



HIS BACK POCKET

SERPENTINE MOTORCYCLE CLUB SAGA

BESTSELLING ROMANCE AUTHOR OF THE
MOROAD MOTORCYCLE CLUB SERIES

DEBRA KAYN

His Back Pocket

Serpentine Motorcycle Club Saga

Book 3

By Debra Kayn

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His Back Pocket, Serpentine Motorcycle Club Saga

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Dedication

To everyone who walked the tracks.



Tracks were a gateway to everywhere. At six years old, I could walk to the right toward the store, the ballfield, and the summer carnival. If I walked left, I was able to play with my cousin and other kids. To walk the tracks gave me the perfect setting to let my imagination go wild. Step, step, step—never look up or you’ll trip—step, step, step.



Prologue

Mia twirled around in the overgrown front yard of the farmhouse, her laughter dancing through the air. Tana extinguished his cigarette in the gravel driveway, his eyes fixed on his young wife. He had kept the purchase of the house a secret, shielding her from potential disappointment if the previous owner had declined his offer.

Only that morning, he had received the news that the property was now theirs. He'd collected the keys before he fetched Mia from their apartment.

They had only been married for six months, but he'd quickly decided the apartment in Whitefish wasn't the ideal place for them. The complex was overcrowded, with too many prying eyes and intrusive voices. Women often berated Mia for marrying a man older than her, while men attempted to flirt with her behind his back. Her mother would drop by whenever he was at work, persistently reminding Mia of the supposed mistake she had made by sleeping with an older man.

There were only twelve years between them. They weren't a fucking mistake.

Mia deserved a better life where she could love him and love their life together without anyone else's influence.

In time, he could turn the farmhouse into something special for her. A new coat of paint. A few pieces of furniture. Privacy for when she wanted to wear her skimpy shorts around the house. Maybe in a couple of years, he could even get a few steers to throw in the pasture.

"It's perfect." She whirled and ran to him.

He braced as she jumped into his arms. "Yeah?"

"I've never lived in a house before." She peppered kisses all over his face. "Are you sure it's ours?"

Mia was young. Only seventeen years old.

Her excitement wrapped around him, making him feel ten feet tall. To her, everything was an adventure. Nothing scared her. She believed in him, and that was the best feeling in the world.

She was eager to love. Her nutjob mom had neglected Mia growing up. She was starving for affection, and he was more than willing to give her all the love she needed.

Maybe that neglect allowed Mia to ignore Tana's past and let her accept him, whereas most women only viewed him as a fun time on a lonely night, not someone to settle down with and start a family. It was that way for a lot of indigenous people when white people were involved.

Society put up barriers. It was hard to deal with those who lived off the reservation.

Most of his people stayed on the reservation where no one judged them. Through Mia's eyes, he wasn't just another Native American off the reservation, struggling to figure out what he wanted to do with his life.

He was a man with a plan to better his future.

He worked hard at Glacier Crest Ranch. Someday, if his plans with Hank and Buffalo worked out, he'd ride his motorcycle alongside others. Opportunities would come to him that would secure his future.

He had spirits watching out for him. His good fortune all started when he stumbled into Mia at a party at the river.

She was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. All her red hair, going in every direction, was as wild and carefree as her. He couldn't help staring at her. She had pale skin with more freckles than he'd ever seen on one person. Her blue eyes stared back at him, daring him to say something.

For the first time in his life, he'd been struck dumb.

He would've been content to watch her all evening—the hell with the guys partying and the throw-together band strumming. If there were women at the party that night, he never noticed. All his attention was on Mia.

He normally wouldn't approach a girl as young as her, but he knew if she stayed by herself much longer, another man would be on her. And he knew if any of the men at the party took one look at her, fists would fly. His.

He'd moved closer to her and noticed she held a can of Dr. Pepper. She wasn't drinking beer like the others. That meant something to him, considering he stayed away from alcohol. He'd seen too many of his people fall victim to the drink.

The party grew wilder the later it got. Yet he and Mia stayed together, whispering into the night, and soon ended up in each other's arms.

The more she talked, the more he liked what she had to say.

From there, they jumped into having sex. Life was not boring with Mia. She made him glad to wake up every day.

Two weeks after the happiest time of his life, Mia's mom found out he was having sex with her underage daughter. The next thing he knew, he stood in the courthouse, saying *I do*.

None of that mattered. If Sylvia Conner wanted to unload her daughter so she could hit the highway, then he would gladly take care of Mia. He'd fallen hard for the red-headed girl.

"We can move in whenever you want." He palmed Mia's ass, keeping her legs wrapped around his hips.

"Tonight?"

He kissed her hard, knowing that's what she'd say. "There's a sleeping bag in my duffle on my Harley. Can you sleep on the floor?"

She slid off him, grabbing his hands and pulling him toward the house. "I think the question is, can *you* sleep on the floor?" Her gaze danced devilishly. "Because I plan on sleeping on top of you. All nice and comfy."

He couldn't wipe the smile off his face. She got him hard every time she looked at him.

He swung her up onto the porch. There were spots he'd need to fix. Broken boards, missing nails. He wouldn't want her to trip and hurt herself.

"Oh, look, look." Mia wiggled out of his arms and half-turned toward the street. "Are those railroad tracks down by the road on our property?"

He studied the area past the tall grass. He'd driven over the tracks in the driveway as they'd approached the house, but Mia failed to notice because all her attention was on the farmhouse.

"The railroad owns them, but there hasn't been a train on that track for over a decade. We don't have to worry about any noise or traffic," he said.

"So, I can walk on them?"

"Walk as far as you want." He took the key out of his pocket and struggled with the rusted doorknob. "You can't get lost. When you tire of walking, turn around, and the tracks will take you home."

He pushed open the door and tumbled inside with her. Once again, he was a spectator, watching her take in the brand-new world he had given her.

He couldn't imagine any other life without her.

Mia faced him, clutching her hands to her chest, and looked at him with more hope in her eyes than he'd ever seen. "Are you sure this is our home?"

He nodded.

She stepped closer and whispered, "Will you love me forever?"

He took his job as her husband as the most important thing he could do. It was his honor to love her.

"Forever and a day," he whispered back.



Chapter One

A teacup hit the wall to the left of Tana Graywolf's head. He stepped backward and slipped out of the house. That time, he hadn't even made it far enough into the house to grab a change of clothes.

Mia followed him outside. "Get back here."

He kept walking. There was a time he couldn't live without her. Lately, staying away from the house was easier than dealing with her.

Stopping at his Harley, he threw his leg over the seat. Thirty years old, and he felt like an old man, having lived through some fucking war he never should've signed up for.

"You can't leave me here to take care of everything." Mia grabbed his shirt sleeve. "I need money. There's no food in the house. I don't know what to do."

"There's food. Make something to eat. You're not going to starve."

"You're supposed to take care of me."

"Maybe you should go back and live with your mom if you need someone around all the time." He started the motorcycle he'd bought off a guy in Whitefish because his old lady told him it was either her or the bike.

Hell, if Mia gave him that ultimatum, he'd hightail it out of Montana with the engine purring between his legs. The farther away from her, the better—wife or no wife. He was tired of putting up with the shit she threw at him daily.

"I can't go to my mom," she screamed. "She's already left with Bo."

Bo was Sylvia's trucker boyfriend. Not that Sylvia was any kind of mother who would help Mia. He'd seen firsthand how quickly Mia's mom pawned her off to him, claiming he screwed her, now she was his problem.

He took the money he'd won in the poker game last night out of his pocket and held it out to her. Mia snatched the cash and stormed back toward the house. That would buy him some time.

Toeing the kickstand, he popped the clutch and rode away. There was always a cot in the bunkhouse of Glacier Crest Ranch where he could crash.

Married for one fucking year, and he couldn't even go home without Mia trying to kill him.

When he found out she was seventeen, he should've driven his beater truck into the ground, trying to put miles between him and Mia's mom. Nowadays, nobody was under any obligation to get married because they had sex—unless the girl was underage.

Hell, if it wasn't him taking Mia's virginity, it would've been another guy at the party. That's the only reason a girl would go down to the river, knowing there were a bunch of horny guys partying and looking for some action.

He'd had his head in the fucking clouds over her. But he wasn't the only one to take the blame.

She had no business hanging around an older crowd, shaking her ass and telling everyone she was eighteen. How was he supposed to tell the difference between a seventeen-year-old girl and an eighteen-year-old woman?

The only reason he'd gone along with marrying her was because she was the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. She was sweet as honey, always wrapping her arms around him, playing with his hair, and whispering about her dreams.

For a good six months, he believed he'd hit the fucking lottery.

Marrying her was supposed to improve his life. He'd worked at Glacier Crest Ranch as a cowboy, wasting his hours away when he met her. He'd lived in the same apartment for four years and had saved enough money to buy a house. He'd been ready to settle down.

He wasn't sure what love felt like, but lust would turn into love someday. At least, that's what he believed a year ago.

Today, he was ready to send Mia packing.

He was tired. He was frustrated. All he wanted was a change of clothes, a shower, and eight hours of sleep.

Pulling out onto the street, he headed toward Rebel Rose's—a dirty dive bar on the edge of Whitefish where tourists were scared to enter, leaving the place to the locals.

He parked by the other two motorcycles at the bar in the gravel lot. His friendship with Hank Sweeney, the son of the richest man in Montana who owned the same ranch Tana worked at, and Buffalo, a native fresh off the nearby reservation who hired on as a cowboy at Glacier Crest Ranch, kept him company every evening when he wasn't staying at the house. They'd take their meal at the bar and bullshit late into the night.

He came to escape his wife.

Hank came to escape his dad. Mr. Sweeney and his son had a loud and abusive relationship. Something Tana had never seen before. Him and Mia—well, they fought because they loved each other too much.

Even on the reservation, where men and women screamed and fought on drunken nights, the violence he had seen was not on the same level as Hank and Mr. Sweeney.

He walked into the building. A blast of Lynyrd Skynyrd deafened him. He stopped until he picked up the voices over the music, and his eyes adjusted to the dimness.

Sitting at the back booth, Hank raised his arm. Tana headed toward them when Lizzie, the full-time waitress, intercepted him.

“Hey, big guy. What can I get you?” Lizza cocked her hip. “The regular?”

“Sure.” He stepped around the waitress. “Some Coke, too.”

“Glass?”

“Can is fine.” He reached the back booth and motioned for Buffalo to scoot over. “How long have you been here?”

“Twenty minutes at the most.” Buffalo pointed at Hank. “He’s on his first drink.”

Lately, Hank seemed more troubled than normal. He stayed at the bar or went riding to stay away from Glacier Crest Ranch.

Lizza approached the booth, sliding a can in front of Tana and then popping the top for him. “How about a shot of whiskey or rum—”

“Nah, I’m good.” He took a drink of Coke.

Alcohol was one vice he stayed away from. He’d seen his people pick up the bottle, and they always ended up taking a one road trip he wanted to stay away from.

Lizza looked at the others and smiled. “Ready to order?”

While the others ordered, Lizza put her hand on Tana’s shoulder. He refused to acknowledge her. She was always touching and flirting, and he’d given her no reason to continue.

Before the waitress left the table, she squeezed him. Only when she left could he relax. He had no interest in other women.

Buffalo put his finger on the empty coaster and twirled it in a circle on the table. “Lizza wants you.”

“Not interested.” He took another drink.

“You could tell her you’re married.” Hank stroked his beard. “Though I doubt if that’s enough to keep her hands off you.”

“My life isn’t anyone’s business.” He put his drink down.

He’d confided in Hank and Buffalo about Mia when they stopped by the farmhouse one day to talk about a side job. They were the only ones who knew he was married. His marital status wasn’t something he shared with anyone.

Women came on to him all the time. But he only wanted one woman. His wife.

When Mia stopped fighting and throwing shit at him, she was the wildest young thing in his dreams. He only had to bide his time for her to let go of whatever made her mad. One of these days, she'd come around to married life and realize their days were better when they were together instead of fighting all the damn time.

“I talked to the Rattle Canyon Motorcycle Club president Thursday night.” Hank braced his elbows on the table and scanned the bar before continuing. “We have their permission to start our club.”

Tana harrumphed and looked at Buffalo. What started as a bullshitting session had become a serious talk about starting a motorcycle club. They loved to ride and recognized the need for like-minded men to share the same desire to control their lives.

They each had something worth fighting for. Hank wanted more control in Montana and to get out of his father's control. He wanted to take his father's power, being the mayor of Whitefish, away from his dad.

Buffalo dreamed about having his own ranch. He wanted to help feed those on the Blackfeet reservation while providing a home for himself.

Tana only wanted to settle down with Mia and have enough money to make her happy to start a life with him. He had everything he needed but the knowledge on how to make Mia happy.

They all had goals that were admirable and trainable. Hank had him believing there were ways to make money away from the ranch.

But there were days he wondered if he worked toward a useless dream. All Mia wanted to do was fight with him. Whether she was too young to see what the future held for them if they worked on their relationship, or she had another idea of what she wanted. She never mentioned her plans to

Tana after she started fighting with him about working long hours.

Either way, he needed money. Working at Glacier Crest Ranch paid his bills. But he couldn't do much else.

“What's our next step if we go ahead and start a club?” Buffalo picked up the coaster and tapped it against the table.

“We need members,” said Hank.

Tana looked around the bar. There were other riders in Whitefish. They'd visit the bar. Roll around on the back roads. But neither Hank nor Buffalo nor himself wanted just anyone. They needed men they could trust.

“We need to start small.” He leaned back in the booth. “Grow slow.

Hank shifted and removed a folded piece of paper from his back pocket. He slid it across the table.

“While we'll ride independently from Rattle Canyon MC, Stinger gave an idea of their bylaws for the area.” Hank pointed to the paper. “I've rewritten the bylaws, implementing what Rattle Canyon showed me and making new ones that would cater to our club. Tell me what you think.”

Tana continued to read the notes as his dinner was served. He was under no illusion. While Hank kept commenting about how it would be their club, he understood Hank would be president. The club was Hank's baby.

He accepted his position in the club if they go forward. He had too much shit going on to take responsibility for other people. He was content to do his part, no more, no less.

He passed the paper to Buffalo. “It looks good.”

Half the page covered how officers of the club would deal with betrayals. It was blunt and harsh—not to mention an unethical, savage way to treat someone. Not to mention a crime.

But if the threat of death kept members loyal, then that's what they'd have to do.

“Don’t you think we’re jumping in too fast?” Buffalo picked up his hamburger. “We don’t have a club name or officers.”

“Hank’s president. That’s all we need to start,” said Tana.

“You could be vice president.” Hank met Tana’s gaze and then looked at Buffalo. “Or you.”

“No,” said Tana and Buffalo simultaneously.

That camaraderie between him and Buffalo broke the tension at the table. Tana dug into his food. While he ate, Hank informed him on how they’d gain members.

Hank got the ball rolling. By the time they finished eating, Tana and Buffalo agreed on the name of the club, and that’s how Serpentine Motorcycle Club was born.



Chapter Two

Mia tossed the newspaper in the trash and glared at the garbage can as if it was responsible for her unemployment status. Nobody would hire someone with no experience.

At least none of the restaurants in town would hire her. There was no use trying any other businesses in Whitefish. She had no skills and no prior employment.

Every desk job wanted her to be proficient in Excel or do payroll. Other than entry level jobs, everyone wanted someone with a college education.

She kicked herself for letting Tana talk her into staying home once he'd bought the farmhouse. If she had gone out and got a job after she graduated, she'd have six months' worth of experience somewhere.

Now, she lived by herself in a house meant to raise a family and had to rely on her husband to show up and throw money at her.

Since Tana rarely slept under the same roof anymore, she stayed up most nights worried about her future. She hated relying on him.

He couldn't even stand spending time with her anymore. She exhaled loudly. Caught up in falling in love, she'd let her guard down. His dreams became more important than her dreams, until she lost a part of herself.

She should've known he'd eventually leave her. Just like her mom always picked her boyfriends over Mia.

At least with her mom, she expected to be disappointed. She expected to come second in her life.

Marriage gave her an excuse to step away from her mom. Out of pure stubbornness, she stopped calling. For a while, she waited, forcing her mom to call her first. But, she never called.

Her mom was somewhere across the United States with Bo —another trucker boyfriend, supporting her wanderings. Her mom went through boyfriends faster than she went through hair dye. No one was able to tie down her mom, including Mia.

She'd ruined her mom's life by being born. Her mom never told her in so many words that it was her fault, but it was evident by the way her mom couldn't commit to having a family. Even when that family was a daughter who desperately needed a mother.

She swallowed hard, looking away from the garbage to the half a loaf of bread on the counter. Whenever she got lonely, she always wondered what her life would've been like if her mom had taken an interest in her life.

Or, what she'd be doing if she hadn't snuck out and went to the river the night she met Tana?

Anger dwelled inside of her over the arrangement of her marriage. She wore a gold ring but she was without a husband.

She had no friends. The two girls she hung around with during high school had moved away from Whitefish after graduation.

If she was honest with herself, Crista and Sarah had stopped being her friends before they walked across the stage and picked up their diplomas. Nobody wanted to hang around a girl who got married six months into her senior year of high school and missed all the parties because she was stuck in a house with a husband who always worked.

Tana worked all. The. Time.

He chose to stay at Glacier Crest Ranch and not take care of her. She would never forgive him. The loneliness was driving her crazy.

In the beginning, he stayed at the farmhouse. He seemed happy at home. It was probably because they were having sex all the time.

She'd thrown herself into the marriage, but she had to face the fact that Tana only married her because he was forced to

by her mom.

She wasn't imagining how Tana felt about her. He spoke the words, and she overheard him.

Two of the cowboys Tana worked with at Glacier Crest Ranch had stopped by the house one day. Tana must've thought she couldn't hear him out on the porch, but the window was open.

"Yeah, it was legal. Her mom signed for her on the marriage permit."

At the time, her face beat with the rush of warmth flooding her skin. She never wanted to be an embarrassment to Tana. She wanted him to be proud of her.

But he broke her heart when he said, *"I don't know what the hell I'm going to do now that I'm married."*

Everything changed that day. Tana kept working longer hours, and when he was home, he never went out of his way to tell her what she was doing wrong or ask her why she was sad. It was like she had nobody in her life who cared about her.

No mom.

No friends.

No husband.

Nobody wanted to listen if she wanted to talk. Nobody had any interest in whether she was happy or sad. She struggled each day, not knowing if the electricity would get shut off at the house or if there would be another can of soup tomorrow if she ate the last one in the pantry because Tana started staying at the ranch and not coming home.

She had no money to take care of herself.

And despite all her worries, Tana seemed to show up in time to pay the electricity, give her money for groceries, and post the mortgage.

But he never made sure she was okay. He never told her he loved her. He never asked if there was anything she needed or wanted.

She was married to a man who hated her, and she hadn't done anything wrong.

Her marriage was like living in a bad dream. One day, she was riding high and in love. The next day, she had so much anger boiling inside her that she shook whenever Tana came home.

When she asked why he stayed at the ranch, he made up excuses about working the cattle and riding the range. But she knew the truth.

He regretted marrying her. He wasn't ready to have a wife or stay home.

Blowing the hair out of her face, she sat down at the table and put her bare feet up on the seat of the chair across from her. Maybe something was wrong with her. Something her mom and Tana could see, and she couldn't.

Maybe her temper was out of control and turned everyone away from her. Despite her sadness, she tried not to have a bitchy face when Tana rode home. She tried to look pretty.

Maybe she had an ugly personality.

Maybe red hair and freckles became old and tiring after awhile when blondes and brunettes were out in the world, ready to sleep with any man.

She was angry and hurt. She wanted Tana to hurt as much as her so he would understand all the feelings drowning her every day.

Picking up the *Help Wanted* clippings she'd cut out of the paper, she crumbled them one by one as she rejected each idea. She had no experience being a dog groomer or working the blackjack table at the casino. She already applied for a housecleaner at the small motel and hadn't heard back yet.

She read the last clipping. *Ranch cook wanted. Males only apply at Circle M.*

Wadding the paper up, she squeezed her fist and hit the table. The one job she could do, and she was the wrong sex.

She'd cooked since she was old enough to reach the stove. There wasn't anything she couldn't make if she had the right ingredients. She would've accepted defeat if they'd wanted a culinary chef with an education. But a ranch cook? Super easy.

She stilled. There were three ranches outside of Whitefish that employed many cowboys. Hundreds, probably. Tana was one of those cowboys.

Dropping the wadded-up paper, she opened the junk drawer by the kitchen sink where she'd put the money Tana had thrust in her hand yesterday. She counted the bills. He'd given her five hundred dollars for groceries for the month. It was more than enough to feed her. Tana never stayed around to eat anymore.

If careful, she could use three hundred dollars and still eat three meals daily with the remaining two hundred.

She dropped the money in the drawer and grabbed a notepad. Rummaging through the loose batteries, screws, and pocketknives in the drawer, she found a pen. Three hundred dollars could be stretched.

Her mom and she had learned how to make money last. They lived off government help and were always low on money. She'd need to think of a menu. Supplies. A way to get the information to the cowboys.

As the ideas came to her, she formulated a plan. Every cowboy who drove to the ranches they worked at would drive past the farmhouse on their way to work. She'd need a sign by the road advertising what she could offer. Word of mouth would go around once the cowboys tried her sack lunches.

Excitement filled her with the possibilities. She could earn even more money than if she worked for someone else.

Individual sack lunches that were packed and ready to go would be a big seller in Whitefish. Big enough meals to fill hungry bellies. Maybe she could even make some pies and offer slices in case they wanted to take food home after work.

She made a list of everything she'd need.

Keeping the positive thoughts coming, she pushed away the negativity, trying to get her to stop with her crazy idea. If she wasted all the money and nobody bought her pre-made lunches, she'd put them in the freezer and eat them herself.

She wouldn't starve.

And just maybe, if she succeeded, she'd make enough money to support herself and not rely on Tana to pay her bills.



Chapter Three

Tana brought the horse into the stable and spotted Buffalo standing at the front in the open doorway, gazing out. Red and blue lights flashed against the door.

He put the horse into the stall and slipped the halter off his head. Once he hung up the leather, he went to the doorway to see what trouble came to Glacier Creek Ranch.

Buffalo put his arm out, stopping him from stepping outside. “Best to stay back.”

He looked past Buffalo. A cop car sat with its lights flashing while the officer talked to Hank. He almost missed the man on the ground.

“Jesus,” he muttered. “Is that Mr. Sweeney?”

“Yeah.”

Hank’s dad employed him. He’d worked on the ranch since he was sixteen years old. It was how he’d met Hank and Buffalo.

“Is he dead?” He squinted, taking in the prone body.

“Looks like it.” Buffalo stepped back, letting Tana step forward.

“Son of a bitch,” he muttered. “Did Hank kill him?”

It was no secret around the ranch that Mr. Sweeney had a heavy hand on his son. Hank often sported bruises and swellings that went unexplained. Tana never asked. It wasn’t his business. But he suspected, going by Hank’s hatred toward his father, that Mr. Sweeney was responsible for the scars.

“Nope. The cop came and was talking to them both.” Buffalo crossed his arms. “One minute, the fucker was standing, and the next, he dropped to the ground.”

He stepped away from the scene in front of him and thrust his fingers into his hair. What would that mean for Hank and the ranch if Sweeney was dead? Would he even have a job?

He needed to pay for the house. Mia needed somewhere to live.

Meeting Buffalo's gaze, he wasn't alone in his thoughts. Every person who worked on the ranch would worry about their next paycheck.

"We'll have Serpentine Motorcycle Club. That's what we swore our lives to," said Buffalo.

Tana turned away from his MC brother. The club was only a few months old. Five members and three others hung out with them when they weren't busy on the ranch. He wouldn't call that enough job security if Hank decided to do something different with the ranch.

Hank had his daddy's money. He wouldn't need to work for a long time.

Buffalo was single and content to sleep in the bunkhouse.

Tana had more to worry about. He wanted to work his way back to his wife. To do that, he needed money to come in steadily. He needed to prove to her that he could give her anything she wanted.

Sirens grew louder. Buffalo looked out the door.

"Ambulance and another cop car arrived." Buffalo reached behind him and smacked Tana in the chest. "Hank jogged to the house and went inside. Let's go out the back."

Tana followed Buffalo outside. He skirted the side of the stables and cut across the land toward the big house—a two-story log house with a wrap-around deck on the lower and second levels.

"What are we doing?" Tana stopped behind the house and bent at the waist, sucking in wind.

"Nothing. We'll hang out back here until we talk to Hank. We don't want the cops looking over and seeing two Indians snooping about when someone is dead." Buffalo studied the back of the house.

Several seconds later, Hank burst onto the deck. Tana straightened.

Hank spotted them and jogged over. His wild gaze, searching the backyard. “I need to find Jade.”

Buffalo looked at his cell phone. “She’s in school for another half hour.”

“Fuck.” Hank inhaled swiftly. “I need to meet the bus before anyone talks to her. She can’t see the cops here before I get to her.”

“What’s going on?” asked Tana.

Jade was the housekeeper’s kid. She lived in the cottage behind the house.

“Jade’s mom had a car accident. She died at the scene.” He met Tana’s gaze. “My father got the news, and I think he had a heart attack.”

“He’s dead?” asked Buffalo.

Hank nodded.

“Shit. Both of them?” Tana rocked back on the heels of his boots. “Damn.”

His gaze went behind him. Jade and her mom lived in the cottage behind the big house. Maria was the housekeeper. There were rumors that she was Mr. Sweeney’s mistress. He always felt bad for Mrs. Sweeney, having her husband’s lover right in front of her nose every single day.

But for both to die on the same day? Fuck, man.

“What do you want us to do?” asked Buffalo.

“My dad’s dead.” Hank shook his head. “They can take his body up to the glacier and get rid of him, for all I care. But I’ll need to take care of Maria...for Jade.” Hank’s face hardened. “This is going to break her little heart.”

Tana kept his opinion to himself. He couldn’t blame Hank for hating his dad. The man deserved everything he got. Now he was dead, and he couldn’t hurt any more people.

“I hate to ask, but can you go out front and stay with my mom.” Hank grabbed the back of his neck. “Mainly to keep her from saying too much to the cops.”

“On it.” Tana led the way.

Mrs. Sweeney tolerated him more than Buffalo, who tended to walk away when disrespected, and the ranch matriarch had a biting tongue toward everyone around her. Probably because she had to put up with Mr. Sweeney.

But it looked as if Mrs. Sweeney would catch a break today. Her life would get easier now that she could live a life not controlled by an asshole husband.

By the time Tana walked around the front corner of the house, the paramedic had shut the back swinging doors of the rescue rig. The driver shut off the siren and drove away from the ranch. There was no emergency. No rush. They were only transporting a body.

Mrs. Sweeney looked at Tana and whirled around, rushing toward the house. He looked at Buffalo and shrugged. He wasn't going to follow her inside. Cowboys weren't welcome at the big house.

“As long as she stays inside, we've done our job.” Buffalo crossed his arms.

Toward Tana's left, Hank started his Harley. He watched his MC brother, his friend, ride down the long tree-lined driveway.

Hank never mentioned Jade, but Tana couldn't help noticing that he let the kid tag along while working with the horses. She had a pretty little mare she took care of in the stables.

Tana inhaled deeply. It was a sad day. Now, the kid had no mom. Hell, Jade couldn't be more than twelve or thirteen years old.

It was a fucking shame.

He'd lost his mom when he was twenty-one after a short battle with brain cancer. His mom was the only person who had ever given a damn about him.

For most of his life, Tana had lived in East Glacier park, an unincorporated community housing the AmTrak station—

where his mom worked until she passed away. He left soon after and went to work at the ranch.

He sniffed, shaking his head. “The world is a fucked up mess.”

“It is the way of life. You’re born. You live. You die.”

He glanced at Buffalo. They were both from the reservation but from different towns. Buffalo was raised in the old ways, while the closest Tana got to learning about his heritage was taught to him by his mother, who had run away from home as a teenager and never returned. Not that he thought the old ways were wrong. He had no desire to change.

Any change in his life only added to his daily stress. He needed the job. He was a damn good cowboy.

“What do you think will happen to the club?” he asked.

Buffalo frowned. “You read the papers. You swore on your life. The club isn’t going anywhere.”

He wasn’t that positive. The ranch was huge. Hank would be in charge now. Would he have time to be the president of Serpentine?

Tana grabbed the back of his neck and stretched. With everything happening, he wanted to swing by the house and see Mia. He wanted to make sure she was okay.

He swallowed hard. Fuck.

Life could change in a second in Montana. He had to make things right before something bad happened to him. Every day away from Mia was a day he couldn’t get back.

He didn’t want to lose another day.



Chapter Four

Jade rode her horse alongside the driveway. Tana throttled the Harley, keeping in front of her on the other side of the fence. The kid would race anyone who came and went from the ranch.

As he approached the bunkhouse, he slowed, looking around. There were two cowboys in the round pen.

Going by the lack of horses in the corral, the rest of the hands were moving cattle in the pasture.

Neil, voted in as vice president of Serpentine Motorcycle Club, stood outside the bunkhouse, smoking a cigarette. Tana parked, lifting his chin. The last three weeks after Mr. Sweeney was put in the ground had gone fast.

Hank used that time to take over the ranch and expand the MC. He'd also pulled the members off ranch work when they were needed elsewhere. That new schedule was something Tana enjoyed. While he never shied away from hard work, he preferred the seat of a Harley over a saddle.

He shut off the engine and toed the kickstand. "What's up?"

He happened to be in Whitefish picking up some bolts to repair the gate on the third pasture when Hank called for a meeting.

Neil shrugged. "I haven't seen Hank yet. Everyone else is inside waiting for him."

He looked past Neil and through the open doorway. Buffalo was in with the others. There were now eight members of Serpentine Motorcycle Club.

Despite his hesitancy to trust other men, he was glad they were around. To Tana's relief, Hank never let his father's death stop the forward progress of the club or ranch. If anything, he was growing the club faster because he only answered to himself.

A lot was changing.

Tana noticed even he had more say in running the ranch. All the cowboys were given more responsibility—it was a good fucking feeling. It made a man feel like a better man.

He walked inside and sat on one of the cots strung around the room. The members were still careful around each other. They hadn't had time to get to know the person behind the name.

Stihl, named because of the way he snored every night, sounded like a damn chainsaw trying to start. He'd approached Hank at the bar and asked if he could ride under the patch. He'd walked out of a ten-year prison sentence a few days earlier and heard Serpentine was looking for members. Stihl had no money to his name and no wheels to ride. Hank had given him a loan to buy a used Harley and gave him a job on the ranch.

Gun shy around everyone, Stihl had a way with the animals. Tana could see how working the cattle and bringing in the horses grounded Stihl. When it was quiet, Stihl held a decent conversation. He'd lived a lot of years and his advice was solid.

Talking to Buffalo, Moon spit sunflower seeds into a plastic cup whenever he stopped to breathe. Moon was the next to swear his life to the patch. More carefree than the others, he was easy to work with on the ranch and the road. Yet, Tana got a sense of a dark side to Moon. He had yet to figure out why.

Hank walked into the room and cleared his throat. Tana stood and shut the door behind their president. While the bunkhouse was reserved for Serpentine members, it wouldn't be a good idea to have one of the cowboys walking by and overhearing what they discussed.

The club was small, but someday, it would be bigger. More powerful.

He had no control over his marriage. But when it came to the club, he sought control over his life. It felt good to belong.

There were things he could do as a member of Serpentine that he couldn't do alone. There was more money to make. More opportunities to secure his future. And while some things that brought them more money were dangerous, he'd have protection from his MC brothers in the end.

"Here's this month's money." Hank reached inside his vest and tossed a thick brick of cash on a vacant cot. "Buffalo, go ahead and divide it."

Buffalo moved forward and pulled off the rubber bands holding the money. Tana glanced at Hank and then back at the pile. Anyone with a brain could see it was more money than any of them had ever seen at one time. They lived off cowboy wages.

Hank was the only one who was used to having money in his pocket.

"I have something that'll bring in twice as much money." Hank stepped over to the wall and leaned back against the surface. "If you're interested."

Tana couldn't imagine more money. The security jobs he'd gone out on paid almost double what he earned riding in the saddle.

Stihl whistled. "Hell, we'd have to kill someone to get more money."

Hank met Stihl's gaze, not arguing his point. Tana's heart thrummed. The tension in the bunkhouse thickened. Hank wasn't fucking around.

"I want Serpentine to own and control the drugs coming into Whitefish." Hank raised his hands to stop anyone from talking. "Right now, there are three ways the drugs are coming in. People are dying in town and across northwest Montana because the drugs are dirty."

"Man, I'm not getting into that shit." Neil crossed his arms. "Not for any amount of money."

"You might not, but I would." Moon sat straighter. "Tell me what you're thinking."

“We’ll talk and have a vote. Everyone is in, or none of us is in.” Hank moved forward, grabbed a chair, and sat amongst the men.

Tana met Buffalo’s gaze. They came from the reservation. They knew firsthand what drugs would do to a person. To Native Americans, a one-time use turned into an addiction.

“Those bringing in the drugs have a lot of money and influence. They’re in control of the casino—”

“Blackfeet owns the casino,” said Buffalo.

“They’re a third of the dealers bringing in the drugs.”

Tana bristled. It was his reaction to protect the reputation of his people. But he knew alcohol and drugs were freely available on the reservation. Someone had to bring it in.

Hank inhaled. “If we can gain control, we can regulate what comes into the area. I won’t lie. There’s money to be made. More than I gave you today.”

Buffalo straightened. “Three thousand and six hundred each.”

Neil blew out his breath. “How dangerous will this be?”

“Not all of you were here when ...my father was alive.” Hank’s gaze narrowed. “He pushed a lot of people. I have enemies because of him. Stepping foot into drug trafficking will put a target on our backs.” He paused. “We will have to do whatever is necessary to protect our freedom and the life of our brothers.”

Moon leaned back. “I need a pistol.”

Stihl kicked Moon’s boot, sending him forward in the chair. “Will you fucking listen? This isn’t a joke.”

“I’m serious. I’ll need a pistol. It’s not like I walked out of the pen with a gun in my hand.”

“I’ll get you a pistol.” Hank swept his gaze around the room. “Tell me what you need to stay protected, and I’ll make sure each of you have it.”

“When do we vote?” asked Tana.

He wasn't ready to decide. There was a lot to think about. He had to think about Mia. If something happened to him, who would take care of her?

He also wasn't wild about going to prison if caught with drugs or distributing.

"Next Tuesday." Hank stood. "Talk to each other and be prepared to vote."

He slapped the back of the chair. "Meeting adjourned."

Hank walked out of the clubhouse. Tana stayed behind. He had to trust these guys, and right now, he wouldn't even share that he was married with the others.

Not sure how a week would change his mind.

"Have you ever killed anyone?" asked Moon.

Raising his gaze, Tana realized the question was directed at him. "Nah."

"Yeah. Me, neither." Moon scratched his chest. "Never needed to, but I could if I have to."

"I wouldn't be bragging about that." Stihl stood and walked to the door. "I need to grab something to eat before I ride out to move the herd."

"I'll walk out with you." Tana went outside.

Stihl stepped over to his Harley and dug in the saddlebag, pulling out a brown paper bag. Tana stood off to the side and viewed what looked like a roast beef sandwich in Stihl's hand. Most of them slapped a peanut butter and jelly sandwich together in the bunkhouse while they worked. After work, they got dinner at Rebel Rose.

"You got a girl making your lunch?" Tana's stomach growled. "That's a hell of a sandwich."

"Nope." Stihl swallowed. "There's a chick out on Gulch Road who put a sign on the main road. She sells sack lunches to cowboys for eight bucks. I swing by on my way to work every morning and grab one."

"Gulch Road?" Tana stepped closer.

