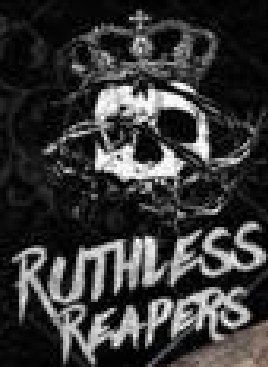


EVERNIGHT PUBLISHING®



BRICK'S

RUTHLESS REAPERS MC

ADDICTION

IF THE BASTARDS COME LOOKING FOR HER, THEY'LL HAVE TO
WALK OVER MY DEAD BODY. ROSE BELONGS TO ME.

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BRICK ' S ADDICTION

Ruthless Reapers MC, 2

Winter Sloane

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Chapter One

After swiping a table clean, Rose McCoy tapped one foot on the scarred wooden floor and checked the time. Close to midnight. Finally, her shift had come to an end. Exhaustion crept into her bones. She could barely keep herself awake, and her feet ached.

Nicky Goodman, her boss and the owner of One for the Road bar, nodded to the only occupied table in the room. Rose followed sighed and walked toward Keegan Butler, the town drunk. In his late forties, balding, and sporting a beer belly, Keegan was also a regular at One for the Road.

Keegan also happened to be the mayor's only brother. Nicky might be an ex-biker covered in tattoos, but he couldn't just toss Keegan outside like the common riff-raff. Only Rose could sweet-talk Keegan into leaving, to convince him he left of his own accord.

“It’s past closing time, Keegan,” she reminded him. “Go home.” She gently gripped him by the elbow, ignoring the lecherous look he gave her. Ever since she entered puberty, she’d gotten used to men gawking at her chest area and her curves. Keegan might be a noisy drunk, but he was always a coward.

Keegan cursed and grunted for a good ten minutes before he slapped a couple of bills on the table. He allowed Rose to lead him to the door. Before he left, Keegan gave her left ass a squeeze. She glowered at him, but he only flashed her a cheeky grin before stumbling out.

Rose didn’t take insult. Growing up in a trailer with an abusive and drunk father who couldn’t hold down a job and a brother who always got into trouble all the time, she developed a pretty thick skin. Keegan was harmless most of the time. Rose had experienced worse.

After helping Nicky clean the place, they closed up. Without saying another word, Nicky walked Rose to her car, even though the parking lot was just a short distance away from the bar. She appreciated the kind gesture. Castle Falls could be dicey at night.

Nicky had no designs on her. Her boss had been happily married to his husband of ten years, Raul, and they even had two sons together. *Whoever said chivalry was dead?* Rose thought.

Nicky passed Rose an envelope containing her latest pay before they parted ways. If she had to choose a favorite among her three jobs, she’d have to pick working for Nicky. Sure, the hours might be long, but the pay was good. The customers always tipped generously.

“See you tomorrow, Rose,” he said.

“Good night, Nicky,” she said.

Rose slid behind the driver’s seat of her second-hand red Chevrolet. The paint peeled and looked faded in some places, and her car almost looked more pink than red. Her ride

also had its share of nicks and dents. She slid her key in, and the engine gave out a weak sputter. Rose expelled a breath.

“Don’t you dare die on me now,” she said.

Frustration welled up inside her. Money was tight right now. She couldn’t afford to send her ride in for repairs.

All she wanted to do was head home, take a hot shower after checking on Stefan, then go to bed. Then repeat the same old cycle all over again the next day. No use thinking about the direction where her life was heading. At the moment, it was nowhere.

It wasn’t like she had a choice. Her brother Donny seemed keen on walking the same crooked path their father did.

She tried the engine again. On the third try, it worked. Thankful for small mercies, Rose navigated out of the bar parking lot and headed home. One for the Road was located on the outskirts of Castle Falls, a twenty-minute drive to the trailer park. No streetlights lit the way home, so she had to rely on her own lights.

The rumble of motorcycles behind her made her grip the steering wheel tight. Panic almost set in, but she refused to let the emotion swallow her up.

She took deep breaths and stopped the car at the side of the road, where she killed the lights and her engine, then silently prayed the bikers would ride past her. She peered outside the windows. Her breath caught when three laughing loons on bikes roared past from where she was.

The sound of a gunshot made her jump in her seat. Rose bit down on her lower lip to prevent herself from giving her position away. Some drunk rider must’ve fired it. She waited with bated breath. Nothing else happened.

About twenty years ago, the Black Dogs MC rode into Castle Falls and declared the town their territory. Rose was four at that time. They never left. Instead, the motorcycle club continued to be a plague in town, and here they would stay.

Rumor had it the club lined the pockets of the local police and even the mayor. Corruption had been rampant everywhere.

Anyone could be bought. Her own father and even Donny worked odd jobs for the MC. Rose chose to keep her head down like everyone else. Deeming the roads safe again, she turned on the engine. For a second, she wondered if her baby would fail her again for the night. It didn't.

Rose let out a breath of relief. She almost thought she had to walk home, but she managed to reach home without any further incident. Home was a single-wide trailer that was slowly falling apart. Like the rest of her life, it was sorely in need of repairs.

Janice, her neighbor and babysitter, must've heard her come in because the teenager left the house. On her shoulder, Janice carried Stefan, Donny's kid.

Someone had left Stefan on their doorstep two months ago along with an angry handwritten note. When Rose confronted her brother about it, he shrugged it off and said both the baby and the note were from an angry ex. Realizing she had another mouth to feed had skyrocketed her stress levels.

When she asked Donny what his plans for Stefan were, his answer had always been the same. He didn't know. Rose brought up the notion of adoption once or twice, because as much as she'd grown to love that little boy, neither Rose nor Donny could give the kid the life he deserved.

"It's 1:00 AM, Rose," Janice said in an exasperated voice.

"I know. I'm really sorry," Rose said.

Janice handed Stefan to her, and he didn't even wake. Rose wanted to give him a kiss, but she felt grimy. "Sorry, could you hold him again for a second? I need to pay you."

Janice complied. Rose retrieved the envelope containing her pay from the car. She paid Janice a little extra for the overtime, but Janice studied her for a moment, then handed the extra bills back. Janice might just be a senior in

high school, but she was perceptive for someone her age. A good kid who reminded Rose of herself a long time ago.

“Could you look after him tomorrow night as well?” Rose asked her. Most of the time, Janice said yes to babysitting. According to the kid, it was easy money and Stefan was delightful to look after, but Rose knew exams were coming soon. What would she do then?

She juggled three jobs and hardly had any free time left. Rose worked herself to the bone so much she wouldn't be surprised one day if she'd simply collapse and die. A morbid thought. Who would take care of Stefan then?

God knew where Donny was. Probably running jobs for the MC, only to flush all that money earned down the drain in a single night of gambling. The Black Dogs MC ran illegal gambling dens all over the city. They owned her brother, and he didn't even realize it.

“Tomorrow then,” Janice agreed.

“Did Donny come by?” she asked.

Rose had instructed Janice to text or call her immediately if her brother or any of his biker “friends” dropped by the trailer. Rose used the word *friends* loosely because she wasn't blind. Those bikers only saw her brother as a pawn to be used, then discarded when they no longer needed him.

Donny had already gone to jail twice for his employers. Never once did they lift a finger to help him. Rose had to bail him every single time.

“Nope, haven't seen him this week.” Janice handed Stefan back to Rose. “That's a good thing, isn't it?”

“I don't know about that,” Rose admitted.

They bid each other good night, and Rose retreated inside the trailer. She remembered to engage all five locks on the front door. One could never be too careful, and with a baby to care for, Rose had become extra paranoid. She sniffed at Stefan. Janice had given him a bath. Good.

Rose set Stefan down on the cot in her room. She looked at the kid for a few moments. Stefan had inherited the same dark curls she and Donny had, but he had brown eyes instead of blue.

“What am I going to do with you, kid?” she whispered.

For now, her system worked as long as she could find a trustworthy babysitter for Stefan. What happened when he finally started school? God knew how she’d be able to pay for his education. Her brother and father might’ve not been there for her, but the last thing she wanted was to abandon this kid. Rose had to exhaust all her options first.

She took a shower. The incident on the road had woken her up. She shook a little as she put her head under the warm water. No use thinking about that either. So far, Rose had stuck with one philosophy throughout her entire life—live one day at a time. Still, she couldn’t ignore her mounting problems.

How could she provide the kid in her room a decent future when she wasn’t even sure of her own? Rose started toweling herself off when she heard that monstrous noise again. *Vroom vroom*, followed by the sound of men laughing and yelling at each other.

She froze. Rose thought she imagined all that noise at first, but it only grew louder. Rose quickly dressed. Instead of her usual nightwear—usually a big shirt, she put on jeans and a shirt. Then she made her way to Stefan. All the noise woke him up and he started crying.

Rose bundled him in his favorite blue blanket and gathered him to her chest. She exited her bedroom. Thank God she had closed all the curtains in the living room. She could make out harsh lights through the window and dark shapes. How many of them were out there? She swallowed. Fear gripped her tight.

There was only one way in and one way out of the trailer. That was through the front door.

“Donny, you thieving, no-good son of a bitch, come out here and face us like a man!” someone yelled.

“You think you can steal from the MC and get away with it?” another drunken voice yelled.

Rose wondered if these were the same bikers that passed her on the way home.

She shoved aside her rising anxiety and tried to make sense of their words. So they were looking for Donny. God. What had her idiot brother done now? What were the chances they’d go away if she and Stefan kept quiet? Stefan sniffled and brawled.

“Shush,” she told Stefan. He wouldn’t stop crying. “Please, Stefan. We can’t aggravate them any further.”

“Is that a baby I hear in there, Donny?” a biker asked. “Didn’t know a dickless coward like you could father a kid.”

The bikers laughed at that.

Sweat trickled down her face. It soaked the back of her shirt.

Something crashed against the windows. Amber liquid sprayed over the window. She recognized that liquid well enough. Rose served plenty of it at the bar. A beer bottle. She sucked in a breath. They were starting to throw things at the trailer now?

“Boys, if we can’t convince him to get out, we’ll just have to flush him out,” yelled one of the bikers.

Her heart nearly stopped at those words. Rose touched the edge of the curtain and took a peek. One biker held out a beer bottle, the top covered in flames. A Molotov cocktail? Rose’s heart was in her throat. The biker spread his legs apart, then entered a baseball-throwing position. Without another warning, he tossed the makeshift bomb right at the window Rose was standing in front of.

Chapter Two

“Where you heading, all geared up?” asked Razor.

The other man eyed the shotgun Brick had slung over his shoulder. Razor also happened to be the Ruthless Reapers MC’s sergeant-at-arms. He had a keen eye for weapons and probably knew Brick had a second gun on him and a knife strapped to his boot for emergencies.

Being the club Vice President, Brick didn’t have to answer Razor. He outranked the other biker after all, but Razor probably asked out of curiosity’s sake.

“Got a lead on the assholes who stole our shipment three days ago,” Brick said.

Razor raised one pierced eyebrow. “You going after the Black Dogs MC scum? Alone?”

“I wanted to check if the information’s solid first,” Brick said.

King, the club President, had always been the reckless one. King picked Brick as his second-in-command for being level-headed and calm, but this was personal.

The Ruthless Reapers MC operated out of Grace, a former mining town out in the mountains. Serenity Hill and Castle Falls, the two neighboring towns, were territories controlled by two other rival MC groups. The Ruthless Reapers MC had a truce with the Chaos Riders MC, a working relationship even. The Black Dogs MC had always been the ones to watch out for. Like feral dogs, they went after enemies and allies alike.

The attack on their delivery convoy had been a quick and dirty operation. The theft had occurred during nighttime. The culprits didn’t wear any cuts with recognizable patches, but Brick knew the Black Dogs MC were responsible. His nephew Trigger had managed to identify one attacker as a member of the Black Dogs MC.

“Something’s wrong with this picture,” Razor mused out loud as he thoughtfully rubbed his unshaven chin. “One, you could’ve sent a prospect on a simple scouting job. Two, you’re packing. That tells me you’re up to something no good.”

“Trigger ended up in the hospital because of those assholes. He’s still in intensive care,” Brick said with a growl.

Brick thought two, three steps ahead most of the time. King and his MC brothers relied on his quick thinking to get the club out of trouble plenty of times, but this was different. Family was involved. No strategy was needed.

Trigger was his little sister’s only son. Tasha died tragically young, caught in a crossfire between the club and another rival group. Brick’s father and grandfather had both been MC men. It was in their blood, but after Tasha died, Brick didn’t want Trigger to follow in the same footsteps of his father, uncle, or grandfather. The boy refused to back down.

God knew Brick had put Trigger through hell. He’d sent Trigger on plenty of unsavory jobs just to dissuade him from joining the club, but Trigger had been adamant about his path. He’d gone from prospect to patch, but look where his first real job for the club as a member landed him.

“Brick? You there?” Razor asked.

“What were you saying?” Brick’s thoughts had wandered off in the middle of the conversation.

“I asked you what King thinks of this revenge mission of yours,” Razor said.

Brick held the other man’s gaze. He and Razor had their share of differences over the years. Razor reminded him too much of King. He liked getting his hands dirty far too much, but the MC needed all kinds of talents. Brick had learned to respect Razor was good at what he did.

“I told King what he expected to hear,” Brick said. King was out of town on another business deal with another group. That meant Brick was in charge. If he knew what Brick

intended, King would probably call a meeting and vote on it. That would take too long.

“And your information’s solid?” Razor asked.

“My source tells me Dragon and his pals will be paying some poor asshole at the Castle Falls Trailer Park a personal visit,” Brick said.

“You sure Dragon’s the man we’re after?” Razor pressed.

Brick had done his research or rather, he told the resident MC hacker to find out all he could about the members of the Black Dogs MC. Brick and King already had dealings in the past with Rat, the President. They also knew Rat’s other top lieutenants on sight.

Dragon was a new enforcer from another Black Dogs MC chapter. He certainly was ambitious and stupid enough to think he could get away with stealing from their MC. Men like that needed to be taught a lesson. Besides, the Ruthless Reapers MC’s reputation was at stake. They had to hit back sooner or later.

