



BOOK FIVE

FURY

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BELLA JEWEL

FURY

Prisoners of Purgatory #5

Also by Bella Jewel

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SIX MONTHS LATER

THE END

DEDICATION



To all my biker babes,
You know these are all for you.

Thank you xx

Warning

*This book contains scenes and mentions of Domestic Violence
as well as miscarriage. If these scenes upset you, please
proceed with caution.*

~*FURY*~



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PROLOGUE



Dear Fury,

I get it, okay?

You didn't sign up to become a fill-in father, or uncle, or biker dad, or whatever it is you want to call yourself.

But the hard truth is, you *don't* have a choice.

I don't want to have to be the one to point out that you can't send your niece to school with no food.

Have you met kids?

They eat a lot.

I'm trying really hard not to get involved, trying not to let her sweet little voice sway me into calling you and telling you that I don't like how you're handling things.

But it's *really* hard.

Because, dammit, she's a good kid, and I can't sit back and let you send her to school with no socks on for a single second longer.

Seriously. No socks?

And if you turn your back on me when I'm talking to you one more time ...

Dammit.

I can't get involved with people like you.

Not when I'm hiding my own demons.

God, if he found out that my eyes watch you leave my classroom every day and I wonder how it would feel to be beneath you ...

No.

I can't.

I won't.

He'd kill me.

He would bury me six feet under, and I know it.

But you're making it really hard for me when I'm constantly having to chase you.

So, if you could do me a solid and just take good care of your niece, I won't have to talk to you again.

Please and thanks,

Alexis Parker.

1



Leaning down so I'm eye level with the beautiful new child in my class, I notice that she's shy and withdrawn. Her head slightly tipped forward and tilted to the side ensures that she won't make eye contact with me unless forced to. I'm not going to force her to, no, because I understand children like her. She's scared, nervous, and from what I was informed by the lady that brought her in, she's come from a rough world.

I need to be gentle with her, show her that I'm a safe space.

"Hi, sweetheart," I say, my voice soft and steady. "My name is Miss Parker, but you can call me Alex if you like."

She doesn't look up; her fingers remain firmly fixed in front of her, so tightly wound that her flesh is turning white. She's terrified, and it breaks my heart to think about what it is she might have gone through to feel this way. No child should ever feel like they're not safe, and I'm going to do everything I can to make sure she never feels that way in this classroom.

"It's scary, isn't it? Starting a new school. I had to come here just last year, and I had no friends, but the good news is, everyone here is super nice, and I just know that you'll make so many friends."

Her fingers loosen just a bit, but she doesn't look up.

“I’m told your name is Hope. That is my favorite name. If I ever have a daughter, that’s just the name I’d pick.”

She glances up at me through those beautiful long lashes. She’s a stunning little girl, with soft blond hair and olive skin. Her eyes, as blue as the sky, are framed with thick lashes. Her dress, on the other hand, looks as though it needs a good wash, and I’m not going to pay attention to the lack of socks today. No, today is just about showing her that she is safe here.

“If you’d like,” I go on, “you can sit up the front, right beside me today. I know it’s scary being in a new place, but I promise you’re safe up there. Would you like that?”

A small nod.

A hell of a victory.

“That’s wonderful, come on. I’ll get you a seat and then we’ll get started.”

She follows me up to my desk at the front of the room, and I set her up with a small chair which she promptly sits down on. The class slowly fills, and I smile and welcome all of my students. Teaching first grade is my favorite part of the job. There is something about the kids, they’re just so innocent and sweet, their souls so pure. It makes me feel safe just being around them, and, in turn, they receive the same feeling.

“Good morning, class.” I smile, raising my hand so they know it’s time to sit down. They do so, without hesitation. “Today is a special day, because today we have a new student. I’m sure you all remember just how scary your first day of school was, so let’s make sure to be kind, compassionate, and

caring toward her on her first day. Would you all like to welcome Hope?”

The class sings out a happy “Welcome Hope”, and out of the corner of my eye, I see the little girl lift her head and peer at them.

I’d say that’s a good start.

“If you’ll all open your textbooks, we’re going to continue on with some reading this morning. But not before we do our morning song; who is going to take it away today?”

A student by the name of Ben shoots his hand up into the air, his big toothy grin eager.

I laugh. “Go on, Ben.”

Standing up, Ben puffs his little chest out and, in his biggest voice, he sings the class the song we wrote together on the first day of school. It’s their favorite part of the day, and hearing their little voices sing along is the highlight of mine.

“Welcome welcome, kids and pals, to Miss Parker’s class. Together here we’re all friends, bound together by our hearts. We love to learn, and we love to read, but mostly we love when we are freed, into the playground we go, swings and sand, joining hands. It’s our happy place, it’s our happy place, where we sit all day, with big smiles on our face.”

As they finish up the song, I can see Hope is looking up now, her head fully risen. She is glancing around the classroom, her eyes taking in the beautiful colored paintings on the walls and lights hanging from the ceiling. I made it my mission to make my classroom fun, to ensure that it has an

abundance of life for the kids to enjoy. We have fish tanks and colored mats, tents, and blocks.

It's *my* happy place.

Because when I go home, into the darkness of my marriage, I'm no longer free.

This is the only world where I can truly be myself and, without it, I don't think I could go on.

"Are we ready to learn?"

The class cheers, and just like that, my day is bright.

For now.



"HI, BONNIE, IS IT?"

The woman who brought Hope in to school this morning is fetching her things in the afternoon when I approach her. She's polite and kind, but I know that Hope isn't her child. As far as I know, she's filling in for someone, but I'd like to get the full story so I'm able to figure out her situation.

Bonnie turns, her face lighting up with a smile. "Yes, that's me. I'm so sorry I didn't get much of a chance to chat this morning. I'm new to all of this."

Bonnie and I appear to be of a similar age. I'm a young teacher, but the students seem to love that, and, because of it, I feel as though I connect with them better. I recognize Bonnie from a few stories that happened a while back. I know she's a reporter who got involved in a biker club and ended up

clearing the name of the town's biggest criminal. At least, what the town *thought* was their biggest criminal. Turns out, it was the people meant to protect us who were the dangerous ones.

Isn't that always the way?

"That's okay. I just wanted to get the backstory on Hope so that I'm able to help her a little better. She's a lovely little girl. is she related to you?"

Bonnie shakes her head. "No, she's a friend of mine's niece. Her mother, unfortunately, is in prison and so she was sent to live with her uncle until it can be worked out. He is the only other family she has, but they're not really familiar with each other. I feel so sorry for her, she's really lost."

Poor Hope.

It's hard enough for her mother to be taken away, let alone to be sent to someone she doesn't know. Kids have a level of love for their mothers, even if they do bad things, and I know how utterly heartbreaking it can be for them to have that taken from their lives. It's truly awful.

"Does her uncle work?"

Bonnie gives me a sheepish smile. "Oh. You don't know who her uncle is ..."

Now I'm curious. "I don't, but you know I'm going to ask ..."

"His name is Ford, he's a member of the Prisoners of Purgatory Motorcycle Club."

Oh.

Oh.

Well, that explains a lot.

“Her uncle is ... a biker?”

Bonnie nods.

“Is she living at the clubhouse?” I gasp, praying her answer is no.

“No, she is staying next door with a wonderful lady who is in a relationship with a guy there. I know it sounds bad, but I promise you they’re really good people and she isn’t being treated poorly.”

I want to tell her that I’m finding that difficult to believe, but talking to her is making me doubt myself. She is lovely and kind, and maybe Hope is being taken care of properly, at least by the ladies. Still, the idea of her spending her time with bikers is concerning. I can’t help but feel that way, it’s not like they have a fantastic reputation. Everyone knows what goes on behind closed doors in that place.

It’s not up to me to decide where she lives, though.

“Look, I’m not here to judge. I’m just concerned for her wellbeing,” I explain. “Hope came to school today with no lunch and no socks. I don’t know if her uncle is aware, but kids need to eat ...”

Bonnie’s eyes widen. “He sent her with no lunch? Oh my gosh, why didn’t you call me?”

“I tried to call the number on file, nobody answered. Don’t worry, I made sure she had food.”

I shared my lunch with Hope and made sure that she had as much as she needed. My stomach might be grumbling now, but I can rest easy knowing that the little girl didn’t go hungry. Not today, at least.

Bonnie’s cheeks redden with anger. “My gosh, I’m going to throttle him. Don’t you worry, he will not be sending her with no food again. I promise you that. I am so sorry.”

“Do you think her uncle will consider coming and speaking to me?” I question.

“I’ll give him no choice. He can bring her in tomorrow. Once again, I am so sorry. I didn’t know. I’m not giving him credit, because he’s going to get a backhand, but he had no idea he had a niece, and he has never had anything to do with children before. So, just go easy on him, it might take some time.”

I smile at her, nodding. “Well, she’s lucky she has you.”

Hope approaches Bonnie and Bonnie leans down, stretching out her arms. The little girl rushes over, embracing her. I can see she trusts Bonnie, and I’m certain that while Bonnie is around, Hope will be taken care of. As for the uncle, well, he’ll just have to come and speak to me. I think it’s time he learned a few lessons about taking care of children.

Whoever this biker is, he needs to get it together.

Or he’ll find me climbing all over his back.

I take my students’ wellbeing very seriously.

He's about to find out just how much.



“You Alexis?”

The gruff male voice startles me.

I’m organizing papers on my desk and didn’t even hear him approach. Spinning around, I’m faced with the sexiest man I’ve ever laid eyes on. I had an image in my head of what Hope’s uncle might look like, and I’m here to say this was *definitely* not it. Wearing a thick leather jacket that very proudly announces who he is, vice president of the motorcycle club, the biker before me crosses his arms over his chest as he lets his eyes roam over my body.

I’ve never felt so exposed in my life.

“I am,” I say, my voice croaky.

I can’t help but stare at the man before me, with his long, thick blond hair that is loose around his shoulders. His beard is perfectly sculpted and mixed with his dazzling green eyes, gives him a god like look. Thor comes to mind.

He’s spectacular.

“I’m Ford. Hope’s uncle. Heard you wanted to talk to me.”

I’m struggling to find my words, to gather my strength. No man has ever made me weak at the knees. Inhaling a deep breath, I straighten as much as I can, but next to him I feel tiny. My short, curvy frame is nothing on his powerful one. I’m suddenly very aware of myself, and quickly tuck my long,

blond locks, wondering if my hair is neat or if I look like an absolute nerd. On a good day, I very much look like a teacher. I'm not sure if it's my petite glasses, or the freckles on my nose, or the flowery dresses I often wear. Maybe it's my weird yellow eyes, or the way my hair is always down in curls.

Either way, I could never catch the eye of a man like him.

I can't seem to get the words out that are in my mind, and, instead, the only sound that comes out is a garbled stutter.

Ford's mouth stretches into a grin that only makes it that much harder for me to get my brain to work. "Am I makin' you nervous, honey?"

Does he just go around calling all women honey?

"Yes," I say, then quickly shake my head. "I-I-I mean no. No. No thanks."

What is happening?

What are the words coming out of my mouth?

A low chuckle erupts as he leans in close, making my throat seize and my stomach flutter. "Don't worry, it happens to the best of them."

Get it together, Alexis.

You're a teacher.

A role model.

Taking a long, deep breath, I close my eyes for just a moment before gathering myself. Finally, I look at him and, in a calmer voice, I say, "Yes, I did want to speak with you."

He's still grinning.

Damn him.

“What about?”

“Hope.”

His eyes flash. “She done somethin’?”

“First of all, no,” I snap, “and even if she did, I don't like the look on your face right now. Little girls need kindness and compassion, a safe place to sleep at night and food in their bellies. Don't get me started on the socks ...”

He crosses his arms over his big chest and tips his head to the side. “I don't fuckin' know what to buy her. Never had a kid before.”

“Don't swear in here, this is a no swear zone,” I say, flashing him a sarcastic smile. “And surely you know how to dress yourself, do you not?”

His eyes narrow. “What are you gettin' at?”

“Doesn't take common sense to figure out how to dress a small child.”

“Careful, *miss*, I don't like bein' spoke at.”

I cross my arms now, too. “And I don't like my students coming in with no socks, hungry, and not feeling safe.”

“I told you,” he grinds out, “I haven't had kids around before.”

“Then you need to find someone who has and get them to help.”

His face lightens. “You’re right.”

I’m shocked. “Yes, of course I am.”

“You can bring her to me after school every day, help her with her homework. Appreciate it.”

With that, he turns and begins walking out.

“I beg your pardon!” I call, waving a hand. “I didn’t mean me. I can’t. It would be against the rules.”

He glances at me over his shoulder. “Lucky I don’t like rules. Later, golden eyes.”

He did not.

Seriously?

Oh my god.

He must be joking?

He’s joking, right?

Right?

Why do I have a feeling that he, indeed, was not?



“YOU’RE MY BEST FRIEND,” I cry, my voice shaking as I stare at her, tears running down my cheeks. “How could you do this to me?”

Her eyes move to Ethan, then back to me. There is no emotion in her gaze; gone are the years of friendship, instead replaced by lies and betrayal. She’s looking at him like he

hung the moon and everything I've ever told her about him is a lie. "I love him," she tells me, shrugging.

Shrugging. Like it's nothing.

"He's my husband!" I screech, taking a step toward her.

We're at a lookout, where she told me to meet her. We have this spot where we climb down a little and there is a massive flat rock. We throw a picnic blanket out and look out over the trees and cliffs as we eat. It's a favorite of ours—it has been for a long time. It didn't seem unusual that she would ask me to meet her here. Ethan, too.

She said she would pick up Ethan on the way and that we'd all have a picnic. I thought nothing of it. I happily got into my car and met them. For a time, everything seemed normal. We climbed down, spread out our picnic rug, stood at the edge, and looked out over the gorgeous mountains, as if nothing was wrong. We had a chat about work, and even drank some wine.

Then, out of nowhere, she decided to break the news and tell me that she and my husband, Ethan, are leaving together. That they're in love. Within a mere second, she completely crushed my world. I didn't see it coming. She had the nerve to bring me here and act as though what she's telling me shouldn't change too much. They'll let me keep the house, she said. Even the car if I want. Oh, how damn kind of her.

"Enough," Ethan orders, as Ella takes a step closer to the edge. It isn't exactly the safest location; after all, we're just on a rock with no barriers to stop us from falling. Ethan's hand is outstretched, ready to catch her, like the hero he is.

She has no idea.

None.

“I’m sorry,” Ella tells me, her voice lacking actual empathy. “It just happened. I didn’t mean to hurt you ...”

I laugh bitterly. “Oh, well that makes it all better.”

My eyes move to Ethan. “I wonder who it is you’ve shown her, because I’m certain it isn’t the man that I live with.”

Abusive. Cold.

He love-bombed me at the beginning, but the moment we were married, everything changed. He’s a stone-cold narcissist, and he’s fooled her completely. He is a manipulative man who will use and abuse to get his way and then suddenly he’s kind and warm. Emotional whiplash. I wanted to leave him, I was trying to, and even though I know what kind of man he is, their news is crushing to me.

Even more crushing than what it is he has already done.

I wish I could feel sorry for her, because she will learn the hard way what kind of man he is, but I don’t because she is tearing my life apart. She is meant to be the person I trust the most in this world, and she just tore me down with one quick sentence. I love her. I never thought in a million years she would do this to me. Ella has always had a selfish streak, but I would have never seen this coming.

Ethan’s eyes flash, but before he can answer, Ella chimes in for him. “Maybe I’m a better woman than you, and for that reason, he is a better man. He is nothing but kind to me. He loves me and treats me right. I’m not certain I believe the lies

you've told me. Maybe you, Alexis, are the one causing him to behave that way."

I see red, mostly because I'm hurt and completely blindsided. The fact that she would actually say that to me, after everything I've confided in her. I take a menacing step toward her, forcing her to take another one back. Ethan curls his fingers around my arm in an attempt to stop me, and as I jerk it from his grips, I swing too hard and my body slams against Ella's. Everything happens in slow motion after that. She stumbles, her eyes widen, and as if in slow motion, she trips and falls, toppling over the edge. Just like that ... she's gone.

Simply gone.

Jerking awake, I bolt upright in bed and realize very quickly that I'm soaked in a cold sweat.

Another nightmare, only it's not make-believe.

It's real, and it hangs over my head every single day.

Glancing over at the man sleeping beside me, I clench my eyes shut. It's the very reason I'm still here, and the only reason he continues to have so much control over me. What happened out there that day is a secret that both of us will take to the grave, but the only problem is that he blackmails me every day of my life by using it.

He knows it'll keep me around, because he knows how afraid I am of both him and the truth.

"Dreaming over her again."

His rumbly voice has my eyes popping open.

I look down at him.

Once, I thought he was the biggest blessing to ever enter my life. Boasting thick dark hair that hangs around his shoulders and dazzling blue eyes, I thought I'd hit the jackpot. He's gorgeous, and he knows it. The catch of a lifetime, I told my mom once. The best thing to ever happen to me. I thought he was everything, until he showed me the monster that lies beneath.

Now, he traps me in a cage, holding the key so I can never escape.

"No," I say, my voice husky.

"You lie," he bites out, as his hand jerks the covers back to reveal a raging boner.

I used to love sleeping with this man, now I loathe it.

If I don't, however, the consequences are simply not worth it.

"You know what to do."

Stomach twisting, I don't bother to argue. Instead, I push off the bed, pull my panties aside and climb over him. Sliding down onto his dick, I keep my face expressionless as I quickly bring him to release. I know how to work him now, to make it quick. I can't stand to be here a second longer than I need. I know he's sleeping with other women, but that doesn't stop his expectations of me as his *'wife'*.

Once he's done, I go to slide off when his hand lashes up to curl around my upper arm. He knows not to leave bruises where people can see them. He wants me to have a job, of

course, because it brings in money and it's another area of my life he can control. "I'm away this weekend. If I find out you leave this house ..."

Swallowing the bile that rises in my throat, I look down at him and nod.

He releases me.

I learned it's best not to fight.

Fighting only ends in pain.

I was never raised to be a fighter. I've always been quiet and compassionate.

My biggest weakness.



He didn't show up.

That cocky, arrogant, shit of a biker didn't show up to get Hope.

Nor did Bonnie.

He is ensuring that I have no choice but to take her to him, just like he said. The confidence of this man is absolutely out of control. I'm in no mood for him today, but I'm not going to show Hope that I'm upset. No, I'm better than that. Instead, I tell her in a happy tone that I get to take her home today. She likes that idea, because she is slowly warming to me, and, if I'm being honest, I kind of adore her, too.

"Your uncle asked if I could help you with your homework today," I tell her, as we leave the school. "Would you like that?"

I'm certain what I'm doing is against every rule in the book, but he won't answer his phone, and I'm left with no other option. I can't leave her alone, and I'm going to make sure she gets home safely, no matter the cost. It can't hurt to help her out a little with her homework, too. I am there, after all.

"Yes," she tells me in a soft tone as I open the door to my car and she climbs in.

I know where the clubhouse is, and considering I don't have Ford's address, I'm going to have to guess he'll be there. Everyone in town knows of the motorcycle club and all the parties they have. Don't get me started on all the drugs that float through town that they are more than willing to supply. They're criminals, and it kills me to know that Hope is involved with no other options.

Arriving at the gates, I park just outside and glance in at the large house, shed, and garage. There are bikes everywhere, trucks, and the huge roller doors to the garage are open and people are milling about inside. Taking a deep, shaky breath, I put on my happiest face and look over to Hope. "Ready?"

She nods and gets out of the car.

I follow her, mostly because I have no idea where I'm going. As we pass through the large, grated gates, my eyes scan over the people who have stopped to gawk. I know I look out of place, it's probably this darn yellow dress. It's very ... summery. My hair whips in the breeze, covering my face. Desperately, I move it off as we approach the open garage. Is this really where Hope spends her time? There are people smoking ... I don't even want to know what.

"Can I help you?"

The rough male voice has me spinning around, nearly tripping over my own feet. Steadying myself, I peer up at the man before me. My word. He is tall, dark, and handsome. Do they all look like this? Silvery grey eyes travel over me, taking me in, before he crosses his arms, waiting for my answer.

“I, ah,” I stammer. “I’m bringing Hope home from school.”

Nodding, the man seems to accept my explanation. “Ah, you’re golden eyes.”

That’s what he told them? Seriously?

Grumbling, I nod in agreement. Anything to hurry this along.

Nice to know he’s told them about me, I suppose.

“Name is Mex,” he goes on. “Fury is busy.”

“Fury?” I question.

Grinning, Mex responds, “Ford.”

“Right,” I mutter. “Well, I am going to help Hope with her homework. Is there somewhere ... quiet, I can do that?”

“Next door. I’ll send Fury over when he’s done. Might take him a while, if you catch my drift.”

I shake my head in confusion. “I don’t.”

“Fury likes the ladies.”

Oh.

Hell.

No.

“You’re telling me he couldn’t pick up—” I pause, glancing down at Hope to ensure she isn’t listening before leaning in closer to Mex “—his own niece because he’s having sex?”

Mex grins. “That’s what I’m tellin’ you.”

I will have a few choice words for him when he’s done.

“Show me where we’re going,” I say to Hope, giving Mex a disgusted look.

“Careful, darlin’,” Mex calls after me, “that stick up your ass might hurt you if you keep clenchin’ that hard.”

I grind my jaw.

It’s nothing I haven’t heard before.

They think because I’m a teacher, because I care about my students, that I’m a goody-two-shoes.

Oh, how wrong they are.

Following Hope, we go through a fence at the back corner and down a little track through the woods. Coming out the other side, I see a beautiful old home. Well, this looks a little better. Hope leads me up the front steps, opening the door, and we step inside to see three women sitting at the table, laughing. One of them is Bonnie, I’d recognize her anywhere. The other two are equally as beautiful, and I’m guessing they, too, are part of the club.

I don’t know how it all works.

“Alexis?” Bonnie leaps up, rushing over. “How come you’re bringing Hope?”

Here we go again. Once more, Ford has forgotten to fill anyone in on his plans.

“Your pal decided he wasn’t going to pick her up, that I needed to bring her to the club and help her with her

homework,” I explain. “Guessing he didn’t tell you.”

Bonnie frowns, putting an arm around Hope’s shoulders. “No. He told me he was collecting her and that I didn’t need to.”

Of course he did.

“Well, he’s currently busy, so here I am.”

Bonnie smiles down at Hope, before extending her arm to her friends. “This is Myla and Acacia. This is Myla’s place.”

God, they’re beautiful. I must look a right mess in comparison to them.

“I have to ask,” I say, my eyes scanning over them. “Is there some sort of selection process that goes on for those bikers and the women who date them, because everyone I’ve seen looks like they belong in a magazine.”

Myla laughs, standing up and walking over. “You’re adorable! But no, it’s just luck of the draw.”

Hmmm.

“Are you Hope’s teacher?” Acacia asks, tipping her head to the side as she studies me.

“Yeah, I am.”

“Damn, I wish I had a teacher like you when I was young. All mine were old and cranky.”

I smile.

Well damn, these girls are nice.

“Are you hungry, honey?” Myla asks Hope. “I made muffins today.”

Hope nods, her little face lighting up as she follows Myla into the kitchen. My heart softens a little, knowing she’s in good hands over here. As for her uncle, well, I’ll be having a word with him when she’s out of earshot, and what I have to say won’t be nice.

“I’m sorry Fury messed you around,” Bonnie offers, extending her hand toward a seat for me to sit.

“Is For ... ah, Fury, often so unorganized?”

Acacia snorts. “No, he’s probably the most organized. He’s just not ... well, dad material.”

She’s not kidding.

“He doesn’t need to be dad material,” I say, sarcastically, “he just needs to know how to put a pair of socks on a child.”

Acacia laughs. “He’s still doing that, huh?”

“Yes. Does he stay here with Hope?”

“No,” Bonnie explains. “She is here after school until it’s time for dinner, then she goes back to his house with him for the night. He drops her off at school. If he can’t, then she stays here with us. More often than not, she is here with us. He will come by in the morning and get her ready, but he doesn’t seem to know how to interact with her.”

That makes more sense.

“Is his sister going to be away for a while?” I ask.

Bonnie shrugs. “We’re not sure, but it’s not looking good. Even if she does get out, her track record isn’t great. That poor little girl deserves better.”

She’s right about that.

“Well, I’m glad she has all of you.”

I offer them a smile.

“Did you talk to anyone over at the club?” Acacia asks as Myla returns with a plate of muffins.

“Ah, Mex?”

Acacia grins. “Oh, he’s with me. I hope he was nice because if he wasn’t, girl you have permission to bring him down.”

I can’t help but laugh. “Well, he told me not to clench too hard or the stick up my ass might hurt me. That was probably the highlight of our conversation.”

Acacia gasps. “He didn’t.”

Bonnie’s eyes widen.

Myla presses a hand over her mouth.

“Oh, he did,” I say, then I can’t help it, a giggle bursts forth. “It’s pretty funny, actually. Don’t worry, I’m used to it. Everyone assumes because I’m a teacher that I don’t know how to have fun. It’s not true, of course. Though, this damn dress doesn’t help.”

I tug at the dress.

It's a pretty dress, don't get me wrong, but it's very proper. It makes me look innocent, sweet, like a little virgin who has never been into trouble in her life. Not exactly the look that draws men like those bikers back there.

"That dress is fire," Myla throws in. "You're the most adorable person I think I've ever seen."

I snort. "Now you're just being nice."

"Seriously," Bonnie shakes her head at my reaction, "you're bloody adorable, woman."

Standing here, with these women, it's hard for me not to feel a pang of sadness. Once, I had a friend, someone I could confide in, trust, love, and she betrayed me in the worst possible way. Ever since I lost her that tragic day, I haven't made more friends. This just makes me realize how much I miss it. I long for the company, someone to talk to, a way to escape my nightmarish life.

These girls are the kinds of people I'd kill to have as friends.

"Heard you were lookin' for me."

The rumbling voice has me turning to see Fury entering the front door, shirtless. I can't help it; my eyes widen with shock. Even though I beg them not to, they rake over that delicious body. Every hard inch of flesh is covered in ink and oh, it does something for me indeed. My cheeks burn, and horror washes over me when a slow grin spreads across his face. He can see it; I know he can. He's looking at me with satisfaction.

He's proud of how he's making me react.

"You left Hope at school," I manage to grind out. "It's not my job to bring her to you. Can't you step it up a little?"

He tucks a thumb into the front of his low dipped jeans and keeps the grin. "I can, but I'm not goin' to. Not when you're doin' such a fine job."

"Don't be a dick, Fury," Bonnie scoffs. "She's a teacher, it's not her job to bring Hope to you."

Fury throws a warning look in her direction, but it does little to deter her.

"I can get her from school if you can't."

"You won't be gettin' her from school," Fury tells Bonnie. "Because golden eyes here is goin' to bring her to me and help with her homework."

"My name is Alexis," I point out. "Do you want me to spell it out?"

His gaze swings back to me. "I think I got it."

He's infuriating.

"I'm not bringing Hope to you every day. Not because I don't want to, but because I'm really not supposed to."

Fury crosses his arms, making his biceps flex. I can't help but wonder who he was with just now. His body is slightly slick, like he's been sweating, and the image of him making love to another woman, his hard body on top of hers, does wicked things to my body.

“I don’t give anyone permission to collect Hope from school,” Fury goes on. “If you let anyone but me take her, I can have you charged.”

He is not serious.

“So, if I don’t show up, then you have no choice but to bring her safely to me.”

He is an arrogant son of a bitch.

“Seriously?” Bonnie mutters. “Real mature, *Ford*.”

Fury grins at her. “No offense to you, sweetheart.”

He’s clever, I’ll give him that. Giving nobody but himself permission means I’m left with little choice if he doesn’t show up.

Well played.

“Why, dare I ask, are you so insistent on me bringing her here?” I question.

“Kid needs extra support. You’re the right person for that.”

I want to throttle him, but a quick glance at Hope watching the television has me restraining myself.

“Fine,” I mutter, “but like all good tutors, I expect to be paid.”

Fury’s grin gets bigger. “Oh, I’ll pay you.”

“I’m married,” I snap, waving a hand at him.

His eyes go to said hand, and he studies it. “Where’s your ring?”

“I, ah, I don’t wear it.”

“Why not?”

“Stop asking so many questions,” I reply, exasperated.

“Okay you two,” Bonnie steps in. “I think that’s enough. Fury, you’re going to pay her because she’s not your damned slave. Alexis, thank you for bringing Hope here to us. It’s nice that *someone* cares about her.”

Fury shoots her another warning glare.

She ignores him.

His eyes move to the little girl in front of the television, and, for a moment, something flashes across them. Is it that he doesn’t know how to take care of a child, or that he doesn’t want to because he’s afraid of just how much he might care for her?

“C’mon, kid. Time to go,” he calls.

Hope stands without argument, walking over to him. Looking up at her uncle, she stretches out her hand. For a moment, he hesitates, but eventually he reaches out and curls his big hand around hers. Something inside of me melts a little. I hate that such a simple moment causes such a huge reaction inside me. Maybe it’s the realization that I’ll never have kids, and I’ll never see the man I love with our child, loving him or her. Not because I can’t have them, but because I’ll never fall in love again.

I’m forever bound to a monster who will never allow me the kind of life I dream of.

“I have to go,” I say, quickly.

Emotions are a tricky thing, and, for me, they can creep up at the worst moments.

Waving a quick goodbye, I rush toward the door.

Fury reaches out and takes my arm, murmuring, “Wait.”

It’s innocent in every sense of the word, but the moment his fingers grip my flesh, my body goes into immediate protection mode. Jerking my arm away with a yelp, I take two quick steps back, my chest rising and falling as panic grips my chest. It’s an extreme reaction for such a small gesture, and the moment I focus on all the eyes that are now set on me, I know I just gave away a huge part of myself.

“Sorry,” I say, quickly. “I, ah, I have to go.”

I get the hell out of there before anyone has the chance to ask questions.

Because they’re questions I simply cannot answer.



“I DIDN’T ... I DIDN’T mean to.”

With trembling hands, I stare over the edge at my friend who is lying below, blood pouring from her head. I don’t know it for certain, but deep in my bones, I feel she’s dead. She isn’t moving, and her eyes appear open, staring into nothing. Vomit rises in my throat as panic grips my chest and every inch of me begins to shake as fear takes over.

I didn’t do it on purpose.

I didn’t ...

I tried to climb down, but I couldn't do it without falling. Crying hysterically, I kept murmuring that I didn't mean to, over and over, as I look down at her.

"What have you done?" Ethan's voice is scarily calm, considering the situation. "How could you do this to her?"

"I didn't mean to."

"That's not what I saw. You pushed her."

What is he talking about?

Turning to face him, I see him lowering his phone.

He was recording me. Recording. Me. What the fuck? Panic grips my chest as I shake my head from side to side. What sort of monster ...

His eyes are stone-cold and emotionless. "From where I stand, you did."

What is he doing?

Is this some sort of joke?

"I didn't. I'm going to call the police and tell them what happened."

"Go on then, tell them you pushed her out of rage and killed her ..."

I shake my head in confusion and horror. "You saw that I didn't. I didn't push her. I didn't. You know I didn't. Ethan, you have to tell them I didn't."

"Tell them?" He laughs, bitterly. "Oh, Alexis, I'm not telling them anything."

“What is wrong with you?” I scream, gripping the sides of my head.

He leans in close. “I’m not going down for anything, but you are.”

What is he talking about?

Turning, he cleans up all our things and then climbs up from the spot we’re in. Glancing over my shoulder desperately, I know I don’t have a choice, and I climb up after him.

