



FRACTURED HEARTS

— PROSPECT —

GRIMM WOLVES MC, BOOK SEVEN

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

D.M. EARL

FRACTURED HEARTS

~Prospect~

GRIMM WOLVES MC

BOOK 7

D.M. EARL



GRIMM WOLVES MC SERIES

THIS SERIES IS A CONTINUATION FROM EACH OF THE PRIOR books. There will not be major cliffhangers at the end of each book, there might be parts of each story that are either unresolved or unanswered so please be aware of this.

This book can not be read as a stand alone it is suggested that you follow the order of the series and read each book in specific order. That order is:

[Behemoth \(Book 1\)](#)

[Bottom of the Chains-Prospect \(Book 2\)](#)

[Santa...Nope The Grimm Wolves \(Book 3\)](#)

[Keeping Secrets-Prospect \(Book 4\)](#)

[A Tormented Man's Soul: Part One \(Book 5\)](#)

[Triad Resumption: Part Two \(Book 6\)](#)

*******Caution/Warning*******

Dark Romantic Suspense

Contains explicit violence, sexual situations, disturbing situations related to the mental and emotional state of a person and taboo subjects, offensive language, and very mature subject matter.

*Recommended for age 18 years and up**

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This book is dedicated to every single person out there who goes out of the comfort zone to find the 'one'. Never give up trying to find that person. Know though that you are enough by yourself. Enjoy your life as it is currently until you find the love of your life.

To my hubby Chuck who is my one. You make writing my stories easier because you always have my back. Never doubt how much I love and appreciate all you do.

Enjoy this Ride we call Life

CELESTINA

NOT SURE HOW I ENDED UP IN THIS BADASS CAR WITH A GUY I barely know. Yeah, Frank and I have gone back and forth on that dating app and through some texts, but we've only just met. Now, after a few days, I'm putting my life in his hands. That thought sends shivers up my spine, but I'm between a rock and a hard place.

“Sweetheart, ya getting hungry? We've been on the road now for just a little over four hours. If you don't want to eat, then let's do a break for a pit stop and some gas. Maybe something to drink, then we can hit the road again. Sound good, Celee?”

Damn him, I'm getting to love that nickname, my first one ever. No one ever cared enough about me to even give me one. To be honest, most people in my past life didn't even call me by my given name. I've been called every dirty name out there, and my father never cared. As long as I didn't cause trouble or draw attention to myself, he left me alone. Unless he needed me or my body for something, then he was all up into my shit. Shaking my head, I realize I'm drifting again.

“Frank, I'm good with whatever you want to do. I'm sure I could eat, or we could just stop for a bit and I'll get something to drink. Maybe an iced coffee, if possible. Guess we are getting close to needing fuel. I'm pretty easygoing and just so you know, I can't make a decision at all to save my life, literally, so I have no problem if you make all the choices.”

Feeling him looking my way, I turn toward him to see an expression on his face I don't recognize. He's staring at me for

a brief second then turns his eyes toward the road. Wow, what was that? Before I can ask, he gives it to me.

“Celee, never give up your power, sweetheart. Only you know what you want to do. I get it, it’s hard sometimes to make decisions, but if you allow others to do that for you forever, you will never do what you want. I’d rather you tell me ‘I’m not sure, let’s get gas and we can decide then.’ I do know where you’re coming from, believe me, that’s why I’m telling you this. So, Celee, are we stopping or going for a bit longer?”

I smile inside, Frank is a good guy, one in a million, and I don’t know how I got so lucky being so stupid. God, I could have ended up with a murderer or a rapist, but instead I found the one biker who seems to have a soft heart and an old soul. Saying that though, I know he’s with the Grimm Wolves so I’m sure when needed he can be a cold-hearted killer.

“Frank, why don’t we stop at the next big truck stop, fill up, and see how we both feel? Sound good?”

He laughs instantly, which has me giggling. This right here. It’s so easy to be with him since he doesn’t make me feel stupid, or worse, worthless. Well, maybe he will if he ever hears my entire story.

“Celee, where did you just go? I felt that all the way over here. There isn’t anything you could share with me that would change the way I see you. Brick, my prez, told me when I wanted to prospect, and he was feeling me out, that what happens in our past is just that, and it should always stay there. Only I can drag that shit up and take it with me wherever I go. And he was right. Try and let it go, Celee. From the little you said, none of it was your choice, so you have nothing to feel bad or embarrassed about.”

After that, we are mainly silent but not uncomfortable. Frank even puts the radio on low and, to my surprise, he stops on a pop station. I give him some crap for it and we laugh about it. He is honest and says he doesn’t let his brothers in the Grimm Wolves club know he jives to that kind of music. I must have fallen asleep to the music and motion of the car on

the highway because I'm jerked awake when I hear him screaming and swearing.

"Celee, grab the wheel. Come on, sweetheart, we ain't got a lot of time. They're almost right next to us. Just keep the car straight, that's all I ask."

When I grab the wheel, he reaches under his vest—no, what did he call it, oh yeah, a kutte—and pulls out a gun. Holy shit, what's going on? I go to turn my head and see the headlights speeding up next to us. We are on a two-way highway, so thank God no one is in the other lane.

Frank's window is open, and he's got his gun out of it. Right before the car comes up next to us, he leans out and starts firing. I hear the pings before there's a sudden, loud explosion as the car swerves off the shoulder toward the ditch. In shock, I watch the car skid, slide, and then flip once, twice, and on the third time land on its roof half in the ditch, half on the shoulder.

Frank drops the gun between his legs and grabs the wheel. Then he slams on the brakes as he does a scary U-turn before coming to a stop in the middle of the road, facing that car. Opening his door, gun in hand, he jogs toward the vehicle. Once there, he cautiously looks in the windows and before I can even get out of the car, he's firing into it. Oh my God, did he just kill whoever was in there? I mean, yeah, they seemed to be after us, but he just killed whoever is in the car without a thought.

I jump out and start running, my mind is all over. He turns when he hears my feet hitting the pavement and puts his hand up to stop me. Something inside me makes me slow down then come to a complete stop, right in front of him. His eyes look crazy and he's breathing heavy.

"What the fuck, Celee, get back in the car. NOW. I'm trying to protect you and I can't do that and take care of this shit too. Come on, sweetheart, we need to get gone as fast as we can."

"Frank, you're risking your life for me, the least I can do is help. Please don't tell me no or treat me like a porcelain doll.

Tell me what to do and I'll do it. Remember who I am and, more importantly, who my family was. Know I've seen a lot of stuff living with my father and brothers. So what's next?"

He watches me for a brief second before he starts moving closer to the car again.

"I'll take the driver; you take the passenger. Use your hoodie, cover your hands to pull out any ID. Grab their weapons and any jewelry or money they have. Make it quick. If you can't hack it, just let me know."

I go around to the passenger side that isn't hanging off toward the ditch and with my phone light see a bloody body slumped over. First, I grab the gun, placing it on the pavement. Reaching farther in, I check the jacket pockets first, taking hold of a phone and a wad of money. That goes next to the gun, then I go back in, going through his jeans pockets. I grasp his wallet and make sure there is nothing else in them.

Turning to pick up the stuff I put on the pavement, I hear a whine from the back seat. Oh no, what was that?

"Frank, I think something is in the back seat. It sounds either hurt or scared. Want me to look what it is?"

His head jerks up and he knocks it up against the frame of the window, he's bellowing as he rubs his head.

"Goddamn motherfucker, that hurt. Son of a bitch, why does this shit keep happening? For Christ's sake. Give me a minute, Celee."

Watching him rub his head, walking back and forth muttering to himself, I hope he doesn't have a concussion, though I doubt it.

"Okay, can you see anything? Be careful, for Christ's sake."

I turn my phone light back on and move closer to the car. Right when I put my phone to the back window, two eyes pop up and scare the fuck out of me. So much I back up, trip over the crap on the road, and fall on my ass. I let out a shriek, trying to catch my breath. By the time I'm on my knees, Frank

is beside me trying to help me up. He grabs me under my arms and pulls me up gently, bringing me up close to his body.

Damn, this man is hard and I mean everywhere. And that goes to say I'm more like my father than I like to think. Two dead bad guys and I'm concentrating on Frank's hardness pressing into my stomach. Which makes me think, why the hell is he hard right at this moment?

"You hurt, Celee? What happened?"

"Let me go, Frank. I think there's an animal in the back."

We both walk back to the car and with my phone again in my hand, I shine the light, yep, there it is. A puppy. It's huge already. There's some blood in its fur so I go to grab it out, and Frank pulls my hand back.

"Leave it, Celee, we need to finish and get the fuck outta here."

"Frank, I'm not leaving a puppy out here with two dead bodies. No way, let me go get it or leave me with it. Your choice."

He makes a face at me but lets me go, so I again reach into the car, this time feeling and then grabbing the pup out of the back seat, needing both hands. It's wiggling all over and once out and on my shoulder is licking me like crazy. Why would these two assholes have a puppy with them while they're chasing the two of us?

"Bait dog, Celee. They probably either stole it or caught that pup and were going to use it to train their fighter dogs. The mob is big into dogfights. Is it okay?"

I kneel, holding the puppy down, giving it a once-over. Seems to be okay, not sure where the blood is coming from unless it's from the men's injuries. Could be splatter from when Frank shot them.

"All right, I'm sure Presley isn't going to like it, but let's put some shit down on the seat before you put the beast in his car. Son of a bitch, it ain't like we don't have enough on our plates already. Now we add a dog, nope a damn puppy, to the mix. What the ever-lovin' fuck?"

Just the way he says it, or maybe it's the stress, but for some reason I break out giggling then laughing out loud. The puppy is wiggling all over while Frank looks at the both of us like we're the crazy ones, instead of him with a gun in his hand and two dead guys in a car that's hanging over a ditch. I walk back to the car, grab the keys, and open the trunk.

Thank God Presley seems to be prepared for anything. There's a blanket, so I pull it out and cover the seat in back. Then I grab his pillow, so sorry, and put it against the one side. When I put the puppy in, it smells around for a bit, makes a few circles, then curls up and falls instantly asleep. I jog back to the car, grabbing the stuff off the road, just as I see Frank putting some kind of cloth in the gas tank. Oh shit, I've seen Dad's guys do this. I move quickly back to the car, getting in quietly, throwing the shit in my hands in one of the bags Presley has in the car for garbage. I turn to see if the puppy is still sleeping, and yeah, it's out like a light.

Speaking of light, a flash almost blinds me as an explosion goes off behind Presley's car just as Frank opens the door, plopping down in the seat. I hand him the keys and he starts the car, taking off like a bat out of hell.

Well, I wouldn't say it's a good start to our ride back to the Grimm Wolves clubhouse. Though expected when it has anything to do with Dario De Luca. Even dead he's still an anchor around my neck and a huge pain in my ass. Father or not.

DINGO

I GLANCE AT CELEE WHO'S SLEEPING SOMEHOW CURLED UP ON the seat, head against the door, and realize—son of a bitch—how deeply and fast I'm falling for her already. So much for going on that stupid dating site and hooking up with a hot chick out of state, then coming back and doing my gig while finishing my prospecting for the Grimm Wolves motorcycle club. No not only didn't I get any, but I'm bringing the chick back with me. And to top it off, there's a beast of a puppy in the back seat. *That hit on the head might have concussed me*, I think, just as the little shit in the back starts to whine.

“What do you want? Gotta go take a piss or shit or just hungry? Okay, don't get all crazy on me and whatever you do, lil' shit, don't piss or shit in Presley's car. That's a definite no-no.”

Hearing soft giggling, I look to see Celee staring at me, a huge smile on her face.

“What are you, the animal whisperer, Frank? Maybe we should stop and see if the pup needs to use the bathroom.”

I look up ahead and there's a big enough space on the shoulder to pull the car over. Once we've stopped, we both take our seat belts off and get out of the car. Me, I stretch 'cause this isn't a comfortable ride. Looks tough as shit and has more power than I can figure out what to do with, but comfort level... not so much. I look over the hood to see my passenger doing the exact same thing. Stretching to get the crimps out of our bodies.

Hearing the puppy whining and crying, I walk to the other side, open the passenger door, flip the seat up, and before I can reach to pull the lil' shit out, he jumps and miraculously lands on his paws, taking off—I'm guessing—to find the perfect spot to piss. When he hits a small tree, he lifts his leg and starts pissing. And pissing and pissing. Well, what do you know, he held it in and didn't piss in the car. One point for lil' shit.

“Oh look, Frank, if lil' shit is lifting his leg, he must be a big boy. We have to give him a name, come on, think of a cool badass name for him. Damn, his paws are huge, so I'm guessing he's going to be humongous when he's fully grown. What should we call him?”

I don't hesitate one second.

“Lil' shit.”

She looks at me like I've grown two fucking heads, for Christ's sake.

“Frank, we can't call him that. What the hell, dude? I want a perfect name for him. Let me think for a while.”

Celee walks over to where the puppy is running back and forth, not sure why. When she picks up a stick, he goes all still, watching said stick so intently it makes me wonder if someone was training him because he's got good manners and is very alert.

The three of us make it to the car and when I see Celee sit down with the pup in her lap, I immediately have the hair on the back of my neck going up.

“No, no way, Celee, is that beast sitting in front with us. What happens if someone else starts chasing us, then what? He could get hurt in the crossfire. Lil' shit needs to be in the back.”

“Nope, Frank, he wants to be with us. And just saying, if someone is chasing us and fires it can hit him in the back just as much as it could hit him in the front. He stays. Now, you said something about food. I'm starving and so is our boy here. Move along, Frank.”

Not sure what else to do, so begrudgingly I once again start to head in the direction that will take us to my club and, hopefully, protection. I glance over at Celee to see her giving kisses to the lil' shit then waits for him to give her puppy licks all over her face. The pure happiness on her face hits me square in the chest. What the fuck is that? Uh oh, no fucking way. Before I can get either an ignorant comment or stupid silly shit outta my mouth, I hear her soft voice.

“You know, I’ve never had a pet. Wasn’t allowed. My father always said they were messy and stinky, so he didn’t want their smell and fur on his expensive furniture. And there was no way he was going to let one of his ‘men’ clean up dog shit. Those idiots had more important things to do. You know, brutalize and kill people. Damn, I don’t think I was ever let to pet an animal. No petting zoos or kids’ pony parties. Well, no birthday parties at all, again he said it was just another day. If I can, want to keep this little guy. He’s beyond smart and I think we’ve bonded. Have you had pets before, Frank?”

Damn, that question brings back a ton of memories and not many good. Just the thought of my old man has my gut tightening and my head start to throb, which is nothing new if it’s a thought of the old bastard, or how his fists felt pounding into my head or body.

“Well, let me think on that one, Celee. Yeah, I’ve had a few pets over the years. Well, until my old man would get home and either kick them outta the house or he’d just grab ‘em by the scruff and break their necks. Then he’d look at us kids and say in that voice of his, ‘I said no animals in my house, motherfuckers.’ The one time Momma stepped up for us, he killed the kitten then beat her to within an inch of her life. Haven’t had a pet since.”

I can feel the intensity of her stare but what I’m not prepared for is her hand grabbing mine, squeezing tightly. And what’s worse is how good it feels to have that connection. So in silence, with our hands holding on to each other, we head toward the next truck stop to grab some grub and probably water the dog too. All while I’m figuring how I have to find a way to ask my prez, Brick, if not only Celee can stay at the

clubhouse but also now with her furry friend. This keeps getting more and more fucked up by the mile. But just one look in those icy-blue eyes and I'm gone. Shit, are my brothers gonna have a field day with me after all the shit I've thrown at them over the years. I hear that old saying my momma used to say, something about what goes around comes around to hit you in the face when you least expect it. Ain't that the goddamn truth.

We drive for about another twenty or twenty-five minutes before a huge truck stop pops up on the right-hand side. Making sure to keep my eyes open wide, I pull in to a pump first to fuel up. Celee pops the door open then pulls it back, slamming it shut.

“Frank, can you do me a favor? I need a leash for the puppy. Can't just let him go out here with all these folks around, don't know if he'll run or not. Or worse, get taken, hit by a car or truck. Please?”

“Yeah, I'll run in to get lil' shit a leash and see if they have some puppy food. You want me to grab you some food?”

As we go back and forth, I see a few truckers checking us out but nothing out of the ordinary. I mean, Presley's car is the shit, not to mention the smokin' hot babe in the front seat holding a cute as fuck puppy. Finishing up with filling the tank, I complete the process and head in to pay. Right when I walk past a pretty old and beat-up tractor with no trailer, I hear some asshole run his fuckin' mouth.

“Look at pretty boy, got himself a fancy car and an even prettier whore. How does a little punk shit like him get the world handed to him while us working stiff's get absolutely nothing? That's why I keep spouting off to ya that life ain't fair, for Christ's sake.”

I try to ignore the son of a bitch but he keeps running his trap until finally, after he disrespects Celee, I let loose.

“What is your fucking problem, old man? Can't get it up no more so you gotta be a dick to everyone else? You don't know me and you surely don't know that woman sittin' in that car. What gives you the right to call her a whore or bitch?”

Motherfucker, today's your lucky day 'cause I'm gonna hold myself back from knockin' you right on your stupid old ass. Mind your own business and stay the fuck away from me and mine."

I pound into the store where everyone is smiling and clapping.

"Good for you, son, he's a total big mouth."

"Way to go, finally, someone told him to zip it."

"She's one lucky girl, that's for sure. Standing up for her honor."

Everyone in the front of the store was watching and seemed thrilled with the way I handled that jerk. Lifting my head a little higher, I go up and down the aisles looking for shit I think we need. When I come to the animal section, which is tiny, I pick up a small bag of puppy chow, two bowls, a few of what toys they have, and some puppy training treats.

Once in line, I check my phone to see a text message from.

Fury: Dingo, where you at, brother? How's things going, any problems? Check in when you can. Be safe, see ya soon. Oh yeah, before I go, Shadow's been calling to make sure her cousin gets here safe and sound. I know you, brother, but make sure she gets here okay, yeah?

Great, not only do I have to worry about the assholes after Celee but that crazy motherfucker up there in Montana now too. It's not like they grew up together, shit, they just met in Texas at that author signing. Whatever, I'll get back home as soon as I can and not gonna let anyone ride my ass. It is what it is.

CELESTINA

WATCHING FRANK RUN HIS LONG FINGERS THROUGH HIS HAIR, I smile to myself. My God, I can't remember the last time tingles appeared throughout my body just watching such a simple act by a man. I can tell he's frustrated that we now have the puppy with us, but there is no way in hell I was going to leave that cutie behind. No fucking way.

Since we really don't know each other, like at all, Frank, or as he keeps telling me to call him, Dingo, doesn't know how I was raised. First, it was the devil's brother who raised me. Dario De Luca thought about no one but himself. One of the few folks out here who have experienced my father's evil is my cousin, Zeona De Luca, or most know her as Shadow, enforcer for the Devil's Handmaidens MC Timber-Ghost Montana chapter.

After finally meeting her, there is no way in hell that we aren't related. Same build, hair, and eye color. Only difference is her total skull face tattoo. It's fucking killer. If only I had the guts to do something like that. I pray that we can continue to get to know each other. Though I know she has her guard up because of who my father was, with what he did to her and being she's the one who finally killed his worthless ass.

“Celee, we are gonna need to find somewhere to bed down. Go on my phone and look for a hotel or motel that is pet friendly, would ya?”

“Sure, Frank, no problem. Where are we right now?”

As we go back and forth, I pull up his Google application and start searching for like he said, pet friendly lodging. I'm beyond surprised by all the hotels that are open to pets staying in their rooms. I give him the names so he can pick. When he picks one of the more expensive ones, I look at him and raise an eyebrow.

"Girl, we are not stopping in a flea-ridden motel, especially with your little friend there on your lap. You figure out what you're gonna name it?"

"Damn, Frank, he's not an it. What do you have against pets, for Christ's sake? Well, yeah, you told me it's about your dad. Well, that was when you were a kid, now you're an adult. Only you can change your life. And no, I've not come up with a name yet. Though I have a few in mind."

As he approaches the hotel, his eyes are searching all over. He drives by, looking at the cars and trucks parked out front. After his third drive-by he seems satisfied, so he grabs a parking spot at the end of an aisle under the big overhead light. He turns to me, smiling.

"Okay, when we go in, don't say a word and try to keep your head down, please. Those stunning eyes of yours will stay in their memories for sure. I'm gonna give you my sweatshirt, wear it so they can't get an idea of your body shape. Also try and keep lil' shit quiet and under control. Though he's a plus because no one will think you're traveling with a puppy. I'm going to register under my given name, so if someone is hunting you down it will be harder for them to put two and two together, hopefully. Okay, let's go. I'll grab both of our travel bags, just take him and his food, bed, and bowls."

I get out of the car, grabbing the puppy and the large shopping bag with all of his supplies. When I make it to the back of the car, Frank is waiting with both bags in his one hand. When I'm next to him, he grabs my hand then starts to make his way to the entrance. This action has me tongue-tied.

I'm in plain shock as no one has ever wanted to walk with me, let alone hand in hand. Something must have shown on my face as he stops, looking down on me.

“Celee, is this okay? If not, no problem, just if we are gonna get a room together wanna make sure they don’t see us as two individuals but as a couple. So ya good or not?”

Not sure why that hurts but it does. So he only wants to hold my hand for a cover. Crap.

“Yeah, I’m good, Dingo.”

Suddenly and abruptly, he stops, pulling me in to him, which means the puppy is trying to climb and give him sloppy kisses. He’s dropped the luggage so his free hand grabs my chin, lifting my face. Then he stares into my eyes.

“Not sure why, now, all of a sudden, you’re calling me Dingo, but the only name I want coming from those gorgeous lips of yours is Frank. And if ya wondering why, this is why.”

Without warning his lips land on mine. I’m totally taken aback, especially when he kisses me like a long-lost lover. His lips are firm but are putting soft kisses on my mouth, chin, and back to my mouth. When his tongue licks the seam of my lips, I sigh and open. Then he takes what he wants. I feel like he’s devouring me and breathing life back into me. Damn, this man can kiss.

When he lifts his mouth I follow, not wanting him to leave. He grins that cute smirk of his then with his free hand runs it down my long hair.

“Does that explain to ya where I’m goin’ with you, Celee? Don’t go telling me we don’t know each other and shit like that. I get it, but we do know some shit from before Texas and the time we’ve been spendin’ together. So let’s see what happens, maybe we can get there together, wherever that is. So can I hold your hand and get a room so we can chill out for a bit and maybe get some shut-eye?”

“Umm, yeah, Din—I mean, Frank. That sounds wonderful. We’re ready. Wait, let me see if he needs to go potty.”

When I put the puppy down, he walks over to the grass, following it to a tree and proceeds to lift his leg and piddle for at least a minute or two. Oh, poor baby, we’ll have to stop more often. Don’t want the puppy to have to try and hold it.

“Aww, you’re such a good boy. Momma loves you, come on, give me puppy kisses.”

Hearing Frank behind me chuckling, I look over my shoulders to see him squinting my way.

“So are ya tellin’ me, all I got to do is piss on a tree and you’ll go crazy over me and give me kisses? Cool, get out of the way, lil’ shit, my turn.”

My mouth drops as he undoes his belt but the twinkle in his eyes tells me he’s teasing.

“Well, okay, Frank, but if you get arrested for disorderly conduct or creating a public nuisance, not my fault.”

I’m smiling hugely as he turns to me, his belt undone and the top button of his jeans open. My mouth drops open as he watches me with a huge smirk on his face.

“Celee, if I was to drop my jeans it would cause chaos, but not the way you’re thinkin’, sweetheart. So we’ll save this for later. Let’s get a room. My ass is draggin’, sweetheart, not sure about yours.”

“Oh no, Frank, you should let me drive to take some of the pressure off of you. I’m a good driver, swear. You can hang with the puppy. That’s our plan in the morning. Give me the keys so I have them.”

He looks at me like I just escaped a loony hospital.

“No fuckin’ way, sweetheart. All I need is some sleep and I’ll be fine. So move that fine ass of yours so we can get this done.”

So hand in hand, with the puppy in my arms, we enter the front door, hoping to get a room so we can clean up, get food, and hopefully some sleep. That’s if this little dog lets us.

DINGO

THANK CHRIST WE WERE ABLE TO GET A ROOM. ONLY problem is my gut is churnin,' which is a warning of an explosion of epic portions is on its way. And I'm sharin' a room with Celee. Shit, fuck, no pun intended.

The room isn't bad, it's a junior suite with a separate bedroom, and just by sheer luck it has two queen beds. Then a small front room with a new couch, chair, and a pretty good-sized television. Also there's a small kitchen thing, forget what they call it. This will work for the puppy and all his shit.

At the moment, Celee is on the floor playing with lil' shit. Both are smiling like lunatics, yeah, that pup is smiling. The few toys I found at that truck stop turned out to be a hit as he is sure enjoying them. Almost like he never had a dog toy before. I drop on one of the chairs and just watch a stunningly beautiful woman playing with her puppy 'cause lil' shit is definitely hers. Another thing I'll have to explain to Brick. I'm so fucked.

"Celee, whatcha want to do? Chill in the room or grab a bite? Or we can order food to be delivered, if you want. That book by the phone gives us restaurants that deliver, I think."

"Fratello, (*Italian for brother 'bro'*) don't know about you, Frank, but I'm good with just chilling and ordering in. Plus, not sure you know who will behave if we leave him alone. And I'm really tired, going to take a shower, eat, and just relax. That's what I want to do. What do you want to do?"

“I’m good with all of that. If you’re okay with a pizza, some salad, and pop, tell me what you like and I’ll order. Go take a shower, I’ll watch the lil’ pain in the ass. Might take him out, see if he needs to piss or just take a short walk while you’re in the shower, give you some privacy.”

She smiles at me then looks down at the dog, who is gazing lovingly at her.

“Handsome boy, do you want to stay with Frank so Momma can grab a shower? He’s going to take you for a short walk so you can stretch your legs and maybe potty. You can trust him, he’s your daddy.”

Hearing that my head jerks up just as hers does. Her cheeks get a rosy pink, as her small tongue comes out before she bites on her full as fuck lower lip. *God, this woman is killin’ me*, I think as my cock starts to lengthen and thicken. Not wanting her to see, I turn and act like I’m lookin’ for the dog’s leash. When I hear jangling behind me, I turn to see Celee shaking the damn leash right in front of my face. How the hell did she sneak up on me without me hearing her?

“Here you go, Frank. I’m going to grab some stuff out of my bag. Do you think we’ll make it back to your clubhouse by tomorrow? I’m just wondering on how much longer?”

“Sweetheart, if we’re lucky, maybe late tomorrow night or, worst case, the next day early morning. No matter, there’s always someone there; a prospect doing what he’s told or a member banging some sweet cheek.”

Fuck, did I just say that? Nowadays most members are involved with women and the ones who ain’t, it’s not my business what they do as a prospect. I can see by the look on Celee’s face she’s about ready to give me some shit.

“Frank, did I hear you correctly? The Grimm Wolves club have women at the clubhouse to service their men’s basic needs? Really, in 2023, this crap still happens? I know my father supplied women for his goombas. Guessing you don’t know what that means—goombas. It means pal, friend, or even associate in Italian. You know, stuff like that. But that

you guys are still in the seventies is surprising. I didn't see anything like that on the website."

Feeling my gut churning and not wanting to get into this right now, as usual, I open mouth and push in foot.

"Goddamn it, Celee, why would I have mentioned it before? My ass is already on the choppin' block for that post with the picture of the clubhouse on that stupid motherfuckin' dating site. Once Brick and Fury find out, my ass is gonna be in deep shit. Secondly, what happens in the clubhouse should stay in there. I just opened my mouth about other brothers and I shouldn't have, so forget what I said. Now, I'm takin' lil' shit out. Go shower, gonna order the food before I leave and give them my cell phone number. Take all the time you need."

I walk to the puppy, click on the leash to the collar I bought him, and make my way out of the room when my stomach starts growling loudly. When I let one rip, know my time is short. Oh fuck. Making a quick rush down the hallway to the elevators, I pick up lil' shit, who thinks we're playing a game. When I get off, I look for a bathroom, which has me almost running down the hall. Fuck it, I'm gonna bring the puppy in with me, no choice.

Hitting a stall, I put lil' shit at my feet, trying to keep the leash in my hands as I drop my jeans and boxers. With barely any time left, I drop my ass down and that's when my gut lets loose. Between the noises and smell the puppy is actually sitting at my feet watching me, head tilted like *'what the fuck.'* Normally at a time like this, I play with my phone or search the internet. But I'm leery of the puppy getting away from me and, fuck, what would I do then.

Reaching down, I start to pet the little bastard who tries to lie down, but I won't let him. Don't want him rolling around on the floor in front of a toilet. Leaning down, I grab him up, which has him licking my entire face. As he starts to relax in my arms, every noise that comes from taking care of business has his head jerk off my shoulder or chest and he'd look deep in my eyes. It's almost like he's saying, *'Really, dude again?'*

When I'm finally finished, I put him down again so I can clean up. Somehow he manages to get into the next stall just as someone walks in. FUCK.

"Hey there, little fellow, you using this stall? You belong to someone or did some asshole drop you here?"

"No, he's with me, sorry. Had to bring him in with me, had an emergency, ya know how that goes. I'll grab him as soon as I pull my jeans up. Hang on."

I still have one side of the leash and suddenly it feels like someone is messing with the puppy's collar, which has me grab my jeans, pulling them up as I open the stall door and can't believe what I'm seeing. Some dork is trying to grab and run away with lil' shit. Well, not happening on my watch, motherfucker.

"Hey, what the fuck, asshole? I told you he was mine and you're still tryin' to grab him? Ain't ya got any brains or did the Lord miss ya? Put him down now, motherfucker."

He looks at me up then down. I'm wearing my kutte and when he gets to the middle of me, I lift one side of it and show him my gun in a holster. His eyes get big as he slowly places the puppy on the floor. Only problem he has is I'm blocking his way out.

"Sorry, Mister, my bad, he's cute. Thought maybe I could make a quick buck, you know, maybe a trucker at that truck stop across the street is lonely and wants a puppy for company. No foul, no harm, right?"

Not wanting to bring attention to myself, I give him one of my asshole looks and say not one word for a few minutes.

"You know what, you ain't worth the bother. Get your ass out of my sight now. And check out the back of my kutte. You're lucky I'm in a givin' mood. Now go get the fuck out."

I watch the weasel make his way out, shaking like a leaf, thanks to our club enforcer, Chains. He's been teaching all the prospects how to intimidate people in all kinds of situations. He always tells us to watch our body language and make sure to keep eye contact, no matter what.

I finish zippin' and buttonin' my jeans then wash my hands and pull them through my hair. Grabbing lil' shit up off the floor, as soon as he's close to my face he starts whining and kissing the hell outta my face and neck. It's almost like he knows how close he was to being taken by that douchebag. I pet his head and even return a kiss to him.

“Never tell anyone about this. I'll deny it and make your life miserable. You hear me? Quit that, that tickles. Come on, with the tongue. All right, let's get you a walk so I can be back when the food gets here.”

When I put him down, he turns and waits for me to pick up the leash, then together we walk out of the bathroom and into the open space by the check-in counter.

“Oh, look at that, cutie. Can I give him a bone?”

Looking at the kid, who's probably just north of eighteen, I give him a grin with a little sneer in it. He just smiles and walks around the counter with a couple of cookies in his hands.

“Here you go, handsome. I'll give your daddy a few for later. Be a good boy.”

Then he hands me four cookies without a word. Once again, we head toward the doors and once out he starts tugging at the leash. As quickly as possible, I get him to the area designated for dogs, and he barely makes it before lifting his leg at one of the fake hydrants.

Running my hands through my hair, I never thought I'd be right here like this while Celee is in our room taking a shower. And more disturbing is, I'm with the girl I met on that dating site and we've not fucked yet. What the fuck is wrong with my life? If I have luck, it's definitely bad luck. With that thought I grab a bag and bend to pick up what lil' shit dropped while I was daydreaming. I read the posts all over this area that say on the sign to pick up their shit. Then we walk around for a few minutes before making our way back to our room.

BRICK

WHAT THE EVER-LOVIN' FUCK DID DINGO DRAG US INTO NOW? Two assholes have been snooping around our apartment building, then had the audacity to try and walk up to our clubhouse, bound and determined to ask questions.

After these two 'Italians' ran their mouths for about three minutes, I'd had enough already. They were stupid enough to let Celestina's name slip a few times and that was all I needed. Without saying a word, I gave the signal to Tiny and Irons, two of our prospects, who at the time were manning the gate. And what a show those Italian imbeciles put on.

Took a while for both Tiny and Irons to get the guys down on the ground and arms zip-tied behind their backs. Once there, my boys pushed them onto their sides then their asses, pulling them into a seated position. All the while they were screamin' what I'm assuming were fuckin' swear words in their native tongue. Whatever, ya stupid pricks, your asses are mine now. And if I know Chains, those tongues will be on his wet room floor in no time at all.

