



HELLFIRE



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C&J NOVELS LLC

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*For my brother, whose shitty stories about the septic world
have always entertained us.*

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TRIGGER WARNINGS

This book is meant for readers 18+. Some content may be unsuitable for some readers. For a full list of warnings, please visit <https://www.cathleencolenovels.com/tropes-warnings>

Once there, swipe to find the series and book you're looking for.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hi there!

I just wanted to thank you for reading Hellfire and to let you know about a little change I'm making.

In a few other books, mostly Smokehouse, I referenced the Wyoming Chapter of The Vikings. They came to help out with Hush and Seek's wedding. I've already gone back and made the changes, but from this point on instead of being Vikings, they will be known as The Berserker's Rage MC. They're still based in Wyoming, and are still allies with The Vikings, but I'm going to be moving forward with their club next, telling their stories.

I wanted to give you a head's up, as you'll see those changes made here in this story. I hope you enjoy it!

CHAPTER 1



Hellfire

A tight ass in blue jeans filled my vision as I came down the stairs. I paused, staring as Kit bent over to slide something behind the bar. She always fucking insisted on restocking both bars and storage rooms herself, even though Riptide was perfectly capable of taking care of it. She was an organized sort of person and she hated running out of anything.

My eyes roamed involuntarily over her. She was a tall woman, and though she was lean and muscular, her ass was nicely rounded in her tight fitting jeans. She didn't wear the clothes most of the sweet butts did. One, she wasn't a sweet butt and wasn't looking for that kind of validation. Two, Smokehouse would probably lose his shit if she went around with her ass and tits out. So would I for that matter. Thing is, she didn't have to dress that way to drive me wild. She wore jeans that hugged her curves and t-shirts tucked in that showed her feminine figure. It left all the good bits to the imagination, while also letting me know that whatever I imagined would never live up to the real thing. Everything about her had been driving me insane since I met her all those years ago. Her long dark hair was up in a ponytail as she restocked the clubhouse's bar. I imagined wrapping it around my fist as I did all the dirty, depraved things to her that I'd dreamed of over the years.

Shrugging on my cut, I tried to pull myself together as I walked down the stairs. I only had a few more weeks of my

uncles being in town, then I was going to need to get back to helping my dad with the family business. It wasn't that I minded the work. In fact, since the business was ours, I loved it. Took pride in it. But things were already busy and adding in a full day there before I came and handled business at the club was going to make for incredibly long days. It didn't matter. I'd do whatever was needed.

Hush and Seek got married yesterday. It was a truly uplifting day for us. At least it was until Dani's ex took her off our compound. The Italians chose that time to strike. Toxic always joked that this was our kind of luck. Get hit with two problems at once. But, at least then we had the opportunity to get both resolved quickly.

Thankfully, Torque, one of Cynic's crew, had seen it happen so we were able to catch up quickly and rescue her. She was okay, just a little rattled. After everything that happened, that was understandable. We were all a little tense this morning. The Italians going after Dani just moved up our timeline on confronting them.

Between them and Fremont this was going to be a shit show, but there wasn't much else we could do. None of us would stand by while anyone harassed our women and children. We'd take the challenge that was being thrown at us.

My eyes were still glued to Kit as I stopped at the bottom of the stairs. It was early, so there weren't many people around.

“What are you looking at?”

I jerked as my best friend, Kit's brother, spoke from behind me. “What? Nothing.”

Smokehouse stopped next to me and studied his sister, his eyes narrowed. She was upright now, thank fuck, and marking something down on her checklist. “Really? ‘Cause it sort of looked like you were staring at Kit.”

Side eyeing him, I tried to judge how he'd feel about it if I admitted I was. My friend was super protective of Kit. They'd both grown up in the MC life and he'd often put himself in

between her and men who wanted to date her, once she was old enough. I'd never spoken to him of the fact that I'd been in love with her pretty much from the start. I wasn't sure how he'd feel about it. Fuck, I didn't know how Kit would feel about it. Didn't matter. I wasn't going to ruin my friendship with Smoke, or my place in the club by hitting on her.

There was a time I'd considered it. Then my dad had me take over the half of our plumbing company that was responsible for septic tanks. That was five years ago and I'd been trying to catch up ever since. All this shit with The Italians was making me realize that I needed help. Needed someone I could trust to handle shit at the business when I wasn't around. None of my useless cousins were interested and my brothers didn't live in Arizona anymore. Who else could you trust other than family? My MC brothers, but no one here had any more time than I did.

"I was just about to go ask if I could help her carry some of that shit," I told Smoke with a shrug. "But if you're going to be a dick *you* can do it." I gave him a shit-eating grin.

The fact that his old lady had been taken last night might have sent some men spiraling. They'd have to be left alone to brood until the worry and stress dissipated. Not Smoke. He took the rational and mature approach, which was to say he hunted the bastards down and shot them. Now that the danger was over, he needed people to distract him. And as one of his best friends, it was my job to help keep his head on straight.

Smoke shot me a glare. "I'm not being a dick. Not when I catch you staring at my sister's a--"

"Toxic!"

Smoke broke off and I sighed in relief at the distraction since I didn't want to discuss Kit's ass with him. The bellow that reverberated through the lower half of our clubhouse was followed by a pissed off looking Lockout. We both watched in shock as he stormed out from the back hallway, murder written all over his face.

"Morning, Prez," I said. My words were cautious since Lock was red in the face and practically foaming at the mouth.

His head snapped in my direction and I promptly zipped my lips. Lock wasn't one to fuck with when he was this angry.

Toxic appeared from behind a table, eyes bleary, hair sticking all directions, and confusion and grogginess stamped on his face. There was an indentation lining his cheek from the gap between boards on our wooden floors.

Smoke squatted and peered at the darkened corner Toxic had been sleeping in. I did the same. If anyone joined him last night, she'd already slunk out before we got down here.

“Did you see him lying there?” Smoke asked.

Shaking my head, I watched as Lock stalked over to our still drunk brother. Lock placed both hands on the table that Toxic was practically spread over as he tried to hold his balance in front of his president.

“I swear to fuck, he's impossible to keep track of,” Smoke muttered, as we straightened back up.

“Lock,” Toxic slurred.

“Stay out of my office.”

Smokehouse choked on a laugh. I shot him a suspicious look, but focused back on the show when my friend didn't say anything. Folding my arms over my chest, I watched the play of emotions on Toxic's face.

“Your...office?”

“Someone was fucking in there!” Lockout snapped. His eyes narrowed as Kit's giggle floated through the air.

“Didn't go to your office.”

I felt bad for poor Toxic. He'd just been jerked out of a sleep deep enough that he was passed out cold on the floor. He was just trying to catch up with whatever had Lock pissed off.

“No, Toxic. Someone was fucking...having sex, in my office,” Lockout growled.

Toxic blinked a few times. “Pretty sure that wasn't me, Prez.” He cocked his head, a look of concentration on his face. “Pretty sure.”

“If anyone was fucking someone in my office, it was probably you.”

His face screwed up again as he thought it over. “Probably s’not definitely. But it does definitely sound like probably me,” he admitted in a drunken slur, swaying as he shoved himself upright. “Don’t remember doing nothing in your office, though.”

Lockout’s hands gripped the edge of the table. He clamped down so hard, fighting for control of his temper, that his knuckles were white. “My desk is halfway across the room and whoever your friend was left her panties on the floor.” He reached into his cut and pulled out a lacy thong. He tossed it at Toxic. “Just stay out of my office.”

Toxic nodded. “Sure will, Prez,” he muttered, the panties hanging off his face. He was so blitzed he didn’t even try to remove them, just left them there as Lockout left.

Lock shot me a threatening look as he went. This was why he’d been named Lockout. In a helicopter, when you put the levers into ‘lockout’ the engines go to max power in an instant. His temper did the same thing. He went from normal to overload in less than a minute. It was why he worked so hard on keeping his anger under control. Every once in a while it broke free, though. We all knew to take cover when that happened.

“What’s his problem?” I wondered out loud.

“Rough morning,” Static said from where he was leaning against the wall near the hallway. He winced as he slid onto a chair at the bar. He had severely bruised ribs from the beating he took at the Event Center.

My eyes wandered over to Kit again and I found her staring at me. Shooting her a lopsided grin, I chuckled to myself when she flushed and tried to look busy with her inventory.

Smoke went over to where Toxic was now slumped on a chair, his arms pillowing his head on the table. “He really can

sleep anywhere.” He grabbed the panties off Toxic’s face and shoved them inside the pocket of his jeans.

My brows shot up. “Something you want to admit to?”

“Nope.” He gave me a toothy grin.

Shaking my head, I focused back on Static. “Why’s he having a rough morning?”

“Fremont. The Italians. Running the club. Running his business. The delays with the school. Family-” Static broke off. “You name it, Lock knows about it and is killing himself trying to fix it.”

“Anything we can do?” Smoke asked.

“He’ll take your head off if you offer. Just give him some space. He’ll be fine.”

“How do you know him so well, Static?” I asked. We hadn’t had much time to get to know the lawyer, but now that he was prospecting, and would soon be our brother, we owed it to him to change that.

“Went to school with him and his brother. I was a few years younger, but once we got out and went into the military the three of us ended up on the same deployment.” Static stood and walked out without another word.

“Guess I should give Lock a break,” Smoke said, looking guilty.

“Probably a good idea.” I watched as he went back upstairs to check on his old lady. Giving it a good minute or two to make sure he didn’t come back down, I gave into the urge that had been nudging me since I came down the stairs.

“Morning, Kit.” I walked over and took the box of liquor bottles from her hands before she had a chance to take a step.

“Hi, Hell,” she said with a smile and a shake of her head. “That’s not your job,” she informed me.

“Not really yours either,” I shot back as I made my way to the storage room.

She followed and brushed past me so she could arrange the bottles like she wanted. My muscles tightened as her body touched mine. She reached to put up a Tequila bottle and the band t-shirt she was wearing rode up, showing off silky smooth skin.

I swallowed and stood there, like a moron, holding the box while she plucked bottles from it. “Why don’t you let Rip do this?”

“He doesn’t do it right.”

That made me chuckle. She grinned at me over her shoulder. Her blue-gray eyes twinkled with humor. Then she bent over to put bottles on one of the lower shelves and I had to bite back a groan.

She was all but waving that perfect ass in my face. It wasn’t like I was going to look away though. Why would I when I could torture myself? My dick hardened in my jeans as I watched her rearrange bottles to put the newest at the back. Fuck, she was beautiful.

“What do you have planned for today?” she asked as she worked.

Clearing my throat, I winced when it still came out husky and deep. “Whatever Lock needs.”

“Not back to work with your dad yet?”

“No. I’ve got a few more weeks.”

She straightened and turned, putting her hands on her hips. “You won’t be working on the school too, though, once you go back to work with your dad, right?”

I opened my mouth to answer, but she cut me off.

“Because there’s no way you can go to work at four a.m., then head over to the construction site once you get off at two, then help out with whatever the plan is for The Italians. You have to *sleep* sometime.” She narrowed her eyes and the look nearly blew my heart out of my chest. She knew my schedule? And was worrying about me? A grin slowly spread over my face as she glared at me. “Right?”

“That was my plan,” I admitted.

She shook her head and wagged a finger at me. “That’s crazy, Hellfire. You’re going to end up hurting yourself. It was bad enough before the club started construction on the school and you were working at the crack of dawn so you could be back in case anyone around here needed anything.”

Arching my brow, my grin only got wider. “You checking up on me, Kit?”

A flush stained her cheeks when she realized what she’d just admitted. “No.”

Both my brows rose this time. “You sure?”

She started to say something, but broke off when the door to the storeroom was jerked open. We both watched Smokehouse with guilty expressions.

“Hell,” he said, the word sounding like a warning. “We need to talk.” He made a good impression of Lockout as he stalked away from the door.

Looking back at Kit, I saw the way her cheeks paled. “Hey,” I said, voice soft with concern. “What’s wrong?”

“He’s got the wrong idea,” she stammered.

Cocking my head, I tried to figure out what she meant. “About what, Vixen?” I’d given her the nickname not long after I started prospecting for the club. She’d never complained, so I used it whenever we were alone.

“Smoke is such a tight ass about me and guys,” she explained, seeming to calm down as soon as she started talking. “I don’t want him to get the wrong idea about us. I don’t want to make trouble for you.”

The fact that she was still worrying about me cinched it. How was I supposed to resist that? Setting the box on one of the shelves now that it was almost empty, I made up my mind. This had gone on long enough. The shit that went down in that Event Center had shook me to my core. Since then, I’d been fighting these feelings day and night. I used to be able to tuck everything I felt for Kit into a tiny corner of my mind and it

only escaped occasionally, usually at night when I was alone in my bed.

But that day, seeing Kit walking out through the crowds and flashing lights of emergency vehicles broke whatever hold I had. Thoughts of her had been running wild through my mind.

I'd spent too many fucking nights dreaming of this woman in my life. Fuck Smoke. I'd find a way to convince him that I was the best thing for Kit. Fuck The Italians. If they touched her, I'd kill each of them in new and increasingly creative ways until I wiped them all from the face of the Earth. First, I needed to make her understand that I didn't want to be just friends with her for the rest of our lives.

Stepping in close, I reveled in the way her eyes widened as I invaded her space. I grasped her chin in my hand. She wasn't a delicate woman, but in my hands everything was fragile. I was gentle with her. "If he's got the wrong impression, we may as well have fun before we get into trouble."

"Wha-"

She broke off when I dipped my head and kissed her.

CHAPTER 2



Hellfire

*K*it stiffened in my arms as I pulled her close. It took every ounce of self-control I had to contain my groan. Her lips were soft beneath mine. I kept my hands firmly on her hips, her body slowly relaxing.

As soon as she melted against me, those sexy lips parting, I slid my arms around her. Tightening my hold, I enjoyed the way her body fit with mine. Despite her height, I still had to bend while kissing her.

Her tongue brushed mine and a filthy image of her raced through my mind. She moaned when I deepened the kiss after she gave me the opening I'd been looking for. She was perfection. My hands slid over her back, touching everywhere I could, and leaving me wanting so much more.

Considering this was the first time we'd ever touched each other sexually, I'd take anything she was willing to give. It was already blowing my expectations out of the water. I'd spent over a decade watching her grow into the woman she'd become and everything about her called to me.

The door was wrenched open a second time and Kit gasped, shoving away from me, her hands on my chest. I let her go reluctantly. We stared at Smokehouse as he stood in the doorway of the storage closet once more.

His eyes were narrowed and he looked like he was about to say something when a resounding crack filled the room and my face felt like someone had pelted it with a sack of angry hornets. Turning my head, I stared down in shock at Kit.

Her eyes were wide, tits heaving, and her arm was still raised. She looked as shocked as we were that she'd just smacked me. Panic flashed over her gorgeous features. *I'm so sorry*, she mouthed at me, before she shoved past her brother and bolted away from us.

Smoke and I just stood there, like a couple of assholes, our mouths hanging open. "Well, fuck," Smoke muttered. He looked as confused as I felt. He turned and left, leaving me standing there the same way his sister had.

My brows shot up and the breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding whooshed from my lungs. I was expecting to get bellowed at. Threatened. At the least I figured he'd attempt to put his size eleven boot up my ass. He didn't do any of that, leaving me even more puzzled about what the hell had just happened.

My cell vibrated in my pocket, cutting into my thoughts. Pulling it out, I said, "Hey, Dad." I frowned at the door to the supply room, trying to make sense of the shit show my life had just become.

"Hey, Ben. One of the pump trucks took a shit on us this morning."

I snorted out a laugh. Those trucks were responsible for pumping *out* shit, so his choice of wording amused me. "I'm heading over now."

"Thanks. I tried taking a look."

Grinning, I shook my head as I made my way out of the closet. Dad's version of 'taking a look' meant he tossed every swear word he knew at the truck while he banged a wrench on the engine. Automotive repair wasn't his specialty, but it was responsible for teaching me my colorful vocabulary as a kid.

Everyone had cleared out of the lower half of the clubhouse, except Toxic, who was still snoring at the corner

table. “If you touched anything we’re probably going to have to take it to a damn mechanic.” I was decent with vehicles, but that wasn’t a skill I’d learned from my old man despite many hours standing around holding a flashlight. The Army had taught me to fix shit. All my dad had given me was the curiosity to pull things apart to see how they worked, something that dismayed my mother many times as I grew up.

“Fuck off,” he chuckled. I could all but see the seriousness spread over his face as his tone turned grim. “I tried not to bother you-”

“Dad. How many times do I have to tell you? Anything you need, I’m there.” I shook my head again. My family respected my need for the club. They didn’t fully understand why I’d joined, but they respected my choice. No one else in my family was in an MC.

Pixie, my cousin, didn’t count. She wasn’t in a female MC, she just liked to fuck bikers. My uncle Hal had done his best to curb her wild ways, but her mother had taken her after the divorce and he’d had no say in raising her. Pixie marched to the beat of her own drum. It was a drum no one was proud of. The only ambition she had in life, as far as I could tell, was to settle down with a biker. Nothing wrong with that, but having her fucking my brothers wasn’t exactly comfortable.

Lock had pulled me aside when she first showed up and checked with me to make sure it was fine that she remained here. She’d only picked this club because of me. She knew it would embarrass me. She didn’t give a shit about family, only herself. As much as I hated it, I let her stick around for my uncle’s sake. Ultimately, I told Lock it wasn’t a problem, but I wasn’t endorsing anything she did.

We had an understanding. I wasn’t responsible for her, or any shit she pulled. Still, I always ended up feeling accountable and having to handle her when she caused trouble. She’d been watching herself since the day she’d gotten into a fight with Seek. It was a nice break. I wasn’t sure why she chose to stay. It hadn’t taken long before my brothers refused to touch her out of respect for me. The only time she got any play was when nomads and ally clubs rode through. If fucking

bikers was her angle, she needed to go find a different club. Preferably in a city far from this one.

We'd already said goodbye to The Berserker's Rage MC and sent them home after the wedding reception. That was the reason Toxic was passed out downstairs rather than in his own bed. Once we'd gotten Dani back from Amato's men, most of the guys started partying. As much as I liked the Berserker crew, I was glad they were gone because now I wouldn't have to watch and make sure Pixie wasn't getting into any trouble with them. The majority of the Berserkers were young and single, so if they wanted to fuck one of the sweet butts, it was no business of mine. But, much to Pixie's dismay, someone had warned them of who she was and none of them would give her the time of day. It said a lot about their loyalty that they were willing to give up pussy just so it didn't make things awkward with me.

Starting up my Harley, I pulled out of the club's lot and onto the road. I raised a hand in greeting to Priest as I left. Sucking in a deep breath, I let the wind wash over me. Arizona didn't have helmet laws and this morning I hadn't felt like wearing mine. If that meant my brains ended up splattered all over I-10, so fucking be it. I needed the wind whipping past to tear the memory of having Kit in my arms away. Until I could speak to her and make her understand that kissing her wasn't a one off thing, I needed to put her out of my mind. It was the only way to control the raging hard-on pressing against my jeans.

I accelerated, weaving in and out of traffic as I made my way south. After what happened last night with Dani being taken, I was on edge. I scanned the cars and trucks as I passed, watching for trouble. It wasn't likely that The Italians would hit again so soon. Not after they lost a handful of guys last night. Still, I studied everything as I went. I wasn't going to be taken by surprise. Those fuckers had a painful death coming their way, all of them. No one messed with what was ours and lived.

I realized as I pulled into the parking lot that I was gritting my teeth. Relaxing my jaw, I cut the engine. I was only

halfway to the cluster of mobile trailers that made up our offices when one of the doors flew open. Grinning, I watched as my mom planted her hands on her hips, glaring at me.

“You don’t call. You don’t come around,” she chided, a smile spreading over her face. She couldn’t hold onto the mock anger she’d been displaying.

“Leave the boy alone,” Dad said, striding over from the building that held our mechanic bay. Not that we had a mechanic at the moment. The last one had been fired six months ago and we hadn’t replaced him yet.

I opened my arms as Mom came down the stairs and stepped into them. “Sorry. Been busy.”

She sighed as she hugged me. Her head just barely came to my chest. She was a small woman with a huge personality. The quintessential mother type. Even if she didn’t have children, she would have mothered anyone who needed it. “You’re the only one left around here, so you get the responsibility of all your brothers.”

I was used to that. I was the oldest of six boys. Responsibility was my middle name. I didn’t hold that against my parents. It was just a part of who I was. I was the spitting image of my father, from my size, to my demeanor. “That’s no problem,” I told her. Turning, keeping one arm looped over her shoulders, I nodded at my father. “Couldn’t get Alan out here?”

Dad sighed. “No, he’s on vacation. Salmon fishing up in Alaska.”

“Sounds fun.” It was mid-June and it was already as hot as the surface of the sun. Even now, at eight in the morning, sweat was rolling down my back. Squeezing my mom to my side once more, I hugged her close before releasing her. “Show me which truck.”

Dad and I walked in silence to the bay and I circled the truck parked inside. “What’s she doing?”

“Keeps sputtering to a stop,” he answered with a shrug.

Nodding, I popped the hood, and went around to stare down into the engine. I frowned as I tested the spark plug connections. Dad was standing next to me, arms folded over his chest, watching.

“Bennett.”

Looking up at him, my brows pulled together. “Yeah?” My name had come out in his serious tone. It was hard for some to differentiate that tone with his normal gruff voice, but as his kid, I knew him well.

He looked uncomfortable, but determined. “Is everything okay?”

Straightening and abandoning the engine before me, I met his worried dark brown gaze. It was like looking into a mirror. A slightly older reflection of myself, but still so close to me it was hard to tell us apart. “Yeah.”

“You...” He sighed and scrubbed a hand over the back of his neck, trying to figure out what to say. “You asked for this time off and-”

“Do you need me back?” I asked, worried. The last thing I wanted was to leave him in the lurch.

“No. Fuck. No. It’s not that. You deserve a damn break. I just- We’re just worried about you.”

Frowning, I leaned against the truck. “Why?”

“You mean besides the fact that you came home with a bullet hole in you?”

I grinned. “Those are Mom’s words,” I told him.

“They’re mine,” he snarled. He leaned his elbows on the frame of the truck, leaning forward. “You work all the fucking time. Do God knows what with that club of yours.” He pierced me with a look and I knew what was coming. They wanted me to settle down. Get married. Have kids.

I wanted to do all those things, besides settling down, but it wasn’t as easy as just finding a woman. Not when I refused to look over the years because I’d already found her. Just hadn’t done anything about it. Until this morning. If they were

patient, maybe I could convince Kit to be mine. Maybe we all would get what we wanted.

“You’re a grown man and I don’t want to tell you what to do-”

“Then don’t,” I muttered, turning back to the truck. Popping the top off the fuel filter housing, I reached in and pulled it out. *Bingo*. There was nothing but grime coating the filter. I tossed it into the trash can nearby, then walked over to one of the shelving units I kept stocked and grabbed a new one. Taking it from the box, I groaned internally when I saw Dad still watching me.

“We’re just wondering what your plan is, Ben?”

“Work. Play. Whatever I want,” I told him with a forced grin.

“Don’t you think it’s time to...change things up?”

“Nope. I like my life.” I wasn’t about to jinx it by telling him about Kit. Pouring my heart out to him didn’t seem right when I still had yet to tell her. He was quiet as I replaced the filter. “I appreciate that you and Mom are worried about me,” I told him, wiping my hands on a rag that was hanging off the grill of the truck, “but I’m doing exactly what I want to do.”

He sighed again. “Alright, Son.”

“What would you have told Gramps if he had this talk with you?” I asked.

He grinned. “I told him exactly what you said.”

I chuckled. As much as I was a replica of my old man, he was of his. “How is Gramps?”

“Busy causing trouble as usual. He bought a boat.”

“...a boat. What’s he doing with a boat?”

“Trolling around the Bayou. Claims he’s fishing.”

“For what? Gators?”

He chuckled. “Who knows. But he’s happy and he keeps shutting the door in the faces of the live-in companions I send

his way.”

Shaking my head, I laughed. Gramps was ancient and stubborn. He wasn't about to accept any help. Not if they were going to keep him from having fun in his old age. Looking over, I saw the worry creeping back into Dad's expression.

“Don't worry,” I told him, slapping a hand on his shoulder. “I've got everything under control.” Everything except a certain dark-haired vixen who was driving me crazy.

“I'd tell you to enjoy your vacation, but something tells me you're not at home relaxing,” he said with a grin.

I hadn't told them about helping to build the school. Not that we were working on it right now. Lock and Rip would let us know once we were cleared to keep building.

“Why don't you come in for some lunch?” Mom asked as we walked up. Their house was out back, behind the trailers.

My stomach rumbled, and I nodded. Spending time with them, and getting a good, home-cooked meal was the perfect way to spend my afternoon. “Sure.”

The hours passed quickly and soon it was time for me to get going. Saying goodbye to my parents, I climbed back on my bike and headed back to the clubhouse. If I was lucky I'd be able to catch Kit alone.

We had some things we needed to discuss. Like that kiss. And the fact that she'd slapped me so hard I'd nearly been left staring at my own ass.

CHAPTER 3



Kit

“*I* knew it!”

Jordan shouted so loud it echoed through The Bunker. Jumping, I glared at her while she and Gwen cackled like mad hens. “Knew what?”

“That you two had a thing for each other,” Gwen told me with a wide smile.

“How did you-”

“Hang on,” Keely said, interrupting me. “I want to hear more about this kiss.” She gave me a narrow eyed look. “You, me, and Gwen are the only ones here not getting smooches. Or, it used to be just us. So now I must live vicariously through you.”

“I’m sure Smokehouse would happily tell you all about his and Dani’s smooches,” Daisha replied with a malicious smile.

Keely and I made the same face, one of horrified disgust. Neither of us wanted to hear about our siblings kissing. “I-”

“Well, I need to know about this slap,” Seek said, cutting me off once again.

“Why did you slap him?” Sloane asked, eyes wide.

I pondered that, trying to figure out how to explain myself. “I-” This time I broke off, eyeing them all with murderous intent in case they wanted to cut me off a third time. They

were all watching me with overly innocent expressions, eager to hear my answer. “Smoke walked in and I sort of... panicked.”

Seek chuckled in evil glee. She was feeling a little violent in the last trimester of her pregnancy. “Are we talking a little tap?”

Guilt twisted through me. “I hauled off and *hit* him,” I whispered, covering my mouth in horror at the memory.

The others laughed, even Sloane tried to smother a giggle. She gave me a sympathetic look. “He’s a big man. I doubt you hurt him.”

“Well, not physically anyway,” Jordan agreed with a laugh. “Might have wounded his pride.”

“Eh,” Seek said, sipping on her half-gallon-sized water cup she hauled around. It was purple with gold sparkles and a straw. “More like you threw a gauntlet down for a challenge. He’s going to be coming for you now.”

That made me swallow hard. Not in fear. I was moments away from needing to squeeze my thighs together to quell the excitement the image of him chasing me down brought forth. It was something I’ve wanted for a long time. The feelings I had for Hellfire went so much deeper than a mere crush. That’s how it started out, ten years ago. An eighteen-year-old girl mooning over her brother’s best friend. It didn’t matter that he was ten years older than me.

He hadn’t seen me as anything more than a kid. I wasn’t sure I would ever graduate from kid sister in his eyes, but I’d done my damndest to flirt with him over the years. Then this morning he’d shocked me by kissing me. When had things changed between us? Or was he just experimenting? Hell never brought women home. There’d been a short stint when I was nineteen that he’d gotten himself a girlfriend. She’d lasted two short months and they’d fought like cats and dogs.

“Can you imagine some of these guys getting hit like that?” Keely asked, her blue eyes sparkling. “They’d lose their minds.”

“Not these men,” Jenny replied.

“She’s right,” Susie said with the shake of her head. “It would shock them, but they wouldn’t fly off the handle the way a lot of men would in their positions.”

“They have huge egos,” Tori added, “but they still have boundaries.”

“They’d just let any of us women hit them?” Keely asked, doubt ringing in her tone.

“They would,” Seek acknowledged, “but whoever your old man is will pay for it.”

“Seriously?” Kelly looked interested.

“Yeah,” I told her. “The men are the club. It’s theirs. And their woman is theirs. So when she misbehaves and affects the club, he takes the punishment.”

Keely’s mouth was hanging open. “That’s-”

“How things are done here,” I told her in a firm tone. Keely wasn’t dating a biker. That didn’t mean we didn’t consider her family. She was Dani’s sister and already we were becoming fast friends, but no one had explained all these rules to her. Who knew what Toxic and Butcher had told her the day Lock had made them speak with her. “We really should go over it all with you,” I said, meeting Susie’s eyes.

Susie, Daisha, and Tori nodded in agreement. The four of us had been here the longest. And even though I wasn’t an old lady, it still fell to me to help newcomers, the same as the other women. “We’ll do that soon,” Susie confirmed.

The only one missing from the conversation was Dani. She and Smoke were out shopping for some baby furniture. They went out not long after they’d gotten back from an ultrasound appointment. They were too excited to sit still. We warned her not to get too much. The triple baby shower was next Friday. She’d promised they wouldn’t go overboard and would leave us some things on the registry that we could buy for them. I already knew exactly what I was doing for all three women and their babies. I couldn’t wait to see the looks on their faces.

“Back to this slap,” Seek said, changing the subject back to the matter at hand.

“I still can’t believe I did that,” I muttered.

“I still don’t get *why* you did,” Keely echoed, a question in her voice.

Susie laughed. “You haven’t been around over the years to see the way Smoke has run off any man who was remotely interested in Kit.”

“He’s done some damage,” I admitted.

“Like...to your confidence?” Jenny asked.

“No, like broken noses, arms, even a femur.”

They were all staring at me slack jawed. I nodded. Taking a breath, I took the plunge. “I’ve been wanting Hellfire to kiss me since I first met him.”

“Awww,” they all chorused.

I glared at them all in mock disapproval. “Not awww. He’s Smoke’s best friend.”

“I thought Ricochet was Smoke’s best friend?” Gwen pointed out.

“The three of them are like the Three Stooges,” Tori said, waving a hand as if that didn’t matter.

“The Three Musketeers,” Susie added.

“The Three Little Pigs,” Daisha said with a snort.

We all paused silently and looked from one to the other, considering the analogies. In unison we all agreed, “Stooges!” we shouted with a chorus of laughter.

I shook my head as the giggles died down. “They’re close. How can I make a move on Hell knowing what my brother is capable of? That he doesn’t want me dating bikers? It could ruin their friendship. Worse, it could cause issues for both of them with the club.” I sighed and rested my chin on my palm.

“Oh my God.”

I looked over at Seek, frowning at the growing smile on her face. “What?”

“You *love* him.”

My eyes rounded in shock. “What? No. I mean... Of course, I love my brother.” She wasn’t talking about Smoke and we both knew it.

The others gasped. Jordan bounced on her seat in excitement. “You owe me twenty bucks,” she told Gwen, holding out her hand. Gwen grumbled before rummaging through her purse and slapping a bill into Jordan’s palm.

My mouth dropped open. “You were gambling on me and Hell?”

Jordan and Gwen let out twin snorts as though that was a stupid question. “Of course,” Jordan said. “I had you saying the L word in the next three months. Gwen thought it would take longer.”

“I didn’t say the L word!”

Jordan gave me a smug smile. “Seek’s right. There’s hearts in your eyes and little birdies floating over your head. You’re totally in love with him.”

“Am not,” I muttered. I wasn’t ready to admit something like that to myself, let alone anyone else. “I’m just...insanely attracted to him.” It was the most I’d ever admitted, out loud, to anyone.

“Perfect,” Keely said, taking over the conversation. “Then tell us about that kiss!”

Groaning, I dropped my head onto the bar. The thunk echoed through my skull. “It was...amazing. He’s so strong and can just kind of move you wherever he wants you. Had me smashed up against him before I even realized what was happening.”

Keely sighed with longing. “I need to get a boyfriend.”

“Better wait until all this crap with The Italians is over with,” Seek advised.

“What? Why?” Keely asked.

“There’s no way the guys are letting anyone new on this compound right now,” Jenny replied. “Priest is locking the compound down per Lockout’s orders. Canceled a sleepover with a few of the girls’ friends and everything. No one is going anywhere and no one is coming here.”

Keely looked between us with desperation crawling over her features. “But that could take weeks to resolve,” she said in horror.

“Probably months,” Susie claimed.

“Yeah,” Jordan added, “cause once The Italians are toast-”

“Bruschetta,” Gwen quipped. That lightened the mood as we laughed at her joke.

“Then they still have to deal with Fremont,” Jordan finished.

Keely’s face was a building storm cloud. “They can’t keep me from dating for months. I’m young. I have oats to sow.”

“Do women sow oats?” Sloane asked the room.

“I’ll wither away and die an old woman. I have needs,” she insisted. “Right now those needs don’t involve bikers.”

Shaking my head, I laughed at her, though I understood her plight. It was how I felt a lot of the time, thanks to my overprotective brother. “Lock gave the order this morning,” I said with a shrug. “If you thought they were bad after the event center debacle, you haven’t seen anything yet.”

“Well, too bad for Lock,” Keely said, crossing her arms over her chest. “I have work.”

“I thought you were on vacation?” Seek asked.

“Well, if I’m here I may as well work,” she amended.

“He’s not going to like that,” I pointed out.

She grumbled something under her breath, but didn’t repeat it when asked. “What are you planning to do about Hellfire?” she asked, changing the subject.

As much as I wanted to keep her in the hot seat and ask what she'd said, the others had focused on me again. "I'm not exactly experienced with men," I started. "I didn't even get my first kiss until I was a senior in high school. Smoke would probably shit himself if he found out I wasn't a virgin." Giving them a desperate look, I shrugged. "I don't know how to do this."

"Flirt?" Susie asked.

"Pursue a forbidden romance?" Daisha added.

"Seduce your brother's best friend?" Jordan tacked on, catching onto the game.

I glowered at them. "All of that," I admitted. "Or how to figure out if Hell is actually into me."

"Girl," Gwen said with a laugh. "He kissed you."

That made all of the women experienced in the ways of bikers laugh. "He's a biker," I clarified when the others looked confused.

"They'd kiss a brick wall if it stood still long enough," Tori replied.

"I'm pretty sure Butcher did that last night," Sloane said with a giggle. We all looked at her in shock until she blushed.

"We've got you making jokes now," I said in wonder. She was coming out of her shell so much and it made me happy to see.

"I'm not sure she was joking," Seek quipped.

"Okay, bikers aren't exactly discerning," Keely said, getting back to the matter at hand. "Got it, but..." she gave me a probing look, "is Hellfire like that?"

I froze, trying to think back to the last time I'd heard any kind of gossip about him and another woman. My brows furrowed as I thought hard. "I..."

"No, he isn't," Susie said. "He had a girlfriend for a few months while he was prospecting, but then she was just gone one day."

“We never did find out what happened to her,” Tori mused.

“I think I know what happened to her,” Jordan said, giving me a shrewd look.

“There were women over the years who tried to catch his eye,” Daisha told us. “And he’d flirt, but nothing ever stuck. Most likely because he was already interested in someone.” Now they were all staring at me.

Rolling my eyes, I shook my head. “There’s no way he’s been interested in me for that long. I was only nineteen at the time.” None of them looked convinced. “He’s never made a move.”

“He did this morning,” Gwen pointed out.

I was at a loss for words. I wasn’t sure why he kissed me. What his game was. Or why thinking about the way his mouth had moved over mine was still tying my stomach into knots hours later.

The clearing of a throat had us all jumping like guilty children. My relief was white-hot when I saw that it was Hush in the doorway of the club’s bar. If it had been Hell I would have died of embarrassment. It was one thing to admit to these women that I’d had a thing for him for years. I wasn’t sure I wanted him to know that yet. And if, by some miracle, he felt the same way about me, there was still the matter of my brother to deal with.

I refused to be the reason Hellfire torpedoed his place here in this club, or his friendship. Smiling, I waved at Seek as Hush whisked her off for her afternoon nap. It was so nice to see them so happy and excited about their new marriage and upcoming baby. I was over the moon that so many of the men were finding these amazing women that they loved. It had never crossed my mind to be jealous. I always assumed one day I’d find the one meant for me. In that deep-seated, secret part of my heart, I knew I’d already found him long ago.

CHAPTER 4



Hellfire

I pulled back into the club compound and looked around as I got off my bike. Most everyone was beginning to get home from work and the parking lot was filling with bikes and cars. Spending the day with my parents had melted the tension from my shoulders. Even though I had business to take care of, I was ready to take on the feisty brunette who tied me into knots with one glance.

The gravel crunched under my heels as I walked. Eyeing The Bunker, I decided this was a good time to speak to Kit. It was best to get everything out in the open. I'd shocked her this morning with that kiss, but I needed to explain to her why I'd finally shown my interest.

A sound had me turning my head and my brows shot up as I saw Jordan unloading groceries from the trunk of her car. I adjusted course and stopped next to her. "Let me help you."

She let out a yelp and turned, clearly startled. "Sorry! I didn't hear you."

A grin spread over my face. "No?"

She gave me a guilty smile. "I was going through a checklist in my head. Sort of distracted me."

"What checklist?"

"Which groceries go to who." She tossed me another smile as I started loading bags into my arms. "Those are for Seek. If

you could please drop them off at her place?”

“Of course. You put them in order and I’ll go drop them off to everyone.”

“Thanks, Hell,” she said. “You’re so sweet.”

I laughed and shook my head. Girls had been saying that to me since I was in middle school. As if I wasn’t a typical teenage boy, and now a grown man, who had a raging libido and dirty mind. My mother had just taught me manners. Somehow, they’d stuck.

Making my way up the stairs with each family’s groceries allowed me the time to figure out what I was going to say to Kit. Last night was one of her nights off, so I knew she’d be spending the day cleaning The Bunker. She was incredibly dedicated to the club in her own way. She loved it just as much as the rest of us, since she’d been raised here.

“Is that it?” I asked Jordan when I came down from the last trip.

“That’s all,” she confirmed. “Thanks so much for your help.”

“Nice of you to get everyone’s groceries.”

She shrugged. “I just picked everything up on my way home.”

Frowning, I looked around. “Where’s Ricochet? Didn’t he go with you today?” It was Lock’s orders that none of the women go anywhere alone right now. Smart, since The Italians proved they weren’t above taking our families.

“He did,” she replied, “but Smoke pulled him away as soon as we got back. He needed some help putting something together. Ricochet promised to come back and help. Smoke looked so excited I didn’t have the heart to ask them to help with the groceries first.”

My cell dinged in my pocket and I pulled it out and grinned down at the picture of a crib that Smoke texted me. I showed it to Jordan and she clapped her hands together.

“It’s so pretty! They chose a good one.”

Looking up, I greeted Ricochet as he hurried across the parking lot. “Work’s done, Asshole,” I joked. “Now you owe me.”

Ricochet groaned and gave Jordan a mock frown. “You couldn’t have waited?”

“The ice cream couldn’t wait,” she shot back. “I should have let you give Seek her melted strawberry ice cream. It would have been fun to watch.”

Ricochet chuckled. “Who likes strawberry anyway?”

“She’s been eating it with pickles,” Jordan said with a grimace.

We both looked at her in horror. “No way?” I asked. “Isn’t that some sort of crime?”

“What? Like the Ice Cream Police will come for her?”

“There should be such a thing.” I gave a mock shudder.

She laughed. “I don’t know what it is about pregnancy that makes you eat weird things, but it does, I guess.”

The door to The Bunker slammed shut, drawing my attention. I didn’t see who’d gone in, but I knew it had to be Kit. “Well, I’ll see you two later.”

“Bye,” Jordan told me, her eyes twinkling with amusement.

I got the distinct impression she knew exactly why I wanted to leave. Giving her a suspicious look, I resumed making my way toward our bar.

“Shit!”

“Would you quit dropping it?” Butcher bellowed.

“I didn’t fucking drop it! You pulled it out of my damn hands,” Toxic shot back.

Stopping, I watched as they argued over a car engine block. It was on the ground as the two bickered back and forth. Sometimes they reminded me of an old married couple. “Whatcha got there?” I asked, walking up.

“Fixing up that old Camaro sitting in the back lot,” Toxic said, bumping the block with his boot.

“I had no idea you could rebuild cars, Toxic.”

The man shrugged. “As long as I can get this block over there without this asshole breaking shit, I can.”

“Why use a lift when we can get a workout in?” Butcher said in a mocking tone.

Bending, I grunted as I heaved the block up into my arms.

“Whoa, whoa,” Toxic yelled. “That’s at least two hundred and seventy pounds,” he muttered after he realized I wasn’t having any trouble holding it.

“Show me where you want it.”

“Thank fuck,” Butcher said. “I was getting sick of hauling shit back and forth. It’ll get done a lot quicker with Hell around.”

Chuckling, I followed them over to where they had everything they’d need set up. “Chose a bad time to do this,” I told them. “It’s hot as fuck out here.”

“I’m building a temporary shed over it,” Toxic told me. “It’ll give us some shade at least.”

Setting the block down, I frowned. “Is there anything you can’t do?”

Toxic winked at me, but Butcher was already shoving me back toward the area where they had the truck and trailer parked. They were filled with all the spare parts the pair would need to rebuild the car.

“What made you decide to do this?” I asked.

“Lock asked us to,” Butcher said.

I hid my grin. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to realize that Lockout was keeping them busy while he figured out what to do about The Italians. The last thing he needed was these two underfoot, causing trouble while we were surrounded by enemies.

“Cool!” Sean came running up, followed by his mother. “What’s all this?”

“Parts to rebuild a car,” Butcher told him. He pointed across the lawn that Rip and Priest kept carefully maintained. It was the reason they couldn’t just drive the parts over to where the car was parked in the back. Lock would have their balls if they ruined the spot he’d created for the families to hang out and the kids to play. Later, they could drive the car out and around the compound, through the desert, back to the road, but taking the trailer through was a recipe for disaster. It would end up getting stuck in the soft, silty, desert sand.

“Can I help?” Sean asked, looking between us and Gwen.

“Oh. Uh...” Gwen froze, her eyes on us in question. “I don’t know, Sean.”

“Sure he can,” Toxic said. “As long as it’s alright with you, Gwen.”

“Yeah... I guess that’s okay,” she replied with a smile. “Dinner is in two hours, though,” she cautioned.

“We’ll make sure he makes it up on time,” Butcher told her.

She nodded and walked away. The women had already learned that it was safe to leave their kids with these two. If only they knew how dangerous these men really were, they might not feel so comfortable. Or maybe they would because the lengths Toxic and Butcher would go to in order to protect these kids were immeasurable. It was the same for us all.

Sean tugged on my cut. “What’s up, Squirt?” I asked.

“Can I tell you a joke?”

“Sure.”

“Two jokes!”

I laughed. “Okay. Two. Give ‘em to me.”

“In the beginning there was nothing...then...Chuck Norris roundhouse kicked nothing and told it to get a job.”

We all chuckled.

Sean's face lit up at finding an appreciative audience for his jokes. "Mom didn't think it was very funny." He made a face. "She didn't even know who Chuck Norris was."

"What?" Toxic asked, horrified.

Sean nodded in a solemn manner. "Static showed me some of his movies."

Static was likely going to get a talking to from the overprotective Gwen. "What's the second joke?" I asked.

Before he could answer, Priest's daughters and Grace came running up. "Hi!" Caitlyn called out as they all approached.

"What are you doing?" Taylor asked with a scrunch of the nose as she eyed the pile of car parts.

"I was telling a joke," Sean informed them.

"Go on," Gabby said, folding her arms over her chest.

Sean took a deep breath, as though his next words were incredibly important. I shared an amused look with Toxic and Butcher. "Chuck Norris is tied up, unconscious, and being held hostage. Then he smiles to himself and thinks, 'I've got them right where I want them.'"

Silence stretched out as Sean finished his joke and the little girls processed it. "That doesn't make sense," Gabby declared. "If he's unconscious, how is he thinking anything to himself?"

"It's *Chuck Norris*," Sean said with a roll of his eyes. He gave us a pained look. One that said he knew girls just wouldn't understand.