“Ella and I called you to the lookout, we just wanted to do the right thing,” he says, casually, his eyes meeting mine. “But you were just so mad, you wouldn’t calm down ...”

“No ...”

“She told you that we had fallen in love. She was so sorry, crying her eyes out, saying that she didn’t mean to, and she didn’t want to hurt you. You got mad, and you lost it, pushing her over the side.”

“What are you doing?” I cry, shaking my head desperately.

He shrugs, casually. “I’m not going down for this. Fortunately, I have proof, so I don’t need to worry. You look pathetic, really, crawling around on the rock crying that you didn’t mean to. It’s all they’ll need ...”

No.

No.

He can’t do this to me.

*“Please, Ethan,” I beg, my voice a desperate plea.
“Please. I’ll do anything. Please don’t go to the police. I will
do anything you want, anything at all, please.”*

He pauses, and a slow smile spreads across his face.

*Closing the distance between us, he reaches out and curls
his fingers around my upper arm, pulling me close.*

“Anything?”

*I nod, frantically. “I don’t want to go to prison. I don’t ... I
didn’t mean for her to fall. Please. You’re my husband.
Please.”*

*“Okay.” He squeezes my arm a little tighter. “I’ll keep
your little secret. But hear me now, Alexis, I own you. From
this moment forward, you do everything I tell you to do. You
will be the perfect little wife. If you don’t, I’ll make sure the
whole town knows what kind of monster you are. You know
they’ll believe me the moment I show them that video. You will
go down for the rest of your days.”*

An agonized wail rips from my throat.

“Do you understand what I’m saying?” he growls.

*I nod, hiccupping as my knees try to give way from beneath
me.*

*“Good. Now you’ll never go against me.” He smiles,
pleased with himself. “If you do, the police will receive the
video of you crying out as you stare over the edge of the cliff,
Ella’s dead body lying on the ground below.”*

He’s a monster.

A true monster.

And now, he owns me.

Once again, a vicious nightmare rips me from my sleep.

Only this time, I'm on the sofa.

Ethan was out last night, but he wanted the bed free in case he decided to bring someone home. That's the kind of man he has become. The power of control has gotten to his head, and, with it, he thrives. He knows he can do anything and I'll say nothing. He knows that he owns me, and he knows that I won't go against him. The idea of living the rest of my life in prison with everyone thinking I'm a murderer is something I can never live with. To me, that is a thousand times worse than this.

Picturing the look on my mother's face if she thought I killed someone is enough to make my stomach twist.

Nobody knows the kind of man Ethan is.

To them, he is a saint, because that's the face he shows them.

Ella's case was ruled a suicide. Of course, we were questioned, and of course Ethan told them that the two of them had been getting close, but when she wanted him to leave me, he told her he couldn't. He put on the best show of his life, and the cops ate it up. They never asked for our phones, it was shoved aside and never looked into again. But I know, oh, I know that if they ever got that video of me, it would change their investigation. A tip from Ethan would have them looking at me and wondering if maybe, just maybe, Ella was pushed.

Pushing off the sofa, I check the time. I start work soon, but I desperately need a run. I've been taking to running because it's the one thing Ethan doesn't stop me from doing. His words are something along the lines of *Yes, you need to run. I don't want a fat wife*. Of course he doesn't, so he allows me this little bit of freedom, and I take it. Every single morning and afternoon, I take it.

Eventually, I learned to absolutely love it.

Slowly, my body is changing, growing healthier and slightly fuller.

Returning home, I come face to face with the man I once loved so dearly. He's standing, shirtless, and any other woman would swoon at the very sight of him. Instead, he makes every sense in my body come alive with fear and concern. I'm always on high alert when I'm around him, never knowing just what it is he's going to do. The last few years have been hell, but somehow, my body has learned to adjust.

My mind, on the other hand ... not so much.

"Come," he orders.

Carefully, I kick my shoes off and walk toward him.

The moment I reach him, he puts his hands on my shoulders, and even though I want to, I don't flinch. Instead, I glance up at him, my breath stuck in my throat as I wait for what it is he's about to deliver. Leaning down, he captures my mouth with his. Too stunned to speak, I stand there as he coaxes my lips apart with his tongue. It has been so long since

he's kissed me, so long since I've felt a tender touch, that my body betrays me.

I melt into him.

Not because I want to, but because I'm so desperate for any kind of comfort.

People will never truly understand the shame that comes with wanting your abuser to love you, even just for a moment.

I kiss him back, for a second letting my mind go back to us just being husband and wife in love.

Pulling away, his eyes search my face.

Of course, I should know that with the delivery of kindness will come cruelty.

“It's time for us to have a baby.”

With that, he turns and walks away, leaving me standing there, the air trapped in my lungs, my feet unable to move.

There it is, the bombshell, the hurricane that has been brewing. A man like him doesn't do things for kindness, they do them for a reason. They make sure that no matter what, their control remains. His words crumple up every bit of security in my body and throw it in the trash, along with every good thing I have left.

The one thing I never wanted with a man like him, is a child.

This day has been one I've been terrified about for the longest time.

Now, it's here.

And I don't know how I'm supposed to make it stop.



“Alexis, I’m so sorry. I wouldn’t call if I had any other options, but we don’t know how to calm her down.”

Bonnie’s frantic voice travels across the other end of the phone just as I sit down to eat. Placing my fork down, I lean forward, concern filling my voice when I ask her what’s going on. It’s a Friday night just past nine. I didn’t know who was contacting me, I rarely get calls, but the moment I heard Bonnie’s voice, I knew something must be wrong.

“We got news today that her mother is getting locked up for a long time. She’s losing it. I’ve never seen a child like this. She was crying and screaming, then she ran off into the woods and won’t come out. She’s scared, and I don’t know how to fix it.”

Oh, Hope.

Pushing to my feet, I glance over at the bedroom where my husband is asleep. Generally, once he’s gone to bed, he doesn’t wake until morning, but leaving is still a risk. Still, I can’t leave Hope alone, scared and feeling like she has nobody she can turn to. “I’m coming,” I tell Bonnie, rushing over to take my keys before slipping out of the house.

The drive over is quick.

Arriving at the club, I can see that they’re having a party. There are people everywhere and a large fire in the middle of

the lot lights up the sky as people sit around it, some dancing, some smoking, all of them drinking. Parking my car, I get out and hesitantly walk toward the entrance. I'm not sure if I'm meant to be here or at Myla's house next door, but I don't think on it too long.

“You must be the teacher.”

A rumbling voice has my head whipping around to see a man that everyone knows. Western Aiken. His name was the talk of the town for so long, his face all over our screens and in the papers. Up close, though, he is far more daunting than I ever would have expected. He's big, taller than I thought, and all the tattoos and scars make him seem that much scarier. His hair is pulled up in a bun atop his head, and the sides are shaven, making him look like some sort of Viking. Oh, boy, he's something entirely.

“Ah, yeah,” I answer. “You're Western.”

He nods. “Let's go.”

He turns without another word and walks through the crowd of people. Nobody stops him—they don't even try—as if the way he walks with such purpose is enough to tell them he's on a mission. I follow along, desperately trying to keep up with him, his large strides difficult to follow without getting into a jog. We approach the back fence, and I see flashlights shining around as the faint sounds of people calling Hope's name can be heard.

Poor Hope.

“Bonnie,” Western barks, and a moment later, Bonnie appears out of the woods, sweat coating her forehead, her face concerned.

“Oh thank gosh, you’re here.”

Rushing over, she stops in front of me.

“Do you have any idea where she could be?” I ask, my eyes scanning the thick woodland.

“No. She just ran in there. I don’t know how far she went, but she’s not answering our calls.”

Of course she’s not, she’s scared.

“Can all of you stop and leave?” I ask, carefully. “Let me go alone.”

Bonnie’s brow furrows. “But ...”

I offer her a reassuring smile. “Trust me, yeah?”

Nodding, Bonnie disappears, and I follow Western toward Myla’s house where we wait for everyone to come back in. Fury comes striding out from behind a row of large trees, his face tight as he waves his flashlight around. The moment his eyes connect with mine, something inside me jerks. Like an electric bolt going through my body. As he approaches, a certain type of nerves grip me. He makes me anxious.

“She won’t come out.”

Those are the first words he offers me.

I nod, extending a hand for the flashlight. “She is overwhelmed; all the screaming will be making it worse. Let me try.”

Slowly, everyone returns to the house, and they watch in anticipation as I go down the front steps alone, walking off in the direction that Fury pointed to. Once I reach the line of trees, I turn on the flashlight and step in, softly calling Hope's name. With every step, I call it again, but I also tell her it's okay, that she's safe, that I won't let anything happen to her and she can trust me.

It takes a long time, but patience is my strongest point.

Eventually, a soft sob can be heard coming from behind a large tree.

I don't rush over; instead, I go over to the tree and sit down, pressing my back to it. I can hear her whimpers on the other side. It breaks my heart, to know she's so afraid. It's hard enough to understand your mother going, let alone the fact that you might not see her again for a very long time. She's only young, she doesn't know how the world works, and she feels like she has lost everything.

"It really sucks, the news you got tonight," I say, my voice soft and understanding. "That must have really upset you."

A small sob.

"I know you're scared right now. You're with people you don't really know, and your mom isn't here. I would be scared, too."

Another sob.

My heart clenches for her.

"I wish there was something I could do to make that go away, but I can't. I can be your friend, though. I might not give

you the best hugs, or make your favorite foods, and I'm certainly not your mom, but I will try really hard. Do you think you might let me?"

Silence.

But not a sob.

"You know when I was young, my dad died," I tell her. "I was only eight. I remember how sad I was. It just felt like all the sadness wanted to come out, and no matter what I did, it wouldn't stay in. That's because sometimes, sadness needs a place to go, too. It doesn't want to stay inside, so letting it out is important. You're allowed to be sad, honey."

A shuffle in the leaves, and then Hope appears around the other side of the tree, standing before me. I can't see her face, and I'm not about to shine a flashlight in it, but I know it'll be streaked with tears, red and puffy. That's okay. Pushing to my feet, I reach out a hand, but she doesn't take it. Instead, she throws herself at me. Catching her, the flashlight tumbles to the ground, but I don't reach for it.

Instead, I pick the little girl up into my arms and she wraps herself around me, her grip tight on my neck as she hangs on, seemingly afraid if she lets go, I might just disappear. My heart explodes as I hold onto her, reaching down for the light and then making my way out of the woods. As I approach the house, everyone is standing on the patio, watching.

When they see me, I can see the look of relief in their gazes.

Especially Fury's.

He strides down the steps, but when he reaches me, I shake my head.

Right now, she needs understanding.

“Where is her room?” I ask him, softly.

His eyes flash, almost like he’s torn between two things, but, eventually, he turns and walks back up the steps. As I pass the others, Bonnie reaches out and gives me a grateful squeeze on the arm. I offer her a smile before following Fury into the house and down the hall. There is a room at the back, all painted in pink and made up for a little girl. They’ve done their best to make her feel at home, I can’t fault them for their effort.

Placing Hope down on her bed, it takes her a moment to release me.

When she does, I get a good look at her. Her little face is streaked with mud and tears, and her skin is blotchy.

It kills me.

“How about you have a shower,” I tell her, “and while you do, I’ll make you something to eat. Whatever you want. Then, I can read you a story before bed.”

Nodding, she tells me in a tiny, cracked voice, “I like grilled cheese.”

“Then I’m going to make you the best grilled cheese you’ve ever had.”

She glances at Fury, who is staring down at her, his face expressionless. Looking back at me, she reaches for a book on

her bedside table and passes it to me. It's one we've been reading in class. I knew she loved it from the moment she turned the page, because it's about a little girl in the foster system who finds a new family and learns that love can come from so many different places.

I smile down at her. "Great choice, this one is my favorite, too."

She takes her things and disappears into the shower. Turning, I face Fury, and his eyes follow her as she leaves the room, his brows slightly furrowed. Then, he turns and looks back to me. "Thanks."

His voice is gruff, but it's more than I had expected from him, so I'll take it.

Shrugging, I tell him, "I get kids, it was no problem. She's a great girl, but she's going to struggle without her mom for a while. It's not easy to understand when you're so little."

"We were raised the same," Fury tells me, his voice tight. "Never thought she would go down that road. All it took was the wrong man ..."

My chest tightens, because if you ask me, I would tell you I never expected to go down this road either, and yet here I am. I was raised right, I knew my boundaries, I would have sworn I'd never let a man abuse me, but here I am, living in this nightmare, knowing that it's wrong but being so afraid to leave. The fear is more than I could have ever expected—the way it sinks into your soul is crushing.

You don't just run.

It's not that easy.

People don't understand, and that's what makes it so much worse.

"The wrong man will do that to you," I murmur.

"Stay."

His statement shocks me, and I look at him with narrowed eyes. "Pardon?"

"Stay here with her. You're the only person who seems to understand her. I'll pay you. Just ... stay. I'm not made for this."

Biting my lower lip, I wish I could do just that, but I can't.

Not because I don't want to, but because Ethan would never allow it.

"I can't," I say softly. "I'm sorry, but I just can't."

"Why not?"

There is an underlying demand in his tone, and as he stands before me, his presence is incredibly overwhelming, yet I'm not afraid of him. He's a man I should be afraid of, he's powerful and dangerous, his very presence reeks of strength, and yet I don't feel any kind of fear when I'm around him.

"I have a job, Fury," I say, quickly, a little too quickly. "It would go against all the rules and ..."

"Bullshit," he cuts me off. "I know for a fact that there would be a way around it. You could be a friend of the family livin' with me. Don't try and make excuses. Tell me why you're really sayin' no."

“I have a life,” I attempt again. “I can’t give it all up to take care of her. She was given to you, not me. I’m sorry, but I can’t.”

Stepping closer to me, he leans in so close I suck in a breath. The overwhelming dominance he radiates is enough to make me weak at the knees as I look up into his intense gaze. “You’re lyin’ to me.”

My voice comes out shaky when I speak. “Please, I can’t. I’m sorry.”

“Is it your husband?”

I take a step away, not wanting to get into it, not wanting to tell him anything. That’s a secret he’ll never find out. Not if I have a choice. He is getting too close and I can’t allow it, this is not a part of my life he has a right to know.

“My personal life is none of your business,” I murmur, turning away from him.

He reaches out, taking my arm.

Once again, my reaction is immediate. Wincing, I freeze, closing my eyes. I hate anyone grabbing me like that. Something about the feeling of their fingers wrapping around my arm has everything inside me seizing. It’s Ethan’s favorite method of control, because it doesn’t matter where we are, he can take my arm and squeeze so hard that nobody around us notices.

But I do.

Oh, I do.

Fury takes the sleeve of my shirt and jerks it up, revealing my upper arms. I know he'll see bruises there, and I quickly pull away, stepping back and growling, "How dare you?"

"He fuckin' hits you."

His voice is ice, and his eyes flash.

Before he can say anything more, Hope appears all dressed in her pajamas. Her eyes move between the two of us, and I know I need to calm my face. I force a smile and say, "You ready for that book? Uncle Fury is going to make your grilled cheese."

She nods and rushes to the bed.

Fury steps up closer to me, his hard chest pressing against my back as he leans down and murmurs into my ear, "We're not done here."

Swallowing, I move toward the bed and as far away from him as I can get.

He's getting too close.

I need to put a stop to this.

Right now.



"WHERE WERE YOU?"

Ethan's voice is as cold as ice as I step through the front door, trying to be as quiet as I can. The moment I hear that emotionless rasp, my entire body freezes. He never wakes up, and now here he is, waiting for me to get home. I should have

known better. I should have never left. Now I have to try and come up with something that will ensure he goes easy on me.

“A student of mine ran away. The school called to help me find her. It is all resolved now.”

Standing, Ethan steps toward me. His hand lashes out and connects with my face, sending my head aggressively to the side. I yelp and press a hand to my cheek as I take a weary step back. “Ethan, please. I’m telling you the truth.”

“You do not leave this house without me. You come in, you tell me, and I escort you. You know the rules, Alexis.”

“I’m sorry,” I say quickly. “You were sleeping, and I didn’t think ...”

Gripping my upper arm, he hauls me closer to him. “You’re right, you didn’t.”

He tosses me backward until my back slams into the door. Shoving his body against mine, his fingers creep up and curl around my neck. He squeezes, enough for the air to cut off and for panic to set in. Desperately, I cry his name as my head begins to throb due to lack of oxygen. I claw at his forearms, but nothing I do has him loosening his grip.

“I own you,” he growls.

“I know,” I gasp.

“I could destroy you in a single second.”

I nod, attempting to get the tiniest bit of air into my lungs.

I’m growing dizzy.

“Do you know what I would do to you if you ever tried to get away?”

I nod, gasping his name once more.

He finally releases me, letting me crumble to the ground.

“Next time you think about leaving the house without telling me, think again.”

With that, he turns and strides into the darkness. Pressing my hands to my chest, I take a few broken breaths as tears burst forth and roll down my cheeks. Pressing my head into my hands, I cry silently on the floor.

One day he’ll kill me.

I know it.

The next day comes slowly, and I’m forced to wear a scarf to cover the finger marks on my neck. He rarely leaves marks where people can see them, but something came over him last night. Perhaps a fear that I could grow stronger and leave. Whatever it was, there was a single moment where I truly thought he might just kill me. It was as terrifying as I could have ever imagined it would be, and, suddenly, I’m very uneasy about my future.

I wish there was a way for me to escape.

“Good morning, Miss.”

As the students pile into my classroom, I feel a sense of ease. It’s the only place in this world where I know he can’t touch me, and I can truly be myself. Being here, it’s my safety

blanket. Without it, I would be a shell of myself. I don't think I could cope.

I smile. "Good morning, everyone."

"Bit hot for a scarf."

The rumbling voice has me turning to face Fury with Hope by his side. Today, she's wearing socks, and I could cheer. I'm not used to seeing him bring her in, but here we are. His eyes scan over my scarf, and I avoid his statement, staring down at Hope. "Good morning, honey. How are you today?"

"Good," Hope responds, her voice soft and quiet.

She looks tired, and I wonder if she had much sleep last night. I stayed with her until she ate and then I read to her until her eyes fluttered closed. I knew she would have a restless sleep, but I was hopeful that at least, she knew she was safe and that she was surrounded by people who cared about her.

"That's wonderful. Hey, listen, do you think you could feed the fish today?"

Her eyes light up as she nods, dropping her backpack to the ground and turning, rushing toward the fish tank. I love seeing her slowly come out of her shell. Fury reaches down and lifts the bag off the floor, his eyes never leaving mine. Slowly, he straightens, and his hand reaches out, his fingers stretching toward my scarf. I know what he's looking for, and I can't do this right here.

"Please don't," I say, my voice more panicked than I'd like.

His brows furrow. "I can help you."

Oh, but he can't.

If it was just an abusive relationship, maybe he could help me.

It's not.

I'll go to prison for life.

My job, everything ... gone.

"There is nothing to help," I respond, calming my voice.

"You think I don't know a beaten wife when I see one?"

"Don't pretend to understand my situation," I grind out.

"You know nothing about me."

"I know that every single fuckin' time I reach for you, you flinch. I can see fear in your eyes, hidden in the depths. You think you've managed to keep it from the world, but your truth is written all over you."

"Stand down," I seethe, completely unsettled. "This isn't the place."

He leans in close. "I don't like men who abuse women. I won't stand down."

With that, he turns and walks over to put Hope's things away.

I watch, my fingers trembling. Shoving my hands into my pockets, I take a few steadying breaths to calm myself as my eyes scan the room. Thankfully, nobody is watching. A few of the moms have their eyes on Fury, and I'm not at all surprised. He's something to look at, and everyone knows he's single.

Half of these women would throw their husbands to the curb for a night with a man that looks like him.

Fury turns, winking at one of them, and a flurry of giggles fills the classroom.

Seriously.

Turning, I begin writing on the board, praying he'll be gone when I turn back.

That's not at all his plan, and moments later, the warm presence of him behind me has me stiffening. I keep writing, forcing my hand to move as he slips something into my pocket. Then, without a word, he's gone. I don't want to turn and look at the women who are no doubt staring at me. I don't want to give them something to talk about.

My fingers burn to pull the note from my pocket, but I don't.

Instead, I wait until everyone has gone and my class is reading before pulling the paper out and unraveling it.

Scrawled on a small, ripped piece of paper is a phone number.

I know it's his.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I shove the paper back into my pocket.

Every ounce of me screams to throw it in the trash, to not let him get involved, but something in the background is telling me to keep it somewhere.

Maybe one day ... I'll need it.

Maybe.



“Got a charity ball,” Fury tells me, handing me a slip of paper. “Raisin’ money for kids in the system, give them the things they miss out on. Club does it every year. Would mean a lot to Hope if you could come.”

I stare down at the printed paper in my hand.

Bikers do this kind of thing?

Seriously?

“This doesn’t seem like something a motorcycle club would do,” I murmur, glancing up at him.

“Why? No wait, let me guess, you’re under the impression that we’re nothin’ but criminals and couldn’t possibly do anything good.”

I bite my bottom lip.

I mean, I *was* under that impression if I’m being completely truthful.

“You know what—” he snatches the paper back “—don’t fuckin’ worry about it.”

He turns, striding toward the door.

Dammit.

“Fury,” I call out, but he doesn’t stop.

Well, I’m doing a great job pissing people off right now.

I pull out my phone and text Bonnie. She gave me her number when she dropped Hope to school yesterday and assured me that I can text her anytime and if I ever want to catch up, she would be more than happy. She's such a kind person, I would love the chance to be her friend, but that won't be something that comes easily. Not for me, anyway.

A – Hey, it's Alex. Fury mentioned a ball, but he didn't leave a paper. Can you forward me the info?

B – Hey girl! Of course! It would be so great if you could come. Hope would absolutely love it.

A – I'm definitely going to try.

She sends me the information, and I check the dates. As I do, my heart flutters. Ethan is away for work; he goes once a year for a week at a time, and it's the only time I'm ever alone. It happens to be exactly when the ball is going to be held. I could actually pull this off. The idea of getting all dressed up, drinking and dancing, has something coming alive inside me. I don't remember the last time I had fun.

And it's for a good cause.

Do I dare?

A – Count me in!

B – OH! That is amazing. I can't wait!

Tucking my phone away, my heart feels a little lighter as I begin my lesson with the class. Hope approaches the desk midway through, and she looks as though she wants to tell me something. Stopping what I'm doing, I offer her a smile. "Is everything okay? Do you need to use the bathroom?"

Shaking her head, she bites her lower lip and looks as though she wants to say something but she isn't sure if she should. I want to be her safe space, so I offer a warm smile and wait for her to speak. Eventually, in a low voice, she tells me, "Uncle Fury has a lot of friends."

Narrowing my eyes, I'm confused as to what it is she's getting at. Does she mean the club? Because of course there are a lot of people involved in that.

"Well, Uncle Fury is part of a motorcycle club, honey. Those men are like his family."

That's a good explanation, right?

"No," she says as she shakes her head, "I mean he has lots of friends at home. Girlfriends."

Oh.

Ohhh.

Clearing my throat, I try to figure out the best way to approach the situation that isn't giving away too much information on the subject. She's way too young to be exposed to Fury having multiple women over. I could throttle that man sometimes because he really has no idea what he's doing. I also can't blame him entirely, for the exact same reason. Men aren't the smartest when it comes to raising kids alone, not at first, anyway.

Especially when they've never been around children.

How do I explain this?

“Maybe Uncle Fury just has a lot of girls that are friends,” I offer.

Hope ponders this. “They always go into his bedroom. Last night, I went in to ask for water and one of them was sitting on his lap.”

My cheeks burn because I know for damned certain she was not sitting on his lap. I could throttle him. What the hell is he doing sleeping around with a little girl in the house? Does he have no brain? Squashing my anger down, I smile at Hope. “Maybe Uncle Fury was having a bad day. I’ll have a chat with him, okay?”

She nods, seemingly pleased with my answer, then she returns back to her desk.

I am taking her home this afternoon, because apparently Fury won’t make it on time, but I’m beginning to wonder if he’s just very good at using me. The fact is, he is probably not busy at all, instead he’s likely balls deep in a woman and too lazy to come and get his niece. I know it shouldn’t get to me as much as it is, but for the rest of the day, it’s all that plays on my mind.

By the time I arrive at Myla’s place to drop Hope off, I’m fuming.

I want to reach out and slap him, to shake some sense into him, to make him understand that he can’t behave this way when he has a child around. What is he thinking? He has all day to play around with his women, why the hell would he bring them around when Hope is home?

Hope rushes inside, excited to help Myla with some afternoon baking. She tells me that every day, they bake something together. It warms my heart to know these women are making such a big effort for her, because right now, she needs it more than they could ever possibly imagine.

“Girl, you look pissed,” Acacia approaches me, standing by the car. “Everything okay?”

“Hope saw Fury having sex,” I tell her through gritted teeth. “I’m not certain if he has lost a few brain cells, or if he really doesn’t care, but surely he can be a little more careful.”

Acacia scrunches up her nose. “Ugh. Bikers are seriously fucking selfish sometimes. He is on his way back, are you going to wait for him?”

“Oh, I’m waiting alright,” I mutter, crossing my arms.

Acacia laughs. “Do you want a drink while you wait?”

“I’m okay.” I offer her a smile. “Thanks.”

She grins and turns, walking back into the house.

I don’t move; I wait until the low rumble of the bike coming down the driveway fills my ears, and the moment I see him come into view, I push off my car and stand, arms crossed over my chest. I’m pissed, probably irrationally so, but I need someone to take this pent-up frustration out on.

Fury kicks the stand on the bike and throws his leg over, his eyes narrowing in on me as he strides in my direction, all decked out in black leather, his chiseled face catching the shimmer of the sun as he moves. God dammit, why does he have to look like a fucking God? It makes everything inside

me feel almost desperate, hungry even. I don't understand this feeling, but I know that when Fury is around, every inch of me goes on high alert.

“Look like you're about to bust, golden eyes,” Fury murmurs, stopping in front of me.

“That's because I am,” I grind out. “Hope told me that she saw you with a woman last night.”

He licks his lower lip. God damn him. I force my gaze to stay on his, even though every single part of me wants to look at that tongue sliding over his full, perfect lip.

“Yeah, didn't know she was goin' to come in.”

“You have a child in your house, Fury,” I snap, throwing my hands on my hips. “You can't just parade different women in every night. She isn't stupid. She is asking why you have so many friends, not to mention the fact that she saw one of them on your lap. You can't behave like that with a little girl in your house.”

He tips his head to the side, completely unfazed by my little rant. “So many friends, eh?”

“Seriously?” I growl. “Did someone drop you on your head when you were little? Because I'm certain you're missing something.”

He grins now. “Your eyes turn green when you're angry. Fuckin' cute, really.”

“Are you listening to me at all?” I screech, throwing my hands up. “My word.”

“I’m hearin’ you, sweetheart, but from where I stand, it seems a whole lot more like you’re jealous than concerned.”

He cannot be serious.

“Jealous?” I sputter, shaking my head frantically. “As if.”

That grin gets wider, and, oh man, my heart is racing.

“You’re wonderin’ what it would be like to be on my lap.”

“I’m married,” I scoff.

Those eyes flash with challenge. “Don’t mean shit.”

“Yes,” I squeak. “Yes. It does. We’re getting off topic. You can’t do that when Hope is in your house.”

“I got that the first time you said it.”

“Why are you so damned infuriating?” I exhale, exasperated.

He doesn’t answer.

He just keeps grinning at me.

“Are you going to stop parading women around while your niece is in your home?”

He nods.

“Great. We could have just gotten to that from the beginning,” I mumble, shoving my hand into my purse to find my keys.

“What does it matter to you, anyway? Are you this passionate about all the kids in your class?”

“If they told me what Hope told me, then yes, I would be.”

“Or is it just that you enjoy comin’ here and yellin’ at me because I’m the only person you can let out your frustrations to that isn’t goin’ to give you a black eye.”

His words have the air in my lungs wheezing out and my entire body jerking. The cocky, arrogant, overbearing dick. How dare he say something like that so ... so ... casually.

“Excuse me?” I manage, my voice too shocked to work.

He crosses his arms. “I didn’t stutter.”

Narrowing my eyes, I cross my arms, too. “Why are you so damned invested in my life?”

“Because,” he tells me, pulling a cigarette out of his pocket, bringing it to his lips and lighting it up, “I want to know why a woman as smart as you, is stayin’ with a man that’s very clearly abusive.”

My knees shake as his words cause a reaction in my body that I’m not certain how to handle.

Too close.

He’s getting too close.

“You know nothing of my situation,” I manage, my voice tight.

“I have eyes. I can see plenty.”

“I’m done here,” I turn, facing my car, and my fingers stretch out to pull the door open, trembling more and more with every passing second.

Fury’s hard chest presses against my back, and I freeze, the keys slipping from my fingers as my entire body turns to

stone. I close my eyes, holding my breath as he leans in, his voice at my ear. “No woman turns to stone when a man touches her if she isn’t been’ beaten.”

His fingers stretch out and run down my arm, and I hold my breath, keeping my eyes closed, even though my body is desperate to respond.

“Not every touch is bad,” he murmurs, his breath tickling my neck.

I want him to stop.

Yet I don’t.

“When you’re ready to tell me what he has on you, then I can help.”

Swallowing the thick lump in my throat, I try to take myself away from this situation. I want it to stop, not because I don’t like it, but because he’s way too close to figuring out the truth. I can’t allow that because that truth won’t set me free. In his mind, I’m just the woman who is being abused by her husband, but that’s not the whole story. If he knew the whole story, he wouldn’t be so willing to help me.

“You can’t help me,” I whisper, my voice shaking.

“You’re wrong.”

Fingers glide up my sides, and it’s the first touch in a long time that I don’t feel repulsed by. It feels gentle, soft, as he moves his palms over the soft fabric of my dress, his hands very carefully exploring. “Tell me why.”

“Please,” I plead, my voice barely a whisper. “You can’t be the hero in this story.”

“Tell me.”

“I can’t. I’m sorry.”

I push back, forcing him to release me, then I reach down for my keys, climb into the car and slam the door. With trembling fingers, I take off, not once looking back. I can’t bear to face him; I can’t look into his eyes when I know he can see right through me. No, I need to create distance, because if I don’t, he’s going to figure me out, and if that happens ...

My life wouldn’t be worth living.



I SHOULDN'T BE HERE, I know I shouldn't, but I still put on the dress and came. Part of it is because I want to support their cause and Hope begged me to come, but the other part is because I will take any chance of freedom I'm given. Ethan is away, and it's the only time that I can truly be myself for a few days. The moment he returns, the glass slipper disappears and I'm back to the broken, run-down Cinderella.

Tonight, though, oh, I get to be the princess.

I picked a gold dress, one I have had in my closet for some time, but it's perfect for the occasion. Tightly hugging my body, it hangs low at the front in an exquisite dip that shows just enough cleavage for it to be sexy but not overly revealing. The material hugs every curve right down to my knees, where

it slowly fans out and trails behind me on the floor. The material has sequins, making it shimmer under the lights.

I paired it with a dainty pair of white heels and decided I'd leave my hair down, curling the long locks and letting them fall over my shoulders. A soft, semi-see-through white coat drapes over my shoulders and halfway down my arms, to hide the bruises, but it only adds to the style. I look as though I've come right off the Titanic. I pray I've done my makeup justice, considering it has been a long time since I've dressed up like this.