He owned the house on Gulch Road. The only house. His wife lived in that house.

“Yeah.” Stihl took another bite, then talked around the food. “You can’t miss it. It’s the old white farmhouse you can see from the road with the aspen trees marking the driveway. The old train track runs parallel to the road.”

His gut tightened. Mia.

Pivoting, he walked away from Stihl and went straight to his motorcycle. He threw his leg over the seat.

“Where are you going?”

“Tell Hank I had an emergency come up.” He started the Harley without waiting for Stihl to pass the message on.

He had more important things to do than stand around and watch another man eat a sandwich made by Tana’s fucking wife.



Chapter Five

The blue and white checkered curtain danced in the breeze on each side of the open window in the kitchen. Mia set the last apple pie out of the oven on the cutting board. She'd sold three pies today but planned to have an extra one for tomorrow, considering it was Friday and she took the weekends off.

She glanced at the calendar tacked to the wall. After two weeks, she'd tripled her investment and had built a nice profit.

Once the month ended, she'd take all her profits and save the money—somewhere private where only she knew where to find it. If Tana kept throwing money at her for groceries, she'd continue using his money to buy supplies. That way, she'd save even more.

It wasn't that she needed a bunch of money or dreamed about becoming rich. She now had some saved, and that was enough to make her feel better.

Business had boomed the day she put the sign out on the road. Bless them, the cowboys had told others, and every day, she had more customers buying a sack lunch.

It felt good to support herself. It gave her confidence that she could succeed on her own. All those places that refused to give her a job could suck it.

If she wanted to, she could take a trip to Disneyland or a cruise to Alaska. Well, not yet. But someday.

Tossing the potholder on the counter, she laughed at the idea of leaving Whitefish. She walked the railroad tracks almost daily, swearing to herself that she'd escape her problems if she kept walking. The farthest she'd gotten in the opposite direction of town was where the lightning split the pine tree in two, and one of the pieces crossed the track.

She never had a desire to travel. That was her mom's life, always dreaming of the impossible and trying to find her happiness somewhere else with someone else.

No, what she'd like to do was more expensive. Impossible.

She wanted a brand new kitchen with a walk-in pantry instead of the old cabinetry in the house. There wasn't any room to store bulk goods or supplies in the kitchen she had now. Even the counter had old linoleum instead of the pretty granite she drooled over in the houses on the Home channel.

Of course, it was foolish to dream about something that made no sense to pursue. For how much she loved the old farmhouse, it was Tana's home, even if he chose to live elsewhere. She wouldn't let herself think she would live here forever.

One day, Tana would stroll into the house and slap divorce papers on the table. She was surprised he hadn't done that already, considering it was almost ten months since he stopped coming home.

On that day, when he broke her heart again, there would be no recovery.

A low rumble permeated the house. She stepped over to the window and peeked out from behind the curtain. Her good mood vanished.

Before Tana could stop the motorcycle, she closed the window and removed the sign with the day's menu. The kitchen window worked perfectly as a drive-up. That way, the cowboys could stay in their vehicle.

Even the yard worked perfectly to get people in and out because the circle driveway went right by the window. A quick pass with the push mower knocked down all the weeds growing in the old gravel driveway, and customers knew exactly where to go when they drove up to the house after seeing the sign down at the road.

She stopped, closed her eyes, and steeled herself for the confrontation.

As long as Tana stayed out of the house, specifically the kitchen, he would remain clueless about her new business. She groaned, slapping her hand on her forehead, and opened her eyes. The A-frame sign she'd made was still standing down at

the road. She hadn't had time to walk down the driveway and set it in the ditch, out of sight, for the weekend.

Tana was going to be livid.

He had never forbidden her from working, but he had never encouraged her to get a job. He seemed content letting her live in the house even though he wanted nothing to do with her.

She floundered like a fish on the bank of the river. She was married, but was she *really* married if her husband wanted nothing to do with her?

The tension that came with Tana showing up at the house returned to her body. She wasn't happy living alone.

At one time, she would've sworn she wanted Tana in her life. Now she was angry, and maybe the best thing would be for him to leave her completely alone.

The thought that he returned with divorce papers in his hand made her want to vomit.

The front door rattled. She sucked in her breath. While she had cowboys dropping in throughout the morning, she'd kept the house locked for her safety—she wasn't stupid.

“Open the damn door, Mia.”

For several seconds, she stubbornly refused to cater to what Tana wanted. But her curiosity won out. She hadn't seen him for two weeks.

Besides, if he came to give her the monthly allowance, she could use the money to buy more food. Cowboys worked hard, which meant they could eat a lot. In return, she could sell more lunches.

She unlocked the deadbolt. The moment the mechanism released, she jumped back as the door swung open.

Tana filled the doorway.

A quiver rolled through her. No matter how long it'd been between visits, seeing him—she inhaled deeply—smelling him stripped away all her defenses.

She still loved him, even though every speck of common sense told her to walk away.

Tana's shoulders broadened. "What the hell are you doing, feeding other men?"

The hair on the back of her neck stood. He couldn't come here and make her feel guilty for doing something for herself.

"Shut it down, Mia." He dropped the sign from the road. "You're not selling lunches."

She jumped at the loud clatter against the hardwood floor. The noise startled her and ignited her temper.

She jabbed the air with her finger. "Get out."

"It's my house." He stepped forward. "You're my wife."

"Your wife?" An air of frustration burst out of her. "I'm nothing to you. My name might be on some stupid piece of paper, but you don't treat me like a wife."

He growled, moving forward. She planted her feet, refusing to let him bully his way into the house.

"You only swing by when you think I'm not being wife material. Yet you're probably out screwing every woman from Whitefish to Kalispell when you're not at home." She planted her fists on her hips. "And you're never home, you're nothing but a damn cheat—"

He grabbed her upper arms and pinned her against the wall. Raised to her tiptoes, she couldn't do anything but glare into Tana's dark, thunderous eyes.

He pushed his body against her breasts. She panted, unable to take a deep breath. He carried part of the ranch home with him—sweat, horses, leather, and pine from the outdoors.

His signature scent singed her vulnerabilities, and she quivered. The only time she was ever touched was when Tana came home.

He bent his knees. The front of him rubbed against her until he was low enough to look into her eyes.

“I don’t want you feeding other men.” His breath caressed her face.

She tried to push him away with her chest, but he was immovable. “Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do.”

“I can tell you whatever I want.” His lips skimmed her cheek. “You’re. My. Fucking. Wife.”

His gravelly voice weakened her knees. Her arousal went under his control, not hers.

Stimulation weakened her knees when he talked in that gravelly voice and held her firmly.

“Did you forget who you belong to?” His tongue caressed her earlobe. “You’re mine.”

Her neck arched at the heat from his lips. She fisted his leather vest to hold on.

Every vein in her body throbbed. She turned her head on instinct. Tana’s mouth captured her lips. His weight pressed her against the wall, keeping her in place as his hands moved down to her hips and yanked her closer. Her breath rushed out of her mouth, but he fed her the oxygen she needed.

He pressed his hard cock against her. She held him tighter. There was a time when Tana was available whenever she wanted him. They made love morning, noon, and night.

He couldn’t pass her in the house without touching her, and she spent her days catering to him because it made her happy.

In the early days of their marriage, every spare moment—outside Tana working, was spent getting to know each other. The time was magical and unforgettable.

She’d never had a good example of what life should be like with someone she loved. All of her mom’s relationships were superficial and needy.

Her mom constantly needed a man by her, reassuring her that she was special. It was the only time her mom loved herself and believed she was worthy of love. But the men were only using her. The pretty words were a lie.

Her mom was free with her body. Everything else in life came after her mom's pleasure—including Mia.

So, when Tana started talking to her that night at the river, it was the best feeling in the world. Sex was new to her, and she couldn't get enough.

With Tana, she truly believed she'd experienced love.

Tana picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. She wrapped her arms around his neck. While she hated what he'd done to their marriage, she hated herself more for still wanting him.

Wanting him in such an unhealthy way, she ended up weaker.

She hated that she recognized traits of her mother inside her.

She hated how she would rather have him in her life than never see him. Even if love hurt her.

Tana hooked his thumbs in the waistband of her shorts, yanking the material down. She lifted her foot and then the other one. Air hit her butt. He'd taken her panties, too, and left her bare.

He lifted and tossed her onto the unmade bed and followed her down before she could get up. Aware of him fighting his belt and zipper, she wrapped her legs around his hips.

She stretched, twisting her upper body while he tried to lower his jeans. Opening the nightstand drawer, she grabbed a condom from the pile and slapped it against his chest.

If he was going to show up periodically and use her, then he had no choice whether to use protection or not. He had to protect her. She couldn't trust that he hadn't slept with a hundred women.

He planted his hands on the mattress near her shoulders and hovered above her. She panted, staring up into his eyes. His gaze locked onto her.

All the lonely nights she'd cried herself to sleep, wishing he was here, angered her. She clasped his leather vest and

shook him. Her strength never measured up against Tana. She couldn't budge him.

He stilled. That made her madder.

She wasn't trying to stop him. She wanted him to keep touching her.

With everything inside of her, she wanted her husband. And despite knowing that when they finished, he'd walk out the door, she still wanted him.

"I hate you." Her jaw ached, and she flailed in defeat.

No matter how hard she tried to fight her attraction toward him, she always weakened. All he had to do was look at her, and she melted.

"You can hate me all you want." He settled between her legs. "I'm still going to fuck you."

His cock slid into her pussy without any resistance. She was soaked with desperation. Her mouth could lie words of hatred. But her body told the truth.

She closed her eyes, unable to face how pathetic she'd grown. Yet, her hands wandered and grabbed, gripped, and squeezed. Tana was getting bigger. He was no longer the lean man she'd married. He'd put on a few pounds. Mostly of muscle, but there was weight to him, too.

He had a sweet tooth and liked fried food. No doubt, living away from her, he relied on fast food from the restaurants and sweets at the grocery store.

The differences only made her more eager to discover the changes in him. She became frantic to find out everything about him.

To think another woman knew Tana better than she drove her crazy with jealousy each night when she crawled into bed alone. He was her husband.

Her core wound tight from lack of love, spasmed. Her inner thighs cramped, locking her legs around his hips as her abdomen muscles drove her pelvis up with each of his

downward thrusts. His body skimmed her clit as his cock stroked her inside, then lifted from her, leaving her moaning.

Tana came down again, grinding against her, giving her exactly what she needed to fill the emptiness inside her. Behind her eyelids, her eyes rolled back.

She opened her mouth but refused to beg.

As if sensing the fight in her, Tana went down on his elbows and grasped her head with both hands. She bucked, but he kept her from moving.

“Stop fighting me.” He slowed, pushing his cock deeper inside of her. “Feel me. I’m right here.”

The tension left her spine. There was a time when he held her all night long, reminding her that she wasn’t alone.

“You’re mine.” He thrust. “You belong to me.”

She could almost pretend he spoke from his heart. That he told the truth. That he wanted to stay.

He ground against her. Her inner thighs quivered. She fought back the orgasm taking hold.

Her pussy tightened down on him. He moved and then plunged. The slick friction and pressure were too much.

She climaxed hard, pressing against him rapidly as pleasure flowed freely throughout her. She panted, trying to catch her breath. Barely aware of him grunting on top of her, relieving himself while inside her.

Then, he pulled out.

He left the bed and turned his back to her.

Mia stayed on the mattress, staring at him. A Serpentine Motorcycle Club patch covered the back of his leather vest.

He tossed the used condom in the waste basket by the dresser, hitched his jeans, and walked out of the room, fastening his belt. She let her head fall back on the mattress and stared at the ceiling.

The front door slammed. She no longer flinched as the house rattled from his violence.

It wasn't the first time Tana had come home and used her.

It probably wouldn't be the last time.



Chapter Six

Tana rolled the throttle, pulled the clutch, and changed gears, slowing the Harley to a stop alongside the county road. He planted the heel of his left boot in the gravel. The eighty-five-degree day felt twice as hotter.

In front of him sat a two-sided sign.

Mia's Sack Lunches

He swiftly inhaled. She'd even taped a menu with prices on the plywood.

He'd come to the house only a week ago and told her to stop feeding other men. She never stopped. He'd noticed more and more cowboys at Glacier Crest Ranch eating out of a brown paper sack.

If that wasn't bad enough, he had to put up with the same men talking about how good the food was the rest of the fucking day.

Meanwhile, he lived off peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from the kitchen in the bunkhouse.

He got off his motorcycle and picked up the sign. Instead of dealing with his wife again, he'd make sure she stopped her little business.

There was no need for her to work. He supported her.

He worked his ass off on the ranch to keep her in the house. Every cent he made riding for Serpentine Motorcycle Club, he put in a separate account for the day Mia decided to treat him like her husband and let him back in the house.

Someday, he'd tear down the old barn behind the house and erect a new one. He had enough acreage to put up a few head of cattle—enough to feed the two of them. Maybe a horse or two, considering Mia at one time expressed an interest in learning to ride.

He never got to take her over to Glacier Crest Ranch and let her spend a day on a horse with him.

There were updates to the house that needed finishing, and he now had the money. He could start doing all that once he returned to the house and Mia started acting like a wife.

Unable to take the sign with him on his motorcycle, he left his bike at the road and hiked up the driveway. He expected Mia to come out and start yelling at him. But he made it to the barn without her coming outside.

Looking around the barn, he was surprised the building hadn't blown over with the last storm. There were more rotten boards than there were sturdy ones. He flung the sign in the corner and used his foot to rake old and moldy hay on top, hiding it from view.

It would take Mia some time to find it now.

He walked outside and squinted into the setting sun. She still hadn't come outside.

Instead of leaving, he walked toward the back of the house. Once he rounded the corner, he stopped at the sight of the kitchen window. It was all dressed up with a blue and white checkered curtain hanging on the outside of the house. The gravel was freshly raked without any weeds growing up through the rocks.

Hell, he'd forgotten the driveway looped around the house. He always pulled up to the front porch.

As long as he'd lived here, the grass grew over the rocks in the backyard. Every few weeks, he whacked the wild grass down with the mower but had no idea there was a gravel pathway back here.

He frowned, looking down the hill. Unless she moved some of the rocks from the driveway. But that would've been too much work.

Surprised that Mia had tried her hand at landscaping, he noticed more improvements she'd made around the place. There were river rocks outlining the gravel. She'd formed a driveway and made a drive-up window.

He gawked at the changes. What had gotten into her head to try and go into business for herself, out of their home?

What the fuck had she needed so much that she put in the extra work? He gave her money. She had a roof over her head. If she needed clothes or doodads for the house, he'd give her money. All she had to do was ask.

Unless she was trying to get attention from men. The sign advertised cowboy lunches, not cowgirl lunches. She targeted men.

He approached the window and raised his hand to block the glare. Able to see inside the kitchen, he found her standing with her back toward him. The apron strings tied into a bow at her lower back swung as she danced in front of the counter.

Music seeped through the window. Dierks Bently, singing *Drunk on a Plane*, had all her attention. That's why she hadn't heard him outside.

Dragging his gaze off her hips, he stepped back and ran his hands over his face. It was probably better if he hightailed it out of there before she caught him peeping in on her. If he stayed away, it would take longer for her to realize the sign was gone.

After a while, if nobody stopped to buy her lunches, she'd give up the stupid idea of feeding every Tom, Dick, and Harry around Whitefish.

Halfway down the driveway, a truck pulled onto the gravel driveway. Tana stayed in the middle of the lane, forcing the truck to come to a complete stop. He rounded the fender and approached the driver's side.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

The man wore a cowboy hat. It wasn't one of the men off Glacier Crest Ranch. He must be from one of the other smaller places around Whitefish.

"I'm heading up to the house." The guy pointed with two fingers and then pushed up the front of his hat. "Who are you?"

"I'm the man who owns this property." He widened his stance. "Now, you have about three seconds to tell me why

you planned to go to my house before I drag you out of your truck and show you what I do to trespassers.”

“Hell, man. No harm. I’m only swinging by to buy one of Mia’s lunches before she shuts down for the day.”

“She’s closed.” He smacked the side of the truck. “Put it in Reverse and back on out.”

“What do you mean? Closed?” The man stuck his head out the opened window. “Just for today? She’ll be open tomorrow, won’t she?”

He waved his hand in the air, moving the man along. Nobody had time to stand around and answer fifty questions.

Walking down the driveway, he kept the cowboy moving until he backed out on the county road and drove away.

He walked to his Harley. In the distance, he spotted riders headed his way. Sitting on the motorcycle, he waited to see if it was Serpentine members.

He’d left the ranch at eleven o’clock to deliver a message to Neil at the casino. He checked his cell and put the phone back in his vest pocket, knowing no one had tried to contact him.

Recognizing Stihl and Moon, he pointed toward the ground for them to stop. His MC brothers quickly killed the motorcycles.

“Looking for me?” he asked.

“Yeah.” Stihl worked his hand on the throttle, clearly agitated. “Buffalo took Prez into the big house. He was having some kind of fit.”

“What do you mean?” Tana looked to Moon, who shook his head. “What’s a fit?”

“He dropped to the ground and rolled into a ball. I couldn’t get his attention. He kept protecting his head with his hands and flinching. The girl—”

“Jade.” Stihl blew out his breath. “Jade was there. She never freaked out when Hank wouldn’t respond to us. She

ordered Buffalo to carry Hank into the house and then locked the door.”

“Did you try calling Hank and asking him what’s going on?” he asked.

Stihl nodded. “He’s not answering. I’m not sure he can. He was out of it. Like out of his head.”

Tana toed the kickstand and lifted his chin. He’d return to the ranch and find out what was happening. Hank often went off on his own, sometimes taking Jade with him. The two were like big brother and little sister, considering Jade now lived with Hank after her mom was killed in a car accident.

He’d never heard of Hank having any medical problems.

The other two riders tailed him back to the ranch. When he arrived, Buffalo sat outside the main house on the deck. Prez was nowhere in sight.

He parked at the bunkhouse and jogged over to the house. The others stayed back.

“What happened?” He stepped up on the porch. “I heard Hank had some kind of seizure or something.”

Buffalo motioned with his hand to keep his voice quiet. “He’s inside with Jade. She’s going to watch him while he sleeps it off.”

“What happened?”

“He blacked out.” Buffalo stood and walked to the railing, closer to Tana. “I remember the elders dealing with episodes where the mind took over and made them unable to look after themselves.”

“Terrors,” he mumbled.

He, too, had witnessed grown men on the reservation unable to move and speak. They tried to hide or protect themselves. While his people believed spirits haunted the darkness, his generation understood that trauma, abuse, and terrors were often the root cause.

Hank never spoke of what he'd lived through when his father was alive. But Tana suspected Mr. Sweeny put Hank through hell.

"The others can't know what happened to him." Buffalo sighed. "They'll question Hank's strength to lead the motorcycle club."

"This doesn't have anything to do with the club." He met Buffalo's gaze. "He's fit as our leader."

Buffalo nodded. "He is."

"Then, that's all they need to know." He slapped Buffalo's shoulder. "I'll settle the others down. A game of poker will distract them."

He returned to the bunkhouse, letting Buffalo stay behind and ensure their president remained protected while he was weak and vulnerable.

His stomach growled. He hadn't eaten since breakfast.

He picked up his pace. Food made him think of Mia.

She was a good cook. From the moment they moved in together in his little apartment on the south end of Whitefish and then into the farmhouse, she'd cooked all the meals. From pasta dishes to steaks, she'd surprise him with a meal meant to fill his stomach.

But the meals he enjoyed the most were the ones on Sunday mornings when he could sleep in. Waking up to the smell of bacon cooking, maple syrup thick in the air, and cinnamon on the French toast was close enough to perfect.

It'd been a long time since he'd had a meal like that.



Chapter Seven

A customer knocked on the kitchen window. Mia smoothed her apron down the front of her and then reached over to slide the glass panel to the side. It was a hot day. Every time she had to open the house up, a big gust of warm air rushed in, defeating the window air conditioner running in the living room.

“Hey, Jack.” She leaned against the sill. “What can I get you today?”

“I’ve got a big order.” He grinned sheepishly and bumped the front of his cowboy hat up before he handed over a piece of paper. “Can I swing back around in a few hours for everything?”

She glanced at the paper. Barely able to make out the writing, she blinked in surprise once the scribbles made sense.

“Are these numbers right?” she asked.

“Sure are.” Jack leaned his head out of the truck. “Everyone’s talking about your lunches. The whole outfit wants to try them.”

Her heart raced. There were over thirty sandwiches ordered. It would take everything she had in the kitchen to make them all.

“What ranch do you work for?” She tilted her head. “That’s a lot of men.”

“Circle M.”

Her spine stiffened in surprise. She remembered reading about a job opportunity at the Circle M for a male ranch cook.

“Just between you and me, there’s a new cook at the ranch. Some guy from the east, or so he says. He puts a lot of vegetables in the food, and the portions aren’t big enough to feed a ten-year-old, much less a cowboy who worked all day.” Jack patted his flat stomach. “Your lunches fill our bellies.”

The warm breeze blasting her overheated body couldn't take the pride out of her smile. "I'm glad to hear that."

"So, you'll make the lunches?"

"You bet." She inhaled deeply. "Come back in two hours, and I'll have the order ready."

Jack drove around the house, following the gravel path. Shutting the window, Mia got busy taking out more bread from the freezer. It'd thaw in no time with the heat coming into the kitchen.

Giving herself a couple of minutes to form a plan, she stared at the ingredients she had on hand. Today's menu was roast chicken sandwiches. She had enough meat as she'd planned to freeze what wasn't used and make chicken salad for next week. She put potato salad in sandwich bags, for lack of any other way to package it, and threw a plastic spoon in the sack with the lunches.

But she only had four cupcakes left. That wasn't enough to include dessert with the orders.

A thought burst through, propelling her toward the fridge. She had eggs. Plenty of eggs since she'd bought five dozen last week from Mrs. Sarkinan down the road, planning to make egg salad on Thursday.

Quickly looking for all the other ingredients she'd need, she brought out her biggest bowl. Everyone liked cookies, and she happened to have bought chocolate chips last week.

Once she had the cookies baking, she started in on the sandwiches. After looking at the order, it turned out that she needed forty-two lunches.

That's the most orders she'd received in one day in the last five weeks of being opened for business.

Almost giddy with excitement, she tried not to think how much money that would bring in on a single day. If she could do that many lunches twice a week, she could put money away and build a safety net for when Tana finally divorced her.

For the first time in forever, confidence gave her strength. She was building her future and taking care of herself.

She felt good. Her self-confidence soared in the kitchen.

A horn honked. She whirled around and found Curt, a previous customer, at the window of his truck. She grabbed a towel and wiped the flour off her hands before opening the window.

“Hey, Mia.” Curt removed his baseball cap. “How are you?”

“Better than a butterfly on a freshly watered flower.” She swung the towel over her shoulder. “What can I get you?”

“A beer sounds good.”

She laughed. “How about a cold can of pop?”

“That’ll do.” Curt grinned. “Throw a sandwich in with that. I’m heading into Whitefish.”

“Will root beer be okay?”

“Yep.”

She tapped the window. “I’m going to close this to keep the flies out. It won’t take me but a moment to get your lunch.”

She wrapped one of the sandwiches she’d finished for the Circle M and put it in a sack with the can of root beer for Curt. Opening the window, she handed the bag to Curt and held out a cupcake.

“Sorry.” She laughed self-consciously. “I should have some way to wrap them, but for now, you’ll have to eat it as you drive away or find a way to set it in your truck without tipping over. Some others are putting it in their cup holder but it’s too warm to leave it without air conditioning...”

Curt’s tongue came out, and he licked a swatch through the creamy chocolate frosting. She stared and caught the moment when his long lashes closed in pleasure.

He opened his eyes and grinned. “I’ll eat it now.”

“Oh, sure.” She inhaled deeply through a tight chest. “You can do that, too.”

The cowboys visiting made her feel good about herself. She was a cook, a baker, a waitress, nothing else. She was married. She couldn't look at the other men as anything but her customers.

But she was human.

Some of the men were cute. The fact that they appreciated her cooking boosted her bruised ego. It wasn't like Tana ever came around to eat anymore.

He never told her the house smelled good when she baked or lit up in anticipation when she made a roast. That's why she was happy running a business. Others appreciated the work she did. They praised her food. They kept coming back.

“What's that?” Curt lifted his chin, motioning behind her,

She glanced over her shoulder and then back at Curt. “The dough?”

“Yeah.”

“I'm making chocolate chip cookies.”

“Damn.” He set the cupcake on the dash and dug in his wallet. “I'll give you ten dollars if you give me a spoonful.”

She laughed. “You're crazy.”

He raised his brows, holding the cash out in front of her. She put her hand on her heart.

“Are you serious?” she asked.

“Mia, I haven't had cookie dough since I was a boy, and my momma used to sneak me a rolled ball of it when baking.” His gaze softened. “She died when I was thirteen, so it's been a good twenty years without a taste.”

Her throat closed. She swallowed hard, holding up a finger for him to wait. Quickly, she made three balls of dough and put them in a sandwich bag.

She returned to the window, ignoring the money he held out to her, and gave him the bag. “If you get e-coli or food poisoning from eating raw eggs, please don’t sue me.”

He tried to give her the ten-dollar bill again. She waved him off, shutting the window.

As Curt drove away, Mia blew out her breath. She was a sucker for a heartwarming story, and Curt losing his momma about did her in.

She washed her hands, drying them on the bottom of her apron, and set to making the cookies and wrapping the sandwiches. Jack would be back in an hour and fifteen minutes to pick up the order for Circle M. She needed to have everything perfect.



Chapter Eight

Every Serpentine Motorcycle Club member except Neil stood around the wooden crate in the bunkhouse. The V.P. remained on-guard in the doorway, making sure no cowboys stumbled onto club business.

“This is only half of what can be sold in two days.” Hank picked up a bag of heroin. “It’ll all have to be tested for Fentanyl before we pass it out to the dealers.”

A week ago, Serpentine took control of one of the three channels, bringing drugs into Whitefish and surrounding areas. There was still one group doing the same thing as the club, except they weren’t selling pure drugs.

They chopped in Fentanyl and clouded heroine to make a quick buck.

His job was more dangerous than Tana had ever seen working the ranch. Still, the money in his pocket gave him the fortitude to continue with the illegal activity. If the MC could control all channels, they’d be sitting pretty.

“How do we test without using the drugs?” asked Moon.

“I’ll show you tonight.” Hank put the top of the crate back on and handed the hammer to Buffalo. “For now, make sure everything is wrapped up. We’ll have the whole night to spend getting this ready to go out. We screw up the first time, the dealers will go to the others, and we won’t stand a chance in hell of taking over the whole thing.”

Tana’s jaw ached. If someone had asked him six months ago if he would ever participate in dealing drugs, he would’ve told the person to fuck off. He had his whole life ahead of him and a future with Mia that he wanted to be present for.

But not much else mattered when he wasn’t sleeping in his bed in his God damn house. At least he’d sock away the money while he waited for his fucking life to straighten out.

Buffalo walked away. Moon shook his head and returned to watching the baseball game on the television in the

bunkhouse. Tana wasn't the only one having second thoughts.

It was one thing to rely on himself. It was another to put his freedom in the hands of the others. Could he trust them?

Hank caught his gaze. "Are you okay?"

"Yep." He glanced at the crate again. "I'm in."

He had a way of getting Mia back. Soon, he could afford anything she wanted. If she wanted to open a damn restaurant and feed every family in Whitefish, he'd buy her a building and enough food to feed the entire county. As long as she slept in his bed at night.

He walked out of the bunkhouse. Buffalo approached him. He took out a cigarette. Not an everyday smoker, he had one when he wanted to relax. Usually, that was after getting in a fight with Mia.

Or, he was asked to distribute heroin to the good citizens of Whitefish.

"Did you ever have someone close to you on the rez fall into the hands of addiction?" asked Buffalo.

Tana nodded. "A tenth of those who I went to school with are dead. Probably another quarter of them are using drugs or alcohol, despite knowing how it affects our people."

"Children are raising themselves because their mom or dad is doped up." Buffalo paused. "Too many of us die."

Tana glanced at his MC brother. "You think what Hank wants to do will benefit our people?"

"I know it will." Buffalo looked him in the eyes. "If it saves one mother, one sister, one man of the house, wouldn't it be worth it?"

"It doesn't take away the addiction. They'll still use."

"But it'll give them one more day to decide to stop. The fentanyl that is coming in is killing people left and right. It's no good. It won't end well on the rez."

Tana understood what Buffalo was saying. He could see what was happening. While he was the last of his line, he

cared about his people.

“I’ll watch your back, brother,” said Buffalo.

Tana clasped Buffalo’s forearm and nodded. “Same. We must protect each other.”

“And the others,” added Buffalo.

Despite his worries and misgivings about including the others in their pack, Tana knew the only way they would accomplish what they set out to complete was if they all worked together.

“And the others,” whispered Tana.

They swore on the Serpentine patch. They were all going to find out if that meant anything to every single one of them.

“Hank.” Jade ran out of the stable. “Hank!”

Tana’s spine stiffened. That wasn’t a yell of excitement.

Hank burst out of the bunkhouse and ran toward the horse barn. Tana moved forward. The kid had lost her mom not long ago and now lived in the big house with Hank. Everyone had orders to watch out for her.

A ranch was a dangerous place. Some cattle weighed over a thousand pounds, and Jade liked hanging around the horses.

Hank caught Jade at the doorway to the horse barn. “What’s wrong?”

“Miguel’s bleeding.” Jade’s round eyes filled with tears.

“Where?” asked Hank.

Jade pointed behind her. Buffalo and Tana ran inside, letting Hank deal with an upset Jade.

Tana found Miguel in the office, struggling to tie a towel around his forearm with one hand. Tana went straight to the cabinet and grabbed a handful of towels. From the blood covering Miguel’s arm, it looked like they’d need to apply some pressure.

“Here.” He passed a towel to Buffalo. “Do you want me to call an ambulance?”

“No, no, no.” Miguel shook his head. “No hospital.”

“You need stitches.” Buffalo ripped a strip off the towel.

“Can’t.” Miguel groaned. “They’ll send me back to Mexico.”

“Shit.” Tana walked out of the room and stopped Hank and Jade from entering. “He needs stitched up but can’t go to the hospital.”

Hank nodded, obviously understanding why Miguel would turn down medical care. “I’ll call the vet. Dr. Carson will treat Miguel.”

“Is he going to die?” Jade hugged Hank’s arm.

“Nah.” Tana softened his voice. “It’s only a cut.”

“There was so much blood.” Jade squeezed her eyes closed and then opened them again. “I couldn’t unwrap the bale of barbed wire around his arm.”

“He’ll be okay.” He lifted his chin and turned his attention to Hank. “Why don’t you take her out of here? I can stay with Miguel.”

“Thanks.” Hank held his phone to his ear and led Jade toward the barn door.

He returned to Miguel, who now sat on a chair with his bandaged arm cradled against his chest, looking pale. Other cowboys came in to check on him while they waited for the veterinarian to arrive.

“Ay yi yi.” Miguel shook his head. “My family is going to worry.”

“You’re married?” Buffalo leaned against the wall. “How come I never knew that?”

Tana shook his head. “Not married. He has a mother and two sisters who live in town. They count on the money Miguel makes to keep a roof over their heads.

“I need to work.” Miguel moved to stand up, and Buffalo pushed him back down.

“Don’t worry until you have something to worry about.” Buffalo pointed. “Keep your arm up.”

Miguel’s dressing was starting to bleed through. Tana hoped it was a simple wound that a few stitches would seal and not a damn artery that got severed.

Hank walked into the office alone. “Dr. Carson is ten minutes away. I’ll stay with him.”

Tana slipped out of the office. In the breezeway, he pulled out his wallet and removed two hundred dollars. At the corkboard, he took a piece of paper, used the pen that hung by a piece of twine, and wrote a note—*For Miguel*.

Then, he pinned the note on top of the cash onto the cork board.

Serpentine Motorcycle Club members looked out for each other, including the cowboys who worked on the ranch.

Tana walked to his motorcycle. Spotting Jade at the fence in front of the big house, he kicked the bike into neutral and rolled toward her.

“Will Miguel be okay?” Jade climbed up on the lower rung of the split timber fence.

“Yeah, he’ll be okay, sweetheart.” Tana planted his feet on the ground and balanced the Harley between his legs. “The vet’s coming by to patch him up.”

Jade jumped down and stood in front of Tana. “Hank’s making me stay at the house and won’t let me back in the barn. Can you tell Miguel I’ll do all his chores until he’s better?”

Tana took off his cowboy hat and set it on the gas tank. “I’m sure Hank will have something to say about that. You have school, don’t you?”

“I don’t need to go. I can stay here and work.” Jade’s eyes filled with tears. “It’s my fault he’s hurt.”

“No, it ain’t.”

“It feels like it,” muttered Jade. “Maybe he would’ve seen the wire snap if I wasn’t in the barn and talking to him.”

“Accidents happen, sweetheart. Miguel’s a grown man. It’s not your fault, even if you’re in the barn.”

A truck barreled up the driveway. Recognizing the veterinarian’s vehicle, he motioned toward the horse barn.

Jade’s gaze followed the doctor’s arrival. Tana hooked the brim of his hat under his thigh. Miguel was taken care of. There was no use sticking around.

“Remember to stay back out of the way. Mind Hank, okay?” He started the engine and rode away from Glacier Creek Ranch.

Before he was scheduled to come back to the bunkhouse and go through the haul of heroin and get it ready for distribution, he wanted to see Mia.



Chapter Nine

Mia stood in the parking lot of Rebel Rose. The four-mile walk on the railroad tracks from home took longer than she'd imagined when she set out that afternoon. It was already five o'clock.

It'd taken her over an hour, and she still had to walk home. Luckily, it was summer, and she wouldn't have to walk the tracks after dark.

Striding toward the bar's front door, she clutched the paper she'd diligently worked over for the last week until it was perfect.

There was a purpose to going to the bar.

Lane, one of the cowboys who frequently bought his lunch from her, had mentioned all the cowboys hung out at Rebel Rose at night and on the weekends when they weren't working. He'd invited her out for a drink sometime, and she'd politely turned him down—of course.

Nobody ever asked her if she was married. They came to the house and probably realized she lived alone and assumed she was single.

She'd stopped wearing her ring when Tana stopped sleeping at home and had never put it back on. Whenever she thought about wearing it again, she stubbornly put it away.

If Tana wanted to pretend he wasn't married, she wouldn't go out of her way to show that she had a husband.

Opening the bar door, she stepped into the dark building and let her eyes adjust. She hadn't come here because Lane asked her to meet him for drinks. After he'd left, she'd got to thinking.

If the cowboys hung out at Rebel Rose, maybe she could put up a flyer advertising her lunch sacks and get more business.

Since she'd opened for business, she'd made over a thousand dollars profit. That's on top of buying enough groceries to make the lunches. If she grew her customer base, her profits would increase. She'd need more money to support herself without Tana's help.

As it was, she needed a meat slicer. She was cutting all the meat by hand, and it took time. Plus, she could cut the meat thinner if she had a slicer. It would make for a better sandwich.

"Hey, Mia." Lane hurried toward her with a pool stick in his hand. "You changed your mind about having a drink?"

She hated to disappoint him. Realizing it made her appear like a tease by showing up, she wrinkled her nose and quickly explained.

"No, I'm sorry. I'm not staying. But I wanted to thank you. When you mentioned Rebel Rose, I got an idea and decided to walk to the bar." She held up the paper. "Would you know who I should talk to about hanging an advertisement where everyone could read it?"

Afraid the bar would think she was trying to take business away from them, she wanted to assure the owner or manager that she strictly sold sack lunches.

He took the paper, read what she'd printed on the front, and smiled. "You don't have to ask anyone. There's a community board in the bar. Come with me, and I'll show you."

