



Starlight
&
Sandcastles

MAINGARDE
CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR NOVELLA

RENÉ VAN DALEN



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SANDCASTLES**

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Maingarde

Christmas/New Year Novella

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Warning: This book contains graphic language and sexual content. Intended for mature audiences, 18 years and older.

DEDICATION

As Always - 13 1 13



This book is dedicated to my ARC squad

*Jayne Rushton; Mari Small; Ashley Alfman; Fabiola Cadet-
Destil; Kathy Jackson;*

*Rosa Kruger; Lee-Anna Dunk; Nikki Vesty; Rebecca
Sprague; Michelle Driver;*

*Hazel Buys; Susan Trewick; Sandra Larry; Guadalupe
Iniguez; Emilie Yang;*

*Ruchika Mahajan; Kirsten Rotmo; Julia Beresford; Kelly
Harrop*

Sarah Van Groningen; Debbie Swaby; Karen Renee Lyles



*In my sky at twilight you are like a cloud
and your form and colour are the way I love them.*

*You are mine, mine woman with sweet lips
and in your life my infinite dreams live.*

In My Sky at Twilight

Pablo Neruda

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Please be aware that this book contains triggers for sensitive readers.

It has graphic language and sex in the content.

Therefore please be aware of the above triggers before you continue.

One more thing, please note that my books are set in **South Africa** and written in **South African English**. Those aren't spelling mistakes

Please note: This book has characters from my Iron Dogz MC series and the Maingarde series. While it isn't required to read the IDMC series some pre-existing situations might be confusing.

With all my books I take walks on the dark side.

Come and walk along with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[AUTHOR'S NOTE](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[OTHER BOOKS BY RENÉ VAN DALEN](#)

[PLAYLIST](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

[CONNECT WITH RENÉ VAN DALEN](#)

CHAPTER ONE

Dominick

Two weeks before Christmas

Overnight our penthouse became Christmas Central. Not only that, it was stuffed to the gills with women.

Women who were all talking at the same time. And sometimes in different languages as well.

How they heard or understood each other I had no idea, but it seemed they did.

For my own sanity I retreated to my office downstairs to avoid being pulled into the madness.

“Knock, knock.”

I looked up as Remy walked in and threw himself into one of the chairs on the opposite side of my desk. He gave Darren who sat in a chair against the wall behind me a chin lift before looking back at me.

“My woman dragged me here because she wanted to see Niko, but hell, Dom, the minute we walked into the penthouse we were swarmed by the crazy. I left my woman with yours

and then I ran. You have the right idea hidin' down here in your office. What the hell is goin' on up there?"

I shook my head as I leant back in my chair.

"My wife told me I was an old scrooge for not having Christmas shit everywhere and she's going to fix it. Today they're baking Christmas cookies and cakes. She's been buying enough decorations we'll be able to wrap this entire building in bloody lights."

Remy contemplated me with a frown then gave a slow nod.

"I saw your buildin' has no Christmas tree or any decorations in the reception area. Why not?"

I didn't like to talk about my past, even after killing the hag who had been the cause of all my troubles.

But for Remy I would make an exception as he was Pixie's man and now part of the family.

"We didn't celebrate Christmas after my parents were killed. The hag had decorators come in and do the place up for her annual Christmas party. Once the party was done the decorations disappeared. The last time I had a proper Christmas my parents were still alive. This will be the first year since they died that Pixie and I will be celebrating Christmas together."

Locking my dark memories away I focused on Remy.

"I'm glad you're here because I need your opinion on something."

Remy immediately sat forward. "Sure, how can I help? Have you been buyin' more businesses?" He asked with a grin.

He wasn't wrong. I was about to buy something. I beckoned him to follow me as I rounded the desk and walked over to the couch where my laptop lay on the coffee table.

"Let me show you."

He looked confused but got up and followed me to the couch.

It was time to let someone, other than Gideon and my team, in on my plan.

"I'm thinking of buying Nika a Christmas present but I don't know if she'll like it or not. I need a second opinion before I sign the final papers."

"What is it you want to buy her?"

"A beach house."

"A beach house? You want to buy her a beach house for Christmas? Damn, brother. Shouldn't you be talkin' to her about this?"

"I wanted it to be a surprise but I don't think that's possible anymore. We have her family staying for Christmas and with your family coming on Friday both our homes will be packed to the bloody rafters."

He nodded in agreement and I continued to explain.

"We need a place where she will have all those she loves in one place. The mansion is out because they've already ripped off the roof and gutted the inside. My solution is to buy a place where we could all be together."

Remy frowned and rubbed a hand over his beard, giving me a confused look.

“You tellin’ me you’re goin’ to buy a house so we can all be together for Christmas?”

I shrugged. It was essentially true.

It was more complicated than wanting to have a place big enough to fit all of us easily.

I wanted to start a tradition for Niko and any other children we might have.

No, fuck the might have, will have. I wanted us to have a family holiday home.

Remy sat deep in thought rubbing a finger back and forth over his bottom lip then gave me a knowing look. I waited to see what that was all about.

“Right, so what you need is a house that’s big enough for essentially two families and any friends who might join us for the day. Where the fuck are you goin’ to find a house like that? Even Pixie’s place isn’t big enough. We’re goin’ to need a house that’s defensible and not close to any neighbours. Everythin’ I’ve seen on or close to the beaches here won’t do the trick.”

He tilted his head, his eyes narrowing as he looked at me.

“What about rentin’ a place?”

“No, that wouldn’t do. Nika wants everyone to spend Christmas Eve and Christmas day together. We can’t do it at the penthouse or at your house. Your house is still a work in progress and the penthouse is big but it’s too small to accommodate everyone.”

Remy gave a slow nod then shrugged.

“Okay, then we’d better start lookin’, brother. But, before we do.” He drew in a breath as he turned on the couch to face me.

His expression was very serious and I frowned. I was hoping like hell it wasn’t anything that would disrupt the peace we were experiencing.

And then he surprised me.

“You know I love your sister. She’s my everythin’ and I’ll be spendin’ the rest of my life ensurin’ she is safe and happy. As her only male relative I would like your permission to marry her. On New Year’s Eve.”

The silence hung around us as I stared at him.

He was asking me to give him permission to marry my sister.

He honoured me by asking. He didn’t have to do it, but he did.

“I’m honoured you are asking for my permission. My sister loves you, Cajun. She’s a little crazy but you can handle her crazy and I know you love her the way she deserves to be loved. You don’t need my permission but you have it. Welcome to the family, brother.”

The next moment he had me in his arms and hugged me hard, kissed both my cheeks then moved back to where he had been sitting. He was grinning like a fucking maniac.

“Thank you, my brother. I swear I will love and protect her to the end of my days. She’s the other half of my soul. It’s been missin’ for too long. Plus marryin’ her will ensure our babies carry both our names.”

Was he saying what I thought he was saying?

“You saying my sister is pregnant?”

Remy grinned. “Not yet, brother, but then again she might be. I’ve been...”

I held up my hand to shut him up. I did not want to know about what they got up to behind closed doors. I hope like hell it was closed doors.

“Don’t want to know.” I growled.

Darren laughed and I gave him a dark look. It had no effect because the bastard didn’t stop.

“Boss, you’re definitely going to need a bigger place. You have to know the minute Niki hears about this she’s going to go into a frenzy organising a wedding on top of her crazy Christmas preparations. We’re going to have more guests, guaranteed.”

He was right. My wife was going to love organising Pixie and Remy’s wedding. She shows her love by doing things for people to make life easier for them, and she loved the two of them. I hoped they would allow her to do it for them.

It looked more and more like buying a beach property was the way forward.

Darren walked over and sat down in the easy chair across from us, joining the conversation.

“Where are you going to find a beach house that would accommodate all of us plus whatever guests Pixie and Niki invite?” Remy asked.

Darren answered before Dom could.

“The boss hasn’t been looking at beach houses. He’s been looking at coastal farms with beach frontage. It’s the only way he’ll get the security he wants. It will give us total control of the area around the house and the beach.”

Remy frowned in confusion. “A farm? What the fuck do you know about farmin’?”

“Nothing. I don’t want a working farm. Ideally there will be housing. If not I will buy a couple of prefabricated homes until I can have a house and cottages built. Like you said, it needs to be defensible. I want it to be a place we can take the kids to get away from the city and relax.” Dom explained. “My agent found a possible and sent me a video.”

Remy sat back and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Let’s see it.”

Opening my laptop I clicked on the video and sent it to the big screen. Before it started I gave him a quick rundown on what we were about to watch.

“The farm used to be a guest lodge. The land is shaped like a narrow rectangle. It has a working farm and a nature reserve on either side. The other borders are the road and the beach. I like that the property doesn’t have a long border with the road. The beach is a small cove with fairly rough rocky outcrops on either side. It is safe for swimming and even surfing and body boarding. Access is via a set of wooden stairs. The current owners are selling because they want to retire and their children have no interest in running it.” He paused for breath. “I instructed the agent to explain I wouldn’t be using the property as a guest lodge and would close it down with immediate effect. I had to give them an assurance that no

development would take place on the property. I did add in that I reserve the right to add cottages for my family.

According to the agent the owners started scaling down their operation some time ago and took no bookings for the Christmas season. So we're okay there. I won't have to ruin people's holidays by booting them out."

I reached out to click the button to play the video but Remy held a hand up and I waited for him to say what he wanted to.

"So you're actually askin' me to look at a guest lodge and not a beach house. Is it my professional opinion you're lookin' for?"

"Yes."

Remy nodded then nodded indicating I should get on with it.

We watched the video silently. Once it was done he reached over and played it again. Pausing the video a few times, zooming in on a frame that caught his interest, and then moving on. Finally he was done.

"It looks good. The part of the property borderin' the road is your shortest border, I like that. It will be easy to strengthen and protect. The access road is defensible and the lodge isn't visible from the road and it's far enough from it to ensure privacy and security. The fence between the property and the nature reserve is great but I would suggest puttin' up your own fence as well, same with the side borderin' the farm. If you buy it we need to beef up the existing perimeter fencin' as well as put up fencin' or a wall around the lodge. We'll put in access controlled gates with a defensible guard post. We're goin' to need roads to patrol the fences and foot and ATV paths for patrols on the beachfront. As for the rest, the lodge is

fairly large and with the cottages it's perfect for what you need. Plus it looks like a very good investment."

"The property values in the area are high and I will be getting it at a really good price. The owners are anxious to sell before the new year. And as you said, it's a good investment."

"Always the businessman."

I nodded in agreement because it was true. It was just the way my mind was wired. I wouldn't change as it kept my family secure.

My ability to run a business successfully was something I would never take for granted. I started at the bottom of my family's corporation and had worked in every single department and business to learn how to take care of it when the time came. Not that the hag had made it easy. What she hadn't realised at the time was that she had taught me how to survive.

Me and Gideon.

We were survivors.

Sliding my phone out of my pocket I called the agent, putting the call on speaker.

"Margaret Lawson, good day." Her cultured voice came over the speaker

"Margaret, Dominick Maingarde."

"Mr Maingarde, good to hear from you. I take it you've watched the video. What did you think?"

"The property has all the features I've been looking for. I'm ready to make a cash offer provided I take occupation before

Christmas Eve. If the owners agree to my stipulation I will pay the full asking price.”

There was a stunned silence for a few seconds.

“Let me call the owners and I’ll get back to you within the hour. I do know they are anxious to sell before Christmas. I’ll call the minute I have an answer for you.”

“Thanks Margaret. I’ll be waiting to hear from you.”

“I’ll be in contact soon, Mr Maingarde. Have a good day.”

I ended the call, sat back and crossed my arms over my chest.

“Now we wait.” I said.

Remy grinned and shook his head. “Could we have coffee while we wait? I didn’t want to chance it upstairs, those women would have dragged me into their crazy.”

Darren laughed as he got up and walked to the door.

“I’ll get it. The boss still hasn’t appointed a new PA.”

He was right, after the shit the last one pulled I wasn’t motivated to employ someone new. I’ve been using secretaries from the other departments on a temporary basis.

“So your PA is still missing?” Remy gave me a look I couldn’t read.

“No, the cops found her body a week ago. It seems she’s been dead for quite a while. They will contact me when they know more. They did say it looks like she was the victim of a serial killer they are hunting.”

“Hmmm. Are you going to wait on them or look for the killer yourself?”

I had to work hard to keep my face emotionless. Thinking about the bitch made me furious. He didn't need to know the serial killer will be executed before the cops got to him. An execution that will be made to look like he had been caught in the act, and killed during the ensuing scuffle.

“I have a team looking into it.”

Darren brought the coffee in and we sat around talking about properties around Cape Town and general shit.

It was a relief when my phone rang and I saw it was Margret Lawson.

“Maingarde.”

“Mr Maingarde, it's Margaret Lawson. I have good news. The owners agreed to your stipulation. They are in actual fact in the process of moving out. I would like to schedule an appointment to sign the paperwork and do a walkthrough of the property. When would suit you?”

I allowed myself a small smile. This was perfect.

“I would have liked to do it today but my wife isn't available. We will meet you at the property tomorrow at twelve noon. Would that suit the owners?”

“Absolutely, they assured me you are welcome at any time. Their son and daughter are with them helping them to pack up their personal possessions. Mr Bezuidenhout asked me to tell you all the furnishings in main lodge and cottages as well as crockery, cutlery, glassware and bedding are included in the sale. His last of his staff have moved out of the staff

accommodations early last week. He apologises for the state of the gardens as the groundskeeper left a month ago so it is a bit overgrown but...”

I interrupted before she could go any further.

“Margaret, I don’t care about the furnishings or the grounds. Those are things I’ll handle when we take occupation. Send me the paperwork and I’ll sign it. I want this done as soon as possible. The money will be transferred into your trust account as soon as both parties have signed the contract. I’ll see you tomorrow at twelve.”

There was a beat of silence before she answered.

“See you tomorrow, sir.”

I ended the call and smiled at Remy and Darren.

“We got ourselves a family retreat.”

CHAPTER TWO

Nika

The next day

“Where are we going?” I asked and got the same answer I did every time I’ve asked since last night.

“It’s a surprise.”

Personally I liked surprises but I wanted them instantly. I didn’t want to wait for them to arrive. I wasn’t the only one wanting to know. Pixie did as well.

Yesterday our men told us we were going on a trip and to not schedule any Christmas shit (their word for it) for today. A trip that would end in a surprise. Neither of them would tell us what that surprise was. When the others heard about the trip and wanted to come along they were given a firm no. Not even my mother got a yes.

Nic told her she had to stay and watch over Niko. As the doting *babushka* (grandmama) she is, she immediately agreed.

It didn’t make guessing what the surprise was easier.

We were travelling in a convoy of four vehicles and had been on the road for about forty minutes. All I could see out the window was parcels of farmland interspersed with natural vegetation. I couldn't even ask Pixie if she knew where we were because she was in the vehicle behind us with Remy.

What could be out here that would be a surprise?

Not a dog, because we had agreed on only looking into getting one once the renovations on Maingarde House was done.

Not a cat either. The same reason as for a dog applied.

What else could there be?

After about another twenty minutes we started to slow and I craned my neck to look out the front but all I could see was the black SUV in front of us pulling off the road and stopping in front of a tall, but wide, gate. It was faded black steel, except for a square in the middle where it looked like a sign had been removed.

“What is this place?” I leant forward to stare out the front window.

No one answered, but the bastards were all giving me knowing looks.

Once through the gate we drove a little way down the road and stopped. Apparently we were waiting for the other cars to join us before driving on.

Looking out the window all I could see was thick bush and tangled trees covering the hillsides on either side of us. It was a narrow gravel road and meandered through the brush and trees between the towering hills. The gap between the trees

sudden widened and the deep blue ocean was in front of us. I gasped at the beauty of it.

I tried to take it all in. The craggy hills enclosed a small coastal valley and there were houses. Not many but they were there.

Why were we here? What surprise did he have hidden out here? I couldn't stop looking around as we drove towards the group of houses.

We pulled up on a small paved parking area in front of the biggest building.

“Don't get out, baby, wait for me.” Leaning towards me he kissed my cheek before he got out and walked around the car to my door.

Helping me out I stood next to him. Holding on to his hand I curiously looked around. Trying to find the surprise. There was nothing jumping out at me. The place looked like it might be some kind of a retreat because there was a main building and several cottages with paths linking to the main building. What little garden there was around the big house was overgrown with neglect. The natural vegetation was fast taking over and I thought it might look better than formal gardens in the end. The natural vegetation flowed all the way down high dunes and rocks to a small beach.

It looked idyllic.

The sand was almost white under the sun and the blue water glittered as the waves rolled in. On either side of the beach huge craggy rocks tumbled down from the rocky hills into the ocean.

“This is so beautiful. It looks like whoever owns it has left it to nature as much as possible.” I said softly.

Putting his arm around me he turned me to the main house. The big house wasn't in the center of the small valley but actually close to the rocky hillside. It was built in the style of the Cape fishermen's cottages, just much bigger. It was a double story in fact. It was built in a u-shape, big chimneys on either end of the u. The long outer walls ended in tall gables. The thatched roof was black against the white of the walls. A wide covered veranda was situated between the two wings. Later, I would find out that it was in actual fact built in an H-shape with a covered patio at the back of the house.

The window frames and shutters were painted a faded blue, the same as a couple of wooden framed glass doors leading out onto the veranda. The doors had shutters as well and I took that to mean that the weather could get a bit wild. Or they were there for security purposes. There were wooden easy chairs and couches scattered across the veranda in loose groupings with white and blue patterned cushions on them. A wide low wall enclosed the veranda and it looked like a great place from which to sit and admire the view over the ocean.

A thigh high white washed stone wall surrounded the house with a stone walk leading to the steps up onto the veranda and the wooden front door. The door was the same old fashioned faded blue as the shutters and window frames, with a shiny brass door knob and door knocker.

A grey haired woman in a pale pink pants suit stood on the veranda, obviously waiting for us.

I was very confused.

Keeping my hand in his Nic led me through the little wooden gate along the path and up onto the veranda.

“Thank you for meeting us here today, Margaret. This is my wife, Nika Maingarde.” He looked down at me. “Baby, this is Margaret Lawson, my estate agent.”

I shook hands with the smiling woman wondering why his agent would be meeting us here.

Turning me around to look out over the ocean, he surrounded me with his arms, drawing me back into his chest. Then he swept one hand in a broad gesture that took in the ocean in front of us as well as the surrounding countryside. I thought he was showing me how pretty it was.

I was wrong.

Kissing my neck he whispered. “Merry Christmas, baby.”

What?

It wasn't Christmas yet. What was he talking about?

I turned my head to look up at him with confusion.

“It isn't Christmas yet.” I could hear the confusion in my voice.

His arms tightened around me and he shook me gently.

“This is my present to you, baby. Your surprise and early Christmas present. You want all of us to be together at Christmas and I want you to have what you want. Now you can invite as many people as we can accommodate in the house and the cottages.”

My mouth fell open in shock.

He bought this for me, for us?

“This is ours?” I asked softly.

He turned me in his arms, dropped his head and kissed me. Thoroughly and deeply. I was all hazy by the time the kiss ended.

“If you two can stop making out I want to see the inside of the beach cottage my brother bought.” Pixie teased, because it was definitely not a beach cottage. It was more like our very own beach resort.

Remy shook his head as he pulled on her hand while pointing to the beach.

“No baby, let them get the business part of the sale done while we check out the beach. When they’re ready to do the walk through Darren will give me a call.”

Nic gave him a nod and we followed Margaret Lawson inside to meet the sellers and sign the paperwork. I glanced back before we went through the front door and saw the two of them walking hand in hand to the wooden stairs leading down to the beach. Pixie was pointing at something and Remy was looking down at her with a wide grin.

They made such a beautiful couple.

Remy

Watching my woman running in and out of the wavelets had me shaking my head. The water was fucking cold even with the sun shining brightly. The property was situated on the cold Atlantic Ocean and the water would always be cold.

She ran back to me where I stood above the waterline, a wide smile on her beautiful face. “Brrr, the water is really cold today.”

I laughed. “Baby, the water is always cold.”

She wrinkled her nose. “You’ll get used to it.”

Looking at her smiling up at me I knew this was the moment. I slowly sank to my knees in front of her. Her smile disappeared, her mouth falling open in stunned surprise.

I held onto her hands, she was so short we were almost the same height. I met and held her beautiful blue eyes.

“The first time I saw you, *mon ange* (my angel) I knew I was in big trouble. My job always came first, no matter the situation I was in. One look at you and the job no longer mattered. Nothin’ mattered except keepin’ you safe and out of harms’ way. Our relationship was never a lie, even when those I worked for thought it was. I fell in love with you between one breath and the next. You are my life, my love, my everythin’ and I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

I drew in a deep breath before continuing.

“*J’taime mon ange* (I love you my angel), will you marry me *mon coeur* (my heart)?”

She slowly sank down pushing me back on my heels and straddling my thighs. Pulling her hands from mine she put them on either side of my neck, meeting my eyes. My arms went around her waist, holding her in place.

“You came into my life and everything changed. You brought love into my life and even with all the problems we had I

knew you were the one. The one meant for me. I love you, my Cajun.”

Her smile was brilliant and filled with love.

“The answer is yes, yes I will marry you.”

I drew her close, leaving not an inch of space between us, dropped my head and sealed my lips over hers. The kiss started out soft but it became hot and it took all my resolve not to tumble her to the sand and make love to her right there.

Lifting my head I ran my nose along her jaw and placed a kiss on her neck, making her shiver. There was more to say.

“I want you to think about this before you say no, *bèbè* (baby). Dom buyin’ this property gives us the perfect venue for our weddin’. I want to marry you here, on this beach, on New Year’s Eve. Both our families will be here for Christmas anyway, it just makes sense. And with Dom goin’ overboard and buyin’ his woman all this you can invite your friends to come and spend the day with us.”

My woman didn’t immediately answer me, but a tiny smile curved her lips as she thought about it then nodded.

“Okay, we’ll get married here on New Year’s Eve, but honestly, I have no idea how we’re going to pull it off. There’s so much we’re going to have to do.” She looked at me, her love shining clearly in her face and eyes.

I grinned. “*Ma belle ange* (My beautiful angel), you know Niki is goin’ to jump all over helpin’ us to organise it. Dom says his wife shows her love by tryin’ to make things easier for her loved ones. So we let her help us.”

I stood, holding her against my chest, her feet dangling. She giggled as I scooped her legs up and carried her back up the stairs like a bride.

Which she was going to be very soon.

A beautiful summer bride.

My bride.

Niki

Dominick and I stood on the veranda and waited for Remy and Pixie to join us. I grinned when I saw the way he was carrying her back up from the beach.

She had her arms around his neck and was laughing up at him. He was so big and she was so petite she looked almost like a child in his arms.

They came towards us and Remy stood at the bottom of the steps grinning up at us.

“She said yes.” He said and I had to think about it for a second.

And then it hit me.

He had asked her to marry him.

I couldn't help it. Giving a little scream of happiness I started jumping up and down.

“That's wonderful! Congratulations to both of you. Have you set a date?” I asked.

Remy glanced at us then looked down at Pixie and winked. She answered, not looking away from him.

“We have, we want to get married on New Year’s Eve. If it’s okay, we’d like to do it here, on the beach, with our family and friends.” She kissed his jaw then looked over at us and smiled.

I didn’t give my man a chance to answer. I was so excited I was bouncing in place.

“Yes, yes, yes, yes! We can totally do a beach wedding for you. It will be so beautiful, Pixie. I can help you with organising and getting invitations out and everything.”