Walking into the large hall that the club hired down the road from them, I stare in awe at the beautiful decorations that have been so elegantly placed. White ribbon and fairy lights drape off the ceiling, and flickers of light line the beautiful wooden dance floor. Tables and chairs are beautifully decorated with white cloths and red flowers off to the sides and a huge buffet has been set up along the back.

Walking toward the crowd of people, I don't see him at first. Mostly because the man standing in a suit is so far from the man in leather that it takes me a moment to realize they're one and the same. Coming to a stop, the air in my lungs whooshes out as everything in my body stops. My eyes rake over the man striding toward me, and I've forgotten how to breathe. I've forgotten how to think, how to feel, how to do anything.

My knees tremble, and my palms grow sweaty as I take him in.

Absolutely breathtaking.

He looks like a prince, with an edge of danger, that has everything inside me melting. It takes all my strength not to place a hand over my heart as he nears, because I'm terrified it might just stop. I've never felt this way looking at a man before, but something about him has my soul roaring to life. I don't know if it's the way that suit hugs his body, fitting perfectly against his narrow waist, or if it's the navy-blue tie. Maybe it's his hair, loose around his shoulders, or perhaps it's the way his eyes dance beneath the flickering lights.

It could be one, or it could be all, but he is the most incredible man I've ever had the pleasure of laying my eyes on, and he's looking me in a way that I've never been looked at before. Like he's hungry, prowling toward me with one purpose, and that is to scoop me into his arms and take me away. I'm certain it's my mind playing tricks on me, but I allow myself to live in the fantasy for a millisecond longer.

Stopping in front of me, his eyes slowly move down my body before coming back up to meet mine. "Took my breath away just now, golden eyes. Didn't think it was possible."

My cheeks heat. "Ditto."

His mouth twitches. "Save me a dance."

With that, he walks off.

I let the breath out I was holding and stare down at my shaking fingers.

What is this man doing to me?

Whatever it is, I need to cut it off, and I need to do it now. It's dangerous, and if Ethan ever found out, he would kill me. I

don't doubt that for a single second. I'm playing a deadly game, and though I know I should stop, the idea of Fury swaying with me on the dance floor is enough to make me wonder if I can just take one night for myself. One dance won't hurt, surely?

"Oh my," Bonnie's voice has me turning to face her. "You look absolutely stunning. Wow. You are so beautiful."

This coming from her, with her luscious hair, tight red dress, and sparkling eyes. She looks like she came right out of a Southern Belle magazine. She is the picture of perfection, innocent yet gorgeous. She is such a beautiful woman; I can see why Western couldn't stay away from her.

"You can talk," I say, leaning in for a hug. "You look dazzling, Bonnie."

She pulls back, giving me a twirl. "Why thank you."

"This is amazing," I tell her, stretching my arms out. "You all did an incredible job."

"It's for a good cause." She smiles. "Get yourself a drink, dance, enjoy. I'll come and have a boogie with you soon."

I do just that.

I get myself a drink or two, I donate, I listen to the speeches, and then the dancing begins after dinner, which was a delicious spread. Everyone here from the club looks incredible, dressed up in their suits, their women by their sides. A pang of guilt slams into my chest, because maybe I was wrong about them. It's clear that they're not all about the crime and are very willing to help out a good cause.

Hope looks adorable in her little pink dress, and she spends the night playing with a few other kids, her infectious laughter filling the hall. It's nice to see her smile like that, to see her truly being herself. She has been hidden in her shell for quite some time now, but with every passing day, she lets a little more of herself out. It makes me happy, and it gives me hope that she might just fit in here.

“Dance with me.”

The low rumbling voice has shivers running up my spine. Closing my eyes, I take a deep shaky breath because the way this man makes me feel ... there are no words. Turning slowly, I face Fury. His eyes are relaxed, and his expression is semi-lustful as he stares into my eyes. He's so overwhelming—just being in his presence has every single part of me on high alert, a mixed bag of feelings that I'm not sure how to sort through.

I don't understand it, yet I can't make the feeling stop.

“I have to warn you,” I murmur, trying to slow my beating heart, “I have two left feet.”

Taking my hand, he guides me onto the dance floor where other couples are swaying to the soft music flowing from the band on the stage. When he pulls me close, and his hands glide over my hips, I don't feel afraid. That doesn't mean everything inside me isn't screaming, but it's not for the reasons I would expect. No, my insides are screaming in desperation for more. More of him.

Sliding my hands up, I hook them around his neck as we begin swaying to the music. Being this close means I can not only feel every hard inch of him against me, but I can smell

him. He smells of cologne, a musky scent that is going to stick with me. His hair smells clean, like it has been freshly washed, and his beard is perfectly sculpted and styled. Like this, he could be anyone. A man high up in the ranks, a powerful lawyer, a detective, anyone. Yet beneath the fabric of the suit, he's a criminal.

I know that should bother me, but I can't seem to find a good enough reason to let it.

"It's incredible what you've all done here tonight," I tell him, needing to make conversation before I melt into a puddle at his feet.

"We're not all bad," he murmurs.

"I'm still on the fence," I tease lightly.

His fingers curl into my hip, bringing me closer, until our bodies are perfectly molded together. I can feel every rock-hard inch of him, and a breath sucks into my lungs as my eyes lock on his.

"Do I make you nervous, golden eyes?"

"Yes," I whisper.

I can't lie, because every single part of me is giving my truth away.

"Why?"

"Because you terrify me."

"And yet—" he spins us around "—not in a bad way."

He's right, he doesn't terrify me in a bad way. He terrifies me because he makes me feel things I don't understand. I

don't know how to handle these kinds of emotions, especially when they're directed at a man that isn't my husband. Even when I met Ethan, I never felt anything like this. It's overwhelming, incredible even.

"I'm ... I ..."

"Married," he finishes for me. "Tell me, sweetheart, one good reason why that should matter to me."

If I had a good husband, I would immediately tell him so and be out of there without hesitation. I don't have a good husband, and, therefore, I have nothing I can say that would make the sacred bind between two people worthy. Fury knows it. He knows that I can't offer him a good reason because there is none.

Well, there is one.

"Because I refuse to be as bad as him."

The words leave my lips without thought, and I know I shouldn't have said them. Fury might already suspect the kind of situation I am in, but I never wanted to give him more reason to hang on. He can't save me, and while I admire that he wants to, I can't allow this to go any further than it has already gone. I shouldn't be here, in his arms, feeling the things I'm feeling.

"There is a way out."

No.

No, there isn't.

Meeting Fury's eyes, I swallow, and I know he can see the sadness there. "I wish you were right."

Reaching up, his finger strokes down my cheek, and it takes everything inside me not to react. It already feels as though the room around us has stopped and we're the only people in the world as I look into his deep gaze. It's as though he can see inside my soul, and I can't allow that to happen. There are a million women in this world better than me, so why is he looking at me like he wants to consume me?

Why is he so obsessed with knowing my secrets.

Heart racing, fear latches on when he moves forward, so close that our lips are just about grazing. My breathing comes out ragged, and my bottom lip trembles just slightly as everything in my world comes to a screaming halt. The only thing I can see is him. The only thing I can feel is *him*. He's going to kiss me, and everything in my body wants him to, but I know that if I allow myself to fall down this hole, I won't be able to climb back out.

Panic grips my chest, and I pull away, heart racing, voice stammering as I say, "I can't ... I can't."

With that, I turn on my heel and rush out before he can see the warm flow of tears that burst forth and roll down my cheeks.

What is happening?

More importantly, why is it happening to me?

Why?



“Are you taking something?” Ethan demands, his arms crossed over his chest as he looks down at me, his expression furious.

“No,” I say softly, shaking my head. “Of course not.”

“Then why are you not pregnant yet? I’ve been inside you every single day. There is no way you wouldn’t be pregnant.”

Bile rises in my throat, but I force it down. The fact of the matter is, I did go and see a doctor and have them give me some contraception that won’t be found around the house. A small device they inserted into my body that stops me from getting pregnant, and Ethan will never know. There is just no way I can have a child with this man, no way in the world. I might have to live with him, but I will never expose a child to that.

That’s one thing I am firm on.

“Sometimes it takes a while,” I offer. “It has only been a month.”

“Well, if there is something wrong, I know it isn’t me,” he grunts. “My body is in perfect working order. If we don’t have a child soon, I’m going to assume you’re useless and I’ll have to find another way.”

I grit my teeth together, but I don’t answer back.

There is no point.

He is always right, and if I try to argue, he will only make it hurt.

“I’m sure we just need more time,” I say, carefully.

“It better be all there is, because if it isn’t and I find out—”

“I haven’t done anything, Ethan,” I cut him off. “I swear.”

His eyes flash, and he glares at me for a long moment before the monster puts its head away and his tone goes back to normal. It’s like he flips a switch, going from evil to normal in a matter of seconds. “Your mother will be here soon; have you prepared lunch?”

I nod. “Everything is ready.”

“Good,” he mutters, turning and leaving the room.

My mother arrives shortly after. It’s not often I get to see her, mostly because she lives in another state, but she is in the town over for work and thought she would drive over and see us while she had the chance. We’re close, to a degree, but she always did expect such high things from me. I know what a bitter disappointment I would be to her if she knew just how weak and broken I really was.

After my dad passed, she stopped giving me the kind of love I know I needed. It’s not that she didn’t care, because she does, it’s just that she has a strange way of showing it. I know she loved my father, and I guess when you lose someone you love that dearly, it can destroy something inside you. She tries, and that’s the best I can ask for, even if her way of trying seems...strange to some.

“You look like you’ve lost weight,” she tells me, the moment she steps through the door, holding my arms out to the side with her hands so she can study me. “Are you well, honey?”

I offer her my best smile and force her to release my arms so I can wrap her in a hug. She smells of lavender and vanilla, and it’s a comforting scent, one I’ve missed. She is the only family I have, and while we have our moments, I don’t know what I’d do without her. I wish I could tell her the truth, but I just know, deep down, that she would have a hard time believing me.

“I’m fine, Mom,” I say, releasing her. “I’m so glad you are here, though.”

“I don’t have long, so tell me everything.”

“There is my favorite mother-in-law.”

Ethan strides into the room, the picture of perfection with his hair brushed and his clothes clean and crisp. He walks over, scooping my mother into a hug that has her releasing a small laugh as he places her back on her feet. She would never believe me if I told her he was a monster. Most people wouldn’t. Not even his own family. He hides it so incredibly well that they’d all simply think I am crazy.

His mother thinks the sun shines out of his backside, and his father is so insanely proud of him.

If I ever mentioned it, they would assume I was trying to take something from him.

“Ethan, you look spectacular,” Mom praises. “Have you been working out?”

Ethan places an arm over my shoulder that has me flinching as he responds. “Well, Alex and I are trying for a baby, so you know I have to get in tip top shape.”

Mom places her hands over her mouth. “You are?”

Ethan nods.

My stomach twists, but I try to force a smile.

It makes me sick, how he can stand here and act like this.

He has the entire world fooled.

“You’re going to make me a nana,” Mom cries happily, hugging Ethan again, then me. “I’m so happy.”

“We’ve only just started,” I say, my voice monotone. “It might take a while.”

Ethan puts his arm around me again, squeezing my shoulder tightly. “Don’t listen to her, she’s always the pessimist.”

Mom claps her hands. “She always was an overthinker. Don’t worry, honey. I’m sure it will happen quickly. How exciting. You two are going to make great parents.”

Ethan grins. “I think so.”

Monster.

Evil. Cold hearted. Monster.

Lunch goes off without a hitch, with Ethan talking Mom’s ear off the entire time. He has her completely fooled, his

charm winning her over. When I look at him like this, I try to put myself in the position of seeing him as the man he truly is. I don't think I'd believe me, either. Not when he is so smooth, caring, compassionate, and fake. He pulls it off so well that it would be next to impossible to believe he could be anything else but perfect.

Mom leaves after a few hours, and I get to work cleaning the kitchen. On weekends, when I'm away from the school and my students, I feel a crippling loneliness in my chest that is so soul crushing that I wonder how I'm going to live the rest of my life with it. It's a time when I feel truly caged, knowing that I can't escape him by going to my job. I'm trapped here, with no way out, and he knows it.

"You did good," Ethan murmurs, walking up behind me and placing his hands on my hips.

I freeze.

"She seems happy for us, don't you think?"

I want to scream at him, to tell him that the only reason she's happy is because she has no idea the kind of man he is, but, instead, I simply nod. I don't feel like arguing with him right now. No, today I'll just let him think he's got me right where he wants me. My body is the only thing I still have control over, and I'll be damned if he's going to take that, too. At least I'm not going to let him impregnate me.

"You're off."

His voice is clipped, so I turn to face him, trying to put a smile on my face. "I'm just tired."

Narrowing his eyes, he tips his head to the side. Gosh, once I loved him so incredibly. “If you’re thinking about going against me ...”

“I’m not,” I say, and my tone is a smidge too snappy.

I know it the moment his eyes narrow and his nostrils flare. I’ve taken it too far, once again. He steps up closer to me, slamming my back into the sink as he leans down so his face is level with mine. “What did you say to me?”

“I didn’t mean to snap,” I respond, as quickly as I can. “I’m just ... I ...”

His hand moves to my upper arm where his fingers curl into the flesh there. “If it wasn’t for me, you wouldn’t even be here, living this life. Or have you forgotten that? You owe me some damned respect.”

“Please let me go,” I plead. “If I’m to get pregnant, you can’t keep doing this. It could hurt the baby or ...”

“What?” he seethes, and, once again, I know I’ve made a mistake. “Are you questioning my ability to parent?”

“No, it’s just ... you’re hurting me ...”

His hand raises up and slaps me so hard across the face my head swings to the side. A pained whimper escapes my throat as tears burn under my eyelids. I don’t know how much more of this I can take. I don’t know if I can live like this any longer. If this is the rest of my life, then maybe I don’t want it.

“The only reason I hurt you is because you’re stupid,” he roars in my face. “Because you don’t listen, no matter how

many times I tell you something. You're ignorant, and you're a fucking thorn in my side."

My bottom lip trembles.

"I'm going out." He shoves me hard in the chest as he steps away. "Maybe I'll find a woman who actually knows how to behave."

With that, he turns and leaves.

I sink down onto the floor, crying until there is nothing left.

I'm just about done.

I can't do this anymore.



I SHOULDN'T BE HERE; I know it, and yet something in my body took over for the first time ever. The moment Ethan left, I got into my car, and I drove. I don't know what came over me, or what I'm thinking, but I can't seem to stop myself. Climbing out of my car, I walk through the front gates to the clubhouse where they're very clearly having a party. There are people everywhere and loud music blares through the cool night air.

One foot in front of another, I walk toward the open garage where I can see him.

My eyes found him the moment I walked in.

I told him not to be a hero, so why am I seeking him out like he is one?

He can't save me. I know this.

Why am I here?

The moment he looks to me, standing pitifully in the opening, my tear-streaked face no doubt red and blotchy, he strides toward me. There is a purpose in his eyes as he shoves people out of the way, his expression dark and dangerous, his jaw tight. He could kill Ethan in a heartbeat. Part of me wishes he would, but I know that the guilt of that would forever eat me alive. It would make me no better, and I pride myself on being better.

“Alexis.”

His voice is a low rumble, and I think it's the first time I've heard him say my name. It rolls off his tongue, rich and gravelly, making my skin prickle.

“Tell me you've got a lot of alcohol around here.”

I shouldn't drink.

If Ethan comes home and I'm not there ...

What do I care? One day, he's going to kill me anyway. Might as well be today.

Taking my hand without another word, Fury leads me out of the garage and over to a quiet area of the yard, picking up two beers as he goes. Finding an old fallen log, we sit down, and as he turns to face me, I know he is looking at my cheek. Fingers stretching out, he reaches up and runs the tips down my cheek. His flesh is rough, but I don't shy away. I know I should be anywhere but here, yet it's the only place in this world right now that I feel safe.

“What happened?”

For once, he’s simply asking.

Oh, how I wish I could tell him everything, but there is just no way that can ever be a reality.

“He gets angry sometimes,” I tell him, just enough.

Even in the darkness, I can see as Fury’s gaze flashes, and his jaw grows so tight I’m worried he’s about to burst. Shifting away from him, concern etched in my features, I wonder if I’ve given too much away already.

“Do not pull away from me,” he growls. “I’m no fuckin’ monster.”

“To be fair,” I whisper, “I don’t know you.”

“Know this one thing then, I would never lay a fuckin’ hand on a woman.”

I ponder this, studying his face as I take a soothing sip of beer. “I know I probably have no idea what really goes on in this club, but for some reason, I find it hard to imagine that you haven’t done some pretty bad things to people. Would that be right?”

He reaches into his jacket and pulls out a cigarette, lighting it before he answers. “You’re right, but I don’t ever hurt anyone who isn’t the fuckin’ devil themselves.”

I guess that makes it better, but a tomato is still a tomato, no matter what you do with it. He still hurts people, and while they might be bad people themselves, I’m certain somewhere along the line an innocent life has been tangled up in that.

“What if you got it wrong?” I ask, shivering slightly in the cold.

“It’s happened, but I would never intentionally hurt someone innocent, and I’d never, not fuckin’ ever, lay a hand on *my* woman.”

Maybe, but other women?

I can’t seem to find fault with his words, I know it’s my messed-up mind, but here we are. There is just something about the way he has taken me on, purely because he can see right through me, that tells me he is passionate about what he’s saying. He might be a bad man, but he wouldn’t hurt the woman he loves, and I admire that. It also makes me feel a lot more secure about Hope’s future.

“Now,” he growls, low, blowing a puff of smoke from between his lips, “stop deflectin’ and tell me why you’re with this man when he does nothin’ but abuse you.”

I stare down at my hands.

Oh, if only it were that easy.

“Because if I leave, he will kill me.”

My voice is soft, and with the wind blowing around us, it’s barely able to be heard. That doesn’t stop Fury from picking up every damned word. I shouldn’t be saying this, I don’t know what has gotten over me, but I can’t seem to help myself. I want to tell him, everything inside me is begging me to just let him know the entire truth. It’s terrifying, because I’ve never found a single person in my life that I’ve wanted to share this with.

“Not if I kill him first.”

Fury’s voice is razor sharp.

I snap my head up. “No.”

“He is an abusive prick, why the fuck would you want him walkin’ on this earth for a single second longer?”

“Because unlike you, I couldn’t live with myself. Death might be something that you can dust off, but it isn’t for me. The guilt would consume me.”

Fury ponders this, then shifts a little closer, reaching for my chin and taking it between his thumb and forefinger, tipping my head up slightly. “There are other ways to bring someone down.”

His words send a shiver up my spine.

But he doesn’t know the entire truth.

If he did, he would know there is simply no way out.

“I ...”

I need to end this conversation, right now.

“I should go.”

Here I go, running again.

Pushing to my feet, he is forced to drop his hand. I place the beer down and turn, but he’s quicker than me. He steps in front of me, already smart enough to know that grabbing me suddenly isn’t something I’m a fan of. He’s smart, but mostly, he cares enough not to. That makes this so much harder, because Fury is giving me a glance of what a different man

might be like, a man that is loving and strong, and it's killing me little by little.

I want that, so desperately, and the more time I spend with him, the more I'm reminded of the bitter disappointment that it will never happen.

"Please," I whisper, my voice shaky, "just let me go."

"You came to me tonight," he murmurs, reaching out and tucking a stray strand of hair behind my ear. It has me shivering with feelings that I'm struggling to control. "Why."

It's not a question, more a demand.

"I just ... I don't know."

"That's not good enough. Answer the question."

"I don't know, Fury," I say, my voice high pitched and frantic. "What do you want from me?"

"Why, Alexis?" he pushes.

I throw my hands up, shaking my head from side to side as I take a step back. "Because you make me feel safe. Dammit, Fury, because you make me feel a little less scared in my miserable fucking life."

He's in front of me again in a second, his hand going up and curling around the back of my neck gently as he pulls me closer until our lips are so damned close I can taste him.

"Please don't kiss me," I whimper, my knees weak. "I'll never be able to stop."

"Then don't," he growls, closing the gap.

His lips are soft to begin with, closing over mine and gently coaxing them open. His beard is scratchy against my cheeks, and I'm fully aware of every single inch of him that is touching me. From his hand around my neck, to the one on my lower back or the way his hard form presses against my soft one, every ridge like a chiseled statue. He smells of leather and beer, and that cologne that I will *never* stop thinking about.

I whimper, in my pathetic attempt at a protest, but he keeps coaxing, his tongue sliding along my bottom lip, just begging it to join in. His mouth is gently moving over mine, and I can't fight it any longer. I respond, kissing him back with a hunger that I have kept hidden in the very depths of myself for so long. A hunger that is almost frantic as my fingers curl into his leather jacket in an attempt to bring him closer, kissing him with everything I have.

It's everything I could have ever needed and more.

He is everything I could have ever needed and more.

That's why this is so dangerous.

That's why I need to stop it right now.

This very instant.

It is my life on the line.

Pulling away, I press a hand over my mouth as horror washes over me. I just cheated. Granted, my husband is a psychopathic, narcissistic dick, but it doesn't matter. I just did something I swore I would never do in my life. I've always promised myself I'd be this amazing woman when I married, that I would never stray, and even though I have valid reason,

it doesn't stop the guilt crushing my chest as reality washes over me.

"I swear to fuckin' God," Fury growls, "if you say that shouldn't have happened or you feel bad, I'm goin' to fuckin' flip."

"I'm married," I whisper, fighting back the tears.

"Don't insult marriage by sayin' what you have is anythin' close to what it stands for. You are married to a monster; don't you dare make yourself feel guilty about a single thing you do."

I know he's right; I know.

But it doesn't make it better.

"I have to go."

Turning, my heart racing, I begin to rush away.

"Tell me one thing before you go."

His voice fills the night air, and I turn slightly to stare at him.

"Can you shoot a gun?"

What kind of question is that?

"No," I say, slightly horrified.

Taking a step closer, he crosses his arms over his chest.

"You won't let me help you in any other fuckin' way, so I can do this one thing. Tomorrow, when you bring Hope home, I'm goin' to teach you how to shoot."

"Why?" I breathe.

“So I know if that filthy mother fucker ever tries to take it too far and your life is in danger, that you can blow his fuckin’ brains out.”

His words are cold, terrifying, and callous.

A glimpse of the kind of man he can be is standing before me, and it’s terrifying.

I reel back, shocked and unable to process the scene he’s putting before me.

He wants to teach me to shoot, so that if Ethan ever takes it too far, I can kill him.

“If you want me to stay out of this,” he growls, “you’ll agree to this.”

“Are you blackmailing me?” I murmur, narrowing my eyes, fingers trembling.

“No, I’m givin’ you a choice. You either let me teach you, or I take matters into my own hands.”

“I said this was none of your—”

He cuts me off by stepping closer, leaning down and hissing, “It’s my fuckin’ business now. Make a choice.”

He is infuriating. He has wedged himself into my life and I know that he isn’t going to back down until I give him what he wants. I need him to stay away from Ethan at all costs, so if this is what I have to do, to ease his mind, then I’ll do it.

Swallowing the wild rage bubbling in my chest, I nod sharply. “Fine.”

It’s the only option I have, and he knows it.

He knows I'm not going to let him get involved, and he's smart.

I guess it can't hurt, right?

After all, you never know when you might need to shoot a gun.



“E ven if you’re in a rush and the situation is frantic, I want you to always take a split second to make sure your feet are planted firmly on the ground. If the gun throws back and you topple with it, then your opponent has the upper hand, especially if you miss. Your feet are your backbone, make sure they’re grounded.”

Fury is standing behind me, his rough voice in my ear as his arms stretch around me, enclosing mine as we hold a gun out in front of me. He’s showing me how to stand, where to point, how to aim, and how to shoot. I’m not a big fan of guns, but something about this little lesson is making me feel a touch safer. Maybe it’s knowing that I have a little control over my life, even if it’s minor.

“What if he’s lunging at me and I lose my footing?” I ask, my fingers rubbing up and down over the trigger, nervous to pull it.

“It takes a split second to make sure your foot is on the ground. We’ll practice.”

He steps away from me, takes the gun, and pulls out the bullets before putting the safety on and handing it back to me. “It’s safe, we’re goin’ to see how you’d handle it if I lunged at you.”

“Are you sure you got all the bullets out?” I question, holding the gun down, refusing to lift it and risk shooting him

if he's wrong.

“Had this gun since I was fifteen years old. Trust me when I say, I know it better than I know myself.”

My eyes widen. “You had a gun at fifteen.”

He glances at me as he stands in front of me, shrugging off his jacket as the afternoon grows warm. “I didn't come from a rosy little family, golden eyes.”

“I didn't think you did. What other reason would you have to join a motorcycle club if it weren't for a bad life?”

He pauses, his eyes flashing as he looks over to me. “For a teacher who has studied and no doubt seen parts of the world, you're very fuckin' set in your black and white ways.”

“I am not,” I scoff, offended.

“You assume that to join a club, we must have had a bad fuckin' life. Ever think we join because we want to?”

“Why?” I blurt, before thinking. “I mean, everyone I've met has been really great, but I still don't understand why you would become a criminal ... for fun.”

“It's more than fun,” he grinds out. “It's family, loyalty, a brotherhood you couldn't begin to understand. Those men would die for me, a million times over, without so much as a second thought. You got anyone in your life that would do that for you?”

My cheeks grow hot with a mixture of shame and sadness. I don't have anyone in my life that would do that for me.

That's a sobering thought.

It only pushes that emptiness in my soul out a little further, until it consumes just a touch more of me.

One day, there will be nowhere else for it to go, and I have to wonder what that day will bring for me.

“Didn’t fuckin’ think so. You need to get off your high horse. The man you married is a far bigger fuckin’ monster than anyone in my club, and he ain’t a criminal. Don’t fool yourself, Alexis, into thinking a title makes a person.”

I’ve made him angry, and if I’m being brutally honest, I’ve made myself angry too. When did I become so judgmental? At what point did I become better than anyone else? He’s right, I’m living with a man who has a good job, a stable home, and yet behind closed doors he’s the worst of them. Who am I to judge a club that I know nothing about?

“You’re right,” I say, softly. “I know nothing about your club, and I have no right to assume anything. I’m sorry.”

His angry glare softens a touch. “One day, I’ll show you what it’s really like to be part of my family. Until then, let’s keep goin’.”

I nod, fighting back the shame and frustration with myself.

Fury and I go over scenario after scenario, with him lunging at me from different angles, and, each time, I get a little better at grounding myself before swinging the gun in his direction. By the end of it, I’ve got the hang of it and have a whole lot more confidence that I might actually be able to do this if I need to. I hope that situation never comes up, but it

makes me feel a little better knowing that if it does, I could handle it.

“Thank you for this,” I tell Fury, as he puts his gun away in his truck before shuffling around and coming out with another one.

He hands it to me.

I stare down at it, eyes wide.

“You didn’t think I was goin’ to teach you how to shoot a gun when you don’t have a gun to shoot?”

I mean, no, but ...

“Is this legal?” I breathe.

“Does it matter?”

I guess not.

I take the gun from his hands, running my fingers over the light silver barrel. It’s lighter than the one he taught me on, but something about holding it in my hand makes me feel like the strongest person in the world. I look up at him, and I hope he can see the appreciation in my eyes, because what he has done for me today ... There are no words.

“Thank you,” I say, my voice genuine and soft. “I know I probably don’t deserve what you’ve done for me today, but I do appreciate it.”

“I know,” he murmurs, handing me a little box to put the gun in. “Load it the same way I taught you. Keep it hidden. Do not, and I mean do-fuckin’-not put this anywhere he can find it. Not ever.”

I nod, bringing the box close to my chest.

The wind flicks my hair over my face, and before I can reach for it, Fury stretches an arm out and tucks it behind my ear, lingering there for a long, breathtaking moment. Hanging onto the air in my lungs, our eyes lock, and there is so much I want to do, but I know that I'd be foolish to ever consider doing it.

“Tell me what he has on you that keeps you so loyal.”

I bite my lower lip, heart jerking into a galloping beat.
“What makes you think he has something on me?”

“There just doesn't seem to be any other reason I can think of why a woman as smart as you would stay with a man like that.”

Oh, if only it were that simple, then the world wouldn't be full of domestic abuse.

But it isn't that simple.

It's never that simple.

“I have to go,” I say, trying to change the subject. “Thanks for today.”

“I can help you,” he goes on, ignoring me. “You would be surprised the things I can make disappear. You can trust me, you can trust the club, we can help free you from this situation.”

Could he?

Is that even a possibility?

I wish I could believe it was, but I just don't see how they could make this go away.

I open my mouth, the words desperate to come out, but I quickly close it again.

I can't bring myself to do it, to say it, to take the risk.

It could end so badly for me.

"I should go."

"Alexis," he calls when I turn.

I stop, but I don't look back at him.

"I can make it go away."

I'm starting to think he really believes that.

And oh, how I wish it was true.

"I wish you could," I call out. "I really do."

Then, I get into my car with my gun tucked safely on the seat beside me, and I drive away, not looking back.

If I look back, I'm afraid I'll turn around, and if I turn around, I might just let him do what he's saying he can.

I might just let him help me.

We both know that would be a bad idea.

Me more so than him.

I can only hope he lets this one go.



ETHAN'S FINGERS CURL around my upper arm as we walk into the school awards night. It's a silent warning that he's here, and with one pinch he can pull me back into line. To others, he looks like a doting husband; to me, he is the devil in disguise. Generally, he doesn't come to school events with me, but tonight he insisted. I'm wondering if he is suspicious, considering I'm coming home later than usual because I help Hope each afternoon.

Either way, he wasn't letting me show up alone.

I'm praying with every ounce of my being that Fury doesn't come. Hope is getting an award, but I told him she could collect it Monday if she was nervous about going up on stage. I'm hoping that I know the rugged biker well enough by now to know that he won't come to something like that. At least, that's what I'm praying as we walk through the crowd.

"Alexis, Ethan, how wonderful to see you both."

The head principal of the school, Roger Hill, smiles as he approaches us. Reaching up, he pushes his thick-framed glasses over his nose, and his blue eyes dance with happiness. Roger is always easy to talk to, he always has a smile. He reminds you of your warm grandfather, like you could go in and tell him anything. Roger is the reason my job at this school is so fulfilling.

I smile as we stop in front of him. "Hi, Roger."

"Ethan, I didn't think I would see you here," Roger tells Ethan, reaching out to shake his hand.

“I miss too many things my wife does; I thought it was time I started getting involved.”

The way he says that, to another might just sound like a loyal husband, but to me, it’s an underlying threat, one I didn’t know existed. He’s suspicious, I know him well enough to know that. The problem is, I had no idea. I didn’t know he was suspecting me of anything, and as my body tenses in his arms, I know that he is well aware of the information he just gave me.

Cold fingers tighten into my side as he puts an arm around me.

Terror washes over me.

Fear of what tonight will bring.

He was scarily calm and cold before we left, and I thought it was merely a bad day at work, but now I’m fully aware that it is so much more. He isn’t just being cold, he’s sending me a warning, a warning that he is onto me and when we get home, it’s going to end very badly. Terror unlike anything I’ve ever felt rushes up my spine, and my brain frantically scrambles for a way out of this.

“You’re a good man,” Roger nods to Ethan, before turning and chatting to someone else.

Ethan leans in close, his breath against my ear as he murmurs, “I know where you’ve been.”

My chest rises and falls with desperation as I try to figure out a way to flee. He’s going to hurt me, in a big way, or worse, he might just expose me and watch me go to prison for

the rest of my life. Either way, Ethan holds the power to completely destroy me, and I'm so damned scared tonight will be the night he does just that. I can't breathe, I can't get my mind to stop spinning as my knees begin to shake.

