



THE
HISTORY
OF RAGE

Book Eleven of Rage MC

Elizabeth N. Harris

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The History of Rage.

Rage is undergoing change, some welcome, some not. One brother is happy to go with the flow until his President's point about the past haunting Rage bites him hard. He made a terrible mistake once and nearly cost a woman he loved her life. He paid his penance and grovelled for forgiveness. So when a woman he wants makes a mistake, how does he react? The same way as any Rage brother... everyone can go to hell! But it's never that simple as fate throws a spanner in the works.

Being the daughter of a solid, upstanding citizen was easy. She was taught values that she cherished, and now her friends and acquaintances are being threatened. She understands there are always shades of grey, but when her father makes her aware of some local history, she puts her foot well and truly in it. What happens when the daughter of a Delta Force Lieutenant-Colonel stands up for those weaker than her and insults a Rage brother?

A brother reacts in hurt, a woman reacts with stubbornness, and two souls may lose their chance together. But Rage was warned, Rapid City hasn't settled, and an old enemy is back and playing the long game. Opposites do attract. Is he strong enough to hold her but let her fire burn brightly? Maybe she can save herself by saving him, or vice versa? A Rage brother and his woman are about to either bend or break. Only time will tell.

Books by Elizabeth N. Harris

Rage MC series.

Rage of the Phoenix.

The Hunters Rage.

The Rage of Reading.

The Crafting of Rage.

Rage's Terror.

The Protection of Rage.

Love's Rage.

The Hope of Rage.

First Rage.

The Innocence of Rage.

The Sweetness of Rage.

The Range of Rage.

Rage's Model.

The Rage of Angels.

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Rage MC–The Prospects.

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Oakwood Manor.

Courtenay House.

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Dedication.

For those who have a past they might be ashamed of, don't. That made you who you are today.

Love

Elizabeth x

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This book was written, produced and edited in England, the United Kingdom, where some spelling, grammar and word usage will vary from US English.

A Quick Note!

After a couple of reviews and emails commenting on grammar and spelling errors, I thought I'd explain. My work is edited thoroughly, and some grammar and spelling will differ from US English. For example, color to colour or focusing instead of focussing. But I type as I imagine the characters to speak. I've been around several MCs and also know a good many bikers, and believe me, they don't watch their grammar! So you may find errors when one of the characters speaks; that's intentional! Even educated characters may drop their p's and q's from time to time, and we'll let them off because we love them so much!

Drake may use *don't* instead of *doesn't*, *it don't make sense* instead of *it doesn't make sense*. Or I *be* angry instead of *I am* angry! Or Phoe may say *me and you* instead of the grammatically correct *you and I*. They also drop words, possibly one of my own personal pet peeves! *You won't do it* becomes *won't do it*, or *it ain't right* turns into *ain't right*. However, typos are not deliberate, and if you find any, I sincerely apologise!

I hope you enjoy the book because I write from the heart and genuinely love my Rage MC characters and the world I'm creating around them.

“We have a legacy, children who are our blood, and we don't want shit from our history scarring them. I see a new future, one we fuckin' bled for, and I realise it's tarnished with our rep. Can't alter the past but can change the future and give those kids a clean patch.”

Happy Reading!



Elizabeth N. Harris

Prologue.

Jan 2019.

Drake

“Any other business?” Drake asked, glancing around church.

All heads shook, apart from one. Axel pulled something from his pocket and studied it before throwing it on the table. Drake reached out, took the piece of paper, and held it up before his face set in a dark temper.

“What the fuck is this?” Drake demanded, turning to stare at each brother. Most looked surprised, one or two curious, but nobody showed recognition or embarrassment.

“I wanna know that too,” Axel boomed.

“Who has the sheer audacity to disrespect the patch the founders created?” Drake seethed. His fists thumped on the table as he rose to his full height. Axel stared at him thoughtfully.

“Fuckin’ answer Drake now!” Axel commanded. There was something in his tone that made Drake turn his head. Drake’s eyes narrowed on several of his brothers, who he knew could draw.

“You better admit it and take the punishment.” Drake growled. “I’ll beat the shit out of you, as will the rest of your brothers, but you’ll keep your patch,” Drake threatened.

Still, no one admitted it.

“I like it,” Axel stated, and Drake swivelled his head to stare at the last founder of Rage.

“What did you say?” Drake yelled.

“I fuckin’ like it, asshole, and don’t you ever speak to me like that!” Axel lumbered to his feet and stared down the infuriated Rage president. Drake glared back, but Axel knew Drake wouldn’t push him. Drake had respect for Axel, and Axel could still take him. Plus, to strike a founder was an

instant dismissal from the club. And not even Drake was exempt from that rule. Axel watched Drake wrestle his anger into a semblance of restraint. A very faint control, judging by the vitriol that layered his following words.

“Da, Fury, and you designed that patch, Axel, the patch we wear with pride on our backs. And some fucker has desecrated it. The Rage patch is off limits!”

“Your da, Fury, and I created that when we were high. It’s why the fucker’s so colourful,” Axel said calmly, and Apache snickered as Drake’s mouth opened and shut silently. Drake sat down with a thump, and although anger shone in his eyes, amusement also peeked through.

“When you were high?” Drake growled, and Axel recognised the signs of Drake trying to hold on to his temper.

“High as fuckin’ kites, brother. We all liked certain images and threw them together, made a hash of it. But this, this fucker, it keeps all those elements and makes them classy. Whoever drew this didn’t do so out of disrespect but respect. And I like it!” Axel boomed the last few words.

“They were high,” Texas snorted, trying not to laugh.

“It was the damn early seventies; of course, we were fuckin’ high!” Axel retorted. Apache couldn’t hold back much longer and burst into laughter. Texas and Fish followed suit. The rest looked at Drake, unsure of how to act. The second-gen didn’t give a shit about Drake’s reaction. But Drake’s generation and the following all regarded Drake to gauge their reactions. However, Rock, Gunner, Lowrider, and Ezra wanted to laugh. Drake scowled.

“What do you mean, you like it?” Drake asked cautiously. He had an inkling Axel was about to land a bomb on him. He watched the remaining founder of Rage carefully. Axel had that look in his eye that meant he was about to blow someone’s world up. Drake was suddenly resigned and believed it was to be his.

“I vote we change patch!” Axel said calmly and sat down as everybody broke out yelling and shouting. Drake sighed and

leaned back in his chair. He'd fuckin' known it.

"Shut the fuck up, assholes!" Axel boomed and whacked the table.

Everyone hushed. It was Drake's turn to snicker.

"Anything you want to say, founder?" Drake asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah. Listen up; you bunch of pissing pussies. That patch means something and always has. But it's got blood, darkness, and disloyalty attached to it. We all know that. Clean as we are, people still see the patch and fear us. We have a legacy, children who are our blood, and we don't want shit from our history scarring them. I see a new future, one we fuckin' bled for, and I realise it's tarnished with our rep. Can't alter the past, but we can change the future and give those kids a clean patch. A beautiful, new, clean patch like they are our beautiful, new, clean future!" Axel boomed. Eyes swivelled from Axel to Drake.

"What else?" Drake asked, knowing Axel had more.

"Those children gonna bust their bollocks off for us. We'll grind them down and build them up. You want Harley wearing a patch linked with disloyalty or one with family and a promising future?" Axel hit Drake straight in the balls. Axel knew exactly what Drake would pick for his son.

"Fuck, never thought of that," Ace muttered.

"So, I fuckin' vote. We built a new Rage over a decade ago. We respect that and use the new patch. I don't give a flying shit who created this. I care because they cared enough to improve on a drunken, drug-fuelled squiggle three assholes drew decades ago." He gestured at the new patch. "One of us sees something better for the club and our reputation. Separate us from the patch that Bulldog wore but keep the founder's design intact and move forward. Because the patch we wear on our backs right now holds us back and doesn't let us move on," Axel pointed out, and Drake nodded. Fresh blood, a new future, disregarding the past and leaving it where it belonged.

"Maybe you have a point," Texas murmured.

“Got another. We need to fuckin’ expand. Don’t have enough rooms here anymore for everyone,” Axel complained.

“We still got half the top floor empty,” Drake refuted.

“And Wild, Cowboy, Harley, Tye, and Carmine will take five of them,” Axel snapped.

“You asking family men to give up their bunks?” Apache asked.

“Fuck no. I bought that huge ass warehouse that’s behind our shops. Wanna tear that fucker down and build a brand-new clubhouse. Look, ain’t no architect, but here’s a rough idea. Build a basement for church and a storage room for shit. The ground floor could be some offices, a rec room, a bigger bar, a good kitchen, a playroom and a few downstairs bunks.

“Fuck, I even suggest a dining area rather than eating all over the place. Two long ass tables where we can sit together. On the top two floors, I’ve created one hundred and fifty bunks, each with adjoining bathrooms. Build them slightly bigger than what we have presently, which is a little better than a cell. It will be a vast fuckin’ clubhouse. Give the old ladies a room to meet in. They need space to plan shit for the club.”

“And what about this clubhouse?” Drake asked Axel tightly.

“Move everything out and tear this down, Drake. Lay a foundation stone for the five founders and put a children’s playground here. Your da would have loved that. Family. We can add a swimming pool on the new land I bought and make the grass area bigger. Put a wall up between the garages and the shops separating the clubhouse land from the garage forecourt. Kids will be safe; we saw what happened with Davy last month.” Axel shoved his point home. Davy had been running across the forecourt to reach Lowrider when a car nearly hit her. Drake and Lowrider had completely lost their shit.

“Not a bad idea,” Ace mused.

“Wall also stops assholes walking in off the street. Candidates and prospects can have gate duty. I’d add three

more bays to the garage. What with Jett, Calamity, and the others, we lose two to three bays for their design work. Why not build them a custom-made bay each and keep five for mechanics and three for design?" Axel pushed.

"I like the idea of enclosing the clubhouse and making it private and safe," Ace agreed.

"This gives our future generations room to grow," Fish acknowledged.

"It's still Rage, just new Rage," Apache murmured.

"Vote!" Drake snapped.

"All for changing the patch," Texas asked.

Everyone stared at Drake as he put his hand in the air. Axel smirked and followed suit.

Chapter One.

January 19th

Mac.

Mac leaned back in his armchair and chucked a can at Klutz. The prospect roared and spun around to launch a mug straight at Mac's head. Mac chuckled as he reached up and snatched it from the air.

"Need to work on your aim, Klutz," Mac drawled. Klutz began grumbling when Harley opened the door and peered in. The teen appeared pale, and Mac sat up. His movement caught Harley's eye, and Harley swallowed.

"Mac, a woman's here to see you," Harley said, and an African American lady pushed past him. Mac idly noted how pretty she was. In her hands, she carried an enormous duffel bag which moved. Not saying a word, she bent down, unzipped it, and pulled out a baby's car seat with a baby inside. Mac leapt to his feet.

"What the fuck?" Mac yelled, drawing attention from the Inner Sanctum where Drake, Ace, Apache, and Axel were. Gunner came out from the backroom with Fish on his heels.

"What's this?" Gunner demanded, staring at the stranger.

"I'm looking for Callum Mackintosh," she mentioned.

"That's me, bitch, and I wanna know why you're carrying a baby around in a duffel bag," Mac asked.

"We have to talk privately, now!" she snapped when Mac hesitated.

"That kid ain't mine. I wrap up, lady, and I never fucked you!" Mac argued after taking a moment.

"I said we need somewhere private," the woman growled.

"In here, both of you," Drake ordered. Mac watched as the woman strutted her shit over to Drake and entered the

sanctum. Slick appeared at Mac's shoulder and reached out, grasping it.

"Yeah," Mac answered the silent question.

Slick followed him into the inner sanctum, where the woman removed the fussing infant from the car seat. Without a word, she handed him straight to Mac, who instantly put the baby to his chest and patted him. She yanked out a bottle, and Mac took it with a glare and settled in a chair to feed the wailing baby.

"My name is Kendara, and I was best friends with Lucy Moore. Lucy once frequented here," Kendara said. Mac thought back.

"Yeah, Lucy was here for a few weeks and then moved on," Mac admitted. The babe guzzled the milk, and Mac raised an eyebrow as blue eyes stared at him. This wasn't his kid, Mac knew that, but the little guy was tugging on his heartstrings.

"Lucy didn't move on. She was taken one night against her will and sold. She ended up in Vermont, miles from here and was held captive for eight months." Kendara dropped the bomb and watched for their reactions.

"What do you mean Lucy was taken?" Mac growled. The baby let out a mew, and Mac forced himself to relax.

"She was kidnapped. Lucy couldn't tell me who and was kept hostage by a rich asshole in Vermont. She was seven months pregnant when she escaped through a dental appointment. The motherfucker thought the guards on her would make Lucy keep her mouth shut. Instead, she begged the dentist for help, and the woman hid Lucy. She had a nurse go open the emergency exit, setting alarms off, and the bodyguards chased after a ghost.

"The dentist kept Lucy until I picked her up a few days later. We sheltered Lucy in my apartment, and she was different from the girl you may have known. Lucy said she'd slept with two brothers here. She wasn't a whore but enjoyed spending time with Mac and Ezra. My accommodation wasn't in the best area, so Lucy remained inside all day. Our next-

door neighbour was also pregnant, and this is where the story gets messy. Before I explain, Lucy wrote you a letter, Mac. Please read it. She asks you to look after her child even though it's not yours."

Boom! Mac thought.

"Give it to me," Mac demanded.

Kendara shoved it towards Mac, who opened it and began reading.

'Dear Mac,

I hope you can forgive the bombshell I'm sure Kendara just laid on you. She's never been the most diplomatic person in the world, although she is my best friend. What Kendara is telling you is the truth. I was kidnapped coming home from Rage one night and hustled away in a black van, but it had green paint inside. I do not know the make or model, but it reminded me of the A-team vehicle.

For a week, I was held, and men came and raped and beat me until I learned to do what they demanded. I don't want to dwell on that nightmare, Mac. Finally, I was sold at an auction. There were other girls, Mac, some not even teenagers. It was in a warehouse, and I don't think we were in Rapid City anymore, but somewhere close by. We didn't travel far to reach the auction.

I was sold to a rich man who forced me onto a plane where his bodyguards raped me repeatedly until I did as I was told. It was easier that way, so I hope you don't think badly of me. Once he got me to his mansion in Vermont, I was locked in a bedroom. He would visit me a couple of times a week, but no one else ever touched me again. After three months, I realised I'd missed a period, and the baby was his. As soon as he guessed I was pregnant, he changed. He kept patting my stomach, telling me what a good girl I was, and that I would give him a son.

A doctor came. He was terrified of him but confirmed it was a boy, and the asshole went over the top. I had to eat at scheduled times and take care of myself and other shit. Deep

down, I understood I had to escape if my baby was to have a chance. So, at eight months pregnant, I feigned a toothache so bad I kept screaming and working myself up. Frightened for the baby, he let me visit a dentist who kindly helped.

Kendara will tell you the rest of the story, but I'm asking you to take Blue, my son, as your own child. I saw you around the Rage children and how good you are. Kendara can't have Blue in case he tracks down a link between her and me. You were good to me, Mac, and ready to be a father. I hope you can overlook Blue's creation and birth and take him to your heart. If you can't, I ask one thing, please could you make sure he is adopted by a great family? The further away from Rapid City, the better.

Thank you,

Lucy.'

Mac shoved the letter towards Drake and glanced at Blue. He took several deep breaths and rolled his neck and shoulders before facing Kendara again.

"Tell me what Lucy didn't," Mac demanded.

"My neighbour to me was an addict and pregnant. She had a similar due date. One night, we heard wails, screams, and lots of banging before everything went silent. Lucy was also in labour, and we'd planned a home birth. Lucy, bless her heart, insisted that I go next door and check.

"It was horrific. The apartment was a mess, with rubbish and shit everywhere. Nowhere had a clean spot. The smell of drugs and smoke hung heavily in the air, and I nearly choked. I made my way into the bedroom, and she was lying on a filthy mattress. There was a band around her arm and a needle in her. She had died. Between her legs lay two perfect babies, both also dead." Kendara broke off and rubbed her eyes.

"Jesus, Ace, fetch the woman a drink," Drake said.

Kendara accepted a tissue from Apache and wiped her tears away.

"I was about to call the police when Lucy let out a muted cry. I raced back to my apartment to find her pushing down

and Blue's head out. Between us, we managed to get him out of the birth canal, and I cut the umbilical cord, clipped it as you're meant to, and cleaned him up. Blue was so tiny, but he was screeching his little heart out. I put him on Lucy and tried to clean her up, but she wouldn't stop bleeding.

"I suggested that we'd have to call an ambulance, and she refused. Instead, she asked about next-door's baby. Telling Lucy that the babies were dead was so hard. Hell, we didn't even know she was expecting twins. Lucy stared at me, said she was dying, and that maybe an ambulance could save her, but she would give Blue a chance at life. She told me about you and then forced me to collect one of the babies. Oh, God!" Kendara broke off on a wail. She hunched over and buried her face in her hands. Apache rubbed her back as Mac lifted Blue to his shoulder to burp him. Drake's eyes met Mac's, and he nodded.

"Kendara, just nod if I'm right. Lucy made you take Blue and leave the dead baby with her. That way, if anyone found her, they'd think Lucy's son died with her. And by doing that, Lucy gave you a chance to smuggle Blue to someone safe while you tidied things up at home," Drake suggested.

"Yes," Kendara replied. "I took Blue to my mother and smuggled him out in that bag. My mom is a childminder, so I knew she'd have everything we'd need. Mom didn't hesitate to help us. Meanwhile, I went back to the apartment, called EMTs, and claimed I had just discovered Lucy. I didn't mention the neighbour, as bad as that sounds. Lucy was my priority; I needed her safely buried before the neighbour was found. Three days later, they let me bury her and that tiny baby and then I fled to my mom's and began making plans to bring Blue here."

"How old is he?" Mac demanded as Blue burped, and his eyes closed.

"He's six days old. I haven't registered his birth, but no offence, I'm sure we can get a fake certificate from somewhere," Kendara said. "Although I have papers from a Karen Gatling that name you as the father, and she signed her custody over to you."

“Kendara, what do you do?” Drake asked suspiciously.

“A lawyer and usually a good one! But this is Lucy’s child, and we need him safe. I told my firm that Karen was from out of town and on the run from an abusive boyfriend. That the baby’s father wasn’t the same guy, and she wanted him to have the babe. They agreed to let me find the dad. Which is Mac, should he choose it. It would pass all scrutiny. And Blue’s birth would be legal, too,” Kendara added.

“Give me what I need to sign. There’s no doubt I won’t take Blue after what you two women have done to protect him,” Mac stated.

“Really?” Kendara urged, tears forming again.

“Kendara, I ain’t going to let Lucy’s sacrifice go to waste. He’s my boy now. Lucy trusted me and has given me the greatest gift ever,” Mac insisted.

“Why not, Ezra?” Slick asked.

“Lucy said Ezra probably would, but he wasn’t ready. Mac was,” Kendara replied. She was shoving papers at Mac, which he signed as he read them. Ten minutes later, Kendara sat back with a sigh.

“There’s no link between me or you or Lucy. Blue will have a very happy life, Mac. I can’t thank you enough,” Kendara spoke with heartfelt emotion.

“Hey, Blue, say hi to your dad,” Mac suggested as Blue slept in his arms. A huge smile crossed his face.

“One day, Kendara, I’ll tell Blue about his mom, how special she was, and about his aunt Kendara. Blue will know the truth about the two amazing women who gave him life. And I can send updates, and you can send a present and if you ever want to visit, feel free. Or if you need help from Rage, you call, and we’ll come running. With no questions,” Mac added.

“I’d like some photos, but not straight away, and if I move, I’ll let you know. In fact, take my mom’s address. She’s better to mail than me. I can’t say thank you enough. Now I have to leave in case I was followed.”

“That’s why Blue was in the duffel bag. You just zipped it over him when you left the car,” Slick spoke. Kendara nodded.

“As long as Blue is safe, I don’t honestly care what happens to me. My best friend died making sure her son lived. Lucy could have saved herself; she didn’t. She sacrificed her life so Blue might live. I hope one day I’m as brave as Lucy,” Kendara said and left after giving Blue a heartfelt kiss.

Mac and Drake watched the others escort Kendara out. Drake approached Mac and stared over his shoulder. His face softened as he took in the expression on Mac’s.

“Blue’s already yours,” Drake murmured.

“Yup!” Mac replied, grinning.

“He’s even got a biker name,” Drake commented, touching a little finger. Blue pursed his lips and relaxed again.

“Yeah, somehow I think Lucy did that on purpose,” Mac admitted.

“We’ll honour her, Mac,” Drake responded.

“Girl deserves it. I only knew Lucy for a few weeks, which wasn’t serious. Just a pretty woman to fuck. I underestimated her. Brave fucking woman,” Mac said.

“Saw the middle name you put down for Blue, Lucas. Nice way to honour Lucy,” Drake replied and gazed out into the full rec room. “Gossips got around, brother.”

Mac looked up and laughed. The old ladies were plastered to the window, peering at him. His brothers stood behind them, shaking their heads as they tried to see.

“Make them give me some space, shit,” Mac suggested, rising to his feet. He silently placed a bet on whether Silvie or Marsha would be the first to claim his boy. Drake opened the door and backed everyone away.

“Meet Blue! Mac’s Legacy!” Drake roared. Mac swallowed hard at hearing those words and bent his head to whisper to Blue.

“Son, let’s meet your family.”

Silvie was the first to grab Blue, as she'd just given birth and was sore and grumpy. No one was going to fight Silvie, even though she played dirty to get hold of Blue. From Silvie, Blue was passed around.

"Right, everyone's had a cuddle. Mac has no shit at his house for a kid," Drake shouted. Old ladies suddenly backed away as the brothers turned to Drake with dark grins.

"Shit!" Lindsey swore as they stampeded to the doors.

"What's that mean?" Ali asked, wide-eyed.

"Wait for it!" Lindsey warned.

"I'm buying the drum kit this time!" Rock glowered as Gunner shoved him.

"Fuck off, it's my turn," Gunner snarled back.

"Out of my way, assholes. I need to beat Axel before he buys the baby bouncer again," Drake shouted as he barrelled past them.

"No fucking bikes!" Ezra yelled, pointing at Lowrider, who smirked.

"They like trikes!"

"Told ya." Lindsey sighed as silence fell suddenly.

"They've done this before?" Ali asked, trying not to laugh.

"Several times. And even worse, they'll take their motorbikes, shop their hearts out and then realise they can't get anything on a bike and send the prospects back for their trucks. Blue will have crap he won't require for five years. Now, us women need to get our heads together for the practical shit," Phoe expressed with a sigh.

"Might be better if we pair up. I can shove lazy bones in her wheelchair," Artemis mentioned, earning a stern look from Silvie. Behind the teasing was a note of concern in Artemis's voice. Silvie had been confined to a wheelchair since her birth two weeks ago. She appeared to have developed a complication called Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction. It was

excruciating, and Silvie couldn't walk without gasping for breath. Despite the pain, Silvie was battling on.

"I'm gonna shove that wheelchair up your ass, bitch!" Silvie shot back.

"Yeah, when you can waddle again," Artemis retorted.

Mac sat and grinned as the women argued and finally left half an hour after his brothers. Blue slept through the entire argument.

Drake - A week later

Drake sat in his chair at the head of the table in church. Brothers had seats while prospects stood crowded into the room. He sighed and swapped glances with Axel, who smirked. A few weeks ago, Axel had proposed re-creating Rage. Drake had been entirely against it, but he was starting to see the value of Axel's proposal. The brothers had been informed of the changes but were unaware plans were moving forward.

Drake threw the drawing of the new Rage patch on the table. The guys had seen it, but the prospects hadn't. As one, they leaned over, and one turned pale. Drake's eyes narrowed straight at him. Wild avoided Drake's stare, and Drake knew he'd discovered the culprit.

"What's that?" Calamity asked, leaning over to peer at the paper.

"Rage's new patch. Some fucker was clearly doodling and left it out. And Axel found it. Before this meeting moves forward, I want the owner to admit it," Drake replied, wondering if Wild would own up. As everyone gazed at one another, Wild's shoulders straightened.

"It's mine. It's something I do. I doodle. I meant no disrespect to the club," Wild spoke in a firm voice.

"Good job you did because you opened our eyes," Drake said.

Quizzical looks came back at him from the prospects.

“How many of you are greeted with fear when people recognise the patch on you?” Ace asked, drumming his fingers on the table.

“About a quarter, they’re fine until they see the Rage patch, and then I get worry, aversion, and so on,” Calamity answered.

“Yeah, I’ve been met with derision, disgust, horror, and the same as Calamity,” Klutz added.

Drake nodded. “Rage, despite being clean for so long, still has a history in people’s memories when they spot our patch. Something I’d not really paid attention to. We were all used to it, but brothers like Jett, Blaze, Hunter, and Slate - it was new to them, the negative feelings. And now the prospects and candidates are going through the same shit,” Drake explained as brothers nodded.

“I like what you did here. You keep the elements the same but bolstered it up, bringing it into the twenty-first century. It keeps our history but gives us a new future Wild. I got three legacies here: Tye, Carmine, and Harley. Cody wishes to join us soon, and I don’t want outsiders watching them with fear in their eyes because they wear the Rage patch. Hate the thought of strangers judging you prospects with hate and dislike because of the past.

“We’ve voted, and we’re endorsing the new patch to take over our old one. A fresh start for the fresh blood coming in. Those who fought to get Rage clean will have their original cuts framed, and they’ll be honoured. But from today, we’ll all be wearing this patch.” Drake nodded at Texas, who dragged some boxes down and began handing out leather cuts identical to what they already wore apart from the new patch.

“The old ladies will have to change theirs,” Gunner noted.

“Phoe and Marsha have got theirs ready to hand out once we leave here wearing ours,” Ace replied.

“And they’re doing the same. Framing the cuts as the women who helped form the old ladies into the force they are today,” Drake said with a nod of honour towards the women.

“Where are we hanging them?”

“Good question. Maybe some of ya have seen construction equipment moving into that warehouse behind us? Yeah, we purchased it. Axel bought the warehouse and offices which made up the real estate. We now own the whole block. The two warehouses are coming down alongside that office building, and we’re going to be building a huge ass clubhouse. Brand spanking new. Apache and Rock have drawn up plans, and it’s larger than what Axel originally wanted,” Drake said.

“Woah, Pres, how much bigger?” Manny asked, leaning forward.

“A fuck load. See how the entire block of land we now own is square? One-quarter is reserved for the garage and parts store. The entire backend of the square, worth two quarters, will be the clubhouse. Axel has plans for the final quarter, which is where we sit now. Church will move to the basement alongside some storage rooms and a full-on security area. No more watching cameras in the inner sanctum. A part of the basement will be separated for the old ladies’ meeting room. They’ve earned it and organise the cookouts and other shit. We’re also installing a panic room down there.

“The ground floor is gonna be split. First will be a load of offices. I’m sick of us working in the rec room or inner sanctum. There’ll be one for each role and one for Marsha. She’s earned it with what she had to do at Christmas, and going forward, she’ll be organising the other shit. A medical office will also be built. Doc Gibbons is retiring and planning to fish and do nothing else. Doc’s going to be on call for us and wants some friendly company, and he gets on well with Axel. We can expect to see a lot of him.

“The north side will house offices with bulletproof glass. A huge kitchen is being built at the east end of the building with an adjoining laundry room. The bar will be to the left of them. On the southeast corner will be the playroom with two huge ass tables to sit everyone for meals. The west will have the entrance and walls for the kids’ trophies and a couple of bathrooms. The rec room takes up the space.” Drake looked around at the approving nods.

“The next two levels are going to be full-on bedrooms with adjoining bathrooms. They’ll be bigger than what we’ve had before, but roughly one hundred and fifty in total. This covers our need for extra rooms as we grow and allows us guest rooms for visiting MCs. We’ll be putting in two discreet elevators, so when shit happens, the stairs won’t be a problem,” Apache said.

“Once this is done, each brother is responsible for cleaning his bunk. If you wanna dump washing in the laundry room, so be it. Make sure it’s in a labelled bag, or don’t whine when shit’s lost. Marsha is looking into hiring a cleaning crew to take care of laundry and cleaning. Anything salvageable from here shifts to the new clubhouse. The front doors are going to be repaired, painted, and rehung. The bar is coming but will be carefully extended. Apache is gonna put a list up. If anything is missing, and you think we need, fuckin’ add it.”

“What’s going to happen to this square quarter, Pres?” Savage asked.

Drake looked uncomfortable and rolled his shoulders.

“We’re tearing it down and building a playground on this. A stone will be laid with the founders’ names on it. It’s what Axel wants. Claims it’s the best way to honour them, and they’d be tickled pink by it,” Drake said as Axel’s head bounced.

Harley’s eyes shot to him, and Axel grinned.

“We built this club for families; not what Bulldog made it. It’s time to own that basic principle and make the MC what we originally needed. Arrow, Fury, Norfolk, Spike and I wanted a club about children, women and good times. Rage has that now, and I want it honoured. A kid’s playground would be perfect because we saw that as our legacy to the future generations,” Axel boomed, and nods were returned at his words.

“And a swimming pool is also going to be installed alongside a proper grilling area, and the speakers will move to a new spot. And after what’s happened with Davy and Willow, we’re putting an eight-foot wall around the compound.

There'll be one entrance, manned by a prospect twenty-four/seven. Our bikes will be parked behind the compound and off the forecourt. The walls shall have towers for defence purposes if required. Ain't expecting trouble, but ya never know, and we're going to be safe," Ace added.

"So, we're starting a compound?" Klutz asked, scratching his head.

"We're making this safe for everyone," Apache replied firmly.

"I don't disagree with the walls, but I do with the towers. Too much like prison," Klutz said, and Drake noted his paleness. It was known amongst Rage that Klutz had been unjustly arrested and sent to jail for a crime he didn't commit. By the time the truth emerged, and his record expunged, the damage had been done.

"It gonna make it so you avoid the clubhouse?" Drake asked.

Klutz took his time to answer before nodding.

"Yeah, eight-foot-high walls, towers, concrete buildings, too much like a prison. We're used to plain buildings here, and as Rage is currently set out, I ain't bothered. But adding those features, I can't deal with those feelings again. But I get where you're coming from, and I'm a prospect, not a brother. Rage gotta do what's right for you, and that goes for me too," Klutz said. Drake sensed what Klutz wasn't saying. He'd leave Rage even though Klutz now thought of them as family. Drake narrowed his eyes. How can the compound be secure for everybody but not a jail?

"What about painting?" Harley suggested. Heads twisted towards him as Drake's son blushed a little.

"What do ya mean?" Drake asked.

"Paint a kick-ass Harley on the east end of the building. Paint us riding our bikes on the north side, and on the south, paint something different. And for the entrance, draw our patch. Then, on the walls inside, let the artists amongst us

come up with murals and decorate them. Klutz, would that help?" Harley inquired.

"Yeah, wouldn't make it seem so much like prison," Klutz agreed after some heart-searching.

"And the towers?" Drake asked. Klutz shook his head. Okay, so he couldn't deal with them.

"Cherry pickers," Tye said. "We could buy some and leave them by the walls, and if we need them, we can then use them. Keeps the towers out of the way, but also gives us portable ones."

Drake and Ace exchanged glances. Not a bad idea.

"That is doable. Klutz, how you feel about that?" Drake asked. He didn't want to lose his prospect. Klutz was Rage, even though he'd not earned brother yet.

"That's cool with me, Drake. I just can't be behind plain concrete walls or surrounded by concrete and guard towers again. That ain't worth my mental health," Klutz admitted.

Drake felt respect for the man's honesty.

"We have you covered, Klutz. But you gotta think of something for the third wall," Drake decided.

"That's fuckin' easy. Paint a mural of our different motorbikes or a portrait of the five founders. Take your pick," Klutz spoke, and brothers nodded.

"Makes sense. Now we got the building plans out of the way, we have other items to discuss," Ace said.

"Yes, club girls will stay to their hours. No change there. Ain't having Eddie witness a skank and brother going at it. Can you imagine what she'd say?" Drake inquired as brothers winced. Yeah, they were frightened of his daughter.

"We discussed the prospects and candidates cleaning, and you're all responsible for your own rooms and shit. The old ladies are going to take turns cooking or ordering takeout, but as we expand, it may be worth hiring a cook. Although if it's Artemis's night, she's ordering takeout," Ace added, grinning. It was a well-known fact that Artemis couldn't cook to save

her life. “Other than that, their roles don’t change. A rota will go up a fortnight in advance, and you can write your name if you want food. They’re only cooking dinner, so breakfast and lunch is on you guys. Ain’t having the women cook for thirty and ten turn up,” Drake announced, looking around.

“Nothing else changes. Candidates and prospects keep the same roles, with extra duties, as do brothers. The charter does not change at all. It remains the same, as do the club’s values. Rage has legacies coming into the club, so no recruitment for three years. I want to see Rage grow before we take on candidates again,” Drake said.

“Did you mention extending the garage?” Jett asked.

Of course, that was his concern, Drake noted ruefully.

“Yes, there’ll be three specialised bays. One each for Jett, and Calamity, Texas, and I are gonna share. Lowrider will also get a bay for his builds. That leaves one garage bay, so we’re extending it to an extra four. That gives us nine bays, and with the work we’ve got coming in, we ain’t sure that’s enough. The parts store is going to be moved to alongside the garage office instead of separate. In its place will go a blacksmith’s forge for Harley.” Harley’s head shot up at his father’s words.

“For real?” Harley asked.

“Yeah, but telling you, son, Rage doesn’t get ignored because you’ve got your nose in a project,” Drake warned, and Harley glowed.

“You choose what you pay into the pot,” Axel boomed, and Harley grinned.

“Same as Gunner and Mac,” Harley replied instantly.

“Good lad,” Texas approved.

“The office will stay where it is.” Ace added, “But it’s gonna be expanded and updated. Autumn can barely move in there as it is.”

“And we’re gonna make a small gallery of our builds. Drake and I have searched through paperwork and found many drawings and finished photos. We’re going to put them up to

help customers and also to brag about our skills. So we're placing a building between the office and part store," Fish said.

"We're doing this for you," Drake announced, pointing to the prospects and then at Hunter, Slate, Blaze, and Jett. "You've been tarred with our past through no fault of your own. And none of ya complained once about being treated like shit. This is your chance, brothers, to make Rage the vision we laid the foundation for. My gen is offering your generation the chance to move forward and make everything great. We're giving you the tools to succeed. The choice is up to you if we win or lose. You're Rage's future, and while we are very much in charge, it's you who will be twenty years down the line. Make us proud."

Chapter Two.

February

Mac

Mac ducked as a baseball bat skimmed past his head and slammed into a wall. He blinked into angry brown eyes as the bat swung back and caught him on the shoulder. Mac reached up with his arm and yanked it and the rather sexy female body towards him. He grinned as he wrestled it from the woman and then groaned as she moved quicker than lightning and kneed him straight in the balls. Mac went down as a groaning wheeze left his lips. Shit, he swore his eyeballs crossed too.

“You go back and tell your piece of crap boss that Mr Wright isn’t paying protection,” the lady leaned over and hissed. She kicked Mac in the leg and took two steps backwards as he got to his feet, wincing and gasping in pain. Mac eyed her more warily as she grabbed a crowbar from behind the shop counter and waved it in his direction.

“Babe, you’re fuckin’ insane,” Mac wheezed and put a hand on the wall to help him stand up.

“Fuck you, shithead,” she spat like a hissy kitten and blew her honey-coloured hair out of her eyes. Christ, she was magnificent, Mac realised, even though his balls told him to run and run fast.

“Casey, shall I call the police?” the old man inquired from behind the counter. Casey, pretty name for a stunning lady, Mac thought, and then winced as a wave of pain hit hard. Fuck, he was going to be sick. Mac needed to explain now.

“Casey, look, I came in to...”

Casey hissed and cut him off.

“Asshole, I know what you came for. One hundred and fifty bucks a week protection money. Well, tell your boss Mr Wright has insurance, and he doesn’t need to be paying a scumbag biker motherfucker.”

“I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about,” Mac said, glancing at the elderly man who appeared frightened and also amused.

“Liar!” Casey hissed and pitched the crowbar.

“I’m not a fuckin’ liar,” Mac roared, took his balls life in his hand, and strode towards her. Casey swung the bar, and Mac grabbed it and missed her left hand, swinging a hammer. Holy fuckin’ shit. The hammerhead hit his wrist with force, and Mac yelled in pain and had enough. Mac wrestled the weapons from her and shoved against her body. Casey turned wildcat and fought hard, scratching, biting, kicking, and punching.

The elderly man guy walked out from the counter. As Mac pushed the woman against the wall with what he thought was a broken wrist, Mr Wright swung the dropped baseball bat at his head. Mac twisted his torso, caught it, and yanked it free a second time.

“Enough!” Mac roared, startling Casey and Mr Wright. “I don’t have a fuckin’ clue about protection money! Rage don’t do that shit. I came here to buy a motherfuckin’ gift for my boy,” Mac snarled.

Mr Wright blinked and stepped away.

“Casey?” Mr Wright asked in a tremulous voice.

“It’s okay, Mr Wright. He has to let go of me sometime, and when he does, I’m gonna have him.” Casey ignored that Mac had her pinned against the wall, using his body to pin hers. Mac reached into his back pocket with his good wrist and pulled his cell out. He tossed it to Mr Wright.

“First name in that is Drake, the president of the MC. Phone him and tell Drake I told him to get his ass down here. I don’t know shit about a protection racket. Drake won’t know crap, either. Then call nine, one, one and ask for a detective fuckin’ to get here. Preferably Tonio Ramirez.

“Inform them someone is hitting you up for protection money and using Rage’s name to do it. Do it now! Before I lose my chance to ever have fuckin’ kids. Enough!” Mac warned as Casey suddenly twisted her body, and he felt a hand

grip his balls. A slight wail left Mac's mouth. Fuck, they'll be black and blue in an hour.

