You can’t leave me here like this,” he looks down at his naked body, half covered with a bedsheet. “You’ll be sorry, you piece of shit,” he yells as I make my way toward the door. I pause.

“Prez,” Fender notices the look in my eyes. He knows I don’t take kindly to threats — of any kind.

Spinning on my heel, I pull my weapon from the safety of its holster, and before McGregor can blink, I have the end of the barrel firmly pressed between his eyes.

“Shit — shit — okay — okay,” he pleads.

Without saying another word, I turn and walk out of the room. I look over at Fender. “He has staff members who should be here in a few hours. One of them will find him. Make sure the judge’s

daughter didn’t leave anything behind. I don’t want her caught up in anything, should something fall back on us. We leave no other evidence we were here.”

“Got it.”

Just then, my phone vibrates inside the inner pocket of my cut. It’s a blocked number, so it can only be one person. “Brother,” I answer.

“What you got for me, man?” Jake asks immediately. I look over my shoulder at the man lying on the bed.

“McGregor won’t be a problem anymore,” I state, then add, “tell Reid to check his email. Kiwi sent a little present.” With that, I hang up.

After taking care of business, we leave the room and make our way downstairs, finding this guy’s office, and run into Kiwi in the process. “Shit, sorry, Prez,” Kiwi takes a step back. I notice he has a file folder in his right hand, and the girl standing behind him. “Found some good shit in there,” he lifts his hand. “This guy has dirt on just about every important figure in Texas.”

“Let’s get out of here. Did you clean the surveillance feed?” I ask as we exit through the back door, we entered in.

“No one will ever know we were here,” Kiwi confirms.

I send Kiwi and Fender down the driveway where the bikes are parked in the woods so we wouldn’t be heard earlier and

walk the young girl to her car. She opens her door and slides in.

Leaning down, I ask her, “McGregor have something on your dad?” She hesitates to answer me. Her lips quiver and she finally explains.

“I thought I could sleep with him, get some dirt on him. Play him at his own game.” She wrings her fingers together. “I would have taken it all the way today if you and your friends hadn’t busted in.” Her eyes lift to mine, tears streaming down her face. “I guess I should be thanking you.”

“You remember what I said before. No, talkin’.”

She nods. “I swear I won’t say a word.”

Looking over my shoulder, I can see the guys in the distance waiting for me. I look back at her.

“Get on out of here.” Taking a step back, she closes her car door, starts the engine, and pulls away. I watch her car disappear as I’m walking down the driveway. Mounting our bikes, we take off, back toward the other side of town.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### LUNA

Standing in front of the mirror, I inspect the bruises on my face. I have two black eyes and bruising along my jaw. With the way I look, I’m surprised I didn’t suffer any broken bones. Turning away from the mirror, I reach into the shower and turn the water on, letting it heat up. I then strip out of the hospital gown and step into the stall. I wince as the water hits my battered body. Taking a shower is almost unbearable. Despite the pain in my ribs, I push through. I couldn’t stand to lay in my filth for any longer. Though the nurse tried to clean me the best she could yesterday, I still had dirt and blood caked in my hair. One of the nurses was kind enough to bring me a pair of scrubs since I didn’t have any clothes to change into. When they brought me into the ER, I had on sleep shorts and a t-shirt.

Those were also covered in mud and blood.



After brushing my teeth, I comb my long blonde hair before pulling it up into a messy bun on the top of my head. Glancing in the mirror one last time, I conclude this is the best I'm going to get, but I'm thankful to feel halfway human again. Turning the knob on the door, I push it open, and I am startled by the police officer standing in my hospital room. I recognize him as the officer that has been assigned to watch over me. He has yet to introduce himself, but I was able to catch a glimpse of his face last night as the doctor came by to check on me. I don't know what it is about this man, but the way he is looking at me now causes the hairs on the back of my neck to stand and a wave of unease to settle in the pit of my stomach. A moment later, he speaks. "Just came to check on you, Miss Novak," he says as I read his lips.

Swallowing hard, I nod. Something strange passes over the officer's face, just as Detective Brooks walks into the room. I can't see what she says to the officer, but by the look on her face, she is not pleased with him being in my room. Without another word, the officer turns and walks out, and I breathe a sigh of relief. Turning toward me, Detective Brooks speaks. "I have something I'd like to discuss with you. I have requested the hospital translator come down, but the nurse said it would be a few minutes."

Sitting gingerly on the edge of the bed, I ignore the burning pinch in my ribs as I reach over, grabbing the notebook and pen laying on the bedside table. *We don't have to wait. We can talk now.*

Just then, Marie, the translator bursts through the door and immediately begins to sign. "Sorry I'm late."

"That's okay," I tell her. "Detective Brooks just got here."

"Thank you, Marie, for coming on such short notice," Detective Brooks says then brings her attention back to me. "First things first. Here you go," she hands over my purse. "This was recovered from the Savage Outlaw clubhouse."

Taking the bag from Detective Brooks, I open it, finding my wallet and phone still tucked inside.

Feeling grateful for having my belongings back, I smile. “Thank you.” Detective Brooks smiles in return but then wastes no time getting down to business. “Rex was arrested last night. He is currently being held without bail,” she informs me and I feel a weight has lifted off my shoulders.

“That’s good news.”

“It is. But there is a large problem that comes with his arrest.”

“What do you mean?”

“We have reason to believe you are in danger. You are the only witness to the murder. He and his club know you are still alive. They know where you live and where you work.”

My body begins to shake at her words. “What am I supposed to do? I don’t have anywhere else to go.”

“I want to take you to a safe house. The judge is supposed to schedule a court date next week.

Once we get word on Rex’s court date, we will go from there.”

“Will I have to testify against him?”

Detective Brooks nods. “Unfortunately, yes. Without your testimony, he will walk.”

The thought of Rex getting out of jail and possibly killing another person or doing to another woman what he did to me causes my stomach to clench. No matter how scared I am, I can’t let that happen. “I’ll do whatever I have to. I don’t want him hurting anyone else.” I can tell Detective Brooks is satisfied with my answer.

“The doctor said you would be discharged today. I already have a safe house in place. My partner and I will escort you there. You will have someone guarding you at all times.”

“Is there a way for me to get some of my things from my apartment?”

“I don’t want to risk taking you back to your place in case it’s being watched by one of Rex’s men.

If you make a list of what you want, I will have it picked up and waiting for you at the safe house.”

Nodding, I scribble down the things I want from my apartment, including clothes, my canvases, and my paints, along with where they can be found then hand the list over to Detective Brooks. Taking the list from me, she stands. "I'll be sure to get you your things. I'll be back in a couple of hours to pick you up."

Sitting in the back seat, I gaze out the tinted window of an unmarked sedan while Detective Morgan drives. I was relieved to find out the officer guarding me at the hospital would not be the one staying with me at the safe house. Instead, that task will go to Detective Morgan who looks to be in his fifties. I like him. His calm demeanor puts me at ease. With my thoughts drifting all over the place, I continue to stare out the window. I have no clue where we are going. We left the town I live in about thirty minutes ago and I'm pretty sure we have passed the same small grocery store at least three times. My guess is Detective Morgan is being extra cautious and making sure we are not followed.

Before leaving the hospital, my phone was taken from me. Detective Brooks was worried it would be traceable. My cell is not something I hold much importance to. I only use it for texting my employer. I have been working at a daycare center for hearing impaired children since I was eighteen. My boss and only friend, Jade, took a chance and hired me on the spot the day I walked into the center. I tried to get Detective Brooks to let me stop by there and let Jade know I was okay and what was going on, but I was told it would be too dangerous. Rex could have one of his men watching the center.

Detective Brooks said the fewer people involved, the better. In the end, I agreed with her. I would never forgive myself if something happened to Jade.

A minute later, I'm brought out of my wandering thoughts when we pull into a residential neighborhood. This is not what I was expecting. I figured we'd be staying in a more secluded area.

Maybe hiding in plain sight is the smartest move. Either way, I have no choice but to trust the detectives know what they are doing. We make several turns before pulling up and parking in

front of a quaint Spanish style home. Stepping out of the car, I peer down the street to my right to see a few kids riding bikes. It seems like a typically quiet neighborhood. Closing the door, I make my way around to the trunk of the vehicle along with Detective Morgan, who helps me with my bags. True to her word, Detective Brooks had everything on my list retrieved from my apartment.

When the three of us walk into the house, Detective Morgan motions for me to follow him down the hall and to a bedroom where he places my bags on a full-size bed. Detective Brooks trails in behind us. Coming to stand in front of me, she speaks. "This will be your room. Detective Morgan will be across the hall. You are not to go outside. Detective Morgan is not to leave you. If you need anything, you let him know, and he will have someone bring it. Do you have any questions?" she asks.

I shake my head, no.

Reaching over, Detective Brooks gives my arm a squeeze. "I know you are scared and completely out of your element, but I want you to know we will do everything within our power to keep you safe.

Let's see what the judge says next week at the hearing, and we'll go from there. Until then, take this time to heal and rest."

OVER THE NEXT WEEK, THE DAYS TICK BY AT A SNAIL'S PACE. EACH DAY IS THE SAME. I SPEND MOST OF

my day held up in my room painting, and each time I venture out, Detective Morgan greets me with a friendly smile. We have engaged in a few casual conversations here and there. He has not shared too many details about his life, but I have learned he is a married father of three. When he spoke of his family, I felt a surge of guilt knowing I am the reason he is not with them now. He saw the look on my face and quickly assured me he often has these types of assignments and that he and his wife are used to it by now. Deciding to turn in for the night, I clean my brushes and put my paints away. Standing from the stool in front of my easel, I stroll over to the dresser and grab my pajamas before heading down the hall to the

bathroom for a quick shower when suddenly the bedroom door is pushed open, and I am startled by Detective Morgan's abrupt entrance. By the look on his face and the gun in his hand, I know something is not right. I see his lips move as he says five words.

"We have to go now."

I don't question him as he grabs my arm and ushers me down the hall, through the kitchen and out the door that leads to the garage where I see a car. I swiftly climb into the back seat where Detective Morgan gives me the signal to lay down. Jumping into the driver's seat, he shifts the car in reverse, where we swiftly peel out of the garage. Bile rises in my throat when I feel shattered glass hit my back. I throw my arms over my head, tucking further into myself.

Taking a chance, I peek up toward the front of the car to see an arm raised over my head as Detective Morgan effectively uses his left hand to steer while he fires several shots out of the rear window of the car toward whoever is behind us. When I feel myself start to panic, I close my eyes and begin counting backward from one thousand in my head. This is a method I have used to calm myself since I was a child. I do my best to center myself and concentrate on my breathing. By the time I reach 157, I feel the car come to a stop.

Lifting my head, I see Detective Morgan exit the vehicle. He pulls open the passenger door and motions for me to get out. Noticing my frazzled state, he grabs my arm and helps me. Looking around

at my surroundings, I notice we are behind a gas station.

On wobbly legs, I'm led to another car. Sliding into the front seat, I buckle up. When we pull back out onto the main road, Detective Morgan retrieves his phone from his suit jacket. I see his mouth moving, but I'm unable to make out what he is saying. Ending the call, he tucks the phone into his pocket then looks over at me. "It's going to be okay."

Roughly thirty-two hours later and I'm passing a sign that reads Polson City Limits. Detective Brooks and Detective Morgan are escorting me to a different safe house. This one is

hundreds of miles away from Arizona and from the Savage Outlaw. After the safe house was compromised and Savage Outlaw once again tried to shut me up permanently, Detective Brooks informed me she got in touch with an old friend who works at a place called New Hope House in Polson, Montana. There is a woman named Sofia Torres who runs the home.

New Hope is a place for women who are needing to escape their old lives and wanting a fresh start. In my case I don't need a new life, I just need a place to hide. Pulling up in front of a coffee shop, Detective Morgan puts the car in park, and the three of us step out. Detective Brooks turns to me. "We are meeting my friend Dr. Kendrick. She's a therapist who works at New Hope House."

I give her a slight nod, and the three of us make our way into the shop — the bell over the door chimes, alerting the woman standing behind the counter to our arrival. The young woman behind the counter offers us a warm smile then says something to Detective Brooks who answers her back as she points to her right where a woman whom I assume is Dr. Kendrick is sitting at a table.

Walking up to the table, Dr. Kendrick stands and hugs Detective Brooks. The two exchange a few words before she turns her attention to me. "Hi, Luna. I'm Dr. Kendrick. It's nice to meet you."

I pull out my small notepad and pen from my hoodie pocket. *It's nice to meet you too. Thank you for agreeing to help me.*

Over the next hour, the four of us discuss the details of my stay at New Hope. I found out before the decision was made to come to Montana that the judge scheduled Rex's trial date six months from now. With Savage Outlaw gunning for me, the best thing was for me to get the hell out of dodge. Once the game plan has been hashed out, we exit the coffee shop and go about gathering my things and transferring them from one car to the other. When Detective Morgan pops the trunk to his car, I'm shocked to see everything of mine that I left at the safe house is here. I turn to him, and he winks. He knows how important my art stuff is to me. I'm lost without my canvases and paints.

Once my things are loaded, I part ways with Detective Brooks and Detective Morgan. They both promise to keep me and Dr. Kendrick updated on all the happenings with Rex and the trial. The drive to New Hope House is quick and it's late afternoon when we arrive. The moment we park I don't waste any time climbing out and walking around to the trunk where I begin pulling my things out the same moment Dr. Kendrick steps up to help. She makes it a point to look directly at me when she speaks. "You'll like it here. Sofia is very kind."

With my hands full, I offer a small smile and follow her inside the house where she leads me through the living room and down the hall to a bedroom. Placing my bags on the bed, I grab my notebook. *Thank you.*

"You're welcome," she replies. "I think Sofia is about to make dinner. Would you like to join her and Emma? I know they both are anxious to meet you."

*I'm not hungry. Would it be okay if I just settle in and get some rest?*

Dr. Kendrick gives me a look of understanding. "Sure. Get some rest and make yourself at home.

I'll stop by in the morning to see how you are doing. I'll let Sofia know you are turning in for the night.

Her room is just across the hall if you need anything. She would want you to make yourself at home

while you're here."

*Thank you for everything.*

Luckily Dr. Kendrick didn't take offense to my wanting to be alone, and hopefully, Sofia and Emma won't either. The way Dr. Kendrick speaks of Sofia she sounds like a good person, but I'm just not ready to socialize yet. This past week has been a whirlwind. I haven't had a chance to wrap my head around everything that has taken place. Witnessing my now ex-boyfriend murder someone, him trying to kill me, me finding out Rex is not who I thought he was and now his club coming after me at the safe house is not exactly what I had in mind for my life. I've been completely uprooted from my home, from

everything I know, taken out of my comfort zone and dropped in the middle of nowhere Polson Montana. To say I am overwhelmed to the point of exhaustion is an understatement.

Deciding I want to get lost in my head a bit and forget the world around me; I set my easel up in front of the bedroom window next to a chair sitting there and place a blank canvas on it. Next, I dig through my bags until I locate my paints. Sitting on the chair, I let my mind drift while my hands go to work.

Painting is something I discovered when I was twelve. I took an art class at school and became addicted to it the moment the paintbrush touched my hand. I've had numerous people tell me I'm good at it, and I should be selling my art, but I don't paint to make money. I paint because I love it and it centers me. Painting is like breathing for me. It's like my therapy. I think if painting became my job, I wouldn't enjoy it as much. I view it as something just for me. I have no desire to share my work with the world. Gazing out the window at the mesmerizing Montana sunset, I watch as the sun begins to disappear behind the mountain. With my inspiration in front of me, I continue with soft strokes as I fill the blank canvas with shades of orange and purple as I leave my troubles behind. At least for tonight.

THE NEXT MORNING, I WAKE FEELING A LITTLE BETTER ABOUT MY SITUATION. I NEED TO MAKE THE

most of my temporary home. Dressing in a pair of black leggings and a sweater, I open the bedroom door and peak out. I don't see anyone, so with my toiletry bag in hand I find the bathroom down the hall. Once I have taken care of business, I store my bag in the cabinet across from the sink. Stepping out of the bathroom, I make my way into the kitchen and find a woman with long brown hair standing at the sink. Spinning around, she looks stunned for a moment then offers me a smile. This woman seems to be somewhere around my age, has a glowing olive complexion and beautiful brown eyes.

Wiping her hands clean on a towel, her face lights up as she introduces herself. "Hi. Nice to finally meet you. I'm Sofia."



For a second, I forget she doesn't know sign language, and I begin to sign. I feel bad when I see her face fall. Retrieving my notebook from the pocket of my sweater, I glide the pen across the paper.

*Good morning. Sorry for not introducing myself last night. My name is Luna.*

“That’s okay. I get it. New place and all. Would you like some coffee?”

*I would love some.*

Sofia motions toward the table for me to take a seat. After fixing the drink, she places the steaming mug in front of me.

“What do you like in your coffee?” she asks.

*I like it cold — milk, sugar, and ice.*

Sofia goes about gathering the fixings for my coffee then places them on the table. She then lightly touches my shoulder.

“Will you be okay until Dr. Kendrick comes by? I have to go to work.”

At the mention of her leaving, I cut my eyes toward the French door where I see several men working in the yard. The house appears to be under construction. “Don’t worry. They are not allowed to enter the house, and I promise I will lock the doors.”

Feeling uneasy, I write. *How long will you be gone?*

“Not long. I promise. And there are only five people outside this house that have the code to get in here.” Sofia assures, and I slump in my seat, close my eyes, and take a deep breath. I am looking at her again. *Sorry*, I tell her.

“Never apologize for being afraid,” she says the same moment I notice something over my shoulder has gained Sofia’s attention. Entering the room is a woman with dark hair, and her eyes are a color I have never seen before. They are brownish yellow. A color you would find on a cat. They are beautiful. Sofia introduces her as Mila. Mila has talked to Dr. Kendrick and has been by the store to pick up some things she thought I might need. She has also agreed to stay with me a bit while Sofia goes to work for which I am grateful.

THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS GO BY IN A BLUR  
WITH ONE DAY BLEEDING INTO THE NEXT. NEW  
HOPE

House is lovely, and Sofia is excellent. I've even hung out with Emma a few times, and she seems friendly enough. I've met Sofia's boyfriend Sam, and he has always offered a polite smile when he's been over at the house. I will say having Sofia's family stop by a time or two has been the most challenging for me. I wasn't told that I would be around another motorcycle club. Considering what I had gone through with Rex and Savage Outlaw, I was weary. But I quickly realized Sofia's family; The Kings, are unlike Savage Outlaw. So aside from being in a strange place and meeting new people, my biggest problem is I feel like my life is stuck in limbo. I miss my apartment and being around my things. I miss work and my friend Jade. Maybe if I could work and have something to do with my time, I'd find my days more bearable. It's not that I'm not grateful for the help and support I have been receiving, because I am. The problem is that I feel useless. I want to pull my own weight and show my gratitude to the people helping me. Sure, I help around the house by cooking and cleaning, but, in my opinion, it's not enough. I'd hate for anyone to think of me as a freeloader.

Shaking those thoughts away, I bring my attention back to the blank canvas in front of me. I'm about to bring it to life when my bedroom door opens, and Sofia walks in. My eyes widen at her disheveled appearance. Matted hair, smudged makeup, and her face bruised. Placing my things down, I shuffle toward her. I study her face a moment then put my hand on her shoulder. She looks like she's been in a fight.

"I'm going to be okay," she assures me. "A man attacked me at work today." I nod slowly letting her know I understand what she's saying. Sofia grabs my hand. The look on her face says I'm not going to like what she has to say next. "He said he knows who you are. He mentioned you by name."

I pull my hand free from hers, cover my mouth, and slowly back away. This sweet, kind woman in front of me was

assaulted, and it's my fault. My shit has followed me to Montana. Savage Outlaw found me.

"He threatened my family and me. I need you to tell me who he is," Sofia continues. Closing my eyes, I shake my head. This has gone too far. Innocent people are getting hurt. With tears running down my face, I focus my attention back on Sofia. "Please tell me something. We won't let anything happen to you, but I need to be able to tell those men out there a name or description so they can find this

guy," she points in the direction of the living room where I am confident her family is.

Taking a deep breath, I agree. Swiping my notebook from the top of the bed, I tell her what I know. *What did he look like? It could be any one of them. They go by Savage Outlaw MC.*

"I didn't see his face," she tells me. "But would it help if I told you he smelled like he smoked a carton of cigarettes a day and bathed in alcohol?" Sofia's description matches Rex's brother to a T.

*Pike. He's their VP.*

"Luna, how did you get mixed up with these guys?" She hands my notebook back over so I can answer.

*I became involved with the President. Stupid, I know. I thought he was a good guy. He treated me well enough. That all changed when I saw something I shouldn't have. He beat me. Dumped my body on the side of the road and left me for dead. I survived. Now he is sitting in jail until the trial.*

*And I am the key witness.*

Once I deliver the blow, Sofia explains we need to tell The Kings what we know. I agree and follow her out to the living room where we are met by her boyfriend Sam and a tall, bearded man wearing a cut with a patch that reads PRESIDENT. The man in front of me oozes authority. He carries a certain kind of demeanor; one that says he is not to be messed with. Trying to calm my nerves, I allow Sofia to lead me over to the sofa where we both sit. The two men begin exchanging words with Sofia. I am unable to make out what

they are saying. I know the exact moment Sofia mentions Savage Outlaw because the big burly man in front of us spits out a curse and his face looks murderous. His actions cause me to shrink back into the sofa. Sofia notices my reaction and is quick to calm me. “It’s okay. Nobody here is going to hurt you. The Kings are not like that — I promise.” I close my eyes and nod. I trust her.

Not worried about trying to keep up with the conversation, I sit patiently while the three discuss the situation at hand. An hour later I watch as the bearded man who Sofia mentioned a second ago that his name is Jake, pulls out his phone. He turns his back to me, so I am unable to decipher what is going on. By the look on his face, I know it isn’t good. A second later, Jake shocks me when he strides in front of me, crouching down to eye level. He looks me straight in my eyes, and his face softens.

“You mean somethin’ to Sofia, so that means you mean somthin’ to the club. You are now under The Kings’ protection.” The look on Jake’s face says he meant every word he said, and I have a feeling I can trust these people. Sofia is right. They are not like Savage Outlaw.

While Sam and Jake continue to pace the living room and say words I don’t understand I sit here a jumbled mess of nerves. As for Sofia, she is sitting next to me like this is just another day at the office. I guess when you’ve been around the club life for so long, you become used to this sort of drama. I don’t know how they do it. I wasn’t with Rex long enough, nor did he bring me in on his day to day business. I was left in the dark when it came to Savage Outlaw. Only now it’s not just me who is paying the price of my being naïve. With a tap on my shoulder, Sofia brings my attention back to her. She goes on to explain that we have to leave New Hope and follow the guys back to the clubhouse. That we will be staying there under their protection until The Kings can get a handle on the situation. The mention of living at their clubhouse brings out a whole new slew of emotions from me.

The last time I was at an MC clubhouse I watched a man get murdered and nearly lost my own life.

Pushing my fears away, I trust in Sofia and go along with the plan.

Sam and Jake take their leave minutes after two other men whose names are Grey and Blake arrive. Sofia said they would be escorting us to the clubhouse. As I make my way back to my bedroom to pack, Sofia follows me in. "I'll help you pack a few things." With my guilty conscious getting the better of me, I hang my head and scribble on my pad.

*I didn't mean to cause trouble. I should leave.*

"No. The club will do whatever it takes to keep you safe and find this guy." Sofia says the same moment Emma appears at the door. Emma and Sofia go about exchanging words. Sofia is no doubt telling her of today's events and about our new living arrangements. I watch as Emma frowns, and it doesn't help the overwhelming sense of guilt I'm carrying around. Countless lives are being affected because of me. I need to figure out a way to fix everything before another person gets hurt, and before I disrupt any more lives. I briefly wonder if I should get in contact with Detective Brooks, but quickly squashed that idea. No. It's time to handle this on my own. I need to leave.

Thirty minutes later, we all pile into Sofia's car as we make the drive to the clubhouse and following close behind on their bikes is Grey and Blake. The trip to the clubhouse takes about twenty minutes. I watch as Emma and Sofia carry on a conversation up front. It's times like this when I wish I could hear. Sometimes I feel left out. Not that the girls are doing anything to exclude me intentionally, but it still sucks, nonetheless.

Turning right, Sofia pulls onto a dirt road. We drive for about a mile before we come upon a closed gate. Sitting behind the entrance is a large compound surrounded by a tall fence. You would think we arrived at a maximum-security prison. The gate slides open, and Sofia pulls up to the side of The Kings clubhouse and parks. Grey and Blake park their bikes then promptly help us ladies with our bags. I unintentionally flinch when Grey goes to help me and curse myself when I notice a look I can't decipher cross his face. He motions to Sofia, who comes to stand beside me while Grey and Blake lead us inside.

I appreciate the fact that Sofia has taken hold of my hand to keep me calm as we walk inside.

When we step through the doors, I survey the room. It looks to be a large common room equipped with a couple of pool tables and a bar along with a sofa and a few chairs. It's a far cry from the Savage Outlaw clubhouse. Rex and his men lived like animals. The Kings clubhouse is clean and carries only a hint of cigarette smoke. Sofia grabs my attention and motions up the stairs. "All the rooms are located upstairs." Emma and I follow Sofia upstairs. She guides me to the room where I'll be staying. "I'm going to take Emma to her room, then I'll come back and check on you," Sofia says before she leaves, allowing me to get settled.

Once she closes the door behind her, I toss my bags on the bed and plop down on the edge. Three moves in one six weeks. That's a record, even from when I was a foster kid. Determined to make the best of my situation until I can come up with a game plan to get out of here, I go about unpacking a few things.

Finished putting my things away, I stand at the bedroom window and stare out at the lush green grass. Some of the club members must have children because I see a giant swing set with an attached slide along with what looks like a sandbox. A smile tugs at my lips at the thought of children. I work with children every day at the daycare center, and I miss seeing their faces. I'm brought out of my memories when I sense I am no longer alone. Turning, I see Sofia standing at the door. Behind her is a woman dressed in sexy clothes and covered in an array of tattoos. She's beautiful. "Luna, this is Raine," Sofia introduces, and I give her a small wave. When Raine lifts her hands and begins to sign, both Sofia and I are shocked. I'm also thrilled as hell. It feels like forever since I've been around someone who I can communicate with. Without skipping a beat, I sign back. A moment later Sofia smiles and excuses herself, leaving Raine and me to talk.

"I heard a little about what you are going through. I'm so sorry," Raine says.

“Thank you. I only wish my past wasn’t causing problems for everyone here. If I thought any of this would have happened, I wouldn’t have come.”

“Nobody here blames you. It’s not your fault. You can’t control other people’s actions. Just know The Kings will take care of everything. Trust me; you won’t find a better group of people. The Kings family is the most loyal I’ve ever met. You’ll see when you get to meet the rest of them later. I know you’ve already met Sam, Jake, Grey, and Blake, but that’s not even half the family.”

“Are you with one of the members?” I ask.

Raine gives me a smirk. “No, honey. I’m one of two club girls. Ember and I tend to the unattached brothers.”

Reading between the lines of ‘tend to,’ I don’t ask her to elaborate. I’m pretty sure I get it. Besides, I’m not one to judge and Raine has been nothing but amazing since we’ve met.

“Anyway, I hope they all know how grateful I am for their help,” I change the subject.

“I’m sure they are,” Raine smiles. “No worries, Luna. You’re in good hands here.”

THE NEXT MORNING RAINE COMES TO MY ROOM  
INVITING ME TO EAT BREAKFAST WITH HER.  
HAVING

her by my side has made my stress level decrease immensely. As we sit at the table along with Sofia, Sam, Grey, Blake, and a woman named Lisa, Raine helps to keep me clued in on the current conversation. Sofia and Emma have a doctor’s appointment today, and Sofia is trying to assure me I don’t have to come. But I am sick of being scared, so I am adamant about coming along with them today. My response earns me an approving smile from several people in the room. Since Lisa, who happens to be an old lady of one of the members, was kind enough to cook breakfast, me, along with Emma and Sofia, offered to clean the kitchen. With the three of us working together, it doesn’t take long to complete the task. Once we finish, we head out to the main room of the

clubhouse where Sam and Grey are waiting to drive us to town.

The morning flies by, and the appointments didn't take long since their doctor is the wife of one of the members. She has her practice in town. I have to say the more time I spend with these people, the more I am surprised. Our last stop of the day before heading back to the clubhouse was The Cookie Jar. It turns out the beautiful red-headed woman who owns the bakery is Jake's wife, Grace.

I'm staring out the car window at the green pastures and breathtaking mountains after leaving the bakery when suddenly all hell breaks loose. The SUV we are riding in swerves, and my body is jerked to the left the same moment one of the SUV windows shatters, spraying broken glass everywhere. Bracing my hands on the seat in front of me, I take in the stricken looks on everyone's face. That's when I cut my eyes out the window to see a man hanging out the window of a dark blue sedan pointing a gun at us. Bringing my attention back to Sofia, I watch as she climbs over the seat and motions for Emma and me to get down on the floorboard. Doing as instructed, I tuck myself into a ball and cover my head with my arms. I get a sense of déjà vu as the memory of this exact thing happened just a few weeks ago. While Sofia, Emma and I huddle together, we continue to get jerked around as shattered glass continues to fly all around us. Peeking through my arms, I see Sofia on the phone; hopefully calling for help. It's weird how something can happen in slow motion yet so fast because the next thing I know is we come to a stop on the dirt road leading to the compound as the SUV is engulfed in a tide of dust. My heart feels as though it's going to beat right out of my chest.

Experiencing complete and utter chaos as a deaf person is much different than those around us.

Because I don't have the sense of hearing, it causes my other senses to heighten. Although I can't listen to what's going on, I feel it tenfold. The tension and fear in the air surrounding us in so thick it's suffocating.



Clutching the headrest in front of me, I raise up to look at my surroundings to find Sam and Grey with their doors open and their weapons drawn. Seconds tick by before Jake and another man I have yet to meet emerge from the cloud of smoke. We breathe a sigh of relief as both back doors are yanked open. Sofia launches herself into Sam's arms the same moment Grey starts fussing over Emma. A wave of jealousy comes over me as I watch both women receive special attention. I'm not mad about it, but I do envy it. I thought I had found that with Rex. Now I'm left wondering if it's something I'll ever have. A man who looks at me the way Sam looks at Sofia; like she is his whole world. He would walk through the rigid depths of hell to give her what her heart desires.

The men waste no time ushering us back to the clubhouse, and it doesn't take long for the rest of The Kings family to show as Jake declares lockdown. Sofia takes the time to walk me around to make introductions with the rest of her family, who start arriving shortly after we do. She begins with a gorgeous brown-haired woman named Bella along with her sister, who looks like her opposite being tall with blonde hair. Bella is married to the club's VP, Logan while Alba is married to the club's Enforcer, Gabriel. When I asked which one, they pointed across the room and said the grumpy looking one with a beard. Next, we stopped over by the bar and said a quick hello to Mila who I had already met when I first arrived at New Hope House. I found out her husband's name is Reid, and he's the club's Road Captain. Turning to me, Sofia says, "the only guy left to meet is Quinn."

Not missing a beat from her place beside me Raine translates when I start to sign. "Is Quinn the one married to the doctor?"

"That would be him," she smiles. "Other than Quinn, this is my family," Sofia spreads her arms, obviously proud of the company she keeps as she should be. They're all great.

"You're fortunate to have them," I tell her. And she is. I used to dream of having a family, but by the time I aged out of the system, I gave up on the notion. Taking one last look around at all the men, women and children milling around, I turn back to Sofia. "Would it be okay if I go to my room?"

“Sure. I’ll check on you in a minute. I’m just going to make sure nobody needs help with anything.”

Nodding in agreement, I give the ladies a small smile before escaping to my room. Keeping her word, Sofia arrives fifteen minutes later to check on me.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RIGGS**

It’s been three days since our trip to Texas, and since I haven’t heard from Jake. I’m assuming our visit took care of the problem they were having with McGregor. Needing some downtime, I’m out here bright and early, on the boat with Pop, plucking crawfish traps from the water. “These are some fat fuckers,” I look at them as I pull another trap into the boat.

“That’s some good eatin’ right there,” Pop boasts, proud of his haul. “You forget, I know these waters and all the sweet spots.”

I won’t argue with the truth. “That’s the last of them. Twenty pods, emptied, and put back in the water.”

“Good — good. This, along with what I’ll pick up from Allen’s, will be more than enough to feed our bunch.” He sits back in his seat and steers us out of shallow water.

While my grandad purges the crawfish, the men and I set up the tables and chairs outside. Other club members start to arrive not long after the grills are fired up. As I stride across the yard heading toward the shed to grab the massive boiler and propane to start the crawfish, my brother’s blue bronco slowly makes its way down the long dirt road leading to the house. After coming to a jerking stop, the engine cuts off. Piper, my niece, opens the driver’s door and jumps out.

“Uncle Abel,” she closes the door and waves.

“I see your dad is letting you drive.” I stop walking as my niece jogs in my direction, then wraps her arms around my waist once she reaches me.

“We would have been here sooner if grandpa here,” she gestures with her thumb, pointing over her shoulder, toward

Cain whose making his way toward us, “would have let me drive the speed limit.”

“It’s not your driving I have a problem with, Bean; it’s the other dipshits on the road,” my brother states.

Piper huffs then rolls her eyes. “Dad, an old couple, who looked like they were in their eighties, driving an old Cadillac, even passed us.”

“And?” Cain says utterly unaffected by her frustration.

“The old lady flipped me the bird,” Piper’s hands go to her hips. “And you did nothing besides laugh.” The banter between the two causes me to chuckle.

Cain pulls his daughter into his chest, then kisses her on top of the head. “Don’t prosecute me for protecting the most important person in my life.”