“Trigger identified him through his prison tattoos,” Brick said.

“Then there’s nothing else I want to ask. I’m coming with you,” Razor said, rising to his feet.

Brick finally noticed the other biker had his favorite revolvers strapped to his belt. So Razor was planning on coming along with him all this time?

Razor could never really sit still. Brick decided to avoid an argument. He only had a short window of time to enact his vengeance. Getting Dragon all alone would be tricky, and Brick didn’t need to wage a war on the entire MC. He’d settle for killing the crew responsible for putting Trigger and three other MC brothers in the hospital.

“Fine. I could use the backup,” Brick said. “But it has to be just the two of us. I need this done fast and quiet. No messes. My source tells me there will only be four of them tonight.”

“Four’s easy,” Razor agreed. “Let’s get to it.”

They exited the noisy clubhouse and walked to their bikes in the parking lot. Brick got behind his Harley, and Razor let him lead the way. Brick always loved the ride. Nothing could compare to being on his bike and feeling the wind on his face and beard, the powerful hum of the Harley engine between his thighs.

Tonight, however, Brick was out on serious business. He had to put down an animal.

Brick had worried the sound of his and Razor’s Harleys would attract attention, but the enemy didn’t even notice them as they slowed their bikes. Residents peeked out from the windows, some fearful, others curious. No one would interrupt whatever was going on. The Black Dogs MC considered themselves kings of Castle Falls. Here, they could do whatever they wanted without repercussions.

He counted how many they were up against. Three men to scare off one associate who worked for the club? Talk about unfair odds. Whoever lived inside that ratty trailer must be terrified of his wits.

Dragon was easily identifiable by his bald head and bad tattoos. Brick didn’t care for the two other nameless bikers who were about to be dead. One of them held what looked like a homemade Molotov cocktail in his hand. Laughing, the biker tossed the flaming bottle, shattering the window of the trailer.

Brick got off his bike but kept the engine running in case they needed to get away quickly. As he drew closer, he spied a dark-haired figure running through the windows of the trailer. Dragon and his crew managed to smoke their prey out after all.

A dark-haired beauty ran out of the front door, coughing and holding a baby to her chest. She reminded Brick of a fallen angel caught in a trap set by worthless devils. What the hell?

His source, Gin, a prospect of the Black Dogs MC, mentioned Dragon's target had been a man. Donny McCoy. Gin failed to mention Donny had a sister, who also happen to have a kid. Anger stirred in Brick's blood. He heard from rumors that the Black Dogs MC didn't care who got in their way. Those who got on their bad side ended up as merchandise on the seller's block.

Human trafficking. Brick spat on the ground. The Ruthless Reapers MC dealt in weapons and a couple of drugs, but they had standards.

Razor had dismounted and crept to his side, gun in his hand. He looked at Brick, but Brick shook his head. Not yet. He didn't want the Black Dogs to know they were there yet. Part of him needed to know what this was all about and how this dark-haired beauty got caught him in all this mess.

It was a miracle Dragon and his goons hadn't seen them yet. Then again, Brick noted two of the bikers swayed on their feet. Were they drunk? That explained why they hadn't caught sight of Brick and Razor. Perfect.

"Look what we have here," Dragon drawled.

He and his lackeys eyed the angel like a piece of meat. She took a few hesitant steps until her back hit the wall. Then she raised her head, and the anger flashing in her sharp blue eyes took Brick's breath away.

"Donny's not here, and I don't know where the hell he is," she said. "Just leave us be."

"Why would we do that, sweetheart?" Dragon asked.

"The dumb bitch doesn't get it," slurred one biker. "Your useless brother left you here as bait."

The woman turned pale at those words.

"Or payment?" Dragon's comment drew laughter from his two companions. "Either way, we can do this the easy way or the hard way."

"She looks like a fighter, Dragon," remarked one of the bikers.

Brick nodded to Razor. He swung his shotgun and leveled it at one of Dragon's goons. Brick had a silencer equipped. Razor also came prepared for the firefight, so he wasn't worried. Gin told him the locals wouldn't tattle as long as Brick paid them for their silence.

He fired, creating a mini crater in the middle of the first biker's chest. Razor's bullet caught the second in the middle of the forehead. That left only Dragon. The woman let out a muffled scream.

"What the hell?" Dragon muttered, turning around. The other two had been drunks. No better than sitting drunks. Dragon had been the only one who looked sober. He looked at Brick and Razor.

"You think you can steal from us and get away with it, scum?" Brick asked him.

"Kill me and you'll bring the entire wrath of my club," Dragon said with a sneer.

"I doubt that, bud. You're new. Just a wannabe," Razor said. "Rat and his buddies wouldn't shed a single tear for you. Any last words before my big, angry friend here blows your brains off?"

"Fuck—"

Brick didn't let him finish. He blew a hole through Dragon's head. The woman stared at the corpses at her feet, then looked at Brick, fear in her beautiful eyes. Brick neared her. She was a problem, he already knew it the moment she ran out of the trailer.

Did Dragon come here on his own or was he on Rat's orders?

"Are you going to kill me and Stefan, too?" she asked him in a leveled voice.

Brick had always been drawn to women with grit. This beauty stared him down despite everything she had witnessed. Having a no-good brother who was willing to abandon her and her baby to the mercy of brutes must've forced her to develop nerves of steel or something.

“Stefan. That your baby’s name?” Brick asked her.

“He’s my brother’s kid,” she said.

Brick looked over his shoulder. Razor was already knocking on the doors of nearby neighbors and offering them money to keep quiet about this incident. Brick should be doing the same, except he couldn’t keep his eyes away from this mystery woman.

“And you? What’s your name?” Brick asked.

“Rose,” she whispered. “Rose McCoy. What do you intend to do with me and Stefan?”

Brick thought about her question for a few moments. “I won’t lie to you, Rose. Even if Razor and I didn’t gun Dragon and his pals down, you and Stefan are already on the Black Dogs MC’s radar thanks to your brother. I don’t know what he did, but I’m betting the MC will keep looking for him.”

Chapter Three

“You’re saying Stefan and I still have targets painted on our backs,” Rose said.

“That’s right,” he said.

Everything happened so fast. When she ran out of the trailer with Stefan, she’d never been more afraid her entire life. She shuddered, thinking about the way Dragon and his pals looked at her. She’d been subjected to stares like that her entire life, but the men who gawked at her in the bar were mostly harmless. Dragon and this new biker, they were a different breed.

No, she wouldn’t exactly put this new biker in that same category but whoever this tall, muscled, and dark-haired stranger was—he was also dangerous. She had to crane her neck to look the titan in the eyes. A titan. That was an apt description.

Grave, blazing green eyes scrutinized her from a rough, bearded face. His entire body seemed like it had been carved from wood. Those massive inked arms looked like they could break a lesser man in half easily.

He was older than she was by maybe two decades, but despite her situation, Rose found herself attracted to him physically. Juggling three jobs to pay the bills never left her much time for romance. She had dated a total of three men her entire life, and all of them ended up being disappointments. Wait.

She liked that he studied her face and not her body, although it would be nice if—if what? Rose’s thoughts had drifted off in an unexpected direction. She had been certain she would be next on his kill list after he mercilessly gunned down Dragon and his friends.

Rose should’ve been disturbed by what she saw, but maybe she was just tired. She was still alive. That was something. She’d think about her yellow-bellied brother’s

betrayal later. Right now, she had little energy for anything else.

“My advice? Take Stefan and go somewhere safe. Forget what you saw tonight. Even better, leave town for a few weeks until this mess blows over,” he said.

“I don’t have anywhere else to go,” she found herself whispering. What was he saying? She’d never left Castle Falls. She had some paltry savings in the bank, sure. Enough for a bus ticket, but where would she go with Stefan?

“Then you and Stefan would just have to come with me,” he said.

She snapped awake at those words. “What?”

“I’ll take you and Stefan under my protection,” he said with a nod. “If you two are with me, no one will dare touch you.”

“This is crazy,” she whispered. “I don’t even know your name. Why would do such a thing? At what price?”

“Everyone calls me Brick,” he said. “We’ll talk about the price later on. Right now, we need to move. One of the trailer residents would’ve probably alerted Rat and the rest of the Black Dogs MC. You have to decide now, Rose. Come with me or stay here. What will it be?”

Rose chewed on her lower lip. Not like she had plenty of choices left either way. There were always terrible stories of folks who happened to get on the Black Dogs MC’s bad side. Tales of how they simply disappeared out of thin air. The same thing would happen to Stefan and her.

Brick was right. Whatever her brother had done, it was bad enough to attract the MC’s attention. They’d hunt down Rose and Stefan just to get to Donny. Going with Brick was the best option she had right now. She knew what kind of price men like Brick demanded, and she found she didn’t care.

Brick saved her from a fate worse than death. That had to mean there was some good in him. Brick’s friend, the one with all the piercings, returned. He raised one eyebrow at Rose.

“She’s coming with us, Razor,” Brick said. “Rose and the kid will be under my protection.”

“Damn, Brick. What’s gotten into you? What’s so special about this one?” Razor asked. He gave her a sweeping gaze, and she didn’t miss the intelligence behind those dark eyes.

“That’s for me to find out,” Brick said. “Let’s go before Dragon’s friends come sniffing around. That your ride?” Brick nodded to Rose’s car. She blinked and nodded.

“Get in that car and follow us,” Brick said.

“Wait,” she blurted. “I need to pack some things. For me and Stefan.”

Brick hesitated.

“Brick, we don’t have time for this,” Razor said. “I’m pretty sure someone here probably ratted us out to the Black Dogs MC. What happened to a quick job?”

“Five minutes,” Brick told her. “I’ll help you.”

Razor cursed under his breath. Rose started for the trailer, but Brick beat her to the door.

“I’ll check if it’s safe first,” Brick said. This biker kept stumping her at every turn. Was Brick pretending to be a gentleman to get on her good side? *Why would he need to do that?* Rose thought a second later. Brick stepped in. As far as she could see, the trailer hadn’t caught fire. Thank God.

“Get in here,” Brick said.

Rose entered her home, grimacing as they passed the living room. The homemade bomb had landed on the floor, leaving a blackened mess. By some miracle, none of the furniture caught fire. Maybe the bikers were too drunk or in a hurry to make a proper bomb.

“I’ll hold him while you pack,” Brick offered.

Rose hesitated, then handed Stefan over. None of this made any sense. She still questioned herself for putting her and Stefan’s safety in Brick’s hands, but it wasn’t like she had

plenty of choices. For some reason, Brick had offered his help to her. His intentions seemed sincere although Rose didn't understand him at all.

Brick held Stefan like a pro, like someone who held babies before. Stefan was wide awake and stared at Brick curiously.

"Hello there, handsome boy. Sorry to interrupt your sleep," Brick murmured to the boy.

Relieved, she went to work. Rose snatched a dusty duffel bag she hadn't used in ages, then dumped clothes and baby supplies in there.

Nothing in this world came free. Rose understood that, but she shook her head. She had to focus on her task.

"Done," she declared.

Brick and Rose left the trailer, and she dumped the bag in the trunk of her car. Brick helped her put Stefan in his baby seat, then she got behind the wheel. Brick and Razor mounted their bikes. She started the car, praying it wouldn't die on her suddenly. It purred to life.

Rose expelled a breath. Was she really doing this? Trusting the word of a biker, a stranger she just met? She made a silent promise to herself to stay away from men like her brother and father. Those two were no better than petty criminals who kept failing at life, but Brick? Brick seemed like the real deal.

When Donny was in a foul mood after drinking and gambling so much, he'd often threaten to kill Rose and Stefan. It didn't take her long to figure out Donny was just pretending he was hot stuff. He'd never have the guts to actually kill anyone, but Brick had killed two men tonight like it was no big deal.

Rose's fingers started to sweat on the wheel as she continued following Brick and Razor out of the trailer park. Not too late to drive off into the sunset. She could pick a random direction. If her car died on her, she'd head to the nearest bus station and could get a ticket.

She could start somewhere new with Stefan. Somewhere no one knew them. Rose would no longer be the girl known for having a deadbeat dad and a no-good brother.

That prospect seemed daunting. Like taking a leap of faith. A number of possible things could go wrong. The Black Dogs MC could continue to hunt her and Stefan down. Even if they sent one or two men after them, Rose would stand no chance against those crazy lunatics.

She pictured another Dragon chasing her down. Rose shook her head. For now, she'd go with Brick. He'd promised she and Stefan would be under his protection. Like most folks living in Castle Falls, Rose kept her head down to avoid drawing attention from the MC, but a girl working in a bar heard plenty of rumors. She didn't miss the patch on Brick's cut or the words *Vice President*.

Brick was the Vice President of the Ruthless Reapers MC. The Black Dogs MC considered that group a threat. A rival even. She was in safe hands, as long as Brick kept his end of the bargain.

She'd be willing to pay his price as well, because unlike Donny or her dad, Rose actually kept her promises. Besides, despite whatever shitty situation she found herself in, she always saw the good in the bad. It had been a while since she had last been with a man. She bet Brick wouldn't disappoint in bed.

Rose remembered the way Brick gently held Stefan while she packed. In those few moments, she had caught a glimpse of Brick's softer side. There was more to this man than what he appeared to be, or maybe that was what Rose wanted to think to feel better?

Either way, she was stuck with him now, at least for the moment.

Chapter Four

“I would’ve put you and Stefan up in a guest bedroom if we had any available, but we’re crowded at the moment,” Brick said, opening the door to his room.

Rose, Stefan, and he had drawn curious looks from a number of his MC brothers the moment they entered the clubhouse. Most normal folk would be intimidated entering the stronghold of a bunch of rowdy bikers. Brick had almost forgotten Rose wasn’t like most people.

She held her head up, smiled at the jokes some of the bikers cracked. Brick truly had a treasure in his hands, one he didn’t intend to let go.

Rose stepped inside his room. As Vice President, Brick’s room was larger than most and he had his own private bathroom.

“Bathroom’s over there, in case you want to take a shower. I can look after the kid so you can take your time,” he offered.

Rose took a deep breath, then finally turned to face him. Her gaze searched his. “Brick, I appreciate everything you’ve done for me and Stefan so far, but this isn’t normal.”