Casey's little hand grabbed and clenched and stopped moving as she looked at him, her lips open. Casey frowned and then loosened her grasp slightly on his sacs, and Mac gave a sigh of heartfelt relief.

"Whoever is hitting you for protection payments isn't us. Rage isn't in that business. Not for a long fuckin' time. If someone is using Rage's name to get cash, they just declared war," Mac told Casey, hoping she would release his balls. No luck.

Drake entered ten minutes later, with Ace and Apache storming behind him. Ezra and Manny followed, looking pissed. Drake glanced at Mac, pinning the woman against the wall, and his eyebrows rose.

"Wanna let her go, brother?" Drake inquired.

"When Casey releases my balls, sure," Mac replied.

Drake's eyebrows climbed even further.

"Lady, wanna release my brother's balls?" Drake asked.

Mac heard the amusement in Drake's voice. Casey looked at them one at a time and then gave Mac a warning squeeze, which made him groan, and Casey let him go. As Casey did, she shifted smoothly, and Mac found the crowbar back in her hand and aimed at his throat. With a low moan, Mac stepped away from her. Drake's eyes narrowed as Casey moved around and placed herself in front of Mr Wright.

"What's happening?" Rock demanded as he entered, Gunner by his side.

"No idea. Ramirez on the way?" Drake asked.

"Silvie was on the phone with Ramirez telling him to get his ass down here," Apache spoke, watching Casey. He turned his gaze to Mac and then back to her.

"Mac, brother, you okay?" Apache asked, seeing Mac wince and bend at the waist.

“Casey hit me with the bat first. Then took my balls out with a knee, then smashed a hammer into my wrist and then got a fuckin’ death grip on my nuts. No, I’m not fuckin’ okay.” Mac whined. Gunner snorted, and Mac glared. “You wanna try taking her down?”

“Autumn kinda likes my gonads where they are. That looks broken,” Gunner replied, eyeing the rapidly bruising and swelling wrist.

“Need ice now, woman,” Rock grunted.

Casey took a sidestep and aimed the crowbar at Rock, who sensibly stayed where he was. Mac’s skin picked up a grey tinge.

“Shit,” Drake snapped, walked to Mac, and sat him gently down on the floor. “Get Lindsey here in a truck.”

“Lindsey?” Ace asked.

“Think Mac wants his brothers seeing him like this? Texas, Axel, or Lowrider wouldn’t let Mac live this down.”

“Hell, I ain’t gonna let him! Mac got taken out by a five-foot-nothing woman.” Rock grinned.

“Fuck you,” Mac panted, his eyes on Casey. She’d earned a lot of respect, and he planned to keep his distance. Casey could beat Rock or Gunner if she wanted to. Those assholes were laughing at him.

“What is going on?” Casey finally snapped. Looks turned severe, and Drake faced her.

“That is what I want to know. You’re claiming that Rage is scamming protection money from this old man. Telling you now, Rage ain’t,” Drake said firmly.

“And I tell you, you are hitting Mr Wright for protection payments. And the majority of the shops on this street have been in the same position as him for months.”

Shock drifted over Drake’s face. Mac watched intently, but his balls were making him feel sick.

“Lady, someone is, but not my club,” Drake insisted.

Casey sneered. Yeah, Mac thought, she wasn't buying shit.

"No?" Casey threw a couple of pictures at Drake, and they fluttered to the floor. Drake's gaze closed on one showing a Rage patch. He bent down and picked them up. Drake shuffled through them and stopped on one, revealing two men in Rage cuts. He didn't recognise them.

"These ain't Rage," Drake said and got another sneer in return.

Mac tilted his head. Casey wasn't ready to believe them, no matter what.

"No? Well, they seemed to be when they came to my shop and demanded one hundred and fifty bucks a week. And a blowjob for each guy when they collect." Casey stepped backwards at the vibe that flooded the store and raised the crowbar again.

"None of my brothers would ever, ever do shit like that. This is not Rage. These two men are not Rage. And they're wearing our old patch. Rage changed it lately. This is the new one," Drake growled, turning his back and showing his cut.

Drake passed the pictures to Rock, who looked and shook his head. Gunner looked and denied knowing them. Apache crouched down by Mac, who was getting paler. Mac studied them, trying to find something to recognise. There was nothing. These two assholes were complete strangers to Mac.

"Someone ain't noticed the new patch and fucked up," Rock growled.

"Mac, you ever seen them?" Drake asked.

"Not around Rapid City."

"I wanna know who the fuck they are. Rock, go back, get shit started."

"Before you start crap, what's happening?" Ramirez said, walking forward through the door. His gaze fell on Mac, the brothers, Casey holding the crowbar, and the frightened old man behind her. Mac instantly felt protective despite the fact she'd beaten his balls black and blue.

“They have been hitting us for protection money and blowjobs,” Casey spat.

Ramirez’s eyebrows shot into his hairline.

“What the fuck, Drake?” Ramirez asked in surprise.

Drake handed him the pictures.

“You know every brother and prospect in Rage, are those ours?”

Ramirez peered carefully and then shook his head in denial.

“These aren’t Rage,” Ramirez said, handing them back. “Ma’am, I’m Detective Antonio Ramirez, RCPD. Can you please tell me what’s going on?”

Casey

I looked at the cop and chewed my lip. Suddenly, I had a really unpleasant sensation that I’d beaten up an innocent man. Biting my cheek, I considered the guy on the floor and chewed my lip harder. Shit, I had that sudden sinking feeling.

“Three months ago, four men started walking into shops down this street and asking for protection money. If people didn’t pay, they returned the following week and began beating owners and staff or destroying stock. Six weeks ago they struck my shop. I was one of the last hit. I refused, and they turned on me, so I pulled a gun on them, and they left. They returned a fortnight later with six men, and shit got rough.”

My voice broke slightly, and his eyes narrowed on me. “I declined to pay. Things got worse; they destroyed stock one night and showed up the following day. I took two out. They didn’t return until a week ago when they punished Mr Wright and told me for every week I didn’t pay, one of my fellow shop owners would get hurt.”

“You paid?” Ramirez asked.

“Of course I did, just that one week. Today is collection day. I’ve closed my store and have been watching for them. Then I saw him walk in here, and I came in straight after him. Mr Wright pulled away in fear, so I defended my friend.” I shut

up, bit my lip, and looked at the sitting guy. In truth, I attacked before Mac could. Mac's gaze met mine, and he winced in pain again.

"Mac?" Ramirez asked.

"Autumn raves about the custom toy shop, so I came to buy a couple of trucks for Blue. This dude here," Mac pointed to Mr Wright, "seemed terrified of me, and I was strolling towards him, trying to reassure him, when suddenly Casey was here."

"Casey, attack you?" Ramirez asked, looking at my face, which I'm sure was paling.

"To be honest, Casey could have misconstrued my intentions."

Woah, there was no fucking way. All Mac had been doing was innocently walking towards Mr Wright. Mac hadn't been threatening him. Oh shit, I had jumped the gun. Guilt was written across my face; I knew it was. Ramirez stared and took in my guilty expression.

"Mac, did Casey attack you?" Ramirez asked again, and Mac shook his head.

"Casey got between the old man and me, and I kept moving towards them, which easily could be misconstrued as a threat. I raised an arm." Now that just didn't happen! "Casey could have thought I was raising it to hit her and defended herself." I glanced at Mac and then at Ramirez.

"Okay, I need a detailed explanation, and I require uniforms to take statements."

The entrance bell jangled, and a woman entered and gasped when she spied Mac on the floor.

"Oh my god, Mac!" she exclaimed, rushed over to him, and fell to her knees. "Oh honey, what happened?" Her hands fluttered over Mac's body as she wasn't sure where to place them.

"Lindsey, sweetheart, get Mac to the hospital," Apache replied.

The guilt got more profound, and my face went from pale to red.

“Who did this? I’ll take their fucking head off,” Lindsey snarled as Rock and Apache lifted Mac to his feet. She looked at me.

“I thought Mac was here for protection money,” I said lamely.

“Are you insane?” Lindsey screeched.

Apache’s arm slid around her waist. “Honey, my brother has a broken wrist, and Mac’s swallowing his balls. Get him to the hospital,” Apache ordered.

The woman pointed at me. “Bitch, we ain’t done,” Lindsey snapped and followed the guys out.

“Shit,” I murmured.

“Don’t worry, if you can do that to Mac, Lindsey don’t have a chance in hell,” Drake muttered, his glare turning to me.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Tell that to Mac’s balls,” Gunner commented. Cars pulled up outside, and uniformed police came in. They began taking orders from Ramirez and then left Mr Wright’s shop. Mr Wright moved closer.

“Casey.” I turned to Mr Wright, misery on my face. “Your father would be proud. It was a genuine mistake, but you took care of our own. Jacob would be so proud, girl,” Mr Wright touched my hair and kissed my cheek.

“Casey’s father?” Ramirez demanded, studying me.

“Lieutenant-Colonel Reeves.” I watched as Ramirez’s head snapped up.

“As in the guy who was Delta Force,” he asked, his voice soft.

“Yup, that’s my dad,” I replied and chewed my lip again.

“No fuckin’ wonder you could take out Mac. He’s fucking lucky to be walking, let alone breathing. Your father is a

legend!” Ramirez said with awe, shaking his head.

“Ramirez?” Drake inquired.

“Delta Force. Casey’s father was in Delta Force. I heard Lieutenant Reeves trained his kid. Christ!” Ramirez answered.

“You were educated by a Delta Force Lieutenant? Crap!” Drake hissed.

I shrugged. Dad taught me to take care of myself!

“I heard of Reeves. Keeps to himself now he’s retired. Kept the streets clean around here,” Manny said, staring with awe also in his eyes.

“Yeah, good man,” Ramirez commented.

“Dad still is,” I whispered.

“He trained you?” Ezra asked curiously.

I grinned.

“Dad wanted a boy but got a girl. He didn’t differentiate between boys and girls. I started my training when I could walk. Mom would put me in pretty dresses, and I would learn how to crawl through mud in them. They drove each other mad,” I replied, smiling slightly.

“You were Delta Force?” Manny asked incredulously.

“No.” I laughed this time. “Just trained by one.”

Ramirez spoke to a uniform who’d returned and looked at me.

“Your neighbours refuse to speak unless they have seen you first,” Ramirez said, and I nodded. Dad had protected this street for years, and now it was my duty.

“Up to you,” I replied.

“Mr Wright, will you talk to an officer while Miss Reeves sees your fellow shopkeepers?” Ramirez asked, and Mr Wright agreed.

I hurried through the other shops and then ran to Mr Wright’s toy store, where I gave my statement. There were only three bikers there when I returned, Drake, Ace, and

Apache. I hesitated when it got to the part to talk about where the fake Rage came back. I glanced at them, and Ramirez followed my gaze.

“Do you want them to leave?” Ramirez asked gently.

There was support for me on their faces. Although I had severely hurt one of their own, Rage was here to help.

“No, they are okay. Just don’t tell my dad,” I whispered. Badass vibes hit me. I hurried through what I had to explain to them. How six had entered my shop and caught me from behind? They’d pinned me down and then stripped me naked.

They had touched me everywhere and been about to rape me when I sank my teeth into one and broke free. The guy who was trying to push his dick into me was set back with a headbutt, and I explained how I fought. Approval shone in Ace’s eyes as he came closer and offered me wordless support. A tear leaked from my eye as I gave Ramirez the rest of my statement. Ramirez patted my hand, spoke briefly to Mr Wright, and left to see how his officers were managing.

“Going to the hospital to check how Mac’s condition is,” Drake announced.

“Can I come? I need to apologise.”

“No need to apologise. Mac will understand.”

“No, Mac didn’t tell the truth. I did attack him. Drake, it was me, and I did Mac wrong. And I own my wrongs. Mac is owed an apology, at the very least.” Plus, I realised I had broken Mac’s wrist. There was no doubt in my mind I had. I also guessed Mac wouldn’t be walking right for a few days.

“Okay, meet us there,” Drake replied finally. “Lindsey will be in a mood; she and Mac are close; just don’t deck her.”

I gave Drake a wry smile.



When I entered the waiting room, I was surprised to see more of Rage present, along with some women, one of whom

was in a wheelchair. A redhead was arguing loudly with Ace, and I heard their conversation as I approached Drake.

“Tell me who the bitch is, and I’ll put her in hospital,” she growled.

“Artemis, it was a misunderstanding. The woman believed she was defending an elderly man against Mac. Casey wasn’t to know.” Ace sighed.

“I’ll break her fuckin’ wrist and whack her in the boobs. See how she likes it!” Artemis snarled.

“You!” another female spat, and I turned and saw Lindsey heading straight towards me. Lindsey’s hand rose to slap me, and before it landed, I knocked her palm away and sent her spinning.

“What the fuck?” Lindsey said as she twisted and her eyes narrowed. She exchanged a glance with the redhead and attacked again.

“Not here for a fight! I’m here to apologise,” I announced quickly. I could hurt both women and was trying to stop them before they ended up here, too.

“Ace, grab Killer before Delta Force puts her down,” Drake suggested.

Ace made a grab for Artemis, who ducked him and came at me. I saw Artemis’s hands flash and felt a torso blow, but I was already turning, and she flew over my hip. I dropped to my knees, and Artemis rolled, but I’d expected that. The way she held her body informed me of everything I needed to know. Springing back on my heels and then leaping forward, I landed where Artemis’s roll ended and yanked her hands up her back.

“Look, I don’t want to hurt you, but I will. Calm down, and let’s be adults,” I suggested.

A brother had grabbed Lindsey and was holding her tightly. Artemis’s body tensed, and then Ace snapped out a sentence that sent me scurrying away in fear.

“Artemis, the baby!”

“She’s pregnant, and you let her come at me?” I shrieked. What was wrong with these people? Artemis leapt to her feet gracefully and sneered at me.

“In one move, I’d have had you under me,” Artemis said, and I shook my head.

“You planned to feint right and move left using your legs to lift. I was always ready for you, and it would have ended in a headlock,” I replied, climbing to my feet.

“Holy fuck, she’s another Artemis,” a man gasped in horror. Artemis eyed me.

“How did you know that?” she demanded.

“Because before you tensed, I felt the tilt of your body lean to the left so you’d get momentum when turning left and then thrusting right. That was a giveaway. Next time control the small roll,” I replied.

Artemis studied me before nodding. “Respect. I’ve never noticed that.”

“I’m trained too.”

“Who by?” Artemis demanded.

“My father,” I replied.

“That tells me shit,” Artemis retorted.

“Casey’s father was Delta Force, Killer. You’ve met your match!” Ezra chortled.

Artemis sent him a stern stare, and Ezra blanched before moving backwards behind Ace. Ace wrapped an arm around Artemis and pulled her close. Artemis let him but kept her eyes thoughtfully on me.

“You served?” Artemis asked, and I shook my head.

“Nope, but Dad trained me from the moment I could walk.”

Artemis continued watching me for a few more moments. She finally slapped a hand out.

“Respect. For your dad and you,” she muttered.

I took it and turned to Lindsey, who stood beside a blonde in a wheelchair who looked highly amused.

“Are we done?” I demanded, and Lindsey glowered.

“Until Mac’s fine, no. He is one of the best men I know, and you hurt him on purpose,” Lindsey hissed.

“I had good reason. Look, let me explain what’s been happening to our shops. Then, if you decide you want to carry on, I’ll meet you in the ring with one hand tied behind my back,” I offered.

“Think you can beat me one-handed?” Lindsey sneered.

“Honey, I don’t think, I know. And one-handed means I don’t hurt you too much. Now I came to apologise to Mac, but as we seem to be waiting, sit your ass down and listen to story time,” I demanded.

Lindsey snorted, but we sat down together. She did actually listen as I explained, and when I talked about the assault in my shop, Lindsey blanched and put her hand on my arm in comfort.

“Well, I can understand why you attacked Mac. But those patches were changed a month ago. Someone hasn’t paid close attention because we’ve been sporting the new ones for four weeks. Did you see a name? Genuine cuts have the brother’s names on them,” Lindsey asked.

“No, I don’t recall any names,” I said after thinking about it.

“Hey, Drake, the cuts had no names,” Lindsey called, and Drake nodded. While Lindsey looked calmer, I did sense a hidden worry about Mac.

“Lindsey, I came to apologise. I should have heard Mac out, but those thugs beat Mr Wright the other week, and I would not let it happen again.”

“It’s okay as long as Mac’s good,” Lindsey mused, and her gaze lit on a woman carrying a baby.

“Hey, Blue wouldn’t settle down. He’s missing Mac. Can you take him, honey?” she asked, handing the baby to Lindsey.

“Now tell Auntie Lindsey what’s wrong?” Lindsey cooed at the infant. The baby stopped fussing and stared at Lindsey with big eyes.

“Seriously!” the stranger exclaimed and trotted across to the brother I recognised as Rock.

“This is Mac’s son, Blue,” Lindsey said, introducing us as Blue gazed at me. Did those little eyes recognise me as the one who beat his father? Guilt flooded me again.

“Is that his wife?” I asked, nodding at the woman hugging Rock. “Should I say sorry to her?”

“No, that’s Carly, Rock’s old lady. I’ve no idea how she ended up with Blue today, but the club won’t put babies down. They’re meant to be in childcare, but someone always steals them for a few hours. Mac isn’t married,” Lindsey added, sending me a sly look.

“Oh. Blue’s mother?” I asked, confused.

“Died. It’s a long story, but Mac is single and ready to mingle,” Lindsey said with a wide grin. Oh boy. Lindsey was matchmaking.

“After what I did to Mac, I very much doubt he’d want to be around me,” I retorted.

“But that’s the problem with the Rage brothers. They’re all perverse like that. Believe me, Mac will find you eventually,” Lindsey claimed happily.

“Well, it’s not as if I’m hiding. I’m here to apologise,” I retorted.

“Yup, we’ll see,” Lindsey replied and snuggled Blue. He was a cute baby, but I saw little Mac in him. Blue must look like his mom.

“We can go in now. Casey, it may be best if you go first,” Drake said, coming over to us.

“Me?” I squeaked.

“Yes, you, Doc Paul here, will take you to Mac,” Drake responded with a glimmer of humour.

Okay then. I thought his brothers and family might want to see Mac first, but they all watched me, amused. I wondered what the hell that was about as I rose to my feet and followed Dr Paul to Mac. The doctor pushed open a door which led to a private room, and I entered looking worried when I saw Mac in a bed.

“Oh lord, what did I do? So sorry, Mac,” I said and approached speedily. The bruising around his eyes shocked me. “I didn’t do that!” I exclaimed in horror.

“Nope, Lindsey did, getting me out of the car. She tripped me accidentally, and I smashed my face on the pavement. So now the summary of my injuries are two black and blue balls which need constant icing, a broken wrist, two black eyes, a loose tooth, and a concussion. Can’t tell me I didn’t do well today!” Mac teased. He waved his wrist, which was in a cast, and frowned.

“Is Blue outside?”

“Yes, Lindsey has him,” I replied. “She won’t drop him, will she?” My voice rose with concern.

“Nah, usually Lindsey’s pretty steady. Anyway, what are you doing here?” Mac jumped straight to the point.

“I came to apologise. You didn’t have to lie for me, and you did. Plus, I did attack you in error, obviously, but I acted before thinking,” I said.

“Well?” Mac asked after a few moments.

“Huh?”

“My apology?” Mac prompted, and I giggled nervously.

“Sorry, twice over! I am sorry for hitting you and not waiting for a few. And I’m sorry you had to prompt me for my apology.”

“It’s okay, Casey, shit happens. Honestly, I’m glad you’re the type who reacts and doesn’t take prisoners because that protected you and Mr Wright.”

“I wish I could make it up to you,” I whispered, feeling guilty again.

“You can bring me dinners for a week or two,” Mac said with a grin.

“Oh no, not unless you want a second visit to the hospital! I can burn water. Even Dad gave up trying to teach me the basics to survive in the wild. I can hunt. I just can’t cook. Dad told me if I was ever stranded, then to pray there were berry bushes around, or I was fucked!” I replied and gaped. I hadn’t meant to tell Mac that and blushed.

“Good job we got women who cook for us then, so I won’t starve,” Mac said pathetically.

“Honestly, I am sorry, Mac. I only attacked to protect Mr Wright. They’d already beaten him once because of me. I wasn’t going to let it happen again. Armed and face to face, they can’t beat me. They know that because they hit me from my rear last time. But we’re not here to discuss that. I came to say sorry, and I have, and I bet your family is biting at the bit to come and visit you.”

“The apology is accepted, but I get a boon later on,” Mac murmured, and I eyed him in trepidation.

“We’ll see. I better go. Rage is waiting, and I’ve caused enough trouble today. Again, I’m sorry, Mac,” I said, reaching out to squeeze his arm. To my surprise, Mac’s hand shot up, and he grabbed my fingers.

“Until next time,” Mac replied and drew my fingers to his mouth, where he kissed them gently and winked at me. Flustered, I tore my hand back, trying to ignore the amusement on his face, and said goodbye before hurrying out. I didn’t stop to say bye to the MC but waved at them as I scurried out. Mac needed to come with a warning. Even bruised, he was potent. I didn’t want to see him when he was fighting fit. Although the feel of Mac’s body against mine remained a memory, it was one I shoved ruthlessly aside.



“And you didn’t tell me because...” I sighed as my father’s imperious tone clipped at me. I’d met Dad for dinner, and

clearly, the gossip had done its rounds and got back to him.

“Because, Dad, you left their protection to me. And until this unknown gang, we’ve managed well.”

“And you beat up one of their members today?” Lieutenant Colonel Jacob Reeves didn’t sound too amused. Then again, he probably was, but I was going to get lectured about thinking before acting.

“A member of Rage MC,” I admitted.

“Painful?” Jacob asked, and I nodded. A grin crossed Dad’s face.

“But Mac was innocent, Dad,” I said, and Jacob’s smile faded.

“Once upon a time, Rage wasn’t, and they were in the protection business. Although I heard that when Drake Michaelson took over the club, he paid back every penny stolen from honest shopkeepers. But innocents got hurt, and many lost their business, which was Rage’s fault. Their president then tried to extort our little row of shops, and I ended it pretty quickly. But make no mistake, Casey, Rage was as dirty as those hitting the shops now,” Jacob said grimly.

“Could they have a couple of rogue brothers?” I asked, my mind making connections.

“Possibly, but Rage has done loads for the community in the last fifteen years. I think Drake Michaelson sees it as reparation for the club’s past, but people have long memories Casey, and they remember. I heard the club patch had been redesigned. Drake wanted the new blood not to be linked to their history. But people are going to wonder, and rightfully so, if Drake and Rage are turning bad,” Jacob mused.

“What do you think, Dad?” I asked, spearing a potato and chewing. My dad always had good advice, and I’d never not listen to him.

“I think Rage need watching. And I’m damn proud of you, girl, even if he was innocent this time. Sometime in the past, this Mac wasn’t. You got a beating in for someone that probably couldn’t. And that honey, I’m proud of you for,”

Jacob said, settling the discussion. Great, no telling off for me tonight! I grinned at Dad and stabbed a piece of cauliflower, and chewed slowly, basking in Dad's pride.

Chapter Three.

Mac

“I come in peace!” Mac teased as he walked through the door of the toy store. He carried Blue on his shoulder, and his son was wide awake. Mac laughingly had a bunny baby-changing bag slung over his arm. Mr Wright looked up, and a scared expression crossed his face at the sight of the cut before his gaze landed on Mac. Mac stopped by the entrance, intent on not being a threat, and held his hand out.

“You!” Mr Wright exclaimed, and his fear deepened. Mac guessed why. The poor guy probably thought Mac was here for revenge.

“I came to see those trucks for my boy. Blue is three months and loves colourful toys. The brighter, the better. The old ladies love your store, as they say the toys are all handmade. Do you have anything suitable for a baby?” Mac inquired, remaining still. Mac turned Blue to see Mr Wright, and Blue cooed.

“He’s a cute one,” Mr Wright responded, finally realising Mac was here to shop. He strolled out from behind the counter. Blue blew bubbles and smiled.

“Blue’s a fat lump. All he does is eat and sleep. But Blue loves colours,” Mac replied.

“I know exactly what he’d love. Come with me,” Mr Wright said, leading Mac around some aisles to some shelves with brightly coloured toys. There were large piece jigsaws, rolling squares with different coloured sides, some big trucks and fire engines, and Blue got excited. He began blowing bubbles as his little hands shot forward and made grabbing motions.

“Yup, Blue loves these. Are they all baby-friendly?” Mac asked.

“Yes, definitely. I’ll leave you to it,” Mr Wright spoke as the bell above the door chimed to announce another visitor. Mac nodded as he studied what was in front of him. He was so

engrossed it took a few minutes before the loud words caught Mac's attention.

"Did you think we'd let you off that easily? You owe last week and this week," a voice said, and Mac stared at the end of the aisle. Unbelievably, this was happening, and with Blue present!

"The police are involved! They were called!" Mr Wright revealed his cry high-pitched. Mac looked for somewhere to put Blue and spied a baby seat. He hurriedly locked Blue in and offered him a rattle before making his way forward.

"Oh, we know, and for that, it's doubled. Three hundred a week, we need six hundred bucks off you today or else," a second man gloated.

Mac peered around the aisle at the counter and saw two men standing above Mr Wright. Their backs were to him, and they wore the old Rage patch. Shit, Mr Wright was being shaken down.

"And as for that bitch, she'll get what's coming to her. You don't fuck with Rage!" the first man threatened.

"No, you fuckin' don't!" Mac growled, stepping out from the aisle, and both men turned around, shocked looks crossing their faces. Mac didn't hesitate and launched himself forward, smashing the first guy in the gut and bringing his knee up to knock him down. He collapsed with a groan, and Mac was already moving on the second. A fist barely missed his face as Mac ducked and landed a blow that lifted his target off the ground. This asshole was all fat compared to the other guy's leanness.

"Call the cops!" Mac grunted as the man swung, and Mac stumbled back. Mac launched a roundhouse punch and knocked the guy backwards. The slender man was getting to his feet, and Mac kicked him in the head. The fat guy took to his heels and slammed through the door, running full out. Mac hesitated and then realised he couldn't leave Blue in the shop with this asshole.

“Got any rope?” Mac asked, dropping to his knees and forcing his captive onto his stomach. Mac yanked his arms up behind him as Mr Wright dropped a roll of duct tape next to him.

“Blue is back there; please, can you fetch him?” Mac grunted as he tied the asshole’s hands together and then his feet. He propped him up as Mr Wright returned holding Blue. Mac sent a glance at Blue, checking his son was okay.

“Mr Wright, get behind the counter and crouch low. I’ll guard the entrance while the police come,” Mac said, drawing a gun. Mr Wright’s eyes got wide, but he did as he was told. Mac observed the front of the store, hidden behind a wall but maintaining a clear line of sight on the street. To Mac’s disbelief, Casey hurried towards him and crashed through the door. Mac reached out and yanked her behind him, keeping his handgun levelled at the road. Casey reacted and slammed her foot into the back of his knees. Mac felt himself going down.

“Goddamn it, Casey, I’ve hogtied a perp. His buddy got away!” Mac yelled as he dropped to his knees. His hands shot out just as Casey lifted her foot to slam into Mac’s arms, and she spun at the last second.

“Blue’s behind the counter with Mr Wright. Check them, and if you’re armed, keep a cover on them,” Mac growled, standing back up. Damn it, every time he met this fuckin’ woman, she beat him down. Casey was worse than Artemis.

“Sorry!” Casey gasped as she crawled to Mr Wright and Blue.

“Later. Casey, get low and protect Blue,” Mac demanded.

He heard bike pipes and raced out the door. Mac saw the fat fucker leaning forward, and the asshole stared at Mac as he passed him. Mac shot for the tyres, and there was a squeal, but the prick held his balance and kept moving. Shit, he’d hit the tyres, and Mac could give chase, but Blue was in the store with the Black Widow, and he didn’t want to leave his boy alone. Blue made Mac jog back to find himself facing a gun nuzzle.

“I’m gonna spank you fuckin’ raw, woman. Move that out of my face now!” Mac growled. Casey lowered her handgun and peered at the street.

“He got away?” she asked.

“Hit his tyres but couldn’t go after him. Blue’s here.”

“I could have watched Blue!” Casey retorted indignantly.

“Blue’s lucky to have a dad because you’re two for two, Casey. Jeez, your dad should have named you the Black Widow,” Mac snapped as he heard sirens. Moments later, Bobby Lucas and Dan Horton rushed in with two uniforms behind them.

“Bobby! I shot a bike’s tyres out. The asshole will be in a couple of blocks’ radius,” Mac stated, taking Blue off Mr Wright. Blue’s little face was scrunching up at the surrounding noise, and Mac began soothing him. The uniforms darted back out of the shop, and Bobby and Dan started collecting statements. Mac’s stern glare kept them away until he sat down, dragged Blue a bottle out, and shoved it in his mouth. Blue latched on and grumbled as he noisily guzzled, and Mac relaxed.

“What happened, Mac?” Bobby asked as Dan Horton tapped the skinny guy awake and moved him out to put him in the back of the cop car outside. Mac explained as calmly as he could, not wanting to upset Blue with his temper.

“And Miss Reeves?” Bobby inquired, and Mac glowered.

“Not much apart from attacking me, taking my knees out and then shoving a gun in my face,” Mac snarled, looking at Casey, who suddenly adopted an air of innocence. Dan Horton snorted as he returned to the store.

“Guy claims he came to buy a toy, and you attacked him,” Dan said, staring at Mac and the baby.

“Tell the fucker Hawthorne’s wired this store. His entire conversation is recorded. Especially the part about them doubling the price,” Mac retorted. “Ramirez can get the recording off Hawthorne later on.”

Casey

My eyes shot to Mac as he causally dropped that into the conversation. He'd wired Mr Wright's shop? My suspicions were immediately aroused. I gave a brief statement saying that the store opposite had seen the bikers and called everyone in the phone tree. When questioned about the gun, I admitted I was armed and held a concealed licence. Mac glowed as he fed his son, and I wriggled uncomfortably.

"Bit of an Artemis deal going on here?" the officer named Bobby Lucas asked with a grin. Mac's scowl deepened.

"No, I won't press charges against Miss Reeves," Mac growled. "But Casey sure as hell owes me some shit!"

Oh no. What did Mac think I owed him?

"Babysitting?" I urged hopefully. Mac snorted, and that put paid to that wild hope.

"Fuck babysitting. I got a club full of brothers and old ladies who'll help with Blue. You owe me more, woman. Talk with Bobby, and then you're gonna deal with the constant fact you keep attacking me. Let alone shoving a gun in my face," Mac said direly.

I swallowed and turned to Bobby, who was grinning like a maniac.

"Definitely an Artemis thing," Bobby replied, and I had no idea what he was going on about. Pushing the niggle of worry to the back of my mind, I kept answering Bobby's questions. Once Bobby had finished asking, I was surprised to see Detectives Ramirez and Benjamin enter. Ben sent a matching scowl to Mac's in my direction while Ramirez looked amused.

"Another assault?" Ramirez asked as Mac sat burping Blue.

"Bitch attacks each time she sees me. Fuck knows what her problem is," Mac said mournfully. Whatever sympathy he was going after didn't work, as Ramirez kept looking amused.

"Maybe it's your face," Ramirez teased.

"Maybe you ought to shut the fuck up, asshole!" Mac retorted as Ramirez threw his head back and laughed.

“So, we caught a perp this time?” Ben asked, staring at Bobby Lucas.

“Yeah, Travers and Smit took him to book him. Mac had hogtied him,” Bobby responded with a grin.

“With duct tape, that’s gonna hurt like the blazes,” Dan said as he stepped forward. “I’ve collected statements from a couple of other shops who witnessed events. Mac here mentioned Hawthorne’s wired the shop up.”

I remembered hearing that and wondered what that meant. Mac didn’t even squirm as he gazed straight at Mr Wright and me before turning to Ramirez.

“Had Hawthorne wire up some stores in an attempt to catch the guy,” Mac admitted.

“With the owner’s permission!” Ramirez spoke pointedly.

“Of course,” Mac said, relaxed, and I glanced at Mr Wright and knew this was news to him.

“Mr Wright, Miss Reeves, anything you’d like to add?” Ramirez sought, looking at us.

“I was aware as Mac had asked me,” Mr Wright reported in a blatant lie. My eyes widened, and Mr Wright shrugged. “Mac explained I might be at risk again as those thugs may return, so I allowed him to secure my premises.”

“Miss Reeves?” Ben inquired.

I guessed by the relaxed expression but burning eyes Mac was offering me that mine was one of those hooked up.

“Yes, we thought to trap them,” I said with a glower.

Mac smirked before shoving Blue’s bottle back into his mouth.

“And they signed release forms?” Ben asked, and Mac snorted.

“Not needed for a temp job, Ben, and you know that!”

Ben shook his head and muttered something about asshole bikers and PIs who assumed they were above the law. Mac

kept grinning at Ben, who finally gave up grumbling and peered at Blue.

“Kid’s lucky he doesn’t look like you!” Ben voiced a dig and wandered off.

“Yeah, must have got his mother’s looks, Mac,” Ramirez agreed.

“Yup, better her than me,” Mac said agreeably, snuggling Blue against his cheek and dropping a kiss on his downy head. A lump lodged in my throat at the apparent love Mac showed Blue, and I turned my head away.

“Okay, we’ll take the perp downtown and discover what shit he has to say. We will request footage from Hawthorne and see what shakes loose from the tree. If you remember anything else, let me know,” Ramirez said.

“Did they find the bike?” Mac asked.

“Yeah, you hit both tyres, Mac, but he escaped on foot a block over,” Ben replied, approaching. “We’ve got an extra description, and he passed a traffic cam, so we have applied for the footage.”

Mac nodded. “Thanks, just keep us updated. Rage wants this gang shut down as much as the shopkeepers and you guys. We dislike being marked for something we ain’t done.”

“History will always raise its head, Mac,” Ben stated sympathetically.

“Yeah, and Rage’s history wasn’t pretty. Don’t matter what we do, I wonder if our efforts are fruitless,” Mac mused.

“No, people benefit, Mac, from what Rage has become. Don’t lose sight of that,” Ramirez responded with a sideways stare at me. Oh, I don’t deny listening avidly to the men. I wanted to know much more.

“We’ve done our best to lie to rest what Bulldog and his cronies forced Rage into. It’s been fifteen years, Ramirez. Rage can’t keep apologising for our past,” Mac said with heat.

“Nobody here is saying different, Mac. You’re among friends. That’s why Drake’s changed the patch, and the

grounds are undergoing a redesign,” Ramirez inquired astutely.

“Yup, we don’t want the legacies tarnished when they come on board. And Calamity’s gen is hitting the same prejudices. We’re hoping to cull some of that. And we are making the clubhouse bigger because of the legacies we’ve already got, and there’s more to come. Fuck, Jett and Ace are planning on taking over a floor for their kids,” Mac laughed.

“Yeah, I can see that. Can’t believe Jett knocked Sin up again. Sin has to be furious,” Ben said with a slight smile. Who were Sin and Jett?

“Sin’s making Jett pay through the nose for it, but she played him good. Jett thinks she is mad at him, and he’s breaking his back to make everything perfect.” Mac chuckled.

“Who’s telling Jett the truth?” Ramirez asked.

Mac sent him a dire glance. “You wanna disturb Sin’s payback? I am not man enough for that. Not with half the old ladies pregnant and hormones flying, including Artemis. There’s no way I got the balls to upset the posse,” Mac answered, smirking.

Ben and Ramirez laughed and took their leave.

“Miss Reeves, try not to go for attempt three. Mac is one of the good guys,” Ramirez teased as he left.

I scowled in response, and their laughter floated back on the wind.

“So, you sneakily hooked us up to spy on us?” I asked as soon as the cops drove away. Mr Wright rolled his eyes and disappeared behind his counter. Mac was gathering up Blue’s things and handed me Blue. I stared aghast at the baby as Blue yanked back in surprise at me.

“Put Blue on your shoulder, woman. Christ, you never held a kid before?” Mac said, looking around for something.

“No!” I exclaimed as I pulled Blue in close. Blue snuggled into my neck, but his head twisted to find his father. Who was bending over, showcasing a magnificent ass. I took a long,

good look before Mac straightened and picked up the bottle lid he'd been searching for.

“Mr Wright, while Casey is holding Blue and unable to attack me, can we pick up the stuff I wanted for Blue?” Mac asked, sending me a sneaky stare.

I tried not to blush, but it crept up my cheeks at Mac's obvious amusement. Mac and Mr Wright returned with armfuls of colourful toys that seemed to perk Blue up. He began bouncing on my shoulder, and Mac waved a red rattle at him. Blue snatched it and clunked himself on the head with it. I watched, spellbound, as Blue shoved his bottom lip out as he decided whether to cry. Mac just grinned, and Blue's tears fled.

“Watch him while I take these to the car,” Mac said to me as he paid for the toys and disappeared out the door. Mac came back a couple of minutes later and took Blue from me.

“The best way to keep you occupied,” Mac added cheekily. My mouth opened to blast him, but Mac turned and faced Mr Wright. “You've got my direct line. If anything happens, call me after the cops. I'll come straight away or send the nearest brother. We'll sort this out and make everything safe for your fellow shopkeepers. I've put Drake's number on the back if you can't get me.” Mac pointed it out, and Mr Wright nodded.

“What are you doing?” I hissed as Mac turned to me and took me by the elbow.

“Come and say goodbye to Blue,” Mac insisted and led me out. He strapped Blue into his car seat.

“What?” I demanded mulishly.

“Call me sadistic, but you and I are going out for dinner,” Mac stated.

I drew back in surprise.

“We're doing what?” I asked, folding my arms.

“Twice you've assaulted me, and I've not pressed charges. So, I think you owe me food, so I'll pick you up tonight, and we'll go for food.”

“No, we are not,” I responded stubbornly.

Mac grinned. “Think again, Casey, twice and one of those times you put me in hospital. I’m owed, and I want food!”

“You cretin!” I exclaimed as Mac looked smug.

Mac had me over a barrel. I had attacked him, and both had been unprovoked. I inhaled a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Fine, dinner then!”