“It’s too much. Just like when you taught me how to ride a bike for the first time,” Piper mumbles.

Cain bursts with laughter, and I join him at the mention of that memory. “I mean, who wraps their kid in bubble wrap — to ride a bike — with training wheels.” Piper looks at her dad, trying her best to

act serious.

“Go see if your Gampy needs a hand in the kitchen.” I use the name she’s called him since she first learned to talk. “He’s in there cooking up his special BBQ sauce,” I tell my niece. Handing the truck keys to her dad, Piper takes off toward the house. I turn to my brother. “She’s growing up too fast.”

Cain follows me as I finish making my way to the shed. “Man, I can’t keep up. One day she’s learning to ride a bike the next she’s driving.” I hand him the large boiler. “And to make matters worse, she announced yesterday that a boy asked her to the school dance,” Cain adds.

God help the young man or any young man who shows interest in Piper. “She’s a good kid, brother, with a good head on her shoulders.” Grabbing the propane tank and base, I carry them across the yard to the patio, with Cain behind me.

“It’s more the fact that I know what’s going through the minds of these hormonal shit heads. I don’t trust them.” Cain’s face turns to stone.

I stop what I’m doing and get serious for a moment. “Piper has been raised by a bunch of bikers.

You’ve taught her how to take care of herself. She knows self-defense. She can handle a weapon as well as any of us, and most importantly, she has a dad that will move the heavens to keep her safe.” I clasp his shoulder. “You’ve done well so far. It’s time to sit back a little bit and let Piper show you that she has learned from the best and is capable of making good choices.”

Cain nods and clears his throat. “Put me to work,” he says, changing the subject.

“The crawfish could probably use another rinse. They’re in the garage.”

“On it,” Cain salutes, then turns on his heels.

Strolling over to the back door, I bend, lifting the lid on the cooler, and pluck a chilled beer from the ice bath it’s sitting in. Popping the cap off, I toss it in the trash can to my left. I’m taking a long pull from the bottle when my phone rings. Pulling it from my pocket, I look down to see Jake’s cell number on the screen.

“Hey, brother. How’s it going?”

“Not good, brother. I’m not calling for a casual chat. I need a few extra men up here. We have ourselves a situation.” Jake’s voice sounds concerned. “A young woman under our protection is wanted by another MC — Savage Outlaw. You heard of them?” Jake asks.

“Can’t say that I have, brother. How high is the threat level?”

Jake lets out a long exhale. “High. One of the fuckers attacked Sofia at work the other day. He was lookin’ for the new girl who moved into New Hope House the other week. Her name is Luna Novak.

Yesterday a few of their men tried to gun down two of my men along with the three women in the SUV

— one of those women being Luna.”

Damn. These bikers are out for blood, which means this woman got herself mixed up in something serious. “Why do they want her so bad?”

“She is the key witness to a murder committed by their President. One of the reasons she came to Hope House was to hide out until the trial.”

“How soon do you need us?”

“How fast can you get here, brother?” he asks right away with urgency.

IT TAKES US TWO DAYS GETTING TO MONTANA,  
AND BY NOON WE ARE DRIVING PAST THE POLSON

welcome sign on the edge of town. I breathe in deep, pulling in the fresh mountain air. The weather up

here is several degrees cooler, and a lot less humid. The drive out to the clubhouse brings back memories from the last time I visited Polson when Quinn was taken by Satans Reapers.

As soon as we take a left turn onto the dirt road, Jake’s clubhouse comes into view. From the looks of it, he has the entire family hunkered down already. Our bikes slow, allowing one of the members to open the gate, letting us pass. Members start filing out the front door at our arrival.

Parking our bikes, I dismount. “Hope we’re not late for the party,” I smile and offer my hand to Jake.

“Just on fuckin’ time,” he welcomes, then leads us inside, and we sidle up at the bar for a drink.

Several of the member’s old ladies appear from the kitchen area and following close behind are a few of their kids. Logan pulls his woman, Bella, into his side, as a little girl clings to her leg.

Bella smiles. “Riggs, it’s good to see you again.” She turns in her husband’s arms, placing her palm on his chest, and looks

up at him. “We’re going to round the kids up in the playroom and feed them lunch. We left a few platters of premade sandwiches on the table in the kitchen for you men to eat.” The warmth in her eyes as she looks upon him warms my heart, and for a moment, I find myself wanting the same. Kissing her forehead, Logan slaps her ass.

“Thanks, babe.” Lifting their daughter, and placing her on her hip, Bella joins the other women in gathering the kids and ushers them into another room.

“I want you to meet our newest prospect,” Jake announces just as Ember, one of the club girls’

hands me and my men a cold beer. “Prospect. Come here — both of ya,” Jake calls out, gaining the attention of a young man. The young woman at his side, as he strides across the room is Sofia. “Riggs, this is Sam, and I’m sure you remember Sofia.”

“Nice to meet you, sir.” Sam sticks out his hand, and I place mine in his, giving a firm handshake.

“Call me, Riggs.” I shift my attention to Sofia. “How ya doin’, darlin’?”

She gives me a soft smile. “Doing okay. It’s nice to see you again.”

Jake clears his throat, and his tone becomes all business.

“Sofia. Remember me telling you I had a plan in the works for Luna?” Sofia nods and her facial expressions change to worry. “I believe the best way to keep her safe is getting her out of Polson, and Riggs agreed to help.” Her eyes dart my way before looking back at Jake.

“What do you mean?” she questions.

“I want you to help convince Luna she needs to go back to Louisiana with Riggs. He’ll get her settled and keep her safe. I feel this is her best bet at starting over.” Jake informs her. Last night when I called to check in with Jake, he brought up the idea of Luna leaving town with me. I wasn’t keen on the idea of babysitting some woman, but I’d do anything to help a brother.

Once Sofia has gathered her thoughts, she sighs. “I don’t know if she will agree to any of this.

Luna is already skittish. I can only imagine how she will react after informing her we want her to leave.”

There’s no need in pussy-footin’ around the issue. A decision has been made, and this young woman I’ve agreed to take back home needs to understand there are other people’s lives at stake. Fear and thinking of yourself can’t be part of the equation right now. “Bring her out here. I want to talk to her myself.” My words come off a bit gruff and stern, but I’m not here to play games or worry about feelings. I’m here to get a job done. Sofia doesn’t hesitate. Walking away, she heads up the stairs.

I’m starting on my second drink when Sofia appears with a young woman standing behind her. I lock eyes with who I assume to be Luna. And fuck me I forget how to breathe. That’s how beautiful she is. Long blonde hair, curves in all the right places, large natural breasts that sway when she walks. Her most striking feature; hands down her eyes; the most hypnotizing shade of violet. With her head held high, even though she looks terrified, she approaches me. It takes all my restraint not to

reach out and pull her closer. Raine, the club’s other girl, steps around Luna and faces her. Sofia starts explaining to Luna what is going on, and I watch Raine use ASL to translate. Jake informed me over the phone Luna is deaf. I think him knowing about my grandmother was another factor that played into him asking this favor of me. Raine speaks for Luna as soon as Sofia finishes talking, but as Luna’s hands move, I already know what she is asking.

I watch Luna’s face as Sofia introduces me, telling her the club wants her to leave with me — to Louisiana. Her eyes dart back and forth between Jake and me, and her chest heaves, and I watch panic begins to set in as she processes everything. Sofia does her best to comfort her. “Luna, Rex knows where you are. If you stay here, you are not safe.” Luna closes her eyes, but I’ve had enough. She needs to understand this is going to

happen, and she needs to know she can trust me, and the choice the club has made.

Standing, I place the beer bottle in my hand on the bar, take a few steps forward, coming toe-to-toe with my violet eyed beauty. Putting my finger beneath Luna's chin, I tilt her head back, for her to look up at me. The contact startles her, and her eyes widen. I give her a second before communicating with her. The moment I use ASL, her mouth drops open. "You don't need to fear me, Mon Tresor. My men and I will keep you safe. I promise."

Luna takes a small step back. Her hands move, and her eyes burn into me. "I don't want to put anymore lives in danger. My mess has caused enough harm. I think it's best I leave on my own." I watch her lips tremble as she fights back the tears pooling in her eyes.

"No. The decision has been made. You're coming back to New Orleans — with me." Luna's face morphs into anger, and her eyes narrow to slits.

"You have no right to decide something like that. You can't boss me around," her hands rush to say, before crossing her arms under her breasts, causing them to push up, and my eyes drop briefly. I have to admit; she has grit and sass. I like it.

Stepping into her space, I grin. "Looks like I just did, Sweetheart." Placing her hands on her hips, she huffs in frustration. Before she can protest any further, Jake interjects.

"That's enough."

Quinn says something, but I have no idea what. I'm too focused on the woman standing before me.

I can tell she is going to test me. Luna holds my stare for a few extra seconds in defiance. I find myself intrigued by her strength and ability to push past the fear I see hiding beneath the surface. She's broken. Something deep inside me wants to protect what remains. Jake grabs my attention after Luna turns on her heels and walks away.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

LUNA



What a jerk. Who does he think he is? What kind of person waltzes up to a stranger and demands anything of them? Apparently sexy, bearded bikers named Riggs is that kind of person. Riggs, with his piercing blue eyes and a beard so lush I want to run my fingers through it.

*Damn it, Luna. Stop lusting after the man.*

I've been pacing the length of my bedroom the better part of an hour, trying to get a handle on my emotions. Tonight, I was introduced to the President of The Kings of Retribution Louisiana Chapter.

Jake informed me the club has concluded it would be in my best interest to leave Polson with that infuriating man. The thought of going anywhere with Riggs causes my belly to flutter, but I quickly push aside those feelings because I refuse to be pawned off on another person. I won't allow my problems to become someone else's burden. Especially since Savage Outlaw has made it abundantly clear, they will hurt whoever stands in their way when it comes to me. It's one thing to be continuously uprooted from my life, but it would be selfish of me to keep allowing strangers to do the same.

Rex and his club are my problem. It is time to distance myself from these people before another person gets hurt. Earlier I was in the kitchen fixing myself a snack, and I was able to sneak a peek at the security code Lisa used when exiting the door that leads to the backyard of the compound. Once everyone turns in for the night, I'm going to sneak out. I remember passing a bus station on HWY 93

when first coming into town. I don't have much cash, but I have enough for a ticket and a few meals. I haven't a clue where I am going. The extent of my plan is to get out of Montana. I'll figure out the rest once I'm on the bus. I know I am playing a dangerous game, but I have no other choice. These people have come to mean something to me, and I can't bear the thought of something happening to them.

With my mind made up, I stride over to the dresser and begin pulling out a couple pairs of jeans, a few t-shirts, and some

undergarments. I don't need much since I'll be leaving out of here on foot.

Grabbing the bookbag on the floor next to the bed, I shove my clothes inside. Once I have packed what little I can take, I decided to take a shower. With the day I have had all I want to do is sleep. I'm exhausted. But if I lay down now, I will miss my opportunity to slip out of the clubhouse without being caught. Hopefully, a hot shower will help ease some of the tension in my body.

Making my way into the en-suite bathroom, I turn the knob in the shower on and let the water heat while I strip out of my clothes. Once the bathroom fills with steam, I step into the stall and under the spray of water. The heat, along with the pressure beating down on my shoulders and back instantly relaxes me. Letting out a deep sigh, I dip my head under the stream and allow some of the days stress to leave my body. Without wanting to, my thoughts drift back to Riggs. For whatever reason, I can't

seem to shake this strange feeling I get when I'm in his presence. The same feeling I get when I close my eyes and picture his handsome face along with the bluest eyes I have ever seen, and it causes a tingle to creep up between my thighs. One of want and need — a need I have never experienced, not even with Rex. Everything about Riggs puts Rex to shame.

Riggs stands at 6 ft 3 in, has brown hair cut close on the sides leaving it long and untamed on top.

He was wearing a black t-shirt that stretched tight across his chest, showing off his impressive form along with a full sleeve of colorful tattoos on one of his well-defined arms. Riggs isn't built large. I would describe him as having more of a swimmer's build. The way he carries himself is what stands out the most. He stands tall and full of confidence. Riggs is a man that knows himself and what he brings to the table. He oozes power and control.

I am so far in my head; I hadn't realized I was rubbing my thighs together, trying to alleviate the ache between my legs.

My nipples are rock hard, and my breaths are coming out in pants. Ignoring my buzzing hormones, I cut the water off, pull back the shower curtain and step out of the stall. Using a fluffy blue towel, I go about drying my body then getting dressed. When I step out of the bathroom, I cut my eyes over to the bedside table to see the clock sitting there reads 12:47 am. Wanting to wait at least a couple more hours before slipping out, I decide to paint. The second I pick up a brush the peacefulness I crave sets in just as it always does, and I get lost in the colors I splash across the once blank canvas.

Setting my brush down, I bring my hands up to my eyes, rubbing them with my palms as I let out a yawn. Turning my head, I check the time once again to see it is now 2:17 am. With any luck, everyone will have gone to bed, and I can sneak out. Picking my backpack up off the floor, I sling it over my shoulder and walk over to the bedroom door. Opening the door, I peer down the hall to my right and then to my left. Confident I'm in the clear; I stroll down the hall. When I get to the first step of the stairs, I see the lights are off in the main room of the clubhouse. With a deep breath, I descend the steps. Turning left at the end of the stairs, I head straight for the kitchen. I push my way through the double doors and up to the alarm panel next to the door that leads to the backyard of the compound, where I type in 79408137 disarming the alarm. With one last look over my shoulder, I suck in a deep breath. It's now or never. I may not be making the wisest decision, but it is the only one I know that will keep my new friends safe.

It doesn't take long to make my trek across the compound in the cold night. My heart begins to beat a mile a minute, the closer I get to the tree line at the back end of the property. It's pitch dark, and the only thing lighting my way is the moonlight. I have always been a bit afraid of the dark. Now here I am about to saunter into the woods when I can hardly see my hand in front of my face. A bear could come up and attack me from behind, and I'd never hear it coming. Just then, with my wild imagination and fear getting the best of me, a hand grabs hold of my arm. With lightning reflexes, I twist my whole body around and using the backpack in my hand; I

swing it at the person behind me. I am stunned when I see Sofia's wide eyes staring back at me.

"What are you doing?" As my eyes well up with tears, my only response is to shake my head as I try to break free from the hold she has on my arm. Turning away, I go to pull free once again when her fingernails dig into my arm, bringing my attention back to her. I'm shocked when I see Pike standing behind Sofia with the barrel of his gun pressed against her head. Sofia looks me directly in my eyes as I watch her mouth move. She says one word. "Run."

With tears streaming down my face, I refuse to do as she says. Pike steps to Sofia's side and snaps his fingers in front of my face, drawing my attention to him. "I know you can read lips, bitch. So, pay attention. Keep walking in that direction," he gestures toward the woods straight in front of us. "Or you'll watch her take her last breath." Pike makes a show of nudging the gun further against Sofia's temple. Sofia mouths the word 'run' once again in hopes I will save myself, but I don't listen. I have to do what Pike says. I refuse to risk Sofia's life to save my own. Doing as I am told; I begin making the trek through the foggy early morning mist and past an old shed.

Without warning, Sofia is shoved against my back as we both lose our footing and stumble. We grab each other's hand in support at the same time Pike steps in front of us, pointing his gun. "I said, keep moving." I look at Rex's brother with disgust. Pike is tall and broad. He has short dark brown hair. The left side of his face is scarred pretty bad. I remember Rex telling me something about fire when they were teenagers. Pike spits something out at Sofia when he catches her staring at his face then cracks his palm against her cheek, causing me to flinch. Showing her defiance Sofia lifts her head and glares at Pike. He says something else to Sofia, and the only words I catch are 'guys' and

*'breaking.'* A lump forms in my throat with what he could have meant.

Hand in hand, we push forward and walk about thirty more feet until we stop at a fence where two guys wait for us on the opposite side with their weapons drawn. The two men exchange words with Pike. He then cuts his eyes over his shoulder and with the fog lifting, I can see the outline of the clubhouse in the distance. Pushing me forward, Pike says, “crawl,” while pointing down to where the fence has been cut allowing enough room for the three of us to belly crawl through. I give Sofia’s hand a squeeze before I drop down to the ground and work my body through the hole in the fence. Next, Sofia follows behind me. Once she clears the fence the two assholes on our side, snatch her up off the ground then aim their guns at her. I try to concentrate on what is being said, but they are talking too fast. From what I can gather, they are saying Sofia was not part of the plan and the two men arguing with Pike do not like the fact Sofia is here right now. One of the men; the one with red hair forces Sofia to her knees. His actions cause me to panic when he presses the barrel of his gun between Sofia’s eyes. *Oh, God. He’s going to kill her right here, and it will be my fault. I did this.* The next thing I know Pike points his gun at his friend. After an intense exchange of words, the redhead lowers his weapon.

Disappearing through the trees of the dense forest, we walk for nearly half a mile before coming out on a narrow dirt road where a rusted blue van is parked with the back door already open, and we are instructed to climb in. Sofia and I sit together with our backs against the wall of the van. Pike along with a bald guy I don’t recognize, hop into the van. Pike closes the doors while the redhead climbs into the driver’s seat. I cut my gaze around the van. Maybe there is something I can use as a weapon. Sadly, the van is bare besides a couple of wooden crates which Pike and the bald guy are using to sit on. Pike narrows his eyes at me like he knows what I’m thinking. He continues to stare at me a moment before the van starts moving and we drive down the bumpy dirt road. Soon the ride turns smooth as we turn onto the highway. Twisting my head, I look at Sofia the same moment she looks at me. Her facial expression mirrors my own. We are both scared.

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch movement and snap my head in Pike's direction. I watch as he takes a cigarette from the front pocket of his shirt, places it between his lips, and lights it. Cocking his head to the side, he blows the smoke out in mine and Sofia's direction. I train my eyes on his mouth as he begins to speak. "I never understood what my brother saw in you." He takes another drag. "You should be dead right now. If it were up to me, you would be. However, my brother still has a hard-on for you." Pike flicks the ashes to the floor of the van. "He's getting out soon. Did you know that?" he smirks, and I want to punch him in his ugly smug face. "Rex has plans for you," he grins.

Next, he shifts his attention to Sofia. Pike leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees, getting within inches of her face. I can't make out what he is saying to her, but I have no doubt it's not

pleasant. Pike then reaches out and grabs hold of Sofia's knee, and I watch as she sneers, knocking his hand away. Pike grabs her again, this time, forcing his hand between her legs. I swallow the bile that rises in my throat as he touches Sofia. Just as I am about to take action, Sofia brings her foot up and kicks Pike square in his chest. Her action causes him to stumble and fall back on his ass. But Pike recovers, and within seconds he is back on his feet lunging for Sofia. Snatching a hand full of her hair, he tosses her across the van as if she were a rag doll.

Crawling across the floor of the van, I make my way over to Sofia. The two of us huddle together for the rest of the ride.

I don't know how long we are on the road before the van comes to a stop and the back door is jerked open with five men staring at us. Sofia and I are ushered out of the back and lead inside a large industrial building where plastic covers the broken windows. A man; one I remember meeting months ago at the Savage Outlaw clubhouse back in Arizona leads Sofia and me passed a massive rusted saw blade, a giant conveyor belt, then up a set of old stairs while Pike walks off in the opposite direction with the bald man from the van. Once we reach the second floor overlooking the main room of the

warehouse, we are taken to what looks like a closet. By the smell coming from inside, it was used to store cleaning supplies. It smells of pine, mold, and something rotten. I don't have time to take in much of my surroundings before I am shoved into the closet along with Sofia.

Squeezing his way into the tight space, the guy who pushed us in here pulls a pair of handcuffs from his back pocket. Then the redhead from before reaches through our bodies, grabs Sofia's wrist, and by the grimace on her face gives it a painful twist. He lifts her arm above her head and holds it against the metal bar sticking out of the wall above us. Grabbing my wrist he places it next to hers.

The handcuffs are slapped on our wrists, locking us together. Both men then step out of the room.

Neither one spares us a second glance before the door is shut, leaving us in utter darkness with nothing but my thoughts to keep me company. And those thoughts offer no comfort. If Rex can beat me within an inch of my life because I saw something not meant for my eyes, I don't want to think of what he has in store for me now. And then there is Sofia.

My new plan is to plead with him. That I will willingly do whatever he wants so long as he lets Sofia go. After finding out what kind of evil my ex-boyfriend is, I'd say my chances of convincing him are slim to none. You would think with Sofia being part of The Kings family, he'll let her go. Surely he doesn't want that kind of trouble. But then again, people like Rex and Pike have no respect or fear.

They are the kind of men who take what they want. They wanted me, and now they have me. Sofia happens to be collateral damage. *Think Luna. You have to figure out a way to get Sofia out of here.*

Feeling helpless, and without a clue as to what I can do to save my friend, I hang my head and try with all I am to keep from breaking down. But my efforts are fruitless as my body starts to shake, and the tears begin to spill from my eyes. My whole life, I have felt worthless and good for nothing. Now at this moment, I know that is precisely what I am. And with our

wrist cuffed together, Sofia takes my hand in hers the best she can as she senses my distress and offers her support. It makes me hate that piece of shit Rex even more than I already do because this incredibly kind and selfless woman next to me is the last person who deserves to be here. Instead of breaking down and blaming me for our current situation, she is trying to comfort me.

Closing my eyes tight, I pray The Kings find us and that Sofia, along with the rest of her family, can forgive me.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **RIGGS**

Giving up on sleep I decide to jump in the shower. It's early; still dark outside. Walking into the bathroom, I flip the light on. The reason for my current state of insomnia — my head is a mess.

Not that I am not focused on today's mission. I'm clear on that. My problem has to do with a short, curvy, blonde with violet eyes. Thoughts of her keep working their way to the forefront of my mind.

Thinking of Luna is starting to fuck with my headspace — my mojo. Reaching into the stall, I turn the water on. I strip out of my boxers and step inside the shower stall. Closing my eyes, I enjoy the hot water beating down on my flesh. Leaning forward, I brace my palms against the tiled wall in front of me, letting the spray hit my lower back.

My muscles ache from the thirty-two-hour drive from New Orleans to Polson. My body has been put through non-stop hell for weeks now, and I'm starting to feel its effects. Taking a deep breath, I relax. When I do, Luna's frightened eyes are all I see. It gutted me that her first reaction after meeting me was fear. That beautiful woman was put through hell, but I understand her weariness of bikers considering what a piece of shit her ex is. When Jake called me a few days ago asking for a favor, he told me Luna's story and what happened between her and that pussy Rex. Any man who puts their hands on a woman doesn't deserve to walk this earth. I didn't hesitate when accepting Jake's plea to help Luna out. I'd do anything



my brother asks of me. My issue lies with how this woman is getting to me. I don't live the kind of life that allows me to go the distance for any woman. Maybe bringing Luna back home with me is not such a good idea. I shake my head. Luna not coming back with me is not an option. No matter how hard I try to fight this pull I have, deep down, I know I'm fighting a losing battle. The thought of another man protecting or taking care of Luna causes emotion to burn inside of me; feelings that makes me want to murder any man who dares to take her from me.

*Fuck. Luna is not even mine.*

*Not yet, anyway.*

Suddenly, I'm pulled from my inner battle when I hear all hell break loose just outside the bedroom.

I hear Jake barking out orders and what sounds like soldiers stomping down the hall. Cutting the water off, I jump out of the shower, half-ass dry myself off, then throw on yesterday's clothes. Before I have my boots laced, there is a pounding on my door — seconds later, Fender bursts in. "Shit just hit the fan, Prez," he says in a panic. "Somethin' or someone just tripped the perimeter alarm. Both Luna and Sofia are not in their rooms. Jake has men searching the grounds now," he informs before he turns and retreats down the hall.

"I'm right behind you." I tie my boots. Yanking my cut draped on the back of the chair beside the bed, I shrug it on as I rush out of the room. By the time I make it to the main floor of the clubhouse,

Jake, along with all his men are standing next to the bar.

"What's the word?"

"Luna and Sofia were taken," Jake delivers the blow.

"How the fuck did that happen?"

"Reid pulled up the security feed. It looks like Luna snuck out through the kitchen. Not long after she left is when Sofia woke. She went to check on Luna only to find her gone and the kitchen door leading out back ajar. She caught up to Luna on the far end of the compound near the property line.

That's where they were taken. Neither of the women knew someone was out there watching and waiting. My best guess is Savage Outlaw was plannin' to blow up the clubhouse, or at least cause some distraction so they could get to Luna. I have my men out in the streets now."

"What the fuck you mean blow up the clubhouse?"

"Come with me," Jake orders.

Following him outside, Jake leads me around to the back of the clubhouse to the patio that leads inside to the kitchen. "I need you to check that shit out. I didn't want any of my men touching it. I was afraid moving it might set it off," Jake points to a table. And sitting on that table is a homemade bomb.

I can already tell from where I stand it's not a very good one. Striding up to the table, I take a closer look — *fucking amateurs*.

"I can tell you right now it's a dud. Whatever idiot put this damn thing together clearly doesn't know his ass from his elbow. The fucking thing is wired, all wrong." Picking the twelve by twelve-inch device up, I stroll past Jake. "Not for long though," I say through gritted teeth. "I'm going to need a few supplies."

"Help yourself, brother. You know where we keep our shit," Jake says as he follows me back inside the clubhouse. Taking a seat at the bar, I place the bomb on the counter in front of me.

"Kiwi," I bark.

"What do ya need, Prez?"

I spout off at least a dozen supplies I'll be needing, and Kiwi wastes no time gathering what I ask for. By the time I finish, this bomb will be ready to light up the sky. Roughly twenty minutes later, I look away from the wires I am currently fusing and peer over at Sam who is sitting to my left carefully gauging my actions. "I always bring my own toys to the party, but this one will do." After a pause, I speak again. "We're going to get our women back, brother. You can fuckin' count

on it.” I don’t know if Sam notices the fact I said *our women*, either way, he chooses not to say anything. Instead, he nods.

“Only Goddamn outcome.”

I have to say I like the kid. Leaving me to finish the task at hand, Sam steps away and goes about getting ready. It’s been nearly an hour since the women were taken, and with every minute that passes, I become more and more agitated. I’m going to tan that woman’s ass for sneaking out like she did and putting her life in danger. I understand why she did what she did. She’s been letting her guilt rule her actions. But one thing Luna needs to get through her head is her life is just as important as those she is trying to protect. As I’m adding the finishing touches to my creation, Reid shouts from his seat at the far end of the bar where he has been typing away on his computer and talking on the phone.

“We have a location!”

“Where?” Jake barks.

“Cocksuckers are held up at the old lumber mill. They were right under our fuckin’ noses when we went out that way a few days ago.”

“You have got to be fuckin’ kiddin’ me,” Jake hisses as he heads out of the clubhouse. His men, along with myself and my guys waste no time filing out behind him. Reid goes on to tell us they have

eyes on the lumber mill, and they have reported we are dealing with thirteen of those fuckers.

“Alright!” Jake bellows as he straddles his bike. “You heard the man. We have confirmed that thirteen of those motherfuckers have taken up residence at the lumber mill but be prepared for more. Always expect the unexpected. We’re goin’ in, and we’re goin’ in hot. We roll in and take those sons of bitches out. You shoot every one of them dead, no questions asked. We don’t stop until every man wearing a Savage Outlaw cut is on the ground with a bullet in them. I want to see those walls painted red.” Jake starts his engine, and we all follow suit. Nine strong, we peel out of the compound and

head in the direction of the mill with Jake and I leading the way.

With Polson being such a small town, the streets are deserted as we come barreling down Main Street. The once early morning night has now been interrupted by the rumbling sound of our steel pipes.

Spotting the lumber mill up ahead, I give Kiwi who is flanking my right, the signal to stay behind me. As we fly past the entrance of the mill, Jake and his men take off to the left where they promptly take cover behind an old eighteen-wheeler. As for Kiwi and me, we split up from Jake and his men and head right as we dodge bullets flying past us. Making our way around to the back of the large metal structure, Kiwi and I park behind a ten-foot-tall pile of logs. Climbing off my bike, I unbuckle the bag carrying the bomb and slide it over my head and across my shoulder. Retrieving my pistol from the inside of my cut, I settle my body against the logs and take a quick peek in the direction of the mill. I immediately spot two men. One is stationed at a broken window on the second floor and the second is standing guard at the door on the first.

“I clocked one at my ten and another at my six. Cover me on three,” I instruct Kiwi. With a nod, I give the one, two, three. Kiwi and I step out from behind the logs and fire. I fire a single shot at the asshole at the door while Kiwi takes out the one at the window. Keeping our eyes peeled we make our way inside the building the same time I spot Sam making his way up the stairs with Jake trailing behind him. Jake looks over his shoulder, spotting me. I slide my bag from over my shoulder then give him a nod, letting him know my intentions.

“Alright, Prez. Let’s do the damn thing so we can find your girl and get our arses out of here,”

Kiwi says while he continues to cover my back as I go to work on planting the bomb.

Retrieving the pliers from my pocket, I fuse the last set of wires. “Done,” I announce the same moment Logan finds us.

“We’re all clear. Did you two come across that fucker, Pike?” he asks his tone hard.

I shake my head.

“Shit,” Logan hisses. “Good news is Prez, and Sam found the women.”

“Where?”

Logan jerks his head. “Upstairs. Third door.”

I turn back to Kiwi. “Get our bikes and meet me out front.” Doing as he’s told Kiwi heads back in the direction we came. I give Logan a nod and make my way to get my girl. Taking the stairs two at a time, I climb my way to the second floor. I hear muffled voices at the end of the hall. I take off in a jog and stop at an open door. That’s when I spot Jake and Sam. “Did you find...” my words are cut off when I see Sofia in Sam’s arms. I cut my eyes behind him to see Jake trying to coax a scared Luna out of a closet. Walking up behind him, I place my hand on his shoulder. “I got her brother. You guys go on. We’re all clear. Our brothers are waitin’.”

“You get the, cocksucker, Pike?” Jake asks.

With clenched teeth, I shake my head. When Jake, Sam, and Sofia exit the room I waste no time getting to Luna, who is still huddled in the closet with her arm around her waist and her face cast

down. Stepping into the small space with her, I cup her face in my hands, lifting her violet eyes to mine. “Come on Mon Tresor. I got you.”

Hand in hand Luna and I walk out of the mill and up to my brothers who are waiting on us.

Stopping at my bike, I ask her, “are you going to be fearless and get on my bike?” She bites her lip and nods.

Climbing on my bike, I hold my hand out to Luna. She places her palm in mine and climbs on behind me, wrapping her arms around my waist. The moment she lays her head against my back, and I feel her body melt into mine, I know without a shadow of a doubt; I’m done for. Never has anything felt so right as the feeling of having Luna on the back of my bike. *Fuckin’ perfect.*

“Let’s go home,” Jake grunts firing up his engine. With Jake and I leading the way, the rest of our brothers fall in formation. Half a mile down the road, I reach inside my cut and retrieve the trigger for the bomb I planted. Holding it above my head, I press my thumb down on the switch. Without warning the ground shakes beneath us as the lumber mill explodes into a fiery cloud of dust, broken metal and orange flames that light up the Montana sky.

Twenty minutes later, we arrive back at the compound. The moment we pull up, the women come filing out of the clubhouse to check on their men. I help Luna climb off my bike the same moment Quinn’s woman Emerson walks up with Sofia to retrieve Luna. I give her a reassuring nod and sign.

“Go on and let Emerson look you over, baby.”

Once the women have retreated inside, Jake speaks. “I want you all to get cleaned up, see to your families and have a few stiff drinks; then I’m callin’ church. That cocksucker Pike slipped by us. We need to figure out our next move.”

“Has anyone seen Demetri?” Quinn cuts in. The men look to each other shaking their heads. Just then a black SUV pulls into the compound. “Speak of the devil,” Quinn grins. Demetri is Logan’s father and leader of the Volkov Empire. A man in a suit exits the driver side, walks around to the back of the SUV the same moment the back-passenger door opens. Demetri and his other son Nikolai exit.

“Where the hell have you been, brother?” Jake asks in a way that says he’s teasing.

Demetri Volkov smiles. “You know I like to show up bearing gifts.” Rounding the back end of the truck, Demetri’s guy makes his way over to us with a body slung over his right shoulder. The man stops in front of Jake and drops Pike’s body to the ground at his feet. Jake shakes his head and chuckles. “Always showing up and dumpin’ bodies. I got to say, brother, I like your gifts.” Jake turns to Gabriel and instructs him to take Pike to the basement while the rest of us men go inside to have a much-needed drink.

Sidling my tired ass up to the bar, one of the club girls passes me a shot of whiskey. Jake sits on the stool next to me. “You good, brother?”

“Yeah, man. I’m good.”

“I want to say I appreciate you droppin’ everything and gettin’ up here as quick as ya did. I wouldn’t have asked you to come if I felt I had another choice.”

“Anytime, brother. You know I always got your back,” I tell him.

“If you think watchin’ over Luna is going to be too much, you let me know, and I’ll figure somethin’

else out. I got a buddy —.” Jake doesn’t get a chance to finish his sentence before I cut him off.

“Luna isn’t leavin’ with anybody but me.”

Jake grins. “You have somethin’ you want to tell me, brother?”

“Not just yet,” I grunt and down another shot.

“I know that look all too well, brother,” Jake claps me on the back. “You’re fucked.”

*Tell me something I don’t know.* Needing to check on Luna, I rap my knuckles on the bar. “Got

somethin’ to do, then I’ll meet you in the basement.”

I take off up the stairs and down the hall with one thing on my mind; or should I say, one person.

Luna. When I reach her door, I twist the knob opening it. Sitting on the bed is a woman who is carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders. Closing the door behind me, I round the foot of the bed and drop to one knee in front of Luna. Placing my finger under her chin, I bring her beautiful eyes to mine. The woman in front of me looks defeated and lost. I see it in her eyes. I don’t like that shit.

