

DELTA SERIES



MAVERICK: THE STORY

INSIGHT

L. ANN MARIE



BALDWIN

BSC BOOK 18

Maverick
Delta Series
BSC West Book 18
By
L. Ann Marie

Continuation from Teller: Connect, BSC book 17

Maverick: Insight Delta Series, BSC Book 18 is our next book in the series.

Delta Rising is growing by leaps and bounds. The Justice League ended the weekly wars and Maverick is ready to start what's next; a woman, new ideas in aero, settling the towns and expanding are on his list.

He never counted on a mechanic that dresses like a character from a Badass book. If he could just get that dinner with her, life would be good.

BSC SERIES Books. Best read in order.

Master's Rise

Benga's Rise

Ranger's Rise

Jack: Honor

Falcon: Respect

Mag: Loyalty

Allegory

Endue

Conform

Justice: Tenacity

Ford's Rise

Driver: Grit

Christiansen: City Boy

Nova: Cred

Blackhawk: Heat

Cooper: Gunslinger

Teller: Connect

Maverick: Insight

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Maverick: Insight Delta Series (BSC Book 18)

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Dedication

To all the readers that understand I'm just a writer doing my best to keep you entertained for a few hours. My books are priced below other authors so it's a cheap date. I do this because I have over 50 books out and all but 4 connect to the first. Long term, it's still a pretty cheap date. If you're new, eek, buy the box sets.

I appreciate the time you spend in my world, laughing, yelling and even crying over Badass and the people in their lives.

My hope with each book is that you feel the lessons of our fathers: Honor, integrity, respect, loyalty, courage, imagination, ingenuity. These are all words I keep close. All words I hope you feel. They're all words that lead to different is just different, not more, not less.

This book has them all. I hope you feel them and take it with you to your parts of the world telling anyone that will listen about your cheap date.

That date may spark and set your world aglow with that Badass flame. A world where different is just different. A world where honor, respect and courage are remembered, bestowed and revered.

Thank you for believing in my world.

Cast of Characters

Full (printable) character lists are on the **Book Info Page** at <https://lanmarie.com/book-info>

Cort Masters - President of Phoenix Rising (*PR*), President of Phoenix Badass Security Council (BSC West)

Raid - VP of Phoenix Rising

Ranger - SAA of Phoenix Rising

Web - Head IT for BSC West, Phoenix Rising

Banks - Stockbroker, invests for the Phoenix Rising and affiliates (*AR*)

Amos - Accountant, manages money for Phoenix Rising

Falcon Beckett - President of Bravo Rising (*BR*)

Jack Decker - VP of Bravo Rising

Mag Bailey - SAA of Bravo Rising

Justice LaPonte-James-Lightfoot - Lead (One) of Prince Crew, 2nd to Cort in BSC West (*BR*)

Teller Knight - Training Officer Bravo, 2nd to Justice, Bravo Protectors

Tats - Protector Lead, New Officer (*BR*) *Alder's Security*

Boulder - Protector Alpha-Bit Security (*BR*)

Trask McCabe - President of Champion Rising (*CR*)

Jinx Solaita - VP of Champion Rising, BSC West, second to Cort (*CR*)

Beacon - SAA of Champion Rising (*CR*)

Major Christiansen - MC Colorado former President

Brekan Greywolf - President of MC Badass Colorado

Spook Reno - VP MC Badass Colorado

Jordan Driver - President of Alpha Rising (*AR*)

Brinks Solaita - VP of Alpha Rising (*AR*)

Slade Nova - SAA (*AR*)

Kyler – Protector, soon to be VP for a Club (*AR*)

Kristos Christiansen - President of Honor Rising (*HR*)

Mase Blackhawk - VP of Honor Rising (*HR*)

Spano - Protector Lead, Second to Kristos (*HR*)

Seth - SAA of Honor Rising, former Prince (*HR*)

Lawson Cooper - President of Elan Rising (*ER*)

Cayden Callahan - VP of Elan Rising (*ER*)

Cecil - SAA of Elan Rising (*ER*)

Maverick - President of Delta Rising (*DR*)

Finn - VP of Delta Rising (*DR*)

Stan - SAA of Delta Rising (*DR*)

Delta Cast

Nero – Head of Design and Integration Head of

Remo - Protector

Kwan - Innovations engineer

Mooney - IT space geek

Deklim - Aero engineer

Cosmos - Space IT geek

Caspian - IT Ops, space geek Ops

Adrian - Protector son of Alan, MC Mass

Ari - Protector son of Alan, MC Mass

Monroe - Protector

Nick - Security Team Lead

Numbers - Brother, admin for Jo's shop

Ratchet - Vehicle Maintenance for Delta

Mars - Head of Badass Aero Technologies

Ren - Doctor, partner to Mars, member of Delta Rising

Chara - Engineer

Prospects

Whisp - Brother patched in

Cliff

Flack - Brother patched in Alpha-Bit enforcer team

Others Appearing

Jo, Josephine Patton - Jojo to younger brother Jacky, Mechanic, shop owner

Jacky Patton - Jo's younger brother

Aunt Rain - Maverick's Aunt

Co - Former Shaman of Rhode Island Mohegan tribe

Magnar - Old MC Brother

Belinda - Perry's sister, nurse

Melvin - Maddy's dad

Clara - Melvin's wife, Maddy's mom
Deputy Kramer - Shady Deputy
Maddy - Josephine's neighbor
Mrs. Lima - Landlady for Jacky
Bobby - Mechanic for Jo
Ken - Mechanic for Jo
Perry - Mechanic for Jo
Willow - Ken's sister
Janice - friend/client of Jo
Jasmine - friend of Jo
Clark - Bobby's dad
River - Remo's dad
Jeffery - Friend of Patton's
Ajhil - Rex and Ant Irma's charge
Rex - Cort's Uncle
Ant Irma - Rex's ol' lady
Crow - MC Badass, Native, Mason, deceased

Ol' ladies/Old ladies

Jane Meadows - Librarian, Austen's mom, Cooper's ol' lady
Stella Jackson - Protector, ol'lady of Jordan and Brinks, former Prince (*AR*)
Hannah McCabe - IT Head, ol'lady to Trask, former Prince, (*CR*)
Alexia - Web's ol' lady, ex-FBI, ABSZ IT Lead, Trainer for BSC West
Seren - Cort's ol' lady, Mom to Caelan, trainer (*PR*)
Freedom - Ranger's ol' lady, Trainer/ Enforcer (*PR*)
Leya - Mag's ol' lady, Chocolatier, Ice cream shop owner (*BR*)
AJ - Jack's ol' lady, Mag's sister, Head of IT for Club (*BR*)
Faith - D'Ability house Director, Beacon's ol' lady, Dreng's mom (*CR*)
Carmen LJJ - Justice's old lady, Cytogenetic tech for Alder
Télia Ford - Ford's wife, the Ford brothers' sister-in-law. Saber sibling
Natalia Kensington - Kristos' ol' lady, Head of Technology (*HR*)
Kateri Todachine - Graphic designer, old lady to Mase Blackhawk (*HR*)
Mikey- Prince Lead Protector, Nova's ol' lady, daughter of Cade (*AR*)
Harper Greywolf - Doctor MC Badass Colorado, Brekan's ol'lady
Chenoa Knight - Teller's old Lady, BR Loyalty clinic (*BR*)

Kids

Dreng - Doug, adopted son of Beacon, Faith

Stephan - Tide's son

Daniel - Raid and Lorelei's son

Tyson - Mag and Leya's son

Amell & Brynn - Mag and Leya's Alpha-Bit boys

Caelan - Cort and Seren's son

Chenzo - Jack and AJ's son

Cove Blackhawk - Hannah and Trask's son

Beck Qunhôtuaq - Hannah and Trask's son

Austen Meadows - Jane's daughter

~

Michael - Web's twin, brother to Ford and Garren

Garren - Michael and Web's older brother, Hamp Ford's twin

Parker Nova - Nova's brother (*AR*)

Doctors

Alder Ford - President of the Alpha-Bits (*BSC*)

Doc - Doctor (*PR*)

Statler - Doctor (*HR*)

Bean - PA (*AR*)

Bones - Doctor (*BR*)

Cannon - Doctor (*ER*)

Chop - Doctor (*CR*)

Patcher - EMT, PA (*PR*)

Chenoa Blackwater - BR Loyalty Clinic (*BR*)

Ren - Doctor (*DR*)

From BSC East Clubs

Ben Knight - President of Territories for the Brotherhood of Badass Bikers, (aka MC Badass) Princes of Prophecy and Badass Security Council (aka BSC)

Ricky Callahan - VP of Territories for the BSC, VP of Mass MC Badass and second for Badass Security Council (aka BSC)

Darren LaPonte-James - VP of Princes of Prophecy

Aaron LaPonte-James – President of MC Virginia

Kaleb Baxter – US Senator

Eliza LaPonte-James - Officer, Enforcer Princes of Prophecy

Elizabeth Callahan - MC Mass, Ricky's old lady, Knight's daughter
Jess Knight - Steve Knight's old lady, Ben and Elizabeth's mom
Dakota Lightfoot - Member of Princes of Prophecy, BSC, pilot, Prophet
Jessie LaPonte-James - Member of Princes of Prophecy
Aiyana Baxter - Princes of Prophecy Protector, Doctor, Shaman
Jeremy Blackhawk - MC, Princes of Prophecy and Protectors
Jacob Blackhawk - Princes of Prophecy and Protectors, BSC
Christian Blackhawk - MC, Princes of Prophecy Protector
Brantley Blackhawk - IT Head BSC, Princes of Prophecy
Taylor Blackhawk - Princes of Prophecy
Beth Blackhawk - Taylor's old lady, nurse
Jess Baxter-LaPonte-James-Lightfoot - Old lady to Jessie, Dakota, mom to Justice, Aquyà, Destiny
Sheila Jackson - Enforcer, Princes of Prophecy
Jax Jackson - Princes of Prophecy
The Stooges - Steve Knight, Danny LaPonte, Tiny Callahan, *Pres Ben James (honorary)
Brian - Reader Princes of Prophecy

BSC Protector Crew from Princes of Prophecy

Justice LaPonte-James-Lightfoot, Teller Knight, Mucimi Blackhawk, Axe LaPonte-James - Bravo
Luke Rayne DeSeville, Jetti Callahan, Tucker Brighton - BSC Training in Nevada.
Hannah Blackhawk (McCabe) - Champion Rising
Cayden Callahan, Lukas Callahan - Elan Rising.
Mase Blackhawk, Seth Baxter-LaPonte-James, Nash Blackhawk - Honor Rising
Stella Jackson-Driver-Solaita, Kyler Moniz, Aylene Knight, Mikey Nova - Alpha Rising.
Lisa Baxter-Martel - Phoenix
Chris Blackhawk - VP of MC Badass Colorado

BSC East Protectors

Phoenix, Aquyà, Honor, Destiny, Joshua, Blake, Chance, Putam, Keesog, Riley

Virginia Badass

Andrew, Brandon, Heath, Zel, Tekah, Luna, Zeke, Oliver, JC, Kutomá, Case
MC Mass

Harley, Colt, Mitchy, Indie, Brenna, Blaze, Sandy, Shona, Ally

Alpha-Bits

As - Akai, Alta, Amal, Aris, Allen, Aaron (O) (CR), Alder, Asa (O), Anton.

Bs - Brody (CR), Brann (ER)

Bs - Budgie, Brex (AR)

Cs - Claus (F)

Cs - Cai, Chikako, Chang

Ds - Demetri, Darius, Drexel

Es - Eli (CR), Emilio (F)

Es - Elijah, Ezra -

Fs - Franz (short arm), Faber (CR)(F)

G - Gregor (backward foot) (F)

Js - Juan, Jose, Jacques

Ls - Locke, Lars

Ms - Marco, Maddox, Mateo, Mario

O - Orion

Ps - Peyton, Pax, Pace, Percy. (O)

Rs - Roman, Radimir, Rostya (PR) (Roland died)

Ss - Sohn, Sabur

Island

9 - 2 yr old - Amell, Bryn, Crain, Denz, Etan, Fynn, Geir,

Hali, Indra - (MC)

Ks - Kier, Kristoff, Kaval (ER) Keon (ER)

Ns - Nasr, Nero (ER), Nigel

Ts - Tamas, Trece

V - Vance (ER)

Ws - Wavan, Wesley

X - Xavier

Sweden

Ls - Les, Laran, Lasil, Lance, Levon, Ledell

N- Nox

Os - Odell (AR), Oman

Qs - Quincy (AR), Quillon (ER)

Rs - Ramell, Runar

Zs – Zale (*AR*), Zachon

Finland

Ms - Mabon, Maurice, Matteus (*AR*)

N - Nyle

Os - Oscar, Oliver

Q - Quest

Ts - Tomas, Theo

Ws - Wolfgang, Wain

Total Alpha-Bits 143

*(O) = Oriental look to them

*(F)=Falcon took from monastery

In this book:

Alpha-Bits on the circuit

Zachon

Quest

Mabon

Tomas

Delta Space IT Alpha-Bits

Anton

Lance

Oman

Chang

Pax

BSC West Clubs

Phoenix Rising and Affiliates:

Cort Masters President of Phoenix Rising, President of Badass Security Council West

Raid Benga VP of Phoenix Rising

Ranger Ross SAA of Phoenix Rising

Web IT Head of BSC West Clubs

Trask McCabe President of Champion Rising

Jinx Solaita VP of Champion Rising

Beacon SAA of Champion Rising

Lawson Cooper President of Elan Rising

Cayden Callahan VP of Elan Rising

Cecil SAA of Elan Rising

Falcon Beckett President of Bravo Rising

Jack Decker VP of Bravo Rising

Mag Bailey SAA of Bravo Rising

Justice LaPonte-James-Lightfoot BSC 2nd to Cort

Alder President of Alpha-Bits, BSC 2nd to Cort

Asa, Akai VPs of Alpha-Bits

Amal SAA of Alpha-Bits

Kristos Christiansen President of Honor Rising

Mase Blackhawk VP of Honor Rising

Seth Baxter-LaPonte-James SAA of Honor Rising

MC Badass Colorado and Affiliates

Brekan Graywolf President of MC Badass Colorado

Chris Blackhawk VP of MC Badass Colorado

Spook Reno VP of MC Badass Colorado (relocating)

Pauly SAA of MC Badass Colorado

Jordan Driver President of Alpha Rising

Brinks Solaita VP of Alpha Rising

Slade Nova SAA of Alpha Rising

Maverick President of Delta Rising

Finn VP of Delta Rising

Stan SAA of Delta Rising

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Reading Order

Prologue

Maverick

“So you want to put a bigger one up higher and replace the one that has the damaged panels? What’s stopping the next satellite from getting damaged?” Finn is great for the Club work but not aero at all.

“The higher would be placed polar orbiting. Meaning it travels from pole to pole scanning the entire Earth. The others are geostationary, until we move them, that is. They’re closer to the Earth and move west to east matching the Earth’s rotation so it looks like it’s always in the same place. It’s not really stationary. If we reprogram the damaged satellite, we can configure it to get rid of the waste by throwing waste higher so the polar stationed satellite can move it out of our orbit-space, closer to the sun where it burns up. We’d have to project it to hit the sun because they can get pretty close without burning up.”

He looks at me like I’m giving him a calculus formula. “Then what? Who pays us for cleaning up orbit-space and how are you moving it with a damaged satellite?”

I smile. “Laser that pulls solar from the sun.” I wave that off thinking of other space junk up there. “We *could* clean other shit, not just dead satellites in *our* space. That’s a good idea. Burning up is better than hitting Earth. I bet it would draw cash for the Clubs. I need to meet with Jordan and Alder.” I gather the maps.

Finn laughs stopping me. “You want to finish the meet you’re in first, Boss?”

Damn. “Yeah. We need work for the engineers and fabricators. Space IT are busy with the contracts. I need to get rid of five fabricators. They aren’t producing and causing problems with the schedule and their work is shit.”

Finn nods when I throw him chin. I’m glad he keeps me tethered. Nero sits straight nodding, he heads Design and Integration. “I have four that need to go. Send me the list, I’ll get rid of them. We got some good Brothers that work both sides. We don’t need fabricators that are slacking, Maverick. I was going to ask you about it today. We’re not slow but not under the gun in deadlines anymore. Consolidating the teams so they’re doing everything instead of just one job has them all happy. Even geeks like seeing their designs come to life, the hands on is good for the shop, fabricators being assholes aren’t, especially when they’re fucking with the women.”

I nod. “My list is four because I threw Magnar out last night. He lost his job and cut. He tried to intimidate Cosmo and Deklim with a torch when they got him away from Chara. The bastard had her pinned at the workbench. She said, “again” but I didn’t ask how often this happened. The bruise on his head was from a pipe she hit him with. I was pissed and just hit him.”

Stan is up. “What the fuck? Where is he?” I’m glad he’s pissed.

“Ren has him in the medic building. He’s cuffed to the bed so he doesn’t give *her* shit. Follow that. I want his shit at

the gate when he goes through it. Check with the Prospects. I think Flack was clearing his room.”

He nods. “You add him to the Badass board?”

“No. I took Cosmo, Chara and Deklim for a beer at a bar in the Peak village.”

They laugh.

“Town Two,” Nero says.

I roll my eyes and shrug. Whatever. I don’t get why we rename everything. It’s a village. “Okay, two, my stickler for town names.”

They laugh louder. I shrug again. Stan smiles. “I’ll deal, Pres. That was his last warning. He plays a little too rough and tried strong arming a Prospect that stepped in for a Club Chick. He was on my list for the Security meet.”

Shit, we have Security after this. Stan’s words get through causing me to shake my head. The dick deserved more than I gave. “He’s out. Get him revoked so he stays out. Fucking with the women is obviously a thing with him.”

Stan sits. “On it, Pres. I’ll head to Ren’s after the meet.”

“You know she’d kick his ass or get Mars to,” Kwan tells him.

I roll my eyes. Finn handles it. “She doesn’t need Mars. You always throw Mars in when we say a word about Ren. Get over it. They’re both great at the job, good Brothers and not into you.”

Kwan looks toward the door. “I didn’t know they were a couple.”

The Brothers laugh. When Ren told him she wasn’t interested, he dogged her through the medic building for a good week moving shit to help her out, according to him. She told him he wasn’t her type and he settled for a whole two fucking days. He gave her attitude when Patcher came to get her settled in the new medic building. At the Club, he made an ass out of himself showing his new sleeve tattoo. Mars made a show of inspecting it and listening to him for a good ten minutes. When Ren came in, Mars pulled her close and kissed her, then walked away to sit alone at a table. Kwan finally got why he wasn’t Ren’s type and started bitching about the pain of his new Patcher-wannabe tattoo. The Brothers were all over him.

Finn nods at Kwan. “Now you know. Do you have a problem with everyone that’s different or just Ren and Mars?”

I look at Finn. He’s right. Damn. I need to focus here. My head is on satellites and meeting times. Security is obviously not right after this one if Stan is going to the medic building. I need to meet Jordan and Alder. Kwan is done stumbling through his hurt pride explanation making me wonder why he’s in Inner Circle. He’s not Badass, Officer or even very confident.

Why is he in here? “Why are you here?”

Kwan is nervous again. “I have some research about the solar power capabil...”

What? “This is Inner Circle. That’s for the meet at engineering.”

Everyone laughs when he jumps to leave. Finn shakes his head. “He said he had the information you asked for so I let him in.”

I shake my head. “I didn’t ask him for anything.”

Nero laughs. “I did. He followed me in saying he had a report for you.”

Stan thinks this is funny too. “Fucking geeks.” He’s got them all laughing.

I can’t argue. We’re geeks and act like geeks. Clicking my notes for this meet, I get on with it.



I run up to Ops hoping this isn’t another attack. I thought Justice and the freaky crew dealt with it. I’ve got no reason to smile but I am. They’re unbelievably good at that job. It’s like having the Justice League right here and the aptly named Brother, Justice, runs it. I laugh hitting the keypad. I really am a geek.

Finn turns my way smiling. “Boss, you’ve got to see this.” He points at the right board where people are leaving shit at the gate. “I added Security to help the gate guards. Fruit, cakes, cookies.” He smiles watching as I walk closer to see what it is. “The Brothers are showing to shuttle it to the dining room. They’re proud, Pres.”

“Why are they feeding us?”

He laughs. “You didn’t catch the news last night. They showed the ex-club blowing, the Rep that was trying to drop chemicals on civilians arrested and the Air Force helping BSC

West stop the planes and shit the Rep set against us. It was a full ten minutes of Badass at its best. The towns are appreciative. They made flaming B cookies.” He moves closer pointing out a Brother holding an open bakery box of cookies. He’s stuffing one in his mouth, but I can’t tell what it looks like.

I laugh. “That’s better than bitching us out for shootouts in the streets.”

He nods smiling. “The sheriff was on saying we give them video and showed some of the shit we’ve dealt with for months. He’s glad the Air Force finally decided to help but Badass had us all covered. They took it and ran with more sheriffs giving comments in every county we have Clubs. It ended with the job training, homeless, vet houses, solar, wind, recycle, PTSD and the violence against women shit we do. All with the logo behind it. The Brothers are feeling it, Pres.”

