



Rise

Tiffany Casper

Pinewood Lake Book 1
Wrath MC

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Dedication

To my readers that I had hoped to have one day all those years ago, I write these books for y'all!

Thank you!

Playlist

Wake Me Up – Avicii

Hold The Line – Toto

Just Give Me A Reason – P!nk

Crank That (Soulja Boi) – Soulja Boi

Still Ridin' Shotgun – Tyler Wood

Can't You See? – Marshall Tucker Band

Fall Into Me – Brantley Gilbert

HOLY – Florida Georgia Line

Let Her Go – Passenger

Turn On The Radio – Reba McEntire

Better Today – Coffey Anderson

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Prequel

Wrath MC

The most notorious, dangerous, one-percenter motorcycle club isn't the one everyone knows about. It isn't the one everyone sees at rallies, charity events, or even at bars. Some say Wrath MC is just a myth. A club that was savage, a club that passed around women and then sold them to the highest bidder. Others say the MC is full of nine-to-fivers and weekend warriors. They also say, no one wanted to cross them. Well, some of those myths just may be true. While there are rumors about the club and those are galore, the rumor of where the mother charter could possibly be located is the largest one of all.

The people in a little old county in South Carolina know better. The three hundred square miles around Pinewood Lake held a secret. A very well-known secret or two. Little did they know, Wrath MC holds many more secrets, and a lot of those are made of stories your momma warned you about.

Some people have even been rumored to have gone missing in the area, never to be heard from again.

While others have either passed through and are but a fading memory, some have come and gone and left their mark. While others have come and made their mark on not only the MC but on the community as well.

This story is about one of the members of Wrath MC—the Enforcer, to be exact.

Hold on for one wild alpha badass man and a romance that will last till the end of time.

Prologue

Tank

Can you imagine the things a single person can accomplish?

Can you see their future?

Walk through their dreams?

See right inside their soul?

Do you ever wonder what they saw the first time they opened their eyes?

Do you feel the power that their tiny bodies can wield?

Often, too many times I had found myself inquiring about those very things.

Now, I guess you're wondering why that is.

Well, it happens when you're sitting on the bottom bunk on a plastic, no-filling piece of something, they call a mattress.

When you're eight years old.

When you weigh only forty pounds.

When you thankfully have a nosey-as-hell neighbor that called child protective services.

How it feels to be taken from a home... Well, I wouldn't classify that as a home, not really.

A home isn't supposed to have boarded-up windows.

Holes in the roof were patched up with black trash bags.

Pots and pans caught the rainwater that drips all over the carpet and the flooring.

Pots and pans are supposed to be used for cooking.

You shouldn't have to scrounge the neighborhood looking for food and something that could house your food without

worrying about it going bad in a day or two because of the poor conditions of the house.

No, in a home, you should sit at a table with your family and have a meal.

In a home, you should be able to lie on your bed and be comfortable.

Not worry about if you laid enough of your meager clothing on top of you when the weather drops to eight degrees, and the power's off because your so-called parents only cared about shooting shit up through their veins.

What you shouldn't have to worry about at eight years old or at any age if you were going to wake up with frostbite.

So, there I sat on the edge of that mattress, unsure.

Not because I was taken from the only thing I've ever known.

Not because I had my meager belongings, three pairs of pants, three shirts, a few pairs of underwear, socks, and one jacket, besides what I was wearing, in one of those wretched black trash bags.

Because sitting there, I made a few promises to myself.

First, drugs were never getting put inside my body. The only way I would take them was if the pain was unbearable should something happen to my body.

Second, the mattress I ended up in every night was going to be darn right comfortable.

Third, I was going to learn how to cook. And I would work my butt off to be able to afford what I wanted to eat.

Fourth, I didn't know where my life was headed, but as soon as I saw something that called out to me, I was going to jump on it and hold on to it with both hands.

I'd added a few more promises to myself that very night, but that's for another time.

And lastly, I vowed to never use a trash bag again.

Only for fucking trash.

Because I would be damned if I would become trash.

Become something that I could be proud of.

Something where I could lay in my very own bed, in my very own home, and go to sleep with a smile on my face knowing that I made it.

Knowing that the shit they tried to give me, pain, violence, drugs, and being poor, I wouldn't be like that.

That I was going to be something better.

So, therefore, when I had the chance for more, I was going to be greedy.

Being greedy in taking whatever good thing life throws at me.

Those meant clothes, shoes, and an education. Being the new kid and not knowing how to write, didn't faze me. No, it gave me fuel.

That also meant I had started to really eat and put on weight.

When my health got better, and my body started to recognize the good it was getting, I really grew to new heights.

That also meant when I was sixteen, and saw a girl getting beaten, I'd stepped in.

Uncaring about the consequences.

Just knowing something I've never been taught.

That you don't put your hands on something weaker than you. If you do that, you deserve to be six feet under.

What I didn't know was that the girl's ass I had saved from having more punches landing on her was the distant, unwanted cousin, but still family, of the current president of a club that was getting a patch over.

They were called Hades Deliverers MC, and they wanted to fall under Wrath MC. The main reason for the patch over was because they didn't appreciate when their mother charter tried to force them to run drugs. The keyword being tried.

And Storm the president had offered me something I never saw coming.

I thought my life had really started when I prospected for Wrath MC when I was sixteen years old.

I thought that it was the very start of my future.

I furthermore thought that hearing the stories of a few old timers in my eyes brought my dreams of being something more to life.

And I couldn't have been more wrong.

Oh... so wrong.

When I was eight, I made those promises to myself, one of those being that when I found something I was going to hold onto it with both hands.

But this... I was going to hold on with both hands and wrap my legs around it and hold the fuck on.

They say when your eyes land on the being that holds the other half of your soul, you just know.

You can see deep in their eyes, right to the very heart of them.

That you can feel every emotion they hold.

Your dreams, your wants, and your hopes are all reflected in that being.

So that was why I could never forget the first time I ever laid eyes on *her*.

What I couldn't have imagined was that life had a sense of fucking humor.

Now, hear me out before you hear about the start of something that I never saw coming.

I'm not a pervert. Far fucking from it.

A friendship was started. Nothing fucking more.

A friendship that I fucking treasured.

Because when you grow up the way I did, you're able to realize things like no other.

You're able to understand things that make no fucking sense to others.

And all of that happened one summer day, and for the rest of my days, I would always hold the man that brought me here in high regard. Because neither of us knew the twists and turns that life was going to throw our way.

She was eight compared to my nineteen, almost twenty.

I had been away at training for the last nineteen months. And my body was enjoying a week of relaxation after the hell I had put it through.

I had just taken a long-needed shower and was walking out to the garage to get started on a bike project of mine. I knew it wouldn't be done before I had to report to my duty station, so that meant working on it every spare second, I could while I was home.

And yes, before you ask, my room at the clubhouse held the most comfortable bed one could find.

That was the day I realized why I was put here on earth.

She was sitting there with Storm, her father, and her mother, Beka. I respected the hell out of her father, he was neat as fuck, but a fucking hard ass.

Hell, he could give my Chiefs a run for their money in BUDs training. But I didn't have a high opinion of her mother due to her lingering eyes and the mannerisms she showed. However, she was his wife.

But... she wasn't his old lady. She didn't have a property patch on. So, from what I had learned, she had the respect of the club, but she didn't have full protection.

They were sitting in front of a bike and at first glance, the little girl oversaw handing Storm wrenches and sockets.

Her hair was in pigtails and upon closer inspection was auburn like her mother's, but it had a deeper tint to it to match her father's jet-black hair.

She had on cut-off denim shorts that were frayed at the ends, a baggy t-shirt, flip-flops, and grease smeared on her cheek. Already, she was the quintessential biker princess.

She had a little button nose that was scrunched up because she couldn't find the wrench that she was looking for.

Walking over, I tagged the wrench she needed, the handle was scuffed through years of use, so reading the measurement was almost impossible.

When she looked up and smiled wide with some of her teeth missing and braces on them with black bands, she said "Thanks."

Offering a chin lift, I said, "Welcome."

Softly, she asked, "Are you, Tank?"

Damn, but I missed talking to people that weren't screaming and yelling non fucking stop.

Knowing I was a big son of a bitch, I got down to her level, and then said, "Yeah. What's your name?"

"Raine with an 'e'." She emphasized with an 'e'.

Figured she had to do that a lot.

"Raine with an 'e' huh. Cool name." I nodded, then held out my hand to shake hers.

She giggled, then placed her hand in mine, and gave it a firm grip, no doubt her father was teaching her right.

After we shook hands, I got to work on my bike.

From the corner of my eye, I watched as she handed Storm the wrench he needed. Then she walked a few feet over to me,

and then asked, “Yeah, I know right? Why do they call you Tank?”

Thankfully, I wasn’t slow and realized exactly what she was saying and asking.

Therefore, I stopped what I was doing, looked at her, then looked down at my body, then back at her, and quirked a brow.

She fucking giggled again, the sound was like a tinkling from a windchime, “Okay, yeah, I get it.”

I was hooked. She was the cutest thing ever.

Shaking my head, I got back to work, then I heard her father say, “And that’s a wrap on this part of it. Gonna go grab a beer.”

Raine was still at my side watching me work on mine when her father stood up along with her mother.

Storm held his hand out to Raine.

She looked at them, then at my bike, then back at me, then she asked, “Can I help you on your bike?”

Shrugging my shoulders I nodded to her parents, “Up to them.”

They looked at her, her dad’s eyes held nothing but pride, whereas her mom, well, I couldn’t make out what her eyes held, then her mom sighed, “You and bikes. I miss when you were little, you didn’t complain about dresses back then and you were into barbie dolls. Now it’s bikes.”

But it was the way she said it, almost as if her daughter was a disappointment.

I knew how that felt. So, I didn’t complain when she stayed.

So, there I sat for the next two hours working on my bike while she asked a few questions but not many, and I was fucking floored when she handed me wrench after wrench without being asked what size.

And then further to my amazement when she saw the nut I was about to get out and handed me the socket before I ever asked for it.

I was grateful that I had grown up the way I had and recognized the little things.

Because it wasn't the big things that make your life.

Far fucking from it.

Chapter 1

Raine Eight Years Old

I had sat on my bed that night with my eyes closed as I replayed everything that had happened that day.

Meeting a man. A man that blew all of the others out of the water. I know, I know, I'm only eight years old.

However, being allowed at club parties when they are tamed allowed me to see all sorts of people.

And out of all those people, I've never seen anyone like him.

He had dark black hair, and when the lights in the garage hit it, it looked blue. It was so cool. He had his hair in the traditional military style, and that was something that always got to me. I didn't understand the men that have long hair, isn't that a girl thing?

To each, your own as my dad would say.

But what really got me were his eyes. They were like melted chocolate. That perfect combination of sweet and spicy.

He had a perfect jawline.

A strong nose.

And these really pretty lips.

And when he stood, and I looked up at him, I had to bend my neck way back to meet his eyes.

He was the tallest person in the club. And the biggest.

Not only weight-wise but muscle-wise.

I swore that three of me made up one of his legs. It would take more than ten of me, and probably more to even come close to being his size.

And someone his size could squash anyone like a bug, but to me, he didn't come off that way. No, he came off in the way that he wouldn't go after you unless you went after him.

Or that of someone important to him. I got those vibes from him, there was no rhyme or reason why or how I knew that, but I just did.

But more importantly than his looks, it was meeting someone that got me.

Because my very own mother sure as heck didn't.

And I vowed that I would be his best friend.

There had just been something about him. Something that called to me. Whether it was the slight darkness behind his eyes. The way his shoulders tensed every so often when he did something and cussed about it.

The others had looked at him curiously as to why the smallest things that he didn't get right aggravated him.

But I had got him.

And so, I kept making small mistakes too.

And when he caught on to what I was doing? That smile? It was better than getting the one Christmas present you've been asking for all flipping year.

And it stayed like that for the rest of the day.

Now, I will admit, I didn't actively seek him out. I really freaking didn't.

It was almost as if there was some kind of magnetic pull between the two of us.

Where I went, he found himself. And vice versa. It happened in the kitchen. In the common room, out back when the grill was started.

Sitting next to each other around the bonfire, the tapping of his boot when a song came on. The tapping of my fingers to

the beats. The smiles. The winks. The blushing of my cheeks, his chuckle. *Sigh.*

See I would go as far as to say that I was head over heels in love with him.

But the emotion of love was something I'd never seen.

Sure, I knew the emotion between a child and a parent had to be different from that of a man and a woman or something completely different. To each their own.

So, instead, I focused on finding a new friend. A new friend that would become my best friend as the years came on.

But today was today. And I had made myself prepare for it. Psych myself up for it.

And that meant hogging as much of him as I could get.

Because in the time that he was here, we were side by side.

Learning about each other.

Learning things that he taught me.

Also, showing him to be carefree in a way that only a kid can be.

No one talked about his past, and I didn't ask him about it. It wasn't my place. I had been taught things belong in the past, and the future is now.

My dad laughed his butt off at most of what went on in building my friendship with Tank.

Only my mom rolled her eyes and made snide comments.

Hearing my dad say, '*If I didn't trust him, he wouldn't be breathing.*'

And it had been that statement that also had me trusting Tank.

And you want to know something, it didn't bother him in the slightest.

He didn't make me leave when he was talking to others, no he shot me a wink, and then made a way for me to be in the conversation.

I was pretty sure that had anyone grumbled, they would have to take on not only Tank but also my father. And my father wasn't called Storm for nothing.

One time, I saw why they called my dad, Storm, instead of his given name, Vance. You see, he can be calm, cool, and collected. It's why he's the Pres. It's why I look up to him. But he can also move in within a blink of an eye and rip apart everything you ever thought you knew. And mess crap up as you've never seen.

And that day had been because my mother had forgotten to pick me up at school that day. Again.

It had started to drizzle as I sat there on the front porch steps of the school.

Waiting.

The teachers had called her but to no avail. And my father had left the day before to go on a run. He didn't expect his men to do it for him. His saying was, *'How could anyone follow a man if they weren't willing to take the lead'*.

My father had taught me to be aware of my surroundings.

So, that was why I had noticed the same dark blue Lincoln Continental, yes, I may have only been eight, but I know my cars drive by the school twice in the past five minutes.

It was also why I noticed that crap was about to go sideways.

Since I didn't have a cell phone, I couldn't call for help. And since the staff member that hated bikers had left me there and gone home, I was alone.

So, when the car stopped in front of the steps, I reached into my backpack for something my dad told me to always carry, a roll of pennies.

I grabbed it and then fisted the roll in my tiny hand.

Two doors opened on the passenger side, and two men got out. One of them was a dark-skinned man with a gold tooth. He was dressed in a white wife beater, dark jeans, and black boots with one jeans leg inside of one boot, and the other over his boot. He had his hair done in dreads, sticking this way and that way.

The other man was a white man, dressed in a black t-shirt, black jeans, and black vans. Tattoos that looked like a three old did them, crawled up his right arm. He had blonde hair that looked in need of a good wash.

The dark-skinned man smiled, looked me up and down, and then asked, “Well, hello there. Can we give you a ride home?”

I wasn’t scared. Not in the slightest. People can smell fear. Act like they don’t phase you, and it confuses them. Another lesson my dad had taught me.

Therefore, I sat there, lifted my chin, and said, “No. My daddy is on his way.”

The white man looked around and then said, “Well, I don’t see him. Do you, Jarvis?”

And as the dark-skinned man went to grab me, I brought my right arm up, and with all my might as my daddy had taught me, I sailed my fist into the man’s left cheek.

He grabbed it and then muttered, “You little bitch. Oh, man, am I going to have fun with you.”

Then the white man snickered, and then I watched as he grabbed his junk. I almost barfed in my mouth. Really?

Adrenaline was coursing through my veins, my body ready to fight. My daddy always told me to never let my size matter, and that even the smallest things can have the biggest impact.

My body was ready with anticipation of showing these two punks that I wouldn’t go quietly. That I would put up a fight until he could get to me.

And then as they both made a move to grab me, I heard the blessed sound of Harley pipes.

They both froze when they saw the big smile on my face, and I couldn't help but quip, "See, I told you my daddy was on his way."

And then as my daddy stopped so fast, he laid his bike down, his VP Red along with Clip the Sergeant at Arms followed suit.

And I sat there as I watched my daddy turn into a raging Storm. I watched him beat the crap out of them while Red and Clip guarded me.

And my daddy didn't forget about the man in the car. Oh no, he sure as heck didn't.

"Sorry, sweetheart," my daddy said as he gathered me in his arms.

I squeezed my arms around his neck and then sighed, "I knew you would come for me."

"Wanna tell me why the man already had a bruise on his face?" Red asked me as he looked down at the roll of pennies in my fist.

I shrugged, "He must have run into a fist."

And that caused all three men to laugh.

I hadn't seen Red make a phone call.

Therefore, when one of the vans the MC owned pulled into the school parking lot, and they started to load the punk butt men into the back, I called out, "One second, daddy."

They all stopped what they were doing, a confused frown was on my daddy's face, and then it morphed into a grin when he saw what I had done.

You see, I really didn't take too kindly to the man that had grabbed his junk in front of me, so I used all the power I could muster and kicked the punk between his legs.

“What did he do sweetheart?” Red asked between chuckles.

A disgusted shiver wracked my body, “He grabbed his junk in front of me.

Needless to say, the man’s dick was crushed by the time the men followed suit.

Oh, and alcohol hitting split knuckles hurts like a mother.

And the punches my dad threw at the three men had nothing on the words he spewed at my mother who had come into the house with shopping bags.

Needless to say, she never forgot me again at school.

And that was only because after that incident, my daddy had given me a phone and programmed every member’s number in it, including all the businesses the club owned. So, I could always get a hold of someone if I needed it.

Also, the teacher who had left me there, ended up not only being fired but also having child endangerment charges and a slew of other charges against her. She’s now the proud wearer of the color orange.

Because as it turned out, this wasn’t her first offense.

But today was today, I knew that I needed to be strong. That I couldn’t cry. Even if I wanted to.

I got up early to get ready. I wouldn’t cry today. I wouldn’t.

I wouldn’t be that type of girl. My father had a hand in raising me. Because my mother sure as heck didn’t.

Today, Tank was leaving for his first-ever duty station.

I was in a pair of leggings, an old cut-up Metallica shirt of my father’s, and my black boots, and I had my hair all curly and wild.

My mother did one thing for me.

She gave me my wild curly hair. Everything else was from my daddy.

I had my father's cool gray eyes, my nose, and his sense of style.

During his going away party, which happened yesterday, Tank hadn't needed to find me. No, I was right there with him. He was going to be gone for a while, but he would keep in touch with me. He promised me.

He'd also told me I was his best friend. And I had told him he was mine.

Therefore, after I had gotten ready, I smiled at my dad and walked with him to the clubhouse. We lived on the back half of the property that the MC owned.

When we reached the clubhouse, I heard Red say, "Tank man, we need to leave brother. Can't be fucking late."

"Give me a minute man. Won't leave without doing something first." His deep voice called out.

And the minute he saw me, I knew what that was.

My dad chuckled at my side, released my hand, and said, "Go get your hug, Cookie."

I didn't hesitate as my little legs ate up the distance to Tank, and then I was up in his arms.

Squeezing him as much as I could, trying to pour all the good vibes into his soul that I could.

Into my hair, he whispered, "Going to miss you, Gray."

I whispered back, "Why Gray?"

"My new favorite color. Be strong. Kickass. Don't ever change, okay?" I wanted to ask about the favorite color thing, but I let it be.

Instead, I gave him my own words right back.

"Okay. Be strong. Show everyone why you're called Tank. Don't take any stuff from anyone. Hold your head high. Trust

your gut. And come back home.”

His arms tightened around me, lowly so only I could hear, he asked, “And if I don’t?”

I knew what he was asking. Even if I didn’t know him as I did, his tensed-up body would tell me everything I needed to know.

Pulling my head from his neck, I looked into his eyes and then whispered, “Then you come back home in any manner that you can. And if it’s your soul, I’ll wrap it up in bubble wrap and duct tape and keep it safe until I meet you on the other side.”

His eyes closed as he inhaled a breath, then let it out, and shook his head, then ever so softly, he said, “Got it.”

Letting go of me, I let go of him and slid down to the ground. He placed two fingers under my chin, lifting my head until his eyes met mine.

They searched for something; I wasn’t sure about. That was until I smiled and then nudged his belly with my fingers, “Get out of here. Go make the world a safer place.”

He nodded and then smirked, “I will Gray. See you soon.”

I had been proud of myself. I hadn’t cried when Tank had gotten in the truck to be taken to the airport.

No, I had cried when I headed back into the clubhouse, and Casen, the treasurer of the club, handed me a teal gift bag.

Inside was a note from Tank. It read ‘*I’ll start the gift-giving. Be sure to send me shit I like. You know me better than anyone. I’ll call and text when I can. Your Bestie, Tank.*’

Also in the bag was a new set of charcoal pencils so I could draw, a new sketchbook that was in the form of a journal, and a black box.

Inside the black box had me giggling. A little note was inside with the necklace that read, ‘*Where we began.*’

It was a gorgeous silver chain with a wrench pendant on it. That had started the tears to fall.

That started my fascination with silver as well.

Outside everyone was waiting on my daddy, but he paid them no mind because he was more concerned about me.

He had seen the gift Tank had given me, and then he wrapped me in his strong arms, as I let the tears fall.

He held me tight and whispered in my ear, “He will be okay. Tank is one tough son of a bitch. You just keep on having faith that he will come back to you.”

I nodded at my daddy, pressed a kiss to his cheek, wiped my eyes, and then let him go.

“Want me to do the honor?” He asked as he nodded at the necklace.

I giggled, wiped my tears, and nodded.

After he had the necklace latched, I whispered, “You see it too?”

He didn’t have to ask what I was talking about; he knew. Just like I knew.

He knelt in front of me and nodded, “Been on this earth a lot of years, Cookie. The connection the two of you share is rare. So rare in fact, I’ve only seen it once, and that was your grandparents. He will come back home to you. Mark my words, baby.”

They were going on a run to help benefit a cancer patient.

I waved him off, but not before he turned to my mother and snapped, “You dare take that shit away from her, it won’t be fucking pretty.”

That night, I went to bed, wanting to run to my father to tell him what I had seen.

Shortly after he had left, my mother brought out her true colors.

Not even an hour later, I had seen her outside against the building getting fucked by a man I didn't know.

And yeah, I know that an eight-year-old shouldn't know what the word fucked or fucking meant, but I was a biker princess. I knew a lot of things I shouldn't know.

I didn't know if my dad knew that she was sleeping with other men.

But if he didn't, I didn't want him to know. My daddy was the greatest man on the planet, and I never wanted to hurt him.

However, my dad had always taught me to tell the truth, even if it may hurt someone.

I was so proud of the man I got to call daddy.

But I wished I could spare him this heartache.

Well, it wouldn't really be considered heartache. Not really.

I knew he didn't love my mother.

But he tried. I know he did.

People didn't realize the things an eight-year-old heard and saw.

That night I fell asleep after sketching out Tank. And I fell asleep clutching the pendant. One I vowed to never take off.

Luckily, I didn't have to tell my daddy. Because apparently the run he was on hadn't taken long at all and he had texted me that he was on his way home early and he told me not to tell my mother.

So, I didn't.

That was how I was woken up one day later by my mother screeching.

Getting out of bed, opening my door, and going down the steps, it was to see some man with his clothes bunched in front of him, a different man this time, running through the house and out the front door in nothing but his birthday suit.

That night, my mother packed her bags and was told to never step foot on the premises again.

After she left without a word to me, I walked to my father, only to see him shaking his head with a couple of pieces of paper in his hand.

Tentatively I asked, "What's that?"

"Custody papers. Made sure when she left, I got you. She has no claim on you nor will she ever."

That was fine with me. I mean I knew she was my mother. But she made me think that some people just either didn't have it in them to be a parent or they didn't want to.

Instead, I asked, "Want to start our marathon?"

He looked at me, smiled, then winked, "I'll go pop the popcorn."

So, there we were, at midnight, eating popcorn, cuddled up while we watched *Fast and The Furious*.

And I called Tank and told him everything. Even the thing that happened at the clubhouse.

He had muttered, "Good fucking riddance."

And yes, he had texted me after he stepped off the plane. He had sent me pictures of his barracks. And I sent him pictures of the drawings I had done. And a lot of them found themselves on his walls in the months to come.

What I didn't know was that a lot of them also found their way on his body.

Something I only found out when he had come home on leave for the fourth.

Chapter 2

Tank

Six Years Later

I had been away for almost a year on a mission. We had to infiltrate an insurgent camp, and one thing after another kept us from getting our target.

And a few of those things were taking breaks so to speak and going after a few other targets, making the main target think that he had bested us.

But we weren't SEALs for nothing.

The ride home was spent with every member of my team catching some z's.

When we touched down, we each hauled ass to our vehicles, ready to be in our spaces.

Normally, I would have showered at the barracks, but I wanted to be home.

When I returned to the clubhouse, the moment, and I mean the very moment my door opened, my boots hit the pavement, I was assaulted.

All by a tiny thing that barely reached my chest who punched me in the belly because I didn't like the licorice, she sent me in the care box from the MC.

You wouldn't like it either if it had sat out in the sun because no one was at headquarters to put the packages inside that day.

I had called Storm when I was told I would be heading home.

I even had him put me on speaker and made sure Raine was there so I could tell her.

Wanting to rile her up, that was when I told her that the licorice was shit, her intake of breath told me I would be getting a talking-to.

Looking down into her pale gray eyes that I was sure would bring men to their knees when she got older. And I would probably be wearing orange for the rest of my life if anyone dared lay their hands on her body.

Smirking down at her, knowing that would get a rise out of her, I said, “What? I’ve been gone for a year, and the only thing I get is a punch in the gut. Starting to rethink this best friend thing,”

She growled and then jumped.

Laughing, I caught her and wrapped my arms around her as she closed her arms around my neck while her legs wrapped around my waist.

Breathing in her scent, I was finally home.

She was fourteen years old now, her braces had come off four years ago, and she was still rocking her own look.

However, instead of some ratty tee, she had on the tee I had made and sent her.

It was distressed and said *Biker Princess* in bold white letters, and then underneath that in a smaller font it read, *Don't Touch This*, and then right below that, it read *You Have Been Warned*.

In my ear, she whispered quietly, “I’m so glad your home. How long do I have you for?”

I grinned, then whispered back, “Two whole fucking weeks.”

I felt her body shudder, and then she sighed, pulled away from me, and then locked her eyes with my blue ones, and whispered one word, one single word, “Okay.”

And let me tell you something, those two weeks, were the best of my life. Bar none.

But I had a feeling, when she got older, as in legal, I would be eating those words.

Because I knew, every day with her for the rest of my life would be the best of my life.

It had been while I was gone that I made up my mind. About her. And about us.

I'd never find someone any more perfect for me... than her.

I was glad that when I came back from some more missions, she had grown up and was sixteen now.

And something that had me gritting my teeth, was that she was actually talking to this boy from her school.

However, the moment I saw him try to grab her ass at the open-to-public club party, I had gone ballistic.

Yes, she was my best friend.

Yes, she was also mine. The very second, she turned eighteen.

It wasn't the fact that he had tried to grab her ass. No, it was the fact that she had told him no.

And the little fucker hadn't listened.

I had him up by the back of his neck, hauled out of the clubhouse, and thrown into the street by the time everyone made it to me.

Everyone tried to get me to calm down, but I wasn't having it, not until she placed her hand on my arm and asked me to stop.

She kissed me on the cheek and told me thanks, then she told the punk-ass little boy it was time he left. Oh, and that they were done.

Fucker was smart to not mouth off with the snarky comment I could see sitting on the lip of his lip.

Sadly, I had to report back that night for a high-profile target rescue operation.

While I was gone, I learned that the boy had made up so many rumors about her and that pissed me off. And those rumors included the fact that she was easy and loose.

When the truth of the matter was that they had done nothing but held hands.

That was fucking it.

And yes, I trusted her inexplicably. They hadn't done anything but that. I had often wondered why that was, then I recalled that if I was a girl, I wouldn't want any part of him touching me.

I still couldn't see what she had seen in him. And they were just talking. Not dating. Only seeing if they were compatible.

Thankfully, the rumors stopped one bright sunny day. You see she had called me crying her eyes out and I told her what to do.

The next day I had been waiting on the call, needless to say, she had been all laughter and no tears.

“Tank, you won't believe how hard he hit the ground. I never knew that hitting that pressure point in the side of his neck would make him drop like a sack of potatoes. Oh, and I told him that if he didn't stop spreading those rumors about me, I would be happy to teach him about another pressure point that can make him piss on himself. And if that threat wasn't enough of a warning, then I would tell everyone about a certain someone on a football team.”

I had told her that I had that boy looked into that night because something about him seemed off. The search had come back that he wasn't straight but gay.

The problem was with his dad. You see, he was also the son of a rival MC, and he was only trying to get with Raine so he would have an in with the club.

Now we don't have a problem with anyone who is gay, straight, or whatever. It's when you get caught sucking off a guy on the football team to try and shave off points so your team will lose because of a lousy bet you made.

Yes, I lusted after a teenage girl yet, how could I not when she was the reason I breathed?

And in the years to come, she didn't know it but her smiling face and the memory of that punch in the gut saved my life in more ways than one.

I knew everything there was to know about her. Like the way she scrunches up her nose when she's asked a question and doesn't want to tell the truth but knows she will anyway.

The way she separates a package of Skittles. The red ones first, then the green ones next, the orange ones, and then last but not least the purple ones. But she never eats the yellow ones. She hates anything lemon unless it's cleaner.

But not furniture polish cleaner. No. That has to be orange scented.

Oh, and the yellow one she hands to me. And if I'm not there, as long as I am coming back soon, she places them in a bag and *gifts* them to me when I get home.

And... like the sucker I am where she's concerned, I eat every last one. Even though I also hate them. But I'll be damned if I tell her that.

How about the way when she passes random strangers and sees their tags are out of their shirts? I've lost count of how many women glared at her when she told their men that their tags were out.

I've also lost count of how many men I've had to kill with my glare because they think it's some new pickup line. They couldn't be further from the truth.

Or like how she's terrified to watch *Nightmare on Elm Street* and anything with *Freddy Kruger* in it, but she loves *Michael? Dawn of the Dead. It*. Clowns don't faze her, yet

they give me the willies. And what does she do? She just fucking laughs. Laughs.

