



DEATHSTALKERS MC BOOK THREE

# HORSEMAN

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# ELIZABETH KNOX

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## Horseman

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## TRIGGER WARNING

This book is intended for mature audiences only. If darker books are not for you, please do not move forward. After re-adjusting my trigger warning system, I will ***not*** be giving any spoilers. Please understand that this is not your run-of-the-mill romance and tough subjects will be discussed in this storyline. This story could include things like rape, kidnapping, abuse, domestic violence, drugs, alcohol abuse, and *many* other potential triggers.

## DEATHSTALKERS MC MEMBERS:

Falcon — Prez

P: Hermoine

Hawk — VP

Kinetic — Enforcer

P: Charlee

C: Vivianna

Bones — Sgt. at Arms

Horseman — Road Captain

Moneybags — Treasurer

Bowser — Tech

Merlin — Full Patch

Vader — Full Patch

Rajah — Full Patch

Mace — Prospect

Snowden — Prospect

## PROLOGUE

*TWO WEEKS AGO . . .*

*Scarlett*

For the middle of May, the weather has been insane. We usually have a lot of bad thunderstorms in the summer, but as of late, it's been happening every single day. Every single day this week, actually. Today is no exception. Only there's one huge difference today. I'm heading over to my house. I haven't lived there in a few years and have been renting it out while I was at school out of State getting my master's degree. I thought it was going to work out great.

I'd be able to make my mortgage payment without stressing too much. Being in college and living out of State is expensive as all hell. Renting out my childhood home was the best course of action. It gave me the ability to have a little bit of financial freedom for a couple of years while I was away, and since my brother and I own the home together, he agreed. He doesn't really do much with the house because he doesn't want it. He knew how much I wanted it, though, so when our mom passed away, he was able to get a loan for the rest of the mortgage and kept it for me. The house will be paid off in just a couple of more years, and I cannot wait until that day comes.

Renting it out was supposed to be easy, but it hasn't been. It's been quite the opposite.

Any time I've come back to Portland for breaks from school or even holidays, I've stayed with my best friend, Jessie, since it was only for a few days at a time.

Now I've graduated with my master's in public administration and being back here hasn't been as easy as I thought it was going to be.



I was supposed to be moving directly into the house after I graduated. However, my tenants have decided that even though I've given them written notice that they were being evicted, they didn't need to vacate the premises.

The original agreement I created with the Randall family was for two years, and after the two years, it would be a month-to-month lease. They knew what I had planned that they'd rent out the property until we were nearing the end of my schooling, and at that point, we'd move over to the month-to-month agreement. They even signed documentation agreeing to all of the terms, which made me feel like everything was great. There was never a doubt in my mind that they'd become the big pain in the asses that they are today.

I fucked up, though. I didn't run a background check on these people. I had made a post on Facebook about renting out my house while I went away to school, and a family friend knew of some people from their church who needed some help. Little did I know helping a needy family would get me into this mess.

They were supposed to leave the house five months ago. They haven't paid rent in over eight months, were supposed to be gone by now, and I'm at my wit's end. I don't know what to do. I'm on my way to my childhood home in my brand-new Ford F-150. I used a good portion of my life savings to be able to afford this car. Luckily, I was able to get my payments under three-hundred dollars because my down payment was so massive. I custom-built this truck, and it was the one thing I really wanted to do for myself when I finished my master's degree. It's the gift I promised to myself, honestly. I got it in Carbonized Gray with a metallic finish on the inside. It's everything I ever wanted, and even though the Randall family is putting me through hell right now, I wasn't going to break this promise to myself.

I have a plan today. I'm going to pull up to the house, walk up to the door and try to get them to talk to me. I've been more than good to them, and I don't know why they're doing this to me. The family friend who gave me their name said that they were going to be homeless if they didn't move into the house, so I saved them from that fate. Now they're avoiding me, ignoring me, and acting like I'm the worst landlord on the face of the earth.

At this point, I'm not in school anymore. I have all of my stuff in the back of my F-150, thankfully with a waterproof cover keeping it all safe inside the bed of the truck. If they don't agree to leave, I don't know what I'm going to do. I have nowhere else to go, and the only thing I think I can do is stay with

my best friend, Jessie. We've known each other since we were fourteen and have always been there for each other, no matter what's happened.

I shake my head, pushing back my stress. I don't know if they're going to give me any problems. Who knows, I could roll right into the driveway, and maybe the house will be empty, and they're gone. That would be the best option, so I'm praying for that.

I drive for a few more minutes, and the rain progressively gets worse. I pull back into our tucked-away neighborhood in Portland's suburbia area. Sure enough, as I drive through the neighborhood, my stomach is being tied in knots. The closer I get to the house, the more I feel like this is going to continue to be a shitshow.

As I spot the house and see their cars in the driveway, I already know this isn't going to be good. Wilhelmina and Jarod Randall seemed like the perfect tenants. People who would've gone above and beyond to keep the property and house in tip-top shape. They promised me they would, at least. They have four kids, all under eighteen, and the mother volunteers at the local soup kitchen with them and homeschools them. They seemed perfect, absolutely perfect . . . and I've been a damn fool. I should have asked more questions before I let them sign the lease and move in. I should have been smarter, and all I can do right now is learn from the mistake I made.

I pull my truck into the driveway and grab the umbrella I always leave tucked away in the space between the passenger seat and the center console. I open my door and open my umbrella outside of the truck, using it as a way to keep the rain from soaking me from head to toe.

My heart pounds in my chest as I walk up the driveway and make it up to the covered porch. I know they're all home because both of their cars are here. Hopefully, they'll speak to me.

I press my finger on the white doorbell, hearing the ringing through the house before I take my finger off it. I wait for a few minutes, and no one comes to the door, so I do it again. I'm not trying to be rude. All I'm trying to do is handle this without going through the court system. This is the last chance I'm giving them before I begin filing with the courts. I've been as nice as I possibly could. For fuck's sake, they haven't paid me in over eight months. Most landlords would have already taken them to court for pulling this shit.

Surprisingly, the front door is thrown open, and Jarod Randall is staring at me with a scowl all over his face. Immediately, I know this isn't going to

be a good experience. He's ready to throw words around. "What do you want?" he grumbles, running his hands through his greasy dark hair.

"When you'll be out of my house. I've given you more than enough time, Jarod. You haven't paid in over eight months, and I'm trying to settle this out of court, but at this point, you're forcing my hand."

He scoffs and snickers, "We're going through a rough time, all right? We can't pay, and we can't move."

I glance over at his old '99 Chevy truck that somehow still runs. Jessie told me she's driven by the house every day, and it's always here. She said it hadn't been moved in over a month. "It must be since you're not working, right?"

Jarod rears his head back and licks his bottom lip. "You have someone watchin' us or something?"

"I grew up here, Jarod. I don't ask about anything, but everyone seems to tell me my tenants have been shooting off fireworks in the front lawn at all hours of the night, haven't mowed the grass in weeks, are blaring music at all hours, and are generally a nuisance."

"Fuckin' rats. Look, I don't know what you want us to do. I'm not leavin'. We don't have nowhere to go, okay?"

"You know what I want you to do. I want you to get the fuck out of my house! I've been more than accommodating. I've been as helpful as I can be. I've been as kind as I can, but I'm not going to be nice anymore. Get out of my house, Jarod. Your time has been up for a while, and you keep staying here. Get the fuck out."

Jarod snickers again and reaches around his back, pulling out a gun in record time. He pulls back the safety. "If you wanna keep talkin' like that, you can deal with the consequences. No one talks to me like this in my own home." Newsflash, it's not his house . . . but there's a gun being pointed at me right now, and I'm not going to be the fact-checking police.

"You're making this uglier than it needs to be," I point out.

"I'm not the one doing jack shit. You're bein' a stupid bitch who doesn't know her place."

"Fine." I look right into his eyes that scream how much he doesn't give a fuck. This is the kind of man who would literally shoot me, so I keep a strong face on and turn around, walk down the steps, over the sidewalk back to my truck, praying he won't actually pull the trigger. Somehow, I managed to make it in the truck without being shot at and head straight for the

courthouse.

This is the nail in the coffin.

I'm filing the paperwork to get these sleazy motherfuckers out of my house. They're moochers. They're users. They're going to do whatever the hell they can to stay here for as long as possible, and I can't wait until the police forcibly remove them from the property when an eviction is ordered.

While I'm on my way to the courthouse, I call Jessie through my Bluetooth system. "Hey. How did it go?"

I swallow hard, trying to force back the anger in my voice. "Not great. I'm heading to the courthouse right now."

"Good. It's about damn time! You've been too nice to them."

"Yeah, and the husband just pointed a gun at me."

"What?!" Jessie screams into the phone.

"Yep, so I'm heading to the courthouse, and then I'm coming over. I need a glass of wine and a hardcore venting session. I need something else too . . ."

"You need to be going to the police, too. At least get a restraining order or something." She's making a valid point . . . but I have an even better idea.

"No, I'm going to call my brother. I don't know if the police can help me, Jessie. We've seen so much stuff like this happen, and they don't do a damn thing until someone ends up getting hurt. I'm not going to be another statistic."

"Okay, fair enough. What else did you need?" Jessie replies, just as the rain is finally letting up.

"To sleep on your couch for a little bit. I promise I won't be too long. I just need some time to figure out where I'm going. I doubt I'll be able to get these assholes out of my house quickly."

"Of course. It'll take a couple of months, but we'll figure this out. Okay? Now, get on over here. I'll have a bottle of wine waiting and a pizza on the way."

This is the first moment I've felt a bit of relief since I left my house.

Everything is going to be okay.

There isn't another option—well, there is, but I'm not going to let that be a possibility.

# CHAPTER ONE

*PRESENT DAY . . .*

*Horseman*

“I need everyone in church as soon as possible,” Falcon’s voice booms through the main area, and everyone stops what they’re doing. Hawk and Vader were in an intense game of pool while Kinetic was playing a game on his phone. Snowden and Mace have been playing chess, which is surprising in itself, but neither of them will have to stop their game since they’re prospects. Bone’s been sitting back in an armchair on the back wall, catching a nap. Bowser’s in the kitchen whipping up something to eat, and Moneybags just walked in through the front door.

Anyone who’s supposed to, stops what they’re doing and follows Falcon into the room where we have church. We all find our seats, and after we’re all seated, the entire room goes quiet. Falcon clears his throat, takes the gavel in his hand, and then slams it on the table. “I received a call from Reed, the president for the Skulls Renegade MC, down in Gainesville, Tennessee.”

“What about?” Kinetic questions, just as curious as the rest of us. There could be many reasons why he has called.

Falcon swallows hard and looks at Kinetic, making sure to have some sort of eye contact with each one of us as he speaks. “Reed is asking a favor of us, and it’s a huge one at that. One I believe we should grant him.”

“We do favors for other clubs all the time. What’s the big deal about this one?” Vader questions. I personally don’t think it’s a big deal that we’re talking about doing a favor for another club. It only means they’ll owe us one in return, and we’ll cash in on it whenever we need to. Something about Falcon’s tone makes me think it’s a little different from us lending a helping

hand to their club in a time of need. It seems a bit more serious.

“Well, Reed wants to know if he can send someone up here. Specifically, someone who needs our help as soon as possible.” Falcon leans back in his chair and narrows his brows. “Her name is Balsinde, and she’s a single mother who has a lot of demons in her past and one that’s currently tormenting her and her two young daughters. Reed needs to get her out of Gainesville and as far away from the Eastern states as possible. He’s afraid if he doesn’t get her out of there, she’ll end up dead.”

“Why does he think she’ll end up dead?” I’m asking the question now. It feels like there must be some underlying risk with this situation.

“Reed didn’t go into grave detail with me. The phone call was a short one since I told him I’d need time to think it over. What I do know about her ex is that he’s a policeman, so he knows every legal loophole there is. I think that’s what makes him so dangerous to her. He knows exactly what to do and how he can do it without facing any real consequences.”

“So, he’s walking around the lines of stalking and harassment charges?” Hawk asks, and Falcon nods.

“He’s barely tiptoeing on the other side of the line, and he knows what he needs to do to avoid crossing it. He’s smart, and that’s why Reed believes Balsinde and her daughters need to get the fuck out of there. As I said, I don’t know too many details, but I know if Reed is telling me this woman needs to leave, it means she needs to leave. He told me Balsinde is afraid for her safety and her children’s.” Falcon continues on, again looking at each of us, “We need to call this to a vote. I know there has been a lot of crazy shit that’s happened lately, but if we can lend a helping hand, I think we should. My vote is yes.”

“Yes,” Kinetic adds.

“Why the hell not?” Bones questions.

“If the situation is as dangerous as Reed says, we’re not really being given a choice,” Hawk comments.

“Yeah, let’s help the woman out,” Vader puts in his two cents.

“I think we should help. It’ll just mean Reed owes us one,” I add. Falcon nods at what I’m saying, and it’s always good to be owed some favors, especially when the time comes when you need them.

“Fuck it. Let’s help them out,” Moneybags finally speaks up.

“If we don’t help, we’re just putting her and her kids at risk,” Rajah comments. He isn’t wrong. If we do nothing, it could very well kill all of

them.

Bowser and Merlin are the last two brothers we're waiting to hear from, and they both look at each other. "Do they really think she's going to get away from him? He's in the police department, right? So, won't he do what he can to locate them after she disappears?" Bowser brings up a good point.

"They're going to live off the radar, and Reed told me he's coming up with a plan if the club says yes so that they won't be easily tracked," Falcon answers his concerns.

"Then we should help her. My only concern is that we'd have to deal with more bullshit when our plate is already full. But it looks like Reed has it covered," Merlin says.

"All right, then it's settled. I'll call Reed and let him know," Falcon tells the entire room, but Rajah clears his throat. "Is there something else you'd like to add, brother?"

Rajah nods. "Where is she going to stay?"

"Why not the old house out back? It's been there since we bought the property, and while it's overgrown, I'm sure it'll be usable," Kinetic suggests.

"That isn't a bad idea. I haven't been in the house, though. When we bought the place, it was in rough shape," Falcon comments.

"It wasn't in rough shape. It just hadn't been lived in for a while." Kinetic cackles.

"Fine, then we need to clean up the property on the inside and out. We won't have a lot of time before they get here. I'm sure the second I tell Reed everything is good, he'll be orchestrating everything to get them up here," Falcon tells us all, which means we're going to have to be busting our asses starting tomorrow.

"I can help with whatever we need to do. Luckily, my construction skills haven't faded over the years." Whenever I'd come back from tours, I'd always pick up some construction jobs. I'd worked for my uncle from the point I was sixteen onward just because it was some damn good money. I also hated not staying busy, and there's always something to be doing when you work on a construction site.

"Aren't you still building your cabin?" Falcon questions.

I'm building a cabin right next to Kinetic and Charlee's property. I bought it not too long ago, and instead of paying someone else to do it and wasting a lot of money, I've done it all myself, with the exception of my

brothers helping me get the walls up. Now, the only thing that needs to be done is the interior work.

“I do, but I’ll just spend a few less hours a day at my place until the house is prepared for her and the children. It shouldn’t take us too long to knock it out,” I suggest, trying to be slightly optimistic.

“I can help Horseman with whatever he needs. I think I’ve picked up a thing or two,” Hawk states.

“Same here. You’re not the only useful son of a bitch around here.” Vader cackles.

I’m grateful to both of them for offering to lend a helping hand. Over the course of the next few minutes, every brother in the room has offered to lend a helping hand. This is exactly what club life is about, being there whenever you need someone.

“The old driveway looks like a damn jungle. We’ll need to get out there early and handle that,” Vader speaks up, and he isn’t wrong. I swear it could classify as part of the Amazon at this point.

“Horseman, do you think you could borrow some heavy machinery to tear down some of the bigger brush that’s grown over the years?” Hawk asks me.

Between my uncle’s construction company and some local friends, I’m sure there will be someone I can borrow some equipment from. “Yeah, I’ll make some calls.”

“We’ll need some stone to lay down after it’s cleared out. Does anyone have someone with stone?” Falcon asks.

“Yeah, my buddy works at the local quarry. I’m sure he’ll cut us a deal,” Hawk answers.

I do have my uncle, but my buddy Steve might be more willing to let me borrow shit without as much hassle as my uncle will probably give me. “You know Steve Wilkinson?” I question Falcon, who nods. “He’s a good friend of mine. I’m going to contact him and see if he’ll help us out with a few things. He might even cut us a break for some extra cash if we want some help.”

“All right, good to know. I’m hoping we can handle most of it ourselves. There shouldn’t be any reason that we need to spend a lot of money on labor for this project. That’s all I have for you guys. Church is adjourned.” Falcon slams the gavel down, and every brother begins making their way out of the room.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, and it’s a text message from my uncle. I



should respond to it, but I see the time. It's a bit past five, and I need to get over to the hardware store to get more supplies for what I'm working on tonight at my cabin, but before I head over there, I need to stop by the Java Zone and get a hot cup of coffee. That's the only way I'm going to stay busy tonight.

My days are long, but I know they're only going to grow longer since we're helping this woman and her two little girls.

By the time I've gotten my coffee and I'm back from the hardware store, the clubhouse is scarce. I only see a couple of my brothers, and just as I'm sitting down on one of the couches, my phone goes off.

I pull up my text messages.

**From: Hawk**

*Hey. You at the club?*

**To: Hawk**

*Yeah. What's up?*

Within a minute, I have another response.

**From: Hawk**

*Scarlett is on her way over there. Make sure the brothers don't fuck with her too much. She sounds like she's had a really bad day, and I need to see what the fuck is up.*

Scarlett is Hawk's younger sister. I haven't seen her in a couple of years, but it will be nice to chat with her before he gets here. In the meantime, maybe I can turn her day around a bit.

**To: Hawk**

*Yeah, no problem.*

## CHAPTER TWO

*SCARLETT*

It's been over two weeks since I went up to my doorstep and told my tenant he and his family needed to get out. I decided that I wasn't going to run and tell my brother right away, but now I'm at the point where I need his help. I don't know what else to do. I've been in Jessie's spare bedroom for over two weeks and feel like I'm being an inconvenience to her. Jessie's told me that isn't the case, but I can't help the way I feel. She didn't sign up to have a roommate. She got a two-bedroom apartment so she could have an extra room when her family came back to see her. I know her mother is coming in a couple of weeks, so whether I like it or not, I have to figure this out.

I finally bit the bullet and called my brother. I asked if I could go over to his motorcycle club's clubhouse so we could talk face-to-face. He thought something was really wrong with me since I wanted to chat with him today. Usually, we schedule a time to have dinner once a week when I'm in town or go out to do something fun.

We've been chatting since I've been back in Portland via text, but I don't think he realized I was actually in town. I never came out and told him, so that's probably why. He was alarmed, but I told him I needed to see him so we could talk about some stuff. He asked if I was pregnant or if he needed to beat someone up. I told him no at first, but not for the last part. I'd love it if my brother showed Jarod right where he needed to shove it.

Hawk isn't at the clubhouse right now, but he said he'd be there in about half an hour. I pull into their parking lot and head right over to the clubhouse. It feels a little odd to be here. It's been years since I've set foot inside the four

walls that my brother calls home. I don't judge him for how he lives his life or anything like that. It's quite the opposite. I commend him for being able to find his place in the world and knowing exactly where he wants to be. At twenty-nine, I'm still trying to figure that out. All I've ever known is that I wanted to go to college and get a master's degree. It's what I promised our mother I'd do before she passed away.

I should be happy as I'm getting out of my truck and walking up to the doors, but instead of being happy, my nerves are shot. My stomach is flopping around, and I'm terrified to tell Hawk about what's happened with my renters. He was a little bit leery at first and told me to be careful with renting the place out. I even assured him that everything was going to be fine, and now here I am, about to tell him everything is anything but fine. I need help, and if I'm going to ask anyone for help, it's going to be Hawk. He's protected me ever since I was a baby, and I know he'll do it until the day he dies. My brother is very much my saving grace.

Hawk did tell me that Horseman knows I'm coming. Horseman . . . who I've always thought was hotter than hell. He has these light sage green eyes with a bit of blue around his irises, which makes them pop. I've never seen eyes as beautiful as his before. If his eyes aren't captivating enough, the rest of his body is.

He's fit. Not to the point where he looks like he's on steroids. His physique is quite thin, kind of like a swimmer, but his muscles are very well-defined. The definition makes his tattoos pop. They're all over his body. I haven't seen him in a few years, but I'm kind of wondering if he has any new ones. I was lucky enough to be here one summer when they had a party. He was in a pair of deep ruby-red swim trunks that clung to his body like a second skin. Jessie was with me, and we both made a comment about how good he looked . . . and how he left little to the imagination.

I walk through the front door, and the club hasn't changed much over the years. There are a couple of new furniture items, possibly a new pool table over on the other side, but I can't tell from this far away.

"Scarlett," Horseman's deep voice calls my attention over.

"Hey." I plaster on a fake smile because I'm feeling stressed the hell out. This situation of not having anywhere to live is not only embarrassing but frustrating too. I had everything planned out perfectly, and my plan blew up right in my face.

Horseman narrows his eyebrows for a moment but quickly returns them

back to normal. “Hawk told me you sounded stressed, but you sound worse than that.”

I roll my eyes. “I should’ve known he was going to tell you something.”

“What’s going on?”

I suck in a deep breath, debating if I should tell Horseman. I don’t know if I want to tell him. It’s going to be hard enough telling Hawk about this, and I don’t want anyone else egging on my brother’s undoubted anger.

“It’s nothing I can’t handle.” I force a laugh but try to make sure it doesn’t sound too bad.

“You’ve been away at college, right?”

“Yeah, in Salt Lake City.”

“How was it? You finish your program yet?”

I walk over to where Horseman’s sitting down on the couch and take a seat beside him. I slide a leg underneath my other one and get comfortable, nodding. “Yeah, I finished up about three weeks ago. I’m so happy it’s finally done.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, what was your degree in?”

“Public Administration.”

Horseman stares at me blankly. “Can you translate that? Like, what can you do with that sort of degree?”

I lick my lips. “I can work for the city, have administrative positions. Basically, a lot of management positions are available to me with a master’s degree.”