Pixie chuckled and gave me a slow nod. We had so much to do. I wanted to start immediately.

“Right. We need to go inside and inspect the kitchens and the rooms and make plans for...”

I started but Nic put his hand over my mouth, shutting me up.

“Baby, calm down, let Pixie catch her breath first. Later, once we’re back home, the two of you can start brainstorming the wedding.”

I gave him a wide smile.

“We have a house, a beach and the beauty that surrounds us, what more could we want? It’s going to be a beautiful wedding.”

I had to speak to my mama because we had watched a particular movie together. A movie that had a beach wedding in it. A beautiful beach wedding. I was totally going to copy it...as much as possible anyway. If Pixie allowed me to do so.

Earlier, when I had followed Dominick inside to sign the paperwork I fell in love with the rustic beauty of the house, or

should I say guest lodge. The lounges were in one wing, the dining areas and kitchen in the other.

In the main lounge a huge fireplace dominated the space. A piece of pale grey driftwood formed the mantel of the fireplace built out of large round rocks. Heavy wooden beams interspersed with reed ceilings and pale wooden floors completed the look. Pale grey and blue upholstered easy chairs and couches were arranged in intimate groupings around the large room.

It was perfect. Everything was perfect.

Now with Pixie and Remy we explored the rest.

From the top of the line chef's kitchen to the dining rooms and bedrooms.

I knew that at a later date we would renovate it to be more in line with our needs and personalities. I would turn it into a family holiday home and not a guest lodge as it was now.

But for now it was perfect.

Our very own family beach resort.

Being the wife of a billionaire was something I had to get used to. My man spoiled me and I was learning not to point out things I like because inevitably it would arrive at the penthouse.

His excuse?

I was going to need it when we moved into the Maingarde family mansion once the renovations were done.

From the start he had involved me in the renovation of his family home. He wanted to return it as close to the original as

possible. It meant we were constantly on the lookout for antique pieces, from furniture to glassware and fittings.

And now we had a beach house to play with as well.

I could see our children and Pixie's children running wild out here. And maybe even my late brother Ivan's kids once my big brother reunited Cat and her boys with our family

I was hoping that one day Sergei too, would have children to bring here.

I knew my brother was working on extracting himself from the clutches of the bratva first. It made my heart clench in fear just thinking about it, but I believed in him.

I believed he would succeed and then we would finally have it all.

We would all be together, a family.

A large family coming together to celebrate special times and holidays at our holiday home.

It would be that kind of place for us.

A place where you could come to relax and leave all your troubles behind.

The perfect place for my husband to take a breath before he had to go back to running his companies and the Syndicate.

He had told me about the Syndicate and how involved he was with the criminal underworld.

While I worried about his safety I wasn't worried about the rest.

I knew he had to be harsh and sometimes take lives to keep
us safe

He was the man I loved. Bloodied hands and all.

Beneath all the darkness was a good man.

A good husband, father, brother and friend.

What he did, he did for us, all of us.

I admired him for it and loved him for it

Dominick Maingarde was an amazing man.

And all mine.

CHAPTER THREE

Pixie

I thought it would be easy to organise a beach wedding.

I was wrong.

Why was I wrong?

I didn't factor in Niki and her Mama, or Sophie, Dom's housekeeper. Nor did I realise Remy's mother and sister would lose their minds when we called to tell them we were getting married.

Their reactions to being told was to book earlier flights for the two of them and on arrival dive right into the frenzy going on at both my house and Dom and Niki's penthouse.

They were on a mission to give us a perfect traditional wedding.

Strangely it was Joney who stepped up to help me find the perfect 'not' wedding dress. We had become closer since the mess with Rider. She wasn't happy with the other women wanting to go dress shopping at bridal boutiques. Muttering to herself under her breath as I assured them I had it covered. I didn't need a posse, only Joney.

That's why we were here, at a little boutique, looking at dresses.

"I promise you'll find something here. They stock petite sizes and a lot of those floaty boho dresses. I can see you in one like that, all lacy, your hair wild with flowers in it and barefoot." She looked around as if checking that we were alone.

We were.

"I didn't want to say anything at the penthouse because they're your family, but the wedding they are planning isn't you. You need to tell them to calm the fuck down. It's your wedding, your day, and you should be the one deciding about the flowers, the food and all that other shit."

Joney shoved her long white blonde hair out of her face and looked away from me. I had no idea she felt so strongly about it.

"They're trying to help, Joney. I know it's not my kind of thing but I sort of feel like I should allow them..." She didn't let me finish.

"No. No you do not. Family should not be allowed to take over your life however well meant it is" She waved a hand around the shop. "We are here finding you the perfect dress and I want you to have the perfect day to go with the dress. You and Remy, you deserve to have the day you want. Not the day someone else imagined you should have. They don't really know you and you're not doing them any favours by letting them run wild planning something they imagine you would want. You and I both know Wild Man and Rooster are going to turn up in jeans and maybe a nice shirt, wearing their

kuttes, the same with the guys for the Iron Dogz. You can't ask them to come to a beach wedding in bloody suits, Pixie."

She threw her hands in the air in exasperation when I grinned.

Patting her arm I winked and she narrowed her eyes at me.

I noticed that about her today. Her make-up wasn't heavy and her hair was product free and hung straight down her back. She was dressed in conservative knee length jean skirt and a tee, a pale pink tee that showed no cleavage. Her nails were painted to match. Even her toe nails because I could see them in her strappy sandals. Flat sandals, another thing she never wore. She was always in sky high heels.

The woman in front of me looked completely different to the woman who strutted around the studio every day.

I waved a hand, indicating her body from top to toe.

"What is all this? This isn't the Joney I know."

She bit her bottom lip, glanced away then back at me. "I know. This is how I used to dress in a another life. Some not so good things happened, and I...let's say I lost my way." She blew out a heavy breath. "But that's a tale for another day. Right now we need to find you a dress."

She turned away motioning one of the sales ladies over. I knew her well enough to know she wouldn't say more. But if she thought this was the end of our discussion she was making a mistake. A big mistake. Even though she has been a pain in my ass she was still a good friend and one of my artists. I cared about her.

We were going to sit down and have a talk, soon.

Putting the heavy behind us we spent the morning arguing about which dress was the best. We had it down to two.

Joney insisted on a heavy lace one with a scalloped hem that fell to my ankles. From every scallop hung two white beads and a tiny golden bell. They rang softly when I moved. The other was made of fine lace with bell-like sleeves and fell to the top of my feet. I would need to wear an underdress because it was almost completely sheer. The lace was thicker over the important bits, but not much. It wasn't suitable for my wedding. It would be perfect in a private situation to seduce my man.

Looking at the two dresses hanging side by side I made a snap decision.

"I'll have both."

Joney hopped up and down and clapped her hands in excitement.

"Remy is going to lose his mind when you wear dress number two."

I made big eyes at her and grinned because she was right. He was going to lose his mind when I wore dress number two for him. When we were alone.

"Now we need shoes." I said but Joney and the sales ladies were way ahead of me.

"Not with this dress. You're getting married on the beach that means you need to be barefoot."

"I know, Joney, but we're not going to be on the beach all night. The reception is going to be on the patio and I don't

want to walk around with no shoes on, it will just be icky.” I protested.

“That’s why we called a friend who makes beautiful leather sandals, she handmade these.” One of the salesladies laid a cloth bag on the counter then opened it.

I gaped in wonder as she slowly pulled out the perfect pair of flat sandals.

They were made to look like thongs but with an ankle strap and were soft tan leather. One of the straps leading to the ankle had tiny sea shells attached to the leather all the way across the top of the foot and up to the buckle on the side of the ankle.

“They are perfect.” I smiled at the sales lady. “Add them to the rest.”

When we eventually left we had bags of stuff and the sales ladies were smiling wide and waved as we were leaving. I’m sure their commission was looking really good. And they deserved it because they had been amazing.

Now that I knew about the shop I would be back as they stocked the type of clothes I liked and in my size.

Back at the penthouse the madness had grown.

From what I could gather the wedding they were planning had become even fancier while we had been out. Joney kept prodding me to talk to Nika and Remy’s mum.

Finally giving in I stood and called for their attention. Silence fell and I drew in a deep breath then let it out slowly before I said what I had to say.

“I am eternally grateful for everything you girls are doing here. So very grateful...but, we have a problem. Remy and I don't want a traditional wedding, that's why we chose to get married on the beach. We don't want suits, fancy flowers and a towering wedding cake because that's not who we are. We don't want a sit down dinner where you ladies will have to work your asses off and not enjoy the day. We are already celebrating Christmas with a huge lunch. I think it will be better if we settle on something easy for the wedding. I'm not saying snacks but we need to find something that will be easy to serve and clean up after. Maybe a buffet or something.”

I was going to say more but Sophie interrupted. “If Pixie wants a less traditional wedding we can't do a big fancy dinner.”

She tipped her head to the side and tapped her finger to her lips.

“Are you and Remy sure you want to get married in the late afternoon?”

Everyone started talking at once and she waved a hand to shut them up to listen to me.

“We were thinking about the beautiful sunsets and wanted to use the light...” I started but she waved a hand at me and I shut up, like the others.

“What if you have an early morning wedding, before the heat of the day? And instead of dinner we serve brunch?” She asked.

Tipping my head to the side to mimic her I smiled as I asked the question I knew the answer to. But I needed all of them to

hear it.

“It would mean a couple of our guests would be arriving the night before the wedding and we’d have to put them up for the night. Do we have the space?”

Niki slowly shook her head from side to side. “No, we don’t because we’ve allocated the cottages to your people, Dom’s teams, Sergei and his men, and to the family.” She turned to Sophie. “I’m sorry, Soph, we’re going to have to stick to the afternoon wedding. We can’t expect people to travel from Cape Town in the early hours of the morning to be there for a dawn wedding. It’s easier for them to arrive during the day for a late afternoon wedding. Pixie already told us the bikers have their own New Year’s Eve traditions and most likely won’t stay late, which is why I didn’t bother with extra accommodation. Although Dominick offered to have a couple of prefab cottages put up if it looks like it might be necessary.” She frowned at me and nodded to herself. “I’m thinking we’re going to do that anyway, just in case someone decides to stay over and not drive back after drinking all day.”

I interrupted before she fell down another rabbit hole.

“Remy and I want to be married at around 6.00pm and the ceremony won’t be long drawn out. It will be an exchange of rings and of vows, signing the register and that’s it. The previous owners of the guest lodge gave Dom the number of a pastor in the area. We’ve called him and he’s happy to marry us. It will be a short ceremony, no frills. It shouldn’t take longer than 30 minutes or so. It means those who need to get back to the city will be able to leave at about 7.30pm or later if they want.”

Niki grinned and winked at me.

“That sounds like a good plan. I’m having a couple of extra cottages put up anyway.” She scribbled something on the pad in front of her and I let it go. If she wanted to invite people to stay over that was her prerogative.

“Now that we have the wedding and accommodation sorted what about the cake? Have you given some thought to what you would like? There’s enough time for my daughter to bake anything you’d like.” Sophie smiled at me when I wrinkled my nose.

“I love chocolate cake and so does Remy, but, it’s summer and it’s going to be hot. Won’t the chocolate melt?”

“Leave it with us. We’ll sort out the cake.” Sophie said as she scribbled on the pad she had in front of her. The same type as Niki’s.

“Now, food. What type of food would you like us to serve?”

“All I know is I don’t want everyone working themselves to the bone over the holidays. I’ve seen the menu you ladies have for the Christmas lunch and it’s huge. I was thinking something easier...” I didn’t get to finish because Sophie’s sister jumped in.

“I have an idea. Pixie wants a relaxed family wedding. In South Africa we relax around the braai, it’s what we do. What if we do seafood on the braai? Mussels, prawns and lobster with buttery garlic and herb sauces. And for those who don’t do seafood we have chicken and beef sosaties along with grilled chicken fillets, sausages and cubed steak with dipping sauces. For desert we could order some of Mari’s secret recipe

Cape Fig and Gooseberry baked cheese cakes. They are seriously delicious. We serve Cape wines with the food and there you go, a relaxed South African family wedding on the beach.”

I clapped my hands in excitement because it sounded exactly right.

“I love it. It sounds perfect. And it won’t require anyone working their butts off and not enjoying the wedding. I was thinking we could hire people from the surrounding area to help out on the day. You know, do the braai and clearing of the tables and so on.”

Niki nodded and added it to her list.

There was one more thing I had on my own list.

“Niki, I wanted to ask you a favour. A big favour.”

“Anything, anything I can do to help.” She was such a sweetie.

“Would you please take our wedding photographs? I love your photographs and would like you to do ours.”

A smile so wide and bright lit her face that we all smiled with her.

“Oh yes! I’d love to take your photos. Thank you for asking me to do this for you, it is my absolute honour and pleasure.”

And just like that the entire massive wedding was averted and turned into a comfortable family wedding. A casual barefoot family wedding on the beach.

Perfect.

Nika

I almost made a huge mistake.

So big my heart galloped frantically in my chest thinking about how big of a disaster it would have been.

I thought Pixie would want the perfect traditional wedding but I was so wrong. I had forgotten she had mostly grown up with wild bikers. And I think despite his upbringing Remy was as unconventional as she was.

Thankfully she had spoken up and we were able to avert a disaster.

We had gone a bit overboard on our planning. None of us had spoken to either of them and assumed the wedding we were planning was what they wanted.

We were wrong.

At least it was easy to fix.

We were now back on track. Planning a wedding that would be a casual get together with family and friends.

Pixie asking me to take their wedding photos totally blew me away.

I was so honoured she asked me instead of hiring a professional wedding photographer. The beach and the surrounding rocky outcrops were going to make for an amazing backdrop. Not to mention the beautiful sunset.

There was something else I had to add to my to-do list.

As a surprise for them both I wanted to have a temporary arbour put up on the beach underneath which they would be married. I was going to drape it in her favourite colours which

were the blues and greens to be found in the ocean around Cape Town. Sophie's daughter, Salome, and I had a date to go shopping at a fabric store she knew. I wanted sheer fabrics in her colours to drape over the structure, along the route to the beach and to use over and around the entertainment patio. Salome had a friend who was going to sew the fabric together for us. I wondered if there was enough time to sew them in a wave pattern. I added it to my list.

Pixie was under the impression we would be having the reception on the patio at the back of the house but her brother had taken one look and said no, it was too small. He didn't like that it had no view over the ocean either. There were building contractors out there right now building the most rustically beautiful entertainment patio specifically for her wedding.

At a later date we'll have doors leading out from the lounge added as well as a pool. We wanted a white in ground pool but with above ground walls you could sit on. I had seen pools like that in Greece and wanted something similar. It would be a feature as well as a place to relax.

In my head I could already see us relaxing on the patio with Niko after a day spent on the beach. Lazing in the pool and just being together as a family.

The beach house was the best present I had ever been given.

I couldn't wait to turn it into a proper family retreat.

Not just for Nic, Niko and I, but for the rest of our family as well. All of them, Sergei and Cat and her boys included.

We were about to celebrate our first family Christmas followed by Pixie and Remy's wedding.

Both days we would be spending with family and friends at our new beach retreat.

I couldn't wait.

CHAPTER FOUR

Remy

Saturday - a week before Christmas

I stood outside International Arrivals waiting for my dad and Lucky. It was damned late but I didn't mind, I couldn't wait to see them. Finally I spotted them coming through the doors and waved to get their attention. Not that I needed to. I stood head and shoulders above the people surrounding me. We got some looks as the three of us hugged.

Lucky and I got our size from our dad and with the three of us in one place we sometimes looked slightly intimidating.

“Great to see you, Papa.” I said as I hugged him.

“Good to be here, my boy. We're damned excited about the weddin' and meetin' Pixie's family.” He gave me a final hard pat on the back before passing me to my brother.

“It's great to be back, brother. Missed you and your girl. Did you get me a ride as I asked?” He slapped me on the back then moved away.

“I did. Let's get out of here. Mum and the girls are waitin' at home.” I said as I led them out to the parking garage and

loaded their shit in the back of the SUV.

“This yours?” Lucky asked as he settled in the passenger seat. Papa had opted for the back seat.

“Yeah, it’s my company vehicle.”

“Ooh, fancy. My baby bro has a company vehicle.” He teased.

“Fuck you, asshole.”

“No, fuck you.” He grinned.

“At least I have a good woman not just a bike.” I teased.

He snorted in mock disgust. “You’re the one gettin’ married, tyin’ yourself to this whole civilian thing. Me, I’m still free and easy, livin’ the fuckin’ life.” He claimed slapping a hand to his chest.

I called bullshit on that one but didn’t stay it out loud.

“Enough with the fuckin’ dirty talk. Tell me about this weddin’ of yours.” Papa said as he smacked both of us on the back of the head.

I grinned at Lucky and he winked. Our papa would never change.

“We’re gettin’ married on the beach at Dom and Niki’s new beach house.” I held up a hand before they could jump in with questions. Questions I knew they would have plenty of.

“Actually, callin’ it a beach house isn’t exactly right. It’s not just a beach house. He bought a fuckin’ farm with its own beach for his woman as an early Christmas present because she wants to have the family close. Pixie and I were walking on the beach and I did it. Asked her to marry me and she said

yes. Told her it was happenin' on New Year's Eve on the beach and she said okay, let's do it. So, here we are. We'll be getting' married in exactly two weeks from today. New Year's Eve."

"Why? Why the fuck would you want to get married on New Year's Eve?" Lucky looked confused. "It's a party night, not a night to get married, brother."

I laughed as I shook my head. My brother didn't understand and no matter what I said he wouldn't until the day he met the one. The woman who was going to turn his life upside down.

"Any night with Pixie is better than a million party nights in the clubhouse, brother."

Papa reached out from the back and patted my shoulder.

"Good to hear, my boy, good to hear. Pixie is a fantastic woman and perfect for you. She will keep you on your toes for the rest of your lives." He suddenly laughed. "And it won't hurt that she will give you beautiful babies. You're goin' to have to invest in a shotgun to keep the boys away if your girls look like their maman."

Fuck. I never thought about that.

"Nope, no, my girls won't date. They will be perfect little angels. Angels who will be nuns." I snarled as papa and Lucky laughed like I had said something funny.

"And if you have boys, brother? Will they be allowed to date and ride?" Lucky kept stirring.

"Yeah, of course, they will be boys. They will look after their sisters and beat the shit out of anyone comin' near them." I said as if it was a done deal.

Papa laughed and laughed and laughed. He had tears in his eyes and shaking his head at me.

“Oh, Remy, son, you have so much to learn about women. Your girls will be like their maman. And there’s nothin’ you can do about it. Ask me, I know.”

Shit. I believed him because my sister is a force of nature. She didn’t let anyone tell her what to do.

“I’ll just have boys then. Easy.” I said glibly and again papa cackled.

“Okay, my boy, whatever you say. We’ll see when the first baby comes along. If it’s a girl I reserve the right to smack you on the back of the head for not getting’ it right.”

Lucky was laughing so hard he couldn’t get a word out as he pointed at papa then tapped his chest.

The bastards.

I knew I was being an ass but just the idea of my baby girl in the hands of some boy had me seeing red.

And I didn’t even have a baby girl yet.

Not yet, but maybe soon.

Pulling up to our house I grinned as the front door burst open and Pixie came rushing out. She was dressed in blue sleep pants with gold fish on them and one of my tees, her hair wild around her head.

She looked amazing.

I fucking loved her so much.

I watched as my papa and brother hugged and teased her while I took the luggage from the back of the car. Lucky came back to help me while she led papa inside.

We had decorated the outside of the house with lights but not too much. I had mostly wrapped strings of lights around the posts on the veranda and around one or two of the bushes in front of the house. Pixie added a wreath to the front door, something she admitted she had never done before. She did it for my family after I told her it was one of Maman's Christmas traditions.

She was going to be wearing my ring on the night we rang in the New Year with my family.

I couldn't wait for my angel to be a part of our traditions.

Lying in bed holding her in my arms was a dream I never thought would come true.

I never thought I'd have a woman of my own and planning a life with her. While working undercover with the FBI I never pursued any relationships because it wouldn't have been fair to subject a woman to my erratic lifestyle.

And then everything changed.

I met Pixie Maingarde.

The woman who was going to be my wife and the mother of my children.

Thinking about making her my wife and having children with her had me instantly hard.

It was easy to slide her on top of my body, caging her in with my arms.

“What are you doing?” She squeaked sleepily.

“I need you, *mon ange* (my angel). I need to be deep inside you right now.” My voice came out in a deep growl and I felt her shudder in my arms.

Slipping a hand down her back and over her ass I gave it a squeeze then slipped my hand inside her panties and dipped down.

She was wet and ready for me.

“I love how your pussy is always wet for me, baby.”

“I can’t help it, when you use your sex voice it happens instantly.”

I bit her neck and sucked softly, not leaving a permanent mark. She shuddered and I kissed her neck while slipping her panties off.

“It’s goin’ to be fast because I can’t wait to get inside you. Next time I’ll spend time lickin’ and suckin’ on your body, right now all I can think about is gettin’ inside you and fuckin’ you senseless.”

She didn’t answer, just slipped a hand down between us, gripped my cock then raised her hips and sank down on me.

Both of us moaned.

I couldn’t even give her time to adjust as my hips started hammering into her.

I shouldn’t have worried about hurting her because she was right there with me. Bouncing on my cock with wild abandon.

Somewhere in my sex crazed head a little voice said to put her on her back, so I did. I flipped us and groaned as her legs

clamped high around my hips.

My thrusts were wild and hard and I knew I was close to coming. But first I had to take care of my woman. Sliding my hand down between us I flicked her clit and her muscles tightened around my cock letting me know she was close as well. We were speeding towards bliss together.

I kept flicking and thrusting. Her nails dug into my shoulders as she arched and came with a moan.

I didn't need more than two thrusts and I was there with her.

Coming so hard it felt as if the world exploded along with me.

Lying between the wide spread legs of my angel I panted wildly then lifted up on my forearms not the squash her.

Sliding both hands into her wild curls I held her head, curved my body over her and sealed my lips over hers. Kissing her gently, softly but deep.

“I love you more than I ever thought I could or would love another person, *mon ange*. I can't wait to slide my ring on your finger and let the world know you belong to me. Only me.” I whispered against her smiling lips.

“You are so arrogant but I love you. You are my Cajun, my man, and I can't wait to slide my ring on your finger to show the horny bitches you are taken.” She teased.

She gently pushed against me to let her up. I knew she liked to clean up after sex but I wasn't letting her go anywhere.

“You're sleepin' with me inside you tonight.” I said softly. “I want to make a *bèbè* with you, and I want it to be soon. I'm

goin' to fill you with my come as many times a day as I can and you're goin' to let it stay inside. No cleanin' up."

I grinned when her nose wrinkled in disgust. "I'm going to be leaking and I hate wet panties."

"Then you're goin' to have to carry extras around with you, *mon ange*, because we're goin' to be fuckin' a lot." I warned her semi-seriously.

"I like the 'fuckin' a lot' thing, but I don't like the wet panties. I'll make sure I have extra panties in my bag."

She grinned up at me and I leant down and kissed her.

Gently moving off her I drew her into my arms and settled her in front of me.

Clamping my hand over her pussy I settled my face in the back of her neck. Breathing her in.

I fell asleep holding my come inside my woman.

It felt glorious.

Pixie

Sunday morning

Remy's mum, who insisted I call her Maman, and I were in the kitchen drinking coffee and chatting when the alarm beeped to tell me someone was at the gate. Walking over to the monitor set into one of the kitchen cupboards I clicked to connect. I grinned at the face the camera showed me.

