

*Keeping* THE  
THRONE

ROYAL BASTARDS MC



USA TODAY AND WALLSTREET JOURNAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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# Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[ROYAL BASTARDS CODE](#)

[Royal Bastards MC Series](#)

[PROLOGUE](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FIFTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SIXTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SEVENTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER NINETEEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE](#)

**CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO**

**CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

**CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

**CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE**

**CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX**

**CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN**

**CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT**

**CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE**

**CHAPTER THIRTY**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT**

**CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE**

**CHAPTER FORTY**

**EPILOGUE**

# KEEPING THE THRONE

*Royal Bastards MC: Durango, Colorado*

By

Nicole James

CLIMBING THE RANKS

Royal Bastards MC

By

Nicole James

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# **ROYAL BASTARDS CODE**

**PROTECT:** The club and your brothers come before anything else, and must be protected at all costs. **CLUB** is **FAMILY**.

**RESPECT:** Earn it & Give it. Respect club law. Respect the patch. Respect your brothers. Disrespect a member and there will be hell to pay.

**HONOR:** Being patched in is an honor, not a right. Your colors are sacred, not to be left alone, and **NEVER** let them touch the ground.

**OL' LADIES:** Never disrespect a member's or brother's Ol'Lady. **PERIOD.**

**CHURCH** is **MANDATORY.**

**LOYALTY:** Takes precedence over all, including well-being.

**HONESTY:** Never **LIE, CHEAT, or STEAL** from another member or the club.

**TERRITORY:** You are to respect your brother's property and follow their Chapter's club rules.

**TRUST:** Years to earn it...seconds to lose it.

**NEVER RIDE OFF:** Brothers do not abandon their family.

# **Royal Bastards MC Series**

## **Fourth Run**

**B.B Blaque:** Royally Malevolent

**Morgan Jane Mitchell:** Royal Road

**Crimson Syn:** Wrecked from Malice

**Glenna Maynard:** Claiming the Biker

**Liberty Parker:** Property of Wrecker

**Amy Davies :** Fighting for Una

**Addison Jane:** His Rival

**Erin Trejo:** Trek

**Misty Walker:** Petra's Biker

**Chelle C . Craze & Eli Abbott:** Wiley AF

**KL Ramsey:** Dizzy's Desire

**Nikki Landis:** Twisted Devil

**M. Merin:** Wolfman

**Kristine Allen:** Sabre

**J.Lynn Lombard:** Derange's Destruction

**Deja Voss:** Forbidden Bruises

**Darlene Tallman:** Brick's House

**Nicole James:** Keeping the Throne

**Shannon Youngblood:** Kingdom and Kourt

**India R. Adams:** Parting for Thunder

**Jessica Ames:** Into the Dark



**J.L. Leslie:** Worth the Pain

**Nicole James:** Climbing the Ranks

**Elle Boon:** Royally Judged

**J.L. Leslie:** Worth the Trouble

**Kristine Dugger:** Familiar Taste of Poison

**Kathleen Kelly:** Creed

**K.E. Osborn:** Alluring Abyss

**Murphy Wallace:** Injustice and Absolution

**Ker Dukey:** Havoc

**Dani Rene:** A Beautiful Monster

Royal Bastards MC Facebook Group -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/royalbastardsmc/> Website-

<https://www.royalbastardsmc.com/>



## PROLOGUE

*Evelyn—*

*One year ago—*

I stand at the stove, tossing the potatoes I'd just sliced into the skillet, when movement catches my attention through the dirty glass of the louvered window over the tiny sink.

This trailer I share with Malik sits across the big gravel lot of the Iron Death MC's clubhouse. Not much has changed in the years since I was a child. It's still the same giant steel shed painted dark brown, except for the club's emblem over the door. My father is still president, and every member is like family to me.

A strong wind picks up, shaking the trailer and ruffling the hair of the three brothers now stalking across the gravel lot. They're headed this way, but Malik's not among them. If they're looking for him, he's not here. He left twenty minutes ago for Church in the clubhouse.

I straighten as they yank the door open without so much as a knock, and the three leather-clad brothers shoulder inside. They fill the small space, taking up all the air, and I move a step back, claustrophobia engulfing me. My brows push together. "What's going on?"

"Club business, darlin'." Caveman, my father's VP pins me with a no nonsense gaze, his eyes piercing from under his brow.

"Does Duck know you're here?"

"Yeah. Your father sent us."

It's all he says. I know better than to ask more questions, and can do nothing but watch as the other two men move into the bedroom. I freeze, my heart suddenly racing.

The sound of the men rummaging through items carries loudly through the small space. I'm sure it's less than thirty seconds, but the moment seems to last forever until Ox emerges with a small black duffel. He's a big man with a dark beard that I've always thought makes him look like a pirate. When his brown eyes flick to me, it's hard to remember he's the same man who took me to my high school prom when every boy in the school was too afraid of my father to ask. His expression is all business now as our eyes hold for only a second before he exits the trailer with the bag. Fish follows him out, his bald head and big build still that of the pro-wrestler he used to be.

Caveman and I lock gazes, but he doesn't say a word. At 5'10", I'm almost eye level with him. I swallow, not sure what to do. He lifts a hand and squeezes my shoulder before following the other men.

I peer out the window, watching their retreating forms, the Iron Death patches on their backs dusty from the Utah desert that surrounds the five acres the MC owns.

I won't know anything until Malik shows up. I busy myself with frying the potatoes, my heart pounding. A million thoughts race through my head, but in the end, there's nothing I can do but wait. I blow out a breath, ruffling the wisp of a bang that's fallen from the messy bun on top of my head. Waiting is not something I do well. It never has been, especially when my nerves are drawn taut as a bow.

I stir the potatoes with jerking motions, the wooden spoon scraping across the iron skillet, mixing them in the sizzling butter. But my thoughts aren't on dinner any longer. All I can

think about is what's happening inside the clubhouse right this minute.

This isn't good. None of this is good.

\*\*\*

*Duck—*

Two of my Iron Death brothers stand over Malik's chair at the opposite end of the table from me. He stares me down. Arrogant bastard. He suspects what's about to happen, that much is clear on his face, and he's nervous. His bouncing knee gives him away, no matter how much he tries to play the tough guy.

If what I've been told proves true, he has cause to be worried. He'll have hell to pay.

The door opens, drawing my attention from Malik's smug face. My VP, Caveman enters, Ox on his heels with a bag he tosses on the table with a bang then proceeds to jerk open, his pissed expression lifting to mine.

My gaze drops to what he's revealed. Even from three feet away, I can see the green stacks of cash.

Murmured curses rise around the room.

Fucking Malik. Judging by his expression, he knew the moment he saw the bag, his goose was cooked.

"Where was it?" My question is for Ox, but my gaze stays locked on Malik.

"Under his goddamn bed."

I push to my feet and walk around the table, shuffling the stacks around and doing a quick calculation in my head. I

thumb through one. It's twenties. At ten grand a stack, he's got about two hundred thousand stashed. And it's all club money. He knows it, and everyone in the room knows it.

I stare at Malik and whistle. "That's quite a little nest egg you've got stashed away." He doesn't deny it. He knows better. Instead, he surges to his feet, anger overtaking fear.

"I did everything for you. Everything! And you passed me over again and again."

The men on either side of him grab his arms, pinning him.

Before the thieving asshole can utter another word, I yank the gun from my shoulder holster and press the muzzle to his fucking forehead. "I should end you right now, motherfucker. If it wasn't for my daughter, we'd be digging your grave."

He glares at me, his face screwed up in rage as he tries to twist free.

I jerk my chin to the men holding him. "Take his fucking cut." I look over to Caveman. "Have a man confiscate his bike. Now."

He nods and leans out the door, emitting a sharp whistle. Boots thunder down the hall, and he murmurs to one of the prospects to do as I ordered.

I turn my attention back to Malik and signal Ox with a lift of my chin. He moves in and administers a savage beating. The motherfucker may be with my daughter, but that fact won't save him from my wrath.

When his eyes swell and blood gushes from his mouth, I stop it with a lift of my hand.

"You're out bad, Malik. I see you again, you're dead. Get the fuck out of my state."

The men shuffle him toward the door, but I hear him spit blood and mumble, "Your state? We'll see how long that

lasts.”

They take him out, and I finally holster my gun. I press my hands to the table, giving myself a moment. I trusted him like a son. I treated him like a son. And he dares to steal from me?

The room erupts, brothers jumping to their feet, cursing and shouting that he deserves much more. I can't argue with them, because he does. Stealing from the club is about as bad as it gets.

“You're really gonna let him go?” Caveman leans in and murmurs low.

I nod. I did it for Evelyn. Her happiness is everything to me. I feel a sharp pain knife through my chest, reminding me the doc said my condition is serious. My ticker is failing, and I only hope I have enough time left to show Evelyn how much I love her. I've ignored her too much all these years, taking her and her mother for granted. It's too late to mend things with Ruthie. She's been gone four years now.

Ruthie. God, I miss her. She'd never have allowed Evelyn to get involved with Malik. She read him like a book from the start. I should have listened to her.

“You sure about this?” Caveman presses again. “That's a lot of fucking money. He had to be skimming for a long damn time.”

I lift my eyes from the table to meet his. “Probably all the way back to when you took the VP spot. Guess he figured it was his.”

“Was it supposed to be?”

“You know better than that. I gave him more than I should have. Trusted him too much. That was my mistake. He was never gonna be worthy of that patch you wear.”

“Guess he revealed his true character. Scumbag.”

“Ruthie always had a feeling about him. She wouldn’t have let Evelyn get involved with Malik.” I slam my palm on the table. “I should have stopped it.”

“He knows a fuck-of-a-lot about our business, Duck. He could be trouble if he wants to use it.”

I collapse into my chair, my teeth clenching against the pain in my chest. I dig in my pocket and pull out a bottle of pills, shake one out, and toss it back, using the bottle of whisky at my left to chase it down.

“You okay, Duck?”

My squinty gaze meets Caveman’s and I nod, then my eyes widen. “Where is she?”

“Evelyn? We left her in the trailer.”

“You what?” I surge forward in my chair.

“We couldn’t tell her club business, prez.”

Leaning back, I dig my phone out of my hip pocket and punch in her number. She doesn’t answer, and a slither of fear runs down my spine. I pin Caveman with my eyes. “Go get her. Hurry.”

\*\*\*

*Evelyn—*

Finally, I can stand it no more, and shut off the burner, tossing the wooden spoon with a clatter against the cast iron, then pace in the small space, biting my nails. It’s something I’ve done since I was a child—a true tell of my anxiety.

The door flings open, startling me, and Malik storms in. His face has me gasping and covering my mouth. One eye is



swollen completely shut and the other a mere slit. His skin is bruising a nasty purple. Blood runs down his chin from his split and swollen lip.

When he grimaces, his mouth is red with blood. He spits a mouthful on the carpet and stares at me. Before I can even utter a word, he grabs me by the hair and jerks my head back. “Did you have anything to do with this?”

“With what? What happened? Who did this to you?”

He shoves me away, and I bang against the refrigerator. “I’m out bad. They found the money. How’d they know, Ev? How?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. What money?”

“I swear I’ll kill you if I find out you had something to do with it.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. *What money?*”

“Never mind. Get in the truck.”

“What? Why?”

“We’re leaving. Now.”

My phone starts to ring, drawing my attention to where it sits on the small dinette table. Malik’s eyes follow.

“Leave it.” He grabs my upper arm and drags me toward the door. “Get in the fucking truck.”

I can’t escape his grasp as he hauls me out and shoves me in the driver’s seat. I scramble across and make a grab for the passenger door handle, intending to scramble right back out again, but he grabs my hair and yanks me back, hissing in my ear.

“You go quietly, like a good ol’ lady, Evelyn. Understand? Or so help me, God, I’ll get my shotgun and kill your father.”

I am immediately still. The look in his eyes makes me take him at his word. He'd do it. I don't have a doubt about that. How did I not see this side of him?

His fist tightens in my hair and gives me a shake. "*Understand?*"

"Yes," I whisper. "I won't give you any trouble. Please don't hurt my father."

He releases me and starts the truck, then stomps on the gas, throwing gravel as we roar off the property. I look toward the clubhouse, but there are only two prospects standing outside the door.

The truck bounces along the rutted drive until Malik hits the blacktop and peels out. My stunned gaze returns to the road we're racing down. I'm trying to comprehend everything that just happened, but my mind functions in slow motion.

Malik drives just far enough to be out of sight of the clubhouse before he turns onto a side road, then again down a drive. There's a big rusty shed, and he parks behind it, out of sight of the highway. He cuts the engine, and the silence jars me from my dazed state. I stare over at the man I've spent the last two years with like he's a stranger.

One thing about Malik is he's smart. Too many, myself included, have underestimated him. I'm not sure if he's thinking on the fly or if he's had a plan all along, but the deviousness of this move can't be denied. It's open country out here, with not much cover if someone in the club were to pursue us. On the open road, they'd catch us for sure, but this? They'll never suspect he's gone to ground so close to the MC.

If anyone is after us, they'll never find us. Malik is always three moves ahead of everyone.

We sit quietly, no sound but the engine ticking and the wind blowing. I don't want to rile his anger, afraid any

comment I make could set him off. Malik is no longer the man he showed me at the beginning of our relationship. He's no longer the laughing, teasing, playful man I fell for—the one who promised me adventure and travel. *That* man disappeared a long time ago. I've just been too stubborn to admit how wrong I've been about him. Perhaps he was only interested in me to get in good with my father, but I don't think Daddy was ever fooled. Maybe that's why he set me up in that trailer right there on club ground; he wanted to keep me close. Malik may have changed over the past two years, but he'd never been rough with me before—not until today. Now I have to wonder just what he's truly capable of.

It's not long before the roar of a dozen Harleys carries to us, and I know without a doubt my father has the entire club out searching for me. I'm sure when he kicked Malik out of the club, he never meant for me to leave with him.

Malik smiles at me. "You're gonna be a good ol' lady, babe. If you ever try to leave me, I'll kill you and your father and his entire club. Understand me?"

I nod. I understand him. A tear slides down my cheek. I understand him all too well.



## CHAPTER ONE

*Evelyn—*

*Present day*

When I was four, my father made me memorize the clubhouse phone number.

*If you ever need help, Peanut, you call this number. Understand?*

I'd nodded, eager to please him. I still remember how he squatted in front of me, making me say the digits over and over, making a game of it. Then he ruffled my hair and grinned, his knees cracking as he stood.

Now twenty-five years later, my hand shakes as I punch the number I've never forgotten into the old pay phone. The truck stop sounds make it hard to hear, and I press the receiver tight to my ear, praying someone picks up.

\*\*\*

*Duck—*

Caveman puts his feet up on my desk. I look across at him and lift a brow. He grins and drops his feet.

“What’s on your mind, prez? You look worried.”

“Everything.” I stare at the calendar pinned on the wall. It’s got pictures of naked girls posing on Harleys, a different

one every month. September's is a hot redhead, but that's not what has my attention. "You know what Tuesday is?"

"Tacos?"

"You're hilarious."

He frowns, pulling his chin to the side and following my gaze. "No. What's Tuesday?"

"It'll be a year ago Tuesday when we kicked Malik out."

He nods slowly. "Still no word?"

I know he's referring to Evelyn. I shake my head, then blow out a breath and lean back in my chair, the leather creaking. "Where the fuck is she?"

"Maybe we could try one of them private detectives, like on those crime shows on TV."

I huff a laugh. "You know one?"

"Not exactly, but my cousin's wife had one investigate him when she divorced him. She hired one to follow him and get the goods on his cheating ass. They had videos and everything of him meeting some chick at a motel. Hung his ass in divorce court."

I nod, losing interest in that story about halfway in. I give the private detective idea a second thought, though. "There might be something in that."

My door swings open, and Ox rushes in. He's breathing hard, like he just ran a mile. I straighten. "What the fuck is it?"

He stares at me and nods, and a flicker of hope runs up my spine. "Evelyn?"

He nods again. "She's on the clubhouse phone. The one behind the bar."

I'm around my desk, shoving him aside and dashing down the hall before he says another word, terrified the line will be

dead by the time I reach it. I round the bar and grab the phone from the prospect, putting it to my ear. “Peanut, is it you?”

“Yes, Daddy.” There’s that voice I’ve missed so badly. She sounds shaky and scared.

“Where are you?” I bark, desperate to get to her.

“I’m at a truck stop off I-40 at the New Mexico/Arizona border. Please hurry.”

\*\*\*

*Evelyn—*

I get off the phone and press my forehead to the receiver. He’ll be here soon. He and the crew will speed the whole way. I know that. Even so, it’ll be hours before they get here. That gives Malik time to find me.

“You okay, honey?”

I twist to see a group of women, all about my age, dressed in jeans and biker boots and looking like they ride. A woman with long lavender gray hair and a bandana around her forehead looks like the leader. There’s a blonde with double braids and a chick with a short pink bob. My head swivels, searching for the men they must be with. I don’t see an MC, but this truck stop is huge.

A tall brunette walks up and taps the leader on the shoulder. “I’m going out to my bike and get my lip balm, Rayne. Get a table.”

“Sure thing, Jenna.”

The one with the pink bob yells after her as she heads to the doors. “Hey, babe. Make sure my saddlebags are locked,

will ya?”

“Will do, Sasha.”

“And check Carmen’s, too.”

Jenna lifts her arm, giving a thumbs-up.

“You have your own bikes?” I ask, searching the faces of the three that remain.

“Yes, ma’am,” replies the one who asked me if I was okay. “We’re headed west to Joshua Tree for an all women’s bike event. Do you ride?”

I shake my head. “I mean, I know how, but I don’t have a bike.”

“Then get one, girl. This event is a blast. You’re missing out.” The one with the pink bob grins.

My eyes shift to the pumps and parking lot.

“You okay?” the one with the long lavender hair asks again.

For some reason—and totally out of character for me—I tell her the truth. “I, um, ran away from my ol’ man.” I lift my hand and fiddle with my earring. It’s a mistake. My sleeve slips down, and her eyes fall to my wrist.

She lifts her chin. “He give you those bruises?”

I quickly drop my arm and yanking the sleeve. I blink rapidly, my throat closing, and can only nod.

“Aw, honey.” She puts her arm around me. “What’s your name?”

“Evelyn.”

“Our table’s ready, Rayne,” the one with the pink bob whispers.



“Come on,” Rayne whispers to me, her arm still around me. “Sit and eat with us. I’m buying.”

The next thing I know, we’re piled in a big booth, eating waffles, and I’m spilling my whole story to them.

“What a dirt bag,” Rayne murmurs, referring to Malik.

“What a *dick*.” Jenna one-ups her.

We finish our meal, and Sasha checks her watch.

“You’re all probably anxious to get back on the road. I suppose you have a long way to go,” I say.

“We can stay with you until your father and his crew get here. I’m not about to leave you alone. I’d worry all the way to California if we did.” Jenna folds her arms, like it’s all decided.

“No way we’re leaving you,” Rayne agrees. “Not with a chance that asshole could have followed you.”

So they wait with me, true sisterhood on display, the kind I wished for all my life. They order coffee and keep them coming.

Three hours later, a horde of motorcycles roars into the lot, turning all our heads. I can only see headlights and dark figures. I stand, but hang back because I’m not sure if it’s my father’s club or if it’s Malik’s new club, the Vipers.

One of the girls drills me with her eyes. “Is that them?”

They pull under the lights of the pumps, and I see the three-piece patch on their backs. Before they can drop kickstands, I dash toward the door and run full out across the parking lot. My father scrambles from his bike before I slam into him, his arms banding around me. I burst into tears of relief and hug his neck like I’ll never let go.

“There now, peanut. You’re safe. I’ll never let him near you again.”

When I finally release him, Ox is there to take me in his arms. He's been my guardian angel since I was little.

I hug him tight, and he whispers against my head.

“Where is he, Little Bit? I'm gonna kill him for this.”

It's been his nickname for me since I was a scrawny child, but at 5' 10" and nearly thirty-five, it's comical he still calls me that.

I pull back and shake my head. “No. He's out of our lives. Let it be done.”

He looks like he wants to say more but in the end, he holds his tongue.

The girls make their way out to me and hug me goodbye. Several of the Iron Death brothers give wolf whistles as I introduce the women to my father.

Duck shakes their hands and thanks them for staying with me until the club arrived. With his long braids and a headband, he looks a lot like Willie Nelson, and the women soon fall under his spell. My father can be quite charming when he wants to be. His smile betrays the badass hidden beneath—the one who doesn't hesitate to beat a man senseless if an insult calls for it.

I study his face now. He looks tired, with a tightness appearing around his mouth that wasn't there before. I suppose I have to acknowledge he's getting older, though in my eyes he'll always be my superhero.

Rayne slips me her number written on a piece of paper. “Text and let me know you make it home safe, girl. Okay?”

I look down at it. *Rayne O'Rourke*. I nod and hug them all. They mount up and ride off, waving goodbye.

After the men gas up, I climb on the back of Dad's bike, and we head to Utah. I hold him tight, my head resting on his

back. *I'm going home.*



## CHAPTER TWO

*Duck—*

I sit at the corner of the bar at the clubhouse, nursing a glass of whiskey. Caveman comes in the door, spots me, and makes his way over to take the barstool next to me. The prospect slides a bottle of beer in front of him, pieces of ice from the cooler still clinging to the wet sides.

“Thanks.” Caveman downs a long slug. “It’s hot as hell out there.”

I’ve got more on my mind than the weather as I swirl the amber liquor around in my glass. Evelyn’s been back now for almost four months. I’ve moved her into one of the rooms at the clubhouse, which isn’t ideal, but I’ve been concerned for her safety. I don’t trust Malik not to dish out some payback, and worrying about all the forms that could take has kept me up a lot of nights.

“Got some news.” My VP breaks into my contemplations. I drag my gaze from the bar top and look at him. He’s just returned from a funeral for a cousin in New Mexico.

“Yeah? Good or bad?”

He lifts a brow. “Not good, that’s for sure. I stopped for gas at a truck stop in Albuquerque. Never guess who I saw.”

“Not in the mood for games, Caveman.” I take a sip of my drink.

“Malik.”

I drop my glass to the bar top with a bang. “What?”

“He was wearing a Vipers patch on his back.”

“Vipers? Jesus Christ.”

“I followed him inside and watched him from an aisle over.”

“He see you?”

“Nope. But get this... he was wearing a VP patch.”

“My God. How the hell did that happen? He’s only been out less than a year and a half.”

“Only one way I can think of.”

I stare at my VP, the answer dawning. “He must have traded info.”

“Only thing he has to trade. Our operation.”

I nod. “I’ve heard rumors the Vipers want Utah. This gives them an added reason to force us into a patch-over. That or disband us and take over the operation, anyway.”

“Fuck that. I don’t want to be a damn Viper. Especially with Malik wearing that patch.”

“He wants revenge. This is it. Goddamn it it, I should have seen this coming. He’s out to destroy our chapter.” I feel the pain in my chest again and shake out a pill. I’ve lasted longer than the doc ever expected, making all the changes to my diet and even having a stint put in. Still, I know that’s not a long-term fix.

“You okay?”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Have you told Evelyn about your condition yet?”

“Nope. And you better not either. I don’t want her to worry.”

“Don’t you think she has a right to know?”

“Nothing she can do but worry. I don’t want that for her. But I’m worried about what happens to her when Malik comes back as an officer of the club that patches us over.”

“We’ll disband before we vote to become Vipers. You know that.”

“The Vipers take over this town, how do I keep her safe?”

“Doesn’t she have an aunt in Jersey?”

“I’m not sending her to Jersey. Jesus Christ. She’d hate it.”

“Then what?”

I suck in a long breath and turn over every possible option, then straighten as it comes to me. “What about the Royal Bastards?”

“What about them?”

“They owe us a favor for that shit that went down with the Hell’s Bandits last year.”

“Yeah, they do. You callin’ it in?”

Movement across the room catches my eye, and I watch Evelyn and Ox head outside. I’m grateful he’s been staying close. He’s like an uncle to her, and I trust her safety with him. Ox would die before he’d ever let anything happen to her. I could send them both into hiding, but that wouldn’t solve our problem. This chapter is vulnerable, and I can’t have that. “Yeah. Get them on the phone. I want to talk to their president.”





## CHAPTER THREE

*Evelyn—*

Ox and I ride up to the ice cream place in town. He turns into the lot, parks his bike, and I climb off. We place our order at the window and sit at the picnic tables under the extended roof.

I lick my ice cream cone while Ox slurps on the straw of his shake.

“Thanks. I needed this.”

Ox winks at me. “No problem, doll.”

I stare down the highway that leads toward the mountain range glimmering faded blue on the horizon. There’s something about it that calls to me, something about it that has always represented freedom to me. I’ve always longed to travel. Somehow, when I first hooked up with Malik, I thought he’d give that to me. How wrong I was. I think again about those girls I met at the truck stop months ago and the freedom they had. I’d give anything to be like them. “Hey, Ox?”

“Yeah, sweetheart?”

“You know that old Sportster your son had?”

He frowns and lowers his cup. “Bobby’s old bike? Yeah. What about it?”

I know Bobby is overseas, serving in the military. “You still have it?”

“Yeah. I’ve still got it. Why?”

“Think he’d want to sell it? I mean, he bought that soft tail before he left, right?”

“Right. Why do you want to know?”

I turn to look at the highway, biting my lip, wondering how he’s going to react. “I want to buy it.”

“You? What for?”

“To ride, silly.”

He gives a hearty belly laugh, but then quiets when he notices my expression. “You’re serious?”

“Yes. I’m serious.”

“Your father would kill me if I sold you that bike.

“He doesn’t have to know.”

“He’d know the minute he laid eyes on it.”

“I could paint it.”

He shakes his head. “You know how Duck is—he’d have my head. It’s bad enough I taught you how to ride when you were in high school. I never should have done that. I put that fire in your soul.”

“It was already there. That’s why I pestered you to teach me.”

“Well, I’m not putting a goddamn bike in your hands. Forget it.”

My shoulders droop, and I stare down the road. This won’t stop me. It just makes it harder.

“Hey.” I turn to meet Ox’s concerned gaze. “Why do you want to ride all of a sudden?”

“It’s not all of a sudden.”

“Seems you were always content to ride bitch with Malik.”

“Don’t bring him up.”

He squints, studying me, and then lifts his chin. “Ah. I know. It’s those girls, right? The ones you introduced us to at that truck stop.”

“Maybe.” I won’t meet his eyes. “Maybe the road has always called to me. Why do I have to be any different from the rest of you?”

He snorts. “Because you are different. You’re the president’s daughter, and he’s super protective of you.”

I snort.

He’s quiet a moment. “Little Bit, you gotta know he feels guilty as hell for letting Malik anywhere near you. He thinks he should have stopped you from ever getting hooked up with that son-of-a-bitch. Hell, I should have stopped you. That guy was never good enough for you, even when we thought he was trustworthy. I never liked him much.”

I reach across and touch his tattooed forearm. “It was my choice, and besides, it’s over and done now. I won’t settle again. I promise you.”

“Good to know.” He finishes his shake and slams the cup down, sighing heavily. “You’re determined about this, huh?”

My body straightens with hope. “Yes. One way or another, I will get what I want.”

He chuckles at that. “Don’t I know it?” He gives another frustrated sigh. “Okay, look. There’s a guy who lives down the road from me. He’s got a bobtail he modified. Rides real low. Probably something you could handle. He’s lookin to sell it. But you didn’t hear any of this from me. Understand?”

I jump from my seat, lean across the table, and hug his neck. “Thank you. Thank you, Ox.” I press a half dozen kisses to his cheek, and he turns beet red.

“Knock it off. Someone rides by and sees us, Duck will dig my grave.”

I sit back in my seat. “Will you take me?”

“Nope.”

I deflate. “Ox!”

“I’ll call him. Find out how much he wants. He’s a good dude. I’m sure he’ll give you a fair deal. But I’m not driving you there. You’ll have to call him yourself and work the payment and delivery out between you.”

“Thanks, Ox.”

“Don’t thank me. I regret this already.”

But he’s punching in the number, and I can’t keep the smile off my face.



## CHAPTER FOUR

*Royal Bastards Clubhouse*

*Durango, Colorado—*

*Rock—*

The rich aroma of the coffee in my mug hits my nose as I lift my mug to my mouth. Leaning one shoulder against the post, I stare out at the blue sky, taking a sip. Mornings have always been my favorite time of day. I left the house at dawn, and the ride over to the clubhouse was chilly with the smell of the approaching fall in the air. I could feel the damp mist in the dips of valleys.

It felt good after the weeklong heat wave we've had. Seems that's finally broken.

I straighten and head inside. I'm the only one here, except for the prospect asleep on the couch near the pool table. The kid didn't rouse when I first came in and made a pot of coffee. This time, he hears the door open.

He rolls over, his bleary eyes squinting open, then widening when he sees it's me. He bolts to his feet. "You need anything, Prez?"

"No. Go back to sleep. It's early."

I walk across the great room of the log structure to the coffeepot behind the bar and refill my mug. Then make my way down the hall to my office.

I like the quiet when the clubhouse isn't full of people.

Moving behind my desk, I toss my keys down, then turn and look out the big picture window in the alcove behind it. I

stare out at the stunning view of the mountains, my palm resting on the wood frame.

When I designed this clubhouse, I took special care to make sure my office was positioned so that it would have this view. Standing right here in this spot, looking at this panorama, is where I always feel closest to Gillian.

I glance over at her photo in the frame on my desk. She's been gone for years now, but the pain of losing her still runs deep. For a long time I couldn't get past it, but lately I try to dwell on her life and the good times instead of how she was taken from me. "It's a beautiful day, baby." My eyes return to the view. "Fall's in the air, just the way you always loved. Perfect day for a ride up to flat top."

It was our spot—a pretty overlook with a flat-topped rock formation; the perfect place to sit and talk and feel closer to God. I haven't been up there since the month she died when I rode up, shook my fist at the sky, and cursed Him for taking her from me.

I close my eyes tight. *Don't go there. Think of the happy times.*

After repeating that mantra over and over, I open them again. The trees are swaying in the wind now. I check the sky, wondering if there's a front moving through, but there's not a cloud to be seen. The wind quiets as suddenly as it started, and I have to grin.

*Message received, sweetheart.*

Sipping my coffee, I drop in my chair and open my laptop to check emails. As I'm scrolling through the list of mostly junk mail, a new one pops in.

It's from a realtor I met at a bar last month, and I click it open.

*Mr. Rockingham,*

*I remember you mentioned you might be looking for land north of your property. A parcel of twenty acres, including the ridge you mentioned, is about to hit the market. If you're interested, please get in touch with me as soon as possible. I'm sure it won't last long. I've attached the photos and listing information that will go live on our website tomorrow.*

*Regards,*

*Bill Benson*

*Benson Realty, Durango*

I click on the photos. It's the exact piece of land where I always wanted to build a house for Gillian. There's something melancholy about the timing of this. The irony of it gets to me. Seems timing has fucked me more than once in my life.

I drag in a long breath and stare at the photo.

Even though all those dreams evaporated the day Gillian died, somehow I still want that land. Something in me feels like it's always been meant to be, like that piece of land has always been meant to be mine. The view from up there is incredible, even better than the one currently out my window.

I click on the listing page he says will go live tomorrow and whistle at the price. I've got it, but it will wipe out almost all of the life insurance money I received when Gillian died—the money I've refused to touch. Somehow, spending it has seemed wrong. I'd give every dime of it to have her back instead.

I take another deep breath. *Stop wishing for the impossible. Life has to go on.*

I stare at the panoramic picture of the land again. I've needed something to look forward to, something to give my



life meaning again. Yeah, I have the club, and Lola and Trez, but they're grown now and have families of their own. Now it's just me left in the big house we all shared together.

Maybe it's time I let it go. There are so many memories there. They hit me in the face every time I walk around a corner. The picture window in the living room where we opened presents around the Christmas tree, the bathroom where Gillian gave our two kids baths, drenching the floor with splashes and happy laughter, the kitchen where I'd come in and find her at the stove, stirring a pot of her amazing marinara sauce. How I'd press against her back, and she'd give me a taste on a wooden spoon.

I close my eyes, and I can *still* taste it, *still* smell it cooking, *still* smell her coconut shampoo as I nuzzled her hair and kissed her ear.

*Stop! Stop torturing yourself, Rock.*

Before I can think better of it, I type out a two-word reply and hit send.

*I'm interested.*

By midday, I've submitted an offer on the land. The realtor says he'll push for a response before the listing goes live. I lean back in my chair, wondering how long it will take. Patience isn't my strong suit. Never has been.

There's a tap on the door, drawing my attention.

"Come in."

Lola pokes her smiling face in. "Hi, Daddy. Got a minute?"

I straighten. "For you, always."

Someone shoves the door wide, and my four-year-old granddaughter runs in, clutching a paper in her hand.

“I made this for you, Grandpa.” She scrambles on my lap, her face lit up with a big smile, and holds her drawing out to me. “See. That’s you, and that’s me.”

She points to a tall stick figure holding the hand of a little stick figure, our heads giant.

“Well, look at that. There we are. Yes, ma’am.”

She grins up at me, pride on her face. “Do you like it?”

“I love it. Do I get to keep this, punkin’?” A vigorous nod gives me my answer. “All right, then I need to find a really good place for it. Where do you think?”

She points at the wall next to my desk. “There.”

I dig in my drawer for a thumbtack. I find one, grab a silver-wrapped chocolate kiss from the stash I keep in there for her, and fold her hand around it. “Shh, don’t tell your mother.”

Lola rolls her eyes and grins. “Tell me what?”

“Nothing, Mommy.”

Stretching, I push the tack into the wall, pinning her drawing there. “Looks nice, doesn’t it?”

She nods, then whispers in my ear, cupping her hand. “Can I have another chocolate?”

I chuckle and snag her one, then whisper back. “Why don’t you go ask Rita for a glass of milk to go with that? She should be in the kitchen.”

“Okay.” She hops from my lap and runs off.

“Say please and thank you,” Lola calls down the hall after her. Then she turns back to me. “How are you doing?”

“Good. It’s a pretty day. You should take Willow to the park.”

“We will on the way back.” She moves to the window behind me, studying the view, and I take her in. Her tummy is round with baby number two.”

“When do we find out if it’s a boy or girl?”

“They’ll do an ultrasound at my next appointment.”

“What are you hoping for?”

“Memphis wants a boy, of course.”

“And you?”

She shrugs. “A boy would be nice, but I kind of have my heart set on a sister for Willow. She wants one so badly.”

“Then maybe she’ll get her wish. If she doesn’t, you can always try again.”

“I suppose.” She turns, and her eyes land on her mother’s photo. I follow her gaze.

“I miss her.” Her hand lands on her belly. “Especially now.”

“Me, too, sweetheart. Every damn day.”

She moves behind my chair and puts her arms around my neck, pressing her cheek to mine. “It’s been so long. I thought you’d have found someone else by now.”

I reach up and pat her forearm, then give it a squeeze. “I think I’m a one-and-done kind of guy. I just haven’t found anyone who comes close to measuring up.”

“None of the women who come around here?”

I huff out a laugh. “Most of ‘em only see the patch. They don’t have a clue who the man is underneath it.”

“You are president, after all. Women find power appealing.”

“Guess so.”

“I know there’ve been women.”

“True. I’m not a monk.”

“And?”

“And they’re all fine.”

“For a night.”

“Exactly.”

“Why is that?”

I shrug. “There just hasn’t been that spark, you know? Like when you met Memphis.”

“When I met Memphis, we hated each other.”

I chuckle. “And how long did that last?”

She grins. “Okay, not long. But there must be someone in this town for you.”

“Don’t you dare try to set me up again. Once is enough.”

“That was a disaster, I’ll admit, but she was pretty.”

“Yeah. Pretty crazy.”

“Well, how was I supposed to know she had four cats and hoarded tuna? She seemed normal when I met her in my yoga class.”

I roll my eyes. “Let me handle my own love life from now on, okay?”

She leans against the desk and folds her arms. “What love life? You use the women who come around to scratch your itch, but you don’t have a relationship with them. When’s the last time you had a meal with a woman or sat and talked? Or had one you even cared enough to have a fight with?”

I sigh. “Okay, Lola. I get your message. But you need to understand it’s my life and stop meddling. If I find a woman, I prefer to do it myself. Okay?”

“Fine.”

I study her. “Besides, if I found someone, you’d hate her.”

“I’ll hate her at first because I’ll have to share you with her.”

“Don’t know if I’ll ever be ready for that. No one will ever replace your mother in my heart.”

“She wouldn’t have to replace Mom. She just has to love you. That’s all I want for you—someone who loves you with all her heart. Someone to be there for you in the dark of night, and not like one of the club girls. Someone you can tell all your troubles to, someone to listen, someone to tell you when you’re wrong.”

I take in her words. My little girl is a smart cookie, and maybe what she says is true. I fold my arms and nod. “Okay.” She doesn’t move, so I sigh. “Message received, honey. Did you want something else?”

She grins. “Nope. Just came to plot your birthday party with Rita.”

“Christ. Is it that time already? Where did the year go?”

“Exactly my point. Time flies, Daddy. Don’t let your life slip by you.”

“Out. Go find Willow and torment Rita for a while. And I don’t want a party this year.”

“Like you have a choice. You know the boys look forward to your birthday blowouts every year.”

“That’s because they usually order strippers. And I get the bill.”

She pauses in the doorway, grinning. “Maybe one will pop out of a cake this year.”

“Go.”

She slams the door, and I check my email again. No response yet.

The door opens again.

“No cake!” I snap, before I look up and realize it’s not Lola.

Darko slips inside. “I didn’t bring any.”

“I thought you were Lola.”

“I like cake. Was she bringing you cake?”

“Never mind. What’s up?”

He drops in one of the chairs across from me, and his eyes hit the drawing tacked to the wall. “Looks just like you. Big head and all.”

“Shut up.”

“Pour me a drink.”

“We have a bar down the hall.”

“Yeah, but you’ve got the good stuff.”

I pull a bottle from the bottom drawer and slap two shot glasses down.

Darko unscrews the cap, fills them, and holds his up. “Here’s to the women in stripper shoes who steal all our money and drink all our booze.”

I grin and shake my head. “The only one drinking my booze is you.”

He drains his glass and smacks his lips. “Damn that’s good.”

“Glad you approve. Was there something you needed?”

“Nope. Just to bother you. Am I succeeding?”

“Don’t you always?”

There's a tap on the door.

Darko lifts his chin. "Hide the good stuff."

I roll my eyes. "Come in."

Trez sticks his head in. "You busy?"

"Nope. What's up?" He comes in, and I immediately notice the tightness in my son's face. "What's wrong?"

He holds his phone out. "President of the Iron Death's Utah chapter wants to talk to you."

I stare at the phone in his hand, and then meet his eyes. We both know there's only one reason he'd be on the phone for me. He's calling in the marker we owe them.

Taking the phone, I put it to my ear. "This is Rock." I listen to what he says and respond. "Yeah, I can do that."

Darko's eyes drill into mine, and he leans forward, waiting for me to get off the phone and tell him what's going down.

"All right. I'll be there." I disconnect.

"What does he want?" Trez beats Darko to the punch.

"Wouldn't tell me over the phone. Wants to talk face to face."

"Is he coming here?" Trez puts his palms on my desk.

"No. Asked me to come out there."

"You agreed?" Darko asks.

I nod.

"When?" he asks.

"Tomorrow."

"I'm going with," Darko insists.

"Me, too," Trez adds, straightening.

I shake my head. “You’re staying here, Trez. Isabella gonna pop any day now. I don’t want to hear an earful from Lola when you miss the birth of your son.”

“This marker was because of me.”

“No, it was because the Hell’s Bandits set our club up. That’s not on you, son. It never was.”

“You’re not going alone,” my VP states, pinning me with an arched glare.

“I need you here.”

“Prez—”

“Fine. I’ll take Memphis and Baja. But we fly under the radar. No colors. We’ll take my truck.”

“Why the secrecy?” Darko asks.

I shrug. “That’s the way he wanted it.”

“Sounds sketchy.”

“Well, VP, maybe he just doesn’t want the world to know he’s contacted the Royal Bastards.”

“Maybe. You trust him?”

“Yeah. He needs help. He did us a favor, now it’s time I return it.”





## CHAPTER FIVE

*Iron Death MC Clubhouse—*

*Evelyn—*

The trailer across the gravel lot shimmers in the heat of the afternoon sun. I stand outside the clubhouse door, my arms folded. The door behind me opens.

My father comes to stand beside me, chewing on a toothpick like I've seen him do a million times.

I stare at the trailer. I haven't been inside it since I've been home, and I have no desire to do so.

"I should burn it to the ground," my father says.

I shake my head. "No. That would be a waste. Let one of the boys have it, or maybe the prospects. It's a perfectly good trailer. I just don't want anything to do with it."

"But there it sits, reminding you of Malik. I think of that asshole every time I lay eyes on it."

"Do what you want." I drop my arms and turn to go inside, but his hand on my arm stops me.

"Hey. You okay?"

"Sure."

"You don't seem happy here. What can I do?"

"You really want to know?"

"Of course."

"Let me have some freedom. I'm a grown woman, yet I feel like a caged animal. I can't go anywhere without an

escort.”

“Because I’m worried for your safety. If that asshole gets his hands on you again, I’ll—”

“Stop. That won’t happen.”

“You know damn well what kind of man he is. Hell yeah, it could happen.”

“Okay. I get that. But I can’t live like this. This isn’t living.” He looks away, and there’s tiredness in his eyes. I sigh deeply. “You worry too much, Daddy.”

“I have a lot to worry about. You. The club. All of it.” He flings the toothpick into the gravel.

“You look tired. Are you taking care of yourself?”

“Sure.”

“I mean it. Are you eating right? When’s the last time you had a vegetable?”

He grins. “I don’t remember.” He pulls the keys to his truck out and dangling them from his index finger. “Okay, fine. Take my truck and run down and get me one of those damn green drinks full of veggies you used to make me drink.”

“You hated them.”

The creases around his eyes crinkle. “Still do. But for you, I’ll drink one.”

I chuckle, reaching out to take the key ring. “Remember when I was in high school, and I tried to get you to do that vegetarian diet with me?”

He pulls a twenty from his hip pocket and holds it out to me between two fingers. “Yes. It was god-awful. But you becoming a vegetarian kept you home and busy growing that

vegetable garden in that hot house Ox built you. Kept you out of trouble with that damn Smith girl.”

Rachel Smith. We used to run around together. I know what trouble he’s referring to. She’s the one who taught me how to steal when we’d go shopping. Then she taught me how to pick a wallet out of a man’s back pocket without getting caught—a trick she apparently learned from her loser mother who ended up doing time for check fraud.

Soon after, her father moved the family to Provo, and I never saw her again.

I snatch the bill. “I haven’t thought about her in years.”

“Good. She was nothing but bad news. Remember all the grief you gave me? Remember the summer you decided to become a pickpocket? I had to pay off the DA and three cops to keep you from going to jail.”

“I only got caught once.”

“You were pretty good at it, but that’s beside the point. You almost gave your mother a stroke that summer.”

“I miss her.”

“So do I.”

He wraps his arm around me, tugging me against his body for a hug. “Now go get me that drink.”

I give him a kiss on the cheek and head to his truck.

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*Duck—*

Ox walks up behind me as Evelyn climbs in my truck and backs out.

“Giving her the keys to your car—you sure that’s smart?”

“No.”

“Then why are you letting her go alone?”

“Because I don’t want her here when the Royal Bastards arrive.”

“Why? She’s gonna find out sooner or later.”

“Yeah, but I’d like them to have five minutes to hear me out before she does.”



## CHAPTER SIX

*Evelyn—*

It's the first time I've been allowed off the property alone in months, and I'm excited. I scan the stations on the radio and find a rock station, then roll down the windows and sing along with the song.

On the way into town, I slow when I see the road where Ox lives, knowing the man with the bike I want to buy lives at the end. On a whim, I head there.

Charlie Reed is out in the driveway, sitting on an overturned bucket working on another bike. He pauses and takes a hit off a bottle of beer.

I climb out of the truck and approach him.

“You got the money for me?”

“Um, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Will you take five hundred less?”

“Nope.”

I bite my lip and see the low rider sitting in the garage.

“How about a payment plan?”

“Do I look like the bank, darlin'?”

“Just for the last five hundred. I have the rest.”

“With you?”

“Well... no.”

“I already knocked the price down for you.”

I nod, letting the silence linger.

He blows out a long breath. “Okay, look. I know who your father is, and I know Ox. You get me another two-fifty, and we’ll call it square.”

I smile huge. “You mean it?”

“Yeah.” He points his beer bottle at me. “But not a penny less, understand?”

“Understand.”

“I need the money by tomorrow. Otherwise, I’ve got another guy interested.”

My shoulders drop. “Tomorrow?” How am I going to come up with another two-fifty in twenty-four hours?