“Hmm. Anything you’re looking to apply for specifically?”

I almost want to laugh. I’ve been applying for jobs left and right but haven’t had any bites yet. “Ideally, I’d really like to be involved in fundraising or budgeting. My minors are in statistics and calculus.”

“Jesus.” Horseman laughs. “I didn’t realize you’re not just smart. You’re a downright genius if you choose to pursue minors in mathematics.”

I laugh, accepting the sweet compliment. “Ever since I was little, I’ve always enjoyed math. My brother was the opposite. I remember our mom would try to get him to help me with my homework when I was little. I really didn’t need the help at all. I think she was trying to get him to get off his video games. He tried to understand the problems while I was blowing right through them.”

“I wasn’t bad at them. Just didn’t really understand shit when I was in school. Ironically enough, I understood it a lot better when I started helping

my uncle at his construction company.”

“Let me guess, you had a lot of kids in your class, and your teacher couldn’t help you all understand what she was trying to teach?”

Horseman nods. “Pretty spot on.”

I frown and then smile. “That’s really common in the public school system. Personally, I think teachers need more aides who can get to other students who are struggling. If our public education system had a bigger budget, we could devote more money to getting the students the help they need.”

“You’re very right. Back in my day, they didn’t have too many resources like that.”

“Yeah. It always takes time to get changes implemented, which sucks, but as long as the changes are made, then I guess it’s okay.”

“That’s a good way to look at it,” Horseman comments just as the door to the clubhouse slams shut.

We both look over, and my brother is rushing in, scanning his eyes around the place until he finds me. “Was that thirty minutes?” I joke.

“No. I was rushing to get over here. C’mon, let’s go chat somewhere.” Hawk motions with his head for me to get up, so I do.

I pop off the couch and look right at Horseman. “It was nice chatting with you, Horseman.”

“Likewise.” He stares at me with those captivating eyes of his. It takes me a couple of seconds longer than usual before I walk off, following my brother to wherever he’s taking me. I follow him up a stairwell, and then we’re walking down a hallway. We reach a bedroom door, and he inserts a key. He opens it for me, flicks on the light, and I head right on in.

Surprisingly, his room is very clean. I sort of expect Hawk to be a slob like he was when we were kids. Being in the service really made my brother grow up. It turned him into an even better man.

I walk across the room to where he has two armchairs side by side. One of them has a coat slung across the back of it, but that’s the most untidy thing here.

Hawk shuts the door behind him and sits down in the armchair directly beside me. “All right, I drove like a bat out of hell to figure out what’s going on here. You wanna fill me in?”

Do I want to? No.

Do I have to? Yes.

I lick my lips nervously, and my stomach begins grumbling. I really hope I don't get bubble guts right now. "The tenants haven't left the house. They're refusing to leave."

My brother looks at me like I've lost my mind. "What do you mean they're *refusing* to leave?"

"Exactly what I said. They won't leave."

"Didn't you have a contract written up with them?"

"Yeah, and here it is." I take out my phone and show my brother the contract that the Randalls signed. He takes a couple of minutes to go over it completely and looks right into my eyes.

"You literally have it here that there's a two-year contract, and then it changes to a month-to-month one. But you have the eviction notice at the end of this PDF . . . so they obviously knew they needed to leave."

I nod. "Yeah, they did, and they haven't paid me rent in over eight months."

"I'm sorry, what?"

The more I tell my brother, the angrier he gets. I'm almost afraid to tell him that Jarod pulled a gun on me because what is Hawk going to do? Is he going to get himself hurt in a bout of rage? It's a real possibility.

"Yeah, and now I'm back and have no house to live in. I'm so stressed, Scott. I don't know what else to do." I rarely ever use my brother's birth name since he's been in this motorcycle club, but I need him to know how afraid I am. How stressed I am. I need his help, and I don't know what else to do.

He's quiet for a couple of minutes, but then he looks right into my eyes. "I think there's something we might be able to do, but I have to talk to Falcon about it first." Falcon is the president of the Deathstalkers MC, so if he's saying that he needs to speak to Falcon, then the club must be the ones who are going to help me.

"Okay . . . so when do you think I'll know something? I need to be out of Jessie's apartment by next week. That's when her mom's coming into town."

"Okay, that's plenty of time. Give me a day or two to talk to Falcon, but we'll figure this out, Scar, I promise." My brother calling me by my nickname honestly calms me down a bit. He gets up from his armchair and pulls me into his arms, forcing a hug. If there's anyone who can make me feel better right now, it's him.

I was going to tell him about what Jarod did, but I don't think that now is

the time. I'll tell him eventually, but I need to at least get settled first.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *HORSEMAN*

I couldn't sleep for shit last night, so I showered around five, and I'd already been at my cabin working for three hours. In that time, I've gotten a lot done around here. Some days, I don't mind getting an early start. I think it's my body's way of reminding me I like to stay busy.

I've always known since I was a small boy that I wanted to build my own house. It wasn't until I was older that I realized I didn't want to build any sort of house. I wanted to build a cabin. So, when I was active in the Marines, I'd spend my downtime on missions imagining the home I'd one day live in. Some days, it kept me going. It was usually when I was in the hottest, god-awful location, with every sort of insect coming after my blood and flesh. I guess, in one way or another, we always need something that will keep us going, even on our worst days. My cabin did that for me. It gave me the courage to move on.

It leads me to where I am now, in the living room of my three-bedroom, two-bathroom cabin, which sits next door to the property of one of my best friends. Kinetic and I really bonded when we were in the Marines together. You bond with everyone on your squad, but Kinetic and I connected over similarities growing up and the losses we endured. I've told that man shit I've never told others, and I think he could say the same when it comes to me.

My cabin has five narrow steps that lead up to a wraparound porch. My front door is directly in front of the steps, and around the corner of my porch is a fireplace where I'll be able to sit outside and enjoy the cool nights with my loved ones. On the other side of the outdoor fireplace is a fireplace inside my living room. I had Steve build the chimney for me since he does a lot



more of them. He made it double the size so it could accommodate both of them.

On the right side of the fireplace is another door, which leads to my massive kitchen. I've put so much thought into this place. Wherever I can have exposed wood, I have it. I want you to be able to walk into my home and know it's right where it should be—in the woods.

While I'm still technically in suburbia, I'm nestled back into a few acres of woods. My property lines up right beside Kinetic and Charlee's, and it only takes a short walk for me to be able to be next door or vice versa.

I've already taken a slight break and drove to Hermoine's coffee shop, the Java Zone. She's Falcon's ol' lady, and she's been hooking us up by giving us free coffee and food. I guess it's a new perk of being with the Deathstalkers MC.

With my to-go cup in hand, I'm staring at my task for the day. I need to finish the tile work in my master bathroom. Once I finish this up, I'll actually be able to start sleeping here instead of at the clubhouse. I don't mind staying there, but I think I'll enjoy having my own place to come back and relax at. It shouldn't take me more than a week.

I already have my backer board in the shower, and I take my box cutter and slice the sides of the box the tile's in. I purchased a mixed pebble stone set that's considered a mid-polish. It has an array of browns, blacks, grays, and whites, and there is even some amber-colored veining going through some of the river rocks. There are also some taupe and bronze colors mixed in, but they're more for accent pieces.

I take the fiberglass sheets of pebbles out and lay them on the shower floor one by one, making sure I like the way the rocks line up. I have to cut around some of the rocks since my shower is technically in the corner, but it isn't a small shower by any means. It's roughly five feet by four feet, and on the other side of the shower is the soaking tub. I figure I might want a nice bath every once in a while, and maybe one day, when I find an ol' lady of my own, she'll be the type who enjoys a nice bath too.

Once I'm happy with the way the pebbles look, I take a couple of pieces and lay them over top of the other. I need to mix up mortar to lay the floor, so I get out of the shower and head over to my five-gallon bucket. The mortar is a powder in a bag, so I pour the bag into the five-gallon bucket and then add water. I have a mixer bit for my drill, so I put the mixer attachment into the five-gallon bucket and then turn on my drill. I allow it to spin until it's a

thick, milkshake-like consistency. Once it's at that point, I pull my drill bit out and then place my drill on a piece of cardboard paper I have lying on the floor, careful not to get it dirty.

I take my tile trowel and scoop up some of the mortar, laying it down thick over the space I cleared, then I put each piece of tile back where it was and press down. I then grab the next three pieces and overlap them over the tiles on the right, put more mortar down, and repeat the process over and over again until the entire floor is done. I'm going to let it sit for a day and then hopefully grout the floor tomorrow. After that, I'll let it sit for a day, and then I'll start on the walls.

I exit the shower and look at myself in the mirror. My Norse-inspired tattoos pop in the light, but as I turn, the scars on my back pop just as much as my tattoos do. They're a constant reminder of the time I was held captive with Rajah and Kinetic. It was our last mission, and it's one I'll never, ever forget. We were tortured for days, and I think all of us thought we were going to die. The enemy wanted us dead, and they wanted to make our executions a spectacle. I think that's why they weren't so quick to jump the gun. God, how in the world was that five years ago?

Heat begins swarming all over my body, and my mouth suddenly goes dry. I shut my eyes and try to push it back because I know what's going to happen. It's the same thing that always fucking happens—my memories come back to haunt me.

*“Jones!” Kinetic’s screams echo through the large room we’re in, and my eyes jolt awake in the process. I’m blinking rapidly, looking around me, and for a brief moment, I think that I’m out of this god-awful place, but the more Kinetic screams for Jones, the more I realize we haven’t been so lucky to escape.*

*Jones hangs in front of us upside down, chained by his feet, with a slit throat. Blood is all I see, and it’s everywhere. It’s over his face, coating what was once blond hair, and it’s in a puddle on the floor below him.*

*“What the fuck? When did this happen?!” I jolt against my chains, looking at Kinetic since he’s the only one who’s awake with me.*

*“I don’t know, man. They fuckin’ drugged us again. I woke up, and I . . . fuck! Jones!” Kinetic is shaking his head in disbelief.*

I shake my head so hard that my neck begins to hurt, but it pulls me out of this fucking episode. Usually, I'm in them for much longer, and every time they end, all I can think about is the man we lost on that mission. He was a

great friend, and he was going to be a father. He was so excited to get back home and welcome his son, but he never got the opportunity. Sometimes, it takes everything in me not to feel guilty for Jones's death . . . but I have to remind myself we weren't responsible for his death. We weren't the ones who slit his throat. No, those were the insufferable bastards who wanted information. They whipped us so badly that we bled over and over again, causing an infection that nearly killed me by the time we were rescued. Jones was the only person on our squad that they killed, and by the end of that day, Falcon came in with reinforcements and got us the fuck out of there.

I get out of the bathroom as quickly as I can because I can't go through another PTSD episode so soon. Most of the time, when I see my scars, it happens. I go out into the living room and throw on a shirt, then slide a leather jacket on, and then my cut. I grab the keys to my bike and head over to the clubhouse. It's probably time I check in with them and see what everyone is up to.

The ride doesn't take me too long, but it starts to rain really hard while I'm on the road, which isn't ideal. I make it to the clubhouse and pull into the garage, park my bike, and dismount. It seems a bit quiet, so I head into the clubhouse only to find that there isn't a single woman in there. Not Charlee, Vivianna, or Hermoine.

"Where in the fuck are all the ladies?" I ask, looking right at Kinetic.

"They're at the house out back helping with some things," he answers me as he peers up from his phone.

"Shit, well, I'd better get over there and see if they need any help." I don't mean this in a bad way, but none of those women have any experience in construction. With any luck, they haven't fucked anything up.

"That's a damn good idea." Kinetic chuckles lightly. My bet is he wanted to watch and see what sort of shitshow or success story they were going to create.

Hawk comes down the hallway, and Falcon's office door shuts. I wonder why he was in there alone. Hawk has his brows drawn into a firm line like he's stressed the fuck out. Scarlett was here yesterday, so does this have something to do with her?

"You good man?" I ask.

Hawk nods. "Yeah, as good as I can be. Mind coming over to the house with me?"

"Yeah. I was actually on my way over to help the ladies."

“I need you to help me get some shit sorted in the basement. It’s mostly finished already and has electrical, but we need to start getting some framing up to close off the rest of it.”

“What do you mean?” As far as I know, we weren’t updating the basement for that one woman and her daughters.

“Falcon has agreed that I can apply some updates to the basement. We’re going to seal off the entrance from the main floor to the basement, so the house will now be in two separate units. Scarlett will have the basement, and then the woman and her daughters will have the main floor and upstairs.”

“Oh, so Scarlett’s moving in?”

“Yeah. She was renting out our childhood home when she went away to school. Seemed like she had some good tenants. But they haven’t paid rent in over eight months and were supposed to be gone as of five months ago. She doesn’t have the extra cash to look for a place right now since she’s paying the mortgage there. So, the club is gonna help her while we get the house back for her and all that.”

“Does she need us to go up to the house and make those fuckers get out?” I’d do it. Scarlett has always been a kind woman, and it’s unfortunate that there are people trying to take advantage of her kindness.

Hawk shakes his head. “No, she doesn’t want that. She’s trying to do it the right way, through the court system or whatever.”

Fair enough. Whatever way she needs us to help, I’ll be on board with it.

## CHAPTER FOUR

*SCARLETT*

“I got another really sad case today,” Jessie tells me as she sips her glass of red wine. It was pretty late in the day, and we usually had dinner together, but she had a hair appointment right after work, so we settled for drinks instead. She usually has a vibrant blue hair color, but today she changed it up a bit. Her roots are dyed black, and the vibrancy of her deep-sea green and cerulean blue hair doesn’t start until the darkness of her roots stops.

She has the most porcelain skin I’ve ever seen, but that’s not really much of a surprise since her parents immigrated here from Belfast in Northern Ireland. Her light skin and vibrant hair really make her hazelnut-colored eyes pop.

“Ugh, can you tell me anything about it?”

“Not specifics like names or anything, but a little boy found his mother passed out in the car when they were at the park. He called 911. The mother was taken to the hospital, and he was brought to me. My boss told me he’d be with us for a while.”

“Oh no. The poor little guy. Did you find out anything about the mother?”

Jessie runs her hand through her long locks. They stop just below her elbows. “Yeah, the same shit as usual. It’s always drugs. I hate that we’re in such an epidemic. You know, I feel for the addicts, but I feel for the children of the addicts just as equally. So many of the kids in foster care are because of addiction. We’re trying to locate some family for him, so he doesn’t have to stay in a group home, but so far, it’s not looking good.”

“Is he at least in an emergency placement right now?”

Jessie nods. “Yeah, but I might be able to get him three days max.” Jessie

tries to keep the kids in emergency placements because she knows what it can be like to grow up in group homes. She was raised by her aunt and uncle, who she calls her mother and father. Her mother had moved here when Jessie was a child. Her mother—much like the new case she has—struggled with addiction as well.

“Hopefully, you can find him a good foster home in the meantime. How old is he?”

“Four. He’s so sweet too. I was the one who picked him up from the hospital. He’s so damn trusting.” Jessie’s smile falters, and I know these are the sorts of cases that really cut her deep.

“Let’s just hope that trust doesn’t burn out over the years.” Being adults, we understand what the world is really like. It’s a hard, dark place.

“Yeah.” Jessie nods and takes another sip of her wine.

My phone begins ringing, and my brother’s name flashes across the screen. I answer and put it on speaker. “Hey, you’re on speakerphone. It’s me and Jessie here.”

“Hey, Scott.” Jessie’s always called Scott by his real name, even after he joined the Deathstalkers MC. In the back of my mind, I think she does it because she knows it gets under his skin.

“Hey, Jessie. How are things?”

“You know. Same as always. How about you?” Jessie doesn’t want to get into the thick of it, and I don’t blame her. I know it’s hard enough to talk to me, let alone talk to others, about what she’s going through.

“I’m good. A little better since I have some good news.”

“What kind of good news?” I pipe in, needing to know.

“I spoke with Falcon, and he’s agreed that I can renovate the basement of the house we have here on the property. It won’t be anything big, a one bedroom, but the living space is big enough for a pullout couch probably. I’m going to draw up some plans with Horseman, and we’re going to start on the framing tonight.”

“Wait . . . are you serious?”

“I am.”

“Thank you so much, Scott. You have no idea how much this means to me.” He knows that any time I call him by his birth name, it’s for good reason.

“I wasn’t going to leave you hangin’, sis.”

“Still, I’m just so happy. This whole situation has been a clusterfuck, and

this is like a light at the end of the tunnel for me. It means so fucking much.” I take a sip of my wine in an attempt not to cry.

“You knew I’d figure out something. It’s temporary until we get those jackasses out of your house, but at least it’s something.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Um, so what are you doing?”

“Horseman and I just got over here. We’re gonna get some measurements and get started.”

“Oh, okay. Um, can you send me the address? Jessie and I can come over and help with some stuff, too,” I offer, wanting to see what my new place will look like.

“Sure, I’ll text you the address.”

“Cool, thanks.”

Hawk and I say our goodbyes, and then we get off the phone. I’ve only had half a glass of wine, so I’ll be the one to drive over. “Please tell me we’re taking the wine.”

“What do you take me for? A savage?” I giggle, and Jessie smirks. Even though she’s smiling, I know her day is weighing heavily on her, so hopefully, going over there will help distract her for a while.

My brother sends me the text message with the address within a couple of minutes, and I realize you have to pass the clubhouse to get to the house. I pull it up on my maps, and the driveway is directly on the left of the clubhouse. It’s the old washed-out path that I’ve noticed before.

I drive my truck, and Jessie sits in the passenger seat. We make small talk while I drive, and when we arrive at the clubhouse’s property, I’m a little shocked. The driveway, which was once a washed-out dirt path with a little bit of old stone, has been refreshed. Now it’s brand new with a whole bunch of stone that looks like it’s been dragged down the driveway. I drive slowly over it, and sure enough, the stone is all the way back to the house.

The house is adorable, but it looks like it’s been sitting for a while. Hopefully, there won’t be any issues with the home if it’s been sitting abandoned for so long. It’s on a hill, and I pull around to where there’s a Polaris Razor parked. From where I’m parked, I have a view of how big the house really is. The basement is made up of concrete, and there’s one window on the side. I’m a little concerned living here might be like living in a dungeon, but I’m trying not to be too negative.

Above the basement is a wooden home. Not necessarily a long one, or as nice as a log home . . . but it looks like the sides are made up of cedar. It’s

likely twenty or thirty years old, and the trim needs a fresh coat of white paint. There is a cinderblock fireplace that goes all the way down to the basement and comes up the side of the home.

“This doesn’t look too bad,” Jessie speaks up.

“Yeah, it’s better than being homeless, so I’ll take it.”

“You’d never be homeless. I told you that you can stay at my place.” I can’t see if Jessie’s rolling her eyes, but I can almost guarantee she is.

“I know what you’ve offered, but I’m not going to do it. You have a second bedroom for when your family comes to visit.”

“And they can afford to get a hotel.” Jessie’s so quick with her response, almost like she’s thought this through. Still, I’m not going to do it.

“I’m not doing it,” I state. In the back of my mind, I think if I’m around Jessie too much, then she’s going to get sick of me. I don’t want that to happen. She’s the only person I can depend on besides my brother.

“Does Scott know that Jarod pulled a gun on you?”

“No, and I’m not telling him yet.”

“Come on. That’s fucking ridiculous. Scar, he’s in a fucking MC club. Let them handle this.” Jessie and I know, as well as anyone, that they’re willing to cross the legal line to get whatever they need to do. I know my brother, though, and if he finds out Jarod pulled a gun on me, he’d be in prison for the rest of my life. I’ve already lost my mother. I can’t lose him too.

“I have my reasons, Jessie. Please don’t say anything. Not until I’m ready to say something.” I’m begging her at this point.

“I don’t like that you haven’t said anything to him. I think it’s bullshit.”

“I know you do, but I’m . . . doing what I can. Okay? I have my reasons, and I need you to respect them.”

“Fine, whatever. Let’s go on inside. If Jarod does something like that again, I’m ratting your ass out. I hope you know that.” Jessie’s getting stern with me, and that’s okay. I know she’s annoyed. I know she doesn’t understand why I don’t want to tell my brother, but I’m sure she’ll understand eventually. The truth is, if I lost her or my brother, I’d lose it. I’d probably off myself. They’re the only people in this world that truly matter to me.

Jessie and I grab our wine and get out of my truck, making it around to the exposed part of the basement. Thankfully, there’s a pair of French doors, and there are a couple of massive windows on the same wall. Okay, so I’ll



have plenty of light and won't be in a dungeon like I thought.

Jessie knocks on the French doors before she opens them, and we walk on inside. "Hello?" she calls through the space, and my brother comes into view in no time. Horseman comes into view as well, and I'm caught ripping my eyes away from him.

I don't know why I'm so attracted to him. It's not like he's ever gone above and beyond to blow me away, flirt with me, or anything. I just am, I guess.

"So, what's the plan with the place?" I ask, trying to stir up some conversation between the group of us.

"There's already a room down here. We just have to add a closet to make it a bedroom. There's already some plumbing on the other side of the room, so we just have to frame that, run electric, and get that put together for you. Then we'll add an open-concept living space, kitchen with a two-person island, and possibly a small breakfast nook," Horseman is quick to tell me like he's had this planned out for ages.

"You came up with all that in the last twenty minutes?"

He cackles. "No, your brother and I have been here for a couple of hours."

"Oh, I see. Thank you for figuring all of that out." I don't know what the hell I'm supposed to say, and I feel kind of like an idiot for saying what I just did. I'm nervous, and hopefully, he doesn't see it.

There's commotion coming from upstairs, and Jessie glances up. "Are there a whole bunch of people working on the house tonight?"

"Yeah. We have a mother with two young daughters living upstairs in the other unit," my brother is quick to tell her.

"Oh, cool. How can we help?" Jessie asks.

"I think there needs to be some painting done upstairs. Let me take you up there. I can show you the gist of it, and I think a couple of the ladies from the club are here working on things too." My brother leads Jessie upstairs and leaves Horseman and me down here by ourselves.

"You seem really stressed out," Horseman says blankly, raking his eyes up and down my body.