Rider.

"Rider! Hi! You're here early."

He was in a big black SUV and leaning out the open window. The man looked tired but smiled into the camera.

“Morning Pixie, yes, we’re here early, sorry about that.” He glanced behind him before turning back and giving me begging eyes. “Let me in before the princess wakes up and starts screeching, please.”

I bounced in place as I put in the code to open the gate then raced to the front door while calling to Remy.

“Remy! Rider and his baby girl are here!” I was so excited to finally meet his little girl.

Keying in the code I threw open the door and dashed to top of the steps and waited as he slowly drove up and stopped. He grinned at me before turning the car off and opening his door. Getting out he stretched his back with a groan. I don’t know if it was my imagination but he looked bigger than the last time I had seen him. It looked like he’s been working out a lot.

I raced down the steps and into his arms, hugging him hard. He chuckled as he hugged me back then set me away from him. Looking me up and down he nodded then smiled.

“You’re looking good, Pixie.”

He on the other hand, even though he was definitely bigger, had dark rings around his eyes and looked tired and worn.

Not good. Not good at all.

“You look tired. Let’s get you and your baby girl inside and get you settled. Then we’ll have breakfast and just laze the day away.”

Remy was suddenly with us and dragged Rider into a hard hug.

“Good to see you again, brother. My old lady is right, let’s get you guys settled in. Not that we’ll be here long, we’ll be headin’ out to the beach house on Wednesday.”

Rider looked confused.

“We’re going to a beach house? I thought we were having Christmas here at your house or at Dom’s penthouse.”

“Change of plans, bro. When the women started countin’ the invited guests they realised there wasn’t enough space. We both know Dom wants his woman to have everythin’ her heart desires, so, he bought her a beach house, but it’s a beach house with a difference. It’s a farm that used to be a guest lodge, now they’re callin’ it the family retreat, or somethin’ like that.”

Remy explained as he helped to unload the luggage.

I, however, had the back door open and was peeking in at where a beautiful little girl was fast asleep in her car seat. Her glossy golden brown hair was tied up in two pony tails with pink ribbons. Both were now sagging. Rosy-red little lips were slightly open as she slept and long dark lashes swept the tops of her rosy little cheeks. A cute little nose and sharp little chin made me think of those photos of baby fairies.

She was beautiful.

I withdrew from the backseat to frown at my friend. “Did you drive through the night? Is that why she’s in her jammies?” I asked softly.

He smiled tiredly and shook his head. “No, we were at a hotel but the little madam back there was being difficult. She

was awake at about four thirty this morning and I couldn't get her back to sleep. Eventually I gave up, packed our shit and got on the road. She was watching her favourite movie and fell asleep within bloody minutes. It's not normal for her so I'm expecting a cranky toddler when she wakes up."

"She's too beautiful to be cranky." I said.

I spoke too soon.

A pissed off little growl came from behind me.

"Dadda, me's not likin' dis caw. Me wants out. Me wants de twalit."

Rider sighed and shook his head as he came and ducked into the car. I heard him saying something to her as he undid the straps then pulled her out of the seat and stood. Her face was hidden in his neck as he faced us.

He stroked over her head with his big hand and gently took her face out of his neck. She looked at us shyly.

"Delly-belly, this is your auntie Pixie and uncle Remy. Say hello then we'll go inside and use the toilet, okay?"

Her very pale blue eyes surrounded by those dark eye lashes were striking. They were sparkling with life and curiosity.

The cutie batted those lashes as she looked us over then smiled sweetly.

"ello Awnty Issie, yews pwetty. Unca Wemy is pwetty too. Nana Soosie says dadda is pwetty. We's all pwetty." She gave a little giggle and ducked her head back into Rider's neck.

I loved the way she tried to say our names.

“Dadda, I has to wee-wee, now.” She whispered urgently to Rider.

Damn she was so cute. I wanted to snatch her from his arms and squish her, but of course I couldn't.

“Brother, take your girl to the bathroom, I'll handle the bags.” Remy said as he patted his shoulder.

“Come on, I'll show you the way.” I gestured to him to follow and ran up the steps to the veranda.

“Quikee, Dadda, quikee.” Delene chanted as we zoomed inside to the guest bathroom.

Rider zipped inside with her while I went to the kitchen.

Maman was still sitting at the kitchen table with her coffee when I came in and looked up with a smile.

“Rider looks really tired, and Maman, his baby girl is so beautiful and so sweet. You're going to want to hug her for days.” I said as I put the kettle on in case Rider wanted tea and not coffee.

“She doesn't look like him so she must look like her mama. It must break his heart every time he looks at her.” I whispered very quietly.

I had thought it wise to let the family know Rider's wife and unborn son had been murdered. I didn't want them to ask questions that would be hurtful for him and embarrassing for them.

Lucky came strolling in through the back door and paused as Rider walked in with his little girl beside him. Delene was

holding on to his hand and she patted his hand with her free hand to get his attention then pointed at Lucky.

“Lookit, Dadda, ‘nuhtha Unca Wemy.”

Lucky immediately dropped down to his haunches and grinned while shaking his head.

“*Non, bèbè*, I’m not Remy, I’m your Uncle Lucky. Your Uncle Remy is my little brother, I’m the big brother.” He explained with the sweetest smile.

Delene let go of Rider’s hand and cautiously approached Lucky then reached out and touched his beard.

“Yew talks funny, Unca Luckee. Yew gots a beeg beawd like Dadda. Yaw beawd is vewy beeeeg. Yew gots ta make it pwetty. Dadda puts smellies on an’ combs it alla time. Beawds dey’s vewy scwatchy.” She scrunched her nose. “Dadda says smellies make dem soft. Yew needs smellies.”

Patting his beard with both hands she tried to tame the wild, rough bush.

I couldn’t help it. I, along with Maman burst out laughing and Delene glanced up at me with a little grin until she saw the stranger standing next to me. Instantly she scooted back to her daddy’s side.

I quickly did the introductions to break the ice.

“Rider, this is Emily Boudreaux, she is Remy, Lucky and Frankie’s maman.”

His smile was as sweet as his daughters’. “It’s very nice to meet you, ma’am. This mouthy little lady is my daughter, Delene.”

He put his hand on top of her head where it was laying against his thigh, she had both little arms wrapped tight around his leg.

“Mine, my Dadda.” She said and patted his knee.

Rider grinned and shook his head, then leant down and picked her up, holding her so that her little butt was resting on his forearm.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Rider and Delene.” Mama smiled. “An’ stop with the ma’am, you can call me Maman or Aunt Emmie, which ever you feel most comfortable with. We’re goin’ to have so much fun when we go to the beach. Have you built a sandcastle on the beach yet, *bèbè*?”

Delene’s eyes were riveted on her. “Yew talks funny, like Unca Wemy an’ Unca Luckee. My dadda builded a pwincess castle wif me on da beach. Awe yews a nana? My nana Soosie has lots an’ lotsa gwanbabies. Dey’s my fwends. I gots lotsa fwends.”

I watched as Maman Boudreaux fell in love with the talkative little sprite.

“No *bèbè*, I don’t have any grandbabies yet. Will you be my grandbaby, please?”

The little madam tapped a finger to her bottom lip as if thinking about it, then with a wide smile she nodded.

“Okaee, I’s be yews gwanbaby ‘till yew gots one. Dunkin says the stwok bwings ‘em. Mebbe yews gots ta ask Fawde Cwismas ta bwing yew one. Ya gots ta wite him a letta. Mebbe he puts a gwanbaby unda da twee.” She leant forward making

wide eyes and saying in a serious little voice. “You hasta be good. If yews nawty no pwesents unda da twee. Dadda says.”

Maman nodded and smiled gently. “I don’t think Father Christmas will be bringin’ me a grandbaby this year, maybe next year. This year can I be your MeeMaw?”

“Okaee. W’as a MeeMaw?”

“A MeeMaw is a nana where I come from.”

Delene watched her with a little frown between her tiny brows.

“Awe yews fwom faw, faw awayee?”

Maman nodded. “We are. We’re from America and that’s why you think we talk funny. We had to take a plane to get here.”

She was silent for a beat. “Mmm...mewika. Whewe’s dat?”

“Far across the sea, *bèbè*”

She nodded as if she understood perfectly. For a three year old she was amazing. But I suppose it came from being around her daddy so much. I noticed that he didn’t talk to her as if she was too little to understand. No baby talk at all.

She was just starting to settle down, sitting on his lap, when Frankie and Papa came in through the back door. They had been swimming when I checked on them earlier.

Maman jumped right in with the introductions.

“Papa, Frankie, come and meet Rider and his baby girl Delene.” She beckoned them over.

Delene had crawled back into her shell and her little hands were holding on to his tee tightly.

“Hi, it’s nice to meet you.” Rider said and nodded at both. He smiled but it was barely there.

Papa immediately stepped forward and held out a hand. Rider took it and shook while his baby girl watched closely.

Only now did I realise she took all her cues from him. If he was relaxed and friendly so was she. If he was a bit reserved so was she.

And right now he was definitely reserved around all the new comers. He shook Frankie’s hand almost stiffly, his face expressionless.

Lucky jumped in to lighten the atmosphere.

“I’m damned glad to have a brother goin’ along on this beach holiday. I was worryin’ I’d be the only one around all these civilians.” He teased.

“You will stop bein’ rude. We have us a baby girl here who I’m sure has radar for ears.” Maman said. “Am I right, Rider?”

He grinned, suddenly relaxed again.

“She does repeat everything she hears so I’ve been trying to keep it clean as much as possible. It’s not easy, but I’m trying.”

Maman took over and very soon we were sitting down having breakfast outside on the patio. Rider and his baby settled in with us and I was happy to see the sadness in his eyes lifting a bit.

Soon all talk returned to our upcoming wedding.

Rider was shocked when we told him we were getting married on New Year's Eve on the beach. He grinned when Remy described the chaos that was the penthouse, advising him against going there and Lucky backed him up.

“It's crazy central, brother. It's better to stay away. If you're okay with leavin' your sweetheart with Maman an' Pixie you an' I can take the bikes out for a run tomorrow. I'm sure you need to check in with your Prez, lettin' him know you're in the area.”

Rider suddenly seemed a bit lighter, as if the thought of riding eased him somehow.

“I've got your sweetie pie, no worries. You ride out to the club and do what you have to.” I assured him.

He kissed his baby's head then nodded. “Thanks, Pixie, it would be great to ride again. I haven't been on my bike in a while now. I think the last time was back home.”

It was decided.

We spent the rest of the morning playing with Delene in the pool until Rider took her up to their room for a nap.

When he came back down he had a pink baby monitor in his hand.

Placing it on the table he sat down and seemed to relax.

He didn't though.

His eyes kept returning to the monitor as if with his eyes on it his baby was safer.

It had to be hell. Absolute hell, raising your baby alone. Especially when that hadn't been the plan at all.

I resolved that while they were with us we would do everything in our power to help him. To make it easier on him.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dom

I pushed my laptop away as Remy walked in and sagged into the chair across from me.

“What’s wrong?”

“Rider arrived yesterday with his baby girl.”

“How is he? Any better than the last time he was here?” I was hoping for good news.

“No, if I had to judge I think he’s worse. The man is not copin’ with his loss, he’s tryin’ but it’s killin’ him. I have no idea how to help him through this.”

Fuck.

“I spoke to Hawk earlier today and they have the same concerns. He’s asked me to keep an eye on him while he’s here. He’s been withdrawing from his club and his friends. Hardly ever contacts them unless it’s work related. The man needs help but he’s not going to ask for it. He needs to talk to a therapist or something because the load he’s carrying is going to break him. And when he breaks his baby will be all alone in this world.”

Remy nodded. “His daughter is the sweetest little thin’ you’ve ever seen, brother. She worships her daddy and if her eyes are open they’re on him. She’s already got us under her spell. I brought her and Pixie over to see Niki and your boy. My parents are shoppin’ because accordin’ to them Delly needs a spectacular Christmas and so does her daddy. The brother doesn’t realise it yet but my folks have adopted the two of them. Maman already has Delly callin’ her MeeMaw and my dad Paw-Paw. It’s a done deal. I’ve got me a new baby brother.” His grin said he was pleased about it.

“Where is he now? You’ve got his baby girl. I can’t see him letting her out of his sight for very long.” I asked.

“Lucky talked him into goin’ to the clubhouse and then on a run. Apparently he has to report in with Orca to let him know he’s in the area. I don’t expect them home soon. Lucky has been talkin’ about takin’ a long run up the coast and I think it will be good for Rider to just get out there and feel the wind on his face. My brother has been through some shit of his own, not that he knows I know, but maybe he will talk to Rider. I’m hopin’ he gets through to him.”

I sat silent as I thought about how to include Rider into our arrangements for Christmas and the wedding. Then I had an idea.

“I’m thinking we need to give him something to do. Something that has nothing to do with his club and everything to do with the holiday. I’m thinking he’s avoiding it as much as he can and he thought coming here would be easier than facing the painful memories at home. Let’s help him make new memories. Memories with his baby girl and with us.”

“I like that. What do you have in mind?” Remy finally relaxed a bit.

“I have a long fucking list of shit that needs to get done for Christmas and I’m thinking we appoint Rider and Lucky as the guys who would be taking care of the list.” I drew my phone to me and sent the list Nika had sent me to Remy.

“Give them the list and my credit card. They’re going to need the big SUV to get all the shit on the list.” I opened my drawer, pulled a black card and set of keys out and slid them across the desk.

At the top of the list was the Christmas trees, four of them. Don’t ask me why she wanted four seeing that we already had one at the penthouse and one in the lobby downstairs. My wife was on a mission and I wasn’t going to interfere, I would rather give her everything she asked for.

Remy frowned, glanced at me then down at the list.

“This is goin’ to take them at least a couple of days to complete. What the fuck do they want all this stuff for? Pixie and I told them we wanted to keep it simple.”

“Brother, learn this lesson now, do not ask because the answers will make no sense to you. Just give them what they want then step away and watch as they turn an ordinary day into a spectacular one.”

Remy sighed, nodded then slid his phone back into his pocket.

“We’ll be headin’ up to the beach house on Thursday mornin’. I’m thinkin’ it should give them enough time to get

everythin' on the list. It will take Rider's mind off his troubles as well."

"That's what I thought." I said and relaxed back in my chair then changed the topic of conversation.

"Have you heard from Sergei? He hasn't reached out to his mother or sister and it's starting to worry me a bit. He was supposed to get the shit in Russia done before Christmas. And we're getting close."

Remy shook his head. "No, not a word but I'm not worried about him. If there's anyone who can take care of himself it's Sergei Orlov. We've very quietly been askin' some questions and accordin' to those who would talk we shouldn't worry. He's apparently more dangerous when it's all quiet than when everyone is talkin' about him. No one is talkin' and they don't want to either. We did pick up whispers of deaths in Moscow and St Petersburg but no names were mentioned."

"You think he's still alive." I said.

He nodded. "*Oui* (Yes). If he was dead those fucks would have been broadcastin' it. There's nothin', which to me means he's alive and rainin' down hell on those who killed his family."

"Nika asks every day but her mother doesn't. It's as if she knows she doesn't have to ask."

Remy just nodded and I didn't push it. There was no use getting stuck in idle speculation.

We would wait for Sergei to reach out to us.

Sergei

Sitting behind his desk he leant back in his chair and stretched his aching shoulders. He had been bent over the laptop for too damned long. Rolling his neck he listened to it crack and sighed. He needed a massage but he didn't trust the bratva's bitches. He wasn't sure where their loyalties lay. He didn't need a knife in the back when he was lying naked on a massage table.

Between keeping his eyes on Ivan's family and taking care of the bratva he was stretched thin. With Viktor, Andrei and Oleg missing and presumed dead he was now Yevgeni's right hand man.

If the murderous bastard knew how close he was to dying he would have drawn those loyal to him closer. The problem for the big boss was that most of those men have switched loyalties, and were now loyal to him and not Yevgeni.

A sharp knock had him looking up. Ilya, his second stood in the open door.

"We have a problem." He said softly after quick glances to either side outside the door.

Motioning him inside Sergei waited until the door was closed then pushed the button to jam all frequencies in and around his office.

"Tell me."

"Delamotte is making moves. He's pissed you got the job and has been talking to some of the men. Most are loyal to you but there are a few who is listening to him. We should prepare for an attack. He's going to make a move to take you out so he

can step up. His father has been calling the boss a lot. I think they are cooking up a deal between them. Not that I think Yevgeni will allow them to take you out, but you never know. If they offer him enough he will take it. He's a greedy fuck."

Rubbing a hand over his lower face as he thought about his next move he made an instant decision.

"We go with the next phase of the plan. I know we planned to wait at least a month for things to start settling down but this is too good an opportunity to waste. If we play this right Claude and his father will make perfect scapegoats for Yevgeni's death. No one will be pointing fingers at us because we will be out of the country. Call the team in. We meet tonight at the usual place." He looked at his best friend and smiled.

It wasn't a good smile.

After all these years existing under the fist of Yevgeni Demidov, the man who had his father and brother murdered, and forced his mother to marry her rapist, he would finally have his vengeance.

His team was made up of men who had very good reasons to want him dead.

They have all lost family and loved ones to him and his son.

The son had been dealt with by his brother-in-law.

Now it was the turn of the father.

The plan was simple. He and two members of his team would be seen leaving to spend the holidays with his family in South Africa. The rest of the team would leave to spend the holidays with family and friends outside of Russia.

They wouldn't go far. They would return under cover of night and take care of Demidov.

Once done they would disappear as fast as they had appeared.

If they did this right all fingers will be pointing at the Delamotte's.

Those who remained loyal to Yevgeni would take care of them.

And no one would think about pointing fingers at his men or him.

Lucky

The man riding next to him was a broken husk of a man.

It was in his eyes and he saw it in his actions. If not for his baby girl he knew the brother would have killed himself by now, she was the only thing keeping him in this world.

How did he know this?

He knew because he had been where his brother was right now.

He never talked about it because he couldn't.

It was club business and would always be club business.

He went down the rabbit hole and almost didn't make it out.

He had been sitting with a gun in his hand ready to pull the trigger when his Veep had found him.

Grave and his old lady talked to him, kept him in their family and helped him to keep living.

He knew he had been lucky, no pun intended, his Veep found him.

Everyone thought his road name came from his luck with the ladies.

It didn't.

It came from being saved in the nick of time.

His Veep gave him his road name so he would always remember. Remember how precious life was and how lucky he was to have survived.

It seemed it was now his turn to pay it forward and save a brother.

Rider might not be sitting with the barrel of a gun in his mouth but he was close. Close enough Lucky could feel it radiating off him. The only thing keeping him here was Delene, his baby girl.

Turning on his indicator he turned off onto the lookout next to the road. They were riding through the mountains and the lookout had an amazing view over the ocean.

Parking next to each other they pulled off their gear before getting off their bikes and walking over to the waist high - to other people - parapet built out of rocks. Lucky had his phone out and took photos he immediately sent to his brothers back home.

"I'm makin' those fuckers back home so jealous. The last time I was here I didn't have time to ride out and explore, now I do. This ride with all the sweeps and steep climbs and then the view is fuckin' magic." He sat down on the wall and took a

photo of Rider looking relaxed and grinning at him then sent it to Remy.

“We have some magnificent scenery. Next time you come out you should arrange to be here longer. We can do a couple of runs together.” Rider said as he sat down as well.

“I would like that but I have no idea when I’ll be back. We have some shit goin’ down back home which is why I’m only here for the few days over Christmas and New Year. My flight home is booked for the evenin’ of the first.” Lucky shrugged.

“Pity, but I get it.”

“And you, brother? When are you goin’ to go home?”

He knew he was pushing but he had to.

Rider threw his legs over the edge of the wall and sat with his elbows on his thighs, his face in his palms, staring out over the ocean. Lucky did the same and waited.

“Every time I think of home I see her lying on that dusty road, bleeding out. And then I can’t fucking breathe. I was able to end the man who took her life and the life of my boy but it wasn’t enough. Even knowing the bitch who orchestrated it is dead is not enough. It will never be enough. I know my brothers need me to go home. I know it. The problem is the memories waiting for me there. I couldn’t handle it and that’s why I left. I’m afraid to go back and fall into that dark place again.” He sighed. “Because if I do I’m not coming out alive.”

He spoke in a low voice but Lucky heard him clearly. Heard the despair and horror.

“I understand, brother. I’ve been where you are. I can’t say much because it’s club business. What I can say is you’re gonna need to replace the memories of her dyin’ with ones of her laughin’ and lovin’ you and your girl. Those are the memories you have to cherish so you can pass them on to your baby girl. She lost her Mama too and she’s fuckin’ scared of losin’ you as well. We’re fuckin’ outlaw bikers so therapy is out of the question, but you need to find someone you can talk to brother. If there’s no one then you call me and we talk you through the dark times.”

He clamped a hand on Rider’s shoulder and held on hard.

“And brother let me tell you, there will be dark times, so fuckin’ many but eventually you’re gonna start to remember the good. You’ll still miss her like you’re missin’ a fuckin’ arm or leg but you’ll be able to live again. For you and for your daughter. She’s goin’ to need her daddy, not just now but for years and years to come. You’re fuckin’ lucky you have her. When I lost my Gloria I had nothin’ but memories to hold on to. Those memories and my VP and his ol’ lady got me through. He was there for me when I needed to talk and got me through the dark times. If you need me I’m there for you. You call and I’ll listen, we’ll talk until you’re out of the dark. I swear it on my patch.”

Lucky looked over at Rider, met his eyes and held out a hand. Their eyes held as Rider took his hand and their fingers curved around each other’s hands. Holding on hard.

“Thank you, my brother. I’ll call. I swear it on my patch.” He said quietly.

Lucky grinned as they shook then let go.

“Good. Now that the pussy part of our day is done let’s get back on this excellent road and enjoy the ride, my brother.”

Their ride took them up the coast and when they finally stopped and turned back towards the city they had forged a friendship in mutual loss.

A friendship they each would rely on in the future.

CHAPTER SIX

Rider

Wednesday

He had no idea how it happened but he and Lucky had been turned into the fetch and carry guys for the women.

Every single day they had a list of shit they needed to pick up and drop off at the penthouse or Pixie's house. Why the fuck would they need all the fabric they had picked up this morning? He understood the tiki torches because obviously it was to be used outside. The strings of lights and decorations he got as well. But the bunch of wooden poles? The spades? What the hell were these women planning?

Lucky was as clueless as he was. Thank fuck later today they would be driving to the beach house so hopefully there would be no more crazy errands to run. He wasn't betting on it though.

He was packing Delene's bag when his phone rang, one look at the caller and he sighed.

Niki. What the hell did she want now?

Drawing in a deep breath he answered.

“Hi Niki.”

“Ry, good morning. I’m sorry to do this to you and Lucky, again, but when you get to the beach house and have unloaded I need you to fetch the trees I ordered. There are four of them so you’re going to need to take one of the bakkies. Okay?”

What else could he say but okay.

“Okay, we’re leaving later today. Will the tree place still be open by the time we get there?”

“Oh yes, they know you’re coming. The owner said she’d wait for you.”

“Okay. We’ll pick up your trees.” He held back the exasperated sigh but only just.

“Thank you, byeeee.” She sang out.

Shutting his phone down he shook his head and finished packing his girl’s bag. Over the couple of days they had been here her clothes had increased dramatically. The women had been shopping.