“What do you mean?” he asked, frowning.

“I’m just a stranger you met tonight. Why would you help us?” she asked.

Brick didn’t miss the suspicion in her voice. He expected that kind of reaction. “I couldn’t just leave a beautiful woman in trouble all alone for the wolves to devour,” he said with a shrug.

That was exactly what the Black Dogs would do, if they got their filthy paws on her. They’d take a strong-willed woman like her and rip her to shreds. The thought made him angry. If she said she wanted to go her own way, he would’ve probably sent a prospect to tail her just to make sure they were both safe.

Good thing she agreed to come with him. Brick had no idea what he was doing, of course, but she and the kid were here now.

“I see. Would you like me to thank you for help now or...” Rose trailed off. Color appeared in her cheeks and neck.

Brick couldn't help but grin. She understood the game after all. He neared her. She didn't step away but firmly held his gaze, even if she had to crane her neck to do so. Rose was such a tiny little thing compared to him. He rested his hand on her cheek, pleased she leaned into it unconsciously. Then he released her, twirling one finger into one of her dark curls.

Her breathing hitched. Brick dipped his gaze lower, letting her see how hungry he was for her. He admired the swell of her generous breasts hidden under her bra. Her luscious curves and body, so ripe for the taking. Her nipples hardened just from one look. If he slipped his hand under her jeans and underwear, would he find her wet for him? Brick's dick woke at that thought.

No. Brick peeled himself away from such temptations. He let go of her hair, although he still pictured her lying naked in his bed, her glorious hair spread out on his pillow and sheets. “Not tonight,” he told her. “You must've had a long day. Take that shower. I'll look after Stefan.”

Disappointment flashed in her eyes, but she handed Stefan to him. She paused before heading to the bathroom. “Can I ask you something?”

“Ask away, sweetheart,” Brick said.

“You know how to hold a baby,” she pointed out. “That surprised me.”

“I don't hear a question,” he reminded her.

“You have experience with kids?” she asked him.

“I used to look after my sister's kid when she was busy working.” Thinking of Trigger still in the hospital and Tasha dead in the ground sobered him right up.

Rose must've sensed the change in his demeanor because she didn't ask him another question. She nodded, then entered the bathroom and locked the door behind her. Brick didn't take offense. Why would she trust a man she just met today, after all?

Cradling Stefan in his arms, he rocked the baby. Stefan went to sleep without any fuss, unlike his Todd—well, he preferred to be called Trigger now. Rose didn't take long. She emerged from the shower ten minutes later, wearing one of his old shirts. It fell to her knees, and the sheer fabric failed to hide her curves and her nipples.

Rose caught him staring. "I hope you don't mind," she began. "I forgot to grab one of my nightshirts from my bag, and—"

"My shirt looks good on you." Brick handed Stefan to her.

"I hope he didn't give you any trouble," she told him, gazing at the boy in her arms that wasn't hers. Still, Brick could tell she loved the kid with all her heart.

"He's a good kid," Brick said. "Trigger—my sister's kid—now he was a troublemaker."

"Your sister named him Trigger?" she asked him with a raise of one dark eyebrow.

"Nah. That's what he wants everyone to call him now. He's part of the MC, you see. Dragon put him and two other members of our crew in the hospital," Brick said. "I'm usually calm and rational most of the time, but Trigger's the only family I have. I can't just sit still while he's at the intensive care unit."

He wasn't sure why he was telling her all this. Brick wouldn't forget the way she'd gone sheet white after he shot those Black Dogs bastards. Maybe a part of him wanted to justify his actions to her. That never happened to him before. Being in the presence of this woman was doing all kinds of strange things to him, but Brick found he didn't care.

“So you killed those men out of vengeance?” she asked softly.

Brick couldn't read her tone or the expression on her face. “When someone hits us, we hit back,” he simply said. “That's all there is to it.”

“Must be nice,” she murmured.

“What is?” Brick asked, finding himself drawn to her again.

He approached her. Rose seemed distracted, looking at Stefan. This close, Brick could smell the soap he used on her skin. His shampoo. Fuck, but she smelled delectable. A wave of possessiveness hit him. They'd only known each other for less than a day, and already, he planned to keep her. Too bad she didn't know that yet, but she would and soon.

“To have someone on your side, to have someone fiercely fight for you,” she said. “I never had that.”

Brick detected sadness in her voice. Rose had probably fought her own battle for the longest time. She was a fighter and ought to be proud of that. “Let me guess. This isn't the first time your brother did this?” he asked her.

She nodded, then blinked, probably realizing how close he was. Rose didn't seem daunted by his presence. “Donny and my father, they're two sides of the same coin. All they cared about were themselves.”

“Your father?” he pressed. One irritating brother was already a chore to deal with. Was Rose telling him she had to support a second dead weight? No wonder she looked so ragged.

“Dead. Got himself killed doing errands for another MC.” Rose let out a bitter laugh. “He was never home most of the time. Left us to fend for ourselves. I have no idea why Donny wanted to follow in his footsteps.”

“So you and the kid are the only two good things that came out of that family.”

“I don’t know about that. I’m barely surviving. Juggling three jobs to pay the bills and watching over my other family members, it takes a toll on you, you know?” Rose shook her head. “Sorry, you probably don’t want to listen to any of this.”

“On the contrary, I want to know everything about you, Rose,” he said.

Careful of the sleeping baby between them, Brick leaned in close and gave her a kiss on the mouth, chaste and quick. A preview of what was to come. Rose kissed him back, and he didn’t miss the desperate hunger she possessed. He grinned after pulling away. Brick debating asking her how long it had been since she’d been with a real man, then decided against it.

“You and Stefan can have the bed for tonight. Tomorrow morning, I’ll see if I can get him a cot,” Brick said.

“Where will you be?” she asked him, watching him fluff up his pillows. Brick fetched a fresh blanket from the closet and laid it on the bed.

“Right next to you.” He nodded to the armchair next to the bed. “I’m not going anywhere, Rose.”

“Okay,” she whispered, and she crawled under the covers with Stefan. “Good. I don’t understand it, but I feel safe with you.”

“I won’t let anything happen to you or Stefan, Rose. You have my word,” Brick said, because she needed to hear those words. Taking this woman and her kid, who were both wanted by an enemy MC, might be a reckless move, but even if Brick could somehow turn back time, he wouldn’t change a damn thing.

Chapter Five

Sleeping on the chair proved damn uncomfortable. Brick couldn't even get a wink of decent sleep, so he contented himself by watching Rose. Asleep, with her eyes closed and her body curled protectively over Stefan, she looked peaceful. Innocent. Rose wasn't naïve though. She possessed grit.

Close to sunrise, Brick rose and worked out the kinks in his neck and back. He decided to hit the gym, start the morning in a productive matter, so he headed to the bathroom and put on his workout clothes. Before exiting the room, he placed a kiss on Rose's cheek. Brick quietly shut the door behind him. The outdoor gym was located in the yard at the back of the clubhouse.

The covered space only used to have a couple of dumbbells and weights. Over time, MC members added new equipment until the place finally resembled a gym. Brick did some laps around the yard. By the time he started working on his weights, a couple of MC brothers had joined him.

In his mid-forties, Brick wasn't getting younger. He kept himself in shape because it was a necessity. It also didn't hurt that Brick enjoyed working out. MC members who became lazy and slow had a tendency to end up dead. Brick finished his last reps when Vin, a prospect, approached him.

"King wants to see you in his office," Vin said.

Brick wiped the sweat off his face with a clean rag. "King's back from his trip early?" He asked.

The prospect nodded. "He and the others just arrived."

Brick scoffed. He had a feeling he knew what King wanted to talk about. "Fine. I'll talk to him soon."

The prospect looked anxious. Brick expelled a breath. It would've been nice to take a shower first, but fine. If King was in an impatient mood, he might end up shouting and scaring off this prospect. Brick drank some water, then headed

back inside the clubhouse. On his way to King's office, he bumped into Prudence, King's old lady. She carried Garth, their son, in her arms.

She beamed when she saw Brick. Brick knew King had taken them both along the trip. Neither Prudence nor Garth was in danger because the Ruthless Reapers MC had been allies with that group for a long time.

"Have a good trip?" Brick asked her.

A few months ago, Brick hadn't been too thrilled when he learned King developed an obsession over the daughter of the president of a rival MC group. Thankfully, they managed to get that sorted out when Prudence gave birth to Garth, and Axel, the President of the Chaos Riders MC, became a grandfather and an ally.

"We did. The meeting ended early, so we had time to sight-see. This little fella certainly enjoyed himself," Prudence said, nodding to Garth. Garth continued to snore softly on her shoulder.

"That reminds me. I need to ask you a favor," Brick said. He told her about Rose's situation. Prudence widened her eyes for a moment, then nodded.

"I'll see what I can do," she said. "I might have a spare cot for you and even a stroller. I'll ask Grizzly to accompany me back to the house. We'll see what else we can find."

"Thanks, Prudence. You're a lifesaver," Brick said, meaning it.

He and Prudence might've gotten off a rocky start, but over time, they'd come to some kind of agreement. Brick never pictured King as the sort of man to ever settle down, but he could also see how Prudence had been a good influence on him.

With that errand taken care of, he entered King's office. The other man was still wearing his cut. Judging by his crumpled clothes and the dust on him, King looked like he had just come from a ride. Brick had a feeling this would be a long conversation, so he took a seat in front of the desk.

“I heard you an interesting evening last night,” King began as he poured himself a glass of brandy.

“Too early to be drinking, don’t you think?” Brick asked. “What would your old lady think of that?”

“I need this drink because of your and Razor’s actions last night,” King said with a growl. He took a sip of his glass before narrowing his eyes at him. “What the fuck were you thinking, Brick?”

“Razor had nothing to do with this,” Brick began. “He just came along for the ride. Mostly, I think he was just worried I’d end up killing myself.”

King scoffed. “I find that hard to believe. Razor’s gotten into plenty of messes before.”

“I’m not joking.” Brick met King’s gaze.

King swore. “Then why the fuck would the two of you gun down three of Rat’s men without telling me about it first?”

“Dragon and his crew were the ones responsible for our stolen shipment four days ago. He’s the one who put a bullet in Trigger’s chest and left him to bleed on that dirty highway,” Brick said. Temper crept into his voice. He gripped the armrests of the chair.

King considered him for a few moments. “Then the two of you had a valid reason. What I don’t understand is why you didn’t run it by me first.”

“There wasn’t any time,” he said. “You already had plenty on your plate.”

“So my level-headed second-in-command decided to play vigilante because you thought you could handle this on your own?”

“It’s handled,” Brick said.

“What about the woman?”

Brick said nothing for a few moments. His MC brothers had seen Rose and Stefan last night. He couldn’t keep that a secret.

“Her brother stole from the Black Dogs MC. I got word Dragon and his crew would be at the Castle Falls Trailer Park that evening to collect a thief.” Brick told King everything, because no one hid secrets in the MC.

“Let me rephrase my earlier question,” King said, drumming his fingers on the desk. “Who is this woman to you?”

“Her name is Rose McCoy,” Brick said. “And I’ve taken her under my protection.”

“She’s trouble,” King finally said. “Your reasons for killing Dragon and his crew might be justified, but it’s probably better if we cut this woman loose.”

“No,” Brick said firmly. “Rose stays with me.”

“No?” King raised an eyebrow.

“Rose and Stefan have nowhere to go. Why should she and the kid suffer, because her brother’s a dick?” Brick said. “I said she’s my responsibility, and that’s that. She’s not leaving.”

“That’s your final decision?” King asked him.

“It is.” Brick nodded. King and he were partners. King couldn’t just order him around like a prospect or a newly patched member.

“Then we have nothing further to discuss. If Rat sends more men as retaliation, then you’re in charge, Brick. This is your mess. You clean it up. Take whoever’s willing to fight if it comes to that.”

“Understood. If we have nothing else to talk about, I’m going to take a shower, then check on Rose.”

Stefan’s crying jolted her awake. Rose groaned, still feeling sluggish, but she knew she had to get up and feed Stefan. She rubbed at her eyes. Unfamiliar surroundings looked back at her. Rose sat up slowly in bed. Stefan lay next to her, wrapped in blankets.

She picked him up, rocked him while she considered her situation.

Last night's events slowly came back to her. Part of her almost believed her mind had conjured up Brick, but he was real. She was in his room. Rose still didn't understand why he'd risk his neck for her. She was no one special.

Maybe Brick did this all the time, rescued women in distress in his free time? No. Brick didn't strike her as that sort of man. She realized the shower was running. Brick was probably in there, naked. Just thinking of the inked and muscled biker without his clothes on made her a little hot and bothered.

Stefan cried again just as Brick emerged from the bathroom, only wearing a pair of jeans. Water dripped down his wet hair and down his chest. Rose noticed there was a trail of dark hair on his abs that went down his jeans. She forced herself to look at his face alone.

"You're awake," he said.

"I need to feed Stefan. Is there a kitchen I can use?" she asked, glad her voice sounded steady.

"Sure. Follow me." Brick pulled out a shirt from a nearby drawer before leading her outside. Last night, the sounds of men laughing, drinking, talking combined with the loud music, had jarred her. In the early hours of the morning, the clubhouse seemed eerily silent. They went downstairs, passing a few MC men who greeted Brick and gave her undisguised curious looks.

The man who'd been with them last night, Razor, jumped to his feet when he spotted them. He'd been cleaning his gun, Rose noticed. He grinned and came over. "You're still here," Razor said to Rose.

"She's staying with me," Brick said loud enough for the other MC men to hear. Did he do that on purpose? Rose wondered.

Razor nodded, like he expected that answer all along. To Brick, he said, "Heard King gave you a thrashing just

now.”

Brick snorted. “Don’t worry, I told him it was all my idea.”

“I appreciate that,” Razor said. “I also heard if Rat decides to retaliate, you’re taking point. Count me in. I’ve also spoken to a couple of guys. Most of them have beef with the Black Dogs, too.”

“Good to hear.” Brick nodded. “I’ll let you and the other fellas know if there’s been a development.”

Razor went back to gun cleaning. Brick looked at her. “Sorry about that. Kitchen’s right over here.”