By now, I've got probably half my club watching the show, some with beer in their hands, while others are wiping grease from theirs because they're working. A few look to have just rolled out of bed. Turning, I search faces until I find the cold, dead eyes of my enforcer.

"Chains, up and front."

He pushes his way to my side and waits. He's not one for small talk, which works for the position he holds in our club.

Though since his commitment ceremony he seems calmer and even a bit nicer, if those words could be applied to him.

“Brother, I want you to take these two assholes to your wet work shed and get as much information as possible from them on how and what they know about Celestina.”

“Then what, Brick? We gonna set up a tea service for these motherfuckers? Have one of the prospects pick up some biscotti to go with their tea?”

Chuckling, I see he’s on a rip about something. Not gonna ask ’cause it ain’t the time.

“Why do you think I’m askin’ you to handle this? Because I know once the questioning is done, I don’t have to worry about one fuckin’ thing. You understand? Good, grab a prospect or two to assist. Thanks, brother.”

I walk right up to the two men who tried to walk on our property and know they will never leave. When I’m within reach, I kick the first jagoff right in the face. Spit and blood burst from it and he starts screaming again. Turning to the second one, knowing he’s expecting my foot, I lean down, wind back, and throw a left that literally knocks him down and out. Then I turn and walk back to the clubhouse and my office. Emmie told me the room is a pigsty and she wasn’t cleaning it any longer. Well, she wouldn’t be able to as she’s carrying my triplets. Thinking that, I can’t keep the smile off of my goofy as fuck face. So now I’m a cleaning man in my spare time.

Hearing my phone ring, I wipe the sweat that’s pouring down my face. Goddamn, didn’t know it took so much effort to clean a stupid room. Reaching for my phone, I take a breath.

“Yo, you got Brick.”

“Hey, Prez, it’s Dingo. We finally found a place to bed down. Reason I’m calling is that...”

“Would it be that little furry fucker that’s been sittin’ on your Celee’s lap for the last couple of hours? Remember who you’re talkin’ to, boy.”

I wait but get nothing. I walk to my office and sit my ass down. Either I shocked him so much he dropped the call,

which I know Dingo would never do, so I give him a few more minutes.

“Sorry, Brick, I tried to get the woman to leave that mutt behind but she finally told me either we take the pup or I leave them both behind. With all that’s going on with her and so many assholes looking for her, I... well... I caved.”

“Wait ’til Presley hears you’ve got a puppy in his dream car.”

Chuckling, I wait for it and then he gives it to me.

“No, Prez, please don’t. I’ll have the car detailed, shit, I’ll do it myself. He’ll never need to know. Come on, cut me some slack, for Christ’s sake. This trip took a serious fucked-up turn for me.”

Now outright laughing, I lean back in my chair as we catch up on where they are and what’s going on. When he asks how I knew about the puppy, I told him.

“Dingo, my God, you’ve watched Karma work. He’s been followin’ your ass on traffic cameras and shit like that. When you’re out on the open roads, it’s harder to follow, but before you left Texas, I had Bullet put a GPS on Presley’s car so we knew where you were at. Now, down to business, brother, how much longer ’til you get back home?”

Going through different alternative routes, since trouble seems to be knocking on their door constantly, I tell him to put the pedal to the metal and get their asses home. After we hang up, I grab a bottle of water and guzzle it down then get back to being my own bitch and cleaning up my mess. Even at my age, it sucks to be an adult. How much longer ’til Emmie has those babies? Gotta check out my calendar to make sure I’m looking at the right date, but for now, know before I leave a mess I’ll be cleaning it up. ’Cause even after the rugrats are born, no way am I expecting my ol’ lady to bust her ass. Or a new thought pops into my mind; I’ll put cleaning on the rotation for the prospects. That idea works perfectly for me.

Must have fallen asleep on the clean, wiped-down leather. My head is on the arm and, fuck, I'm drooling like a dog. Hearing my phone, I feel for it but can't find it. Shit, I go to roll up and instead over shift and roll right off the couch. *Thank Christ I mopped the floor*, I think as I look at the floor on my hands and knees.

Managing to get to my feet, I see the phone on the corner of the desk.

"Yo."

"Mike, hi it's me, just wondering when you're coming home. And don't fret, nothing is wrong. I was going to try and make some dinner."

"Sugar, don't go to any bother, please. You need to rest, keep those gorgeous legs up so they don't swell on you. I'll be leaving shortly. I can pick up anything you want."

"Thank God, I didn't feel like cooking anyway. I want a Blizzard from Dairy Queen and two cheeseburgers with extra cheese and extra pickles from that place you always go. Oh, and some fries, please."

"Sure, that's all, no soup, salad, or onion rings?"

I can almost hear the wheels turning in her head. So patiently I wait.

"Bring home a Maxwell polish too with cheese sticks. Ranch too."

"All right, leavin' now, be home shortly. Love ya, Emmie."

"I love you too, Mike."

Just as I go to put the phone in my inside kutte pocket, someone pounds on my door.

"Yeah, come on in."

Lookin' up I see Chains, Fury, and Stitch. This ain't good if all three are together and in my office.

"What's up?"

“Brick, we might have a problem. Those two assholes from the gate, well, I got them hanging off the rafter, literally, and the shit they’ve told us I have Karma looking into. Dingo and the chick need to get here now. That crazy as fuck mafia family has issued orders to every single asshole in their ‘family’ looking for Celestina, and the bounty is enough to keep all of us and our kids safe and around doing absolutely nothing for the rest of our lives. Better let the kid know to keep his eyes open, and they should get on the road as early as possible. No lounging around ’cause this ain’t no goddamn vacation. Even though her coming home with Dingo is leading the mob directly to us, what the fuck else could he do? Right, Brick? It’s not like he can dump her and the mutt on the side of the road.”

Listening to Chains, I get it, but damn, we ain’t having any luck as each brother falls for his own special ol’ lady. I’m figuring this is gonna be another shitshow for sure.

“They breathin’, Chains? If so, get whatever you can and end them. Have the prospects very carefully get rid of any evidence. I’m sure as fuck you know what I mean, right, brother?”

Watching the look cross Chains’s face, even I tremble. I know how badass he is. With that smile and look in his crazy fuckin’ eyes, they tell me he’s going to be very creative with the way those two Italians take their last breaths. Not my problem, I’ve got a woman at home waiting on me to bring her some dinner to satisfy her cravings as she’s carrying my three babies. That thought brings a huge smile to my face and having the three in front of me stare like they’ve never seen me smile before. Really...what a bunch of assholes. I smile all the goddamn time.

Then without another word to anyone, I grab my shit and make my way to my office door, without even looking back. Once in the main room, I see Spitfire, Joy, and Winnie standing by the bar drinking pops, having what seems to be a very intense conversation. Well, until Spitfire sees me, then she clears her throat and the other two shut up immediately. I could walk over and see what’s going on or continue on my

way home. I choose the latter. In the long run, might have been better if I stayed and found out what the hens were talking about. But I usually do everything the hard way, kinda like my club name.

DINGO

I'M WATCHING CELEE SLEEPING WITH THAT LIL' SHIT CURLED right into her neck as he smirks at me, I swear to Christ, if I could I would boop him on his nose. He knows what he's doing, the asshole. Don't care that he's a dog, he's where I want to be. I carefully and quietly get up and walk to the bathroom. When lil' shit looks my way, I flip him off, shutting the door softly.

Taking care of my business, I grab the package of toiletries left for travelers. I brush my teeth, feeling better already. Looking at the shower, I figure a quick one won't bother Celee, so I do just that using the body wash in that container on the wall to clean up. The thought of pounding one out comes to me but don't want her to hear me so, instead, I pump some shampoo into my hands from the contraption on the wall. I rub it through my hair, thinking might be time to get a haircut.

Quickly finishing up, I grab a towel and dry off, then wrap it around my waist. Grabbing the boxers I slept in, I open the door to see lil' shit right there, looking up at me. Well, fuck me, dude, gonna have to wait 'til I throw on some clothes. He follows me to my bag then sits watching me pick out new boxers, along with socks, jeans, and a grayish T-shirt. When I drop the towel, bending to get my boxers on, I hear a slow whistle from behind me.

“Well now, what a sight to wake up to, Frank. Thought they said sunny today but all I'm seeing is one fine-ass moon.”

I can't help myself; I start laughing while finishing pulling my boxers up. Then I turn to see she's pulled herself up to the headboard, blankets covering her up to her neck. She's got a huge smile on her face. It hits me, damn, she is gorgeous, even if she's just waking up.

"If I knew this is what was waiting for me, I'd have jumped out of bed at the crack of dawn. So who do I thank for my morning greeting?"

"Very funny, Celee, gotta get our asses on the road. I haven't heard from Brick or Fury yet, but don't want them to think I'm lounging around instead of bustin' ass to get back home. Want to shake that fine ass and get ready? I'll go grab some coffees. Do you want some breakfast?"

"Of course, I'll have a large coffee, a small cranberry juice with a glass of ice, and a pastry."

"Is that all, Princess?"

"Frank, do me a favor never call me that name again. I'd rather you call me a spoiled bitch than that. I'm going to get ready. Can you please take the puppy and let him go potty?"

I watch as she, well, kind of stomps to the bathroom, closing the door firmly. What the ever-lovin' fuck? No way in hell. What the hell did she lock it for? Like I'd invade her goddamn privacy. Well, this morning isn't starting out the way I thought it would.

Trying to catch lil' shit is a joke. Every time I reach for him the lil' fucker runs, waiting me to chase him. Finally tired of his goddamn game, I grab the comforter and when he runs, I throw it over him, catching him. Once I get a hold of his collar, I clip the leash on and we head out. Just as I reach the elevator, my phone starts vibrating. Yeah, I was trying to be a good guy so I put my phone to vibrate so it wouldn't wake up 'princess.' Never again.

"Hello."

"Prospect, where the ever-lovin' fuck are you? Takin' a bubble bath while someone paints your toenails?"

Great, just my luck, should have known the way the morning has been going.

“Hey, Chains, I’m waiting on Celee to get ready so we can get back on the road. What’s up?”

“Well, we happened to have two Italians fall into our laps and after I got done with them, got some information for you, if you want to hear it, brother.”

My stomach drops at Chains’s words. What the fuck, now what?

“Yeah, brother, go ahead, tell me whatcha got.”

As Chains starts breaking down what he found out, I pull lil’ shit outside to do his duty. He must know something is wrong because he doesn’t dillydally at all. On the way back in, as a bunch of folks start to fuss over him, I lean down and pick him up, though dropping my phone.

“Prospect, what the fuck are you doin’, asshole?”

“Shit, sorry, Chains, dropped the phone, was picking lil’ shit up.”

“Who is lil’ shit, Dingo? Didn’t know Celestina had a kid. And, dude, not nice callin’ the boy lil’ shit.”

I laugh at Chains, well until he growls.

“Nope, brother, lil’ shit is the puppy we found when we handled those two assholes after Celee. She found the pup in the back seat. I’m taking a guess they were gonna use him for bait. She wouldn’t leave him there, even though I didn’t want to bring him along. Though he’s cute as shit.”

“So while the mob is after her, Celestina decides to add to the ‘fun’ a puppy she happens to find? Sounds like the kind of woman us Grimm Wolves men are drawn to. Difficult women, and if you tell Winnie I said that, your ass is mine, brother. Get back here in one piece and watch your back, brother. See ya later tonight at the clubhouse. Oh, since you’re livin’ in Fury and Abby’s apartment, might want to make sure they’re okay with a puppy, though they gotta couple of their own for those twins from hell. If not, I’m sure Jackson and Winnie wouldn’t

mind a pup around. Probably will need to twist Luna May's arm, but in the end it should be okay. We gotcha, brother."

After I say goodbye to him, I start grabbing a tray and filling it with coffee, pastries, fruit, and a plate of eggs and bacon. Then I head back up to our room, lil' shit smelling every few feet. With my hands full, I just have to let him sniff and pull on his leash.

Banging on the door with my elbow, I wait impatiently with the pup trying to pull me down the hallway.

"Coming, hang on one minute."

"Move your ass, sweetheart, or your coffee is gonna be all over the door and floor."

Before I can say another word, the door flies open with Celee standing there with a brush in one hand and, oh, she's half naked. I feel my mouth drop open as I take her in. Bare feet, tight as fuck jeans, and a light blue bra that matches her eyes, which are outlined, and her lashes have some mascara on them.

"Close your mouth, Frank, I'm sure you've seen more than your share of naked women. Come on, I'm starving and I have to feed the puppy before we take off. I packed everything up except a plate of food for him."

She pulls me in while wrapping a towel around her shoulders, then grabs her coffee and takes a long drink.

"Oh, the liquid of the gods. Thank you so much. Oh, sweets. Wait, let me put this plate down so he can eat as we do. Then we can let him potty number two before we leave."

She grabs a huge, I don't know, some chocolate pastry and starts shoving it in her mouth. She's so different from other women I've been around, who barely eat a lettuce leaf. I can't believe how she manages to eat that entire pastry in less than two minutes. When she grabs the fruity looking one, she sits down at the small table and the noises coming out of her make me hard as a rock. Fuck, not again. Driving with a hard-on ain't fun.

Not wanting to embarrass myself, I turn and take a seat on the one bed, sipping my coffee. She looks at me then the plate of eggs and bacon.

“That’s for you, right? Well, come sit and eat your breakfast, Frank, we got to get moving. Wait, what’s wrong? Why are you all the way over there? Come on, no secrets, remember?”

I walk over and sit on the chair across from her, my eyes staring into the blue abyss that are hers.

“Well, sweetheart, if those noises keep comin’ from that perfect as fuck mouth of yours, we are gonna be getting on the road much later than we expected. I can only take so much. Opening the door half-naked, not to mention my head still is spinning from hearin’ all the sounds you make after sleeping in this room with you. Celee, your nighttime moans drove me batshit crazy. My God, Celee, please tell me you’re playin’ with me. You can’t be that innocent, can you?”

She tilts her head as I watch her face. It’s like I can see her digesting my words. When it hits her, she starts to turn a faint pink blush and her eyes go down. The truth is right in front of my eyes and hits me in the face. She is that innocent. How the fuck does the daughter of a mobster not have the mouth of a truck driver and the experience of a downtown whore? Before I can ask her, she blows my mind even further.

“Well, all I can tell you, Frank, is if I’m too much trouble, just tell me so the pup and I will find another way. Or I can go to Timber Ghost, Montana and hang out with my cousin, Shadow. I’m not kissing anyone’s ass ever again, especially a cocky disrespectful jerk. Make up your mind now so I can see which way I’m going to go. And you were right before, what a fucked-up start to a new day, especially when someone is in a foul mood without telling the person they are traveling with why. While you decide, I’m going to finish getting dressed since it’s such a distraction to your thirteen-year-old brain and dick.”

With that, she turns and walks back into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her. Why the hell are women

always pissed off enough at me to literally almost take a door off its hinges to let me know that. I mean, didn't think I disrespected Celee at all. I do see a bit of her cousin Shadow in those icy-blue eyes when she gets pissed off. That had my balls running, no crawling, back up into my body and the hardness immediately disappearing from my dick like the helium when a balloon is popped. Yeah, Shadow has that effect. Panther has to be a brave fuckin' saint.

Sitting down, I start on my lukewarm eggs and bacon while drinking my coffee. The lil' asshole has the audacity to sit right in front of me begging and whining. Figuring he's hungry, I get up and put some more kibble in a bowl then add some of my eggs and bacon. Fuck, before the bowl was fully on the floor his little head is down deep in it eating greedily. Once I know he's good; I sit back down. Just as I'm digging into my food, the bathroom door swings open and this time Celee has a tight, blueish T-shirt tucked into her jeans.

With purpose she walks right up to me, putting her hands on my shoulders. When she looks into my eyes, I'm not sure what that look from her is. As I try to figure it out, Celee leans even farther into me and licks her lips before hers land right on mine. The shock has my mouth opening and she takes full advantage, though hesitantly. That's when my fried brain reengages and my hands land on her luscious ass, pulling her body even closer. When I take control of the kiss, her soft moan has my cock once again filling up.

Goddamn, this woman is gonna be the death of me but this is one hell of a way to go, as we go hot and heavy for a while. Before we end up back in bed naked, I gently pull away my hands, moving to her hair, pushing it outta her face.

DINGO

BETWEEN THE SOUNDS SHE MAKES AND HAVING MY HANDS ON her hot, tight little body, the tiny bit of working brain cells I have short-circuit. Somehow though, it does remind me of the situation we are currently involved in. Not to mention the little pain in the ass whining then growling to get our attention. When we both pull back grudgingly and look down at him, I can't stop the chuckle that escapes my lips.

“Well, looks like the boy is ready to get busy from the moves he's got going on.”

Lil' shit has the corner of his bed in his mouth as his little hips are humping the bed furiously. I hear Celee snort right before she moves away from me and walks toward him, grabbing his bed, pulling it away from his mouth.

“Bad boy. No, don't do that, it's gross. Come on, baby, you're too young for that.”

“Well, we gave him a bit of a show so he was trying to get some practice and get his groove on. Just a quick thought, might want to look into getting his balls snipped before he's doing more than practicing. Now, you about ready? Oh, I spoke to Chains, it seems like two more of your father's goons found their way to the Grimm Wolves clubhouse. Though doubt they'll ever leave it breathin' again.”

Her eyes get huge and she swallows repeatedly.

“Your club killed two men just for being Italian and from out of town?”

“No, they pulled them in and Chains ‘questioned’ them, finding out they were given orders to hunt, hurt you in ways I’ll never share with you, then kill you, in that order. Payment was half at the front and the rest when proof of death was received. So who do you think is barking orders in the De Luca organization? And why would they want you dead if you weren’t involved with your father’s business? Or is that you blowing smoke up my ass, just to get me to help you?”

I see her literally take a few very deep breaths as she closes those gorgeous blue eyes. When she opens them, she’s staring right at me, no not at me, through me. Her eyes are cold as fuck, not the shining blue of a few minutes ago when my mouth was on hers. Well, now I get what my brothers who have ol’ ladies mean when they say they can go from zero to crazy in two point five seconds. I’m witnessing it right now. When she squints her eyes it’s like she can read my mind because, I swear to Christ, there is smoke coming out of her ears. Before she can shoot the fire I’m sure is in her nose, I slowly approach her, hands out, palms facing upward.

“Hang on a fuckin’ minute, Celee. If you had no part in your dad’s empire, then why are you being hunted like a rabid dog after it bit a small goddamn kid? No, think about it a quick minute, it makes no damn sense. I might not be the brightest nut in the can, but give me some credit. I do have a little something between my ears.”

Her head drops forward while her hands form fists. Well, fuck me, she better not swing at me ’cause I don’t hit women, that is as long as they don’t hit me. It’s a two-way street. Watched for too many years as my parents beat on each other and swore it wouldn’t happen to me. Usually, in fact, if folks around me are getting into it I generally just disappear. Can’t handle that shit, especially after the last time at home.

“Frank, again I’m sorry. You’re right. No, I didn’t work with or generally for my father. Though he did force me to clean up his money, so yeah, money laundering. The money he stashed all over the world is mind-blowing, if you only knew how much. I’m guessing that’s what all these folks following or trying to track me down want. From what I’ve heard,

Shadow and her sisters did some major damage at that compound of my dad's in Montana. But I'm thinking at least one of my brothers made it. Not sure what the extent of their injuries were since I wasn't there. My cousin was and she barely got out without being captured. Before you ask, there are underground tunnels. My father was a smart man when it came to devious shit like that. If he wasn't shot and killed they'd be after him, but now whoever hated him would also hate me. And because he was such a dick when he didn't get his way, which with me was every single day since I'd become an adult. He made sure everyone knew I had the access and codes to all of his bank accounts and hidden money. That doesn't matter now that he's dead. Every moron and prick he ever was in contact with wants me to give them the accounts because they have dreams of rooms full of money and gold bars. Stupid assholes."

"When was the last time you were in touch with your ol' man, Celee? 'Cause if it was years ago, don't get why everyone's running around trying to catch your ass. You're a grown woman who is entitled to a life of her own, no matter who her asshole father is."

I watch her close her eyes for a second then open them, and the emotions and pain in them takes my breath away.

"Frank, my God, it's been at least four or more years. And no, I had no clue he was involved with human trafficking and prostitution, but it doesn't surprise me. Saying that, don't think for a minute I was an innocent De Luca either. I might not have known exactly what his businesses were but, believe me, I knew he was an evil tyrant of a man. Like I told you before, he auctioned off my virginity at my sweet sixteen party after guarding me and it for years. After I got out of the hospital, I kept my head down and tried to hide small amounts of his money he gave me for clothes and school stuff so I could get away eventually. This was all I could do. When I had enough money, I could sneak away when the time was right, and I would be able to get the hell away from him.

"Somehow, he must have known I was up to something because that's when he ordered me to work for him. My job

was to handle some of his bank accounts. Also I had to work with his rotten accountant and make it look like everything he did was legal. So my laptop had all the fake shit while his deviant accountant kept the real records for my father. I didn't get it, as it was weird. I was just shy of eighteen and my two asshole brothers were older, but I don't think Dario, my dad, trusted them as far as he could throw either of them. When he gave me access to all his accounts in the States and overseas, including the Cayman Islands, first the amount of money he had shocked the life out of me. His threat of torture and then selling my ass to the worst sadist he could find scared the shit out of me. To this day, I never understood why he gave me that kind of power.

“So I guess I broke a ton of laws laundering his money and accounts. He never found out I was very carefully skimming tiny amounts off of the deposits. It took forever, but it allowed me to build a hefty rainy-day fund for myself. And I kept a secret file on my computer with the real records so I had something to protect myself.

“That was my plan, to continue building my fund, until he explained to me how he was going to marry me off to one of his friends; or as I refer to them as, one of my rapists. Dear old dad arranged this between the two of them. Said he was a favorite friend. And the guy who he picked for his little girl to marry was the oldest and most sadistic of the men who abused me that day. No way in hell was I going to let that old jagoff get his hands on me again. So I squirreled away as much money as I could, under a new identity, in banks all over the United States. I knew bad people too, who hated my father and could make a fake ID for me and were glad to fuck him over behind his back. Of course for a certain price. Then my opening came when one day my father thought I was on my way to the Cayman Islands to take care of his business. Instead, I took a flight to Idaho and disappeared. I've never used the name Celestina De Luca ever again. You actually are the first person I've shared that name with in years. Then I shared it with your friends in Texas.

“So am I innocent? In a manner of speaking, I guess so, but in other ways not at all. So where does this leave us,

Frank? We're wasting time but this needed to be hashed out. So with that said, ball is in your court now. Are we finishing this trip to your clubhouse or am I on my own?"

Looking at her, I think to myself, this is the question of the day for sure.

CELESTINA

WE'VE BEEN ON THE ROAD FOR ABOUT THREE AND A HALF hours and Frank has maybe said five words to me since we got in the car. Actually, I'm surprised he said that many. I think he's pissed after I kind of put him on the spot. Well, son of a bitch, he told me his brother Chains killed two men because of me.

One of my biggest flaws is that I'm honest to a fault. I told him everything about my relationship or lack of with my father, what he made me do for him, his disgusting friends, and his business. He probably doesn't believe I'm a good person and being honest. And he's kind of right, though not in the way he's thinking. This has me wondering about who he hangs around with that he has such a low level of trust for those in his life.

In Texas I met Irons, Joy, Bullet, and his girlfriend, Clementine, or as the club calls her, Spitfire. She was a breath of fresh air. I hope and pray she's around when I get there because I'm nervous as hell the closer we get to his clubhouse. Especially, with the little bit Frank's mentioned about Chains, Brick, and Fury. And those are just three of his brothers, though these three are the top badasses in his club who he looks up to, which is very easy to see. Sitting here, knowing it's going to have to be me who breaks the silence, I do it because this quiet is driving me crazy. "Frank, come on, don't be like this. You asked me a question and I was honest. I can't help it if you don't want to believe someone could be forced to live the way I did. There are monsters out there who manipulate, abuse, and force their children to either become

like them or make them even worse. I was lucky, I managed to get out. If you tell me why you're pissed we can talk it out and, hopefully, move on. For Christ's sake, *frate*, I'm a nervous wreck. I'm afraid for my life and this right here isn't making it any easier. I've put my trust in you and I barely know you. What does that say about me? Please don't be mad at me, I can't handle that right now."

I look at him and his face is blank as hell. Well, I tried. *Vaffanculo* (fuck you), I'm not begging. If he wants to act like a spoiled brat then he can have a go at it. I shift in the seat so I'm looking out the window of the passenger door and close my eyes. Mainly so I don't cry. With the motion of the car, eventually I fall asleep.

A sudden swerve has me jerking forward then back, banging against the seat. It abruptly wakes me up as my head smacks into the window.

"Ow, what the fuck, Frank, you fall asleep?"

I look his way to see he's ghost white. Turning to look out the back window, I see a huge SUV following way too close. Oh shit, not again. Not sure where we are, but I face forward and keep my mouth shut. If he needs me to do something he will let me know.

"Sweetheart, in about two or three minutes the cavalry will be arriving. Until then, please sit just like you are. Don't move around 'cause every time you show yourself it gives them a better target. In fact, get down on the floor, please. I know, but if they start shootin', the first place, besides my head, they will aim for is your side. Come on, Celee, trust me on this, sweetheart."

I can tell by the tone of his voice he's stressed, so I unbuckle the seat belt and squeeze myself on the floor in front of the passenger seat. The car seems to be all over the road, but I know Frank doesn't want to mess up Presley's car. Suddenly, I hear a faint rumble with it seeming to get louder by the second, like it's coming toward us.

By the time I realize what it is, I think bikes are racing by us making my heart beat like crazy.

“Celeee, get back in your seat and belt up, my brothers are here. We’re good now.”

I crawl back on the seat and when I can look around us, all I can see is bikes. All kinds of them and they are surrounding us. One points to Frank then back at himself before giving devil horns. He chuckles, which has me looking at him in shock.

“Just like Stallion, always showin’ up. Celee, get ready to be amused by a bunch of stooges. Well, most of the prospects are goofy. The members are another story. We’re like ten minutes, if that, from our clubhouse. Once we get there, I’ll introduce you to Brick and Fury, my prez and VP. They’ll tell us what they’ve decided to do and where we are gonna put you up to make sure you’re safe at all times. What’s that look for?”

“I’m not staying with you? Thought that was the game plan, but now you’re saying I might stay with strangers? Please, Frank, don’t make me stay somewhere without you.”

He looks at me with a soft face for a quick second.

“Celee, if I have any say in it, I’ll do my best to make sure we stay together. Remember though, sweetheart, I don’t have much say. I’m at the lowest spot in the club, a prospect, though Brick, my prez, is a pretty cool dude. Let’s not worry about it right now, let’s get our asses to the clubhouse first, then we can worry. ’Kay?”

I nod then lean back and close my eyes. When he grabs my hand from my lap and entwines his fingers with mine, then puts them on top of his thigh, it surprises me. Though it was the right thing because it calms my nerves to the point I don’t feel like throwing up anymore. He holds on to my hand all the way until he drives through an electric gate and pulls up to the front of a huge building that looks like a manufacturing business, though I recognize the sign from the picture on Frank’s dating page.

As he parks the car, all kinds of bikes pull in on both sides of us and behind even. My hand reaches out to his and I squeeze his hand tightly. My heart feels like it’s going to jump out of my chest, especially when this huge as hell giant opens

Frank's door, pulling him out while he fights to keep hold of my hand. I hear the giant talking to him.

“Motherfucker, 'bout time you get your ugly ass home, brother. Shit, ain't the same around here with you gone. By the looks of it, you brought home the piece you went out there for.”

Frank jerks away and pushes his friend away from him. “Asshole, watch your mouth. She's not a piece. Celee, come on, sweetheart, get outta the car. You're safe. These assholes won't bother you if they know what's good for them.”

“Who you calling an asshole, you smart-ass punk? Your generation has no respect.”

I'm just rounding the car when I hear these words. I look up and in Frank's direction and when my eyes meet the stranger's, I stop dead in my steps. I feel like he was looking into my soul with those dead as fuck emerald-green eyes. They have even less life in them than my cousin Shadow's the first time I met her.

Knowing I'm staring, I put my head down and walk over to Frank. That's when I hear the stranger mouth off.

“Ya were right, brother, she looks just like that maniac, Shadow, without the skull face. It actually makes the hair on my neck stand up when I look into her eyes, they remind me so much of Shadow. Fuck, just what we need, more trouble.”

I feel it before I can stop it.

“Why are you talking shit, man, when you don't even know me? And watch what you say about my cousin because it's not good manners to talk about a person behind their back. And who the hell are you anyway? A prospect who hasn't learned his place?”

It's like everyone comes to a complete halt. I could probably hear a pin drop on the blacktop. The tension is growing and everyone is looking between me and the big mouth. Not sure who he is, but I'm getting the feeling he's someone important within Frank's club. Even he's looking a bit green under the skin. “Well, girl, you share Shadow's

mouthy ways. Let's say I don't let many people talk to me that way and live." Hearing that, I know who he is. Son of a bitch, I just was a total asshole to the one guy I didn't even want to meet. Looking me in the eyes is the enforcer of the Grimm Wolves MC. Chains. I almost piss myself when that thought enters my mind, as I'm not sure what to do now. I'm not one to apologize and I've already done it with Frank too many times. Just the way he's glaring at me, I know he wants me to say I'm sorry. Well, he can go to hell. My De Luca is showing as I'm tired and hungry, not to mention scared to death. Before I can say a word, the door swings open and I hear the angelic voice I love.

"Well, howdy, Celestina. Sugah, c'mon on in and sit a spell. We'll do some catchin' up because we're fixin' to get the food out. You look plum tuckered. Why do you look madder than a wet hen, Chains?"

No one says a word so Clementine grabs my hand and pulls me toward the door. I look back at Frank and he's standing there like a statue as Chains stares at me. Knowing I'll look like an idiot, I do it anyway. I wave then turn and go in.

CELESTINA

I'M SO CONFUSED AND UNABLE TO KEEP UP WITH EVERYTHING going on since I walked into the Grimm Wolves MC clubhouse. It's total chaos, though I think I'm the only one thinking this way. There are kids of all different ages running all over the place. There are three boys close in age causing havoc, while a younger boy is at a high table coloring, I think. Twin girls are sitting on one couch reading. And one little princess, who's literally dressed in a princess costume and everything, she's playing with a bunch of dolls. Then there are the women. Clementine introduced me to them all but between the kids and the women, I'm lost. I tried to offer some help with the food but was gently pushed to the bar and asked what I wanted. So I requested my favorite, no matter what time it is, coffee. The young guy behind the bar smiled and told me it'd be a minute or two as he was going to make a fresh pot.

Through all of this I have no idea where Frank is. My comfort level is nonexistent as I feel my anxiety rising, and I figure I'm barreling close to a panic attack. It always starts like bugs are crawling all over me, which freaks me out. I'm already rubbing up and down my arms, trying to get them off. The noise factor seems to be getting louder and louder in my head. I need to find somewhere to just take a minute and breathe deeply.

So when someone puts their hands on my shoulders, that's the final straw and my protective instinct kicks in. I quickly turn, grabbing both hands and twisting them up, hearing a man's voice scream. Without even looking, I swing my leg back and bring my knee up into his junk. He makes a loud

noise on his way down. Before he's even fully on the ground, I have my knee on his throat and the little gun I keep in the back of my jeans against his temple. That's when I see it's Frank. The room is finally quiet...until it's not.

“Mother of fuckin’ Christ, Celee, what the hell? Well, I’m sure there goes my chances of me ever havin’ a family. It’s hard work right now trying to swallow with my balls stuck in my throat. What the shit? Did you think I’d leave ya in a place that wasn’t safe, sweetheart? Um, duh, we just drove almost two and a half days together, so if I wanted to hurt or dump you that would have been the time, not when we get back to my home with my family all around.”

He stops for a minute, trying to catch his breath, while his hands are holding his balls. It starts quietly, then gets louder until I hear different men chuckling and laughing out loud.

“Well, hot damn, that one will give Spitfire a run for her money, for goddamn sure. Look at Dingo, I’ve never seen that son of a bitch’s mouth not spewing his bullshit.

“Come on, brothers, you all know he’s always got a stupid joke or smart-ass remark spewing from his mouth. Well, look at him now in agony, rolling around on the floor, hanging on to his balls, almost in tears. There’s got to be a joke there, right?”

I don’t know who that jerk is but before I can say a word, a very deep, raspy male voice gives an order no one in their right mind would ignore.

“Knock off your bullshit right now, Bad Dog, before I sic that woman after your decrepit ass. Now everyone back to what you were doing. Celestina, right? I’m Fury. That big guy over there is Brick, and I believe you already met Chains. The one running his mouth is Bad Dog. Over there at that table is Beast and Cathy, who’s sitting next to my ol’ lady, Abby. Bubba and his wife, Molly, or as we call her Momma Molly, is with them. Right next to her is Chains and Jackson’s wife, Winnie. Jackson’s running late. At that other table is Stitch, his ol’ lady, Grace, Spitfire—ya know her as Clementine—and Joy with Irons, who you also know. We have some brothers

out and about. Manning the grill is Bullet, Tiny, and Doc, along with Puma. The rest of the club you'll meet eventually.