By the time he headed home he was going to need another trailer just for his girl’s shit.

Pixie

My phone rang and I grinned when I saw Niki’s name.

“Hey you, how are you?”

“I’m good, I just called Rider to let him know to pick up the trees I ordered. Dominick has some last minute business stuff to take care of so we’ll only get there tomorrow. Will you be a

honey and check on it for me? We'll set them in place when I get there and then we can decorate." She said in a rush.

"No problem, the guys are busy packing the cars while I'm helping Frankie and Maman. They've made snacks and stuff for when we arrive at the house. I actually can't wait to see it now that the patios are done."

"I've seen the photos and it's beautiful, and don't even ask because I'm not sending them to you. You'll have to wait until you get there." She laughed.

Shaking my head I looked up when Remy walked in and tapped his watch.

"I'm being told to finish talking because time's running out. I'll call when we get there. See you later."

"See you later. Byeeee!"

I smiled up at Remy. "My sister-in-law is driving Rider and Lucky crazy. She's ordered four Christmas trees and they have to pick them up once we get to the beach house."

Remy laughed while shaking his head. "She's a bit crazy about the holidays. Are you ready, baby? The cars are packed and Lucky and Rider are ready to go. Delly has decided to ride with her MeeMaw and Paw-Paw. Frankie is goin' with the guys. What is left to pack?"

I pointed at the kitchen and the stacked containers.

"What the fuck's in those?"

"Food." I grinned. "Your maman colour coded them, a different colour for each of the cars."

He frowned as he walked into the kitchen and opened one of the containers.

Snagging one of the small meatballs he popped it in his mouth and closed the container.

“Hmmm.” He hummed in appreciation as he grabbed one of the stacks and walked out to where the cars were parked at the back of the house.

His dad rushed in and grabbed another stack. I left them to it and did a final check of the upstairs windows. Plus checking for anything we might have forgotten.

When I walked into the kitchen the containers were all gone. Remy came walking from the front door and with a hand on my lower back pushed me towards the back door.

“Get in the car, baby, I’ll lock up and set the alarm.”

As my seatbelt clicked in place my man got in and did the same.

And finally we were on our way.

On our way to the beach house where we were spending Christmas and New Year with family and friends. And where we were getting married.

When our small convoy reached the property I was amazed at all the security Dom had had installed. Entry was through a code Remy had in his phone and he waved the other cars through before we drove through and closed and locked the gate behind us. It was only after we were through that I saw the guard post hidden in the thick bush. The windows were tinted so I had no idea if someone was in there or not.

The last time we were here we had to be careful of ruts and potholes, they were all gone now. The road had been graded smooth and packed hard. As we drove from the enclosing trees and brush into the open around the house I gasped. Dom's people had been very busy indeed. The gardens had been cleared and new shrubs and flowers had been planted. I knew that they were all indigenous to the coastal area because Niki talked about it. Raised wooden pathways now led away from the main building to the cottages. Some of the cottages had new wooden decks and I could see others were being renovated. Everything was being done not to disturb the indigenous shrubs and flowers around the buildings. The walkways would keep feet away from fragile plants.

The wooden stairway down to the beach no longer looked grey and dilapidated. It too had been rebuilt. So much had been done in the short time since we had been here last.

It was amazing.

We parked next to the others and I jumped out and walked over to the new look out deck from which stairs led down to the beach. It was so beautiful. The sea was calm and several shades of blue. From a clear blue-green close to the shore to the deep navy blue of the deep ocean. Throwing my arms wide I breathed in deep, savouring the sea air, then breathed out.

I heard giggles and when I looked around I saw everyone watching me. I was about to snip at them when I noticed why they were watching.

Delene stood next to me mimicking my stance. Her little arms wide, her head thrown back and her nose crinkled up as she breathed in.

“Do you smell that, baby?” I asked softly.

She grinned as she looked up at me. “I’s smellin de sea wif yew.”

“It smells good doesn’t it?”

She nodded and her ponytails whipped around as she turned. “Come, MeeMaw, come Awnty Fwankee, come smell de sea wif us.” She ordered.

It ended up with all us girls standing on the deck smelling the sea while the guys unpacked the vehicles.

It was a magical moment.

None of us realised it but Lucky sneakily took a photo of the four of us standing there with our arms thrown wide. He sent it to Niki. She had it printed and put one up with all the other family photos she had in the penthouse. Eventually she would have them up on a wall in the beach house as well.

She gave a print of the photo to each of us. Even to Delene. Hers was in safekeeping with Rider and he had promised to put it up in her room once they went home.

I caught the glance Lucky threw at him before he looked away with a slight smile.

I wondered what that meant.

Thursday

The trees Rider and Lucky fetched were set in place. The biggest one was set up on the patio where the Christmas and wedding celebrations were going to take place. The second one in the lounge. The third and fourth trees were small and

were for Niko and Delene. Niko's was set up in the living area of their suite upstairs and Delene's in the small lounge of the cottage they shared with Lucky.

Lucky had become one of her favourite people and because of him she added a new word to her vocabulary.

No matter how many times Rider told her she's not supposed to say it the more she used her 'Unca Luckee's wod'.

And how did it start? With Lucky taking the princess to the beach to build sandcastles.

"Come on, Princess, get ya shit. We're going ta build some castles today."

Those pale blue eyes of hers had lit up and she had run to where she had her buckets, spades and beach toys stacked in a crate on the veranda.

"I's gettin' ma shit, Unca Luckee!"

She was even picking up his Cajun accent. It was the cutest thing ever.

Not the swearing but it was the way the two of them were together.

Actually the three of them because they were always together.

Between the two rough looking bikers, holding on to their hands, strutted a little princess in a bright pink bathing suit, a big beige sunhat on her sun streaked golden brown hair and tiny pink slip slops on her feet.

The funniest was the guys had to carry all the crap she wanted to take to the beach. And there was a lot of it.

They did so with smiles on their faces.

Nika took photos of the three of them and of each of the guys with the princess in their arms.

Lucky was a big man and she looked like a little fairy in his big arms.

She had claimed him as she had her Dadda.

Nika

We arrived early this morning and I immediately got to work. We had so much to do before Christmas and then the wedding.

The guys had planted the thin poles that would hold the fabric along the steps going down to the beach and I fibbed when Pixie wanted to know why they were there. I said they were to support the young indigenous shrubs I would be planting to serve as windbreak when they were bigger. I said I was using the manpower while I had it to get it done quickly.

After I told the fib I realised that it was actually a good idea, so I made a note to discuss it with the landscape artist.

We were leaving the harbour I wanted to put up on the beach for the morning of the wedding. I didn't want her to see what we were doing. I wanted it to be a surprise.

The arrangements for Christmas day and the wedding were going well.

Pixie's dress and shoes were hanging in a protective cover in my dressing room, ready for her big day.

When Sophie, her daughter and their families arrived the kitchen would be theirs. Their men were in charge of the grills

that would be set up on the kitchen patio.

For the wedding I had hired people from the local community to help with serving the food. They would be given dinner as well.

I was sitting in the lounge with my notebook on my knee and Niko on a quilt on the floor when Delene and her entourage came through the front door.

Rider, Lucky and Frankie were with her all the time.

She came right to Niko and sat down next to him. Leaning over she kissed his forehead.

“ello little bwo.” She said and stretched out on her side next to him, her head supported in her hand. “He’s gotta eat veggies ta gwow big and stwong.” She declared.

I had to bite my lip not to laugh.

“He’s still very little, Delly, he can’t eat veggies yet.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Cos him gots no teef.” She said importantly. “I’s gots lotsa teef. I eat alla ma veggies, so I cans haf sweeties now.”

“Nice try, Delly-belly.” Rider laughed. “I told you, no sweets today. Tomorrow is another day and there will be lots of good stuff to eat. We’ll wait for tomorrow, okay?”

Throwing herself on her back and rolling her eyes dramatically she sighed.

“Fine.”

Sitting back up she crossed her arms over her chest, only just managing it.

“Dadda says I haf ta be good for Fawde Cwismas and ‘coz Awnty Issie is gettin’ mawwied and we’s gonna haf good foods ta eat. I can’t wait.” She said with a dramatic sigh.

Rider and Lucky were biting their lips to hold in their laughter while shaking their heads. I looked at Frankie who had her head on her knees her shoulders shaking.

I controlled my laughter but only just.

“Your Dadda is right. We’re going to eat really good food tomorrow and on Christmas day and again when your Auntie Pixie gets married. We’re going to eat such a lot of good food.”

She nodded her head wildly, her eyes wide and full of wonder.

“I sawded de foods in de kichen. Lots and lots.” She glanced at Rider before looking back at me. Her eyes all big and innocent. “I like stwabewwies, deys good ta eat and watamelo. I likes it.”

I knew a hint when I heard it.

With her daddy’s permission I went into the kitchen and got her a couple of cut up strawberries and a few chunks of watermelon in a small bowl.

She very daintily sat and ate them as she chatted about her day on the beach. From the corner of my eye I watched Rider watching his little girl with pain in his eyes.

Pain in his eyes but a big smile on his face.

The little girl sitting on the quilt was the sweetest little angel and Rider’s entire world.

Without her he would have been lost.

Suddenly she looked towards the door with a huge smile holding her small bowl up in the air.

“Look Unca Dommie, I’s gots stwabewwies an’ watamelo. Awnty Niki gibbs it ta me.”

Rider and Lucky snorted at the name she had given him. It didn’t bother Dominick at all, he took it in his stride.

My husband looking relaxed in black boardshorts and a white tee strolled in and sat down on the floor next to our son. Leaning over he kissed Niko’s forehead and then did the same to Delly.

“That looks yummy, miss Delly.” He said and she giggled.

“I’s notta miss, I’s jus Delly.” She said importantly as she picked up the last piece of strawberry and bit into it.

Pulling a face she shivered and smacked her lips. “Ooh, sowa.”

That face had me giggling and the guys and Frankie chuckled. We really should shoot more videos of her for Rider. It would be a wonderful memory to look back on. I know Pixie has sneaked a couple, so have I and so has Lucky and Frankie.

I decided I would put them all together and give them to him when they went home.

Remy, Pixie and his parents walked in and Delly perked up when she saw them.

“Awnty Issie! I’s had stwabewwies an’ watamelo fwom da kichen. Awnty Niki gibbs it to me. I’s had a sowa one.” She shook dramatically. “You needs ta put shooga onit. My

Mamma putted shooga on ma stwabewwies alla time.” She frowned, her face scrunched up in concentration as she worked on something in her head.

Rider had gone solid in his chair and Lucky reached out and put a hand on his shoulder.

Delene looked at her daddy. “Dadda says de angels tooked Mamma and my bwuwwa. Dey needs dem in heaben. Me no like de angels. Deys nawty. Me no like dem on de Cwismas twee. Dey mus go home. Deys not habing ma Dadda. We’s not goin’ ta heaben wif dem. We’s stayin’ hewe wif yews.”

Dear God.

She thought the angels were bad and that they would come back for her daddy. Leaving her all alone. That’s why she watched him and clung to him all the time. She was guarding him in her own small way from being taken from her.

My heart broke and so did the hearts of everyone else. Tears ran unchecked and I wiped my eyes and blinked continuously. Meeting Pixie’s I saw she was crying as well. So was everyone else.

Rider gave a heartbroken growl as he snatched her up off the floor and into his arms.

“Baby girl, the angels aren’t nasty or bad. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, people like your Mamma and brother, and the angels take them away to keep them safe. They aren’t going to take me from you. I’m here baby, and I’m not going anywhere. I’m not leaving you, not ever.” His voice was rough but filled with love and hard resolve.

Her little hands went to his cheeks and she looked into his tear filled eyes.

“Pwomise?”

He nodded. “Yes, baby girl, I promise.”

With a sigh she laid her head on his shoulder, her little face snuggled into his neck.

“Okaee.” She said quietly.

Without a word Rider walked out the door with his little girl in his arms.

Sniffles sounded in the quiet and then a couple of heavy sighs.

“That boy is goin’ to need help, he’s lost in his grief and his child knows it.” Remy’s mum said quietly as she wiped her eyes with a tissue.

“He is, Maman, but what happened is a good thing. He’s been walkin’ too close to the edge of darkness and his baby girl just gave him a reason to live. He has to live for her. I think he forgot how much she really needs him and how deeply she feels her mother’s death. Everyone has been tellin’ him she’s little, she doesn’t understand. That’s fuckin’ bullshit. Delly is very bright and she understands more than people think. What she just said proves it.” Lucky said his voice rough and deep with emotion.

“Everyone in his club is worried about him. Hawk has been calling to find out how he’s doing. They want him to come home and I think it might be a good idea.” Dom said.

“No, Dom.” Remy’s dad said. “He isn’t ready for that yet. He needs a bit more time to come to terms with his loss. He hasn’t yet but he’s gettin’ there. And that sweet baby is helpin’ more than any of us could. She just ripped a hole in the wall he’s built around himself. The rest is up to him. We’ll be there for him when he needs us, that’s all we can do.”

“Papa is right.” Frankie said with a sniff. “He has to deal with this himself.”

I wiped my eyes, got up and went and sat next to Dominick on the carpet. I needed his warmth.

We had survived several attempts on our lives and made it through.

I know Rider lost his wife and son but he still had Delly.

She needed him as much as he needed her.

I prayed that he will find his way and make it through.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Pixie

Friday

Yesterday had been an emotional day but our little miss had rebounded and was as sassy as ever.

Yes, she was ours now.

She had crept so deep into our hearts she was now a part of our family.

This morning after breakfast she informed the family that we were going to the beach. Apparently she wanted to pick up shells for Christmas and the wedding.

None of us knew what she planned to do with the shells but we went and picked up shells.

As it was a bit windy Niko had been left behind with Sophie. I laughed when I walked into the kitchen and found him securely tied to Sophie's back in a colourful wrap made of shweshwe fabric. He was fast asleep.

"Is that his *pepa* (carry) blanket?" I asked with a smile.

She nodded, smiling. “It is. I’ve been carrying him around like this when his Mama needs a nap or has something to do where she can’t have him with her. He likes the closeness. It’s what women have been doing through the ages. It works.”

I nodded. It was true. Women the world over carried their babies like this. There were even special cloths to facilitate the carrying.

I left her doing her thing in the kitchen and joined the others on the beach.

Delene held Rider and Lucky’s hands and was swinging on them as they walked down the wooden stairs to the beach. Rider had smothered her in sunscreen and she had her big hat on her head. Today she was wearing a bright blue bathing suit with yellow starfish on it.

Once on the sand she let go of their hands, grabbed her bucket and was off on a mission. She was like a bright dot against the white sand of the beach. I had my phone out and filmed her as she crouched over rock pools and ran in and out of the little waves breaking on the beach, laughing wildly. It was a wonderful and relaxing couple of hours spent following her around and putting shells and pretty stones in her bucket. It was overflowing by the time Rider decided it was time to get out of the sun.

His princess complained bitterly but he only had to raise an eyebrow and she gave a big sigh and held her arms up. Hiding his grin he picked her up and swung her around onto his back. She gave a delighted little scream and her arms clamped tight around his neck.

“Up, Dadda, up high.” She demanded.

With an ease that came from practice he slid her back around then lifted her high and set her on his shoulders. She laughed and threw her arms out to the side.

“Lookit meee!” She shouted gleefully.

I wasn't the only one taking photos of the two of them.

Rider was laughing, his hands holding onto her and she had her hands clamped in his hair. It had to have hurt because he moved them and she leant forward clamping her arms around his head, her little hands on his forehead.

Back at the house we all went straight to the outside shower to wash the sand and salt off our feet and legs. Delly had to shower as she had rolled around in the warm rock pools and the sand. As the outside shower had warm water Rider got her out of her suit right there and quickly washed her with the baby shower gel put in there especially for her, then wrapped her up like a little burrito. He was walking around the back of the house towards their cottage when Delly peeked over his shoulder.

“I's comin' back faw ma shells, okaee?” She said and I held up her bucket and set it down next to the shower to show her where it will be.

I was sure Rider would want to rinse the shells and rocks before he allowed her to play with them.

Remy's arm settled around me and he bent to whisper in my ear.

“I want one of those, so fuckin' badly, *mon ange* (my angel). Seein' you with her down there on the beach made me think of

you with our baby. You'll be playin' with her down there as well."

"She's a very special little girl. And yes, I want that as well. I want to watch you carry our baby on your shoulders and see the love in your eyes as she pulls your hair." I said with a grin and pulled on his long hair.

"I won't mind as long as she's a part of you." He whispered against my ear.

I kissed his cheek and smiled. My man was in for a surprise.

He had no idea I had two pregnancy tests in my vanity bag.

I would be taking the test today.

Looking up at him I knew the time to tell him was now.

"Come with me. I have something to show you. In our room." I wiggled my eyebrows suggestively.

Laughing he grabbed my hand and speed walked us inside. We went straight up to our room.

"Show me." He said and sat down on the side of the bed. I'm sure he expected a strip tease.

That isn't what he got.

Going to my vanity bag I pulled out the two tests and waved them at him.

He leant forward, grabbed me then looked at the tests in my hand.

"You think you might be pregnant?"

I nodded. "I do. That's why I bought the tests."

Setting me back he took one and ripped it out of the packaging, grabbed my hand and dragged me into the bathroom.

“Pee. Now.” He said as he held it out to me.

I laughed and shook my head. “I’m not peeing with you watching.”

“I’ve been all up in that pussy, *mon ange*. Don’t tell me I can’t watch you pee, baby. Do it. Now.” He wasn’t wrong.

So I did it. I peed on the stick, wrapped it with loo paper and handed to him. He turned to the basin and cleaned it off while I finished my business and flushed. Pushing him to the side I washed and dried my hands.

My man was staring down at the stick he had set on the edge of the vanity and I did the same.

“How long are we supposed to wait? You ripped the box so quickly I didn’t have a chance to check.”

“We wait until it does whatever it’s supposed to do.” He mumbled.

So we waited.

Suddenly he grabbed my face and kissed me. Hard.

Lifting his head he gave me his beautiful smile.

“We’re pregnant, *mon ange* (my angel). You’re havin’ my baby.”

Throwing my arms around his waist I hugged him hard.

“I’m having your baby and we’re getting married. I’m so happy.” I whispered against his chest.

“I don’t want to tell anyone yet. I want it to be just us for a little bit. Is that okay?” He dipped his head to meet my eyes and I nodded.

“Absolutely, I want that too.”

We spent the rest of the afternoon in our room celebrating.

Making love with an intensity that took my breath away.

When we finally emerged from our room it was very late in the afternoon. We were just in time to watch a spectacular sunset with everyone on the front veranda while having sundowner drinks.

Remy jumped to get our drinks to disguise the fact I wasn’t drinking.

Mama Lena and Maman had chased Sophia out of the kitchen, telling her to rest. They were taking care of dinner tonight.

Sophia and her family had taken the opportunity to spend some time with family they had in the district and would be back later.

Dom’s ever present phone buzzed and he went from relaxed to alert in seconds.

“Yes.” He said then listened.

“Yes, they’re expected. Let them in.” He finally said.

I wondered who it could be.

He set his phone down and looked at Niki.

“Sergei is here, baby.” He said gently.

Tears immediately filled her eyes as she put her hands together under her chin and whispered.

“Thank God, he made it.”

Looking at Dom and then Remy and seeing the looks on their faces I suddenly realised that when Sergei went back to Russia he had walked straight into danger.

I knew he was part of the Demidov Bratva and that they were bad, really, really bad people. Remy did tell me they were hoping he'd soon be able to get out of it. He didn't tell me how he would manage it and I didn't ask. I didn't want to know.

Niki ran into the house and I heard her mum's voice as she shouted something in Russian and the two of them came rushing back on to the veranda.

They stood at the top of the steps waiting, their eyes on the road leading towards the house.

Lights flashed in the dense bush as the vehicle came closer and then shone brightly, no longer hidden.

There was enough reflected light I could see it was a dark coloured SUV coming our way.

The car pulled up in the parking area in front of the house where the security lights had come on and the driver's door opened. The driver stepped out and opened the back door.

Sergei Orlov stepped out and looked up at the two women waiting on him and smiled.

His blonde hair was cut short and he was clean shaven. His big body was encased in a dark suit with a black shirt and tie. He was as handsome as I remembered.

Niki and his mother stormed him.

“Seryosha!” His mother shouted as she flung herself at him.

His arms went around her and he ducked his head, talking to her softly before freeing one arm and holding it out to gather Niki into their huddle.

They were hugging and babbling in Russian to each other and I was happy for them.

I looked away when I heard a car door open and saw a man step out and open the back door on the opposite side of the SUV.

My mouth fell open in shock when Joney stepped out of the SUV.

What the hell?

I rushed down the steps and around the car and once again saw a Joney who didn't look like the Joney from work. She was dressed in an ankle length black skirt with tiny pink flowers sprinkled all over and a pale pink v-neck tee that again, showed no cleavage. And she was wearing slip-slops. A total Joney no-no.

“Joney! What's going on? What's happened? Is everything okay?” I didn't really give her a chance to answer any of my questions as they came one after the other.

She dragged me into a hug then set me away.

“I came early to help you with Christmas and wedding stuff. Surprise. I should have left the shop earlier but I got hung up when my last appointment ran over time. There's that really dark piece of road with no lights, and I hit something. In my

head I remembered all those horror stories about people hitting something in the dark and when they stopped to check they were attacked. So I kept driving. It was freaking scary, sparks coming from the front of my car and I had to cling to the steering wheel to keep it in the road because it kept swerving. I wasn't going to pull over but then Sergei and his guys raced up next to me and told me to pull over because my car was on fire. I pulled over under the first light I got to, grabbed my fire extinguisher and jumped out. I shouldn't have bothered because Ilya and Dima were already there putting the fire out."

She shook her head and dragged her hands through her long hair.

"I don't know what would have happened if they hadn't stopped me when they did. I was so scared I just kept driving, looking for people, or a shop or something. But there's nothing on that stretch of road."

"Oh my...I'm so glad you're okay. You should never have driven here in the dark. You know how dangerous the road out of Cape Town is at night." I

"Never again." She said with a shudder.

Her outfit was really cute. She looked sweet, even with all her visible tattoos.

Maybe she should do it more often judging by the looks one of her rescuers was giving her.

"Sorry, I'm being rude." I said as I reached out to shake his hand.

"I'm Pixie Maingarde."

He smiled as he shook my hand.

“Pleased to meet you Ms Maingarde. I’m Ilya Malinkov.”

“Pleased to meet you and welcome. I must warn you it’s a madhouse right now with Christmas and the wedding. I’m sure Joney told you all about it.”

He glanced at Joney then gave me a nod.

“She did. She was worried you might need a friend and that’s why she took such a chance. She should not have been driving after dark on that road. It’s dangerous for a woman alone.” He gave Joney a look then grinned when she snorted and shrugged at him.

It seemed like she had made a new friend.

We joined the others on the veranda and introductions were made. The other man with Sergei was introduced as Dima Chernoff. I instinctively knew both were his bodyguards but also his friends. Like Darren and his team were Dom’s friends as well as his guards.

Maman rushed into the kitchen to get them something to eat and I took Joney upstairs to the room next to ours. It was supposed to be Lucky’s but he chose to share a cottage with Rider so it was available.

After dropping her bags we went back downstairs where Sergei and his men now had their jackets and ties off and shirt sleeves rolled up. They almost looked relaxed.

Almost but not quite.

Sergei

When he saw the car in front of them swerving wildly across the road his first thought had been they were being ambushed.