"Do you know me well enough to say such a thing?" I question him. He doesn't know me that well, and it's a bit frustrating he can read me like an open book. I'm stressed as fuck, and I try really hard to not let my emotions show like this.

“Not really. I’m good at reading people, though. What’s got you all up in your head? The tenant situation?” Ah, so I guess everyone here knows about it.

“You could say that,” I murmur.

“You don’t need to worry about it anymore, Scarlett. You have a place to stay where you’ll be safe, and from what Hawk tells me, this will all be settled in court very shortly.”

“I hope so. We have a court date tomorrow, and it says online they were served, but who knows if they’ll actually show up.”

“If they don’t, it’s only going to benefit you in the end. Even if shit gets crazy, you have people who will fight for you.” There’s something in his words that makes me feel like I’m important to him. Horseman and I aren’t close, so maybe I’m just looking for something that isn’t there.

He doesn’t understand what Jarod is like. If he’s willing to pull a gun on me, what else is he capable of?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *HORSEMAN*

Over the past couple of days, my schedule has been jam-packed. Between helping Scarlett get her apartment in the house finished, club duties, and then coming back to my own place to work, I feel like I've barely had any time to relax. I was lucky enough to be able to come here over the past few days and still get some work done. My master bedroom shower is now complete. The flooring inside it has been done for a couple of days, and the walls are all up, and they've been grouted. This morning I went ahead and installed the glass doors.

The long dual vanity came in late last night and has been sitting on my porch, so I got it up on a dolly, ratchet strapped it around the dolly, and brought it in here. I've already managed to get it down on the floor and removed the cardboard around it. I put the order in for this vanity weeks ago and already marked up where it needs to go on the wall, so very carefully, I move one end of the vanity at a time until it's where my marks are. It's level, which saves me some hassle, so I drill pilot holes into the studs and attach it with screws.

Once I have it screwed into the wall, I take a step back and look at the vanity. The countertop isn't on, but I'll need some help before I do that. I try to do as much as I can by myself, but there are times when I need another man or two for some heavy lifting. I bought this sick-looking fancy brown marble slab. It was expensive, but it's the only place in the house where I'm putting it. I've been thinking about putting it on the countertop in the other bathroom, but I haven't made up my mind yet. Luckily, my buddy Jason owns the local marble and granite store.

A knock on my front door echoes through my mostly empty house, so I wipe my hands on my jeans and exit my master bathroom, walk through the bedroom, and go down the hallway until I'm in my open-concept living area. I go up a couple of steps into the foyer area and unlock the door, then pull it open.

Kinetic's standing on the other side with two beers, one in each hand. He gives one to me, and I pull the aluminum tab back, needing a drink right about now. "Hey, how are things going?" he questions as I take my first sip of Budweiser.

I take a step back and motion for him to come inside, and he shuts the door behind him. "Not too bad. This place is keeping me as busy as ever," I say, and for a split second, I think this is the best timing. "Mind helping me get the stone on the vanity in the master bathroom?"

I already have suction cup handles on both sides of the top of the stone, so it won't be too hard. "Yeah, sure," Kinetic replies.

"Perfect. Let me caulk the vanity first, then we'll grab the stone." I have it leaning up against the hallway on a cart so it doesn't fall over. I head into the master bathroom and grab my caulk, taking it over every bit of the wood. I want it to be as stable as it can be, and this is the best way to make sure the stone stays secure. Once I finish caulking the vanity, I go back into the hallway and place my beer down. Kinetic does the same, and then we both head over to the cart where the stone is.

Kinetic grabs his side by the handles, and I grab mine, then we lift together. We're not weak men by any means but fuck if this isn't heavy. Still, we use all of our strength to lift the stone up and then turn the corner into the master bedroom. It's only a few more feet until we're in the master bathroom, so we get inside there and then line the stone up perfectly. We slowly place it down onto the vanity, and it's already pre-cut where the sinks and fixtures will go. I have to take a step back and look at it on top of the vanity, and man, it looks amazing. For a while there, I was worrying about the overall style of the house, afraid I might have too much wood exposed, but seeing the rooms come together like this is really showing me I need to trust my gut.

"Thank you. I was gonna head over to the club later and see if any of the brothers felt like helping me get some things done around here, but now you've saved me from it."

"Yeah, like they'd actually offer to come over and do more work. With Falcon having us all pitching in at the house for that single mom and Scarlett,

I think everyone is burned out.” Kinetic makes a good point. I didn’t even think about that.

“Yeah, you’re right. If I could do everything myself, I would, but there are things I need more help with.” Kinetic’s leaving out the fact that Hawk and I are the two who are mainly working in Scarlett’s section of the house. The plan is to finish the basement apartment for her, and then we’re going to seal the entrance from the main floor into the basement so both units have their own privacy.

“When you need help, just ask me. You know I don’t mind pitching in. Hell, I’ve watched you literally build this place from the ground up. If you keep trying to do everything yourself, you’re never going to get moved in here.” Kinetic laughs, but he isn’t wrong. I need to work on asking for help more often. He goes and grabs his beer, and then I get mine. We both take a couple of sips.

“Once the bathroom is done, I’ll actually end up moving in. I can still live here and be working here while I finish up the final touches on a few of the rooms.”

“Oh? Is that why you finished the master bedroom and the kitchen before the master bath?”

I nod. “Yeah, I figured all I really need in here is a bathroom, bedroom, and somewhere to cook. The rest might take me a few more months, but this has been years in the making. It won’t kill me to wait a little bit longer.”

“You have to be the most patient bastard I know, Horseman.” Kinetic’s words come off as a compliment. One I don’t mind in the least bit.

“Thanks. How are things with Charlee and Vivi?”

Kinetic smiles brightly, and it’s one of those shit-eating grins of his. “They’re good. Charlee and I actually found out some news. Some really good news. She’s pregnant.”

“Shit, no way!” I slap my brother on the back of the shoulder, and his grin grows even bigger.

“Yeah, I’m ecstatic about it. With Vivi, I didn’t have the option to be around, but with this baby, I’m going to be there for everything. I’m not going to miss out on anything. I’ll be around so much that Charlee will probably be annoyed as fuck with me.”

Kinetic was in the Marines, and Charlee didn’t tell him she was pregnant. It’s a long story with a lot of heartbreak, but they eventually found their way back to each other. You’d never know they had issues in the past by looking

at them now. “It’s bound to be a different experience for you for sure.”

“Yeah, it will be. You’re the only person I’ve told. I think we’re going to wait a little bit longer before we tell anyone else at the club. It’s so hard these days, miscarriage and all of that. I don’t want Charlee to be put through anything she doesn’t need to be.” I can only imagine the pain of telling everyone you’re pregnant, only to have to tell them you lost the baby. It must be difficult.

“Well, I won’t tell a goddamned soul. Is Vivi excited?”

“Oh yeah, she’s demanded a baby brother, and Charlee had to explain that’s not how it works. Then she started asking questions about how it worked, and that was a conversation neither of us was ready for.”

“So, you went into the whole birds and the bees thing?”

“Eh . . . more like we went into the fact the bees have a special honey, and that special honey chooses the gender of the baby. She said it was totally unfair and that we should get to choose.” Kinetic nervously laughs, and I cackle at him.

“You barely avoided the intensity of that conversation.”

“By the edge of my teeth, brother. By the edge of my fuckin’ teeth. I don’t want to have that conversation for a couple more years, at least. But kids are growing up so fast these days. We can’t keep it from her for long.” Kinetic shakes his head and groans. It has to be another one of the harder parts of having children. “Anyway, Charlee is making dinner tonight. Do you wanna come over and have a damn good home-cooked meal?”

“Do bears shit in the woods?”

“I’ll text Charlee now and let her know you’re coming.” Kinetic snickers.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *SCARLETT*

I've been at the house a lot lately. While I'm still applying for jobs with the city of Portland, I have so much free time on my hands, and the last thing I want to do is sit around twiddling my thumbs. After all, it's not like I have to study for class or anything these days.

Since I've been spending a lot of time at the house, I've gotten pretty close with Charlee, who's with Kinetic. She's his partner, and they share a little girl named Vivi together. She told me today that they just found out she's pregnant. Kinetic doesn't want her telling too many people in case something bad happens, like a miscarriage, but she said she couldn't keep all of the excitement to herself. She told me the only people who know are her, Kinetic, and their little girl. She said Vivi is so excited to have a baby brother or sister, but how she really wants a baby brother.

Charlee and I are so close that she invited me over for dinner tonight. She said I could invite Jessie, but she has a date with this redneck guy named Larson, so she won't be attending. I'm already at her house and parked my Ford in her driveway. I've been helping Charlee and Vivi make dinner and spending some nice quality time with the ladies.

I've actually been able to chat with a couple of the ladies at the clubhouse. I get along with Charlee really well, but Falcon's girl Hermoine is really nice too. She owns the Java Zone, which is a local coffee shop that also serves pastries, muffins, desserts, and lunch options. She told me the other day they're looking to expand their menu, and if things keep going well, she'll be looking into opening a secondary location right in the center of the city. I really hope things continue going well for her. It's nice to see people

with small businesses thriving instead of these mega-corporations like Starbucks. Not that I'm hating on them, but I'd rather have a sweet cream cold brew from a place like Hermoine's.

"Dinner should be ready here in a few minutes. Do you two mind setting the table?" Charlee asks as she's staring over the stove.

"Sure, we can do that. Vivi, can you show me where everything is?"

"Yep! I sure can."

I follow Vivi out of the kitchen into the dining room, where Charlee has her dishes in a china cabinet, on full display. I open the doors and grab the plates while Vivi grabs the placemats and puts them down before I have a chance to set the plates down.

"Mom! How many people will be here?" Vivi hollers.

"Six, baby."

"Okay, so we need six." Vivi places the last two placemats down, and I put the plates on top of them. Then she grabs the silverware and begins placing them exactly where they belong. I grab some glasses and place them in the front right area above the plates. Soon enough, we're done, and men's laughter is coming in through the front door.

"Wow. We got that done fast!" Vivi smiles as she looks at me and puts her hand up for a high-five. I smack my hand against hers, and she laughs. Vivi has been spending some time at the house, too, helping us get everything ready. Some days if it doesn't make sense for me to be in the basement, I'm upstairs helping Charlee. Hermoine helps as well, but not nearly as much as Charlee does.

"Fuck, it smells good in here," Kinetic says, making it a point to inhale deeply.

Vivi sees her father and begins laughing. "Mommy, me, and Miss Scar have been cooking for a while, Daddy! I think you're gonna love it!"

"I'm sure I will, buttercup. What's for dessert?" he asks.

"A brown sugar peach-topped cheesecake. I made it fresh for everyone this morning."

"God, that sounds delicious," Kinetic comments.

"It is. It's really, really good. I could eat the whole thing by myself, honestly. At least you guys are saving me from the embarrassment of eating it all," I joke.

Vivi runs off back into the kitchen, probably to see if Charlee needs anything.



“Peaches are my favorite,” Horseman states, looking right into my eyes. He’s completely shirtless right now, probably because he and Kinetic are drenched in sweat. I lick my lips slowly and stop, tearing my eyes away from Horseman’s body.

I clear my throat. “So, what have you guys been doing today?”

“Working at my house next door.”

“Oh? You live next door?”

“Yeah. I . . . well, I don’t live there yet. I’ve been building a log cabin for a while, and now I’m at the point where I’ll be able to move in while I work on the rest of it.”

“Man, that’s amazing. I bet you’re really proud of your work. Not every man has the talent to be able to build their own home.” As I’m saying it, Kinetic smirks and makes himself scarce.

Horseman breaks the distance between us until there might be a foot separating the two of us. We stand here and chat about the apartment, how things are going with the tenants, and all of that. I told him that they didn’t show up to the first court date, so now the trial has been postponed a month. The judge seems to be on my side, but it’s still really frustrating that we’re even giving them the time of day to show up when they obviously have no intention of showing up. What ends up happening is they get another free month of rent at my house, which is fucking ridiculous in my opinion, but I have to trust the system.

Charlee and Kinetic bring the food out, and Vivi helps them bring a small side dish out. We all sit down, and I notice there’s one empty chair. “Is someone else joining us?”

“Yeah, Hawk will be here in about ten minutes. He told us to go ahead and start eating,” Charlee explains.

I stare down at the chicken fricassee, roasted red potatoes, and asparagus. The food not only looks delicious but tastes just as good. Not one of us was waiting for my brother, but he said it was okay to eat, so we dug in. The cheesecake I made for everyone is already in the fridge, and while dinner is amazing, I know dessert is going to blow my dear friends away.

My brother ends up showing up, his hair an absolute mess, and I stare at him accusingly. What in the hell was he doing? He looks like a teenager who just rushed out after getting a quick fuck in college. I’m not going to question him about it right now . . . but I’m going to get my answer at some point.

He comes up to the dinner table, makes his plate, and digs in. We all talk

about the baby, and Kinetic sort of drills Charlee about telling me and now Hawk. He says they shouldn't tell anyone else yet, and they agree that they won't. Somehow, I don't believe that's going to end up sticking. I think they have every intention of keeping things to themselves, but I don't know if they will. I think they're both so excited that all they want to do is tell everyone, and there's nothing wrong with that. Having a baby is a beautiful thing. It's only natural that they're all so excited about it.

Everyone ends up asking what's going on with my tenant situation, so I tell them exactly what I told Horseman. They think it's bullshit, just like I do, but there's nothing that I can do to make it any easier. I have to follow the court system and trust that they'll end up ruling in my favor. They don't know what Jarod did to me, but I think that the court system and the police forcing him and his family out of my home is the only thing that will actually end up getting him the fuck out.

We sit at the dinner table for a couple of hours chatting, then Charlee takes Vivi upstairs and gets her ready for bed.

"You guys wanna go light a fire out back?" Kinetic suggests.

"Yeah, that sounds great," I say, just as I'm finishing my last bite of cheesecake. Everyone loved it, even Vivi. She tore up her cake, and I think that's why she's already upstairs. It really looks like a sugar crash to me.

"This was absolutely amazing," Horseman states.

He's been sitting beside me, and every now and again, he gives me this look that only makes me think he's being flirtatious with me. I really want him to be, and there's a good chance that could be the little bit of alcohol I've had tonight talking. I have found him extremely attractive for years, though, and if given the chance, I would see what could transpire between us.

"Good. I'm glad you liked it," I comment.

"You two want to go with me outside to get some wood?" Kinetic questions the guys, who both nod and end up going outside with him.

I go ahead and start cleaning off the table, taking the dishes to the sink, and then place them in the dishwasher. Charlee comes back down the stairs as I'm loading it. "You're my guest. You didn't have to do this. For goodness' sake, you helped me cook dinner."

"It's no big deal, girl. Thank you for inviting me over. I've had a great time," I explain. I feel like helping her cleanup is only having good manners. There's no way in hell I would have ever left everything out there on the table for her to clean up by herself. That would be rude as fuck.

“I’m glad you came. Really. It’s kind of been hard for me to have girlfriends throughout my life. I got burned a lot. You and Hermoine have become really close to me. She couldn’t make it tonight, but I’m glad you could.” I’m going to have to make sure Charlee can spend some time with Jessie. She’s a really awesome woman, and I’m sure Charlee would like to get to know her better if given the chance.

“Any time you invite me over, I’ll be here. I really like hanging out with you guys.”

“Good. We love having you over here. But go out and have some fun. You’ve done enough, and I can handle the rest of this.”

“Are you sure?” I still feel like I’m leaving her hanging.

“Yes, now go.” Charlee waves her hand at me like I should get going, so I walk out the back door and out into the yard.

I slowly make my way up to where the guys are, and as I approach them, Horseman looks right at me. “Be careful. There are landmines everywhere out here.”

“Landmines?”

“Dog poop.”

“Okay, I’ll be carefu—” I don’t get to finish my sentence because I step right into a pile of fresh dog shit and start going backward. Horseman is over to me in record time and catches me right before I fall. He has his strong arms around me, pulling me back upright and giving me a once-over.

“Are you okay?”

I nod. “Yeah, thanks to you, I am.”

I feel the little bit of alcohol I’ve had chill me out a bit. I don’t drink a lot, maybe have a glass of wine every once in a while, but I definitely enjoy having a couple of drinks with friends over a dinner like this.

Horseman hasn’t said anything since I said what I did. It’s complete silence, but his eyes are telling me something totally different. The way he’s looking at me makes me feel like all he wants to do is slowly drag his hands up and down my body until he’s savored every part of me.

He drags his tongue against his bottom lip as he stares at me in his continued silence. My heart starts beating intensely in my chest.

“Give me your shoe, Scarlett.”

I’ve never enjoyed anyone calling me by my full name, but the way Horseman says it makes me feel like it’s completely erotic. I give him my shoe, and he grabs the hose, which is only a couple of feet away from him,

rinsing the bottom of it off before sliding it back on my foot perfectly.

“Thank you so much . . .” I don’t know Horseman’s real name, and calling him Horseman seems so casual to me. I want to know his name. His real name.

“Jeb.”

“Thank you, Jeb.” I grab onto his forearm and graze my fingertips against his skin. It might not seem like a big deal to outsiders, but it is a big deal to me. It seems like every single time I’m with him, we’re progressively getting closer and closer.

I want that.

I want to see how close Jeb and I can get.

This could be the alcohol talking . . . but I think there’s an intense connection between us, and I’m having a really hard time refraining from wanting to do that. He’s my brother’s friend, but fuck if I don’t feel like we’re two magnets being pulled toward one another.

I have to explore this.

There isn’t another fucking option.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *HORSEMAN*

Any time I can be back at my cabin, I'm here, and I think the work over the last week-and-a-half really shows that. My master bathroom is completely finished now. I just put the sinks and fixtures in yesterday. I don't want to toot my own horn, but I think this could be in some interior design magazine somewhere.

Yesterday, I went and bought a master bedroom set that will really pop in my bedroom, especially with all of the exposed wood. I even bought some curtains and a few other things so I can begin moving my stuff in here. With any luck, I can start grabbing some of my shit from my room at the clubhouse and bring it over tonight. The master bedroom set should be delivered by the end of this week. So, I guess I was right about the fact I could be living here within two weeks of starting the tile work on the shower.

I'm halfway up the stairwell, fully intending on checking things upstairs and seeing which room I'm going to start in next when my phone starts ringing. I pick it up without checking the caller ID. "Hello," I say into the receiver.

"Horseman, I need you at the clubhouse as soon as you can get here," my president's voice rings through the other end of the line.

"Sure. Everything okay?"

"Yeah, I just need to talk to you about something, and it can't wait," Falcon explains, but he's not really doing much explaining.

"All right. I'll head over there in five minutes," I tell him.

"Sounds good. See you then," Falcon states and then ends the call with a click.

I slide the phone into the back pocket of my jeans, wondering why Falcon wouldn't just talk to me over the phone. It's not like he couldn't tell me whatever it is over the phone . . . so is everything okay? Or is it something serious? I'll bet on the latter.

Just as I told Falcon, I was out of my house within five minutes, on my bike, and headed to the club. The ride isn't too bad, but it's fucking windy out today, so I've got quite the chill by the time I'm pulling into the garage bay. I turn off my bike, dismount, and then head inside. As I'm walking in, Falcon is pressing a kiss to Hermoine's temple, and she's heading toward the front door. Hawk is going with her, which makes a lot of sense. My guess is that since we're still wondering where the rest of Geno's men are, we're at least going to have one member from the club at the Java Zone until further notice. You can never be too careful these days.

Fuck, Hermoine went through hell because of her biological father. He killed her mother, and her stepfather in cold blood, leaving Hermoine to deal with picking up the pieces. Not to mention the fact she was abducted and assaulted by her father's club. How in the world a father could let shit like that happen to their own daughter is beyond me. Geno deserved the horrendous death we brought down upon him. He didn't deserve to have a quick, painless one. We all wanted him to suffer as much as he made Hermoine, if not more.

As Hermoine and Hawk are walking out through the front door, Falcon motions with his head for me to follow him. I do as he's silently asking me, and he leads me back to his office. We both go inside, and I shut the door behind me. He goes around his desk and takes a seat in his office chair while I sit across from him. "Being in here, it must be damn serious," I joke, but underneath my joking tone is the desire to know what the hell is going on.

"I need you to do me a solid, and I know it's going to mess up your plans."

"What do you mean, mess up my plans?" I inquire, not sure where he's going with this.

"Kinetic told me that you were going to be moving into your house sometime within the next week, but I need you to keep a close eye on Scarlett." That comes as a surprise to me.

My jaw drops slightly. "Why?" What in the hell is so important that I keep an eye on Scarlett? For a split second, I wonder if it has anything to do with her tenant situation. It wouldn't be overly surprising, considering her

tenant seems like a real piece of work. I don't know all of the details, but I know enough.

"Hawk spoke in more detail with me about the situation going on with Scarlett's tenants," Falcon pauses and licks his lips. It's like he's trying to find the right wording. "Do you know much about it?"

"Just the basics, like they hadn't paid rent in a while and were supposed to be out a few months ago so she could move in when she came back from school."

"Yeah, well, it turns out shit is more serious than we thought. Scarlett ended up telling Hawk this morning that Jarod pulled a gun on her."

"Who the fuck is Jarod?" I grumble out, my entire body convulsing with rage.

"One of the tenants, the husband."

"When the fuck did this happen?"

"A few weeks ago, according to Hawk. Hawk said Scarlett came back from school and went to the house to try to get them out. She was trying to talk to them like adults, pointing out the fact they'd been there for longer than what was agreed, and he pulled a gun on her. Hawk told me Scarlett left, and that's when she wanted to pursue everything legally to get them kicked out."

"Fuck the legal system. Someone needs to go beat this motherfucker within an inch of his life to send a damn message."

Falcon nods, and I know he agrees with me. But he seems really reserved right now. "I agree, but I've done some digging into Jarod Randall, and I don't know how the fuck Scarlett ended up renting her house to someone like him."

"What do you mean?" Falcon's done some hardcore digging, and I'm glad.

"He was in prison for almost ninety months for attempting to murder his neighbor. She was a single mom who called the cops on them numerous times for being loud when she had a newborn baby. He went into her house and stabbed her over a hundred times in front of the child. Somehow, she managed to survive, and he was locked up for a while after that. Scarlett's in some deep shit with this guy, and Hawk thinks he might try to hurt her again."