"Now, I think Dingo is done catching his breath. When Brick's done on the phone we can then go over some things, then we can all get some food. Oh shit, the kids, we'll go over them later as it seems like the club is more kids than brothers lately. Emmie, Brick's ol' lady, is on bed rest; she's pregnant with triplets. So eventually three more will be running around here with the others."

Looking down, I see a couple of boys are trying to help Frank up as they giggle and ask him how much his balls hurt, and if they went up into his body when I kicked him. Then I see Clementine coming out of the kitchen with some frozen peas. That's when one of the boy's yells at her.

"Dang it, Spitfire, make sure those go in the garbage when he's done. I don't want to eat peas that have been sitting on Dingo's balls."

"Damn it, Talon, get your little ass over here. Nice impression on Celestina with that mouth of yours. Should shove a bar of soap in it to clean it out."

As I listen I hear, I guess, Talon telling his mother he can't chew on any more Zest soap and that she's damaged him for life. Fury chuckles in front of me while someone behind me gives him shit.

"Damn, Fury, you got your hands full with those two demons or no, what does your ol' lady call them? Yeah, hellions. Not sure how you and Abby manage to have a life with those two delinquents around."

It hits me that voice sounds like the one from outside when we first arrived. When I glance behind me my eyes meet Chains. Oh shit, just what I don't need with my panic sensors on high alert. That man makes me nervous as hell. I need some quiet time and a soft bed so I can sleep for like ten hours. But apparently, that's not going to happen.

"Can I get you anything? How 'bout that coffee you asked for? I think Diesel was making a fresh pot for you. Let me see

where they are with it, can get one of the prospects to bring it back to the office for you. How you take it, Celestina?”

I tell Fury, who then picks up his cell, telling whoever he calls how I like my coffee. Feeling like I’m being watched, I look around and yes I am, by Chains. I raise an eyebrow, which he does right back at me. Son of a bitch, I’m not in the mood for any games.

“What are you looking at, Chains?”

“It’s eerie how much you and that crazy as fuck bitch in Montana look alike. You sure you’re not sisters instead of cousins? I don’t think you have it in you to do what she does for her club. Even though I’m sure at this moment Dingo would disagree with me ’cause his balls have to be throbbing, burning, and swelling up like a bitch.”

“Well, with that description that tells me you’ve been kicked in the balls, which is no surprise there with your winning personality. So since you’ve got a hard-on for my cousin, maybe it’s best we stay as far away from each other as possible.”

“Sister, first a hard-on and Shadow will never happen or maybe when hell freezes over. I save my hard-ons for my wife and husband. I got nothing against you, Celestina, except all the trouble you’re bringin’ to our clubhouse. My first question is how did you figure out my brother, Dingo, was associated with the Grimm Wolves motorcycle club? That is one of the first things all prospects are told; to keep all club affiliations private. Actually, they are instructed not to speak about the club at all. So wanna tell me how you knew to reach out to Dingo?”

Before I can answer all his questions, a growl behind me has me turning and my eyes lifting to see Frank standing next to Bad Dog, his face red.

“Back the fuck up, brother. Not sure what your problem is but leave Celee alone. She’s got enough going on, though I’m a bit pissed off right now. I’ll never be able to hear the words *‘rack your balls’* without grabbing my junk. Damn,

sweetheart, might need to train with ya, didn't even see it comin'. No pun intended."

Then he smiles my way and I know he's not mad at me. When I turn back I see that smirk on Chains's face, so I do it without thought or hesitation. I flip him the bird, which by the look on his face shocks him until he bursts out laughing. Everyone in the room joins in, including me, which helps with the heaviness of my anxiety. Well, at least for this moment. Later is another story. I'll see what this discussion is about and then will go from there. I'm kind of at the mercy of everyone here, thanks to Frank.

BRICK

LISTENING TO EMMIE TELL ME, ONCE AGAIN, HOW SICK SHE IS of always being left out of everything because she's forced to stay in bed is honestly giving me a fuckin' headache. As much as I love my ol' lady, personally, I can't wait for these babies to get their little asses here already. Thank God, Spitfire's friend, Esmeralda, took the part-time job helping out, making sure she's okay and following orders. Like Spitfire, Esmeralda is in the process of becoming a nurse, so she has basic knowledge if my woman starts to go into early labor. Fuck, the thought I'm gonna be a daddy both thrills and scares the ever-lovin' fuck outta me. I've even talked to my dad, Griller, about it.

Now that I finished the call to my ol' lady, time to take care of the situation Dingo brought home. That lil' fucker is like that bunny with the batteries, always giving us more and more trouble. Flinging my office door open, I walk into the common/party room and come to a complete stop. Everyone is either chuckling, giggling, or outright belly laughing. Chains for one, which almost lands me on my ass. My enforcer barely smiles let alone laughs out loud.

“Somebody want to tell me what the fuck is goin' on, for Christ's sake? One minute I'm being told Chains and Celestina aren't playin' well in the sandbox and the next, I walk in to everyone laughing and having a gay old time. So which is it?”

I glance around and it still startles the hell outta me when I lock eyes with Celestina's icy-blue ones that match Shadow's to a T. I kinda always wondered what that maniac in the

Devil's Handmaidens MC would look like without all that ink on her face. Now I know.

Hearing a throat clear, I see it's Celestina so I give her my attention.

"It's my fault, Brick, your boy over there, Chains, was giving me shit so I dished it right back to him. Guess he found it funny, though he's not laughing now. He might need to get checked for being bipolar or having mood swings. Just saying."

I can't help it; I laugh with everyone but Chains in the room. He looks like he's gotta take a shit or is ready to blow a gasket. Either way, it's funny. Goddamn, Celestina and Dingo together could take their comedy act on the road as a show.

"Thanks for that laugh, woman. Now everyone back to the office and park your asses so we can get down to business. Dingo here has kept us in the loop on what he knows. But if you want our club's help, gonna have to fill in the blanks 'cause goin' against any mob is bad enough, but hittin' horns with the De Luca mafia is actually insanity. We did get word that one of your brothers is still alive for sure. Now, did you have only two, some information stated you had three?"

"If you can start at the beginning so we get the full picture. Not asking you for all the tiny particulars, but enough so we can see if the idea we have will work. You good with that? Oh, here's Tiny with some refreshments. Better have some Jack on that tray or you're making a second trip, brother."

"Prez when don't I have Jack Daniels on any tray that is in a room with you. Brought the Gentleman Jack, figuring you need something smooth tonight."

As we bullshit, I see Dingo's woman glancing around with a confused look on her face. From what I'm gathering, she wasn't involved with her old man's interactions with his men. She's uncomfortable too, if her body language is speaking the truth. I make sure I notice this shit 'cause it could be the difference between life and death for me and my brothers.

Once again, when everyone is seated, I walk behind my desk and sit back in the chair. Seeing Dingo carefully trying to sit on one of the couches brings a smirk to my face. That chick has some of her own balls to do what she did in this club. Guess it's that Italian upbringing and the old saying *show no fear*.

“All right, whenever you're ready, Celestina.”

Not sure how late it is, but the stress showing on Dingo's friend or ol' lady, not sure which, is telling. We might have to pick this up tomorrow. Looking at my watch, I'm shocked to see how late it really is. Sure the ol' ladies are pissed that we have them holding dinner up. Better get our asses out there and get some food.

“Hey, before you start up again why don't we break here and go get some of that food the women cooked up. We can finish up tomorrow, if that's okay? You gotta be tired, and I can see Dingo is about to pass out from the looks of him. Getting his balls racked didn't help. For now, Celestina, you and the puppy are going to stay at the apartment with Dingo, Bullet, and Irons. Now, along with them that includes Spitfire, Joy. Oh, and Irons and Joy's lil' girl, Everly. Don't know what shit you two are involved in, so if you don't want to sleep with his dorky ass there are extra bedrooms. The estate is owned by Fury over there and his ol' lady, Abby. I'll let the guys fill you in. Does that sound okay? Hope it does 'cause I'm done, need to get home to Emmie. Don't like leavin' her for too long.”

After sayin' all my goodbyes to not only my brothers, ol' ladies, and the kiddos, I jump on my bike and head home. Fuck, Emmie has changed everything. I remember when, at one time, the clubhouse was what I called home. Not now, she has made sure I have solitude and a peaceful place I can come to after a long day as the president of a one-percent motorcycle club. That she's still with me after all the bullshit is totally fuckin' amazing. Now we are gonna have our own kiddos. Can't believe it, though I am more than a bit nervous. It's one

thing to play with a brother's kid but to have your own, that makes me responsible for everything about them. And we are right around the corner from having three little people.

After about twelve to fifteen minutes, I pull down the long driveway and as I approach see there are quite a few lights on. Esmeralda's SUV is in front with another car I don't know. I never got a call about a problem, but who the fuck is here at this time of night? Jumping off my bike, I stalk toward the front door, flinging it open. What I see I'll never unsee.

My beautiful ol' lady is lying down on our coffee table with the ottoman holding up her legs. Some chick is spreading shit on her pussy then covers it with a cheesecloth. What the fuck?

"Jesus Christ, what are you doin' to my woman? Hey, stop, don't do that. Oh my God, that had to fuckin' hurt. My balls just shrank into my body, probably never to drop again. Emmie, you okay? Woman, open your eyes and look at me. Did you drug her? What's wrong with her?"

Esmeralda looks at me shaking her head, a small smile on her face.

"Brick, calm the hell down. She's meditating, trying to get ready for the birth of your three babies. And the pain is not that bad. It's when they get to the back door, that's when you see stars for sure."

Why? Why, I ask myself as I kneel next to Emmie, softly touching her face, leaning down, and giving her a very tender kiss on her lips. When her eyes start to slowly open up, I smile down at her.

"Oh crap, you're home already? I wanted it to be a surprise. Well, okay, damn it, I can never make anything a surprise for you. So here goes. Whoopie! Surprise!"

It dawns on me my shy ol' lady is sitting on our coffee table, legs kinda spread, butt-ass naked in front of not only me but two women, and it's not even bothering her. Pregnancy is changing her, and I'm not sure I like all of this happening.

“Well, I’m home now, so these ladies can head home. Anything you need I can get or do for you. Thanks again, Esmeralda, appreciate you spending time with Emmie.”

“Brick, I’m not done so either stay or go up to your office for about another ten or so minutes, please, honey.”

“What else has to get done, Emmie? There’s nothing here, it’s all gone. Wait, no, oh shit. Don’t do it. Esmeralda says it hurts like a motherfuckin’ bitch, and I believe her. Let it go, please. Why are you doing this, baby?”

“I read that it is cleaner and safer for the babies. Even with a Cesarean, if it comes to that, the cleaner I am the better for the babies. And it’s said men like it when a woman is bare down there. You wouldn’t like it, Mike?”

I look to the waxer and Esmeralda who nod and both leave the room, heading to the kitchen.

“Emmie, sugar, talk to me, what is really going on?”

She puts both hands up for help, so as gently as possible I help her into a sitting position. Then I wrap one of the throws off the couch around her and kneel in front of her. I grab her hands, squeezing them.

“Just tell me, please. There’s nothin’ we can’t handle if we’re always honest with each other.”

“Mike, what happens if something happens to one or all of the babies? What if I can’t manage with this messed-up hand of mine? I’m bigger than a house and I worry every single day that my body won’t be able to hang on to these children until I’m thirty-two weeks. I’m surprised I’ve made it to twenty-nine ish right now. And I’ve heard through the grapevine Dingo brought a woman in trouble with the mob. What happens if they come after all of you and in turn your ol’ ladies? I can’t go through another loss, Mike.”

Wow, that’s a lot to cover but I’ve got to try. Right when I get ready to muddle my way through, Esmeralda comes back in with the lady waxer.

“If you give us a few minutes we’ll clean up and get out of your way. Brick, can you help me carry this to Carrie’s car?”

Something is up but Emmie is so worried about everything that she doesn't catch what's so obviously right in front of her face.

"Sure, sugar, I'll be right back, gonna give Esmeralda a hand."

I grab whatever she hands me then I follow her out to the car in our driveway.

"I'm sorry, Brick, Emmie was insistent about getting you know what done. Carrie is a friend and willing to come to the house. Anyway, we'll get out of here, just wanted to let you know I called Grace. Both Stitch and her are on the way. Thought you could use some backup."

Damn, thank Christ. I nod then make my way back into the house to see Emmie now with one of those huge dress things on, sitting in the recliner that helps you get out of it. She needs the help, especially if she's alone, which is hardly ever now.

Going to her, I once again kneel down and place my hands on her huge belly.

"Love ya, sugar. We got this and please don't worry about any of the shit you mentioned. Told you, when you agreed to be my ol' lady, I'd never let anything bad happen to you if I could help it. And I've kept my word, right? Have some faith, beautiful."

With my head on her lap and Emmie running her fingers through my hair, I start to relax. I'm almost asleep when I hear the rap on the door before it opens up. In walks Stitch with Grace, Damien, and lil' Josephine—or as everyone calls her Joey—in tow on her daddy's arm in her carrier. Fuck, didn't think the entire family was coming over. Damien walks right up to Emmie, hugging her around the shoulders.

"Auntie Emmie, we're here now, don't worry. It's normal to be nervous, but you have all of us so try to relax. I'm going to go take care of Joey in your family room so Momma can talk to you. I love you, Auntie Emmie."

I watch as a huge smile appears on her face. Once again, I thank God for my man Damien.

DINGO

THANK GOD BRICK WANTED TO GET HOME TO HIS OL' LADY 'cause I'm about ready to fall on my ass. After grabbing a bite we followed Fury, Abby, and the two demon boys from hell back to their home. Fury told me to park Presley's car in one of his garages to keep it out of sight.

When we got there Celestina didn't say a word, though her eyes popped out of her head.

"A biker lives here? How much money do you guys pull in?"

Laughing, I grab her hand.

"Celee, Fury comes from money. I mean real old money. Even though his old man disowned him, his grandparents had a trust fund set up for him when he reached twenty-five, I think. And, yeah, we make pretty good money as a club, but it has its ups and downs. Abby also has her own business and she's doing really good. Come on, let's go in, think they're waiting."

When we walk in Bullet, Spitfire, Joy with Everly, and Irons are sitting in the huge great room with my VP and his ol' lady. No idea where the boys and their dogs are. For some reason Celee seems hesitant with lil' shit in her arms, so I almost have to pull her to one of the couches. Abby passes out bottled water before she starts.

"Celestina, you have some options here. You can go to the apartment with these guys, they do have a spare bedroom you could sleep in. Or you could stay here tonight. We have a

couple of suites upstairs and you'd have one whole section to yourself. Whatever makes you comfortable. We're here for you, all of us, and there's no judgment on whatever you want to do. Tomorrow, you, Fury, Brick, Chains, and Stitch will figure out the next steps. Hold on, Tiger, I'm sure you'll be there too, Dingo. I've got to get my hellion twins to bed before they tear the whole goddamn house up. If you decide to stay in our home, Fury can take you and that adorable puppy upstairs and you can pick a suite. And don't worry, no way Spitfire is going to leave you until you make a decision. I can see her little momma coming out. Night, everyone."

Abby gets up, walks to Fury, and when she's within reach, he pulls her down on his lap—and damn—gives her a kiss like one nobody should witness, it's so crazy intimate. I actually look at Celee, who's watching them with her eyes wide before she looks away. When Fury and Abby are done, she pops up like nothing happened and starts screaming for the boys. Celee looks at me with an expression on her face like what circus did she just walk into. I get that we as a group can be intimidating and crazy as shit, so I smile and give her a wink. I'll explain later how bikers are with their ol' ladies.

"So, Celee, whatcha wanna do? Hang here with Fury and his family or take a chance with us younger people? Your choice, sweetheart, but I'm gonna say it before she bursts outta that part of the couch. Spitfire really wants you to stay with us so she can talk all night and share all the gossip with you."

Celee's head shoots up.

"What you say...gossip? Well, that settles it. Sorry, Fury, got to go with the all-night session of hearsay."

Everyone starts laughing as we get to our feet. Irons is carrying little Everly, who's half asleep. We walk through the kitchen and the one large garage that leads to the walkway. Celee's looking around like crazy but says nothing. Spitfire comes up and grabs her hand.

"Sister, it'll all come out in the wash and probably get really ugly. I can see you're worn slap out, so we can gibber 'til the cows come home tomorrow night."

Just from the look on Celee's face she has no idea what Spitfire just said. And to be honest, I didn't get most of it either. Bullet saves us both.

"What Flame is trying to tell you is everything is going to be okay. She knows you're wiped, so why don't you all wait 'til tomorrow to shoot the shit."

Laughing, Spitfire looks at her man with a huge smile on her face.

"Hush your mouth, Tim, before I have a hissy fit. I plum reckon and declare they know what I was going on about. Heavens to Betsy, I'm speaking English."

Everyone starts laughing then Celee grabs my hand, so I look at her. She looks ready to drop, so saying goodnight I gently walk with her to the spare bedroom we keep for guests. To me it's fancy as shit but not sure how Celee's going to see it. When I open the door and turn the light on her mouth drops open.

"This is you guys' spare room? Damn, I need to become a biker. Might need to hook up with cousin Shadow. This is nicer than the guest rooms my father had in the family house. My God, is that an en suite?"

She walks through the huge room with a giant king bed, walk-in closet, sitting area with a sectional, and television area. In the far corner is a small desk. Abby did all of this 'cause none of my brothers or me could or would even think to do it.

I hear her squealing in the bathroom so walk that way.

"There's this huge soaker tub. Can I use it? Please? Haven't taken a bath in forever. Most motels and hotels don't have them and even if they do, yuck, never wanted to soak in a hotel bath."

I know the next couple of days are going to be rough for her because once our club takes on someone's problems we are all-in. Saying that, she's going to have to hold up her end.

"Sure, Celee, help yourself. There's all that shit on the shelf there, use whatever. I'm gonna get something to eat

'cause I can't believe but I'm hungry again. Didn't eat enough at the clubhouse, too nervous. Do you want me to check on you say in an hour or so?"

She nods so I turn and leave, heading back to the kitchen with lil' shit following me. Bullet and Irons are sitting at the island, both with huge sandwiches in front of them. My mouth is watering when Bullet points to the fridge. I go and open it and right in front is another sandwich.

"Flame thought you might be hungry again just like we are. Come take a load off, brother, and tell us everything."

As I sit down, grabbing half of the sandwich, I bite in, taking my time chewing so I can try to figure out what to tell my brothers. Of course, Bullet busts my chops.

"Asshole, just spill. Flame already got the down-low from Shadow. She reached out, calling her to get the scoop. Hey, don't give me stink eye, you know my ol' lady, right? Anyway, we are here for both you and Celestina, no matter what. The little Flame shared with me tells me how truly horrible the poor woman's life has been. Just knowing her dad was Dario Du Luca says it all. Too bad we can't all go back and get a chance at killing that asshole. I mean, just for what he did to Shadow, that low life son of a bitch. That these two women can even function is a miracle. And what's this we hear, one of Celestina's brothers is alive and breathing? Great, just what she needs. Thought Shadow took care of both of them. So what are we missing?"

As I break it down for my brothers, it dawns on me that to get this done right it's going to take a village, and that village is mine because Celestina doesn't have one. In fact, she has no one on her side except me, my club, and her crazy as fuck cousin, Shadow, with her club. Her odds have changed now with both clubs having her back.

After bullshitting with Bullet and Irons, I make my way back to the guest suite, knocking first before entering. I don't see Celestina so I walk toward the bathroom. I knock softly then a bit harder. Getting worried, I slightly open the door and am shocked to see her still in the tub, fast asleep. Shit, now

what do I do? Don't want to invade her space but can't leave her in a goddamn tub all night. I close the door as I reach for my phone, dialing Bullet,

“Miss me already, brother? Need me to come tuck your ugly ass in?”

“Fuck you, Bullet. No, can you send Spitfire down to the guest room? Celestina fell asleep in the tub and I don't know what to do. Yeah, right, motherfucker, I know what to do in that way, just don't want to step over any boundaries or minefields. Thanks a lot.”

In less than not even a minute or so a knock on the door comes, right before a red head sticks in.

“Okay to come in? Gracious me, oh Lord, you decent, Dingo?”

I hear her giggling at her own joke. As I try to explain, she puts a hand up.

“Mind yourself, Dingo. Bless your heart, sugah, for being so worried. I'll just go check on our girl, get her out of the bathtub.”

Then she reaches up to caress my cheek with her little hand. Just that little contact seems to calm me down. After setting up lil' shit's bed and stuff, I go and sit on one of the chairs in the corner with the table set and wait. God, I'm so tired. That is the last thing I remember before I fall asleep, legs stretched out, head resting against the wall, arms crossed at my chest.

CELESTINA

FEELING SOMETHING ON MY ARM, I TRY TO SWAT IT AWAY BUT it keeps irritating me. When I go to open my eyes, all I see is a small person leaning over me with lots and lots of red hair. That shocks the hell out of me, so I go to get up but hear water sloshing. Then it penetrates my slow brain that I'm still in the bathtub with water that has turned cold. I can't believe I fell asleep in here. Damn, I must have been tired.

“Now, don't get your panties in a wad!”

Then she busts out giggling and I have no idea why until she explains.

“Honey, you ain't wearing any britches. Let's get you out of there and in bed, bless your heart. Had a rough couple of days, they plum tired you out.”

Usually I'm a bit of a prude, don't like being naked around just anyone, but for some reason I'm comfortable with Clementine. She's like a breath of sunshine and I've never been exposed to someone like her. All the women in my entire life have been total bitches, trying to always outdo each other. She puts a tiny hand out to help me, so I reach up, and to my utter surprise she's like a little hurricane. Strong as one at least. When her eyes stop on the top of my arms, it dawns on me no one here knows me or what I've been through. Well, except Frank and whoever he told. For some unknown reason this little Spitfire makes me feel safe.

“Well, um, do I call you Clementine or Spitfire?”

“Sugah, you call me whatever your lil' old heart desires.”

“Clementine, my life hasn’t been the best. Shit, it’s been a living hell, a total disaster. Now I don’t say that for pity or shit like that, but to explain why I have so many scars on the tops of my arms. When I was younger, the way I dealt with anything that bothered me was to cut myself. It wasn’t the right thing to do but it helped me from doing something worse, if you know what I mean.”

She’s intently watching me, her eyes never leaving mine as she helps me out of the tub then reaches for a huge bath towel on a rack. Once I’m out of the tub, Hurricane Clementine throws herself in my arms while I barely keep the towel covering me.

“One day soon, Celestina, you and me are going to have a huge glass of my sweet tea while fixin’ to share stories. Now lemme help you git into bed. Come on, girl, reckon Dingo’s just about to raise Cain. I know you’re worn slap out, so let me git. Thank the heavens your little puppy can sleep through a storm over there. I’ll let him in if that’s fine and dandy with you, Celestina?”

Lost from the first sentence I just nod. She helps me find a large T-shirt in one of the drawers while I draw a pair of girly boxers from my bag. She gives me a hug right before she settles me in bed, then walks out quick as can be, but I hear her talking to I’m guessing Frank.

“Dang, my God you scared the fuck outta me, Spitfire. You could have at least given me some warning. She okay? Did ya get her outta of the tub? For fuck’s sake, she could have slipped down, don’t even want to think of that. She need anything before I go to bed?”

All I hear is mumbling then Frank is at my side sitting on the bed. I know this is asking a lot of him, but I don’t want to be alone in this new place where I know only him.

“Would you mind staying with me, Frank? At least ’til I fall asleep. Promise won’t keep bothering you after tonight.”

“You’re no bother, Celee. Let me tell the brothers I’m gonna go down for the night in here, I’ll be right back.”

He turns and heads out. I shift and try to get comfortable on this big bed. Pulling the many pillows this way and that way, can't seem to find the right spot. Me moving and shifting wakes up lil' shit so he walks over to the bed, looking up. Well shit, how do you say no to that? Reaching down, I grab him, pulling him up and under the covers. He shifts a bit, then walks to the other side doing circles until he's partially under the covers up against the pillows. Lucky dog, if only I could do that myself.

I lie on my side so I can pet, I'm guessing, my dog. He's so cute, got to think up a name for him. Lil' shit is what Frank calls him but that isn't a real name. Is it? With me petting him the puppy moves closer to me, snuggling up tight. Between the long day, all the stress of the last few months, and just life, I crash with the dog right under my chin in a small ball against me.

I feel a slight shift in the bed, it doesn't bother me until I hear a squeal followed by a growl and barking. "What the fuck, you little monster. Bite me again and I'll drop throw you across the room. Celee, why the goddamn hell is that dog in this bed? He has his own bed over there in the corner. Why isn't he in that? Don't start spoiling him now, he'll never learn, sweetheart." Not wanting to get into an argument right now as I'm dopey as shit after my soak in the tub, I reach up, grabbing the pup, and turn, giving Frank my back. When I don't hear anything, I glance over my shoulder and feel heat pooling between my legs with just the look on his face. His eyes are taking in my back and definitely my ass. He's unconsciously licking his lips, which puts dirty images in my already overheated brain. Damn, why can't I control this need I'm feeling suddenly? I've gone a long time with no sex or involvement, why now and why him? Turning back, I get a face full of puppy kisses as I feel Frank get into the bed. The knowledge Frank's right there and all I have to do is turn and crawl up his body to straddle him has my body temperature rising up higher and higher. I could lift and plunge down on him in one fluid movement, taking us down that road to ecstasy. Though it dawns on me now is not the right time. First off, what am I going to do with the puppy? Fling him off the

bed? Second, if I'm going to be bumping uglies with someone, need to take care of some 'personal' things in my girly parts beforehand. So when his hand and arm wrap around me, pulling my back to his front, I'm unable to stop the shiver that shakes my entire body. His chuckle on my shoulder sends wetness to my thighs. Oh damn, it's going to be impossible to sleep with him and his hot as fuck body this close to me. For Christ's sake, I can feel his cock between the cheeks of my ass, though he's not pushing it toward me, it's just because he's hard.

“Don't think too much on it, Celee, or it's gonna drive us both crazy. Let's try to get some shut-eye. Tomorrow is another day and Brick wants to go over some of the shit Karma was able to dig up on your father, brothers—dead and alive—and the familia. Night, sweetheart. Night, pain in my ass lil' shit.”

He reaches his fingers to ruffle the pup's hair on his head, which in turn earns him some puppy licks. He leaves his hand between me and the dog. I can feel his breath against my neck, and when his body slips off to sleep, the way he relaxes into it tells me he's totally under.

I lie here for quite a while, trying to figure out why of all the matches I picked Frank. Something, maybe it truly was destiny that we meet and come together. I can only pray my bullshit doesn't hurt him, his brothers, and their women. That would definitely kill me.

Taking a deep breath, hoping to go to sleep, I hear a whoosh right before the worst smell ever hits my nose.

“What the fuck?”

Behind me I feel Frank rousing when he bellows himself.

“Mother of God, what is that horrific smell? Did that dog shit the bed, Celee?”

That thought has me jumping up and over Frank. I can handle a lot of stuff but sleeping with dog shit, never going to happen in this lifetime.

I lean over Frank, who's still in bed holding the puppy. He looks at me shaking his head.

“Perfect example of why we shouldn't feed him people food. Look at his poor face, he's got a belly ache. Listen to his stomach. Damn, he's probably going to get the shits next. I don't have a clue what to do for him either. Give me my phone, sweetheart.”

I do as he asks while I watch and wait as he dials someone.

“Yeah, Bullet, sorry, me again. The pup has sick belly issues and really bad damn gas. He's farting like crazy. Yeah, okay, I'll get up and take him out. All right, tell her to put it on the island and on my way back will grab it. Sorry, brother. Will try my best not to bother you again. Night.”

“Did you interrupt them, Frank? I feel so bad, they've done so much for me already.”

“No, Celee, nothing like that. Hard to believe but Bullet and Spitfire aren't, as she puts it, something like *'sex isn't just the act but a coming together of two hearts and souls.'* Don't know where she's going with it, but in a weird as fuck way I really admire her for sticking to her guns. Bullet said she didn't want to let her momma and meemaw down.”

I knew I liked that woman. She sticks to who she is, what she believes in, and doesn't care about what anyone thinks. Bullet is a lucky guy.

“Well, good, didn't want to be a bigger pain in the ass. What did she say to do for our lil' man?”

He stares at me for a minute or two then shakes his head.

“Told me to put him on a heating pad after we try to feed him some rice. She was gonna grab some leftovers from the Chinese leftovers, just the white rice. Said it should help. Also to get him outside before he blows if he's, as she put it, *'blowing wind.'* Bullet was laughing so hard when he hung up. Women... the fuckin' dog is fartin'. It's natural, why such a big deal?”

Then he gets up, stands there in a pair of boxer briefs, scratching his six-pack with one hand, and rubbing his other

hand through his hair. When he rounds the bed, he leans down and picks up the puppy, who lets a long noisy fart go.

“Oh crap, Frank, better hurry, sounds like he’s getting ready.”

“Shit...”

His last words as he literally runs out of the bedroom and down the hall, all the while swearing like a sailor. I fall back into bed laughing like a loon. The thought hits me, he’s only in his boxers. That has me laughing even harder.

DINGO

SITTING IN FURY’S OFFICE, I’M SWEATING ALREADY. MY PREZ is staring at me, not saying a word. When my phone vibrated with the text notification this morning, all I got was it was Fury, and it read: ‘Get your ass in my office now.’

When I got here, Brick was already here but no one else. So here I am, waiting for what, I don’t have a fuckin’ clue. Last night, I barely got a few hours of sleep. Fucking puppy had the shits so after two, no three, servings of rice and the heating pad, he finally calmed down—well—after about four or five runs outside. Guess I’m going to have to clean that shit up too. Fuck, this is getting worse by the minute.

The door flies open and in walks Karma, Stitch, Beast, and Fury. Right before my VP can slam the door, Chains pushes his way in, a huge smirk on his face when he looks at Fury. Our VP doesn’t look happy.

“All right, can someone tell me why we need to meet at my home for a club meeting? Thought that was what the clubhouse was for?”

We all turn to Brick, who’s tapping his fingers on Fury’s antique desk. Glancing around, we all look beyond uncomfortable. This house is like *Better Homes and Gardens*, not a place for a bunch of badass goddamn bikers.

“Fury, calm the fuck down, will ya? Karma’s been workin’ his shit all night. When he called me this morning at what... 4:00 a.m., I waited to wake all you pussies up at a reasonable hour. Well, Emmie made me wait. Oh, Karma, remind me to

beat your ass for callin' me so early and waking up my ol' lady."

Karma drops his head 'cause he's gonna lose either way. 'Cause if he calls he gets beat, if he don't call he'd get a beat down then too.

"All right, brother, give it to them."

Our technology brother flings open his laptop first, then pushes a tablet on also. He fiddles with both for a second or two then looks up and nods to Fury, who dims the lights. Not sure how the fuck he does it, but Karma has one whole wall that is reflecting what's on his laptop.

"All right, like Prez said, since Dingo told us about Celestina and her connection with Dario De Luca, I've been trying to find what's going on and why anyone would want anything to do with De Luca's kid. To tell you, brothers, how deep this shit is buried, I reached out to not only Raven out in Montana but also to Celestina's cousin, Shadow. Got more from her, surprising."

He shifts and the wall changes as a document is now showing

"When Shadow had all her troubles with Dario and they found his compound in Montana, some of her sisters found books filled with documents. Raven has been going through them when she can, with the help of some of her sisters, to see if they can find anything about what was going on there. One thing stands out that's been a major pain in the Devil's Handmaidens club's asses. The Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood. Now listen, before ya all start beatin' me up, for Christ's sake."

Karma takes a minute to take a huge swallow of his Monster energy drink then gulps a mouthful of coffee. Fuck, this brother is on the road to an early heart attack. And leave it to Chains to say shit.

"Motherfuck, brother, you wanna die just come out to my shed behind the clubhouse, and I'll put you outta your misery

quickly. That shit right there is gonna tear your gut up, not to mention give you the ragin' shits."

That has everyone chuckling or snickering, except for me. Not something I want to think about since I've watched the pup shit his poor little guts out all night.

"What's up your ass, Dingo? No smart-ass reply from ya today? Feelin' sick, brother?"

"Nope, Chains, been dealing with my own version of the shits, so just don't want to think of Karma shitting his guts out too early in the morning. Now can we get on with what he was gonna tell us?"

Chains growls low in his throat and goes to stand, when Brick's hand lands on his shoulder and he shakes his head. Then our prez looks to Karma and nods.