They entered the kitchen, where another MC member was working the stove. The smell of bacon made Rose’s stomach grumble. Her last meal had been lunch the day before. Stefan started crying again. Rose held the bag containing Stefan’s baby formula and food with her.

“Who’s this little cutie?” the big, inked older biker asked, looking at Stefan.

“Grizzly, that’s Stefan, and this is Rose. She needs to prepare food for the kid,” Brick explained.

“No problem. The kitchen’s big enough for the both of us,” Grizzly said.

Rose made Stefan’s formula, and minutes later, they sat at the kitchen table. Grizzly made breakfast for them. Brick grabbed a cup of coffee and took a seat next to her.

“How did you sleep?” Brick asked her.

“Pretty good,” she admitted. Brick offered to hold Stefan so she could eat her breakfast in peace.

“Huh,” Grizzly remarked. The other biker looked like he had finished making breakfast. There were huge platters of scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, and pancakes on the counter. Rose guessed he had cooked for the entire MC. She didn’t know how many members the Ruthless Reapers MC had, but judging by the size of this clubhouse and the motorcycles parked outside, they must number at least fifty.

“What?” Brick asked him.

“Nothing, you two remind me of a married couple,” Grizzly said, making Rose blush.

“Scram,” Brick told him. The big biker laughed, then exited the kitchen with all that food.

“That reminds me, I need to call the diner,” she blurted. Good thing she had her phone with her. “Do you mind if I make a call?”

“Go ahead. Want more coffee?” Brick asked her, nothing her cup was empty.

She nodded. *He’s sweet*, Rose thought. Her stomach fluttered. Nerves? Something else? God knew she couldn’t be attracted to Brick. That road wouldn’t, couldn’t end well. She had done her best to make sure she wouldn’t get entangled in the mess that had been her father and brother’s lives. Those two seemed like petty criminals compared to Brick and the operation his MC ran.

Getting further involved with a man like Brick—there was no future in that, but she couldn’t deny the fact she was drawn to him either. Rose called her manager, only to find out she was fired.

“But why? I never missed work even once,” she blurted.

“Sorry, Rose, but I made it clear that if any of my employees don’t show up without giving me a valid reason, they’re fired,” said Jerry, her prick manager. Before she could argue, he ended the call. Rose stared at her cell phone blankly for a few moments.

“Unbelievable,” she whispered.

“How much was he paying you?” Brick asked. She blinked, and he repeated the question.

Chapter Six

“\$7.00 an hour,” Rose replied. “We waitresses mostly rely on tips.”

Brick snorted. “Not even minimum wage?”

Rose looked annoyed. “It’s not like I can afford to be picky. Jobs are few and between in Castle Falls. Ever since the Black Dogs MC moved in, they’ve effectively scared off tourists.”

Brick remembered Rose mentioning she had three jobs to support Stefan and her brother.

“You can work for us,” Brick said decidedly.

“Work for you how? Like the women I saw last night?” she asked.

“No.” Brick suddenly growled. Just thinking of Rose running around half naked while his MC brothers leered made his blood boil. “You don’t have to be a club whore. Those women wanted to be here because they wanted a little fun and adventure. The MC runs other businesses in town. A sandwich store, an auto repair shop, cafe, a laundromat—you name it.”

“Are those businesses,” Rose asked, hesitating, “a front for something else?”

“Of course, but they’re legitimate businesses nonetheless,” Brick said. “We’d pay you a lot better than your previous employers. You don’t need to juggle three jobs just to survive.”

Hell, if she wanted, she didn’t need to work for the rest of her life. Brick would take care of her and Stefan just fine, except telling her that might send her running.

“I might take you up on that offer,” Rose admitted. There was a knock on the door. Brick hated being interrupted, but it might be important.

“Who is it?” Brick asked.

“It’s me. I brought the stuff you asked for, Brick,” Prudence said.

Brick opened the door and let Prudence and Grizzly in. Grizzly brought in a baby cot and other baby stuff Brick asked for. He didn’t expect it to be a lot, but King’s old lady had outdone herself. Rose looked a little overwhelmed.

“You must be Rose,” Prudence said, walking up to the other woman. She introduced herself.

“Thank you. I’m not sure what I can do to repay you for all this,” Rose said.

“Thank Brick, not me. He wanted to make sure you have everything you needed,” Prudence said with a smile.

“You did all this for me?” Rose asked. Stefan woke from all the excitement. Rose picked him up and showed him his new toys.

“It’s nothing. Just extra supplies Prudence didn’t need,” Brick explained. “Say, Prudence, could you do me a favor and take Stefan here?”

Rose looked at him, then at Prudence. Brick gauged her reaction. He wasn’t a bastard. If Rose told her she wasn’t comfortable letting someone else babysit Stefan for a little while, then he’d respect her decision.

“I don’t mind at all. I need to feed Garth as well,” Prudence said.

“How old is Garth?” Rose asked Prudence softly.

“He’ll turn one next month,” Prudence said. The other woman took out her phone then showed Rose pics of Garth. Brick groaned, wondering if this was going to take long.

“Okay,” Rose finally said. “I owe you one.”

“Not a problem. I hope we’ll be good friends, Rose,” Prudence said.

Rose handed Stefan to him, and Prudence crooned at the baby. He seemed delighted by her. Then again, Stefan

seemed to get along with everyone. He was an easy baby to handle, Brick mused.

“Good friends?” Rose asked.

“That’s right. There are other old ladies in the club, but they’re older than I am. It’s nice to be able to hang out with someone my age,” Prudence said. The sly fox gave Brick a wink. King didn’t see it, but his old lady did. That Rose was different from all the girls Brick had hooked up before.

Grizzly, Prudence, and Stefan finally exited the room, leaving Rose once more alone with Brick.

“No one has ever done anything for me like this before.” She walked up to him, steps hesitant. Rose grew determined, bold as she pressed one hand against the skin over his heart.

“You’re a good man, Brick. How do I even begin to thank you for everything?” she asked.

Using two fingers, Brick tipped her chin, locking his eyes with hers. “I have an idea,” Brick said as he leaned in close and finally did what he’d been wanting to do since he met her.

He kissed her for real, no holds barred. Without a baby between them, Brick took his time tasting her. Sweetness exploded on his tongue. He tugged her close, and she let out a little gasp of surprise but didn’t push him away. Brick deepened the kiss, and the little minx sucked down on his tongue.

Brick slid his hands under her shirt, touching soft and creamy skin. Rose didn’t wear any bra, so he could see her nipples under the huge shirt he wore. He bunched up her shirt. They paused from the kiss so Brick could yank her shirt off without ceremony.

Rose widened her eyes. Her breaths came in fast.

“Say the word and I’ll stop,” he told her.

Brick usually got what he wanted, and he had no problem inviting women to bed in the past. Problem was,

Brick never wanted any of them to stay. He didn't establish any sort of deep connection with them beyond the intimate, but Rose was different. Brick had known that from the start.

“Don't stop,” Rose whispered. “It's been so long for me.”

Brick led her to the bed. “I've been looking forward to this.”

Rose climbed up his bed and lay on her back. An angel, waiting to be ravished by a beast. Brick took off his shirt, smirking as he caught sight of the silent appreciation in her eyes. His pants and underwear came next. Rose's gaze lingered on the package between his legs.

She sucked in a breath. Just looking at his tempting prize made him rock hard.

He climbed on top of her. Gathering her arms above her head, Brick pinned them while he took his time kissing her, enjoying her. Rose responded hungrily to his kiss, and she moaned when he moved his mouth to the side of her neck. Her nipples hardened, rubbing against his chest.

Brick worked his way down, releasing her arms so he could focus on her breasts. Rose clutched the sheets above her, watching him with half-lidded eyes. Brick kissed both her nipples, then took the left one in his mouth. He sucked on it, making her groan, and he set his teeth on the bud and bit.

She gasped as Brick slid his hand past the band of her panties. He began fingering her cunt, which was already sopping wet for him. Brick marked her on her other nipple, memorizing her sweet cry in his head. He kissed her navel, then settled between her legs.

Brick peeled her panty down her legs and dropped it to the floor. She blushed as he gazed at her. His teeth marks looked vivid under the morning light, and possessive want surged through his entire body. Rose parted her thighs for him, exposing the pink folds of her pussy peeking under the dark curls of her pubic hair.

“Look at you, baby,” Brick murmured. “So fucking perfect.”

He pressed a kiss to her inner thigh, then gave her clit a long lick. She shuddered above him.

“I want to see you come for me,” Brick said.

“I—” Rose began but seemed to forget whatever it was she wanted to say.

Brick traced the shape of her pussy lips, then drove his tongue inside her folds. Rose cried up above him. He moved to her clit again, sucking on the sensitive nub of flesh. Then he pushed two fingers in her, and she buckled. He bit her softly and she cried out again. That was all it took for her to climax.

Gasping, she came all over his face, and he took his time, licking her cream off. Rose stared at him, expression languid. A bead of sweat slid down her marked breasts, and he licked that too. She flushed.

“You still haven’t fucked me,” she whispered.

“That’s right. I wanted to enjoy your body first,” Brick said. “Now flip over. I want to fuck you while you’re on all fours.”

He positioned her on the edge of the bed and helped her to her hands and knees. Brick grabbed a pillow and placed it under her stomach for support. He gave her a long and rough kiss on the mouth.

“Fucking hell, Rose. I can’t wait to be inside you,” Brick said.

“Yes,” was the only word she uttered.

Then Brick snatched his pants and grabbed a condom from his wallet. After slipping it on, he positioned himself behind her. Brick guided his cock head inside her entrance. Gripping her hips, he pushed in, slow and careful. While it was tempting to simply go all the way in, he wanted their first time to be memorable.

Rose gasped as he finally buried himself all the way to the hilt.

“Breathe, baby. That’s it. You’re such a good girl, for taking all of me inside you. Now sit back and enjoy the ride,” he said.

Chapter Seven

“I want to hear you come again,” he again. “Your pussy feels so damn good wrapped around my cock.”

Rose’s face burned, and yet she enjoyed every single second of Brick fucking her like he owned her. She’d never been with a man who liked to talk dirty during sex. With Brick, she found she liked it. Brick pulled out of her cunt only to push in again. She gasped. He was so big, but damn he knew how to make her feel good.

The initial ache of his entry quickly faded away as he replaced pain with pleasure. Ecstasy surged through her entire body. Her tits tightened to points as he hammered her into the mattress, and she only begged him for more.

“Faster, Brick. Please.”

Brick went deeper and deeper.

Rose couldn’t believe those words came out of her mouth. All three of her past relationships had been nothing but a disappointment, but this?

Rose could get addicted to Brick. Part of her still didn’t understand why he’d helped her. Brick didn’t just save her from Dragon and his men. He even offered her a job, and what he did for Stefan—that had been so sweet. Brick was a generous man, and God, did he know how to make her body sing.

Each time Brick entered her, it felt like a part of her soul drifted out of her body to merge with him. Sex had always been quick, nothing special, but this? It was mind-blowing. Rose could get addicted to Brick’s cock, to his possessive touches and heated kisses. He reduced them both to panting and needy animals. Pressure built inside her like a dam waiting to break open.

She found herself meeting him for every thrust. The next time Brick entered her, he found her G-spot. Rose gasped, arching her back, and a scream tore out of her mouth as he

nailed her there. At his last push, she shattered. She screamed his name while she came all over his cock.

Her mind floated twenty thousand feet in the air. A few moments later, Brick let out a growl before climaxing. He pulled out of her, and Rose collapsed on the bed. She took a few seconds to gather herself. Rose felt deliciously sore. Well-used.

Brick disappeared inside his bathroom and returned with a towel to clean them both up. With that task done, Brick joined her in bed. She found herself seeking his warmth. When he wrapped his big and warm body around her smaller one, she left out a sigh of relief.

Emotions stirred inside her chest—contentment, want, and another emotion she couldn't name. Soon, the euphoria would fade, and Rose would be left with doubt. Questions.

“I once made a promise to myself that I can't fall for a man like you,” she found herself saying. Why was it when she was with Brick, she couldn't hide anything from him?

“Are you falling for me?” Brick sounded smug.

Rose turned to look him in the eyes. She couldn't answer him. “Those words slipped out by accident,” she said.

“Tell me why,” Brick urged.

“Why? You need to ask me that? My brother and father involved themselves in the MC. Look how well that ended,” she said.

“You're not them,” Brick said, resting his hand against her cheek. To her chagrin, Rose found herself leaning into his touch. No one had ever taken care of her before. Was that why she was drawn to him? No. She didn't stay with him just because of those shallow reasons.

She saw the man underneath the criminal. Brick possessed a good heart, she knew it in her bones, but this was also the life he'd chosen. Rose saw it in his eyes. Brick would live and die by the MC. There was no changing his path. If she chose to entangle herself in his world, would she end up dead like her father?

Rose didn't know what else to say, so she only nodded.

“Stay or go, that's your choice, but if you decide to stick around, well. You'll be mine, you understand?” Brick traced her bottom lip with his thumb.

Rose sucked on his digit, unsure why she did that. Hearing those words from Brick sent an unexplainable thrill down her spine.

For most of her life, she had followed the rules. In high school, everyone saw her as the daughter of a loser even though she tried her best to carve a positive reputation for herself. Rose was sick of trying to convince other people she was good. She was tired of holding everything together when her world had already fallen apart.

“I'll stay,” Rose finally said.

“I knew you would,” Brick said, kissing her on the mouth. Just the brush of his lips and she was a goner.

“You mentioned in our previous phone call that you know how to work the cash register?” Nancy, the proprietor of Heaven's Café, asked her.

Nancy was a lean, wiry woman in her late forties with a no-nonsense attitude. Rose didn't miss the tattoos the woman sported under her long-sleeved blouse and pencil skirt. Rose briefly wondered what her story was, then decided now wasn't the time. She had to focus and pay attention. Rose didn't want to screw up on her first day at work.

“I do,” Rose said. “When things got too busy at the diner and bar, I handled the cash register.”

“You do have plenty of experience waitressing. I called the previous places you've worked and the managers had positive things to say about you.” Nancy held out a hand, and Rose shook it. “I'm looking forward to working together, Rose.”