“*Tomorrow*. I’ll be home at 4pm. If you’re not here by 6, I’m calling the other dude. Got it?”

“6pm. Got it.”

I jog to the truck and hear over my shoulder. “Don’t you leave me hangin’, girl.”

I smile brightly as I climb in my dad’s old pickup. “I won’t.”

When I pull in the quick stop five minutes later, I tap my thumb on the steering wheel, trying to think how I can pick up the rest of the money. I’ve got nothing left to sell, having pawned the engagement ring Malik bought me when times were good.

I bite my lip. There’s got to be a way.

I shove my shoulder into the truck door, pushing it open, and climb out.

Stepping into the air-conditioned store, I make my way to the large cooler cases in the back and scan the displays for the drink I’m looking for.



A man is bent over, studying the choice of chips on the shelves behind me, his hands on his knees. I can't see his face, but my eyes drop to his cute ass. It's then I notice the long leather wallet sticking out of his back pocket. It's similar to the kind the guys in the clubhouse use, a chain attached to their belt to keep it secure when they ride.

Though this one has no chain, there is a telltale silver circle where a chain may have been removed. The next thing I notice is the stack of green bills pressed between the leather. My eyes widen. It's a good amount of money—more cash than most people carry around these days.

I bet there's more than two-fifty in there.

Something clicks in my brain, and I glance around. The next thing I know, I'm slipping it from his back pocket, just like Rachel Smith taught me to do all those years ago.

I don't get two steps before a large hand wraps around my neck, and I'm suddenly pinned against the cooler doors where the beer is kept. It all happens so fast, I'm stunned.

I had no idea how tall the man was until I'm staring up at broad shoulders and a man a good five inches taller than me.

The light from behind me illuminates his face, and I'm sucked into ice-blue eyes that seem to look right into my soul.

I'm stricken in place, frozen with fear, and the wallet slips from my grip to fall to the floor with a *thunk*.

The clerk comes running, skidding to a stop at the end of the aisle, but my prisoner ignores her, his laser gaze all on me, the muscles in his jaw clenching.

I clutch at his strong wrist frantically, my eyes trailing up his inked forearm.

His hand is tight and immovable, but not choking. I can breathe. When he doesn't tighten his grip to where it might

threaten that ability, some of the panic leaves me, and my spine stiffens, my teeth clenching.

If he's expecting me to beg, I won't. I stare back, unflinching, though try as I may, I can't keep my eyes from stinging. *Oh, God. Please don't let me cry in front of this man.*

Why did I pick him, of all people, to pickpocket?

What was I thinking?

He looks like he could snap me in two with no effort at all.

He's going to send me to jail, at the very least. I'm sure of it.

Out of the corner of my eyes, I see two men charge down the aisle. Where they were, I don't know, but they must be traveling together.

"Rock, are you okay?" one barks.

*Rock.* Now I know his name.

With a single lift of his free hand, he stops the others dead in their tracks, controlling them with just a gesture. And then we're all standing caught in some high-noon moment, all of us wondering what is going to happen next.

"Let go of my arm," he growls.

For some reason I can't explain, I do as he commands and let my hands slip from his wrist and drop to my sides.

His eyes travel over my face and track down my body, taking in every inch of me, over my scooped-necked tank, my short-shorts, and down the length of my tanned legs. I feel his gaze like a hot touch, and heat flushes my skin.

He steps closer, until mere inches separate us, then leans in, and his nostrils flare like he breathing in the floral soap I use.

My entire body shivers with a response I've never felt for a man, not even Malik. This man, no, *this moment*, is like danger wrapped in sexual attraction and dipped in a power dynamic that doesn't frighten me; it stirs something in me. He shifts closer, and his scent hits me—a heady masculine body wash.

Before I can even process what's happening between us, he speaks.

“You're skinny. Are you hungry? Is that it? You need money to eat? You could ask rather than just take.”

Mortification floods over me. Oh my God. He thinks I'm some homeless waif off the street, needing a meal.

I slap at his arm, but he doesn't release his hold on me.

He digs in his hip pocket, pulls out a bill, and shoves it down the cleavage between my breasts, his gaze dropping there for a moment. There's heat in his eyes when they lift to mine again. “Get some food.”

My mouth drops open.

“Did she take your wallet? You want me to call the police?” the nervous clerk asks.

I stare in my captor's eyes, wondering if he's going to press charges. I take in the ink on his arm. If I didn't know better, I'd swear he was a biker.

“No,” he replies to the clerk. “It was just a misunderstanding.”

He finally releases me, and I fall back a step, sucking in air while he and his men retreat. With every step he takes, I feel a physical pull. It's like he's taking all the air in the room with him, leaving an empty vacuum behind. I'm drawn to follow and walk to the window. They load into a pickup truck and drive out, spraying gravel as they hit the blacktop.

“Get out,” the clerk snaps, pointing to the door. “And don’t come back.”

Colorado plates on the back are the only clue I’ll ever have about the mysterious man who just changed everything inside me.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

*Rock—*

My eyes are on the road, but my mind is back at the quick stop, reliving every second of my encounter with the dark-haired beauty with the chocolate eyes and the killer body. I don't even know her name, but I know I'll never forget her. Hell, the girl is going to play front and center in every wet dream I have from now on. I know for certain when I lay down tonight and close my eyes, it'll be her face and body I see as my palm strokes my hard dick.

I haven't reacted to a woman this way in a long fucking time.

What's wrong with me? She's a common thief.

I drag a hand down my jaw and emit a heavy sigh. *For God's sake, get your mind on business, Rock. Now's not the time to let some drop-dead gorgeous little pickpocket steal your focus.*

"I think this is the turn," Baja says.

I dip my head and peer at the gravel turn off. There are no markings, but his GPS is guiding us in, so I guess I'll trust it.

I make the turn, the truck bumping along the rutted drive, a dust plume kicking up behind us. Half a mile down, a big steel building comes into view, painted brown with the Iron Death MC logo above the door.

I park next to a dozen bikes gleaming in the hot sun, and we climb out, stretching.

A prospect standing by the door pokes his head inside, probably announcing our arrival. Before I can light a cigarette,

two men emerge and approach us. I guess even before they're close enough to read the patches on their cuts, that the younger one must be the VP named Caveman who Trez interacted with, and the older man must be their president, Duck.

He looks about ten years older than me. His long braids are graying at the temples, and a blue bandana is wrapped around his head. He extends his hand. "I'm Duck."

I shake his hand in a firm grip. "Rock."

He jerks a thumb to the man next to him. "This is my VP, Caveman."

We shake hands, and I introduce my men.

"This is Baja and Memphis."

"Thanks for coming." Duck meets my eyes. "Come on in and have a drink."

We follow them through the door and out of the bright sun, finding a bar and some tables scattered around and a hall that leads off to other parts of the building.

Duck leads us to the bar, and once we have a drink in hand, he puts a hand on my shoulder. "Let's all talk in my office, all right?"

"Sure." We follow him through a door and down a hall. Once we're settled in his office, he leans forward, his arms folded, his elbows on his desk, and stares at the wood before meeting my gaze.

"So... glad you're here. How was your drive in?"

I rest my booted ankle on my knee, leaning in my chair and sipping my whiskey. "Fine. Long."

"Yeah. Guess so."

I can tell he's hedging and not sure how to ask for what he needs. I appreciate the fact that asking for help is a difficult

thing, especially for men like us, so I make it easy on him.  
“We owe you one, Duck. What do you need?”

He raps his knuckles on the desktop. “I need you to patch us over.”

Of all the things I thought would come out of his mouth, that didn't even make the top ten. The boys and I exchange a look. My boot drops to the floor, and I sit up straighter. “You're joking, right?”

He sighs heavily. “I wish I was. I know it's a hell of a thing to ask, but unfortunately I'm very serious.”

“Why would you want that? Heard you've got a sweet operation here,” Memphis asks.

“Outside threats.”

“Who?” I set my glass on the desk.

“Vipers.”

Again, the boys and I exchange a look. My brows lift. “*Vipers?*”

“Yeah. I kicked out one of our members for stealing from my club. Should have killed the son-of-a-bitch. I didn't. That was my mistake. He took what he knew about our operation and I'm sure leveraged it with the Vipers.”

“Leveraged it for what?” A million possibilities cross my mind.

“VP patch.”

I whistle. “That's some damn backstabbing shit, huh?”

Duck nods. “Yeah. He wants to destroy this chapter, and me specifically, any way he can.” He shakes his head. “I'd kill him now, but that would bring down the Vipers' wrath on us.”

It absolutely would. “He knew that when he went to them. Knew he'd be untouchable. He's a smart son-of-a-bitch, huh?”



“Yep.”

“So his plan for revenge is to get the Vipers to take your chapter from you one way or another.” Memphis leans forward, elbows to his knees.

“Exactly.” Duck raps his knuckles on the desk. “Only thing that might stop them is if you beat ‘em to it. They won’t go up against the Royal Bastards.”

“No. They won’t. Not unless they want to start a war.” I move to a window and lean a hand on the frame. Is that really a fight I want to bring on? “Being president isn’t easy, is it, Duck?”

“Nope. Got a lot of men trusting me, counting on me. My mistake with Malik might lead to the entire chapter’s downfall. I’ll have to live with that.”

I twist to look at him. “Malik—is that his name?”

“Yeah.”

I pace back to the desk, shoving my hands in my pockets. “Look, it’s not that I don’t want to help you out. I do. But patching you over, hell, I’d have to go up the chain to national to get the okay for something like that. Especially if it puts us head to head with the Vipers.”

“And what do you think the chances are of National giving that okay?”

“Zero. They already think we’re growing too fast. They want us to lie low. We’ve got several chapters now under surveillance. ATF is always trying to pin us with RICO charges. We keep adding chapters like we’ve been, it only draws more attention on us.”

I watch the hope drain out of Duck’s eyes. He blows out a slow breath, rubs his hand over his fist, and stares at the wall like he wants to punch a hole in it. I don’t blame him for

feeling that way. He seems like a good man, and he dropped everything to come to our rescue when we were knee deep in shit. I feel for him, I really do.

“I understand,” he murmurs.

“Look, Duck. I want to help you. There’s gotta be some other way. Maybe we could take this son-of-a-bitch out for you.”

He shakes his head. “That won’t stop the Vipers. They’ve always wanted the state of Utah, and now that Malik’s given them insider information about our operations and the money we rake in, there won’t be any stopping them. Whether Malik’s dead or not, the Vipers are going to make a move on us.”

I drop into my chair and run a hand across my jaw. “I can give it a try with National. See what they say.”

“Thanks.”

He doesn’t sound hopeful, and I hate leaving things like this. “Look, I still owe you a marker. You think of anything I can do—”

He folds his hands like he’s praying and rests his forehead against his thumbs. Without looking at me, he murmurs a request. “There is one thing.”

“Sure. What’s that?”

“I need you to protect my daughter. Take her to Durango with you. Keep her safe from Malik.”

I freeze. This just got a whole lot more complex. “Why do you think Malik would go after your daughter?”

“Because he’ll do anything to get to me. He knows she’s everything to me. She’s my Achilles’ heel. He hurts her; he hurts me. And he wants to hurt me. Badly.”

I surge to my feet and pace to the window again, running a hand through my hair. “How old is your daughter?” She could be a child for all I know.

“Thirty-two.”

I study the view. “How long would I have to keep her away from here?”

“Until this is over, one way or another.”

I look back at him. “You gonna go up against the Vipers alone?”

“I guess so, unless you want to join me?”

“I can’t start a war. They bring one to me, that’s different.”

“I understand.”

I run a hand through my hair again. “You don’t ask for much, do you?”

The corner of his mouth pulls up, but there’s no joy in it. “You haven’t seen my daughter yet. It won’t be a hardship, but just so we’re clear, you keep your hands to yourself.”

“Understood.”

His gaze takes in Memphis and Baja. “That goes for your men as well.”

“No one will touch her.” I give him a promise I’m not sure will be easy to keep. If she’s pretty, it’ll be a hassle keeping my boys away.

Duck picks up his phone and calls someone. “Get Evelyn for me. Send her to my office.”

I pace again, and end up standing at the window. I was hoping this trip would be something easy, something we could take care of quickly and be done with it. Now it looks like it’s going to be an open-ended task.

The boys drain their glasses and set them on the desk.

Duck offers more from a bottle, but they both wave him off.

The door clicks open, and I turn my head to glance over my shoulder.

My hand drops from the window frame, and my mouth falls open. In walks my little pickpocket, cool as a cucumber. A bright smile lights her face until she catches sight of me. And we freeze.

Shocked is a mild word for what I am. I never thought I'd lay eyes on this woman again, and here she is, walking into my life twice in one day.

Baja jumps to his feet. "Oh hell no. Her? Are you kidding me?"

I motion him back into his chair.

"What are *they* doing here?" She pins her father with an angry look.

"Rock, this is my daughter, Evelyn."

*Evelyn.* Her name floats through my brain.

He looks over at his daughter. "Rock is the president of the Royal Bastards' Durango chapter."

"Why is he here?" She looks panicked, like maybe I'm here because of what happened at the quick stop. Like I found out who she was and—in a matter of an hour—tracked her down somehow. *Right.*

"I called him."

"Why?"

"I want you to go with him, Evelyn."

"*Go with him?* Go where? Why on earth would I go with him?" She takes a step back.

“I want you safe until this thing with Malik is over, that’s why. Now calm the fuck down.”

“No. I won’t calm down. This is crazy. *I’m not leaving.* Especially not with him.” She gestures toward me, and I can’t help but raise a brow.

“Oh? Why not?” Duck questions.

I grin at the corner she’s just backed herself into and can’t help twisting the knife. “Yeah? Why not, *Evelyn?*”

Her chin lifts, and she stares at me like I’m some giant cockroach that needs to be squashed.

“Evelyn?” Duck presses.

“Because I... I don’t even know him.”

“Rock is a good man. I wouldn’t send you if he wasn’t.”

“A good man? How do you know? You don’t know him,” she argues.

“I do by reputation. He’s given me his word you’ll be safe, and his word is good.”

“Daddy, you can’t be serious. I won’t do it.”

Duck comes to his feet with a frustrated sigh. “You will.”

Something about seeing her discomfort gives me pleasure. I can’t dismiss the fact that I owe her some payback. Having her in Durango would certainly give me a chance to get some.

Last thing I want to do is drag some chick back with us, but it’ll be worth the hassle if only to see her squirm. Knowing she wants nothing to do with me is just the cherry on top. I drain my glass. “Pack a bag, darlin’. Meet me outside in five minutes.”

“Five minutes? You’re joking.”

I grin and lift a brow, challenging her to defy me. “Clock’s ticking, Evelyn.”

She whirls on her heel to stare at her father for one last appeal. “Daddy, please. Don’t do this.”

“You heard the man, baby girl. Let’s not keep him waiting. Go pack your things. It’s just until we get things settled here.”

“Settled how?”

“Evelyn. Go. *Now.*” Duck has apparently reached his limit of questions.

She blows out a breath and slams the door on her way out.

Five minutes later, I’m standing by my truck.

Memphis lifts a hand. “Sorry, Rock, but I gotta be the voice of reason here. Have you lost your friggin’ mind?”

“In the way of markers, this one’s a piece of cake. What’s your issue with it?” I fold my arms. “She’s not gonna be your problem. She’ll be mine.” I’m fully aware what this will put on me. I’ve been alone a long time, and now I’ll have a woman in my house. I’ll be leaving my bachelorhood to babysit.

Memphis starts to tick off on his fingers the reasons why this is a terrible idea. “One. It’s her, the little thief who tried to lift your wallet for Christ’s sake. Two. Now this Malik asshole becomes our problem.”

“You can’t be serious about this, prez?” Baja seconds him.

The fact they’re forgetting so quickly what the Iron Death did for us raises my ire, and I take a step toward them, pointing toward the building. “That club saved my son’s life and yours”—I jam my finger in Baja’s chest—“and Memphis and the rest of your brothers. We owe him. *I* owe him.”

Baja lifts his hands in surrender, wisely keeping his mouth shut.

Memphis digs his phone out of his hip pocket and lets out a huff. “So, where is she? She’s three minutes late.”

I pin him with a look that warns him to shut his mouth as well, which only earns me a grin.

The door is flung open so forcefully it bangs against the wall, jolting us all.

Evelyn steps out with a duffel bag, a backpack, and her purse. She stalks toward the pickup and attempts to fling her duffel into the truck bed, but I’ve got a lift kit on it, and she can’t get the weighty bag over the side. I take it from her and heft it in. I don’t get a thank you, but I don’t expect one.

Memphis starts to pull open the front passenger door, but I push him aside. “Get in the back.”

“Why?”

“Because I’d rather ride next to a pretty girl than your ugly mug.” He climbs in the back, accompanied by Baja’s hoot of laughter. I hold the front door with a flourish for Evelyn. “Your chariot awaits, m’lady.”

She rolls her eyes and climbs in, settling her backpack between her feet.

“You want me to stow that in the back for you?”

“No, I’ll keep it with me.” She clutches her hand tight to the strap, like I’m going to fight her for it.

I lift my palms. “No problem.”

Duck strolls up and shakes my hand. “Thank you for this.”

“No problem. I’ll take care of her.”

“Evelyn?” She stares straight ahead, ignoring him.

“Can we get on the road, please?” she asks.

I could cut the tension with a knife. “Yeah. Sure.”

Duck steps back, and I shut her door, then circle around the hood and climb in. I back up and head toward the road, glancing in my rearview to see Duck still standing there.

Considering what Lola's put me through in the past, I know how he feels. Fighting with your children to the point they aren't speaking to you is hell. I don't envy him at all. But Evelyn needs to understand he's doing this for her. Now's not the time to set her straight, but I make a note to bring it up later.

My gaze is drawn to her as we hit the blacktop highway. It skates down her long legs and back up over her flat waist and the cleavage revealed by the scooped tank she wears. On her wrist is a stack of bracelets, and dangling earrings brush her collarbones, drawing my attention to her delicate neck and dewy skin with its sun-kissed glow.

Perhaps sensing my eyes, she turns. I return my attention to the road, straightening in my seat and resting my arm on the door, brushing my mouth with my hand.

I think I'll let her stew for a while, at least until she's not in the bitchy mood she's in now.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

*Evelyn—*

There's silence in the truck until we get miles down the road. I'm angry, but I'm also anxious. I'm leaving everything I know—my home, my family. I don't know *any of these men*. My father seems to trust them due to some biker code he believes in, but after Malik, I've realized men have their own motivations, and I don't know if I trust that code anymore.

I have no clue what awaits me when we get to where we're going. I assume to their clubhouse, but perhaps Rock's going to take me somewhere else. Perhaps some secure location and stash me there. I doubt I'll have a say.

A million questions run through my brain, and I hate that I don't have the answers, and the only way to get any answers would be to speak to this man.

After our encounter at the quick stop, and the aggressive way he reacted, I have no clue what he's capable of. Perhaps he wants payback. I'm basically going to be at his mercy.

Staring out the window, I wish for the hundredth time I'd never done what I did. It was the pinnacle of stupidity. I didn't even bother with the number one rule Rachel taught me. Always size up your mark before you make a move.

I certainly underestimated this mark.

I glance over at him from the corner of my eye.

*Rock.*

What kind of a name is that? What kind of a man is he?

He made it to the rank of president—not an easy task—so he must be formidable. I know all too well from my own

father what it takes to run a crew like these men. You have to demand respect, and more than demand it, you have to earn it. You have to be smart, and you have to size up a situation quickly. Except for Malik, I always thought my father was a good judge of character.

I wonder if Rock has all those same qualities.

Judging from our encounter in my father's office, he's obviously used to getting what he wants.

I risk a quick side-glance at him. He's a good-looking man—ungodly gorgeous, actually. With his attention on the road, I have the opportunity to study him without those penetrating blue eyes staring into my soul.

His shoulders are broad, and he's tall with long legs. His blond hair hangs free and comes to the middle of his chest. He's wearing a black t-shirt, tattoos running up both arms, and I can't help wondering what he looks like in his club's colors. I'm glad he's not wearing them right now. It gives me a chance to see past all that to the man.

One hand rests on the steering wheel, a chunky silver bracelet around his wrist. There's only one ring on his hand—a silver one with a design. It could be his club's ring, but I can't get a good enough look to tell.

He glances over, and I hastily turn away.

The center console opens, and he pulls a bottle of water out.

“Want one?” He holds it out.

I shake my head.

He cracks the cap open, tips the bottle up, and I watch his throat work as he drinks down half of it. I pull my eyes from him and try to ignore his overwhelming presence.

The farther we drive, the lower the sun drops behind us. It sets in the reflection of the side mirror. It reminds me of everything I'm leaving behind, and melancholy washes over me like a chill.

This situation is only temporary, I tell myself, and repeat the words in my head. *Think of it as a vacation, Ev.* Still, I can't help but think Rock's going to make this anything but a vacation. I'm sure we're going to butt heads. I feel it in my bones. Considering his position, I'm sure he's not used to anyone questioning him, I, on the other hand, was raised to question everything and rebel against most things.

Rock flips his blinker on and slows. I notice the highway he's about to turn down. "You don't want to go this way."

When those cool baby blues hit mine, they send a shiver through me. "I didn't ask, did I?"

"Have it your way." I fold my arms and slump down in my seat.

He smirks. "Been to Colorado often, have you?"

"No, but that doesn't mean I don't know the roads *here*."

He checks his GPS again and keeps driving. Five minutes down the road, we come to a spot where the highway crosses a dry wash. We had a heavy rain last night, and I knew it would be flooded with the runoff from the mountains upstream.

Rock slows the truck, and I'm afraid he's going to try to drive through it.

I put a hand on the roof and one on the handle strap. "It's deeper than it looks."

Thankfully, he second-guesses his decision and turns the truck around instead, cussing the whole while. Finally, he glances my way. "Why didn't you tell me this was the reason?"

My brows arch, and I put a hand to my chest. “I tried. You didn’t seem to want my opinion. You seemed to think you know it all.” I huff out a laugh. “Where’d that get you?”

Once we’re heading back the way we came, Rock huffs, “You say I told you so, I’ll put you out on the side of the road.”

“Promise?”

He quickly turns his head to hide his grin.

“So, are you one of those?”

“One of what?”

“One of those men who won’t ask for directions and won’t take any help?”

The man seated behind me leans forward. “You rethinking that shotgun seat about now, prez?”

“Yup.” Rock meets his eyes in the rearview.

“Pull over. He can have it.” There’s an edge in my voice, and Rock hears it.

He meets my eyes. “Don’t get your panties in a wad.”

“You’re insufferable.”

“You’re a pain in the ass.”

“Fine. Then drop me off in the next town. I can take care of myself.”

He laughs outright at that. “I doubt it.”

“What’s so funny? You don’t think I’m capable?”

“What would you do? Hitchhike back to the clubhouse? Call *Daddy* for a ride?”

“Is that what you think of me? That I’m some little club princess who’s been catered to her whole life? You don’t know shit about me.”

His jaw hardens, and I hear an *oh-oh* from the backseat.

“Just that you’re a thief and a liar.”

“Liar? When did I lie to you?” I let the thief part slide, because, okay, it’s true.

“You didn’t lie to me. You lied to your father, though, didn’t you?”

“*What?*”

“Did you tell him about our little encounter?”

“No.”

“You had a chance to tell him all about it when he asked you why you didn’t want to come with me. You didn’t say a damn word. In my book, that’s lying by omission. If you were my daughter—”

“Thank God I’m not.”

He blows out a breath and drags a hand down his face. “Look, we’re stuck with each other for now. You don’t have to like me, and I don’t have to like you. I owe your father a favor, and I’m doing this because he asked. Now just sit there and look pretty until we get back to Durango.”

I suck in a breath, and my eyes widen. “Look *pretty*? Is that all you think women are good for, being eye-candy for men?”

“You ain’t gonna win this fight, prez,” the man behind him advises.

“Damn straight he’s not,” I murmur, folding my arms, my spine stiffening.

“Thanks, Mr. Obvious.” Rock glares at him in the rearview.

“No shit,” I mutter under my breath.

Rock sighs heavily, his foot pressing down on the gas until our speed escalates. He divides his attention between the road and me. “What’s obvious is we rub each other the wrong way.”

Baja chuckles. “Don’t sound like there’s going to be any rubbing going on between you two.”

“Shut up, Baja. I want your opinion, I’ll give it to you.”

“Yes, boss,” he replies with a stifled laugh.

“Jesus Christ, this ride can’t end soon enough,” the man next to Baja grumbles.

“You shut up, too. All of you shut up. No one talks until we cross the goddamn state line. Understand?” Rock barks.

No one says a word.

Twenty minutes later, the *Welcome to Colorado* sign comes into view. I stare at it, turning my head as we roll past. Somehow, to me, it feels like I’m crossing a point of no return, like there’s no going back now.

I look behind us, spotting the *Welcome to Utah* sign on the other side of the road. It gets smaller quickly as we barrel down the highway and a weight settles in my chest. Every mile we drive, I’m farther and farther from my home and everything that was my safety net.

Now it’s just me. No, correction, me and this stranger in the driver’s seat, who has more control over me than I want any man to have ever again. Malik taught me well what giving up my freedom and control means, and I never want to go back to that.

Rock slows and turns into a place called the State Line Bar. It’s the only bit of civilization in sight.

“What are we doing?” I ask.

“I need a drink.”

Three truck doors open, and the men climb out. I stare at the structure, wondering how big of a dive this place is. Rock comes around and opens my door, holding out his hand. “Come on.”

I slip mine in his warm grip, suddenly remembering when that same hand was wrapped around my delicate throat, but his touch is gentle as he helps me down. Once my feet are on the ground, he releases his hold, walking next to me onto the boardwalk that stretches across the front of the building with an overhanging roof supported by six wooden posts.

Rock holds the door for me, and we follow the other two men in. It’s rustic inside, with only a couple of other people and a bartender.

The men take a seat at the bar, and Rock pulls out a barstool for me.

“Want a beer?” he asks, meeting my eyes.

“Sure.”

He orders a round and then walks toward a hallway marked restrooms.

I look over at the man next to me. “I’m sorry. I didn’t catch your name.”

“Memphis.” He holds out a hand, and I shake it. Then he jerks his thumb to the man on his other side. “This is Baja.”

Baja peers his head around Memphis and lifts his chin. There’s no smile from either of them, and I get the impression they’re putting up with me, but they’re not happy about it. And why would they be? They remember me from the quick stop. I’m sure they’d love to leave me on the side of the road.

Maybe worse.



The bartender slides four longnecks on the bar. I take mine and sip on it, trying to ignore their cold stares.

Rock returns and takes a long pull off his bottle, then studies our silence. I'm sure he must sense the tenseness in the air.

I wonder if he's gotten over what I did quicker than his men have. Probably not.

The bartender comes over and wipes down the bar top. "You boys from Colorado or Utah?"

I'm sure he's just making small talk. The guy probably doesn't get very many customers after all. But the men don't take to his question well.

"You writin' a book or something?" Baja snaps.

The bartender retreats without another word.

"You didn't have to bite his head off," I snap.

Baja barely glances at me, like my opinion is of no concern.

I lift a brow. "So, I don't exist to you. Is that it?"

"Your opinion doesn't exist for me, lady. Don't make the mistake of thinking it does."

"Baja!" Rock barks. "Some respect."

"Did she earn any?" he snaps back.

"We owe her father to treat her right, and that's what you'll do. Understand?"

"Sure." Baja tilts his beer up, looking away.

I bite the side of my inner cheek, wondering if this is how it's going to be the entire time I'm with the Royal Bastards. I huff a silent laugh. They sure got that name right. Royal Bastards is what they are.

“You up for a game of darts?” Memphis asks Baja.

“Better than sitting here,” the man replies snidely, and they both get up and move to an electronic dartboard in the corner.

Rock leans his elbows on the bar. “Don’t mind them. They’re just bein’ protective of their president.”

“I guess I deserve it, considering.”

“True.” His quick agreement has me glaring at him, which only earns me a belly laugh.

I look over at the two men, hoping neither of them hit the damn board.

Rock chuckles. “Quit.”

My head swivels back. “Quit what?”

“Giving them the evil eye. So they don’t like you. They’ll get over it.”

I sigh and drink my beer.

“You wanna play?”

His question out of the blue has my mind on other things, and I almost choke on my beer. “What?”

“Darts.”

“Oh. No thanks.”

“What’d you think I meant?”

“Nothing.” I drain my beer as his men finish their game. “Can we get back on the road now?”

“Sure.” Rock downs his own beer and stands. “Let’s go, boys.”

Ninety minutes later, we roll into the town of Durango. The landscape is so different here than back home. I’m truly in

a different world.

Until the day Malik took me from the Iron Death clubhouse, I'd never been outside of a fifty-mile radius of it. Now I've let another man take me away.

There's a charming main street with cute restaurants and shops, and I'd love to spend hours perusing all of them. A few buildings even look like they may date back to the turn of the century, and I'm fascinated by each one.

We pass through town and into a more modern section, then up a long road. Eventually, after several turns, Rock pulls off the highway, down a drive, and we end at a gravel lot before a large log structure with a big porch across the front. There are about a half dozen bikes parked out front. Rock parks next to them.

I lean to peer through the windshield. "What's this?"

"The Durango clubhouse." Rock climbs out, and so do the men in the back.

I never expected it to look like this. Stepping out, the first thing that hits me is the scent of pine trees. It's different than the arid land around the Iron Death's clubhouse.

"Come on. We'll get your bags later."

I leave my things and follow the men up the steps, and Rock holds the door for me. Stepping inside, the clubhouse is warm and inviting with exposed logs and a wood floor. A bar sits off to the side with some tables and chairs and leather sofas.

"You want something to drink?" Rock leads the way to the bar. A prospect is behind it, washing glasses.

"What can I get you all?"

Rock looks at me.

"I'll have a cola."

“Yes, ma’am. Coming right up.”

Rock orders a scotch on ice and the men get beer.

Once we all finish our drinks, Rock jerks his head. “Come on. I’ll show you around.”

I follow him across the large room and down a hall.

“The boys have rooms here.” He indicates the doors we pass. He nods to a set of double doors. “This is church.”

“Can I see?”

He nods and stops, opening the door and letting me poke my head in. There’s a big table with chairs, like I suspected. No windows, nothing else but the club’s logo on the wall.

I step back. “Thanks.”

We continue down the hall to the end, and he unlocks a door. It leads into a large room with a desk in front of an alcove with a picture window that looks out over a stunning view. A stone fireplace sits off to the side.

“This is my office.”

“It’s lovely.” I move to the view. “Wow. I could stare out this window all day.”

He closes the door and follows, stopping on the other side of the desk and folding his arms. “I made sure I had this view when I designed the layout.”

I turn to look at him. “You designed all this?”

“I did.” A look of pride appears on his face.

“It’s lovely. Truly.”

“Thanks.”

I spot a door. “What’s that? A closet?”

He opens it to reveal a masculine decorated bathroom with a door on the other side. “What’s beyond there?”

“My bedroom.” He doesn’t offer to show it to me, and I’m filled with curiosity.

“I see, and where am I staying? Here at the clubhouse?”

“I figured you’d be more comfortable at my house. I’ve got several empty bedrooms there since my kids are grown.”

It’s the first time he’s talked about himself, and I’ve got a million questions. “How many kids do you and your wife have?”

“My wife died several years ago. We have a son named Trez. He’s sergeant at arms. You’ll meet him later, I’m sure. My daughter, Lola, is married to Memphis.”

“Oh.” I study him. I have no clue how old he is, but he’s one of the most attractive men I’ve ever met, and despite the age difference, I can’t deny I’m drawn to him. I want to ask his age so badly, but I think it would seem rude, so I hold my tongue.

I suddenly realize this is the first time he and I are completely alone together. I tilt my head. “Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.” He sits a hip on the edge of his desk. “Shoot.”

“Why did you agree to this?”

“Bringing you here, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“I owed your father.”

I frown. “Why?”

“That’s club business. Let’s just say he saved some of my men, including my son, from a dangerous situation.”

“Oh.”

“You don’t seem to be as concerned as your father.”

“About what?”

“About your safety. You aren’t worried about this Malik dude?”

*This Malik dude.* I realize Rock probably doesn’t have the whole story about my relationship with Malik, and I’m not sure I’m ready to clue him in. I bite my inner cheek. “How much did my father tell you?”

Rock searches my eyes for a moment, and I’m sure he’s figuring out there’s more. “He said Malik was out bad, and he was worried about retaliation. Said Malik would use you to hurt him. Said you were the most important thing in his life and Malik knew that. Is there more I’m missing?”

I’m not ready to share more. “That about covers it.”

Rock tilts his head. “But you’re not as concerned?”

“I am. I just think shipping me off to another state is a bit excessive.”

“What’s your take on Malik?”

“He’s smart and not someone you want to underestimate.”

Rock nods. “Okay. Then this is how it’s going to be. You don’t go anywhere without an escort. My visit to your father was under the radar. I’m sure he didn’t want there to be any chance that Malik would somehow find out the Royal Bastards had shown up. As long as my visit remains that way, it’s unlikely Malik will be able to track you here.”

“What are you hinting at? That someone in the club would tip him off? You think we’ve got a rat?”

“I’m not saying that. What I’m saying is he may have someone watching; he may be paying off someone who comes around the club, like hang-arounds or any of the women who come and go. You just never know.” He shrugs. “Could be your father might be overreacting. You tell me.”

“You’re a father. What do you think?”

He huffs a laugh. “My kids have put me through the wringer. Worrying is a father’s job. Keeping a daughter safe is a whole other level of worry. Believe me. I felt for Duck when you wouldn’t even say goodbye to him properly.”

There’s an edge of accusation in his voice, and guilt washes over me. I dip my head. “I was angry. I didn’t like being shipped off. I’m a grown woman.”

“Evelyn, just so you know, I’m not a man who likes excuses.”

I lift my head and meet his eyes. He sees right through me. “My emotions are valid. It’s how I was feeling. It’s not an excuse.”

“Isn’t it? Don’t you think your father deserved a goodbye? It’s obvious you love him, and he loves you.”

My eyes tear up at his words, and my throat tightens. I’m not sure I can even speak, so I just nod.

Rock’s arms unfold, and he reaches out a hand, snagging mine, tugging me forward. “Hey.”

I meet his eyes.

“Look, we might as well try to get along. Okay?”

I get a warm, safe feeling from this man, and there’s a certain level of trust that comes with it. I’m sure he means every word of his pledge to my father. He’ll do everything in his power to keep me safe, and if I know Duck, he made Rock swear to keep his hands off me. Somehow the off limits of that make me think about it all the more. The forbidden is always hot.

My eyes drop to Rock’s mouth, and I suddenly wonder what it’d be like to kiss him. It’s an insane thought, but the moment hangs longer than it should.

There's a knock on the door.

Rock stands, and I step back like I just got caught with a boyfriend on the living room couch.

"Come in."

"Just take me to the bus station. I'll go to my aunt's house," I offer, wanting away from him and this place.

"Not gonna happen. I promised your father I'd keep you safe here."

"You don't want me here, and I don't want to be here."

"Doesn't matter. That wasn't the deal. Besides, we don't have a bus station."

"You don't have a bus station?"

A dark-haired older man with silver at his temples enters, his eyes sweeping over me. "So it's true. She's the marker?"

"Evelyn, this is my VP, Darko. Darko, this is Duck's daughter, Evelyn. You'll treat her with the utmost respect while she's here, understood?"

He approaches me. "Of course. Nice to meet you, kid."

"I'm hardly a kid," I snap, still irritated.

"Sure, I can see that." His eyes shift from me to Rock. "Got some business to talk about."

Rock nods. "Evelyn, mind waiting out by the bar for a few minutes? Then we'll drive over to my place and get you settled."

"Sure. Excuse me." I slip past Darko to the door. As I close it, I see both of them staring back at me. I hear Darko's comment to Rock.

"What is it about chicks today? They take offense to every damn thing you say."



“Maybe it’s just you,” Rock replies.

I make my way down the hall back to the bar.

There are more people here now. At least four patched members sit at the bar, and several women in shorts and skimpy tops hang on them.

I take an empty barstool off to the side, and the same prospect who waited on me before comes over.

“Would you like another cola, ma’am?”

“Yes, please.”

While I wait, I get the stink eye from the women. I’m sure they don’t have a clue who I am or why I’m here. I know enough about club whores from the Iron Death clubhouse to recognize them when I see them. They’re different from ol’ ladies. They’re competitive, even more territorial, and almost have a cockiness that ol’ ladies don’t have. Ol’ ladies are more secure in their position than club whores, whose position here only exists by staying in the good graces of the men. They supply a service, fill a need I was always told, but to me they’re just trouble.

I stare right back until it pisses one of them off enough to confront me.

“What are you lookin’ at, bitch?” a redhead snaps, shifting her head from side to side like she’s about to throw down.

I lift a brow and let my gaze trail down her skanky outfit. “Nothing. Absolutely nothing.”

That sets her off, and she charges toward me. I slip off my barstool, grab the longneck of an empty beer bottle off the bar, and clench it at my side. I’m ready to hit this bitch with it if she tries anything, but before she can reach me, one of the Royal Bastards hooks her waist with an arm and lifts her clear off her feet.

“Settle down, Arlene. She’s here as a guest of Rock.”

“I’ll take that,” comes a voice at my ear, and an arm reaches down and takes the bottle from my clenched fist. I twist to find Memphis grinning. “No need to bust her head open.”

“Says you.”

He chuckles. “Finish your drink and don’t start any more shit.”

“More? I didn’t start anything.”

“Right.”

I sit and watch as they haul Arlene out the front door. The other two women study me with new eyes now that the bit of information about me being Rock’s guest is revealed. I lift my chin and stick my tongue out at them.

Memphis sighs. “You’re doing it again.”

“Maybe they need to keep their skanky eyes to themselves.”

He chuckles.

“What are you laughing at?” I whirl on him.

“You. Skanky eyes. That’s a new one. Is that like smoky eyes?”

I can’t help smiling. “Not exactly. More like *‘I slept in my makeup and I look like a raccoon’* eyes.”

He downs his drink, dimples on his cheek revealing his grin. “You’re a hoot.”

I study him and crunch on a piece of ice from my glass. “So, I hear you’re married to the boss’s daughter.”

“Yup.” He studies me. “Guess you have something in common with her.”

“What’s that? That we’re both considered club princesses?”

“You’re both firecrackers.”

I sip my drink and look straight ahead. “That’s probably because we have to be.”

“Guess so. Though, you’d do well not to start any trouble while you’re here.”

I turn my head, shocked he just said that to me. “You don’t like me, do you?”

He shrugs. “It’s more like I don’t trust you.”

“Because of the quick stop incident.”

“Don’t downplay it. You didn’t bump into Rock and spill his slushie. You tried to steal from our president, lady, so, yeah, I don’t trust you.”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done it. I realize that. It was a big mistake.”

“Huge.”

“Okay, huge.”

“So, no, I’m not happy you’re here.”

“This wasn’t my idea, you know? I didn’t want to come here. Apparently, I’m just some favor owed.”

“Yep. That’s exactly what you are. I’d remember that if I were you.”

“I’m sure no one is going to let me forget it.” I stare straight ahead, but then start giggling.

Memphis looks over. “What’s so funny?”

“I was just imagining Rock slurping on a slushie.”

Memphis grins, then before long, he’s laughing with me.





## CHAPTER NINE

*Rock—*

Juice dribbles down Evelyn's chin as she takes a big bite of her French Dip sandwich. She giggles and grabs a napkin from the dispenser against the window. On the way home from the club, I brought her to one of my favorite restaurants—a little roadhouse dive with great home cooking.

I grin. I like a woman who can eat with gusto. My eyes trail down her slender body. Though, where she puts it, I have no clue. “Good?”

“Um hmm,” she replies around the mouthful. When she finishes chewing, she elaborates. “Though, not as good as the pot roast sandwiches I make my father.”

I cock a brow. “Pot roast sandwiches?”

“My father's favorite. My mom used to make them for him all the time.”

“Used to?”

The light in her eyes dims, and she looks away, staring off like she's reliving a bad memory. “She died about four years ago.”

“Oh. Sorry to hear that. What happened?”

“I don't really want to talk about it.”

I wish I'd never asked. She'd finally been relaxing around me, and now I've ruined it. I cast about for a way to steer the conversation back from her mother's death, a subject that's still obviously painful for her. I can relate. I still don't like to talk about Gillian's death.

She sets her sandwich down and picks up the ketchup bottle, squirting a dollop on her plate, then does the same with the mayo, and mixes them together.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“You’ve never heard of frysauce?” She picks up a fry, dragging it through the concoction.

“Nope.”

“It’s huge in Utah.”

“Huh. Not so much in Colorado.” She shrugs, and I’m guessing she’s losing interest in the frysauce topic. “So, um, these sandwiches you make, are they difficult?”

“Not really. They just take some prep time. I cook the roast in a crockpot. Why?”

“I’m having some of the boys over for poker night Friday. If you could make those sandwiches, it’d be a big upgrade from the usual chips we have.”

She shrugs. “I suppose I could.”

“That’d be great. Make me a list of what you need, and I’ll have someone pick them up.”

“Do you have a crockpot?”

Now it’s my turn to get sucked into that dark hole of loss. I can’t block out the image of Gillian standing over a crockpot, ladling out her famous beef stew into bowls. It was one of my favorite meals. God, I haven’t thought of it in years. I can almost taste it now.

“You okay?”

Lifting my eyes from the table, I shake off the memory and force a smile. “Yeah, I think I still have one.”

“You zoned out there for a minute.” She crosses her eyes, trying to make a silly face.

I chuckle. “Is that supposed to be me?”

“If the shoe fits. Did you hear about what happened earlier with that chick, Arlene?”

Her sudden change of topic has me reeling for a moment. I cock a brow. “As a matter of fact, I did. Something about her having to be hauled out of the place, and you calling someone skanky eyes.”

She points her fry at me. “Now *that* shoe fit. No lie.”

She makes me laugh. I haven’t had a woman do that in a long time. “Just don’t start any fights in my clubhouse, okay?”

“Hey, I didn’t start shit.”

“Whatever,” I reply like I don’t believe a word of it. “Then do me a favor and don’t take the bait.”

“How about you make sure they don’t bait me?”

I nod. “I suppose I can do that.”

“I’d appreciate it. I know how club’s work. I’ve grown up in one. And I don’t need the shit club whores dish out. Thank you very much.”

“Club whores, huh?”

“I’m not an idiot, Rock. Don’t take me for one.”

“No chance of that happening.”

“Good.”

“You remind me of my daughter.”

“You’re not the first to tell me that.”

I frown. “Who else told you?”

“Her ol’ man.”

“Ah. Memphis.”



“Right. Memphis. He’s the one who took the beer bottle away from me.”

Back the train up. “Beer bottle?”

“Yep.”

“I guess he left that part out. What were you going to do? Hit her with it?”

“If she came at me, hell yes.”

“Christ. You’re gonna be a handful.”

“No, I’m not. Just keep those skanks away from me.”

“I’ll have a word.”

“You do that, boss man.”

“Rock.”

“Fine. Rock.”

I watch her take another bite.

As she chews, she stares at me, then asks once she swallows, “Are you just going to sit there and watch me eat?”

I chuckle. “You do make an Olympic event out of it.”

She leans back against the red vinyl booth and folds her arms. “Tell me you’re not one of those men who thinks a woman should pick at her food like a hummingbird.”

“Not at all.”

She lifts her chin toward my plate. “Something wrong with yours?”

“Nope.” I grin around the word, then shut up and take a big bite, letting her watch me as I make a show of chewing it.

Finally, she rolls her eyes and laughs. It’s a sweet tinkling sound that I could get addicted to.

The waitress comes over. “Can I get you anything else, Rock?”

Her name’s Patty, and she usually waits on me when I stop in here, which is about once a week. She eyes Evelyn up like competition. The saying goes don’t shit where you eat. I made that mistake once with Patty.

“No thanks, darlin’. Just the check.”

“Sure.” She pulls it out of her apron pocket and slaps it on the table, again giving Evelyn the side-eye. *If looks could kill...*

Once she retreats across the room, Evelyn meets my gaze. “Friend of yours?”

“Something like that.”

“I see. You stop in here often, do you?”

“Yeah, as a matter of fact, I do. But she and I, that’s ancient history, and it was just one drunken night.”

“Not sure she thinks so.” Evelyn looks down at her plate. “Think she poisoned my food?”

I wipe my mouth with a napkin. “Nah. Just spit in it.”

“Great.”

“Good thing you already polished off the sandwich.”

“Right. Good thing.” She grabs her throat and starts to make choking noises like she’s dying.

I roll my eyes, but chuckle. “Knock it off.”

She sobers and sips her drink.

I lean my elbows on the table, pushing my plate to the side. “So tell me something, Evelyn.”

“What’s that, Rock?”

“Why’d you try to steal from me?”