Just as the kids geared up to argue with each other, Butcher put a stop to it with a few simple words. "Makes sense to me."

Everyone stared at him for a few moments and I couldn't help but shake my head. It was such a Butcher thing to say. Waving at the others, I walked away. "See you later."

Other than calling out a few hellos to my brothers and their families as I passed, I ignored everyone. Normally, I had no problem helping wherever I was needed, but this time I needed

to take some time to myself so I could speak with Kit. I wasn't about to let days pass with us not talking about that kiss.

I made it to the door of The Bunker without getting pulled into anything else. Breathing a sigh of relief, I shoved open the door. Kit's head popped up from behind the bar. Eyes narrowing on her beautiful, dirt smudged face, I asked, "What are you doing back there?"

She disappeared behind the bar once more as I made my way across the room. "Cleaning the grout lines back here."

"You've got to be kidding me. That can't be part of your job."

"Well, the cleaning crew doesn't do it. Someone has to," she informed me.

I leaned over the bar top and stared down at her. She was on her hands and knees, scrubbing away with a toothbrush. "Get up, Kit."

Her head snapped up at the anger in my voice. "What?"

"Get off the floor."

She set the brush aside, wiped her hands on her jeans and stood up. A frown marred her pretty face and worry clouded her gray-blue eyes. "What's wrong?"

"You shouldn't be doing that shit. That's the cleaning crew's job." I made a mental note to talk to Riptide about sitting down with the owner of the cleaning service and Kit so that she could explain what she wanted done in the bar and how often. "It's bullshit that you're left doing their job."

She looked shocked. "I don't mind-"

"I do."

That made her blink. "I like to be helpful, Hell-"

I cut her off again. "You're plenty helpful without needing to crawl around on your hands and knees cleaning up the floors. I'll take care of it."

"...thank you. I think." She gave me a tumultuous smile.

It wasn't hard to see that she didn't know what to do with me. The moment I walked in and saw her it put me in a mood. That mood had taken a downward swing once I realized what she was doing. She wasn't our servant. She wasn't required to do half the shit she did around here. She was organized and liked things to be clean and orderly. That often meant she got stuck doing it because her standard was higher than other people's.

"We need to talk," I told her. Realizing I snapped that at her, I tried to soften my tone. "About this morning."

Kit nodded and stood across the bar from me. "Okay." It took all my willpower not to grab her and pull her into my lap. *Although that might be more effective than anything I was about to say.* She was everything I wanted. Now, I just had to convince her of that.

CHAPTER 5



Kit

He was glowering at me. It wasn't hard to see that he was pissed, I just hoped it wasn't all because of the slap from this morning. Guilt pricked at me once more because of how hard I'd hit him. "I'm so sorry for slapping you," I blurted out before he had a chance to say anything.

One dark eyebrow rose as he studied me. "I can take a hit. Though, I'm curious why you slapped me? You didn't seem to mind what we were doing." His voice was deep and smooth, like melted chocolate, and my body heated at the memory of his lips on mine.

"Smoke walked in," I explained with a shrug. "It was instinct."

He nodded in understanding. "I get it. He's your brother and he's protective of you."

"That's an understatement." Smoke was so good at chasing men away that until Hell had kissed me I had nearly given up hope of feeling a man's touch again. I hadn't been with anyone since high school. I sighed as I looked around the bar. It was empty, except for us, and that was probably for the best. "He's not going to be happy about this."

"About what?"

I looked up into his dark eyes and swallowed back the urge to leap over the bar top and kiss him again. He was watching

me with a penetrating look. One that made my insides flutter. “The fact that we kissed. He’s probably going to lay into both of us once he catches up with us,” I replied.

“I’ll take care of him,” he rumbled. “There’s no need for you to worry.”

Sighing, I leaned forward onto my arms on the bar. “Hell...” This was hard. Admitting that I liked him put me in a vulnerable position, but I didn’t want him to think otherwise. I was basically in love with the man, though I still refused to admit it out loud. “I’m not worried for me,” I explained. “I don’t want to ruin your relationship with my brother. Or get either of you into trouble with the club,” I admitted.

His eyes narrowed. “That’s what the slap was about?”

Grimacing, I nodded. “Sorry, *again*.”

He gripped the edge of the bar top, squeezing it. I wasn’t sure if he was imagining strangling me, or just fighting for control of the anger that was flooding over his face. Either way, I was too busy staring at his forearms as muscles flexed under tanned skin and veins popped out like they were in this month’s issue of a nurse’s porn catalog. One of my childhood friends had become a nurse and she was always going off about men’s veins and how much they were appreciated when they stood out like Hell’s. Realizing it was quiet, I looked up and found him watching me. He still looked pissed, but now it was mixed with resignation and a hint of a smile. He moved around the bar, coming to a stop near me. I had to tilt my head back to stare up at him. I was five-eight but he had nearly a foot on me at six-six. The man was huge.

“You’re not going to ruin anything,” he told me, voice firm. “I’m not worried about Smokehouse.”

“You’re not?” I asked, skeptical.

He shook his head and reached over to grasp my chin in one hand. “No. And you shouldn’t be either.”

My breath caught as his thumb stroked over my bottom lip. His dark eyes followed that movement and I felt the heat of his gaze like a physical touch.

“I’ve wanted to kiss you for years, Kit,” he admitted.

“R-really?” I hated the way my voice broke. “I’ve wanted that, too,” I told him.

The look on his face was nothing short of triumphant. He leaned forward and kissed me again. One hand gripped the bar top and the other settled on his bicep as I fought to stay upright when my knees went weak. He was so good at this. So good at everything. It wasn’t fair. How could I possibly compete with all the women who’d come before me? I didn’t know how many there were. His social life was a mystery to me.

He pulled back and studied me for a minute, his expression serious. “I want more than just a kiss from you, Vixen.”

That made me blink. “Like what?” I asked, tone suspicious.

He chuckled. “I want everything you have to give. I want you to be my old lady.”

My jaw dropped in shock. Just like that, he said the words I’d longed to hear for years. “Your...old lady?” I whispered, afraid he would take it back if the words were said too loudly.

“Yeah.” He leaned forward again until our faces were only inches apart. “You want that?” he asked, voice soft as his eyes searched mine.

“Yes,” I breathed. “Yes, please.”

He grinned at the way I begged. “Good girl,” he murmured against my lips before kissing me again. This time it was a slow kiss. He took his time exploring my mouth. His tongue slid along mine, teasing and tasting. It was like he wanted to savor every moment of the kiss and make sure I knew exactly how much he wanted me.

When he finally pulled back, I was breathing heavily and my heart was racing. For such a quiet man, he sure packed a punch in the kissing department. He’d snuck past all my defenses and now I was spinning out of control.

“I’m going to go talk to Smokehouse.”

“Hellfire-”

He cut me off with another quick kiss. “Don’t worry, Vixen. Everything’s going to be fine.”

“You’re giving Smokehouse too much credit,” I warned him, but he just chuckled and kissed my cheek.

“I’ll see you later.” He turned and left without another word.

I stared at the door as it swung shut behind him. My fingers lifted to my lips and I couldn’t help but rub them. “Was that a dream?” I muttered to myself. It had to be, right? No way the man I’d been pining over for years just walked in here and told me he wanted me to be his old lady. Then kissed me in a way that nearly had me combusting in his arms. Things like this just didn’t happen to me. It just seemed too easy, like I needed to be extra cautious now. Hope was surging in my chest, but I needed to be careful. Life had a way of knocking me on my ass anytime I got my hopes up. And that *never* felt good.

Staring down at the floor, I considered going back to scrubbing. Cleaning always had a way of soothing my chaotic thoughts. Then Hell’s angry face flashed through my mind, and I figured I’d better not. I scooped up my supplies and stowed them all away inside the closet in the back. Pausing after I shut the door, I thought about our kiss again—well, kisses—and let out a shaky laugh. Giving in, I pinched my arm, hard, then yelped when the pain hit. Definitely not dreaming. Shaking my head in bewilderment, I spoke out loud. “What the hell just happened?”

“Kit!”

I jumped as Smokehouse bellowed my name from out in the bar. “Shit,” I muttered, stepping out of the back office area. He sounded pissed off. Had he seen Hell leave? Did he know what had just happened?

“Yeah?” I asked cautiously, coming around the end of the bar.

He was standing near one of the pool tables with his arms folded over his chest. His eyes were narrowed and his lips

were pressed into a thin line. “We need to talk.”

“About what?” I asked, trying for nonchalance.

His brows shot up and he gave me a disbelieving look. “You know damn well what.”

“No, actually, I don’t.”

“Jesus Christ.” He raked a hand through his hair. He pinned me with a look. “You’re not going to admit it?”

Pursing my lips together, I shrugged, then gave him a cautious smile. “Not sure what you’re talking about.” Hell said he was going to talk to Smoke. The last thing I wanted was to get in the middle and show Hell I didn’t trust him when he said he’d handle it.

“I saw the way you and Hell-”

“Smoke,” I interrupted.

He broke off and glared at me. “What?”

“If you want to talk about this, you need to go speak with your friend.”

His jaw dropped open. “What?”

“Go talk to Hell. I have work to do.” I turned away from him, grabbing the cloth and spray I used to wipe down this place every day.

“You’re going to let us work this out between ourselves?” Smoke asked, sounding cautious.

My gut twisted. I was an independent woman. I ran my own life. It irritated me the way Smoke phrased that, which told me he was trying to get under my skin on purpose. Shooting him a look over my shoulder, I said, “Yup.” Turning away from the disbelief etched on his face without mocking him wasn’t easy. He’d never leave if I did that, though, so I focused on removing the liquor bottles from the stand they were sitting on then wiping down the wood.

His chuckle was deep and echoed through the empty bar. He shook his head, sounding bewildered. “Well, shit. Okay.”

I waited until I heard the door bang shut behind me before my shoulders sagged. None of these men could go through a door without yanking it open or slamming it shut. I've had to tighten the hinges on the bar door more often than I cared to admit. Setting down the rag and spray bottle, I gave in to the need to analyze my conflicting emotions. I already told Hellfire yes. I wanted to be his, wanted it more than anything, but the doubts were beginning to creep in.

What was I doing? Hellfire was one of my best friends. I'd always had a thing for him, but he was Smoke's friend first and foremost. He'd always been off limits. Not because of Smoke's overprotective bullshit, but because I always worried about losing that friendship. Losing him.

"Screw this," I muttered. I shoved the bottles back onto the shelf, ignoring the little voice inside that insisted I straighten them until they were spaced equally apart and the labels faced the front. I needed to talk with someone or I was going to lose my mind.

I squinted as I stepped out of the bar and the sunlight hit me. Who could I speak to? I had my choice of all the women. They would all be willing to help, but I needed someone who knew something about rejection. About it taking a while before her biker gave into his feelings and claimed her. I needed Seek.

Taking the stairs in the clubhouse two at a time, I bolted until I skidded to a stop in front of Seek and Hush's apartment door. I was breathing heavily, more from the anxiety of the conversation I was about to have than anything else. I forced myself to knock. The sound echoed through my mind and I almost chickened out.

"Come in!"

Biting my lower lip, I hesitated. Was I ready to lay myself bare just to get some advice?

"I swear to God if you make me get up from this couch I'm going to make you pay! *Come in!*" Seek called out from inside the apartment.

Chuckling, I opened the door. “Hey, sorry.”

“Oh.” She frowned. “That’s okay. I thought it was one of the guys. Hush has had them stopping in all day to check on me since he’s out doing something for Lock.”

“That’s okay,” I said, coming over to where she was sitting on the couch. An air conditioner was blowing directly on her and she was in shorts and a tank top. Her belly was so big there was a gap between where the end of the shirt stopped and her shorts started. The shorts were huge. They had to be Hush’s.

“Sorry,” she said with a wry smile. “I don’t really like maternity clothes. So when I’m home I just-” she broke off and waved a hand at herself.

“You look adorable,” I told her.

She scrunched her nose and pointed at the chair next to the couch. “Sit.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” I replied with a laugh.

She ignored my jab and studied me with shrewd eyes. She and I were a lot alike. Independent, strong, we even sort of looked alike with long dark hair and blue eyes. Mine were a little grayer than hers were, but some might mistake us for sisters if they didn’t know any better. “Is everything okay, Kit?”

I sighed and dropped my head into my hands. They were cradling my forehead as I stared at the floor. “I wanted to ask you something.”

“Okay.”

Lifting my head, I looked over at her. “When Hush was firmly in his own head and thinking that the two of you couldn’t be together, how did that make you feel?”

Her brows pulled low over her eyes. “Like shit, if I’m being honest. Eventually, I just had to walk away. Lock had a lot to do with Hush finally realizing he wanted me to be his old lady.”

Groaning, I nodded. “That’s what I figured.”

“Why?”

I gave her a pleading look. As much as I needed her to ask that question, I couldn't just blurt out the answer. I hadn't spoken about any of this, before this morning, to anyone before. I was used to keeping it buried inside. In one day, Hellfire had turned my world upside down.

Seek's eyes softened. “You obviously need some help figuring it out, Honey. Why not let me give you some advice?”

I blew out a breath and launched into it before I could talk myself into leaving. “I'm in love with Hellfire.” Seek's eyebrows shot up, but she didn't say anything to interrupt. So I rushed on in my explanation. “I've been in love with him for a really long time now.”

“And he kissed you,” she prompted when I trailed off.

“Again.”

“Wait.” She sat up a little, her eyes sparkling with excitement. “He kissed you a second time?”

I nodded. “And said he wants me to be his old lady.”

She sat there, absorbing the information before she spoke. “So, when you were asking about what happened with me and Hush, it was because you feel like Hush did?”

“Sort of,” I whispered. “I want him. Hell, I mean,” I clarified. The last thing I needed was an angry pregnant lady after me because she thought I wanted her husband. She was mean as a badger when she was threatened. “But I'm terrified,” I admitted.

“Of what?”

“Everything,” I sighed. “But mostly that something will go wrong and I'll lose him. And that my brother and he will lose their friendship. But mostly...that I'll lose him,” I repeated.

Seek nodded in understanding. “I get that, but sweetie... You can't let that stop you.”

I made a face at her. “Why not?”

“Because,” she said in an overly patient tone, “then you’d be cheating both you and Hellfire out of something potentially amazing.”

“And if we try this and it doesn’t work out?” I asked. “I’ll lose my home.”

“Huh?” She shook her head in disbelief. “Lock would never kick you out, or fire you. He wouldn’t tell you that you couldn’t come around anymore.”

“He wouldn’t,” I agreed. “But that doesn’t mean I could stay and see Hellfire moving on. Marrying someone. Having kids with them.”

She sat back again and a smile spread over her face. “You really *are* in love with him. I had no idea.”

“I tried not to let anyone know,” I told her with a rueful smile.

“It worked. Look. Is having these deep feelings scary? Yes. Could it go badly? Yes. Does that mean you shouldn’t try? No way!” She shrugged her shoulders. “You have a fifty-fifty chance here, Kit. Love and happiness, or despair. It’s the risk we all take. And in my opinion,” she patted her swollen stomach, “it’s absolutely worth it.”

The tension bled out of my shoulders and I sagged back against the chair. “I know. I think I was just looking for someone to confirm it.”

“So why do you still look so glum?”

“Now Hellfire has to deal with my brother.”

Seek snorted out a laugh. “That would be fun to watch, but don’t worry. Smokehouse doesn’t stand a chance.”

“You think?” I asked.

“If Hellfire fails to convince him, we’ll sic Dani on him,” Seek offered.

We laughed together at the thought of my brother’s pregnant old lady tearing into him for standing between me

and Hell. “That would be fun to watch,” I said, echoing her earlier words.

I went and sat near Seek, resting my hand on her belly so I could feel her baby move. We sat that way and chatted until Hush finally came home.

“Hey, Kit,” he said as he walked in the door. “Anythin’ I can help you with?”

“No thanks, Hush. I was just keeping Seek company for a while.” I gave her a look that told her to keep her trap shut, at least until I left. I didn’t want to be speaking to all of Hell’s brothers about this before he even spoke to mine. I said goodbye to them both, leaning down to give Seek a hug. “Thanks, girl.”

“Anytime,” she whispered back.

Shoving my hands in my pockets I headed further down the hallway to the apartment the club had given me when they’d ordered us all to move into the clubhouse. I shut the door behind me and leaned back against it. I was fighting so many fears, but I couldn’t let them take away the one thing I’d always wanted.

Talking to Seek had helped me realize that I was holding myself back out of fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of losing everyone I loved here at the club. Fear of being hurt. It was time to take control of my life. Time to stop hiding behind my fears and start living.

I’d never know if I didn’t try. If things went badly with Hellfire, we could work through it. I wasn’t going to let my brother, or my worries, dictate who I dated or how I lived my life anymore.

CHAPTER 6



Hellfire

The days passed in a blur and not once had I found the right time to talk to Smoke about my plans for his sister. Lock and the other club members were keeping me busy during the day and I didn't want to interrupt Smoke and Dani at night. They were busy enjoying their time together before they ended up with a new baby.

Swiping my hand over the back of my neck, I brushed the sweat away. It was scorching hot as summer settled down on us. But I'd finished the errand Lock had needed doing and I was back at the compound. And more importantly, so was Smoke. He and Ricochet had their heads together as they sat out back at one of the picnic tables, looking at something on Smoke's phone. Their laughter floated on the hot, dry breeze.

"Hey," I called out as I approached.

Both their heads lifted and they grinned in greeting. "Check this out," Smoke said, passing over his phone.

I watched the video with a grin as Priest's girls tormented Butcher and Toxic. "I swear, those two were afraid of kids not that long ago."

"Babies," Ricochet replied.

Arching my brow in question, I handed Smoke's phone back to him. "What?"

"They're terrified of babies," Ricochet elaborated.

“They seem to really enjoy kids, though,” Smoke said.

“They’re easily corruptible,” I replied, answering his unasked question about why that would be.

Both men chuckled again. “True,” Smoke said. His eyes settled on me and he leaned forward, his forearms on the table. “Haven’t seen you around much in the last few days.”

“Lock needed help with something.”

“Something to do with The Italians?” Ricochet asked, sitting up a little straighter. We were all eager to pay Amato back for ordering his men to come after one of our own.

“He thought it might be, but it turned out to be a dead end,” I replied.

“Rat hasn’t found them yet?” Ricochet questioned with a frown.

“He knows where they are,” Smoke said. “We all know where they are.”

Afanzo Amato’s home was nestled into the Catalina foothills. It belonged to his father before him and was the place their empire was born. I doubted their rich neighbors had any idea they lived out there, tucked in the mountains, next to a mafia don. A grin spread over my face as I thought about them finding out about that.

“What are you thinking?” Ricochet asked, eyeing me suspiciously.

I chuckled. “Just thinking about how much fun it will be when we go after those fuckers.”

Smoke grinned. “You have a mean streak.”

“I do,” I agreed with a shrug. “But I’m not going to apologize for it.”

“Never expected you to. We’re all going to enjoy the destruction The Italians have coming to them.” Smoke stood and stretched. “We’re heading in for a drink. You coming?”

I shook my head. “I need to speak to you.”

Smoke's brows shot up. "Oh yeah? What about?"

"Not here," I told him. "Want to go a round in the gym?"

"Fuck yeah, I do," he muttered. "I haven't had a chance to box in weeks."

Ricochet stood and slapped us both on the back as he walked by. "See you two later."

Heading into the clubhouse, I made my way down the hall toward the gym. It was quiet here this afternoon. Most of our brothers were either at work or out running errands for the club.

The gym door opened and I heard Smoke's footsteps behind me as he followed me inside. We both went over to the lockers and started stripping off our shirts. He was already dressed in shorts and sneakers, he and Ricochet must have just finished up a workout, so I quickly changed.

"So," he said, rubbing his hands together with a grin, "what did you need to talk about?"

"I kissed Kit," I told him, punching my gloves together as I bent to make my way between the ropes of the boxing ring.

"Well, fuck. Warn a guy before you say shit like that," Smoke grumbled as he followed me in.

"You walked in on us," I pointed out.

"That was a nice slap she gave you," he replied, a wide grin splitting his face. "Not nearly as good as what I'm about to do to you, though."

"Do whatever you want," I growled, "but I'm taking Kit as mine."

That knocked him back a step. "What the fuck did you just say to me?"

Glaring at him, I stepped in and threw a quick jab at him while he wasn't paying attention. His head snapped backward and a malicious smile quirked my lips.

"Fuck! God dammit, Hell." He wiped his now bleeding nose on his forearm. It spread all over his face. "We haven't

fucking started yet!”

“The fuck we haven’t,” I muttered. “Fight and talk or get the shit kicked out of you. I don’t care which.”

“What’s up your ass today? And what the fuck do you mean, you’re *taking* Kit?”

“Making her my old lady.” I was circling him, waiting for him to slip up and drop his guard.

He sighed and shook his head. “You sure know how to ruin a guy’s fun.”

That had me stuttering to a stop. “What?” I ducked as he took my moment of surprise to throw a right hook at my face.

“I was planning on harassing you and making your life a living hell until you realized that you wanted Kit.”

This time his punch connected because I was standing like an asshole with my mouth hanging open. Swearing, I wiped blood from my face where his glove had split my eyebrow. “The fuck are you talking about?” I muttered, swiping more blood away before it dripped into my eye. I was expecting to have to beat Smokehouse into compliance, not have him admit that he wanted me to date his sister. This wasn’t like him at all.

“You seriously think I didn’t notice after the women were attacked at the Event Center?”

“Notice what?” I snapped, getting pissed off because he had me off balance.

Smoke bounced from foot to foot, looking for an opening in my guard. “How much you want her.”

My brows shot up, then immediately dropped back down in a scowl. “Noticed that, did you?” I watched him cautiously as he circled around me. Was this some kind of trick? Was he planning on telling me he’d give me his blessing only to make me drop my guard? Mentally, I shook off that thought. He was one of my best friends. Even as protective of his sister as he was, he wouldn’t do something like that to me. Which meant, this was really happening.

“It’s not like you were being fucking subtle,” he muttered.

I snorted. “I’ve been trying to keep my hands off her for years.”

“Why?”

“Because she’s your sister.”

He cocked his head, looking confused. “So?”

“You’ve beaten the shit out of every man who’s even looked sideways at her,” I told him, tone incredulous.

“That’s because none of them were worthy of her,” he replied with a shrug.

“And... I am?” We weren’t boxing anymore, just standing, bleeding, and talking.

“Who better for my sister than my best friend,” he answered with another shrug. “I know you better than anyone else fucking does, Hell. No one is better for Kit than you.”

“So, you’re not going to give me a hard time about this?” I asked. I was still suspicious of how easily this was happening.

“I mean, I still plan to fuck with you, but I won’t stand in your way.” His eyes narrowed. “If you hurt her though, all bets are off. I’ll fuck you up.”

Nodding, I held out my glove. “And I’ll let you.”

He tapped my glove. “Can we box now?”

“Yeah,” I growled and lunged at him, gloves swinging.

The gym inside the clubhouse rang with our grunts and hits as we fought. This was something all our brothers enjoyed doing, especially now that we were on hold, waiting to see what the plan for The Italians was. No one wanted to wait around, but we couldn’t storm the gates of Amato’s home either. We’d be gunned down by his security team before we ever stepped foot on his grounds.

That’s why Lock had me out so much this week. Me and a few others were tracking down any leads Rip, Dash, and Rat found to see if we could find another spot to confront the mafia at. It wasn’t proving easy. They either didn’t have

another area, or they made sure to keep that shit on the real down low because our guys weren't having any luck.

We had to come up with a solid plan. One that would take out Amato and as many of his men as possible. We weren't going to stop until they were all dead. Then we'd move on to Fremont. That fucker was next in line for a bullet. Not that we could just kill the DA that easily, but Lock would think of something. He always did. I was an enforcer. It wasn't my job to come up with game plans. It was my job to execute them and as many people as Lock and Rip pointed me at. I was perfectly happy with that.

Smoke and I finished up and went our separate ways after a shower. He was headed home to Dani. I had other plans. Plans that involved a certain woman with dark hair and blue-gray eyes. Pausing in the clubhouse hallway, I cocked my head as I studied the door across the way.

"What the fuck. May as well get all my answers at once." I knocked on the door.

"Come in."

I entered Lock's office and nodded in greeting at my president. He studied my bruised and still bleeding face. "Who won?" he asked.

Chuckling, I shrugged. "Hard to say." As strong as I was, Smokehouse was a fast fucker and we were decently matched. We'd beat on each other until we'd called a truce. My muscles were fatigued and I'd gotten the blessing I needed from him. Now it was time to get a second one. "I want to make Kit my old lady."

Lockout blinked at me as he processed the words I'd blurted out. He leaned back in his chair and folded his hands together on the desk in front of him. "About time." He motioned for me to take a seat.

"I'll make sure to take good care-" It was my turn to stare at him in confusion. "What?"

"I wondered when you would finally act on your feelings for her. Took you long enough."

“How did *you* know? How am I the last to know?” I muttered, though I wasn’t sure why I was bothering to ask. Not much escaped Lockout’s notice. It just made me wonder how many of my brothers knew I’d been in love with Kit. I thought I’d done a damn fine job of hiding it. Apparently not.

He chuckled. “You’ve been in love with her since you stepped foot on the compound. Have you spoken to Smokehouse?”

“What do you think this was about?” I motioned to my bloodied face. I ignored the slide of blood over my skin. Getting my eyebrow to stop bleeding had proven impossible.

He nodded. “Probably the smarter way to go about it. He’d handle a discussion like that better in the ring.”

That was the truth.

“So, why are you here, talking to me?” Lock asked.

“I want to make sure that you won’t have a problem with it.” I shrugged my shoulders.

“As much as I appreciate that, Hell, I don’t get involved in who dates who.”

“You sure seemed to get involved when Hush was trying to break it off with Seek,” I pointed out.

Lock made a face of concession. “You have me there. Why would I mind if you dated Kit?”

“She works for the club. If things go sideways, you’ll lose the one who actually manages The Bunker, ‘cause we all know it isn’t Riptide.” We both chuckled. “If it goes sideways, Smoke is going to try to kill me.”

“If it goes sideways you’ll be blaming yourself and a lot less useful,” Lock said, getting into the spirit. He leaned forward, holding my gaze. “That means there’s just one thing to do, Hell.”

I flinched, expecting the worst. “What’s that, Prez?”

“Don’t fuck things up with her. That’s if she even gives you a chance. Ultimately, the choice is completely up to her.”

That was all the blessing I needed. A smile slowly spread over my face. “I don’t plan on fucking up.”

“Good. Get out of my office. You’re bleeding all over my floor.” The words were said with a smile, so I didn’t take exception to them.

Shoving off the chair, I walked out the door. Now I just had to seal the deal with my fierce vixen. I’d never been closer to having everything I’d ever wanted than I was right now.

CHAPTER 7



Kit

I sighed as I stared down at the baseboard in front of me. The toothbrush I held was gripped in my hand like a weapon. I'd agreed to be Hell's old lady. Freaked out. Went to Seek and let her convince me to give the big oaf a chance. And what did I get for my troubles? Radio silence for over a week. As far as I knew he hadn't spoken to Smokehouse. He hadn't even been around much. Was he avoiding me?

It wasn't hard for me to tell that the anger I was feeling toward him spawned from my fear that he'd changed his mind. It didn't matter that I had my own panic attack about taking our relationship to the next level. I was allowed. He was the man. He was the one who was supposed to be certain about everything and convince me it would be alright. Huffing, I crossed my arms and legs as I sat on the floor and gave into the need to pout a little.

A knock on the door to my apartment had me rolling my eyes. It was probably Riptide wondering where something was over in the bar. It was my night off and he always double checked with me a few times during the day before he took over. Normally, I appreciated his thoroughness. Today I wasn't in the mood to answer a bunch of questions. Not even for the bar I loved. The Bunker was as much my baby as it was the MCs.

Smoke was helping Rip out tonight. The bar would be fine without me for the next two days. Well, I'd have a mess to clean up and reorganizing to do, but the building would still be standing. Probably. Smoke was working at the bar again since the guys weren't back working on the school yet. That project would likely be put off for a while. They couldn't afford to divide their attention and take the risk that the mafia would come after the clubhouse and those of us living here.

I opened the door and froze when I saw Hellfire was standing there instead of Riptide. My eyes widened as I looked up at him. He was wearing jeans and his cut, but he'd added a t-shirt that hugged his muscles. His hair was damp and his dark brown eyes were focused on me. A cut above his eye was fresh and angry. Blood dripped down over his cheek and into his dark beard.

"What happened?" I asked, my voice sounding breathless even to my own ears. Seeing him all bloodied up reminded me of how dangerous he was. Most of the time he was like a huge, huggable teddy bear. To me at least. It was easy to forget that this man could kill with his bare hands. Despite his injury, it was a welcomed reminder of who he could be. There was just something incredibly sexy about a man who was dangerous and willing to protect those he loved. I reached out and gripped his cut, tugging him into the apartment.

He came along easily enough, stepping inside, his eyes roaming over me in a way that made heat pool low in my belly. "It's nothing," he said.

"Sit," I told him, shoving him toward my dining room table. Before he could say anything, I hurried out of the room to grab my first aid kit. It was something necessary around this place. Blood and bikers went together like a hammer and nails.

When I came back out he was sitting there, holding a wad of paper towels to the gash on his forehead. "Let me see." I set the kit down and took the mass of towels from him when he handed it over. It was soaked with blood. I winced at the sight of the cut. "What happened?" I asked again.

“Had a run-in with your brother,” he said, voice strangely pleasant.

My eyes widened and I froze, staring down at him in shock. “What? Why?”

He sighed, his eyes studying me as I dabbed at the cut to try and clean it up so I could see what we were dealing with. “I told you I was going to talk to him about us.”

My heart started pounding as I realized what he meant. “You did,” I replied, a little hesitant, “but it’s been a week. I sort of thought-” Breaking off, I bit back what I was going to say.

“You thought I changed my mind.” It wasn’t a question and was said in a grim tone.

His large hand gripped my chin and forced my face to the side so I had to stare into his eyes. They were so dark they were nearly black. His gaze was intense, but there wasn’t any anger there. “I’m not changing my mind,” he said, his voice low and deep. “Not when it comes to what I want. Which is you.” He released me and let his hand drop back to his lap. He sat back, studying my reaction.

I swallowed, trying to get my thoughts together. “What did Smoke say?” I wasn’t ready to address the fact that I was what he wanted. My heart skipped in my chest at the thought.

He shrugged. “Nothing much.”

My brows rose at that as I grabbed the antiseptic cream. “Nothing much?” I repeated.

“Just that he already knew how I felt and that he was planning to prod me into admitting I have feelings for you.” He grinned at me.

Glowering at him, I fisted my hands on my hips. “As if I need my brother’s help in getting a man,” I grumbled. Before I could continue to vent, Hellfire laughed, then tugged me down onto his lap. His lips were on mine, drowning my complaints in an instant.

“You’re right,” he said when he pulled back. “You don’t need anyone’s help.” The look he gave me made me flush with pleasure. “But that doesn’t mean you won’t get it.”

My skin was flushed and my core pulsed from both the kiss and sitting in his lap. He didn’t seem to realize how much he affected me. My body was trembling as I fought against the desire threatening to overwhelm me.

He was right, though. Smoke would never stop butting into my life and I may as well get used to it. Most of the time I enjoyed having an older brother. We’d stayed pretty close as we grew up and I hoped one day to be old geezers, watching our grandkids play together. That didn’t mean that I appreciated how much he tried to control my life. I was perfectly in control of it and didn’t need his help.

“I also spoke to Lockout,” Hell continued.

Frowning, I reached over and grabbed a butterfly bandage from my supplies. I shifted on his lap so that I could easily reach his eye. “About what?” If he was going to act like me sitting on his lap didn’t affect him, I could do the same. I ignored my shaking fingers.

“Making you my old lady.”

I hesitated a moment, then squeezed his cut together until the torn edges of skin were aligned, then applied the bandage. He didn’t flinch, or make a sound as I worked on the tender area. “Do you need Lockout’s permission?” That was new. I hadn’t heard of any of the other men asking for permission. The fact that we were sitting here, discussing us getting into a relationship so nonchalantly was throwing me off.

“No. But I figured, since you work for the club, I should check before we make this official.”

My eyes shot to his face, widening in shock. “Official?”

He nodded. “I want you as my old lady, Kit.”

“But-”

“You have the final say here,” he said, pressing his finger to my lips to silence me. “But I want you. Not just for the

night. Not even for a little while. I want you to be mine, forever.”

My heart was pounding again as I tried to figure out what to say. He was everything I wanted in a man. He was strong, protective, and loyal. He was also kind and caring. And sexy as hell. His dark hair and eyes, and quiet nature often made him look like he was brooding, but he was always quick to smile. His skin was tanned and his muscles bulged, decorated with colorful tattoos. No woman alive would turn him down. So why was I hesitating?

You've spent so long wanting him, what will you do next? Is he going to binge watch shows with you? What would date night even look like? What if all the fantasy built in my head over the years is just that? Fantasy? I was on the verge of a panic attack when his hand clamped firmly and smoothly on my thigh. The panic and doubt drained away and I composed myself.

“What did Lock say?” I asked, eyes darting away from his, ignoring the question in his words. I wasn't ready. This was all so overwhelming. I'd been wanting it for so long it was almost like now that it was here, I was worried it would be snatched away from me if I acknowledged it. Breathless as I waited for the answer, I ran my hand over his cheek and beard. Being able to touch him any way I wanted was freeing after so long of hiding my love for him.

“He said it was up to you.”

My brows pulled together as I studied his face. “That's it?”

Hell nodded. “He said you're a grown woman and can make your own decisions.” He grinned, but there was still a hint of worry in his eyes. “We have both his blessing and your brother's. What do you say, Kit? Will you be mine?”

Biting my lower lip as my thoughts mixed into a chaotic jumble, I tried to quiet those stupid fears that kept rearing their ugly heads. “You're not worried, Hell?”

“About what, Gorgeous?” His hand lifted and his thumb brushed over my cheek.

“That this is all going to go wrong?” I admitted.

His eyes narrowed in confusion. “Wrong how?”

I shrugged and shook my head. I couldn’t put words to what I was feeling, but it was like a dark cloud hanging over me, waiting to rain down on us.

He sighed and pulled me close, wrapping his arms around me. I sighed as I rested my head on his chest. He felt so good, so warm and strong. I wanted to stay like this forever.

“What’s got you so scared, Kit? We’ve been flirting for years.”

“I know.” We had. It was a fun game that never failed to rev me up, but now that it was real, I was terrified. “What if I lose you?”

“Why would you lose me?” he asked, sounding baffled.

“I don’t know,” I whispered. “I’m not good at relationships.”

He chuckled softly. “Neither am I. Haven’t had many, to be honest.” He tipped my head back and stared into my eyes. “We’ll figure it out together, Vixen.”

I nodded, feeling a little better. “You sure you want to take this on? I’m not the easiest person in the world to deal with. I can be a little controlling and OCD.” I gave him a shaky grin.

“You’re worth it,” he said, his voice husky.

My heart melted and I knew there was no going back. Not that I wanted to go back. I’d been waiting for this man to be mine for so long. I wasn’t going to let my fears get in the way of being happy with him.

His head dipped and he kissed me again. This time it wasn’t as tentative or sweet. His tongue slid into my mouth, tangling with mine as he explored me. My hands gripped his cut as I leaned into him, my body melting into his.

He groaned as he pulled away and stared down at me with hungry eyes. “I want you, Kit.” He looked around the room.

“But not before you answer my question. Put me out of my misery, Vixen. Say you’ll be mine.”

“I’m yours,” I whispered.

His grin was victorious. “Fucking finally,” he muttered before his mouth claimed mine once more.

There was no going back. Not that I wanted to. I laughed as Hellfire stood up, with me in his arms. He was so strong, I was probably as light as a bag of feathers to him, but I still squirmed. “I can walk.”

“No need,” he rumbled, lowering his head so he could brush his lips over my neck.

I shivered at the touch, his hot breath grazing over sensitive nerve endings. I’d dreamed of this, of him, for so long and he was finally mine.

He carried me through my kitchen into the master bedroom. Setting me on my feet, he turned me to face the bed. He kissed my neck again as he slid my hair over one shoulder, giving himself better access to the other side. My eyes closed as his hands slid over my body, cupping my breasts, then sliding down to my hips.

I was gasping for air, already so turned on I wasn’t sure I could stand the slow pace he was setting. Turning to face him, I pushed at his cut, eager to get it and his t-shirt off. I frowned up at him when he bracketed my wrists with his huge hands.

“I’ve waited for this for too long to rush, Baby,” he told me.

I scowled at him. “You can go slow later.”

His grin was pure sin. “Oh, I plan on it.” He kissed me again and I struggled against him, trying to get out of his hold. “Kit,” he growled. “Let me do this.”

“No.”

He chuckled and released me. I shoved at his cut again and this time he let it fall to the floor. His t-shirt came next, though he had to help me take that up since he was so much taller, and I took a moment to admire his body. There was dark hair

scattered over his muscular chest. He was all man and it was slowly starting to sink in that he was mine. I ran my hands over his left bicep where a tattoo crawled up over his shoulder and covered his left pec. Everything about him was perfect. Even the ink's distortion by the scar from where he got shot just added to his masculinity.

“Now who's taking her time?” His voice was husky, teasing, as he stared down at me.

I looked up into his eyes, smiling. “You're gorgeous.”

His brows shot up. “Me? You're the one who's gorgeous.”

“I said it first.”

He shook his head. “You're one of a kind, Vixen” he said before he kissed me again.

This kiss was different than the others had been so far. It was deep, passionate, and full of promise. I could feel the heat building between us, and I wanted to see if it would burn us alive or consume us with pleasure.

CHAPTER 8



Hellfire

This had to be a dream. Kit writhing in my arms while we kissed was something I'd dreamed about for so long, there was no way this could be real. But my eye ached like a bitch where Smokehouse had clocked me, and her lips sure felt real. They were soft, supple, and fuck if I didn't want to just throw her down onto the bed and fuck her. I wasn't about to do that, though. I wanted to take this slow. To drive her wild before I finally took her.

She was mine. Fuck. How was I so goddamned lucky? She was everything I wanted in a woman. Smart, funny, gorgeous as hell, and she had the body of a pin-up model. She was tall and curvy in all the right places. And that ass. Fuck. That ass was perfection. It was round and firm, and it made me want to sink my teeth into it while I fucked her from behind.

I groaned as she ran her hands over my chest and shoulders. She was exploring me, teasing me with her touch, and I loved every second of it. "Kit," I rasped as she nipped at my earlobe. "You're going to drive me crazy."

She giggled and pulled away, smiling up at me. Her eyes were bright pools of gray, cheeks flushed, and I could see her pulse racing at the base of her throat. She wanted this as much as I did. That knowledge only made it harder for me to control myself. My dick throbbed inside my jeans, eager to be released.

“I’ve wanted this for so long,” she told me.

I grinned down at her. “You and me both.” I reached down and drew her shirt up and over her head, leaving her standing in jeans and a bra. Why was that so fucking sexy? Maybe because we’d never been this far before? I had no idea, but I liked it. A lot.

Her hands went to my jeans, but I caught them and shook my head. If she touched me now, I wasn’t going to be able to hold back. I needed her to keep her hands to herself or this was going to be a short night for us both.

She pouted, but let me lead her over to the bed. She sat down on the edge of it and I took a moment to just admire her. A pretty blush stained her cheeks as I studied her. Her tits were full and round, straining against the fabric of her bra. I could see the hard points of her nipples through the thin material and it made my mouth water.

I traced my fingers over one of them, teasing her through the lace. She moaned softly, arching into my touch. Fuck, that was hot. I wanted to hear more of those sounds coming from her mouth.

Leaning down, I captured her lips in another kiss, my tongue tangling with hers. She tasted sweet and spicy, like cinnamon. Her hands came up and tangled in my hair, pulling me closer as she deepened the kiss. She was so eager for me, it made me want to roar in triumph.

I reached around and unhooked her bra, pulling it off her and tossing it aside. Her tits bounced free, and I couldn’t resist bending down further and taking one of her nipples into my mouth. She gasped as I sucked on it, teasing it with my tongue. Her hands tightened in my hair as I switched to the other nipple, giving it the same attention. Kneeling down between her spread thighs, I looked up at her. “I want to taste you.”

She bit her lip and nodded, her eyes dark with desire. I unbuttoned her jeans and pulled them down, along with her panties. She was bare before me now, and I could see how wet she was for me already. My cock throbbed painfully as I stared

at her glistening pussy. It was pink and perfect, and I couldn't wait to get my mouth on it.

Grasping her chin, I gave her a quick kiss before I pressed on her shoulder, laying her back on the bed. Her ass was right on the edge, and as much as I wanted to flip her over so I could worship it, I needed this more. I leaned in and ran my tongue over her folds, tasting her sweetness. My hands clamped down on her thighs as she groaned and her hips arched up, seeking more. Fuck she was going to be the death of me.

I teased her with my tongue, licking and sucking until she was a writhing mess beneath me. When I finally slid a finger inside her, she cried out and gripped the sheets in her fists. "Hellfire!"

Her pussy clenched around my finger as I fucked her with it, and I knew she was close. Years of built up tension between the two of us was making this hot and fast. I was fine with that as long as she came first. Maybe a few times. I wasn't about to leave her behind in this. I wanted to watch her come undone for me. Wanted her to be so thoroughly satisfied she never thought of another man. Our first time together needed to be mind blowing. Adding another finger, I increased the pace, curling them to hit that spot inside her that would drive her crazy. Her hips bucked against my hand as she chased her release, and when I sucked her clit into my mouth, she exploded.

Groaning, I lapped at her, unwilling to stop. She tasted so fucking good. I could do this all night long and die a happy man. But my dick had other ideas, throbbing painfully in my jeans. Reluctantly, I pulled away from her and stood up, unbuttoning my jeans and freeing my cock. Her eyes widened as she stared at me, and I knew she was impressed. I wasn't a small man, anywhere. I smirked as I stroked myself, loving the way she watched me with hungry eyes.

"Do you want this, Kit?" I asked, my voice low and husky with desire.

Her eyes were dark with lust as she nodded, biting her lip again. Fuck that was sexy. “Yes. I want you so badly, Hell,” she begged.

So much for taking it slow. The way she was pleading was sending me over the edge. Never let it be said that I didn’t give my lady what she wanted. There’d be time later to take things slowly. Right now? I needed to be buried balls deep inside her welcoming body.

I grabbed a condom from my pocket and stood up, rolling it on before angling her a little closer to the edge of the bed. I gripped her hips as I lined up with her entrance, and slowly slid inside. Her pussy was so tight and wet, it felt like heaven around my cock. I groaned as I bottomed out inside her, and she gasped, her eyes fluttering closed.

“Look at me,” I commanded, needing to see her eyes as I fucked her. Her eyes snapped open and locked on mine as I pulled back and thrust in again. She cried out, but didn’t look away as I started moving faster, pounding into her hard and fast. Her tits bounced with each thrust, and I wanted to bury my face between them. Next time. Right now I needed to watch her come again. “You’re so fucking beautiful.”

I reached down and rubbed her clit with my thumb, making her cry out again as she arched against me. “Come for me, Kit,” I growled. “I want to feel your pussy squeezing my cock.”

She moaned as I kept fucking her, rubbing her clit in time with my thrusts until she shattered, screaming my name. Her pussy clenched around me so tight it almost hurt, and I couldn’t hold back anymore. With one last hard thrust, I came, groaning her name as pleasure washed over me.

“Oh. My. God,” Kit breathed as I slumped over her.

My head was on her chest as I tried to gather my wits enough to move. “Fuck,” I muttered.

“Yeah,” she replied with a husky laugh.

I grinned and lifted my head to look at her. She was smiling up at me, looking completely satisfied. Good. That’s

exactly what I'd wanted to do for her.

"That was...wow." She gave me a shy look. "It's been a really long time since I've done that. With anyone else, I mean."

I chuckled and kissed her softly. "Good. It's the last time you'll do it with anyone but me." Pulling out of her, I disposed of the condom in the small trash can near her bed, then crawled onto the bed.