Not one bit. Bringing my hands in front of me, I ask her. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Luna shakes her head. I nod. “That’s okay, baby. You don’t have to say anything. Just know that I see you. When I look in your eyes, I see everything you’re afraid to say. Most importantly, I see who you are. No more worrying. You leave all that to me. I got you now.” Luna’s shoulders sag as she lets out a breath she was holding. She doesn’t try to hold back the tears that soon start running down her face. Taking her face between the palms of my hands, I kiss the top of her head, then stand. Before I leave her room, I repeat myself. “I got you now.”

When Jake finally makes it down to the basement, Kiwi, Fender, and I decide to stand back and observe. This is Jake’s party, and he will run the show as he sees fit. It doesn’t take long for Jake to break Pike. My brother is old school and enjoys a pair of brass knuckles. Pike is now sporting a broken nose.

“Your compliance won’t save you, but it will determine how swift your death will be,” Jake snarls. “I couldn’t care less either way. Tell me what Rex knows about Luna and who is feeding him the information.”

Finally, Pike speaks. “My brother gets his intel from one of the guards at the jail. I don’t fuckin’

know which one. Besides,” Pike looks at Jake with a smile and blood dripping from his mouth, “Rex was released two days ago. It turns out the authorities don’t need that bitch of his. The charges against my brother were dropped due to insufficient evidence.”

“Fuck,” I hiss. Pike begins to cackle, and it’s grating on my nerves. The more he speaks, the more I want to end his worthless life.

“You assholes are so fucked. My brother will not stop until he gets what he wants, and for whatever reason, he wants that deaf bitch. Don’t know why he’d want that whore.” The moment those words leave his mouth, I fly across the room and tackle Pike to the floor where I begin to beat his worthless ass. After many blows to his face and body, I rein my temper in and back off. Killing this pussy is not my place. Pike heaves



in a few deep breaths, then coughs out two teeth onto the basement floor.

“Rex is coming for her. He won’t stop until he gets back what’s his,” Pike wheezes.

Standing over the pathetic excuse for a man, I spit, “he’ll never touch Luna again. I look forward to the day I send your brother straight to hell, right beside you.” With nothing left to say, I give Jake a look, then walk out of the basement with my brothers Fender and Kiwi following behind. By the time I clear the top of the stairs, a single gunshot rings out. Justice has been served — Kings style.

EARLY THE FOLLOWING MORNING, THE ENTIRE KINGS FAMILY STANDS OUTSIDE THE CLUBHOUSE SAYING

their goodbyes. Luna says a private goodbye to Sofia while Jake and his men along with myself and my brothers share a round of handshakes. “It was damn good to see ya, brother,” Jake says. “Fucked up circumstances, but it is what it is.”

“Right back at ya, man,” I return mounting my bike. “I want y’all to bring your asses down to New Orleans real soon, you hear. Show y’all how us Cajuns like to party.”

“I’ll make it happen soon, brother. You have my word,” Jake promises.

I turn my attention from one of my oldest friends to Luna, who is hugging Sofia. When she breaks away, she catches my eye. “You ready, baby?” I asked, then hold out my hand for her to take. Without breaking eye contact, Luna walks up to my bike, takes my hand, and climbs on behind me.

*Fucking ruined.*

Raising my hand, I give Jake one final salute over my shoulder as my brothers and I ride through the gate. Turning my head to the side so Luna can see my face, I bring my hand up, touch all five fingers to the corner of my mouth, then drag them up to the edge of my eye, I sign the word *home*. Luna gives me a sweet smile.

*Yeah. My girl is coming home with me.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### LUNA

We've been on the road for several hours now, and my body is starting to feel the effects. This is only my second time on a motorcycle; my first being when I was rescued from the lumber mill. Even though I was with Rex for a couple of months, he not once took me for a ride on his; not that I ever showed any interest. I always thought I'd be scared to ride on the back of a motorcycle, but surprisingly being on the back of Riggs' is not so bad. I had been tense for the first thirty minutes of the ride, but as the minutes ticked by, I slowly started to relax. I'm sure Riggs was grateful since I had such a death grip on his torso. With my body so close to his, I am rewarded with the scent of his woody cologne mixed with his own personal musk and motor oil. I hate to admit it, but I like it; I like it a whole lot.

When the bike makes a turn, I open my eyes and lift my head from Riggs' back. I've been so lost in my thoughts I haven't noticed I'd been resting up against him. I straighten my back as I try to put a couple of inches of distance in between us as we park in front of a diner. Cutting the engine to his bike, Riggs offers me his hand and helps me slide off on unsteady legs.

Climbing off, he turns to me. "You hungry?" Just then, my stomach rumbles, answering his question. He must have heard because his lips tip up in a smirk and I blush.

Looking over my shoulder, Riggs tips his chin at the other men, Kiwi and Fender who have already parked their bikes and are now roaming in our direction. Without hesitation, Riggs takes hold of my hand in his much bigger one and leads the way inside the diner. The second we step inside, our presence draws the attention of each customer. Feeling uneasy with the sudden attention I shrink away, hiding my body behind Riggs. There is something about having so many eyes on me that brings a sense of vulnerability. It's the way people look at you as if they are judging you; making you feel transparent. As if they can see straight through me to all my flaws. I know it's not true. I'm the kind of person who'd rather

blend in instead of standing out. But right now, that is kind of hard with the three bikers standing with me looking utterly unaffected by the attention they have gained. Then again, I'm sure they are used to it by now. Aside from being large men wearing MC cuts, they are also three handsome men.

Tugging on my hand, Riggs walks us passed an elderly couple sitting at a table looking at us with suspicious eyes as Kiwi and Fender fall in behind us. Stopping at an empty booth, Riggs motions for me to sit. I do without question, and he slides in beside me while his two men take a seat across from us. When the waitress steps up to us, she places our menus on the table. I also don't miss the googly eyes she makes at the man sitting beside me, then subtly pulls the front of her uniform down, like she's trying to offer up her big boobs as an appetizer. Without missing a beat, Riggs starts to sign what the waitress is saying. "Hi. My name is Becky, and I'll be your waitress. Can I get you all something to drink?"

As if our waitress couldn't get any more annoying, she swoons over the sight of a big, hot biker using ASL. I guess his ability to communicate with the hearing impaired has taken his hotness to the next level. I must not have hidden my reaction very well because I catch sight of Kiwi across from me and by the jerky movements of his shoulders, he's getting a good laugh. When I bring my attention back to Riggs and our waitress, she doesn't look too pleased with my reaction.

*Damn. I hope she doesn't spit in my food.*

Ignoring her, I tell Riggs, "I'd like a Coke, please." He relays my choice to Becky. After taking everyone else's drink order, she trots off behind the counter. I don't miss the way she puts an exaggerated sway into her hips as she retreats.

*Desperate much?*

I don't know why her flirting bothers me. Riggs is nothing to me. He's no more than a bossy, overbearing, babysitter. And I'm just a chick that was pawned off on him as a favor to the club.

Shoving those thoughts away, I turn and tap Riggs on the shoulder. When he trains those blue eyes on me, I tell him, “I need to use the bathroom.” Nodding, he stands from the booth. Scooting my way to the edge, I wait a second for Riggs to take a step back and allow me more space to pass. When I see that he has no intention of moving, I am forced to invade his personal space as my breasts brush over his arm. The contact causes my skin to prickle and my breath to hitch. When I chance a glance up at his face, his stare has turned molten, and his pupils are dilated, making his blue eyes look more piercing. The air around us becomes electric; neither one of us says a word. I cut my eyes over to our audience; I see Fender with his head cocked as if he’s trying to make heads or tails of the situation.

As am I.

Whereas Kiwi is sporting a shit-eating grin. Feeling overwhelmed and confused, I tuck tail and make a mad dash toward the ladies’ room.

Finished with my business, I exit the stall and head to the sink to wash my hands. Bracing my palm on the counter, I give my reflection a long hard look.

I look like shit with my frizzy wind-blown hair to the bags under my eyes. Shaking my head, I hold my palm under the cold water then continue to splash it on my face. I wet my hands again and run my fingers through my hair. Taking a hair tie from my pocket, I go about braiding my long blonde hair in an attempt to tame the fizziness. Satisfied with the look, I dry my hands, toss the paper towel in the trash bin, and exit the bathroom. Waiting in the hallway for me is Riggs.

“I came to check on you. Wanted to make sure you didn’t try to slip out the back.”

“I already told you, no more sneaking out.”

“I know, but still.”

“Whatever,” I sign my face going hard as I step around his tall form and make my way to the booth as he trails close behind. By the time I return to the table, the food has been delivered.

Riggs must have ordered for me while I was in the bathroom. Once I am seated, I lift the bun off the top of the burger to see that it's mushroom and swiss. *Yum*. Satisfied with the meal chosen for me, I waste no time digging in. I let out a small moan as the delicious flavor hits my taste buds. What can I say, I enjoy food, and all ladylike manners fly out the window when I'm this hungry. Setting my burger down, I reach to my right for the ketchup and squeeze a healthy amount over the top of my fries. I then pick up the mustard, doing the same. Satisfied with my ketchup to mustard ratio, I pluck three fries up at the same time and shove them in my mouth. I do it two more times before I pick my hamburger up and take another generous bite. Realizing I have three sets of eyes on me, I peer up from my plate. I

take in Riggs, Fender and Kiwi's faces. "What?"

Riggs grins and shakes his head. "Nothing, baby."

Realizing I probably look like a pig, I blush and look away from the guys feeling embarrassed.

Snatching the napkin off the table, I hang my head as I wipe the ketchup from my mouth. Placing his finger underneath my chin, Riggs urges me to look at him. "I wasn't making fun of you, baby. I love watching you eat. I even like the sexy little moans you make when you enjoy your food."

Holy shit! If I thought my face couldn't turn redder, I was wrong.

"Eat," Riggs nods toward the table. Smiling, I tuck back into my meal. Once I have finished every bite, I push the plate away the same moment our waitress returns. She smiles and places the check on the table. I also watch as she tears a piece of paper from her notepad and slides it across the table in front of Riggs. She makes it a point to make eye contact with him. When he pockets the number, my stomach sinks, and she slides her gaze over to me with a smirk.

*Bitch.*

With all the confidence in the world, she trots back behind the counter where she goes about serving a few other patrons.

Standing from the booth, Riggs grabs the check from the table and offers me his hand. I look at his face, then his hand and back at his face. Lifting my chin, I ignore his offering. It pisses me off when I see the hint of a smile behind his beard.

*Asshole.*

I follow behind him as he steps up to the counter to pay the bill, but quickly decide I am not in the mood to watch him flirt with the waitress. When I go to move past him, I don't make it two steps before I feel a secure arm snag around my waist, and I'm pulled flush against Riggs' side. Bitch Becky loses the smile she had on her face moments ago. She takes the check, and the cash from Riggs as she goes about placing the money in the register then gives him his change. Crossing my arms over my chest, I not so patiently wait for them to finish.

Beside the register, I spot the tip jar and wonder how much Riggs thinks Becky's service is worth. But instead of placing the change into the tip jar, he pockets it. Next, he takes a piece of paper out of the front pocket of his cut. It's then I notice it's the paper the waitress wrote her number on. Releasing his hold on my waist, Riggs places the paper in the tip jar then brings his hands up to sign. "My girl didn't appreciate your advance back at our table.

My tip for you; don't flirt with men while you are on the job. Especially not when the customer is with his woman. It's disrespectful." Riggs finishes leaving me stunned, and the waitress pissed. Without a second glance, he places his hand on the small of my back and ushers me out of the diner.

When we step up to where we are parked, Kiwi and Fender are sitting on their bikes, smoking a cigarette. The two of them, along with Riggs exchange a few words as I grab my helmet from its place on the back of his bike. Riggs looks at me.

"We're going to ride a few more hours then find a place to crash for the night."

"Okay," I tell him.

Straddling his bike Riggs looks at me expectantly. When I step up to him, I glance back over my shoulder at Kiwi and Fender

then back at Riggs. “Should I ride with one of the other guys? Give you a break?” I ask.

Riggs’ face grows hard. “No.” This time he doesn’t sign. He doesn’t need to. I understood him perfectly. I swallow past the lump in my throat as I place a shaky hand on his shoulder and climb on his bike behind him. If I had known my question was going to make him mad, I wouldn’t have asked. I just figured he could use a break from my clutches.

Back on the road, I last all of thirty minutes of trying to keep some distance between myself and

Riggs and not mold myself to his back as I did for the first half of our ride. But I soon lose the fight and close the gap between us wrapping my arms fully around his waist. For whatever reason, I can’t help the strange pull I have toward this man. It’s like my body seeks his warmth. Releasing a deep breath, I rest my cheek on his leather covered back, breathing in his intoxicating scent, close my eyes, and enjoy the wind on my face. I smile into Riggs’ cut when he reaches back and runs his big hand up my leg.

Darkness has fallen well over an hour ago, and the warm sun has turned into a chilly breeze. I have on jeans, but the short sleeve t-shirt is not keeping me warm, and I start to shiver. It takes Riggs all of two seconds to sense my distress, and he makes some sort of hand signal to Kiwi and Fender before pulling off to the side of the road. Cutting the engine to his bike, he slides off. I watch as he tugs his cut off and hangs it on the handlebar where he proceeds to pull off the hunter green long sleeve thermal he’s wearing, leaving himself in just a black t-shirt. “Arms up baby,” he instructs.

Lifting my shaky hands as I shiver, I ask, “what about you?”

“I’ll be fine. Now arms up.”

Deciding not to argue, I allow Riggs to slide his shirt on over my head, then thread my arms through. With his heat still engulfed in the shirt, it feels like heaven against my cold skin. Without thinking, I bring the front of the thermal to my nose and inhale his scent. When I open my eyes Riggs’

nostrils flare, and his eyes have turned molten. I'm embarrassed I have been caught sniffing his shirt.

Jerking his cut from the handlebar, Riggs turns back toward me and runs his hand through his beard, looking frustrated. I suddenly feel self-conscious again, thinking I have somehow irritated him.

Not knowing what to do, I start fidgeting with the sleeves of his shirt I have on as I try to avoid eye contact. I look up through my lashes to catch Riggs taking a step closer toward me. He braces one hand on the fuel tank and the other on the seat next to my butt as he looms over me, invading every inch of my personal space. With his face a mere inch away from mine, I have no trouble reading his lips. "Soon Mon Tresor, this is going to happen," he declares and my breath hitches. My eyes travel from his mouth up to his blue eyes and back down to his mouth. Thinking about what kissing him would be like, I suppress the urge by biting down on my bottom lip. Standing to his full height, Riggs gives me a look I can't quite decipher before climbing on his bike.

An hour later we pull into the parking lot of a hotel. Riggs says something to Fender, and he promptly makes his way inside. He returns a few minutes later with two key cards. He keeps one then passes one over to Riggs. Both Fender and Kiwi retrieve their bags from the back of their bikes as Riggs goes about doing the same, passing me mine. He then grabs my hand in his and leads us up a set of stairs. I glance over my shoulder to see Kiwi and Fender head for a room on the lower level of the hotel. Suddenly it dawns on me that Fender only had two key cards. I didn't think about what our sleeping arrangements would be while traveling. Coming to a dead stop, I pull away from Riggs. He turns to look at me, and I ask. "Don't I get my own room?"

Riggs gives me a bored look and says his favorite word. "No." Leaving no room for argument, I have no choice but to follow him as he once again takes my hand and leads us to our room. Once inside he tells me I can take a shower first and no way in hell am I going to argue that. After being on the road all day I feel grimy. Carrying my bag with me, I head straight for the



bathroom. Stepping inside, I lock the door behind me. Setting my bag on the counter next to the sink, I pull out my sleep shorts and top. Since I was only able to bring my essentials with me on the road, I had to leave my hair products behind. Luckily the hotel supplies those tiny bottles of shampoo and conditioner. They will do in a pinch. Finished with a much-needed shower, I dress in my pajamas and brush my hair, deciding to leave it down for the night.

The smell of Chinese food assaults my nose the moment I open the bathroom door; or at least I hope that's what it is. When I step out of the bathroom, Riggs has his back turned to me as he lays food containers out on the table in front of the hotel room window. Sensing my presence behind him, he turns. With hooded eyes, he doesn't hide the way he appraises me from head to toe. The way he is looking at me causes my tummy to flutter, and I'm suddenly nervous about us sharing a room. A room with only one bed. One king size bed. Finished with his inspection, he tells me, "I had Kiwi go out and get us some dinner."

Too hungry to think about our sleeping arrangements at the moment, I join Riggs at the table where we eat together comfortably without conversation. With my belly full my eyelids grow heavy as my food coma starts getting the better of me. Standing from the table, I amble over to the bed and grab one of the extra blankets folded at the foot, then make my way over to the chair in the corner of the room. The chair doesn't look comfortable, but no way am I sharing a bed with Riggs. Plopping down, I pull my legs up to my chest and snuggle into the blanket. No sooner do my eyes close when I am abruptly lifted into a pair of strong arms. The action causes me to startle, and I have no choice but to wrap my arms around Riggs' neck. Gently he lays me down on the bed. "I'm going to jump in the shower. Your ass better be in this bed when I get back." With that, he turns and stalks into the bathroom, shutting the door, not allowing me to say anything in protest.

*What the hell?*

Crossing my arms over my chest, I sit in the spot he planted me. That man is so irritating. By the time Riggs comes out of the bathroom bare-chested and in nothing but a pair of grey sweats that hang low on his hips, I'm still fuming. By the look on his face, I'd say he thinks the situation is amusing. "I like it when you pout, baby."

"I am not pouting," I tell him.

*I'm totally pouting.*

Riggs shakes his head. I roll my eyes and decide this whole exchange is not worth me losing sleep. I'm exhausted. Lifting my chin, I scoot as close to the edge of the bed as possible, yank back the blanket and turn my back to him as he makes his way to the opposite side. I try not to be too obvious as I take in his lean form, six-pack abs and the trail of hair that starts at his chest and disappears into the waistband of his sweats. I also take in the colorful array of tattoos that cover his whole right arm and shoulder as he makes his way over to the bed. When my eyes work their way up from his chest to his face, he gives me a knowing wink.

*Busted.*

Snatching one of four pillows on the bed, I place it strategically in the middle. I then pull the blanket up to my shoulders and sigh. A second later the lights are cut off, and I feel a dip in the bed as Riggs climbs in. A breeze washes over my backside as Riggs lifts the blanket, snatches the pillow from between us and tosses it to the floor. Next, a strong arm wraps around my middle, pulling me back against a firm chest. Riggs then pins me down when he places one of his legs over the top of mine. My body goes stiff as I'm momentarily caught off guard. My breath gets lodged in my throat as I try to make heads or tails of my predicament. The last thing I need is to catch feelings or become some easy lay. I don't know what kind of game this man is playing, but I'm not having any of it. Soon enough, I come to my senses and go to remove myself from his hold; only my efforts cause his grip on me to tighten. Realizing he has no plans of letting me go, I give up the fight. When Riggs feels my body lose some of its tension, he slips his palm underneath my shirt and starts to rub feather-light

circles on the spot just below my navel; the sensation causes my body to relax fully, and my eyelids grow heavy once again. Before sleep takes me, I feel a pair of warm lips kiss the back of my neck.

OPENING MY EYES THE NEXT MORNING, I FIND MY FACE BURIED IN SOMEONE'S NECK. THAT SOMEONE being Riggs. But that's not what's mortifying.

Nope.

What has me wishing a hole would open and swallow me whole is the fact that we are lying chest to chest, my face buried in his neck and my hand is literally in his sweatpants.

On. His. Ass.

*Oh my God! I fondled Riggs in his sleep. Maybe I can slip my hand out without waking him. He would never know.*

Unfortunately, that is not what happens. After I gingerly remove my hand from his ass and carefully separate my body from his, I go to roll out of the bed when a pair of bright blue eyes and a set of straight white teeth greet me. "You get enough of grabbing my ass, babe?" Riggs teases.

"I wasn't grabbing your ass."

"Yeah, you were. Had your hand down my pants all night."

I lift my hand to sign my reply only I have no response. My lack of words causes him to smile even brighter. "Shut up," I tell him as I climb out of bed and stomp to the bathroom.

I took more time than necessary in the bathroom to avoid Riggs and the whole hand in his pants fiasco. Thankfully once I appeared, he hadn't said any more about it. Now here we are, on the road again with me on the back of his bike. We are on day two of our trek to New Orleans, and we have at least another day before we get there. Riggs said we'll find another hotel tonight. If we leave early enough tomorrow, we should roll up to the clubhouse by nightfall.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **RIGGS**

Damn it's good to be home. When we roll up to the clubhouse, the gate opens for us to enter the compound, and Track and Everest are out front ready to greet us. They stride up to me the moment I cut my engine. "Prez."

"You two get the shit I asked for?"

"Yes, sir," Track answers. "Josie and Payton offered to help. We got everything on your list. The girls picked up a few things that were not on the list as well. Some girly shit they said Luna would need. Nova carried it all over to your place yesterday." I don't miss the curious glance Track sends over my shoulder to the woman who is currently on the back of my bike, but he doesn't say a word.

"Everyone here like I asked?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I got somethin' I want to say, and I only want to say it once. Go on in. I'll be there in a minute." With a nod, Track and Everest make their way back inside the clubhouse.

"Catch ya inside, Prez," Fender calls out as he and Kiwi follow behind our prospects.

I turn to Luna, who is still sitting behind me patiently, waiting to see what she should do. Her nervous energy is rolling off her in waves. "Climb off, baby," I instruct her. Once she's off, I follow suit. Luna begins to shuffle from foot to foot as she takes in her new surroundings. It takes a lot for a woman to be shuffled around from state to state and shoved in the hands of a stranger, all while having no choice but to trust them. I have to give it to my girl; she's pretty fucking brave.

Brushing my knuckles across her cheek, I get her attention.

"I'm going to take you inside and introduce you to my brothers." Luna visibly swallows as she cuts her eyes over my shoulder to the clubhouse.

"Once I have introduced you to everyone, I'll take you back to my place where you'll be staying with me."

Luna's eyes go big. "You don't live here?"

“No, baby. I have an apartment above a bar I own. I don’t live with anyone.” I watch Luna’s whole body relax with my statement. At least I know her tension was caused by the fact she believed she would be staying here at the clubhouse. No fucking way was that shit happening. My girl will be wherever I am. “Come on,” I say, taking her hand. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t love the fact Luna doesn’t resist my constant hand holding. The first couple of times I’d taken her hand she resisted, but now she acts like it’s second nature. Never in my life have I wanted to do something so simple as hold a woman’s hand. Luna is fucking different. No woman has had this effect on me before. I have no doubt when I walk into the clubhouse with her hand in mine my brothers will take notice.

All chatter halts and all eyes are on us the moment Luna, and I step inside. I cut my eyes to my left to see Wick with his ass propped against the wall and his arms crossed over his chest. His eyes move from me to Luna then down to our joined hands. I glare at him when the corners of his mouth turn up in a big shit eating grin. He knows the score. “Where the hell is Nova?” I ask seeing he’s the only person missing. Just then the door opens behind me and my brother steps through with my niece in tow. “Chill the fuck out. I’m here. I had to pick Piper up from her friend’s house.”

“Well, if you’d let me drive the car sitting in the garage at home, by myself, you wouldn’t have to worry about hauling me around everywhere, Dad,” Piper sasses back with an eye roll.

“You know the rules, Piper. Not until you’re sixteen. You still have two more months.”

“Since when do you care about the rules?”

Shaking my head, I chuckle. They have this same debate every week. “Will you two can it for a minute?”

Piper turns her attention away from her dad and beams. “Hi, Uncle Abel,” she says as she steps up to me and hugs my neck.

“How ya doin’, sweetheart?”

“Oh, you know me, I’m giving Dad a hard time as usual. Have to keep him on his toes,” she whispers so only I can hear then kisses my cheek. Luna snorts. Out of respect, I have signed every word spoken since stepping into the clubhouse. I never want Luna to feel left out of any conversation.

My Grandad was the same way with my grandmother. I talked to both Nova and Wick before leaving Montana telling them about Luna, so her being deaf has come as no surprise. The other brothers are watching the exchange with curiosity. I think the little show between Nova and his daughter has gone so far as to help Luna relax even more.

My niece turns to Luna and signs. “Hi. I’m Piper.”

Luna beams in return. “It’s nice to meet you, Piper. I’m Luna.”

Piper is not as skilled at ASL as Nova and me because she was just a little girl when my grandmother passed, but I love her more for making an effort toward my girl. Next, Nova steps forward, allowing Luna to get a better look at him, and I chuckle at the shocked expression on her face. There is no missing the fact Nova and I are twins.

“How’s it going, sweetheart? Everyone calls me Nova.”

Luna gives him a small wave. We turn our attention to the rest of the crowd. I go down the line starting with my best friend.

“That guy over there is Wick.” I then point to our two prospects who are standing by the bar. “There we have Everest and Track. You, of course, know Kiwi and Fender.”

Luna waves to everyone. When I get to the three women standing about fifteen feet to my right, I feel Luna stiffen. “These ladies are Payton, Josie, and Lexi.” As expected, Josie and Payton offer warm smiles and say hi. But Lexi stands with her arms crossed over her chest and a scowl on her face. I make a mental note to keep an eye on her and her attitude. Nova, who is standing next to me, reads my face perfectly then cuts his eyes over to Lexi. He gives me a subtle nod. He too suspects she could be trouble. My brothers know Lexi has a hard-on for me and hasn’t accepted the fact that I am not interested.

“I called everyone here for a reason. I wanted to take this opportunity for you all to meet Luna. As most of you already know, Luna is under The Kings’ protection. She will also be staying with us; more specifically at my place. Let it be known; I will not tolerate anything less than your utmost respect when it comes to her.” I make it a point to look directly at Lexi when I say these words. I then cut my eyes to each one of my men. “When I am not around, I expect you all to watch over her as I would. Also, let it be known, Luna is off limits —” I let my sentence hang. I don’t need to elaborate. I

haven’t officially claimed Luna, because she is not ready for that, but unofficially my brothers know she belongs to me. “I’m taking Luna home to get her settled. I’ll be back in an hour. I’m calling church.”

I cut my eyes to Everest. “Prospect. You’re coming with me. When I am not home, it will be your job to watch over Luna. Your ass will stay downstairs at the bar. Nobody is allowed in my place without my approval. Got it?”

“Got it, Prez. You can count on me.”

“Alright. Go on ahead. We’ll meet you there.” I chose Everest to guard Luna because next to Wick he’s the biggest motherfucker we got. He’s also shown his willingness in recent months to go the distance for the club. Everest knows the task I’ve given him is a big deal. He fucks up, and his ass is gone.

Pulling up behind the bar, Luna and I climb off my bike, and I lead her up the stairs to my apartment. When I get to the door, I use my cell to punch in the code for the alarm. I don’t have a code panel. I don’t trust that shit can’t be broken into. “Only three people have the code to this door,” I tell Luna. “Me, Wick, and Nova. I trust those two men with my life, and so can you. But you don’t need to worry because neither one of them will show up here without mine or your approval.”

“Okay, Riggs. I trust you,” Luna tells me.

Stepping into my apartment, I go about showing her around. “As you can see, it’s not much. The bathroom is there,” I point to my right. “The kitchen is straight ahead.” I gesture behind

her. “Bedroom is there.” With my apartment being an open floor plan, she can see the one bedroom I have as we stand right next to it.

“I like it,” she confesses. “It looks almost like my place back home.” A look of sadness crosses her face at the mention of her home. Wanting to wipe that look off her face, I suddenly remember the surprise I have waiting for her.

“Come on; I have something to show you.” Luna follows me to the French doors that lead to the balcony that overlooks Bourbon Street. I open the doors; Luna brings her hand up to her mouth and lets out a gasp. I fucking live for those little noises she sometimes allows to escape her mouth.

Stepping out onto the balcony, Luna takes in her surprise. Sitting there is a stool, an easel, a shit ton of paints, brushes, along with several blank canvases. Before leaving Polson, I pulled Sofia aside and found out what materials Luna had been using. We had no way of bringing all of her things with us, but I’ll be damned if my girl didn’t have her passion waiting for her when we got home. I stressed to Track and Everest to spare no expense. Buy the whole fucking store if need be. And by the look on Luna’s face, I’d say I did well.

She’s taking in all the paints and supplies like a kid in a candy store. What she does next, shocks the hell out of me and nearly simultaneously brings me to my knees. One-minute Luna is standing stock still, and the next she launches herself into my arms and buries her face in my neck. Her fingers thread through the hair on the back of my head as she begins to cry. I feel her tears run down my skin. Like the greedy motherfucker I am, I hold her in my arms for as long as she allows. Too soon for my liking, Luna releases her grip and takes a step back. “I hope those are happy tears, baby.”

Luna beams at me with her violet eyes shining. “They are most definitely happy tears. Thank you. I don’t know how I could ever repay you. I feel lost without my art, so this gift means more to me than you’ll ever know.”

I use the pad of my thumb to wipe away her tears. “Your beautiful smile is all the thanks I need, baby.” I kiss the top of



her head, then each cheek the same moment she releases a shuttered breath.

Her lips are calling for me to taste them, but I resist the urge. When I take Luna's mouth for the first time, I want to be one hundred percent sure it's what she wants. "Alright, sweetheart. I have to run to

the clubhouse to talk to my men. If you want to take a shower or a bath, I have everything you need in the bathroom. Josie and Payton went shopping for you." I lead Luna to the closet to where her new clothes are hanging. "I had to guess your size, but if something doesn't fit, we'll take it back, or if you don't like what the girls picked out," I explain as Luna sifts through the clothes on the hangers. The girls went all out. I see an assortment of jeans, shorts, summer dresses, t-shirts.

Also folded on the shelf beneath where the clothes are hanging is an array of undergarments. I don't miss the blush that attacks Luna's face when she spots a few silk nighties. We step out of the closet, and I point to the door that leads down to the bar. "This door will take you down to the bar.

Everest will be standing guard at the bottom of the stairs whenever I am not up here with you. If you need anything, you go to him. But he is not allowed up here." I take a phone from the inside of my cut.

"This is for you. There is only one number in there, and that's mine. I don't care when or where; you need me — you text."

Luna tucks the phone into her back pocket. "Do you think we should contact Detective Brooks?

Let her know what's going on and where I am?"

"I don't want you to worry about any of that. I'll take care of everything."

"Okay," Luna says without argument.

I nod and make my way to the back door. "I'll bring supper home. Is there anything specific you're in the mood for?"

"Do you have food here?" she asks.

"Yeah. I had the refrigerator stocked before we arrived."

“Is it okay if I cook us something. I love to cook,” Luna tells me, looking shy.

“You won’t catch me turning down a home cooked meal, baby. So, if you want to cook, go for it.” I kiss the top of her head once more. “I won’t be long.”

Striding into church, I take my place at the head of the table and slam the gavel bringing the attention of all my men. “You all know why we are here. Jake contacted us needing a favor, and that was to help him out with Luna. In case some of you have missed what went down, Luna got mixed up with a club that goes by Savage Outlaw. They are based out of Arizona. Luna had been the girlfriend of their President, Rex. She ended up seeing some shit she wasn’t supposed to, and that led Rex to try and shut her up permanently. The motherfucker beat the hell out of her, then he and his brother Pike dumped her on the side of the road in the middle of nowhere. Luckily a passerby found her and called 911. When word got back to Rex she survived, the club began gunnin’ for her life. Luna had been set up in a safe house, but they soon discovered her whereabouts. That is when the detective working Rex’s case set Luna up in Polson at New Hope House. Somehow Savage Outlaw found her there too.”

“You think the authorities have a snitch? You know anything about this detective?” these questions coming from Nova.

“Jake said the detective and her partner checked out. But to be safe, we’ve decided not to tell them where Luna is now.”

“How do you plan on handling the authorities back in Arizona?” Wick asks.

“I’m going to place a call to them tomorrow. I plan to be straight up with them. Tell them Luna is no longer their concern. It’s not like they can force her to come back. The charges against Rex were dropped. There is no case and I damn sure don’t trust the cops to keep my girl safe. Not when her last two locations were breached.”

“So, what’s the end game here, Prez?” Fender speaks up.

“I’m going to hunt that son of a bitch, Rex, down and put a bullet in him,” I declare with venom in my voice.

Wick is the next to jump in. “You know, Prez, the Commander is from Arizona. I remember him saying he still visits his parents out there several times a year. Think we should put a call into him.

Maybe he knows something about this club since he’s from there. Either that or he’s heard something.

Doesn’t hurt to ask. We need to gather as much intel about the fuckers as we can. Find out exactly what kind of shit they’re into. Cross our T’s and dot our I’s before we go in guns blazin’. I’ve never heard of Savage Outlaw. We don’t know what shit they are into or what connections they may have. I say we take them out but be smart. Make sure we don’t suffer any repercussions or gain any unwanted enemies in the process.”

“Sounds like a plan, brother. You’re right. We need to play this smart. Once the situation is handled, I want it dead and buried. I don’t want Luna to have to look over her shoulder for the rest of her life and live in fear. And the club doesn’t want anything to come back and bite us in the ass later on down the road. For now, the plan is to put a call into our former commander. We’ll see what he has to say. My guess is he will jump at the chance to get his hands dirty. You know he retired last year. I’m sure he’s itchin’ for some action,” I say, and Wick chuckles.

“You’re probably right, Prez.”

“Alright, men,” I stand. “If any of you need the prospects for anything, you’ll have to hit up Track.

Everest will be Luna’s personal protection whenever I’m not around until I say otherwise.” With that, I slam the gavel.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **LUNA**

With Riggs gone, I do what all women do — I snoop. His apartment is not big. I wasn’t lying when I said I liked it. Double checking to make sure the door is locked, I make my way back into the bedroom and walk into the closet. Hanging

on one side are his clothes. Riggs' wardrobe consists of jeans, t-shirts, and long sleeve thermals. Surprisingly everything is neat and organized.