Her gaze moves out the window for a moment, then back to me. “The truth?”

“No. Lie to me.”

She grins. “Okay, look, I shouldn’t have done it. It was wrong—a big mistake. Huge.”

“Absolutely.” I drill her with my eyes. “Now tell me why you did it.”

“There was something I wanted to buy, and I was just a few hundred short with no way to get more. I saw your wallet and the cash sticking out. You really shouldn’t do that, by the way. You’re just asking to be robbed.”

“Thanks for the tip. You still haven’t said why you did it.”

She shrugs. “It was an impulse, really.”

“You’ve done it before?”

“Not since high school.”

“And what made you give in to the impulse this time?”

“A motorcycle.”

“A motorcycle?”

“I wanted to buy one. Guess he sold it by now.”

“Why did you want to buy a motorcycle?”

“To ride. Why is everyone surprised at that?”

“You ride?”

“I know how, yes.”

I tilt my head. “You’ve had a bike before?”

“Well, no, not exactly. Duck won’t let me.”

“Why not?”

“None of your business.”

“I’m betting it’s because he didn’t want you to kill yourself. Am I right?”

She shrugs. For some reason a shiver runs up my spine and I picture her lying in the road, her body twisted and the bike on its side, parts strewn all over. It’s just a flash before I force it away, closing my eyes. That was Gillian, not this girl. Don’t think about it. Don’t picture the scene in your head.

God, it’s been a year since I’ve let myself remember that horrible scene. My hand shakes as I reach for my cup and chug down the remainder, then stand, tossing some bills on the table for a tip. “You ready?”

Evelyn stares up at me like I’ve grown two heads. “Sure. You okay?”

“Fine. Let’s go.”

I pay the tab at the register. Luckily, it’s Tony, the owner, who takes my money and not Patty.

“How was everything tonight?” he asks.

“Great. Thanks.”

I hold the door for Evelyn, and we walk to my truck. Once I start it up and pull onto the highway, she twists her body toward mine.

“You’re a lot like Duck.”

Great, she’s comparing me to her father. “Probably so.”

“When he’s done with a topic, he does the same thing.”

I cut to the chase. “Something you want to ask me?”

“Yes. What were you thinking back there? Suddenly you just... shut down.”

I shake my head. “Doesn’t matter.”

“Yes, it does.”

My phone rings, saving me from having to explain further, because I'm coming to realize Evelyn is not the kind to let a brush-off stop her.

I put it to my ear. "Yeah?"

"Heard you brought back company." It's Trez.

"Yep."

"Where you keepin' her?"

"My place. Why?"

"Just wondered. How's that gonna go?"

"We'll find out. How'd everything go with the Denver run?"

"Fine."

"No problems?"

"Nope."

"Okay. Good. Anything else?"

"Nope."

"Hey, tell one of the prospects I need him to go shopping for groceries for me and deliver them to the house. I'll text a list. Who's available?"

"Paco."

"He'll do. Talk to you later."

I disconnect and make the turn that leads up the road into the mountains to my place. When I pull in the drive a couple minutes later, Evelyn peers out the window.

"Wow. This is your house?"

I shut off the truck and stare up at the place. I never thought of it as wow worthy, but I'm glad she thinks so. "Yep. Come on."





## CHAPTER TEN

*Evelyn—*

From the moment we turn, the fantastic landscaping along the circular drive draws me in. Rock parks, and I gaze up at a log house. “It’s beautiful.”

“Thanks.” He shoulders his driver door open. “Come on.”

I climb out and breathe in the fresh mountain air.

Rock grabs my suitcase, and I follow him through a back door that comes into a kitchen with a big dining area adjacent.

He strides through it and into a huge front room. Soaring windows spotlight the view. I observe the lights of Durango twinkling in the distance like little diamonds in midnight blue velvet.

A set of sliders leads out of the dining area, and I move to them. There’s a massive deck at the back of the house that overlooks a valley with a river sparkling in the moonlight.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Rock asks from over my shoulder.

I tilt my head. “No, it sucks.”

He grins at my smartass comment. He moves to the refrigerator and grabs out two bottles of water, tossing me one. “Come on. I’ll show you your room.”

I follow him upstairs and down a hall. We pass a couple of doors, and he opens one.

“This is my daughter’s old bedroom. I thought you’d be comfortable here. There’s a bathroom through there.”

I look past him to see a pretty, feminine room. “Yes. This will be fine.”



“The one across the hall was my son’s before he moved out, and the one at the end of the hall facing the back of the house is mine.”

He sets my suitcase down, and I drop my backpack and purse on the bed.

“You need anything?”

“No, I’ll be fine.”

“I’m gonna be in the garage working on my bike for a while.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll probably be gone when you get up in the morning, but feel free to help yourself to whatever’s in the fridge. I’ll get more groceries tomorrow.”

“Thanks. I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

“Great.”

“Where are you going so early?”

“Got some business to take care of. I’ll probably be gone most of the day.”

“Okay. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Evelyn.”

After he walks down the hall, I close the door and browse through the few personal items left in the room. A bulletin board hangs on the wall, the kind with crisscross ribbons and pictures and concert ticket stubs tucked inside. I lean closer and study what photos remain. There are several of a group of girls. One stands out; with her long blonde hair, she’s a dead ringer for Rock. She must be his daughter. She’s pretty, with a happy smile. Her friends are making silly faces in some of the photos. They look like the kind of friends I always longed for growing up, but the town I grew up in was so small that there

were only forty-four kids in my graduating class, and none of them wanted to have anything to do with some dirty biker's daughter. I was basically a pariah.

*Don't let it get to you, Ev. Let it go. Fate didn't hand you that kind of life.*

I move to the bed and unpack the things I hastily threw in my bag, storing them in the empty dresser drawers. Then I dig out a loose fitting tank and some yoga pants and dress for bed.

I climb in, finding it cozy, and play on my phone for a bit until it lights up with a text.

**Duck: U speaking to me yet?**

**Me: Yes. Sorry I didn't say goodbye. I was pissed**

**Duck: Where r u?**

**Me: His house**

**Duck: u ok honey?**

**Me: Fine. Settled in his spare room**

**Duck: Good. Miss u already baby girl**

**Me: Miss u 2**

**Duck: Keep me posted**

**Me: I will. Night Daddy**

I set my phone on the nightstand and stretch out in the bed. I'm exhausted, but my mind is running a mile a minute. I'm in a strange bed in a strange house with a strange man at the end of the hall. As far as I know, we're the only two here. It's a weird feeling, but maybe I've watched too many murder mysteries.

I sit up and grab my purse, digging out my sleeping pills. I usually only use them when it storms outside. Lightning has always terrified me. I shake one out and pop it to the back of my throat, swallowing it down with some water.

I close my eyes, roll to my side, tuck my hands under my face, and try not to think about any of that. Rock would never hurt me. My father and the entire Iron Death MC would come for him if he did.

Besides, Rock is nothing like Malik. With his intense highs and lows, Malik was probably bi-polar. He was totally unpredictable. I never knew where I stood with him.

I don't sense any of that from Rock. He doesn't seem volatile. He seems like the kind of man who will tell you straight out what he wants, what he expects. You know what you get from him. There's a certain comfort and safety in that. I won't ever have to wonder with a man like him. He and Malik are night and day in that regard.

I let my mind settle on that comforting fact. Before I know it, I slip into blessed sleep.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

*Rock—*

I pause in the kitchen to grab a beer before I head to the garage. The liquid is cool on my throat, and I lean back against the sink, taking a long drink.

Footsteps and the sound of drawers opening and closing carry to me from upstairs. Soon it quiets, and I hear the bed creak. Evelyn is probably settling in.

I stare at the ceiling, trying not to imagine what she's wearing. *Talk about leaving my comfort zone.* I haven't had a woman in this house since Lola moved out. That's been several years now. And I've never had one in the bed I shared with Gillian. Not that I would. For me, that's a line I'll never cross. I'm no monk. I don't claim to be, but some things, at least in my mind, are sacred.

I stride out to the attached garage and sit on the overturned bucket in front of my bike. I've got an oil leak, and I'm determined to find it before I drive it another mile tomorrow. Since I've called an early meeting, that means I've got to get it fixed. I reach for my tools and start taking off the primary cover.

Lola's conversation with me this morning plays in my head. I know I've been alone for far too long, like she insisted, but since the accident, I just haven't been able to even envision getting serious with anyone else... until today.

The image of Evelyn and the look on her face when I first confronted her in that quick stop flash through my mind. The way she stared at me with those big brown eyes. Lord, she was stunning. I felt a reaction run up from the palm of my hand

and zing along my nerve endings, straight to my brain, and farther, to the base of my spine and into my hardening dick.

I haven't had a reaction that strong to a woman since Gillian.

I never thought I would again.

The time and place and way it happened shocked me most of all. I wasn't expecting it. I just turned and there she was, my wallet in her hand, pickpocketing me like a thief. I reacted, pure and simple, and before I realized what I was doing, I had her by the throat.

Her soft skin under my callused hand... holy shit, it was like a bolt of lightning hitting me out of the blue.

I swear to God, it was like my soul recognized hers. Like I'd been looking for her all my life, and there she was, staring back at me in the beer aisle of all places, with the refrigerated cases backlighting her stunning face.

Christ, I'm losing it. I haven't had a woman in months, and I'm going stark raving mad.

I drag a hand down my face. I need sleep. I haven't been sleeping well. That's all this is. Things will look different in the morning. Evelyn will look different in the morning. She'll be just another chick again. I'll go to the clubhouse, grab the first girl I see, fuck her three ways to Sunday, and everything will fall into its rightful place.

Yeah, that's what I'll do, right after Church tomorrow.

I strain against the wrench and try to convince myself it isn't a lie.

Finally, the nut loosens, and the socket wrench slips. Before I can catch myself, my hand jams against the bike, and I slice the skin on the palm of my hand at the base of my thumb.

*Motherfucker!*

I fling the tool across the garage with a clatter and jump to my feet. Pain sears up my arm, and I stomp my boot. Jesus Christ, that fucking hurts.

I grab my hand, blood already dripping on the garage floor.

Son-of-a-bitch.

I trudge inside to the kitchen sink and flip on the tap to run water on the wound, accidentally knocking over glasses in the sink with a loud clatter. The water runs pink with my blood, the wound still oozing. I grab a dishtowel from a nearby drawer and apply pressure. It doesn't take long for my blood to stain the fabric red.

My hands are covered in grease and I know I have to clean the wound, so I bite the bullet and pour some dish soap in my palm and wash. The burning is so intense I hiss in a breath, my jaw clenching. *Goddamn*. It didn't hurt this bad when it happened. I rinse quickly and grab the dishtowel, pressing it firm.

Footsteps skip down the stairs.

“Are you okay?”

I twist to see Evelyn standing in the archway. My eyes skate down her body. She's got on a loose fitting tank that exposes the sides of her braless breasts, the nipples clearly outlined. Even without a bra, those beautiful tits are high and firm. I turn to the sink and grit through my teeth, “Fine. Just cut myself. Go back to bed.”

“Don't be silly. Here, let me see.” She moves to my side, and her soft hand lands gently on my forearm. Her delicate long fingers against my tanned, inked skin are quite a contrast.

“It's fine,” I insist again.

Her brows shoot up. “Don't argue. Let me see it.”

I let her pull the dishtowel away. Blood oozes from the inch-long gash. She dips her head to get a better look, and I catch the scent of coconut mixed with some type of tropical flower. I drag it in and almost feel woozy. Maybe I'm losing more blood than I thought. Or maybe it's just this woman who seems to affect me in ways I never expected. I don't know if it's her shampoo or some girly lotion she rubs into her golden tanned skin, but I'm instantly fucking addicted.

Evelyn looks up, and my eyes lock with her brown ones. Her subtle makeup is perfection, but she hardly needs it.

“You probably should get stitches.”

I shake my head. “I'll be fine.”

“All right. Then do you at least have a first aid kit?”

“Maybe in that cabinet.” I lift my chin to the one over the toaster on the other side of the kitchen. At least that's where Gillian used to keep one, I think.

Evelyn moves to it, and I instantly miss her closeness. She finds a plastic bin full of supplies and carries it to the counter next to me, then rifles through it. “These butterfly bandages should do the trick.”

She sets them aside and pulls out a tube of antibiotic ointment and a roll of gauze. Pressing a paper towel to the cut firmly for a long minute, she then smears on the ointment and applies the bandages, wrapping the whole thing tight. She's quick and efficient.

“There. That should hold.”

“You've done this before.”

“Florence Nightingale, that's me.” Her eyes meet mine again. “Growing up around the club, there's always someone with some type of injury.”



“They were lucky to have you. Thanks for taking care of this. I probably would have just kept the dishtowel pressed to it.”

“I’m glad I could help. What were you doing?”

“I was trying to get the primary cover off. The thing wouldn’t budge. When it busted free, my hand scraped on something.”

“How’s the pain?”

I grin. “Not gonna lie. It burns like a mother.”

She chuckles. “I’m sure.”

Her eyes drop to my mouth, and her smile slowly fades. Is she wondering, like I am, what it would be like if I dragged her mouth to mine, if my tongue swept inside for a taste?

I sway toward her, or maybe she sways toward me. I’m a second away from cupping the back of her neck and hauling her body flush to mine when she steps away.

I swallow down my disappointment. It’s for the best. I can’t go there. She’s off limits.

“Well, if you’re sure you’re okay...” Her voice is breathy and sexy as fuck.

“Sorry I disturbed you. Were you asleep?” I can’t stop my eyes from dropping to her outfit and stopping on her chest.

She folds her arms. “I’d just dozed off.”

“Well, don’t let me keep you.”

“Okay, then. Goodnight.”

She pads out of the room, and my gaze drops to her glorious ass. My uninjured palm drops to the fly of my jeans and the growing erection beneath. I haven’t wanted to fuck a woman this badly in forever.

Blowing out a breath, I head to the garage to finish working on my bike.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

*Evelyn—*

The sound of Rock's truck starting up in the morning wakes me. I get out of bed in time to peer out the window and see him pulling out and driving away.

I smile. That means I have the house to myself, and there's one room I'm dying to see. I pad down the hall to the man's bedroom and push the door open with a creak. I peer inside. The bed is big and unmade. I can't resist moving to the side, taking the pillow in my hand, and bringing it to my nose.

I inhale his scent and close my eyes. I imagine him naked in this bed, and a zing shoots through me. I drop the pillow like a hot potato. *Quit, Evelyn.*

The door to the bathroom catches my eye, and I move across the room to it. My mouth drops open. The place is modern and sexy in dark gray slate tiles on the floor and a huge glass shower twice the size of the one in my room. I pop open the glass door and take in the big rectangle tiles in a matte gray finish. It's sleek and masculine.

Three bottles are lined up neatly in the shower caddy. I grab the shower gel, pop it open, and bring it to my nose. The scent I've already come to associate with the man assails my nose, and I moan. It's a sexy scent, and I instantly want to shower with it and rub it all over my body. There'd be something dirty and naughty about using it. I wonder if he'd even notice his scent all over me when he comes home.

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*Rock—*

It's a twenty-minute ride from my place to the clubhouse. I never got my bike back together last night and ended up calling Darko to see if he could take a look at the gears.

I'm climbing out of my truck when he pulls in next to me on his bike.

"You got the parts you want me to look at?"

I tilt my head back and slam my eyes shut. "Son of a bitch, I left them at the house." When I open them again, Darko is grinning at me.

"Got your mind on something else, do ya boss?"

I know what he's insinuating, and I don't like it, no matter how fucking true it may be. "Knock it off. Don't go starting talk like that around the clubhouse, understand?"

He lifts his hands. "No problem."

I rake my un-bandaged hand through my hair and blow out a breath. "Sorry. Didn't mean to snap."

"What happened to your hand?"

"Cut it last night, working on the bike."

"You bandage that yourself?"

"I had help."

He nods, reading more into it. "I see."

"No, you don't, but that doesn't matter."

"You're in a mood today."

"This girl's gonna be the fucking death of me, VP." I head toward the door, his laughter following me. I spin to face him. "Go tell the boys I'll be back in about forty-five minutes. Goin' to get that part."

“I can swing by and pick it up later.”

“No. I’ll get it. Just do what I said.”

He gives me a salute like I’m goddamn Hitler, and I want to smack the shit out of him. He cracks a smile, and I shake my head, firing my truck up and whirling it around.

I stop to fill my near empty tank and then head to the house. Grabbing what I need from the garage, I load it in the bed of the pickup, then on impulse head inside to refill my travel mug from the pot I made before I left.

With my bandaged hand, I fumble getting the lid off and spill the remaining cold coffee all over my shirt.

“Goddamn it.” What the hell is wrong with me? I head upstairs to change. As I’m passing Lola’s old room, I tap on the door. There’s no answer, and for a moment the thought crosses my mind that maybe Evelyn took off. I poke my head in. “Evelyn?”

No reply.

I head into my bedroom and stop short. The sound of my shower running carries to me. The door to the bathroom is ajar, and I’ve got a clear shot of the mirror above the sink. A sharp intake of breath passes my lips. Evelyn’s in the glass shower, water sluicing over her naked body. There’s a slight fog on the glass that makes her image that much more erotic.

I’m frozen in place, unable to tear my eyes from the reflection.

She pours some of my shower gel into her hand and begins soaping her body, her hands running over every dip and curve. Down her neck, shoulders, and arms, over her luscious breasts, down her flat stomach and the curve of her hips, dipping between her legs. She moans, and I wonder what she’s thinking about as she touches herself.

I stand, hypnotized, unable to turn away. Hell, I wouldn't walk away now if the damn house were on fire. She takes up a rhythmic motion, her head thrown back, her lower lip caught between her teeth.

I want to be the water running over her body, touching every inch.

It's then I smell the scent of the body wash I use. Something about the fact that she's soaping her body with my scent hardens my already stiff erection.

She rests a hand against the shower wall, her movements quickening, and soon I can tell she's on the verge of climax. I stand, riveted, committing every second of this erotic scene to my memory. I know the image of Evelyn naked and panting in my shower will be forever burned in my brain.

Finally, and all too soon for my liking, she throws her head back, crying out, her body shuddering with her orgasm. She's breathing heavy when her head drops forward, and I hear her sigh the one word I hadn't expected.

*“Rock.”*

I'm rooted to the spot. Did I just hear what I thought I did? I drag a shaking hand down my face and slip soundlessly from the room. I don't bother with the shirt, instead backtracking quickly out of the house. I have to get the fuck out of here before I do something I shouldn't even contemplate.

I'm a mile down the road before I let myself think about the fact that I was on her mind as she masturbated. It's then I admit the words to myself. “This could get fucking complicated.”





## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*Rock—*

I return earlier than I'd planned, coming through the backdoor and into the kitchen at just after three in the afternoon. I'd texted Evelyn hours ago and told her I wouldn't be home for dinner, planning to stay away as long as I could, but as hard as I tried to stay in my office going over bills, even shooting a game of pool with the boys—something I never do—I just couldn't stay away.

The house is quiet.

I stop at the dining table and run my hands through my hair. What am I doing here? I should have slept at the clubhouse.

When my fingertips get to my jaw and my eyes focus in on the back deck, I see Evelyn stretched out on her stomach on one of the chaise lounges, sunbathing.

Her feet are aimed toward me, and my gaze moves over her, up her slender long legs to the scrap of fabric that barely covers her ass. Her back is bare. Either she has on a backless one-piece or she's sunbathing topless. I take a step closer, looking for a tie at the nape of her neck. Her long hair is swept to the side, giving me a clear view. There isn't one. The only thing I see under her is the towel she's laying on.

Then I spot the phone, the lotion, and the scrap of fabric lying next to it on the decking.

The sliders roll silently when I push them open just enough to slip outside. She's got music blasting through a pair of earbuds, and I'm sure she can't hear a thing around her.

I let my eyes trail over her golden skin glistening with lotion and the heat of the sun.

She checks the time on her phone, then shifts and rolls to her back, revealing that fabulous rack I've been dreaming of.

I've got a much better view this time with no steam to fog the image. This obviously isn't the first time she's sunbathed topless, because there's not a tan line to be seen. Her nipples are big and brown against her tanned skin, which glistens with sweat that trickles between her large mounds.

I long to close my big hands around them, to brush those nipples with my thumbs, to cover them with my mouth and suck until her back arches, and she stutters in a ragged breath, clutching my head and begging for more.

I drag in a shaky breath. *Get a grip, Rock.*

Still, I can't tear my eyes away.

One knee rises, and Evelyn plants the bottom of her foot on the lounge to lift her hips, adjusting and wiggling to get comfortable. I watch, fascinated as those glorious tits jiggle. I really should announce myself before my straining cock has me doing something I shouldn't.

"Nice tan," I say loudly.

Evelyn jackknives to a sitting position, yanking the earpieces free and covering herself with her hands. "Oh my God. What are you doing here?"

"I live here. Remember?"

She scrambles to her feet and turns her back to me, looking over her shoulder. "You said you'd be gone until late."

I shrug. "Things changed."

She bends and snatches the towel off the chaise, covering her chest. "Do you mind?"

“Not at all. Feel free to sunbath topless anytime.”

“That isn’t what I meant.” She whirls and looks past me to the sliders, but I stand between her and them, and she doesn’t seem in any hurry to close the distance. So I do.

I take a couple of steps toward her, and she retreats an equal distance until her back is pressed against the railing.

“Are you hot? You look hot, Evelyn?” I bend and scoop up her glass, the condensation running down the side. I hold it out to her. “Here, have a drink. Can’t have you getting dehydrated.”

She quickly wraps the towel around her body, struggling to tuck it in without running the risk of it slipping to the decking. “I’m fine.”

I lift a brow. “You are fine. Very fine indeed.”

She rolls her eyes.

“Drop the towel.”

“What?”

“Drop the towel. Let me see you.”

“You apparently already got an eyeful.”

“Let’s call it payback for that stunt you pulled in the quick stop.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“As a heart attack.”

Our eyes lock and suddenly neither of us can look away. I lift a brow, waiting, daring her to do it. Her chin comes up and those soft lips I’m dying to kiss part.

She pulls the towel loose, opening the front and revealing herself to my hot gaze. She lets me look my fill before she closes it again.

I smile and stroke the back of my finger along her jaw, catching a droplet of sweat. I really should let her get inside out of the sun. “You know what would help that? A cool shower.”

I watch her swallow. “Yes. A shower.”

“Feel free to use the one in my room anytime. I think you’ll find it roomier.”

“Yours?”

“And help yourself to any of my products.” I lean forward and smell her forehead. “I like my scent on you.” When I pull back, her eyes have widened. She knows I know.

“T-thank you.” She moves to slip past me, and this time I let her go.

She grabs up her tiny string bikini top and her phone and hightails it through the sliders, then practically runs toward the stairs.

My laughter follows her.

When I come in from the garage later that night, covered in grease and starving, I see Evelyn sitting at the table tapping out a text. The smell of something cooking hits my nose, and I glance to the stovetop where smoke trails from something in a fry pan. “You cooking something?”

“Oh shit.” Evelyn jumps to her feet, dropping her phone on the table and dashes to the stove, yanking the skillet off the burner. She grabs the spatula and flips the items onto a plate. Burnt black on one side.

“What were they?” I lean closer to look.

“Grilled cheese.” Her shoulders deflate. “Damn it.”

“You do this often?”

“What? Cook?”

I grin. “No. Burn shit.”

She huffs out a breath. “*No*. I was just... distracted.”

“Um hmm.” I move past her.

“What?” She whirls on me, her hand landing on her hip.  
“I’m a good cook.”

“Guess we’ll find out when the boys come over for poker.  
Can’t wait to taste those pot roast sandwiches of yours.”

“They’re delicious.” Her chin comes up, challenging me to deny it.

“You say so, babe.”

“I’m not your babe,” she snaps.

“Thank God,” I mutter under my breath, but she hears it.

“What was that?”

“Nothing. Goin’ up to take a shower. When you finish your... meal, feel free to join me.” I grin as I tease her.

“Don’t hold your breath.”



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*Rock—*

Six of us roar up the driveway and park in front of my garage. This is the first time I've allowed anyone to come by the house since Evelyn moved in.

"Give me a minute," I tell them and head inside. Evelyn's at the small laundry closet between the garage and the kitchen, bent over putting wet clothes in the dryer.

I stare at her legs in the short shorts she's wearing. Last thing I want is every one of the guys checking her out. Before the night is over, I may have to knock some heads.

She twists when I come in. "Hey."

"Hey."

She catches my look. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Why don't you go put some clothes on?"

She lifts a brow. "Are you looking at my legs?"

"They're nice legs."

She grins. "And that's a bad thing?"

"I just don't want to have to knock the shit out of one of my boys."

"Well, since you put it that way, fine. I wouldn't want you to come to blows over me."

The way she says it makes it sound like we'd be fighting over her. I roll my eyes and she lifts her chin, giving me a knowing smile, and trots off to change.

The boys troop in behind me.

The smell of something delicious hits me the moment we come into the kitchen. I spot the crockpot and can't help lifting the lid and dragging in a breath. My stomach growls, reminding me I haven't eaten today.

"Something smells great." Baja moves to the refrigerator and grabs himself a beer. Then passes them out to everyone else, tossing a bottle through the air to me. "Thought you said she couldn't cook worth a shit, Rock."

There's movement beyond him, and we all turn to see Evelyn standing in the doorway. Her hand hits her hip, and her eyes narrow on me. "Oh really?"

My eyes hit my *soon-to-be-a-dead-man* treasurer. "Thanks, Baja."

He grins big. "Sorry, prez."

Evelyn's brows hit her hairline. "The food's ready, if you're hungry, but if you don't want any..."

"Hell, I want some," Darko says, stepping forward. "Thanks for cooking for us."

"You're welcome. You can have the first plate." She smiles at him, and I get a smirk.

I'm contemplating the ten different ways I can make Baja's life miserable. I flick him a glance, and he lowers his beer bottle, swallowing hard.

Evelyn does indeed serve Darko first, and he carries his plate to the table. He's got a hoagie bun overflowing with tender meat and au jus. The rest of the boys are in line with plates.

I lean against the counter, my arms folded, and watch as Darko takes his first bite, then moans around the mouthful like he's in heaven. He chews and swallows. "Now that's the best damn thing I've ever had."



I highly doubt it's that good and roll my eyes.

The rest of the boys settle around the table and movement in my peripheral vision catches my attention. I turn to see Evelyn holding out a plate to me. It's loaded with the mouthwatering sandwich.

I slowly reach out and take it from her hands, wondering if she dosed my portion with a ton of cayenne pepper or something to get back at me. I wouldn't put it past her. "Thanks."

Her chin comes up again. "You're welcome."

I move to the head of the table and sit. When Evelyn follows with her own plate, I pull out the chair next to mine for her. Once she's settled, I take my first bite. The meat is tender and flavorful, and I'm in meatlover's paradise.

"Well?" She's waiting for my opinion.

"It's fantastic, Evelyn. Really."

The smile that lights her face does something to me. It's nice to see her happy. I'm learning I like putting that smile on her face.

"Good God, girl," Utah says around a mouthful. "You should get a food truck and sell these. You'd make a killing."

She actually blushes. "Really?"

"Damn straight," Memphis seconds it. "I'd be a regular customer."

"There enough for seconds?" Baja asks.

"No. I'm sorry. There were too many of you. It's all gone."

"Keep 'em wanting more, darlin'," Darko replies, pointing his beer at her. "That's good business."

She laughs and blushes some more. I have to wonder if she's not used to receiving compliments, and the thought

makes me sad. I guess I'll have to do something to remedy that.

The boys polish off their food in no time, and soon we're settled down, playing cards. I ask if Evelyn wants to join in, but she declines and heads to her room.

"I like her," Baja says the minute she's out of sight, and I realize he's much more age appropriate for her than I'll ever be. The thought pisses me off.

I glare over at him. "No one asked you, asshole."



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*Lola—*

Memphis rolls on top of me and works his way down my body with his mouth. I can feel his morning wood thick and hard against my thigh. The man's desire for me never fails.

I thread my fingers through his hair, my nails scratching his scalp, and he purrs. He releases my nipple long enough to give me an order.

“Do that again, babe.”

I smile and give him what he wants. He trails his mouth down my round belly, pressing kisses to it. Then he spreads my thighs apart with his shoulders, and I feel that first swipe of his tongue across the seam of my pussy. My head rears back at the delicious feeling.

Then he proceeds to give me what I want.

Once I orgasm long and hard, Memphis moves up over me, his fists planted in the mattress at my waist, and he drives into my slick pussy.

“There's my girl,” he grunts.

“Oh, yes.” I sigh at the exquisite sensation of him filling me. It never gets old with this man. Never. I glide my palms up his arms, the muscles corded and bulging as he holds himself up and rocks against me, increasing his speed with every thrust. He takes me to another orgasm and then comes hard right behind me.

We're both sweating and breathing heavily when he collapses next to me.

He rolls to his side, up on an elbow, his head in his hand, and strokes my belly. “How’s our little one?”

On cue, I feel a kick against his hand. A smile lights his face, and I melt a little more inside. He dips and presses a kiss to the mound. I trace the back of my finger along his cheek. “I love you.”

He turns his head and kisses my palm. “I love you more, sweetheart.”

I brush my fingers through the damp curls that have fallen over his temple. “Tell me about this girl from the Iron Death.”

Memphis drops to his back with a laugh. “Stay out of it, Lola. I know what you’re up to.”

“Is she nice?”

“She’s a thief.”

“What?” Now it’s my turn to come up on an elbow. “No way.”

“Yes, way. She tried to steal the wallet out of Rock’s back pocket.”

“She did not.”

“The hell she didn’t.”

“So, what’s the story with her? Why did he bring her back? I hear she’s staying at his house.”

“She is.”

I nudge him with my shoulder. “Memphis. Spill.”

“We owed the Iron Death a marker. She’s it.”

“What do you mean, she’s it?”

“Her father’s their president, so you two should have something in common in that regard. Anyway, he asked Rock to take her out of there to keep her safe.”

“From what?”

He shrugs. “An ex-member who’s out for revenge. Duck was afraid she’d be used to hurt him.”

I try to put it all together, but there are a lot of missing pieces. “So, why is she staying with my dad?”

“Because Rock promised to keep her safe and that no one would touch her. That includes the boys at our clubhouse. Plus, I think Rock is trying to keep her out of everyone’s hair.”

“She pretty?”

He lifts a finger and waggles it. “Nah, nah. I’m not going there. Only one woman I’ve got eyes for.”

I slug his shoulder. “I know that, but is she pretty?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“What does she look like? Is she my father’s type?”

“Your father has a type?”

“All men have a type.”

“Long hair. Brown eyes. Tall. Is that his type?”

“Have you seen the pictures of my mother?”

“Okay, I guess she’s his type, but don’t go getting that cupid look in your eyes, babe. It ain’t gonna work.”

“Why not?”

“One, there’s an age gap. Two, sparks fly whenever they’re together, and not the good kind. Three, like I said, she’s a thief. You seem to have breezed right over that part.”

“Well, I want to meet her. Maybe they’d be good together.”

“Those two? Ha! Don’t hold your breath, babe. And stop trying to fix up your father.”

I stare at the ceiling. “It’s like you don’t even know me, husband.”

“Christ.”

“I’m going to the club with you this morning.”

“No. You’re not.”

“Fine.”

He looks over at me. “Fine? You never give up that easy.”

I shrug. “You’re right. No sense in me going to the clubhouse.”

“*I’m right?*” He arches a brow at me.

“She’ll be at my dad’s house. I’ll ride over there.”

“Seriously?”

“Well, I need to tell him we’re having a boy. He’ll be thrilled.”

Memphis strokes my cheek. “How about you? Are you thrilled? I know how much you wanted a little sister for Willow.”

I nip at his finger. “There’s always next time.”

“I love you, pretty girl.”

“I love you, too, Memphis, and I’m going to love your son so much.”

He chuckles. “Even when he takes after his old man and becomes a little terror?”

“Even then.”

“Why don’t you just call Rock? Leave this chick alone.”

“My way is more fun.”

Memphis laughs and swings his legs over the side of the bed. “You go for it, baby. I’d pay money to see you two go

head to head.” Then he pauses. “Seriously though, don’t underestimate this chick. I took a beer bottle out of her hand the other day. She was about to go at it with Arlene.”

“Arlene probably deserved it. There’s been a time or two I wanted to bash her head. I don’t know why you put up with having her around the club.”

“Ain’t my decision, honey.”

“You could make her life hell, though. Make her leave.”

“I’ll leave that to you and your soon-to-be bestie.”

I throw a pillow at his naked back as he walks toward the closet. The man has the sexiest ass, and I can’t keep my eyes off it. He slips into a pair of jeans. “Go check on our daughter.”

“She’s probably in front of the TV with a bowl of cereal, watching Saturday morning cartoons, Lola.”

“Check on her anyway.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He winks at me and heads out the door.

I sit in bed and plot my day, then pick up my phone and hit up the brat pack.

It’s early when I show up at my father’s with my daughter in tow. He may not want me here, but he’ll never complain about getting to see his granddaughter. Besides, we’ve got a box of his favorite bear claws from Dooby’s Bakery.

I hand them to Willow and push the door open, bending to whisper. “Give those to Papa, okay?”

“Okay, Mommy.”

Coming in the back door, the first thing I see is my father standing way too close to this girl I’ve heard about. She’s leaned against the kitchen counter, a cup of coffee held in both



hands, smiling up at him. She's dressed in a cute pair of pajama shorts and matching tank top, her long curls tumbling down her back.

But what really catches my eye is the look on my father's face. It's lit up in a way I rarely see anymore. He's looking at this girl the way he used to look at my mother. He's happy, laughing like maybe they just shared a joke. It's what I want for him, what I've longed for, but seeing it still throws me.

The two of them jump apart when we walk in as if I caught them like two teens. My father takes a step back, and the girl straightens, moving a step toward the dining room.

"Hi, Grandpa!" Willow runs to him, the box of treats bouncing in her hands.

He bends to a knee and catches her with one arm, hugging her and taking the box with his free hand. "Hey, princess. How's my best girl?"

She hugs his neck and kisses his cheek. "We brought you a surprise."

"I see that." He looks at the label on the box. "Dooby's. Yum. Are these my favorite bear claws?"

She nods excitedly.

He glances over her head at me. "Morning, Lola. You two are out early."

It's a veiled remark. He knows why I'm here, but I don't care. "It's a beautiful day."

He stands and hands the box to Willow. "Go put these on the table and I'll get us some plates, okay?"

"Okay, Papa."

"Lola, this is Evelyn. Evelyn, this is my daughter and granddaughter."

She extends her hand to me. “Nice to meet you.”

I take it. “You too.”

“You want some coffee?” Rock asks me.

I rub my belly bump. “Off caffeine right now, Dad.”

“Oh, right. There’s OJ. Want a glass?”

“Sure. Thanks.”

I move to the cabinet and grab four dessert plates, making myself at home, and perhaps reminding this girl we’re on my turf.

“When are you due, Lola?” she asks.

I carry the plates to the table, and she follows, taking a seat. “December. I’ve got three more months to go.”

“I’m going to have a baby—” Willow starts to announce proudly, but I put a hand over her mouth.

“Shh. It’s a surprise. Remember?” I hiss in her ear.

“Oops. Sorry, Mommy.”

“It’s okay. Go sit down, angel.”

Evelyn gives her a bright smile. “How wonderful for you. I always wanted a sibling.”

“You don’t have any?” I ask, taking a seat next to Willow.

“No. It’s just me.”

My father brings the carton of OJ and four small glasses, setting them in the middle of the table, and then moves off to fill a mug of coffee for himself.

I wait until Dad takes a seat between Willow and Evelyn, then push the box toward him. “Open it.”

He gives me a suspicious look. “Okay.”

I can't keep the smile off my face, because I know he's going to be happy about this. He flips up the cover and reads the words I had the baker write across the bear claws in baby blue icing.

*IT'S A BOY!*

Rock's eyes flick to mine. "A boy? For real?"

I grin. "For real."

Willow whispers behind a hand, "Can I tell him now, Mommy?"

I chuckle. "Yes, baby. You can tell him now."

My daughter turns to my father. "I'm going to have a baby brother, Grandpa!"

"How about that, princess! Are you excited?"

She nods. "Yeah. I guess so. I wanted a sister to play dolls with me, but Daddy said maybe next time."

Dad chuckles. "Next time it is, then."

"Congratulations," Evelyn murmurs. "How wonderful you'll have one of each."

"Thanks." I push my plate toward my father. "Load me up, Dad. Little man is hungry and kicking like a mule."

He grins and puts a bear claw on my plate, then Willow's and Evelyn's.

"Thanks, Grandpa," Evelyn murmurs, grinning at him.

My father actually flushes with happy embarrassment. "Grandpa, that's me."

I bite into my bear claw and glance between the two of them. Evelyn's a little nervous, but I think that's more because

of me than him. The two of them exchange a smile that he tries to cover with a sip of coffee.

“So what’s your deal, Evelyn?” I catch her mid-bite, and her eyes widen.

“Lola,” Dad says in a warning tone. One I know so well. “She’s here as my guest.”

“So I’ve heard.” My gaze drills into her. “How long are you staying?”

Dad answers for her. “As long as she needs to.”

“What does that mean?”

“Lola.”

“It’s okay.” Evelyn assures him, and then meets my gaze head on. “I just needed to get out of Utah for a while. Club drama. I’m sure you know the kind I’m talking about. Your father owed mine, so here I am. But don’t worry, I don’t plan to overstay my welcome.”

“I like your hair,” Willow pipes in, bless her heart.

Evelyn gives her a big smile. “I like yours, too, sweetie. And I love your sundress.”

Willow smiles brightly, eating up the attention. “You’re pretty.”

“Thank you,” Evelyn replies. “But not as beautiful as you or your mommy.”

Great. Now she’s trying to butter me up. I’m not as easily bowled over as my daughter. Or my father, apparently, judging by the way he’s looking at her. “So, what are your plans for the day, Evelyn?”

Her gaze moves between Dad and me. “Um. Nothing really. Just hanging out here. Rock said something about taking me for a ride on his bike later.”

“Pfft. Boring. I have a better idea. My friends and I are meeting up at the mall today, do some shopping, grab some lunch. Why don’t you join us? You’ve got to be tired of being cooped up here.” I set the trap. I’ll get to the bottom of this girl straight from the source.

Judging by the look on Dad’s face, he’s not a fan of me spending time with Evelyn. Of course, he wants me to stay out of this. Which is exactly why I’m not. If this girl is bad news, I’ll find it out and run her ass off quick. If she’s not, and there’s a chance she could be good for my father, I want to know that, too. I want him to be happy, regardless of what he thinks, but I know my father. He’s self sabotaging. I’ve seen him do it over and over with women since my mother died. One thing’s guaranteed: he’ll screw this up. I plan to make sure that doesn’t happen.

I study the two of them. Evelyn is looking at Dad like she’s wondering if she should accept my offer, and he’s looking at her like he wants to tell her no, but knows he can’t come out and say it. I decide to settle the matter. “Rock won’t mind. Will you, Daddy?”

“No. Whatever she wants. I’m sure you’ll show her a good time. Won’t you, Lola?” He arcs a brow at me, and I know his words are a warning to behave myself.

“Of course. We’ll have a grand time.” My gaze moves between the two of them, then settles on Dad. “Memphis said there was Church this morning.”

“Right.” He scoots his chair back. “I’ve got to get going.” He stands, then bends and kisses the top of Willow’s head. “Thank you for the bear claws, peanut. It was a good surprise.”

My daughter stares up at him like he hung the moon. “Love you, Grandpa.”

“Love you, too, princess.” He grabs her nose between his knuckles like he’s stealing it.

“My nose.” She grabs her face. “Give it back.”

He pretends to tuck it in his hip pocket. “I’ll give it back next time I see you.”

It’s a game they play all the time. She puts her hands on her hips. “I need my nose, Grandpa.”

“I’ll keep it safe. Bye, honey.” He walks out the back door, and Willow giggles.

Once I hear his bike roar off, I pull out my phone and type a text to Josie, telling her we’re on for today, then look up at Evelyn. “Go get ready. We’re meeting my friends in an hour.”

“You’re sure you want me tagging along? You don’t even know me.”

“Well, let’s change that then, all right?”

“All right. Give me time to shower and dress.”

“We’ll wait.”

With that, Evelyn trots upstairs, looking skinny and adorable, and I’m jealous. My hand strays down over my extended belly. I love being pregnant, but I miss fitting into my favorite outfits and looking cute like that.

“Can I watch cartoons, Mommy?” I nod, and Willow jumps off her chair and runs into the living room. She knows how to work the remote, and soon the TV is blaring Peppa Pig.

I can hear Evelyn walking around upstairs. I see why any man would be attracted to her. She’s gorgeous, but is she good for my father? That’s what I aim to find out.

An hour later, I pull into a spot at the mall, Evelyn sitting next to me, and Willow in her car seat in the back. I text Josie,

and she replies that they're just pulling into the lot. A moment later, her car pulls in the spot next to mine. I grin over at Amy in the passenger seat. She sticks her tongue out at me.

We all climb out.

I make the introductions. "Evelyn, this is my sister-in-law, Isabella, and my friends Josie, Amy, and Katie. Girls, this is Evelyn."





## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

*Evelyn—*

“Hi everyone,” I greet Lola’s friends. They give me the once over, murmuring soft hellos. It’s obvious by the way they’re sizing me up that she’s told them something about me. I just wonder how much she knows to tell.

They smile at Lola’s daughter, and one of them—I’ve already forgotten who is who—scoops her up and hugs her.

“How’s my pumpkin?” the woman asks.

Willow grins ear-to-ear. “Fine, Aunt Izzy. Mommy says I get to carry my own purse. See?” She pats the little pink bag with white polka dots that she wears cross-body style.

“That is so cool. I love it.”

We all make our way into the mall.

I’m just window-shopping, since I don’t have much money. I wander around the trendy shop. Amy and Isabella have taken Willow to the purses hanging on the wall.

I’m flipping through a rack of cute summer tops when Lola appears at my side.

“That one’s pretty. You should try it on.”

I shake my head. “I don’t think so.”

“Did you know it’s Rock’s birthday Saturday?”

I meet her eyes, my hand stilling on the hanger I’m sliding across the metal bar. “No.”

“It’s a big one, too. Huge.”

“What do you mean? How old is he going to be?”

“The big five-o.”

“Fifty? Wow. He doesn’t look it.”

“Well, he is, and the guys are throwing a big party at the clubhouse. I’m bringing a huge cake. I suppose you’ll be there, too, right?”

I shrug. “I don’t know. Rock didn’t say anything about it, so maybe I’m not invited. It seems like he wants to keep me away from the clubhouse.”

She searches my eyes and bites the inside of her cheek. “Hmm. Right. I heard about your little tiff with Arlene. Is that the reason?”

“Arlene’s a bitch,” Josie throws out, joining us. “What’d she do this time?”

“I don’t really want to get into it.” I’m not sure I won’t come off as a bitch in the telling.

Lola’s brow lifts. “Well, I heard you were going to hit her with a beer bottle.”

Apparently, the story is out.

At Lola’s comment, Josie hoots out a laugh. “Oh, man. I’d have paid money to see that.”

“Is it true?” Lola asks.

I shrug and go back to flipping hangers with a little more force than necessary. “Memphis stopped me.”

“Yeah. I heard that, too.”

“Is he the one you heard it from?” I ask.

“Of course. He tells me everything.”

“Everything?”

“Okay, well, not everything, but a lot.”

“Would you have really done it?” Josie asks.

“She was coming at me, so yeah, probably.”

Josie grins and looks at Lola. “I like her.”

Lola keeps her eyes on me, but answers her friend. “I think I do, too.”

“Well, thanks, but I suppose the guys hate me.” I pause on a cute shirt that ties under the boobs.

“For what?” Josie asks.

“The stuff about the wallet, right?” Lola fills in, staring at me and waiting for me to confirm it.

“You heard about that, too?”

She ignores my question and asks one of her own. “Why’d you do it?”

I turn and fold my arms. “Okay, fine. I’ll tell you, but I doubt it’ll matter.”

Lola folds her arms right back. “Let me be the judge of that.”

I suck in a breath and blow it out. “I did it because I needed the money to buy a motorcycle. I had all of it, but the last couple hundred with no way of getting more. I saw your father with that wallet of his sticking out of his back pocket. It was stuffed thick with bills.” I shrug. “Guess I couldn’t resist falling into my old ways.”

“Old ways?” Josie beats Lola to the punch.

“I did it in high school. It was an easy way to get money back then, and no one really gave a damn until I got arrested and my father had to pay off a district attorney to get me out of it.” I blink. “So now you know. I suppose you want me gone.”

“Not at all.”

I’m surprised by her reply, and my arms come unfolded. “Why’s that?”

“Because I saw the way you and my father were looking at each other.”