“Me, too,” Rose said.

Prudence had offered to look after Stefan on her first day of work. It was a temporary solution. Rose promised her she would find a viable solution soon. Prudence mentioned there was a good daycare center in town. Checking out the daycare was on Rose's checklist this week.

The morning and lunch crowd kept Rose and Nancy busy. Although Nancy mentioned a part-timer came in three times a week, it was mostly just the two of them. Rose could handle the workload. She was used to working at understaffed places. At the end of the day, Rose was beat.

"I have to admit, I'd been reluctant to hire you," Nancy said as they cleaned the tables. "When it comes to women, Brick isn't exactly a good judge of character. The last woman Brick sent my way, well, let's just say she didn't last a day."

Rose halted at those words. Her skin prickled with unease. Of course, she wouldn't be the first damsel in distress Brick helped. Unwarranted jealousy hit her out of nowhere. She and Stefan had only been staying with Brick for a week. The sex had been amazing, but it wasn't like Brick was her boyfriend or anything yet.

"So Brick has helped other women find jobs before?" she found herself asking. Rose cringed after hearing herself.

"Sure, but he's never taken one under his personal protection," Nancy said. "I saw the way he looked at you when he dropped you off this morning. You're different."

Rose wasn't sure if she ought to be relieved or worried after hearing that. "You don't have to worry, Nancy. I'll do my job just fine."

"I can see that you're a hard worker, even if you've only been here a day." The woman flashed her a smile for the first time. "I know I can be a little blunt sometimes, but I can tell you're a good person."

"This is a wonderful café you're running," Rose remarked. She'd fallen in love with the cozy décor and warm tones of the place right away. Lunch came free for employees, so she knew the food and coffee tasted fantastic.

“I named it after my husband, Heaven. He used to ride with the MC,” Nancy explained.

“Used to? I’m sorry to hear that,” Rose said. She didn’t miss the grief in the other woman’s voice.

“We always talked about opening a café after he retired,” Nancy said. “But he got gunned down during a job. King and Brick promised me they’ll help keep this place running, in memory of Heaven.”

“So ... it’s guilt money?” Rose asked.

Looking at Nancy, Rose wondered if she’d end up like this one day—alone and deeply missing Brick. Anything went in the MC. A job could go wrong at any moment, and the MC had plenty of enemies. It could also be the other way around, and Rose would get caught in the crossfire, leaving Brick alone.

What would happen to Stefan then? Her brother was practically dead to her after Donny abandoned Stefan and her to the mercies of Dragon and his crew. Dang it. She might be overthinking matters.

Nancy chuckled. “You don’t mince your words either, don’t you? I can see why Brick’s smitten with you. Well, to be fair, I was mad at the MC for a long time, but I’ve come to terms with Heaven’s death. You see, he died the way he wanted after all.”

Someone knocked on the café windows. Rose was about yell they were close, but it wasn’t a customer. Brick grinned at her and gave her a wave. Her heart did somersaults despite the fact she’d just been thinking about how dangerous it was to fall for a man like Brick.

“Go on,” Nancy said with a nod. “I can close up.”

“You sure?” Rose asked her.

“Yup. The place is spotless, thanks to your help. See you tomorrow, kid.”

“Tomorrow then,” Rose said with a nod.

She wiped her sweaty palms on her apron before taking it off. After folding it and leaving it at her cubby, she snatched her purse and headed outside to meet Brick.

“How was your first day?” Brick asked her. “I hope Nancy didn’t work you too hard.”

“It was fantastic,” she said, surprising him. “I think I’m going to enjoy working with Nancy.”

“That’s good to hear,” Brick said. “What do you want to eat for dinner?”

“You pick?” Rose asked.

Brick looked thoughtful. “You in the mood for tacos and fajitas?”

Her stomach rumbled at those words. Prudence promised to watch Stefan tonight. Rose had been worried it might be too much trouble, but the other woman said it was fine, even though King would probably be unhappy with her.

The President of the Ruthless Reapers MC didn’t seem to be a fan of her from the start.

“Sounds good,” she said.

They walked to where Brick parked his Harley. Brick helped her put her helmet on, even though she could put it on herself. He leaned in and gave her a breathless kiss that left her wanting more.

“Looks like someone’s hungry for more than tacos tonight.” She couldn’t help but tease.

Brick flashed her a predatory smile that made her shiver in anticipation. Rose climbed behind him, and they zipped for the restaurant. Despite the crowd, the proprietor of the place recognized who Brick was right away and found them a good table.

“I could get used to this,” she murmured. After they ordered, Rose told Brick all about her day. Unlike the men she dated in the past, he listened. He seemed genuinely interested in what went on in her life.

“What about you?” she asked him.

“I visited Trigger in the hospital after dropping you off at work,” Brick said.

“How is he?” Rose asked.

Brick had taken her along during one of his visits. Trigger, like Prudence, supported their relationship and seemed glad his uncle found someone he could be serious with. Was Rose that person?

“There was a delivery job after that, but it went smoothly,” Brick said.

Brick didn't hide what the MC did for a living, but he didn't go into the exact details either. That suited Rose just fine. While she worried about him and his men constantly, as long as they came back safe, she was relieved. Her mind took her back to her conversation with Nancy.

“I found out Nancy named her café after her husband,” Rose said. Their food had arrived, and they both dug into their fish tacos. Rose also ordered a tequila. Brick didn't order any alcohol because he was the one driving.

A grim expression crossed Brick's face. “Heaven was one of the good ones. He was taken from us too soon.”

“Brick,” Rose said and hesitated. “I can't help but wonder if that's the kind of future in store for us.”

Brick reached for her hands across the table and clasped them. “What brought this about?”

Rose shook her head. “I can't imagine the hell Nancy had gone through when her husband died. She still misses him.”

“Rose.” He expelled a breath. “No one can predict what the future will bring. What happened to Heaven was an unfortunate accident. I won't die so soon on you. Promise. King made me Vice President because I'm level-headed and patient. I plan ahead to ensure our jobs run smoothly.”

“When you went after Dragon and his men, you acted on impulse,” she pointed out. “Not that I'm ungrateful, of

course. If it weren't for you, Stefan and I might not be alive today."

"Your fears are valid," he said. "But ultimately, it's up to you to decide whether you want to stick with me or not."

"I'm sorry for bringing this up out of the blue," she said, and Brick released her hands. The rest of dinner was a quiet affair. They shared a dessert, then he paid for the bill. Although they practically had sex every other night, this was their first official date. She had gone ahead and ruined it.

"Something else on your mind?" he asked her as they headed out of the restaurant.

"I'm sorry for wrecking our date," she said. It was chilly tonight, and she shivered a little.

"Come here," he said, pulling her close. Cocooned in his warmth, she sighed and leaned against him.

Brick cupped her cheek, then took her mouth. The kiss was all heat and bite. Rose didn't remain compliant. She responded fiercely, clutching at his shoulders.

"Can't get enough of you," he said with a growl after releasing her.

Rose felt the same way. Screw the conflicting emotions raging inside her. There was nothing wrong with taking one step at a time and living in the present. Right now, she wanted Brick to take her home and ravish her. He possessed the power to make her easily forget her problems.

"Me either," she whispered. "Not sure if that's a good or bad thing."

"Definitely good." Brick paused, then took off his cut. He placed it around her shoulders, and she put it on. It smelled just like him. Motor oil, cigarette smoke, and the mint. He handed her a helmet. After putting it on, Rose took her place behind him. She wrapped her arms around his solid body and pressed her face between his shoulders. *Safe*, Rose thought, *and mine*.

Chapter Eight

Rose woke with Brick's cock buried inside her. When she experimentally wiggled, he groaned behind her. He had one arm and leg thrown over her body. She still marveled at the perfect way their bodies fit. Brick pulled his prick out of her, then kissed the nape of her neck.

"Morning, sweetheart," he murmured sleepily in her ear.

"Hey," she answered.

Rose could get used to this, to waking up next to Brick's solid and warm body. If she was honest, she wanted more mornings like this. A couple of weeks had passed since Brick took her to that Mexican restaurant and she laid her fears bare before him. Stefan and Rose were adjusting nicely to their new life.

Everything at work was going swell. She loved working at the café with Nancy. Rent and food were practically free since she lived with Brick at the MC clubhouse, and most of her salary went to her savings account. She had no fears about being able to put Stefan in school. As for Brick and her, things couldn't be better.

"Brick," she said as he wrapped his arms tighter around her body.

"Hmm?" Brick asked, sliding his cock between her legs again.

She groaned. "We can't. I'll be late for work, and you'll be late for your meeting. I can't give King another reason to hate me," she pointed out.

The President of the Ruthless Reapers MC had only traded a few curt words with her, but he avoided her if possible. Rose couldn't blame him. Ever since Brick killed off Dragon and his crew, she knew the MCs frequently butted heads. Brick did his best to avoid talking about the conflict, but she could still hear the other MC men talking.

Trigger and the other two MC guys that Dragon landed in the hospital had finally been discharged from the hospital. They were eager to hit back at the Black Dogs and rode with Brick whenever there was a potential fight. Guilt filled her each time her man and his crew rode out.

This was all on her, Rose knew. The Black Dogs MC was still looking for Donny. Brick suspected her brother had already skipped town, so the rival MC's closest target was her and Stefan.

Brick snorted, finally awake. "King doesn't hate you."

"This is all my fault," she said, twisting in his arms. Brick loosened his hold so she could turn and face him. "I heard the others talking. This meeting is about the Black Dogs MC, isn't it?"

"Rat sent a crew to steal one of our shipments," he admitted. "But we won't stay idle. We'll get them back, and how many times have I told you? None of this is your fault."

"But—" Rose began.

Brick put a finger to her lips. "But nothing," he said firmly. "The Black Dogs MC are scum. They were just waiting for an excuse to start a war with us. They used Donny as a spark. You and Stefan happened to be caught in all this mess."

"Thank you for coming to my defense every single time," she said with a smile.

"Leave the Black Dogs to me," he said, pressing a kiss to her mouth. "Now since we're in a hurry, why don't we shower together to save water and time?"

Rose grinned. She couldn't say no to that. After an invigorating shower, Rose bathed then fed Stefan in the kitchen. Brick and Rose usually ate with the other members of the MC. Some of Brick's MC brothers might be apprehensive of her presence, but Stefan was an attention hogger who could make anyone smile, even the grumpiest biker.

After eating, Rose took her car and drove Stefan to the daycare center. Prudence tagged along with her. Brick and a

few of his guys had given her car a tune-up and now it ran like a dream.

“So, how are things going with you and Brick?” Prudence asked her. The other woman begged her to stop at a nearby donut shop. They got a dozen, and Prudence ate while she drove.

“Good, I think,” Rose admitted.

She hesitated, then told Prudence about her guilt. Prudence and Rose had grown close over the past few weeks. Rose hadn't had time for friends or much of a social life before Brick rescued her, so having a close confidante took getting used to. She liked Prudence. The red-haired woman didn't take any bullshit from anyone, even King or her father, who was the President of another MC the Reapers were allied with.

Prudence scoffed. “Nonsense. Brick is right. None of this is your fault. Even before you came along, the Reapers and Black Dogs were already butting heads. The Black Dogs MC is a menace. They kill without remorse and trample on those they deem weak.”

“Your husband thinks I'm partly responsible,” she pointed out.

“Don't worry about King. It takes a while for him to warm up to newcomers.” Prudence let out a laugh that made her feel a little better. “Brick didn't approve of me either, when King brought me to the clubhouse.”

Prudence had mentioned this before, but Rose couldn't quite believe her. “What did you do to change Brick's mind?” she asked her out of curiosity.

“When Brick realized I wasn't planning on going anywhere and that I'd do anything for King, he decided it was better if we became friends,” Prudence said, finishing a glazed donut.

They arrived at their destination. After dropping the kids off, Prudence said she needed to talk to Nancy. Once they arrived at the café, Rose went to work helping Nancy open up. Prudence and Nancy talked about club business on the side

while Rose welcomed the first customer of the day with a smile. Prudence eventually left, but before she did, she made Rose promise they would meet up for drinks later tonight. She said she found a prospect willing to watch their kids.

“All right, I could use a drink or two,” she admitted. She didn’t think Brick would mind either. After his meeting, he had another important delivery job to supervise.

The rest of the morning passed by in a blur. Her stomach felt queasy by lunchtime, and Rose spent some time throwing up during her break. Eating seemed impossible, so she settled for some soup and hard bread. Brick texted her, asking how she was. Rose lied and said she was fine, knowing her man had plenty of things on his mind today. She made a quick run to the pharmacy for some pills, and she took them before resuming work.

She vomited twice again in the afternoon, and this time, Nancy noticed. The other woman caught her just as she exited the ladies’ room. Nancy gave her a once-over and frowned. “Rose, take the rest of the day off,” she said in that no-nonsense voice Rose had gotten used to.

“I’m fine. Must be something I ate the day before,” she pointed out. That was odd, because the guys in charge of cooking at the MC always procured fresh ingredients. Another stray thought struck her as Nancy crossed her arms and considered her. She’d missed her period. Two weeks now.

“If you caught something, you won’t want to pass it to unsuspecting customers, would you?” Nancy finally asked her.

Rose grimaced. The other woman had a point. If she had the flu, then that would be so much better than the alternative. Rose couldn’t be pregnant with Brick’s baby. It was too soon. Besides, Brick only fucked her bareback that one time. In the heat of passion, she told him to dispense with the condom. After all, both of them were clean. Dang it. Could one time be enough?

Nancy grasped her shoulders. “Rose, you look pale. Just go home and rest.”

“But how will you manage?” she asked, concerned.

“I managed fine on my own before,” Nancy said with a nod. “Don’t worry. Your job will be waiting for you.”

“Okay,” she said a little reluctantly.

She only agreed because the possibility she was pregnant was an enormous game changer. Brick and she were an item, yes. She would go so far as to call him her boyfriend, but they never talked about the future. Certainly, they never discussed kids. God. What if he freaked out? Brick was already amazing when it came to Stefan, and Stefan wasn’t even her own child.