I bet. They were all stopping me at the Club last night. I thought it was because we’re off of battling everyday as if we’re at war. Too many Brothers are still feeling that. “We need to share some of that before it goes bad.” I point at the bags and boxes being handed over. Some civilians are hugging the guards. They must love that.

“Not to the other Clubs. Caspian, show the other Club gates,” Finn says to his tech.

I’ve always liked the name and think he fits right in here. “Roger, Boss.” Caspian has boards changing.

The other Clubs show and I laugh. A huge stuffed lion is on the side of Bravo’s gate. “Falcon must love that.”

He points to Champion where a big dog is standing on the inside of the gate. It's huge but a small breed with long hair. "Just wait. I bet the wizard and scarecrow show since Toto is at Champion."

I pull my vibrating phone wondering about Toto, a wizard and scarecrow. Fuck, its Oz, I think, hitting Cort on. "Yeah, Boss."

"Meet in twenty. Dreng will send the feeds out so open when you see it. We need to get rid of this shit. The kitchen has no room to make lunch with all this on their tables."

"Roger, Cort. I'll get Prospects on separating some out for the Brothers and pack the rest in a truck until it's decided what to do with it. We've got displaced Indians and some low income schools here."

"Dreng mentioned that. He's getting a list together for each Club to distribute so we're not planning fucking Ops over cakes and shit. Eleven-thirty."

I laugh. "Roger, Boss." Hitting him off, I call the front. "Flack, get a refrigerated box truck to the kitchen then front. I need the food separated so the Brothers get to see and taste the civvies' appreciation, but we aren't wasting the rest, it will go to people in need."

"That's cool, Pres. I'll get Whisp and Cliff on it. While I have you, the Alpha-Bits are due in today. Stan had me send the alert out. Do I need to add more Security?"

I look toward Finn smiling. "No, Flack. You're not allowed to add Security. Stan has it. Get someone on their

rooms and rechecking their portion sizes. The pool time is covered but add two Prospects.”

“Roger, Pres.”

I swipe him off smiling. “He’s going to be a good Brother.”

Finn nods. “He’s worried about the Bits. Sunday is his day, he’s on my shifts for the Alpha-Bit circuit starting Monday. I’m glad he moved.” On his shifts? Enforcer and Protectors. Flack is at Enforcer in the Protector classes. I need to focus.

I’ll need his patches current for Church. “Make sure Stan has his patches on for his ceremony. Jordan sent him. It was here or Honor. He knows more about the Alpha-Bits than we do. He was trained in Champion, took his place at Alpha, then moved here when Alpha settled.”

My VP makes me smile with his nodding head and eyes on the boards. “I read his bio. I’m glad he chose us. Mase gets the Alpha-Bits better than I do. They’re little Brothers but so fucking smart, I forget they’re new to living around us.”

I remember Alder and Anton crying. “They are smart but you’re right, living with Brothers has got to be scary. These are newer than some of our Prospects so we need to watch out for them. This group is the four that have been out before so they get the Club rules and have a better understanding of Brothers, but they’ve been with the Phoenix Clubs and at the MC. Those Presidents see everything. Make sure I see what’s going on, Brother.”

He laughs at me. “You miss the news and shit that isn’t important. You don’t miss shit with the Brothers, Maverick. I’ll keep watch but I won’t need to tell you.”

I hope he’s right. Cort will come and kill me if I fuck it up with the Bits. Fuck. So will Falcon, Cooper, Justice and Trask. Harper would probably cut out my brain. She threatened to do that to a Brother, then just shot him. “I can’t fuck this up. They’ll all kill me.”

Turning, he smiles. “Mase would cremate you.”

I walk away. “Fuck off, Finn. Make sure I know what’s going on.”

The techs are trying to cover their laughing, Finn isn’t. I hold my middle finger up as I walk out and they’re all laughing. Shitheads.

Stan catches me at the bottom of the stairs. “Pres, are you bringing the Alpha-Bits to the track?”

That’s a good idea. “If they want. Their bikes are here. Asa will be there with his little nitro mini. They may want to watch him.”

His face lights up. “He beat Remo on the test run. He said he was adjusting it to go faster. He didn’t use a kit, Pres. They built a nitro motor. I’m surprised he doesn’t just fly it up the track. I don’t get how the tires stay on the ground now.” He’s just learning about NOS racing and seems to love it as much as I do.

I laugh remembering the feeling I got when I learned how to make an engine give me more. “Give him time. He’ll

have one flying over the track soon. They had a chute on the trunk ready to engage if he needed it.”

He shakes his head. “I hope the Alpha-Bits want to go.”

I smile walking through the door. “I’ve got a meet. I should be out before the Bits get here.”

“Roger, Pres.”

Looking at my watch, I start jogging. Fuck, the hallways everywhere suck. I need to ask Brekan about a compound. He’s in the mansion now, Jordan is on a growing-by-City-blocks compound and I’m still in the Club of halls. Cort has a nice place just behind the Phoenix grounds. Everyone is together, sort of. Falcon, Kristos and Cooper have nice places too. I wouldn’t mind a house or igloo. My hand is out for the keypad when I hear the voices in the meeting room. Cort, Dreng, Tyson and the Presidents are on so I throw chin. I didn’t need to open Dreng. These kids are unbelievable.

“We’re waiting on Justice, he just set down, Brother.” Cort doesn’t need to explain to me but always does.

I nod seeing Alder run in. Wait... Justice? “He took President?” It’s about time.

Cort smiles. “Not a Club because they work ours but a department. Mase and Luke Rayne wouldn’t agree unless they wore a President and VP patch. Everyone is good with the Pres and VP.”

I smile. “Nice. They deserve it. I’m glad the older Brothers pointed it out for them. So they aren’t a Club?”

Falcon answers. “They’re running VPs and SAAs in other Clubs. They don’t sleep much but having a job in another Club isn’t going to work.”

I can see that, they’re already a crew and do all kinds of other shit, so I nod. Falcon goes on, “The Brothers wouldn’t give much weight to orders from a Nomad either. A Protector Club would fuck with the point of them spreading out.”

I agree. “It would. I’ve got a mix of Brothers, IT and engineers here that would give shit to Finn if he was a Nomad. He had a BSC East cut when he got here and some of the MC ignored him. We’re getting better but we’re not there yet.” We’ve weeded out a lot of MC now but we’re right back to 700 plus members.

All the Presidents agree. Cort watches everyone with his eyes changing to that lighter blue. In person, I know the focus he has looks like someone flipped a higher sharpness setting. “We’ll work on that when we settle. It’s been busy but we should have a couple of months before we hit crazy again. Every Brother needs to hear the Protectors are all Officers in their department. Every one of them gets that respect. Show feeds, have them demonstrate, do whatever the fuck you have to, but make sure your Clubs know these are Brothers that can kill you with their thoughts. We have Axe at Bravo, he’s younger than Nash and just as deadly. Maverick, you’ll be getting two Protectors from MC Mass today. They call them Enforcers, but up there that means Protector without ability. Here, they’re Protectors. Mag sent their bios over yesterday. One is taken with the Alpha-Bits. You can set him as a Lead for them when they’re in your yard. The other is fierce Mase

said. He'd be a good Lead for Teams. Both train and can run as Ops Controls for all positions."

I got the bios, I need to read them. "Thanks, I'm losing Brothers for Sentinel." That's supposed to be addressed in our Security meet that didn't happen today.

He nods. "We got it covered. I met with all the SAAs today about the trainees. You have two Teams coming in to help with the expansion. You're growing as fast as Honor. These two from MC Mass will work well with your Club." He turns to Alder.

"Yeah, Pres Cort. Best result to Delta." Alder has me relaxing. He works Cooper's number thing fast.

Brekan hits his table. "Fuck. I worked with Ari. He's a reader but easier than Axe. He'll explain shit if he does something you question. Some don't and Axe will tell you to fuck off. They're both right up there, Brother. I had hopes they'd come up to the MC."

I smile at Brekan. "Sorry, Pres, they're mine. I'm keeping them happy so they stay mine."

The Brothers on screen laugh. Justice sits on the side of Alder smiling. "Sorry, Brothers. Security slid trying to carry too much shit from the gate."

Falcon looks surprised. "Is he okay? Why didn't you just show here?"

The young new President smiles. "He's fine. Bones is glad he doesn't have to use the ReCell. His face and arm took the worst. Aylen was headed to cover my training but she

stopped to help so it was quick. You said Cort wanted me in Phoenix, Pres.”

Falcon smiles with his eyes bouncing to Cort. “I did.”

Cort loves Justice. We can all see it in his smile and eyes. “Let me know next time. Thanks for getting here, Brother.”

Justice looks confused but nods. “I will, Boss.”

Alder stands on his chair. “Pres Justice, ReCell supply low?”

Justice looks down then right back up quick. “The Pres takes some getting used to, LP. No, but he thinks Mase is going to burn Brothers and doesn’t want to run out when you call for it.”

Kristos sits up while the Brothers laugh. “He stopped the fire from hitting the Brothers. They fell because he blew wind at them.”

I smile watching Justice nod. “*Threw* wind, but he did. It scrambles their brain. It’s better than burning them because it’s free. He wouldn’t waste money on pussies treatment, rehab and shit.” He’s got everyone laughing but doesn’t know why. Dreng leans over explaining. Justice shrugs and waits for Cort. I’m not laughing because I think it’s smart.

We get through the meeting with lists of where we deliver. I’m glad the reservation and shelters get shit. Dreng said Tyson added the school headed toward Honor. They’re rural and don’t get much out that way. I’m smiling. Two Brothers mentioned it after Church last Sunday. It feels good to know this shit before I’m told. I walkout still smiling

because I was just told by kids. They're smart fucking kids. Hitting my mic, I start down the first hall.

"Pres, Alpha-Bits and Asa setting down. I've got two Brothers and Teller at the gate from Protectors." Finn is good with seeing me click on.

"Roger, Finn. Get the Protectors to the pad. One will be on Alpha-Bits. I sent the delivery list to your tech. Get food moving."

"Roger, Boss. Asa is with them." He says it like we wouldn't need the Protectors on the Bits.

"Yeah, Brother. They aren't working today, but they're from MC Mass, they wouldn't have met the little Brothers. The circuit up there is Mass, Rhode Island and Virginia. They come back every three months."

"The shit I learn. Roger, Pres. Teller has them at the pad. Delivery is moving." He's so good at this shit.

"He's VP of Protectors. Make sure Teller feels that, Brother. I just watched it hit *Pres Justice*."

He laughs in my ear. "It's about time. I'll make sure the Brothers know, Boss."

Pushing through the door, I smile. Teller and the new Brothers are normal size. I'm close to six-four and feel small around the Samoans. Shaking my head, I fix that, six-three and a half and I'm obviously feeling the half I'm not.

Teller turns throwing chin with his smile. "I'm hoping I grow an inch to be my dad's height."

The Protectors throw chin but don't greet me. The taller is my size and says, "I don't know, VP. He's always going to be Prez. That's a fuck of a big shoe to fill."

Teller doesn't react to the title. Stepping closer, I hug him. "It is but he's got his own shoes Brothers are hoping to grow into. Congratulations or as everyone else says, it's about fucking time, VP."

The Brothers laugh getting to the door of the chopper. Teller steps them back. "Thanks, Maverick. Ari, give it a minute, Asa will open when he's ready. The wind up here knocks them over."

The taller Brother is Ari, he nods. "Roger, VP. I didn't think of that."

Asa opens the door a little ways and the other Brother smiles. "Asa?" He asks Teller.

"Don't fuck with him or he'll shoot you. He's VP of Alpha-Bits." Teller moves closer to the door and floats Asa down. That's freaky shit but the new Brothers don't react.

"Asa, this is Ari. He'll be heading the Protector Teams on the Circuit crew here. His brother Adrian is on Teams and training. They're both Ops controls and know IT enough to help if you need it."

Asa throws chin to me then the new Brothers. "Medics, Mass MC. I get bio." He looks at Ari. "Bend I see your eyes."

I smile watching the Brothers bend. "Thank you to watch my Alpha-Bit Brothers. Runar, Nyle, Theo, Oscar work to you Ops. Brothers say you show respect, help to them they

no understand. Pres Alder show he honor to you.” His little fist hits his chest. “I show honor to you. You need Alpha-Bit to build, work, help, you ask. We have your back, Boss Ari, Boss Adrian.” He leans bumping his shoulder with them both.

I smile at Teller. “He’s Badass.”

Teller laughs as the Flight Crew jumps down with the marines. They lift the Alpha-Bits down and the Flight Crew goes back in. The Marines stand watching.

Zachon smiles at me so I bend for them. “Welcome back, Brothers. We’re happy you’ll be staying this time.”

Zachon smiles. “Two hour?”

The kids laugh. “I’m hoping the full week, Brothers. We have some new Brothers from MC Mass. I just got their names. We’ll learn about them together. Ari is going to be the Lead Protector for you starting tomorrow. He’s approved by Justice, Alder, Cort and Asa. If you need anything or Brothers switched off your Team, you see me, Finn, Stan or Ari.” I motion for Ari to bend again. “His brother is Adrian. He’s a Protector on Ops Teams.” I don’t have to wave him down, he bends with us.

“Freaky?” Zachon asks.

Teller bends. “They’re readers and have some shielding ability.”

Asa touches Zachon’s shoulder. “No fly everywhere, Brother. Read only here.”

Zachon nods. “Pres Justice scare Quest. Fly freaky eyes close. He no say.”

Teller hugs the little guy. “Sorry, Brother. We forget not everyone knows.” He shrugs making Ari laugh.

The little guy, Quest, nods. “I jump cliff to you party. Pres Justice say no jump to no Protector. I no jump cliff no Protector, close eyes.” His head is shaking.

“Oh fuck. You jumped alone?” Adrian asks.

Asa nods. “Pres Justice see me run, he help.”

Teller smiles. “So, if we’re carrying you, close your eyes. You know the Brothers that suspend. It’s still the same. Adrian and Ari don’t suspend yet. They’ll tell you when they do.”

The Alpha-Bits all look at the new Brothers getting nods. I turn hiding my smile. They are cute.

Standing, I see Stan and Remo. “Brothers, you know Remo, this is Stan, he’s SAA for Delta Rising.” I touch his shoulder.

Remo bends. “You staying this time?” Everyone was let down when they were called to help get the MC up and running an hour after they got here.

The Bits laugh. We all look up at a Bravo Rising chopper. “I have a meet I think you all need to be in on. Alder and Jordan are here for it.”

The Bits look excited. Teller pulls my cut and points to the portico. I get the Bits moving. Asa leads the way pulling Zachon with him. The Marines climb back on the chopper. I don’t get why they show. We wait as they lift off and Bravo’s chopper sets down.

Asa jerks my cut once. “Pres Maverick, meet stop race?”

I shake my head at him. “No, Brother. It’s an idea I hope will work. Stella tell you about the satellite?”

“Akai tell. No loss to data. Alder have Boss Jane save server to hard drive. One time to month.”

That’s smart but overkill. BSC does it for every territory. Maybe he sees more than I am. “He does, Pres. Sorry we didn’t acknowledge. You’re young for a Pres.” Ari makes me laugh. They both hug me with acknowledgments.

I’m glad they didn’t have time to read the bio either. “I thought you knew Justice and Teller.”

They throw chin. Teller smiles. “Nash is VP of Sentinel Rising. Chris is VP of MC Colorado. Aylen will be a President and Jeti an SAA by next year. Age doesn’t play out here, experience and knowledge gets you everywhere.”

The Brothers shake their heads. “Luke Rayne commanding the base and Tucker his second had us moving. They’re both hard working Brothers. They deserve it.”

I smile looking at Ari then Adrian. “Good. The future plans were of you both stepping up to high Officers.”

They look at Teller getting a nod. I get hugged by both and smile seeing Jordan turn for Alder to climb on his back.

Everyone comes to the meeting room except Adrian. Stan takes him on a tour while Ari and Teller walk into the meeting room behind the Bits. Remo throws me chin at the door. He’s not into all the geek shit so he always waits in the hall.



“Pres Maverick, I go with Asa, Zachon?”

I turn and Ari steps up. “I’ll bring him.”

“You stay with Ari, Quest. Mabon and Tomas, do you want to go by the car or handle the start?”

“Start engine. I stay, Pres Maverick.” Tomas is cute.

I look at Mabon’s nodding head. “To you. Bets.”

I laugh and nod to Ari. “I got them. Remo is down there if you get bored.”

He smiles. “Not a chance, Pres. Asa said they built the motor.” He jogs behind Quest.

The next cars come up and Mabon runs to the driver with his tablet at the ready. “Bet? Four to one you lose.”

I laugh. Deklim hands him money pegging a finger at Jinx. “I help to you car to next race.”

Deklim stops with his helmet half on. “Yeah? I think the kit is wrong. The NOS mix isn’t working until the end.”

Mabon nods and points. “I help later. Move to line.”

Tomas stands on the lift someone brought out and holds the flags up. I lift Mabon up checking the clocks. When they reset, I nod and Tomas drops the flags. Mabon’s feet are running to the next car before I set him down. He gets names and their bets, I never took money up here like this, it’s a good idea.

“Get the fuck out of here!” A young Brother checking the tires yells at Mabon.

I step up quick lifting Mabon. Remo is yanking the Brother by the back of his shirt. He's not in a cut or Club gear. "Who the fuck are you?" Remo asks so he's not a Brother.

The dick swings his legs to pull away. I bring Mabon to the other car. "Don't pay the ass any attention. Remo will teach him how to act."

Mabon nods wiggling to get down. He runs to Teller not caring about the dick. "VP Teller, you bet. Twenty to one, you win."

Teller laughs giving Mabon a fifty. "Who does it go to?"

"Old slave see water park, bus, food, dinner."

Teller gives him another fifty. "You let me know if you come up short. I'll get the Brothers to bet on something else." They're all good Brothers but I love Justice and Teller. Nothing is too small for them to help with.

Mabon nods pointing at the start line. "I text." Mabon runs the eight feet to me with his arms up. He knows the drill.

Remo laughs behind me. "I'm glad they like racing."

"They love anything they can help with. Work is fun."

Mabon proves it. "Happy!"

Remo laughs. "Cute. Adrian took the ass out and will send Stan his ID for the gate. They don't put up with shit, Pres. I love them both already."

This is good. "Ari will be running Teams for the Bits. You'll be back on my detail." I nod for Tomas.

Remo waits for the cars to move a good fifty yards away. “Finn sent it to me. Leaving you with Enforcers wasn’t working for me.” He’s the Lead for my Teams and a good Officer for the Club. He helps Stan with SAA duties now that we’re back to higher numbers.

When the next racers stop, I put Mabon down. “I appreciate it, Brother, but I haven’t been off the Club grounds much with the fires and fucking wars we’ve had.”

He smiles. “You will be. Before the daily attacks you were everywhere. Bet your new clunker will have us riding for parts.”

I smile. I hope so. I miss having time off to just piddle around.



Josephine

I just get the steel doors rolled down and turn at the sound of Jacky's car. He was at the races again, or I thought he was. Slamming his brakes down, he skids to four feet away from me. "Don't leave skid marks in front of the fucking bays!"

Who the hell is with him and where did *this* black eye come from? He almost falls out of the car making me wonder where he came from. My mom was dainty and graceful. My dad agile and flexible, like a damn cat. I wish he had nine lives. Jacky is a klutz until he's painting. It's the only thing I've ever seen him do without his normal mishaps.

"Jojo, the Club threw me out for yelling at some kid. What the fuck is with kids at the races? They act like I hit the kid. I just got him away from Perry."

This is not good. "You know better than to start shit with the Club. Is that where you got the black eye?"

He doesn't have a problem waving his arms so he must have just gotten the black eye. "No. I was helping Magnar get his shit in the back and ran right into Magnar's cast. He was a fabricator for the Club. I told him he could rent my spare room. He paid until Friday in advance and gave me money for loading his shit up."

I shake my head. "Dad warned us about the bikers for a reason, Jacky. They kill people. We even saw them do it." I'll never forget pulling over and watching the guy on a bike shoot two men right in front of us.

His head is going a mile a minute. “You didn’t watch the news. They got the other guys away from town people. The town is bringing food and shit to them as a thanks.”

What the hell? I pull my phone but don’t take my eyes off of Jacky. “Why is this guy moving in with you?” No one sent me anything to help.

“The President threw him out.” He steps closer. “I think he beat him too. He’s a welder. You said we could use help.”

I shake my head. “I don’t need that kind of help. We can all weld. If he was thrown out, you should steer clear.”

His eyes bug out. “He’s hurt. He can stay until he’s better. They took him from their hospital to the gate with all his shit piled outside of it. He’s wrecked, Jojo. I couldn’t leave him there.” My brother the Good Samaritan.

His eyes tell me I’m not winning this one. “He stays at your place until he’s better then he’s gone. The end of the week, Jacky. If he’s not out by then, I’m going to the club and asking them to step in.”