"Mmmm," she agreed in satisfaction. It sounded like a little purr. She was adorable. She had already moved to the middle so she could starfish out and enjoy the lasting effects from her orgasms. Sighing as I lay down next to her, she snuggled against me, making me smile even more.

I loved that I could hold her anytime I wanted now. My arm wrapped around her, pulling her closer against my body.

"So... We're doing that again, right?"

I couldn't help but laugh. "Just as soon as I catch a second wind."

She leaned up on her elbow and pouted down at me. "Aren't you bikers supposed to be able to go all night?" she teased.

Chuckling, I shook my head. "Maybe when I was eighteen, but I'm thirty-eight, Vixen. I'm going to need a minute."

She nestled back down against my chest. "Worth the wait," she announced. She was quiet for a few minutes before she finally whispered. "I can't believe I'm yours."

"Believe it, Kit," I murmured. "I've been waiting for this day for a long time."

"What made you finally make a move?" she asked, looking up at me.

Seeing her lying there against my body, her cheek pressed against my skin, made my heart kick in my chest. "Everything. The cult. Getting shot. Almost losing you at the Event Center. Having The Italians and Fremont on our asses." I closed my

eyes and shook my head. “Life is too fucking short and I wasted so much of our time together.”

“We’ve spent the years getting to know one another,” she said, lifting her hand and rubbing her finger between my eyes where the skin was pursed together with my frown. “It wasn’t a waste.”

“You’re right,” I said, my frown melting away at her touch. “I came downstairs last week and saw you bent over, doing inventory, and something just...snapped. I was tired of waiting. Denying myself.”

She gave me a soft smile. “I’m glad you did. I was beginning to think I would never have any of this,” she admitted. “That I’d have to watch you fall in love with someone else.” Her voice broke a little. “That would have killed me, Hell.”

“There’s no one for me but you, Kit. Never has been.”

She rose up and kissed me softly. I groaned when her tongue slipped into my mouth, but she pulled away before I could get lost in her again. She laid her head back on my chest and we just lay there, content in each other’s arms.

“What do you want to eat?” she asked after a while.

“You,” I answered immediately, making her laugh.

“I meant for dinner.”

“You don’t have to cook for me,” I told her.

She sat up, uncaring that she was naked as she kneeled on the bed next to me. “I happen to like cooking and I’ve never had an old man to cook for. I want to.”

I grinned at her and crossed my arms beneath my head, enjoying the view of her body. “Alright, Vixen. What are you making me?”

She cocked her head as she studied me. “I think you need some good southern food. How does fried chicken sound?”

My mouth watered at the thought. “Sounds perfect.”

“Good. Now get your fine ass out of here so I can clean up this room and start cooking.” She gave me a saucy grin.

“Yes, Ma’am,” I said, sitting up and kissing her before climbing off the bed. “I’m going to shower,” I called over my shoulder. Her reply was muffled, but I took it as consent as I walked into her bathroom. Starting up the spray, I thought about the last week as the water heated up. Somehow, I was the lucky son of a bitch—no offense to my mother—who had not only caught her eye, but got to keep her. I wasn’t going to question my luck. I was running with it and I wouldn’t ever give her the chance to wonder if she made a mistake.

We had a lot of lost time to make up for and I planned to fill her every waking moment with laughter and love, so she knew exactly why she chose me. Picking up her shampoo, I opened and sniffed at it. Chuckling as the scent of honeysuckle assaulted my nose, I poured a bunch into my palm and then worked it into my hair and beard.

I shut off the water and grabbed a towel from the cabinet in her bathroom. Wrapping it around my waist, I went back out into her bedroom. She’d folded my clothes and left them on a fancy chair in the corner. Grinning, I dressed. I was pretty sure I was going to like having an old lady. It was a bonus that it was her, but no one had taken care of me like this in a really long time.

It wasn’t that I couldn’t take care of myself. I could, but this was different. This was someone else making sure I was comfortable. That I was happy. It made me feel like I was important to her and that was something I hadn’t felt in a long time.

When I walked into the kitchen, she looked up from where she was cutting potatoes at the counter. Her smile lit up her face and I knew that I would do whatever it took to make sure she smiled like that for the rest of our lives.

CHAPTER 9



Kit

The next day I was in The Bunker, restocking the bar, despite it being my day off, and going over the events of last night. A small part of me wanted to keep this to myself. To enjoy the knowledge that Hellfire and I were a couple for a little while, so that I could revel in that fact. But the minute he wrapped his arm around me in front of the others, they were going to know something was up. That was if my loud-mouthed brother hadn't already spilled the beans. Besides, my friends and his brothers were going to be ecstatic for us. It would be almost as much fun to celebrate with them as it would to immerse myself in the knowledge that I now belonged to the man who'd stolen my heart years ago.

I was still shocked that he'd fucked me like that. It was hard to meld what I knew from the man who'd been my friend for so long and the man he was as a lover. It was a dream come true.

I'd spent so many nights fantasizing about him, wondering what it would be like to have him in my bed. Now, I knew. And it blew my mind.

He was the perfect combination of rough and tender. He'd taken control, but not in a way that made me feel powerless. He made me feel cherished and desired.

As if he knew I was thinking about him, Hellfire walked into The Bunker. My eyes roved over him as I took him in. He

wore his usual jeans and a black t-shirt with his cut over it. His dark hair was damp and curling around his ears and neck from the shower he'd taken that morning. That was all mine. I was worried that I was going to wake up from this dream.

One thing about Hellfire, thanks to his job at his family company, was he showered a lot. Often three times a day or more. When you worked with other people's feces that was bound to be a habit you built. The job sounded disgusting to me, but it was one that still had to be done and he always stepped up when he was needed. When his dad had asked him to take over half the company Hell had nearly turned himself inside out figuring out how to make it all work. That was who he was. Reliable. Loyal. Dependable. Everyone around here knew that if you needed something, Hell would be the first in line to help you with it. I doubted he realized the reputation he built with his brothers and their families, but he was highly respected.

He grinned when his eyes landed on me. I felt myself flush under the heat of his gaze. He was so sexy it made my mouth water just looking at him.

"Hey, Hell," Seek called out. She and the others were seated at my bar.

I hadn't told them anything yet. I was waiting for the right moment. That right moment was barreling down on me as he approached.

"Hey." Though he spoke to the room, his eyes didn't leave mine as he walked over to us. He stopped next to me and pulled me in for a kiss that curled my toes inside my sneakers. "Isn't it a bit early for drinking?" he asked after he let me go. I was too breathless to answer. "You bunch are getting as bad as the men around here."

The others were too busy picking their jaws off the ground to answer his accusations. The laughter spilled out before I could hold it back. They looked so shocked. Hell joined in. "I guess you haven't told them yet."

"No," Jenny said accusingly, "she hasn't."

“When did this happen?” Seek asked with a satisfied smile.

“Last night,” I said, elbowing Hellfire in the ribs for ruining my surprise.

He grunted dramatically and rubbed his side. “Sure is ornery in the morning,” he declared.

“I’m not ornery,” I told him. “And it’s not morning anymore.”

“True.”

“You were gone early,” I told him as the women babbled happily amongst themselves about the news.

“Sorry, Lock has me out running club errands. Probably going to be early mornings for a while.” He smiled down at me, cupping my face with his huge hand.

“That’s okay. I just wasn’t sure where you’d gone.” I’d woken up confused and insecure, wondering why he’d snuck out of my bed.

“I didn’t want to wake you up. You looked so peaceful.”

His words made me feel warm and fuzzy inside, melting away the insecurities and making me feel dumb for having them in the first place. Then again, even as sweet as he was, Hell was a man, and a biker. He was born just as wild and different as the rest of them, so maybe my doubts were just logical. I was still holding onto that peaceful feeling when he leaned down and kissed me again. “I’ll be back later,” he said against my lips.

“Okay.”

He gave me another quick kiss before he left. I watched him go, a smile on my face. It was only after I turned back around that I realized the others had been watching our exchange and that the bar was silent.

“What?” I asked, pasting an innocent expression on my face.

“We’ve been sitting here for twenty minutes!” Jordan exclaimed. “And not a peep.”

“You were all busy talking about babies,” I told them with a shrug. I wasn’t going to tell them that I’d just gotten Hellfire into my bed last night and didn’t want to jinx it by spilling the beans so soon.

“How long has this been going on?” Gwen asked.

“He asked me last week to be his old lady,” I admitted.

“And you waited this long to say anything?” Susie gasped.

“I didn’t want to jump the gun. He still needed to talk to Smokehouse.”

“That’s why Smoke came home all bruised up last night,” Dani said with a shake of her head. “What is it about these guys?”

“They talk better with each other when they’re fighting,” Daisha replied.

“You’ll get used to it,” Tori added.

“Tell us more,” Sloane pleaded, an eager look on her face.

“Well, Smoke gave his blessing. Turns out he knew Hellfire was into me and was planning on doing something about it anyway,” I told them. Then I smiled at them. “So, Hell asked me again to be his old lady and I said yes.” I looked over at Seek and admitted. “I sort of freaked out when he asked me the first time. Well, I told him yes, then I freaked out. Seek helped me through it.”

“She’s good for that,” Gwen said, giving Seek a side hug.

“We’re so happy for you,” Keely said, smiling at me. “Did you guys have sex?”

“Keely!” Dani snapped.

“What?” she asked, an innocent expression on her face. “I was just wondering how it was. A single girl needs to know these things.”

“Us married girls do, too,” Seek added with a wiggle of her brows.

I laughed and shook my head. “Best I’ve ever had.” Not that I had a lot to compare to.

Jordan whooped as the others laughed. “I figured. He seems like the type to really take his time and make it all consuming.”

I was shocked at how close she was, though I wasn’t going to admit it out loud. Not yet. “Enough about me-”

“It’ll never be enough,” Jenny said with a grin, “but we’ll let it go for now.”

Rolling my eyes, I grinned. I was right. It was fun sharing this news with my friends. “I asked you all to meet up because of the baby showers tonight. You three,” I said, pointing at Seek, Sloane, and Dani, “need to be here at five. That’s it.” I waved my hand, dismissing them. “Can’t have you hanging around and ruining surprises.”

“Aw man,” Dani said with a pout. “We don’t want to miss more Hellfire gossip.”

“That’s an easy fix,” I told her. “We won’t talk about him, or our relationship again until we’re all together. But not tonight,” I added. “Tonight is about you three.”

“Deal,” Sloane said. She came over to me and squeezed me tight. “I’m so happy for you, Kit.”

My eyes misted over. I loved these women more than they would ever know. They were my friends. My sisters. And I’d do anything for them. “Thanks,” I whispered back.

The other two gave me their own hugs and congratulated me. Then I got hugs and well wishes from the rest of the group. I waited until the three mamas-to-be left the bar before I clapped my hands together. “We have a ton of work to do, so let’s get started.

It took hours, but we transformed the bar from a gritty biker hangout to a festive baby shower spot. There were pink and blue ribbons hanging everywhere, balloons, the cakes had

been delivered, and I was busy carrying over a pot of my famous baked beans. The girls had decided on a potluck. I made the beans, potato salad, and a couple of pies. I enjoyed cooking for the barbecues and family get togethers. The others had chipped in, too, and the long table that Rip had set up for us inside groaned under the weight of all the food spread out on it as I set down the pot of baked beans.

I stepped back outside and went over to the grassy area where we had our barbecues. “How’s it coming?”

Lock and Hush looked up at my question. “Almost done,” Lock told me with a grin. He had stepped up and offered to grill the various meats for the meal tonight.

They’d stopped speaking when I walked up, so I was sure they were talking club business. Everyone was on full alert because of The Italians. I was just glad Lock hadn’t shut down the baby showers. It would have disappointed all of us women, though we would have done it. They did their best to keep us all safe, even if we didn’t always like their methods.

“Perfect. Everyone is starting to show up.” I looked over my shoulder as the sound of motorcycles filled the air. It was Friday and the guys were all getting off work and were going to be ready to party. It was a lot different than their usual parties, but it was going to be fun. “I’m glad all the guys wanted to come,” I said.

“You kiddin’?” Hush asked. “Free food. Games. Spendin’ time with our families? Why wouldn’t they come?”

I laughed. “Co-ed baby showers aren’t your guys’ usual speed.”

“Our speed is slowing down these days,” Lock told me with a smile. “Never know where we’re going to end up.”

Frowning, I opened my mouth to ask him what he meant by that, but someone interrupted, calling my name. “Excuse me,” I told them. “Oh,” I called out as I hurried back toward the bar. “Could you bring all that in once it’s ready?”

“Don’t worry, we’ll take care of it,” Lockout assured me.

I nodded, knowing if he was in charge everything would be fine.

CHAPTER 10



Kit

*M*y eyes swept over the room, looking for anything that wasn't set up right. This all needed to be perfect. I wouldn't accept anything less for the women who were now as much a part of my life as they were their men's.

The door opened and the three guests of honor came in. They were blindfolded and being led by their bikers. Auron and Jecht trotted in behind the group, watching carefully. I swore it seemed like they were making sure that the women weren't going to trip. Those dogs were a wonder. No one around here was going to be able to bring home another dog without having Seek train it, so that it behaved as well as they did.

"Please tell me there's going to be at least *some* alcohol at this shindig."

I jumped as the voice sounded from right behind me. Whirling around, I laughed at the pained look on Toxic's face. "There will be plenty of alcohol," I assured him with a pat on his shoulder. "But you're not allowed anywhere near it." Since there were kids, and pregnant women who might murder me for having alcohol when they couldn't drink, I hid it all in the back office. I doubted the girls would notice as people slipped back there to refresh their drinks all night.

He groaned, but nodded. "Fine. I'll just sit in the corner and watch everyone else drink." He gave me a pitiful look.

My eyes narrowed on him, but he didn't seem to notice. He was already staring off into space like he was imagining all the booze he was missing out on. I'd been planning to tell him I was kidding, but he wandered off before I had the chance. Shaking my head in amusement, I went to greet our guests of honor.

They were all gasping with pleasure by the time their men took off their blindfolds. They gushed over pink and blue balloons. Then the streamers and banners hanging from the ceiling and walls. It was overdone, but it was perfect for this party and all three women loved it.

"Oh!" Dani cried as soon as she saw the trio of rocking chairs we'd set up at the back of the room. "Those are gorgeous." She rushed over and ran her hands over them. "I love the color of the wood."

"Toxic thought you'd all probably picked out cribs already," I told her with a smile. "He and Butcher can tell you all about them. They made them themselves."

Three pairs of eyes landed on me, filled with astonishment and tears. I had a feeling there were going to be a lot of tears tonight.

"They *made* them?" Seek asked, her voice low and husky as she fought back tears. Hush frowned down at his wife, then stalked off.

"Where's he going?" I asked. Tonight was going to be a juggling act of making sure these rough and rowdy men behaved and didn't ruin the baby shower. Though, given how much they loved the women being celebrated, I doubted they'd do anything to actually mess things up. At least I hoped. You never knew.

Before Seek could answer, Hush returned, hauling both Toxic and Butcher over by their cuts. I lifted my hand to muffle laughter at the look on the men's faces.

"What the hell, Hush?" Butcher asked, jerking out of Hush's hold.

"The girls want to talk to you."

Toxic grinned at them. “Happy Baby Shower.”

“You made those?” Sloane asked, a wayward tear sliding down her cheek as she pointed to the rocking chairs.

Toxic looked more than a little uncomfortable. “Maybe.” The word came out hesitant and slow.

Butcher glanced at the women, who were all three shedding tears now, then over at Hush. “Depends. Is the gorilla going to beat the shit out of us if we say we made them?”

Hush folded his arms over his muscular chest and grunted in response.

I shrugged when Butcher looked my way for translation. I had no idea what most of Hush’s grunts and groans meant. There was no holding back my laughter as the women surrounded Toxic and Butcher and hugged them while thanking them profusely. Butcher patted Seek on the back as he was pulled into a hug. “You’re going to get me killed, Seek.”

“Not this time,” Hush said, grabbing him as soon as his wife was finished with him. “Thank you both for the chairs.”

“Glad you’re happy with them,” Toxic said with a smile.

“What kind of wood is this?” Dani asked.

“Purple heart,” he answered. He launched into an explanation about how they’d built them.

The chairs were so beautiful. The wood was a reddish-purple color with a heavy grain pattern that stood out and made each rocking chair unique. When I saw them a few days ago, I’d gasped out loud, then peppered them with questions.

I watched as they rejoined their brothers over near the bar, both still looking uncomfortable at being thanked so profusely. They deserved the gratitude. These chairs were works of art. I knew the women would cherish them long past the time they rocked their babies to sleep in them.

“They’re amazing,” Sloane said again as she ran a hand over the arm of her chair.

Seek nodded in agreement, her hand on her belly as she sat down in hers. We'd stationed them against the wall, with everything facing the chairs like they were the women's own personal thrones. They were the center of this party.

Pounding feet on the hardwood warned me before a mob of children, led by Priest's girls, rushed over to me. I smiled down at eager faces. They were all dressed up nicely, though Dex was pulling at the collar of his shirt.

"How come I gotta wear this?" he whined.

"If I hear that question one more time," Susie warned as she materialized from the crowd, "I'll make you wear something worse."

"Yeah, like a dress," Taylor complained as she motioned to her own. That shut Dex up quickly.

"Can we have cake?" Grace asked, hope filling her face.

"Soon," I told her with a laugh. She was a girl after my own heart. I too wanted to start with dessert. Who needed dinner? Clearing my throat, I looked around expectantly. The noise in the room didn't die down. I opened my mouth, only to shut it in shock when Hellfire came up beside me and yanked me against his side.

"I've got this," he told me. "Hey! Shut the fuuu..." He stared down at the excited faces of the children and swallowed back what he'd been about to bellow at his noisy brothers.

I elbowed him and shook my head with a laugh. "Thank you all for coming to celebrate with us today," I spoke to the room since Hell's bellowing, even cut short, had worked to quiet them. It was mostly our MC family, but Dani and Seek's families and a few other friends were here as well. "Lockout is going to go over the rules for the property," I told everyone, this was mainly for the women's families' sake, "and then we're going to eat and play games. Then we'll have some cake and open presents."

Everyone gave whooping cheers and the sight of Seek, Sloane, and Dani's happy smiles made my eyes mist up a little. They were dressed up in beautiful dresses and had flushed

faces as everyone went over to them to congratulate them and ask questions.

“Getting a little soft on me, Vixen?”

I looked up at the man who was now mine and shrugged. “Honestly, I’ve always had a soft spot.”

“I know,” he replied, completely serious. “Your huge heart is the first thing that made me fall in love with you.” He moved me around to the front, until I was facing him and wrapped his arms around me. “I was out of town on a run with the club and my mom called. Her car had broken down on the side of I-10 and Dad was out at a jobsite that was over an hour away.” He smiled down at me. “Smoke told me not to worry about it. You didn’t know it, but he had you on speaker phone when he called that night. The only question you asked was where she was at. Mom said you showed up within ten minutes and rescued her off the highway.”

“It was pouring down rain,” I told him. “The monsoon was so big the storm had knocked the power out to half the city. Who wouldn’t have gone to get her?”

“Some wouldn’t have,” he rumbled. “Some might have done so begrudgingly. Not you. You went out in a storm, no questions asked, to help someone else. You’re amazing,” he told me, brushing his fingers over my cheek. “Everything about you.”

Would this ever stop feeling like a dream? Hearing the man I loved say those words back had my heart threatening to burst in my chest. Being wrapped in his arms made me feel so safe and wanted. This was heaven. It had to be. Nothing on earth could feel this perfect.

“I was a dumbass for waiting so long to claim you.” He leaned down and brushed his lips over mine.

My heart pounded in my chest. Being wrapped up in his muscular arms made me feel as though no one else existed. Just him and me. Staring up into his handsome face, I smiled. This was all so thrilling and new. We still had a lot to learn

about one another, about how to navigate together, but I knew we'd figure it out.

"Hey!" Smoke's bellow had me jumping back and Hellfire steadying me with a sigh. "No PDA!" My brother gave me a wicked grin. Hell had told me about Smoke's plan to give him a hard time, badger him into eventually realizing he loved me and doing something about it.

I wasn't sure whether to be grateful to my brother or to smack him upside the head, because now I knew he was going to hound us unmercifully until he got it out of his system. Hell had taken away his opportunity to rile him up in that way, now he was doing it in this way.

Hellfire flipped Smoke off, but when I looked up at him there was no heat in his eyes. He just looked amused and happy. "Well, that's one way to tell everyone we're together now."

I laughed and shook my head. "That was probably a better idea than slapping you."

"Probably," he agreed with a chuckle. "But don't worry about it. It's not like I'm going to be telling anyone about that."

My smile grew as I studied him. "Afraid the guys will give you grief for getting slapped by a girl?" I teased.

He chuckled. "If they do, I'll just have you give them a demonstration." He rubbed his hand over his face. "You hit hard." His eyes twinkled with deviousness. "For a girl."

Gasping, I smacked his chest. "For anyone."

"Girl," he echoed. Grabbing my hand, he pulled me over toward where the party was happening.

"Looks like you two deserve congratulations as well," Lockout said as we approached. He pulled me in for a hug. "If he gives you any shit, you let me know."

Laughing, I shot Hellfire a look. "Oh, leverage. Now you can't mess up or you'll have Smoke *and* Lock coming for you."

The men standing around chuckled. “More than that,” Priest told me. “You’re kind of like a little sister to all of us. You’ve been around as long as this shithead.” Priest punctuated the sentence by smacking the back of his hand into Smoke’s stomach.

My brother groaned and rubbed his abs. “What was that for?”

“Just a reminder to behave,” Priest replied with a grin.

“Not all of us see her as our sister,” Hell reminded the group.

Toxic started humming the chords for Sweet Home Alabama, sending the group into another round of laughter.

I happily walked back under Hellfire’s arm, letting him tuck me up against his side. I was ready to spend the night with the people I loved most in this world, minus my dad, who was busy enjoying his life in Europe. I’d like to think he’d be happy if he knew what I was doing right now. He always wanted me to find a man who made me happy. I’d give him a call soon and catch him up on everything.

Looking up at Hellfire as he laughed at something Lockout said, I realized that if he hadn’t taken this step, I would have remained single forever. There was no one else I wanted to spend my life with.

“You’re staring again,” Smoke growled from behind us.

I jumped as my brother’s voice cut into my thoughts. Turning, I glared at him. “How long are you going to do this for?” I asked, with a shake of my head.

He grinned. “Sorry.”

“No, you’re not,” I muttered.

He shrugged and winked at me. “You two have fun,” he told us, before he walked away to join Dani at one of the tables where she was sitting with Gwen and Keely.

“Well, this is a nice surprise.”

My eyes widened at the sound of the bitchy voice that could only belong to one woman. Looking over at Hellfire, I saw his face harden as he turned around. “What are you doing here?”

Pixie’s eyes narrowed as she looked up at Hellfire. “I’m here to party. What else would I be doing?”

“Maybe you should go find someone else to party with,” Hellfire suggested in a low, menacing tone. He and his cousin had a complicated relationship.

I never understood why he didn’t insist that Lock make her leave. Her being a sweet butt here obviously bothered Hell, but he never said a word about it. She’s one of the few people I’ve seen him treat badly though; that was usually reserved for enemies.

Pixie’s eyes cut my way. “Why? You got a problem with me being here?”

“This is a party for the families,” I told her. That was clearly the case, as children ran around laughing and all the wives were here. She was just trying to see what she could get away with. Pushing the boundaries like she usually did. She’d been quiet for a while, ever since she pulled that stunt and fought with Seek. She’d kept her nose clean. Looked like that was over. “No club girls allowed.” My eyes narrowed. She was in her usual jean skirt. It was so short her ass was nearly hanging out, and her top was a bright pink thing that didn’t cover her belly or the majority of her breasts.

“Sylvia’s here,” Pixie said, her face twisting into a pout.

“Syl *is* family,” Hellfire told her.

“And I’m not?” She put her hands on her hips. “Since when?”

“Since you started fucking every nomad who comes through this place,” he snarled. “You may be my cousin, but you’re nothing but a-.” He took a deep breath, probably remembering that whatever he said to Pixie could get back to his family. “You don’t belong here. Get out.”

Pixie's eyes narrowed as she wrenched them off Hellfire and looked at me. "What about the bar in the clubhouse?"

"It's shut down for the night," I told her. "Scarlett was supposed to pass the message on to you."

"Well, she didn't." Her gaze shifted and a longing crossed her face as she watched the families gathering around Seek, Sloane, and Dani.

"Leave, Pixie," Hell told her, his voice gentling as he saw the emotion on her face.

"Fine," she snapped, spinning on her heel. She stomped away, her ass swinging in her skirt. I frowned when she stopped and spoke to Smokehouse for a minute. He had made his way over toward the door once he saw she was here. There was no way he was going to let her ruin Dani's night. Or the others. He nodded at whatever she said and she left without another word.

Hellfire turned back to me with a sigh. "Sorry about that."

"Not your fault." I shrugged. "She's family."

"Sort of," he agreed, his eyes warming as they met mine. His head cocked to the side as he studied me. "Does anything rile you up?"

My brows shot up. "What do you mean? Of course things rile me up."

He grinned. "Like what?"

"I don't know. Lots of stuff." I pressed my lips together when I saw his smile widen. "Why are you asking me that?"

"Because you're always so calm. You never get angry. You never lose your temper." He leaned closer, lowering his voice. "You never slap anyone."

My cheeks flushed at his taunting. "I do, too. Stick around and you'll end up seeing me angry. We can start now," I teased as I walked away from him.

"Wait. What?" he asked.

My laughter floated through the room. "You heard me."

I was still chuckling when I reached the group of women who were gathered around, eating from their heaping plates. The guys were busy dishing up their own plates, having dished up food for their old ladies and kids first. This was the life I grew up in. The only way I wanted to live going forward. I wouldn't belong anywhere else. This lifestyle and group had my heart. I'd do anything for them. Thoughts of the threats coming for my family made me frown. Nothing would take them away from me. Nothing.

CHAPTER 11



Hellfire

I kept an eye on the door after that. It was bullshit that Pixie had shown up here. She knew better. She was just trying to get a rise out of me. Or piss off the girls. Something. She wouldn't want to do anything bad enough to have Lockout banning her from the club, but it was obvious she was finished behaving. It lasted longer than I thought it would, to be honest.

I'd read her the riot act that day after she'd been caught fighting with Seek. Told her I was going to get her banned if she pulled something like that again. Threatened to tell her father what she was really doing here. He mistakenly thought she was somehow a part of the club. He didn't know that his daughter chose to whore herself out in hopes someone would eventually make her his old lady.

Uncle Hal was a good guy. I couldn't break his heart like that. He only recently established a relationship with Pixie again. He and her mom had gotten divorced when she was three and Aunt Colleen had done everything in her power to kick him out of their lives. Once she turned eighteen Pixie had searched my uncle out to berate him for leaving, never believing that her witch of a mother refused to let him near his daughter. Like mother, like daughter. Neither woman was likable. I wasn't sure how Uncle Hal had put up with his ex-wife as long as he had.

He was the complete opposite of his ex. He was a kind man, with a huge heart. He'd been devastated when his wife kicked him out. It had taken years for him to get over it and move on with his life. He'd remarried, had two more children, and seemed happy. I didn't want to ruin that for him. I needed to find another way to deal with my cousin.

"You okay?"

I looked over and found Lockout watching me. I'd been standing by myself, watching the party from the fringes for about half an hour now and I hadn't even heard him walk up. "Fine."

Lockout sighed. "Why don't I just kick her off property?"

Cringing, I shook my head. "Don't do that. I mean, unless she does something to deserve it."

"I never could figure it out, Hell." His hazel eyes studied me. "You hate having her here, but you didn't ever say you wanted her gone."

Sighing, I rolled my shoulders. The left was still a little tight from when I'd been shot. It didn't seem to matter how much I stretched it, there was a lingering ache. "If she wasn't here, she'd be with another club."

"Yeah."

I ground my teeth together. We shouldn't be talking about Pixie tonight. I shouldn't be pissed off and hanging out alone because my cousin pulled one of her usual stunts. Lock had a hard and fast rule. The sweet butts didn't come to family parties. They were kept as separate as we could manage. Pixie broke that rule tonight. I was sure she did it on purpose. She was the definition of difficult. I knew for a fact that Lock kept her here for me. Because he knew that for whatever reason, it was easier for me to have her here, even though I hated it at the same time.

"I promised my parents I'd keep an eye on her," I admitted.

"To keep her safe?"

“Sort of. That, but more...to keep her in line. She’s embarrassed my family in a lot of ways over the last four years. Once she showed up on my uncle’s doorstep, it’s been her mission to destroy what he has. He can’t see it, though, and refuses to kick her out of his life. So, we’re all stuck with her.”

“Hal doesn’t even live here anymore,” Lock pointed out. “Why didn’t she move when he did a few years back?”

“She found out what I was doing and decided she wanted to be a part of the lifestyle.” I shook my head. “But she’s a bitch. No one is ever going to wife her up. No one decent anyway. She’ll figure it out eventually.”

Lock nodded. “Whatever is easiest for you, Hell. You say the word and she’s gone.” He clapped a hand on my shoulder, giving it a squeeze. We stood in silence for a bit after that, watching everyone enjoy themselves.

I understood why Pixie wanted this. It was hard not to be drawn to the way my brothers and their wives banded together. She’d only ever had her mother growing up. Colleen did her best to turn Pixie as toxic as she was. It’d worked and now my cousin was nothing but a pain in the ass. She was family, but only to a point. The way she’d treated Uncle Hal over the years, the rest of us were ready to cut all ties the moment he said the word. Until then, we’d keep her under control as much as possible so she didn’t break his heart even further.

“You’re brooding.”

Looking over, I offered Kit a smile that wasn’t quite real. “I don’t brood.”

Her brows shot up. “Hell, you’re the king of brooding. You’re all dark eyes and fierce scowl right now. Rumor has it Batman takes brooding lessons from you.”

That got a laugh out of me. She always knew how to make me laugh. “It’s Pixie,” I admitted.

“Did she come back?”

“No. I’m just sick of cleaning up her messes.”

“You’ve been doing it for a long time,” she said with a nod. She didn’t say anything else, knew better than to try to force me to talk when I wasn’t feeling up to it. That was the thing. This woman knew me better than most. There was no new, exciting, getting to know you stage. We already knew each other. Which meant we were just slipping into a comfortable relationship like we’d been together forever. I liked it. That was what I wanted. She was what I wanted, and I finally had her. I’d been a dickhead for making us both wait this long.

“We could get out of here,” I suggested with a low growl.

She laughed when I grabbed her and pulled her in close. My lips were already brushing over her neck. “Hell,” she groaned. “We can’t leave now.”

“Why not?” I asked, nibbling on her earlobe. She shivered in my arms and it took everything in me not to throw her over my shoulder and drag her out of here.

“Because we’re hosting the party,” she reminded me. “We’d hurt the girls’ feelings.”

I sighed, resting my forehead against hers. “You’re right.”

“Of course, I am.”

“Are we interrupting something?”

I looked up at Smokehouse’s voice. He and Dani were standing there watching us. Dani was grinning like a fool while my best friend looked like he was ready to rip my head off.

Kit laughed, stepping back and slipping her arm around my waist. “No. We’re just having fun.”

Smoke’s eyes narrowed as they landed on me. I smirked at him. “Not as much fun as we’ll be having later.” I said, winking at Smokehouse to get a rise out of him. He knew exactly what I’d been doing. He also knew Kit would never let him get away with treating me badly for it. Just because he’d given his blessing and wanted me to be with his sister didn’t mean he wanted to watch me kiss up on her at one of our parties. Whatever. He’d get used to it eventually.

“You two are adorable,” Dani gushed. Before I could thank her, Keely, Jordan, and Gwen rounded her up to go sit with the others. They were about to start opening presents.

“Hell. Smoke.”

My head snapped to my left. Rip’s tone held a level of urgency we almost never heard from him, though he was keeping his voice low so as not to alert anyone else. “What’s going on?” I asked. Toxic and Butcher made their way over, somehow sensing trouble. I couldn’t figure out how they always knew.

“Cops.” Riptide shot us a grim look.

I looked down at Kit. “Keep all the women and kids inside,” I told her. She nodded, but I grabbed her chin, forcing her to meet my eyes and pay attention. “I’m serious, Kit. No one comes outside until we give the all clear.” I bent and kissed her then walked outside to see what was going on.

Lock and the others were already over by the front gate, speaking with one of the police officers. There were four squad cars waiting outside the compound.

“What’s this about?” Lock asked as we joined them.

“We got a noise complaint,” the cop replied.

“From who?” Hush growled. There weren’t any residential places near us. The closest thing was the apartment buildings down the road, which Rip happened to own. Not to mention that as loud as the girls could be when together, it was nothing compared to our normal parties.

“Anonymous call,” the second officer answered with a smug smile.

“No problem,” Lock said, crossing his arms over his chest. “We’ll keep it down.”

The cops exchanged looks. They hadn’t been expecting that. “Uh. We need to search the area.”

“Not happening without a warrant,” Static answered. “Good luck getting one for a noise complaint. Especially when we’ve already agreed to cooperate and turn down the music.”

The music was only a muffled noise from within The Bunker's walls. This wasn't about noise. This was Fremont. He was the last thing we needed to deal with right now.

"It'll be faster for you if you just let us take a look around. Then we'll be gone and out of your hair," the officer said. It was a thinly veiled threat, but not one that was going to make us comply. We knew the laws well, and even if we didn't, Static did.

"You're not coming on property until you get a warrant," Lock told them again.

The officers looked pissed, but they knew they couldn't do anything about it. They'd have to get permission from a judge before they could search our compound. There was nothing here for them to find anyway. We didn't keep our guns in places they would discover them. The clubhouse had plenty of false walls and hiding places. And all our businesses were legal.

"Don't make us have to come back," the original cop told us, giving in, knowing his hands were tied. We all knew it was an empty threat, an attempt to save face.

"Have a good night," the second officer said with a large, toothy smile, smacking his gum.

I burned their faces into memory before they walked off. They weren't just random beat cops. We'd be seeing them again before this was all over with Fremont.

We waited by the gate while they spoke with their fellow officers back by the cars, then they all got into their vehicles and left.

"Fucking dickheads," Priest muttered.

"What do we do now?" Toxic asked. "Fremont clearly isn't going to wait for us to finish with The Italians."

Lock frowned. "As long as we don't give him a chance to catch us doing anything, he won't have a choice."

"Hard to do when we're going to be taking out a huge crime syndicate in the city," Butcher pointed out.

“We’ll discuss this tomorrow,” Lockout declared. “Church at nine. No one say anything to the women. I don’t want to ruin the baby showers, or have them worrying for no reason.” He eyed Butcher and Toxic for an extra moment before addressing everyone. “Best behavior, they will be looking for a reason, *any* reason to come at us.”

We all agreed and headed back inside. Kit was smiling and keeping everyone busy. I didn’t know what she told them to keep them from wondering why we’d disappeared, but the women were exclaiming over gifts being opened and the kids were in a sugar coma in the corner, most of them passed out on the floor. We’d been partying for hours and it was all catching up to them. They were sleeping through all the commotion.

We joined the women, and I could feel Kit’s curious gaze on me. “Later, Vixen,” I told her under my breath.

She nodded and we focused back on the women in front of us. Priest grabbed a few extra guys to help with the perimeter sweeps for the rest of the night. I’d take my turn out there in an hour or two so everyone could have a good time. My heart sank in my chest. We were surrounded by fucking enemies. The prospect of a fight usually revved me up, but this time, I had too fucking much to lose. Stepping behind Kit, I wrapped my arms around her. Holding onto her eased some of the tension. She was safe. So were the others.

Lock would come up with a plan for The Italians and if we were lucky enough we wouldn’t end up facing both enemies at once. But if we did, we’d handle it. We always did. This was our town and nothing was going to keep us from protecting it. We sure could use a fucking break, though.

CHAPTER 12



Hellfire

The next morning, we all sat around the table, waiting for Lockout to start church. Everyone was tense. We refused to let it affect the party last night, but it was in the backs of all of our minds. If Fremont was sending cops to harass us, then we were running out of time. He was probably trying to escalate knowing that The Italians were about to do the same. If our focus was split he'd have an easier time bringing us down. I sighed and scrubbed a hand over my face.

“What’s the plan, Prez?” I asked.

He shut the door and sat back down at the head of the table. “We need to keep Fremont busy.”

“How do we do that without splittin’ our forces and makin’ us more vulnerable?” Hush asked, clearly pissed about the whole thing.

“We could call Wyoming back in,” Toxic suggested.

“Hold off on that,” Lock replied. “I don’t want to bring them in too early. We might end up needing them later and I don’t want Fremont knowing how many men we have.”

“So what do we do?” Static asked. He was sitting at the far end of the table. Our entire club was present this morning. We were crowded into every nook and cranny of the room, though the rest of the members were silent, waiting to see what plan we’d come up with.

Lock looked around at us, a devious smile on his face. “We need to call in a few favors. We can’t take care of The Italians with Fremont up our asses. And we can’t afford to go after Fremont first. So we make sure that his little errand boys are too tied up to bother us.”

A grin slowly spread over my face, mirroring his. “Who you thinking of calling?”

“Everyone,” he growled, grin gone. “Anyone we’ve ever helped who can handle this.”

“What’re we talking about here?” Smoke asked.

“Anything they can come up with that’ll keep the Marana and Oro Valley cops busy. Too busy to be doing Fremont’s bidding.”

Dash let out a low whistle. “That’s going to take a lot of people.”

“Good thing we’ve helped a lot of people, then,” Ricochet said. “This isn’t too much to ask of them in return.”

“It probably is,” Lock sighed, “but it’s our only option for now.” He looked around. “Some of our contacts we know well will only take a call to get them on board. The others we’ll need to reach out in person. Who’s available to help?”

“I’m in,” I told him. “Whatever you need from me.”

“Same,” Smoke said.

“I can help, too,” Ricochet said.

“Good. Rip, get them a list of who to contact over the next few days.” Lock met my gaze. “Let them know that if they’re willing they need to do as much as possible for the next few weeks. We’ll contact them to let them know once they can let up.”

“Understood.”

“What about The Italians?” Butcher asked.

“They’re locked down like Fort Knox,” Lockout said, blowing out a frustrated breath. “The women stumbling onto them at The Event Center was a fucking one off chance

apparently. Word is that Amato is bringing in every made man he has, though. He's preparing for the war he knows we're bringing." He shook his head. "We need to find a way to start chipping away at his numbers. If we launch a full scale assault at his home, it'll be a fucking blood bath."

"So we take our time and chip away at 'em," Hush said with a shrug. "It won't be quick but it'll be effective."

Lock nodded. "That's what I'm thinking."

"We can't just sit here and wait," Butcher argued.

"We're not going to," Lockout assured him. "But this needs to be done right. We can't afford to lose any of you." Lock looked at the upper level of the clubhouse, where the families were living. This wasn't just about losing a brother.

Butcher nodded, his eyes narrowing. "Whatever you need from me, Prez. Just let me know."

"Sit tight, just a little longer. All of you. As soon as I have a plan that doesn't involve putting all of us into the crosshairs, we'll begin."

"What if they start first?" Hush asked.

"Then shit gets real easy. No more making plans. We kill them all." Lock's words rang around the silent room.

Smiles were spreading over my brother's faces and I knew they were getting impatient. Once we were set loose, the mafia wasn't going to know what fucking hit them. They may be a crime organization, but we were trained fucking killers. We may have less numbers than The Italians, but that just evened up the odds for them. If Amato thought he was going to win this fight, he was dead fucking wrong.

As soon as Lock released us from church, Smoke, Ricochet, and I followed Rip back to his apartment so we could get a list of names and addresses to start with.

"I'll send you more as I go through them," he told us. "I'll text a few names to you so you can get on the road, but I'd start with Jackie."

“Oh shit,” Ricochet said with a laugh. “I didn’t even think about her.”

Riptide grinned over his shoulder at us. “She’ll be exactly what we need.”

“Text us, we’re going to hit the road,” I told him.

“You know where she is?” Rip asked.

“Yeah, she hangs out near my parents’ place. We’ll find her.”

It didn’t take long to make it out to where Jackie liked to turn tricks. It wasn’t that our family business, and my parents’ home, was in a shady part of town. It was a decent area, actually. Jackie just didn’t like other hookers. Or their pimps. She tended to steer clear of Miracle Mile, the area they usually congregated at. That meant the rest of Tucson got to put up with Jackie as a result.

Slowing my bike to a stop, I cut the engine and eyed the woman strutting down the sidewalk in broad daylight. As soon as the others shut down, I whistled.

Jackie’s head snapped my way so fast it nearly sent her to her ass. A huge grin formed as she came over. “Well hey there, Hellfire.”

“Hey, Jackie.”

“You looking for a good time, handsome? I’ve been asking to climb this tree for a long time now.” She licked her lips. Ricochet and Smoke chuckled from behind me.

“Not this time, Jackie,” I told her. Not any time. Ever. Most of the time you couldn’t be sure which eye was really looking at you because they pointed in two different directions, and she only had a few teeth left in her head. She didn’t seem to hurt for customers, though. Didn’t mean I was going to be one of them. “We wanted to see if you’d give the club a hand.”

That wiped the smile off her face. “Anything you need.”

Jackie was a nice enough lady. We’d helped her out a few years back when her pimp was abusing her. No one fucking

deserved what that man was doing. She was a free agent these days, or so she liked to say. My mom often dropped her off homemade dinners while she was out working on the street. She didn't know where Jackie lived or she'd probably bring the meals there. That was just the way my mom was. She fed the homeless as often as she could, as well.

"We don't want you doing so much you get arrested. Jackie," I told her, getting one of her eyes to focus on me when they started to wander. "Don't get arrested," I reiterated in case she hadn't been paying attention, "but here's what we need." I explained it to her and she was cackling with glee by the time I was done.

"I can do that, Hell. No problem."

"Thanks, Jackie."

We said goodbye to her, and I gave her forty bucks from my wallet. It wasn't much, but it meant she'd eat tonight and she didn't have to suck a dick to get it. I looked down at my cell as it buzzed. "Rip texted. Let's go."

We started up our bikes and took off. It was going to take a few days to put this plan into action, but Lock was right. It should keep Fremont off our backs. It wouldn't give us long, hopefully just enough time to take care of our first problem.

* * *

BY THE TIME we pulled back into the club parking lot, we'd spoken to ten different people. That was more than enough to get us started. We hadn't even gotten to the end of the day and Mom had called to say that Jackie and some bum from down the street had gotten into a brawl and the cops were there to break it up. Mom had tried so many times to help Jackie clean her life up, but Jackie was happy doing what she was doing. Mom had finally accepted it and now just tried to help where she could.

"She'll be fine, Mom," I told her.

“Oh, I know. I went to go help straighten things out and both Jackie and Henry claimed it was nothing but a misunderstanding.”

I grinned as I pushed open the door to The Bunker. Frowning when I didn't find Kit there, I said bye to my mom and headed up to her apartment. My heart started to pound when she didn't answer her door. “Better not have left this compound,” I muttered as I hit her number on my phone.

“Oh! Shit!” I heard a clatter as Kit answered.

“Where are you?” I demanded, worried something happened to her.

“I'm in Seek's apartment,” she answered. “Come over and give me a hand okay?”

“Why are you-” I broke off as I realized she already hung up. Grumbling, I made my way down the hall and opened Hush's door. “Kit?”

“Back here!” She called out.

I followed the sound of her voice. “What are you doing in here?” I asked, pushing open the door to one of the back rooms. Freezing in my tracks, I stared at my old lady and the room behind her. She grinned at me, paint splashed on her face and clothes. She was so damn beautiful my chest tightened.

“Do you like it?”

“Holy shit.” I stared up at the mural that she'd painted on the walls of Seek's nursery.

Kit's smile slipped a little. “Hush helped me move all the furniture out,” she said in a rush. “He said this was what Seek was hoping to do for her theme.”