“Oh, Mac, I’d love to have dinner with you, so kind of you to offer,” Mac responded in a high-pitched voice before staring at me. Okay, maybe I had been grumpy.

“Thank you for offering to have dinner with me. I’ll meet you at the restaurant,” I said, ruining any resemblance of politeness.

“Seven tonight at Bernard’s,” Mac stated and lifted his chin as a goodbye before climbing into his truck and pulling out. There was a wicked smile on Mac’s face as he twisted to check me and wave bye. What had I let myself in for?



Rushing, I darted out of my car, conscious I was ten minutes late. I’d dithered over what to wear. Bernard’s was a very nice restaurant, yet I didn’t want to give Mac the idea of a date! I’d torn through my four dresses and decided none were correct as each screamed date! In the end, I wore a pair of black trousers and an emerald-green top. My hair I left with its usual ‘just got out of bed’ look, and I shoved my feet into boots.

Men looked at me and saw a model. No point lying. I was confronted by my image daily. Long ash blonde hair, high cheekbones that Faith Hill would envy, full lips, and naturally arching eyebrows, which were a contrast against my blonde hair as they were dark. My breasts were full and very perky. I had a tiny waist and flaring hips, and a pert ass. My eyes alternated between smooth brown and lighter hazel when I was angry. There was a tattoo on one arm, a skull with a rose, and under that, butterflies trailed down my arm, entwined with ivy.

Usually, I wore tees and jeans and shitkickers. Tonight's outfit was unusual and rare for me to dress up. I loved chunky silver jewellery but had left that off tonight. I was stunning and knew it, but I didn't act entitled to my good looks. Hell, crawling through mud and lord knows what else soon knocked any ideas of vanity out of you. And I'd rather be the tough chick I am than be a stuck-up piece of shit.

As I entered the restaurant, I saw Mac sitting at a table, and while he was chatting with a guy, he didn't seem happy. The waitress came over, and I swear Mac heaved a sigh of relief when I approached. The stranger glanced up before offering a smile and moving aside.

"Casey," Mac said warmly, rising to his feet.

The guy cocked an eyebrow, and then a slow grin spread across his face.

"Casey Reeves, Miss Black Widow herself?" he asked as a question.

"Who are you?" I inquired somewhat rudely. "And what's with the Black Widow shit?"

"Dylan Hawthorne of Hawthorne Investigations. And Black Widow because I hear you kick ass like Scarlett Johansson," he replied with a head tilt.

Oh, the man behind the spying of my fellow shopkeepers.

"Nice to meet you," I murmured, ignoring the Black Widow comment, although I was secretly amused. Both men laughed.

"Casey, your tone couldn't be any more dubious. Anyway, there's my sister. Catch you later, Mac. Casey, a pleasure," Dylan said and moved smoothly away.

"Where's Blue?" I asked, I'd expected seeing the cute little thing again.

"Lindsey is babysitting him," Mac replied with a smile as he thought of his son.

"You didn't seem happy speaking to Mr Hawthorne?" I asked as I pulled out a chair. Mac stood to hold my chair, and

we both gazed at each other in awkwardness. Mac chuckled and sat.

“You didn’t seem happy speaking to him?” I asked as I pulled out a chair.

Mac stood to hold my chair, and we both gazed at each other in awkwardness. Mac chuckled and sat.

“Hawthorne was ribbing me about being attacked by you twice. I don’t think Hawthorne appreciates the cost of crossing someone trained by a Delta Force Lieutenant. He will one day,” Mac said cockily.

“Oh?” I asked. A devilish stare crossed Mac’s face, and I wondered what he was up to.

“Heard your father owns and operates a tracking assault course.”

“Yes?”

“Well, let’s say I’ve booked the assholes who’ve given me a rough time a day-long course,” Mac replied with a wicked grin.

“Um, Mac, you know Dad will kill them? He won’t go easy on them,” I announced, horrified.

“That’s all I want, Casey!” Mac looked pleased with himself.

“Dare I ask how many you booked?”

“The entire MC, asshole prospects included, those little fuckers can suffer too. And half of Hawthorne’s who think they can open their mouths. Ramirez, Ben, Horton, and Lucas, and half of Hellfire MC.”

“Are you doing it?” I asked hesitantly.

“Yup,” Mac said, supremely confident.

“Dad will kill you,” I muttered.

“If I did it raw on the day, yes. But I’ve spoken to him, and I have scheduled three training sessions a week for four weeks,

upping it to four in the final two weeks.” Mac smiled. I made some mental calculations.

“Which course is he running you guys on?” I asked. Dad owned a vast tract of land and ran these assault courses off it. Believe it or not, he was constantly booked. He also boasted several buildings set up for recovery and assault. Dad has a lot of out-of-state clients attempting his courses, which even trained seals had failed.

“Delta.” Mac smirked, and I winced.

“Do you know how many pass Delta on their first attempt?” I demanded, shocked.

“Lieutenant-Colonel Reeves said about eight per cent. Even if I don’t finish, I just need to kick their asses and be the last man standing. I’ll give them ‘I’ve gone weak!’” Mac muttered, glaring at his imaginary brothers and friends.

“I will do it with you,” I announced, to my surprise.

Mac sent me a beaming stare.

“That could be fun,” Mac mused.

I shook my head as a waitress approached. “Believe me, by the time Dad finishes with you, fun will be the last thing you’re thinking of. A quick and painless death will be your best hope,” I said.

The waitress looked shocked and quietly asked to take our orders. I’d barely glanced at the menu and swiftly did now. While Mac placed his, I chose a prawn cocktail, homemade brown bread, and the surf and turf for the main meal. As I was driving, I ordered lemonade while Mac wanted Pepsi.

“So, tell me about yourself,” Mac said, relaxing back in his chair.

“My father commanded a Delta Force squadron and still emulates their lifestyle despite having been retired for five years. My mother was far from the typical homemaker. Mom ran her own career guidance business on base, setting spouses up in chosen careers. Mom is as terrifying as Dad and was a constant presence on camp for decades. I’m an only child, so

while Mom went over the top with frilly dresses, Dad had me crawling through mud in them.” Both Mac and I shared a laugh.

“I bet that annoyed your mother,” Mac said.

“Oh, you’ve no idea. Out there, Dad was the boss. Once he stepped over the threshold, it was Mom’s domain, and she ensured Dad obeyed her rules. They are ridiculously as much in love now as when they married. It’s sweet. Dad brings Mom flowers every Sunday, come hell or high water. On her birthday and anniversary, which he never forgets, he takes Mom to her favourite restaurant, which is now Bernard’s.

“On the other hand, Mom always ensures Dad has his full roast dinner on Sundays, and Saturdays are his game food night. The one evening a week, Dad indulges in burgers and crap, as he calls it, while watching a game. Dad works out daily while Mom sticks her nose into local military life and runs her business aimed at the spouses.”

“And what do you do?” Mac asked.

“Despite being a mega badass who protects her neighbourhood, I own a store where Dad had his. Although we called it Dad’s, he rarely was in it. But everyone knew Dad owned it. It was a hardware store, and it had been my grandfather’s. Dad closed it a few years ago when it didn’t make money but kept the shop for me. Dad signed it over as a gift for my twenty-first, telling me to go nuts.” I laughed at the memory. Dad had known full well what I planned to do with the store, and it changed from a man’s domain to a woman’s.

“What do you sell?”

“Bath bombs, bath cremes, soaps, bubble baths, lotions, incense sticks, wax melts etc., all handmade by me. I have a large kitchen out back where I make all my creations, and I have a degree in homoeopathy, aromatherapy, and herbalism. I create everything in my store, and I can tell you about every ingredient in any item on the shop floor.”

“Are you busy, Casey?” Mac asked curiously. He seemed interested, I thought.

“Yes, my online sales are out of this world, and I’ve recently hired two staff to help. One operates the front of the store, the other helps package deliveries, and I keep stock levels up. For a twenty-four-year-old, I have done pretty damn well for myself.”

“Did Lieutenant-Colonel Reeves disagree with your career? Did he want you to follow in his footsteps?”

“Nope. Dad said as long as I’m happy, then he was happy. He said joining the military was a calling, not a career, and if I didn’t feel the call, then not to join. It would have been a mistake. He was right because I love my shop and the other shopkeepers. I found my calling, and there are other ways to serve. I pay a percentage of my profits to the Phoenix Trust, as do Mom and Dad. We volunteer for rallies and other fundraisers and will always salute the flag.”

“Sounds like a great life, Casey,” Mac replied, smiling.

“What about you?” I asked as the waitress brought our starters.

I stared at the prawn cocktail in disbelief. Mac laughed.

“Bernard. He knows Rage well, and when we dine here, we often get larger proportions,” Mac explained.

“Bigger? That’s about four times the size of a normal one!” I exclaimed, amused.

“If you can’t eat it, leave it,” Mac stated, and I shook my head. I loved food, even if it meant an extra half hour on the course tomorrow.

“Prawn cocktail is my all-time favourite food. I’m not passing this up!” I said, digging in. There were two slabs of rustic bread on the plate, and by the time I finished, Mac was laughing at my glee.

“Bernard will be over the moon!” Mac spoke. When the waitress collected our plates, he told her to inform Bernard to go easy on the fries and extras. She seemed to understand what Mac meant because she offered a nod and walked away after taking another drink order.

“So, you never told me what you do,” I said to Mac when our drinks arrived.

“I am co-manager in Hells Rage, the bar down the road to the clubhouse that is jointly owned by Rage and Hellfire MC. I work the day shift, tally everything up, pay wages, organise day staff, etc. My counterpart at Hellfire does the evening shit. It works well, and we’ve got the club running smoothly. I take one shift a week on patrol, ensuring our streets are clean and helping where I’m needed.”

“Streets are clean?” I asked.

“Rage sends a couple of patrols out each night. No drug dealers, whores, extortion etc., are allowed within five miles of us. Which is why what happened to you and the shopkeepers was a shock. Your street is just over our boundary, so someone thought they were smart. Instead, they fucked up because they did not want to draw our attention and have done. We’ll help RCPD hunt them down and then hand them over.”

“You work with the police?” I asked, confused because of what Dad had mentioned.

“Rage does now. We were fuckin’ dirty once. Half of Bulldog’s previous crew were arrested, and many still serve time. But we got the club good and live the life we want,” Mac replied.

My confusion deepened. “So, are Rage clean or dirty? Who is Bulldog? Dad mentioned a Drake Michaelson; that’s who I’ve met, yes?”

Mac sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

“Rage’s history is heavy for a first date,” Mac murmured.

“We’re not on a date. I’m buying you dinner because I beat you,” I objected.

Mac shot me an incredulous stare before laughing.

“Honey, we need to talk!” Mac said firmly. Somehow, I didn’t like the sound of that!

Chapter Four.

Mac

“This is a date, Casey; I’m very interested in you and not because I’ve got a perverse wish to be beaten daily. I loved the way you defended Mr Wright and the other shopkeepers. To me, that spoke of a deep abiding loyalty for those around you, respect for others and a sense of fair play. Your actions told me that you wish to keep those you love safe and that, darlin’, means something to me.”

“What?” Casey asked baldly, and Mac liked her directness.

“I want to date you, that you understand the values and morals I hold dear, and you live them too. Tells me that you’re special and not to be messed with, and I fuckin’ adore your strength,” Mac replied honestly. Casey tilted her head as she sipped her drink, and Mac waited.

“Except I do not wish to court you. I know about Rage’s history, or some of it at least, and let me tell you, it’s not attractive,” Casey said bluntly. Mac’s heart fell, and he took in a staggered breath.

“Nah, you think you know Rage’s past, but you don’t. Not unless you’re Rage, and neither you nor your father was,” Mac retorted. Drake’s words in church were coming back to haunt him.

“Most of you were criminals who barely escaped jail. That’s not the person I want to date nor people I wish to be around,” Casey replied, and Mac’s temper ignited. To be judged on their past was unfair, and how dare Casey judge him?

“Okay honey, let me tell you the fuckin’ truth of Rage. And then after tonight, we don’t have to see each other again. But I want you to understand who you’re judging. I was born in 1980 and joined Rage in 1998. I was recruited by Drake eight years after his father was murdered and his club torn away from him. Drake was fifteen and too young to become president. Rage under Bulldog went downhill.

“Prostitution, extortion, blackmail, bullying, drugs, and gunrunning. If it was illegal, Bulldog dragged the MC into it. But Drake knew he was always to be Rage’s legacy Pres from the moment he was born. Bulldog may have snatched Drake’s club from him at fifteen, but Drake, Axel, Apache, and Ace began planning immediately. They understood which brothers were pure and who would follow Bulldog. They collected the good brothers, Slick, Texas, Fish, and so on and did their best to keep them out of Bulldog’s greedy hands.

“Drake then sent them out to recruit members who wanted a clean fuckin’ club. They found me, Manny, Rock, and some others, and we bonded. At eighteen, when I joined Rage, I was full of anger and piss. My dad was a career criminal, and my mother enabled him. The day Drake discovered me, I was beating the shit out of someone who was trying to force my sister into fucking him to pay a debt my father owed. Drake helped me get her out of there and put her somewhere secure. Axel ensured Paisley was safe and got to finish school.

“I wanted their vision, a band of men who grouped together with the same values. Love, honour, respect, and family. Fuck, I burned to be a part of that. But Drake ensured those who joined knew we’d have to suck shit for a while until he made his move. So, I enlisted and worked against Bulldog and his cronies, ensuring that the whores Bulldog demanded to be beaten for not bringing in enough money were safe. The kids that Bulldog demanded to sell drugs to often found a beat cop on their street preventing the sale of drugs. Cops got lots of tipoffs in the early days.

“My brothers and I worked to undermine Bulldog at every chance we had, while breaking the law against our own will. Drake claimed VP three years after I joined, and that’s when we began moving. The garage was built, and the parts store and our other very legal ventures were started. We were already looking to the future to create money because once we cleaned out the illegal shit, we wanted to keep brothers flush. Rage worked our fuckin’ bollocks off at that, even while sucking up Bulldogs’ crap. Manny took bullets in the back, others were beaten, and Ace was stabbed in church, and that gave Drake the option of forcing the vote.

“In 2007, we grabbed our chance and won. Rage immediately kicked Bulldog and his assholes off Rage and began cutting the illegal shit out. Bulldog went to war with us. My brothers bled for those streets and the land around Rage. For a year, we fought against Bulldog and his men, broke agreements that Bulldog had created, and we clawed our way to a legal MC. All of us spilt blood in one form or another.

“Once clean, we turned to what we desired for the club. An MC that helped and looked after its community and respected the law. Rage reached out and made ties with local cops. They got a lot of arrests in our early days. We fought a war on multiple sides, and after winning, we held on tightly to what we’d gained. And with each step we took, we left behind our shit-stained past. We cleansed our souls with each kind gesture, charity ride, and fetching shopping for elderly neighbours because we had earned our vision. We keep a five-mile radius around our land and ensure no crime happens there.

“No drugs, no arms sales or pussy being sold. Rage’s message was loud and clear and took a while, but the criminals finally realised we meant it. Now we work hand in hand with RCPD, bringing down thugs, protecting our streets and solving crimes. Call us vigilantes or whatever, but nothing smears our little patch of Rapid City. If somebody’s robbed, Rage tracks the perp down and turns them over to the cops. If someone’s brutalised, we give them a beat down but hand them over. Beat an old granny or a kid, Rage will find you and offer our form of justice before handing them to the police.

“That is our history, Casey. It ain’t pretty, and it isn’t rainbows and unicorns. It’s a brutal story about a group of guys who imagined and fought for a better life for themselves and their brothers. That is the man you’re turning your stuck-up nose at. Not everyone has dotting parents like you. Ninety per cent of Rage is cut off from family. We made a family, and we’ll fuckin’ bleed for each other. I have a son and I’d be proud to let him join Rage one day. In fact I am hoping he does, as Blue is my legacy. You sit there on your throne, judging and sneering at us without even considering the women we claimed.

“Phoenix needs no introduction, a bookstore owner who’s remarkable for her valuations in the rare artefact world. We claim two famous authors, a French duchess, a ranch owner, and a Hollywood actress. Let alone our other incredible, beautiful women. So, sit there, Casey, and judge me for being a criminal. Makes me happy I can see the real you, not the false idea I had of you. So, thanks for saving me the heartbreak of falling for a bitch.” Mac stopped talking and rose to his feet. He tossed a couple of hundred-dollar bills on the table and sneered at Casey.

“As we’re criminals, I’ll pull the protection I put on your neighbours and friends. You don’t want to be associated with us, obviously. Good luck in life,” Mac spat and walked out.

Casey

I sat there spellbound as Mac ranted at me. He didn’t raise his voice, but he was firm and to the point. At the halfway mark, I felt shame for judging him, and I was crawling with embarrassment by the end. But Mac admitted to committing crimes, and I didn’t want to be a part of that. Before I could gather my racing thoughts, Mac tossed a couple of bills on the table and left. Red hit my cheeks as I realised his friend Dylan Hawthorne was staring at me with a pretty brunette by his side. Dylan’s face was impassive, but the woman looked outright disgusted.

“What a cunt,” she exclaimed to another table, and I twisted to see two further strangers glaring in disbelief.

“Marissa,” Dylan spoke.

“Nah, come on, brother. She judges Mac like that. Who the fuck does she think she is? Bitch knows nothing about him or Rage and sits there on her high horse,” Marissa snarled at me. The other lady exchanged a nod with Marissa.

“How about Mac dining with a congressman and senators?” the woman offered, anger evident in her voice.

“Or that Mac got shot and nearly died saving the author L. Smithson, who is married to one of his brothers?” Marissa added, her eyes narrowing.

“Or that Mac signs up yearly for the charity run to raise money for disabled children. And he visits the old people’s home once a month, bringing them treats and movies?”

“Don’t forget, Willow, that Mac also purchases presents alongside Phoe at Christmas for homeless and hospitalised kids,” Marissa spat.

“Well, all my uncles do that, Marissa, but yeah, Mac actually hits the shops and buys his own. Unlike my other uncles, who pass it off to their wives if possible,” the woman called Willow snorted.

“How about the time Mac donated to the cancer ward once a week, visiting the women and kids there to cheer them up?” Marissa tossed out.

“And you sit there judging him. Well, bitch, I’m FBI, and my uncle is as clean as they come. You think Mac’s not good enough for you? You ain’t good enough to lick his shoes. Vile cunt. Grey, are you done? Her poison is choking my air?” Willow hissed, throwing down her napkin.

My face was so red by the time they’d finished; it was a wonder no one mistook me for a tomato.

“He still has a criminal past,” I finally stuttered.

Marissa stared at me in disbelief, while Willow looked like she wanted to pull her gun and shoot me.

“Yeah, he does. He did bad things to earn something clean and beautiful. And I pity your small-mindedness because you were never worthy of my uncle. He protects people and doesn’t judge them. After all, didn’t he cover your fat ass twice? Mac could have had you arrested, but he saw what you were attempting to do and lied for you. And yet you sit there, free as a bird, with no jail time or arrest record because of my uncle’s sacrifice. Get fucked, and get the hell out of Bernard’s because who’s the criminal who ain’t been charged? Enemies of Rage aren’t welcome!” Willow’s voice rose, drawing the attention of other diners. I climbed to my feet, gathering my tattered dignity around me.

“I’m leaving,” I said and marched away.

“God damn, what a bitch. Trust Mac to take the hard road. Thank fuck Mac saw her for what she is. A judgemental cunt. She’ll never be a wonderful old lady or one of the posse. Could you imagine going to a strip club with her? She’d faint at the sight of a dick!” Marissa announced to Willow.

“Just glad I ain’t got to see her sour face around the clubhouse. Can you imagine her with Aunts Artemis, Lindsey, and Autumn when they get going? Christ, she’d pitch a bitch fit right there, and her tighty-whitey’s would disappear up her tight ass,” Willow sneered.

“How dare you judge me!” I snapped, turning back, Willow’s comment burning through me.

“As you judged Mac?” Marissa hissed, and I blanched. “Problem with women like you. You think you’re all that, and a guy has to dance to your tune. You may be beautiful outside, but you are ugly as fuck inside. And it’s a good job a decent guy like Mac saw that before he fell and offered you the fuckin’ world!” Marissa spat.

Tears blinded my sight as a man approached at speed. His face held a look of pure disgust as he stopped by me.

“I want you to leave before you cause more of a scene. Those who judge my friends aren’t welcome here. This is your official notice you’re banned from here, and please inform your parents they are, too. Yes, I recognise who you are. And I have no time for judgemental bitches in my restaurant,” the guy called Bernard said.

I held my head up high and stormed through the dining room. During the walk of shame, comments were aimed at me about how lucky an escape Mac just had. Clearly, half of these people knew him and were judging me harshly. Well, fuck the lot of them.

Mac

It was late when Mac returned to the clubhouse. The anger had burned inside him so brightly he’d taken to the roads to clear his mind. Mac considered stopping at Magic’s bar for a beer, but the wound Casey had opened bled deeply. If Magic,

Chance, Lance, or Inglorious were present, they'd realise he was hurting. Not tonight. He wanted to lick his wounds and then head to his bunk. The home which had never made Mac unwelcome or feel unloved.

When Mac entered, he was surprised to see Axel waiting for him. The big man looked pissed, and Mac wondered what had happened. Axel lumbered towards him, and Mac felt a fission of alarm. The only time Axel was that furious was when somebody was hurt or it concerned Ellen. A hand shot out, and Axel's brow dropped to Mac's own. Mac hesitated before lifting a hand and clasping Axel's shoulder.

"Inner sanctum," Axel boomed, and Mac nodded.

Axel waited until Mac closed the door before opening his mouth.

"Willow was seated behind you and Marissa Hawthorne to your left. Willow's fit to be tied, and Marissa Hawthorne did not keep her mouth shut. The bitch went home with her tail between her legs. Now I wanna know how you're feeling, brother?"

"Gutted."

"Talk to me," Axel pressed.

"Thought she might be the one. Casey was everything I was looking for until she wasn't. She called us criminals, and while we may have been in the past, we ain't been for fifteen years. That crap Bulldog was into was not Rage, and once we cleared the filth, we became what we wanted to. Fifteen years and Bulldog's shit haunts us. I know that fucker held Rage in his grip for seventeen years, Axel, but surely the strides we took made a difference?" Mac asked.

"To some people, we'll always be the outlaw gang of rogue bikers. Others, like Hawthorne, Washington, and the cops, know differently. Rage holds our area in a tight grasp. Why? Because we understand intimately the blood spilt to protect the city from Bulldog. Those nine to fivers, Mac, will never understand that pain. The agony of taking a beating yourself or beating a whore who was sick and didn't bring in her cut.

That's lessons we won't ever forget, but we move on," Axel said.

"I was looking forward!" Mac exclaimed.

"Yeah, and just because that stuck-up cunt can't see it doesn't mean the next will not. Be yourself, Mac, and your soulmate will come along. I saw you hoping, Mac, wondering if the next girl through the clubhouse doors would be yours. That's natural. Especially when we get younger fuckers claiming women before us older ones. Jett stung me personally because I wondered why the prospect, as he was then, could claim a lady before me. And if Manny hadn't been so patient, Jett would have lost her because Manny was gung-ho for Sin."

"Think we all saw that, Axel," Mac said, rubbing his neck.

"Yeah, and Manny's still waiting, even though Blaze and Hunter have claimed women since. Makes me sick watching you guys with the yearning in your eyes. But your one will come along, and she'll blow your socks off when she does. She'll never doubt you or your past, won't care about your history and will fuckin' worship you for the great man you are. That's what you need to seek. Because you deserve no less," Axel said.

"You believe that, Axel?"

"Fuck yes. Ain't no lie. Drake, Apache, Ace, and I sought a certain type of brother. A guy who'd suck shit up and release it when life is grand. I got concerns about two of the brothers, but you aren't one of them. You let the crap go, cleansed yourself in fire, and were reborn. Two of those assholes haven't released their past crap. They worry me; you don't. You're open to being loved, brother, which is a great thing. Now just seek the woman worthy of you," Axel announced.

"Easier said than done, Axel, but thanks for the pep talk. How's Ellen doing?" Axel's brow quickly furrowed.

"Shit's wrong. Sutton nor Jayne can discover any evidence of what happened to Ellen that day, and Ellen still can't remember," Axel replied sullenly.

“You think Ellen was targeted,” Mac stated, feeling anger burn in his gut. He loved Ellen like all of Rage, and the thought of somebody targeting Axel’s precious wife burned deep.

“Yeah, but need proof,” Axel muttered.

“Then we’ll find it. Phone Ramirez and tell Sutton that a complaint was made that someone pushed Ellen, and now everyone needs to be witnessed. Fuck, I’ll call in the complaint to Ramirez, and he can investigate,” Mac offered.

“Not a bad idea,” Axel mused.

“Let me know, brother, because we have to protect our women.”

Axel nodded as he rose to his feet and drew Mac into a one-armed hug. They clapped each other on the back, and Mac took off and headed to his bunk, avoiding the whores as they tried to catch his eye. He was long past that. He needed someone special now.

Casey—two weeks later.

I’d avoided Dad even though I knew the gossip from that disastrous date with Mac would have got back to him. Mom, however, was a different story. She kept ringing and texting, and finally, I had to tell her I was extra busy as my orders had doubled. But that did not stop Mom. Oh no. She demanded I come for dinner, for drinks, anything so she could discover from my own lips what had happened. Mother was furious that I’d been humiliated in public, but she did not know the entire story, and truthfully, I felt more than a little ashamed of myself now.

For one, I’d researched Rage now, and plenty of stories were out there. Mac has spoken the truth about the club being clean until a guy called Bulldog got his hands on it. Then I read arrest report after report, none of the existing Rage members having been named on them. But Bulldog’s men cropped up several times. A newspaper detailed how the MC exchanged presidents in 2007, and then what seemed to be a

yearlong war started. Drake's side won. And Rage became pillars of the community.

Their first charitable act had been to ride and collect cash for an old person's home. Their next was to walk alongside RCPD during a run to raise money for the widows and orphan's fund. And then Rage hit the papers every couple of months for their charity work. Official stats showed how crime disappeared within a five-mile radius of Rage, just as Mac had claimed. RCPD had a run on arrests for two years of Drake's presidency. I devoured everything I could find in relation to Rage MC, and even Mac starred in a few articles of his own.

I had judged unfairly, but also not. They had done criminal things and had escaped punishment. And since 2007, their records had been unblemished. I couldn't tally the two in my head. Criminals escaping punishment but becoming good men. Could a leopard change its spots? Usually, I'd say no. But on the flip side, what if they were decent guys pretending to be bad before becoming themselves again? It was enough to make my brain hurt. I was so preoccupied I failed to hear the door open, and the first sense of danger I got was when someone shoved a gun in my face. I froze instantly.

"Fuckin' bitch, bringing in Rage MC. Where are they now, honey? Heard you thought you were better than them, and they cut you loose," Fatboy growled.

I recognised him from the other day. Behind him stood two other guys, both leering.

"What do you want?" I demanded.

"Well, we require payment, but after the fuckin' trouble you've caused us, we are gonna take a little something extra. And we're ready for your moves this time." Fatboy smiled.

The fuck they would. I readied myself for action, and a blow from the gun hit me hard. Hard enough to stun me. I staggered as cuffs were wrapped around my wrists.

"Think you could beat us? You're nothing but pussy," Fatboy gloated in my ear as blood dripped down my face. A second hard punch knocked me off my feet, and I knew I was

in real trouble. I'd disobeyed Dad's number one rule. Always be aware of your surroundings. But he hadn't cuffed my legs. As I fell down, blinded, I scissored my legs out and caught him off guard. He stumbled and toppled himself. With my arms behind my back, I had little chance of fighting.

Rolling and struggling to bring my hands over my legs, I had them in front of me. I was stopped by a swift kick to the head, and that did it. I collapsed against the floor as blood ran from my nose. Everything was a blur, as I couldn't see properly. Someone grabbed me by my hair and began dragging me out of the shop. A loud bang made me jump, and somebody landed next to me. Dazed, I reached out, and a second noise sounded right next to me. Four more shots followed, and I was lifted into muscular arms and placed on a motorbike. My hands were hooked over a neck, and I felt the road fade away and me alongside it.

Drake

"Got injured here," Savage yelled, hitting the forecourt. Drake and Jett looked up, and their eyes widened as Savage drove straight to the clubhouse and pulled a lady off his bike.

"Fuck is that...?" Jett asked as Drake nodded.

"See where Mac's at and tell him," Drake announced as Savage carried the unconscious woman into the clubhouse. Casey's face was black and blue, and her appearance was met with concern but overridden with hostility.

"Call Ramirez. Let him know what we have," Drake spoke.

"Shot two, injured but not DOA," Savage grunted.

"No probs, was self-defence. I'll grab Hawthorne and see what he has. Despite Mac backing away, he still had Hawthorne protecting them," Drake responded, even as his phone rang.

"Max here, pulling footage, a clear case of attempted kidnapping and assault. Two escaped, but the third remained. No honour among thieves. Horton and Lucas are on site now. Dylan's letting them know Casey was brought to Rage, and

Ramirez is on his way. Camera over the back door glitched, and we can't see what happened next.”

“They shot four times at me. I returned fire and grabbed the woman,” Savage replied.

“Had good cover there, Savage, not to be hit.” Max chuckled. He and Drake exchanged a few more words before hanging up.

“Stick to that story,” Drake ordered, and Savage shrugged.

“That’s the truth,” he responded.

Drake hid a grim grin. No doubt Savage had picked up their hands holding the gun and fired in his direction, a straightforward case of self-defence. Drake watched as Texas checked Casey over and declared she’d live.

“Get an ambo. I don’t want her in Rage,” Drake spoke. His dislike was plain to everyone. No one argued, and Axel made the call. As Axel hung up, Mac walked in and looked confused at what was in front of him.

“Where’s Blue?” Drake demanded.

“He’s safe, he’s at the childcare in HQ. What happened?” Mac replied.

“What happened?”

“Bitch was pistol-whipped and jumped. Got her clear and brought her here,” Savage answered shortly and disappeared into the back.

“Anybody called an ambulance?” Mac inquired, his eyes flicking over Casey.

“Yeah, Axel,” Drake replied.

“Am I needed for clean-up?” Mac asked.

“Nah, just thought you’d want to know, brother. After all, you kept a prospect and Hawthornes on her,” Drake pointed out.

Mac gazed steadily at him.

“Did we get anyone?”

“The fat fuck who escaped you the other night, and Hawthorne has the images of two different guys. All wearing Rage cuts,” Drake confirmed. His brow furrowed. Surely those idiots must have realised Rage had changed their patch. Yet they continued to wear the old one. Why? It would make sense to change it, to implicate Rage further, but they hadn’t. Did they think they’d taken over the old patch? Drake was missing something important but couldn’t put his finger on it.

Sirens screeched onto the forecourt, and Ramirez entered, followed by a couple of paramedics. They checked Casey over before loading her up and taking her to the hospital. She was just regaining consciousness, so Ramirez took a brief statement from Savage and left. Rage exchanged looks, but no one said anything when Mac returned to the bar. Drake’s gut feeling was this shit wasn’t ended by a long shot.

Ghost

He paced as he waited for everyone to go to bed. He knew where the cameras were, having cased this place many times. Ghost could see his target in the room’s low light, and he approached quietly and cautiously. He didn’t need to tip security off that he was here. Ghost was already disobeying orders; getting caught would blow everything. He reached the window and tapped twice, and the target’s head shot towards him. Ghost popped his head up and held a finger to his lips. Drake’s eyes narrowed in anger as he stormed across the room and opened the window.

“Wanna explain yourself?” Drake demanded.

“Keep your voice down. I can’t get caught,” Ghost said.

“Security clocked you ten minutes ago, asshole. I told them to let it play out,” Drake announced.

Ghost whistled softly.

“Thought I got all cameras. Good security.”

“What do you want, Ghost? You come to bare your soul to me? Give me the fuckin’ truth of what you’re up to?” Drake retorted.

“Too soon to blow my cover. I’m one step away, Drake, from what I need. But I am giving you a warning. This extortion ring is a mask for something bigger. The men you caught are low on the ladder. Keep the next two and make them talk. And watch out for Ellen. She’s a target,” Ghost mentioned, and Drake stiffened.

“What do you mean?” he spat.

“Ellen witnessed something, no idea what. I don’t think Ellen even realises herself. But they need her silenced, and this is all one fuckin’ mess mixed,” Ghost revealed.

A noise made him crouch down and pull his weapon. Drake waved a hand, and the person moved away.

“How much danger is Ellen in?” Drake demanded.

“Drake, death ain’t good enough for them. They want her beheaded to make sure she is dead. Keep her tight and safe. She’s innocent, and I’m fuckin’ certain she is not aware of seeing something implicating someone. But somebody’s frightened, and they ordered Ellen’s death,” Ghost answered.

“They’ll get to Ellen over our dead bodies,” Drake promised.

“Keep pushing on the extortion ring. It’s somehow linked to Ellen, but I don’t have the details. I gotta go. I’m breaking orders by being here,” Ghost said, casting a wary look around.

Drake reached out and grabbed his arm.

“Come in. Let us protect you,” Drake begged.

“Not until Rage is finally free. And I’m close, Drake. Keep a bunk open for me,” Ghost responded, smiling bitterly.

“You’ve been fifteen years undercover,” Drake whispered.

Ghost smiled.

“I’ve been swimming in shit for fifteen years, brother. It’s nearly over, just a while more,” Ghost said and, pulling his arm free, disappeared into the night.

Drake watched his old friend and wondered whose side Ghost was on.

Casey

I opened my eyelids and blinked in the bright light. A soft moan left my mouth, and I covered my eyes with my arm. Someone rose from beside me, and the curtains were pulled, and I squinted into the dim light as the tall figure of my dad walked back towards me. He sat next to me, and a slight smile crossed his lips at seeing me awake.

“What happened?” I asked.

“You were attacked in your shop again. They got the jump on you... again. We’ll have to work on your situational awareness when you’re better, baby girl.”

“How did I end up here? I can’t believe they let me go,” I said.

“No, they didn’t. They intended to leave your beaten body in the street as a warning. But a member of Rage was watching you, and he stepped in. He shot two of them, and a third was arrested in the shop. One wounded man was picked up when he foolishly came to the hospital for treatment. Rage has apprehended three thugs. The police are holding them as the footage is enough to charge them.”

“Rage? Video footage? Mac told me they’d pulled the cover for the shops,” I muttered.

Dad sent me a stern look, and I flinched.

“Yes, your mother wishes to talk to you about the fiasco in Bernard’s. Causing a scene like that, Casey, it’s very unlike you. But whatever happened, Rage and Hawthorne’s continued watching. The police were already on their way when the Rage member saved you. He took you to the clubhouse, and they called for an ambulance there.”

“You’re ashamed of me, Dad,” I whispered, hearing the censure in his words.

“Yes. I didn’t tell you about Rage for you to tar all of them with one brush. I was giving you the information you needed at the time. Instead, Casey, you rather jumped the gun and accused the entire club of being criminals. Good guys, Casey, can do bad things for a secure future. You look at me with

wonder and love in your eyes. Yet a child of one of the men I killed would hate me and see me as a monster.”

“But you fought for your country!” I exclaimed, hurt that my dad saw himself that way. He twisted his head and stared at me.

“And Rage broke the law so they could uphold the law. I judged them, too, Casey, but I also did research before running my mouth. Those under Bulldog did many illegal things, but they’ve done a lot of good since. And there are women and children today who wouldn’t be alive if Rage hadn’t stepped in and protected them. Maybe when I spoke to you, my own prejudices came through, but I’ve got respect for a man who cuts my daughter loose but still protects her.” I opened my mouth and shut it. Dad was right. Even after our nasty scene in Bernard’s, Mac had gone out on a limb for me. I sighed. Nothing was ever black and white; somehow, I’d forgotten that lesson.

Chapter Five.

Jacob.

Jacob walked into the clubhouse as if he owned it and sought Drake. Without hesitation, Jacob approached Drake, who cocked an eyebrow at the man invading Rage's sanctuary.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Jacob Reeves retired," Jacob announced, holding out his hand.

Drake took it and shook it.

"Thank you for your service. What can I do for you, Sir?" Drake asked.

Jacob peered around and nodded towards the bar.

"A beer would be a good start," Jacob suggested, and Drake snorted in amusement.

Jacob had balls.

"Sure," Drake responded and motioned for Jacob to take a seat. Jacob studied Drake as he walked around the counter and pulled two beers, popping off their lids and handing one to him.

"Casey is stubborn, beautiful, and wild, but stubborn and feels deep. She also feels a responsibility that I drove into her to defend those weaker. She'll fight to the dying breath to protect those she cares about, and Casey won't care who she takes down in the fallout," Jacob declared as Drake studied him.

"Casey sounds like an exceptional woman," Drake said diplomatically, and Jacob threw his head back with a loud chuckle.

"Casey is that and a pain in the ass of everyone she comes across. My daughter judged your man because she's a good girl," Jacob responded finally. Jacob saw Drake try not to respond abruptly and continued. "Casey listens to her father, and I warned her Rage used to be involved in shit similar to what's going down today. What do you think my baby did?"

“Found Rage guilty without knowing us,” Drake replied, taking a drink.

“Yeah, and that is on my shoulders. Casey sucked up my thoughts, and because she knew I’d flip the fuck out if she dated a criminal, she shoved Mac away. Casey wasn’t delicate about it. Now I’ve had time to research and realise I got a lot of stuff wrong. As an honourable man, I’m here to apologise. As I told Casey, good men will commit evil to secure a decent future. They’ll suck crap up while looking forward because they know what and who they wish to become.

“No shit, I wasn’t around for Rage’s battles, but I heard tales. The one time Bulldog set sights on my street, the asshole met my brothers and me. Bulldog didn’t push after that incident.” Jacob stared at Drake.