"So after trying to find a common thing that has that asshole group and all the other folks together, it all boils down to one thing... money. Wait a goddamn minute, listen up. Janice DeThorne, Dario De Luca, Pepe 'Juice' Rodriguez, and Cletus 'Slick' Jennings. They all have had dealings with the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood. And let's dig a little deeper now, Janice had a connection to Chains, Winnie, and Jackson. Dario is linked to Shadow, her old man the sheriff, and Celestina. Juice is the jagoff in Nevada who pimped out young girls, including Vixen. And fucking Slick, who had history with Taz, was actually trying to work with the brotherhood when he got busted by Tank. And now his ass is here for what, don't know, but maybe we can use him or what he knows from his time in Montana. Someone in the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood is the one pushing to get a hold of Celestina. It all traces back to them. Now not sure if her asshole brother is part of them or just using them, tryin' to find out. How one brother made it out after the damage Shadow did, can't figure it out. She didn't actually castrate him, but he lost a ball anyway. From what I'm hearing, he's even a bigger prick. I've been hearing rumors the younger brother lived also, but got no proof. Anyway, it all leads back to money. Chains, you know Janice had all those underground tunnels with rooms full of money. The Devil's Handmaidens found a few

bedrooms full of boxes filled with cash in Mesquite when trying to get Vixen's girl Poodle out. And if we push Slick, we'll probably find out where they are stashing their money in Montana. So why would all these deviants hook their sick stars to a racist group? Or what does this group have on each one of these predators? Whatever, they're hungry still and want Dario De Luca's millions, if not billions. I don't see anywhere that tells me Celestina is involved. She's another victim in this vicious circle. The problem is, she knows where her father's money trail leads and ends."

Brick leans forward rubbing his temples. He's looking at the diagram on the wall. Not sure what he sees, all I can grasp are names, numbers, and locations. Whoa, wait a goddamn minute.

"Karma, is that right? How could De Luca have that kind of money here? I don't ever remember hearin' anything about the mafia coming to our town. And we all know if something like that happened here, we'd all know, right?"

Beast stands and walks to the wall, intent on reading something right before he punches the wall, putting a hole in it.

"Motherfucker, what is he thinkin'? If he does this it's gonna kill our mother for sure, not to mention the old man in that dump of an old folks' home."

Oh shit, Beast has a brother who is running a rogue motorcycle club, The Satan's Flaming Marauders. From what I know, which isn't much, his old man was a total prick and treated his family like total dog shit. Beast left and hooked his star to Brick's club, which pissed off not only his father, Mammoth, but his brother, Cain. Fuck, I remember when we had to rescue Beast's mom, Odina, from the living hell her husband, Mammoth, put her in and left her to die.

"Beast, explain your temper tantrum, brother. What did your brother do, and does it have anything to do with Celestina?"

I can hear in Brick's voice he's getting impatient, but Beast is Beast and you just gotta give him his space. When he drops

his head and turns, I see his knuckles are raw and bleeding. That shit is gonna hurt bad later on.

“Brick, fuck, Prez, I had no idea. Dmari, the little prick, has always been a thorn in my side, even before he became Cain. Seems like that old building the Satan’s Flaming Marauders owned about twenty minutes from here is part of some shit. According to this title, it was sold last year to an Elijah Smith. Now that wouldn’t matter if Karma hadn’t tied him to that racist group. For fuck’s sake, he’s one of the elders. I know when we blew their shit up in Montana, never thought they’d make their way here.”

Karma hands Brick something, which has our prez’s eyebrow raise up. He nods to Karma.

“Well, when all that shit went down with Juice, he told the powers that be that the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood swore to get revenge on the two bike clubs from Montana that poked around in their business. And a biker club from out of state. As we all know, we were the club out of state, obviously, along with Tank of the Intruders and Tink of the Devil’s Handmaidens. I think we found our link, brothers. The racist pigs need Celestina because she’s the one person who has the resources of unlimited cash. It would fund their fucked-up cause whatever it is.”

Fuck, my brother Karma is right. She’s a walking financial institute in those racists’ eyes. The money that Dario hurt, abused, threatened, sold and killed to build his dynasty. He set up his only daughter so when he was gone, the rodents and vile human beings would hunt her down ’til they were able to get what they wanted. The God Almighty dollar. *Well, too bad, motherfucker, ain’t gonna happen*, I think to myself. And he left her to die at the hands of animals. He never wanted her to have a life, she was his doll to play with and use.

“So what’s the plan, Brick? I can’t let Celee deal with this herself; she’ll be dead in the blink of an eye. I don’t want anything to happen to any of my brothers or their families either. Fuck, Stitch and Grace just had Joey not that long ago, and Emmie is ready to have your babies, Brick. I could take her away, try and deal with this shit myself.”

Rubbing my hands through my hair, the pressure of everything is weighing me down. Then I hear his fucked-up snicker. I look up to see Chains staring my way, a huge grin on his face. What the fuck is his problem? Can't he see the weight of the world on my shoulders, for Christ's sake.

"I'm glad you find something to smirk at, you crazy motherfucker."

"Yeah, prospect, I do, and watch your fuckin' mouth. Just was thinkin' to myself and wanted to say, *Welcome, brother.*"

"Chains, what the hell are you talking about? Welcome to what?"

"Look around this table, ya dumbass. Stitch, Beast, Fury, Brick, and me. Why do you think our very wise prez ordered all of us to be here?"

"Look, I'm about to lose my mind. I don't know. Have no idea."

"Dingo, we've all been where you are right now. That's what happens when you care about someone, no matter what bullshit they're carrying or draggin' with them. Your Celee caught you, brother, without you even seein' it. We saw it, brother, and are here to support you and protect her. That's what this club stands for, and you've done it enough times for each man here and their families." My head drops to my lap as I'm overwhelmed with emotions. Feeling a hand on my shoulder, don't need to look up to see it's Stitch. I feel the calm and steadiness of what he is. Without words, my brother is able to give me the peace of mind so the raging fear that is building in me subsides a bit. My life as I know it, the clown of the club, sweet butts galore, and just havin' the time of my life drinkin' and fuckin' around is over. And I'm not complaining or sad about it at all.

"Brother, what you lose isn't even a tenth of what you gain. Promise ya, Dingo. Look at what Grace brought to my life and she keeps giving me every single fuckin' day."

With Stitch's voice in my head, I deep breathe before I make a total asshole of myself. Now it's time to figure out

what plan Brick and Fury have come up with to make sure my ol' lady survives all this bullshit so we can maybe have a life together.

ABBY

KNOWING WYATT IS MEETING WITH HIS BROTHERS, I AM IN THE kitchen doing what I love to do: bake. When the men come out, they'll want something to eat and since I don't feel like making breakfast, I settle for sweets. From the first time I met Wyatt or as most know him, Fury, he quickly became my obsession. Never once in all the time we've been together has he let me down. The whole club shit kind of blew my mind at first. I'm not an easy woman to live with, just ask anyone who knows me. Then add my twin boys into the mix and we are a messed-up combination. When he told me about this affiliation with the Grimm Wolves motorcycle club and how he was not only a member but the vice president, I took a step back. If it was only me, that was one thing, but I had the twin boys who were young and my world. Wyatt being Wyatt understood why I needed the time, and he never rushed me. That was one of the things that stood out for me. Back then, the club was into some shady as fuck shit and being a mom, that kind of put a huge red flag up. But like their momma, my boys fell in love with Wyatt after only a few times of him being a part of our family.

When he got hurt, no almost killed, on a run, Brick somehow found me, and told me to get my ass to the hospital because he was calling for me. I decided, right then and there, I'd rather have him in my life for however long than not at all. So here I am now, baking my ass off because we have a situation yet again. I've come to grips with all that is the Grimm Wolves and have even made friends with most of the ol' ladies. So when Celestina stumbles into the kitchen, I can

tell she's in the same spot I was in all those many years ago. Confused, scared and falling in love with a brother of the Grimm Wolves MC.

“Morning. Can I get you some coffee?”

“Oh, hi, Abby. Yes, please, if you don't mind. Clementine told me it was okay to come down. I'm waiting on Frank and his brothers so I can learn what the plan is.”

Unable to hold it in, I laugh out loud. Her icy-blue eyes squint in my direction as her hands form fists. Yeah, this one has some spunk to her, that's for sure.

“Sorry, Celestina, I'm not laughing at you, just at you actually calling them by their real names. I almost had to ask who the hell Frank was because to me he's always been Dingo. And poor Spitfire, she has so many names, not sure she knows which one to answer to.”

Her head tilts as Celestina takes me in. Eyes go from my toes up to my hair. Not sure what she's looking for, but I'm secure enough in myself, I dress now for only me.

“Something wrong with the way I'm dressed, sister?”

She shakes her head, a bit of a grin on her face.

“Abby, you sure don't fit the image of a 'biker bitch.' That's what I've been thinking and why I was checking you out. Sorry about that, I'm not the best with interacting with people, especially women. Though Clementine barreled right in when we met. This whole club thing isn't anything like I pictured. I mean, look at this house and property.”

“Celestina, I know you're smart and have already figured out what the Grimm Wolves club is about now. Well, back in the day, it wasn't like it is now. We've seen our fair share of blood and guts. Saying that, know that when the club decides to help and protect someone, they never go back on their word. If you want a life that is whatever normal is, then listen to what they say. With Brick, Wyatt, Stitch, and even Chains involved, they'll get you to the other side. Just please make sure to remember they have families outside of the club who love them also. Now, I know you have a ton of questions, I can

see it in your eyes. Let's grab a warm-up and some of my goodies and sit on the back screen porch."

My mouth drops open after Abby's first couple of sentences. How did she know that deep inside I'm beyond worrying? My life and all these folks' lives are at stake. Nothing can go wrong and no one can get hurt, or I'll never forgive myself.

"Come on, Talon, don't tell anyone. We're twins, there's a code, bruh!"

I turn just in time to see Abby's twin boys come into the kitchen. Damn, something's up with them. One's face is red and pissed off while the other is smirking. Trouble is brewing.

"Okay, you two hellions, shut up and sit down. We aren't starting our day off with World War Twenty-Seven Hundred, hear me?"

They both look up at their mother smiling. She plops down some juice in front of each of them, then goes to the island, grabs two plates, and piles some of her baked stuff on both.

"Breakfast of champions."

This has them both laughing like the little goofs they are. Glancing back, I see Celestina watching the boys with such intensity it takes my breath away.

"Hey, let's leave the hellions on their own and take a sit on the small patio right out here. I'm sure you have a million and one questions and if I can, I'd love to answer them and reassure you that everything will turn out the way it's supposed to. Can't say it's what you want to hear, but shit, not the first time I've broken that bubble. No, relax, girl, I got you. And fuck, I can't believe how much you and Shadow look alike. Well, minus her friggin' awesome face tattoo."

Again, her mouth drops open, probably because I'm not a judger. By the way I look and dress, most assume I have my nose in the air and my head up my own ass. Wrong. I was raised dirt poor and had to fight my way out of that cow town. Everything Wyatt and I have, this property and the others we rehab and rent, plus his cars, and my stocks, we've worked

hard for everything. And this was Wyatt's idea, his money from the Grimm Wolves work goes into a separate account. He said when the boys are ready for college or buying a house or whatever, the money will help them achieve that goal. And for him that money will be used for good.

I grab Celestina's hand and kind of pull her to the sliding door, opening it up all the way. Hearing her shocked delight, I go to the small café table in the center, grab the remote, and the fireplace starts to flicker. Watching her face is fantastic for my secret ego. I designed this and it's one of my favorite places in the entire house.

After we sit and get comfortable, I tell her she can ask me anything, nothing is off the table. It takes her a minute, but the first question from her is probably what I'd have asked if I was in her shoes.

“Do you think, tell me honestly, the Grimm Wolves club has a chance against the people coming after me?”

So looking her in the eyes, I tell her the only thing I can. And it comes from my heart.

“Abso-fuckin-lutely.”

With that she stares for a quick minute then busts out laughing, which takes the intensity and stress levels down. Then for the next, crap I don't know, forty-five minutes to an hour she asks question after question. I answer as honestly as possible, the only time I leave is to switch my trays in the ovens.

And this is how the guys find us, knee-deep in coffee and sweets, and both of us laughing hysterically. When I catch Wyatt's eye, he winks and mouths, “Thanks, Momma.” I just give him a quick nod while Dingo looks like a little lost puppy.

Speaking of the puppy, I hear the barking before the cutest little dog comes running up from back where the apartment is, Spitfire following him, I'm assuming.

“Sorry, y'all, the ding dong who was supposed to work this shift didn't show, probably living hog wild. My boss is fit to be tied. So I'm fixin' to head to work. Celestina, he's plum

adorable. Got him to do his duty in the back yonder. I reckon he's feeling better, it was—you know—put together and formed. See y'all later."

Celestina

She is gone before I can even grasp what she just said. I look to Abby to see her smiling, along with all the men. Frank has the puppy in his arms while the lil' shit licks his face. Something catches my eye and I see Fury looking at me.

"Celestina, Spitfire's way of speaking kind of grows on you. Takes a while though. She just wanted to let you know shit went down at work and she got called in. Your pup is good and she'll be back later. Now, Brick and I have a few calls to make. Let's say everyone meet up at the clubhouse in two hours, and we will go over what we've come up with. And, Celestina, just 'cause we think this will work, you have final say in this. It's your life, so make sure you know and understand every aspect of what's going on in it. Good. Now, woman, get me a coffee."

I watch as he smiles at Abby, who flips him off nonchalantly. Then he grabs his mug and heads through the wide opening to the island, where there is a shit ton of stuff. I try to concentrate on what everyone is saying but I'm beyond nervous. When Fury returns, he has three mugs. He hands one to Abby, one to me, and keeps one for himself. When I go to take a sip, I smell alcohol so I look at him. He nods so I try it. Holy mother of God is this good. Not sure what's in it but as it travels down it leaves a warm path behind. After just maybe two or three sips, my anxiety is leveling off. Maybe this will work out, only time will tell. With that thought, I know time is speeding by me with all the assholes, racists, and mafia jerks looking everywhere for me. The more I think about it, the anxiety starts to weigh down on my shoulders. Well, until I feel a puppy dropped onto my lap and two strong hands start to massage my shoulders and neck.

DINGO

DAMN, CELEE'S SHOULDERS AND NECK WERE SO FUCKIN' tight I couldn't believe it. When I dropped lil' shit onto her lap, I could just see her anxiety and depression starting to settle in again, even after Fury gave her his special coffee. As part of the Grimm Wolves, I get the pressure of being in a life that isn't normal or all good. I mean, we do both good and bad in our club. We're doing more good now than back in the day, from what I hear, like when Brick's dad, Griller, ran it. And like Celestina, I also get coming from a crazy as fuck family, which can mess with your head too.

The difference between Celee and me is that my chosen family does do good, even if we break laws to get it done. Her father, brothers, and all those in that demented circle do horrific things, each worse than the last. Her father, Dario, having that auction house up in Montana and selling human beings for profit. Sick as fuck. And we never knew that was going on. Fuck, neither did Tank and he lives right there in Timber-Ghost, Montana.

So when I touched her, I just was going to give her a squeeze of support but then I felt her tension. I had to do something, so I started to rub and massage her shoulders and neck. Not sure who was more surprised Celee, Abby, or my brothers. I don't care as long as she's okay with it. Time for everyone to realize I'm more than entertainment for the club.

Now I'm waiting for Celee to put some jeans on 'cause we're heading to the clubhouse to go over the plan. She wasn't happy I wouldn't let her jump on the back of my bike in shorts

and flip-flops. What the fuck? This ain't no goddamn television show about bikers. This is real life and if we go down you'll leave toes and skin for miles. I look up from my phone to see her heading my way.

Well, hot damn, she's got on a pair of skinny jeans tucked into, not sure maybe, Doc Martens, and a Harley T-shirt on. And her hair is braided with a doo rag around her head. She looks hot and so fuckable. But where and how did this happen?

"Before you ask, I see your confusion. Abby let me borrow some shit. Her boots and the T-shirt. Will this be okay, *Dad*, to get on the back of your bike?"

Oh no, she didn't go there.

"Celee, hey, I was only tryin' to make sure you had some protection in case something happened and we went down. Not that I plan for that to happen, but shit, there are assholes out there in cages who never see bikers. If it's too much of a bother, go put on your tramp shorts and tiny shirt with your flip-flops, and you can follow me in my truck. Fuck me, see what happens when you try to be a nice guy?"

I turn and stomp down the stairs to the spare garage where all of us who rent store our shit. I leave Celee upstairs, mouth open, with Tiny, Bullet, and Velvet. Irons is down here already pulling his cover off his bike.

"Dingo, you okay, brother? Face is red as can be. What's up?"

"How do you do it, Irons? This shit with havin' a ol'lady in your life? Brother, it's like no matter what you say or do it's the wrong thing. I'm so fuckin' pissed and really shouldn't be. It's not like Celee and I are really together. For Christ's sake, haven't even fucked her yet. And now our entire club is goin' to bat for her and she acts like I'm being a dick to her when I'm lookin' out for her. Whatever."

Doc stops what he's doing and walks over, leaning against Tiny's bike which is ready to go.

“Really, Dingo, what’s got your balls in a vise? Is it the woman or is it something else? You’ve not been yourself for a while now, and I just thought maybe I’d give ya some time and room to work it out. But it ain’t working out, so talk to us, brother.”

“Remember when we all were single and used to do shit together, ride, get drunk, get laid, and cause chaos? Now look at the brothers. Brick is in deep with Emmie, Beast with Kathy, Fury and Abby, Stitch with Grace, you, Irons, with Joy, even our baby Bullet with Spitfire. Fuck, Bad Dog is hanging with Beast’s mom, Odina. I’m starting to feel like a third wheel in my own club, and I’m not even patched in yet. Not sure how you feel, Doc.

“I think everyone just sees me as the carefree guy who’s the clown of the club. Always there to provide a laugh. I don’t belong here with you guys, and it sucks. I’ve put in so much time and lately been thinkin’ of just pullin’ it before it gets any further, ya know, patch and rocker with the tattoo.”

Irons stares at me for a minute then looks around the garage before his eyes land on me again.

“Dingo, gonna be honest. What you’re going through is part of being an adult, motherfucker. Life continues to move and rock all through our lives. We can’t just pick the fun shit; it don’t work like that. I mean, since I started prospecting I’ve seen the changes in the club too, and in myself. Then when the brothers start talking about the old days where it was way different; I’m glad I’m here right now. This is my time to be with the Grimm Wolves. Just like you. Nothing in this life comes with everything hunky-dory like my Everly says. It’s ups and downs. Gotta learn to manage, then follow ’cause it does that you’re whole entire life. And even if you drop and don’t get patched in and grab the ink, do you think these men are gonna let you go without a fight? Dingo, think for a second. They are not your club brothers, but they, no, we are your family.

“How do you think Brick, Stitch, Chains, Karma, Bad Dog, Fury, Puma, and Bubba feel. Especially Bubba, he was around when Griller, Brick’s old man, was prez. Don’t get

stuck on the itty-bitty shit, brother. Look at Joy and me. For years we struggled but if not for the club and, hate to give him credit... Chains, we'd have never gotten to this point. You don't talk about it much, but your years before here weren't good. No, not askin', just stating an observation. Don't start comparing people to those in your past who fucked you up. Judge each person on their own merits and, more importantly, how they treat you.

“Now I got to get my ass in gear. Brick asked me to do something before the meeting and don't want to get a fine or an ass-chewing because it ain't done. Dingo, if you need a friend, you have many in the club, brother.

“Two are standing right in front of you, ready to help any way Doc or I can. I mean, my daughter can't say enough about her Unce Dingo. And as far as Celee, give her a break too. Her life has been one fuckin' roller coaster. Now she has no one or nothing. Well, that ain't true, she's got Shadow, which I can't tell if that's a good or bad thing. See ya in a bit, brother.”

I stand back as he walks over to his bike, starts it up, lifts his kickstand, waves at us, and takes off like a bat out of hell. Doc gives me a swat on the arm then walks over to his bike. Swinging a leg over the seat, he starts up his bitchin' bike then hits the throttle and follows Irons down the driveway. The side door to the garage flings open and Celee is standing there, tears still on her cheeks. Oh fuck, not the goddamn tears. She must have been running 'cause she hangs on to the handle for dear life.

“Oh, Frank, I thought you left me. Don't be angry with me. Not now. I owe you an apology for upstairs. My nerves are shot and I have no idea if I'm coming or going. You've been my only constant since we met in Texas. Please don't give up on me. Not sure I could take that. Lil' shit couldn't take it either if you left us.”

I walk toward her, grabbing her around the neck, and pulling her up to her toes.

“Celeee, either stop me or I'm gonna kiss you now.”

She stands a bit taller so I lower my head, and instead of crushing her lips, I nibble on them at first. Then I softly place butterfly kisses from one side to the other. When she moans, I press our lips together and start to explore with only my lips on her face. Kissing her eyes, the tip of her button nose, down her jaw, and over the apple of each of her cheeks, watching her the entire time.

When I get back to her lips without touching them, I lick the seam. When she opens that's when my hunger takes over. I kiss her passionately like I'm a starved man. Which I am, hungry for my Celee. Her taste is fresh and, as we learn each other, I pull her as close to me as possible. Just when my hand starts to move the T-shirt up so I can touch and feel her skin, I hear that evil, raspy voice of Chains.

"Well, for fuck's sake, either get a room or go to your room. There are kids around here, asshole. And don't you have a meeting to get to, brother?"

When I pull away from Celee, she's smiling and looking over her shoulder. Not wanting to, but I do it anyway, I look over her shoulder to see Chains standing there, his hands crossed over his chest. I pull away and turn, throwing my arms in the air like *what*. That's when he flips me off and continues to walk to his tricked-out, favorite blue bike.

Knowing he's right and time is ticking, I turn to Celee and grab her hand, pulling her to my baby. I explain to her the concept of riding after she tells me she's never been on a bike before. Then I get on after putting her foot pedals down. I offer her an arm and walk her through how to step up. Show her where to place her hands, and how to hold on tightly to me.

When I start my Harley, it's loud as fuck. As soon as I shift and start to take off, she's laughing. Well, guess Celee likes bikes. To give her a real ride once we're down the driveway, I grab the throttle shift and we take off like the hounds of hell are after our asses. Throughout it all Celee is giggling and laughing the whole way.

BRICK

AFTER FUCKING AROUND ON THE PATIO HAVIN' A COFFEE break, Fury and I make our calls, also getting some confirmations. I thank my VP for letting us meet in his home. Then I follow him out to where Abby and the twins are in the yard fucking around with their dogs and that puppy Dingo and Celestina brought back.

“What, Abby, did they drop the mutt on you for today?”

“No, Brick, the boys offered to doggy sit. So they will play with him, feed him, and clean his poops up. And for that Dingo is going to pay each one twenty-five dollars. Something I'm not paying them to do with our own dogs. Though not a bad deal, I almost said I'd do it for forty-five but I've got an appointment with a new client later.”

“Momma, remember what I said, don't go anywhere by yourself. Take someone with, one of the prospects or even a brother.”

I say my thanks and goodbyes before a fight starts. Those two love hard and fight harder. Before I get on my bike I text Emmie to see if she's okay. Not even a minute later I get a yes and a bunch of silly emojis. Now for the hard shit. If this don't work, it can not only get Celestina killed but could wreck our club and all the other folks who are gonna be involved. We'll see what everyone's input is and get something together so we can put an end to the assholes hounding that poor girl of Dario's.

The ride from Fury's to the clubhouse isn't long but it's a nice day, sun is out, and I love being on my bike. It puts me in a good mood, which I'm sure all my brothers will be happy about. Now, usually, when we have something like this come up, it's only members in Church. But since this is Dingo's shit, I told Fury to make sure all the prospects who aren't working a job get their asses there also. So we're gonna have a full house. Probably won't have the meeting in Church but out in the gathering room. It's bigger and more comfortable. Running through what I'm gonna have to explain in just a few, by the time I realize how close I am to the clubhouse, I see I got me a tail. Son of a bitch. They are hanging back in an older Buick or Oldsmobile, not sure. Two in front, and one in the back, so three. Well, this is gonna get interesting for them in about four minutes.

As I turn down the street to the clubhouse, I hit the throttle and zoom down, finger on the horn. By the time I hit the gate, the car has sped up but is still back there. Stallion and MacGuire, along with Slick, are at the gate. Slick is opening it and the other two prospects are armed like they're going to war. Which we are. I turn in and immediately downshift and hit the brakes. Before the gate is closed and the brothers are behind the brick shed, I'm off my bike, leaning it on its kickstand next to the shed, and I'm right there with them.

The car slows down and the asshole in the back's window comes down. I see the barrel of some kind of assault weapon right before he starts firing. The car comes to a complete stop and the front passenger window opens, and I see something get flung out. When the gas container explodes, it doesn't do much at all. Then I hear pipes coming down the street. Fuck, whoever is coming down is going to be like sitting ducks for these assholes.

"Fire and make sure you hit these assholes. Now, come on, let's get this done before our brothers ride into a hellfire."

I don't know if it's the sound of guns firing or the assault weapon, but suddenly I don't hear the pipes making their way to us. I pray whoever it was heard and either stopped or turned around so they could warn the others.

One of the prospects hits the passenger in the head as brain matter is all over half of the window that didn't get rolled down. Two tires are flat on our side. Fuckers would be smart to just give up and get the hell outta here. That's when I hear it. Bikes, and sounds like quite a few. I watch as they round the corner and right in front is Chains, a maniac smile on his face. Son of a bitch, I thought when they adopted Luna May he'd calm his ass down. But as usual, he leads the pack.

The bikes split in two rows, flying by the car. At first, I think *what the fuck*, but then the car blows sky high. Well, damn, someone threw a grenade. Slick sticks his head out, face white and full of sweat.

“Boss, you okay?”

I think to myself, *Tank owes me for letting this asshole into my club*. Especially since he's not a biker, though he's trying to prospect and seems to be holding his own so far.

“Yeah, Slick, I'm good. Go open the gate.”

Well, so much for a boring meeting.

Dingo's face gets any redder, we'll have to put a call in to Grace or Spitfire 'cause he might be havin' a heart attack or stroke with all the screaming he's doing. Fury lets loose, which is rare for my VP.

“Enough, for Christ's sake, Dingo. Do you really think we'd put Celestina in harm's way? Brother, get your head out of your ass. No, keep it shut for a minute, you're giving me a goddamn headache. All Brick is suggesting is if we play this right, once Celestina does her part we can make a big production of her dying at their hands. No, we aren't going to let her die, you stupid fucker, but this way they'll leave her alone because—yeah, that's right—she's dead. Take a few breaths, Dingo. Celestina, what are your thoughts?”

I watch her eyes move to the huge screen that has our Zoom callers on it. One being Shadow. Celestina looks at her

cousin's head tilted to the side.

“Zoena, what do you think? Could it work? I mean, if one of my brother's is still alive and I play the part right, then just maybe, to the world, I'll die.”

“Well, yeah, cuz, I think it'll work, but Brick ain't told you everything. I'm gonna head down and when the time comes I'll be you. Yeah, I know my face, but there is shit out there to cover tattoos, so if I use that then I could pass as you. Celestina, nothing against ya, girl, but not sure you'll be able to do this. You have to always have alternate plans and your mind needs to be going through each option. Also, you ain't got the dark inside like I do.”

I sit a bit taller when Celestina looks my way with the icy-blue eyes that are just like Shadow's.

“Brick, do you think I could do this? Be honest, because I'd rather not have Shadow taking unnecessary risks for me.”

The Zoom call is muted as we watch Tink trying to calm or control Shadow. Not sure what set the psycho off, but I'm glad she ain't here at the moment. Tank's face shows up on the screen.

“Brick, let us call you back in like five minutes, brother. Got a fuckin' situation.”

Then it goes dark. I look to Karma, who raises his shoulder up and shuts the screen down to sleep. Everyone is still waiting on me to answer Celestina. So I do.

“Well, to answer your question, first, I have to ask you how much you want your freedom. Second, there are stipulations to this plan, as we mentioned. Are you willing to draw out as much of your father's wealth as possible? And then are you willing to use it as we suggest? If you can work with us, yeah, I think you could do it. Would I feel better if Shadow did it, yeah definitely. Hey, give me a second, woman. First, she can fuckin' kill someone in like two point five seconds. Can you do the same? Didn't think so. Second, she's in the life and like she told you, got to rely on your instincts.

Though this is your life we're talkin' about so if you want it, then yeah, you could do it."

I listen as others throw in their two cents while drinking my now cold coffee. That is until Slick comes in the room with a huge pot of hot coffee. He comes right to me, warms me up, and then walks around the room. Once he's gone the talks start up again. Karma gives a whistle and points to the television. So guessin' our Montana friends are back. And yeah, there they are and everyone is still breathing. Tank takes a seat.

"Sorry, Brick, didn't mean any disrespect. Had to put out a family fire. I'll explain later. So is Celestina up to it? Well shit, darlin', you're right there. Child, you think you can work this to your advantage? It would set you free to live your life without always looking over your shoulder. Personally, I think you got it in ya, girl, but do you believe that?"

I watch as Tank talks to her like one of his own daughters. Guess more happened in Texas than I thought or heard about. Though Tank, over the years, is becoming a softy when it comes to abused, damaged, or neglected people, especially women. Just like his daughter, Tink, who's sitting in one of the other chairs. Shadow is nowhere in sight.

"So we all agree this plan is probably the best we have. Oh, Tank, we had a bit of excitement right before the meeting. I was followed in by three assholes in an older car. They are literally dust in the wind, but keep your eyes open. They could have been Celestina's past tryin' to catch up or maybe some of the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood. We've had some vandalism around town with that Nazi racist graffiti shit goin' up. Had Karma put some more cameras around so we can keep an eye out. The town needs our protection and in return, as you well know, they leave us alone while having our backs. I'll check in with you later, Tank. Thanks for your time. Tink, take care, darlin'. Tell Noodles I said hi and to give me a call."

Once disconnected, we sit and go over every detail, option, and alternate plan. We're at it so long that Stitch calls in pizzas. All I want is to get this shit done so I can go home to Emmie and make sure she's okay. Each day that goes by my

stress levels go up too. The last doctor visit they set a tentative date for the Cesarean, but she said something about pressure and babies' positions it could cause Emmie's water to break at any time. So I've been making deals with the devil. Anything to keep my ol' lady and our babies safe.

CELESTINA

BRICK TOLD ME TO GO TO HIS OFFICE AND HE'D BE HERE IN A second. Frank was speaking with Fury so Bubba was the one who escorted me. At first it was weird but he's one of the friendliest men in the club. Even after I was seated on the couch in Brick's office, Bubba sat on a chair and told me stories about Momma Molly. He even told me stories about some of the prospects, including Frank, Bullet, Doc, and Irons. Some of their antics were hilarious so Brick walked in to the two of us laughing like crazy.

"I'm afraid to ask what's so fuckin' funny in here. Bubba, whatcha tell her? Celestina, his stories are all bullshit all the time so don't believe any of his goddamn lies."

That just makes me laugh harder. The way all these men kid and joke around is something I'm not used to. My father ran a very tight ship and laughter was nonexistent and punishable if someone slipped and did laugh. Even when it was just the family, no one even smiled, let alone laughed like these people do. Bubba stands up, giving Brick a look before shifting his eyes to me.

"Girl, know that this one here is a bullshitter. I don't ever lie and if you don't believe me, ask my wife 'cause she's been with me longer than your pretty self has been on this earth. Now, we'll get ya taken care of so you can finally find yourself and be able to have a life without always looking over your shoulder. And you're always welcome at our home if you need anything. Now, I'm gonna get my ass on the road so I can

get home and spend some, shit—what did she call it—oh yeah, ‘quality time’ together.”

Once Bubba is gone I feel a bit weird. I don’t know Brick at all and Frank is nowhere to be found. Brick walks around his desk, sits down, and leans back, arms behind his head. Not sure what that is all about.

“Celestina, darlin’, now is the time for you to come clean. Now, don’t give me those big blue eyes that has my prospect outta of his mind tryin’ to protect ya. Or any bullshit about how you have no idea what’s going on and why anyone is stalking you. I had Karma do some checking and, surprise, he found three banks that hold accounts for your father that have just about been emptied out. So without all the female drama, just tell me the fuckin’ truth, and remember I’m not naïve like Dingo. You might be able to pull the wool over his eyes but, Celestina, I’m older and much wiser. So talk.”

Knowing that my time is running out, I try to think of what and how much to tell Brick. Before I can even put together a thought or two, the door flies open and there’s Frank with Stitch and Irons at his sides. Stitch looks to Brick.

“Sorry, Prez, he’s more slippery than I thought. Between Irons and me, we’ll be able to drag his ass out.”

“No, it’s all good, Stitch. Dingo, put your nosy as fuck ass on a chair, might as well hear this with me. Brothers, you can leave, we’re good.”

Feeling Frank’s eyes on me, I start to fidget on the couch. Fuck, thought it would take them longer to track my steps. My life sucks.

“Dingo, we were talkin’ and your girl here was ’bout to open up and explain to me why she about closed three of her father’s accounts and what she did with the money.”

Frank jumps up, arms in the air.

“What the fuck, Brick? First, who dropped dead and left you in charge of what she does in her own life? She’s had enough of people bossing her around, telling her what to do.

Two, you got your facts wrong, if Celee had done that she'd have told me. Where'd ya get your information from?"