“Kit. It looks fucking awesome,” I told her awe in my voice. She'd painted a forest with little baby woodland creatures everywhere. “I didn't know you could paint.”

She gave me a soft smile. “I don't like to show people my work, usually. I'm doing one for the others, too. Though it won't be as much of a surprise since they'll see Seek's before I manage to get to theirs.”

“I doubt they’re going to complain,” I told her. Going over, I pulled her into my arms. “This is incredible.” It was hard to keep my hands off her now that she was mine. I doubted that was going to change anytime soon.

“Thanks,” she said, ducking her head. Her cheeks were flushed with pleasure. “Want to help me clean up and move everything back? Hush is keeping Seek busy, but it won’t be long before they’re back and I’d love for her to see it all put together.”

“Of course.” I got to work helping her get everything set up. It never failed to amaze me how big Kit’s heart was. Her love for Seek was splashed all over the walls in bright colors for all to see.

The look on Seek’s face was pretty much what I expected when she walked into her nursery a short thirty minutes later. I’d just finished moving all the furniture back into the correct places when her gasp announced her presence.

My eyes darted over to Kit. Worry was spreading over her face. She clasped her paint splattered hands in front of her as her friend’s wide eyes took in the room.

“If you don’t like it-”

“Are you kidding me?” Seek said, voice husky with unshed tears. “I love it!”

A smile bloomed on Kit’s face, punching me in the chest with its beauty.

Seek rushed over to hug her friend. Kit laughed as she held onto Seek, both of them talking at once as they gushed over how much they loved the nursery.

I watched the two women with a smile. They were both so happy and excited about this baby that I couldn’t help but feel the same way. Smiling, I shook my head when I saw Hush standing in the doorway. He was watching his old lady with a look of awe on his face. He looked over and caught me staring at him.

We shared a grin, both of us happy for our women.

“Kit,” Seek said, pulling away from her friend. “This is amazing.” She looked around, completely awed by what she was seeing. “You did all this?”

“Yeah,” Kit said, looking shy. “I’m glad you like it.” She took Seek by the hand and pulled her over to where the rocking chair was set up. “Look.”

There, painted on the wall, were Auron and Jecht. Seek’s fingers brushed over the images of her dogs. “They look just like them. Thank you so much.” They hugged again.

“Why don’t you boys give us a while,” Seek said. “I’m going to need Kit to stick around while I show everyone else this masterpiece.”

Kit gave me a happy smile, twin spots of red coloring her cheeks from the praise.

“We’ll be downstairs,” Hush told them.

I headed downstairs with him. “Need a beer?”

“Fuck yeah, I do.”

We found some of the others already hanging in the main clubhouse area. The air was tense with worry, but we were all ready to cut loose for the night. Drinking away problems was a favorite pastime of ours.

“What’s going on?” I asked, taking a seat at one of the tables.

“Just waiting for the others to get back,” Lockout answered as he came down the stairs. He looked tired, but not angry.

“From where?”

“Rat found a spot that the mafia may be using as a backup for the Event Center,” Lock replied. “I sent Priest and Static to check it out.”

“Tell us all about it,” I said, eager to know what kind of break we were being dealt.

CHAPTER 13



Kit

I sighed happily as I watched the women coo over the paint job. Giving Seek this gift, and later the other two, was something that made me nervous. I'd been painting since I was a kid, but very few people knew about it. My therapist had suggested it as a way to let out some of the hurt and frustration of our mother leaving us. Smoke had just scoffed and did his own thing. Once I started I hadn't been able to stop.

Even though I didn't share my paintings with anyone, it meant so much to me. It was my heart on a canvas. Which was why I kept it locked away. Smoke wasn't the only one with mommy issues. I just hid my pain in different ways than he did.

"You did such a good job," Sloane said, giving me a hopeful look. "Is there any way this will be our present, too?"

Dani gave me a pleading look. "Please say yes."

I laughed. "That was my plan. If that's what you want?"

"We do," they exclaimed together.

My heart was so full I swear it was about to burst. I knew the guys were on the verge of a huge fight, and while that worried me, it was hard to dwell on it right now. Not with everything that's happened over the last couple days. It was like all my wishes were being granted. "Then that's what I'll do. You'll have to let me know what you want done."

They discussed ideas while the group headed downstairs. We all paused at the bottom of the stairs while we watched the men knocking back drinks and celebrating.

“What’s going on?” I asked, unsure of what I’d missed while I’d been locked up in Seek’s apartment for most of the afternoon.

“Not sure,” Seek said, frowning.

I watched, eyes narrowing, as Scarlett sashayed over toward the group with pitchers of beer on a tray. She set the tray on a table, then smiled up at Hellfire. It was too loud in the room to hear what she told him, but she leaned her curvy little body into him and placed a hand on his chest.

My biker was busy chugging back a glass full of beer, but he glanced down when she touched him. Whatever she said made him toss back his head and laugh. It took a minute for the buzzing in my ears to fade enough for me to realize the women surrounding me weren’t saying a thing. They were standing, waiting, quietly. The sweet butt wasn’t touching any of their men, so they were waiting to see how I wanted to handle this.

Anger simmered in my stomach as Scarlett scurried back to the bar to refresh more drinks. I didn’t like seeing her touch him. I hadn’t liked it before he’d made me his, but now it was unacceptable. The men were laughing, and taking a seat around the tables as they talked.

“Oh, hey,” Syl said, stopping near our group with more pitchers of beer in her hands.

“What’s going on?” I asked. They didn’t usually pull out a keg unless they were throwing a party.

Sylvia shrugged. “Priest just came back a little while ago. The guys have been celebrating ever since.” She gave us a quick smile, then hurried over to one of the tables to refresh their drinks.

“What are you going to do about that?” Seek asked, voice tight.

I glanced over and my stomach dropped down to my feet. Scarlett was back flirting with Hell. To his credit he was ignoring her, but she wasn't taking the hint. He was busy talking with Lockout and Static, but she was leaning into him again and batting her lashes.

I'd had enough. With a growl, I stomped across the room. I didn't care if it made me look like an idiot in front of everyone. I was not putting up with this shit. Not when it came to him. "Scarlett!" I snapped as I got closer.

She jumped at my tone and whirled around to face me, eyes wide.

"What are you doing?"

"Uh- I'm working," she said, glancing around nervously.

"Since when does your job include rubbing your tits all over a member who's taken?" I put my hands on my hips. It was either that or strangle her.

"Wha-what?" she asked.

Since I helped Rip run The Bunker and stocked up everything I had naturally ended up taking over scheduling the shifts for the sweet butts who worked here. It was only three for now, but in the past there'd been a lot more. They looked at me as sort of a boss and they, other than Pixie, didn't like to piss me off. Syl and Scarlett were sweet women. I actually got along with them really well and hoped they'd eventually find the loves of their lives. But right now, after seeing her rubbing all over my man, I wasn't feeling so warm toward Scarlett.

"He-" Her eyes were wide and darting around, looking for help. She didn't find it. Everyone was silent, watching me handle this. "I- I didn't know he was with someone." She swallowed.

"Why don't you get back behind the bar?" I suggested, my tone cool. I was doing my best not to lay into her. She was right. This thing between Hell and I was brand new and she probably hadn't known. But Hellfire did.

"Sure thing, Kit," she said, sounding grateful to get off the hot seat. She hurried back to the bar and the conversations

started back up again.

“Vixen.”

I turned my head and gave Hellfire an icy look. Without a word, I walked over to where the old ladies were sitting. Those who could, had drinks sitting in front of them. Seek walked over as I sat down and set a cocktail in front of me.

“You look like you could use this,” she told me with a grin.

“Thanks. You didn’t have to do that.”

She sat down gingerly, looking uncomfortable. She tossed her chin toward where Hellfire was sitting. “How long are you going to make him suffer?”

I pondered that. “A while,” I told her with a feral grin.

“He deserves it,” Susie said with nod. “He knows better than to let a club girl touch him after he’s claimed an old lady.”

“It’s disrespectful,” Tori added.

It was. And I’d put up with years of watching women flirting with him. Touching him. Getting further with him than I ever did even though he was everything I ever wanted. Sure, I’d kept my distance the same way he had. That didn’t mean it hadn’t killed me each and every time.

I glanced over at Hellfire and found him watching me. His eyes were dark and intense. My heart skipped a beat and I had to look away before I gave in.

“You know, you could just talk to him,” Gwen suggested.

“I don’t want to talk to him.”

“He deserves to stew a bit,” Jordan said with a laugh.

Shooting her a glare, I picked up my drink and sipped. “I’ll speak with him. Eventually.”

“He’s a sweet man,” Sloane said. “I don’t know why he didn’t set her straight to begin with.”

Sighing, I set the drink down. Talking about this was making it turn bitter on my tongue. “He’s been single nearly

his entire life. They're all excited." I shook my head when Butcher toppled backward in the chair he'd been tilting back on two legs. "And drunk already." Something eased in my heart. "He wasn't thinking."

"That better be his excuse," Keely said.

"Doesn't mean he's not going to hear about it," I grumbled, shooting a glare his way. Hell's eyes narrowed on me. He knew he'd fucked up, but he wasn't about to address it now and ruin everyone's good time.

"Good for you," Jenny said with an evil little grin. "Setting your boundaries now just means he'll know not to cross them in the future."

"Pretty sure Scarlett's not coming near you again for a while either," Seek said with a laugh. "And she probably won't ever touch Hell again."

"You looked like you were about to murder her," Gwen said in a low tone. "I can't blame her for being worried."

"Good." My eyes shifted to the bar and Scarlett ducked her head, pretending to be busy with something. My gaze shifted back to Hellfire and I was happy to see the grim look on his face while he watched me. I stood up, turned my chair away from him, then sat back down. "Everyone's celebrating," I announced. "No reason for us not to."

I wasn't sure how long we sat down there, or how many pitchers of margaritas we had, but the night passed in a blur. Groaning when the world shifted, I rested my cheek against a strong chest. The scent of leather had my eyes opening. "Go away," I muttered.

"You're not sleeping down here, Vixen."

"Mad at you," I told him.

"I know."

He carried me upstairs. I let him manipulate me as he saw fit and soon I was in my comfy pajamas and tucked up in bed with his huge body surrounding mine. I was lying with my back to his chest, head tucked under his chin.

“I’m still mad,” I slurred, but I shifted back into him until I was in a comfortable position.

“Go to sleep, Baby. We’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

Lying in his arms made it too difficult to resist. I closed my eyes and let the darkness sweep over me.

CHAPTER 14



Kit

A phone ringing woke me the next morning. I groaned, lifting a hand to my head. Rolling over, I stared up at the ceiling. I rarely drank anymore. I didn't enjoy the loss of control I felt while I was drunk. Plus, at twenty-eight, it was getting harder and harder to recover from the hangovers. I didn't know how the guys managed to drink the night away and still function the next day.

"Shit. Sorry," Hell said in a low voice as he came into his bedroom. We were in his apartment. I could tell by the sparse furniture inside the room and the lack of pillows on the bed. He lived like a total bachelor. He grabbed the phone, gave me a sympathetic look, then took it out of the room. I could hear him talking to someone as I willed my head to stop spinning.

"Here."

My eyes opened and I realized I'd dozed back off. I sat up and groaned as my head protested the move. Hell dropped some meds into my hand and gave me a glass of water. "Thanks," I croaked.

His huge hand covered my forehead, then swiped over my hair. I wasn't sure if he was comforting me, or himself. "I'm not sick," I told him. "Just feel like crap."

"Understandable," he rumbled. "You and the others knocked back quite a few pitchers of margaritas." He

chuckled. “Seek, Sloane, and Dani were the only ones able to walk back to their apartments. Well, waddle.”

I glared at him from under the glass as I drank the water he brought me. “Why don’t you look any worse for wear?” I asked once I finished the liquid inside the cup.

He chuckled again and cupped my cheek. “Baby, we drink every weekend. Damn near every night,” he added. “I can’t remember the last time I saw you have more than a single drink.”

Pleasure coiled inside of me. He’d been paying attention to what I had, or hadn’t, been drinking? I had to still the fluttering of my heart because there was still business to take care of. “I’m still mad at you,” I told him, trying to sound firm despite the fact that his hand was stroking my cheek so gently it was making it hard to think.

“I know,” he said. “I fucked up.” Since I didn’t move away from his touch, he kept up the soothing rhythm. “Honestly, Kit, I just didn’t think about it. Scar’s been flirting with me for years.”

“I know,” I told him from between gritted teeth. “I’ve had to stand back and watch it. Stupid me for thinking you’d set her straight now that you’ve claimed me.”

“I should have.”

His agreeableness was just making me more angry. I jerked back from his hand and he let it drop. My finger drilled into his chest, hurting me more than him, I was sure. His chest was rock hard. That didn’t stop me. “You embarrassed me in front of everyone.”

“No one thinks less of you-”

“That doesn’t matter!” I snapped. Growling in anger, I flipped back the blankets covering me and slid out of the bed before he could stop me. I stomped into the living room, not caring that I was giving him a hard time. I didn’t want to be sitting in his bed while we spoke about this. It was too intimate. Too hard to resist him there.

“The guys were impressed with how you handled it. I was, too,” he told me, as he followed me out. He reached out and grabbed my arm, pulling me down next to him on the couch.

“How would you like it if I let some guy press up against me?” I asked, jerking my arm away from him and folding them under my breasts.

Something dangerous flashed in his dark eyes. “No one fucking touches you, Kit. You’re mine.”

I glared right back at him, not completely oblivious to the fact that he’d just laid claim to me again. He did that a lot. It wasn’t enough for him to have kissed me and made it known we were together. No, he had to keep reminding me and everyone else that I was his. And normally, that would thrill me. But not now. Not when I was so mad at him. “Then why do you think it’s okay for some bitch to rub herself all over you?”

He growled in frustration and ran a hand over his face before looking back at me. “You’re right. I fucked up. It won’t happen again.” The air was tense, crackling with barely restrained anger. Me at him, and him at the thought of some man touching me. “But Vixen...”

My anger slipped a bit at his apology and desire took over at the look on his face. He reached out and lightly grabbed my throat. His large hand flexed, making my eyes widen. He was showing me nothing but gentleness, but the move was telling me that he could hurt me if he wanted to. He never would. I’d stake my life on it. That didn’t mean that him gripping my throat wasn’t doing things to me, doing things to my libido.

My system was internally combusting. A low fission of fear raced through me. Even though my heart and my mind knew he would never do anything to harm me, my adrenal glands didn’t and they were sending out warning signals. At the same time, my body was reacting to the fact that this man was touching me in a way that was both dominant and possessive. My pussy throbbed, desperate to be touched. My nipples were rock hard underneath the little tank top he’d put on me before bed.

His thumb caressed over my pulse point and his eyes flared as it sped up beneath his touch. “I don’t share,” he growled, voice low and deep. “You’re mine.”

“I know,” I whispered. “And you’re mine.”

“Damn right I am,” he rumbled. “No one fucking touches what belongs to me.” His eyes searched mine, waiting.

“I won’t let anyone touch me,” I promised.

He pulled me close, his hand still around my neck, and kissed me. It was hard, punishing, and full of need. His other arm slid around my waist and pulled me tight against him. My legs spread over his thighs as he pulled me onto his lap.

I moaned into his mouth as I felt how hard he was for me. It was impossible not to grind down against him. He was already dressed, so my cotton-covered pussy ground down against the rough material of his jeans.

“You’re going to be the death of me,” he groaned against my lips as I rubbed against his cock.

“But what a way to go,” I teased. He’d apologized. Promised it wouldn’t happen again. I was pretty sure we had an understanding between us now, and I was ready to forgive. Especially if it came with a mind-numbing orgasm. My brain could use a good numbing since it was still aching inside my skull.

Hellfire’s eyes flashed with heat and he claimed my mouth again. This time it was gentler. He took his time exploring me, learning what I liked and what made me moan. His hand slid down from my neck, over my shoulder, and down my back. He cupped my ass, squeezing it before he pulled me tighter against him.

My head spun as the kiss deepened. He was always so serious, so focused on whatever he was doing. It was like he’d put all that intensity into kissing me. I always knew sex with him would be amazing. In reality, it was so much better than I could have ever imagined.

I gripped his shoulders as I continued to rub against him. The seam of his jeans hit my clit just right and I gasped as

pleasure raced through me. My hips bucked against him.

“You’re killing me,” he growled against my lips. “I need you naked.”

“Then make it happen,” I taunted.

He grinned, a flash of white teeth in that dark beard that had been driving me crazy since he started growing it out. His hands slid up my sides, under my shirt, and lifted it off over my head. He tossed it aside before his eyes dropped to my breasts.

I wasn’t wearing a bra. He’d put me to bed last night, but from what I could remember he hadn’t taken advantage. That wasn’t the case now. His big hands cupped my breasts, squeezing and molding them as he leaned forward and sucked one of my nipples into his mouth.

My fingers slid through his hair as I held him close. My back arched as he sucked hard, his tongue lashing over my sensitive peak. First one side, then the other. He was relentless as he drove me higher and higher with just his mouth on me.

“Hellfire,” I moaned when he bit down gently on my nipple. The teasing was melting me. I was sopping wet for him. Needing him. “Please.”

He released my nipple and looked up at me with a wicked grin. “Please, what?” he asked, voice husky with need.

I gaped at him. “You know what,” I snapped.

His eyes flashed again, this time with humor. “I want to hear you say it, Kit.”

“I need you inside me.”

“That’s not quite what I want to hear.”

My eyes narrowed and I glared at him as my pussy throbbed with pleasure. He plucked my nipple, twisting until a bite of pain made me cry out. It was instantly replaced with a flare of heat that streaked through my body directly down to my clit. My head spun as the pleasure washed over me. I’d never been into pain, but Hellfire was making me reconsider that.

“Fuck me,” I panted. “Please, Hellfire. Fuck my pussy with your big cock.”

“Shit,” he groaned and his head dipped forward so he could suck my nipple back into his mouth again. This time he didn’t tease. His tongue lashed over it as his teeth bit down harder than before. My hands fisted in his hair as I held him close, begging for more without words.

His hands slid to my hips and he lifted me off his lap. He stood and wrapped his arms around me, lifting me right off my feet as he kissed me. My mind spun as he moved, but I was still dangling in his grasp. It was so hot that he was strong. That he could easily lift me and move me around. He set me on my feet in front of him and spun me around. The back of the couch hit me at the perfect height for what he had in mind.

I heard his zipper slide down and then his jeans were hitting the floor. I glanced back over my shoulder to find him stroking his thick cock. It was long and hard, a pearl of precum glistening on the tip.

“You keep looking at me like that and this is going to be over before it starts,” he warned.

“Then hurry up and fuck me,” I demanded.

His eyes flashed again as he grinned at me. “Whatever my old lady demands.”

He stepped up behind me and slid a hand between my legs. His fingers parted my pussy lips and he groaned when he found me soaking wet for him. He slid two fingers inside me, thrusting deep and fast. My head fell forward against the couch as I moaned in pleasure.

“Fuck, you’re tight,” he rasped.

I rocked back against his hand, loving the way he filled me. It wasn’t enough, though. I needed more. “Hellfire,” I pleaded.

He pulled his fingers free and positioned his cock at my entrance. He held still for a second and I looked back at him with a frown. He was watching me with such intensity that it

sent a shiver through me. Then he was pushing into me, filling me inch by inch until he was seated deep inside me.

“Fuck, Kit,” he groaned.

I gasped, understanding why he’d hesitated. He hadn’t bothered to put a condom on. I was on birth control, so he wasn’t going to get me pregnant, but the thought of having his baby made me shiver. I wouldn’t mind so much. Just...not yet. We had so much to learn about each other, and to enjoy about finally being together. We didn’t need any distractions. Some day. Someday I wanted this man’s babies. “I’m on the pill,” I gritted, forcing the words out even though a moan was fighting to free itself from my chest. He filled me to the point of pain. His cock was fucking huge and each time I’d taken it, I’d worried it wouldn’t fit. It always did.

“I know, baby,” he said, his voice strained as he held still, letting me adjust to him. “But fuck, you feel so good.”

I pushed back against him, needing more. He pulled out slowly and then slammed back in. His fingers dug into my hips as he fucked me hard and fast. My fingers gripped the back of the couch as I tried to stay upright under the onslaught. He pounded into me, his balls slapping against my clit with each thrust. The sound of our skin smacking together filled the air, along with our grunts and moans.

My body tightened, an orgasm already building inside me. I’d never come so quickly before, but Hellfire was like a fucking magician with his cock. It didn’t take long before I was screaming out my release as it ripped through me.

He kept fucking me, not letting up for one second. I was still riding the high of my orgasm when another started building deep inside me. “Oh my God, Hell,” I gasped, my head falling forward again as I fought to catch my breath.

“You want another one, baby?” he growled. “I’m gonna give it to you.” His fingers dug in even harder, bruising my hips, and I loved it. I wanted him to mark me. Wanted everyone to know that I was his. That we were finally together.

“Yes,” I moaned. “Yes, yes, yessss.”

“Fuck yeah,” he grunted. He thrust harder, faster, until I was screaming again as another orgasm ripped through me. This time he followed me over the edge, his cock jerking inside me as he came.

He collapsed against my back, pressing me into the couch cushions beneath us. We stayed there for a minute, both of us trying to catch our breath.

I moaned in pleasure as he lifted off me and started moving around. It rubbed his dick against all the right places while he was still lodged inside me. The next thing I knew his dick popped out of me, I was in his arms, and we were falling. I squealed, grasping onto him for dear life.

He chuckled as we landed on the couch and he held me close. I buried my face in his chest, enjoying the feel of his chest hair on my cheek. He’d kicked off his boots and jeans then had just fallen over the back of the couch. He was lying on it now, and I was on top of him. His huge hand smoothed my hair off the side of my face as I rested against him. He kept petting me, and I had to admit, it felt good. The hangover was only a minor nagging, easily ignored. I sighed, content to lay there with him.

We’d have more fights. It was inevitable as we learned each other’s boundaries, but if they all ended like this? My lips curled into a satisfied smile. I didn’t mind too much.

“What are you smiling about?” he asked, his fingers trailing down my back.

“Nothing,” I told him, snuggling closer to him.

He snorted. “I doubt that.”

“I’m just happy,” I admitted.

“Good,” he said, his voice gruff. “I like making you happy.”

“I can tell.”

He laughed at that. “So, what now?”

I lifted my head and looked down at him. His eyes were soft as he watched me. “I forgive you for being a jackass.”

He choked on a laugh, then just shook his head. He slapped my ass, the sound overpowering my gasp of shock. “Appreciate that.”

I laughed with him, laying back down against his chest. I didn’t have to worry about being too heavy for him. He was a behemoth. “What was happening last night?” I asked. I held my breath, wondering if he was going to tell me. In the past, it was Smoke’s job to keep me informed of the things that the club wanted us to know. That duty had now shifted to Hellfire.

“We found another business that The Italians are operating out of,” he told me.

The words vibrated through my head as he spoke. With my ear pressed to his chest, I could hear his heart beating, echoing through my head. The steady sound was soothing. He was here. He was mine. And for now, at least, he was alive and well. I couldn’t ask for him to not go up against the mafia. Just like I couldn’t ask that of my brother. Or the others. It worried me. The Italians weren’t some random group of guys oppressing women out in the desert. The cult never had a chance against the MC. But even then, Hellfire had been shot. It would be worse with The Italians. They knew what they were doing.

“What’s wrong?” His fingers brushing over my body sent goosebumps scattering over my skin.

“I’m scared,” I admitted.

His arms came around me and he crushed me with a hug. “I’ll never let anything happen to you, Vixen.”

“It’s not that,” I told him. “I’m scared for you,” I admitted after a brief hesitation.

He dropped his arms and his huge hand grasped my chin, forcing my whole body to turn so he could make me meet his eyes. Amusement shone in the brown depths I’d come to know so well. He had beautiful eyes. So deep and dark, I swore I got lost in them more often than not. “You don’t have to worry for me, Gorgeous.” He flashed a grin that just made him even more sexy. “They don’t stand a chance against us.”

“I know,” I sighed. “You’re better trained than they will ever be, but Hell... What if something happens? I can’t lose you now.” I swallowed hard, trying to fight back the tears that were pricking my eyes.

He sat up, taking me with him and cuddled me on his lap. Kissing the side of my face, he promised, “Nothing’s going to happen, Vixen. I promise.”

Sighing again, I relaxed against him, groaning when he began kissing me once more. “What are you doing?” I asked between kisses.

“What do you think?” he asked, tongue tracing the shell of my ear.

Shuddering with pleasure, I huffed, “Bothering me.” I laughed when he growled in my ear. “I have work to do.”

“You’re not working right now,” he pointed out.

“No, but if you keep distracting me, then I’ll never get it done,” I told him.

He chuckled and leaned back, pulling me with him. “Then let’s get some sleep.”

“Sleep?” I asked, surprised.

“Yeah. Sleep. You’re exhausted.” He studied me for a moment. “When was the last time you slept in?”

My brows pulled together as I tried to remember. I didn’t like lounging in bed. There was always so much to get done. I laughed when he adjusted me on top of him. “I’m not going to be able to sleep on you like this. We should at least go back to bed.”

“Too far,” he grunted. “Relax,” he murmured, running his finger up and down my spine. After a few minutes he grabbed a blanket off the back of the couch and spread it over us.

Something about being surrounded by him, being held in his arms set me at ease. I knew every piece of myself was safe with him. We hadn’t told each other how we felt about one another, verbally anyway, but I wouldn’t be able to hold back

telling him for long. The love inside me was fighting my control.

CHAPTER 15



Hellfire

The next week passed quickly. Smoke, Ricochet, Rip, and I had been busy as fuck speaking with our contacts and getting them on board to help keep Fremont and his minions off our ass. Lock, Hush, and Priest were busy making plans for The Italians. We'd found a chain of laundromats that Amato was using to launder his money. Seemed a bit on the nose to me, but what the fuck did I know?

Tonight, we were going to hit the first place. It was the biggest and likely to have the most of Amato's men there. Every Tuesday night they went to each of the places and made a drop. We were going to be waiting. Instead of splitting our forces and hitting all of the businesses, we were hitting just the one. That way we were all there to watch each other's asses. We expected it to be an easy ambush since they shouldn't know we were coming.

I was glad this was going down now, because in another few days I'd be going back to work with my dad. As much as I was looking forward to getting back to work for our family business, I found myself getting tense and irritated every time I thought about it. It meant I wouldn't be here to watch over Kit during the days. The others have assured me they'd keep an eye on her and I knew they'd keep her safe, but it wasn't going to be the same as *me* guarding her. The protective instincts I had were in overdrive these days. If it wasn't for this looming fight with The Italians and Fremont, I wouldn't

have a worry about splitting my time between the club and the business again.

Kit and I settled into a routine after our fight. We each did our prospective work during the day, we had dinner together, spent time with the rest of the club, then we went back to my apartment and I fucked her brains out until we finally passed out from exhaustion. It was fucking amazing. I wouldn't have thought there was more to learn about her since we'd been friends for so long, but I was wrong.

I learned that she liked to be teased until she was begging for release. That she was sensitive on the insides of her thighs. And that she loved it when I took control of her. She didn't like being restrained, though, which was fine by me. I didn't want to do anything that would make her uncomfortable or scared.

The things I was learning about her weren't only in the bedroom. She loved to drink her first cup of coffee in front of her easel, while she painted the early morning hours away. Even when she worked late, shutting down The Bunker most nights, she was still up by seven a.m., earlier if she didn't work the night before.

She'd been painting a lot lately and I got to see some of the new pieces. She was talented as fuck. Her paintings were so lifelike they seemed to come off the canvas. I'd never seen anyone with her kind of talent. She was amazing at everything she did.

I'd convinced her to let me take her out for lunch today, but we had an hour before that happened. I needed to make sure my bike was ready for tonight's run. It was acting up and I wanted to get it fixed before we went out. Stripping off my cut, I laid it across the seat as I fiddled with my bike. I was bent over, checking the drive belt when a shadow fell over me.

“Hey, Hell.”

Looking up, I leveled a grim look at Pixie. She was standing there in a pair of ridiculously short shorts and a tank top that barely covered her tits. “What's up?” My tone was resigned. Any day where I had to deal with her left me feeling

pissed off. She usually only approached me when she needed something.

“What’s all the excitement about?”

I straightened up, eyes narrowing on her face. She looked nervous. Most probably wouldn’t have noticed, but I did. What did she have to be nervous about? “What do you mean?”

“It just seems busier than normal around here.” She tried for a nonchalant shrug, but her whole demeanor was off.

“Nothing’s going on,” I told her, keeping my expression neutral. Normally, I’d tell her to fuck off, that it wasn’t her business, but my radar was going off, telling me she was up to something. Fuck, I didn’t have time for this shit. “Just doing a run tonight.”

“Oh?” she asked.

“There’s a kid over in South Tucson that needs some help,” I lied. As her face relaxed, I tensed up even more. Now I *knew* she was up to something, though I wasn’t sure what. As if my plate wasn’t full enough, now I needed to keep an eye on my cousin.

“That’s nice of you guys to help out,” she said. “Well, I better get inside.” She hurried off toward the clubhouse.

Lock paid the sweet butts to help bartend both our club bar and The Bunker. It kept them around for any of the guys to sleep with if they wanted to and it kept the women happy, too. They didn’t have to split their time between a job and finding a biker to marry.

Watching her make her way inside, I tried to figure out why she was suddenly so interested in what we were doing. It wasn’t good, whatever it was. Sighing, I went back to my bike.

“Hi.”

I looked up at the sound of Kit’s voice. A grin spread over my face as soon as I saw her. “Hey.”

She hesitated for just a minute before she spoke. “I just came by to see if you were ready for lunch?”

I glanced down at my watch. “Shit.” It was already after one. I’d been working on my bike for over an hour without even realizing it. My mind was occupied with all my responsibilities and now my shoulders were tense and aching. “Yeah, give me a minute to clean all this up,” I told her.

Her eyes followed me as I moved around, putting my tools away and wiping down my bike. She didn’t seem angry that I was running late. Her face was relaxed and a small smile was on her face.

“What?”

“What?” she parroted.

“You’re smiling.”

“Oh.” Twin spots of pink appeared on her cheeks. “I just like watching you.”

Straightening, I brushed the dust off my jeans as much as I could. I studied her, marveling at the fact that she wasn’t upset. Most women expected you to wait on them while they preened and primped for a date. Instead, I’d kept her waiting and all she could say was that she liked watching me. This gorgeous creature was too damn good to be true. Her eyes were more gray today than blue, something that happened often. They turned to molten silver when she came. The fact that I now knew that made me fucking hard every time I came across something that was the exact color of her eyes in the midst of an orgasm.

“You ready?”

Her voice broke into my thoughts. “Yeah. Where do you want to go?”

She shrugged. “I’m not picky.”

“How about we go get some Mexican?” I handed her my spare helmet and watched as she put it on.

“Sounds great.” She climbed on behind me, wrapping her arms around my waist to steady herself.

The ride was quick and soon we were pulling up outside a little hole in the wall restaurant. It was one of my favorite

places to eat. The food was amazing and it was always busy. Kit seemed to agree with my choice as she grabbed my hand and pulled me inside.

We were seated quickly at a booth in the back and ordered our drinks before the waitress left us alone. I studied Kit as she looked over her menu. "I'll be starting back up at work Monday."

Kit set her menu down and smiled. "I bet your dad will be glad to have you back."

I snorted and picked up a chip to dunk in the salsa the waitress dropped off. "He's been having a blast with Uncle Hal and Uncle Chris." The three men had started Portman's Plumbing and Septic years ago. When my uncles decided to move out of state, Dad had bought them out of their shares of the company and brought me in full-time.

Kit laughed and shook her head. "I can only imagine. I bet it's the same when all your brothers come into town."

Chaos. That's what it was like when the Portman family was reunited. It was always a good time. "Pretty much," I replied. Rubbing a hand over the back of my neck, I met Kit's gaze. "I'm going to need you to stick close to the clubhouse."

Her pretty eyes narrowed, my first indication that she was going to be difficult. "I am. Have been since Lockout asked."

My shoulders were already bunched tight from earlier, yet they tightened further at the defiant look on her face. A headache began to form behind my eyes. "I'm going to have to leave early in the morning and I won't be back until the afternoon," I explained.

"Okay?"

Sighing, I pressed my fingers to my eyes trying to relieve the dull ache. "Kit."

"Hell."

"I don't like the idea of not being there. And I really need you to stick around the compound. I don't want you going anywhere."

She was gritting her teeth because the waitress stopped by to take our order. The woman jotted everything down then walked away, oblivious to the tension that had sprung up between us.

“You’re not my keeper,” Kit said, voice low as she leaned across the table.

“No,” I agreed, “but I am your old man and I’m not going to let anything fucking happen to you.” Her eyes flashed with anger and she opened her mouth, but before she could bite my head off, I held up my hand. “Just for a few days. Maybe a week. Give me a chance to get back into the grind without having to worry about you on top of it all.”

She sat back against the booth with a sigh. “That’s not fair.” She folded her arms under her tits, shoving them up and distracting me.

“What isn’t?” I asked, eyeing the way they were straining against the fabric of her death metal t-shirt.

“Making me feel bad for how busy you are in order to get me to do what you want.”

I met her eyes, grinning unapologetically. “Whatever it takes.”

“Hell, I’m already sticking around the clubhouse.”

“You left yesterday to go grocery shopping,” I countered.

Her mouth dropped open. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” she hissed, keeping her voice down so she didn’t disrupt anyone else. “I can’t grocery shop?”

“Not right now. I don’t have time to go with you, Kit.”

“Do you have any idea how much you eat?” she exclaimed. “We’ll starve if I have to wait very long just to grocery shop.”

Chuckling, I sat back in my chair. “Good point. I’ll set it up so one of the guys goes with you. But we’re going to be busy tonight.”

She bit her lip. I already spoke to her this morning about the plan for tonight. We were leaving minimal men behind to watch over the clubhouse and our families, so all the women were told to be on high alert. The Italians had lost men the night they'd taken Dani, and they weren't going to just walk away from this fight. For all we knew they were planning a counter attack right now. It was going to come down to whoever made the first move. That needed to be us.

"I'm going to be fine," she told me, her voice softening. She reached across the table and grasped my hand. "You don't need to worry about me."

"It's my job to worry about you."

She squeezed my fingers before releasing them as our food arrived. "I know." She gave me a small smile. "But you have other things to focus on right now."

"Then do what I'm asking."

She nodded and picked up a taco. "Fine. I'll become even more of a pariah than before and not go anywhere."

Chuckling, I cut into the enchilada on my plate. "Thank you. One more thing."

Her eyebrow rose, but she waited to see what I was going to ask of her. That was the thing about Kit, she was always reasonable. I'd watched her wait out one of her brother's angry rants with a calm coolness that managed to make him blow up even more. Her temper ran ice cold while he blew up in white hot anger.

"Do you already have the phone tracking app on?"

"The what?"

I held my hand out for her cell phone. She dropped it into my palm, then watched with curiosity while I went into her settings and turned on the option to track her phone. It didn't take long to link our phones.

"Yours is on, too...right?"

Looking up at her, I gave her a sheepish grin, but turned mine on after I gave back her phone. "Of course," I said as

soon as it was done.

She had already taken a massive bite and her cheek poked out like a chipmunk's when she smiled at me. "Of course," she parroted with sarcasm heavy in her voice. "You're going to owe me big time," she warned, waving her taco at me.

"Look at it this way, you're the only woman in the city who has a tracking app on not because your boyfriend is jealous, but because he wants you safe."

"Yeah, that makes it better."

"After this is over," I told her. "We can go wherever you want."

"I'd love that," she replied. "Are you ready for tonight?" There was no missing the worry creeping into her eyes. It made them a soft, misty gray tinged with the faintest blue.

"Yeah." I nodded, giving her a reassuring smile. "I don't want you to worry. We were trained for this shit." Of course, the US Military wouldn't approve of how we were now using the training they gave us. That was too fucking bad. We were done taking orders from anyone but Lockout.

"I know," she said. "Do you think it will work?"

"I'm hoping it does." We needed to get the drop on The Italians so we could end this war before it got any worse than it already was. If we could decimate Amato's numbers, he wouldn't have the manpower to come after us. Unfortunately, his empire was old and well-established, thanks to his father and grandfather before him.

She nodded and took another bite of her food. She chewed thoughtfully, then told me, "If anyone can take these guys down, it's the club. I'm just worried about you."

It was amazing the difference having an old lady depending on me made. Going in and taking out the cult, there'd been nothing but excitement and this overwhelming need to blow off some steam. Those feelings were still there within me, but now my focus was split between what I needed to do tonight, and what I had to do in order to keep Kit safe.

The safety of *all* our families was paramount, but the thought of losing Kit made my throat go dry. Picking up my drink, I downed half of it. There was too much at stake for us to fuck this up. We were going to land a blow tonight that hurt Amato down to his core. If the fucker was smart, he'd take the lesson and leave us alone. If he didn't, we'd wipe him off the map.

CHAPTER 16



Hellfire

Shifting, I adjusted my balls so they weren't being smashed against my seat. I felt Lock's stare, more than I saw it as I moved. We were parked under some trees in the barren parking lot, waiting for Amato's men to show up at the laundromat. It was a dark night and being under the shadows of the trees the city had planted for shade only helped us blend in. We'd been sitting here for over an hour, barely moving, patiently waiting on our prey.

"You okay?" Lock asked me in a low voice.

I nodded. "Just don't want this to be a waste of time."

Butcher snorted out a laugh. "We're going to have to do something about your balls if you keep shifting around like that."

"Fuck off," I muttered. Like I'd let that crazy asshole anywhere near my junk.

"Here we go," Hush called out in a low voice as three SUVs pulled up and parked in front of the storefront.

"Not exactly low profile," Ricochet muttered.

"They don't need to be," Lock pointed out. "Look at this place."

The surrounding stores were all locked down for the night and other than a few cars sprinkled throughout the parking lot,

it was dead. Who was going to see them? That worked for us. It meant we wouldn't have to worry about any innocents getting caught up in this.

We watched as Amato's men got out of the vehicles and went inside the laundromat. We'd been staking out the place for a week now, so we knew what was going on inside. There was a trap door under one of the washing machines that led to a basement where they stored the money they were having laundered at this site. They'd have someone go down and bring up duffel bags full of cash, then they'd take them to another location. They were constantly moving around cash in order to keep a steady flow trickling into their boss's pockets.

"Let's go," Lock ordered. We all climbed off our bikes and started to make our way across the parking lot.

I pulled my gun from my holster, holding it low at my side. My brothers did the same. The Italians wouldn't know what hit them.

We had a simple plan. Go in, take out Amato's men, and leave him a message he couldn't ignore. Eagerness filled me, but my training overrode the feeling. Everything inside me stilled and calmed as I shut down my emotions, waiting for the moment when shit would hit the fan. We'd been working for weeks to get here, but now that we were about to do it, I was impatient to get it over with. That didn't mean I allowed the feeling to make me act irrationally.

Lock held up his hand when we reached the door and we all stopped. "Ricochet."

He stepped forward and picked the lock on the door. It swung open silently under his hand and we all filed inside. Amato's men were down below, the wash machine had been moved to the side and the stairs down into the depths of the building were exposed. This place was perfect for the mafia. There were very few places, even commercial buildings, in Tucson that had basements. It allowed Amato to hold his cash in a neutral place. If his home was raided by law enforcement nothing would be found, and connecting these laundromats to

his family was damn near impossible. The fact that Rat was a genius was the only reason we had.

“Hush,” Lock said, nodding at him.

Hush pulled out a flash bang grenade and pulled the pin. We all covered our ears and turned our heads away as he tossed it down into the basement. The sound of it going off was muffled by our hands. We didn’t wait for them to recover.

Lock led us down the stairs, guns raised as we went. I took in the scene as I followed my brothers down. Amato’s men were sprawled on the floor, groaning and holding their heads. They were dazed, but not incapacitated. Not yet, anyway.

We spread out around them, pistols pointed at their heads. “You’ve been fucking with the wrong club,” Lock told them.

“Fuck you,” one man spat. “We’re only just beginning.”

“No, fuck you.” Lock shot him point blank in the head. Blood splattered over his friends who were all staring at him with wide eyes. “Anyone else want to mouth off?”

“What do you want?” another man asked, his dark eyes watching us with fury.

“I want you to tell your boss that we’re done playing games. We’re coming for him and he’d better be ready.”

“He’s going to kill you,” a third man said, his voice shaking.

Lock grinned. “I’m looking forward to that.” He nodded toward us. We’d discussed what we wanted to do tonight before we came here. “You won’t live to see it, though,” he informed them.

The men started cursing and trying to scramble away from us, but there was no escape. Our gunfire was muffled down in the bowels of the building.

When it was over we stood there, breathing heavily as we stared at the dead bodies around us. Rip took a cell phone off one of the bodies and handed it over to Lockout.

Our president scrolled through until he found Amato's name and number and shot him a text. We wanted to make sure they knew exactly who had done this. We were ready to face them and put all of this to rest.

"Let's go." Lock said, tossing the phone back onto the body. He turned and headed up the stairs.

We followed him, not saying a word. We'd ambushed them and now had five more deaths on our hands. It was just part of being in this MC. You had to be willing to do whatever it took for your club. For your brothers. There wasn't anything we did that I regretted. Certainly not this. This organization had tried to kill our women. Had taken Dani. They needed to know that wasn't going to be forgotten.

Static pulled up to the curb in one of the club's cage rides and we tossed the bags of money into the back. He let out a whistle when he saw how many there were. "What's the plan, Lock?"

"Follow us," Lock told Static, then motioned for the rest of us and we headed to where our bikes were parked. We weren't worried about cameras, or being seen. We already let Amato know who was responsible. There wasn't any fucking way he'd bring this to the cops. Our bikes roared to life and as one group, we pulled out of the parking lot and rode across town.

We waited while Lockout knocked on the door to a well-known children's organization. It was late, but the woman who ran the joint answered. She pulled her robe tight around herself as she eyed us through the security door. "Yes?"

"We have a donation to make," Lockout told her.

Her brows shot up. "At one o'clock in the morning?"

"That's right."

"What kind of donation?"

"Cash."

Mistrust was written all over her face, but she couldn't afford to turn away help, so she opened the door. Her jaw dropped as we started piling the bags of money just inside the

door. Smiling at her, I nodded to her before stepping back. The bags were stacked in two piles almost to her hips.

“This...is cash?” she asked. Her gasp filled the still night air as she dragged open a zipper and saw for herself. Her wide eyes flashed to our faces, looking around. “You’re giving all of this to me?”

“For the kids,” Lockout explained.

“Everything we get as donations goes to the children living here, or to needy families in the area.” A slow smile spread over her face. “Are...are you sure?”

“It’s all yours,” Riptide told her with a smile.

“Um...it’s going to take me a while to count it. But I can get you a receipt for your tax write off.”

“Don’t need it,” Lock told her. “Just put it to good use.”

“Is this blood?” she asked, worry creeping into her voice as she plucked at one of the bags.

“Ketchup,” Toxic said, speaking up. “Dropped my fucking hot dog right on the bag. It was a good hotdog, too. I’ll miss it.”

She gave him a puzzled smile and shook her head as though to say she didn’t have the ability to figure him out. She wasn’t the only one. “Thank you so much. Who can I say the credit goes to?”

“No one,” Lock told her. “Don’t tell anyone about getting the money this way.”

Her eyes widened again at the demand, but she nodded. “You’re like an answer to my prayers,” she whispered.

We backed off the front steps and went back to our bikes. I shrugged on the cut I’d left on my seat, my brothers doing the same. We didn’t need this lady connecting that money back to us. Not because we were worried about the repercussions for us. She was the one who would be in danger if Amato figured out where his cash had gone.

We rode back to the clubhouse in silence, all of us lost in thought. It was hard not to feel good about helping those kids, even if it did come with a price. Tonight had gone exactly as we planned. We wanted it to be a bloodbath for their side and that's what happened.