That thought alone has me smirking recalling the last time we were out trick or treating with a fellow MC and someone was dressed as a clown. Half the MC along with myself moved to the other side of the road.

Damn... but I fucking miss her.

While I was laying there on my bunk, I hadn't realized what my fingertips had been rubbing inside my pocket.

And no, it wasn't my dick.

It was simply something from her that I carry everywhere with me.

In fact, I'll never forget the day I was leaving on the latest mission when she had come to the airport and hugged me for all she was worth. She had slipped a note in my pocket, and I still have that note and I read it all the time.

She had written, *If you don't come back to me, I'm hunting you down and cutting your balls off.*

That very colorful message came with a drawing, a stick figure holding a knife that had blood dripping from it with a smile on its face. So, I made sure I always came back to save my family jewels.

The MC and she were the only reasons I were still alive on this earth.

Because it sure as well wasn't because of my parents.

My present didn't define who I am today. The people that I have placed in my life have helped me be the man I am today and I'm damn proud of that man.

Chapter 3

Raine

Two more years. Two more freaking years.

I would no longer be jailbait.

Then, I was going to let him know that I wanted more than friends with him.

Oh, so much more.

Because as I stood there and watched Tank climb into my dad's truck so he could take him to the airstrip where he would be leaving for his latest mission, he stopped right in the open door, turned his head over his shoulder, and gave me our secret move.

Both hands making a heart.

So, therefore, I did it right back.

And once he got that, he smiled, winked, and then got in the truck.

I also had to remind myself that I would only be able to count on the letters I sent him in care packages, hopefully, a video chat once a month, and emails whenever he got the chance.

Compared to what I was used to, this was going to be hard.

He had told me that the area he was headed to wasn't as advanced as the other places, he had been to. And I didn't like that. Not one bit.

I knew he was a SEAL. Almost every single member of our chapter of Wrath MC were or tried to be SEALs.

Now, as for the tried-to-be, my father was one of those but due to a broken bone in his arm that had never healed correctly, well not correctly enough for the program, he hadn't been able to get into it. But he still did a stint in the Navy.

Standing there, I watched, and watched, and watched until I couldn't see the taillights anymore.

My heart was in that truck. But in two years, well, I stayed up late thinking about it. The man was an eleven on a bad day and a fifteen on a good day. Take *Chris Hemsworth* and combine those genes with *James Dean*, there was Tank.

And who was I kidding that he would be more interested in me when I was a five on a bad day and a six on a good day?

But I was going to hold my head high and tell him how I felt.

My dad also taught me that beauty was only skin deep. That it mattered what was in the heart of someone, and not what rested on the outside.

Something else that had taken place while Tank was away fighting for our country was that someone that looked extremely close to Tank's looks showed up at the clubhouse.

Apparently, after Tank had left when he was eight, his mother had gotten pregnant a year later.

It was a shame that they hadn't learned their lesson. Well, it was really a shame that the man above gave her the right to even have children.

Even more so when apparently, the woman, his younger sister, showed up beaten black and freaking blue that the MC had stepped in.

And with Tank's permission, they had done something to their parents.

I of course wasn't allowed to know.

But just like ever since I was small, I heard things.

So, I technically knew what happened to their bodies.

I just didn't know what happened after they both received a point-blank shot in their foreheads.

Sure, killing people was a sin.

Yes, it was.

But it was only a sin to needlessly kill someone.

I mean, for soldiers defending their country, it was given. Saving the lives of their brothers was even more of a given.

Killing pedophiles and rapists? Yes, that was a given as well.

And another given was any person that beat a child. No matter their age. If you are the reason they are breathing on this earth, then you keep your danged hands to yourself.

What was also given in this MC was that you never shot someone in the back. It didn't matter the situation.

As long as they saw the shot coming then it was kosher.

I was sitting outside catching some sun on one of the picnic tables that sat in the forecourt of the clubhouse when I saw the gates move.

I recognized that van. It was one of the clubs.

Then I recognized Hippy behind the wheel as Red escorted them into the forecourt.

When I heard about Red's daughter, surprise, surprise, I immediately hoped that she wouldn't be like Tank's sister.

Prissy. Needy. Demanding. Thinking her shit doesn't stink. Not helping out with anything, and also hitting all of the brothers for extra cash.

She told them it was so she could get enough money for tuition at first. And when they offered to pay it in full so she could start, then she came up with another plan.

I wasn't sure about the plan she had used but it had worked.

Instead of using the cash they gave her, she spent it on clothes.

And not your normal everyday wear kind of clothes. No. These were slut clothes.

Hell, she made the sweet butts look tame in comparison.

And speaking of his sister, well, they only shared the looks department.

They definitely didn't share the manners department.

In fact, I got along with her brother so well, I thought the two of us would be like peas and carrots.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

She was snotty. Demanding. Rude. Heck, I wouldn't have been surprised if she was magically cast as an addition to Mean Girls. She was that bad.

That was proven even more so when I had been on a random facetime call with Tank, she had walked by, and when I called out to see if she wanted to say hey to her brother, all she did was sneer at me.

And no, I hadn't missed the rage and anger on his face when I told him what she did.

I also had a feeling that the two of them were going to be having a long talk when he got home.

In fact, I hate to say this about a fellow female, but she seriously needs to be put in her place. Not with actions unless it's the last resort but with a stern talking to.

However, everything else changed once again when we were told that Red's daughter was coming to live with us.

None of us even knew that he had a daughter.

In fact, neither did he.

Therefore, the expression on his face when he dropped the cell, he had been clutching would have been comical if it wasn't for the tears that came out of his eyes.

Red was a big man. Not as big as Tank, but he was pretty darn close. He was an inch shorter than Tank and only twenty pounds lighter.

That had been three days ago.

My dad had just gotten the call that they were on their way back and would be here in four hours.

I was outside with everyone else.

And when I saw the girl, I knew she had to be around my age, which I hoped was going to be really cool.

Let me tell you something, if I swung that way, I would be all over that. I knew her name was Lena. She had midnight black hair that hung halfway to her back, and these gorgeous emerald-green eyes that had to come from Red. I was jealous. She was that beautiful.

Seeing that she was looking nervous, I sent up a silent prayer that she wouldn't be like Tank's sister and made my way over to them.

Red saw me coming, smiled, and winked, "Darlin' this is Raine. She's the president's daughter. Raine, this is my daughter, Lena."

I smiled at Red then looked at Lena, and asked, wanting to ease the nerves that were written clearly across her face, "Hey, so tell me, how weird is this?"

"Well, it's pretty darn weird. Can I ask you something?" She asked as she bit her bottom lip just like I did. If that wasn't a sign, I didn't know what was.

I shrugged my shoulders, "Sure."

I had all sorts of answers for whatever she wanted to know. I figured it was something about the club.

But you could've knocked me over with a feather at what came out of her mouth.

"Please tell me where you got your tee. I've been stuck on their music and I've yet to be able to find one of their band tees?" she asked with a smile and nodded at the shirt I had on.

I laughed. I couldn't help it. Of all the things she could have asked me, she chose that one.

I smiled wide, "You know, I have a feeling we are going to be best friends."

“I have the same feeling. It’s a good one.” She returned my wide smile.

“To be honest, my best friend, Tank, got it for me. We went to one of their shows. Their music is even better live.”

She gasped at that, “Really? Darn it. I don’t suppose you’ll let me borrow it sometime?”

I shrugged, “Doesn’t matter to me. Looks like we are close to the same size. You can borrow anything of mine anytime except for a few pieces.”

“Same. I was nervous about this. But thanks for putting me at ease. Now, I ate a while ago, and I’m hungry again. Do y’all have any food here?”

I had a craving for walking tacos earlier, so that’s why I said, “Sure. I was going to make some walking tacos. You want some?”

“Seriously! Lead the way.” I smiled, looped my arm with hers, and then led us into the clubhouse.

All the while Red called out, “Show my daughter around Raine. I know they won’t fuck with her if she’s with you.”

I raised my hand and waved, signaling I had her.

It was while we were eating that I burped, not lady like I know, and she did the same, and we proceeded to rate each other’s burp without commenting about doing it.

The chuckles that burst forth turned into full-blown laughter.

And that was how she became my second-best friend in the whole world.

A fact she was totally okay with.

After I showed her around the clubhouse and helped her settle into her new room at Red’s house, we binged on popcorn, watched movies, and talked about our love lives. I showed her a picture of Tank.

And thankfully, she caught my feelings for the man without me having to say a word about it.

She told me about a boy she thought she was interested in until she watched him walk past a girl that was being bullied and purposefully ram into her, which knocked all the stuff she had in her arms.

I also found out that Lena stood up for others because she had helped that girl pick her stuff up, and then later in the day, her foot slipped, and he went sailing to the ground.

To which she had said loudly, “Doesn’t feel good to be embarrassed, now does it?”

She was my hero.

Chapter 4

Tank

I've been gone for four months. Four long fucking months and I missed the hell out of Raine.

While I was gone, I had a lot of time to think about everything. She would be turning eighteen soon. And it was time to put my plan into action.

Because seeing her was like a punch to the gut.

In fact, I had even laid out my plans with Storm when I got back.

I respected the hell out of Storm. This was why before I brought it up to Raine that I was going to make her mine, I had to lay out everything in front of him. He was not only my pres. but her father as well.

Sitting there at the stoplight my answer to him when he asked me what I would do if he had said no, caused a sly smirk to break across my lips.

'I'll make her mine anyway. There is no me without her.'

Yesterday had been a perfect day relaxing with Raine. I also got to officially meet my sister, and I could tell that we weren't going to get along as I had hoped we would. I also got to meet Raine's other best friend Lena.

I liked Lena. I liked her a lot. And that was only because she matched Raine perfectly. Even more so the girl didn't look at me like I was a piece of meat, and the only topic we talked about was Raine.

And I was glad that while I was gone, Raine would have someone else she could talk to. Someone that got her as I got her.

It was a day later when I saw her again.

In fact, I had even pouted when she told me that she would be busy today working on an assignment for one of her classes.

This time she was walking into the grocery store with some meathead-looking wanna-be who had his arm wrapped around her fucking shoulders.

Yeah, that shit ain't flying.

Even more so when he said something to her, and she tossed her head back and laughed.

But I was okay with that. Somewhat.

Because it wasn't the laugh that I was so used to. The one where she laughed and gave zero fucks. With full abandonment.

My mood went from aggravated that the fucker had his arm around her shoulders, to I'm going to bury this son of a bitch when I saw him put his arm around her waist.

Lucky for him I decided against it when she slid out of his grasp and told him to stop. Gone was the laughter in her eyes and her voice. It was stern as fuck.

I stalked in after them and when I got to Raine I did what any human male would do. Or rather what I would do considering it was Raine.

I wrapped my arm around her waist, hauled her up my body, pulled her close, and ran my nose along the column of her neck.

Vanilla and caramel. Two of my favorite scents ever.

Pressing a kiss to her temple after I sat her back on her feet, I winked at her after seeing her rolling her eyes, but that shit-eating grin on her face was prominent as hell.

When I finally pulled away from her it was to see the meathead still standing there fucking looking at the two of us.

“What the fuck are you still standing there for? Want to buy a ticket or some shit?” I asked him.

The boy decided to be all snotty and shit, and had the nerve to puff out his chest at me, really? Fucking. Really?

Raine saw it too, and she giggled.

He was five inches shorter than me and about a hundred pounds lighter.

He looked me up and down and asked with his nose turned up, “Raine, do you know this man?”

What? Did he think his shit didn’t stink or something?

“Kyle, this is Tank, my best friend.” As she said that, I saw something in her eyes, and then... yeah, she scrunched her nose and bit the corner of her lip. Her tell.

I knew there was more to it, but this wasn’t the right time to ask her about it.

“Tank, this is Kyle. He’s in a few of my classes and is a friend.” The fucker didn’t like that she called him a friend. He gave that fact away when the corner of his eye twitched.

“Nice to meet you, bro. If you’ll excuse us, we have plans.” The fucker said to me.

See, I was damn good at my job. So good that I could read a person I’d never fucking met.

I could even tell you what they more than likely had for dinner two weeks ago.

And judging by the tightening of his lips, and the creases around his eyes, he was trying to show me that she was his and that he didn’t appreciate me stopping them from shopping. What also stood out was the way his hands were shaking, and when he saw that I noticed them, he shoved them into his pockets.

Ignoring him, I asked Raine, “What are you up to Gray?”

“We’re grabbing food so I can cook it and refuel after we did that assignment I mentioned earlier. I think it kicked both of our butts.” She told me as she gestured to a few things in the cart.

“Need any help?” I asked her. I hoped like hell she would say yes. Going another day without her when I was here, well, I couldn’t fucking do it.

“No, we’ve got all the help...” He trailed off as I tossed a glare his way, I only reserved for people who were dangerously close to eating one of my bullets.

Needless to say, he shut the fuck up.

“I wasn’t asking you fucker. First, don’t ever wrap your arm around Raine again. Better yet always keep at least twenty feet between the two of you. Second, I’m not your bro. What I am is a man that knows how to kill someone two hundred and thirty-seven ways, and by the way, that number is still climbing.”

He swallowed thickly, I watched his Adam’s apple bob up and down.

Raine looked up at me and said, “Really Tank? We are in the same class, and we were assigned to do this by our teacher. It’s kind of impossible to keep that many feet away from each other.”

I looked down at her and shrugged my shoulders, “Don’t give a fuck. I don’t need to be over there worrying about some limp dick fucker making you uncomfortable. Wait... I got an idea.” I told her with a wink then I looked at the meathead.

I refused to use his name. “I need your license.”

The meathead’s posture stiffened, “The fuck for?”

“So, I can give it to my brothers. That way, if Raine says you got close to her, I can have them pay you a visit.” I raised my brows and tapped at my kutte.

I knew it before he even said it, “Best friends you say? Right. Fuck this shit, I’m out of here.”

“Good riddance mother fucker.” I mumbled.

“Please tell me you can take me back home with some groceries. I rode here with him.” She was laughing her ass off

and so was I.

“Yeah, Gray, I got you. We’re on the bike so keep that in mind. So, what are you making me for supper? I’m starving.” I asked her.

And with her next response, she didn’t even bat a fucking eyelash. God damn this girl.

“Well, I was going to cook grilled chicken and make a salad because he doesn’t eat red meat. But if you’re down for some spaghetti, salad, and some garlic bread then I’ll make extra for you too.”

“You spoke right to my heart. Let us do this. Wait, you’re not buying store-bought shit, right? You’re making the sauce from scratch?”

She lifted her brow that said, *What do you think?* I lived for her homemade sauce.

All I had to do was nod and hold in the urge to not get down on one knee and ask her to marry me.

I lived for her cooking.

I knew that her mother didn’t teach her.

And I knew her father hadn’t taught her either, the man could grill, but he burnt fucking water. And yes, that is a thing. That’s when you forget you’re boiling something and leave it on the stove.

So, when she confided that her cooking was all thanks to *The Tube*, I had half a mind to buy stock in the company.

I pushed the buggy down the aisles while she gathered the things she would need.

All the while the mothers that frequent the store kept their eyes glued to my arms, and my ass.

And yes, by God I have eyes in the back of my head.

They were called Raine One and Raine Two.

Once we were done, we headed to the front.

While the chick was scanning the shit, she kept checking me out. And the way she was doing it was pissing me off because she was blatantly disrespecting Raine. And I didn't like that. Not one bit.

See, we had the same mentality. People could look for two point five seconds, anything more than that was way too much.

I was about to say something until Raine piped up and said, "Look honey, I know he's drop-dead gorgeous and I'm flattered that you want to check him out and all but if you don't stop eye fucking him, you're going to be wearing eye patches to freaking work."

My lips twitched. Raine didn't like to cuss. I still hadn't figured out why, but that was one of the many facets of Raine.

Did I correct her? Hell, no I did not. It instantly got hard.

Lay it down, boy. I chastised my cock which was rock fucking hard.

She isn't eighteen. *Yet.*

She was going to be my everything. I just had to lay the groundwork.

But right now, I was smirking, because I had been missing seeing something.

And that was when the spitfire that she really was came out to play.

Therefore, I shoved Raine out of the way and handed the woman cash before Raine could even get it out of her bag.

"Tank? What do you think you're doing? I'm the one cooking supper, not you." She growled.

"Gray, whichever way you want to spin this; no matter where we are, you will never pay a damn dime for anything," I told her but from the corner of my eye, I saw the cashier sigh.

Yeah, cashier girl lap it up. You ain't getting this.

“Tank, you’re crazy.” Yeah, well being the way I am is worth the smile I get from her and those dimples that pop out.

We grabbed the bags and loaded the stuff in my saddle bags once I grabbed the helmet for her that stays in there for when she rides with me.

It’s purple with gold flakes in it. I had it custom painted. And let me tell you, the cost of it was worth it when her eyes fucking glowed when she saw it for the first time.

We rode in comfortable silence to her house, and I really wished it was longer. I didn’t know if she realized it or not but every time, we moved to the right she would press her whole body into mine more and I swore I felt her cunt rub against my ass.

We pulled into the driveway, and once the bike came to a stop, I helped her off.

With a hand on her hip, I moved her out of the way, nodded my head at the front door, and said, “Go unlock the doors, Gray, I got this.”

With a smile and a wink, she headed up the drive.

I had to turn my head and take a deep breath.

Not. Fucking. Eighteen. Yet. Mother. Fucker.

But damn... her fucking ass.

I knew her dad wasn’t here, because he was at the new strip club we just opened.

Everyone was there yet I canceled going there when I hit the store and saw what I saw.

And no, I wasn’t going to check out the talent. I was going there because the building wasn’t only a strip club.

We also set up an underground dungeon... of sorts. It made Ripper happy as fuck or, so I was told. And I wanted to check out all the tools they had collected there.

After I got everything in the house and placed it on the island, I toed off my boots, I asked, “Anything I can do to help?”

She looked at me like I was an alien or some shit. “You’re offering... to help me cook? Did I hear you right?”

“What? You think because I’m in an MC I can’t cook?” I puffed out my chest and everything.

She even had just taken a swig of her favorite drink and got choked because the little imp was laughing at me.

“Okay, can you come over here and cut up the tomato, cucumber, and onion please?” She had a cutting board and a knife ready for me.

I watched her brown the meat then she added the sauce and a few extra spices. Next, she put the spaghetti in a pot of boiling water.

Once I was done cutting up the veggies, I mixed them all together with the salad mix and put the bowl in the fridge.

She had just placed the garlic bread in the oven and grabbed me a beer and herself another Dr. Pepper.

Leaning against the island, I saw her bite her lip, “So Tank, can I ask you something?”

“Yeah, ask me whatever.” I meant that too, there was not anything she couldn’t ask me.

But before that, I didn’t even hesitate to move a lock of her hair behind her ear with a finger.

And yeah, there was that ever-present electric current that flowed through my body.

And it helped that I saw a full-body shiver race across her features.

“What is it that you really do? I mean I know it’s missions and it’s for the military and all that but like what does that entail?” Except that. I would answer anything but that.

“Gray, there’s nothing I won’t ever tell you, but I can’t give out the information about my job. The only thing I can tell you is that we are very few in my line of work. They call us in when they want something kept quiet or to make someone disappear. That is all I can and will ever tell you. Hell, you know more about what I do than anyone else outside of the military.”

But my Raine, she didn’t pout. She didn’t cause a fuss that it was all that I told her. She just smiled, winked, and took a sip of her soda, “Okay, well that’s a lot more than I thought I would get. Thanks.”

I nodded at her, “You’re welcome. So, tell me what made you want to be a Nurse in the NICU?”

I’ve been meaning to ask her about that, every time I come home, but it always slips to the back of my mind. I had no idea that’s what she wanted to do with her life. We talked about our dreams, yes. She knew I wanted to be a career Navy. And I knew that she simply wanted to be happy.

I found out about it while I was gone last year, Storm told me she had sent out some college applications and that was what she wanted to be.

“Wait, how do you... never mind.” She shook her head.

Then she took in a breath and said, “When I was little, I was in the car with my mom. We were on the way home from school when one of the old club girls turned old lady who just so happened to be a friend of hers, called my mom and told her that she had just given birth but that there had been complications.”

With a raised eyebrow, unable to believe it, I asked, “Wait, your mom actually had friends?”

She laughed and nodded, “Weird, right? Anyway, the complications had been that the baby boy had been born fifteen weeks early and not breathing. I saw a nurse and a doctor fight God himself to keep that baby here and they won. Ever since then, I wanted to be like that Nurse and fight for

little ones. Plus, the thought of watching life being born is a miracle in itself.”

“That’s pretty fucking cool, Gray.” She nodded and smiled.

Then softly she said, “But not just for that. I wanted to be the person to help the parents.”

“How so?”

“Well, after the baby boy was marked healthy, we went back, and we were there when they placed the baby in the woman’s arms. And her old man, he was as big as you, and she, well, as tiny as I am. And he told her something that has stuck with me to this day. He said, *‘The Trees May Blow, The Clouds May Move. The waters may flow, But My Love Will Never Waver. To the End of Time. And Beyond the Seasons, You’re My Soul, My Heart, My World.’*”

I nodded at her, “That’s pretty damn powerful.”

She smiled, then said, “I know. I want to help those parents too. Going through something like that, and not having someone there to help you? I just can’t imagine it.”

And with that said, she turned and started to stir the noodles and the sauce.

Once the pasta, bread, and sauce were done, she grabbed the salad from the fridge and the dressing. We made our plates and headed to the living room.

“You cool with eating here and watching a movie?” She asked. Normally whenever I ate with her, we always sat at the table in the dining room.

It was something her dad did with her.

“Shit yeah. What movie are we watching?” I asked as I caught a whiff of the food, I knew was going to be mouth-watering.

Uh oh, she had a look about her. Was I in trouble?

“You cannot laugh at me. I mean it!” she said as she placed her food on the coffee table.

“Okay, I promise.” I meant it too, even if I hated the movie.

However, she shocked the shit out of me when she put the movie into the DVD player and *The Goonies* on the screen. I then proceeded to laugh my ass off.

“That movie is classic; I love that movie.” I rushed out of my mouth because she had grabbed a fly swat and got ready to use it because I had laughed.

We chowed down and watched the movie. About halfway through the movie, she started yawning so I pulled her up against me and smiled when she laid her head on my shoulder.

Fucking perfection. If I could end every day just like this for the rest of my life, I could die a happy man.

When it was nearing the end, I noticed she had fallen asleep. Gently I eased her head off my shoulder and picked her up ever so gently. I carried her down the hall to her room and carefully laid her down on the bed.

Tagging her light purple duvet, I carefully covered her not wanting to wake her.

I knew that in the future if this was how she wanted to decorate our bedroom, I’d go to sleep every single fucking night with a smile on my face as long as she was in my arms.

Bending down, I kissed her forehead and whispered, “Gray, you don’t know this yet, but I aim to make you mine. On the day you turn eighteen. The very minute.”

But do you know the thing about the best-laid plans?

No matter how well you plan them, everything goes to complete and utter shit.

Pressing another kiss on her forehead, I looked at the picture on her nightstand, smiled, and tapped it.

It was a picture of the two of us, in fact, it was the same one I had on my home screen on my cell.

She had her legs wrapped around my waist. My arms were around her back, her long dark auburn hair was flowing down in curls, and her head was tilted as she laughed her ass off at something I'd said. I remembered the feeling of her in my arms, but not a freaking clue to what I'd said that had her laughing like that.

Shaking my head, I walked out of her bedroom and closed her door so the sounds I was about to make didn't startle her awake.

Once I was in the kitchen, I put the leftovers in the fridge and loaded up the dishwasher.

After I made my rounds and made sure the house was locked up tight to ensure her safety, I headed to the clubhouse.

That night as I lay there in bed, I started planning the day out that I was finally making her mine.

However, that planning had to take a back burner because tomorrow we are all going on a charity run for a very special boy and I needed to have my head in the game with her on the back of my bike.

Because I would be damned if I did something stupid that opened up the option of her being hurt on my watch.

Chapter 5

Raine

When I got up the next morning, it took me a bit to realize just where I was, and then it hit me as I took in my bedroom.

Sighing, I got up and headed for the bathroom to do my morning ritual.

Knowing what today held, I went ahead and took a shower, and then did my skincare routine.

After I was satisfied, I pulled on a pair of light-washed skinny jeans, my knee-high black boots with a little two-inch heel because I was going to be on the bike today, and a loose-fitting long-sleeve white shirt.

Since I would be on the bike, I went ahead and added some product to my hair and then put it in a braid so that when I took it out it would be extra curly seeing as my hair was already curly.

After throwing on some deodorant and some perfume, I headed out of my room.

It wasn't until I checked my dad's room, upon seeing his bed completely made, I realized that he hadn't come home that night, that I realized just who had carried me to bed.

Dang, it. I lived for the moments I was in his arms, and I slept right through it. *What the heck bells Raine?*

I sighed, then walked into the kitchen and made myself a quick breakfast, which consisted of popping a premade steak and egg burrito in the microwave.

Then while that cooked, I made myself a cup of coffee. I was in the middle of adding the caramel syrup to my cup when there was a rat-a-tat on the door. Knowing who that was, I called out, "It's open."

Hearing the door open and then close, I grinned as Lena entered the house.

“Hey girl, how did I do for my first bike rally?” She asked as she held her arms out and then spun around.

I grinned at her and then started to laugh.

She looked at me like I had a screw loose, and then taking in what I had on she started laughing as well.

“This wasn’t planned.” And I said that because we were dressed the same, only her jeans were dark washed compared to mine.

I nodded at her straightened hair, “Want me to braid your hair? It’ll get tangled if you leave it long like that.”

She nodded and then said, “I’m making a cup of coffee first.”

I nodded, then while she did that, I braided her hair for her.

“Carrot, can you believe it? It’s my first bike rally. Ahh, I’m so excited!” Lena was giddy with excitement; she was literally bouncing off the walls.

“I know Pea. I’m so stoked. I still can’t believe I’m going with Tank too. I’m just glad he’s home for this one. This is great. We get to have a great time and help raise money for people with Down syndrome!”

There was an annual *You Cannot Put Them Down Awareness* event on the coast.

It was a full-day event; bikers ride from one half of the coast in a town then meet the next bikers and continue to the next set.

The best thing about the event was that people with Down Syndrome got to ride on the backs of the bikes and they got to travel with a cool group of people. Then from an anonymous donor, they were all flown back to their homes.

It was a great event and seeing their smiles was worth it all. To which Lena agreed not even seconds later, “Right! I swear seeing their smiles is going to be my favorite part!”

After I ate my burrito, locked up the house, and then arm in arm the two of us headed to the clubhouse.

We had just crossed the back lot and then headed to the front so we could mount up when my dad called out for us to do so.

My eyes were searching for Tank, and when I didn't see him, I started to head inside the clubhouse while Lena walked over to her father's bike and settled on the back of it.

But before I could spin all the way around, that deep rumbling voice that I'd missed said behind me, "Good Morning, Gray."

Spinning around, I looked up at Tank with a smile on my face, and said, "Good Morning, Tank."

Moving forward I wrapped my arms around his waist and smiled even wider as he pulled me in closer to his body. Dang, but I had missed this.

With my face buried in his chest, I said softly, "Thank you for carrying me to bed and tucking me in. Thank you for cleaning up the kitchen for me. You didn't have to do that."

I could hear the smile in his voice, "Gray, I'm gone more than I'm home. I'm here, I'm helping you."

That all too familiar instant shiver wracked my body, and I knew he felt it when his arms tightened even harder around me.

"Now, you riding with me?" He asked, pulling my head away from his chest, I looked up into his eyes and then started to nod until I heard something that had me gritting my teeth.

"I thought I was riding with you?" Her voice. My god, it rubbed me the wrong way. Everything about her did that.

Summer had been approved to be a club girl two months ago, and I knew she had already been with almost every single member.

Rumor was, she was looking to be an old lady.

“Nah. When I’m home only one person is on the back of my bike.” Tank told her while keeping his eyes locked with mine. “So, you riding with me?”

“My helmet in your saddlebags?” I asked, making a point.

He winked down at me, knowing what I was doing, “Where the fuck else would it be?”

Laughing, I squeezed him one more time then let go and started to head for his bike.

That was until he tagged my hand and then said, “Meet you over there. Gotta grab my wallet.”

Nodding, I headed for his bike, opened his saddle bags, and then grabbed my helmet.

I was sitting on his bike talking to Lena when she winked at me and then nodded at the door to the clubhouse.

With my shades on I was really able to take my fill of him.

When I saw Tank emerge I may or may not have gotten a little weak in the knees seeing that man. Thank goodness I was sitting down. I didn’t get to do this earlier.

But he did this to me every single freaking time.

He looked so good under his kutte and his black tight-fitting shirt. Not to mention he had on light-washed jeans that hugged his muscular thighs so well it should be a sin and his black motorcycle boots.

Let us not forget the hat he had on backward. My kryptonite.

Just his presence alone made my heartbeat faster. Can you imagine what I’ll be like in the future? Oh, that is scary. But freaking exciting.

Once he reached me, a smile so wide on his face I got to see his dimples, he asked, “You ready, Gray?”

He was taking off his hat, tucking the bill into the back of his jeans, and putting his helmet on.

“Yeah totally. I’m super stoked.” I really was excited. This event was by far my favorite event of all time plus I got to be with Tank so that was the icing on this girl’s cake.

After he mounted in front of me, I wrapped my arms around his waist and scooted closer.

That was when my dad locked eyes with me, winked, and then said, “All right. Y’all know what we’re doing today. We have the second leg for the kiddos. Anyone that has a rider with him now, will be climbing in the back of the trucks. And then once we trade the kids to the next group it’ll be time to eat.”

“Let’s make some kids smile,” I called out.

To that, everyone hooped and hollered.

When he started the bike, the vibrations made my vagina tingle, and it was such a turn-on. If you’ve never been on the back of a bike before, then you don’t know what you’re missing.

Come on the big day. Please hurry. I said to myself.

And then like a well-oiled machine we were off.

My dad took the lead, as Clip with Summer on the back of his bike got beside him.

Normally, seeing as Red is my dad’s VP he rode beside him, however, since this was Lena’s first ride, they rode beside us. We were right behind my dad. With everyone else falling in behind us and Gravel taking up the rear since he’s the Road Captain.

I became lost in thought as we started through town to make that four-hour ride.

Something that had a slight damper on my mood was that I knew he had to leave right after my graduation which was taking place in two weeks.

And I freaking hated it.

I wanted more time with him.