“Rage tried to put right what Bulldog did, but sometimes shit’s too late. Rage made amends as best as we could. The dirty money Fish got access to, Rage returned to those shop owners and other victims. Once we’d finished reparations, there was plenty left over, so we gave a fuckload to Marsha, Rage’s one old lady, and let her decide where to spend it,” Drake admitted.

“And Marsha did well. But in my arrogant thinking, I thought I knew who Rage was. I fucked up and informed Casey wrongly.” Jacob leaned forward. “I’m aware, Drake Michaelson, that there are bodies very recent in the ground that Rage or an ally put there. And I also know that those are the corpses of some terrible individuals who liked to hurt innocents. Now, I swore a life in service to my country and its people. I may be retired, but that doesn’t mean I turn my back when evil crosses my path.

“Now, it means that when I confront darkness, I have the skills to put it down, as does my daughter. My father owned a shop on that street, and I signed it over to Casey when she finished her education. A Reeves has always had property there, and in our role as leaders, we defend the weak. But it takes a strong man or woman to point out when we are wrong, and my wife, Claire, is one of those. After Claire stopped

reaming me for being so judgemental, she set me homework, and I've diligently obeyed."

"And that was to discover more about Rage?" Drake guessed, and Jacob nodded.

"Yup, and now I'm a prick of the biggest proportions. For a man of my stature, it ain't easy admitting I am wrong, but on rare occasions, I am. And I own my fuckups," Jacob said ruefully and extended a hand to Drake. Jacob hoped Drake understood what he meant. Drake looked at his hand and then grasped it. Jacob yanked Drake forward.

"Good men do dirty shit to ensure life's safe for everybody around them. Good men suffer while innocents celebrate. I served for personal reasons, but Rage found a different way to serve once they carved the evil from the club. It would be an honour, son, to stand with you on this, and let's keep our parts of Rapid City clean. Might also do Casey some good to have a brother to liaise with," Jacob suggested and grinned when Drake threw his head back and laughed.

"You matchmaking fucker," Drake accused.

"Casey don't date. She doesn't tolerate fools, and she'd have had no qualms shooting Mac down, irrespective of whether or not she kicked Mac's ass by mistake. Casey saw something in Mac she liked. Now I am here to ensure Casey puts her screw-up straight and makes amends. But I'm also here to see if I can get me some grandbabies, I hear Mac has a cute little boy," Jacob said without an ounce of embarrassment. Drake laughed harder.

"Casey will have a mountain to climb. She hurt Mac, and he's not one of the more forgiving brothers. But just tell Casey to remind Mac of Lindsey. Casey might not understand, but Mac will. He had to grovel for forgiveness once after Rage jumped the gun and upset a very special lady. Rage also owns our mistakes, Lieutenant-Colonel."

"Call me Jacob because I think we'll be seeing a lot of each other, Drake Michaelson," Jacob said with a wicked grin.

Drake slapped his shoulder and nodded.

Casey

Luckily, my stock didn't just cover women. Men covered thirty per cent of the shop's sales. Dad had discovered a guy named Savage had saved me the other day, so I was wandering around putting a basket together. I was doing two big boxes of stuff for the rest of Rage to share between them. My brand was good, and the men's range was excellent. And I was putting together smaller baskets for Marissa and Willow, who'd insulted me at the restaurant, and for Dylan Hawthorne, Bernard, and the man called Grey. They'd all witnessed my ugly, and I owned that. It was time to make amends. As for Mac, I had something different on offer for him.

Once I'd packed everything up, I turned to my two shop girls and informed them I'd be out for the rest of the day. I had some mileage to cover. Bernard's, the local FBI office, Hawthornes Investigations, a haunted house, and Rage. I planned to visit them in that order, so I headed for Bernard's first. Slightly worried about how Bernard might take my apology, I squared my shoulders and marched straight into the restaurant. The hostess stared at the basket as I asked to see him. Bernard wasn't happy when he saw me standing there.

"Bernard, I wish to apologise. That isn't how I usually am, and I was given erroneous information, leading to making the wrong decision and snap judgements. This isn't for you to rescind the ban, but an apology for upsetting and insulting your restaurant and friends," I said quickly as Bernard frowned.

"Guess you learned a few home truths," Bernard replied, studying my face.

I made to duck behind my hair and then straightened.

"Yes, the hard way," I admitted.

Bernard peered into the basket and groaned. "You buy or own this shit?" he asked.

I felt a momentary pang of worry. "Oh, I own the shop and range. This is all mine."

“My husband goes nuts over this. Absolutely loves your line. Guess I can let bygones be bygones if I’m going to get a thrilled spouse,” Bernard said with a roll of his eyes.

I chuckled, wished him a good evening, and took my leave. One down, many more to go.

At the FBI offices, I was embarrassed when I asked for Agents Willow and Grey. The receptionist stared at me in askance and inquired if I had surnames. Shyly admitting no, she raised an eyebrow and told me to take a seat. Ten minutes later, Willow strolled out, followed by Grey. Willow stopped when she saw me.

“I’m not here to fight, but I am here to apologise,” I said as Willow glared and opened her mouth. Quickly, I rushed through my explanation again and offered her and Grey the baskets as apologies.

“And what do you need from Grey and me?” Willow demanded.

That confused me, and I frowned.

“What?”

“We’re FBI. You must want something. Maybe someone to investigate your case?” Willow suggested, and I stared, horrified.

“Er, no, thank you. The RCPD, Dad, and I are looking into it and chasing leads. We don’t require FBI help, although I am not saying the FBI wouldn’t be helpful, but we don’t need it. And I’m putting my foot in my mouth again. I insulted and upset you, especially as Mac is your uncle. That wasn’t my intention, and this is my apology. I own it when I fuck up, and I did with Mac. Please accept the baskets without expectations of anything in return. And I hope you have a good day,” I replied, shoving the gifts at them. I began walking out fast.

“Casey! Make it right with Mac,” Willow said with a smile. “Because I like a woman who owns her mistakes.”

“Will do!” I called and disappeared.

Dylan Hawthorne was much easier; he took the gift and accepted my apologies but warned he'd monitor me. Dylan brushed it off when I handed over the bigger box for his guys as thanks for watching out for me. He informed me I owed Mac for that, but his men had been monitoring my fellow shopkeepers and keeping us all safe. Marissa, his sister, however, was a different story.

“So a gift basket makes everything okay?” Marissa demanded, looking down at it.

“Nope but saying an honest apology should. I understand if that's not enough. But I committed a terrible mistake and harmed people, to my regret. If you never want to talk to me again, that's cool. But I am genuinely sorry for hurting your feelings.”

“It's Mac you need to make amends with,” Marissa retorted.

“Rage is my final visit today.”

“Then I'll reserve judgement,” Marissa said magnanimously.

I snickered at Marissa's double-sided words.

“Very generous,” I replied, and Marissa regally tilted her head.

“Yes, it is, isn't it? Look, I ain't Rage, but my family and them are close. Us Hawthorne Females, oh, we know what they call us, are friends with the old ladies. All of us would stand for those brothers, the Washington guys, and the Juno Group. They are grey, but the world's a lot fuckin' safer with them in it.

“Remember that serial killer, Frenzy? Rage took Frenzy on as a candidate without knowing what he was. When they discovered his real identity, Rage tracked Frenzy down and handed him over alive to the cops. Many wouldn't have blamed Rage for making him disappear or having his body turn up somewhere. But Rage understood families were suffering and wanted to offer them closure. Drake even discovered the few survivors of Frenzy's attacks and filled their bank accounts so their lives would be a little easier. Of

course, money couldn't replace what they lost, but they didn't need to worry about going hungry or losing their home.

"Drake and Rage didn't have to pay compensation. But they did because even a stranger's pain hurts them. That's the type of guy in Rage MC, honey. Not what you believed. Rage hasn't been a one-percenter club for years, so stop thinking of them as one. Take them as they come, and they'll surprise you," Marissa said, and I listened closely.

That was something else I hadn't known, and my shame grew deeper. How the hell was I meant to look these guys in the eyes again?

Marissa continued. "Plus Casey, Mac has Blue. Don't mess him about, because that baby is everything to him. Don't take on Mac unless you can handle Blue."

"Making me feel even more guilty ain't gonna do much good, Marissa. I already feel bad, and I plan to apologise, especially to Mac. I am old and ugly enough to admit my mistakes. But before my courage leaves me and I collapse into a nervous wreck, I'm gonna get going. Enjoy the basket and take care of yourself," I replied.

Marissa nodded, shrewd eyes watching.

"Hey, Delta Force, you make shit right with the guys and want a wild night out, let me know! Us Hawthorne Females appreciate how to party," Marissa called, and I waved a hand. I was unsure if being invited was a step forward or back!



When I arrived at Rage, men were pulling down the shutters on the bays and walking to cars. I bit my lip as I glanced towards the grey concrete building with several flags flying above it. Was that the Rage clubhouse, or did they congregate elsewhere? I drove over, parked out front, and grabbed Savage's basket. Oh well, I could only look a fool once I decided and knocked loudly. A scuff of boots made me jump, and I spun around to see Drake standing there with another

brother. Both guys were frowning, and Drake's eyes held puzzlement as he spied the hamper in my hands.

"It's for Savage. Dad told me Savage was the one who saved me. It's a thank-you gift from my shop, my range of men's toiletries. Even men moisturise nowadays," I babbled, and the handsome man next to Drake's eyebrows disappeared into his hairline.

"They do?" Drake rumbled, still not looking friendly.

"Yes," I replied firmly. "I should know because I serve plenty."

"Gonna stand there all day or what?" a grumpy voice demanded. Surprised, I jumped and spun to see a guy glowering. My eyes dropped to his cut, and I saw the name Savage.

"Hi, you're Savage!"

"Yeah?" he answered, and his unfriendliness was off-putting, but I hung in there.

"This is a thank you for saving my life." I thrust the basket into his hands, and Savage stared in disbelief before glancing at Drake and the other guy for a clue.

"Woman says men moisturise," Drake said with a barely concealed grin.

"Do I fuckin' look like I do?" Savage demanded.

"Oh, there are shower gels, beard lotions, and shampoos. Not just moisturising creams," I replied.

Savage once again stared at Drake for a lead.

"Say thank you, Savage," Drake prompted, and the other guy, I now saw was called Jett, laughed.

"Thanks?" Savage said, but it sounded more like a question. Savage sent me a confused glance before heading back into the clubhouse.

"There's some stuff for everyone here. Two boxes for the brothers and a couple for the old ladies. It's not much of an apology, but it's heartfelt," I spoke to Drake, holding his eyes.

“Club will appreciate the apology, Casey, but it is Mac you need to grovel to,” Drake said as a scowl crossed Jett’s face.

I straightened my shoulders, handed Drake a box, and shoved one at Jett.

“Then let’s do this. Would you mind collecting the other two boxes for me, please?” I asked and pushed into the clubhouse. I moved to the side as Drake and Jett entered the door, dumped their packages on a pool table, and headed back out. Meanwhile, I tried not to flinch at the hostility that slapped me in waves. I gazed around, trying to seek Mac out, and couldn’t see him. Drake returned with Jett and put the last few packages on the pool table before Drake swept the room with his own gimlet stare.

“Where’s Mac?” Drake asked.

“What’s she want?” a guy demanded.

“Ezra, where is Mac?” Drake inquired again.

“Ain’t saying until I know what that bitch is doing here,” Ezra replied.

“I’m here to say sorry,” I announced clearly, and everyone’s eyes turned to me.

“Shit get too hot for you? Decide you needed a man around to protect you?” another brother urged hatefully.

“Mac don’t need your sort,” a third said.

“And I don’t desire your mouth or a man’s protection. I can handle myself. Now, I’m here to apologise to the club and Mac. Could you fetch Mac?” I sought, glaring at the guys.

Drake snorted.

“You’ve got balls, woman. I’ll give you that!” Drake announced before moving away.

“More than most men. Is Mac here or not?” I demanded.

“Nope, ain’t here,” a Native American answered with a glower.

“Fine. I’d like to apologise for how I judged the MC and misjudged you all. Truthfully, I was out of line and a bitch. I’ve never seen shit in shades of black and white before, and I don’t know why I did this time. But that’s no excuse for how I behaved and embarrassed Mac and your club. And thank you for saving me the other day. I would have got free, but not before harm found me in one shape or form. You went above and beyond for someone who didn’t deserve it, and that speaks volumes about who Rage is. So, I hope you enjoy the gifts I brought, but I need to find Mac,” I announced, offered everyone a nod, and turned on my heel.

With great effort, I kept my shoulders straight, head held high, and walked out. I could feel their laser beam stares glaring at my back, but it was done and dusted. I’d said sorry and meant it. As I strode out, heading to my car, I spotted a man striding around the corner of the wall, and my heart kicked. It was Mac. Mac’s head was down, typing on his phone, and I began moving toward him. He stopped near the entrance as he concentrated on whatever he was reading.

As I was walking towards him, I could see everything. Mac was distracted and not paying attention. A car edged out in traffic, and I noticed the licence plates were missing. Without hesitating, I broke into a run and screamed at Mac to get down. Mac looked up from his phone in surprise as I flew toward him, and he began turning around as tyres screeched. I slammed into Mac and took him down to the ground mere seconds before bullets were fired. Using my momentum, I rolled Mac twice before stealing the gun I saw in his waistband.

Quickly leaping to my feet, I raced into the road, ignoring cars swerving and shot at the unmarked sedan. I hit it three times before it swerved and crashed into another. I was already running before it stopped, and I was yanking open the passenger door within seconds of the crash. A brief glance showed me the driver with a bullet through his brain, but the passenger surged upwards and landed a blow on my chin. I reeled back but ducked low and swept his legs out. A swift kick to the head dazed him while the rear door opened, and another assailant charged.

I landed three punches on his jaw and slammed my foot into the downed man. The second guy came at me and caught me fair on the ribs. The blow lifted me off my toes, so I jabbed my head under his chin. A roar of pain escaped as he bit into his tongue, and I spun and shoved an elbow into his nose, breaking it in one clean move. He went down hard, and I put my foot out, catching him in the throat and leaving him choking as I turned to the larger male.

That fucker attacked from behind and wrapped his arms around me. My ribs screamed from where I'd been punched, and this asshole was crushing me. I kicked backwards in his shin, making him move a little and then, placing my feet on the car, ran up the side and used my weight to flip backwards. My weight pulled him down, and I heard his spine crack before he landed on the pavement with my face in his chest. I kned him straight in the head and then kicked out with my other foot under his chin, and he flopped under me.

Another set of arms closed around me, and I dropped my weight. But he expected that. He forced me toward a van that had pulled up haphazardly, and as we got close, I slammed my head upwards, hitting his chin. I lifted my legs up and locked them on either side of the open door. In this position, he couldn't shove me inside, and I jabbed both my elbows, catching him in the ribs. He let go of me just as something punched my neck, and I landed hard on my tailbone. I'd been expecting that, but I still caught my breath.

Acting on instinct, I rolled backwards onto my shoulders and punched upwards, hitting him in his groin. As he bent, I brought my legs forward and kicked him in the face, and he went down hard on top of me. With more than a bit of spite, I ground my elbow into his dick as I sensed a fourth assailant behind me. I yanked the gun I'd stolen from Mac from the ground, spun, and just stopped myself from firing.

"God damn it, Casey! Stop pointing guns at me!" Mac yelled in my face.

"Stop creeping up on me!" I shouted back as I staggered to the side of the road. I sat down hard and relaxed backwards on my elbows as I gasped for breath.

“How bad are you hurt?” Mac questioned, following me.

“Two broken ribs and some severe bruising, but hey, what an apology, right? Saving your life counts for something,” I said and leaned my head back. Huh, my cheek was bleeding, fancy that.

“Is she fuckin’ kidding me?” Mac asked of someone.

“Look, I came to apologise. No better apology than saving you. We’re even stevens,” I chortled, and Mac turned red. Puce wasn’t a great colour on Mac by a long shot.

“Are you insane?” Mac demanded.

“Oh, stop hovering over me. I’m fine. I saw the car and knew you weren’t reacting quick enough, and now I saved your life. Mac, you’re welcome,” I responded with sarcasm.

Mac and now Drake were shaking their heads in disbelief.

“Ramirez just arrived. He’d been coming our way and called the attack in,” Rock mentioned, approaching Drake at a jog.

Strangely, I was starting to feel lightheaded and very happy.

“Hey Rock, how’s it hanging, bro!” I said cheerfully and then laid back on the pavement. Fuck, I think I was running on adrenaline. Because I was never this fuckin’ happy.

“Bitch high or injured?” Rock asked.

“Fuck knows, but Casey ain’t making sense,” Mac grumbled.

“Oh, hush up. You’re pissy because I saved your ass. Two fired, you know? The passenger and the backseat asshole. They meant business and intended for you to be riddled with bullets. Just admit it wasn’t the way you wanted me on top of you, and we’re fine, Mac. Shit’s all good! Hey, I think I’ve been drugged. I’ve been jabbed!” I said, poking my neck with a finger and finding a spot of blood.

“What the fuck?” Mac demanded, turning my head to get a look.

“Rock, search for a syringe,” Drake said as he checked my pupils and started taking my pulse.

“Oh, happy days,” I began singing, and Drake rolled his eyes.

“Casey’s high as a kite. Mac, we need to get her to the hospital and have her system flushed. If Casey fought like that drugged, can you imagine her unimpaired?”

“I don’t need to. I fuckin’ been on the receiving end,” Mac grumbled.

“Casey okay?” someone asked, and I squinted up and waved.

“Hi, detective dude! How’s it hanging? Better than that guy, I guess. I broke his dick. They say it ain’t possible to break a cock, but if you hit it in the right place, you can break a dick. Hey Mac, I didn’t snap your dick, honey. It will be usable by the time I’ve sobered up. Such a nice cock. Anyway, asshole won’t use his again because I made sure of that. Motherfucker tried to rape me before, and I recognised him. Who’s laughing now, bitch tits? Ha, we can call you the bus stop wanker because that’s all you’ll be doing in the future,” I crowed. Muted amusement met me as I began babbling about the ways to torture a man’s balls.

“What the fuck happened to Casey?” Ramirez asked with a wince, his laughter stopping when I mentioned twisting the sacs in two different directions.

“They drugged Casey to make her more malleable. It backfired, and Casey broke his dick,” Drake said, trying to control his amusement as I rattled on.

“Hey Drake, dude, don’t let the bus stop wanker go. A-hole tried to shove his broken cock in me. Won’t be shoving it anywhere anytime soon. Damn, he’s gonna be someone’s bitch in prison,” I chuckled and high-fived myself.

“Shit, Casey’s worse than Mina,” Mac muttered, staring.

“Mac, you owe me dinner, asshole. I saved your life, so now you owe me. Let’s skip the fancy food shit and go for a ride

because you know you wanna ride me! Yeah, boy, ride me like a cowboy!”

“Casey is gonna regret this in the morning.” Drake chuckled.

“Don’t worry. I got everything on record!”

“Tye, give me that fuckin’ phone!” Mac roared.

“Over my dead body. Prospect keep filming,” Drake ordered.

“Hey, no videoing our kinky shit. That’s for our eyes only,” I muttered, feeling sleepy.

“Who said we’re getting kinky?” Mac asked.

I frowned at Mac before beaming.

“Oh, you know you wanna do me. Stop lying. Your dick likes me.” I giggled and yawned.

“He’s about the only one who does,” Mac grumbled, and I grinned.

“At least someone fuckin’ does!”

Chapter Six.

Casey

I groaned as I blinked my eyes. Damn, my face felt like it had gone ten rounds with Mike Tyson, and I had well and truly lost. My left side was swollen, and my eyelid closed. Images flickered through my mind in rapid succession. Apologising to everyone I'd insulted or hurt, Mac strolling across the forecourt, the sedan speeding at us, the fight and then, strangely, a jumble I couldn't figure out. I heard movement and opened my good eye and saw Dad peering at me.

"Morning, cupcake," he said solemnly. Behind him, sleeping in a chair, was Mac.

"What on earth happened?" I urged, confused. "I remember fighting and then nothing. Just get flashes."

"You were drugged, Casey, to make you malleable. Or Mac easier to manage." Something in Dad's voice tipped me off.

"What aren't you telling me?" I asked suspiciously.

A deep red started at the base of my dad's neck.

"You were rather chatty, Casey," Dad admitted.

"Dad!"

"Damnit, Casey! Let's say I learned more concerning your sex life than I wished to! I know what age you lost your virginity, who too, and how crappy he was in bed. And you've had three lovers who failed to give you the goodies! And your friend Bob is the best you have ever had." Dad was redder than a tomato, as was I. Oh God, there's shit you don't tell your parents!

"That's not all I said?" I pressed, and Dad shifted in his chair.

"No, you were graphic in what you wished to do to Mac. I'm surprised Mac didn't run for the hills. Your mother is going to have a serious chat with you!"

“Oh, like you and Mom didn’t go at it like rabbits!” I replied mulishly. How bloody embarrassing. Crap, I wanted the ground to open and swallow me, but it wasn’t obeying.

“Not in public! And we never discussed that with you!” Dad spat. His eyes kept avoiding me, and a sinking sensation settled in my gut.

“What aren’t you saying?”

Dad choked and clammed up.

“Casey, you claimed that if you were that way inclined, you’d gang bang all of Rage. Have them lined up for goodies,” Mac’s amused voice said. “And offered a threesome to a paramedic and me.”

“No!” I exclaimed in horror.

“Yup, and told a nurse if you swung that way, you’d do her too. But sadly, you didn’t. You then confessed you were a criminal, that you had stolen chocolate bars when a child, and were also guilty of jaywalking,” Mac added.

“Oh, and admitted you cheated on several maths tests and skipped sports for six weeks because you pretended to have hurt your ankle. And snuck out of the house to kiss Andy Briars, who you think you turned gay because they weren’t great kisses,” Dad declared, sounding even unhappier.

“And said that you stuffed your bra when you were thirteen and late to develop. Didn’t Casey also admit to licking a rival’s pizza before serving her it in school? Oh, you sewed prawns in an ex-boyfriend’s curtains when he cheated on you. That was lover number three, who you proclaimed to all and sundry that he may have had a big dick but did not know how to use it.” Mac grinned from his chair.

“Oh, God!” I moaned and dropped my head back to the pillow.

“Bit gross when you said you spat in the woman’s coffee who he was cheating on you with. Really, Casey, you have quite the temper and range of skills required for vengeance. And speaking of revenge, you told everyone how you used to hire your skill set to get revenge on cheaters in various ways.

The best one was where you borrowed your friends' kids, stalked a colleague's two-timing husband, and showed up with seven children wailing and creating a scene. Forewarned is forearmed!" Mac announced smugly.

Damn, I had done all those things and could sense Dad's eyes glaring. Shit, he wasn't so proud of me at the moment.

"Love you, Daddy?" I whimpered, and Dad and Mac both snorted.

"Sure you do, Casey, but you have quite a vengeful streak. I will say you terrified half the brothers in Rage while amusing the rest. There were several mentions of keeping you away from Lindsey, Artemis, and Autumn because the men thought Armageddon would arrive early," Dad replied.

"But your mom is proud of you," Mac said and began laughing as Dad made a disgusted noise.

"Her mother comes across all prim and proper, but half those antics she would have dreamed up herself. Claire is exactly the same but hides it better. I knew the moment I gazed into Casey's eyes we had a firecracker, and I sure as hell wasn't wrong," Dad responded with a long-suffering sigh.

"The world hates me!" I complained and covered the good side of my face with my arm.

"Not as much as me right now," Dad whined.

"Oh?"

"Casey, you were quite detailed about your ex's failings in bed. No father should hear his daughter wanted to be done like a split roast and instead got a... No, I can't say it," Dad broke off and shook his head.

"Got a man who kept going like the Duracell bunny but with no technique," Mac offered helpfully.

"Urgh," I whimpered and changed the subject.

"Did they take anyone alive?" I asked.

Mac shifted his chair closer.

“The van driver got away. The sedan driver had a perfect shot straight through his head. But the other three men were arrested. Ramirez is disturbed at how this gang has lost seven members, and yet they’ve kept coming. So far, none, including the previous captives, have spoken a single word. But it seems their focus has shifted from the shopkeepers to you or Rage. Hawthorne will continue surveillance, and we’ll continue to keep people on the street,” Mac elaborated.

“But you don’t think they’re under threat anymore?” I asked, concerned.

“No, I think you’re target number one because you’ve fucked their plans up. And Rage is second because we’re aware of what’s going on,” Mac replied.

“Is Blue at risk because of my actions?” I demanded with fear in my voice. Mac sent me a warm look that made my bones weaken.

“No. And he spends a lot of time at HQ locked up behind solid glass or he is always with a brother or old lady. Blue is never left with strangers,” Mac replied. I nodded as my mind raced ahead.

“What I wish to know is how many they have that they can afford to keep losing guys? That’s a worry for me. They will either take more desperate risks or attack in force. And I don’t enjoy fighting an unknown number of men. And with those locked up keeping their mouth shut, that means that this isn’t some random gang off the street. These are trained to some degree,” Dad said, and I agreed.

“Drake and Rage agree that they aimed to ruin Rage’s reputation. Your row of shops is just outside our boundary, so eventually, it would have got back to us what is happening. Unfortunately, Rage found out earlier than they wanted because whatever their next step was, we’d thrown it out of whack. That’s why the attacks are so random now,” Mac added.

“Was anyone else hurt when they began firing?” I asked.

“No, I was the target, and they had a clear line of sight. I was lucky because I wasn’t alert. Rage is on lockdown,” Mac said.

“What’s that?” Dad demanded.

“Women and children are not allowed on Rage until this is finished. Rage won’t ever risk them getting hurt. I can’t wait until the new walls are built. That will stop this bullshit of keeping our families apart. I didn’t like the idea of hiding behind eight-foot walls. Now I can’t fuckin’ wait,” Mac said.

“I don’t understand,” Dad replied.

“No, I expect you don’t. Rage bought the buildings on our block and now owns the entire block. We’re knocking them down. Rage is establishing a new, larger clubhouse, a small guest accommodation, swimming pool, playground and other shit. And we’re extending the garage and putting in a few other buildings. But around the clubhouse and outside space for the kids, we’re raising an eight-foot wall because stuff like this keeps happening! And Rage ain’t encouraging it!” Mac said hotly.

I felt Mac’s anger. If what he’d told me was true, and I firmly believed it was, Rage was clean and desired a simple life. Instead, trouble kept finding them and putting their families at risk. That sucked big time. Now Rage had to keep their women and children behind a wall to ensure their safety.

“Sorry, Mac,” I whispered.

“Not your fault, Casey,” Mac replied.

“But somehow, I feel it is. Rage wasn’t involved until I attacked you,” I replied, heavy on guilt.

“Casey, I already said this was aimed at Rage. We’re sorry for you and your fellow shopkeepers being dragged in,” Mac insisted. Dad was frowning.

“What is it, Dad?”

“Can’t help but feel these are diversionary tactics. Giving you an issue right on your doorstep while something bigger is

going down. Rage's attention is fully on this problem, and it's come out of the blue. Why?" Dad urged.

"Jacob, that's a damn good question," Mac drawled. "Santos."

"Who?" I sought, but Dad's nose wrinkled in disgust.

"Santos is a career criminal who wants to rule the city. From what I've heard, Rage has stopped many of his enterprises alongside a mercenary called Artemis. He's been hiding and keeping low for a few years. Are you telling me Santos is back?" Dad asked Mac, who was tapping on his phone.

"Yes, he brazenly had lunch at Bernard's, a place well known to be under Rage protection. Bernard's husband works with Drake's wife at the Phoenix Trust, and Phoe, Stefan, and Bernard are pretty tight. Shit, this makes sense. Distract us while he is running some other scheme. Rage needs to call a meeting," Mac announced and jabbed his phone again.

"I'd like to attend, son. I've got some people I can bring to the mix," Dad replied, and I jolted. Dad meant his old team.

"Dad?" I whispered. He smiled reassuringly. "You retired from this shit."

"Still Delta Force, baby girl. Bet my boys are bored fuckin' stupid. This will be right up their alley," Dad mused as Mac glanced up.

"If you've got allies, Jacob, they'd be welcome. Drake will set a date for a meeting asap. Jacob, I'll inform you of the time and place."

"I'll be there," Dad responded, and I shook my head.

"No, we'll both be, Dad. Both of us, this concerns me too, and you didn't raise me to hide away," I retorted.

Dad offered a sharp nod before looking down at his mobile.

"Mom's arrived and wants me to meet her in the car park. Mac, will you wait with Casey?"

"Sure," Mac replied, typing one last thing on his phone and then shoving it into his cut. Dad left the room, and Mac stared

at me. I wriggled in the bed, torn between blurting an apology for how I'd judged him and then another for what I'd said to him while drugged. Ah, to hell with it.

"Sorry for being judgemental. I had bad information and went with it, and I should have given you a fair chance," I announced.

Mac's eyes held mine.

"Hard to forgive when someone uses the past against you when they do not know what crap you were trapped in. When they have no clue how many times a day you showered but still didn't feel clean. And the times you gazed into a whore's face and begged her to leave the life and escape. Yeah, I did shit, Casey, and I'll never be proud of it. But I'm damn grateful my actions got Rage clean and gave us a future. If not for Drake and those like me, we'd probably be six feet under, and innocents would have suffered.

"Phoe wouldn't have met Drake, and her ex would've murdered her. Same goes for Lindsey. Carly would be nothing but a pussy used to keep her asshole brothers supplied with coke and drink. Their three adopted children would have entered the system, and who knows what would have happened to them? Mina's stalker probably would have killed her alongside a lot of other innocents.

"And I could go on with the kids we've adopted and saved. Two brave FBI agents who risked everything to bring a cartel down would be dead. Penny and her children would have been burned alive, and I can keep going, Casey, on the good we have done since getting clean. And then there's my son. Christ knows what would have happened to Blue if I hadn't been around." Mac's eyes flashed as he spoke of Blue.

I sensed there was something to Blue's story I didn't know.

"I am honestly sorry. Mac, I'd no idea about this, and I jumped the gun."

"Last time you listened to Jacob, right?" Mac teased, and my head shot up. "You don't know? Jacob did his own research after the scene in Bernard's and concluded he had

misjudged us. He had a beer with Drake, apologised, and admitted he'd given you misleading information.

“In our past, those crimes existed. Maybe we didn't pay the price in a lawman's eyes. But we paid the price. A girl was snatched and tortured and left for dead, destroying one brother. Phoe was shot on Rage, and Drake nearly lost her and Dante, the baby. Gunner was taken and tortured. Jett took a beating and nearly watched his wife raped, and he wasn't part of us back then. Rage has paid for our history in many ways, yet it haunts us.

“Which is why, even though I was against changing the club's patch privately, I agreed. Because I've seen Blaze, Hunter, and Jett suffer for Rage's past, and I don't want to watch anyone else go through that. I see the old patch as a sign of our strength, proof we survived and got clean. But others view it with fear and loathing. And our legacies, candidates, and prospects only deserve the good of Rage. Not the history of Rage.”

“And I did what strangers have done and judged you by rumours and gossip,” I said, shame in my voice.

“Yeah, you did. But then, beautiful girl, you realised you made a wrong and set out to make it right. I've spoken to Hawthorne, Marissa, Bernard, Willow, and Grey, and I heard Savage is taking some shit for his hamper, but he ain't sharing. The boxes you brought have also been emptied. And it takes guts to face a club of hostile brothers and apologise, but Drake said it was clearly heartfelt. And then, Casey, you saved my life. So, I think you're forgiven, although the old ladies will take some work,” Mac mused. “Especially Lindsey.”

“Lindsey?” I asked. Mac kept mentioning her.

“Lindsey's married to Lowrider, but every woman has a platonic husband. No sexual shit or anything kinky. But when they're unsure of rules or need someone to talk to who won't blow up, get a gun and resolve it for them, they turn to their alternative, as we're called. When Lindsey first came to the club, I fucked her over, accused her of some crap she didn't do, and I nearly got her killed. Instead, I took the bullets for

her and considered we were even. Lindsey thought otherwise, and now I'm her alternative.

“When Lowrider doesn't let Lindsey spend five k on a pair of shoes, it's me she bitches to. When Lowrider's out on patrol and she doesn't feel safe, Lindsey calls me. And when she worries shit is going down with the club and recognises Lowrider can't handle her fears, I listen. Lowrider wants nothing more than Lindsey to feel cherished and happy. If he knew she'd wait until he came home or worry herself sick, it would make him unhappy. So, I take those feelings on for her, and she and Lowrider live in a cheerful bubble.”

“And all the old ladies have one?”

“Yup, even Mina, somehow, she claimed Savage, much to his disgust. But Savage stood with Mina through her drama. And when Mina shot the cop in her kitchen and had nightmares, Savage was there to soothe them away when Hunter's on patrol. Savage slept downstairs in her house whenever Hunter worked late for the club. It gives Mina some much-needed security,” Mac explained.

“Mina, do you mean Thomasina Mae Blake?” I gasped vaguely, recalling she'd been involved in some nasty shit.

“Yes, Rage boasts a Hollywood actress. How about that!” Mac teased.

“Guess you got some special women in Rage,” I said.

“Yeah, and some fuckin' special brothers. Calamity brought down Frenzy by protecting Silvie. Fuck, did that kid take a beating before help arrived. Calamity was determined not to let Frenzy kidnap Silvie. Tye Michaelson, yeah, you know that name, is a prospect now, and so is Carmine Michaelson. They are Drake and Phoe's boys. Jett is renowned for his builds and designs within the MC and motorbike world. Klutz was gonna be a doctor when shit went bad for him. And I can keep going, but you'll learn their stories as you go and be the better for knowing them,” Mac responded.

“Oh, you're sure of that?” I asked.

Mac grinned.

“I heard in precise detail what you want to do to me. Yeah, Casey, I’m fuckin’ certain.” Damn my potty mouth! I moved my lips to answer, but the door opened, and my parents came in.

“Casey!” Mom exclaimed and bustled over to give me a peck and examine my bruising, which I am sure looked spectacular. She studied me intently before spinning on Mac with a smile on her face that I quickly recognised.

“Hello, I’m Claire Reeves, and you’re Casey’s young man!”

Mac hitched an eyebrow but rose to his feet to take Mom’s hand. Yeah, that would not happen. Mom enveloped Mac in an enormous hug and patted his back.

“I’m so excited to meet you!” she gushed. Oh boy, here we go. “Anybody Casey thinks is worth risking her life to save must be very special indeed. I’m looking forward to getting to know my future son-in-law! And my grandbaby, I don’t see him here today?”

Mac displayed shock and then humour as I gaped at my mother’s audacity.

“Dad! Control her!” I whispered, and Dad shrugged. There was no controlling Mom when she was in this mischievous mood.

“Casey, hush. It’s pretty obvious you care deeply for this young man, and what a handsome fellow he is too! Such big arms. They remind me of your father when he was this age. And that tee, I bet, hides a six-pack. I bet that little bundle of joy looks just like his father. Jacob had such a wonderful figure, you know, entirely lickable from head to toe.”

“Mother!” I wailed as a grin broke out on Mac’s face.

“What, darling? Now don’t stress yourself. Young man, I brought food because no way is Casey ever going to eat the slop they dish up here. But around the corner is a lovely café where we could do lunch,” Mom said, beaming at Mac. I recognised the canny gleam in her eyes and knew exactly what Mom was doing.

“Don’t fall for the bimbo act, Mac. Check her eyes out. Mom is as cunning as the devil. She’s taking your measurements, and while doing so, she’s also matchmaking. And embarrassing the hell out of me. Mom, stop!” I demanded.

Mac looked trapped now, no doubt wanting to avoid lunch with this overly effervescent woman. Mom shot me a sharp look before patting Mac on the arm.

“Ignore Casey. She’s always been tetchy when she is poorly.”

“I’m not ill, Mom. I got in a fight and kicked some ass,” I retorted.

Dad laughed as Mom turned back to me and raised an eyebrow.

“Well, they kicked your butt, too. Guess you forgot to duck, Casey. You need to go a couple of rounds with your father or Uncle Gilbert. You’ll soon learn how to move again,” Mom said with a bite.

Mac’s gaze was swapping between us, not sure of what he was witnessing.

“Screw getting in the ring with Uncle Gilbert. He hits like a tank. Uncle Gilbert’s given me enough bruises to last a lifetime,” I hissed.

“Yes, and after the new ones he’ll give you, you’ll duck!” Mom retorted, and Mac sat down quietly.

“You’re okay with Casey fighting?” Mac asked.

“Oh, Gilbert will bat Casey around the ring a few times. She’ll get a couple of bruises, but they won’t be noticeable unless she gets naked. Are you at that stage yet? You might have to cut the aerodynamics in the bedroom, but nothing too major. The missionary position can be creative too,” Mom smiled at Mac, waiting for the shock factor.

Instead, Mac gazed at her shrewdly.

“Mother!” I shrieked.

“You finished trying to embarrass Casey and chase me away yet? Or is there more?” Mac asked.

Mom tossed her hair back and started laughing. “You’ll do Mac. Come to dinner next Friday when Casey is out and recovered. I make a mean pot roast and a scrumptious apple pie,” Mom responded and opened the bags she’d brought. Mac met my glance over her head, and his lips twisted up in amusement.

“I’d love to,” he replied. “There’s always room for pie.”

“Hear that, Jacob? That’s a son-in-law I can support. Yum!” Mom announced and gave Mac a wrapped sandwich.

“Roast pork with stuffing and apple sauce. One of Casey’s favourite comfort foods, enjoy,” she said. Mother handed me one, and then Dad before she perched on Dad’s lap and grinned at me. Oh, Mom was in so much trouble it didn’t compute. I’d get revenge if it was the last thing I did.

“Most men run the gauntlet of fathers. Yours is your mother,” Mac announced when my parents had left. Mom spent most of the visit gushing over Mac, trying to make him uncomfortable in a multitude of ways.

“Oh no, they still have to get past Dad. Mom’s the second barrier,” I replied.

“I liked them. Both protective but also willing to let you be the badass you are,” Mac said.

“Mom had no choice. Dad was going to train me no matter what. She gets her revenge in other ways.” I laughed.