But when Dima swerved as well and swore he realised the car in front of them had hit whatever he had swerved to avoid.

“What the fuck was that?” Ilya snarled.

“Fucking rocks in the road. The car in front of us hit them. The driver is clever not to stop. Someone is obviously waiting out there in the dark. I’ll follow and see if they need help. It looks like the impact took out the front left tyre because there’s sparks coming from that side of the car.”

Ilya leant forward and peered at the car that was slowly driving and swerving in the road ahead of them.

“Fuck. We need to pull them over. There’s flames under there.” He said.

“Go.” Sergei leant forward, watching the car ahead of them.

The big SUV growled as it lunged forward.

When they pulled up next to the car he saw the frightened eyes of the woman behind the wheel.

“Ilya, tell her to stop, her car is on fire.” He ordered.

His friend did as told, wound his window down and shouted at the frightened woman, pointing at the front of her car.

It took a bit of persuasion but she soon pulled over and both Ilya and Dima jumped out, grabbed the fire extinguishers and sprayed the side and underneath her car.

Sergei got out and walked over to where she stood watching his men put out the fire.

She was shaking, clutching a small fire extinguisher in her hands.

“Did you get hurt when you hit the rocks?” He asked.

She looked up at him, her eyes worried and scared.

“No, I was wearing my seat belt. I was thrown about a bit but that’s all. I never saw the rocks. I don’t know how I never saw them. I was driving so carefully because I know this piece of the road is dangerous.” She looked back at her car and shook her head slowly.

“What a mess. There’s no way I can continue on to the beach and I don’t want to call my friends to come and fetch me. I don’t want to sit and wait for them out here in the dark.” She muttered to herself as she inspected her car.

“I can drop you off. It is no problem. I’m on my way to my sister’s house.”

She suddenly looked up at him and narrowed her eyes as she inspected him.

“Your accent. Are you Russian?”

He nodded, wondering where she was going with the question.

“Your sister, is her name Nika by any chance?”

It couldn’t be.

“Yes.” He didn’t say more. The rest had to come from her.

“That’s where I was going!” She smiled in relief. “I work for Pixie Maingarde. I was only supposed to arrive on Christmas morning but I wanted to get there early to help her with all the wedding stuff.”

Wedding? What wedding.

“I don’t know about a wedding.” He looked at Ilya with a frown. His friend shrugged, keeping his eyes on the woman.

“It was a last minute decision. Remy asked her to marry him and she said yes. Then he asked Dom’s permission to marry her and boom! Suddenly we were organising Christmas and a wedding. They’re getting married on New Year’s Eve, on the beach. It’s been an absolute rush to get everything organised.” She explained.

“What are you doing in the wedding?” Ilya asked and she turned to look at him.

“Nothing really, I’m just going to help her get dressed and run around getting her anything she wants because she can’t see Remy before the wedding. It’s bad luck.” She pulled a face. “I think it’s bullshit but Niki insists it’s the truth and so does Remy’s Maman.” She shrugged again. “So we’re doing what they want. Pixie doesn’t have a mother, she likes that Remy’s mum is taking such an interest in her.”

She turned and looked at her smouldering car.

“What am I going to do about my car? I can’t leave it here. There will be nothing but a shell left by the time I can get someone out here to tow it into a garage.”

Dima stepped up with a phone to his ear. “I’m on it. I’ve called a towing service and they’ve dispatched a truck. It will get here in about twenty minutes.”

“We wait with you and you then ride with us. You aren’t safe out here and we don’t know the driver of the tow truck. We stay.” He said as he turned to Ilya.

“Get her bags and put them in the back of the car.”

Turning back to her he found her eyes wide with what looked like wonder mixed with shock.

“If you have anything in the car you should take it out. You should leave nothing of value in it.”

She nodded and dashed back to her car, leaning in to extract a handbag from the front and several plastic bags from behind the front seats. Ilya was there and took them from her, leaving her only with her handbag. He put her shit in the back of the car and pushed the button to close the hatch.

“We’ll wait for the truck in the car. It’s safer for you.”

They sat in the car for maybe fifteen minutes before lights appeared from behind them then pulled in behind her car. Both doors of the tow truck opened and two men came walking towards them. Ilya and Dima got out and walked to meet them.

“I should get out and talk to them.” She said.

He shook his head. “No. Let my men handle it.”

Soon after they were back on the road and the woman finally told them her name. Joney August. A strange name.

His attention wandered and he left the conversation to Ilya and Dima.

His mind was back in Russia and on what had happened before they left. Or rather, what happened after they had supposedly left.

They never left.

And if everything plays out the way it should he would soon be free.

Free to follow his own path.

A path that was never going to be pristine but not filthy like the one he had been on since he was a teenager.

When the dust settled he and his crew would walk away, leaving the Demidov Bratva in ruins.

Their downfall was long overdue.

With no one left to lead them the other criminal organisations will rush in to take over.

They will find there was nothing left to take. All the money was gone, siphoned off and distributed to worthy causes. Their stocks sold off and the money transferred multiple times across the world never to be found. The only things left were the office building Yevgeni had bought to run his businesses from and his house. But even that would not be left standing very long.

He had liquidated and quietly sold off everything Yevgeni Demidov owned. Except the office building and the house, it would have raised too many questions if he sold them.

He had cut the throat of the Demidov Bratva.

The final knife had been the one in his hand.

The one that took Yevgeni's life.

For his father and his brother.

Vengeance.

They could finally rest. And so could he.

But not for long.

He had another promise to keep and would start working on it soon.

First he had to spend time with his family.

Get to know them again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Niki

Friday Morning

I was so happy.

My brother was here and was going to spend Christmas with us. I had been so worried he wouldn't be able to get away. That he would be stuck with the Demidovs in Russia like he has been for years and years.

This would be our first Christmas together in a very long time.

I wish he could live here, in South Africa, with us, but I knew it was not to be.

My brother was a marked man in the criminal underworld, a *pahkan*. He was one of the bosses in the Demidov Bratva and people were afraid of him. Afraid of who he was and the power he wielded. Everyone thought I was so damned clueless, but I wasn't. I knew he had to do dreadful things to survive in that ghastly family.

With Viktor's disappearance he became even more powerful. He became Yevgeni's right hand man. A man to be feared.

I wondered how he had convinced the old man to let him come to South Africa.

If my brother thought he was going to ride in here and ride out again without answering questions he was making a mistake.

A big mistake.

I wanted him to be a part of our lives, a part of my son's life. I was quite happy to use Niko as an incentive to keep him close.

Watching him holding my boy as if he was made out of fragile glass made my heart ache for him. He should have had a family by now. A wife and children. He didn't because he would never put a woman and children in harm's way. In the Demidov family it's exactly where they would have been.

In danger every second of every day.

Maybe it was best he didn't have a woman or children. Yevgeni would have had an even tighter hold on him through them.

Shaking off my dark thoughts I watched my family having breakfast out on the patio.

Everyone was wearing shorts and tees, even Sergei and his men. They were smiling and chatting with everyone.

I grinned when I thought about it. This was my house and they were all my guests.

My guests as well as my family.

I loved it.

Strong arms came around me from the back and I leant back against his warm chest, clasping my hands over his arms.

My husband. A man with a reputation as dark as Sergei's who was a family man at his core.

“You happy, baby?” He whispered.

“So very happy. Thank you for giving me this, Nic. It's the best present in the known universe of presents.”

He kissed my neck and I shivered in reaction.

“I wish we could go back to our bed so I could make love to you again but we have guests. They would miss us.” He teased.

“They would, but maybe we can slip away later when I put Niko down for his nap.”

“That sounds like a very good plan, baby girl.” He growled and softly bit my neck.

I giggled softly.

My man had suffered while waiting for my doctor to give me the all clear. We had both been impatient to start our love life again. We wanted more children but were going to wait until Niko was at least a year old before trying again. His delivery had been traumatic and had scared both of us but after a long talk with my doctor we were more at ease with having more children.

“Hey you two! Stop being all lovey dovey and come and have breakfast with the fam.” Pixie called out while grinning wide.

Nic took my hand, kissed my neck one last time and led me over to our seats at the long table. I loved it, loved to see everyone around our table.

The food, like always with Sophie ruling the kitchen, was superb. I was snaking my last piece of toast through the juices on my plate when Dominick's phone buzzed. It was lying on the table next to his plate and it now slid around on the cloth as it buzzed.

Picking it up and answering he looked at me and gave his version of a smile, a quirk of his lips.

“Yes, let them through.” He said very quietly.

Putting his phone down he looked at me and then at Pixie.

“Gideon and Kellen are here and they've brought someone with them. You ladies are going to have to find another bed somewhere.”

Pixie snorted in amusement. “We don't have to. You put up those four cottages just in case we have more guests than expected. Whoever it is can have one of them. Niki had them furnished...just in case.”

Everyone laughed as she made a face at me.

“You can tease as much as you like.” I laughed with them. “Because look...my over preparedness has paid off. We have space for more people and I don't mind more guests. The more the merrier.”

Delly gave a little cackle and waved her hands in the air from where she sat in a highchair between Rider and Lucky.

“Mewwies! We's gonna hab mewwies. I likes mewwies.”

Joney leant over to look at her with a big smile.

“When have you had merries, little squirrel?”

“No Onee, I’s notta squiwwel, I’s a gel. I tole yew lass time on de veejoe chats.” The little madam said with a roll of her eyes.

Snorts came from around the table as everyone tried not to laugh.

Pixie picked it up before I did.

She swung a finger between Joney and Delly with a questioning look on her face.

“You two have video chats? Since when?” She asked.

“Onee chats wif me an Dadda alla time on de tabet. We haf lotsa veejoe chats. She likes ma moobies. We’s gonna watch ma fawowit awfta we goes on da beach. I likes Awiel, she be a fish gel. Swimmin in de sea. I’s gots a fish kwashtjum. Dadda gots if faw me. I wanted a Awiel kwashtjum, de shop don’ haf em.” She ended her tale with a sad face.

Then it lit up again as she thought of something.

“My Awnty Genna gibbs me mewwies. We haf dancin’ wif de utha kids an Awnty Towi. Dey says we makes mewwies. I likes it.” She paused for a breath. “Me an’ Dadda, we’s on ho...ho-lee-daay, when we’s goes home I’s gonna make mewwies ‘gain.”

Joney was quick to answer. “That’s right little squirrel. You and your Dadda are going to go home and then you’re going to go dancing with your Aunty Genna and Aunty Tori. It’s going

to be such fun. We'll do more video chats so you can tell me all about it."

Delly nodded and wiped her hair from her face with a slightly sticky hand.

"I likes de veejoe chats. Dadda an I chats wif evabody. Unca Haawk an' Unca Scaaw an' Unca Woof."

Lucky started laughing so hard he held his head in his hands as his body shook.

"You okaee Unca Luckee?" The cause of the laughter patted him on his back.

Lucky nodded, looked up and threw his head back to look up at the rafters above us.

"This is too good not to use. I'm not lettin' it go." He said almost as if to himself.

Pulling his phone out he tapped on it then held it between him and Delly.

"Tell me again, sweet Delly-belly. Who do you chat to at the club?"

"Weeelll, I hab veejoe chats wif Unca Haawk an' Unca Scaaw an' Unca Woof. Dey's in de club wif ma Dadda." She narrowed her eyes at Lucky. "Dey's gots haiwy faces too, like yew an' Dadda."

Muffled laughter sounded around the table and Lucky worked hard not to laugh.

"Thanks baby girl." He said and gave an evil smirk as he tapped out a message on his phone and sent it along with the voice message.

Dominick shook his head as he stood and I went with him to greet our guests who we had almost forgotten about in the fun around the table.

Gideon was just getting out of an SUV with two surfboards strapped to the roof as we walked out the front door. I waved at him and grinned when Kellen jumped out of the passenger side and waved back with a wide grin. He opened the back door and helped a darkish blonde woman out of the car. The other back door opened and another woman got out. She was tall with darker blonde hair and looked around with undisguised interest.

We walked down the steps towards them and I did not like the way her eyes zeroed in on my husband.

I know. I was a teeny bit of a jealous bitch.

Striding up to Gideon, Nic drew him into a short hug.

“Gid, welcome brother. Glad you finally got here. We’ve got you and Kellen in one of the original cottages but your friends will have to stay in one of the new prefab units. They don’t have bathrooms as they’re only temporary housing. There’s a communal bathroom at the side of the main house they’ll have to use. They will only be sharing the bathroom if we have more unexpected guest turning up.”

My husband explained before he had even been introduced to the two women. The one with Kellen just grinned and nodded, not fussed at all. The other one wasn’t happy.

She batted her thick false eyelashes up at my man and smiled seductively as she reached out a red taloned hand to touch

him. He immediately stepped back, leaving her hand hanging. She dropped it but didn't drop the smile.

“I'm sure you can find me somewhere inside. I don't mind sharing.” She tried to move closer but Gid cut her off as he turned to look over the top of the car at Kellen.

Kellen's face was flushed with embarrassment as he quickly came around the car with the other woman.

“Niki, Dom, I'd like to introduce you to Melissa Younger, she's our surrogate.” He smiled but it dropped as he pointed at the flirty bitch. “And this is her sister, Miranda.”

The woman he introduced as Melissa came towards us and shook hands while smiling.

“Thank you so much for allowing us to intrude during your Christmas celebrations. Kellen was insistent I had to come and meet you.” She said sweetly.

I liked her. I did not like her sister who stood to the side giving me the once over.

Right then Pixie came bouncing down the steps and grabbed Kellen in a tight hug.

“Hey you, glad you guys finally made it here. Couldn't do the Christmas and wedding thing without you and the rest of the crew.” She said with a big smile.

Then she saw the two women. Her eyes narrowed on the second one and she slowly shook her head from side to side. Her expression going from happy to pissed off.

“Nope, it's not happening.” She glared at Gideon and Dominick. “You can load Randy the Bitchface over there back

into the car and take her ass back to Cape Town. She's not welcome here. In fact she's not welcome anywhere near me, my family or my crew."

She looked up at an embarrassed Kellen.

"You obviously didn't know because the crap she pulled happened before you started at the shop. She has been banned for life from ever stepping foot inside any of my shops, from going anywhere near the Road Warriors MC, the Sinners Sons MC and the Iron Dogz MC. I want her gone before my biker family arrives."

She swung around and was walking away when the bitch opened her mouth.

"Don't be such a bitch, Pixie. It happened years ago. It's water under the bridge."

Pixie swung around and came back to stand next to me.

"It will never be water under the bridge. Those of us who were impacted by your bullshit will never forgive or forget. Get out of here Miranda and don't EVER step foot near my family again."

"I'm so sorry." Melissa said as she threw an angry look at her sister. "It's my fault. I didn't know about her being banned or any of that stuff. She insisted on coming along to meet with Kellen and Gideon's family. She wanted to be sure I wasn't being taken advantage of."

She sighed and shook her head.

"I see now it was just another one of her schemes."

She patted Kellen on the arm. “I’m sorry Kellen, it’s better if we leave”

That’s when I heard Dominick on his phone.

“Darren, send two of the men down. We have a situation at the house I need you to take care of.” He listened for a second or two. “It’s an unexpected and unwanted guest who needs to be returned to the city. It is of note that the guest has been banned for life by the Warriors, Dogz and Sinners and my sister has banned her from all her studios.”

He listened again. “Yes, maybe Lex is the best call. Send the new recruit as well.”

“You will be escorted back to Cape Town. If I see you anywhere near any of my family you will regret it.” His voice was as cold and dead as his eyes and I shivered in reaction.

My husband was a scary, scary man.

“I should have done background checks on her.” Gideon rasped angrily. “Sorry, brother, this fuck up is on me.”

“No worries. We caught it in time.”

I looked at Melissa and saw by the look in her eyes her sister had been doing things like this most of her life.

But not today.

“You don’t have to leave, Melissa. You’re welcome to stay.” I said as I took Dominick’s hand in mine.

“I...I don’t know.” She whispered.

“We insist.” Pixie said with a smile. “We really are happy to have you here. It will make Kellen happy and when he’s happy Gideon is happy.”

Her sister was quick to stomp all over the idea.

“You’re not staying. You do and I will tell your precious boyfriend you’re having a gay man’s baby for money. He will drop you like a ton of bricks.” She snarled nastily.

Melissa sighed. “No, he won’t, because he’s not my boyfriend. He’s just a guy I know. You made up the whole boyfriend scenario, not me.”

She turned to me and smiled. “I would be honoured to stay and spend Christmas with you and your family.”

She was definitely a sweetie with a bad bitch for a sister.

“Let’s get you guys settled in.” Pixie said and grabbed Melissa’s hand dragging her away and up the steps into the house. Kellen went with them.

A small SUV came barrelling down the road and pulled up behind Gideon’s car. Lex jumped out with a big smile on her face. Another woman stepped out but stayed with the car. She didn’t greet anyone or smile.

“You called for a takeout, boss.” Lex called out.

My man nodded towards the pissed off woman.

“Riiight.” Lex said slowly then looked around. “Luggage?”

Gideon went to the back of his car and withdrew a big bag plus another smaller one and carried them to the back of the smaller car. Lex opened the hatch and he threw the bags in.

“Let’s go, I don’t have all the time in the world.” Lex growled at the bitch as she grabbed her upper arm and frog marched her to the car. Opening the door she settled her in the back behind the passenger seat.

Within minutes it was done. The car carrying the bitch was gone.

“I think you’re going to have to re-think your choice of a surrogate, brother.” Dominick said quietly.

Gideon sighed and shook his head. “It’s too late. Melissa is pregnant.”

“Fuck.” Dominick swore. “At least tell me you aren’t using her eggs. Tell me you used donor eggs.”

“We’re not. We used donor eggs because we don’t want the biological mother to be in the picture. Melissa is only carrying our baby.” Gideon explained and I heard the relief in his voice.

“We’ll keep an eye on the sister.” Dominick promised quietly. “Let’s get your stuff inside and get you settled in. We’re all heading to the beach later. My wife tells me we’re going to have a picnic.” He grinned down at me. “As long as the wind doesn’t start blowing. I’d hate to have sand in my food.”

I smacked him on the arm as both of them laughed.

The tension that had been in the air evaporated like magic.

Like it had never been there in the first place.

I had to wonder how Gideon and Kellen found Melissa. Was she someone recommended by their specialist? Or had they found her online?

Not that I wanted to call trouble our way but I had a feeling Melissa’s sister was going to be a problem for the guys.

It could impact the health of their baby and we might have to step in.

I filed it away to mention to my man later.

Later, much later.

Right now we had a day at the beach to look forward to.

CHAPTER NINE

Remy

Friday Evening

The day on the beach had been exactly what we all needed after the drama with Gideon and Kellen's surrogate. Well not her exactly, but her sister. Still, it did not bode well for their future with the woman.

I sat on the veranda with my woman in my lap, a beer in my hand, enjoying the cool evening breeze. Dom and Niki were in the chair next to ours, my parents on the small couch and Niki's mum in a chair next to the couch. Gideon and Kellen sat on the other couch. Melissa sat quietly in a chair next to them. Sergei, Ilya and Dima were sitting in Adirondack chairs they had drawn up to join us.

Hurricane candle lamps were set all along the low veranda wall and provided the only light. Pixie and Joney had strung greenery through the rafters and around the veranda posts with clusters of red berries here and there as well as big red bows. The light glinted off the red berries.

“The veranda looks nice, baby.” I said quietly, breaking the silence.

“It was Joney’s idea. She said the inside looks so festive we should do the outside as well. So we did.”

“It looks good.” Lucky said from behind us as he came out onto the veranda followed by Joney and Rider.

The three of them sank down on the top step and Rider moved so his back was to the wall and he was facing us with the pink baby monitor on the floor next to him.

“The little squirrel finally closed her eyes after I read Ariel from beginning to end, twice. I’m going to have to introduce the kid to some new stories. Maybe get her into Aquaman, I wouldn’t mind watching that movie with her over and over.” She grinned at a snarling Rider. “And pause it on his abs to teach her the beauty of the male form.” She teased with a wink.

She laughed and scooted almost into Lucky’s lap as Rider aimed a foot playfully at her legs.

“My daughter is not going to know about male abs until she’s at least forty. Maybe not even then.” He declared. “There will be no boy talk from you, madam.” He warned Joney who laughed and pulled a face at him.

“She’s beautiful and has the world’s biggest crush on her Duncan. You should watch that romance.” She kept teasing.

“No. Just no. Not my baby girl.” Rider pointed a finger at her with a warning look.

I laughed but I had to agree with Rider. No boy was ever going to be good enough for our girls. I slid my hand down

over my angel's belly and just held her and our baby. She slid her hand over mine and gave it a little squeeze.

“Uhm, where is your little girl now? Did you leave her alone in your cottage?” Melissa spoke up and the laughter faded.

Rider gave her an annoyed look but it wasn't him who answered. It was Lucky.

“We have a lot of security but leavin' his *bèbè* alone at the cottage isn't somethin' he'd do.”

Then Joney jumped in.

“She's in my bed upstairs. I read to her until she fell asleep. Rider will get her when he and Lucky goes back to their cottage. He has the monitor and if she wakes up he will go right up to her. Same as with Niko, his monitor is over there on the table with Niki and Dom.”

“Sorry, I don't really know any of you. I seem to be putting my foot in it all the time.” She apologised.

“No worries.” Rider eased the situation. “You didn't know.”

She looked as if she was going to answer him but it was too late. He had already turned away to listen to something Lucky was saying.

I found the friendship between those three interesting. It was very obvious it was all it was.

A friendship.

After what my angel told me about Rider and Joney's first meeting I was amazed that they were now friends. Close enough friends that she video called and chatted to both him and his little girl. The man was very protective over who he

allowed close to her and somehow Joney must have passed some test.

“Are you looking forward to the wedding, Pixie?” Maman suddenly asked.

My woman nodded and smiled. “I am. I’m so excited to have the wedding with my friends and family around us. It’s going to be the best ever.” She laughed and shook her head. “I’m so glad you’re used to wild bikers because when my family arrives it’s going to be crazy. Wild Man and Rooster has never done anything like normal people would. They are usually over the top and...wild.”

My maman laughed. “Oh sweet girl, we’re not worried. They are your family and that’s that. Our Lucky and his friends are crazy too. It’s just who they are.”

I loved my parents. They never tried to hold any of us back.

I would be raising my own children the way they did us.

Rider suddenly stood and stretched. “I’m heading up to collect my baby girl and hitting the sack. Tomorrow is going to be another long day.”

Picking up the monitor he smiled at all of us in a general sweep and walked inside.

Lucky and Joney followed shortly after.

Everyone trickled away until it was just the two of us.

Standing with my woman in my arms I walked from lamp to lamp blowing out the candles until only the two at the front door were left.

I then sat down on the steps with her and pointed up at the night sky.

“Look at all that beauty up there, *mon ange* (my angel). I’m thinking we need to put a skylight in our room at home so we can lie in bed and look up at the sky.”

“As long as you remember there’s a lot of light pollution back home. It won’t be as spectacular as this.” She sat on my lap with her head tipped back, looking up at the sky.

“I can’t wait to sit here and watch the full moon over the water while our baby is asleep upstairs. This is the best thing my brother has ever bought. Maybe we should ask him to sell us a piece to build our own house on. What do you think?”

“We’ll have to ask Niki, he gave this to her as a Christmas present, remember?” I murmured as I rubbed the side of my face against her hair.

“That’s easy then. She loves having her family close. She’ll totally sell us a piece.”

I nodded while looking down at the dark beach where I would be marrying her very soon.