His hands go up and he backs away. “End of the week, I promise. You sure you don’t want him to work? He welded satellites.”

Not a chance. “I am not getting in the middle of a former member and the club. It’s not the kind of work I need anyway. Get him out by the end of the week.”

He nods backing up. “All right, Jojo. Johnny said he wanted the room anyway. He starts his new job in two weeks.”

I smile. “Good for him. He’s going to be a great assistant manager at the Pro-shop, he’s worked there forever.” He’s a good friend to Jacky but not as close as he used to be. I don’t know why my mom and dad dying has people shying away from us.

He’s back to smiling. “Yeah, I’m lucky he doesn’t like living alone.” Since he doesn’t either, this will work out well. He should have stayed with me at the house but mom killed herself there. He won’t even come in for dinner.

I just nod. “I’ll see you tomorrow, buddy.”

He points getting in his mustang. “You got breakfast.”

I shake my head walking to my car. I wish he’d come to the house. I’d make him breakfasts. Sitting behind the wheel, I smile knowing he does breakfast better than I do. I make a mean pot roast, steaks and smothered chicken. Stews and soups are my thing but I learned it all. Someone had to cook when momma was down, which was more than she was up. She just couldn’t climb back up once daddy died. I never said, but I knew she wouldn’t make it a year without him. Poor Jacky’s had enough loss to last him a lifetime.

Jenny died when we were young, but he put a little school picture of her on the visor of his mustang, he still misses his little shadow. I feel bad he found her too. She climbed a tree waiting for his bus and fell. I just got to the tech school in Florida and had to leave my truck and trailer at a storage facility to fly home. It was not an easy year. I have four pictures of Jenny and Jacky in my room. Not being there when it happened had me feeling guilty. My school counselor told me to keep her with me and not hide her. It helped me but

momma lost it then. I didn't know how bad until I came home from school. Daddy said she just needed time. With all her pills, she needed more than time. I get my stubborn streak from daddy. I knew he wouldn't budge and he never did. Some counseling may have helped them both.

Backing out, I shake my head. I dragged Jacky to counseling when mom died. I'm not dad and him sleeping in a tent in the backfield wasn't normal. Mom swallowing a whole bottle of pills wasn't normal either but Jacky found her. The therapist suggested the apartment so I helped him get a small house close to downtown. Mrs. Lima knew right away what was going on and rented it with his name on the lease. She was our English teacher in high school and it's a small town. I left my number but I didn't have to. Jacky is a good kid.

Pulling up to the house, I wonder if I should sell it. The old bungalow is in great shape but it's too big for just me. With Jacky's vow of never setting foot in it, I should find a place he'd at least visit me in.

With a sigh, I hit the garage control and roll my GTO in on the side of dad's Trans Am and moms '66 Mustang Coupe. I definitely need to get rid of that car. I think I drove it more than mom. Jacky wouldn't take it when I handed him the title. I can sell it and give him the money.

With that settled, I head in with a list of shit to get done. I guess it's time to clean house and move on. I'm glad I bought the garage. With me managing the shop, I let Lenny go. He was old school, male chauvinist and just plain rude. Without dad to keep him in line, my first day as owner had us in a showdown. He lost and moved his shit out of the

apartment above the stockroom. Since I never liked him and he barely did any work, it wasn't a great loss to me. The shop is running smooth and my crew all know me. Working for my dad and school in Florida made me a great mechanic. I can never say it out loud, but I know it. My love will always be classic muscle cars, but I can fix just about anything.

I'll get Jacky on painting and have time to find a place to live. I'm glad he shut down the apartment now. He called it a dungeon. It's not that bad and will brighten up with cleaning and paint.

"Thanks, Dad." I smile throwing my bag on the floor. He taught me more than school did.

Chapter One

One and a half weeks

Maverick

Glaring at my phone doesn't stop it from ringing. My first day off in months and I'm called before seven in the morning. I roll over Melissa trying to reach it. "Sorry, babe." Swiping it on, I roll back and right off the bed. "Maverick." As soon as it's out of my mouth I look to see who is calling. Shit, Brekan doesn't call this early unless there's trouble.

"Brother, Ben Knight is on his way to Delta. He's there for a couple of days. I just checked with your Prospect." That's better than the trouble I expected but I'm finally off today.

Fuck. "Thanks, Pres. I'm on my way." I need coffee for this.

"You're not at Delta?" He's surprised?

"No. It's my first day off in months. I'm twenty from the Club." I fill the pot then wash my face while he talks.

He breathes out. "Sorry, Brother. I can have Chris cover you when Ben leaves. You're the last Club he's at for BSC West."

Finding a towel bunched in the drawer with junk, I wipe up. "It's fine, Pres. If Chris can cover Finn, I can take the days right after." The cabinets are as bad as the drawers. This kitchen is deceiving.

“Done, Brother. Thanks for doing this. They’re going to watch the first job from there. He made it sound like the old game Space Invaders or whatever it was called.”

I laugh. I loved that game. “It sort of is. I didn’t know they got it reprogrammed.” I start the coffee maker. “That’s fucking fast, Boss. I need to get moving so I make it before Ben.”

“Go, Maverick. I’ll try to get down there tomorrow.” That means he’s not making it. If he was, I’d get a definite plan. Brekan is always busy with other Clubs.

“Roger, Pres.”

Swiping off, I turn, glad she’s awake. “Gotta go.”

“I thought you were the President.”

“I am for Delta Rising. He’s the Lead for the territory, my mother chapter, it’s a respect thing.” I need to tell her the plan.

Her eyes roll. “I’m going away this weekend.”

What? I have a truck coming for her shit. Pulling clothes on, I ask as if it’s not a big deal. “Where?”

With the look, I know. “A Brother from Honor is taking me up to Wyoming for the weekend.” She’s got to be kidding.

“A Brother from Honor?” The kitchen isn’t the only thing deceiving today.

She rolls facing the wall. “Yeah, you showed once this month, won’t let me move my stuff in your rooms and call like once a week.”

I call her at least three times a week. She doesn't always answer saying she was working. "Take me off your list, Melissa. The deal was we'd see where it goes after the Club settled. So you know, it's settled as of last week. My first day off had me here."

"You always have excuses. You're leaving so it's not done, but I am." She fucked me while seeing a Brother from Honor knowing she was quitting me.

I shake my head getting my cut on. "Have fun, Melissa. I'm out."

Her middle finger waving has me smiling. At least she's not making a scene. Before I start my bike, I call the Prospect desk. "Pull Melissa's clearance per me. Cancel the truck for her house."

Whisp breathes deep. "Sorry, Pres. I sent it to Security and canceled the Prospects."

"Ben Knight is in today. Make sure he gets whatever he needs."

"Roger, Pres. He's got Brothers with him. José called and set them up. They won't need much."

I watch the bike coming my way. "I'm out."

Michaels shuts his bike off at the curb. "Maverick, funny seeing you here."

"You the Brother going to Wyoming this weekend?"

His head goes back? "No, I'm off and thought I'd stop on my way to Champion. Is Melissa a Club chick?" The way

that sounds coming out of his mouth, the thought doesn't thrill him.

"Nope, but I just learned she's a good actress. An Honor Brother is taking her to Wyoming this weekend. I just got the Club clear and thought I was moving her in. Now you show another string she's dangling in the pool. I'm out, Brother."

"You were moving me in?"

We both look up to the balcony. Melissa is dressed for a ride.

"I canceled the truck." I look at Michaels. "Have fun."

He shakes his head. "I'm out, Brother. I only had two weeks in, but she didn't mention you."

"Wait! Maverick, I'll cancel with Spano, he's not even a President yet," Melissa says in that sweet voice I didn't get this morning.

Michaels laughs. "I'll let Spano know and get her out of the Clubs."

"Thanks, Brother. Ben Knight is on his way to Delta, I need to get back."

He throws me chin hitting his phone. I pull away with the Security truck following. I'm surprised a Brother rides up on my side until I see it's Remo. I'm doing a hundred on the state road. He's crazy. I hit my mic on. "You on?"

"Yeah, Boss. Security let me know you were heading back."

Great. "Ben Knight is on his way."

“Yeah, I was in Ops, Finn sent me. You were supposed to wait for a Team.”

I don't look at him but roll my eyes then turn for the back gate. “I want a compound. You want to live in an igloo or the adobe houses like Alpha?”

He laughs. “Glad you're done with her. I like the igloos like the Protectors. Can they do that with the adobes?”

“Whatever the hell I want. I'll ask Alder, maybe we can incorporate space as the theme.”

“Jesus. Now I'm rethinking it, Pres.”

I laugh. “We need the room and I'm sick of living in the Club of halls like I'm a rat in a maze. We could have main housing then igloos like satellites. Security in one, Enforcers, Protectors, Engineers, Officers and VIPs.” I pull in my spot and shut my bike off while he laughs at me.

“Whatever the hell you want, Pres.”

“I need a shower and breakfast. I'll be down in twenty.”

“Roger, Pres.”

Taking the halls to my rooms I think igloos would be better than this. We have plenty of land between us and the air strip. My phone vibrates. Spano texts me a thanks and he was almost two months in but saw Michaels pull up there today. Melissa was a piece of work.

Swiping into my space, I breathe deep. She wouldn't have worked anyway. All my shit is neat and organized. The trial run was based on her being sweet, honest and neat. I

surprised her last night seeing her little apartment messier than I've seen it before. Since she isn't sweet or honest, neat can't be expected.

Dropping my clothes in the hamper, I shower feeling relieved. I felt bad about how long it took to get the Club settled so I was going to do the trial run not having much physical time in. Talking had me thinking she was sweet and showing patience with understanding. I didn't mention it last night feeling something was off. That wasn't just her messy apartment. I'm glad I didn't say anything now. Me, Michaels and Spano? Fuck.

Dressing fast, I run the halls to the dining room. Ben is here with Phoenix and Teller. I don't know his Security today. Some Officers stop chatting and acknowledge when I step closer.

"Ben, Brothers." I acknowledge getting chin back. "I hope you weren't waiting for me."

Ben shakes his head. "No, Brother. We just sat down." He looks at the door.

Finn walks in looking excited. "Brothers, Pres. Hey, I found a Mustang in between one and two. It says coupe. That's what you're looking for, right, Remo?"

Remo nods sitting with Finn's phone.

"The '66?" I ask.

He's been looking forever. He hands me Finn's phone. "It says stock parts in great condition."

It looks good in the picture. "It's an automatic."

He looks at me like I'm crazy. "I'm not racing it. My dad got rid of his when I was born. It's for him." His dad is cool. He's going to love this.

I smile. "Nice, Brother. I'll help if it needs work. When can we see it?"

"They close at five. I can go when you're off this weekend."

"Let's go today. Ops is tomorrow morning. This means something," Ben says.

Phoenix nods. "Honoring your father is about as badass as you can be. I'm in."

Teller agrees. Ben breathes deep feeling that. I smile. "I'm in. We can go after breakfast."

Remo is floored. "Yeah? Thanks, Brothers. My dad lost everything young but never quit. He should get some back now he's retired."

I lean bumping his shoulder. "You're a good son and he taught you what's important, Remo. His little log cabin with the view, poles for the lake at Christmas and the car he let go, it's all giving him his. He's a good man and that shows in you."

He looks down smiling. "He's the man I want to be, Pres. He never quit, when my mom died, his folks got in the accident, he lost his arm, was discharged, he never quit."

I nod taking his arm for a second then look at the Prospect who's taking Ben's order. Remo has been with me for years. I've been fishing with him and his dad, went for Thanksgivings and once for Christmas. The last was his

retirement party. Remo is proud of his dad and should be. The man is the dad I'd want if I had a choice. Mine died overseas but I was young and don't have a lot of memories with him. I hear all of Remo's and always wonder if I'd have had that.

Breakfast gets lighter as Teller explains about the satellite. We have one that went up that was set polar getting Phoenix explaining the placement so the Officers here understand. I look at Ben smiling at his boys. He's proud too. He should be. They're amazing Brothers at twenty-one. It shows he is a great dad.

"Thanks. I try to be. It always looks easy. I'm telling you it isn't as a favor, Maverick. When you have kids, no matter what it is, just do your best. Everyone else looks like they were born knowing shit, they weren't. They'll think you make it look easy too."

I nod. "It won't be any time soon, but I'll remember. My aunt and uncle raised me. It was good until I joined the Club. They moved to an ex-pat community in Buenos Aires. Major took me in and sent me to the military. I was pissed at the world but he saw through it." I shake my head smiling. Major saved me from drugs, booze and myself. I was a scared kid with no one close, trying to prove myself with the Brothers.

"They'd be proud, Brother." Teller is smiling.

I agree. "I got a letter from my aunt saying my parents would be proud of me, she is. She saw me in the news for something with the satellites and has been writing every few months. My uncle died but she's happy there."

Remo hits my shoulder with his. “That’s good, Brother. I’m glad she reconnected.”

“She visits soon. Make sure she meets Major.” Teller has my eyes whipping to his.

Ben laughs while Phoenix shakes his head. Shit. I’ll write to her later. Maybe I can get someone to pick her up. Teller stands up. “I can go.”

“I need to write and ask, Brother. Relax.” Fuck, she’d have a conniption seeing strange bikers appear in front of her.

They laugh. “I’ll be back. I still have half a list I need to get through today, but Mucimi is at Honor and Mase is calling to me.”

Ben looks at him. “You need me there?”

Teller shakes his head. “Today was you relaxing, Dad. Mase and Mucimi aren’t giving you that. I’ve got them. Go fishing or something with Remo’s dad.” Teller is just gone.

I laugh. “You’re stuck with us.”

Ben smiles. “My last full day off was riding with Cooper and Cort. I find the West Brothers easy to relax with.”

Phoenix leans forward. “Since I do too, I take no offense, Dad.”

The Officers laugh.



Josephine

Jacky helps me get the boxes up. The movers already brought in my furniture. The rest will go to storage.

“Why are you moving in here now? It still smells like paint.”

“The cleaners are coming today so pictures can be taken for the realtor. It’s not even on the site and the Walters from the village want it. She’s pregnant again and they need the room.”

“They already have four kids. She needs birth control, or he needs rubbers.”

I laugh glad my dad drilled that in. “He’s selling his parents’ house, if it weren’t in the village, I’d consider it. I’ll open the windows and let the paint smell out.”

He shakes his head dropping his box on the small table my dad made for my room. He made all our furniture, but this is special so I wince. “Careful with the furniture.”

He looks down quick. “It’s fine. Aren’t you sick of wood everything?” His apartment is modern black and chrome.

“No. It’s all I’ve ever seen. I love it.” My head cocks to the side hearing bikes out front. The guys will deal. We work on bikes so it’s not unusual, but we don’t get many because the club has their own shop.

“Whatever. We’re almost done. We should have gotten help.” He walks out while I take a minute to look around and open the window above the sink. The view is great. It will be a

nice resting place while I look for a new home. Now that it's clean and painted, I think I'll like it here.

"Get the fuck out of here!" Jacky's yell has me running down the stairs. All I can see is Jacky's back at the side of the truck. He whirls back falling on his side just as I hear metal being hammered out front and guys yelling.

"What the hell?"

Magnar steps around the side of the truck with a bat. "You are a fine-looking piece of ass."

Sonofabitch! I knew he was bad news. "He helped you when you needed it and this is how you repay him?"

"I deserve more for the three days he didn't shut up. You'll do and learn to show some respect to men you think you're better than." He reaches toward my face and I slap his hand down.

"Keep your fucking hands off me, asshole."

Jacky moves taking my eyes away and I know it's a mistake when Magnar grabs my hair. I hear muffled bikes but the bat swings up forcing me to kick and hit up. Catching him in the balls and under his chin has my hair released at least. Magnar swings low with an animal growl catching my shin just below my knee. The shock of that pain has my foot off the ground pretty damn quick. All I get, through the pain, is my breath back before I hop a step away.

"You fuck!" Jacky tackles the pig but Magnar isn't done with me. His grip on my shirt has me hopping another step unbalanced before I'm dragged down with them. The jolt has me dizzy.

Breathing through pain, I bend my good leg pulling my knife from my boot. My dad paid good money for me to learn to defend myself. I've never had to go this far but think this makes it worth every penny. The bat rattles my brain bringing more tears to my eyes but my hand keeps moving. With my knife at his throat, Jacky stops hitting the bastard.

"She doesn't play with knives, asshole. If you feel it, she means it." He picks up the bat just as another biker moves close fast. "Stop right there or he's dead."

I blink hard trying to see this guy. Sandy hair, biker vest and tall is all I get until he moves his hands up. He's rock solid and moves like my dad with that easy nature that disguises the power behind the movements. Fuck, we're in trouble.

"I'm one of the good guys. My Brothers are collecting the dicks wrecking the cars." He doesn't stop moving. "I'll throw you cuffs. You can cuff him yourself while the woman holds him. Do that quick so we can help her."

Jacky nods. "You're the President. He said you threw him out." He catches cuffs and moves. "One minute, Jojo."

"Magnar, somehow I knew I'd see you again. Fucking with women is going to get you killed yet." The biker doesn't move but a new one walks right by him.

"That may be today, Pres. He broke her leg with the bat, Boss. I'll get him to holding. Bet Chara calls first shot."

The President nods smiling as his hand touches his jacket near his throat. "I need Ren at my twenty in the medic truck with X-ray for a possible broken leg. Thanks, Brother.

Send a cleanup Team and Ratchet with his Brothers. Hold on. He was beating the shit out of someone wrecking a GTO with a sledgehammer.” The suit fits him nice as he walks a little further away but his words penetrate then piss me off.

“Fuck! That’s mine. Jacky, help me up.” Sonofabitches wrecked my car too.

Magnar laughs when Jacky holds his side moaning with his other arm out. The big biker slams him backward into the truck’s side frame.

“Thanks, Mister.” Jacky puts his hand out for me.

I shake my head. “He hit you in the side with the bat?”

“Yeah, I thought I was never going to breathe again.” He explains that feeling well.

“Uhh.”

We both look back as Magnar falls. The big biker rolls him with his foot and stomps on his side. “He’ll get to feel that too, little Brother. The fucking prick isn’t going to be able to forget this lesson.” As he talks, he lifts Magnar’s hands and wire ties him to the lift brace so his arms are stretched out.

I look at Jacky and wince. “I’m glad they’re the good guys.”

He sits holding his side and tries to laugh. I see pain on his face through the groan. “Yeah.”

“Jo, you okay?” Bobby bends holding a shop towel to his head.

This is not going to give me a good work environment rating. He’s freaking bleeding. “I think he broke my leg. I’ll be

okay. Are you okay?"

"The guy told me to wait with you. I need stitches but I'm fine. They wrecked the GTO and Jacky's mustang, then smashed windshields on some of the others. We kept them out of the shop but couldn't stop them all."

Jacky groans again. "How many?"

"Eight counting Magnar." The biker supplies. "You need to lay down, little Brother." He helps Jacky lay back.

My brother moans the whole way. "We need to get you to the hospital." I hold his hand breathing through the leaning over dizziness I'm feeling.

The biker shakes his head no. "The medic truck is like a mobile hospital, Ren is a good doctor. She'll get him straight. Pres would have made the call for EMTs with her. I need to get something to raise him a little."

The biker goes in the truck and Bobby whispers, "He knocked a guy out cold with one punch. Only three left. They beat the hell out of all eight. Some with their suits and guns were standing back watching."

I shake my head. Thank God for the good guys. Magnar showed with ten men. My three guys are no match for this shit. "Tell me Ken and Perry are okay."

He nods. "They'll be sore but they're okay. Perry was going to call the customers and close up but the guy told him he has mechanics on the way. We can rest while they work. We only have the appointments that showed. I saw Mr. Hawkins drive away."

"I'll get someone to call the rest and reschedule."

“Josephine! Jacky, are you alright?” A neighbor, Maddy, runs to us just as a big truck with the club logo stops. Maddy is one that shies away from us. Why is she here now? Our biker drops a chair pillow back in the U-Haul and walks back to us. Maddy’s eyes follow. This is great, she’s man-hunting, now?

I move over a few inches not wanting to move my leg. I never imagined I’d think it, but I wouldn’t mind seeing a bottle of pills today. I bet mom had one for pain in her cabinet. She had so many bottles but only two kinds. It was weird that she wasn’t taking them but hid herself away from us. I let that go and watch the big guy lift Jacky and carry him into the truck. Jacky isn’t little. That’s some muscle he’s got going on.



Maverick

Ben smiles seeing the bikes and pickup pulling in. “The woman is worried about her crew. This will help. Good call, Brother.”

“Remo is going to be pissed. The mustang *was* pristine. I bet Ratchet can get it back to good. I can help this weekend.”

He smiles walking to the other side with me. “You know cars?”

“I piddle around with the classics. It’s something to do that isn’t Club related. Every car I restore is bought by a Brother so it’s not completely unrelated.”

He laughs. “Trask is like that. Axe is interested in his barracuda. Anything with power suits that kid.”

I nod. “Trask does nice work. I saw the Camaro before the ‘cuda.” I have a Camaro that does not like the snow.