Even his shoes are lined up flawlessly against the wall of the closet. Switching to the opposite side, I take in the new women's clothing with tags still attached. I can't believe he did this for me.

Scanning the tags, I notice the sizes are spot on. When he said Payton and Josie picked the clothes out, I was a little surprised they willingly helped shop for another woman. Women can be catty, but when I met them earlier at the clubhouse, they seemed welcoming, both offering warm smiles. Lexi, on the other hand, looked at me as if I'd kicked her puppy or something. I'm pretty sure I know what her problem with me is about. I am a woman after all, so I read the venomous vibes coming off her loud and clear. I start to wonder if she and Riggs have a thing going on. Maybe they did in the past.

I'm not naïve enough to not know what those three women do at the club.

Not that I am passing judgment. I just don't want to be mixed up in some sort of lover's quarrel.

Suddenly the thought of Riggs involved with someone causes a wave of sadness to wash over me. I start second guessing his touches and the way he kisses my forehead or calls me baby. Does he do that with all women? Have I been reading more into his actions? I could have sworn he wanted to kiss me earlier before he left. Maybe it was my imagination. I am so out of my element. I don't have much experience when it comes to men or dating. I don't know what to think about these feelings I'm having for Riggs. My gut tells me I can trust him with my life, but can I trust him with my heart? Pushing those thoughts away, I step out of the closet and turn to face the perfectly made king-sized bed that sits in the open space. There are tables that sit on either side of the bed. I can tell which side is his by the framed photo sitting on top. Sitting on the edge of the bed, I take the photo in my hand. The picture is of an older couple. The way they are looking at each other in the photo makes me smile. Setting it back in its place, I go

about opening the top drawer of the nightstand. Staring back at me is a large box of condoms; next to the condoms, a bottle of lube and a gun. I slam the drawer shut and back away from the table as if it burned me.

Deciding I have had enough snooping around, I choose to take a quick shower before cooking dinner. Grabbing the pair of silk pajama pants and spaghetti strap camisole I spied earlier along with a pair of panties, I make my way to the bathroom. Flipping the light on, I take in the numerous bottles of female products lining the counter next to the sink: shampoo, conditioner, bubble bath, three different bottles of lotion, perfume. There is also an unopened pack of razors and a toothbrush.

Clearly, the girls thought of everything. I make a mental note to thank them the next time I see them.

After I finish with my shower, I head straight for the kitchen. The first thing I do is make myself familiar with where everything is kept. I then inspect the fridge. On the top shelf, I spot some ground beef. A meatloaf sounds perfect and doesn't take too long to cook. Behind me, I open the cabinet and begin pulling out the necessary ingredients then I preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Once the loaf is in the oven, I go about peeling the potatoes for mashed potatoes and gravy along with boiling some water for the green beans. When I spy at least a dozen peaches in the fruit bowl on the small dining room table, I know what I will be making for desert. Peach pie. When I told Riggs, I love to cook; it was a bit of an understatement. It is my favorite thing to do next to the painting. If I'm not working on my art, I most likely will have my nose stuck in a cookbook or scouring the internet for new recipes.

Two and a half hours later, dinner is on the table, and Riggs is walking through the back door the same moment I'm taking the pie from the oven and setting it on the cooling rack. I take in Riggs'

reaction as he steps up to the two-seater dining table. He's taking in all the food with a look on his face I can't decipher. My nerves kick in, and I'm instantly aware I may have gone a bit overboard with dinner. Come to think of it, with the way I

have a table set for two and a peach pie made from scratch sitting on the counter and me traipsing around in my pajamas; it looks as though I've made myself a little too comfortable. I don't want Riggs to think I'm trying to play house or take over his apartment so I'm quick to say something. Bringing my hands up, I say, "I'm sorry."

When Riggs still doesn't say anything, I start to fidget. A few awkward seconds tick by with neither one of us saying a word, so I make a move to begin clearing the table. I'm gathering the plates and silverware in my hands when they are abruptly snatched from my grip. "Coming home to find the most beautiful fucking woman in the world, wearing the clothes I bought her, her silky blonde hair wet from using my shower, and standing in my kitchen preparing the most delicious smelling food; has got to be the best fucking sight in the world." Then without warning, Riggs snakes his left arm around my waist while his right hand cups the back of my head. I don't have time to process his move before his mouth is on mine. When I gasp in shock, Riggs takes full advantage delving his tongue inside my mouth, tasting me, taking what he wants. I let out a throaty moan when the taste of whiskey paired with a hint of mint explodes in my mouth. Throwing caution to the wind, I allow my body to melt against his and savor the feel of his lips against mine and his hands on my body. Threading my fingers through his hair, I press my breasts against the hard plains of his chest. I swallow his growl when my tongue tangles with his.

Too soon for my liking, Riggs breaks our connection, a whimper escapes my mouth, and my fists release the hold they have on his hair. "Sweetest fucking mouth I ever tasted," I read his lips when he goes to rest his forehead against mine. With one last gentle peck on my lips, Riggs releases his hold on me. "Let's eat, baby."

*That's it? Well, if I wasn't confused about what's going on between Riggs and me before, then I most definitely am now.*

Riggs and I eat our meal together. One thing I like about being around him is I am comfortable just being with him. There is no awkwardness. Neither one of us needs to fill the space

around us with constant conversation. We both enjoy being in the moment and enjoying our food. The meatloaf turned out perfect as did the mashed potatoes. Once Riggs and I are both finished with our meal, he pushes himself away from the table, stands and clears our empty plates, taking them to the sink. He goes to the refrigerator and retrieves two beers. Riggs holds one up with a silent question, and I nod. Popping the top, he sets the bottle in front of me and takes his seat. I finally ask the question I've been dying to know for days. "How is it you came to learn ASL?"

"My grandmother was deaf," he answers.

"Was?" I question.

"She passed away several years ago."

"I'm sorry," I tell him my face sincere. "What about your grandad? I saw the picture on your nightstand. Is he still alive?"

"He is. He lives here in New Orleans. I still see him almost every day."

"Have you always lived in New Orleans?" I ask.

"Yes. My grandad and grandmother raised my brother and me."

"What about your mom and dad?"

Riggs shakes his head. "Mom could never stay in one place too long. She'd drop my brother and me off on my grandparents every chance she got. Finally, my Grandad had said enough was enough.

He told my mom we needed stability. He told her to either settle her ass down in one spot or leave us with him permanently. She chose the latter. As for my father; I've never met the man."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I'm not. I couldn't have asked to be raised by two better people. Besides, I don't hold anything against my mother. She loves my brother and me. She made the right choice." Riggs doesn't say anything for a minute before he

flips the tables and starts asking the questions. “Were you born deaf?”

I shake my head. “No. I was born with a genetic disorder. I went completely deaf by the time I was four.”

Riggs tilts his head to the side, studying me then takes a swig of his beer. “That would mean you can talk. No?”

I bite the inside of my cheek, hesitant to answer him. “Yes. I can talk a little,” I tell him truthfully.

And I know what his next question will be.

“So, why don’t you?”

“I was so young when I lost my hearing, Riggs. My verbal development stopped at age four.

Teachers and school therapist encouraged me to keep trying, but with the constant bullying from other kids, because I sounded different when I spoke, became too much. It wasn’t just the kids at school either. I was picked on by the kids in the foster homes I stayed in, and some of my foster parents could be just as cruel. I was happiest when I remained silent and invisible. For the most part, I was left alone. But even though I stopped speaking, I made myself master reading people’s lips. I can’t make out every word someone says, but I can understand every other word. It’s easy enough to piece sentences together. I had to learn to read lips anyway since most foster parents don’t know ASL,” I shrug my shoulders. “I was placed in a school for the hearing impaired when I was six. The state made sure whatever family I was placed with was within the same district as the school. I don’t have many nice things to say about the system, but at least they did that for me. I loved my school, and I excelled there.” Looking back now, I realized that even as a kid, I understood the meaning of survival.

I did what I had to do to get by. By the time I finish telling Riggs that small piece of my past, he looks ready to spit nails. He’s gripping the beer bottle so hard I’m afraid it’s going to shatter. He stands so abruptly the chair he was sitting in flies backward. I’m confused by his actions.



Riggs takes two long strides around the table, dropping to one knee in front of me. He gets so close I can feel his warm breath on my face as he speaks. “Someone as extraordinary as you should never hide or be ignored,” he declares. The fiery look in his blue eyes causes my breath to get lodged in my throat. Riggs grips my chin with one hand and signs with the other. “I see you. You are not invisible.” He leans forward and gently kisses my lips. I close my eyes and let the tears roll down my

cheeks. Riggs is the first person I have opened to like this. I don’t know why, but I feel safe with him.

I feel as though I can tell him anything.

Later that evening, Riggs and I didn’t delve any further into my past. I guess he figures we had covered enough for the night, for which I am grateful. Now here I am sitting on his bed eating peach pie and watching TV. Riggs had to go downstairs to the bar, but before he left, he asked if I’d like to watch TV. I had nodded and told him I had been missing Game of Thrones like you wouldn’t believe. I was already four episodes behind. So, Riggs set his large flat screen TV up with subtitles, pulled up his DVR list, and fixed me up. It turns out Riggs is a bit obsessed with the show himself.

I’m pulled from my show when my cell phone vibrated against my leg.

**Riggs:** How are you doing baby? Do you need anything?

**Me:** I’m good. Sitting on your bed, eating pie, and watching TV.

**Riggs:** Save me some. I’ll be up soon.

**Me:** Okay.

**Riggs:** Enjoy your show, sweetheart.

Smiling to myself, I tuck my phone back under my leg and turn my attention back to the TV. I soon find myself unable to concentrate. All I can think about is Riggs and anticipate his return.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

## RIGGS

It's been a few hours since leaving Luna upstairs, and that is precisely where I left my concentration as well. Even the regular noise from the live music playing tonight, mixed with the patrons having a good time isn't enough to drown out my all-consuming thoughts of her. Like a movie scene set on loop, I replay her lips on mine for the first time. I haven't taken my eyes off the back-entrance, which leads to my apartment. Maybe I shouldn't have kissed her. Not so soon. My self-control went right out the fucking window. Goddamn, the way her body melted against my touch; like she'd been craving me as much as I'd been craving her.

"Riggs." Wick's voice draws me from my thoughts. Snapping my head around, I look at my brother.

"Yeah?"

Dragging a chair from the next table, Wick sits across from me, straddling it. "What's up with you tonight?"

"Nothin'." Picking up the glass of whiskey sitting on the table in front of me, I bring the rim to my lips, inhaling the smokiness of the aged bourbon before tipping my head back. The smooth, earthy flavor coats my tongue doing nothing to erase the taste of Luna.

Leaning forward, Wick braces his forearms on the back of the chair. He studies me for a beat. In the background, Fender starts strumming a new tune on his guitar. "Spit it out." I down the rest of the brown liquor in the bottom of the glass in my hand.

"She's got you feelin' something," Wick says, and I grunt. My best friend sees right through me. He grins. "We all see it. You got the look."

"What look is that, brother?" I ask.

"The one that has you looking past tomorrow," he says, hitting the nail on the head. "She's got herself mixed up in some serious shit. Rex wants her bad. My gut tells me the fucker will stop at nothing to get her."

My body grows tense. "He'll have to go through me first."

“Is she worth dying for?” His question pisses me off.

“If keeping her from harm meant taking my last breath, I would do it,” I tell him with certainty.

Wick nods then looked past my shoulder. Whatever catches his eye causes his face to harden.

“Third guy positioned near the end of the bar,” he lifts his chin. Turning, I look over my shoulder at the man in question and recognize him immediately. We’ve run the asshole off before when we caught him peddling drugs to the crowds outside our bar about a month ago. “The fucker just dropped some shit into the little brunette’s drink sitting beside him.”

I take the scene in for a second. She’s talking to a couple of guys. I notice their body language and catch the slight nod to the guy behind her; the one Wick’s attention is trained on. “Looks like the three of them are in on it. Those two distracted her long enough for their buddy there to slip her something.”

Both of us are out of our chairs and across the bar within seconds. The two assholes who had the young woman distracted with conversation catches us heading in their direction and try to leave.

Everest, our prospect whose manning the front door blocks the exit. The other fucker moves to flee once he spots the reason why his friends are trying to retreat in a hurry. Grabbing him by the back of his neck, I shove his face into the bar top. He squirms, trying to break free.

“What the hell?” he screeches. Applying pressure, I keep my hold as I grab the wine glass beside me, pour the contents down the sink behind the bar, and turn to the young woman who almost became this scumbag’s victim tonight.

“Never turn your back on your drink.” Her eyes dart from her now emptied glass back to me then to the guy whose face I have smashed against the countertop. Standing the pile of dog shit up, I twist his arm behind his back, placing his hand and wrist in a painfully awkward angle — his face grimaces.

“Shit, man. I’m sorry, bro.” I twist his wrist harder, making him raise on his toes.

“I’m not your, bro. Apologize to her asshole. She’s the one you and your buddies over there,” I gesture toward the front door where Wick and Everest have the other two assholes contained, “were plannin’ on assaulting tonight.”

“I didn’t do shit,” he spits. His bullshit attitude pisses me off further. I apply more pressure to his wrist.

“Goddammit, I’m sorry, okay?” he says through clenched teeth. The scope of the situation starts to show on the young woman’s face, but she stands tall and faces her would be assailant, then punches him square in the nose. I grin. Good for her.

“Get an Uber and go home,” I instruct the young lady. Nodding, she pulls her phone from her handbag. “Let’s go,” I order the guy and push him forward. Turning, I lead the guy across the bar.

“Man, the door,” I order Sean our other bouncer. Jerking my head toward the back door, Wick and Everest follow.

Once we’ve stepped outside into the back alley, I toss the fucker to the gravel. My men keep hold of the others; whose faces lose all color. “I believe I told you once before not to let me catch you around my bar again.” The guy gets back to his feet.

His eyes cut to his buddies, then looks back at me. “You don’t own these streets, and what I do ain’t none of your business.” He spits at my feet. I advance on him, landing a blow to his

already swelling nose from the punch he received earlier. The crack heard from it breaking, followed by his blood dripping from his hands as he shields his face from further assault satisfies me. “You broke my fucking nose,” he cries in pain.

“You deserve worse.” I land a blow to his ribcage, knocking the wind from his body and he doubles over. This time when he comes back up, he’s holding a five-inch blade in his right hand.

“Stupid move.” I hear Wick mumble.

Just as fast, I reach into my cut, producing my handgun.

“Didn’t anyone ever tell your dumb ass never bring a knife to a gunfight?”

“Fuck you. I’m not going to let you beat the shit out of me without a fight.” He widens his stance.

“What the hell, Jace? You’re going to get us all killed.” One of his pals tries to warn him. Now I have a name for the motherfucker. Jace stares me down and answers his conspirator. “Shut the fuck up,” he tells him.

“Mr. Kostas isn’t going to like this, man.” The one Wick is holding mentions. Mr. Kostas. That asshole is becoming a problem. He has his pushers and cronies infiltrating large portions of New Orleans with a new type of drug. It’s becoming the leading cause of overdose deaths in the city. Not to mention I’ve heard he’s been having his men strong arm a couple of small business owners in the city.

Growing increasingly agitated and tired of the bullshit, I shoot the guy in the foot. He screams in agony and drops his knife to the ground. Taking a few steps forward, I kick the blade away from his reach. Not having enough, the bastard lunges for me. All it takes is a swift blow to the side of his head; rendering him unconscious. His body falls like a sack of bricks at my feet. I look at his buddies.

“Pick up your trash and get the fuck out of here.”

Wick and Everest release them. They hastily pick their guy off the ground and carry his limp body down the alley. We stand

and watch until they have disappeared around the corner of the building.

“Think we’ll have some retaliation from this Kostas?” Wick asks.

“I dare the motherfucker to try.” All the tension in my body begins to relax as my adrenaline subsides. “It’s nearing closing time. Let’s head inside.”

Thirty minutes after 2:00 am, the bar is locked tight and I’m dragging my ass up the stairs. As soon as I open the door and walk into the apartment, I feel more at ease. Getting back to Luna is all I’ve been thinking of since I left her hours ago.

Crossing the living room, I tug my cut off, tossing it on the back of the couch where I find Luna fast asleep, curled on her side, wrapped up in a blanket. When I texted her earlier, she was watching TV on my bed. If she thinks the couch will be her sleeping arrangement; she’s wrong. Knowing I want her close, I bend, scoop her into my arms and carry her into my room, then gently place her on my bed. I stare at her for a moment, taking in her beauty, and wanting so badly to kiss her again. Luna’s eyes open, finding me hovering above her. Instead of startling, she smiles.

“Hi,” she signs.

“Hi.” I do the same.

“Kiss me,” she tells me. I hesitate, which causes her to frown and look away. Softly tugging on her chin, I bring her face upwards. Leaning further into her, I press my lips against hers. Luna’s fingers tangle in my hair, and I kiss her harder. Tugging on my shoulders, she pulls me down on to the bed with her. Rolling us over, I bring her to where she is lying on top of me. The bedroom is lit with the glow of the streetlights outside filtering through the window blinds. Bracing her hands on my chest, Luna sits up and straddles my hips. I can feel the heat of her pussy through the thin material that separates us as she looks down on me. She plays with the hem of my shirt, before skating her palms upwards across my abs. Her touch causes my cock to swell painfully against the confines of my jeans, but I lay beneath her, letting her take the lead.

My shirt rises as her hands reach my chest. Reaching for the bottom of my shirt, I pull it over my head and toss it to the floor. Her eyes drink me in as she fists the hem of her silk top. Time slows to a crawl watching her peel the thin material from her body. The moment her tits break free, I want nothing more than to take them in my mouth. Running my palms up her thighs, and over her hips; I follow the curves of her body. My fingertips graze the sides of her heavy breasts, before running the pads of my thumbs across her sensitive erect nipples. Luna's chest rises and falls. Her skin prickles beneath my touch, and her eyes never leave mine.

Putting up no resistance, I pull her forward, bringing her breasts over my face, and take one of her taut nipples into my mouth, while palming the other. She begins to rock her hips.

With her hands braced on both sides of my head, she increases her hip movements. Reaching down, I grip her ass in the palms of my hands and guide her.

Being the selfish fucker, I am, I don't allow her to bring herself to orgasm. Rolling our bodies, I bring her beneath me, and hover above her, making sure she's looking at me. "I need to taste you." Her eyes widen. "We don't have to go any further. We can stop," I assure her.

"No," she signs quickly. "I'm a little nervous. No one has ever gone down on me before," she admits.

"I'm the first to taste you, babe?"

She nods.

"Do you trust me?" I ask her. Knowing I'm the first to do so makes my dick harden even more.

Again, she nods.

I start working my way down her body with my lips. I lift my eyes to hers when I hook my fingers in the band of her pajama pants, then slowly pull them down, taking her panties with them. Before pulling the material past her thighs, I pause. With her swollen clit exposed, I dip my head, taking the first taste of my woman. Flattening my tongue, I run it through her center, then eagerly suck her bundle of nerves into my mouth. Her

sweet taste causes a primal growl to leave my body. Repeating the process, I swipe my tongue across her flesh again, sucking her clit into my mouth once more. With no shame, I thrust my hips a few times, grinding my heavy cock into the mattress, wanting nothing more than to bury myself deep inside her sweet tasting pussy. But not tonight. Tonight, it is about my woman.

Pulling her pj's free, I toss them to the side and waste no time worshipping her body. Looking up, I find Luna watching me. It's the sexiest thing I've ever seen. Her watching me pleasure her is now my obsession. I flattened my tongue and rub it against her clit, then slowly sink two fingers into her. I can tell as much as she enjoys watching me devour her, she's still holding back. Hooking my fingers, I find her sweet spot. At the same time, I suck her swollen clit into my mouth once more. Her walls tighten around my fingers, pulsing with her orgasm as it consumes her. With her pleasure controlling her, Luna is unable to hold back the raspy cries that leave her mouth. I slide my tongue up her center, tasting her one more time before crawling up her body, claiming her mouth.

Feeling her palms press against my shoulders, gesturing for me to rise above her, I lift my body from hers and look down at her. Luna's hands come between us. "I want to taste you," she signs, using the exact words I said to her moments ago. I sit back on my heels.

"Tonight, is about you, baby," I explain.

Luna repositions herself, kneeling on the bed in front of me. "I want to."

I search her eyes before moving from the bed. Standing at the foot, I kick off my boots, then quickly lose my pants. I stand there at the end of the bed, with my cock hanging heavy between my legs hypnotized by the depths of hunger shining in the violet pools of Luna's eyes. My feet become frozen to the floor the moment Luna begins to crawl on her hands and knees toward me. Once at the edge, she sits back on her heels. With her eyes trained on my cock, she reaches out, grazing her nails down my abs, letting her fingers travel around the base of my cock, before wrapping her fingers around my girth,



stroking me a few times. Lifting her chin, Luna locks eyes with me, leans forward, and runs the tip of her tongue over the head of my cock. With a firm hold, she takes half my length into the warmth of her mouth. With twisting motions, she strokes the base with her hand simultaneously as she sucks the top half of my cock. The combination of the two movements causes my toes to curl into the carpet beneath my feet. Grabbing a fist full of her long blonde hair, I watch her take a little more of my cock into her mouth.

It doesn't take long before I'm ready to explode. Not wanting to surprise her, I tap Luna's shoulder, hopeful she will know why. Understanding, she increases her speed, sending me into the most intense

release I've ever experienced as she greedily swallows everything I give her. With my head tilted back, I take a moment to catch my breath as I run my fingers through Luna's hair while she rests her head against my abdomen. Taking my woman's face between the palms of my hands, I lean down and take her mouth with mine. Breaking our kiss, I pull back so she can read my lips. "You're perfect," and kiss her once more.

Walking around to the side of the bed, I motion for Luna to join me under the blanket. Tucking in close to my side, she cradles her head on my shoulder and puts her palm over my heart. I kiss the top of her head. We lay here, like this for a while. Thinking Luna has fallen asleep, I close my eyes, letting my entire body become heavy. Before sleep takes me too, I feel her fingertips etching letters across my skin, quietly marking me, spelling out a single word.

*Mine.*

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **LUNA**

Blinking my eyes open, I'm rewarded with the warm glow of the New Orleans sunrise shining through the bedroom window. I don't remember the last time I slept so soundly and felt so at peace. When I went to bed with Riggs last night, and he wrapped me in his strong embrace, I felt so protected. He

makes all my worries and fears disappear. In the short time I have been with him, he has proven with not only his words, but with his actions, he is dedicated to keeping me safe. Not just physically, but mentally also. He proved to me last night the pull he and I have had between us since the moment we laid eyes on each other in Polson was not my imagination. Just thinking about how Riggs worshiped my body last night causes the space between my legs to tingle. I don't know what came over me last night when I initiated our kiss, which in turn lead to more. All I know is when I opened my eyes to find him standing over me; I wanted nothing more than to kiss him.

Peering over my shoulder, I take a moment to study his face as he lays in bed next to me. He looks so relaxed and peaceful. Not wanting to wake him, I carefully slide out from under his arm. Walking toward the edge of the bed, I spot his t-shirt on the floor. Picking it up, I bring it to my nose and inhale. It smells of cologne and beer. Slipping the shirt on over my naked body, I make my way into the bathroom. Once I have washed my face, brushed my teeth, and taken care of business, I stroll out of the bathroom and into the kitchen. After I fix myself a cup of coffee, I open the refrigerator and take in its contents. Pulling out the bacon and eggs, I place them on the counter next to the stove. With a craving for biscuits, I decided to whip up a quick batch. There is nothing better than homemade biscuits with butter and honey.

Forty-five minutes later, the biscuits are hot out of the oven, and the bacon is fried to perfection. I am scooping scrambled eggs out onto two plates when an arm snakes around my waist, and a pair of warm lips touch the space on my neck just below my ear, sending a delicious shiver down my spine.

Riggs reaches in front of me, plucking a piece of bacon off the plate and pops it into his mouth.

Turning the stove off, I spin around in his arms and place my palms on his chest. He looks down at me with the kind of smile that will turn any woman into a pile of mush before he swoops down stealing a kiss. "Good morning, Mon Tresor," he says once he has broken the connection. I lick the taste of bacon from my lips.

“Good morning,” I tell him in return.

Riggs fixes himself a cup of coffee before carrying our plates to the table. We settle into our breakfast, and I get a satisfying thrill watching him eat every bite; his face telling me he’s enjoying his meal. “This is so damn good, baby. I swear everything about you is perfect. Your cooking is perfect, the way you’re looking at me right now — perfect. Your beautiful as fuck eyes are perfect. Your silky

hair is perfect, and your delicious sweet pussy — perfect,” he finishes with a grin, and I blush. I have no doubt my face is six shades of red right now. “In fact, I’d like another taste.” Riggs shoves his plate to the opposite end of the table. “Come here, Luna.”

Doing as I’m told, I stand from my seat and make my way over to Riggs. Pushing his chair back, he places his hands on either side of my hips, guiding me to stand between his sprawled legs and the table. Dropping his hands to my thighs, Riggs drags his palms up, lifting the shirt I am wearing, exposing me. I take in the pleased look on his face as he discovers I am not wearing panties. Picking me up as though I weigh nothing, he sets my bare bottom on top of the table. “Spread your legs and show me what’s mine.”

With my breaths coming out in pants, I open for him, giving him what he wants; what I want.

Hooking his hands underneath my knees, Riggs brings my butt to the very edge of the table. The movement causes me to lean back on my elbows. With a wolfish grin, he dips his head. The moment his tongue takes its first swipe up my center, I throw my head back and moan. I spend the remainder of the morning getting lost in the pleasure Riggs is giving me.

Sometime around noon Riggs and I finally venture out of his apartment. This time he takes me out through the back instead of the front. When we enter the main area of the bar, we draw a few curious glances our way along with a chin lift from a couple of men at a table in the corner of the room. “We don’t open until one, but those old timers have been coming here for years. They pretty much have free rein,” Riggs signs while

also speaking out loud so the three old men sitting at the table can hear. Riggs turns his attention to his brother Nova who is behind the bar. I still can't get over the fact that he has a twin brother. Nova is even sporting a beard though his is not as full as Riggs'. Another difference is their eyes. Riggs has blue while Nova has hazel.

At first glance, the brothers look identical, but if you pay close attention, you will see they have many differences. Right down to the way they carry themselves. "We're headed to the clubhouse,"

Riggs tells his brother before leading me to the back of the bar, down the hall past an office and out the back. The second we step outside, the thick humidity assaults me. The weather is something I miss about Polson. Montana does not have the same kind of heat as the south. I'm suddenly more thankful for the clothes Payton and Josie picked out for me. Today I am wearing a pair of shorts, a spaghetti strap top that shows a sliver of skin at my mid-section and a pair of four-inch wedge sandals. "Let's go, beautiful," Riggs says, straddling his bike, and I climb on behind him. Though I can't hear the mighty rumble of his bike, I can feel it. It's fast becoming an addiction of mine, just like everything else that has to do with this man.

The ride to the clubhouse doesn't take long. And just like the day before, it's mostly quiet. When we step inside, I take in the few members milling around along with Kiwi who is sitting on the couch with Josie on his lap. Josie is on the curvier side like me, has red hair, blue eyes, and an abundance of freckles. She's stunning. Without stopping to talk to anyone, we walk past the bar, down the hall to an office. "You okay with waiting in here while I go handle some business real quick?" Riggs asks.

"Sure."

"Come on," he says motioning to the chair behind his desk, and I sit. He reaches over, firing up his computer. A minute and a few clicks of the mouse later Sofia and Raine's faces fill the screen. I peer up at Riggs stunned.

“Jake called saying Sofia, and the girls have been worried about you. I figured you all could Skype with each other, and they could see for themselves. Plus, I thought you’d like to see some familiar faces,” he finishes.

Beaming up at him. I tell him. “Thank you.” I catch both Sofia’s and Raine’s surprised looks out of

the corner of my eye when Riggs leans down and kisses me. “I’ll be back,” he winks. Once Riggs has left the office, I turn my attention back to the laptop where the girls are sporting the biggest smiles.

Sofia speaks first while Raine translates.

“Do you have something you want to tell us?”

Unable to keep the smile off my face, I shrug. “Riggs and I haven’t talked about what we are, but I like him.”

“By the look on both of your faces just then, I’d say you more than like each other.” This is coming from Raine.

“I think I more than like him too,” I confess. “I’m not sure what to think, but I like the way he makes me feel. Riggs makes me feel important, and he makes me feel safe.”

“We are happy for you, Luna. You deserve a good man like Riggs. I knew Jake was making the right decision bringing him in on the situation. Nobody saw you and him getting together, but we are thrilled.”

“Thank you, Sofia. That means a lot coming from you. I know putting up with me was difficult, but I’m thankful you and The Kings stuck by my side.”

Sofia narrows her eyes at my comment. “There was no putting up with you. I would help you a thousand times over if faced with the same situation. And I can say with absolute certainty; my whole family would feel the same way.”

Neither Sofia, Raine, or I say anything for a moment as I absorb the sincerity of her words. I need to stop thinking I’m an inconvenience to people. It’s a bad habit I need to work on breaking. A minute later, Raine is the one to change the subject. “So, tell us about New Orleans. What’s it like?”

I smile. “Well, I’ve only been here a couple of days, but what I can say is it’s hot as hell.” The girls laugh. The three of us chat for fifteen more minutes before signing off with the promise to talk again next week.

When I close the laptop, I startle when I notice Lexi standing in the doorway to Riggs’ office with the same look on her face as yesterday. Lexi stands a few inches taller than me, has brown eyes and black hair cut into a pixie style. She also has the whole biker chick look down to a T. She’s wearing a short jean skirt with her ass practically hanging out, a top so small it looks like she bought it from the children’s department, and the outfit is paired with ankle boots. I would say Lexi could be a beautiful girl if it weren’t for her clown makeup and ugly attitude. I know Lexi’s type too. The catty, jealous type. She is not here to make friends. When the woman continues to stand there without saying a word, I decide to take myself out of the uncomfortable situation and go find Riggs. I don’t much like the idea of wandering around the clubhouse, but anything is better than staying here with the bitch vibes coming off Lexi.

Refusing to back down entirely, I keep eye contact with her while she shoots daggers at me as I stand from the chair behind the desk and make my way toward the exit. Just as I go to brush past her, she blocks the doorway, giving me a light shove with her shoulder in the process. I’m no fighter, but I’m no pushover either. Narrowing my eyes, I hold my head high and stand my ground.

Lexi begins to speak, and I read her lips. “I know you can read my lips, so read this you little deaf bitch. I don’t want you coming here messing up what I have going on with Riggs. I have plans on becoming his old lady. So, I suggest you take your damsel in distress act somewhere else and leave Riggs to me — a real woman.” The whole time Lexi is ranting, I don’t bother to tell her Josie is standing right behind her. She doesn’t look pleased either. Having heard enough, Josie finally speaks up.

“You just fucked up talking to the Prez’s woman like that, Lexi.” I’m thankful Josie has chosen to

face me so I can have a clear view of her face to understand what she is saying. Just then, Wick appears. She and Wick exchange words before he turns a murderous glare to Lexi who looks as though she realizes her current situation won't be working out in her favor. Wick says something else to Josie, and she takes off down the hall. She returns moments later with a pissed off Riggs in tow.

Riggs starts to sign.

"Tell me," he directs his question at Josie.

"I was coming to see if Luna wanted to eat lunch with me and Payton. When I got to your office, Lexi was in Luna's face. She was talking shit about how Luna being here was messing with what you and she have going on and how she was going to be your old lady." Josie stops speaking long enough to look at Lexi with a sneer. When she speaks again, her next words set shit off. "That was after she called your woman a deaf bitch." Josie's last statement has Riggs dropping his hands and advancing on Lexi. The woman is so shocked and scared she takes two steps back plastering her body against the wall as Riggs gets in her face. The whole time he doesn't miss a beat relaying to me what he is saying.

"If you think you can come to my club and threaten my woman, you are a special kind of stupid. I told you the moment you stepped foot into my clubhouse months ago, I wasn't interested in you or what's between your legs. You never had a chance at riding my dick or wearing my patch. You have ten minutes to pack your shit. Wick will escort your ass out. You are not welcome on Kings property again. You are done." With that, Riggs turns to Wick and says something. Wick nods and grabs Lexi by her arm and ushers her down the hall out of view. But not before she looks back over her shoulder with her venomous eyes aimed straight at me. A look that says she is far from done. Something about that woman doesn't sit right with me.

Stepping into my line of sight of Lexi and Wick's retreating backs, Riggs brings my attention to him. "You okay, baby?"

I nod. "Yeah. I'm good."

“I’m so damn sorry that bitch said that shit to you. I want you to know everything she said was a lie. I never touched her.”

“I know you haven’t. Even if you had, it’s not my business, but I believe you.”

“Do you believe me when I say, I’ll never let anyone get away with hurting you? I had a feeling Lexi was going to be trouble. I should have listened to my gut and kicked her ass out of here yesterday. I actually should have done it weeks ago.”

“I believe you, Riggs. You can’t protect me from everything.”

Riggs steps closer to me. “I can and will protect you to the best of my abilities, Mon Tresor.” He kisses me. “Let’s get out of here. I got someone I want you to meet.”

By the time Riggs and I walk back through the clubhouse, Wick is sitting at the bar and Lexi is nowhere in sight. When I cut my gaze over to the other side of the room, I see Josie sitting on the couch with Payton. Not knowing if she will understand me, I sign anyway. “Thank you.” She and Payton both smile and wave in return.

When Riggs and I step outside the clubhouse and up to his bike, I turn to him. “I like Josie and Payton.”