"Thank you."

Eager to put up the flyer, she let Lane take her hand and pull her across the bar. On the other side of the building, near the pool table, was a corkboard littered with business cards, slips of paper, and pictures. The setup was exactly what she'd hoped for. Now, she could advertise to a bigger audience than those who happened to drive down the county road.

More cowboys from other ranches could use her service. They only needed an invitation to try her sack lunches.

She found an unused thumbtack and hung the paper. Standing behind her, Lane reached over her shoulder and

placed the paper higher on the board.

“That way, it’ll be at eye level with the men.” Lane’s body pressed against her back.

She shrank away from his touch and slipped out from underneath his arm, turning to face him. “Thanks. I want nothing more than to expand my business.”

“You’re a go-getter. I like that.” Lane hooked his thumbs in his front pockets and grinned at her. “I don’t understand why some man hasn’t swept in and made you his.”

“Oh, I’m—”

“Is that right? Has she told you that she’s single?” said a familiar gruff voice behind her.

She swiveled and came face to face with Tana. He had no idea what was going on but jumped to his own conclusion. Maybe if he were around more, he’d know she was trying to build a business for herself, and she wasn’t here to drink.

Lane put his hand on Mia’s arm and stepped in front of her in a show of protection. “Who are you?”

Mia groaned. Lane was only making the situation worse. Tana would see him touching her and jump—

Pop

Mia flinched, startled by the violence behind Tana’s fist hitting Lane in the face. She’d never seen Tana lift a hand to another person before.

Sure, he could raise his voice, storm through the house, and even slam doors, but he’d never gotten violent toward or around her.

“Tana.” She stepped between the two men and grabbed her husband’s arm. “Stop it.”

He glared behind her at Lane. She patted his chest, trying to push him back, but he refused to budge.

“Mia?”

She flinched. Lane would be better off if he tucked his tail and left. Going by the look in Tana's gaze, he was in no mood to listen to either of them.

"I'm fine, Lane. You should go back to your dinner." She stayed in front of Tana. "Thanks for your help earlier."

"Who is this guy to you?"

She pressed her lips together. Tana wanted to live his own life away from her. She wouldn't stake her claims on him, even if she had a piece of paper stating she was married to him.

At that moment, she was embarrassed.

Tana grabbed her upper arm and propelled her toward the door without uttering a word. Once outside, he whirled her away from him. She stumbled for balance and caught herself before falling to her knees.

Away from the others, she pointed at Tana. "Don't you ever do that again."

"You're my wife."

"And that gives you the right to hit someone?"

"He touched you." Tana stepped closer. "You're married, but that's a little fact you seem to have forgotten to tell him."

She sputtered and walked away from him. Storming out of the parking lot, she headed toward the road. She wasn't going to stand there and let him lecture her.

She'd done nothing wrong.

Each step away from the bar, the more frustrated she became. Tana was wrapped up in pointing the finger at her when he forgot that he was at the bar, too. Why was he there? Was he picking up women?

Had he started drinking? Her chest tightened. He'd explained his views on alcohol. Had their marriage driven him to go against what he believed?

Her eyes burned. She stepped into the ditch and climbed the other side up to the railroad tracks. The long walk home

never entered her mind. All she wanted to do was escape the humiliation and hurt she'd experienced at Rebel Rose.

Suppose any cowboys who bought their lunches from her witnessed the altercation between Tana, her, and Lane. They'd probably stop paying her to make their meal. They'd all fear Tana creating a scene or hurting them if they came to the house.

A low rumble filled her ears, disturbing her thoughts. She refused to look behind her on the road because she knew Tana followed. His stupid, loud motorcycle could wake the dead.

Her toe caught on the edge of the railroad tie. She caught herself and started over, stepping on the wood pieces. He could keep riding. She wasn't stopping.

Tana roared past her, pulled over, and stopped. Seeing his intent to wait until the railroad tracks moved close to the road, she growled. He infuriated her.

She hadn't gone to Rebel Rose to check up on him. She purposely lived her life trying to avoid him because it was embarrassing to have others witness how dysfunctional they were.

Not that many people knew they were married. Probably only Tana's coworkers knew about her.

She kept going.

When she was alongside his motorcycle, he said, "Get on."

"I'm walking."

"It's too far."

"I've already walked this far. I can walk back." She swung her arms, keeping a steady pace as her feet came down on each wooden tie.

He rolled beside her. "I'll take you home."

"I don't need anything from you."

"Mia." He revved the Harley. "Get your ass off the railroad tracks and get on the seat."

She exhaled loudly, though he couldn't hear her with how loud the motorcycle was. Everything with him had to end up in a fight. She couldn't do anything to please him.

He held out his hand. As if her feet had a mind of their own, she stepped off the tracks and jumped the ditch until she stood beside him. She couldn't resist touching him. Knowing if she got on behind him, she'd need to hold him the whole way home. He'd believe she was holding on when, in truth, she lived for the times she could be close to him.

She put her foot on the peg.

“Watch your bare legs.”

She looked down, avoiding the muffler. Once settled behind him, she put her arms around his waist. She held on to him. If he was an anchor, going to drag her deep under the water, she wanted to go down with him.

The ride home ended before she was ready. Knowing he'd leave, she hopped off the Harley and pulled her cutoffs down from where they'd rode up on her legs.

He shut off the engine. She frowned. What was she supposed to do, thank him for bringing her home?

Tana looked away from her and swallowed. “Are you fucking that guy?”

She clenched her fists, whirled around, and ran toward the house. His question deserved no answer. Let him think what he wanted.

She went to bed every night, worried about what he was doing with other women. Maybe it was time for him to wonder what she was up to when he wasn't around.

Unlocking the door, she went inside and kicked off her shoes. While tonight had gone better than she'd hoped, putting the flyer on the bulletin board, she hadn't expected to run into Tana.

The confrontation. The violence. The embarrassment. Sometimes it was all too much. Maybe going into business by

herself wasn't worth it. Maybe she wasn't meant to find happiness.

Outside, the Harley roared to life. She moved to the window and peeked out. Tana rode down the driveway and turned right—probably going back to Rebel Rose.

The wish-wash of emotions made her sick. The highs and lows left her unbalanced. The uncertainty of her life set her on edge.

Tana had no right to treat her as if she'd done something wrong when he wasn't a saint.

She walked to the spare room and grabbed another poster board she'd picked up at the Dollar Store a few days ago. Someone had stolen her wooden sign advertising Mia's Lunchbox that she used down at the road. So, she'd hammered a piece of old plywood to her mailbox post and put a poster on the board.

But after a while, the paper began to show wear and tear from the semi-trucks flying down the road, bending the sign in half. Eventually, she'd find the sign gone, probably rolling down the road like a tumbleweed.

Making a new sign would hopefully get her mind off Tana.



Chapter Ten

Tana grabbed the brown sack from Neil's hand and tossed it toward the garbage can in the corner of the room.

"Hey." Neil rushed over and picked up the sack. "That's my lunch."

"Buy it somewhere else." Tana pointed his finger, circling the bunkhouse. "That goes for everyone else. If I see another bagged lunch, I will shoot the fucker who bought it."

"What crawled up your ass?" Moon pulled off a boot and shook the dust out of the inside. "Does it have anything to do with that little lady who got you upset at Rebel Rose?"

"Mia's my wife," he said.

"Mia? The sack lunch lady?" Neil paused with the sandwich halfway to his mouth. "Your wife?"

"Holy shit." Moon whistled. "Since when?"

"Since before you joined Serpentine." He glared.

"Why are you staying at the bunkhouse when you have a pretty—"

"That's my business, not yours." Tana walked outside.

He'd take off, but he needed his allotment of money from the club. Then, he needed to take Mia her share. Paying the bills and giving her cash every month for groceries gave him an excuse to see her.

If he were smart, he'd drop the money in the mailbox and stay away from her.

She hadn't stopped her crazy idea of going into business for herself. If anything, she'd gained more customers.

The cowboys on Glacier Crest Ranch talked about her food. While having dinner at the bar, he heard other men chatting about tomorrow's sack lunch because Mia's cooking beat out every restaurant in Whitefish.

If Mia weren't doing it to shame him, he'd be damn proud of her for figuring out how to make money by staying home.

From day one, he'd told her to make the farmhouse into their home and take her time to decide what she wanted to do with her life. He felt spending time with him and getting used to married life was more important.

Mia was young. Half his marriage, she was still attending the local high school. She'd just graduated less than four months ago.

Mia deserved a vacation and time to discover what she wanted.

His job at the ranch paid their bills. He could take care of her.

The prouder of her he became, the more angered he grew. He always believed she could do whatever she set out to accomplish. But she was doing it to shame him.

He had to put up with the men around him praising his wife's cooking every damn day.

Hank walked from the main house toward the bunkhouse. Buffalo stepped outside and met Hank away from the building. Tana stayed back, giving them time. All he wanted was his money, and then he planned to go home.

It would be up to Mia if he stayed.

Maybe tonight, she'd drop whatever reason she was angry at him and start letting him back in her life.

His experience with women existed in a bed, not out. He'd worked his ass off trying to make Mia happy. The longer hours he put in on the ranch, the more distant she became. He couldn't figure out how to make her happy.

Buffalo walked toward him while Hank went into the bunkhouse. "Are you sticking around?"

"No."

Buffalo grabbed Tana's envelope from the stack and handed it over. He took the pouch without looking to see how

much he'd received. His pay had quadrupled since he'd started distributing the drugs for Serpentine Motorcycle Club.

He shoved the envelope into the hidden pocket on his vest and walked over to his Harley. The sun had finally slipped behind the mountain range. With temps topping the mid-nineties all week, it would feel good to ride tonight. The cooler temperatures against his skin would wash away the sweat.

By the time he reached the driveway to the farmhouse, Mia had taken down the sign she hung on the mailbox. Stealing the wooden sign hadn't stopped her from opening for business. Ripping the other two signs in half and letting her find the destroyed papers on the ground hadn't stopped her from selling lunches the next day.

She would open regardless of what he had to say about her working out of the house.

He rode up the driveway, parked the bike, and stepped onto the porch. He turned the doorknob, finding it locked, and knocked. After several minutes, it was clear Mia wouldn't answer the door.

That was unlike her. She knew what day he got paid. She'd want the money.

He walked around the corner of the house to the backyard—not that it was a yard anymore. She had enough traffic driving to the kitchen window. There was now a permanent driveway etched in the gravel wrapped around the house.

Peering in the window, he couldn't see Mia anywhere. He took out his keyring and prepared to go through the backdoor when the hair at the back of his neck stood, knowing someone or something was behind him.

He dropped the keys into his left hand, freeing his right hand, and pivoted while reaching for the pistol tucked in his vest pocket. But he stopped before his fingers wrapped around the grip of the weapon.

Mia shifted a bucket in her arms and balanced the container on her cocked hip. "What are you doing here?"

“Payday.” He took in the bare legs and stained T-shirt.
“What are you doing?”

She walked toward him but never stopped, continuing past him until she reached the door. “It’s huckleberry season.”

“You’d have to walk at least two miles up the mountain before you spotted berries.” He turned, waiting for her to turn back around.

“It’s only time and exercise.” She unlocked the door and pushed it open. “And it pays off.”

“What do you mean it pays off?” He followed her to the door and stepped into the house.

“That’s what I mean. It pays off. I sell huckleberry pies.” She’d already gone through the mud room and entered the kitchen.

He gazed down her back, taking in the tight ass and lean legs, as he followed her. “Did you start some exercise program or something? You’re in fine shape.”

She glanced over her shoulder and then returned to the bucket in front of her. “Too bad you’re not around here to enjoy my *fine shape*.”

The bucket *thunked* against the counter as if she angrily slammed it down. He inhaled deeply, trying his best not to piss her off. If it were his choice, he would be living with her.

Half the time, he couldn’t figure out where it went wrong between them. The other half, he was sure the problem had to do with her age. She needed to grow up.

Mia scoffed and ran her hands over her face. He moved beside her and took in the problem. She’d splattered huckleberry juice all over her face.

He grabbed the dry dish towel and turned on the faucet. “Don’t touch your face, or you’ll be purple tomorrow.”

Getting it good and wet, he wrung the towel and approached her. He scrubbed the purple dots.

“It won’t come off without soap,” said Mia.

“Come on.” He led the way to the bathroom.

He’d always loved that room in the farmhouse. Used to the small bunkhouse bathroom that anyone rarely cleaned, he enjoyed how Mia kept the place shiny and sterilized. He suspected the room had been a bedroom at one time in the past, going off the size. He’d put a walk-in shower in when he bought the house, and Mia wanted a bathtub. There was room for both.

He pointed toward the tub. “Sit.”

She sat down on the edge. “I can clean—”

“I’ve got it.” He ran the dishtowel under warm water and lathered it with soap. “Just don’t touch anything while you’re in here.”

She held her hands in the air and closed her eyes while he dabbed around her face. Because she wasn’t staring at him, he took his time, letting the cloth glide over her skin. She was the palest woman he’d ever been with on account of her red hair.

She had so many freckles it was useless to try and count them all. He’d tried.

“Don’t get soap in my mouth.”

“Keep it shut, and I won’t.” He fought back a grin.

That was one way to keep her from fighting with him. He brushed her hair off her forehead and worked soap over each purple spot.

“They blend in with your freckles,” he murmured.

She scoffed without opening her mouth. He widened his stance, capturing her knees between his legs. Touching her this way was doing things to him.

He rubbed the cloth over her entire face. “Keep your eyes closed.”

He moved away, got a washrag, and saturated it with warm water. Squeezing the material to keep it from dripping, he returned to Mia and washed the soap off her face.

Spending more time on her lips, he made sure no soap residue was left behind, and then he kissed her.

Her eyes snapped open. A spark of arousal stared back at him.

Mia's breasts rose and pressed against her tank top. His cock pulsed to life.

Her gaze frantically came alive. His chest filled with air.

Sexually charged seconds ticked between them. He shrugged out of his vest and ripped his shirt off over his head before she could raise her arms from her position on the tub.

He grabbed the hem of her T-shirt, pulled the material over her head, and tossed it to the floor. His gut tightened at all the bare skin he hadn't seen in a while.

Mia's white bra was a remembrance of when he'd met her. It was his first time seeing a bra with a tiny blue flower sewn between the cups. It'd fascinated the hell out of him, to Mia's embarrassment. He never could figure out why she wanted to hide that little flower from him.

But the bra she had on today was flowerless.

He needed to give her more money. She could buy herself some clothes. Maybe another bra with a flower.

Reaching behind her, he unhooked the bra and slipped the straps off her arms. She gasped. His cock pulsed harder. For as much as she fought her feelings, she wasn't immune to him. That was one thing she couldn't hide.

He captured her mouth, slipping his tongue between her lips. She sucked, taking him in. Picking her up, he shoved at her shorts until he had her bottom half naked, too.

Mia stayed busy with his belt, quickly unlatching the buckle from the leather. His cock pounded, wanting free of the confines of his jeans. He cupped her breast and backed her against the wall. He pulled down his jeans with his other hand, letting the denim puddle at his knees.

He slipped his hands under her armpits and lifted her. She wrapped her legs around his waist. The adrenaline rush left

him flying. Whenever he was inside Mia, life was perfect. They never argued. Their fights were behind them. He could believe they had a future together.

Fuck, *he* wanted a future with his wife.

He planned to drive that fact home.



Chapter Eleven

Tana teased her pussy with his cock, until he plunged inside her with a moan. Mia sucked in her breath, her throat constricting at the monumental moment. Though he raged, he'd come to her with tenderness, trying to contain control.

She felt the same way. Half out of her mind, ready to scream. It was always that way with him.

Around him, she was ready to explode—in pleasure or frustration, for good or bad.

He brought out feelings within her she neither recognized nor felt comfortable with. But they were exhilarating and intoxicating.

Right now, they were together, neither one winning an argument or pressuring the other to change. He wasn't accusing her of being a bitch. She wasn't complaining about him working all the time.

She no longer fought to keep her distance or worried about him breaking her heart. Everything she admired in him, his strength, focus, and hardworking spirit, wrapped around her, and the relief from her stressful existence was overwhelming. She wanted to hold on to him and never let the feeling he gave her slip away.

He rocked back and forth. The friction between their bodies rubbed her sex. Pressed against the wall, she accepted everything he wanted to do to her.

Her body heated, and she dug her fingers into his shoulders.

She locked her legs around his hips. Her insides clenched, throbbing, straining. She panted. Mentally, she reached for more. Physically, she let down her defenses.

He buried his face in her neck and whispered, "You want it harder?"

“Yes.” She panted.

He thrust inside of her. Pleasure sparked throughout her body, and she wrapped tighter around him as he kept her suspended against the wall.

Tana’s focus never left her face, the absolute enjoyment in his gaze more powerful than anything he could do to her. With each plunge of his cock, her will to hold back let go, and she squirmed, giving him back the pleasure he gave her.

An upward spiral torpedoed through her. She clung to Tana as her climax assaulted her body.

Tana buried himself deep inside of her, groaning his release. Exhilarated, she ran her hand into his long hair and held him against her while her body trembled.

“You’re mine. I don’t care if I have to tell every fucking cowboy in Flathead County. Hell, in all of Montana,” he whispered.

She smiled against his shoulder. “Then, stay home. Stay with me. Don’t leave.”

“Never been so glad to hear that, Mia.”

He slipped his cock out of her and lowered her to her feet. She looked up at him. The prospect of them living together again was huge. She’d gained a lot of confidence going into business for herself. She wasn’t the same girl that he married.

She had choices, options, and power within the relationship.

“I’m still going to make lunches for the cowboys.” She put two fingers over his lips, stopping him from arguing. “It brings in money. Maybe you won’t have to work so much now. Maybe you can spend more time at home.”

“I’ve got the motorcycle club.” He bit the tip of her index finger. “I still work a lot, Mia. You’ll be here by yourself a lot of the time.”

She’d seen that he was riding for Serpentine Motorcycle Club. That might scare others, but not her. Tana loved riding.

He loved it as much as she loved cooking for other people. They could compromise.

“I’m okay by myself.” She shrugged when he narrowed his gaze. “I’ve learned that I’m happy working.”

She understood that at the beginning of her marriage, she fought with him a lot because she wanted him home. But she’d gotten used to doing things on her own.

Now that she had the lunch business, she hadn’t had time to feel sorry for herself. Instead, she felt needed and respected by her customers.

“Sometimes I like to be alone.” She kissed him. “But, I still want you home at night. I want you to hold me when I sleep.”

“In our bed.” Tana kissed her back. “Between your legs.”

She warmed despite having sex moments ago. With Tana, she was always ready.

Tana grabbed a towel and wiped off his cock. Mia groaned at the realization he hadn’t worn a condom.

From the first time they had sex, he always wore protection. After they were married, he continued to protect her from getting pregnant because she couldn’t take birth control pills—she’d tried, and they made her nauseous around the clock. Of course, there were other ways to keep from getting pregnant, but she hadn’t looked into doing any of them because Tana stayed away from the house.

“Tana...?” She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. “You didn’t use protection.”

He stilled. “Mia, I haven’t been with any other woman.”

How could she trust him when he’d left the house, lived at Glacier Crest Ranch, and hung around with Serpentine Motorcycle Club members? She’d caught him at Rebel Rose Bar, too. What had he done when she wasn’t around?

She raised her chin. “Tana—”

“I’ll go to the clinic on the rez and get a fucking doctor’s report to show you I’m clean.” He hiked up his jeans and threaded his belt. “You have nothing to worry about.”

She hadn’t meant to make him angry. They both needed to keep their heads. Their relationship was fragile. It felt like one wrong move, and Tana would leave again.

“I’ll go to the doctor, too.” She shrugged. “Maybe there’s another way I can protect myself against pregnancy.”

He lifted his gaze, studying her. She was willing to meet him halfway.

“I’ll take care of you.” He leaned over and kissed her upturned lips.

Relief swept through her. They’d gotten past their first conversation without her throwing or saying something in frustration and Tana leaving in anger.

“I need to ride back to the bunkhouse, get my bag, and let Hank know I’m moving back home.” He walked out of the room.

She rushed to the dresser to grab one of his old T-shirts and hesitated to follow him. The evidence of him not wearing a condom ran down the inside of her thigh.

Turning in the other direction, she went into the bathroom. Once she cleaned up from having sex, she put on the shirt and ran out into the living room while his Harley rumbled to life outside.

Standing at the front of the farmhouse, she leaned against the doorframe and sagged in disappointment at missing him. Even though Tana promised to return, she worried that he’d change his mind once he got to the ranch.

Once he was out of sight, she shut the door and looked around. The small living room looked out to the driveway and the county road. She hadn’t changed anything since Tana moved out. The couch they’d bought together sat in front of the television on the half-hutch she’d found at a garage sale, and Tana re-stained it. There wasn’t a speck of dust on the

coffee table. Her wedding picture still sat on top of the mantel above the fireplace.

Knowing that one room looked different since Tana lived in the farmhouse, she walked into the kitchen and exhaled in resignation. She could do nothing to make the space more appealing to Tana.

She'd set everything up to make the space more efficient for her business. A lot of sandwiches and food preparation were going on five days a week. She'd shoved the table that used to sit in the attached dining area into the kitchen and used the surface as an island where she could make twenty sandwiches at a time.

The unopened gallon jars of pickles, mayonnaise, mustard, and ketchup were lined up on the counter. The new canisters she'd bought at the Dollar Store sat on the short counter between the stove and the fridge. That's where she completed all her baking.

There was a cash box on the rolling cart beside the window, where she handled all transactions. The sink under the second window was sparkling clean. While the stainless steel surface wouldn't impress Tana, she'd need to find some way for him to accept the changes in the kitchen.

Nowhere was there a place for Tana to sit and enjoy a cup of coffee or wait for her while she cooked him pancakes and eggs on a lazy Sunday morning.

There was nothing she could do about the changes. The area was only so big, and she needed the drive-thru window to serve the cowboys.

All she could do was make sure Tana always had a meal before he left for work, whether he stood in the kitchen or sat on the couch in the living room. He wouldn't be neglected.

She'd take care of him like a wife was supposed to care for a husband. And in return, Tana would love her.

She closed her eyes. God, she wanted him to love her this time.

Their marriage had to work. She couldn't lose him.



Chapter Twelve

Tana hauled another load of drugs out to his Harley. Securing the package in his duffle bag, he looked over at Buffalo. Hank never mentioned anything about making a delivery earlier.

He'd promised Mia he'd return to the farmhouse. She was going to be pissed if he was late.

Hank walked out of the bunkhouse, carrying another taped-up brick, and handed it to Moon. "Sorry about the late notice." He looked at everyone, counting heads. "You'll all be going to different drop-off locations tonight."

"With no backup?" asked Buffalo.

"Stihl is following Moon. Neil is going to trail you." Hank turned to Tana. "You have a safe location. You'll meet the man at the south end of Flathead Lake, south of Kalispell."

Tana cinched the Bungee cord and straightened beside his motorcycle. "You're not going to trail?"

Already irritated about delaying his return home, he jabbed at Hank. He hadn't strayed off the ranch in months, preferring to stay on the property.

Besides, none of the members had ridden out alone while making deliveries. It was safer to have someone watching over them.

"You'll be safe," said Hank.

"Cause I'm an Indian?" He studied his Prez.

The south end of Flathead Lake was part of the Flathead Reservation. It was true that anyone would mistake him for belonging to the Salish or Kootenai Tribes. They wouldn't think twice, seeing him riding around.

"That's one reason." Hank widened his stance. "Also, you know the man you'll be meeting?"

"Who?"

“Butch.” Hank looked at the others and then met Tana’s gaze again. “He’s the guy from Rebel Rose who asked about joining Serpentine. I’m using tonight as a way to feel him out.”

So, he wasn’t meeting with a stranger. Yet he had no reason to trust someone because they frequented the same bar.

He questioned Hank because he’d noticed a pattern starting with him. Hank rarely left the ranch anymore. He stopped going to Rebel Rose or into Whitefish.

While he could say Hank put more responsibility on the members of Serpentine Motorcycle Club lately, with more members available to do the work, there was something else going on, too.

He might be free to travel within the reservation, but tribal police would arrest him regardless of the blood running through his veins if he transported drugs.

He dipped his chin, accepting his orders without any more questions.

“Alright, ride safe.” Hank walked between him and Buffalo on his way toward the main house.

Buffalo shrugged, unconcerned about tonight’s ride, and straddled his motorcycle. Since he was on his own, he left first, heading down the long driveway toward the county road.

Mia would wonder why he hadn’t returned to her after agreeing to move back in and be husband and wife. He’d told her all he had to do was pick up his bag at the ranch, and he’d be back. The longer it took for him to return to her, the more she would worry.

Then, she was going to get mad.

It was a half hour to the drop-off spot. He’d return before ten o’clock. Mia would need to understand that as a Serpentine Motorcycle Club member, he would be called away at all hours—and he’d have to go.

She’d learn that he could give her a better life within the club. They’d have more money. More security.

After growing up with a mom who chased boyfriends and never put Mia first in her life, she craved attention. There was a deep-seated yearning for attention inside of her. Yet, she was old enough to get defensive if she felt anyone was close enough to disappoint her.

Most of their fights weren't over a certain thing, but simply Mia showing how hurt she had become. It was a battle of wills to get her to drop the walls she'd erected and let him back in. He, as her husband, would be the one to provide everything she desired. Whenever she needed it. When she let him.

Hell, if she wanted to continue making lunches and selling them from the house, he'd let her. As long as she understood she belonged to him, whether he was home or not.

Traffic remained steady on his way to Flathead Lake. Tourists traveled the road that time of year. Like the Blackfoot rez, the reservation became a constant flow of outsiders wanting to pick up a pair of beaded moccasins, a coin purse, or a cheap carton of cigarettes.

The money from the tourists helped feed and house the Indigenous people. Many women used the income from the crafts they sold to feed their families. Multigenerational families worked beside each other to try and have a better life.

The lake came into view. He looked in his side mirror. There were two cars following him. They'd appeared four miles back, getting on the popular scenic route.

Checking his speed, he continued to ride south on Highway 93, staying at sixty miles per hour. He couldn't take the chance of a cop stopping him for speeding and finding the load of heroin in his bag.

Dusk darkened the road. The mountains to his right made deeper shadows. He turned on his headlight and immediately lost the beam.

"Fuck." He slowed, flicking the switch on the left handgrip.

Without a headlight, he wasn't going much farther. It would be too dangerous. Not only could he go off the road, but other drivers wouldn't see him.

He needed to get the delivery made for the club. After that, he could hunker down and wait for someone to come and get him.

Two more miles and oncoming cars began to flash their lights at him in warning to turn his on. When the road went to two lanes, the car following him made to pass him.

He focused on the road in front of him, having a hard time seeing the way of the road with lights coming up on the side.

"Hey, asshole. Turn on your light," yelled the driver out his open window.

The vehicle sped past him. Unable to see a damn thing, he pulled his bike over to the side of the road.

Quickly shutting down, he toed his kickstand and pulled out his cell phone. He had to meet his contact in ten minutes. Pulling up Hank's number, he pushed the contact button.

The call failed to go through. There was no cell coverage.

Getting off the motorcycle, he jogged along the side of the road, stopped, and tried again. Still no connection. Not wanting to leave the package on his bike, he knew he'd have to hoof it to the contact. He couldn't sit here in the dark and chance missing the drop-off.

He returned to his Harley. The last thing he wanted to do was lug the wrapped package out in the open on the side of the road. There was enough heroin to give him twenty-five years in prison or more.

Looking around while trying to decide what to do, he spotted a car on the side of the road in a pullout. Unable to see if anyone was standing around in the dark, he grabbed his duffle and jogged south. If he could get someone to give him a ride and drop him off close to the drop-off point, he could run the rest of the way.

He'd deal with getting his bike back on the road after he finished club business.

At the vehicle, he looked inside. There was nobody around. The lake was thirty feet away down an embankment. Whoever owned the car was probably night fishing.

Time was ticking.

He looked at the car again. It was an old Ford Taurus on its last leg.

Setting this duffle on the ground at his feet, he patted his pockets, looking for something heavy and blunt. He pulled out the pistol in his vest pocket. With one more look around, he used the butt of the pistol and broke the driver's side window.

"What was that?" said a voice in the distance.

Shit. He reached inside, popped the lock, and picked up the bag.

Sliding into the driver's seat, he felt under the dash for the wires. Grabbing a handful, he leaned down to see the colors and couldn't see a thing. He reached over to the glove box and searched through the contents.

"Yes." He grabbed the flashlight, hoping there were good batteries in it.

A light lit up the inside of the vehicle. Tossing the flashlight on the floorboard, he quickly went to work.

The engine turned over. Never hesitating, he put the car into Drive and pulled onto the road. Once he headed in the right direction, he reached underneath him to turn off the flashlight.

Knowing the road and having a vehicle with lights, he made it to the gravel patch where the drop-off point was scheduled. He scanned the area. Dread filled him.

He'd missed the drop-off.

Rechecking his phone, he punched the steering wheel. There still wasn't cell service.

A single headlight lit up the inside of the vehicle. He pocketed the phone and looked straight ahead. Hank had picked an area without others around. There shouldn't be anyone else stopping at the gravel pit.

No one from Serpentine Motorcycle Club had followed him. He was on his own.

The motorcycle stopped. Tana pulled out his pistol and laid it on the seat beside him. He had a hell of a lot of heroin. It hadn't been that long since Serpentine had taken control of the drugs in Whitefish.

It could be another club after the distribution. It could be someone coming after him in retaliation. It could be someone planning to take the drugs and get rid of him.

He gripped the handle of the pistol. Nobody was going to take it from him.

A car door opened, and a man stepped into the headlight. Unable to see anything but the shadow of the man walking toward him and blinded to everything else, Tana raised his hand and braced his forearm on the door, aiming his pistol.

“Hold it up, right there,” he shouted.

“Tana?”

Not recognizing the voice, he said, “Who are you?”

“Butch.”

Unsure if it was the man he was supposed to meet, he stayed in the vehicle. “You're late.”

“So are you. You're lucky I stayed in the area.” Butch stopped. “I was expecting you to show up on your motorcycle, but thought I'd better check out who was hanging around the gravel pit.”

“Yeah, well, plans changed.” He got out of the vehicle. “I've got a pistol aimed at you.”

“I can see.”

Tana was at a disadvantage. He'd met Butch before, but without seeing him, he couldn't tell his voice from a stranger

in the next town over.

“Step out of the light. Slowly. One wrong move, and I’ll blow your fucking head off,” he said.

Butch moved as instructed. Tana blinked, letting his eyes adjust. After several seconds, he recognized the man and put his arm down, pointing the pistol at the ground.

Delivering drugs was new to him. He kept the weapon in his hand. He’d rather be safe than sorry.

“Wanna tell me why you were late?” asked Butch.

Tana reached into the car and pulled out the package. “Headlight burned out on the Harley. I wouldn’t have made it here in time, but I found a beater not far from where I parked and borrowed it.”

Butch whistled softly. “Risky, man. You’re not carrying sugar home from the store.”

“No, shit.” He handed over the heroin. “I’ll let Prez know it’s in your hands.”

Butch dipped his chin. “Preciate it.”

If Prez put Butch through a challenge, it was a good way to get shot. It wouldn’t be the first murder that happened at the hands of Serpentine Motorcycle Club.

Tana steeled his response and shut down the unease that crept up on him when he thought of what had to be done to secure their position as the only drug distributor in the area. The only thing that kept him looking forward was the good they’d be doing for his people.

There would never be a time when the world was drug-free. That was the cold, hard fact.

But Serpentine members could make sure the drugs were as clean as possible. What happened after that was in the hands of the user.

Tana returned to the car, fiddled with the wires, and revved the motor. He waited until Butch had the package secured on

his motorcycle and rode away before returning to the county road.

It'd be faster to ride back to Glacier Crest Ranch, seek help getting back to his Harley to pick it up and ditch the car somewhere far enough away from Flathead Lake. It'd take a while before someone found it.

He wrung the steering wheel in his hand. It wasn't the best place to leave his motorcycle.

A dark street with no one around, anyone could load it up on the back of a truck, and he'd never see his Harley again.

Halfway back to the ranch, flashing lights filled the rearview mirror. Instantly knowing, if he pulled over, the cop wouldn't zoom by him, going toward an emergency call. The police were after him.

He'd stolen the car.

He slowed, grabbing his phone. Glancing down, he pulled up Mia's number. There was no service.

Tana took his foot off the accelerator and let the phone fall to the car's seat. The vehicle rolled to the side of the road.

As he came to a stop, he exhaled loudly and let his head fall back on the headrest of the seat. He wasn't going to make it back to Mia.



Part Two

Chapter Thirteen



BUFFALO SAT ON THE other side of the table in the visiting room of the Flathead Detention Center. Tana neither leaned against the chair nor tilted forward. He remained perched, ready to run, even though he couldn't stand.

Nine months, twenty-eight days, and six fucking hours. That was the length of his sentence. The court was backed up at the time of his arrest, and it took two months of sitting in a jail cell to receive his punishment.

He was now pushing a year inside the prison.

The only thing going for him was that he was a registered Blackfoot arrested on Flathead reservation. The judge kept him in the detention center instead of letting the federal agents escort him to the state prison, where Native American people usually received longer sentences.

Every fucking day, he thought of Mia. He'd used his weekly phone call to call her for six months straight. She never answered the damn phone.

Then, one day, the number was disconnected.

He continued for a few more weeks until he gave up. Mia either ignored the calls or bought a new cell phone with a different number.

"Where's Prez?" he asked.

Buffalo shook his head. "On the ranch."

Noticing something in Buffalo's gaze, Tana studied his MC brother. "What's going on?"

"Hank still doesn't leave the ranch."

"At all?"

Buffalo's chest expanded. Nothing more was said. Tana tried to understand what was happening outside the walls of

the detention center. There were things he couldn't communicate while sitting inside with other prisoners and guards around, listening and watching.

The men inside were always looking to use information to their advantage. He kept to himself the best he could on the inside, but he never backed away from a fight. He'd gotten into plenty of confrontations during his stay. The guards never reported the violence. It was a sport to them—an entertainment.

“Neil will be at your hearing next week.” Buffalo placed his hands on the table. “Do you need us to do anything?”

“Nah, man.”

Buffalo looked away and then leaned forward, meeting Tana's gaze. “In case you're wondering, Hank mailed your percentage of the pot to M—”

“Keep her name out of here.” His jaw hardened.

He wasn't sharing Mia with anyone. No one knew about her. It was better that way.

She could live off his money while he was away. Knowing her, she probably continued running the lunch business out of the house. Because she was pissed that he hadn't returned, she'd had enough time to talk herself out of loving him.

While he sat in here every day and thought of nothing but her, she'd probably forgotten about him.

Mia could've contacted Glacier Creek Ranch at any time in the last year and asked about him. He'd waited and waited for any sign that she cared about him. But with every visitation, Buffalo let him know that Mia hadn't gone to the ranch. The few times someone from Serpentine Motorcycle Club rode up to the house to check on her for him, she either wasn't home or locked the door and pretended not to be there.

The rumors were that anyone showing up on a motorcycle would not get a sack lunch. She only sold lunches to cowboys.

And he sure in hell wouldn't confide in any of the cowboys to check on his wife. He didn't trust any man around

her. She was too beautiful, and if they knew he was locked up, they'd move right in on her.

“If you get out of here next week, where are you going to stay?”

He swallowed hard. “The ranch.”

There was no use going home. Mia had cut off communication with him the second he failed to return to the house and live with her again.

“Well, things will be much more comfortable than before you were locked up.” Buffalo sat back in the chair. “Everyone from Serpentine has moved into the big house. The cowboys have taken over the bunkhouse.”