Remo turns from the medic truck looking worried. “The kid’s got broken ribs and she’s got a broken leg. Ren’s checking for concussion. He whacked her in the face with the bat. I’m surprised the bone didn’t break. That kid’s ribs were broke when we pulled in, Pres. I called a shot, but Ren called in for beds in the medic room.” Meaning the Brothers aren’t going to leave anything for him.

I nod watching Ben fly into the truck. He’s got his hands on the boy. “He’s the kid that yelled at Mabon. I’m glad to see him defending the woman.” With the broken ribs, she must mean something to him with pain like that.

He nods. “He was pissed Mabon told his buddy he was slated to lose.”

That makes sense but doesn't give him the right to yell at a kid. “Why is Magnar showing here?” We've got businesses all over the new town and into the ones around us. Why here?

“I'll ask when...”

“The kid helped him out when he was dropped at the gate. He gave him a room until he was up and around. The pussy called his friends because the kid's sister wouldn't give him a job. He was taking her after he wrecked the place. He promised the friends a turn at her. This isn't done.” Phoenix flies into the truck and holds the woman's arm. So she's his sister.

Remo looks at me. “The three that left.”

Fuck. I walk away calling Ops, glad to hear Finn. “I need surveillance at this garage. A Security Team and everything on the woman and the kid you can find. Hold on. A mechanic said their cars got wrecked, I'll get you the plates.” I walk to the front.

“Why did he pick that place?” Finn asks.

“Kid let him stay with him until he was up and moving. The woman is a looker.” She has clothes that look biker and something else. Old world or something but the look is sexy. I shake my head clearing it.

“Fuck.”

I agree and give him the plates. He'll get the Bits on it. Since I'm at the front, I check in with Ratchet.

He's checking under the hood of the GTO. "It's time and money but no damage to the motor on either. Tires, windows and body work are easy. They have all the machinery to work the metal. These are professional, Boss. She may not want someone else working on her car. The kid inside said that's her brother's. She did all the work on them alone. Look at this motor, she knows what she's doing."

It's clean. "It's stock."

"Kid says she builds them exact. She works one on her down time for the mustang. The brother is young and rides it hard. The tranny is done and just waiting. Kid inside thinks it's funny, they love this woman, she's been working here longer than them."

She's younger than me. "Really?"

He nods. "Her dad owned it. She went to school in Florida for cars then bikes but the kid says she didn't need it. She's lucky she had it when her old man died. She bought her dad's partner out. No one would show here for a woman without the paper. She's got a good rep too."

This poor woman. Finn will have the dad dying so I don't ask. "So you want to leave this for her?"

He shrugs. "I can get the kid's car done in a day or two, it gives them a ride. I'd rather not fuck with her work. If it was mine I'd be pissed."

I nod. "I would too. Okay. Get the kid's done. They're in the medic building tonight. She's got a broken leg, maybe a concussion and the kid broken ribs. What about the other shit Magnar's hit squad did?"

“Fucking Magnar did this?”

I shake my head as the Brothers move closer. “His goons did. Three got away before we could stop them. Eight total will be in holding. Magnar beat the kid and woman. She had a knife to his neck after I saw Magnar break her leg with a bat. I bet that’s how the kid got the broken ribs.” I stopped a dick from hitting a mechanic with a tire iron again before going for the girl. I shouldn’t have stopped but if I didn’t, the mechanic would be dead. Choices like that kill me inside.

“I’m calling a shot.” Ratchet has all the Brothers calling shots.

“Have at it, Brothers. They aren’t going to the Sheriff until tomorrow.” I look back at Ratchet feeling good. They’ll pay for what they’ve done here. I doubt Magnar will make it out walking. “The shop?”

“I’ll cover it until Friday. They have appointments and her crew ain’t leaving. Three got out, they aren’t gonna be safe here, Boss.”

I nod. “Surveillance is coming to wire it tomorrow. We’ll have them covered. This started because of me. The kid helped Magnar from the gate. Gave him a room until he could move around. This is what he got for that. There’s no telling what story he got at the gate.”

Brothers growl, this is good, they’ll look out for the kid and woman. The kid I sent for stitches comes over with a bandaid on his head. “You look a damn sight better.”

He smiles. “Yeah. It’s just a scar but the doctor covered it. The guy in there heals with those younger guys. I

saw the flying on TV, but one flew in the truck. I almost passed out when his hand held my arm.” He smiles like this is all fun.

“Justice or Teller?”

He shrugs. Justice always tells new people his name. It must be Teller. “They’re crazy with healing. Mucimi would just appear. He never tones it down, even for civilians.”

He shakes his head. “I don’t want anyone hitting me, but I don’t think you should touch Jo’s car. Her mom’s is the mustang up for sale.” He points to the one Remo wants. “She probably doesn’t want to work on it. It’s only been a few months since she died.”

Jesus, this woman’s been through hell. “When did her dad die?”

“Just over a year now. The mother was sickly. We didn’t think she’d make it as long as she did. The dad was shot by the bikers that rode through town. He stood in front of a daycare lady saving her. He was a good guy.”

I know who he’s talking about. We went to the memorial at the town center for him and an old man that got hit yelling at the dicks that were riding the sidewalk scaring people. The woman that was protected was a fucking mess but thankful to be alive. Fucking shit.

“We’ll cover them. Surveillance will get cameras up so we can keep an eye on the shop. Three got out. I don’t expect this to be the end. Security will be around.”

He nods looking relieved. “Thanks, Mister. The doctor is bringing them to the club for a brace Jo can walk in. She

said Jacky needs to stay in bed tonight.”

I’m glad they won’t be here tonight. I need a way to keep them at the Club tomorrow. “I’m Maverick.” I point out Ratchet talking to the other two mechanics. “Ratchet will set Brothers to cover your customers, get some of the damage fixed and watch out for your crew. You see a Brother or call the Club if you need anything.”

He nods backing away. “I’m Bobby, thanks, Maverick.”

I go back to see who showed up. Justice, Phoenix and Teller are in the truck. Ben is on his phone pacing at the side of it. I step in and sit by Ren.

“This is crazy. The stitches got taken out already. It’s a scar on the kid I stitched and they had me stop on Jo here.” Her smile says it’s a good crazy.

“You wouldn’t believe what they can do.”

“Yes I would. I pointed out where the ribs bruised organs. That was on a hologram picture better than an MRI while Justice had his hands over the kid’s body.”

I smile. That’s crazy even for freaky. “I’m glad they’re ours.”

She nods. “The Alpha-Bits can make her a brace. I need to get them back. Do I wait here, or can they heal while I’m driving?”

I smile. “You want a shot at Magnar.”

“Could be.” She smiles. “Mars is one of the first. I’m not in a hurry.”

“You can drive. I need my bike brought back.” Phoenix stops chanting to answer. Since I didn’t know, I throw him chin.

Stepping out, I walk to cleanup. “Get the BSC bike back. He’s riding in the truck.”

The Lead nods. “Roger, Pres. They’re bad?”

Remo talks so I don’t have to repeat it. I move into the fenced side lot where they sell shit. Three cars are on staging, they lost windshields and have obvious new sledgehammer dents. The mustang took a beating but it’s all passenger side. Someone has the hood up, I check it out, impressed. I’m glad they stopped the dick before he hit all of it. An old Indian and newer Harley are sitting side by side in the back. They’re untouched. Behind them are a couple of newer cars and a pickup. Finn is looking for a short bed. I take a picture and send it to him in chat. I don’t know why he’d want a short bed but I’m not driving it.

He wants it. I knew the blue would catch his eye. I send that Josephine will be at the medic building in a couple. I find Bobby who brings me to Perry and tell him Finn wants the truck and I want the Indian. Cort has the match to it, but this one is perfect. It will go nice in his office. I give him my card for the bike, then tell him to put the truck on it. If Finn hates it, another Brother will take it. Calling Finn, I hand the phone over for the bill of sale.

Remo comes in smiling. “That car is perfect. Ratchet said he’d have it done in a couple of days. They even have the aftermarket radiator.”

The price is more than fair for the shape it's in with attention to future issues the buyer won't be saddled with. It's a car that was built with love. "That's one thing they never got right on the mustangs. Rolling off the floor they couldn't cool the Shelby motor. The radio is retro with USB and Bluetooth capabilities. Power steering too. Your dad will like that." I'm glad he still wants it. The quality and time put into it shouldn't be thrown out for a couple of dents.

He nods smiling. "A Coupe 289ci, Shelby 350 manifolds. Cragar five spoke wheels, odometer rolled once and it's sitting at 14K. He's going to fucking flip." He's happy.

Hitting his back, I agree. "Your dad will feel that honor, Brother."

Ben comes in looking around. "This is a nice place."

Perry hands me my phone and paperwork for the bike. "It's going to Phoenix Rising." I give it back handing him my phone with the address.

Ben laughs. "The Indian?"

"Yeah. It will look good in the lobby. You want to ride?"

"Always."

I guess we're riding to Phoenix.



It's already four when we pull in the gates. Cort loves the bike. We had to ride with him looking like a giant on the poor Indian. It never even coughed. Ben loves the old school

bikes and took a ride with his Security following. I didn't know. I'll have to find out what he likes and refurbish one for him. He's got a modified Harley he rides at home. It has the HS technology, revamped motor and Kevlar skins hidden so it looks like what he loves. I laughed when he said he wouldn't let them change the exhaust. The feel and sound had me agreeing. Old school is all about the feel and sound.

I didn't know the kids made their own bikes up there. Crow and Major were crazy with shit like that. I didn't think Jordan ever made a bike, but I saw the program for kids building them. The mechanics Major had always ragged on Jordan. I helped him out before I went to the Air Force but he was an Officer when I got back. His bike was taken care of so he never needed the help. Jordan has always been one of my closest Brothers. We were Enforcer Leads together and kept close because Major always had us together for shit. Neither of us complained.

"You remind me of Cooper too. You're not on BSC Ops but know the job." Ben surprises me when I shut the BSC bike Cort leant me off.

"I usually have something building in my head. When I'm not building, I'm in Ops but the wars we've had aren't something I'm used to directing. I was an Enforcer for Major. Control was always the older Brothers so I'm new to it."

He nods. "They have plenty of Protectors now. We call them Enforcers too. Old school." He smiles. "I meant personality wise, you remind me of Jordan and Cooper. I don't know how they get so many Officers and Presidents on this side of the country. It's got to be in the water."

I smile and throw chin for the compliment. “I don’t know Cooper well, but Jordan was brought up by Major. He taught me about Brotherhood. The biggest thing I learned is time management. Jordan is funny about it. He’ll shoot someone quick, always watching a timeline in his head, while he walks on to the next thing. We don’t have time for dicks and the shit they’ll cause so we deal. Moving up in the ranks, I’ve learned not to kill everyone but give them a chance to live their way. Now I throw them out. I didn’t expect Magnar to come back so soon. Two in holding are old MC. It tells me the Club isn’t as settled as I thought. No wars means I can get to cleaning it up.”

He smiles. “You have a lot of change coming, Maverick. With two readers here, cleanup will move quickly. Take some time to breathe. You have a woman in the medic building, you should take her dinner, she’s ready to breakout.”

Shit. She can’t go back until the cameras are in tomorrow. “I’ll go.”

He hits my back laughing, my feet stop and he pulls me to the stairs. “Go, I’ve got to check in. Kansas has been hit hard and the Lead Club in Michigan lost their VP.”

“I’ll mention it at Church and send a message for the fallen Brother. Losing a Brother sucks but an Officer more so. The Club needs to know we feel that.” Shit, that and his own Clubs are a lot. Dinner sounds easier. He walks the hall to Ops while I turn to the dining room. Remo must still be outside. When I turn back to thank Ben, he’s gone. I hope he knows I appreciate the time he shared today. It’s been a good day off. I should have asked about the woman, but I don’t want the

vision thing adding shit to my plate. I've got enough shit to deal with without buying trouble.

I order our dinner for an hour and head to the medic building thinking about Jo, Jojo or Josephine. I've heard her called all three. Her names suit her.

I shake my head, she was holding a knife to Magnar's neck with a bruise and a half on her face and a broken leg. She's definitely not a pushover. Her clothes tell a story of a stylish woman with some goth or something hard. Buckles, pockets and that shirt was fucking hot and edgy. I don't really have a type but honest, sweet and neat are a must. Maybe I need to rethink the sweet. It hasn't worked so far so it can't hurt to drop it. The knife to the throat isn't making the sweet list. She runs a garage I'd love to work in. She can't be sweet with a job like that. Men are stupid and wouldn't let her do shit to their cars. I guess I'll find out.

I push through the doors throwing chin to Security and check rooms as I go. The last two lights are on. The kid is sleeping in the first. Jo is sitting on the bed in the second.

"You're supposed to be resting." I'm sorry to see her in Club sweatpants and a T.

She looks from the wall to me showing the bruise in a straight line across her cheek. Her eye has a greenish hue around it that washes her green eyes out. Shit, that doesn't look painless. "How do you feel?" I ask walking in.

"I'm fine. You're the President?"

"Yeah. I'm Maverick. I know you as Jo, JoJo and Josephine. What do I call you?"

She laughs looking pretty, even with the bruise. “Jojo is a family name. I’m known as Josephine to everyone in town. My dad called me Jo at the shop so guys don’t feel emasculated by me working on their cars. It stuck.” Family name sticks in my head. Maybe a grandmother or something.

I nod taking a stab at the choices. “Josephine it is. On the way over, I thought all three names suit you.” The sweats don’t but I’d never say it.

She nods but doesn’t ask anything. “Did you meet Alder?” I try.

“Yes. He was on a funny computer thing. An Allen is making me a brace and they’ll send it tomorrow. He said I can walk with it because of the robotics. If they’d give me crutches, I could get us out of your hair.”

I nod thinking it’s not happening. “The robotic brace will keep your leg moving with no pain or damage so it heals right. The Alpha-Bits make everything from plastic casts to prosthetics. We’ve had a couple of Brothers get new from them. Hold on.” I pull the pictures from the Elan Brother and Nose from the MC. “They say they’re better than the VAs.” I hand her my phone.

“That’s unbelievably cool for a leg. Ha, that one has Badass on it.” She swipes then hands me back my phone. “Not losing days of work will be good. Thanks for stopping and hauling the bikers away. I don’t know what we would have looked like without help showing up.”

It would have been bad. “You held your own even with the broken leg. I have mechanics at your place. Your crew

wouldn't leave so they're supervising. When you see it tomorrow, it won't look so bad." I push for the night here.

She pushes her hair back and I see the bruise goes into her hair. The force that hit her makes me want to cringe, but I keep my face neutral. Her head shakes dropping her hair back to where it was. "I saw Jacky's and my car from the window when we pulled out. They trashed them. I hope they didn't get all of them."

I shake my head. "The two out front, but it's all exterior. The ones on staging lost windshields and windows. That mustang on the side is the reason we were there. My Brother wants it for his dad. The mechanic said he'd have it fixed in a couple of days." I smile hoping this helps. "A Brother bought the truck and I bought the Indian for a Brother in Phoenix Rising. Cort loves it. You do good work. I piddle around refurbishing classics so I'm not just blowing smoke."

Her face brightens. "Thanks. I don't mean to sound ungrateful but I'd rather your mechanic not touch my car. I built it from a bare chassis. It's my first complete build. I started it with my dad at sixteen. He let me go once I listed the parts in priority." Her smile says that's a good memory to have.

"Ratchet said that and isn't touching it other than to cover it so nothing hits the interior."

She breathes deep. "Thanks. I was worried when I saw the hood up. What classics do you work on?"

We get to talking our last cars, our favorites and her brother's crazy paint jobs. Jacky comes in adding to the stories

and our laughter. He's a pretty cool kid but I need to bring up the yelling at kids.

Prospects have a table and our food so it's a good break. Once everything is out, Whisp says he'll be back to clean and has dessert coming.

I let them get a few bites in and ask, "What's with you yelling at the Alpha-Bits? They're the blond kids from the track."

He shakes his head. "He told Perry the bet was huge that he'd lose. Who tells drivers before a race they're not only shit but at the bottom of the outhouse shit well. I was yelling because it was loud."

I smile because he's got a point. "I'll let Mabon know not to give the odds. I didn't think of that but you scared the shit out of him."

He nods. "I saw him here and called him in to apologize. I didn't see him as a little kid and just wanted him away from Perry. He's cool and hung out. He's twelve and knows everything. He sent measurements for Jojo's brace and they're building it. He said they have 143 Alpha-Bits. That's amazing." He's smiling at his sister, but she catches my head shaking.

She asks, "It's not good?"

"No. They were grown in labs by CIA or ex-CIA. Badass went around the world collecting them and bringing them here with the As. They're the oldest of the group and have been here the longest."

“Fuck, that’s sick. They didn’t show that on the news. Is that why he doesn’t talk right?” Jacky is getting it.

“Yeah, they worked IT in different countries. They know at minimum three languages, but it wasn’t English. They’re learning to live out of the Labs and interact with the Brothers. Work is all they know so we show them new shit. The race was the first for them. They always jump to work. That’s why Mabon was taking bets and Tomas was on flag detail.” I shake my head. “The only things we’ve found to keep them off the computer or from working is swimming and horseback riding. They love both but are funny about shit they don’t know.” I tell them about Asa, then show them the video of the horse eating at the table with him. “They’re cute but don’t get everything. Some were beat, some worked as slaves for businesses, they scare easily.”

“Shit. I’m glad I apologized. He’s cool for twelve. He thinks we can paint with changing colors that would last longer than a year or two. He’s researching it tonight. I should tell him to forget it.” He moves but I stop him with a hand on his arm before he gets up.

“No, new is good for them, he’d be working on something else if not paint. Learning is their high. Let him learn.”

He nods pulling his seat back. “Do you really have slave women? Magnar said there were hundreds.” Jacky’s concerned look shows he doesn’t like that. He’s a good kid.

I nod. “Badass stole them back from wherever. There aren’t hundreds, it’s maybe forty. They closed human trafficking down out here, or the biggest trafficker that was

here. They're with Alder on his ABSZ. That's a group of compounds inside a safe zone. The Marines and Navy guard it so the women won't be touched."

Josephine stares at me with her fork midair. "You have human trafficked slaves?"

I nod. "That's what the race betting was about, the Alpha-Bits are bringing them to the waterpark and dinner. They're learning to live free just like the Bits learned. Alder thinks they'll learn it faster with the Bits because they lived it too."

She nods. "So they aren't slaves for the bikers."

"Fuck no. We're Badass. We shut down trafficking. That's the other guys stealing women and kids." She came close to being treated like one by Magnar's dickheads.

She nods still looking shocked. I don't like that look. "You don't know much about us." Pulling my phone, I call the front desk. "Get me two charged laptops for the Patton's." Once I'm rogered, I put my phone down.

"Sorry. You can look us up later. Badass is a national Club. Some Clubs are Badass Security Council Clubs, that's the BSC to everyone in them. This Club makes satellites and everything aeronautic. The City Club President runs Badass Innovations. He builds technology for everyday use. Champion is Masons. They train there and move throughout the Badass Clubs helping where they can. Bravo trains for Flight and Security. The FBI/Badass Training Center trains Aerial in Nevada. We have Brothers running and training alongside the FBI. Elan does ground, Security and ex-military. We'll have the Advocate and Security run by a woman Brother

up soon. We also have the freaky kids. They run Protectors with abilities department of the BSC. Cort, the President of Phoenix Rising is President of BSC West. He'll open Clubs with training for the different positions each Club needs. One will open next year for Officer Training. You can look up the Club and anything you can find on Badass. We're not doing anything more than trying to make the world better Badass style."

Josephine nods and starts eating. Jacky asks me questions while I finish. It's good and he likes the idea of helping others.

"You gave away the food," Josephine says. It's not a question and her smile has me smiling.

"Yeah. Schools, displaced Indians and the shelters. The other Clubs got appreciation food too so the Little Brothers came up with plans for us to get rid of the food before it went bad."

She laughs sounding sweet. "What's Little Brothers?"

"Kids. Masons, kids brought up in the Club, kids watched out for at the Little Brothers buildings after school. We set one up in town one. That's the new town of Brothers and businesses. They have the school buses bring the kids over. It's like a Boys and Girls Club. We have a bus that drops them home if the parent can't get to the Club."

She nods. "We didn't have that but a friend said her son and daughter go. She's a nurse and her husband a fireman. The kids love it. I didn't know Badass ran it."

I nod. "It's called Rising. We're the Delta Rising Club. We run the food pantry and job training out of the building on the side of Little Brothers. We just put one sign up." I shrug making Jacky laugh.

He hits my arm. "So you're a geek or do you fly?"

"I was an Air Force Officer so I can fly but don't. I never flew choppers and like riding better. I can fly jets but don't own one. I'd rather build. We built the guns and all IT components for the jets Badass owns. The Brothers love the laser technology."

"You don't just do the rockets and satellites. That's cool. My dad had us learn everything so we could take the job we liked. I was never into the cars like Jojo, but it pays the bills. I like art. I'm going to paint but I don't know what. I like painting everything."