Lockout wanted to draw Amato out and what better way to do that than to pick off his men in small groups until he's left with nothing? We were hoping to force the mafia don into making a stupid move. Losing his men was going to sting, but something told me that the loss of his money was going to enrage him. The fucker had sent his men after one of our women over the loss of far less money than we stole tonight.

Grinning in the dark at the thought of his anger, I let myself into my apartment and stripped as I moved toward my bedroom. I was in nothing but my boxers by the time I crawled into bed.

Kit shifted as I wrapped my arms around her. "Everything okay?" she asked, voice groggy.

"It's fine. Go to sleep." A sliver of a moon had risen in the sky as we rode back to the clubhouse. Its light was spilling into the room, allowing me to see her. I brushed my hand over her hair, trying to soothe her back to sleep.

Her hands pressed against my chest, roaming over my skin as she checked me for wounds. She pressed her face to my throat and the feel of her lips there had me closing my eyes, drinking in the pleasure. Some of the guys were downstairs, raiding the bar in order to ease the bloodlust that we all felt after a battle. Sure it hadn't been much of one as we hadn't given the mafia guys the chance to fight back, but something about killing made the adrenaline flow. It was pumping through my veins and now with Kit touching me, there was no stopping myself. She kissed up my neck, over my jaw, before pressing her mouth to mine.

I groaned as her tongue slipped between my lips and stroked mine. Her hands moved over me, touching everywhere she could reach. I rolled her onto her back, covering her with my body. She moaned as I settled between her legs, our hips

grinding together. I didn't have the patience to let her have her way. I needed to fuck her more than I needed my next breath.

Her nails dug into my shoulders as I kissed down her throat. I sucked a nipple into my mouth and she cried out in pleasure. I was hard as a fucking rock as I moved to the other breast, giving it the same attention I gave the first.

Kit arched beneath me as I kissed down her stomach. Her fingers tangled in my hair when I reached her belly button and swirled my tongue around it. "Bennett," she gasped when I moved lower still, kissing over the silky skin of her inner thighs.

Growling at hearing her moan my name, I pressed my lips to the top of her pussy and she jerked against me. We both groaned when I slid a finger inside her wet heat. She was soaked for me. My thumb brushed over her clit and she moaned, her hips rocking against my hand.

I added another finger, stretching her as I pumped them in and out of her body. She was close, so close. I could feel it in the way she was tightening around me. She responded to my touch as though I made her wild. It was so fucking sexy. This woman was mine. She was made for me. She proved it in the way she begged so sweetly. In the way she welcomed me both into her body and into her life. I was one lucky bastard.

My cock was throbbing with the need to be buried deep inside her, but I wasn't going to stop until I felt her come on my tongue. I needed her to fall apart around me. I sucked her clit into my mouth and Kit cried out my name again as she shattered. Her hands tightened almost painfully in my hair as she came. "That's my girl. I love watching you come."

Pushing myself up, I stared down at her flushed face, her chest heaving as she tried to catch her breath. She looked like a goddess spread out beneath me. Her dark hair was splayed over the pillow and her eyes were dazed as she stared up at me.

"You ready for me to fuck you?"

She nodded, biting her full lower lip.

Any other time, I would drag this out, pull a few more orgasms from her. I wouldn't stop until she was shaking and crying out, begging for me to fuck her. Not this time. I didn't have the patience. My need was too great. I positioned myself between her legs and slid into her slowly. I growled into her neck as I bottomed out inside of her. She wrapped her arms and legs around me as I started to move. It wasn't long before we were both panting with the need for release. She didn't utter a single complaint as I pounded into her, releasing all my frustrations and aggression on her body.

"Fuck," I hissed as I pulled out of her.

She sat up on an elbow, giving me a confused look until I grabbed her by the hips and flipped her. She landed on her hands and knees.

I climbed up behind her, sliding back inside in one thrust. "Bennett!" she cried out when my thumb pressed against her ass.

"I'm going to fuck you here soon, too," I promised her, pressing harder against that tight ring of muscle.

Her pussy tightened around me at the threat, making me grin. She wanted it, even if she was too shy to admit it.

Kit's fingers curled into the sheets beneath us as I started to move again. Her head fell forward and she moaned, "Harder."

"Goddamn," I groaned as I complied.

She pushed back against me with every thrust, meeting me halfway. It was like she needed this just as much as I did. My hand came down hard on the curve of her ass and she jerked as the sound echoed through the room.

"You like that?" I asked, smacking her ass again.

"Yes!"

I grinned as I spanked her again. She liked it rough. Who knew? Not me, but I wasn't going to complain about it either. I was going to enjoy finding out all of Kit's kinks.

Her body tightened around me and I knew she was close. “Come for me, Kit.”

She cried out my name again as she fell over the edge and I followed her a few thrusts later.

I started to pull away, but stopped when she collapsed onto the bed, moaning. Chuckling, I lay down next to her, pulling her against me. She snuggled into my side, her face pressed against my neck. “Are you okay?”

“Pretty sure I should be asking you that. I was a little rougher than before.”

“I loved it,” she told me, a sleepy smile playing over her face in the moonlight. Her fingers were brushing over my abs, making my dick twitch in appreciation with each stroke. “Did everything-”

“Shhh,” I told her. “I’ll tell you about it in the morning. Get some sleep.”

She nodded and closed her eyes. It wasn’t long before her breathing evened out. She was asleep in minutes.

I stared up at the ceiling as I held her close. My mind wouldn’t shut off as I went over everything that had happened today. The man I’d killed in that basement. The look of gratitude on the woman’s face as we gave her that money. We kicked the hornet’s nest. Now we needed to exterminate Amato and his crew before they had a chance to retaliate.

CHAPTER 17



Kit

Smiling, I swiped my brush through the paint and then dabbed it on the wall. The women were all gathered around inside Sloane's nursery while I worked on her mural. We dragged various chairs inside so they could sit and watch me work.

Hellfire told me everything that went down last night, so it came as no surprise when Lockout announced that he was shutting down The Bunker for the next few weeks. Every one of the guys was tense, waiting for the mafia's response to all of this.

I gave Hellfire a shoulder massage this morning before meeting the girls. He was trying to roll the stiffness from his muscles. The knots I found may as well have been boulders. And no wonder, I couldn't imagine the stress he was under. I enjoyed touching him though, and listening to his groans of appreciation as I smoothed out weary muscles, it had my panties dampening in a hurry. Too bad there wasn't enough time to take care of that.

"Ricochet is driving me crazy," Jordan said with a sigh. "He made me call in sick today." She gave us all an indignant look. "Do you know how long it's been since I've called in sick?"

"Then you're due," I told her with a soft smile thrown over my shoulder. "Your dad can handle the birds."

“I know,” she said with a heavy sigh. “I just don’t like being penned up here. Makes me itchy.”

“Look,” I said, spinning around on my butt so I was facing them. My voice was soft and understanding. As much as I didn’t like being stuck here either, I was looked at as a leader amongst these women, or so Hell had told me this morning. It was part of my obligation to the club and the women themselves to help them understand and follow the rules in a time like this. The guys had valid reasons for wanting to keep us close. “I know this is tough. None of us want to be cooped up, forced to call out of work, but this is important. If we can’t stay here, where it’s easy for the guys to keep an eye on us, who knows what will happen.”

There were nods and murmurs of agreement. “This is the only way for the guys to protect us while their focus is on The Italians,” Susie added.

“I vote they send us to Mexico,” Seek said with a grin. “I hear Cabo is nice this time of year.”

Everyone laughed, even Jordan. Her shoulders slumped. “Sorry. I know they’re doing their best and I don’t mean to complain. I just miss my damn bird. Since living here, I haven’t had the time to take her out hunting. I barely get to visit her, or my family.”

“We understand,” Sloane said, scooting over to wrap an arm around her shoulders.

“And if you can’t bitch to us,” Jenny added, “who can you complain to?”

Gwen patted Jordan’s thigh from where she was sitting on the other side of her. “Think of it as a mini vacation with your best friends.”

“I’ll drink to that,” Seek said.

“You will not,” I told her with a mock frown.

“What are you painting?” Keely asked me, changing the topic.

“An ocean scene.” I’d already outlined the coral and was working on the shading now. Sloane and Riptide were so completely in love with the ocean it only made sense that she’d asked me to paint an underwater scene for her baby. The sun would shine through the water, lighting up the depths and the sea creatures below.

“That’s going to be gorgeous,” Seek said with a smile, rubbing her belly as she watched me work.

“Thanks.”

We chatted as I worked and everyone was so busy enjoying the quiet morning that no one noticed when Seek went still. “Um...guys?”

I looked over and frowned with worry. “Are you okay? You’re white as a ghost.” Scrambling up from my spot on the floor, I went over to her.

“I thought it was just indigestion,” she muttered, teeth clenched.

“What?” I asked, shaking my head.

“I’ve been feeling off all morning,” she explained.

“Uh oh,” Tori said, giving Susie and Gwen a knowing look. They’d been through childbirth before and obviously knew the signs.

“I’ll get Hush,” Susie said, standing up.

“It’s not time yet,” Seek said, looking a little desperate. “I still have two weeks to go until my due date.”

“Babies don’t care about due dates,” Jenny told her in a low soothing voice. “Just breathe.”

“I’m breathing,” Seek snapped, then grimaced at her friend. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Jenny told her with a laugh and a hug. “You’re allowed to feel a little cranky.”

My mouth dropped open when Hush slammed through the door so hard it hit the door stopper at an odd angle and the

handle crashed through the drywall, leaving a hole. There was worry and a little bit of panic on his face. “Seek?”

“She’s fine,” I said, moving out of the way so he could drop to a knee beside where she was sitting in Sloane’s rocking chair.

“We need to go to the hospital,” he said. “I’ve got her go bag here.” He looked around frantically, forgetting that we were at Rip and Sloane’s apartment. “Where the fuck is that bag?”

“We have time,” Susie told him. “Her water hasn’t even broken yet.”

“Could you maybe plan for that to happen in your apartment?” Rip asked from the doorway. “I’m already going to have to patch that hole.” He gave Hush an unamused look. “I don’t want to be ripping up the carpets too.” He held his hands up when Seek glared at him. Jecht raised his head and growled at the man. “Fine. Leak wherever you want to,” he said with a sigh.

Hush scooped Seek up in his arms. She was so tall that it was sort of funny to see her cradled against his chest like that. “We’re goin’ to the hospital,” he announced as he carried her out of there.

“I’ll go grab her bag,” Gwen said, as she and Jordan jumped up and followed them out.

I looked over at Lockout and Hellfire and shrugged. “So much for keeping everyone here today.”

“It’s fine,” Lock said, looking amused. “We can all sit around the hospital just as easily as we can here.”

* * *

THREE HOURS, and multiple cups of coffee, later, I stood up, stretching my back. Sitting here waiting was beginning to grate on my nerves. I was worried about Seek. About her baby. I knew it could take a long time for babies to be born, but I wished there was something I could do to be helpful.

“She’s going to be fine,” Hellfire told me as he joined me in the hallway outside the waiting room. I hadn’t even realized I’d wandered this way, lost in thought. “She’s strong.” He gave my hand a squeeze and I smiled at him.

“I know.”

“And so is her baby.”

“I know that too,” I said with a laugh. “I just wish we could help them somehow.”

He grinned at me. “You’re a good friend.”

I shrugged, unsure of how to respond to that. I tried to be a good person. Good friend. But sometimes I felt like I wasn’t doing enough to help those around me. Especially after The Event Center debacle. We’d brought The Italians into our lives and now the guys were having to deal with the consequences of our actions. Sure, we were all in danger from the mafia, but they were the ones who would have to neutralize them. I felt guilty. We’d caused this and they had to clean it up.

“Are you okay?” he asked, his voice soft and concerned.

My eyes shot up to his face in shock. He could read me so well. Had always been able to. It still surprised me. “I was just wishing that I could go back and stop us from going into the back of The Event Center. Then we wouldn’t have all this trouble following us around.”

“We’d still have Fremont,” Hell pointed out. He pulled me against his chest, wrapping brawny arms around me. It always made me feel safe when I was crushed up against him. He was so damn strong it was like no one could ever get through him to me. “This isn’t your fault.”

“The Italians are,” I said with a sigh.

“No, not really. If anything you did us a favor putting them on our radar this early. They’re working with Fremont. It was only a matter of time before he sent them after us, and we would have been blindsided. There’s no point assigning blame,” he continued. “What’s done is done. We’ll handle it and everything will go back to normal.”

Resting my head on his chest, I let the sound of his heart soothe me. At least until Hush came rushing out into the waiting room, a huge grin splitting his face. “It’s a boy. He’s healthy and Seek was amazin’. She’s restin’ now.” He looked so proud and excited. They had chosen not to find out the gender of the baby prior to the birth, wanting it to be a surprise.

We all rushed to congratulate him, the sound of hands slapping backs echoing throughout the room as his brothers embraced him. Eventually, he went to rejoin his wife and newborn son. No one followed. This was their chance to bond as a family and we didn’t want to interrupt that even though we were all excited to meet the newest addition.

Hours later we were still waiting. It was almost midnight now and everyone was getting antsy. I was sitting in one of the chairs, my legs pulled up under me, my head resting on Hell’s shoulder when he shook me awake. “Is everything okay?” I asked with a yawn.

“Yeah. A few of the guys are staying here to watch over Hush and Seek. The rest of us are going home to get some sleep.”

I nodded, standing and stretching before I grabbed my jacket off the back of the chair. He walked out with me, his arm around my shoulders as we made our way to the parking lot.

The streetlights illuminated his face as we walked, hand in hand. “Do you want kids?”

A grin stretched over his face as he looked down at me. “Absolutely. Ten.”

I choked on a laugh. “Ten? You’re insane. I’m not having ten babies.”

He chuckled and stopped walking. Pulling me against him, he gazed down at me, a soft look on his face that I’d never seen before. “I’m kidding. We can have whatever number you want.” His hands cupped my cheeks and he leaned down, kissing me softly.

My arms went around his neck and I kissed him back. The kiss was sweet and gentle, nothing like the rough meeting of lips we'd shared in the middle of the night when he'd gotten home. I enjoyed both, one as much as the other. I wanted to spend the rest of my life kissing Hellfire.

"You get her pregnant and you're marrying her," Smoke said as he appeared out of the dark, walking beside Dani.

Hell shot him a smirk. "Yeah? When's your wedding?"

"Yeah, Smoke," Dani said, pulling her hand from his and planting her fists on her hips. "When are we getting married?" Her lips twitched as she tried to hold back a smile.

Smoke looked back and forth between them. "That's different-

"Doesn't seem very different," I told him.

"You're my sister," he told me in a haughty tone. "If I hear him talking about impregnating you again, I won't be responsible for what I do. It will probably involve a shotgun and a preacher."

"If you weren't skulking around in the shadows, listening in on private conversations, you wouldn't have heard anything."

"I'm not skulking," he replied, making a face. "I was just fucking walking-"

"Then you can keep right on walking," I told him, waving him away.

Dani lifted a hand to hide her laughter at the look on Smoke's face. My brother looked over at Hellfire and gave him a pitying look. "Never mind. Do whatever you want with her." He shot me a glare before he stalked off.

Hell and Dani both burst into laughter. "He's so easy to rile up," Dani said, shaking her head. She looked at me, a smile still on her face. "He's not going to stop until he badgers you into getting married."

"Who knew he was so fucking sentimental," Hellfire asked with a shake of his head.

“He can’t shut it off,” I replied. “He’s been worrying about me for too long.”

Dani waved to us and hurried to catch up with Smokehouse. I sucked in a huge lungful of air. If it wasn’t for The Italians and Fremont everything would be perfect right now. There was no use in worrying, though I knew I would anyway. All I could do was trust Hell and the others to take care of everything and do my part to make sure it all turned out alright.

CHAPTER 18



Hellfire

I stared down at the squirming bundle in my arms in awe. The hospital had kept Seek overnight and for most of the next day, but they were home now and it was my turn to hold the baby who was being passed around. Looking up, I met Kit's sparkling eyes. She had this soft smile on her face as she watched me with the newborn. "I changed my mind."

"About what?" she asked with a laugh.

"I *do* want ten of these."

The group crowding around laughed at that, except Smoke who scowled at me. He could shove it up his ass. I knew what game he was playing. He was thrilled I was dating his sister, mostly. Maybe not when he was reminded that us dating meant I fucked her as often as I got the chance. That was probably the reason for his shitty attitude at the moment. But for the most part, he was glad we were together and that his sister was happy.

Carefully cradling the baby, I raised my right hand and flipped him off. His laughter floated around the room as he shook his head. "Do you have a name yet?" I asked, looking over at Seek.

She was seated on one of the couches in the main living area of the club. She looked tired, but happy, and she'd refused

to head upstairs every time her husband suggested it, which was often. She wanted everyone to get the chance to meet her son. "Sawyer Davis Jenkins."

"That's so cute!" Sloane gasped.

"Sawyer was my grandfather's name," Hush told us.

"And Davis after his daddy," Seek said with a smile. She reached out her arms as the baby began to fuss and I handed him back to her.

"Okay, that's all I can take," Hush announced. "You can finish meetin' him later, but I need my wife to rest now." There was worry etched into his face.

Seek laughed, but stood up with his help. "Okay, okay. We're going."

"It's so sweet seeing him be so protective," Kit said, wrapping an arm around my waist as she leaned against my side.

"That's his family," I replied with a shrug. "I get it."

She looked up at me and I dipped my head to kiss her. It was a quick peck since we were in the middle of the common area. I wasn't about to get too hot and heavy with everyone here. That would be disrespectful to my woman. But I couldn't resist kissing her when she was smiling at me like that. Plus, I didn't want to listen to Smoke whine again.

"You look good together," Jordan told us, her eyes sparkling with humor.

"Thank you," Kit said with a laugh. "I'm-"

Before she could finish whatever she'd been about to say, the door to the clubhouse burst open and Butcher and Toxic rushed in. "There's trouble..." Butcher paused as he looked around at all the shocked faces of the women. "Uh..."

"The Children's Lifeline building is burning," Toxic said, taking over.

"Shit," I muttered. Looking down at Kit, I cupped her face in my hands. "Stay here. Stay alert."

“Kit,” Lock said as everyone began running out the door toward their bikes. “Let Hush know, but tell him not to follow us. He can watch over the clubhouse with Dash, Mel, Bear, and Breaker.”

I pressed a kiss to her lips and was following my president out the door before she had the chance to respond. “How the fuck did Amato figure out we gave them the money?” I asked as we ran.

“Fuck if I know,” he snarled. “I thought the fucker would come for *us*, not after a bunch of fucking kids. Goddamned coward.”

We were all on our bikes within minutes and racing down the highway. The Italians were sloppy. Dangerous. And they weren't above going after innocents in order to get their way. It made me hate them even more. This was a clear message that they weren't going to let up until we dealt with Amato directly. They'd already hit us once when they'd taken Dani, but this was more than just a warning.

It didn't take long to reach the Children's Lifeline building. It was burning fast. The firefighters were there, but it looked like it was too late to save it. The CL housed kids who didn't have families as well as helped low income families all over Tucson. This was a huge blow for the city.

Walking over, we stopped near the woman who we'd met the other night. “What happened?” Lockout asked in a low voice.

She jumped at his voice, looking over her shoulder at him. There was a group of kids, ranging from ages five to fifteen clustered around her. “Teddy,” she told one of the older boys, “take the children and wait over there. Stay out of the way of the firemen.”

We watched in silence as the gangly teenager walked the rest of the kids a short distance away. Gritting my teeth, I tried to ignore the tears tracking down the younger kids' faces as they watched their home burn.

“I don’t know,” Amy told us. Rip had done some research to figure out who she was. She seemed like a genuinely good person. “I didn’t tell anyone.”

Frowning, I rubbed my hand over the back of my neck as I looked around. Everything in me froze when I saw a group of men approaching. “Lock.”

My tone had my president and the rest of my brothers on high alert. The man leading the group had to be Amato. He was dressed in an expensive suit and had that authoritative look on his face. The one that said the world would bend to his will, or he’d burn it down. Men like this expected people to do what he said because he’d been born into a position of power.

He never worked to earn the trust of his men. He never had to go through shit to earn the expensive things he owned. He just had to be born. His dark brown hair was styled perfectly and intelligent brown eyes met mine. Something dangerous was hidden in their depths. He was dangerous for the same reason the cult leader had been dangerous. He had power and he wasn’t above killing to maintain it. He didn’t care who he stepped on as long as he remained on top.

We squared off with Amato and seven of his made men, putting ourselves between them and Amy and her children.

“Where’s my money,” Amato snarled as they stopped in front of us.

We were facing off in two lines, staring each other down as chaos continued around us.

“Somewhere you’ll never find it,” Lock replied. He was calm in the face of Amato’s anger. It was clear to see the mafia don was a hot head. Every move he’d made so far just backed that theory up. Sending his men after Dani. Burning down this building.

“Why’d you do this?” I asked, motioning to the blaze. “Why go after children?”

“They mean something to you,” Amato announced. That made me frown. We’d only met Amy the one time before.

Why did he assume they meant anything to us? “You take care of them. Give them a home. Build them a school.”

Toxic’s curse was too low for any of the men across from us to hear. Amato had gotten his wires crossed. Whoever was feeding him his information, probably Fremont, had told him about the women and children we’d saved from the cult. But somehow he thought they were the kids here at The Children’s Lifeline. He didn’t know that we brought them the money. If we had never come here he still would have burned it. Fucking psycho.

“I want my money. Maybe if you return it, I won’t take the pound of flesh owed to me for the loss of my men.”

My fingers itched to grab the gun, hidden at my back, when one of Amato’s men rested his hand on the butt of his own weapon hidden under his suit coat. I didn’t grab for it, no matter how badly I wanted to. We couldn’t afford a shootout in the middle of the city with children standing directly behind us.

I glared at the man, refusing to back down when he squeezed his hand over the butt of his gun. He didn’t scare me. He was just a pansy ass in a suit. The nerves were getting to him, which meant he was nothing but a coward. The fear was clear on his face and in the nervous flick of his eyes as he took our measure. These men were used to dealing with average everyday citizens. Now that they’d come across a group like ours, they weren’t as confident anymore. And they shouldn’t be. Each of us had made war our career for far longer than these men had been working for Amato.

“Your men came after our women first,” Lock replied. “Tried to kidnap one of them.”

“She stole from me.” Amato gave Lock a vicious grin. “She deserves to be flayed alive.”

Reaching out, I grabbed a hold of Smoke by the cut as he lunged forward. “Easy,” I muttered. “This isn’t the time or place.” He knew that as well as I did, but hearing that shit stain speak about his old lady had him lashing out. Amato wanted us to start the fight here. Probably so they could pin any

casualties on us and give Fremont the opening he was looking for. It wasn't going to happen. We'd come prepared for this confrontation, but we weren't going to give them an excuse to start a war in the middle of Tucson.

"You want your fucking money?" Lock asked, his voice low and deadly. "Then meet us out in the desert and come take it back."

Amato scoffed. "You don't have the numbers to stand up to my men."

"Then it shouldn't be too hard for you to take us up on the offer," I told him. There was a flash of doubt in his eyes. We scared him. That meant he wasn't completely stupid. He should be afraid of us.

His head turned and he studied me for a moment, regaining his composure. "No. Instead, I'm going to hunt anyone who means anything to your club. I will set my men on them. They will rape, kill, and burn any who stand in our way. Unless you give me my money."

It wasn't about the fucking money. Even if we handed it over now, Amato would still come after us. He'd come after our women and children. He was just trying to push our buttons, get us to react so he had an excuse for his actions. It was a smart move on his part. We were already pissed off that they'd gone after them before.

"You're not getting your fucking money back," Lock said, voice cold as ice. "Either take us up on the offer of meeting us out in the desert, or get the fuck out of here."

Amato's eyes narrowed and he studied Lock for a moment. "Fine. What happens next is on you." Turning, he stalked away with his men following behind him.

I watched them go, my eyes narrowed as I tried to read their intentions. They weren't going to leave us alone. They wanted war and we were going to give it to them.

We waited around for hours while the firemen worked. We avoided the cops completely when they showed up on scene to help with crowd control. Lock sent Static and Rip back to the

compound to grab a few cage rides so we could take Amy and the children over to the apartment complex where we were housing the rest of the women and children we'd saved from the cult. We were going to have to increase our security there to make sure Amato didn't go after them. Giving them somewhere to go was the least we could do. It was going to take time for her to find a new place to keep the kids. Though, now she had the money to do so. Amato's money now belonged to them. That is, whatever didn't burn up in the fire.

It was late by the time we dragged ourselves back to the clubhouse. "I get that Amato thought Amy and the kids were the women and children that we saved from the cult. But how the fuck did he get that idea? How did he find Amy?" Smokehouse asked, raking a hand over his hair. Ash floated down toward the ground as he disturbed it. We all smelled like smoke and sweat.

"One of his men had to have followed us from the laundromat," Lock mused. "It's the only thing that makes sense."

"I didn't see anyone pull up after you guys went inside," Static said with a shake of his head. "I was watching."

"Nothing else makes sense," Rip replied in agreement with Lock. "He must have spotted you and stayed out of your view."

"Who told Amato about the apartment building? And the school?" I wondered out loud. Suspicion was tightening my gut in knots.

"It had to be Fremont," Priest suggested. "He knows about the school. It wouldn't be hard for him to find out about the apartments housing the women and children."

"I don't know," I replied. "Something about it doesn't sit right."

Lockout focused on me. "What do you mean?"

"Fremont wouldn't want the bad press of burning down an orphanage," I told him. "If that was ever connected to him he'd be fucked."

“Who else knows, though?” Ricochet asked.

My heart sank as I thought about the way Pixie had been acting earlier that day. “I don’t know for sure,” I started, hesitating.

“What is it?” Lock asked.

“Let me check something out,” I requested. “See if my intuition is right.”

Lock narrowed his eyes. “You don’t have to handle her alone.” Leave it to Lock to have already figured out that I suspected Pixie.

“Yeah, I do. If too many of us start following her around, she’ll get suspicious.” The others quietly listened as we spoke.

“Once you find out for sure, we’ll take care of the problem,” Lock told me. “However you feel is best.”

Nodding, I shot him a grateful look. I didn’t want to be the reason my cousin was killed if she was innocent. But if she had given us over to our enemies, I’d kill her myself.

“I’ll help,” Smokehouse insisted, voice hard.

“No,” I replied. “I need to figure out if it was really her first. I owe my uncle that at least.”

Smoke’s jaw clenched and he gave a short nod in agreement. “Fine. But if it was her, you don’t handle it on your own.”

“Deal.” I wasn’t going to argue with him about that. Pixie was a pain in the ass, but she was still family. If she betrayed us, I wasn’t sure how I’d react.

The meeting broke up and we all went our separate ways. I headed straight for my apartment. Kit wasn’t spending time in her own place anymore. We were slowly moving more and more of her things into my home. I wanted her there. Gathering her into my arms the moment I stepped in the door, I breathed her in. She was my center. Even when I was still deploying, anytime shit hit the fan all I had to do was think of her to calm my nerves.

I'd been in love with her since the first time I saw her. She'd always been it for me. Now that she was finally mine, I wasn't letting go.

"How are you doing?" I asked, as she leaned back to look at me.

"I'm fine." Her smile was soft and sweet, just like she was. "Are you okay?"

Clenching my jaw, I considered telling her about Pixie, but I decided not to. Not yet. It was a blow to my pride that someone from my own family had potentially betrayed us. Admitting it to my brothers brought enough shame for one night. "We saw Amato."

Her eyes widened. "He showed up?"

"Yeah. Refused to meet us to end this."

She snorted. "That doesn't surprise me. He's a coward."

"He threw around a lot of threats."

"Looks like your guys' orders to stick close were spot on," she said with a grimace. "If he's the kind to go after kids, there's no telling what he'll do next."

I nodded and kissed her forehead. "Exactly. That's why I need you here."

She sighed, but agreed. "But now, I need you to go shower. You stink," she said with a laugh.

Chuckling, I tugged her into the bathroom with me. I'd have to handle Pixie soon enough. There was no reason to start tonight, though. I was going to spend the night making my old lady beg and plead for me. Tomorrow, I'd begin investigating my fucking cousin.

CHAPTER 19



Hellfire

I was beginning to doubt myself. I'd been watching Pixie for a few days and she hadn't done anything remotely suspicious. Still, my gut was telling me she was up to no good. Sighing, I got out of bed as carefully as I could. That wasn't easy to do when you weighed as much as I did.

As soon as I rolled, Kit's body shifted toward me as the mattress compressed. Reaching out a hand, I stilled her body while I slipped off the bed. I got dressed in the dark before closing the bathroom door so I could piss and brush my teeth before I needed to leave for work.

Stepping back into the bedroom, I allowed my eyes to adjust to the darkness once more before I bent over Kit and tucked the blankets back in around her. I left the apartment and made my way through the quiet clubhouse. It was four in the morning, so no one was awake yet. The sky outside was still dark as I drove my bike toward my parent's place.

"Finally," Dad said as I pulled up and parked my bike near his truck in front of their house.

"I'm not late," I told him with a laugh.

"No. I mean I finally have you back. I swear to Christ those idiot brothers of mine caused more chaos than not." There was a grin on his face and I knew for a fact, thanks to Mom, he and his brothers had been having a blast while they

visited. Our family was close. The fact that my uncles had moved away from Tucson had been a shock at first, but they came back every few months. They and their families spent the last couple months here and I'd enjoyed seeing them all again. It was time to get back to work though.

“You ready?”

“Yep.” I stretched out my shoulders, preparing for the day ahead.

He led the way into the shop and we got straight to work. It was nice having him back at my side. He'd taught me everything I knew about septic tanks. Well, everything I knew about plumbing in general. It wasn't until I joined the Army that I learned about fixing helicopters and other things.

I set up the pump truck I liked to use, getting everything put into place. The clipboard Mom outfitted with all my calls was waiting there on my seat along with a packed lunch. It made me grin. Kit had packed me a lunch last night as well, but I hadn't told my parents yet that she and I were together. So Mom was doing what Mom always did, taking care of her boys. She was going to be fucking thrilled once she found out Kit and I were dating. If I said anything now, she'd be berating me for details all day and I'd never get any work done. I'd wait until later to tell her.

I brought Kit and Smoke home often for dinners and family get-togethers. I swore my family liked Kit more than they did me. Not really, but if it was true it wouldn't bother me in the least. With my girl on my mind, I climbed up into my truck, waved to my dad, then pulled out of the garage to begin my day.

Hours later, I was wiping sweat off my forehead with my forearm. I glared at the ground that was refusing to give way, then up at the sun that was beating down on me while I worked. This was my last call of the day and I was currently digging out the septic tank for an eighty-year-old woman who needed it pumped. People could save money by digging down themselves until all I had to do was open up the tank. There

was no way this lady was digging through the caliche mud and I wasn't going to charge her my usual rate to do it for her.

My shovel hit plastic and I sighed with relief. It was noon and the heat had sweat pouring down every inch of me. My balls were plastered to my fucking thigh, and I just wanted to get home and drink a beer while taking an ice cold shower. A cracking sound filled the air and my eyes widened. "Fuck. No-" The lid gave out beneath my weight and sent me and the rest of the dirt on top of it into the tank. "Goddamn it," I muttered as liquid, and fuck knew what else, sloshed around the top of my thighs. It seeped into my jeans and boxers and I groaned, trying not to think about what I was fucking standing in. Sadly, this wasn't the first time something like this had happened. People waited so long to call us out that their tanks were old and not well maintained. I was just grateful it wasn't completely full or I'd be standing in shit up to my chest.

I climbed up and out, glaring at the tank as I made my way over to my truck. Going to the passenger side, I yanked the door open and pulled out the scissors I kept inside the glove box. Swearing the whole time, I cut my jeans above the line of piss and shit, leaving me in entirely too short Daisy Dukes. Fuck my life. I looked fucking ridiculous, but it was better than walking around with those biohazards on my legs. I grabbed a towel and wetted my legs down with the lady's garden hose before drying my legs and dumping the cloth inside her garbage can. I still smelled like a walking porta potty, but at least, I was somewhat clean.

It took me about an hour to finish up at her house and another fifteen minutes of the lady profusely apologizing for what had happened, before I was able to get the pump truck returned back to the garage. I told her I'd be back in a day or two with a new lid. Dad was still out on his runs and Mom's car was gone, so I just shot Dad a text, letting him know I'd see him tomorrow. They were going to get a good laugh from my predicament. They always did.

I'd pretty much gotten used to the way I smelled by the time I pulled into the clubhouse parking lot. It wasn't until I stepped inside that I realized how bad it was.

“What the fuck?” Butcher asked, disgust filling his face.

“Why do you smell like that?” Toxic asked, gagging a little.

Before I could answer, they’d taken a hold of each of my shoulders and shoved me back outside. “Let me go,” I growled at them. I wasn’t in the mood to deal with these two idiots.

“Nope,” Butcher said. He squinted at me. “Please tell me that’s not shit in your beard?”

Toxic’s face filled my vision. “Jesus fucking Christ, it is.” His skin turned a bit green. “Did it get in your...” he swallowed hard. “Mouth?” he finished, looking like he was going to puke.

“I washed it out with Mountain Dew,” I said with a shrug. Again, this wasn’t the first time I’d ever gotten questionable liquids inside my mouth while at work. Nothing a tough stomach and Mountain Dew couldn’t take care of.

“I can’t,” Toxic said with a shake of his head. “You just swigged some fucking soda?”

“I spit it out,” I replied.

Butcher disappeared, but came back with a hose.

“Don’t,” I warned him. “I’m heading upstairs to shower.”

“You’re not tracking shit inside the clubhouse,” Toxic said. “I can deal with most things. That’s not one of them. Butcher.”

I cursed when hot water from the hose blasted me in the face. “You fucking cunt!” I bellowed, trying to block it with my hand. With the hose lying in the sun all day the water came out at a blistering temperature. “I’m going to fuck you up!”

“Nice shorts, Hell.”

“Those are some sexy legs.”

Groaning, I turned and glared at Smokehouse and Ricochet. They were standing behind me, cracking up. Meanwhile, Butcher and Toxic were still attacking me with the fucking hose. Water dripped off my nose as I glowered at my brothers. Thankfully the water was cooling down now.

“What happened?” Ricochet asked, laughing his ass off.

“Shithead got shit in his mouth,” Toxic told him, gagging again.

“And his beard,” Butcher added.

“That explains why it smells like a sewer over here,” Smokehouse claimed with raised brows. “How did you get shit in your mouth?” he asked me.

“Because he’s always talking shit!” Toxic roared.

“What do you expect, he’s got shit for brains!” Butcher howled next to him.

“Is that why he has a shit eating grin?” Ricochet quipped. I narrowed my eyes at him, then got another blast from the hose.

“Have I ever told you that you couldn’t pay me enough to do that job?” Toxic asked.

“Fuck off,” I muttered, then cursed when the hose hit the back of my head. It wasn’t a soft trickle, no, it had an attachment on it that was enough to flay skin from bone. I turned and gave them a narrowed-eyed look. “I’m going to kill both of you,” I told them again.

“Not if we kill you first,” Butcher said, grinning at me. He sprayed my face again and I growled at him.

“Do I want to know?”

“Prez, I’m not shitting you, this is by far the shittiest thing Hell has ever done,” Ricochet told Lockout as he started toward us.

“Yeah, yeah, get it all out, who’s got another one? Let’s get all the poop jokes out,” I snapped, losing my patience.

I turned and watched as Lockout stopped next to the others. He was trying, for my sake, to hold back a grin. Toxic explained the situation. Again. With more gagging.

“Quit being a fucking pussy,” I told him. “It’s not *that* bad.”

“Not that *bad*—” He shook his head, eyes comically wide. “Brother, this is literally the shittiest of shit situations.”

I rolled my eyes, then shrugged. “Whatever.” My arm darted out and I snagged the hose from Butcher before he could pull out of range. I turned it on both men, causing them to curse and bolt, but not before I gave them a good soaking.

“Fucker,” Toxic called out, then he chuckled as he shook the water from his arms.

“Hell.”

I looked over at Lock, turning the knob at the end of the hose to shut it off. “Yeah?”

“Strip before you go inside.” Lock crossed his arms over his chest, face completely serious.

“What?”

“You’ve got shit spilling out of your boots, Brother,” he explained. “Take them off.”

Sighing, I bent and untied my work boots, toeing them and my socks off. Giving my president a nod, I turned toward the door.

“The rest, too.”

Smoke started beatboxing out a techno tune for me to strip to. I flipped him off. I gave Lock a baleful look. “You fucking serious?”

Lockout just held my stare, unblinking. The others snickered as they watched me pull my soaked shirt off over my head. Next came the shorts my jeans had turned into.

“What do we have to pay for the show?” Toxic was waving around bills.

Sighing, I looked up at the sky, begging for patience. “You’re lucky I don’t have my fucking boots on anymore, Toxic,” I threatened.

Ignoring the whoops and hollers from the guys, I made my way inside. By the time I opened the door to my apartment my

irritation was fading and humor was taking over. Especially when I saw Kit's face.

“Um...Bennett?”

“Yeah?” I sort of liked hearing my real name leaving her soft lips.

“Why are you naked?”

“I have my boxers on,” I told her with a chuckle.

She shook her head, eyes wide as she stared at me. “That doesn't answer my question.”

“Lockout made me strip out front”

She rolled her lips between her teeth to bite back the laugh. “Okay. But...why?”

Shaking my head, I explained as I walked straight to the bathroom and turned on the shower. It was scalding. I was fine with that. Burning your flesh off was the only way to erase the knowledge that you had other people's feces on you. For hours. Drying in the scorching sun. It was a traumatic event the first time it happened. By now? I was mostly used to it. It'd happened before. It would happen again.

I grinned when the curtain whipped back and Kit shoved an ice cold beer in my hand. “You're fucking perfection,” I groaned in appreciation.

“Me? Or the beer?” she asked with a laugh.

“Yes.” I closed my eyes as I let the chilly liquid fill my mouth and quench my thirst. She laughed again, then stood there watching me drink it. “You could join me.”

“Any other time, I might.” Her nose scrunched up. “But Hell?” I cocked my head in question. “You stink.”

My laughter followed her as she walked out of the bathroom and left me to scrub my skin raw.

CHAPTER 20



Kit

It had been just over a week since the guys had confronted The Italians at Children's Lifeline. The mafia had taken their money from the line of laundromats and holed up inside of Amato's mansion, according to Hellfire. They were preparing for what was coming. We all knew it.

The club was tense and on edge as they waited for Lock to give them the go-ahead to attack. He wanted to make sure they had everything in place before they took them on. That meant waiting for their extra weapons and ammo to come in, and for their allies to arrive from Wyoming. Hell had mentioned that the Berserker's Rage MC, who had come to assist during Seek's wedding, was coming down to give a hand against the mafia. They were an ally club who had worked closely with The Vikings on more than one occasion. It was also the club that Toxic had started out in when he was younger.

If Hellfire got any more tense, he was going to snap like a rubber band. It didn't help that he was working himself to the bone at his family's business. He'd only been back for a few days, but was already jumping back in full-time, trying to catch up on the jobs his uncles hadn't been able to finish before they left town.

I tried to convince him to take more time off, but he wouldn't listen to me. He wouldn't leave his dad shorthanded. They were always busy because they were trustworthy and had

built a reputation for always showing up, no matter the circumstances. That didn't give them a lot of downtime. Once he managed to catch up, he wouldn't be working such long hours, but in the meantime all I could do was make sure he was fed and happy while he was home.

I wiped down the bar top as I thought about how much my life had changed over the last month. Despite the looming threats, I was happier than I'd ever been. Belonging to Hellfire was everything I always hoped it would be. He was sexy and kind, but also the kind of man I knew would protect the family I wanted to one day have.

“Do you ever stop cleaning in here?”

Glancing up, I smiled at Hell as he walked up. I'd been splitting my time between deep cleaning the bar since it was shut down for now and working on Sloane's nursery. I spent a few hours each day working on it, instead of an entire day the way I had with Seek's. I'd worked my ass off to give my friend the surprise of a mural in her nursery before her baby came, but since Sloane and Dani knew about the gifts I was giving them, I was taking my time.

“It keeps me busy,” I told him. Cleaning helped clear away the worry and stress of everything that was going on. Both our apartments were already spotless thanks to all the stress we'd been under. They hadn't taken me long to clean. The bar was always a welcomed challenge in times like this.

He leaned over the bar top and kissed me, his tongue sliding along mine. “I can think of other things that would keep you busy.”

My cheeks flamed as he gave me a heated look. He was insatiable. We both were. We'd waited so long for each other it was almost impossible to keep our hands off one another. “You haven't been around much.”

Being back working with his dad and helping the club prepare for taking on The Italians was eating up the majority of his hours. “I know,” he told me. “And I know you're going crazy being cooped up here. Mom's having us over for dinner tonight. I was hoping that would help make up for the fact that

I've confined you here." He came around the bar and pulled me into his arms.

My heart leapt in my chest. Even after being together for a month, it was still doing that. I hoped it continued doing it forever. "I'd love that!"

"She invited Smoke and Dani, too," he cautioned.

I laughed. "That will be fun."

He gave me a wolfish grin. "We have a few hours before we have to--"

"Hell."

He groaned, tossing a dark look over his shoulder at Riptide. "Yeah?"

"Lock's calling church. The Berserkers just got here."

"I'll be right there."

Reaching up, I dug my thumbs and fingers into his tense shoulders. He was like granite. I knew his gunshot wound was still bothering him and part of that was because he was always so tense. It was like he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders. In a way he did. His responsibilities were enough to crush most men. Not Bennett Portman. He shouldered the obligations with a smile. It was just who he was. He would never dream of letting his family or his club down. And now he had the added responsibility of me.

It didn't matter that I knew how to take care of myself. With him around, I'd never have to and he wouldn't have it any other way. In return, I wanted to be the one to take care of him. To show him that he could let me help carry some of those responsibilities that called him in opposite directions.

He groaned in appreciation of the quick massage that wouldn't do nearly enough to chase the stress from his muscles. "Be ready by six. We'll all drive over together," he told me.

His kiss was brief, but it still made my lips tingle. Other parts of my body sparked to life as I watched his powerful form move through the room toward the door. How I managed

to keep my hands off him for so long, I'd never know. I was just glad I didn't need to anymore. I went back to cleaning, trying to put my curiosity aside as the two clubs met next door to discuss a game plan.

The rest of the day passed quickly for me and I was dressed and ready by the time Hellfire finished up with his meeting. Dani and I were downstairs, chatting as we waited for the men. I studied both Hell and my brother's faces as they walked up. They both looked grim. "Everything okay?" I asked.

"Yeah," Hell answered. He wasn't going to tell me what was going on until we were alone inside his apartment and I was fine with that. "Let's get going." He held out his hand and with a roll of my eyes, I dropped my keys into his palm.

He was the kind of man who always drove. Who filled my gas tank up for me, even though I was perfectly capable. I was grateful his mother had raised him with manners, but Hellfire was anything but a gentleman. He was dangerous and deviant in his own ways. That didn't mean he didn't treat me respectfully.

As a woman who was used to being single, it was hard to give up the habit of doing everything myself. A part of me was giddy over having an old man to take care of me. The other part couldn't help the occasional shake of the head or roll of the eyes. I always showed my appreciation though, because at the end of the day he would be helping me teach our sons how to treat women and I wouldn't have them doing anything different than their father.

The thought of having Hell's babies made me pause on the way to the car. A flush crept over my skin. I wanted it so badly. Being a mother had been in my plans from the time I graduated high school. I just hadn't met the man I wanted to have babies with until a couple years later, then I had to wait until he finally claimed me. That dream of mine was a reality now. I wouldn't bring it up with him until after The Italians and Fremont were taken care of, but just the idea excited me. Especially with Sawyer here now and all the other children

running around the clubhouse these days, the urges living inside me were threatening to burst free.

“Vixen?”

Blinking, I realized we were all standing by my car and Hell was staring down at me with a frown on his face. “Sorry,” I muttered, sliding into the backseat as he opened the door for me. He shut it behind me and got into the driver’s seat. He had to shove the seat all the way back and he was still crammed inside my car. I bit back a laugh.