Surprised at the move, he raised his brows. Hank had promised to take the club to a higher place. The money they brought in from trafficking drugs in Whitefish benefitted them all.

He'd missed the last year. It was hard to feel a part of the MC when his ass was sitting in the detention center. He'd never had a chance to build up loyalty with the others.

While they were out running the show. He sat behind bars with no one to trust.

None of them could help him. He was here alone with his wife on the outside, shutting him out.

“Sounds good. I've forgotten what a real bed feels like.” He shifted.

The chain shackled around his ankles rattled. He stilled. All he'd wanted to do was leave, and now that he had a shot, if the judge let him, he found himself leery of leaving the confines of the prison.

For the first time in his life, he had no idea what waited for him.

Over the speaker, the detention officer called an end to visitation. Buffalo planted his hands on the table to push himself up and leaned closer.

“Everything is as it should be. You’ll be safe while you get your land legs.” Buffalo straightened, dipped his chin, and turned away.

Tana kept his gaze straight ahead on Buffalo’s back. Though his attention went to the room around him. After these visits, the inmates power-played as entertainment. If they spotted a weakness, they’d come after him.

He only had a week more on the inside if everything played out.

Once he was outside, he needed to get back on his feet. He needed to return to his life. He needed Mia.

A guard stopped at his table. “Hands flat on the table.”

He reached out, spreading his fingers. The guard slapped handcuffs on him.

“Keep your hands above the table.” The guard squatted beside the chair and unlocked the shackle from the hook on the floor.

While they allowed him his hands during visitations, they made sure he couldn’t run away.

The guard stood. “Get in line.”

He walked to the other side of the room and stood behind another inmate. All he had to do was follow the rules and stay away from fighting for six days.

Six days until freedom.



Chapter Fourteen

A car honked twice outside the farmhouse. Mia threw a blanket over the front of her and walked into the kitchen.

Through the window, a cowboy waved his hand from the seat of his truck. Irritation boiled inside of her. Nobody could read the sign.

She tapped the window where she'd taped the paper. "New hours, Glen. It's posted down on the road *and* on the window. You have to get here before ten o'clock. I'm no longer open afterward."

"You've got nothing to spare?" Glen held out his arm, cash pinched between his fingers. "I'm working until seven o'clock, honey. I'll starve."

She exhaled and walked over to the fridge. There were three sack lunches left from earlier.

"It'll cost you double." She held the sack out of his reach.

Glen took more money from his wallet and handed it to "Thanks, darlin'."

She dropped the cash on the counter and closed the window before the mewling cry filled the room.

"I know. I know." She hurried into the living room and sat on the couch.

Once her son latched onto her nipple, Mia exhaled in relief.

She closed her eyes and let herself sink deeper into the corner of the couch. With barely two hours of broken sleep in her system and a hurried morning putting all the lunches together so her customers wouldn't go without, she was exhausted.

"Kaden Montana Graywolf, you need to learn to sleep longer than twenty minutes at a time," she whispered.

Sharp little fingernails scratched at her breast. She patted her son's tiny butt, trying to lull him to sleep while he filled his tummy.

He was a healthy eater and getting heavier every day.

The last two months had both crawled at a snail's pace and flew past like a hummingbird. She'd spent forty weeks worried about bringing a baby into the world by herself. Half that time, she had no idea where Tana was since he never returned to her.

The other half, she spent pissed off. Hank, the owner of Glacier Crest Ranch and the president of Serpentine Motorcycle Club, had put a note in the envelope that came once a month full of cash, informing her Tana was in prison on the Flathead Reservation.

Not only was she mad at Tana for not coming home, but her anger grew to include his boss. Six months of thinking Tana skipped town *and* left her pregnant had broken her.

Knowing the truth of why he hadn't returned hadn't healed the heartache. She was bitter. It wasn't easy going through her pregnancy, running her business, and worried about her future by herself.

She'd scoured all the newspapers she could find in Whitefish and looked on the internet, but there was no mention of his name.

When she found out he was imprisoned on the Flathead Reservation, she'd called for information. Because she had no tribal registration card for herself or Tana had his card with him, they wouldn't give her any information on him or let her inside the detention center.

The more she fumed at home, the angrier she grew. Without knowing what Tana had done to get arrested, she was unsure if she wanted him around the baby.

To make matters worse, her mom was M.I.A.

Then, she had her son, and the only thing that mattered was making sure Kaden was taken care of. She had no time to

feel sorry for herself for having no help. Business had to go on.

Three days after giving birth, she put the sign down on the road and started making lunches again.

She had no other choice.

While she struggled with Kaden to breastfeed, cried every time she peed, and worried about not hearing Kaden cry at night when she was alone in the house with him, she forgot about Tana.

She forgot how much she loved him.

She forgot how much she needed him.

She forgot how much she'd changed.

Her son took all her attention and love. He was the only one who mattered. The moment the doctor put her son in her arms, and she held him, she understood that her life was forever changed.

She would die for her son.

She would kill for her son.

She would love him and care for him until the day she took her last breath.

Another horn honked. She opened her eyes and peeled back the blanket covering her son.

Kaden no longer nursed. For once, he dozed. Nothing in the world would make her disrupt the peace. Whoever was outside would get the hint she was closed when she refused to go to the window.

“To be strong and successful, you must hold your head high, little wolf,” she whispered, rubbing his chubby cheek with the back of her finger. “And then, you keep moving forward, believing in yourself.”

She'd read many articles on how to turn around her life on the internet. Some of the advice seemed impossible. But there was a lot of information she tried to remember when she grew

frustrated. It was better for her to find a more productive way to take care of her life than letting her temper get the best.

She was a mom now. She couldn't yell or break out in tears whenever something wouldn't go her way. As Kaden grew, she wanted to grow, too.

Kaden needed a mom he could depend on. She would be everything she always wanted in a mother when she was a child.

She held her breath and strained to hear outside. The vehicle had gone away.

Not wanting to move in case Kaden woke up, she leaned back on the couch, propped her feet on the coffee table, and closed her eyes.

She must've fallen asleep because Kaden woke her up by squirming with a wet diaper. Yawning, she swiveled on the couch and laid him on the cushion. With only them in the house, she had a stack of clean diapers on the coffee table, in the bathroom, and the bedroom so that she could change him wherever they happened to be.

"Hello, sleepy." She leaned down and kissed his dewy cheek. "Are you going to stay awake?"

She changed Kaden's diaper and redressed him in his sleeper. She carried him over to his infant carrier and put him down while washing her hands.

She'd need to go to town soon.

Her thoughts went straight to Jack. Her loyal customer had turned out to be a good friend during her pregnancy. He assured her it was okay for him to take off work from Circle M whenever she needed to run an errand or go to the doctor.

The last time she'd mustered the courage to ask Jack to take her emotional self to Whitefish because she needed supplies for the baby and hadn't realized how many diapers one little eight-pound baby boy went through in a week, she'd approached him a blubbering mess, promising never to bother him again.

Jack had already done so much for her after he found out she walked the six-mile round trip to the doctor's appointments each month while pregnant.

He stepped up and became her friend when she had no one. She would've lost it without him telling her she could raise her son alone.

Jack never asked for anything in return except a free lunch. And she'd gained so much through the months with his help.

He often shared about his sister—a woman married to an abusive man, trying to raise two kids. The admiration and protectiveness in his voice encouraged her to keep moving forward with her life more than anything. There were days she almost gave up. Raising a child on her own overwhelmed her. But Jack always had the right thing to say to motivate her to get up and move.

Her mom had raised her by herself and failed in so many areas. But Mia had survived.

She never wanted to be a neglectful mother who left her child wondering if something was wrong with him because he wasn't loved the way he needed to be loved.

Yet, after she gave birth, she had times when she pitied her mother.

Life was hard. It was much harder doing it as a single parent.

Her mother, to this day, continued to chase love. It was sad.

Her mother hadn't loved herself, so how could she have loved Mia?

She picked up the cell phone, found Jack's contact information, and texted him. Then, she promised him a week's worth of lunches if he'd take her to Whitefish for the day on Thursday and return to pick her up that afternoon.

Kaden had a well-baby checkup with Dr. Henson that morning. She also needed to go grocery shopping for the business, and she wanted to buy a stroller.

Her son was getting too heavy to carry on her walk to town and back. But she could make the trip pushing a stroller on the railroad tracks. It would be bumpy but doable.

Until winter came to Montana, the snow and cold weather arrived, making her housebound. It wouldn't be safe to have an infant out in the elements.

She'd need to find a babysitter or learn to drive and purchase a car. To do either one, she'd need money.

Even though Serpentine Motorcycle Club gave her a bundle of cash each month, which she assumed was part of Tana's pay, she couldn't count on that coming in much longer. Tana wasn't there to work at the ranch or ride for the club. They wouldn't give his pay to her indefinitely.

Because that money belonged to Tana, she kept it in a box underneath the bed. There were things she needed to buy, like the stroller and pay the mortgage, but the majority of the money she saved. Someday, she would have to tell Kaden about his father.

Then, when Kaden became an adult, she would hand the money to him if Tana failed to show up to collect it. Maybe the money would give her son a head start in life. Maybe he could go to college or take classes at the community center.

She looked at the cell phone again. Knowing Jack was busy at Circle M and she probably wouldn't get an answer to the text right away, she carried the carrier into the kitchen and turned the music on. Kaden loved noise and started following her with his eyes when she moved around the kitchen.



Chapter Fifteen

“It’s good to have you back, brother.” Neil leaned against the railing outside the main house on Glacier Crest Ranch. “I suspect it’ll take a while to get your bearings after not having the freedom to walk outside and take a piss whenever the urge hits you.”

“There’s a lot of strange faces.” He gazed out past the horse stable.

“You’re not kidding.”

There were more Serpentine members. From his count last night, there were ten more. Ten men that he had no idea he could trust.

“Hank’s expanded the ranch, too.” Neil turned and gazed out at the field. “He added two hundred heads of cattle to last year’s herd. Instead of sending them all to auction, we’ve got a contract with the Blackfeet Nation. Buffalo is handling those. But I suppose he’ll update you on everything happening when he gets a chance.”

“Where is he?” asked Tana.

“Dealing with Jade.”

“The kid is still living on the ranch?”

Neil nodded. “She has nowhere else to go. No one to care for her.”

Hank always had a soft spot for Jade. Tana pointed toward the truck barreling down the driveway. “What’s going on there?”

“That’s one of the newer cowboys. His name’s Ian. He buys lunches for the cowboys and then hurries back to ride out into the northeast pasture.”

From his spot on the porch, he watched the truck stop beside the bunkhouse. A guy, still wearing his chaps, stepped out and picked a box out of the truck. He could see brown

paper bags filling the cardboard container from a hundred feet away.

His muscles tensed. He'd gone by the farmhouse yesterday after sleeping seventy-two hours straight. Mia had a new sign out on the road. She was still making lunches. However, she wasn't home when he stopped by.

Once he talked to Hank and got a feel for how his days would be from here on out, he wanted to swing by the house again and talk to Mia—face to face.

“Where do the cowboys get their lunches from?” he asked, knowing the answer.

There were lots of restaurants in Whitefish, plus the casino. As far as he knew, they all sent to-go meals out in a Styrofoam container, not a brown paper sack.

“You want to hear it straight?” Neil faced him. “Or do you want me to pretend I don't know?”

“Shoot.”

Neil inhaled. “They buy from Mia's Sack Lunches.”

“Do they know...?” He swallowed hard.

He'd always kept his and Mia's marriage private. It was nobody's business.

“The cowboys don't know.” Neil shook his head. “No reason to tell them. They need to eat, and they like the food.”

“What about the newer members of Serpentine?” He glanced at Neil. “Do they know Mia belongs to me?”

He dipped his chin. “It stays within the club. As far as I know, they don't visit the house or buy their lunches there because your wife has a strict rule that she doesn't feed bikers. Buffalo and I have ridden over there a couple of times, but she shuts the house up nice and tight and waits us out. We never have seen her.” He hitched his thumb over his shoulder. “Tricia, the new housekeeper, tries to keep food stocked in the fridge, but the cowboys are on their own. Understandably, they'd go where the food is good.”

“How much is the allotment?” he asked.

All his earned money from Serpentine Motorcycle Club went to Mia once he was stuck in a cell. He had no use for money while locked up. He’d spoken to Hank at the beginning of his sentence and made sure he knew to give it all to Mia.

“The club’s doing good.” Neil lowered his voice. “Last month, we all took in four thousand, two hundred and fifty bucks.”

Tana couldn’t hide his surprise that Serpentine was doing so well. He’d missed a lot in a year.

“I can’t speak for Hank regarding your work on the ranch, but the two wages bring a nice little chump of change.” Neil chuckled. “Better than the mayor’s job.”

Tana harrumphed. His MC brother tried to lighten the mood. They both knew Hank paid Neil extra to have him in Whitefish, manipulating things for Serpentine.

“Here comes Hank now.” Neil clamped his hand on Tana’s shoulder. “I’ll catch you later.”

“Sure thing.” Tana grabbed the cigarette pack that someone had left on the railing.

Taking one out, he held the cigarette under his nose and inhaled the woody scent. A craving hit him hard. It was his way to ease the stress.

Coming back to Glacier Crest Ranch was supposed to be a relief. He was free. Nobody was watching his every step.

Instead, he struggled with not seeing Mia and not knowing what she’d been up to for the last year. He’d left her, fully committed to living with her again. And he returned, not even knowing how to contact his damn wife.

“Heads up.” Hank tossed a lighter in his direction.

Tana snatched it out of the air and lit the cigarette before giving the lighter back to Hank. “Thanks.”

“I don’t know how long it’ll take you to get your feet under you, but—”

“I’m ready.” Tana exhaled the smoke. “Put me to work.”

Hank studied him and then dipped his chin. “Things have changed since you’ve been gone. I’ll have Buffalo show you the ropes.”

“Sounds good.” He inhaled deeply, holding the smoke in his lungs. “Give me a few hours, and I’ll be ready. I need to go home first.”

Hank crossed his arms. “You haven’t seen your wife.”

It wasn’t a question. Hank knew enough about Tana’s marriage to realize they were estranged.

“A lot can happen in a year.” Hank walked over to the coffee can full of wet sand and tossed his cigarette inside. “Don’t go off the deep end when you see her. You just got out of a dark place. You don’t want to do something stupid and get thrown back in.”

“Do you know something I should know?”

“I don’t get in your business. Just like I don’t expect you to get in mine.” Hank stepped off the porch and headed toward the stable.

Tana wanted to follow him and ask what he meant—had something happened to Mia?

Walking in the opposite direction, he went straight to his Harley. He’d go to the farmhouse and wait all day if that’s what it took to see Mia.

She was at the house. The cowboys had lunches from her. She had to be home.

His hair whipped off his face. He sped down the driveway. The last time he had a haircut, Mia had trimmed the ends in the backyard one night by the floodlight because the house was warm after a hot day. That was over two years ago.

He turned onto the county road and headed straight to the farmhouse.

Ignoring the sign propped up against the mailbox, he rode up the gravel driveway, taking in a truck parked in front of the

house.

Mia didn't drive.

The navy-colored Ford wasn't parked at the kitchen window at the back of the house. It was right in front of the porch where Tana used to park.

Either Mia learned how to drive and bought a truck while he was gone, or she had company.

His gut tightened. Mia never required girlfriends.

The truck had a lift on it. He stopped behind the vehicle. It also had hay stuck underneath the tailgate.

He shut off the Harley, toed the kickstand, and threw his leg over the seat to dismount when the front door opened.

A man stepped out and stopped on the porch. The cowboy held a purse.

Stepping forward, not knowing what the man had done to Mia, Tana aimed his pistol at the man's chest. "Don't move."

"Who are you?"

"That's what I should be asking you." Tana's finger hugged the trigger. "You're in my house."

"You're Tana." The man looked off into the distance, then returned his gaze to Tana. "Mia isn't here."

How the hell would he know where his wife was?

"She forgot her purse and asked me to come get it for her." The purse at his side lifted a few inches, then settled back at the man's side. "She's waiting for me to return."

"Where is she?"

"In Whitefish."

"Where in Whitefish?"

"I'm not sure she would want me to share that information."

"I'm her fucking husband."

The man's lips thinned, and he remained silent.

Tana pointed the pistol toward the porch and then back at the man's chest. "Put the bag down."

"Mia—"

"You've got five seconds to get in your truck and get off my property before I fucking blow your head off." Tana never budged.

The man dropped the purse, stepped off the porch, and walked within three feet of Tana, never going out of his way to avoid the gun. The guy had balls.

Tana's finger itched. He could easily shoot the fucker and take him out to the glacier and feed him to the wolves. Mia had no right to bring a man into *his* house.

The tires on the truck ate up the gravel, spitting them several feet behind the vehicle in the man's hurry to leave. Alone, he put the pistol back behind his belt and approached the house. Trying the door, he found it locked.

He dug in his pocket and pulled out his keyring. Putting the key in the lock, he turned the handle and found it bolted. She'd changed the locks.

Someone had changed the locks.

He looked over his shoulder at the road. The man had come out of the house. He had a key.

Tana picked up Mia's purse and rifled through the contents, looking for her keychain. It wasn't there. Putting the purse on the chair, he took position on the step and waited.

Mia would have to come home eventually. When she arrived, he wanted answers.



Chapter Sixteen

Mia picked Kaden up from the seat in Jack's truck and put the wet diaper she'd removed in the bag. She couldn't hide out much longer.

Kaden needed a nap. She needed to eat. And Jack, poor Jack, never signed up for any of her family drama.

She had no idea Tana was out of prison until Jack informed her that he'd shown up at the house. No one warned her.

No one had told her anything but that he was arrested and serving a sentence for his crime.

She had no idea what crime he'd even committed.

"You can't sit out here forever. He could have plans to wait at your house until you get there." Jack reached out and rubbed Kaden's cheek. "You're not without options. I can take you to a hotel for the night. You can stay at my house. I can stay with you if you don't want to face him alone. Any of those choices would be better than hiding in the truck."

Knowing Tana and his possessiveness, he wouldn't tolerate another man anywhere around the farmhouse. She watched the figure in the distance pace the porch. She had no idea what to do.

Thankfully, Jack had parked in a stand of trees down the county road that allowed her to view the farmhouse undetected.

But she couldn't hide forever.

She rubbed Kaden's back. Her son deserved better from her, even if he wouldn't remember today.

When Jack had returned to her in Whitefish and explained why he hadn't brought her purse, which she'd forgotten in her rush to get her and the baby out of the house and to the doctor's appointment in time, the news about Tana returning knocked all the wind out of her.

She barely remembered Kaden's well-baby checkup. Or the grocery trip.

If Jack hadn't stayed with her, she would've put Kaden in the new stroller she'd bought that morning and kept walking.

Walking away from Whitefish.

Walking away from Tana.

Walking away from her business.

Tana was a tumultuous point in her life. She couldn't have that level of anger and frustration in her life. Not if she was going to be a good mom for Kaden.

She inhaled deeply. "I need to go back home. Everything I need for Kaden is in that house."

Jack hung his wrist over the steering wheel. "Listen, I don't know what happened between you and your husband. I know he's been gone for a long time. I know you've struggled ___"

"I'm doing okay," she said.

"More than okay, Mia. You're surviving." His gaze softened. "But I'm worried about you. The man who held a gun on me earlier doesn't seem like a man who will walk into your house and listen to you without going ballistic."

She appreciated Jack's care. Holding Kaden tighter, she met Jack's gaze. There would never be enough she could do to pay him back for everything he'd done for her.

Emotions clogged her throat. In the end, she would hurt him. Not intentionally.

On her side, they were friends. On his side, he felt something for her. She swallowed hard. He'd never confessed to feeling more for her, but she could see it in his eyes. There was nothing he wouldn't do for her and Kaden.

She realized that too late.

Maybe being pregnant and then giving birth distracted her from what was happening. Maybe she needed Jack's friendship as much as he needed her.

He was a sweetheart. A good man.

But, she was married to Tana—a fact Jack knew from the beginning.

“I need to go home.” She exhaled harshly. “We’ll be fine.”

“What if he hurts you?”

She smiled sadly at Jack. He couldn’t see beyond the fact that Tana wasn’t with her. He wasn’t there during her pregnancy or birth.

“Tana would never hurt me,” she whispered. “I need to go home.”

Jack looked away from her, obviously disagreeing with her but too polite to tell her she was a fool for believing in a love that was volatile, raw, and oftentimes absent.

“Well, it looks like it’s your lucky day,” muttered Jack.

She followed his gaze and spotted what grabbed his attention. She trembled. Tana rode down the driveway on his Harley. He was leaving.

Kaden squirmed, pulling his legs up tight to his belly. She patted his back and hummed quietly as she watched Tana turn onto the county road and ride in the opposite direction.

The relief she expected to come with him leaving the house never came. Tana might be gone tonight, but he’d come back. When he returned, he’d be angrier and more determined to see her.

She opened the truck door, slid off the seat, and opened the back door of the crew cab. Kaden fussed. She hummed while buckling him in his car seat.

Ignoring his grunts and cries of being belted in the seat, Mia got in the front of the truck and motioned for Jack to go. There was nothing stopping her from returning to the farmhouse now.

But her day of reckoning would come.

Jack pulled up to the porch. She jumped out of the truck, quickly unlatched the car seat, and removed Kaden from the

vehicle.

“I’m going to put him inside, and then I’ll come back and unload all my bags.” She stepped toward the house.

“Take care of him. I’ll bring your things inside.” Jack reached over the tailgate and grabbed two sacks from the grocery store.

She let him once again take care of her and went inside with the baby. While Jack handled the manual labor, Mia lifted her shirt and put Kaden on her breast. A wave of relief came to her. He was overdue for a meal.

Grabbing one of the baby’s throw blankets, she draped the light material over her shoulder, covering herself. Jack had seen her breastfeed before. Half the cowboys in the county had probably seen her. Sometimes, making lunches and handing them out the window came at the same time as Kaden’s meals.

It was life. If the cowboys couldn’t handle it, they could make their own lunches.

Jack brought in a large box as if it weighed nothing when she knew it’d taken two young men to carry it to his truck for her. Shocked at hearing Tana was back, she’d forgotten about her big purchase today.

From now on, she could take Kaden in the stroller wherever she had to go. For the next four, maybe five months, when the weather cooperated, she could make going to town an outing for them both. No longer would Jack have to take her to town.

“I’ll put this together—”

“You don’t have to.” She swayed side to side with Kaden in her arms. “The salesman promised that it’s all together. I have to lift on the handle and snap it into place.”

Jack frowned. “At least let me take it out of the box.”

She kept her mouth shut. That’s how it worked between her and Jack. There was no power struggle. He wanted to help. She needed help.

He removed a knife from his side and cut through the cardboard. It should be Tana here, opening the stroller and setting it up for his son. But it was too late. Tana had missed her pregnancy, birth, and the newborn stage.

She watched Jack.

He was a handsome man. His brown hair touched his shoulders in the back, and his cowboy hat kept the strands off his forehead. He was never clean-shaven, but she wouldn't call what he had a beard. More of a rugged look that hid the scar on his chin.

An old injury he claimed came from getting kicked by a horse.

He was closer to her age than Tana. If she remembered right, Jack mentioned he was twenty-five years old.

Even though she was nineteen years old now, she felt older. Other women her age were still figuring out what they wanted to do with their life.

She knew what she was going to do. Peeking at Kaden underneath the blanket, she shifted and pulled her shirt down. He slept contently in her arms.

Jack lifted the stroller from the box and set it on the floor.

She pointed to the side of the handle. "There's a lever that you unhook. Then, on the other side, you flip the bar."

He followed her directions. In front of her, the stroller expanded until all four wheels were on the ground, and the handle was in the air.

The stroller cost more than she'd budgeted for, but she had the money from the profits of her business to make it possible to purchase. She hadn't had to touch any of Tana's money she put in the box for Kaden when he was older, and for that, she was grateful.

Since having the baby, she found it more important to support herself. She wanted no guilt over using Tana's money.

"Looks good." Jack rolled the stroller back and forth. "The big wheels will make it possible to cross the railroad ties."

She smiled sadly. Her plans always included Tana. Now, she was making plans for herself and her son without him.

Suddenly feeling the need to be alone, she walked to the door. “Thanks again for all your help today, Jack. I sure appreciate it.”

She refrained from mentioning Tana and his altercation with her husband. Though it wasn't her fault Tana pulled a gun on Jack, she still felt guilty. Jack wouldn't have been at the house if it wasn't for her.

“Anytime.” Jack stepped toward her.

She opened the door. “Remember to stop by each morning for your free lunch.”

He stopped beside her. She watched him raise his hand and sucked in her breath, afraid he'd touch her, but he cupped Kaden's head. She swallowed hard. Kaden deserved someone in his life who would love and care for him.

Jack gave her son tenderness, which every little boy needed, along with roughhousing and hard examples. She'd read every *Bringing Up Baby* book at the library over the last six months.

“Night, Mia.” Jack stepped outside.

She shut the door, needing time to catch her breath after what happened that day. The one thing she couldn't give her son that the books recommended was a Dad.

Not when Kaden's father had no idea she'd had a baby.



Chapter Seventeen

Tana stormed up on the farmhouse's porch and banged his fist on the door. "Open up, Mia."

She was home. He could hear music coming from inside.

"Come on," he yelled.

Ranch chores took longer than he'd planned. It was four o'clock by the time he rode in from the back pasture and was able to leave.

He was tired, hungry, and out of patience.

Every spare minute was filled with the idea of Mia being involved with that man he'd held at gunpoint yesterday. He should've put a bullet in his head.

"Mia." He raised his hand to knock, and the door swung open.

His wife glared at him. "Keep your voice down."

"It's my fucking house. If I want to stand on my porch and yell, I will." He stepped inside the farmhouse.

Now, he was irritated. After not seeing her for a year, he expected more of a reaction from her. She barely looked at him. At the least, he expected her to start peppering him with questions about where he'd been for the last year.

Mia hugged her middle and stood before him, blocking him from coming inside. "Please, I'm asking you to calm down and stop yelling."

He gritted his teeth, taking the time to soak her in. She was as beautiful as she was the day he married her.

She wore her hair longer, tied at the back of her neck. Her cheekbones seemed higher, or maybe she'd lost the youthful roundness from her teenage years. She looked older. Something was different about her, but that difference only made her more stunning.

His gaze lowered. She'd filled out nicely. No longer the gangly teenager but a woman with curves.

"We need to talk." She waited until he looked into her eyes. "Can you sit on the couch without yelling?"

Tension filled him. She was too calm. Too polite.

If she planned to tell him she wanted a divorce because she'd hooked up with another man, she'd quickly learn he wouldn't give her one.

"If you've got something to say, say it." He held his ground.

"Don't be like that." She frowned and looked behind her.

He looked around the living room. Everything looked how he remembered, except she'd moved the couch against the wall and made more floor space.

"I called you every week I was gone." His jaw ached. "I needed you, Mia."

"I..." She frowned. "I got a new phone last year."

"Because of me?"

She shook her head. "My cell fell into the sink when it was full of water. I had to buy a new one but because I waited until I went to town and it's a pay-as-you-go phone, they issued me a new number." She glared at him. "I didn't even know where you were. How would I have told you about my phone?"

He inhaled deeply. "Hank sent you my pay every month?"

She nodded. "Do you want it back?"

"I don't care about the money." He stared at her. "I want you back."

"Tana—"

"Before I was arrested, I was coming back here."

She looked away. "What did you do to get arrested?"

"I stole a car."

Her mouth opened and then closed. She shook her head. She hadn't heard. Buffalo mentioned how Hank had become a recluse on the ranch when Tana was away. Still, he figured his president would've contacted Mia.

"Why would you do that?" Mia frowned. "You have a motorcycle."

"The headlight on my bike blew out. I couldn't ride it in the dark, so I borrowed a car."

"Oh, Tana," she whispered.

"It doesn't matter now. I'm back." He paused. "I want to come back home."

Several seconds passed, and she finally shook her head. "You can't."

"Are you fucking around?" He scratched his jaw. "That-that man that was here yesterday. Is that him?"

"This has nothing to do with Jack," she blurted. "Leave him out of the conversation."

He turned away from her. Having her stand up for another man in front of him was like getting stabbed with a knife. He hadn't sat in prison for a year, thinking about her with another guy. He imagined her with him. She carried his last name.

"Tana, when you were gone, a lot happened."

"Fuck, Mia." He thrust his hands in his hair and turned away from her. "I don't want to hear this bullshit. A lot happened to both of us. It's over now."

He would never share her with another man. She was supposed to love him until death. He was only gone a year.

"It's not what you're thinking. A *lot* happened," she said.

He whirled around. "I'm thinking you couldn't keep your legs together and wait for me."

She shook her head, reaching for him. He stepped back, holding his hands, not letting her touch him.

“I tried to contact you. The people at the detention center wouldn’t give me any information because I didn’t have your C...CDI—”

“Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood card.” Jack rubbed his hands over his face.

“I searched the house for the card.” Her voice grew higher. “Even if I could’ve found someone to drive me to the reservation, they wouldn’t have let me in to see you without showing them the card.”

His cheek twitched, hearing her frustration and hurt. Each reservation had its own rules. He had no idea if what she was saying was true. He lived in a cell, not on the outside, for the last twelve months.

“You could’ve contacted Glacier Crest Ranch and had someone help you. They could’ve got a message to me.” He fisted his hands. “Someone gave you money every month, you could’ve asked—”

“They mailed the money to me. Who would I have asked? The mailman?” she blurted.

He inhaled swiftly. Buffalo had told him Hank had become a hermit on the ranch.

“You could’ve called the ranch.” He glared. “You had the number when I worked there.”

“I had a lot going on.”

He looked over her head toward the entrance to the kitchen. He couldn’t see what was in there or if she still had the table in the middle of the room.

“Your business was more important than your husband?” He shook his head. “Maybe that’s how you’ve always thought about me.”

When she clamped her mouth shut, he walked to the door. There was nothing more to say tonight.

“Tana?”

He stopped at the door but refused to turn back around. She had time to run a business and get involved with another man. There was nothing more to say.

“If you can wait. There’s something we need to talk about,” she said.

He stepped outside and shut the door. If she thought he’d agree to a divorce so she could have a relationship with that other guy, she’d find out exactly how long he could go without giving her what she wanted.

He was back. She was his wife. He wasn’t going to let *Jack* get close to her.



Chapter Eighteen

Mia dribbled water over Kaden's head using a plastic cup, making sure the water stayed off his face. Gripping his wet body in one hand, she rinsed off the soap suds. Bath time was usually her favorite part of the evening.

Kaden loved the relaxing time, and she marveled at the miracle she created. Her son was getting bigger and changing every day.

But instead of an enjoyable night, she walked around the house expecting trouble in the form of Tana to come knocking.

She'd tried to tell him about his son, but he intended to make her look like the bad guy. He was so sure she cheated on him while he was locked up that he refused to listen.

"You are the most beautiful baby boy ever." She crooned, lifting Kaden out of the sink where she gave him his bath.

Soon, she'd have to start bathing him in the bathtub. Her single sink was the perfect size to hold his bathing lounger.

"Let's get you warm, huh?" She wrapped him in a towel and carried him into the nursery.

She'd put the crib up in the spare bedroom before he was born, but he was only now sleeping three hours at a time in his bed. Before that, she kept him with her in bed, but all he wanted to do was nurse if she was nearby.

She placed him on the changing table and kissed his forehead. "What do you want to wear tonight? Bugs or Baseballs?"

Before she dressed him, she smeared Baby Lotion all over his body. The music from the kitchen floated into the room. She danced in place while making funny faces at him.

Kaden found his fist. She laughed and picked out the onesie with baseballs and stripes that made it look like a uniform.

Once he was diapered and dressed, she snuggled him to her chest. Pressing her lips against the top of his head, she inhaled his sweet scent. There was nothing better than the smell of a freshly washed baby.

She carried him out to the living room and came to a hard stop.

Tana stood beside the couch, peering at the baby stroller she'd left there. Knowing he would probably show up yesterday, she'd cleared all the baby items out of the living room and put them in the nursery.

She'd wanted to tell him about Kaden before overloading him with everything that came with a baby.

Obviously, in her busy day, she'd forgotten to put the stroller in the nursery after using it earlier.

Kaden squirmed. Realizing she was holding him too tight, she loosened her hold and put her hand on the back of his head as if to shield him from what would happen.

Tana had yet to turn around. He seemed fixated on the stroller.

Knowing she couldn't hide Kaden from Tana, nor would she want to, she cleared her throat. She needed Tana to calmly listen to her and not walk out until she finished explaining.

She was a mother. She had a three-month-old baby.

There was no good time to talk.

Tana turned around. A frown marred his face.

Her heart pounded, filling the space between them. He never looked at her. All his attention was on the baby.

She fought against the desire to take Kaden to the bedroom. He never asked for his parents to have an unhealthy relationship. Thank God he was too young to know the emotional storm brewing around him.

"I wanted to tell you the other night," she whispered.

He stared at Kaden. Her heart thrummed. She wished he'd say something. Anything.

A knock startled her. She jumped, using the arrival of a visitor as an escape from the tension rolling off Tana.

She swung the door open and inwardly cringed. Nothing about tonight was going right.

Jack held out a sack. "I found this in the truck today. I must've missed it yesterday when I brought your stuff inside."

She shifted Kaden to her other side. "Thanks."

"It's just bread. Nothing that would go bad left out of the fridge." Jack stepped into the house and kissed the back of Kaden's head. "You've got your hands full. I'll put it in the kitchen for you."

"Wait." She turned to stop him from going farther into the house, but it was too late.

Jack came face to face with Tana. Both men squared off like two roosters in the hen house.

Shielding Kaden, she stayed away from the two men. Tana glanced at her. Glanced at Jack. Swung his gaze down to the baby. A mask came down over his face. She wanted to cry out for him to stop.

Stop thinking.

Stop assuming.

Stop guessing.

He always thought the worst of her.

Tana walked out of the house. Several seconds later, the rumble of his motorcycle rocked the house.

Kaden cried. Jostled to soothe her son, she hurried into the kitchen and shut off the music. She would've heard Tana arrive if she hadn't had the music on.

In the silence, she was left shaking. Kaden continued to cry. It was his bedtime, and he was hungry.

"Mia, feed your boy." Jack put his hands on her shoulder and steered her out of the room.

She sat on the couch, trying to calm herself. Letting her emotional state rub off on Kaden would do no good.

Jack stood by the window, looking out. She tried to shake off her irritation. Tana had no right to be angry. Jack was returning a sack of groceries she'd bought and left in his truck.

If anything, Jack was doing Tana's job. It was supposed to be Tana taking care of her and Kaden, not Jack.

"I'm sorry about the bad timing." Jack turned from the window and faced her. "I pulled up to the house and never noticed his motorcycle—honestly, I wasn't looking for it."

She adjusted her shirt, making sure her breast stayed covered. Kaden drank like all the stress made him hungry. Unlike her, she'd lost her appetite.

"It's not your fault." She stared down at Kaden's cheek, moving as he nursed. "Tana is..."

Jack moved closer and sat on the coffee table in front of her. "You don't have to put up with him. I can find an attorney that will help you divorce him. You and Kaden deserve someone that will take care of you."

She understood what Jack was telling her. He was a wonderful man. She would be lucky to have him in her life.

But she loved Tana. She was married to Tana.

Guilt that she'd asked too much of Jack, knowing he hoped for something different than friendship with her, she couldn't look him in the eyes.

Maybe if he hadn't offered to help her, she wouldn't have fallen into the habit of relying on him. She'd taken advantage of him. While pregnant, she had no one to help her until Jack stepped up and offered a hand and a shoulder.

Granted, she was no longer pregnant. But life was hard as a mom whose husband was in prison.