"You're makin' me feel like something else has happened."

"Yeah, she got a text message today from an unknown number telling her to 'drop the case, or else'."

“It doesn’t take a genius to figure out who that came from.”

“Exactly, so will you keep a close eye on her for a bit?”

Okay, so this is about keeping her safe from this psychopath. There’s no question about if I’m doing this or not. I *have* to do it. “Yeah, of course. Does Scarlett know about this?”

Falcon shakes his head. “No. Hawk and I agreed that we shouldn’t worry her unless we needed to. She’s already been through so much already because of Jarod. If we tell her about this, it would only cause more stress.”

I don’t agree with Hawk and Falcon’s decision at all. This guy has obviously caused Scarlett problems, and instead of being honest with her about it, they want to basically say it’s a way of protecting her by not telling her. For fuck’s sake, she already knows he’s the one who’s tormenting her. Why shouldn’t they tell her? If she knows I’m sticking to her like glue for her own protection, she might feel better about it.

I don’t know why they think it’s a good idea to keep this from her. It isn’t in my eyes. If you ask me, it’s just going to cause some unnecessary distrust between the two of us. That’s shit I don’t want nor need. She and I have this unspoken chemistry between the two of us, and the last thing I want is for this to fuck that up between us. But I don’t get to go up against my president about this. I don’t know Scarlett too well, but I know enough. She’s the type of woman who hates being lied to, and here we are, keeping something of great importance from her.

“Okay, so how in the fuck do you want me to broach the subject with her? It’s not like I can tell Scarlett the truth, per what you and Hawk want.” I subtly throw it in his face that the only reason I’m not going to say anything is because of his direct orders.

Falcon licks his lips as he tries to think of a reason why I’d be in her house, guarding her twenty-four-seven.

“You know she’s a smart woman. She’s going to figure out something is wrong. I get why you and Hawk don’t want to worry her, but not telling her the truth is only going to cause more problems,” I add, hoping he’ll see reason.

“Fine, I see your point. I’m stuck in a difficult situation because I’m trying to appease Hawk and not upset him in the process, but we’re going to have to tell Scarlett. You’re right about it all. It’s only going to add to the problem. As much as I don’t want you to tell her, I don’t see there being another option right now.” Good. He sees I have a voice of reason. It’s about



damn time.

“Okay. I’ll figure out a good way to tell her what’s going on. I take it you want me to stay at her place for the foreseeable future?”

Falcon nods. “Yes. She had a pullout couch put in her living room, so stay there. I need you to be as close to her as possible until we can figure out some sort of game plan with Jarod. Scarlett is Hawk’s little sister, and we’re not going to let anything happen to her. Everything I’ve found out about this guy is bad. He’s worse than Geno, Horseman. He’s a fucking manipulative sack of shit who’s hungry for more power than he already has, and he does whatever he can to abuse the system to suit his needs. I’ve done some digging into his wife, and she does the exact same shit. They’re con artists, paper pushers, real sacks of shit. I don’t like this shit. I don’t like it one bit.” Falcon shakes his head, obviously frustrated with the situation we’re dealing with. I can’t blame him. He’s the top dog here at the clubhouse, so every difficult decision has to be made by him, and he carries the brunt of the weight. I don’t envy his job one bit.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll do my job, and if I notice anything fishy, I’ll let you know about it,” I tell him, and he nods in appreciation. “Was there anything else we needed to discuss?”

“No, you’re dismissed. Thank you for stepping up to the plate.”

“No problem,” I comment and leave Falcon’s office. From Falcon’s office, I head directly for the garage and get into one of the side-by-sides the club has. I turn the key, and the engine revs to life. I throw it in reverse, back out of the garage, and then head down to Scarlett’s new place. The stone driveway looks awesome, and I’m so thankful the club has friends in all sorts of places. It makes shit like this so much easier to do.

As I’m making my ride down to her house, the intensity of the situation hits me. I have an immense attraction toward this woman, and now I’m going to be forced to be closer to her. It’s going to be like waving a bloody steak in front of a starved dog, and Scarlett’s the damn steak. I’m going to have to try and keep my primal feelings at bay, but there’s no denying I’m interested in her. But Scarlett isn’t like any other woman. She’s been through a lot of shit, and I’ll guarantee she’s not very trusting of men because of the situation with her ex.

I pull the side-by-side up to her garage, then put it in park and take the key out. I walk around to the back and head to her French doors, knocking my knuckles loudly against it. No one comes at first, but after a couple of

minutes, the shuffling of feet can be heard, and Scarlett's in a thin black robe with wet hair.

"Hey, sorry, I just got out of the shower. Everything okay?" Hot damn, this is exactly what I mean. A steak in front of a starved dog.

"Horseman, what's up?"

"Hey, sorry for the intrusion, but we need to have a chat. Is it okay if I come in?" As I'm asking, Scarlett is searching for some sort of answer in my eyes. She knows something is up, and the way she swallows hard, and motions with her hand for me to come inside proves it.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

*SCARLETT*

I know something is up if Horseman is coming to my apartment at this hour. It's a little past seven in the evening, and I just got out of a steaming hot shower. I heard knocking but could have easily stayed in there for another twenty minutes if I wanted.

Now Horseman is walking inside my apartment. "You guys did a really good job here. Thank you so much for everything. I don't think I've said that yet, Jeb, but I really appreciate everything you did to help me get in here." For some reason, I want to keep calling him Jeb. I really like his real name. It's strong and unique. Horseman is good too, but it feels much more personal to me to call him Jeb.

"I'm glad we could get you in here in the time we did. Thankfully, you had most of the bones. We just had to build it up a little more."

"Well, if there's anything I can do to help you at your house, let me know. I'm not really good with construction, but I'm really good at painting."

"I'm gonna have to take you up on that offer. Painting is the bane of my existence. I do it because I have to, not because I need to."

"Okay, it's a small way to pay you back for everything you did for me."

"You don't need to be paying me back for anything." Horseman's tone gets a bit firmer, and I clear my throat.

"You're right. I don't have to do it, but I want to."

There are still a few things that need to be done like the guys putting the countertops in the kitchen, but otherwise, everything else is finished.

"Fine, I'm not gonna stand here and argue with you," he finally declares.

I walk into the living room and take a seat on the oversized couch, which

also doubles as a bed. Hawk actually picked it out and brought it over. I asked him to get a couple of throw pillows for it, and he, of course, got three random pillows that didn't even match the deep navy-blue couch. Whatever, pillows are pillows. They work, so we'll be fine.

Horseman takes a seat on the other side of the couch, kicks off his boots, and makes himself comfortable.

"You know the suspense is killing me, right?"

"I'm not trying for it to." He chuckles lightly and throws an arm on the back side of the couch. "You're going to be seeing me a lot more, and I thought you'd want to know that."

I arch an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

Horseman licks his lips and looks right into my eyes. "Falcon asked that I keep a close eye on you because of what's happening with your tenant."

I rear my head back a bit. I asked Hawk not to tell anyone about the gun being pulled out on me, but I should have known better. Of course, he'd tell his club, and they'd want to get involved.

"Hawk told Falcon about the gun, didn't he?"

Horseman sits up a bit straighter. "I take it from your reaction you didn't know he was going to tell us?"

"I mean, I knew it could be a possibility, but I didn't think he'd like run and tell you guys immediately."

"He only did it to help keep you safe. I know that's probably not what you want to hear, but the bottom line is you're not the only person in this house who has some demons. The single mother who's moving upstairs has a crazy ex who works in the police department. It'll be good for me to be around and keep an eye out for anyone. Do you think Jarod knows where you live?"

I shake my head. "No, I don't believe so . . . but over time, I've learned that he's not the stand-up guy I thought he was when I agreed to let him and his family move in. He lied about a lot. I can't even get into the house to do an inspection because they won't let me go in. Legally, all I have to do is give them twenty-four hours' notice, and they're just . . . they're being pains in my ass. I . . . I have a bad feeling about him, Jeb. Something isn't sitting right with me anymore."

He sucks in a deep breath and keeps his eyes trained on mine. "Let me ask you a question. Did you ever do a background check on them?"

"No, and I know that's a bad answer. The reason I didn't is because a

church was advocating for them and trying to help them find a place. I didn't think it would ever turn out to be like this." I can feel my heart beating in my chest. This isn't what I wanted. All I wanted was to help people who would respect the plan I had set in place. I was honest with them from the very beginning, and they seemed to act like I wasn't.

They're acting like they're the victims here, and it's really fucking pissing me off.

"Falcon found out some stuff about the husband, Jarod Randall."

I get up from the couch. "I want to hear this, but I really need a drink. Do you want one?"

"Sure, water is fine."

I head over to where the fridge is and grab a bottle of water and a Diet Coke, then walk back over to the couch. I plop down in the seat that I was just in, and Horseman starts speaking once more. "He tried to kill his neighbor and was in jail for ninety months."

I hand the cold bottle of water over to him as the reality of what he's just said completely rocks my world. "Please tell me that's some sick, twisted joke."

"It's not. He's a dangerous man, Scarlett. A dangerous man who could have easily killed you that day. I'm not telling you this to scare you, but I do need you to understand the kind of man you're dealing with."

"What in the hell did I get myself mixed up in?" My emotions are flooding through my voice. I'm trying so hard to not let this affect me so much, but dammit, this isn't easy. I feel like this can't get much worse, but it always does. It always gets so much fucking worse.

"Whoa. Take a breath. You didn't know about any of this, and Jarod was banking on that. He knew he could trick you into leasing the house to him. You're the victim in all of this, not him." Horseman grabs onto my forearm and gives me a reassuring squeeze. He's got those charismatic eyes staring right at me.

I pull my arm away from Horseman, knowing I shouldn't be having the feelings I am right now. I want him to keep touching me. I want him to hold me in his strong arms and tell me that everything's going to be okay, but I can't. He's my brother's friend. Hawk always told me to stay away from his biker friends anyway because if any of them ever hurt me, he'd probably kill them. I know he wasn't kidding. Hawk would kill for me. He's killed people for less when he was in the service.

I don't want this to be some awkward thing, so I changed the subject. "Um, the woman who's moving in. Do you know anything else about them?" Charlee doesn't know too much, just that she's a single mom with two daughters.

"Uh yeah." I think he's offended that I've pulled away from him. "Balsinde is the mother, and she has two daughters, Gunhild and Signe."

"Oh, okay. Do you know when they'll be here?"

"Probably a week or two. They're working on arranging their transport now," Horseman comments, looking me up and down. "Did I make you feel weird or something?"

Oh God, so we are going to talk about me pulling away.

"No, I just . . ." I have to close my eyes for a second and gather my thoughts, but how am I going to say this to him without sounding like I'm some needy woman who's been longing over him for such a long time? "You're overly tempting to me, Jeb. Since the first time I met you, I thought you were breathtakingly hot, and over the past couple of weeks, we've had some flirtatious moments . . . but Hawk specifically said I shouldn't mess around with any of his club brothers."

"He's saying that so you won't get hurt. If I had a little sister, I would have told her the same shit. I'm not normally so forward, but I want to explore this. We don't have to tell Hawk jack shit, but I know you feel somethin' too."

He makes a good point. "You're very right," I murmur, meeting his eyes once more. I finally open up my Diet Coke and take a sip.

Horseman snickers lightly. "Falcon wants me in the house for the foreseeable future, so I'll be sleeping here on the couch. I promise I won't invade your space, but I am going to bring a bag with some clothes and necessities if that's okay with you."

"Of course, it is," I reply, placing my drink on the coffee table to the left of me.

Horseman puts his bottle of water on the coffee table. "Scarlett, come here."

I lick my lips nervously and get up on my knees, walking on them over to the other side of the couch. Horseman slides a hand around my waist, pulling me over his legs until I'm sitting directly on top of him.

"You look like a mermaid right now," he says as he brushes his fingertips against my half-wet hair.

“A mermaid who didn’t even have time to brush her hair since someone was knocking.”

“I’d never be able to tell. You look damn good like this.” Horseman runs his fingertips up my spine and to the top of my neck. “Don’t be so nervous. Your brother doesn’t have to know about this until we’re ready to tell him.”

I inhale deeply through my nose. “You’re sure?”

“Yeah. If it’s going to create some conflict, we can keep it between us for now. We don’t have to keep it this way forever if we discover we mesh well, but if for some reason we don’t get along and shit goes sideways, we don’t have to tell him a damn thing. I don’t want to put you in an awkward position with him.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that.” I’m not sure if he’s doing it for me or for him, but I don’t really care. “Kiss me already, Jeb.”

He pulls my head toward him and presses his dry lips against mine. It’s better than any first kiss I’ve ever had. It’s like he’s calling me to him in an unspoken way. I know that I’ve felt an attraction to him for years now, but this is better than I imagined it could be.

I scoot closer to him and really get into our kiss. He uses his other hand to hold me against him as I deepen our kiss. I even push my tongue past his teeth and let his mesh with mine. Not one bit of this feels forced, and I’m oddly so comfortable with him.

We stay here kissing for God knows how long before hardness begins to press against me. I kiss him harder than we’ve been kissing and continue doing so. I don’t know what comes over me, but I begin grinding against him.

Horseman takes his hand from the small of my back and tugs at the silk knot on my robe. He pulls it until my body is on display for him. The man licks his lips and looks up at me adoringly. “God, you’re beautiful.”

I don’t even have time to respond before he captures one of my breasts in his mouth, teasing and taunting my nipple in the process. He’s tweaking my other nipple between his fingers, and it sends electric shocks throughout my body.

I continue grinding against him as he does this, but eventually, I search for his belt buckle and begin taking it off. I unzip his jeans and pull his hard cock out through his boxers. I’m completely bare other than my silk robe hanging over my shoulders, covering my back, and the way he’s kissing my breasts is turning me on like nothing else. I want him.

Who am I kidding?

I've wanted Horseman for a long time.

I line myself up over him and slowly sink down onto his throbbing cock. I've been hovering over him the entire time, so I didn't realize his size. He's wide, so wide that I'm in a little bit of pain. He takes his lips away from my breast and drops his hand between us, rubbing his thumb against my clit as I slowly go up and down on him.

He captures my lips once more and continues kissing me as I bounce up and down on his cock. He continues playing with my clit while he plants his other hand on the top of my ass, rubbing me reassuringly.

Jeb is an attentive lover, and I really enjoy that.

It's been hard to find men in the past who could make me happy in this way. Jeb is doing everything he can to make sure every one of my needs is met.

I switch it up and roll my hips a different way. Jeb gasps, "Mmm, just like that, Scarlett." No one ever really calls me by my birth name, but goddamn . . . I like it a lot.

He begins thrusting, and every time he moves at the same time I do, he glides against my G-spot, and I see stars. "God, go faster," I beg of him, and he does exactly as I wish.

Jeb slams his cock in and out of me and every single time he brushes against my G-spot, and a tingling sensation runs through my entire body before a rush of warmth.

"Fuck, I'm going to come," I moan as I wrap my arms around his shoulders. He captures my breast back into his mouth one more time and rolls his tongue against my nipple, sucking and teasing me as my orgasm begins to roll right through me.

"Fuckin' hell, Scarlett," Jeb groans. I'm growing tighter around his cock, and from the way he's sounding, I think he's about to reach his breaking point too. "Fuck, yes," he continues, ramming his cock into me harder than before.

I'm at the tail end of my orgasm, and Jeb keeps going, but after a couple of minutes, he has to stop. Sweat beads along his forehead, and I collapse against his chest. He wraps his arms around me and holds me close to him.

Some would call me a slut for sleeping with him on the first 'date', if that's what I can even call this . . . but I'd tell them I'm living my life without regrets. I've always admired him from afar and had to know if we click in this way. Thankfully, we do . . . and I look forward to seeing if we continue



to mesh well.

I hope so.

I really like him.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *HORSEMAN*

It's been almost a week since I've been staying in Scarlett's apartment. In that week there have been a lot of changes. I've learned very quickly what Scarlett's typical routine is in the morning, and I've been able to watch up close and personal how she spends her time. She's still applying for jobs and gets in her head that she won't find something soon, but I always tell her something is going to pop up.

When I first came over and told Scarlett about Jarod being in prison and trying to kill that woman, her reaction wasn't the greatest. I couldn't blame her one bit, given the fact she was only trying to help him and his family. She was upset, and naturally so. I assured her that Falcon and the entire club were doing whatever we needed to, to make sure she was safe and that Jarod doesn't fuck with her anymore. She took it really well when I told her I'd be staying in her apartment for a little while. I gave her some information about her new neighbors too. Falcon didn't ask me to stay here so I could watch over them too, but Scarlett doesn't know that. I wasn't trying to lie to her, but I felt like if she thought I was here for more than just her that she'd be a little less stressed about how dangerous Jarod could be.

In the almost week I've been here, I've kept myself as busy as I can. I've been doing small jobs around the place, figuring if I can't go back to my cabin and get work done there, I could at least pitch in and make Scarlett's apartment a bit more comfortable for her. Hawk and I installed her kitchen counters, so the rest of her place is officially done. I have been doing some other things upstairs before her new neighbors arrive. Their part of the house is going to be completely finished by the time they come here.

Most of the work in the house has been cosmetic, but there have been a few things that needed to be changed out because they haven't worked in years. That, or while the house was sitting, things went bad. Scarlett ended up telling me about an issue with her water, how it was spitting air out any time she had it on for too long, so I already replaced the entire water line in the well. Now the spitting has stopped, thank goodness.

Yesterday I finished my last project, so I'm on a new one today, and I've noticed someone peering over my shoulder every few minutes. Charlee asked Scarlett to watch Vivi while she and Kinetic went away for a long weekend. Scarlett told me it's called a baby moon, a vacation the parents take by themselves before a baby arrives. They're taking their trip really early, but Scarlett told me that sometimes later in pregnancy, it can be harder. "Vivi, would you like to help me with this?" I ask as I turn my head to look at the small girl.

I can't remember how old Vivi is, but she's been hanging around with me upstairs. "Can I?" she asks, taking a couple of steps closer to where I'm sitting in the bathroom.

"You sure can. So, right now, I'm painting the cabinets for the new tenants. Scarlett said we should probably change it up and make it look prettier. What do you think?"

"Yeah, it looks kinda old," Vivi replies.

"Okay, cool. So that means she wants to freshen it up a bit and make it look prettier. Are you a good painter?"

"Uh-huh." She nods eagerly, smiling as I fetch her a small paintbrush.

"See, that's what I thought too. Perfect! Pop a squat and help me paint this side here, will ya?" I point to the floor beside me, and Vivi comes over and does as I ask her.

I already sanded the cabinets and prepped them earlier this afternoon, so Vivi's coming in at the best time to help me. I take the paint roller and roll it in the tray, getting a good bit of the paint on the roller. I keep a good hold on the handle and then roll it up and down on the side of the cabinet. I already have painter's tape up against the wall, so Vivi won't be able to get any paint on the white subway tile. "You just have to go up and down like this until that entire area is covered," I inform Vivi, and she nods over and over. She grabs onto the handle, and I take my hand away, and she does as I just instructed her. I keep painting the front of the cabinets, making sure to get every nook and cranny on the wood.

“I like painting,” Vivi says after a couple of minutes.

“I figured you would. It’s pretty neat seeing the cabinet go from that yucky brown to this green, right?” Vivi nods as I ask her the question.

“Vivi!” Scarlett calls for my little helper, and I realize I don’t think that she knew Vivi was up here with me.

“I’m here, Miss Scar!” Vivi calls back, basically screaming in my damn ear.

After a couple of minutes, Scarlett comes up the stairs and appears in the doorway of the bathroom located on the second floor. With cocked brows and an amused smile, she clears her throat. “What in the world are you two doing?”

“Vivi here saw I needed a helping hand, and she was so gracious enough to offer her impeccable painting services,” I tell Scarlett, who snickers and covers her mouth with her hand to hide her smile.

“I’m doing a really good job. I bet my dad can’t even paint this good!” Vivi tells Scarlett, and she nods, trying to lean to see what Vivi’s doing, but she’s on the other side of me. I lean over, and there are parts that she needs to go over again, but it could be a lot worse, so I’m not going to complain in the slightest.

“I can see that, kiddo. But it’s about bedtime, so I need to get you ready.”

“Awe.” Vivi pouts, trying to get Scarlett to let her have more time painting, no doubt.

“I’m sure Mr. Horseman will have lots of other painting jobs for you to do another time, but you need to get to bed. Your parents were very adamant about when you needed to get your butt to bed. It’s been a really long day for you already.” Scarlett tries to coax Vivi into doing what she wants, and Vivi looks right into my eyes.

“Scarlett is right, Vivi. There are so many things we have to paint around here, so one day, how about you and I paint all day long? Would that make you happy?”

“Yeah!” Vivi says and throws her paint roller in the air excitedly. Thank God she doesn’t drop it, but droplets of green paint do fly around the bathroom. I grab a wet rag I have sitting in a bucket from behind Vivi and begin wiping the droplets up so it doesn’t stain the floor or tile.

“I’m so sorry about that,” Scarlett tells me as Vivi hands me the roller. I place it back into the tray.

“It’s fine. She’s excited. There are far worse things a child could do. Stuff

like that doesn't bother me in the slightest."

"Good to know. Come on, Vivi, let's go get you ready for bed," Scarlett tells her.

Vivi rises up from the floor and goes over to Scarlett, slipping past her curvy frame to get out into the hallway. I hear the slight sound of footsteps on the hardwood floor, so she must already be heading toward the stairs.

"Thank you for including her. I know it really means a lot to be included at that age."

"Scarlett, there isn't any reason to thank me for that. Whenever any of the kids we'll have here show interest in anything I do, I'm always gonna make sure they feel included or at least has the opportunity to contribute. I wish I had a man in my life who did this sort of shit with me when I was her age, so I guess I'm payin' it forward and all. Maybe one day she'll do the same for another child."

Scarlett blinks a couple of times and nods. "Maybe. I still appreciate what you've done for her." Scarlett leaves the doorway of the bathroom and heads toward the stairs, surely getting Vivi and then taking her downstairs to get her ready for bed.