“Everything okay?” Dani asked me as Hell pulled out of the clubhouse parking lot and onto the road.

“Yeah,” I answered with a smile. “Just lost in thought.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Nervous?”

“About eating dinner with his parents?” Dani prompted.

This time I let my laugh ring through the car. I met Hellfire’s eyes in the rearview and they were crinkled at the edges, letting me know he was smiling. The man smiled whenever I laughed. God, he knew how to melt a woman’s heart. “I’ve eaten dinner at the Portman’s so many times, I may as well call them family,” I explained to Dani when she gave me a puzzled smile.

“Oh. That’s nice,” she said. “At least there’s no first meeting jitters then. I was so nervous to meet all of you for the first time.”

“Well, those were different circumstances,” I said, nodding toward her belly with a soft smile.

“True.”

Hell pulled in front of his parents’ house and we all piled out of the car. Their house was located on three acres, and their business was set up out front. The trailer that acted as their office was dark and next to it the huge metal building that served as their mechanic’s garage loomed. It wasn’t dark yet, but everything out front was shut down. Their house was the

exact opposite, lit up from inside and on the front porch Hell's Mom and Dad were waiting for us with a smile.

He opened the back door and helped me out, his large hands lingering on my hips as I slid out. He leaned down and brushed his lips over mine, then pulled away before his parents could see. They were already introducing themselves to Dani, who they hadn't met yet.

I followed Hellfire over to his parents. Lisa turned and pulled me into a hug. "It's been too long since my son has brought you to see us," she claimed.

Laughing, I clutched her closer, extending the hug. Lisa Portman was everything I wished my own mother could have been. Loving. Caring. Present in her children's lives. "I've been really busy," I told her. Hell didn't tell his parents much about the club, so I was happy to run interference with an explanation. It wasn't really a lie. Between working, planning the baby showers, and painting those murals, I *had* kept busy. The Bunker being shut down not long ago was what had slowed things for me.

"Come in," Zeke, Hellfire's dad, offered, ushering us inside.

Hellfire explained earlier that he hadn't had a chance to tell his parents about us yet. I understood. With everything going on, he was too busy to stop in for a long heart-to-heart with his parents. He planned to rectify that tonight. We all sat down at the dining room table and listened as his mother caught us up on what they'd been up to.

"How about you?" she asked, watching each of us.

"Did you know your son is going to marry my sister?" Smoke asked, face completely serious.

Hellfire choked on the bite of food he'd just taken. Smoke helpfully slammed his palm in the middle of Hell's back so hard he jerked forward. Silence descended around the table as Hellfire struggled to breathe. I bit my lips to keep from laughing. My brother was a dick, but that was pretty funny. Mostly because I wasn't too worried that Lisa and Zeke would

be disappointed about Hell and I being together. At least...I hadn't been. The longer the silence went on, the more the worry built.

Lisa's eyes were wide, but they finally met mine and I relaxed when I saw the hope shining in them. "Really?" she breathed.

"He finally got his head out of his ass and took you off the market, huh?" Zeke asked.

Dani covered her mouth with her hands as if that could stop the laughter from pouring out.

"We're not actually engaged," I explained, shooting my brother a glare for getting their hopes up.

"But we're together," Hell confirmed, finally able to speak. His face was red from the lack of oxygen. He glared at Smokehouse, who was grinning unrepentantly.

Lisa jumped up and ran around the table, pulling me into a hug. "I knew it!" she cried, squeezing me tight enough to make me grunt. She pulled back and cupped my cheeks in her palms. "I'm so happy." She whispered so the others wouldn't hear. "I knew one day he'd see what he had standing right in front of him. I've loved you for so long and I'm thrilled to have you in our family."

Tears welled up in my eyes and I blinked them back, not wanting to ruin the moment by crying. "Me too," I croaked out, unable to express my appreciation for her acceptance, or tell her how much I loved her. She was more of a mother to me than my own had ever been.

She released me and turned to Hellfire, pulling him into a hug next. She was so little next to him. This tiny woman had birthed six huge sons, though Hellfire was the biggest, but they all treated her with the respect she deserved. Hell had her wrapped up in his arms. It never failed to make me smile every time I saw the love this family had for one another. Glancing over at Smoke, I caught his eye and we shared a look. Our father had given us this. A family. Love. A place to belong,

but being rejected by your own mother left scars that even a loving father couldn't quite heal.

I'd never be able to thank Hellfire enough for bringing us into this family. All I could hope for was to show him every day for the rest of our lives how much I appreciate him. And that was exactly what I wanted, forever with him.

Zeke stood and shook Hell's hand, giving him a pat on the back before he pulled me into a hug too. "Welcome to the family, Kit."

"Thanks, Zeke."

He released me and sat back down, pulling Lisa onto his lap and wrapping his arms around her. I always had an idea of how Hellfire would be in a relationship because of his father. They were so much alike. Zeke was part of the reason I'd held out for Hell for so long. I wanted what his parents had. I wanted the man I loved to be my best friend as well as my partner. I finally got it. He was mine.

We still hadn't told each other that we loved one another, but I knew it was coming. I wasn't going to push. Hell had enough on his plate and I wasn't going to add to that by forcing him to give me those words before he was ready. I hadn't admitted them yet, either. Mostly because I was scared this was going to be snatched away from me, and if I admitted my feelings out loud it would be that much more devastating when it was taken from me. I shoved those feelings deep down. They never needed to see the light of day, lest they become a manifestation of my fears.

The dinner went well, and Dani got a chance to see why we considered Lisa and Zeke family. We recounted the very first time Lisa and I had met, in the pouring rain, with laughter and love and talked for hours after the meal was finished. They'd sent us home with hugs and well wishes, and demands to come back soon. It didn't matter what happened with Hellfire and me, I would never give up his parents. They would always be in my life, the same way my father would be. I loved them too much to ever lose them.

The whole way home and the rest of the evening I basically floated on a cloud of my own happy dreams. “You’re quiet,” Hell said, breaking into my thoughts. He was running his fingers up and down my spine.

We were tangled up together, naked, coming down from an intense love making session. I swore he was trying to see if he could make me go comatose from orgasming. “Just thinking,” I told him.

“About what?”

“Nothing,” I said, shifting so I could reach up to kiss him.

His eyes clouded over. “I don’t want you to worry about all this shit with The Italians.”

“That wasn’t what I was thinking about. I was just...” I sighed as I hesitated. He and the club were gearing up for this fight. One that some of them may not come back from. The thought of losing him had tears welling in my eyes. “I love you, Bennett.”

He stilled, searching my face. “You have no fucking clue how long I’ve waited to hear you say that, Vixen.” His arms tightened around me. “Tell me again.”

Laughing, I shook my head at his antics. “I love you.” The thought of sending him off to fight without him knowing had been eating at me. Saying the words to him lightened my burden and my soul soared at his next words.

“I love you, too.”

CHAPTER 21



Hellfire

The compound was chaotic and busy and had been since the Wyoming guys had arrived to help us out. That was four days ago. The preparations were made. The plan was in place, and we were going after the mafia in two days. It didn't matter that they were holed up in Amato's fortress in the hills. We were done fucking around. Lockout had given Amato the chance to face us like men and finish this and the coward had chosen to hide away.

We weren't idiots. They were making their own preparations. If we waited too long, Amato was going to make good on his threats to come after those we loved. We couldn't have that.

With our thirteen Berserker brothers here we were a little better off with numbers, though still outmatched by The Italians. We were better trained, however. The Wyoming Chapter of Berserker's Rage MC was former military as well. They were damn near a perfect match with our chapter. Former or current military, well trained, dangerous as fuck, and vigilantes in their own right. They didn't protect a city the way we did, but they always stepped up whenever someone needed help.

Toxic had brought this club into our lives, but Lock had met with the Berserker president, as well as a few of their other chapter presidents and he was more than happy to be

allies with them. I hadn't met too many of the men yet, but if Lock had approved, I knew we'd get along. We had too much in common not to. And soon, we'd be going into battle together, cementing our bonds as brothers and friends. Nothing showed you a man's character faster than fighting beside them.

I made my way through the clubhouse, looking around as I went. Lock waved me over to where my brothers were sitting, and drinking, with our Wyoming friends.

"Have you seen Butcher?" Lock asked. "I was going to send him with some of the guys to show them the area we'd be in during the fight, but I couldn't find him."

Frowning, I thought back. "I haven't seen him at all today... or yesterday."

Everyone around the table was shaking their heads, indicating they hadn't seen him either. Hush sighed. "I haven't seen Toxic either. Though, I probably couldn't tell you who I *have* seen over the last few days." He had dark circles under his eyes. Taking care of a newborn and a wife in postpartum had a way of wearing a man out. Despite that, Hush was walking around with a huge grin on his face most days. It was so out of character for him, but fuck did it make me happy to see him get everything he deserved.

"Do you think-" Priest cut himself off and we all followed his gaze.

Toxic strolled into the clubhouse...alone. My eyes narrowed and I exchanged a look with Smokehouse and Ricochet. We all wore matching grim expressions. Toxic and Butcher had been in-fucking-separable for over a year now. Where one went, the other followed. Shit, I was surprised they didn't fucking room up together, that's how close their friendship had grown.

"Where's Butcher?" Lock asked as soon as Toxic walked up. He didn't even give the man a chance to grab the beer that Karma had hurried over with before asking.

"Butcher?" Toxic took the beer and smiled at the new girl. She blushed prettily and gave him doe eyes. It wasn't hard to

see she was infatuated with Toxic. It didn't seem to matter to her that he was twice her age. She was twenty and Toxic was in his forties. It didn't matter to the sweet butt; she'd been hanging all over him from the moment she'd stepped inside the club a few weeks ago.

"Yeah, Toxic," Lockout said, "Butcher. Where the fuck is he?"

It wasn't like Lock kept close tabs on us. We were free to come and go as we pleased, but Butcher was different. He needed to be kept under control, especially in a time like this. Given Butcher's past, he was prone to take the initiative as he saw fit. Usually with disastrous results. The upside for us was it was typically more disastrous to our enemies than us. That didn't mean we didn't need to keep an eye on him.

"He's around...somewhere," Toxic said with a shrug. He took a long pull from the beer, avoiding Lockout's eyes.

"Somewhere?" Lockout's tone was dark. "Where, somewhere?"

While Toxic sputtered through some excuse, probably giving Butcher time to get into whatever trouble he'd come up with, I watched as Pixie did a slow scan of the room. My brother's voices faded out as I watched the prey I'd been waiting for finally make her move.

With everything going on, I knew if my cousin was going to do something sketchy, it'd be now. Following her around for almost two weeks hadn't gained me any new insights on what she was up to, but the way she was creeping across the club compound now told me that was about to change. The others could handle finding Butcher. I had more important things to do, like find out if my cousin was a fucking traitor.

It wasn't hard to keep up with her piece of shit car as she made her way across the city. Where was she going? Tonight was her night to man the club's bar. With The Bunker shut down, the sweet butts weren't as busy, but they were still working at our bar inside the clubhouse. Scarlett, Pixie, and Karma were thrilled to have the Wyoming guys in town, and Sylvia had been taking over more than a few late night shifts

as the women kept our allies busy. Pixie was pissed because none of the men would give her any attention since she was my cousin. She was left helping Sylvia man the bar most nights while the other girls got their pick of single bikers.

Lockout had done his due diligence before allowing Karma to hang around our club. She was a little blonde who was quiet and soft spoken and thanks to Rip looking into her background we knew she had no connections with either The Italians or Fremont. The same couldn't be said about my cousin. My worst fears were coming true as I hung back and watched her pull into an empty parking lot in Oro Valley. It was late, dark, and suspicious enough to have me looking around for whoever she was meeting.

The fact that I'd picked up on her behavior meant it didn't shock me when Fremont stepped into the halo of light one of the streetlights was casting over the lot. I watched them speak while gritting my teeth. I had strict instructions from Lockout. If I was alone, I wasn't to confront Fremont or any mafia she met with. It was only Fremont here, and though I was fucking raging inside to rip her to shreds, I waited patiently for them to finish before I did anything. I watched as Fremont left, then followed Pixie home to the little house she rented in Marana.

As soon as she shut the door, I was there, knocking on it. Confronting her in the parking lot was stupid and I wasn't an idiot. Fremont might have had his stooges there to arrest me. But she didn't know I was coming here. Didn't know she'd fucked up and alerted me of what she was up to.

"Bennett," she said, looking surprised as she opened the door.

I shoved my way into her house, glaring down at her. "What the fuck have you done, Pixie?" I asked. She didn't deserve the respect of using the name my uncle had given her. She wasn't family anymore. Not after seeing her speaking with our enemy. She was just a fucking whore who hung around our club. Though, she wouldn't be that for much longer either.

She shut the door behind me, her brows pulling together as she frowned at me. “What do you mean?”

“I saw you,” I growled. “I saw you meet with Fremont.” I took a step toward her and she flinched back, fear flashing over her face. “You’re going to tell me everything you know about him. Everything he’s doing. Everything you told him about us.”

She shook her head and backed away from me. I followed her until she was pressed against the wall. “I don’t know anything,” she insisted, her eyes wide. “He just wanted to ask questions about the club.”

“Bullshit,” I hissed. “You’re a fucking rat.” I used one hand to pin her collarbone to the wall. It pained me to even fucking touch her, but I didn’t want her to slip away before she heard what I had to say.

“No!” she cried out, shaking her head again, tears filling her eyes. She was a good actress. I’d give her that.

“You’re done hanging around our club,” I told her, my voice hard. “You’re done fucking my brothers and causing problems for them. You’re finished making trouble for my family.”

Her face screwed up in anger and she shoved at me, but it was like a kitten trying to move a mountain. “You can’t do that!” she shrieked.

“I can.” Lockout had already given me the authority to deal with her in any way I chose. “You should just be grateful all I’m doing is kicking you out.” We’d work on getting whatever information from her that we could, but she wasn’t stepping foot inside our clubhouse again.

Her mouth gaped open like a fish. “You wouldn’t do that. I’m your cousin.”

“You’re nothing to me anymore. The only reason I put up with you for so long was because of Uncle Hal. I’m done, Pixie. You’re not family anymore.” I released her and stepped back.

She stared at me, tears streaming down her face, but there was a calculating look in her eyes. One that shouldn't be there. Her expression turned smug, alerting me a split second before the creaking floorboards did. It was too late. Spinning around, I raised my hand, but the gun hit me in the temple before I could deflect it. The man didn't stop with one hit, he kept going until I was on the ground, vision swimming as I fought to hold onto consciousness.

Pixie squatted down beside me. "You don't have a fucking say in my life, Bennett. You never have. I'll help your enemies tear your club apart by the fucking seams for the way you've all treated me."

"Fucking bitch," I muttered, trying to shove my way to my feet.

"Enough of this bullshit," someone said from behind her. "We don't have time for this. His fucking crew could be right behind him."

Something hit my head again and this time I couldn't keep the blackness from overpowering me.

CHAPTER 22



Kit

I paced back and forth in the hallway in front of my brother's apartment. I was going to feel so stupid when Hellfire walked in and found out I'd been panicking. But he'd been gone for hours. It was after ten p.m. and he wasn't home. He hadn't called. I didn't know where he was. It was all so unlike Hell.

Huffing out a breath, I knocked on Smoke's door. It didn't take long before he answered. "I'm so sorry. I know it's late—"

"What's wrong?" he asked, worry etched into his features. His eyes scanned me, checking to make sure I was okay.

"Hellfire hasn't come home."

He frowned and leaned against his door frame, crossing his arms over his chest. "Did you guys have a fight?"

"No," I answered. "He texted me and told me he had something he needed to check on and that he'd be back later." I bit my lip. "I haven't heard from him since and that was five hours ago."

Smoke shoved off the door, a scowl spreading over his face. "Did he say what he was checking on?"

"No."

"Shit." He shoved past me, not at all helping my anxiety over the situation. "I need to talk to Lock."

Rushing after him, I grabbed him by the arm. He stopped and glowered down at me. “What’s going on?”

“It’s...nothing.”

“Smoke,” I snapped. “I’m your sister. This is my old man. I swear to God if you don’t tell me, I’m going to make your life so miserable you’ll have to move to fucking Antarctica to escape me.”

He rolled his eyes, but a smile tugged at the corner of his lips. It immediately disappeared as he thought about whatever it was that had him worried. “Hellfire thinks Pixie might be leaking information to someone.”

My eyes widened in shock. “Why wouldn’t he tell me that?”

“He didn’t want anyone to know until he had proof. He didn’t want to condemn her in everyone’s eyes until he was sure.”

My heart dropped. “You think she’s working with The Italians?”

He shrugged. “Or Fremont. Both? We don’t know.”

“I’m going with you,” I insisted.

He knew better than to argue, so as one, we went down the hall to Lockout’s apartment. Smoke knocked, and Lock answered the door. He was in a pair of gray sweatpants and was shrugging on a t-shirt. “What’s up?” he asked, looking between us. Smoke explained about Hellfire and I watched as Lock’s scowl got deeper and deeper. “Fuck. Okay. Smoke, wake everyone up.” His eyes met mine. “Any chance he’d be at his parents’ place?”

“Possibly, but he would have answered his phone, Lock,” I told him. There was no reason for him not to be answering unless something was wrong. My gut was telling me something happened.

“Yeah. Okay. You stay here and we’ll go look for him.”

“I want to come.”

He shook his head. “Not happening.” His eyes softened when he saw the stricken look on my face. Sitting here just waiting wasn’t easy for me. “We’ll find him, Kit. I promise.”

Nodding, I stepped back so he could meet with the rest of the guys as they began filling the hallway. Following them downstairs, I watched as they made a quick plan and headed out. I sat on a bar stool and tried to shove all negative thoughts from my mind.

“You okay?” Jordan asked, coming up beside me and rubbing my back.

“I’m sure he’s fine,” I told her, trying to convince myself as much as her. “He’s Hellfire.”

She smiled and nodded in agreement. “Yeah, he is.”

“What do you know about Pixie?” Gwen asked as she took the barstool on the other side of me. All of them were coming down the stairs, even Seek, holding Sawyer.

The guys had obviously filled their women in on what Hellfire suspected and why they had to leave so abruptly tonight. I shrugged. “She’s Hellfire’s cousin. Even though she’s always been kind of a pain in the ass, I can’t imagine she’d do something to hurt him.”

“Not everyone is close with their family,” Keely pointed out. “She sort of strikes me as the type to think everyone else is the reason for her bad luck.”

Seek nodded. “You know *I’m* not a fan.”

We all laughed. Seek and Pixie had bad blood and that dislike had only grown since she’d been living here.

“I’ve never gotten a good vibe from her,” Sloane admitted, joining us at the bar. “There were a few women like her in the cult. They were always prodding their husbands to try to get higher in The Order and were fine with whatever had to be done to get promotions.”

Dani winced, looking over at Sloane. “Whatever had to be done?”

“You don’t want to know,” Sloane said with a tight smile. “Nothing good.”

“I’m surprised Lock let her stay,” Jordan said with a thoughtful look on her face.

“He only let her stick around for Hellfire,” I told them.

“But Hell doesn’t even want her here,” Jenny said in confusion.

“True,” Susie replied, “but at least here, he can keep an eye on her.”

“Exactly,” I confirmed. “He watches over her for his uncle’s sake. He loves his Uncle Hal and doesn’t want to have to tell him that his oldest daughter was raped and beaten to death because she got caught up with the wrong sort.”

“He’s going to be okay,” Daisha told me. The others had dragged the barstools over and now we were sitting in a circle.

“I swear someone needs to chip these guys,” Keely said with a laugh.

“What do you mean?” Tori asked.

“Well, first they lose Butcher, now Hellfire. Gwen, you’re a vet tech, would an animal chip work?”

Gwen threw her head back and laughed. Everyone else joined in. “Only if someone found them and wanted to figure out who they belonged to. I think a wedding ring is more effective for that.”

My ears began buzzing as my eyes widened. “A tracker.”

“What?” Seek asked, frowning at me.

“A tracker! Keely! You’re a freaking genius,” I muttered the last as I pulled my cell phone from my pocket. “Who knows how to use this stupid find my phone app?”

“Give it,” Jenny said and grabbed my phone out of my hands. By the time she handed it back there was a mark on my GPS map.

I hit a number in my contact and ground my teeth together as I listened to Smoke's phone ring and ring and eventually go to voicemail. I had the same luck with Lock's phone. The other women were trying their own guys and I sighed when no one answered. "I'm going to check it out."

"Wait," Seek said with a worried look. "You can't go alone."

"For all we know he's in the hospital," I told her. "Or jail." Those were probably the best case scenarios, though almost as concerning. "Or on the side of the road needing help. I have to go check. Keep trying to get a hold of the guys." I took a screenshot of the map and sent it to Smoke and the other women.

"They're going to be pissed if you go alone," Daisha said with a shake of her head. "Bring Mel with you."

"He's supposed to be here to help guard the clubhouse," I told her.

"We still have Bear, Hush, and Breaker," Seek said.

"Have us for what?" Hush asked, coming in the front door.

"Kit knows where Hellfire is."

"Where his phone is," I corrected.

Hush's eyes narrowed and he too pulled his phone from his pocket and tried to call the others.

"Hush," I said when he hung up with a scowl. His eyes met mine. "I'm going to go find him."

"The fuck you are."

"I'm not waiting around when he could be hurt, or in trouble."

"I'll go," Hush said.

"No one is supposed to go anywhere alone," I reminded him. "I'm going with you. Let me go grab my gun."

His curses followed me up the stairs, but I knew Seek wouldn't let him leave without me. By the time I came back

downstairs, my gun holstered to my belt, he had already gathered the other men who remained behind. “Keep your eyes open. Who knows what this means. With both Butcher and Hellfire missin’, this could be Amato holdin’ true to his threats,” he warned. They all turned to face me when I approached.

I’d changed into jeans and one of Hellfire’s t-shirts to cover my weapon. It hung down to my thighs and looked ridiculous, but it covered my gun and enveloped me in his scent. It soothed my nerves. I didn’t actually need to cover my gun, Arizona was an open carry state, but it was always better if your enemy didn’t know what you had on you. Which was why my switchblade, that Dad had given me for my twelfth birthday, was concealed on the inside of my boot. I was dressed for a fight. As much as I was hoping to find Hellfire broke down on the side of the road, deep down, I knew something was wrong.

“No one else is goin’,” Hush barked as the women started to make their offers. “You’re stayin’ here where it’s safe,” he added, looking at his wife and newborn son.

“We’ll stay, Hush,” she told him, then shot me an apologetic look.

As if I wanted her or her baby to be in harm’s way. I didn’t want any of them to be in danger. “I love you all so much,” I told them. “The fact that you’re offering to go just shows me how much you love me, too. But you can’t go. You need to stay here and help protect the children.”

Hugs were given and Hush and I strode out into the night. “We can take my car,” I told him.

He acknowledged that with a grunt and caught the keys I tossed his way. He drove while I navigated and before long we pulled up in front of a house. “Do you know who lives here?” Hush asked, voice low.

“No.” A hard lump formed in my throat. “If we walk in there and he’s cheating on me,” I told Hush, “I’m going to need you to step back so I can kill him.”

“He wouldn’t.”

I let out a soft laugh. “I know, Hush. I was joking. Mostly.” Nerves were fluttering so hard in my stomach, I had to swallow back bile. I was so scared about what I would find. Hellfire wouldn’t cheat on me. I really did know that, but what if he was dead? What if I walked in that house and found him lying on the floor with blood everywhere? A sob broke free of my throat.

“Hey.” Hush turned in the seat and grabbed my shoulders. “Breathe, Kit.” I sucked in a shaky breath. Losing it here in the car wasn’t helping Hell. “Stay here,” he said.

“No. I’m fine. I promise.” Pulling myself together, I got out of the car, careful to close the door quietly. We’d parked across the street a few houses down so as not to be so suspicious.

“You know how to use that gun, right?”

I snorted out a laugh. “My dad had me shooting and learning to fight right along Smokehouse,” I promised him. “I may not be able to take on a man in a fair fight, but I wasn’t taught to fight fair to begin with.”

Hush chuckled. “Good. I’m goin’ around back to see what I can find. Wait here until I get back.”

CHAPTER 23



Kit

I really had planned on waiting for Hush. Really. But then I saw Pixie walk past the window on her way to the kitchen and I saw red. The traitorous bitch had something to do with Hell going missing? No fucking way was I waiting around to confront her.

Stomping across the front lawn, I didn't bother being quiet as I made my way up the front steps of the house. Anger was making me shake as I reached for the door knob. It opened before I could touch it and Pixie stood there, staring up at me in shock. She had a purse and keys in her hand, like she was planning on going somewhere.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" she snarled.

"Where is he?" I asked, shoving my way past her. "Hell?" I called out, looking around.

"Get out of my house," Pixie snapped. She shut the door, closing us inside her house.

"I'm only going to ask one more time," I told her. "Where is Hellfire?"

"How the fuck should I know?" Her eyes darted away from mine.

"Wow, Pixie. You really aren't very bright. His bike is in your fucking drive way. His phone led me here."

She swallowed, but didn't answer me.

"I swear to God I will beat the shit out of you if you don't tell me where he is."

"He's not here," she said with a shrug.

"Then why is his phone here? Why is his bike here?" I demanded.

"He left it here."

My brows shot up. "You expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth," she snapped. "He left it here and took off."

"Bullshit! He wouldn't go anywhere without telling me."

"Maybe he wanted to go get some pussy without his annoying old lady breathing down his neck," she taunted.

Gritting my teeth, I tried to rein in my temper. She was just goading me and that wasn't going to help me think straight. I spun and started searching all the rooms in the one story house.

"Hey! You can't just barge in here-" She made the mistake of grabbing me. Just by the arm, but it was enough to snap that precarious hold I had on my fury.

Turning, I punched her in the face. She crumpled down to the ground after I felt a glorious crunch from the impact. Following her down, I straddled her hips and wrapped my hands around her throat. I squeezed hard enough to be a warning. Her green eyes widened in shock and fear. "Tell me where he is, Pixie, or this is going to end badly for you. I'm not messing around."

"He's not here," she wheezed.

"Where is he?"

She shook her head.

I tightened my grip and watched as she started turning red. "Tell me!"

"You'll have to kill me," she gasped out. "Because I don't know where they were taking him."

My heart stopped beating. “What do you mean? Who took him? Who is they?”

“The Italians,” she said with a cough. “If you don’t want the same thing happening to you, I suggest you get off me and get out of here.”

I stared down at her, my hands relaxing their hold. “You sold him out?” I asked in disbelief.

She shrugged, looking smug. “What if I did?”

“He’s your cousin.”

“He’s an asshole. He never wanted me around. None of my dad’s family did. They all thought they were too good for me. He deserves what he gets.”

How had we not seen the anger and spitefulness in her? Maybe Hell had. Maybe that was part of the reason he never liked her. I never would have thought she’d do something like this to him. I was so shocked, so devastated to learn Hellfire was with our enemies, that I didn’t notice Pixie reaching for something.

We were inside the master bedroom, and she had shit strewn everywhere. Before I could react, she smashed something into the side of my head. White starbursts exploded in front of my eyes as I was knocked backward. My hands went to my head and I felt blood trickling down my face. Pain throbbed inside my head. Pixie scrambled out from under me and bolted out the door.

My vision was blurred, my head pounding. I couldn’t think straight. Shaking my head to try to clear it, I surged to my feet, slamming into the wall as I tried to steady myself. I gave chase and caught up to her in the kitchen. We went down in a tangle of limbs as I tackled her. I was much bigger than she was, but she was mean. She kept biting and scratching at me. I wasn’t sure what I was doing other than preventing her from running away. The guys would be able to deal with her, and could get information from her.

White hot pain rocketed through my body, causing me to gasp and look down. Pixie had a maniacal smile on her face. A

kitchen knife was protruding from my abdomen. “You crazy bitch,” I whispered, unsure of what to do. The pain was radiating outward and I was afraid I was going to pass out. I punched her again, but my vision was wavering and my fist only clipped her cheek before sliding off and hitting the floor beside her head. The pain of my knuckles crashing into tile didn’t even register.

Somehow, Pixie managed to buck me off her. I laid there on the floor, breathing through the pain and watched as she grabbed a second knife from the butcher block. She advanced on me with murder in her eyes.

“You’re going to die,” she told me in a low voice. “Just like my cousin. He’s probably being tortured as we speak.

I tried to move, but my body wasn’t cooperating. My vision was fading in and out. “Why?” I gasped out.

“Because you’re all fucking bitches. You don’t deserve any of these men. They’re mine.” She raised the knife over her head. She misunderstood me.

I didn’t care why she wanted to kill me. I only cared why she would do this to Hellfire. He was a good man. A worthy man. He didn’t deserve to have this poisonous little bitch as his cousin. Didn’t deserve to be going through pain right now because of her.

I leaned to the side, reaching my hand behind to my back. Grabbing my gun, I raised it and watched the horror flood her face. That knife was already starting its downward arc. It was me or her, and by God it wasn’t going to be me. She’d already caused our family enough grief. My vision was fading. Blackness was swallowing me whole, but I had business to take care of before I passed out. My trigger pull was smooth, my dad’s voice in my mind, telling me not to jerk it.

The sound of gunfire was like a distant echo, not nearly as loud as it should have been. The gun bucked in my hand, but I managed to hang onto it despite the numbness in my fingers. It bucked three more times before she fell, the knife she had held clattering across the tile. The front door burst open and I saw Hush’s worried face.

“Fuck! Kit!” He stopped long enough to kick the knife further from Pixie’s grasp. He pressed two fingers to her neck.

“Is she dead?” I gasped.

“Yeah, Kit, she is.” He knelt down next to me and pulled me into his lap.

I stared up into his eyes. “The Italians have Hellfire. You have to let Lockout know.” That was all I was able to gasp out before I passed out in Hush’s arms.

CHAPTER 24



Hellfire

*M*y head was throbbing in pain. *Did I drink too much last night?* It'd been a while since I let Toxic and Butcher talk me into going round for round with them, but fuck did I feel like shit. Opening my eyes, I groaned and pressed my hands to my temples. Squeezing, I tried to force the pain out. That just made shit worse.

Flopping to my back, I stared up at the ceiling. Everything came flooding back, following Pixie, getting knocked out. Fuck. I was with The Italians. I vaguely remember them dragging me into a car before passing out again.

“Good, you’re awake.”

Frowning, I blinked hard, trying to clear my vision. Why did that voice sound so familiar? My head lolled to the side and I groaned when I saw Butcher sitting there, tied to a chair, grinning at me. The crazy fucker had a black eye, bruises all over his face, and a busted lip. But his smile was covering the entirety of his face.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” I asked.

“I’m your rescue party,” he told me with a chuckle. “You’re welcome.”

“Fuck off.”

“Don’t be like that, Hell. You know you missed me.” His grin widened as he stared at me.

Rolling my eyes, I tried to sit up. It took a few tries before I was able to get myself upright. “How long have we been here?”

Butcher shrugged. “I don’t know. They knocked me out when they brought me in.”

“Wait,” I said, shaking my head to clear the fog. “You went missing before I did.” I was fully conscious now, the headache wasn’t going anywhere, but the brain fog had lifted.

“Fine,” Butcher admitted, “I went looking for The Italians. I wanted to be here.” He smiled, “I got them right where I want them.”

“Why the fuck would you want to be here?”

“I got tired of waiting.”

“Lock is going to kick your ass,” I muttered. These dumb motherfuckers hadn’t tied me up. That was their first mistake. They assumed I was going to be knocked out for a while. Their second was bringing Butcher here. They had no idea what they had just allowed into their inner sanctum. And with both of us here? They were fucked.

“Yeah. I know. Still, this was the easiest way to get access to Amato’s mansion.”

I eyed him, sitting there bruised and tied up, yet he didn’t look worried at all. It didn’t surprise me. We all knew of his exploits with the team he led during his time with the military. He was still young when they honorably discharged him. He’d gotten too difficult for them to control. So they’d set him loose on society. It would have been a fucking disaster if Lockout hadn’t found him and taken him in. At thirty-six he was only a couple years younger than me, but he was more dangerous than a house full of men. He’d been trained well, and reveled in the violence. Fuck, we all did. It was why we did this vigilante shit. We needed an outlet for all the pent up aggression that had been fostered in us from the time we were kids fresh out of high school.

You didn’t just set that shit aside because you were no longer in the military. You tried to ignore it, until it grew too

big. Then it was either get rid of it, or explode. No one wanted to see what would happen if one of us got to that point, so Lock had figured out ways for us to release the building tension. Fucking, drinking, fighting, those all helped, but sometimes we just needed to get into a conflict that ended with enough bloodshed to soothe the inner beast.

“I can’t believe they didn’t tie you up,” Butcher said, sounding amused.

“Guess they didn’t think I was as crazy as you are.”

He snorted. “You’re just better at hiding it.”

I grinned. He wasn’t wrong. I’d learned how to control myself from a young age. My brothers were always busy getting themselves into trouble and I was usually the one to get them out. It wouldn’t have helped any of us if I hadn’t been in control.

“They were in a hurry,” Butcher said. “They’re going to regret making that mistake.” He shifted on his chair. “Now, can you get me the fuck out of this?”

“What? Can’t get yourself out?”

“Not without breaking my thumb to slip under the ropes. Since you’re here, I’ll keep all my digits intact.”

Going over to his chair, I started working at the knots. I didn’t have any of my weapons on me. They hadn’t been in too much of a hurry to take my gun or knife. “What’s your plan?”

“To kill them all,” he replied.

I looked up and found him staring straight ahead with a blank look in his eyes. That was his actual plan. Yeah. He was a crazy fucking bastard, but he was *our* crazy fucking bastard. I was glad he was on my side. I’d take him over the entire mafia crew that was inside this mansion.

The door opened and we both turned as one of the men came back into the room. His brows rose when he saw me and Butcher free. He held rope in his hands, clearly coming to tie me up. “What-”

“You should probably run,” Butcher told him, voice low and deadly.

The man’s eyes widened and he turned and ran out the door, slamming it behind him. We both burst into laughter.

“Shit,” Butcher said, shaking his head as he stood up. “That was fun.”

“Fun?” I asked, incredulous. The chuckle slipped out before I could stop it. “Something tells me you’re going to enjoy everything that’s about to happen.”

“Fuck right, I am.” He grinned at me, a feral expression on his face. He cracked his knuckles and rolled his neck in an exaggerated stretch.

I shook my head. “Let’s get this shit done.”

“Think your huge ass can take out that door?”

Studying it, I shrugged, then took a few steps back to get some momentum. My teeth rattled in my head as I hit the door. A deafening crack filled the room, but the door held.

“Couple more hits should do it,” he encouraged.

“You could take a turn,” I muttered. Hitting that fucking wood jarred my brain causing pain to fracture through my skull.

“That shit’s too thick for me to break through.” He made a motion with his hand, then folded his arms over his chest, waiting for me to do the dirty work.

“Dick head.” He was right. Two more hits and the wood splintered out into the hallway.

We both froze as footsteps raced toward us. Butcher shoved me behind him as two men came into view. “Fuck!” one of them shouted.

They pulled out guns and one minute I was standing in the hall, the next I was flat on my back inside the room again. Butcher knocked me right off my feet. Sweat broke out on my brow as I heard the gunfire. The first shot was so loud my ears were ringing, muffling the rest.

“Butcher!” I shoved to my feet and stormed into the hallway, ready to kill the mafia fucks who’d dared to shoot at us.

Butcher was standing over one of the men, his boot on the man’s chest as he fired into him again and again. The second man was lying face down a few feet away, blood pooling around him.

“You’re hit,” I told him, voice shaking.

He looked at me with a blank expression. “I’m fine.” He winked at me. “Barely a flesh wound.” He turned back to the guy he was shooting and emptied the magazine into him.

“Butcher,” I said, trying to get his attention. When he finally looked up, I raised a brow. “Next time, keep some of the fucking ammo.”

He reached down and pulled another pistol from a holster under the man’s suit coat. “There’s plenty.” He tossed it to me.

Catching it, I checked the magazine and saw he was right. There was plenty of ammo for us to use. He was already pulling more magazines off the dead bodies. We’d need them if we were going to get out of here alive.

Shouts came from down the hallway and I met his crazed eyes. “We better find a place with more cover or we’re going to be full of holes by the time this is over.”

“I know where we can go,” Butcher growled. “Follow me.”

I trailed behind him, watching our backs as he led us through a maze of hallways. We took a few turns and then stopped at an open door. “In here,” he whispered.

Stepping into the room, I waited until he was inside before shutting the door. I looked around and saw a chair sitting in the middle of the room, blood surrounding it. “That yours?” I asked.

“They thought they could torture information about the club out of me.” He gave me an insidious grin. “They’re amateurs when it comes to torture.” He chuckled, “They

smear more blood than they actually bled out of me. Look at this mess. One of them actually ran out and puked. Pussies.”

He would know. His squad had done their fair amount of torturing people. I listened at the door, waiting for the footsteps to go pounding by. “They’re gone. Do you know how many men Amato has?”

“Fuck ton,” he said with a shrug. “Let’s start narrowing them down. We should manage to kill quite a few before the others get here.”

“How do you know they’re coming?” I asked. Patting my pockets, I checked for my phone. It was gone. I swore under my breath.

Butcher didn’t answer, he just opened the door, sticking his head out to make sure the coast was clear. “This way.”

I followed behind him as he led us down another hallway. We stopped as we heard voices coming from up ahead.

“Where the fuck did they go?”

“We need to double back. Check all the rooms.”

I knelt down on one knee, preparing for them to come into view by making myself a smaller target. Butcher was on the wall opposite me, his gun raised. “Soon as this starts, they’re going to come in from every direction,” I warned.

“Don’t get shot,” he told me.

There wasn’t time for any more conversation because the two men rounded the corner and saw us. They both started firing at the same time. Butcher took a step forward and fired at one while I aimed at the second. He was dead before he hit the ground. The other man was still shooting as Butcher emptied his magazine into him.

The hallway was filled with smoke from all the gunpowder being discharged. I coughed as I tried to see through it. “We need to move,” I said, voice hoarse.

Butcher grabbed my arm and pulled me down the hall. “This way.”

He stopped at an open door and shoved me in front of him. I froze as soon as I stepped inside. A man stood there, a gun pointed at my head. I heard Butcher's gun click behind me as he tried to fire it. It was empty. "Drop it," the man ordered.

I didn't have time to think about what I was doing, I just reacted. Grabbing the barrel of the gun, I pushed it up and to the side as he squeezed the trigger. My ears rang from the shot sounding so close to my head. I jerked the gun out of his grasp and turned it on him. I only fired twice. At point blank range, that was all I needed to kill him.

Butcher was staring at me with narrowed eyes when I looked over at him. "You okay?"

"Yeah," I breathed. "Nice move." He'd taught it to me. Considering my main job in the Army had been to reload the ammo on helicopters, I hadn't found myself in nearly as many skirmishes as some of the guys. Butcher had taught me a lot throughout the years and I was grateful for it. He'd helped turn me into a killing machine. It didn't bother me to take a life. Not when they were my enemy anyway. I'd done far more killing for my club and for this city than I had in the military.

"Let's go." I searched the body in front of me and found more ammo. "Quit going through it so fucking fast."

He chuckled as he followed me back into the hall, his gun raised as he covered our backs. We ran down another hallway, then another, before we came to a door. "This is it," he told me.

I nodded and kicked the door in. It slammed against the wall and we both stepped inside. The man sitting at the table looked up, eyes wide with surprise. He reached for the gun on the table, but Butcher was faster. He was next to the man in a flash and I watched as the man gurgled his last breath around Butcher's protruding knife.

"Where the fuck did you get that?" I asked.

"One of the first guys had it on him."

This time as we moved back into the hall we were met with an onslaught of bullets. "Fuck!" I jerked back into the

doorway, taking cover.

“We’re pinned down,” Butcher said, voice grim.

“There’s no other way out of here.”

He nodded. “I’ll cover you. Run back the way we came and see if you can find a way to get behind them.”

This was by far the biggest house I’d ever seen. It had hallways for days and so many damn rooms I doubted we’d be able to check them all. It was obvious that Amato’s grandfather had built it with the intention of housing the majority of his men here. It was a good way to keep his family safe. It was too bad for us, because we were probably going to get lost in this monstrosity.

“On three,” Butcher said. He counted off, then raised his gun over the doorframe and fired while I bolted down the hall.

I ran until I found an alcove to duck into and took a second to catch my breath. My heart was pounding in my ears as I tried to figure out what direction I should go. The sound of running feet made me tense. I waited until the person was close enough, then reached out and grabbed them.

The guy who’d been running toward me yelped as I yanked him into the alcove with me. I didn’t want to use my gun and alert the others to my location, so I wrapped my arm around his neck and began to squeeze. He clawed at my arm, but his feet were dangling off the ground, so he couldn’t get any leverage.

His struggles slowed, then stopped altogether. His body went limp in my arms and I lowered him to the ground silently. Searching his body, I found a handgun and tucked it into my waistband. It never hurt to have an extra in a situation like this.

CHAPTER 25



Hellfire

Moving down the hall, I kept an eye out for anyone else coming my way. I made it all the way back to where we'd started without seeing another soul. Then I heard Butcher shout. My heart jumped into my throat as I ran toward the sound of gunfire.

I skidded to a stop when I saw Butcher on his back, two men standing over him with guns pointed at his head. "Drop it!" a third man yelled as he turned toward me.

I froze, my gun pointed at him. They were going to kill Butcher. They'd managed to flip the tables on us. If I didn't do something we were both going to die here. I couldn't let that happen. Not to him. Not to me. Meeting Butcher's gaze, I gave a barely discernible nod. At the same time, we lunged for the men closest to us.

Butcher reached up and grabbed the barrel of the gun, shoving it upward as he rolled to the side. The guy fired, but the bullet flew down the hall and buried itself into a wall. I shot mine in the chest, then turned and fired at the man who'd been watching in horror as Butcher fought his partner.

"Fuck!" The man shouted, his voice filled with pain as blood bloomed over his shirt. He slumped down onto the floor as he bled out.

I spun around and saw Butcher still struggling with the man who'd tried to kill him. He was happily sticking his knife into every part of the man when given the opening.

Grabbing the guy by the neck, I tossed him off Butcher like a ragdoll. He hit the wall with a thud and slid onto the ground. A quick check of the pulse assured me he was dead. His head had hit hard enough to splatter his brains against the paint. Not that he would have lived very long thanks to Butcher's punctures.

"Looks like they got you, too," Butcher said as he got to his feet. His eyes were on my shoulder. It was the same one I'd been shot in the night we'd taken down the cult.

"It's just a graze." This wasn't the first time I'd been shot and though it was burning like a bitch, it wasn't like the last time. My poor shoulder was going to be a fucking mess of arthritis by the time I hit sixty though.

"We should get to another part of the house," he suggested. "We're sitting ducks if we stay here where they know to look for us."

"How do you know so much about the house?" I asked as I followed him back down the hall.

"Didn't you check out the blueprints Rip was handing out to the Wyoming guys?"

"No." There were too many other things on my mind, like my traitorous cousin. If we were lucky we'd get out of this alive and I'd be able to pay her back for selling me out to The Italians. First we had to cut down the throngs of Amato's men. Without any idea of how many were here we were in danger of running out of ammo before we accomplished that mission.

We ran until we came to a door that led outside. It was raining, the first monsoon of the summer, soaking us both instantly. "Fucking rain," Butcher muttered.

The mud had us skidding, trying to keep our footing as we raced for cover. A bullet whizzed past my head and I ducked, nearly falling in the mud. Butcher grabbed my arm and pulled

me upright. My shoulder burned under his pulling, but I pushed through.

“Where are they?” I shouted, looking around.

“I don’t know.” Lightning split the air, followed closely by thunder. We hadn’t even heard the storm inside, thanks to all the insulation and gunfire.

The rain was pouring down as lightning split the sky. “We need to get to cover,” I shouted.

Butcher nodded and pointed at a shed that was a few hundred yards away. It was small, but it would provide some cover from the bullets flying our way.