I wanted all the time we had left on this earth with him.

But I couldn't be selfish.

I couldn't be like that.

I refused to be like that.

Because I was proud of him. So dang proud of him and what he does.

But hopefully, when he left to go back, he would officially be mine. My big day couldn't get here fast enough.

We rode up through the mountains and along the streams and creeks that seemed to flow forever. And seeing as it's nearing the end of May and the first of June, the weather was perfect. Not too hot yet with a good breeze.

We had been riding for almost two hours when my dad signaled right, and we all pulled into a convenience store. Good, because I had to pee like a freaking racehorse.

Laughing, I nodded and took off my helmet with blinding speed.

Tagging Lena's hand, I pulled her with me, and we headed to the bathroom at a near run. Obviously, the coffee we'd both consumed earlier was catching up to us.

While we were both peeing when I heard the bathroom door being opened.

And that was when some other chicks, by the sound of their voices, that I knew weren't a part of our group began running their mouths.

"Can you believe all that sexy man meat out there? Oh my god, I got wet from just looking at them." Said a woman and knowing just who she was talking about, I started to smile, that was until I heard what the next woman said, and then decided to dub the first one that spoke as, Sank One.

"Right! But can you believe those girls were with them? I mean, hello. Has she never heard of a slim fast shake? Ugh!" Said Skank Two.

Now, we didn't plan this, but Lena and I opened our stall doors at the same time, slamming them into the wall and got right in their faces.

I snapped, "Let me tell you something, toothpick. My man happens to love my curves because it gives him something to hold on to when I ride him into oblivion."

Lena raised an eyebrow and put her hands on her hips backing me up. She knew I was lying, but she was still there for me.

I was so going to hell for lying about him being my man and what I did to him, but I would be darned if I allowed someone to trash talk me and to talk about Tank that way.

One of the skanks sputtered, but I wasn't done, therefore, I said, "You can look all you want because getting wet from afar is all you're ever going to get from my man."

That was when Lena piped up, "Now, how about you take your skanky ass self out of here before I show you my awesome right hook?"

I loved when Lena showed off that particular favorite of hers. It was downright funny watching their reaction to seeing a small girl knock someone on their butt. She had taken some self-defense lessons from her dad and even knocked a few prospects out with it.

Thankfully, they took that threat wisely and they both left.

Which had us laughing our butts off.

We finished and headed back to the bikes.

Only the girls were a lot dumber than they looked.

Skank One was all over Tank and I could see from here he was pushing her off of him.

Whereas Skank Two was standing there trying to push her tits out in my father's face.

Nice girl left the building and out came pissed off Raine.

Lena looked at me with a raised brow, I snickered, then nodded.

We both marched over to them, Lena surprisingly went to Skank Two and knocked her away from my dad with a well-placed punch, and shouted, “How fucking stupid, are you? First, you say you want that man who happens to belong to my best friend. Then here you stand like the Skank you are and you’re trying to hit on her very own father?”

I would have laughed if I hadn’t seen Skank One try again to wrap her body around Tank’s and the pissed-off expression on his face after he pushed her off him the first time.

Therefore, I wrapped my hand up in her nasty-butt bleached blonde hair and yanked for all I was worth and got her away from Tank.

“I guess you didn’t take the message in the bathroom the right way. So let me enlighten you.” I snarled.

I brought my other hand and punched her square in the nose.

The crunch and the blood that was pouring were extremely satisfying.

Letting her go, I shoved her away from me and from where I stood in front of Tank with my hands on my hips, “Now that was your last warning whore. Walk away now before I really do some real harm to you.”

After Skank Two helped Skank One they both walked to a small mini cooper, got in, and then left the parking lot.

Looking around I spotted Lena walking to Red’s bike, and my dad, well, I didn’t understand the look in his eyes as he watched her walk off. It was one I’d never seen before.

He looked at me, shook his head, and then started pumping his gas.

Before I could walk over there to him and ask if he was okay, I felt an enormous amount of heat at my back, and then

heard Tank ask, “So, what did Lena mean that I belong to you?”

Glaring up at him, I snapped, “Shut up. You know what I meant.”

He got in my face, locked his eyes with mine, and then all the air in my lungs rushed out of my body, when I heard, “I think Lena had the right of it. And so did you.”

After that happened, I didn’t say a word, my thoughts were running rampant.

Did that mean what I think it meant? That he was saying he was mine. I freaking hoped so. Because I wanted to be his.

A proven fact that he knew me better than anyone else, he surprised me and nodded to the two things that were sitting on his bike waiting for me. A can of Dr. Pepper and my bag of Nacho Cheese Bugles.

Smiling wide, I grabbed them and then blew him a kiss. Did he catch it and place it over his heart without a care in the world about who was watching? Yes, he did.

After I ate my fill, all the while handing one to Tank every so often, and drank my drink, I got my helmet on and then settled on the back of Tank’s bike.

I glanced over at Lena to see a smile on her face with wide eyes. I knew that she heard what Tank had said to me. That was proven true when we both giggled, and Tank’s eyes bounced from her to me, and then he muttered with a smile on his face, “Women.”

When we made it to the meeting spot to meet the other bikers that were taking part in the charity, imagine our delight when we filled a Walmart parking lot. Completely filled it.

There wasn’t a parking space left to be seen that didn’t house a bike.

There were bikes everywhere, as well as a few vans and some trucks. The vibration was so loud you could see the windows in nearby stores moving. I freaking loved it.

When I looked around and saw Chelsea, I smiled, got off Tank's bike, removed my helmet, and sat it on my seat, then I raced over to her, calling out as I ran, "Chels!"

She whipped her head around, smiled her huge smile, and then raced over to me.

Chelsea is the daughter of Skinner, the Icer, for a chapter of Wrath MC in Tennessee.

"Raine! It's so good to see you!" She squealed as I wrapped my arms around her.

Lena came bouncing up and once I introduced her to Chelsea, the two of them started gabbing, and numbers were exchanged.

Seeing Harlow, I walked over to her and hugged her, she whispered in my ear, "You happy he's home?"

I nodded and then pulled back from her, "So much."

I was close to Harlow. After the last rally, some idiot had been rude to Chelsea, I had ripped him a new one before Skinner and Harlow could make it over to us.

Something else had happened to the idiot, he carried a busted-up face from Declan. Who just so happened to be the President of another chapter of Wrath MC in Alabama.

I was standing there talking to Harlow about a few classes I was excited to take, when I heard someone's voice, I haven't heard in over a year, "Damn, Raine. You look prettier and prettier every time I see you."

I jumped, and then whirled, and then laughed, "Maddox."

Maddox just so happened to be the son of Cooper and Miriam, as well as Shiloh's nephew.

He started to wrap me in a hug, and that was until a body materialized in front of me. Glancing up I shook my head when I saw who had blocked him.

"Good to see you, man." Tank rumbled to Maddox.

“You too, man. But you blocked my hug, mind stepping aside?” Maddox asked.

Tank shook his head and then said, “Nah, don’t think I will.”

Shaking my head, I looked around Tank at Maddox and then asked, “How’s Kiiri doing?”

“She’s good. She’s over there” He nodded to the group he was with.

Nodding, I looked up at Tank and then tugged at his bicep, which was our signal for him to lower his head.

He did as I asked, and then I whispered in his ear, “Maddox loves Kiiri, and she loves him. They are committed to their relationship. Now, move so I can get my hug, and then go see some smiling faces.”

Kiiri also happened to be the oldest daughter of Knox and Fiona.

He glared and then nodded with a sigh.

With a smile, I got my hug from Maddox.

We all gathered around, all of us hugging and shaking hands with the other members of Wrath MC.

After everything was further explained we got in position and then waited. Each team would have the kids on their bikes for thirty minutes.

We were also given index cards with their names on them so the kids would know who they were riding with.

I was standing there waiting to get in the back of the truck when I saw Summer smirk and then sashay her way over to where Tank was sitting on his bike with his front facing me.

I knew that Lena saw the same thing I did, because when she started in that direction, I wrapped my hand around her arm, and then shook my head.

She didn't need to go over there; I knew what Tank was going to do.

And he did it.

He shrugged her off him, and then pushed her away from him. I snorted when Summer wobbled on her heels, then looked over at me and glared.

To which I wiggled my fingers to her in a wave. Did she not get the hint? Was pushing her off him and ignoring her not enough for her? Some people just didn't get it.

Hearing the rumble of the first set of bikes as they got closer, I couldn't help but grin wide.

Lena and I both headed over to the bikes.

Standing beside Tank, I took the index card from him, and then smiled when he reached into his saddle bag and pulled out a goodie bag.

I knew what was in that bag, he had told me. A hoodie. A t-shirt. And a bunch of candy.

That was when I saw a little boy looking at all the index cards, and the moment his eyes locked on ours, he yelled, "Hi! I'm Calvin."

Tank and I both chuckled, and then Tank, knowing his size could put kids off, warmed my heart to my very core when he lowered to the ground and got on one knee.

Now, you wouldn't think a nine-year-old little boy could knock Tank back, but he did, he gave Tank the biggest hug ever.

After he released him, he looked at me, and my God, his smile melted my heart.

"Hey Calvin, I'm Raine and this is Tank. It's super nice to meet you." I said with a smile.

"You too! Thanks." He was so excited he couldn't stand still. He even kept running his hands up and down the bike.

Calvin looked up at me with the brightest blue eyes I'd ever seen, with his blonde hair flopping off to one side, and then said rapidly, "Is he called Tank because of his size? If so, that's really cool. I hope I get to be as big as he is."

Before I could answer him, his eyes landed on the bag that Tank picked up off his bike.

That was when Tank handed him the goodie bag. And seeing his smile, seeing everything that was in there, somehow, his smile got even wider. How was that even possible?

I knew Tank had my heart, but I didn't realize how deep he was embedded in it until he became embedded even more.

He pulled his bandana from around his neck and wrapped it around Calvin's head then helped him with my helmet. After a short safety brief was given, the ride began.

The rest of us all climbed into the backs of the trucks and followed along, laughing as we heard some of the kids shouting and waving at everyone as they relished in all the waves they were getting.

They only went thirty miles per hour to make sure that the kids would be safe.

Finally, we made it to the next stopping point and took pictures with all of the kids.

After the rally was complete, Calvin came running over to us pulling an older man and woman with him.

They introduced themselves as his grandparents. Apparently, his parents thought that he was an abomination. I had the urge to have Hippie, our tech guru find his parents and give them a piece of my mind.

I knew Tank was of the same mindset as I was due to the clenching of his jaw.

Seeing the smiles on their faces as they all climbed off the bikes they were on and then got on our bikes was so worth the four-hour bike ride here and then the same one right back.

Every member who had a bike in this donated a hundred dollars.

We had raised over fifty thousand dollars. That was all thanks to the two hundred bikers that had shown up. As well as donations from people, food, and merchants that donated their profits to the cause.

Walking with Lena at my side we followed the guys into a nearby diner.

Thankfully, half the diner was open, so the guys pulled tables together.

I sat down beside Tank, with Lena to my right.

We had just placed our orders for food and then got our drinks when I leaned into Lena.

Smiling, I said, “That was a blast, right?”

She giggled, and then nodded, “So worth it.”

Once we got our food, a new route was discussed because apparently there was a bad accident on one of the roads.

“You turn eighteen next week, you excited?” Tank asked me as he dipped his fry in ketchup and then placed it in his mouth.

I nodded, “So ready.”

With a raised brow, he asked, “Why’s that?”

I shrugged my shoulders, and then said, “Oh, a few things really.”

With the same brow raised, he asked, “Care to share them with me.”

“Well... one thing is that graduation is right around the corner.” And it really was. I turn eighteen the week before graduation.

And then in two months, I’ll be starting at the community college. Thankfully, Lena was of the same mindset as I was.

We both took college classes online to better ourselves. So, we both only needed two years at college, and we would both have our degrees.

“I really am proud of you Raine. I know it hasn’t been easy, but damn, you’ve been killing it.” He was right too.

I always sent him my test scores, to which he always replied with; *Damn, fucking proud.*

“What else are you excited about being the big eighteen?” He asked with a smirk.

Upon seeing that smirk, I shook my head, “Hmmm, a girl’s got to keep a few secrets.”

He lost that smirk, and then narrowed his eyes, “Not from me.”

I shrugged my shoulders, “Guess you’ll have to wait and see then.”

And then I swore I heard him mumble under his breath, “One minute past midnight. Come the fuck on time.”

But before I could question him further, my father stood up and then said, “Daylight’s burning. Time to hit the road.”

We all mounted up and then made the long trek home.

And quite a few times, Tank’s hand rested on the back of my calf.

To which Lena saw and winked at me. Every. Single. Time.

That night, as I lay in my bed, I sent up a silent prayer that on my eighteenth birthday, I would have the courage to tell him how I feel.

And that he wouldn’t think we were ruining our friendship.

Chapter 6

Tank

I was in the process of starting to make the calls I needed to make it known that Raine was mine and I was hers.

That was until I saw a number come up on my phone. No.

No.

Fucking.

Way.

I debated not answering it.

For five seconds versus the one second, it usually took for me to take that call.

And that was because I didn't want to take the fucking call.

I was fucking pissed. So fucking pissed off.

I dreaded the conversation I had to have with Raine.

Not to mention, all the shit I had planned out, it all went to hell and a fucking handbasket after I hung up the phone.

Apparently, they were calling us all back four days before we were supposed to be back. Four fucking days. Meaning the time frame, they needed us in, I had to be at the airstrip in two fucking hours.

If it had been something else other than what they needed me for, I would have told them to fuck off. But sadly, I couldn't fucking do that.

And tomorrow, fucking tomorrow was the day I was going to be telling Raine that shit between us was going to be changing. Immediately fucking changing.

I was missing her birthday. Her fucking eighteenth birthday.

I had so much I wanted, no, needed to say to her. Son of a fucking bitch.

Not to mention I was probably missing her graduation too.

Instead of calling her, I called Storm, and the first words he said were, “You ready for tomorrow?”

He knew. He fucking knew what I was planning on doing tomorrow.

“Storm...” And with that one word, I’d never felt so helpless before.

Chapter 7

Raine

When I awoke that morning, I couldn't keep the smile off my face, less than twenty-four hours from now I would be turning the big eighteen. I couldn't freaking wait.

Jumping out of bed I did what I needed, then got dressed in some short shorts, and a fitted tee shirt.

Walking into the kitchen I made myself some breakfast and then headed over to Lena's house so we could go and get our toes and nails done.

Mainly for my birthday tomorrow, but also for graduation next week.

But something in the air had my entire body tensing.

I didn't understand it. I didn't freaking get it.

Shaking off those thoughts, I smiled at Lena as she came bouncing down the steps, dressed similarly to what I had on.

After she got in, I cranked the stereo, and then off we went.

My nails were done for tomorrow.

Pretty white tips adorned my fingers, and I had a pretty deep purple on my toes.

I was in a good mood.

After dropping Lena off so she could do some last-minute prep for the gift she got me, I headed home and heated up some left over's for dinner.

Every single time something felt different in the air, I knew that something was wrong.

And I knew that was about to happen.

Even more so when my gut told me I needed to head outside.

So that was what I did. I didn't question it. I never did.

Therefore, when I stepped outside on our front porch and saw Tank climbing out of his truck I knew.

His truck.

Not getting off the back of his bike.

Furthermore, what he was wearing.

"No," I said in a choked whisper.

He bowed his head as he closed his door, and then walked over to me, at the last minute, he lifted his head, and whispered, "I'm fucking sorry, Gray."

I knew he was too. I could see it. The deep anguish in his eyes. The way his shoulders were slumped.

Taking a deep breath so I didn't start crying my eyes out, I asked, "Tank, what is it?"

"We've lost all communication with one of our teams. They can't find them. The intel they're getting, it's not good. They're calling me back to try and find them."

I sighed. I didn't want him to leave. I couldn't be selfish. I couldn't do that. I knew that each team consisted of about five to seven men, therefore, I asked in a whisper, "When do you leave?"

I saw his body shudder. It actually freaking shuddered, "I need to be at the airstrip in forty-five minutes."

I gasped, I couldn't help it, "You're going to miss my birthday."

"Yeah, beautiful. I'm fucking sorry." That was the first time he called me beautiful as a name.

I would have shouted to the rooftops, the tops of the trees, even the mountains if he had said it at any other freaking time.

But that wasn't the case.

He sighed, then pulled something from one of his pockets, locked his eyes with mine, and then said, “I had so much I wanted to say to you when I handed this to you tomorrow. But I want you to have this now.”

I saw a small black box, then I asked, “What is it?”

“Open it and see,” he told me.

I smiled at him, trying to not let the hurt I felt at him missing my birthday to show, but I knew I was failing when his lips tipped down, and that familiar tick started in his jaw.

Taking the box from him, I lifted the lid and at what I saw, I gasped.

Then and only then, I didn’t try to fight the tears that have been threatening to pour out of my eyes since I saw his truck and what he had on.

“This is my promise to you. I’ll always make it back to the one thing I call home.” He told me, and no, I didn’t miss the number of emotions that were laced with every word he spoke.

I stared at the black iridescent ring and couldn’t help but feel as though my heart melted.

He took the ring out of the box, then tagged my right hand, and started to slide it on my ring finger, “I want you to wear it on this finger. So, when I come back, we need to have a long talk. And if that talk goes the way I fucking hope it does, I’ll move it to the other finger. But please, wait for me to come home. Please.”

As he said that, I saw my dad’s bike pulling up, then parking, and I held in a scream when I still heard the bike running.

Tank looked over his shoulder at my dad, and then back at me, and his shoulders dropped, “I want you to ride with me to the airstrip. Your dad’s going to give you a ride back. You okay with that.”

No. I freaking wasn’t okay with that. I wasn’t okay with anything that was happening right now.

But that didn't matter.

What mattered was finding the men on that team and bringing them home. Because I was only one person. They were many with families.

Looking up into his eyes, I fought the tears that were still running rampant down my cheeks.

He leaned down, while his thumbs came up and wiped them from my cheeks, "Breath for me, baby. Breath."

Doing what he said, I tried to get a handle on my emotions.

After a few minutes, he smiled, then leaned down, and pressed a kiss on my forehead.

His lips lingered there.

For a one, two, three beat, then he pulled away, checked his watch, cursed, and then said, "Time to go, baby."

After I was in his truck, he closed the door then said something to my dad, and once they finished talking, he rounded the hood and got in.

With my hand wrapped tightly in his, lying atop his center console, he drove us to the airstrip.

Once he parked his truck in his spot, he looked out the front windshield, cursed, then climbed out of the truck, rounded the hood, and helped me out.

Helping him with his things, I carried his rucksack with my dad trailing behind us.

Being there to support me when I needed him.

Dropping his things to the ground, I followed suit, and then I was up, and, in his arms, his face buried in my neck, inhaling deeply. Then ever so softly, he whispered, "Please wait for me, Gray. Wait for us to have that talk."

I didn't get to respond to him. Someone was calling his name, saying it was time to go.

I didn't want to let him go. I never wanted to let him go ever again. But somehow, I found the courage to do just that.

And when he got to the door of the plane, he turned around and made that freaking heart shape with his hands.

Returning the gesture, I smiled and then nodded to his question I hadn't answered, and seeing the smile on his face, he knew what I was agreeing to.

Then the moment I could no longer see him, I shed even more tears.

With my dad's arm wrapped tightly around my shoulders, holding me up, I didn't move from my spot until I could no longer see the C-130 in the air.

My right hand that held my new ring was holding onto the necklace with the wrench on it that I never took off.

I never spoke this aloud. Not ever. Only to myself.

But those big hunks of metal were carrying the one thing I loved with all my heart in this world.

"Come on honey. Let's get home and get in bed. Big day tomorrow." I nodded to my father and let him lead me back across the pavement.

My feet felt as though they were made of lead.

That morning when I woke up, I sent a message to Tank, making sure he made it okay.

After I showered and got ready for the day, I walked into the kitchen, the smell of bacon showing the way.

Smiling, it was to see my dad at the stove. Hearing my footsteps, he sat the spatula down, rounded the island, then pulled me in his arms, "Happy Birthday, Cookie."

"Thanks, daddy." I smiled at him.

After he sat me on my feet, he finished with the bacon, then he took the biscuits out of the oven, and made the gravy and eggs.

Needless to say, I was glad that I was wearing some baggy clothes today, because I needed room for my belly.

I had a good day. I couldn't call it great. Because there was one person missing that I wanted there more than anything,

Lena and everyone around me did their best and I appreciated it all the more.

Later that afternoon, I saw my dad check his phone, smile wide, then put it back in his pocket, then, he tagged my hand, and said, "Trust me?"

I sighed then shook my head and smiled, "With my life."

He nodded, "Good."

That was when he led me to his bike, "This is going to feel weird I'm sure, but you know how to ride."

I was about to ask him what he was talking about when he pulled a blindfold from his back pocket, "Turn around for me, Cookie."

I narrowed my eyes and then did as he asked.

After he helped me on the bike, he climbed on, and then once we were ready, he started it up.

"Hold on tight Cookie." Nodding, I did just that and held on tight.

It was about ten minutes later when we finally came to a permanent stop and the bike turned off.

I sighed, gratefully, needless to say, I didn't ever plan on riding on the back of a bike with a blindfold ever again.

He helped me off first and then said, "Keep that on for me, Cookie."

After I nodded, he took my hand and then said, "You're walking on pavement. I'll tell you when we need to step up on the stairs."

And he did just that. We walked a few steps, probably twenty or so, and then he told me to step up five times.

After he brought us to a stop, he said, “Okay Cookie, take the blindfold off.”

I did and took in everything around me.

We were standing on a cute little white porch. It had a black wrought iron railing on it, the same color of white steps below it.

In front of me was a red-painted door, with two huge windows on either side with black shutters to match the railing.

I was flabbergasted.

Were we moving? This didn't make any sense, therefore, I turned to him and asked, “What's this?”

He smiled down at me, and said, “You're eighteen now. You amaze me every day. And since you won't let me get you a new car because you love the one you have, this was the next best thing.”

And with that, my dad laid a set of keys in my palm.

A set of shiny keys.

“Daddy?” I felt tears prick my eyes.

“I'm so proud of you sweetheart. So damn proud. You kicked ass and are about to graduate high school with two years of college classes already under your belt. You're kicking ass at it. Working your ass off. You'll graduate a semester earlier than the others will. You volunteer your time. You help out anywhere you can. You just fucking amaze me, sweetheart.”

I couldn't help it. With my new shiny keys in my hand, I jumped up into my dad's arms and then cried into his neck.

His big body shook with laughter, “I take it you like it.”

I nodded but then blubbered, “You didn't have to do this. It's too much.”

“It’s fucking not. You never ask me for a damn thing. You didn’t ask for your car, you worked at the garage for it. You don’t ask for anything. You deserve this baby.”

When I didn’t say anything, he asked, “Now, are you ready to see the inside?”

I could only nod against his chest.

Letting go of him, I wiped my cheeks, then stepped to the front door, and put the key in the lock.

As soon as I turned the doorknob, I was shocked way the heck out that it was all already furnished.

My dad laughed at my stupefied expression. “Lena picked the furniture out. She knows you really well. Prospects under Lena’s direction boxed up your bedroom, and I know for a fact that Lena handled your feminine shit that you wouldn’t want anyone to see, except for another girl.”

After I got a tour of the house, the sound of bikes rumbling could be heard.

Dad laughed and then shook his head, “They didn’t waste any time getting here.”

Smiling, I raced out the front door and waved at everyone.

Pizzas and beer, soda for me and Lena was the perfect housewarming party. And with one other person here it would have been magical.

And it hadn’t hit me until that very moment, that Tank never let me know that he made it there okay.

Lena and I had our own little dance party right there in my brand-new living room.

I also found out that my dad had bought these five acres and had this house built for me.

And it was my name on the deed. No one else.

His words to me that night while we stood on my front porch were, “I don’t care where you go in life. I don’t care

what dreams you want to chase. I want you to know that you will always have a safe landing to come back home to. And if something ever happens to me, I don't want you to ever worry about anything being taken away from you."

After I had waved my dad off, Lena told me she was staying the night so she could help me move anything around if I didn't like where something was placed.

Luckily, that hadn't been the case so we both had just binged on Netflix and ended up falling asleep in the living room.

Today was Monday which meant we had five more days until graduation.

Walking into class, I took my seat and pulled out the printed syllabus for my next four classes starting in spring at college.

Taking out one of the books I needed, I got to work, hoping I could get ahead in those classes.

"Hey, Raine. Have a good birthday?" Payton asked as he sat beside me.

Payton was cute, in that lean, blonde hair surfer body kind of way. Seeing as all throughout high school whenever we got our seating assignments they were done with our last names, he and I were normally always at the exact same seating positions.

Not up for smiling like I normally do; I simply shrugged and dove back into what I was working on.

"Okay, I'll take your silence and the lack of smile to mean that you didn't have a good birthday." He said and then started to mess with his phone.

It wasn't. Not really. But thankfully I had the best family a girl could ask for.

Just then my phone vibrated in my hoodie pocket. Since we were done with class and just free to do whatever as long

as we were in the classes, I pulled it out and then inhaled a breath.

Tank – I know you're in class. Wanted to let you know I'm safe. I'll make it up to you by missing your birthday. Promise you that, Gray.

Even though I was still upset that they had called him in, and he missed my birthday and would more than likely be missing my graduation, I knew I couldn't be mad at him.

Not when he was doing something he loved doing.

Therefore, I texted him back. Intending to put a smile on his face.

Me – I'm glad you're safe, and I want you to remain safe. So please be careful. Tell Fuego I said to watch your six. I know you will. Miss you. Love you like a fat kid loves cake.

Apparently, that was the only message I would receive. But not the only one I would send him.

It was the beginning of the end for us. In more ways than one.

Because I wasn't stupid.

I knew that he got my texts.

I knew that he read my emails.

I knew he saw where I tried to call him. Skype shows missed calls.

I also knew that with every no-reply I got, it was the end.

And it was proven when my dad would comment on something with Tank and act like I already knew about it. Because I normally did.

But I didn't

Chapter 8

Tank

It's been six months since I left for this latest mission that had been one F.U.B.A.R. right after another one. The mission was supposed to only take three months, four at the latest, well you know how that goes. Especially in the military, hurry up, and fucking wait.

But more importantly, something happened on this mission that is still making me unable to eat or drink anything red.

I can't unsee something I swore I would never do.

Hell, I hoped it never happened to me. But it fucking did.

Shaking my head, trying to get the thoughts out of my head, I closed my eyes and brought the one thing that makes my life any better. I think about *her*.

She always had a way to get me back in the here and now.

Thinking about her eyes. Her lips. Her body. The way she smiles. The enormous heart she has. And now, since she's finally fucking legal, I don't have to hold back anymore.

The ride home was long and sweet.

However, I had a few things I needed to accomplish as soon as my boots hit U.S. soil again.

And one of those was confronting my sister.

Because I'd been told about the way she's been acting, and that's not okay by any means.

The second thing I need to accomplish would be apologizing to Raine.

I saw where she messaged me.

Saw where she emailed me.

Fuck, even saw all of the missed phone calls.

But after what happened that second week in, after we found the team that had been butchered, and then the subsequent events that befell that incident, I just didn't have it in me.

But I would be making all of that right again. Oh, fucking yes, I was.

I couldn't wait to lie down in my fucking bed.

Enjoy a damn juicy double freaking cheeseburger. Also, maybe a large fry and a strawberry shake. The good kind of shake that came with whipped cream and a cherry on top.

I was thankful this mission and subsequent missions we had to partake in were done, and we were able to go home to kick back for a few weeks. Hopefully. Because I fucking needed it.

My body wasn't as young as it once was.

However, knowing our luck, we would get called back a lot sooner than was planned.

Such was the life of a Navy SEAL.

Food. Shower. Sleep. Finding her and making her mine.

In that order, or maybe shower then the rest but it was all happening today.

When I stepped off that plane and tossed my goodbyes to the team members living in this area, I was glad to see my brothers.

Normally, I left my truck here, however, while I was gone, I had Clip take it to the shop so it could have some work done.

Which included a new exhaust, and a new paint job. But mainly, I had running boards put on my truck. I knew Raine loved riding in my truck, but she hated having to jump a mile every single time to get up in it.

So, instead of driving home in my truck, I would be riding home on my bike and in my kutte.

I had a few more years in the military then I was free to live how I chose and with who I chose to spend the rest of my life with.

We just had to have that talk, and I had to get her to forgive me for not talking back to her.

The moment the doors to the plane opened, I was out of it. My eyes searched everyone gathered near the fence.

And upon seeing my brothers there waiting for me, I grinned at them all and shook hands.

I was fucking glad to be home.

I put on my kutte that declared me a member of Wrath MC; this was my life, my brotherhood. I wasn't leaving it.

Stepping to Storm, I asked, "Where is she?"

He gave me that all-knowing smirk, "At the clubhouse getting everything ready for tonight."

Tonight, was our monthly dinner at the clubhouse. Thank fuck I made it home in time.

I felt my Fat Boy's rumble and the vibrations in the asphalt as we all started up, twenty-five bikes in tow.

We left the airstrip then turned right and let our bikes carry us home. I was never more thankful when the Pres. signaled for us to pull over at the Whataburger on Main. They had the best food around.

Well not technically. The best food, well, that was all Raine.

As soon as we parked in the back lot, all of us backing our bikes in a row, I inhaled that smell. You know the smell of oil cooking, burgers frying. Goddamn had I missed it.

Normally people fled when they saw this many bikers in one location, however, everyone around here knew us, and they knew not to be afraid unless you fucked up.

While we were all walking in, something caught my eye.

I was so goddamn furious it wasn't even funny. Since when did my little sister think it was okay for her to dress like a typical street corner hooker?

She had on a small tube top. Her damn boobs looked like they were about to pop out, not to mention I could see damn hickey's all over her neck because she had her hair off to one side.

That was when my eyes bugged out at something else, I saw. A tattoo?

Since when the fuck was, she old enough to get a damn tattoo on her side, oh, and let's not forget the leather mini skirt she was sporting and four-inch heels. She was sixteen for fucks sake.

“What the absolute fuck?” I muttered.

My brothers looked at me, then looked to where I was looking. And a round of *Oh Shit's* and *Damn, about fucking time's* filtered through my ears and into my brain.

“Shea? What the actual fuck?” I roared at her.

She jumped straight out of the booth and would have fallen on her ass if my brother Clip hadn't reacted so quickly.