Suddenly, I don't want to continue this conversation. I straighten and glance around the shop, wishing a fire alarm would go off or something. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

She gives me a sly grin. “Yes, you do. When I walked into his kitchen this morning, you two were standing close, and you jumped apart like you'd been caught doing something.”

I shake my head. “You misread the situation.”

“I don't think so. I saw the way he looked at you. He hasn't looked at anyone that way since my mother.” She turns to Josie. “There were sparks flying. Swear to God.”

Josie shrugs. “She's too young for him.”

Lola shakes her head, but her attention stays on me. “I don't think age matters where the heart is concerned. Do you?”

“Both of you, slow down. Geez. Lola, I think you may be imagining things where your father is concerned. Besides, I'm just staying until things die down at home, then I'm gone.”

“Has he kissed you?” Josie asks, eager like she's listening to a BFF's first date recap.

“Of course not.”

“But you wanted to.” Josie points her finger at me like she caught me.

Lola tilts her head. “I'm betting your father laid down the law about you. No MC president is going to let his daughter go off like this without reading, the riot act. I'm betting he told Rock to keep his hands off you.”

My eyes shift to the side because I hadn't thought of that, but now it makes perfect sense. Of course he would have. I

turn to the rack, but Lola stops me with a hand on my arm.

“You can’t tell me you haven’t seen the heat in my father’s eyes when he looks at you.”

I shrug. “Maybe, but I’m sure it doesn’t mean anything. If you’re worried I’m going to lead him on or hurt him, I’m not.”

“My father has been alone for a long time. If you are honestly attracted to him, I wish you’d say so.”

“I mean, sure, he’s good looking, and he’s...” I whirl away, feeling my face heat. I can’t believe I almost admitted to her...

She whirls me back. “He’s what?”

“You know... he’s got a commanding presence, an intimidating presence. I admit that him being the president of an MC is appealing. I mean all that power and yet still he can smile, and it’s like he’s a different person.”

“A different person?”

“Like I could just talk to him and joke with him, and we’re totally normal. Then one of his men walks in the room, and that mask of power drops over his face, and he’s who he is again—a man in command of one of the baddest MCs around.” I shrug. “I’ve seen it with my father. I just never thought I’d see it in any other man.”

“See what?”

“That ability to compartmentalize the MC away from his relationship with his lady, his family. I’m sure you’ve seen it.” I stare at Lola.

“I suppose I have. But he’s not that way with any of the other clubwomen. With them, he’s always that patch on his cut. He never lets that mask slip with them.” She lifts her chin, eyeing me. “He must feel some kind of connection with you. One he doesn’t feel with anyone else.”

“Okay, perhaps we do share some connection, but that doesn’t change things. He is who he is, and I am who I am. I’ll go back to Utah and the Iron Death when things settle down.”

“What exactly is this thing you’re waiting to settle down?”  
Josie leans in.

“It’s a long story.”

Lola cuts her off, stepping between us. “If my father has feelings for you, if he wanted you to stay and give whatever this is between you a shot, would you?”

“Would I what?”

“Want to stay.”

I remain silent. I’m not even sure I can admit these feelings to myself yet, let alone her.

“There’s your answer,” Josie fills in, jerking her head toward me, and Lola nods.

“What? I didn’t say anything.”

“You didn’t have to, girl,” Josie replies, grinning. “It’s written all over your face. You are so into him.”

“Is that true?” Lola asks.

I shrug.

“You know what she needs?” Josie asks Lola. “A knock-him-dead outfit to wear to his party. That’ll push him across that line her father drew in the sand.” She snaps her fingers. “I saw just the thing. Come on.”

Lola and I exchange a glance and follow.

Josie grabs a hanger and holds it up. “If this doesn’t do the trick, nothing will.”

“Oh, my God,” Lola murmurs.

“Have you lost your minds? To a biker clubhouse?”

Lola taps her finger to her mouth. “What if we all dressed up? Would you do it then? You’d just be one of the girls.”

“Yeah, but Rock’s eyes would be all for you, lady.” Josie grins.

Lola nods, agreeing with her friend. “Come on. Give him a push. Besides, it *is* his birthday.”

I arch a brow. “You are so bad. He’s your *father*.”

Her hand slams on her hip. “And I’ve been trying to set him up for over a year. You, my dear, are the first woman he’s been gaga over.”

I hold up a hand. “No one said he was gaga over me.”

Lola grabs the hanger from Josie and shoves it at me. “Well, if he’s not, then this outfit won’t affect him, will it? Let’s see who’s right. Me or you.”

“Ooh. I feel a bet coming on.” Josie rubs her hands together. “Fifty bucks says one look at her in that, and he fucks her before the sun rises Sunday morning.”

Lola rolls her eyes. “We all think that. No one’s going to take your bet.”

“Oh. Right.”

Lola shoves me in the direction of the dressing rooms. “Go try it on. The girls and I need to find outfits. We’ll meet you in there.”

Before I know it, I’m standing before a mirror between the stalls, staring at my reflection. Could I actually dare to walk into the clubhouse wearing this?

It’s a short tight black dress, backless with string ties that lace across the back. I had to have Josie help me tie it.

Lola comes out of her stall in a short pink dress that hugs her curves and blossoming belly. She’s gorgeous.

“God, how can you look so hot in that dress when you’re pregnant?” I ask.

“Is it okay?” She plucks at the hem.

“Hell, yes.”

Her eyes lift to my outfit. “Spin.”

I do as she says.

“Oh, my God. Rock is going to flip when he sees you in that.”

“It’s too much, isn’t it?”

“Nope. It’s perfect.”

“I don’t know.”

“You want to look good for him, don’t you? I mean, it sure seemed like there was mutual attraction between you.”

I shrug and look at the price tag. Oh my God, it’s two hundred and fifty dollars. It doesn’t escape me it’s the amount I was trying to steal from Rock. There’s a symmetry here, I suppose, and I would love to see his face when he gets a load of me in this outfit. I wonder how he’ll react. I have a feeling he wouldn’t like it, not with a clubhouse full of men there to ogle me as well. But it’s not like he can do anything about it. And it would be payback for—what I’ve come to think of as—the sunbathing incident. That alone makes me want to buy the thing just to get a dig in at him. I do have the money squirreled away that I was planning on spending on the Harley I never got to buy. “Fine. I’ll get it. But you all have to dress up, too.”

“Deal,” Lola promises.





## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

*Evelyn—*

Lola calls her father and tells him I'm spending the rest of the day with her and the girls, and she'll bring me back when she comes to the clubhouse for his party.

I don't hear what he says on the other side of the conversation, but Lola rolls her eyes at me. "Yes, yes. She's fine. We'll see you tonight."

We all head to Lola's house, and everyone spends the rest of the day doing our nails, dancing to old eighties music, and laughing. These girls are hilarious. Amy gets up and sings an old Madonna hit into a hairbrush. *Like a Virgin* blasts through the stereo.

We eat pizza and afterward, Lola puts Willow to bed and an elderly neighbor lady comes over to babysit.

It's after nine by the time we're all dressed and ready to go. I've got my hair pinned up in a French twist so the backless dress is shown to advantage.

Lola brings out a huge cake she had a bakery make special for Rock. "I'm hoping this fits in the trunk."

"You better drive super slow," Isabella advises.

"I will. Come on, help me carry it."

Katie and Amy push them away. "Let us girls who don't have big prego bellies carry it."

By some miracle of God they get it to the car without dropping it, Lola nervously following. Then we all pile into two cars and head to the club. Lola, Isabella, and I are in one.

“Today was so much fun. Thanks for including me,” I say from the backseat.

Izzy turns from the front passenger seat next to Lola. “I was the new girl for a while, too. But the brat pack took me in, and I love them all. They’re always here for me when I need them.”

“I never had that growing up,” I admit.

Lola meets my eyes in the mirror. “Never? You didn’t have friends in high school?”

I shake my head. “With the whole biker thing, no one wanted anything to do with me.”

“That sucks. I mean, I get it, but that’s your dad, not you.”

I shrug. “It was a small town. They thought the Iron Death was nothing but trouble. None of the parents wanted their daughters to have any association with it, and that meant me as well.”

Isabella smiles brightly. “Well, you’ve got us now.”

Lola watches my reaction in the rearview.

“Yes, while I’m here, I do. Today has been so much fun.”

“I’m glad,” Isabella replies. “We’ll have to do it again. Right, Lola?”

“Sure. *While she’s here.*”

Something about the way she says the last part lets me know she’s a little miffed at me for qualifying my own answer. I can’t help it. It’s the truth. This is all temporary. I stare out the window and suddenly think I’m kind of like Cinderella—all dressed up and going to the ball—and this magic has a time limit on it, just like my time in this town. I smile and lift my chin. Well, I might as well enjoy it while it lasts.

Before I know it, we pull into the clubhouse lot. It's packed with bikes and vehicles, reminding me that this is an open party.

Lola finds a parking spot, then pulls out her phone. "Let me text Memphis we're here and to bring some prospects to carry the cake inside."

Izzy fixes her lipstick in the drop down mirror. She's a dark-haired beauty, and the red lipstick really sets it off.

Josie pulls in next to us, and we all climb out. Each one of us is decked out like we're heading into a dance club, not a biker club. But at least we're all doing this crazy thing together, and it is Rock's birthday, so maybe it won't seem that odd.

"Gravel is not made for heels," Josie says, teetering on four-inch spikes. She grabs my arm to keep from falling, and we almost both go down, bursting out laughing. The only thing that saves us is when I grab the trunk.

There's a sharp whistle from near the door, and we all turn. It's Memphis.

Lola motions him over, and the look on that boy's face when he sees his wife melts my heart. His gaze sweeps over her from top to bottom, pausing on her adorable baby bump.

"You've never looked sexier, baby girl." Then he takes her in his arms and bends her back until one leg lifts, and she clutches him.

"Don't drop me," she gasps.

He kisses her, then lifts his head to stare into her face. "Have I ever dropped you?"

Josie fans herself with her clutch. "I really need to get me one of those."

I laugh. “Well, there’s a clubhouse full just beyond those doors, and in that little dress, I’m guessing you can have your pick.”

“Girl, ain’t nobody gonna look twice at me once you walk in.”

I smack her arm. “Shut up. You’re gorgeous.”

Two prospects walk out the door and stare around the parking lot. Memphis turns and emits another sharp whistle, motioning them over.

Lola pops the trunk, and Memphis jerks his chin to the men. “Carry it in the side door. You drop it, you’re fucking dead men.”

They carefully lift it out and shuffle slowly toward the side of the building.

Memphis tucks his wife against his side and leads the way in. “Come on, girls. Ladies in hot dresses drink free tonight.”

We giggle and follow him inside.

Music throbs through the air the minute we’re through the door. The place is packed, and we fall in a line behind Memphis’s broad shoulders as he makes a path for us to the bar.

Lola leans to shout something in his ear that sounds like take us to my father. We make our way through the crowd to the far end of the bar, where I see Rock holding court with his officers around him and several of the club girls hanging on him.

Darko yanks Arlene off Rock, but not before I see him do it. I have to give the man credit for trying to protect his president and head off the drama. Lola steps forward and gives her father a hug and kiss on his cheek.

“Happy birthday, Daddy.” Then she steps out of the way, and his eyes hit me, sweeping down my length and back up. I do a little spin, holding my hands at my shoulders.

“Do I look all right?”

Rock stands from his barstool, the club girls forgotten. “You look amazing. C’mere.”

I move to him. “I understand it’s your birthday today, so I thought I’d dress up.”

“You’re stunning, and not a tan line in sight.” His brow lifts as he smiles.

I grin back. “I do hate tan lines.”

“I remember.” His eyes sweep down again and linger on my breasts for a second, and all I can think about is dropping that towel and standing topless before him on his deck.

The heat in his eyes tells me he’s remembering it, too.

“Let’s find a table. Come on.” He takes my hand and leads the group through the crowd. There’s a bunch of tables pushed together off to the side of the big room and with a jerk of his chin, the partygoers sitting there clear out, taking their drinks with them.

Rock takes a seat at the end, pulling a chair out for me to sit next to him. Then he motions over a prospect from behind the bar, who hurries over.

“Yes, sir?”

“Take everyone’s drink order.”

The kid pulls his phone from his pocket and makes his way around the table, starting with me.

“Um.” I hesitate, wondering what mixers they have.

Rock helps me out. “What’s your favorite drink?”

“A lemon drop martini.”

“What’s in it?” the prospect asks.

“Citron Vodka, Orange Liquor, Triple Sec, and Lemon liquor.”

The kid taps out a note into his phone of everything I tell him.

Rock grabs the kid’s sleeve in his fist. “If you don’t have all that, go get it. Understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

He moves on down the table, taking orders.

Rock covers my hand with his. “Thanks for coming. And thanks for going to all the trouble of dressing up so pretty.”

“Are you pleased?”

“Definitely.”

“I thought you might be upset I’m dressed like this.”

“Any other night, hell yes. But since it’s my birthday, and I’ve already had a couple shots and I’m feeling mellow, I’m going to enjoy it.” He leans closer to me. “But any guy in here lays a hand on you, it’s gonna ruin my mood cause I’m gonna have to kill him. Then I’m gonna have to bury the body.”

“Total mood killer.” I giggle.

He flashes his teeth at me. “Exactly. And who wants that? So do me a favor and don’t smile at anyone else. Promise?”

“Promise.”

Soon our drinks arrive, and I sip mine.

“How is it?” Rock asks. “Did they get it right?”

My laugh is throaty. “And if they didn’t?”

“Then heads will roll.”

“It’s delicious.”

“Good.”

He takes my hand, and his thumb rubs over my knuckles. “Did you have a good day? Did my daughter give you a hard time?”

“It was a wonderful day, and no, Lola is the best.”

“Good. And the rest of the brat pack? Did they treat you nice?”

“They’re all great. It was a fun day.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed yourself.”

“Were you worried?”

He chuckles. “A bit. Yeah.”

“And how was your day, birthday boy?”

He moves his hand to my back, stroking his fingertips over my bare skin, taking advantage of all that the backless dress exposes. “Boring. Sat around here for most of it.”

“We never got to take that bike ride.”

“No, we didn’t.”

“Maybe tomorrow?”

He nods, his eyes following his trailing fingertips that send tingles along my skin. “Bet on it.”

“So, this is a big birthday for you, huh?” I stare up at all the decorations and the 50 signs dangling from the ceiling.

He rolls his eyes. “Good of them to broadcast it, huh?”

“You look good for your age, old man,” I tease.

With a hooked finger, he snaps one of the crisscross ties against my skin with a sting. “Watch it, darlin’. I’m still in my prime.”

“I can see that.”



Many of the girls get up and move through the crowd, mingling.

Lola and Memphis stand and move to the bar. She makes a face at Darko like she wants him to take the hint and follow. She's only drinking juice and her ol' man is hovering over her, staying close to her side all night.

Darko glances over to us, and then follows, his chair scraping as he stands.

Once he disappears into the crowd, Rock's eyes meet mine. He stares at me like he can read every thought, every secret I try to hide. His blue eyes darken. He has such an intimidating presence, but right now I feel that entire façade dropping away, like he's letting the mask he wears slip to reveal the lonely man underneath.

The clubhouse is loud and crowded, but it suddenly feels like Rock and I are the only ones in it.

I finally tear my gaze away and clear my throat. "These parties get pretty wild, huh?"

"Any excuse for a party with this bunch. I'm sure it's the same with the Iron Death. If we didn't indulge the men on occasion, there'd be an insurrection. I'm sure your father is the same way. What we do in this business carries a ton of stress with it. Gotta let the boys blow off steam."

"Do you ever wish you could escape these things?"

"All the time." His statement draws my gaze back to his. He holds my eyes a long moment as if contemplating something, then reaches out and grabs the legs of my chair and, in one quick jerk, drags it around to face him until my knees are between his spread ones.

It startles a gasp of surprise out of me.

Rock leans forward, his elbows on his knees, bringing his broad shoulders and head so close I can hardly breathe. I'm sure we're attracting attention, but I can't look away from those penetrating blues of his.

"Ever have a one-night stand, Evelyn?" His voice is a deep, decadent, rumbly thunder that shoots a zing straight to my core.

I shake my head. "Duck would have killed any man who tried."

Rock nods. "I suppose he would have when you were younger, but you're a grown woman now."

He releases the arms of my chair and settles those big palms on my knees. Heat radiates into my skin. They move up and curl around my thighs, just above my knees. How much farther will he go? I can't drag my eyes from his, which are right now staring at my mouth. Is he going to kiss me?

He leans closer until I can feel his breath on my face and smell that intoxicating shower gel he uses.

His thumbs begin rubbing circles on the inside of my thighs in slow, sensual motions, and suddenly all I can think about is those thumbs doing that over my clit. Is he thinking about that, too? My heart is pounding.

He's suddenly jerked back, chair and all. The spell broken, I flick my gaze to see some of his men over his shoulder.

"Sorry, Evelyn. Gotta steal the birthday boy for this," Utah says and two of the men lift Rock's chair up and carry him away. They set him in the center of the crowd. I stand on my chair to watch what's happening, straining to see over the shoulders of all the bikers.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

*Evelyn—*

Stripper music blasts from the speakers, and a girl strolls over from the bar. Stroll is the wrong word. She *struts*. Dressed in a black trench coat belted at the waist and thigh-high black boots, she's beyond sexy. Her long blonde hair falls in curls down her back. It's an odd getup, considering how hot it is outside, but it all makes sense when I see her stop in front of Rock's chair and spin the end of the belt in a slow erotic circle to the music.

She's going to dance for him, and apparently strip. I can only imagine the outfit she has on under the trench. But I'm surprised when she flings it off and is completely nude underneath. Her body is fabulous, and catcalls and whistles reverberate throughout the clubhouse. The roar is deafening.

She does some shakes and spins, then as if by some pre-arranged plan, the men around the room bring out neon colored water guns and squirt her naked body as she dances. Soon she's dripping wet, the water running in rivulets down her curves.

It's erotic as hell.

I climb down, not wanting to see what happens next. I'm sure a lap dance is coming, if not something wilder. God only knows.

Suddenly, the stripper music changes over to a recording of Marilyn Monroe singing... *Happy birthday, Mr. President... Happy birthday to you.*

The men are whistling and cheering once again, and I can only imagine what's happening. Perhaps she's crawled on his

lap.

I move to the bar unnoticed, and sit in the farthest corner against the wall.

Eventually the show breaks up. I stare at my drink glass, wishing I had a ride to Rock's place so I could escape all of this. Maybe I could call an Uber. I smile at the thought, wondering if they'd actually show up at the Royal Bastards' clubhouse.

Arlene shoulders in next to me and gives me her best bitch face. "Just so you know, honey, ain't nothin' special about you. I'm Rock's favorite here. That's not about to change."

Is this chick for real? I lift a brow. "Maybe the gorgeous blonde stripper is changing that right about now." Her chin goes up, and I know I've hit a nerve. This bitch is not half as confident as she pretends to be. "Desperation doesn't look good on you, sweetie."

"You bitch. If I had a drink, I'd throw it in your face."

I move my glass toward her. "I've got one right here. Try it. I dare you."

Taking me up on my offer, she reaches for my glass.

"Ladies, calm it down." Darko appears on Arlene's other side and grabs her forearm.

A set of broad shoulders moving through the crowd toward this end of the bar pulls my gaze. It's Rock. His dark eyes are on me, but Arlene is standing here, too, and I can't help wondering which one of us he's coming for.

Without a word, Rock takes my hand and pulls me from my barstool. I guess the blonde didn't hold his interest, after all. I can't help a parting shot at Arlene, so I stick my tongue out at her. "Guess you're not so special after all, *honey*."

I have no clue where Rock is taking me until he leads me through the crowd and down the back hall. Once we're through the doors that separate it, the deafening sound dies down.

“Where are we going?”

He doesn't even pause, just throws the answer over his shoulder. “To finish what we started.”

Uh oh. I'm in trouble. I trail behind him as he pulls me along. Once we're through his office door, he locks it.

I stand in the center of the room, unsure, and if I'm being honest, excited.

He squats by the fireplace. It's already stacked with wood and kindling, and all he has to do is wad some paper up and shove it underneath the pile and light it. It only takes a minute before he straightens, leaning a hand on the mantle to watch the flames catch and lick up the sides of the split logs. His face glows in the golden light.

“I like a fire. Don't you?” he asks, finally lifting his gaze to mine.

I nod, unable to find words. The man is so damn sexy it makes me melt just to look at him. He paces the few feet toward me.

“Want a drink?”

“No.”

“Good. C'mere.” He tugs my hand, leans against his desk, and pulls me between his spread legs until I'm pressed against him. Our faces are level. He drags the pad of his thumb across my lower lip, his eyes on it. “You want me to lay it out for you, Evelyn? I want you. I know there's an age gap, but you're a beautiful woman and I'm a man. It's as simple as that. Only problem is I promised your father I'd keep my hands off you.”

And Goddamn, that promise is getting harder to keep every day. Right now I want to kiss you so bad I can already taste you.”

“Then kiss me.”

“If I do, I know I won’t stop there. I’ll take you through that door to the bed, strip you naked, and kiss every inch of you. Christ, I haven’t wanted to fuck a woman more than I want to fuck you in a long time. So if that’s not what you want, if that’s not a road you want to go down, then you need to tell me right now.”

I don’t say a word. Instead, I cup the back of his neck and pull his mouth those few remaining inches to mine. The minute I do, it’s like a dam breaks within him. His hands grab my ass and pull me tight against his crotch, and I feel his bulging erection—proof that every word is true. That or the stripper did her job well.

The thought makes me break away, both of us breathing hard. “Tell me this isn’t just because that naked girl got you all hot and bothered.”

A grin pulls across his face. “Hot and bothered?” He hefts me in his arms and my legs naturally wrap around his waist. I’m above him now, and he has to tip his head back. He stares dead in my eyes and dispels any worry I have. “No, ma’am. This is all you, Evelyn. Swear to God.”

I drop my mouth back to his, and his tongue doesn’t hesitate to sweep inside.

He picks me up and moves around the desk, then sets my ass on it right in front of his chair.

“Here? We can’t. What if someone comes in?”

“Door’s locked.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready for this.”

“Don’t worry. I’m only going to use my mouth. But if I don’t get a taste of you...” He doesn’t finish his thought but drops into the chair. His palms glide up my outer thighs, his fingertips slipping under my hem, and he pushes my dress up as he goes. “Lean back.”

I do as he asks, my hands hitting the desk behind me. His burrowing fingers find my lace panties and curl into the fabric at my hips, then drag them down my legs, past my sexy heels and off. He shimmies my dress up enough to expose my bare pussy to his eyes.

He leans forward. “Goddamn you smell good.” He spreads my knees apart, his eyes between my legs. “Look at that pretty pussy.”

“Oh, God,” I breathe and lift my hips toward him instinctively, wanting his first touch, needing it so bad.

He dips his head. I watch, mesmerized, as his tongue sweeps over me. At that first glorious touch, I throw my head back, my mouth falling open. He moans, and the vibration only adds to my pleasure. I tilt my head because I can’t resist the urge to watch him work me with his mouth.

I struggle to bring myself closer to him, but he holds me tight, teasing me with soft licks and flicks of his tongue until I’m squirming with the need for more. He teases me, dragging out every sensation and giving the word foreplay a totally new definition for me.

“Like that, baby?”

“Yes. God, yes. More. Please,” I beg.

His hands shift down and those thumbs brush over my clit again and again until I’m shaking and dripping wet.

“So pretty.” His voice is rumbling from deep in his throat. “So wet for me.”



His thumbs spread me apart, and he dips his head, his mouth latching onto my clit. He sucks hard, and I shudder. My arms are shaking, and he uses that moment to insert two long fingers inside me.

“Oh God,” I gasp.

He searches, stroking and curling his fingers until he finds that trigger that sends my hips jerking. I can barely catch my breath before he adds his thumb to strum my clit.

“Show me those pretty tits, baby. Let me see them bounce.”

They are bouncing because I’m fucking his hand. I’m gripping the edge of the desk so hard I’m going to have marks on my palms. I’m not sure I can let go.

“Do it or I stop.”

I yank my dress down until my bare breasts pop free.

“There those beauties are.” He doubles his efforts with his stroking fingers and thumb, his eyes on my bouncing chest as I thrust against his hand. He gets a rhythm going that I can’t fight, and I buck against him out of control.

He leans forward and latches onto one nipple and then the other, licking and sucking until I can feel myself building toward the mother of all orgasms.

“You close?” he breaks free to ask, gravel in his voice.

I nod vigorously, unable to speak.

He reaches up with his free hand and pinches one of my nipples, and I detonate, sucking in a breath and tightening my thighs. They hit his immovable shoulders, and there’s no way to escape the onslaught as he keeps stroking, extending the orgasm longer than I’ve ever experienced. Finally, his mouth drops over my clit and laves it tenderly. I fall against the

desktop, my breath sawing in and out, my body slick with sweat.

Rock laps me clean, every drop as my breathing slows.

I feel soft kisses move along my inner thighs, tickling. Again, I can't escape it because my thighs are still pinned wide. His lips trail up over my mound and belly, then he moves up to latch onto a nipple. He sucks hard again, and I feel another gush flood forth.

“Oh, God,” I whisper, threading my fingers through his hair, my nails scraping his scalp. He leans over me, pressing my back to the desk, and brings his mouth to mine. I taste myself on him. His warm body presses down on my naked one, and I feel his erection hard and long against his jeans crowded against my pussy. He's going to have a wet mark on the front with the scent of my release. I like that, and can't help smiling against his mouth.

He lifts an inch and returns my smile.

A pounding on the door breaks us apart, and we both crane our necks to look toward it. Someone tries the knob. It shakes, but it's locked. I'm sure Rock's going to ignore it until I hear Lola's voice.

“Daddy, come on. It's cake time. I had it made special.”

Rock drops his head to my shoulder. “Dammit.”

“You have to go,” I whisper against the side of his face. “She went to all that trouble.”

“She'll get over it.” He tries to put it off, but I know how much he loves his daughter.

I grin. “No, she won't. You have to go.”

He stares down at me. “You're kidding right?”

“Nope.”

“You’re gonna be the death of me.”

I just grin at him.

“Fine. Wait here for me. Better yet, be naked in my bed when I get back. I won’t be long, okay?”

I nod, and he pulls back off me and moves across the room. He doesn’t open the door enough to let Lola see in, and I’m grateful for that. Pausing in the doorway, he winks at me then mouths *best birthday ever*.

I grin, happiness flooding me. After weeks of this cat and mouse dance we’ve been doing, it’s going to be an epic night.

I right my dress, tuck my panties in the little beaded bag Lola leant me and go in the bathroom to clean up a bit. I fluff up my hair and fix my lipstick. A few minutes later, I hear voices coming from Rock’s bedroom.

“In here,” a male voice says.

“Wait on his bed,” another male says.

“Here, put this red bow around your tits.”

“You’re joking, right?” a female voice replies.

“Darlin’, we paid for the whole night, and as much as you charge, you’ll do it.”

“Fine. You did pay for the birthday boy package.”

“Adjust the gift tag.”

“This thing is huge,” she mutters. “What does it say?”

“Signed, sealed, delivered. I’m yours. Happy 50<sup>th</sup> old man! From the MC,” one of the men replies.

“Baja thought of it,” another male voice says.

“Cute, boys. You really think he’s going to take the time to read the tag? If so, I’m losing my looks.”

“You’re fucking hot, babe. But still, make him read the tag. We want credit for this. Maybe he’ll lay off us for a while.”

“Come on, they’re rolling out the cake. Hurry up.”

I hear them shuffle out of the room and down the hall. The door is ajar, and I peek inside. It’s the blonde stripper. She’s reclining against the pillows, stark naked with a big red bow tied around her tits.

*Shit.* This can’t be happening. If it was Arlene who snuck into his room and decided to gift herself to Rock, I’d throw her ass out in the hall. But this girl? If I did that to her, every guy in the club would see her walk through, and they’d find out why their *gift* was not delivered.

Then I’d have the entire club pissed at me. God, this is so awkward. Do I wait in Rock’s office? What if he takes her up on what she’s offering? He has been drinking. If he finds I’m not in there, maybe he’ll think I changed my mind. I shake my head. This night started out so well, and now it’s a total shit-show.

I go through Rock’s office, intending to leave, but I find Arlene reclined on the couch, a cigarette in her hand, smoking as if she didn’t have a care in the world.

“Did your fun get ruined?” Her voice is filled with sly venom.

“What are you doing here?” I snap.

“Just wanted to see the look on your face, sweetie. Rock will never belong to you. Hell, he’s got a different girl in there every night.” She lifts her chin in the direction of the bedroom. “Think this is Amber’s first trip to his room? Think again. She’s his favorite from The Cheetah Club.”

I can’t bear to hear another word. I storm out with her laughter following me down the hall. I need air. I need to get the fuck out of here. I need to go home to Utah.

The main room is packed, and I skirt my way around to a side door and slip out. It's quiet outside with a starry, dark sky. I pause at the front of the building, peaking around the corner. Two men are talking, but the door opens, and someone tells them to hurry or they're gonna miss the cake coming out.

They toss their cigarette butts and go inside.

Not wanting to spoil anybody's fun, I indeed try calling an Uber. When they inform me, it'll be an hour wait, I start walking down the road toward the gas station at the bottom of the hill. If memory serves, there's a motel half a mile down where I can get a room for the night.

Maybe I can call and ask Ox to come for me tomorrow.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

*Evelyn—*

Twenty minutes later, my feet are killing me. A car drives by me with a man inside who stares hard at me, giving me the creeps. It's the second time he's driven by checking me out. I'm walking past a closed donut shop with the motel's neon sign just two blocks away. I consider taking my heels off and running for it when I hear the unmistakable roar of a Harley. I barely have time to turn around when the bike surges into the drive of the parking lot, stopping dead on the sidewalk in front of me.

It's Rock, and he looks pissed.

"Get on the fucking bike, Evelyn."

"No." I walk around him.

"Do not make me chase after you."

His voice is sharp behind me, but I disregard it and keep walking, flipping him off over my shoulder.

"Goddamn it, woman."

He shuts the bike off and hits the kickstand with his boot. Then he's off and after me in a split second. "Where the fuck do you think you're going dressed like that at this time of night?"

He grabs my arm and hauls me around to face him. I try to jerk free, but he's strong.

"Let go," I growl between my teeth.

"No. It's dangerous for you to be out here alone. Have you lost your fucking mind?"

The same car with the creepy guy pulls up again, stopping in the street, and the man leans out his window. “You need help, lady?”

As quick as a blink of the eye, Rock spins, his grip still on my upper arm with one hand and pulls a 9mm from under his cut, aiming it dead center at the man’s face. “Get the fuck out of here before I blow your head off.”

The sedan squeals away, and Rock holsters his weapon.

Although I’m glad he ran that creep off, I push uselessly at Rock’s chest. “Go back to your birthday present. Leave me alone.”

“Is that it? You’re pissed about that blonde? It wasn’t my idea. The boys hired her.”

“She’s a professional trying to earn a living. I get that. I can respect that, unlike the other bitch I found in your office.”

“Wait a minute. What other bitch?”

“Arlene, the whore who claims to be your favorite.”

“Claims to be *my what?*”

“Favorite.” I lean forward, practically spitting the word. “She also said Amber is your favorite girl from the Cheetah Club. Perhaps you have an entire list of favorites. Well, I don’t plan to be added to it.” This time I jerk free, and he lets me. Maybe my words have thrown him for a second. I take advantage of the fact to spin and stalk down the sidewalk. I just need to walk another two blocks. Tears fill my eyes, and I wipe at my wet cheeks. Great. Now I’m going to look like a fucking raccoon when I walk in the lobby.

The heavy thud of Rock’s boot steps approaches behind me. Before I can look back, he grabs my wrist, spins me and puts a shoulder to my waist. I’m up and over like a sack of potatoes before I can scream. But then I do. Loudly.



“Quiet.” He smacks my ass.

“Put me down,” I shriek.

“Not a chance in hell. You’re comin’ with me. You don’t want to finish what we started, fine. But I’m not leaving you walking the streets at this time of night. It’s dangerous.” He sets me down at his bike. “Now, are you gonna get on the back of my bike or not?”

I eye the neon motel sign.

“You can try, but I’m faster than you.” When I hesitate, he steps in front of me and takes my chin in his hand. “Walking away is not an option. Not tonight. Not when you’re dressed like this alone in the dark. Any other day, you want me to chase you, I’m all in, Evelyn. Now be an adult and get on the bike.”

I cross my arms. “I’m not going back to the clubhouse.”

“You don’t run from those bitches. You have a problem with anyone in my clubhouse, you come to me, and I fix it.” He drags a hand through his hair and blows out a breath. “I didn’t know the guys were gonna do that, Evelyn. Swear to God. I sure as hell didn’t take her up on it.”

I turn my head, refusing to look at him. Maybe he didn’t, but I’m still pissed. Do I really want to start anything with a man who has a line of women waiting to fuck him, thinking they have some claim on him? “And what about Arlene?”

He swings his leg over the bike and picks it up off the kickstand, then fires it up. “Climb on, Evelyn. I’m gonna fix that, and you’re gonna want to see how I do it.”

He’s got me curious now, so I get on behind him. In a few minutes, he’s turning into the clubhouse lot, the rows of motorcycles gleaming in the moonlight.

I'm dreading walking inside, but Rock grabs my hand in his, giving me no choice. "Hold your head up high, babe."

At his words, my chin lifts.

He opens the door for me, never letting go of my hand, then leads me through the crowd and parks me on a stool. Dipping his head, he presses his forehead to mine.

"This is to show you how important you are to me. You. No one else." With a quick press of his lips to mine, he backs away, pointing at me. "Don't move."

I have no clue what he's about to do, and my eyes shift around at the men, some of whom are now watching.

Rock makes his way behind the bar and yanks a plug out of the wall with a jerk. The blasting rock music is instantly silenced. He tosses it violently to the side and whirls on the crowd.

A quiet hush silences the raucous laughter and talking from a moment ago, and everyone turns to stare at him.

There are club members, hangers on, and friends of the club.

Rock stalks to the center of the room and stares around at every face until I could hear a pin drop. His men shuffle their feet and exchange questioning glances. Some shrug as if to say they don't have a clue either.

He keeps searching the crowd, until he stops on whoever he's looking for. He dips his chin, his eyes boring out from under his brows. His face looks damn scary, and I'm glad that look isn't aimed at me.

"You." He points a finger, then curls it. "Come here. Now."

His words are short and loud, slicing through the thick silence.

I crane my neck to see whom he's talking to and every head in the place swivels that direction. Arlene emerges from the crowd to move to the center of the room and stand before him. She's got a nervous smile on her face.

"Hey, Rock. Can I get you a drink?" She licks her lips and tries a flirtatious look.

I fold my arms and cross my legs, wondering what he's going to do.

No one moves an inch.

He grabs her by the upper arm and swings her around to face the crowd, then calls out to his VP and Enforcer. "Darko, Utah. This bitch is banned. I ever see her face on club property again, the two of you will have hell to pay. Is that clear?"

"Crystal," Darko replies.

"Let me take out the trash for you, Prez," Utah growls, stepping forward.

Rock shoves Arlene toward his enforcer, and Utah catches her arm. She struggles, trying to pull free.

"I didn't do anything. It was that bitch who started it."

"Shut your goddamn mouth." Rock points a finger at her. "Not another fucking word. I don't want to hear anymore of your fucking lies." He jerks his chin to the door, his eyes going over her head to his Enforcer. "Get her out of here."

"With pleasure." Utah manhandles her out.

Rock's gaze scans the crowd. "Any other bitch in this clubhouse who spreads shit about their importance around here will get the same. Party's over. Everybody out."

A few eyes shift my way, as if I'm to blame for this, but no one dares say a word. The crowd shuffles out the door until it's just me on the stool, staring at Rock, who's still standing in the middle of the room.

We stare across the distance at each other. A part of me wants to run to him and hug him for what he did, because I know he did that for me, to show me he gives a damn how I'm treated here. It's important to him. I'm important to him, and that warms my heart.

But I don't do any of those things; instead I sit frozen, because I'm not sure where this night is going. I'm starting to feel things for this man, things that may only end with a broken heart.

In the quiet clubhouse, the sound of bikes and cars firing up carries and we listen until the last Harley roars down the road.

Only then does he lift his hand and curl his finger. "C'mere."

I slip off the barstool, drawn to him as if his words have some power over me, a magic spell I'm helpless to resist.

When I'm across the room, I stop a mere foot from him, our gazes locked.

Rock takes my chin and gently tips my head back. "Did I make my message clear enough?"

"Yes." I breathe the word and swallow.

"Good. I don't want there to be any doubt about who has all my attention. Not a stripper from the local club, not a cut slut, no one else, Evelyn. Only you."

"Thank you for doing that. It meant a lot."

The corner of his mouth pulls up. "Good. It was meant to."

"Though you didn't have to stop the party on my account."

"Yeah, I did. I wanted to be alone with you with no chance anyone was going to interrupt us again." Without another word, he takes my hand, and his strong grip leads me down the quiet hallway to his office.

“It’s weird with everyone gone,” I whisper in the silence. He quirks a brow at me, and I quickly add, “but I’m not complaining.”

Rock unlocks his bedroom door and we enter. I catch a glimpse of his big bed against the wall.

He backs me to the door. “You’re looking at me like you did the first time I saw you.” I wet my lips and his eyes drop to my mouth. He drags his thumb across my full lower one. “Were you scared of me, then?”

“Terrified.” My voice is barely a whisper.

“You made my dick hard.”

“You made me wet.”

He nods. “Most will say this is crazy, you and me.”

“Do you care?”

“No. I don’t give a fuck what they think. But I care what you think. Am I too old for you, Evelyn?”

“No. You’re perfect.”

He smiles, and my stomach does a flip.

His hands cup my face, and I rest my palms on his chest. He tilts his head and covers my mouth with his. This time, the kiss is harder, more possessive. He’s not teasing any longer. There’s urgency in him, like he doesn’t want to waste anymore time with games or bullshit.

When we come up for air, I drag in a breath. “I never planned this.”

“You came out of nowhere. I never expected to find someone. I thought those days were over for me. But then there you were when I least expected you.”

“Is this crazy?” I pant as he kisses my neck and nibbles on my ear.

“No. This feels like the first bit of sanity I’ve had in years of crazy.”

He presses more kisses over my face. My body is reacting to his. My nipples are hard and tingling and begging for attention, same with my wet, aching pussy.

Rock pulls back and stares into my eyes. “I just want to reiterate in case you have any doubts. I didn’t know what the boys were planning, and I sure didn’t take her up on it. I sent her packing the minute I walked in the room and found her instead of you. That was not a good surprise for me, Evelyn. It was you I wanted to find naked in my bed, no one else. Understand?”

I nod.

“Say it.”

“I understand.”

He captures my hips in his hands. “So, are we good now? Can we put that behind us?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” He taps my forehead. “Because I don’t want you thinking about anything else but the here and now.”

With that, he takes my face in his hands, dips his head and kisses me. His tongue pushes inside my mouth.

It’s a possessive kiss, as if he’s branding me his. In this moment, I am his—his to control. Giving myself over, I melt against his chest, tilting my head back and giving him better access. Tonight he owns me.

He tugs me toward the bed, and positions me facing it so I’m standing between him and the edge of the mattress. The back of his index finger traces down my bare spine. “You have the sexiest back I’ve ever seen.”

I turn my head, my chin to my shoulder. “Unlace me.”

Rock doesn't waste a second. I feel his light touch at the back of my neck, pulling the string I tied in a bow. He puts two fingers under them and pulls. It doesn't take much for the skimpy dress to slide over my skin to pool at my strappy heels. I've got nothing on underneath.

Rock sucks in a breath. "Jesus Christ."

I wrap my arms around myself and look over my shoulder.

"Let your hair down," he orders, his voice gravelly with lust.

I reach up and do as he commands. Before I can get all the pins out, he steps against me. His palms settle on my hips and I suck in a breath. He strokes slowly from my hips to my ribs and then his big hands close over my breasts, squeezing their fullness and pinching my nipples between thumbs and forefingers.

I moan and arch, rubbing my ass against the hard erection I feel straining against his jeans.

I'm completely naked, and he's fully clothed, and there's something so erotic about that. I arch against him like a cat in heat.

His mouth travels along my shoulder and neck, then nips my ear right before he whispers. "Stretch out on the bed, angel."

I do as he says, reclining on the warm corduroy fabric of the midnight blue patchwork quilt. It feels like velvet against my skin.

Rock works the strap of one of my heels, pulling it free, then does the same with the other. He takes one delicate foot in his big hands, squeezing and massaging, and I moan, my head going back at his tender ministrations.

I roll to a hip, pressing my thighs together and hiding myself from him.

He doesn't like that.

“Show me that pussy, baby.”

I part my legs just enough to give him a tantalizing glimpse.

It does its job.

His hands work his belt buckle and zipper, and his erection pops out into his waiting hand.

My eyes are glued to it. He's well endowed and right now, it's standing erect. He wraps his palm around it and strokes from root to tip, giving the end a twist.

I can't help extending my arms over my head and undulating on the bed. I bend my knee and run the sole of my foot across the mattress enticingly.

“You look so sexy all stretched out for me, pretty girl.”

Rock strips out of the rest quickly and I watch, enjoying every inch of hard, glorious body he reveals. This is no dad bod. He must work out by the looks of his arms and chest.

He puts a knee to the mattress, grabs both my ankles, and yanks me to the edge. I slide down the comforter with a yelp. He takes my hand and pulls me to a sitting position, his other palm stroking my head and pulling it closer to his waiting cock.

“Suck me,” he commands.

I take his cock in my hands lovingly and stroke him, brushing my thumb over the glistening drops of pre-cum on the head.

His hand cups the back of my neck, nudging me forward. I dip my head and lick him. He tastes salty, and I hear the



inhalation of breath he sucks in at my touch.

“Fuck yes, baby.”

I take him down to the root, the crown of his dick hitting the back of my throat and down until I can't breathe. He withdraws, and then I feel that tug at my nape, urging me forward again. We take up a rhythm until both of his hands fist in my hair, and he fucks my mouth faster and faster.

I cup his balls and stroke the skin between them and his dick, pressing and his body goes solid, and he explodes in orgasm, shooting his ejaculate down my throat. I take it all, every drop.

His hold gentles, and he staggers a step back.

“Holy fuck. So good.” He pulls free, and I stare up at his heaving chest and smile. He grins, flashing his white teeth at me. It's a wicked smile that says he's not anywhere close to being through with me. “Are you wet for me, pretty girl?”

I nod.

Wrapping an arm around my ribs, he drags me up the bed. He reclines on the pillows propped at the headboard and pulls me on top of him until I have a knee on either side of his chest. His big hands cup my ass and bring my pussy forward to his waiting mouth.

I grab the headboard and hang on as his mouth works over me. He toys and teases my clit with light touches that have me wanting more. Two fingers slip inside me and find that spot within seconds, like he's already memorized its location. He strokes and presses his free hand against my mound, making the pressure even greater.

I buck, my head falling back and begin to ride his hand. “Oh, Rock.”

“Goddamn I love to watch you get off.”

I tip my head forward and meet his eyes. He's watching my breasts bounce in front of his face.

"You've got the prettiest tits, baby. Firm and round. Bring that nipple to me."

I lean forward, eager to please him. He latches on, sucking hard, then nipping and working my swollen bud. He gives the other the same attention.

"I want these sore tomorrow. I want you to think of me every time the fabric of your shirt drags across them."

"I'll wear a bra."

"Not if I say don't, you won't."

"You want me braless in front of your men?"

"You were braless in front of them tonight."

"That's different. The dress called for it."

"Bullshit. You just like driving men over the edge."

I stroke his cheek and pant. "Only you, Rock."

His eyes go soft at that. "You're so fucking gorgeous when you're getting off."

It's not long before I'm climbing to orgasm quickly and moan loudly.

"Hold off for me, baby. Not yet."

He slows the strokes of his fingers, giving me respite, then ramping me back up again. He does this several times until I'm sure I can't take it anymore.

"Please, Rock."

I feel his erection bob against my ass and know he's hard again. His hands cup my waist and he lifts me, then grabs his cock and brings it to the entrance of my pussy, circling it around and around in my wetness.

A sexy groan rumbles up from his chest. “Fuck yeah. So wet, and it’s all for me.”

A moment later, he thrusts inside me, holding me tight with his strong grip on my waist. The sensation is overwhelming and my mouth forms an O. I take a moment to adjust to the exquisite feeling of him filling me completely.

“Ride me,” he orders, and I do, rolling my hips in slow sensual movements, arching my back and dragging my sensitive clit across the skin at the base of his cock.

The feeling is so good I know right then I never want to stop.

He smacks my ass cheek. “Faster.”

But I only smile and disobey his command, shaking my head, and giving him a taste of his own medicine.

He grins, but he’s having none of that. With a tight arm around my waist, he rolls us both until he’s over me, pinning me to the bed with his hard body.