With Scarlett tending to Vivi, I have a hard time remembering I'm here as her protection detail. Some days it feels like we're playing house together. I spend a lot of time with her since we're in such close quarters. The only time I really get a break is if I'm upstairs doing some work.

I finish the second coat of paint on the cabinets and make sure Vivi's side looks good before I begin washing the paintbrushes and rollers off. I'll let this dry overnight, and then I plan on taking the same color green, and I'll paint the walls above the subway tile the same thing. I feel like the white subway tile with the black grout really makes a difference in contrast which will make the cabinet and walls pop. By the morning, the cabinets should be dry, and I should be able to put the doors back on, then put the new handles on the cabinets.

I clean up the bathroom as best as I can, and then I head down the stairs, leave the top unit of the house and go around to the basement. Once I'm in there, I toss my phone on the table next to the couch and realize it's after nine. Damn, where did the day go? I move the coffee table out of the way and pull out my bed, grabbing my pillow from the closet on the other side of the wall.

I head into the bathroom, shut the door, and get out of the clothes I've

worn all day, toss them in a hamper Scarlett added in here, and change into my pajamas. I grab my toothbrush, brush my teeth, and then go find Scarlett and Vivi. They're in Scarlett's room, and Scarlett is reading her a bedtime story.

"I'm gonna hit the hay, guys, but I'll see you both in the morning," I tell them both, and they say goodnight to me. Before I go to bed, I walk around the entire apartment and check to make sure every door and window is locked. Only then do I actually head back into the living room and slide under the covers.

Sleep takes me quicker than I thought it would, and I head into hopefully a bliss-filled dream.

Only it doesn't last for long.

I wake up out of nowhere, drenched in sweat. It feels like I've been in a damn swimming pool. Scarlett's sitting on the side of my bed with one of her hands on my face. "Are you okay?" Scarlett asks, sounding more frazzled than usual.

"Y-yeah," I stammer out. "What happened?" I look around, terrified I know what fucking happened. Sometimes when I'm asleep, I have nightmares from the time when I was in the service. I don't always know every time it happens, but based on the terrified look on Scarlett's face, I know this wasn't good.

"You were screaming. It was so loud. I . . . I ran out here, and you were thrashing around in your bed. You kept saying the name Jones over and over again." Scarlett looks away like she doesn't want to see the grief flashing across my face.

Jones's death will haunt me for the rest of my days.

"Was there anything else I said?" I need to know.

"You . . . yeah. There was 'not again', 'bastards', and 'don't hurt him'. You started hyperventilating, so that's when I started touching you, and only then did you start to settle down. You . . . you were scaring the shit out of me, Jeb. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. Vivi woke up too, but I settled her down," Scarlett admits, emotion flooding through her voice. "I grabbed you, started touching you, then got a cold towel and pressed it against your forehead. Eventually, you came out of it, but God, it scared me half to death."

"I'm so fuckin' sorry I had to put you through that, Scarlett," I tell her, but sorry isn't a big enough word for how bad I feel right now. "I was in the Marines for years, and there were some really intense missions I went on

with my squad. Jones was one of my brothers who passed away while we were on a mission. He was killed by the enemy, and his death stays with me every day.”

“It’s okay. You don’t need to apologize at all.” Scarlett’s hand gives mine a squeeze, and it’s when I realize her hand is in my own. I’ve been holding onto it this entire fucking time. I glance down at our interlinked hands, and she does, too, then her sweet green eyes lock onto mine. “I’m just glad I was here for you. I can’t imagine if you went through that by yourself.”

Scarlett surprises me completely because she leans over me a bit and brings her lips down onto my own. She kisses me passionately, and every bit of attraction I have for her comes to the forefront of my mind. I’ve been so good at keeping my feelings on the back burner because I’m not trying to scare her off or jump into anything too serious. We had sex the other night, and it was great, but I keep thinking I’ll push her away if I’m too forward. Still, I kiss her back just as passionately as she’s kissing me.

Scarlett pulls away after a couple of minutes and abruptly stands up. “Um, I’m going to go back to bed. Are you good?”

“Y-yeah,” I say, still completely thrown off guard by what just happened. “Sorry again about the disturbance.”

“Stop apologizing, Jeb,” Scarlett chastises me a bit and then walks out of the living room, shutting the door behind her.

I stare up at the ceiling in shock. What in the fuck just happened?

## CHAPTER TEN

### *SCARLETT*

Charlee dragged me out of the apartment today in the middle of applying for more jobs, only to lead me to the sweetest surprise I've had in a very long time. The clubhouse threw me a surprise birthday party. I don't know if any of the guys in the club are behind it. It really seems like something Charlee and Hermoine would do. The two of them are overly kind like that, though Hermoine is a bit more reserved. I heard whispers about Hermoine's parents being killed by her birth father, but I don't know if that's the truth or if it's just a sick rumor. If it is true, it would explain why she keeps her distance. If something like that had happened to me, I would be acting the same way.

I'm in the clubhouse right now, just having texted Jessie to let her know to come on over if she's off work. She already texted me back and said she'd be here in about an hour or so. I haven't ever brought her around the clubhouse, so I'm excited for her to meet the only other people who actually give a damn about me.

Vivi comes running up to me, jumping up and down while handing me a pink-wrapped present. "Happy Birthday, Miss Scarlett!"

"Thank you, sweetheart. This is so nice." I give Vivi a hug when Charlee makes her way back over to me.

"I can't believe you put this whole thing together," I admit, blown away by how the interior of the clubhouse is transformed.

It no longer looks like a place where all the men congregate. There's a 'Happy Birthday' banner spread halfway across the room, while purple and pink balloons are spread across the entire place. There's a table with a whole bunch of presents and an array of foods being served buffet-style. Charlee



told me that Hermoine catered the party with foods from the Java Zone. There's even a massive cake on a table by itself. I'd bet it's big enough to feed thirty or forty people.

"Yeah, well, you're family now, and if you ask me, you deserve to be spoiled a little bit. Things have been really stressful on you lately, and I figure this makes up for it a tad." The news about Jarod pulling a gun on me has spread like wildfire throughout the club. There have been numerous occasions when club members have caught me pulling into the driveway and asked when they can go deal with him. If something happens to Jarod, it won't be because I've told them to do it. I don't know if I could ever deal with that guilt.

"Thank you. This is just mind-blowing." I stare at everything in awe, and music plays in the background.

"Aren't you going to open up your present?" Vivi impatiently asks.

"Vivianna," Charlee chastises her daughter, but I know she's only excited.

"It's okay," I tell Charlee as I peel back the paper and open up the box. When I was watching Vivi the other day, I had all of my spices in a drawer, and I happened to complain about not having a spice rack. She must have remembered I needed one. "Thank you so much! This is so thoughtful, and you knew I needed one so bad. Didn't you?"

"Yup. I remember you said you needed it."

"Vivi, come here," Kinetic calls his daughter, and Vivi goes running off toward him.

"I bet he's trying to give you some peace and quiet. Enjoy your party, okay?"

"She's not bothering me in the least bit. I love talking to her."

"I know, but sometimes Vivi doesn't realize when there are others trying to get your attention." Charlee smiles widely and motions with her eyes over my shoulder.

"Ah, thank you."

Charlee nods, still smiling as she walks away.

I turn around, and Horseman is leaning against the back wall drinking a Budweiser. I have a Corona in my hand and walk right up to him. He's watching every single step I take, and while he's being quiet, his eyes are saying a lot.

"Happy Birthday, Scarlett." There's a low grumble in his tone, which just

makes me want to take him back to the apartment and have my wicked way with him.

“Thank you.” I smile, trying not to have too much eye contact with him.

“I left your present on the kitchen counter after Charlee dragged you over here,” he smirks, taking another sip of his beer.

“Oh? What is it?” The fact I’m getting so many presents is blowing me away. My brother and I never really got much because our mother was a single mom. A lot of the time, we were barely scraping by. As we both went into adulthood, we never really got each other gifts. I think it’s because we were so used to growing up the way we did. I guess the gifts never really mattered to us but spending as much time as we could together did.

“A helmet so I can take you out on a ride sometime.”

Horseman and I haven’t told anyone about us, and I don’t think we’re going to yet. It’s still really early, and while things are going great, I don’t want any outside influence or pressure from other people, mainly my brother.

“Yeah? You want me on the back of your bike?” He might not realize it, but I do know how much of a big deal that is to bikers.

“Yeah, very much so. Maybe we can go in a couple of days.”

“I’d really, really like that.” I smile brightly and quickly take a sip of my Corona as my brother walks over to us from the side.

“Happy Birthday, sis.” Hawk pulls me into his arms and gives me a big bear hug. I wrap my arms around him, and he kisses me on the cheek like he’s done since we were kids.

“Thank you.”

“Scar!” Jessie’s voice rings through the clubhouse, and Hawk turns, staring at Jessie, who’s wearing a skin-tight faux leather dress. It stops a couple of inches below her ass, and she has a pair of knee-high boots on.

“Dang, you look good!” I say as she comes over, pulling me into a tight embrace.

“Mind if I speak to you for a few minutes?” my brother asks Horseman, who nods, and the two of them walk off, leaving me and Jessie by ourselves.

“That was weird,” I mutter lowly.

“Mhm, especially since you two have that thing going on.” Jessie is the only person I can tell everything to. I know whatever I say is safe with her, and I’ve never found that sort of safety with any other friend.

My eyes go wide at what she’s just said.

“Calm down. It’s not like I screamed it.”

“I know, it’s just a little nerve-racking since it’s under wraps.”

“I bet it is. Keeping secrets is always a hard job. This place is super cute, though. Did they do all of this for you?” Jessie motions around at the decorations spread across the place.

“Yeah, they did. It’s super sweet, right?”

“It is. It’s kind of like having another family.” Jessie smiles, but her smile quickly fades away. Her family life is complicated, but I know that her mom and dad do give a damn about her. They moved to Portland when they were in the process of adopting her, I believe, and when Jessie was old enough to fend for herself, they moved back to Northern Ireland. Jessie’s never told me she’s lonely, but I’m not an idiot. I can see that her family being so far away from her really messes with her head. “Do you have any idea what those two are talking about?” Jessie asks, motioning over to Hawk and Horseman.

Neither of them seems tense, so hopefully, it isn’t anything too serious. “No, I don’t have a clue at all.”

As I stare at the two of them, I find myself really focusing on Horseman, or Jeb, as I’ve found myself calling him more often than not. He’s slowly started breaking down my walls, and I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t scared. He’s the kind of man who could wreck me, yet at the same time, he’s the type of man who has the potential to make me the happiest woman on the face of the earth.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *HORSEMAN*

Charlee had Scarlett out of the house for most of the day, so I was able to do something special for Scarlett's birthday. I'm supposed to be with her twenty-four-seven pretty much, but I couldn't be with them and still get this whole thing done for Scarlett, so I asked Vader or Hawk if they'd mind spending the day with the girls. Hawk ended up accepting, and I've been at Scarlett's house, completely transforming her bedroom into something a bit more special. Right now, it's plain Jane, but she told me the type of aesthetic she likes.

"Do you want to go out for a couple of drinks?" I suggest. She had her surprise birthday party at the club, and while it's still popping in the clubhouse, I think we should slip away and have some time to ourselves.

"Yeah, why the hell not?" Scarlett ends up saying. I know she's been looking for an excuse to get out of here, and I have too.

I'll take Scarlett out for some drinks, and then we'll come back, and I'll show her what I've done to her bedroom. The bedroom was already in the basement of the house, but all we did was clean it up. We didn't paint it or anything. It doesn't look so plain now. "Cool. I know just the place. Come on," I urge her, and we walk out through the clubhouse into the four-bay-long garage attached to the clubhouse. We head all the way down to the last bay, and I notice Rajah is in the garage sitting on a stool at the workbench. He's come a long way since he was shot, and honestly, he's doing so much better than any of us thought he would be.

"Rajah, mind shutting the door behind us?" I call over as Scarlett and I approach my bike. I grab an extra helmet off the workstation and hand it to

her since her helmet is back at the apartment. Then I take my own and put it on my head. I get on my bike first and then extend a hand to Scarlett. She grabs onto my hand and throws her leg around the bike, finally settling on the back. I tell her where to put her feet and to hold onto me as I back the bike up out of the garage, and as soon as we're out, Rajah presses the button for the door to come down.

I know just the place where I'm taking Scarlett, so I get out onto the main road, and we drive for about twenty minutes. It's on the outside of Portland, and it's a little hole-in-the-wall sort of joint called the Waterhole. It's been around for thirty or forty years, and in that time, there have only been a couple of renovations done to this place. The original owner was a decent guy, but when he died, his idiot of a grandson inherited the place. Snowden's brother, Noah, is a bartender at the joint and lives in the apartment upstairs.

I pull into the bar's parking lot, and there are only two cars. One of which I know has to belong to Noah.

We both take off our helmets once I've parked my bike and I have them hanging off the handlebars. Scarlett dismounts first, and then I follow her lead. The two of us walk side-by-side into the Waterhole until we get into the doorway. It's narrow, so I step in front of her, and the second I'm pushing the door open, Noah's eyes are pinned on me. Ever since the incident with Charlee, Kinetic, and Rocky, I'm sure Noah is keeping a better eye on who comes into the place.

"Horseman, long time no see." Noah waves, and then Scarlett comes into his view. He raises both of his brows as he gets a good look at Scarlett, probably silently noting how beautiful she is.

His hair's slicked back a bit and looks a bit greasy from this angle, but the further we walk into the bar, the less he looks like he hasn't taken care of himself. It has to be the lighting in this place. They're warm, yellow lights that, in hindsight, must make everyone look bad. "Yeah, it has."

"Bet you've been keeping busy," Noah adds.

I nod. "That's the understatement of the year. How you been? Haven't seen you around town much."

"Man, I'm the only bartender at this place. I work seven days a week, nine to ten-hour shifts. When the bar isn't open, I'm off, and I'm lucky to get out once a week for some groceries. Guess I'm too tired to do much of anything else." Fuck, Noah's the only one working here?

Well, looking around the place, I guess I can see that. There's only one

other patron here, tucked away in a booth in the back. “Shit, man. Sounds like the boss has you working your ass off.”

“Yeah, I’ll have to give him a stern talking to when I see him again, whenever I look in the mirror,” Noah nonchalantly says.

“No shit, you own the place now?”

“Yeah, I bought it off that stupid fuck for five thousand bucks. That’s what his grandfather’s baby was worth to him. Five G’s. It blows my fucking mind, man.” Noah shakes his head. “I’m going to get the place a small facelift, and then I’ll start advertising online. Friday nights will be ladies’ nights, and I have a few other things planned for the future.”

“That’s awesome, man. Congratulations. Your brother didn’t say anything to me. Otherwise, I would’ve stopped in and congratulated you sooner,” I explain to Noah, but he chuckles.

“I haven’t even told him about it, but enough about me. Who is this beautiful lady here with ya? She your girlfriend?”

“Hi, I’m Scarlett, Horseman’s uh . . .” Scarlett looks at me like she’s unsure of what to say.

“Look, Noah, we’re seeing each other. No one at the club knows yet because it’s so new. Especially Hawk,” I explain.

“Why? What’s up with Hawk?” Noah furrows his brows and looks between Scarlett and me.

“Hawk is my brother.” Scarlett laughs nervously.

“Well, that makes sense. You’re dating your friend’s sister.” Noah chuckles at Horseman and then turns his attention to me. “It’s nice to meet ya. What’ll you be drinking?” Noah asks Scarlett.

“A Moscow mule, please.” I guess she’s decided to switch from the Coronas she’d been drinking at her birthday party.

“What about you, Horseman?”

“I’ll take a Budweiser.” If I’m riding us back to the club, then I’m going to stick with my beer. Budweiser doesn’t really get me drunk, and I want to be safe with her on the back of my bike.

“Sure thing.” Noah goes and starts making Scarlett’s drink.

“Do you only drink Budweiser? I think that’s the only alcoholic drink I’ve seen you have,” Scarlett questions with a laugh.

“Yeah, well, I like the shit. Why would I change up what I like?” I don’t see a reason why I should tell her I’m only drinking beer tonight. I’ll explain it to her at some point.

She nods. "True, very true."

Over the course of the next few minutes, Noah gets Scarlett's drink ready for her, and then he hands me my beer. "You two want anything to eat?" he asks, and I look over at Scarlett, who shakes her head.

"No thanks, man," I tell Noah and take Scarlett over to a small two-person table across from the bar.

We take a seat at the table, and Scarlett takes a sip of her drink. She looks over me slowly, almost like she's worried. "Something bothering you?"

"Bothering me? No. I am wondering how you've been since the other day."

The other day? What the fuck happened the other day?

Ah, she means my nightmare.

"I'm fine, thank you. I'm sorry you had to go through that. I . . . I get them from time to time, and being in the Marines left me with some fucked up memories. Memories I can't seem to shake." I don't want to give her too many details because when I think too hard about something, it usually triggers me into having another episode, and I don't want to fucking deal with that.

"It's okay. I understand how memories can plague your mind. If anyone gets it, it's me." Scarlett has her own fair share of demons that haunt her. The only difference is the circumstances the demons came in for both of us. Hers are probably related to her nightmare tenants, and mine are related to my time serving the United States of America. "Do you want to talk about it?"

I shake my head. "No, it'll just trigger me."

"That's okay. You don't have to talk about it." Scarlett takes another sip, and I know she's only trying to conversate with me, so I offer up some information about myself.

"I don't know if I told you this yet, but I grew up in Akron, Ohio, by a single mother. My dad was super shitty to me and her, especially when my brothers and sisters came along. I'm the oldest out of all of them, and by the time I was six, he left."

I don't really talk about my home life with anyone. It's something really vulnerable, and I don't like dredging up those old memories either, especially since I'd like to forget them most of the time. I feel like it's okay for me to talk to Scarlett about it because she's already seen such a vulnerable part of me.

"My dad was never around, and if that wasn't bad enough, my mom died

a week before my birthday. Hawk has always been there for me since our mom died. We never had a father who was actually there for us. I guess the two of us have that in common. When we lost her, our entire lives changed. We didn't realize it back then, but she really was the center of our world." I'm fortunate enough to still have my mother, even if she is in Akron.

"I'm so sorry. That must have been really hard."

Scarlett nods her head. "Yeah, it was. It taught us to take every moment and cherish it like it could be our last. I really learned how to do that when Hawk was in the service. I was so worried that I was going to lose my brother, too." Scarlett glances down at the floor, and I can sense her previous worry and fear.

I decide to change the subject, and it works out for the better. Scarlett and I spend the next couple of hours having some drinks and chatting. It's a nice way to spend the evening of her birthday, but I can't wait until we get back home because I want her to see what I did for her.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

*SCARLETT*

Horseman and I had the best time at the Waterhole. For as long as I've lived in Portland, I never even knew it was there. It really is a little hole in the wall. He sipped on his Budweiser while I drank my Moscow mules. He insisted that I keep drinking because it was my birthday, so I did as he said. By the time we make it back to my apartment, I'm barely short of being two sheets to the wind.

I unlock my door, and the two of us head inside. I flick on the light switch and notice the brand-new helmet sitting on the island in my kitchen. It's monochrome, with the colors fading from purple to blue, to teal to purple, and even to pink and gold in some areas.

I head on over to it and pick it up, amazed at how beautiful it is. "There's a Bluetooth setting in the helmet so we can hear each other when we're out on the road or even listen to the same music," Horseman tells me.

I turn my head and look right at him. "Thank you so much, Jeb. I love it." I find myself calling him Jeb more and more these days, and it's no surprise when I walk right up to him and give him a big hug.

"I don't think that's going to be the only thing you love. Follow me." I do as he says and follow him toward my bedroom door. He slowly opens it, and it takes me a couple of seconds to realize we're really staring in my bedroom right now. It's no longer the plain Jane room it was before when I moved in.

"Did you do all of this today?" I'm completely blown away.

"I sure did," Horseman smirks and licks his lips nervously. "Do you like it?"

The walls are painted a fresh coat of white, and he's created some sort of

bedframe out of pallets. I didn't have a headboard before, and I don't think I need one now since Horseman's added a wooden feature wall behind my bed. He even has small fairy lights draped from one side of the wall to the other to give some ambiance to the room. That's not all, though. No, the upgrades continue.

He's gotten me a comforter and a big dusty rose-colored blanket. It almost looks like it's crocheted, but it's so big. There's a new woven basket on the right of my bed with a couple of other blankets as well, and on the left side of my bed, there's a smaller square basket with some goodies in it. So far, I have spotted a black and white polka dot coffee mug, a pair of fuzzy slippers, a journal, and a gift card to the Java Zone, and there's more underneath that. "You didn't have to do all of this. Seriously? I . . . I'm . . ." I don't know what in the hell I should say right now. I have never—not once—been spoiled like this.

"I like treating people who are important to me well. It's your birthday, so it's time you were spoiled a little bit, don't you think?"

"I . . . I guess so. Thank you so much, Jeb. I love everything you've done for me today. It's . . . it's almost too much."

Horseman shakes his head. "It isn't too much, Scarlett. If I'm being honest, I don't even think this is enough. I feel like I should be doing more for you." He takes a couple of steps toward me and drags his fingertips against my cheek.

"Are you kidding me? This is crazy! Look at everything you've done." The more I'm with Horseman, the more he's breaking down my walls by doing amazing things like this. He's showing me that there might be a little more to this, to the relationship growing between us. Hell, he's even giving me an insight into what the future could look like with him. Horseman hasn't even thrown one red flag in my direction, and that's surprising. Most men throw ten red flags before a woman notices them.

"I'd do it all over again," Horseman smirks, looking deep into my eyes. God, he has no idea how much I love his eyes. It's probably my favorite body part on him.

I'm silent for a few moments before I finally speak up again, "Jeb, I have to ask you something."

"Go right ahead."

"What did my brother drag you off for earlier tonight?" I crane my neck to the side a bit as I await his answer. I've thought about tons of reasons

Hawk could have pulled him away. Maybe it has something to do with the club, and they needed to discuss it in private. Maybe Hawk knows that Horseman and I are more than friends, and he was threatening him. Maybe my brother was trying to have a pow-wow with Horseman about my nightmare tenants on how they could deal with them for me. As I said, there are so many possibilities.