“I can imagine; they’re good people,” Mac replied.

“Proud of them. You mentioned you had a sister?” Mac broke into the biggest grin I’d yet seen from him.

“Yeah, Paisley, Drake, and I got her out of Rapid city and to my grandma’s in Wyoming. Paisley is amazing.”

“What does she do?”

“She’s a lawyer. Drake and I smuggled her out when Bulldog began amping things up. I sent Paisley to my grandma

on my mother's side. We've stayed in contact and had a good relationship. Grams was overjoyed to take Paisley, and they're very close. They still live together in the farmhouse Grams owns. We try to spend a weekend together every month."

"That's sweet. Who's Silvia?" I asked.

Mac snorted and looked at the tattoo on his biceps.

"Grams," Mac replied.

"Thought so."

"I've got a tat across my chest, 1983. That's when Paisley was born. Fuck, I didn't know what to make of this pink squalling thing that my mom brought home. But I fell head over heels for her," Mac admitted, and I smiled. That was sweet.

"You love her very much."

"Worship the ground she walks on. Paisley is the best sister I could have asked for. She's never criticised or judged the path I walked. She understood what I was trying to create, and, in her own way, Paisley created that with Grams. Now you know everything relevant. You gonna date me or what?" Mac demanded, and my jaw dropped open.

"That's blunt," I said with a chuckle.

"I'm a Rage brother Casey. We see what we want and chase hell for leather after it. I wanna see if my first impression of you was right."

"We can start again. God knows I'm the one who fucked everything up."

"I imagine growing up with someone like Jacob, that things were very regimented in your household. That, although you understood grey, black and white often won out. But life has many shades of grey. And I'll be honest, Casey, and upfront. Rage still commits crimes in your eyes, and the laws to make Rapid City a safe place. A terrible man may disappear because justice won't punish him because he has the money to bribe his way out. A snitch might get beaten for selling Rage out.

“We do not flinch from using force to move along those who wish to sell drugs to kids. And should anyone fuck with one of our women or children, there’ll be a bullet and unmarked grave waiting for him. But we don’t traffic women, indulge in prostitution, sell drugs, or run arms. Or anything like that. Rage protects our own and makes sure that our way of life and our friends are protected. Now I know dropping that on you may cause some bad feelings, especially after yesterday.

“So, I’ll do the decent thing and give you a few days to think about it. Rage is borderline grey and won’t change. We’ll walk a fine line between right and wrong, and we will always support the underdog. Whatever that route takes. And Casey, you need to know this. I’ve had blood on my hands in the past and recently. But I saved lives, and to me, that’s what’s important. So, I’ll leave you before we have another scene. Think shit through because this life is what you’ll be a part of. And once I claimed you, I’d expect you to have my back.” Mac rose to his feet, his eyes staring deep into my soul. He smiled and then left.

Well, that was some information he’d given me to consider!

Chapter Seven.

This was the strangest meeting I'd ever attended. Four days after my release from the hospital, I was back at Rage and sat in their inner sanctum. The large room was crowded with a group of strangers (to me) I'd never witnessed the likes of.

Dylan Hawthorne was present, with his second in command, Davies, a woman called Leila and his cousin, Arturo. Beside them was a guy whose name everybody was familiar with. James Washington. The former heavy-time hitter in the criminal world, James had gone straight when his best friend was killed. With James stood his bodyguard, Adam, his nephew, Jamie and his close friend, Jason. Crowded in behind them was the Juno Group. I'd never heard of them, but Dad clearly had as he nodded respectfully to the red-headed Artemis, who I recognised from the clubhouse.

Artemis was next to a Japanese guy she called her brother, Akemi, a fellow named Nigel, and a man and woman introduced as Simone and Butch. All of them owned an air of strength and danger. Opposite them were Detectives Ramirez and Ben, with Bobby Lucas and Dan Horton, the uniformed officers I recognised. Then there were us, Dad, Uncle Major Gilbert Cunningham and two Master Sergeants I knew from Dad's parade and drill days. Jonathon Kind and Harris Botham were not people I'd like to meet on a dark night.

There were other MCs here, starting with The Unwanted Bastards. Their President was called Inglorious, and his VP, Psych and Enforcer Mouse, accompanied him. They were talking quietly to a second MC, The Fallen Warriors. Their President, Lance, was a stern-looking guy who was clearly formerly military. His VP, Bat, and Enforcer, Sniper were also ex-military. Being around armed forces for so long made them easy to spot. The third MC present was Hellfire; Chance was the president and Drake's cousin. Chance had his VP, Bear, and an older man, his Chaplin, known as Big Al. The last member was a mountain of a man named Magic, a nomad with some secret power, considering the respectful looks he got.

Willow and Grey were sitting next to Inglorious, and occasionally I saw Inglorious teasing Willow, who gave as good back. And finally, Rage slotted themselves into the room. Drake, Ace, Apache, Gunner, Rock, Axel, and Mac. We were truly a motley crew, but no one seemed awkward, not even the Feds or cops. In fact, Bobby Lucas wholeheartedly explained to Bat what I'd done to Mac, who was leaning over the table laughing his ass off. Silently, I noted Mac's disgust and saw a mental promise cross his mind to get revenge.

"Let's call this meeting," Drake said, banging a gavel.

People stopped talking and looked towards him.

"When Casey was hospitalised the second time, a habit for that girl, I'm thinking, her, Mac and Jacob hit on something, and I think we need to chase it. Jacob, please take the floor?" Dad nodded.

"I was listening to Casey and Mac talk about the attacks and extortion of our neighbourhood shopkeepers and wondered why now. Rage has been clean for over a decade, and none of it made sense. There was no reason to cause Rage trouble because they'd proved themselves legal. But if this were planned to keep Rage and RCPD occupied chasing a local gang making threats, then their attention would be kept away from the genuine issue."

"Jacob, you're saying this was diversionary?" Ramirez asked, his head snapping up.

"Yeah. RCPD and Rage were busy with what was happening to us while the actual crimes occurred elsewhere. The whole situation was orchestrated to keep Rage trying to prove their innocence while police ran in circles looking for these assholes," Dad said.

"It worked," Apache agreed.

"Not well enough. Those men behind bars won't speak, which means they are organised. These aren't some local gangs who felt like pocketing some money. These are highly trained," Dad added.

“I discovered they belong to a mercenary team who travels the world selling their services to the highest bidder. Problems Solved is the group’s name, and they hid their tracks well, but no one can beat me,” Nigel mentioned. Leila coughed. “Apart from Leila. But together, we’re dynamic. The mercs are known in the criminal circles, and they’ve crossed paths with the Juno Group three times and lost each battle.”

“Which means we have some experience of how they’ll play this. They will stay quiet until bailed and disappear to another country. They won’t set foot back in Rapid City again. We’ve got the judge to delay seeing them, but they’re in court in two days, then they’ll be in the breeze,” Artemis spoke, which didn’t sit well with Dad.

“We’ll pick that up, Sir,” Jonathon replied, and Dad nodded.

“My team was digging around, trying to discover what it could be that they’re helping to cover. Mac mentioned a man called Santos. Yes, I am familiar with him. Santos clashed once with me and did not bother coming back. Major Cunningham, please inform everyone what you’ve discovered,” Dad said.

“Well, I ruled out certain suspects: guns, drugs, the usual shit. While they are evident in Rapid City, there’s been no upscale in movement. However, when I dug deeper, RC and the surrounding area, within a hundred miles radius, had experienced the disappearance of thirty girls aged from twelve to eighteen. Over two months,” Uncle Gilbert mentioned.

Nausea hit my stomach. Child trafficking.

“And I can elaborate further on that. Because these kids are from different towns and states, nobody’s put the disappearances together. But the kidnappings are consistent and happen on a Sunday night,” Leila added.

“Fuck!” Drake roared, echoing everyone’s thoughts.

“Santos warned us, and we didn’t see it,” James hissed with pure venom in his voice.

“We guessed Santos had his fingers in a bigger pie, but I never expected him to sink this low,” Hawthorne spoke.

“I’m betting Santos hired Problems Solved to keep you all occupied while Santos set up his new trafficking lines. Once he got them established, the mercs would back off, and Santos would breathe easy. I bet anything, Drake, you’ve pulled some of your distance routes to patrol,” Ben asked.

“Yeah, I did because we were protecting the shopkeepers,” Drake admitted.

“And the job’s done,” Ben replied.

“Shit, we need to put every man available on this,” Ace interrupted.

“Yes, but we’ve day jobs to handle as well,” Ramirez pointed out.

“Don’t forget my men. There’s thirty of us,” Dad declared, and I gazed up in disbelief. “All are retired and bouncing around. And each of them is ex-Delta Force and trained by me.”

“And they’re available?” Inglorious asked.

“Yeah, and they can be here within twenty-four hours of my call,” Dad responded.

“Let’s make plans on routes because, no shit, Santos is running this out of RC, and we need to stop him,” Chance said, and everyone nodded.

“Up the patrols. Put more men on the street, and we’ll catch the bastard,” Lance agreed.

“Between us, we’ve got enough manpower to hunt these motherfuckers down and contact some old allies. I will not condone child trafficking in our area,” James Washington mentioned.

“I’ll inform the chief what we have so far. He’ll let me and Ben take the lead. And I’ll try to get Lucas and Horton on board, too,” Ramirez added.

“Let’s look at routes because they won’t be moving through RC. They’ll be on the outskirts. RC is too heavily watched,” Artemis said, and nods accompanied her statement.

I settled in as maps were laid on the table, and everyone began discussing back roads and potential spots.



“Coming, baby girl?” Dad asked several hours later as we left the meeting. I saw Mac standing to one side holding Blue, his eyes on me, and I shook my head.

“I’m going to spend some time with Mac. If that’s okay?” I inquired.

“Yup, but remember, Mom’s expecting you two tomorrow for dinner.” Dad grinned.

“Is Mom gonna behave?”

“What do you think?” Dad teased and dropped a kiss on my forehead before leaving. I ducked around the crowds of people talking and headed to Mac. Just before I got there, Lindsey stepped into my path and glowered.

“I hate you. You upset Mac,” Lindsey announced without preamble.

“And I apologised,” I countered.

“And I don’t give a fuck. You judged Mac unfairly and really hurt him. Mac withdrew from us,” Lindsey spat.

“All I can do is make it up to him, but that’s between Mac and me, not you,” I replied, understanding where Lindsey was coming from. Lindsey had been betrayed by Mac, who she was defending.

“You are not welcome here. None of us wants you around. We think you’re playing games with Mac to protect yourself,” Lindsey declared.

Some women stood behind her, nodding.

“Fine, you don’t want me here; I’m cool with that. Mac and I can meet at my house or elsewhere. I get where you’re coming from, Lindsey. You love Mac. That’s wonderful for you both. But Mac betrayed you once and had to grovel to gain your trust. That’s no different for me. But I’ll keep my

distance from the clubhouse, no skin off my nose. But then you won't see how genuine I am," I said calmly.

Lindsey stuck her face in mine.

"Stay away from Rage and Mac. This is your only warning," Lindsey hissed.

I leaned into her personal space.

"Attack me, and this is *my* warning. I'll fuck you up, bitch. Now take your double standards and peddle them elsewhere. Because from what I understand, there've been many misunderstandings in Rage, and they've been forgiven. So, treating me differently makes you all hypocrites," I retorted and moved past her on the way to Mac.

The crowd was thinning out quickly, and I realised most guests had left. Inglorious, Chance, Lance, and their men were hanging around with a beer in their hands, but the others had dispersed.

"What was that with Lindsey?" Mac inquired as I got close. I ducked my head and smiled at Blue. He was sound asleep.

"Women's crap. Leave it alone, Mac. Shit will get worked out," I replied, smiling falsely. "I was wondering, because I've not eaten, if I could buy you dinner?"

Mac jolted, and then a beatific grin lit his lips.

"You decided?"

"Truthfully, I didn't need to consider it. But I did as you required out of respect. Dad pointed something out to me that hit home. In our eyes, Dad's kills overseas were legal in defence of our country. But to the families and friends of those he eradicated, Dad is a criminal who illegally shot their loved one. So, I turned that line of thought into Rage, and it's simple. And tonight, just rammed that lesson home harder. You're all passionate about protecting our city and the people who live here."

Mac dragged me closer and dropped a light kiss on my lips.

"Let's get some dinner," he murmured with a wicked glint in his eye.

We turned to leave, me ignoring the dirty looks the old ladies were sending me when the door opened, and a tiny woman entered. She couldn't have been five feet and was stunning. Long black hair fell in a smooth sheet to her waist. Almond-coloured eyes stared at the crowd around her as she sought someone out. Her figure was fabulous, and I felt a wave of envy. She looked mixed race, but I wasn't sure. Her gaze stopped on Drake, and a smile crossed her mouth.

"Hey, Dad," she said, and Drake gazed back in shock.

Slowly, she began making her way across the room and slung her arms around Drake as a glass hit the floor and smashed. I glanced over and saw Phoe had turned incredibly pale. Drake's arms snuck around the woman, pulling her in tight.

"Holy shit, Aurora Victoria?" Drake muttered into the silence.

"Yeah, Dad, it's me," the woman's voice broke as Drake seemed to pull her in even tighter.

"Drake has a daughter?" a lady asked, shocked.

I thought her name was Autumn. And the shock on Autumn's face was mirrored by most of the old ladies. Phoe groped for a chair as she stared at Drake, who was oblivious.

"Aurora?" another woman said, pushing forward and grabbing the lady from Drake's grip.

"Hey, Auntie Marsha," Aurora replied and threw her arms around Marsha.

The sound of crying echoed through the silent room.

"You've got a fucking daughter you never told me about!" Phoe screeched, her voice full of pain. Drake's head snapped round, and he paled at the state of Phoe.

"No, Aurora's not my child!" Drake said quickly.

"She called you Dad!" Phoe yelled.

"Aurora couldn't pronounce Drake! She used to call me Dad, and it just stuck!" Drake babbled, hurrying across the

floor to Phoe.

Phoe appeared like she wished to scratch his eyes out.

“Who the fuck is she?” Phoe demanded as Aurora stepped back from Marsha and observed Phoe.

“Norfolk’s granddaughter!” Drake said quickly.

“The founder, Norfolk?” Phoe asked, somewhat quieter as she kept her gaze on Aurora.

“Yes. I was ten when Aurora was born, and she used to follow us around. Norfolk took care of her, and when he died, Aurora got sent away to his ex to raise. The last time I saw Aurora was when she was eleven, and she and Hilary came back to bury Aurora’s dad.”

“Drake’s telling the truth,” Aurora said and squealed as she spied Axel.

“Pappies!” Aurora cried and raced across to him.

Axel boomed as he lifted her in his arms and hugged her.

“Well, now, it’s our little Rory. This a visit girl, or you staying?” Axel beamed.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Drake holding Phoe tightly, murmuring in her ear.

“Gran passed a few months ago, so my promise to her is ended, and I’m moving back,” Aurora said with a smile.

“Promise?” Texas asked, coming to hug Aurora.

In between hugs, Aurora explained, “Gran refused to allow me to have anything to do with Rage when Bulldog stole president. As soon as Grandpa died, she says she knew what would happen and got me out. Gran was worried Bulldog might try to hold me hostage to keep everyone in line. We lived quietly in a small town in Washington State. Gran monitored things but forced me to agree not to return while she was alive. And Gran gave me a wonderful life, so I upheld that commitment until she passed.”

“Where are you staying? Between us, we’ve got plenty of room,” Drake urged.

“Do you know her?” I asked Mac quietly.

“No, Aurora was gone by the time I joined. But her Gran did the right thing. Bulldog would have held Aurora over everyone’s heads. Only three founders had kids; Enigma had Drake, Axel had Willow, and Keith and Norfolk had Aurora,” Mac replied.

“Oh, didn’t you know? I still own Grandpa’s home. Gran kept and rented it out and gave me quite a cushion. So, I’m renting out Gran’s house and planning to move back into Grandpa’s. I handed the tenants notice when Gran died, and it’s empty,” Aurora answered Drake.

“Hi, I’m sorry for my reaction. I am Phoe, Drake’s wife,” Phoe said now over her shock, and a welcoming smile appeared on her face. That pained me because all I got was scowls.

“Want to get out of here?” Mac suggested, and I nodded. Mac crossed to the room to speak to Carly and then handed Blue over. She smiled at Mac, but sent me a dark look, before fussing over the baby in her arms. We slipped through the crowd, but I felt piercing eyes digging into my back. The Rage old ladies weren’t finished with me yet.



Mac was perfectly relaxed when I asked to take my car and climbed into the passenger seat without a murmur. Another plus for him. My previous three boyfriends had been sexist pigs and insisted on driving me, even in my vehicle. That was one reason they were exes. We drove to a roadside diner that Mac swore did the best burgers in the state, although by the looks of the outside, I expected food poisoning instead.

But Mac was right because they were mouth-watering. We chatted for a while about the sudden appearance of Aurora Victoria and what it meant. To my surprise, Mac was as suspicious as I was. Rage was under attack, and then a long-forgotten Rage Princess turns up? Seemed very dodgy to me. Mac admitted that the timing was highly coincidental. We were leaving the diner when I turned to Mac on impulse.

“Come home with me?” I inquired and slapped a hand to my mouth.

“Say again.” Mac chuckled.

“Oh hell, you’re going to think I’m easy,” I gasped out in horror.

“Casey, you are anything but easy. Believe me, I know from experience,” Mac said, allowing himself a laugh. A blush started that I couldn’t control. Mac tipped my chin up to look into his eyes.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, and Mac shook his head.

“No, I am highly flattered you want me. But before I take you, you need to understand. Once I’ve been inside you, it means you’re mine. No second thoughts, no running away because shit gets difficult. Casey, we’ll belong to each other, and there is nobody else for either of us. I don’t cheat. Won’t look at another woman and betray you, but I expect the same from you in return. You’ll be able to call me your man and know it’s true,” Mac said bluntly. Shit, if he didn’t get inside me soon, I was going to combust.

I’d been turned on earlier by the way he watched me during the meeting. Mac hadn’t taken his eyes off me. Then in the common room at Rage, when he tugged me towards him, making it clear I was with him, had made my girlie parts stand up and cheer. And it had been sheer torture watching him eat and listen to the little moans of enjoyment he issued. After those words, I was needy with a capital N. I drove as quickly home as I dared without getting pulled over by the police. All the while, tension mounted between Mac and me.

I nearly broke my neck, climbing out of the car and hurrying up the path to unlock the front door, and Mac was on my heels. As soon as I was inside, Mac pounced, slamming me against the wall with his hard body and claiming my lips. He kicked the door shut as he grabbed my hair to tilt my mouth to the right angle for him to devour me. Mac kissed me like he was drowning, and I was his life raft in the turbulent ocean.

My hands scrabbled at his jeans. I'd never felt such urgency in getting a man inside me as I did now. Mac knocked my fingers away and held them flat against the wall as Mac used only his mouth to arouse me further. My hips moved of their own accord, meeting his as we rubbed against each other.

"Fuck, Casey, slow down," Mac said, breaking the kiss.

I moaned and wrenched my hands-free to dive straight for his buttons again and popped them open. Oh, thank god Mac was commando. I shoved my hand inside and grasped his cock as Mac hissed through his teeth. Mac clashed with me as he tried to get my jeans undone, and my pussy cried out for attention. Finally, his fingers found me, and his mouth took mine. We toyed with each other, stoking the fire between us until I bit Mac's lip in frustration.

"You, in me, now!" I demanded, shimmying my hips free and shrugging my trousers down my legs. Mac ripped my panties from me, lifted me, and pushed inside without another word. Both of us groaned in sheer relief.

"You on the pill?" Mac grunted as he thrust into me.

"Yes!" I cried.

"Thank fuck," Mac growled and let go of his control.

His hips hammered into mine as his cock shoved and slammed into me repeatedly. My slick juices allowed Mac to go deeper than any man had ever been, and I was crying his name as I gripped his shoulders. I couldn't vocalise what I needed, but Mac understood as he upped his pace. My breath left me in short pants as I let my body take over and claim what it wanted. My first orgasm ripped through me without warning, and I screamed Mac's name as he continued to fuck me through it. No sooner had that ended, I felt the waves build up again, and I jammed my hips down, craving my second. That time we came simultaneously, and Mac pumped lazily through his release. But he wasn't finished.

With a wicked look, Mac lifted me up and then lowered me to the ground. His dick was still half-mast, and Mac pushed me onto all fours. Fuck! I was soaking wet with our mixed

juices, but Mac shoved back inside me and started pounding into me again. Mews left my mouth as Mac fucked me with all the passion of a man processed. I felt a third orgasm unbelievably building, and as Mac slapped my ass hard, I released with a scream. My body collapsed to the floor, but Mac's arm wrapped around me like a steel band as he hammered into me, seeking his release. All I could do was take his cock and his urgency as his breath whistled harshly in my ear.

"Casey," he grunted and stiffened behind me as he came a second time. We both fell forward as Mac's warm and solid body covered mine. He tried to keep his weight off but lay fully on me.

"When we've got our breath, I've a king-size bed upstairs," I gasped.

"Hope it has good springs," Mac moaned, rolling onto his side and taking me with him. Our wetness ran down my legs, and I found I couldn't give a shit. No ex-partner had fucked me like that, and I didn't believe anyone would again!



"Can I keep you?" I murmured the following day.

Luckily, it wasn't my turn to open the shop, or I would be very late. Mac chuckled as he wrapped himself around me. I'd be lucky to walk today, seven orgasms Mac had given me since we got home. Who'd believe more than three was possible? Seven? A miracle, but my legs and body felt like jelly.

"You agreed to that last night," Mac teased, nibbling my shoulder.

"Time out," I giggled. No way could we have sex again. My starved pussy had shut and barricaded the doors and was demanding a holiday for twenty-four hours.

"Sure?" Mac sought, dragging his teeth lightly across my skin and making me shiver.

“Yes, the Fluff Muster is on strike!” I responded, and Mac roared with laughter.

“The Fluff Muster?”

“What do you call your dick?” I asked.

“Er, cock,” Mac retorted.

“Well, my bundle of joy is called Miss Fluff Muster. And she’s on strike,” I announced firmly.

“Who’d believe Delta Force has a limit?” Mac teased and snuggled deeper into me.

“Why do you keep calling me that? That was Dad, not me?” I urged.

“Because honey, you kick ass like your father,” Mac replied.

“Dad’s better. Are you ready for dinner tonight? Mom’s going to be on her best and worst behaviour.”

“How’s that work?” Mac inquired.

“Oh, she’ll be the hostess with the mostest. And then Mom will be the she-demon from hell who scents a son-in-law on the horizon. And Mom will wish to see how far she can push your boundaries, Mac.”

“We’ll see,” Mac replied, and I snorted. I knew my mother too well.



Mom opened the door with a beaming smile. And I rolled my eyes. She was dressed in a twinset with a smart pair of pants. Oh, Mom was out to make a particular impression. Her hair was tied back in a ponytail, and she had minimal makeup on.

“Casey darling! Mac, welcome to our home,” Mom cried as she kissed me and then Mac. Mac held out his gifts and Mom put a hand on her chest.

“For me? How thoughtful!” she exclaimed.

“Rage’s founder told us, brothers, if we ever attended dinner at a woman’s parents, to always bring flowers, chocolates and wine,” Mac announced, smiling.

“Axel said that?” I murmured as Mom ushered us in. Her eyes darted to Blue who I was holding in my arms. I could tell Mom itched to take Blue from me, but manners was keeping her restrained for now.

“Yeah, remember, half of us had shitty parents, for example. Axel tried to train us on some dating etiquette until he called us all heathens and left us alone,” Mac replied. I giggled, and so did Mom.

“Well, he did something correctly because your manners are perfect. Jacob, Casey and Mac have arrived,” she hailed.

“Casey knows where I am,” Dad shot back.

I laughed and led Mac into the snug. It was comfortable and set around my dad’s tastes. It was the one room Mother had not been allowed to decorate. As I passed Mom, she snatched Blue from me and began cooing. I gazed at my empty arms and at Mom, making Mac chuckle as we entered Dad’s domain.

“So, you decided to brave it, more fool you,” Dad said to Mac, who chuckled and held out a bag. Dad took it and peered curiously inside.

“Bribery, young man?” Dad asked, pulling out the bottle of whiskey and two cigars.

“Thought we could have a drink and a smoke after dinner,” Mac responded.

“I don’t smoke, but on a rare occasion, a good cigar never goes amiss,” Dad replied, but I knew he was pleased with the gifts. “Sit down, Mac. Casey, help your mother.”

“Mom never needs help in the kitchen,” I protested.

Dad had a glint in his eye I did not like.

“Casey, get lost. And give me that baby, Claire. Go talk to one another or whatever,” Dad said bluntly, and Mac laughed.

“Jacob, I just got this bundle of joy,” Mom said with a warning in her tone.

“And the baby can’t cook, so give him to me. You can hold him through dinner,” Dad said reasonably but he was being anything but reasonable.

“Don’t frighten him off!” I warned. Dad smirked as he took Blue carefully from Mac and gazed at the little boy. His face lit in a smile, and he cooed to Blue who watched Dad from solemn blue eyes.

“Thought it was your Mom I had to worry about,” Mac teased, and I sent him a dire look. Giving me good sex didn’t mean he could tease me. I bent over and kissed Dad’s head.

“Second thoughts, give it to him both barrels,” I replied, and Mac narrowed his eyes. I smirked and disappeared. The kitchen smelt wonderful as Mom busied herself over the oven.

“Really, a twinset?” I urged, and she threw a smile at me.

“How often do I get to play the mom role?” she asked me as she checked the pot roast.

“Not since I left high school,” I admitted, and Mom grinned.

“So, hush your mouth, Casey; let me have my fun.”

“And if you scare Mac off?”

“Then he’s not the one for you, but I think Mac might surprise us,” Mom suggested, smiling. “Here, stir the gravy while I check the starters.” Mom poked her head in the fridge as I did as I was told.

“What have we got?” I asked.

“Prawn cocktail, your father eats nothing else. And homemade pate with crackers, fresh melon balls, and raspberries,” Mom answered.

“One starter would have been enough,” I said, rolling my eyes.

Mom was a domestic goddess; I was definitely not.

“And we have crispy potatoes with a pot roast with seasoned veg and a lemon and lime cheesecake covered with a mango gel.”

“Jeez, my favourites.”

“Mac needs to see you have a healthy appetite, darling. Not one of those picky idiot women. If he doesn't enjoy a woman loving her food, then you need to be aware,” Mom retorted, shutting the fridge.

“It's not as if I don't work any excess off with father three times a week.” Every Tuesday and Thursday, I did a four-hour training session with Dad. And on Sunday, I did at least six. And after Dad's sessions, who the hell needed a gym?

“That's true. Would you call them in for dinner?”

Mom and I returned to the snug and found Dad and Mac talking.

“Mom says dinner's ready,” I announced, and they both rose to their feet. To my surprise Dad still held Blue.

“Your dad was explaining how many men he commanded. It's astounding when you think about it. Being responsible for all of them,” Mac replied.

“Yeah, Dad led a squadron, which comprised three troops, and each troop had four teams. They average from two to twelve members. Dad commanded two assault troops and reconnaissance and surveillance. He had elite men under his control. I think Dad was over about one hundred and twenty-five guys,” I replied.

“Lot of lives,” Mac said quietly.

“Yes, and whenever he lost a man, which was rare, but it happened, Dad felt it keenly. He didn't command from afar; he led from the lines. Dad's called in thirty for this job, but if we need more men, he can phone most of them. Some are still active, but those who've retired will answer his call. Dad was a stern but fair commander and looked after his squadron,” I explained.

“How so?” Mac asked as I led him into the dining room. Dad was already seated at the head of the ten-seater table we owned. Mom was by his right-hand side, and Mac and I took our places on his left.

“How what?” Dad demanded as Mom began serving the starters. Mac reached for Blue, and Dad shook his head as he cradled Blue in one arm. It was so sweet.

“How you were a good commander. I was explaining to Mac. But if one of his lads needed paternity leave, Dad ensured they got it. If one of their families had an illness or sudden death, Dad had them on the first flight home. Many soldiers applied to Dad’s squadron because he was well known for being just. And also never leaving a man behind. Not even if he went in himself after them,” I added.

Dad squirmed.

“Don’t need to talk mushy stuff, Casey,” Dad declared.

I smiled. What I’d said was the truth, and we knew it.

“Mac, what would you like? A little of each or any particular one?” Mom asked, waving at the starters as she placed a large bowl of prawn cocktail in front of Dad.

“Go for a bit of each; they’ll all be fantastic,” I urged.

“Whatever Casey recommends,” Mac answered, and Mom beamed.

“I love a man with a hearty appetite,” Mom cooed, and I rolled my eyes. Here we go!

Mac asked Dad, during dinner, which was as amazing as I claimed, many questions about Delta Force. Dad skirted confidential information but told Mac a few stories. Mom urged him to tell the story of where Dad told a three-star general to go fuck himself and took a team in himself to save another trapped team. My father should have been demoted, and court marshalled for it. He escaped because one of those rescued was the nephew of a five-star general who also told the three-star-general to go fuck himself. Mac laughed at the story as Mother explained she was furious, not because Dad went in after them or cussed out a higher-ranking officer. No,

she was angry because she'd just started her business and getting kicked off base would have set her back.

I could see Mac listening intently and felt the respect building in Mac for Mom and Dad. Mac inquired if being an army wife was difficult, and Mom explained yes and no. She hated Dad being away overseas, but only because of what he witnessed and missed in seeing me grow up. But she loved the comradery that came from being an army wife. Most of the retired men's wives remained in contact with one another.

They all met up twice a year, once in spring and once in autumn, at a campsite that allowed them to book it out. The men and women of Dad's teams brought their spouses and children, and a good time was had by everybody. Mac kept nodding at places, and I realised this was what he had with Rage, only it was on a daily basis. Mom told Mac that should any member of Dad's team call, everyone would reply instantly.

Dad nearly turned red when Mom and I explained that for all those who'd retired from Delta Force, Dad had helped find new careers. Some had gone into protection, and others into private investigations. A few had set up bodyguard companies and hired their former teammates. Nobody was left to struggle.

To my amusement, Mom ditched her airhead act as the dinner went on, and I saw Mac shrewdly access her. Once dinner was over she claimed Blue and refused to give him up. Even changing his diaper and feeding him his bottle. Mom was more in love with Blue than Mac at that point. On the way home, he informed me seriously he didn't know who to be more afraid of. Mom or my dad.

Chapter Eight.

Casey

“We’ve got a lead,” Uncle Gilbert announced three days later at a meeting. He pointed to a place on a map, and I peered over at it. It was a field with two exits hidden by mountains.

“Too narrow for a plane,” Hawthorne said.

Uncle Gilbert nodded in agreement and then pulled up a screen on his laptop.

“This happened five days ago.”

Everyone watched as a video played of a van and waited with its lights off. A dark sedan arrived, but no one got out. A short while after, a lorry appeared, and we saw ten girls shoved out of the van and into the lorry. One guy crossed to the sedan, and the window rolled down. We all leaned forward to catch a glimpse of who was inside, but the shadow hid him. Money exchanged hands, and the vehicles drove off. Nausea rose in my stomach, and judging by the expressions around me, everybody felt the same.

“Did we trace the lorry?” Drake ground out.

“Lost it when the satellite moved. Last seen heading towards Nebraska, which doesn’t seem a likely place for child trafficking. However, a day ago, a buddy in New Orleans intercepted what he thought was a drug run and found ten young girls from South Dakota instead,” Uncle Gilbert responded.

“They’ll hide them in the port and ship them out,” Dad replied, and Uncle Gilbert nodded.

“So, they’re starting from here and ending up in Louisiana. But we don’t know the route or who is behind it,” Ramirez said.

“Santos,” Ace declared, and several agreed.

“How do we prove it? I can’t arrest him. We need rock-hard evidence he’s part of it. Otherwise, the slimy fucker will wriggle out of it,” Ben stated, and most of those present turned around in shock.

“What, I have fuckin’ feelings? Some of those are kids!” Ben exclaimed. Ben pointed at the screen of the children on the video.

“They are safe,” Apache spoke.

Ben glowered.

“Those teens are, but what about the victims beforehand and terrified girls being snatched right now?” Ben snarled.

“We’ll find them and then track those youngsters down. If they’re alive, we will bring them home. If not, then we’ll take revenge,” Drake vowed.

Ben met Drake’s gaze with burning eyes.

“And for once, I’ll turn a blind eye,” Ben promised.

“I checked the satellite back for two months; there was no other delivery here. My tech guy is scanning other footage, but either that was the first drop off, or they change routes,” Uncle Gilbert said.

“Santos has always been a slippery cunt,” James added.

“Can we get anybody on the inside?” I inquired. Head shakes met my question.

“Not a chance in hell. We’ve no idea where the fucker is hiding. Despite our best efforts. Santos went to ground, and we couldn’t find hide or hair of him. Wherever Santos is holed up, it’s a fucking brilliant hidey hole,” Drake responded angrily.

“So we still have nothing?” Artemis got straight to the point.

“I suspect he’s alternating routes in case someone is watching. It would make sense to have three or four places to collect from and rotate them. My guy is searching for other satellite feeds as we speak,” Uncle Gilbert replied.

“At least we got the children taken this time to safety,” Leila said, peering at us from over her laptop.

Drake’s following words chilled me to the bones.

“Yeah, but now, they’ll take double to make up for the orders they just lost.”

And I didn’t think shit could get worse.



It was Tuesday, and Mac accompanied me to Dad’s assault course. I had told him to dress for exercise, and he’d looked at me dubiously. Then I reminded Mac he’d signed his MC up for this. Mac grimaced but arrived to pick me up with a backpack on. Laughing, I climbed onto the rear of his bike and slung his bag over my shoulders. Wrapped around Mac’s back, I was slightly nervous, as it was my first-time riding behind someone. Whenever I’d ridden in the past, I had been in charge. But we reached the course safely, and Mac gulped when he noticed the wicked grin on Dad’s face.

“Get changed over there.” Dad grinned, pointing to a building. “Casey, start your warmup.” I began limbering up while Mac changed. When he came back, Dad smirked evilly at him.

“Casey, drop and give me one hundred,” Dad ordered, and Mac’s eyes went wide. “Let’s get you warmed up, biker boy!”

I was trying not to laugh as Dad put Mac through his paces.

“One hundred sit-ups,” Dad demanded as I counted to ninety.

I finished the push-ups and did as Dad commanded. Mac, meanwhile, was struggling through his first set of fifty. Dad was in his element, berating and encouraging at the same time. I could see Mac flipping at the way Dad kept changing tactics.

“Fuck, I go to the gym,” Mac grunted as he began the sit-ups.

“Pussy!” Dad sneered and looked at me.

“Five miles, Casey,” Dad ordered, and I took off in a steady jog. “One-mile marker, pick the backpack up!”

“Yes, Sir!” I shouted. I set off at a steady pace, reached the marker, and picked up the pack. It had about thirty pounds in it. I shrugged it on and started jogging. An hour later, I hit the home base and noticed Mac was running laps. Dad nodded in approval as I dumped the pack and wiped the sweat from my eyelids.

“Mac, pause and hydrate,” Dad called, passing me a bottle. Mac came over in a sweaty mess and stared at me with puppy eyes.

“Don’t even think it. You’re coming every week with me, or your brothers will kick your ass,” I warned.

Mac reached out and picked the bag up before wincing.

“You ran four miles with that?” Mac asked.

“Dad varies the weight. This one was middling. I can run with up to eighty pounds.”

“Fuck,” Mac hissed, drawing the word out.

I grinned at Mac as father whistled.

“You ready for the assault course? Mac, do not strain yourself. Complete as much as possible before you quit. Don’t try to keep up with Casey; she’ll outstrip you easily,” Dad ordered.

Mac sent me a frantic glare as he stared at the beginning of the course.

“Holy fuck,” Mac muttered as Dad blared, and I started.

Amused, I tossed Mac a grin over my shoulder and mentally set myself to conquer.

I was a sweaty mess when I finished and found my father and Mac waiting for me. Mac looked near collapse while Dad was grinning mercilessly. As I came to a stop breathing heavily, Mac shook his head at me.

“How far did you get?” I panted.

“About one-fifth of the way round,” Dad said as Mac sent him a dirty look. “Boy did better than I thought. We have four weeks to whip Mac into shape. By the time I’ve finished, Mac will complete two third of the course as long as he sticks to the training regime I set him.”

Mac muttered something under his breath as I wheezed a laugh.

“Those beams get higher, and the net smaller? I had trouble finding footholds,” I sought, and Dad nodded. Typical Dad, torture at his best.

“Could you finish?” Mac asked Dad curiously, and Dad responded.

“Casey is faster than me, but yes, I can still do it,” Dad admitted.

“No more gym for me, for it sure as hell ain’t building stamina,” Mac said ruefully.

“Gym builds up one set of muscles. That course, my boy, strengthens another. Want you here nightly from six. Casey will train with you, too. She was four minutes slower on her finish time,” Dad griped, and I sighed.

“Fine, but we get a day off to rest,” I argued.

Dad appeared bullish for a moment but agreed.

“Make sure Mac soaks tonight, or he’ll be as stiff as hell in the morning and won’t be able to run tomorrow.” Dad grinned. He tipped us a salute before walking off.

“Is he serious?” Mac asked, collapsing on the ground.

I joined him there as I grabbed a water bottle. After a few deep gulps, I looked at Mac.

“Yes.”

“Kill me now!” Mac grumbled, and I laughed.

Mac

“What happened to you?” Axel boomed as Mac limped into the clubhouse the following day.

“Training with Casey’s dad,” Mac groaned and collapsed into an armchair.

Axel raised his eyebrow and sat down opposite him. Mac snorted as he saw Blue cradled to Axel’s chest in a baby carrier. Axel sent him a look daring Mac to comment.

“Jacob fuck you up?” Axel asked curiously.