“Hi Miss.”

The soft, familiar little voice has my eyes clamping closed.

It's Hope.

Terrified to turn, to face what I know is going to be standing beside me.

Ethan turns us, and I am faced with the one person I didn't want to see – Fury. He's wearing a tight black tee that hugs his chest, a pair of faded blue jeans, and boots. His hair is down, framing his face in a way that makes him look so incredibly breathtaking, my heart aches. The tattoos on his arms can be seen as they snake down, around his wrists, but it's the look he's giving Ethan that makes my blood run cold.

This can't be happening.

The lump in my throat feels as though it's restricting my air supply as fear courses through my veins. I'm afraid of how this is going to go, because the look Fury is giving Ethan is enough to make me want to run. I can't have him confronting him, because if he does, it will end up so much worse for me. I meet Fury's eyes, my gaze pleading with him not to do anything as I shake my head in the slightest. His eyes move back to Ethan.

“You must be Alex's husband,” Fury says, but there is an ice in his tone that is chilling. “She's a great teacher. Hope

wouldn't be doing as well as she is without her.”

Ethan's gaze is scanning the biker as he stretches out a hand. “That's me. And you are?”

“Ford.”

It's strange, hearing him use his real name. It rolls off his tongue with such strength and ease. As he takes Ethan's hand, I can see just how hard he shakes it. Ethan jerks by my side but keeps the smile on his face. Fury is pushing his limits without saying a word. I need him to stop. He doesn't understand what will happen to me if he doesn't.

Releasing Ethan, Fury looks to me. “Hope didn't want to miss her award.”

Forcing a shaky smile, I stare down at the little girl. “I am so happy you came. If you want me to come up on stage with you, just tell me okay, honey?”

She nods, then turns and happily skips off with a group of friends she has made.

“I need to use the bathroom,” I say, separating myself from Ethan.

I rush off, praying Fury will take the hint and follow me, or at least find a way to speak to me. I need to tell him to stop—whatever it is he's planning on doing or saying, he needs to back off. If he confronts Ethan, or so much as gives him the wrong impression, it's over for me. I'm fearful, right down to my very core. Every single ounce of my body thrums with terror as I rush into the bathroom, gripping the sink as I stare in the mirror.

Why can't I be stronger than this?

There has to be a part of me that can fight back.

Why am I taking this?

Washing my hands, I take a moment to gather myself before turning and leaving. I run straight into Fury, who catches me with his hands on my upper arms. Before I can say a word, he turns me and pulls me down the hall where it is dark and quiet. Only when he's certain we're alone does he whip around and narrow his eyes. Before he can speak, I start.

"Please," I beg, a tremble in my voice. "Don't do or say anything. Fury please. He ... he will hurt me."

"Why?" he grinds out. "What is going on? I can see the fear in your eyes. What the fuck does he know?"

"I don't know," I whisper, and my voice breaks. A tear rolls down my cheek. "But he knows something. He's going to hurt me. Please don't make it worse."

Reaching up, Fury catches the tear with his thumb, his eyes scanning my face. "You can't ask me to let you walk out of here knowin' he's goin' to put hands on you."

"Please, Fury, I'm begging you. If you make it worse, he will ..."

"He will what?"

His voice is like ice now.

"I just ... I can't. Please. Please don't say anything."

"Alexis."

Ethan's voice travels down the hallway, and everything inside me turns to stone. He has found us. There is no way I can explain this situation away. I know how it looks. Stepping away from Fury, I rush past him.

"I was just tellin' Alex here that Hope is doin' really well thanks to her," Fury says casually, walking down the hall and past Ethan.

Ethan's eyes move between us. "Well. She is a good teacher."

"She's good at a lot of things," Fury goes on.

Stop.

Please.

Ethan's eyes flash. "It seems like you know her well, then."

"Don't know her at all," Fury says with a shrug. "I just know that a teacher that good has incredible qualities. You should be proud to call her your wife."

My knees shake.

"Indeed," Ethan murmurs.

Fury doesn't say another word, he just disappears.

The moment he's gone, Ethan spins on me, lashing out and grabbing my arm, pushing me up against the wall. "How fucking stupid do you think I am?"

My knees tremble.

"It's nothing, Ethan."

“Do you think I don’t know where you’ve fucking been? I track your car, you stupid fucking bitch. You have been at that club, and you think I haven’t figured it out. Are you fucking him?”

“No,” I cry, shaking my head. “No. I have just been dropping Hope off and helping her. I swear.”

“You’re a fucking liar.”

“Get your fucking hands off her.”

Fury’s voice is a whip, and it travels right up my spine.

Ethan releases me, turning to face the angry biker staring him down, his eyes stone cold. “This is none of your concern, biker.”

“You lay a fuckin’ hand on her again and I’ll ...”

“Fury, stop,” I blurt.

“Fury?” Ethan laughs bitterly. “And you want me to believe there is nothing going on. Come, Alexis. We’re leaving.”

“You’re not takin’ her anywhere.”

Fury stands like a force at the exit to the hallway, refusing to let us past. He’s terrifying, and I know he could take Ethan down with one swing of his fist, but that would end so badly. Not only would I lose my job, but probably my life, too.

“Stop,” I cry out. “Not here. Not now. Please. Just let us leave.”

Ethan takes my arm. “You wouldn’t want to cause a scene and have her lose her job, now would you, biker?”

Fury's jaw tics.

"Uncle Fury?"

Hope's small voice comes from behind Fury, and he immediately gathers himself. Turning, he stares down at her.

"What is it, honey?"

The way he talks to her has my heart racing.

He cares about her.

So much.

"I need to use the bathroom."

Fury looks back up at Ethan, who is grinning now.

He knows as well as I do that Fury won't act out in front of Hope, and he's right. Tugging his hand, Hope has him turning, and as his gaze rolls over mine, I can see the wild rage in his depths. He wants to stop this, but he knows he can't. As Ethan pulls me past him, I know that my night is about to go in a direction that I will never come back from.

Everything is over for me.

Fury just made sure of it.



Sitting in my car, staring down at my trembling hands, I try to gather myself. My breathing is ragged, my mouth is tender, and there is blood running from a wound in my head. My ribs feel as though they're broken, and every breath is like fire. Ethan made sure that I would never, *ever* cross him again. He ensured I knew that for the rest of my days he was in control.

I can't live like this anymore.

The pain and anguish I went through tonight was enough to cripple something inside me.

I don't want to suffer anymore.

I want out.

So, I ran.

I don't know where I was planning on going, but I knew that I couldn't stay for a single second longer. Even if it means I spend the rest of my life in prison, it has to be better than this. If I didn't run, he could have killed me tonight. I'm sure he would have, if I didn't stop the attack by fleeing. He nearly caught me as I ran out the front door. For a split second, I knew that if he caught me, I would die tonight.

He's tracking my car, and I know that he will find me if I don't get out of it, so that's what I do. I pull over on the side of the road, I leave my phone inside, and I get out. Every single

part of me burns as I take one step after another, walking into the darkness on the highway, unsure where the hell I'm going.

I walk down the side of the road for what feels like hours.

Every single car that approaches, has me hiding behind a thick tree, terrified it will be Ethan. It's the low rumbling sound of a motorcycle that brings me pause. One singular light comes toward me, and I don't run. I don't run because I only know one person in this world who rides a motorcycle that sounds like that. As it slows, the light shining on my broken and bruised face, part of me prays it's actually Fury.

He might just be the only person who can save me now.

The motorcycle comes to a stop, and heavy booted feet hit the pavement. Before I know it, he's in front of me, his hand cupping my face as he tips my head back. I can't see him, we're in pure darkness, but I can feel him. His fingers graze over my face, feeling every inch of it. I know he can feel the warm blood, the puffy swollen eye and most especially, my split lip.

"Dammit, Alexis," he growls into the night. "Dammit."

Without a single word, he turns me toward the bike. I'm not certain I can get on it, but right now, he is the only person who can make me feel safe, so I'll hang on until my body gives way if I have to. Lifting me with ease, he places me on the bike, and I wince in pain as everything feels as though it's broken.

"Hang on, sweetheart. I got you."

His words have tears rolling down my cheeks, even though he can't see them.

As he gets on the bike, I let my body fall into his.

He reaches back with one hand, and he hangs onto me.

Somehow, he manages to ride slowly while hanging onto me. My arms are around his waist, my face pressed into the leather jacket, and I can't bring myself to find the strength to sit up. As he rolls into the club, I know there are eyes on us, but I don't care. Fury stops the bike, and his body moves slightly, then, a minute later, someone is reaching for me. I don't know who it is, but it's a hard form and they pull me off the bike and hold me up as Fury gets off.

A moment later, his arm is around my waist and he's holding up all my weight as we move toward the clubhouse.

“What the hell happened?”

Colt's low gravelly voice comes from behind me, and I'm guessing it was him who helped me off the bike.

Fury makes a low growling sound in his throat. “Her husband.”

“The fuck.”

Bringing me into a room at the back of the clubhouse, one I'm guessing belongs to him, Fury helps me sit on the bed. I hang my head, my body exhausted. I'm in so much pain I can't tell where it begins and where it ends. I catch a glimpse of the white blouse I wore to the school awards night and see it is covered in blood. My bottom lip trembles as I reach for it, my fingers shaking.

“Give me your eyes,” Fury orders, and I know what he’s asking.

I look up at him, letting him get a full glimpse of my face.

His gaze hardens in a way that is utterly terrifying as he takes in every bruise, cut, and injury.

“Jesus,” Colt growls from behind him, standing with his arms crossed. “Are we goin’ to kill this fucker now or what?”

“Soon,” Fury murmurs, his eyes never leaving mine. “Where does it hurt?”

“Everywhere,” I whisper.

Then, I point to my ribs because those hurt so bad it’s mind numbing.

Reaching down, Fury unbuttons my blouse, and I don’t care at all that there are two men in the room right now. I just want him to take the pain away. As he pushes it off my shoulders, his eyes fall to my ribs. “Fuck.”

“Is it bad?” I croak, scared to look down.

“They’re in a bad way. Could have broken some. You might need a hospital.”

“No,” I say, so quickly it has his head jerking up. “No please. If you take me to the hospital, they will call him. If I refuse, they will wonder why, and they’ll call the police, and if the police are called ...”

“What?”

Fury’s gaze locks on mine so intensely I can’t look away.

“I’ll go to prison,” I whisper.

His eyes flash, then he looks over his shoulder at Colt.
“Get me a first-aid kit, bandages, anything you can find. Good painkillers, too.”

Colt nods and leaves the room.

Fury looks back to me. “Start talkin’.”

I know I no longer have a choice. If I want a world free of Ethan, then I need to tell Fury the truth. I trust him, and if anyone in this world can help me, it’s him. So, I start talking.

“Do you remember a few years back a girl was said to have jumped off the rocks at the local lookout?”

Fury, who is now using a damp washcloth Colt brought in to wipe the blood from my face, pauses. “Yeah.”

“She was my best friend. Her name was Ella. That day, she called Ethan and I up there, we went there a lot. There was this little rock you could climb down to that was perfectly flat. We would go down and drink wine there sometimes or have a picnic. That day, we went down there. I thought nothing of it but ...”

Fury nods, encouraging me to go on.

I take a deep, shaking breath, and it hurts so fucking bad I have to pause as the wave of pain washes over before subsiding a little.

“They took me up there to tell me they were having an affair. I didn’t see it coming; I was completely blindsided. We got into an argument, and I took a step toward her. Ethan

reached out to stop me, and I swung around, trying to jerk my arm from his grip, and somehow, my body slammed into hers. Before I knew what was happening ... she fell over the side.”

A sob rises up in my throat, and I clench my eyes shut to try and stop the memory from repeating over and over in my mind.

“I didn’t mean for her to fall,” I whisper, my voice hoarse. “I didn’t mean it.”

“Take a breath,” Fury orders, his voice scarily calm.

I don’t know how he can be calm; I feel like the entire world is closing in around me.

“I was frantic, staring over the side, mumbling that I didn’t mean it over and over ... Ethan kept saying strange things, asking why I would do that, and how horrified he was, it made no sense ... he knew I didn’t push her. When I turned around, he was filming.”

Fury snarls, a low growl escaping his lips. “That shady, filthy motherfucker. I’ll kill him.”

“He has proof, enough that the police would believe I pushed her. It doesn’t matter that I didn’t. It’s his word against mine, and he has the video. Sure, he might get into a little bit of trouble for not saying anything, but he will talk his way out of it. Me, I’ll go to prison for the rest of my life.”

Fury exhales, closing his eyes for a moment, his hand curled into a fist on his lap where he sits on a chair in front of me, fighting for calm.

I wait, terrified that he is going to tell me there is nothing he can do.

Eventually, he opens his eyes. “How smart is this fucker? Would he have the video on his phone still?”

I shake my head. “Maybe, but would have also sent it somewhere or saved it on a drive and hidden it. He’s not stupid.”

“I figured,” Fury mutters. “A man that comes up with a plan that fuckin’ vile in a matter of minutes is the evilest of them all.”

“What do we do?” I whisper. “He’ll kill me, Fury. One day ...”

“Hey,” he growls, taking my chin in his hand and tipping my head back, “he will never fuckin’ hurt you again. We’re goin’ to figure this out, until then, you will not go back to that house.”

I shake my head, tears welling. “He’ll find me. He will, I know you think he won’t, but he will ...”

“No,” Fury grinds out. “He won’t.”

“He’ll come into the school ...”

“Alexis, I need you to trust me. My club has dealt with far worse than that wet rag you call a husband. We will deal with him, and you will get your life back. He won’t be hurtin’ you anymore.”

A pained cry rips from my throat. It’s so unexpected it causes my body to heave. Perhaps it’s the relief of finally

telling someone the truth, or maybe it's the idea that I might just get my life back. One way or another, I might smell freedom once more. Clutching my stomach, I hang my head as my body shakes.

“Hey,” Fury growls low, taking hold of me and pulling me onto his lap.

He doesn't even hesitate to comfort me, and as my legs fall either side of his hips, I can't control the urge that washes over me. I want him, I want him more than I've ever wanted anything in my life. I need him to kiss me, but more than that, I need him inside me. I need to feel that there is hope beyond this pain, I need to know that maybe I can be with someone again and for it to feel right. I want so many things right now, but Fury is something I need with such depth I can't control it.

My lips find his.

He doesn't fight me.

Every inch of my body burns with desire and pain, but I don't stop, and I pray to whoever is listening that he doesn't stop me.

With a ragged growl, Fury carefully circles his arm around my waist as he kisses me, his tongue meeting mine in a ferocious dance that has me grinding against him with a guttural moan. His dick is already hard beneath me, and I find the right spot by circling my hips, letting it rub against my clit. The thin material of my shorts doesn't prevent the friction at all, in fact, they only add to it. Grinding against him, pleasure builds in my core as I kiss him, my fingers going up to tangle in his thick hair.

“Slow down,” he growls, leaning back, tearing those perfect lips away from mine. “You’re hurt.”

“I don’t care,” I breathe, sliding my tongue out to lick his lower lip, earning me a low hiss. “I need this, Fury. Please, I need it more than you could ever imagine. I don’t care anymore. I don’t want to hold back. Fuck me.”

His eyes flash, and then his mouth is on mine again.

We kiss until my lips burn and my face aches. I don’t care that everything inside me is begging me to stop, I just want him to keep going. I don’t want this to end. Reaching down, Fury undoes his jeans, shuffling a little without moving me too much. He jerks his cock out before shoving my shorts aside. They’re loose, and they move easily. I was getting ready for bed when ... when everything happened. For a moment, just a small moment, I thought I might get away with what happened at the awards ceremony.

I’m wearing no panties, and his fingers glide over my exposed flesh, causing me to gasp. It has been so long since I’ve been touched in a way I’ve wanted. I have forgotten how it feels for my body to heat, for my pussy to ache, and for it to feel safe. Fury lets out a long, low growl as his finger glides up my flesh, sliding over my clit. “When you’re better, I’m goin’ to suck this pussy until you can’t scream no more.”

Oh.

My.

Word.

I gasp in pleasure as he slips a finger inside me, his mouth finding my neck where he gently kisses all the way down to my shoulder. His other hand remains around my waist, keeping me steady. Unable to help myself, I reach beneath the hand doing wicked things to me, and I find his cock. It's hard, big, and thick. Like stone in my palm, I give it a little squeeze, and it jerks in my hand.

Oh. I need this.

I need it.

So fucking bad.

I stroke up and down as he brings me closer and closer to the edge with his fingers inside me, gently fucking my pussy with such precision, it's incredible. He knows what he's doing, and he's good at doing it. Using his arm, he bumps my hand away from his cock with a ragged groan that has my skin flushing with need.

“You keep doin’ that, we don’t be fucking.”

“Does that mean you like it?” I murmur, my lips grazing over his beard, cheeks, and then settling on his mouth.

I could spend all damn day with this mouth.

“I fuckin’ like it alright.”

I moan as a bolt of pleasure shoots through me, and slowly grows, expanding until I can't take it a second longer. I cry out as an orgasm traps Fury's fingers deep inside me, and I can feel my pussy pulse around them as the pleasure consumes me. His rasp of satisfaction in my ear is enough to have my entire body trembling as I come down from such a glorious high.

“I need you inside me,” I whisper, pulling back so I can meet his gaze.

“Gotta go easy. I don’t want to hurt you.”

Carefully, he lifts me up, and I use my hand to guide his cock to my entrance. Then, inch by glorious inch, I lower myself down, until he’s fully sheathed inside me. It feels incredible, and my body immediately comes to life. I rock a little, but he’s right, the pain is intense, and it’ll only get worse the more I try and push it. Focusing on only my hips, I carefully begin to rotate them around, loving the way his breathing grows ragged in my ear.

He helps me out, taking my hips in his hands and guiding me in a pattern that has pleasure exploding inside me. I cum without much stimulation, horrifyingly fast, but I can’t stop it. I moan into his ear as shudder after shudder rips through me. His breathing turns into sharp pants as he moves me slightly faster, his cock growing deliciously hard inside me as I know he’s near his end, too.

I find his mouth once more, kissing him with such ferocity the cut on my lip begins to bleed, but neither of us pulls away. We kiss until he’s growling with pleasure into my mouth, his cock jerking inside me, his fingers gripping my hips tightly. Only when his cock stops throbbing does he release me, pulling back. I reach forward, wiping the blood off his lip with my thumb. There is something erotic about seeing my blood on him, something that makes my insides twist with need.

“You like seein’ blood,” he growls, reaching for my lip with his own thumb now, swiping the blood off before

dragging it down my chin.

God dammit.

I need more.

“Is that sick?” I whisper, as his cock grows hard inside me once more.

“Fuck no.”

“You like it?”

He rolls his hips, his cock continuing to grow hard. “What do you think?”

“I want you ... I want you to bite me, so hard you draw blood.”

It's twisted, I know, and it's an extreme ask. I don't even know where it came from. Sure, I've always had a thing with pain, but the years I spent with Ethan dulled that. Pain became my nightmare, but with Fury, it's reemerging as pleasure, and I'm embracing it. I'm tired of hiding every little piece of who I am. I want him to know that I'm not just a quiet little teacher, that inside, I can be a woman who will take his breath away.

“Your wish,” he rumbles, thrusting upward, “is my command.”

Fury fucks me again, a little more frantic this time.

It hurts like hell, and that only makes me want it more.

His cock is dangerous as it thrusts up inside me, hitting me in all the right places.

And just as I'm about to orgasm again, he bites down onto my shoulder, so hard I scream in pain. My pleasure quickly overtakes it, exploding within me in a way I've never experienced. It's the most powerful, incredible, sensational, painful thing I've ever experienced in my entire life, and for a moment, it feels as though the world stops.

It's like nothing I've ever felt before.

But it's something I want to feel again.

Oh, yes.

Over and over.



I SLEEP, FOR A DAMN long time.

I go into the night and until lunchtime the next day.

It's probably the painkillers Fury gave me last night, or maybe it's because for the first time in a long time, I feel safe. Truly safe. Deep within my soul, I know that I'm protected here and my body knows it's finally time to relax. Relax, I do. The bed is comfortable, the room is cool, and it's the best sleep I've had in such a long time.

By the time I wake, the sun is pushing through the window, covering half the bed. Shifting, my body screams in pain. The aches inside me are going to take some time to heal. One of my eyes feels swollen, and my lip is burning. My ribs, though, they're what hurt the most. Fury bandaged them as best he could and told me that if they didn't get better soon, we were going to have to go to a hospital.

I want to avoid that at all costs, but if I have no choice, then I'll go.

Climbing out of the bed, I straighten my clothes, staring at the chair that is still beside it. Remembering how Fury fucked me twice last night has me reaching for my shoulder where the ache of his bite burns into my skin. It's a good pain though, and remembering it has my core tightening. I'm certain if a therapist got hold of me, they would have a lot to say about my sexual preference.

Either way, it was the best sex I've ever had.

And it was only just the beginning.

Fury sparks something inside me, something I've never felt before.

I want to explore more.

I want to know what a world with him in it feels like.

For the first time in years, I feel a spark of hope in my chest. It's exciting, a little scary, but mostly overwhelming. I never thought it was something I'd feel again. I never thought I'd look forward to my future, to wonder what life might bring that isn't disaster and pain. It's thrilling, and I can't help the smile that stretches across my face as I walk out of the room and very slowly make my way down the stairs.

My steps are small, and I'm slightly hunched over as I go in search of Fury.

I need painkillers, because with every passing step, the pain comes back a little more. By the time I reach the main living area, scattered with bikers, I'm biting my lower lip. It's

bad, and if I don't find relief soon, I'm afraid I might just fall down. Approaching Mex, who is standing by a large pool table, I ask him where Fury is.

He points toward the kitchen.

Thanking him, I walk toward it, pushing the door open but stopping when I hear Fury's voice trailing out. It's not his voice that stops me, it's the words coming out of his mouth. The mention of my name has me pausing to listen, and what I hear crushes every little strand of hope I was hanging onto this morning.

"You need to be careful, Fury," Bonnie says, her voice low and calm. "She is married, and not only that, she's married to a psycho. You can't sleep with a married woman; it will only end in disaster."

"Hear you," Fury mutters, "but she's not goin' back there."

"I know you want to believe that, but sometimes abused women do return because they're so afraid, or maybe it's all they know. You can't just assume she's going to give up her life and stay here."

"Never said that," Fury grumbles.

"You can't go catching feelings for a woman who is taken ..."

I close my eyes, swallowing.

"I'm not catchin' feelings, Bonnie. Got no feelings at all toward her. I feel sorry for her, the woman has nowhere else to go and when it comes to him, she's weak. I don't want to see an innocent person get hurt, but it's got nothing to do with

having any kind of emotion toward her because I'm not certain I could be with someone who has no backbone."

His words are like a knife to my heart.

Pressing a hand over my mouth, to stop the pained cry, I turn and hobble away as fast as I can.

Tears burn under my eyelids and shame washes over me as I push past anyone who gets in my way, desperate to get out of here.

I stumble down the front steps, crying out in pain, and manage to make it halfway across the front yard when Fury barks my name.

I don't stop.

I have no idea what my plan is, considering I don't have a car or a phone, but I can't stay here. I will not be anyone's burden. I'm not here for a pity party. He thinks I'm weak; he has no fucking idea what it's like to be so afraid of one single person. To say I have no backbone, how dare he?

"Fuck, Alexis, stop."

I don't.

I won't.

I scurry toward the gate until he stops me with a careful hand around my upper arm. It's a gentle stop, one that ensures he doesn't hurt me, but I'm not about to sit back and take him touching me after what he just said. Jerking my arm from his grips, I wail in agony as my ribs pinch and burn. Fury

immediately releases me, putting his hands up to show he isn't going to try and touch me again.

Panting, I drop my hands to my knees, unable to take the pain any longer.

“Alexis, listen ...”

“Do *not*,” I grind out through gritted teeth, lifting my head just enough to look at him. “Do not tell me to fucking listen. How dare you? Is this some sort of joke to you?”

“You only heard part of a conversation.”

A bitter laugh bubbles out of my throat. “Oh, well, do enlighten me. Because I'm not certain how you calling me weak and saying I have no backbone could be misinterpreted.”

His jaw tics, but he doesn't say anything.

I straighten, just a little. “I can't believe I trusted you. I actually thought you could help me, when all along you're just looking at me as this pathetic, broken little woman you need to help so you can be rid of her.”

“You're fuckin' overreacting. If you'll just listen.”

“Fuck you,” I yell, kicking a heap of dust in his direction and immediately regretting the movement.

“Alex,” Bonnie's sweet voice fills my ears, and my eyes whip to hers.

“Do you feel the same? After all, you were telling him not to get involved with me. None of you have any idea, do you? Not a single fucking one of you. Tell me, Bonnie, have you ever been afraid in your life? Truly, soul crushingly afraid? To

the point where your stomach is always in knots, your adrenaline is always running, and you're terrified to say the wrong thing every single second of every single day?"

She closes her mouth and shakes her head slowly. "No."

"No. You don't. Well let me tell you, I do know what it's like. I feel that way every fucking day. He scares me, so badly that when he's around, I withdraw into myself, scared to say the wrong thing because I know what he'll do. I have no voice, I have nothing, and you're all here calling me weak."

Bonnie shakes her head, going to take a step forward, but I stop her by throwing my hand out in front of me. "Don't."

"I think you're incredibly strong," Bonnie tries. "I was wrong, I'm sorry."

"It's too fucking late for that. Screw all of you."

I turn and hobble toward the gate.

"If you leave, he'll kill you," Fury calls.

I pause, turning to stare at him. "If I stay, I'll kill *you*."

His face goes slack, and, for a moment, hurt flashes across his gaze.

It takes me back, and I'm momentarily stunned.

"You're in pain, if you go out there, you'll get worse. Please, just let us help you," Bonnie tries.

I shake my head. "I can take care of myself."

"Alexis," Fury growls. "Don't leave this compound."

“Try and stop me, Ford. If you do, I swear to everything, I will kill myself fighting you.”

With that, I walk out.

I don't have a plan; I just start hobbling down the road.

A moment later, a car slows down beside me. The window rolls down and Bonnie stares at me. “I'm not letting you walk into town. You can hate me all you like, but at least let me take you somewhere safe and get you some help.”

I pause, wanting to scream at her to go away, but I know right now I am out of options. I can't stay at the club, I can't go home, and I have no phone or car. She's the only chance I have.

“I'm getting in, only because I can't take another step. It doesn't mean I'm okay with what you said.”

She nods, and I hesitantly get in.

Stretching out her hand, she opens her palm and exposes two white pills. Then, she reaches toward the cupholder and hands me a water bottle. I don't hesitate, I don't even ask what it is, I just know I need something to help with the pain. Swallowing it, I close my eyes and lean my head back against the headrest.

“Western has a place in town—he rents it out but right now it's vacant. He said you can stay there as long as you like.”

I don't answer her.

I know I'm being rude, and I know it's not right, but, in this moment, I'm so hurt that I can't think straight. The very

idea that they're all looking at me, thinking that I'm weak and pathetic, is soul crushing. It brings out a part of me that I don't like, an insecure, broken part. I never thought I'd be seen as the abused woman, but here I am.

I don't like it, and I don't ever want to feel this way again.

Right now, I just want the thoughts in my head to stop.

I hope the painkillers work soon, because I'm afraid if they don't, I'll break.

Really, truly break.



Western's rental is nice.

It's a one bedroom, fully furnished apartment with a small courtyard. It's nothing fancy, but it's neat, tidy, and perfect for one person. Bonnie told me that the last woman moved out, and he hasn't gotten around to renting it again. Lucky for me, I guess. Whoever she was, she left the place in good condition.

Standing in the doorway, I'm feeling slightly uneasy with Bonnie behind me. I know she cares, I do, but I'm so hurt that a huge part of me doesn't want her here. I need space, but the thought of being alone is equally gripping. Turning slowly, I face her. "I appreciate what you've done here, I ... I just need to rest."

It's a lie, considering I only just woke up, but my body is exhausted, and I'm certain I could probably sleep a little more when these painkillers kick in. Bonnie's eyes scan my face, and I can see there is so much she wants to say, but none of it comes out. Instead, she nods slowly and takes a step back. "I'm going to leave you to rest, but I am coming back later. I'm sorry, but I can't not check on you."

"As long as you're alone, I don't care," I murmur.

Her eyes flash with upset, but she nods in agreement. Then, she turns and leaves.

The moment she's gone, I close the door and slump against it, exhaling. At the very least, I'm safe here. I don't have the gun Fury gave me here with me—it's hidden back at the house—but I know I'd feel a whole lot better if I could get it. I'm not going to take that risk, because I know Ethan will be looking for me. He will be hunting me down, scared of what I might reveal.

Hell, he'll probably go to the police just to spite me.

To watch me suffer for going against him.

Right now, I can't find it in myself to care.

I'm tired of being afraid.

Walking farther into the apartment, I go for a look around. The room is basic, but it is very clean. The bed has fresh sheets and the ensuite is clean and smells nice. It's good enough for me. Kicking off my shoes, I walk over to the bed, the painkillers making my head a little dizzy, and I lie down. Before I know it, blissful darkness takes hold, and I stay that way for what feels like hours.

By the time I wake, the afternoon sun is dancing against the window.

Rolling with a groan, I push myself out of the bed. The pain isn't as bad as it was this morning, and I'm grateful. Shuffling to the shower, I strip down before staring in the mirror at my black and blue body. My fingers rise up and graze over the bite mark on my shoulder and memories of Fury deep inside me have my body heating. That feeling is quickly replaced by one of hurt and betrayal.

A dark, twisted feeling washes over me.

One I don't like.

I shower and get changed back into my clothes. I have nothing else. Eventually, I'm going to have to find a way to get my things. I can't hide forever. I also can't avoid going to work, and I know for certain that will be the first place Ethan looks. Without my phone, I can't call my boss and tell him I'm sick, but I will get hold of a new one soon and do just that. I need some time to figure out what the hell I'm going to do here.

A knock on the door just as I've finished dressing has my heart jumping. While I'm certain it's probably Bonnie, it doesn't stop the uneasy feeling that swims in my chest. Has Ethan found me somehow? Scared to go and check, I carefully walk out, my footsteps soft as I approach the door. I'm not about to call out, just in case it is him. Pressing my ear to the door, I try to hear who is outside.

Right away, a flurry of female voices has me frowning.

"Alexis," Bonnie calls, "it's just us."

Us?

Pushing the door open, I'm faced with not just Bonnie, but Myla and Acacia, too. My eyes scan over them, and I'm not certain if I want the company. Myla is holding some bags of food, Acacia some alcohol, and Bonnie has a block of chocolate in her hand. Before I can argue or tell them to leave, Acacia speaks. "We have been shit friends, girl, but we're here to make it up to you."

Friends?

They consider me a friend?

“I’m not sure,” I say, my voice croaky from sleep.

“Just give us a chance,” Myla pleads, offering me a smile.

“I swear, we can change your mind.”

Oh, what the hell.

I step aside, and I’m rewarded by their triumphant smiles as they walk into the apartment. Myla looks around and then calls out, “Damn, Bonnie. Western is loaded. This is a nice little place.”

Bonnie snorts. “Don’t I know it. The man is always reminding me. I told him maybe he should buy me a house if he’s throwing his cash around.”

Acacia laughs. “Get it, girl.”

It’s hard not to like these girls. They’re so easy to get along with.