“Ah, that.” Horseman chuckles. “Well, your brother . . .” Horseman licks his lips and chuckles once more. “Your brother told me that he saw Rajah staring at you a lot and how I need to keep an eye on Rajah. I didn’t even notice Rajah was looking at you because I was too busy doing the same.”

I’m not quite understanding. “Why does Hawk want to tell you Rajah was staring at me?”

“So I can make sure he doesn’t get too close to you. Your brother doesn’t want any of us to get close to you like that. He might have assigned me with the task of making sure that doesn’t happen.”

“Oh boy, you’re in deep shit.”

“Mhm, but luckily for me, your brother doesn’t know it yet.”

I don’t want to create a problem between my brother and his club brothers, especially Horseman, but there’s no way I’d be able to stop spending time with him now. Not only because Falcon wants Horseman here to watch over me and the single mother upstairs—whenever she moves in—but also because we’ve grown so close. I find myself being so attached to him.

“Did he bring up anything else?”

“Mhm, your tenant. He’s pissed about everything and wants us to handle it. I told him you’re adamant about settling in court, but I’m going to be honest with you, Scarlett. If that fucker tries to threaten or hurt you again. Hell, if he even looks at you the wrong fucking way, I’m going to rip his head off his damn body.”

I swallow hard at Horseman’s words. There’s no way he could be serious. “He isn’t worth it. He’s a criminal. A bully. He’s not worth you potentially going to jail or prison.” I’m trying to be a voice of reason right now, but in all actuality, he’s being the voice of reason.

“I won’t catch a charge, and you can count on that. I have absolutely no affiliations with Randall, and I’m not going to. I’m not trying to scare you, Scarlett, but the club has made people disappear before, and we’ve never gotten caught.”

I roll my head back at the shocking news he's just told me. "What?"

"No one who didn't deserve it. If we do anything, it's to people who deserve it."

I'm trying to not let what he said bother me, but in a way, it does. "What makes you guys decide who deserves it and who doesn't?" I'm generally curious to know this answer.

"What they've done to us, or the people we care about. We don't tolerate violence against women or children, Scarlett. I know this must come as a shock to you, but if someone tries to hurt or ends up getting away with hurting people we care about, we put the kibosh on it as soon as possible. Your brother doesn't want you getting hurt by this dumb motherfucker, and neither do I."

"I have another court date coming up. Hopefully, at this one, I'll get the property back."

"Do you think that a court order will really help you? Like, honestly?"

"It will prove that I have the right to my home, yes. I'm sure I'll have to get the police involved to help kick them out, but I'm more optimistic if I go through the court system."

"This guy works the system like he's been doing his entire life. He's going to look for whatever loopholes are available and stretch them out. In the meantime, he'll probably keep threatening you too. Has he done anything recently?"

I swallow hard, knowing there's another text message on my phone. I didn't want to read it, but I saw it came from an unknown number. I lick my lips nervously and look right into Horseman's eyes. I don't want him to be mad, but I need him to know that the Randall family intends on tormenting me for as long as possible. The last thing I want is for him to get in trouble while defending me. But I can't keep this from him.

"I haven't looked at it yet, but there's this." I grab my phone from my small crossbody bag and pull up my text messages. I click on the text message thread and don't bother looking, only handing it to him.

"Stop pursuing the Randall family, or you'll learn to regret it." Horseman reads the text aloud. He shakes his head and shuts his eyes for a moment before opening them again. "They're not going to stop harassing you, Scarlett. And I'm not going to let anything happen to you either."

I'm about to ask him something I've been wondering for a little bit. "Jeb, why do you care so much about me? Honestly. Why are you so adamant

about protecting me? We just started dating, or whatever we want to call this. There's really no reason to go to the lengths you're willing to go for me."

"You don't see what's right in front of you. I've adored you for years, Scarlett. Ever since the first time I had the pleasure of laying eyes on you. We are dating, which means you're mine. My woman. My responsibility. My precious thing to protect. Which means I'm not going to let anyone hurt you. If they try, I will rip their fucking heads off." Horseman sets my phone down on the bedside table, and I don't know why, but warmth is spreading across my entire body.

I swallow hard, and it's like the two of us can't stay away from each other. He grabs onto me forcefully and pulls me against him, claiming my lips the way he claims every part of me. I've never been with a man who would do anything for me, and Horseman is that man. He'd go to the ends of the earth to make sure I'm safe, and that's the kind of man I want to spend my forever with. It might be too early to tell if I'll be with him forever, but I'd be lying if I said it didn't look promising right now.

We're pawing at each other's clothes like two horny teenagers, ripping them off until they're in piles on my wooden floor. The two of us move so fast until we're on my bed, and Horseman is spreading my legs, lining his massive cock up at my entrance. He slowly enters me, and while the adjustment to his size is always painful, after the initial shock, it always feels so damn good.

"I could do this forever with you," he admits as he presses chaste kisses down my neck while thrusting inside me.

"Then do it."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *HORSEMAN*

It's been a few days since Scarlett's birthday. When I look back, I realize there was never even a thought in my mind that the two of us could stay away from each other. Years ago, I always admired her from afar. I knew I wanted to spend time with her, sure, but I wasn't looking to get my dick wet back then. I like Scarlett for who she is, not what she can do for me in that way. Since the years have passed, my longing for her has grown, and I'm glad that I finally decided to act on it.

I think things just sort of fell into place when we got back to the house, and she saw what I did. I replaced the old, stingy carpet with a mixed-tone hardwood floor, and after that, I made a bed frame out of wooden pallets. It was pretty simple. I found some that were made to hold a good amount of weight, with thick, good boards, and doubled them up on top of each other. I secured each pallet to the other. It took four pallets total, but all in all, it looks pretty damn good. Scarlett has this interesting style about her. She likes minimalistic things but also likes there to be natural wood elements and to bring out natural colors, like oranges, greens, and occasionally some blues and grays. I've learned all of this since I've been living with her, so I figured she'd like everything I did.

I even found some lights to hang on the back wall, bringing the string along it and then up and over her closet door. I added a feature wall with a wood element behind her bed, giving it another unique touch.

Since the two of us had sex, things have been really intense between us. I notice Scarlett staring at me from time to time, or she catches me staring at her from a distance. The connection we have is undeniable, and as more time

passes, I know there isn't going to be any way I'll ever give her up.

Still, I feel like there's always been some strong emotional connection between the two of us. It's gotten more profound since we connected recently, and I imagine over time, it's only going to grow even more.

The tricky thing is, I was trying so damn hard to stay away from her at first. I was making it my life's mission to not cross a line with Scarlett. The night of my PTSD episode completely threw a rock in my plans. I had been staying so strong, not acting on any of the attraction I had toward her, but Scarlett had other plans. She kissed me so passionately after I had come out of that nightmare, and while I've been fighting it, I knew it was going to be harder to do. Still, I assumed we'd take things slow if anything, but Scarlett . . . the other night, she just made me feel like at that moment that she didn't want to take things slow. She wanted me, and hell if I didn't want her.

Since I've had Scarlett, I won't be able to keep my distance. She's everything I thought she could be and likely more. At some point, I'm going to have to come clean with her brother, and I know that doing so is going to create some issues between me and him.

Scarlett's in the kitchen right now washing some dishes from earlier today, humming the melody to a song to herself.

My phone begins ringing on the small coffee table in front of me, so I grab it. "Falcon, what's up?" I say since I saw my president's name as I answer.

"I need you to come over to the clubhouse as soon as you can." Mmm. Something in his voice doesn't sound right to me.

"Okay. Who's gonna watch Scarlett while I'm gone?"

"I'll send Vader over. Stay there until Vader's in the house. Then I need you to come over. No bullshitting around over there. Got me?"

"Yeah, as soon as he's here, I'll head over to the clubhouse," I tell Falcon, and then he hangs up.

I rise from the couch and head into the kitchen. Scarlett's tirelessly scrubbing a pot over and over again. I decide I'm going to give her a couple of minutes, but she doesn't say anything. "Scarlett, Falcon is sending Vader over to watch you for a bit."

Scarlett pauses what she's doing and places the pot down in the sink, then tosses the sponge in there. She turns around and looks at me. "This doesn't have anything to do with us, right?"

I immediately want to ease her worries. "No, it doesn't. I'm not sure what

it's about, honestly. Falcon called and asked that I head over, so I need to go see what's up."

"Okay, um, forget I said anything," Scarlett mutters and quickly turns around, then grabs her sponge again. I decide to take this as another opportunity to be closer to her. I walk over to Scarlett and slide my hand behind her back, holding onto her hip in a comforting way, then press a soft, chaste kiss to her forehead.

"Don't worry about anything. We're good," I state, making sure she knows I mean it, but there's a creaking sound coming from the front door, so I step away from her as quickly as I approached. Sure enough, Vader's walking right in. No one in the club knows I was intimate with Scarlett, and nor should they. At some point, we're going to have to fess up, but I'd like for the two of us to have a bit more time together first.

"Hey there, folks. What's going on?" Vader asks.

"Not much, man. It's just a typical rainy day around here," I state, and Scarlett's scrubbing the pot again.

"I'm on chore duty. Hence the intense scrubbing," Scarlett quickly tells Vader.

"I can see that. Mind if I chill on the couch for a little bit?" Vader asks.

"No, not at all. Make yourself at home," Scarlett answers him.

"I'll be back in a while," I tell Scarlett, and our eyes lock on each other's before I head into the living room and then go out the front door. The club's side-by-side is already by the garage, so I put the key in the ignition and drive it back up to the clubhouse. It's only a couple of minutes before I'm at the club and have pulled the side-by-side in the garage. I shut the bay door behind me and walk on in, looking for Falcon.

I spot him sitting on a couch, sipping on a beer, so I head on over to him. "What's up, brother?"

"Have a seat." At Falcon's order, my nerves start to get to me. Is he about to give me a stern talking to because he might know about Scarlett and me? Were we not discreet?

I do as Falcon says and have a seat next to him, and then he clears his throat, which is an indication that whatever he's about to say is very serious. "Spit it out, will you? You're makin' me all nervous and shit."

Falcon laughs lightly at my words.

"All right. I'll come out with it. Laramey is having some trouble." Laramey is someone who used to be on our team years ago. He was injured



and then was medically discharged a short time later. His injury was a hard one to watch. He was shot right in the back and was paralyzed for quite some time, but with surgeries and rehabilitative therapies, I heard he's walking again. I didn't visit the man as much as I should've. I was still serving, and then when I was on leave, things kept coming up. Fuck, I haven't been a good friend to him.

"Isn't he walking again?" I inquire.

"Yeah. Physically he's doing great, but mentally he's fucked, just like the rest of us."

"Shit. What's going on?"

"He's not the same man we once knew, Horseman. He's no longer Cadillac. He's Laramie. He's lost part of himself, I think. I think the demons in his head are at war with him, and . . . fuck, I'm going to cut the bullshit right now. If anyone understands the battles within their mind, it's you. I thought you could ride down to California and speak with him because I don't want to get another call that one of our brothers has killed themselves. I can't fuckin' keep doin' that shit. I'm tired of losing good men, and he's a damn good man. I think he just needs some help, maybe some guidance, or he might just need to know he isn't alone."

"So, you want me to go and spend some time with him?"

Falcon shakes his head. "No, I want you to go and bring our brother home where he belongs. Him being by himself is what got him in this mess in the first place."

"Okay. I'll do what I can. Do you have his address and everything?"

"Yeah, I'll text it to you. In the meantime, I'm going to have Vader watch over Scarlett while you're gone. Hawk specifically told me not to let Rajah near her." Falcon raises his eyebrows and chuckles lowly.

"Okay, sounds good. Yeah, Hawk isn't too keen on Rajah being around Scarlett. I'm going to let her know I'll be gone for a few days. It's the least I can do instead of leaving without saying a word."

Falcon cocks a brow. "Rajah isn't the one Hawk should be worried about."

Well, I don't know if Falcon knows exactly what happened, but I know he's seen that we have some sort of close bond. "Don't get the rumor mill started."

"I don't have to do that. The two of you are doing a great job of that on your own." There isn't anything I can say right now to throw Falcon off his

trail. Truth be told, I don't think he's going to be thrown off it. Falcon knows that Scarlett and I have a connection, and as much as I don't want to say anything, I have to.

"We're figuring shit out, so please don't go and say anything to Hawk."

Falcon has a shit-eating grin crossing his face. "It's not my place to do that or my business. If I were you, I'd tell him something soon before he does end up figuring it out on his own. If he does that, shit will be weird between the two of you for a while."

"He's not going to figure that out." We're being careful, and Scarlett and I will continue to be careful for however long it takes. We'll tell her brother when we're ready to do that, and not a moment before.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*SCARLETT*

“How’s the job hunt going?” Jessie asks as she sits across from me at my small, four-person max, round wooden table. I can’t have too much company over here because the apartment isn’t overly large, but that’s okay. Hopefully, I’m only here for a year or so.

“Not too bad. I actually have a phone interview later today for a financial manager position with the Health Department, and I have an interview in a couple of days with a charity looking for a fundraising manager.”

“Oh, really?” Jessie knows how hard it’s been on me to even land an interview. I figured when I graduated with my master’s degree, I would be well sought out, but apparently not. I started getting to the point where I thought I needed to ask Hermoine if I could pick up a few shifts a week at the Java Zone.

“Yeah, I’m excited.”

“Which one do you want to get? Are you more excited about one position as opposed to the other?” Leave it to Jessie to ask me a million and one questions. I know she’s only doing it because she’s excited for me.

“You know, I always wanted to work with the city in some manner, but I’m kind of hoping I get the position with the charity. They work primarily with women who can’t afford healthcare and with women who need assistance with their children. Whether it’s providing money to a daycare so the mother can work or paying for the child to be in soccer for the fall. They just want to help as many people as they can, and I feel like that would be a great place for me.”

“That really would be. Honestly, you’ve always loved helping people,

and I think if you ended up getting a job with the city, you'd be bored of it within a year or two. Are you still going to do both interviews?"

I nod. "Without a doubt. It's not like I'm guaranteed to get the job with the charity, and I'd really like to at least have a job. Even if I get the city one and not the charity, I can always look for a better fit while I'm working for the city."

"True, very true," Jessie confirms.

"So, how's work with you going?" I ask as I get up to grab the champagne I have in the fridge. I get two champagne flutes, pop the bottle and proceed to pour myself and Jessie a glass.

"It's going. Some days are great, and I love my job, but other days I'm losing my faith in humanity. I just wish parents would treat their children better. I understand some cases can't be helped, like parents going to prison, guardians passing away and leaving the kids with nowhere to go, and parents needing to go into mental health institutions or away to rehab. Some cases gut me because they're not the ones where they're trying to better themselves for their kids. They're the people who shouldn't have had kids in the first place."

I don't know how Jessie works in the field that she does. If I was a social worker, I would want to take so many kids home and show them what a good life should be. A lot of these kids just don't ever get the opportunity to live like that.

"You're an angel. I hope you know that," I say as I take a sip of my champagne.

Jessie takes a sip, too, and my phone begins ringing on the table. I think, for a moment, it might be Horseman calling to check in on me. He had to go away on a run for the club. He didn't give me too much information, but he said that one of the men he had been in the service with was struggling mentally and that Falcon needed him to go out there. Horseman didn't tell me that Falcon was sending him for a specific reason, though I've seen firsthand how Horseman has PTSD. That one day, I ran out into the living room when he was thrashing around and screaming, it really puts into perspective how our servicemen and women struggle even after they're back home.

Surprisingly, it isn't Horseman. It is a local number from Portland, so I answered it, thinking it could be the courthouse or something similar. "Hello," I say into my phone.

There isn't one sound coming from the other end of the line.

“Hello?” I repeat myself, wondering why I can’t hear anything.

I glance over for a split second and notice Vader intently watching me.

“Hello, can you hear me?”

Still, there’s nothing. Not one peep coming from the other end of the line.

I inhale deeply and decide to hang up. If it’s someone that important, they will call me back.

“Who was that?” Jessie asks.

“No idea. They didn’t say anything when I answered the phone,” I tell her, and Vader still has his eyes on me. He’s been watching TV for most of the time that he’s been in the apartment, but I notice every once in a while, he’ll be eavesdropping or paying a little bit more attention than usual.

“Weird. Probably some robo-caller or something. I wouldn’t pay too much attention to it.” Jessie’s probably right.

“Yeah. Want to make some cupcakes for the club? I’ve kind of been in the mood to bake today.” It’s less about wanting to bake and more about wanting to distract myself. Since Horseman’s been watching over me, I’ve gotten into the routine of having him around, and his being away is kind of giving me slight anxiety.

Jessie and I spend the next couple of hours baking various types of cupcakes and then making icing from scratch. We made an almond cake with a strawberry topping, a chocolate cupcake with Oreo icing, and lastly, a carrot cake cupcake with cream cheese icing. All in all, I think we made about a hundred and seventeen cupcakes.

Jessie and I get in my car once we have everything packed up, leaving only a dozen cupcakes at my apartment and taking the rest to the clubhouse. Jessie has three trays, and so do I. Luckily, Vader came with us, so he opened the door, and we walked inside.

My brother is sitting on one of the couches and looks up at me, cocking a brow at Vader. “What the fuck, dude? You make the ladies carry this shit in here by themselves? You should have all the trays.” Hawk is pretty fucking annoyed if you ask me.

“I offered, brother! They’re the ones who didn’t want my help,” Vader explains. I’m carefully assessing the situation, and while Jessie doesn’t know it, Vader has his eyes planted right on her large behind. She’s a curvy woman, probably a size twelve or fourteen but holds her weight well. Yet, the woman has a Kardashian ass, if you know what I mean.

“It didn’t have anything to do with the fact he’s almost tripped three times

today,” Jessie sarcastically says, and I stifle a laugh. My brother, on the other hand, doesn’t think that’s a good enough excuse.

“It doesn’t fuckin’ matter. You’re ladies. He’s a man. He’s supposed to do it anyway,” Hawk grumbles.

“Geeze, grumpy pants. Calm down a little, would you?” I bark out at him.

“Someone’s got his panties in a tizzy.” Jessie picks on Hawk, and the way he glares at her is interesting to me. He’s glaring, but he doesn’t look like he wants to kill her. That’s his usual go-to look whenever someone pisses him off.

“Vader, go fuckin’ do somethin’,” Hawk hisses. Since my brother is the VP of the club, Vader makes himself scarce and leaves the room.

Jessie and I walk off, too, getting away from my brother and his bad mood. We head into the kitchen and place all the trays of cupcakes down on the counter, leaving the plastic wrap around them so whenever someone wants to come eat them, they’re fresh. There’s a whiteboard with a marker in the kitchen, so I write down the types of cupcakes we made so everyone is aware.

“Okay, what the hell was that about? I feel like I was totally missing something,” Jessie says, looking at me with wide eyes.

“Um, yeah. So Vader wasn’t able to take his eyes off your ass, and my brother ripped him a new asshole.”

Jessie smirks, but I’m not sure if she’s smirking because Vader was giving her attention or if it’s because Hawk stood up for her. “Hawk got mad about that?”

Oh boy.

Does . . . does Jessie have a crush on my brother?

“I think livid is the better term here.”

“Oh, wow.” Jessie licks her lips and makes her way over to the cupcake trays, grabbing one of the carrot cupcakes.

“I have to ask you something because it’s totally going to eat me up if I don’t.” I start off trying to figure out how in the hell I’m going to ask her this.

“Okay, shoot.”

“Do you like my brother?”

“Honestly?” Jessie leans up against the counter and sighs. “I’ve always liked Hawk. I’ve just never acted on it because he’s your brother, and I didn’t want things to be weird if it didn’t work out.”

Jessie’s had her fair share of asshole boyfriends in the past. What she

deserves is a good, honest man. While it might be awkward if she does date or fuck my brother, he's a good guy. A really good one. "Don't let that stop you. Life is too short to live with regrets, and if something were to happen between you two, I wouldn't be upset about it. Even if you two didn't work out, I'd still have you both in my life. Neither of you are replaceable."

Jessie takes a big bite of her cupcake and chews it up quickly. "Thank you. That makes me feel so much better."

"No need to thank me at all."

Just as I finish responding, Hawk walks into the kitchen. "I'm sorry for losing my temper. I just hate that fuckin' shit."

"It's no big deal," Jessie says with a sweet smile, but her phone starts ringing, and she sighs as she walks out of the room and answers it.

"I don't know if I told you this yet, but your neighbor and her kids will arrive tomorrow."

"Okay, cool. I made some cupcakes, so I'll take them some over tomorrow." I'm sure that's a great way to make a first impression.

"Scar, I need you to shoot somethin' straight with me. Okay?"

"Okay?" What in the world could he be questioning me about. Hawk's only ever used 'shoot something straight' with me when he wants to talk to me about something serious.

"Are you and Horseman an item?"

If I had a drink right now, I would have spit it across the kitchen.

"Sorry, what?" I blink at him a couple of times.

"I'm not an idiot, all right? Doesn't help that I mentioned to Falcon how I wasn't gonna let any of the brothers here fuck around with you, especially not Rajah. Falcon mentioned how Rajah wasn't in the running anyway, and I have noticed how cozy you seem with Horseman, so I'm asking."

I'm so nervous to admit this to my brother, but at some point, I was going to have to come clean. "Yeah, Horseman and I are exploring things. Um . . . do you have a problem with that?"

Hawk shakes his head. "No, he's the most stand-up guy in the club. He's respectful. A good one. If it could have been any of my brothers, I would have picked him."

I let out a sigh of relief. I was so worried Hawk would want to kill him or something. "Okay, good."

"Yeah." I can tell my brother's having a hard time accepting this, even if he's telling me that he's okay with it. The only thing I can think of doing is

distracting him.

“If you like Jessie, then shoot your shot. I *think* she might like you.” I wink at my brother, and his attitude immediately perks up.

“Wait. What?”