She swallowed and let Kaden finish nursing. When he lost interest and lazily sucked every few seconds, she removed her nipple from his mouth and put him on her shoulder. Patting his back, she got him to burp.

She stood and swayed from side to side. “Jack, I’m married. For better or worse. We might be having problems now, but I—”

“Are you going to be miserable for the rest of your life?” Jack’s gaze softened. “You deserve better.”

She looked away. It would be easy to let Jack take care of her. She wanted happiness. She wanted love. She wanted passion. She wanted everything she dreamed about on her wedding day.

“I need to put Kaden to bed. Can you see yourself out?” She walked toward the hallway.

Not waiting for him to answer, she escaped. She was getting good at escaping.



Chapter Nineteen

Hank stormed out of the bunkhouse. Tana looked at Buffalo. The three of them were supposed to separate the heroin so the other members of Serpentine Motorcycle Club could deliver the packages to the dealers.

“What’s up with him?” asked Tana.

“Jade’s going to some dance.” Buffalo separated a pile. “He’s busy preparing.”

“I haven’t even seen Jade since I got back.” Tana dropped a package in a bag. “Didn’t know she was old enough to date.”

Buffalo grunted.

Tana carried the bags they’d filled to the cot they used to put the assortment. His new job since serving his sentence was to stay on the end of packaging. He no longer had to make the deliveries.

Not because he couldn’t but because Hank wanted him to stay out of the eyes of the cops for a while. That was something he appreciated. He wasn’t looking forward to going back to prison anytime soon.

“We should be done in an hour.” Buffalo walked across the room. “Are you sticking around until they return from delivering the packages?”

“Yeah, I’ll stay.” He counted the drops.

“At least this delivery looks pure.” Buffalo returned to the crate. “Last month, it tested out as over thirty percent talcum powder.”

“Glad I’m not an addict,” mumbled Tana. “Seen enough of that inside the center.”

“Are they using inside the prison?”

“They are on the reservation. There are enough dirty guards bringing drugs in that it’s a problem. However, they aren’t going to do anything about it. It’s cheaper to lock them up.” Tana carried the bag to the cot. “Last one.”

“I’ll call Neil.” Buffalo walked outside.

Cell service was spotty everywhere because of the mountains. While Buffalo handled club business, Tana washed his hands at the back of the bunkhouse. While it was supposed to be safe, holding the packages because they were wrapped in Saranwrap, he took no chances.

Then, he walked outside and strolled over to the round pen. Miguel lassoed a horse. Tana climbed up on the top rung and sat.

“You want to give this boy a ride?” Miguel worked his way around the pen.

“He’s a beaut with a bulldog face.” Tana whistled.
“Where’s he going?”

“Eventually, he’ll join the cowboy’s stock.” Miguel rubbed the horse’s neck. “That’s if we can break him.”

“He looks calm enough.”

Miguel chuckled. “Go ahead, get on him.”

“Fuck, man.” Tana grinned. “My weight alone would break him. I’ll let you have your fun.”

Miguel was a short, slender man. Tana had about forty pounds extra on him that he couldn’t shake the last ten years.

“It’ll be my pleasure, amigo.” Miguel moved the horse to the middle of the pen.

Ian rode in, sliding off his horse and looping the reins over the hitching post. “Where’s Hank?”

Tana jumped down off the railing. “In the house. Do you want me to get him?”

“Yeah. Tell him that we found three dead steers at the base of Bearhat Peak.” Ian walked backward. “I’m going back out with the trailer to get the dead out of the pasture, but I need to know where Hank wants them to go.”

“What got them?”

“Looks like wolves.”

“I’ll tell him. Don’t leave until I get back. I’m not getting on a horse to ride out after you.” He jogged to the main house.

Tricia came out the front door carrying a throw rug. He nodded at the housekeeper and swept past her before the door shut. Striding up the stairs, he went straight to the office and knocked.

“Yeah,” shouted Hank. “Open.”

He went inside. “Ian rode in. We’ve lost some steers. He’s returning with the trailer and wants to know where you want them.”

“Those fucking wolves.” Hank threw a pen across the room. “Have him take the backhoe and dig a hole in the pasture. Burn them, and then cover ‘em up. Maybe that’ll push back the wolves.”

“Got it.” He turned to head out, and Hank called his name. “Yeah?”

“Stihl and Moon will be here on the hour. Neil will follow close behind. Make sure the bags are packed and ready for them,” said Hank.

“Already done, Prez.” He left the office.

Seeing Tricia again on his way out, he opened the door for her. “Evening.”

“You’re such a gentleman, Tana.” Tricia smiled at him, carrying the rug inside. “Thank you.”

“Not a problem.” He closed the door.

There wasn’t much gentlemen left inside of him. But Tricia treated him no differently than anyone else. She left food in the fridge for all the bikers who lived in the big house now. He no longer depended on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to get him by.

Hank asked them to keep all talk of club business away from Tricia when she spent a couple hours each day cleaning the place and ensuring there was food in the kitchen. It was almost like being married, except for the lack of sex. Tricia was off-limits to all the men.

Not that he was interested.

He exhaled harshly. Mia took up all his time whether he was around her or not. Now some other guy got her pregnant, and Tana was a big enough asshole to make her life more difficult by not letting her get a divorce.

That's what she wanted to talk to him about.

Now she had a kid by someone else. She had the audacity to face him and ask for a divorce.

He growled. If he stuck around, he would've shot the fucker who was fucking his wife and stole his life.



Chapter Twenty

Pete handed over a twenty-dollar bill through the farmhouse's kitchen window. Mia picked up a ten and held his change out to him.

"Give me a few cookies and keep the change." Pete set the sack on the dash of his truck.

"Sure thing." Mia put half a dozen cookies into a Ziplock and handed it to Pete. "Here you go."

"See you tomorrow."

"Nope." She smiled. "It's Saturday."

"Damn. That's right." Pete adjusted his baseball cap. "Boss has us separating the herd tomorrow."

"I hope you get Sunday off to rest."

"Me, too." Pete winked and drove off.

Mia closed and locked the window. Then, she washed her hands and took off her apron.

"Time to go roll on the *bumpies*, Kaden." Mia gathered her son, who had a full tummy and was content to kick his feet in the carrier. "Let's get you in the stroller."

Each day since having Kaden, she closed at one o'clock. All the cowboys knew to get to the house before she locked the kitchen window for the day, or they'd be out of luck.

Once Kaden was strapped and settled in the stroller, she checked the diaper bag to make sure she had everything for the trip to Whitefish. Then, she put the bag under the stroller and wheeled her son outside.

Making sure the umbrella was up to protect Kaden from the sun, she navigated the driveway by staying between the tire tracks where the grass grew in the middle.

She'd seen Tana ride his motorcycle between the tracks many times, but the grass grew thick and long since he was gone.

She picked up her pace, pushing the stroller faster to try and outrun any thoughts of Tana.

She turned left on the railroad track at the end of the driveway. The oversized tires on the stroller made navigating the railroad toes doable.

When she was pregnant, she loved to walk the tracks to town. She'd get lost in the familiar rhythm of stepping on every other railroad tie. For miles, she would never look up, just step, step, step.

That alone time was therapeutic to her. She'd talk to herself, talk to the baby growing inside her, and cuss out Tana for not being with her.

It was a good time to walk. She could get to town in an hour if she kept a steady pace, and Kaden slept the whole way.

She'd noticed yesterday that Kaden's toes were starting to curl in all the newborn to three-month-old sleepers. He was growing fast.

Kaden was built like his daddy. Solid and big.

She'd only need a few light sleepers to make it through the rest of summer. Before she was ready, the colder months would arrive, and Kaden would need something thicker to sleep in. But she'd cross that bridge when it came.

A car appeared in the distance on the road. She pushed the stroller, keeping steady as the wheels went over the *bumpies*. She smiled, not caring that she looked a little crazy. The victory was sweet. The stroller was the best thing she'd bought since opening Mia's Sack Lunches.

She continued walking. As planned, she made it to Whitefish two minutes after two o'clock.

The consignment shop she'd bought clothes at was on the backside of the main street. The bell on the door announced her arrival. She pushed the stroller into the store.

Wendy, who owned Clothes For All Occasions, smiled from behind the cash register before lowering her gaze and *ahhing*. "Look at him. He's getting so big."

“Tell me about it.” She pushed the stroller. “That’s why we’re here. I need bigger sleepers.”

“I know we have some sack gowns that tie at the bottom.” Wendy walked around the counter. “Some of them are brand new.”

“I’d prefer sleepers.” She followed Wendy to the back of the store where the baby clothes were hung.

“Three months?”

“We need to jump up to six or nine months, I think.” Mia thumbed through the rack. “He already weighs fourteen pounds.”

“How much did he weigh when he was born?”

“Nine pounds seven ounces.”

“Ouch.”

“Yep.” She laughed, holding up a sleeper. “This should do.”

“We have more on this side.” Wendy held a few up.

Mia picked out the boyish ones with balls and trucks. She gazed around the room, seeing if anything else caught her eye.

She’d discovered the consignment store when she was pregnant, and all her clothes were too tight. It was a cheap way to get clothes. Plus, she returned all the maternity wear, put them on consignment, and used the store credit to buy baby clothes.

“Let’s see what you have on your tab.” Wendy returned to the cash register.

Mia went over to the toys. There was a fluffy cow in brand-new condition. She held it up and inspected it. Deciding to treat Kaden to a toy, she went to the counter.

“You have three dollars and twenty-five cents in credit. Do you want to use it for your purchases?” asked Wendy.

“Sure. Thanks.”

She left the store only two dollars poorer but feeling like she'd won the lottery. Every time she accomplished something and paid for things with her money, she grew more confident that she could support herself and all Tana's money would be saved for Kaden.

On the sidewalk, she adjusted Kaden in the seat. He was young enough she kept him prone in the stroller. Awake and gnawing on his fist, she wondered how far they would get before she had to nurse him.

"I have an idea, my little wolf." She set off in the opposite direction.

She left Dairy Queen two blocks later with a butterscotch-dipped ice cream cone. Unable to push the stroller with one hand in a straight line, she sat down on the outside table and turned the stroller, so Kaden was out of the sun, and she could see him.

She couldn't remember the last time she indulged herself. Everything she'd bought since finding out she was pregnant centered around Kaden.

Yet, she felt zero guilt. She needed the treat.

After the long walk to town, the ice cream cooled her off and rejuvenated her.

"One day, you'll have an ice cream cone, too." She leaned over Kaden and cooed. "Yes, you will. And if you only listen to one thing I tell you ...butterscotch makes everything better. Remember that."

"I'm sure he's listening," said a familiar voice behind her.

She turned and smiled. "What are you doing here?"

Jack pointed at the chair beside her. She nodded and scooted over to let him sit at the table.

"I got off work early and came in to pick up dinner. I was heading back to Circle M when I spotted some beautiful red hair and realized it was you. I figured I'd stop and see if you need a ride home."

Aware of her ice cream melting quickly, she licked the drips going down the cone. “That’s nice of you to offer, but I can walk back home.”

“Yeah, but there’s no reason to be out in the heat if you can ride back in the air-conditioned truck.” He pushed back the tip of his cowboy hat and grinned. “You’re losing the battle with the ice cream, sweetheart.”

She licked faster. “I know.”

For the next several seconds, she worked at getting the ice cream down to a manageable amount. She wiggled her fingers with success. Not a drop got on her.

“Would you like a cone? My treat.” She raised her brows. “It’s really good.”

Not one to normally splurge, she knew spending a couple of dollars to give Jack a treat wouldn’t break the bank. He’d done so much for her and Kaden, she’d never be able to pay him back.

“I’d rather have some of yours.” He wrapped his fingers around her wrist and pulled her ice cream toward him.

He gazed at her as he used his tongue to lick around the top of the ice cream. Her stomach fluttered at the attention. Shocked that she could feel something, anything, after going through hell with Tana and giving birth to Kaden, she dropped the cone and jerked her hand out of his grasp.

“Whoa.” Jack made to grab the cone, and it slipped through his fingers.

“I’m so sorry.” She grabbed the handful of napkins on the table and handed them to him. “I made a mess all over you.”

“No harm.” He chuckled. “Let me buy you another cone.”

“No. Really. I don’t need another one.” She stood up. “I’m trying to lose the baby weight I gained with Kaden, anyway.”

Jack’s gaze traveled down her body. She flushed, uncomfortable but thrilled that he was looking at her. How long had it been since someone looked at her? Touched her? Spoken to her?

She swallowed hard. “I should get going.”

“I’ll give you a ride.”

“No. I couldn’t—”

“Come on. I’m not going to let you say no.” Jack tossed the napkins in the trash. “Go ahead and take Kaden out of there, and I’ll throw the stroller in the back.”

Common sense came rushing at her. She grabbed the stroller in relief.

“I don’t have Kaden’s car seat.” She smiled to soften the answer. “We can’t ride. I’ll walk.”

Jack looked left and right as if he could pull a car seat out of thin air. She patted his arm and pushed the stroller toward the sidewalk.

All she wanted to do was escape.

At the end of the block, she stopped to check for traffic and found Tana sitting at the curb on his Harley, glaring at her. Her breath choked her. From where he sat, he had a clear view of the table in front of Dairy Queen.

How long had he been there? Had he seen Jack?

Not wanting to know the answer, she looked straight ahead and pretended not to see him. She could feel the heat of his eyes on her back. Of course, he knew she’d seen him.

She had guilt written all over her face.

Her calves burned from exertion. She pushed the stroller as if the flames of hell were after her. Not stopping at the edge of town, she fought the urge to pick her feet up and start jogging, but the railroad tracks slowed her down.

Halfway home, her son cried, letting her know he’d had enough of the stroller and was hungry. Since her plan to have an ice cream, feed her son, and then walk home was thwarted, she looked for a spot where she could find shade.

A grove of aspen trees grew like a beacon out of the land a few yards off the tracks. It would only take her a few minutes

to wrangle the stroller off the tracks and through the wild grass.

The spot looked close enough to the tracks to be owned by the railroad. If not, surely the property owner wouldn't go after her for trespassing.

A hum filled the air. She looked behind her, down on the road. A lone motorcycle rider approached.

She knew who it was without even seeing his leather vest.

Ignoring Tana, she made it to the grove of trees and pushed Kaden into the shade. Out of her peripheral vision, Tana stopped at the side of the road.

For some reason, she was self-conscious to nurse Kaden with Tana watching.

She turned her back, lifted her shirt, and put her son at her breast. He latched on greedily, hungry from their outing.

She sat on the ground behind the stroller. Out of view of Tana, she inhaled deeply through her nose and exhaled out of her mouth. Her heart continued to race from her walk. The whole day had turned into a bigger ordeal than she'd planned. Good intentions gone awry, she felt it was impossible to dig herself out of the hole she'd gotten herself in with Tana.

Except, Tana was the one who had left her. Tana was the one who got arrested. Tana was the father of the baby she held in her arms.

She peeked around the stroller, keeping her head down, and looked through the tall grass. Tana still sat out on the road.

If he wanted to talk to her, he could walk over to the trees and say what was on his mind.

Kaden squirmed. She stroked his head, soothing him to finish. It wouldn't do Kaden any good if she got upset.

Once her son finished, she put him on her shoulder and gave him some love. While he did great in the stroller, she never expected him to be in it for so long. They'd have to take breaks on their outings. Maybe next time, she'd bring lunch with her and have a picnic under the trees.

She glanced over at Tana. Next time, he wouldn't be around.

“Let's go home, little wolf,” she whispered, getting onto her knees.

She put Kaden in the stroller and tucked the blanket down the side of him so he could have his legs free to kick. It was a warm day. Perfect weather to let his little toes feel the air.

She pushed the stroller back to the railroad tracks. Shoulders back, chin straight, gaze forward, she pushed Kaden past Tana. Her husband never said a word to her.

Twenty feet past him, she stopped and turned around. “Why are you following me?”

“Because you're my wife.”

She shook her head. “Only on a piece of paper.”

Tana started the Harley. She groaned. The conversation was over.

Turning back around, she pushed Kaden home. Tana followed her to the bottom of the driveway and waited until she entered the house.

Then, he rode away.



Chapter Twenty One

Stihl held up a bottle of beer. Tana shook his head. No matter how fucked up his life had become, he wouldn't make it worse with alcohol.

“It's been a long time since you stuck around and enjoyed yourself.” Stihl swatted the ass of one of the women hanging out behind the big house.

It was Saturday night. A couple of the Serpentine Motorcycle Club members had gone into Whitefish and rounded up some women for them to enjoy.

But he was about as interested in the women as he was in alcohol. He had bigger problems that needed his attention.

“What do you know about the Circle M?” he asked.

“It's a spread about a quarter of the size of Glacier Crest Ranch.” Stihl sat in one of the outdoor chairs. “It's owned by an older guy named Harold Murphy. The foreman's name is Evan. They stick with white-faced Herefords.”

He grunted.

Stihl took a drink from the bottle and then looked at Tana. “Why are you asking?”

“There's a Circle M employee that I'd like to get rid of.”

His love for Mia was enough. He'd kill the man that was replacing him in her life. He wasn't going to wait until Jack whatever-the-fuck-his-name-was walked away from Mia because nobody in their right-fucking-mind would ever walk away from her—including him.

She might believe he chose to leave her, but he'd gone to prison under no control. It was always his intention to live with her as husband and wife. He wouldn't back away and let some other man take his place.

Until that moment when he spoke his needs to Stihl, he hadn't realized that he'd chosen to accept the responsibility of raising Mia's baby.

He wanted her. *All of her.*

“If you’re serious, you must talk to Hank.” Stihl lowered his voice. “It wouldn’t be the first time we’ve taken someone to the glacier.”

The members of Serpentine Motorcycle Club had committed crimes. They’d taken lives, all for the good of the club and the community. What he wanted to do was personal.

Buffalo burst out the back door of the house and stopped on the deck. “Everyone, round up.”

Stihl glanced at Tana. He shrugged, not knowing what was going on. Buffalo and Hank were testing the heroin inside and making sure it was clean. Everyone else was waiting around, ready to do their job of packaging and distributing.

He followed the others inside. For now, they had to work within the confines of the big house until they found somewhere else to do the drugs. Hank was looking at purchasing a different location to get the activities off the ranch but, so far, had no luck.

Hank stood by the table in the dining room and whistled to get everyone’s attention. Tana leaned against the wall and crossed his arms. The club had twenty-six members now. The room was packed, and the crates of drugs were in the mix.

Hank slammed his hand down on the top of the crate. “Half the supply is dirty. We can’t sell it.”

Mac, the newest member, stepped in front of Buffalo. “Dirty with what?”

Tana stayed back. As a kid on the rez, he learned to listen before asking questions. Only when his emotions were involved, like when he fought with Mia, would he argue, fight, and leave.

“Fentanyl.”

“What’s that?” Mac moved closer to the table.

The others were all aware of the damage fentanyl caused. Anyone purposely taking fentanyl, in pill form, was committing suicide. Those who were taking heroin or popping

pills and unaware that their drug of choice was laced with fentanyl were also taking a chance they could be taking a drug that would kill them in a heartbeat.

As Hank informed Mac, showing him the test strip, Buffalo's phone rang. Tana waited to find out where they went from there. They couldn't deliver dirty drugs.

But without the supply, the addicts would go elsewhere to find their next hit. They couldn't guarantee that those drugs were clean.

"Alright, listen up." Hank pointed at Battle, Neil, Daren, and Butch. "I want all of you to take what's clean and spread them around to each distributor."

"It won't be enough." Neil grabbed the back of his neck. "Every area will be jonesin'."

"It can't be helped." Hank pointed at Moon, Tana, and Buffalo. "Get rid of what's cross-contaminated."

If the dealers couldn't give their customers what they needed, those who needed the drugs would get it elsewhere.

Packing the crate into the front room, Buffalo handed out plastic bags. Tana took four packages.

"Where are we dumping them?" asked Moon.

"We'll ride out to the glacier, open the packages and bury the drugs underground where no animals will dig it up. We'll let the elements destroy what man has made." Buffalo put two packs in his vest pockets.

"Who eats the lose?" asked Tana.

"We do." Neil met his gaze. "We'll make it up with the next delivery."

Though the packages were concealed in plastic, it was evident they were riding away from the ranch carrying something. Tana had a better idea.

"I'll round up the horses. Meet me on the other side of the round pen." He looked at Buffalo's vest and Moon's hands.

“That way, the cowboys won’t think we’ve robbed a bank. They talk enough as it is.”

“Hang on.” Hank walked into the room. “Put everything in here.”

Tana took the duffle bag. “That’ll work.”

“Now the cowboys will think we’ve got Mia’s sack lunches on us and come running for a chance to eat,” said Moon.

Tana had the front of Moon’s shirt in his hands, and his MC brother slammed against the wall before Hank could stop him.

Rage boiled out of him. He brought his arm back and fisted his hand.

“Let him go.” Hank put his arm between the two men, prying them apart. “Let’s concentrate on getting rid of the drugs. Afterward, if you want to beat the shit out of Moon, do it in your free time.”

Tana pushed Moon away from him and walked toward the round pen to grab the horse. He tried to shake off the feeling everyone except him had a piece of Mia in one way or another. It wasn’t a good feeling.

Moon caught up with Tana and walked beside him. “I meant no harm, brother.”

Tana swung open the gate. “Just keep my wife’s name out of your mouth.”

He had too many problems piling up on him. First, he needed to get rid of Jack. Then, he’d work on getting his wife back.

For now, he needed to get his mind off Mia.

“Where will they buy drugs if not from us?” He took one of the harnesses off the fence and walked out into the group of horses.

He’d been gone long enough that he wasn’t up to date on the particulars of the trade, seeing how it changed hands

quickly.

“There’s a guy at the casino who isn’t giving up his corner of the market. I imagine they’ll go to him.” Moon caught a horse. “Take this one. He can carry a big load.”

Tana grunted. “You’re not that much lighter than me, *brother*.”

Moon grinned. “Bet you twenty bucks the scale tips forty pounds heavier for you.”

“We’ve got better things to do.” He readied the horse and then pulled himself up into the saddle with a grunt.

He wasn’t built for horse riding. He was more comfortable on the seat of his Harley.



Chapter Twenty Two

Mia quietly closed the nursery door and tiptoed down the hallway with the receiver for the baby monitor in her hand. After testing the monitor for two days, she was satisfied that if Kaden cried, choked, gasped, or coughed, she'd hear him.

Jack had brought the setup to her over the weekend. Apparently, his sister had used it for her babies and no longer needed it since her kids were now in school.

Since she started using it, Kaden slept longer and seemed more content now that he was getting adequate sleep during the day and night. Which put her in a better mood, too.

She entered the kitchen. If she worked fast, she'd have a full hour to deep clean. Weekends went by quickly, but it helped if she started Mondays with a clean kitchen and stocked supplies.

Grabbing a handful of rags from the bottom drawer, she'd start with the ceiling fan that sadly got ignored for the last four months since Kaden was born. She filled the sink with warm, soapy water.

Shutting off the faucet, she cocked her head as a rumble replaced the whoosh of water. The noise grew louder. Her stomach flipped in anticipation and trepidation.

She threw the rag in the water, grabbed the receiver, and rushed to the front of the house, knowing exactly who was arriving. Going out on the porch, she waved her hands over her head, motioning Tana to stop and turn off his motorcycle before he woke Kaden.

He continued to ride straight to the porch. She shook her head in disapproval.

Once he cut the engine, she held up the receiver and listened. Exhaling in relief that Kaden still slept through the noise of Tana's arrival, she looked at him.

“What do you want?” The rudeness rolled off her tongue before she could contain her irritation. “It’s not the beginning of the month.”

Typically, he gave her money at the beginning of each month. When he was in prison, Serpentine Motorcycle Club mailed her an envelope with cash.

“We need to talk.” Tana got off the Harley.

“I’ve told you that same thing before, but something always happens to stop us from having a conversation, and I never get to say what I need to say.” She sighed.

Tana stared at her. Unable to read his face, she tried to calm down.

“What made you come today?” she asked.

“Because that fuck—” He closed his mouth and looked away from her.

She frowned, watching him. She was surprised that he tried to control his temper.

He returned his gaze to her and worked his jaw. “I knew you were alone.”

Understanding dawned on her. Every time he’d come around, Jack had been with her.

She inhaled deeply. So, he wanted to get everything out in the open when it was convenient for him. He never even thought about the fact that she had a baby to care for, and her time wasn’t hers.

She half hoped Kaden would wake up and demand her time so she could delay the inevitable.

“Can we go inside?” asked Tana.

“Can you keep your voice down while we talk?” She held up the receiver. “The baby is sleeping.”

Hurt flashed over his face before he schooled his features. He nodded. Since it was half his house, she couldn’t keep him outside.

It *was* past time to talk to him.

Part of that was her fault. She feared losing him.

He could take the news badly.

When they were first married and getting along, they were all up in each other's business. It was always about Tana and Mia. Their wishes centered around finding more time together.

Then, the fights started, and everything changed between them. Kids were never a subject of those rare times they had sex during their separation.

She was nervous about discussing how she'd become pregnant from the last time they had sex and how she went through the pregnancy alone and had a child without any input from him—well, she wasn't sure how he'd react to suddenly having a son.

She led him inside and closed the door. She pointed to the couch and sat on the other end. She needed distance to get through their talk.

"Where do you want to start?" she asked, hoping to delay a full-blown emotional confession until she gathered more courage.

"Do you love him?" asked Tana.

She sucked in a breath. He wasn't messing around.

Well, either was she.

"I love him with my whole heart." She met his gaze. "Until him, I had no idea I could love someone so much that I was willing to give up everything I'd ever known for him."

The muscle in Tana's jaw bulged with emotions. She raised her chin. Over the last year, she'd matured. Her priorities were becoming clearer.

She no longer depended on anyone. She was independent, supported herself financially, and became a stable person in her desire to be the best mom for Kaden.

She wasn't willing to lose everything she'd gained. She wanted to add to it.

For her sake and Kaden's sake.

Her love for Tana had never left her. But her priorities had changed.

She was stronger.

To her surprise, she'd become a fighter.

She could fight for herself.

She could fight for Tana.

And she would fight to the ends of the earth for their son.

If she had to spend the rest of her days proving to Tana where her priorities lay, she would.

Tana's Adam apple bobbed in his silence. All he gave her in return was a stony stare. She hated the cushion on the couch separating them. Their life together should never have ended where they were scared to touch and love one another.

"I won't..." His lips thinned.

She swallowed hard. Had things changed so much that he found it hard to talk with her? Had he stopped loving her?

Tana stood. She reached for him to keep him there but dropped her arm before he could see her trying hard not to cry. She swallowed hard, trying to hide her emotions.

"Fuck, Mia. You were always supposed to be mine. You were supposed to love me." Tana clutched his head and looked at her. "I won't let another man have you. Fight me all you want, but at the end of the day, you belong to me. You're my wife."

Her stomach fluttered. She pressed her thighs together. It took her a few seconds to realize he wasn't talking about her love for her son.

"W-who do you think I love?" she whispered.

"That fucker." He pointed toward the door. "Jack."

Her jaw unhinged. She stared at him. He was upset because he believed she loved Jack?

"Oh, Tana." She shook her head. "You—"

A sharp cry filled the room. Startled, she dropped the receiver, quickly scooped it off the floor, and stood.

“I have to...” She hurried out of the room when Tana refused to look at her.

Her thoughts circled. Tana had the wrong idea about everything.

He thought she loved Jack. He hadn't even asked about Kaden.

Opening the nursery, she went straight to the blackout blinds and raised them, letting in the daylight. At the crib, Kaden gnawed on his fist, intermittently crying.

“You have your daddy's temper and bad sense of timing,” she whispered, picking her son up and cuddling him.

Wetness soaked into her shirt. She pulled him away and looked down the front of her. He'd wet through his clothes.

“No wonder you're unhappy.” She put him on the changing table. “Let's get you cleaned. I have someone you need to meet.”

The accident was bad timing. Though, she'd learned little boys had a talent for leaking through their diapers.

Meeting his father would have to wait until Kaden was changed into a new outfit.

She strapped him onto the changing table, went into the bathroom, and got a wet, warm washcloth.

Because Tana was in the living room, she yelled, “Give me a minute. I have to change the baby.”

She returned to the room and quickly wiped her son down. Then, she put a fresh diaper on him and picked out one of the outfits he hadn't worn before. It was a pair of baby jeans with a little blue T-shirt with the phrase ‘Giddy-up’ printed on the front.

Lastly, she swept his baby hair to the side and watched it fall back in place. He had jet-black hair like his father. Stick straight and silky.

Growing up, she always thought if she had kids, they'd have red hair like her and be covered in freckles.

Kaden was the opposite of her in all the good ways.

Along with his black hair, he had a darker complexion than her and brown eyes. He didn't have one freckle—she'd looked.

She imagined when her son grew up, he would be built like Tana. Already, he was a solid little boy.

He was an adorable infant who would be a mischievous little boy who grew up to be a handsome, strong man.

She tucked in his shirt, leaned over, and kissed his nose. "Let's go meet your daddy."

Mia picked Kaden and placed him against her shoulder, keeping him away from the small wet spot on her side. Soon, he'd get hungry—he was always hungry. She'd need to introduce Tana to his son before her attention was pulled away to feed Kaden, and she could change into a clean shirt.

No matter what happened, she needed to hold it together. She needed to remain strong and dependable.

"Tana?" She carried Kaden to the living room. "I want you to meet—"

A rumble of a motorcycle sparked to life outside. Kaden startled in her arms and cried. His little body stiffened.

Knowing her son would be okay, she ran to the door and stepped out on the porch. Tana rode down the driveway, not even looking back.

Tears burned her eyes. She stared at the black-clothed figure on the Harley. The situation was worse than she'd imagined.

Tana believed she loved Jack and wouldn't even listen to her.



Chapter Twenty Three

Tana threw open the door of his bedroom in the big house at Glacier Crest Ranch after finishing twenty-four hours in the back pasture, going after the wolves terrorizing the herd. He stormed straight to the closet. Taking the box off the shelf, he brought the container to the bed and opened it up.

He shoved his hand underneath the folded blanket and removed the nine millimeter he kept there. It was a clean weapon—no telling marks and unregistered. The barrel had been smooth bored. There was no way for the authorities to track him down if he used the pistol.

Stihl stepped into the room. “What’s got you running hot?”

“Not running.” He opened the box of ammunition. “I’m going hunting.”

“The cattle are moved. We can let the rest of the wolves roam that area. They’ll eventually move on after realizing the cowboys moved the herd to the front pasture, and they lost their free meals.”

Stihl stood beside him. Tana wasn’t hiding. Mia spit it out in the open the last time he talked to her. She loved Jack.

“I’m not hunting wolves.”

“What are you hunting?”

“Not what. Who.” Tana took a handful of ammo and dropped it in his vest pocket. “Let Prez know if I don’t return, I want Mia taken care of.”

“Fuck, man.” Stihl grabbed the back of Tana’s vest. “You’re not running off alone.”

“It’s personal.” He met his MC brother’s gaze. “I’m not involving the club.”

Stihl pushed him toward the door. “Fill me in on the way to my bike.”

Understanding flashed between the two men. If Tana ever questioned the loyalty from wearing the same patch and

colors, his doubts were pushed away by what he viewed in Stihl's eyes.

Outside, Tana tucked the pistol underneath his belt. "His name's Jack. He's a cowboy over at Circle M."

"We can't ride over there and demand to see him." Stihl kept in step with him.

"We'll stake out the entrance and wait until he leaves." He stopped at his Harley. "He'll probably go see Mia soon. When he does, I'll be ready."

"You need to think things through."

"I'm done thinking." He started his bike and raised his voice. "I want my wife back."

"I hear you, brother." Stihl got on his Harley.

Together, they rode away from the house.

Halfway to the road, coming down the driveway, Hank motioned for them to stop. Tana's muscles tensed. He'd had too many setbacks. He needed to go now.

Behind Hank on the motorcycle sat Jade. He must've picked her up at the bus stop.

"What's up?" asked Hank.

Stihl motioned for Tana to talk first. His natural response was to ride away. He'd struggled and fought his whole life to dig himself out of poverty. Then, he'd done everything he could to keep Mia safe and happy. It was his instinct to take care of business himself.

She and he fought like two pissed-off cats in a cage together, but he would do everything for her.

He swore to love, protect, and take care of her.

It was his job.

"I'm going to get my wife back." He held Hank's gaze, not wanting to say more because Jade was listening.

Hank protected the kid, keeping her away from any of the Serpentine Motorcycle Club business. No one was allowed to

speak about what goes down in the MC around Jade.

“Do I even want to know?” asked Hank.

“No,” said Tana and Stihl at the same time.

Since Tana had gone to prison, Hank never left the ranch. Any club business done off the ranch was completed by a member of the motorcycle club.

Hank looked off into the distance. “Do you need a crew to go out with you?”

“No.” Tana shifted his weight on his bike.

“Watch out for each other.” Hank rode toward the main house.

Tana headed out, followed by Stihl. The Circle M was fifteen minutes away. As he rode, he kept his gaze on the road, looking for a navy blue Ford pickup.

He wasn't irrational or impatient. To take Jack out of the picture, he would have to confront him when he was alone. There couldn't be any witnesses.

His hunt was short-lived. The fucker was parked in front of the farmhouse as he rode past on the county road.

He motioned to Stihl, then pointed up ahead toward a grove of trees. There was nothing he could do while the asshole was with Mia.

After he parked, he shut off the engine and hopped off the Harley. Excess energy made it impossible to sit still. It seemed like forever since he'd been with Mia.

She could yell all she wanted at him, but in the end, she'd honor their marriage.

He pushed his fingers through his hair. It ate at him that Jack was with her now like the fucker had a right to be at the house.

“I didn't know the guy you're after was fucking around with your wife.” Stihl frowned, gazing up at the farmhouse. “Sorry, man.”

There was no place for pity. He was away for a year. It was his job to take care of his wife.

He'd failed.

He had no one to blame but himself.

Self-hate fueled his need to take Jack out of the equation. It was the easiest way to get his wife back.

"I planned to return to her the night I got arrested." He gritted his teeth. "We'd decided to live together again."

"Shit," muttered Stihl.

"The damn reservation wouldn't let her in to see me because my Blackfeet registration card was on me when I got arrested." He inhaled deeply. "She's not from the rez. She had no idea how to navigate around those controlling the center. No one to ask for help."

"Why didn't you tell one of us when we visited you in prison?"

"Because I didn't want anyone around my wife."

Stihl clicked his tongue. Tana stared across the road and up the hill to the house. He'd fucked up.

Maybe the club could've stopped her from seeing Jack. Maybe they could've warned him that she was seeing someone else.

"I don't know, man," he muttered. "I just want her back."

Stihl stared up at the house. "He thinks your sugar is sweeter."

"He ain't going to think anything when he's dead." Tana gritted his teeth.

The adrenaline high he rode out on from Glacier Crest Ranch had waned during his talk with Stihl. He was full of regrets and nothing much else.

"You know what I'd do?" Stihl pointed. "I'd ride up there and go home. No matter what's happening between you and your woman, you own the house. She belongs to you. You can

kick the asshole out and keep him away from your woman if you're there. If you don't go home, all you can do is kill the fucker, and the chances are high that you'll end up in prison again. You'll lose her for sure if that happens."

What Stihl said made sense. Except there were bigger problems.

"She had his kid while I was away."

Stihl shook his head. "You either want her or you don't."

He wanted her more than he wanted to go on living without her. He started his Harley, looked at Stihl, and dipped his chin in respect.

Then, he rode home.



Chapter Twenty Four

Mia packed the last sandwich into the sack. “Thirty-six roast beef sandwiches.” She grabbed the next full sack. “Twenty sides of coleslaw salad.” Moving around the kitchen table, she picked up the last bag. “Five cherry pies, and I included a handful of plastic forks, but you’ll have to find a knife.”