“Yeah, and he was going gentle on me. Can’t imagine how hard he pushed Casey as a kid. No wonder she can take down a fully grown man twice her size,” Mac whimpered as he stretched his leg out. Despite soaking in a long, warm bath, Mac had woken with a cramp in the middle of the night, and Casey had massaged it away. And then they’d got hot and bothered. Kindly, Axel and Ellen had Blue overnight, or rather Ellen commandeered Blue.

“You’re training to beat your brothers,” Axel said shrewdly, and Mac managed a tired wink.

“Hunter and Blaze are both going down,” Mac agreed.

“Our secret. I’m gonna bet on you, Mac, don’t fuckin’ let me down,” Axel boomed. Mac waved a hand and whimpered as his shoulders complained. “Then again, looking at the state of ya...”

Mac sent a dirty look before closing his eyes. His body hurt in places he didn’t think were natural.

“I didn’t call you here about that. I heard something back in Ellen’s fall. A student apparently saw Ellen being pushed. That’s the word on the street. And mentioned that it was a teacher. Start Sutton going through any teachers Ellen disciplined or marked down. Anyone who might hold a grudge,” Mac replied as Axel grew stiffer and stiffer.

“Fuck, I guessed there was more,” Axel growled.

“Wild, get me a bottle of water, cold,” Mac yelled at the candidate. “Why ain’t Wild at school?” Mac demanded.

“Got first lesson free. He’s riding in half an hour.”

“And how’s Cowboy getting on?” Mac asked.

“A little asshole about having to study, but he isn’t arguing with Ellen. Especially now she’s hurt. Damn, Ellen mothers them, and they lap it up. It’s fuckin’ heart-breaking, Mac, they’re brilliant kids, and Rio Valden abused them.”

“Is Chance dealing with him?”

“Yeah, Rio’s losing customers hand over fist.” Axel grinned smugly.

“Good. Destroy Rio where it hurts first, then Rage will take care of him for how he treated those boys,” Mac agreed.

Axel offered a sharp nod as Wild approached with a bottle of water and two painkillers, to Mac’s surprise.

“Seems like you need them,” Wild stated.

“Yeah, took some at Casey’s, but fuck, I’m hurt,” Mac complained.

“That’s coz you’re old, man,” Wild replied cheekily, and Mac’s jaw dropped open as the kid sauntered away.

Axel hid a snort of amusement.

“That little shit!” Mac exclaimed. “I’ll kick his ass on the course too!”

“Like to see that. Tell your snitch thanks for me. The kids have clammed up at the school, so him passing the info on is sound.”

“Will do.” Mac groaned and closed his eyes. Two minutes later, a wet cloth landed on his forehead, and Wild shot past him at speed. Oh yeah, Mac was kicking the candidate’s ass.

Casey

I was leaving home when the call came in. It was Abby Saunders, who owned the florist a couple of doors down. Abby was hysterical, and it took me a few moments to understand what she was saying. When I finally grasped her meaning, I hopped into my car and sped toward my shop. When I arrived, I found half the street shut and the police line blocking anyone passing. I parked in the first available place and leapt out, jogging towards the tape. Locals were already

crowding it. Two ambulances and a swarm of law enforcement caught my attention.

“Bobby!” I shouted, seeing a familiar face. He waved and yelled to the cop, who was stopping people from entering, to let me through. I jogged over and grabbed his arm.

“Is it true?” I asked.

Bobby nodded solemnly.

“Both Mr Wright and Jim, the butcher?”

“Sorry, Casey, but both of them have been hurt badly. We think Mr Wright saw what was happening in your shop and came to stop it. The assholes began beating him, and we believe Mr Curtis noticed what was transpiring and went to help. They’re both alive, severely beaten, but they’re stable, Casey.”

“I need to go to the hospital,” I replied, shock setting in as I stared at the two ambulances pulling away, sirens blaring.

“Casey, you were the principal target of the attack. We want you to check the shop. I’m sorry, honey, but it’s a mess. And it’s best you stay here until we can get a guy on you,” Bobby said as his partner Dan approached.

“We’ve got them on camera. We will identify them all,” Dan stated.

“All? How many were there?” I asked.

“Six,” Dan replied.

“Six to beat an elderly man and a butcher. Fuck me!”

“Casey, please come and see your shop. We’ll have to take you through the rear as the main entrance is...” Bobby broke off, looking uncomfortable.

“Where the attack happened?” I whispered as I noticed a pool of blood and wondered which of my friends it belonged to.

“Casey, I’ll call Drake and get Mac here,” Dan said, and I nodded numbly.

Two of my friends had been attacked, and from what I could tell, it was because they'd witnessed my shop being wrecked. The store wasn't worth their lives. I was barely holding myself together as we walked around the back, and I let us in. Immediately I saw my work area had been smashed to smithereens. Moulds and bottles were flung haphazardly. Ingredients were thrown together to make a mess, and a lot of my equipment was broken.

A sob stuck in my throat as I gazed at how my sanctuary had been violated. There was hardly anything untouched, but I spied that the cellar door was locked, which gave me some relief. Down there, I held stock that had already been made and things like my excess bottles, tubs, and the more expensive ingredients. And my safe was down there, which meant I hadn't lost this week's takings. Bobby led me into the front of the shop, and I stared in horror as I saw the toppled two aisles and the shelves ripped from the walls.

This was a worse mess than the rear, but strangely, it seemed a fair amount of my stock had survived. The beautiful wooden counter had been smashed with an axe. The décor smudged with paint, and the register was dumped on the floor and broken open. Basket racks had been tipped over, and display stands had been tossed carelessly aside. The shop door had been kicked in and was severely damaged. It hung on its hinges drunkenly. And the glass windows were smeared with red paint, dripping like blood. Or was it?

"They meant business," I whispered, feeling the colour drain from my face. "Is that blood?"

"No, Casey," Bobby said quickly.

There were signs of a violent scuffle and scratch marks where a fight had happened. My eyes closed when I landed on the baseball bat Mr Wright kept behind the counter. A sensation I'd never experienced well up inside. It was so unusual that it took me a while to give it a name. Hate. Pure, unadulterated hate. Those animals had broken into my business, destroyed a good sixty per cent of my stock, and wrecked everything and, for what? Fucking money? The chance to cause Rage trouble?

They had beaten an old fellow who wanted nothing more than to create his toys and see the happiness on the children's faces. A man who'd earned his right to live peacefully and on his terms. And Jim, a sweet guy, had been severely harmed because of what? I'd never experienced this before and couldn't deal with it. Slowly, I walked over to the door that led to the small kitchenette, bathroom, and office. The first two were untouched, but someone had done a number in my office. A quick glance at the wall safe showed they'd tried getting in but failed. Good, my recipes were all in there.

The chair was splintered into firewood, as was my table. My laptop lay smashed where they'd stamped on it. The worst was the portrait hanging on my wall of Mom, Dad, and me. A message was written across it, 'They're next.' Simple and frightening. Anger burned in my gut. Slow and simmering, but it was there. How dare they threaten my parents? They'd gone too far. A noise made me jump, and then arms wrapped around me. Mac. Craving support, I sank into them and allowed Mac to offer me the comfort I desperately needed.

"Everything will be okay," Mac promised, murder in his voice.

"Mac, the crime scene has given the go-ahead to tidy in the rear prep room. Stay away from the front of the store for now, please," Bobby said, and then I heard his footsteps disappear.

"They beat Mr Wright, and he's sixty if a day. And harmed Jim, who came to defend Mr Wright. They're beasts, Mac."

"I know, baby. Look, let's start clearing this up. We'll need pictures for insurance. Do you have insurance, Casey?" Mac asked.

"Yeah, I pay for the top package, so it shouldn't take long for the cheque to clear."

Mac made a noise of concern and bent down to peer at my laptop.

"Were your recipes on here?" Mac asked.

"Yes, but I have two paper copies for safety. One set is kept in this safe, another in the safe downstairs, and I have a flash

drive at Dad's. It's more the clean-up than anything else bothering me and ordering all the equipment and ingredients. What concerns me the most is Mr Wright and Jim being harmed. Mac, we have to stop them. They are resorting to physical action," I said sadly.

Mac's arms wrapped around me again, and he drew me in close.

"We'll find them, Casey; that is a promise I intend to keep."

For the next hour, I was kept busy on the phone with the insurance and taking photos. They informed us they could get an assessor to me tomorrow and not to clean anything up. Mac took several calls from Drake, and I talked to Dad, who was at the hospital awaiting news. The only thing he'd been able to confirm was Jim and Mr Wright were stable.

I was surprised when Lindsey stopped by to give Mac Blue. She didn't look at me, and I wasn't interested in conversation with her either. Mac spoke to Lindsey for a few moments before she left. He carried Blue over to me, and I smiled as he lifted his chubby arms for a cuddle.

"Mac, I really can't see anything of you in Blue," I said, studying the cute little face.

"Truthfully, Casey, I am not surprised. I need to explain, but I want to know, are you all in with me and Blue?" Mac asked.

"Yes, I thought I'd proved that by now," I replied.

Mac dropped a kiss on my lips to still any further comments.

"You have, but I'm just making sure. What I'm about to tell you could rip mine and Blue's life apart if you used it against us."

"Mac, I wouldn't do that. I am falling for you hard," I whispered, and Mac stared at me mutely. "Too quick?" I asked as I reddened.

"Not at all," Mac replied and laid a claiming kiss on my lips. "Never too soon to hear that, Casey."

“Thought I’d embarrassed you then,” I said with a nervous giggle.

“Never. Let me tell you about Blue and me. Your observation was spot on. Blue looks nothing like me because I’m not his blood father,” Mac declared softly.

My mouth dropped open in shock. Anyone around Mac when he’s with Blue could see how much Mac loved Blue.

“Seriously?” I gasped.

“Blue’s mother, Lucy, was a girl who hung at the clubhouse. She wasn’t a whore or a skank and only ever slept with Ezra and me. One night, Lucy was walking home from the club, and she was snatched. I won’t go into details, but she was a victim of trafficking. Lucy was sold to a rich man who abused her body until she became pregnant. Convinced she had a son, he started treating her well, leading to Lucy escaping.

“Lucy contacted an old buddy who protected them until Blue was born. They concocted a plan to smuggle Blue out. Their next-door neighbour was a drug user, and she died giving birth to two dead babies. Lucy’s friend replaced Blue with one of those dead babies as Lucy was dying herself. She then snuck Blue to her mother in a duffle bag, returned to the apartment, and called the police and paramedics. Everyone believed Lucy’s boy had passed with her.

“When it was safe, Lucy’s friend smuggled Blue to me with a letter from Lucy. It begged me to take care of her son, even though he wasn’t mine. Lucy wrote everything down for me, including what a dangerous man his blood father was. There was no choice. The moment I saw Blue, I fell in love with him, and I would do whatever it took to keep him protected. Lucy’s friend was a lawyer and had some documents that would name me as Blue’s father, and there’d be no trace back to Lucy. Instead, he had a different mother on his birth certificate.

“So that’s it in a nutshell. Blue isn’t truly mine, but he’s mine in every way that counts. I am his dad and the only one he’ll ever know. I don’t give a fuck if he shares my blood or

not. Casey, I'm his father, and I'll protect him," Mac announced in a rush.

"Damn!" was the first thing I said as I stared at Mac. What a hell of a story. My heart broke for the young woman who was kidnapped and abused. And I admired her strength in doing everything she could to save Blue.

"Say something," Mac urged after I remained silent for a few minutes.

"I'm trying to get my head around Lucy and her friends' bravery!" I replied immediately. Mac's tension, which I hadn't noticed until now, lessened slightly.

"I've still not come to terms with Lucy's actions. Not that I find them repellent, but Lucy was delicate, not a fighter," Mac stated.

"Is that why you weren't exclusive?" I inquired.

"Lucy was a stop-gap, and so was I. It was fun for both of us, but nothing else," Mac replied, and I shook my head.

"No, it was more for Lucy, or she'd never have sent her son to you. The most precious thing in her world," I responded, gazing at Blue.

Blue's serious eyes stared back, and I pulled a face to make him laugh.

"Casey, I can't comment on something I don't know. As far as I was concerned, it was fun."

"I believe you made an impression on Lucy with your kindness and gentleness. That gave Lucy the courage to send Blue to you, knowing you'd fight for him. And I believe Lucy chose the correct path."

"Casey, do you want to be with me, even though Blue isn't my blood?" Mac asked cautiously. My temper flared.

"Mac, Blue is innocent in all this. He needs a family, and we can provide him with one. End of story. Blue is ours now, and we'll honour Lucy, but we'll be his parents." I stopped and rocked as I realised I had meant every word I had just uttered.

Mac swooped Blue and me up with a relieved laugh and spun us around before putting me on my feet.

“Hey, sorry to disturb you. The officer said I could come through,” a female announced.

I twisted and spied Aurora Victoria standing in the doorway.

“Hi!” I replied, puzzled by why she was there.

“We don’t know each other. But I was visiting the clubhouse and overheard what had occurred. The other old ladies... um... were tied up, so I thought I’d pop along and see if you need help?” Aurora said shyly.

“Come in, Aurora,” Mac stated with a smile. “Have you met my son, Blue?”

“No, and he’s so cute! Can I hold him?” Aurora squealed.

I laughed and passed Blue over, who made a grab for her hair. Mac caught Blue’s fingers before he could twist them up and swept Aurora’s long hair out of his reach. Aurora giggled and blew a raspberry, and Blue chortled.

“How are you settling in?” I asked Aurora, remembering she said she was going to live in her dad’s house.

“Disappointed and furious at the moment. The tenants have wrecked Dad’s house, and I’m livid. Tiles have been pulled off walls; floor coverings are such a mess I daren’t step on them without shoes. The whole place is disgusting, the yard is grown over, they’ve ruined it,” Aurora said sadly, and I put a hand on her shoulder for sympathy.

“Have you spoken to Apache yet? Or Rock?” Mac inquired.

“Yeah, Uncle Apache is coming to check it over for me. As it’s only a two-up and two-down, I’m thinking of expanding it, anyway. Dad left some drawings of a couple of expansions, so Uncle Apache will look at them,” Aurora replied.

“That’s great. What do you do for work?” I asked.

Aurora smiled serenely.

“I am a mystic,” she said, and Mac choked.

I cocked an interested eyebrow.

“As in tarots and stuff?”

“I read tarot, and I’m no good at the crystal ball. I just see a white mist, and I also link with people. Built up a rep back home, and my website has a lot of positive reviews,” Aurora responded happily.

“As in all that psychic woo woo?” Mac asked.

“Yeah, but it’s fine to be a disbeliever, Mac. It won’t stop me from going ahead with my store plans.” Aurora smiled.

“Did you just open a shop for tarot readings, or did you sell other stuff?” I inquired, wondering if my business was about to take a hit. Many psychics also ran a similar store to mine.

“I’ve never been creative like that. Hell, I burn water. But something tells me there’ll be a supplier for my shop close at hand. Or there will be once I’m up and running, Casey. I know we’ll design our own line of witchy goods, which will take off.” Aurora stared directly into my eyes and smiled.

“I could supply you, even create your own supply. But witchy goods are beyond me,” I said with a grin.

Mac looked appalled.

“No, they’re not because it’s herbal remedies you already use or know about. Our brand will have a little black witch logo flying under the moon. And it’ll be an oval label with our names, Casey and Aurora’s Witchy Cures. And they will be all-natural ingredients. Such as Hawthorne, which strengthens the heart...”

“And lowers blood pressure and could help prevent heart disease,” I finished, and Aurora nodded.

“See, we’re already there,” Aurora beamed. “Things like St John’s Wart and ginseng to improve a mood.”

“Those I can do,” I agreed.

“And I also see a third partner coming along. I have the recipes and the witchy thing going, you have the skills, but she’ll have a garden which grows everything we need. But it’s

not time for her yet, but we'll meet her within a year. Uncle Slick isn't ready for her brand of mayhem," Aurora said with a giggle, and Mac's head snapped around.

"Slick's gonna fall for a witch?" Mac asked suspiciously.

"No, Uncle Slick is going to claim a gardener who grows natural products and makes quite a reasonable living off them. But she will give Uncle Slick the run around for a while. Uncle Slick will be a little dense to start." Aurora laughed. "You thought Casey was bad beating on you. Uncle Slick is heading for a lot worse."

A shiver ran down my spine. Aurora seemed completely genuine and matter-of-fact about her abilities. Too casual for me to dismiss her responses. Mac looked disbelieving, but Aurora was serene and calm.

"Time will prove me right, Mac, and when it does, remember today," Aurora teased. "Now, I came to help you clear up, but I'm sensing we are not allowed to."

"No, we aren't. The insurance company is sending an assessor tomorrow, and we've been told to leave everything. Someone is coming to board the door. Until then, there's nothing I can do," I admitted.

"Such a shame, but it'll be wonderful again, Casey. Anyhow, before that happens, there'll be a nasty event, but life is gonna be roses for you. Well, I'm going to pay Phoenix a visit at the Trusts. I don't think Phoe trusts me very much or believes I've not got an eye on Uncle Drake. Like yuk, he's my uncle," Aurora said with a pout.

"We'll speak soon," I promised, liking Aurora.

"Sooner than you think." Aurora winked and walked out.

"Well, she's a character!" Mac exclaimed, and I laughed, suddenly feeling better.

"I wonder what Rage will do with a psychic," I teased Mac, who grunted. No surprise there!

Chapter Nine.

Casey

Lindsey returned five minutes before Mac, and I left the shop and took Blue. Mac had called and asked her to pick him up as he planned to take me for a ride. Lindsey sent me a dirty look when she collected Blue but said nothing. Mac noticed her glare with concern, but I waved it off.

We locked up the rear exit, walked down the alley at the back of the shops, and headed towards his bike. A black Ford Transit van skidded to a halt, and Mac yanked me behind him, his hand grabbing his handgun from his waistband. The van's side door slid open, and a horrific sight met us. Aurora Victoria was tied and gagged, with a man sitting behind her, holding a gun to her head. Aurora's eyes were wide and filled with fear.

"Get in, or I'll blow the bitch's brains out," the guy demanded.

Mac and I exchanged glances.

"Let the girls go, and I'll come," Mac bargained.

"Both of you," he insisted, jabbing the piece harder into Aurora's forehead. Mac stepped forward, and a man jumped out, removed Mac's gun, and patted him down. He pulled further weapons from Mac before forcing him inside. A thump echoed, and I leapt forward, and the guy held me back as he searched me. His hand lingered on my ass, and I sent him a stare of pure disgust.

With a shove, he pushed me into the vehicle, and I climbed in and saw Mac lying splayed out. I moved towards him, and someone pistol-whipped me. Poor Mac, I thought as I landed on top of him.



"Fools," I muttered. Sheer amateurs. I'd woken alone on a dusty floor of an old warehouse. There was no sign of Mac or

Aurora, which was smart on the kidnapper's behalf. Although I was bound, they'd fucked up. The idiots hadn't tied me to anything. Didn't these assholes learn from past mistakes? Blearily, I cracked my eyes and took notice of where I was. It was a dingy room in an abandoned factory. Three sides were brick, but the last wall held a large glass dirty window. Outside, I noticed heavy equipment towering high, and I saw a hulking shadow guarding me through the pane.

Rolling on my side, I yanked my tied arms from around my back and shoved my feet through them. First problem solved. My fingers were tingling but still moved, so I untied my ankles, wriggling them to get feeling back. Cautiously, I swallowed a shriek from the pins and needles I was experiencing. Once under control, I brought my wrists to my mouth and began working on the knots. That took over ten minutes, but I loosened one, so the others slipped free. Instead of rushing to the exit fighting, I took time and searched for a weapon. Not seeing any, I made sure I was limber enough to move and defend myself before approaching the door.

There was only one possible way of beating this asshole in a fight. From what I could see, he had height, arm reach, and strength on me. In the Delta Force way, there was one option. Adapt. I remained low to the ground so my shadow wouldn't warn him as I approached. Twice, I ran through the following steps quietly in my mind to ensure I knew the plan of action. Once satisfied, I yanked open the door and prayed it wasn't locked or squeaky and, without warning, leapt on the big man's back. He instantly reacted, but too late. I kept my arms in place and placed a stranglehold on him. Using my training, I used my weight to lean backwards, toppled us both, and shoved the door shut again.

The asshole thrashed around, driving the air from my lungs, but I'd expected this and tightened my grip. He'd choke out before I released the hold. I felt the struggles wane and then cease. I wasted no time shoving him off me, and without a second thought, I snapped his neck. Heavily panting, I crouched low, checked for a weapon, and found two handguns and a knife. He also kindly provided me with a silencer. I observed the exit for evidence of someone hearing the

struggle. I waited quietly for a few moments before heading to the door.

Upon opening it, I didn't see or hear anyone rushing towards me, and I slipped out. I was indeed in a factory, but not one I could say I recognised. Not that I often visited a warehouse. I was on the top level looking down at numerous large pieces of equipment, and I honestly did not know what they did. There was a walkway, and I noticed several other doors. They needed investigating. Unfortunately, there was also no cover. If someone were facing me, they'd spot me. I checked the gun for bullets and then attached the silencer. The best hope was my aim was faster and more accurate than theirs.

I snuck along the walkway, checking each office as I passed. All were empty. No sign of either Aurora or Mac. After completing the circuit, I saw some stairs and crept down to the next level. On this floor, I heard a murmur and gauged their location. I listened as they talked of a 'Rage bitch' and 'How much would Rage pay to have their founder's kid returned' and knew they were talking about Aurora. There was no mention of Mac. The voices drifted away, and I landed lightly on my feet and began moving.

As I turned the corner, I spied a shadow and fell against the wall. I'd caught the two men up, and one was smoking. Now I could hear clearly, and they weren't being complimentary. They were making fun of how Aurora jumped when one of them touched her and how they couldn't wait to get the go-ahead to play. Anger welled up inside as I guessed what they wanted to do to my new friend, and I stepped out.

Surprise shone in their eyes before both wore a bullet hole in the middle of their heads. Quickly, I darted forward, opened the door they'd been in front of and sighed when I saw Aurora tied. Aurora was blindfolded and shaking and was already flinching when I spoke.

"Aurora, it's Casey. Do not say a word. I'm bringing in bodies." Aurora stiffened and nodded. I dragged the heavy men in and stared at the pool of blood. Fuck. That was a glaring beacon. But someone loved me, I decided as I noticed

a pile of blankets and, grabbing one, I ran back and wiped up as much of the blood as possible. Luckily, the floor was so dirty the remainder didn't stand out. I threw the stained blanket over the guys, talking to Aurora and assuring her I'd free her soon. Understanding Aurora might not be used to bodies, I put a couple more covers over the dead men so Aurora did not have to see and yanked off her blindfold.

"Knew you'd come," Aurora gasped.

"Aurora, I may not be officially Delta Force, but as an honoured member, I sure swallowed their purpose," I whispered with a smile. Briskly, I untied Aurora and rubbed her limbs to get the blood moving again. Pins and needles hit as an agonising look came over her face.

"Honey, we need to get you out, and I have to find Mac," I informed Aurora when her body relaxed.

"They separated us," Aurora replied.

"Guessed that. That's the only clever thing they've done. Can you shoot?" I asked, and Aurora looked horrified.

"No. But after today, I think I need to learn."

"Stay behind me. If I say run, Aurora, run and don't stop until you escape. Hear me?" Aurora nodded as I handed her a gun. "Point and fire. Doesn't matter if you hit them. If you're firing, they are ducking."

"That makes sense."

"And keep running and zig zag. The easiest target in the world to hit is someone who runs in a straight line."

"Got it," Aurora acknowledged.

I checked the two men I had killed and found more weapons. Stuffing them and the extra clips in my pockets and waistband, I handed another gun to Aurora. Then I remembered to show Aurora how to put the safety on and off before she shot herself or me. Aurora offered a dry look but refrained from commenting. We made our way around this level. Aurora stayed five steps behind in case I ordered her to

run, but this floor was deserted, too. Nodding to a set of stairs, I held my fingers up, and Aurora nodded.

I climbed down silently, and voices echoed close by. I put a hand up and sensed Aurora stop. With nowhere to hide and on the stairs, I crouched down and prayed the approaching guys wouldn't see me. Luck was on our side as they marched past, too intent on their conversation. I stepped off the stairs, took aim, and shot them in the back of their heads. Aurora and I dragged them behind a container, and I peeked out, looking for further men. That was five down. How many were there?

Alert to hearing voices of people approaching, I opened a door, shoved Aurora inside, and joined her. There were more than two this time. I kept my gaze on the window, but they changed directions and walked away. Aurora tugged on my sleeve, and I turned, and my eyes widened. What the ever-loving fuck was this? I approached the stack of shit with respect and caution. In front of me were several homemade bombs and bomb-making equipment. A grin crossed my face as I realised exactly what I had in my hands. Bombs. Hell yeah.

I studied them, taking a few hand-sized ones and looking for a bag. I discovered one under the table and began packing them in carefully. Of course, I had no idea if they were stable, so I was hoping and praying I didn't blow us all up.

“Aurora, stay behind the drums. I don't think they'll come and check here. But I am going to plant these.”

“No way am I staying here. You need someone to watch your back while you sow them.”

“Aurora.”

“I'm older than you, Casey. Do as your elders say,” Aurora whispered.

I stifled a chuckle and gave a sharp nod. We left the room, and I crept out, taking the lead. Aurora stayed the five steps behind me.

“That fucker talking?” a guy growled, and I held a finger up.

Both of us froze near an enormous piece of equipment. I silently took out a bomb and set the trigger. I listened as I worked.

“Asshole knows how to keep his mouth shut. Ain’t many who won’t talk after taking a beating like that.”

“Boss, how long do you think we can keep them?”

“As long as we want. Rage hasn’t got a clue where we are. And our boys will be out soon. As far as the customer’s concerned, we have completed the tasks we were set. He’s happy and content to let us play with what we’ve caught.”

“Rage will search,” the second guy replied.

“Yeah, and they’ll walk right into a death trap. Leaves Rapid City open for takeover.”

“Fair play.”

“Gonna check how that fucker’s holding up. Watch your six,” the man in charge said, and footsteps walked away.

I peeked out, and a guy was walking towards me. As soon as he passed, I leapt on his back and jammed my knife into his throat. He let out a squeak and dropped to his knees. Angrily, I peered into his face.

“You fuckers forgot one thing. I was trained to be a Delta Force soldier. It’s gonna be you motherfuckers going up with a bang. Not Rage,” I muttered and dragged him backwards. I thanked Dad for making me run with all those kilos because my strength didn’t fail me.

“Aurora, there’s a space there. Hide for now. I’ll come for you. But I need to move swiftly and silently,” I whispered.

Aurora looked like she planned to argue but nodded and hid. I snuck around, avoiding some people and taking out a few others. It took me twenty minutes to plant and arm the bombs. Then I noticed two guys standing in front of a room where further men were inside. Not a problem.

I moved towards them and shot both through the forehead. Their bodies made a noise as they crashed to the ground, and the door opened, and I killed the third man. The fourth hid,

and I saw him open his mouth. A bullet flew straight into it and exploded the back of his head. I grimaced and hoped Mac was inside. Moving silently, I stepped over the dead body and saw Mac tied to a rope in the ceiling. Mac's feet were inched off the floor, and he'd been beaten bloody.

"Fuck," I hissed, and Mac's chin lifted slowly.

"Casey," he slurred.

"Hold on, I'll get you down," I whispered, looking for something to climb on. I saw a crate, grabbed it, and stepped on it. I sawed at the ropes cutting into Mac's wrists and tried to avoid hurting him further. Mac thumped to the ground as the last piece broke, and I leapt off the box and cradled his head. His face was a swollen mess, and there were marks all over his back and chest where he'd been hit.

"Casey, you need to leave," Mac slurred.

"Not without you. Mac, get to your feet, baby. Aurora's here too, and we need you," I whispered, brushing his hair.

Mac winced.

"Are you two hurt?"

"No. But we are not leaving you. I've rigged this place to blow. So, get up, Mac," I urged.

A noise made me glance up, and I spied a man entering. Without a second thought, my arm swept up, and I fired. He hit the deck, but I knew others wouldn't be far behind him.

"Mac now, before we're both roadkill," I snapped and, taking his weight, I helped him stagger to his feet.

"You armed?" Mac mumbled.

"Yeah, don't worry. We're gonna collect Aurora and get the hell out of here. Just stay with me, baby, okay?" I pleaded as we staggered towards where Aurora had been hidden.

A shout rang out, and I knew the bodies had been discovered. On my rounds, I'd found a fire exit near where Aurora was. We had to get there. Fast-running footsteps

pounded, and I shoved Mac behind a piece of machinery as men ran past. I waited a few moments and then continued.

“Casey?” Aurora whispered as we came into view.

“Aurora, help me with Mac. As soon as we are clear, I’m hitting the trigger.”

Bless her, Mac was two feet taller than her, but Aurora helped us struggle toward the exit. We were within inches of it when a bullet pinged above my head. I spun, letting go of Mac, and fired instantly. I hit a body, but a second took its place. Shit. Aurora had struggled to carry Mac with my help, but his weight would make her go down without it.

“Aurora, when I say run, run,” I gasped and began laying down covering fire. I rushed to Mac, hooked an arm over me, and dragged him forward. We burst through the exit as something hard struck me, and I felt a second hit. I staggered but kept going.

“Run!” I screamed when we’d put several feet between us.

Aurora took off. A guy came to the door as I let Mac drop.

“Hope your entire fucking gang is inside,” I barked and touched the trigger. I’d put a ten-second delay on the bombs and prayed I had programmed it right.

“Bitch, you’re dead. My team is going to fuck the life out of you,” he snarled.

I recognised his voice. This was the man in charge.

“One problem, asshole, you ain’t gonna be alive to see shit,” I said and flung myself over Mac’s body as the factory went up in a boom. The surrounding buildings shook as the building exploded in a rain of fire and debris. Bricks and wood hit my back, and something stabbed me in the shoulder. Fuck, that hurt. Flames reached sky high as secondary booms sounded, and I staggered to my feet and began dragging Mac backwards. Aurora appeared at my shoulder shouting, but I tapped my ears, and we worked together to drag Mac to safety.

Debris flew like bullets, glass-like spears, and the fire made us both sweat. My face was hot, and I was sure I’d got a

beautiful sunstroke from the heat of the blast. We finally made our way out of the rain of burning embers and sat on a curb. Aurora and I looked at each other as I laid Mac's head down on my lap.

"Can't hear anything," I said, but judging by how Aurora winced, I must have yelled.

"Sirens," Aurora replied, and I read her lips.

"Mac needs help. He's badly injured. Make sure they check Mac first," I responded.

Aurora nodded, but her face took on a glare of horror, and she reached over and touched something embedded in my back.

"What is it?"

"Wood," Aurora mouthed.

Yeah, that hurt. We sat together, me stroking Mac's brow as a fire engine came around the corner.

"Aurora, tell the truth, but not concerning the bombs. Say we found bomb-making stuff but didn't touch it. Honestly, I don't really wanna go to prison for blowing up a load of assholes and a building. I'll tell them that shit must have been unstable," I said, and Aurora nodded without hesitation.

The fire engine screeched to a halt with a second behind it. A fireman climbed out and gaped in amazement before hurrying over. He dropped his helmet, stared into our faces, and spoke.

"Can't hear," I bellowed, and he responded.

"Javier Hawthorne. Is this Mac from Rage?" Javier mouthed.

I nodded.

"We were kidnapped," I replied.

"Honey, I'm going to call my cousin Dylan," Javier said.

"Okay. Tell Dylan I found Problems Solved, and I solved a problem," I announced.

Javier sent me a sharp glance but yanked a mobile out and spoke rapidly.

“Nobody knew you were missing,” Javier declared, putting the phone down.

“Not surprised. Where’s the ambulance? Mac needs help, and Aurora must be checked.”

“A minute out. We’ve called for a second. Dylan will contact everyone who needs to know.”

I nodded and relaxed, one arm wrapped around Aurora’s shoulder and my other hand on Mac’s pulse. An ambulance finally flew around the corner, and paramedics raced towards us.

Despite them trying to check me over, I insisted they look at Aurora and Mac first. Then and only then did I allow them to lead me to an ambulance. Painfully, I climbed in beside Mac, and Aurora shoved her way in.

“We’ll stay together, thanks. Try to separate us after what we’ve been through, and I’ll hurt someone,” I threatened.

The paramedics backed down and drove to the hospital.



“I’m gonna cut me a bitch if somebody doesn’t tell me exactly what’s happening to Mac right now!” I exploded. This woman kept stopping me from leaving the booth, and with my hearing loss, her quick speech wasn’t helping matters. The nurse frowned, and I glared back. The door opened, and Ace walked in. I gazed at Ace mulishly.

“What’s going on with Mac?” I demanded.

“Drake is with him, and he’s being examined,” Ace said, and I shook my head.

“I’m fucking deaf. Why can’t you all speak slower?” I screeched as my frustration reached an epic level.

Ace repeated himself, and I watched his lips closer.

“Now, will you calm down and stop making a scene?” Ace ordered, and I shot him the finger. Aurora rushed in and stopped.

“Why hasn’t Casey been treated?” Aurora asked.

“The patient won’t let me near her,” the nurse said, speaking slower.

“Casey has a piece of wood stabbed in her shoulder, and you haven’t removed it?” Aurora exclaimed.

“Think I got a bullet in my ribs too,” I gasped as I felt pain sweep my body.

Now I knew Mac was being treated, my adrenaline was slowing, and agony was winning. I was checked by Ace, who made a noise of concern. My breath was beginning to hitch, and pain spread across my chest in a fierce fire.

“Why ain’t you had this sorted?” Ace demanded, his face close to mine.

“Because no fucker would tell me about Mac! And where is Blue?”

“Blue is fine Casey, he’s safe. Sit your ass down and let the nurse see to you,””

“Sit your ass down, and let the nurse see to you,” Ace snapped, and I offered him the finger but did as I was told.

The nurse carefully cut my shirt away, and Ace made a face.

“I was shot?”

“Twice!” Ace replied.

“Who’d have thought?” I responded as the pain overwhelmed me, and I sank into the darkness.



“Hey, Dad,” I chirped as Dad stormed into the hospital room I was lying in. No thanks to Ace. I’d been sedated and rushed to surgery before I even got to see my parents. Twelve hours had passed, and I shared a private room with Mac, who

remained unconscious. Mac's poor face was black and blue and so swollen he looked disfigured. By his side sat Drake, who kept staring and shaking his head. By Drake's side was Blue in a car seat.

"Blue okay?" I demanded, the baby my priority now I could see him.

"Blue's happy, he's been fed, burped and then shit his diaper. He's clean and asleep," Drake grunted. I guessed Drake had changed Blue's diaper and I hid a smile.

"Did well, Casey," Dad said, and I smirked.

"Blew the fuck out of that building, Dad. Think they were all present," I gloated, and Dad laughed.

"Have the police taken your statement yet?" Dad asked, sitting.

"No."

"The cops will. Don't mention the bombing," Dad warned, and I rolled my eyes.

"They were planning to use them on Rage. The plan was to call in with Mac and Aurora's whereabouts, wait until Rage was inside, and blow it. But I hijacked their crap and blew them up instead."

"Do not tell the police that," Drake finally spoke.

"Duh. As far as I'm concerned, I found their shit and saw it was unstable and got Mac, Aurora and myself the fuck out of there."

"How many did you kill, Casey?" Dad asked.

"Twelve for certain. The rest died in the explosion. The boss was present, so I know he's dead. Other than that, I haven't a clue," I replied.

"If you took the bulk out, the random few will scatter," Drake spoke.

"Possibly. There won't be many left. They were working for someone they called a client, but not a name. Also planned to

take over the Rage clubhouse. They had plans I blew to hell,” I added smugly.

Dad laughed, and Drake nodded curtly. I imagined he thought Mac was behind the takedown. Fuck, I didn't care.

“How come Mac is beaten, and you ain't?” a snide voice asked, and I shot a hand out to Dad. Dad sent Lindsey a nasty stare as she entered with Silvie and Artemis on her heels.

“Because I got free, and Mac didn't.”

“Somehow, I don't believe that,” Lindsey fired back, and anger welled inside.

“Lucky for me then, your opinion doesn't matter,” I stated, turning my head to Dad.

“So, how long until I can escape? I have a business to fix,” I asked.

Dad was sending Lindsey and her bitches death stares, but I wasn't interested.

“Yeah, all about the money, isn't it, bitch?” Lindsey snorted, and I continued to ignore her.

“The doctors were worried about the bullet that came close to your heart. It ricocheted around a bit before exiting. Doc's ordered a couple of days' rest. The first was a through and through. The wound on your shoulder was also deep. You won't be picking up those kettles for a while,” Dad said.

“I'll be fine, Dad. I'll make up smaller batches, but don't leave me here to go stir-crazy,” I almost begged.

“Yeah, you can take the trash out and leave Mac to family,” Lindsey sneered, and that was it.

Dad rose to his feet and stared down at Drake.

“You've no idea what my daughter suffered to save Mac. Casey saved him and one of your women, and this is the treatment you approve of? Mac and Aurora would both be dead if not for Casey, whether those bitches recognise it or not. Casey could have escaped and got herself free and left them

behind. And according to Aurora, Casey came for her first and then freed Mac.

“I’m disgusted you allow those cunts to speak to my daughter like that. Casey made a simple mistake, which I must admit was partly my prejudice. Since then, Casey has been loyal to Mac, and we welcomed him into our family. Casey followed the dictates I taught her, never leave a man behind, and brought both out alive. She had a bullet wound close to her heart and still fought to save them. Even with Casey being badly wounded, she kept dragging Mac away from the bombs and factory. By doing so, the bullet close to her heart moved around, and she could have died. You only have to check Casey’s face to see how close she was when she blew the building.

“And before one of you bitches open your mouth again. Why does Casey have two bullet wounds and a severe wound to her back if she hadn’t protected Mac? Why does Casey have burn marks on her hands and face, and yet apart from his bruising and swelling, Mac is fine? Casey got them out. Aurora will tell you that, and because you choose to be haters, you’ll call one of your own a liar. Well, fuck you and our alliance. Drake, I’m pulling my men. We’ll act alone on the other problem because I sure as hell don’t want my daughter around this negative shit!” Dad exploded, and Drake rose to his feet.