I know she just told me, but I want both of them to be happy, and if I can help push them together, then I’m going to do that.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *HORSEMAN*

I've almost made it to Redding, California, where Laramey's currently living. It's been a six-and-a-half-hour ride, and my ass is starting to go numb at this point. I only made one pit stop over halfway through to take a piss and get some grub. I can't complain too much, though. The weather has been decent, and I've had a light jacket on the entire way.

Falcon told me he was calling Laramey to let him know I'd be here late tonight to see him, but Falcon didn't have me wait around for Laramey to tell me it was okay for me to come. Instead, I got on the road as quickly as I could. If Laramey's as bad off as Falcon says, then I need to get to him soon before the demons plaguing his mind take over.

The fact Falcon thought I was the man for this job really speaks volumes to me. He knows about my struggles and doesn't look at me differently for having them. Instead, he views it as a tool or resource that I can tap into when it comes to helping our brothers or sisters in the forces. We go through a lot of heavy shit when we're active in one of the branches. There's no way we can beat around that bush, but we come out of it stronger. It's what I tell myself at night when the memories begin to plague me, but even I sometimes have a hard time believing it.

I pull into the apartment complex where Laramey lives and park in an empty spot near his entrance. I slowly get off my bike, and my body screams with every step I take. I shouldn't be hurting this bad. For fuck's sake, I'm only thirty-six. I take my helmet off and place it on my bike, then crane my neck to the right and the left until it has a good pop.

Falcon already gave me the apartment number for Laramey, so I walked

inside the apartment building and headed up the stairs. He's on the third floor, so I get to that level and then follow the signs leading to number three-forty-seven.

I approach his door and knock my fingers on it, then after waiting a few moments, the door comes open. "Horseman," Laramey says, looking a little worse for wear.

He's thinner than I remember, and his cheekbones are showing vividly from his weight loss. I wonder if he's eating, but I'm going to naturally assume he isn't. "Hey brother, it's been a long time," I say.

"Yeah, it has been. Uh, Falcon told me you were coming. The place is a mess, but come on in." Laramey motions with his hands for me to walk inside, and I do.

His apartment isn't overly large, and it's not small, either. It might be around nine hundred square feet, with a decent-sized bedroom with a master bath. There's a small dining area, a good-sized kitchen, and a living area too. But there's not much in the apartment at all. He has a full-sized mattress in the bedroom with a small light next to it, and there's a TV in the living room, but it's maybe forty inches. He's got a futon in here too, which I'm surprised he doesn't sleep on. His dining room table is one that folds up, and he has a fold-up chair sitting in front of it.

"I'm not gonna lie to you, man. Falcon told me you're having a rough time." There's no easy way for me to start this conversation.

"Rough, huh?" Laramey laughs, but it's not a joyous one. No, he's aggravated, but not that Falcon said he's having a difficult time. He's angry at himself for even causing this much attention to come his way, and I know it. "I don't know if rough cuts it. Some days I feel like I'm just a fuckin' fraud, man. I feel like the worst thing that bullet did was stop in my spine 'cause it should've gone through my heart or head. Fuck." Laramey shakes his head, and I know the battle he's having with himself all too well.

When you enlist, they never tell you about the shit you end up bringing back with you. They only tell you that you're doing whatever you can for your country and that by enlisting, you're helping keep America the land of the free. They feed you a whole bunch of bullshit. Granted, I wouldn't change my mind even after all I've witnessed, but I would've liked it if they were a bit more honest with what we should expect. If they were, maybe it would prepare us a bit more.

"Did Falcon tell you I have problems too?"

Laramey looks right into my eyes. “He didn’t, but he alluded to you having some sort of issues. That’s why he told me to stay here because he was sending you, and he thought it would be a good idea for the two of us to chat.”

I nod. “Yeah, well, my mind is fucked up, brother. The shit you’re thinking about yourself right now, I have the same thoughts. Hell, I have nightmares that make it next to impossible for me to get a good night’s sleep and flashbacks that happen at the most random times. None of it makes sense, and I’m getting to the point where I might go talk to someone about it. They have all these resources for veterans, so why not check them out? At least, that’s my opinion.”

“Dude, I don’t want to talk to some random person about my shit,” Laramey tells me, and I don’t blame him one bit. It’s hard for men like us to talk about the things we’ve been through to anyone, much less a complete stranger.

“I have a hard time swallowing that pill too, but if it’s a resource for us, then we should at least try to use it. Now I haven’t gone and done it, so I’m just as leery as you are . . . but I think it might be time I do it soon, or maybe even go to a support group with other veterans. I struggle a lot with feeling alone in it.”

Laramey nods like he relates to my statement. “That’s my main problem. I feel like I’m alone in my pain, my memories, my fuckin’ hopelessness. Sometimes I feel like all I am is a burden on the world and like I shouldn’t be here anymore.”

There’s a brief moment of silence between the two of us. “Brother, what are you doing down here in Redding?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, is there family here or something?” I know Laramey doesn’t have any family here at all.

He shakes his head. “No, man. It’s just me. It’s been me for a long ass time.”

“Falcon sent me down here to talk to you about the way you’ve been feelin’ and shit, but he doesn’t want me leaving you here. He wants me to bring you home, and I want to. You need to be in a brotherhood, surrounded by people who actually give a shit about you, not by yourself. You and I know what happens when men like us are by themselves. We end up letting the darkness take over.”

Laramey inhales deeply through his nose and leans against his wall. “I don’t know hardly anyone up there at your club. I left before a lot of them came into your unit.”

“Not everyone there was in our unit. Some are Marines, some are Special Forces, and some are Coast Guard. We have a mixture of everything, brother, but the important thing is that we’re all there for each other. We all know what it’s like. You have a place in the club if you want it, Laramey.”

Laramey goes quiet and takes a few moments to think about it. “You guys really want me at your clubhouse?”

I nod without an ounce of hesitation. The last thing I want to do is leave Laramey here and then find out in a couple of months that he’s shot himself in the head. “Yeah, I do. We all do. I can find you some work up in Portland, and maybe a change of scenery is exactly what you need. At least you wouldn’t be alone up there,” I suggest, trying to get Laramey to agree to leave with me.

“What the hell? It can’t hurt,” Laramey ultimately says, causing any bit of anxiety I have inside me to dissipate. “When do you want to leave?” he asks.

“Tomorrow morning. I need some sleep after that ride. We can get some of your shit packed up in the meantime, and then we can go out for a late dinner.”

“Yeah, that sounds good,” Laramey comments.

Laramey and I spend the next couple of hours getting his bike and mine on his trailer. He has a long truck bed and doesn’t have much shit, so we should be able to get the futon and the mattress in the bed of his truck in the morning. In the meantime, we box up his plates, the few small kitchen appliances, and the majority of his clothes and put them in the back seat of his truck. All we have to do in the morning is throw the last few things in the back of the truck and the bed, then we can head to Portland.

I hate that he’s been struggling on his own for so long, but I think that his coming to the Deathstalkers MC is only going to give him more purpose in life, and that’s what Laramey needs. He needs some fucking purpose.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

*SCARLETT*

There has been so much ruckus going on upstairs because Balsinde and her two little girls arrived an hour ago. I hadn't gone up to see them yet, figuring they'd want a little bit of time to settle in when they got here. Hawk did tell me that the club was going to be coming over in about an hour, so they could start helping them unpack some of the furniture they brought with them.

I don't know too much about the situation other than the fact that the club voted on helping them and bringing them here and that her ex is crazy and is part of the police department. It leads me to believe she doesn't feel safe being anywhere around him, which is how she ended up here in the first place.

I made those cupcakes and already made a plate for her and her girls. There are a few more left at the apartment for whenever Horseman gets home. I really want him to try some, so hopefully, he gets back soon. If he's gone for a couple more days, then they'll be stale, and I might very well have to make some fresh ones.

"Where are you going?" Vader asks from his seat on the couch. He's been scrolling on his phone, swiping right and left as he looks over women he can fuck around with. He hasn't left my side since Horseman's been gone, but I do think that the moment he can get relieved, he's going to make sure he sets up some plans.

"I'm heading upstairs to meet Balsinde and her kids. It would be the neighborly thing to do, don't you think?"

Vader swallows and nods, slides his phone into his pocket, and then we

both leave the apartment and head around the house until we're on her porch.

I take my knuckles and rap them against her front door. After a couple of moments, a small girl comes up, immediately looking at the plate of cupcakes I have. "Hi, I'm Signe." The little girl must be the younger of the two, with light brown hair tied in two pigtails. She has the most beautiful icy blue eyes and an adorable button nose.

"I'm Scarlett, and I live downstairs." I smile, wanting her to know I'm not a threat.

"Sig! Where are you? We have much to do here, okay?" a woman's voice echoes throughout the home, and then she comes into view. This must be Balsinde.

"Who's that?" Signe asks me, looking at Vader. She furrows her brows and presses her lips together firmly, almost like she doesn't like him.

"That's Vader. He's a friend of mine and part of the motorcycle club who's renting you the house." I'm not sure what she knows, so I'm keeping things as vague as possible.

"Oh, okay."

"Sig." Balsinde seems startled and a bit taken aback. She puts her hands on her daughter's shoulders. "Why don't you go play for a bit with Gun?"

"Really? Okay!" Her eyes light up, and then she runs across the house, looking for her older sister.

"I'm Balsinde but go by Sin." She opens the door and walks out onto the front porch. She is a tall woman with an athletic body and has snow-white hair that's taken back in two braids away from her face before it falls effortlessly down her back. She looks just like she sounds—like a Viking woman.

"I'm Scarlett. I was telling Sig I live downstairs." I offer a smile.

"Who's that?" Sin looks over at Vader. She seems guarded, if anything, and is glaring at him.

"Vader. He's part of the Deathstalkers MC."

He comes into view a little more, so his cut is more clearly visible. "Ah, okay."

"My brother is the VP here, and he said that the guys are coming over to help you finish moving in an hour or so. If you want some help with some smaller things now, I'd be more than willing to help you out until they arrive."

If anything, it's hard for me to get a read on her. She has a resting bitch

face, and I don't mean any offense by that. In some circumstances, I think it must be a good thing to have one because people don't fuck with you as much as they do with others. "That would be great, actually. The girls have been in the car for a long time, and they need to burn off some energy. I feel bad making them work their butts off so much over the past couple of days. Maybe if you help, I can give them a break, even if it's for a little bit."

"Of course. We can put my muscle to good work, too," I joke, and Sin's eyes drift past me once more.

"Yours? Are you two an item?"

"Oh, God, no. I'm dating someone else in the club. I'm sure you'll meet him in a day or two. His name is Horseman. Vader is just staying with me while Horseman is gone."

Sin chuckles. "Oh, so you're in one of those types of relationships."

"No, not at all. I'm not normally so open with other people, but I know you've had a rough go of it too. I have a situation where I'm being threatened by tenants who are in my childhood home. The threats have gotten a bit scarier over the last couple of weeks, so the club has someone with me a lot of the time in case my tenants try to act on their threats."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. It was wrong of me to assume."

A lot of people are into swinging and open relationships these days, so I understand why she'd make an assumption like that. "It's okay. You didn't know. I did make you guys some cupcakes. I wasn't sure what you guys liked, so I made a couple different varieties."

"I know the girls are going to love that. They have the worst sweet teeth I've ever seen. Come on in,"

I follow Sin into her home, and she leads me into the kitchen, where she takes the plate out of my hands and puts it on the kitchen counter.

Sin and I begin unboxing a few of the boxes in the kitchen, putting away plates, cutlery, bowls, and kitchen gadgets. "Are you excited about your new beginning here?" I question her.

Sin smiles softly and then presses her lips together. "Yes and no. I'm excited to be away, but I am still fearful. We're running away from my ex-husband. It's plain and simple. I think we were smart enough to evade him for a while, but eventually, he will find us, and our peace will be short-lived. My daughters don't know that, and I don't want them to. I want them to think that everything is okay. I want them to not have to look over their shoulder constantly." All I hear is a mother who's trying to do the very best for her

children. That's all she wants. She wants them to be okay, to be happy, and to not worry about things that are outside of their control.

"I can only imagine. Just know you're protected here whenever that time comes. The Deathstalkers don't let anything bad happen to those they care about."

Sin licks her lips and locks eyes with me. "You are someone they care about. My daughters and I are a favor Falcon owed Reed. I don't expect any of them to protect us." Sin goes cold on me, and it makes me realize this woman has been through a hell of a lot. I can tell she doesn't trust easily, and likely for good reason.

For the next three hours, the two of us work, and then the guys from the club come over to help as well. We help Sin get her house set up, and the guys do a lot of the heavy lifting and putting of furniture together.

By the time I'm done, I'm exhausted and head back to my apartment with Vader. I take a nice long, hot shower, and once I'm done, I get some clothes on and decide to text Jessie. She usually texts me every day, but so far, she hasn't done that.

**To: Jessie**

*Hey. You good?*

I don't get a response for about twenty minutes, but when I do, it gives me the heebie-jeebies.

**From: Jessie**

*No, and you won't be either.*

Jessie's never spoken to me like this, and it really rubs me the wrong way. Instead of replying through text, I call her back immediately.

"H-hello," Jessie stammers, something obviously wrong with her.

"Hey. You sound weird. Is everything okay?" I know it's not okay. My stomach is dropping into the pit of my stomach, and I know something is horribly wrong here.

"I . . . I . . ." Jessie begins sobbing on the other end of the line.

"No, she isn't okay," a man's deep, rugged voice tells me from the other end of the line.

I don't know who it is at first, but I quickly figure it out. It's Jarod Randall.

"What are you doing with Jessie?"

He chuckles manically on the other end of the line. "Whatever I damn well please, honestly. I told you if you didn't drop the case, the people you



love would get hurt. You're always with Jessie, so hurting her makes a lot of sense. I'm twisting the knife in you, Scarlett. You fucked with me, so now I'm fucking with you."

I put him on speaker and tap away on my phone. I have an app where Jessie and I share our locations. Luckily, location services haven't been turned off, and I can see exactly where her phone is pinging. She's in a wooded area quite a few acres behind that bar Horseman took me to not too long ago. I believe it's called the Waterhole.

"If you touch a hair on her head, I swear to God—"

"Go ahead, keep making threats. It's not like you're gonna do anything about it. Don't worry, though. I'm going to have some fun with her before I kill her. Just remember, this is all your fault. If you'd just left me and my family alone, I wouldn't be doing any of this." The phone call ends, and my heart feels like it's going to beat out of my chest.

I have to get out of the apartment and get to her.

The last thing I want to do is use my brother's club to help me get out of this mess.

I got myself into it, and now I need to get myself out.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *HORSEMAN*

Laramey and I left as soon as we had all of his stuff in his truck. The mattress and futon fit in the truck's bed, and we already secured our bikes on his trailer yesterday. There was even a couple of feet of room toward the back of the trailer, so we strapped down some totes with his clothes in them. The rest of his stuff we put in the back seat of his truck, and we went on our way.

Laramey called his landlord while he was behind the wheel from the Bluetooth setting and explained to her that he won't be renewing his lease. The woman sounded nice enough on the phone and asked if Laramey was okay because she hadn't heard from him in a while. Long story short, Laramey told her he's been in his head a lot, and not in a good way. Instead of immediately going into how Laramey was violating the terms of his lease since he still had three months left, she asked if he knew people wherever he was going.

Laramey told her that everything was going to be fine because he was moving in with a group of friends who were all veterans. She seemed pleased to hear that and wished Laramey well, but I thought it was interesting how she told him not to be a stranger. When Laramey got off the phone, I asked if he and the woman were more than friends. He merely laughed it off and then told me that he and Sophie were only friends, and maybe if he was feeling more like himself that he would've tried something with the red-headed beauty.

\* \* \*

We're already six hours into our trip and only have twenty-something minutes before we make it back to the clubhouse. "You were so quick to grill me about Sophie, but you didn't say if you have a lucky lady in your life."

"Man, if you only knew the half of it." Yes, she's in my life. Scarlett is becoming my entire world, whether she knows it or not.

"Ah, so there's someone." Laramy cackles from the passenger seat. We switched off about halfway through when we made our first and only pit stop. But I tend to speed a little more than usual, so we didn't actually end up gaining any time. Whereas, Laramy is a bit of a slow poke.

"Yeah, but it's a little complicated," I explain, not getting into the thick of it.

"Now you have to tell me why it's complicated." Laramy's only trying to boost me up a bit, and I'm not blind to that fact.

"She's Hawk's little sister."

"Mmm, so that's a giant clusterfuck." Laramy's trying to make light of the situation, and all I can do is nod at him.

"Yeah, that would be accurate. We're making the best of it, though, and Hawk knows I'm with her now."

"How'd he handle that?"

"Better than I thought he would, honestly. He wanted me to keep the other brothers away from her, and in doing so, I ended up getting closer than I thought."

"Oh, that's a load of crap. You liked her from the very beginning, didn't you?" Laramy knows me well. Almost too well.

"I was attracted to her years ago when I first met her, but I stayed away." I knew it would likely create a problem, and the last thing I wanted to do was create an issue.

"See, I knew it. What is she like? I don't believe I've ever had the pleasure of meeting Hawk's sister."

I think long and hard for a moment before I answer him. "She's smart, well-rounded, tough. She's gone through hell recently and still doesn't let it tear her down. I think that just goes to show how strong she really is."

Laramy smiles brightly. "Then she's probably a good match for you. People tend to find others when they need them the most. Maybe now is the right time for the two of you, and that's why you're together now."

"You're right. I don't think the timing has ever been more perfect than it is right now."

Laramey chuckles and takes a sip of his Coke that we picked up a couple of hours ago. "I already know I'm right."

"Damn, look at you getting all cocky and shit."

"When you know you're right, what's the harm in acting like you know it?"

Never did I think the guy who was practically ready to kill himself would be joking around with me right now, but I'm glad. I'm glad I got to Laramey before he really hurt himself. "Very true."

The rest of the ride back to the clubhouse isn't too bad at all. It's quiet, there isn't much traffic, and before I know it, we're pulling onto the back road where the clubhouse resides. Then before long, we're pulling the truck up beside the garage. Laramey and I get out of the truck, and instead of starting to unpack, we head into the clubhouse. We really need to figure out where Falcon's going to have Laramey set up. I know there are a couple of open rooms upstairs, so I imagine it's going to be one of them.

We walk through the clubhouse doors, and there are a couple of guys here, but I noticed as we were walking in from one of the open garage doors that a lot of the bikes weren't there. This can only mean that a lot of my brothers are out on a run, but I feel like Falcon would've told me what to expect at some point on my way home.

Falcon's sitting down on one of the couches, with brows furrowed, staring down at his phone. The door finally slams shut behind Laramey and me, causing him to glance up from his phone, and the moment he does, his eyes are on me, then he drifts to Laramey. He forces a smile and rises up. "Laramey, it's good to have you home," Falcon states, acting as if the Deathstalkers MC was the only place Laramey should've ever been.

"Thank you for inviting me. I appreciate everything you're doing, Falcon, and thank you for sending Horseman down. I don't know if I could've hung on too much longer." It's the first time I'm hearing Laramey say this, but I'm not surprised. He didn't look too great when I arrived in Redding, and while getting him to come with me took a little bit of convincing, I'm glad he's here. Like I said before, I'm tired of hearing about good men killing themselves. What I told Laramey about me thinking about talking to someone is total bullshit, but I was trying to get him to come up here. This could be everything he needs to keep going, but like everything else, only time will tell.

"No thanks necessary. I'm going to set you up in a room upstairs. It has a

bathroom attached, and while it isn't a lot of room, it should be fine," Falcon explains.

"I'm sure it'll suit me just fine," Laramey comments.

"Vader, show Laramey where his room is and help him get his shit upstairs. Will ya?" Falcon calls over to Vader, who's on his laptop on the other side of the main area.

Vader . . . Vader's supposed to be watching Scarlett.

Who is watching her right now?

Vader nods and proceeds to get up and approaches Laramey. Falcon's eyes drift back to me, and I know something isn't right. I feel it deep in my gut. He's keeping something from me, and the longer he stares at me and remains quiet, the more I'm itching to know what the fuck is going on.

My mind runs through a million possibilities, but the thing that keeps popping up is Geno's men. We didn't find all of them, and there was a threat made that insinuated they'd be stirring up some trouble. "Horseman, come with me. We really need to talk."

There's no denying it. Something is very much the matter.

I walk off with Falcon to a quiet corner in the main area, and he clears his throat, then meets his eyes with my own once more. "There's no easy way for me to tell you this, but Scarlett is gone."

"W-what?" I stammer, not sure I've heard him right.

"She's gone, Horseman."

"What do you mean, gone? Did she leave?" Everything seemed so normal the other day when I left.

Falcon shrugs. "I'm not sure, Horseman. The car is gone, and Scarlett never gave anyone an indication she wanted to leave . . . so my guess is that there's something else going on here. It's why a lot of the brothers aren't here. I have them on the streets, trying to get some sort of information. She's got to be around here somewhere. There's no other choice."

"Did this . . . did this shit happen on Vader's watch?" I'm having a really hard time holding myself together right now. I only went to go get Laramey because Falcon asked me to, and if I thought for even a split second that Vader wouldn't have been able to keep Scarlett safe, I never would've left.

"Vader was asleep. He woke up and found this. She left it for you." Falcon digs into his pocket and hands me a letter with my name written on it.

I rip open the envelope and find a note on the inside.

*Horseman,*

*Jarod has Jessie. I know it's dangerous, but I have to go after him. I hope you'll understand. I'll reach out when I can.*

*XO, Scarlett*

“Jarod Randall took Jessie,” I grit out and hand the note to Falcon, who quickly reads over it.

“Fuck.” There’s undeniable rage behind his eyes. I don’t know if I’ve ever heard Falcon this angry, and after serving with him, that’s saying something. There are a few things our club doesn’t stand for, but one of them is any sort of violence against women.

We all know what Jarod Randall is like.

He has no morals.

He has no code.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

*SCARLETT*

I know I shouldn't be doing this. In the back of my mind, I know it's dumb to be going here by myself . . . but I don't feel like it's the club's responsibility to save me from this. I got myself into this mess and I feel like it's my responsibility to get myself out of it.