His gaze deepens and I feel a rush of warmth flood my pussy.

He spreads his knees, moving my thighs apart even farther, then hooks an arm under each knee, pressing them forward until I’m totally immobilized. Then he grins that wicked grin of his, letting me know he’s got me now. Anyway, he wants me, fast, slow, shallow, deep. I can’t do a thing about it but submit.

But it is his birthday, so I don’t mind giving him whatever he wants.

He strokes in and out in long slow swipes until I’m desperate for more, only when I beg him please, does he finally give me what I want, increasing his pace and thrusts until his body is slick with sweat, and my pussy is dripping for

him, coating him fully. The sensation is so fucking good, I don't ever want him to stop. Somehow, the words slip out of my mouth in a breathy mantra. "Don't ever stop. Don't ever stop."

That only urges him on until his whole body is shaking, on the verge of exploding in orgasm. And then we both come hard. I cry out, and he grunts.

We're both breathing hard when my arms go around him, and he collapses on top of me. He flips off me, his chest heaving. I watch and trail the back of my hand down his slick skin. I want to rub my nipples across that chest. I want to drag them teasingly across his skin.

My sweating body is chilled and misses his warmth, so I roll and lay across that chest that so beckons me. His arms go around me, banding me to him. A feeling shoots through me from my heart to my brain. It tells me I'm home. I finally found my safe spot. It's here, held in his arms, listening to his heartbeat under my ear, feeling his hands stroke my spine. This is my magic juju, my perfect drug, my everything. Here. This spot.

I close my eyes.

I don't ever want to leave it.

But fate is a bitch and I'm afraid she's not done with me yet. Somewhere out there is Malik, and I fear he's not done with me yet, either.

As if he senses something, Rock presses his lips to my forehead. "Tell me you won't regret this tomorrow."

"Never."

"Good. Sleep, baby. I've got you."

My body listens to him like he rules me. I'm out like a light in minutes.





## CHAPTER TWENTY

*Evelyn—*

Morning sun filters in the blinds. Warm fingers trace the scar on my ribs, followed by a soft mouth. Sweet kisses move along the burn line, making my chest tight.

“Where’d you get these?” Rock asks, lifting his head and brushing the mark with his fingertips. There’s a frown marring his face.

“It’s nothing.”

“Tell me,” he says, like he has a right to know everything, to demand everything from me. But this is an ugly story and it has no place between us now. Things have been so good.

I shake my head.

He pushes me to my back, hovering over me, those intense blue eyes drilling into mine. “No secrets between us. You need to understand you can trust me—*with everything*. You don’t get that yet, but you will. I’ll see to it.”

Everything? I don’t trust easily anymore, not since Malik. He saw to that. But this man who I’ve only known for such a short time looks at me like I’m his everything. He makes me feel like I am—like he’d do anything for me, like he’d have my back no matter what, which is crazy because he hardly knows me. I’ve never had this before. I’ve never had anyone look at me like he does.

“Do you trust me, Evelyn? I need to hear you say that you do.”

I turn my head. I can’t bear to look into his eyes and lie to him, and I’m not sure I can tell him the truth. I know how he’ll

react, and I'm terrified of the chain of events that will incur. It's too soon. Everything was so good. It's too soon to bring it all crashing down.

A firm hand grips my chin, making me look back at him.

His blue eyes go soft around the edges. What is it about this man that has me melting inside every time he looks at me? It's like I can't hide a thing from him.

How did either of us ever think this could ever be just a one-night thing? I already don't want to be away from his side. I can't imagine the pain of walking out the door one day.

When I stay quiet, he blows out a breath. "Take a ride with me. There's someplace I want to show you."

He doesn't wait for an answer, just pulls me to my feet.

"But I don't have any clothes for riding. Just my dress from last night."

"Hmm. True. Wait right here."

He slips his jeans on and disappears out the door. I grab his t-shirt from last night and drop it over my head, then go in the bathroom and do what I can with his products and the mascara and lipstick in my tiny purse.

Rock returns in about fifteen minutes, tossing a bag on the bed.

"Here you go."

"What's that?"

"Some of it is club merchandise. The rest I had a prospect get from the Harley shop down the road. It's closer than the house, or I'd have gone and gotten you your own clothes. Sorry, I didn't know your shoe size, so you'll have to wear those heels. We can stop and buy you some boots on the way if you want."



I arch a brow, wondering what he could have possibly gotten me. I grab up the bag and peer inside, then pull out the items. There's a pair of jeans with studs down the sides that are to-die-for, the tags still on them. There's also a skimpy black tank with an RBMC support logo on the front and a similar pair of black panties. I hold them up. Across the front it says *Property of RBMC*.

"Oh, really?"

Rock grins and lifts a chin. "Put 'em on."

I shimmy into them, pull Rock's shirt off, letting it drop and slip on the tight tank top. It hugs my braless breasts, revealing my hard nipples.

"Fucking gorgeous."

I shimmy up the tight jeans and slip into the strappy heels.

"I'm tempted to strip you naked again." Rock comes toward me, catching me around the waist, the heat in his eyes warning me it's still a possibility he'll do exactly that.

I push on his chest. "No way. I want that ride you promised."

"I was thinking of a different kind of ride just now."

"Well, hold that thought for later."

"Fine." He grabs his shirt and cut and then takes my hand. "Come on, sexy mama. Let's roll."

We walk through the mostly deserted clubhouse, but I notice one or two guys at the end of the bar sipping coffee. One of them is Darko.

"Hey VP?" Rock calls out over his shoulder as we move through the main room. "Tell the boys Church is in two hours."

Darko gives him a thumbs up.

I follow Rock out to his bike. It's a beautiful morning, the air already heating up.

He swings his leg over his seat, firing the bike up, then digs in his saddlebag and holds a helmet out to me.

Once I'm seated behind him, he hits the throttle, and we surge out onto the road. We shoot through town and out the other side. Rock takes a two-lane highway up into the mountains. Eventually, he turns off and parks in a desolate place high in the hills.

We climb off. There's an outcropping of rocks with a flat area. He takes my hand and leads me to it. "Sit."

I do, and he scoots next to me. The view is amazing.

He squeezes my hand. "It's pretty, isn't it?"

"Gorgeous. You come here a lot?"

He shakes his head. "Haven't been back since right after my wife died. I came up here to curse God for taking her from me."

His statement guts me. "I'm so sorry."

He nods, but stays quiet.

I want to ask him how she died, but I think maybe it would be better if I just let him tell me when he's ready. "Is this where you and her would come?"

"Yep. It was our spot. We called it flat top."

I swallow at that bit of information. I feel like I'm intruding. "Why did you bring me here, then?"

He turns and looks me in the eyes. "Never brought another person up here, no one."

"Then why me?"

He shrugs. "You're different. Haven't felt this way before with anyone else since Gillian."

“Is that her name, Gillian?”

He nods.

“Tell me about her.”

He picks up a stone and flings it. “She was the love of my life. Met in high school. Thought we’d be together forever. But I didn’t bring you up here to talk about her. I brought you up here to talk about you, about us.”

“Is there an us?”

“I’m hoping there could be, if you give me a shot. And if you trust me.”

“I trust you.”

“Good. Need to ask you something. What do you know about Malik?”

His request takes me by surprise. “Why?”

“I’d like to know what kind of threat he is.”

“A bad one.” I turn away. “He’s the last person I want to talk about.”

“I’m sure he is, but you need to tell me. Everything you know, Evelyn.”

I huff out a laugh. “You sure about that?”

“Yep.” There’s deadly seriousness in his eyes. “All of it.”

“What did my father tell you?”

“That Malik stole from the club and was kicked out for it. Said he wished he’d killed him.”

“Where do you want me to start?”

“The beginning.”

“Malik had been in my father’s club for several years before my mother died, but he really wasn’t on my radar. It

wasn't until Mom was gone that I really started spending more time around the clubhouse."

"Why's that?"

I shrug. "I guess because the house seemed so empty without her. I missed her terribly. She was my best friend, you know?"

Rock reaches over and takes my hand, giving it a little squeeze.

"I wasn't really looking for a relationship. Not really. It just sort of happened."

Suddenly everything about Rock goes tense. "Wait a fucking minute. You had a relationship with this guy?"

"Duck didn't tell you that?"

Rock runs a hand through his hair. "Seems he left that tidbit out."

"I figured you knew."

He lifts his chin. "Tell me the rest."

I blow out a breath. "Looking back now, I think Malik saw an opportunity, and he took it. I was just a means to an end. I think he figured if he got in good with me, he'd get in good with my father. And for a long while, that was probably true. Duck treated him like the son he never had. But at the same time, my father kept me close. He insisted we move into that trailer on the property. At the time I didn't think anything of it, but now I see it was a way for Duck to keep an eye on me." I shrug. "Maybe he had his suspicions about Malik, or maybe he was just being a protective father."

"Maybe both," Rock suggests.

I give him a half smile. "Maybe."

"When did it all fall apart?"

“Things changed about six months before Duck kicked him out. I started to suspect something was going on. Malik was acting secretive, and his attitude changed.”

“How so?”

“He was cold and distant. I guess by then he’d dropped all pretense of caring.”

“Another woman?”

“At first that’s what I thought, but I could never find any proof, and the other guys insisted he didn’t have anyone on the side. It took me months to figure out what was happening.”

“That he was stealing from the club?”

I nod. “One night while he was out, I found a duffel bag full of money stashed under the bed. When I opened it and saw all of that cash, I was stunned. I didn’t know what to do. I tried to tell myself he was getting it as his share of the club’s business, but it was a lot of money, and he wasn’t even an officer. It just didn’t add up. Either he was out committing armed robbery, or he was taking it from the club. It was the only other explanation I could come up with. I wanted to believe there was a reason he’d do such a thing. I thought maybe he had a gambling debt or a drug debt, but there was no reason for his backstabbing double-crossing thievery. It was just pure greed. That or maybe revenge because he had been passed over for the VP position—one he thought belonged to him.

“In the end, I knew I couldn’t be any part of his treachery, and I couldn’t keep it from my father. So I went and told him what Malik was doing.”

“What was your father’s reaction?”

“Duck said it explained a lot.” Rock stares at me, waiting for more, so I give it to him. “He was worried about me. He didn’t want Malik to know it was me who gave him up.

Anyway, they held church and some of the guys came and got the bag of money. They kicked Malik out. I didn't realize it was all going down that night and I was in the trailer. My father meant for the guys to take me out and stash me somewhere safe, but they left with the money, leaving me in the trailer. A while later, Malik came in. They'd beaten him badly. He confronted me, sure I'd ratted him out. I denied it. I was scared he'd kill me. He said as much."

Rock stays silent, but he flexes his hand and makes a fist, and the muscles in his jaw clench.

"I had no intention of going anywhere with him, but he hauled me out to his pickup and forced me into the cab. I tried to scramble out the other side, but he caught me by the hair and told me he'd kill my father if I didn't go with him like a good ol' lady. I believed him. So I went along without a fight."

"Where?" Rock's voice is tight. "Where'd he take you?"

"We bounced around from place to place."

"What'd you do for money?"

"Malik was robbing liquor stores."

"While you sat in the truck?"

I nod. I can still feel the shame of it.

"Why didn't you leave him? Drive away?"

"He threatened to kill me."

"Why didn't you call your father?"

"I didn't have a phone when I was with Malik, and he kept on me all the time. He barely let me pee alone. Psychologically, he beat me down, threatening me over and over. Said the minute the club showed up, he'd kill them. I believed it. He even made a pipe bomb and said he'd blow us all up. I was terrified. He'd question me, telling me if he ever

found out I ratted him out to my father, he'd kill me and they'd never find my body. I believed every word."

"But you did get free. How?"

"We were in New Mexico by then, and he fell in with the Vipers MC chapter in Albuquerque. One night, three of the baddest of them showed up at the dump Malik had rented us. They drank heavily. By midnight, the Vipers left, and Malik was passed out. I saw my chance and took it. I couldn't get the keys from his pocket to take his truck, so I walked up to I40 and hitched a ride with a trucker. He let me off at a truck stop at the Arizona state line. I called Duck. Some female motorcycle riders saw how upset I was, and they took care of me. They waited with me until the Iron Death showed up."

Rock's jaw works. "Did he hurt you?"

I look away. It's the part I don't like to talk about. The part I never told my father. I nod, tears filling my eyes.

Rock surges to his feet and begins pacing, raking his hands through his hair.

I stare at him, needing him to understand. "I never thought I'd be one of those women, never thought I'd let myself be put in that position. But when it happens to you..." I suck in a gasping breath, trying to hold back the sobs.

Everything about Rock is tense as he comes to stand over me—everything except his gentle voice. "What'd he do, Evelyn?"

I can't bear to look at him as the words tumble out of my mouth. "He hit me, usually with the back of his hand, a couple of times with his fists. It was getting progressively worse. That's when I knew I had to take the chance to get out, because I was afraid the next time he wasn't going to stop until he killed me."

“Jesus Christ,” Rock whispers. Then his palm settles on the top of my head, and I lean into him, laying my cheek against his thigh. He strokes my head for a long moment, then finally tips my chin up. “Tell me the truth, honey. Did he make that burn mark on you?”

Tears fill my eyes and spill over.

I stand and pace away from him. He follows, pressing his body to my back, his arms encircling me. I clutch at his forearm. His mouth is at my ear, and his voice is soft. “Tell me.”

I nod.

He holds me as I confess everything, my voice shaky and my body trembling as I reveal my darkest secret. It’s crushing and humiliating that I let this happen to me. “The memory of the night he pressed the hot curling iron to my skin is so vivid it’s like it happened yesterday. And if I ever forget, I’ve got a scar as a reminder. I can’t stop wondering what I did to deserve it.”

Rock spins me, holding my upper arms. “Nothing. You did nothing to deserve the way that animal treated you. Get that idea out of your head. Understand?”

I nod, tears streaming down my face.

“I’m going to kill the motherfucker, Evelyn. I’m going to see fear in his eyes before I do it, and I’m going to make sure he knows why. Then I’m going to make it slow and painful.”

I shake my head, panicked now. I clutch at his cut. “No. It’s done. It’s over. Promise me.”

He shakes his head and paces away. “No. It’s not over. Duck doesn’t think so. I’m only wondering why he hasn’t done it himself yet.”



“Because I kept the scar hidden from everyone, and I never told him any of this.”

Rock turns and stares at me. “Why not?”

“Because he’d react the same as you. Malik has the protection of the Vipers now. There’d be retaliation. Who knows how many of the Iron Death would end up dead because of me.”

“Not because of you.” Rock points toward the western sky, in the general direction of Utah. “If any of the Iron Death dies, it’d be because Malik is an asshole, and they never should have put a patch on his back in the first fucking place.”

“But they did.”

He drags a hand over his mouth and down his beard. “This changes everything.”

“No it doesn’t.”

“Yeah, it does.”

“Rock, please—”

“Evelyn, you mean something to me. No one hurts you and gets away with it. I’m not the kind of man who can let this slide. Not now. Not ever. This may have started as a favor to your father, but I think you know it’s more than that now.” He takes a step toward me. “Don’t you?”

I nod, but everything inside me hates that this good man is being dragged into my shit. As nice as it is having a man come to my defense like my own knight in shining armor, I can’t put him in danger. I couldn’t live with myself if anything happened to Rock. God help me, I’m falling for this man. “I should go. I should leave before all of this comes down on you and your club. Last thing I want to do is lead Malik to your doorstep.”

Rock takes my face in his hands. “If you think I’m letting you leave now, you don’t know me at all.”

“Maybe it’s not your choice.”

“Guess it all comes down to whether or not you trust me.”

“I do trust you.”

“Then you won’t run out on me. You’ll stay, and we’ll figure this out.” He tips my face up. “Yeah?”

I nod, and he presses a kiss to my lips.

I push back and stare into his eyes. “Can we not talk about this anymore? Please?”

“All right—for now. I didn’t mean to upset you. That’s not why I brought you up here. I wanted to share this place with you. I guess I hoped you’d love it like I do.”

“I do love it.”

“Okay, then. No more talk of the past. Leave it all to me. I’ll handle it. Let’s go get some breakfast.” Looping an arm around my shoulders, he leads me toward his bike. I don’t fight him or push the debate further. But in my heart I know, if Malik comes for me, I’ll leave with him willingly before I let him hurt Rock.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

*Rock—*

We return to the clubhouse after breakfast. There are more men at the bar now—probably a dozen—all my officers are here for the meeting I ordered before we left.

I ignore them all and lead Evelyn down the hall. We pass the meeting room. The doors are open and some of the men are already gathering. Good. I want them to hear us, and I know with only one thin wall between my office and it, they will.

I tug Evelyn inside and move straight to my desk. I'm a determined man on a mission, and by the look on her face, I think she's beginning to get a clue the nature of that mission.

"Rock," she barely gets the word out before I crush my lips to hers. The kiss is full of everything I can't yet admit or say out loud to her. She responds with a passion I can't believe I'm lucky enough to have found. Her hunger and lust ignite everything inside me. She must feel it, too, because she clings to my vest, her hands moving to cup my nape tightly and hold me to her. I heft her up and walk her behind my desk, never breaking the kiss. Her legs wrap around me and lock at my waist.

The realization of how much I need this woman washes over me, and I squeeze her ass in my big hands before I set her on top of my desk. I break the kiss and step back. "Show me your tits."

She doesn't hesitate to comply, pulling the tank top off.

I drop my head to suck them one at a time, going back and forth. Then I take her arms and place them around my neck,

my hands having free roam to stroke her naked back. “I want to fuck you. Right here. Right now.”

There’s a tap on the door. Utah sticks his head in, takes in the scene and lowers his eyes. “Boss, we still having church?”

Evelyn freezes and tries to pull her hands down to cover herself, but I grab her forearms and hold them pinned to my chest, denying her. I grin down at her. It’s only her back he sees, and maybe some side boob. And it all plays into my plan.

I look over her head at my enforcer. “Yeah. Is everyone in there?”

“Just waitin’ on you.”

“Give me a minute.”

The door closes, and my gaze locks with Evelyn’s. “Shimmy out of those tight jeans and bend over my desk.”

The sound of the men’s muffled talking carries through the wall.

“Now? We can’t. They’ll hear us,” she hisses low.

“You and I both know that pussy of yours is wet and begging for me.” She blushes and looks away but doesn’t deny it. She can’t, because we both know it’s true.

“Show me it’s not, and I’ll let you go.”

“And if it is?”

“Then you’re going to give me what I want.”

She bites her lip as if she has a choice.

“Pull ‘em down, baby girl. We both know the answer. You’re not leaving this room until my dick fucks that wet pussy good and hard.”

“You’re pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you? Maybe you’re wrong.”

I chuckle. “Then prove it. Let me see.” I see the heat flare in her eyes. She likes the way I boss her around, and she wants my dick as much as I want that sweet pussy of hers. I’m normally not into game playing, but this is one game I will play.

I pinch both nipples, holding them, and lift a brow. She gets the message that I’m not going anywhere until she shows me.

Her hands go to her waistband, and she unfastens the button and zipper, then scoots off the desk to shimmy her jeans and panties down to her thighs, giving me just enough space to see her pussy.

“Put your hands on the desk.”

She cocks her elbows and lays her palms on the edge.

“Keep them there.”

Her mouth drops open at my command. She likes this. She likes all of this.

I brush my fingertips along her slit, and she nearly jumps. I tease her a bit, playing with just her clit until she’s so turned on she’s rolling her hips, begging for more with her body.

I dip two fingers in her pussy, finding her soaking.

“The body never lies, darlin’.”

Her bare breasts rise and fall, her breathing accelerates while I play with her, teasing circles around her clit with my thumb as my fingers find her g-spot.

Her scent goes straight to my head. It’s heady and brings out the strongest instinct a man has.

“Tell me again how this pussy isn’t mine to take whenever I want it, wherever I want it. Tell me you don’t want me to fuck you.”

She doesn't say a word.

I dip my head and kiss her, then lift an inch to whisper against her lips. "Bend over the desk."

I could drown in her big, dark eyes when she looks at me. She hesitates only a moment, before turning and laying her bare breasts against the wood, her arms spread wide, her ass in the air so pretty for me, tipped high and giving me access.

I work my buckle and unzip my jeans, then pull out my hard erection. She jumps when I curl one palm around her hip and line my cock up with her dripping pussy. "Easy, baby. I'm not gonna hurt you."

I bring the head of my dick to her entrance and swirl it in her lubrication, teasing her even more, until she moans and goes further up on her toes.

"Is this mine?"

She nods, her head dipped forward.

"Say it."

"Yes, yes."

I circle the head around the opening, once, twice, three times until she's squirming, tilting up higher and practically begging for it.

"You want my dick, pretty girl?"

"Yes," she whispers.

"Louder. Say it. Yell it."

"I want your dick. Please, Rock."

I grin. I'm pretty sure the boys heard that one.

"Who do you belong to?"

"You, Rock. I belong to you."

“Damn right,” I groan, thrusting home in one stroke, burying deep, until she gasps out. My grip is tight around her hips, and I ease her forward, my cock coming almost all the way out. Her glistening release coats me.

“Look at that. My dick looks so good sliding in and out of that soaking wet pussy.” I pull her hips back, burying deep again, then slide back out. I repeat the motions over and over, hitting that magic spot deep inside her with every glide until her back is arching, and she’s begging me.

“Please, baby.”

“I need this rough and hard. I think we both do.”

“Yes. Yes. Please, Rock. Fuck me hard.”

“Louder,” I say.

“Fuck me hard.”

I smile and give her what she wants, driving into her at a faster pace until the desk is rocking and banging.

I know my boys can hear. I want them to hear. I want to walk in late, smelling of her and let them all know she’s mine. I want them to know without a word being said that I’m claiming her.

I fuck her hard into the desk with her face pressed against the wood. Leaning over her, I take up the unmistakable rhythm I know my boys will recognize immediately. We’re making a lot of noise, but I don’t give a fuck. I hope the whole goddamn club hears how hard I’m fucking her.

I fuck Evelyn harder and harder until she begins panting. Chanting the same word over and over.

“Yes. Yes. Yes.”

Her pussy flutters around me, and I groan. She arches further into me, and then she screams, her orgasm hitting her



hard and fast. Her tight pussy clamps down on me, and I explode, coming hard inside her body.

When I regain my breathing, I drop over her back and press gentle kisses on the side of her neck. She turns her face to the side.

“I love you,” she whispers, and I smile against her skin. Her words make me ecstatic, but I’m not ready to say them back. Some part of me knows I already feel them. She’s burned in my soul. But I’m still hanging onto the fear of losing her. I’m not ready to say I love her. Once I do, I’ve handed her the power to hurt me. My heart knows she’s already got it, but my brain is slower to admit it.

I continue spreading gentle kisses on her neck and cheek, hoping she’ll stick this out with me until my stubborn tongue can form the words I know she needs to hear.

\*\*\*

*Evelyn—*

Rock lifts off me, never saying the words I long to hear. I know this is crazy. It’s all happening so fast. I shouldn’t have let myself get so carried away. I should have guarded my heart better where he’s concerned, but it’s too late. I’ve already given him the power to hurt me.

He tucks himself in and zips up. I straighten, and he kisses me behind the ear.

I reach for the forgotten tank, but he grabs it up, holding it out of my reach.

“Nope. You stay in here topless. That way, I know you’re not going anywhere. I’ll be back soon.”

“You’re joking.”

He winks. “Nope. I’m gonna sit in that meeting and think about your pretty bare breasts in here waiting for me.”

My mouth falls open, but he just grins and walks out the door. I quickly move to it and throw the lock. I can’t believe he just did this to me.

I hear the door in the hall open and close, then a roar of laughter and hoots. My face heats with mortification. I’m sure they heard every sound, every scream, every time I begged for more.

Oh my God. How will I ever face them? But then I realize this was his plan all along. He wanted them to hear us. Why? Because he wanted them to know he was claiming me? If Rock is one thing, I’ve found, it’s possessive.

He may not be able to say the words I long to hear, but he wants me. For now, that has to be enough.

I close my eyes and sigh at the things he can make my body feel. His masterful touch can elicit reactions from me, like my body is his to command.

I can’t believe how quickly I’ve gone from being a thief who pickpocketed him to never wanting to be without him.

How will I ever return to Utah? I can’t bear to be without him. How have I lived half my life without him in it?

I feel safe with him. Safe and taken care of in a way I’ve never felt before.

This is crazy, and if not for the fact that his need for me is just as powerful, if not more, as mine is for him, I’d swear I was losing it. But this feels real. This *is* real.

A feeling like this can’t be some mirage of the heart.

I know my father wanted him to keep his distance. I know he wants me back home at some point, but my need to be with

Rock overrides all of that.

I can't believe I'm head over heels in love with the president of the Royal Bastards.

If this isn't serious for him, I know my heart will shatter into a million pieces. I've got too much pride to hang around hoping for something that will never be. If he doesn't feel the same way I do, I know I'll have to let him go, because one thing I'm sure of, I'll never beg for a man's love again.

We took a risk having sex without protection.

Malik had wanted me to have a baby. I think in the end, he thought it was just another way to solidify his hold on me. He tossed my pills in the trash, but I retrieved them and took them secretly. As much as I want to be a mother someday, I knew I could never saddle my child with a man like him for a father.

But that was months ago, and I stopped taking them when the prescription ran out, and I had no man in my life. I honestly wasn't sure there'd ever be another man I'd let close, not after Malik and what he did to me.

I'm aware that with my age, my biological clock is ticking down.

What if I'm pregnant now? Perhaps Rock is done with children. He's had his, and they're already grown. Why would he want to start at the beginning with me? Perhaps that's why he questioned if his age bothered me. What if he's had a vasectomy to make sure there would be no more children? Could I live with that finality?

"God, way to get ahead of yourself, Evelyn."

Having sex without protection was the height of stupidity, and if Rock isn't in this for the long haul, I may be dealing with it all on my own.

I think of that possibility of returning to Utah if Rock can't say the words I need to hear. If that happens, it might be nice to take a piece of him back with me.

I close my eyes and imagine a toddler with his golden blond hair.

It's a nice dream.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

*Rock—*

The room explodes with applause and hoots when I walk in and move to the head of the table. I can't keep the grin off my face as my brothers give me a standing ovation. I've still got Evelyn's tank top in my fist. I lift it to my nose and breathe in her scent.

I sit and slam the gavel down. "All right. Enough. Let's get down to business."

Once we get the formalities out of the way, I look around the table and stop my gaze on Baja. "Treasurer, how are our finances?"

He launches into a recap of dues owed and monies collected from our various sources of income. I try to pay attention, but all I can think about is Evelyn topless in the next room and how those firm tits feel in the palms of my hands.

I'm basically coasting through this meeting. Baja could be telling me the club was broke, and I'd just nod.

My phone vibrates in my hip pocket. Usually cell phones are a big no during church, but I can't resist slipping it halfway out to see if it's Evelyn.

When I look down and see it's her father calling me, I sit up, my leather chair creaking.

Holding up my hand, I stop the proceedings. "Give me a minute, boys." I hit receive and put it to my ear. "This is Rock."

I listen intently to everything he relays to me. When I finally disconnect and scan the men around the table, there's

dead silence.

“What’s going on?” Trez asks.

“A pipe bomb detonated at the Iron Death’s Clubhouse last night. Two prospects were killed.”

Trez meets my eyes. “My God.”

There’s a murmur of reaction around the table.

“Pipe bomb, that’s some Una-bomber shit, Prez,” Utah grumbles.

“Who do they think did it?” Darko asks.

“Duck is sure it was Malik, and from some of the things Evelyn’s revealed to me, I agree with him.”

I catch my VP’s eyes. “I’m gonna have to rethink this patch-over deal.”

He splays his hands. “National’s not gonna go for it. You know that.”

“Maybe not. But I’m still gonna try.”

“Is there no way to take out this motherfucker?” Utah asks.

“He’s a Viper now—their goddamn VP. Can you think of a way to kill their VP that doesn’t bring us into a war?” I snap. No one at the table gives me an answer. I didn’t expect one. “This guy’s a smart son-of-a-bitch.”

“Then let’s outsmart him,” Trez says.

I look at my son. There are a lot of risks in being in an MC. I always wanted him here, with a seat at the table, and now he’s Sargent At Arms. But that makes every decision I make that much more serious. I don’t want to risk the lives of my guys, but especially my son’s. I have to be careful with whatever move I make next. I know how Duck feels, worried about his daughter. The only good thing is this asshole has no clue where Evelyn is. At least that’s one worry off my mind.

“You think he had the backing of his club?” Utah asks.

“I don’t know. Duck says they want to claim the state of Utah, so maybe. On the other hand, Malik might be doing this on his own without their knowledge.” I run a hand down my beard.

“They’re gonna hear about it. Hard to keep something like that from making the biker gossip mill,” Baja says.

“True.” I stroke my beard again.

“Let’s not do anything rash. Let’s give this some thought, see if we can come up with a plan to put an end to this without starting a goddamn war,” Darko suggests.

“All right. Meeting adjourned.” I slam the gavel down, and the men shuffle out until it’s just me and Darko left.

He lights a smoke and exhales toward the ceiling, then grins at me. “So, your not-so-subtle message earlier—that mean you’re claiming this girl?”

“We’ve got a few things to work out, but yeah.”

“A few things?” He taps his ash in the tray. “Like how to keep Duck from killing you?”

The corner of my mouth pulls up. “For one, yeah.”

“You save his club, he might forgive you. Hell, he might welcome you as a son-in-law.”

“Nobody said anything about putting a ring on it yet.”

“You take her as yours, she’s gonna want that. Probably kids, too. You thought of that yet?”

I run a hand over my eyes. “Nope.”

He chuckles. “Damn, you’re in it, aren’t you?”

“She’s something else, VP. Been waiting a long time for this. Didn’t think it’d ever come again.”



“I’m happy for you.”

“It’s early yet. Don’t start planning any bachelor parties just yet.”

“All right.” He tamps his smoke out and stands. “You let me know when to start that, and I’ll get right on it.” He slaps me on the shoulder and walks out.

I steeple my hands and think about Evelyn big with my child. I can’t help the feeling of happiness that floods me at the idea, but hell, am I ready for all that? I feel like I just crossed the finish line of raising the ones I had. I lived to see them happily married and having kids of their own. Can I really go back to the starting line, and do it all over? It isn’t something to take lightly, and the heaviness of it settles on me. Still, I can’t get the idea out of my head of a pregnant Evelyn, looking radiant.

Fuck, it makes me feel young again. Considering on my last birthday the guys were giving me arthritis cream and prune juice, the thought of still being able to knock up Evelyn is a real boost. I have no idea if she even wants kids. Guess we’ve still got a lot of talking to do.

I stand, grab her shirt, and head to my office.

The shower is running. It shuts off a moment after I enter. I give her a minute, then knock on the door before I open it. She’s wrapped in a towel.

“Meeting over?” she asks, pulling her hair down from the band that held it on top of her head.

“Yeah.” I drop the shirt on the vanity. “Get dressed. Let’s ride to the house.”

Her hand slows. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah. Just club stuff is all. I’ll meet you outside.”

“Okay.”

I shut the door without so much as a kiss. I have no intention of telling her about the pipe bomb and told Duck the same thing. If she found out, she'd want to go home and make sure he was okay, and that's the last thing her father or I want.

I walk outside and light a smoke, leaning against the logs of the clubhouse. I try to come up with a plan, but I can't think straight right now. There's too much in my head.

By the time I'm down to the filter, Evelyn emerges dressed and ready to ride. We climb on my bike and head to the house.

I stroke her thigh. I'm already getting used to having her on the back of my bike. It's been a long time since I've had a woman riding bitch. I forgot how much I used to like it.

We stop at a light and she rests her cheek against my back. I squeeze her knee.

Soon I'm turning in my long drive and we're home.

I'm tired when I climb off. We walk inside, and I head to the kitchen. "I'm gonna grab a beer. You want something?"

"No."

My phone vibrates, and I pull it out. Evelyn wanders to the stairs leading up to the bedrooms. I drink half my beer and read the text from Duck.

**Duck: I think you're right. I won't tell her. You don't either.**

I tap out a response.

**Me: Don't plan on it.**

I finish my beer and stare out the kitchen window. I try to feel Gillian's presence, but I'm feeling it less and less now. Seems lately all that fills my mind is Evelyn. There's a flash of guilt with that fact. I guess I'll have to live with it.

Tossing the bottle in the trashcan, I go upstairs.

I stick my head in Lola's room, but Evelyn's not there. I move down the hall to mine and push open the door. There's a candle lit on the dresser, and Evelyn's naked in my bed, the covers down around her waist, revealing her tits.

My jaw tenses. It's a line I can't cross. Not here. Not in the bed I shared with Gillian. I move to her and hold my hand out. She slips hers in mine, a confused look on her face. Last thing I want to do is hurt or embarrass her, but I just can't have her in this bed.

I tug her to her feet.

"Where are we going? What's wrong?"

"Nothing, babe. I need a shower, and I want you."

She trails behind me. I'm sure she senses my mood, but she doesn't ask anymore questions, just watches me strip.

I turn on the water and adjust the temperature, then pull her in with me. I back her under the spray, then change places with her, grabbing my shower gel. She takes it from my hands and pours some in her palm.

"Let me."

I stand there and let her soap my body, running her soft hands all over me. I turn and let her do my back, and she rubs the tension from my shoulders. I moan and drop my head under the spray, letting the hot water pour over my hair and down my face.

Evelyn's warm soft body presses against my back, and her arms wrap around me. I feel her cheek on my shoulder. "Is

everything okay, baby?"

Her question is soft. I don't want to lie to her, but I don't know how to tell her what's bothering me, so I nod. "Yeah. Fine."

She knows it's not. I can read it in her face when I turn to face her, but she doesn't push, and I'm grateful. Instead, she pours some shampoo in her hand and washes my hair.

By the time she's through, my dick is hard. I'm about to turn her around and take her from behind when she surprises me by dropping to her knees and sucking me off. She takes me in her mouth, all the way to the back of her throat.

It's good, better than good. She's phenomenal. I stroke her hair, urging her on. Soon I'm holding her head with both hands and fucking her mouth.

"Oh, sweet Jesus, that mouth of yours," I groan.

All too soon I'm close, but I don't want this to end this quickly.

I see her hand disappear between her legs to finger her pussy. Fuck, just watching her get herself off does me in. I want her now, but not like this. I want my dick buried in her pussy. But first I want her as desperate for me as I am for her. I pull her off of my cock and up on her feet. Before she has a chance to complain, I drag her warm, wet body flush against mine.

I return the favor and wash her hair, taking my time, massaging her scalp.

I hold her under the spray, and she lifts her face. She moans as the hot, cleansing water washes over her while my big hands move up and down her body. The scent of my shower gel rises around us while I soap her body.

“Oh God, that feels so good.” She closes her eyes and tilts her head back to rinse her face while my hands move over her breasts and down her stomach.

When my soapy fingers move between her legs, she gasps but spreads them wider so I can get to all of her.

Parting her folds, I brush over her clit and then thrust inside her.

She gasps, her eyes falling shut.

“Look at me, babe.” When she opens her eyes, I know she sees the hunger consuming me.

“Rock,” she whispers, just before my lips come crashing down on hers. I’m desperate and starving and give her no choice but to give in to me.

“Turn around,” I demand, and spin her to face the tile. I put her in the position I want her, with her legs spread wide and hands high on the tile wall. My gaze is totally fixed on her pussy.

Over the past few days, I’ve learned how to play her body like an instrument.

I slip my fingers between her legs, stroking them through her wetness. “Tell me you want this... Tell me you want to be here with me.”

“Yes. More than anything.”

I make lazy circles around her clit and keep at her until she’s quivering with need and can’t take anymore, until I know that hot wave of pleasure is building up inside her. I give her no choice but to give in to me.

My free arm locks around her waist and holds her tight. She can’t move as the pleasure I give her radiates through her body. I want her entire world focused on me, on us, on this

moment, just as my entire world is focused on this moment. There is nowhere else I want to be than right here with her.

I don't let up until she cries out, the climax taking over her. She melts against the tile and gives in to it.

She goes limp and it's only my arm that holds her up.

"I've got you, baby." I replace my fingers with the head of my cock, rubbing back and forth, making her moan. There's no stopping the sounds pouring from her.

I don't enter her yet; instead I just rub the head of my cock around her entrance, her release coating me. "Sensitive?"

She nods.

I slip inside an inch, and she moans. I slide deeper, clutching her hips tight.

Her tight pussy grips my cock, and I ride her hard. Her hands don't move an inch as I fuck her. It's good, but I want to see her face. I pull out and spin her around, lifting and pressing her to the wall and holding her pinned as I thrust inside her. I hold her up with my arms under her thighs. She's at my mercy now, spread wide and unable to move.

Her arms wrap around my neck. I look into her eyes, and we move together, and it's so intense I can see tears form in her eyes. Never have I had this connection with anyone since Gillian, but with Evelyn, it feels right.

When I think about my bare cock inside her, I realize neither of us talked about protection or what could happen from this. "You've been letting me fuck you bare. I haven't done this since my wife. Not with any of the others. Not once."

"I'm glad."

"Do you want me to pull out?"

"No."

“Are you on the pill?”

“No.”

We stare into each other’s eyes. “This is as real as it gets, then.”

She nods. “Are you scared?”

I grin. “Not a bit.”

I double my efforts, sliding in and out of her, working us into a frenzy.

My orgasm barrels through me like a runaway train, and I have no time to brace myself.

“Fuck!” I shout, pressing her to the wall and holding her there with my body.

I can feel the muscles in my back tighten and flex as I pour wave after wave of ejaculate into her.

Her orgasm hits hard and fast. I see the pleasure of it wash across her face.

I lean forward to sink my teeth into the soft skin of her neck and close my eyes.

If she gets pregnant, I swear I won’t be sorry.

Afterward, I gently soap her again and rinse her, taking care of her. Then I pull her out of the shower and wrap her in a big towel, grabbing another to wrap around my hips.

She moves to walk away, but I snag her wrist, tugging her back.

“Where do you think you’re going?” I throw her over my shoulder, and she squeals and wiggles. I carry her to the living room and drop her down to the soft cushions of the pit group. I wrap her up in a throw, tucking her into the corner, then drop a soft kiss to her lips. “Hungry?”

“Starving.”

“I’ll make you something. Stay right there.” I toss her the remote. “Find us a movie.”

I make a big plate of odds and ends I find in the kitchen and carry it in.

I scoot in next to her and we nibble on the treats and watch a movie. Halfway into it she dozes off, cuddled to my side. It was a way out of taking her to my bed, but I know this can’t go on. I decide to figure it out tomorrow. I tuck the covers tighter until she’s snug, and fall asleep with my arms wrapped around her.





## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

*Rock—*

We spend the next night in my room at the clubhouse.

The following morning, I wake up to find the bed next to me empty. Dressing, I wander out to the main room. Darko is sitting at the bar drinking a mug of coffee.

I lift my chin to the prospect behind the bar. “Pour me a cup.”

I take a seat next to my VP and a steaming mug is slid in front of me. Lifting it to my lips, I take a sip, then squint at Darko. “Have you seen Evelyn?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Well?” I pause, the mug halfway to my lips, but he doesn’t elaborate. “Where is she?”

“Outside.”

“Outside? Doing what?”

He grins. “Go see for yourself.”

I glare at him. I don’t need his shit this early in the morning. Not before I’ve had my first cup of Joe. I get up, taking my mug with me, and walk out the door onto the front porch. It’s almost midday, and there are several bikes parked up front.

Beyond them, Evelyn is sitting on Baja’s old bike while Memphis, Utah, and he are talking with her over the noise of the engine. In the split second it takes me to take in the scene before my eyes, she pulls away and makes a loop around the mostly empty parking lot.

When she comes back around, I charge off the porch, flinging the black liquid from my mug and slamming it on the ground. “Oh, hell no. Get her off that bike. Now.”

The men’s eyes widen but immediately wave her off, and she comes to a stop. Baja reaches across, killing the engine.

“Get off. Now,” I bark, pointing at Evelyn.

She swings her leg over, looking at me like I’ve grown two heads. “What in the world is wrong?”

“You on that bike? Forget it. Not happening.” I know which bike this is. The one Baja’s been trying to sell for six months now. It’s got a sticking clutch and bad brakes. I whirl on him. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Nothing, prez. I brought it up to show to a guy later today. She saw it and wanted to ride. What’s wrong, Rock?”

I point at Evelyn. “Her on a bike, that’s what the fuck is wrong.”

“It was just a spin around the lot. Have you lost your mind?” Evelyn snaps.

I know I’m overreacting. I know I’m embarrassing her in front of my men. I know there’s no reason for me to lose my shit like this. I know all of that, but that doesn’t stop the overwhelming feeling of fear that has gripped me by the throat and won’t let go—the one that won’t let me forget the images of broken bikes and bodies in the road—the one that won’t let me forget how quickly everything can change, how easily life can be snatched from you with no do-over.

My own guilt drives me. I know that. I’ve never fully let go of the fact that decisions I made had a hand in the series of events that led to my wife losing her life, and my son so broken—inside and out—that he’ll walk with a limp for the rest of his life, and the scars he carries on the inside will never leave him.

If I hadn't bought him that motorcycle...

All of these things flash through my brain, and maybe none of it is a rational excuse for applying any of it to this woman, here and now. But that doesn't even exist in my decision as I grab her arm and drag her toward the porch.

Of course, she's having none of it. Did I expect anything else from Evelyn? She yanks her arm free, whirling on me.

Her generation, Lola's, Isabella's... these women weren't raised to just go along with things because that's how it's always been. They question everything. The #MeToo generation—they don't stand for injustice, they don't like being told to sit down and shut up; they don't like being told no... not without a reason. They don't like to sit on the sidelines either. It doesn't mesh well with the MC life, not the male dominated factors of it. Sure, they love the freedom side, the rebellious side, but they have a hard time with the rest. I've had to deal with it with my own daughter in how I've treated her differently than Trez, and the unfairness of that. And I'm well aware of the injustice she sees in me. But not wanting her to ride or Evelyn to ride has nothing to do with that, and everything to do with the fact that I'm terrified of losing them.

And that's on me. And I know that in my head, but tell that to my knee-jerk reaction that stems straight from my gut. I can't go through it again. Having to say goodbye to a broken body covered with a sheet in an emergency room while a dozen medical professionals stand around staring at me. Having to bury the love of your life in a cold grave on a rainy day, years too soon. Having to pack up the things of the woman who was my reason for living, my best friend, my everything.

I can't lose another woman the way I lost Gillian.

None of the people standing in this parking lot understand any of that.

They just see a man acting like a lunatic over nothing at all.

How can I make them see any of the things that drive me in this moment?

I can't. So I do the only thing I can. I draw a line in the sand I shouldn't draw, and in so doing drive a wedge forever between Evelyn and I—one I may never be able to repair.

I point at the bike, getting right in her face. "You will never ride a motorcycle for as long as you are mine. Do you understand?"

Of course she doesn't. How could she?

The men back away, shuffling their feet as she stands her ground toe-to-toe with me. Her eyes glaze, but she sucks in a breath, refusing to cry in front of me.

She flings the helmet into the gravel. "I thought you were different. I thought you understood me."

With a look that makes me feel like I've crushed her dreams, she whirls and stalks away from me, ripping my heart out with every step she takes.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

*Rock—*

“Did you hear it all?” I look across my desk to my VP.

Darko chuckles and raises the glass of whiskey he’s holding, his boot on his knee, slumped back in the chair in front of me. “Brother, everybody heard you. The gas station at the bottom of the hill heard you. Hell, the Space Station probably heard you.”

“Okay, enough. I get it.”

“Do you?”

“Who took her home?” I stare at my desk, thinking how much I fucked everything up. Evelyn wouldn’t even speak to me. She tried to order an Uber. That’s when I murmured to Darko to get her a ride as I passed him in the doorway and stalked back inside the clubhouse.

“Memphis. He should be back anytime now.”

Lola throws the door open to my office and storms in. Yes, storms, in all her glory, as well as a pregnant woman can when her weight distribution is off. I sigh, knowing what’s coming.

She doesn’t even acknowledge Darko, just starts in and lets me have it.

“What the hell were you thinking, Daddy?”

“Apparently, Memphis relayed the whole sordid scene to you.”

“He brought Evelyn to our house. She’s there with Josie and Katie.”

“He should have taken her home.”

“Evelyn is devastated.”

“Devastated?” I frown, and almost come out of my chair. She seemed more pissed than hurt.

“What is with you and this caveman attitude? You don’t get to run everyone’s life.” Her hands hit her hips.

I dip my head and drag a hand over my nape, pent up frustration ready to explode out of me. “Look, this doesn’t concern you, honey. This is between her and me.”

“Uh oh,” I hear Darko whisper, a sure sign that even he can see I just lit a match to a powder keg.