“Thanks.” Jack stood near her, holding Kaden on his shoulder. “I meant to get over here sooner, but I had to help load the steers into the trailer, and the truck was running late.”

“No problem.” She smiled. “I was running late myself. I doubt if I could’ve got it done without someone holding Kaden. He’s teething and likes to be held. One of his bottom teeth broke through yesterday, but you can tell his other one is right under the skin, ready to appear.”

“Give him some beef jerky to chew on.” Jack chuckled.

“It’s good that you’re a cowboy and not a pediatrician.” Mia laughed. “Keep holding him, and I’ll run these sacks out to your truck.”

“I can get them.”

“No.” She softened her voice. “You’ve got the magic touch with him this morning. I’m enjoying the silence.”

She hefted the bag into her arms and walked out the front door. Jack had parked by the porch, out of the way of the drive-up window to the kitchen. Without his help with Kaden, she’d still be making sandwiches.

Leaving the truck door open, she ran back inside and picked up the next bag. The whole time she loaded everything into the vehicle, Jack paced around her house, putting Kaden under his spell. She couldn’t help smiling. To see her son content and not cranky was a mother’s joy.

Once she finished, she stood on the porch with Jack and held out her arms, then hugged her chest before she could take

the baby. “Maybe you should take the day off and spend the day with me. He’s so content in your arms.”

“Boss wouldn’t like that. Either would all the men waiting for their sack lunch.”

She pouted. He was right. She couldn’t be selfish.

A rumble distracted her. She peered down the driveway and groaned. Tana’s arrival came at the worst time. Once he noticed Jack at the house, he’d go ballistic.

Kaden’s cries broke through the growing noise. She stepped over to take her son from Jack, but the cowboy ignored her. He gazed at Tana, and his hold on Kaden never budged.

She worked her hands in worry. Tana misunderstood what was going on.

All she knew, from the bottom of her heart, was that she had a son, and nothing, and no one would take him away from her.

She had a business that supported her and the baby. She could raise Kaden on her own if Tana no longer loved her.

A heaviness settled in her chest. How had they become that couple? That couple who got lost along the way to finding their happily-ever-after?

She no longer knew Tana’s feelings. Extreme sadness threatened to take her to her knees. There was a time, even when they fought, she could see the passion and love coming through.

She was blind to what was going on in her own life. A spectator.

Tana pulled around Jack’s truck and stopped next to the porch, where he always parked when he lived at the house. She swallowed hard. It was late morning. Tana worked during the day. What was he doing here?”

Tana shut off his motorcycle without looking at her. He threw his leg over the seat and grabbed his duffle. Mia’s eyes widened, watching him step onto the porch.

He stopped beside her. Her heart thrummed at the closeness. She almost forgot Jack held Kaden on her other side. The air crackled with electricity.

He met her gaze. "I'm staying."

Lightheaded and shocked, she nodded.

His gaze raised from her and intensified as he focused on Jack. "I won't put up with another man stopping by to see my wife. If I see you again, I'll kill you."

Mia gasped, reaching for Kaden. There would be no violence around her son.

"You should go," she whispered, taking Kaden from Jack.

Jack's whiskered jaw twitched in frustration, and he studied her. "You're okay with him staying here?"

"He's my husband." She held Kaden to her chest as if that statement was enough to explain her relationship to Jack.

"You've got my number if you need—"

"I'll be fine." She stepped back, letting him know she could handle Tana alone.

While Jack probably thought she needed help, considering how much she'd leaned on him over the last year, it was best to deal with Tana alone.

She understood that her friendship with Jack only made the situation more complicated.

Once Jack was in the truck, Tana walked into the house. Mia stayed out on the porch, needing to breathe.

She swayed from side to side, clinging to Kaden, who'd gone back to sleep during the most stressful time for his momma. If only Mia could blink and be done with telling Tana about her pregnancy, about growing her business, about how hard it'd been over the last year, and about her friendship with Jack.

All she wanted was to heal and get over her bitterness toward Tana.

Whether he deserved the blame or not, she couldn't deny that she'd spent hours, days, weeks, and months pissed off at her husband for not being here when she needed him.

Unable to put off talking with Tana, she pulled all the strength coursing through her body and turned around. Tana was going to listen to her. She wouldn't let him leave the house and avoid her any longer.

She went into the house, past Tana in the living room, and straight to the nursery. Putting her son in the crib, she turned on the monitor and picked up the receiver.

Then, she shut the door in case Tana raised his voice.

She had an hour, if lucky, to discuss the last year with Tana without Kaden waking up.

Mia returned to the living room. Tana wasn't there.

A *thunk, thunk, thunk* came from the kitchen. The booted footsteps against the hardwood floors were a familiar sound she'd missed.

Tana walked with purpose and determination. He wasn't a person who paced or dawdled. He knew where he needed or wanted to go, and he went.

She stepped into the room. Tana stood in front of the refrigerator.

"There's beer in the house," he said.

She walked around the table in the middle of the room and stood by the sink. "You've been gone a long time."

He looked over his shoulder at her. His gaze traveled down and stopped at her breasts. She'd worn an older white T-shirt because it hid the wet marks from leaking better than a darker-colored shirt when she worked. Through the window, the cowboys couldn't tell it was past time to feed Kaden.

But if someone looked closely, they could tell the T-shirt was stained yellow right on top of her nipples.

She refused to cover herself.

Tana knew her body before she had a child. She was no longer the slim, young girl that married him. Her hips were wider from carrying his son. Her thighs were solid from all the walks into town. And her breasts were heavy with milk and two sizes bigger.

What he couldn't see were the stretchmarks and the flabby pouch on her lower stomach that her tight jeans hid.

Knowing everything that was different and probably a turnoff to Tana, she still stood there soaking him in and wishing he was here to stay.

He grunted and dragged his gaze back to her face before he looked away. She swallowed hard. She was no longer his.

She had a child.

She was a mom.

She couldn't make all that disappear to make him happy. Those things wouldn't change, and if he thought about the differences in her, he'd realize that he was the one who made her pregnant. He was fifty percent responsible for why she'd changed.

"When does the kid leave?" asked Tana.

As if splashed with frigid water from the arctic, Mia stilled. Her next breath never came. She tingled all over. Pain seared through her chest.

"*The kid?*" She barely managed to move her lips.

No one had ever called Kaden a kid. He was a baby. An infant. A three-month-old. *Her son.*

The disassociation coming from Tana raised the hair on the back of her neck.

"That's what I said." Tana shut the refrigerator door and turned toward her. "I want time with my wife. Only my wife."

"Your wife has to take care of the *kid*." Her upper lip quivered. "Your wife isn't going to leave the *kid*. The *kid* is going to stay in this house."

Tana opened his mouth.

Her hand came up, and she pointed at him. “The *kid* is your baby. A baby you weren’t here to see grow inside of me. A *kid* that I squeezed out of my body by myself while you were locked up in prison. A *kid* who I fed and changed and rocked and bathed and—”

“What did you say?” Tana’s gaze narrowed, and he tilted his head, staring at her hard.

The copious emotional and physical weight of doing everything alone without a husband fell on top of her, making it impossible to breathe before she said, “The *kid* is your son.”

Tana whipped around, fire shooting in his gaze. Mia held her ground. A mama bear, standing up, protecting her baby.



Chapter Twenty Five

Tana stared at Mia, saying the words she'd spoken over and over in his head. Had she claimed the baby belonged to him?

He'd been gone a year. Add on several weeks after he was released when he'd stayed at Glacier Crest Ranch.

"How old is the kid?" When she hesitated, he raised his voice. "How *old* is the *kid*?"

Mia snapped to attention and shook her head. "Keep your voice down. You'll wake Kaden."

Kaden? He rocked back on the heels of his boots. Tana's first name was Kaden. Kaden Montana Graywolf. Everyone called him Tana.

"I've been trying to tell you." Mia stepped forward. "You won't listen."

He put his hand up, keeping her away from him. Inside, he boiled. He had no idea if he wanted to tear down the farmhouse with his bare hands or shout in elation.

He couldn't trust himself right now.

"Tana." She inhaled deeply. "If you remember the last time, before you disappeared—"

"I didn't fucking disappear. I went to prison."

She blinked extra-long. "Yes. You went to prison. But before you left, we had sex. You didn't use a condom."

That was the only time he'd forgotten. She couldn't tell him that he got her pregnant because he'd gone without a condom once in his fucking life.

She was fucking around with Jack.

Maybe Jack was the kid's dad.

Serpentine Motorcycle Club had brought in a lot of money. Money that had gone to Mia until he walked out of the correction center. Maybe she'd turned into a money-hungry—

“I found out I was pregnant two months later.” She paused. “Do the math, Tana.”

With all the information she’d given him, he couldn’t think. He couldn’t add two and two together.

“It’s July.” She bugged her eyes.

She wanted him to say something. The only thing that came to mind was something he wanted to pretend never existed. But he’d had the truth thrown in his face several times since he walked out of the cell.

“You’re fucking Jack,” he blurted.

Refusing to look away, he willed her to tell the truth. He’d spent the last several years loving her, fighting with her, and making up with her.

She belonged to him, damnit. She was his wife.

“Don’t be rude.” Mia snarled. “Jack has nothing to do with us.”

“He has everything to do with us if he’s had his dick between your legs.” He stepped around her and went into the living room.

The urge to walk out the door and ignore the argument. Ignore the fight. Ignore the differences of opinion pulsed inside of him. It’s how he dealt with their relationship in the past.

But a kid was involved. A kid Mia was trying to pawn off on him.

He wouldn’t pay for someone else’s mistake because everyone in Whitefish knew he had money coming in every month from Glacier Crest Ranch and Serpentine Motorcycle Club.

“Tana, don’t you leave.”

He stopped and turned around. “Why did you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Get together with someone else.” He bit down on his anger. “You’re married to me.”

“You’re not listening.” She poked him in the chest. “I had your son while you were gone. Do you think I had time to think about sex? I couldn’t even handle being married to you. How would I handle someone else?”

A baby’s whimper broke the heated silence between them. Mia held up her hand, holding a monitor, and thrust it toward him.

He took the walkie-talkie thing. She hurried out of the room and disappeared down the hall. He stepped over to the coffee table and leaned over to set the receiver down when Mia’s voice came over the gadget.

“Hey, little wolf. Let’s get you changed, and you can finally meet your daddy.”

Tana let go of the receiver and straightened. His heart pounded. What was he supposed to do?

Not once had he given any thought to the kid being his. He rubbed his hands over his face. He couldn’t think. There was too much information.

“Don’t let his gruff voice scare you.” Mia cooed from the other room. “He’s mad at mommy, but once he can see that you’re his son, he’s going to love you.”

Tana clutched his head. Was she telling him the truth? Was the kid in the other room his?

He wanted to bolt. He needed time to think without all the pressure in his head.

Mia came into the living room. He glanced at her and then gawked.

She held the baby against her shoulder. “Do you want to hold him?”

He shook his head. His hands shook. He had an earthquake going on inside of him. He’d drop the baby.

Mia stopped in front of him and shifted, flipping the baby onto his back. The kid blinked, staring into the air.

Tana rubbed the back of his neck. Mia was pale as the moon and covered with freckles. The baby was brown with black hair.

He stared into brown eyes. At the moment, he couldn't remember the color of Jack's hair. He hadn't gotten close enough to the man to look at the color of his eyes. But he knew for fucking sure Jack wasn't Native American.

He glanced at Mia. She studied him.

Going back to looking at the baby, Tana's chest hurt. He'd had sex with Mia before getting arrested for stealing the car.

He was in a hurry and skipped wearing a condom.

They'd made plans for him to move back home.

They were going to make a solid effort in their marriage. They'd only survive and stay together if he lived under the same roof.

He stumbled backward, hitting the couch. Needing to sit down, he stepped around the arm of the sofa and let himself fall to the cushion.

He had a kid?

Rubbing his hands over his face, he tried to understand how everything happened while he was gone. Mia had given birth on her own, without him. He should've been here.

Mia sat beside him. Thigh to thigh.

He looked at the baby. She'd turned him around so they both could look at the boy.

His little red lips worked together every time he grunted, trying to move. He wiggled a lot.

Little hands fisted and raised. The boy attacked his clenched hand, smacking his lips against his tiny fingers.

Tiny fingers, more delicate than a dandelion stem, constantly moved. How could a baby survive being that small?

“He’s always hungry.” Mia laughed softly. “Like you.”

His gut tightened. She breastfed the kid. His kid.

He rubbed his palm over his jaw. It was hard to accept that Mia’s body belonged to the baby, not him.

“Why didn’t you tell...?” He pressed his lips together.

She was alone the last year, thinking he chose to run away from her. Even if she wanted help, she wouldn’t have sought out the club because she was mad at him.

He knew Mia better than anyone. She was a proud woman.

She hated appearing weak—almost to a fault.

He’d gotten her pregnant. Because of his incarceration, she’d had the baby alone. She hated him. And for a good reason. He should’ve been here.

He exhaled roughly. How could he make up a year?

The baby. Kaden. The kid cried out, tired of being stared at.

Mia shifted him to her left arm and lifted the front of her shirt. Tana jumped to his feet and hit the door before Mia could stop him. Outside on the porch, he inhaled deep breaths, drowning in the knowledge dumped on him today. He was a father.

He married Mia to take care of her for the rest of his life. He’d fucked up.

Even before Mia got pregnant, he’d handled their marriage wrong in all ways. Prison had given him time to consider what was important in his life and how he’d do things differently if he could.

Then, he came back and let his anger get the best of him. He wanted to make things better, not worse.

He’d fought and argued with Mia on a weekly basis, believing he had all the time in the world to make it up to her. But marriage wasn’t like that. Life was short, and shit happened.

He stepped into the doorway and leaned against the frame. Mia sat on the couch, calm as an angel, with the baby at her breast.

That was his baby. His son. His wife.

While he had never talked about having a child with Mia, he'd assumed they would, eventually. She was young. Jesus.

He gawked at her. Nineteen years old, and she'd gone through hell...with him, for him, because of him. Yet, she sat on the couch, loving his son for both of them.

“Are you okay?” Emotions clogged his throat. “He didn't hurt you? I didn't hurt you?”

Mia's raised brows relaxed, and her lips softened. “Women have babies all the time, Tana.”

He was a big guy. The kid looked big. Mia was slender and small. It physically hurt him to imagine her going through the pain of childbirth.

“I would've...” He blew out his breath. “If I had known, I never would've—”

“I believe you.” She lifted her chin. “Come and meet your son. He needs a daddy.”

“Is that what Jack was around here for?”

Mia cocked her brow. He couldn't forget that there was someone else involved.

“We'll talk about him later. Right now, I want you to meet your son.”

He stepped over to the couch in time to see the kid's lips fall from her nipple. His cock pulsed in awareness. It'd been a long fucking time since he enjoyed Mia.

She held the baby, cradling his head and putting him in a sitting position on her lap. As she easily handled the infant, she patted the boy's back, getting a burp out of him.

“I named him Kaden Montana Graywolf because I wasn't sure how you'd want to name your son.” She rubbed the baby's cheek with her thumb. “I call him Kaden most of the

time but also Wolf because of our last name. He's like a little puppy when he mews."

"Wolf is good." He swallowed.

In his tribe, an elder in the family usually gave the child a name. But since he had no family left and Mia had taken the responsibility onto herself to birth and care for his son on her own, she had the right to name him anything she wanted.

He was honored that she'd incorporated his name into their son's name.

"He weighed nine pounds and seven ounces when he was born." She glanced at him. "He's a big boy."

He nodded. Just looking at him, he could tell his son was strong.

"He was born the day after April Fool's Day." She laughed. "Two minutes after midnight. Thank goodness. I didn't want him saddled with jokes for the rest of his life."

She shifted. "Put your hands out in front of you. You want to hold the back of his neck and let his head settle right against your fingers. Then put your other hand under his little butt."

"I'll break him."

She laughed. "He's tougher than you think."

He followed her directions. It wasn't like he hadn't seen someone hold a baby before.

As soon as she took her hands away and he realized he held his tiny son in his hands, he wanted to give him back. He was too small.

One wiggle, and his son would slip right out of his hands.

"You're okay." Mia leaned against his arm. "He's sleepy right now, but when he wakes up, you'll see that he has your brown eyes."

She looked at him with blue eyes, blinking her pale lashes at him. He wondered if she could hear his heart beating.

He broke his gaze and turned his attention to his son. There were a million things he needed to do, and he had no idea where to start.

“I don’t know how you did it?” he whispered. “I should’ve been here.”

Mia inhaled deeply. “You’re here now.”

“We need to be a family. I want to be a family. For you. For our son.” His eyes burned, soaking in every detail about his baby. “No more running.”

“No more fighting,” she whispered.

“We’re both stubborn.”

She blinked. “Stubborn enough to make our marriage work?”

“Yeah.” He turned his head and kissed the top of Mia’s head. “Just us.”

“It’s always been just us.”

Knowing he’d do anything for his wife and son, he kept quiet about what he thought about Jack being at the house.

He was home. He wasn’t leaving.



Chapter Twenty Six

Mia stood outside the barn, surrounded by Serpentine Motorcycle Club members after taking a walk-through tour of the stables and having Tana educate her on the acreage beyond the barns and in front of the mountains. Glacier Crest Ranch was bigger than she had imagined.

Now that she understood how profitable and sprawling the ranch was, she could see why Tana was needed to run such a big ranch.

She rocked the stroller back and forth with one hand while she kept her hand in Tana's back pocket.

Her husband was not much of a talker, so when he informed the others that he was married and introduced her and Kaden to his coworkers and biker brothers as his family, she couldn't take her eyes off him.

He was proud.

It was the first time she'd witnessed that in him. She couldn't stop smiling. Being here with him made her feel accepted and beautiful. And, loved.

Mac stepped forward. "It's good to see you out of the kitchen, Mia."

Beside her, Tana hardened. She squeezed his ass without letting anyone else know. Tana was bothered by the familiar way Mac addressed her. She wanted to assure him that there was nothing unusual going on.

"I'm surprised anyone can recognize me without flour on my face and without my old apron on." She smiled, leaning into Tana to ease him into accepting the men were customers of Mia's Sack Lunches.

A lot of the cowboys in the round pen had visited the farmhouse. Until today, she had assumed most of them came from Circle M and the surrounding ranches. She was surprised that she also recognized customers from Glacier Crest Ranch.

“Mia, this is Hank.” Tana turned her toward the man beside him. “The president of the MC and the owner of the ranch.”

Having heard Tana was on business for the club when he stole a car and got arrested, she wasn't prepared to like any bikers, especially the president. She squeezed the handle of the stroller.

“It's nice to meet you.” She forced a smile.

“Pleasure.” Hank widened his stance. “Has Tana showed you around the ranch?”

“Mm hm.” She leaned against Tana. “It's beautiful.”

Hank was a big man. Though his voice was pleasant, the roughness around his eyes warned her away.

Tana put his arm around her shoulders. “We're going to take off.”

Kaden had slept longer than she'd expected. All the rolling around in his stroller had lulled him into sleep. The noise from the ranch sang to him. But, soon, he'd wake up hungry and screaming his head off if he couldn't eat.

She removed her hand from his back pocket and pushed the stroller toward the truck Tana had borrowed from the ranch to bring her here today.

Not having a vehicle to accommodate Kaden, Tana would have to take her home, drop her off, and then return to the ranch and get his Harley.

“What do you think?” asked Tana.

“The ranch is big.” She stopped beside the pickup and unfastened Kaden from the stroller, lifting him out. “Bigger than I thought. The horses are gorgeous. Though, I can't say if the cattle are pretty or not.”

He chuckled. “And the club?”

She stilled, holding Kaden. “The club took you away from me.”

Several seconds passed. Tana finally moved to fold the stroller and put it in the back of the truck.

They'd never talked about what he was doing for Serpentine Motorcycle Club that night he got arrested. She understood that whatever he was doing, he would've landed in prison regardless of whether he'd stolen a car.

She never pressed him for answers because she feared he'd demand to know what happened between her and Jack while he was gone. Over the last several days, he'd refrained from asking her.

It was too much to hope that he'd forget.

He would never understand her side of things. All the fear and loneliness she'd gone through.

She climbed into the truck's cab once Kaden was secured in the car seat. Visiting the ranch was such a normal thing to do. She had a hard time remembering why he hadn't invited her to where he worked before.

In fact, she wondered why he had never invited his coworkers over for a barbeque before or introduced her to their girlfriends or wives. There were so many things they hadn't done in their marriage. Now that she could see past their relationship, she could take some blame for not settling down.

Her mom had never taught her by example. The television shows she'd watched as a kid taught her more about how families worked than her home life.

Now that she had a son, she wanted Kaden to experience his parents together and grasp what a normal family should be like. She wanted to show him they could work separately, have friends together, and share interests in their lives.

There was a community surrounding him. A whole world for him to explore as he got older. She wanted him to have the confidence to find what makes him happy.

Once they pulled onto the country road, Tana glanced at her. "I need to ride out tonight after I take the truck back."

Her stomach clenched. “When do you think you’ll be home?”

“Probably not until early morning.”

She stared out the windshield. The fear of losing Tana never lessened after he’d returned home. Only her reaction to him had changed.

She had a son to take care of now. But that hadn’t lessened her need to have Tana with her. She’d just got him back.

The insecurities crept in.

“What is the club making you do?” she asked.

“Club business.” He slowed around the corner. “Nothing more.”

His answer told her nothing. She chewed the inside of her cheek. Learning about some of his jobs at the ranch today was only a distraction from what the motorcycle club made him do. She wanted to remove every secret from their lives.

“Will whatever you’re doing be illegal?” She looked at him. “Can you get arrested?”

“Enough, Mia.” He gripped the top of the steering wheel. “You take care of Kaden, and I’ll take care of my family.”

“You weren’t taking care of me when you were arrested and imprisoned.” Her temper snapped.

She could no longer keep her anger inside than allow him to walk away from her without a reason. It wasn’t fair that she had to sit back and let him do whatever he wanted when she was responsible for raising her son and running her business.

The truck suddenly slowed. Pressed against the seatbelt, she grabbed for the dash when Tana pulled off the road and shoved the gearshift into park.

“What are you doing?” She checked Kaden.

He’d slept through the rough ride.

“He’s fine.” He glared at her. “Do you want to get into it now? Because I’m not going to ride off tonight, knowing when

I get home, you'll fight with me.”

She pursed her lips. He wasn't going to tell her what to do.

“I'm out earning money for my family.” His brows lowered. “While you're making friends with the local cowboys.”

She sucked in a breath. “So, you're going to go there? Are you sure?”

It was wishful thinking that he wouldn't throw Jack in her face if she got on him about the MC.

“You're my *wife*.”

She panted with frustration. The urge to storm out of the truck and walk back to the farmhouse boiled inside her because she refused to leave Kaden alone with Tana.

“Where were you when I needed you?” She hissed. “Where were you when I had your son?”

He growled. All the pent-up anger, hurt, confusion, and bitterness bubbled out.

“Jack was here for me. He took me to every doctor's appointment and waited outside in the parking lot to take me back home.” She took off her seatbelt, needing to move. “When I was bent over with morning sickness for three months and couldn't get to the store, Jack bought my groceries so I wouldn't have to leave the house. It wasn't *you* taking care of me. It was Jack. Jack stepped up and did everything you should've done for me.” A sob slipped out of her mouth. “Jack did everything I wanted *you* to do.”

She reached for the door handle and stopped. He'd riled her enough that she forgot Kaden was in the car.

Exhaling loudly, she pressed her back against the seat. “Take me home.”

Tana started the truck and drove back onto the road. She turned her head away from his view and closed her eyes.

She would never let Tana know how much he'd hurt her.



Chapter Twenty Seven

Hank talked to Bobby, a new cowboy, ten feet away from the line of motorcycles. Staying by his Harley, Tana waited for the okay to ride off. They'd finished delivering the drugs, and he wasn't needed until tomorrow at the ranch when he'd help move the cattle to the next pasture.

Stihl walked out of the big house with a beer in his hand. Tana picked at the edge of his leather vest, impatient to leave.

"I wonder how many cowboys he's going to hire." Stihl lit a cigarette and held out the pack to Tana.

He shook his head. "His business, not mine."

"What's got on your bad side?"

He spit to the side. "Just ready to go home."

He doubted if going home would put him in a better mood. When he'd dropped off Mia and Kaden, she wasn't talking to him after blowing up in the truck.

He couldn't change the fact that he was incarcerated and missed out on the birth of his son and supporting Mia. He couldn't change his membership with Serpentine. Like his marriage, he was pledged to the club till death.

"Your old lady talk you into bringing her to the ranch earlier?"

"It was my idea." He lifted his foot and put his boot on the foot peg of his bike. "She needs to know if something happens to me, she can contact the club. Last time, she had to do everything herself. If I get picked up, I'll want the club to help her more than passing over my monthly allotment of money."

"Are you planning on getting picked up by the feds?"

"No, but I can't say it won't happen." He inhaled deeply. "What we're doing will get us life behind bars if we're caught. What we've already done to acquire the drug trade in Whitefish is enough to get us put in front of the firing squad. I've got a family to think about now."

He'd fucked up the first time and left Mia alone. Now, he had to pay for his mistakes.

"Here comes Hank. I take it you're waiting for him." Stihl stubbed out the cigarette on the thigh of his jeans and pocketed the filter. "I'll catch you later."

He wanted to get home and make things right with Mia, once and for all.

Hank approached him. "I thought you'd be gone by now."

"Didn't want to leave before checking in with you."

"Everything is done. We're all going to lay low today." Hank pointed toward the stable. "I hired two new hands. Bobby and Tanner."

"Cowboys?"

Hank crossed his arms. "Yeah, but I'm putting them in the horse barn. We can always pull them off if we need an extra hand."

"I didn't think you'd be taking on more horses."

Hank looked down at his boot. "Jade won't be around forever. She does more work in the barn than two cowboys together."

"Kids have a way of growing up." He toed his kickstand. "I'm gonna ride out."

"Take it easy, brother." Hank slapped his shoulder and turned to go into the big house.

The sun broke completely over the mountain as he hit the county road. Mia would be up and fixing lunches already, trying to juggle the baby while doing her job.

He hadn't done much but hold Kaden when she passed him over. Most of the time, if the baby wasn't sleeping, she was breastfeeding him. There wasn't much he could do to lighten Mia's load.

Over the last several weeks, he'd come to realize he sucked as a dad. Mia took care of Kaden. There wasn't much he could do to lighten her load.

He slowed. The Mia's Sack Lunches sign was already out in front of the mailbox. It was later in the morning than he realized if she had already opened the kitchen to customers.

Sure enough, a pickup was parked at the back of the house.

Riding the middle strip of grass that grew in the gravel driveway, he recognized the dent in the back bumper of the truck at the back of the house. He throttled the Harley, shot up to the vehicle, and toed the kickstand as he jumped off his motorcycle.

He was through the open driver's side window, grabbing Jack and opening the door to drag him out before the man could defend himself.

The door banged against the house. Tana threw Jack on the ground, following him down. He swung, connecting solidly on the cowboy's jaw before Jack brought his clutched hands together and punched Tana's stomach.

Rolling away from the pain, he coughed to gain his breath.

"Tana, stop," yelled Mia.

Having her close by only fueled the flames. He heaved himself to his knees and swung, catching Jack before he could get to his feet.

Jack lunged. Tana tackled and rolled. Pain flooded his side. He used his leg and flipped Jack over onto his back.

Reaching behind him, he pulled the pistol from underneath his belt and slammed the end of the barrel into Jack's temple. "You're a dead man."

"Maybe you'll kill me. Maybe you won't." Jack's gaze locked onto Tana. "But if I live, I'll be right here with Mia while you're rotting—"

"Tana, stop it. Get off him." Mia grabbed his arm.

He refused to move the gun away from Jack's head. No one would take his wife or threaten him.

Mia hit his shoulder. "Get up, Tana. Let him go."

“Go in the house, Mia.” He tightened his hand around Jack’s neck.

Shoot him or choke him. Tana was going to get rid of Jack for good. The cowboy was standing between him and his wife.

“I’m not going anywhere.” Mia shoved him in the back. “Jack’s here to pick up Circle M’s lunch order. A big order. Let him go.”

Jack cocked his brow as Tana realized what Mia was telling him. He couldn’t help but notice the cowboy wasn’t afraid of dying over a few lunches.

He pushed off Jack and stood, holding the pistol at his side. Today might not be the day he killed the asshole, but he wouldn’t let him remain at the house. Jack wasn’t the only cowboy at the Circle M. Someone else could pick up the order.

“If I find you on my property again, nobody, not even Mia, will stop me from killing you.” He hitched his chin, signaling him to leave.

Jack brushed off his arms and stepped toward the open door of his truck. Tana turned, keeping him in sight.

He walked around the corner of the house, making sure Jack drove down the driveway and got on the county road.

Satisfied the man was gone, he slipped the pistol back underneath his belt and turned toward the house.

A door slammed.

He exhaled. Mia was his wife, yet she hadn’t jumped into the fight and told Jack to stop. She’d protected the cowboy, not Tana.

He walked to the back door and found it locked. Inhaling deeply, he turned, ready to walk off, but stopped himself. Tucking his elbow, he turned and threw himself at the door, busting the wood away from the hinges.

He propped the broken door back into place and turned to find Mia holding Kaden in the kitchen, glaring at him.

“If he comes back, get rid of him,” he said.

“Jack takes thirty lunches back to Circle M. Thirty, Tana. At eight dollars each, I make two hundred and forty dollars from one ranch in one day. They’re my biggest customer base. After buying groceries and supplies, I make a nice profit every week. A profit that has clothed and kept a roof over our son’s head while you’ve been gone. So, excuse me for not wanting to lose my biggest customer.” Her face continued to grow more red.

“You don’t need money. I make enough for you and Kaden.”

She stomped her foot. “It’s not about the money, Tana. Jack was there for me when I needed someone. He’s not only a customer. He’s also a friend.”

“There’s no such thing as friends between a man and a woman.” He gave her a pointed look. “Especially when one of them is married.”

Her mouth opened, and nothing more came out.

If Circle M wanted to continue buying their lunches from Mia, they could send another cowboy to retrieve them. Jack had no business at the farmhouse anymore. Mia was off-limits.

“You’re jealous,” blurted Mia.

“I’m not jealous.” His frustration grew. “I’m pissed.”

Her brows lowered. His heart thrummed. How had they ended up here?

Their marriage wasn’t supposed to involve someone else.

“I didn’t even know I had a son until two weeks ago.” The facts would forever be burned into his soul. “You claim Jack was with you every step, and that’s something I will never have. I can never get back. No matter if I’m here every day for the rest of Kaden’s life, another man took something from me.”

His chest ached. He’d lost time with his wife and son he couldn’t get back.

He had a son he barely knew. A wife who needed him.

As a man who'd grown up on the reservation, fighting for everything he'd ever achieved and wishing his whole life that he had a father to ease the burden, he swore when it was his time to settle down and have a kid, he'd be there. Every fucking second.

To know that he wasn't there for Kaden. He wasn't there for Mia. Killed him.

He turned away from Mia. What he'd done to his family, he couldn't make up to them.

A slender arm, full of love and strength, circled his waist. Mia pressed against his back. He closed his eyes, weakened by her strength. She'd always been the strong one.

Her strength was visible to everyone who looked at her. She carried herself with confidence, even though she struggled. And that made her more beautiful than any other woman to him.

"It's not too late to know your son," she whispered. "He's just a baby. Your memories with him will grow every day. Kaden will never know you missed out on his birth because he won't remember."

He turned and wrapped his arms around his wife and son. Clung to them in hopes of never losing them for the shitstorm he brought into their lives. He struggled with how to ride with Serpentine Motorcycle Club and keep that part of his life from touching them. Yet, knowing they would be better off in life with more security, protection, and money if he stayed loyal to the club.

The club was everything he, Buffalo, and Hank had wanted. He was on the right track to support his family.

He kissed the top of her head. "Love you, Mia, but Jack has to go."

She tilted her head. "I never slept with him. It was only a friendship."

"Maybe on your part, but a man doesn't hang around a married woman unless there's feelings involved." He held on to her face, making her look at him. "You know that."

She closed her eyes. There was no hiding the truth. If Jack refused to stay away, she understood that Tana would do something about it.

He cupped the back of his son's head. "I will protect my family."

That was a promise he'd keep.



Chapter Twenty Eight

Tana lay between Mia's legs and held her face with his hands. She stared up into his eyes. The emotional day with Tana attacking Jack made her aware that she needed to do something. It wasn't fair for Tana to have to worry about Jack.

"I love you." She swallowed the emotions, tightening her throat. "We'll work everything out, right?"

She remained afraid he'd leave before giving her time to thank Jack for being her friend.

She hoped, in time, Tana would ease back on his hatred and let Jack remain a customer. Not that she was worried about losing the money Circle M brought her. That was a part of it, but because she cared about Jack. He was a nice man. Too nice.

"We will." He kissed the tip of her nose. "I married you because I love you. I want you with me for the rest of my life. Mia, you know I can't live without you."

"Can't or won't."

"Both." He captured her lips.

She wrapped her arms around his neck. Kaden had fallen asleep twenty minutes ago. This was the first night she hadn't fallen asleep after putting her son to bed.

She remained uptight. It'd been a long time since she'd made love with Tana.

Her body still felt foreign to her after having Kaden. She was a little bigger. Her breasts belonged to her son now. Her pussy—God, she wasn't even sure how that part of her worked, considering she hadn't had sex since she'd conceived Kaden.

She'd neglected to have any kind of pleasure since Tana was arrested. Between pregnancy, birth, and working, having an orgasm seemed like the least of her needs.

Until Tana returned and thrust her back into thinking of herself as a woman with needs, wants, and desires.

Now, she wanted to know what it felt like to have sex. She craved the release of pleasure. She needed closeness, comfort, and support.

“Are you sure we can do this?” He smoothed the hair off her forehead. “I won’t hurt you?”

Kaden was three and a half months old. It seemed like the doctor had mentioned something about regular exercise on her last checkup. All she had to do was listen to her body. She was ready.

“You won’t hurt me.” She caught his thumb with her mouth.

His gaze heated. He removed his hand and captured her lips, kissing her deeply.

He pressed against her. His cock lined up with the opening of her pussy. She widened her legs, raising her knees and hugging his hips with her thighs.

With care, he inched forward. Her body stretched and welcomed him in. Relief that everything worked and felt like before she had Kaden, she sank her fingers into his hair and raised her hips off the bed.

Tana groaned. She held on as he thrust deeper and pulled out, only stopping before he slipped completely out of her body.

She trembled in anticipation.

Then, he plunged again. More determined. Harder. Needier.

She gasped. Every muscle constricted and heated.

In return, she softened, accepted, and took.

“Tana.” She sucked on his tongue.

He ground his pelvis against her. Pleasure filled her. She moved underneath him, climbing his body with her legs, opening herself to him.

Her pussy, slick with arousal, squeezed down on his cock. She clung to him, moving, writhing, arching against him as they moved together.

The more they came together. The longer they lasted. The deeper they went. A dam opened inside her, spilling all the protected emotions she'd refused to let go of over the last year.

Tears streamed out the corners of her eyes and slipped into her hair. Out of desperation, she held on to Tana's head and continued to make love to his mouth. She showed him everything that frightened her. She let go of all her anger. She welcomed the love that dwelled inside of her for her family. The hope was that she would have the chance to love Tana for the rest of her life.

He slipped his hand between her legs and found her clitoris. Her hips bucked. Then, her arousal softened her movements when he circled the small nub.

Tana kissed his way up her jaw to her ear. "Come for me."