“They’re good girls. You don’t have anything to worry about with them. They don’t pull the kind of shit Lexi did. If a brother is attached, they respect that and keep their distance.”

“That’s good to know. I appreciate what Josie did for me back there. I don’t like confrontation. It can sometimes be difficult to defend myself with words when the other person is unable to communicate the way I do. It makes me feel at a disadvantage when I’m faced with a situation like

now with Lexi; I want to dissolve disputes with words. I don’t like feeling as if I have no way of defending myself.” I let out a relieved breath feeling better now that I have purged my feelings. “I’m sorry I dumped all that on you just now.” I shake my head suddenly feeling stupid for admitting all that.

Riggs kisses me. “Don’t ever apologize for telling me your feelings. I want to know everything about you, Luna.”



“I want to know everything about you too, Riggs.”

“Looks like we’re on the same page then, baby.” Riggs takes me in his arms and kisses the hell out of me.

Stepping away, he lands one last peck before handing me a helmet. “Where are you taking me?” I ask.

“I’m taking you home to meet my grandad.”

I freeze. “Why are you taking me there?”

“I’m taking you because my grandad is one of the most important people in my life, and I want him to meet another important person in my life,” Riggs says all this as if it’s not a big deal.

“Are you sure? We hardly know each other. Not enough for me to meet the man who raised you anyway.”

“Hell, yes, I’m sure.” Riggs straddles his bike. “Now, hop on babe.”

Riggs’ grandad is the most important person in his life, and he wants me to meet him. Am I ready for that? We’ve known each other for a week, and he wants to take me home. When I don’t make a move, Riggs slides off his bike and stands toe-to-toe with me. “Tell me what you’re thinking?”

“I’m freaking out.”

Riggs grins. “No, you’re not. What’s bothering you is the fact you are not freaking out, but you think you should be.”

Damn, he’s right. When I peer up at his face, he has a brow lifted knowing he’s got me there.

“Look, babe. When I’m sure of something I want, I go after it; no holds barred. I knew from the second I laid eyes on you, I wanted you, and I knew the moment I pulled you from that closet at the lumber mill, I was going to have you. You. Are. Mine. I also know for a fact you feel the same way.

So, stop thinking so hard, and let’s go.” He kisses me, stealing my breath from my lungs and sealing the deal.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

## RIGGS

Luna is the first woman to ever ride on the back of my bike. She's also the first woman I have brought home to meet my granddad. So, to see the surprised expression on his face was to be expected. Parking my bike behind my granddad's truck, Luna and I climb off as he stands from the rocking chair on his porch and makes his way down the steps in our direction. "How's it going today, Pop?" I ask. I watch as Pop's steps falter as he is taken back by my using sign language. My granddad is, of course, fluent in ASL because his wife; my grandmother was deaf, but it has been ten years since he has spoken it. Without missing a beat, he signs.

"I woke up this morning still breathing so I can't complain," he grins darting his eyes back and forth between me and Luna.

"Pop, I'd like you to meet Luna Novak."

"It's nice to meet you, pretty lady," Pop offers his hand.

"It's nice to meet you too, Mr. LeBlanc," Luna returns with a smile.

"Oh, child, you can call me Abraham or Abe."

"Okay, Abe."

"Come on, you two," my granddad ushers us to the porch. "I just made some sweet tea. Come take a load off."

Taking the chair next to Pop, I pull Luna down onto my lap, and she settles without protest. When my eyes leave her and cut over to my granddad, he's sporting a big ass smile. "About damn time, son.

Now, how long are you going to make an old man wait until you give me some great grandbabies?"

Luna chokes on her tea the moment the words leave Pop's mouth.

"You alright, baby?" I tease.

"He's not serious, is he?" she asks.

"As a heart attack," I answer waiting for the panic to cross Luna's face, but it never comes. *Fuck yeah. My girl likes the*

*idea.*

Luna and I hold each other's stare, silently communicating we both want the same thing. And fuck me if I'm not going to put my baby in her belly sometime in the near future. Kids are another thing I never considered having, but Luna is my game changer. Like I said before when I find something I want, I'm all in. There will be no holding back. Reaching up, I fist the hair on the back of Luna's head and bring her mouth down on mine and lick the seam of her lips demanding entrance. My woman doesn't hesitate to give me what I seek.

Hearing a throat clear from beside me reminds me that we are not alone. My grandad laughs at Luna's apparent embarrassment as she too forgot we had an audience. "Don't be embarrassed child. I

remember what it was like to be in love. I was in love with my Etta for most of my life. Finding true love is not easy, but once you do, make sure you hold on to it," my grandad states. He gives me a stern look. "Don't screw it up."

Two hours later Luna and I are on our way back to the clubhouse after receiving a call from Wick, letting me know that our former commander is in town. He didn't hesitate to jump in with both feet when I asked him to look into Savage Outlaw, although I was expecting a phone call and not for him to come all the way out to New Orleans. Not that I'm complaining. I haven't seen my commander in over a year so it will be nice catching up.

When I pull through the gate of the clubhouse, I notice a rental SUV parked next to Wicks bike, and I pull up alongside it. Cutting the engine, Luna and I hop off my bike and make our way inside.

The moment I open the door I hear booming laughter fill the air around us. "Hey, Prez," Wick shouts.

"Look what the cat dragged in." Standing from his perch at the bar is a man I have looked up to for more than ten years.

"Damn, it's good to see you, Commander," I say striding in his direction.

“You too, LeBlanc. I hope you don’t mind me dropping in like this,” he shakes my hand and claps me on the back.

“Hell, no. You know you don’t need an invitation. My door is always open.”

“Dawson was telling me—” my former commander’s words are cut short when he gets a peek at Luna standing behind me. He suddenly looks as though he’s seen a ghost.

*What the fuck is that all about?*

“Commander, this is my girl. Babe, this is my former commander, Neil Bryant,” I sign introducing them. The vibes coming off Neil seem to be making Luna uneasy. Wick, who is standing beside Neil, notices the same thing. “You alright, man?” I ask Neil.

Neil clears his throat and seems to shake off whatever was bothering him. “Yeah, I’m good,” he looks at Luna again. “It’s just— I don’t know.” Neil scrubs his hand down his face. Wick decides to step in and break the awkward situation by clapping Neil on his back.

“How about the four of us sit down for a drink?” Instead of the bar, Wick leads us over to a round table in the corner of the room. Once the four of us take a seat, I motion to Everest.

“What can I get ya, Prez?”

I turn to Luna and ask. “What would you like to drink, baby?”

“I’ll take a Coke if you have it.”

“We’ll have one Coke and a few beers.”

“You got it, Prez.” Less than a minute later, Everest returns with our drinks setting Luna’s in front of her. Several minutes pass and the energy surrounding our group has intensified, and the way Neil keeps looking at my woman is about to set me off. Neil is a man I hold a high amount of respect for, but commander or not, I will lose my shit all over his ass if he doesn’t remove his eyes off my woman.

Not able to hold back any longer, I level Neil with a look. But before I get a chance to open my mouth, Neil beats me to it.

“I didn’t get your girlfriend’s name.”

My back goes straight, and I narrow my eyes. “That’s because I didn’t offer it.”

“I don’t mean any disrespect, Abel. It’s not like that.”

“Then what the hell is it like?” I demand.

“How about we calm down here, brother,” Wick suggests motioning to Luna who is sitting beside me looking worried.

“What’s wrong?” she asks. “Why does he want to know my name?” It’s then I realize she must have

read his lips because I wasn’t signing.

“Everything is alright, babe. I’m going to have Everest take you to my office while I talk with Neil.” Luna doesn’t question me; she nods.

“Prospect,” I bellow, and Everest appears from down the hall. He has taken his duty of watching Luna to heart and is never too far away. “Take Luna to my office.”

“Wait!” Neil says with urgency his face going pale as he reaches out, grabbing hold of my arm the same time Everest moves Luna behind him, shielding her.

*Good man.*

“You said her name is Luna?” Neil asks.

“What the fuck is going on, Neil?”

“I heard you call her Luna,” he takes a step forward.

“Yeah, her name is Luna Novak. What of it?”

Out of the corner of my eyes, Wick advances, knowing I’m on edge. I also realize our outburst has drawn the attention of Kiwi who walked through the door about thirty seconds ago. I don’t know what the hell is going on, but in the decade I have known my commander, he has not once looked this shell shocked or exhibited this type of unnerving behavior. No, the man in front of me seems as though he has seen a ghost and is on the verge of passing out. Those two facts are the only thing keeping me from putting my hands on him. I never imagined

myself in any position where I'd give thought to harming the man who stands before me, but like I said before, Luna is a game changer. There is nothing in this world I wouldn't do to keep her safe.

Having enough of my woman looking afraid, I give Everest a nod, and he takes off down the hall toward my office with Luna in tow. I don't miss the way Neil watches her retreat under the protection of my prospect. The moment Luna is out of view, I start demanding answers. "I'm going to start by saying I respect the hell out of you, Commander. You are one of the last men I want to go toe-to-toe with, but all that shit aside, you have about two seconds to explain to me what the hell is going on right now."

"I — I think," Neil stumbles over his words. "That woman," he points down the hall. "She looks like someone I once knew."

"She looks like someone you knew. You, come up here scaring the shit out of my woman because she looks familiar. What the hell, Neil?"

"You don't get it, LeBlanc. I'm trying to explain to you the resemblance is uncanny. She could be her twin. I know it sounds crazy." He runs a hand through his hair.

"So, tell me; who does Luna look like, Commander?" Wick cuts in.

Neil shakes his head, and a look of sadness crosses his face. "Her name was Amelia Novak."

My gut clenches. This Amelia shares the same last name as my woman. Giving Kiwi a brief look, I interrupt the commander for a moment. "Kiwi, Grab your computer. See what you can find out on Amelia Novak."

"You got it." Turning, he walks off.

Neil continues. "We grew up in the same town back in Arizona, and attended the same high school." He sighs. "Amelia was a freshman when I was in my senior year. The two of us didn't really hang with the same crowd in school. After graduating, I went off to basic. Sometimes, I would

return home when on leave, but never saw her again until five years later. One summer, I ended up having a two-month leave and decided to stay with my parents. Amelia was working at a bar. She was only twenty at the time but being we lived in a small town and people tended to overlook that sort of thing.

I remember sitting down at the bar and not being able to take my eyes off her. Amelia had long blonde

hair and blue eyes. She was a fucking knockout.” Neil pauses and closes his eyes. “She knew who I was and greeted me by name. I stuck around until closing time, then asked her out for coffee. Amelia and I sat in that coffee shop until seven o’clock the following morning.” Neil shakes his head. “I’ve never experienced a connection with a woman as I did with Amelia.”

“So, what happened?” I ask wondering where he’s going with his story and what it has to do with Luna.

“We spent everyday together for the next two months. I was fucking obsessed, man. I took her home to meet my parents. Even met her dad at one point. I didn’t like him. He was a piece of shit drunk, and Amelia admitted he tended to knock her around. That’s why she was working at the bar.

She was saving up to move out of his place and get her own apartment. I begged her to let me put her up in a place before I had to leave, but she refused. She was too proud and shut me down immediately. A week later, I shipped back out. I made her promise to email me. I tried to call her for months after I left, but she would never answer my calls. Every day of my life, I regret not telling Amelia I loved her before I left town. I knew in my gut she was the one for me and I wanted to marry her — I should have.” Neil hangs his head. “I don’t know what held me back.” He looks back up.

“Eighteen months later, I finally came home. When I landed in town, the bar she worked at was the first place I stopped. The owner told me she up and quit a couple of weeks after I left. After leaving the bar, I went to her dad’s house.” Neil stops talking, his face a mask of pain. Wick and I don’t push for him to say more. We allow him to compose himself before he finishes his story. “When her father answered the door, I asked

him where Amelia was. He told me she was dead,” Neil chokes. “He told me the woman I loved was dead, then proceeded to tell me the location she was buried before slamming the door in my face. That piece of shit didn’t have one ounce of remorse on his face as he said those words to me. At first, I didn’t believe him. That was until I went to the cemetery and saw for my own eyes. I found her marker. That son of a bitch didn’t have the decency to get his daughter a headstone. So, I did.”

“What happened to her. How’d she die?” I question.

Neil shakes his head. “Never asked. All that mattered was my girl was gone, and there was no way I was going back to her old man’s place. Not without putting a bullet in his head. Back then, I’ll admit I was too scared to want to know what happened to Amelia, but now, I think I need to know.

Because the woman who walked out of this room — your woman is my Amelia made over. I swear to God, Riggs.”

“Prez,” Kiwi interrupts from his place at the bar where he’s typing away on his laptop.

“What is it, brother?”

“I have some information you guys will want to hear.”

“Spit it out, Kiwi.”

Kiwi stops typing and faces Neil and me. “Amelia Novak age twenty died twenty-six years ago.

Cause of death; complications from childbirth.”

“Holy shit,” Wick mutters from beside me. *Holy shit is right.* Commander’s puzzle pieces are starting to come together.

“The baby, Kiwi?” I inquire but fear I already know the answer.

“Luna Novak. Born May 11, 1993, to Amelia Novak. There is no father listed on the birth certificate.”

“She’s my daughter, isn’t she?” Neil asks, and I can’t do anything but look at him because God helps us, I think Neil is Luna’s father.



“Luna’s mine isn’t she!” This time Neil bellows his face full of rage. Picking the glass bottle up off

the table, he spins around and hurls it across the room, hitting the wall where it shatters into a million pieces. My former commander loses all composure as he grabs the edge of the table in front of us and flips it over. “I’m going to kill that motherfucker! That piece of shit father of hers didn’t tell me I had a daughter!” Neil picks the chair up, but before he gets a chance to throw it, Wick tackles him to the floor to restrain our former commander which is no easy task considering Neil is 6’ 2” and 260

pounds of solid muscle. At the age of fifty, he can still handle his own; as Wick is finding out. Just then, Fender bursts through the clubhouse door.

“It’s alright, brother. The Commander was just lettin’ off some steam, and rightly so.” Fender nods but doesn’t leave.

“I’m cool now, LeBlanc,” Neil grits out. He’s still pissed but has his shit under control. I give Wick the signal to let him up. Once both men have picked themselves up off the floor, Neil brushes past me and out of the clubhouse.

“Fuck, brother. I didn’t see that shit comin’,” Wick mutters wiping the blood from his bottom lip.

Neil must have gotten a lick in. “Think he’s cooled down enough?”

“Only one way to find out. That’s if he’s still here and not on his way back to Arizona to hunt down the motherfucker who didn’t tell him he had a kid.” Wick and I walk out of the clubhouse to find Neil sitting in a chair just outside the door with his head in his hands. I can’t begin to understand what it is like to find out you have a kid you never knew about — a grown one at that. Wick nor I say a word as we come to stand beside our friend. He is the first to break the silence. “Riggs, tell me where my daughter has been the last twenty-six years.”

“You sure you’re ready to know that?”

Neil looks up at me his face full of anguish. “I need to know.”

“Luna grew up in the system. I’m sure I don’t need to tell you what that was like. I won’t tell you the details because Luna has told me her story in confidence, but I will say it nearly destroyed her. My woman is strong, though, and she made it.”

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck,” Neil repeats as he stands and begins to pace back and forth in front of me.

“My kid went her whole life thinking she wasn’t wanted; that she didn’t have a family.” Neil stops in front of me. “I would have taken her had I known, LeBlanc. She is my daughter, and I would have given her the life she deserved. She may not have had her mother, but she would have had a father who would have given her the world and two grandparents who would have adored her.”

“I know what kind of man you are, Commander. This shit is not on you.”

“Isn’t it? Had I found out back then what happened to Amelia instead of trying to forget, I could have easily found out I had a daughter. I can’t lay all the blame on her old man. Though the motherfucker is still going to get what’s coming to him.”

Neil regards me for a beat. “I want to speak to my daughter.”

“With all due respect, that’s not happenin’ until I talk with her.”

Neil goes to protest, but I cut him off. “When we drop this bomb in Luna’s lap, that shit is going to explode, Commander. My woman has been through hell and back the past couple of months. She’s hardly gotten over those pussies Savage Outlaw kidnapping her, and now we’re about to unload a whole new kind of hurt on her.”

“You telling me that club you had me check on kidnapped my daughter?” Neil fumes.

“We’re not discussing details out here, Commander.” I turn to Wick. “Call the brothers. I want them here in ten. I’m callin’ church.” I turn my attention back to Neil. “We don’t normally bring outsiders into the fold, but considering I asked you to check out Savage and the fact it’s lookin’ like Luna is your

daughter, I'll make an exception. We're going to find out what you dug up on Savage

Outlaw; then we will deal with telling her about you."

Fifteen minutes later, after checking in with Everest on how Luna is doing, I slam the gavel starting church. "Let me start by introducing you all to the man sittin' at my left. This is my former Commander Neil Bryant. He's been helping the club look into Savage Outlaw. And thirty minutes ago, it was revealed Neil might be Luna's father." As expected, several shocked faces stare back at me.

"My woman doesn't know that shit yet, so I expect everyone to keep their mouths shut until Neil and I have had a chance to talk to her. Right now, our focus is on Rex. Before I give Neil the floor, I'm going to catch him up to speed." I take a seat, swipe my cigarettes laying on the table in front of me and light one. I turn my attention toward Neil. "When I called you askin' for a favor I didn't divulge details on why my club is after Savage. A few months ago, Luna started seeing the President of Savage Outlaw. The dickhead's name is Rex. Long story short, she didn't know what kind of man she had tangled herself up with. Luna witnessed Rex kill a man. Rex and his brother beat the shit out of her and left her for dead on the side of the road. Luna later woke up in the hospital. Then word got out she was alive. Rex and his club were gunnin' for her, so she had to go into protective custody. In the end, Savage found the safe house she was held up in and eventually found her in Polson where she was staying with The Kings Montana Chapter. Jake, The Kings founding President, called me up, askin' me if I would be willin' to take Luna out of Polson. We ended up killin' all those motherfuckers who were hidin' out in a nearby town, even took out Rex's brother, Pike. But before he was finished off, he confessed Rex had been let out of jail and was comin' for Luna," I covey.

"I can tell you right now Rex will not be getting his hands on my daughter," Neil promises with venom in his tone.

"Then we're on the same page. Now, we need you to tell us what you dug up on his club."

Neil nods. "Savage Outlaw has been around for roughly six years. Their former President was Rex's father. Someone killed him the second year the club was in operation. Drug trade went bad.

Their club has doubled crossed pretty much everyone they have worked with. They are burnin'

bridges left, and right so if you were worried about a fallout with any of the club's connection there wouldn't be any. I don't foresee one damn organization coming to Savage Outlaw's defense. The club is more of a nuisance."

"What all do they deal in?" I ask.

"Drugs, weapons, and prostitution. Rex has a reputation for picking up a beautiful young woman, dating them for a while, then turning them out."

My stomach clenches and rage radiates through my body. "He was plannin' on pimpin' out Luna," I state.

"I'd put money on it," Neil agrees. "He forces women to take drugs to get them addicted. They eventually comply with allowing men to use their bodies in exchange for their next fix."

"Let's keep this tidbit of information to ourselves for now. Luna has enough on her plate as it is.

I'm not adding to it by telling her Rex had planned on turnin' her into a sex slave." Leaning back in my chair, I close my eyes, take a long drag of my cigarette, and try to wrap my head around what Neil just told us.

"What's the plan, Prez?" Nova pipes up.

I sit forward and eye Neil. "You plan on stickin' around awhile, Commander?"

"I'm staying wherever my daughter is. I'm not going anywhere."

"The club is going after Rex and Savage Outlaw. Are you in?"

"You know you don't even have to ask."

I nod and turn to Wick. “Get a plan together. Call Tequila. We’ll be needing a pilot to fly us out to

Arizona. Let her know this needs to stay off the radar.” I look at the rest of my men. “For now, I want your eyes and ears open. As far as we know, Rex hasn’t figured out where Luna is. He’s still lickin’

his wounds from the loss of his brother and his men. He’s down thirteen men already. That’s a big blow to his club. We’ll use it to our advantage. We won’t wait too long to act. Rex will be lookin’ to add numbers back to Savage, and I want to strike before he does.” I slam the gavel ending church.

Neil and I stay seated as my brothers file out. “I’ll have one of the prospects set you up in a room here. You good with that, Commander?”

“Yeah. I appreciate it, LeBlanc.”

I scrub my hand down my face. “I’m going to tend to my girl. It will be her choice when it comes to talkin’ to you. I won’t force her. Just lettin’ you know it might not be today. We have to let her come to terms with you on her own time. Are you going to be good with that?”

“It kills me Luna may not want to see me right away, but I understand. Her feelings come first. I’ll follow her lead on this.”

Standing, I offer my hand, and Neil accepts.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### LUNA

Shuffling through Riggs’ desk drawer, I find some paper and a pen. I scribble, *What’s going on?*

and slide the paper across the desk to Everest who is sitting across from me. I was dragged back here to Riggs’ office fifteen minutes ago without an explanation as to why. I got the impression Neil, Riggs and Wicks’ former commander was a friend, but the moment the man saw me, he began acting strange, and his actions became tense which set Riggs on edge. I’ll admit Neil’s odd behavior was making me uncomfortable

as well. Reading what I wrote, Everest shrugs his shoulders and rubs his jaw.

“I can’t say, but I’m sure Prez will be here soon, and you can ask him.”

I sigh and slump back in the chair. Another few minutes pass with neither myself or Everest saying a word so I decide what the hell and figure I can try to get to know the man in front of me a little. He has after all been acting as a bodyguard of sorts. Wherever I go Everest is not far away unless I am with Riggs in his apartment. I’ve grown comfortable with his presence. Knowing I have someone watching over me when Riggs is not around is comforting.

Reaching across the desk, I retrieve the piece of paper I was writing on and write down the question I’ve been wanting to ask. *What’s your real name?*

The man across from me reads what I wrote and grins. “My name is Kallum.”

I take in Everest’s appearance; he doesn’t look like a Kallum at all. Everest has to be at least as tall as Riggs; only Everest is enormous. He’s built like a linebacker and then some. He’s a wall of muscle. Come to think of it; his nickname makes sense. *I see why the guys call you Everest.* I write, and he smiles. *Are you from New Orleans?*

Everest shakes his head. “No. I grew up in Minnesota.” When he doesn’t offer more. I decide not to pry into his past, and focus on the present.

*Do you like being a part of the club?*

“Hell yeah. I can’t imagine being anywhere else. I’m treated like family here. I have a purpose.”

I smile at him. *I’m glad you have that. Everyone deserves a family.* I scribble on the piece of paper.

“Yeah, darlin’, they do,” his face goes soft. I’m sure my past is no secret around here. The men here appear to be extremely close. They refer to themselves as brothers and I have no doubt they don’t keep much from one another. It was the same way with The Kings back in Polson. Family is not always by

blood. Some families are self made. Just as that thought comes to mind, Riggs comes striding into the room, his eyes immediately on me. I'll never tire of the way he looks at me with such intensity. Cutting his eyes to Everest, Riggs nods, and Everest takes his leave.

"Want to take a ride with me, beautiful?" Riggs asks.

"I'd go anywhere with you," I tell him truthfully.

Standing from the chair, I go to him. He takes my hand in his, and we walk out of his office, down the hall and past Josie and Fender who are sitting at the bar in the main room. Riggs and Fender acknowledge each other with a chin lift as we make our way out of the clubhouse. Instead of leading me to his bike, Riggs and I walk around the back of the clubhouse and to a big black truck parked under a large oak tree. Opening the passenger door, Riggs hoists me up and onto the seat. I go about buckling my seat belt as he strides around the front of the truck then climbs into the driver seat. "Is this your truck?" I ask.

"Yes. I don't drive it often, but we'll need it for where we are going."

"Where is that?"

Riggs grins. "You'll see."

Our first stop is a little hole in the wall Creole café, where we pick up some food to go. Fifteen minutes later we are driving down a dirt road until Riggs turns left and we are no longer on the road but driving through the brush. With nothing but trees and shrubbery surrounding us, I'm beginning to wonder exactly where he is taking me. After about a mile the trees clear and a lake appears in front of us. Riggs does a U-turn, shifts the truck into reverse and backs up right to the water's edge and puts the truck in park. I open the door to climb out, but Riggs is at my side in no time, helping me out.

Before setting me on the ground, he kisses me. Once I'm let down, Riggs pulls open the back-passenger door, retrieving a blanket and our food. I follow him to the bed of the truck where he lets the tailgate down. Unfolding the blanket, Riggs

spreads it out. He then picks me up and places me in the back. "I could have climbed in myself you know."

"I know, babe. But I like taking care of you." The look on his face is so sincere I don't have it in me to argue. Besides, it's nice being taken care of. "I'll be right back, baby. Let me grab some drinks."

While Riggs goes to grab the cooler, I finally take in my surroundings. I'm in awe at how breathtaking the scenery is. The large lake is surrounded by dozens of Cypress Oak trees with hanging moss. The burnt orange sky complements the view as the sun begins to set. Riggs appears back in front of me carrying a cooler in one hand and two lanterns in the other. "It will be dark soon. So, these will be necessary out here," he says, coming to sit by me. We both remove our shoes, getting more comfortable.

Grabbing our food, I go about spreading the containers out, eager to see what Riggs got us. I open the first lid to find gumbo. "This smells amazing," I tell him. The next top I open has my stomach rumbling. "What's this?"

"That right there is the best cheesy grits and shrimp you'll ever put in your mouth," Riggs answers rubbing his hands together. If the smell is anything to go by, I'd say he's right. Riggs does the honors of flipping open the lid of the third container. "Last but not least, this is Mrs. Maggie's famous bread pudding. Best damn bread pudding in all New Orleans."

Without wasting time, the two of us dig into our meal. I moan when the first bite touches my tongue *Holy shit. This is heaven*. With every bite I take, I continue my appraisal of Riggs' little secret hideaway. "Do you come here often?" I inquire.

"At least once a month. Cain and I discovered this place when we were kids. You can't see it from here, but my grandad's house is just over that way about a mile beyond the brush," Riggs points to his right.

"This place is a dream. You are fortunate to have grown up here."



With the sun setting behind the bayou and the lighting bugs finding their way above the water, I lay

back in the bed of the truck, close my eyes, breathe in the sweet scent of honeysuckle and try to imagine what sounds the little creatures around us would make. In all my twenty-two years of silence, I have never wished I could hear more than I have in the past week. If I were granted one wish, I'd want the chance to listen to Riggs' voice. I bet his voice is as smooth as whiskey, yet deep and gravelly. When I feel something touch my face, I open my eyes to Riggs running his knuckles along my cheek. "What are you thinking about, Mon Tresor?"

"I'm imagining what your voice would sound like, and how I want so much to hear it."

His face goes soft. "What do you imagine it sounds like?"

"Deep and gravelly, but smooth like whiskey."

With a wicked gleam in his eyes, Riggs hops out of the truck and makes his way to the driver side door, opening it. I watch as he reaches inside and a second later the truck starts to vibrate beneath me.

Striding back in front of me, he climbs back in the truck, takes my hand, and pulls me to my feet.

"Dance with me."

I shake my head in protest. "I don't know how to dance. How will I know if I'm moving in time with the music?"

"You'll move with me. I'll lead you. Can you feel the vibration of the music?"

"Yes."

"That's all you need, baby. Now come lay your head on my chest, and I'll sing to you."

Stepping into his arms, I ask. "What is the song called?"

"Tennessee Whiskey."

Laying my head on Riggs' chest, I close my eyes and get lost in the smooth rumble of his voice as he sings to me. I may not hear, but I can feel. In this perfect moment, with the man I am

starting to fall in love with, who has his arms around me, I couldn't ask for more.

When the beat of the music fades away, it's me who reaches up and takes Riggs' mouth with mine.

In all my life I've never had anyone give me something so beautiful. It doesn't take long for the kiss to turn heated and my core to clench. I want this man more than my next breath; the need to have him inside me is strong. Riggs must sense it because he wastes no time taking over our kiss. Opening my mouth to him, I welcome the sweet invasion of his tongue. Fisting my hands in his hair, I pull his body flush against mine in an attempt to alleviate the ache my body has for him. I curse the clothes separating us. Clutching the hem of my shirt, I pull it off over my head and toss it to our feet while Riggs does the same. My bra follows the growing pile as do my shorts. With my mouth watering at the thought of tasting him, I drop to my knees. Unbuckling his belt, I pop the button to his jeans and swiftly tug them down until his cock springs free. Taking it in my hand, I swipe my tongue across the head, tasting his pre-cum before I take as much of his length in my mouth as possible. When Riggs fists his hand in my hair, it fuels my need to pleasure him. I continue to suck and lick as I get lost in his taste until I am abruptly pulled off, followed by Riggs dropping to his knees in front of me. I read his lips.

"I'm going to come in your pussy this time."

Hooking his arm around my waist, he sits and leans his back against the side of the truck. I follow by straddling his hips. I gasp the moment my heated center comes in contact with his cock. On instinct, I thrust my hips and throw my head back with a moan as I grind myself down on him. Riggs leans forward and latches onto one of my nipples. He begins to lick and nip his way up to my mouth. Once his lips find mine, he devours them as I continue to glide my wet pussy along his cock. A jolt of electricity shoots through my core each time the head meets my clit — the feeling is exquisite torture.

Having had enough of the teasing, Riggs grabs hold of my hips. I look at his face as he tells me, "put me inside, Luna."

I reach between our bodies and take his heavy cock in my hand. Without breaking eye contact, I guide him inside me. Riggs' nostrils flare the second the tip kisses my entrance. Placing my hands on his shoulder, I slowly sink down, taking his girth one inch at a time. The fit is so tight I stop midway to take a deep breath. With a roll of my hips, I take him the rest of the way. Once I'm fully seated, I release the breath I was holding and relish the feeling of being so full.

With my hands still clenched to Riggs' shoulders and his still gripping my hips, I start to move, keeping my rhythm slow because I want the moment to last. *Oh, that feels so good.* Desperate to feel his body on mine, I press my breasts against his sweaty chest and thread my fingers through his damp hair as he buries his face in my neck. Riggs bites down on the space just below my ear, and I suck in a sharp breath at the slight pinch of pain. I swear it makes me wetter, and my center clenches around his cock. At this point, I have no control over the noises that escape my mouth. Riggs being inside me feels too good. Just as my orgasm starts to build, I'm flipped on my back with Riggs hovering above me, making a noise of protest when he slips out from inside me. I look down between us at his heavy cock glistening with my arousal as he sits back on his heels, grabs me under my knees, and pulls my bottom to rest on top of his thighs. Grabbing hold of my hips with both hands, Riggs surges forward.

He begins thrusting with so much force, I have no choice but to reach over my head and brace my palms against the side of the truck. This man has completely and utterly hypnotized me. His heated stare has me in a trance. Riggs becomes more commanding as he continues to thrust above me while the hot, humid air causes sweat to drip from his body onto mine. When my orgasm starts to build once again, he releases his hold on my hips, leans his body over mine, and wraps his large hands over the rail of the truck bed. The veins in his arm pulse as he drills into me with abandon. Suddenly, out of nowhere, white flashes of light burst behind my eyelids as my orgasm crashes through me. When my center clamps around Riggs' cock, he throws his head back. I watch the chords in his neck pulse as he chases his own release.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING RIGGS AND I ARE SITTING ON THE TERRACE WHILE HE DRINKS COFFEE AND I paint. I've been lost in my head for hours, and Riggs has been content just watching me. The once blank canvas in front of me now carries the memory of one of the best moments of my life. Dipping the brush in black paint, I place my signature at the bottom right corner of the painting along with the words *Lovers Bayou*.

Setting the brush down, I pick up my mug and take a sip of coffee while looking out over Bourbon Street. After we made love last night, Riggs told me about Neil. I'll admit afterward I completely shut down. I listened to what details he knew, but I haven't talked to him since we left the lake. The same goes for this morning. We've been sitting outside on the terrace for two hours, and neither of us has communicated one word. I know Riggs senses I'm trying to wrap my head around the newfound information, and I appreciate him not pushing. The last thing he told me last night before dropping the subject was that Neil said he was staying in New Orleans for as long as it took for me to come to terms with the situation. Riggs said he is anxious to talk with me but will wait until I am comfortable doing so. My feelings are a mixture of sadness, anger, and disbelief. I'm angry because I was robbed of the childhood I desperately wanted, but a part of me doesn't believe any of this is true; that I have a dad. One who wanted me all along. Oh, how I wish I could talk to my only friend back in Arizona.

Jade is the one person beside Riggs I have ever confided my story too. I make a mental note to ask

Riggs if I can get in touch with her. I miss my friend.

Sighing, I set my cup down on the table beside me. I need to get out of my head and face the fact that my current situation is not going away. I also need to stop thinking I'm the only one reeling from the revelation. There is a man out there who up until yesterday had no idea I existed. I can't imagine what he's going through. Looking over at Riggs, I find his eyes still on me; watching and waiting.

Letting out a deep sigh, I tell him, "I'm ready to talk to him."

An hour later, we walk through the door of the clubhouse to find Neil sitting on the sofa. When the other men in the room catch sight of us, they clear out, leaving just the three of us. Neil stands from the sofa but doesn't make a move. Some of my tough exterior breaks when I see the look of pure anguish on his face. Taking a deep breath, I make my way to where he's standing, stopping two feet in front of him. Neil Bryant is well over 6 ft tall with brown hair and a touch of graying at the temples with a military-style haircut. I take in his face, which looks as if it's been a few days since he's shaved. I study his features trying to find some similarities but find none; that is until my eyes lock on his and I gasp bringing my hand to my mouth because I'm looking into a pair of violet eyes; ones that mirror my own.

With my hands shaking, I turn to Riggs. "Will you stay with me?"

Riggs answers while speaking out loud for Neil to hear my question and his response. "I'm not going anywhere, baby."

I turn back to Neil. "Do you know ASL?"