I pointed at it.

“Soon, down there, I’ll be makin’ you mine. Givin’ you my ring and my name. I thank the gods every day my job brought me here, to you.”

She turned to straddle me and clasped her hands over my cheeks. Her eyes catching the flames of the candles as they flickered behind us.

“And I’ll be putting my ring on your finger and making you mine. I am so thankful for you my big Cajun. You changed my life when you walked into my studio and I’m grateful for it every single day.”

Leaning forward she kissed me and I melted as her tongue slipped over my top lip. I opened for her and her warm tongue slipped into my mouth. She kissed me soft and slow.

Taking her time and drawing it out until I was hard as a rock and ready to rip off her panties and take her right there.

Only the knowledge that we were on camera and there were men patrolling the grounds stopped me.

Standing with her in my arms I turned, blew out the last candles, closed and locked the door behind us and set the alarm.

I did a walk through and turned lights off then took the stairs two at a time.

I needed my woman.

In my head I was counting down the nights.

Very soon she was going to be my wife.

My pregnant wife.

I couldn’t fucking wait.

CHAPTER TEN

Niki

Christmas Eve

The house was buzzing with activity. In the kitchen Mama and Remy's mum were prepping the spread they had decided to lay on for tonight and the guys had set up the tables and chairs under the pergola in the entertainment area. Joney and Melissa were busy stringing garlands of green with red berries through the rafters and hanging multi-coloured baubles and golden stars everywhere. Joney was on the ladder with Melissa handing things up to her.

With the big tree in the corner it was looking amazingly festive.

Sophie and Jephthah had gone back to the city this morning to spend Christmas Eve and Christmas day with their families. They would return on the 28th to help us prepare and celebrate Pixie and Remy's wedding.

I was sitting on the veranda going over the Christmas and wedding guest lists one more time to ensure everyone had a place to sleep if they wanted to stay over.

Not that we were expecting more guests for Christmas Eve. Pixie's MC family would only be coming tomorrow as they had a party at their clubhouse tonight. Wild Man let us know they would join us for Christmas lunch but would be returning to the city in the late afternoon before it got dark.

Everyone was wary of travelling after dark, especially after Joney's experience while driving here.

Of course Dominick stepped up security after what happened. He said he wasn't taking any chances with our safety.

This morning he and Gideon had left on ATV's to ride around the perimeter of the property to check the fences. They would be out for at least two hours as they would be checking in on their men at the same time.

Since meeting and marrying him I've become accustomed to having bodyguards around all the time. I knew they were out there watching me right now but it didn't worry me. Not anymore. It made me feel safe.

After helping to set up the table and chairs, Rider and Lucky had taken the little miss down to the beach to keep her busy. She was buzzing with excitement because tonight Father Christmas was coming. When I asked her if she had written him a letter she gave me big eyes and nodded hard enough her ponytails with their red ribbons swished up and down furiously.

Rider was so good with her hair and put it in cute styles all the time. She always had ribbons and colourful hairclips in her hair.

“Dadda said ta ask faw da fings Fawde Cwismas can cawwy in his Cwismas caw. He comes fwom da Noff Poul, it’s faw, faw away. He bwings pwesents ta kids all ova da waald.” She made big eyes at me.

It took me a minute to realise she thought he was coming in a car and not in a sleigh.

“What did you ask him to bring you?”

She lifted a little hand and ticked it off one by one.

“A pink bike wif faiwy wheels an’ pink spawklee stweemas, my liddle pony fambilee, jebels to makes bwacelets and a Hawleykin doll.”

I was confused. What was a Hawleykin doll? I had to ask.

“What’s a Hawleykin doll, sweetie?”

Her mouth fell open. “Yew doan know? She be in da Batman moobie. Hers fwends wif Joka. I likes hew haiw.”

Dear lord she watched the Batman movies?

“Did you watch the movie with Dadda?”

Her head slowly moved from side to side. “Dadda says I’s too small faw da moobie. I sawded da picha of Hawleykin in da shop. She has pwetty pink an blue haiw.”

Of course he wouldn’t let her watch a movie full of violence. What was I thinking?

Shaking my head I forced my attention back to my lists.

But it was not to be.

“Niki, can I have a minute?” Sergei asked as he drew out a chair and sat next to me.

He looked relaxed in jeans and a tee. Not in shorts like the other guys but still better than his suits.

“Sure, how can I help?”

“I’ve only brought gifts for you and Mama. I’m going into the city to get a few things. Is there anything you need? I could pick it up for you.”

I shook my head. “You don’t need to give them anything, Sergei. No one expects gifts.”

He smiled and raised his eyebrows. “I know better little sister. People like getting gifts. I won’t be out long because there’s no need to go into the centre of the city. Ilya checked on your big Malls. It will have what we need.”

My brother was a softie under the ice cold exterior he showed the world. Okay, maybe not a softie but he was a good man who had to do terrible things to survive. I would never judge him for what he had done. Never.

“Thanks, but I’ve got everything I need. If you want I can quickly ask the ladies in the kitchen.”

He gave me a small smile and shook his head.

“Already done, little sister. Only Mama had a few things she wanted me to get her. If you’re sure there’s nothing you need.” He tilted his head in question and I shook mine.

“We’ll see you later.” He said as he stood.

“Drive safe!” I called out as he jogged down the stairs to the waiting car.

He waved a hand over his shoulder as Dima opened the back door of their SUV and he got in. I watched as they drove away.

Putting my notebook to the side I reached for my glass of juice but found it empty.

“Just in time I see.” Pixie said as she came out on to the veranda carrying a tray. “I scored us a jug of freshly made lemonade from the ladies in the kitchen.”

She set it down on the table and sank into the chair next to me, Joney, Frankie and Melissa took the other chairs.

“We’re all set up for tonight and the guys are either patrolling with Dom and Gid or down on the beach with Lucky and Rider. The mums are in the kitchen doing their thing. I thought it was time we just sat here, enjoyed the view and relax.”

Melissa suddenly sat up and pointed. “Look! Someone is out surfing.”

Pixie smiled. “Ja, that’s Kell. He said he was going to catch some waves because there are some good swells today.”

“He’s really good. I’ve been to some of the surfing competitions he took part in. He’s been on the podium a time or two.” Joney said as she sat forward watching intently. “A little while ago he was tentatively looking at going on the Big Wave surfing circuit with some friends of his but decided against it. I for one was glad he decided against it because it’s incredibly dangerous.”

“Really?” Surfing wasn’t a sport I ever watched.

“Google big wave surfing and you’ll see. I was speechless the first time Kell showed me some of the videos. Those guys are crazy, all of them wanting to ride the biggest waves in the

world.” Joney shook her head and made big eyes as she sat back.

“*Merde* (shit), that sounds incredibly scary.” Frankie said.

“He was really thinking of doing that?” Pixie frowned. “I thought it was just something Strange wanted to do. That girl is just plain crazy.”

“What a weird name. Is her name really Strange?” I asked as I sipped my lemonade while watching Kellen effortlessly gliding through the water.

“No one knows her real name. She was involved in something I think, because she disappeared off the surfing scene quite suddenly.” Pixie said with a shrug.

We sat watching Kellen surf, sipping our drinks and chatting about the house, our plans and just general stuff.

It was very relaxing after the rush we had been in to get everything set up for Christmas. I knew that after Christmas it was going to be another rush to swop the decorations out for the wedding.

Not that we were going to take it all down. Some, like the trees would be staying up but I will be swopping out the red decorations for blue ones.

The wedding colours were blue and gold, not that Pixie knew this. She had no idea her wedding had specific colours. It was a little surprise we were preparing for her.

Just one of the surprises I thought with an internal grin.

Dominick

Christmas Eve Dinner

I sat at the head of the long table with my wife on my right and my sister on my left. It was something I never thought I'd have. A wife I loved and my sister beside me at my table.

Holding Nika's hand I tapped the table with the hilt my knife, looking at the faces sitting around our table.

“As we gather around this table tonight I want to take the opportunity to welcome all of you into our home. To share our first Christmas with us as a family and to celebrate it with us. I want to thank both Mama and Maman for the spread they've laid out for us tonight. We truly appreciate the effort the two of you have made to prepare this and the Christmas lunch we're having tomorrow. If any of you have taken a walk through the kitchen, then you know it smells like heaven in there. Tonight we'll eat, have a few drinks and relax. Thank you for being here with us.”

Raising my glass I sipped my whisky as everyone raised their glasses and sipped as well.

The atmosphere was light hearted and relaxed as we ate and talked and ate some more. I had no idea how we were going to be able to eat again tomorrow.

Rider was the first to leave the table to put Delene to bed. The poor little thing had fallen asleep in her high chair. Luckily not in her food.

Everyone helped to clear the table and take the dishes to the kitchen.

They were quickly rinsed and stacked in the dishwasher and once the counters were wiped down both the mums went to

their beds.

Sergei and his guys along with Joney and Lucky were chatting in the lounge when I took my wife upstairs.

Our boy would be waking early and I knew it was going to be a long day.

Lying in bed with her settled in front of me, her back against my chest and my arms around her, I once again marvelled at my incredible luck.

“I love you, Nika.” I whispered in her hair.

“I love you too, Nic.” She whispered and I heard it in her voice.

Need.

Reaching down I angled my cock between her thighs and slowly thrust the head over her slick pussy.

“You’re always so wet for me.” I groaned as I kept thrusting.

“I know. It’s the way you look at me and the sound of your voice. It does things to me.” Her voice sounded breathless.

I thrust a bit harder, hitting her clit and she let out a gasp and shuddered.

“Would you like me to fuck you, baby?” I whispered. “Or do you want me to take it slow and easy?”

She shook as I slid my hands up her belly and over her tits, tweaking her nipples. I loved the silken feel of her skin and then the hard points of her nipples beneath my fingers

“Like this...I want it...like this.” She panted.

Sliding my hand back down over her satiny belly I stroked over the top of her mound, avoiding the little cluster of nerves she so badly wanted me to touch. Dragging the tips of my fingers down her thigh I clasped it and lifted her leg, resting it on top of mine.

Now she was wide open to me.

I kept playing with her nipples while nibbling on her soft and sensitive neck

Sliding my cock between her lips I felt how soaked she was for me and angling my hips I notched the head in her opening and pushed. I felt her shudder as the thick head stretched her open, my piercings sliding over her slick skin. My breathing kicked up at the sensations streaking from my cock. Slow, very slow I started to fill her.

I kept pushing until all of me was inside her.

“You always make me feel so full. Stretched and full of you. I love it.” She moaned in a breathy voice.

“I like filling you up, baby. I like feeling how my cock stretches you open as I push inside.”

Thrusting in and out of her slick pussy I kept one hand on her breast, the other on her belly. I held her in such a way that the tips of my fingers just touched her clit. I didn't do anything. I just held her as I glided in and out of her.

She tried to push back against me but I held her too tight.

Tonight she was at my mercy.

I liked her being at my mercy, under my control.

Keeping my thrusts slow and steady I slid my hand down just a little and stroked the top of her clit. Her walls fluttered and I smiled against her neck. I knew my breathing on her neck drove her wild as did me biting her. Setting my teeth on the muscle I slowly started biting down as I sped up my thrusts. Her pussy flooded and I knew she was close. I wanted to come with her, in her as she clamped down on my cock. Easing up on her neck I thrust harder and harder, breathing in harsh pants. Both her hands were now behind my neck, holding my head to her. I knew what it meant. She wanted me to bite her.

So I did. Hard.

Rolling her onto her belly I lay on top of her. My legs spread hers wide, my hands clamped around her wrists, raising them above her head. She was totally restrained as I slammed into her. Sucking on her neck I bit down, not hard enough to break the skin, but hard enough to leave a mark.

My mark.

On my woman.

Her moans were now coming almost continuously as were my grunts every time I slammed deep. By the flutters and tightening of the muscles in her pussy I knew she was close. Very close. I was on the edge. Right on the edge and ready to fall over.

Her body seized under me, her ass arched up and I felt every muscle harden as she started coming. Her internal muscles clamped down, spasming as I slammed deep and came.

My cock jerked as I came in my wife.

Her muscles massaging every bit of come from my balls.

Slowly, so very slowly, I released the muscle I had my teeth clamped down on. I licked and kissed away the hurt. A hurt she liked.

Letting go of her wrists I took my weight on my forearms but kept my groin tight against her ass, holding my cock deep inside her.

Dropping my forehead to the back of her neck I lay there listening to her panting breaths.

I loved that I could do that to her. That I could completely wreck her.

Lifting my head I nuzzled her hair away from the side of her face and kissed her cheek.

“I love the way you come for me, baby girl.” I whispered

She gave a little snort.

“I come like that because of the way you play my body. I love it.” She mumbled.

I smiled, leant forward and took her lips. Kissing her soft and slow while I slowly withdrew from her body. She shuddered as the piercings slid over sensitive skin. Tremors raced up my back as her pussy fluttered and clenched over the head of my cock.

Withdrawing completely I sat up and rested on my knees between her wide spread legs.

Reaching out I dragged my fingers through our combined juices leaking out of her pussy.

I didn't want to wear condoms with her. And she'd had bad reactions to the pill.

We were trying out an IUD. So far it worked for us.

I got to fuck her bare and she had time to be with Niko before our next baby.

And there would be another baby. Maybe even two more babies.

At first I had been opposed after almost losing her in childbirth. She got her doc to talk to me and after considering the facts I gave in. We would be having more children. If she thought I was overprotective now she had no idea what was going to happen when she carried my next baby.

I would not take any chances with her life.

Leaving the bed and my blissed out wife I went to clean up and brought back a warm cloth to take care of her. I gently cleaned her then took the cloth back to the bathroom and rinsed it, wrung it out and dropped it on the hamper. She hated the evidence of our nights or days to be left on display for the staff. Consequently I always rinsed out the cloth afterwards.

I liked that she was so protective of our privacy.

Going back to bed I rolled her back into my arms.

Holding her to me as I kissed my mark on her shoulder.

“I love you, baby girl.” I whispered.

“Love you too.” Her voice was barely there as she fell asleep.

I lay with her in my arms for a while before I followed her.

When I did I slept deep, without dreams.

I only woke when my boy started moving around for his late night feed.

Leaving my wife to sleep I took care of it. Changing his nappy and warming his bottle. Sitting in the rocker I rocked as I fed him and murmured to him.

“Papa loves you, Niko. I will always be there for you, always.”

After he was done eating and falling asleep I put him down and went back to my wife.

Curling my body around hers I listened to her breathing as I fell asleep.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Remy

Christmas Morning

We were woken by a knock on the door.

Looking at my watch I groaned, it was barely seven. I slipped out from under my angel, pulled on my sweats and went to the door.

Whoever it was they could damned well go away.

Snatching the door open I was surprised to find Rider standing there.

“Sorry to disturb, brother, I know it’s early, but it’s Christmas morning, and my princess insists you and Pixie have to be there when she opens her presents. Could you please come down and do this thing with us, you can come back and spend the rest of the day in bed.” He shrugged as he stepped back. “Well not really because there’s lunch and all that shit still to come.”

Dragging my hands through my hair I sighed.

“Give us a few minutes, brother. Tell her we’re gettin’ dressed or somethin’. We’ll be there soon.”

He gave me a wave and started walking down the passage, fast. His princess must really be giving all of them hell about the presents.

My woman was awake and up when I walked into the room.

“I heard. We have time for a quick shower, but only a shower.” She smiled. “We can come back for some fun times after the whole present thing.”

True to her word we had a quick shower, dressed and went downstairs.

Everyone was gathered in the lounge around the massive Christmas tree underneath which mounds of gaily wrapped gifts waited.

My papa had a red Christmas hat with a white pom-pom on the end on his head and the little miss was sitting on his lap, a tiny replica of his hat on her head.

She glared at us as we walked in.

“I’s bin waitin’ faw yous. It’s pwesents time.” She gestured at the piles. “Lookit all de pwesents Fawde Cwismas gibbed us in de night.” She turned to my dad and patted his cheek. “Can’s we hab dem now, Paw-Paw?”

He nodded. “Yes, princess we can start. You give me the presents and I’ll call the names then you give it to them. Okay?”

Sliding off his lap she ran to the tree and grabbed one of the gifts and gave it to him.

And so it started.

Rider sat on the floor with his phone out, taking photos as she bounced around the lounge giving out the gifts. Between his spread legs a mound was growing. Most had her name on the label. A few were for him and he seemed surprised, happy and sad at the same time.

When the final present had been handed out she ran to her daddy.

“Evyone has deys pwesents, Dadda. Now I cans open dem.” She hopped around in excitement. “I’s gots lots an lots. Lookit Dadda.”

“You’re a very lucky girl, baby. Come over here and we’ll open them together.”

She proceeded to rip and cry out with joy every time she opened a present. Niki had her camera out, taking photos. Rider had a black plastic rubbish bin bag he stuffed the ripped paper into.

Finally she was done and sat on the floor surrounded by colourful toys, some educational, some just for fun. She had also scored a lot of clothes. And a pair of shiny boots, boots that looked a lot like a pair I’ve seen Joney wear.

“I luvvvvs it. Deys like Onee’s bootsies. Now I gots ones too. We same same.” She sat with the little box between her legs touching the boots reverently with one finger. Stroking over it gently.

“You have to put those away today, baby girl. It’s too hot to wear boots.” When she pulled a face Rider pointed at Joney’s feet. “Look, Joney is wearing her slops, just like you.”

Everyone took their Christmas loot to their rooms or if it was jewellery put it on immediately.

I packed the presents given to us in a basket and carried it up to our room while Pixie stayed behind for coffee. I grinned wondering how she was going to get out of it. She told me yesterday that her coffee and alcohol drinking days were over until after the baby was born.

When I came back they had moved to the patio. It had been cleaned and set up for today. There were places set for the extended family that would be arriving soon. From the Road Warriors MC it was Wild Man, Rooster and Hammer. Zane, one of Pixie's artists was coming as well. They were all single and weren't bringing women with them. Just as well, we would have needed two tables to accommodate everyone.

A very long table covered in Christmas fabric stood in the center of the patio. Delene's high chair stood at the far end of the table.

There were coloured baubles in glass jars set on the table as decorations along with tiny plastic Christmas trees with flashing lights. There were golden under plates and colourful Christmas themed serviettes at each place setting. A table had been set up at the end of the patio closest to the kitchen and held a stack of plates and wire things with knives, forks and spoons. There was an alarming amount of space left for the food that would be set out on it later.

Along the wall a table had been set up with big urns that had been plugged in and filled with water for coffee and tea. Cups, mugs and jugs with milk and bowls of sugar were waiting

under a net cover. Several plungers had been set up, two of which held freshly brewed coffee.

Helping myself to a mug of hot coffee I sat down beside my woman. I tried to hide my grin when I saw she had a glass of milk in front of her. Tried but didn't succeed.

"Don't you dare say a word. I'm having milk with Delly and Joney, and she has gone to fetch the chocolate mix. So it will be chocolate milk once it's done." She wrinkled her nose and I had to look away. I knew my woman wasn't a fan of milk.

"You don't have to drink it, baby. Have something else." I pointed out.

"I can't, I want coffee and I can't have it. I asked and there's no decaf." She whispered sulkily.

And suddenly I no longer wanted to wait to share our news with our family. I wanted them to know.

"Can I tell them?" I whispered in her ear.

"Wild Man isn't here yet. We can't." She shook her head.

"What are you two whispering about over there?" Niki suddenly asked from the top of the table. "You're not sneaking out of here to go do stuff. We're doing a family Christmas, properly." She warned.

Both of us laughed and shook our heads.

"We're not going to sneak off." Pixie laughed. "I was wondering when Wild Man would be getting here."

She had scarcely said the words when Dom's phone buzzed and he walked out and into the house. Not long after there was the thunder of approaching bikes and my girl hopped up and

rushed into the house. I followed much slower. Everyone else stayed on the patio.

Walking out on the front veranda I grinned as I watched my angel hugging her biker family. Rooster swung her around wildly before kissing the top of her head and setting her down. I saw that I was right, Zane had ridden out with them. It was safer that way.

Wild Man's eyes were on me as they walked up the path then up the steps. We shook and he clapped a hand on my shoulder and gave me a slight shake.

“Merry Christmas and all that ho-ho-ho shit.” He grumbled then gave me sly smile and a wink.

“Wild Man!” Pixie snapped. “We have a little girl here who is over the moon that it's Christmas, so behave yourself.”

Everyone laughed as he held up his hands in surrender with a wide smile.

We quickly got everyone to the patio and settled in with coffee or tea and Christmas cookies.

Delly sat in her high chair watching Wild Man and the others then smacked Rider on his arm.

“Dadda, lookit, deys gots kuttles like yaws. Awe dey yaw bwuddas like Unca Haawk?” She asked.

Before Rider could answer Hammer did. The big man leant forward and for the first time since he arrived he smiled.

“We are baby girl, we're friends, but we're in a different club. Your Dadda is an Iron Dog and we are Road Warriors.”

He stood and turned looking over his shoulder at her. “See, it’s different to your dadda’s kutte.”

She nodded as if she understood every single word. She was only three so it must still be a difficult concept for her, differentiating between clubs. Hammer smiled at her as he sat down again.

“Can I tell them now?” I whispered to Pixie.

“You really can’t wait, can you?” She grinned through her whisper.

I shook my head from side to side, slowly.

“Okay, do it.” She patted my thigh under the table.

I stood, looked at my parents then at Dom and lastly at Wild Man.

“Pixie and I have an announcement we’d like to make.”

Taking my angel’s hand I pulled her up next to me and put my arm around her, pulling her close.

“We were going to wait until after the wedding to make the announcement but it’s Christmas and we’re all here together, so here goes. We’re pregnant.”

My mother gave a yell and jumped up and ran around the table, grabbing both of us in a tight hug.

“I’m so happy for you both. And for me. My first grandbaby. I’m goin’ to spoil him or her so much you’re goin’ to hate me.” She laughed.

My dad and Lucky joined us and we hugged tight. Dom and Niki joined the huddle and everyone else followed.

Wild Man and Rooster came to our huddle and Pixie leapt into their arms. They stood in a small huddle as the men whispered to her. She nodded, tears glinting in her eyes. Stepping away from her they came to me and both hugged and slapped my back.

“Congratulations, son.” Wild Man growled roughly. Rooster didn’t say a word, just hugged me hard and slapped my back.

The well wishes I appreciated the most came from Rider. He held his baby girl in his arms as he came to us. There was no way he could hide the sorrow in his eyes but he still smiled and hugged both of us.

Delly gave both of us wet cheek kisses. “Con...gwa...chulashuns.” She smiled as she managed to get the long word out, her way, but she managed it.

“Yews habin’ a babee in yews tummy.” She wrinkled her nose. “MeeMaw asted Fawde Cwismas faw a gwanbaby and he putted it in yews tummy and not unda da twee. Why?”

Rider walked back to their places at the table, trying to explain babies weren’t left under the tree, but that they were in the mummy’s tummy. There were several chuckles as he battled with that one. Thank fuck I didn’t have to try and explain it to her.

Dominick

My baby sister was pregnant.

The news was a shock and not a shock.

She was a grown woman and was marrying the man she loves. I was happy for them but I was also worried. Looking across the table at Sergei and his men I saw the tension in their eyes and knew there might be shit in our future.

I resolved that between us, Remy and I would make certain that she was safe. As safe as my wife and son.

Right now though, it was Christmas.

I had to shake off my dark thoughts and concentrate on what we had right now.

Our families, united under one roof.