Brick opens a folder on his desk, shifting papers around until he finds what he's looking for. He tosses three pictures across the desk at Frank. They're photos of me at three different banks. As soon as Frank looks at them his face goes white then ruby red. His hands form into fists. But he doesn't say a single word, just stares at me with empty eyes. Got to try and get my shit in order if I expect any of the Grimm Wolves to help me with the rest of my plan. More importantly, I don't want to lose him.

"Frank, first, I'm so sorry. I didn't lie, just kept a couple of things to myself. Believe me or not, but I planned to talk to you before we started to work this plan of yours. Brick is correct, I went to three banks that my father had accounts in. The amount is like a spit compared to his net worth. But I needed the money to—well—I needed it to take care of those who gave their entire lives to Dario De Luca. He never even took the time to arrange for these people in case of his death, which doesn't surprise me at all."

I take a deep breath just as Brick stands, walks to a mini fridge, grabs three waters, and hands each of us a bottle. Opening mine, I quickly drink a third of the bottle. Neither of them says a word, just keep watching me.

"So I didn't think taking money out of the accounts would be a red flag since I left some in there, and because I had no idea anyone was even watching those accounts. These were some of the small accounts and I left one hundred thousand in each account but took the rest out. It was a different amount at each bank, but the total amount is close to three million dollars. Yeah, I know it sounds like a lot, but it doesn't even scratch the amount I need."

"What in the fuck do you need so much money for, Celee? And why did you keep it from me? Am I learning that not only are you playin' me and my club, but you're a fuckin liar to boot? Guess you saw a naïve, stupid son of a bitch to get you the help you needed, right? A dumbass guy who you could suck in with those blue eyes and bitchin' body to help you

with your family drama when you realized you couldn't do it alone. Well, this idiot asshole has his eyes open now, so you do whatcha gotta do, and I'll do what I have to, Celee. I'm sure Brick and the brothers will still be on board to help, but this is where I say sayonara. The club won't mind I take a back seat on this one, as they all know I hate liars. Brick, thanks for the eye-opener, Prez. I'm outta here."

Before I can say a single word or try to explain to him my mission further, Frank stands and walks out of the room, slamming the door behind him. I spin around, giving Brick stink eye and all he does is raise an eyebrow. What a big asshole and jerk.

"I know you don't know me, Brick, but that was an asinine way to ask me why I took the money. Putting me on the spot like I did something wrong. If I was doing it for myself, would I be looking for help to save my own life? Did you even give it any thought before you just threw me under the bus? Thanks, dude, for ruining the one good thing in my life. President of what, being a jagoff maybe, because your human skills totally suck. I'm going to reach out to Shadow, see if I can go to Montana and maybe her club can help me figure this shit out. Before I go though, since you asked so nicely, Brick, yeah, I did almost empty three bank accounts of my father's. But I didn't use them to travel the world, buy a fancy sports car, or even buy designer clothes. I spent time trying to track down the people who have worked for my family for years. My father never cared about a single soul in his rotten life. He treated his staff like they were his slaves, and I hate that word, but he used it regularly around the staff.

"I've been able to find quite a few past employees. I used that blood money he was saving to help those people get some security in their lives. It will never take away how he treated them. And, Brick, he was one mean son of a bitch. He'd give housekeepers, cooks, and maids to his men or he'd keep one or two just for his perverted needs. My brothers followed in his footsteps too. I want to try and make the rest of their lives as good as I can, or at least better than what they had during their employment with the De Luca family business."

I stand to leave, and before I can even make it to the door, Brick is in front of it blocking my way. I give a quick thought to kneeling him in the balls, but he must have read my mind because he literally crosses his legs and shifts to the side a bit. That earns him a smirk.

“Celestina, let’s talk a minute. Maybe I was wrong. Emmie tells me all the time I’m a rotten son of a bitch because I’m always judgin’ people harshly, and usually she’s right and I’m always wrong. She’s always saying I don’t think before I open my fuckin’ mouth. Case in point.”

He looks so sorry, almost like a dog that got caught doing something wrong. No, he can keep sniveling a bit more. After all, he didn’t talk to me or even ask any questions. He ran right over me, just like my father always did. That thought has me lifting my shoulders higher and looking him directly in the eyes.

“Yeah, Brick, your Emmie is right. She’s just pointed out the obvious, you’re a total asshole and prick.”

Before he can reply, his phone starts ringing. When he looks at it, his face goes gray, and his hand starts to shake, which has him dropping it. Quickly I bend down, pick it up, and swipe to answer.

“Hello, Brick’s phone.”

“Um, hi, is Brick around? OWWWWwww.”

“Yeah, hang on.”

As I go to hand him the phone, we hear the worst noise ever, a woman in agony. Then another voice.

“Emmie, give me the phone. Woman, give me that goddamn fucking phone before I have to take it from you. Brick, this is Esmeralda, you need to meet us at the hospital. Emmie’s water broke about twenty minutes ago, but she just told me three minutes ago when a really bad contraction hit. Hey, Brick, you there? Motherfucker, your ol’ lady is in labor, get your biker ass to the hospital. We’ll meet you there.”

Again I take the phone, placing it on the table next to me for a minute. Brick is standing there frozen. Great, the badass

tough biker doesn't know what to do. I open the door and scream for help. I hear boots hitting the floor like a herd of cattle coming down the hallway.

In front are Chains and Stitch. Good. When they all abruptly stop, seeing me in the doorway, Brick still frozen so I don't hesitate.

“Emmie's water broke. Someone named Esmeralda is going to get her to the hospital. He froze and hasn't moved or spoke since she hung up. You guys need to get him to that hospital to be with his wife. Move your asses, she was in a lot of pain, never heard that before, kind of like she was in pure agony.”

I watch as Chains walks right up to Brick, leans back, and cracks him across the face, not once but twice. It brings him out of whatever, as he returns the swing with a fist, knocking Chains backward, right into me. Between his weight and the force of him falling backward, I have no time to do anything but put my arm out to steady myself, which is the worst thing I could have done. The noise hits my ears right before the pain in my wrist. I let out a small, short scream. Stitch, Karma, and Tiny are at my side immediately. Stitch looks at it then shakes his head.

“Celestina, damn it, sorry, but you're gonna be going in too. Looks like that big fucker broke your wrist. Tiny, pick her up, get her to the van. Let's move ass. Chains, you clumsy fucker, get Brick in the van, don't want him on his bike. Let's move, Grimm Wolves, we got three new members to welcome to our family. And we got to get this pretty lady fixed up.”

Before I know it, I'm in Tiny's arms being carried out. When we get outside, I don't see Frank's bike anywhere.

“Don't worry, Bullet was putting a callout to Dingo. He'll meet you at the hospital. Whatever is going on, Celestina, I know my brother. Give him a chance. From the little I heard; Brick was being Brick. In his own way he was trying to protect not only Dingo but the club. We'll get this straightened out and get you in a safe place in your life, promise. Oh, here comes Brick. He's gonna be a total asshole so be prepared.”

Not even three minutes later Tiny drives off like a fuckin' maniac, as Brick uses every swear word and some I haven't heard. Finally, Chains cracks him upside the head. I just lean back and try not to cry from the pain. My life is so fucked up and it isn't getting any better, no matter what I do. And now I'm going to have a cast or something on my wrist. Again, wrong place, wrong time; story of my life.

My head starts to ache and my stomach is queasy with the motion of the van. I pray it doesn't get any worse, not sure I can take much more.

DINGO

I'M SITTING ON ONE OF THE SECTIONALS IN THE APARTMENT, with a bottle of Jack in my hands. Right when I put it up to my lips, my phone goes off. Son of a bitch.

“Yeah, what the fuck you want, asshole?”

“Nice, Dingo. Get your loser ass to the hospital, pronto. Brick's ol' lady is in labor. Our prez kinda panicked, and when Chains tried to get him under control Brick punched him, which had him falling backward. He fell on Celestina, who put her arm out. Stitch thinks she broke her wrist.”

“Motherfucker, why didn't you lead with that? I'll be there as soon as I can.”

Slamming the bottle on the table, I jump up, going to grab my bike keys, but stop. I've already had a beer and one gulp of Jack before I had to take a piss. Better take my cage. I go to the key thing Spitfire hung up for us to put our keys on and grabbed my cage ones. Running to the garage, I see Abby and the twins coming out of their garage. When she blows the horn, I wait for her to drive the short distance.

“Dingo, jump in, we're heading to the hospital and figure that's where you're off to. Talon, get in the back seat with Rogue. No, don't even, Son, you're already on my shit list, now move your ass. Get in, Dingo, now.”

Not gonna fight with Abby, she can get tricked out. I wait for Talon to get out of the front and then I get in, buckling up. Abby waits for her son to get settled then she literally pushes

the gas to the floor. Motherfucker, she drives worse than Chains and Bad Dog together.

“What the hell happened, Dingo? I thought Emmie was on bed rest. Thank God Esmeralda was there, the thought of her going through this alone makes me cringe. What’s up with Celestina? Karma said she got hurt somehow? And why the fuck are you here and she’s at the clubhouse? You being a prick, Dingo?”

I turn toward the back and look at both boys, who have smirks on their faces. Rogue just shuffles his shoulders but Talon being Talon can’t hold his tongue.

“Better you, dude, than us. She’s always on our asses. Every single minute of every single day.”

“Really, Talon? I’m right here, Son. Now you’ve got toilet duty for a week.”

“Naw, Momma dearest, we have a maid so no one, not even you, clean toilets in our house.”

Rogue gives his brother an elbow and shakes his head. Talon just grins. Until Abby pulls the SUV over and puts it in park. When she turns, both boys put their hands up. What the fuck? Abby hits those boys? No way.

“Did you just mouth me, boy? What have I told you about that smart-ass mouth of yours? It always gets you in trouble. Give me your phone. No privileges for two weeks. Nope, don’t want to hear it, we don’t have time. Your auntie Emmie is in trouble and Celestina got hurt. So get your head out of your ass, Talon. Grow up, will ya, Son?”

I wait for a minute or two but have to ask.

“Abby, you hit the boys? I mean they seemed shell-shocked when you turned their way. Not that it’s my business, but well, grew up with shit like that and it can fuck a kid up.”

She looks at me for a brief second before her eyes go back to the road. In a soft voice she tears my heart out.

“Dingo, no worries, brother. I’ve never raised a hand to my boys and never will, and if someone else did they’d never

breathe another breath. And I get you too. Grew up with a monster and know what happens to a young child when that kind of shit happens. Thanks for caring enough about my boys to ask. Now, enough, need a minute to calm myself so I don't kill that little brat sitting in the back."

GRACE

I GOT THE CALL FROM MY OL' MAN AND ALMOST SCREAMED. Poor Emmie. I tell my staff that I'm going to the emergency room and leave. Knowing Esmeralda is bringing her in doesn't give me any peace of mind. She's a lunatic and drives worse than any of the guys.

I'm pacing back and forth when I see her SUV pull up to the front doors. I call for help and rush out. Esmeralda is already out of her vehicle, giving orders, and swearing like a sailor. When she sees me she lets loose.

"Grace, she—fuck—there's shit all over the seats. It won't stop, it's like she's constantly peeing on my fucking seat."

She shuts up when the passenger door opens and the orderlies try to get Emmie out, but she's in the middle of a contraction so she just sits there holding tightly to the grab bar in front of her. As I check her out, she's white as a ghost, sweating and breathing shallow. Not good. Her hands are shaking, holding on as she tries to breathe. I push my way to the front.

"Emmie, sweetie, I'm here. Come on, you got this, in and out. Breathe in and out slowly. How quickly are they coming?"

"Grace, my God, you did this twice? What is wrong with you? I think every four or five minutes, but it takes that long in between before all the pain subsides then another one starts. I can't go through labor, Grace, that's what the doctor told Mike

and me. Oh my God, did someone call Mike? And my suitcase, I didn't grab it.

Esmeralda comes from the back with a teal suitcase wheeling behind her. I hear Emmie sigh, so at least that part is taken care of and she doesn't have to worry about it. Poor Emmie, the next twenty-four hours or so are going to be extreme holy hell on her.

Just as she's being wheeled in, I see a blur of a van take the turn into the hospital parking lot at about fifty miles an hour and on two wheels. Great, the clowns are here. Now I'm going to have to try and keep their antics from the other patients because a bunch of nervous Grimm Wolves can be loud, obnoxious, and pains in the ass.

Tiny pulls in right behind the ambulance and barely stops in time. I actually thought he was going to plow into the back of it. Before it stops, the passenger door flies open and a crazy-eyed Brick jumps out, running right to me.

"Grace, where is she? My God, it's too early. I thought they were gonna cut the kids out. Are they okay? Where the fuck is she? Come on, Grace, not the time to play around. Where is my goddamn ol' lady?"

Before I can try to calm him down, security comes rushing out the sliding doors, probably thinking they are going to save me from a raging biker. I put my hands up, and they suddenly come to a stop. I look over my shoulder and there is Francis. Of course my six-foot-six-inch man would make anyone stop in their tracks.

"Hey, Bobby, we're good here. He's an expectant father of triplets so he's losing his mind, that's all. Thanks though for having my back. Have you met Francis? No, didn't think so. Francis, this is Bobby, our security, and Bobby, this is my better half, Francis."

Francis gives me a smirk before he approaches Bobby, and with his soft voice and calming ways has our security guard eating out of his hands in like no time at all. By this time I hear the growl of a bunch of bikes pulling into the lot. Then I see Abby's huge SUV and again she pulls in behind the club

van. I know she's barely stopped before Dingo is out and running toward us.

"Grace, how's Celee? Is it bad? Where is she, for Christ's sake?"

Since I have no idea what he's blabbering about, I turn to Brick who turns to Chains. Never have I seen the man look sheepish. Then I see Tiny lean in and help a dark-haired woman out. My God, it's Shadow without a tattooed face. Same icy-blue eyes, dark hair, and damn, what the hell happened to her wrist? She's got to be in excruciating pain. I move toward her at the same time Dingo goes to move. I hear a thud and when I turn Dingo is hanging off of Francis's arm. Wow, didn't know he could do that.

"Prospect, I get your worked up, but don't you ever go to walk in front of my ol' lady ever again. Next time won't be so easy on you. Let Grace look at Celestina, dude. She's in some big time pain. And I'm believing some of that is on you, asshole. So step back for now. Yeah, let her know you're here, but that's it."

As I'm assessing her wrist, I feel her body stiffen as Dingo comes closer. He's hesitant, which isn't him at all, but not my business.

"Celee, I'm here, you'll be okay, promise. We'll talk later, 'kay, sweetheart."

I hear the breath she lets out. Oh oh, something is going on here.

"Frank, nothing to say. You didn't give me a chance before so I get it. Wash your hands, I'll find my way. I'm thinking asking the Grimm Wolves club for help isn't the best way for me to get this handled. Between you and Chains, you've beaten me body and soul, not much left. Grace, sorry, I'm ready."

As we get her pushed into the hospital, I look back and Dingo's face is one of a broken man, not the usual club clown he's always been. I give Francis a look then glance back at

Dingo. He gets it by giving me a nod. Then I go in to take care of my friend and a lost woman.

Walking toward the waiting room, I stop and lean against the wall. It's been a hell of a day for sure. Celestina is still in surgery with her wrist. That is after Fury worked his magic because she couldn't be registered under her given name as, according to him, the hospital would have become a war zone. He didn't tell our administrator that, just she was being protected. Since the Grimm Wolves brothers are responsible for the two new units in this hospital, she was registered under a name Fury gave them.

During that they had to actually give Brick a diazepam, or as most know it, Valium. He was causing such a ruckus even Emmie told him to shut the fuck up, which had everyone stop in their tracks. She's not the kind of person who swears and barely ever that word. And she screamed it so he walked out of her room and slid down the wall right outside of it. Once we got him the medicine and got her prepped for her Cesarean surgery, everyone started to calm down.

I'm the club liaison between them, Emmie, and Celestina. Now I'm on my way to give everyone an update. The room is filled with every member and prospect of the Grimm Wolves, along with most of their family members. I managed to get one of the larger waiting rooms just for the club, as they were scaring everyone in the regular waiting room.

Walking in, I see Abby with her twins sitting with my Damien and Francis, who's holding our daughter Joey. The prospects are in one corner while the brothers are in another. The women are in the other corner. Spitfire is serving food to everyone. Go figure, our Southern belle is showing love in the form of food. When she sees me, a huge smile shows on her face as she raises the coffeepot my way.

I make my way to Fury, who's walking toward Abby. Everyone stands and all eyes are on me, but no one says a

word. My eyes shift to Francis who looks to the far corner, which is where Dingo is. I give him a nod and he walks over to him, grabbing his arm, pulling him over to the group.

“All right, Celestina is still in surgery. From what I understand she’s going to end up with a plate and some pins. But we’ll see, they said another forty minutes to an hour. Emmie and Brick are the proud parents of triplets. Brick asked I say nothing more until he comes out with their news. They’ll go to the NICU until they can breathe on their own. No, they are good, each is just under five pounds, God bless Emmie. She’s fine, a bit groggy, but happy as a lark. Brick is a wreck, so you guys are going to have to help him with it. That’s all I got for now.”

Fury raises his arms and everyone shuts up. I always wondered how one of the quietest and calmest brothers could do that.

“Grace, we’re gonna stick around. Anything we can do for either of the women? How ’bout for our brother?”

“Fury, just be there for them. Now for Celestina, I know she has no one, so maybe try to make her feel part of this family. She was feeling really low before the surgery, so much the doctor was worried but had to proceed to give her a chance of full mobility. Also the bill is going to be outrageous.”

“I got the fuckin’ bill. And she’ll come stay with us so we can take care of her.”

Looking at Chains, I’m shocked. Winnie grabs his hand as Jackson pats his shoulder. Hmm, a story there for sure. Then I hear the growl.

“No, Chains, you don’t get to decide for Celee. If you weren’t such a dick she wouldn’t be in surgery, you big clumsy ass. No, she’s not livin’ with you, she’s with us. We got her.”

“Really, Dingo? Then why was she so upset talkin’ to Brick after you stormed outta there? You, brother, are the asshole, not me. Yeah, it was an accident. I didn’t think Brick was gonna knock me on my ass with that right of his and had

no idea she was directly behind me. ACCIDENT, you son of a bitch. And I'll take care of her because it was my fault. You intentionally hurt her being a dick and acting like a bratty kid. That's on you. We'll leave it up to her where she lives. You gonna pick up her bill too? Didn't think so, prospect, aint' got that kind of money, do ya? Thought not. Grace, just let me know who I pay, please."

He turns and his wife and husband grab him into their special three-way hug to give him support. I feel for Chains, accidents happen. If he wasn't such a huge guy, maybe she wouldn't have fallen and tried to break her fall. They'll figure it out. Francis walks toward me, and Joey already has her arms out toward me. I look down my scrubs but all I've been doing is running between rooms, so I'm good. Grabbing my daughter, I hold her close, taking in that special smell all babies have. Damien comes up next to me, hanging on tight.

"They gonna be okay, Grace?"

Looking at my man, I smile. He's a goof at times.

"You already know the answer to that question, Francis. They both should be okay. Celestina is the one who's going to have a hard road ahead."

I hear a ruckus and turn to Brick walking in, hands in his hair. He looks exhausted but his eyes are shining. Everyone rushes to congratulate him, but he puts his hands up.

"No, motherfuckers, all the congrats go to that woman in there. She's beyond awesome. Emmie gifted me with three children, all healthy. We have two boys and a little princess. We had already picked names before so here goes. Our first son is William Nicolas Jones. Second boy is George Wyatt Jones. And our little girl is named Hazel Grace Jones. Emmie wanted us to honor those who matter most in our lives. So my dad and mom and the four of you who are special in our lives. Not that the other pain in the asses in here aren't, but I mean, I've known Bubba all my life, just about. He's like a second dad to me. Fury and Chains are truly like brothers and, Grace, she feels the same about you. Well, that you're like a sister. Emmie's okay, just nervous, you know... three babies. I'll

walk you to the NICU to see them through the glass, if you want.”

The big yell of yes, yeah, and totally brings a huge smile to his face for a second. Then he looks off to the side where Dingo is standing. He walks over, putting his arm around his brother’s shoulder.

“All I got is I’m sorry. Didn’t think, which is fuckin’ usual for me. We’ll fix this shit with you and your Celee, you have my word on it. Now, ya want to come see my kids, Dingo?”

Dingo looks up with wet eyes. Brick swears then pulls him in tight. Fury tells everyone to give them the room and before I leave, I hear Dingo softly tell Brick he’s happy for him. Family comes in all shapes and sizes, that’s for sure.

We all wait until Brick comes out, followed by Dingo.

“Well, let’s go meet the three new pains in my ass.”

With that everyone laughs, as Francis grabs Dingo close on one side and me on the other, with Joey in my arms. Damien is walking next to Dingo holding his hand. I know why too. My son has such a soft heart.

CELESTINA

STRUGGLING FOR SOME REASON, I CAN'T OPEN MY EYES. I CAN hear beeping and some noise from a distance, but that doesn't help me to know where I'm at. Then I feel someone holding my hand, a finger moving on top of it in a soothing motion. From deep inside I know it's Frank. When I saw him outside, yeah, I'm in the hospital, that's right. He came up to me all worried and, me being me, I pushed him away.

Though after I thought about it for a quick minute, he didn't do anything that I wouldn't have done in the same situation. I should have told him everything, including me taking that money out gave the vultures what they needed. A way to get at my father's fortune.

My head is pounding and I don't have the energy to go over this with Frank. Only good thing is my wrist doesn't hurt at all. When I try to wiggle my fingers that hand squeezes gently.

“Celee, sweetheart, don't move your fingers. Come on, I know you're awake. Please open those gorgeous eyes so I can apologize for being a total fuckup. I was wrong, should have let you talk, but instead acted like a spoiled brat who didn't get his way. Please, sweetheart, don't give up on me. I swear to God I'll try to do better. Celee, don't give up on me. I promised to help you and that's what I'm gonna do.”

There is no way in hell I can stay mad at him when he sounds like a little boy. Then it dawns on me. Frank's childhood was bad, his words. He never really had a family 'til the Grimm Wolves, and even then he's put himself in the

position of the clown. I lightly squeeze his hand and he drops his head on top of our hands. My fingers of their own will tousle through his hair. That's the last thing I remember before the dark drags me under.

Next time I'm conscious, Frank's still holding my hand, head on our hands. I think he fell asleep like that. This time I'm able to open my eyes, feels like someone wiped the goop from them. My room is getting dark, though the drapes are still open. When I look around, I let out a scream when I see a figure in the corner, sitting. When it stands, I squeeze Frank's hand, who in turn jumps outta his chair. Then the little light above my bed shows it's Chains.

“Well, damn it, Chains, you scared the crap out of me.”

All he does is look at me with those deep emerald eyes of his. It's like he can see into my soul. Before either of us can say a word, Frank gets into Chains's face.

“Motherfucker, get out, you ain't welcome in this room. See Celee lying there? She's there because of you, asshole.”

I can see the restraint in Chains's entire body, and I know it's a matter of seconds before he kills Frank.

“Frank, come here. No, please come here, it's not his fault or anyone's. It's an accident, that's all. Come on, sit and let's see what Chains wants, okay?”

Frank is also on the verge of losing his shit. I know it because I'm talking to him and, barely listening, he gives in and walks back to me, sitting next to the bed. He gently grabs my good hand. We both wait on Chains, who is looking at our entwined hands.

“Dingo, is right, it's my fault. With all the shit that's been on Brick's mind, not a smart move to crack him across the face. And I also forgot about his right cross. Not why I'm here. Celestina, I've already talked to the administration, they will be sending the bill to me, it's handled. Also I will take care of your physical therapy if needed. Now Winnie, Jackson, and I would love you to stay with us during your recovery, but that

asswipe there said you'd rather stay where you are. That choice is yours, just want you to know you have options.

“Finally, and I know this will piss you off, but I put a call out to your crazy as fuck cousin, Shadow. No one thinks it's a good idea to have you trying to lure all the assholes out in the open with your injury. Fury and I talked about it, and Jackson put his lawyer two cents in. Shadow is on her way here and the purpose is she will play you. No, don't argue, please. It's for the best. And we need to get this done sooner rather than later. This will allow you to recover without any stress in your life. Well, that only works if you drop this son of a bitch.”

Knowing Chains is just trying to poke at Frank, I again keep a firm grasp on his hand. I take a minute or two to think on what Chains said.

“Chains, thank you, but I'm fucked. As soon as I was registered as Celestina De Luca my death warrant was signed.”

“This isn't our first, how do they say, yeah, this ain't our first rodeo. You were registered under an alias.”

That makes my heart happy because it gives me a bit of wiggle room.

“Awesome, thanks. I know I'd have never thought of that. So yeah, not happy about Shadow being involved. She's been through enough already. But I'm sure she's on her way so nothing I can do about that. As far as staying with you, can I get back to you on that? Frank and I have some talking to do, but I'm already exhausted so need to take a little nap first. And, Chains, quit beating yourself up, could have been anyone. You didn't purposely throw me across a room, did you? Nope, that would have been my father, back in the day, so let this go. I appreciate your kindness, tell Winnie and Jackson thank you from me.”

With that he gives me a chin lift, Frank the finger, and leaves the room quietly. Way too silent for such a large man.

“How does he move like that, no sound at all?”

Frank looks at me then at the door.

“That’s what Chains does. Not sure how, Celee. That was nice of you to let him off that easy. You could have asked for anything and he’d have given it to you.”

“I know but, Frank, listen to me, first, he’s your club brother and, second, he’s a member. Chains didn’t mean for me to get hurt. Drop it, will you please? Now we need to talk but I’m seriously in need of a nap. Can we talk when I wake up again?”

He says nothing, just nods. Grateful for that, I close my eyes, and I bet in under two minutes I’m out again.

Feeling myself wake up, I know it has been much longer than a quick nap. The room is dark except for the little light off to the side. I can hear Frank’s little snores and when I tilt my head, he’s still in the uncomfortable chair, head down on our hands, asleep. Poor guy, once I let go of my Italian grudge-holding ways, it hit me that Frank had a right to be upset, hurt, and pissed off. Now, I got to be the woman I’ve been working to be.

“Frank, hon, wake up. Hey, Frank.”

On my second call of his name, I raised my voice just a little, but he’s up and reaching behind himself. When he pulls out a gun, I almost crap the bed.

“Frank, it’s me Celee. Calm down, hon. Everything is okay, just put that away before someone walks in and you get in all kinds of trouble for killing a hospital employee.”

His head snaps and he stares at me for a minute or two, then that handsome smile of his appears.

“You called me hon. You called me hon.”

That’s all he says. But the grin gets bigger.

“Hon, that’s what you called me. Does that mean you’re not mad at me anymore, Celee? Please, sweetheart, tell me you’re not mad.”

How is this guy lonely and single? He's hot, kindhearted, a gentleman, and a biker. What is wrong with the female population around here? Just as I go to answer, a young nurse comes in and turns the light on. When she sees me she smiles, but when she looks at Frank she gets all red in the face and shy like. Do they know each other?

"Hey, Dingo, long time no see."

"Hi, babe. How ya doin'?"

What? Babe? Who is this guy and where did Frank go? With my mind trying to figure out what's going on, I missed part of the conversation.

"Are you going to be around later? I get off shift at eleven or midnight at the latest. We could maybe hang or get a drink?"

Am I invisible? Does this girl really think he's hanging around because we're just friends? Well, actually, that's what we are. I mean, any fooling around has been innocent and we've not even gotten naked and sweaty. Maybe Frank thinks we're just friends. I can feel my jealous bitch surfacing.

"Hey, little nurse, you're here to take care of me not hook up with the hot bikers. And, you, get out for a while. Go walk it off, Frank."

When he smirks, I know he can see I'm jealous. Dang it, I'm showing all my cards. He walks to my bed and leans down, not whispering at all.

"Celee, if I'm walking anything off it's because of you. I like grown women, not little girls."

I hear a humph behind him.

"Really, Dingo? You didn't have a problem when me and Denise spent the night in your room at the clubhouse?"

Wait... did she say, her and another girl? I look to Frank to see he's watching me. He shrugs his shoulders and I laugh. What else can I do? We both have our pasts. Though if we're together, he's had his last threesome because I don't share.

“Frank, that is never going to happen with me, just saying.”

He leans down, giving me a soft intimate kiss on the lips.

“You’ll be all I need.”

Then he turns and walks out the door, leaving me with his pissy friend.

DINGO

SCRAMBLING SOME EGGS WHILE THE BACON IS FRYING UP, I push the toast down. I've already cut up the fruit so Celee can have a good breakfast before I leave to go work at the apartment building. Slowly, we've been remodeling each unit when they are either empty or we have a place to put the renters until we are done. This has been an ongoing project but with Abby in charge, it's finally getting finished. And, man, are they looking awesome.

Hearing a noise behind me, I see Bullet scratching his ass before he sits at the island.

"Hey, brother, mornin'. You okay?"

"Yeah kinda of, Dingo, Flame volunteered us to help out Emmie and Brick with the triplets. Think I might have gotten ten or fifteen minutes of sleep all night. How do babies do it? Never really settle down. And to have three, damn, Brick had no idea what he was getting into, for Christ's sake. And my ol' lady had a blast telling Emmie how eventually, after we get married, we're going to have at least six kids. SIX... Is she friggin' crazy? No way is that ever gonna happen. Anyway, smelled bacon. Did you make enough for me or is it all for Celestina?"

Feeling for my brother, I grab the toast that popped up, put a tab of butter on each piece, throw some bacon alongside of it, and two spoons of scrambled eggs.

"Here ya go, Bullet. Looks like you could use it. I'll grab ya some coffee too."

“Wow, thanks, brother, ’preciate it. Smells great. And yeah, I’m starving.”

He digs in as I start to put more bread in the toaster. I feel her before even knowing she’s in the room. Turning, I see her getting settled next to Bullet, grabbing a strawberry to munch on from the bowl I left on the island.

“Mornin’, sweetheart. Did you sleep good? That body pillow help at all?”

I spoke to Spitfire yesterday, telling her how much trouble Celee was having sleeping with how her wrist is bandaged and braced. She told me to get her a body pillow, so I did. She looks more rested, I think.

“Yes, Frank, surprisingly that pillow helped me sleep through the night. Well, that and the pain pill. Hi, Bullet, you look beat. Not feeling well?”

“Nope, Flame thought it’d be a great idea to babysit for Emmie and Brick so they could get a good night’s sleep. Emmie even pumped the milk so we could feed the rugrats that shit, I mean, well you know. Yeah, learned a bit too much about pumps, breast milk, and all kinds of other things I had no interest in. Oh, I was telling Dingo my ol’ lady thinks we are gonna have at least six kids. Crazy, isn’t it?”

I can see Celee has no clue what to say so she nods and just smiles. I butter her toast and after piling food on a plate, I place it in front of her. Then I grab her coffee, putting cream in it for her. When I go to put it in front of her, I can’t believe it, her plate’s almost empty. What the hell? When I look at Bullet’s his is full and they both start laughing. *Oh, ha ha*, I think to myself.

“What’s on your agenda for today, Celee?”

“Not much, Abby invited me over for lunch so I guess that. By the time I’m out of this thing and in a cast I’ll not be able to fit in my clothes. All each of you do is feed me.”

She’s laughing as she says it. Well, until the doorbell rings. We all look at it because no one rings our doorbell ’cause no one comes here. Not to mention Fury’s property has security

and a guarded gate. And we all hang out together and live here so my hackles are up, as I can see so are Bullet's. I motion for Celee to come around the island and to kneel behind it. Then Bullet and I go to the door, both armed. The doorbell goes off yet again, so I carefully, from the side, look out the eye peeper and almost shit my pants. Fuckin' dark as fuck skull face is lookin' back at me, icy-blue eyes so familiar, but colder, staring right at the peephole. Looking at Bullet, I mouth, "Shadow," and he drops his head. We put our guns in our pants and I open the door.

"Motherfucker, took you long enough. What the fuck, you two hold hands and skip to open the door? Shit, get outta my way, here to see my little cuz. Nice job you Wolves did of keeping her safe. NOT. Come on, Panther, you too, Big Bird. Get your asses inside."

Turning, I see both men slowly walking in, giving me the eye. Well, what the fuck? Celee and I have spoken to her lunatic cousin numerous times and explained everything has been straightened out.

When I hear the squeal, I push Bullet outta the way and head toward the kitchen. When I make it with the three other men on my heels, I skid to a stop. Celee is in Shadow's arms and to my utter shock both have tears on their faces. Celee I understand, she leads with her heart, but Shadow? Didn't know she had a heart. Looking around, I do my best to play host.

"Any of ya want coffee or maybe breakfast?"

Avalanche steps forward, smiling.

"I could use some coffee and breakfast, if you're offering, Dingo."

This seems to break the ice as everyone moves to the large table and I start to make more eggs, while Bullet pulls another slab of bacon out. Celee is eating her food with her one good hand, which I know is ice cold, so I go and grab it to warm it up. Shadow raises an eyebrow but Celee knocks her good elbow into her. Watching them, it's actually eerie. Bullet says what's on my mind.