With his face full of regret, he shakes his head no. I glance back at Riggs who nods letting me know he'll translate. Neil and I take a seat on the sofa while Riggs settles in the chair across from us.

I look awkwardly at Neil, not knowing where to start. Thankfully he's the first to speak. "Do you have any questions for me?"

I nod. "Will you be willing to take a paternity test to confirm you are my father?"

"Of course. Though I am certain you are my daughter, I have no problem submitting to the test if that's what you need."

"Riggs told me you grew up in the same town as my mother. That you went to the same high school?"

"We did. Although, I didn't get to know Amelia until I was home on leave when I was twenty-four, and she was twenty. Your mom and I spent a couple of months together. I fell in love with her at that time."

“So, you had no idea she was pregnant with me?”

“None. I begged Amelia to stay in contact with me. I even called and emailed any chance I got. I didn’t get a response. I want you to know I loved your mom more than anything. I wanted to marry her.

I regret not telling her that before I left. To this day, I have no clue why she chose not to speak to me again.”

“When you went to her father, he didn’t tell you she was pregnant or had a baby?”

“No. He informed me your mother was dead and slammed the door in my face.”

“Did you try to find out what happened to her?”

With a clenched jaw, Neil shakes his head. “I’ll never forgive myself for not finding out. Had I done so, I could have easily found she had a baby, and you would have been mine. I’m so fucking sorry, Luna. I have no words to express how sorry I am.” By the look on Neil’s face and his red-rimmed eyes, I don’t doubt the sincerity of his words. I have two choices here. I can choose to be angry at the mistakes made or decide to move on. If Neil is, in fact, my dad, I’d like very much to get to know him and his family. At that thought, I’m quick to ask. “Are you married? Do you have

children?”

“No. I’ve never married, and I don’t have any children. You do have a grandmother and a grandfather who are excited to meet you, though.”

“You told your parents about me already? We don’t even know for sure if I’m your daughter.”

“You’re my daughter, Luna. Not only do you look just like Amelia, and have my eyes, but she gave you my mother’s name.”

I swallow past the lump in my throat. “What?”

“It’s true. Luna is my mother’s name. Amelia grew up without her mother. The first time she met mine, she said if she had her mother in her life, she wished she would have been like mine.

I may never find out why Amelia chose to keep her pregnancy from me, but her giving our daughter my mother's name tells me she cared for me as much as I did for her and she loved you. I have no doubt your mother loved you with all her heart, Luna."

By the time Neil is finished telling me about my name, I can no longer hold back the tears and Riggs is immediately by my side, pulling me into his arms. "You okay, baby?" he asks, then swipes the tears away with the pad of his thumb.

"I'm okay. It's just a lot to take in is all." I turn to Neil. "I'm sorry I'm such a mess."

He shakes his head. "There's nothing to be sorry for."

"How about we put this chat on hold for now. Take a breather," Riggs suggests. Neil and I agree.

We have all the time in the world to get to know each other.

Just then something over my shoulder gains Riggs' attention, and I turn to see Nova standing by the front door of the clubhouse with a woman. I look to Riggs to see what's going on. "This is Dr. Teagan.

She's going to handle the DNA test."

Dr. Teagan is a beautiful blonde woman wearing a burgundy pencil skirt, cream-colored button-down blouse, and four-inch leopard print heels. Coming to stand in front of Neil, she offers a warm smile. "The test is simple. I'm going to take what looks like a large Q-tip and swab the inside of your cheek," she explains, holding up the swab. I nod. Seems simple enough. I watch as Dr. Teagan swabs the inside of Neil's mouth before she places it in a tube. She then repeats the process on me. "That's it." She packs her things away in her bag. "I'll put a rush on the test. We will know the results in a day or two." Slinging her bag over her shoulder, Dr. Teagan leaves the clubhouse with Nova's hand on her ass.

I turn to Riggs. "Is she his girlfriend?" He gives me an exasperated look. "No. They have a casual thing going on. Same goes for the principal at his daughter's school, the

woman who owns the boutique two blocks over and the tarot card reader who sets up shop on the corner of Bourbon Street.”

“I’m beginning to see why you guys call him Nova.”

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **RIGGS**

It’s Sunday morning. Luna is still in the bedroom, getting dressed, while I whip up some breakfast.

Pouring batter into the waffle iron, I close the lid, and turn back toward the stovetop and tend to the strips of bacon sizzling in the frying pan. I’m taking her to the indoor shooting range today, but she doesn’t know that yet.

Hearing bare feet pad across the living room floor, I look up from my task and see Luna’s smiling face heading my way. Turning the burner off, I scoop the bacon from the pan, placing them on a plate lined with paper towels to soak up the excess grease and set the plate to the side on the counter.

Rounding the small kitchen island, I pull her body into mine. She’s wearing cutoff jeans with an off the shoulder shirt, paired with a pair of brown loosely laced combat boots. “You look beautiful, Mon Tresor.” Bending I kiss the shallow of her neck and feel her skin prickle from my touch. Looking at me, she runs her fingers through my beard, before wrapping her fingers around it, pulling my lips to hers, kissing me. My body reacts. Grabbing her ass, I knead her flesh as my tongue dances with hers.

I’ll never get enough of kissing this woman — my woman.

When the kiss ends, Luna’s eyes twinkle with mischief as she runs her fingers along the length of my cock, causing me to hiss. “Careful woman,” I raise a brow, warning her.

She smirks. Her hands come between us as she tells me, “or what?” Luna pretends innocence.

“Lose the shorts,” I order. I watch as Luna unfastens the button of her shorts, and slowly slides the zipper down. She removes her panties along with them, letting both articles of clothing slide down her legs to the floor. Lifting her, I sit her on top of



the kitchen island. Bringing her to the edge, I spread her legs. *Fuck. She's already ready for me.* With the pad of my thumb, I circle her clit. Throwing her head back, she moans. Leaning forward, Luna hooks her thumbs into the waistband of my joggers, pushing them down over my hips and ass, until my cock springs free. And fuck I damn near explode when she wraps her hand around it and rubs her clit with the head of my dick, using me to pleasure herself. For a moment, all I do is watch. My woman is a little dirty, and I fucking love it.

Without warning, I take control and slowly bury my length inside her. With Luna's hands on my shoulders, she looks between us, watching as I fuck her. Reaching down, I circle her clit and feel her walls tighten around my cock as her orgasm rips through her body, causing me to explode with my release. Dipping her head, Luna runs her soft lips along the side of my neck, nipping at my flesh a few times before I capture her mouth with mine. This woman fucking owns me.

After our pre-breakfast workout, I finish preparing our food. "Let's sit out on the balcony and enjoy our meal." I sign, then rest my forehead against hers for a moment. My hands run up and down her arms. I still can't believe she's mine. Softly kissing the top of her head, I step around her. Going to the refrigerator, Luna grabs the orange juice from the shelf. Taking down two glasses from the cabinet, she fills them, places the juice back in the refrigerator, and carries our drinks outside. After preparing our plates, I grab some forks from inside the dishwasher and join my woman.

There's a warm breeze this morning, and a heaviness in the air. Sitting across from Luna, I watch her place the first bite in her mouth. She doesn't shy away from enjoying her food, which is another thing I love about her. There it is again. Love. Never thought I'd find myself falling in love, yet here I am, aching to spend the rest of my life with the woman in front of me. The sun rising behind her, casts a golden halo around her long blonde hair. Raising her fork to her mouth with another bite of waffle, Luna catches me staring at her. Her head tilts to the side, and she smiles. Luna smiles because she knows. Her free

hand skirts across the table and she hooks her pinky with mine, and we say nothing.

Hearing my phone ringing from inside, I reluctantly break our connection and sign, "I'll be right back." Walking inside, I grab my phone from the charging pad and answer. "How's it going, Fender?"

"How's it going, Prez? Listen, I'm about to send Track down to the gun range to set shit up. You have a specific piece of equipment you'd like your woman to practice with? If so, I'll make sure everything is ready to go when we get there," Fender says.

Turning, I stroll back outside. "Yeah, get her a small handgun. She needs something that will fit her hand comfortably and won't give her much kickback," I tell him.

"Good choice. Alright, brother. The rest of us men will meet you two down there in a couple of hours." Fender disconnects the call, and I set the phone down on the table beside my plate and take my seat.

"Everything okay?" Luna questions.

"Yeah, babe. Everything is fine. I'm taking you to the shooting range with me and the guys today," I sign.

"Oh yeah? Do you practice often?" she asks, then takes a sip of her juice.

"The guys and I go every weekend. You're learning how to use a firearm today as well," I add, and her eyes widen.

"Me?"

I eat a few bites of my breakfast before explaining further. "It's important you know how to defend yourself." I expect Luna to argue, but she surprises me.

"Okay," she agrees.

A couple of hours later, I have my woman, on the back of my bike, pressed firmly against my back, with my free hand stroking her calf as we cruise down the city streets of New Orleans. When Luna and I roll up in the parking lot of Kings Tactical, we find Wick, Fender, and Kiwi standing next to their

bikes laughing as they shoot the shit with one another. I pull my bike alongside the others, put the kickstand down, and turn off the engine. Wick walks up.

“Hey, brother.” He faces Luna. “Luna,” he nods.

“What the hell you three doin’ standing out here in this inferno?” I ask as the heat of the sun beats down on my back.

“The three of us were at the clubhouse this morning, so we rode in together. Just got here a few minutes before you pulled in. You that eager for me to whip your ass at target practice?” Wick grins, as I help Luna off the bike.

“We wait long enough, they’ll start comparing dick sizes too,” Kiwi laughs. He isn’t wrong. Wick and I get competitive with one another. I laugh along with them, then pull my woman to my side. She looks at me and smiles.

“You ready, babe?” I ask.

“Yeah. I’m kind of excited.”

I grin. Grabbing her face in the palm of my hands, I crash my mouth down on hers, leaving her breathless and my heart pounding. Hearing throats clear, I remember we are not alone, and Luna blushes. Taking her by the hand, I lead her through the store toward the entrance of the shooting range found in the second half of the large building. Fender pulls the heavy door open. We enter a lit room protected by bulletproof glass and reinforced walls that separates us from the shooting range on the other side. “Fender, didn’t you send Track down here to get shit set up?” I look around noticing the tables in the room are empty of supplies and the range is cloaked in darkness.

“You saw his bike sitting out front, Prez. Maybe he’s in the supply room.” Fender looks puzzled.

Wick opens the door to the range and flips the switches on the wall. One by one, the ten separated cubicles light up followed by the range out in front of us. Luna’s grip on my hand tightens to the point her nails are digging into my flesh. Undeniable fear crosses her face when I look at her. Her eyes locked dead ahead with tears pooling in them. Turning my head, I follow her line of sight. Down at the far end of lane

ten, hangs the unmoving body of Track. “Kiwi, get Luna out of here and into the safe room. Now!” Rage burns in my gut. Stepping in front of her, I block Luna from seeing more as Fender and Wick rush to our brother. “Baby,” I grab her face making her pay attention. “Go with Kiwi.” She frantically shakes her head no. “Luna,” I sign, being firmer with my movements. “Go.”

Kiwi quickly guides her down the hallway, to the built-in safe room we had put in when we built the place. Always be prepared for anything. Right?

I rush out from behind the protected area toward my men, who have just gotten Track down from where he was hanging. I look down, taking in the words written in bold black marker across a target sheet stuck to his chest.

**I’ll kill every man you’ve got until what belongs to me is returned.**

I stare at the bone handle of a large hunting knife going straight into the center of the bullseyes; the blade buried deep in my man’s chest. Wick looks up at me from his kneeling position.

“He’s gone, brother. Track is dead, man,” he says through clenched teeth. I look over at Fender whose head hangs looking at our dead brother. His fists clenched at his sides.

“Fender, lock it down. Call Everest, tell him to lock the clubhouse down too.” Without looking my way, Fender walks off.

“I’ll call it in.” Wick stays kneeling beside our brother and digs his phone from the pocket of his cut.

It takes ten minutes for two officers to arrive on the scene and an extra fifteen before the other first responders to come in, making the official call. I give them all of Track’s information, along with access to the surveillance footage, which come to find out, didn’t do them or us any good. It seems someone was smart enough to track down the feed lines outside, killing all the functions to our security system. “Listen, Riggs,” Officer

Holloway pulls me to the side. “Before I send my men to his mother’s house —.”

“I’ll tell her,” I cut in. My stomach sinks, knowing I’m about to break his momma’s heart. Track was her only son — her baby.

“Sorry about all this,” Officer Holloway says.

Stone-faced, I turn my back and walk away. I head in the only direction my feet will carry me before I make that long drive to deliver the worst news a mother can receive. I head to the safe room.

Straight for my woman. As soon as I get there, I type in the code and turn the handle opening the door.

There she is, sitting on the cushioned seat along the wall. Her head whips up, then she rushes toward me, slamming hard into my chest. My arms wrap around her, holding her tight. Closing my eyes, I pull

in a ragged breath. Lifting my chin, I peer at Kiwi. “I’m going to need you to stay with her until I get back from seeing Track’s family.” Kiwi’s face says everything else I can’t at the moment. Millions of emotions pass over his face before he nods. Peeling Luna off my body, I tell her, “I have one more task to handle today, so I’m going to need you to go back to the clubhouse with Kiwi.” Her lips tremble, but she holds her feelings at bay.

“Is he okay?” Luna asks.

“No, baby.” Tears fall down her cheeks “Kiwi,” I look back at him. “Have the girls keep Luna company.” I glance down again, and Luna’s big beautiful eyes, full of sadness rips at my heart, making it hard to leave her side. “I’ll see you soon,” I assure her.

Reaching up, her hand caresses my face. “Promise?” she signs.

“I’ll always find my way home, Mon Tresor.”

A LITTLE MORE THAN AN HOUR LATER, I’M  
STANDING ON THE FRONT PORCH OF TRACK’S  
FAMILY HOME

in Ponchatoula. I knock on the front door. It doesn't take long for the curtain covering the window on the door to move, as Mrs. Dupuis peeks outside. The door opens.

"Riggs, it's good to see you." She looks around finding me alone. "What brings you out this way?"

"Mrs. Dupuis, mind if I step inside?" I keep my voice even, but her smile falls from her face, and her hand clenches at her chest.

"Something isn't right. I feel it. You tell me right now why you came all the way out here, Riggs."

She pleads for the truth. How do you tell a mother that their child is dead? I try to find the right words, but there are none.

"Mrs. Dupuis, Daniel died." I hate to put it so bluntly, but I don't want to leave any room for doubt or confusion. The most gut-wrenching blood-curdling cry exits his mother's body, and I catch her as her knees buckle beneath her.

"Why him, Riggs? Why my baby?" she cries, as my cut soaks up her tears.

Night has fallen by the time I leave the Dupuis home in Ponchatoula. I called a couple of the other members, asking them to sit and watch over her and her daughter for the next couple of days. I told Track's mom the club would take care of all the funeral expenses. Hugging her one final time, I straddle my bike and take off down the road heading home.

Pulling through the clubhouse gate, I'm not surprised to find Wick outside by himself sitting on the picnic table facing the river. Parking my bike, I cross the yard. "How's everyone holdin' up?"

"Good, considering. How's his momma and sister holdin' up?" he asks in return.

"As good as can be expected. She'll call tomorrow with funeral arrangements." I stand there a beat. "We need to address the situation before heads hit pillows tonight. I'm callin' church," I inform him, and Wick stands.

“He was a good man, Riggs.” We walk toward the clubhouse side by side.

“I know.”

“It was those fuckin’ Savage Outlaw bastards, wasn’t it?” Wick questions though he already knows the answer.

“Yeah,” I pull the front door open, and the cold air from inside cools my skin. I don’t have to say a word. Once my men notice I’m in the room they get up from where they are sitting and head straight for the back room to conduct business. The door closes as the last member enters, and the room falls silent. The weight of Track’s death looms over our heads like a dark storm cloud. “Over the following

days, I want every man vigilant. Someone slithered their way into our den and took one of our own.

Track wasn’t a full-fledged member yet, but we all know he was well on his way to earning that patch.” Fists pound the table.

“The message was heard loud and clear. We know the fuckers who did this, and once we bury our brother, you’ll be damn sure we will hunt them down.” I make eye contact with each man in the room.

“Kiwi, work your social media outlets. Check out camera feeds around the city. See if you can find any evidence of just how many we are dealing with. Wick, you, and Cain spread the word. I want to know who may have seen these assholes. Get people talkin’ on the streets. I want these fuckers to know we aren’t laying down or tuckin’ tail. Track’s death will not go unpunished.” The room falls quiet again, and I welcome it. I bring the gavel down and say no more.

My focus shifts to one person. My woman. Leaving my brothers, I head upstairs where I run into Payton in the hallway exiting my bedroom. “Hey, Riggs,” she speaks low as she pulls the door closed.

Her face falls, looking like she’s barely holding it together. The girls spend a lot of time with both Track and Everest since the four of them live here at the clubhouse. “Luna wasn’t

feeling well. Said she has a headache, so I gave her some medicine, and she just crawled into bed. I was about to fix her a warm cup of tea,” Payton explains while hugging herself.

“I appreciate you sitting with her today. Why don’t you turn in for the night?” I tell her.

“I think I’ll go sit with Everest. He’s not doing so well,” Payton sighs. “I’m going to miss him.

Track was a good man. You know almost all the money he made working at Kings Tactical goes into a money box, under his bed? He’s been saving to buy his sister a reliable car to get back and forth to nursing school in,” Payton smiles. “Just thought you should know it’s there, in his room.”

“I’ll make sure she gets it,” I assure her. Payton nods then walks away.

Turning the handle, I open the door to my room. I find Luna on the bed beneath the covers like Payton said. Shrugging my cut off my shoulders, I lay it on top of the dresser next to the door. The moment I sit down on the edge of the bed and start to unlace my boots, I feel a hand on my thigh.

Toeing my shoes off, I position myself in the bed beside my woman. Her arms embrace me without questions. Touching is the only communication needed after today. Luna gives me what I need the most. Love.

MY HEART IS HEAVY BECAUSE WE BURY TRACK TODAY. STANDING OUTSIDE ON THE BALCONY, I LOOK

out on the darkened skies. Storm clouds rolled in almost an hour ago, threatening rain — a pair of soft arms snake around my waist. Spinning, I face Luna. “Ready?” I ask, and she nods.

After making sure the apartment and bar are locked up tight, I help my woman on the back of my bike, and we head toward the clubhouse to meet up with the other members and ride out together.

When we roll up, my men are waiting on me just outside the gate. “Where’s Fender?” I ask, noticing his absence.



“Making sure the road ahead is safe. If he spots anything, he’ll radio back. He took Everest with him,” Wick informs.

“Alright.” Bike engines roar, as members fall in behind Wick, Nova, Kiwi and me. “Let’s Roll,” I call out and pull out onto the road.

Pulling into the funeral home parking lot, my men and I fall into formation in front of the hearse.

The roar of our bikes draws attention as we lead the procession, taking our friend to his final resting place. Dozens of friends and family showed today to pay their respects to a good man. As we watch Track’s family mourn, while gathered around his casket, anger boils inside me. I take in the faces of my brothers as they watch Track’s mother and sister weep over the grave of a son and a brother.

Fender grabs his guitar and starts to sing the song Mrs. Dupuis asked for. *Go Rest High on That Mountain*. Her sobs wrack her body, and her daughter embraces her, as Daniel’s casket slowly lowers into the ground.

Luna’s hand tightens around mine as she sheds tears beside me, and I pull her closer. I share a look with each of my brothers. Death is coming for Rex and the rest of his sorry excuse of a club.

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

### **LUNA**

The ride back home from Track’s funeral is a somber one. Riggs will not tell me the details surrounding Track’s death, partly because the details are club business and partly because he’s trying to protect me, but I know it’s Rex’s handy work. I also know his death is on my hands. The past twenty-four hours Riggs has been carefully gauging my reaction to the whole ordeal. I think he’s waiting to see if I’m going to run. I told him before no more running, and I meant it. I have never in my life wished death on someone, but I hope that when Riggs and his club find Rex, they make his death a slow and painful one. Having to look at Track’s mom and sister in the

eyes, and see the pain they are going through, nearly brought me to my knees.

Exiting the highway, in the direction of New Orleans, Riggs turns left heading in the direction of the bar while the rest of the guys keep right toward the clubhouse. Peering over my shoulder, I see Kiwi still tailing us. Riggs had mentioned earlier we needed to stop by the apartment before going back to the clubhouse.

I'm brought out of my thoughts when I feel Riggs' whole body go tense. Using his right hand, he reaches into his cut, pulling out a gun. Shocked, my eyes go big, and my senses are on high alert.

When I look over my shoulder again, I see Kiwi has placed himself inches from us on the left; covering us. He too has drawn his weapon. That's when I see a white sedan headed in our direction at an alarming speed. My breath gets caught in my throat, and my heart rate picks up as I clutch the back of Riggs' cut. Swiftly moving into the other lane, we begin to speed up. Riggs expertly maneuvers his bike through the traffic. We haven't made it into the city yet, but cars and people walking the streets still surround us. Just as I go to look over my shoulder again for the car following us, I startle and nearly jump out of my seat when the rear window of the car driving beside us is shattered by a bullet, causing the vehicle to run off the road. I send a silent prayer the driver is okay. When I peer over my shoulder once again, I see Kiwi returning fire on the white sedan, the same time Riggs' tattooed arm appears in my line of sight as he fires off a few rounds.

Holstering his weapon, Riggs begins to take us on a series of turns as we enter the busy streets of New Orleans. Bile rises in my throat at the thought of a stray bullet hitting an innocent bystander, but when I twist my head around, I no longer see Kiwi or the white car. Not stopping at his apartment Riggs speeds past the bar, and we head in the direction of the clubhouse. Five minutes later we are pulling through the gates and are greeted by Fender, Wick, Nova, and several other brothers. Once we park, Riggs says something to his men, and

Fender swiftly jumps on his bike and peels out of the compound. I'm assuming to find Kiwi and the person who was chasing us. *Oh God, let Kiwi be okay.*

Frozen in place and still clutching the back of Riggs' cut, it takes me a second to realize he's

talking to me. "We're okay, baby. We're okay."

Losing my hold on him, Riggs is off his bike in time to catch me as I slump into his arms.

Wrapping his arms around me, he holds me until my body stops shaking and I compose myself. He runs his hands through my hair and kisses my neck. Worried about Kiwi, I ask, "Where is Kiwi; is he okay?"

"Kiwi will be fine. He knows how to handle himself."

"Where did he go? Shouldn't he have followed us here?"

Riggs shakes his head. "Kiwi did what any of my men would have done in that situation. He protected his Prez and my woman by leading whoever was after us in the opposite direction. He did what he had to do so I could get us back to the clubhouse safely." With nothing else left to say, I lay my head against his chest, breathe in his scent, and allow the familiar smell of cologne and exhaust to calm me. Riggs kisses the top of my head. "Come on. Let's go inside. I need to talk to my men." When we step inside the clubhouse, the main room is packed with every club member along with Payton and Josie. All the guys are waiting for their President. Nodding in the direction of Josie and Payton, Riggs asks, "will you go sit with the girls for a few minutes while I sort some shit out?"

Doing as he asks, I make my way to the sofa where the two women are perched, both looking worried. Payton and Josie give me a friendly smile as I take a seat next to them. Keeping my eyes trained across the room, I watch as Riggs engages his men. Five minutes later, Kiwi and Fender burst through the door. It looks like I am not the only person to breathe a sigh of relief. As Kiwi strides in Riggs' direction, he briefly cuts his eyes over to me, as if to make sure I'm okay. It amazes me how these men will go through great lengths to protect their

brothers. It surprises me more to see they will do the same for me; someone they hardly know.

I can't make out what the men are saying, but when Riggs says something to Kiwi and Kiwi shakes his head in return, Riggs goes red in the face. *That can't be good.* Riggs says one last thing to the guys as he points to me before they all take off in a different direction. Riggs strides toward me, and I stand to meet him halfway. "We're going to Pop's place."

"Why?" I ask.

"Some shit is about to go down, and I don't want you anywhere near it. Nova is bringing Piper too." Just then Nova steps back into the room with his daughter in tow. He gives his brother a chin lift as he and Piper walk out of the clubhouse.

"Come on. We'll talk more once we get to Pop's."

Trusting his decision, I do as he says.

When we get to Mr. LeBlanc's house, he is waiting for us on the front porch; shotgun in hand. I take in how shook up Piper is. She may not know the details of what's going on, but she is scared and worried about her dad and uncle. Stepping away from Riggs, I walk over to Nova's bike where he is trying to console his daughter. Luckily Nova jumps in to translate what I am saying. "How about we go inside. Maybe your grandpa has the fixings for cookies. Whenever I'm sad or worried, I find baking helps. What do you say? Want to help me?"

Piper wipes the tears from her eyes and nods. Taking her hand in mine, I lead her up to the house.

Nova sends me a quick thank you when I look back over my shoulder, and I smile. When Piper and I step onto the porch, I greet Riggs' granddad. "Hi, Abe. I hope you don't mind if Piper and I raid your kitchen. We're going to see if you have the fixings for some cookies."

He smiles. "You two go on ahead. I know for a fact you'll find what you need in the pantry. I haven't had homemade cookies in a spell. You won't hear me complaining, sweetheart." Abe turns to his granddaughter. "Don't go telling your dad and uncle. I'm not supposed to have all that sugar." Abe's

words put a smile on Piper's face.

Once inside the kitchen, Piper goes about showing me where everything is. I'm surprised to see that Abe does have a fully stocked pantry complete with everything we need to make chocolate chip cookies. Placing a large mixing bowl in front of Piper, I show her how much of each ingredient to pour into the container. Next, we scoop out spoonfuls of dough onto a cookie sheet then place it into the oven. Piper sets the timer before taking a seat at the kitchen table next to me. When I notice how fidgety she is acting while nibbling on her bottom lip, I make a motion with my hands for a pen and paper. Understanding what I am asking for, she springs from her chair over to a drawer next to the refrigerator. Pulling it open, she retrieves a notebook and pen. Piper takes her seat beside me and slides the notebook over. Opening it, I scribble, "*What's on your mind?*"

Piper doesn't hesitate to answer. "I know something terrible is going on, but Dad won't tell me. He treats me like I'm a little kid who won't understand."

*It's not that he thinks you won't understand; he wants to protect you. You know how the club works. This is my mess, and I don't even know all the details. You have to trust in your dad's reasoning for not telling you, the same way I have to put my trust into your uncle.*

Piper seems to ponder my response before she continues. "You're right. If I were in my dad's shoes, I'd want to protect my kid. I'm mostly worried about him and Uncle Abel. They are the only family I have."

Damn this kid is fantastic. *You're an amazing young lady; you know that?* I compliment her, and she blushes.

"I'm not," she says.

*You are. Few sixteen-year-olds will see logic like you. Instead of staying mad at your dad, you were able to stop, think, and put yourself in his shoes. You allowed yourself to accept and understand the way things need to be. Believe me when I say you're pretty amazing.*

Piper motions to the oven signaling the timer has gone off, breaking our little mush fest. Patting her on the arm, I stand and make my way to the oven to take the cookies out while she goes to the refrigerator and grabs us some milk. Just as we sit down at the table to indulge in our sweet treat, Riggs, Nova and Mr. LeBlanc walk into the kitchen. “Looks like we made it just in time,” Mr.

LeBlanc grins snatching a cookie off the plate. Riggs gives his grandad a scolding look. Abe shoves the whole cookie in his mouth ignoring him.

Riggs shakes his head and turns to me. “I want you to come outside with me.”

“What are we doing?”

“You’ll see. Come on.”

Nova and Mr. LeBlanc take a seat at the table with Piper, while I stand and follow Riggs outside.

He leads me around back and about twenty yards away from the house. Just along the tree line, I see eight tree stumps sitting upright with soda cans sitting on top of them. “What are we doing?”

Riggs pulls a gun from his cut and shows it to me. “I’m giving you a crash course in how to handle a gun and shoot it.”

My nerves kick in. “Do you think this is necessary?”

“Yes. I want you to feel confident you can protect yourself if for whatever reason I’m not around to do it.”

I nod. “Okay.”

Holding the weapon out in front of me, pointing it away from us, Riggs starts explaining how to handle the gun safely. “This is the safety. Never take it off unless you are prepared to use it.” He flicks it back and forth, showing me, and I nod. “Here,” Riggs hands me the gun. “I’m going to stand behind

you and help you with your aim. Once you feel confident, pull the trigger,” he instructs and moves to stand behind me. Next, I raise my arm out in front of me while allowing Riggs to help me with my stance. Aiming at one of the empty cans sitting on

top of the stump, I take a deep breath and pull the trigger. Missing my mark, the bullet ricochets off the tree stump. Riggs encourages me to try again by tapping my arm. Again, I take aim and fire. I miss the mark a second time. Refusing to give up, I try two more times, and on my fifth shot, I hit the can, and watch as it flies off the tree stump. I cannot help but smile at my accomplishment. Nudging my side, Riggs nods for me to keep going, so I do. We spend the next hour practicing, and I surprise myself with how good a shot I am. “You’re a natural, babe. You did well. I’m so fucking proud of you.” He kisses me.

When we walk back inside Riggs instructs, “go get your purse.”

I walk into the kitchen and retrieve my bag from the kitchen counter then walk back out to the living room. He hands me the gun I was practicing with along with two magazines. “Put these in there.” We eye each other, silently communicating. I take the pistol and magazines from his outstretched hand and place them in my purse. “Cain and I need to head back to the clubhouse. You and Piper will be safe here with Pop. And don’t let his age fool you,” Riggs smiles. “Pop is a better shot than I am. Leaning down, Riggs touches his lips to mine. “I’ll be back later. I want you to look after my niece. You’re strong, Luna and I trust you.” It means a lot that Riggs and Nova trust me enough to look after Piper.

Nova steps up to my side. “I appreciate you looking out for my girl, Luna.”

“She’s a good kid, Nova. And it is no problem watching her. I enjoy her company very much.”

“Thanks, darlin’,” he says before turning to Riggs. “You ready, brother?” Riggs nods and holds his finger up, signaling to give him a minute. Riggs takes my face in his hands, giving me one last kiss.

“Bye, baby.”

“Please be safe.”

I can't help the wave of unease that settles in the pit of my stomach as I watch Riggs and Nova walk out of the house. Pushing my feelings aside, I put on a brave face and make my way back into the next room where Piper is currently cleaning up the mess we made from our cookie making. I step up to the sink where she is washing dishes, pick up the hand towel from the counter, and start drying while she rinses. I bump my hip into hers. When she looks at me, I wink. That earns a bump and a smile in return.

I'm sitting on the porch in a rocking chair next to Abe, who has a shotgun resting on his lap. I'm not as comfortable with weaponry as Abe, but I'm no fool either, so my purse is sitting within arm's reach next to my chair. Piper is currently laid out on the porch swing where she fell asleep thirty minutes ago. "My wife and I used to sit out here every evening with a cold glass of sweet tea and watched the sunset together," Abe tells me out of nowhere. "No matter how busy our days were with our jobs and running around after the boys, not once in our fifty-two years of marriage, did we miss a sunset. Not even when I was in the army. The nights I spent away from my wife; I'd still watch the sunset.

Wherever I was in the world, I took solace in knowing she was doing the same. That's how I knew she was with me. Just like she's with me now." A look of longing crosses his face as he tells his story.

Abe turns to me. "My one wish in life was that Abel and Cain find the kind of love I had with their grandmother. I know without a shadow of a doubt; you are Abel's person — his soulmate. He looks at you the way I use to look at his grandmother."

I swipe at the tear that has fallen down my cheek. "I care for your grandson very much."

"Oh, child. You're not fooling anyone. You more than care for Abel, you're in love with him just like he's in love with you." Abe reaches over and pats my hand when he registers the shocked look on



my face. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. I know you’ll tell him when you’re ready.” Abe pauses, looking me in the eyes. “Don’t take too long telling him. Life is too short.”

Abe sits back in his chair, take a sip of his sweet tea, and begins to rock. I turn my attention to the lake in front of his house and let his words sink in. He’s right. Life is too short. I understand that better than anyone. I’m also smart enough to know how lucky I am to have found a man as wonderful as Riggs. When I woke up in the hospital after I survived the near-death beating Rex gave me, I vowed never to trust another man. I told myself I was better off not opening my heart up to someone only to have them destroy it. What I have come to learn with Riggs is not being with him is what would destroy me. Riggs had my trust and stole my heart the second we locked eyes with each other back in Montana. That man owns me. Mind. Body. Soul.

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

### **RIGGS**

“Goddammit.” I send a chair flying across the main room of the clubhouse, fucking furious as hell at the events that unfolded on the road home earlier today.

“Cool your shit, brother.” Cain sits at the bar, nursing a beer. “Your woman and Piper are in the safest place they can be right now.”

I continue pacing the floor. Two days of my men riding the city streets, and the hours Kiwi spent on his computer trying to gain access to any footage that would lead us in the direction of the Savage Outlaw has turned up nothing. We thought we might have had a lead a time or two, but the two men caught on a street light camera proved to be a couple of nonaffiliated bikers.

The rumble of Wick’s Harley can be heard rolling on to clubhouse property, so I swing the front door open and step outside into the hot, muggy night air. Looking past Wick, I watch a brown van roll through the gate, with Fender behind the wheel. “Where’d the cage come from?”

Wick looks at me with a shit eating grin. “Borrowed it from a friend.” The van rolls to a stop and Fender steps out from behind the steering wheel.

“You’ll never guess what we found.” Fender rubs his hands together, and the three of us walk toward the back of the vehicle. “Or I should say who,” he says.

Reaching out, Wick pulls the double doors open. Inside, with hands tied behind their backs, and feet crossed and taped at the ankles, along with a wide ass strip across their faces, is none other than our ex-club girl Lexi and some short, stocky motherfucker I’ve never seen before.