I nodded at him and leveled my glare at her. One that has been known to make grown men piss themselves.

“Tank, what...what are...are yo...you doing here?” She was visibly shaken and rightly so.

“Umm... looks like I just got back from a mission to get some food and walked in here and saw that.” I motioned to her whole body

Then she had the nerve to put her hands on her hips, and here we go.

“What is that supposed to mean? You saw that?” To which she used her hands to gesture up and down her body as I had, “What? Am I not dressed to your standards, big brother? I like how I'm dressed; Mom and Dad never cared, so why should

you? It's my body, it's my life. Get the hell over it." She sneered up at me.

Yeah, even with her fucking heels on I still towered over her.

"Oh, get the hell over it huh?" I marched over to her while I was taking off my kutte then I took off my desert fatigue shirt, replaced my kutte, then grabbed her by her waist, and tossed her over my shoulder.

Using my shirt to cover her ass.

I carried her outside with her beating and banging on my back, shit didn't faze me.

"Put me down, you ass!" She screamed.

"Oh, I'm going to put you down all right." I walked to the side of the building where there was some thick grass for padding, then I threw her on the ground.

"You asshole! What the fuck?" She shouted, glared, and then stood up, all the while brushing off the grass.

"First of all, you watch your goddamn mouth, Shea; I've had it up to here already." I said while placing my hand over my head, "Where the hell do you get off using that kind of language? Secondly, if you want to dress like that, showing everyone what you got, then you better be prepared to be treated like a whore. You want to dress like that, then you do it with me or one of my brothers at your back." I watched the sneer she had on her face soften. "Third, you're seventeen, you're not old enough for a tattoo."

I watched as that softened face hardened, and then she spouted off, "Well, the person who did it thought I was old enough and don't you dare tell me to watch my mouth brother, not when you string curse words together like it's as easy as breathing."

"Well, for starters I'm twelve years older than you which means I can talk however I damn well, please. Plus, you haven't served your country I have, so when you can say that

to me, I won't dare tell you how to fucking talk." I sneered. Took in a breath, and then continued on when I saw she was gearing up to throw something back that I knew would just piss me off even more.

"Also, I want the name of the person who did that so-called tattoo." It looked like a piece of fucking shit; I'd be getting with Clutch another brother from another chapter and having him fix it up.

Crossing her arms over her chest she glared, "No."

"You sure you want to be that way?" I asked with a raised brow.

"I'm not being, anyway, you're being a jerk." And the fact that she stomped her foot, just proved to me that she didn't know a goddamn thing.

"No, I'm just the jerk who cares about you when I have no fucking need to. You want to be better than that bitch who pushed us both out? Then fucking do better. Because I can tell you right now, the way you're going, it's not looking that good." I snapped.

She acted like she wasn't smart, even though she really was.

Because when you haven't been made to go to school, and yet on your placement exam, you score well above where you're supposedly slated to be?

That says a lot.

Doesn't it?

I knew the moment she took in every word I said to her.

Because her eyes softened, her body loosened, and I got a nod. A barely their nod, but still, it was a fucking nod.

"Plus, I told you, when you called me crying, I will do anything for you. And I proved that. You told me you owed me. Remember?" I asked her, using my card.

And she fucking did. Had it not been for my team, I would have gotten into some serious fucking trouble.

See, I'd had a long talk with her, and we had come to somewhat of an understanding. She promised to call me if she needed me, and I proved to her I would have her back. All she had to do was show some respect, and fucking make a life for herself she could be proud of.

So, when she called me, crying, I hadn't hesitated in fucking up two pieces of shit's worlds. They thought it was okay to slip into the girl's locker room at school and video her taking a fucking shower and then spread that shit far and wide.

Needless to say, thanks to the contacts I had, the video was gone, and an alert would pop up if the video appeared.

Now, as for how I handled the two little shits. Well, it would be hard for them to do anything with their fingers being unable to hit the buttons to release any more videos.

I often wondered if they ever made it to the hospital to have those digits reattached.

Probably not, seeing as we didn't have ice on us to keep them viable.

Fucking whoops.

She should know what was about to come out of my mouth, "I'm calling in my favor."

I'd been hoping to hold onto that favor for a long time, but this would be fine. Because I would be damned if the fucker would get away with doing a shitty ass job on my sister."

She dropped her head and sighed, "Ugh you had to go there. Okay, what favor?"

There we go, smart girl. "The name?"

"Kink at Grisham Tattoo." I would be paying him a visit later.

Leaning down, she picked up the shirt I'd taken off and then shrugged into it. I could see the pain in her eyes when she

realized that every word, I had said to her was true.

And she knew now, that as long as she had someone at her back to protect her, she could dress however the hell she wanted.

Nodding, thankful that she was covered once again, I said, “Now please take your ass home, put on some real clothes, and meet me at the club for dinner?”

“Oh fine, all right.” When she was walking away, she turned and said, “Tank, I’m glad your home safe.” Then she gave me that small smile she hides but not from me, that’s my sister.

Then the little fucker threw the middle finger at me. Yep, that’s her.

After I was through dealing with her, I headed back into the restaurant and swallowed the food that Storm had ordered for me.

When we pulled up at the clubhouse, we had some club girls hanging around outside and I noticed that they had added some new talent.

It was also time to spread the word if anyone tried to touch me or flirt with me, they would be on the chopping block to leave if they fucked up again.

Because my entire body, heart, and soul were owned by one person, and one person only.

Not seeing her yet, I headed into the big, opened bay door, the clubhouse was like a big warehouse. We had thirteen rooms all with bathrooms for the members and we had three rooms for the girls to share.

There was a common area, a billiards area, a dance floor with a stripper pole, a kitchen, and the area we called Church that was off-limits to everyone that wasn’t a brother.

Normally, I would have gone straight to Raine, but I needed to get the words into my head so I could explain everything to her.

I knew she had to be hurt.

The fact that I never replied to her.

That was something I never did.

Hell, even the members of my team knew that when she messaged me, I would stop what I was doing to message her back if I could.

And they knew when I was talking to her. There was no hiding the smile that lit my face.

Bypassing the kitchen, well, unable to bypass it fully, I peeked into it and saw her smiling face that sent shockwaves through my soul. She was talking to Lena.

Seeing that she was okay, I headed up to my room and had to smile at the decorations that covered my door.

Black balloons were taped to it.

A welcome home sign on fucking pink poster board.

I knew who did that. It was the same person that always did that. It didn't matter how mad or upset with me she was, she was still there for me.

Taking out my key, I unlocked the door, then walked into my room, sat down on my bed, and then took off my boots.

In that position as I unlaced the last boot, I recalled her latest message.

I hope you're okay. But if not, I'll keep my promise. Make sure your soul returns to me, and I'll wrap it in bubble wrap, and duct tape and protect it always. But you better freaking be okay. I mean it, Carter. You better be okay.

Placing my head in my hands, I closed my eyes, trying to ward off the image of her possibly in tears from writing that. Grief riding her hard. Her features tight and cheeks flushed with tears.

It was almost more than I could bear.

Shaking my head, I started to undress on my way to the shower, running ideas through my head to apologize to her. Beg her forgiveness. And show her just how much she mattered to me.

So, fucking much that I knew if she asked me to retire from the Navy, I would do it in a heartbeat.

And furthermore, if she wanted to take a break from the club, move somewhere else, and experience a normal civilian life, then I would hang up my kutte and follow her to wherever her heart desires.

I was in the shower, my head resting on my forearm against the dark tiled walls.

My hand was on my dick.

Images of Raine in her bikini from last year that I hadn't dared notice anything below her chin, but now, now I imagined what her body looked like.

Her curves.

Were her nipples small and pert or were they large and rose-colored?

Would they pebble with the merest touch of my lips, my tongue, and my hands?

Was her waist as narrow as I thought it was, and then flared out to her hips?

Would her ass cheeks fit perfectly in my hands when I lifted her up and slammed her into a wall?

To those thoughts alone, I was hard as a fucking rock.

The water helped lubricate it along with the body wash I favored. Damn, but it smelled good. When you're in country, you can't use things that are scented, seeing as it can give your position away.

And needing to come back home to her, there wasn't a thing I would do to chance it.

Even more so now that she was eight-fucking-teen.

Daydreams about what I was going to do to her body after she forgave me.

My eyes were closed, I could feel my body coming to my orgasm.

Thinking about what it would finally feel like when I slid my cock into its forever home.

I wasn't thinking.

I wasn't aware of anything.

And when a song came on from the main room of the clubhouse, the jolt of it sent my thoughts to a place I didn't want them to be in.

The only thing I could see was that innocent little boy that had taken that bullet to his head.

His fucking mother had grabbed him and used him as a fucking shield.

And it had been too late for me to not have squeezed that trigger.

Seeing the other team butchered and their limbs scattered about, a few of them were lucky to still be breathing.

Finding the fuckers that did that and returning what they did to them ten-fold.

Raine turned eighteen while I was gone.

Everything was hitting me at once.

I hadn't registered something happening.

That was why when someone stepped into my shower, something that would set everything that I wanted to achieve backward by a fucking mile. It didn't register in my mind.

I just knew it. And I knew, I hadn't helped matters at fucking all.

And before I could climax, I felt something on the head of my cock, and at the same time, lips crashed into mine.

I was so deep into my thoughts and my dreams; I didn't notice anything was wrong.

Slipping my tongue in her mouth, the taste wasn't what I thought it might be.

My brain was thinking, *What the fuck?* but my body was still thinking it was Raine doing all of this to me.

And when I heard a moan, I knew. I fucking knew.

It wasn't raspy like I dreamed it would be. The touch wasn't as soft as I dreamed it would be.

Pulling my lips from whoever had dared to touch me, I glared down at the body that was about to stop breathing.

Glaring down at Summer, I asked in a voice that couldn't believe what the fuck just happened, "What the fuck do you think you think you're doing?"

And before she could answer me, from my peripheral vision, I saw the door to my room open, and then... I felt all the blood in my body drain out of me, even more so when I heard, "Tank, you big butt head, why didn't you come to..."

She trailed off. And I fucking knew why.

Because at the door, it had a clear view to the bathroom and the clear as fuck shower door.

She could see everything.

Every part of me.

And every part of a naked soon-to-be fucked up, Summer.

After Raine closed her eyes, sighed, and then let out a breath, she nodded, and then closed the door.

But not before I saw those tears in her eyes. Son of a fucking bitch.

"Raine. Wait." I all but shouted at her. Knowing it was pointless. The music was blaring down in the main room of

the clubhouse.

And I knew that by now, she had to be far away from here.

Looking at Summer I snapped, “Get the fuck out and don’t you fucking dare come near me again.”

She looked confused, and why I had no fucking clue. I never made any move to her. Ever.

But it was what she said next that told me why she was confused.

I was one dumb fuck.

“But... you kissed me back.”

I shook my head and snarled, “It was a moment of insanity. Now get the fuck out, I’m fucking off limits to you.”

When she didn’t move, instead she opened her mouth to say something else, I wrapped my hand around her throat, effectively shutting her up.

“Not. Another. Fucking. Word. Summer. You come at me again, and I’ll have the club bless me by putting a bullet between your eyes. You’re doing the same goddamn thing that men do to women. My fucking answer is no, and it always will be no.”

I didn’t pay her any mind after that, she knew all of us well enough to know to get gone when you’re told.

Sighing, I finished my shower, but not before I let the hot water wash away six months of sand, dirt, debris, and blood. I even had new scars from this latest mission to show for it.

Looking into the mirror, I let out a string of curses at what I saw. Red fucking lipstick was smeared on my lips.

Lips that were the wrong color.

Lips that had another’s touch them.

Knowing that not only did I have to apologize for fucking ignoring her, missing her birthday, and her fucking graduation,

but I had to apologize for allowing another woman to touch me.

I know I did nothing wrong. Technically. We weren't official, but I knew I was hers.

It felt like I was cheating on my heart. It burned me to let someone else touch me, but I hadn't even told her how I felt. Well enough of that shit, it was high time I got what I wanted.

I got dressed and headed to the common room for the monthly dinner and to find my woman. Because she was mine.

I was surprised to see Cassidee already here, seeing that her mom and dad, especially her dad let her come alone. Because her dad was none other than the President of the mother chapter of Wrath MC, Cotton.

Cassidee was here to help rebuild a falling-down diner that the town freaking loved.

And I was even more surprised to see her talking to Clip. I wasn't worried about Clip; he's the most respectful dude out of all of us.

I headed for the kitchen to talk to Raine, and when I didn't see her, I looked around the clubhouse.

Spotting Lena, I made my way over to her, however, was stopped when Storm whistled, getting everyone's attention.

"Yo! Shut the fuck up and let me talk. We are all here today because one of our own, one of our brothers has made it back home to us safely. It's been a long six months, but we are fucking glad your back home. Here's to you fucker." Storm said as he lifted his beer and so did everyone else. I nodded with acknowledgment.

Looking around the clubhouse my body felt like something was missing.

More importantly, someone.

And when I didn't see her after the plates of food were brought out, I knew that I had fucked up. That I had fucked up

huge.

Chapter 9

Raine

It was at that moment that I knew. That I knew his heart would never be mine.

I needed bleach. Freaking asap to wipe out the images my eyes had relayed to my brain.

Walking down the hall and then down the steps, I tried not to let my broken heart show on my face. Why had he asked me to wait for him when he obviously wanted another?

Making it to the kitchen, I washed my hands, then got back to work helping the women get dinner finished. Then, I wanted to be far away from everything that included Carter Tank Calaveras.

“So, you happy he’s home?” My bestie Lena asked me with a smile on her face.

She had seen how happy I was when my dad walked in here and told us he was home.

I had lit a fire under my feet as I ran up the stairs as laughter followed in my wake.

She knew that when we had gotten word that he was headed home, I had been ecstatic. Sure, he didn’t reply to a lot of my texts, but that was his norm.

Or at least... I had thought it was until I walked in and saw what I saw.

But... before I could answer her, Summer came walking in with a smile on her face, and I knew she had heard what Lena asked me.

Because a smile was on her face and then she said, “I know I sure am. Damn that man’s cock is heaven. And the strength of his tongue.”

Lena gasped, “Wait, he fucked you?”

Summer smirked, placed her hand on her hip, and then said, “He sure the hell did.

“You’re lying.” Lena snapped.

That was when Summer, the skanky whore looked at me, and asked snidely, “Am I?”

Lena’s head snapped my way as concern laced her brow.

I shook my head, silently telling her I didn’t want to talk about it. Not at all.

And why I had expected Tank to come find me as soon as he got home like he always did, I didn’t know. Especially with the way he had been acting these last six months.

Heck, I had even prepared for the worse, my father telling me that he was sure he was safe and not to worry.

I had only released the fear of him dying over there when my dad told me yesterday that he was headed home.

Right now, though, I had to grit my teeth as they talked around me, Lena still at my side. I was about to tell them all to shut the heck up when I got a call.

See, while I was in school going for my degree I also volunteered as part of my credit hours in the neonatal department and the local hospital.

Placing the knife on the cutting board, I pulled out my phone, and knowing the ringtone, I took the call without glancing at the display. “Hello?”

“Hey, sweetie. We’ve got a case for you. Can you come?” I loved Stella. Freaking loved her.

Smiling, I nodded, and then said, “Yeah, be there in fifteen.”

It was then that I registered with what she said next, what was going on, because her voice was super soft, “Okay, we will see you soon.”

Hanging up the phone, I placed it in my back pocket, leaned into Lena, and said, “Case at the hospital. I’ll call you later.”

She nodded, then placed her hand on my forearm, “We will be talking about everything and if what that bitch said is true, then we are kicking Tank’s ass.”

Sighing, because she wouldn’t let this go, I nodded, and then without another word I walked out of the clubhouse, got in my car, and drove to the hospital.

The playlist I created for this very thing, blared out of my speakers, boosting me up for what lay ahead of me tonight.

“Hey Stella,” I called out softly after I did the required steps before I stepped into the closed off room.

She whipped her head around and smiled. But I didn’t like that smile. Not one bit. It was her sad smile, with fury laced in it.

“Come meet this little girl,” she said, and then I made my way to her.

Stella’s smile was barely there, but it was there. However, no one could miss the anger that bubbled just below the surface in her deep blue eyes, “She was just abandoned by her mother who mind you walked out of the hospital AMA. She’s sixteen weeks too early. And her system isn’t going to handle her going through detox. The mom has been taking heroin for the entirety of her pregnancy apparently.” That was all that she had to tell me. Stella looked at me and asked softly, “You up for it?”

Tears welled in my eyes.

This poor angel. This poor sweet angel.

Nodding, I carefully lifted the little girl into my arms and took her to our angel room without another word.

Our angel room was just to the right of the unit. It was painted in a soft gray, with white accents and lavender touches. It was the essence of a calm space.

Laying the little cutie in a cushioned cart, I took off my shirt, and my bra, tagged a blanket to cover us, and then I lifted the precious angel into my arms and cuddled her close.

Settling into the light-colored gray rocker, I started to softly rock her as I rubbed circles over her back and started to sing a soft lullaby to her.

Her soft little breaths fanned against my neck.

They were drawn out, and slow.

I knew she didn't have long.

But no way in hell was she going to pass on without knowing that someone had her back for the mere hours she was here.

Hitting the chorus of the lullaby my dad used to sing to me when I couldn't sleep as a baby, I pressed a kiss to her dark blonde-haired head and closed my eyes as I inhaled her baby scent.

I continued singing to her, and thankfully, her cries and whimpers stopped during the first chorus.

Just as I went to stop rubbing circles into her back, that was when I noticed it.

It fucking killed me.

Slayed me.

The thought that a human being could have no freaking care for others astounded me.

Because this little precious cutie hadn't even had the chance to show the world what she could become.

I swore then and there as I cradled her lifeless body to my chest that if the cops didn't do anything to the bitch, then the

club would. I didn't give a fuck what they had to do to make that happen.

Just then, I heard a soft knock on the door.

Wiping the tears from my eyes, I called out for whomever it was to enter.

Hearing the door creak open, I saw Stella's black hair in a messy bun, and then I locked eyes with her, shook my head, then said, "God must have needed her back."

Stella dropped her head, and then seconds later I watched as her shoulders shook.

Carefully, I stood up, turned my back to Stella, and then when she was ready and had herself under control, she walked over and carefully took the angel into her arms.

Getting dressed was a feat in and of itself.

I reckon that's because, with every move I made, another tear would trail down my cheeks.

After I was ready, I walked out of the angel room in time for them to place her little body in a black bag.

Knowing Stella would give me the answer I needed tomorrow, I headed out of the neonatal floor.

Tears still in my eyes, knowing I wouldn't be able to drive, I called the one person I needed. The one person I knew who would drop everything to get to me.

And he answered on the second ring, music and voices were plenty in the background, "Cookie."

I sniffed back another set of tears, and said, "Daddy, I need you. I can't drive safely. I'm at the hospital. They had a case." And that was all the information my dad needed.

I heard a chair scrape back, and then, "Leaving now. Be right there. I love you, Cookie."

I sniffled through more tears, "Love you too, daddy."

And then I finished making my way out of the hospital and then sitting down on a concrete bench.

Closing my eyes, I sent up a silent prayer to the man above to let the little cutie become an angel. And then if it's possible, send her back somehow and let her become the person that cures cancer, or global warming, or creates a magic pill to give everyone who thinks it's okay to be a shitty human being a killer death.

What I didn't think about was Tank.

Nor did I think about Summer.

Or the red lipstick that was smeared on his lips.

I didn't think about any of it.

Not only had I been a naïve and trusting fool, but I was an idiot.

Because yes, I thought about it.

And yes, I hated it.

Knowing that he didn't care for me as I cared for him, hurt.

Because I know that no other man has ever put their hands on me in anything more than a hug.

But Tank has with other women.

And before my thoughts could go down a certain road that I never wanted to travel down; I heard that unmistakable sound.

Harley pipes.

I didn't hesitate to fling myself in my dad's arms the moment he stopped and dropped the kickstand.

With his arms wrapped around me, my face pressed into his barrel of a chest, I didn't fight back the remaining tears, and all the while, my dad rubbed my back and murmured, over and over again, "I got you, Cookie. I got you."

After he dropped me off at my house, he nodded at Lena whom I had texted when we stopped for gas.

She wrapped her arms around me and then we headed into my house.

And there on the couch as we shared a bottle of Jack my dad handed me; I told her everything that happened.

She was the light of reason that I couldn't judge him for three reasons.

Firstly, we didn't know how he felt about me. We didn't know if my emotions and feelings were reciprocated.

Second, I couldn't judge him because we weren't together. That statement was plain as freaking day.

And third, because we didn't know what had happened leading up to what I walked in on, I couldn't judge him without having the facts.

But she was also the voice of reason as to why I should move on and stop having him on a pedestal and comparing him to every guy I've ever met.

Which had me wondering if all this time, he was placating me and letting me be his best friend before I met Lena.

Because let's face it. No one wants to be nineteen years old and have an eight-year-old as a best friend.

I had way too much Jack to be thinking any of that.

Therefore, to move on, I should accept the coffee date from a guy that had asked me out.

So, while a lot of Jack flooded my system, I accepted the coffee date.

But as I laid in bed that night beside Lena as she snored rather loudly, I might add, one of my dreams was being shot to crap.

Because I wanted my first date, my first everything to be with Carter 'Tank' Calaveras

Fate was one fickle heifer.

I was never drinking again.

Chapter 10

Tank

Sitting at the table, with no sign of Raine still, I tried to run different scenarios through my mind.

Different plans. It was what I did. Cause and effect. Entry and Exit.

And this minefield I had stepped into with Raine would be no different.

However, I shouldn't have relied on planning anything when it came to Raine. And that was proven when I heard my president's phone ring.

He checked the caller, smiled, then brought it to his ear, "Cookie."

I knew it was Raine just from that one endearment.

But... when I watched that smile on his face drop, his shoulders tensing, that alone told me that shit wasn't good.

My body tensed, ready to jump up and do whatever was necessary if she was hurt.

But before I or anyone else could ask him what was wrong, he was up and out of his chair and moving out the door.

Looking over at Red where he stood, I asked, "Should we follow?"

Red shook his head and then gave me a light smile, one that I didn't fucking know the meaning of, and then he said, "No. She just needs her dad. She'll be okay."

I knew there was something I was missing. Something major. But before I could ask him, I saw Lena walk over to her dad, and then I asked her, "What do you know that we don't know?"

I watched as Lena leaned up on her toes and whispered something into Red's ear.

He closed his eyes, sighed, and then nodded. He opened his eyes once more, and then pressed a kiss to Lena's forehead.

And with that, she walked away. Completely ignoring me. Judging by how tight her features were, there was something heavy weighing on her mind.

Tightening my fists, my knuckles turning white, reality slapping me in the fucking face. She hadn't called me. She knew I was home, but she hadn't called me.

Did you fucking expect her to after she walked in on something that never should have even gotten started, nor should it have even gotten to that point?

Fuck no.

But still, she was mine, god damnit.

Replaying what had taken place only hours before, I gritted my teeth.

Seeing the rise of her shoulders as they were up and then crashing down, hearing the inhale of breath that filled her lungs, I fucking hated myself.

A man has needs for Christ's sake.

No...

No.... don't you dare become an asshole.

Not to her.

She had every right to be upset. Because I allowed another woman to touch me.

Seeing how in my mind and my heart, I was fucking hers since I was nineteen fucking years old.

Fuck me.

So why the fuck had I come home and started jerking off in the shower.

I could go months in country and not do a goddamned thing.

Hell, I hadn't been with anyone else since she was fourteen years old. It just didn't fucking feel right.

So why the fuck had I messed up? Fucking now of all the times to mess up, it had to be now?

Why had I not known I was no longer in a daydream but in real life?

And I wasn't going to let what had happened take us back a mile, over my dead body.

Therefore, I pulled out my phone and shot her a text.

I was sitting there, refreshing my screen every few minutes, waiting for her reply.

And after thirty minutes, I sighed, tagged a beer, and swallowed a healthy pull.

After another thirty minutes had passed and nothing on Raine, I was tempted to call her, only, that was the moment Storm walked back into the clubhouse.

Getting out of my chair, I walked over to him and asked, "She okay?"

"Yeah, she's going to be just fine. She's my tough cookie." He said with pride, lacing every word.

"What happened?" I asked him.

He sighed, then ran his hand through his hair, "One of the babies passed."

I was freaking confused, "What are you talking about? What baby?"

Storm cocked an eyebrow, staring at me, and then I watched as realization came over his face, and then he shook his head and fucking walked off.

The rest of the night went on the same; I drank beer. Then after said beer, I took shot after shot. Recalling the look Storm

had shot at me. He was... disappointed in me.

Luckily, I was able to slow down halfway through the night. Well... It was more like one or two in the morning but who fucking cares?

The night was going decent until Summer started her pouty clingy shit.

I shoved her off of me more than once and this last time she tried to grab my junk.

Now I don't hurt women unless you're trying to kill me or someone I know. I grabbed her wrist and twisted it with enough force for it to pain her but not break it.

Leaning down to whisper, because like hell was, I going to blast what went down and have anyone say something to Raine that will hurt her more before I have a chance to explain, "I've told you more than once to stop your shit, Summer. My head was in a bad place earlier. It fucking isn't now. You try and touch me one more goddamn time you'll find yourself out on your ass."

She started to struggle but I didn't let up on my grip, then she cried out, "Ow you broke my wrist, I can't move it."

Everyone busted out laughing.

"Honey, if he wanted to break your wrist he would have. Hell, he could kill you with his pinky and not even break a sweat. So seriously stop your shit. It's getting fucking old." Red called out.

I nodded at him and decided I'd had enough of the party.

Letting go of her wrist, I pushed back roughly and then headed to my room.

Laying back in my bed, I realized something.

If I ever wanted to see her smile at me like she used to, so free, so abandoned, then I had a lot of ground to cover where she was concerned.

And I had a lot of groveling to do.

So, if that meant eating crow, then I was fucking eating crow.

But not before meeting this fucker named Kink and teaching him a fucking lesson, which I did the very next day, and then dropped his fucking ass at the hospital for them to put stitches in his face, and still no answer from Raine.

I was sitting at the bar, refreshing my screen on my phone once again to see if she had responded to the many apparently drunk texts, I had sent her last night.

And all of them, fucking all of them showed as delivered.

Not fucking read.

Sighing, and recalling the way Storm had reacted to me last night when I asked him about the baby, I pulled up my emails, and then went to the very first one she sent me while I was gone and started to read.

.... Knowing that she had reached out to me to tell me what she was volunteering for, and knowing that I didn't reply to her... I didn't think anything could make me feel any less of a man.

But I was wrong.

Oh, so wrong.

That was because a notification from Raine's Insta hit my phone.

Hitting the notification immediately to see what she was up to... I was thankful my phone was in a hard case.

Because I sat there as it bounced off the wall and then dropped to the floor.

Seeing her tagged with someone's fucking arm wrapped around her body with two cups of coffee sitting before them... I saw red.

Someone else was touching her.

Touching what was mine.

Shaking my head and putting it in my hands I tried to plan out where to go from here.

How to get her back so we could have a long overdue talk.

But the trick was getting her to fucking talk to me.

That was when I noticed a tattooed hand place my phone down in front of me, and then I heard, “Okay, what is going on with you and my daughter? Gave you my blessing. But... thinking about taking it back.”

“I did shit. Didn’t deserve her. By the time I figured it all out, hell, it was too fucking late apparently.” I nodded at my phone then.

“I raised her right then,” And without another word, he got up and started to walk away, but he stopped and speared me with a look, one such look that if I wasn’t the man I am, it would have shriveled my balls, “You make her cry one more goddamn time, brother or not, I’ll put a bullet right between your eyes.”

Therefore, I did the only thing I could do, to show him I meant everything I’ve ever said to him, that Raine was my world. I pulled my gun from the small of my back and offered it to him.

He looked at it, then took in my roughened appearance and asked, “Now, I want to know what the fuck you did.”

So, I told him what a fucking dumbass I was.

And where my head had been at.

He listened to every word that came out of my mouth.

And there he sat, for the longest time, not saying a fucking word.

Then he opened his mouth and said, “Okay, I’m going to help you. But let me make one thing perfectly fucking clear. If she takes you in with everything you’ve done, if you ever pull another stunt like this, don’t expect to be a brother. I’ll rip that

kutte off, burn off our mark, and then I'll kill you. Be damned of the consequences.”

I nodded as fast as I could.

That was when he sighed, pulled out his phone, and texted something.

Seeing my phone light up I opened his text and saw an address. “That’s her’s. That’s her present from me on her birthday. Whatever else happens heed my warning, yeah?”

I nodded, pocketed my phone, then headed outside, jumped on my bike, and headed for the address Storm had texted me.

Ten minutes later, when I pulled into a cute little house that screamed Raine, I couldn’t help but smile. Because my dumbass self didn’t read her emails when she told me about her birthday present.

Knocking on her door, I checked the time. She should be here.

If anything from the emails I had read, one of them included her class schedule, she didn’t have classes today.

A smile broke out on my face just thinking about fucking seeing her.

Damn, what this woman did to me.

I was vibrating with energy, knowing any minute now, she was going to open that door, and I would finally have my say.

But I should have known it wouldn’t be that easy. Not when it came to her.

Because when she loved, she loved with her whole heart and soul. When she trusted, it was with absolute abandonment. And I had broken that. Not intentionally. But I still had done it.

I just needed to talk to her.

Tell her what happened.

Explain what I had planned after I had my shower and some sleep.

However, after five minutes of my knocking and not hearing movement inside, I pulled my cell out, went to favorites, and called her.

And it didn't go directly to voicemail.

No. It rang twice, then went to voicemail.

My shoulders dropped.

Because that meant one thing and one thing only.

She had seen my call, and fucking declined it.

That night with my head in my hands, I sighed.

I'd fucked up.

That was when the chair beside me moved, and then I watched as Lena sat down in it and smiled softly, "I know she's not talking to you. And I've tried talking to her about it. But she's a stubborn one, which you well know."

I nodded, "Yeah, she's stubborn alright. But I adore that about her. Any advice on getting her to talk to me?"

She sighed then, "Honestly, if what happened in your shower was the only mark against you, I'd almost guarantee to give her another day, and then show up and stick to her like glue. But... you really hurt her by not replying to anything she sent you. Hurt doesn't even cover it. She became more depressed as time went on."