“*Doesn’t concern me?*” Her voice rises at the end. “You bring this girl here. Install her into your home, in my old bedroom, mind you. You seem truly interested in her. We all, no—I take her into the fold like family, trying to make her feel welcome, and you blow it all up and dare to say this doesn’t concern me?”

I sigh. She’s right, but I’ll be damned if I’ll admit that to her. If I know Lola, she’s not going to quit, so I might as well listen to her tirade and get it over with. I no doubt have it coming anyway. “Just say what you came to say already.”

“This girl is right for you, you stubborn fool. I see the way you are around her. If you want to make this work with her, you can’t keep her in a cage.”

“I’m not trying to keep her in a cage, Lola.”

“Aren’t you? I know why you’re afraid. I get it. It’s justifiable, but this isn’t the answer. No one can guarantee how long any of us live. You can’t protect us all from life, Daddy.”

I listen to her words. I understand what she’s saying, but my brain won’t let the fear go, and I haven’t figured out how to live with it. “She wants a motorcycle, Lola. After



everything this family has gone through—after all the pain—how do I deal with that?”

Her face softens. “You make sure she knows how to ride. You make sure she takes safety seriously. You get her a good helmet. You do whatever precautions you need to, but you have to let her live life. And if this is her dream, you can’t crush that. If you do, then you crush her soul, too.”

I work my jaw, the muscles clamping. This has got to be one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. Protecting is what I do—as a father, as the president of this club. How do I let go of that? I meet Lola’s gaze. She loves me. It’s there in her eyes.

“Don’t throw this away, Daddy. She’s the best thing that’s happened to you in a long time. I don’t want to see you blow it, that’s all. I want you to be happy.”

“C’mere.” I stand and hold out my arms. She comes into them like she’s done since she was a child. She reminds me so much of her mother. Always there to tell me when I’m wrong. Never afraid to tell me when I’ve fucked up. I smile and kiss her temple. “Okay. I’ll try.”

She pulls back and meets my eyes. “You haven’t told her about Mom, have you?”

I shake my head. “It’s hard to talk about.”

“She needs to know, Daddy—everything, the good, the bad, and the ugly. The accident devastated all of us, but we came through to the other side.”

“You’re right. I’ll find the time and place.”

“Soon.” She drags the promise from me.

“Soon.”

She smiles big and pulls back. “My work here is done, then.” Her eyes connect with Darko’s like she just noticed him

in the room. “Hey, Darko.”

“Hey, girl.”

“Gotta run, now.”

“What are you girls up to today?” I ask, mainly wanting to know what Evelyn will be doing.

“We’re going to the lake. You can come and pick Evelyn up after dinner, okay?”

“Sure. I’ll be there. Have fun. Tell her I’m sorry.”

“Nope. You’re gonna have to do that yourself.”

“Right.”

She winks at me and walks out.

Darko starts laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

“You. Why is it always a woman brings the big bad biker down?”

“Cause they’ve got this magical thing between their legs called a pussy.”

“Oh, right. That.” He nods. “Been the downfall of many a good man.”

I stare out the window.

“So the deal with the Denver run...” Darko pauses. “Never mind. I can see your mind is elsewhere today.”

I nod.

“What’s wrong?”

I don’t answer.

“This whole bike issue. Why do you care? This girl is leaving.”

“Maybe not.”

“Oh, really? So what’s the deal?”

“Her and I—it’s insane, right?”

He shrugs. “Not if she makes you happy. But if you’re just fucking with her and Duck finds out...”

I stroke my chin. He doesn’t need to finish that sentence. I already know Duck is an issue I’ll have to deal with at some point. “That’s not it.”

“There’s something else besides this bike business?”

“There is.”

He studies me, trying, I’m sure, to figure me out. “I notice you two have been staying at the clubhouse a lot since your birthday party.”

He’s closing in, even so, he’ll never guess the problem. “Things have been awkward at the house.”

“What do you mean?”

I pick up a pencil and tap it on the desk a mile a minute, wondering how to say it. I blow out a breath, toss the pencil, and lean back in my chair. Then I come right out with it. “I, ah, can’t bring myself to have sex with her in the bed I shared with Gillian.” I shake my head. “That’s just a line I can’t cross.” I splay my hands. “She was staying in Lola’s old room and—”

He finishes the sentence for me. “You can’t fuck her in the bed your daughter slept in.”

“Exactly.”

“Maybe you need to buy a new bed.” Leave it to my VP to cut through the bullshit and find the simple solution.

The thought never occurred to me because that would mean letting go of the bed I shared with Gillian and letting go

of another piece of her, of us. I shake my head. I'm not sure I'm ready for that. I'm not sure I can do it.

He lifts a brow. "Or maybe you need a new house."

My gaze flicks up, piercing his. "A new house?"

Darko lifts his chin to a pile of papers on my desk. "Saw your new real estate investment. The land up on the ridge you've always wanted."

"Flat top. It was our spot. Gillian and me. We always dreamed of buying and building on it."

"Is that why you bought it?"

I sigh. "To tell you the truth, I don't know why I bought it. It came up for sale, and I knew it'd be the only chance I ever had of grabbing it. Maybe it was another piece of Gillian I didn't want to let go of."

"So now you've got it."

"Yeah."

He waits, knowing if he gives me silence, I'll talk it out. It works every damn time.

I shrug. "I thought it might give me something to do, something to look forward to, some other purpose to keep me occupied."

"So you did consider building on it."

"Yeah." I stare out the window.

"So do it." He leans forward, his elbows on his knees. "But do it for you, Rock, not for a dream you had with Gillian. That's gone, and frankly my brother, it's time you let it go. It's time you let her go."

My eyes flick to his. It's the first time he's dared say anything about Gillian.

“Look, Rock, your love for her, your devotion to her memory—no one can question. But you’ve grieved enough. I thought you were moving past all that.”

“I am. I was. I thought I was.”

“Until Evelyn showed up and stirred everything up?”

“I guess.” I rub my palms together, then dip my head and rub a blister on my palm.

“You feel unfaithful with this girl. Which is funny because you’ve slept with your share of women in the last few years.”

“They didn’t mean anything.”

“And this one does?”

“Yeah. This one does.”

“Rock, Gillian would want you to be happy. She’d be the first one to want that. You have a long life left. She wouldn’t want you to spend it alone.”

The corner of my mouth pulls up. “I’m not sure I could say the same if the situation were reversed, and I went before her. I’d want to come back from the grave and haunt any motherfucker who replaced me.”

Darko chuckles. “Yeah, I can’t blame you there, brother.” He lifts his glass and waits for me to lift mine. “A toast. To women and their magical pussies. God love them.”

I can’t argue with that, so I clink my glass to his.

“So what are you going to do about Evelyn? What’s gonna be this big gesture Lola suggested you come up with?”

“Show her she means something. I know one thing I can do.”

“What’s that?”

“Tell her everything about Gillian.”

He lifts a finger off his glass and points it at me. “Take her up to the cabin. Get her alone.”

“Good idea.”

“It’s a start, but it’s not gonna be enough.”

I blow out a breath. “You’re right. I guess I’m gonna have to rethink the bike thing.” I meet his eyes. “I may need your help.”

He grins. “You always do.”



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

*Evelyn—*

Lola leans against the sink and shoves a forkful of tiramisu in her mouth. “Oh my God. This is to die for.”

I’m loading plates into the dishwasher and smile as she gobbles up her second piece.

Memphis walks in with several glasses and sets them on the counter, then kisses his wife’s forehead. “Babe, that shit’s got coffee in it, you know?”

Lola points her fork at him like she’s going to jab him with it. “Don’t you dare take away my tiramisu. I’ve had to give up coffee, wine, cola, chocolate. I’m having the damn dessert.”

He lifts his palms in surrender. “Okay. Okay. Chill out.”

“I was totally chill until you walked into the kitchen.”

Memphis grabs her by the waist and presses his forehead to hers. “Watch it, Mama, or no back rub for you tonight.”

“I’m grumpy when I don’t get a backrub.”

He laughs. “Baby doll, you’re grumpy right now.”

“Only because I can’t have so many things,” Lola whines.

He opens his mouth, and she shares a forkful with him.

“Thanks.”

“That’s all you get.”

“What? That’s your second piece!”

“So?”

I giggle at the two of them and set another plate in the dishwasher. The cell phone in my back pocket vibrates with a



call. I pull it out and see it's Ox. Frowning, I look to Lola. "I've got to take this."

"Go ahead," Lola replies, still in her husband's arms. "Memphis can finish loading for me."

I head out the door into their backyard and put the phone to my ear. "Ox?"

"Hey, lil' bit. How are you doing?"

"Fine. I miss everyone. How's it going there?"

"Not good."

"Why not? What's happened?" I pace back and forth.

"Everything's going to shit."

"Like what?"

"Did you hear two of our prospects were killed?"

Stopping in my tracks, I press the phone tighter to my ear. "What? No. How?"

"A pipe bomb."

"Oh my God. Which ones?"

"We buried them yesterday. It was those two twin brothers, Jay and Ray."

"That's so awful. Was it Malik?"

"That's everyone's guess. We think the Vipers are coming to patch us over in three days."

"In three days? Oh, no. What's going to happen, Ox?"

"I don't want to be a fucking Viper, I know that. Either we go along with it and put that damn patch on our back, which means we're in a club with Malik. That or they disband us and take everything your ol' man worked to build all these years."

"How is Duck?"

“He’s not doing so good, Ev.”

“What do you mean?” I frown.

“He’s not been well. It’s his heart. He didn’t want to tell you, but I thought you should know.”

“I should come home.”

“Absolutely not. Malik would use you to hurt Duck. It might be the very thing that sets his heart off. He can’t take that worry right now.”

“But I can’t just sit here and do nothing. I feel so useless.”

“There is one thing you can do.”

“What? I’ll do anything to help.”

“Talk to the president of the Royal Bastards.”

“Rock? How can he help?”

“Before Duck sent you away with him, Duck asked him to patch us over, beat the Vipers to it. It was one of the reasons he asked them to come out here. When he refused, Duck decided it’d be best if they got you out of the way.”

“I didn’t know.”

“I shouldn’t be telling you any of this. Duck would have my hide if he knew. I guess I figured you might be our last hope. Maybe you could ask Rock to reconsider.”

“Things aren’t really good between us right now.”

He immediately goes into big brother mode. “He better be treating you right. If he’s not, you just say the word, and I’ll come out there. I swear to God, lil’ bit.”

“It’s fine. He’s treating me well. We just had an argument.”

“About what?”

I blow out a breath, hating to admit it to him. “About a motorcycle.”

“Babe, that again? You’re kiddin’ me, right?”

“A girl wants what a girl wants. Why does it have to be such a big deal with everyone?”

I hear him sigh through the phone. “So, I take it he’s not in the mood to do you any favors?”

“I didn’t say that. Maybe I could get him to do something.” I’d have to use all my charms to do it, though.

“We don’t have a lot of time, honey. Clock’s ticking.”

“All right. I’ll give it a shot tonight. Keep me posted, will you? I feel so out of the loop here.”

“That’s the way Duck wanted it.”

“Take care of him for me, will you, Ox? Watch his back.”

“Always.”

I hear the roar of a motorcycle and know it must be Rock coming to get me. “Ox, I’ve got to go. He just pulled up.”

“Okay. Take care of yourself, honey.”

“You too. I’ll call you.”

I disconnect and go inside.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

*Evelyn—*

Rock rides me into the mountains, and I'm eager to see where we're going. We turn down a long gravel drive and stop at a small cabin.

I climb off and pull my helmet free, staring at the structure. I wonder if we're visiting someone. "What is this place?"

"My hunting cabin."

Big fat raindrops start to fall.

"Looks like we made it just in time." Rock grabs the hand grips and pushes the bike into a small shed attached to the side of the cabin.

By the time he shuts it up, and we dash up on the front porch, it's pouring.

Rock unlocks the door and lets me enter first. He moves around the room, turning on lamps and filling the room with a golden light.

The place is rustic with a big stone fireplace with windows in the corners on either side. It's decorated with warm colors and overstuffed armchairs and colorful braided rugs.

Rock squats down and builds a fire. Soon flames lick up the side of the logs, snapping and crackling. The two of us stand in front of it, warming up and drying our damp clothes.

"There's something about a fire, huh?" Rock grins at me.

I nod and hold my hands out to the heat.

An old photo, framed and sitting on the mantle catches my eye, and I pick it up. It's a picture of a car. "What's this?"

Rock comes to stand pressed to my back, his cheek to mine. “That was my first car. A Mustang GT Hatchback. Had a 5.0-liter V8. Thing kicked like a mule comin’ off the line.”

I twist my head. There’s a young kid standing next to it, but he looks nothing like this man I’ve come to know. “No way. Is this you?”

Rock grins. “Yup. My dad bought that car for me brand new on my sixteenth birthday. We went down to the dealership, and he let me pick out what I wanted.”

“Wow. That’s a pretty cool gift.”

“It was. My parents were working class folks. They didn’t have a lot of money, so it wasn’t something I ever expected.”

“What made him do it?”

“My dad had cancer. By that summer, I think he knew he only had a few more months to live. I guess it was his way of sharing something with me, knowing he wouldn’t be around for another birthday.

“I still remember how happy he was when we drove it off the lot and took it for a spin, the radio blasting.” Rock has a wistful expression on his face as he stares at the photo for a long moment. “We stopped to get root beer floats at the A&W in town. We didn’t go home until dinnertime. It was the best day ever.”

“That’s a special car. Do you still have it?” I turn in his arms as he takes the frame and sets it on the mantle.

“Nah. Sold it a long time ago.”

“You didn’t want to keep it?”

“Sure I did. That car was my last connection to my father. But by the time I sold it, I was newly married to Gillian. We were young and broke, and we’d just had Trez. I had my Harley that I had to have for the club, and I had the Mustang.

We needed a more family friendly car, so I traded it in for a Jeep Grand Cherokee. Gillian begged me not to sell the car, said she'd get a job—anything for me to keep that car, but I knew all her earnings would just have had to go to pay for daycare.

“I was in the MC by then, and so I couldn't let the bike go. The only other choice was the Mustang.”

“It must have broken your heart to let go of the car your father bought you.”

“Of course it did, but I didn't really have a choice.” He gets a far off look in his eyes. “I guess sometimes we have to let go of the past to make room for the future, huh?”

I stare at him, wishing he'd say more.

He clears his throat. “That's one of the reasons I brought you up here. I wanted to talk.”

“Okay.”

“I wanted to explain some things to you about my past, and about why I act the way I do sometimes.”

“All right.”

“No one's told you anything about how my wife died, have they?”

“No. No one.”

“She and I had gotten Trez a motorcycle for his graduation. He'd only had it for a short time when he offered to take his mom for a ride. She climbed on the back and they headed into town. He cut through a neighborhood. The street was curved. There were some bushes, and he didn't see the vehicle backing out of a driveway.”

“Oh no,” I whisper, afraid of what's coming.

“Trez hit the rear axle. He rolled up and over the trunk. Landed about thirty feet down the street. Gillian slammed into the passenger door. It broke her neck instantly. She was dead before she slid to the ground.”

“I’m so sorry.” My eyes fill. His pain must be unimaginable.

“Lola lost her mother at a critical time and started acting out. I had no clue what I was doing as a single father. I made a mess of everything.

“Trez was hurt badly, too. He’s got pins in his leg, and his hip has never quite healed. He’ll walk with a limp for the rest of his life. His recovery was painful. He still struggles with pain. Some days are good, and some are bad. For a while, he became dependent on painkillers. It was a slippery slope that ended in an addiction that almost destroyed our family. So you see, that bike wreck nearly took everything from me.”

“And that’s why you reacted the way you did.” I fill in the blanks.

He nods. “When I saw you on that bike, all I could see in my mind was death and destruction.”

“I’m so sorry I put you through that.”

He shakes his head. “Don’t be. It’s not your fault. I overreacted. You’re the one who deserves an apology. I had no right to dump on you. You have every right to ride if that’s your dream.”

“It has been for a long time.”

“Just know that I’m gonna try to be better about it in the future. I can’t promise I won’t have a gut reaction, but I’ll try to rein it in.”

“Okay. Deal.”



He sits in a thickly padded armchair and pulls me on his lap. “There’s something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

“There’s something I want to talk to you about, too.”

“You go first.”

“No, you.”

“All right. You may have noticed I’ve been avoiding staying at the house since we got together.”

“Actually, I have.”

“It’s my bed.”

I frown. “Your bed? What do you mean?”

“I don’t take women to that bed. It’s the one I shared with Gillian.”

“Oh.” I feel like such an idiot. My eyes slide shut. “I was such a fool.”

“What do you mean?”

“That night, when you walked in, and I was waiting naked in your bed. You couldn’t get me in the shower quick enough. Then we went to the couch after that.”

He runs his hand up and down my jean-clad thigh. “Yeah. Sorry about that.”

“I understand. It’s hard to let her go.” I shrug. “So we’ll stay at the clubhouse then. It’s okay.”

“It’s not okay. But I took care of the problem.”

“How?”

“There’s a new bed being delivered first thing tomorrow morning.”

I stare at this man who’s done so much for me. “You did that for me?”

“For both of us. I guess like with my Mustang.” He nods toward the picture on the mantle. “I need to let go of the past to make room for the future. That’s what I’m doing with you.”

I feel like crying. No one’s ever done anything like that for me.

“What did you want to talk about?”

I hate to even bring it up now. How do I ask him to do one more thing for me when he’s already done so much?

“Evelyn?”

I shake my head. “I wanted to ask you something, but it’s too big, it’s too much.”

“Why don’t you tell me what it is and let me decide what’s too much?”

“I heard from Ox earlier tonight.”

“Ox?”

“One of the Iron Death. He’s like an uncle to me. Anyway, he told me about some things.” Rock blows out a breath, and I can feel his anger rising. I frown. “What is it?”

“I’m gonna be pissed if he told you what I think he told you.”

“You know?”

“Depends. Tell me what he said.”

“He said there was a pipe bomb. Two prospects were killed. I’m sure it was Malik.”

“Goddamn it. Duck didn’t want you to know.”

“He told you?”

“Yeah.”

“Did he also tell you the Vipers are coming in two days to patch them over?”

Rock stills. “No, he didn’t.”

“Can you help them? Please? This is all my fault.”

“How is this your fault?”

“I found the money. I’m the one who told my father. If I’d stayed quiet—”

“If you’d stayed quiet, you’d be with a cruel asshole who was stealing from your father’s club.”

I nod because he’s right, but I’m frantic for him to understand. My eyes fill with tears. “Please help them, Rock. Please.”

He strokes my leg. “I’ve been trying to think of a way, believe me.”

“Ox said my father is sick.”

Rock nods. “I thought you knew.”

“I had no clue. He said Duck’s heart is failing. I have to go back.”

“No way.”

“How can I sit here and do nothing?”

“Because you being there helps no one.”

“I’ll have to go back, eventually.”

He looks panicked. “Is that what you want? To leave here, leave me?”

“Not at all.”

“When this is over, are you still going back to Utah? After everything between us?”

“I don’t want to. But you haven’t asked me to stay.”

“I’m asking you. Stay with me, Evelyn.”

It isn't an I love you, but it's a start. "All right. But what about my father's club? Can you help them?"

"I don't know."

"Please, Rock. If you care for me, you'll help them."

"I care about you, Evelyn. More than you know." He presses his lips to my forehead. "All right. I'll do what I can. I can't make any promises."

"Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." I press kisses all over his face.

"You can show me how thankful you are later in bed."

I smile, more than willing to pay that bill. I bite my lower lip, thinking about everything.

"You're worrying. Stop."

"I can't help it."

"You don't worry about it," he tells me. He doesn't seem worried in the least. He was more worried when he thought I wanted to go back home than he is about Malik. I trust Rock can handle Malik. But Malik is unpredictable.

Rock's eyes roam over me. He looks tired.

"Relax." He reaches out and tucks my hair behind my ear. "I'll work it out. You only need to worry about getting some rest."

I snuggle into him and he wraps his arms around me.

We stay like that, cuddled in the chair by the fire until it burns down to embers. I drift off and am only woken when Rock shifts under me.

He stands and holds out his hand without a word. I take it. His strong fingers wrap around mine in a warm hold and I follow him to the bedroom.

He strips me down and does the same, then pulls the colorful quilt back.

We lay down together. I'm on my side, and he spoons me from behind, pulling a sheet over us and then wrapping his big body around mine.

It feels nice having him cuddled against me, his hot skin pressed to mine, with nothing between us. He puts his mouth to my ear. "I'll keep you safe, baby. I swear it to you."

With that promise, I fall into a deep sleep, locked in his warm, protective embrace.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

*Evelyn—*

The sun is peeping through the lace curtains when I smell the aroma of rich coffee brewing and bacon sizzling in a pan.

I throw on Rock's flannel shirt, with not a stitch on underneath, and follow the scent to the kitchen, where Rock is standing at the stove, tending the fry pan. His eyes hit me and skate down the shirt and my bare legs and feet. "You hungry?"

"Famished."

"There's coffee. The bacon is gonna take a few more minutes."

I pour myself a cup and move to the table.

Soon, he turns off the burner, puts the bacon on a plate, and sets it on the table. I snag a piece and start munching.

Rock grabs a mug of coffee for himself and joins me. After a couple of sips, he sets it down and nabs my hand, tugging. "C'mere."

He pulls me onto his lap, facing him with my legs around his waist. Just the shirt and no panties.

There's a platter of eggs on the table, and he spoon-feeds me.

I chew then dip my mouth to his. With just the tip of my tongue, I graze his lips and feel his cock jerk against me. My pussy gets wet at his response. I love knowing I can get him worked up with barely any effort.

I cup his neck. "Maybe you can think of something better to have for breakfast this morning."

He grins and slips a hand under the shirt, finding and stroking my bare pussy with a barely there, teasing touch. “You mean *this*? Baby, I plan to eat this every morning for the rest of my days.”

I swallow, my heart melting at his admission. I’m not sure he realizes what he just said. It’s as close to a forever as he’s spoken. It gives me a thrill of hope that he’s in this as deep as I am.

“Let’s fool around,” I suggest.

He has other ideas. “You need to eat.” He picks up a fork and carries some scrambled eggs to my mouth. “Open.” The way he says it, it’s not a request; it’s an order.

I open my mouth and let him feed me. After I take the bite, he goes to scoop another forkful. I take advantage of his distraction to unbutton the flannel shirt and shrug out of it. He lets out a groan.

“You, little one, are not playing fair.” The fork clatters to the plate. “I ever tell you that you’ve got fucking gorgeous tits?”

“Touch them.”

His eyes drop to between my legs, and I know he wants this as much as I do.

I readjust, wiggling on him until he sucks in a breath. I can feel him growing hard beneath me. Rock’s eyes go to my breasts again as they bounce a little at the motion. He lets out a groan and turns to the plate of food, pretending for all he’s worth that he doesn’t want to jump my bones.

I grin. He’s not gonna win this game. Not today.

I can feel the proof beneath me. I lean forward and whisper against his jaw, using his own words against him. “The body doesn’t lie, baby.”



He grabs my face and kisses me. It's passionate, savage, possessive, all the things this man is. When he finally comes up for air, he growls, "I want to take you back to bed and eat your pussy all damn day."

I grin. "You won't get any argument from me on that one."

He doesn't move for a few beats, just studies me. He grins, his brow lifting like he's somehow going to beat me at my game. He reaches for his mug. "Here. Hold this." He grabs mine. "And this one."

"Rock, what are you doing?" I'm now sitting naked on his lap with two mugs of hot coffee in my hands, worried I'm going to spill them on one or both of us.

"Stay right there," he commands, and then he brushes his thumb lightly across my pussy.

"No fair. You play dirty."

His phone rings, but he doesn't let up.

"Aren't you going to get that?" I ask, my voice shaky from the things he's doing to me.

"Stay like you are," he orders, then looks at his phone, sees who it is and puts it to his ear. "Yeah?"

The entire time he's talking, he's stroking tight, barely there circles over my clit, and I can't do a thing to stop him short of pouring the coffee out on the floor. The table is behind me and I can't twist to reach it with the mugs. Rock grins, knowing my dilemma. My arms are getting tired, and my hands are beginning to tremble.

His thumb caresses my clit while his eyes watch mine.

He drags the wetness up from my pussy and lubricates my clit, never letting up on it.

How can he talk club business with his eyes locked on mine the whole time he's teasing me relentlessly?

I wiggle and my breasts jiggle. They catch his eyes, and he dips his fingers into my pussy again, coating them with my arousal, then brings it up and slathers it on my nipples. Dipping his head, he licks and sucks one, then the other, the entire time, murmuring yes and no into his phone when called for.

I'm frantic from his lazy ministrations, his thumb stroking small slow circles around my clit again and again.

"Please, Rock." I tilt my head back, and my eyes slide closed.

"You almost here?" he asks the person on the other end, and my eyes pop open.

"What?" I ask in a panic, envisioning one of his men walking through the door while I sit straddling Rock, completely naked.

"Okay. Great. See ya soon." Rock sets his phone down and grins. "You asked for it when you took off the shirt. Teasing me relentlessly. Two can play that game. And babe, I always win."

"Who's coming? Is someone coming?"

He doesn't reply, just takes the mugs from my shaking hands, then wraps his arm around my back, splaying me out over the table until my legs are pushed with one of his arms hooked under each thigh. He dips his head and finishes me with his mouth.

He's wrong about what he said... *so* wrong. He doesn't always win. Every time he makes me orgasm? Winning!

I've barely recovered when he scoops me in his arms and carries me to the couch, then bends me over the arm. I hear his zipper go down and the head of his cock circles the entrance to my pussy. "You like to tease, baby? I like to tease, too. Now

you're good and wet, and I'm about to explode. You gonna take my dick any way I want to give it to you?"

"Yes," I pant and a nano-second after my reply, he thrusts into me so deep I go up on my toes, throwing my head back. His warm palm moves up my spine.

"There's my girl. Always so hot and ready for me."

He slides in and out, taking his sweet time, dragging each stroke out until I can't bear the anticipation of the next one.

"Faster," I beg.

He smacks my ass cheek. "I say how fast this time."

He grabs my hips, his fingers digging in and holding me immobile. With every stroke, he hits that magic spot that has me writhing and bucking against him, needing more.

"Please, Rock."

"You gonna be sweet to me?"

"Yes," I moan.

"Then I'll be sweet to you. See how this works?" His fingers come around my hip and dive between my legs. He works my clit, knowing just the right amount of pressure and speed. That combined with what his dick is doing to my g-spot, I'm barreling toward a powerful orgasm.

"Oh, God. Yes. Yes."

His fingers ramp up their speed, and I fly over the edge into ecstasy, using the cushions to muffle my screams.

I fall back to earth, panting, all my nerve endings super sensitive from the orgasms that just rocked my world. I can feel the wetness coating him as he still slides in and out of me.

He pulls me up so my back is pressed to his chest. It changes the angle, making it even more intense on my g-spot. I moan and wiggle.

Rock cups my breasts with his big hands, his thumbs strumming my engorged and sensitive nipples.

It feels so damn good. His arms lock around my ribs, pinning me, and then he picks up his pace, until soon he's ramming into me, our skin slapping together.

Oh God, I'm going to come again. I can't believe I'm ready so soon. Oh, sweet Jesus.

We're both covered in a sheen of sweat when Rock curls forward and bites my shoulder. I scream and come hard. He grunts and, with three strokes, he's right behind me.

I suck in a ragged breath, and his strong arms are all that keep me on my feet. My bones feel like jelly. I could melt in a puddle on the floor right now.

He kisses my temple. "I like playing these games with you."

The sound of a Harley coming up the long gravel drive through the woods carries to us, and I tense.

"Relax," Rock orders. "It's just Darko."

The sound of a vehicle crunching on the gravel right behind him carries to us.

"And maybe a prospect."

I wiggle free, and Rock lets me go, tucking himself in his jeans. I race to the bedroom to dress.

When I come out, Rock is waiting for me. He grabs my hand and pulls me out the door. One bike and a pickup truck are parked in front of the porch. A prospect and Darko are both looking at the bike. It's a pretty sleek low rider in a deep purple.

Darko turns to Rock and a set of keys fly through the air. Rock catches them in his fist. I frown, wondering what's going on.

Rock turns and smiles. He holds his hand out to me, the keys dangling. “Here.”

I reach up and take them. “What’s this?”

“The bike’s yours.”

My mouth drops open, and I search all their faces, waiting for the joke, but they’re all just smiling back at me. “Wait. What?”

“It’s yours, baby. I got it for you. Happy late birthday or early Christmas or whatever fucking holiday is next.”

“Is this a joke?”

“Nope. It’s yours. I hope you like purple, because I ain’t paintin’ it.”

Darko chuckles. “Darlin’ you say you want a different color, he’ll paint it a different color. Don’t let him fool you.”

“You shut up,” Rock points at his VP.

“Come on, ma’am. Take it for a spin,” the prospect encourages, grinning.

I look at Rock, and my throat gets tight and my eyes pool. I can’t believe this man. He winks and curls an arm around my shoulder, tucking me against his side. His head dips, his mouth to my temple. “No tears, baby girl. This is your dream, remember?”

He’s wrong. Because now I know he’s my dream.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

*Rock—*

The bouquet of sunflowers brushes against my leg as I approach the grave. Gillian always loved sunflowers. I set them against the granite marker and squat to brush away some leaves and sticks.

My knees crack when I stand.

I shove my hands in my hip pockets and stare at her name. Gillian Rockingham. The name I gave her when she was just eighteen.

“God, you were a knockout, babe.”

I stare at the horizon, and the clouds tripping across the sky. A quiet peacefulness settles over me.

“I’ve missed you so much, honey, every damn day. But lately I feel your presence less often. Is that me or you?” I shuffle my feet. “It’s crazy, I know, but I met someone. You’d like her, I think. She’s got your fire. She loves me. She told me so, and I believe her. I haven’t said it back yet, but I feel it. I hope you’re okay with that. I wish I knew.” I stare at the line of trees in the distance. A quiet wind whistles through them, moving the branches. “I’d like to think you sent her to me. It’d make it easier to let you go.” I suck in a deep breath. “God, we had a good run, didn’t we, babe? It just wasn’t long enough.”

The sun sinks below the tree line now, and the temperature drops. “I should have come up earlier when the sun was still high.” I glance around again. “The kids and I have reinstated Friday night dinner just like you used to do. Well, we don’t make every week, but we try at least once a month. You’ve got a beautiful granddaughter. I wish you could see her. She’s

something else. Pretty like her momma and sweet as can be. Got two grandsons on the way, too. Gonna have a full house come Christmas.”

A breeze ruffles my hair. “I bought the ridge, baby. Gonna build a house up there. I’m gonna try anyway. God, this is hard. Harder than I thought it would be. Baby, I came up here to tell you I’ve got to let you go. I hope that’s okay. I’ve tried to hang on, but I’ve got to start living again. I’m gonna try to do that with Evelyn. That’s her name.” I clear my throat. “I may not come up here as often, but I promise I’ll never miss your birthday.”

I squat down, press two fingers to my lips and touch the stone. “I’ll see you on the other side, baby. I love you.”

Then I walk to my bike. I throw my leg over, and while I’m strapping on my helmet, I spot an orange fox standing in the distant tree line. It watches me for a moment, then disappears into the woods.

I lift my bike off the kickstand and fire it up.

Thirty minutes later, I walk into the full meeting room and take my seat at the head of the table. I slam the gavel down twice, and all the talking silences. Chairs creak as men lean back and study me.

I lace my fingers, my elbows on the scarred wood. “Think I figured out a solution to that problem we were discussing at the last meeting. I need you boys to tell me if it’s doable, or if I’m out of my mind.”

Eyes shift around the table, men glancing at each other, their curiosity piqued.

“What plan?” my son asks.



I look at Trez and it strikes me how much he looks like Gillian around the eyes. For a moment, it's like I'm staring into her gaze. He's come a long way through the trials of hell since the accident, and I'm damn proud of the man he's become.

“Rock?” Darko prods.

My gaze shifts to my right-hand man—one who's been with me since the beginning. No matter what, he's always had my back. “We do a fake patch-over of the Iron Death.”

“A fake patch-over. What the hell is that?” Utah asks.

“We bring the cuts, we do the party. We take down every piece of Iron Death shit and replace it with Royal Bastards stuff, logos, signs, the works. They ride around and get seen in their new gear. Word spreads to the Vipers. I'm imagining it won't take long. They show up, see it's true, and we smoke out Malik.”

“Smoke out Malik?”

“The Vipers aren't gonna go up against us over this. They're just not. But I'm guessing he's gonna lose his shit. When his plan fails, he's gonna push them to do something stupid, something not in the club's benefit, but in his alone.” I shrug. “Maybe the Vipers see his true loyalty isn't really to the Vipers, but to himself.”

There's quiet in the room, and I'm wondering if this plan is insane.

Darko strokes his mouth, then drops his hand. “When's this plan of yours supposed to take place?”

“In two days.”

He whistles. “It's gonna take a lot of gear. We're gonna need a dozen vests at least.”

“Vest won’t be a problem, it’s getting the patches sewn on in time,” Baja muses.

“Maybe we could glue them on—I mean, it’s a quick fix, and they won’t have to last long.”

“We could take the logos and flags and shit from here to fool ‘em if it’s just got to be for a few days,” Trez adds.

I smile. My club. Always havin’ my back. Not one question about the insanity of the plan, no mention of what National might think, just brothers finding ways to make it work. I look over at Darko. “Thanks, brother.”

“We’ll make it work, but we’ve got to get everybody on it like now.”

I slam the gavel down. “Meeting dismissed. Make it happen, boys.”

Chairs scrape across the floor and the room empties out, everyone talking and making plans.

I stand at the head and lay my palms on the table. Darko slaps my back. “You okay, man?”

I nod.

“You heard from Evelyn?”

“Yeah. She’s over at Lola’s, showing off her bike to the brat pack.”

“Shit. They’re all gonna want one.”

I grin. “Probably. Am I out of favors?”

“You might have one left, why?”

I dig into my pocket and pull out a slip of paper with a name and phone number. “Think you can locate this girl? There’s one dream left I want to give Evelyn.”



## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

*Iron Death MC Clubhouse, Utah—*

*Rock—*

The thunder of motorcycles roaring up carries to us where we sit inside the Iron Death Clubhouse. I glance around at my men. Everyone is on edge.

Every Iron Death member is currently sporting a Royal Bastards cut. There's Royal Bastard's memorabilia hung all around the walls. Our logo hangs over the entrance. Another one hangs on the wall in here. A flag with our logo hangs over the bar. Is it enough? We're about to find out.

There's a bonfire out in the parking lot, and earlier some of the men were shooting off fireworks. Others were firing their guns in the air.

For the last hour we've been waiting, agitation running high. Duck's had friends of the club watching the only highway in and out of town. Ten minutes ago, we got a tip off that a pack of eight Vipers just crossed into town, headed toward the clubhouse.

I wait with my guys at a long table in the middle of the room while Duck's men stand outside. The music is blasting; this is a patch-over party, after all.

The door is propped open, and we can see outside.

I ordered that, more so that the Vipers could see inside than for us to observe them. Memphis is stationed by the door. He moves toward me. "They're comin' in, Rock. Duck just invited them in for a drink.

Four men shoulder their way inside. Duck and Caveman follow them in. We make eye contact, and Duck lifts a chin toward the one on the left. He must be Malik. I get my first look at the man. He's tall and shock twists his face. I raise a shot glass to my lips and sip. One of the club girls moves behind me, running her hands down my cut. She dips her head.

"You need anything, doll?" Her scent isn't Evelyn's, and I'm turned off. I shake my head and push her arm off me.

Another hangs on Baja. The women don't know this party isn't real.

I eye the Vipers and take in their patches, finding their president. He zeros in on me as well. I stand, and he moves to me. He's short and stocky, with his night riding glasses pushed up on his head, holding back wavy gray hair.

I extend a hand and he shakes it. "Welcome to our party."

"I'm Cooter."

"Rock. What brings you here, Cooter?"

His eyes travel around the room, eying all the Royal Bastards' logos, and all the new patches. "Just traveling through. Hadn't heard this news. Didn't know the Royal Bastards had an interest in this state."

"Well, now you know." I don't give him much.

"Your club is growing larger every day, huh?"

"It is. Got a lot of chapters a phone call away." The threat is veiled, but his eyes narrow nonetheless.

I fold my arms and lift a chin to one of the girls. "Get our friends some beer, doll."

"Yes, sir." She scurries off.

I study the other Vipers. Behind him is his Enforcer, Sargent at Arms, and the man I'm most interested in: his VP,

Malik.

I catch the look Cooter casts over his shoulder at his VP. He's pissed. Probably mad as hell they came all this way, and Malik's intel was so completely wrong. I've known of officers to be sunk for much less than this.

"So, Vipers from New Mexico." I drag the words out, nodding like I'm sizing them up as some club I've never heard of, some club of little importance. In size, the Royal Bastards are probably double the membership of the Vipers, which I'm sure was why they were looking to expand. "You came a long way for nothing tonight."

His chin lifts, and his eyes narrow. "Seems so. Like I said, hadn't heard of your interest in this state."

With the men from my chapter as well as all of Duck's, plus the hangers-on who joined the party, the Vipers are vastly outnumbered here tonight. Cooter knows that. Everyone in the room knows that. Perhaps the only man who doesn't is Malik. He's been embarrassed here tonight, and that has quickly turned to fury. I see the venom in his eyes when they lock on me. Apparently, he's found a new target for his rage. I realize he's not a man to be underestimated, and I may have done that.

Bring it on, asshole. Your time is coming.

"This is fuckin' bullshit," he whispers in Cooter's ear.

Cooter wisely turns his chin. "Shut up."

Division in the ranks—I love it and don't hide my grin. "You've been outmaneuvered, Cooter. Don't know where you got your bad information, but this trip of yours has been a waste of time."

His eyes cut to Malik. Oh, yeah, there's gonna be hell to pay when they get down the road.

I lift a chin to one of Duck's men positioned by the wall and he returns it. A second later, the music cuts out and chairs scrape against the floor as my guys all come to their feet, ready to throw down on these assholes.

Cooter knows he's got no option but to back down. He nods. "We'll leave you to your party."

"You do that." I lock eyes with him, then flick my gaze over his shoulder to Malik. "You got a problem we need to deal with?"

He's so pissed, his head is about to explode. Color climbs his neck and face. He wants to charge me, and actually sways toward me. Utah steps in front of me, defending his president.

Cooter puts a hand on his VP's chest. "Ain't no problem. We were just leavin'."

Goddamn, I wish he'd made a move. I could have ended it right here and now. Instead I watch them turn and stalk out, four Viper patches disappearing out the door. Half my men follow to make sure they ride on.

Duck and I exchange a look.

"Do you think he bought it?" he asks me.

"I think Cooter did. Malik I'm not so sure. You tell me."

Duck blows out a long sigh when their bikes thunder away into the distance. "Thank you for doing this."

I lift my chin to the back hall that leads to his office. "We need to talk."

"Sure." He leads the way.

I lean in to Darko. "Make sure they leave town. Get someone in a vehicle to follow them out without being seen."

"Got it."

I follow Duck to his office, and he closes the door.

He moves behind his desk and digs in his pocket, pulling out a pill bottle. He shakes one out and pops it in his mouth, downing it with his beer.

“You okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

“Don’t worry about me.” His eyes lock on mine. “Now Malik knows about you, and I’m worried he’s going to come after you. That puts Evelyn in danger.”

“He’s got to find her first.”

“He’s gonna have an easy time finding your clubhouse. The man’s smart.”

I nod, considering his words. “I’ll never let anything happen to her. Got my word.” Duck is pale, and I can’t help asking the question on my mind. “Evelyn know how sick you are?”

“No. And I don’t want her to. Nothing she can do but worry. What’d you want to talk about?”

“Her.”

“What about her? Is she okay?”

“She’s fine—better than fine. She’s in love.”

“In love? With who, for Christ’s sake?” He surges to his feet. “Did one of your men touch her?”

“Calm the fuck down.”

He sucks in a breath. “Daughters, huh? You got one?”

“I do.”

“They’ll be the death of us.” He collapses in his chair.

I grin. “I know what you mean.”



“So, who’s Evelyn in love with this time? Anyone’s got to be better than that asshole, Malik.” He studies the top of his desk.

“Me.”

Duck’s eyes flick up. “You?”

“Me.”

He surges to his feet again. “Have you fucking touched her?”

“I have,” I admit. He’s pissed, and I can’t blame him.

He drags a hand over his mouth. “I’d fucking knock your lights out, but I like you too much.”

I chuckle. “Thanks.”

He’s breathing heavily and sits back down. “You’re a little old for her, aren’t you?”

“Maybe so, but it doesn’t seem to matter to her. It’s all a little shocking, I know. It came out of the blue for me. I never expected to find another woman after I lost my ol’ lady. But it happened. I love her, and she loves me.”

“Goddamn,” he whispers. He sits for a minute, taking it in, and I give him that. Finally, he stands and offers me his hand. “Well, if she’s got to find a man, I couldn’t imagine a better one.”

I grasp his offered hand. “I’ll be good to her, Duck. I promise you.”

He nods. “You better be. Christ, she’ll be in Colorado then, huh? God, I hate to lose her.”

“You won’t lose her. You’re welcome to visit anytime.”

“So, this gonna be official?”

“You mean marriage?”

“Yeah, I mean marriage. I want for my daughter the same things I’m sure you want for yours.”

“Haven’t asked her yet. We still got some things to talk about. But, yeah, if she’ll have me.”

“She’ll have you. We should toast.” He pulls out a bottle of whiskey and pours us both a shot.

“To your daughter’s happiness,” I say, lifting mine.

He clinks my glass. “Love her well.”

“I plan to.” We throw them back.

“Thanks for everything tonight. When you headin’ home?”

“Figured we’d crash here for the night and head out tomorrow.”

He slaps me on the shoulder. “Well, let’s go join the party.”

When I return to the table, Darko leans to me. “You tell him?”

“I did.”

“How’d it go? I see he didn’t put a bullet in you, and you don’t have a black eye, so that’s good, right?”

“It went fine. He’s as happy as a man can be who’s losing his daughter to another MC president in another goddamn state.”

Darko chuckles. “You’re gonna be happy for that distance, her maybe not so much.”

I nod, my mind on Malik.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

“Just thinkin’ about that asshole, Malik. I may have underestimated him. And now I’ve put a target on Evelyn’s back and on our chapter’s back.”

“We’ll be ready.”

“Will we, VP?”

“Damn right we will.”



## CHAPTER THIRTY

*Evelyn—*

I'm on the back of Rock's bike, and we're heading up to the cabin. I press my cheek to his back, happy and hopeful and so thankful for everything this man did for my father. Grateful too that he came home in one piece. He wouldn't talk much about what happened, except to say that he did get a look at Malik, and that he had told my father about us.

I really do need to call him and make a mental note to do that later.

Rock picked me up at Lola's where he'd wanted me to stay while he was out of town. I did as he'd asked, knowing only that he was going to Utah. He wouldn't tell me another word until he returned and picked me up an hour ago.

When we arrive at the cabin, I climb off the bike and stretch. Rock shuts the Harley off and grabs my hand, leading me inside.

We don't waste anytime. He's only been gone a day, and I missed him like crazy. He pulls me along, straight to the bedroom.

He sets me on the end of the bed. "Lie back."

When I do, he tugs my boots, jeans, and panties off, leaving me in nothing but my shirt and bra.

He drops to his knees and his palms press on the inside of my thighs. "Let me see, Evelyn. Show me how wet you are for me."

I suck in a breath when his hands push my legs open, spreading them wide.

Hot palms slide up soft skin, and my breath staggers. He reaches the juncture of my thighs and his thumbs brush lightly over my seam. My hips buck, pushing gently against his hand, my body desperate for more.

He chuckles darkly. “Are you eager for me, baby?”

“Yes. Please, Rock.”

His thumb strokes over me, and pleasure melts through me. “Such a wet little pussy, and all for me. Did you miss me, sweetheart?”

“Desperately.”

His thumb brushes up and down, stroking my pussy, spreading my wetness, and the pleasure between my legs begins to pulse.

He dips his head, his breath on my bare thighs, making my skin prickle and shiver. His eyes lock on mine, and I fall into his gaze.

He inhales, catching my scent, and groans.

“Fuck, Evelyn,” he growls, his eyes blazing with heat. “I’ve missed you. I’ve missed this sweet pussy.” His hungry gaze focuses in on it. I feel his breath across my bare, slick lips.

“Please,” I gasp quietly, so... so... desperate to feel his mouth on me.

“So eager, aren’t you, baby girl? I’ll always give my baby what she wants.” He leans in, and when his tongue drags over me in a long slow swipe, I arch my back and cry out. Pleasure I’ve only felt with him melts through me, starting between my legs and radiating out through my entire body. His beard against my sensitive skin adds a whole other sensation. One big warm palm strokes up my flat belly, his eyes watching my body react.