“Can’t believe how much they look like each other. I’d never say it to Shadow, but wonder if Dario could be her father too.”

I shrug and concentrate on making breakfast. The rest we’ll deal with later. Well, until Shadow starts with her usual goofy bullshit with Avalanche.

“Damn, Big Bird, is that all you do is eat? I know you’re a huge-ass bird but, dude, you need to watch it or you’ll be too big to fly.”

She starts cackling while Celee tries to hide her giggle with a cough. Avalanche being Avalanche smirks and flips Shadow the bird. As I watch all the interaction, it dawns on me how much I’ve kept myself removed from the closeness some of these folks have. Even though Shadow and Avalanche seem to have a love/hate relationship, I’ve heard the stories about when Shadow had her thing and how Avalanche almost died for her.

I’d die for any Grimm Wolves brother, I think. Never been in that situation. Chains I know would do it for anyone of us, no hesitation. Sometimes I wonder if I’m meant to be a Wolf. I’m kinda close to the prospects but probably because we live and work together. Bullet has Spitfire, Tiny has his girls and sometimes Sweet Pea, one of the sweet butts. Doc has his dad to take care of and Irons has Joy and Everly. Velvet, Diesel, Stallion, and MacGuire I don’t know a lot about, and Slick—who knows what the fuck he is and why he’s here—though he’s been hooking up with one of the newer sweet butts.

Hearing my name, I look up to see like eight, no ten, eyes watching me intently. Shadow has a smirk on her face and Celee looks worried. The guys look like, ya know, guys.

“What, did I miss something? Why ya all lookin’ at me like I’ve got two heads, for Christ’s sake?”

Avalanche coughs while Bullet looks the other way. Panther barely shakes his head while Celee just stares. Great, it’s something Shadow asked me and now she’s gonna give me shit. But to my utter surprise, she tilts her head, watching me for a minute or two, then just drinks her coffee for a second.

“Dingo, I asked if you know when we can go over the new plan? I know Brick has his hands full of babies, but can we meet with Fury and Stitch sometime today? I’ve got some time to get this done, but we’ve got shit going down back in Timber-Ghost that I’ve eventually got to get back to. So let’s try to figure out the best way to finish this shit, so my lil cuz here can finally have a life and hopefully get laid. You up for that, prospect?”

Celee actually spit her food out across the island, while both Avalanche and Bullet start coughing then choking. The only one it didn’t affect was Panther. He just looks at Shadow, a slight smile on his face.

“Nizhoni, be nice. This is serious business and Celestina’s life is depending on how this works out. Unless she wants to change her looks and move to Montana.”

Celee bites her lip, looking at me. *Is that even an option?* I think to myself. Then to my surprise, I guess it is, as Celee replies to Panther.

“Panther, I’ve thought about it, but no matter how much you pay a plastic surgeon, someone else can pay more to obtain information about your transformation surgery. Not to mention their employees, who have to be a part of the procedure. And I kind of like my face, though had no idea growing up I shared it with Zeona. Or as each of you know her as Shadow or Zoey.”

Shadow again gives Celee a shoulder bump and I’m glad Celee is building something with her cousin. I think they both can use it for different reasons.

“Shadow, once I’m done with breakfast, I’ll get a hold of Fury.”

Bullet is on his phone, probably trying to get a hold of Spitfire, when he looks up at me.

“Brother, I just sent Fury a text. He said he can be here within the hour so we should all hang. He wants me to reach out to Stitch, Beast, Karma, and Bubba to get their asses here too.”

“That works. Gives the women time to visit before we get down to business. Any news from Montana and the Thunder Cloud Knuckle Brotherhood, or have they not resurfaced?”

As Avalanche starts to fill me in on the shit with that asshole racist group and how they were working with Juice in Nevada, I make a plate for myself. When I place it on the island, I feel something warm, and when I look up, Celee is looking at me with a smile on her face. She mouths, “Thank you,” and gives me a cute grin. That right there makes my heart feel good, which actually scares the shit outta me. Looking to the side of Celee, Shadow is watching and she mouths, “Hurt her and you’re dead.” That almost gives me a heart attack. Shit, I’m fucked either way. All I can do is my best to make sure Celee comes outta this on top.

FURY

AFTER REPLYING TO BULLET, I HIT CHAINS'S NAME ON MY contacts and listen to it ringing.

“Yeah, brother, whatcha need?”

“Chains, we're going over the plan at the prospect's apartment in about an hour or so. Need you there but a warning, Shadow, Panther and Avalanche are already there. Wanted to give you a heads-up.”

“Fury, got no problem with the men, but if Shadow throws attitude, that's a different story. Though I've heard she's mellowed a bit since she hooked her star to Panther, we'll see. Need anything else?”

“No, that should do it. What's going on over there? I can hear Luna May laughing.”

“Yeah, we just showed her the jungle gym thing we bought for her. She can't decide what she wants to do first. She's such a riot, dude. And Winnie is beside herself, so that means so are Jackson and me. We've come full circle, ya know?”

As I shoot the shit with Chains, I find myself shaking my head a lot. He's been through hell then fought his way back, so I'm glad he's finally enjoying his husband and wife. Now they have a daughter, so I see good things for him in the future. We agree to meet at the apartment, which for me is a walk across my driveway. I'm working in my garage on my 1967 GTO, so I've got some time to get this carburetor rebuilt or close to it.

I'm praying this plan works because, otherwise, Celestina is going to either be on the run, end up getting plastic surgery, or going up to Montana and living on the ranch. And if she picks option number three, I think we might lose a prospect. Dingo is gone on her, no doubt. I'm glad, been worried about that brother. Know his old man was a prick and his life before the Grimm Wolves was shit. Just hope he's feeling like he has some hope and direction now. If he wants, Brick and I can talk to Tank, see if he can finish prospecting with the Intruders. He's pretty tight with Enforcer, so he won't be walking in blind and totally new. First things first, got to get Celestina out of this fucking mess she made, even though she was trying to help others. Seems like that's the story of life, when you try to do good things, sometimes it bites you in the ass.

I hear a commotion at the door right before Talon and Rogue come barreling ass right to me. They stop, I mean, not even a foot from where I'm working, then go on the other side of the GTO and scrunch down. Oh fuck, what did these two kids do now? I don't hear it at first, but as she gets closer I can hear Abby screaming at the top of her lungs. Fuck, they had to really mess up 'cause my ol' lady usually is calm and collected.

"Okay, we don't have much time, break it down for me. What did you two get into now? She's pissed."

They look at each other and when Rogue nods at Talon, he then looks at me, taking a deep breath first.

"Okay, it's like this, Mom wanted us to clean our rooms and also scrub down our bathrooms. Well, the bedrooms were bad enough but shit, man, the toilets are gross. So we threw everything in our walk-in closets and then put all the towels and shit in the hamper. Squirted that bleach stuff in the shower and in the sink. Filled the toilet with cleaner too."

"So why is your mom just about to commit hara-kiri on your asses?"

"Well, we used so much bleach we both started coughing, so we opened the windows to get the smell out, and started spraying that air cleaner stuff."

“Okay, Talon, get to it.”

“Well, we forgot we lit candles and when we sprayed the air spray shit, it kinda exploded and made a total fuckin’ mess. I think Rogue started a towel on fire. The fire alarm thing was beeping, so we ran.”

Motherfucker, did these two morons burn our house down, for Christ’s sake? As I’m running out, Abby is almost to the door.

“Momma, is the house okay? Did they start it on fire?”

“Well, kinda, but it’s okay. I took care of it. Where are my two hellions? Going to send them back to hell, I’ve had enough of their bullshit. They make the mess but don’t want to clean it. Done, Wyatt, you hear me? I’m fucking done.”

I grab her, pulling her close. She’s so mad she’s shaking. Son of a bitch, and Brick wanted to go through this shit and, damn, he’s got three. Lunatic, that’s what he is.

“Momma, explain how you took care of it, please?”

“Hot Stuff, I grabbed the towel that was on fire and threw it in the tub that smelled like a gallon of bleach was dropped in it. Thank God it didn’t start on fire. Then I turned the shower on and put the towel out. Now, where are they?”

I think for a second but decide they need to face the fire, no pun intended.

“They’re hiding behind my GTO. All I ask is don’t get any blood or body matter on any of my cars, Momma. Whatever else you do, Chains is on his way so he can get rid of the evidence.”

I say it loud enough I know the boys hear me, because they come flying out the door, tears running down their faces.

“Mom, we’re sorry. Please don’t let Uncle Chains get rid of us. We’ll do whatever punishment you think we deserve and won’t complain or bitch. I mean whine. Please, you know Uncle Chains can be vicious, mean, and he don’t like either of us anyway. Always says we’re the devil’s spawn.”

I can't help it; I break out laughing as Abby cracks me in the back of the head. When I turn, she's got a huge smile on her face.

"Come here, boys. Now."

They hesitantly walk over to their mother, heads down.

"Look at me when I talk to you. Now, yeah, I'm a bit pissed with the bleach, toilet cleaner, and clothes thrown in your closets. But the fire... what the hell, boys? If you would have told me, probably would have been a little pissed, but this shit, you leave me in a house with burning towels? That's how much you care about me, not to mention all of Wyatt's and my stuff, along with yours? We don't have a money tree, boys. Everything we have, both of us have worked very hard for. So you're going to go in and clean both bedrooms and bathrooms, including the mess you made. Then I want you to clean the guest bathroom. After that I want your phones, video game thingies, and all other electronics. You've lost them for the weekend, if not longer. And if I hear one complaint, then you won't ever get that shit back. Wyatt, anything you want to add?"

"Yeah, Momma, for the next month or for however long Celee is here, you will both be on puppy shit duty. That means every day I want you to rotate and pick up dog shit. If I see any in the side yard where lil' shit goes we are going to have a problem. Got it?"

They both stare at me open-mouthed, until Rogue puts his foot in his.

"Why do we have to clean up after a dog that ain't even ours? We don't even clean up after our own, Mom does it."

Abby clears her throat and he looks at her.

"I mean *isn't* ours."

"Rogue, because you have no concept of anything because you're spoiled rotten. Son, don't roll your eyes when I'm standing right in front of you. For that you will also clean up after our dogs, help your mom with grocery shopping, and carry that shit in and help put it away. And will be responsible

for putting the dirty dishes in the dishwasher. Anything else you want to run your mouth off about?”

He glares at me, stink eye and everything, but keeps his mouth shut. Talon’s eyes are going to his brother then to me and back. I know how much it’s killing him not to stick up for his brother but glad he’s learning. Now to finish this shit up.

“Boys, if your mother and I didn’t care, we’d let you both do whatever the fuck you want. I know, Abby, but they’re older now, and swear worse than you and me together. For Christ’s sake, they hang out in a motorcycle club where guys’ every second word is a swear word. Time and place, boys. Now, do either of you have anything to add or say? We’ll listen as always, as you both know. In this house live four people and we talk shit out around here.”

Rogue looks at his brother then puts his head down.

“I’m sorry for being an idiot. Can’t talk for him, but I’ll do my punishment and here is my phone now. Didn’t think and I panicked, so my bad. I’ll start cleaning now.”

He turns and starts walking away when we hear loud pipes, which I know are Chains’s. Talon’s face goes white as a ghost and it dawns on me he thinks Chains is here because of them. Abby is smiling like a loon. He looks at both of us and starts running to the house, passing his brother on the way. Both of us break out laughing and that’s what Chains walks into.

“So hey, Abby, what the fuck is so funny and why are the boys running into the house when usually they are running out?”

Abby gives him an abbreviated story and his eyes go wide before he runs his hands through his hair.

“Fuck, I hope to Christ Luna May doesn’t get any ideas, though she’s been mouthy for a little kid. Not sure where she gets that from.”

Abby and I look at each other and she snorts, while I try without any success not to laugh. Chains gives us a weird look and I have to.

“Dude, you serious? She gets that from you.”

He grins 'cause he knew that already. I go and close the shit down I was trying to work on as Chains visits a bit with Abby. Then together we make our way to the prospects' apartment just as I hear other bikes coming down the driveway.

CELESTINA

SITTING IN THE GREAT ROOM OF THE APARTMENT, MY ANXIETY is getting the best of me. First, Frank was nowhere to be found again. Second, all the prospects either came out of their rooms or started showing up. Couches and chairs got moved or shoved as tables were set up, where they came from, I don't have a friggin' clue. The only women are Shadow and me.

Then Fury walks in with Chains, and the air in the room changes. All the prospects get quieter and seem to be watching what they are saying. Then Beast, Stitch, Bubba, and Karma walk in with Puma. As everyone starts to find their seats, it's weird to see all the brothers who are members sitting, while the prospects seem to be hanging closer to the couches. Just as Fury gets ready to start, we hear boots hitting the floor. When we turn, Brick and Bad Dog make their way to the group. Fury is shaking his head at Brick.

“Dude, told ya I had this shit. Who's with Emmie and the munchkins? Please tell me she's not alone at home.”

“Fuck, Fury, think I'm an imbecile? Esmeralda, Joy, and Kathy are there with Slick. Why that fucker is there, no idea, but he can help with whatever the ol' ladies need. Now, let's get this shit done.”

Fury nods to Karma, who again flips his computer open, then turns on the huge television that takes up the entire wall. As he fiddles with his electronics, no one says a word. I look around, when I get to Chains he's looking between Shadow and me then back again. My cousin must have felt his stares because all of the sudden, she blows.

“Jesus Christ, Chains, you act like you’ve never seen two women who look alike. For fuck’s sake, get a grip, will ya? We got more important things to worry about besides your weird obsession. Motherfucker, don’t make me put a call out to Winnie on your ass.”

All you hear is everyone either gasping or taking in a breath as they watch the disaster who is my cousin and her mouth. I’ve learned this quite quickly. Avalanche is snickering, just as Panther elbows him hard in the chest. Avalanche looks so brokenhearted that I can’t help but giggle. That gets every pair of eyes on me. I look down, hoping they’ll just move on.

“Karma, brother, ya bout ready with that shit?”

“Ya, Prez, here we go. So I’ve been keeping track of the area around here since we had that issue of the drive-by. In town, our hangarounds, Timmy and Ralph, have been keeping an eye out for cars or SUVs from out of town. Just the other day, they saw a couple of vehicles from New York drive through, stop for gas, and then head out toward Eastwood. Ralph jumped in his truck and followed, which I didn’t tell him to do, but thank God he did. Remember that old area right in Eastwood where the strip mall was, by the school that closed down? Well, there’s a bunch of assholes hanging around there. He couldn’t get a count but he said a lot. Now I take that with a grain of salt ’cause we all know both Timmy and Ralph love their weed and are always high.

So during the night, I ran my drone out that way and took some pictures, though they ain’t the best. Take a look at the television.”

As everyone turns that way, I’m squinting my eyes to try and make out what I’m looking at. As Karma starts flipping through the pictures, my heart suddenly stops. Blinking my eyes, I try to see if I can open them and unsee what I just saw, but Karma has moved on to the next one.

“Wait!!!! Karma, go back. No, go to the one before this one. Oh my GOD, it can’t be...how the hell did he survive?”

Everyone is looking at me but when Frank's arms come around me, pulling me into him, I grab on tight.

"Celee, what's wrong? Come on, sweetheart, take a deep breath. In and out."

"Move the fuck outa the way, Dingo. Give her to me, for Christ's sake."

I hear both Shadow and Frank going at it, and I've just had it.

"Fucking shut up, both of you. My goddamn life is on the line and you two are arguing like a bunch of punk asses. You want to know what's bothering me? That guy standing by the car is my brother. Yeah, Zeona, guess he's alive. And next to him is the old dick I was supposed to marry to make my dad's organization stronger. He's someone big in the mob. If I remember correctly, my father called him a Consigliere, like that would impress me. He's old enough to be my father. The thought of even being close to him has me puking in my throat. Damn, if he's here then they know more than any of us thought. I only took some money from those three accounts like I told you, Frank, and I didn't empty them. I explained all that to you after my surgery."

"What money, Celestina? You touched the accounts when? Why? What the hell were you thinking?"

I look at Zeona to see she's in full Shadow mode. Well, I can get a bit pyscho too.

"Well, *Shadow*, I was trying to right a wrong, or many wrongs. You were on the receiving end of Dario De Luca so you, out of everyone, should know what I've been trying to do. I took money out of the accounts and made it my mission to find past employees of my father's and tried to set them up. He treated people worse than he did you or me, so take that in. Maybe I didn't think it through, but what's done is done. Brick, Fury, I'm sorry, can we get back to what's going to happen next?"

Fury looks again to Karma, who nods, then jumps right in.

“Celestina is correct, that’s one of her brothers. From what I could find out, they managed to stop the bleeding and save his miserable life, though he’s one ball short. Now, let me share this with you. As I was taking pictures with my drone, look what I caught. See that, about a quarter mile away in that barn? See that tall, thin hunched-over bastard? That’s Elijah, one of the elders of the Thunder Cloud Knuckle Brotherhood. And the rest of those dicks are also part of that group. Seems like the Italians and the racist assholes ain’t playing well in the sandbox. If we can figure out some way to get them pissed off and then just kill each other off, that would solve part of our problem. Maybe have Celestina call each group, promising to give up the accounts if they let her live. I’m not you, Brick, or you, Fury, just a thought.”

I watch as both Brick and Fury look at each other. Since I don’t know them at all I can’t read what their faces are saying, but everyone seems to relax a bit.

“Karma, brother, good to see you’re thinking outside the box. And that might work, so thanks. Anything else we need to know before we get to the bones of everything?”

Karma shakes his head and sits back. I hear Bullet say something, can’t make it out, but it was directed at Karma. Then I hear the growl.

“Motherfuckin’ kid, knock it off. Now’s not the time. Grow the fuck up, Bullet. It’s gettin’ old.”

Chains glares at the poor kid as Bullet’s face gets red as an apple. No one says a word then Brick starts going over some of the options we have. Fury, Stitch, Panther, surprisingly, and even my cousin they all throw out different options. I see Karma taking notes on his tablet while the rest of the prospects are sitting, just listening, like they’re afraid to say a single word. I’ve been on the receiving side of that growing up, so I clear my throat.

“Brick, can I ask the prospects if they have any ideas on how to handle my predicament or are they not allowed to talk or give any insight?”

Dingo is still holding me and after I'm done, his hands are squeezing me like no tomorrow. I peek at the prospects and no one will meet my eyes except Bullet, who winks at me with that cute grin of his. Good, he knows why I said what I said. I hate how Chains berated him in front of everyone.

“Yeah, Celestina, every brother can put in their two cents. Though we are under the gun to get this done before all hell breaks out. Gotta remember, girl, we are also responsible for our little town, along with the folks who live here. We've had enough of our bullshit blow back on them in the past, and it took us forever to find a balance and gain their trust again. So let me open it up to you assholes, I mean, prospects, to give us your two cents whenever you want.”

I'm giving Brick the stink eye and when he looks my way he laughs out loud, then looks at Shadow.

“It ain't no secret you two are related by the way you look alike. The other clue is she's got balls just like you.”

Not sure why but it flies out of my mouth before I can stop it.

“Nope, Brick, you got it wrong, we have ovaries, which makes us stronger than you men and we have no fear showing our strength.”

Frank immediately starts howling with laughter as do all the prospects. Brick drops his head while Fury just smiles my way. Afraid to look at Chains, I sneak a peek to see he's looking my way, and I see a sparkle in his eyes. Great, at least no one wants to kill me in this room. There's enough out there in the world who would gut me in a second or two.

“Celee, sweetheart, you keep surprising me. Thanks for sticking up for my brothers. Chains can be a prick, especially to Bullet, not sure he has forgiven him for fucking up awhile back. Means a lot, you having our backs.”

“Frank, how could I not? You guys are risking your lives for me. If we can make this work, I should be able to get on with my life, whatever that will be. I'm hoping it includes you in more ways than always just getting me out of trouble.”

“About that, we need to talk, sweetheart. Maybe tonight?”

I nod, totally afraid of what this ‘talk’ is about. But I’ve dealt with bullshit and more my entire life. I’ll handle whatever this turns out to be, though I’m getting used to having Frank in my life. I want to pursue this further but he has his own demons, so together we should be a great fucked-up pair. *Guess I’d fit in around here*, I’m thinking.

DINGO

I CAN'T REMEMBER, SINCE I BECAME A PROSPECT FOR THE Grimm Wolves club, when anyone—and I mean anyone—has ever spoken up for us prospects. I mean, some of these assholes would beat off, come all over their bedroom walls in the dorm part of our clubhouse, then call whichever one of us was on call to come clean it up, while laughing the entire time. Or to test us, to see if we had the stomach to be brothers, after Chains would finish his 'work' in his wet room, he'd do a shout-out for a prospect to clean his mess and get rid of the remaining body or parts. I've done many of these callouts and have never shirked my duties as a prospect.

Celee is the first person to speak up for us like we matter and should each have an equal say in some things. Now, it's much later in the day. After our impromptu meeting in the apartment, I had to take off to do my shift so Celee and lil' shit hung out with Abby and the boys with their dogs. Though the boys were weirdly subdued.

When I got to the clubhouse, Fury pulled me aside and told me he was glad Celee did what she did. Then he shocked the shit outta me when he said he hoped I knew he was always around if I needed to talk or get anything off my chest. What the fuck was that about? I mean, out of all the brothers Fury is the one I respect the most. He's got his shit tight in the club but also outside. I don't know his story, but do know he comes from old money and he don't speak to his family. Well, he has on a few occasions when the club was in dire straits. Like when Chains was kidnapped and he wanted to make sure the club had unlimited funds, in case whoever took our brother

came in with a ransom request, we'd have it, no matter what. And fuck, he's bangin' Abby. I mean she's every prospects' MILF for sure. That property and mansion they live in and how they made the loft above the huge, nine-car second garage and turned it into an apartment so all of us would have a nice place to live for a reasonable rent. Fury is one in a million, and I hope those twins realize how goddamn lucky they are.

Now that I'm done at work, I pull my phone out, texting Celee to see if she wants something to eat so I can pick it up on the way back to the apartment. Just as I start, the alarm goes off from the gate. When I go to look at the camera behind the large bar, I hear boots running down the hall. Looking, it's Karma with his pad in his hands and he's talking into, I guess, his earbud.

"Motherfucker, don't open that gate, kid. I don't care what they do, you're armed. We're on our way. Hang on."

He looks at me and, without a word, I'm following him out the door as he runs full-out toward the gate, grabbing his Glock at his side. Reaching behind me, I grab my SIG, not sure what the fuck we're running into. And I don't have my bulletproof vest on 'cause not expecting this kind of shit to go down.

Then when I can see the gate in the distance, I hear it. Pop-pop-pop. Gunfire. Karma actually drops his pad and moves off to the left, pointing for me to go right. That's when I hear it. Sounds like an injured animal. Or person. FUCK!!! The screeching of tires and the smell of burning rubber is heard in the sudden silence.

We hit the gate at the same time. Diesel is on his knees, his hands pressing in on Slick's chest or shoulder. His hands are covered in blood. Karma hits the inside button and the gate starts to close. I run into the guards shed and grab the huge medical bag. By the time I get back to Slick, I see Fury hammering it down toward us.

He actually slides in and immediately is in medic form. He's yelling for shit I have no idea what it is, so Karma and Chains push me outta the way, telling me to call 9-1-1. I see

Fury rip Slick's T-shirt and see there are two entry holes, one in his upper shoulder, the other about five inches lower. Fury screams for Chains to lift Slick's head and Karma to raise his feet.

More boots to the ground are heading our way. Then in the distance I hear sirens. Bad Dog and Puma get up close and personal, all-hands-on-deck. I go down the driveway to flag the ambulance in. Diesel is standing with me shaking. When I look at him, he's white as a ghost. He's our newest prospect, well actually, Slick is our newest but Diesel is right above him.

"Diesel, you good, man?"

"Not sure, brother, it happened so fucking fast. Think I gotta sit down, Dingo. Dizzy as hell and nauseated."

Squinting my eyes, I don't see it at first but then I do; there's blood running down his side right under his vest. Motherfucker, he's been shot too.

"Need some help! Diesel's been shot too. Shit, he's goin' down. A hand here, motherfuckers!"

I grab him as he starts to fade then, as gently as possible, lower him down, opening his bulletproof vest to see where he is hit. On his side I see a hole, and when I roll him, don't see an exit so I check the other side and nope, nothing. Means the bullet is still inside, which can cause a shit ton of damage. Fury is at my side, hands full of Slick's blood and some gauze.

"Goddamn, how'd we miss he was hit? Dingo, open that gauze for me, brother. Diesel, kid, motherfucker, stay awake. Talk to me, sing a song, say the alphabet, goddamn it! Don't give a shit, just don't fall asleep. Hear me, boy?"

As quick as I rip the box of gauze pads open, I guess Fury is packing Diesel with it. When he presses on his gut, Diesel lets out a loud scream.

"All right, Diesel, look at me. You ain't dying but not gonna lie, this is gonna hurt like a motherfucker. Do you have family or someone we should call for you?"

I watch Diesel shake his head no. That pisses me off.

“Yeah, Diesel, you have people. Every single one of us Grimm Wolves brothers and then all the ol’ ladies and kids. So don’t give up, kid. We got you, Diesel. Hear me? Nod if you hear me.”

Barely but I see him do it. He slowly nods. When I look up, Fury is watching me closely, a weird look on his face. Then he looks down, keeping pressure on the gauze as the ambulance pulls up. He starts giving the paramedics Diesel’s stats as they look at him in his kutte, VP right there on his chest.

“Don’t have time, guys, but I was training to be a surgeon, so trust me, he needs care stat. Then a transfer to the hospital so they can get him into surgery to remove the bullet.”

As they assess Diesel and start to move him to a gurney, another ambulance comes in hot behind the first one that’s already here. They run to Slick and before I can blink, both brothers are being pulled into the rigs. Fury looks to Chains, who nods and jumps in with Slick while Fury jumps in the back with Diesel.

“Dingo, call Brick then every brother. Tell them what happened. Call my ol’ lady, tell her to start the phone chain and get everyone heading over to our place. Once everyone is in place, lock it down, and tell her everyone should go downstairs if possible. I’ll be in touch. Send two prospects to Brick and Emmie’s for protection. Esmeralda is there and she’s trained, so that should at least give them some kind of a front. Brick can’t be moving Emmie to our place yet, I don’t think. We need to avoid that as much as possible. Get your ass back to the apartment, don’t let Celestina out of your vision. Do it now, Dingo!”

With that he’s gone. Both ambulances take off like the devil’s hounds are chasing them. Everyone looks shell-shocked for like two minutes, then we all start doing what our VP told us to. Back to the clubhouse, gate closed. Each and every one of us is making sure we’re armed to the fullest before we disperse to where we’re needed.

I call Abby and tell her exactly what Fury said and she tells me to be safe. Also, she tells me Celestina and lil' shit are at the main house. She said not to forget she has Shadow, Panther, and Avalanche with her, so they'll help with protecting the main house too.

Then I go about locking down the clubhouse, pulling down bars over the windows and padlocking the door downstairs, then activating the digital locks on all rooms, including the back area where bedrooms are at. Since we don't have enough people to be in multiple places at the same time, gotta do whatever to keep this place safe. Stallion and MacGuire walk up to me.

“Dingo, want us to stay back and guard this place? Fury didn't say anything but might be a good idea, your call though, brother. Seems like our VP put you in charge, so we'll do whatever you tell us.”

They both look at me with wide eyes and I feel my heart rate sky rocketing. Haven't felt like this since back in the day when my dad was drunk and we were trying to stay outta his way. I take a quick second and then do what I know Brick and Fury would want.

“Yeah, both of you stay here, but once the gate is locked and electrified, come back up into the clubhouse. Grab the assault rifles, along with some grenades, and that gas can shit. Whatever you do, don't let anyone in here if you can help it. Kill if you have to, we'll deal with the consequences after. Keep your satellite phones close by. Someone will be in touch. Thanks, brothers. Be fuckin' safe.”

Between the three of us we get the building as secured as possible. We pull two of the club vans out in front, blocking the entrance with them. And in the back are two of our box trucks. After this is done, I head back to my house to make sure Celee is okay and safe.

Seems like the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood is making their move, and it's separate from the mafia. This whole thing with Celee just got more complicated. Or we have to figure out how to use each side to maybe eliminate the

other. Though those thoughts are way above my kutte and paycheck.

SHADOW

LISTENING TO ABBY, SOUNDS LIKE THE SHIT IS ACTUALLY hitting the fan. I look at Panther and Avalanche then jerk my head to the outside screened area. I walk to the farthest spot then turn and wait for them to follow.

“I know there’s a plan, but it’s got to start now. With two of the Grimm Wolves down, it’s gonna thin out their ability to protect their innocents because they’ll have to split their protection to at least two, no three, different spots. The hospital, here, and Brick’s place. Panther, need your help, gonna try that shit Momma Diane bought to cover tattoos. Big Bird, try and keep everyone’s attention, be the goof you usually are. Ruffle your feathers, do a dance, whatever it takes.”

Avalanche’s face instantly looks pissed off.

“Skull anii’, I’ve told you multiple times to quit calling me Big Bird. Keep it up and I don’t care if you’re sharing spit with my brother, I’ll show how much I’m not Big Bird. Now, go try and make yourself look normal, while I do my thing to keep the crowd from getting too crazy. How long is that shit gonna take? I feel we should be out on the streets keeping an eye on Brick. He’s a target, even if he isn’t, because his head ain’t in the game at all. And right there we have four innocents. Emmie and those three newborn babies.”

Listening to him, it hits me how right Avalanche is. Fuck, never gave it that much thought.

“Avalanche, you’re right. Reach out to Brick, see if it’s possible to move his family here. Whatever we need to do to make that happen, we’ll do. Come on, Panther, let’s get this done. Hey, Big Bird—oh shit—I mean, Avalanche, don’t tell Celestina what we’re doing, want to see if we truly look alike. And umm, hey, big dude, thanks for being here and helping protect my cousin.”

With that I start to walk away when I hear Avalanche ask my man if hell froze over. That has me laughing out loud. God, he’s so easy to fuck with. As I make my way to the suite or shit, Abby called it the something, wing. Whatever, trying to stay out of everyone’s way I make it to our section of the house.

Grabbing my backpack, I open it, pulling out the box Momma Diane ordered for me months ago. She said to try it, see if it works, and if I like what it can do. Then she backtracked saying no matter what, I’m beautiful. She doesn’t realize that’s the worst thing to say to me. One of the main reasons I did the face tattoo was to hide that beauty. Seeing Celestina is like looking in a mirror and seeing my face from my past.

Opening the box and tipping it so the bottles fall out, I grab the instructions so I can see how this is done. Each bottle is numbered. As I read, Panther makes his way into our room.

“Nizhoni, quite fucking with Avalanche’s head. He’s got enough going on up there, he don’t need all your petty shit. Yeah, I get he’s a huge pain in your ass. The two of you are like oil and water. Zoey, this situation is starting to come to a head. Let’s make sure we don’t lose anyone, including your little cousin Celestina. She’s in the middle, but at least now we know her brother is still in charge of pulling the strings, which definitely makes it more dangerous. He wants what he generally assumes is his. So, come on, sit down, I’ll try to do this. Not sure why everyone thinks it’s necessary, you could have worn a hat to shadow your face. Ha ha, no pun intended. Let me read the directions. Well, fuck, who can read this print? Let me use my phone flashlight, see if that helps.”

I'm watching my man, and yeah, that's what he is. I've finally accepted that and more importantly him. There's never a time he doesn't jump right into whatever muck or shit I've jumped in or am trudging through. Without any questions. Like right now, he up and left his ranch to come with me. Big Bird too.

Suddenly, I'm not sure why I'm getting emotional. What the hell is happening to me? This ain't me, more like how my bestie Goldilocks acts. Feeling eyes on me, I look up to see Panther watching me closely. He must see something he likes 'cause he blesses me with that beautiful smile of his. My God, he's beyond gorgeous. I have no words or anything to say that isn't asinine or being a bitch to hide my feelings. And he knows it, so he goes back to reading the directions.

Feels like Panther's been at it for hours, but probably ain't but one. When he steps back, wiping his hands on a towel, his eyes look directly at me, and I can see it in his face. The shit must have worked.

"Come on, Nizhoni, let's go see what you think. Bathroom mirror is probably the best. Be prepared, okay?"

That's all he says, so I get up and walk into the bathroom, but don't turn on the lights yet. First, I take a deep breath then reach over and flip the switch.

"Holy fucking shit. No way."

I'm looking at my face from what... ten plus years ago. And my God, Celestina and I could be twins, no doubt. I'm probably going to freak her out when I walk down there. The feeling starts in my chest then I feel it up my throat, and it ends up in my eyes. Before I can help it, my eyes overflow and tears start rolling down my face.

"Damn, Panther, will this shit ruin the face stuff? Is it waterproof?"