I laugh. "Keep painting and it will come to you. We have some artists and a graphic designer that does work for us."

He shakes his head. "I like real paint."

I pull my phone and show him Alder and Web's compounds. He takes it scrolling through the igloos. "Yeah, like this. These are cool. I wouldn't mind a job painting bubble houses." He's got me laughing.

"I'm building a compound with an aero theme. Each set of houses will be different, but I haven't decided on how. I know I want space that looks different in the light and dark. Look up Badass IT. They have a building that looks like it scrolls. I want something like that but space or sky."

He nods and I can see the wheels turning. “Mabon is looking up paint. I’ll draw something out if you let me paint them.”

I shake my head. “This is over a hundred buildings. We’re overflowing and our second town isn’t done. We need the room. The Bits make printers, a bunch of those houses were drawn by an artist on paper and the printers painted them.”

“Unreal. I’ll draw if you let me paint one grouping. We’re talking space like the Milky Way, planets orbiting, galaxies from different perspectives?”

I’m surprised. “Yeah, you know a lot about space?”
He’s aero?

“I liked painting the planets for school. I did the front wall of the high school.”

This is crazy. “It’s one of the first rides I took when I moved here. You painted that?”

He nods. “It took me three weeks, but I wanted it right. I’m faster now. I got this.”

What are the odds? I look at a smiling Josephine. She’s not showing teeth, but her face looks comfortable in the smile. “I can’t believe I found a painter right here. I didn’t know what I wanted but had an idea. This is going to be epic.”

Now she’s smiling. “Epic?”

“Solar systems, the Milky Way, its fucking epic.” I nod.

She laughs at me. I shrug. “I’m a geek.”

Jacky leaves us when dessert gets here. I get the Prospect to get him pencils, charcoal and paper.

Josephine shakes her head. “He’s gone. I’ll be lucky if he shows to work when he’s better.”

“I can keep him painting after work and weekends.”

She nods. “He paints and works the front for me. He doesn’t work full time painting. I’m not ready to eat more.”

“I’ll take you for a walk. I need to move so a walk sounds good right now.”

She nods looking shy about it. There’s sweet again. “Thanks. Cooped up isn’t my thing. You don’t have plans?”

“It’s my day off but the President of Badass Territories showed up so I’m off this weekend. He had shit to do so I’m free for now. He’s the older Indian you met today.”

Her eyes are huge. “The Indian healer is the President of Badass? Isn’t he young for that?”

I nod. “We call him Ben. I think he’s early forty’s. His kids are the other healers, they’re young twenty-ish. They live at the ABSZ and keep the Clubs safe. That’s the Protectors with abilities. I think the abilities are from their Native culture. I’ll get the wheelchair.” I walk out seeing Ren. “Brother, do they need to be checked?”

She nods. “Jacky does every four hours. He’s breathing fine. He’s sore but the healing helped. I’m making sure he doesn’t get pneumonia. Those healers won’t be happy with me.”

I nod. I don't think they will. "I need a wheelchair to take Josephine for a walk."

She smiles with that sly look on her face. I shake my head. She turns fast telling Security to get me a chair and blanket for Jo.

"Only her shop call her Jo so men aren't emasculated by her."

She laughs leaning on the counter. "She doesn't care. Don't be too much of a geek, Pres. She's a good girl living in a man's world."

I turn for the chair rolling my eyes.



Josephine

Maverick is a lot smarter than I thought bikers were. My dad was wrong about them. I met three that talked to Maverick while I was taking in the view from the back walking trail. I'm glad it's a paved trail. It's almost park-like, right inside the grounds with seating areas all the way through it, I like the one we're at right now.

The biker sitting by Maverick is talking about more men coming in. I've seen Cort on TV but these guys talk and laugh about him like he's an eccentric god. With the dish thing, maybe they're right.

"Sorry, ma'am. I'll get out of your way," the man says with only his teeth showing he's smiling.

"You never got in my way of the night sky playing against the mountain. I'm just here for the open air because the medic room is boring."

He laughs. "Right, I'll let you get back to the view." His shape moves away.

"It's a nice view. I'm glad we didn't bore you with Club shit." Maverick made that sound like a question.

"No. I was thinking about my dad and how he was wrong about the bikers. You're not the bikers to watch out for. Obviously, it was the ones bringing trouble with the crossbones on their vests or men like Magnar."

He slides down the bench closer to me. "Yeah. Two in holding are old MC. That tells me we still have some loyalty issues in the Club. With readers here, Ben said that will clear quickly. It's taken almost two years to get here. With the

compounds going in, I won't move Brothers until the readers okay them. Not being at war daily gives a false sense of safety. I can't wait for this to be settled."

"You own the company that builds satellites and whatever and run a huge Club along side that. Aren't you exhausted yet?" I get tired just running the shop. It's one shop with four employees.

He laughs. "Not yet, we're just getting to the good part. The other Clubs settled and are running sweet. Jordan at Alpha went through hell, but in the last few months, he's got the Club running like clockwork. The Officers are doing the job and Brothers are working with the city to clean up the little shit. I see Delta doing that for the new towns and rural areas between us and Honor. When it does, we can spread out to the other towns."

I turn toward him glad the moon is shining so I can see more than an outline. "What would you do in the other towns?" I may not be moving close.

His eyes don't leave the skyline over the mountain across from us but he smiles. "Police the areas. The sheriff loves us because our gear has video. We can afford everything the little PDs can't. When we call him for pick-ups, they get video of the crime and usually confessions because the dicks forget to remain silent. Most of the time it isn't anything we ask for. We don't have to go to court and the sheriff can use the evidence we collect because we're trained better than cops with BSC training. No PD for the towns means civilians aren't paying more and more taxes. We help in schools and job training for homeless. The Brothers like building the

neighborhoods and working Vet houses. We could do more. With the bigger area, we'd have a bigger need. They'll like that," he says showing a deep passion that tells me he feels things deep. It's not anything that would hurt anyone but helps all of us.

I smile. Almost everything I heard from the other men was the same premise. They're just trying to make life better for people. "Your passion tells me it means a lot to help the civilians, homeless and vets."

He turns from the view. "It means everything, Josephine. I was Air Force but never fought for the country. I was lucky jumping to aero engineering. Elan Rising is the Club that has the most military right now, but every President wants to show appreciation for those men and women. We do our part with the neighborhoods, training for better pay and feeding through the food banks. There were so many Indians that lost homes. That's what Cosmos was talking about. Alder and the Bravo Club made Navajo and Cheyenne a compound. He wants to get it going so *our* Indian neighbors will be out of the shelters before the winter."

There were hundreds of families displaced. "How do you pay for all this?"

His smile has me smiling. "Satellites alone are millions in profits. Banks is the Clubs' investor. He's crazy with pay so I use that to cover the expansions we do but he always finds a way to get it back to the Club. We build the satellites for Badass and other companies. The other companies pay for IT, monitoring and upgrades. Badass doesn't collect dues from us because we don't charge them for

the satellites. We use that money for the towns we're building up. Now we're cleaning space junk that will go to the Clubs to help set up more Clubs in areas of need. I know Banks will find a way to get some of that money to me but I get paid by the Club. Officer pay is already more than I need and Badass owns all kinds of companies so whatever we build is cheap." He's something else.

"Very philanthropic. You're extremely humble for a millionaire." I'm guessing here.

He shakes his head. "The ability to make money came from training paid for by the Air Force and Badass. Badass has a vision we follow that's similar to Masons. Being better Brothers, making better communities is what we do. Personally, I think Banks is crazy. Money in the bank for my kids or grandkids isn't doing shit for the old guy that worked a mine and put two kids in college only to be left alone in his house to freeze last year. We have to do better. This year elderly and low income have a grant for insulation, better windows, solar and heat. That money is better spent saving a life than gaining interest. We have the Brothers to work and that's a worthy job the Brothers would be proud to have."

I feel that pain in my heart. "Mr. Tobias was a good man. He coached my dad's baseball team. His son never even showed for the funeral. His daughter Patty lives in California and showed with her daughter and one month old grandbaby to show off. It got around that she wasn't grieving her dad at all, so the townsfolk stopped making her dinners. She sold the house and hightailed it out of town. I don't know what happened to them. Mr. Tobias got too old to visit them, but they never came back here." The woman was always a bitch.

He shakes his head and clears his throat. “I need to write my aunt. She’s in Buenos Aires. She says she’s happy there, but my uncle died. I know she won’t freeze but she shouldn’t die alone.” He told me his parents died. I’m glad he had family to take him in.

I take his hand. “Take it from me, don’t miss the time you have with her.”

He nods turning our hands so our fingers intertwine. “I’ll get one of the Alpha-Bits to get me her phone number. They quit me when I joined the Club. She wrote after my uncle died. He was just as strict with her as he was with me so I get why. I’ll call her.”

They quit him? The Club sounds like the place you’d *want* a teenager. I know I’m going to encourage Jacky to paint everything Maverick will let him. He needs men showing him the good in the world. He’s seen too much bad.

I squeeze Maverick’s hand and focus on the view. “I’m happy you’ll have her back. Totally off the subject, do you know what time the brace is here tomorrow?”

His body stills. I don’t even hear him breathe. “Probably afternoon. They have to build it. I have cameras being put on the road and in the lot so surveillance can keep watch. Three took off when we rode in. I got a warning that it’s not done. You’re not safe there alone.” He got a warning?

“Great. I didn’t even finish moving my stuff up to the apartment.”

Moving it up? “You were moving in?”

I nod. “Jacky won’t go in my parents’ house. He found my mom. Anyway, it’s too big for me, so I’m selling it, or it may be sold. The apartment was empty and Jacky painted it for me. It gives me time to find a new place.”

His hand tightens in mine. “Tell me *found her* doesn’t mean she committed suicide.”

My jaw will not open. He lets my hand go and paces. “Jacky is pissed at the world. That’s why he yelled at Mabon. Fucking Christ.” He sits fast surprising me. “We can keep watch on him. Major took me in when *I* was pissed at the world. Help me keep him close so he doesn’t fall into drugs and alcohol. We have some good Brothers that will paint with him. The Indians may want paint for their tribes. I can find him work he loves and Brothers to mentor him.”

A dream. I just thought Jacky needed male guidance. “I don’t know what I did to deserve this but I’m thanking every damn star in the sky, for me, they’re all lucky tonight. Yes, I just thought about him needing to be around good men. You need to know he found my sister too. She died years ago but she was his shadow. He still carries her picture on the visor of his car. She fell out of a tree waiting for his bus to bring him home.” She wasn’t a climber so it was horrible for Jacky to find her that way. She was going to surprise him being up in the tree. My poor brother.

His head goes down and hand reaches for mine. I twine our fingers blinking like crazy. His throat clears. “I feel that loss for you and Jacky. We’ll watch out for him. You’ve lost too much already. We’ll work to make sure Jacky isn’t on that list.”

“Sonofabitch.” I wipe my eyes seeing his when he lifts his head.

He swallows hard making that bump in his throat bounce. “What?”

“You made me cry. Thanks. Tell me a story that isn’t sad, Maverick.”



Maverick

Walking out of the medic building, I head to the Club. It's already eleven. I didn't realize how much time passed. Jo is a sweet woman that doesn't deserve more shit from Magnar or the old MC rejects. She's going to be easy to keep Jacky safe. I'm putting her in the house that's used for Major when he visits. He hasn't been here since he was shot. Now he's into his new virtual shit so we meet in cyber world. He makes me smile.

Before I go to the bar I get Prospects to move Jo's shit first thing in the morning. Jacky had his head together with Mabon so we didn't bother them. I'll get his stuff in as soon as I talk to him.

Ben is at the bar with Finn. "Brothers." I acknowledge.

They both turn my way throwing chin. "They settled?" Ben asks.

"Yeah. I'm putting them in Major's house for now."

"*You're* unsettled." He sees everything.

I nod for Ben. "Her dad was shot in one of our wars. We showed when we got the call, but he was shot before or we got the call because of him and an old man that was lost. Then Magnar beat them and caused more shit for them. Mom committed suicide after dad died and their sister fell out of a tree and died when they were young. How much shit people go through kills me. The kid paints." I can help give him that. "He wants to paint the new igloos."

Ben smiles. “Web calls them igloos, the kids call them pods. Sounds like you’re getting him to happy and keeping them safe.”

I nod. “I’m trying.”

Finn hits my shoulder. “We’ll help, Pres. They got nowhere to go but up.”

I smile at the Aero line he uses. “Yeah. Thanks.”

“I’m out. I love my truck, Pres. I’m going to breakfast at the restaurant in the morning.”

“Glad you like it, Brother.” I watch him walk out thinking about that short bed. Why the short bed?

Ben is smiling when I turn back. “It’s too cold to ride in the winter, he doesn’t need it for anything but getting around in the snow. Sandbags at the tailgate will give him that.”

I nod. “Makes more sense now. He must have got stuck in his car last winter.”

“Your girl doesn’t blame you or the Club for her dad or what happened today. Justice had us stop so the worst was healed but they’ll be sore. I didn’t agree but now think he was smart. Keeping them here will keep them safe.”

I nod pushing the ‘*my girl*’ away. “The warning is blowback?”

He nods. “She was going with them. The pussy promised the others a turn at her. Their plans were to make her a slave.”

I shake my head. Breaking her leg would have made that easy. “Fuck.”

“Two shots, Brother,” Ben says to the Brother behind the bar as his hand rests on my shoulder.

I feel heat run through me. It’s not my normal but I could use a shot. I’d kill them all myself before I let Josephine be taken as a slave.

“I would too, Brother. Your woman isn’t ever up for grabs.” Ben smiles.

My woman again. Fuck, Cort is going to be here if he keeps saying shit like that.

He laughs. Fucking Brothers.

Chapter Two

Josephine

I smile looking around the room. This place is massive. It's not the house I was expecting. It's an old Victorian with six bedrooms and service quarters. An excited EMT Prospect is staying in the service quarters. I'd love to see what they look like but I'm not going anywhere close to them.

"Jacky?" I call up the stairs. My room is up there but climbing the stairs right now doesn't seem like a good idea. My leg feels like it weighs more than the rest of me.

He smiles down. "This place is huge." He starts down holding his side. I bet he's feeling it too. "They put me in the room by yours. We have our own bathrooms right in our room like dad." He never says mom and dad. "How long are we here for? The guy has my key so he can get me clothes."

I don't want to scare him but don't want him getting hurt again. "Three bikers got away. Maverick said he got a warning that it's not the end. We're here until their security people say we're safe. I don't know anything about the bikers they're dealing with so I'm going with whatever they say. We can work when we're able, but we'll have security watching or with us."

He nods. "The guy said he heard that Maverick thinks this is his fault. I shouldn't have talked to Magnar. I was mad but he's a scary guy. How do I tell Maverick this is all my fault? Look at this place. He isn't sticking us in one of the

bunkhouses. This is too much. I was the one in the wrong.” He finally gets to the bottom so I hug him gently.

“You’re going to think it’s your fault, Maverick will think it’s his fault. Men are weird, Jacky. This is Magnar’s fault. Neither you or Maverick are going to see that. Magnar called people to come wreck the shop and apparently us.”

He shakes his head. “The big guy was talking on his radio thing and told someone not to let you out of sight. Magnar was going to take you as a slave for them. That’s the sex kind, Jojo. If Maverick didn’t show, I would have lost...” he pulls me into a hug.

I hold him gently. “I’m here. They showed so it doesn’t matter. No one told me that. I’ll stay with the security people and do what they say. I’m not going anywhere, Jacky.”

“Ma’am, Jacky, I don’t think Pres wanted to scare you with that. He’s a geek but was an Enforcer for Major. He knows how to keep people safe. Pres Jordan and Pres were top Enforcer Teams to be on from the stories the Brothers tell. He said to show you this but maybe it can wait. He’s in BSC Ops for the space shit and won’t be out for a while.” While the Prospect talks Jacky wipes his face quick then gets that look that shows anger.

I shake my head. “We’re following whatever the security guys say and will stay here. Hiding information so it doesn’t hurt isn’t a help. What should we see?”

“Security showed to open the shop with Ratchet and your crew.” He hands me a tablet. Jacky catches it when I drop it like it burned my hands through the picture. A second just

changed my life. A second is all it takes to wipe my dad, history, work, me, away. This can't be happening.

“It's surrounded by trees and the wind was north last night. Pres is pissed no one called it in and checked for why. We just went through all that wildfire shit. Someone should have reported it.”

My leg finally gives, so I sit on the steps. Everything I worked so hard for is gone. My dad's work, clearing land and building the perfect garage is gone.

“Fucking assholes. Why are they doing this? All I did was help the guy out. Fuck. Oh my God, Jojo. I'm sorry I ever opened my mouth to him.” Jacky sits and takes my hand.

The Prospect catches our attention. “Not to make this worse, but them losing a slave and pissing Badass off would play more than Magnar getting help. Everyone hated the douche-bag but he started getting bad lately. Before he was just a jerk. I had to clean his bike and boots for almost a month. He picked on all the Prospects. He's like the bad from the old MC.”

My head is swimming with what this means for my workers and us but my ears didn't miss that. “The old MC was bad?” My dad drilled it in to stay away from the bikers. Maverick said something about old Badass.

“Badass doesn't stop Brothers from living their way, but the Officers are always decent men in the good Clubs. Major is the one that got drugs out and kept trafficking away from the Club. Not all Clubs are like that. This Club was one of Major's for overflow from MC Badass Colorado. When Maverick moved here, he was running it for Major. He was

like a VP but not at the MC. Brothers, the engineers and space IT followed Maverick making it too big to be handled by MC Colorado, so Major moved Maverick to Pres and Jordan to Pres of Alpha. That Club dealt with Brother shit too. The bad of the MC was recruiting and let more bad in. Jordan and Maverick were fighting their own Brothers plus the clubs the reject jerks went to as they got kicked out. Cort and the alliance stepped in and threw help getting the Clubs settled. It's not all clean, but it will be. Jerks like Magnar are more obvious but we have readers that will help with the hidden ones now. Cort did it in Phoenix and all his Clubs. I'm from Phoenix so I've seen it all this last year."

I nod thinking this is why dad warned us. How are people supposed to know the good guys? I just lost my shop to a bad one. I tune Jacky and his questions out thinking about the burnt down shop. Oh shit. I cover my face leaning my elbows on my knees. My furniture was in the apartment. The whole damn building is a shell, burnt to a crisp, totaled. Fuck!

"Jojo, I'm sorry. I'll help clean it up. My laptop was in the U-Haul so it's here. We have insurance and I have all the receipts."

I'm glad he's good in the front. "Yeah. I was thinking of the furniture dad made. It's all gone. Dad made every piece specifically for me."

"Fuck. The rest is in storage, right?"

I move my hands and nod. "Yeah, but mine was made for me with all the hidden keepsakes in it. You know what, forget it. We weren't there. I'm so glad we weren't there. How the hell would I fight grown men with the cast I had on? I

would be a slave right now if it weren't for Ren bringing us to the medic building behind their walls. I have the furniture pictures from the insurance file. I'm glad I'll get to see them. I need coffee." I need a hell of a lot more than coffee, but I'll take what I can get right now.

Moving to the kitchen is with the weight of the world pressing in on me. I have three workers and Jacky to try and get work for. Customers need to be called. Shit, the insurance, suppliers, Mrs. Lima. At the island, that is longer than my old kitchen, I stop and lean on it. The next step is a big one.

There's the old Jiffy Lube in the new town. They were a quick business that just didn't take off. Out by the state road is a good location but the two fast food places closed. One, oddly enough, because of a fire. Jiffy Lube closed shortly after. They have the lifts, a car wash and whatever the shed building has in it. Locals didn't stop going to my dad so they never hurt his business. Maybe they can help mine.

"You okay, Jojo?"

Pushing off the counter, I straighten me up and take that next step. "Yeah, Jacky. The Jiffy Lube is sitting there ready to go. Some cleaning, utilities on and we can be up and ready to go in no time. I need to find out what it will cost to get in there."

His smile says I got this right. "It will be good, Jojo. The machines won't need more than cleaning and rewiring. I'll call Mr. Greer and find out about the building." Greer Realty must have the listing. There are only two realtors close and Greer isn't mine for the house.

While he walks away, I smile, he's never wanted to work in the shop, but he's always done whatever we've needed. I love my brother.



Maverick

Akai, Amal and Anton are working at BSC IT on the ABSZ while Alder is in with the space IT Brothers here. I watch the satellite finally hit its mark and the geeks cheer.

Mars looks over smiling at Alder. "It's a go, Little Pres."

Alder's hands never stop, but he nods with a smile. "Akai, field up now."

Turning to the virtual Bits, I smile at Anton's excitement. "All force field in place, Boss." All?

I look at the boards then Alder. "You did them all?"

Cort moves closer to me. Alder nods. "All BSC satellite, Baxter satellite in force field. Warning to junk close, we counter laser. No more damage." He shrugs and starts typing again. Cort laughs shaking his head.

"Fuckin' kids," Brantley says, then explains to his room that they covered all satellites in force fields and have laser capabilities on all the satellites. Ben is smiling.