“Fender and I decided to ride a little further, just to the other side of Lake Pontchartrain into Slidell. Don’t ask me why, just a gut feelin’ I had.” Lexi’s eyes widen with fear before dropping her head. “Found these two in somewhat of a compromising position near the backside of a little mom and pop gas station we pulled up to.” Wick continues to explain.

Fender snickers. “Wick here fuckin’ snuck up on them with those ninja skills of his, scaring the shit out of her.” He starts laughing louder. “She was bobbin’ away, and dipshit here never saw a thing.

Lexi damn near bit the fucker’s dick off when our brother here pressed the barrel of his gun to the fucker’s head.”

Fender steps inside the back of the van, takes a blade clipped to the inside of his boot and uses it to cut the tape wrapped around Lexi’s ankles. He pulls Lexi to the edge of the van opening. “Let’s go.”

He orders. Bent over, Lexi shuffles her feet to the end of the van then stops.

“Get your ass out,” I bark, and she jumps out. Wick grips her upper arm when she tries to dart around him. Fender does the same with the biker, and cuts the tape around his ankles, standing him up.

The fucker leaps the couple of feet to the ground, his face completely void of any emotion.

“Take them around back,” I tell my men.

On the back end of the property, about ten yards from the banks of the river is a solid brick building built on a thick concrete slab. I'm not sure what was housed here in the past, but due to the proximity of the river and the ability to clean away evidence of a questionable nature with a pressure washer, it's the perfect location for interrogation. Wick and Fender do as they are told, dragging them across the yard.

Just as I'm making my way inside the clubhouse to grab the other men a flicker of light gains my attention. Pivoting, I stare toward the gate. Blocking the beam with my hand, I strain to get a look at who is on the other side. My phone rings.  
"Yeah?"

"How about you take your thumb out of your ass and open this gate." There's a brief pause before the voice adds, "Sir."

I grin. Pulling the app feature up on my screen, I type out the four-digit code, and the gate rolls open, then closes once the bike has cleared. A dark cherry red KRG1-1 rolls up next to me. "I wasn't expecting you until tomorrow, Tequila."

Lifting a helmet the same slick red color as her bike off her head, Tequila tosses her dark hair over her shoulder. "Got to keep you on your toes." Turning off the engine, she swings her long leg over her bike, walks up, and hugs my neck. "So," she pulls her riding gloves off her hands, placing them inside her helmet. "Looks like you have a situation. I think I saw Wick and one of your other men walking a couple of people to the dungeon of doom." She peers around my shoulder in the direction in question, then turns retrieving a duffel bag strapped to the back of her bike.

"Club shit. Come on in and make yourself at home. You know where everything is, and your room is ready for you. Unfortunately, the club is empty besides us men. We had some shit go down over the past forty-eight hours and had to send the women somewhere safe." I walk her inside.

"How about I hang with you and the guys for a while? Just let me throw my shit in the room."

Tequila strolls ahead of me heading for the stairs.

“I already told you. We have club shit to take care of. You know the rules,” I tell her knowing she’s going to ignore every word I say.

“Catch you later, Riggs,” she waves over her shoulder as she climbs the stairs. Cain comes strolling in from the kitchen and peers above him as he crosses the floor.

“I thought I heard a familiar voice. I haven’t seen her in a while. Thought she wasn’t supposed to be here until tomorrow.” Cain stops beside me. I turn to him knowing we need to take care of business.

“Come on. Wick and Fender are waitin’ out back.” I clap him on his shoulder. “Maybe we can get some information out of the fucker they brought us tonight.” Turning, he follows me outside and around the building.

Upon entering the shed, Cain and I find Wick and Fender standing off to the side, and our guests of honor roughly five feet apart, tied to chairs, right in the middle of the room. Walking up and standing in front of the biker, I address him first. “Couldn’t help but notice your little tattoo there.” I glance at the red and black ink on his forearm, yet his eyes stay fixed on my movements as I walk around him.

He’s running around without a cut, which means there are others in town doing the same. “Must be a fuckin’ bunch of pussies if you can’t show up for war without hidin’ your colors,” I goaded him, before ripping the tape off his lips, taking facial hair along with it.

“Fuck you, asshole. You and your men are as good as dead,” he spews. Reaching into my cut, I slip on my brass knuckles. “Nice town you got here. Looking forward to taking it from you. Your club whore here is already showing where her new loyalties lie,” he sneers, and I reward his shit talking

by burying my fist in his face. Blood pours from his mouth. Leaning forward, he spits a few teeth to the floor at his feet. Surging upward, he flings his body at me, only for me to stop his momentum with a blow to his massive gut, dropping him to his knees. Wick walks over, grabs the fucker by the collar of his shirt, and slams his ass back down in the chair.

Taking a few steps, I come to stand in front of Lexi. “And you.” I narrow my eyes to slits, fucking mad as hell at her betrayal. “You went runnin’ straight to the enemy.” I rip the tape from her mouth, causing her to cuss.

“Fucking hell.” She stomps her feet at the pain, then lifts her head and glares.

“This is your only chance to use that mouth for more than lies and suckin’ cock, girl,” I warn her.

“She can’t even do that right,” the biker mumbles under his breath and Fender clocks him upside his head.

“Shut up, Phil,” Lexi screams, giving up his name.

“Keep your mouth shut if you know what’s good for you whore,” Phil growls a warning in Lexi’s direction. She rolls her eyes.

“Or what?” she shifts in her seat.

“Enough!” I bellow, tired of listening to their bullshit. Grabbing Lexi by the chin, I bring her attention to me. “Talk,” I growl growing impatient. She smirks, and my hands clench at my sides. I won’t give a second thought to torturing or taking the life of another man if necessary, but beating, or taking the life of a woman is something I won’t do.

“I know you, Riggs. You won’t hit me.” Lexi’s eyes drop, eyeballing my crotch. She raises a brow, then licks her smudged red lips. “I’d be willing to give up some information in exchange for —.”

“I’ll beat the nasty bitch,” Tequila saunters into the building, wearing a pair of army green shorts, combat boots, and a white tank. “Tequila, this is club business. Get your ass back to the main building and stay there.” Wick steps in front of her, his eyes rake over her body before settling on her face.

Tequila stands glaring at him for a beat.

“Nice to see you too, Dawson.” Tequila steps around Wick’s large frame. “Come on, LeBlanc. Let me have a little fun.” Tequila offers a solution to our current situation. I look around the room at my men — Kiwi, Nova, and Fender nod, all three

grinning from ear to ear. Wick however, it takes him a second longer to give me a firm nod. Tequila's eyes light up once she's given the green light.

Reaching down to her right, Tequila pulls a blade from the sheath strapped to her boot, and approaches Lexi, twirling the weapon in her hand a few times.

"In a fair fight, you wouldn't stand a chance," Lexi smirks, thinking highly of herself. I watch the switch flip in Tequila's eyes. Lexi just fucked up. Tequila looks around the room, and with the tip of her blade points to herself.

"Is this bitch talking to me? I know she didn't just say she could beat my ass." Lexi just fucked with the wrong woman. Tequila bends, getting into Lexi's personal space and stares her down. With a flick of her wrist, she cuts loose the tape binding Lexi's wrists. "You want a fair fight?" Tequila stays in her face.

"Fuck you," Lexi spits. Tequila rises above her, backhanding Lexi, the force of the blow sending her and the seat crashing to the concrete floor.

Tequila slices the rope binding Lexi to the chair. "Get your ass up. You wanted a shot at me, now you got one." Tequila hands her knife to Wick, who is standing closest to her.

"Lexi, give us the information we want and this doesn't have to go any further." I give her an out before Tequila begins. Instead, she charges forward trying to get her hands on Tequila first. Instead receives a blow to the face, causing her to stumble backward a few feet. Tequila is trained in hand to hand combat. Lexi won't walk away without some serious injuries if she doesn't stop now. Obviously, she doesn't know what's best for her because Lexi steps forward and readies herself. Tequila steps into her space again. Lexi brings her right fist up and swings. Blocking the blow, Tequila's knuckles crack Lexi square in the jaw. She falls to her knees, where Tequila's booted foot makes contact with her ribcage not once but twice. Tequila bounces on the balls of her feet eager for more fight. Lexi coughs and spits blood. This time she stays down.

“None of this would have happened if that deaf bitch would have never been brought into this clubhouse. She ruined everything!” Lexi screams in anger and pain. “You were mine,” She glares at me. “And that dumb ass bitch went and fucked it all up.” Holding her middle, Lexi sits back on her ass and leans against the concrete wall behind her. Blood drips from her busted and swelling lip. “She fucked with the wrong woman,” Lexi sneers, and through her pain, she smirks. “I overheard who was after her. What better way to get her out of my way than to give her up to the man looking for her.”

Rage builds with her confession. She’s the one who gave up Luna’s location. She’s the reason my woman was put in danger and the reason one of my men is dead. “Track’s death is on your hands,” I growl.

Lexi’s face falls for a moment. “That’s not on me. I didn’t know they would kill Track.” Her words fall flat because they mean nothing.

“It’s on you. You’re as much to blame as the man who put that knife in his chest,” I tell her.

“So, what are you going to do to me now? Kill me?” Lexi shows no emotion or regret for the turmoil she has caused.

“Tell me where the Savage Outlaw are,” I demand.

Lexi shakes her head. “I don’t know.”

I cock my head. “I won’t be the one to kill you. You want to lay in bed with the snake, then that’s right where I’m sending you. Kiwi, Fender, Nova; I want the three of you to take her back across the bridge. Drop her off where you found her. Start calling everyone you know. Make sure word gets around that Lexi here has been talkin’ and can’t be trusted.

“They’ll kill me!” Lexi shouts.

“That’s not my problem anymore.” Nodding, Fender, and Kiwi pull her off the floor, taking her out of the building, with my brother leading the way.

“Damn, that’s one cold ass bitch,” Tequila quips, and I turn to her.

“I appreciate your skills, but we have business to finish here, so I need you to step out,” I tell her, and look at the Savage Outlaw who’s been sitting in his chair quietly observing.

Wick cuts in. “Try to listen this time and stay your ass in the clubhouse.”

Tequila saunters across the room, her dark skin glistening from the heat and humidity in the room, then stops by the door Wick’s holding open. I watch as her eyes roam over his body. His eyes dip to her breasts before settling on her face. “Since when do I follow the rules?” Tequila quips as she exits.

Turning our attention to the man of the hour, I motion for Wick to take a position on one side of him as I take my place on the other. “You going to tell us where Rex and the rest of his men are?” I ask, even though my gut is telling me this man won’t break easily, if at all.

“It’s a shame I won’t live long enough to watch each one of you die,” Phil smirks again, and Wick hits him with an uppercut, sending him and the chair flying backward. Blood spews from his broken nose, and the fucker starts laughing. Picking him and the chair off the floor, we sit him back up. “I know I’m not leaving this room alive, so I’m not tellin’ you shit,” he admits accepting his fate. Doesn’t mean he won’t suffer a bit more before the fact. I bury my fist in his bloodied face, and blood coats my knuckles. Blow after satisfying blow, Wick and I beat the man until his face is unrecognizable and his breaths are shallow. The pain inflicted on his body does nothing to feed the rage inside me.

There’s only one thing that will quench the thirst I have, and that’s killing the one man responsible.

Rex. For now, I’ll take what I can get. Drawing my gun from the holster, I aim the barrel right between the fucker’s eyes and pull the trigger.

I stand there for a moment and watch dark red blood oozing from the bullet hole. The adrenaline pumping through my veins is a whole different monster compared to the feeling of



killing the enemy in battle. Taking a life for revenge — for retribution — is not the same.

“What should we do with the body?” Wick asks.

“We’ll dump him in the river. Let the mighty Mississippi have him. That’s if the gators don’t get him first.”

After disposing of the body and cleaning the evidence, Wick and I return to the clubhouse. We find Tequila sitting at the bar with a bottle of whiskey and a half-filled glass sitting beside her.

“I take it the battle came to you this time around?” she lifts the glass to her painted red lips, and we take our seats at the bar beside her. Reaching behind the bar, she snags two more glasses, pours three fingers full in each, then slides them in our direction. “Mind if I hang around?”

Taking a sip, I let the whiskey linger in my mouth, before feeling the burn as the liquid slides down my throat. “We’re kind of in the middle of some shit.”

Tequila laughs. “No, shit. That’s why I’m asking.”

Wick hangs his head and mumbles, “Fuck.”

“Alright, but one condition,” I tell her.

Tequila downs the rest of her drink. “You and I both know I don’t do conditions, LeBlanc.”

I eye her. “My woman’s life and the safety of this club means more than any one of us or our egos, Tequila. You stay — you follow the rules, just as if we were out there in combat.”

“Are you telling me you’ve done gone and fell in love?” she raises her brow, and her lips turn up in a genuine smile. She looks past me to Wick, who nods, confirming her inquiry. “Do I get to see more action?”

“Probably,” I tell her.

“Okay.”

“Okay?” It’s my turn to raise a brow.

“I’ll fall in line and do as I’m told.” Tequila pauses before saying, “this time.”

Thirty minutes later, Kiwi and Fender are walking through the door.

“Word is out. I’m pretty sure Lexi is on her way out of town by now.” Kiwi joins us at the bar.

Fender walks behind the bar, grabs two cold beers from the small fridge below the counter, pops the tops off and hands one to Kiwi. “I can almost guarantee she won’t make it. She dug herself a deep hole this time. I don’t see her getting out of it.” He downs half his beer.

It’s getting late. I look around at my men and take in how tired they look. It’s been a long ass day

— for all of us. “Turn in. Get some rest. We sleep here tonight. I’ll take the first watch.” I turn to my brother. “Get a hold of Pop, and make sure everything is alright out there.” Then I address Wick.

“We’re used to power naps, so you’ll rotate with me in three hours. Then, Fender, you’ll relieve Wick after his three.”

I stay seated as they disperse, all of them heading up the stairs besides Cain, who pulls his phone from his pocket and makes a call. He doesn’t stay on the phone for too long. He says a few words to Pop and briefly talks to Piper, telling her goodnight, and he loves her. “Everything is quiet out there.

Piper hasn’t left Luna’s side.”

Placing my hand on his shoulder, I squeeze. “Thanks, brother. Now go get some sleep.” He nods,

and claps my back, before taking his leave.

After doing a security sweep, I walk outside and sit on top of the picnic table near the river.

Taking a cigarette and a match from the pack in my pocket, I strike the match tip across the bottom of my boot and light the tobacco. I take a long hard pull, then stare out toward the city lights. Grabbing my phone from the inside of my cut, I swipe

the screen and tap on the message thread and type out a text to my woman.

**Me:** How are you doing?

Her reply is instant.

**Luna:** I'm okay. Are you coming back?

**Me:** Not tonight. It's not safe to travel. I'm not going to risk leading them to you.

A whole minute passes before tiny dots appear on the screen, letting me know she is typing.

**Luna:** I love you.

Those three words settle deep in my chest. I stare at them for a beat, repeatedly reading them.

**Me:** I love you too, baby.

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

### LUNA

2:27 am. I have been staring at the clock sitting on the bedside table for hours now. Giving up on sleep, I climb out of bed, careful not to wake Piper. She has been stuck to me like glue since we arrived here at Abe's, but I don't mind. I find her presence comforting as much as she does mine.

Slipping my shoes on, I make my way out of the room, shutting the door behind me. The house is dark as I stroll into the kitchen, where I decide to make some coffee. As I'm pouring sugar into my mug, I think back to the text I sent Riggs earlier. Telling someone you love them for the first time shouldn't be done over text, but I kept thinking about what Abe told me. *Don't wait too long.* And with what is going on with Savage Outlaw, I began to let the 'what ifs' run through my head. What if something terrible happens to Riggs while he and the club are hunting down Rex and I don't see him again? I would lose my chance telling him how I feel. I'll admit waiting for his reply had me doubting whether he felt the same. Once those magical words displayed across the phone screen, I realized how silly it was for me to have

doubted for even a second. With every touch, every look, and every kiss Riggs gives me, he's showing me he loves me.

Closing my eyes, I cover my mouth with my hand as I let out a yawn. Just as I go to take another sip of coffee, movement out of the corner of my eye catches my attention. Though the house is dark aside from the stove light being on, I can make out a shadowy figure standing out on the front porch.

With my heart in my throat, I slowly stand from the kitchen table and make my way toward the living room window. On closer inspection, I notice it's Abe standing on the porch, unmoving with his shotgun in hand. Cupping my hands around my face against the window, I try to see what has his attention, but I only see darkness accompanied by the moonlight dancing across the lake. Strolling to the front door, I pull it open and step out to where Abe is standing. "What are you looking at?"

Abe turns his head toward me, and the look on his face has me on high alert. "A storm is brewing, and it's not mother nature," he says. "Someone is out there watching us."

Bile rises in my throat as I try one more time to see what Abe is seeing. "Are you sure? If so. Why haven't they tried anything?" I ask.

"Yes, I'm sure. They're out there. Not sure what they are waiting for, but I felt their presence five minutes before you came out here."

My breathing picks up, and I feel panic starting to set in. *It's Rex. He's found me.*

"It's time to call my grandson," Abe warns. But we don't get a chance because the lights on the porch and in the house begin to flash, alerting us that someone has breached his property. Abe told me about the lights and security system earlier. Abe grabs my arm, gaining my attention. "Go to Piper and lock yourself in the bedroom. I have a crawl space underneath the house. Lift the throw rug on the

floor. Underneath is a latch. Pull on it, and an escape hatch will open. You and Piper crawl to the back of the house. There

will be an opening. When the coast is clear, run. Do you understand?” he signs quickly.

Nodding, I turn to run back inside when a spray of bullets starts hitting the house. I don't waste time looking to see if Abe is okay. Riggs assured me his grandad could handle his own, so I am going to pray that he can. Right now, my only concern is for Piper and getting her out safely. Running through the living room and down the hall, I rush into the bedroom to see Piper crouched down in one corner of the room. I lock the door before making my way over to the side of the bed and snatch my purse off the bedside table. Opening it, I retrieve the gun Riggs gave me.

I run over to Piper, grab her hand, and pull her with me. She follows without protest. Doing as Abe said, I lift the rug beneath our feet to find the latch he was talking about. Pulling on the lever, it opens with ease. I retake Piper's hand and nod toward the opening that leads underneath the house.

She has a look of panic mixed with tears on her face but does as instructed and lowers herself down in the hole; the whole time I keep my eyes trained on the bedroom door ready to shoot anyone who dares to enter. Once Piper is clear, I go down to my butt and slide through the opening.

I quickly reach up and close the hatch. We don't have long before one of Rex's men break into the bedroom and discovers our escape route. With no room to stand Piper and me, are forced to lay on our bellies. I tuck the pistol in the band of my shorts. With Piper's eyes on me, waiting for what to do next, I point directly in front of us and use my fingers to make the signal to crawl. It doesn't take long before I spot the opening that will lead us out from under the house. When we are about ten feet from our escape, Piper freezes. When I peer over my shoulder to see what is freaking her out, I see a man with a flashlight crawling straight for us. Shoving Piper on her bottom, I urge for her to move. Instead of following behind, I pull the gun from my waistband, flick the safety, turn on my back, brace my heels into the dirt and take aim at the son of a bitch behind me. Everything happens so fast, but I don't miss

the 'oh shit' look on the asshole's face two seconds before I pull the trigger, hitting him right between the eyes.

With no time to think about what I just did, I continue forward where I find Piper waiting for me at the opening. She's looking behind me at the dead man lying there. I reach over and tug her chin bringing her eyes to mine. I shake my head at her and sign for her not to look hoping she understands me. It kills me she had to see me do that, but I would do it a thousand times over to keep her safe. Not a part of me regrets killing that scum. With the gun still in my hand, I survey the yard for any threats.

When I see none, I give Piper the signal to wait. I decide to crawl out first to make sure we are clear.

I cautiously push to my feet keeping the gun trained in front of me, ready to shoot. I motion for Piper to move when I don't see anyone. Once she's out on her feet, I grab her hand in mine, and we make a run for it, straight to the back of the property that leads to the woods. Hiding amongst the trees is our best bet. We don't make it ten yards when Piper's hand is jerked from mine, and all the wind is knocked from my body as I'm tackled from behind. My body lands hard on the ground below me as the gun I was carrying goes flying across the yard. Just as I start to register what's happened, I'm flipped on my back, and I start to hit and kick at the person above me, earning a swift blow to my left cheek. Only the punch doesn't deter me, and I claw the hell out of the man's face, drawing blood.

*Kitty has claws motherfucker; literally.*

It's the three punches to the ribs that finally do me in. Unable to breathe, I roll to the side as I try to catch my breath. That's also when I see a man wearing a Savage Outlaw cut holding Piper.

*Oh, God, no.*

The man is standing behind her with one hand fisted in her hair and another holding a gun to her

head. I ignore the searing pain in my ribs as I push myself to my knees while keeping my hands out in front of me, showing them, I surrender. I can't risk Piper by continuing to fight. The man holding Piper gives me a wicked smile knowing he has won. The guy, whose face I scratched all to hell, tugs me to my feet by my hair. Piper and I are then dragged back toward the house. As we round the corner of the porch, my blood runs cold when I see Rex standing there. A sinister smile takes over his face, and I read his lips. "Take them inside."

Shoved through the front door, I breathe a sigh of relief when I see Abe. But my blood starts to boil when I see Rex's men have roughed him up. Jerking my arm from the guy who is holding me, I turn and face Rex. With my jaw clenched, I point toward Abe then to Rex. I sign even though I know he won't understand. "You're a pussy. Only pussies beat a woman and an elderly man."

I noticed out of the corner of my eye, Abe's shoulders shaking as he laughs, and it causes Rex to narrow his eyes at me. "What did the bitch say?" he directs his question at Abe, but I was able to read his lips. Abe grins and shrugs his shoulders. That pisses Rex off even more. Stalking in front of Abe, Rex rears back and punches him in his face. Blood trickles from his nose and I see red. I am not a fighter. Never have been, but for these people, my new family; I'm damn sure not going to stand by and allow shit like that to happen. Without a thought, I lunge for Rex and slap him across his face so hard my hand stings.

A look of shock crosses his face for a split second before he wraps his fist in my hair and hurls my body across the room causing my head to smack against the coffee table. My body crumples to the floor. I bring my hand to my head as I try to blink away the flashes of light dancing behind my eyelids.

I don't have a chance to compose myself before I am once again pulled to my feet and tossed to the sofa next to a frightened Piper. Looking up, I watch Rex sit on the table in front of me. He rests his elbows on his knees, pulls a cigarette from his cut, lights it, and takes a drag. He cocks his head to the side, studying me for a minute before he speaks.

“I have big plans for you just as soon as I take care of those fucking Kings.” Rex slides his gaze over to Piper, and I stop breathing. Abe goes to stand only to have one of Rex’s men shove him back in his seat.

“So, young. So pretty,” he says running his eyes up and down Piper’s body. “She’ll be coming with us too. I can make some bank off of her.” He brings his eyes back to me and smiles. “That is, after me, and my boys break her in.”

Piper’s body shakes violently next to me at Rex’s words. I lunge for him once more only to be stopped when he brings his pistol up and presses the barrel against my temple. “You’d be smart not to test me, bitch.”

I hold my chin up and give Rex a look that says go right ahead.

“I like the new Luna. You’ve gotten tough. It’s going to make it much more fun to break you,” Rex says with an evil gleam in his eyes.

Standing, Rex tucks his gun back into his cut and strides across the living room where he puts his phone to his ear, making a call. With a plan forming in my head, I cut my eyes to the man standing over Abe and notice his attention is on Rex. Piper, Abe, and I look at each other. I hold my hand down low and spell out the word *‘plan’* in hopes Piper will understand. She nods, letting me know she does.

*Thank God.*

Closing my eyes, I suck in a deep breath. *Please let this work.*

When I open my eyes, I give Abe and Piper a nod. They have no idea what my plan is, but hopefully, they will follow my lead. Lifting my arm, I wave my hands out in front of me to gain Rex’s attention. The man standing next to Abe says something while pointing to me and Rex turns, giving me an annoyed look. “What?”

I sign while Abe translates. “Piper and I need to use the bathroom.”



Rex barks something to his man, and he walks toward Piper and me. Pointing his gun at us, he says, “let’s go.”

I’m walking past Rex when he reaches out and snags my arm, stopping me. “Don’t fucking try anything, Luna.” The vibes coming off him send chills running down my spine. I know the consequences of what I am about to do, but my only concern is for Piper. Piper holds onto my hand for dear life. I can feel how scared she is by the way her body is trembling. As we walk past Abe, neither Rex nor his guys notice when I sign *distraction* to Abe. He gives me a slight nod. My stomach twists at the thought of putting Abe in the position where he might get hurt, but I know he wants his granddaughter out of danger just as much as I do.

When we get to the bathroom, I go to close the door. As suspected, the asshole who escorting us stops me. He shakes his head. When I am about to protest, Abe comes through for me, and the man in front of me startles, then darts down the hall in the direction of the living room. I slam the door closed and flip the lock. Next, I rush over to the window to pull it open; only it won’t budge. *Shit. Think Luna.* Twisting around, I peer around the bathroom before my eyes settle on the shower.

An idea comes to mind when I pull back the plastic curtain revealing the metal rod. Reaching up, I pull on it, and the suction cups release from the tiled wall of the shower. I take the rubber end of the metal rod off and motion for Piper to stand back. Using both hands, I lift the rod and bring it down on the glass with all the strength I can muster. The window doesn’t shatter, but it does puncture a hole through the glass.

*Good enough.*

Using the hand towel hanging next to the sink, I wrap it around my fist and begin punching out the glass. As I finish clearing the last shard of glass from the sill, Piper pulls on my shoulder while pointing at the bathroom door. Someone must be trying to break in. Knowing I have only seconds before Rex comes through the door, I take Piper by her arm and guide her to the window. She puts one leg through and then the other while I hold her arms, so she doesn’t cut herself as she lowers

herself to the ground below. The moment her feet touch the ground, I let go of her hands. Looking up at me Piper waves her arm, motioning for me to follow. I glance behind me at the door to see it has started to splinter from its hinges. I know there is no time for me to escape. I have to fight off whoever is coming through that door, giving Piper enough time to get away. I sign, “go.” But she shakes her head and continues to plead with me.

Peering over my shoulder, I startle as Rex busts through the broken door. My determination to save Piper has me doing something I haven’t done in over twenty years. “Go!” I scream, my throat feeling like I gargled nails. Using my voice seems so foreign, but I need for Piper to listen. Her eyes go wide. Whether it’s from the fact I just projected my voice or because Rex is directly behind me, I don’t know. Piper turns away from me and darts across the yard as fast as she can into the darkness, and I want to cry in relief.

My relief is short-lived because the next thing I know, I’m pulled away from the window by the hair on my head, drug out of the bathroom and down the hall to the living room where Rex tosses me to the floor in a heap next to Abe’s bloody motionless body. I start to cry as I crawl across the floor to check on him. Only I don’t make it two feet when I feel the blunt force of a steel toe boot hit my stomach. I wrap my arms around my midsection, trying to catch my breath. Rex kneels on the floor over my body, snatches my head back and sneers. “You’re going to pay for that.” He punches me across my cheek, and a hot searing pain explodes across my entire face. Just as he rears back to

deliver another blow, all hell breaks loose around us.

## **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

### **RIGGS**

Two and a half hours into my watch my phone vibrates. Retrieving it, I take in the alert glowing on my screen from the security system set around the perimeter of Pop’s property. At the same time, Cain bursts out the clubhouse door.

“Alarm was tripped out at Pop’s.”

“My phone just went off too,” I tell him.

“Pop would call if it were serious,” Cain states. “Right?” he adds.

My grip tightens on my phone. “He would call regardless of the situation unless for some reason he isn’t able to.”

Sharing a look, Cain and I rush inside, and up the stairs, banging on the men’s doors. One by one, we instruct everyone to get downstairs. Tequila’s bedroom door flings open. Fully dressed in combat gear, she steps out. “I heard you barking orders. Tell me what you need me to do.”

I don’t give a second thought about having her alongside us. “Fall in with the rest of the men downstairs,” I instruct her. Within minutes everyone is gathered, standing, and waiting near the front door. “We’re riding out to Pop’s. Perimeter alarm has been tripped. It could be nothing, but my gut says otherwise.”

“He didn’t call?” Wick wonders knowing the old man wouldn’t let us worry if there wasn’t any danger. The fact we haven’t heard a word isn’t a good sign.

“Total silence, brother.” My stomach falls, thinking that my family is in potential danger. “We’re thirty minutes out. Once we get on the road, you open those bikes up.” I look at my brothers. “Let’s ride.”

As we mount our bikes, Cain stops me. “My daughter is out there, Abel.” He gets choked on his words, visibly swallowing the lump in his throat. I watch his face fall as his emotions start to get the better of him. “If something happens to her,” his voice cracks.

“Focus, brother. She needs us clear headed. We have no idea what the situation is and what we are going into, but I can promise you this; I’ll give my life for theirs. I won’t let anything happen to Piper, Pop, or my woman.” I grip his shoulder. “Got it?”

“Yeah. Got it.” Pulling from my grip, Cain mounts his bike. Engines rumble, the gate opens, and we roll out onto the street and take off down the road.

Ignoring speed limits, we near Pop's property line along the west side in about twenty minutes.

Slowing to a stop, I cut my engine, and my men follow suit. Getting off my bike, I peer off into the distance, and notice lights on in the house, but we are still too far to make out any movement within the home. Wick kneels, pointing to the gravel road.

"Tire marks. Several." He stands and walks a few yards off into the tall grass. "They veer off the road here," he points, and we follow the treads into the tree line where we find bikes. Nine to be exact. All scattered within a few feet of each other, with large pieces of camouflage burlap draped across them. "If I had to guess they've been here for a couple of hours and waited." We all look at each other, knowing what this means. The Savage Outlaw have our family. Rex has my woman.

Weapons drawn we cover the area around the bikes. Before getting any closer, I go back to my bike, open and reach into the survival pack I always carry with me and pull out a pair of night vision binoculars. It's dark as hell out here, with nothing but trees, tall grass, and the bayou surrounding the property. Making my way back to my men, we quietly track our route to the edge of the tree line until we've gotten closer to the house.

Out the corner of my eye, I catch movement. "Everyone, get the fuck down." The seven of us take cover in the tall grass. Belly crawling, I position myself and look through the lens to get a clear view.

Scanning I spot a tall, slender man stepping out the front door onto the porch, followed by two more men; all three with weapons. "Three men out front." I look over at Wick, who has his rifle, looking toward the house through the scope. "Can you see inside?" I ask

"A couple of men. I don't see anyone else. Shit. Wait," Wick's voices alert us all. "One of the fuckers just raised his weapon, but I can't see who he is aiming at."

I process the information. "You have a clean shot?"

Wick grips his rifle, pressing the stock firmly against his shoulder. “Affirmative.”

It’s time they know we’re here. “Take it.” Wick pulls the trigger.

“Target?” I question.

“Eliminated.”

All this happens in a fraction of a second; then all hell breaks loose. The men on the porch fire their weapons blindly into the night, as we stay low to the ground. I keep scanning the property for several minutes, watching the Savage Outlaw regroup. Looking out toward the old boat dock, I catch movement. A small head appears from behind Pop’s fishing boat, backed up against the side of the pod shed nearest the water’s edge. “Fuck.” I adjust my focus to get a clearer image. My heart catches in my throat, and I glance over my shoulder, finding Cain to the left of me. “Piper is out there.” Cain begins to bolt, but I yank him down. “There are three men outside with handguns. You go runnin’ in blind you’ll be risking Piper’s life, along with your own. She’s hidden at the moment.” I look at my men. “Listen up. Piper is near the water. We need a distraction. Someone needs to head toward the tree lines over there.” I motion to my left. “Once you get in position, fire off a shot, hopefully, that will give us enough time to get Piper to safety.”

“On it,” Everest volunteers.

“I’m going with him.” Kiwi backs away, hiding amongst the cover of the trees. Pulling his piece from his side and staying low, he follows Everest.

I turn my attention back to where Piper is and find her still hunched behind the boat. I turn to Wick. “You three stay here.” I hand him the binoculars. “Keep an eye on her. If they get too close —

kill them.”

Wick nods.

“Let’s move in,” I gesture for my brother to follow leaving the others behind. Keeping low, we dash across the gravel road

leading up to the house, then duck down again until we reach the waterline. “We have to get wet, brother. It’s the only way to reach Piper without getting shot at.”

Without hesitating, he slips into the water, and I do the same. The growth around parts of the bank becomes too thick to maneuver through, so we have to move further out where the water becomes

chest deep. We continue to move forward, trying to control our movements not to create any splashing sounds, which would draw attention to us.

We soon reach the small broken boat dock Pop doesn’t use anymore but is close enough for us to gain access to Piper. “Bean,” Cain calls quietly to his daughter whose roughly twelve yards away.

Her head whips around, trying to see through the darkness, so Cain calls out again. “Piper.”

“Daddy?” Piper says low, her voice shaking with fear.

That’s when gunfire rings out, and men start yelling. Both Cain and I hoist ourselves from the water, and belly crawls toward her. “Daddy.” Piper whimpers and Cain wraps her in his arms the moment we reach her. “Oh my God. Daddy, they have Gampy and Luna,” Piper begins to sob quietly.

“Listen to me, sweetheart.” I make Piper look at me as more gunfire cracks like thunder not far from our location. “I need you to be brave and go with your dad. He’s going to keep you safe, but you need to get in the water. Whatever happens — whatever you hear going on behind you, don’t let go of your dad, and don’t look back. Got it?”

Her head nods. “Got it.”

Lowering myself to the ground, I peer under the boat trailer to get a look. Near the house, I notice an extra man hiding in the shadows. The three Savage Outlaw who are standing on the porch run, taking cover behind Pop’s pickup truck parked at the far side of the porch. Rising, I press my back to the side of the boat. “Can you tell me what room they have Pop and Luna in?” I ask my niece.