She held on tighter, grinding against him. For a moment, it was only Tana and her, wrapped up in each other like it had been at the beginning of their relationship. How it had been each time they came back to each other after a fight.

The love between them was strong and bright.

She exploded.

Tana held her as she fell apart from her orgasm.

She inhaled deeply on the fringe of total meltdown as he set out to rebuild her. Stroking and thrusting. She no longer needed his hand between her legs. His cock caressed every sensitive spot.

Her lower stomach tightened, recoiling tighter and tighter. She squirmed, unable to stop the heightened pleasure growing inside her already spent body.

Tana took his mouth off her ear and pushed his upper body off her. Braced above her, he pounded on her. She grabbed his thick forearms as he pushed her across the mattress with each thrust.

Her pussy spasmed. She clutched his hips with her thighs. Her second orgasm spiraled, rolling her eyes back in her head.

Above her, Tana thrust and held himself between her legs. His body hardened, pinning her to the bed.

Her head came up, gulping for air.

Tana came down, grunting in completion. Her legs gave way, and she let her elbows fall to the mattress. Leaving her ankles hooked behind his calves, she blinked into awareness.

He'd always been able to take her to another world when having sex. Nothing had changed.

He kissed her softly. "Okay?"

"Better than okay." She stroked his sides with her fingertips. "I love you."

"Love you, too." He rolled off her, taking her with him.

Gently, he eased his cock out of her and removed the condom. She propped her head up on her hand and watched him dump the used protection in the garbage.

"Do you regret not using a condom the last time we had sex?" she asked.

"Mia." He rolled back to her. "That would be asking if I regret my son."

"No." Hard reality brought her up into a sitting position. "I'm asking if you regret how things happened. The timing of having our child wasn't ideal. I would've loved to have had you with me. I missed out on telling you I was pregnant, finding out the sex of our baby, and having you during the delivery. It would make sense that you, too, felt like you missed out on everything. You can regret how everything happened without your feelings toward Kaden changing."

Tana's jaw worked, making the muscles along his neck constrict. She waited, needing to know what thoughts were taking up residency in his head.

She'd had a lot of time to go through every emotion. In the end, nothing would ever change the love for her son. The way

she felt about Kaden spread over her whole life.

“I regret everything. Every second away from you. Away from my kid,” he whispered.

Her throat closed. She waited for him to blame her. Before he’d gone to prison, she was the one who instigated all the fights. She could see that now.

“I left you alone. I missed out on so much.” Tana’s chest expanded as he inhaled. “I was brought up to know I was the head of my family. I was the one who would protect my family.” His heart pounded against her. “Another man did my job. I more than regret what happened. I hate what I’ve done to you.”

She understood what bitterness could do to a person. Until she had Kaden, she fed off her anger toward Tana. It was easier than admitting she was hurt and needed more from him.

She loved him. But that love almost broke her heart when he wasn’t here.

She framed his face with her hands and kissed his lips. Tana would learn she was willing to put the past behind her and be his wife. They could make their relationship work.

“You don’t have to worry about how I’m feeling.” She kissed him. “You’re home where you belong now. You’re my husband. I love you.”

She refrained from bringing up Jack and how she’d talk to him because she wanted Tana to concentrate on the here and now. They were together. That’s all that mattered.



Chapter Twenty Nine

The distributor for the supply of drugs in the Northwest section of Whitefish carried the package across the room. All Tana knew about the man was that he went by the name of Dirk and had the word *died* tattooed on the back of his fingers of his left hand.

Tana looked at Stihl to see what he thought of the transaction. His MC brother shrugged, unconcerned with letting Dirk take the drugs. Until they were paid, Tana preferred to keep the dope in his hands.

“It’s never been a problem before,” whispered Stihl.

Tana backed down. He’d only regained his position in the drop-off the last two weeks. If no one else saw a problem, he’d refrain from starting trouble.

Dirk pulled out a container from his pocket and held up a thin strip of paper. Stihl nodded.

It was customary for the distributors to test each batch. Serpentine members were confident of what they sold because they’d tested every delivery twice to make sure there were no signs of fentanyl in the heroin.

“Nice.” Dirk put one of the packages up on a scale and eyeballed the counterweight. “That’s more than last time.”

“We hope to continue with this amount until you need more.” Stihl uncrossed his arms.

“We’ll always need more.” Dirk pointed to the drawer. “The world isn’t getting any easier. People need help, and they get it from the heroin.”

Tana dipped his chin, letting him know he could reach inside. There was mutual respect. Neither party made unnecessary moves. They were all armed and knew gunfire would break out if anything went wrong or someone spooked.

What he did for Serpentine Motorcycle Club was dangerous. Because of that danger, he was paid well to do the

job.

Dirk handed a brick of cash over to Stihl, who counted the bills. Tana remained by the door, ensuring no one left the room until both parties were satisfied.

When Stihl met his gaze, and they agreed business was over, the two men left the building and walked east a block to where their motorcycles were parked. While they had executed the transaction, a crew of Serpentine members ran security in the area, making sure law enforcement was busy somewhere else in Whitefish.

Because the motorcycle club had grown since his arrest, every drop-off point was protected—something that would've kept him from stealing a car to make the delivery.

“We'll take the loop and then go straight through town.” Stihl sat his Harley.

“Sounds good.” Tana tightened the bandana around his head to keep it on while he rode.

At one time, putting extra miles on the bike was his only form of entertainment during the times he wasn't living with his wife.

Knowing he was home with his wife rather than wasting time filling his head space with air felt good. Though, he looked forward to any excuse to ride.

A half mile from the drop-off location, they picked up Buffalo, the first member on point. With the three of them riding, they later picked up Butch and Mac. The others would come back to the ranch on their own when the other drop-offs were made.

Stihl led the way through town. Tana slowed, obeying the twenty-five mile per hour limit past the casino. In a half hour, the sun would dip below the mountain range. He'd be back at the ranch by then. Once he finished, he'd head home to Mia.

Tomorrow, he'd wake up early and be at the ranch to work an honest day.

Outside of town, before he passed the farmhouse on the way to Glacier Crest Ranch, he spotted a familiar lone figure walking alongside the train track. He motioned to the others and slowed, pulling off to the side of the road.

He was off the Harley and jumping over the ditch when Mia stopped pushing the stroller. He stepped up the embankment and took in Kaden, and then his wife. Both of them seemed calm.

Mia smiled and reached for him. He leaned over and kissed her lips.

“Why are you out here?” He looked at the sky. “You’re losing daylight.”

“Because your son was cranky.” She bent at the waist and looked around the canopy of the stroller.

Kaden gnawed on his tiny fist, happy as an earwig on a cob of corn. He chuckled. There were times when Kaden could scream his head off. Other times, he was satisfied to stare up at the ceiling. He couldn’t predict what kind of mood would hit him, but Mia seemed to know the reasons behind his outbursts.

She also knew how to soothe him back into happiness.

He had a lot to learn about raising a child.

“He likes the bumpy ride.” Mia gazed at the road. “I thought you would be gone most of the night.”

“I will be.” He slid his hand down her back and cupped her hip. “I’m heading to the ranch now.”

Mia stuck out her bottom lip. “I wish you could stay home.”

“Tomorrow night.” He patted her ass. “And the next night.”

She kissed him again. “Promise?”

“Yep.” He walked with her to the driveway.

She stopped. “My mom called earlier.”

He grunted. There was no love lost between him and Mia's mother.

"What did she want?" he asked.

"She mentioned wanting to come back to Whitefish and see me." She shrugged. "I didn't ask, but I'm assuming the latest boyfriend is history. Mom's probably looking for someone new to take care of her."

"She's not staying here."

Mia laughed. "That was my first thought. I figured she was calling to see if she could stay with us. But she never asked."

"Did you tell her about Kaden?"

Mia shook her head. "It wasn't the right time."

Her mother had her problems. As much as Mia would love a mom in her life to help with Kaden and support her, she would never find it with her mom.

"I better take him back into the house before I lose daylight." Mia stretched on her toes and kissed Tana. "See you later, right?"

"Right." He kissed her again. "Lock the door when you get inside."

"I will."

Staying below, he waited until Mia waved to him from the front porch before he jogged out to the county road to his motorcycle. By the time he throttled the Harley and headed toward the ranch, dusk had fallen.



Chapter Thirty

Tana rode into the round pen and slid off the horse. His boots hit the ground, and he groaned. He'd spent too long in the saddle.

“Are you trying to kill the horse?” Miguel grinned, catching the reins before the horse could move away. “Poor Brownie.”

Tana stretched his back. “So that you know, I’ve lost ten pounds.”

“Are you sure, amigo?” Miguel laughed. “Your old lady’s lunches are starting to show up around your middle.”

“How do you say *fuck off* in Spanish?” he muttered.

Miguel slapped the side of the horse, now smiling wildly. “*Soy gordo.*”

Tana muttered, “*Soy gor-doh.*”

Feminine giggles came from behind him. He turned around.

Jade covered her mouth. He glared. Was she laughing at him?

“What’s so funny?” he asked.

“Miguel didn’t teach you to say...” Jade looked around before meeting his gaze and whispering, “Fuck you.”

He stepped closer. “What does *soy gor-doh* mean?”

“He made you say you’re fat.” Jade giggled. “Miguel always says *estás gorda* when he’s talking to the mares and patting their belly.”

If it weren’t for Jade finding the situation funny, he would’ve let loose with a few suggestions on what Miguel could do with his Spanish lessons.

Instead, he chucked her under the chin with his hooked finger. “I thought you were working in the stable.”

Jade's smile left. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Where're you going?"

"College." Her eyes filled with tears, and she lifted her chin, pulling them back from escaping. "Hank's sending me away."

"Not for good, though." He took in the hurt on Jade's face. "The ranch is your home."

Jade looked away. "He doesn't want me here. He says it's time for me to grow up. But, I've been through a lot. A lot more than other kids my age have gone through. It's not fair."

Not sure what was going on between Jade and Hank, Tana patted her shoulder and walked out of the round pen. Jade's situation could be why Hank was in a bad mood lately. Ever since Maria died and he took guardian of Jade, Hank shut himself off from everyone.

"Are you leaving?" shouted Neil.

"Yep." He raised his arm in the air and kept walking toward his motorcycle.

He was off the clock. All he wanted to do was go home and see his wife and son.

"Swing by the house first. There's a new prospect moving in. Hank wants everyone to meet him." Neil headed back into the horse stable.

That was fast. He had no sooner moved out of the house and back to the farmhouse, and Prez filled his bed. Hank wasted no time.

He walked into the house, following the stream of voices from the kitchen.

The bikers that lived in the house but worked off the ranch filled the room. Tana peered around the shoulders of the men and spotted the new guy. His blood ran hot.

Pushing his way through the crowd, the moment he broke through, he threw his fist through the air and connected it with the man's face that stood by Hank.

“Jesus, Tana.” Hank caught him before he could get another hit in. “Back off.”

“I’ll kill him.” He lunged, but more hands grabbed him.

In front of him, Jack wiped his bloody lip on his shoulder and faced him. “Let him go.”

Tana pushed off Hank. “He works for Circle M.”

“Not anymore.”

He refused to back down. “He’s been trying to fuck my wife.”

Hank turned to Jack. “Is that so?”

Jack shrugged. “He wasn’t around.”

Tana threw himself forward, barreling into Buffalo, who wrapped his arms around Tana’s ribs.

“Everyone get out,” shouted Hank. “Buffalo, keep ahold of Tana. Jack, move before Tana kills you.”

Hank removed Tana’s pistol at the small of his back. He clenched his teeth together. If he’d had time to think, he would’ve blown a hole in the fucker’s forehead before anyone noticed him in the house.

“Okay, let go of him.” Hank stood in between Tana and Jack. “Tana, speak your mind.”

“I’ve already kicked him off my property. Mia has told him to stay away.” He balled his fists. “He knew she was married.”

“You left her pregnant,” said Jack.

“Shut your fucking mouth.” He stabbed the air with his finger. “Mia’s my wife.”

“Who was pregnant and alone. She needed help, bustin’ her ass daily cooking for every man in the county.”

“She’s not alone now, is she?” He stepped forward. “I’m home, and I’ll make damn sure you don’t touch her.”

Hank slapped his hand on Tana’s chest, stopping him. He should’ve killed Jack the moment he found him at the

farmhouse instead of letting him go.

“It’s not looking good for you, Jack.” Hank looked at the other man. “You signed on with Glacier Creek Ranch and want to ride with Serpentine. But you’ll need Tana’s vote at the end of your probation. Do you think you stand a chance at putting your loyalty on the patch, much less protecting Tana’s back?”

“Hell, no,” muttered Tana.

“Yeah. I do.” Jack widened his stance. “I’ll take the three months. If I’m sent away in the end, I’ll walk myself out without my Harley.”

Tana studied the cowboy. Not once had he seen Jack ride a motorcycle. He drove for Circle M.

“Are you going to stay away from Tana’s woman?” asked Hank.

Jack dipped his chin. “As long as he treats her right.”

Tana wouldn’t trust the fucker with his worst enemy. While prospects were kept out of the real business behind Serpentine Motorcycle Club and Jack had three months to prove his loyalty before he was brought in and held in confidence, Tana wasn’t holding his breath.

“Go ahead and get settled in.” Hank motioned for Tana to follow him.

Outside, he raised his hands to his head and clutched his hair. Frustrated having Jack within his safety net, he wanted the asshole gone. All it would take was Jack going to the feds and handing over evidence on Tana to have him sent to prison.

How the fuck was he supposed to protect Mia if he was locked up in a cell?

“You’re making a big mistake,” he said.

Hank leaned against the railing. “You and Buffalo helped me form Serpentine Motorcycle Club, and I trust your opinion on how we move forward.”

“Then sign on anyone but that asshole,” muttered Tana.

Hank held up his hand. “Jack wants to go after his brother-in-law and wants our help.”

“We don’t owe him anything.”

“His brother-in-law is Lloyd Primley.” Hank paused. “The other person bringing drugs into Whitefish, and the person we want to stop.”

“Shit.” Tana walked to the corner of the porch and back. “You think getting in the middle of family will accomplish that? How can you be sure Jack isn’t feeding Primley any of the information he discovers about us?”

“Because he wants Primley dead. To show his loyalty, he quit Circle M and came aboard Glacier Crest Ranch, asking for our help in killing his brother-in-law.” Hank spoke with the confidence that he wouldn’t be overheard. “He can prove his allegiance by bringing us the last drug trail.”

Tana spit over the rail. The whole thing left a bitter taste in his mouth.

While he understood the need to work with Jack, he couldn’t forget how the cowboy was there when his son was born, and his wife needed help. He wasn’t grateful. He was pissed.

“Can you keep your cool?” asked Hank.

“I have no choice.” Tana walked off the porch. “If he fucks up, I’m the first one who’ll put a bullet in his head and dump him at the bottom of the glacier.”

“Deal,” said Hank behind him.

Storming to his motorcycle, Tana got on his Harley and rode away from the ranch. He needed the ride home to calm down. It wouldn’t do Mia or Kaden any good to see him angry at the world.



Chapter Thirty One

Inside Rebel Rose, Mia pulled the fabric over Kaden's head. Tana had brought her the wrap from the reservation, showing her how to carry her son on her chest. The fabric allowed her hands to remain free. He claimed women on the reservation often wore their children near them while they worked.

She was excited to try it out while she made the lunches, but what thrilled her more was the invitation to go to Rebel Rose with Tana for dinner. It was almost like a date.

"We'll sit in the back booth." Tana put his hand on her back and guided her across the room.

When she sat down, she recognized other Serpentine members in the bar. She waved at Stihl and Buffalo, who sat at a nearby table.

"Is this a Serpentine dinner?" She leaned back and patted the rounded mound on her chest.

Despite her moving and the extra noise in the bar, Kaden continued sleeping. Luckily, it was early. They served dinner until eight o'clock to the community, when they stopped to serve alcohol to the customers who were twenty-one years and older.

At least, that's what Tana told her, considering she was underage. She was excited to leave the house and have someone else cook for her.

"Nah." He tapped his fingers against the surface of the table. "A lot of us end up here because it's the one big meal of our day."

"I'm surprised Glacier Crest Ranch doesn't have a cook."

"They do. Her name is Tricia. But she cooks on a small scale for the cowboys that live in the bunkhouse. Once in a while, she'll make up some chili or stew and leave it in the big house for the bikers. But most of the time, we're on our own."

“You’re not on your own.” She smiled across the table.
“Not anymore.”

She loved having him at the farmhouse. It felt like their honeymoon all over again.

Waking up to feed Kaden, she sat on the couch and watched Tana get ready to head to the ranch every morning. Starting her day with him gave her something to look forward to when he got home every night.

She’d grown accustomed to having him with her. He only stayed away one night a week to deal with club business. Because he came home in a good mood, ready to put the club behind him, she looked forward to that time because it meant he’d be home for the next six nights.

Tana’s smooth cheek twitched as he looked at her. She tilted her head, studying him. He looked like he wanted to say something.

“Why are you looking at me that way?” she whispered.

Warmth settled on her cheeks. He only had that pleased expression when they were home alone.

He leaned to the side and reached into his front pocket. Then, he set his hand on the table. She glanced down in time to see him push a key toward her.

“What’s that for?”

“I bought a car.” He grinned. “For you.”

She bit off her laugh and gawked at him when he sat there smiling at her. “Are you serious?”

He nodded.

“I don’t know how to drive.”

“I’ll teach you.” He glanced at her chest, where Kaden slept wrapped tightly against her. “You can’t push Kaden on the railroad tracks in the winter.”

Excitement bubbled up inside of her. It wasn’t only the thought of having a car to run her errands, but that Tana surprised her with a gift. That he would be the one who

teaches her how to drive. It was something the two of them could do together that they'd never done before.

It was one more sign that Tana was putting an effort into their marriage.

She scooted out of the booth, went to the other side of the table, and slid beside him. Nestled against his side, she put her hand on his thigh, leaned in, and kissed him.

"I love you." She kissed him again. "This is the coolest thing you've ever done."

"Yeah?" He caught her hand under the table and threaded his fingers through her. "I borrowed the truck from the ranch to bring you here because Mac will bring the car around. Then, he'll take the truck back to Glacier Crest."

"We get to take it home?" Excitement filled her. "What's it look like?"

He lifted his arm and put it behind her on the booth. "You'll see it when you get your first lesson and drive us home tonight."

"I can't." She hugged Kaden. "It'll be too scary. Can't you teach me on our property?"

"I will, but you can go home slow. We're on the backroad."

"I don't have a license."

"Gotta learn sometime." He turned when the waitress came and delivered their meals.

Tana must've set everything up because she hadn't ordered anything yet. The waitress sat down a plate with a hamburger and fries in front of her. Tana got a steak and potato.

Her stomach warmed, and she met Tana's gaze. It was precisely what they'd ordered right after they got married and before they spent all night making love.

She picked up a fry. Her appetite was gone. All the surprises tonight left her wanting to rush home and show Tana

how much she appreciated the thought he'd put into everything.

A car.

She could get groceries and be back at the house in an hour. It wouldn't be a chore to take Kaden to his doctor visits. Maybe if she learned to drive, she could even meet Tana for lunch somewhere and spend time with him before he had to go back to work.

Beside her, Tana dug into his steak. She pulled the material away from Kaden's head and peered at her sleeping son. The noise from the bar relaxed him. He was content.

Unlike the first time she'd entered Rebel Rose, she was comfortable. Even though others were at the bar, it felt like a true date night with her husband.

"Thank you for bringing me here." She wiped her mouth on her napkin. "I've missed this."

"This?"

"Being with you." She leaned against him. "Having fun."

It hit her hard how much she appreciated tonight. She wanted to make plans of her own and show Tana what it felt like to be on the receiving end of her attention.

With her business booming and Kaden taking up much of her energy, she could do better with showing Tana how much he was loved and appreciated.

"I like that, Mia." He cut off a piece of steak and held it out in front of her.

She leaned forward and took the bite. The smokey flavor consumed her. She moaned. That tasted so good.

In exchange, she held up her burger and let Tana take a bite. She laughed when barbecue sauce dribbled down his chin. Grabbing her napkin, she cleaned him up and then kissed him.

When she pulled back, movement caught her eye, and she looked away, straight at Jack standing at the table next to

them. She leaned away from Tana. What was Jack doing here?

She hadn't seen him since Tana attacked Jack at the farmhouse. Every day since Gunther from Circle M stopped by and bought all the lunches. She hadn't lost any business but wondered what Jack thought of the situation.

She hadn't entered into a friendship intending to hurt his feelings or show him any disrespect for all he'd done for her and Kaden.

Tana put his fork and knife down on the table. Mia grabbed his forearm, seeing the direction of his gaze. He'd spotted Jack, too.

"We can leave," she whispered.

The last thing she wanted was to ruin their beautiful evening.

Feeling her tension, Kaden squirmed and whined. She patted his bottom through the material. Knowing her son would fuss until she fed him. It'd been a while since he breastfed. He'd taken a long nap.

"We're not leaving." He picked up his fork. "Feed the baby and eat your dinner."

While Tana wouldn't let Jack ruin their date, his demeanor had changed. With a lot of wiggling, she loosened the material holding Kaden and situated him to nurse from her breast. All the shuffling and tension warmed her.

She grabbed the ice water off the table and drank hungrily from the glass, hoping she'd calm down.

Tana put his hand on her thigh under the table. She grabbed his fingers and put her other hand on Kaden's back. A strong desire to hold her family close came over her.

She became possessive about keeping her family together.

Then, she noticed Jack had on a black leather vest.

She was used to seeing Tana in his vest, so she wondered what that meant with Jack wearing one, too. It became

apparent Jack was here to talk to Serpentine Motorcycle Club members—which Tana was a part of.

She bit her lip. It would ruin his mood if she asked Tana why Jack was riding with him. So, she remained quiet.

Jack met her gaze, dipped his chin, and turned his attention to Neil at the table. Tana held her hand and finished eating his baked potatoes. Everyone seemed to ignore the awkwardness of the situation.

If they could, then she could.

She leaned against Tana and let her son feed off her. Nothing was going to spoil her night.



Chapter Thirty Two

Mia handed four sack lunches through the window.
“That’ll be thirty two—”

“And a huckleberry pie.” Ken opened his billfold. “How much are those?”

“Eighteen dollars.”

He handed a fifty-dollar bill to her. She grabbed the pie and handed it through the window to him.

“That’s the last huckleberry pie for the season. I’m out of berries.” She slid the cash into her pocket.

“Damn.” Ken set the pie on the seat. “Cody bought one yesterday, and it was gone before I got any. Maybe I’ll keep this one for myself.”

She laughed. “It would be the smart thing to do.”

Honking interrupted the conversation. She stuck her head out the window and peered down the driveway.

“What in the world?” She gawked.

A small white car sped toward the house, leaving a cloud of dust in its wake. She absently waved to Ken as he drove away and kept her gaze on the loud arrival of her next customer.

Except the car turned and went to the front of the house and not the back. She brought her head back inside of the house and shut the window, then hurried to the front window.

The driver’s door swung open. Mia gasped in surprise. Her mom stepped out of the vehicle. She was halfway to the door when she remembered Kaden sitting in his carrier in the kitchen.

She hurried back into the other room, unstrapped her son from the seat, and picked him up.

The doorbell rang incessantly. Losing patience, Mia unlocked the door and swung it open.

“Please, not so loud.” She stuck out her bottom lip and blew her bangs out of her eyes. “I can’t have Kaden screaming while trying to work.”

Her mom’s arms fell to her sides, and her mouth opened. Mia exhaled loudly. She had planned to tell her mom about the baby, but the rare phone calls always focused on what her mom was doing, not what Mia was going through.

She hadn’t even told her mom about Tana getting arrested and being away from her for over a year.

“Who’s baby?” Her mom planted her hands on her hips. “Are you babysitting now?”

She stepped back. “You might as well come in and meet your grandson.”

Thank goodness Kaden was too young, and she wouldn’t have to explain her oddball mother to him yet. That would come eventually when her son was old enough to question the stranger that swept in and out of their lives but never stayed.

“Grandson?” Her mom’s head snapped back. “You had a baby?”

“That’s usually how it happens. People are usually happy about the news and offer congratulations.” She shifted Kaden to her left arm and turned him around so he faced toward her mother. “This is Kaden Montana Graywolf.”

“He’s Tana’s son?”

She groaned. Her mom wasn’t Tana’s biggest fan, but there was no reason to sound surprised.

Her mom acted as if it wasn’t out of the question that Mia slept around and had moved onto another man. She wanted to shout that she wasn’t like her mother but refused to lower herself to her mom’s standards.

“Look at him.” She kissed the top of Kaden’s head. “He looks exactly like Tana.”

Her mom still hadn’t moved closer or tried to touch her grandson. Mia turned Kaden back around and patted his back, urging him to put his head down and go to sleep—so that he

could miss the first, and maybe only visit, from his only grandparent.

Walking into the kitchen, expecting her mom to follow, she said, “What brought you here?”

Her mom stopped at the table. “I asked at the store where I could find you and Tana.”

That answered her next question. When she and Tana married, her mom took off. They were living in an apartment in town. Tana hadn’t even bought the farmhouse yet.

“Well, you found me.” She put Kaden back in his carrier and handed him a set of plastic keys to chew on. “Did you need something?”

“Why would you think I’d need something.” Her mom walked around the kitchen. “Do I look like I need something?”

A truck pulled up to the window. Mia used the arrival of a customer as an excuse not to argue with her mom.

She sold two lunches while holding Kaden because she wouldn’t set her son in the carrier and take a chance that her mom picked him up. Not once could she remember being held or comforted by her mother. Although, she must’ve been held and fed. But she couldn’t remember when she felt her mom’s arms around her.

She held on to Kaden tighter. That was something her son wouldn’t have to question. She’d shower affection on him every chance she got.

“Thanks, Rick.” She handed two dollars in change back to him.

Rick slipped the dollars in the jar on the windowsill. “See you tomorrow.”

Mia’s mom picked up the tip container as the cowboy drove away. “What’s all this?”

She took the jar from her mom and set it up in the cabinet, shutting the door. “It’s money. I have a business.”

“You sell them sandwiches?” Her mom laughed.
“Seriously?”

“Yes.” She stepped away, trying to lead her mom out of the kitchen to the living room.

As she entered the room, the front door swung open, and Tana came inside. She hurried to him, handing Kaden to him.

“Can you take him to the nursery and change his diaper?” she whispered.

He frowned, looking over her head. “What’s she doing here?”

“I don’t know.” She put their son in Tana’s arms and pushed him toward the bedroom.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t the big man.” Mia’s mom walked across the rooms, letting her hips lead her.

Mia rolled her eyes. Her mom was predictable. It didn’t matter if a man was married or her son-in-law, a switch flipped in her mom, and she acted as if she had to perform.

“He’s busy.” She waved Tana away.

For how much she’d like to ask her husband what brought him home in the middle of the day, she wanted to keep Kaden away from her mom more.

Except Tana held his ground. “What are you doing here, Sylvia?”

“Is that any way to treat your sweet mother-in-law?” Her mom blinked rapidly. “No one tells me anything. I didn’t even know I had a grandchild.”

Mia squeezed Tana’s arm. “It’s okay.”

He studied her. She nodded, letting him know leaving her alone with her mom was okay. Whatever neglect was done in the past couldn’t harm her today. She had a husband and a baby. They came first.

“I only have a few minutes, and then I need to talk to you.” Tana carried the baby to the other room.

Not sure if her mom intended to stay, she inhaled deeply and faced her mother. “Do you want a glass of water or lemonade?”

“I didn’t think you’d ever ask.” Her mom followed her into the kitchen. “What about one of those sandwiches you make? I haven’t had anything to eat since yesterday.”

She grabbed a turkey club from the refrigerator, unwrapped the sandwich, and set it on a plate. “Why aren’t you eating?”

“I’ve been traveling.” Her mom took a bite.

“Where are you going to next?”

Her mom finished chewing. “I’m not sure. I’m meeting a guy tomorrow in town. He put me in a room and gave me money to rent a car to see you. Wasn’t that nice of him?”

“Hm. Nice.” She looked at the clock.

It was two o’clock. She normally closed the business for the day, but she wouldn’t leave her mom in the house to run down the driveway and get the sign.

“He’s from around here, you know?”

“Who?”

“My guy.” Her mom shook her finger at Mia. “Aren’t you listening?”

“I’m listening.”

“George is picking up his load today.” Her mom wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “He’s a trucker.”

“I’m not surprised,” mumbled Mia.

All her mom’s boyfriends were truckers. She wasn’t positive, but she believed there was a magazine or maybe a website that advertised available male truckers that her mom would use to find her next boyfriend. That would explain why her mom never veered out of the trucker gene pool.

“He’s the one this time, Mia.” Her mom kept working on the sandwich, barely taking a breath to talk and eat at the same

time. “I think he’ll marry me. Maybe we’ll even settle down in Whitefish after a while.”

Mia pulled the plate holding the pieces of cherry pie and set one in front of her mom. Tana walked into the kitchen and motioned for Mia. She grabbed the cash box under the window and the tip jar out of the cabinet and left the room.

While she loved her mother, she wouldn’t trust her around her hard-earned money. She set everything on the back of the couch and took Kaden from Tana.

“Can you put that somewhere my mom won’t find it?” she asked.

“Yeah.” He picked up everything. “I’ll put it in the garage. Are you okay with her here, or do you want me to chase her off?”

“I’m fine.” She shrugged. “It’s just weird that she’d show up now only to tell me she’s leaving tomorrow.”

“Where is she going?”

“I don’t know. She’s got a new man in her life.”

Tana exhaled, pulling her toward him. “I need to take off. Club business.”

“Now?” She pouted.

He’d been gone two nights ago. Usually, he only had to go once a week.

“Yeah, something came up.” He chucked Kaden under the chin. “If you need anything, call Hank.”

She nodded. It wasn’t like she could argue for him to stay. He had to go when Serpentine Motorcycle Club needed him.

“Are you sure you’re okay with your mom here?”

She looked over her shoulder and then back at Tana. “I’ve put up with her my whole life. One day isn’t going to break me.”

“Cute.” He kissed her hard. “Keep the doors locked.”

“I will.” She pulled him closer and kissed him deeper. “Be careful.”

“Love you.” He patted her ass and stepped to the door.

“Love you, too.” She picked up Kaden’s hand and waved. “Say bye, bye.”

Tana paused in the doorway, lifted his hand, and waved his four fingers up and down. “Bye, son.”

Then, the softness on his face melted away to hardness, and he left. She swallowed hard. It always scared her when he went out riding with the MC.

She was never one hundred percent sure he’d come back to her.



Chapter Thirty Three

Lloyd Primley got out of a Yukon and walked into the warehouse off Elm Street, three blocks from the casino in Whitefish. Tana took in the man's slight limp. He'd seen him before but couldn't remember where.

Whitefish was a small town, but there were smaller municipalities surrounding the area. Hell, he could even be off the reservation.

Stihl approached him at the side of the vacant gas station and handed him a high-scoped rifle. "Jack's here."

He never looked away from the door Primley disappeared behind. "This is his job."

"It's our job." Stihl lowered his voice. "We need that arm to possess all of the drugs coming into Whitefish. Doesn't matter if Jack's related to the son of a bitch. He's a dead man by the end of the night."

"Not by my hand." He glanced at the rifle. "This is going to sit on Jack's back."

"Amen, brother." Stihl held his rifle at his side. "But if anything goes wrong, I'm not going down."

His mood shifted at the addition of Jack, Battle, and Mac. Whatever tiff Jack had with his brother-in-law, it had nothing to do with Serpentine Motorcycle Club.

"How many are in the building?" Mac peered around the corner. "There's no cars out front."

"They're parked around the side. Only one other person walked inside. I can't verify how many were there before I arrived two hours ago." Tana finally met Jack's gaze. "Once you want across the street, you're on your own. We're only here to clean up your mess. Got it?"

Serpentine would remove Lloyd Primley's body after Jack took him out. They'd deliver him to the glacier and let the wolves get rid of the evidence.

Stihl removed a pistol from his vest pocket and handed it over to Jack. “Give me the one you’re carrying and take this one.”

“Why?”

“Because.” Stihl held his hand out and waited until Jack handed his personal weapon over. “You’ll get your gun back when it’s over.”

Tana understood the reason for the exchange of weapons. Hank knew how to plan and execute a crime. It wasn’t the first time someone had disappeared from Whitefish. It probably wouldn’t be the last.

Though Hank stayed behind and preferred to do all his business from the security of Glacier Crest Ranch, he knew what happened when he wasn’t here.

Several minutes later, Jack tucked the pistol behind his belt buckle and strode from the building. He walked straight across the street.

“I don’t know if he’s smart or stupid,” muttered Stihl. “Did anyone check for cameras nearby?”

“Neil cleared the area earlier. We should be fine,” said Tana.

“What about any noise?” Battle leaned against the building. “If gunfire breaks out, the sound will travel. It’ll echo because of the mountain.”

“We’ll have to take that chance.” Stihl rubbed his whiskered jaw. “He never gave us the time.”

Tana tensed. Jack was supposed to set a time limit on how long he would be inside.

“Fuck, man.” Mac stepped away from the building. “We don’t know what he’s walking into in there.”

“He told Hank that only two others, besides Primley, handle the drugs. Jack verified that they got a shipment this morning and would be here. From what I can see, he was right.” He studied the building, looking for any movement on

the sides in case they missed any exits. “Now, we wait. It can’t take too—”

Bang.

Tana raised the rifle and peered through the scope. The door remained closed.

Nobody said a word. Everyone’s attention went to the warehouse across the street. Anything could go wrong. Every Serpentine member had a choice.

They could stay.

Or they could run.

Tana kept his sight on the door. Several seconds hung heavily in the air when another gunshot came.

Coming from inside the building, the noise only reached their ears because they were listening for any sign of Jack taking out Lloyd Primley.

They were safe for now. The echo from the gunshot wouldn’t reach the residential area of Whitefish.

“Anything?” asked Stihl.

“No.” He used the scope to watch the building.

Two gunshots could mean anything. One shot from Primley. A final shot from Jack.

Or Primley killed Jack with two bullets.

His cheek twitched, and he shifted his hold on the rifle without taking his gaze from the marked target area. Putting all the drug trade in Serpentine’s hands would make his job less dangerous. If someone else tried to take over or manipulate the distribution, someone would be out to get him and his MC brothers.

“Primley beats Jack’s sister. He knocked her up a couple of times and treated her like shit the whole time. The kids are old enough to get in his way now, and Jack mentioned Primley having a heavy hand toward them.” Mac spit on the ground. “Primley needs to die. Not because of dirty drugs he brings

into Whitefish but because he's put his hands on a woman and her babies."

Until tonight, he hadn't heard Jack's beef with Primley, but if there were a slim bit of truth in the story, then it would be the one time he'd agree with Jack. Lloyd Primley had to go.

"It's been too long. If he'd done the job, he was supposed to come right out and let us do clean up." Battle stepped away from the building. "I'm going in."

"Hold on." Tana lowered his rifle. "Take Mac with you and go in from the back. There's an overhead loading door. It'll be easier and safer."

Battle patted his front pockets. "I don't have—"

"Get the crowbar out of the truck. It'll pop any lock." Battle motioned for him. "We'll drive around the block and enter from the back."

Mac pointed at Tana and Stihl. "You two good here?"

"Yep." He peered through the scope. "No one is getting out. If you happen to come out the front, throw something out the door first so I don't blow your fucking head off."

"Understood." Mac jogged toward the truck with the others.

Only Stihl and Tana rode their motorcycles to the location. They would escort the truck, loaded with the body, to the bottom of the glacier.

"I don't have a good feeling," muttered Stihl.