"Amal, laser to junk my coordinate." Alder quiets the geeks down. Dashed red lines show arching from the damaged satellite to the polar set satellite.

"Roger, Boss." Amal types and a blue line flashes quick, pauses then flashes a little longer.

I watch the satellite being moved turn, rise, then follow Alder's arching red dash. My space geeks cheer again. Alder turns toward me. "Pres Maverick, junk two-day travel. New satellite position coordinate set. Warning to show junk

close, IT shoot laser send to sun automatic. Coordinate, force set. Alpha-Bits watch.” He shrugs packing his glasses.

“It’s going to move junk on its own?” That’s not much of a job for us.

“Yeah. You know soccer?” His question takes me a second.

I nod and he goes on. “Satellite goalie. Space IT hit to goalie.”

Everyone is laughing. Jesus, they’re fucking smart. “So the job?”

Mars raises her hand. “Focus, people. We have a job to do.”

Alder smiles at me. “They work to Alpha-Bit IT supervise. I go to Elan. Boss Mars good to go. Later, Brothers, Preses.” He runs making me smile.

Brantley looks confused on his board. “He’s going riding while they do the job?”

Ignoring the virtual convo, I watch my geeks. When Akai gives Mars a roger, she issues a go and light flashes. The room quiets watching the satellite follow a new arched dash of lines.

Cosmos smiles at our board. “Dead satellite will be in goalie’s air space in nine hours, Pres.”

I smile. “Good job, Cosmos, space geeks.” Looking at Mars I shake my head. “Nicely done, Mars. I’ll send over the next job when they send payment.”

She's all but glowing green neon. "Roger, Pres. We're ready." Turning to her next board she thanks the Alpha-Bits.

Everyone in all the Clubs on the boards are talking. I wait to thank them all. Ben waits with his hand on my back. Banks flashes on a side board. "Maverick, Ben. I had two companies with interest watching with me and they need shit moved. I'll send it over. They're paying today."

Ben laughs, I shake my head. "How did you do that?"

Banks smiles. "The Alpha-Bits explained what you're doing and showed garbage set to hit satellites. I said it would be good to move the shit before they caused damage and Quincy got me names. A call is all it took. They knew about the trash and want it away from their satellites. Quincy and Odell are looking for more garbage. I told them to send it to Mars. There's a lot of shit up there and they're the Alpha-Bits. They won't be happy until it's all cleaned up."

"You're all unbelievable. Thanks, Banks, and thank the little Brothers for me."

He nods with that big Banks smile. "I will but they think it's fun. Anything new is fun to them."

I nod. "Thank God."

He laughs. "I'm out."

When his screen goes black, Ben laughs, turning me to the front boards. "Brothers." He raises his hand. Everyone turns our way. "A few years ago, Jeremy, Mucimi, Chance, Stella, hell, all the kids in Princes, Mass and Virginia, helped build force fields. Today those fields were used by the Alpha-Bits across the country," He points to the circuit Bits in his

room, “to keep the satellites from sustaining more damage. Because they never do anything half way, they not only stop damage, but push junk to the satellite that went up four days ago. That satellite pushes the junk to the sun to burn up. Never did I imagine those words would come out of my mouth. I’m a biker, President of a Club, dad, husband, brother, son. I am not an astronaut, Air Force or aero anything. Thank fuck Maverick is. He even made it easy for us calling his geeks space IT. I’m not required to learn his words or their jobs.” He pauses while everyone laughs.

“Badass restructure brought us here, Brothers. With the BSC, we have specialized Clubs that deal with training for Protectors, Flight, Officers, military Brothers and now space. Cort is setting up Clubs using everything available to make Badass a name to remember. Badass Innovations is a name known around the world. Badass Aero Technologies will be right there with them. Kaleb sent me a message that the US government will pay for the removal of old satellite debris and he’s passing the information on to US allies.”

I turn fast seeing the space geeks freak the fuck out. The Alpha-Bits in their IT building cheer. Amal points to me shaking his head. I didn’t know they had them all watching. Holy fuck. I bend and breathe. It was just an idea last week.

Cort pulls me up and right into a bear hug. “Jesus, you’re fucking amazing, Brother.”

I hit his back hoping he puts me down. When he does, Ben puts his hand on my shoulder and his other hand up. “Brothers, Maverick and his space geeks have four jobs that came in from Kaleb and two from Banks. They need to get to

work and so do you. We have a new satellite to test and move information to. Send your Brothers a thanks through email to Delta Rising. Brantley sent the address. It's a new beginning like no other, Brothers. Be proud and keep being fuckin' Badass."

The Princes and MC Mass boards go black. Mars is staring at me from our board. I shake my head. Akai throws me chin and their board fades a little. They have us up but aren't engaged.

I look at Ben. "You know I had this idea last week. The satellite went up days ago. Finn asked who would pay last week." I cannot believe this. The BSC satellite was waiting and added to a payload while the Bits re-worked programming. That just happened.

He laughs. "Good job getting it up and running. You're faster than Jeremy."

I nod and look at Cort. He just laughs. My eyes find Mars. Hers have tears in them but she's smiling. "This is the place to be, Maverick. Your Badass beliefs changed my life and gave me this right here. Thank you."

I throw her chin. "This was you, Mars. Getting it on that payload did this. You got the job because you're the best. I'm glad the government is showing you now. We'll meet tomorrow about the jobs coming in. Do your thing, Brother. I'll see you at the Club later."

She signs a thanks and moves the room to inactive on our Ops board. They have a million tests they run on new satellites so she's not done. I bend again. Cort pulls me up and turns me. The side has the Presidents up from Phoenix.

Brekan is shaking his head. “I wish I was there, Maverick. You make me proud, Brother.”

Everyone agrees. Cort talks for a minute but I’m thinking about the jobs. Justice laughs catching my attention. “Boss, he is going through the job and his need for IT. Nothing you’re saying is getting through.”

The Presidents laugh. I shake my head. “This was an idea last week, I wasn’t expecting all this, I need more space geeks and room for them.”

Cort looks at the other side board so I do. “The printers building for him, Asa?”

Asa nods. He’s at Honor again. “Yeah, Pres Cort. Two section done. Pres Maverick, Alpha-Bits be your IT. Alder have four to space IT. Four house to your compound Alpha-Bit size. Small star to you galaxy.” He shrugs. Everyone laughs.

I shake my head. With a good job from everyone, Cort and Ben bring me to a late lunch. Remo hits my back as we walk into the dining room. Too many Brothers are here with geeks and engineers. I throw chin and sit fast. I still can’t believe all that happened today and have nothing I can string together that makes sense. We moved a dead satellite with laser force today, have force fields up and jobs to do more. Fucking crazy.

“Brother, you good?” Cort has my head up and eyes on him.

“Yeah, Boss. It’s a lot to take in. I’m glad the laser works.”

He laughs. “Alder said it would.”

I nod. “He did, but when does shit ever work on the first try? They reprogrammed satellites from here to shoot. It wasn’t even tested, Cort. Banks had customers watching. Ben had Clubs watching. I was just hoping it worked.”

Ben smiles. “The satellites went up with future solar capabilities. You were the one that said they could do more.” He’s right but they programmed that for laser.

“Yeah. I didn’t expect it to be so soon and never expected it would be used for shooting space junk. It was an idea.” I shrug.

“An idea that will pay off, Brother. Take a step forward. You thought it, did it, now what?”

“Alpha-Bits on IT will help. I need more Protectors for them that aren’t pulled to Ops. They need an office and we’re maxed out.”

Ben nods. “The Club of halls is tough, Brother. Without all the fuckin’ halls, you’d have more room. Brekan has the northeast side being redesigned all the way up. It gives more cells, Ops room and offices.”

“I need that, I hate the halls. Do I need to ask Brekan to change it?”

Cort shakes his head. “He runs like Phoenix Clubs. The buildings and land are yours to do whatever with as long as it stays Badass. If you start running drugs and women, I’ll blow it up.” He shrugs like he’d do it without caring.

Ben laughs. I smile. “Never happening. I need to get rid of the halls and get more offices in. Space IT will need more monitoring consoles.”

“I’ll get Alder on it. Paul is building Aylen’s Club. If he calls Danny, keep them separate. Danny redesigns but Alder will get it done.” Cort has me paying attention.

“Alder is already doing the compound igloos.”

Cort shakes his head. “Brann in Elan drew them up. They have shit going in everywhere. Alder approves and sets timelines Asa keeps straight. Alder checks in at the Clubs to make sure everything is followed. He’s one Brother with more than building going on.” He was making a brace for Josephine.

I nod. “So Alder stays away from Danny. Who does the construction?”

“The new crews Paul has been hiring. He can’t keep up with all Alder’s shit, so he’s been hiring crews for the Clubs. They travel too. It’s fucking crazy. I need a construction Club.”

I laugh with Ben. Cort is serious which makes it funnier. I order a sandwich feeling more myself. “Thanks, Brothers. Getting past *it worked* wasn’t easy.”

“That’s good. Your girl’s place burnt down. You need to be able to focus on what she’s going to need.” Ben reminds me.

I put my head down. “Fuck. I didn’t ask if they got anything while I was in Ops.”

“What girl?”

My head is up and I see Cort’s sharp blue eyes. Fuck! I look at Ben. He started this shit.

He laughs. “Mechanic he bought the Indian off of. We got there while they were fighting bikers. Some were ex-MC, one he threw out days before. The girl is talented and looks like a character from a book. Her style is pure Badass. She took a broken leg and concussion from a bat to the face when we pulled in. They wrecked some pricey classics she built. Her brother had broken ribs and some internal damage Justice, Teller and Phoenix helped with. The pussies were taking her as a slave.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? MC rejects are still here?” Cort growls.

I do everything not to move away from him while shaking my head. “They were called by Magnar, the dick I threw out.”

“Where are they from?”

I put my hands up before he hits me. “IT has a couple of addresses just over the Arizona line at the four corners. It was sent yesterday. Last night they torched her garage.”

“Fucking shit. They’ll keep going until they find her. How many?”

Ben answers. “Three got away. Eight went to holding. Seven were picked up by the sheriff this morning.”

I look at him wondering how he knows then, just as fast, dismiss it. He sees everything. Cort pulls his phone. “Ranger, the four corners ex-MC?” He listens.

I watch Ben smile thinking I don’t need to know. He turns my way. “You need it.”

I was afraid of that. I nod and wait.

“Blow them up.” Cort swipes and moves for his plate.

Ben laughs. “I like your style, Brother.”

I move looking at my sandwich. I love this one. Ben has me looking up. “I do too. It’s a staple in New England.”

Cort points at my plate. “It’s getting popular here. I didn’t think anyone would order it outside of November but Raid got it yesterday.”

They’re crazy. “What’s happening in Ops?”

Cort takes a bite of his steak and cheese and waves shaking his head. Ben answers. “IT pulled more and found some California rejects that are with them. Honor is picking up a slave they took as soon as Doc from Phoenix gets there. Nash is using the jet to blow their new makeshift barn-club up.” He bites into his chicken and cheese. Oh, that’s all. They have freaky Ops going on all the time now. It’s not a concern to either.

I look at my sandwich then mash it down. I’m glad I’m not Ranger. “She’ll be safe now?”

Cort shakes his head. “Not if she’s yours. This Club has always been local or the other clubs trying to wipe you out first before hitting Badass. Now you’re set to make fucking millions a job, that target just got bigger.” Again, with the nonchalant delivery.

I shake my head. “We make money on all the satellites we put up and monitor. Aero is a big company with private and government contracts. She’s not mine. I met her yesterday.” I want her but I’m not jumping without knowing her. I just did that shit with Melissa.

“Tell me you have them safe.” His eyes and growl catch me by surprise.

“Yeah, Boss. Magnar is who beat them with a fucking bat. Their dad is the younger guy that died last year in town two. Mother committed suicide a couple of months ago.”

“Jesus. Keep them covered, Brother. How the fuck do people keep going after all that shit?”

I shrug. “I asked the same thing. Now her garage is gone. It was state of the art. I hope the insurance doesn’t take forever. I bet her first thought is her crew working.”

Ben freezes so I eat. He always does that. I can wait. Teller shows on the side of me and I almost choke on my first bite. He hits my back. “Breathe, Brother.”

I nod taking some water to wash it down. Fucking Brothers. “Your dad walks most places then sits. He doesn’t just appear.”

Mucimi appears and throws me chin with his smile. I shake my head as Ben and Cort laugh.

“She’s buying the garage in the Brothers town. It’s a setup that will be easy for her to move into. Her dad built hers for everything she does to takeover when he retired but it’s totaled. Her picture is posted, Pres Maverick. She’s not clear.” Mucimi looks worried delivering that.

Fuck. “I’ll keep Security with her. I won’t be able to keep her here without telling her why. She got the brace the Bits built so she’ll be walking today.”

Teller turns from the Prospect. “No, she’s sticking close. The bikers scared her. She isn’t going to quit but knows

she needs your help.”

I nod. “She had a knife at Magnar’s throat with a concussion and broken leg. She didn’t look scared.” She’s definitely not one to go quietly.

Mucimi steals a handful of tater tots from my plate. “I knew I should have got the salad.” I only wanted the sandwich anyway.

Mucimi is gone then right back with an empty plate. I nod and he takes mine leaving the empty for me. Fucking Brothers.

“Why didn’t you order food?” Teller asks what I’m thinking.

“It’s done, here and he doesn’t want them.” Mucimi shrugs. “They’re hot now. They’ll be cold when he’s done with the sandwich.” He’s not wrong.

I swallow my bite. “That was smart.”

They all laugh at me.



“Maverick, Mabon and Tomas took me to the houses. I can’t wait to start. I’ve been drawing for yours. It’s going to be the first compound done.” Jacky has the island covered in paper. Tomas looks at me with a smile. I throw him chin.

Josephine watches us from the little table in the corner with that small smile and bright eyes. Her face still has the green around her eye and dark bruise across her cheekbone. I keep my eyes on Jacky but take in everything about her. The

shirt looks like an old-fashioned corset cream dress that's see through from under her chest to her waist. It's longer in the back with the top layer lace hanging past the seat. Her pants are tan with a side pocket that looks strapped to it and tight legs from her knees down to her high-top shoes with the leather flap covering the ties and a buckle on the side. Taming my dick, I think of her loss and breathe through the next steps.

“I was told today that four houses were added as small stars. They're for new Alpha-Bits that will be living here.”

Jacky's face falls. “Shit. I need to redo this.”

“No, small house. Here, Boss Jacky.” Tomas points at the blueprint in front of him. “Two single, one bunk, one two sleep room.”

I move to see it. “It's the Milky Way. What are the buildings?”

“Solar system to you compound. Protector Outer arm. Enforcer Perseus arm. Engineer, IT Sagittarius arm. You, Officer Orion Spur.” He moves his hand to the other side. “Here, VIP, Norma arm. Security Scutum Centaurus arm.” He hits the compound in outer space. “Prospect black hole.”

I laugh. “I like it, Brother. So these are compounds not buildings.”

He moves the blueprint so I help flip it. “You compound here.” The walkways run in the Milky Way spirals. The other compounds are away from this one with a line of sensors running right around it. “Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter is kitchen, living room, IT/Ops, garage. Mars, Earth,

Venus, Mercury is VP Finn, you, Boss Stan, Alpha-Bits. Rest stars. Sun pool, train, outside eat.” He shrugs.

“I love it. I’m in Earth.”

Josephine laughs from right behind me so I move to the side. “Look at this. They got everything in and have it all along the Milky Way.” Ripping the blueprints apart I show her the compounds. “Officer is right here.”

She laughs. “You’re as excited as Jacky. I like the community kitchens and living rooms. Is this what you’re building for the Indians at the shelters?”

“Similar but not set in the Milky Way.”

“I show, Pres Maverick.” Tomas pulls his little backpack open and gets his tablet. Seeing the layout, I like mine better, theirs is just set in circles like the others.

“They’ll be using the one kitchen too?”

I nod. “Web and Alder’s kitchens have seating for a hundred, the Indians will have that too. Ours will seat twenty to thirty. Everyone won’t be there every day because of work, but if we are, we’ll all fit.”

“That’s really cool.”

I close my eyes knowing what’s next. Tomas jumps right in. “Ill, chill, tight, sick...”

I look at Josephine. “If you say the word, they say the chant. Don’t say the word.” I yell, “Happy!” When Jacky and Tomas do.

Jacky laughs. “Every time you say it, they all do that, so I’m never saying it again.”

I laugh. “We’re all helping to stop that.”

Tomas smiles packing his tablet up. “Everyone say it. Alpha-Bits happy. I work. Later, Pres Maverick, Bosses.” He runs making me smile.

“I’ve seen three of them today. They’re all cute. Don’t tell Alder I called him cute. He’s like an old man in a young body.” She’s not wrong.

“When did you see Alder?”

“When he brought the brace. Allen said I’m good to go. Ren agreed and had security bring us here. How come you don’t live here?”

I shrug looking at the compounds. “It was Major’s house. He grew up in a mansion so this worked for him when he visited. He always had Brothers staying here with him. It’s too big for me and I’m never asking Brothers to live with me.”

Jacky laughs. I shrug again. “I came to talk to you and invite you to dinner then the Club. The biggest part of testing is done. The satellites are working and we got more jobs today from two companies, the government and some allies. The Brothers are proud.”

“Congratulations. Launching satellites is big. You’ll have to explain later about jobs in space. We’re wearing the only clothes we own.” Jo points out.

They don’t understand how Badass works. “Didn’t a Prospect get your sizes and preferences?”

She nods. Jacky is smiling, maybe he understands. “Your clothes should be in your room but what you’re wearing is fine for the Club. The women there are in everything from

almost lingerie to khakis. Club chicks are almost lingerie and IT, engineers or Security are Club gear or khakis.”

She nods. “You have women in security?”

“Yeah, if they can do the job, they get it. We have a lot of women space geeks because they were overlooked by companies or the predominantly male government. Head of Badass Aero Technologies is a woman I’m so glad was fed up with the Air Force. She’s top of her field and knows more than I ever will about launches and payloads. If you watch the news, she’s the one that launched from a jet.”

“Holy shit. I saw that like last year.” Jacky is impressed with everything. It reminds me how good our people are.

I nod. “She’s unbelievable. Ren is her partner, I lucked out getting someone to run the business and a doctor for the Club. That launch was for one of our first clients. They needed the satellite up and in position and kept getting scrubbed because of weather by a Texas company that quoted cheaper. Mars got them out of weather and the satellite placed before their deadline and they never looked for cheaper again.”

“You run GPS and phones too, right?” Jacky asks.

“Yeah, sort of, we have smaller contracts. We program for some government satellites, but they maintain them. You can ask the space geeks at the Club later. They’ll tell you what’s not classified.”

Josephine is watching me. “What do you need to say?” She looks like she’s bracing for more bad news. I don’t want to deliver it but she needs it.

“You already know about the shop. I’m sorry we couldn’t save it. IT got addresses from the dicks in holding. Cort sent Brothers to the four corners to steal the slave they had and blow their makeshift club up.”

Her face on the right pales. “Sit, you look like you’re going to pass out.”

“They had a slave? A sex slave?”

I look at Jacky. “Yeah, maybe now isn’t the time.”

Josephine sits. “No, we heard. I can’t believe they had another woman there. Is she okay?”

“I don’t know more than Doc was bringing her to the ABSZ women. They understand and can help her more than a Club of Brothers can. If she was hurt bad, they’d bring her to the medic Center for Chenoa to see. She took on their compound.”

“Who’s Chenoa?” She asks.

“Teller’s ol’ lady is a doctor that works for Alder and has a clinic for Indians in one of Bravo’s towns. She’s Navajo from the reservation that got burned out a couple of years ago in New Mexico. This year the plateaus burned. They’re in between ABSZ and Bravo now. Hopefully they catch a break and can live without people setting fire to shit close to them. Which brings us back to your shop.”

She puts her hand up. Jacky slides glasses of water across the island to us. “I’m renting the Jiffy Lube building until the closing in a month. Jacky talked to the insurance agent and had pictures and receipts for everything on his laptop so that’s already in the works. The lifts and some of the

machinery can be moved over. Dad had a friend that offered to bring everything over on tractor trailers. The mechanics are cleaning it up and coordinating trucks starting tomorrow. Jacky's place was ransacked. They didn't burn it but Mrs. Lima said they might as well have. The mechanics went over to clean that up today and she let him out of the lease. I had no time to find a place to live today."

I stop anything else before she's moving tomorrow. "You know we have readers. Some of the Protectors are seers." I jump half a foot when Mucimi shows.

"Who the fuck are you?" Jacky falls back into the back counter.

My hand is up. "Relax. This is Mucimi. He sees visions and I don't know what. He moves fast and looks like he just appears places." I give him a look. "If you keep showing like this, I'm going to shoot you like Cooper does."

Mucimi smiles. "Christian taught me how to keep the shield in place. It would bounce off."

I shake my head as Jacky laughs. "Fucking Brother. Do you have a reason to scare the shit out of us?"

He nods looking serious. "Stay here. Your picture is being passed along to Southern California, Mexico and an Outlaw club in Texas."