“How is the pain?” Bonnie asks me, pulling a pill bottle out from her purse and handing it to me. “Fury instructed me to give these to you. You’ve got him spinning in circles.”

Fuck Fury.

“I hope he spins himself to the ground,” I mutter.

“Well, that’s why we’re here. We’ve got a lot to talk about,” Acacia says, handing me a drink.

I have no idea what it is, but I’ll take it.

“Am I meant to mix alcohol and painkillers?” I ask, taking it.

“It’s weak. You’ll be fine.”

Hmm.

“What exactly is it you think we’re going to discuss?” I question, as Myla begins dishing out some food.

My stomach rumbles.

I can’t remember the last time I ate.

“Drink that up and we’ll get to it.”

Well.

This should be interesting.



“SO, THERE YOU HAVE it,” Bonnie tells me. “What Fury was saying that day was only one part of the story. He doesn’t mean to come across that way, but he’s been so burned in the past that he holds back, but I promise you, he does not feel sorry for you or think you’re weak. Fury protecting you is because he cares because I can promise you, he has not protected any other woman before.”

I stare at Bonnie, a bowl of Chinese food on my lap, a glass of vodka in my hand. She just explained that I only heard part of the conversation she was having with Fury and that after he said what I overheard, she got into him and told him to stop denying how he really felt just because he’s been hurt before. After a back-and-forth conversation, Fury admitted

that he did care more than he was willing to let on and that he didn't think I was weak.

It eases the pain, but I still can't help but feel betrayed.

She also told me that the last relationship he had ended in him being cheated on, and, because of that, he hasn't had one since. He hasn't connected with a woman, and she thinks that I scare him because he feels something. I want to believe she's right—after all, it makes sense, but I still wonder if deep down he does feel a little sorry for me and that is driving the hero response in him. He wants to help me because I'm a woman, and he doesn't like that I'm being abused, but does that mean he cares?

It's debatable.

"Maybe," I say, my voice soft. "I guess I can't help but think he really does just feel sorry for me, I mean ... who wouldn't? I'm a pity party."

"You're not," Myla tells me, her voice firm. "You're a god damned warrior, Alexis. Not everyone can live through what you have. That takes strength."

"Or weakness," I point out.

She shakes her head. "I refuse to believe that."

"Tell us more about what that son-of-a-bitch has on you," Acacia says. "I have dealt with some sketchy people in my time, I might just be able to help you."

I glance at her. I've heard a few stories about Acacia being the daughter of one of the biggest criminals around, so it wouldn't surprise me that she has her hand in a few dangerous

pies. Do I risk telling them everything? They know I've been abused, but Fury is the only one who knows why. If I tell them, they might leave and go to the police.

Something inside me tells me that won't happen, though.

So, I take another sip of my drink and tell them everything.

When I'm done, the room is silent. Holding my breath, I watch them, scared they might judge me.

"Holy shit," Bonnie breathes. "What an absolute piece of shit."

I'm shocked that they're not at all concerned about the fact that it was my body that slammed into Ella's and pushed her off the cliff.

"It was my fault she fell," I say again, just in case they missed that part.

"Bullshit." Acacia shakes her head, her eyes wild. "They took you there to drop a fucking bomb on you and if he didn't grab you like that, you wouldn't have tried to get away. It was a damned accident, and the only people responsible for it is your husband and your selfish cunt of a best friend."

Oh.

Whoa.

"I agree," Myla throws in. "What sort of shit friend would do something like that? And then have the nerve to tell you if you were a better wife, maybe he wouldn't have done all those horrible things. God, I'm glad she fell off that cliff because if that bitch was still alive, I'd push her myself."

I can't help it, a giggle bubbles up in my throat and bursts forth. Pressing a hand over my mouth, I try to stifle it but it's no use. It won't stop, no matter how hard I try. It's like years of suppressed emotion is suddenly spewing out in the form of laughter. The girls join in, and before we know it, we're all laughing so hard it hurts. The pain it causes me isn't enough for me to be able to make it stop.

I laugh until tears stream down my face, and then, out of the blue, I start crying.

God dammit.

Bonnie stops laughing immediately and scoots closer to me, putting her arm around my shoulder.

"I'm so fucking pathetic," I cry, shaking my head. "Forever letting him use this to ruin me."

"Hey," Bonnie tells me, her voice firm. "You are not pathetic, not even close. He is a cold, fucked up monster, and we're never going to let him hurt you again."

"He has that video," I croak, swiping the tears from my eyes. "If he shows the police, it's over for me."

"We won't let that happen," Acacia tells me, her voice strong and determined. "We're going to get that video back, and then we're going to go to the police ourselves and you're going to tell them that you saw him push her."

My eyes widen. "They would never believe it."

"Oh, but they will. Because we're going to file a report as soon as we find that damned video and do him for assault. Then, we're going to come clean and tell them everything."

Trust me, they'll believe you because all it will take is for them to look back through his messages and see they were having an affair."

"They'll just think I'm lying. He is a smooth talker; he will twist it and tell them that I pushed her because I found out. It'll never work."

Acacia grins. "Oh, but it will, because we're going to make him so angry that we record him threatening you. All we have to do is prove he was there, having an affair, and has been abusing you since. Trust me, with the right words, we can get him to slip up and tell us just enough that the cops won't believe a word he says."

"He'll never admit to being there," I say, shaking my head. "He's too smart for that."

"Not if he doesn't know you're wired," Acacia goes on, her eyes narrowing with her wicked plan.

She's smart, but I have a sick feeling Ethan is smarter.

I can just see so many ways this could go wrong.

Still, that doesn't stop the swirl of hope from swarming in my belly at the thought of maybe, just maybe, bringing Ethan down for everything he has done.

"All you have to do is get enough to make it sound like he did it. To make it sound like he called you there and got mad and pushed her. Then, he decided to try and turn it on you by using blackmail and kept you prisoner in your own life for years. It's enough. I know some police officers that we could send the information to who owe me one," Acacia goes on.

“You do?” I question.

She nods. “Oh, I do. What do you say? Let us help you.”

I bite my lip, glancing at the three of them and their hopeful faces.

Ah, fuck it.

What have I got to lose?



“So, we’re clear on the plan?” I say to the three of them, well after midnight.

We sat down and worked it all out.

First, we need to get that video.

There is only one place I can think of where he would hide something like that. He has a safe in his shed that’s down in the yard, and the only reason I know it’s there is because I saw him open it one day when he didn’t know I was home. It’s hidden behind a large toolbox, and I’m positive that’s where he would have any evidence against me.

The problem is getting into it.

Acacia asked a lot of questions, the most obvious being ... can we lift the safe? I said I wasn’t certain if it was bolted down or not, but if it wasn’t, with two of us, we could possibly carry it out of there. I’m not sure if Ethan is smart enough to bolt it down, considering he thinks it’s so well hidden, and he locks his shed up incredibly well. I know he had mentioned putting extra security on the shed, so I can only hope he hasn’t done that yet.

From what I remember, there are cameras in the yard but we should be able to get to the shed and sneak in without being seen if we go in the right way.

We’re going to risk it in hopes that it can be moved.

Then, Acacia is going to try and sneak into my house and steal Ethan's phone.

That's the part that terrifies me.

I know the security system, and unless he has changed it, I can unlock the door and disarm the alarm. I can't see him spending money on changing it after one day of me being gone. No, he would be more worried about finding me. So, here's hoping we get away with that, too. It's a risky plan, but I can't deny that it's a good one. If it works, we are covering my ass, and then all we have to do is get Ethan to make a confession of sorts, and he's going to prison.

I hope this works.

"We're clear. Can you get over this fence?" Acacia asks, as we stop at my back fence.

It's high, but not terribly so. Just enough that a person can't step over it easily.

"I'll try. I know where the safe is, it'll be quicker if I come."

"I'll go over first," Myla offers, her voice a whisper. "Then Acacia can give you a leg up, and I'll help you down. It will probably hurt still, but a whole lot less."

I nod.

Bonnie brings her phone out, using the flashlight so we can see what we're doing. "I'll keep a lookout."

Myla leaps up, curling her fingers around the top of the fence and scrambling over like some sort of pro. A moment

later, she whispers that she's on the ground and Acacia gives me a leg up. It takes a lot of strength for me to pull my body over, and it hurts like hell, but without them, I wouldn't have been able to do it. As I throw my leg over the side, Myla catches my foot and takes some of my weight off so I can slide down.

Hitting the grass on the other side, I lean forward and exhale slowly.

Everything hurts.

"You okay?" Myla whispers.

"Yeah."

A moment later, Acacia springs over the fence and then we move very slowly towards the shed, keeping low. It doesn't appear to have a new security system on it yet, so Acacia begins what I can only call expert lock picking. The girl has clearly been raised in a life of crime. She is quick and effective, working with only the light of Myla's phone as she pokes tools into the lock. Less than ten minutes later, the door to the shed swings open.

My word.

She did it.

"I'm not going to even ask who taught you that," Myla murmurs, "but girl, you're bad ass."

"I agree," I say, following them in when they go inside.

We don't turn on any lights, but I lead them straight to the large toolbox. I'm not certain why I haven't thought to look in

here sooner. I figured he was hiding something, but it never clicked to me that he would be hiding the video. My mind probably automatically shut it off – considering it could be a matter of life or death for me. I was on my own, I had nobody to help. Now ... it's different. These girls make me feel as though I might just have a chance.

It takes a great deal of effort to move the toolbox—it's large and full—but, eventually, between the three of us, we manage to drag it out of the way. He has it well hidden, nobody would think to move the toolbox, as it looks like a wall behind it, but Ethan is clever and the safe slides into an opening he had built into the wall. The safe appears and thankfully, it doesn't look to be bolted down which means we might actually be able to get it out of here. It's bigger than I thought, though, and that means it's going to be heavy.

Biting my lip, I help Acacia pull it out.

I am right, it's heavier than I was anticipating. I'm not entirely sure we can actually lift it. "I don't know," I say, my voice quiet, "this is heavy."

"We won't be able to get that over the fence without causing a scene," Myla murmurs.

"Let's just see if we can lift it," Acacia goes on.

We grunt and pull and manage to get the safe off the bench and out into the middle of the floor. Between the three of us, we can lift it, but it's getting it over the fence that's the problem. "I think if the three of us lift it and push it over the fence, it can just smash onto the ground on the other side. We're not worried if it breaks," Acacia throws out.

“What if it makes a loud noise?” Myla questions.

“It shouldn’t be too loud if it hits the grass,” I point out.

“It’s worth a shot, it’s the only option we have.”

Coming to an agreement, we lean down ready to lift the safe when a voice comes into the darkness. “What the fuck do you girls think you’re doing.”

I recognize that voice, and I whip my head around to see the light of a phone as Fury stands in the doorway, Mex by his side. They’re looking at us with angry faces, and I know we’re totally busted. Pushing to our feet, we all stand. Mex is the one to speak first. “I thought it was strange, you rushin’ back to the club to get tools. We thought we’d follow you, lucky for us we did.”

“I tried to stop them,” Bonnie squeaks from behind them.

I avoid Fury’s gaze, staring down at his boots on the concrete floor.

“What the fuck are you actually plannin’ to do?” he orders.

“We’re taking this safe, then we’re going to steal Ethan’s phone,” Acacia says casually, as if we’re simply here having coffee.

“Then what?” Mex grunts.

“Then, we’re going to find a way to take him down. We don’t need your help, babe, and we’re doing this with or without you. So, now you’re here, a lift with this safe would be helpful.”

Damn.

She's straight to the point.

"How do you know there is anything in there worth stealin' it for?" Fury murmurs, and I can feel his gaze burning into the side of my face as I look anywhere but at him.

"We're pretty confident," Myla answers for me. "Now, can we get on with it because we're risking a lot being here for longer than we need."

"We'll get the safe," Mex tells Acacia.

"Good, then we can go get the phone."

"She's not goin' in that fuckin' house," Fury cuts in. "If he catches her, he'll kill her."

"I'm right here," I finally mutter, acknowledging him. "And I'm the only one who can get it because I am the only one who can disarm the security system. It doesn't matter what you say, I'm doing this."

He gives me a hard look, but he doesn't argue.

"Come on," Acacia says. "Let's get this done."

Nodding, I follow her out and show her around the side of the house where there are no cameras. We slink up to the back door and I get her to give me a leg up to the beam on the roof where I placed a spare key. I'm forever losing my keys, and after locking myself out, I decided to hide one up high where nobody would find it. Acacia holds my foot as I stretch up and shove my hands into the roof beams, patting around until I finally get the key.

Lowering me, she holds the light so I can unlock the door. Once it's open, I only have so long to enter the code before the alarm will go off. I quickly rush to the keypad and turn off the alarm system. Once it's disabled, I exhale the breath I was holding, then turn to Acacia. "This way."

I'm praying Ethan is in a deep sleep, because if he hears me, he'll probably kill the both of us. He keeps his phone by the bed, so I need to be in and out as quickly as possible. Tiptoeing up the stairs, we pause when we reach the bedroom door. I turn to Acacia and press my fingers to my lips. She nods, and then carefully I take the door handle and twist it. It makes a slightly creaking sound, and I pause, holding my breath.

When I hear nothing, I push it open. The soft snoring sounds tell me Ethan is asleep, and I breathe a sigh of relief as I tiptoe over toward the bed. Luckily for me, I know the room well enough, because if I didn't, I would surely wake him up. Carefully, I stretch my fingers out and pat around on the bedside table. Something tips over, and I pause, my entire body going stiff as I hear Ethan roll. It's a long, terrifying few moments, but eventually, his snoring begins again.

Oh, thank god.

Finally, my fingers curl around his phone, and I quickly shove it into my pocket before tiptoeing to my dresser by the door. I pull the drawer open as quietly as I can and take a handful of clothes, then I do the same for the next one. Once I have whatever I can, I leave the room and carefully close the door.

We make our way downstairs, and I quickly look around for my purse with my phone. I find it on the kitchen counter, and I have no doubt he has gone right through it. I pick it up, but then hesitate. He's probably got trackers on everything that belongs to me. Exhaling, I put it down, it's not worth the risk. I do take my purse, though.

A creaking sound has Acacia and I freezing.

Footsteps above.

Heart racing, I take Acacia's arm and pull her into the kitchen. Sickness rises in my stomach as we duck down behind the counter, and I hold my breath. If he looks out the window and notices any sort of light in the backyard, it's over for us. Closing my eyes, my fingers tremble as I pray that he doesn't come downstairs.

What feels like the longest moment passes before the sound of a door closing can be heard.

I know Ethan, and I know he'll probably start looking for his phone. He often wakes up during the night, scrolls, and then puts it away. We have minutes. Tugging Acacia's arm, I pull her to her feet. "We need to get out of here," I whisper. "He will figure out his phone is gone and come looking. Let's go."

Nodding, she follows me as we rush out of the kitchen as quietly as we can. Shoving the clothes in her hands, I tell her to go while I activate the alarm again. Hesitantly, she takes them and then turns, rushing off into the night. Fingers trembling, I use the light on Ethan's phone to see the numbers

I'm punching in the keypad. The moment the alarm is activated, I rush out the door.

But not before footsteps can be heard coming down the stairs.

Picking up my pace, I rush toward the fence where Acacia is waiting to help me over. "Go!" I whisper hiss.

The back door swings open.

"Hey!"

Ethan's furious voice fills the cool night and I know we've run out of time. Tossing everything over the fence, I turn to Acacia as she leans down to give me a leg up. He's quick and manages to reach us before Acacia can throw me over the fence. His fingers curl into my hair, jerking me back – a pained yelp escapes my throat. "I fucking knew it was you. Bitch. Where is my phone?"

"Acacia," I gasp. "Go."

"Fuck no," she growls, and then her fist flies out without question and hits Ethan in the jaw.

Barking in pain, he releases me before spinning on her. "Who the fuck are you?"

"Touch her again, you filthy son-of-a-bitch, and I'll gut you like a fish."

Jesus.

"Where the fuck is my phone?" Ethan thunders.

"You'll never find it," I seethe, the first time I've used such a cold, hard tone when speaking to him. "I'm done with

your threats. I'm done with you hurting me. It won't be happening anymore. It's over for you, Ethan. We found your little safe, it's gone too. Good luck proving it was us."

His eyes flash, and I know I've got him.

I know that whatever is in that safe, he doesn't want me to find.

His fist lashes out, aiming right toward me, and for the first time since I've been with him, I shove my arm up to block it. His closed hand slams into my forearm, and it hurts, but nothing like it would have if it hit my face.

"I said," I growl, shoving his fist away with my arm, "you won't be doing that to me anymore."

The blaring alarm sounds out, echoing through the night. He didn't disarm it, and because the door is open, the shrill sounds fill the air. Cursing, and no doubt not wanting to pay a fee if they come out for no reason, Ethan turns to shut it off before it alerts the authorities. This is our chance. Acacia leans down and helps me up and over the fence before hauling herself over, too.

On the other side, Bonnie stands, her phone in her hand, looking like she was just about to make a call.

"Are you okay?" she whispers, rushing over when we both land on the ground.

"Yeah, we're okay," I groan. "Are the guys still here?"

"They took the safe to the truck. We should go."

She's right.

We need to get the hell out of here.

Right now.



“CRACK IT,” WESTERN orders, and the guys blow the safe.

I don't want to know how they've got the material to blow the lock, but they do. A loud popping sound, some smoke, and then the door swings open. Just like that. It's rather alarming how easily they managed to do that. Nervous anticipation washes over me as the smoke clears and the safe comes into view. Walking over, the guys step out of the way, letting me look first.

Stopping in front of the safe, I stretch my fingers out before closing them again. Taking a deep, nervous breath, I exhale and then reach in. Whatever is in here, I want to know. I'm praying the one thing I'm looking for is in this safe. If it is, we might just have enough to get Ethan right where we want him.

The first few items I pull out are large sums of cash. At least fifty thousand dollars. Eyes widening, I stare down at it as bundle after bundle comes out of the safe. Ethan has been stashing money. Why? What is it he was planning on doing? Was he going to get rid of me and leave? Or was he hiding this for another reason? He earns good money, and I don't touch a cent of it, so why is he hiding it?

“Fuck me,” Fury growls. “Cunt was stashin' some cash. That's a lot.”

He really doesn't like him.

Can't say I blame him.

Reaching in, I pull out a few more items. His passport, a few documents for his car and the house, and then a couple of USB drives. Holding one of tiny devices in my hand, I wonder if it holds what we need. If it does, then Ethan has nothing on me, and I can be free of this nightmare. If it doesn't, then we're back to square one. Turning, I face Bonnie who reaches out her hand and I give her the first device.

Walking over, she uses the laptop she brought in, and plugs the USB in. A moment later, she clicks on a file and then the screen lights up. I don't move, instead, I stare at myself looking over the edge of the cliff, crying out and mumbling that I didn't mean to. Tears burn under my eyelids as the memory of that day comes flashing back. Crossing my arms, I rub frantically and take a step back as I stare at the pitiful girl on the screen.

The moment he broke me.

"Turn it off," I croak.

Bonnie turns it off.

I avoid everyone's gaze as I stare down at my crossed arms, fighting back the shame and hurt.

"Hey."

Fury's voice cuts through the silence, and I glance up at him, biting my bottom lip to stop the tears flowing forward.

“You do not feel one single fuckin’ moment of shame for that. You did nothin’ wrong.”

I can’t answer him.

My throat is tight, and my chest is heavy.

“We have what we need, we’ll go through his phone,” Bonnie tells me. “But you’ve had a big night and you need to sleep. Go, get some rest, we will tell you if we find anything.”

I don’t have the strength to argue, nor the strength to go back to the apartment. Nodding, I turn and walk out of the garage. Fury follows me. He doesn’t say a word, but I’m very aware that he is behind me. I’m going to his room, because I don’t know any other ones, and the moment I step inside, I pause.

I can feel him as he stops, too, his heat radiating off his body.

“We need to talk.”

His voice is gravelly, and I don’t have the strength to argue.

Instead, I move to the bed and sit on the side, kicking my shoes off.

Fury stops in front of me, and this feels very much like it did when we were together before.

“I fucked up,” Fury begins. “What I said about you, it wasn’t true. I was scared, and it was fuckin’ gutless of me to turn it around instead of facin’ up to it. I don’t think you’re

weak, Alexis. What you did tonight took more balls than most of these club members have.”

I look up at him, my eyes raking over his perfect face, that immaculate beard, the way a tattoo peeks up from the collar of his jacket. I don't have it in me to hate Fury tonight, or any night for that matter. After all, part of what he said was true, even if he didn't mean it. I just didn't want to face it. Tonight, I stood up for myself and it made me feel strong, like I had some power back.

“Fury?” I whisper, holding his eyes.

“Yeah, darlin’?”

“Let's take him down.”

His mouth spreads into a wicked smile. “There you are. Don't hide that girl again.”

Oh, I don't plan to.

No, I'm not going to let Ethan take a single moment of my life away again.

He is going to pay for the hell he put me through.

“I know you didn't mean it,” I finally acknowledge what he said earlier. “But you were right about some of it. I don't want to hide anymore; I want him to suffer, and then I want my life back.”

Fury steps forward, reaching for my chin. He tips my head back. “Then that's exactly what you'll get.”

“And this?” I dare to ask, reaching out and hooking my pointer finger into the top of his jeans.

“This is whatever you want it to be.”

“Right now,” I murmur. “I want only one thing.”

His eyes flash then grow warm as he strokes a thumb over my jaw. “Your wish is my command.”

Oh.

Yes.

“I’m going to shower first,” I say, releasing his jeans and pushing to my feet. “I did some breaking and entering tonight.”

“A real criminal now. I thought you were against criminals.”

I half smile. “Well, I’m thinking maybe they aren’t so bad ...”

“Hmmm.”

I take a step toward the door, looking over my shoulder at him. “Well, are you going to join me?”

His grin returns.

Ah, yes.

I think I can forgive him.



Fury's mouth is fire as he laps up my clit, rubbing his tongue over it in circular motions before closing his lips over it and sucking hard. The harder the better, and he figures that out quickly as my moans turn to screams. His fingers bite into my ass as he hangs onto the flesh there, and my own fingers are tangled in his hair as I gyrate my hips to fuck his face.

The man is wicked.

Purely wicked.

"Fuck," I moan. "Fury."

The orgasm that consumes me is out of this world, and I know as soon as Fury rises to his feet that it was only just the beginning. Reaching for my hair, he tangles his fingers into it and jerks my head back, pressing his mouth over my neck and licking the droplets of water that fall down from the slow shower stream behind me. He grazes my flesh with his teeth, hinting that he could bite into me at any moment, and I'm wound up just waiting for him to.

"Stop teasing me," I moan, running my fingernails down his back, making him flinch.

His growl radiates against my flesh as he finally bites down, making me moan. Moving down, he bites another piece of my flesh, going forward until his mouth captures my nipple. Carefully, he rolls it between his teeth, and my whimpers of

pleasure spur him on. He bites down, hard enough for a sharp hiss to leave my lips, and I reach for his hair, tugging on it.

Bringing him back up to my mouth, I kiss him furiously, wrapping my arms around his neck to keep him as close as I can. Reaching for my leg, he lifts it up using one arm so that his cock is at my entrance. I want him to fuck me, hard and deep, quick and wild. It's the only thing that can make everything else in this world fade away right now.

"I'm goin' to fuck your tight little cunt until my name breaks on your lips."

"I'm looking forward to it," I whimper against his lips as he slowly pushes upward.

His cock is hard and ready; it stretches and fills me as he drives it deep into my waiting flesh. My fingernails claw at his shoulders and my head drops back as pleasure shoots through me. Fury drags his mouth up my throat, licking and sucking as he fucks me with such precision, it should be illegal. The things he's doing to my body should be illegal.

"Bite me again," I plead, as his pace quickens and he drives his cock so deep sharp pain shoots through my body, only increasing my pleasure. "Make me bleed."

"Filthy," he growls, licking my neck, "dirty girl."

He bites down, and my screams echo through the shower as blood mixes with the water, washing down the drain. Fury leans back, still dragging his cock in and out, and I can see blood on his lips as he reaches up with his thumb, carefully swiping it away. Him, looking like that, completely unhinged

and feral, has an orgasm exploding deep within me. I cry out his name as he licks those lips, taking the last of me into his mouth.

It's mind blowing.

Fury keeps fucking me until he finds his own release. With a ragged growl and a pulsing cock, he cums inside me. I grind my hips, milking him of every last drop, before slowly dropping my leg back to the ground. Fury steps forward, pushing my back against the cool tiled wall where he presses against me, every hard inch of his flesh molding with mine. He reaches up, stroking my bottom lip with his thumb as he murmurs, "You're mine now. Nothin' hurts what's mine."

His words send shivers up my spine.

But in a good way.

Oh, yes, a very good way.

"What makes me different to the many other girls who have been right where I am?" I ask, reaching for his chest and stroking my finger over his beautiful tattoos.

"Wish I had that answer, but I don't. I just know you are. I feel it every single time we're in the same room. You're fuckin' captivating."

Heart pounding against my chest, I offer him a small smile. "I'll take it."

"We're goin' to bring him down, golden eyes, and when we do, you'll be free for me to show you what the world can really offer you."

I can't say I ever considered myself being part of a biker club—I'm still not one hundred percent sure I am okay with it—but I do know something ... this club, they look out for one another. It's the kind of protection and relationship that a person could only dream of. One thing I have figured out over the last few months is that it doesn't take a criminal to be a monster, a normal man can be far worse.

Plus, with Fury comes Hope, and that's an added bonus.

“Where is Hope?” I ask, wondering where she was while the girls and Fury were helping me.

“She is with one of the old ladies. There are a few older members, and their wives fuckin' love her. She adores 'em, so I let her stay there sometimes. They spoil the shit out of her.”

I laugh. “I just bet they do. Why do you call them old ladies, though?”

“Believe it or not, it's a term of endearment.”

Well then.

That's interesting.

“Do they only get called that if they're married to a biker?”

Fury shakes his head as he turns the shower off. “Nah, we can give it to anyone we value, and think is important enough to be respected within the club. Not everyone gets that title.”

“Have you ever had an old lady?” I ask, stepping out and taking a towel.

He shakes his head. “Nope.”

“Bonnie said your last relationship ended badly.”

He shrugs. "I was young, but yeah, it fucked me over. Since then, I haven't been interested in havin' another one."

"Do you think someone will ever change your mind?"

I hold my breath.

He glances at me. "You play your cards right; you might get lucky."

I laugh.

Well, I guess I had better start playing a little harder.

I wonder ... What would it be like to be Fury's old lady?



"THIS IS THE ONLY THING that will work," I say to the group, as we come up with a plan to bring Ethan down.

He's not stupid, he knows I'm up to something, but I'm hoping he only thinks I wanted to steal the proof so I can leave him. For now, that's what I want him to think. He didn't call the police when we broke in, which tells me he's concerned. If he wasn't, he would have called them and sent them around right away.

"It's too dangerous," Fury growls. "Fuckin' no."

"I know it is," I respond, carefully, "but he won't meet me any other way."

Fury shoots me a look that tells me he's a little more than displeased. "You want us to let you go and meet him alone. You must be fuckin' mad."

“If he thinks any of you are with me, he won’t come. Fury, you know this is the only option. You can be nearby.”

“What are you going to tell him when you call?” Bonnie asks, before Fury can argue any further.

“I’m going to tell him to meet me, and we’ll work out a deal. If he doesn’t want me to go to the police and tell them everything, then he needs to divorce me and let me go,” I say, my voice steady for the first time in years.

I’m determined to end this.

“He’ll never fuckin’ go for it,” Fury snaps again. “It’s a stupid fuckin’ plan. Let’s just go get the fucker, kill him, and be done with it.”

I stare at him, slightly horrified. “That might be how you deal with things, but it isn’t how I do them. I don’t want to kill him; you can’t just eliminate every single person in life that gives you trouble.”

“Can’t I?”

His voice is icy, and it sends shivers up my spine.

I know he’s angry and scared, but I hope that isn’t how he chooses to deal with everything bad, because I think we might have a problem if it is. Right now, though, I can only think about ending this so I can get on with my life. Surely Ethan won’t fight too hard, not if it means that he might just get into some kind of trouble out of it. He won’t risk it. I don’t mean anything to him.

“Make the call,” Western orders, overruling Fury, which earns him a furious glare that he ignores.

Pulling out Ethan's phone, I dial his work number. I know he'll be at work; he never misses a day. He won't risk losing money. I just hope he's around to answer it, because the nerves in my stomach are already making me ill. I need this over and done with, right fucking now.

When I hear his low, calm voice answer the phone, my entire body stiffens.

I take a deep, shaky breath because I can't let him see even an ounce of fear.

Not an ounce.

"It's me."

Silence.

"Where the fuck are you?"

His voice is a low hiss, but I stay calm.

"That doesn't matter. I will get straight to the point. I've removed any trace of that video. You can't use it against me anymore. If you want your things back, including your money, you'll meet me, and we'll make a deal."

"What the fuck do you think you're playing at? How do you know I don't have any more copies?"

"I don't," I say calmly. "But I'm now in possession of a lot of cash. I can disappear pretty easily."

"Fuck you," he spits, and it's in that moment I know he doesn't have any more copies. He's too angry, too wound up, and besides ... if he had more, he would have gone to the police to spite me.

No.

Finally, I have the upper hand.

“What’s it going to be? You meet me and we come up with something that works for both of us, or I disappear with your cash. Either is fine with me.”

His voice comes out in a low grind when he mutters,
“Where?”

“The southside wharf, nine p.m. tomorrow tonight. Don’t be late. I’m not going to wait.”

“Fine,” he growls.

“Oh, and Ethan? Don’t even think about doing anything stupid. It won’t end well for you.”

With that, I hang up the phone.

Power floods my veins—it’s a feeling I’ve never had when I’ve been around him. It’s strength and resilience, it’s determination and pride. I feel like a person, an actual human being. Someone who has a say, who can stand up for what she believes in, who can do anything she sets her mind to.

With a triumphant smile, I glance at Western.

He nods.

Fury is scowling at me, but he doesn’t argue.

Bonnie steps up and puts her arm around my shoulder.
“Well look at you.”

Indeed.

Just take a look at me now.

Ethan won't know what hit him.



“Come on,” I murmur, running my mouth over Fury’s naked shoulder.

He’s sitting in his bed, and I’ve made myself at home on his lap. He’s angry, and I understand why, but I can’t have him frustrated with me all afternoon. Not when tomorrow night could go any type of way. Biting down on his flesh, he growls in response, his hand going to my hair where he tugs my head back so he can see my face.

“Quit fuckin’ biting me.”

“Not until you stop being angry at me.”

“You’re riskin’ your life, it’s not goin’ to happen.”

“I’m getting my life back so we can have a chance together.”

“I could do that for you,” he mutters, releasing my hair.

“Maybe,” I say, going back to his shoulder, gliding my tongue over it. “But I couldn’t live with that, and you wouldn’t be getting the best of me then. I need to do this my way if I’m to ever move on.”

“He deserves a fuckin’ bullet.”

Lifting my head, I meet his gaze. “Yes, he does, but it won’t be because I ordered it.”

“Don’t have to order it, I’ll do it without permission.”

I smile, leaning forward and pressing my mouth against his. “I have no doubt. Now come on, don’t make me beg for it.”

“You’ll be beggin’,” he murmurs, his voice less tense now.

Running a hand up, he glides it over my bottom before sliding it up my back. He kisses me back when I keep urging his mouth to part. I wrap my arms around his neck, rocking my pussy against his dick as I kiss him, deeper and deeper, until his dick turns rigid beneath me. Only then do I pull away.