"He's still got time. Let's not rush things." Tana stretched his pointer finger, keeping it relaxed and ready over the trigger.

"Phone." Stihl stuck his hand in his pocket and pulled out his cell. "Yeah?"

Tana kept his gaze on the door. It was no skin off his back if Jack fucked up. But he silently agreed with Stihl. It was taking too long.

In his peripheral vision the truck carrying Battle and Mac entered his peripheral vision. He blinked rapidly, soothing his eyes, and then went back to watching the door once the truck passed in front of him.

“Are you sure, Prez?” said Stihl.

Tana could do no more than keep an eye on the building while Stihl got orders from Hank. While Serpentine’s president wasn’t here. All orders came from him.

“Okay. Yeah. As soon as I can.” Stihl exhaled. “Hank wants us all to go in. He doesn’t want to take the chance that Primley gets out and starts talking about Serpentine’s trying to kill him.”

“He’s having second thoughts about Jack.” He lowered the rifle.

“Maybe.” Stihl took out his pistol. “Or maybe he wants the job done sooner rather than later. Whatever it is, we need to get our asses over there.”

“We’re going to run head-on to the others. They don’t know we’re coming.” Tana checked his pistol, making sure it was ready, and tucked it back under his belt. Carrying the rifle, he led the way across the street.

The area was deserted. It was a part of town where two businesses shut down—the gas station and a car lot. It is too far away from the casino to interest the tourists.

Tana jogged onto the sidewalk and cut across the parking area around the warehouse.

“Tana, down,” shouted Stihl.

He dropped to the asphalt at the same time a gunshot rang out. Prone on the ground, he took in someone running out of the building. At a second glance, it was Jack. His uneven gaunt slowed him down.

Behind him, a man raised his arm.

“Fuck. I’m too far away,” said Stihl.

Tana dragged the rifle into position and braced his elbow on the ground. Getting his sight on the man, he lined up the crosshairs.

“It’s Primley.” He slowed his breathing and kept his finger relaxed.

Primley shot toward Jack. Tana braced himself, knowing he’d only have one chance, and squeezed the trigger.

Lloyd Primley flew back against the building and slid to the ground. Tana kept him in his sight.

“You got him.” Stihl slapped Tana’s shoulder. “He’s down.”

“I’ll hold the bead on him. Go check for a pulse.” Tana exhaled slowly.

He wanted to lift his head and look without the scope to see what was happening, but he wouldn’t chance the man pulling the pistol on Stihl.

“On it.” Stihl ran in front of him.

Less than thirty seconds later, Stihl waved for Tana. The man was dead.

Tana grunted. It wasn’t the first man he’d killed. Though he had to keep telling himself that Primley’s wife was safe. His babies would not be hurt.

Getting to his feet, Tana looked around and found Jack on the ground a hundred feet away. He put the rifle strap over his shoulder and jogged to the other man.

Ten feet away, he could see the problem. Blood stained Jack’s pant leg. He stopped beside him, placed the rifle on the ground, and removed his belt.

“Where are you shot?”

“My calf.” Jack grunted. “I walked in, expecting him with the drugs, and he came in after me. I dove, but he got me.”

Tana pulled the belt around Jack’s leg. “Where did the other shot go?”

“One of his workers tried to get in front of him. I shot him and then tried to get out of the building.”

“He should’ve shot you,” he mumbled.

“You’d like that.” Jack moaned in pain when Tana tightened the belt.

“You even think about touching my woman, and you’ll be a dead man. I don’t care if you pledge your life to Serpentine. Mia’s off limits to you and everyone else.”

Jack tried to stand and fell back on his ass. “She needed help.”

“And now she doesn’t.” He stood. “I could’ve shot you instead of Primley. I would’ve loved to see you die.”

Jack dipped his chin. “I owe you.”

“Damn right, you do.” Tana walked away from him.

There was a job to do. None of them were in the clear yet.



Chapter Thirty Four

The rumble of the motorcycle woke Mia. She looked at Kaden, lying beside her on the bed. She'd fallen asleep with him as he nursed off her.

Being careful not to wake him, she grabbed her cell phone. Seven o'clock?

She'd changed and brought Kaden to their bed at six-thirty. It felt like she'd slept longer than a half hour.

She carefully picked up Kaden and carried him back to his crib in the nursery. If she were lucky, he'd sleep a couple more hours before he was ready for playtime.

He never even squirmed when she put him on his back. Taking the receiver to hear him, she left the room and hurried to the bathroom.

The noise outside had stopped.

She went to the kitchen to start a pot of coffee, and the door from the garage opened. Tana's gaze warmed her. She walked to him and molded herself against his chest. His skin and leather were cold from the ride.

"Kaden asleep?" he whispered.

"Yes. He's in his crib." She moved over to finish putting the grounds in the coffee maker. "Can I make you something to eat?"

He'd left yesterday when her mom—she gasped and hurried into the living room. Last night, she'd given her mom extra blankets and a pillow to make up the couch because their spare bedroom had no bed.

Instead of finding her mom asleep, she found a note on the coffee table. She snatched up the piece of paper.

I couldn't sleep, so I'm going to the casino to wait for George. I'll call when I know where we're stopping. — Mom

She held the paper out to Tana and shook her head. In typical Sylvia fashion, she ditched her daughter to take off

with another man.

“You okay?” asked Tana.

“Sure.” She shrugged. “It’s better this way. She can live how she wants, and I’m exactly where I want to be.”

He wrapped her in a hug. She slipped her arms under his vest. He was warmer now.

She closed her eyes for a moment and let all the tension flow out of her. It was a relief not to deal with her mother. She was an adult, a wife, a mom, and the added stress of dealing with her mom wasn’t wanted or needed.

Tana raised his hands and tangled his fingers in her hair, pulling her head back. He captured her mouth. There was nothing sweet and soft about the urgency in his kiss. He opened her mouth and tasted her, diving back in with a groan.

He stole her breath and dragged her against his body. Determined, he took the kiss deeper, grabbing her ass and picking her up.

She pulled her mouth off him. “Tana?”

“I need you. Now.” He walked down the hallway. “Is Kaden going to stay asleep?”

“I hope so.” She still had the receiver in her hand.

He carried her to the bedroom. Her body pulsed as she held his head, feeding off his urgency.

“Is everything okay?” she whispered.

He’d been gone all night on club business. Usually, he came back beat from being gone all night and went straight to bed while she worked in the kitchen.

He set her on her feet, breaking apart from her only to peel the robe off her arms. She was already naked, preferring not to wear anything as a convenience when nursing.

Tana’s gaze dropped to her breasts. She rubbed her hands over them, knowing they’d changed since he returned. Sometimes, it seemed like they changed daily to meet the demands of her son.

Tana rubbed his lips together, staring at her breasts. His breathing had deepened and accelerated.

“Get on the bed.” He shucked his vest off and yanked his shirt over his head.

While she watched him strip out of his jeans and boots, she walked backward and put the receiver at the bottom of the bed. Everything about him was in the mood for sex. His shoulders bulged. His broad chest rose and fell with each breath. His stomach hardened. His cock thickened and stiffened.

But his gaze stayed troubled.

“Tana?” she whispered.

He looked up into her eyes and frowned before shaking away his thoughts. She could see the moment he pushed past whatever bothered him and returned to her.

He stepped toward her like a jaguar, inching closer to its prey. She scooted back on the bed.

He kept coming, crawling toward her on the bed. She opened her legs and held out her arms, wanting to soothe the tension away from him.

Instead of coming up, he stopped between her legs and lowered his head, taking her nipple in his mouth. Her whole body shuddered with relief. There was no way to stop her milk flow.

She stroked his curtain of hair back away from his forehead and gazed at his closed eyes. Her lower stomach quivered. A softness came over his hard face. The same softness she'd fallen in love with.

God, she remembered him as a sexy older man. He was the exact opposite of her. She used to marvel at the way her freckled skin looked so pale compared to his dark skin and hair. He was tall and broad while she was short and slim—not as much nowadays post-pregnancy.

Tana was the stereotypical Native American man with few words and controlled emotions. Except he talked to her. And

he listened. And he fought. And he loved. And he was free to express himself.

He was full of passion. A passion he gave her and nobody else.

She'd never had anyone who fought to be with her. Her mom had walked away too many times for her to know what it felt like to be loved.

Tana loved her.

She loved him.

He slipped his hand between her legs. She bent her neck and kissed the top of his head. He smelled like pine trees and fresh air with a hint of tobacco. Her stomach fluttered over the aroma.

He licked her hardened nipple. She moaned, threading her fingers in his hair. His fingers slid between her wetness, spreading her pussy.

She put her leg over his naked hip, giving him more room between her legs, which he took advantage of. Panting, she arched against his touch.

He shifted, never letting go of her breast or stopping the slow glide of his finger through the wetness of her folds. She stretched, trailing her hands over his broad shoulders and his arms.

Tana lifted his head from her sensitive nipple and opened his eyes. Those dark brown orbs pierced her soul. She sucked in her breath and thrust her pelvis off the bed.

His forehead bumped hers as she rocked against his hand. She hugged his neck, gasping as her orgasm spiraled higher and higher.

“I want you inside me.” She held her breath, struggling to hold back.

In the back of her mind, she needed to hurry. Kaden wouldn't sleep for long, and she'd lost track of time.

Like always, she was selfish with her time with Tana. She wanted him constantly.

He raised his head and looked into her eyes. She moaned, losing control. How could she connect with someone so deeply, so intimately, and so desperately?

His brows lowered, and his body tensed. She exhaled a shaky breath, willing her body to calm down.

Tana looked around the room as if searching for something. Knowing what he needed, she pointed to the end table.

“In the drawer.” She’d put the condoms out of sight after her mother had shown up unannounced. “Hurry.”

She wanted to be with him as long as possible. And, afterward, she wanted him again and again, as many times as they could squeeze in before Kaden would need her.

Tana rolled the protection over his hard cock. She squeezed her thighs together and reached for him, brushing her fingers against his muscled leg.

He raised his gaze and climbed over her, settling between her legs. She reached down and wrapped her fingers around his hardness.

Lines marked his forehead. She could sense his struggle because the same edginess grabbed her.

“Rest. I’ll take care of you,” she whispered, pushing on his chest.

He rolled, taking her with him. She got up on her knees, propping her hands on his stomach, and looked between her legs.

He was ready for her. She lowered herself down, moaning loudly as he filled her fully. Every part of her body reacted, and she shivered.

As if he read her mind, he cupped her breasts, warming her painfully engorged nipples. Pleasure spread through her. She rocked on him, stroking him with her pussy. His length caressed her deeply, and her arousal wound tighter.

She planted her hands on his chest, caught the desire smoldering beneath his lowered eyelids, and pressed her upper body into his hands.

Her movements lengthened, and she rode him harder. He was a big man. A solid man.

She sucked in a harsh inhale and moved faster. She wanted to yell, scream, and thrash atop him, but she couldn't wake the baby.

Tana groaned, squeezing her breasts. His thighs came up and tipped her forward. He lowered her, still holding her, and kissed her. Moving her arms, she braced her hands on the mattress above his broad shoulders and stroked him with her tongue.

His hands roamed over her ribs, hips, and around her ass. He helped move her. Up. Down. Up. Down. As they rocked, loved, moved, and kissed, she rode wildly, uncontrollably, greedily.

“I can't keep going,” she said against his lips. “I'm—”

His hands captured her head, sucking on her bottom lip. “You can do it. Don't stop,” he mumbled against her.

Impaling herself on him over and over, she stopped breathing. Suspended in the air, she moved, taking, giving, squeezing.

Her body exploded in pleasure. Tana swallowed her moan and added a groan of his own. His cock pulsated inside of her as he climaxed. She sagged on him, heavy and weak.

Tana wrapped his arms around her, stroking her head and putting her face against his neck. She closed her eyes, cocooned in his care.

Tana was her husband. She couldn't face life without him.

“I'll love you forever, Mia,” he whispered.

She smiled against his neck. “I'll love you forever and a day.”



Epilogue

—Four years later —



THE CRISP EVENING AIR was filled with the scent of pine and the occasional nicker from the three mares in the pasture. The sun was beginning its descent behind the rugged peaks of the Rockies, casting a warm golden glow across the landscape. Tana's heart swelled with contentment as he walked beside Mia, who had her hand tucked into his back pocket.

Ahead of them, their four-year-old son, Kaden, engaged in a daring game of lava, jumped from one weathered railroad tie to the next with the boundless energy of youth. Tana watched with pride and amusement, his son's laughter carrying on the breeze.

Kaden was the shadow of him. But his mother's spirit gave his son his temperament—stubborn, fierce, and daring.

Beside Tana, Mia's reassuring touch grounded him in the present moment. The railroad tracks, once symbols of uncertainty and distance, now represented stability and the unbreakable bond of family.

As they walked along the tracks, Tana's gaze shifted to Mia, her pregnant belly proof of his inability to stay off his wife. The sun's warm rays danced in her light eyes, reflecting the excitement that radiated from within.

Tana's stride mirrored his newfound certainty in the future. He envisioned the life they were building.

He'd grown the farmstead and now had three horses, six head of cattle, and, to his amusement, a flock of chickens that Mia called her pets. He'd spent many hours sitting on the porch, watching his wife and son chase those stupid birds around the yard. Every day was an Easter egg hunt to them.

The motorcycle club that had once been a distant dream built between three men had grown beyond Tana's expectations. Not only had they dominated the drug trade within Whitefish, but they had members in every aspect of running the county.

Less people were lost. In Whitefish and the neighboring reservation. While others would claim they were criminals, they knew the statistics. Less people had died of fentanyl overdoses.

Some would say they're profiting off illegal drugs. They were right. But if it wasn't Serpentine Motorcycle Club, it would be someone else. Someone who wouldn't care who was killed in the process.

Hank's vision of brotherhood had become a reality and flourished beyond Tana's wildest dreams. The MC gave him what he was missing from the reservation and more.

The members poured their heart and soul into Glacier Crest Ranch, and it flourished as well. The land others claimed was wild and untamable became a place where thousands of cattle roamed.

At home, Mia's business had gained a reputation with nearby ranches. She sold around three hundred sack lunches a day. Her income helped add two additional bedrooms and a brand new kitchen onto the farmhouse.

But it wasn't the success of Serpentine Motorcycle Club or his job at Glacier Crest Ranch that filled Tana's heart with the most profound sense of accomplishment. It was the family he had built with Mia.

The love that bound them together.

The bright future that lay ahead of them all.

As they continued their nightly walk, Tana stole another glance at Mia's pregnant belly. Their second child was on the way. He was both excited and nervous. He wasn't around when she got pregnant with Kaden. She'd given birth by herself. This time, he'd be there every step of the way.

It scared him to fucking death to think about his wife in pain and going through hours of labor, but he promised not to leave her side.

Life would become even busier with a growing family, but he welcomed the challenge. He wanted to give his kids more than he'd had. Mia was on the same line of thinking.

They'd each grown up without any siblings. He'd lost his mother at an early age. Mia suffered from a neglectful mom. By giving Kaden a sibling, they knew he would never be alone.

Mia met his gaze with a knowing smile. She had always been the anchor in their marriage. The one who believed in them when he'd almost lost her.

Together, they had built a stable and fulfilling life, a far cry from the unpredictability of their past.

As they approached a bend in the tracks and Kaden started slowing down, Tana looped his arm around Mia's shoulders, squeezing her. They both understood their walk was almost over.

Any minute, he'd haul Kaden onto his shoulders and carry him back to the farmhouse. Mia's steps slowed as her hand slipped from his back pocket and cradled the bump in front of her.

She had two more weeks to go until her due date.

There was still time to put his son to bed. Make love with his wife. And ride out again with Serpentine Motorcycle Club.

That was his future. A future he would never have had without the strength of his redheaded wife who refused to stop loving him.

Dear Readers —

Thank you for reading the Serpentine Motorcycle Club Saga series. Don't forget to leave a review so that others can learn about my books, too.

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Love, Debra Kayn

Author Bio



Debra Kayn is published by Grand Central Publishing, Simon & Schuster Publishing, Carina Press - Harlequin Enterprises Limited, and repped by FinePrint Literary Management.

Believing everyone deserves to love and be loved, she takes the most unlikely characters and turns them into heroes and heroines.

She lives with her family in the Bitterroot Mountains of beautiful North Idaho, where she enjoys the outdoors, the four seasons, and the wild animals that gather in her yard.

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Debra Kayn's Backlist



SERPENTINE MOTORCYCLE Club Saga

Echoing Heartbeats

Under the Moon

His Back Pocket

A Heartbreaking-Fall-in-Love-Want-to-Die-Saga

Even Better in Real Life

Killere Motorcycle Club

Deep Heart

Heart Dance

Heart Truth

Shadow Heart

Avery Falls Motorcycle Club

The Switch

The Intuition

The Implosion

The Four Stages of Loving Dutch Owen

Patches: Tarkio MC

His Road Dog

His Old Lady

His Other Half

His Loyal Rebel

Choices: Tarkio MC

Chasing His Fox

Burning Hot Rumors

Two Hearts Born to Love

All of His Secrets

Slag Motorcycle Club series

Roar & Lizzy – A Forever Kind of Love

Brage & Dinah – A Perfectly Captive Love

Elling & Jackie – A War of Forbidden Love

Peer & Coco – A Runaway For Love

Escape to the Bitterroot Mountains series

Every Little Piece of Him

Every Girl Needs a Hero

Every Second in his Arms

A Brikken Motorcycle Club Saga series

Chief

Jett

Olin

Thorn

Notus Motorcycle Club series

Hard Reality

Hard Mistake

Hard Drifter

Hard Escape

Hard Proof



RONACKS MOTORCYCLE Club series

...or something

Don't Say It

Rather Be Wrong

Can't Stop Fate

Red Light: Silver Girls series

Blow Softly

Touch Slowly

Fall Gently

Moroad Motorcycle Club series

Wrapped Around Him

For Life

His Crime

Time Owed

Falling For Crazy

Chasing Down Changes

Bantorus Motorcycle Club series

Breathing His Air

Aching To Exhale

Soothing His Madness

Grasping for Freedom

Fighting To Ride

Struggling For Justice

Starving For Vengeance

Living A Beautiful War

Melt My Heart - Anthology.

Laying Down His Colors – Bantorus Motorcycle Club

A Hard Body Novel series

Archer

Weston

The Chromes and Wheels Gang series

Biker Babe in Black

Ride Free

Healing Trace

Playing For Hearts series

Wildly

Seductively

Conveniently

Secretly

Surprisingly

Modern Love – Anthology

The Sisters of McDougal Ranch series

Chantilly's Cowboy

Val's Rancher

Margot's Lawman

Florentine's Hero

Single Titles

The Sandbar Saga

The Higher You Fly

Suite Cowboy

Hijinks

Resurrecting Charlie's Girl

Betraying the Prince

Love Rescued Me

Double Agent

Breaking Fire Code

Preview

Even Better in Real Life

By Debra Kayn

Available Now



Chapter One

The sliding door opened in front of Country Mart grocery store in Federal, Idaho. Maggie closed her romance book, shoving it underneath the cash register.

Mr. Turner walked in and stood at the end of Maggie's counter, skipping all the aisles because he was always on a mission. "I'll take a pint of Jack and a pack of Marlboros."

"Let me get that for you." She stepped away from the counter and retrieved the two items set out of reach of the customers. "Will that be all, Mr. Turner?"

"It's all I can afford until Friday." He handed over cash with a shrug. "The union never pays us early."

"That's a shame." She gave him his change, throwing his receipt in the trash. "Well, you have a good evening."

"You, too, Maggie." Mr. Turner left the store.

Having spent all her forty years within twenty miles of Federal, Idaho, and working the last six years at the store, she knew almost everyone. If not by name, then by face. And she might not know every man, especially if he was married, but she knew all the women in town because they tended to do the shopping.

She reached for her book, but her coworker returned to the front of the store and stepped behind the other cash register. Disappointed that she couldn't read a page or two between customers because it set a bad example, she picked up the duster and swept the conveyer belt.

There were four lanes with cash registers in the store, but Mr. Dorchester preferred to have only two opened at a time. She and Dawn had worked the night shift together for almost three years, closing the store five out of the seven nights of the week.

Luckily, her seniority gave her the weekends off.

“Fifteen more minutes until we can go home.” Dawn tucked stray strands of hair back into her messy bun. “It’s so hot in here.”

“They say it’ll hit ninety-four degrees tomorrow. I wish this old building had air conditioning.”

“That would go against code, I think. All the buildings in town have to stay with the historical significance of the times when they were built.”

She groaned. The tourists came to see the historic town. But she had to work here, and some AC would be fantastic in the summer.

She put the book in her bag, kicked the sack underneath the register out of sight of the customers, and said, “Do you have any big plans for the weekend?”

Deep down, her introverted personality preferred to stay home and read. She tended to live vicariously through other people who had a social life.

“Tim mentioned floating the river last night, but it’ll depend on if he ends up working or not. The miners are picking up more hours lately.”

“They need it with the cost of living going up. Everyone’s grocery bill keeps getting higher and higher. I hear customers complain about the prices all day long.” She glanced at the clock above the door.

“How about your plans for the weekend? Any hot date I should know about?”

She laughed. “If you count sitting at home and sewing a Girl Scout patch on Bailey’s vest a hot date, then yeah, big plans.”

“Who’s Bailey belong to?”

“Sharyl.” She twirled her finger in the air. “Lots of curls and tall, about six feet tall, I think. She lives in the trailer park.”

“Oh, yeah, I know who she is. She usually comes in on Thursdays to shop and carries a purse that is kick ass with all

the fringe.”

“Yeah, that’s her.”

Federal was a small town. It was nice to know who the locals were. Most of them knew her by name. She fingered her name tag.

Welcome to Country Mart. My name’s Maggie. How can I help you?

“You could come with Tim and me,” said Dawn.

“Thanks, but no.” She opened the till. “Why don’t we count each other’s drawers and close up? There are only a few more minutes, and I haven’t seen anyone drive by in the last ten minutes.”

Dawn locked the front door and met Maggie at the customer service desk. They had a routine. As long as the customers were gone, they could be out of the store and have the security alarm set within five minutes.

At precisely nine o’clock, Maggie set the alarm and ran for the front door. She only had ninety seconds to get outside and close the automatic door, or the security company would notify Mr. Dorchester of a security breach.

“I got it.” Dawn pushed the sliding door closed behind her.

Maggie waited to hear the beep, letting them know the alarm had set.

“Whew. It feels good out here with a little breeze.” Dawn let her head fall back.

All Maggie wanted to do was go home and get off her feet. Tomorrow, she’d sew and catch up on laundry. In-between loads, she could finish her latest book. That way, she could get online and check in with her reading group in the evening.

Dawn looked around the empty parking lot and pointed to her car in the back row. “Do you need a ride? I can run you over to Bitterroot Trailer Park on my way home.”

She stepped in the opposite direction. “I parked across the street under the viaduct because the lot was full when I

arrived.”

“Well, let me drive you over there.”

She laughed. “It’s right there.”

“Look across the street and make sure those bikers aren’t parked under there before you go.” Dawn frowned and lowered her voice. “I’ll sit in my car and watch you. You can flash your lights at me when you pull out.”

“I’ll be fine.” She jingled the keys on her wrist strap. “But thank you.”

“Remember, flash your lights.”

“I will.” She picked up her pace and hurried across the street a little lighter now that she was off work for the next two days.

Under the viaduct, she tapped the flashlight app on her phone to light the area in front of her. Rumors were that long ago, the bikers shot out the overhead lights under the interstate, casting darkness onto the parking area that went over the east end of Federal. The city got tired of replacing the expensive bulbs because someone would shoot them out every time they put new ones up.

Ten feet from her car, she led the way with an outstretched hand as if the key would transport her faster. She fumbled with the lock. Stuck with the beater with a heater since the divorce, she missed the convenience of a remote lock on her keychain.

What she never missed was her ex-husband, Gerald Sawyer. Goodbye to the four-timing loser who thought he could have a girlfriend in every city he stopped his big rig in.

Long-haul truckers made the worst spouses.

It was bad enough that he was never home but cheating on her was a slap in the face when she’d stayed loyal to him—even though she was lonely through ninety percent of their marriage.

She slid into the driver’s seat, getting twisted in the apron she forgot to take off and hang in the breakroom before

coming home. Yanking the material, she squirmed in the seat until she got comfortable, then she started the car.

A light turned on, blinding her.

“Hey,” she mumbled, shielding her eyes with her hand.

The light persisted, followed by a loud rumble that shook the car. Fighting the light source, she blinked rapidly, trying to see what was in front of her when the beam left, leaving her blind to the night.

Breathing heavily, she sagged against the steering wheel, recognizing the roar of a motorcycle. Under the viaduct, sounds echoed.

She let her head fall back on the headrest and closed her eyes. She could not drive with the ball of light burned into her retinas.

A car horn honked. She jumped in the seat, throwing up her hands.

“Maggie!”

She rubbed her eyes and blindly searched for the ignition, turning the key backward and hitting the window button.

“Holy shit,” said Dawn. “I thought that guy had done something to you. I might’ve left burn marks in the store parking lot for how fast I put the car in reverse. Are you okay?”

She squinted, barely making out Dawn. “His headlight blinded me. I’m waiting until the big ball of light in my vision goes away.”

Dawn laughed. “Oh, I thought you weren’t leaving because something happened.”

“No, everything is okay.” She looked over her shoulder and out the back window.

The biker must’ve hightailed it because Main Street was empty. There wasn’t a vehicle in sight.

Her vision cleared. She started the car.

“I’ll see you on Monday, if not sooner.” Dawn waved.

“Have fun with Tim.” She waved back and then went in the opposite direction than Dawn.

Living in the trailer park gave her a break from running into the locals from town on her off hours. All she had to deal with were the other residents of Bitterroot Trailer Park.

She couldn’t complain. Emmett Parker and his wife, Nova, kept the little community clean. After her divorce and finding herself without a place to live and only her wages from working at the store, she was grateful for somewhere to stay. And she could afford the rent.

At the entrance to the park, she slowed. A lot of children lived in the community. Everyone allowed them to ride their bikes around the loop and play in the empty lots. When she’d first moved here, she was afraid of hitting one of them with her car, but they were street smart and stayed out of the way, most times.

As she parked in front of the trailer, she spotted Bailey, the little girl who lived next door, running toward the car. She opened the door and grabbed her bag.

“Bailey, my lady, what can I do for you?” She smiled at all the curls escaping the ponytail.

“Can I come in and watch television?” Bailey rubbed her nose. “Jason won’t let me watch what I want to watch.”

“What do you want to watch?”

“I don’t know,” she mumbled.

Keeping her amusement to herself, she put her hand on the top of Bailey’s head and tilted the girl’s gaze up. “I would love to have you come in, but I’m tired from working. Let’s get together tomorrow when I sew your badges on your vest, okay?”

“For sure?”

“Positive. Right now, I’m going to go to bed and sleep.”

“Already?” Bailey giggled. “I don’t have to go to bed until ten o’clock.”

“That’s in less than an hour.”

Bailey shrugged. Her mom gave out a relaxed curfew. She let them run wild with all the other kids in the park. Thankfully, there were a lot of people around who watched over the younger ones. It wasn’t like they were running loose in Federal and hanging out under the viaduct or near the Silver Girls Dance Hall—she’d heard rumors about that place.

“Bailey, come back. We’re playing Jet Blue,” yelled Kirk, another kid around her age.

“See ya tomorrow, Maggie.” Bailey darted off.

Maggie inhaled deeply. She couldn’t remember the last time she had that much energy.

Inside the house, she took out her book, went straight to the sink, and washed her hands. The amount of money she dealt with daily, coming from the miners, the dancing girls, and bills plucked out of some big-breasted woman’s cleavage—made her filthy.

She stripped off her clothes, leaving her bra and panties on. Once she deemed herself clean enough to eat, she scooped some cottage cheese on a paper plate and put a slice of pineapple on top. Glancing back at the potato chips, she forced herself to carry the plate into her room.

Since the divorce, she was bound and determined to lose the extra forty pounds she’d gained in her five-year marriage. So far, she wasn’t having any luck. Sometimes, she believed stress kept her extra curvy.

She plopped down on the bed, grabbed her laptop, and turned it on. While she waited for the old thing to start, she took a bite. Her stomach growled.

Once she checked her messages and reader groups, she planned to finish her book.

Some women in the group could read three or four books a week. She could only manage to read one while working. But

over the weekend, she could catch up.

She clicked the Facebook icon. Her messages lit up.

Ignoring her food, she opened messenger and read. Two lines in, she opened another window on the screen and looked at the group. An author had gone on a rant about her lack of reviews and left Facebook. Maggie clicked and typed with one finger.

Sure enough, the author's page was gone. She exhaled, sputtering her lips. Damnit.

The same author wrote the first book of that trilogy about the fireman who hooked up with the nurse at the local hospital. She enjoyed that book. Now, the author would probably never finish the series.

She scanned the rest of the messages. Besides the rant, it was a slow day on social media. She opened a document and typed two book titles that were to release at midnight. Checking the time, she finished her cottage cheese and wandered back into the kitchen for the bag of potato chips. She'd worry about losing weight tomorrow.

Putting her pillows against the headboard, she lounged back and opened her book. Normally, she stuck to reading Kindle books on her phone or laptop because they were cheaper. But she loved paperbacks. Her current read came from a giveaway from a promotional company almost a year ago that she had forgotten about.

Depending on where she read, she switched back and forth between digital books and paperback books. She was lucky that Trina, who lived on Lot 6a, gave her a sack full of romance books destined for the dump. Trina's mom had died, and they were cleaning her house, and no one she knew liked to read.

While sad about the death, she was thankful for the books. Some were fairly current that people still talked about them online.

She flipped to the bookmark—an old receipt from the store. Right now, she was going through a biker phase. She

loved the alpha boys.

The outlaw in the book took no shit from anyone. Sarge, that was the hero's road name, lived at the clubhouse and helped run the sale of illegal guns. What set him apart from all the other bikers she'd ever read about was his habit of chewing gum instead of smoking. She liked the change. It was endearing.

Plus, the hero was older. Since she was forty years old, she was tired of reading about all the thirty-year-old boys.

She sighed in pleasure, reaching into the bag and pulling out a chip. Her day slipped away, and the book transported her into a new world.



Chapter Two

The single-story former motel shaped in the letter L remained dark out in front. The hint of pine smoke hung heavily in the air.

Home to Moroad Motorcycle Club, the place also acted as a halfway house for those fresh out of prison. Housing was scarce in the area. Top that off with being an ex-convict, and most people wouldn't open their door to a member of Moroad.

After he left his last rental, it was easier to crash at the motel than find another place. Besides, he had a room to himself. That was good enough for him.

Lash rolled to a stop, backing his Harley in front of his room. There would be no fanfare tonight. The monthly shipment of illegal guns had never reached him.

Once the others made it back, they'd figure out what happened and where in the train everything went wrong. He hoped it wasn't the Feds who put a hit on the club.

If someone else had hijacked the guns, they could start a war and go after them. But nobody wanted to mess with the government.

Most of the members of Moroad had already spent too much time in prison to want to go back. Half the fucking club was behind bars.

He toed the kickstand and slumped on the seat, leaning his forearms on the handlebar. The club had to face the fact that too many miles along the route were out of their control. They had Blue threatening them. Red's trying to outbuy them with the help of Los Li, the Mexican cartel from across the border. Not to mention every damn motorcycle club in the Pacific Northwest wanted product from them.

They were going to run out of supplies, and they'd all face hard times if they couldn't keep the money rolling in. Moroad couldn't get the weapons fast enough for demand, which made men anxious and impatient.

A big figure stepped out of the shadows. "I heard what happened."

Lash squinted into the darkness until he could make out the president of Moroad. Jeremy Aldridge was a fair leader. A stern leader. He was also one who would slice your throat if he felt your loyalty wavered while wearing a patch.

Many men had gone up against Jeremy. None of them were around to ask how that worked out for them.

He swung his leg off the motorcycle and stepped under the overhead awning in front of his room. "What's your plan?"

Jeremy remained silent. It was a rare moment when the president showed his hand.

"A couple of the women from Silver Girls are at the firepit, entertaining the men." Jeremy dipped his head, lighting a cigarette. "You might as well enjoy the rest of your night."

That was Jeremy's way of telling him he wouldn't talk business tonight. That was all right with him. He was beat.

"I think I'm going to hit the hay." He stepped toward the door. "If you need me before the morning, give a shout."

Jeremy walked away without acknowledging him. Lash understood his president heard him. He wasn't going to get more of a response out of him.

Inside the room, he left his vest on and dove forward, landing on the bed. He let his boots hang off the mattress. He groaned as his spine uncompressed from the long hours on the seat of the Harley.

It wasn't his choice to sit under the viaduct all fucking night. But after Tracker got killed ten miles outside of Federal a year ago, there was no one to take the high pressured spot on the train. He had to make sure no one witnessed the arrival of gun parts or discovered what he was doing when he rode off toward Spokane to meet the next Moroad member on the east side of the Fourth of July pass.

Luckily, with summer going on, the only people that bothered him while he waited to make contact were two

teenage boys on bicycles, rolling past him, and the chick from the store.

His balls tightened, remembering the way the woman's breasts bounced as she hurried to her car. Even in the fucking dark, he could see the curves of her body behind the blue apron.

He couldn't remember when he'd stepped foot inside the store in the last twenty-eight years that he was a free man. He never cooked for himself. There was no need for a trip inside the store.

Usually, if the women hadn't brought food to the motel, he ate from the warmer at the gas station or hit up Rail Point Bar for a meal since it was owned by a Moroad member's old lady. Merk had stepped away from riding long hours after getting pins in his hands after busting the bones in a fight. Now he spent most of his day helping his woman at the bar. Lash could usually find his MC brother bullshitting behind the counter.

He rolled over. A groan squeezed out of him as his back protested the movement. He should probably wander into the backyard and let one of the women make him feel better.

Some nice squeezing and pampering would do him right.

He remained on the bed. His back wasn't going to let him do shit until the muscles stopped spasming. Since he'd laid his bike on the pavement two years ago, it took longer to shake the soreness after a day in the saddle.

The only way he would get better was if he took a week or two off and stayed away from riding. That sure in the hell wasn't going to happen. He'd rather take a gun to his head than stay off his Harley.

The door rattled with a knock. Without lifting his head, he shouted, "It's open."

The door swung open. Prez entered. "The train's back on track."

He pushed off the bed and staggered to his feet, holding his breath. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

His contact had never arrived. He'd stayed there an hour after the meeting time. There was no way he missed picking up the rifles.

A cramp wrapped around his lower back. He arched his spine and grunted in pain.

“Jacko took a ride on Nine Mile Road and found the contact that was supposed to meet you dead on the side of the road. Whoever was responsible dropped the guns and split.” Jeremy motioned for him to come outside.

Lash tucked his pistol underneath his belt and stepped through the door. He waited until Jeremy issued orders to Sorbet, a two-year recruit straight out of the Idaho State prison.

Once Jeremy turned back to Lash, he popped a piece of gum in his mouth.

“You need to meet Jacko under the viaduct. He's going to help you get them to the next drop-off point.” Jeremy walked with him to Lash's Harley. “I'll let them know the train is coming.”

“Are you contacting Jacko?” he asked.

“I will.”

“Let him know I'm five minutes out. Tell him to stay out of sight, or we're going to have the sheriff breathing down our neck. What are we doing with the DOA?”

“I sent a cleanup crew out there to get rid of the body. I don't want that tracked back to Moroad.”

He two-finger saluted Jeremy, started his bike, and roared out of the lot onto the road.

At a moment's notice, he would always be ready to ride for Moroad. It was a damn shame he got pulled away from his bed. He was just starting to drift off, thinking of that gal at the store and what he could've done with his dick and her big tits.