The door opened, and Mom and Aurora stood there with their mouths open.

“Get me out of here. I’ll recover at home, and I mean your house, Mom, before you start. I’m done with Rage. What a bunch of God Damn bitches they are!” I snarled, wincing as I tried to get up.

“Casey, stay in bed. We’ll get you another room on your own,” Dad said.

I sent Dad a look that made him blanch and struggled upright, ignoring the pain.

“You have two minutes to find me a wheelchair and some clothes. Tell the cops they can one glance at me and left.

“Get me some clothes,” I snarled.

A soft gasp echoed from behind me as the wound on my back came into view of the watchers. Yeah, I knew it was significant because I felt it.

“Claire, I’ll run down and fetch Casey some clothing,” Aurora said. “Get out of my way, Silvie. How dare you say what you did to Casey? Mac and I would be dead if not for her bravery. Casey could have left us but didn’t. I hate all of you and Drake. If this is what Rage has become, it’s no better off than when it was under Bulldog!” Aurora snapped and disappeared.

I listened as Drake took a deep breath as Aurora’s words punched him in the gut.

With a doctor fretting over me, I pulled on some sweats despite my pain. Aurora found a loose kimono in the shop, and we put it on carefully. The doc was fuming that we were leaving, but I’d had enough of the Rage wives to last a lifetime.

I kept looking at Blue, wondering if I could take him. I didn’t want to leave the cute baby with them, but I didn’t know how Mac would react. Mac had entrusted me with Blue’s secret, but I was unsure what to do. My heart was torn when the doctor interrupted my thoughts.

“This is against medical advice!” he repeated for the fifth time.

“Doc, I ain’t breathing the poisonous air of those bitches anymore. Even in a different ward, I would know they were here polluting my good mood and atmosphere. I’d rather die than remain here with them around,” I spat, glaring at the three witches.

They all looked guilty.

“Jacob, make Casey stay. I’ll ban the old ladies until Mac is awake,” Drake spoke with his own brand of guilt.

“No fucking way. You can leave me in the gutter before I ever share space with them again!” I hissed.

Mom took my wheelchair and shoved me out. She didn't say a word to the women, but the look of pure disgust on Mom's face said everything. Lindsey blanched, realising that maybe she'd gone too far.

"Casey, stay, please, until Mac wakes up," Drake asked.

"Never. Fuck, I'm done with Rage and the bullshit that comes with it. I'm badly hurt from saving your people, I nearly died. Shit, I killed twelve men. That's on my conscience, but who gives a shit? You all think Mac did it while I stood by and watched. Screw you all!" I spat, and Mom shoved me out the door. I took one last lingering look at the sleeping baby that had wriggled his way into my heart. Further pain settled deep into my soul at leaving Blue behind.

How I got home, I don't know; the pain was awful, but once there, Dad made up a bed downstairs, and I tumbled into it and slept.

Chapter Ten.

Casey.

Three days later, the pain was easing, and I could sit up without help. Mom had been a constant presence while Dad hovered and then disappeared when he caught my eye. The truth was, I needed more effective painkillers, but what doesn't kill us makes us stronger, right? I'd spoken to Detectives Ramirez and Ben and given a statement. When they mentioned bombs, I explained I knew little about them, but the ones I had seen hadn't looked safe and that they'd been scattered around. So maybe a stray bullet hit one. After quizzing me for hours, they said my explanation matched Mac's and Aurora's and that no further action would be taken.

Aurora was a constant presence, to the point of moving into the guest bedroom. She hovered as much as I allowed her. Aurora Victoria wasn't used to a life of fear and violence, and this incident had shaken her. If Aurora needed reassurance, that was fine. I honestly couldn't blame her. Instead, we discussed what stock Aurora wanted to sell of my brand and what she required for our joint venture. Luckily, Aurora was as knowledgeable as me, and we quickly agreed on things.

I had heard nothing from Rage, not even how Mac was doing. That cut me as I thought Mac and I had settled our differences. But as much as my heart hurt, I would recover. No doubt those catty women had got their claws into Mac. Clearly, Mac chose those bitches over me. Fine. Aurora had several calls from brothers she knew and quietly but firmly informed them she had little to say and was making her own decisions. Drake called Aurora twice daily, but she kept the conversation short and often hung up.

Dad had his men out looking for the child trafficking gang, and they were no longer sharing information with Drake and his allies. He'd cut all communication with them and was working alone. Dad also had patrols in our shops for a just-in-case scenario. Mom met with the insurance agent, knowing

that everything was in hand. There wasn't much for me to do besides planning recipes with Aurora.

I was napping late afternoon, as I tired quickly due to healing, when I noticed a male presence. Instinct reared, and as he approached, I waited and then struck out.

“God damn, woman! Ain't I black and blue enough!” Mac roared, and I opened my eyes and stared at his battered face. Mac was holding his nose and glowering.

“Sorry, I thought you were an intruder!”

Mac glowered as he settled a baby basket next to my bed and I peered and saw Blue sleeping. Mac dumped a baby changing bag, rucksack and a large duffle by my bed.

“No, now move over,” Mac said, pouting, and climbed into bed, gently shuffling me over.

“What are you doing?” I demanded.

Mac snuggled down and drew my head to his chest. His arms wrapped around me, and a happy rumble escaped his lips.

“Snuggling,” Mac replied.

“Mac, I can see that, but why? The entirety of Rage is against me!” I snarled.

Mac soothed my hair with his hand.

“And I ain't talking to anyone in Rage. I informed Drake exactly what had happened. That you saved Aurora and me. Lindsey won't sit down for a week after I've torn her a new one for her stunt. Silvie and Autumn are persons unknown to me for now, and Drake is on my shit list. Which I made him fully aware of. Rage disrespected the woman I claimed. They crapped on my girl and forced her to leave the hospital hours after she was operated on. Oh yeah, we aren't on good terms.”

“Wow.”

“Casey, I discharged myself. Can we please get some rest? I'm still hurting bad,” Mac begged.

Contentedly, I nodded, and we held one another as we dozed off.

Mom was excited to see Mac, while Dad was furious we were sleeping in the same bed. She had stolen Blue while we slept, and I decided he was going to be one spoilt little boy and I couldn't care less. Blue was so cute.

Mac reasonably pointed out neither of us was in a condition to disrespect Dad, which did not mollify him at all. However, Mom carried on, blathering about her beautiful and brave son-in-law and being a doting grandma. She cooked all Mac's favourite foods, which upset Dad further and tickled me pink.

Dad kept disappearing, but I knew he was hunting the traffickers down. I didn't press him for information because I was in no condition to fight. Mac turned his phone off when it did not stop pinging and pointedly refused to look at the messages. He was angry at his club. A few days later, Mac was moving better, albeit stiffly, whereas I remained in a lot of pain. Dad had settled down finally, once he realised he'd have free access to Blue for a few days which made me laugh. Mac began spending time with Dad, away from my ears, as I continued healing. Honestly, I was shocked at how the pain lingered, considering it had been a week, but as Mac pointed out, I hardly had access to good meds.

Therefore, I was surprised when, eight days after the kidnapping, Dad and Mac disappeared for the afternoon. Mom didn't know where they had gone, or she wasn't telling me. I was sitting up in bed reading when Mom ushered some guests in. She was cradling Blue against her shoulder and her hand was covering his head as if to protect him. My cheerful mood evaporated immediately when I saw the full range of old ladies. Phoe jabbed Lindsey in the shoulder, and she sent Phoe a glare before stepping forward.

Mom offered to give me Blue, and I shook my head. I didn't know why they were here and if they'd come to take Blue, Mom would be able to flee while I fought to give her time.

"Whatever you have to say, just stow it and leave," I said firmly, unwilling to engage in yet another fight.

“Casey, I came to apologise,” Lindsey replied, and I blinked.

“What?”

“Casey, I’m sorry. A few years ago, I was running from an abusive husband. I landed on Rage and was accepted. Mine’s a long story, but I was hiding the fact I’d had a book approved by a publisher as I wanted to surprise Rage. Show Rage I could stand on my own two feet. They judged me and hacked my laptop. Well, Mac did. They found a couple of emails they thought were sent by Santos, and there was an awful scene. After I told them the truth, they felt how I do now. Pretty shitty. Then I stormed out and nearly got killed. Mac was shot.

“Since then, Mac and I have been close. Mac misjudged me, and we both came close to dying because of it. I know how it feels to be judged and sentenced for a simple mistake. And instead of remembering that, I took the route of hate. Information can get mixed up and twisted, and I forgot that. So I feel pretty ashamed of myself and how I’ve treated you. Casey, you made a judgement based on erroneous knowledge, but you’re not alone in that.

“And despite the harsh welcome we gave you at Rage, with our self-righteous indignation, we had one lesson that was drummed into us. Everyone can make a mistake. What matters is how you proceed after recognising it. And truthfully, I wasn’t very nice. And I am sorry,” Lindsey said.

“You here because Mac reamed you out?” I asked honestly.

Shame crossed Lindsey’s face.

“No, I’m here because I did you wrong, and I’m big enough to own that. Mac is angry because of what happened. Hell, I never expected you to leave when you were so severely hurt. Hearing Mac had been beaten to a pulp scared the shit out of me, and I took that out on you. Casey, I know you freed him and Aurora at a high risk to yourself. Aurora said you weren’t injured when you saved her. Those injuries came with saving them both. Thank you for keeping Mac alive and not leaving him behind.”

I wondered how sincere Lindsey was. The women with her looked embarrassed. A couple didn't because they hadn't interacted with me.

"Are you here because Mac is at odds with his club and you?" Mom asked sternly.

"No. We're not allowed to get involved in a brother's business, but Mac is rightfully and sincerely pissed. That is on us. And I wouldn't blame you for not accepting our apology. We treated you terribly and cruelly, especially after you were wounded. That is something that will haunt me," Lindsey whispered.

"Yeah, alright, I accept. Just let shit go. Mistakes were made on both sides. It's nice someone is so loyal to Mac," I responded, feeling uncomfortable.

"We hoped you'd forgive us, and we brought goodies," Silvie said, stepping forward.

Woah, I mentioned nothing about forgiving them but whatever. It would take a lot of patience to build a bond with these women. But I needed to because I would never dream of demanding Mac leave Rage.

"Goodies?" Mom asked, swapping a glance with me. She was as unconvinced as I was.

"Yeah. Although Mina had nothing to do with this, she brought her full set of books, as did Lindsey. They're both authors. Vivie made chocolates, and they are divine. Lindsey brought a quilt she made and Carly a blanket. Marsha bought the makings of booze-free mimosas, and Artemis wants to give you her new knife." The way Silvie announced that, it appeared to be a massive gift from Artemis.

"Sin's got you an online book token; Autumn grabbed magazines and puzzle books and Alison, several bunches of rare flowers. Ellen is a teacher and didn't think you'd want student books, but she did bring you a spa day voucher for when you feel better. And I've booked you and Mac a week away in one of my holiday homes," Phoe mentioned.

"Show off," Lindsey muttered.

“Rich bitch!” Artemis growled, and Phoe smiled serenely.

“You forgot me! I brought several boxes of pastries from the shop. Hi, I’m Penny,” a woman announced with a smile.

“That’s very kind,” I replied carefully.

“And I also brought you this. We all have these,” Phoe revealed and handed me a parcel. Cautiously, I opened it and found a matching cut to Mac’s, only, on the back, it said, ‘Casey, Mac’s Old Lady.’

“They used to say property of, and Phoe took offence. Claimed it was like slave labour, and the guys allowed us this minor change,” Marsha added with a grin.

I stared down at the soft leather cut and touched it gently. Out of everything they’d brought, this meant the most.

“Shit,” I responded and wiped a tear from my eye. “Thank you.”

“Told you it would be the old lady cut,” Artemis crowed.

“Oh, shut up!” Carly drawled, and Artemis glared.

I laughed as the women started squabbling over who had the best gift, while Mom and I watched in amazement. Finally, Marsha stepped out of the fight and smiled.

“So, do you have glasses or what? Half these bitches are pregnant, so they can’t drink, and Casey certainly can’t.”

“Follow me,” Mom said with a raised eyebrow.



Mac returned home several hours later, and the moment he saw the ladies, he went on alert. His eyes searched me before he opened his mouth, ready to take any lead I might offer. I shrugged and patted the bed, and Mac came over and dropped a kiss on my lips before curling up behind me. I wriggled until I was comfortable and leaned back against him, while Blue was settled in my arms. I loved the smell of Blue and kept sniffing him and dropping kisses on his head. Blue was so

easy to love. Dad was not amused to find his house full of women and did not say a word before retreating to his room.

It was a pleasant afternoon spent with the women, which shocked me. Mac didn't give a shit about being around the ladies and was content with me. When they spoke about a girls' night at Washingtons, the premier strip club for Rapid City, he balked and shook his head. I sent Mac a serene smile and said that I'd met Marissa Hawthorne, and she also had suggested a night out. Mac covered his eyes with a groan.

James

James sat at his desk in Washingtons, feeling more at home here than he did at the smart offices his wife and sister-in-law had set up. He loved Kate, but James was not the type of man who preferred to be trapped behind a table. So he, Kate, and the team had agreed that James could escape twice a week. James was also disgruntled at being forced to be the CEO of Bryant and Washingtons. He just wanted to run the businesses, but Kate had made him realise he did need to look legal. Which, of course, James now was.

Adam knocked, entered and took a seat, and shook his head. James should have been warned by the view of abject horror on Adam's face, but he wasn't. And more fool him.

"What?" James asked.

Adam pointed to the big window that overlooked the strip club, and James rose to his feet. It was darkened glass, so James could watch the floor, but nobody could see in. Sometimes he allowed people to spy his presence. James gazed out at the stage. On seeing the dancers were okay, he checked his bar staff. Slowly his gaze drifted until he hit the VIP area exclusive to a bunch of ladies James highly feared.

The blood drained from James's face as he spied his beloved wife, his sister-in-law, Tammy, with Frankie, Mandy and Rina. They weren't so bad. But James focused on the women following behind wearing Rage cuts. Oh no, no! James's hackles went up as he saw Autumn and Lindsey alongside Silvie and the new girl, Casey. His terrified gaze landed on the rest of the Rage ladies, and James made a

choking noise. James turned completely pale when the Hawthorne females followed Rage.

“Batten the hatches!” James shouted, causing Adam to snort in amusement.

“Bit late, they’re in. The door guards didn’t even argue. Not a peep. Just stepped aside and let them stroll through security!” Adam growled.

“Call Drake and Dylan and tell them we have an emergency and to come to my office the back way. No fuckin’ chance is our security handling those women on their own!” James snarled as he began mentally cursing Drake and Dylan. Those two men would pay for this!

Casey

I was glancing around in interest. I’d never been to a strip club before, and it wasn’t as seedy as I had imagined. The décor was very tasteful, and the floor held booths and tables. Of course, it was all mainly guys, and they eyed us, women with a range of expressions from lust to wariness. Kate, James’s wife, had explained that there were two levels, the lower one held the male dancers, and the upper floor had the female. Marissa chipped in by saying that they usually supported the female dancers. Agreeably, I nodded my head.

Before anyone ordered, a couple of barmaids brought over a round of shots. To my surprise, there was plenty for everyone. Kate grinned.

“James is in his office, and this is our VIP area. If one of us wants the booth, we have to call up and let the bar know, and they’ll reserve it. Otherwise, the rule is we are not allowed to just turn up. That’s because of the chaos that follows us when we’re together!”

“That bad?” I asked, wondering what the hell I’d got into. Kate had led us to a large area where the booth surrounded a massive circular table. There was plenty of room for everyone here.

“Oh yeah, just watch!” Kate grinned.

That did not fill me with confidence. The drinks kept coming, and the ladies started getting loud. As each dancer came on stage, the women whooped and cheered them on. They clearly had some favourites as they threw dollars at them. This group wasn't strangers to the dancers as they played up to them. After our fourth round of shots, I began laughing as Marissa Hawthorne, with her triplet cousins, Imelda, Justine, and Maria, rose to their feet and began dancing. Idly, I noted that two security guards were at either end of our booth, keeping back any punters who might get overly happy.

Phoe was up on the seats, her ass sat on the back as she twirled her hands around her head and encouraged them. Lindsey and a few others were screeching as they sexy danced each other. Amused, I rolled my eyes, laughing as Imelda bent over and Maria smacked her ass. Kate was hollering encouragement, and the dancer on stage, Cotton Candy, was wriggling her hips at Marissa. Marissa needed no further prompting and leapt up on stage and spanked Candy. I was roaring with laughter as Cotton Candy coyly turned and put a hand to her mouth in mock surprise.

The crowd was cheering as Candy grabbed Marissa's hips and began grinding. In return, Marissa clasped Candy's hands and held her close. I was on my feet by now, yelling my head off. Marissa beckoned to me, and I jogged up the stairs, ducking a bodyguard and joined the two women on stage. Marissa whistled, and Candy poked her head around. With a gleeful grin, Candy faced me and wriggled and shimmed around me. Meanwhile, Marissa was slowly stripping her shirt off, which was fine as she wore a tank underneath.

Men in the crowd were acting crazy. I matched Marissa and shrugged my top off, and Marissa and I took our tops off and shimmied our boobs leaning forward. The girls roared approval, and Marissa and I turned back-to-back and worked our way down to the floor before moving back upright. Candy danced around, kicking her legs high and then bending over and shaking her ass. Marissa began pulling up her tank and then shook her finger at the women, who shrieked in glee.

I gripped Candy's hips as she bent over and made grinding motions before she straightened, turned, and kicked her leg onto my shoulder. I stepped backwards carefully and dragged Candy across the stage. Candy's smile encouraged me all the while.

A group of about fifteen guys approached, yelling at Marissa and me to get them off. Marissa flipped them the bird before blowing Candy a kiss and heading for the edge of the stage. One man reached out and clutched her ankle, and Marissa spun and booted him in the face.

Roars of outrage erupted, and instantly half the women headed in our direction. Meanwhile, security appeared and began hauling men back from the stage, but chaos broke out. My drunkenness faded a little as I realised what situation we were in. As the atmosphere changed, what had been fun became deadly. Cotton Candy collected her haul of money, tipped us a salute, and disappeared. The press of guys was overwhelming guards who were appearing from nowhere.

A hand grabbed my leg and began yanking me down, and I stamped on his palm, grinding my heel into it. My attacker screamed and released me, and then I was flung over a man's shoulder. Hell no, I immediately bit his ass, and a roar hit my ears.

"For fuck's sake, Casey!" And I patted Mac in sympathy. I'd have to kiss it better later. I saw Rage brothers carrying women over their shoulders and waved at Phoe, who was chuckling uncontrollably over Drake's shoulder. Several other men had hold of the Hawthorne ladies. When I turned around, James and Adam were escorting Kate and the crew to safety.

"What the fuck! Imelda! Hawthorne!" Ezra roared, and I gave Mac a wedgie to make him stop. I began laughing hysterically as I saw Ezra taped to a seat and Imelda straddling him. Ezra grimly tried to avoid Imelda's boobs as they kept thrusting in his face as she lap-danced him.

Another man grabbed Imelda, and she shrieked as Dylan carried his cousin out. When we got outside, the women were gathered in a circle. I was astounded as Slick was pinned to the

ground with Maria giving him a sexy dance. Slick was trying to shove her off, but wherever he placed his hands, he seemed to end up grabbing her boobs.

Davies from Hawthorne's strode forward, picked Maria up, and shoved her into an SUV. One by one, they rounded up the Hawthorne females while we watched in amusement. Carla and Teresa Hawthorne both avoided capture as they groped Rage brothers and goosed Hawthorne's men. Miguel Hawthorne finally caught Carla and Dylan grabbed Teresa. We yelled goodbye as the ladies hung out the windows and screamed. Marissa was waving her tank at us, black bra on display, and the guys covered their eyes and turned away.

"Dear God," James Washington said as we heard sirens in the distance. "Ramirez will freak."

I faced him and saw Sophia Hawthorne behind Lindsey. Sophia was weaving back and forward and had stripped down to her bra and was undoing her jeans.

"They forgot one!" Drake howled as Sophia shimmed out and stood there in her underwear.

With a squeal of delight, Sophia began dancing, her hands over her head. James shrugged his jacket off, and Adam tackled Sophia, who squealed and ran. Adam landed face-first in the dirt as Kate and her gang of girls cried with laughter. Sophia darted around fast, grabbing men before running in front of a slowing vehicle. As it stopped, the headlights hit her, and Sophia sexily walked away.

"Sophia!" Ramirez yelled, nearly falling out of the car.

"What? It's no worse than wearing a bikini at the beach!" Sophia shouted back and took off as Ramirez raced after her.

"You know, I'm hot too," Carly announced and began trying to undress.

Rock scooped her up and carried her off. Ramirez returned with Sophia slung over his shoulder.

"Sweet Sophia, my ass," Ramirez growled.

“Washington, get your women home. I’ll deal with mine,” Drake spoke with a glare at each of us.

“Isn’t Drake cute! Drake thinks he can control us. Wait till I give him his blow job tonight. He’ll be putty in my hands,” Phoe crowed as I laughed.

The old ladies, as one, turned and blew raspberries at Drake and then started trying to escape their men to bond together. One by one, they were carried away, and I was left smiling sloppily at Mac.

“Back of my bike, Casey!” Mac ordered, and I flipped him the finger and began heading back to the bar. Mac grabbed hold of me and steered me towards his motorbike.

“I’m so hot, Mac, and I’m randy!”

“Babe, I’ll fuck you when we get home,” Mac replied.

“No, now!” I said as I straddled the Harley, and my fingers moved to his belt. Mac captured my hands and placed them on his taut stomach. I patted Mac’s cock and purred as I leaned my head against his back.

Mac sighed and started his bike, and we pulled out. We headed towards the clubhouse, and I giggled as I saw Ace pull over, and he and Artemis began making out like there was no tomorrow.

“Get a fuckin’ room!” Mac roared, and Ace raised a hand.

I laughed and shouted to Artemis, who offered a fist pump. Mac rode to the clubhouse and scooped me up, and I caressed his wonderfully cute butt as he headed toward his bedroom. Once inside, I tore at Mac’s clothes as he tried to control my wandering hands. Finally, Mac picked me up and dumped me on the bed as I shimmied my panties and jeans down. Barely, I smiled as Mac undressed and turned to me. Mac’s cock poked through his boxer shorts, and I shifted suddenly, grabbing Mac by the hips and yanking him towards me. I ripped Mac’s boxers, eager to get his dick, and took him in my mouth.

Mac groaned as I drank him in and deep-throated him. But even then, I couldn’t take his entire length. His hands crept to either side of my head as I tortured him. Mac groaned as he

tried to remove himself from my lips, and I gripped his ass and dug my nails in. Fuck no, I loved sucking him off. Mac wasn't ruining my fun. Mac finally got free and pounced, worshipping my body as he did. I was humming in pure pleasure when Mac sank his mouth on me. My first release was fast, and Mac kept teasing my clit until he wrung a second from me.

“My pussy!” I cried, and Mac understood.

Catching one leg on his shoulder, Mac lowered himself into me. Thank fuck I was bendy. Mac hauled my body towards his and began pounding hard. His face was taut with pleasure and concentration as one hand sank to my clit and played there. Despite being drunk, I felt a third orgasm rise, and I screamed a release as Mac sought his own. We came together, and Mac rolled to the side, taking me with him.

“I like drunk Casey!” Mac murmured, and I chuckled.

Moments later, Mac got to his feet and cleaned us both up. He forced me to take some Tylenol and drink a glass of water before letting me sleep. Warm and relaxed, I snuggled into Mac and drifted off.



“Holy fuck!” Mac exclaimed as I glared at him from the bed. Blue blinked at me from surprised eyes and I guessed Mom and Dad had dropped him off this morning. Oh, Mac could be all happy and chirpy. I curled my lips in a snarl, and Mac shoved two tablets, one glass of water and a cup of coffee in front of me. He said nothing else, but Mac's eyes danced with amusement. Blue's eyes widened and his mouth opened. He made a little noise of horror which made Mac grin.

I was aware I didn't look my best. My hair was wild and tangled, and I was green. Hangovers and I didn't suit one another. Mac's phone pinged, and I looked up in time to see him snap a picture.

“What are you doing?” I croaked.

“Oh, the boys and I are swapping pictures on whose old lady looks the worse. Mina was winning, with Lindsey in second place. But you just took top!” Mac replied.

What the fuck! I narrowed my eyes at Mac, and he snapped another shot and sent it.

“I will kill you.”

“Yeah, but not today. I’ll run you a bath. You might be more human after that,” Mac grinned.

Mac’s phone pinged again, laughed at the message, and walked away. When I entered the bathroom, I screamed! I looked like the Crow. My makeup was streaked, and I realised I’d forgotten to take it off. No wonder I was winning the roughest old lady competition. I cleaned my face and climbed slowly into the bath.

“Just won a cool two thousand. Thanks, babe,” Mac announced, dropping a kiss on my forehead as he began washing my hair. Blue sat in his bouncer at Mac’s feet, gurgling to himself.

“Huh?”

“We made a bet on who had the worst hungover woman. I won,” Mac said happily.

I didn’t have the energy to beat his ass today, but I noted it. Payback was a bitch, and I wore the bitch pants! I leaned my head against Mac’s legs and whimpered. Someone was punishing me for having a good time, and I wanted to rip their throat out. A memory poked me.

“Holy crap, did I get up on a strippers stage and dance?” I asked.

“Yeah, got that on camera, too, and it’s made the rounds.” Mac grinned.

“I’ll never face your brothers again!” I moaned.

“Hell, they’re dead impressed. Rage thought you had a stick up your ass and are relieved to see you’re as insane as the rest of them. Well, maybe not ecstatic over that, because aw fuck, I

mean, another crazy old lady? But yeah, they are happy you know how to enjoy yourself.” Mac grinned.

Where was my gun? It would be easier to shoot Mac than beat him. Blue didn't need to know about his dad. I could pretend I had Blue by immaculate conception. Blue would never know the difference. Mom and Dad would back me up!

“Hate you!” I muttered.

Mac's grin grew brighter.

“You didn't say that when at three this morning you woke me up having sex with me.”

“I did not!” I exclaimed. Or did I?

“Baby, I was sound asleep and suddenly wide awake as you fucked me stupid.” Mac continued grinning.

“Oh my God, I attacked you!”

“Ain't complaining. Anytime the urge happens, feel free,” Mac offered.

Holy crap. No more drinking like last night. Poor Mac, I'd violated him! Guilt swept over me, but Mac pulled me close.

“Casey, if I felt victimised, you'd have been off me in a second. Instead, I was incredibly turned on and hope you'll do it again. You can fuck me when, where, and however you want. I'm more than a willing partner where you're concerned.”

“Love you,” I whispered as shame left me.

“Back at ya, babe, you and me forever.”

Chapter Eleven.

Casey

Three weeks had passed since my drunken adventure, and Mac was out on patrol tonight. However, I wasn't tucked up in bed like Mac might have thought. No, I was hiding in the grass with a sniper rifle and a pair of night-vision glasses. My face was streaked, and I wore combat clothing. Dad's team had finally tracked down the traffickers, and we waited patiently for them. As Uncle Gilbert had guessed, they were moving locations, and we'd cottoned on to them.

Dad's entire unit was out here, all thirty-five of us. Every single angle was covered, and we maintained radio silence. Despite the old ladies' offers of friendship, Dad was still pissed, so we were alone. Although, considering the other thirty-four bodies here with me, we were hardly lonely. Two dark sedans pulled into the clearing, and I aimed at the driver of the first with my sight. Inside I saw two guys talking to themselves, but the rear windows were blacked out. I guessed the money man was inside. A black van drove up next to them with two more men, and one jumped out and approached the sedan driver.

They shot the shit for a few minutes, laughing and joking, and disgust welled in me. My finger twitched on the trigger, but I held firm. We needed proof the women were here. The van's rear doors opened, and three more guys got out. That made nine confirmed and six potentials.

"Truck sighted," Target muttered over the mic.

No one replied apart from Dad, who clicked once to confirm the message had been received. A truck arrived, and two men exited. Men from the smaller van moved over to greet them, and we saw an envelope exchanged.

"Money verified," Trigger informed those who couldn't see.

The six guys walked around to the truck and swung open the double doors, and I growled. Inside, I could see a huddle of

girls and a couple of boys. They aged from ten to eighteen. There were at least twenty in total.

“Alpha, Bravo, Delta, approach. Charlie, cover our backs,” Dad ordered.

I was on Alpha and rose and moved silently forward. Around me, I saw men and women moving towards the vehicles and victims. The moon was high in the sky and bright tonight, which worked against us as we kept low to the ground. I watched as the team leader held up a hand, and we paused in the long grass.

“Alpha in position,” he muttered.

“Bravo team in position,” the Bravo leader said after a few moments. We waited patiently for Delta, and a second later, he called an affirmative.

“Mission is a go,” Dad ordered, and we moved swiftly forward. The first clue the traffickers had of trouble was when somebody shot two assholes standing by a vehicle. Delta opened the rear door, and a shot was discharged. Instantly, the traffickers slammed the truck doors shut and began firing. We shot back, causing far more damage than their random shots. Four fell before they knew what was happening. The first car’s driver tried to take off, but a bullet pierced the windscreen, and it skidded to a stop. The guy in the passenger seat got out and fired blindly. A bullet spun him around, and a second took him down.

The rear doors opened, and two suspects started running. I hit the second as, out of the darkness, a figure reared and tackled the first. I moved forward, keeping my eyes open, and saw the teams capturing the rest of the men. Staying behind, I covered their backs should anyone approach. Meanwhile, Charlie team watched my back. A bullet fired close by made me wince, but I didn’t lose concentration. Slowly, I began moving on the guys near the truck. One of them dragged a young girl out and held a gun to her head.

“Let me go! I’ll blow her brains out!” he yelled as I arrived from behind.

Quietly, I knelt and took the shot, and his head exploded as the girl screamed. A figure in combats ran forward and moved the child out of the way as I spun as someone approached. My rifle aimed before I lowered it on seeing Dad.

“Got them all. Three dead, six were injured, and seven captured. And we have the money man,” Dad announced, pointing at a suited fellow who had been kept separate from the rest.

“We need info,” I said, and Dad nodded.

The teams moved around zip-tying the captives.

“The victims?” I asked, approaching the lorry with Dad.

“FBI has a call in right now. A friend is coming. We’ll leave them in the truck, which I hate, but we have to. Alpha, Bravo, and Delta will return to home base with our captive, and Charlie will watch until the FBI arrives. My acquaintance was on standby, so he’ll be here shortly. Charlie will make sure the rescue happens before pulling back,” Dad answered.

“Injuries?”

“None.” Wow, good going.

The money man stood surrounded by Dad’s men, and I felt a flicker of recognition. He’d not spoken a word but appeared frightened, so he should. Dad ordered for him to be secured and told me to leave.

“Not leaving, Dad. We wanted this to go down tonight,” I replied.

I studied the guy’s face after following Dad to where he was being held. There again was the niggles of recognition, but it slipped from my grasp. Instead of pushing it, I would let it come to me.

“The boss will kill you,” the man finally grunted.

Dad hit him straight in the kidneys.

“I want a name,” Dad ordered.

“Fuck you,” the guy spat at Dad. Dad let rip with a hammer of a blow and then aimed and fired at his knee.

“A name!” Dad demanded.

“Shit!” the man yelled.

Dad shot the other knee out.

“Give me a name!”

“Never.” The illusive feeling subsided.

“That’s Ricardo Santos, and second in command to Romeo Santos. They are cousins. We know where we’re headed,” I said.

Dad fired me a look, and I nodded.

“One hundred per cent certain, Dad.”

Dad raised his gun and shot him straight through the head.

“The money they have, he’d walk. Not anymore. Move out; we identified our next target,” Dad ordered.

I pulled back with Dad and jogged a mile down the road to where we’d stashed the SUVs. I jumped in the rear as Dad climbed in the front, and when we were full, Dad drove off with no lights. No point hiding our identity if we allow the FBI to track our car lights. It was amusing watching Dad drive the car with his night-vision on. Charlie team had stayed to protect the victims, which meant we were five men down.

Dad had gone with his gut feeling that Santos was involved, and we had studied the plans a few days ago. And built up a plan to attack if we got confirmation he was behind this vile crime. No need to act on the fly. We were now implementing Plan Home Breach. We parked a mile from the building and took our routes into the compound where Santos lived. Delta team had broken down into Delta and Foxtrot. Foxtrot moved toward higher ground to cover our backs as we approached stealthily.

“Infiltrate,” Dad ordered.

We knew the plan and had studied it well, and I went over the wall and shot the bodyguard I saw. We were using tranquilisers, for now, non-lethal, so the cops could arrest people. But our small arms were holding bullets should we

need them. I crept up to the house and cracked open a door. Behind me, someone tapped my shoulder three times, and I stepped back to let my team go first.

I shot a couple of men inside, and they collapsed silently with the feathered darts sticking out of their necks. Stealthily, I continued heading to the basement. A scream shattered the silence, and I knew our surprise element had gone. Shouting and shots were heard, and the loud retort of returning fire. I dropped the tranquiliser gun and reached for my handgun. I opened the door at the bottom of the basement and listened to a faint wail. Somebody was down here.

Moving forward, a tap landed on my shoulder, and I stepped aside and let my teammate pass. I tapped my ear and pointed, telling him I'd heard somebody in that direction. With me watching him, we moved through the basement as there was another cry. We arrived in a large room and glanced around. It was empty, yet someone was here. We began searching for a hidden entrance, and my partner found one. Hauling the door open, we both flinched at the aroma that flooded out. Horrified, I peered inside and saw cells with children in them. Fuck! Santos had been holding them here before transferring them.

"The police are on their way. We'll return," I announced. As much as I wanted to free them, I couldn't. Some cried out not to leave them, which broke my heart.

"Come on," my teammate said, and I moved away, hardening myself to their cries. We had to find Santos and end this. Moving slowly, we headed back upstairs, taking out a couple of random guards, and then I heard a shot and the sound of a chopper. We raced up the stairs and for the roof. I saw Dad just in front, taking cover as several men fired down the stairwell. Santos was going to escape! Dad launched a flashbang up the steps, and we piled up them, shooting whatever moved. As we reached the roof, the helicopter lifted off, and I spied a man sitting inside with a woman and children. They were all wearing nightwear, and it was clear we'd caught them off guard.

“Fuck!” I roared, knowing it was Santos, and shot at the chopper, hoping to bring it down. It cleared the house and flew away.

“I’ve called the police, announced we’re under attack, and told them I’m a bodyguard. Also informed them of the prisoners below,” Alpha team leader declared with disgust.

“Move out,” Dad said, staring after the speck in the sky. “Next time, we’ll have a gunship waiting!”

Damn, we had missed Santos but taken out the ring. There’d been at least thirty captives downstairs, and what with the ones rescued in the truck, we’d done well. But our primary target had escaped. Though Santos was on our radar now, and Delta Force never failed to bring a mark in.



I yawned as Mac climbed into bed with me and tucked me against his body. He snuggled down with me and wrapped me tight. Unknown to Mac, Mom had watched Blue while Dad and I completed our mission. She’d gone home with Dad when he’d dropped me off. Mom was so in love with Blue, she grabbed any time she could with him.

“Okay?” I asked.

“Yeah, strange night. Drake heard that the FBI had taken down a trafficking team, and twenty-three kids were rescued. Which somehow led to Santos and the cops are presently at his home. Santos’s place was raided by unknown perps who all escaped. But another thirty children were saved. It seemed Santos used his basement as a holding room. Three women who’d been locked in bedrooms and raped repeatedly by Santos’s men were also picked up. But no one knows who hit the traffickers or Santos’s home,” Mac mused.

“They get Santos?”

“No, and you know you didn’t, Casey,” Mac retorted.

“Hey! Why would I?” I demanded, outraged.

“Yeah, that tone sounds as fake as hell. You know how I know, Casey? You missed some camouflage makeup near your ear,” Mac said and kissed the aforementioned ear.

Damn!

“There are multiple arrest warrants for Santos because they finally have him on something. Even better, his number two, Ricardo, was killed at the trucks. Looks an awful lot like an execution, and he was beaten beforehand,” Mac informed me.

“Wow!” I gasped, and Mac snorted.

“Fine, don’t tell me anything. I’m just glad you’re home to snuggle up to!”

And with that, Mac closed his eyes and began snoring. Ha!

Mac

“Casey confirm or deny it?” Drake asked in church the next day.

Mac shook his head.

“Nope, but I pretended to see a tiny sliver of camouflage makeup, and Casey’s body gave away she was involved,” Mac replied with a laugh.

“Casey’s going to be a handful!” Drake warned, and Mac nodded with a grin.

That was precisely what he wanted.

“We’ve got to make amends with her father somehow. We know that Jacob and his team took out those traffickers, and I feel a bit cheated. Santos is in the wind. They just missed him. Strangely enough, Santos escaped in a chopper with a woman and kids, but Ramirez discovered his wife and three children at the mansion. We have no idea who he’s run with. The wife is insisting he doesn’t have a mistress.”

Drake scratched his chin. “Then who did he take?”

“Fuck if I know,” Mac replied. “The wife is facing charges because there’s no way she had those captives in her home and didn’t realise. The victims have been taken into foster care

until they can be reunited with their families, and Hawthorne has put a man on them.”

“How do you suggest making amends with Jacob?” Apache asked.

“Asking him here for a beer, cookouts, ensuring Jacob takes part in family time. If we find info on Santos, then we will share. Those types of things, like we did when we rebuilt the relationship with Hawthorne,” Mac replied.

“It would benefit us in the long run. I don’t feel Santos is done with Rapid City yet. Rumours are he’s in Mexico. But he has a hard-on for Rapid City. The question to be answered is why,” Gunner considered.

“Yeah, it’s unnatural his obsession,” Ezra mused.