Climbing off him, I scoot down and reach for his jeans, undoing them. Lifting his hips, he lets me pull them down until his cock springs free, hard and eager. Licking my lips, I look up at him before curling my hand around the thick shaft. His hiss of satisfaction spurs me on, and I lower down, enclosing my mouth around the tip. Fury’s hips jerk and his cock stretches my mouth wide as I lap at it, licking and sucking every hard inch.

“You better slow down,” he growls, “or this won’t last.”

“Maybe I don’t want it to,” I say softly, my lips swollen as I look up at him.

“If you’re goin’ on a damned suicide mission, then I’m goin’ to have that pussy once more.”

“So morbid.” I smirk, releasing his dick and pushing to my knees. “How do you want me?”

“I want you on your hands and knees so I can spank that pretty little ass for goin’ against me.”

I grin, reaching for my pants to shuffle them off. “Oh.”

Fury watches me undress, and when I'm before him naked, his eyes run over my body. "So fuckin' curvaceous, your body does things to me."

Considering he could have anyone he wanted, that's a huge compliment.

"Fury?" I ask, when he kneels on the bed to bring his jeans down.

"Mmmm?"

"Spank me with your belt."

His eyes flash, and then grow hungry with desire. "Are you sure?"

I nod. "So sure."

With a pleased growl, he reaches for his jeans and pulls his belt off. Then, he nods at me to turn around. With a satisfied grin, I turn until I'm on my hands and knees, my bottom facing him. Approaching from behind, he runs his hands over the ample flesh before gliding one up and over my ribs, moving around to squeeze my breast. I moan with delight, and I can feel his cock against my bottom as his mouth comes down to my shoulder, and he begins kissing.

Shuddering, my entire body comes to life as he drags his mouth down my spine, until he reaches my bottom. There, he bites down hard on the flesh, causing a scream of pain to rip from my throat, followed quickly by a bolt of pleasure. My word, I'm sick, but I love it. I want more. Every burst of pain only turns me on, making my desire grow. It's twisted, I know, but I can't deny it.

Moving his mouth from my bottom, he uses a finger to glide down, over my entrance where he pauses, his finger right there, in a place nobody has ever been. “You ever been fucked here?”

His words are filthy, and I love every second of them. “No,” I respond, my voice mellow and crackly.

“Soon, you will.”

I can’t wait.

His finger keeps moving, until he finds the slick passage of my pussy. There, he pushes his finger inside, making me moan as he curls it and carefully begins massaging that sensitive spot. Without warning, he lifts the belt and slams it down over my flesh. I cry out, jerking forward, unexpected. He stops me from going too far by curling his finger inside me. The pressure of that, plus the burning pain on my bottom, has me gasping with need.

“Your cunt just held on so fuckin’ tight,” he growls. “You filthy girl.”

“Again,” I moan, pushing back into him as his finger keeps massaging, making the pleasure build.

He hits me again, and the sting has my moans turning to garbled screams as the orgasm gets closer to the surface.

“Oh, god,” I scream. “Again.”

“Fuckin’ dirty girl,” he growls.

He brings the belt down again, harder this time, and just as he does, he pulls his finger from inside me and replaces it with

his cock, shoving in hard and fast as the sting of the belt tears through my body. Pure pleasure explodes in my core, and if it wasn't for the fact that Fury leans forward and curls his arms around my body, I would collapse onto the bed.

He holds me there, fucking me with ferocity as my body shakes beneath his.

His fingers dig into the flesh on my stomach, hanging on as he rides me, his hips rolling in the perfect motion, hitting all the right spots. One of his hands moves between my legs where he finds my clit, and there, he rubs it as he regulates his thrusts, tipping his hips just slightly so that I can feel every inch of him.

I'm not even aware of my screaming anymore, I'm completely consumed by him.

He fucks me until I can't cum anymore, and only then, does he find his own release. With a ragged moan, he cums inside me, pulse after pulse until there is nothing left. Finally letting my hands fall, I slump down onto the bed, coated in sweat and panting. Fury comes with me, but he rolls slightly to the side, so he doesn't crush me. His mouth finds the back of my neck and he kisses the sensitive flesh there.

"You're a bad girl, miss."

I laugh croakily. "I'm deranged."

"A little."

I turn my head and shift my body so we're facing each other. "Do you think I have issues?"

He studies my face. "No."

“It’s weird, though. Right? I know it’s not normal, to want pain inflicted on me. I’m quite certain I would be a therapist’s dream. It has to do with the abuse, and I can’t help but feel like there is something wrong with me.”

“Ain’t nothin’ wrong with you. Most people have somethin’ that they feel or need that they wouldn’t dare share with the world because of how wrong it might seem. You had the guts to share with me. I respect that.”

I guess he’s right.

It makes sense, of course.

Everyone has a little something twisted in them.

“I think it’s because I trust you that I’m letting it out,” I say, offering a little smile.

“Means a lot that you trust I wouldn’t hurt you.”

“I know you wouldn’t.”

“Then go crazy, golden eyes. I’m here for it.”

I laugh and playfully shove his shoulder. “I’m quite sure you are. Come on, we had better get up so we can go pick up Hope. We should do something with her – something fun. I’m thinking ice cream.”

He grins.

“What?” I say.

“I just think I might keep you, golden eyes.”

I think I might just let him.



“I’M LATE,” I WHISPER to Myla the next morning.

It didn’t click to me until the middle of the night, but suddenly I was wide awake and trying to remember when I had my last period. Sure, I don’t get them often with the contraception I had put in, but I still get a light bleed each month and I haven’t had one. It’s probably highly unlikely, but what if, somehow, I got pregnant? The very thought has my blood running cold and all morning, it played on my mind over and over until I could find someone to talk to.

Myla was that person.

“Are your periods regular?” Myla asks, leaning against her kitchen counter.

“I am on contraception, I got some when Ethan decided he wanted to be a father, but I still get a light period. It’s fairly regular, though it can be a bit wishy washy.”

“So, it could just be that the contraception has had a while longer to work and you’re no longer getting them. Sometimes it can take months for it to eliminate periods. But to be safe, let’s do a test.”

Nodding, I rub my hands over my stomach to try and dull the sick feeling swirling around. Myla turns and walks into the bathroom, coming back a moment later with a box in her hand.

My eyes widen. “You keep tests here?”

“I’ve always got a test handy. You could say I’m paranoid. Here, go and check. It’ll ease your mind, but I’m sure it’s

nothing anyway.”

I hope she’s right.

I take the box and go into the bathroom, doing what I have to do. It’s fiddly, and not easy to pee on, but I manage before shoving it back into the box and rushing out. I thrust the box at Myla. “I can’t look.”

She reaches out, squeezing my arm. “I’ll do it.”

I hold my breath as she pulls the test out of the box and flips it over. I stare at her face, praying it washes over with relief as she tells me it’s negative, but that doesn’t happen. She gives me an expression of sympathy, and my heart falls. It feels as though it literally drops into my chest. Shaking my head, I press my hand over my heart, tears welling in my eyes. “Don’t say it,” I choke out. “Please don’t say it.”

“It’s going to be okay, honey.”

No.

No.

No. This can’t be happening.

Please, God, this can’t be real.

I fall back onto the kitchen counter, gripping it with my fingertips. How? How did this happen? I’m on contraception. It’s meant to work. It’s not meant to ... *no*. This must be false, there must be a reason it is showing up. Something else. Can there be a false positive? Is that a thing?

“You’re freaking out, I get it,” Myla says, stepping closer, “but we will work it out. I promise you.”

“I’m on contraception, this isn’t meant to happen.”

“I know, but it has. Do you ... I’m so sorry, but do you know whose baby it is?”

I whip my head in her direction.

I’ve been sleeping with Fury and Ethan.

Fury has only been recently and surely, I wouldn’t be pregnant, though a few weeks have passed so it is possible. It would depend how far along I am. It could be either, if I’m honest, and that thought terrifies me.

If Ethan is the father, my life is over.

Over.

“I don’t know,” I whisper. “I don’t know who the baby belongs to.”

“What fuckin’ baby?”

Spinning around, I see Fury standing in the doorway, staring at me. There is rage in his eyes as he glances down at the test in Myla’s hand, then back up to me.

Shaking, I open my mouth to answer but nothing comes out. Nothing but a squeak as I try to tell him all the words swirling in my mind.

“Answer me,” Fury growls, his fists clenched by his side.

“The ... the test says I’m pregnant.”

A mix of fear, anger, and concern washes over his face and, for a moment, he doesn’t speak.

“Who does it belong to, Alexis?”

The tears I can't hold back any longer burst forward. "I don't know," I whisper. "I don't ..."

"You were fucking the man who was beating you?"

His words are like a slap to the face, and shame washes over my body.

"Hey," Myla yells, stepping next to me. "Do not fucking make her feel bad. She was married to an abusive man and that man did some awful things. You have no idea of the situation; you do not get to judge."

"I just want to know if the child she's carrying could belong to an abusive fuck!"

He's mad.

Part of me gets it, but the other part, the bigger part, doesn't.

"Stop," I whisper, my voice breaking. "Please."

"I want to know," he grinds out, "because it changes fuckin' everything."

I shake my head, tears falling down my cheeks. "Why?"

"I don't want any part of that man in my life."

His words are like a slap to the face.

"Back off, Fury," Myla warns, her voice low. "She didn't plan this. You better quit it before I lose my shit."

"I have a right to feel what I feel," he growls, through gritted teeth.

“She just got some of the hardest news of her life, go easy. That child in there could be yours.”

“I fuckin’ doubt it,” he snaps, his eyes narrowing. “We haven’t been fucking that long.”

“Can you just stop?” I say, pressing my hands to my face. “I can’t handle this. I can’t ... Please. Just stop.”

“Okay,” Myla says, stepping between us and putting her hands out. “This is a heated situation and you’re both emotional. First things first, we need to go to a doctor, but we can’t do that until we’ve dealt with Ethan.”

“I’m going now,” I say, pushing her hand aside. “I’ll deal with him so that I get the hell away from all of it.”

“You’re not goin’ anywhere,” Fury holds my determined stare with one of his own.

“Fuck,” I say, leaning in close, “you.”

Then, I shove past him and rush down the front steps.

“Fuckin’ stop,” Fury barks, but I don’t.

I pick up into a run, heading toward the long driveway that leads to the road.

Fury is after me, his heavy booted feet pounding down the dirt road after me. He catches me about halfway down, but it’s only because I’m too slow due to my injuries, otherwise I would far outrun him. Swinging me around, I don’t let him speak before my hand connects with his face in a hard slap and a loud, agonized yell. It’s enough to make him let me go, and

he steps back, shocked and angry. His face twisted with both emotions.

“Do not,” I say, pointing my finger at him. “Do not.”

“You’re not goin’ to see him alone.”

“You can’t stop me, Fury.”

“I fuckin’ can, and I *will*.”

“If you put your hands on me,” I warn, taking a step back.

He takes a step forward and, in a low voice, he growls.

“You and I both know damn well I’d never hurt you. So I’m not sorry for what I’m about to do.”

He moves quickly, dropping his shoulder into my stomach and hauling me over his own, as if I weigh nothing. Horrified, I pummel my fists on his back over and over as he turns and strides right past the house where Myla is watching, her mouth slightly agape. He carries me all the way back to the club, and the entire time I curse him. The only thing that slows me down is Hope’s soft voice that comes from my left when we get inside.

“Uncle Fury, why are you carrying Miss Alexis?”

I stop all attempts to get Fury to release me, because the last thing I want is for this little girl to think he’s hurting me. I offer her a smile, lifting my head and meeting her beautiful little gaze. “Uncle Fury and I are just playing, honey,” I say. “Do you want a turn?”

Fury’s grip tightens on me, because he knows exactly what I’m doing.

“Yes, please!” Hope cries, jumping up and down.

“Hear that,” I say to Fury. “You have to give Hope a turn.”

“You will fuckin’ ...” he begins, but stops when Hope rushes up to him, stretching her arms out.

He is forced to put me down, and the moment he does, Hope leaps up and he has no choice but to catch her. Throwing her over his shoulder, the little girl squeals with delight as she begs him to go up and down the stairs with her. Offering me a warning look, Fury does as she’s asking, and the second he’s at the top of the stairs, I’m out of there. I take the keys to his truck, and I rush out the door, not slowing down even when I charge past Western, Colt, and Mex, who are all watching me with narrowed eyes. When I unlock Fury’s truck, Western steps forward, but I don’t wait for him to stop me.

I don’t give anyone the chance to stop me; I hit the gas and speed out of the compound without looking back.

Fuck Fury.

Hurt washes through me as I drive down the road, and I know I’ve developed some decent feelings for the strong, rugged biker. His words hurt; they penetrate deep. If this baby belongs to Ethan, then Fury doesn’t want it, which means he doesn’t want me. The very thought of that has my stomach twisting because fuck, it burns. It burns so deeply I have trouble concentrating.

I need to replace that hurt with rage, because if I’m facing Ethan, I can’t afford to be weak when it comes to him.

No.

I need to show him that I'm done with him, and if he wants his freedom too, then he needs to let me leave and never bother me again.

It seems like a simple request, but as I pull up to the house, I know it's not as easy as it sounds. What if he decides he isn't going to accept it? What if he kills me on the spot? Is this a huge risk? Maybe I should have him meet me somewhere? I don't think being in a private place like the house is a good idea.

Hesitating, I decide it's best if I drive away and call him, so I do just that.

I go into town and find a café that allows me to use their phone, then I call our house number. I know he'll be home today, and I'm right, because he answers on the second ring with a gruff voice. For a moment, I pause, but then I take a deep breath and in the strongest voice I can muster, I speak.

"It's me."

"I thought we were meeting tonight," he growls.

"We were, but I'm out of patience and time. Let's meet now."

"Fine. I'll see you there."

He hangs up, without letting me say another word.

I thank the waitress and then leave the café, getting in the truck and driving out to the wharf where I organized to meet Ethan later tonight. I'm concerned I'm making a bad choice here, but I just want this over with. I can't live like this anymore, under the care of the bikers, not being able to work. I

want this situation to end so that I can finally be free and make my own choices.

Whether those include Fury or not, I don't know.

What if this baby is his?

I can't think about it.

The wharf is about an hour's drive from the town, and during that time, all I can think about is the million ways this could go wrong. I wish I had my gun, at least then I would feel safer. I come up with a plan, the best one I can, and pray that Ethan will just accept what I have to say and leave. Surely, he is done, too. Surely, he doesn't want to spend the rest of his life with me, either.

Arriving at the wharf, it's scarily quiet. It's a weekend, so nobody is here, and the stillness is overwhelming. I glance around, making sure we're definitely alone, then I pull up right near the water. Getting out, I leave the keys in the truck in case I need a quick getaway. Then, I wait. I stand by the shiny black machine, and I wait until finally I can see Ethan's truck roll in.

Anxiety grips my chest as he moves closer and comes to a stop.

Well.

Here goes nothing.



“What the fuck do you want?”

Those are the first words Ethan speaks as he climbs out of his car. He’s standing before me wearing jeans, a white tee, and a jacket. His hair is messy from a shower, and as I stare at him, I recall just how lucky I once thought I was. Now, all I see is a monster. A cold man with no soul.

Crossing my arms, I rub them together as I keep my back to the truck.

“I want a divorce,” I say, my voice careful. “If you want your money back, your phone, and everything else, then I want a divorce. I don’t want the house, or anything but my car. I just want my things, and I want out. I want you to free me.”

He tips his head to the side. “I will say, I’m impressed by your bravado, Alexis. I didn’t think you had a backbone.”

I clench my fists. “Well, you were wrong. I’m not here to chat about myself. Do you want that money or not?”

His eyes flash. “You don’t know what you’re messing with, taking that cash. If you want a divorce, then you had better fucking hand it over right now plus whatever else you found in that safe, or I won’t give you shit.”

I laugh, bitterly. “I’m not giving you a single thing until I see signed papers, Ethan.”

He steps forward but pauses and clenches his fists. “I need that money, Alexis.”

“Why, did you steal it?”

His face pales a little.

Oh my God.

Did he steal it?

I laugh, unable to help myself. “Don’t tell me you’re in some kind of trouble, Ethan.”

“Give me my fucking things,” he barks.

I shake my head. “Not until you get those papers done. I’m sure if you want it bad enough, you can have it done quickly.”

For a second, just a second, I have the upper hand.

Until I don’t.

Ethan takes a step forward, and as he does, he reaches around behind his back in a flash and pulls out a gun. Suddenly, that gun is pointing right at me. It takes me a moment, just a moment, but I realize very quickly that it’s *my* gun.

He found my gun.

I thought he would never find that gun.

I was so sure.

“Do you know who this gun belongs to?” He grins as I take a step back, pressing myself into the truck, nowhere else to go.

I don't answer, because in this second, I can't breathe. All the air is trapped in my lungs as I realize the huge mistake I've made coming here alone. I should have listened to Fury; I should have thought this through. Of course Ethan wasn't just going to let me take control, he lives for control. He was never going to sit back and be pushed around. I just poured gas into the fire, and now it's too big for me to handle.

The only leverage I have now is the money.

"I'm going to guess it belongs to your little biker boyfriend," Ethan goes on, when I don't answer. "So, when I blow your brains out and leave the gun behind, the police are going to think it was him. The fact that you're driving his truck only makes my plan that much better."

No.

No.

No.

"If you kill me, you'll never see that money again," I say, the fear in my voice unable to be hidden.

Ethan laughs. "I'll find a way, I assure you."

"You'll never get it. The club will kill you."

I won't break.

I can't.

"By the time they find you, I'll be long gone. I have my resources; I'll get the money back."

This can't be happening.

Who is this man standing before me?

He's not just a psycho, he's a criminal, too.

“What do you want from me?”

He takes another step closer. “I want to watch you beg for your pathetic little life. Get on your knees. I promise I'll make it quick.”

He's going to kill me; I know it as well as he does.

My brains will be all over this parking lot in a matter of seconds if I don't try and get out of this.

Sickness swirls inside me, and a fear unlike any other grips my chest.

“There are cameras here, you'll be seen.”

He laughs again. “There are cameras on the surface of the building, not all the way out here in this far parking lot. Don't worry, I checked.”

He was way ahead of me—this entire time he had a plan.

I was never going to come out of this alive.

If I had waited, I would be wired, and Fury would be close by. He would hear Ethan's threats and come running in to save the day, but, instead, I decided I'd come on my own in some feeble attempt at escaping this nightmare. I don't know what else I'm meant to do, other than use the one thing I have left, the one thing I never wanted him to know about.

“I'm pregnant.”

It catches him off guard, his eyes flash, and a range of emotions settle across his face before it turns to stone once more.

“Do you think that’s enough to save you?”

I’m going to be sick.

“Get on your knees, Alexis.”

Lowering down, tears bursting forth and rolling down my cheeks, I get to my knees. My mind is numb, and it doesn’t seem to matter how many times I try to come up with a way out of this, I find myself empty. I’ve got nothing left, there is no other option. Ethan is going to kill me, and there isn’t a single damned thing I can do about it. Not a thing. I look up at him when my knees hit the gravelly parking lot, and I beg.

“Please,” I say, my voice soft. “I will give you your money back and I’ll disappear. You’ll never see me again. I’ll do anything, please.”

Ethan grins. “We’ve been here before, only you didn’t do as you promised. You tried to double cross me, to run, to disobey. Now, you’ll suffer because you’re nothing more than a thorn in my side.”

“Ethan.”

“Close your eyes, unless you want to watch me pull the trigger. Either way, it’ll be quick. I’ll give you that much.”

“Don’t,” I cry, my voice breaking as my entire body begins to tremble.

“I’ll count it down for you,” he goes on, so calm it’s terrifying. “One.”

“Please,” I try again, my voice growing more frantic.

“Two.”

“Ethan!” I scream. “Don’t.”

“Three.”

I clench my eyes shut, and a gun rings out.

My body flinches, but after a crippling few seconds, I realize ...

I haven’t been shot.



MY EYES POP OPEN, AND I stare in horror at the scene before me.

Ethan is slumped forward, blood pouring from the back of his head which has been blown wide open, and the gun is lying on the floor beside him. Whipping my head around, I expect to see someone from the club, but the men approaching me aren’t ones I’ve ever seen before. Someone just shot Ethan, and it isn’t someone I know. I can’t control my shaking as I remain frozen on my knees, shock consuming my body.

“You’re welcome.”

The smooth, incredibly strong accented Russian voice has my eyes moving to the man who stops in front of me.

Sucking in a breath, I tip my head back to take him in.

His black coat is what I notice first, long and whipping in the wind, like he's right out of a movie.

Then, I take in his face.

Oh.

It is, without a doubt, the most incredible face I've ever laid eyes on. Not just in a handsome way, no, it's because he looks like he has been chiseled out of fine stone, as if the gods sat down and took their time, carving him until he was the picture of the perfect man, strong and sleek, like a lion.

His hair is long, black, and thick, tied at the nape of his neck. His eyes, crystal blue, are set amongst creamy white skin. A dark beard shadows his face that is utterly perfect other than the scar that runs down it. Tattoos peek from his shirt, and while he's not as bulky as Fury, his body is muscled and lean, yet still scarily powerful.

He's beautiful.

"W-w-who are you?" I croak, still unable to move.

"Marek," he murmurs, his eyes scanning Ethan. "He took things that belonged to me."

"He?" My mind is scrambled, I can't even get the words out.

"Get to your feet."

I do as he asks, pushing to my feet, my legs shaky. Even standing at my full height, he looks so much more powerful. Like he could bring me down with a simple look. There is an energy that radiates off him that tells me he is a very, very bad

man. My entire body goes on immediate alert, and the urge to run is scarily overwhelming.

“He had something I want, now you do,” Marek purrs, his voice a low drawl.

“I don’t,” I stammer. “I don’t understand.”

“I want what your pathetic excused of a husband stole from me, but you see, the little club you left it with, they’re not my biggest fans. I’m going to need you.”

“You want me to go and get it?”

“No, child, I am going to use you to get them to bring it to me.”

I don’t understand.

Why doesn’t he just let me go and get it?

Seeing the confusion on my face, he goes on. “I don’t know you; I don’t trust you, and I find it hard to believe they’ll let you bring it to me. So, to ensure they do, I’m going to keep you until such time as they bring it to me.”

“And if they don’t?”

He smiles, cold and so terrifying it sends shivers up my spine. “Then you get to find out the kind of operation I run.”

That doesn’t sound good.

Not at all.

“I don’t ... I don’t have any way of contacting them,” I try, a pathetic attempt to get out of what, exactly?

I don’t even know.

I don't know who this man is, but something tells me I don't want to.

“Don't worry,” he says as he raises a hand and one of the men waiting steps forward, “I have an inside source.”

The man approaches me and quickly reaches out, taking my arm and hauling me toward him. Shaking my head, I try to free myself but there is no point, he's far bigger than I am, and there are three of them and only one of me. I glance down at Ethan once more, and my stomach twists. “W-w-what about him?”

“Don't you worry about him,” Marek tells me, before turning and walking toward a car I didn't even hear come in.

“Where are you taking me?”

Marek pauses but doesn't turn. “Don't you worry about that, either. Be a good girl, and you'll be safe.”

Safe?

The man holding me pulls me to the car and puts me in. I go without a fight, mostly because my body is in some serious shock. I'm shaking all over and my mind is scarily numb, it doesn't seem to matter how many times I try and get my thoughts together, nothing comes of it. All I can see is Ethan's body on the ground, flashing over and over in my mind.

He's dead.

It's over.

But is it?

I pay no attention to where we're actually going. I just sit, head hung, as the car moves in complete silence. When we finally come to a stop, I see we're at some motel. It's not familiar, so it must be out of town. Marek turns, his eyes scouring over me, before he nods at the guy, and, without hesitation, he pulls me from the car.

They move quickly to a motel room, and once we're inside, they close and lock the door.

Marek pulls out a phone, his eyes locking on mine. His gaze doesn't shift the entire time he makes a call.

He's terrifying.

"I have Alexis," he murmurs low into the phone to whoever he's talking to.

How does he know my name?

Did I tell him?

My mind is mush.

"If you want her back, I want everything you found in that safe. I've dealt with her problem, you're welcome. I suppose I owe you one. Meet me, and you get her back."

He listens for a moment, a small smirk stretching across his face.

"I see you've missed me, sweetheart."

Who is he talking to?

Whoever it is clearly doesn't like his comment because I can hear yelling on the other end of the phone.

Marek keeps his confident, cold smile.

“Come now, Acacia, you’re hurting my feelings.”

Acacia?

She is the person he is talking to?

How does he know her?

Better yet, how does she know him?

“You know where we’ll meet. Six hours. Be there with the items or your little lady here dies.”

With that, he hangs up the phone and casually puts it back in his pocket.

“You know Acacia?” I ask, confusion washing over me.

“You could say we go a long way back,” he answers, his voice low. “Now, be a good girl and sit down. Your bikers will be coming for you soon.”

Will they, though?

After what I just did?

Am I worth coming after?

Truly, to them, I am nothing.

Why would they risk it all for me?



Six hours quickly turns to an overnigher, and I'm concerned that the bikers aren't going to come for me. Fury, especially. Why would he after what he just found out? I could be carrying Ethan's baby, or I could be carrying his. It's hard to know, and our relationship is strained as it is. I've done nothing to make the club want to help me, so it wouldn't surprise me if they just left me here.

Here being a fucking circus.

I think.

I can't tell.

We didn't drive to a motel, we drove for hours, long past what I thought we would. We're at least three or four towns over, and when we arrived, all I could see was a huge tent surrounded by large fences with guards standing at every entrance. Even as I was pulled from the truck, I couldn't help but stare in awe at the sheer size of the place. I've heard of this group before, but I've never been to one of their shows. I had no idea Marek ran it.

I've heard it's incredible.

I wonder how Acacia was caught up in this world.

Were her and Marek a thing?

"Change of plans," Marek tells me in a smooth, calm voice as we walk into the large tent. "I have a situation I need to deal

with, your bikers can get you from here.”

Assuming we’re going to just wait in the tent, I’m surprised when the man who is gripping my arm so hard, I know I’ll never pull away, leads me through the tent and out the other side. A large RV sits just outside the back entrance, and there are multiple caravans set up around the lot, as well as a few other tents, one of which is guarded. That’s where they lead me to.

When we step inside, my blood runs cold.

Never in my wildest imaginings would I ever have thought I’d see what I’m seeing on the other side of those doors.

Cages.

Like animal cages, only they don’t contain animals.

They contain ... *humans*.

Women.

I gasp, attempting to reel back, but I’m quickly stopped by the man hanging onto me. He makes a low, throaty sound and thrusts me forward, so I’m forced to face what my brain refuses to believe is true. Marek turns slowly, facing me. There is no expression on his face, nothing but ice-cold emptiness.

“Welcome to my show, Alexis.”

Show?

Show.

I want to vomit.

My eyes roam over the cages. They’re big enough for the women to sit, lie down, and move around, but not enough to

stand. They are being kept like dogs, like filthy animals. I want to scream and rush toward them, but I can't move. Even if I wasn't being held back, my body doesn't want to cooperate. Everything inside me is numb, and my hands are shaking.

“What ...” I gasp because it's the only word my brain can form right now.

“These are my captives. They make my show great. They're amazing, don't you think?”

Something about his tone sends shivers up my spine.

I whip my eyes in his direction, meeting his stone-cold blue ones. How can someone so incredibly breathtaking be such a fucking monster?

“They're human beings,” I whisper. “They are not captives. What is wrong with you?”

“They're scum, off the streets, addicted to drugs, alcohol, crime. I'm giving them a second chance.”

I laugh because it's the only reaction that makes me sound as hysterical as I feel. “You can't be serious?”

“Dead,” he murmurs.

“Who are you?”

He smiles now, but it's as cold as the Antarctic snow. “Your worst nightmare.”

My entire body jerks because it knows he's dangerous. Everything about him screams at my senses to run, but there is nowhere I can go.

This man is the worst kind—dangerous, gorgeous and scarily calm. The combination is so deadly, because it means he can do anything he wants and people will come to him, effortlessly, because they won't see the devil behind the disguise. He's clever and what he's doing here should be stopped.

“Give her a cage for the evening,” Marek orders the guard holding me.

He moves quickly toward an empty cage to the left of the room. I squirm, but it doesn't matter what I do; I'm not strong enough to escape. I yell and curse, kick and twist, but I'm powerless. He thrusts me inside and slams the door closed, locking it. The mesh is not large enough to fit my arm through, and even if it was, they're key locked. I'd never escape. I kick the sides of the cage, the grass cold beneath my bottom as I try desperately to break free.

“I wouldn't bother,” a voice comes from the cage beside me. “You'll never escape.”

I shuffle and turn, staring over at the girl who spoke to me.

Her cage is fairly close to mine, and she's sitting in the corner, her feet stretched out in front of her and crossed at the ankles. From beneath the dim light hanging on top of this tent, I can see that she is exceptionally beautiful. The kind of beauty that makes it so foreign to see her sitting in a cage. She looks like she belongs on a throne, in a time where men would bow to her feet.

Long locks of white, blond hair fall over her shoulder, tied loosely. Her skin, soft and pale, only accentuates her beauty.

Her eyes, when she glances over at me, are the lightest of blue, a shade I've never seen on another human before. Her lips are full and a dark shade of red, making it look like she's wearing makeup. She's petite and small, just a tiny little thing.

There is something about her that makes it hard to look away.

She certainly doesn't look like a drug addict or someone living a life of crime.

So why is she here?

"What is happening here?" I whisper to her, shuffling over to the side of the cage, my heart racing.

"What is happening is the devil has risen and is using girls to make a show," she murmurs.

The devil being Marek.

"How long have you been here?"

She pushes her bottom lip out and shrugs. "A week, maybe two. I don't know."

"I'm Alexis," I tell her.

"I'm Ellie, and yes, before you ask, my parents thought it would be fantastic to make my middle name Mae."

I can't help but smile, because it's a ridiculously adorable name but I can understand why she doesn't seem pleased about it.

"Well, Ellie, I like it."

She huffs. “What are you here for? Drugs? Stealing? He always has a reason.”

I shake my head. “He killed my abusive husband and is using me to get money off someone who owes him. If they don’t come for me, I’m toast.”

She studies me, her eyes roaming up and down. “No, you’re pretty enough for him to use. He keeps the pretty ones for the shows.”

I stare at her, horrified. “He keeps them. What do you mean?”

“He trains them, like circus monkeys. Out there every day until they learn what he wants, if they refuse or aren’t good enough, they get punished. If that doesn’t work, he sells them off for cash.”

My mouth drops open.

What kind of sick, twisted monster?

“What about you?” I dare to ask.

“I’m a dancer. A good one, too. He happened to stumble across me dancing and decided he wanted me for his fucking act. Not to mention, he was drawn to the way I look. The man is trying to break me, but he’s not going to win. I will not be broken, and I will not dance for him. I’m tough, so he can try his best.”

She sounds tough, she certainly doesn’t look it, though.

Looks can be incredibly deceiving.

I can see why he is drawn to her, though. It's hard not to be. She is so incredibly ... unique.

“Has he hurt you?” I whisper.

She holds up her hand, which has a bandage on it. “He tries. I know he won't kill me, though. He's determined to use me, and that only gives me the strength I need to endure his torture. He won't mark my body, or ruin my face, not when he thinks I'll be the star of his pathetic little show.”

She is incredible.

Everything about her.