We raced across the compound, trying to get to safety before we were shot, again. The door was locked, but Butcher kicked it in and we both stumbled inside. He slammed the door shut behind us and I leaned over, hands on my knees while I tried to catch my breath.

Butcher looked at my shoulder, then down at his own ‘flesh wound’. “I guess we’ve had enough fun, it’s time to get serious about these guys.”

“What?” It was all I could manage to say to such a ridiculous statement, though I didn’t doubt that he was having fun with this.

“We don’t need any bullet holes.” Both of us had managed to get away with grazes at this point. He was right, our luck wouldn’t hold out forever. Butcher peeked out the door “We’ll come out and hook right, around the east side is the entrance to the kitchen. From there we can move past the dining room and upstairs toward his office. He has a safe room back there, that’s where he’ll make his stand.”

I put a fresh magazine in my pistol and put the partial mag in my back pocket. “Ready,” I said with a nod.

Butcher hesitated for a second, looking past me with a grin. He tucked his pistol into his pants and reached past me. I turned to see what he was smiling at, behind me was a pile of lawn tools. He pulled an ax out of the pile and studied it. “Yeah, this will do.”

He hefted the ax, then peeked out the door again. "Let's go!" He bolted, I held my gun low and ran behind him, trying to ignore the rain that was pelting me. We made it to the kitchen entrance, and Butcher charged through with no hesitation.

What unfolded next was a true Viking raid. Butcher tapped into something ancestral and primal. Running through the door, cooks and helpers scattered in all directions. Butcher honed in on a goon in a suit. Swinging the ax as he ran, he caught the man in the chest.

He hit with such force that the man was lifted off the ground, the momentum carrying him in an arc, right into another guy. Butcher heaved, ripping the ax from the fallen man's chest, bringing with it a spray of blood and guts. He pulled the ax back over his head, and yelling maniacally, brought it down into the second man's skull.

Fuck. Me. Butcher was finally letting loose.

The door swung open, a man coming through with his gun raised. Butcher swung the ax up and took the man's hands clean off. The man fell, screaming at his stumps. Butcher casually stepped over him on his way out to the dining room. I followed his lead, walking past stumpy.

The dining room was huge, with a stereotypical mile long table. We took up position on either side and began stalking toward the other end. Three men burst through, into the room. I raised my pistol and started firing. With an angry, berserker-like curse, Butcher chucked his ax overhead, hurtling into one of them.

He had his pistol out now, firing into the remaining man. He was angry that he had to relinquish his toy. We made it to the end of the table. I was about to check the bodies for more ammo when a hail of gunfire came through the doorway. More goons on the other side.

We dove to either side of the doorway. I had just started to yell to Butcher when a man ran through the door. Before I could fire Butcher charged into him, catching the man at the waist and tossing him onto his shoulder. With his free hand he

leveled his pistol and ran through the door. He was using the man as a human shield. A living human shield.

Jumping Jesus Christ, I'm glad this thing is on our side.

Butcher charged straight at them, the man he was carrying played his part well, absorbing all the bullets fired at Butcher. The guy was alive when Butcher started the charge. By the time he closed the gap the man must have taken twenty bullets and was hanging limply in Butcher's grasp.

Butcher plowed through them, dropped his human shield and started to stab the men around him. Where he got the knife from I didn't know, it seemed to just materialize in his hand. I pulled my own knife and waded into the fray. We expertly and gracefully cut, slashed and stabbed until no one was left moving inside the room. Blood was splashed all over our clothes. We looked like we'd just walked out of a horror movie.

Butcher wandered over to where he had thrown his ax and pulled it out of the body. The wet sucking sound had a look of disgust crossing my face. "Ready?" he asked, as though this was all completely normal. I nodded as he stuck the bloodied ax through his belt, so it dangled there like a gory warning.

Moving upstairs, we made our way down the hallway and into what looked like the largest and gaudiest waiting room known to man. "We must be close to his office, his safe room."

"Should be through those doors" Butcher said, pointing with his knife.

We were right. The doors flew open and half a dozen men poured out, firing. "Fuck!" I bellowed, unable to form the words to warn Butcher. Not that he didn't see the threat. I caught a round in my thigh and fell to my knee with a grunt of pain. Butcher grabbed me by the collar and dragged me back through the door we came out of, taking cover behind the wall. I sat on my ass, back to the wall as I surveyed the damage.

"Did it go through?" he asked, prodding at my thigh.

Shoving his hands away before he did more damage to my leg, I looked at the front where the wound was visible and bleeding. Grimacing, I felt around on the back side. No hole in my jeans, or blood, back there. “No, it’s lodged in.” Sighing, I resigned myself to the fact that I’d be dealing with another gunshot wound and another visit to Crash Cart.

“Sucks for you.” He reached down and took my gun from me. “Don’t worry, I’ll kill them for you.”

“What the fuck, Butcher?” I never got an answer. He took off through the door firing. I ripped off two long strips from my shirt, bundling one up over the bullet hole and tied the other around my leg over it. I winced as I pulled it tight and knotted it. Not tourniquet tight. It didn’t look that bad and I had no idea how long we’d be here. I didn’t want to lose my whole fucking leg.

The doorway opposite us burst open, making me jerk in reaction. I reached into my waistband for the small pistol I had tucked away earlier. It was in my hand before I realized who I was looking at.

“Hellfire?” It was Lockout and the rest of the crew.

I blew out a huge sigh of relief. “Thank fuck it’s you guys. Come on, get me up, Butcher went through there. He needs our help.”

“Speak for yourself, gimp.” Butcher strolled into the room and dropped the pistol he stole from me into my lap. It landed on my wound.

“Goddamn it, that hurt. Fucker.”

“Amato’s in there, no more goons between us and the safe room.” He pulled the ax from his belt, then continued his casual stroll out of the room.

“Butcher, where are you going?” Lockout hollered

Toxic put his arm on Lock’s shoulder. “Best to let him get this out of his system.”

“Where’d he get the ax?” Riptide asked the room.

“We’re going to have to deal with that sooner or later.” Lockout muttered, ignoring Rip’s question. He let Butcher go with a shake of his head.

“Yeah, well, later is always better with Butcher,” Toxic replied.

Ricochet and Smokehouse helped me to my feet. They moved to put a shoulder under each arm, but I shrugged them off. I could walk. I’d limp, but I could walk. We moved into the next room, the waiting area. Butcher had left the bodies strewn around like a child leaves their toys on the ground.

“Jesus,” Riptide muttered as he looked around. “He didn’t fuck around, did he?”

“Nope,” I answered. Honestly, if I had to be stuck in this fucked up situation, there hadn’t been a better choice than having Butcher by my side. But I was fucking glad to see the rest of my brothers here. Amato didn’t stand a fucking chance. Gunfire ripped through the air as Butcher found more enemies to engage.

Lockout sighed and glanced over at Toxic. “I know he can handle it, but I still want you to go with him.”

Toxic grinned. “Mostly so he has a babysitter, right?”

“Something like that.”

“Sure thing, Prez,” Toxic said and trotted off toward the sound of the shooting. He was humming as he went. I shook my head when he started singing, his voice echoing back toward us. “One little, two little, three little dead goons. Four little, five little, six little dead goons.” The song trailed off as he got farther away.

“Does he ever have a bad day?” I asked the room. There were grins and shrugs in answer. Toxic’s infectious good mood was a good counter weight to Butcher’s psychotic nature, so no one questioned it too closely.

“Let’s get this done,” Lock said, staring at the door to what could only be Amato’s office. We gathered around, guns raised, while he lifted a boot and kicked in the door.

CHAPTER 26



Hellfire

No one was there. We spread out looking around, and I remembered what Butcher had said. “Look for something that would open a door.”

Ricochet nodded. “Doesn’t surprise me this fucker has a safe room.”

“You sure it’s in here?” Smoke asked.

“Considering how many men are dead out there in that waiting room, you can bet on it,” Lock answered before I could.

We all started searching, looking for any sign of a hidden door or something that would trigger a lock. A rhythmic thinking had me looking over my shoulder and I saw Priest, one by one, flicking books off a bookshelf. Shaking my head, I went back to searching. It took a few minutes, but I finally saw it. A small panel on the wall with a keypad. It blended in with the rest of the wall so well I almost missed it. Turned out this gaudy Italian wallpaper was good for something. “Found it.” Cocking my head, I studied the keypad. “Maybe the code is in his desk?”

“That would be a stupid place to keep it since that’s where his enemies would search first,” Riptide said with a laugh. I shrugged, but moved out of the way when Riptide stepped close to look at the pad. “Torque?”

“Yeah.”

“Can you go out and get the small tool bag out of my saddlebags on my bike?”

“Sure.”

“Take a couple of your guys,” Lock told him. “I don’t want anyone going anywhere alone.”

The Berserker’s Rage guys were on loan to us by their president, and while they were all more than capable of defending themselves, we didn’t need to send them back in pieces. Their president might not blame us, but we didn’t need to get our allies shot up or no one would fucking help us anymore.

I paced back and forth in front of the door while we waited for Torque and the others to get back.

“You’re making me dizzy,” Ricochet said, his hand shooting out to grab my arm as I passed him.

Glaring at him, I jerked away. “Sorry.” I was too fucking jittery to have anyone touching me right now.

He shook his head. “You’re going to make that gunshot wound worse.”

“It’s fine,” I insisted, but stopped pacing. I didn’t need the adrenaline dying back right as we confronted Amato. That would be embarrassing, passing out in the middle of Lock interrogating him. Fuck me, I’d never live that down.

Amato was the last puzzle piece. Getting rid of him ended half of our problems. All that would be left was Fremont. Fuck I was ready for it all to be over.

Torque appeared with the tool bag and Riptide went to work on the keypad. He ignored our questions when we asked what he was using. It was some kind of handheld device that he had connected to the keypad. He was tapping away on it for a few minutes before there was a click and he pushed on the wall. It swung open, revealing a small staircase.

Lock and Rip insisted on going first even though I was chomping at the bit to go kill the fucker hiding somewhere

down on the main floor of the mansion. Lock motioned for us to follow him and we did as he descended down the stairs. “It must go behind a false wall, all the way down,” I said, voice low.

Static nodded and kept pace with me as every step brought us closer to a bright light. I heard Lock talking before we even managed to get off the last step. The Berserkers were right on our asses, not wanting to miss anything.

“You may as well put the gun down, Amato,” Lock said, voice calm and reasonable. “Your men are dead.” If there were any left alive, Butcher and Toxic would find them. “And you’re trapped down here.”

Amato had a scowl on his face and he looked more like a sullen teenager than a mafia boss. One who’d been caught doing something bad and was about to be punished for it. The guy was in his early thirties, so it wasn’t like he was a kid, it was just the impression I got. This whole situation had come about because he had daddy’s money and daddy’s men to fight for him. He, himself, wasn’t much of a threat.

He didn’t look like he believed Lock when he told him his men were dead, but he also didn’t seem to care. He still had his gun aimed at Lockout, who was standing in front of him with his gun pointed down toward the floor. He knew Amato had nowhere to run. The rest of us had our guns trained at the fucker’s head, so it didn’t matter that Lock didn’t have his gun raised.

Lock was standing there, looking like the cocky asshole he was, but in this case he’d won the right. Maybe having me and Butcher being kidnapped hadn’t been his plan, but we’d won anyway. Amato had made a huge fucking mistake bringing me and Butcher here. He’d let his own demise in through the front fucking door.

“What are you going to do with me? I have money.” Amato demanded, glaring at Lock as he lowered his weapon. He knew better than to fire a shot. He’d be full of bullet holes in a matter of seconds. He wasn’t the ‘go out in a blaze of

glory' type. We were fanned out around him, there was no way he'd be able to avoid the amount of lead we'd throw his way.

Lock's eyes narrowed and I knew he was considering whether he should even talk to this piece of shit, or just shoot him. I sure as fuck wanted to put a bullet in him and be done with it, but I waited for Lock's order.

"You're going to die," Lock said after a long moment. "But I'm going to give you the opportunity to have a say in your death."

Amato's eyes narrowed and his lip lifted in disgust. "What does that mean?"

"Tell me what I want to know and I'll make your death quick and clean," Lock said with a shrug. "Don't, and I'll let my men tear into you like rabid dogs. Your choice."

Amato's chest was heaving as he considered those options. The fact that he wasn't begging for his life was the only point of respect I was willing to give him. He knew it was useless. He wasn't leaving here alive. "What do you want to know?"

"How closely are you working with Fremont?"

A muscle twitched in Amato's jaw as he heard the question. "I don't work with him," he spat. "He's a fucking peon. We laundered some of his money for him, and in return he gave us intel. I was planning to just keep him on the back burner in case I ever needed him to get me out of a mess." Amato turned his head and spat on the ground, as though talking about Fremont left a bad taste in his mouth.

"Do you have any other relatives set to take over the... family business?"

Amato's eyes flashed to the floor, breaking his eye contact with Lockout. "My cousin, Angelo, is to take over if something happens to me."

"Where's Angelo?" Lock asked.

"Somewhere here in my home."

"Then he's dead," I said, voice flat. When Amato's eyes met mine, I knew he saw zero emotion there in my gaze.

A pained expression passed over his face. “Then there is no one.”

Lock nodded, a smile spreading over his face. “Good to hear. Where does your money go?”

“If...” He swallowed hard. “If both Angelo and I are dead, then my lawyer has been instructed to split it up amongst our families and the families of my men.”

“Any of them itching to take over a broken mafia empire?” Lock asked.

“No. They’re women and children,” he said, as though we were monsters for contemplating going after them at all. As if he hadn’t gone after women and children himself. He was the fucking scumbag here, not us.

“Good.”

Amato’s eyes widened as Lock lifted his gun and fired. The bullet tore through his forehead and blood and brains sprayed out the back of his head. His body crumpled to the floor.

“Fuck,” Toxic muttered next to me, sounding disgusted.

My head snapped to where he was standing. “Where the fuck did you come from?”

“The stairs,” Toxic said with a shrug, sounding as though I was the crazy one for asking the question.

“Where’s Butcher?” I asked.

Toxic motioned over to where some of The Berserkers were standing and there was Butcher, leaning against the wall, watching the show. He nodded at me and gave me that crazy grin of his. There was blood streaked all over his face. I was sure it was the same for me. I nodded back at him before turning my attention back to Lock.

His eyes stopped on Toxic. “Everyone taken care of?”

“A couple of guys made a run for it, but I put a tracker on their car. We wanted to check in with you before going after them,” Toxic replied.

“Where’d you get a tracker?” Riptide asked, his eyes narrowing suspiciously.

“That little bag you always keep with you.” Toxic gave him a wide smile while Rip swore.

“Stay out of my shit, Toxic.”

“Stop having such cool shit,” he replied, with a shrug. He would keep going through anything left around and taking anything he thought might be useful in the future and wasn’t about to feel bad about it.

“Go ahead,” Lock told him, giving him permission to go after the escapees. “Take The Berserkers with you.”

“Priest, put a proper bandage on Hell’s leg so he doesn’t bleed out before we get to Crash Cart,” Lockout ordered. Priest had a small med pack on his belt. Nothing fancy, mostly just gauze and tape, the same kit they give every soldier. Most of us took similar things home from the military.

“Open that up,” Priest told me, pointing at my wound. I knew what he meant. I sat down and untied the fabric, then ripped my jeans where the bullet went in, exposing my skin. Priest packed a thick wad of gauze against the wound, then wrapped the medical tape around tightly. This would hold long enough and stop the bleeding. Mostly.

“We’re going to have to rename you. Hellfire doesn’t work for me,” Toxic said, poking my bandage with his finger.

“Ow! Fucker!”

“I think bullet sponge works better. You know, because of the bullet in your leg. And the one you took in the shoulder a few months ago.”

“Yeah, yeah. I get it. Now go fuck off”

“Next time we do a raid I think I’m standing behind you. Let you soak up all the bullets.”

I flipped him off but couldn’t help but laugh with him.

We all headed back up the stairs, leaving Amato lying in his own blood, then out to the hallway that led us back to the

first floor again, this time outside of the safe room. “Anyone here ever been fingerprinted?” Lock asked.

“We were when Ricochet threatened Trent,” Smoke reminded him.

Lock looked over at Rip. “That something you can handle, or do we need Rat to do it?”

“Nah, Dash and I can take care of that. Rat gave us a way to get access to pretty much any system we want,” he said with a grin. “I’ll take care of it as soon as I get back to the clubhouse.”

Lockout pulled his phone out as we all headed out toward the bikes. He frowned. “Hush called.” He hit the screen and held the phone up to his ears. His face grew darker and more worried by the second as he listened.

“Everyone okay?” Priest asked, worry coating his tone. Hush had been left behind with a few others to guard the clubhouse. Priest’s kids were there with the others. He had a lot to lose if something had gone wrong.

“Fuck,” Lock barked out. “It’s Kit,” he said, his eyes going to me. “She tracked your phone. She tried calling. So did Hush. My phone’s been off just in case we found you guys, didn’t want it ringing at an inopportune time.”

“Is she okay?” I asked, searching his face, my heart plummeting down into my ass.

“Pixie attacked her. Stabbed her.”

My breath caught in my lungs as everything inside me twisted in agony. Smoke took over since I couldn’t breathe.

“Is she fucking alive, Lock?” he asked, sounding like he was in as much pain as me.

“I...fuck...I don’t know. Hush was taking her to the hospital because the ambulance was taking too long.”

I didn’t say a word, just sprinted toward the bikes as fast as my leg would let me, praying with everything inside me that she was still alive. My brothers were right behind me and I hopped on the back of Ricochet’s bike. We raced away from

Amato's mansion as fast as the Harleys would go, leaving a mess behind, but my thoughts were only on my girl.

CHAPTER 27



Hellfire

Limping forward, my eyes were glued to Hush. He had blood everywhere and there was a tortured look on his face. “Kit?” I croaked. Hush hadn’t given Lockout many details when he called, just that Kit had been severely injured and was in a nearby hospital in surgery. Smokehouse was right by my side, fear etched into his features. Our brothers were surrounding us, listening to Hush while trying to give me and Smokehouse comfort.

“The doctors haven’t come out yet,” Hush said with a shake of his head. “I’m so fuckin’ sorry, Hell.” He shot both me and Smoke an apologetic look.

“What the fuck happened?” I asked. I wasn’t pissed at him. Or her. I was just fucking terrified of losing her. How could she be taken from me after I finally made her mine?

“She tracked your phone,” Hush explained. “Wouldn’t listen when I told her to stay at the clubhouse. She was worried you were lyin’ on the road somewhere. I didn’t think it would be a big deal to just let her come along.”

My heart constricted in my chest. My sweet, perfect woman had gone to help me and I hadn’t been there for her when she needed me.

“We found Pixie’s house.”

“Where is she?” Lock asked, putting a hand on my shoulder.

“Dead. Kit shot her when Pixie went after her with a second knife.” He gave me an apologetic look. “She was supposed to wait out front while I checked around back to make sure no one was hidin’ there, waitin’ to ambush us. She went inside and I didn’t see most of what happened. There were two of Amato’s men in the back. If I hadn’t stopped to take care of them, I might have gotten there before Kit was stabbed.”

I reached out and squeezed his shoulder. “If you hadn’t killed them, then you both would have been attacked and would have ended up dead or in that mansion beside me and Butcher. It’s not your fault, Hush. What did the doctors say?” It was getting hard to fucking breathe. I didn’t want to hear any of this, but I needed to know.

“They didn’t really take the time to talk,” he replied. “They barked a few questions at me and one of the nurses thanked me for not pullin’ the knife out of her.” We all had enough basic medical training to know not to pull an impaled object out. Not unless you were near a damn hospital because that object was likely all that was keeping you from bleeding out. He rubbed a blood-stained hand through his hair. “Fuck.”

“She’s going to be okay,” Smoke said, his voice cracking. He had tears in his eyes.

I nodded, trying to reassure myself as much as him.

“Here.”

Looking over my shoulder, I found Priest standing there holding clothes. Frowning, I took the t-shirt and sweats. “Where’d this come from?”

“I always keep extra shit in my saddlebags. They’ll be a bit small on you, but at least they’re not covered in blood.” He tossed a second set to Hush. It didn’t take us long to find the bathroom and change. I winced as I shoved my injured leg into the gray sweatpants.

A quick look in the mirror had me slowing down and taking the time to wash off my face, neck and arms. The pink tinted water flowed down the drain as I watched. Hush cleaned off too, then we went back out to the waiting room.

“Thanks,” I told Priest.

Before he could answer, the door opened and we all turned, ready to jump on whoever it was just to hear any kind of news. A doctor stepped through, her eyes widening as she took us all in. “Are you here for Kit Kincaid?”

I stepped forward. “Yes.”

She looked around at all of us, her eyes soft with sympathy. “Are you family?” she asked.

“I’m her brother, Knox Kincaid,” Smoke told her. He nodded toward me. “This is her fiancé.”

I gave him a grateful look. If I had to wait to find out what was happening, I was going to lose my mind.

“Kit is out of surgery and is in recovery,” she told us. She looked weary. “She’s not out of the woods yet, the knife nicked her liver.”

Swallowing hard, I searched the doctor’s face. “What are her chances?”

“Well, the liver is able to heal itself better than most organs and it wasn’t a very long laceration. She should pull through, but she’s going to have a lot of healing to do,” the doctor warned.

Smoke bowed his head, resting his hands on the back of it as he stared down at the floor. The relief I felt was cautious, but I couldn’t help but feel hopeful. Kit was going to be okay.

“Can we see her?” I asked.

The doctor nodded and led me and Smoke down the hall to a room where Kit was lying in a bed. There were so many machines hooked up to her and tubes everywhere. Her skin looked pale against all the white of the hospital sheets and bandages.

“Your friend saved her life,” the doctor told me. “If he hadn’t gotten her here so quickly she would have bled out before we could help her.”

“Thanks, Doc,” I replied. Not bothering to wait for her to leave, I walked over to the side of her bed and took Kit’s hand in mine. “Hey, Baby,” I said softly, leaning down and kissing her forehead.

Smoke came up behind me and put a hand on my shoulder as I sat down in a chair. “I’m going to go call Dad,” he said. He was giving me a few minutes alone with her, something that couldn’t have been easy for him.

I nodded, not looking away from Kit as he left. She was still out from the anesthesia. I squeezed her hand, trying to give her something to feel, to hold onto. She was strong and she was going to pull through this. I couldn’t lose her.

Laying my head down, I rested it on her shoulder. “I need you to fight, Vixen. Come back to me.” Exhaustion tugged at me, but I couldn’t sleep. Not with my girl lying here in this bed, machines beeping as they monitored her, and the adrenaline from the fight still pumping through my veins.

“How is she?”

Glancing over my shoulder, I motioned for Hush to come in. “The doctor told me you saved her.”

“The fuckin’ ambulance was taking too goddamned long. So, I just drove her myself.”

A sigh huffed out of me when I thought about Kit bleeding in the backseat of her car while Hush drove like a bat out of hell to get her here in time. “Don’t know how I’m ever going to repay you,” I told him, voice thick with emotion.

“I shouldn’t have let her go in the first place,” he admitted. “I thought I could handle whatever was goin’ to be waitin’ for us. If it had just been The Italians, it would have been fine. Didn’t account for Pixie. Didn’t think she would...”

There was no grief. No sadness in knowing that my cousin was dead. I was relieved she was gone. The only thing I

worried about was having to tell Uncle Hal what happened. Pixie may have been a traitorous cunt, but she was still his kid.

“It’s better this way. She was going to be a problem for us down the road.”

Hush moved forward and bent to brush a kiss over Kit’s forehead. All of the men here thought of her like a little sister. She’s been here since the beginning. It was going to be ripping them up almost as much as me.

“I’ll go let the others know how she’s doin’. How long do they expect her to be out?”

“They said a few hours. Tell them they can come visit once she’s awake and comfortable,” I told him.

Hush nodded and walked out the door. He stopped and said something in a low voice to Smokehouse as they passed. Smoke came in and pulled up a chair on the other side of her bed. I watched as he took her free hand in his and kissed the back of it. “You’re not going to fucking leave me, Kit. You hear me? I need you.”

I had to swallow hard at the emotion in his voice. He looked like he was barely holding himself together. I knew I looked the same. “She’ll be okay, Smoke.” It was almost as though I was convincing myself.

His eyes met mine and I could see the worry there. “I know.” His voice was gruff as he bit out the words.

We sat in silence, listening to the beeping, moving out of the way when nurses came in to check on Kit and do whatever they needed to with her. The hours ticked by on the clock and soon my eyes were too heavy to hold open.

Something touched me, jerked me awake. My eyes flew to the wall where a clock was hanging. I’d been asleep for three hours. A hand brushed over my hair again and I turned my head, my breath caught up inside my lungs. Kit looked exhausted and worse for wear, but she was still the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.

The metal chair I was sitting in flew backward as I stood in a rush and carefully cradled her head to my chest. I rested my

cheek on top of her head, eyes closing. It was an awkward maneuver to curl my huge body up so I could hold her like this without hurting her, but it was worth it.

Smokehouse had been asleep, his head tipped back, arms crossed over his chest, mouth hanging open, but he jerked awake at the sound of the chair slamming into the wall. Our gazes met and I saw my own relief reflected in his eyes. “Kit,” he breathed as he stood and moved around the bed to stand next to me. “How do you feel?”

She groaned and shifted in my arms. “Like I got stabbed.” She tried to sit up and gasped, “It hurts.”

“I’ll get someone,” Smoke said immediately and left the room.

Bending down, I cupped her cheeks in my hands and kissed her. “You scared the fucking hell out of me,” I said voice hoarse with emotion.

“I’m so sorry,” she told me, her eyes searching mine. “I lost my temper and went in there to find out where you were. I didn’t actually think she was going to do anything to hurt me.”

“I know,” I told her soothingly. “You’ve known her almost as long as you have me. She betrayed us all.”

Kit’s eyes fluttered closed, then popped back open. “Are you okay?”

I wasn’t about to mention the bullet that was still lodged in my thigh. “I’m fine, Vixen. It’s you we’re worrying about now.” Crash Cart would fix me up later. Thanks to Priest giving me new clothes, I didn’t have to worry about the doctors or nurses wondering what happened. I was free to get it figured out later, once I knew my girl was going to be okay.

“Hi there.” We both looked over as the same doctor from before came into the room with a smile on her face. “I’m so glad to see you’re awake.” She met my gaze as she said, “That’s a very good sign.” She looked back at Kit. “You’re going to need to stay as still as possible and just focus on resting. You’re feeling pain?”

Kit nodded and despite the pain her eyes kept fluttering closed. Her body was worn out and trying to force her to sleep.

“I’ll up your pain medication a little so you can rest comfortably,” she said.

“Thank you,” Kit whispered before closing her eyes again.

“You should let her sleep,” the doctor said as she messed with the controls and tubing that were feeding medication into Kit’s body.

“I’m not leaving,” I told her, voice firm.

“Only one person can stay overnight,” the doctor advised as she left the room.

“I’ll stay.” Smoke had come in behind the doctor, and stood watching.

I growled at him, about to rip him a new one for suggesting I leave her. I didn’t give a fuck if she was his sister. She was *my* everything.

“You need to go get that leg checked out. Not to mention help Lock and the others get Pixie’s place cleaned up.”

“Shit.” He was right. I had to get my phone and bike away from Pixie’s place and there were at least three bodies to clean up. Indecision warred within me.

“Don’t make me go to Lock,” Smoke warned.

“Fucker. Fine. I’ll be back first thing in the morning.” I leaned over and kissed Kit on the lips. Between exhaustion and the extra meds she was passed back out again. I limped my way out of her room, every fiber of my being screaming at me to go back and sit by her side, my leg, my bike, my responsibilities be damned.

“You good?” Lock asked, his eyes taking in my limp as he fell into step beside me.

“Yeah.” He didn’t say anything else, just walked with me down to the parking garage. “Let’s go get this done.”

“You need to go see Crash Cart.”

“After I deal with my cousin.”

“She’s dead, Hell. We can deal with the body. You don’t have to be the one to do it.”

“Yeah, I do. I owe it to my uncle.”

Lockout studied me for a moment, then nodded. “We’ll wrap this up as quickly as we can.”

I sighed and took Kit’s keys from Hush. Someone had moved the car from in front of the emergency exit to where we’d parked our bikes and I was grateful it hadn’t been towed when Hush left it there to get Kit inside. The last thing I needed was to pick her car up from an impound lot.

The next few days were going to be complicated as fuck. The last thing I wanted to be doing was leaving my girl in the hospital, but I had to get my shit straightened out. I owed it to my family. I planned to be back first thing in the morning so I could sit next to Kit until she was able to come home. Nothing would keep me from her. No one would hurt her again as long as I was alive.

CHAPTER 28



Kit

I'd been in and out of it for a couple of days, but I was starting to finally feel better. Most of my time in the hospital has been spent sleeping and visiting with my club family as they all stopped in to see me. Hellfire was by my side the whole time, refusing to leave. The other guys were bringing him fresh clothes and he was showering in my little ensuite bathroom.

It was hard to say whether I was more grateful or guilty for having him here. He was always so attentive, making sure I had everything I needed, even when the nurses said I shouldn't have it. He'd even brought me a bag of my favorite snacks from home and a few books to read. He'd been so sweet, but I couldn't help worrying about what was going to happen next. I killed his cousin. He was going to hate me. Even if he didn't, his family was bound to.

He stepped out of the bathroom, worry on his face. "Did I wake you?"

"No. I'm just tired of sleeping," I told him with a wry grin. This was the first time we'd been alone where I felt halfway decent enough to have this conversation. "What happened with The Italians?"

"They won't be bothering us again," he replied with a satisfied look. I arched a brow in question. "Amato is dead. Any of his men who are still alive will scatter. They won't

make it very far. Lock is sending Butcher, Toxic, and the Wyoming guys after them.”

“Good.” I couldn’t keep the satisfaction out of my voice. Just knowing that they wouldn’t be able to come after any of us again gave me relief. “I’m-.” I swallowed hard, trying to figure out how to say this. “I’m so sorry about Pixie.”

He shrugged as he sat next to me on the bed. “She brought it on herself.”

“She was your family. And I- I killed her.”

“You were protecting yourself, Kit,” he said, eyes flashing. “I’m just sorry that you had to go through that. And that you were hurt. I never wanted anything to happen to you.”

I shook my head and stared down at the blanket covering me. He was saying all the right things, but he didn’t seem to realize how big of a deal this was. How much guilt was weighing me down. “I’m going to end up in jail.”

“What?”

Our eyes locked as I looked up. “I killed her, Hell. You don’t get to just kill people... Well, *you* do.”

His deep chuckle bounced around the room. “I’m taking care of it, Kit. No one will ever know you killed her besides our family.”

“What about your uncle?” My chest tightened as I thought about the grief he would suffer because of me. It didn’t matter that Pixie was trying to kill me. Deep down, I knew I had the right to defend myself and that Hell was right, she had brought her death on herself. But that didn’t change the fact that I’d killed her. That once he wasn’t so busy trying to clean up the mess, he was going to realize what I’d done and start blaming me. The guilt was drowning me. I’d never even seriously hurt anyone before, let alone put an end to their life. It was messing with my head.

“He’s flying in as soon as he can make arrangements. I’ll explain it to him. I’ll make him understand.”

“That was his *child*, Hell,” I said softly.

“Don’t worry about all that, Vixen,” he said, picking up my hand and holding it in his. “It’s going to be fine. I’ll take care of it.”

I wasn’t sure how. I didn’t know how to move on from this. If it was some random mafia guy I’d killed, I might not be having all these doubts and worries. If Pixie wasn’t a part of Hellfire’s life I might not either, but how was he going to feel tomorrow when he had to tell his uncle? A week from now when the truth of what I’d done settled in? I’d lose him, I just didn’t know when. “I’m tired,” I murmured, closing my eyes.

Hellfire’s stare was heavy, I could feel it even with my eyes closed, but he didn’t say anything. He just leaned forward and kissed my forehead before moving off the bed and onto the chair next to me.

I woke up in the middle of the night, my heart pounding as I tried to figure out where I was. Tried to figure out if I was being attacked. Then Hellfire’s deep voice sounded from the chair and I remembered. He was here. No one was going to harm me with him by my side.

“It’s okay, Kit. You’re okay.” His huge palm was resting on my head as he checked on me, whispering soothing things.

“I’m okay,” I said, repeating his words. “Just a dream.”

He grunted, but didn’t say anything else. He also didn’t move his hand. It was comforting and made me feel connected to him.

This hospital room was never dark. It was a testament to how awful I’d been feeling that I’d even slept with all the lights, and beeping, and the nurses coming in and out. I wasn’t sure how Hell was managing. He’d fallen asleep in his clothes and his hair was a mess, but he still looked like sex on a stick. The fact that all this stress and worry over the last few days still hadn’t managed to dim his good looks wasn’t fair. No one should look that good after everything we went through.

“How’s your leg?” I asked, not wanting to go back to sleep. He’d finally admitted to me that he’d been shot when I noticed him limping.

“Fine. Crash fixed it up.”

He'd ignored my pleas to have the doctors here take a look at it. He said they wouldn't be able to do anything better than what Crash could, and he didn't want the questions that would come along with the care. I couldn't argue with him there.

“You should get some more sleep,” he murmured.

“I'm not tired anymore.” I wanted to talk to him. I needed to know what happened with Pixie. What was going on with the club. What would happen now?

“Kit.” His voice was stern, but gentle. “You need rest.”

“Where is she?” I whispered, unable to let it go.

He sighed, running his free hand over his face as though he could brush off the exhaustion. He wasn't sleeping enough, of that, I was certain. “Marty's taking care of her.”

I frowned, but didn't try sitting up. When you had a hole in your stomach that wasn't the best option. It was something I'd learned when I first woke up and tried to sit straight up. “Won't Hal need to see her body? If Marty incinerates her-”

“He's not,” Hell told me. “We're doing a funeral at his mortuary in three days. After that, Pixie will disappear.”

“I want to go.”

“Kit-”

“Bennett,” I said, knowing that using his real name would force him to hear what I was saying. “I'm going.”

His eyes narrowed on me. He looked as though he was about to argue, but he sighed and nodded instead. “Okay.”

My tense muscles relaxed, relieved that he was going to listen to me. I wasn't sure why he was being so accommodating. Maybe it was because I'd nearly died. Whatever the reason, I was thankful for it. The last thing I wanted was to see Pixie's dad, but I knew I needed to. If I was going to get past this, I had to force myself to face what I'd done.

* * *

THE NEXT MORNING, the girls I'd come to love like sisters all came bustling into my hospital room like a small tornado. They had all visited over the last week, but never all together. And this was the first day I felt stronger, like I could stay awake for more than a few minutes at a time.

Seeing them eased something inside of me. The guilt slunk off to cower in the corner in the face of the joy and light that my friends surrounded me in. They were perched on the arms of chairs, while Sloane and Dani sat in them, and on the edge of my bed.

"How are you holding up?" Seek asked, patting my hand. She'd left Sawyer at home with Hush, so that she could visit uninterrupted.

Looking around at them, tears pricked at my eyes. "I don't know how to feel," I admitted.

"About killing Pixie?" Sloane asked when the rest remained quiet. She was probably the only person in this world who could say that and make it so I didn't feel judged. There was sympathy shining from her eyes and it made it easier to nod in answer to her question.

"That wasn't your fault," Jenny insisted. "She was trying to kill you."

"She almost succeeded," Jordan said quietly. She and Gwen leaned against one another at the foot of my bed.

"We know something about how you feel. Even though we didn't actually kill Trent," Gwen said, "I went through so much guilt knowing that it was the circumstances of that night that got him killed. I helped take my kids' dad away from them."

I shook my head, sniffing away the tears before they could fall. "It wasn't your fault. Somewhere deep down, I know it wasn't my fault either. But, I made mistakes," I told them. "I

shouldn't have gone in the first place. I should have waited outside like Hush told me to."

"You were worried about your old man," Seek said firmly. "We *all* wanted to go."

"Sure did," Dani confirmed.

"We just knew there was no way Hush would let all of us come," Tori added with a smile. "You deserved to go look for your damn boyfriend. You didn't know for sure that he wasn't just broken down on the side of the road."

"I would have stormed in there, too," Jordan added. "Once I saw Pixie. She was supposed to be on our side."

"Well, not *our* side," Tori said. "She was never an old lady."

"In a way we did always treat her differently. Even from the other sweet butts," Daisha admitted.

"Because she was Hell's family," Susie said with a nod. "It should have risen her up to Sylvia's status."

"Syl doesn't actually sleep around with the bikers," Tori argued. "She's not really a sweet butt. Not in any of our eyes. Pixie slept with anyone who looked her way."

"Plus, she's always been trouble," I added. "It made it hard to like her. Partly because she was just a bitch most of the time. But also--"

"Because we all love Hellfire so much, we hate to see him embarrassed or hurting," Daisha said. "And Pixie did a lot of embarrassing and hurting over the years."

"I'm sorry you're going through this," Dani told me, her eyes shining with tears.

"It's weird," I confessed. "Sometimes I'm not sorry I killed her. You know? I think if she had been a stranger this would have been easier. But she's my boyfriend's cousin. And even though he could hardly stand her, he loves his uncle. And now I've caused the worst kind of pain to Hal. How-" I shook my head and broke off before the sob tore from my throat.

“You can tell us,” Sloane encouraged. “None of us will judge you. I’ve told everyone the things I had to do to survive and not *one* of you has turned away from me for it.”

“How is Hellfire going to forgive me for causing such pain to his family? Will his family ever be able to forgive me?” Looking down, I stared at the sheets. “In the end, even if I didn’t really like Pixie, I still took a life. I said it would be easier if it was a stranger, and that’s because I wouldn’t be feeling guilty for them being connected to Hell, but I still have to somehow come to terms with the fact that I *killed* somebody.” I looked up at them, meeting each of their eyes, knowing I looked a little desperate. “Having it be life or death helps, but...how do I come to grips with that?”

None of them had ever killed anyone before. They couldn’t help me. I saw it in their eyes. They empathized with my struggle, but they didn’t truly know.

Sloane stood and came over to sit next to me on the bed. She wrapped her arms around me and hugged me tight. “I’m sorry you have to go through this. It’s not something anyone should have to deal with. But you’re strong enough to get through it.”

“I don’t feel strong,” I admitted.

She smiled sadly. “I know. But you *are*.”

I leaned into her embrace and after a long bout of silence we began to speak of something else. I was the one to switch the topic. It wasn’t that I couldn’t talk about this with them, I could speak to them about anything, they just couldn’t help make this better. I needed a distraction from my thoughts and that’s what they gave me.

We talked about the babies, about the school, but mostly we talked about our men. The Italians were gone. Thank God. We all knew there was another piece of this puzzle the guys had to take care of, Fremont, but that would come later. For now, it was time to heal and pick up the pieces.

Lockout was busy trying to find somewhere permanent for The Children’s Lifeline kids to go, and Amy, because putting

them in the apartments where we had the other women and kids had made things a little cramped. Everyone was getting along fine, but they needed somewhere to go where the place would be theirs. And, of course, the club was going to help them out. That's just how they worked. They were the worst nightmare of anyone who thought to hurt others. But to the good people? They were heroes. Nothing was going to change that.

CHAPTER 29



Hellfire

As much as I wanted to stay by Kit's side all hours of the day and night, I had to leave her in her brother's, in my opinion, less than capable hands, so I could get everything done for this funeral. Uncle Hal had only arrived an hour ago thanks to having to make arrangements for his other children and a delayed flight. My dad left a while ago to pick him up at the airport and they were coming straight to Marty's funeral home for the service.

I'd enlisted Mom's help with all the decisions that needed to be made for the funeral. How the fuck did I know what kind of flowers were right? Or the music? Mom had been a Godsend because I couldn't very well ask Kit to help me. Not for this. Not when the woman in the casket had put a knife into her belly. Fuck. There was a huge part of me that wanted to go over to that fucking coffin and strangle a dead woman. Something told me that would be frowned upon, so I managed not to. The urge was still sizzling there within me though.

My thoughts shuddered to a stop when Kit walked through the door. The doctor released her this morning. I was there and had driven her home. I left her in my bed, set up to rest comfortably for the afternoon. It didn't matter how many times I told her she didn't need to be here, she was still here.

Her face was pale and I could tell she was hurting. But she was here. I tugged the tight collar of my shirt away from my

neck before I walked over to her. “You okay?”

“Fine,” she said with a firm set to her lips. She thought I was going to try to convince her to go home.

She needed this. I’ve killed more than my fair share of people, but never family. I could only imagine the guilt that was hitting her. She needed to be part of the closure process. I was just trying to get through this charade without anyone losing it. The whole ordeal was only for my uncle. If it wasn’t for him, we’d have tossed Pixie’s body in the incinerator and been done with it. I needed to give my uncle that closure, though.

It’d been hard to sit my parents down and explain, with bits and pieces left out, about Pixie attacking Kit. My parents were the ones who came up with this plan to let Uncle Hal know. To help him move on. Then act as though it had never happened and move on with life. They assured me they would help smooth everything over.

Wrapping my arm around Kit, I led her over to her seat. My leg was fucking killing me. Despite my newly acquired bullet hole, I’d been running around on it like I hadn’t been shot. It was keeping me awake at night, aching. I didn’t have time to rest or take it easy. There was too much to be done. “You need anything?”

“No,” she said, giving me a strained smile. “Thank you.”

“Everything is ready,” Marty told me, his voice soft. He was dressed in his usual funeral attire of a black suit and tie. His salt and pepper hair was perfectly combed back. He was a good friend of the club and we trusted him to keep this secret. He knew a lot of our secrets since he got rid of most of our bodies for us.

I nodded and gave him a tight smile. “Thanks.”

“I’ll be right here if you need anything,” Kit said brushing her lips over mine when I leaned down.

There was tension between us. I’d been feeling it since she woke up, but hadn’t had the time to address it. The first few days of her hospital stay, she’d hardly been able to keep her

eyes open. Since then, I'd been working to make sure everything was finished in time. This rift between us was fucking killing me, though, and I honestly wasn't sure if it was coming from her, or me.

The sound of the door shutting alerted me that someone was here. Most of the family was already seated and waiting. I turned to see my dad and Uncle Hal walk in. They were both somber, their faces grim. Uncle Hal had been hit hard by Pixie's death. We'd all been worried about how he'd take it when we told him she'd been killed. He'd taken it better than I'd expected, but I knew he was still grieving.

Dad paused next to me and squeezed my shoulder. "You ready?"

"No."

He gave me an understanding smile. "It's a fucked up situation." I'd told them as much as I could without giving away all the club's secrets. They knew that Pixie had sold us out to an enemy, giving me over to them and that the guys had found me. They knew that Kit had been searching for me and found Pixie instead, and that Pixie had attacked her and seriously wounded her.

Everyone else only knew that Pixie had been killed. My family and the club were the only ones who knew it was in self-defense. We didn't tell Uncle Hal that Kit was the one who ended Pixie's life. There was no reason for there to be friction between them. It wasn't Kit's fault. He only needed to know that Pixie fell in with a bad crowd, that I failed to save her, and that it cost her her life. It was one hundred percent true.

"Yeah. Thanks for everything, Dad."

He nodded and gave me a hug before taking his seat next to Mom. Uncle Hal stopped next to me, looking around at all the people gathered here. "What is this?"

"A service," I told him, keeping my voice low. He thought there was only going to be a quick viewing for him and his

wife. I hoped that having our whole family, plus my MC family here would comfort him. “For Savannah.”

His eyes widened as he stared at me. “You did this?”

I nodded. “I know you’ve been having a hard time and I wanted to do something to help you move on. There’s a memorial at Mom and Dad’s afterward.”

He pulled me into a hug and I could feel the way his body trembled with emotion. “Thank you.”

Squeezing him tight, I let go and led him over to the front row of seats that had been set up. We’d closed down the funeral home for the service. Uncle Hal sat next to my dad and I went back to sit by Kit. She gave me a soft smile as I took her hand.