Panther doesn't say a word but pulls me close, holding on to me tightly. And that's when the waterworks start. I feel they've been stored up forever. And I can't stop them. Jesus Christ, of all times for my shit to come to a head. I hear a

knock on the door, but before I can pull myself together it opens, and I hear, “Oh fuck.”

“Goddamn it, Big Bird, don’t you wait for someone to tell you it’s okay to enter?”

With that I push off of Panther, wiping my face with the top of my shirt. When I turn around to give Big Bird more shit, his face is in shock. He kinda shifts backward against the wall next to the door.

“My God, you look just like Celestina. I can’t believe it. I know you probably don’t want to think about it, but for fuck’s sake, Zoey, could you two be sisters instead of cousins?”

That stops me in my tracks as I walk back into the bathroom, looking at my face. We do look so much alike but can’t cousins look a lot alike? Because for us to be sisters that means Dario would have had to rape my mother and my real dad, Dario’s brother, wouldn’t have known about it. Or did he know and try to hide it? Fuck.

“Panther, can you put a call into Sheriff George and ask him the question we are all wondering. And, yeah, it’s better coming from you than me. Thank you so much.”

I walk toward Avalanche, who’s still staring at me like he’s seen a ghost. When I get to him, I move right into his space, putting my arms around his waist, and laying my head on his chest. It takes him a minute or two before I feel his arms wrap me tight. I’m done crying but need the emotional support that only my family can give. And since none of my Devil’s Handmaidens sisters are here and Panther’s on the phone, Avalanche is what’s left. It hit me minutes ago that he is indeed part of my family, no matter how much shit I give him. So in a whispered voice I give it to him.

“Avalanche, I hope you know that no matter what happens between us, you are a part of Panther so that makes you a part of me. The three of us are family, never forget that.”

His arms tighten and his chin drops to the top of my head, but he says not a word. We stay like this until Panther’s call is ended. That’s how he finds the two of us. And Panther being

who he is, I never heard him walk over to us until I felt his arms when he wraps the two of us up. That's where we stand until it feels right to separate. And no one has a smart-ass remark. We just all started to walk out so we can show them Shadow without her skull face.

Walking down the stairs, I can hear the noise from the great room. Neither Panther nor Avalanche says a word, but they each grab one of my hands as we walk around the corner and stop. It's actually scary how in tune we are with each other. It takes a while and I don't know who notices us first. It might have been either Bullet or Irons. But with Bullet comes Spitfire. When she turns to see why Bullet's mouth dropped, her eyes almost pop outta her head. Then fuck if I know what the shit she says.

“Well, butter my backside and call me a biscuit. No, hush your mouth, Tim, my gosh, I can't believe my eyes. Sugah, come closer dang, girl, you're pretty as a peach. Just like Celestina.”

This gets just about everyone's attention. And when they all start looking around, I only have eyes for my cousin, waiting for her reaction. When her eyes finally find mine, her mouth drops open and she looks like she's ready to faint. Fuck, I know that feeling. She grabs on to Dingo with her good arm so he can help her up. Then together they walk over to the three of us.

When she reaches us, she raises her good hand and puts it to my face. Not sure why, but my head leans into her. When she pulls me to her, I first hear her soft sobs but when I grab and pull her close, she loses it just like I did upstairs. Panther and Avalanche close in around us. And to my surprise Dingo joins us, and before I know it, the entire room is in the mix and everyone is involved in the group hug.

That's when I know in my heart that whatever plan we go with is going to work. It has to.

CELESTINA

WHAT A DAY AND NIGHT. I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE HOW MUCH Zeona and I look alike. It's actually a bit scary to me. I don't want to even think what it could mean, though my cousin had that thought. She had Panther put a call out to her father, Sheriff George, who adamantly stated that no way in hell did his brother get together with Zeona's mother. We can believe him or not, though everyone is going to believe what they want.

I just finished washing my face, when I hear the knock on the door before Frank walks in with lil' shit. The dog looks tuckered out. Makes sense since he's been out most of the day with the twins and their dogs. Lil' shit goes right to his bed, plops down, and crap, he's out in less than a minute.

Looking up, I see Frank staring at me, eyes full of want. I watch as his eyes take in my bare feet, up my legs, to where my nightie starts mid-thigh. Then his eyes stop at my middle and slowly move up to my breasts, which are heaving with my shallow breaths. By the time he gets to my face I'm almost panting. I don't understand why this man affects me like this, but tonight I really don't care. I want to feel his arms around me, his mouth on me, and his cock in me. Shame on me, but this is something I want.

He must see something in my face because he slowly walks toward me. Well, really, it's a swagger. When he's within reach, both hands cup my head and he just stares into my eyes for a second or two.

“Tell me now if you want me to stop or else tonight I’m gonna finally get to taste that body of yours. Celee, sweetheart, you’re killing me.”

When I don’t say a word, just keep my eyes on his, it takes him a few seconds before he crushes his lips to mine. This kiss isn’t a *get to know you*, it’s an *I’m going to fuck you hard*. His hands shift my head first one way then another before his tongue touches my lips. Without even a second of hesitation, I open. He rocks my world, devouring me like I’m the best thing he’s ever tasted. Not only does his tongue intimately fuck my mouth, but his hands are moving all over my body. His fingers caress my breasts, making my nipples hard, which he pinches, drawing a squeal from me.

He lifts his mouth for a second, glancing at my face. When a sexy grin appears, I know tonight is going to change my life. Not like a virgin on her first night because that’s not me. Frank and I have gotten to know each other, and we are adults taking our relationship to the next step.

He grabs my good hand, walking me to the bed. He helps me to sit and then goes behind me, pulling me to the middle of the mattress. When he kneels at the end of the bed, I almost lose it. I can feel the wet in my panties already. His rough hands start at my ankles and work their way up to my knees then to my inner thighs, putting pressure on them to open. I oblige but, obviously, not enough because he pushes until they fit his broad shoulders between them.

I’m nervous because this hasn’t ever gone good for me. Usually, I just lie there until the person either has enough of my lack of enthusiasm or feels they’ve done their duty. Frank must feel my fear because he looks up from between my legs, that sexy grin still in place.

“Celee, sweetheart, my mouth is watering from the way you smell. Gonna go down on you now. Don’t worry, scream as loud as you want. Won’t be the first time a woman cries out.”

With that, he rips down my panties and his long, rough fingers separate me and his mouth literally clamps on my

bundle of nerves and sucks hard. Not expecting that, it takes no time at all before my body is trembling and I can feel an orgasm coming on fast. Frank must feel it somehow, because he slowly puts a finger in my core. When he can't go any farther and my walls contract tightly to his finger, my body flies as I flood his hand and mouth. The moans coming from my mouth shock me, but I can't stop them if I try. Frank keeps going until I'm spent. I have to put my one hand to his head to get him to stop, it is too much.

When he raises his mouth, his face has a sheen to it from what he did to me. His eyes are dark with need, so I raise my good arm toward him and he takes it, pulling me up, then he yanks my nightie clear off. Once I'm naked, he gently places me back on the bed.

He pushes back off the mattress, yanking his kutte off, placing it on the chair. Then his T-shirt comes off before he opens his belt. He moves to the chair and removes his motorcycle boots and socks. I'm in awe of his body. Six-pack stomach, with the shredded V that leads to the promise in his jeans. I must have licked my lips because I hear him groan.

“I want you, Frank.”

“Yeah, I know, Celee, give me a second or this will be over in nothing flat. That's how much I want ya, sweetheart.”

Then he flips the top of his jeans open and unzips them. I swear, the sound of that zipper is extremely loud, like it is by a speaker. When he finishes, he pushes his jeans, along with boxers, down his thick thighs, all the way over his knees. He shifts and in a blink of an eye, they are gone.

He moves toward the bed after he reaches down to his jeans. He flicks a strip of condoms on the mattress by my shoulder as he crawls up the bed and my body. He's barely touching me as he's holding his body in a plank position. As soon as he shifts his hips, I can feel how hard and velvety he feels. His head drops and the first kiss is a whisper, then as his body lowers over mine, one hand goes to my cheek. Then he really kisses me with all the need he has coming to the surface. Our mouths and hands go at each other like crazy. It's not long

before I'm begging him. When he kneels between my legs, grabbing for one of the condoms, I'm whispering for him to hurry up. He has the condom in one hand when the other pats my side telling me to be calm. With his teeth he rips the package open and pulls out the condom. After pinching the top he slowly pulls it over his cock. Once it's in place, he gives his cock one, two jerks before he pulls me closer to him, my ass almost on his thighs. He's looking at me down there and I feel shy all of a sudden, until I feel the tip of him moving through my wetness, tapping on my clit.

I spread even farther and Frank slowly feeds himself into me. The stretch burns but it's a good one. I try to catch my breath but it's gone, so panting is the way I manage to get air in my lungs. Once all the way in, Frank takes a minute or two to give me a chance to get used to him. I feel him swelling more and pulsing. That's when I tell him to move.

He starts out slow and gentle but quickly picks up speed. We fight together to reach the abyss. I know when he's close because he starts panting my name..."Celee, Celee, oh God, Celee." Then his fingers pinch my clit, and that's it. My body completely tenses for a second or two, then I feel free. Everything seems to fly by at warp speed, until I hear Frank shout my name and lose his rhythm. He's pounding, racing toward his orgasm, and I wrap him up, wanting him to know I got him.

Once spent, Frank rolls over, holding me close. I'm beyond satisfied and blown away. Again, how is this man not taken?

"Celee, you okay? Tell me if I was too rough, sweetheart, sometimes I get in my head during sex."

"No, Frank, I'm good. Really good."

He smiles at me and pulls me into him. I brace my bad arm against his body. Before long, his body relaxes and he starts to breathe deeply. I know he's out.

Carefully, I manage to get out of the bed. On my way to the bathroom, I grab my nightie and a new pair of panties, putting both on. Reaching for a washrag, I place it under the

faucet when warm. Walking back into the room, Frank hasn't moved so I gently pull the condom off and place it on the side while I wipe him off. Taking the used condom and washrag back to the restroom, I throw the one out and rinse and place the other over the tub.

Moving back to bed, I hear lil' shit's tail hitting the wall. He's up and watching me. I walk over and grab him with my good arm, bringing him back to bed with me. Once he's situated, I take a breath and slowly let it out. I do that a few more times and feel my body starting to relax again. Finally, I feel sleep overtaking me. The last thought I have is, *this is one of the best nights of my life*. I pray there will be many more like it in the future. And that I even have a future.

Our plan starts tomorrow. I hope to God this works and the good guys finally win over the bad ones. Fingers crossed.

DINGO

AFTER SUCH A PHENOMENAL NIGHT AND WAKING UP TO Celee's lips wrapped around my dick, how it went from that to this bullshit, I can't figure it out.

Shadow, Panther, and Fury are up my ass because I really don't want to be seen with Shadow acting like Celee. It bugs the shit out of me. I know why, but don't really feel like sharing my fucked-up history with them. As we are facing off against each other in Fury's office, a soft knock comes at the door. Fury tells whoever to come on in.

Celee walks in, looking more beautiful than ever. Her eyes are sparkling and her lips are still a bit swollen from sucking me dry. Just the thought has my pants feeling a bit snug. She must see it because she gives me a pucker of her lips and winks. Damn, wish we could just spend the day in bed.

"Hey, what's up?" Celee asks as she takes a seat next to me on the love seat.

Fury starts to explain and when he gets to the part about me not wanting to be seen with her cousin looking like her, Celee's hand lands on my upper thigh. All eyes look at her hand then at both of us. Then she shocks the shit outta me.

"Would you mind if I had a private moment with Frank, please? Won't take long, promise."

Shadow glares but Fury and Panther nod and all three walk out, closing the door behind them.

“What’s wrong, Frank? Come on, tell me because this doesn’t make sense. It’s been part of the plan all along. Why change it now?”

Looking at her, it dawns on me that for the first time in my entire life, I’m falling for someone, and I don’t want to ruin it with this bullshit. Don’t want to touch another woman in any way. Not only because of this, but because of what my dad did back when I was a kid.

“You can tell me anything and it won’t change us.”

She grabs my hand with hers and waits, saying nothing.

“When I was a kid, my dad cheated on my mom so many times, lost count. And he was brazen about it, bringing his whores to our home when Mom was at work. We’d hear them rutting like animals. Most of the time my sisters had to clean up so Mom wouldn’t find out ’cause, yeah, he fucked them in the bed he shared with our mother. Then one time, I wasn’t there when he brought his new whore over. When I got home my sisters seemed weird, but fuck, at the time I thought all girls were weird.

“When the noises stopped and the headboard stopped banging into the wall, we all waited for them to leave. I was sitting on the front steps when the door banged shut behind me. I didn’t look, figured it was some tramp so was waiting for them to leave so I could get my homework done. When someone ran their fingers through my hair, I looked up and for a split second thought it was Mom, but then the perfume was wrong. I knew the perfume and the woman. It was my mom’s twin sister. From that minute, until the day she died of cancer, I hated her guts. As bad as this sounds, Celee, I was glad when I found out she got cancer. In my mind she deserved it. So just the thought of holding Shadow’s hand or faking a kiss, whatever, makes me want to puke. And it’s not Shadow, it’s because you two look like the same person. What happens, especially since last night, if I go to fake kiss her and then take it too far? Who do you think will kill me first, Shadow or Panther?”

She laughs softly then answers me.

“Totally, Shadow. Frank, think of it as a job. Be honest with them, set limits you can handle, but still make it look like your kissing, you know, fake it ’til you make it. Come on, please. I want this done so we can start our lives together.”

I rock back. Her words run through me like a live wire. Together. She wants to start our lives together. I’ve never had a woman want anything from me. Well, except the sweet butts wanting to be an ol’ lady or some waitress wanting bragging rights that she blew or fucked a Grimm Wolves brother. Nobody ever tried to get to know me, Frank, not Dingo.

I pull her close and just hold her for a minute. Then I nod and she goes to the door, telling them to come back in. As they wait patiently, I try to find the words and Panther helps me with the situation, though how I don’t know.

“Dingo, look at me. I’m a firm believer the past is just that, the past. The only way it can hurt you is when you bring it into your present. So whatever is weighing on your mind, remember that was then, this is now. And don’t let a person or people from your past have that much power over you. Brother, you’re your own man now. If anyone can do this, it’s you, Frank.”

Hearing that I feel empowered. Words from a man I barely know, but it seems like he has a read on me. I sit next to Celee and she grabs my hand with her good one. Then as hard as it is, I open up and explain why I’m having a hard time moving forward with our plan. I keep my eyes on Panther, not looking at Shadow or Fury. When I’m done, I lean back, trying to rest my body that has gone stiff with anxiety. My head is down, so I don’t see when Shadow gets up and walks toward me. When she sits down on the other side of me, it shocks the shit outta me. Then she grabs my hand, holding it, but I know it’s not Celee. It’s like holding on to something insignificant. A stranger.

“Dingo, you should have just told us. This I can handle. The problem is we don’t really know each other. So you shared some of your history, now I’ll share some of mine.”

She leans over giving Celee a squeeze on her leg, still looking her in the eyes.

“Don’t take anything I’m about to say as a dig or me being a bitch to you, because I’m not. So from what I’ve found out from my dad, Sheriff George, he and my mother were deeply in love. She was Native American so, of course, his family did not approve. He didn’t care. After he turned on the family they lived in WITSEC for a few years, but like he said, all good things come to an end for a De Luca. Dario took my mother and to this day my dad doesn’t know if they killed or sold her. A sister from my club, Raven, is trying to see if she can find anything out about what happened to her. Dario left me alone until I got a bit older, then he made my life a living hell. He sold me to anyone who would pay, the more sadistic the better.

“This tattoo on my face was to hide not only my face but who I am, because of my looks he made money off of me and men and women abused me for their own sick purposes. When I hooked my star to Goldilocks—oh shit, ya know her as Tink—I tried to forget all the shit that happened. That didn’t work, my friend. We all gotta deal with our shit eventually, Dingo. Don’t be embarrassed because, brother, you survived.”

I feel my chest get tight as I glance at her and am surprised that when you look closely, Shadow’s eyes are different than Celee’s. They don’t burn as bright. Even with the makeup, they still don’t look exactly the same. Though today I see something new in Shadow’s eyes, a slight bit of uncertainty, or shit, don’t know what to call it.

“Dingo, you know what happened at Dario’s compound back home in Montana. How he made me torture the one man I have ever cared for. And I almost killed that man over there but, thank God, in the end it all worked out and Panther lived, while Dario—as far as I know—died and went to hell where he belonged. Now, to help your ol’ lady find her own way so the two of you can figure out this shit everyone calls ‘love.’ Or you could just have tons of monkey sex, whichever works for the two of you.”

Then to my utter surprise, she leans into me for a quick second and I can feel how uncomfortable she is but she still

does it. Then she jumps up and walks over to Panther, who pulls her down onto his lap. He wraps her up and she snuggles in. My eyes see it too. Shadow, enforcer to the Devil's Handmaidens club snuggling. *What is happening?* I think to myself. Fury breaks through my brain fog.

“So are we good now to move forward? Because if it's a yes, tonight starts the fun for you two, Dingo and Shadow. I want your asses in town doing something. Be visible and don't have to show too much PDA but some. I think you'll be able to handle it, right, Dingo? This has to be convincing so the rest of us can work in the background. For now, let's stop and take a break. Shadow, thanks for coming out to give us a hand. You too, Panther, we appreciate all the help we can get.”

I watch as everyone starts to leave until it's just Celee and me. She walks over to me, just as I hear the tapping of his nails on the floor. When he sees the both of us he starts getting crazy. Celee kneels down but I pull her up, just before lil' shit would have jumped right on her injured arm. We watch him jumping like a lunatic at her feet until I tell him to sit. And he does. Celee reaches down and pets his head.

“Celee, let's get some air and let him run around in the yard. This might be our last time to just chill.”

I grab her hand and together with lil' shit we head outside for some fresh air before the shit starts to hit the fan. I don't do it often but I say a quick prayer that we can get this done and everyone on our side stays safe and breathing.

SHADOW

I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW FUCKING UNCOMFORTABLE I AM. STUPID me let Abby and Celestina dress me and now, damn, just the look on Avalanche's face as he reaches behind him, pulling his phone out and taking a picture while laughing his ass off. That's when he goes back to Big Bird to me. Asshole.

Panther, on the other hand, just grabs me and pulls me close, placing a soft kiss on my lips. Then he whispers how he likes me better like myself. That really helps my insecurities.

“Hey, Celee, wanna get a bite to eat? We can go either to the family restaurant or maybe the Italian place? Got a preference?”

Gotta give it to Dingo, he's really trying.

“Whatever you want to do, Frankie.”

He squeezes my hand and I hear him make a noise under his breath. Ha ha ha, did he think I wouldn't take my punches whenever I could? He starts to walk faster, bet he thought I wouldn't be able to keep up but, boy, it ain't happening. I pull back on his arm and then it's tug-of-war time. We probably look like a couple goofing around. When I release his hand and hold on to his arm, pinching him, he lets out a howl.

That makes me laugh out loud, just as my phone goes off. Oh shit, busted. Dingo looks at me with a smirk on his face. I stick my tongue out and then stop in my tracks. What am I doing acting like a teenage girl, sticking my tongue out? Grabbing my phone, I don't even look at it and hit the button.

“What!”

“It’s good to know you’re such a good actress, Shadow. Keep it up, you’ve gotten plenty of attention. Tell Dingo to try and get a little bit closer to you. Keep doing what you’re doing ’cause Karma is tracking different bunches of men following you both. Make sure you both stay on the defense. Oh, Panther’s here, hang on a minute.”

“Thanks, Fury, how are you doing, Nizhoni? We are watching you both and you’re doing a good job. I had a fleeting thought that if I didn’t know you, would have fallen under your spell, Celestina. Now the prospects are gonna meet you at the pizza parlor place, so head that way with your young beau.”

I can hear the humor in his voice, so might as well push the bull.

“That sounds great. Let me tell him, hang on.”

With the purr in my voice I’ve seen Goldilocks use on Noodles, I lean into Dingo at my side, pressing my front—especially my tits—into his arm.

“Sexy, your roomies want to meet up at the pizza place, if you’re interested. Or we could just go back to the apartment since no one will be there. We can be as loud as we want. Which would you like to do, Frankie?”

I can feel the jolt in Dingo as he struggles not to laugh. When I put the phone next to my ear, I can feel the vibration coming through as I can hear Big Bird’s voice trying to calm down Panther.

“Brother, she’s trying to pull your chain, don’t let her. You give that woman too much power over you. Be strong, give it back. That new waitress at the Wooden Spirits Bar and Grill has been givin’ ya the sign she’d drop her panties at any time for you. Go for it.”

I feel my head splitting in two just as Dingo grabs my phone.

“Yeah, great idea, we’ll meet ya there. Might get there a bit later, well yeah, Bullet, have you seen her rockin’ fuckin’

body. And let me tell you..."

With this he disengages and hands me my phone back.

"You'll have to protect me from Panther and your Big Bird. All I heard was growing and Avalanche tellin' your ol' man to calm down. Now let's take our time and start to head toward the pizza place, that good, Celee?"

I smile 'cause didn't think Dingo would be able to handle this whole situation. For me it's weird to be out in public and not have people stare or point fingers my way. Not that I'd ever regret my tattoo. It is now a part of me. Just gives me a different perspective, I guess. Without it on display, I kind of feel naked to the world. It's going to be hard to ignore Panther if he shows up at the pizza parlor. So I stop and reach up on my tippy-toes.

"Dingo, text Panther, tell him to stay away from me. Not sure I'll be able to hold it together otherwise."

He gives me a slight nod, reaching into his back pocket, pulling his phone out. While he does as I asked, I shift my eyes around—and yeah, holy fuck—there's three assholes over there and that bunch of four men don't look like all the others. So two groups of men who don't fit with the rest. That makes me grin. Ohhh, this is getting to be fun. Can't wait.

It's now after pizza and beer. These idiots are a blast and I can't remember having this much fun in forever. With my club we are always running to save the next victim/survivor, or shut down a human trafficking circuit, so fun is usually either pushed to the back or we enjoy it in very small amounts at a time.

Suddenly, I hear raised voices, then a commotion at the front of the parlor. Some of the prospects get up and go to look, leaving me and Dingo sitting at the table by ourselves. I know the plan is to leave us hanging, but damn, that's exactly how it feels. Then I hear Chains's voice.

"Look, motherfucker, you're in our town now. If I tell ya to jump, ya ask how high. Now tell me why I've found ya spying on one of my brothers and his ol' lady? Shut up, you

asshole, wasn't talkin' to you, talkin' to the big man over there."

We get up and move to the front window. I literally fall back against Dingo. Thank God, he is standing behind me because I'm looking into a pair of eyes filled with such hatred, I feel that empty emotion I've always felt when I was around Dario. Yeah, this is one of his spawn children. Looks to be the one I tried to castrate back at that compound. Just a few seconds in his sights and it hits me, my lil' cousin had it just as bad as me, just in a different way. And she had to deal with not only two asshole brothers but a father from hell.

The asshole in question walks toward the window and taps on it to get my attention, or as he thinks... his sister's attention. When I look his way, he gives me one of the snarkest smiles I've ever seen, right before he raises his hand, pointing it like a gun, and pulling the trigger. Not sure why but I step back, just as Dingo reaches behind him and actually pulls his gun. Then in a raised voice lets loose.

"Motherfucker, you threatening my ol' lady? I'll put a bullet 'tween your eyes, put you outta your goddamn misery. Don't even look at her again, ya hear me? Not sure why you're in our town, but get your business done and get. Don't push the Grimm Wolves to make your stay permanent, if you get what I'm sayin'."

He says something to the idiots standing next to him, which enrages Chains. He reaches under his kutte and with one of his guns in hand bitch slaps Celestina's brother across the face. Right there in public. Wiping the blood from his face, the De Luca sibling looks at each one of us and snarls.

"When I'm done, none of you will be breathing and that bitch will be given to that old fuck who's been waiting to marry her worthless ass. I'll be in touch. And you, maniac, touch me again and I'll have my men shove your hands up your own ass. Celestina, I'll be in touch, dear sister of mine."

With that the group of men make their way down the street to waiting SUVs idling at the curb. We watch them take off. Once gone, Chains walks to me, putting his arm around my

shoulders. I can feel the bile coming up fast, but he leans in with barely a whisper.

“Shadow, don’t fall out of character now. You know your cuz would be upset so here, let me lend you a shoulder. Come on, be that tenderhearted woman you’ll never be. Ow, that hurt! No slamming elbows into my gut, for Christ’s sake.”

Smiling saccharine sweet, I lean in, placing my head on his chest while my hand grabs his side, twisting as hard as I can. He jumps back and grabs his side.

“You devil woman from hell. Swear to Christ, if I could get away with it...oh well, fuck it.”

Not sure why he stopped until I look around and see a few townfolk stopping to watch our show. Dingo comes close, pulling me in while he slaps Chains a bit harder than necessary on the shoulder. Chains’s mouths to Dingo, “Later, prospect,” which has a shiver go through Dingo’s entire body. After he recovers, my ‘ol’ man’ pulls me back into the restaurant to finish our dinner.

With everything that just went down, no one on that sidewalk caught a glimpse of the other group of men watching and waiting. Though the shiver down my back shocks me, as usually that doesn’t happen to me. For Christ’s sake, I’m Shadow, enforcer of the Devil’s Handmaidens motorcycle club. I put the fear of God in men and women, not the other way around.

KARMA

MY EYES ARE BURNING, BUT I DON'T WANT TO STOP reviewing all the tapes because all it takes is one thing to fuck a plan to shit. Brick and Fury told me to keep an eye out, but they also warned me if I intake too much Red Bull and all those energy drinks in my fridge that my ass will be out in the open.

It is by the grace of God that when Celestina's brother and goons jumped into the SUVs and took off, I saw the glint of a gun off to the side, down the alleyway. I concentrated on the area and was able to make out the four, no maybe, five men in that dark alley. When the younger De Luca took off, I watched them casually walk to a huge Navigator, jump in, and follow the same pathway of our nemesis.

Now I've been trying to place facial recognitions but it's not working. Most in the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood are very careful in their dirty deeds not to get caught, fingerprinted, or have a mug shot taken. The lower members, kinda like our prospects, might get nabbed, but generally even they are careful. The racist fuckers have so much support high up the ladder that they have sort of a force field around them.

What I'm trying to do is remove that shield. Once I can do that, then we will have unlimited access to all of the members of that group. Then maybe I'll be able to get into their financials and start fucking with them. I've sent an email to both Raven and Freak in Montana to see if they can give me some help.

Needing to take a minute, I stand and stretch. Damn, my back is killing me. Gonna need a new and better office chair 'cause I've worn this bitch out. First, I text Grace to make sure Calum is doing okay by her. My boy is autistic and has issues around kids, though can't call Damien a normal child. Calum seems to adore the older boy so we've been experimenting with sleepovers, which thank God is at Stitch's house tonight so I can work.

I take a walk to the attached bathroom to take care of business while I'm up. Then I wash my hands and throw ice-cold water on my face. After about three or four splashes, I start to feel normal again. I don't want to take any chances of fucking up with the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood.

Shadow, Panther, and Avalanche shared late last night, after all the planning shit was over, how they keep running up against this bunch of asshole racists. Guess a couple of the sisters in the Devil's Handmaidens have been sort of involved, or maybe a better way to say it is they were dragged in without their consent. Most recent is Vixen who, shit, from what Shadow said, had no idea all that shit had happened to her back in the day. That she was hooked on drugs is shocking 'cause she barely drinks when we've all been together. And that she has two kids, twins actually, damn.

Though listening to her story, she deserves only happiness goin' forward for sure. Fury told all of us when we started never to judge a book by its cover. At the time he was talking about Chains and how he was even more of a maniac than he appeared to be.

I wipe my face, run my fingers through my hair, and head back to my desk area. Before getting there, I grab a party size Chex Mix 'cause my stomach is empty or feels like it. As I sit, one of my programs stops dead on a face. Well, here we go, took long enough. Seems like that ugly as fuck guy from before, who was lookin' to get under Chains skin. Asshole didn't realize before that could happen, my brother Chains would boil him alive and pull his layers of skin off, feeding that shit to him before putting a bullet between his eyes. I've seen him do just that and worse.

Hello, Matthew Smythsens. See you've served time for well, go figure: rape, domestic violence, and murder. Though all the witnesses either disappeared or took back their accusations and testimony. He's been with the brotherhood since he was only thirteen, his mother joined. By the time he hit fifteen, he was already in a ton of trouble because of his affiliation with the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood. They use all their underage men to do the worst crimes because generally and, especially up in Montana, nothing happens. So involved in fuckin' around on the computer, I literally jump, grab my gun, and almost piss myself when someone silently comes up behind me, putting hands on my shoulders.

When I turn, it's to see Chains with a huge smirk on his face with his husband Jackson at his side. These two never cease to amaze me how in tune they are to each other. Guess that comes from growing up together in that fucked-up foster home.

"What happened, Karma? Thought I trained ya to always be prepared. Jackson, you owe me twenty."

My eyes catch the attorney's eyes, who just shakes his head smiling my way as he pulls his wallet out and puts a twenty-dollar bill in my enforcer's hand. Chains laughs diabolically.

"Whatcha need, Chains? Hey, Jackson, how's shit? Where's Winnie and your lil' one? What's her name again? Luna something?"

Chains laughs while Jackson tells me it's Luna May. As I shoot the shit with Jackson, Chains is reviewing everything I've tagged regarding the brotherhood. When he gets to that Matthew guy, he looks over his arrest reports and he looks at me.

"He might be the loose cannon, Karma. He's got issues with women and just look how Dingo's ol' lady and Shadow look. He might feel he deserves that, who the fuck knows why the man does what he does. Do you want me to put a call in to Fury? I know our VP said to limit our interactions with Brick

to give our prez time to get used to his new home life. Watch ya think?’

I watch the emotions run across his face, which in turn shocks the shit outta me. Since I first prospected, Chains never showed a lick of anything. He was colder than a steak left in the freezer for months. And his eyes used to freak me out with how green they are. Not normal. When his head lifts and he stares back at me, I swear to Christ he can read my mind. Damn, I need some sleep.

“I’ll let Fury know. What you need to do is find everything out you can about this prick, Matthew. I have a feelin’ there’s a lot more out there about this jagoff. Tonight we did accomplish what we wanted. Celestina’s brother is beyond pissed and we now know the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood is also out and about hunting their prey. Fuck around with this for another hour or so, brother, then get some shut-eye. You look like total shit, Karma.”

“Thanks, Chains, glad to see you’re back to normal, brother. Think I’m coming down with something, so yeah, gonna do a couple more things then call it a night. We’ll meet up in the morning to go over if I caught anything.”

I watch as Chains and Jackson turn, it brings a smile to my face when Jackson puts his hand in the back pocket of Chains’s jeans, while our enforcer lays his head on his husband’s shoulder. Fuck, never thought I’d see that. Then I turn to my computer to get back to work.

DINGO

THE POUNDING IN MY HEAD MAKES NO GODDAMN SENSE. I didn't even drink last night. Too busy fuckin' my woman to exhaustion. She didn't even do her usual of rolling off the bed to clean up before putting on at least her nightie or my T-shirt. My woman is not into being naked in bed, which I find cute.

Feeling Celestina stirring next to me, I jump up still, in just my boxer briefs, stomping to the locked door. Well shit, never know what could happen. Swinging it open, I almost shit myself when I see Fury standing there. When his eyes meet mine, know it ain't good.

“Get your ol' lady up and come on over to the main house, Dingo. We've got a situation.”

With that he turns and I can hear him knocking on the doors of the other brothers living here in the apartment. Our VP tells them the same thing he told me. Get your ol' lady up and get to the main house. That's what I'm gonna do. When I turn, Celee is already up pulling on her panties. She pads off to the bathroom so I give her a few minutes to take care of her business privately. She gets embarrassed if I walk in when she's peeing so I give her some space. Me, I couldn't give a fuck, but guess that's one of the differences between men and women.

Hearing the water turn on, I figure she's brushing her teeth so I go into the separate area to empty my bladder. Then I go to the empty sink and wash my face and hands. I brush my teeth while watching Celee get ready. She's brushed her hair and is in the process of trying to put her hair up with one hand.

I get closer, grab the ponytail holder, and within a minute braid her hair. She turns smiling at me. Next she washes her face and puts lotion on it, then just a smidge of some kind of powder. She finishes off with a bit of lip shiner. That's it.

When she turns to get dressed, I trap her between me and the sink.

“Morning, Celee. How'd ya sleep, sweetheart?”

Then I press a quick but hard kiss against her lips. I watch her eyes close as she leans into me, lifting up on her toes as she follows my mouth. That right there makes me smile.

“Come on, sexy, let's get dressed, grab a few coffees to go, and head over to Fury and Abby's.”

By the time we are ready it's like a parade over to the main house. There is Bullet and Spitfire, Irons, Joy, and Everly, finally Tiny with his twin girls, Savannah and Adelaide. Though haven't seen Susana, or as we all know her as Sweet Pea, one of our sweet butts from the club he keeps spending time with. She's not been around for a while. Stallion and MacGuire and last, but not least, Celee, lil' shit, and me.