It takes a certain level of strength to endure what he is dishing out.

“Have you tried to escape?”

She shakes her head. “No, but I will. He's not keeping me here; he just doesn't know it yet. I have a career, people who will be looking for me. There is no way he'll ever get away with making me perform.”

“Does he think he can break you enough for them to believe you went with him willingly?”

She shrugs. “I think that's the plan. He'll get a rude awakening. I've dealt with bigger monsters than him.”

That is a terrifying thought.

Because from what I can see, Marek is the worst of them.

She's so confident that he won't hurt her too badly because he wants what she has to offer, and I hope she's right.

“You really don’t think he’ll hurt you?”

“Oh,” she laughs, bitterly, “he’ll hurt me, he just won’t do it badly enough to ruin what he thinks I can bring to his little show.”

“I can’t believe people come to watch this,” I murmur, rubbing my upper arms.

“They don’t know what he’s doing behind closed doors. Have you seen one of his shows? They’re breathtaking. Utterly awe inspiring. He is charming and attractive; he captures the audience in a way that is impressive. Marek is smart, and he’s powerful. He has some big fish behind him to ensure he doesn’t get busted.”

Well.

She’s certainly paid attention.

“I’ve heard of his,” I admit. “But I’ve never seen it. I certainly didn’t know this was going on. Do you think he’s going to let me know, now I’ve seen it?”

“Even if you told someone,” she says with a shrug, “nobody would ever get close enough to do anything. He would have you killed long before that happened.”

I shudder at the thought.

She gives me a small smile.

“Welcome to hell.”



I DON'T KNOW WHEN I fall asleep, but somehow, I do.

I'm woken to the sound of voices, and I stir from my uncomfortable spot on the ground, the grass itching my skin. Groaning, I roll to my side and see Ellie sitting up in her cage, staring up at someone. I focus my gaze, but don't sit up. Instead, I watch as Marek looks over her, his eyes focused on hers, the two of them locked in some kind of battle.

"I can starve you, and the perfect dancer's body will be forever tarnished," he murmurs, his voice a low hum in the darkness.

His accent is strong, and if you closed your eyes and listened to him speak, you would be swept away with fantasy of that voice speaking to you as he fucked you. The problem is, when you open your eyes, you see the stone-cold glare he offers, and very quickly his stunning looks make your stomach turn with fear and confusion. He has the ability to cripple you with one, single glance.

"Go ahead," Ellie responds, her voice strong and unwavering. "I'll be no good to you if I'm too thin. Nobody will pay to watch that. Try harder, Master."

Master?

He bares his teeth at her, a silent warning.

"I will find a way to break you, mark my words, and when I do, you will kneel before me and beg for your life."

Ellie laughs, the sound bitter and cold. "If that's what helps you sleep at night."

She's catching him off guard, and it's rather thrilling to see. Something about her has him reconsidering all his tactics,

and because of that, he is left to try and come up with something that will work. What will he use to get her to give him what he wants?

Her family?

A loved one?

Maybe a child?

I don't know, but I'm certain Marek is the kind to get creative.

Ellie, however, is the kind to fight through it all.

“You will yield, Ellie Mae.”

His use of her full name has my skin prickling. The way it rolls off his tongue is equal parts captivating and terrifying.

“We shall see,” Ellie murmurs, then turns and lies on the ground, turning her back to him.

His eyes swing to me, and he catches me watching.

“Have you got a question, Alexis?”

I push up into a sitting position, studying him. “Yeah, actually. Why?”

“Why not?”

Pursing my lips, I glance at Ellie who has lifted her head and is looking over at me.

“Why, instead of tormenting women, don't you treat them nicely? I'm certain you would get far more interest.”

He smiles, and lord, it sends ice through my veins.

“Because those women don't deserve kindness.”

“Who are you, God?”

“I’m as close as you’ll find.”

Cocky. Arrogant. Dick.

“Come, Alexis. Let me show you.”

I shake my head, but he’s already raising a hand. A guard is there almost immediately, tall and well built, he unlocks the cage and hauls me out. I press a hand over my stomach, as if that would do anything to protect it from these people. I nearly lose my footing more than once, but I manage to keep up as they take me out of the tent and into the main one, where there are five or six girls practicing.

We come to a stop, and I can’t help but tip my head back and look up at a woman who is flying across the roof, hanging on only by a small rope, and seeing her body move so effortlessly makes it hard to look away. The way her body twists and turns, flips and soars, is absolutely mind blowing.

“That is Olivia,” Marek murmurs, so close to my ear instant chills run down my spine. “She was collected from the streets after leaving her child in a bathroom for three days while she went out to get her fix. Now, she is a star. She is clean, and if she does as she is told, she has somewhere to sleep at night that isn’t the streets.”

“Oh, you mean a cage?” I mutter.

“Only the rebellious find themselves in those cages. Eventually, they learn.”

I grit my teeth.

Part of me kind of gets it, but at the same time I don't think taking someone from a bad life and punishing them makes you any better of a person. He thinks, somehow, he is doing something good, but all he is doing is giving himself a god complex. A way to feel as though he is powerful. It's all an act for him, and to everyone else around, for that matter.

“Pay attention,” Marek tells me, and my eyes can't help but follow Olivia as she swings across the open tent.

She is incredible.

“How did she learn to do that?”

I can't help it; I need to know how someone who came off the streets can now do something so ... elegant and beautiful. It's not like we all have that talent, because we certainly don't.

“I train them.”

Like they're dogs.

“So, you can do that, then?” I mutter, my voice laced with sarcasm.

He turns to me, his eyes flashing. “I can do a lot of things, including slitting your throat and letting your bikers find you bleeding out on the cage floor.”

My eyes widen.

Jesus.

“I hear you,” I say, my voice soft.

“Good. You're a fast learner.”

Do I really have a choice?

I think about the baby inside me, more often than I'd like to admit, and I wonder if Marek suspects anything. I fear that if he knew, he would use it to his advantage. I can't help but wonder what it is that happened in his life for him to turn into this cold, broken person. He has to be broken, because people who are together don't do things like this. I consider that, perhaps, his mother was a drug addict or abused him in some way.

Is that why he seems to have such disrespect for women?

Watching Olivia perform captivates me, and I can't seem to take my eyes away until she finally lands on the ground, undoing herself from the rope and meeting Marek's intense gaze. She nods, and he returns it, then she disappears without so much as a word. A moment or two later, two other girls come in. They're small, petite, and very pretty. They take the ropes, attach themselves, and then are launched into the air as they do a trick together, hands joined, their bodies swirling around the others as if they were made for each other.

I can't look away.

"Impressive, no?"

I nod, forgetting for a moment where I am.

Marek points to the raven-haired girl flying through the air, her legs now twisted with her partner's as they make magic. "That's Stacia. She was a stripper, an addict, and in trouble with some bad people. Now, she travels with me."

I bite my lower lip.

I don't want to give him any kind of praise, because he's still treating these women like they're dogs until they bend and do as he wishes. If they don't do as he wishes, or they don't perform in a way that impresses him, he discards them, selling them or tossing them back onto the streets. There is no way he deserves any kind of award for what he's doing here.

"What about when they don't perform to your standard?" I dare ask. "You can't praise yourself and say you're helping them then."

"They're sold to people who can give them a far better life than the one they're living."

"I fail to see how," I mumble, shaking my head. "Being sold as what, a sex slave, how can that be better?"

Marek turns, glancing down at me with a narrow glare that has me taking a step back. "How naïve you are to assume that every woman sold is sold for sex."

"You're telling me they're not?" I challenge.

"Be careful, Alexis. I'm beginning to think you need to spend more time here so you can mind your tongue."

I clamp down, not saying anything more.

The last thing I want is to remain here.

"What happened to Ethan's body?"

My words shock me, and seemingly him, because he jerks back a little, and his eyes widen.

"I mean," I say quickly, "will someone find it and think it was me?"

Another thought that has crossed my mind, over and over again. What if his body is found, and the police think I did it? With a little searching, could they link me to it and then assume I killed Ella, too? If that is the case, my life is over before it has begun. Not once have I thought about Ethan's death with sadness. No, only relief. But that doesn't take away the fear of being caught out.

“If your bikers give me my money, I assure you, nobody will ever find his body.”

“The police will think it was me regardless, when he goes missing.”

Marek grins, that same, cold, terrifying grin. “Trust me, nobody is going to come for you, unless, of course, you give me reason to ensure they do.”

That's not going to happen.

Come on, Fury.

Please come for me.



They didn't come for me.

It has been three days.

The pain consuming my heart and wrapping its angry fingers around my stomach are enough to send me over the edge.

It hurts.

More than I ever thought it would.

I haven't been told anything.

Marek hasn't come in for days.

We've been crammed in these cages, left with nothing. I'm hungry, thirsty, and scared. Ellie told me it's strange for him not to come in, and that something must be wrong. Has he gone after the club? Did they come after him? Has something happened and we'll be left here to die? The thought is beyond terrifying, and it scares me in a way that has me chilled to the very bone.

Some of the girls in here are crying out, pleading and begging, yelling all night to be let free. I don't know if they're new, or if they're simply hungry and want someone to come in. Either way, it means there has been no rest. Not a single moment of it. I'm soaked from sweat, the lack of airflow in this tent making it hard to breathe. My stomach gave up rumbling yesterday, and I'm exhausted.

“Something is wrong,” Ellie whispers, scooting as close to the edge of her cage as she can, so she can see me.

Yesterday, she stretched her fingers through.

I stretched mine back and our fingertips grazed.

It was the only kind of connection I’ve had in days.

A slight comfort.

“We need to get out of here,” I say to her. “There has to be a way.”

“Believe me, there isn’t. I’ve tried.”

“We’ll die,” I whisper, my eyes narrowing in fear.

“Someone will come,” she murmurs, “they will.”

But what if they don’t?

Shuffling, I curl on the flattened piece of grass and close my eyes, praying for a moment of sleep. Strangely, it comes. I know it’s because my body is exhausted, and combined with the heat, I am unable to keep myself awake. My sleep is restless, though, and I wake covered in sweat. Moving, I groan, and my back aches, but it’s the sharp pain that shoots through my stomach that has me pausing, fear gripping my chest.

Glancing down, I see that what I thought was sweat, is actually blood. It’s soaking my shorts and staining my legs. Fear, unlike anything I’ve ever felt consumes my body as I make a gasping sound. Instinctively, I reach down, and my fingers run through the warm blood. I bring it to my face and

stare at it. It's as if my brain doesn't want to comprehend what I'm seeing.

“Alexis?”

Ellie's voice is a whisper as she pushes her face against the cage, staring over to try and get a better look.

“Are you bleeding?” Her voice is full of concern.

“I-I-I ... I'm pregnant.”

Her eyes widen and she shakes her head slightly, almost in disbelief.

“Oh, oh no.”

I stare at her, scared and frozen. “What do I do? Ellie ... what ...”

She moves quickly, curling her fingers around the cage and shouting. She shouts and she shouts, over and over until her voice grows hoarse. Nobody comes in. It doesn't matter what she does, there is no one around. Tears well in my eyes and then slide down my cheeks as the cramping becomes worse. I know what's happening, and I know there isn't a single thing I can do to stop it.

It's in this moment, I realize I was growing attached to the idea of having a baby.

I don't realize I'm sobbing until Ellie's soft voice fills my ears. “It's okay. Alexis, I promise I'll get you out of here.”

I cry until my body shakes and until my tears dry up. That doesn't take long, considering I haven't had water for a few days now. I know I should stop, to save my strength, but I

can't seem to make myself. Ellie soothes me the entire time, her kind voice flowing through my cage until my sobs subside. She's kind, an incredible soul.

The tent doors flap open.

Her head whips over in the direction, and I lift my head, weakly.

Marek is walking in, his coat roaring behind him as he strides towards the cage. His face is bloodied, and so are his hands. Whatever happened to him, it doesn't look good. Pausing at the cage, he glances down at me, panting with some kind of wild rage. Then, he unlocks the cage and reaches in, hauling me out.

“Your time is up.”

I freeze, terrified at his cold, clipped tone.

“W-w-w-what?”

“Nobody came for you. You're of no use to me.”

What does that mean?

What is he saying?

“Please,” I whisper. “Just let me go.”

“I'll make it quick.”

No.

No.

“No!” Ellie screams, curling her fingers around the cage.

“No, please. Let her go.”

Marek ignores her as he drags me toward the exit. I dig my heels into the ground, thrashing and fighting, doing anything I can to make him stop, but he's too strong.

"Please," I beg. "Please, no."

"Marek," Ellie bellows, her voice strong and determined. "Let her go. If you let her go, I'll dance. I'll do what you want."

Pausing, Marek stiffens and turns slowly, his fingers still gripping me so tightly I can't get away.

His eyes meet hers, and, for a moment, they stare at one another.

"That's what it will take," Ellie goes on. "You wanted to know, well that's it. Let her go, and I'll do whatever you want."

Something flashes in his gaze, and I'm certain that he is going to deny her, but, instead, he simply nods.

"I want to see her released, though," Ellie goes on. "I don't trust you. Let me see her go, and I'll be yours."

Tipping his head to the side, seemingly impressed by her bravado, he raises a hand, and a guard comes strolling in. He moves to Ellie's cage, unlocking it and hauling her out. Then, she's beside me. I shake my head, the salty tears attempting to form as they burn my eyes. "You can't. Ellie, no."

"It's okay," she tells me, reaching out a hand and curling her fingers around mine, "I promise."

Marek moves, ripping us apart.

He steps out of the tent, and the blistering sunlight burns my eyes, forcing me to put my hand up to stop it. My legs are numb as Marek drags me toward the exit. When we come to a stop, I drop my hand and stare down at my blood-soaked shorts. It takes everything inside me not to scream, to cry, to do something to make all of this stop.

“Leave. If I see you again, I’ll kill you. When you get back, tell your bikers this isn’t over.”

Staring up into the cold eyes of the monster who has held me captive, I fail to come up with anything.

So, I turn to Ellie.

“You don’t have to do this,” I whisper.

“I won’t let you die,” she tells me, her eyes welling with tears. “I won’t.”

I don’t care if he likes it or not, I step toward Ellie and I throw my arms around her. She holds me tight with her one free arm, and I hang onto her until she’s being tugged away. Before she goes, I whisper into her ear, “I’m going to find a way to get you out of here. I swear it.”

She offers me a small smile as the guard pulls her away.

Marek throws his arm out. “Go.”

I’m scared to move, fearful that he will shoot me the second I turn my back to him, but I also know that he isn’t going to wait for me to consider my options. So, without any further thought, I run. I run as fast as my wobbly, weak legs will take me. I dart out onto the quiet road and realize very

quickly we're in the middle of absolutely nowhere. All I can see for miles is trees and sparse woods.

I'm dehydrated.

It occurs to me very quickly that the reason Marek agreed to let me go is because he doesn't think I'll make it out of here alive.

I've had no food, no water, and I'm bleeding.

The chances are slim.

Reaching a large tree, I press my back to it and gather my thoughts. I have to get out of here, because if I don't, nobody in the world will help Ellie, and I can't allow her to live out her life being Marek's slave. I have to get back because her life depends on it. But I'm not going anywhere if I don't get some water soon. Peering back around the tree, I look toward the large ground where they are set up.

There is water back there, but I'm risking my life if I return.

Daring to go a little closer, I duck down low and use the trees for coverage as I sneak closer to get a better look. If there is a way I can just get some water, then I can find my way out of here. Once it's fully back in view, I can see that every entrance is guarded. The fence is far too high for me to climb over, and I don't have any tools to cut through it. My options are limited, at best.

Perhaps when night falls, I might have a better chance at getting close enough to find some water, but that could be hours away. I have no idea what time it is—judging by the

sun, I'm guessing sometime in the afternoon, but that's a guess. Watching from my position behind a thick line of trees, I see the guards rotate stations. There is a moment, a small window, where the gate is unguarded as they walk to the next one. A mere minute or two, before the next lot of guards arrive.

I could run in, get some water from the tap that sits outside the tent, and get out if I'm quick.

It's a risk, but if I don't get some water soon, I'm not going to be able to walk another step.

So, I decide it's worth the risk.

Even if it costs me my life.



IT TAKES LONGER THAN I'd hope for the guards to change stations, so I find myself a position I can sit in without causing too much movement, and I wait. The cramping in my lower stomach is intense, and the bleeding intensifies. Though I know there is nothing I can do about it, it doesn't change that the pain is crippling and with every cramp, my heart breaks a little more.

I can't afford to cry, though.

Not right now.

Not when I have to save all my strength to get out of this place.

Movement at the main gate catches my eye, and it's slowly beginning to grow dark on the horizon. The lights surrounding

the large tents have already come on, and soon, I will be shielded by darkness. It's a car that catches my attention, rolling in slowly from the long road. It stops at the gate, and the driver's door opens. A man gets out, who, I don't know, and walks around to the back door.

Marek is approaching the gate, and I quickly duck down, to ensure I'm unable to be seen. I keep my eye on them, while shielding myself as best I can. Heart racing, I watch as his eyes scan the woods, before focusing back on the car. The man reaches in, and when he reappears, my heart stops beating. For a solid moment, it feels as though my entire body is going to melt into the ground and fade into nothing.

Because what I see, has everything inside me breaking.

The man has Hope.

Pressing a hand to my mouth, I force back a cry of horror as the man holds little Hope by the arm. She's calm, but I can see the fear in her eyes as she glances up at Marek. He looks down at her, and if he so much as lays a fucking hand on her, I'll kill him myself. Surprisingly, he doesn't, he leans down and speaks to her. Hope gives a little nod, and he takes over by holding on to her shoulder and leading her through the gates.

Bile rises in my throat as panic seizes my heart.

I need to get her.

My plan of getting back to the club just changed, and I know I cannot step foot out of this place without that little girl. An instinct inside me, so strong, takes over and my plan changes. I watch on, hoping I'll see a way in. If he puts Hope

in a cage, I'll never be able to get her out. Squinting my eyes, I push the shrub aside a little more, so I can see where Marek is leading her. Straight into the main tent.

He'll keep her in his RV if he has any soul.

I'm praying that's the case, at least.

Why has he got Hope?

Is it because Fury didn't come for me?

Does he want that money so badly, or is there something else I'm missing?

Either way, I'm not leaving without her.

When the guards change their stations, I'll be running onto the grounds, and I'll find a way to get her out.

A sharp pain shoots through my stomach, and I double over from its intensity. Biting down on my lower lip until I taste blood, I try to stop the moan of pain escaping my lips. The bleeding is getting worse, and so is the pain. With every cramp, something inside me breaks a little more. Gritting my teeth to stop the tears, I think of Hope. I can't do anything about what's happening to my body, but I can do something about what's happening to her.

Breathing through the pain, I look up just in time to see the guard stepping away from the main gate. He's about to walk to the next post, or swap with someone else, and I have a matter of seconds. Without thought, I push away from the bushes, and I run. I run with everything I have, keeping as low as possible as I dart through the front gates. A gravelly voice yelling has

me pressing my back against the main tent, heart racing, as I slide around the side as quietly as I can.

“What was that?”

“I don’t know. Check the area.”

Shit.

Shit.

Did they see me?

I need to hide.

Glancing around, I know there is one place I can hide that I’ll basically blend in.

I rush towards the tent where all the girls are in cages.

There is a guard at the front door, and I’m immediately forced to stop. Mind racing, I press against an old caravan, slipping around the back of it and going to the back of the tent. Trying to keep my breathing as steady as I can, I drop to the ground and crawl, trying to find a place on the base of the tent that I can slip in. There is one next to a secured back exit, where the peg has been hastily hammered into the ground. Curling my fingers around the heavy material, I push up as hard as I can, making just enough room for me to shove my head beneath.

With great effort, I manage to slide myself into the tent.

For a moment, I lay there, completely still on my back, my breathing ragged as I wait to see if I have been caught. When no guards come and haul me out, I push up and glance around. The dim light shows me the line of cages, and my eyes

immediately search for Ellie. She isn't here. Every cage I crawl past has a woman in it, but none of them are her. The terrifying thing is, none of them seem to acknowledge me at all. It's as if they're drugged.

Are they?

Is that how he keeps them so damned quiet?

The front entrance is suddenly open, and two guards stand, flashing their lights around the cages.

I have seconds.

There is a pile of old barrels just to the left of me, and as quietly as I can, I slip towards them, squeezing myself behind and holding my breath as the flashlight moves around the room. I can see it nearing, and I close my eyes, dropping my head and praying that they don't find me. Heavily booted feet move past each cage, shining their flashlight in, but after a terrifying moment, the guard barks that it's all clear, and we're left in silence once more.

I exhale.

“If they find you, they'll kill you.”

The soft voice comes from the cage in front of the barrels.

Heart pounding, I move from my position and come around to the front to see a dark-haired girl watching me from her spot on the grass. She stares at me with curiosity, but there is a dullness in her gaze that breaks my heart.

“Marek has someone I want. A little girl.”

Her head tips to the side. “They have a meeting every night. Only the guards at the main entrances stay on their post, everyone else goes to the main tent to discuss their plans for the next day. If you want your girl back, that’s your window.”

I could cry with gratitude, but my heart feels hollow knowing that she is in that cage and there seems to be nothing I can do about it.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“It’ll start soon. Keep your eye out. Good luck.”

There are so many things I wish I could say to her, but none of them seem to express the gratitude I feel. I would give anything to get her out of here, but right now, I know that Hope is alone, scared and she needs me. I have to get her out, and the only way I can do that is to take the small window I’ve been given.

Offering the woman a smile, I quickly disappear and shove my way back out of the tent, keeping low against the back of it and moving as close to the main tent as I can without being seen. I need to get Marek’s RV in sight, so I can see when he leaves. Will he leave Hope alone? If he is in the main tent, he just might. I pray he does because if he puts a guard at the door, I don’t know what I’m going to do.

Please, God, give me this one.

The moment I have his RV in sight, I find a position where I’m out of sight near another caravan, and I wait.

Just like the woman said, about half an hour later, the RV door opens and Marek steps out. The back entrance to the

main tent is so close, he only has to take a few steps. He pulls the door closed, glances around, and then walks into the back of the tent. My heart screams with relief because it seems like he has left the door unguarded. Hope is only small, and my guess is that he has her secured, so she can't move.

He doesn't see her as a threat.

For that, I'm incredibly thankful.

I move as quietly as I can toward his RV, keeping low as I shuffle across the grass. Once I reach it, I peer around and hear low voices coming from the main tent. The back entrance is slightly open, so I know I'm going to have to be incredibly quiet when I open that door because if they look over, they could see me. Carefully, I tip toe up to the back entrance and peer in. There is a group of men standing with Marek as he speaks, all of them have their backs to me, but Marek is facing my direction.

His eyes move up, and I quickly pull back, breath hitching as I pray he didn't see me.

I wait for an agonizing moment, but nothing happens.

He keeps speaking.

Glancing in again, I see he's explaining something and for a moment, his attention isn't on the RV.

It's my chance.

I turn and sneak towards the door, carefully taking the handle in my hand and pulling it down, so slowly it cannot possibly make a sound. Once it is open, I pull it back just as slowly, opening it just enough for me to slide inside. The

moment I'm in, I close it softly and peer around. There is only one light on, and it's coming from the back of the RV, where a bed sits. On that bed is Hope. Her hands and feet are tied, and she's lying on her back, the television on for her.

I gasp and rush over, careful not to make the RV rock.

Her eyes move to me and the moment she sees me, she begins to cry.

Scooping her up into my arms, I press her to my chest as I bury my face in her hair. "It's okay, sweet girl. I'm here. I've got you. Are you hurt? Did he hurt you?"

She shakes her head and relief floods me.

"He gave me a bag of candy," she tells me in a quiet voice, "he said that Uncle Fury was coming soon."

I hate Marek with a passion, but I'm glad that for a moment of his life, he found some kind of compassion and didn't hurt this little girl.

"He tied your hands," I say, pulling back and reaching for the rope.

"He said it was only for a minute and if I was quiet, he would let me swing on the big swing."

My sweet girl.

So innocent.

I undo her hands, which are very loosely tied, and then I undo her feet.

"Hope, I need you to listen to me, okay? We have to get out of here, but if that man sees us, he might get very mad and

make us stay. Uncle Fury wants me to help you, okay, so I need you to do as I ask and be really, really quiet. Can you do that?"

She nods.

Please.

Let this go to plan.



I get Hope out of the RV, but we don't get far before the alarm is raised. Marek figures it out, I don't take time to worry about how. His booming voice can be heard as Hope and I stand behind his RV, pressing our backs against it. He's going to come looking, and if we run, he'll see us. The RV door slams as he charges out, and we have a mere few seconds before he finds us here.

"We're going to climb under the big van, okay, sweetheart?" I whisper to Hope.

She nods, and I help her down, both of us sliding underneath the massive RV. It's the only option I have right now, and I can only pray it's enough. One step at a time. That's all I can do. We shift as close to the large wheels at the back, shielding ourselves as much as possible, then I bring Hope close to me and wrap my arms around her, pulling us both down until we're flat on the ground. Her breathing is shallow, and she makes a slight whining sound.

"I know this isn't fun," I whisper to her, "but I need you to be quiet."

She shuffles into me, but she stops making any sounds.

Heavy footsteps stop at the outside of the RV, and I know they belong to Marek.

“Find them. They can’t have gone far. Send out guards. If you see that woman, kill her, but leave the child.”

He knows it’s me.

Of course, he does. Who else would it be?

He takes a step closer, and I hold my breath, terrified he’s going to look under the RV. For a moment, I’m certain he is going to. I hang on so tightly to Hope, praying he doesn’t look beneath it, and then I close my eyes and wait with bated breath until I hear the sounds of his footsteps disappearing.

We don’t move, not for quite some time.

Only when I can no longer hear voices, do I dare to release Hope and peer out. I can’t see anyone, but I can hear commotion in the tent where the cages are. I have no doubt they’re checking each one of them. Caravan doors open and close as staff come in and out, no doubt helping in the search. I crane my neck, desperately looking for a way out.

Towards the back of the lot, it goes quite dark.

A fence surrounds this place, and I have no idea if we could possibly get out, but there is no option for us to go through the front or side gates. Our only way out will be to cut a hole in the wire.

Think, Alexis.

“Hope, I’m going to go and get something for us to cut the wire and get out. I need you to stay right here, okay? Don’t move. Don’t make any noise.”

Hope grips my hand, whimpering.

“I promise I’ll be back. I promise. I just have to go inside for one minute. Can you stay really still and quiet?”

She whispers yes.

I release her, promising once more that I’ll be back, and then I shuffle across the grass until I’m closer to the door of the RV. I peer out, and when I see the coast is clear, I hurry into a standing position, opening the RV door and climbing inside. There has to be something in here I can use to cut wire. Frantically, I begin looking through drawers, until I can find something, *anything* that might work. I come across a large knife, but there is no way I’m going to be able to use that. A heavy pair of scissors? That might work. I tuck them into my pants just as an overwhelming cramp has me doubling over.

Groaning, I clench my eyes shut, praying for it to pass quickly.

It’s getting worse, and the longer I leave it, the harder it will be to get out of here.

Rushing to the kitchenette, I take a glass and drink two rounds of water. My stomach turns angrily at the onslaught after being dehydrated for days, but if I don’t drink, then I can’t help Hope. Praying it stays down, I take the scissors and a wrench type tool I find, and I get the hell out of that RV. Ducking down, I urge Hope to climb out. Quickly, she does, and I pull her with haste towards the darkness.

I’m right, the fence is too high to climb, but it is pitch black out here, so nobody can see us unless they shine a light in our direction. I hope we manage to have a few minutes before anyone comes in this direction. Flashlights are shining

all around, and I can hear the rumbling of vehicles going down the road, no doubt looking for us. It won't take them long to come this way.

I take the scissors and with all my might, I start clamping them down on the wire. It's not easy, and it takes all my strength to break each little piece. My stomach turns, the threat of vomit so close that I'm not certain I can hold it down much longer. Sweat trickles down my face as I cut, my fingers getting tangled and scratched in the process. Using the wrench tool, I shove it in the wire I've cut and try to wedge it open as much as I can.

It's not great, but we have to make it work.

"Go through, I'll hold it open," I say to Hope, who has been beside me the entire time, the only sound alerting me that she's there, an occasional snuffle.

Hope reaches out her hand, looking for me, and I take it, guiding her to the small opening I've made. She shuffles through it as I hold it open, using every last bit of strength in my body. When she's out the other side, I push myself through. I'm bigger than her, and as I shove my body through the jagged wire, I feel it tear into my skin. Gritting my teeth and forcing myself not to moan in pain, I take a deep breath and shove myself out the other side.

Then we're up and running.

I don't know where, because it's scarily dark out here, but I keep my hand wrapped firmly around Hope's as we head away from the light of the camp and the bellowing voices. After five or so minutes, I pull Hope to a stop when a pair of

headlights alerts me that someone is ahead. Carefully, using the trees for cover, I get a little closer to see how many people we need to get past.

The truck idling by the long road is empty.

I can hear the faint sound of someone relieving themselves, the light scent of smoke tells me whoever it is, seems to also be having a cigarette break.

This is my chance.

I don't think, I don't take time to do anything except focus on the task ahead. Taking the truck and getting the hell out of here. I pull Hope into a run straight toward the truck. Throwing the door open, I frantically tell her to get in. A shouting voice from the man who was peeing, tells me I only have seconds, if that. The moment Hope is in, I dive into the front seat and throw the truck into drive, then I hit the gas, and it lurches forward.

Hands gripping the steering wheel, I drive full speed down the road.

I don't know where I'm going, or how long this road is, but an instant feeling of relief floods me. With this truck, we might just make it out of here alive.

We pass other trucks, and I attempt to keep low as I speed past them.

Eventually, the long road joins a main one, and I pull the truck out, hoping to see a sign soon that will let me know exactly what town I'm near. It takes a while, but slowly I am met with a handful of other cars, and I see a sign to indicate

that I'm forty or so miles from the closest town. I have no choice but to go to it, and hope I can find a way back home, or maybe a way to contact Fury so he doesn't go after Hope and get himself killed.

"Are you okay?" I ask Hope, my heart rate slowly easing the further away we get.

"Yes," she whispers, her voice quiet.

"I know that was really scary, but it's over now. I'm going to take you to Uncle Fury, okay?"

She nods and reaches across for my hand.

I squeeze hers.

I don't know how, but we did it.

I got her out of there.

Now, I just have to get her home.



ADRENALINE IS A FUNNY thing.

It masks all your pain, your body's exhaustion, and it makes you feel like you could move mountains. The problem with it, though, is that when it wears off, it wears off hard. It hits you like a hurricane, gripping your chest and twisting your heart until you can barely breathe.

That's undoubtedly how it goes for me.

I find a secluded restaurant in a backstreet, and I stop the truck. Everything hits me so hard; I fear I won't be able to climb out of the truck and get help. The cramping, the

bleeding, the turning of my stomach and the burning on my back, it's all too much. Gripping the handle to open the door, I clench my eyes shut, praying the cold sweat forming on my body will ease.

It doesn't.

I open the door just in time for the nothingness my stomach holds to attempt to escape. I gag and gag until my body is heaving. Hope cries, but I can do nothing to help her, to comfort her, everything is shutting down. I need help, and I need it now, but I'm afraid if I go to a hospital, Marek will find me. I need to stay out of the public. Panting through the dry gagging, I finally manage to make it stop long enough to lift my head and see a woman standing on the street, staring at me.

"Are you okay?"

I shake my head. "No," I whisper. "It's a long story. I'm having a miscarriage, and I don't have a phone."