Those words hurt, but I didn't realize how much her next words would, "We both understood to some degree. I don't because I don't know what it is you do exactly, but I know she has a little more understanding of that. But... Well, what really hurt her was that one of the men from your team emailed her letting her know that y'all were safe. She didn't understand how he could take the time to let her know that, but you couldn't."

“And the situation isn’t helped because while you were gone Summer was running her mouth and saying that she was going to be yours. She was doing it to rile up Raine. Raine was holding her own. Until...” She stopped speaking.

I finished her statement, “Until she walked in and saw something that never should have fucking happened.”

She was silent for a beat, shook her head, and then said, “Yeah, no. I’m not going to wait for Raine to tell me. My curiosity is killing me, so what really happened in the shower.”

Knowing that I might be able to enlist Lena’s help in getting Raine to talk to me, I told her what happened in the shower. All of it.

But what I left out were the events that took place that had me in that head space. I only told Storm because he was her father and my Pres. But the only person I truly trusted with that information, was Raine.

Lena sighed and nodded, “I figured it had to be something of that nature. I think, if it would’ve been another girl and not Summer, she wouldn’t be hurting as bad. Well... I don’t know. I’m not going to betray her confidence though. So, you need to think about where the two of you go from here.”

Before I could open my mouth and lay out my plans, she spoke again.

“If you can’t give her all of you, trust in her to know she will have your back, then you need to let her go.”

And that single statement sparked a whole other can of worms we needed to talk about.

It wasn’t the words that were a slap in the face, it was the fact that my mistrust of her, had lost me my best friend.

The person I thought I told everything to.

The person I thought knew me better than anyone else ever had, or for that matter ever will.

But it wasn’t her fault.

Not at fucking all.

I realized that I had been the one to break us.

Not telling her when I was leaving or returning. But only telling Storm.

Her text messages of *Are you whole* once a month, stay unread in my inbox.

I didn't know if I could let her go.

If I could continue, breathing, but not existing.

Because Raine... She was the air I needed to breathe. She was the thing that caused my heart to beat. She was the reason my entire world remained spinning.

Gravity was a thing for some.

But... she was my gravity.

Lena smiled and then winked, "I take it you're going to fight for her. And I hope it's so you can finally make her yours."

And with that, she got up and walked out of the clubhouse.

Two days later, still nothing from her.

But today... today I was going to at least see her.

To get my fill of her.

Because we were having an open barbeque. We did these every few months. Inviting the public so they could see that we weren't a bunch of long-haired, big-bellied, asshole barbarians.

I was ready to see her. I even dressed in my nicest pair of jeans and a fitted white t-shirt because she loved them on me.

And yes, she's told me that, quite a few times.

From my position at the open bar outside, my eyes kept scanning for any sign of her.

And when I saw that familiar head of dark auburn hair, my heart started pumping double time.

But my teeth gritted so hard at what I saw, I feared I had cracked a molar.

Some motherfucker walked beside her with his hand on her lower back.

What. The. Fuck?

Was it?

No.

No. fucking. Way.

It was.

Son of a fucking bitch.

The same son of a bitch that had his arm wrapped around her in that photo on her Insta.

Chapter 11

Raine

The past three days have been a testament to my will.

That was for sure.

Every text that came through from him.

Every call that I declined.

I knew I was being unfair to him.

Treating him like this.

But didn't he do the same thing to me?

But could I really fault him entirely?

Sure, he's never done this.

But at the same time, I've never had to experience even a molecule of what he does while he's working.

Ugh, this was so frustrating.

Here I was in the car with another man and Tank occupied my every thought.

Seeing the clubhouse, I smiled.

To which Oliver commented, "Take it you're happy?"

"Yeah, haven't seen my dad in a few days. I miss him."
That was half the truth, I just used my dad. Raine Lowman, you fool.

"Didn't know you were a daddy's girl," and the way he said it, he was so condescending it wasn't even funny.

Which caused my spine to straighten, "When he's the only parent I've had since I was eight, yeah, I am."

He didn't even nod as he parked the car to the side of the building where I directed him to park, "Where's your mom?"

I shrugged my shoulders, “Don’t know. Don’t care.”

He scoffed and then... and then... in a chiding tone, he said, “You shouldn’t be like that about your mom you know. She did bring you into this world.”

“Yeah, and if you knew my situation, then you would understand. But you don’t.” I snapped.

I was never texting or calling anyone when I had alcohol in my system.

Never. Again.

He wouldn’t even be coming if Lena hadn’t opened her mouth the other day in front of him, but I knew why she did it.

All because of that twinkle in her eye.

She knew who would be here.

The heifer.

Without another word to him, I climbed out of the car and was pulling my phone out to text Lena when she beat me to it.

“You’re here.” Lena smiled as she bounded over to me.

“I know. The traffic was crazy. They were doing construction on forty. Again.” I said. We were about fifteen minutes later than I wanted to be.

She shook her head, “My word. That highway, I avoid it at all costs.”

Since Oliver and Lena had already met, I didn’t bother to introduce them.

We were rounding the corner to the back of the clubhouse where everything was taking place when I spotted someone, she was finally here.

“Cassidee?” I called out when we got closer.

She spun around, her eyes lighting as she saw me, and then she walked over to me and hugged me while saying, “Hey, you’re a sight for sore eyes.”

Returning her hug I said, “I know. I’ve been busy with school and volunteering at the hospital.”

“All the while avoiding someone,” Lena said while using a cough to mask her words.

Therefore, I elbowed her in the stomach.

And if I didn’t know that Oliver and I were never going to work from his butt plug of a self, it would have been proven even more true when he looked both Lena and Cassidee up and down. Hunger in his eyes.

Tank never did that.

It didn’t matter where we had been, or what we were doing.

It was something I noticed when I was around fourteen or fifteen. If I was near him or in his general vicinity, he didn’t even notice other women.

Speaking of Tank, again, today was the day that I planned on talking to him. To finally get the story from him and pray with all my might that what I think happened, didn’t.

Hearing Oliver’s voice ask what he did next, to smack him, “Are you going to introduce me?”

I wasn’t planning on it truthfully, and thankfully, I didn’t have to.

Because someone had also noticed the hunger in his eyes when he looked at her.

“You don’t need to know her name. Not when you have a woman at your side,” Thank god for Clip.

Oh, I could kiss that big man on the cheek.

And I almost did because Cassidee’s cheeks flamed a bright pink.

“Come on, I’m hungry,” I told Oliver and then headed for the food table.

And I could have sworn I heard him say, “Thank god you love food.”

I knew he had to be referring to my body.

For some reason, as we passed some civilians, ones that had turned their heads to watch me walk by, I felt Oliver place his hand on the smile of my back, and from the corner of my eye, I saw his chest puff out.

Seriously?

He was going to act like a fucking peacock.

Especially after he had reacted to Cassidee like that?

I freaking hated this. Hated having his hands on me. Hated feeling like my heart was breaking.

Christ. How many more times would it continue to do so?

Lena had caught back up to us, she had stopped to talk to someone she knew.

When we reached the tables, I didn't even have to look up to see who had materialized near me.

Not when I heard, “Raine, you're looking good.”

Without looking up from my plate that I was filling, I muttered, “Thanks.”

My heart and soul called out to me to slam my body into his.

To have his touch wipe away Oliver's hands.

To feel safe.

Comforted.

Cherished.

Because in his arms, in Tank's embrace, that was what it felt like.

I only wished that his actions backed up his feelings for me. Because he had asked me to wait,

With that thought in mind, I finished filling my plate, Lena and Oliver doing the same, and then I turned on my heel and headed to our table.

Feeling Tank's eyes on my back, burning into me, searing into my very soul.

I almost stopped and turned back.

Almost.

When we reached the table, we always claimed, I walked into my dad's arms after he stood up at my approach and squeezed him tight, "Missed you."

With his mouth near my ear, he said, "Missed you too, Cookie. You talk to him yet?"

And like my eyes had a mind of their own, they found him in the crowd immediately, and wouldn't you know it, his eyes were directed at me as he stood in a group of five people.

Why did he have to look so good?

Did he wear that shirt to torture me?

Closing my eyes, I shook my head and then answered my dad's unanswered question, "Not yet."

He pulled back from me, looked into my eyes, and then voicing what's been running through my mind, he said softly, but sternly, "You need to talk to him, Sweetheart. Find out why. I know how you feel about him. And I know how he feels about you. Listen to him. Yeah?"

I nodded, "I know what you're saying, Dad. But he should have come to me. He should have trusted me to be there for him in whatever manner he needed."

He sighed then, "Cookie, I can't tell you what he told me. But what I will say is that, if I went through what he went through, I would hope that when I was ready to talk about it, the person I wanted to tell about it would take the time and listen to me."

He was right. On so many levels.

And my father had just chided me for acting like a little shiitake mushroom.

Furthermore, he hammered home that I wasn't acting like the adult I thought I was, not when he said, "But I think the boy deserves a break. I will say this. If you did to him what he did to you, he would have forgiven you. Because trust me, the way that boy looks at you, it's like you lit up the stars in his world."

Only my dad would call Tank a boy.

I chuckled at that, "I hear you, Dad."

"Okay Cookie." And with that, he pressed a kiss atop my head, squeezed me once, and then let me go.

"Hey, I'm Oliver," Oliver said to my dad.

I sighed. I was an idiot, and I was whooping Lena's booty later.

My dad looked him up and down and then I knew what was going to come out of his mouth, I just knew it, and I was right, "Customary when you introduce yourself to someone you offer to shake their fucking hand."

Oliver looked confused for a minute, and then he held out his hand, to which my dad grabbed it, and I choked on a laugh when I saw my dad's forearm flexing and Oliver's face turning red, "Storm."

After he proved his point that he could break him with one hand, my dad let his go, then sat down, and started eating.

Following suit, I did the same.

Sitting beside my dad, Oliver sat beside me, Lena across from me, and Red in front of my dad.

I was waiting for it. How I knew he was going to ask what he did, I couldn't tell you, but I knew it.

And I was again proven true when Oliver asked, "So, who were the two of you talking about?"

My dad stopped what he was talking about, and looked at him, in only the way my dad could look at someone, that freaking glare.

I was never on the receiving end of it, but I saw it.

And it affected Oliver as well. Because he shut the heck up and started eating.

I bit back a chuckle and smiled up at my dad's twinkling eyes.

Lena, however, didn't even try to hide her laughter.

Oliver looked at her then at me and asked, "What's so funny?"

To which we both started laughing even harder.

It wasn't until someone walked over to our table, sat down a heaping plate of food, and then took a seat.

All the laughter dried up in my body.

"I still don't get it." Oliver said.

"Then you just proved you're an idiot." Lena said while still laughing, paying no mind to the man that sat down beside her.

"Who do you think..." He shut up when Red pounded on the table.

"She's speaking the truth. Who the fuck comes to a motorcycle clubhouse for a fucking barbeque in a pink fucking polo shirt? You. The idiot. That's who."

Before anyone else could say a word, Summer said, "Hey baby, come find me later?"

Summer winked at me as she walked by our table.

"Who the hell is that?" Oliver asked. It wasn't in a tone that suggested he was offended. No. The opposite of that. If he wanted her, he could freaking have her.

Tank shrugged and then with every word he spoke, his eyes stayed with mine so I could see the honesty in his eyes,

“Someone that probably has a loose pussy. Wouldn’t know but I can imagine.”

I didn’t say a word to that.

Instead, I inhaled a breath and then started eating. Well, I was about to.

“When is she going to be out?” Tank asked my dad.

My dad looked at him, then down at me, and then over to Red. And to which Red nodded.

I didn’t know what transpired between them, not until I heard, “Summer?”

When my dad called out her name, my body tensed.

Why was he calling her over here?

I couldn’t stand her. Not just because she had apparently done something with Tank. But because of the way, she bragged about it. And treated me.

And I knew a lot of what she was talking about was true. I knew that. I had walked in on something.

But I also knew that she had told a freaking lie.

He didn’t fuck her according to her with his clothes off. I know he didn’t. He didn’t ever take his shirt off unless the two of us were at the beach. And only if it was the two of us.

He trusted me. He knew I didn’t see the scars that littered his body. I just saw him.

His body is a patchwork of scars from his childhood. The way he had to defend himself before he turned eighteen. The missions he’s been on.

The only way she knew about his scars was by seeing them in the shower.

“Yeah, Storm?” She asked as she came to a stop.

Right behind Tank.

Freaking heifer.

“You’ve been told repeatedly to leave someone alone. And with the stunt you pulled a few days ago, we took a vote. You’re out of here. You’re also banned from all Wrath MC affiliations.”

I didn’t even try to hide my smirk at the face she made.

That was when she looked at me, placed a hand on her hip, and then asked, “What did you do? Complain to daddy that Tank didn’t want you but wanted me? Threw a tantrum, didn’t you?”

“Nope. But Tank brought it to a vote. He didn’t appreciate the shit you’ve been pulling; you’ve been warned too many times.” My dad informed her.

But I knew she wouldn’t go quietly.

She just had that look in her eyes, and I knew when she was ready to say something, because her hand went to her hip when she said, “I’m telling you; he tastes like no other. Oh, the way the man can work his cock. But you’re never going to find out about that. No man wants to fuck a woman that wouldn’t know what to do with a cock right in front of her face. Tell me, are you still holding on to that virginal card?”

Why I answered, her I didn’t know, but I couldn’t keep quiet anymore, “First of all, the shit you’ve been spewing about how good he fucks, the way his muscles bunch, and the sheen of sweat on his chest you licked up. I know he wouldn’t have fucked you without clothes on his body. And far as I know, I’m the only one he allows to touch his body. And you’re right, it is a work of art. Secondly, I might not know what to do with a cock right in front of my face, but I bet I can figure it out right quick. And thanks, by the way, for showing me what not to do. Wasn’t it Porter that you were blowing and when you weren’t doing the job correctly, he pulled his cock from your mouth, shoved you away, closed his eyes, and jerked his own self off? Third, yeah, I still hold my virgin card, because unlike you, I know that a good man is going to be my everything in return, he’s going to make me his everything.”

Summer's face was red and full of rage, and I knew I hit my points home, therefore she did the only thing she could, she attacked my body. And I was proud of it.

But I wasn't going to let it slide. Anyone that made fun of a person because of their weight deserved to have that notion knocked out of them.

"Well, you'll be holding onto that card for a long time. No one wants to fuck a pig."

Tank's face hardened, he stood, turned around, and was about to put her in her place, but I wasn't having that.

I got up, jumped on the table, and then launched myself at her, and got in a good smack right across her face before my body was tagged and pulled into a hard, familiar, place I never wanted to leave, my chest.

"Men like bodies they can hold onto and pound into them knowing they aren't going to break," Tank said.

"Your shit has already been put in a garbage bag. Prospect," My dad called out, as three new prospects emerged immediately. "Escort her off the property."

But Tank wasn't done, not when I felt his chest rumble as he said, "Funny. Last time I checked, no one's tasted me or felt me in their bodies in four years."

Summer stopped struggling when Jimmy tried to haul her away and then said, "Then what do you call what happened between us?"

"You mean when you came into my room uninvited. Climbed in my shower, and then wrapped your hand around my cock and pressed your lips to mine? And it took me a beat, but I pulled my body from yours and threw your ass out. Just like we're doing now."

"Let's go, Summer. Oh, and by the way, when you leave, visit a fucking clinic. You gave me the clap." Prospect Jimmy said for everyone to hear.

And as Summer took a step, Lena stuck her foot out, and tripped Summer, “Oops. My foot slipped.”

Summer started to open her mouth until Jimmy clamped a hand on her mouth and then bodily dragged her away.

Good freaking riddance.

I stayed in my spot, not wanting to leave it.

And judging by the tightening of Tank’s arms, he didn’t want me to leave it either.

The feel of his hot breath against my ear caused shivers to trail through my body, “You know something we haven’t done since I got home?”

“What’s that?” I asked him softly.

“Had our dance.” I could hear the smile in his voice.

Biting my lip, I looked over at Hippie, to see his eyes on us, and with a wink, he nodded.

Tank chuckled at my back, released me, stepped to my side, then held his hand out to me.

Sighing, I placed mine in his and then allowed him to lead me out to the makeshift dance floor.

As soon as we were in the middle, he spun me around, my hand going to his bicep, his arm wrapped around my waist and pulling me close, my much smaller hand cradled in his.

With his smile and showing me his dimples, I couldn’t help but return my smile right back.

That was when our song started, “*A whisper away... from changing’ everything. But is it safe to say... such dangerous things. When your hands are trembling, girl, I’m weak in the knees.*”

We were both silent as we let the lyrics float around us, that was until he lowered his mouth to my ear and said, “I just need a few minutes of your time. To explain everything. Can you give me that? Please?”

My face was pressed against his chest as I murmured,
“Why?”

“Because you deserve the truth. And if I give it to you, if you don’t want me, I’ll leave. I’ll let you go.”

“What do you mean if I don’t want you?” I asked him, my heart doing double time in my chest.

“Just... please let me know of a day and time and I’ll be there. To explain everything.”

I hadn’t realized I had nodded because I wanted that too.

And it was time to stop acting like a shitake mushroom.

So, I said softly, “Tomorrow around three? I get out of class at two.”

The song was ending when he said, “I’ll be there.”

It was only when we started walking back to the table that I realized, the man who had brought me here, hadn’t been on my mind, not once that I danced with Tank.

It was Lena’s smile when I reached the table, and her soft words, “Want to get out of here?”

I nodded immediately.

Looking at Oliver, I said, “This isn’t going to work.”

And with that, my bestie and I left the backyard of the clubhouse, got in her car, and headed to my house.

And that night, with we both, drank our cares away.

We also found out that Oliver had taken a woman home with him.

While we were at my house this conversation also took place, and it would leave me wondering if I would always come second to his career, and whether or not I could really handle that if he became my man.

Hearing my phone ring as I took a pull from my beer, I grabbed it and checked the display.

Fuck. No. Fucking hell.

And I was half tempted to chuck that bitch into the ocean. And then make up a lie about not being able to replace it right away.

But I knew I couldn't do that.

So, I took the fucking phone call and cursed out this world in my head for all I was fucking worth.

Hitting the end button, I looked at Storm and without a word, he said, "How soon?"

"We need to be wheels up tomorrow at seventeen hundred hours. Fucking hell. I finally got Raine to agree to talk and let me explain, and once I do that, I have to fucking leave."

"If I thought you weren't worth it, I'd put the bullet in you now." And that was all he said before he got up and walked away.

Thankfully, I had been able to concentrate in class and then I was headed home to wait for Tank.

And to my shock, he was sitting on my front porch when I pulled into the drive. A bag of takeout from my favorite Chinese place and two Styrofoam cups.

Seeing me getting out of the car, he smiled. I was up on the porch now, and then sat down beside him on my swing, "Okay, let's talk."

He chuckled, "Fucking adore you, Gray."

Handing me my food, I thanked him and then started eating.

Only it wasn't until a couple of bites in that I realized he wasn't eating.

I watched as he took in a deep breath, and then said, “Okay, so here goes, the first part of what I’m going to tell you has to stay between the two of us. You can’t tell anyone.”

He waited for my nod and my pinkie locking onto his, and I never let go as he told me about the mission he had been on. About the woman that was one of their targets, and the way she had used a little boy to be her human shield.

I could hear the devastation in his tone, cracks in his façade as he talked about pulling the trigger before she grabbed him.

He told me about the scene he had to watch.

A group of insurgents raping a teenage girl, and they hadn’t been able to intervene or else it would ruin their mission.

About how a new team had come along on one mission, and about the friendly fire that had taken place.

And he told me about the team he had been called in to find, and how he had found them. I was glad I hadn’t had more than a few bites. Anything else and I would have hurled it up.

With all of that, I could understand now.

And my dad’s words came back to me. It wasn’t that he didn’t trust me. It was that things had happened that we hadn’t been able to avoid, and you’re only human if you make mistakes.

Setting my food to the side, I scooted closer to him, wrapped my arm around his back, pressed my side to his arm, and rested my chin on his shoulder. Softly, I said, “I’m sorry you had to go through that. I’m really sorry. And you’re forgiven for not talking to me. I don’t know if I would’ve been able to keep on living if I had to endure all of that. You amaze me, Tank. Truly amaze me.”

“Easy to keep on living when someone is the reason you’re still here.” He said cryptically.

I asked, “What are you talking about?”

He tilted his head and looked at me, “To tell you the truth. I had planned on having this talk at twelve oh one on your birthday, but work called. I planned to do it as soon as I had some food, a shower, and some sleep because I was dead on my feet and needed to be clear-headed, so I didn’t fuck everything up I wanted to say to you. Then that bitch happened. And now... here we are.”

That statement caused the breath in my lungs to hitch. “Okay. Why are you telling me this.”

“Because I thought I could let you go. Thought I could do it. But I fucking can’t. I need you in my life.”

I nodded, but I had to know something. I know he laid out what happened with Summer yesterday.

“Did you kiss her back?” I asked him.

And then... I watched as his head dropped, and then he nodded, and in a rough, ravished voice, he said, “Barely. But yes. I did.”

I could see it. The guilt he felt was eating him alive.

“I’m sorry, Gray. Fucking sorry. I was in my head from all the shit I told you about and I was thinking about you.”

It wasn’t the time to ask him what all he was thinking about me with his hand on his cock.

We sat there in silence for a beat, and then when I didn’t ask him, he asked, “So, you still seeing that dumbass?”

“No. He was a self-entitled prick.” I told him.

I watched as his jaw tightened, and then he asked, “You let him kiss you?”

I shook my head, “No. Only person I ever want to kiss me hasn’t yet.”

I felt his body tense, and then something sounded from his phone.

He cursed a blue streak a mile wide.

After he silenced... and alarm, I asked, "Okay, what aren't you telling me?"

He sighed, "I'm leaving for another mission. I should be back in a few weeks."

I nodded, and offered him an understanding smile, "Are you going to be talking to me again?"

He nodded immediately, "Yeah Gray, I am. No way am I fucking anything else up when it comes to us."

"Oh, there's an us?" I asked, happiness lacing every word.

I could even hear how serious he was in the words he spoke next, "I get back, you agree to what I want, you bet your ass there'll be an us."

With my side pressed to his cologne wrapping around me, I whispered, "Thought you had to leave."

He nodded, sighed, and then whispered, "You're my end game."

And with that, we said our see you later's, and he told me from the open window of his truck, "If I'm that man you're waiting on a kiss from, you'll get it when I make you mine. Because no way in hell am I going to have a taste of you and not have you as mine."

That night in bed, after I had thought about everything, I pulled up his contact and typed out my message to him.

Raine – I'm going to try, Tank. But you mess up one more freaking time, and it's done. Over. I won't go through this again. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Fool me a third time, and I'll shoot you.

Three hours later, I got a message back.

Tank – That's all I'm asking for. I won't fuck this up again. I miss you. We just landed.

Three weeks later, emails, messages, and voice chats it was time.

And I knew he hadn't told my dad, or anyone else. No. He told me. And that meant the freaking world to me. He was trying.

I ran into Red and Lena's house, my bare feet slapping on the hardwood floors because I kicked off my flip-flops. When I opened the door, I shouted, "Lena."

I heard her from the kitchen, "What?"

"He's on his way home," I screamed.

She ran out of the kitchen with a huge ass smile on her face, and then when she reached me, we both hugged and jumped.

The next day, we were sitting at the clubhouse waiting for his truck to pull in the lot. He didn't have his bike because we were going to the beach today and the brothers had fueled it up for him.

"Thank you," I whispered as I bumped her shoulder.

She looked at me like I was crazy, "What are you thinking me for?"

"For not going after him, and for not having the hots for him. You're truly my bestie." I told her with a smile.

"Oh, don't get me wrong, that man is fine with a capital T. But he doesn't get my motor running." And as she said that I saw her eyes trail to a spot in the forecourt.

And who would have thought had caught her attention?

I was just thinking about that and how it would work if he felt the same for her when everyone started to load up on their bikes.

And then as I was getting worried, I knew I shouldn't have.

His black truck came barreling into the lot.

Smiling, I got up and ran to him.

He was out of his truck, the motor still running, and I was up, and, in his arms, my face buried in his neck, his buried in mine.

He inhaled a deep breath and then muttered, "Home."

Goosebumps rose on my skin.

"I didn't think you were going to make it," I said as happiness enveloped every molecule of my being.

I was a fool for this man. A plain old fool. But I couldn't freaking help it.

The man could walk all over me, and I would forgive him.

Love was a bitch like that, wasn't she?

Chapter 12

Tank

I sighed when my boots landed back on US soil. I was tired.

Yet energized. The mission we had completed. It has helped millions of people.

With that thought in mind, I headed to the clubhouse to find my woman.

And she was my woman. I would just have to make her see that and have that fucking talk with her damnit.

And that would be happening today. I wasn't taking a chance on something else happening.

No fucking way. Which was why when I got closer to the clubhouse, I turned my fucking phone on silent.

Thankfully, I didn't have to go in search of her, because the moment my truck pulled into the forecourt, she was up and running at me.

Luckily, I got it in park before I vaulted out of the truck.

I knew she didn't get it when I murmured the single word *home*. But she would.

"Got off the plane and came straight here. I got ten minutes to shower?" I asked her.

But it wasn't her that answered me, "Yeah, boy. But get a move on. Daylight's burning." Looking over her head, I nodded at Storm.

"Got it." Squeezing Raine's waist, I let her go, stepped around her, and then headed into the clubhouse.

Storm slapped my shoulder on my way in, and called out, "Welcome home, brother."

Turning my head over my shoulder, I looked at Raine first, and then at him, and nodded. The fucker had a shit-eating grin on his face and then he shook his head and nodded.

After my shower, throwing on some swim trunks, and then a tee, I slipped my arms into my kutte and sighed.

At first, the feeling of this kutte was mighty fucking powerful. But just like everything in my life when it comes to her, it takes a step back and settles for second place.

Now, I just needed to prove all of that to her.

Walking out of the clubhouse, I put my shades on and then made my way to my bike.

And seeing her sitting there in an old t-shirt of mine that I had given her a few years ago, cut-off jean shorts, her tanned legs on display, nothing had ever looked better.

Not giving a flying fuck, I pulled my phone out and snapped a picture.

“Excuse you. But you’re supposed to take it when you get on the bike,” the imp called out with laughter in her voice.

So that was what I did. Me smiling, her smiling, and that was going on my lock screen.

The proof of the day I made her mine officially because I would be damned if I closed my eyes tonight and she wasn’t mine.

Storm made the signal and like that, we pulled out of the clubhouse and headed to the beach.

Thankfully, we had a beach house and had some prospects head down yesterday to stock it.

Hot dogs and burgers sizzled on the grill as my eyes stayed glued on Raine and where she stood with Lena, Cassidee, and believe it or not, my sister.

She had witnessed the way I really looked at Raine that day at the clubhouse, and she saw how I felt while we danced.

Therefore, I knew she was going out of her way to get to know Raine. Because she knew that Raine would be in my life for a fuck of a long time.

“Surprised your ass isn’t glued to her,” Clip said as he helped me prop up the wall.

“Got line of sight to her. All I need. For now.” I told him as I took a sip of my beer.

He nodded.

I knew he got it.

Because he had the same thing with Cassidee.

“You finally going to make her yours?” I asked him.

He nodded, “Soon as I talk to Cotton.”

“You ready for that? He isn’t just the President of the mother charter of Wrath MC for nothing.” I said.

“For her. Yeah, brother. She’s fucking worth it. I’m ready for the beat down I know he’s more than likely going to give me.” Clip was almost as tall as I was, only an inch shorter.

“What about her brother, Jasper?” I asked with a chuckle.

“That, that I’m not looking forward to. Better have my grave ready.” He even shivered.

Jasper was something else. He was a brick powerhouse like his dad. He also fought in underground fighting rings. He’d even been approached by the UFC but had declined. Not wanting to give up everything the club life represented.

Raine looked over at me and winked, to which I replied of course with a wink of my own.

The food was almost finished when I saw a group of boys walk by and all of them had their necks craned as they checked the girls out.

Like it was a choreographed move, I moved to Raine, Clip to Cassidee, Jimmy to Shea, and believe it or not, Storm to Lena.

After they got a sight of all of us, they had to give themselves whiplash as they looked away.

The four of us chuckled as we moved back to where we all were.

After we ate, I followed Raine like a fucking puppy and sat down beside her as we stared out into the ocean.

It was time. Time to ask her to be mine. And if she said no, kidnap her and keep her until she said yes.

Staring out into the water, I asked her, “You have no idea what you did for me.”

Looking over at me, she asked, “What did I do for you?”

Staring into those gray eyes of hers, I told her, “You saved me.”

She scrunched up her brow and asked, “How did I do that?”

Tangling my fingers with hers, the calm I desperately crave wrapped itself around me, filling up every fiber of my being, “Whenever we were in a dangerous location, all I had to do was keep your smiling face at the forefront of my mind. I didn’t see the men I killed. All I saw was that they were on my way of getting back home. To you. Every mission was like that.”

“Carter...” hearing my name whispered on her lips, the biting of her bottom lip, the unshed tears that filled her eyes.

The next thing I knew she had her face planted in my chest, her tiny frame shaking. Wrapping my arms around her, pulling her in close, her tears soaking through my shirt.

Pressing a kiss on the top of her head, I looked back out at sea. It was time, the sun was starting to set.

And I wanted this moment to be perfect.

I wanted to brand it on the backs of my eyelids.

Then decided to not take a chance, I threw everything I was going to say to convince her to be mine into the trash and went with my gut.

“Raine, you’ve been mine since you took your first breath. I just couldn’t act on it until you turned eighteen. So let me make this clear for you, I’m in love with you. I think you like me back at least.” I let out a little chuckle.

“We’re going to give this a try, you, and me, and I know it will last. I just have to prove it to you. So, in case you missed the memo, you’re my woman, and I’m your man.”

“Don’t I get a say so?” She asked as she snuggled into my chest.

“Not when you’re the air I need to breathe. My gravity. If something happened to you, I would follow you to the depths of the earth and even beyond that if that was what it took to remain at your side.”

Pulling her face from my body, wiping the remaining tears from her cheeks, and then laughing softly when new ones started to form.

“Are you really mine?” She asked, hope lacing every word, love shining brightly in her eyes.

“Been yours since I took my first breath. Just had to wait twenty-nine years to make you mine. And I know it’s going to be worth it.”

Seeing the tenderness on her face, the way the sun was casting a majestic glow all around her, lighting her dark auburn hair, streaks of red blasting out through it.

I couldn’t have created a better moment even if I tried.