Rose quickly pulled her apron off and grabbed her purse. Her first stop? The pharmacy. She bought cold medicine here just hours ago, during her lunch break. Now she was back here again. Her mind spun. She wandered aisle to aisle, unable to find what she wanted.

Finally, she flagged a staff down to help her. “Where can I find a pregnancy kit?”

The staff member, a bored teenager, didn’t look up from her phone. “Aisle ten.”

Rose hurried over to that direction. She thought she could just pluck one box and go, but the numerous options stumped her. Rose grew dizzy and staggered backward a little, nearly knocking over an annoyed elderly lady pushing a cart.

“Sorry, ma’am,” she quickly said. The old woman rolled her eyes before moving on.

Rose could pull out her phone and figure out which was the best one to buy. Then again, weren’t they all practically the same? Rose stood there for a good long while, sweating. She kept imagining how Brick would react. Happy? Disappointed? Angry? All three? Would a baby ruin all his plans for them?

She hadn't planned on becoming a mother either. Rose had her hands full with Stefan.

"Dammit. This is taking too long," she whispered to herself.

Rose snatched the first box off the shelf and went to the cash register to pay for it. Her hands shook as she handed over the bills. Then she grabbed her brown paper bag and exited the shop, only to bump into someone she never expected to see in a million years. Her paper bag went flying. She groaned, irritated.

The man who had been waiting for her picked up the bag and peeked at it curiously. Then he stood up and handed it back to her. Rose froze, unable to believe her eyes. Donny flashed her a sheepish smile.

"Hey, sis. It's been a while," Donny said.

She plucked the bag from him and dumped it in her purse. This couldn't be a sheer coincidence. Brick told some of his men to be on the lookout for Donny but found no trail of him. Like a rat, her brother had finally come out of hiding. For what reason?

"What the hell are you doing here?" Rose demanded.

"Aren't you glad to see me? Can't a concerned father see his own son?" Donny asked her. "By the way, where are you and Stefan living?"

She narrowed her eyes at him and asked him point-blank. "You knew I was living in this town. Who told you? The Black Dogs MC?"

"Hush," Donny said, quickly grabbing her arm and pulling her inside a side alley. "Don't mention that name out loud."

She tensed. Rose had pepper spray in her purse, and she wasn't afraid to use it. She studied the alleyway, almost expecting a couple of men to jump out and snatch her. A ridiculous thought. As if Rose was worth anything to anyone—unless they knew she was important to Brick.

Rose's stomach churned at those words, and it wasn't from morning sickness. When it came to Donny, nothing surprised her anymore.

"What do you want, Donny?" She pushed him away.

Donny released her and held out both his hands in mock defeat. "What's with the aggressive tone, sis?"

"You asshole. When you learned the Black Dogs were after your sorry little ass, you ran and left Stefan and me to their mercy." She practically spat out those words. Even Donny looked slightly taken aback.

"Hey, I didn't know what would've happened. Who would have predicted they would go after my family?" he asked.

He had always perfected that look. That I'm-a-victim-too look. Time and time again, Rose had caved and felt sorry for her brother. Not this time. She had Brick, Stefan, and possibly the baby growing in her belly to think about.

"Don't play games with me, Donny." It struck Rose that she didn't have to listen to his drivel any longer. She shoved her way past him, angry. Donny mentioned Stefan, but truth was, he never gave two shits about his son. All he cared about was saving his own skin.

"Wait, you're right, Rose, but I was scared. I can't imagine what they'd do to me, so I crashed at a friend's place for a little while," Donny said.

Rose kept walking. She didn't care for his explanations.

"Rose, don't walk away from me. You're the only family I have left," he said, switching to his wheedling voice. "Just spare me some money. \$500. That's all I ever ask from you again. I just need some cash to leave town."

Rose halted. She should've kept going, but it occurred to her that this was the first time she truly heard Donny desperate. She looked at him. She only had one photo of her parents, back when they were teenagers. Donny looked so much like her dad.

“Answer my first question, Donny, and I might give you what you want. How did you find me?” she asked.

“Fair enough. A couple of months ago, I activated the tracking option on your phone that lets me know where you are.”

“So, you’re not here as the Black Dogs MC errand dog?” she asked.

His face twitched at those words. Donny clenched his fists by his sides. Rose slipped her hand into her bag and closed her fingers over the spray bottle.

“Hurt me and my man will come after you,” Rose warned. “The Ruthless Reapers MC own this town, Donny. Just the way the Black Dogs MC runs Castle Falls. Believe me, you don’t want to do anything to me on their turf.”

Donny turned pale as a ghost. “You hooked up with one of them?” He sneered. “I thought you said you’d never end up with a biker.”

“You didn’t leave me with any choice,” she said. “So, whose side are you on?”

“I ain’t working with the Black Dogs MC,” Donny said. “They killed Ken in front of my eyes.”

This time, Rose knew he wasn’t faking because Donny began to tremble. Ken was Donny’s best friend, and they both did jobs for the Black Dogs.

“They said you owe them money,” Rose said.

“Ken and I just skimmed a little from a job. Just some spare change. Nothing to it,” Donny said defensively.

“Then where’s the money?” Rose asked him.

Donny flashed her a guilty look. “Blew it all away on online gambling and some coke.”

Her brother never did change, did he?

Donny approached her. Rose tensed, but he only fell to his knees and hugged her leg.

“Please, Rose. Just help me this one last time and I’ll never bother you and Stefan again,” Donny blubbered. Tears slipped down his face. She had never seen her brother cry before. Donny thrived on bullying others. Maybe he finally found it was unpleasant being on the other side.

“Fine, I’ll need to get to an ATM,” Rose said.

“Thank you, baby sister. You won’t regret this.”

Chapter Nine

“Everyone knows what they need to do?” Brick asked the others. He and half a dozen men spread themselves out on the side of the road. The other men gave him nods. Brick checked his watch. The convoy should be arriving by now.

“Let’s rip these assholes a new one,” Razor said, and the others agreed with him.

A mix of eager young and old faces peered back at Brick, including Trigger. Trigger made it clear he stood by his decisions and insisted he wanted to come. Brick had been reluctant to let him in the mission, but King told him to give the kid a chance.

The Black Dogs MC had stolen two of their shipments. They hit back once, but Brick believed two times was the charm. Brick positioned himself by the front. He held his rifle steady as the first pair of riders appeared in his line of sight.

Brick rested the butt of the gun on his shoulder to steady his aim and fired. The rider to the left toppled over, his bike careening to the side. Some of his men quickly took cover. Razor took out the man to the right. The convoy soon appeared, and Brick sucked in a breath. An armored truck? Where the hell did Rat have the funds for that?

Razor appeared next to him. He carried a handgun Brick had never seen him use before. Razor popped open a small case next to him and loaded the cylinder. Brick blinked. “Are those armor-piercing rounds?”

“Never hurts to be prepared,” Razor said.

“You crazy bastard,” Brick said, letting Razor hear the fondness and awe in his voice. Grinning, Razor fired. His first shot missed, and the second barely made a dent on the vehicle. Razor fired at the glass, but it didn’t shatter. All it did was make the driver jump in his seat. Razor swore.

“These defective or something?” Razor demanded.

“Go for the wheels. We’ll both take it out,” Brick said.

Razor did as they asked. One of Brick's bullets caught the front left wheel. Razor got the back. The truck went past them, but Brick knew it would eventually come to halt. More enemy riders fanned out from the back. They all carried guns.

"Take cover," he yelled at his guys. Most of them managed to dive into the bushes or hide behind the trees right on time. The Black Dogs MC started firing. He spotted Trigger and another newly patched member crawling on their bellies toward the firefight. Trigger whipped out his revolver.

"Wait for it," Brick yelled. Trigger and his friend looked torn between rushing in or lying low.

"Follow the fucking plan," Brick said.

Trigger gave him a curt nod. The kid knew how to follow orders after all. Maybe after Trigger's stint in the hospital, he learned a measure of patience.

The Black Dogs eventually ran out of bullets. It would take them a couple of seconds to reload. Precious seconds Brick and his crew could make use of. Brick leaped to his feet. He started shooting, and Razor was behind him. The others did the same. It was a bloodbath. One Black Dogs MC member managed to turn his bike around, ready to flee. He didn't get far. Razor shot him in the back. He toppled over.

Brick walked up to the waiting armored truck. Trigger and Grizzly had gotten the door open. The grim expressions on their faces made Brick hasten his footsteps. "Something wrong? Our stolen shipment not there?" he asked.

"It's there all right, but there's something else you should see, boss," Grizzly said.

"Something good or bad?" Brick asked.

"Bad, judging by their expressions," Razor remarked by his shoulder.

Grizzly held the door open. Brick had to squint because there were no windows inside the truck. He saw the crates of their stolen shipment first. He breathed a sigh of relief. King and their clients would be happy to know they got their guns back.

A soft whimper made Brick freeze in his tracks. Three women had been handcuffed to the railing of the vehicle. They looked young, scantily clad. Tears and ruined makeup streamed down their faces.

“Fuck,” Brick muttered under his breath. He heard the rumors that the Black Dogs MC dipped their fingers in human trafficking, but seeing it in person was another thing.

“What are we going to do about them, Brick?” Trigger asked, flashing the women a nervous look.

“Help me get them free,” Brick said.

Razor and Brick got into the truck. Trigger found the keys to unlock the handcuffs on their wrists from the jean pocket of the driver. The three women huddled together and shot them frightened looks.

“You’ll be all right,” Brick said. “No one can hurt you anymore. We’ll make sure you’ll all be returned to your loved ones.”

Brick sighed as he exited the truck. Trigger managed to persuade the women to climb out. None of them tried to run. Maybe Trigger had a more trustworthy face. Rose could’ve ended up like them, Brick thought, if Dragon and his men had their way.

The thought made him see red for a couple of moments.

“What a headache. Now we have to get the cops involved. How are we going to explain the women and all this to them?” Razor asked by his side. The other man gestured to the corpses on the floor.

Brick pushed his angry thoughts aside. Rose was his woman now, and he promised her that nothing would ever happen to her or Stefan. Razor and his other MC brothers needed them now.

“We’ll clean up the scene as best as we can. The bodies will need to go. The truck, we’ll need to put to a vote. It might be useful to us in the future,” Brick said, thinking.

“Then what? We’ll just have to tell the cops we happen to find the women the Black Dogs were holding captive against their will?”

Brick nodded. “We won’t mention the convoy or the robbery. We’ll convince the women to stick to our version of the story. I’m sure they’ll be amendable. We’re on their side, after all. If the cops give us trouble, then we’ll just have to give them a little more incentive.”

“All right then,” Razor said with a nod.

“You heard him. Let’s clean up,” Razor yelled to the others.

It took the better part of the night, cleaning up the mess they created. Finding a remote place to bury the bodies also proved to be exhausting work, but Brick wanted to make sure no one would be able to trace the murders to them. Grizzly and Trigger said they’d handle the cops and make sure the women would be safely returned to their homes.

Brick wasn’t sure Trigger would be ready to take on that huge of a responsibility, but Grizzly had his back.

“What a day,” Razor said, leaning on his shovel.

Brick’s back ached from all the hard labor, but he wasn’t about to bring that up. He looked at the seven bodies in the dirt. The MC owned this huge stretch of wildlife, and the local coppers were in their pocket. He’d make sure no one would come sniffing around these parts either.

He sighed. The job went as planned for the most part, but he didn’t anticipate finding those women.

“I could use a drink or two and a warm woman on my lap,” Razor said as they walked back to their bikes. They dumped the shovels and other equipment on the truck. Another MC member would drive that truck back to the clubhouse’s garage.

“What about you?” Razor asked. The other man acted like it was just all in the day’s work. They weren’t close

enough for Brick to ask if finding the women bothered him. Brick had to talk to King.

“I just want to see Rose and Stefan,” Brick admitted.

They mounted their bikes.

Razor nodded. “When you going to propose?”

“What?” Brick asked, stumped by the sudden question.

“Don’t act coy.” Razor wagged a finger at him, then grinned. “Everyone with eyes can see you planned on making Rose your old lady.”

“Now’s not the time,” Brick eventually said. “But soon.”

Razor slapped him on the back. “I’m not sure whether I should envy you or warn you that marriage’s a lot of work.”

“I’ve already made up my mind.”

“I figured,” Razor said with a shrug.

The ride back home turned out to be a quiet one. After Brick parked his motorcycle, he looked at his phone. Trigger’s last text indicated they were still at the police station. Brick strode inside. He wasn’t in the mood to eat with his fellow MC brothers.

Brick sought King out, but he wasn’t in his office. He flagged down a prospect and asked about King.

“King went home early. Should I call him and tell him it’s urgent?” the prospect asked.

“Nah. I’ll update him tomorrow,” Brick said.

Brick sent King a text, updating him about what happened. Then Brick headed back to his bedroom, where Rose was waiting for him.

Chapter Ten

She perched on the bed, watching TV on mute while wearing one of his big shirts. His heart ached at the sight of her. Some days, Brick could hardly believe this gorgeous woman had chosen him. He knew she had her doubts about them before, but he seemed to have convinced her they belonged together.

“Oh, my God, Brick.” Rose got to her feet and ran up to him, concern written all over her face. “What happened? Are you hurt? Do we need to go to the hospital?”

“Things got a little messy,” he admitted. “But I’m fine. Let me shower and clean this dirt off me.”

Rose bit her bottom lip. She looked worried, and Brick wondered what upset her. “We need to talk.”

“Do I have to be worried?” Brick joked.

“I don’t know,” she admitted.

“Okay,” he said. This seemed serious. “I won’t be long.”

Once in the bathroom, Brick took off his clothes. Ten minutes later, he had washed the dirt, grime, and blood off his body. He put on a pair of boxers and returned to the bedroom. She’d turned off the television.

Brick checked on Stefan, seeing that the kid was fast asleep. He slipped into bed with Rose, surprised she cuddled close to him. Brick slid a possessive arm over her body. He figured he’d done something wrong but maybe he’d made a mistake.

“What did you want to tell me?” Brick asked her.

“Two things,” Rose said. She reached for his fingers and gave them a squeeze.

“Rose, you’re starting to worry me,” he said. “Whatever it is, spit it out. I’m all ears.”