I got up and extracted two of several bottles of champagne that has been chilling in a bath of ice. Opening them I poured for both Niki and I then passed the bottles on.

Pixie-belle wouldn't be having any alcohol instead she got a flute of apple juice along with Delly.

I stood and held my glass up, my hand on the shoulder of my wife.

“This year has been dark but it has given us so many blessings as well. Nika and I met and married and had our son. Pixie-belle met her Remy and will be marrying him soon. It is our privilege and honour to welcome his family into ours. We are also very pleased to welcome Sergei, Ilya and Dima to our table. My wife has been looking forward to his visit for months. Gideon and Kellen are our family and we welcome Melissa who has agreed to be their surrogate and has given them the good news that she is pregnant as well. We wish them well on their journey together. We have other visitors at our table who have become family. To our new family, Rider

and Delene, you will always be welcome in our home and at our table, the same with Joney. You have become valued members of our family and any time you feel the urge know that our doors are open wide to you.”

I looked around the table trying to get the words together but there were none.

“I think I’ve said everything there is to be said. Except... Merry Christmas everyone.”

I lifted my glass, tapped it against my wife’s and looking in her eyes took a sip.

With my family surrounding me I knew I was the luckiest man alive.

I had almost gone under but had been saved by the love of a good woman.

I, no we, we have been truly blessed.

A Merry Christmas to us indeed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Niki

Wedding Morning

I made sure Joney had Pixie in her room before I called the guys into the dining room and started organising the construction of an arbour on the beach.

Joney's room didn't have a sea view so she wouldn't see what we were up to. That's why we decided she had to get ready in that room.

With Rider and Lucky on either side of me and Sergei, Dima and Ilya watching I quickly sketched my idea.

Rider nodded as I drew. "That's totally doable. We won't even have to use nails. We can tie the poles together with twine or rope. It's only supposed to stand for today so no need to get technical."

"We have to check the tide marks. Don't wanna to set it up only to find we have to move it 'cause the tide is comin' in." Lucky said.

"No worries there. I've checked it out and marked the position with rocks. You can't miss it." I said quickly.

“Will it only be the five of us buildin’ it or are we havin’ help?” Lucky asked.

“Kellen and Frankie are helping and I felt bad so I asked Melissa as well. The nine of us should get things done before any of the guests arrive. Unless they come early then I’ll just make them help us.”

Lucky frowned in confusion and I readied myself to explain.

“Why would you need so many people to build the arbour thing? It’s basically eight poles tied together with rope or twine, nothin’ more.”

“Well it’s not just that. The arbour has to be draped in some of the fabric you guys picked up for me. Fabric also has to be strung between the poles you planted going up the steps. Plus fabric has to be draped around the lookout deck at the top of the steps. And I want to wrap the broad golden ribbons around the railings of the deck and all the way down to the beach. And I want gold stars to be hung from the fabric. The flower bunches has to be tied to the top and bottom of the stairs and I want the blue and gold cord strung from the steps of the house to the lookout deck. But, after Pixie has walked down the steps to the beach it has to come down and I want to use it to show the way to where we are having the wedding reception.”

I was rushing through my list but there was one more thing.

“The music, I was hoping one of you knew what to do. We need it playing when Pixie walks down the stairs and towards Remy. It’s only one song, so I thought we could maybe have a speaker down there?” I looked around with raised eyebrows hoping one of them would answer.

Rider sighed and stepped back.

“Don’t worry about the music, I’ve got it.” He patted my back reassuringly.

“We’d better start this thing, brothers.” He said to the men. “Or we’re never going to sit down and have a beer before the wedding.”

“I think you’re right. Let’s do this. We haven’t even started yet an’ I already need a beer.” Lucky gave me one last look, shook his head then he and Rider walked out through the kitchen and out the back door.

They didn’t have to ask where all the stuff was. They already knew. Sergei grinned at me and shook his head before he and his guys followed them out.

I had another job to do. Checking that the honeymoon cottage was ready for tonight.

After Remy asked Pixie to marry him I realised they couldn’t spend their wedding night with the lot of us in the house. They needed somewhere private and away from of us.

I came up with the honeymoon cottage.

The cottage used to be the manager’s cottage and set apart from the others. It has one bedroom with a nice sized bathroom, and an open plan lounge, dining and kitchen area. Perfect for a couple to spend a few days in private.

I had ordered the furniture from a local craftsman after I saw his woodwork online. I was lucky he could deliver on such short notice.

The bed is huge with carved head and footboards. It was so big he had to assemble it in the room. If I decided to move it I would have to call him in to do it.

I quickly walked through the rooms made sure they had enough towels, and that the bed was made with the linen I had rush ordered with overnight delivery. Why I had to check I don't know as I had made the bed and stacked the towels myself.

I made a note to stock their little fridge with snacks and juices. Seeing that Pixie was pregnant they wouldn't be drinking champagne.

Locking the door behind me I grinned at the keys in my hand. Keys hanging from a red crystal heart key ring.

Putting my things away I made my way to the beach.

The guys were busy erecting the poles where I had placed the rocks. When they stood in front of the pastor they would be facing the sea and the setting sun.

There was a folding table stacked with the fabrics I wanted to drape over the arbour and up the stairs. The gold ribbon and boxes of stars were there as well.

Melissa, Kellen and I started work on the stairs.

We started wrapping from the bottom towards the top. It took the three of us to do it because I wanted it to be perfectly spaced and tight. I didn't want it to shift when people touched it on their way down or up the stairs.

Standing at the top of the stairs looking down at the guys getting the structure together I smiled.

The weather was playing along, it was a beautiful day.

It was a perfect day for a beach wedding.

Pixie

I sat against the headboard of Joney's bed still in my pj's sipping my coffee. It was decaf, don't ask me where it came from but it was here this morning.

Joney was sitting cross legged at the bottom doing the same. Sipping on her coffee, definitely not decaf.

It was the perfect time to ask the question that had me burning with curiosity.

"How long have you been friends with Rider?" I asked.

She didn't react, just kept sipping her coffee.

"Come on, Joney, it's not like it's a state secret or something." I prodded.

Looking up at me she gave me a slightly evil smile.

"It's been killing you not to ask, hasn't it?" She teased.

The only reaction I gave her was to point a finger at her. She grinned as I sipped my coffee waiting for her to answer. I didn't have to wait very long.

"I saw his number in the studio's database and put it in my phone. I did it because I knew what I had done was really bad. I had to call him. Call him and apologise for being such a sick tart when he came in for his tattoo. It took me a little while to work up the courage to do so but eventually I did." She shook her head and shrugged.

“He answered when you called?” I was amazed. Bikers usually ignored calls from numbers they didn’t know. Well actually, most people did.

“He did. It was a very difficult call but he’s a nice guy and he listened. I apologised and we started talking. It was as I was ending the call that he suddenly said ‘If you ever just need to talk, call me. I’ll listen’. His generosity blew me away. So I started calling him to talk, and sometimes he even called me, eventually we started video chatting and Ms Squirrel joined in our chats. We built a friendship that I think is going to last forever. I want it to last forever. He’s my person, you know?”

I nodded, I knew what she meant.

She leant over the side of the bed and put her empty mug on the carpet. As she straightened she looked a bit uncomfortable and I understood why when she spoke.

“I...uhm...I haven’t hooked up with anyone since he said what he did. I’ve been taking stock of my life, of what I had allowed myself to become. I’m changing some things. I’m not saying I’m going to be a little miss homemaker now. That’s not it. I’m still going to be me, wear what I want when I want. If I feel like dressing more conservative I’ll do it, if I feel more adventurous I’ll do the same. From now on I’ll be putting me first. I deserve it.”

I wanted to bounce in place but couldn’t, as my coffee would have gone everywhere.

“I’m so happy for you, Joney. All I ever wanted was for you to be happy. I love that you have found a friend in Rider and now in Lucky. They are good guys, both of them. Even though they look like serial killers on a good day.” I teased.

Joney laughed and nodded.

“They are, plus they are super funny when they are together. I haven’t heard Rider laugh as much as when he’s with Lucky and Ms Squirrel.”

“I have to know. Why do you call her that?”

She smiled and shook her head.

“Wait until you see her eating grapes. She likes to store them in her cheeks just like a little squirrel. The first time she did it was on one of our video chats and I about lost it. Since then she’s my Ms Squirrel.”

“That kid is the cutest little diva.” I grinned.

“She is and she has her dadda wrapped tightly around her entire hand, not just her pinky. It’s cute seeing the big rough biker going all soft for his baby girl.”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “Are you sure you don’t have any feelings other than friendship for the guy?”

She immediately raised both hands with crossed fingers.

“I swear he’s only a friend.” She thought about it for a second. “He’s my best friend.”

She smiled as she slid off the bed and pointed a finger at me.

“That’s the end of the Joney inquisition. It’s time to start your day of beauty. We want to have Remy weak at the knees when he sees you walking towards him later today.”

I drank the last of my now lukewarm coffee and set the mug on the bedside table.

“What exactly is it that you have planned?”

She ticked it off on her fingers.

“First there’s a long soak in a warm fragrant bath, then a good exfoliation. I know you do the laser thing so no need to shave. A warm massage. Then a mani and pedi followed by your make-up and hair. Once that’s done it will be time for the dress and shoes.”

“It sounds wonderful. Thank you so much. I was just going to bath and get ready like I normally do. You’re making it so special for me. You’re a good friend, Joney.”

“It is my honour to be with you today. I know you were hoping DC would make it down but I’m here and I’ll make sure today goes off without any hitches for the bride.” She grinned.

I nodded. “She’s been so busy with her boys, the studio and the club I was sort of expecting them not to show. And then they surprised us all by getting married on Christmas day.” I shrugged. “And now they’re on honeymoon for a few days.”

Joney winked with a sly grin. “I’m sure she’s having a great time with that man of hers.”

I made big eyes and nodded. She was definitely having a good time. My thoughts veered from the Joburg chapter to the local one. The one my cousin Noe was a part of as Kid’s old lady.

They were joining us today and I was looking forward to seeing them and their baby girl, Delaney.

A knock on the door started my wedding day in earnest.

Maman, Frankie and Niki’s Mama came bustling in and took over. I was told Niki would be in later after she’s seen to some

things. Sophie was manning the kitchen and sent up tea and snacks for us.

The day was fun but nerve wracking at the same time.

I was getting married. Nothing could go wrong. Nothing.

A few minutes before we were to head down to the beach there came a knock at the door and my heart sped up a tiny bit. Why it did I had no idea.

Joney opened the door, looked over her shoulder at me, smiled and winked. When she stepped to the side to let the person in I realised why she did.

Noe walked in, came to a stop and shook her head as she looked me over.

“You’re looking absolutely gorgeous, cuddie. I’m not hugging you because I don’t want to start snivelling. You have to know Remy is going to lose his mind when he sees you.” She grinned. “Talking about the man, he sent me up here to give you something.”

She brought her hand from behind her back. In her hand was a small square box wrapped in shiny blue paper with a gold ribbon around it.

“This is for you, from the groom.” She smiled as she handed it to me.

Leaning forward she pecked me on the cheek. “I have to get back down there. See you in a bit cuddie.” She winked.

“Thank you for coming home early to be here with me today, Noe. I love you, cuddie.”

“Love you back.” She threw over her shoulder as she left.

My attention went back to the gift I was clasping in both hands.

My hands shook as I pulled off the ribbon and very carefully undid the paper.

Lifting the lid from the black box I gasped in amazement. A fine gold chain with two gold stars suspended from it lay on dark blue satin. A card was tucked along the side.

I gently pulled it out.

When I bought this I didn't know what I do now.

It couldn't be more perfect for our day.

I'm down here, mon ange, waiting for my stars to descend and join me.

J'taime mon coeur. (I love you my heart)

R

Blinking furiously to stop the tears I held the box out.

“Put it on me, Joney. Please.” I whispered.

I kept hold of the card when she took the box. I watched in the mirror as she draped it around my neck and fastened it. Gently touching the stars lying just below the juncture of my collar bones I bit my lip, then smiled. It was beautiful.

“I'm ready.” I drew in a breath and turned.

The other women had left earlier so it was only Joney and I in the room.

She looked beautiful in a pale blue knee length dress with darker blue insets in the flowy skirt. It was strapless and the top fitted her abundant assets perfectly. Her almost white

blonde hair hung to just below her shoulder blades in a shining fall. Her make-up wasn't heavy but minimal like mine.

“Nope, we're not.” She grinned then winked when there came a hard knock on the door.

She opened the door wide and I smiled when Wild Man and Dominick walked in.

“You thought I would let my daughter walk to her man alone? Not happening my Pixie.” Wild Man growled and enveloped me in a gentle hug.

“I'm so happy you're here. Thank you for missing out on part of the club party to be with me.” I said softly.

“Baby, no party is worth missing my best girl's wedding. Not happening. Rooster is down there having a talk with your man so I don't think we should linger up here. Do you?” He winked while giving me his naughty grin.

Stepping back I took him in. He was dressed like a biker, but a cleaned up version. He wore a dark navy blue button up shirt under his kutte with black jeans and his boots. His hair was tied back and his beard had been trimmed. He looked damned good.

“You're looking scrumptious, Wild. You hoping to snag a lady tonight?” I teased.

“This is for you, my girl, not some strange woman.” He growled as he stepped aside for my brother.

Dom came to me with a hint of a smile on his face. And for once it reached his eyes, eyes exactly the same blue as mine. His dark curly hair was combed back from his forehead but a

few strands had escaped and curled over his forehead. As always he was strikingly handsome.

Like Wild he was wearing black jeans with a dark navy blue shirt that was open at the neck and with the sleeves rolled up and shiny black boots. He looked relaxed and at ease.

His shirt was the exact same colour as Wild Man's. I waved a finger between the two of them.

“I take it this is Niki's work.”

He gave a snort. “You know it is Pixie-belle.”

His arms came around me and he pulled me close, his head bent down to rest against the side of mine. His voice was soft and just for me when he spoke.

“Our parents would have been so proud to see you today. You are radiantly beautiful little sister. It is such an honour to be here and celebrate this day with you. Remy is a good man and it is with confidence that I give you to him today. He will love and protect you and your children every single day of his life. Always remember he gave up his country and his people for you because he loves you.”

He hugged me then stepped away and held out his arm. I slipped my fingers into the crook of his elbow and his fingers closed over mine, giving a soft squeeze.

“I'm taking you downstairs and once we're downstairs where there's more space Wild Man will join us. Joney will go on ahead and then we'll walk you down to the beach.”

I nodded. I no longer had words.

We slowly walked downstairs and out the front door.

I gasped in wonder.

Hundreds of gold stars dripped from the rafters and shimmered in the slight breeze. A gold and blue corded rope led to the lookout deck. Stars were suspended here and there on the rope.

My mouth hung open in amazement as I walked between my brother and my adopted dad to the lookout deck at the top of the stairs. The deck was draped in fabric in shades of blue. The rail wrapped in wide gold ribbon and there was a small bunch of star shaped white flowers resting at the start. Joney picked it up and waited for us to reach her.

“This is for you, from your new Maman.” She whispered and blinked several times before turning away, and slowly descended the stairs.

I blinked the tears away as I looked at the small bouquet of tiny white star shaped flowers tied with thin blue ribbon, tiny gold stars were suspended from the ends. Everything was so perfect.

Along the stairs fabric in two shades of blue had been sewn together to look like waves and strung between the poles Niki had said was to support shrubs. It was as if I was looking down a corridor of shades of blue and the palest of greens. The fabric had gold stars suspended against them here and there as well. Not a lot, just a few.

“This is so beautiful.” I whispered.

“It’s all for you, Pixie-belle.” Dom said softly.

Holding on to two very important men in my life I started to descend the steps.

Joney was kicking off her shoes on a platform that had a lot of shoes on it already and waited for us. When we reached the bottom she crouched and pulled my shoes off and set them next to hers while Dom and Wild Man took off their boots and socks.

The hum of voices and the rumble and hiss of waves breaking were the only sounds.

Joney smiled as she stepped past the last piece of concealing fabric and instantly music started playing.

I gasped. It was a song from my playlist we had listened to while lying in bed with Remy's hand on my belly. My still flat belly.

It was our song.

To Make You Feel My Love by Billy Joel. It said everything we both felt.

The piano chords rang out over the beach and had me blinking rapidly to disperse the tears.

And then we stepped past the last piece of fabric.

I gasped at all the people standing on the beach, waiting for me. But that wasn't the only reason I gasped.

A wooden arbour had been built on the beach and was draped in sheer fabrics from white to the darkest blue. The way it was set up it we would be facing the setting sun.

Usually the sun would have been too sharp to look into but there were a couple of fleecy clouds on the horizon, softening the brightness.

The beach was suffused in a golden glow and the sea glittered gold, orange, bronze and blue under the lowering rays of the sun.

I looked at the man waiting for me.

As always he took my breath away.

A sheer white pirate shirt with the top buttons undone stretched over his wide shoulders and were tucked into the top of black jeans. His hair wasn't tied back, he had left it loose because I liked it like that. His beard was trimmed close and his dark eyes were on me.

I walked across the sand past our guests on the arms of my brother and my biker dad.

I didn't see them, my eyes only saw him.

My Cajun.

Remy

My angel walked across the sand towards me and I found it hard to breathe.

She looked so damned beautiful.

Her hair was loose and curly and she had small flowers and stars tucked into the waves. Her white dress was made out of lace and had beads and tiny golden bells along the hem.

Seeing those little bells I realised why Joney had insisted on gold and not silver today. She had been with my angel when she bought her dress. A beautiful dress that had my heart beating fiercely.

I couldn't tear my eyes from her.

Wild Man's pissy growl had me looking away from her and into his eyes filled with a dire warning.

"I hand you my treasure today. Do not fuck it up."

Pixie snorted with suppressed laughter when I nodded and took her hand when as he gave it to me. I held it gently.

Wild Man stepped back, walking away to sit beside his son, Rooster.

Dom held his sister's other hand in both of his and looked at me with eyes filled with warmth.

"I give you my sister knowing you will love and keep her safe. She is precious to me. Today I hand over to you one of my most precious possessions. Love her always." He said softly as he set her hand in mine.

"I swear it on my life, brother." I answered as softly.

This moment was for us, not anyone else.

Dom nodded, leant down, kissed her cheek then walked over to where his wife sat with their baby on her lap. Taking him from her he settled him in his arms.

I looked down at my girl and saw she had been watching him as well.

Gently tightening my hands around hers I turned us the face the pastor where he waited behind the little lectern Niki had found somewhere. I had to let go of her hands, and I did, reluctantly.

He smiled at us, then at the people behind us.

“When I was asked to officiate at the wedding I didn’t know the couple or any of their family. But over the last few days I’ve had several conversations with Niki and Joney and through them got to know the couple standing before you now. Before the bride arrived I had the pleasure of conversing with the groom, and I must say, he’s isn’t only an impressive man in stature but in mind as well. He left his country, his people and his job to start over in a new country. This he did for the woman he fell in love with. They met and fell in love under challenging circumstances but made it through to today. Their wedding day.” He looked at us and smiled.

“We ask the Lord to watch over them and keep them safe on their journey through life together. To keep his guiding hand over their love and to bless their union.”

He looked at me and then at Pixie.

“We will now have the vows and an exchange of rings.”

I glanced at Lucky and he gave me a wink.

“Do you Remy “Cajun” Boudreaux take Elizabeth “Pixie” Carlisle Maingarde as your lawfully wedded wife?”

“I do.” My voice sounded strong as I answered.

“Do you Elizabeth “Pixie” Carlisle Maingarde take Remy “Cajun” Boudreaux as your lawfully wedded husband?”

“I do.”

“We will now do the exchange of the rings.” He looked at me and I turned to nod at Lucky.

My brother stepped up and pulled a black suede bag from his pocket. The pastor indicated that he should place the rings on

the bible he held in both hands. Lucky frowned but did as he was asked then stepped back. I know the religious part of the ceremony pissed him off but he handled it.

Pixie and I hadn't discussed the religious part of the ceremony but we had both decided to just go with it.

“We ask that you bless these rings, Lord. That you strengthen their bond with your love and compassion.”

“Turn to each other, please.” He said quietly.

I took my angel's hands and faced her. On the pastors' orders I picked up her ring, lifted her left hand and kissed her finger before I slid it on. It was wide gold band, a path of alternating diamonds and sapphires circled it. I wanted her to be able to wear her wedding band while at work and having the jewels sunk into the band made that possible.

Our eyes met and at that moment, as we exchanged our vows, we were the only people in the world.

“With this ring I give you my heart. From this day forward you shall not walk alone. My heart will be your shelter and my arms will be your home.”

My ring was a plain wide gold band with a single sapphire sunk into the top.

Taking my hand in hers she slowly slid the wide band onto my finger then kissed it.

“I give you this ring as a sign of my love. With all that I am I honour you. As I've given you my hands to hold, so I give you my life to keep.”

There were a couple of sniffles coming from those watching but I only had eyes for my woman.

The pastors' voice interrupted.

“By the powers vested in me I now declare you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride.”

Taking her face in my hands I softly kissed her. Her hands covered my cheeks as her mouth opened under mine and the kiss went from soft to hot in an instant. It was the whistles that drew us back and I slowly raised my head to smile at her.

“*J'taime mon ange* (I love you my angel).

“*J'taime* right back at you, my Cajun.” She grinned up at me.

We followed the pastor, Dom, Joney and Wild Man up the stairs. The paving was hot under our bare feet. The marriage register had to be signed under a roof so we headed into the lounge and did it there. Dom and Wild Man were our witnesses. My dad understood why he wasn't selected, today was all about Pixie.

We thanked the pastor for marrying us and headed back outside.

Our guests were streaming up from the beach and heading to the side patio.

Niki came bouncing up to us with her camera in hand. “Let's take some photos of you two before the sun disappears.”

We headed back down to the beach and had fun taking photos with Dom, Joney, Wild Man, Rooster, Lucky and my parents. Niki was in the family photos as well, using her tripod to set it up.

She was very professional and got the family photos done first and sent Dom and the others back upstairs to entertain our guests.

Using the sunset as a backdrop she posed us under the arbour.

Snapping a lot of photos of us along the beach and with our feet in the water as the sun disappeared below the horizon.

The sun was now completely gone but it was still light. The sky was washed in colours from blue through to orange and red. It was spectacular.

As spectacular as our wedding day.

Holding my wife in my arms I smiled into the camera and felt so damned blessed I had found her.

I almost lost her but here she was.

In my arms.

My wife.

My wife and the life she carried inside her.

Our baby.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Pixie

My husband washed the sand off my feet, dried them gently then slipped my sandals on. I returned the favour, washing his in turn and pulling his socks on then let him slip his feet into his boots. I tied the laces then stood on my tip toes and kissed him on the neck.

Throughout Niki kept taking pictures.

Glancing down at my ring I smiled.

“I have one last request.” She said. “Would you please pose on the lookout deck the way you did when we arrived here the other day? I’d like a photo of the two of you against the golden sky.”

So we did it.

And then it was time to join our guests.

When we walked in they started clapping and whistling and calling out to us. I waved and holding his hand let Remy lead me to where his parents, Lucky and Joney were standing. We were seated at the bridal table while Dom held a hand up for silence.

We had discussed not doing the usual round of formal speeches and had pared it down to Dominick and Remy.