I looked at Jessie's location pin again and found that there's an old access road that leads back down into the woods. I'm driving on it now and the forest is thick on either side of me. I'm going slow and every ten or twenty feet I have to move my steering wheel so I don't hit a pothole. It obviously hasn't been well maintained, but who knows if it's even in use anymore. All it does is goes back to old powerlines and a cabin owned by the Oregon's department of Fish & Wildlife. Basically, the game wardens use it whenever they deem fit.

The further I drive down this road, the more my stomach flops around. My anxiety is storming through me right now.

Has Jarod hurt Jessie?

Is she okay?

What's it going to be like when I get there?

So many questions are running through my mind. I know I need to get there as soon as possible, and I didn't even bring a gun with me. I have a knife that's tucked away in the pocket of my jeans. It flips open and is a bit bigger than a typical switchblade. As far as protection, that's the only thing I have.

I continue driving down until I see the cabin and there's a cleared field behind it. There's another vehicle there but I recognize it as one of the

vehicles Jarod had broken down in my driveway. Ironic how he can't make good on his rent, but can afford to get his truck fixed out of nowhere.

I swallow hard as I pull up on the other side of the cabin. I don't want to be right next to his car, or too close to him for that matter. I suck in a deep breath and ready myself for the chaos that I'm sure is about to happen. I'm praying that Jarod will let Jessie go as long as I agree to get the case thrown out. That would be the best case scenario and I need to have some hope here.

I get out of my vehicle, slide my phone into my back pocket, and shut the door. Scanning the surrounding area I look for wherever they might be and soon enough the old game warden cabin's front door is being opened. "I thought you'd never show up," Jarod cackles in a sinister manner.

"I told you I'd be here." I state, keeping my tone plain and simple.

"Yeah, you did." Jarod looks around me, surveying the forest and my car. I don't know what he's looking for, but I came alone. I made sure I came alone so it wouldn't put Jessie in even more risk.

I walk up to the small deck on the cabin and don't take another step. "Where is she?"

"In here! I'm in here!" Jessie screams at the top of her lungs. "Run, Scar! It's a trap. He's going to hurt you too!"

My eyes immediately drift to Jarod and there's no doubt about it. He has every intention on harming me. I run as fast as I can in the cabin and somehow manage to slam the door shut and lock the deadbolt before Jarod can try to come in.

I run over to Jessie who's tied to an old heater with rope. "Oh my God, why in the fuck can't you listen? I told you to run, not be some hero!"

She can be as mad at me as she wants, but my number one priority is making sure we both get out of here. There was no way I'd come out here and leave without her. What kind of friend would I be if I just left her like that?

"I wasn't going to leave your ass with this criminal." I bark out at her as I take my knife out of my pocket. I open it and drag the blade against the rope until it finally gives. It's a bit dark in here and not to mention eerie as fuck. I plan on getting the hell out of here, so I grab onto Jessie's hand and run toward the other door.

"What do you think you're doing, Scarlett?" Jarod hollers through the main doorway. He looks in through the window and sees we're running toward the other door, but at the last possible moment I rush toward the door



I came in from, unlock it, and run as fast as I can toward my car.

I think everything is good and dandy until I open the door and get in it. The keys aren't in the ignition where I left them at all.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" I can't contain my fear, and just as I'm realizing how fucked we are in this moment Jarod is coming around the other side of the cabin, dangling my keys in his hand.

"Oh, no." Jessie mutters.

"Yeah, get out. Get out and run," I tell her, handing her my phone in the process.

"What about you?"

As much as I want to act like we can get out of this on our own . . . I don't believe we can. Jarod is prepared to do whatever he can to hurt me and I need the club's help whether I want it or not.

"I'll buy us some time," I took track in high school and think I can use some of my skillset to outrun him. Sure, he might be bigger and burly . . . but there's no way he'd be able to run for ten minutes straight without needing a break.

"No, I don't like it."

For the first time I look right at Jessie's face and realize she has massive swelling on her left eye and a cut on her right cheek. "He hit you?"

"Yeah, but I'm fine. It's not a big deal. We need to get out of here together."

"I don't have time to argue with you. Get out, Jessie! Run! Call Horseman, Hawk, someone. We need help." I plead with my eyes and she finally nods, running out the door and Jarod is about to hit my car. I lock my doors and Jessie's already out of the car.

I dart out behind her and manage to escape the vehicle before Jarod can come around the other end.

Jessie runs down the access road with my phone in her hand and I rush off into the woods, not too far away but not overly close. I think if I drag him through the woods he might trip or something could take him by surprise. I have better odds in here and I know it.

God, please let them get here soon.

I need help.

We need help.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *HORSEMAN*

I'm waiting on the brothers to come into church. It's an emergency meeting and we all need to talk about the elephant in the room—Scarlett being missing.

Everyone made sure to get in here as soon as possible, minus the prospects, which only leaves a couple of men excluded. I'm sure Falcon will tell them they need to stay back at the club whenever we start fanning out and trying to locate Scarlett.

Falcon slams the gavel down on the table. "All right. I'm giving the floor over to Horseman so he can speak and let you all know whatever the hell is going on. I'm not even privy to that information."

Each of my brothers immediately shift their attention to me. They know that something isn't right. It's not just odd because Vader isn't here. He's back at the house with Balsinde and her daughters because regardless of what's still going on, she and her children need to have eyes on them as well.

"You all know Scarlett is missing, but what you don't know is why she left. She left me a note explaining that, so I want you to have all of the information too so we can find her as soon as possible."

"You had a reason the whole time and no one said shit to us?" Moneybags shakes his head.

"No, I just got the fucking note. Nice of you to assume I'd keep somethin' from your dumb asses though," I explain and wait a couple of moments for anyone else in case they feel like speaking up. No one does, so I continue. "Jarod took Jessie and Scarlett went after her. I haven't heard from Scarlett and neither has anyone as far as we know. Have any of you heard

from her?”

I scan around the room, but my eyes lock on the one man who's closer to Scarlett than anyone else—her brother.

“You knew Jessie was taken?” Hawk barks out. He's naturally upset and I understand. I'm upset too, but I'm doing my best so that I can keep my emotions at bay and focus on the most important thing here right now: finding both of the ladies.

I've noticed numerous times that Hawk gets very antsy whenever Jessie is involved in anything. I'm the same way with Scarlett, so I understand why he's acting this way. He cares for the woman and it's undeniable.

“Have any of you heard anything?” I glance around the room and make sure I meet my eyes with every single one of my brothers. They all shake their heads and as they do my worries only grow worse.

“Did she give you any sort of idea where she was heading?” Hawk asks, looking for any sort of answer.

I shake my head, and my phone starts buzzing on the side table near the outlet where it's charging. I rush over and see Scarlett's name flashing on the screen. “Scarlett, where are you?” I shoot my question out the second I answer the phone.

“H-horseman-n,” Jessie's out of breath, trying to talk. I can hear the desperation in her voice.

“Jessie? What's going on? Why are you calling me from Scarlett's phone?”

All I hear on the other end of the line is heavy breathing like she's still trying to catch her breath. “Jarod t-took me. He took me to get back at Scar and then she came to get me.”

“Okay,” Fuck. This is bad! “Do you know where you are?”

“No, I . . . fuck I'll send you our location.” Within a minute I have a text message from Scarlett's phone showing me where she is.

“Okay, I have it. Are you moving? What's going on?”

“We're running from Jarod. Scarlett got me out of the cabin, got me untied, then we tried to get back in her car but he took the keys out of her car I guess.” Why in the fuck would Scarlett keep her keys in her car? Why in the fuck would she run off and do this alone? She could have asked her brother for help. She could have told Vader and then he would have taken it to

Falcon so we could get Jessie out of that situation.

“Falcon, Jessie’s on the phone with me. I have their location,” I tell Falcon and he immediately comes over to me and glances down at my phone.

“C’mon, all of you head for the access road by the Waterhole, as soon as fuckin’ possible!” Falcon roars out, heading for the door himself.

“Okay, we’re on the way. What’s going on now?”

“Scar is running through the woods trying to lose Jarod. I’m on the access road running and keeping an eye on them. She’s about ten feet in front of him right now,” Jessie breathes heavily.

I rush out of the room we’re holding church in and dart to the garage, getting on my bike in record time. My brothers are flying out of the garage as quickly as possible, all of us racing the access road by the Waterhole. Scarlett has to be close by, and I’m damn sure I’m going to find her.

I spot Jessie a short time after I pull onto the access road and she’s waving us down. I come to a stop and put my kickstand off, jumping off the bike I toss my helmet on the ground and look in the direction Jessie is now pointing.

Jarod is right behind Scarlett and he’s catching up to her. I pull my gun out from under my shirt and fire at him. I want him to know there’s no getting out of this. He’s going to be mine tonight and I’m not going to let this crazy son of a bitch return back home to his family.

Jarod tackles Scarlett to the ground and I’m running as fast as I can through the woods, jumping over broken down logs, avoiding sticker bushes, and pushing branches out of my way. By the time I get over to them Jarod has Scarlett down on the ground and is hitting her back and forth with both of his fists.

I could easily shoot him, but I don’t want to. I want him to feel everything I’m going to put him through. I grab him by the back of the neck and yank him off Scarlett just as my club brothers come to my aide.

“Hey, fuckface, pick on someone your own size,” I snarl as I push him down on the ground, right into a sticker bush. He grumbles at me in frustration and comes charging at me like a raging bull.

I push with all of my might as I collide into his chest, and the two of us tumble back at least ten feet. We hit the ground, but I rise to my feet as fast as I went down. Jarod, on the other hand, smirks and wipes a bit of blood from his lip, then slowly rises.

I glance back for a second and see Hawk is by Scarlett, trying to get her

to come to. Good, now that I know someone is paying attention to her, I can focus on the bastard in front of me.

“You’re going to regret ever coming after me.” Jarod promises, but he doesn’t understand how little of a fuck I give.

“I don’t think so. I think I might actually enjoy it.” I’m making sure my tone breathes the fact that I’m a badass, and it does. I want him to know he’s a fucking piece of shit. I want him to know I’m not scared of him and I never will be.

“You think you’re some big, bad, tough guy, huh?” Jarod laughs, mocking me.

I lick my bottom lip and crane my neck to the left and then to the right. I wait until they both pop, and then it’s go time.

“I don’t think shit. I know.” I’m not going to make this easy on him. Not in the least.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

*SCARLETT*

I'm trying my hardest to stay awake, but no matter what I do the blankness fills my vision. It feels like my head is going to the right and the left, but I don't feel the impact of the hits anymore. There's only throbbing, only pain. I blink over and over again and in between the blinking the first face I see is my brother's.

He's talking, but I can't hear him. I watch his mouth moving back and forth but there's no sound. It kind of reminds me of the movies where there's been a bomb that goes off close by. There's only a ringing sound and the throbbing on both sides of my face. A coppery taste floats over my tongue and I know I have to be bleeding somewhere . . . but where?

I keep blinking over and over again, trying to keep myself calm. My heartbeat can be felt in my head and my limbs feel like Jell-o. "Scar! Scar!"

Eventually I can hear my brother's words. He's taking his cut off and removes his shirt, pressing it against the side of my face, but I'm not sure why he's doing that.

"J-Jessie," I stammer out.

"She's okay. You're both okay. We got him, all right? We got Jarod."

I try to nod, but nodding isn't as easy nor painless as I thought it would be. Horseman comes into my view and grabs onto my hand. "Hey, I'm here."

All I can do is offer him a soft smile and he takes over for my brother.

"We need to get her back at the club so Laramey can look at her,"

"Why?" I rasp. Why on Earth would they want Laramey to look at me?

"He's a medic," Horseman explains.

I shake my head and groan as I do so, instantly regretting it. "No, I want you to take me to the hospital."

"You'll be okay, Scar. I promise." Hawk jumps in.

"That's not w-why I want to do it. I want a medical r-report. I want a p-police report. I want them to know who did this to me so he never gets away with it ever a-again," I'm trying my best to not allow my emotions to take over me, but it's hard.

Hawk and Horseman share a glance, but neither of them say a word at first.

"What?" I finally snap at the two of them.

"He's not going to hurt anyone ever again because I'm not letting him. I promise you, Scarlett. Jarod Randall will never see the light of day ever again." There's a darkness in Horseman's voice that I've never heard before.

"No, I want him to pay for this. I want him to suffer." I've never been the kind of woman who's ever said anything like this. I feel as angry as Sansa did at Ramsay Bolton in *Game of Thrones*.

"He's going to suffer . . . just in a different way." Horseman promises me . . . and I'm putting it together now. The club is going to deal with Jarod, and honestly maybe they should have from the first place. All of this could have been avoided if I simply asked for help, and now look what's happened. Not only am I hurt, but Jessie is too.

"I'm s-so sorry," I stammer out as tears flood down my cheeks.

"No, don't you be doing any of that. You have nothing to apologize for, Scarlett. Everything is fine. I'm handling it." Horseman stares at me with those charismatic eyes of his and I feel like he means every word he's saying.

"I should have asked for help." I state, now looking at my brother.

"It's okay. You're getting the help you needed now." Hawk says, his face full of concern.

"We're going to get you back at the club and Laramey is going to take a look at you. Okay?" Laramey is the man Horseman was supposed to be going to see in California if I'm remembering correctly.

“Okay,” I agree and look back at my brother. “Go check on Jessie. I know you want to.” For some people it would be their worst fear for their brother and their best friend to start dating, but not me. My brother has never been able to find a good woman, or one who could really appreciate him for who he is. While Jessie has never been able to find a man who truly appreciated her and all she does for whoever is the special man in her life. I really think that Jessie and Hawk could work out. Plus, I’m sort of dating one of my brother’s friends.

“Fine. You scared the shit out of me, Scar. I’m so glad you’re okay.” Hawk leans down and presses a kiss to my forehead, then walks off to wherever Jessie might be.

“Jeb, I want to sit up.” I murmur and he offers me an arm. He helps me get up to where I’m sitting on my ass and there’s this expression on his face that I’ve never seen before. “What? What is it? Is the blood and swelling really bad?” There’s still the taste of copper on my tongue and I know I’m bleeding somewhere in my mouth, but I’m sure I’m probably bleeding somewhere on my face too. Every punch Jarod landed on me felt like it was coming at lightning speed. There was so much anger and outrage behind each one, but the person who has the right to feel angered and outraged is me. Not him.

Horseman shakes his head. “It’s not too bad.”

“Okay, so why are you staring at me like that?”

“Because I realized I can’t lose you, Scarlett. When I found out you were missing it scared the ever loving fuck out of me. You have become the center of my world over these last few weeks and I can’t imagine my life without you in it. I know we talked about us dating, but dammit woman, I want you to be my ol’ lady. I want you to be mine forever.”

“You’re serious?” I’ve never had a connection with anyone the way I do with Horseman, or Jeb as I find myself calling him so often. There’s this undeniable trust between the two of us and I know he would never, ever hurt me. In fact, he’d do anything to protect me and I mean anything.

“As a heart attack,” he smirks and I smile in response, but the second I smile, I’m regretting it. Pain shoots down my face and I stop myself.

“Shit, we’d better get you back to the club. Laramey needs to give you a once over and tell me nothing’s seriously wrong. If it is, I’ll take you to the hospital like you wanted. I do want to get you some Ibuprofen and make you more comfortable too.”



“Okay . . . thank you so much, Jeb.”

“There’s nothing to thank me for, Scarlett. Not a damn thing.”

## EPILOGUE

*ONE WEEK LATER . . .*

*Horseman*

Things have been smooth as hell since the incident last week with Jarod and the ladies. Both Jessie and Scarlett are doing well. Jessie got the easy end of the stick while Scarlett got the brunt of it. Even now she still has bruising on her face, while Jessie's bruises have cleared up.

I'm in Scarlett's apartment, which has been slowly becoming our apartment. She even told me to get some of my clothes and bring them over here so I'm not running back and forth between the club and the house too much. It feels like things are going fast, but when I think about it our entire relationship has gone very fast.

I'm doing as she said and have a duffel bag thrown over my shoulder. I place it on her bed and unzip it, taking out the clothes I folded up when I was back at my room in the clubhouse. She comes running in through the front doorway. How do I know? Well, Scarlett is notorious for slamming the door a little too hard when she comes inside.

"Jeb! I have wonderful news." Scarlett comes darting into the bedroom with a huge smile spread across her face.

"Let me guess . . . you got the job you wanted at the charity?" Scarlett's been talking about it non-stop and while she's been doing other interviews, I know this is the job she was really hoping she'd land.

"Yes! They want me to start next week and even went ten-thousand over what I wanted my base salary to be. Can you believe it? It's like a dream come true."

"That's what happens when you work hard, things end up working out for

you.” I smile, so proud of my girl.

Scarlett wraps her arms around me and hugs me tight. “I’m so happy. I can’t even begin to tell you how happy I am.”

“You don’t have to. I see it all over your face.” I can read her like a book. Since we’ve gotten more serious it’s become easier for me to tell what’s on Scarlett’s mind. I don’t think either of us have any walls up anymore. We’re really taking this next step in our relationship very seriously.

Scarlett throws her head back and laughs, “Well, I don’t even feel bad. I’m so fucking excited. Jessie and I are going out for drinks tonight and I can’t wait. I’m sure she’ll give me the tea on what’s going on between her and my brother too.”

Hawk’s been away from the club a little bit more than usual . . . but I’m not sure if that has anything to do with Jessie or not.

“Okay, have fun. I’m—” I’m in the middle of speaking to her when my phone rings. It’s Laramey, so I answer. “Hey man, you good?”

“Yeah, I’m doing great. I thought we’d pay a visit to Jarod’s wife.”

“Ah, okay. Yeah, I can help you with that.” I state, not wanting to make it seem like I’m going to do anything like what Laramey just asked me.

“Sounds good. Meet me at the clubhouse in ten,”

“Bet,” I reply and hang up the phone. “That was Laramey. He needs me to run into town with him for a bit. You cool with that?”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t I be? I’m glad you brought him up here, babe. The first couple of days he seemed really shut down, but I’m noticing when I’ve seen him over the last couple of days he’s started to perk up a bit. So, whatever you’re doing, keep doing it.”

“All I’m doing is being a good friend. Falcon’s talking about potentially making him a prospect.”

“That would make a lot of sense, considering he’s living at the clubhouse with the rest of the guys.”

“Yeah. I think it would be good for him too. I really think Laramey needs to feel like he’s part of something. You know?”

Scarlett nods. “Yeah, I do. You go ahead and help Laramey. I’m going to hop in the shower and get myself all dolled up for a girl’s night out. Hermoine and Charlee might end up coming with us too.”

“Awesome. Have a great time,” I press a chaste kiss to Scarlett’s lips and make my way out of the apartment, get in the Polaris Razor and ride up to the clubhouse where Laramey’s waiting on me outside, but Hermoine is right by

him too. I wonder what those two are discussing.

I get out of the side-by-side and walk right up to the two of them. “Hey. Are you ready to go run those errands?” I’m speaking in code because I don’t want anyone to know what we’re doing.

“Yeah, we are ready.” Hermoine states, crossing her arms.

Oh, shit. “You know?”

“Who do you think came up with this brilliant idea? Come on, I need to have enough time to come back and get ready for my girl’s night with your woman.”

The three of us get in Laramey’s truck and I give him instructions on how to get to Scarlett’s childhood home. Once we’re there, Hermoine’s the first one to jump out of the truck.

“Fuck, she’s got a crazy bone in her. I like it!” Laramey’s cackling from behind the wheel.

I get out and follow Hermoine, right up by her side by the time she reaches the front door. She pulls something out of her pocket and I quickly realize it’s a key. She doesn’t even knock. She just walks right on in.

“Listen up, everybody!” she hollers, slamming the door behind her.

Shuffling comes from behind the stairwell where the kitchen is and Mrs. Randall comes storming up. “Get out of my house! You have no right to be here.”

Hermoine licks her bottom lip and then smiles. “See, that’s where you’re wrong. You have no right to be here, so get your kids and get the fuck out right now or I’m going to make them wonder where their other parent is.”

God damn. I have never seen Hermoine so fed up or threatening before. I guess Jessie and Scarlett getting attacked really pissed her off. “You can’t say things like that to me.” Mrs. Randall is living in a delusional world where she believes she must have some sort of prior authorization before other people speak.

“That’s so funny because I just did!” The sarcastic bitch comes out in Hermoine, and she grabs a vase sitting on a table in the hallway and walks toward the door. She throws it open and tosses the vase across the porch. It shatters into many small pieces and Mrs. Randall goes running out, almost like she wants to see all of the damage.

“If you don’t leave, that’s going to be what your face looks like. Now, I am so sorry that your deadbeat of a husband went missing, but you really need to leave now. You’ve overstayed your welcome and the last thing you

want to do is piss me off, or my husband. You know, the president of the Deathstalkers MC.” Wait . . . when in the fuck did they get married?

“I have a right to be here.”

“Actually, you don’t. The locks are getting changed in three hours. You need to be gone by the time they come back, and if you aren’t I’ll make this ugly.”

Hermoine and I leave the home and walk back to Laramey’s truck. Once we get in I have to ask her. “Why’d you tell her that you and Falcon are married?”

“Because we are,” she says it so nonchalantly while she types away on her cell.

“What? I’ve never heard that until now!”

“Probably because we eloped. We’re going to throw a really big wedding next year, but we didn’t want anything so massive right now.”

“Understandable. Congratulations,” I offer her.

“Yeah, congrats!”

“Thank you both. All I can say is that Mrs. Randall better leave. Scarlett has been nothing but nice to them and they’ve steamrolled over her too many times.”

“I agree,” Speaking of Mrs. Randall, I think I’ll pay a visit to her husband tonight. Jarod is in the Pit and he’ll stay there until I’ve had my way with him. For now, I enjoy torturing him every day and night. After everything he put my ol’ lady through, this doesn’t even compare.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth is a romantic suspense author most popular for her motorcycle club and mafia books. While Elizabeth loves to write she is an avid reader as well who reads a mixture of genres. She lives in the North-Eastern United States on a farm with her rescue animals. When she isn't working you can find her spending time with her family, camping, or binge watching the latest trending show on Netflix.

Make sure you join Elizabeth's [newsletter](#) so you can get special news, announcements, and sneak peeks into incoming books.

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