Rose took a deep breath. “Brick, I’m pregnant.”

At first, he couldn’t process the words. Then Rose told him how she kept vomiting during work and how Nancy told her to head home.

She paused and hesitated. “Brick, are you mad?”

“Why would I be? Sweetheart, this is the best news I’ve ever heard in years,” he said. He leaned forward and gave her a deep and slow kiss, and she let out a sigh of relief. Brick could see her nipples rising through his shirt. He wanted to put his mouth over the bud and mark her again, but remembered she had one more thing she wanted to discuss with him.

“Rose, I promise you this. I’ll take care good care of you and our baby,” Brick told her.

“Thank you, Brick. That means more to me than you could ever know,” she whispered. “I’m not sure I could’ve done this alone. Stefan is a handful but having another kid along the way would be hard.”

“I’ll be right beside you, every step of the way,” he assured her. “We make a good team, don’t we?”

“We do,” she agreed. “You’re so good with Stefan, and you’ve always made me feel special.”

“Because you are a very special lady,” Brick said.

This was it. The moment he should tell her that he wanted her to become his old lady. His conversation with Razor got him thinking. Why did he have to wait? Rose looked to be on the same page as him. She was also carrying his child. There was no time like the present. They could have a fall wedding.

Hell, he could call the pastor the very next day. Book the church early. They could have the wedding reception right at the clubhouse. Rose mentioned she’d never been anywhere out of the country.

Brick could take her to Europe or the Maldives for their honeymoon after the baby was born. They’d only be gone

for a few days. Maybe he could convince Prudence to look after the kids.

Ah, fuck. He was planning too far ahead, wasn't he?

"There's more," she began, fingering the sheet.

Brick thought after telling him about the baby, she'd be more relaxed, but it was the exact opposite. He tucked a stray strand of wayward hair that had fallen across her face and regarded her.

"I bumped into my brother today," she finally said.

"Your brother?" Brick furrowed his brow. "Donny?"

He sent some of his guys to Castle Falls and the surrounding areas. Brick told them to keep an eye out for Donny, but they always reported back nothing. Brick presumed Donny had either skipped town or he'd found a good hiding place. He realized it was the latter after Rose told him about the rest of her day.

"So, he's leaving town tomorrow? All he wanted from you was cash?" Brick asked, unable to keep the rage from his voice. This was the same asshole who left his own sister and baby as bait. Brick remembered the three women they found in the armored truck.

Rose touched his cheek. It occurred to Brick that she'd stopped talking.

"Brick, what's wrong? Did something happen today? You said your job turned messy," she said.

Brick sighed. He didn't want to add more to his plate, but talking to Rose always helped, so he told her. The blood rushed out of her face when he told her about the women they'd found.

If Dragon had gotten to Rose earlier than he did—Brick ended that line of thought. Rose was here with him now. She and Stefan were safe, untouchable as long as they were under his protection. Once he made her his wife, then Rose wouldn't need to worry about a single damn thing. Brick

would make sure Rose, Stefan, and their baby would be taken care of for the rest of their lives.

“What will happen to them now?” she whispered.

That was one of the things Brick loved about her. She had a big heart. Rose was worried about these women although she never met them.

“Grizzly and Trigger will make sure they’re returned to their homes,” Brick said. “Rose, you didn’t answer my earlier question.”

“Oh. Sorry. Donny wants to see Stefan one more time before he leaves,” she admitted.

Brick stared at her for a few seconds. He took a deep breath before saying his piece. “Rose, you’re aware he’s asking you to walk into a trap, right?”

“I’ve considered that, but he made a convincing argument. He says he wants to see his kid one last time before he leaves. Donny also promised that once he’s settled somewhere safe, he’ll send me the relevant papers so I can finally take custody of Stefan.”

“That fucker,” Brick said under his breath.

Rose flinched, and he reminded himself to calm down. Stefan cleverly dangled bait designed to ensure Rose would make an appearance tomorrow. “Rose, don’t think for a second I’ll allow you and Stefan to go.”

She pulled away from him and sat up in bed, furious. Damn it. She looked beautiful when she got angry. Like a pissed-off goddess about to unleash her wrath on poor mortals. “Brick, I don’t need your permission,” she said.

“Think about this more carefully, Rose. You, Donny, and Stefan would be in one place. The Black Dogs MC could just swoop in, kill you all, and that will solve their problems. I’m on your side, sweetheart. Remember that.” Brick pulled her to a hug. Rose didn’t fight him.

“Do you think he’s still working for them?” she asked.

“My guess? They found him first, but obtaining Donny isn’t enough for them. They want you too, because of Dragon.” Brick winced as he said the words because killing Dragon was on him.

“What am I going to do?” she asked.

Brick wanted her to sit tight while he resolved this mess, but one look at the determined expression on her face told him he’d have a hell of a fight on his hands. Even if he locked her up in his bedroom, Rose wasn’t the kind of girl who obeyed orders. She’d find a way to slip out and meet her brother. Brick had to factor her in the plan forming in his head.

“Okay,” he said, taking a deep breath. “We do this together. I’ll tell you about my plan, but you have to promise me one thing.”

Rose looked momentarily stunned, but she quickly recovered. “What’s that?”

“That your safety and Stefan’s comes first. Remember that there’s a life growing inside you,” he reminded her.

She sucked in a breath. “Okay, let’s hear your plan.”

So, Brick told her. They spent most of the night sharing ideas and brainstorming what could go wrong the next day.

“I can’t believe it. You actually showed,” Donny said in a strained voice as Rose slid into the booth Donny had chosen. Her brother looked worse for wear, if that was possible. She had only seen him the day before, and yet he looked like he lost more weight. His clothes looked like they hung on his thin frame.

“You said you wanted to see your son one last time, so here he is,” Rose said. She juggled Stefan in her arms. He cooed at her, and Rose gave her a kiss on the nose. Donny looked like he was about to throw up. A waitress arrived to take their orders.

“Fuck off,” Donny said.

“I’m sorry about him. He didn’t get much sleep last night,” Rose said.

Brick told her to act as normal as possible. She killed the urge to study her surroundings. Brick said the Black Dogs MC would probably have someone already in the diner. Someone nondescript. They were still in the Ruthless Reapers MC’s territory, so the Black Dogs wouldn’t dare try anything big.

Knowing Brick and his men were outside gave her courage. When Rose walked up to the diner, she had started shaking. Brick had been adamant that she remain at home. He even suggested using another woman to pose as her, but Rose ruled that out. Rose didn’t want to endanger another person. This was her problem to deal with.

The waitress finished taking her order and left the table.

“Are you really as dumb as you look?” Donny hissed.

“Look at your son, Donny,” she said in a quiet voice.

Donny seemed surprised. For the first time that morning, he snuck a look at Stefan. Regret and guilt filled his features. She’d never thought she’d see those two emotions on her brother’s face.

“You shouldn’t have come, Rose,” he said in a pleading, whining voice. He buried his face into his hands. “We’re dead. All of us.”

“Damn right,” said a gruff voice from the next booth. A huge man stood up. He wore dirty jeans and a hoodie, but he couldn’t quite conceal his tattoos. He took out a gun from inside his jacket. Fear gripped Rose in a vise. She couldn’t move or think.

Then Brick came barreling out of the men’s room, revolver pointed at the enemy biker. Rose shut her eyes and cradled Stefan against her chest. A pop went off. Brick had a silencer on his gun, she remembered. A heavy thump made her open her eyes. The Black Dogs MC member lay dead at her feet, his blood pooling on the floor.

“Let’s go,” Brick told her, hauling her to her feet.

“Donny, come on,” she yelled at her brother. Brick put his body in front of her, and she realized he was using himself as a shield. Finally, they got out of the diner. The rumble of a motorcycle engine made her grasp Brick’s arm. Brick’s backup, or were those more enemy bikers?

“Stay close to me,” Brick said in a low voice. A Harley rounded on the corner, where she and Donny were standing. The rider pointed a gunshot at her. Time froze to a standstill.

“Get out of the way,” Donny yelled.

Her brother ran in front of her just as the biker fired. Donny let out a cry as the bullet hit impact. She let out a scream. The killer changed direction, probably deciding it wasn’t worth it trying a second shot. Razor came running from the men’s room, carrying a shotgun. He aimed and shot the killer right in the chest. Both the corpse and the bike went wild.

She tore her eyes from the grisly scene.

“Donny,” she whispered, kneeling. Stefan started crying. Brick stood in front of her, gun out, probably watching for more enemies. A second passed, then a minute. None came. Donny stared at her, mouth slack open, eyes dead. Her heart threatened to rip in two. Donny had been an asshole to Rose her entire life, but he finally did one good thing for his son.

“Rest in peace, big brother,” Rose said, then closed his eyes with two fingers.

Chapter Eleven

“Be careful with that body,” Brick said with a growl under his voice. One prospect put a white sheet over the body. With that task done, he and another prospect carried it to the van. Brick returned to where Rose was, sitting on the sidewalk and hugging Stefan next to her.

“Let’s head home,” Brick told her. “Don’t worry, we’ll make all the proper funeral arrangements for your brother.”

Brick helped Rose to her feet. He kissed the top of Stefan’s head, and the baby cooed at him. He already knew Stefan would grow up to become a strong man someday.

“Thank you,” Rose said in a soft voice.

She wore a distracted look on her face, even when they returned to the clubhouse. Once inside their room, Brick took Stefan, placed him in his cot, then ushered Rose in the bathroom. Splatters of Donny’s blood remained on her dress. Brick convinced her to take it off.

“I need to take a shower. I don’t feel clean,” she said with a shudder.

Brick nodded. Ten minutes later, she emerged from the stall. Brick was ready with a towel. He helped dry her hair and body.

Once Rose was dressed in new clothes, she looked a lot better. Brick guided her back to the bedroom. A quick check showed him Stefan had gone back to sleep, and Brick returned his attention to Rose. He opened his arms, and she stepped into his embrace. Brick held her tight.

“He’s really dead,” she whispered, then started to sob uncontrollably.

Brick said nothing, letting her weep. He couldn’t believe it either. When that enemy biker came around the bend and pointed that gun at Rose and Stefan, he’d never been more afraid his entire life. Donny might’ve been a piece of shit, but he finally did one good thing in his life by sacrificing himself.

“Donny was a terrible brother,” she finally said, lifting her head from his chest. “But he redeemed himself in the end.”

Brick didn't know what to say about that. One good deed didn't cancel out a lifetime of sins, but he didn't point that out loud. He led her to the bed, and she cuddled next to him.

“I hardly knew him,” she said. “Donny did whatever the hell he wanted. I still can't forgive him for leaving me and Stefan as bait.”

“Deaths in the family can be hard,” he murmured, thinking of his sister. “But I'm right here with you, sweetheart. You're not alone in this.”

“Thank God for that,” she said. “What would I do without you, Brick?”

They said nothing for a few moments. Brick knew it would be better if he gave her some time after everything that had happened, but he also nearly lost her today. “Rose,” he said, taking a breath. “I know this isn't the appropriate time, or maybe it is...”

Rose looked at him curiously. “What's going on, Brick?”

He fished out the ring in his pocket. She gasped as he got off the bed and knelt. “Today, I could've lost you and Stefan,” he began. “That made me realize how much I love you. I can't live without you, Rose. Marry me?”

Rose swung her legs off the bed and stood, eyes wide and mouth slightly parted. He'd get to kissing those tempting, beautiful lips as soon as she told him yes.

“Rose? I don't hear an answer,” he said. The tension was killing him.

“Of course, it's a yes. I love you so much too, baby,” Rose said.

Brick rose to his feet and slid the ring into her finger. “It belonged to my mother,” he told her.

Rose held the diamond ring to the light, then sprang at him. She wrapped her arms around his neck, and he leaned forward to plunder her lips. Sweetness exploded on his tongue. He could never get enough of Rose, and soon enough, she'd be his in every sense of the word. His old lady and his baby mama. He deepened the kiss and edged her toward the bed again.

She parted from him. Flashing him a knowing smile, she climbed into bed and peeled her shirt off, exposing her pert nipples. Brick noticed she hadn't bothered with panties. Growling in approval, he climbed on top of her. After pinning her arms above her head, Brick started kissing her again.

Keeping one hand over her wrists, Brick unzipped his pants and pulled his dick out. In one smooth motion, he slid inside her pussy, knowing she was already wet for him. Rose gasped against his mouth when he released her. He loved the feel of her nipples rubbing against his shirt. He knew she loved it when they fucked like this, with her naked and him still dressed.

Brick moved in and out of Rose, loving every moan he wrangled from her lips, which were still a little swollen from their earlier kiss. How could he have lived his entire life without his woman? No time like the present to enjoy her and cherish her.

"Brick," she said, and he loved the sound of his name on her lips. He released her wrists and groaned when she raked her nails down his arm. Fuck, that was hot. Brick's cock felt like a steel pipe between his legs. His balls tightened as he fucked her good and deep.

Brick made sure his cock brushed against her sensitive clit each time he hammered her, and Rose clutched the sheets above her. He rammed into her one last time. She shattered, crying out as her pussy muscles clenched his shaft, and he growled as the pressure inside him broke. Brick filled her with his seed, then collapsed next to her.

Through a tangle of sweaty hair, she smiled at him. She reached for his fingers, and he clasped them tight.

“Wow,” she said softly.

“Yeah,” was all he said. Brick tucked her body next to him and inhaled her scent. Fuck, he had the rest of his life to enjoy this, to enjoy her.

“Love you, sweetheart,” he murmured in her ear.

“Right at you, Brick,” she answered back.

Epilogue

Nine months later

Rose placed a bookmark on the page she'd been reading just as Brick entered the bedroom. Her doctor said she'd give birth either this week or the next. Brick had persuaded her to take a break from work. Rose initially disagreed, but after discussing it with Nancy, here she was.

Nancy told her she'd hire a part-timer while Rose was on maternity leave. Her job would be waiting for her after she gave birth.

Nine months had passed since Donny died. Rose still thought of him and his sacrifice. Sometimes, she burst into tears for no reason despite the fact she and Donny had never been close. Donny lived his life, constantly moving from one hustle to the next, never tiring. She hoped wherever he was, he was happy. At peace.