“We were in the living room before Luna helped me escape out the bathroom window,” Piper whispers. With no time to get more details, I kiss my niece on the forehead, then give one final look at my brother before I watch them crawl toward the water. With Piper on his back, Cain looks back one final time, wearing a look on his face like it’s the last time he’ll ever see me again, then he disappears as they wade further into the water and ripples become the only evidence they were there.

The snapping of a twig alerts me to someone’s approach. Peering under the trailer again, I notice a pair of boots walking in my direction. Doing my best, I tuck back in the shadows of the boat as his footsteps get closer. The figure slowly appears near the engine of the boat. Slowing my breathing, I watch him as he pays close attention to the water in front of him; too close for my liking. He steps past the boat, never looking down. His focus is solely on the water. He steps out onto the broken dock. Fearing, he will notice my brother wading in the water, I act. Pulling a knife from the inside of my boot, I jump him from behind. He fires off a shot, hitting the water, just before I slit his throat.

Bullets hit the boat and splinter the rotten wood beneath my feet. Tossing the body into the bayou, I duck back behind the boat, draw my pistol from inside my cut, and return fire, hitting one of the men standing at the side of the house. The gunfire continues for several minutes. Dropping to the ground, I line up my shot. Another Savage Outlaw steps into my crosshairs and I pull the trigger, watching him slump against the house before falling to the ground.

Everything falls silent.

Taking the opportunity, I make a run for the house. Once there, a Savage at my feet starts to move.

Aiming my gun, I put a bullet in his head. Now that I have a better position, looking out in the direction I left my men, I catch sight of Wick, along with Fender as they approach the house, their weapons out in front of them. Peering around the corner of the house, I notice three bodies — one on the front porch, and two on the ground at the tailgate of Pop’s truck.

Needing to gain entrance into the house, I walk around back knowing I'll find the bathroom window broken from Piper's escape. I pull myself up. Shattered glass cuts into my skin as I hoist myself through. Getting to my feet, I pause when I hear a loud pop, then a thud.

"Shut the hell up old man, or I'll blow your fuckin' head off."

I don't know the voice, but I realize he's talking to Pop. Without another thought, I rush out of the bathroom, only to be met with the barrel end of a sawed-off shotgun. "Drop it, motherfucker."

Dropping my handgun, the asshole walks backward and guides me down the hall into the living room. The moment I enter the room, I spot Pop unmoving on the floor, blood coming from a gash on the side of his head.

"Nice of you to join us." I look across the room and see my woman, frightened, her face beaten, sitting beside a bearded man. He pulls Luna closer, and gropes her breast, before running his dirty hand up her thigh. "She's perfect, isn't she? Tits, ass, and she can't talk back." He stares me down as his hands touch my woman.

"Rex." I don't hide the disdain in my voice.

"Aww," he grabs Luna by the chin, making her face him. "I see my girl has told you all about me."

He forces his lips on hers, and she resists. I look down at Pop when he moves a little. "Resilient old bastard," Rex kicks him. "I give him points for that."

"I'm gonna enjoy killin' you," I smirk.

Rex laughs. "That's a good one."

"Are you okay?" I sign. Luna nods, and Rex yanks on her hair.

"Why must you go and disrespect me like that?" Rex fumes, wrapping his hand around her throat and begins to squeeze. Luna coughs and pulls at his fingers, trying to free herself.

Having watched more than enough, I quickly disarm the dipshit who has me at gunpoint. Turning the gun on him, I pull



the trigger, sending his body backward. At the same time, I feel a pain rip through my chest.

Time slows.

I point the shotgun at Rex, who is now standing. Suddenly, I find it hard to breathe, and my arms begin to feel heavy. Losing my grip, the weapon drops to the floor, and I fall to my knees. *Okay. So, this time is different.* I think to myself.

“Looks like I won.” Rex hovers over me, with the gun that just put a bullet in my chest pointed at my head. With all the strength I have, I pull the knife from my boot for the second time tonight.

Grabbing the barrel of his pistol, I growl. Surging upward, I bury my blade in his jugular.

“Wrong. Motherfucker. I. Won.” I pull the metal from his flesh, and blood gushes from the puncture wound. His eyes grow wide, and he stumbles backward, Rex hits the wall, and his feet slide out from under him until his ass is on the floor. I watch the life leave his eyes.

Luna steps in front of me, her eyes frantic, as she pulls at my cut, removing it. “Baby,” I gasp, trying to get her to calm down. Suddenly, I feel drained and fall to the couch. The front door bursts open, causing Luna to pick the shotgun up off the floor and stands in front of me.

“Oh shit.” I hear Wick’s voice though it sounds distant. I do my best to take a deep breath but find it difficult. Luna sets the gun back on the floor, strips her shirt from her body, and presses the cloth against my chest. That’s when I remember. The fucker shot me, and I glance down at my blood-soaked shirt.

“Luna, sweetheart, I need to tend to Riggs,” Wick talks calmly to my woman. Tears stream down her beautiful face. She shakes her head no and applies more pressure to my chest, the blood already soaking through her shirt. Wick gently pulls her from me, and she fights him. Ripping my shirt open, Wick gets a look at my wound.

“Pop?” I question as he tends to me.

“He’s coming around. Fender is with him. He’s going to be okay, brother.” Wick hoists my big ass off the couch. “We need to get you to the hospital, but I’ll have to get you there myself, brother. Too

many bodies out here.” He tries to walk me out the front door, but my legs give out, and I’m unable to hold myself up. “Get the truck keys. Now!” Wick orders, the tone in his voice urgent. Cain comes running up the porch steps.

“Shit.” He grabs the other side of me, and I feel my body become weightless as they carry me to the back of Pop’s truck.

“Piper.”

Cain looks down at me as they lay me down on a blanket.

“She’s with Tequila. I had her take her to Buck’s house down the road.”

I start to shiver, which means I’m losing a good bit of blood.

“Where’s my woman?” Just then Luna appears and climbs into the truck. “I love you,” I find the energy to sign. Leaning forward, she holds a clean towel to my chest, trying to slow the blood flow. She presses her lips to mine, and her tears drip down her cheeks onto my face.

“I love you,” she signs back.

I feel the truck jerk forward as we take off down the driveway, then swerve. Tires squeal as we turn onto the paved road.

Luna’s hair whips around her face. All I can do is stare at her and think how lucky I was to have had the chance to fall in love with her, and I smile. My eyes begin to feel weighted, so I close them for a moment.

“Wake up, Abel.” I’m pulled back from the sleep I find myself chasing and crack my eyes open.

“Don’t you dare die on me,” Cain’s voice breaks.

I feel myself slipping, and it’s becoming harder to keep my eyes open. Turning my head, I look up at my woman.

Luna signs. “Don’t leave me.”

As I lay here fighting to breathe, I realize this may be the last time I see her face. Reaching up, I caress her cheek with my

knuckles. Tugging on her hair, I bring her face close to mine. If I die, I will die knowing my last breath was not wasted. Taking what feels like my final breath, I kiss the woman I love.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

LUNA

The moment, Riggs closes his eyes, and I no longer feel the rise and fall of his chest beneath the blood-soaked towel I have pressed against the hole in his chest, I sob. Lifting my shaky hand, I press two fingers to his throat. I desperately search for a pulse, only to find nothing.

Swiping my hand out of the way, Cain's fingers replace the spot mine just were. I watch as the look of horror strikes his face. Riggs has stopped breathing, and he has no heartbeat. Tugging Riggs'

lifeless body from my lap, Cain doesn't waste a second as he starts chest compressions. The only thing I can do is helplessly watch while Cain tries to pump life back into his brother. I count each compression Cain delivers to Riggs; thirty in total before he tilts his head back and gives two rescue breaths. Time slows to a crawl as Cain repeats the process several more times. The only thing I can focus on is the blood that continues to gush from the bullet hole in Riggs' chest.

*I can't lose him.*

When Riggs came into my life, he brought purpose; he brought strength. He made me feel alive for the first time in my existence. God wouldn't be so cruel as to take him from me. At the thought of Riggs being ripped away from me, I start to hyperventilate. The visions I have of our future together begins to evaporate with each second that ticks by; with each chest compression, and breath of life Cain tries to force into Riggs.

Abandoning his brothers' body, Cain pounds his fist on the back window of the truck. I watch his mouth open, and he says something to Wick who is driving. Wick whips his head around and peers into the bed of the truck. His eyes go big as

he sees Cain resume CPR on his best friend. The truck lurches forward as Wick punches harder on the gas. I don't know how much time has passed since Riggs has stopped breathing, but it feels like an eternity. Things are looking bleak, but I refuse to give up hope. Miracles happen every day, and we need God to work one tonight.

A beacon of hope washes over me when we pass the entrance sign for the local hospital. Wick brings the truck to an abrupt stop in front of the emergency room. Our arrival alerts two nurses who are standing just outside the entrance. One nurse rushes up to the back of the truck while the other hauls ass back inside; hopefully for help. Jumping out of the bed of the truck, Cain lowers the tailgate.

Moments later, the second nurse reappears with two doctors and a third nurse. None of them bat an eye at the situation, they fly directly into lifesaving mode as they gather Riggs' body from the back of the truck, sliding him onto a gurney. One doctor starts issuing orders while they swiftly roll him away from us. Wick quickly climbs out of the truck and joins Cain and me. The three of us watch helplessly as the team of doctors and nurses disappear through the emergency room doors with Riggs.

We rush in behind them but don't make it past the front desk of the waiting room before we are

stopped by the receptionist. The only words I make out as she holds up her hands, halting us in place is — “can't go back, sir.”

Cain goes toe-to-toe with the woman as they argue back and forth. Soon a security guard makes the mistake of placing his palm against Cain's chest urging him to step back. Cain's face turns red as he knocks the security guy's hand away and shoves him. That's when Wick steps in and places his arm between the two. Wick shakes his head at Cain, giving him a look. He then says something to his brother, causing him to glance back in my direction. Whatever he said seems to have done the trick, because Cain steps back. He turns away from the security guard, and receptionist then strides in my direction, stopping in front of me. Neither of us say anything.

We don't need to. We are both thinking the same thing. *What if he doesn't make it?*

Unable to hold back, I launch myself into his arms. My body shakes violently as I clutch the front of Cain's cut and sob. Cain holds me, seeking the same comfort. Every breath he takes is a shuttered one, and I know he's trying to contain his own emotion. Riggs is his twin — his flesh and blood. The bond they share is like no other. I can only imagine Cain is feeling a piece of his soul slipping away. I feel my whole heart shatter into a million pieces. Breaking away from him, I look around the waiting room to find Wick sitting in the corner with his head bowed and his hands threaded over the back of his head. Wick is Riggs' best friend and is hurting just as bad as Cain and me. I peer up at Cain, and he signs, "go."

Squeezing his hand, I break away from Cain and make my way over to Wick. Kneeling on the floor in front of where he sits, I reach up and pull his hands into mine. He looks into my eyes with such pain, I do the only thing I know to do; I wrap my arms around him. Wick returns my embrace.

Our moment is broken when there is a tap on my shoulder. I look back at Cain as he points out the window behind us. He signs. "Our brothers are here." Looking out the window, I watch as one bike after another pulls up and all the brothers come rushing into the emergency room. Kiwi is the first to spot us; he looks wild with fear and anger. Following close behind him are Fender and Everest. Even Neil arrives.

I watch as an SUV pulls up with three other club members, and with them Riggs' grandad and Piper. Standing beside Piper is a beautiful tall African American woman whom I've never met.

Releasing the woman's hand, Piper runs inside, straight into her dad's arms. When Abe ambles into the E.R. looking a little worse for wear, a nurse rushes up to him, concerned. Abe has a good bit of bruising and swelling on his face. He waves her off and joins the rest of us who have gathered in the far corner of the waiting room. I push through the crowd and come to a stop in front of him. "You should at least let one of the nurses look you over, Abe."

He waves me off. “Tell me how my grandson is doing.”

I close my eyes and shake my head. I don't have the strength to tell Abe his grandson was not breathing, and had no heartbeat by the time we arrived. Cain is the one to deliver the news. “I had to administer CPR on the way here, Pop. We've been here fifteen minutes and are still waiting on word.”

The moment CPR leaves Cain's mouth, Abe pales, and he brings a shaky hand to his mouth. Just when Abe raises his hands to speak again, the doctor who aided us when we first arrived followed by a nurse walks into the waiting room. His steps falter briefly when he takes in the dozen or so bikers in front of him but recovers quickly as he makes his way toward us. The look on the doctor's face is not an encouraging one, and my stomach sinks. *Don't tell me he's dead.*

“Are you the family of Abel LeBlanc?” the doctor asks, and Cain translates for me. I nod while everyone else speaks up. The doctor looks a bit taken back. “I can only speak to immediate family.”

“We are all his immediate family,” Cain grinds out. He points to Abe. “This is our grandad.” He

points to me next. “This is his fiancé.” Cain then motions to all the men standing in the room looking ready to crack skulls if they don't get some answers. “And these are his brothers. Now if you are done fuckin' around and wasting valuable time, can you tell me how my brother is doing?”

The doctor swallows. “Very well. As you know, your brother came in with no heartbeat, and he was not breathing. His injuries caused by a single gunshot wound to his chest. For ten minutes, we administered CPR –” the doctor continues to explain. My knees go weak, and bile rises into my throat.

*Oh God. He didn't make it.*

Someone behind me grabs me around my waist to hold me up as the doctor continues. “Finally, our attempts were successful, and we were able to get a pulse. It's weak, but it's there, and for now, Mr. LeBlanc is alive.”

“Is he going to make it?” Cain asks.

The doctor lets out a deep sigh. “I’m not going to lie. His chances of making it are slim. I’d say he has a twenty percent chance at this point. That’s if he makes it through surgery.”

*Twenty percent!*

“Surgery?” Abe questions.

“The bullet is still lodged in Mr. LeBlanc’s chest. The only way to remove it is through surgery.

The surgeons will most likely have to open his chest to retrieve the bullet and attempt to repair the damage left behind. Mr. LeBlanc has already lost a lot of blood. Surgery is a risk, but it is his only chance at survival.”

I ask the next question. “Has he been taken to surgery? Can we speak to the surgeon? Does he need more blood? Perhaps one of us can donate.”

“Mr. LeBlanc will be receiving another transfusion during his surgery. If any of you would like to donate, that would be great. He has already gone upstairs and is being prepped as we speak. Time is crucial. If you like I can have a nurse take you all upstairs to the waiting room. I’ll page the surgeon who will be operating on Mr. LeBlanc to see if he will have enough time to answer any questions you may have before he gets started.”

We all nod as the nurse standing next to the doctor gives us a warm smile and leads the way to the elevator. Because there are so many of us here for Riggs, we split up and take two elevators to the eighth floor. Unfortunately, the surgeon working on Riggs was unable to meet with us before his surgery. His case is so dire; there was no time to waste. Kiwi did, however, look up the surgeon operating on Riggs to find Dr. Muller is the best surgeon in the state of Louisiana. That little fact went a long way with easing my nerves. Riggs has a twenty percent chance at making it. Twenty percent is not good. But he is strong, healthy and he is a fighter.

The energy in the waiting room is somber as we all sit around waiting on word from the surgeon.

Earlier, a nurse came in and was kind enough to offer me a clean scrub top since she noticed the tank top I had on was covered in blood. Trying not to replay those events, I look across the room to Piper, who is sitting with her dad. She breaks away from him and rushes up to me. I waste no time opening my arms to her and let her cry into my neck. When her tears subside, she pulls her face away. I wipe the tears away with my thumb, tuck her hair behind her ear, and kiss the top of her head. She says two words to me. “Thank you.”

Cain walks up behind his daughter and regards me. “I need to thank you for saving my daughter; for getting her out of that house when you did. You risked your life to save hers. I don’t know how I’ll ever repay you.”

I shake my head. “You don’t. I care about Piper. I care about all of you. You all have become my family. I’d do anything for you all.”

Cain accepts my answer with a look of gratitude and pride. “Riggs is lucky to have found you, and we are damn lucky to have you as a part of our family.”

Three hours later, an exhausted-looking doctor steps into the waiting room. Everyone jumps to their feet while holding their breath. The doctor tugs the surgical cap from his head. He gives us a relieved look. “He pulled through.”

Wick, who is standing behind me, catches my fall as my knees buckle. He pulls me into his arms, and we hug the shit out of each other. The doctor waits patiently while we all have our moment of relief and gratitude before he speaks again. “I want you all to know Mr. LeBlanc is not completely out of the woods. He had major surgery. There is still a risk for many complications, including blood clots and infection. The first forty-eight hours will be his most critical. Mr. LeBlanc will remain in the ICU until those forty-eight hours have passed and he wakes up. We got the bullet out, repaired the damage it caused, and I am confident he will make a full recovery.”

“When can we see him?” Abe asks.

“I’ll allow two visitors at a time. You get fifteen minutes each. I’m sorry, but we don’t allow overnight guests in ICU.”



Once the doctor has left, I insisted Abe and Cain go in first. Fifteen minutes later, it's mine and Wick's turn. I knew by the look on Abe's face when he returned from seeing his grandson it must be bad. I wasn't at all prepared to see the man I love laying on a hospital bed hooked up to machines with a tube sticking out of his mouth. His chest and abdomen have wires hooked up everywhere, and there is a bandage covering the incision down the middle of his chest. Riggs looks so pale. Careful not to touch anything, I lean over and place a gentle kiss on the corner of his mouth.

When Wick and I make it back to the waiting room, most of the men are getting ready to leave.

Cain turns to me. "Abe and the rest of the brothers are heading back to the clubhouse. I'm going to stay here. I'm not about to force you to go home because I already know what your answer will be. I will ask that you let Wick take your back to Riggs' place so you can clean up, and maybe get a bite to eat.

My brother would kick my ass if he found out I didn't take care of you."

I look down at my blood-stained shorts and scrub top. Cain is right. I should at least clean up and change my clothes. "Okay. I'll go with Wick as long as I can come back. I don't want to be away from Riggs." I look to Wick, and he nods agreeing to bring me back. I turn back to Cain. "We have a long night ahead of us. I have some leftover chicken fried steak and potato salad at home in the refrigerator. How about I warm that up and bring it back with me. Along with a thermos of fresh coffee?"

"I think you had me at the chicken fried steak, sweetheart. And we are going to need a shit ton of coffee," he smiles.

When Wick and I step outside the hospital, Everest is there waiting on us. He tosses Wick a set of keys then leads me to a black SUV. Wick opens the door for me, and I climb in. The ride to the apartment is a short one. Once we make it inside, Wick takes a seat at the kitchen table while I pull the leftover food from the refrigerator. Taking a plate down from the cabinet, I scoop a generous amount onto the plate, pop it in the

microwave and heat it. Satisfied the food is hot enough, I take the offering along with a glass of sweet tea and place the plate on the table in front of Wick.

Patting his shoulder, I give him a warm smile. I read his lips when he says, “thank you.” Wick tucks into his food as I brew a pot of coffee and finish preparing the rest of the leftovers. Finished with one task, I move on to the next; shower and clean clothes. I step into the bedroom and into the closet where I snag a pair of jeans and a t-shirt off the hangers. I make my way into the bathroom. I’m not shocked to see the mess of a woman staring back at me when I peer into the mirror.

Bloodshot

eyes, a swollen cheek. Along with a visible lump on my head from smacking it on the coffee table.

Not wanting to waste time, I strip out of my bloody clothes; ignoring the pain in my ribs and toss them in the trash bin. Turning the shower on, I don’t wait for the water to heat before stepping inside under the spray, sucking in my breath the moment the cold water hits my skin.

Finished with my shower, I dry off, pull my hair up into a messy bun, and get dressed. I step back into the kitchen to find Wick has devoured his meal. He smiles and pats his tummy. I also notice he has placed the lids back on the food containers and poured the coffee into the thermos. He grabs the bags of food off the counter, and I grab the coffee. It’s then I remember I don’t have my purse. I make a mental note to ask Cain about it.

Wick and I arrive back at the hospital to find Cain sitting in one of the waiting room chairs with his head propped back against the wall, and his eyes closed. When I sit down beside him, his eyes pop open. “I thought you were sleeping. I wasn’t going to bother you.”

“I was only resting my eyes. Besides, I could never sleep through the smell coming from that bag you’re holding. I’m starving.”

THE NEXT MORNING I’M A BUNDLE OF NERVES AS I WATCH THE CLOCK ON THE WALL. IT’S 7:43 AM AND

visiting hours are not until 9:00 am. Just then a frazzled nurse bursts into the waiting room, bringing Cain and me to our feet. The first thought that comes to mind is something has happened to Riggs. It takes me a second to note the nurse looks more irritated than frazzled. “Mr. LeBlanc is awake. He’s insisting on seeing Luna Novak. Now we don’t normally allow visitors in before 9:00 am but, Mr.

LeBlanc is threatening bodily harm if we don’t comply. Although his vocabulary was much more colorful.” Cain barely translates the last word before he doubles over his body shaking with laughter.

I, too, am unable to hold back my giggle. When the noise escapes my mouth Cain rears back in shock.

Few people have heard me laugh before. I’m finding myself more comfortable showing that part of me. Cain looks at me with brotherly affection.

I follow the annoyed nurse down the hall and into the room Riggs is staying in. When I cross the threshold, his head slowly turns in my direction, and his blue eyes meet mine. When a sob escapes, I cover my mouth with my hand. He holds up his hand and says, “come.”

When I step up to his bedside, I take his hand in mine and press it against my face needing to feel the warmth of his flesh because the last time I touched Riggs, he was cold. The doctor steps into the room, followed by Cain, interrupting our reunion. Riggs gives him and his brother a pointed look.

Cain has the nerve to grin. “Don’t give us that look. The doctor comes bearing good news,” Cain tells us.

The doctor looks over the chart in his hand. “Your vitals look good this morning, Mr. LeBlanc. I was going to wait forty-eight hours before moving you to a regular room for the rest of your stay, but I think we’ll make an exception just this once. That way you can have all the visitors you want.”

“How long will he have to stay in the hospital?” I ask the doctor, and Cain translates.

“I’m going to say no more than seven days. How about we take it one day at a time. He will need someone taking care of him once he’s discharged. Mr. LeBlanc will have limitations,” the doctor finishes.

“I’ll be taking care of all his needs, doctor. I’ll make sure he does as instructed.” Cain translates for me.

SIX DAYS LATER, I AM HELPING RIGGS CHANGE OUT OF THE HOSPITAL GOWN AND INTO A PAIR OF JEANS

and a black t-shirt. As he sits on the edge of the bed, I slip the shirt on over his head and wait for him to put his arms through. Once the shirt is on, he gives me a crooked grin.

“You know, I can get dressed by myself, Mon Tresor.”

“I know, but can you please let me take care of you?”

Riggs’ face softens with understanding. I almost lost him. Me helping him get better is like my therapy. I crouch down on the floor and begin lacing up his boots when Wick comes striding into the hospital room. “Hey, brother. There is a Detective Brooks here to see Luna.”

I wonder what she’s doing here. Riggs assured me the club wouldn’t face any blowback from what went down at his grandad’s house with Rex. Riggs didn’t offer any details, and I didn’t ask for further information on how they handled things. Riggs gives Wick a nod, and Detective Brooks strides into the room. She pulls a notebook from her bag and holds it out to me. I shake my head and sign, knowing Riggs will translate. “Riggs will translate for us.”

Detective Brooks nods. “I don’t normally travel to deliver such news, but I felt given your circumstances, it was warranted I speak to you in person. I wanted to tell you we have closed the case on Rex and his club Savage Outlaw. His body, along with several members of his club, was found just outside of Texas. A drug deal gone wrong. With only a few members of the club left and no leader, I have on good authority Savage Outlaw is no more.” The detective looks at Riggs then back at me. I sense she knows that’s not the truth but sticks to her story. “I also felt you had the right to know

who compromised the first safe house and your location back in Montana.”

“Who?” I ask. I had always wondered how Rex found me both times.

“Officer Conner.”

“Wait. Are you talking about the one who was at the hospital when Rex beat me? The one you found in my room? I knew that guy gave me the creeps for some reason. I couldn’t explain it, though.”

“I’m sorry, Luna. I should have known something wasn’t right when I found him in your hospital room. I reprimanded him for it because he was instructed not to enter unless there was a threat. He never gave us any more trouble after that. It turns out he was our leak.”

“Where is he now? In jail?”

“No. He was found dead in his apartment a week ago with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. I can safely say he is no longer a threat; along with Savage Outlaw.”

“So, no more hiding?”

“No, Miss Novak. No more hiding. You are free to return home to Arizona.”

Riggs slides his arm around my waist and kisses the top of my head. I peer up at his handsome face and beam. “I am home Detective Brooks.”

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE**

### **RIGGS**

Standing in front of the bathroom mirror, I fixate on the raised scar running down the middle of my chest. It’s been two months since a bullet damn near sent me to my grave. Death had his cold hand on my spine, pulling me down, and for the first time in my life, I faced my mortality with a different point of view, and I wasn’t okay with leaving. The last moment I can recall was kissing my woman. My next memory was waking up in a hospital bed. Like the many near misses I’ve had

before, I think about it and wonder what I could have done differently, then realized none of that matters.

Reality is; I survived, and my family is safe.

Luna steps into the bathroom. The light of my life. The reason I'm standing here today. Her love gives me purpose. It's our love that brought me back. I firmly believe that, and not one person will ever convince me otherwise. Luna looks at my reflection in the mirror. "It looks better. The lotion is helping." Grabbing the jar from the countertop, Luna unscrews the lid, dips her finger into the thick cream, and places it back on the counter. I turn and face her. Leaning forward, she presses her lips to my chest, then spreads the lotion on my skin, and massages the cream over my scar. She's right. It's faded some over the past three weeks, and the redness has dulled to a dark shade of pink.

When she has finished, she smiles. "You excited?"

I smile back. "You have no idea." It's been two months to the day since I've ridden my bike. No taking risks, lifting anything over a certain weight, the list goes on. But those were the doctor's orders, and Luna has ridden my ass since day one making sure I followed every order the doctor gave. From the moment they wheeled my stubborn ass out of the hospital, my woman has taken care of me.

Hooking my finger through the belt loop of her jeans, I pull her body flush against mine. Wrapping my hand around her ponytail, I gently tug her head back and press my lips to hers.

**THIRTY MINUTES LATER, WE'RE OUTSIDE AND I'M HELPING MY WOMAN CLIMB ON THE BACK OF MY BIKE.**

Adjusting herself, Luna taps me on the shoulder, signaling she's ready. Turning the key, I fire her up.

Twisting the throttle, I give the bike a little gas, warming the engine, before pulling onto the road. The moment we leave the busy streets behind us, I pick up speed, and we ride.

It doesn't take long before I'm turning onto the gravel road to Pop's. I park my bike alongside Cain's Harley. Slipping the

helmet from Luna's head, I lift her off the bike.

"The doctor said—" she signs, but I cut her off by scooping her off the ground.

"Don't fuss at me, woman. The doctor said not to overdo it. Holding my woman in my arms doesn't come close." I kiss the tip of her nose, and she crosses her arms over her chest. Hearing the

front screen door slam shut, I turn my head to see Pop and Piper coming down the porch steps.

"It's good to see you riding again," Pop says as he walks my way. "You just going to carry your woman around all day?" He chuckles because I still haven't let loose of Luna, her feet still dangling above the ground. I sit her down. Stepping around me, she wraps her arms around Pop, then kisses his cheek. "Careful," he signs, "or I might just keep you for myself," Pop chuckles, and I embrace him myself.

"How's it goin', Pop?"

"Oh, I can't complain. Got up early, caught some fish, and now my family is here. Good day so far."

"Hey, Uncle Abel." Piper hugs me after hugging Luna.

"Hey, birthday girl. I noticed your dad finally let you have the key to the car."

Piper looks over her shoulder at the red car sitting in the driveway just behind Pop's truck. "Yep,"

she rocks back on her heels. "He said when I turned sixteen, she was mine," Piper beams.

Luna slips the pack she's wearing off her back and unzips it, pulling a card-shaped envelope from inside. She hands it to Piper, and I laugh because she's so eager for her to open it. "Happy birthday,"

she signs, and we watch Piper tear it open.

Piper squeals. "No way! Tickets to see East of Addiction." Her happiness is contagious, and I can't help but smile. "Oh, my

God! How'd you get these? The entire tour has been sold out for months."

"You won't believe it, but it turns out that a club member's old lady back in Montana knows Easton." Piper stares at me for a moment.

"Shut up. Are you serious?" Piper's face lights up.

I rub the back of my neck. "I'm not pullin' your leg kid."

My brother rounds the corner of the house. "What the hell are you carryin' on about?" Piper runs up to her dad and waves the tickets in his face. "Uncle Abel and Luna gave me East of Addiction tickets for my birthday."

"You're shittin' me. How the hell did you get those? You aren't supposed to be cooler than me, bro." My brother jokes and he claps me on the back.

"Looks like the rest of the men are rolling in." Pop announces as Wick drives toward us, followed by Fender, Kiwi, and Everest. Looking down at my woman, I wait for her reaction. For weeks she has been facetimeing her best friend in Arizona, Jade, and I can tell she misses her. Luna has been through a lot in the past few months and nursed me back to health. She's done all this with a smile on her face.

So, I got in touch with her friend and set a plan into motion. After I took care of her airfare, Jade hopped on a plane early this morning and flew into New Orleans. The closer they get; I notice Kiwi has our guest on the back of his bike.

"I see Kiwi has himself a lady friend," Pop states, and Luna's eyes follow the bikes as they roll to a stop. Kiwi dismounts and helps the young woman off his ride. With her back still to us, Jade removes her helmet and runs her fingers through her long brown hair. When she begins to turn around Luna gasps. Jade smiles and signs. "Surprise!" Then throws her hands in the air.

Leaving my side, Luna tackles her best friend. "Oh my God! How — when?" she asks Jade.

"Riggs." She tells Luna, and my woman spins on her heels. The look she gives me says everything.



“Thank you,” she signs.

A few hours later, the men have the grill fired up, and music playing as the family enjoys our day together. Piper invited a few friends over, one of them being the young man who asked her to the school dance, and Luna and Jade haven’t stopped talking to each other since she got here. Opening the

cooler sitting beside me, I grab an ice-cold beer, pop the top off, and down half. Just then, Neil rounds the corner of the house and walks over to where I’m sitting. “Commander.” Reaching out, he shakes my offered hand.

“LeBlanc.”

“Have a seat.” I point to the lawn chair beside me. “Thought you had business you had to leave town for.” Sitting my beer down, I retrieve one from the cooler and hand it to him.

“Thanks.” He pops the top and tosses it to the trash can behind us. “I want to spend more time here in Louisiana.”

I admire that. Neil is doing all he can to make up for lost time. He and Luna finally got the DNA test result back not long after I was released from the hospital. The legal piece of paper finalizing what they both already knew. It took a couple of days for it to really sink in. Luna went through a gambit of emotions, but in the end, the two of them have been spending time together. Neil is sharing all he can about Luna’s mother, and they are both trying to navigate the whole father-daughter relationship.

“Who is that with Luna?” Commander asks.

I glance across the yard to where my woman is. “Her friend, Jade.” Commander and I watch the two of them signing away, and Luna throws her head back laughing. I get serious for a moment. “You look into what’s left of Savage Outlaw?”

“Once word got around Rex and eight of his men were dead, the remaining members disbanded.

Don’t foresee you having any further problems,” Commander informs me. “What about that other issue?” I ask. Neil knows I’m referring to that piece of shit that was Amelia’s father.

“Yup.” Is the only response he gives. It doesn’t take a genius to read between the lines.

Wick settles in the lawn chair on the other side of me. “Turned out to be one hell of a day, brother.”

My eyes roam the yard, taking in everyone enjoying themselves, and all I can think about is how fucking grateful I am to be alive. I nod and clink the neck of my beer bottle against his. “I don’t see how it could get any better, brother.”

When night falls, Fender lights the bonfire. Piper and her friends break out ingredients for s’mores, while the adults laugh at some story Pop is telling. Wanting some alone time with my woman, I grab a blanket, and take her by the hand, pulling her attention from her friend. Jade looks at me, then to Luna. Something passes between them, but she says nothing as she looks back at me.

“Everything okay? Do you not feel good?” she asks.

I lead her toward the water’s edge and spread the blanket on the ground. “Never better.” I pull her down with me and tuck her between my legs. We sit like this, alone, looking out at the water, and watch the lightning bugs dance across the surface.

After several minutes, Luna nudges my side, then turns in my arms, facing me. “There’s something I need to tell you.”

“Okay,” I sign.

“I’m pregnant.”

I blink.

My heart flutters, and I grab my chest. “Say it again,” I tell her.

Her face lights up. “We are going to have a baby.” She touches her stomach.

“Yeah?” I ask, and she nods. Not able to hold my excitement, I stand, scoop her into my arms and spin her around, causing her to giggle. I’ll never grow tired of hearing her laughter.

Overwhelmed, I stop spinning and set Luna on her feet.

Grasping her face in the palms of my hands, I look into the eyes

of the woman I love, and the mother of my unborn child — my future. “Marry me.”

Her eyes light up and become misty. “Yes.” She signs.

Bursting with excitement, I turn toward our family and friends standing a few yards away. “Listen up!” I yell, grabbing everyone’s attention. Looking down on Luna’s smiling face, I announce as loud as I can. “This beautiful woman just gave me the best news of my life by agreeing to become my wife.

And, we’re having a baby! I’m going to be a dad!” Cheers and applause erupt around us as our family celebrates the news.

Leaning back, Luna signs. “I’m a little nervous.”

“Mon Tresor. Just keep lovin’ me, and I’ll keep lovin’ you. The rest will all fall into place.”

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