The music started and everyone stood as the pastor that Marty used began to speak. Mom had put together a lot of what he had to say up there, since the guy didn’t know any of us. She did a great job, though. He talked about Pixie’s short life, then moved on to talk about how she was in heaven now, which was bullshit. I wasn’t sure I believed in heaven and hell, but if they were actual places Pixie certainly wasn’t being outfitted for a robe and halo.

When he was done, everyone sat back down, waiting for the family to go up one at a time to place flowers on the coffin that was covered in pictures of Pixie. Uncle Hal went first, followed by his wife. I didn’t take my turn, hoping that my uncle didn’t notice. I couldn’t go pretend to be grieving over her, not even for him. Not when she nearly got me killed and almost took the best thing in my life away from me. I sat there next to Kit while everyone gathered around the casket.

Looking over at her, I noticed the blank look in her eyes. “Are you okay?” I asked in a low voice.

She swallowed hard, snapped out of wherever she’d gone in her head and gave me a shaky smile. “Yeah. Sorry.”

“Don’t be, Vixen.” I frowned, realizing that I’d been so focused on Uncle Hal that I hadn’t been checking in as closely with her as I should have today. “This can’t be easy for you.”

I'd killed a lot of men. I'd never sat through a funeral for them, watching their family grieve over their loss. This had to be torture for her. "I can take you home, if you want? I'll stay there with you."

"No," she said with a shake of her head, her dark hair shining under the lighting. It was easy to see she wasn't feeling her best, physically or emotionally, but she was alive and I was fucking grateful for it. "I want to stay with you."

My heart swelled and I leaned in, pressing my forehead to hers. We sat like that until Uncle Hal walked up to us. He didn't say anything about my not going up front. "Thanks for doing this, Ben." Kit stood when I did and I flinched when Uncle Hal hugged her.

She tried to conceal the pain, but he'd squeezed her hard enough that a little sound escaped her lips. "Sorry," she said, trying to play it off.

Uncle Hal frowned and looked back and forth between us. "You're limping," he said to me, his eyes narrowing. "And she's clearly injured..." Kit shook her head, starting to deny it, but shut up once Hal pinned her with a dark look. "Does any of this have to do with my daughter being dead?"

"Hal-" Dad had followed his brother over to us. He was sticking to Uncle Hal's side like glue.

"No, Zeke," Hal said, raising his hand to silence my dad. "I have the right to know what's going on."

I looked around and found Lockout's gaze. He raised a brow in question. He would take over and clear everything up if I wanted him to. As much as I appreciated it, this was my burden to bear. "Come outside, Uncle Hal," I requested. "You wait here," I told Kit.

Her lower lip trembled, but then a fiery determination lit her eyes. "No. We'll face this together."

Nodding, knowing she needed to see this through, I followed my dad and uncle outside with my old lady by my side.

Uncle Hal turned and faced us as we walked up. “I want to know what’s going on.” The pure devastation written on his face nearly broke me. But I wasn’t going to throw Kit under the bus and I couldn’t go around telling everyone about what had happened with The Italians. Bad enough that my parents knew what they did. It put them in danger and I didn’t like that. It didn’t matter that we’d finished off The Italians. The more people who knew, the more issues we were going to have. We stood there, staring at each other, for a long moment. Finally, I sighed. He was going to find out eventually anyway, but I needed to be careful about how much I told him.

“Savannah got caught up with the wrong people,” I began carefully, “her death was the result of her involvement with them.”

Kit shifted against my side and I knew she was about to confess everything. I squeezed her closer to my side, silently telling her not to say anything.

“And your injuries?”

“Also from the wrong people,” I told him. “I...I had the chance to save her, but I failed. In the end she was in too deep. I couldn’t protect her.” It wasn’t exactly a lie. More like a bastardized truth.

Our eyes were locked as he tried to figure out if I was telling the truth. Finally, he sighed and wiped his hand over his mouth. “I wish I could have gotten custody of her.” His voice cracked, filled with pain. “Maybe then she would have had a chance.” He shook his head. “I always knew this was where she was going to end up. She was too much like her mother, except for with Savannah, it wasn’t drugs. It was danger. Men, situations, whatever she could find. I’m sorry,” he said, looking between me and Kit. “I know you’re not telling me everything, but honestly? Maybe it’s better if I don’t know.”

It was definitely better for him. “Why don’t you let Dad take you back to the house?” I suggested.

We watched as Dad led Uncle Hal away. Pulling Kit in front of me, I wrapped her up into a hug. I could tell she

needed one. She'd seemed so defeated the last few days. "Talk to me, Vixen."

"Why didn't you tell him?" she asked, voice muffled against my chest as she buried her face against me.

"Because it's not his burden to bear. Because the truth will only hurt him more. Because...this is the cost of our lifestyle." I told her simply. "It isn't either of your burdens. I'll carry it for the both of you. You're my old lady and I protect what's mine."

She pulled back and stared up at me. Her eyes were filled with tears. "I'm so sorry," she whispered, her voice breaking. "I can't seem to justify her death to myself."

I sighed. I didn't know how to fix this for her. How to tell her that this wasn't her fault and make her believe it. "It's alright, Kit."

Her expression turned horrified. "No, it's not! I- You-you must hate me. I've hurt your family so badly."

"Kit," I said, trying to get her attention. "You-"

"Kit?"

Her head snapped to the side and she froze in my arms. She wasn't even breathing as she watched the man hurrying across the parking lot toward her.

She hadn't seen her father in years, since he moved over to Europe. He was on a cruise when Smoke had called him about Kit being hurt. Looked like he was finally home. "Go," I told her, nudging her into action. I knew she was going to lose it any moment. I nodded at Ridgeback right before Kit started moving. She wasn't able to move very quickly, but Ridgeback made up ground quickly with his long stride.

"Dad," she cried out as he pulled her into a gentle hug. She was sobbing against his chest as I walked up.

"So sorry to hear about the trouble, Son," Ridgeback told me, his eyes understanding. He wasn't the type to try to kick my ass for failing to protect Kit. Smoke most likely told him everything that went down, so he knew the circumstances.

“Thanks, Ridge.” I’d known him as long as I knew his kids. He was a good man. One I respected.

“You and I will talk later,” he told me. “But you should go be with your family now. I’ll take care of my little girl here.”

I nodded and brushed my hand over Kit’s hair. “You good?” She wasn’t. I knew it. There was so much we needed to talk about, but other shit just kept getting in the way. I was being pulled in too many directions. It wasn’t fair to her, but I didn’t know how to fix it until the memorial was over. Then I’d have time to set her straight.

She turned and gave me a hug. “I will be. Go. I’ll be at the clubhouse with Dad.”

Tipping her chin up, I brushed my lips over her, ignoring the warning look her father was giving me. I met his eyes after I straightened back up. I wasn’t sure whether she had told her father about us, but at this point, I didn’t care. We both needed the comfort and I wasn’t going to leave her hanging because her dad was right there.

“It’ll be a *long* talk, Son,” Ridge warned.

Chuckling, I nodded in agreement and left to go do my duty to my family. All I wanted was for this day to be over so I could hold Kit in my arms in the quiet of our apartment, but that wasn’t going to happen for quite some time. Straightening my spine, I headed back inside.

CHAPTER 30



Kit

“Can we sit out here?” I asked Dad as we pulled into the parking lot of the clubhouse.

“Of course, Darlin’,” Dad replied. “Wherever you want.”

The sun was beating down on us as we walked over to the picnic tables and sat down. I could feel my father’s eyes on me, but he didn’t say anything, he just walked at my pace and held my arm as I sank down onto the bench. The pain meds the doctor gave me were the only reason I was making it through all this. Even with them my stomach was killing me.

Dad sat down next to me and I leaned on his steady shoulder. It was so good to be back with him. He’d been in Europe for years, working as a consultant for some big oil company. Having him here now was helping in a way I couldn’t verbalize.

“I’m so sorry to pull you away from your vacation” I told him again.

“You don’t have to apologize, Kit. You did nothing wrong.” He rubbed my back as I sniffed back tears. “I’m just glad you’re okay.” He looked down at me. “You are okay, right?”

I shook my head, swallowing back tears. He knew about my injury, but he didn’t know the whole story. “No,” I whispered.

He pulled me closer and I rested my head on his shoulder as he wrapped his arm around me. “Tell me what’s going on, Darlin’.”

“It’s all such a mess,” I said with a sigh. Dad had stuck around while Lockout took over the club since Smoke and I stayed on. It wasn’t until everything was settled that he decided to move overseas, so he was considered part of our inner sanctum. We could tell him anything we wanted about what was going on with the club. Lock trusted him as much as we did and Dad would never tell anyone anything about the club. We all knew it. So, I told him about The Italians. About Hell going missing. About Pixie and what I did.

“Sounds to me like you did what you needed to, Kit,” he replied once I fell silent. “What other option did you have?”

“None. That’s why I’ll get over killing her. I’ll be able to move on and live my life. But-” I broke off, trying to figure out how to voice my next worry to him.

“You’re afraid your young man won’t forgive you.”

My eyes closed of their own volition. Dad always seemed to understand somehow. “He says exactly what everyone else has been saying. That it wasn’t my fault. I had no choice, but...I’m scared he’s going to change his mind.”

“About what?” he asked, confused.

“About being okay with the fact that his old lady killed a member of his family. I wouldn’t be able to forgive him if he killed you, or Smoke.”

“Could you forgive him if he killed your mother?”

I froze at the question. “I-” He’d thrown me for a loop.

“Not a fair comparison because kids will always love their parents, even when we fuck up,” Dad said with a sigh. “I was just trying to point out that Pixie doesn’t mean shit to Hellfire. Right?”

“He protected her for his Uncle’s sake,” I agreed. “He never really liked her. And over the years I’m sure his dislike turned to hatred considering everything she put him through.”

“So why would he choose loyalty to her over you?” I glanced over and found him watching me with understanding and compassion. “Part of the problem is the dumbass hasn’t told you any of this. Have you told him your fears?”

“We’ve only been dating a little over a month,” I explained. “I’m still trying to figure out how to talk to him.”

“Bullshit. You’re evading.”

I laughed softly, a twinge in my stomach from the movement causing me to gasp halfway through. “Don’t make me laugh. It hurts.”

“You should go get some rest.”

“Soon,” I promised him.

“Then I guess we’ll finish this conversation.” I groaned, but he didn’t let that deter him. “You’ve been friends with Hellfire long enough that you know exactly what he’s about. You’re just too much in your head.”

“I’m terrified to lose him,” I admitted.

“When did my daughter become a wimp?” Dad wondered out loud.

This time my gasp had nothing to do with pain and everything to do with outrage. “Wimp?”

“Mmmhmmm. Afraid to talk to her man. Afraid to tell her dad who she’s dating...”

“I wasn’t afraid to tell you,” I denied, sitting straight and smacking his shoulder. “I’ve been busy. I’ve had a knife in my gut.”

“Too busy to call your dad. I get it.” He shot me a lopsided grin. “Like we all haven’t had a knife in our gut at some point.”

“I’ve missed you so much, Dad.”

“I’ve missed you too, Darlin’.” He stood and held out his hand. “Why don’t we go get you settled upstairs? If you get any more pale you’re going to make people think you’re a ghost.”

Standing, I linked my fingers with his and let him take me upstairs. I bypassed Hellfire's apartment and went straight to my own. It didn't matter that I hadn't been staying in here since Hell and I started dating, with Dad here, I wasn't sure Hell would want us both staying at his place.

"You know what sucks?" I asked as Dad pulled back the covers on my bed.

"What's that?" he asked as he helped me into bed.

"You're going to leave again and I'm not going to have anyone to talk to about this stuff."

He chuckled. "You've got friends downstairs, Darlin'. You don't need an old man like me."

"I'll always need you, Dad." He leaned down and hugged me and I inhaled the smell of cigars and peppermint. Those scents combined would always remind me of the first man I ever loved. The man who showed me exactly how someone should treat me. Who showed me that a gruff exterior and a soft heart was the only type I'd ever look for in my future husband.

"I'll be around for a while," Dad told me. "Don't you worry about that."

"What about Candy?" I asked, referring to his girlfriend.

"She'll be there when I get back home. Who knows, maybe I'll fly her out so you and Smoke can finally meet her in person."

"I'd really like that." It didn't matter to me that Candy was a year younger than I was. She was good for my dad and she actually loved him. He deserved all the happiness in the world after what our mother had done to him.

"Sleep, Darlin'. We'll talk more once you wake up."

* * *

I ONLY SLEPT for a few hours, but by the time I woke up I was feeling a lot better. Padding out of my bedroom in my

pajamas, which I'd changed into once Dad had left the room, I looked around. "Dad?" The silence greeted me. Frowning, I slid my feet into a pair of slip-ons and headed downstairs.

The clubhouse was eerily quiet, but I found Butcher sitting downstairs at one of the tables. He looked up and relief washed over his face. "Hey."

"Hi, Butcher," I told him as I came down the stairs.

He got up and shocked me by pulling me into a hug. He wasn't usually the demonstrative type. "Sorry I didn't come see you in the hospital," he said, looking sheepish as we broke apart and sat down at his table. "I offered to help clean up and watch over this place."

"That's okay. I know you guys have been really busy."

"How you feeling?"

I shrugged. "Healing," I replied, looking away from his probing gaze. "I hear I have you to thank for helping Hellfire?"

He snorted in amusement. "Not sure who helped who. Didn't want him to end up in that place with me, but once he was there, I was glad for it. Though, I wish it hadn't resulted in what happened with you and Pixie." He gave me an apologetic look. As if he had anything to feel sorry about.

I studied him for a few moments in silence before working up the courage to ask him what I needed to. It had been my plan to track him down in a couple days, but the opportunity had presented itself. "How do you do it?"

His brows shot up as he leaned back in his chair. "Do what?"

"How do you deal with the fact that you've killed people?" I bit my lip, but continued when he didn't answer right away. "It sounds weird, but...I watched the life drain out of her eyes," I whispered. "I see it in my dreams. I need to know how to put that aside. To act like it doesn't matter."

"That's all it would be," he said with a shrug. "An act. I was born fucked up, Kit. Killing never bothered me." He

shifted in his seat as though he was uncomfortable talking about it. He probably was. I wasn't sure he spoke to anyone like this. "Seeing them in your dreams? It's the price you pay for taking a life."

"You see them too?"

He nods, a quick sharp movement of acknowledgement. "For someone like you, it'll be a reminder for the rest of your life."

"How do I stop feeling like this?" I asked.

He shrugged again. "Time. Eventually, the guilt will fade. It'll always be there in the background, like a TV playing, but it'll be on mute. You know?"

"That's how it happens for you?"

"Not exactly. It's always on mute for me." He gave me a lopsided grin. "But that's because I don't give a shit."

I smiled at him. "Thank you," I said, reaching out to squeeze his arm in gratitude.

He nodded and we sat there for a while in silence. I was considering everything he told me and I hoped he was right. If one day the pangs of guilt and shame would fade into the background, I could figure out how to live with what I'd done.

The front door opened and Dad walked through with bags of groceries. He eyed us as he came and sat down next to us, setting the groceries on the floor. "You hungry?" he asked.

"Starving," Butcher replied.

"I was talking to my daughter," he muttered, but he pulled a pizza box out of one of the bags and set it in the middle of the table. It was from the place we'd been going to since Smoke and I were kids.

"What kind of freak puts a pizza into a sack and carries it on its side?" Butcher asked with disgust. "The cheese is going to be all over the box." He flipped open the lid. "See! You ruined those slices." He waved at the slices that were a little smooshed at the end.

“Then those can be yours,” Dad replied with a grin. He grabbed a slice and shoved half of it into his mouth.

“I’ll do you a favor and eat them all. Can’t have civilized people eating cheeseless pizza,” Butcher grunted, shoving a slice in his mouth.

Laughing at their antics, I took my own piece and nibbled at it. I still wasn’t eating much and had only graduated to solids in the last day or so. I listened as Butcher and Dad argued back and forth. The sounds, strangely enough, lightened my heart. There was nothing like being around family and soaking in all the love. I knew without anyone needing to tell me that this was the first step in my journey toward healing.

CHAPTER 31



Hellfire

“*Y*ou’re in a hurry,” Smoke said as we walked across the clubhouse parking lot.

“Leave him alone, Smoke,” Ricochet replied, giving me a thoughtful look.

“No, fuck that. My sister is sitting upstairs, dealing with all this shit on her own and I want to know what he’s going to do about it.” He stepped in front of me, getting into my face.

“Why the fuck do you think I’m rushing back?” I snarled. Shoving him back a couple steps, I glared at him. “You think this is fucking fun for me? I know damn well I haven’t been there for Kit over the last few days.”

“The last week and a half,” Smoke interrupted.

I growled in frustration and shoved a hand through my hair. “I’m fucking aware of it, Smoke, but I’m doing the best I can.” Coming home the day of the funeral and finding her staying in her own apartment had sent a crack echoing through my soul. I hadn’t fought it though because her dad was here and she obviously needed the space. I wasn’t sure what the problem was, but between juggling my family and club obligations, I hadn’t found out yet either. I was eager to rectify that.

“My uncle is back on a plane, heading home. My family is good. The club is good. Now I plan to go check in on my old

lady. What more do you fucking want from me?"

"I want you not to put her third, goddamn it!" Fury sparked in his eyes, but his words were like a bucket of ice cold water dousing me.

"Third?" I looked over at Ricochet, who just shrugged his shoulders as though to say this was between the two of us and he wasn't getting involved. "You think I've been putting her third?"

"You're so fucking concerned about your family and the club in this whole situation," Smoke shouted, "you haven't given a shit about her!"

"Is that seriously what you think?" I asked, calmness seeping over me as I stared at him.

"No! Fucking- Goddamn-" He broke off and let out a bellow of rage. That was Smoke. I was used to this kind of reaction, just not normally pointed my way. He huffed out a breath, glowering at me. "I know you've been doing your best to keep it all together, but I'm fucking worried about Kit. Okay?"

"Okay." My eyes strayed up to the top story of the clubhouse. "Is there something going on I don't know about?"

"It's not my damn place to tell you. Just go talk to your old lady. For fuck's sake," he muttered, stalking off.

"You know, if you hadn't stopped me I'd be talking to her already, right?" I called out.

In response, I got a middle finger. Shaking my head, I continued on into the clubhouse. Did Kit think I was putting her third? I'd spent as much time in the hospital with her as I could. I did my best to talk to her, but she'd been withdrawn and moody since the funeral. I understood. I really did, but I was doing my best to watch out for her and my family. It was like I was being pulled in every direction at once.

I knocked on her apartment door and gave Ridgeback a grim look when he answered. "Kit here?"

“Bout time, Son,” Ridge said, before pushing past me, leaving the door standing open.

“Fucking Kincaids,” I muttered. “They’re all a bunch of unreasonable-”

Kit looked over as I walked in and narrowed her eyes. “Unreasonable what, Bennett?”

I swallowed back the words. “I meant your brother and father. Not you.”

“Uh huh.” She watched me warily as I came and sat down on the recliner next to the couch where she was sitting. “What do you want?”

“To talk.”

She cocked her head and stared at me for a long moment. “You should probably go.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re busy.”

My brows shot up. “You’re mad at me.”

She sighed and shook her head. “No, Hell, I’m really not.”

“Then what’s all this?”

“All what?” Her expression was blank, not giving away anything about how she was feeling.

“It feels like I’m getting the cold shoulder, Vixen. You’re not staying with me anymore. I know I’ve been busy, but every time I try to talk to you, I get shut down.”

“Sorry.” The blank look was gone and now she just looked miserable.

“Alright,” I growled.

She looked up at me, shock replacing the sadness. “Huh?”

“That’s it,” I told her, standing, I leaned over and scooped her into my arms, carrying her bride style.

“Hell!” she squealed. “What are you doing?”

“Am I hurting you?” I asked as I walked out of her apartment and down the hall.

“No, but... Where are we going?” She broke off, brows pulled low in confusion as I stopped by my door.

I shifted her in my arms a bit so I could open my apartment door. “We’re going to talk about whatever is going on inside our home.”

“My apartment-”

“Isn’t your home anymore,” I told her as I set her down on my couch. “What’s going on?” I sat next to her and pinned her with an uncompromising look.

She stared at me for a long moment, then sighed and leaned back against the couch. She opened her mouth like she was going to say something, then closed it again looking unsure.

“I’m sorry if you’ve felt like I haven’t been prioritizing you.” It was a guess based off of what her brother and father had said to me.

Her eyes flew to mine and she shook her head. “It’s not that. I know how important your family is to you. How important the club is. It’s not your fault that everything is happening all at once right now. You’re trying to juggle it all.”

“Then why are you mad at me, Vixen?”

Her laugh was humorless. “I’m not *mad* at you, Hell.”

“You’ve been giving me a pretty decent version of the cold shoulder-”

“I’m terrified,” she admitted in a quiet voice, staring down at her hands in her lap.

Confusion and worry rocked me. “Of what?” I didn’t like seeing her this way. I wanted to fix whatever it was and never see that look on her face again. Never wanted her to feel this way again. “Talk to me, Gorgeous,” I prompted when she didn’t say anything.

She met my eyes and let out a shaky breath. “I’m so scared that you’re going to eventually realize how badly I hurt your family.” I frowned trying to figure out where she was going with this. “And then you’re going to leave me.”

My heart broke for her as I realized what she was saying. Reaching over, I pulled her into my lap. She came willingly, but still looked miserable as she stared up at me from my arms. “Vixen, *you* are my family. Nothing is going to change that. Nothing you could do is going to come between us. Did it hurt my uncle that his kid died? Yes. Would he blame you? No. No one who knows what happened does.”

She laid her head on my chest. “I’m trying to get over killing her. It’s going to take me time, but I think I can get there. As long as you mean it and you aren’t going to walk away from me.”

I chuckled, then coughed when she glared up at me. “Sorry. I’m not laughing at you. Just... The idea that I would leave you for killing Pixie? It’s fucking crazy, Kit. I didn’t really get the chance to tell you this, but once I woke up in Amato’s mansion, with all those assholes trying to kill me? Knowing I’d been put there because of Pixie? I was planning on killing her myself.”

She gasped and I nodded grimly. “It wasn’t your fault she died. It was her own damn fault. If anything, you did me a favor by taking her out before I got my hands on her.”

“You’re serious?”

“Dead serious.”

She sighed and snuggled into my chest. “As awful as it sounds, that makes me feel better.”

“Good. I never wanted you to feel guilty for that. I’m sorry I didn’t stop what I was doing to make sure that you knew how I felt about all this shit.”

“It’s been hard,” she admitted. “Worrying about how you’d react, but also how I was feeling about it all.”

“We can talk about it anytime, Baby.”

“Actually, Butcher helped me feel a lot better about killing someone.”

I stiffened and looked down at her in shock. “Butcher?”

“Yeah. He talked me through a lot of the guilt and made some really valid points that actually helped.”

“Butcher?” I echoed.

She laughed and smacked my chest. “Yes, Butcher.”

“I’m sorry. I’m having a hard time comprehending this. Butcher talked about...feelings? Did he steal them from someone? Where did Butcher get feelings?” When she just shook her head at my antics and smiled, I conceded, “I’m glad he was able to help you.”

Her laughter was like music to my ears after too many days of tension and worry. She relaxed against me and we sat in silence for a few minutes. I ran my hand up and down her back, enjoying the fact that she wasn’t pushing me away. My mind went back over everything that happened. The Italians were history. Pixie was dead. My family was taken care of, and my old lady was back in my arms where she belonged.

“You’re not going back to your apartment,” I warned her.

“But Dad-”

“Has his very own guest house to stay in now. You belong here with me.”

She sighed. “I know.”

I tilted her head up so I could look into her eyes. “I’m sorry you had to go through all this shit, Baby.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“I know. Doesn’t mean I don’t hate the fact that you were put in danger because of me.”

She smiled at me. “It’s over now.”

“Just promise me one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“The next time you’re feeling this way, come to me. Let me know what’s going on in that pretty head of yours.”

“I will,” she agreed.

I kissed her forehead and held her close. I was never letting her go again. She would never feel like I was putting anything else over her safety and happiness. Having her curled up in my lap was everything I needed and the stress melted from my shoulders. I rubbed my hand over her soft pajama pants. “I like these.” My voice was husky, even to my own ears.

She shifted so she could look up at me with a knowing smile. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” I leaned down and nipped her bottom lip with my teeth, making her gasp.

She ran her hands over my chest, but I caught her wrists in my hands. “You know, you’re not supposed to be doing anything strenuous for a while.”

“I’m not,” she said with a little pout.

“What do you call this?” I asked as I slid my hand over her pants and cupped her ass in my hand.

“Not strenuous,” she breathed.

I chuckled and kissed her. It was going to take a lot of self-control to keep my hands off her. “You should rest.”

“I’m sick of everyone telling me that,” she said, her eyes glinting. “I don’t want to rest. I want to reconnect with my boyfriend.”

“Yeah?” I asked, cocking my head. “How?” Her grin was wicked and I shook my head. “I’m not fucking you. I’ll end up hurting you.”

“You won’t,” she promised, nipping at my lower lip.

“Kit,” I muttered as she shifted so she was straddling me. Her lips were on mine and I couldn’t resist her anymore. My hands slid over her ass again, this time under her pajama pants

instead of over them. She moaned into my mouth when I cupped the bare skin in my hand, squeezing gently.

She rocked against me, rubbing her core against my erection. Fuck. I needed to stop this before it got out of control. “Baby,” I growled while she sucked on my neck. My cock was aching, already leaking for her. As much as I needed to bury myself inside of her, I couldn’t. Not until she was fully recovered.

“I need you inside me,” she whispered against my ear.

My hips bucked up against her involuntarily and we both groaned. “Kit,” I warned again, but she wasn’t listening.

She reached between us and started unbuttoning my jeans. Her hand wrapped around my cock and I groaned again, my head falling back against the couch cushions. “You’re going to kill me, woman.”

“Not before I fuck you,” she promised with another wicked smile.

I watched warily as she stood up, then tossed a pillow from the couch down onto the ground. The damned thing was hers, fuck knew I didn’t have decorative pillows lying around. She knelt on it and looked up at me through her lashes as she pulled my jeans down further.

“Kit-”

“Shh,” she whispered, giving the head of my cock a little kiss. My hips bucked again and she smiled. “Let me take care of you.”

“Fuck,” I groaned as her tongue flicked over the slit at the head of my dick.

She sucked me into her mouth and I nearly lost control right there. My hand tangled in her hair as I tried not to come too fast. She was careful not to lean on my thigh that I’d been shot in. Her hands were busy stroking what she couldn’t fit in her mouth.

I watched her as she worked me over, those gorgeous blue eyes looking up at me as she sucked me off. “You’re so

fucking beautiful,” I told her, my voice hoarse with need.

She moaned around my cock and the vibrations sent a shiver through me. I was close, but I didn’t want to finish like this. “Baby, stop.”

She shook her head and sucked harder.

“Kit,” I growled. “I’m going to come.”

She looked up at me again, a challenge in her eyes. She was daring me to come in her mouth. Fuck. My hips jerked as I lost control, shooting my cum down her throat. She swallowed it all down, then licked me clean before she sat back on her heels.

“Fuck,” I muttered again, staring down at her.

She gave me a satisfied smile. “I love you.”

My heart squeezed in my chest. “I love you, too.”

She laughed as I lifted her carefully into my arms again and shuffled my way into our bedroom. I had to be careful since my jeans and boxer briefs were down around my ankles, anchored there by my boots. I managed to get us to the bed without dropping her, or tripping. Setting her gently on the bed, I studied her as she leaned back against the pillows. She was the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen and she was all mine.

CHAPTER 32



Kit

I laid on the bed and watched as Hellfire pulled his shirt off. He'd managed to ease my fears, at least momentarily. I was sure they would pop up again, but when they did, I'd go straight to him. I'd had enough of wallowing in my guilt and grief alone. He was my old man. My love. There was no reason I shouldn't be able to talk to him about what I was feeling. It didn't matter that Pixie had been his family.

The worry of him eventually regretting her death had been stilled when he told me he was planning to kill her himself. There was no way to fault me in the future if that was how he felt about things. I wasn't going to let my own guilt and fear ruin what we had.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked as he crawled onto the bed with me. He'd kicked off his boots and jeans, leaving him only in his boxer briefs. They hugged his muscular thighs and showed off his impressive bulge.

"Just how happy I am," I told him, reaching for him. There was no space here in our bed for ghosts or regrets.

He settled over me, careful not to put any weight on me. "I'm happy, too," he murmured, kissing me gently.

My hands slid over his broad shoulders, down his back, then back up again. I loved touching him. His skin was warm

and smooth under my fingers. My nails dug into his back when his mouth left mine to trail kisses down my neck.

His lips brushed over my collarbone as he eased the strap of my tank top off one shoulder. He kissed a path to the swell of my breast. His hand cupped it through the material of the shirt and I moaned when his thumb flicked over my nipple. This was what we needed. To reconnect with one another. It didn't matter that we were both injured. We'd work around that small inconvenience.

His lips closed over my nipple through the thin cotton of my top and I gasped at the sensation. It felt so good to be touched by him again. I hadn't realized how much I'd missed this until now.

He moved to the other side, his hand sliding under the hem of my shirt to cup my breast. His fingers plucked at my nipple, drawing a groan from me as he sucked on the other one through my shirt.

"Hell," I breathed, struggling not to arch into his touch. I didn't want to injure myself more than I already was.

He released my nipple and I whimpered in protest until he pulled my top up, exposing me to him. His dark eyes met mine for a second before he dipped his head again and sucked a nipple into his mouth once more.

"Oh!" I fisted the bedspread beneath me as he sucked hard on it. He didn't stop there though. His tongue flicked over it, then he nipped it with his teeth, making me cry out in surprise. He soothed the sting with his tongue, then moved to the other one.

My hands were in his hair, holding him to me as he teased and tortured my breasts with his mouth. I'd never been this turned on in my life. My panties were soaked with my need for him.

His hand slid down my stomach, his fingers dipping under the waistband of my shorts. I moaned when he cupped me through my underwear. He pressed against my clit and I moved slightly against his touch.

“Hell!” It was an admonishment for not giving me what my body was demanding from him.

He released my nipple and kissed his way down my stomach. “Greedy woman,” he growled against my skin.

I *was* greedy. For him. Always for him. I needed him more than I needed air in my lungs. He was the other half of me. The part that made me whole.

He pulled off my shorts and underwear, tossing them over his shoulder. He spread my legs wide and stared down at me like a man starved. His hands slid up the insides of my thighs and I shivered at the feel of his calloused palms on my sensitive skin.

“You’re so fucking gorgeous.” He leaned down and licked a path from my opening to my clit. I cried out as he sucked it into his mouth and flicked it with his tongue.

“Bennett,” I moaned, lifting my hips toward his mouth. The little zip of pain from my wound nearly made my eyes cross, but then he flicked my sensitive bundle of nerves again and I hissed out a breath.

His fingers slid inside me, curling up as he pumped them in and out. I had to force myself to lay still instead of meeting every thrust of his fingers. It wasn’t enough though. I wanted more. I wanted him inside me.

“I need you,” I panted. “Please.”

He released my clit and I groaned at the loss of sensation. “Not yet,” he growled, sounding just as desperate as I was. “I want to taste you when you come.” His fingers moved faster, his thumb brushing over my clit. “Come for me, Vixen.”

His head dipped back down and he sucked my clit into his mouth again. He flicked it with his tongue as he fucked me with his fingers. It didn’t take long before I was crying out his name as an orgasm crashed through me. My muscles contorted and I sucked in a breath at the pain that came with my stomach muscles bunching. Still, it was worth it. The pain and pleasure mingled, shoving me higher.

He kept licking and sucking on my clit until I was a writhing mess on the bed, begging for mercy. He finally released me and sat up. His eyes were wild as he stared down at me, his chest heaving. "You're so fucking sexy when you come," he rasped. A frown overtook his face as he stared down at me.

"What?" I gasped.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"Lay down," I told him. Climbing over his huge body as he laid on his back, I shoved down his boxers, then slung a leg over his hips. I was careful not to jostle his injured leg. My pussy was throbbing with need for him. I gently grasped his dick and positioned myself over it. Slowly, I slid down, taking him inch by inch until my ass rested against his pelvis.

Hellfire's eyes were glued to my tits as they swayed with the movement of my body. "Fuck, Vixen. You feel so damn good." His hands gripped my waist as I rode him, slowly at first, then faster and faster as my orgasm built once more. I gasped as I ground my clit against his pubic bone with every movement of my body.

He sat up and sucked my nipple into his mouth, biting it lightly before releasing it and sucking the other one into his mouth. He released that one too and kissed me, hard. His hands slid down to cup my ass, gripping me tightly as he moved my body up and down on his cock.

"I'm close," he bit out between clenched teeth. "Come for me again, Vixen."

I was already there. The orgasm crashed through me and I cried out his name as he followed me over the edge. He groaned my name as his cock jerked inside me, filling me with his cum.

We both flopped back onto the bed, him cuddling me close, as we drifted. I came back to the present, panting, and with an ache in my stomach that would have to be taken care of later. I pressed my face into his chest, enjoying the feel of his fingers trailing up and down my spine. I loved that he

could never seem to keep from touching me. It was the same for me. I traced the tattoo on his chest.

Lying here now, with him, all my fears seemed so trivial. I knew they weren't, but in the aftermath of his assurances and lovemaking, they were a distant memory. I wanted it to stay that way. "Thank you."

"For what, Baby?" His chest rumbled under my cheek.

"For talking sense into me. For finally making me yours... For loving me."

His arms closed around my shoulders and he squeezed me closer. "I will always talk sense into you. And you've always been mine." We sat in silence for a few beats of his heart. "Nothing is going to take you from me, Kit.

I nodded against his chest and snuggled in closer. "I'm looking forward to the time after you guys have taken care of Fremont."

A deep sound of agreement rumbled in his chest. "We should have a break from him, though."

"Really?" I asked, shoving up on my elbows and staring down at him.

"Think so. He's going to have to regroup. So we have some time, and during it, I'm all yours." A lazy smile spread over his face, but his eyes flashed mischievously. "What do you want to do with me?"

My brows shot up. I really didn't know what he meant by that. "Umm..."

He chuckled and pulled me down for a kiss that left no doubt in my mind about what he was talking about.

The next few days passed quickly. Hellfire and I spent every spare moment together, which wasn't much since he had to get back to work with his dad. He came home one night, filthy as usual, and I cocked my head at him. "If your mom needs a break or anything, I can always help out. Especially while the bar is closed."

Hell's brows shot up. "I'm sure she'd appreciate the help. I'll let her know."

"Okay. Dinner's in twenty minutes."

He showered quickly and pinned me up against the counter, his lips trailing down my neck as I dished our plates. "Have I ever told you that I love you, Kit Kincaid?"

A grin spread over my face. "Maybe once or twice."

"That's not nearly enough," he muttered, shoving my hair out of his way so he could keep going lower.

Turning in his arms, I searched his eyes. "Dinner can wait."

His smile was slow to spread across his face, but when it did, it made me feel like I was the only woman in the world. "You're mine now, Vixen."

I laughed as he scooped me up into his arms. He was everything I'd always wanted and I'd be damned if I'd let anything get in the way of that again. He was mine as much as I was his and we were going to spend our lives making up for lost time. Starting now.

CHAPTER 33



Hellfire

“Looks like they’re finally talking about it,” Static said, taking the remote off the table in the meeting room as he walked in, and flicking on the TV hanging on the wall.

I watched the reporter on the screen recount what the police had found in Amato’s mansion. It didn’t surprise us that it had taken two weeks to talk about what they’d found there. He didn’t likely invite many people over and all of his made men were dead. If their families found the slaughter, it wasn’t like they were going to step forward and be connected to a bunch of criminals. So, we weren’t even sure how long it took them to find the scene. They’d probably taken their time combing through everything, too.

We weren’t worried about them finding anything connecting us to the murders. Riptide had erased our prints from the cops’ system and if they found more at the crime scene, they wouldn’t have anything to compare it to.

“The death toll keeps rising in The Catalina Foothills as the police investigate what looks to be a gang retaliation.” I snorted in amusement. They always thought shit was gang related. Of course, there was no way for them to know it was Butcher related. “The police have asked that anyone having information please call this number.” The reporter was a beautiful blonde who looked appropriately horrified about the

story she was reporting on. She repeated the number for the information hotline.

“Shut it off,” Lock told Static. As soon as the screen flicked off, he asked, “Have you and Dash taken care of everything, Rip?”

“Yeah. All the cameras are wiped and there’s nothing left that will connect us to that shit. Everyone’s information is off the criminal databases. I’ve got Dash triple checking for us, but we should be in the clear.”

“Won’t Fremont put it together?” Hush asked.

“Yeah, he will,” Lock replied. “But there’s no way he’s going to involve himself in this. It would draw too much attention.”

“He’ll lay low for a while,” Priest predicted.

Lock nodded in agreement. “We just bought ourselves some time to rest and recoup.” His eyes met mine. “How’s Kit?”

“Healing,” I told him. It would be a bit before she was completely healed up, but the doctor was happy with the progress so far.

“And you?”

“Fine,” I told him.

He nodded again. “Angelo, Amato’s cousin, was with the men who escaped the mansion. His guys were trying to get him out of there after they realized Amato wasn’t going to live.”

“Angelo won’t be taking over anything anymore. The Amato empire is finished,” Butcher said as he played with the blade of his knife.

“Good,” Priest said, “one down, one to go.”

“Should we just go on the offensive?” Ricochet asked.

“No,” Lock told him. “We need to regroup. This time I want to actually utilize the fucking plan I make,” he replied, giving Butcher a hard look. Butcher just grinned and shrugged.

The look Lock shot me was less stern because it wasn't like I planned to get taken the way Butcher had.

“What do we do in the meantime?” Smoke asked.

“We'll open The Bunker up again. And start back up on building the school,” Lockout told us. “Give the families a chance to take a breath and prepare for what comes next.”

“I contacted everyone helping us keep the cops off our asses and told them they could stop,” I told Lock and the others. It had been Lock's orders, but the others didn't know what I'd found out yet, so I relayed it. “Jackie told me the cops have pulled back.” I looked over at Lock, “So, Fremont is definitely dialing it back.”

“Good. Rip, make sure you thank everyone in person. Compensate them for the trouble.”

“Will do.”

“What else?” Lock asked, looking around.

I let my mind wander to the woman who was sleeping upstairs, naked, in my bed, and what I was planning to do to her once I was released from church. I'd never take Kit being around for granted again. She'd been there, in the background, for years, but now she was always at the forefront of my mind. I couldn't wait to take the next steps together. Get married. Have babies. Grow old. It was going to be fucking fun going through life with my woman.

* * *

FOUR MONTHS Later

I PULLED my phone out of my pocket and grinned at the photo that Kit had sent me. My heart rate skyrocketed as I looked at her lying naked on our kitchen table.

“What the fuck is so important that you're looking at your phone?” Smoke complained. We were waiting on Lock to start

church. He was usually the first one here, so there was a tension filling the room as we waited.

“I should be a dick and show you,” I told him. He opened his mouth to comment, but snapped it closed when I warned, “Keep it up and I will. It will fucking traumatize you, I promise you that.”

He narrowed his eyes, but didn’t say anything else. I knew how to take care of my friend, and the threat of telling him about my and his sister’s sexcapades always managed to make him back down.

Looking at the picture again, I grinned despite the shouting happening out in the hallway. There was a time I didn’t think I had a shot of making her mine. Now all I had to do was convince her to stick around for the rest of my life. And I planned to show her how good I was for her, every day. It didn’t matter what threats were coming for us, we’d face them together.

“So what’s the problem?” Lockout asked, stalking into the room. He looked like he was already in a bad mood.

I shoved my phone into the pocket of my jeans and tried to focus on the matter at hand. My old lady was going to make good on the teasing invitation she’d just sent me, just as soon as I got the fuck out of here.

Everyone was quiet as Lock raised a brow at Static, waiting on him to answer. Work on the school was progressing to the point where Lock had put him in charge of speaking to The State Board of Education and The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools. “There’s a problem with the accreditation process,” Static explained. “But there shouldn’t be.”

Lock’s expression darkened in response.

Static sighed. “This isn’t the typical bureaucratic bullshit. This is deliberate. And it gets worse. There was a surprise inspection yesterday from a new guy. He wouldn’t say what happened to the old inspector. Wasn’t much I could do other than let him do another one. He ‘found’ a series of violations,” he told us with a sigh. “Violations that didn’t exist when we

passed the last inspection with flying colors. And to top it all off, Child Protective Services wants to interview the children. Find out why they aren't in school.

"Fucking pricks," Smokehouse muttered. Everyone at the table looked pissed off, but he was the only one to say anything once Static stopped speaking.

I'd been pulling double shifts both at my family's business and at the school. It'd taken a little over a month before I'd been able to do anything, thanks to my leg having a hole in it, but once the pain faded, I'd jumped right back in. Everybody had been busting their ass. "I think I liked it better when all we had to do was fight armed gunmen," I told the room.

"No fucking kidding. Lock, how do we fight this?" Hush asked.

Lock didn't answer. He tapped his index finger on the table while thinking through the barrage of problems Static had just dumped on him.

Static chimed in after a minute of silence. "Lockout, we're in so far over our heads here...I'm at the limit of what I can do, what we can do. We can't threaten or fight our way through this one. We need help."

Lockout's mood took an instant shift. The aggression and fire that suddenly flared in his eyes was unlike anything I'd seen with him before. He fixed his eyes on Static. "No."

Static continued unperturbed. "I had a talk with Riptide, seeing as he's the VP."

Lockout gripped the table in front of him, his fingers digging into the wood. I could hear the wood groan under the pressure. "I said no," he growled, looking furious.

Riptide chimed in. "I knew that's what you'd say, but with CPS closing in now, and the possibility of the kids being taken, well, I made a call."

This was bad. Really bad. You didn't go behind the president's back. For Static, a prospect, and Rip to make a decision that they knew Lockout wouldn't approve of? Bad.

Somehow, Lockout already seemed to know whatever decision they made and he looked like he wanted to kill them both.

“What-” I broke off when the door to the meeting room slammed open and hit the wall with a bang. My gun was in my hand before I even knew I was reaching for it. The man standing there had my mouth dropping open. Through my gun sights I was looking at Lockout. I glanced back over my shoulder and saw Lockout still sitting at the table. My eyes moved back to the doorway. The only difference between the two men was the suit. Well, that and the man in the doorway was grinning while our president was spitting out a string of curses that were both creative and mechanically impossible.

The man standing there must have shocked the rest of my brothers into inaction as well because the only one moving was Lockout. I studied the man who was shoving his hands into the pockets of his designer suit. I never knew Lock had a twin brother, but the guy standing there couldn't be anything else because he was the spitting image of our president. Gone were the jeans and cut, replaced with an expensive suit, but the same hazel eyes scanned the room and I'd seen that shit-eating grin often enough to recognize it.

“Hello, Liam.”

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Lockout roared, standing up so quickly his heavy wooden chair skidded backward and crashed into the wall. “Get. The. Fuck. Out!”

I glanced over and met Smoke and Ricochet's wide eyes. Clearly there was some bad blood here, judging off Lock's reaction.

“Out,” Lock snarled, pointing toward the door.

The newcomer lifted his hands in mock surrender with a satisfied, smug smile. “Not this time brother. This time we settle it.”

They left us alone and there was silence for a few heartbeats before Toxic finally asked, “Who the fuck is that?”

“That, gentleman,” Static said with a lopsided smile, “is the man from Idaho.”

“Goddamn it,” Riptide muttered before he hurried from the room. A few seconds later something slammed hard into the wall, causing the TV to wobble on its rack.

“This is going to be interesting,” Butcher said with a growing grin.

“You don’t know the half of it,” Static said, before he too went out into the hall to try to help.

THANKS FOR READING!

The [pre-order](#) for book seven of the Vikings MC: Tucson Chapter, Idaho, is available now.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathleen and Frank live in SE Oregon where they have a family farm. They split their days between working with their animals and writing. Both left a law enforcement background to pursue their passions and for Cathleen that meant picking back up a long-forgotten hobby with writing. They strive to bring readers steamy, action-packed stories that provide hours of entertainment.

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