"Fuck. Why didn't you tell me before?"

Mucimi shrugs. "Mexico just got it." A picture shows in my head that's got to be from him.

Fucking hell, they put the picture on the wall. "Shit."

“How did you do that?” Josephine’s shaky voice asks.

“I showed you what I see,” Mucimi tells her. “Stay close to the Club and Maverick or the Officers. Mexico will bury you.”

Fuck! “Mucimi!” I turn hearing Mase’s voice with mine. “Hey, Mase. Can you stop him from scaring the hell out of Josephine and Jacky?”

Josephine is up and moving back. “You shot men right in front of me.”

Mase turns. “I might have. I worked to clear the Club with the Protectors.”

Jacky moves closer to Mase. “You’re the fire guy. That was all over the news. How do you do that? Your hair looks better down.”

I shake my head. Mase smiles holding his hand out. “The ancestors are crazy. I learned how to throw the fireballs that day.” Fire appears on his hand then is gone.

“Mase.” Jacky isn’t letting me finish so I turn toward Josephine. “They’re all crazy. He did help clean the towns and stole the slave back today. They can move faster than Brothers so they get those jobs.”

She nods watching Mase juggle fire. “This is normal for you?”

I laugh. “I’m a science geek that learned not everything can be explained. The ability kids are unexplained. Native paranormal activity has been documented for years. They prove it every time I see them. We only have readers in

the Club right now. Mucimi is from Bravo Rising and Mase is VP of Honor Rising. They're both Blackhawks."

She finally smiles looking at me. "Pretty interesting friends you have here. Mucimi sees as in his picture and words mean I should pay attention?"

I nod not smiling. Mase walks toward us. "He sees more. We take the warning and make sure you stay safe. Justice is pissed Mucimi scared you but thinks you need the warning. If Justice and Mucimi see it, you need the warning. I don't get vision like they do but have seen enough fuckin' slaves to know it's not a joke."

Josephine nods. Mase grabs Mucimi's arm and they're gone. I shake my head.

"That was fucking awesome!" Jacky yells.

My eyes stay on Josephine. "He stole the slaves Alder made a compound for?" She's a smart woman.

I nod. "He took in four kids. Brothers in different Clubs have younger Alpha-Bits and kids born into slavery that didn't have a mom."

"That's sick." Jacky has me nodding but my eyes are still on Josephine.

Her eyes tear up. "My picture and location are in clubs that sell women?"

I nod again. "We won't let anything happen to you. I have a cuff and Asa is coming this week to stamp you with tracking so we don't lose you."

She nods. “The warning is Mucimi saying to stay close to you and Officers?”

“Yeah. My compound is going to be finished early next week. My house is done but I can’t move until the high Officers do. Badass is crazy with Security for Presidents. Readers will tell me about the others when they meet them all. You can both stay in one of the igloos. The new shop is not far from here and Security already has you on their rotation. We have feeds of the main roads and there’s a fire hydrant on the road twenty feet from your new parking lot.”

“I never thought about it before, but it already makes this easier. So we’ll move to your igloo houses? This isn’t a problem for you?”

I shake my head wanting them close before something else hits them. No one can keep getting buried in loss without breaking at some point. They’re both good people that were dealt a shit hand. I can help that. “Everything is built with expansion in mind. I have more igloos marked for new Officers that I don’t have. Three more igloos are two bedrooms for whoever has kids. No one even has an ol’ lady. There’s even a playroom for kids. They’re crazy and Asa said he’s busy so they’re doing it now.”

They laugh. I shrug hoping we’re done with questions. “Dinner?”

Josephine nods. “Celebrating satellites and the new garage sounds good. It’s been a hell of a few days.”

Jacky swipes his papers in a pile. “Here’s yours. Earth.” he looks proud handing the top over.

“Fucking sweet, little Brother. I’m glad it’s not a map picture.”

He smiles at Josephine. “I’m a little brother.”

I laugh guiding Josephine out. “We call everyone Brother. Little Brother is Alpha-Bits, new or young Brothers. That’s not to be confused with the kids, that Little Brother is always used but carries a capital L for the name of the group.”

“Bikers have a lot of rules. Some guy called a woman Brother,” Jacky says from behind us.

I nod. “Women Brothers are more common than they were a few short years ago. As a President, I see them as Brothers. They do the job and shouldn’t be left feeling less. The other side of that is if they’re treated different, old-school Brothers will jump on it and take advantage. Since women have to outperform in order to get respect, I’m showing and demanding that respect for them with Brother. Some men are just ignorant.” I lift Josephine up into the cab.

Jacky jumps into the back. “Nice ride, Maverick.”

I walk around thinking it is. When I get in, I explain. “I restore cars but roads here aren’t always plowed. I got stuck on a test drive and had to wait for Ratchet to put a plow on one of his wreckers so I bought the truck.”

Josephine laughs. “My dad had a plow truck so Jacky makes a mint with it every winter. He must have missed you stuck in the snow.”

“The Brothers will need that. There’s one with a plow for his truck. When he’s busy, Brothers are screwed.”

“I’ll help them out. You’re doing all this for us. It’s the least I can do.” The kid sounds choked up.

Remo picks me up on our way out the gate. “No, Jacky. You work for pay. Brothers have money to pay for the shit they need. When you come across someone that needs your help, you do that with no strings. We call it putting your hand out. You did it for Magnar. Seeing him hurt, you probably got a story. Putting your hand out, not knowing me or why he’d get thrown out, wasn’t wrong. He was just the wrong guy to help.”

“Why’d he get kicked out?”

“He pinned a woman against a table. When she fought back, engineers were right there. He threatened them with a torch. I was walking through the engineering building and saw the torch. He’s lucky I didn’t use it on him. Engineers aren’t Badass trained but they stood up for the woman. I have Security roaming now. My engineers and IT shouldn’t be afraid to work or even afraid of the Brothers.”

“He forgot to mention that part.” Jacky is feeling that.

“I knew when I heard you gave him a ride. Magnar fooled his supervisor and about four Brothers above him. The SAA had him on a list to be removed the next day but he was already out. He was Badass from Colorado that came down a few months ago for the work. I can’t say I knew him well. I spoke to him once and beat the shit out of him the second time he spoke to me. I have over seven hundred Brothers and space geeks. I don’t know everyone personally and take Magnar as a lesson. Everyone will be stepping up and watching for un-

Badass behavior.” That’s what I told them at Church. Stan already has a list and a half of Brothers with complaints.

Pulling into the restaurant, I look over at Josephine. “You’re quiet.”

“I read about Badass last night. I like hearing more and don’t mind just listening. Are your friends here?”

“Brothers and yeah. They’re pumped about the jobs today so they’ll be celebrating. This is one of our businesses. We tend to stick together.” I point at Remo by her door. “That’s Remo, he’s my Protector Lead. That means he runs my Security Teams, is trained for everything and acts like a mother hen.”

They laugh when he opens her door. “Pres, ma’am. Security is in, Boss. VP called for them when he ran bikes out of here.”

I nod and slide out. “BSC here?” I look for the bikes. “Cort is here?”

“Yeah, Boss. He’s got his ol’ lady here. Falcon and Kristos are here.”

I nod for him and guide Josephine in. “Picasso is ex-graffiti that took up painting, Jacky. He’d like the work you showed me. If he’s here, I’ll point him out.”

“Thanks, Maverick.”

I nod guiding Josephine in. “There are readers here. I wouldn’t be surprised if Mase or Mucimi show again. All the Brothers named are Presidents. That’s Cort, Kristos, Falcon and Ben, the Head of Badass Territories. Their Security is here

with them. The women are as crazy as the men. You'll see what I mean when they pull you away to sit with them."

She gives me an odd look. "I'm not sitting with you?"

Security opens the door throwing chin. I give it back. "I did say they're crazy. Wherever you are, it will be in my view. They're ol' ladies and aren't out of their man's view."

She nods looking around as I guide her toward the back sections Security is guarding. Remo looks in, then stands aside. "Freaky crew in."

I throw him chin as I walk by. "Eat at the bar while everyone is in then replace so the other Teams get to eat."

"Roger, Boss."

Throwing chin to the table of Presidents, I stop at Mars and hug her. "Everything tested out. Good job, Mars."

She steps back to Ren who is talking to Josephine. "I can't believe it worked. My email had jobs coming in. This is huge, Boss."

"We have Alpha-Bits moving to work IT for you. I need a handler that's not going to drop them."

Ren puts her hand on my arm and squeezes. "I want it, Pres. I can ask Solei and Seren what to do."

I nod, this will be good. "It's yours if you stop clawing the shit out of me."

Mars pulls her back smiling. "I've got her. Go, you've got people waiting."

I'm stopped by every fucking Brother. Seeing Mike, I stop. "Picasso here, Mike?"

He nods. "He's sitting with Ratchet's crew." He points.

I throw him chin and walk Jacky over to Ratchet. "Brothers, this is Jacky. He's the owner of the mustang in front of the shop."

The Brothers throw chin and start talking right away. Ratchet throws me chin. "I got this, Pres. I sent Picasso the walls he painted in the shop. He just sat asking about them. They'll get along great."

I hit his back and keep moving. Seren stands in front of me and waits for an engineer to finish talking. I turn smiling. "Seren, my guess is you're saving Josephine from my boring life."

She laughs. "Always the smartass. Not your boring life but this walk of no one to talk to feeling like every pair of eyes are on her. Mostly because they are. I'm Seren, Josephine, come sit with the ol' ladies. We'll get you a drink and Ren said you probably need to sit by now."

I look at Josephine. "You're in pain?"

She shakes her head. "No, but my leg feels heavy."

Fuck. "I should have asked."

"I'm going to sit and find out how she can call you names without getting shot."

I laugh and point Cort out. "Cort is hers. He'd step on my head."

Seren shakes her head pulling Josephine away from me. With no one else to see, I move to the Presidents. My first

stop is Justice. “It’s about time, Pres. Congratulations.”

He smiles hugging me. “Thanks, Maverick. Good job today with the satellite. I had to read the code to see how they managed to get it to work. Alder and Anton are fuckin’ crazy with skillz.”

I nod. “They are. I was sweating it and that was before I saw everyone watching.”

He laughs stepping back while Falcon hugs me. I’m passed down like I’m new and joining the family. Fucking Brothers. Ben pushes a seat out and pulls me down. “Sit or you’ll end up on the other side.”

“Thanks, Brother. They’re crazy with congratulations.”

He nods. “I have Brother emails from all over the country trying to get a job in your Club. Since they’re writing to me, I told José to trash them. If they aren’t smart enough to follow the Badass website, they aren’t smart enough to work here.”

“Thanks for that too. I don’t hire anyone but Heads. There’s a process on our site they have to follow. We’re not making washing machines. Our metals and parts are expensive and hard enough to get without it being a replacement. The readers will be a help. MC came down just for the take.”

He looks at me. “Fuck. I’ll get a team here. You have two and they’re on shifts already.”

Cort sits back down. I didn’t see where he went but he’s interested in this now. “What happened?”

“Nothing yet. Ben has email for jobs here. That means the smarter will be emailing the Delta site. He mentioned getting readers here.”

He nods. “Even sending Sentinel Brothers, you’re over 700 with the space geeks. We need to get through the Brothers you have.”

I nod. “It was my thought before you sat. I’d appreciate it, Ben. I can hold off moving Brothers because of construction in the Club. I’d still have IT. I don’t want anyone getting past the Club doors to the compounds if they aren’t Badass. IT and engineers will be like sitting ducks. I have a lot of women going into that compound.”

“Why so many women?” Cort is one to push women so I know he just wants to know.

I smile. “Men don’t hire women in science positions. Whether it’s government or companies, they don’t give them a shot. Mars gets a report with a number and hires by experience and training. When she likes a candidate, she approves it for HR. She was Air Force so she’s not easy but she’s fucking good.”

“I like her. Seren thinks she’s the shit. Is she a member?”

I shake my head. “Very few women joined. Her partner Ren is a member.”

“She’s the doctor?” Ben asks.

I nod. “She thought the Brothers would accept her more with a cut. She isn’t wrong. I wish I could get the IT women in but they’re all fairly new here. Weeding out old MC

had Mars hiring almost seventy percent of our IT workforce. We've been working on the fabricators lately. They're mostly Brothers. I wouldn't mind getting someone like Freedom to run Aero Engineering for me. Mars had Brothers quitting IT."

He nods. "She's a pretty woman. I can see that."

Teller leans over. "Is Mars her real name?"

I laugh. "Mariselle. Mars is what I called her on base. It stuck."

"So you've known her for years." Cort and the questions.

"I was brought in to Head a project. She was from a launch crew. I wasn't on launch. I'm an engineer. When I needed help, I asked and she answered, since she knew the job, I took her as second on the team. The commander was pissed and thought I hooked up with her. As soon as she said she was gay she was stuck with shit jobs. When she finished her tour, she called and I hired her. She's how the satellite got up so fast. We had a smaller payload, but it wasn't small enough to add a BSC satellite. With the laser capabilities, she removed the new Kevlar shields dropping weight and fit BSC on. I'm so fucking glad the laser worked. Those shields were from our clients' satellites."

Justice shakes his head. "Fuck, are they going to be pissed they paid for it?"

I shake my head no. "Mars told them about the laser shielding them. Men brought up on Star Wars and Star Trek love shit like that."

They laugh. I check on Josephine then Jacky. They both look happy. Justice turns toward me. “They’re good, Brother. Chenoa likes her. She’s talking about cars.”

Teller gives him a look. “Don’t be a dick.”

Ben laughs. ‘*He can’t read his old lady.*’

Cort laughs at the same time I do. “Good. You need to stop reading everything and live like normal Brothers. We don’t read anyone. Get over it.” A laugh has me looking over at Josephine for a second. She’s happy. Women are amazing.

Justice smiles at Teller getting a finger back. I love these two. “Settle down. Why don’t you put your energy into getting the women in IT to join the Delta Club.” Ben has the two Brothers gone.

Cort laughs so I follow his eyes. They’re talking to the women. “That’s smart.”

Now he’s laughing at me.



Josephine

So much is going on in my head. Chenoa said the tribe lost cars in the fires. They were choppered out so they lost everything but what they could salvage. Ratchet said he could find me cars and he'll help. Since I don't know what shape my tools are in, I could be weeks behind and haven't even talked to my workers.

"What's wrong?" I jump. "Damn." I hold my heart like that helps. "Sorry, I forgot you were here. I was thinking about my tools."

He laughs. "That's not good for my ego. I thought it was women joining the Club and was compiling information to counter everything you could object to." He's cute but his ego? What does he mean?

"I think women in the Club is good but not realistic. IT aren't known for riding. You'd be better off hiring a matchmaker to get them on the back of bikes first. Once they meet decent men, they'll be in the Club as ol' ladies."

Either he hates that or is thinking it has merit. "You ride?" Or that.

"Yeah, the Harley is mine. I don't ride much but need it to work on them."

He looks from the road to me. "You need it to work on them?"

I'm glad he turns back to the road. "It's a guy thing. I don't know why."

"You didn't stroke my ego down." The ego again?

“I don’t get that. You’re not a man that needs his ego stroked so you saying it confuses me. Why are you asking?”

He smiles pulling into the compound. “You forgot I was here isn’t good for any man to hear. Are you just not interested?”

Holy shit. “That’s very direct. Do you want me to be?”
What the hell am I supposed to say?

“It was a hope. If you’re not, I’ll back off.” Oh no.

I don’t want him to back off. He’s the only man I ever met that doesn’t see me as a weak pathetic woman. That’s not true, my workers and some customers are good men.

He parks and turns in his seat. “You don’t have to go to the Club. I’ll take you back to Major’s and let Jacky know.”

I shake my head. “It’s not that and I want to answer you but I’m not sure how. I’ve lived in a world where I was the boss’ kid so I got a pass and it was cute to see me dirty. Then my dad died, then my mom died. People don’t talk to me. I stay under cars, shop on Sunday mornings and keep to myself. I don’t fit in my world and don’t know yours. I like you, Maverick, but it’s new and I’m learning.”

He nods. “It’s new meaning Badass or men?”

I look down. Damn. “Both. No one is interested in a woman that’s a mechanic.”

He’s surprised. “I am. As long as you’re happy, I don’t care what job you do.”

I look out the window. “You have no idea how foreign that is to me.”

He takes my hand. “It’s not that foreign. Your dad believed in you.”

“He did, no one else did, but he did.” I miss my dad.

He shakes his head. “Jacky does. I do. Ratchet wants to hire you. Cort likes you. Ben thinks you’re already Badass to the core and Falcon loves you for building him the bike he wants. Is this you finding a way to stay alone?”

I’m insulted. “My first month of school, I fought guys off trying to get me on the worktables or in the storage room. A guy took pity and made me his by telling everyone I was. We spent four years hanging and going to parties together. Spring breaks he’d hang with his friends but the rest of the year he was with me. It took me four years to realize he was gay, Maverick. He was using me for cover. I thought we were best friends. Here guys stay away from me. The two that made an effort were taking bets and dropped me as soon as they got what they wanted. I don’t know anything more than what I’ve lived. It’s not about *wanting* to be alone. It’s just how it is.”

“Men are fucking stupid. You know, women outnumber men and they still don’t get how to treat them. I can see how that keeps you in your box. Since I’m not about to take bets and I’m obviously not gay, what do you say to giving me a chance?” He really is cute.

“Yes, but you should know, I thought I was and it was obvious. I went to dinner with you. Sort of, I guess, we ate at the same place.” I look at him hoping that was right.

He laughs. “Dinner with me should have been dinner with me. I can see I’m not helping you climb out of that box. I didn’t expect that many Brothers at the restaurant. When

everyone gets together the ol' ladies stick together because we bore the shit out of them talking shop. It's good at times. In the Clubs the women pull their men to dance then send them away to the Brothers. We're boring a lot I guess."

I laugh. The women I met said that. Since I don't know what to talk to him about, I didn't say a word and we're talking now. "Maybe that's what gives them stuff to talk about. I'm not saying I'm talking about Seren's baby count but having a life that isn't about the Club will keep me from drowning in all the new."

He nods. "I like that. Ask me what you want to know and I'll answer what I can. Seren and Solei have been around for a while."

I nod. "I got that. So, this is the same? They'll drag me to a table?"

"Yeah. Since you're with them, no one will bother you."

I smile at that. "I thought that was, *since I'm with you, no one will bother me.*"

He smiles. "You didn't think you knew how to stroke my ego."

I laugh. He's a little geeky. I guess with his job he's a lot geeky but he's President of a biker club for a reason that isn't missed by me. The man is scorching hot and oozes confidence. Solei said presidential presence or something. Whatever it is, Maverick has it.



Maverick

The Club is packed but the women are having a good time. I wanted to pull Josephine out and walk the Milky Way. Ben catches my attention sitting his ol' lady with the rest. I guess it will wait for tomorrow. Ben stops before he gets to the bar and scans the room. His Security moves from the doors to the bar and scatters around the room.

His eyes fall on mine then we're moving. "Fuck." I put my hand over my eyes. That's what Teller said to do.

"Close your eyes. Cort is fuckin' pissed. An Alpha-Bit got hurt."

I close my eyes until I hear Cort's roar. "Fucking dickass!" He's got a Brother against the wall. One is by his feet. My eyes go to Tomas and Ari.

"Shit." Ben stops at Cort. I keep moving to Tomas. "Tomas, Jesus." I take him when his arms go up. "Get me some ice."

Ari turns saying something to someone. "He was just running to the room when the fuck swung at him, Pres. Two were holding me and calling for more Brothers when I shot the fuck. Thank fuck Cort came out. The others ran. Two were giants."

I nod taking the ice from one of Ari's Team. "Where's your Team?"

"In with the Bits and Caelan. I took one so Tomas could go to the bathroom. They don't have a stool at the toilet."

I nod. Fucking hell, he didn't do anything wrong but fuck. In the fucking Club? "Get me two Enforcer Teams to move the Alpha-Bits to Major's. I need a couple of Prospects."

Ari steps back. I kiss Tomas's head. "Is the ice helping, Brother?"

Mucimi shows right in front of me as Tomas is nodding. I feel that warm again. I throw Mucimi chin. "You feel Mucimi healing you, Tomas?"

His head turns fast so I grab the ice bag. "Heal to me?"

I smile at the hopefulness in there. Mucimi nods. "You'll feel better soon. The Brother is gone. Ari made sure he couldn't hurt you again. I'll get you back to perfect."

Tomas nods. "I tell Pres Alder you heal to me." His smile says his cheek doesn't hurt. Mucimi is incredible.

I kiss his head. "We'll call Alder when Mucimi is done. He's going to want to talk to me."

"Boss Ari shoot Brother. He no hit Alpha-Bits again."

Ari moves close. "I'm sorry he hit you. I'll do better, Brother."

Tomas shakes his head. "You say stay to you. I run."

I kiss his head again. "I think you're both right. We know you run so we'll make sure Protectors are running with you." I need to get the fucking Brothers that were called out.