“My sister and her husband asked me to thank all of you for taking the time to join us here today. Thank you to Kid and Noe for cutting their visit to Joburg short to be here today. We know some of you have somewhere else to be tonight so we’ll be keeping it short. A special thank you goes to Wild Man and his son Rooster who took Pixie-belle in when I was unable to take care of her. You will never know how grateful I am that you stepped up for her and helped to establish her amazing career. For those who don’t know, my sister is one of the foremost tattoo artists in the world. Her artwork can be seen on her Road Warrior family, Remy, Joney and several others who are here tonight.”

He smiled at me before he continued. I was stunned because he didn’t smile very often.

“Remy and Pixie-belle want to thank Sophie and her team for laying on the amazing food we’ll be eating soon. They thank my wife Nika and her teams for organising the wedding and for making today special for the two of them. Special thanks go to Joney for all she’s done to make today special for Pixie-belle.”

He turned to our table.

“When I heard my sister had hooked up with this unknown American I had serious reservations. That was until I met him and saw how much he loves my sister. I no longer have any reservations about the man who today, became my sister’s husband and my brother. I welcome him and his family into

ours.” He leant over the table and he and Remy clasped hands.
“Welcome to the family my brother.”

He turned back, picked up his glass and raised it high. “To the bride and groom.”

Glasses were raised high and ‘to the bride and groom’ was shouted by all.

I could only smile as my brother sat down next to Niki, put his arm around her and kissed her on the temple.

Remy kept hold of my hand as he stood.

“My wife and I...” He got no further as everyone whooped and whistled but he waited patiently.

“As I said, my wife and I want to thank you for comin’ out and celebratin’ our very special day with us.”

He turned fully towards me and ignored everyone, looking in my eyes.

“When I met you it was under a dark cloud but not even that cloud could stop what was meant to be. You and I. You are my reason for openin’ my eyes every mornin’ because I know when I open them I’ll be able to look at you. You are everythin’ to me. You are my soul mate, my future, my life. I’ll be lovin’ you till the day I close my eyes for the final time. Thank you for bein’ my wife.” He leant down and kissed me softly and I reached up and stroked his cheek.

My perfect man.

My Cajun.

We ate, we drank, (not me, I was on juice) and celebrated with our family and friends.

The food was amazing and I ate hopelessly too much.

I was laughing at something Joney had said when Niki and Dominick came to our table.

Niki placed a key ring with a big red crystal heart on it in front of Remy.

“What is this?” He asked.

“That is your key to the kingdom.” She joked. “The Honeymoon Kingdom. I’ve had all your things moved over so there’s no need to go upstairs. If you sneak away now no one will notice. They’re too busy partying.”

Dominick grinned and shook his head. “You won’t be able to miss it. Nika sprinkled bloody white flower petals along the path. Not so much everyone will notice but just enough so you’ll be able to follow them to your cottage.”

After thanking them for an amazing day we sneaked out, ran around the house and found the line of petals.

We followed them to a cottage set back from the rest. A cottage that was supposedly still being renovated. My sister-in-law, who was more like a sister, was sneaky. Very sneaky.

After unlocking the door Remy picked me up and carried me over the threshold, kicking the door closed behind him. He didn’t have to turn the lights on because lamps had been left on for us. He didn’t put me down until we got to the bedroom.

Then he gently slid me down his body until my feet touched the floor.

I looked around the room and gasped. It was like a calm and peaceful oasis after the high of today.

“Shower then bed.” My man said imperiously as he pulled me towards the bathroom.

“Wait, I want to take off my dress and shoes first.” He let go of my hand and I quickly divested myself of my dress, standing there in my white lace wedding undies.

He shook his head slowly. “If I had known what was hidin’ under that dress we would have come straight here after the weddin’. Nothin’ would have stopped me.”

“Let’s shower and then I’ll show you my other surprise.” I winked and wiggled my eyebrows.

We showered and I sent him off to get me a glass of juice. I wasn’t really thirsty I needed to get into my surprise.

I quickly found my second wedding dress, the one I bought for us.

Pulling it on over my naked body I stood beside the bed and waited. He came striding into the room, wearing a towel wrapped low around his hips. When he saw me his steps stuttered and he very carefully set the glass down then came at me. Fast.

Gently, oh so gently, he cupped my shoulders and slowly spun me around until I was facing him again.

“Fuck, this is the sexiest sight I’ve ever seen. My wife wearin’ nothing but lace. Do you have any idea how beautiful you are right now? The way your skin shimmers beneath the lace, the way your eyes are glowin’ up at me. I fuckin’ love you, my angel. I was goin’ to take it slow but now it’s fuckin’ impossible. I’ve wanted you all day and have been battlin’ my

cock from gettin' hard. I don't have to anymore. It's just you and me now."

He lifted me up dropping me in the center of the bed. I laughed as I bounced and then he was on top of me, dragging my dress up and over my hips.

His head dropped and he sucked my nipple through the lace, moving it from side to side with his tongue and heightening the sensation. A hand reached in and fingers swiped through my wet lips. A shudder raced through my body.

"So ready for me, mon ange." His growl was low and rough.

Opening my legs wide I gave him the access he wanted. Access I wanted him to have. I wanted him inside me, desperately.

I didn't have to wait.

The heavy head of his cock slipped through my slippery lips then nudged my opening before he slowly started filling me. He took it slow because he was a big man and he always took care with me. It was only when I was ready that he would be rough with me.

"I need you, my husband." I gasped as he seated himself deep inside.

"Fuck. I love to hear you say that. It makes me fuckin' crazy." He nuzzled my breast then bit the fleshy side and when I moaned he started thrusting.

Deep and hard.

I was so turned on my orgasm rose quickly.

“Hard, my Cajun, give it to me hard. I’m almost there. Almost.”

His thrusts became almost brutal and the bed creaked and groaned as he used his big body to get as deep as he could. To stroke over that spot inside that loved him being deeper than deep.

It rose like a wave in the ocean, rolling towards me as it would roll to the beach. Cresting high before it broke over me in a rush of white.

My scream of pleasure was joined by his deep grunt as he came. His cock jerking inside me.

Every single muscle in my body was pulled tight as I arched up underneath him.

“I love you so much, baby.” He muttered in my neck.

“Love you too, lots and lots.” I muttered back.

“Happy New Year, *mon ange* (my angel). This is the best new year ever.” Lifting his head he gave me a soft kiss.

“Happy New Year, my Cajun. And you’re right, it is the best.”

We made love twice more during the night and slept entwined in each other.

My husband and I.

It was almost too good to believe.

I had a husband and I was pregnant with his baby.

We were surrounded by loving family and friends. I would never be alone again.

We were all now joined together.

A family.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Joney

Everyone who had come from the city had left soon after the delicious dinner. Pixie and Remy had sneaked off to their cottage earlier and we pretended we didn't see them leaving.

Niki's Mama was the first to leave the party, Lucky's parents left soon after her as did Sophie and her husband. I didn't blame them. They had to be tired, because those ladies did one hell of a job today.

Niki and Dom stayed until Niko's yell on the baby monitor had them saying Happy New Year and goodnight then going upstairs.

Rider left when they did with Ms Squirrel fast asleep on his shoulder where she had been snoring away for quite a while. He seemed to want to hold on to her today. I knew he was finding it difficult with the pregnancy bomb Pixie and Remy dropped on Christmas day and then the wedding today. It must've brought back memories for him. By the dark bruises under his eyes I knew he wasn't sleeping well. He had been doing so well but now he wasn't.

I made a note to myself to take some time to have a chat with him.

Gideon and Kellen hung out with the rest of us and we had fun until I saw the staff wanted to clean up and get home. I shooed everyone to the front veranda and helped them clear the tables. It didn't take long as they had been cleaning around us all evening. When they were done I collected the envelopes with their money from Niki's desk drawer. She had asked me to please take care of paying them when they went upstairs. Once done I called the front gate to let them know they were leaving.

I did one final check then went to join the others on the veranda. Only to find Lucky was the only one still there.

"Where did everyone go?" I asked in surprise. "None of them stayed to ring in the New Year?"

"Bunch of sissies, darlin'." He said with mild disgust. "They were tired and went to bed."

I snorted and flung myself down in a chair next to him. "I think we should drink a toast to us, the last of the party animals." I said with a grin.

"Nah, I have a better plan." He grinned and winked at me.

Even though he was my friend parts of me quivered when he looked at me like that.

He looked at me like he found me sexually attractive. I would be lying to say I didn't feel the same. It has been between us from the first time we met.

We had chemistry, lots of chemistry.

Both of us ignored it. Because we were friends. Only friends.

“You do? Tell me this brilliant plan of yours.” I teased.

He stood, towering over me, grabbed my hand and pulled me up. Standing next to the massive man always made me feel more feminine, maybe because I’m a tall girl and very few men towered over me.

“What do you think about goin’ down to the beach and findin’ a nice spot to lie back and look up at the stars as the New Year arrives, and in the mornin’ watch the sun come up?”

Tipping my head back I looked up at him and smiled. I’ve wanted to do it since I got here but was a bit wary of being on the beach on my own. Even with the nightly patrols. I’ve watched one too many scary movies where the bad guys came up out of the dark ocean.

“That’s the best idea. I’ve wanted to lie on the beach and look at the stars since I got here.” I said.

“Good girl, you find the blankets and cushions and I’ll get us somethin’ to drink and celebrate the New Year.”

For some reason my heart was racing and my palms were clammy. I shook it off and spoke to myself harshly, but only in my head.

Stop it, Joney. The man is a friend, nothing else. Calm the hell down.

I shook my head at myself but stopped. It would be too strange if Lucky walked out and found me shaking my head at nothing.

I found quilts in the blanket box in the lounge as well as pillows, I took two of each. Rolling them into a tight sausage I sat down on the steps to wait for him. Hearing his steps I glanced over my shoulder and raised my eyebrows at the cooler he was carrying. Not a small one either.

“I packed us a little picnic, darlin’.” He grinned and winked. “I got some left over pastries, cheese and crackers, two bottles of champagne, some beers and a couple bottles of water. Didn’t bother with glasses as we can drink straight from the bottle.”

“That sounds great. Did you grab a torch or one of the LED lamps?”

“Lamps are too bright. I’ve got a torch to get us down there, set up and then it’s just us and the stars.” He gestured for me to go ahead of him.

I walked down the steps towards the lookout deck. When I got there I kicked off my slip slops and watched as Lucky put down the cooler to take off his boots. Pulling off his socks he stuck them in his boots then picked up the big cooler again.

“Give me the shit you’re carryin’, sweetheart. You go ahead with the torch and I’ll follow.” He ordered, shocking me a bit by calling me sweetheart. It was always darlin’ or my name.

We descended slowly and I breathed deep, loving the smell of the ocean and the sounds of the waves breaking on the beach.

“Where are we going to camp out?” I asked when I stepped onto the sand.

He paused next to me; our bedding flung over one shoulder, the cooler in his hand and used his head to point to the far side of the beach.

“There’s a group of rocks above the waterline over there in the soft sand. I found it when I went explorin’ the other mornin’. It’s protected from the wind and has an amazin’ view over the water.” He started across the beach and I quickly followed, lighting our way.

He was right.

The rocks formed a nice little hideaway.

I held the torch as he made a bed out of the quilts and set the pillows against a big rock we were going to use like a back rest. I had thought we would each have our own quilt.

I was wrong. We were sharing.

When he had everything set up to his satisfaction he took my hand and pulled me close.

“Crawl in while I get our drinks, Jo-Jo.” He gave me a squeeze and stepped away.

I didn’t read anything into his actions. He was being friendly. And giving me a nickname? I loved it.

I sat down, brushed the sand off my feet and crawled in under the top quilt. Resting my back against the big fluffy pillow I sighed as my head fell back and I finally relaxed.

Lucky brought the cooler close to the edge of our beach bed then crawled in next to me.

We lay next to each other, staring up at the stars and marvelled at their brightness. It was much brighter than in the

city. I pointed out the constellations as the sky was unfamiliar to him, being from the Northern Hemisphere they would be. A streak of light in the sky had me gasping in wonder. Lucky gave a soft growl as we watched a falling star shoot across the sky before it disappeared. I silently wished upon a falling star.

What did I wish for?

I wished for a year with no problems.

“Happy New Year, Jo-Jo.” He leant across and kissed my cheek and I returned the favour.

“Happy New Year, Lucky. Stay safe this year.” I whispered as I kissed his cheek.

He shrugged almost as if staying safe wasn't a problem. Him being an outlaw biker I knew safety was a concern. I let it go.

We passed the bottle of champers between us and nibbled on the snacks. I've never had a problem talking to him and tonight was no different.

I talked about the studio, my clients and how much I liked my job. He talked about his club and how much he loved his brothers and how they were his family. As the night progressed and it became cooler we curled up closer and closer. I don't know when it happened or why but I suddenly found myself lying on his chest, stroking a hand up and down.

He had gorgeously defined muscles and some hair across his chest. Not a carpet of hair but a nice amount. A good amount of hair. Was there even such a thing as a good amount?

I liked men with hair on their chests. It was sort of my thing.

“Where's your shirt?” I asked, not pausing my stroking.

“Took it off when you started feelin’ me up, baby.” He growled where his chin rested on the top of my head. “Had no fuckin’ idea I would like the feel of your hands on me this much.”

His hand slid down my back and up again and I shivered.

“I like your hands on me too, they’re so big and warm.” I whispered.

“Baby, you’ve got to know, I’m not immune to your touch.” He slipped a big finger under my chin and lifted my face so our eyes met.

It was dark with only a faint moon and the light from the stars but I could see him.

Damn, he was so ruggedly beautiful.

“Can I kiss you?” He growled and all I could do was nod.

His head blocked out the stars and my eyes slowly slid closed as our lips met. At first he just held his lips against mine but then he slid his tongue along my lips. My mouth opened and he slid inside, sliding and curling his tongue over mine and going deep. I explored his lips and mouth with my tongue. He tasted like champagne and beer. I found I liked his taste.

We kissed and kissed slowly sliding down the pillows until I was lying on my back with him over me. My arms slid up over his broad shoulders, pulling him close and I moaned softly into his mouth.

Lifting his head slightly he stared down at me. “Baby, what are we doin’? If we keep kissin’ the way we are I’m goin’ to fuck you. I know it and you know it. We aren’t stupid.”

“I...I don’t actually know what we’re doing. I like you. I like kissing you. I know we’re just friends. I know it, but I like how...” I was about to continue but he put a finger across my lips, silencing me.

“You can feel how much I want you, Jo-Jo. I like you too and right now I fuckin’ need you so bad. But you have to know, this is all there is, nothin’ more. I can’t give you what I don’t have to give. I won’t ever love you, baby. That part of me is dead and it’s not comin’ back to life. What I can give you is this right here. If you want it, it’s yours until I leave. And baby, I leave the day after tomorrow, so we have tonight and tomorrow night. It’s all I can give you, ever. Once it’s done it’s done.” His beautiful voice growled out low and I could hear the honesty in it. See it in his eyes.

Should I do this after I’ve turned my life around with Rider’s help? Should I have sex with this man because my body cried out for him?

My heart said yes, to take what he was offering. My pussy was saying the same thing.

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Clasping his face in my hands I brought him closer, so close my lips touched his.

“Yes, I want it. I want all you can give me.” I whispered.

“Thank fuck.” He growled as he closed the distance between us and kissed me deep and rough.

I liked it. Liked it a lot. Liked his teeth biting into my lower lip, bruising it.

Pulling the top of my dress down he exposed my breasts and cupped both in his hands.

“*Bon Dieu!* (Good God!) You have the most beautiful fuckin’ tits I’ve ever seen, *bèbè* (baby). So fuckin’ plump and round and soft. I want to bite them, leave my marks all over so when you look at them days from now you’ll remember my teeth on you.” He almost snarled.

I shivered in reaction. “Do it.” I whispered breathlessly.

He sucked and licked and bit leaving his teeth marks and beard burn on my breasts.

“I need you naked, *pichouette* (little girl).” He grabbed the hem of my dress and dragged it up and over my head, throwing it on the quilt beside him. Going up on his knees he unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned and unzipped then slipped his jeans off, kicking them away before lowering himself over me.

While he did all that I was mesmerised.

Mesmerised by his massive pierced cock.

How did I know it was massive and pierced? Because he had gone commando under his jeans. When he unzipped it was right there. So hard I could almost see it throbbing where it stood out from his body.

I was in a total daze and hardly realised he had pulled my panties off.

Until I felt him against my mound, and not through my panties. Skin to skin.

“I fuckin’ love your bare pussy, Jo-Jo. It means when I eat you I can lick, bite and suck every little bit of you. I’m gonna

make you come so hard, *bèbè* (baby), gonna stretch this *'tite fleur* (little flower) of mine wide open with my big cock. When I'm done wreckin' my *'tite fleur* you're gonna feel me for days. It's gonna be all mine until I have to go. You get me, *'ma bon pichouette* (my good little girl)?"

I could only moan yes as I panted, helplessly caught up in his suddenly thick accent and the Cajun words peppering it.

And I did get what he was saying. He wasn't staying and he would never be mine.

Tonight and tomorrow night was all we would ever have.

It was more than enough for me.

He didn't slam into me like I thought he would. He took me slow, making me writhe and moan on a quilt in the sand.

While he took me in every way possible I didn't realise I would remember this night for a very long time.

For the rest of my life in actual fact.

As the sun rose and painted the ocean magenta and gold he had me on my hands and knees in front of him. Facing the ocean. My knees bracketed by his, his hard cock slowly sliding up and down my butt.

When he finally pushed through the swollen folds of my sore pussy it felt as if I was being torn in two. He felt so much bigger than he did during the night as he took me over and over and over. Constantly muttering how he couldn't get enough of me. How he had to have more.

I have never in my life been with a man with so much stamina. He could come and within minutes would be ready to

go again.

“Down, *pichouette*, (little girl) arms around the pillows, chin on them, lookin’ out over the sea. Ass in the air, presentin’ my ‘*tite fleur*’ to me. Keep those knees together, and do not move. This is not for you, it is all for me, takin’ you and rememberin’ you givin’ me everythin’ as the sun paints the sea as rosy red as my ‘*tite fleur*.’” He murmured in his deeply accented voice as he slowly pushed against my swollen folds.

My poor pussy moaned in distress because she was sore, but at the same time she bloody gushed for him. Slicking me up and preparing the way for his big cock.

Once he was fully seated inside he held my hips tight in his hands, so hard I knew I would have bruises on top of bruises.

I thought he would be powering into me, he didn’t.

He took me slow and easy, playing with my clit and my nipples. Taking me higher and higher until I came with a wild moan. He sped up his thrusts as I shuddered, my pussy tight and spasming around his hard shaft.

Covering my back with his chest he held me close as he thrust deep and came, his cock jerking deep inside, his seed splashing my pulsing walls.

We had the talk. We were both clean and neither one of us had brought condoms.

Plus I was on birth control. We were safe to play.

“*Bon Dieu avoir pitié*. (Good God have mercy.) Never in my life have I come so fuckin’ hard or so many fuckin’ times in one night.” He whispered against my shoulder as he gave it

one last nip then pulled me up, his cock still inside me to sit on his thighs.

With one big hand clamped around my throat and his arm around my waist he held me until he softened and naturally started to slide out of me. Not all the way because damn, the man was really big.

“Let’s get you cleaned up and dressed, *ma petite chatte* (my little cat). It’s time to go back up to the house.” He whispered in my ear then gently lifted me off his lap and set me down on the quilt.

Using his tee he cleaned between my legs then pulled my panties up my legs.

He helped me to get dressed, only then did he pull his jeans on. His tee was pushed into the back of his pants, hanging there like a flag. A flag of our night together. His long hair was in a wild and tangled mess and his beard wasn’t much better. I gaped at the lines my nails had raked down his back. Raised red and painful looking marks.

Shaking out a quilt he draped it around me, pulled me close to his chest and pressed soft kisses to my eyelids, nose and mouth.

“*Merci boucoup* (Many thanks) for the most amazin’ night of my life, *tite chatte* (little cat). I’m not just sayin’ that. It’s the truth.” He was quiet for a beat. “I wish I was a different man, a man who could give you the home and babies you deserve. But I’m not. I’m only half a man, and the half that’s left is no good for you. He’s a monster. I truly wish I had more to give. I do. If I did I would give it to you, no one else, Jo-Jo.”

I couldn't help the tears that filled my eyes and silently ran down my cheeks. I was so sad for him, and for me.

Shaking his head he wiped them away with his thumbs. “*tite chatte, casse pas mon coeur.* (Little cat, don't break my heart). What little I have left of it. *Je suis désolé* (I'm sorry).” He whispered.

I don't know what he said but as soon as he did he changed.

He pushed me away and I could see him closing down. It was almost as if a steel wall slid down between us. Even his accent wasn't as pronounced.

“I won't call or text or answer any calls or texts from you. When I leave it will be the end of what we shared here between us. Do you understand?” He wasn't being nasty at all. He was being honest.

What could I say or do but agree.

“I understand, Monster man.” I teased before turning serious.

“I won't call or text, you have my word.”

I gave him my word without a second thought.

We had one more night together before he had to leave.

In the end he gave me two nights I would remember for the rest of my life.

I stood in front of the house with everyone and watched Rider and Ms Squirrel drive away with Lucky in the passenger seat, their bikes loaded on the trailer. They were dropping Lucky's loaner bike off at Remy's house before taking him to the airport.

Rider and my little squirrel would be heading out from there and I wasn't sure when I would see the two of them again.

At least I would be able to chat to them again soon.

The same wasn't true of Lucky, my secret Monster man.

I knew it was entirely possible I would never see or speak to him again.

I waved and smiled, hiding my tears.

I had done something really stupid.

Absolutely insanelly stupid.

I had fallen for my two night stand.

OTHER BOOKS BY RENÉ VAN DALEN

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Burning Bright In The Black

Lost And Found In Blue

Black Heart And Red Redemption

A Single Shining Moment (Novella)

Vengeance Of A Black Knight

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Neither Black Nor White

A Touch Of Grey

Birds Of A Feather (Novella)

Bitter Taste Of Sin

Bikers, Baubles & Bells (Novella)

ANTHOLOGY

These Deviant Ties

Including the short story Evil Beautiful

MAINGARDE

Evil Beautiful

Angel Beautiful

Savage Beautiful

Starlight & Sandcastles (Novella)

PLAYLIST

Billy Joel - To Feel My Love

The Parlotones - I'll be There

Eagles - One of These Nights

Chris Cornell - Nearly Forgot My Broken Heart

Meatloaf - Two Out of Three Ain't Bad

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Thank you for holding my hand as we take over the world. Love you lady.

A big hug to you, my readers, you are the reason I keep writing. Thank you.

To my arc squad, all I can say is...wow! You give so much of your time to read and review. My thanks come with love and hugs.

To Mari Small, thank you for helping to name this book! I was lost until you gave me the title.

Finally, I hope each and every one of you had a very merry and bright Christmas.

May your New Year be filled with joy, love and laughter.

Stay safe and well.

See you on the flipside!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

René Van Dalen grew up in a small town in the Transkeian region of South Africa close to the ocean and the mountains. After high school she moved to the city to go to College. She never left and misses the ocean every single day.

Her parents gave her the love of books and music. Haunting the library when she should have been studying helped to satisfy her craving to read more and more books.

Doing what the majority of people do is not for her, she loves who she finally turned out to be.

René likes her music loud and heavy, her coffee with a touch of milk and slightly sweet, and chocolate in all its shapes and forms. She's a voracious reader and a huge fan of J R Ward's Black Dagger Brotherhood. Her three adult children are the loves of her life.

Music is her muse. Her house is never silent. Whether she's writing or reading or just chilling there is always music playing.

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