Her eyes widen and she rushes over.

The kindness of some strangers will forever surprise me.

"Here, let me help you."

She sits me up straight in the truck as she notices Hope in the front seat. "Oh, are you okay, sweetie?"

"I think she's a little frightened. She hasn't seen me like this," I tell the stranger. "Do you have a phone?"

She nods, pulling out her cellphone.

I don't know anyone's phone number, but I do know how to contact the school and if I am directed through to Roger, he can give me Fury's number from the records. Glancing at the phone, I see it's a little past seven in the evening. The school phone automatically converts to his cell after hours, so I pray he answers. Knowing the number off by heart, I dial it and after a few rings I hear the distinct change as it diverts to his cell.

Answering a moment later, I thank whoever is helping me tonight because my luck is impeccable.

"Roger. It's Alexis," I say, my voice croaky. "I have a situation and I need to contact Hope's Uncle. I have lost my phone and am injured. Can you please find a way to get his number for me?"

"What's happened? Are you okay?"

"Not really. It's a long story. Please, can you get it?"

"Give me a minute."

I hear him shuffling about as he no doubt goes to his laptop.

A moment later, he returns. "Have you got a pen?"

"No, I'll type it into the phone."

I place the phone on speaker mode and open the keypad to type in the number Roger gives. Then, I thank him, even though he continues to ask me if I'm okay. I promise to call him back when I'm home safe, and then I hang up. Dialing Fury's number, I cross my fingers and hope he answers. If he doesn't, I'm not certain how I'll contact the club.

“Who the fuck is this? If you have Hope ...”

Fury’s angry voice fills my ears, but instead of being upset, I am instantly relieved.

“Fury, it’s me.”

A pause.

“Alexis?”

“I have Hope. She’s okay. It’s a long story, but...we need help.”

“You have Hope?”

I nod, even though he can’t see it. “Yes. Please, I don’t feel safe. We need you to come and get us.”

“Where are you?”

I give him the location and the restaurant we have parked in front of.

“Fuck,” he murmurs. “Okay, it’ll take a few hours for us to get there. How did you get into town?”

“I stole one of their cars.”

“Ditch it, right now,” his voice comes out icy, “he will have trackers on those trucks. You need to get out of it.”

My heart skips a beat as I glance at Hope sitting in the truck.

“Okay,” I whisper. “We’ll go.”

“You need to find somewhere safe, somewhere he won’t find you. If he finds you, Alexis, he will kill you.”

“I know,” I say softly. “I just... I don’t know where to go.”

“I have a friend who lives close by. I’ll give you her address. Go there, and we’ll come for you.”

Her?

Shaking my head, I want to curse myself for even worrying about that right now.

What does it matter?

Fury gives me the address and tells me to get away from that truck, then we end the call. The lady who let me use her phone pulls a piece of paper from her purse and hands me a pen, so I can write the address down. I thank her, over and over, and when she offers us a ride, I take it.

I get Hope out of the truck and we follow the lady to her car, as soon as Hope is safely in, I get into the front seat. “I’m Alexis, by the way,” I tell her, as she begins driving.

She smiles. “I’m Lisa.”

“I can’t thank you enough, Lisa. You’re literally saving me right now.”

A small laugh. “I always wanted to be a hero. Come on, let’s get you somewhere, so you can rest.”

Her eyes move to my blood-soaked shorts, and I’m reminded of the situation I’m in. I swallow the thick lump in my throat and stare out the window as we disappear down the road. Only ten minutes later, we’re arriving at the address Fury gave me. Of course he knows someone in a town this far away, the man probably has women everywhere. Shaking the thought

from my head, I thank Lisa once more before getting Hope out.

Then we walk up to the front door of the ground level apartment.

Before we reach the door, it opens, and a woman steps out.

She's stunning.

Of course, she's stunning.

Long blond hair falls around her shoulders and her eyes are a beautiful chocolate brown. Her body is to die for, full breasts and curvy hips. Don't get me started on her perfectly shaped lips and petite face.

"Oh, you must be Alexis. You poor thing. I'm Luna. Come in, let me get you sorted out."

Dammit, she's lovely.

"Thank you so much for helping us," I say to her, offering my best smile, but I know it's barely anything.

"Of course. You must be Hope, you're just as beautiful as your uncle said," Luna smiles down at Hope, who blushes and hides behind my legs.

We walk inside her neat apartment, and I can see her eyes on my shorts. When they meet mine, she offers me a genuine smile.

"Are you okay?"

Her voice is kind, compassionate, and caring.

Dammit, I like her.

“Not really,” I croak, the emotions bubbling to the surface.

She walks over, placing a hand on my arm. “Let me get Hope settled, and I will get you some fresh clothes.”

I nod, and she asks Hope what her favorite show is. Wearily, Hope follows her, but quickly I see the little girl warming up. Luna places the television on for her, gives her a snack and some water, and then she comes back to me with a glass of water. “Drink this slowly, or you’ll make yourself sick.”

I gratefully take the water and sip at it, fighting with every urge in my body not to gulp it up. I know that’ll only make it come rushing back out. Luna leads me down the hall to the shower, and hands me a clean towel. Then, she goes and gets me some clothes, some sanitary pads, and some painkillers.

“Thank you,” I tell her, my voice so incredibly sincere.

She smiles. “It’s not a problem at all. Are you hungry, I can make you some food?”

“I haven’t eaten for days, but I think I should probably try.”

Her smile falters. “Oh. I’m sorry. How about some soup? I have some in the freezer I can warm up.”

I nod.

“How do you know Fury?” I ask her, taking the items as she hands them to me.

“We go way back. High school sweethearts, but it didn’t work out. We’re still good friends.”

Is she the one that cheated on him?

Jealousy grips my heart, and I hate it because this woman is nothing but kind and sweet. Just knowing that Fury was with someone so incredibly beautiful, makes me feel somewhat inferior. I could never look like her. I know I need to snap out of it, so I offer her a smile once more and then go into the bathroom.

I'm an absolute mess.

The moment my clothes are off, I can see the dried blood on my legs. Turning, I glance at my back where scratches mar my skin from the fence. They're not deep, but they are bleeding. Turning the shower on warm, I step in. My back stings and I clench my eyes closed, standing under the water until the pain subsides. Then, I wash myself. I'm still bleeding, and I know I'll need to see a doctor soon, but for right now, I just want to sleep.

Mostly, though.

I want to be alone.

Because I don't think I can handle the pain much longer.



Hope falls asleep on the sofa, and Luna covers her with a soft blanket. I sit nearby, eating the chicken soup little by little, letting each mouthful settle in my stomach before I try another one. The cramping has eased somewhat since I took the painkillers, but with every passing minute, the ache in my heart grows bigger. Luna is kind and caring, her words soft as she speaks to me, and I'm so damned grateful for her right now.

"Fury won't be much longer," she assures me, filling my glass of water and handing it back to me. "Can I get you something else?"

I shake my head. "You've done enough already. I appreciate it more than you could possibly imagine."

She smiles, sitting beside me. "I'm glad I could help. You look like you've been through it."

"You could say that," I laugh softly.

"Has the pain eased?"

I nod. "Yes, thank you."

"I'm sorry."

I didn't need to tell her, she just knew. I guess women are like that, we understand things in a way that a man simply couldn't.

“Thanks,” I whisper, staring down at my soup and fighting back the tears.

I don’t even know how far along I was, or if the baby belonged to Ethan or Fury, but I do know that my heart had begun opening to the idea, and it hurts to know that it will not be.

“You should get some rest while you wait for Fury.”

I need to lie down, there’s no doubt about that. “Will you send him in when he arrives?”

She nods. “Of course.”

I finish up as much soup as I can, then I take my water and follow Luna as she leads me to a spare room. The moment she’s gone, I pull back the covers and slide into the soft bed. My body is beyond exhausted, and I can’t fight sleep a single second longer. Without so much as a single thought, I drift off into a place where it doesn’t hurt. Just for a little while.

I’m woken to a warm, hard body pressing against mine.

For a second, I think I’m dreaming, until the familiar scent washes over me.

Big, burly arms enclose me and pull me against the chest that brings me so much comfort. His mouth presses against the back of my neck, and he holds me in a way that makes me feel safe, needed, cared for. Tears burn my eyelids, and I can’t fight them for a second longer. They roll down my cheeks as I sob silently, my body trembling. He hangs onto me, not releasing me for even a second as the pain rushes out.

Rolling, I turn towards him, pressing my face into the crook of his neck.

“I got you,” he murmurs, his lips trailing over my hair.
“You’re safe.”

“I lost it,” I whimper, the tears coming fresh again.

“I know. I’m sorry. I’m so fuckin’ sorry.”

I know he is.

So am I.

“You saved my girl.”

My heart swells. “I wasn’t leaving without her.”

“You’ll never know how grateful I am, Alexis.”

I know.

I feel it.

“Is it over now?” I whisper.

“No, honey,” he responds, his voice low and gravelly, “not yet.”

Oh.

“Why does he want that money so badly he would take Hope?”

“It’s not the money he wants. There was a USB drive in the safe that Ethan stole, too. It has information Marek doesn’t want in anyone else’s hands.”

I completely forgot there were two USB drives in the safe.

“What kind of information?”

“Higher ups, who he is trading with, who he has sold to. I don’t know how your husband got his hands on it, but it’s why he’s fuckin’ dead.”

“I’m sorry,” I say, my voice shaky. “I shouldn’t have run off.”

“Could have gotten yourself killed, but I was a fuckin’ dick to you. I can’t say I blame you.”

He’s right, he was.

“I was afraid of him, Fury. I didn’t sleep with him because I wanted to...”

Pulling me tighter, Fury rests his chin against my head. “I fucked up.”

“It’s okay.”

“He’s gone now. You never have to think of him again.”

“Do you think...do you think Marek might pin it on me if he doesn’t get what he wants?”

The thought hadn’t crossed my mind, until now.

I made him angry. I took Hope. I escaped. I screwed up all his plans. He could effortlessly bring me down for Ethan’s murder, and he’s powerful enough to do it. The thought has cold chills running up my spine.

“Not goin’ to lie,” Fury answers, his tone icy, “it’s a possibility, but we’re goin’ to do everything possible to get to him first.”

What if it’s too late for that?

My bottom lip trembles.

I don't want to go to prison. If they link me to Ethan, it won't take much to link me to Ella. Then, I'll never see the light of day again. Not even the club can save me from that if Marek decides to act out his revenge.

Fury pulls me closer, an attempt at comfort, but right now, nothing is easing the anxiety filling my chest, making it seem as though a hundred pounds are sitting on top of it. I want this to go away, but I also know the club isn't just going to sit back and let it slide. Marek took Hope, and they won't stand for it. They'll start a war, and that war could destroy my life.

There has to be another way.

“You didn't come for me.”

The words come as a shock, even for me. The feeling deep down of hurt that he didn't come for me, isn't something I was willing to bring up, but it slipped from my lips before my brain could register that it's a bad idea.

“I was comin' for you, Alexis. Don't doubt it. When we found the USB, we had to pull back. Needed to rethink the situation and use it to our advantage. We knew he wouldn't kill you because he wanted it so badly. That is until he took Hope, and that's when I knew how much I had fucked up because your life wouldn't matter anymore. I misread the situation, but don't ever think I would have left you there.”

“He was going to kill me,” I say softly, “but there is a girl there, and she promised to dance for him if he let me go. He

wants her so badly, he agreed. I want to get her out, Fury. She deserves freedom.”

He squeezes me. “One thing at a time.”

Right.

One thing at a time.

Hang in there, Ellie.



“OH MY GOSH, I’M SO glad you’re okay,” Bonnie cries the second we step through the clubhouse gates.

She throws her arms around me and squeezes me until I wince, then pulls back mouthing *sorry* before making her next hug a little less forceful.

“Hope, sweetheart, come here.”

Pulling Hope into a hug, Bonnie squeezes the little girl, the relief evident on her face. Her eyes meet mine and the smile she gives me is so full of gratitude. Fury has thanked me, over and over again, for saving Hope. I did what I had to do, what anyone would do. There was never a moment I was going to leave that little girl there, even if it cost me my life.

We make our way into the clubhouse and the second I step in, Acacia comes over. She puts her hands on my shoulders and gives me a sympathetic smile. “I am so sorry you had to deal with Marek. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” I tell her. “He didn’t hurt me.”

“You’re lucky, then. Don’t worry, he won’t touch you again.”

“We need to come up with a way to retaliate, without starting a war,” Bonnie tells me. “He is the last person this club needs to be fighting with.”

“Since when did you become the boss,” Western murmurs to his woman, putting an arm around her shoulder and bringing her close.

“I mean, I’m just saying what we’re all thinking. I know you don’t want a fight with someone like him.”

“She’s not wrong,” Colt agrees, walking into the room with Myla by his side.

She gives me a hug before joining in the conversation, too.

“You got a plan?” Western throws at his father, and Colt gives him a look.

“I’m thinkin’,” Colt mutters.

“Think faster,” Western growls, “because that fucker isn’t goin’ to mess around. He will come in here and he will blow this place to pieces.”

My eyes widen. “Literally?”

Fury chuckles beside me. “Not literally, babe. But he will do some kind of damage.”

Oh, thank gosh.

“Even with our manpower,” Mex chimes in. “It’s nothin’ on his. It’s a war that will crush us.”

“You think I don’t fuckin’ know that?” Western snaps.

“Maybe we’re looking at this the wrong way,” I dare to say.

The club has no reason to trust me, especially after I ran off and got them into this situation, but they’re thinking with violence and violence isn’t always the answer. I’m certain for them, it might be, but there has to be another way. A smarter way. A way that will let Marek know the club isn’t going to sit back and do nothing, but something that won’t end in bloodshed.

“I’m listenin’,” Western crosses his big arms and stares at me.

God he’s intense.

“Well, I already know you’re not going to sit back and do nothing, but what if you attack from a different angle. Give him so much drama that he won’t be able to focus on the club.”

Bonnie tips her head to the side. “Well, you’ve got me intrigued.”

“Give him the USB, take a copy and give it back to him. Return the money. Make sure there is nothing else he wants from you.”

Western opens his mouth to argue, but I put a hand up.

Risky, I know.

“Please, hear me out. If you keep it all, he won’t stop until he gets what he wants. That is going to cause bloodshed. Give

it to him but take him down in a different way. Nobody knows what Marek does behind closed doors, and that's because he has higher ups working for him. The thing about life is, it doesn't matter how powerful you are, if the public knows the kind of person you are, you're done."

Bonnie's eyes widen as she begins to catch onto what I'm saying.

"He has a girl there, a girl who has people that love her. We need to tell her family where she is, then, we need to report it to every media outlet we can that he is stealing girls. Once the world knows what he's doing, it won't matter who is on his side because the sheer size of the public outcry will be too much to handle."

"You're a genius!" Bonnie claps her hands. "I can get something written up, and I know exactly how to get it all printed. We can expose him, let everyone know what it is he's doing, and he'll be crushed. You can't have power if nobody wants to go to your shows."

"Exactly," I say, grinning. "He'll know it was us, but he'll have that much to deal with, it won't be the focus of his attention. You might get yourself a war, but I'm thinking it'll be less likely this way."

"It's not a bad idea," Fury agrees. "Marek will be quick to expose everyone of power that is helping him to save his own ass. That, or he'll run."

"How do we prove it, though," Acacia says, pursing her lips. "We need something that can't be disproved. Photos, statements, things like that."

“I got out,” I say. “I can get back in.”

“No,” Fury growls. “Not fuckin’ happening.”

“I know where everything is,” I argue. “I know where the fence is unguarded. I can get in and get photos.”

“It’s not happenin’.”

Frustration bubbles in my chest.

“What if she does it when he’s not there,” Myla offers. “You can organize a time to have him collect the USB and cash, when he does, we can focus on getting in and taking some pictures. He’ll take a good heap of his men with him, for safety.”

“That could work,” Mex nods his head. “It’s a good idea. Pres?”

Western glances at Fury. “She knows where to go.”

“We’re not riskin’ her fuckin’ life,” Fury barks, fists clenching by his sides.

“I’ll go with her,” Bonnie says. “She won’t be alone.”

Western shoots her a look.

Fury grunts. “Oh, don’t like it when it’s your woman but it’s okay to throw mine in there?”

He considers me his woman?

My heart flutters.

“You’ve made your point,” Western grinds out. “The girls are goin’, but we’ll have someone there as backup.”

Fury clenches his jaw before declaring, “I’ll be with them, the entire fuckin’ time.”

Western nods.

So that’s it then?

We have a plan.

We’re actually doing this.

God, I hope it works.

I would love nothing more than to see Marek go down.

The taste of his own medicine will be bittersweet karma.

He won’t see it coming.



My tongue slides down Fury's cock and his feral growl only urges me on. Licking the tip, and swirling the head, I close my mouth over it and suck slowly, moving my head up and down, loving the way his hand curls into my hair. Reaching down, I cup his balls, giving them a gentle squeeze as I pick up the pace, opening my throat to take him deep. His hiss of pleasure above me has the ache in my pussy growing so intense, I squeeze my thighs together to try and calm it down.

Fingers sliding down my jaw, Fury grips my chin as I suck, giving me the kind of masculine energy that makes me wild. I want him, but right now, I can't have him. I can, however, enjoy the sound of his pleased growls as I suck his dick, bringing him closer and closer to the edge. Deciding to spice things up a little, I stop just as I feel his cock swell, and I release him from my mouth. His hiss of rage only makes my decision that much hotter.

Looking up at him, I can see the insane need in his eyes as his fingers tighten on my jaw. "Don't be a bad fucking girl, Alexis," he grinds out.

"Maybe I'm tired of being good." I smile, licking my lips.

"Put your mouth back on my dick."

"Only if you promise to finish on my face."

His eyes flare. “Dirty girl.”

Grinning, I close my mouth back over his cock and suck, bringing him back to the edge once more. I know he’s close because his fingers are tight on my jaw and his hips are thrusting as he pushes himself deeper into my mouth. Curling his fingers into my hair, he jerks my head back, releasing my jaw and gripping onto his cock as he strokes frantically, before groaning with release as he finishes on my face, just like I asked.

Warm liquid drips off my bottom lip, sliding down my chin as I stare up at him.

He reaches down, swiping it off with his thumb, pushing it into my mouth as I close my lips around him, sucking until his thumb is clean. His eyes flash with heat and I know he likes this side of me. Hell, *I* like this side of me. Removing his hand, he reaches down and takes whatever item of clothing he can find, to wipe my face, then he pulls me to my feet.

His lips close over mine, hot and heavy, not caring that I taste of him. We kiss until my body is grinding against his, desperate for him, but being able to do nothing about it. His arm goes around my waist as he hauls me closer to him, making sure his bare cock is rubbing against me, making me absolutely frantic inside. Pulling away, panting, I wiggle a finger at him. “You’re teasing me. I can’t handle it.”

He grins.

He’s fucking *exceptional* when he grins.

“Just makin’ it worth your while when the time comes.”

Stepping up closer to him, I wrap my arms around his neck. “Everything with you is worth my while.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” I breathe.

“You know I’m not happy about you goin’ back in there tonight. I just got you back, you’re still bleedin’, I don’t like it.”

I know he doesn’t like it, but I have to do it.

I promised Ellie, and I want to see Marek in a situation that he doesn’t have full control over. Seeing him unravel will be worth every second.

I know Fury is concerned, and I don’t say I blame him. He has been incredible today, from taking me to the doctor to hanging onto me when I cried. It was difficult, even though I knew what the answer would be. The bleeding has eased, but every time I use the bathroom, it is a stark reminder that I lost something I didn’t even know I wanted.

Fury has been incredible.

He has showed up in a way I truly didn’t think he could.

I respect him for that.

“Everything will be okay,” I assure him, redirecting my thoughts back to his concerns. “I promise.”

“Can’t promise that, baby,” he murmurs.

“You’re talking like you’ve claimed me or something,” I tease lightly, loving the way his husky voice rolls over the word *baby*.

“Once this is over, I might just make you mine. *Officially.*”

My heart skips a beat.

I know we should probably take things slow, considering in a matter of days, I’m going to have to face what happened with Ethan. There will be police officers, questions, and a lot of things to deal with. My family will be concerned, everyone will want to know if I’m okay. To them, I should be a broken widow. I can’t just parade Fury around, so for now, I have to keep him somewhat of a secret.

That doesn’t mean I’m not going to enjoy every single second of it.

“I have a lot to deal with once this is over,” I tell him, stepping back. “Ethan’s family, my family, the police. What if Marek gets revenge by making it look like I killed Ethan...”

“We don’t know what Marek will do, but I don’t think he’ll be worryin’ about gettin’ back at you. Ethan’s death will look like a hit, we’ll make sure of it. You have my word. There isn’t a single ounce of evidence that you killed him, you don’t even own a gun. We’ve got this, let the club make sure you come out clean.”

“What about Ella? If they ask questions...”

“You stick to the story. The evidence is destroyed. There is nothin’ tying anyone to that day. Without evidence, they have no reason to believe anything else happened.”

“What if Ethan had more...”

“He didn’t,” Fury tells me, his voice calm as he holds my worried gaze. “If he did, he wouldn’t have reacted the way he

did.”

He’s right.

I know he’s right.

That doesn’t take away the fear that something will happen.

I just have to trust that the club will protect me, that Fury will protect me.

I have no other option.



EVERYTHING GOES TO plan.

Marek agrees to meet Western at an arranged meeting point.

We know for certain he won’t come alone, and he’s smart enough to know Western won’t, either.

For that reason, he thinks the club will otherwise be occupied.

He has no idea that while he’s doing that, we’re sneaking into his little circus.

It takes more than a little time for me to recall the roads I turned down when I escaped, but I do remember the town I went to, not to mention a sign saying how far away it was. It wasn’t much past that sign where I turned onto the main road, from the little dirt road. We go over the map, and there is only one small road that runs off the main one, so we have to assume that’s it.

A few hours before Western is due to meet Marek, we leave.

We want to make sure we're as close as possible when Marek leaves, to give us more time. Considering it's a few hours' worth of driving, we would rather not run the risk of running out of time. Fury isn't thrilled with the plan, but he isn't leaving my side. We bring all the tools we'll need to cut the fence, and then we dress in dark clothing and begin our journey.

Western organized Marek to meet him in the evening, smart really. He wanted to make sure it was dark when we went in.

The road I guessed is correct, and as we slowly move down it, we can see the lights coming from the tents in the distance. I tell Fury that we need to go off-road a little, to go around the back, and we have to walk a fair distance, so they don't see our headlights. We find a safe place to park the truck, and then, loaded with everything we need, we get out. Nobody talks much as we trek through the woods to get closer to the camp, we're all on edge, concerned that this will go wrong.

By the time we arrive at the grounds, it's incredibly quiet.

There are no guards anywhere but at the front, and the caravans are mostly dark, like everyone has left. Marek certainly didn't leave without a shitload of men. We didn't expect he would, which is why this plan should work. He never goes anywhere without a back-up, and we were counting on it.

Finding a spot that is in the darkest part of the lot, we begin quietly cutting the fence. Fury works effortlessly, making it look a lot easier than it did when I did it. Mind you, I had some scissors and a wrench. Once he cuts a hole big enough, we move in. Sliding beneath the fence, I point quietly to where we need to go. Using the caravans as coverage, we slink towards the tent where the cages are.

I know for certain a guard will be in front of them, so we have to go under the back like I did last time.

Fury also makes that job look a lot easier, lifting the tent with ease, so we can slide beneath it.

The moment we're in, we do a brief look around before turning on the flashlight on a phone. We need some light for the photos, but we certainly do not want to alarm the guards at the front. Dropping low, I crawl towards Ellie's cage, praying she's there. The moment I stop in front of it, and see her with her fingers through the cage, watching me, my heart explodes.

"Alexis," she gasps, "what are you doing here?"

"Shhh," I whisper. "I'm here to bring Marek down."

I give her a very brief rundown of my plan, and her eyes widen.

"You're a genius." She breathes.

Her eyes move to Fury and Bonnie, who are by my side now.

"We could get her out," Bonnie says, her eyes darting to mine.

We could.

We could cut the cage and free all of them.

My heart races.

“No,” Ellie says, her voice low but stern.

I narrow my eyes, confused. “No?”

“Your plan is incredible. If you take me, he will return, and all hell will break loose. You know it will. He’ll hurt people just to get his way. If you leave it the way it is, things will run so much smoother.”

Dammit, she’s right.

For a moment, just a moment, the idea of freeing her made my heart sing.

“I hate leaving you here,” I say, reaching out and curling my fingers through the cage over the top of hers.

“He’s treating me okay now I’m doing what he wants, but don’t you worry, I am giving him absolute hell. I’m okay here, Alexis. Just do what you have to do.”

“What if he runs when it all comes out, and takes you with him?” I ask, the idea making my skin prickle.

“I’m strong, trust me, I’ll find a way. Just do this, please. I’m begging you not to worry about me. I can handle Marek.”

I know she can. She’s probably the strongest, sassiest woman I’ve ever met. Still, it doesn’t bring me comfort to know she sleeps in a cage every night.

“Here,” I say, pulling out my phone.

I quickly turn off all locks, so she can easily access it. I delete every app, anything that can use power, and then I slide it beneath the bottom of the cage. “Take this. Text your family – tell them you’re okay. If something goes wrong, call us, and we will find a way to get you out. Fury’s number is in there, Bonnie’s too.”

Her eyes widen as she takes the phone. “Alexis...”

“Please?” I beg. “Turn it off to save power, only use it if you need. Hide it well.”

She nods and quickly turns the phone off.

It won’t last forever, of course, but she might be able to at least tell her family she is okay.

“We’ve got to move,” Fury murmurs.

I nod, giving Ellie my warmest smile before stepping away from the cage. Then, we use the light quietly as Bonnie takes photos. Once we’re done, I say goodbye to Ellie, and we sneak back out. Bonnie takes as many pictures as she can while we make our way back out, and the moment we’re on the other side of the fence again, I look back, my heart sinking.

I hate leaving her there.

“She’s strong,” Fury murmurs, his hand circling mine.

“I know, but she shouldn’t have to be,” I say softly.

“We’ll find a way to get her out.”

I know we will.

We get the hell out of there and the moment we’re back in the truck, Bonnie goes through the photos.

“Tell me they’re good?” I say, turning to face her.

She grins. “Oh, they’re good. I’ll have the article done by tonight. I have people on board, ready to send it out. Marek is going down.”

Oh, indeed he is.

Indeed, he is.



Monster revealed.

The creator of the infamous travelling show that holds some of the world's best dancers has been exposed as a monster. Marek, the ringleader and owner, has been taking women from the streets, from their homes, and keeping them in cages as he abuses them, forcing them to work.

Missing girl, Ellie Mae Lowe, is seen in the photos provided by an anonymous source. Her family have been desperately trying to find her since she went missing months ago. Her fiancé tells reporters that he will stop at nothing to return her to him. The incredible dancer was taken for her amazing skills and has yet to be located.

The public is urged to report anyone missing in their lives, and to keep their eyes peeled for the man running the show. Having disappeared, authorities are doing their best to locate and bring down the man in question. Anyone with information should come forward.

Let's bring these women home.



SIX MONTHS LATER



“My gosh, you’re the most adorable pregnant woman I’ve ever seen,” I say to Bonnie, running my hands over her rounding stomach.

“Stop it, I look like a whale.”

I chuckle, shaking my head. “You do not look like a whale. You’re glowing.”

“Have to agree,” Western murmurs, nuzzling her neck as he walks up behind her. “Might just keep you pregnant, so I can see you like this all the time.”

“You’re awful,” Bonnie scoffs, but her cheeks flush.

I can’t help but smile at the two of them. They’re adorable. Bonnie found out she was pregnant not long after the articles came out about Marek. Everything didn’t go quite to plan because he must have known something was coming. By the time the articles were released, Marek was gone. Packed up, vanished. Nobody has seen or heard from him since. There are rumors he has gone overseas, but we can’t be certain.

It broke my heart.

Knowing we left Ellie there torments me daily because we should have gotten her out. I haven’t heard a single thing from her, she never made a call. I don’t know if she’s okay, and when we tried to track the phone, it came up empty. We can’t locate her. Which means Marek must have found the phone.

The club has promised they won't stop looking, and have made it their mission to find her, but knowing she is out there, alone, just breaks my heart.

We will find her, though.

I know it.

We slowed Marek down, at the very least.

He'll never hold a show anywhere in this area again, and people are rioting to find him. Authorities, that aren't working for him, have been looking for those girls non-stop. We caused an uproar, which is precisely what we wanted to do. He can't hide forever, and one day soon, he will face what he has done. I can only pray that Ellie is strong enough to handle him until that time comes.

Something tells me she will be.

Otherwise, life has gone on scarily well.

Ethan's death was linked to Marek, just like Fury promised it would be, and the police came to tell me the '*devastating*' news. Of course, I put on the show of my life. It worked beautifully. We had a funeral, I played the part for his family and mine, and the moment it was all over, I packed up his things and never looked back. I sold the house, sold everything we owned together, and purchased a new place just up the road from the club. A place big enough for my new family.

Fury, Hope, and I.

Hope's mother agreed to let us adopt Hope, as long as she could have regular visits when she was finished serving her time. We agreed with pleasure, and signed the papers as soon

as we could. Hope is thrilled with the idea of us being her parents, and I made sure that her new home was everything she could have ever imagined and more.

Fury is growing into an incredible parent, and seeing him with her, makes my heart ache for the baby I lost.

But I know one day soon, I'll have that chance again.

He officially made me his old lady, and I became a part of the club I was certain I would never understand.

Fury was right, he did show me his family and I grew to understand they were the most incredibly family you could have.

I was so very wrong about them.

I got promoted in my job, and I am loving every second of my new life.

It's the life I always dreamed of, but never thought I'd have.

A life that I finally feel like I deserve.

"It'll be you one day," Fury murmurs, coming up behind me and wrapping his arms around me, closing his hands over my stomach. "I promise you that."

I smile, watching Bonnie and Western.

"I know," I say softly, "but for now, I've got all I could ever need."

Hope rushes over, skidding to a stop in front of me as she thrusts her hand open, exposing a little bug she found in the garden. "Look!"

I laugh, leaning down to inspect the poor, partially squashed creature. “Oh, that’s lovely.”

“Jack and I found so many of them.”

Jack, a grandson of one of the old ladies, comes by to play with Hope a lot. The two of them get along incredibly well, and it’s wonderful to see her with some friends.

“Just make sure you’re careful with them, honey.”

“I will be. Look, Uncle,” she thrusts her hand in Fury’s direction.

“Amazing baby girl.”

With a cheesy smile, she skips off.

“One day,” Fury growls into my ear again. “For now, what do you say we get some practice in?”

I giggle. “You’re insatiable.”

“You have no idea. Let me bruise that backside a little more.”

My bottom tingles with the memory of the spanking he gave me last night.

“Oh, please.”

Squeezing me close, my smile widens as I look around at my new life.

Ah yes, a dream come true.

A life I never thought I’d have.

A fantasy come to life.

Everything is just...perfect.

Finally.

THE END



We made it!

I hope you loved everything about this new biker series! I know I loved writing it.

The good news is Ellie Mae's story isn't over. She will have a single novel released in January 2024, and I promise you, it is one to get!

After that, I have a big surprise for you, so keep your eyes peeled. Jackson, Cade and Spike have some unfinished business...

You didn't hear it from me.

As always, if you loved this book, please go over and leave a review, it truly means the world to me!

Bella xx

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