Therefore, I placed my hand on the side of her face, my heart ramping up in beats when she closed her eyes, leaned her face into my touch and fucking sighed.

Waiting.

I sat there.

Needing her to open her eyes for what I was about to do next.

And when she opened them, I leaned into her, my face close to hers, my eyes staying locked with hers. “Going to kiss you now. Going to make you mine now. Then make you mine in every way imaginable whenever you’re ready. You don’t want me to do that, you need to tell me now. Because Gray, I get a taste of you, I’m never letting you go.”

She swallowed, looked into my eyes, and then I shit you not, said, “Well, what the hell are you waiting for? I’ve been yours since I was eight.”

Laughing, I nodded, closed my eyes, and found her lips with my own. She was tentative at first, but that didn’t bother me, not in the slightest.

Because the feel of her lips against mine, there was no other feeling like it.

They were soft, warm, inviting, cleansing, and safe.

So, when I teased them with my tongue, nudging them open so I could slip inside, heaven, fucking heaven greeted me.

Her tongue stroked mine, not needing to be taught a goddamn thing.

I wasn’t sure how long my lips stayed on hers, but I knew one thing, I was going to be patient with her. It would all be on her terms, her own time.

I let out a growl as I felt my cock get rock hard, I was going to have a bad case of blue balls.

It was going to test my every strength to do that, but there was no way in hell I was taking us any further. Especially not with who all was here to watch.

Slipping my tongue out of her mouth, I nibbled on her bottom lip, kissed her softly once more, then pulled back but rested my forehead on hers.

“Worth it. All the years we had to wait. Fucking worth.” I whispered.

She inhaled a deep breath and muttered, “Well, spit.”

I couldn’t even fight the chuckle that burst forth even if I wanted to. “Still not cussing, Gray?”

“Hush it. It’s not ladylike.” She said as she pulled her forehead from mine.

I scoffed, “You’re a biker princess, Raine. Lady-like shouldn’t even be in your vocabulary.”

She chuckled, then asked, “Wanna take a wild on the dark side with me?”

“Dark side?” I asked her.

She laughed softly, pressed a kiss to my jaw, stood up, and strode for the water all the while taking off her shirt and her shorts.

And I could do nothing but sit there and stare at the woman that I never allowed myself to get my feel of.

Of a woman’s body that was fucking created for me.

Now, I didn’t have a preference for tits or ass. The man above made you in his eye, so according to him you were perfect.

But for me, I never wanted to look at another woman’s ass or tits, because perfection was right in front of me, and nothing else could ever come close.

She. Was. Fucking. Perfect.

Every single inch of her.

And everything that body held was mine.

However, I groaned, the little dark blue bikini didn’t hide enough of her body, and I knew I didn’t need to go to jail today. I didn’t look good in orange.

Knowing that I stood up, kicked off my shoes, and waded into the water to join her. I left my shirt, because like she had

said, I only removed my shirt when it had been just the two of us at the beach.

When I reached her, I asked, “What the fuck do you mean the dark side?”

She stared out as the sun was almost gone, and then whispered, “You know, the dark side when all the little baddies of the sea come out.”

I chuckled, “Not even going to apologize, are you?”

She spun in the water, then asked, “Apologize for what?”

I didn’t say a word as I looked down at the bulge between my legs that could be seen as the water wasn’t high enough to hide my rock-hard cock where I stood.

She just looked back at me, quirked her brow, and then chuckled, and said, “Was my very first kiss not an apology from me?”

And with that, the little firecracker bent down, scooped up water, and then threw it at me.

Tilting my head to the side, I said low, “Oh, that’s how you want to play this?”

She laughed as I splashed water back at her.

And then I ran at her, grabbed her by her waist, her laughter ringing out wild and free with zero abandonment. Fuck, but I missed that.

I twirled us around in the water, then placed a soft kiss on her lips, and when I saw the goosebumps on her skin, I carried us out of the water.

Setting her down on her feet, I nodded my thanks at Lena who handed us two towels.

After we dried off, she got redressed.

“So, the two of you finally fucking together?” I looked over my shoulder and then grinned.

“Fucking right we are.” And then, not able to help myself, I slapped Raine on the ass.

A dozen, *It's about time.*

Another dozen *Hallelujahs* rent the night air.

“I’m going to regret agreeing to be yours. Aren’t I?” She asked with her hand tucked into mine

“You might. But I’ll try my best to curb my tendencies. Because I never had something that was solely mine. I’m going to be jealous. Possessive. Obsessive. An alpha-hole. But I can promise you, no one in this world will ever love you like I will. You’re getting every part of me I’ve never given to a single soul.” I told her after I pulled her into my front.

She looked up at me, and winked, “You got a little problem there, soulja boi?”

Little imp.

I still had a fucking boner. And how could I not, first, seeing her in that bikini, and then feeling her body up against mine?

She’s been calling me soulja boi ever since the men on my team got drunk one night in country on one of our nights off and we all danced to that song. The video found its way to every single team member’s woman. And I fucking missed hearing her calling me that for the better part of a year.

She was walking back to the house with Lena, Cassidee, and Shea, she looked over her shoulder, and not giving a fuck, she called out, “Carter?”

“Yeah, Gray?” I called out as Porter slapped me on my back.

“I love you too.” Damn if I didn’t almost melt.

“That’s good. You’re the storm crashing into my waves. You’re the air I need to breathe. My life has always been black and white. But with you, it’s full of fucking color. Everything I thought I knew, changed the day I met you.”

She called out in a laugh, “Pervert.”

I couldn't help but burst out laughing.

Chapter 13

Raine

The past four weeks had been a blast.

Tank's phone hadn't rung once. And I couldn't believe it.

Not to mention we went everywhere together. I never drove myself to class or clinical or home for that matter.

And I never had to make dinner.

Tank did all of that for me.

He made a promise to me that no one could love me as he could.

And I believed it.

I never went to bed alone, and I never woke up alone.

He even had a drawer in my dresser, some hanging space in my closet, and yes, his own side of the bathroom.

We just hadn't made everything official in the manner of him making me his fully, but I was already there.

I just needed to tell him. Which I planned to do tonight after clinical.

Because no way I was going to go another day and wonder what all the hype about sex was.

And I knew that with it being with Tank. It was going to be something freaking magical. Of that, I had no doubt.

Smiling at the direction my thoughts were headed, I walked out of the hospital and smiled at the man that was resting on his bike.

Dark jeans on his thighs, his black motorcycle boots adorned his feet. And a fitted black henley.

"Hey, Gorgeous," he called out.

I heard several ladies swoon at my sides.

They started walking out with me, most of them waiting until I was done to get a good look at him.

“Please tell me he has a twin?” One of the women that works in the department asked me, Tallie.

I shook my head, grinning, because that man was all mine, “Nope. I’m sorry. But the club does have some single men. They’re pretty hot if you’re into older men”

Jessika asked, “How old?”

I shrugged, “About ten to fifteen years I think.”

“Hmmm, I’ll need to see them in the flesh.” Jessika’s eyes lit up as she said that.

Carmen nodded, “Same. Invite us to a party so we can get our eyes full.”

I laughed. I couldn’t help it.

Addressing them, I said, “Two months from now we’re having a barbeque where we invite the public. I’ll let y’all know the date and time.”

“Righteous.” Tallie sighed again.

“That gives me time to plan the perfect outfit.” Jessika saluted me.

“What are you doing, Gray?” Even I wanted to swoon at his voice, which I knew the women at my sides did.

Shrugging, I said, “Possibly setting up some people.”

He shook his head, “Come on, baby. Dinners in the oven and I don’t want you to eat it cold.”

Stella came out right as he said that, and asked, “He cooked your dinner?”

I nodded and didn’t hold back the huge smile on my face, “He has been ever since we made everything official.”

“Happy for you, Sweet Pea. No one deserves to have their happily ever after more than you.” Stella said as she walked to where her own man waited to take her home.

Waving off at the girls and promising as soon as I had the date for the barbeque, I would tell them.

Walking up to Tank, I smiled when he opened his arms for me and tilted his head to get something I knew he wanted.

And as I molded my lips to his, my tongue dancing with his, I couldn't help the moan that slipped out.

He pulled back from me, cocked an eyebrow, and asked, hotly, “It's like that?”

I growled at him, fisted his shirt, and then pulled him back down to me once more to finish the kiss. Which I did.

And the blinding smile I got from him? Stab me with a fork because I was done.

After I had my helmet on, he started the bike up, and with my arms wrapped around his waist, he took us home.

And then fed me dinner in front of the fireplace.

It was starting to get colder at night.

Which meant it was also time to redecorate my house in oranges, yellows, and deep reds. I couldn't wait.

I also may have already ordered some stuff online in preparation and needed Tank to get the boxes out of the garage.

“So? What do you want to do tonight?” He asked me as we finished off the dishes.

Drying my hands, I walked around the island and waited for him to lock eyes with me, and then I crooked my finger.

He cocked a brow, and then dried his hands and followed me.

I was standing there in the doorway to what was now our room unofficially.

“What’s this about, baby?” He asked when he reached me, placed his finger under my chin to lift my mouth up.

And then he claimed it in a short and sweet kiss.

“Well, I’ve been thinking.” Then I stepped closer to him and ran my fingers down his chest, and then I slipped them underneath the material and felt his warm skin.

He swallowed, his breathing coming out in pants, “Yeah?”

“Yeah. You see, I’ve been waiting. Me knowing I have no clue how to go about this, but you do. I figured you were waiting on me to tell you I was ready. But honestly, I would have jumped on you on my birthday.”

And with that, I hopped up, wrapped my legs around his waist, as his hands cradled my ass to keep me where I wanted to be.

“But now it seems like a great idea to do it,” I said huskily.

He walked us to the wall, and then he slanted his mouth and claimed my lips.

My fingers were running through his hair, down the back of his neck, to his shoulders, and back up.

I couldn’t quit touching him, and I didn’t think I would ever be able to stop.

That was when his freaking cell phone rang, “Don’t take it. Please. Ignore it.”

He growled into my mouth, and then having the same thoughts as me, he continued to assault my mouth with his tongue.

Leaving my lips, he trailed a path to my jaw, and then down to the column of my neck.

His lips left a trail of heat, and my skin rose to the heat and pebbled.

I let out a premature sigh because that was when his phone stopped ringing, and then immediately started up again.

He sighed into my neck, pulled away, tagged his phone from his jeans, checked the call, and the tick in his cheek started to jerk.

“Yeah,” I stared into his eyes as he seemed completely enthralled with the caller.

Something naughty had me leaning my lips into the column of his throat, kissing at the bottom of his neck, my tongue trailed a pattern.

However, before I could do more, he pulled away from me and then started talking back into the phone, “One minute. Not secure.”

And then... just like that, he walked out the door.

It didn't register to my brain that he wouldn't be back.

And that night I curled up on the couch waiting for whatever had caused him to leave would be resolved soon.

Because I got used to sleeping next to him.

I didn't want to go back to sleeping without him.

And it wouldn't be until the very next morning that I was told what happened.

Not by Tank. The man who said he was mine and I was his.

No.

Not by Red.

Not by Lena.

Not by my dad.

Not by Shea.

But by Summer who stopped at the clubhouse to pass along something she overheard at another MC. Apparently, the woman still had loyalty, but something told me, that wasn't it at all.

Summer smirked at me after delivering the news that he got called back for a mission.

Normally, I would have backtalked her.

Normally, I would have put her in her place.

However, it wasn't her fault.

No, it was his.

Walking out of the clubhouse, my arms wrapped around my middle, I made it all the way to my car, got in, locked the door, started her up, and then drove home.

And only... Only when I was safely inside my house did I finally allow the tears to fall.

Staring at my pale cheeks, nose red from crying, the capillaries in my eyes burst.

And there, in my bathroom, I promised myself that I would never cry over that man again.

That I deserved more.

He should have given me the chance.

He should have trusted me. I could have gone to another room, put my headphones in and taken a bath. I could have waited in the living room while he went outside to have his *secure* conversation.

But he didn't do that.

Why couldn't his actions back up his words? Fucking why?

I didn't lift my head from my hands when I felt someone's body slide down the wall beside me where I apparently found myself.

"I just found out. I'm sure he has a good reason, honey."
At Lena's words, I started crying yet again.

And guess what, not a phone call. Not a message. Not an email for the two weeks he was gone.

“I went by our house and when you weren’t there I came straight here.” He said the moment he walked into the clubhouse where I sat beside Lena as we both worked on schoolwork.

I didn’t say anything as I continued working.

When I still didn’t reply, I heard someone I’d never heard before ask, “Dude, what the fuck did you do?”

“I didn’t tell her I was leaving. I didn’t have the fucking time.” Tank bit out.

Without looking up from my book and the sentence I had read four times, not understanding a bit of it since he walked in, I snapped, “Yeah, you didn’t tell me you were leaving. Right in the middle of the start of our first time together mind you. I could have gone into another room while you took your phone call. I could have pulled on headphones and rode with you to the clubhouse to get your stuff. There was no reason to leave me standing there wondering when you would be home. Scared out of my mind that something bad had happened.”

“Wait. The start of y’all’s first time together? Dude? What the fuck is the matter with you?” That voice questioned again.

I knew Tank ignored him because I felt him walk over to where I was sitting and kneel on the ground beside my chair.

Then I felt his warm palm through my sage green leggings, “Baby, please, look at me. Give me those eyes that are my favorite color.”

The only reason I even gave him my eyes was that he was indeed kneeling on the ground at my feet.

“Gray, I didn’t have time to tell you. I barely had time to tell Storm. I didn’t know Summer was standing there listening to what was happening. Did your dad not tell you how important it was?”

That was when my dad walked over and scrubbed underneath his chin, his little tale that he fucked up, “Yeah, I

dropped the ball. Sorry, Cookie. I had meant to tell you first thing when he left but one thing after another came up and I plum forgot. I'm sorry."

I looked from my dad, and then back to Tank, and asked, "Are you going to stay down there for the rest of your life?"

His tone was so serious, it left no room for argument, "If that's what it takes, baby."

I sighed, "You ever do that again, I mean it, Carter. I've already warned you before. This happens one more time, and that's it. I love you. I love you with my whole heart and soul. I can't take that happening again. And you broke a promise. You promised to stay in contact with me the best you could on missions."

"I know, baby." That was when he lifted from his knees and leaned in and whispered in my ear so Lena who was sitting beside me couldn't hear.

"America's most wanted list. A target was on there. He's responsible for a huge sex trafficking ring in the southern hemisphere. We had a thirty-minute window."

Softly, so only he could hear, I asked, "Did you get him?"

He winked, "What do you think?"

I sighed, leaned in, and pressed a kiss to his lips, and then muttered, "You're both forgiven. Thank God I'm young and healthy. My heart can handle all this right now."

"Hold up, that's why you call her gray because of her eyes?" The man looked from Tank to me, and then stared into my eyes, his own widening. "Yeah, now, I fucking get it."

I looked at the man, and then back at Tank.

To which he grinned, got up, and then offered his hand to me to help me up from my chair.

"Hey, heard a lot about you. Names Pete." He held out his hand for me to shake.

Smiling, I placed mine in his and shook his hand in return, “Hi Pete. Glad you made it home safe. I’m assuming you know my name is Raine and not Gray.”

He laughed, nodded, and then stared down at our still joined hands when he muttered, “Damn.”

Confused, I asked, “What?”

“No fucking fireworks. Figures. See a beautiful woman, and there’s no fucking fireworks,” he smiled a charming, and what I assumed to be his panty-dropping smile.

Luckily, it hadn’t phased me.

However, for the man that just placed his arm around my chest and pulled me into his embrace, everything Pete had mentioned happened with Tank.

That move effectively had my hand being given back to me.

“Get your eyes off her brother or else I’ll remove them from their sockets,” Tank growled.

To which Pete simply chuckled.

I couldn’t help but giggle, and then needing my hug, I spun in his embrace and didn’t hesitate to fling my arms around his neck.

Whispering against his chest, I said, “Welcome home, baby.”

He pressed a kiss to my forehead and murmured there, “Fucking missed you, Gray”

I was introducing Pete to Lena and Shea when Cassidee came walking in with Clip on her heels.

When I went to introduce her to Pete, she shook her head and then headed for the hallway that led to the room she was using.

Clip stopped, as he watched her disappear, and then dropped his head as his shoulders sagged.

Tank released me, and then went to Clip.

After I introduced Pete to the brothers, I got back to studying. We each had an exam the following day that would make up thirty percent of our grade, therefore it was imperative to ace the test.

After I put my pencil down, I smiled.

I did good.

There was only one question on the exam that I didn't recall, but I tried my best, so hopefully, that will be enough.

Standing up from my chair, I grabbed my things and headed to the Professor's desk.

Smiling at her, I placed my exam in front of her and started to walk away until she asked in a low tone so as to not take the rest of the students that were still taking their exam, "Ms. Lowman, I was wondering if you've already sent in your applications to hospitals? It's been a long time since I saw that fire in someone else's eyes when it comes to caring for the little ones that desperately need our help."

Smiling, I nodded, "Yes, I have. And I've already heard back from all of them. As long as I pass my classes with an A at least I'll have my pick, but I've already decided on where I want to work.

She looked at me expectantly for my answer, and knowing I had that in the bag already, thanks to Stella, I told her, "Carolina Regional."

Her face lit up, and then she nodded, "They indeed have one of the best Neonatal departments on the East Coast."

Smiling again, I nodded, "I know. I have volunteered there ever since I was sixteen and old enough."

"Congratulations. Will you tell Stella I said hello?" She asked with a twinkle in her eye.

That had me curious, but knowing she more than likely wouldn't answer, and besides, I had to get home and get ready, "I'll do it. Have a good weekend, Professor Montgomery."

Walking out of her class, I headed for the double doors that led to the parking lot.

Tank was busy doing something with the club, so he was unable to pick me up.

Climbing in my car, I started it up, turned up the radio, and then headed home.

Once I got there, I kicked off my shoes in my entryway, smiled at the comparison of my small feet to Tank's massive ones, and checked my messages.

Lena – Just finished. That was nerve-wracking. Thank you for forcing me to study yesterday.

Me – Welcome. I'm sure you killed it.

Shea – Never thought I would see the day when big bro looked nervous.

With that text was a picture of my man buying flowers.

I couldn't help but giggle.

Me – He still looks sexy as sin.

Tank – Hey baby, know you killed it on your exam, let me know when you make it home, so I don't worry. Love you.

Me – Home. Miss you. I'm going to start getting ready. Love you more.

I couldn't wait.

Tonight, was our first official date.

Wasn't that weird? I've known him eight years shy of my entire life.

Daddy – Hey Cookie, I'm sure you aced your exam, drinking a beer to celebrate.

I chuckled. Of course, my dad would drink a beer for me to celebrate.

Me – *Sounds great, Dad.*

I just added the last curl to my hair, ran my fingers through the curls to loosen them up, sprayed texturizing spray, and hairspray then bent, shook my hair out, and then flipped back up.

Perfect.

Tank preferred my hair wild and loose.

After I had my makeup done and slipped into a dark green dress that played off my tan and the color of my hair, I pulled on a few pieces of jewelry.

Spritzed on some perfume and that was when I heard his bike.

Smiling wide, I went ahead and pulled on my black peep-toe heels, and then started to make my way from our bedroom.

And just like I had timed it perfectly, the moment I stepped through the hallway, he was walking in through the front door.

When Tank saw what I was wearing, he smiled, then said, “No fucking way.”

I knew what he was talking about, I melted.

He was saying there was no freaking way I loved him more.

And I figured that was the truth.

He told me about his childhood, and I had nothing like his.

Smiling, I walked up to him, and before I could make another move, his strong arm wrapped around my waist hauled me up his body, and asked, “Lipstick?”

“I can reapply it. Your kisses are worth it.” Then in the next breath, his lips claimed my own.

After he took a quick shower and changed into those dark-washed jeans of his, and a dark green button-up to match my

dress, he pulled on his kutte, and out the door we went.

And that was when he got a good look at the back of my dress.

His boots stopped.

His growl came littering through the night.

Turning my head to see his expression, I couldn't help but laugh my butt off.

"You are a fucking imp." He said as he continued to where I stood beside his truck.

And there on my seat were my flowers. Grabbing them, I smelled them and smiled wide.

Looking up at him, I asked, "Pulling out the stops?"

He winked at me, "You deserve this and more, Gray."

And with that said, he placed his hands on my waist, even though he had running boards put on his truck for me, he lifted me up ever so gently and placed me in my seat.

Once I was settled with my flowers in my lap, he started the truck up, I asked, "So, where are we going?"

"You remember that place we passed going to the beach? Your arms tightened on the way there when you saw it and, on the way back."

"You picked up on that huh?" I asked him, excitement feeling my every pore.

"I try to pick up on everything when it comes to you." I loved his smile; in case you didn't know.

Grinning, I looked down at his hand where it rested atop my thigh.

Forty-five minutes later Tank was parked, and then I got that look.

That look told me to sit right where I was and not to try anything. Normally, I would try to push his buttons, but we

were having a good night. I would wait until another time to escape and spike his temper.

Because I knew he would never hurt me. Not like that. Never like that.

He opened my door for me, I placed the flowers on the console and then I tagged his kutte, pulled him to me, and pressed my lips against his.

After he moaned, then pulled back, he shook his head and helped me down.

After my heels were settled and firm under my feet, he closed the door and then maneuvered me until I was walking in front of his body.

He grumbled at my back, “I’m going to end up killing someone tonight.”

“Why is that?” I asked with a wink.

“Like you don’t know,” He scoffed.

Opening the door for me, I winked at him and stepped through it, and then with his heat at my open back, we walked to the hostess stand.

The man behind the stand, dressed in a black button-down with his blonde hair slicked back, asked, “Name?”

The gruff man and my back said, “Calaveras.”

The man checked the screen, nodded, then said, “Follow me.”

After we were seated the man looked at Tank, then back to me, and winked.

I couldn’t help but chuckle while Tank shook his head. “Least I don’t have to worry about killing him.”

I started laughing, I couldn’t help it. Because right as he said that our waitress appeared at our table, and all through ordering our drinks and food, she looked at me the entire time.

And then, without a look at anything else, she scurried off as if the hounds of hell were nipping at her heels.

Oh, I had seen her looking at him appreciatively as we were led through the restaurant and to our table.

“Looks like you don’t have to worry about the host, and I don’t have to worry about the waitress.” To that he winked.

When the waitress came by with our drinks, I could have sworn her hand shook as she placed his beer and a glass of water down in front of him, followed by my glass of Dr. Pepper.

He lifted his beer, and I did the same with my soda, then he said, “Here’s to our first official date. When I was eight, I made promises to myself. There’s one I never told you about. I promised that when I found something real, something good, I was going to hold onto that with every piece of me. And I fully intend to do so. I’ll worship at your feet. And I can’t wait for you to have my last name one day and for you to be pregnant with my child in your belly. I love you Raine. With my whole heart. Here’s to us.”

Smiling, I said, “Here’s to us. And you need to promise me that I get to name our daughter. You can name our son.”

“Deal,” Just like that, we clinked our glasses.

We talked about when I would be starting my new job. At first, he wondered why I wasn’t looking elsewhere, but I simply smiled. And reminded him this place was my place.

“But you’re my home. You’re my safety. My hero. My best friend.” I told him with my eyes locked with his.

I saw his eyes soften and then he said, “I’m glad I can be all of that for you. But how do you do that?”

I’d just taken a sip of my drink and asked, “How do I do what?”

I loved when he made sure any time we talked, his eyes were locked with mine, “Take the words right out of my head and speak them first?”

“It’s called Soul Mate,” I said with humor in my voice.

He brought his beer to his lips, and winked, “And you just did it again.”

The waitress finally brought my food, and I was right. The name of the restaurant, Juliet’s, had been on par with the food.

I had just moaned when the spices hit my tongue from my garlic chicken and pasta when I saw Tank’s eyes were heated, and then I saw him reach his hand to his groin and do something.

Either it was the mood of the night, or it was seeing what I did to this big man of mine, I set my fork down on my plate, and then asked, “What are you wanting to do to me?”

He froze, took in my features, and then I just had to lick my bottom lip, and dang, seeing the fire in his eyes was hot enough to scorch me.

“Well, the first thing I plan to do is kiss your toes and suckle them. Then it’s to your arches, your ankles, your calves. I want to touch every part of you. Your fucking thighs. I want to bite them. Mark them. So, when you wear shorts, everyone will know you’re taken.” He took a breath and swallowed as if what he was saying was affecting him almost as much as me.

Because I wanted all of that. Every freaking part of it.

“Then, I plan to work my way up your body...”

I didn’t let him finish as I called out, “Waitress, check please.”

My breathing coming in pants.

He let out a chuckle and then when the waitress came in a flash with the check, he paid, and then he had my hand in his walking us double time to his truck.

He lifted me up, settled me, adjusted his cock, and then rounded the hood of the truck and climbed in.

Then with his hand on the back of my neck, he kissed me like he’s never kissed me before. Almost as if he couldn’t

believe I was his. As if this would be our very last kiss.

I felt every emotion in that one kiss.

Fire.

Heat.

Power.

Want.

Need.

Once he pulled back from my mouth, he nodded, started the truck, and then drove us in the direction of my house.

Twenty minutes later, I couldn't take it anymore.

No, not when he was biting his bottom lip and seeing one of his dimples.

Seeing his forearms flex as he drove with one hand on the steering wheel and the other on my thigh.

Almost squeezing it in tandem with my heartbeat.

I couldn't take it anymore.

Huskily, I demanded, "Tank, find somewhere, and pull over."

He shook his head instantly, "Gray, no way in hell am I taking you for our first time in a fucking truck."

"I don't give a fuck. I need you. I need you now." My body was burning. And I just said a curse word. But I didn't care.

At a red light, that didn't need to be there, he stared into my eyes, seeing how bad I needed him, and then said, "Gray..."

I groaned, "Carter. Please. I've been patient long enough. I fucking need you."

"I don't have any condoms, Gray. And you're not on birth control." But I didn't care about any of that. I could get on birth control. Later.

Throwing my hands up in the air, I snapped, “Unless you don’t plan to be with me in our front rocker watching our great grandkids running through a sprinkler as I do, then take us home. But if you see yourself there, then find a fucking spot, pull over, and take me. Make me yours, Carter. Please.”

And that was all it took for him to find a place.

My seat belt was undone.

My ass was hauled up and then settled on his lap.

His hard thick cock was pressed into me.

His shirt was ripped open.

Lips touched.

Tongues danced.

Necks were marked.

My dress was unzipped.

Nipples were suckled, caressed, and pinched.

His belt was loosened, his button undone, and his zipper was down.

Against my skin, he murmured, “I need to get you ready, baby.”

“You can do that later Tank,” I said as I trailed my hands down his chest, his abs that I wanted to lick and kiss, then down to the band of his boxers.

His skin rippled with goosebumps as my hands had trailed.

He was breathing hard now, trying to hold onto his will, “Raine, I’m big. And you’ve never had anything inside of you.”

That was when I grabbed his hand and placed it between my legs.

His eyes widened when he realized how wet I was. I knew he felt it through the black lace underwear I wore, breathlessly, I said, “I’m like that any time I see you.”

“I fucking love you, Raine Michelle Lowman.”

“I love you, Carter Alexander Calaveras.”

And just like that, all his thoughts on why we should wait until we got home, flew out the proverbial window.

He looked down at his cock, then at me, and nodded.

I loved that we could speak without actually talking.

As I pulled his massive cock I wanted to devour, he slipped my underwear to the side, and lifted me up, and then with his eyes locked with mine, I slowly and methodically started to lower myself on him.

I could see the nerve in his jaw throbbing, sweat beading on his forehead and his nostrils flaring.

And when I got half of him inside of me, his forearms were tense.

His thighs were rock hard.

Hunger was in his eyes.

And then as I moved down lower, I felt it, and then I did it. I lowered myself until every single amazing inch of him was inside me.

He moaned, “Fucking hell. Knew it would feel like what I think heaven would be inside of you. But I never imagined it would feel like this.”

After the pain ebbed away, I lifted myself off his cock, until I felt the tip, and then I lowered myself back on him.

Up and down, I moved, the top of the truck restricting how I needed it.

I didn’t know how I needed it. But I knew I needed more.

He let out a groan and then pushed up inside of me, his eyes widening when he did that.

Lowering my head so I could press a kiss to his lips, I whispered, “Fuck me.”

“Don’t want to hurt you, Gray.”

“You won’t.” He saw the sincerity in my eyes.

And then he moved.

And when I say he moved, I mean he fucking moved.

We were out of the truck, his cock still buried inside me, his pants at his ankles, my dress hiked up, and my back pressed to the cool metal of his truck.

And then he pounded inside of me, the truck rocking with his forceful thrusts.

“More. Yes. Give me more.” I moaned out as my breath became erratic.

“God. Fucking. Damnit.” He said each word with each thrust.

“Fucking right.” I moaned as he hit a certain spot inside of me.

“Knew it would be good with you. But had no fucking clue it would be like this.” He gritted his teeth.

Panting, he said breathlessly, “Need you to come, baby. I can’t hold it off anymore.”

“I need... more.” I told him.

His eyes were tense, I could see the control he had was fading. Fading fast.

He let go of my ass with one hand then did something with my clit that made stars dance in my eyes, and then I felt it. Fireworks. Stars. Galaxies.

“Thank fucking, God.” He said as he thrust once more inside of me and stilled.

And that was when I felt it. His hot cum shooting inside me.

“Well, I’m not a virgin anymore,” I whispered against his lips.

The gleam in his eyes almost brought me to tears with happiness.

“That’s good, Raine. Means I won’t have to hunt whoever was here before me and kill them.”

I laughed and then groaned when he pulled out of me and carefully sat me down on my feet.

Pulling my underwear off, as he pulled up his pants.

Then he pressed a kiss on the tip of my nose, opened the back door, grabbed a plastic bag, and handed it to me for my underwear and I had to giggle at the pack of wet wipes he produced.

And there, on the wipes was the evidence of what we had done and my virginity.

“If I was a sick son of a bitch, I’d have that wipe fucking framed and preserved for all of time.”

I looked at him like he had a screw loose and shook my head.

After we were back in the truck, I needed him close.

I couldn’t explain why.

I just needed him close.

Therefore, I didn’t hesitate to climb over the console and settle myself on his lap.

“Whatcha doing?” He asked me with humor in his eyes.

“Getting settled for the ride home,” I told him as if it was an everyday occurrence.

He chuckled, then shrugged, “Let’s hope we don’t get pulled over.”