We all make it to the second garage and walk through the open bays to the connecting door that leads to the great room. As soon as we enter, I can feel something is definitely off. Every one of us with ol' ladies or kids with us puts them behind us. Abby, Talon, and Rogue are sitting on one of the sectionals, their dogs on the floor by their feet. What really sends a chill up my spine is the way they all look like they've seen a ghost.

Fury comes walking in with Shadow, Panther, and Avalanche behind him. Everyone is so somber; I'm wondering if something happened to Emmie or the babies. Our VP motions for us to sit. Well, the brothers, he asks Abby to take everyone else downstairs to the safe section of the basement. That right there has everyone's head jerking up. Fury only had that side of the house done in case of an extreme emergency.

I pull Celee to me, which has lil' shit trying to lick me to death. I kiss her softly while whispering it's all gonna be okay.

Once they're gone, Fury sits down where Abby was, leans forward, and rubs his hands through his hair like he's trying to gather his thoughts.

“All right, going to put it out there and we can figure it out. Fuck, Karma, get Brick on the Zoom call please, brother. We'll wait, not going over this shit twice.”

We wait, as when Karma called Brick it was feeding time at the Jones household. It was kinda hokey and cute to see our prez running around, some kind of towel on his shoulder, because once Emmie got done breastfeeding each baby, he was on burp duty. Then he told us with three babies Emmie was struggling so they have to supplement her breast milk with formula. I look to Bullet mouthing, “TMI,” which he just smiles at.

Now the babies are down for a nap with the monitor in their bedroom. Brick is sitting at his kitchen table, cup of coffee in his hands. Emmie just walks in giving her man a kiss on top of his head. I hear her say she's going to grab a quick shower while they're down. Once she leaves, Brick looks into his phone.

“Fuck, sorry, brothers, to keep ya hangin' on. This is our routine and there is no way in hell I'm gonna break it. So, Fury, what the fuck is goin' on? From the tone in your voice and now the way you look, my gut tells me I ain't gonna like it. So spill.”

“Yeah, Brick, not sure what, but something went down last night. When Abby let our dogs out this morning early, they both jumped the fence and headed down the fucking driveway. Not wanting to wake the boys up, Abby grabbed me and pulled me into our walk-in closet. What she told me gave me the creeps. So I threw on some clothes and with my guns and our dogs, who were covered in shit, walk down to the sealed gates.

“As I got close, couldn't make out what I was actually seeing. But when I did, my stomach actually turned. Dingo, today you'll have your hands full, brother. Not sure how, think they cut the power and alarm for the fence, along with our

guard, Phil. Most of the Italians who were at that pizza place giving you and Celee/Shadow a hard time are currently hanging on my metal security fence. Oh, in pieces. So someone took the time to beat them within an inch of their lives, then disemboweled them before hanging those pieces up in the correct order per body. Well, except each man had his own dick shoved down his throat.”

Brick interrupts Fury, telling him fuck the schedule they are on their way. He wasn't going to take any chances with his family. After he hangs up, Fury turns back to me.

“Dingo, there's only one left alive besides Celestina's brother. Though using the word alive is really stretching it. I put a shout out to Chains before I called you, so both him and Jackson are trying to get that shit down before anyone else sees it. Only plus is that we live on so many acres. Bad thing is, my ol' lady saw it and now wants to move from her dream house. It's the threat that it was left at our home not the clubhouse, Chains, Winnie and Jackson's, or even Brick's or Beast's. And they killed our night time guard. Fuck, Phil didn't do anything to anyone, ever.”

Hearing boots hit the floor, we all turn just as Chains and Jackson walk in covered in blood and God knows what else. Immediately, Irons gets up, walking over to Chains, probably to help him. Lately, whenever shit like this needs to be done, Chains doesn't put out a general call out to the prospects, he specifically asks for Irons.

Jackson looks around at all of us then at Fury. When our VP points downstairs, Jackson lets out a sigh. Then he walks toward the mudroom to do what, I have no idea. Irons and Chains are whispering then Irons takes off just as Beast, Doc, and Bad Dog come in. After Irons speaks, mainly to Beast, he turns and goes out.

The brothers who just got here are staring at Chains. He looks like a mass murderer. That's what Stitch, Grace, Damien, Calum, lil' Joey, and Esmeralda walk right into. Though not sure how, but at the same time Stitch pulls the women, Damien blocks Calum's view of their Uncle Chains. Joey is a baby so all the women, the two boys, and the little

girl in her momma's arms head downstairs as Fury punches in a text, I'm assuming to Abby.

Jackson walks back in much cleaner. He leans down and talks into Chains's ear, who nods then heads in the direction Jackson just came from. The controlled chaos is the way our club has always worked.

Hearing more noises, can't make them out, we all come to our feet when Brick, along with Emmie and a three-carrier thing, walks in. It looks like a tray waiters use with the carriers sitting on it, one after the other. I can't help it; I walk fast toward them to get a good look at the babies. Oh my God, they are gorgeous. And all are sleeping. My eyes go to Emmie, who looks fantastic except for the fear in her eyes. Fury walks up to her, pulling her in close.

"Thanks, Emmie, for doing this for me. Abby already set up the main floor suite for you and Brick. It has a huge dressing area where the babies can sleep. You tell us what you need and between all of us we'll get that shit done. Now, come on, let me get you downstairs. Fuck, I mean shit, can you do stairs or do I need to carry you?"

Emmie looks shocked as her head snaps to Brick's. He just nods so her eyes go back to Fury kinda shy.

"Wyatt, I can do stairs, just have to take my time. If three of the prospects can follow me down with Billy, Georgie, and Hazel, I'd be forever grateful. Mike won't say a word but he's past exhausted. Sit down please, Mike. Can someone get him a coffee and maybe throw in a shot of his Jack Daniels, please? Wyatt, you said Abby is downstairs. Are Grace and Kathy here too?"

As our VP takes our prez's woman to the safe area, I pick up Hazel while Bullet grabs Billy and Tiny very carefully picks up Georgie. Looking at us, no one would even know we were badass, motherfucking brothers of the Grimm Wolves club. Before my feet even hit the last stair, I can see everyone making their way to us. I put up a hand and like synchronized swimmers they all stop while not saying a single word. I tilt my head and put my free finger to my mouth, saying hush.

Celee makes her way to the front. She grabs the carrier from my hand and walks over to the sectional, placing it down. She then leans in, unclipping Hazel, and gently picks her up, cradling the baby in her arms. That's when it hits me that she's gonna be it for me. From the moment I saw her on that dating site to when she was lying on that lounge in Texas, she has taken my breath away. I watch in awe as she gently moves from side to side, murmuring who knows what to that baby girl to keep her in sleepy land.

Glancing around, I see Spitfire has one of the boys. I'm not even sure when she got here, but Momma Molly has Georgie, with who I think is Beast's mom, Odina, hovering close by. Can't believe how much better that woman is doing. We all thought she was gonna die and look at her now.

This is my family, and why it's hitting me right this second I have no idea. I take a step back to lean against the wall behind me. For all my time with the Grimm Wolves club, I never felt like I belonged as much as I do right this minute. The feeling is so good, no it's fucking great. All the beatings and cruelty dealt to me by my dad haven't gone away, but Fury is so right, as usual. It's in the goddamn fuckin' past, so why would I want to live there when I have the chance to live right here in the moment.

Feeling someone slide up next to me, somehow, I know it's Fury. Especially when he puts a hand on my shoulder, squeezing.

“Brother, like I've told you before, I'm always here for you. We gotta deal with this shit quickly right now. Grab Celestina, if you can drag her away from the children and come back up. And, Dingo, let's keep everyone else out of this, if possible. Just so you know, brother, shit has definitely hit the fan. We'll be upstairs waiting.”

SHADOW

SITTING AND WAITING FOR CELESTINA, MY MIND IS GOING IN all directions. Chains caught me for a few seconds, told me to be prepared and that he might need my help. Then he left, leaving me hanging. Total asshole.

Panther and Avalanche disappeared about ten minutes ago when Irons texted them, asking them to give him a hand with a situation. My man leaned into me, asking if I was okay waiting by myself. That's Panther, always worried about me. I'm his primary concern and for someone who had my type of life, that right there means the world.

Seeing Fury make his way back up, he gives me a nod before he looks around.

“If you're looking for Brick, he went to the bathroom down the hall. Don't take this as me talking outta turn, but your prez is at his breaking point. Fury, check him out when he gets back. His hands are shaking, seems a bit confused. I'm thinking that he's sleep deprived and it's finally peaking. Oh shit, here he comes, just a warning, my friend.”

We stand together as Brick walks toward us. Just looking at him you can see the exhaustion all around him. Fury waits until he's right in front of us.

“All right, Brick, quick rundown. Someone left the mob hanging off my gate, literally. Oh, and they were dismembered, probably still alive when they did it. We have two still intact and breathing, barely. We are in the process of interrogating these two men. No, don't go there, Mike. I want

you to go down the hall and get some sleep. Don't argue, brother, please, and don't make this any harder than it is. It'll be between the three of us. Just a few hours. Clear your head, Brick, that's all I'm asking. Believe me, I get not sleeping because of babies crying, shitting, and eating. Remember, I got with Abby when the twins were tiny. Been there, done that, brother. I got this, promise. Now go, I'll tell Abby to let Emmie know you're down for a couple. I'm sure that will give her a bit of peace."

"Brother, never have I been more grateful than I am at this moment to have you at my side. Fury, I can't even think. My bad, should have reached out for help but felt like I needed to be the man and take care of my family. All I did was put them at risk. A couple of hours of sleep sounds damn good. Come get me sooner if you need to. Oh, Shadow, thanks for all of your help. And yeah, fuck, not something I ever dreamed would be coming from my goddamn mouth."

Then he turns and stumbles down to the room Abby and Fury prepared for Brick and his family. No doubt he'll be asleep before his head hits the pillow. Fury turns toward me as I hear someone walking up from downstairs.

"Shadow, I know you've been to hell and back from your connection to the De Luca family. Well, sister, sorry to say it's not over yet. Once... oh, there she is. Celestina, I was just about to tell Shadow what's going on. I need the two of you to come with me. Yeah, I'll try to explain best I can. This is gonna affect both of you. Let's walk, they're waiting. And please, no questions, you'll get your answers in less than five minutes."

We follow Fury through one of the biggest garages I've ever seen filled with muscle cars and old vintage ones too, also two rows of motorcycles, best of the best. This motherfucker is loaded, I think to myself. We go out the back door and through the woods behind the house. Not sure why we didn't just go out the back door, but who am I to question the VP of the Grimm Wolves.

Looking ahead, I see a building, not sure what it is but it's the size of a single-car garage. The closer we get, the clearer I

hear a familiar sound. I feel Celestina beside me stop walking and stand still.

“What’s the matter? It’ll be okay and you’re not alone, lil’ cuz. Come on, let’s get this shit done. You got this.”

To my utter surprise, she grabs my hand and I let her. Fuck, I’m gettin’ soft, for Christ’s sake. Even though I’ve been in this bitch of a life for over a decade, it don’t get any easier. Especially since I can smell death in the air.

Fury turns to us with the weirdest look on his face when he glances at Celestina. When he reaches for her other hand, I know this is gonna suck. Well, at least for her.

“This isn’t going to be easy so lean on both Shadow and me. Dingo will be here shortly, he had to grab something for me. Let’s go.”

Then he knocks and walks in the side door. I hear my cousin suck in a breath as she jerks back, trying to turn and run. Fury grabs her around the waist as she starts screaming. I just stare at the scene we walked into.

Chains is bare chested in a pair of torn-up jeans, no shoes or socks on. He’s covered in blood, which makes him look insane and dangerous. Avalanche also is without a shirt, but he’s in the process of beating some guy hanging off a hook. The guy is beaten almost to death. Something moves in the corner and Panther steps up, pulling Big Bird back. Then he leans down, picks up a bucket, and throws it on the dude.

“Fury, what the hell is going on and why are we here?”

Then I hear a voice I prayed I’d never hear again. That deep, raspy, whining voice. Celestina goes completely still. When her eyes meet mine, I now know why we are both here. Fury lets her go and she comes to stand next to me. He goes to the wall and hits a button as the men move outta the way. Fury pulls a box down and hits a button. Looking up, I see a chain-run pulley that is shuffling toward us. Something like the machine in a cleaners that holds the clothes.

With that thought I miss the first sight of him, but Celestina doesn’t. Her free hand goes to her mouth, just as I

look up into the eyes of one of the De Luca I never wanted to see again. Fuck, guess it was true I didn't kill this motherfucker. Talk about having nine lives, this prick certainly does. I'm in the shadows, ha no pun intended, so I don't think he sees me at first, so I stay quiet.

“Well, well, little sister, seems like you've landed on your claws yet again. Dad was right about you, should have taken care of you a long time ago. Too bad the old man is dead and won't see what's going to happen to his precious Celestina. Though I know, dear sister, and in fact I was in on the plans, so I want to make sure that by the time they're done you're begging for your life. AWEEEEEEEE!”

I never saw Dingo come in the back door, and he's got a stun gun on Dario Jr.'s back. Jr.'s body is jerking all over as he lets out a whine that I feel in my soul.

“Dingo, brother, enough. Goddamn it, Dingo, enough. Panther, stop him.”

Watching the show; it dawns on me that Jr. has no idea today is the day he'll take his last breath. Maybe by Chains's hands or Dingo's, maybe even Celestina's. But I will have a part in ending that motherfucking bastard. This time for good, I swear to Christ. Fuck, I wish I didn't have this makeup on and my skull was on display.

“Jr., now is the time to tell us what you know. If you do, maybe I can convince Chains over there to end your life quickly and as painless as possible. Otherwise, and I know you know, being the son of a man who had no soul, what can be done to you. Now just to show you, make sure to keep your eyes open, Jr.”

I also turn and see Irons standing next to the guy on a hook. By the time I see the mini chainsaw in his hand, he's grabbed the unknown guy's foot—who's already barefoot—and cuts off a toe. The guy is drooling while he's screaming so much that he's losing his voice. In less than two minutes, he's lost all five toes on his one foot. I feel the peace start to spread throughout my body. This feeling right now is what has always happened when I'm in my wet room. At the moment, it gives

me some relief because since I hooked my star to Panther I've had some nerves and worries that I'd have to pass the torch, so to speak. The screech brings me back to the present to see Irons pouring salt on the mangled open flesh. *Good follow-up for a prospect*, my mind throws out there. He's been training with Chains.

It happens in like a second. One minute Celestina is next to me, the next she's moved and grabbed a knife off the table. Before she can plunge it into her brother's chest, I'm behind her, twisting her arm behind her back.

"Nope, lil' cousin, ya don't want this on your conscience. Leave this to me and Chains, we got you."

Her shoulders start to tremble and then she turns to me, eyes full.

"Please, Shadow, I need this. You have no idea what he did to me growing up. No, nothing sexual, but he beat and belittled me. Him and my other brother bullied me. I lived in terror my whole life."

I hear Jr. laughing. I can't help myself. I walk out of the corner and into the full light. When he sees me, he starts coughing and choking. I do nothing but watch him. After he stops, I walk up to him, grabbing his only ball, and squeeze.

"Find something funny, you little prick?"

"Who the fuck are you? Son of a bitch, you two bitches could be twins. Did dear old dad have another little twat with one of his whores? Maybe another one of those natives?"

I see it but can't believe how fast my man can move. He has his hand around Jr.'s throat and he's screaming. With one crack across the face, Jr. stops struggling when he must see something in Panther's eyes. Before he passes out, he looks at the two of us, confused as hell.

Dingo comes out from the back with a bag of shit. Now he has my full attention until Fury steps in front of me.

"Game's over, Shadow. Time to get back to real. Here's the shit to wash your face. No, I get it and if you're gonna be part of this, you have to be your normal self."

Fury stops when we hear laughter. I see Big Bird bent over laughing hysterically, while both Dingo and Irons are struggling to hold it in. Even Panther is struggling. Only one who isn't is Celestina. She just looks scared and confused.

“Deal, Fury, only if you get her outta here. She don't need to be a part of this, no matter how much she thinks she does. Deal?”

He looks deeply into my eyes then motions for Dingo to hand me the bag. Looking in, I smile and then head toward the back where there is a laundry sink. This shit comes off a lot easier than when you put it on. As the shit starts to come off, I feel Shadow coming back. I mean, yeah, I know my name and who I am, but between all our drama back home in Montana and now all of this, it's been crazy. And from what I'm getting from Raven, it's still going on up there in Timber-Ghost, though this time it's our VP.

Water is warm and I've had this shit on my face for a bit. Scrubbing kinda hard, I rinse and wash again. One more time and then stand up, grabbing the paper towel my man is standing there offering. When I see nothing comes off on the towel I look over to see Panther grinning that sexy as hell smile.

“What are you smiling about?”

“Welcome back, Nizhoni, I've missed you. Now is the time to make sure your past stays back there.”

That in itself tells me that the time has come. And I'm thankful I'll be able to give Celestina her freedom finally. That's worth everything.

DINGO

NOT SURE WHAT GOT INTO ME BUT WHEN THAT ASSHOLE started running his mouth off to Celee, I couldn't help it. Wish I coulda ended him but I get it, Fury has to make sure he gets everything he needs before this jagoff is put to ground.

At first didn't know why Fury wanted me to grab that shit for Shadow, but watching her I'm II it. I can't wait to see this bastard when he comes face-to-face with the fear-inducing Shadow.

Once she's done, all of our Montana guests walk to the front where Chains is at. Celee is standing with Fury. Irons and I are backup and support. I have a feeling the party is about to start. Jr. must hear the Int because he's trying to get a look at what's coming, but he can't. It seems like time stands still, until first Panther then Avalanche walk to the front, stopping at Fury's side. I see Shadow stop for a second, right next to Jr. but she says nothing, just waits. Then it hits me, Irons points and I see the jagoff just pissed himself. *Great*, I think as I grab a small scoop of cat litter and flip it on the puddle. It works pretty quick. My attention goes back to Shadow. She pats Jr.'s arm then walks directly to Celestina.

It's when she turns, the feel in the room changes. Shadow says not a word just continues to stare right ahead. Jr. jerks at first, then his body starts to tremble, a bit then goes into spasms. His bulging eyes following Shadow the entire time. She pulls Celestina closer and whispers for a quick second. Then Shadow puts Celee to the side and with her hands in fists, Shadow takes a few minutes to punch Jr. in the stomach.

When she finishes and he's gasping for air in between his grunts of pain, she leans into him, grabbing his hair, pulling his head up so she can look him in the eyes.

"You're gonna wish I took both of your balls that night when we get done with you, motherfucker."

Then she motions for Bullet and me to take him down while she goes and talks to Chains and Irons. When I'm done, I walk over to Celee, pulling her close.

"How ya doin,' sweetheart? A good way to think of it is the Thunder Club Knuckle Brotherhood has saved us a ton of time hunting down these motherfuckers. Not cool the way they literally left them hanging on Fury's gate. Now, Celee, this is gonna go down a road I'm not sure you're ready for. Between Chains and Shadow, this is probably heading to hell before they put your brother under. It ain't gonna be pretty or quick. Want me to take you back? Hey, no judgment by anyone here, and right now none of the women know but Abby, and she won't say a single word."

She leans her head on my chest while her hands circle my sides. I move the two of us against the wall and out of the way. I need to know what she wants to do 'cause if she's goin' back, we need to move our asses. Then as usual, Celee surprises the hell outta me.

"Frank, as much as I don't want to be here, this is the exact spot I need to be. I think my healing will start when all the players are either jailed or dead. So I'm going to stay. Oh my God, what are they doing? That shit has to hurt."

When I look up, I see Jr. is now racked above everyone. And Irons is in charge of tightening the ropes every few minutes. Looks like they are finally getting ready to take this motherfucker out. Then the smell hits my nose. Shit, the torch is out. That's when I hear her wretch for the first time. Leaning, I grab a bag and hand it to her.

"Frank, how are you able to watch this? My God, it's horrible. And the stuff they do, it's inhuman. How do they come up with it? And damn the sounds, thankfully, they put that rag or whatever in his mouth. What are they doing to

him?” She points to the second guy, who looks to be passed out from pain.

That’s Chains’s way to work them slowly and methodically. Me, I’d put a bullet in their head and be done. Oh well, probably why he does what he does and I clean up after him. I glance at Irons and he nods, so I pull Celee outside for some fresh air ’cause in no time at all she will smell every bodily scent possible. Especially if Chains guts one of them. Then he pulls their intestines out, wrapping them around the person’s neck as they slowly die. Sick motherfucker.

“Frank, why are we out here and they are still doing the torture?”

“Celee, first, you needed a break and some fresh air. Second, it’s going to get intense and I’m checking to see where you’re at. Sweetheart, no one will think anything if you say that you’ve had enough and leave it in their hands. Also, you will see a side of your cousin that you’ve never seen, sweetheart.”

“Nope, I want to be the last face he sees before he goes to be with our father. After all he’s done to both Zeona and me, we owe that bastard plenty, Frank.”

All right, I’ve tried a few times, I can’t force her to leave unless Fury tells me otherwise. We stand outside, walking around the cabin, stretching our legs. Since I’m not normally with Chains when he’s in torture mode and now he’s working alongside Shadow, I can’t imagine what they will be doing when we go back in.

The side door opens and its Bullet rushing to a tree, puking his guts out. Yeah, that’s about right. Never thought he’d have the stomach to handle the downright torture of a human being. When he’s done, he walks toward us, face red, head down.

“Hey, brother. Bullet, look at me. Don’t lose any sleep about it. It is what it is. Chains has been doing it since he was younger than you. Remember what he did to rescue both Winnie and Jackson when they were kids in that foster home. He’s used to blood on his hands and guts and brain matter

literally on him. Same with Shadow. They live that and continue to, it fulfills some crazy demented part of their souls.

“Fury, our VP, I don’t get how he can stand it in there, but maybe that’s why he’s Brick’s right hand. Bullet, we’re the newbies so do what you can and be honest if you can’t do it. Especially with Fury, he’s the most understanding brother we are lucky to be around. He’s got patience so if you can’t handle this, like I just told Celee, no one’s gonna think badly. Now here, got a mint, ’cause, brother, ya need it. What were they up to and what made ya heave?”

“Fuck, Dingo, they took the blowtorch and started burning that dude’s arm but from a distance. That didn’t bother me but when Chains grabbed some, I don’t know what it was, but he had some tool in his hand and started to skin the guy, and when he passed out, Irons zapped him in the balls. Don’t think that guy will be breathing when we get back in there. Fury already told me to leave him and all the gore there, so sorry, Celestina, so your brother can focus on it and know it’s coming. Some kind of mind fuck. Anyway, I’m taking a bit of a walk then I’ll be back.”

“Brother, don’t go too far, we don’t know who’s in these forests. Especially now, so gun in hand and head in the game.”

Celee and I watch Bullet walk away. I feel for the kid. When I turn, Fury is watching me, a slight grin on his face. Then he gives it to me straight, which literally guts me in a good way.

“Dingo, you did good, brother. Bullet is a bit of a soft heart when it comes to this kind of shit. You handled it with finesse and not sure the other prospects would have done that. Guess it’s time to let you know. Brick gave the go-ahead. Once this shit is done, you’ll be getting your patch and rocker. Welcome, brother, welcome home.”

With that he comes to me, grabbing me, and pulling me tight while he beats me on my back. He keeps me close for a minute then pushes me away while he brings Celee close.

“Darlin’, need to get your ass back in there if you’re doing this. He ain’t gonna last much longer. Take some advice from

someone who knows. Hold no anger so you can be happy that he is suffering, but remember to put that in a cabinet you can lock and throw the key away. This is the final step in taking your life back.

“We already know from what they have said, the brotherhood is responsible for taking the De Luca mob down. They supposedly had a synchronized attack organized by one of their big honchos, so it seems like it was a success. Know it’s cleanup time and we are more than glad you’re able to stick it out. Now, it’s gonna go by fast as both Chains and Shadow have been at them. Now let’s go, kids. Take some clean air before you walk in. Breathe through your mouths when in there.”

Knowing once we enter it can never be forgotten, a small part of me wishes Celee wouldn’t be a part of this, but I can’t tell her not to be. Even if we were further along in our relationship, I’m not that guy. As soon as the door closes, Celee grabs my hand and I send up a request that this isn’t what becomes of my ol’ lady. I like her just the way she is, don’t want this shit to change or fuck with her.

CELESTINA

MY EYES FLY OPEN AS I FEEL LIKE I CAN'T BREATHE. AT first, I have no idea where I'm at. Then it dawns on me that I'm in bed, Frank beside me, though thank God he's still sleeping and my thrashing didn't wake him up.

My heart is pounding in my chest and I know sleep will not be happening anytime soon. I get up, first hit the bathroom to relieve my bladder then wash my face and hands. Concentrating on cold water to help with the slight headache, I brush my teeth to get rid of the acidic taste. Then I open the bedroom door and head to the kitchen to maybe grab a shot of something, Jack or Jose. Maybe it'll help me sleep.

Rounding the corner, I come to a complete stop. Zeona is sitting at the island in the kitchen, head down, shoulders hunched, and shaking. No way. I move silently and quickly to her side. Right when I'm about to touch her, she jumps off the stool, twisting my good arm around my back, and shoves me against the island.

"Fuck, Celestina! Didn't know it was you, son of a bitch. Did I hurt you, lil' cousin? Hey, talk to me, please."

I can hear her but am trying to catch my breath when she releases my good arm and starts rubbing it. I'm thankful she didn't grab my bad one.

"Zeona, stop. I'm okay. Why are you up? Were you crying? What's wrong?"

"Oh, Celestina. The nights are the worst after what we did today. Talked to Goldilocks tonight and I feel so bad for her,

so yeah, just having a night. Poor Panther is out so thought I'd come out here and try to get my shit together. Why are you up, lil' cousin? Too much shit on your mind?"

Thinking it might help if I talk about it, I give it to her. For some reason I feel a tiny bit of loss with my brother Jr. now gone. And man is he gone. I need to remember to never get on the bad side of Chains, Zeona, or even Irons. He was the biggest surprise because I've seen him with Everly, and it's like he's two different men. When I'm done, I look at her with an eyebrow up. She sighs then starts speaking quietly.

"Sorry you're feeling so bad, lil' cousin. It's gonna take some time for your mind to process all the shit you saw today. Just let it happen and don't fight it. This too will pass. Now, no, I wasn't crying, maybe having a weak moment. Second, Goldilocks got her period again so it's another month that she's not pregnant. That is slowly killing her because when she got pregnant with Hannah, it was just the one time, or a wham bam thank you, ma'am. Her words, not mine. I wish there was something I could do for her but there isn't. Ugh!"

Without thinking, I reach out to her and to my surprise she hangs on strongly. We sit like that for a bit before she pulls away, wiping her eyes.

"You want a coffee, water, or a shot?"

That brings a smile to my face. Yeah, we are related, no doubt.

"I'll take a shot of whatever, surprise me."

She walks to the built-in side bar and grabs two shot glasses, filling them with who knows what. Then she comes back, putting the glasses on the island counter. She points to my upper arms where you can see what I've done to myself before.

"What you saw today won't make you go back to that shit, will it, Celestina? 'Cause if you feel anything coming on you, call me. I'm assuming you're staying here, right? You're always welcome in Montana, don't forget it. Now, to a new

life that is filled with everything you want and more importantly deserve. Salute.”

I grab the shot and throw it back. Wow, it tastes like battery acid. Burns all the way down. I look at her and she smiles.

“Jack Daniels all the way, cousin. That’s what they all drink around here and since you’re staying here, gotta train you so you don’t get embarrassingly drunk when the group gets together.”

I laugh and finish my shot. It’s warmed me up from the inside out. We talk and laugh for a minute or two then I go back to bed, moving close to Frank and lil’ shit. And this time I sleep like a rock.

Not sure what time it is, but I know for sure I’ve slept later than usual. I feel better than I did before I went out and had a drink with Zeona. I hope even though we live in different states, we continue to get close. Sensing arms pulling me close, I feel the evidence of his desire pressing against my ass. Yeah, this is what I want. All of it and now might have a chance.

After the shit went down with my brother, all the prospects, well not Slick or Diesel, but the rest were patched in. Received their top and bottom rocker, along with the center one. I’ve never seen anything like it. Simple as can be, it was done in the clubhouse like a small family gathering. Each member had something nice to say about each new brother, even Chains. I could tell which members favored which prospect. Like Chains with Irons, Stitch with Bullet and Doc, Brick and Fury with Frank, and Tiny with Beast. Finally Brick again with Stallion and MacGuire.

I couldn’t believe something like getting patched in could have so much power over each man receiving the patches. The expressions on their faces will stay with me forever. I’ve never been prouder than I was that afternoon. And Frank’s face was so full of pride. Something changed in him that night with Jr. He seems lighter and more accepting of his past. We’ve both talked and shared a lot about our pasts. Frank was severely

abused so I'm thankful to the Grimm Wolves, and especially Brick, for seeing something in Frank and bringing him into the fold. I think it saved his life.

We've been putting everything into getting to know each other. I've been working on my mission to help those who my family abused over the years. I've emptied and closed around fifteen accounts. With Karma's help, which thank God for his mad skills, I've been able to help keep some from being homeless or getting them in for drug and alcohol treatment. Others I've bought homes or new cars. Each time I can help takes another black mark my family left on my heart off.

Frank and I are trying to figure out what's next for us as a couple. We both love the apartment and our roommates, though the thought of having our own place is intriguing. I've talked to Abby about it and she's keeping her eye open for anything she thinks I'll like. She's even offered to help me make it my own. Then she surprised the shit out of me by offering me a job. Her accountant gave notice and she needs someone who's good with numbers. When I told her I only have an associate's from an online college, she laughed, telling me her last one didn't have even that.

I talked it over with Frank and he told me to do whatever I want. Since I love numbers and Abby is really cool and easy to be around, I'm now an employee of Patrick's Construction, Design, and Remodeling. So far it's going great. I have an office and everything. My pay is outrageous and I'm entitled to the full benefits package, along with a 401K and a pension package. Abby is very generous. She bought me a new computer system that Karma set up for me. Also a new laptop with all the programs I need to work from home if I want. This allows me to come and go like I please. Abby isn't watching me at all, and she's always there if I have any questions. Karma has been a huge help and it shocked me when I found out he has a young son. So when I finally met Calum, I fell in love. And to Karma's surprise, his son adores me.

Now when Karma needs a babysitter I'm first on the list because Calum loves being with me. I finally feel like I'm part

of a family, though most might not consider it normal. I'm loved and accepted. That is what matters most to me.

So right now, I'm waiting for Frank so we can meet Abby at a small house up for sale about eight minutes from Abby and Fury's house. Actually, if you walk through the woods to the north the house butts up to it. It's right next to Fury's property, on land they have been trying to purchase, so if we like the house—when they buy the land—both Abby and Fury said it's ours. All we have to do is put in some sweat equity. These people can't be real. My blood family never did anything good for me and strangers do more than anyone in my prior life.

Hearing footsteps coming up the outside stairs, I wait by the kitchen island until Frank unlocks the door and walks my way.

“Hey, Celee, you 'bout ready? Don't know about you but I'm excited. I love it here but to have our own place, never thought it could happen. Ya know, being a loser and all.”

I get up and walk to him, arms going around his waist. I lay my head on his chest, hearing the beating of his heart.

“Frank, you're not a loser. Your dad was because a real man doesn't beat his kids physically or mentally until they believe the bullshit coming out of his mouth. And you've proved it in how you live your life. I mean, you had Karma find your siblings and you're helping them move on from the abuse by getting them help. You're a good man, Frank Smith.”

He squeezes me and when I look up he makes googly eyes at me.

“So do we have enough time for me to ravish you before we meet with Abby?”

Laughing, I try to pull back but he doesn't let me go. Instead he pushes into me so I can feel how hard he is.

“Frank, don't be a tease. We have to get going, we're late as it is. Come on, we can celebrate after we check this place out.”

He grabs my face and kisses me like he's starving. Then, hand in hand, we walk out of our apartment and into our future, whatever that will be.

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Enjoy this Ride we call Life!!

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I LOVE WRITING ABOUT THE PROSPECTS AS MUCH AS THE members of the club.

“Stay tuned to see which Grimm Wolves MC members and prospects end up with their own book in the very near future make sure to check out my website and join my newsletter and follow me”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

USA Today Bestselling author, D. M. Earl creates authentic and genuine characters while spinning stories that feel so real and relatable that the readers plunge deep within the plot, begging for more. Complete with drama, angst, romance, and passion, the stories jump off the page.

When Earl, an avid reader since childhood, isn't at her keyboard pouring her heart into her work, you'll find her in Northwest Indiana snuggling up to her husband, the love of her life, with her seven fur babies nearby. Her other passions include gardening and shockingly cruising around town on the back of her 2004 Harley. She's a woman of many talents and interests. Earl appreciates each and every reader who has ever given her a chance—and hopes to connect on social media with all of her readers.

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