“Show me those gorgeous tits I’ve missed.”

I obey instantly, pulling my shirt over my head, reaching under my back to flick the hook open and fling my bra to the floor.

“So pretty.” He groans, and dips his head again, his thumbs separate my folds, and his tongue swipes over my clit. I cry out, trembling and bucking my hips shamelessly against his mouth.

“There’s my greedy little girl,” he purrs, pushing his tongue into me and making me gasp as he drives it in and out, shallowly fucking me with his tongue. My body shudders, and my breasts quiver. I can feel my pussy flooding.

That wicked tongue of his darts in and out of me before he replaces it with two fingers, stretching me, and I gasp, my body jerking at the sudden invasion.

“Easy, baby.” His tongue swirls across my clit and I moan.

Shoving my thighs farther apart with his shoulders, his hand works my pussy so good. He pulls his mouth away and replaces it with his thumb, rubbing my clit over and over until I moan loudly, throwing my head back, my spine arching off the mattress.

“Oh, God.”

“So hot. I’ve got the hottest fucking girl, always so eager for it.”

I dip my chin to catch his eyes. My mouth is slack, and my eyes are hooded with lust as I watch him. His fill with heat.

“Play with your nipples.”

I give him what he wants with no hesitation, pinching and rolling the swollen and sensitive nubs, moaning at the sensation.

“Good girl.” He dips his mouth to me again and his hot tongue licks me again and again. I drop a hand to his head and thread my fingers into his thick blond hair, and when he swirls his tongue around and around my clit, I can’t take it any longer.

“I’m going to come,” I pant.

“Not yet. Hold off, Evelyn.”

“I can’t.”

He moves back in, mercilessly teasing my clit over and over and over again. His seeking fingers stroke deep, finding my g-spot. I try to hang on, my hands fisting in the bedding. I pant faster, fighting it. When he sucks my clit between his lips and bats it with his tongue, I explode.

I throw my head back, and my hips lift. The orgasm explodes through me. He doesn’t let up. I moan, writhing, bucking against his mouth over and over, until with one last little spasm of pleasure, I whimper and melt.

My body trembles, my breathing ragged while he lifts off me and strips, then crawls up my body, settling between my spread thighs. His hot skin presses to mine. A throb of pleasure still pulses between my legs. He rests on his elbows and brushes the hair from my sweaty forehead, and we lock eyes. His face is a mask of lust.

“So beautiful. I love to watch you come. I could play all night with you.” He brushes his mouth over mine.

I taste myself on his lips, and I kiss him back hungrily. As sate as I am, I’m still desperate for his cock inside me, filling me completely.

He licks and kisses and bites his way down my neck, teasing his way to my breasts. He captures my nipples, settling in for a good long time. He sucks and nips and licks first one, then the other like he can’t get enough of them.



I feel his hard erection against my thigh, and the head brushes against my opening. He goes up on his elbows again, his face hovering above mine. His eyes are soft, and his expression is gentle and full of love. He nudges forward with his hips, pushing the crown of his dick inside me barely an inch.

I moan breathlessly. He's driving me insane.

He hovers over me, and our eyes lock. "I've missed you, pretty girl."

"I've missed you, too. So much. Take me," I moan softly, my head lifting, my lips brushing his. "Make love to me."

He rocks his hips, and without another moment's hesitation, he pushes forward. His thick cock plunges into my tight, wet pussy, filling me. I whimper against his mouth, clutching him to me, my body tightening around him.

He drops his mouth to my shoulder, biting me, then just as quickly laving the spot with his tongue. He begins to move, his hips thrusting, his cock sliding in and out of me so slowly, the sensation exquisite. His mouth finds mine, and he kisses me softly, letting every single word of love he hasn't spoken pour into his kiss.

His cock slides in and out, and he makes love to me tenderly, treating me like a precious gift. I groan in pleasure and let my arms and legs wrap tight around him.

"I love when you let me inside this perfect, pretty little pussy."

My legs pull him in deeper, urging him on. Our lips sear together, tongues swirling as he sinks every inch of his bare cock deep over and over.

"Evelyn," he moans softly into my mouth, and when he kisses me this time, I feel his love.

He pushes deep and stays like that, buried to the hilt. “Such a tight, perfect little pussy. And all mine.”

“Yes. All yours,” I moan and start to move my hips, panting into his mouth, eager for him to fuck me.

“My baby wants something?”

“Fuck me, Rock. Please.”

He kisses me fiercely and pulls out, then pushes in hard. I cling to him, my legs tightening around him. He does it again, sliding out and then back in, burying deep, and I moan in pleasure.

“So wet for me,” he growls, making me gasp as I take every inch of him. He thrusts come harder, and I cry out as he buries himself to the hilt.

“Oh, fuck, that’s so, so good,” he murmurs.

I’m panting and trembling, my head falling back.

He grunts, his hands sliding to my hips and my ass, yanking me against him as he starts to drive harder and move faster. His swollen cock stretches me, and I cling to him, so eager for more.

His hips crash against my thighs, and my nipples drag over his chest, sending tingling sensations through them as we rock together faster and harder.

Any semblance of control he may have had shatters. He’s fucking me hard now, just like I want, our bodies writhing together.

I can think of nothing but him and the slick, heavenly hard cock pumping between my legs. I know my inner thighs are going to be sore tomorrow and I don’t care. My soft moans urge him on. My pussy clings to him, tightening in rippling waves until he growls.

“Fuck, yes.”

My moans fall away, replaced by quick, panting little whimpers. He buries his face in my neck, biting and sucking at the tender skin, marking me there as he ruts into me like a man possessed. He fucks me hard, both of us panting and moaning as we slam together again and again.

One hand drifts down from my hip, his thumb seeking and finding my clit. He rolls it, strumming it as he fucks me. I come undone again, as a powerful orgasm barrels toward me.

“Oh, God.”

“Come all over my dick, baby,” he growls in my ear.

I explode. It’s sudden, and all-consuming, and when I do, my whole body shudders. I clutch his back, clinging to him as ecstasy pours over me.

He groans into my neck, goes rigid against me, and comes hard with me.

We hold each other tight, and there’s nowhere else I ever want to be. He’s my mate, my life, my everything.

His mouth moves to my ear, and I hear the words I’ve waited for. “I love you, Evelyn.”



## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

*Evelyn—*

The bed shifts, and I crack open my eyes to the bright morning light. Rock has his back to the headboard, and his phone in his hands, texting someone.

I'm on my stomach, and I go up on my elbows, squinting. "Everything okay."

He pauses to press a soft kiss to my lips. "Everything's fine. Just takin' care of some business. Go back to sleep."

I roll to my side and fall back asleep. The next time I wake is when the bed shifts. I twist to see Rock slipping into his jeans.

"Where are you going?" I ask, rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

"Just getting some coffee. You want one?"

"Sure. I can make it."

"Nope. You stay in bed. I'll get it." I take in his sexy ass and the ink on his bare back. His club tattoo stretches across it.

I scoot against the headboard, the sheet tucked around my bare breasts. Soon Rock returns, carrying two steaming mugs. He sets them down on the nightstand and sits facing me. He props a fist on the mattress at my hip and leans over me, bringing his mouth to mine. I cup his face with one hand, his beard soft under my palm.

"Say it again." I search his eyes.

He grins and gives me what I want. "I love you, Evelyn. I have for a while, just wasn't ready to say the words."

“I love you, too. So much.” I bite my lip. “Did you say anything to my father?”

“Yep. Told him you were in love. He asked me who the hell with, and I said me. I thought he was gonna hit me. Said he would knock my lights out, except he likes me too much.”

“So, he’s okay with it?”

“He is. He wasn’t too happy you’d be living a state away, but I told him he was welcome anytime. That reminds me.” He sits up and pulls the drawer of the nightstand open and digs out a velvet box.

My heart skips a beat.

He pops it open, and I’m staring at a circlet of diamonds set in a band. “I wasn’t sure what you’d like, but this caught my eye.”

I stare down at it, then smile and lift my eyes to his. “It’s perfect.”

He takes it out. “Give me your hand.”

I hold it out.

“I love you, baby. Marry me and make me the happiest man on the planet. I can’t promise you everything will always be easy, but I can promise you I’ll love you well, and I’ll do anything to make you happy.”

I nod. “I can’t imagine my life with anyone else.”

He slips the ring on my finger, and I wrap my arms around his neck. His arms go around me, and his hands stroke the skin of my back. He kisses me passionately, and when he pulls back, the sheet falls away. His gaze drops to my bare breasts, and he grins. “You naked in my bed every night. What more does a man need?”

I’m so happy, a giggle bubbles up from my chest.

Rock strokes my hair. “Anything I do, I do to keep you safe and protected. You get that right?”

I frown at his strange words. “Yes, why?”

He stares at me, and the sound of a motorcycle carries to me, drawing my eyes to the window. “Is someone coming?”

He stands and grabs his mug. “Get dressed, baby. We got company.”

With that, he walks out of the room, leaving me confused. I gaze at the ring sparkling in the morning sun. Then I scramble from the bed and get dressed. I grab my own mug and wander into the kitchen. I stop dead when I see a box of groceries sitting on the counter. I glance toward the living room and notice my duffel bag sitting on the floor. How in the world? Was it there last night, and I hadn’t noticed?

I go outside and find Rock standing on the porch sipping his coffee. There’s one bike parked, and a prospect stands at the bottom of the stairs, one boot on the bottom step.

“I’ll send someone up with more supplies later,” Rock says to him.

I frown. “What’s going on?”

Rock motions toward the kid with his mug. “Evelyn, this is Woody. He’s going to stay with you while I’m gone.”

“Stay with me?”

“I need you up here at the cabin for a few days.”

“Why?”

“Because after our trip to Utah, Malik knows who I am. The clubhouse and even my house are too easy for him to find, but not this hunting cabin. You’ll be safe here.”

“I don’t want to be apart from you.”

“It’s just until I know his next move.” He sets his mug on the railing and closes his hands around my upper arms, rubbing up and down. “I need you to do this for me, baby. No arguments.”

I search his eyes and give him what he wants. “All right. If you think it best.”

“That’s my good girl.” He presses his lips to my forehead. “I’ve got to go. I’ll call you later.”

“I love you.”

“Love you, too, baby.”

I watch him move down the steps and to his motorcycle. He fires it up and roars down the driveway, taking my heart with him. The sound of the Harley engine fades down the highway, and then there’s just silence.

My eyes move to the prospect. “You want some coffee, Woody?”

“Sounds great. Thanks.”

He follows me into the kitchen. I pour him a mug, then sit at the table with him. The sparkle of the ring on my finger sends refracted light across the table.

“Rock give you that?” Woody nods to my hand.

“Yes, this morning.”

“Nice.”

On impulse, I pull out my phone and snap a photo, then text it to Lola.

I get an emoji face back with big heart eyes and an OMG.

I giggle, knowing she’s probably already on the phone spreading the word to the brat pack.

I get a text back.



**Lola: Dad had me pack your things and get some groceries. Memphis brought them up yesterday.**

**Me: Oh. So it was you. Did you know about the ring?**

**Lola: Nope. He did that all on his own.**

**Me: The boy did good.**

**Lola: He did. We have a wedding to plan!!!**

**Me: We haven't talked about that yet.**

**Lola: I can't wait to go dress shopping with you.**

**Me: Willow will have to be our flower girl.**

**Lola: OMG! She'll love that!**

**Me: Talk to you later.**

**Lola: Bye. I'm going out to buy you some bridal magazines now.**

I giggle and disconnect.

“You look happy,” Woody says.

“I am. Happier than I’ve ever been.”



## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

*Rock—*

Tossing down my pen, I slouch in my chair and rub my eyes. I'm exhausted. I've spent all day at the clubhouse trying to work a plan to set up Malik. I've got to figure out a way to get to him without the Vipers knowing it's us. The boys have come up with several ideas, but I see problems in every one of them. I want this done right. I want the Vipers to have no reason to bring blow back on us.

We located their clubhouse, and I've studied it on every map and virtual drive-by app there is. It's in a rundown, abandoned factory on the poor side of Albuquerque. There are several levels and it's surrounded by fence topped with barbwire. I'm wondering what they're protecting so well. Maybe they've got a meth lab running inside. The whole thing looks like it'd be a great place for a haunted insane asylum come Halloween. People would pay good money to walk through and have the crap scared out of them. I've never understood that. Who in their right mind would want to spend any time in this place, let alone run your MC out of it? Talk about a depressing place to come every day. But, to each his own, I guess.

I don't give a damn about their shitty clubhouse. I'm not after taking out the Vipers, anyway. I just want Malik, if for nothing else, for that burn on Evelyn's ribs. I can't let a man who did that to the woman I love walk this earth another week. I'd say a day, but this is going to take some time.

Thunder rouses me from my musings, and I glance out the window behind my desk. The western sky is stormy, though the sun still shines here. I'm glad I've been keeping my truck

here, parked on the edge of the lot and out of the way. I may need it later if that threatening sky comes this way.

A bolt of lightning strikes the ground like an arrow, reminding me of Mother Nature's power. I stand and move to the glass, checking the eastern sky. The hunting cabin where I've stashed Evelyn is that direction. About the only thing I have to worry about doing any damage up there is a tree falling on it or a forest fire.

I shoot her a text.

**Me: How r u baby?**

**Evelyn: Missing you**

**Me: Ditto**

**Evelyn: How much longer?**

**Me: I'll let you know. How's the weather up there?**

**Evelyn: Sunny. Why?**

**Me: There's a storm approaching from the west. It might skate by you to the north.**

**Evelyn: I love you**

**Me: Love you more**

Darko walks in. "Baja just called. He and Trez are at the hospital with Izzy. She's gone into labor."

"Wow. Gonna have a grandson before the day is out, VP."

"Baja said the kid was comin' fast. You gonna head up there?"

I glance again at the New Mexico info, then nod. "I should call Lola."

“Memphis just left to pick her up.”

“I guess I’ll meet her up there, then.”

Darko nods. “I’m gonna finish checking our bar stock, and then I’ll stop up.”

“All right.” I grab my keys. “Think I’ll take the truck. Maybe stop and get her flowers.”

“Hell, you can buy those in the lobby.”

“Right.”

He follows me down the hall into the main room, then splits off to the bar. I head out the door and down the steps off the porch. I’m halfway across the lot, my thumb moving over my phone, texting Trez.

### **Me: Just heard. On my way**

I hit my remote to unlock the truck door and then the remote start button.

A huge blast explodes the truck, knocking me back. I slam on the gravel lot, and everything goes black.

When I come to, I stare up at the sky and clouds, everything fuzzy around the edges. Darko appears over me, his face glowing orange, and then I look over and realize there’s a bonfire in the parking lot. I frown. Why is there a bonfire in the parking lot? Then I realize it’s not a bonfire, it’s the heaping metal remainder of my pickup. Thick black smoke billows toward the sky.

Darko shouts something, but I can’t hear anything. It’s like I’m underwater. He touches my head, and his hand comes away bloody. He turns and shouts to someone else, then

suddenly Utah is there standing over me, shouting into his phone.

Everything goes dark, and I lay my head back.





## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

*Evelyn—*

It's been hours since I last got a text from Rock. I stand at the window, watching the sky.

Woody is out on the porch smoking a cigarette, sitting in one of the old wooden rockers. I can hear it through the screen door, rolling across the floorboards in a soothing rhythm.

I was in the bedroom taking a nap. I'm sure he thinks I'm still in there. When his phone rings, he answers, unaware that I can hear every word.

"Yeah." The rocker creaks as he stands. "What? When?"

I move closer, straining to hear.

"Is he okay?" He paces across the porch. "Which hospital did they take him to? That the one on King Street?"

A foreboding fills my chest. Dear God, don't let this be about Rock.

"How'd it happen?" He paces again. "Jesus Christ, you're kidding." He paces back. "Do I tell her? No, you're right. Okay, keep me informed. And you better keep Memphis's ol' lady from tellin' her. They're tight. Okay. Later."

I slip away and scurry to the bedroom. I barely make it before the screen door creaks open and slams against the frame.

My pulse pounds, and my heart is in my throat. Something horrible has happened, and I think it happened to Rock.

I pull my phone out and call him. It goes straight to voicemail without even ringing. That can't be good. I try texting.

**Me: Baby, tell me you're all right. Please.**

I get no response. It doesn't even show it being delivered.

I try Lola, but she's not answering either. I don't know the phone numbers of the other girls yet. Goddamn it, why didn't I get everyone's number? Lola and Rock are the only two I have.

I have no choice but to march in there and demand Woody tell me, but knowing the ways of the club, I doubt I'll get anything out of him.

He turns when he hears me approach. I stop in front of him, my hands on my hips. "What's going on?"

"What do you mean?" He sits up straighter on the couch, but will barely meet my eyes.

"I heard your call. Who'd they take to the hospital?"

"Uh, Trez's ol' lady is having a baby."

"That was no call about a baby. Spill. Is this about Rock?"

"Evelyn, I can't tell you club business."

I hold up my hand, shoving the diamond ring in his face. "This says you can. I love him, Woody. If he's hurt, I need to go to him."

"You can't. Darko said it may be a trap just to flush you out."

"What are you talking about? What trap? You still haven't told me what happened."

"Maybe you better sit down."

Oh God. It's worse than I thought. I lower slowly to the cushion next to him, tears in my eyes. "Please tell me."

“Someone rigged a pipe bomb to his truck.”

I feel the blood drain from my face. He can't be dead. He can't be.

Woody holds his hand up. “He wasn't in it, just walking toward it.”

I put my hand to my chest. “Oh, thank God. But he's hurt?”

“He was about halfway across the lot when it exploded in his face. He was thrown to the ground, has some lacerations on his head. They're worried about internal injuries. He was taken to St. Joseph's on King Street.”

I stand up. “Take me to him.”

He stands as well. “I can't do that. Like I said, it could be a trap.”

I scream at him, slapping his chest until he catches my wrists. “Do you think I care? I have to go to him. I love him. I can't lose him now.”

He holds my wrists tight. “I can't let you do that. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry, but I've got orders. Rock wanted me to protect you, and that's what I'm gonna do.”

I collapse against him, my sobs coming out in wails.

Ten minutes later, I stare out the screen door while the prospect sits on the couch, dividing his attention between me and the game he's playing on his phone. My eyes fall to his bike. If I could get his keys, maybe I could ride it into town. I'm not sure I can handle a bike as big as Woody's Harley Fatboy, but I'll damn sure try. I just have to figure out a way to get the keys and slip away from him. I turn and stare at him, biting my lip. A crack of thunder sounds, and I jump. My nerves are shot. I rub my upper arms and it starts to rain. I'm

not going to let that stop me, either. I'll ride through a damn downpour if I have to.

I move to the kitchen to make myself a coffee, hoping it won't make me jittery. I set the carafe down slowly, my salvation dawning on me. The sleeping pills I always keep for nights like this when lightning makes me anxious, and I can't sleep.

If I can slip one in a drink, maybe I can get the keys away from Woody.

I go in the bedroom and dig one out, palming it, then return to the kitchen. "You want some coffee?"

"No thanks."

"You sure?"

"Yep."

Dammit. I open the fridge and spot the orange juice. "How about a glass of nice cold OJ?"

"I suppose."

I take out the container and fill a tumbler with a few inches, then pull open the capsule and shake the powdery drug into the juice, giving it a quick stir. I carry it to the living room. "Here you go."

"Thanks." Woody takes it and drinks about half of it down in one gulp, then sits the remainder on the table.

I sit next to him. "Heard anything more?"

He meets my eyes. "No, sorry."

I look at his phone. "What game are you playing?"

"Qubix. It's just something to pass the time. It's kind of addictive."

"Can I see? I could use something to take my mind off everything."

“Sure.” He passes it over.

I feign interest and begin playing, him coaching me along. After a few minutes, he reaches for the glass and chugs down the rest of the juice.

Now I just have to wait it out and hope one pill is enough. He’s a skinny kid, so I’m hoping it is.

Two games later, he’s so bored that the drug easily takes effect, and his head droops against the couch. I wait another few minutes to be sure he’s out like a light. Then I unclip the carabineer that holds his keys to his belt.

He drags in a snore, shifting, and I freeze. After another moment, I slowly stand up and back away. Closing the door behind me, I can only pray when the bike fires up that he doesn’t wake. If he does, he’ll be out the door after me, and I’ll only have seconds to get away.

I strap on his helmet, put the key in the ignition and turn it, lift the kickstand, and hit the starter button. The bike fires on the first try. I drop it in gear, and let up on the clutch, easing away as quietly as I can. I make it down the driveway and out onto the paved road, then accelerate. I’m not very confident on a bike this size, so I take it slow. It’s drizzling, but thankfully it’s not a downpour.

Somehow, by the grace of God, I make it all the way to St. Joseph’s hospital. I pull into a spot, shut the bike down, and run for the doors.

I come to a stop at the reception desk. The woman looks up at my frantic face and soaking wet clothes.

“Can I help you, ma’am?”

“I’m looking for my fiancé. His last name is Rockingham. He was brought in after an explosion.”

“Rockingham. Let me see.” She taps on her computer. “Yes, ma’am. He’s been admitted. Third floor. Room 220.” She points toward a bank of elevators.

I dash toward them without even thanking her. Skidding to a stop, I hit the button over and over.

When I finally reach the third floor, I see a group of Royal Bastards crowded around a doorway at the end of the hall. I run, disregarding the yells from the nurse’s station telling me to walk.

Three patches turn and see me coming. They step out of my way as I push into the room.

Lola and Memphis turn. Darko is on the other side of the bed. Lola steps back and I get my first look at Rock.

He’s in a hospital gown, and his face is bruised and cut. More bandages wrap around both forearms. Suddenly, everything is in slow motion, and everyone else in the room fades away. I move toward him, our eyes locked.

“Oh my God, baby. Are you okay?” I want to grab his hand, but I’m afraid to touch him. I don’t want to hurt him.

“What are you doing here?” He looks beyond me. “Where’s Woody?”

I don’t answer him. “I’ve been so worried.” I stroke his temple and look at his wound. “Tell me you’re okay.”

“You aren’t supposed to be here, Evelyn. How did you get here?”

“Stop asking me that and tell me you’re all right!” My voice rises with my anxiety.

A doctor walks in with a nurse. “Okay, people. You’re all going to have to wait downstairs. We can’t have this many people in the room.”

I whirl on the man. “Is he okay?”

“We’re taking him down for an MRI right now to find that out. I need you all to step back.”

I can’t let him go. I just got here. I grab Rock’s hand and stare into his eyes. “I love you. I’ll be here waiting when you get back up. Okay?”

Rock squeezes my hand. “If you don’t obey orders, how am I supposed to keep you safe, baby?”

“You’re the one hurt.”

“I’m fine. Just banged up. They’re just worried about my kidneys.”

“Then I’m worried about your kidneys, too.” That gets a grin out of him, but then he winces.

He looks at Lola. “Stay with her.”

“I will, Daddy. I’ll take her to the cafeteria.”

With that the room empties, and they wheel Rock away on a gurney. I stare after him until he disappears through a set of stainless double doors.

Lola wraps her arm around me. “Come on. Let’s get some tea or decaf coffee.”

“I don’t want coffee.”

“You’re coming, nonetheless.”

“Wait a minute.” Memphis stops me with a hand. “How did you get here?”

Darko moves closer, interested in my answer as well.

“I, um, took Woody’s bike.”

Memphis’s brow lifts. “You what?”

“His Fatboy?” Darko clarifies the question.

“Yes.”

“Where is Woody, by the way?” Darko asks.

I shrug. “I, um, may have slipped a sleeping pill in his OJ. He’s passed out on the couch. Don’t blame him.”

Darko huffs. “Right.”

Lola herds me toward the elevator, and we take it to the ground floor, finding the cafeteria. The rest of the boys go out front to smoke. She gets us coffees, and we sit at a table. I barely touch mine.

“He’ll be all right, Evelyn. He got lucky.”

“Is that what you call it? He was blown up. Are you sure it’s just his kidneys they’re worried about?”

“They were also going to check his spine. I don’t think he wanted to tell you that. They already determined he has a slight concussion.”

“Oh, God. This is all my fault.” I cover my face with my hands.

She reaches across the table and pulls my wrist until I drop my hands. “Stop that. How is it your fault?”

“Malik did this. I’m sure of it. A pipe bomb? That’s right up his alley.”

Lola taps a packet of sugar and stirs it into her decaf coffee. “Well, don’t worry about it. The boys will hunt him down. No doubt about that. No one is going to get away with this.”

“What about the cops?”

“There was no avoiding their involvement. Not with a bomb going off. They’ve already taken it all into evidence. But don’t worry, the Royal Bastards won’t be the ones taking the fall.”



“No, but it draws attention to them. Rock won’t be happy about that.”

“Probably not. Hey, did you hear? Izzy’s up in maternity, having her baby right now. Trez is with her.”

“Well, that’s some good news, anyway.”

Lola looks at her watch. “She’s been up there awhile. Last I heard, she was fully dilated, and it was”—she makes quotation marks with her fingers—“go time. Or so Trez said.”

My eyes drop to her pregnant belly. “Soon it’ll be your turn.”

“I’ve got a few months to go.” Suddenly, she straightens and grabs my hand. “With everything I almost forgot. Let me see your ring!”

I hold it out, a halfhearted smile on my lips. “The day started out so wonderful and now we’re here in the hospital. As I raced over here, all I could think about was how easily I could lose it all.”

Lola shakes my hand. “You’re not going to lose anything. Stop saying that.”

I blow out a breath. She’s right. I have to be positive. I drink part of my coffee, tapping my fingernail on the table until Lola reaches her hand over and stops me.

“Quit.”

“I have to use the restroom. I’ll be right back.” I stand.

“Okay. I’m going to get a cookie. You want one?”

I shake my head and look around. “Where is it?”

She points. “I think out those doors and down the hall.”

“Okay. Be back in a second. I’m hoping there’s one of those hot air hand dryers. Maybe I can do something with my damp shirt and hair.”

She giggles. “Good luck with that.”

I go out into the hall and see the door marked women’s restroom at the end near the fire doors to the stairwell. I’m almost to it when I’m grabbed from behind with a gloved hand over my mouth and an arm locked around my belly. My attacker drags me into the stairwell, spins me around, and pins me to the wall.

*Malik!*

I feel the blood drain from my face, and my legs almost go out from under me. My terror is real, and a chill goes down my spine.

“You’re going to do exactly what I tell you or I kill him, understand?” There’s a warning to Malik’s tone that tells me I better not fight him. He digs his fingers into my arm, and I moan in pain behind his hand. “Do you understand me, Evelyn? You wouldn’t want me to come back here and kill your lover, would you?”

My eyes widen when he discloses how he knows about our relationship. How can he possibly know that?

“Would you?” he prompts.

I shake my head.

His smile is evil. “I think I found something that will make you behave. I should kill him for touching what’s mine, but then I wouldn’t have something to hold over you, would I? You’re not going to make me kill him, are you, Evelyn?”

I shake my head again, faster this time. He’s pressing his hand over so much of my mouth that he’s almost covering my nose as well. I struggle to breathe. Rock’s face flashes in my mind.

The look Malik gives me is terrifyingly calm, and I know he’s not bluffing. I wonder what he plans for me, and panic

sets in, creeping up my throat.

“You behave or I’ll put two slugs in your head.”

My heart hammers in my chest, and my mouth dries up. This isn’t going to be good. Is he going to take me to the Vipers’ clubhouse? Is he planning to pass me around? Any feelings he once had for me are long gone. Now I mean nothing to him other than a means of revenge.

My throat tightens, and my panic rises. I stare into Malik’s cold eyes and blink back tears. The thought crosses my mind that he’s going to kill Rock, anyway.

“You’re going to leave with me quietly, with no fuss, Evelyn. You raise any alarm, attract any attention, and I’ll kill him. I’ve got a rifle with a scope in the car. It won’t be hard to do, and I won’t even have to get close to the man.”

I believe every word he says, so I do as I’m told.

What other option do I have?



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

*Rock—*

“Where’s Evelyn?” I ask when Lola walks in my room ten minutes after they brought me back from radiology. She looks nervous, and every hair on the back of my neck stands up. “What is it?”

“I thought she might be back up here.” Lola approaches the bed.

“Up here?” I snap. “Wasn’t she with you?”

“She left to go to the restroom. She never came back.”

“Oh my God.” Fear shoots down my spine. I glance at Darko. “She’s gone.”

There’s a pause before he speaks. “Don’t panic. Did she leave or did she get taken?”

“I don’t fucking know!” I yell, and I realize that I’m beginning to lose control.

“Take a breath, Rock. We’ll find her.”

I glance to Utah and Memphis. “Search the hospital. Find her, goddammit!”

They tear out of the room, and I start ripping tape off my arm that’s connecting me to the IV they just hooked me to. Then I start in on the tabs taped to my chest that monitor my heart rate, which right this minute is spiking off the damn charts. I’ve got to get to Evelyn. I can’t even think about what may have happened to her. Monitors start beeping and nurses come running.

“Sir, what are you doing? Get back in bed. We have to reattach these. You’re not cleared for release yet.”

“Lola, toss me my clothes and turn your back. You nurses want a free show, stick around, but I’m not staying.”

They wisely retreat.

I’m putting on my shirt when Darko returns. I meet his eyes and know it’s bad. “What? Tell me?”

He holds up a book of matches. “Found these and three cigarette butts in the stairwell near the cafeteria.” He passes them to me. On the cover is the Vipers’ logo.

“No!” I shout and sway. I probably wouldn’t stay on my feet if it weren’t for my VP grabbing me in his arms.

“I’ve got you, brother.”

“He took her. She’s gone,” I manage to say between heaving breaths.

“Who?” Lola asks.

“Malik, who the fuck else? Who knows how long he’s been watching me.” I cover my face with my hands. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to snap your head off, honey.”

“We’ll check the hospital security cameras,” Darko says.

“When was the last time you saw her?” My eyes drill into Lola’s.

She checks her watch. “About half an hour ago. I waited for her for a few minutes before I went looking, then came up here.”

Baja dashes into the room. I guess news is spreading. Darko probably texted everyone. Baja’s one of the youngest of the group and most tech savvy. He’s our go to computer guy.

Darko pins him with a look. “Can you hack into the hospital’s security cameras?”

He nods. “Just get me in the room.”

Utah turns to leave. “Come with me. We’ll find it, and I’ll get you in somehow.”

“I can’t lose her, Darko. I love her.”

He nods. “Good to hear you finally say it.”

“It’s what I’ve been feeling inside since the moment I met her.” I wish desperately now that I’d told her those words sooner.

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*Evelyn—*

Malik drives us all the way to Albuquerque and takes me to some sort of old abandoned factory. He hauls me through a door, down a hall and into another smaller room. There’s a bar and some tables, but there’s no one here. With his hold still firm on my arm, he stops at the bar and grabs a bottle of whiskey. He pours some in a glass and throws it back like it’s water.

Glancing around, I’m wondering what this place is. I’m trying to figure it out when the door opens. Two men walk in, and my stomach drops at the sight of the patches decorating their leathers. Vipers. But I don’t recognize either of them.

Locking my gaze on them, they both suddenly go still. Their gaze shifts to Malik. They must know who I am. Odds are they had no clue what Malik was up to taking me.

“Malik, you know who you’re fucking with?” The taller man lifts his chin toward me. “She’s Duck’s daughter, isn’t she? And he’s with the Royal Bastards now. Cooter’s not gonna go for this. One more fuck up, and you’re out.”

The other man grins. “I think our VP got a taste of this one earlier. Maybe we should have one, too.”

They both take a step toward me, but stop short. I’m so focused in on the Vipers that I completely forget about Malik. His arm wraps around my waist, pulling my back flush to his front, holding me in a possessive grip. Then Malik shocks even me when he actually pulls a gun on the other two. Even worse, I realize I’m his shield. What a fucking coward.

“There a problem?” Malik growls from behind me. He locks his arm around me tighter. Neither of the Vipers says a word. They just study him for a few beats before fastening their gaze back on me.

“You’re fucking a Royal Bastard’s daughter, Malik.” The tall one shifts on his feet.

“Is this what the fuck you’ve been up to?” The other one folds his arms.

I see my chance to drive a wedge between Malik and the club he thought had at his back. “He planted a pipe bomb on Rock’s truck.”

“Shut up,” Malik snaps, jerking me by the arm. “Don’t listen to her.”

“Who the fuck is Rock?” the short one asks.

The taller one’s eyes narrow on Malik. “He was at that damn patch-over, Malik. He was the Durango president. Jesus Christ, what have you done?”

“You tryin’ to start a war, VP?” the short guy asks. “Cooter’s gonna shit when he hears about this.”

“Do what you gotta do.” Malik drags me through a door. He hurries me down a hall, and we make several turns then he shoves me through another door, following me in.



“You fucking bitch.” He backhands me, and I fall to the floor. He comes to stand over me.

I look up at him with venom in my eyes. “Cooter will kill you for this.” Then I laugh, and I know I’m losing it.

“Cooter can’t do shit. He’s dead in a shallow grave ten miles outside of town.”

My eyes widen. There’s nothing he won’t stoop to. Now he’s murdered three people. I have a feeling Rock and I are number four and five on his list. I’m truly losing all hope. I don’t know what I can do to stop him.

Malik chuckles. “Your lover is a stupid man. Not even close to my brilliance. Want to know how I knew about you and him?”

I nod, almost afraid of the answer.

“Chick named Arlene ring a bell?”

*Oh my God.*

He huffs out an evil laugh. “Yep. Boy, does that bitch *hate* you. It didn’t take too much snooping around town before I found her in a bar one night cursing Rock up a storm to anyone who would listen. She was happy to tell me all about the club and you. Everything I needed to know to set my trap for the price of a few drinks.”

“You’re sick, Malik. You need help.”

His smile fades. “Maybe my brother had a good idea after all. Maybe I should turn you over to them. I could have a line in the hall in five minutes. All of them ready to fuck you every which way, so watch your fucking mouth.”

With that, he leaves, locking the door. I look around my surroundings. There’s one window in this tiny room, but it’s high in the wall, and I could never reach it. It’s useless except as a means of light. The walls are all cement block and the

floor is concrete. The door is steel. I try it anyway, but it's locked tight.

Oh my God. What if he leaves me in here to die?

Then I glance up and notice a small video camera aimed at me. It totally creeps me out, and I wonder who's watching.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

*Rock—*

I sit at the head of the table in Church and stare around the room at every officer in my chapter. Even Trez is here, rushing over after the birth of his son. I take a deep breath and blow it out. “If anything happens to Evelyn—if, God forbid, the worst happens—I’m trusting in you, my loyal officers, to follow my wishes.”

Trez looks around the room and then at me. “What wishes?”

Darko studies me, then the rest of the men. I’ve already informed him. “He wants us to put him to ground.”

The room erupts in objections.

Trez surges to his feet. “Fuck no. I can’t do that. I won’t. None of us will.”

I hold up my hand. “I love you, son, you and Lola. And I loved your mother. Losing her nearly destroyed me. I never thought I’d find a love like that again. But I did—with Evelyn. If she’s gone, if we don’t find her in time, I don’t want to go on living. I’d rather go with her.”

“You can’t be serious,” Memphis murmurs. “You’ll break Lola. And with the baby...”

“I know. I know all that. But I’ll be dead inside, don’t you get that?”

“Fuck all this talk. I don’t want to listen to any more of this defeatist bullshit. Let’s go get her back.” Utah surges to his feet. “Come on. We know where their damn clubhouse is.”

“You don’t think I already called there?” I say quietly.

He turns, stunned. “What did they say?”

“Said they haven’t seen Malik or Cooter.”

“Fuck the lying bastards.” He slaps the back of his hand to his palm. “We go in, find the bastard, and torture him till he tells us, then we kill him.” Utah is nothing if not biblical in his justice.

Everyone stands.

I fight the feeling inside that terrifies me most—the one that tells me I’m already too late, that she’s already lying dead somewhere where I’ll never find her body. I stand and nod.

Darko puts his arm around me. “We’ll find her.”

It’s a three-hour trip to Albuquerque, but hauling ass, we make it in a little over two. We come to a stop on the side of a road that leads in. Darkness has fallen, and we load up on weaponry, strapping all manner of guns on. Utah’s even got a flamethrower strapped to his back, God love him.

We jog down the road, everyone in black, our cuts hidden under hoodies. We pause on the other side of an abandoned house and take in the facility. It’s even creepier in the dark than it was on the map apps. The place is surrounded by a chain-link fence and barbed wire.

Utah steps forward with wire cutters and cuts a slit big enough for us to squeeze through. Before we enter, Darko holds up a hand.

“There may be surveillance, boys. We’ve got to move quickly if we’re doing this. Hit ‘em fast and hard before they have time to organize.”

We move in across the property and stop along the wall. It takes me back to Iraq and the days of clearing buildings in

Fallujah. Only this time, I know my men aren't going to allow me to risk my life. But fuck that bullshit.

I hold up a hand, stopping Utah. "I go first."

He looks over his shoulder at me. "Boss, you can't. That's my job."

Darko steps in front of me, blocking my way. "No way. You wait for the men to clear it."

I grab his shirt. "I won't let my crew take a bullet that's meant for me. I've let my personal shit affect this club. I've let it bleed over. That stops now. I've got to be the first through that door." I move around him.

"Now you're just pissing me the fuck off, Prez," he growls and follows me in, motioning the rest to follow.

We walk into a cavernous room that must have been used for manufacturing at one point. There are only security lights and exit signs. Broken glass litters the concrete floor from skylights high above, but not a Viper in sight. It's as if the place is deserted.

Utah puts his finger to his mouth, cocking his head and listening. He moves stealthily toward a door on the right and kicks it in, lifting his AR-15.

"Hands in the air, boys," he growls. I peer beyond him. Two surprised prospects jump from their chairs in what looks like a barroom. It's small for a place this size and doesn't make any sense.

I push past Utah. Memphis and Trez take up position at the door covering our backs.

"Where the fuck is she?" I shout in their faces.

"Who?" the taller one asks shakily.

"My ol' lady. Your VP took her."

“We haven’t seen him. There’s no one here but us,” the short one says.

“Where is everyone?” I demand. They shrug.

“No one tells us shit,” the tall kid says.

Baja takes their weapons. When he’s done, he whistles, catching my attention, then lifts his chin to a camera up in the corner of the room.

I point at it, bending to one of the prospects. “Where’s the monitoring for that?”

“There’s a room down the hall through that door. They’ve got a whole set up in there.”

“And no one’s in there?”

They shake their heads.

“I guess not, or you’d have seen us coming.” I put my back to the wall and nod to Utah. He yanks the knob open. I grab one of the prospects as a shield and shove him down the hall ahead of us. My gun pokes in his back as I hiss in his ear. “You tip anyone off, I’ll blow your spine in half.”

He leads me down the hall and opens the door. It looks like a fucking control room for the six o’clock news. Monitors line a desk with two empty chairs. The screens switch between groups of camera shots, four at a time. I see the outside. I see the front door. I see some back door. I see hallways. I see an empty lab. *Ah, so they are cooking meth.*

Considering there’s no one here, they aren’t guarding product very well.

Another set of four small empty rooms pop up, then another. I whirl to Baja. “Can you make it go back to those last cameras? I thought I saw movement, but it was too quick.”

“Sure.” He takes a seat and pushes some buttons.

“There. That one. What’s that shape in the corner? There, see? It moved again.”

“It’s too dark.”

“Can you zoom in?”

He fiddles some more and fills the screen with only that room. It’s grainy and black and white, but I swear I see an ankle with a sneaker peeking out of the shadows. I whirl to the prospect. “Where’s that room?”

He holds up his hands. “I don’t have a clue, but I know there’s a hall on the other side with a bunch of small rooms. They’re always locked.”

“Who’s got the keys?”

“I don’t know.” I grab him by the shirt and point my gun to his temple. He turns white. “T-there’s a-a set behind the bar. Maybe those work.”

I spin, and Utah is out the door like a flash. “I’m on it.”

“Darko, stay and watch those cameras. Keep an eye out for any Vipers.” I drag the prospect. “Show me these rooms.”

We walk through this fucking house of horrors and find the hallway. Every door is steel and locked. I pound on them with my fist one by one and call out her name. “Evelyn? Evelyn?”

A muffled scream echoes from somewhere down the hall.

“Quiet,” I hiss to my men. We spread out, silently listening at every door.

“Here,” Trez yells out, his ear to the second from last on the left.

I run, and my palm slams against the metal, then I press my ear to the door. “Evelyn!”

There’s a pounding from the other side. “Yes. I’m in here. Rock?”



“It’s me, baby. We’re gonna get you out. Just hang on. Are you hurt?”

“No.”

Utah runs down the hall with a ring of keys. There must be thirty. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“I got it, boss.” Baja grabs them and squats down, trying one after another.

Utah studies the doorframe. “Looks like the hinge is on the inside. If we could get to that, we could take the door off.”

I nod.

He looks over at me. “The Vipers may come back. We need to get out of here before that happens. Maybe we can blow it.”

I shake my head. I appreciate his concern for his club, but I’ve got more on the line than he does. There’s no way I’m risking injuring Evelyn.

Baja is about a quarter of a way through the keys. It’s taking longer than I want, and all I can think about is getting to my girl.

I press my cheek to the door. “Is there a window in there, babe?”

“There’s one, but it’s about ten feet up. I can’t reach it.”

I look up. The ceilings are really high in this place. “Is there a sky light?”

“No.”

Baja finishes all the keys and looks up at me, shaking his head.

I press my palms to the door. “Babe?”

“Yes?”

“The keys didn’t work. I’m gonna try the window.”

“Don’t leave me.” There’s panic in her voice. “Please. It’s dark in here.”

Baja and Trez silently signal that they’re going around to the window.

I nod and talk to Evelyn. “I’m not going anywhere, honey. I’m right here. I promise I won’t leave you.”

Trez calls my phone a minute later. I put it to my ear. “Yeah?”

“We can’t tell which window she’s at. We’re gonna start throwin’ rocks and bustin’ glass until we find it. Tell her to cover her head.”

“Be careful.” I talk through the door. “Evelyn?”

“Yes?”

“They’re gonna throw a rock through the window to make sure it’s the right one, okay? You need to duck down against the corner and cover your head.”

“Okay.”

“Tell me when they hit yours.”

“Okay.”

I hear glass shatter, but she says nothing. I talk into the phone. “Nope. Try again.”

It’s not until the third window that I hear her. “That’s the one.”

I relay it to Trez.

“Tell her I’m gonna throw a rope up,” he says. “Have her tie it to the doorknob.”

I relay that to her.

“Dad?”

“Yeah, Trez?”

He chuckles. “Baja’s scurrying up the wall like a fucking spider monkey. Now he’s hanging halfway in the window.”

I can hear scuffling, then a bang like Baja just jumped to the floor. “You okay?”

“May have sprained my ankle, boss. Hang on. I’m gonna turn on my flashlight app.”

A slit of light appears under the door.

“Give me a minute, and I’ll have the door off. Gotta get the tools out of the pack.”

A minute later I hear metal striking metal and know he’s hammering on the hinge, knocking the pin free. He starts on the other one. It takes about five long minutes, but finally he yells out.

“Can I get a little help here?”

I hear the door scrape and move an inch. Utah and I shove our shoulders against it, and manage to slide it back two feet. It’s heavy as fuck. Evelyn slips out of the opening, and Baja limps out.

Utah and I let the door fall to the floor with a boom that shakes the building and rattles the glass.

Evelyn flies into my arms, and I clutch her tight, stroking her head and thanking God. I push her to arms length and scan her, looking for injuries. “Did he hurt you?”

“No.” She shakes her head. “Just scared me.”

“Where is he, Evelyn?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know.” Tears fill her eyes, but they don’t fall. My baby is tough as nails.

“There are only two prospects here. I don’t get it.”

She shakes her head. “Two patched Vipers were here when Malik brought me in. They argued with him. They said Cooter would be pissed when he found out what he was up to. Malik pulled a gun on them, then dragged me down the hall and locked me in the room.” She clutches my arm. “He told me he killed Cooter. I don’t know if he was lying or not.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“He said he came to Durango trying to find out about the club. He ran into Arlene at a bar, running her mouth. She told him everything about us, and about where the clubhouse was.”

I slam my hand into the metal door across the hall. I want to rip his head off. “Come on. Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

We leave the prospects tied up. Trez rips a poster off the wall and scrawls across it with a sharpie he finds, then holds it in front of them and clicks a photo.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Posting it on social media.”

I glance down at what he wrote.

*FREE METH*

*COME ON DOWN*

*AMALGAMATED WAREHOUSE*

*944 11<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE*

He holds up his phone and shows me some dark website where he posts it. He also posts a picture of the lab. He grins at me. “I’m pretty sure the feds monitor this site.”

I reach up and ruffle his hair. “Never thought social media would be how the future generation of MC kids take each

other out.”