“Fuck it. I’m comfortable.” I said as I nuzzled the side of his neck.

“Fuck it indeed.” And with that, he started the truck up.

And once we got home, he surprised me as he started up the bath water, added a bath bomb and flexed his arms and his back as he did so.

It took me a second to realize what he was doing and that was trying to drive me crazy and turn me on. Well, I can play fire with fire too. I shimmed out of my clothes and was giddy that he immediately stopped what he was doing and stared.

When I can make a grown-ass man stop and stare? Yeah, I am doing something right, thank you to the bag of Doritos I had for a snack before my exam today.

He shook his head and then held out his hand for me to get in the water.

Once I was settled inside the water, he leaned down and whispered, "Can't wait to make love to you again."

After my bath, which helped a lot, I threw myself at him.

And guess what, he didn't even bother with the condom this time.

And yes, he did what he promised at the restaurant.

There wasn't a spot on my body, or his for that matter that our lips and tongues didn't touch.

Was I paying for it the next day as I carefully lowered myself down on a bar stool while he made me breakfast? Yes, I was.

But did I care?

Heck no.

Did his smile and the shake of his head faze me when he sat a plate of spam, eggs, and fresh-cut strawberries in front of me?

Again, heck no.

Chapter 14

Tank

This woman, this woman undid me.

Her body was pressed against mine.

Her hair fanning out behind her, her head nestled on my chest, her leg thrown over my own.

I laid there, and realized I was finally content.

I had a safe place to sleep.

And a good roof over my head.

Amazing people around me.

A good woman.

A kick ass job.

And black trash bags were only used for trash.

Just as that thought crossed my mind, my phone rang.

To say I was surprised that it had taken this long to go off was an understatement.

But I didn't give a fuck.

It gave me time to make her mine. To make me hers.

To finally have every part of her.

Carefully, I maneuvered her off of me, using my pillow in place of my chest, and then I took the call.

“Calaveras.”

“Secure?” The voice on the other line asked.

I looked down at my woman and smiled. She was right. I should have trusted her from the beginning.

I nodded, “Affirmative.”

And that was when I got my orders.

After I showered, dressed, and packed what gear I would need that was all in her spare bedroom, I started the coffee for her.

Walking back into the bedroom, I sat down on the edge of the bed, then moved a strand of her soft hair behind her ear, then lowered my head and kissed her.

Her lips moved automatically.

Then when I pulled away, she tagged my hand and murmured with her eyes closed, "It's too early. Come back to bed and snuggle."

Laughing softly, I said, "You don't know how good that sounds, Gray. But I have to go. I'm needed."

Her eyes opened and then she took in what I had on. And like that, she was up.

And with a clear head, she nodded, "Do I have ten minutes to go with you?"

I nodded, "Yeah, get your sexy ass ready."

And when she emerged from the bedroom in a pair of leggings, and an old baggy sweatshirt of mine, her hair still in a disarray, she's never looked sexier.

At the airstrip, I wrapped her in my arms and kissed the hell out of her.

With that, I sat her back on her feet, and then with one final look at what I was fighting for, I turned on my boot and headed for the plane.

The screeching of tires had my head whipping to the side to see something I wasn't expecting.

Seeing Pete climb out of Shea's car, and her chasing after him.

Nor had I expected to see him haul her in his arms and kiss her hard.

Well hell, it looked like he and I had some shit to talk about.

Was I bothered by it?

That he was my brother from another mother and she, my sister?

Nope. I knew he was a good man. In fact, she would never find a better man than him.

After we talked on the long plane ride, I shot a message off to Raine and then got Shea's version of events.

Stepping off the plane, hating the heat, I cleared my head, put my game face on, and then got to work.

I should have known. Judging by the smile on her face, I should have fucking known.

My woman. All fucking mine.

There she stood in a pretty dark blue sundress, on the front porch with a key in her hand and a red piece of ribbon tied to it, "Welcome home, Carter."

"Are you trying to tell me something?" I asked as I sat my stuff down and then started up the stairs.

She winked at me, "Maybe. See, I think it's time."

My fingers were itching to bury my hands in her soft hair, but I held back, instead, I asked, "You think it's time for what exactly?"

"For you to move in here. Officially. You told me I was your home. And seeing as you're my home too, why don't we call this place with four walls our home."

"You mean I get to go to sleep every night with you by my side and wake up the same way?"

When she nodded, I didn't hesitate about what I wanted to do.

I buried my hands in her hair, hauled her close to me, and then kissed her.

When we first kissed, I thought I had tasted what heaven really tastes like, but that had nothing on her taste. On her essence.

Fucking hell, it was so goddamn intoxicating that my fucking head spun.

My welcome home dinner at the clubhouse they threw every time I came home had started without us.

Whoops.

Being away from her for three weeks wasn't something I wanted to repeat.

And that thought had my gears spinning in my head.

So that was why two weeks later, another mission was done, and since it was time to either reenlist or retire, I made my decision.

However, it was one of the worst firefights of my life that helped confirm my thoughts.

The firefight continued, and we were able to take down the fifty or so gunmen that surrounded the cartel's estate.

We breached the big house and the other smaller homes to make sure we cleared the area. Next, we made it to the big bedroom and found our target.

We were told to not let him leave the house. In other words, we weren't taking him with us.

I drew up my rifle, the look in his eyes told me he knew what was coming.

I didn't even blink when I fired the shot.

He had a hole between his eyes then he hit the ground.

One of the men checked his pulse and gave the cutthroat signal.

I radioed in, "Mission Complete."

We all left the house and headed to the rendezvous point then we went to the airstrip and flew to headquarters.

That was my confirmed one hundred and seventh kill. It never seemed to faze me anymore. I guess because of that and my love for Raine were my reasons for wanting to get out.

I went to my commanding officer and told him I was done. He didn't try to argue with me. He knew I was done. I served fifteen years, and I would've been a lifer; however, I now had a reason to want to be home.

After I got in my truck, the papers I needed settled in my passenger seat that was missing Raine.

Pulling my phone out, I checked to see if what I ordered was ready.

And seeing that it was, I pulled my truck out of the airstrip, and then headed in another direction.

Chapter 15

Raine

I was standing in front of the sink, rinsing out the dishes from lunch, music playing, my ass swaying when I felt it.

I jumped.

The feel of my home pressed into my back.

Squealing, with wet hands and all, I spun in his arms, and then wrapped him in a hug, and kissed him hard.

“Your home.” I breathed out.

“I’m home. I missed you. I love you.”

“I love you too. Oh, so very much.”

With another kiss that we both needed, he asked, “Go somewhere with me?”

I didn’t hesitate to nod as I looked down at the leggings I had on and the tank, then I looked up at him, “Do I need to change?”

He shook his head, smiled, giving me those dimples, I adored, “Nope. You’re perfect the way you are.”

Smiling, I pressed a kiss on his chest, dried off my hands, and then slipped my feet into some booties, and tagged a lightweight jacket.

He held my hand out the door after he locked it, and he held my hand all the way to the truck, only letting it go to round the truck and climb in, and then yes, he tagged my hand again.

I didn’t bother asking him where we were going.

It didn’t matter because I was with him.

Ten minutes later, I had to frown.

What were we doing at the clubhouse?

When I looked over at him to ask him, the butthead was already out of the truck and making his way over to me.

After he opened my door and helped me out, he pressed a finger to my lips, silently telling me to keep quiet and not to ask questions.

I was even more dumbfounded when he led me to the garage.

He stepped over to Gravel and then said something to him that I couldn't hear.

I stood there, and watched as Gravel smiled, nodded, moved the bike, and then walked out of the garage.

Only then did Tank walk back to where I stood.

His gaze locked with mine and then he said, "Thunder booms and it scares the fuck out of me. Lightning strikes and it feels as though bombs are exploding. But your touch alone gets me through it. Calms me. Centers me. No matter the miles we're apart. The hours. The days. I'm never too far from you."

Tears gathered in my eyes as he spoke those words to me.

And when he got down on one knee, it felt as though my chest was about to explode.

"Raine, you're my heart. You're everything to me. I told you about the promises I made when I was eight. And I fully intend to keep them. And this is the second to last one. Keeping my happiness secure. And the last one is to make you happy. It's what I live for. So, will you do the same in return? Keep me happy. Marry me, Gray. Give me the thing I need most in life."

And then he opened that black box.

I couldn't even see it because my tears were blurring my vision.

But I didn't care. He could use a twist tie as an engagement ring, and my answer would never change.

Softly, my throat closing, I whispered, “Yes.”

The ring was on my finger, his arms were around me, spinning me with our lips connected.

I hadn't realized that everyone was here.

Everyone that was important to us.

They all clapped. Whooped. Hollered.

Lena called out, “Matron of Honor right here. Cassidee is a bridesmaid, as well as Shea. And ladies when I get married it'll be the same. Only Raine will be my maid of honor since she'll be married.”

After everyone gave their congratulations, we were inside and eating dinner.

I was on his lap when I finally had the time to take in my ring.

My breath hitched in my chest.

It was stunning.

“Is it...”

“Yeah, it's one of those radiant diamonds you love so much.” He smiled.

It really was worth the love I gave to it.

The diamond was cut in an oval and had a halo of smaller diamonds surrounding it. Sat on a white gold band.

It made my fingers look even tinier than they really were.

Looking at his stunning melted chocolate eyes, I asked, “What kind of statement are you trying to make with this rock?”

“That you're taken. And I want whoever thinks it's a good idea to approach you, to not do it.”

Laughing, I kissed him and then started back to eating.

I also found out that he was done. That he had retired. I knew he had made that decision because of me, and after

repeating that he was happy to never have a reason to be away from me, I gave up.

To say I was happy was an understatement.

That night, in bed, after we made love, he whispered two words into the back of my neck, "I'm sorry."

I tried to turn in his arms, the keyword in that had been tried.

Those strong arms of his holding me in place, whispering into the darkness of our bedroom I asked, "Why are you sorry?"

"For that fucking night. Made a lot of bad decisions, Gray. A lot of them, kept me up at night, but there's only one night that I fucking regret with everything in me."

"What night are you talking about?" I asked him as sleep started to claim me.

He inhaled a breath, nuzzled the back of my neck, "I don't like bringing anything but the two of us in our bed..." he was silent for a beat, and then in a dead whisper, I heard, "That night I kissed, Summer."

"Honey, that night is in the past. Why are you bringing it up?" I asked him after a yawn.

"I can't forgive myself for doing it." I knew he still felt guilt over that, and I hated that he did.

Snuggling deeper into his body, I said, "But we weren't together then."

And at his next words, I was suddenly awake and felt tears forming, "No. But you owned my heart, Gray. Owned every part of me."

Tears scalded my cheeks as I turned into him and showed him that he too owned every part of me.

Thoroughly.

Needless to say, he forgot about his anger at himself.

I made sure of it.

And since he was out, he was able to be in the crowd when I accepted my diploma.

I had wondered who would cheer the loudest.

My dad or Tank.

But I should have known.

The two idiots battled to be loudest.

And when I winked at Tank.

He won.

Of course, he did.

Walking into our house, I was so excited to share the news that I had gotten this very morning with Tank.

Damn, but I love that man.

And I loved him even more with every second I breathe.

The gift bag in my hand felt as though it was on fire.

But I wanted this to be perfect.

I've been patient.

He's been patient.

But I was done with being patient.

So done with it point of fact that the moment I stepped through the archway that led to the living room I called out, "Tank."

Normally, I wouldn't have raised my voice that loud. I know how he can get. Because every time there's a sound that is extremely loud, he jumps.

So, therefore, I have tried my best to keep my voice down, to not alarm him or scare him.

"Guest bedroom, Gray." He called out.

Smiling when I heard his voice, I skipped down the hallway, smiling even wider at the pictures we had lining the walls.

And yes, every single picture was there ever since I was eight and he was nineteen.

Rounding the doorway, I made sure I had the bag concealed behind my back, and just like lightning struck the house, my smile vanished.

My body which was on a high adrenaline rush crashed.

All because he was going over his gear, and then packing it into his duffle or in his rucksack.

Not realizing the tone, nor realizing how raspy my voice sounded, with slumped shoulders, I asked, “When do you leave, and where are you going?”

“Can’t tell you were, babe. But I need to report to the hangar at zero three hundred hours.”

Sighing, I placed the bag underneath the bed.

Was I an idiot to not tell him I was pregnant?

Yes. I was.

But did I want his mind on me and not where he was and what he needed to do, no.

Because all too easily I learned that if your mind wasn’t right. If it was focused on something back home, then you risked getting shot at. The kind of shot at that there’s no coming back from.

What I did know was that he had a good reason for going back.

He had to have.

Because he promised to never break another one to me if he could help it.

It’s been three months since Tank left for places unknown.

These three months have been difficult to say the least.

In between working my new job as an RN in the NICU at Carolina Regional and being worried about him, as well as hiding something from everyone was taking its toll on me.

Let's just say it's been a hard three months.

I'm lucky if I hear from Tank at least once a week and that's usually on Wednesdays. It's been two weeks since I last talked to him.

When my day gets bad, I'll scroll through his voicemails and listen to them just so I can hear his voice. He makes everything better.

I had just left the supermarket for a weekly grocery run when suddenly; I began having a dull ache in my lower stomach. It felt like cramps, but it was probably just constipation from all the beans I have been craving lately.

It lasted for about two minutes and then I was good.

Sadly, to say it only continued and got worse during the rest of my day, I took two Tylenol to see if that would ease it off. It seemed to help a little bit.

Thinking it was just an upset stomach, I decided I needed some Pepto.

But knowing we didn't have any here and knowing that I really shouldn't chance driving right now, I pulled up Lena's contact.

Me – *Can you do me a solid?*

Lena – *Sure Pea what's up?*

Me – *Any way you can run me some Pepto?*

Lena – *You gassing up the place Pea?*

Me – *Ha... Ha... Ha*

Lena – *Well I've been telling u that u needed to lay off dem beans. LOL*

Me – *Smartass, thanks.*

Lena – *Yo welcomes. OMW*

I had a stinking suspicion that because the cramps have been an all-day thing that it wasn't the beans or constipation causing this. Just to be safe and sure I wanted to try the Pepto.

I was resting on the couch, the Tylenol not even touching it when Lena, without knocking mind you because she knew Tank wasn't here, showed up.

If I wasn't hurting so bad, I would have laughed at what she had around the bottle.

A purple bow, you know the kind they put on presents.

She was a cow like that.

She didn't even try to fight off the laughter and the wiggling of her brows as I growled, took off the bow, threw it at her, and drank some of the pink liquid.

After I swallowed down another mouthful, I told her, "Oh you're so funny you smartass."

Fingers crossed this would work, I told her thank you.

And then she left, but not before saying, "Tootles. Love you."

To which I replied that I loved her too. And I did. She was my other best friend. I loved her like a hormonal woman loves chocolate.

She had to get back home to take the lasagna out of the oven she was making for dinner.

Since the pain had slowed, I thanked my lucky stars, got up, and headed for bed.

And I didn't stop the tears when I realized his scent was gone from his pillow.

I needed him here.

I hated sleeping in our bed without him.

He still hasn't told me why he had to leave, and I figured that was because the emails weren't secure enough for him to tell me. No, he would do that face-to-face.

Thankfully, two hours later, I was able to fall asleep.

I must have been asleep for a few hours, yet I wasn't sure what had awakened me.

Rolling to my side, I turned on the switch for my lamp.

Taking in the bedroom, and the rooms beyond when I didn't hear anything, I sighed.

Only that was when what had woke me up, made itself known.

Tears filled my vision, sharp pains in my stomach, I suddenly became very dizzy.

It wasn't until I rolled back over, trying to escape the pain, that I felt something.

It was wet and warm and had a really weird smell. I lifted up the sheets tentatively and what lay there shocked me. I grabbed my phone and called my father.

"Hey Cookie, everything okay?" Sleep was in his voice.

"Daddy," I yelled in the phone. Oh god I hope I'm wrong.

He was awake instantly upon hearing my panic, "Cookie, what's wrong?"

"I need you. Now." I was shaking so bad.

He hung up after promising he would be right here.

Then another pain wracked my body.

After I tried to breathe through it but was failing, I heard feet pounding on the floors and someone headed to my room.

When he reached the doorway, his face turned white as a sheet because I had uncovered myself.

"Darlin', what's wrong? What happened?" He came closer and looked at the blood that was staining my sheets.

"Daddy, I need to go to the hospital. Please don't freak out." I said as tears trailed down my cheeks from the pain, I was in.

All the blood and the cramps from yesterday told me exactly what was wrong with me.

“Darlin’ you need to tell me, now.” He was raising his voice; he only did that when he was pissed or scared. I knew it to be the latter.

“I’m pregnant or well I was. I was waiting to tell Tank first when I saw him but well, that’s not going to happen.”

“Oh no. Okay. We got this. Let’s get you to the hospital.” And my father turned into a pillar of support instantly.

He picked me up and grabbed my blanket and wrapped it around me then carried me out to his truck and put me in the passenger side.

“Do you want me to call anyone?” He asked after he started the truck up and peeled out of my driveway.

“No. No one else knows. I didn’t want anyone to know until I told him.” The pain was unbearable.

His eyes softened and then he nodded, “Okay, Cookie.”

Dad had his foot on the gas pedal the whole way to Carolina Regional.

What should’ve been a twenty-minute ride ended up being eleven minutes.

Thankfully we didn’t see any cops on the way.

When we got to the hospital, dad parked in front of the emergency doors and ran inside to get some help.

While he was gone, I started fading in and out of consciousness.

I barely noticed the door being open, nor did I notice being lifted and placed on a gurney. The questions then started but only one of them registered to me.

That was when I felt a warm soft hand on my face, “Honey, my name is Doctor Taylor. Can you tell me what’s going on?”

“Yes, I’m seventeen weeks pregnant. I woke up to sharp pains and a lot of blood” I didn’t even realize that my voice had slurred.

And then just like that, I was out.

Storm

I can’t remember a time I’ve been this scared.

When I woke up to the sound of my phone ringing, I had been pissed the fuck off.

I haven’t been sleeping that well because I was worried about the club and the fact that Tank had to leave when he promised my daughter he wasn’t going anywhere ever again. And I was worrying about Raine.

So, when I saw who was calling me through bleary eyes, I answered it with a small smile on my face.

However, that smile dropped when she told me she needed me, and I could hear the fear in her voice. My spine had shot ramrod straight.

I hadn’t hesitated on getting to her.

I knew that I broke so many laws on my way.

My mind had been preparing me for something bad. And my hand itched to have my gun at the ready and decimate anything that sought to do her harm.

But nothing could have prepared me for what I saw when I got to their bedroom.

And then I broke even more laws on our way to the hospital.

Did I give a fuck?

No. No, I sure as hell didn’t.

When I heard the words, *miscarriage probably* and then I heard, *she’s too far along, she will have to go through with delivery*, my whole world tilted on its axis.

I've been in the waiting room for going on three hours now.

Finally, the family of Raine Lowman was called to the desk.

I went up there and was shown to a smaller waiting room.

I was in there for about five minutes which was five minutes too long when a woman walked in.

Pretty little thing too, she had a wedding ring on. Damn.

But I shook my head because I felt as if I was cheating.

Nope. Don't go there. Don't worry about it right now.

Your daughter needs you.

"Mr. Lowman?" she asked.

"That's me. How is she?" My hands were sweaty.

"Well, I'm sure by now you must know about the pregnancy." Fucking really? She was pretty but she had a badass attitude. And not in a good way either. She went from pretty to somewhat pretty.

I shook my head. "Yeah. I found out tonight. Don't think bad about her Doc," I could see the sneer forming on her face, she went from somewhat pretty to fucking ugly. "She was waiting to tell her fiancée when she saw him again."

The woman looked at my kutte and then glared, "Oh, I see, is he in prison or something? Is that why he isn't here?"

Anger filled my every pore at her words, and then I didn't even try to curb my language. Fuck that shit. "Look here bitch. Just because I'm in an MC doesn't give you the right to judge my daughter and look at her like she's a piece of trash. For your fucking information my future son-in-law and a brother in my MC is in the Military, a certain division that I can't speak about. And even if I could, I wouldn't talk about it with the likes of you. I'm sure he's going to appreciate you being snobby and rude when he gets here from his latest mission. Now, if you don't mind, I'd appreciate you telling me how my

daughter is and then get your nasty ass self out of my face. I'll be getting her another doctor."

"Mr... Mr. Lowman, that wasn't my intention at all. I just wanted to make sure that the people who needed to be here were here." She tried to hide her attitude. And failed.

"Yeah, no you didn't. And you're fucking lucky I'm dog tired and I'm worried about my daughter. The last person that disrespected her ended up breathing through a fucking tube. Now, how's my daughter?"

"She's going to be fine. Except, I'm sorry. But she lost the baby. I know this isn't the news anyone wants to hear, but the doctors didn't see anything that would prevent her from getting pregnant again if that's any consolation. We have people she can talk to if she wishes."

"When can I see her?" I was getting impatient with this bitch.

"In about an hour or so, someone will come and get you when she is in her room and out of recovery."

I didn't say anything else to her. I got up and walked out. I had to go get a smoke.

Tagging my phone, knowing that Raine would need her.

I called Lena, and when she answered, I told her what happened.

She was at the hospital in under fifteen minutes.

And what killed me was that she wouldn't look me in the eye.

What I didn't realize, instead of trying her hand and talking to me about her feelings, she decided to use everything she could and trash those feelings.

I would soon realize that I didn't like that. Not one motherfucking bit.

But I couldn't think about that now. No, I had a fucking phone call to make.

And hope like hell he's able to get here.

Chapter 16

Tank

Seeing Frog in the infirmary with having a cast on his entire arm hit me hard.

What the fuck would cause him to do something so monumentally stupid?

Getting captured. What the fuck?

In fact, I was about to open my mouth to ask him when my phone rang.

Stepping out of his room to see the rest of the team waiting on him to be released, I checked the caller and then frowned.

Quickly, I calculated the time difference and had to frown. It was two in the morning there.

So why the fuck would Storm be calling me?

Without another thought except that he was calling to tell me that something was wrong with Raine, I accepted the call and put it to my ear.

“Pres?”

“Brother. You need to get home now. Get to Carolina Regional as fast as you can. She’s okay. But she’s going to need you.”

At his words about the hospital, I spun on my boot and hurriedly went to talk to the man in charge.

“What is it?” I asked him.

“Better if she tells you, brother. But get here. Yeah? I’m here, and Lena is here. But she’s going to need you.”

Cursing a streak, a mile long, when my team saw my face which I was sure held nothing but pure terror, and heard my voice, they all came to attention.

And like that, thirteen hours later, my team with me, I climbed into Clip’s SUV as the rest of my team climbed into

my brother's vehicles, and then in a convoy, we drove like a bat out of hell to the hospital.

When we made it to the hospital, Clip's SUV didn't even come to a full stop as I was out of it and racing inside.

Dirt. Sand. Mud. Blood. You name it, it was on my uniform.

Seeing Storm, Lena, Red, Gravel, Porter, Shea, Hippie, Ripper, Cason, Cassidee, Stella, and some of the nurses that work with Raine sitting in chairs, I made a beeline for the group.

My team filed in behind me, reaching Storm, I asked, "Where is she?"

"They had to run a few tests. And she told me I could tell you. She doesn't think she can. Sit down, son, you're going to need it." Storm told me, and those words sent a chill through my body I'd never felt before.

But I wasn't sitting down. Been sitting down for the past thirteen hours and some odd minutes it took to get here.

He saw the look of determination on my face, nodded and then said, "She was going to tell you on the day you left. When she got home you were packing and in a hurry. She didn't want you to do whatever it was you needed to while worrying about her."

I nodded, "Okay."

He swallowed, tears in the old man's eyes, "She was coming to tell you she was pregnant."

And those words, the word *was*, catapulted my heart to beating triple.

"Was?" I asked harshly.

Storm shook his head, "She called me last night. She had a miscarriage. They had to perform a c-section because she was unconscious and couldn't deliver the baby's body."

Almost as if I didn't understand it, my legs came out from underneath me, and then I would have fallen on my ass if whoever was all behind me, hadn't reacted quickly to grab my body.

I was led to a chair and then replayed his words over and over in my head.

Roughly, I whispered, "No. Don't you dare tell me that. Don't you dare tell me that I chose a mission over her. Don't."

"That's exactly what you fucking did. You promised her, Tank. You fucking promised her that you were done. That you were ready to give her your all. And with one phone call, you broke that promise."

Fucking hell.

"She's okay, right? She's going to be, okay?" I asked Storm.

Storm nodded, "Yeah brother. I've seen her. She's sad. Tired. Worried about you. But she's going to be just fine."

"When can I see her?" I asked him.

"The nurse is going to come get us when they're done." Storm was tired, unkempt. No doubt he hadn't rested at all.

I nodded.

Putting my head in my hands, I inhaled deeply. I would've cried for our lost baby if I didn't need to be strong for Raine. I haven't talked to her in two weeks.

Two fucking weeks.

Lifting my head, I locked eyes with my brothers, the women, and my team.

But it was the guilt in Frog's eyes that told me how he felt about this.

And that look right there had me wondering.

"So... how did you get captured?"

I could hear the guilt in his eyes, but I needed to know, “It was fucking stupid. So fucking stupid.”

And that was when he told me he’d fallen in love with a woman.

A certain woman that was the daughter of a target they were going after.

And when everything came to light, she had been working with the mole. She’d been in on it. Trying to take out the team before they could get to their target.

In fact, she was one of the people that had taken a steel pipe and slammed it down on his arm.

I sat there. Tried to rein in my temper. Fucking tried to rein that beast in.

But...

Fuck it.

I had my hand on his throat, hauling him up and slamming him into the wall within my next breath.

“Chief?”

“What the fuck Tank?”

“Oh shit.”

“What the hell?”

I heard coming at me from all sides, but I didn’t lose my concentration, hell fucking no.

And I missed the nurse letting us know she was back in her room. I had missed seeing Strom and Lena leave, but none of that registered into my brain through my furry.

“You mean to tell me, getting your dick wet was more important than my woman coming to tell me she was pregnant the very fucking day you were captured? You mean to tell me that getting your dick wet was even more important than me being here with my woman. With my woman mind you, that

suffered a fucking miscarriage without me by her side through it all?" I roared at him.

He didn't say a word as he stared into my eyes, letting me see that he felt fucking horrible in the hand he played in all of this.

I shook my head, then looked him square in the eyes, and whispered, "If she never wants my touch again, I'll beat the living hell out of you. I'll make the job they did on you look like child's play. If she leaves me because of this, because you already know I was on thin fucking ice, I'll kill you."

"Tank, brother, that woman loves you," Ripper told me from my side.

"I crave her fucking touch. And I'd never leave her. That's how buried deep inside of me she is." I said as my heart felt as though it was ripping in two.

I let go of Frog, took a step back, and promptly fell on my ass, luckily there was an open chair behind me.

Red knew I'd fucked up one too many times when he said, "But does she know that?"

Dropping my head in my hands, my breathing erratic. Breathe in. Breathe out. Again. Again.

"Do you know how many times she said she loved me through the years? And I never said it back? Not fucking once. And the stupid answer, I love you didn't fucking cover the way I feel about her. I wracked my brain multiple times a day on how to accurately tell her how much I love her. To tell her she's the air I need to breathe. To tell her, she's the calm in my storm. She's the color to my fucking world. Without her... fuck... I can't even imagine it."

"That answer just saved your ass." Looking over my shoulder at Storm, I grunted.

I nodded, then answered, "I would have handed you my gun to do the job."

“And that answer just saved your ass too. She’s asking for you.” Shea said as she came up behind Storm.

Without conscious thought, I was up and out of my chair and striding to her room which Storm had told me which room number as I’d passed him.

And when I made it to her room, I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I’d been holding.

I noticed.

Fuck, did I notice.

I knew I had fucked up.

I had fucked up huge.

But knowing that there was still a chance that she would forgive me, I was grabbing a hold of that chance with everything in me.

Because she showed me a sign.

My ring still adorned her finger.

I knew that if I was going to be living in hell without her, then she wouldn’t still be wearing my ring.

Walking into her room, the moment Lena spotted me, she rose from her chair and then said, “I’ll give you guys some alone time.”

And as she passed me, her little elbow slammed into my ribs.

Letting out a grunt, I locked my gaze with Raine’s tear filled eyes.

I stood there as I let the vision of her soothe the ache inside my heart for knowing that I had chosen someone else over her.

When she never would have done that.

Correction she might have, but she would have found out what happened and then if she didn’t like that answer she would’ve come directly to me. Of that, I had no doubt.

“Are you going to give me my hug and a good fucking explanation? Or do you want your ring back, the kutte off your body, and then start over somewhere else?” She asked, anger, hurt, pain, betrayal, laced every word.

With those words, and not liking them one damn bit, I walked further into her room until I was at her side, and then I carefully wrapped her in my arms.

And there, against my neck, she let the tears fall.

And for the first time in a long ass time, I did the same.

“Why?” She asked as tears still trailed down both of our cheeks.

Pulling away from her so she could see in my eyes, I wiped my tears away, and then wiped hers away and pressed a tentative kiss on her brow.

Then, I opened my mouth and told her exactly why, “One of my team members was captured, baby. You don’t know what they will do to Americans in war.”

“What took so long?” my home whispered with her eyes closed.

And me, not caring if anyone heard me, I said, “Every time we got close to where they were holding him, they moved him. After two months we found a mole within the organization. He’s been handled.”

She took a deep breath, and asked, “And your team member?”

“He’s okay. Got a messed-up arm but he’s still standing. Matter of fact he and the rest of my team came with me.”

She nodded, “I’m glad he’s okay. But when he gets better, he better prepare himself for me to give him a good kick in the balls.”

I nodded. But needed her to understand something, “If I would have ignored that call, he would have died there. Half the team was in another country. And without me, we would

have had no chance in getting him out without us losing our lives right along with him. And if I would have left him to his fate, then I wouldn't be the man that you fell in love with."

Tears were in her eyes at my words.

I saw it.

Her gray eyes shimmered with tears.

The indecision in those deep orbs.

"I'm sorry I hurt you, baby. So, fucking sorry. But I couldn't let him become a POW. I just fucking couldn't."

She closed her eyes then said, "I'm a freaking fool. One more chance Carter. One. You ever abandon me again and that's it. I'll walk away and forget we ever existed."

"I promise Raine. Fucking promise, you." I said as I pressed a kiss on her forehead, letting my lips linger there, needing her touch to soothe the guilt that was wracking my body.