“Is it?” Slick asked. “Think about it. Miguel Santos ran the crime here, and Romeo handed his dad over. Maybe he believes he earned RC by giving up Miguel. But if Romeo fails here, he’ll fail anywhere. That’s what I’m guessing he’s thinking. To claim back the Santos right, he must start here and win. It’s ego.”

“Could be Slick. His father was warped in the head. At first, I believed when Romeo reached out to Artemis, we’d have a cease-fire and stay away from each other. But the man’s ego is outstanding. Romeo is just as fucked up as his dad,” Drake agreed.

“Santos doesn’t understand the protection RC has. Hawthorne’s, The Juno Group, RCPD, Delta Force, Washington’s, and us. That’s a lot of power to fight. And he keeps trying,” Ace replied.

“Something is whacked with Romeo’s thought process,” Slate said.

“And further news, those assholes out on bail have disappeared. The shopkeepers are reporting back that there’s been no further trouble. And even better, the funds forced out of them have been returned,” Rock stated.

“What the fuck?” Drake asked, sitting up and staring at Mac.

“I hacked into their bank. Problems Solved had a hefty balance. It’s now gone. Some of those proceeds went to the shopkeepers as compensation for being ripped off. The rest was channelled into the Eternal Trust,” Mac replied.

Drake’s eyebrows rose into his hairline.

“Who?” Drake inquired.

“It wasn’t me, Nigel, or Leila. I can only imagine someone from the Delta Force acted,” Mac answered.

“Damn, they’re great,” Fish grumbled.

“So, let’s get them on our side, shall we?” Mac suggested.

It would make life easier for him if Casey were happy with her family not being at war with them.

“Good idea.” Drake nodded. “Come up with a plan.”

Epilogue.

Casey

“This was not what I meant when I told you to come up with a plan!” Drake snarled, glowering at Mac. Six weeks had passed since that comment, and Drake was facing the Delta Force assault course. He’d already commented that it looked like a complete bitch.

“Jacob insisted and said if you wanted to work shit out, then the bitch from hell it is,” Mac replied with a nod at the course.

He’d been training secretly, and bets had been taken on who would last the longest. Blaze and Hunter were trying for that. Mac intended to kick their ass. I walked up with Lindsey beside the men, dressed in sweats and tees like everyone else. Artemis stood by her side.

“Thinks she can beat me!” I cackled.

“I would,” Artemis complained.

“Once you have that baby, it’s me and you, girl. Put your money where your mouth is,” I shot back.

“You’re on!” Artemis grinned.

“That’s a bet for another day,” Drake warned as the brothers began swapping bets.

Jacob jogged over with a wicked grin on his face. He carried Blue in a baby carrier on his chest and Blue was wide awake and looking around. They’d done his warmup, and Drake already looked like he was going to drop.

“Casey, wear a pack.” Dad smirked, and I groaned.

“Are they wearing packs?”

“Thirty kilos, Casey!” Dad ordered, and I wandered away cursing.

“Well, I’m betting one thousand on my daughter finishing first with the extra weight,” Dad declared as I returned.

“Yeah, I’ll take that,” Fish said, eyeing me up.

My face remained impassive until the bets had been called, and then Dad dropped his bombshell.

“Casey’s ran it with seventy before and finished.” Dad smirked again and moved to the starting line. Looks of disbelief followed him. Dad placed some tiny earmuff’s over Blue’s ears and smirked.

“We got played,” Ace murmured.

“No shit, nothing Dad likes more. Making money off pain,” I said, grinning.

Dad blew the whistle, and we were off. Intimately knowing the course, I was soon at the back of the pack. No one rushed this bitch. But I kept my pace steady. Just as we approached the first set of frames, about one-fifth of the way around, Slick and Slate, with Lindsey, dropped out. I saluted them and flew through those fuckers like I had wings. Slick shouted something rude after me. I caught Apache and Fish in the net, and Apache was walking away, shaking his head as Silvie yelled abuse.

There was no doubt the Rage men were fit, but they weren’t used to this type of exercise. Jett, Manny, Rock, Gunner, and Texas all stopped by the second fifth of the course, and I was laughing as I kept my steady pace. Before we hit the third fifth, all that was left was Drake, which surprised me, Mac, Hunter, and Blaze. I was now level with them, and while my breathing had fastened, I wasn’t heavy breathing like them. I ran the tyres and dropped to scramble through the mud pits covered by nets.

When I came out and headed for the bars, I saw Hunter and Mac still with me. Drake was flat on his back, and Blaze sat next to him. When I got through the fourth section, only Mac and I were left. On the sidelines, Rage whipped themselves up, calling encouragement. Dad bellowed orders and waved Blue’s hand. I smirked when I saw the earmuffs still on Blue’s ears. Steadily, I upped my pace and took off. Thirty kilos would not stop me. When I reached the end and rang the bell, I spied Mac a long way behind me.

“Come on. Mac, you can do it!” I roared encouragement.

Rage was near me, with their women all urging Mac on. We watched Mac get a second wind, and he tackled the last part as Dad roared instructions. Finally, Mac staggered across the finish and collapsed.

“Respect, boy. Now I know you’re worthy of being my son-in-law,” Dad announced with a wicked grin. He gently placed Blue on Mac’s lap, and Blue grinned up at his dad.

Mac waved a hand as he tried to get his breath. He sat up and downed a bottle of water as Rage slapped him on the back.

“We’re gonna have to practise this,” Hunter said to Blaze, who nodded thoughtfully.

“Be fun to figure something out in relation to the gym with this,” Blaze mentioned to Dad.

“Boys, when you finish the course, we’ll talk business,” Dad replied, chuckling.

“We quits now, Jacob?” Drake asked, still breathing heavily.

“When you pay me my pennies!” Jacob suggested, making grabby fingers at Drake. Phoe laughed and stepped forward with the cash.

“When you wanna lose more, let me know, and we’ll set a date up,” Dad declared, giving me half the wad, and walking away cackling.

“I’ll buy the beers,” I said, holding the money up and laughing.

“Damn right you will,” Drake shot back, and we walked towards the changing rooms, teasing one another.

“Jacob got his revenge,” Mac stated.

“Yeah, Dad’s happy, and I’m happy, so that’s all that matters,” I replied to Mac.

“Love you, Casey,” Mac murmured.

“Love you back.” I smiled and headed into the changing room.

Life was going to be interesting with Rage around.

Vermont

“Well, did the DNA match?” a man demanded, leaning forward on his desk, steeping his fingers. The woman in front of him shook her head.

“The child buried with Lucy was not her own,” she confirmed.

“Then where the hell is my son?” He rose to his feet, furious.

“I have a lead I’m chasing. We will bring your son home, Mr Carnegie,” she promised as she rose to her feet.

“Whatever it takes. Mrs Dumas. I want my child,” Mr Carnegie growled. Mrs Dumas nodded and left the room. She had a lead, one that led to a woman in Indiana. Time to get to work.

Characters.

Rage MC

Founders.

Arrow. Drake's father.

Axel. See below.

Norfolk. Aurora Victoria's grandfather.

Fury.

Spike.

Members.

Drake Michaelson. DOB. 1975. Drake is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. His father started Rage MC and died before Drake was old enough to become President. Drake became VP and, in a hostile takeover, became President. Phoenix thinks he looks like Tim McGraw with longer hair. Drake has a leanness to him but has well-defined muscles and broad shoulders. Drake sports dark brown eyes with laughter lines. He's six foot four. He adopted Phoe's 16 children, and they have two of their own.

Apache. DOB 1969. Apache is a second-gen Rage; he was in the second lot of brothers recruited into Rage. He is one of Drake's enforcers. Apache has bright green eyes and is six foot two. He is of Native American origin. Apache's described as absolutely stunning, with high cheekbones and raven black hair that hangs past his shoulders. Apache's real name is Tye (meaning Chief) Blackelk. He looks like Lou Diamond Philips. Apache is partnered with Rock in a construction company. He is married to Silvie and has two children with her.

Ace. DOB 1983. Ace is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Ace is Drake's VP. He's described as looking like a young Lou Diamond Philips. Like his father, he is Native American. Ace has bright green eyes and is six foot two. He is described much the same as his

father, absolutely stunning with high cheekbones and raven black hair that hangs past his shoulders. Ace is no stranger to violence and will do whatever it takes to protect his club. He was shot five times, protecting Phoe from her ex. He is now married to Artemis and has several children with her.

Fish. DOB 1978. Fish's birth name is Justin Greenway. He is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Fish is Drake's sergeant at arms. He's been married to Marsha for many years and has three children. Fish runs the Rage garage. Fish has a bushy beard and untamed hair, which he keeps in check with a bandana. He is tall and broadly built and has an innate kindness.

Texas. DOB 1965. Texas is a second-gen Rage; he was in the second lot of brothers recruited into Rage. His full name is Blake Craven. Texas is an older man and is the MC's secretary and treasurer. He works on bike design and specialised paintwork. Texas has a robust moral code but is mindful of what the MC is capable of. He once alludes to cleaning up after their messes. Texas is tall and broad, with a goatee, dark salt and pepper hair slightly too long and piercing brown eyes. He can also play the keyboard. Texas stands at six foot four, and his old lady is Penny.

Axel. DOB 1951. Axel was one of the founders of the club, which makes him a first-generation Rage. He is the Chaplin of the MC. The Chaplin's role is to look after Rage's needs spiritually. Axel makes sure they have their heads on straight and performs their marriages and death ceremonies. He has blue eyes and has a salt-and-pepper beard, and is very loud. He's built like a mountain. Axel has wild hair which hangs to his shoulders. He is six foot six. Axel claims an old lady, a schoolteacher called Ellen and dotes on her.

Gunner. DOB 1976. Gunner is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Gunner is one of Drake's Enforcers at the MC. Gunner is described as having silver-grey eyes with thick lashes. His name is Cole Washington. James Washington is Gunner's brother, and they are estranged. Gunner's described as having long sandy brown hair, high cheekbones and firm, soft lips. Gunner owns four

houses, three of which he rents out. He also works at Made by Rage carving wood with Manny. He pays fifty per cent with Manny into the pot. His old lady is Autumn.

Slick. DOB 1978. Slick is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Slick loves books and is happy reading quietly. He has soft brown eyes and is heavily muscled. Slick runs a leasing company. He has over twenty properties he rents and pays fifty per cent into the pot. He also plays chess.

Manny. DOB 1983. Manny is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. He's described as tall, sexy as in the cute boy next door way, with tousled blond hair and light amber-coloured eyes. Manny was beaten by Bulldog for failing to report a pregnant prostitute and then shot in the back by Bulldog's men. Manny is six foot four. He carves wood and works his own section of Made by Rage. He pays fifty per cent with Gunner into the pot. Manny enjoys playing chess.

Lowrider. DOB 1984. Lowrider is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. He has ebony hair shaved short at the sides and longer on top. Lowrider has a roman nose and full lips, and he has blue eyes. He has a tattoo of black flames that crawls up his throat. He's six foot three of lean, powerful muscle and tanned. (He looks like Colin Farrell.) Lowrider's actual name is Nathan Miller. Lowrider is a mechanic and makes builds from scratch. His old lady is Lindsey.

Ezra. DOB 1979. Ezra is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. His parents died when he was sixteen in a house fire. He has a younger sister called Lindsey, who seeks him out. He has brown eyes, is tall and has shaggy dark hair. Ezra's a broad-shouldered man with a deep, broad chest, beautiful bone structure and a neatly trimmed goatee. (Looks like Robert Downey Junior.) Ezra owns a landscaping company which is in high demand.

Mac. DOB 1970. Mac is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. He was shot protecting Lindsey from her ex-husband. Mac is responsible

for running the bar. He falls for Casey when she attacks him as he tries to protect her shopkeeper friends. His real name is Callum MacKintosh, and he has a sister called Paisley, who is a lawyer. His gran other, Silvia, is still alive too, and he sees them once a month.

Rock. DOB 1985. Rock is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Rock is six foot four and huge. He has a goatee and has a Dodge Charger he's very protective of. He runs the Blackrock construction company with Apache. Rock has soft brown eyes and dark brown hair. He is closest to Lex out of the MC. Rock and Carly adopt three orphans he and Drake saved in the floods.

Lex. DOB 1984. Lex is third generation Rage; he was in the third lot of brothers recruited into Rage. He runs the Rage shop. Lex has hazel eyes framed by thick dark lashes. He has a dimple on his right cheek.

Blaze. DOB 1992. Blaze is a fourth-generation Rage; he was in the fourth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. He became a brother in 2016. Blaze ran the parts store but stopped when he opened a gym with Hunter. He's got green eyes. Blaze is close to Carly and thinks of her as a little sister. Blaze owns a Harley Dyna Glide and a Military Enfield he restored.

Slate. DOB 1992. Slate is a fourth-generation Rage; he was in the fourth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Became a brother in 2016. Slate runs into Penny's burning house in Rage's Heat to save her and the children with Texas. He works with Ezra in a landscaping company.

Hunter. DOB 1991. Hunter is a fourth-generation Rage; he was in the fourth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Became a brother in 2016. Hunter is also a designer for paintwork on bikes. He plays the bass guitar. Hunter opened a gym with Blaze. He shared a house with Klutz, Slate, Calamity and Savage. Hunter is ripped and covered in tattoos. He is now married to Mina.

Jett. DOB. 1990. Jett is a fourth-generation Rage; he was in the fourth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Became a brother in 2015; his name is Alexander Cutter. He's described

as having black hair, dark brown eyes, high cheekbones, a square jawline and firm, soft lips. He is tall and broad, lean-hipped, long-legged and as tightly muscled. Jett is a mechanic, engine designer, and paintwork designer. His old lady is Sin.

Calamity. DOB 1996. Calamity is a fifth-generation Rage; he was in the fifth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. His name is Billy Tomkins. Calamity becomes a prospect after only being on Rage for a month. He's a talented mechanic, body designer and spray painter. He interferes and stops Frenzy from harming Silvie and takes a bullet in the shoulder for Autumn. In the Rage of Angels, we discover Calamity is taking a night class for car design.

Ghost. Ex-member who was supposed to be dead. He has white-blond hair and a scar down his right cheek. Ghost has a tattoo of red and black flames on his throat. His eyes are dark brown. He was close with Apache before his disappearance. His voice is described as a throaty rumble. Ghost approaches Drake and warns him Ellen is in danger because she witnessed something she's not aware of. Drake is still trying to determine his loyalty.

Prospects.

Savage. DOB 1983. He is a fifth-generation Rage; he was in the fifth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Savage is thirty-two years old and is a mechanic.. Savage is Mina's alt. He shares a house with Hunter, Slate and Klutz.

Gauntlet. DOB 1987. Gauntlet is a fifth-generation Rage; he was in the fifth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. He works in the garage.

Klutz. DOB 1989. He is a fifth-generation Rage; he was in the fifth lot of brothers recruited into Rage. Klutz is a talented bartender and often pulls scenes much similar to those in the film Cocktail. He's African American. Klutz's roommate was dealing drugs in college, and Klutz got swept up in the sting. The cops beat him, and then his innocence was proven, and he was freed. He shares a house with Hunter, Slate, and Savage.

Carmine. DOB 1996, half African American and half white; he plays for the Cubs. Carmine joined Rage in 2019.

He's from Maine and was adopted in 2010. Carmine looked after Tye, Harley, and Serenity on the streets. Phoe alludes to Carmine sacrificing himself to protect Harley and Serenity.

Tyelar. DOB 1996, Tye is half Mexican and half Caucasian and is from Maine. Tye joined Rage in 2019. He was adopted in 2010. In the Hunter's Rage, Tyelar is playing for the Blackhawks.. Tye, like Carmine, looked after Harley and Serenity. Phoe alludes to Tye sacrificing himself to protect Harley and Serenity.

Harley. DOB 1999. Harley's from Maine and was adopted in 2010. In November 2015, two seventeen-year-olds attacked Harley from behind, cracking his skull and putting him into a coma. Harley was protecting Christian. He has soft brown eyes and ash-blond hair. Harley woke up in Nov 2016 after the flooding of Rapid City. He joined Rage in 2019. Harley is now an apprentice Blacksmith after being told he'll never make a professional baseball player.

Cody. DOB 2000. Carmine found Cody living on the streets in Colorado; he was adopted in 2011. Cody speaks to Phoe about joining the Trusts while he is at college. He and Christian want to run them when Phoe retires. In the meantime, he wants to manage the Rebirth Trust. Cody joined Rage in 2019.

Candidates.

Wild. DOB December 1999. He is known as Jonas Valden and approached rage to join the club when he was fifteen. His father is a well-known tattoo artist, Rio Valden. Wild takes his younger brother and runs away.

Cowboy. DOB 2002, Cowboy is hot-headed and apt to act before thinking. Wild is three years older than him and has taken care of him for several years. Cowboy is immensely loyal to his brother. He leaps from his bike to Wild's, trusting his brother will catch him. His name is Zac Valden.

Rage Old Ladies.

Phoenix. DOB 1979. Drake's old lady. She is English and left England to escape an abusive relationship. She has six

children she gave birth to and adopted eleven. Phoe is exceedingly well off and runs three National Charities. The Phoenix Trust, the Rebirth Trust and the Eternal Trust. On meeting Drake, Phoe had two more children with him. Phoe has long, blond hair and is green-eyed and five foot tall. She met Hellfire MC first and is loyal to them and a Hellfire sister. Her alternative guy is Ace.

Marsha Greenway. DOB 1978. Fish's old lady and the only old lady the club has until Phoenix meets Drake. She's known to be kind and caring. Axel is Marsha's alternative guy. Although the old ladies don't have a ranking, Marsha is Phoe's VP. Marsha has blue eyes and shoulder-length brown hair.

Silvie Stanton. DOB 1982. She's claimed by Apache. Silvie's kind and generous. The MC has a lot of respect for her. She has blond, curly hair and is close to Gunner. Silvie has soft brown eyes. She takes a job at the Made by Rage shop, working for Lindsey, first helping cut material and then as a receptionist. Finally, she becomes the shop manager. Although the old ladies don't have a ranking, Silvie is Phoe's Chaplin. Her alternative guy is Gunner. After giving birth to Halona, Silvie is currently in a wheelchair suffering from Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction.

Artemis, aka Kayleigh Mitchell. DOB 1987. She has red curly hair and green eyes; she's small, dainty and muscled. She has a heart-shaped pixie face and full lips. She was part of a group called Revenge before she left and formed the Artemis group. The Artemis Group became the Juno group when she went legal with her efforts. She has combat skills and has killed many times. Artemis's alternative guy is Drake. She is Phoe's equivalent of an enforcer. Artemis now has a large team working for her on search and rescue for child and women trafficking. She also provides protection, and James Washington makes use of her skills. She's extremely expensive.

Sinclair Montgomery. DOB 1993. Sin takes over her father's shop, the Reading Nook when he dies, and with Reid, they turn it into something special. Sin was an only child, and Reid became her surrogate brother. She is socially awkward

and inept and feels out of place in crowds. She's described as dainty with brown hair and big blue eyes. Sin doesn't think she's pretty, but people describe her as beautiful. She has low self-esteem created by attending college and university when she was fifteen. Manny is Sin's alternative guy. Manny is Sin's alternative guy.

Penny Nelson. DOB 1976. Penny is a cook and server at Reading Nook; she loves cooking and baking and makes everything from scratch. She has a warm and caring attitude. Penny has two children, a son of five and a daughter aged three. Penny has short dark hair cut into a bob and is a few pounds overweight with blue eyes and freckles. Penny is five foot six. Her alternative guy is Fish.

Lindsey Miller nee Smithson. DOB 1989. She is ten years younger than Ezra and is his baby sister. She has brown eyes with gold flecks and long waist-length brown hair with red highlights. Her face is a sweetheart shape, and she has plump lips and high cheekbones. Lindsey has her own business called Made by Rage, Designs by Lindsey. While Lindsey is wary of strangers, she has no worries about speaking her mind to the Rage brothers. She's kind and generous. Lindsey's books are published under the pen name of L. Smithson. Her alternative guy is Mac.

Autumn Rydell. DOB 1990. When Rage finds Autumn, she's on her knees, unable to cope and has no money. She resists the relationship with Gunner at first. Autumn starts work at the Rage Garage as their office girl. Calamity is her alternative guy, and Autumn is also an enforcer for Phoe. Autumn is a brunette with dark brown eyes and a sweetheart-shaped face. She is about five foot six and is slender but has curves in the right place.

Carly Lennon. DOB 1997. She has long dark brown hair and enormous brown eyes. Carly arrived at Made by Rage, underweight, and Lindsey and Silvie decided to look after her. She had no clothes and was living in a homeless shelter. Carly moves in with Silvie. Rock protects Carly, and although he's worried about the age gap, he loves her very much. Blaze is her alternative.

Ellen Keating. DOB 1961. Ellen works at the Black Oak Hills Academy. She has rounded curves and chestnut hair with strands of grey. Ellen works long hours from seven in the morning till six at night usually. She became the English Department Head when she was thirty-five and has held the job for twenty years. In the History of Rage, Ellen is recovering from being pushed down the stairs and severely hurt.

Geneviève Angelique Blanchard. DOB 1994. Vivie is twenty-three when she meets Lex. She owns her own business, Chocolates by Geneviève. She also owns Blanchards Creations and a vineyard, amongst several other things. Vivie is a billionaireess but shies away from the public. She has brown hair and green eyes and loves reading. She inherited everything from both sets of grandparents. Vivie also holds the title Duchesse Toulouse, something Lex is slightly uncomfortable with. After her attack, Vivie stopped talking, and it takes an ex-girlfriend of Lex's being mean to make her talk.

Alison Jackson. DOB 1995. Ali runs the Jackson ranch and is well thought of in the local community. Ali saves Blaze from being killed by the gang and is tortured herself. Blaze protects her as he feels she suffered because of him. Ali is strong, mouthy, and is not frightened to use a gun if needed. She is loyal and dedicated to raising her younger siblings. Ali's alternative is Slick.

Thomasina Mae Blake. DOB 1990. Mina was a shut-in for three years after a stalker murdered three people very close to her. He stalked her for the two previous years before turning to violence. Mina was a child actress who turned into a famous actress. Since she became a shut-in, she has begun writing books about a PI under the name A. Dudley. Mina visited a secret sex club called the Moonlight Escape as she discovered she was a Domme. She is married to Hunter.

Casey Reeves. She was brought up by her father to be tough and look after those weaker than her. When the shops begin to get shaken down, Casey steps up to protect them. She attacks Mac thinking he's one of the gang attacking her

people. Casey makes a judgement about Mac which is wrong and causes trouble. Her father has trained her to be as close to a Delta Force operative as possible.

When Casey, Mac and Aurora are kidnapped, it is Casey that frees them. Casey takes two bullets, saving them but blows the warehouse sky high. She then goes on a mission when fit to save the children who are being trafficked and helps take them out.

Rage children.

Blue Lucas Mackintosh. (Mac and Casey). DOB. Jan 13th 2019.

Willow Ware. (Axel and Ellen.) DOB 1991. She has her father's blue eyes. Willow is actually an undercover FBI officer and has been under for five years. She escapes the trap Keith set for her and warns Axel that the cartel is coming for him as payback for her and Keith. Willow is now based in Rapid City with her partner Grey.

Tye Michaelson. (Phoe and Drake.) See Rage prospects.

Carmine Michaelson. (Phoe and Drake.) See Rage prospects.

Harley Michaelson. (Phoe and Drake.) See Rage prospects.

Cody Michaelson. (Phoe and Drake.) See Rage prospects.

Hawthorne's Investigations.

Dylan Hawthorne. Owner of Hawthorne investigations. He is extremely intelligent and will bend and break the rules as he wants. Dylan thinks of Drake as a close friend and takes Rage's back during the Artemis war. He discovers information on Artemis, which leads to Rage discovering who she is. Dylan is involved in protecting Rapid City.

Leila Gibson. She is Hawthorne's computer genius. Leila managed to get a trace on Artemis, which led Rage to Artemis's, Stacy Conway identity. She becomes part of Phoe's school board. Leila has helped the Hawthorne females cover up their revenge against those who scorned them.

Davies. Hawthorne investigator. He's Hawthorne's top security expert and also does undercover work. Davies is Hawthorne's second in command.

Arturo. Hawthorne's investigator and Dylan's cousin.

RCPD.

Antonio Ramirez. He is over six-foot tall and has wavy black hair, olive tanned skin. He is Mexican and has brown soft, gentle eyes. Tonio is lean-hipped and long-legged, and broad-shouldered. He is a good cop, and Drake thinks a lot of him. Ramirez brought down his previous chief, who was taking bribes from Santos. He also quit his job when he was called out on being too close to Rage, which led to a walkout from RCPD. Tonio is involved in a fiery relationship with Sophia Hawthorne. Dylan is amused at how his cousin is running the cop ragged. Tonio is classed as one of Rage even though he's not a brother, and Drake is extremely fond of Tonio.

Eric Benjamin. Known as Ben. Partner of Ramirez. He's a clean cop and thinks Ramirez sometimes turns a blind eye to Rage, but he'll always back his partner up. Ben finally realises in the Hope of Rage that Rage is clean, and he's been judging them wrongly. Ben gets claimed in 2018.

Officer Dan Horton. He attends Geneviève's shooting. Dan locks Mandy's father in the police car when he attacks her. He is becoming more involved in working with Rage/Washingtons and the Juno Group to protect Rapid City.

Officer Bobby Lucas. He is becoming more involved in working with Rage/Washingtons and the Juno Group to protect Rapid City.

Officer Travers. A uniform who arrives at Casey's shop.

Officer Smit. A uniform who attends Casey's break-in.

The Juno Group.

Akemi. (Artemis's adopted brother). Akemi is Japanese and Artemis's adopted brother. He is tall and slender with well-defined muscles. Master Hoshi calls him his son. There are no lengths Akemi won't go to, to defend his family. He

uses a Katana and is graceful and beautiful when he uses it. Akemi is an expert at hand-to-hand as well as weapons.

Nigel. Nigel is a hacker; he has a wiry and slender build. He's often mistaken for being a geek but is as deadly as the others. Nigel's known to have hacked into government databases. Washington lets slip that Nigel's initials are NM. He has a license for carrying a concealed weapon.

Simone and Butch. They are two hunters at Artemis, and they will only work with each other. Butch has special force training; he moves like a ghost, and Simone is much like Artemis in character but not in looks.

Washington's.

James Washington. DOB 1966. James is Gunner's older brother. James skirted the illegal side of life and is someone Santos is afraid of. He is ten years older than Gunner. James has sandy brown hair greying at the temples and the same grey eyes as Gunner. He also runs into a fire in the Protection of Rage to rescue people when his club is blown up. He has lightly greying sandy brown hair and grey eyes. James has gone clean since Frank's death and is overjoyed at finding Frankie and Jaime. He is still protective of everyone and has a small circle of those he thinks of as family. James flies a light plane for fun.

Kate. She's twenty-four and much younger than James. Kate had six months left until she finished her university course. She quit when she discovered her older sister Tammi had cancer. She is married to James after he takes care of her and Tammi.

Adam. Adam takes over Frank's position as a bodyguard, but James holds him at arms-length. Adam also knows a lot of secrets and carries them close unless they're a threat to James. He discovers he has a son who needs a liver transplant and offers up his own. He wasn't aware Walker existed. Adam finds out his brother Jake knew and kept Walker from him.

Marina Masters. Rina is Walker's Aunt. She adopted Walker when her sister, Walker's mother, died. Rina is also known as M.T. Masters, a famous artist. She is dedicated to

raising Walker and giving him the best life possible. She is married to Adam.

Jaime. He was the bar manager for James's main club. He turns out to be Frank's son. Jaime has a daughter, Ella, who he kept hidden from people, and he understands how Frank felt. He hired a hitman to kill James, which he tried to call off, but it backfired. Jaime broke his leg in Jaime and then is injured in a car crash caused by Ranson. Jaime is crazy about Mandy and is planning to marry her.

Frankie. She is Frank's daughter and is a bartender. Frankie is Jaime's twin sister. Frankie has self-confidence issues because her mother constantly undermines her. She's pretty lonely and is overjoyed to have Mandy and Kate as close friends. Jason starts to build up Frankie's confidence with skydiving and flying lessons. Frankie slowly learns to stand on her own two feet against her mother.

Jason. Jason is now in charge of all the strip joints and hates it. He is married to Frankie. Jason is one of six brothers, and his Mom and Dad own Barr's Juicy Milks, a nationwide business earning billions. His grandfather Pops is still alive. Jason grew up on a farm and loves being a country boy while working at Bryant and Washington.

Mandy. She is Kate's friend, and someone James thinks a lot of. She is put in charge of the hotels owned by Bryant and Washington. Mandy's parents are abusive and have no qualms about hitting her. The Gravedigger killed her father, and her mother was chased out of Rapid City. Mandy is pretty confident but hides her true personality to not draw attention to herself. She is pregnant in Frankie, but an accident causes her to lose the baby. She and Jaime blame themselves.

Tammi. Kate's sister, she is battling cancer, and Kate quit her job to look after her. She did have a job as an office manager but was fired because she needed so much time off. Tammi works for James, designing his new ladies' club and then running it.

Hawthorne Females.

Imelda Hawthorne. She works for Phoe in The Hell of Christmas Rage.

Justine Hawthorne. She's the eldest of the triplets. Ends up with Benjamin. She works for Phoe in The Hell of Christmas Rage.

Maria Hawthorne. Maria's the middle triplet. Ends up with Nik from Hawthorne's. She works for Phoe in The Hell of Christmas Rage.

Sophia Hawthorne. Sophia is the youngest triplet. She's known to be sweet, quiet, and reliable. She's known as Sweet Sophia, but she's not so sweet when riled. She and Ramirez have an on and off again relationship. Sophia approaches Vivie and reassures her and is friendly, encouraging Vivie to speak when she wants to. She strips to her underwear in History of Rage and drives Ramirez insane.

Carla Hawthorne.

Teresa Hawthorne.

Marissa Hawthorne. Marissa is younger than Dylan and apt to find trouble; she lives life to the full and runs a Haunted House attraction she keeps running all year. Her best friends are Lina and Mckenna. Marissa rips Casey a new one for disrespecting Mac.

Hellfire MC.

Chance Michaelson. DOB 1973. Chance is the Hellfire President. His father started Hellfire. Chance looks like Tim McGraw with long hair. He is Drake's older cousin. They were brought up together and are as close as brothers. They both fought to get their clubs clean from the filth that infected them. There are a lot of comments that Chance and Drake could be twins. Chance is very protective of Phoenix and loves her without reserve.

Chance is six foot four and projects a deceptive leanness. In fact, he has a broad chest and shoulders that are muscled, not heavy like a wrestler but with clear muscle definition. He's lean-hipped and long-legged. Chance's hair is shaved on the sides, and the top is long and tied back in a ponytail. He has

sharp, bright green eyes with laughter lines. Chance has a neat goatee the same colour as his hair, which is a brown so dark it looks black sometimes. He has a pin-up girl on his right arm.

Bear. Bear is the Hellfire VP. Chance lets it slip to Drake that Bear has a dead sister. Phoenix calls him Bearbear. Bear loves his food and drink and doesn't care who knows it. His real name is Sky Blue. Bear can be hot-headed and hot-tempered, but he's loyal and caring. His hair is light brown and cut short at the sides and long on top. Bear has a floppy lock that keeps falling over his eyes.

His eyes are light hazel, which look amber when the light catches him just right. Bear has a strong face, not classically handsome but eye-catching and attractive. His jaw is square, and a goatee hides firm but plump lips. Bear is six foot seven with shoulders as wide as a wrestler and his chest just as broad. He has long legs and thick muscles.

Big Al. Al is Hellfire's Chaplin. He has an old lady called Tatianna and owns a pawnbroker. Al is the only First Gen left and is over twenty years older than Tati. Big Al marries Axel and Ellen.

Unwanted Bastards.

Inglorious. He's the president of the MC and was involved in Clio's rescue. He got hit by Slimy Sam driving a car at him after Inglorious rescued Clio.

Psych. He's the Unwanted Bastards VP and was involved in Clio's rescue.

Mouse. He was wounded by another biker gang but overheard them saying they were responsible for Silvie being hurt.

Fallen Warriors.

Lance. President of the Fallen Warriors.

Bat. VP of the Fallen Warriors.

Sniper. He's the enforcer for the Fallen Warriors.

Santos Empire.

Miguel Santos, Senior. In his late fifties, he is mean and power-mad. He is known to be one of the worse crime lords in Rapid City; however, the police are unable to catch him. Artemis crosses him when he tries to get her to kill an innocent man, and she begins a war with him. He is killed by Artemis when his son Romeo Santos hands him over.

Romeo Santos. He has taken over his father's empire, and in a move to gain peace, hands Artemis Jacked, Thunder and his own father. Some people may have called him handsome, but there was a deadness to his expression that was very unattractive. He is tall and well built, with dark hair with slight greying at the sides, and his eyes are slightly lined. His skin held that beautiful olive tone of the Mexicans. He is around forty to forty-five years old. Romeo kidnaps Lindsey for a meeting and is behind Gunner's shooting.

Romeo goes to ground and hides to rebuild his empire when things get too hot. We discover he's now involved in people trafficking, and the Delta Force team take him down, but he escapes.

Ricardo Santos. He is Romeo's cousin and second in command. He is shot and killed by Jacob Reeves when they break the trafficking ring.

Delta Force

Lieutenant-Colonel Jacob Reeves. Jacob dedicated his life to serving his country and commanded a Delta Force team. He had many men under his command and was loyal to them. Jacob strongly believed in never leaving a man behind and even went against a three-star general to lead a team to save his men.

When he discovers the child traffickers, he leads a team to save them and shut Santos down. He calls in thirty retired Delta Force members to help with his mission. Casey also takes part. He trained his daughter to never be vulnerable to a man's attack and is very proud of Casey.

Claire Reeves. Casey's mom and Jacob's wife. She started her own company helping army wives on base find a career while their husbands were away. She stays in contact with

most of them still. Claire is canny and plays up to Mac testing his mettle. Mac is more afraid of her than Jacob. Claire has a good heart and is loyal.

Major Gilbert Cunningham. He is a close friend of Jacob's, and Casey refers to him as Uncle. He has sparred with Casey many times, leaving her bruised but more aware of defending herself.

Master Sergeant Jonathon Kind. He is part of Jacob's previous team and works with Jacob to take the traffickers down.

Master Sergeant Harris Botham. He is part of Jacob's previous team and works with Jacob to take the traffickers down.

Other Characters.

Doc Paul. A doctor who is a friend of the club. He works at the hospital and has helped save many lives and often works on Rage when they're brought in. His father was a lone biker who was well-known in South Dakota.

Abby Saunders. A florist in Casey's row of shops. She informs Casey of the attack on Mr Wright and Jim.

Mr Wright. He is a toy maker who is one of the Problems Solved victims. They are extorting money from him for protection. Casey attacks Mac in his shop, thinking he's one of the bad guys. Mac then saves him a week later from two guys threatening him. Mr Wright is badly beaten when he goes to save Casey's shop from being trashed. He is elderly, around his mid-sixties.

Jim Curtis. He is a butcher in Casey's row of shops and goes to aid Mr Wright and is beaten badly. He owns a butcher.

Cotton Candy. A striper at Washingtons who knows the Rage/Washington and Hawthorne females very well.

Lucy. She was a woman who was loosely attached to the club and slept with Mac and Ezra, but she wasn't a bunny or club whore. She was kidnapped by traffickers and ended up with a rich man who treated her badly until she got pregnant. Lucy escaped and gave birth to Blue. She made Kendara swap

Blue for a dead baby and forced Kendara to get Blue to Mac. She died soon after giving birth.

Kendara. Lucy's close friend. Kendara kept Lucy hidden from the rich man and helped smuggle Blue to Kendara's mom to save him. She then got Blue to Mac when he was six days old. She is a lawyer and helped forge paperwork declaring Mac Blue's father.

Javier Hawthorne. He's a fireman in Rapid City.

Bernard Mansell. Bernard is Stefan's husband and the calmer of the two. He quit a well-paying job to move to Rapid City with Stefan, and Phoe helped front a new restaurant he runs. Bernard's, as it is aptly named, is booked up to one year in advance, and he'll deliver take-out meals to Rage and friends. He becomes part of Phoe's school board.

Dan Grey. Willow's partner in the FBI.

Dale Sutton. Dale's age is unknown, although Ellen regards him as her equal, so one assumes they're the same age. He's the Vice Principal for Black Oak Hills school. Dale does William's job for him until he is suspended by William. Phoe makes him Principal when she buys the school.

Aurora Victoria. She is Norfolk's granddaughter, and when he died, his ex came and grabbed her before Bulldog could use her against the club. She calls Drake Dad because when she was born, she couldn't say Drake. Aurora's gran raised her and helped her stay safe and made Aurora promise not to visit Rage while she was alive. Her gran died, and now Aurora is back.

She calls herself a mystic/psychic, which amuses Mac to no end. But she warns something terrible is going to happen, and then they all get kidnapped. Aurora is opening a shop and plans to read tarot cards and people's auras. She is going to rent her grans house out and live in Norfolk's, which had been previously rented. To her despair, she finds the previous tenants have wrecked it, and it needs work.

Magic. He owns a bar out in the hills on an open stretch of road that is a biker-neutral zone. Magic doesn't allow violence

in his bar, nor does he allow truces to be broken in it. He's a big man, but no one knows his age. No one wants to upset Magic. He's rumoured to have buried the bodies of those who've upset him in the hills behind his bar. Magic got shot, saving Clio from Slimy Sam.

Thank you for reading The Rage of Angels. Do check out the other titles in this series, and also take a gander at the Hellfire MC Series, starting with [Chance's Hell](#). For more Rage check out Rage MC-The Prospects, book one [Calamity](#) out now. Or take a peek at Washingtons, starting with [James](#).

Also, take a gander at the Love Beyond Death series, book one of which, [Oakwood Manor](#), is out now. And the new series of Love Beyond Death-The Inns begins with [The Jekyll and Hyde](#). If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review at,

[Goodreads](#) and [Amazon](#)

Please remember your reviews are so important to me!

Thank you!

Elizabeth.