“Hey, whatever works, right? Payback’s a bitch.”

We beat it out of there and back to our bikes. I look over at Baja, who’s limping badly. “You gonna be able to ride?”

“I’ll manage.”

We mount up. Evelyn hugs me tight as I hit the throttle and lead us the fuck out of town. We hit the interstate and race home.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

*Rock—*

It's late when we stop for gas on the way home. We're all exhausted from the long ride to New Mexico and back, and from the stress level we've been under.

I pull to a pump and shut the bike off. Evelyn climbs off and rubs her ass. I swing my leg over and stretch, then grin at her.

“Sore, baby girl?”

She grins and nods.

I swipe a card and yank the nozzle from the pump, unscrewing my gas cap and shoving it in. The fluorescent lights overhead hum in the dark night, illuminating the station like an oasis in a dark desert.

While the gas pumps, Evelyn keeps glancing around.

I watch her for a moment. “Babe.” Her eyes come to mine. “Stop worrying. They're not in the field over there or behind the gas station. A pack of Vipers—we'd hear 'em coming a mile off.”

“I forgot something Malik said to me.”

I straighten, my smile fading. “What's that?”

“He told me he had a rifle in his car with a scope. Said he could kill you without even getting close.”

I nod, letting her words settle in my brain.

Her eyes search mine, and she steps nearer, her hands landing on my waist. “Maybe we should avoid going where he'd expect. Maybe we should go to a motel.”

I stare down the interstate. “If he’d wanted to lay a trap for me, he would have known I’d come for you. He could have taken me out at that warehouse.”

Darko is pumping gas at the pump behind me and wanders over. “What’s wrong?”

I tell him, and we stare at each other, probably both thinking the same damn thing. I say it. “Where the fuck are they? Maybe that whole warehouse deal was just a diversion.”

Darko straightens. “The clubhouse.”

“Who hung back?”

“Just the prospects and Night Train.” He digs his phone out and calls the clubhouse number. Someone picks up, and he barks into the phone. “Everything okay there? Any problems?” He listens for a moment. “Be on high alert. The Vipers might be making a move on us. No clue what shape that may take. Just lock up and stay out of sight. You see anything suspicious, you call. Got it?”

He disconnects. By this time, the others have gathered around and heard every word.

Darko looks at me. “I’m not letting you walk into a trap.”

I scrub my face. “I’m gonna kill that son-of-a-bitch.”

“If he really has a hard-on for taking you out, we could use that to our advantage. Turn the tables. We play him,” Memphis says.

I nod. “Exactly what I’m thinking. I lead him right into a trap. He’ll come back to finish the job. No doubt about it. He can’t let it go. He’s obsessed.”

“That’s our turf. We know it better than he does,” Trez adds.

I look at my son, and then at Memphis. “Call your ol’ ladies. I want everyone on lockdown.”



Five minutes later, we're back on the road.

In three hours, we're back in Durango. We go to Trez's place and ditch our bikes. We're too easy to spot riding through town in our colors. Lola meets us there with Willow, and the women all hole up at the house. We divide into the three available vehicles: Trez's, Izzy's, and Lola's.

On the way to the clubhouse, we make a pit stop at the hospital to check in on Izzy and the baby.

I get to see my grandson for the first time since all this started. He's got a tuft of blond hair on his head, just like his father had when he was first born. I hold out my finger, and he clamps onto it with his tiny hand.

"Got a grip on him already," I murmur, then smile at Izzy, who's holding him, and kiss her on the cheek. "You did great, little mama. What's his name gonna be?"

She looks at Trez. "We thought we'd continue the tradition. He could be Richard Garrison Rockingham IV."

"The forth? I appreciate the thought, but that's a lot to saddle a kid with. Don't feel obligated if you don't really love it."

Trez brushes Izzy's forehead. "We'll talk about it some more. We haven't filled in the birth certificate yet."

"Stay with your wife and baby, Trez. I need you, I'll call."

He follows me to the door. "Keep me posted."

I squeeze his shoulder, and he grabs me in a hug. I whisper in his ear. "Keep an eye out. I love you, son."

"You too, Dad."

The rest of us head to the clubhouse. We hang back a few blocks and stake it out, just to make sure we're not walking

into a trap. Dawn is just starting to lighten the eastern skies. After about fifteen minutes, we move in on foot, sticking to the coverage of the woods.

Everything is quiet. We tell them we're coming in and slip in the back door. The men we left behind are sitting in the middle of the great room, shotguns cradled in their arms. They look tired, like they've been up all night. I know how they feel.

Darko and I retreat to my office. I stand at the window and stare out at the view. "Where the fuck is he?" I murmur more to myself than expecting my VP to answer. Something on a distant ridge catches my eye. Thick billowing smoke rises. "Oh my God."

"What is it?"

"My house is up that way."

He jumps out of his chair and comes to the window. "Who do you know up there? Call someone."

"Gillian used to be friends with the people at the end of the road. Maybe I've still got their number. I scan my contacts and find the one. I call and put the phone to my ear. "Ryan? Hey, man, have you—" I don't even get the question out before he blurts a question himself.

"You're all right? Thank God. I was afraid you were inside. Your house is on fire, man. Did you know that?"

"No. Just saw the smoke from Durango. Checkin' on you. Is it bad?"

"It's fully engulfed, Rock. The fire department is up there, but... I'm sorry, looks like you've lost everything."

"Thanks." I disconnect and look at Darko and nod.

"Jesus Christ. You think it's him?"

"I know it is."

“Maybe this is our chance. Bet he’s up there watching, maybe even waiting for you.”

I pace, thinking, trying not to deal with the devastation of the loss, pushing that aside for now. “If I wanted a good view, I’d go up on the ridge across the street.”

“Let’s sneak up behind him and get the son-of-a-bitch.”

“They mountain bike up there. There’s a trailhead just to the south. We go up through the access road.”

He nods. “Could work. We don’t have much darkness left. We’ll need to hurry.”

“Get everyone loaded up. We head out now.” He dashes out the door, and I turn to look one last time at the billowing smoke. My eyes drop to Gillian’s framed picture. I feel like every connection to her was just ripped from my life. I glance down at my hand, at the wedding ring I still wear. I tug it off and put it in my top drawer. “I’m sorry, baby.” Then I head out to meet my crew.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

*Rock—*

We creep quietly up the hills across the street from my house, coming in the back way up through an access road. Five of us move silently and slowly, dressed in black.

I lift my arm, signaling my crew to stop. We all squat low. I catch the scent of cigarette smoke and see the flaring tip of one in the dark of night. I point and Darko, Utah, Memphis, and Baja all nod.

I signal with hand gestures, and the men spread out in a ring. The closer we get, I see a rifle with a scope leaning against the tree next to Malik. I scan the area, making sure he's alone. Not for the first time, I wonder where the rest of the Vipers are.

I nod to Darko, and he makes a bird noise. Malik straightens, turning and glancing around. It's the signal, and we rush him. Before he can reach for a gun, Baja tackles him.

I point my gun at Malik's head and grin. "Waiting for me?"

His eyes narrow, shooting daggers.

Baja's got his glove pressed tight over Malik's mouth so he can't make a sound.

I keep my voice low. "How's it feel to be on the other end of the barrel, motherfucker?"

He thrashes.

I lift my chin, and the men drag him down the slope away from the fire trucks and police cars. No one's going to come save him.

We get to the bottom of a ravine, and the men secure his ankles with duct tape, covering his mouth as well. Then they tape his arms to his side, mummy style. This fucker's not going anywhere.

There's a crevice in the dirt almost grave size. I point at it. "Drop him down in there. Face up. I want to see his eyes."

Memphis and Baja heft him in, grabbing his legs and shoulders and dropping him with a thud.

I squat down and stare at Malik. "So you like fire, do you? I hear you also like handing out burns and making people suffer. Well, I believe in an eye for an eye. So that's what I'm gonna do." I stand and hold my hand out to Utah. He pulls the item he's got slung across his back.

I take the flamethrower and switch it on, pulling the trigger. Flames shoot fifteen feet in the air.

Malik's eyes get big, and he starts thrashing as much as his bounds allow, which isn't much at all.

I grin down at the bastard and watch his absolute terror.

"How's it feel to be scared, Malik?" I slowly lower the flame toward him. "This is for Evelyn and every person on this earth you ever hurt." I set the motherfucker on fire and watch him scream behind the tape. The smell of burning flesh hits our nostrils. My men step back. I understand. It's a gruesome sight, watching a man burn alive.

Soon smoke starts to rise.

Darko taps my arm. "Someone's gonna spot the smoke soon if we don't douse it."

I switch it off. He's charred black but still jerking. "Push some dirt on him. Bury him alive."

Darko snaps his fingers, and the men come forward. Baja pulls a small military shovel from his belt and hacks some dirt

free. The men shove it on him until they smother the smoke. Ten minutes later, he's buried good and deep.

We disappear into the night, back the way we came.

As we drive away, Utah meets my eyes in the rearview. "That was some grisly shit, prez."

"You brought the flamethrower," I remind him.

He chuckles and looks back to the road. "Yeah, I did."

Ten minutes later, we're almost back to the clubhouse.

"No fucking way," Utah says, leaning forward over the steering wheel and looking at the sky.

I've got my elbow on the armrest, my head in my hand, but I straighten at the tone in his voice, and follow his gaze.

Smoke curls up above the trees.

"The clubhouse!" Darko yells. "Step on it."

"No. Pull over," I bark the order. He stops, and I throw the car door open and climb out. Darko follows. I stare at him. "The Vipers."

"Malik would have put them up to. I bet he blamed Cooter's murder on us."

"Shit. Come on. If we head through the woods, maybe we can still catch them." Once again tonight we take to the forest along the road and see a line of men standing shoulder to shoulder just inside the tree line in front of us. The silhouette is illuminated by the fire licking up the logs in the rear corner of the clubhouse. Thank God it's not fully engulfed. I can't lose both my home and the clubhouse I worked so hard to build in one night.

I signal the boys, and we sneak up and put guns to the back of the four remaining Vipers' heads.

“Hands in the air, boys.”

They freeze, but none of them seem brave enough to risk a bullet to the brainstem by trying to make a move on us.

“Turn around,” I order, and they turn to face us. I lift a chin and Utah and Memphis restrain and disarm them.

Darko stays behind, keeping them at gunpoint while the rest of us run to the clubhouse. We charge inside and grab fire extinguishers from the storeroom, rushing outside, spraying the surging flames until the chemical foam finally does its job.

The corner of the clubhouse is burnt black, but the logs are thick and hopefully the structure will survive. I fling an empty canister and drop my hands to my knees, breathing hard. Goddamn motherfuckers.

Memphis dashes to the side and brings around a hose, soaking down the burnt area and the entire building to be safe.

I stalk back up the hill. “You morons tryin’ to start a war between the Vipers and the Royal Bastards? ‘Cause that’s what you’ve got.”

Their Enforcer answers, his chin in the air. “You’re the ones who did that when you killed our president, you son-of-a-bitch.”

“Let me guess, Malik told you that,” I spit out.

They glance at each other, and the enforcer answers. “Yeah.”

I step closer, getting in his face. “He tell you he took my woman?”

Two of them exchange a look, and I remember what Evelyn said about her and Malik running into two Vipers at their clubhouse. “You saw him bring her in, didn’t you?”

“Maybe.”



“We went and got her,” Darko says, taking out his phone. He pulls something up on it. “He had her locked in some room. We broke into your surveillance room to figure out where she was. While we were there, I checked your security camera files from the day Malik took Evelyn... and the days before. You may be interested in this file I emailed to myself.” He hits play. “Here’s what happened to your President.”

We watch a recording of a corridor as Cooter is hustled out the back door at gunpoint by Malik.

I remember what Evelyn had told me. “When Malik and Evelyn ran into you at the clubhouse, she said you guys told him to wait till Cooter hears about what he’s doing.”

“Right,” the enforcer replies.

I nod. “Malik later told her he didn’t have to worry about Cooter because he’d killed him and buried him in a shallow grave ten miles outside of town.”

The Vipers all suck in a breath and straighten, exchanging glances.

“That motherfucker,” the enforcer growls.

“It wasn’t us who killed him,” I clarify. “Malik never gave a damn about the Vipers. The only thing Malik ever gave a damn about was Malik. He was in it for revenge against the Iron Death for kicking him out for stealing a ton of cash from them. Malik used the Vipers to make sure he was untouchable when he went after his old club. Obviously, this latest stunt proves he was making a power grab to take the gavel of your chapter. He wanted to pin Cooter’s murder on us and emerge the hero. Only problem was it was all bullshit and manipulations. All of this stems back from him wanting to hurt Duck and his old club any way he could, and anyone who helped Duck—like me, or got in his way—like Cooter, had to be taken out.”

“It makes sense,” the enforcer says.

“I never liked the guy,” the road captain replies.

“I never trusted the guy,” the sergeant at arms adds.

“War with us? That isn’t a fight you want right now, boys. Not over some rogue action by a thieving, murdering VP bent on personal revenge that has nothing to do with Vipers’ business.”

“I suppose,” the sergeant at arms replies.

I don’t breathe a word of what we did to Malik. I’d never give them that to hold over my head with law enforcement. “We good, fellas?”

“Yeah. We’re good,” the enforcer replies.

“One other thing,” I add. “How about both clubs leave Utah alone? Deal?”

The sergeant at arms extends his hand. “Deal.”

It’s a shaky truce, but a truce, nonetheless.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

*Evelyn—*

“What are *you* doing up?” Lola asks me as she walks in Trez and Izzy’s kitchen.

“Same as you.” I stir my coffee, mixing in the vanilla creamer I found in the fridge.

She grabs a bottle of OJ and a glass and joins me at the table. “I got a couple hours of sleep. Did you get any?”

“I dozed off for a bit.” I abandon the coffee and rub my upper arms. “Have you heard anything?”

“No.”

“I wish we’d hear something.” I pick my phone up off the table and check it for the millionth time. A far-off rumble has both of us locking eyes, and then dashing to the front door. She pulls it open, and we peer out the screen at the road. The sound gets louder. It’s definitely more than one bike. It sounds like they’re slowing and downshifting.

We both move on to the porch, the screen door banging shut behind us. Two bikes turn up the drive. It’s Rock and Memphis.

Lola and I are down the steps and hugging our men the second they climb from their bikes.

Rock catches me in his arms, hugging me tight.

I murmur in his ear, gulping back a sob. “I was so worried about you. Thank God you’re safe. What happened?”

His hand rubs up and down my back. “Shh. We’re fine. Everyone is fine.” He pushes me at arms length. “Let’s go inside.”

Memphis wraps his arm around Lola, cuddling her pregnant body to his side, and we all climb the stairs and go in the house.

“There’s coffee if you want some,” I offer.

Rock collapses in a kitchen chair, then tugs my hand. “C’mere.” He pulls me onto his lap.

Memphis moves to the coffeemaker and pours himself a mug, then tugs Lola against him to give her a sweet forehead kiss. “How’s my little guy?”

“Restless.”

“How’s my girl?”

“Hungry. Feed me.”

The corner of his mouth pulls up. “Yes, ma’am.” He looks in the fridge and takes out a dozen eggs. “You guys want eggs and bacon?”

“No thanks. Evelyn and I are gonna head to the clubhouse.” Rock looks at me. “You ready to go?”

“You just got here. Aren’t you tired?”

“I’m exhausted. That’s why I want to get to the clubhouse and go to bed.”

I slip off his lap and go over to Lola and give her a hug. “Get some sleep, girl.”

“I will.”

I release her, and Memphis hugs me.

“Take care, Evelyn.”

Rock and Memphis exchange one of those handshakes where it looks like they’re about to arm wrestle. Rock pats Memphis on the shoulder, and they exchange a look and nod, neither saying a word.

We walk outside and Rock climbs on his bike, then reaches down into his saddlebag to dig a helmet out for me. “I want to make a stop on the way back. Okay?”

“Sure.” I strap it on and climb on behind him, hugging him tight.

Rock rides us to the burned rubble of his once beautiful home. It’s black, smoldering, and completely heartbreaking. One fire truck remains, hosing down the heap of charred debris.

Rock parks, and we climb off.

“Oh, Rock.” I cover my mouth with my hand, then reach for his, giving it a squeeze. He tugs me to him, and I press my body against his. He raised his children here. All the memories he had with his wife were here. Now everything is gone. Nothing is left. “Oh, baby. I’m so sorry.”

His arms wrap around me, and we stand quietly. He presses a kiss against my temple. “There’s no way to make this better, no way to fix it. We just have to grieve what’s gone and move on.”

At his reflective words, I tilt my head to look at him, my arms tight around his waist. “Yes, that’s what we’ll do. We’ll look forward. Not backward.”

He drags in a long breath and, after another minute, he seems ready to leave. Nudging my shoulder, he turns us toward the bike. “Come on. Somewhere else I want to stop.”

We climb on the bike, and he rides us up to flattop. I’m not sure why, but he seems to have a mission.

Instead of the rock we’d sat on the last time he’d brought me up here, he leads me to a piece of land with few trees facing the same view. We stand in the early morning light and then he takes my hands and turns me to face him.

“No more looking over your shoulder, no more worrying about the past. That’s over, starting now, Evelyn.”

“Truly?” I search his eyes, confused by what it all means. Can it really be true? My eyes fill and a tear rolls down my cheek as I teeter on the precipice between being terrified and being finally able to let it all go and rest easy. He gently wipes my cheek with a thumb, then takes my chin.

“Malik is dead, Evelyn. He’ll never hurt you again. Understand? You are done worrying about that asshole.”

“But how?”

“I outsmarted him. You think I would ever let him take you from me? For years, I fell asleep in an empty bed. I woke in an empty bed. There was no one I cared enough about to change that. Now I can’t imagine laying my head down and your body not being pressed against my side, my chest rising and falling with your ear to my heart, and my fingers threading in your hair. I can’t imagine reaching out first thing in the morning and you not being there. From now on, I want you to be the first thing I see in the morning and the last thing I touch before I sleep. You’re my everything, Evelyn, my whole goddamn world.” He gives me a little shake. “And no one who hurts you gets to walk the face of this earth. End of story.”

I clutch at his cut, worry for his safety flooding me. “But the Vipers. They’ll come for you.”

“Took care of that, too. They know it was Malik who killed their president and not us.”

“They took your word for that?”

“No, but Darko found some recorded security footage that showed Malik taking Cooter out the back of their clubhouse at gunpoint. There was no question it was him. If they suspect we killed their VP, they don’t give a damn enough to think about

getting revenge on us for taking out their trash for them. Far as they're concerned, we did 'em a favor."

"Oh, Rock. Is it truly over?" I choke out a sob.

"It is." He cups my face. "You are my heart. I will always protect you. Got my oath on that."

"I love you so much."

"Back atcha, babe." He spins me in his arms to face the view of the sun rising from the ridge he loves. "Gotta build a new house. I'm thinkin' right where we're standing. What do you think?"

"I think that's a wonderful idea. It's perfect."

"Where do you want to put our bedroom?"

I lay my hand over his forearm resting across my waist and holding me tight. "Here. Right here."

\*\*\*

*Rock—*

I take Evelyn to the clubhouse. It's where we'll have to live until I can get the house built. Maybe we'll divide our time between here during the week and the hunting cabin on weekends. I make a note to ask her if she'd like that, but it's not a conversation I want to have right now. There'll be time for that tomorrow.

Right now, I'm so exhausted, I just want to take Evelyn to bed and sleep the day away. There are still problems to be dealt with, but they can wait. We're both drained, and right now, I just want to hold her. I slowly strip her naked and then myself and we climb into bed. I take her in my arms. This is



exactly what I need. I need to hold her, to feel her head on my chest, to lean my jaw on the top of her head, to inhale her sweet scent and know she's home, safe in my arms where she belongs. I almost lost her, and the thought of how different things could have turned out is not lost on me. I thank God I have her back. I'll never take having her in my life for granted. Not for one minute.

I suck in a deep breath and blow it out, letting myself finally relax. It's over.

I didn't sleep while she was gone, and exhaustion drags me under. I tuck the blanket close and tighten my arms around Evelyn. I kiss her forehead and hold her until her breathing changes, and I know she's drifted off. Only then do I let myself follow.

They'll be plenty of time to plan the rest of our lives.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

*Ten months later—*

*Evelyn—*

Lola and I walk into Darko's garage. He's bent over working under the hood of some old muscle car but straightens when Lola calls out his name.

"Hey, ladies. What brings you here?"

Lola twirls the cherry sucker in her mouth then points to me with it. Evelyn has something she wants to ask you.

He looks at me. "Sure. What's that?"

"I hear you're some kind of a car guru."

He grins, wiping his greasy hands on a shop rag. "Some may say that. Whatcha need darlin'?"

I dig into my purse and pull out the framed photo of Rock and his first car. "I want to find this car if possible."

He nods. "I remember that car."

"What are the chances of finding it?"

"Won't know until I try. Could be in someone's garage. Could be in a junkyard. Could be they crushed it for scrap at some point if it was wrecked." He cocks his head. "How badly do you want it?"

"Very badly."

"A gift for Rock?"

I nod. "A wedding present."

He lifts his chin. “Ah. I see. Well, I pull this rabbit out of a hat, you’re gonna owe me big time.”

I cock my head. “What do you want?”

He thinks for a minute, stroking his chin. “I think pot roast sandwiches once a week for life should do it.”

I huff out a laugh.

Lola puts her hand on her hip. “Oh my God. What is the deal with these pot roast sandwiches I keep hearing about? Memphis was raving about them, too.”

Darko leans in close and whispers conspiratorially in my ear. “Don’t give her your recipe, Evelyn. You keep that yours and yours alone. It’s special.”

“Well, since she’s going to be family, and since in this family we instigated Friday night dinners again, and since Darko wants pot roast sandwiches once a week...” Lola looks at me. “Do you see where I’m going with this, Evelyn?”

“Pot roast sandwiches every Friday night for the family, and Darko comes over, too?”

“Yep.”

I look at Darko. “You find me that car, and it’s a deal.”

He sticks his hand out, and we shake on it. “Deal. Now that you have me starving, you could go get me a burger, since I’ll be up all night searching the computer for Rock’s car.”

“We don’t have time. We have a final dress fitting to go to,” Lola argues.

Darko gives us his best puppy dog sad face.

“We could *probably* squeeze it in,” I say, totally caving.

Lola looks at me and rolls her eyes. “Fine. Let’s go get the man a sandwich.”

“And fries,” he yells as we walk to her car.

Lola flips him off over her shoulder and keeps walking.

“And a hot apple pie.”

She swings the car door open and yells over the doorframe. “You’re pushing your luck, Darko.”

“And a shake.”

Lola backs her car out and grins. “I’m gonna drink half his shake before we give it to him. See how he likes *that*.”

I chuckle. My emotions have been running high with the wedding only a week away, but if I could get that car, it would be so awesome.

Before I know it, the day is upon us, and Rock and I, and a hundred of our closest family and friends, are at our wedding reception under a perfect starry night.

I’m sitting on Rock’s lap in my wedding dress. The only thing he requested was that it be backless. He got his wish. The dress has a deep V cut in the back and a smaller one in front with straps. It’s fitted down to my knees where it flares out in layers like a flamenco dancer.

We married at sunset on Trez’s big deck. Tables and a dance floor are set up on the back lawn overlooking the creek in the distance. A beautifully rustic trellis with greenery and flowers covers the wedding party. Rock let me spend a ton on the reception decorations. I wanted twinkling lights and lanterns everywhere.

A florist in town took my dream vision and made it happen. It turned out magical. The best steak house in town catered it, so Rock and the boys are well fed and happy. And most importantly, we have family and good friends to share our day.

Rock asked if he could pick our song for the first dance, so I let him. He picked *Waiting All My Life* by Rascal Flatts. He said it describes us perfectly, and slow dancing in his arms, while he stared into my eyes, was heavenly.

Our love story started out as crazy as it gets. I got lucky when I picked the wrong man to pickpocket. Rock would disagree; he'd say he's the lucky one. In fact, he did—in his vows, with the sun setting over the horizon.

I cuddle against him, and he strokes his fingers over my bare back.

My father winks at me from across the table, and I blow him a kiss. Our father-daughter dance wasn't much more than us shuffling in a circle, but with my head on his shoulder, I didn't care. I'll always be his little girl and I'm just glad with all the stress of Malik and the Vipers gone, that he's feeling better.

Darko stands and taps a butter knife against his glass, and all the laughter and talking quiets down. He picks up a microphone. "Time for the best man's toast. As you all know, I'm sharing this duty with Trez today. Oh, wait a minute..." He looks over at Rock's son and puts his hand out. "Rock, paper, scissors." They do the motions. "Ha ha. I go first, loser." The crowd laughs, and he turns to me. "Evelyn, I'd like to take this opportunity to say how beautiful you look today."

I blow him a kiss.

"You make Rock look good—which is a difficult task, I know—but you manage it simply by standing next to him. Rock—hmmm, you could have groomed the beard a bit better, but overall, not a bad effort for you."

A tinkling of laughter filters through the crowd.

"I knew Evelyn's effect on Rock was instant because he couldn't wait to let us all know the morning after his birthday

bash—in a very loud and boisterous way—that she was his.”

The men find this hilarious, laughing so hard they turn red and some start coughing.

I cover my face with my hands, flooded with embarrassment. Rock bumps his knees up and down under my ass, until I almost topple off and have to clutch the arm he has tight around my waist. People start clinking their glasses and chant, *kiss, kiss, kiss*, until Rock bends me over his arm and does just that.

Darko twists to stare over at us. “Can I get back to my speech? Yeah?” Rock nods, and he continues. “Our president also couldn’t help mentioning her age to all of us. I think the only time he shut up was when I worked out that Evelyn was closer in age to his daughter than himself.”

There’s another roar of laughter.

“Evelyn, you are so much more mature than Rock will ever be. All kidding aside, darlin’, I know you will make Rock very happy; you are everything he needs.” He lifts his wine glass. “Everyone, please raise your glasses to the bride and groom.”

I glance around and see everyone coming to their feet with glasses in their hand.

Darko turns to us. “Congratulations to you both. Rock, it’s been an honor being your VP, and now one of your best men. Love you, brother, and Evelyn, welcome to this crazy MC family!”

Everyone yells, “Hear, hear!”

Rock sets me off his lap and stands to give Darko a backslapping hug.

Trez stands next and takes the microphone. “I don’t know how to top that one. So, I’m just going to wish the bride and

groom much love and a long and happy marriage. Love you, Dad.”

They hug, and everyone cheers again.

Rock turns to the crowd. “I’d like to say a few words—some things I didn’t say during my vows.” Then he turns and looks at me. “I waited a long time for you, baby.”

He hesitates, and my eyes mist.

“I was drawn to you from the day we met. Right off the bat, I fell in love with your sass, your spirit, and the way you stand up for yourself. Damn, girl, the first time you beamed that amazing smile at me, I was done. *D-O-N-E, done.*”

“I love that we started out the way we did, although if you’d have told me then that we’d be standing here today, celebrating our wedding in front of everyone, I never would have believed it. But I’m glad now about how it started. It gave us the time to really get to know each other. You got to truly see me. For some reason, God only knows, you stuck around, and I’ll always be grateful for that.

“Baby, you understand me in a way no one else can. You’ve filled my days with beauty and laughter when I needed it most. I promise you I’ll always be by your side, to my last breath. I love you, baby. You are my everything.”

I stand, my eyes flooding with tears as our friends and family come to their feet in a rousing ovation.

I kiss my husband.

The past months have been a true testament to the man he is and the husband he will be. He’d drop everything if I needed him. When I think of all the people he’s met and all the places he’s been, that he ended up here with me, is a very powerful and humbling thing. I think of all the hell I went through with Malik, but it was the journey I had to take to get to this man, and he makes it all worth it.



I'm too choked up to say any of that, but I promise I'll show him later. Now, all I can get out is, "I love you so much."

It's enough for him. We come together in each other's arms, and he kisses me, then pulls back to wipe the tears from my cheeks. "No tears. This is a happy day."

I nod. It is. So happy.

Later that evening, I'm dancing with Darko, when he dips his head to my ear. "Found Rock's car."

I pull back, my mouth dropping open. "Where?"

"Car lot in Minnesota. They want twelve grand for it. They'll take twenty-five hundred down with payments. You have that?"

"I have enough for the down payment. Is it in good shape?"

"Looks clean. Has 77,000 miles on it now, but that's pretty low for how old it is. Any work it needs I can do at my shop."

I bite my lip, wondering how much all that will cost. "I'd have to qualify for a loan, and I'm not working right now."

"Darlin', how about I get it, and you can make payments to me?"

"That's asking a lot of you."

"Let me do this for you."

"You're sure?"

"Positive. I'll pick it up while you and Rock are on your honeymoon, all right?"

"Thank you, Darko." I hug his neck.

"Hey, break it up. You tryin' to steal my woman?" I turn to see Rock behind me.

“She’s all yours, bro.” Darko winks before he turns me over to his president.

Rock takes me in his arms and stares into my smiling face. “Happy?”

“So happy. Thank you for making this day perfect.”

“You did all the work, babe.”

“But you let me have anything I wanted.”

“You sure the hunting cabin is enough for the honeymoon?”

“It’s perfect. Is it okay with you? Did you want something more?”

“Babe, all I need is you and a bed, and I’ll be happy.”

I grin. “I love you so much.”

“Back atcha babe.” He dips to kiss me, then pulls back. “I got you a wedding present, but it won’t be ready until we get back next week.”

“Um, same. We can just exchange then. It’ll be fun.”

“Our journey has just begun, Evelyn.”

I nod. “It has, and I can’t wait to see what the future holds for us, husband.”



## CHAPTER FORTY

*Evelyn—*

I lie against the pillows, naked, my legs spread, and Rock's face buried between my thighs. I thought he was joking the night he said he wanted my pussy every morning. Apparently, I was wrong.

I start to pant, my hands fisting in the white sheets. He's been at me for a while, and I'm so close to orgasm. My hips lift off the mattress, wanting more, always wanting more of this man.

I reach back and grab the rails of the headboard and hold on. Rock curls his arms around my thighs and drags me up to his mouth, then sucks long and hard on my clit. I explode with a scream. He keeps at me until he's drawn every last quiver from my shaking body.

While I struggle to regain my breath, he climbs up my body, positions his hips between my thighs, and drives inside my slick pussy with his hard erection.

Heaven. Pure heaven. There is nothing better than having my man grab my hips and take me in one quick thrust. Except maybe to look on his face as his body moves over me. The love in his eyes, the flexing muscles slick with a sheen of sweat. And it's all for me.

I cup his jaw and drag his mouth to mine. He gives it to me, his tongue sliding between my lips, and I taste myself on him. He moans into my mouth and increases his pace, his hips rolling, dragging his cock in and out over a million sensitive nerve endings in my body. He lights a fire in me so powerful I can't fight it. I'm starting to climb that tall roller coaster again.

He pulls his mouth back an inch and stares into my eyes. I rock against him, my legs going around him, my ankles hooking at the small of his back while my hands stroke up and down his ribs.

We never break eye contact.

The corners of his mouth pull up in a tender, loving smile. Then he drops his forehead to mine and bucks against me in earnest.

I clutch his neck and hold on tight.

That tense drawing feeling climbs my body until it shoots through me, and I climax hard. Rock thrusts deep and goes still, chanting my name as he comes hard.

When he's finished, he collapses on top of me. I love the weight of him pinning me to the bed, and I stroke his back and neck lovingly until he lifts his head and brushes a kiss to my lips.

"So fucking good. Always so fucking good with you, babe."

I smile. "It's all you, honey. You seem to do most of the work."

"Give me a few minutes, and I'll let you climb on top of me and do your share." He grins, and I giggle.

"With pleasure, you gorgeous stud."

He rolls off me, his shoulders shaking with his laughter. Then he snags my hand and carries it to his lips. "I love you."

"Back atcha, babe," I imitate him in a deep voice.

He lifts a brow and rolls to his side, grabs my nipple and pinches. "Are you mocking me?"

"Not me." I bat his hand away, and we end up in a wrestling match until he pins me easily, then trails kisses

across both breasts. He gives up and flops to his back.

“You wear me out.”

“It’s our honeymoon. That’s my job.”

His smile fades, and he looks over at me. “Today’s the last day. I need to get back. Some stuff I’ve got to do.”

I feel a tinge of sadness that our week is over, but I understand. “Sure.”

“Let’s stop and see how the house is going on our ride to the clubhouse.”

“All right.” Rock showed me a design he drew up for the new house on the ridge. There was only one change I’d asked for... I wanted a small bedroom with a connecting door off our master. He’d given me a quizzical look but complied without asking why.

He doesn’t know it yet, but he’s going to be a daddy again. I just have to pick the right time to spring it on him. I hope he’s as happy as I am. So far, I’ve had no morning sickness, just a bit tired.

“Come on, my love.” Rock stands and tugs me to my feet, then leads me to the shower.

Afterward, I dress in jeans and boots and the Royal Bastards tank Rock gave me, and we head out.

It’s Sunday, so there are no workers at the construction site today, but the foundation and framework are already up. Rock takes my hand and leads me inside the open framing. I wander to the section where our bedroom will be and stare at the view through the already framed out window. “Oh, Rock. It’s going to be stunning.”

He comes up behind me and wraps his arms around me, his chin on my shoulder, looking at it with me. “It is, isn’t it?”

I nod and cover his arms with mine. He kisses the side of my neck and whispers in my ear. “So, how soon are we going to need that other room to be ready?”

My mouth parts in shock, and my eyes shift to the side, then I twist my head and stare at him.

He grins.

“You know?”

“Baby, I do now. That just confirmed it for me.”

I slug his arm. “I wanted to tell you.”

He cups my face. “So, tell me.”

My eyes fill. “We’re going to have a baby.”

He presses his forehead to mine. “I love you. Are you happy?”

“So happy.”

“Good. That’s all I want.”

“This will be a big change for you, huh?”

“I’ve done it before. I’ll do it again. It doesn’t scare me, Evelyn. How can you carrying my child be anything but a good thing?”

Relief floods me. “I so glad. I was afraid you wouldn’t be exactly thrilled.”

“I can’t lie. I would have liked more time with just the two of us, but we need to get this family of ours started. I’ve got no time to waste.”

I smile. “You have plenty of time, Rock.”

“Guess I’m gonna have to live to be a hundred now. Gonna need your help with that.”

“I’ll have to change your diet. More oatmeal and veggies are in your future, ol’ man.”

He gives a long-suffering sigh. “I guess you’re worth it, honey. Come on, let’s go to the clubhouse. I’ve got a surprise for you.”

“I have one for you as well.”

We ride down the ridge, and soon we’re pulling in the gravel lot of the clubhouse. I’m surprised to find it full of bikes today. It looks like everyone is here, which seems odd. Maybe they all knew Rock was returning from his honeymoon. We climb off the bike. I look at Rock with a frown. “What’s going on?”

He grins and hooks his arm around me, leading me through the crowd to where Memphis, Baja, and Utah are standing, their backs to us. Memphis turns and sees us. They step out of the way, and I stare at who’s behind them.

Rayne, Sasha, Carmen, and Jenna are sitting sideways on their bikes. They smile at me. “Hey, Evelyn. Heard you got married,” Rayne says.

“What are you doing here?” I sputter.

Rock answers. “I called them. You’re going to Joshua Tree with them this year. That’s your wedding present from me to you.”

“What?” I ask in shock, not understanding.

“Your gear’s already packed. They’re just waitin’ on you.”

“Are you serious right now?”

“Serious as a heart attack, babe.”

“Come on, girl,” Sasha says. “We’re burnin’ daylight. We need to get on the road.”

I look back at Rock. “Are you sure? I know how you feel about me riding. I know how much you worry.”



“You mean more to me than anything. This is your dream. As long as I’m alive, you’ll get every one of them.”

“Even after finding out...”

A smile plays across his lips, and he captures my hips, dipping his forehead to mine. “Even so. I know you’ll be careful, right?”

“Of course.”

“And this may be your last chance at this kind of freedom. Now, more than ever, I want you to have that.”

With tears in my eyes, I hug him. “I love you. You’re the best husband ever.”

“Gonna try to be, baby.” He slaps my ass, then nods to something, and I turn and see my motorcycle, packed and loaded up with gear, sitting on the other side of the girls. “You better climb on that bike before I change my mind.”

I pull back and stare at him. “Thank you for this. It means the world.”

“You’re welcome.” He takes my face in his hands. “Be careful. Yeah?”

I nod. “Always.”

“And have *fun*. Okay?”

I nod again, tears streaming down my face. He brushes them away. “None of that. Be happy.”

“I am. Truly. So happy.”

“Good. That’s all I want.”

Darko steps forward and whispers in my ear. “The Mustang is at my shop.” He pulls back and stares at me.

I wanted to see Rock’s expression, but the girls are waiting. I could delay and give him his gift when I return, but

it'd be something he'd enjoy while I'm gone. I lean forward and whisper, "Take him to it when I leave."

He searches my eyes. "You sure?"

"Yes. It'll give him something to play with while I'm gone." I wink.

Darko grins and steps back.

"What are you two whispering about?" Rock frowns.

"Nothing." I kiss him again.

Rock lifts his chin at me. "Go," he urges again.

"All right." Throwing my arms around him, I hug him tight, then step back. I look at the girls, then back at him. "I'll call you."

\*\*\*

*Rock—*

I think about what it's about to cost me letting her ride off like this, and I'm so close to calling it off. I know I can't do that, so I just smile. "You better, baby, every damn night. And send me some dirty pictures to help me get through the days," I say, grabbing her ass and stealing another quick kiss.

"I'll think about it."

"Can you think about it when you're spread out naked on your bike in the desert? Because that would probably hold me over for the entire trip."

She laughs, blushing pink.

I lift my chin. "I love you. Now go."

I stand back with Darko and watch her strap her helmet on and fire her bike up, and then they all pull out onto the road, heading west.

“There she goes,” I murmur aloud.

Darko stands next to me. “Yup. Letting her ride off like that... you made it look easy, ol’ man.”

“Far from it, VP. That right there was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done.” I watch her disappear down the road and out of sight. “God, I miss her already.”

“She’ll be gone, like what, two weeks?”

“Yeah.”

“Come on. Take a ride with me. I’ve got something to show you.”

“Can’t it wait?”

“Nope. You’re gonna want to see this.”

I blow out a breath. “Fine.”

I follow him to his house, park in his driveway, and climb off my bike.

“It’s in here.” He pulls his garage door up, and suddenly I’m staring at a red Mustang hatchback with a big white bow wrapped around the hood. I frown, my chin pulling to the side as my gaze travels over it. “Is that...?”

I look over and see Darko with his phone up, taking my picture.

“Yup. It’s your first car.”

My mouth drops open. “How...?”

“It’s your wedding present from Evelyn. She wanted to be here to see your face.” He holds his phone out to me. “Guess this picture will have to do, since she had to leave with the girls.”

“Did I ruin her surprise?”

“I think she’ll forgive you.”

Suddenly, I feel my eyes sting. I can’t believe she did this.

Darko sees and slaps me on the shoulder. “She came to me, asking me if I could try to track it down for you.”

“Where was it?”

“Minnesota of all places.”

“No shit.”

“Yup. But believe it or not, it’s only had three owners. You, the guy you sold it to, and the guy in Minneapolis who traded it in to the car lot where I found it.”

“Huh. How about that?” I walk slowly around it. “I still can’t believe it. I should call Evelyn and thank her, but she’s on the road.” I meet Darko’s eyes. “Thanks for your part in this. I guess you’ve been doin’ favors for both of us, huh?”

“Yep. But this was worth it. I get to see your face right now. I know how much this car means to you.”

“Thanks, VP.”

“I get something out of this deal, too.”

“Oh, yeah? What’s that?”

“I’ve got a standing invitation to Friday night dinners at your house. She promised to make me pot roast sandwiches.”

“Win-win for both of us, then, huh?”

“Yep.” Darko tosses the keys to me. “Come on, prez. Let’s rip the bow off and take it for a spin.”

“Sounds good.” I yank it off and climb in the driver’s seat. I’m suddenly transported back in time. I take a moment to run my hand lovingly over the dashboard. Propped on it above the steering wheel is my old, framed picture of me at sixteen with

my shiny new car. I pick it up and look at it. “Those were the days, huh?”

Darko gets in the shotgun seat and grins over at me. “They were. That’s why I loaded a mix tape of songs from 1988.” He hands it to me.

I stare over at him and bust out laughing. Then I fire it up and pop the cassette in the player. *Sweet Child O Mine* by Guns N Roses blasts through the speakers, and I shift it into gear, back out of his garage, and burn rubber peeling out onto the highway.



## EPILOGUE

*Rock—*

I hear her before I see her, the rumble of her motorcycle coming up the road.

She turns in the lot, and I watch as she shuts her bike off and stands, then pulls her helmet off and shakes her hair out. God, how I've missed wrapping that long dark hair around my fist. I'm instantly hard just from watching her do nothing more than that simple gesture.

She looks around, searching for me in the crowd of people here to greet her. Lola, Izzy, and the rest of the brat pack all surround her with questions about her trip. She smiles, but her eyes go over their heads, and finally she spots me standing on the porch of the clubhouse.

She's a fucking gorgeous badass, and if I falter at this job of being her man, the line of guys waiting to take my place will be long.

I have no intention of failing.

I move down the steps toward her, and the crowd parts, and then she's running toward me. I bend my knees and catch her up in my arms, spinning her around. When I set her on her feet, I cup her face and kiss her with all the pent up desire flaring inside me.

By the time I pull back, we're both out of breath. "God, how I missed you," I gasp. "How was your trip?"

"I loved it, but I don't think I ever want to be apart from you that long again."

“Good. I’m not a fan either.” My eyes drop to her stomach.  
“You feeling okay?”

“I’m fine.”

I cup her hips and drag her against me. “You’re not leaving my side until after this baby is born.”

“I’m good with that. How’s the house coming?”

“They’re installing appliances today. Want to drive up and see it? I’ve got this real sweet ride we could take.”

She grins. “Do you, now?”

I toss her up in my arms, and her legs wrap around my waist. “Yep. This gorgeous woman bought it for me. I think she’s after my body. I’m gonna hold out, though. I might be able to get a new motorcycle if I play my cards right.”

“A new motorcycle, huh? Sounds like you’ve got a real sugar mama.”

“I do. She’s the sweetest thing ever.” I kiss her and carry her into the clubhouse.

“Honey, I thought we were going for a ride in your car?” she protests.

“That can wait. Right now, I want to make love to the prettiest woman on the planet.”

“On the whole planet?”

“Yeah, baby.” I carry her down the hall. “She gives really good head, too.”

She giggles. “Oh, does she now?”

I walk into our room and kick the door shut. Then I take her to her back on the bed, following her down. I brush the hair from her forehead. “God, I missed you, baby.”

“You said that already.”



“I can’t say it twice?”

“You can say it a million times.” She pulls me down for a kiss.

And then I make love to my ol’ lady, my wife, my love.

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*Seven months later...*

I’m on the deck of our new house overlooking the view, kicked back in one of the Adirondack chairs Evelyn bought for us. It’s a beautiful summer morning, and already warm. I stroke the back of my daughter’s tiny body as she lies on my chest. Her little feet are tucked up under her, her little booty in the air. My big hand covers over half her body. I put my nose to her crown and breathe in her sweet baby scent. There’s nothing like it on this earth.

She kept her mommy up all night long, so I chastise her in a soft whisper. “You need to get your days and nights straightened out, Rachel. You’re wearing your mama out.”

She lifts her chin a fraction, her lower lip coming out, and then she makes a sucking motion in her sleep. I chuckle. “I know how you feel, baby girl. I like those pretty nipples, too, but since you’ve been hogging them day and night, Daddy’s been cut off from touching them. So go easy on ‘em, okay? Mama’s pretty sore already, and you’re only two weeks old.”

I hear the sliders open and footsteps across the deck. Evelyn comes behind my chair and lays her hands on my shoulders, dipping her head and kissing my cheek.

“How is she? Do you need me to take her?”

“No. We’re having daddy-daughter time. Go back to bed.”

She runs her hand over my temple. “I love you.”

“Love you, too. Now go.”

She dips and kisses my cheek, then retreats.

I stroke Rachel’s back. “You have no idea how crazy I am for you, little one. I never expected this. I never expected you. But God saw fit to send me a blessing.

“I’m sure you’re gonna have me wrapped around your finger in no time, but take it easy on your old pops, okay? I may lose it occasionally, like on your first day of kindergarten, or your first date, or when I walk you down the aisle. And yes, I plan to be around long enough to do that, even if it means I have to eat more broccoli.” I take a moment to just breathe her in. “I’m gonna make sure you have the best life, sweetheart.”

She stretches and turns her head.

I kiss her downy hair and whisper, “Can I tell you a secret, angel? I never saw this coming. Not in a million years.”

Thank you for reading *Keeping the Throne*. Please check out my other books [here](#).