I heard Storm say from the doorway, "Damn girl. You weren't supposed to forgive him."

I looked over my shoulder, and said, "I'll give you me in the ring, and I won't fight back."

My spitfire's body tightened when she said, "Like hell, you will."

Her father grinned. "Two weeks. I'll meet you there."

Knowing what I needed and what she needed, I nodded at the space in the bed.

She smiled and then held out her hands, silently asking for my help in moving her.

Carefully, I helped her shift in the bed and then I laid down beside her, gathered her in my arms, and then softly, I whispered into her hair, "Tell me what you need baby."

I heard her swallow and then she said, "Not to push me for another baby. I can't go through that again."

“Then we will remember our baby. I bet he or she had your eyes.” I told her.

That was when she whispered, “Peanut.”

Softly, I asked, “What?”

“I was calling him or her, Peanut.” I smiled at that; it was fitting.

“Peanut. Works for me, baby. And you got it.” And with that, my tired woman fell asleep against my chest.

Ten minutes after that, Storm walked in and stretched his legs out once he settled on the couch, followed by Lena, and they both fell asleep.

And stationed at the doorway were members of my team, protecting us.

Giving them a grateful nod and seeing Frog glance at Raine and then at me, he slammed his fist over his heart and promised without words, he would make this right.

Only then did I let sleep pull me under.

One more day and she was home, and I deleted the number that always called me from my phone.

My team had gone to the higher-ups and had someone that was almost as good as I, replaced me.

Thank God.

Two weeks later as promised, I met Storm in the ring.

I let him get in three hits. For the three months, I was away from her, and then I didn't hold back.

And Raine, well, she hadn't appreciated it at all.

In fact, she left the clubhouse and locked the deadbolt to the house that I didn't have a fucking key to.

So, I slept on the front porch.

Thankfully, it was a warm night and not fucking cold as shit.

And when I opened my eyes the next morning and discovered the blanket that was thrown over me, I couldn't help but chuckle.

Chapter 17

Raine

Wanting to believe him with every fiber of my being, I held onto that line to my heart that was connected to his with a tight grasp. Needing to trust him fully.

And judging by the text I got after I turned my phone off silent as I sat down with my lunch in the cafeteria, I knew, I knew that he was trying. Well, it was the first try really, he had many more to go.

I smiled at the text that was on my screen, I couldn't help it. Damn him.

Yes, he had gotten out, but he had also been asked to train someone new.

Someone that had reminded him of himself.

And with my persuasion, he went. Reluctantly, but he went.

I was still upset about everything that had happened.

But I couldn't be too angry with him.

I understood why he left.

Even though it hurt at the time.

But we both vowed we would never forget about our peanut, and every day we visited where our little boy was buried. Yes, our little boy. I had broken down the following morning when Tank got home and told him about his son.

Tank – *Made it here. Missing you.*

Me – *I'm glad you made it there. But I do wish you were here. Please stay safe. I'll see you when you get home.*

There. Simple. Sweet. But also protecting my heart.

And he knew me, inside and out, because of all my barriers, he had knocked them all down without even trying.

But for me, I felt as though some days, I didn't even know him. Sometimes, I thought I saw the heart of him. However, on other days, I knew that I didn't. Not by a long shot.

And he proved that with his next text.

Tank – *Supposed to be getting some shuteye. Lol. Can't help but text you back. Which by the way, I will be doing.*

Me – *Goober. You need your sleep. You need to be ready for whatever comes your way.*

Tank – *What I need to know is what I can do to get you no longer mad at me. And to get back to where we were headed before I left on that mission.*

Me – *That's the thing. I shouldn't have to tell you. You should be willing to do anything, Tank.*

Tank – *I know. Can't kill a guy for asking. Right?*

Tank – *But seriously, I promise you, I'm going to bust my ass to get us there. Speaking of which you should be receiving something soon. Now, I'm getting some sleep. You'll be in my dreams like you always are.*

Before I could reply, Stella came into the cafeteria with her own lunch, and seeing the smile on my face, she plunked her lunchbox down on the table and asked, "Okay, so... spill it. What's Tank done now?"

Laughing, I placed my phone down beside me and then told her all about Tank and me. Starting with how we met when I was a little girl, and he was a teen. Then ending with how he's been treating me, and what all took place yesterday at my house.

"Make him grovel for it. Even though the two of you have history. Don't you dare give in." Stella said, her words echoing through my mind for the rest of my shift.

I had just finished the chart of my last patient when from the corner of my eye, I saw a man in a dark red shirt, and black pants walk into the unit with a large bouquet of flowers.

And that single sight had every woman that was free rushing forward to see who they were for.

“Can we help you?” And bless the man’s heart, he looked worried.

Because six women had rushed him.

Laughing softly, I shut down the chart I was working on and then made my way over to them.

“Yes, I’m looking for the future, Mrs. Calaveras.”

And at his words, I shook my head, that man.

“That would be me,” I called out.

He looked at me, stepped forward, and then held out a tablet and said, “Please sign for these. Mr. Calaveras was quite adamant that we make sure they go to you and to no one else.”

I couldn’t help the soft laughter that escaped my lips, of course, he did.

After I signed the screen, I wondered when they would make signatures on screens look more legible when they always looked like a three old signed something and not a twenty or over-something person.

Taking the large bouquet of wildflowers, I plucked out the card, and it read, *Made you many promises. I know I broke a few, but no more. No one will ever love you like I can. I mean every word. You’re my home. Happy Anniversary, Gray.*

It took me a moment to understand the Happy Anniversary bit, but then, a feeling of warmth, safety, and love-filled me to my core.

It’s been twelve years since the first day I met him.

With my flowers in my arm, I clocked out, said see you later to the ladies, and then headed to the locker to get my

stuff.

We had a busy day today which helped the day go by faster, but I was ready to get home, kick my feet up and watch the new episode of *Yellowstone*. Thankfully, I didn't need to pause the screen when Rip appeared. I had my own Rip. But he was nice to look at.

Taking a picture of the flowers I sent it to Lena and then waited for a beat and called her, "Bitch, who are those from?"

With a smile on my face, I said, "Tank."

"Wow. Hell. Guess that boy took your words to heart. About damn time. You make him sweat, Raine. No matter what." She said in all seriousness, but I knew with what I was about to tell her, she would be changing her tune.

"Kind of hard to do that with what was written on the card," I told her.

She was silent for a beat and knowing her like I do, she wouldn't hesitate to ask, "Tell me already. Damn you."

Chuckling, I read the card to her.

"Happy Anniversary? That doesn't sound right." And she would be correct if she didn't know our full story.

"It does if you think about today's date and the first time, we met each other." I said, unable to keep the smile from my face.

"Damn. The man is good. Yeah, I get it. It would be hard to do that too. You didn't say a word about the date, did you?"

I shook my head even though she couldn't see me, "Nope. I sure as heck didn't."

That night after I watched my show and ate a dinner of pot roast, mashed potatoes, and green beans, I crawled into bed, using his pillow, and then checked the time.

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

Then a blinding smile lit up on my face, my phone rang. Right on time.

Smiling, I answered the phone, “Hey, honey.”

“Hey, baby. I fucking miss you. Not sure how much longer I can do this.” I could hear the tension in his tone.

That made my brow wrinkled, “What do you mean?”

He sighed, “The guy is good. Don’t get me wrong. But he needs a lot more training. It’s almost as if he was asleep during his training. He doesn’t know a damn thing.”

“I’m sorry, honey. Tell whomever you need and then get your ass back home.” I told him because I dang sure missed him too.

“I’m working on it. I got an appointment with my evidence for tomorrow.” He said with a tired voice, and I knew he was close to knocking out.

But first, I had to know, “So, why the wording on the card?”

“Did you understand it?” He asked with a smile in his voice.

“Yes. But I still want to know.” I smiled right back, and with what he said next... I knew I couldn’t hold on to my animosity.

“Because that was the day my life actually started.”

Freaking heck but I missed him. I couldn’t stay mad at him. I just couldn’t.

Even more so proven that I couldn’t stay mad at him, he asked me the question we had started asking each other ever since that fateful day, “What are three things you’re thankful for?”

Smiling, I answered him, “You. My family. And red velvet cake pops.”

He chuckled, “So do I need to have a bunch sent to you?”

“That would be swell,” I said.

Then I asked him, “What are three things you are thankful for?”

“You. You. Umm, yeah, and you.” He said.

I couldn’t help but giggle, “Tank, be serious.”

“Damn, but I love that sound. Okay, seriously. I’m thankful I have hearing so I can hear you say you love me, to hear your giggles that light up my day, to hear you sigh, your moan, the small sounds you make when you come, and your growl. I’m thankful to have my sight because living an existence and never knowing what actual beauty looks like would kill me. And finally, I’m thankful you love me.”

“That’s not fair,” I said as I sniffed and pouted that he wasn’t here, which I didn’t like, even though I had been the one that pushed him to go.

“I told you. No one could ever love you as I love you.”

And the next morning when I woke up with our call still connected, I heard, “Good Morning, Beautiful.”

And then I got that phone call.

Seeing Tank stepping off that plane, I smiled wide and then ran to him.

His smile matched my own and then I was up in his arms, my legs wrapped around his waist, my lips on his.

Tongues circling.

Lips bitten.

All of it dancing to our own rhythm that only the two of us could hear.

We didn’t make it home, no, we hadn’t been able to wait that long.

We ended up in his room at the clubhouse.

And emerged with flushed cheeks and everyone laughing their asses off while my dad said, “I could have gone the rest of my fucking life without hearing that shit.”

Chapter 18

Raine

I was happy. Oh, so happy.

Today was the day.

The day I had been waiting for my entire life.

I was marrying my best friend.

The one person that knew everything about me.

My hopes.

My dreams.

My fears.

My wants.

My desires.

Everything about me.

Opening my eyes, I glanced at the clock and smiled.

Seven hours from now, I was walking down the aisle.

Lena grumbled beside me, holding her hand to her head, “I shouldn’t have drank so much last night.

I couldn’t help but laugh, and when she opened one eye, her body jerked.

And then almost as if it were in a movie, she bolted up out of mine and Tank’s bed.

She looked around the room, and then at me, “Umm, apparently, I can’t remember half of the night. How the hell did we get here?”

I couldn’t help but laugh my butt off.

“Well, it just so happened that someone had to carry you to the truck. And then carry you into my house, and then put you

to bed. And you were put in our bed because we didn't think you would make it to the bathroom on your own if you needed to puke."

When she bit her lip, and asked, "Who was it?"

I pretended to play with her, and then said, nonchalantly, "Oh, just the man you were thinking about all night."

She buried her head in her hands and groaned, "It's too early for games, Raine. Tell me. Please. Please tell me I didn't make a fool of myself in front of him."

I knew who she was talking about.

So, I said, "You didn't. He said you were adorable and wished you would lower your defenses around him more."

"Really? He... he said that?" It took everything in me to not start laughing again. I didn't know why she was fighting the chemistry between the two of them.

I got out of bed, walked to the bathroom, stepped through the doorway, and then said, "Nope. He just said you were weird, and he didn't understand you."

And with that, I slammed the door, locked it, and then laughed when something was thrown at the door.

After my shower, I pulled on something that would be easy to take off and not mess up my hair and make-up.

We had four hours to get ready. Nails. Hair. And then a brunch with the women of Wrath MC.

Tank and my father had a no holds barred argument on who was paying for what.

Tank had almost won until my dad pulled out the big guns with, "Do you love her?"

Tank had sighed, knowing Storm had him, and then shook his head and said, "More than the oxygen I need."

My dad nodded proudly, satisfaction on his face, "Good. Then you'll let me pay for everything."

Smiling at the memory, I headed to the kitchen to start the coffee that we would both need and let Lena take her shower.

Four hours later, the entire female population of Wrath MC, which were, Lena, Shea, Cassidee, Novalie, Marley, Kiera, Valerie, Creedence, Miriam, Phoebe, Pebbles, Sydney, Ebony, Lucy, Fiona, Kirri, Kynnydee, Lil, Rosa, June, Hailey, Michelle, Laci, Mackenzie, Wren, Harlow, Chelsea, Conleigh, Collins, Shiloh, Layla, Ember, and even the Ariel DeLuca and Caristiona Svanokov, where all gathered around the wide circle of tables enjoying brunch.

And when I say that the room had tighter protection than the President of the United States, it's not a joke. Because, around the room at every exit stood a man keeping an eye out, and at every door on the outside held the same.

Laughter. Tears. Jokes. Were all plentiful around the room.

And after we were done eating and drinking Mimosas for the ones that could drink, and orange juice for the ones that couldn't, several of the men laughed and had to help their women to their respective seats.

We all also saw how protective a few of the men were towards a few of the girls.

Two hours later, and a small amount of makeup because Tank didn't like it when I wore too much, and neither did I. In fact, he had told me multiple times that he preferred the look I had on my face when I woke up every morning.

We were in the bridal suite of the winery that my father had rented out, and Lena asked, "Seriously, what did he say?"

She had just zipped up the back of my dress.

I turned to her after it was zipped and then placed my hands on her shoulders, "Sweetie, you need to talk to him. Ask him what he said."

She bit her lip and looked so unsure that I almost didn't recognize her, "And you're okay with it?"

I smiled, “If I wasn’t would I be encouraging you to talk to him? Besides, there’s no one else I could ever want for him other than you. When I was growing up, I was the only one that could make him smile. Until you came along.”

A slow smile started to form, and then she whispered, “You’re amazing.”

I huffed out a laugh at that. “I try. Now, let’s finish getting me ready. I’m sure Tank is over this whole waiting thing to see me.”

And I was right.

Because when the double doors opened, my arm wrapped in my father’s, Tank’s eyes landed on me, I saw him wipe a stray tear, and then over the music we all heard, “Fuck this shit.”

And then his ever-present black motorcycle boots were carrying him down the aisle towards me.

My dad stopped and then started laughing at the site.

And what a site it was. It was my dream to see my man in a black tuxedo. And my man wanted me happy, so he had it on.

I was up and, in his arms, his lips on mine as he carried me down the aisle and to Powers who was marrying us.

After Tank sat me down on my feet, he looked at me, “Not even going to apologize if I messed up your lipstick.”

“Guess it’s a good thing I didn’t put any on.” I said with a smile and all the happiness I could muster.

“Thank fuck. And Gray, you in this dress, thank fuck there’s no one here that I have to worry about killing anyone.”

And through the rest of the ceremony, everyone’s laughter filled the entire winery.

And yes, my dad paid to rent it out for the entire day. Because we had a huge family.

Before I knew it, the ceremony was over.

Tank's arm was around my back, his hand resting on my hip, my hair falling down in waves, my back arched, his body bowed, his lips on mine.

I was finally, Raine Lowman Calaveras.

I didn't miss the looks my dad tossed Lena. Never missed them.

Nor did I miss the blushing of her cheeks when she turned her head away from him. She needed to grow a pair and talk to him.

Sure, to others, their age would've been a turn-off.

But in the world of the MC, there were no rules.

And I fucking loved it.

I felt those strong arms wrap around me, and then whispered in my neck, "What's got that smile on your face, wife?"

Smiling, I said, "I think, for the next thing I do. It's going to be to get those two together."

"Yeah. What makes you say that?" he asked as I leaned my head back into his chest.

"The way he looks at her. It's the same as when you look at me." I told him honestly because it was.

He hummed, "Yeah, I've seen it a few times. Think she's interested in him?"

"Watch.... One... two... three... and there you go." I smiled triumphantly.

He laughed softly, "Huh. Well damn. Guess she is interested in him."

I laughed softly in return, "Yeah, you could say that. We just have to figure out whether Red will be okay with it or not."

And I knew Red saw it, especially when his mouth tightened into a hard line.

Tank saw the same thing I did, and then he whispered in my ear, "I'm thinking not. That, or it's going to take a lot to get him on board."

The rest of the night was spent with our friends and family.

Oh, if you ever want to see some hot guys.

Hot guys, that are SEALS?

Get yourself invited to a wedding of a SEAL.

There you will have a plethora of hot guy overload.

But that's neither here nor there because I had the hottest man on the planet between my thighs in a cabana on our honeymoon.

And yes, sand does take forever to get out of certain places.

But the memories that are made, are so worth it.

Two months later, we were on a charity run helping raise money for Leukemia. And we were all proud that Collins had finally passed her remission phase.

With no signs of cancer, she was determined cancer free.

But that didn't mean that we never forgot about the doctors that worked tirelessly to help rid cancer from her body.

I had just stood up from putting a few snacks in Tank's saddlebags, my shorts rising, because it was hot as a mother today, I had on cut off denim shorts and a long-sleeved loose shirt.

That was when I felt someone's piercing eyes boring into my back.

When I looked over my shoulder, I saw that I wasn't the only one turned on because the man looked hot as sin standing

there in a white tee while doing the most mundane thing of all, putting gas in the tank.

I saw Tank signal to my dad, which caused him to start laughing his butt off.

However, I didn't have any time to figure out what they were up to when I was picked up and thrown over Tank's shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

"Put me down you big goof," I called out with a view of his butt, which for that, I wasn't entirely mad.

His answer was a slap on my butt.

He strode with a purpose to the women's restroom; then made sure there was nobody in there when he locked the door and only then did, he put me on my feet.

With that look in his eyes, I knew what that meant.

Before I had time to think of anything else, he was on me.

His lips on mine, his tongue dancing with my own, we were both a bundle of nerves with needs.

He pushed me up against the wall and undid the button on my shorts and slid them off.

Then he wrapped his hands around my butt cheeks, lifted me, then pressed me against the wall.

I quickly undid his jeans and pulled at his boxers so his cock could spring free.

He didn't waste any time, he shoved into me with so much force that my back bowed.

He stilled as he locked his eyes with mine. Knowing he wanted to say something, but I wasn't letting him.

I moaned as I needed him to move. And that moan was all that was needed.

He didn't waste any time in plunging into me faster, and faster, and faster.

“I love how your pussy squeezes my dick, Gray. Oh, that’s it, come for me baby, come on.” His teeth were gritted as he held himself back, waiting for me.

My man never came before me. He never allowed it. He did whatever he needed to ensure that. And I loved him for it.

With another couple of strokes, I came while seeing stars.

My toes curled and my back bowed.

“Perfect, Gray. You’re fucking perfect.” He said as he stared into my eyes.

“Love the look on your face when you come.” He kissed my nose, then carefully slid out of me.

After we were both redressed and used a good amount of toilet paper to clean off, he unlocked the door, opened it, and then I tossed him a wink over my shoulder and said, “Thanks, honey.”

We both ignored the impatient stares from the two women that stood there waiting to go into the restroom.

With my hand secured firmly in his, I ran one finger over his wedding band as we walked back to the bikes.

Roars of laughter greeted us.

And what did we do?

Tank bowed and I curtsied.

Chapter 19

Tank

I was working on a bike when Raine called me. We both had designated ringtones for one another.

It was our song, *Fall Into Me* by BG.

Smiling, I tagged my phone and answered it, “Hey baby. I love you.”

She sighed but with happiness, “I love you too. But I need to know how much you love me?”

“I love you so much it hurts to breathe. Because you’re my oxygen, baby. What is it?”

“Well, you see, there’s this little baby.” I could hear the uncertainty in her tone, and I didn’t like it one fucking bit.

Until a thought hit me.

There was this little boy that was delivered three weeks ago, and every single shift, Raine had come home crying because she couldn’t understand how someone could hurt something so precious.

The little boy had lived his life in utero with heroin swirling around him.

And I knew that she was talking about that little boy with her next words, “And Stella brought an idea and possibly a solution to me when she saw how he reacted to me.”

“That’s what makes you great at your job baby,” I told her as I grabbed a rag and wiped the grease from my hands.

“How’d you feel about making him a part of our family?” I heard the words, clearly.

That was only one of the reasons I loved this woman. She had a huge fucking heart.

When I didn't answer her quick enough for her liking, she snapped, "Carter."

"I'm here, baby. You should know my answer already. If this will make you happy, then I'm all for it. Where do you need me?" I told her, as I put away my tools, and then headed to let Storm know I would be gone for the rest of the day.

I heard her sigh, and then that gorgeous smile of hers that lit up my fucking world came through the phone, "At the hospital in an hour."

I nodded and then smiled, "Got it. I'll be there."

And I showed up right on time with a baby carrier and a few little boy's things in my arms.

And when my woman saw that, as well as Stella and some other woman, all she did was smile and nod.

And just like that, we signed our names on the dotted line and became parents for real this time.

And since the mother didn't give a fuck, we were asked what we wanted to name our son.

Raine looked at me, and then smiled and said, "Elijah Trevor Calaveras."

Something else happened when we got home, Storm had called in reinforcements and there waiting for us was the MC with loads and loads of baby crap.

So much stuff that we hadn't needed to buy a single thing.

Four months later Elijah was back to the health that a newborn baby should be at.

Sure, he still had to take some medication to reverse the effects that were done to him, but he was healthy and happy, and that was all that mattered.

Another thing that had happened, Raine had gotten the flu.

And the birth control she was on had taken a back burner.

A month later when she couldn't keep anything down and the smell of her favorite snack, Bugles with Nacho Cheese made her nauseous, I ran to get some pregnancy tests.

Never in my life could I have promised myself to be happy when I was eight years old, could I have known that I would be this happy.

My heart was so full it was damn near bursting when Elijah leaned down, ever so carefully, and pressed a kiss on his sister's forehead.

And wouldn't you know that she reached out with her little hand and wrapped it around Elijah's finger and fell right to sleep.

Epilogue

Raine

Dozens of pictures lined our walls.

I didn't know how my dad knew, but he knew.

He knew the relationship that was formed when I was eight and Tank was nineteen years old that it was a once-in-a-lifetime kind of thing.

He snapped pictures of us throughout the years.

We had a lot of pictures.

But my favorite ones were the days that Tank came home.

Dressed in his BDUs in the forecourt of the clubhouse with me up in his arms.

I smiled at those pictures and then tried to be as stealthy as I could like my husband as I crept down the hall to our daughter's nursery.

We added the room onto our house when we passed the twenty-week mark and the baby, and I were determined safe.

That didn't mean we didn't take precautions.

I was on bed rest more times than not, and that wasn't the doctors telling us to do that, that was our decision.

Because neither one of us could go through that experience again.

Oh, and I never walked anywhere. If Tank couldn't carry me, then my dad did.

But anyway, that's beside the point, I was creeping slowly down the hall because I wanted to video this moment.

But my husband ruined it.

The butthead.

With a finger pressed to his lips, he had his phone pointed into the nursery.

Peeking around the corner carefully, it was to hear Elijah singing ever so softly to Saylah.

And he did that because I had been the one to sing to him when he was a newborn and he calmed instantly.

And it worked for Saylah too. It was the only way she was able to fall asleep.

Tank

“What do you want to be for Halloween, buddy?” Raine was on her way home from work and I was home with the kids.

My son looked at me, and then said, “I’ve thought long and hard about it.”

I nodded, “Okay... and what did your genius brain decide on?”

“I want to be a clown.” As soon as our son said that I spat my beer all over myself.

That was when I saw my wife standing in the kitchen in her scrubs, her lunch bag, and her purse, laughing her little ass off, “You put him up to that. Didn’t you?”

The little imp looked at me, and then scrunched up her nose. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Ever want to see a SEAL run screaming from a room?

Add a fake knife with red food coloring on it in the hands of someone dressed like a clown.

I never got tired of it. I didn’t think I ever would when he called me dad.

We still couldn’t find rhyme or reason why people would hurt their children. It was something we just couldn’t wrap our minds around.

“Dad?” Elijah asked me as I sat beside him and played Call of Duty with him.

I had just taken a target out when I said, “Yeah, buddy?”

Elijah took out another one and then asked, “Is it because you and mom have been together for so long that you can read her like a book?”

I nodded, “That’s part of it, buddy.”

“What’s the other part?” He asked. He was smart. So damn smart that it rocked our worlds with how smart he was.

I shrugged, “The other part is that your mom has a few tells. I learned a long time ago what her tells were.”

My son’s bright blue eyes sparkled with mischief and were locked on mine, and then he lowered his voice in a whisper and asked, “And what are they?”

“Well, when you ask her something, and she’s nervous about the answer, her nose scrunches up. And when she’s excited about something, she bites the left corner of her bottom lip. And when she’s mad, her eyes get even darker. It’s a sight to behold.”

My son’s eyes got wide when he nodded and then rushed to say, “I know what you mean. The other day, mom spent all day cleaning the house because your old team was coming by for the fourth. Anyway, we were outside playing, and we didn’t remember mom telling us that when we were ready to come inside the house to call out to her and wait in the mud room.”

“Instead, we both ran inside, and she had been in the bathroom. When she came out and saw the muddy footprints and our clothes with mud and dirt on them on the white carpet, her eyes got so dark. She was really mad.”

I cringed when I remembered the ass-chewing I got from her when I got home.

And I rightly deserved it.

And yes, it took everything in me to not laugh in her face.

It wasn't because she literally reamed me a new asshole but the fact that I was still as big as I used to be, and she was still my shorty. But with more curves. And her having the balls, sorry, lady cojones to ream my ass.

Yes, I deserved it. Because she told them not to get dirty and to avoid the puddles that were in the backyard.

I however had told them to have fun, because they only got to splash in muddy puddles while they were still little.

"Yeah, I recall that day." I held back the cringe.

Because she withheld her body from me that night. Actually, her correct words were that I wasn't getting any piece of her that day.

That was until I woke her up a minute after midnight with my mouth between her legs. I still drool at her taste. Even though it's been this long with her, I could never imagine tasting anything other than her. My heaven.

My daughter brought me back from the dirty thoughts that filled my mind, "We're sorry we got you in trouble, Daddy."

"Don't ever be sorry, bug. Besides, I got myself in trouble. Your mother was right. Now, while I am thinking about it, how about we do something nice for her? What do you guys say?"

"Like what?" Elijah asked.

Saylah nodded immediately, "We're in."

"Okay, when your mother texts me that she's on her way home, I'm going to run her a bath. Saylah, I want you to throw two towels in the dryer for her. Buddy, I'm going to trust you with carrying a bottle of wine and a glass to our bathroom. Can the two of you do that for me?"

They both nodded immediately, but it was Elijah that said, "Yes. And we will go to the game room and be quiet so she can relax."

Saylah nodded, "Yeah, mom works hard."

She does indeed.

Two years ago, my wife was offered a new position. Now, she's the charge nurse in the NICU unit. Stella had gone to bat for her, even though she hadn't needed to because Stella wanted to retire.

And every time she leaves for work when our son is home, he wraps her in a hug, looks at her like she hung the moon, and kisses her cheek.

She saved his life.

She went to hell and back for him.

And I couldn't be more proud of her even if I tried.

Fifteen Years Later

My wife sat to my left; a tissue clutched in her fingertips. My daughter sat to my right. And the rest of the seats, two rows of them, were filled with men and women in leather.

Today, our son was graduating from college. He had a dream.

And with hard work. Study sessions with everyone in the MC, even more so with Raine, he achieved his dream.

In two months, he was going to be working for NASA.

“Thank you everyone for coming to help celebrate the graduating class of twenty-twenty-three. We have been privileged to help our students learn and grow. To become things, they have only dreamed about. And I am proud to announce this year's Valedictorian is one such young gentleman. Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce Elijah Calaveras. Not only has he maintained his four-point five GPA, but he has also accepted a job offer with NASA. So, without further ado, Elijah will you please take the stand?”

I beamed with fatherly pride as I watched my son stand up from his chair and approach the podium dressed in his black gown with so many cords around his neck it was comical.

“Thank you, Professor Walkins. We are always told as kids that no matter what we want to be, that as long as we work hard and never give up, we can achieve those dreams. And the one person on this planet that I owe everything to is my mother. Everyone ribs me all the time that I’m a Momma’s boy. And they are correct. It’s why I never get angry, and why would I? It’s the truth.”

He took a breath and looked at my wife with a smile that had her tears cascading down her cheeks, she mouthed I love you.

And my son not giving a flying fuck, returned her I love you in front of five hundred people.

“What a lot of you don’t know, is that the woman I call mom didn’t give birth to me. No. I didn’t spend nine months in her belly. Her body wasn’t ever considered as the vessel that would birth me. That was... until I took my very first breath, and her eyes locked onto mine. My birth mother was an addict. She shut up heroin, molly, and cocaine all throughout her pregnancy. Never once caring about the innocent life in her belly.”

“So, the day I was born, I was born with an addiction. Three hours after that my heart stopped. I was dead for one minute and eleven seconds. Think about that. One minute and eleven seconds. That’s how long it takes to walk from the boy’s bathroom in the main hall to the cafeteria. That little amount of time. I was also taught a valuable lesson that day. That no matter how insignificant a certain time is, it can have the biggest impact on our lives. And I only came back to life because of one woman who vowed to never give up on me. And she didn’t. So, with that, I want all of you to take your fears, your hopes, your dreams, and tell them to one single person. Just one.”

He let the crowd take in his words, and then he said, “And then I want you to watch the magic that happens.”

My boy was correct.

That magic took place over thirty years ago when I met the love of my life.

The End.

Thank you so much for reading my book from the bottom of my heart. I hope you fell in love with the characters as much as I have.

XoXo,
Tiffany.

P.S. Storm's book is coming next in the series. Will his woman finally grow a pair and claim what she wants? Or will she allow the best man she's ever met to slip through her fingers?

Other Works

Wrath MC

Mountain of Clearwater

Clearwater's Savior

Clearwater's Hope

Clearwater's Fire

Clearwater's Miracle

Clearwater's Treasure

Clearwater's Luck

Clearwater's Redemption

Christmas in Clearwater

Dogwood's Treasures

Dove's Life

Phoenix's Plight

Raven's Climb

Wren's Salvation

Lo's Wraith

Falcon's Rise

Lark's Precious

Sparrow's Grace (2023)

DeLuca Empire

The Devil & The Siren

The Cleaner & The Princess

The Soldier & The Dancer (2023)

The Shadow & The Mafia Princess (TBD)

Willow Creek

Where Hearts Align

Where Hearts Connect (TBD)

Where Hearts Grow (TBD)

Where Hearts Mend (TBD)

Pinewood Lake

Rise

Empower (2023)

Strength (2023)

Armor (2023)

Calm (2023)

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Cold As Ice

Dark As Coal (2023)

Smooth As Whiskey (2023)

Novella's

Hotter Than Sin

Silver Treasure

Wrath Ink

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