Matters with the Black Dogs MC had been far from resolved, but ever since the day Donny died and Brick killed more of their men, the rival MC had stopped stealing the Ruthless Reapers MC's shipments. Brick told her the Black Dogs were at war with another group.

"I got something for you," Brick said. He had just dropped off Stefan at the daycare center. He pulled out a pint of cookies and cream ice cream from a brown paper bag.

"Gimme," she said, setting her book aside.

Brick handed it to her, along with a spoon. Then he lifted the covers and slid next to her in bed. He watched her for a few moments.

"You're a saint," she said, digging into the pint.

Rose sometimes felt like a waddling whale, but Brick always told her she was beautiful. He didn't care that her body was changing. In fact, her husband had only grown extra protective and growly around her. Rose didn't mind the extra

attention. She found it hot when Brick reverted to his gruff, caveman mode.

“Thank you,” she said. She looked at the pint and groaned, not realizing she’d finished it in less than twenty minutes. She had odd food cravings lately, especially in the middle of the night. Brick always went out and got her what she wanted. He was sweet that way.

“What do you have planned for the—” Rose couldn’t continue. She gasped as a bolt of pain suddenly hit her in the stomach. Brick gripped her hands, expression concerned.

“Sweetheart, what’s wrong?” he asked.

Rose lifted the sheet and they both discovered her water had broken. Brick quickly recovered before Rose did. The next thing she knew, he pulled out a packed bag from under the bed. They were ready for this, she realized. Another contraction hit her, and she gasped.

Brick opened the bedroom door, yelling, but she couldn’t quite process the words. Her husband helped her out of the room and down the stairs. She was surprised to find Razor waiting outside the clubhouse. He was at the wheel of her new Blue Chevrolet. Brick bought her the car five months ago for her birthday.

Once Brick bundled her inside the car, he joined her. He was on the phone with someone. He ended the call and looked at her. “Prudence says she’ll pick up Stefan from the daycare.”

“Thank her for me,” Rose said. During the entire ride to the hospital, she gripped Brick’s arm so tightly she was bound to leave bruises. Brick didn’t seem to care. Once they arrived at the hospital, he found a wheelchair for her and ushered her in while Razor found a parking spot.

From there, it was a whirlwind. The baby couldn’t seem to wait. A nurse spirited Rose to the delivery room, and hours later, she was in her own room, holding baby Sam in her arms. Brick stood next to her, and he couldn’t stop smiling.

“Look, baby. Sam has your eyes,” he said.

“And your nose,” she added. Brick kissed her quickly on the mouth, and she smiled at him. Brick harbored fears he wouldn’t be a good father to their kid, but she told him time and time again that all his fears were unfounded. After all, Brick had been so good with Stefan. Having another kid would be a walk in the park—at least she hoped it would.

“Want to hold him?” she asked him.

Brick nodded, and she handed him their son. Brick didn’t get to hold Sam for long because Razor soon entered the room, along with King and Prudence.

“Congratulations,” King told her.

She and the President of the MC didn’t get along well at the start, but ever since she and Brick had gotten engaged, King’s attitude had slowly changed. Maybe he finally realized Rose wasn’t going anywhere and his own wife was good friends with Rose.

“Stefan?” she asked Prudence.

Razor and King crowded around Brick and looked delighted by Sam. These MC men might be all rough and tumble most of the time, but deep down, she knew they were softies.

“Grizzly’s babysitting him and my son,” Prudence said. “How are you feeling? I heard it was a fast pregnancy.”

“It was. Thank God,” she said. The both of them laughed it over.

Eventually, Prudence, Razor, and King had to leave to make way for incoming visitors—more MC members. The nurses looked irritated by the commotion and chaos, but since the Ruthless Reapers MC practically owned this town, they could say nothing. Besides, it was still visiting hours and the bikers were relatively harmless.

Once their visitors had left, Brick settled on the armchair next to the bed. He gazed lovingly at his son. “Finally, they’re all gone,” he mumbled.

“I don’t mind. Look at the gifts everyone bought us,” Rose said, glancing at the teddy bears and congratulatory balloons and flowers decorating her room. The gifts injected the bland hospital with life. She felt all warm inside. Before Brick rescued her and Stefan, she felt incredibly alone. Now, everything had changed. Rose had found herself a good and caring man, and she even had a son with him. Rose also inherited a big family with the MC. She couldn’t ask for anything more.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Brick asked, gently handing Sam back to her. He gave Sam’s head a kiss. Smiling, Rose told him.

The End

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BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER

BRATVA BOSS ' BABY

Kotov Bratva, 1

Winter Sloane

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Sample Chapter

“Ava, sorry to disturb you, but Charles Green and Amanda Hill want to see you in the conference room,” Gina said.

Ava Madison looked up from her computer screen. She had to get this particular report done by noon. Oh, she knew the deadline was still in three days, but she liked being ahead of the game. She studied Gina for a few seconds.

Gina could barely contain the excitement on her face. Her eyes shone, and she wore a big smile. Both Gina and she had been hired by Green and Hill Accounting at the same time. The brunette had soon moved from co-worker to best friend.

“What do the senior partners want with me?” Ava asked.

“They didn’t say, but don’t you think it’s obvious, Ava? Today’s the day they finally promote you to Senior Accountant!” Gina beamed at her.

Ava grinned. She couldn’t help but share Gina’s enthusiasm. Ava had been working her ass off for nearly five years. Gina had been content to do the bare minimum, but Ava had always been a perfectionist. She constantly strove to push herself. All those late nights spent at the office when she could have a social life weren’t for naught.

Ava straightened the creases over her sky-blue dress. She knew she wore her lucky dress for a reason today. It was her favorite because this particular shade of blue was the same color as her eyes. It didn’t hurt the fabric hugged her curves perfectly. She slowly rose to her feet, heart thumping.

“How do I look?” Ava asked her best friend.

Gina looked at her critically, then reached out to smooth the blonde hairs sticking out of her head.

“Perfect,” Gina said. “You’ve earned this, Ava.”

Ava noticed her other work colleagues giving them curious glances. It was hard to keep a secret in the office. The cubicles in the office were small and the dividers were thin.

A senior accountant, however, had his or her own office, one surrounded by glass walls. They had their own assistants, too. The day Ava had been dreaming of had finally arrived.

“Tell me everything after,” Gina said. “We can go to Rum and Monkey tonight to celebrate.”

“Sure. My treat,” Ava said. She’d be getting a bigger salary soon after all.

Head held high and shoulders straight, she marched toward the conference room. Before entering, she looked at her feet. Ava wished she wore heels instead of the black flats she usually wore.

Then again, she never got the hang of heels. She’d probably topple over while walking. Plus, they hurt. Gina

never had a problem with them. Whatever. Her physical appearance didn't matter. Her efforts were finally being recognized. She knocked on the door.

“Come in,” came Charles's voice.

She opened the door.

“Ava, please have a seat,” Amanda said, nodding to the empty chairs around the long conference table.

Amanda sat at the end of the table. Charles took the seat to her right. Ava pulled out a chair and sat left of Amanda. Both senior partners were in their early fifties but kept in shape. To Ava, the ex-husband and wife team always looked so put-together, so polished. The smile Amanda flashed her looked a little strained, fake almost. Charles kept looking at the opened file in front of him. Should that be a cause for alarm?

“Before the two of you say anything,” she began. She took a deep breath. “I accept.”

The firm always valued employees who took initiative. Ava prided herself on being a strong and confident woman. She came from nowhere, a dirt-poor mountain town, with no penny to her name. Ava was the first member of her family to go to college and get a degree. She'd gotten a practical one, because, hey. The world always needed accountants.

“Excuse me?” Charles asked. The two partners looked at each other, puzzled.

“This is a promotion, yes?” Ava's confidence took a deep dive as the two partners offered her looks of sympathy.

Oh, no. Had Ava misread the situation? Maybe the position wasn't hers yet. Perhaps Charles and Amanda had a few candidates in mind and were about to tell Ava she had to compete for the job.

Well, she was ready to tackle any challenge they threw at her.

“At the Christmas party, we announced the firm had to cut costs this year,” Charles said, clearing his voice.

“What does that have to do with anything?” she asked.

“Ava, there’s no easy way to say this,” Amanda said. The older woman put her hand on hers. She tentatively withdrew from her touch, not liking this at all. The office called Amanda a shark behind her back. She didn’t offer anyone sympathy unless it was false. “We have to let you go.”

Those six words felt like lethal blows to her gut. Ava could hardly believe her ears.

“W-why? I don’t understand. I work harder than anyone else. My performance—”

“Is exceptional,” Charles finished. “However, when we looked at your file again, we discovered you received your accounting degree from a community college.”

Ava balled her hands into fists and set them on her lap. He opened his mouth and kept talking, but she couldn’t hear him. Gina, like everyone else at the firm, had graduated from a fancy Ivy League school. They came from good, solid families. None of them grew up in a trailer park, like Ava did.

“Mrs. Chambers didn’t think it seemed to matter,” Ava finally spoke up, referring to the HR manager. “Why isn’t she here, anyway? Isn’t firing staff supposed to be her job?”

Amanda pursed her lips and looked annoyed Ava had interrupted Charles’s monologue.

Finally, Amanda spoke. “At Green and Hill Accounting, we’re a family. Charles and I see it as our duty to personally inform our staff that—”

“I don’t need to hear this bullshit anymore. I get it. You guys want me gone. It doesn’t matter if I slaved at this job for five years. Hell, if I only knew all that wasted time would lead me to this moment, I would’ve put myself out there. I’d be married and have kids by now.”

Oh, my God. Ava had broken down. She was babbling nonsense and couldn’t seem to stop herself.

“Ava, please sit back down,” Charles said. “We’d like to make this transition as fluid as possible.”

When had she stood up? She shook with silent anger. Never had she felt so humiliated.

“Fluid for *you*?” She shook her head. *Fuck you both*, were the three parting words she wanted to leave them, but she culled her temper. Despite her origins, Ava had class. “Thank you for having me for the last five years. I’ve learned a lot, but I’ve also realized it’s time for me to move on.”

With that, she strode out of that conference room, her head still held high. On the outside, she might appear strong, but deep down? Ava wanted to hide somewhere where no one would find her.

Then she’d curl into a ball and cry her heart out. Ava knew the place where she could do that. She pushed past Gina on her way to her secret location. Gina gave her a concerned look.

“What’s wrong?” Gina silently mouthed at her.

“Bathroom,” Ava lied. “Need to fix my makeup.”

Gina knew her better than that. Her best friend probably knew she was lying, but Ava needed to get away. She felt many stares on her fleeing figure, but that was probably just a figment of her imagination.

Amanda thought the firm was a family? Yeah, right. Ava worked in a cut-throat environment. Every junior accountant fought for a project like sharks who scented blood in the water.

She reached the door at the end of the corridor. One that read *office supplies*. She yanked it open and slid inside then turned the light on. Reams of paper and stationery stared back at her from the shelves.

Whenever the pressures of her job got her down, Ava always came here to think. To clear her head. She had always loved stationery, and the smell of her paper calmed her.

Growing up in a small and often empty trailer, she’d head to the stationery store in town to pass the time. Reminiscing about her childhood made her think of her mom.

“Oh, God,” she whispered.

She slid to the floor, not caring if her dress got dirty. Tears streamed down her cheek. Ava wasn't a crier. She couldn't remember the last time she shed tears. When her dad left Ava and her mother, perhaps? Her mom was a saint.

Joanna Addison had worked two jobs to pay the bills and to keep Ava in school. She owed her mom everything. Half her paychecks went to her mom.

Unfortunately, after five years of being chained to her desk, Ava had become a stranger to her own mother. She hadn't even been home since she'd started working here. Failure tasted like bitter ashes in her mouth. A tentative knock on the door made her jump.

“Ava? It's Gina. Can I come in?”

“Go away. Please.”

Ava probably looked awful. All that stupid crying messed up her mascara and eyeliner. She probably looked like a clown. Gina, of course, didn't listen. She opened the door, took one look at Ava, then closed the door behind her. Gina took a seat next to her. There wasn't much room in the tiny space, and neither Gina and her were exactly small.

“Hey, you know you can talk to me.” Gina took her hands in hers. “What happened?”

“They didn't call me in to tell me I'm promoted. They're letting me go.”

Gina widened her eyes. “You're joking. There must be some kind of mistake. Ava, you work harder than everyone else here. If you hadn't helped Anton with his client, the firm would probably be in trouble.”

“Don't remind me about Anton,” she said with a scoff.

Anton was a senior accountant Ava worked with on a project. She had wondered how he got the position because Anton never seemed to be interested in doing any work. Anton had attended no meetings with their client either.

Ava did everything. What was worse? She agreed to date that loser. She didn't know what had come over her. Maybe it had been the loneliness and late nights talking. Either way, that relationship didn't last long.

"Let me talk to Charles and Amanda. My parents are good friends with them. I'm sure I can get them to reconsider," Gina said.

She shook her head firmly. "Gina, I appreciate the offer, but I don't want to continue working for a firm that treats their employees like shit. Besides, it might only get you in trouble."

"Did they say why they're letting you go?" Gina asked.

Ava scoffed. "They found out I graduated from a community college."

Gina frowned. "What does that have to do with anything? You're more than qualified."

"I guess I don't fit the image of the firm."

Some of Charles's words came back to her. The firm had certain standards to maintain, he had said. Charles promised to write her a good recommendation, but would he still do that after she walked out of that meeting in a huff?

"Okay," Gina said. "Today's almost over. We can think about the future later. We'll both get hammered at the Rum and Monkey. What do you say?"

Ava had planned to head back to her lonely apartment. To order in massive amounts of Chinese takeout and to binge-watch some romance movies with Fatty, her tabby cat. Drinking her sorrows away seemed like a much better idea. Alcohol might be a momentary cure, but she didn't care.

"I'm in," Ava said.

She smiled as Gina pulled out a handkerchief and wiped away her smudged makeup.

"There's my awesome girl," Gina said.

Ava gave the other woman's hand a squeeze. "I'm so glad you're here. I wouldn't know what to do if you weren't."

"You can always count on me, babe."

End of sample chapter

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