Ari nods to me. "I'll run with them. I was closing the door when I saw him go. Next time I'll have him holding my belt."

He doesn't think much of his second. "He's Ops pulled to Bits. Quest is working IT so we needed to split the Team."

Shit. "I need reader help to clear Brothers out. I'm taking them to Major's house until we can get something else settled. This doesn't feel done and I'm not risking them here. Brothers doing this shit while you're right here is a message as far as I'm concerned."

He nods. "It's the beginning, Pres. Adrian is with Prez and Cort. Prez is calling for readers to get here faster. Adrian caught the thoughts of Brothers that ran." He looks at Tomas. "Mucimi's good, Tomas. The bruise is gone." He looks at me. *'It was planned. Prez read the pussy Cort killed.'*

Fuck. "Get them ready to go to Major's. I'll talk to Cort about moving Caelan with them."

I turn and Cort isn't here. Neither is Ben. "When I find him."

Ari and Tomas laugh. "He's following Prez. We need Seren and Solei out of the Club. Teller has Chenoa at home. He's on his way back. Mase is coming." He turns. "He's with Prez. Pres Falcon can get the women and Alpha-Bits moved."

I nod watching Falcon stalk our way. Tomas bounces with his arms out to Mucimi. "I stay to you."

I let him go when Mucimi has him. "He's not mad at you. He's mad a Brother hurt you." Mucimi walks down the hall with Ari. I watch until Ari closes the door and stands outside.

“The ol’ ladies are in some meeting room downstairs.”
Falcon catches me up.

I nod. This is good. “I want to move them to Major’s house. With Ben’s Security I’m not sure that will fly.”

“Mase is here. It will fly if he’s with them.” It sounds right to me.

Teller shows beside Falcon. Jesus. “I’ll go with Mase and Security. My mom has a full Team and my dad called for the Flight Crew. They’re outside Major’s now.”

I look at Falcon. “Mucimi in with the kids?”

Teller answers while I’m nodding. “No, they’re at Major’s. Aylen is with them.”

“I meant that.” I have no idea what the fuck is going on. Turning back, Ari is gone from the door

Falcon hits my shoulder. “They know what’s next. Ask that.”

I’ll go with that. “What’s next, Teller?”

“We need you out of the hall. Close your eyes.”

I don’t ask even one of the questions going through my head.

“Sometimes you’re better off,” Teller answers what I didn’t say and I know he’s smiling.



Josephine

I see the little guy and move as fast as I can with my leg feeling like it's going to fall off. "You were hurt?" My hand goes to his back and his on my shoulder.

"I good to go. Mucimi heal to me. No hurt." Tomas holds on to me which is a surprise.

Solei let's him go. "Aylen said one more."

I get a better grip on the little guy shifting my weight to my good leg. "No, there's two."

Tomas shakes his head. "Quest work IT shift."

"I got him, Brother. He can work from here. You feeling okay, Tomas?"

I turn fast hearing the male voice. I saw him with Carmen. "Justice?"

He nods putting his hand on Tomas's head. "Yeah. Quest is working in the den. No pain, Tomas?"

"I good to go. No pain. Boss Mucimi heal to *me*." He's so cute.

I smile at my little buddy who wiggles against me. "Do you want to get down?"

"I show compound. Alpha-Bits sleep to you house Pres Maverick, Prez Little Ben."

I nod. "Everyone is sleeping here tonight. It's plenty big enough." I set him down and he runs to the island. I guess he's better.

Justice smiles. "You're not."

“I got it, Justice. My dad needs you.” The sweet voice is from a pretty Indian woman. Her dad is Ben, I can see him in her eyes and smile. Looking from her to Justice, I hold the chair in front of me, Justice is gone. The people appearing and disappearing make me dizzy.

“I’m Aylen. Solei went to help get a room ready for the Alpha-Bits. Mucimi is there so she won’t need to do much.”

“I’m Jo, Aylen. It’s nice to meet you.”

She glides my way. “Same here. Let’s get you feeling better then we can talk. I love your clothes. It’s a Badass look that fits in and keeps you covered.”

I nod. I hope I can get more soon. “It works for mechanic too. Coveralls make me feel like I’m in a trash bag. I need the clothes to remind me I’m in a man’s world but still a woman. You’re one of the healers. Tell me what to do.” The guys held my arm and leg.

“I’ll do the same. Sit where you’ll be comfortable.”

I smile walking to the sitting area with cushioned chairs. She answered what I thought.

“We try not to but it doesn’t always work. Just relax. I’m going to do the same thing my dad and brothers did.”

I relax and close my eyes. It’s been an interesting night. I hope the security guy finds Jacky. He rode with his new painter friend so I haven’t seen him since the restaurant.



I open my eyes hearing Jacky's yell. "Jojo!"

"Here." Moving to stand has my arm squeezed.

"He's coming over." Aylen turns. "Her leg was bothering her. She's okay."

Jacky stops a few feet away. "Who are you?"

"Aylen Knight. I'm a Protector from the Alpha Rising Club."

I smile at Jacky's face. "You're the one that's going to be a President? You're beautiful. The Brother talked about you like you were a hag."

Aylen sits up straight. "You told Teller so he'll deal. Thanks for watching out for me and the beautiful thing. I'm just like everyone else, Brother. Your sister here isn't a hag either."

I laugh at the emotion I know he's going through. "She's a reader too. If you don't want her seeing it, don't think it," I tell him.

He nods and sits across from us. "You're really okay?"

I nod. "I was worried you were lost in the Club. They took us to a room but no one said why."

Jacky shakes his head. "Some guy hit one of the kids. It got crazy with guys mad about that then other guys complaining about the new clubs and listening to kids. They were ready to start fighting. Picasso pulled me out of the bar and brought me to a Prospect that graduated. He brought me to the Teller guy then I was here. All he said was close your eyes and I was in the kitchen."

I shake my head. “It was a crazy feeling. My leg felt like it stayed back at the Club when I got here. Tomas is okay. Mucimi healed him. He hugged me and stayed in my arms for a couple of minutes. They’re sweet little guys. I’m glad you’re here and safe.”

He nods. “Now that I know you’re okay, I want to help Maverick. Those guys were mad.”

I shake my head. “Not worrying if you’re in the middle of all that will be a help. Mucimi is helping get rooms ready.”

“I can help at the Club.” My brother the Good Samaritan.

Aylen doesn’t like that. “Pissed off armed Brothers that are trained by the MC are not going to think twice about shooting you. Think about what you’re jumping into before you take that leap. There’s an army out there guarding this house for a reason. If Teller brought you here, there’s a reason. You’re one to be protected, Jack. I bet if you find Mucimi he’ll explain all that.”

Jacky nods. “I’ll go find Mucimi.”

“He’s making a teepee on the second floor.” Aylen helps him out.

I laugh when Jacky runs. “He’s eighteen but young.”

Aylen smiles showing that beauty Jacky saw. “He’ll get along great with Mucimi.”

“You really are beautiful. There’s a calmness about you that makes it seem spiritual or something.” I must sound like a crackpot.

She smiles. “Our ancestors gift us with abilities. I believe that calm is them working through me. To people that weren’t born in that culture, it is us that sound like crackpots.”

I smile. “Mase was juggling fire earlier. I’m getting acquainted with the gifts quickly.”

“It gets crazy but we’re fun. You should come to the compound and jump the cliff. Chenoa thinks we’re all nuts.”
Jump the cliff?

“I’m reserving my opinion until I get more information.” I’m serious but she laughs.

Lily and Seren sit smiling. They’re happy people while whatever is happening at the Club is happening at the Club. Seren asks, “Are you okay? I didn’t want to stop Aylen.”

I move my leg, feeling lighter. “Yes. It doesn’t feel so heavy.”

“Is it the brace that’s heavy?” Lily asks.

“I don’t think so. I just got it this morning. After a while I need to sit. My leg was broke yesterday so it should be sore.” I take it as normal.

“The bone is healed. Muscle and tendons need to heal around it,” Aylen says sounding like Ren.

I nod. “Thank you for what you’ve done to help that.”

“No problem. I’m glad I have something to do. My dad thinks I’ll set the Brothers off if I show. Walker and Nova are over there. Mikey is on her way here.”

Lily is up and moving to the back door. I look at Seren and Aylen. “Is it me, or is everyone around here extremely

pretty or handsome?”

Aylen laughs. “Wait until you see Cooper. They’re all hot, but Cooper is movie star hot. Jane calls him a Robert Redford look-alike.” Seren doesn’t say anything about the women. She’s like a model.

“Who’s that?” It sounds familiar but I can’t place a Robert Redford.

Her phone is out and she’s scrolling. I look at Aylen, but she shrugs. “I didn’t know either. He’s handsome. You’ve seen my dad and Brothers. It’s weird that they don’t ever say it. The women don’t either. It just is. You’re like that.”

I’m just a mechanic. She laughs as Seren shows me her phone. “That’s Cooper in the middle of Cort and Falcon.”

“Holy shit. He’s drop dead gorgeous. They all are.”

Now they’re both laughing.

I get up for a drink without feeling the weight and pressure of my leg. Lily stops with Mikey who is another pretty woman. Everyone here is calm and relaxed while being helpful and so nice. It feels good to be included without the awkward stiffness of the town people that turn away when they see me coming. Lily and Mikey help me get drinks out then we go looking for my brother and Mucimi while Seren checks on Caelan.



Maverick

I'm fucking pissed and shoot the first three before the others move hoping to save their feet from holes. Ben, Falcon and Cort don't let them get far. Seventeen.

"Remo, get two Protector Teams to ride with them to Browns National Wildlife Refuge." They can take their chances with the wildlife in the most remote area of Colorado.

Ben, Mase and Adrian laugh. I shrug. "No towers close."

Justice and Teller come in smiling. "Axe called a shot. He can fly them up in the small Badass plane. He's collecting old chutes for them."

Cort laughs. I nod. "Thank him for me. That works. Throw them out in the center, it will take them days to get out if they make it past the animals."

Teller looks like he's going to laugh. "With fresh gunshot wounds?"

I shrug. "They'll figure it out or not. It's a refuge, everything they need is right there. At least one of them should be military." I point to a whining dick. "Shut him up."

"They aren't military, Pres. You did the survival thing didn't you?" Ari has me smiling. Security comes in, each taking a traitor.

"Yeah. Not one is military?" I like that the line of Security Brothers keep coming in.

Ari shakes his head with a smile that I know is holding his laugh. I shrug. "They'll learn to appreciate the

Brothers that are.”

Cort and Ben laugh. Falcon hits my back. “Good call, Brother.”

I throw him chin and look at Remo at the door. “They’re all on?”

He smiles throwing chin to Stan to answer. “Most. They called a shot.” He shrugs.

“Good job. They’re in a refrigerator truck to the airfield?”

Stan nods. “Yeah, Pres. I liked the last transport.” He turns following the last traitor out.

Remo laughs. “You’re all crazy, Pres. He called for a box of venison to drop with them.”

“I love my Brothers,” I say smiling. We have quite a few hunters that bring meat in regularly.

He shakes his head walking away. “The meat will attract animals when it thaws.” Justice explains why I love my Brothers.

Cutting through their laughing I ask, “What now? This is seventeen. Finn is checking surveillance for the dicks that left. We have shifts in the morning and afternoon that will show, plus the businesses in the towns.”

Ben nods. “Readers are here at seven your time. They can be at the gate and transported to businesses.”

Cort nods. “That’s good. BSC is focused here. Do you have a rocket out?”

I shake my head no. “Not until the end of the month. Everything for Aero is in the hangars.”

“Security?” He asks.

“Always. No one will be in the building until a week before we move to the pad. It’s standard for us. The next one is classified.”

Cort nods again. “I don’t know your procedures. High is where you need to be so your shit isn’t fucked with. Do that. If you need IT watching surveillance, I’ll get them on it.”

That feels good. I close the door and jam the room before answering. “We have sensors and alerts on the whole airfield, but Aero is fenced inside with Security at the gate. *I* get retina scanned going in. Classified is part of the job so we follow high every day.”

“The shit I learn. That’s what your satellite does?”
Cort and the questions.

“Yeah, Boss. It’s Security for Aero. If the field is breached it does crazy shit like raise the electric to fences, alerts me and Ops at the Club. If they get in the fence, they’d be foreign bodies and shot from the guns on the building. Anything on the pad would lose fuel and the control stations frozen. If they breach the fence, the government gets the same call I do. They’d send a response Team in.”

They’re all looking at me surprised. “Jesus. I don’t want to know what the fuck causes that extreme response. I’m glad you’re covered.”

I nod. “They don’t have anything like Badass does. We stick to the security because they pay well. It doesn’t hurt

us and keeps the techs clean. The drug and background checks are continuous.”

Ben laughs. “Good to know they don’t have us targeted.”

I smile. “They have everyone targeted in their million scenarios, Ben. They just won’t have the missiles to fire at those targets. We get the alert to bring them up. The military controls very few on their own now.” I shrug. “You have the force fields that would stop them, we have them here, they have to know that too.” It’s never been said but everyone here should know.

“Jesus fuck.” Ari looks nervous.

I shake my head. “This isn’t something that happens. They make plans for all kinds of stupid shit. We decided we like knowing and maybe stopping their stupid shit so we take every job they bring us. It probably isn’t happening in my lifetime. I’ve seen too much to let my guard down so I keep it close.”

“Why doesn’t Saber know this?” Ben asks.

I smile. “It’s classified. As director, he’d get where the missiles are but wouldn’t know about their doom’s day crazy shit. They have a plan to bomb New York, just wipe it out. What the hell could they need that for? They were smarter hunting for aliens. Time, money and a shit load of energy has been wasted on what isn’t feasible. It would be a waste of *his* time to try wading through their crazy. If it ever happens, I’d call him or Kaleb. I don’t know anyone else to trust with it.”

Now they look like I'm the crazy one. The government is the one that has all the scenarios. Ben nods. "You're the one that could stop it. You're one guy that's had this decision."

I see he doesn't like that and shake my head. "Major said I need three to make the call. I have Mars and Nero then Jordan for objectivity. Major doesn't understand it so he refused. When I met Kaleb and Saber, I thought they'd be good Brothers to give the heads-up."

"You're not telling them in advance?" Justice asks.

"It would serve no purpose and the more that know outside of Badass puts me and the Club at risk." I point at Ari. "Ari would read it, but he's loyal to Badass and the Club. Everyone in this room would protect me with their lives so you knowing is a benefit to me."

Falcon and Justice laugh. I shrug.

Ben is looking at Cort. Teller is watching them so I am. Ben finally turns. "If we get that heads-up, it works for us."

I nod knowing it would. "That's why I said it. Jordan is always busy. Someone with more focus while a deadline is forcing a decision works for me."

I hit the jammer and walk to the door but turn back before I open it. "We're done for tonight?"

Teller and Justice nod smiling. "Yeah. The readers at the gate will be next. I'm out." Justice is gone with Teller.

I shake my head. "Later, Brothers." Mase is gone.

I walk out. They're freaky. I hear Ben, "Clear your head, Ari. Bury it and shield."

"Roger, Prez." Ari is a good Brother.

"Keep Maverick covered." Cort thinks I can't keep me safe?

"I got him, Cort." Remo makes me smile. My very own supernanny.

Ben and Ari laugh. I turn back smiling at them.

Chapter Three

Three days

Maverick

Working through email I feel her watching and turn toward the door. Those green eyes are happy this morning. No bruise makes a huge difference in her look or maybe it's the low hung pajama pants and short steampunk T that make her look soft and young. The style she wears is steampunk. Why didn't I see it before? No bruise helps. Before, her green eyes looked faded, like they were fighting the greenish color on her face. Today they shine with a match to that little smile her lips always form. "Morning, beautiful."

Her head shakes as she walks toward me. She's not overly built in any area, she's solid from head to toe like an athlete that works out regularly. I ask about that, "Do you work out?"

She stops almost making it to me. I reach, pulling her hand and forcing her next step. "Not for a year, but I had a treadmill I'd run on daily. I'm always up early and running helps clear my head for the day." Since her dad died.

I nod. "I worked out earlier. We spar twice a week but I work out every morning. I don't sleep much either."

Her head angles showing a graceful line from the collar of her shirt up to her ear. I'd like to taste that right there but slide my hand around her feeling that soft swell of her hips then hidden slope of her back. With a little pressure she leans in so I can kiss her. That kiss to her lips isn't enough. Swiping

her lips with my tongue always gets her to take in a breath and makes taking more possible. Ending with a kiss to her lips, I breathe her in. Everything about her is sweet and feminine including that light scent of vanilla she always has. I know it isn't perfume. It's Josephine.

“When you're ready we have a training igloo that has a treadmill.”

Her eyes stay on mine when she opens them. That's a sexy look right there. “Jacky showed me, he was excited because it's the first igloo he did, I didn't have time to see the rest. I'll be training with the women. Ren said I can join their class in the morning on virtual.”

I nod. “It will show on the board at the training igloo, or you can do it in your igloo or the center yard. They put mat like material for us to do positions and have a pedestal with a keypad that will show a hologram board over it. Ren said you can work out with the brace on.”

My favorite smile hits her face. “Your futuristic world is getting to be my new normal. I understood everything you said.”

Kissing her lips quick I stand. “Good. I want you in my world. Your understanding will get me there.” Pulling the next chair out, I sit her and get her vanilla cream out of the fridge for her coffee. “What's your day look like?”

“Two appointments that can't wait while the mechanics finish filling the toolboxes. Jacky got theirs sanded and painted yesterday. Thanks again for the boxes. He'll do mine today. Your mechanic will have a full set when he starts on Monday.”

“Your mechanic and you’re welcome. Ratchet doesn’t have room for another. He asked about a painter. Picasso doesn’t have enough work to keep him busy. The new BSC bikes come in painted.”

She nods. “Jacky asked me yesterday. I wanted to make sure Ratchet was okay with Picasso splitting time. With them painting houses it will work well. He did a great job on the mustang for Remo.”

I smile bringing the coffee over. “Remo is happy. I didn’t know Picasso could paint cars. I don’t have time to paint right now.” Setting her cup down in front of her, I kiss her cheek and sit.

“I don’t either. I’ll talk to Ratchet about his time. Maddy will handle the front so Jacky was going to come in when I need him. I get enough work to keep them at what they need for the month.” Maddy is not my favorite person. She’s hunting and a bitch.

“The background came back on Maddy. Are you sure you want her there?”

Her look changes to guarded. “I need the help and she ran the business side for her ex in the dental office.”

I nod. “She doesn’t seem to like the men and was arguing with Jacky when I went in yesterday.” I’m not saying she’s a bitch, but she is. Josephine ran for their lunch so Maddy thought she was queen for an hour.

She looks surprised. “Jacky didn’t tell me. I need the help but I don’t want problems at work.”

I nod glad she's not shutting it down. "We have business admin Brothers. HR can hook you up with Brothers to interview. They aren't mechanics but all ride so they'd get when shit goes wrong with a vehicle. Sitting on the side of the road makes us appreciate any help we get."

Her nod relaxes me. "That would give an understanding attitude for people coming in. Maddy was short with a customer after lunch. I explained customer's frustration using a toothache analogy but didn't feel she got it."

"Why did you keep her?"

The shrug and the turn of her head has me watching close. "People don't talk to us. I know they don't know what to say."

Shit. My arm goes around her. "That's fucked up, babe. You've lived here your whole life."

Her eyes go everywhere but back on mine. "I never really fit in. Jacky has always been into everything. I lost the fight to play baseball and it was never forgotten. I don't understand why they aren't showing him more support. When mom died, no one but my dad's friends even called. I had no idea what to do. Jacky was sleeping in the field." A tear rolls down her cheek.

All I can do is hug her. Jesus, that's fucking jacked. "You're here and the Brothers love you both for who you are. You're still working the job you love and can relax. We take care of each other. It's not all on you."

She shakes her head. "This is temporary."

I shake my own head sitting back. “Jacky put an app in. Brotherhood is forever, Jo. That means for you too.”

She wipes her face showing me there’s no makeup to be fucked up. “Ren said I should put an app in. I love it here but I don’t know where all this is going.”

Finally. I smile at her shyness and turn her face my way. “I told you to take your time. It was a lie. I want you to get to where I am fucking quick. We’ve talked cars, bikes, space and the Club. Breakfasts, dinners, dancing, walks and meeting the Brothers has been a lot to take in while losing everything then getting the new place set up. I spend every free minute I have with you just to be close enough to smell your sweet scent and see you smile over my crazy Brothers or new tools. You’ve got my head spinning faster than Earth rotates.”

She stops me from throwing out everything in my head with her laugh. “That’s a thousand miles an hour. My head is there too, I guess.”

I shake my head. “You need to know, beautiful. I know what I want. I know I want it with you and it’s forever.”

“How? This is all so new and nothing like I’ve ever felt.”

I nod. “When you came down this morning I knew. I felt you close and looked for you. At the Club, you felt when I walked back in, you turned knowing I was there. You feel it.” I stop before sounding like I’m trying to convince her. She needs to get there on her own and I know it.

Mucimi has me reaching for my gun. “Fucking Brother. Walk in a fucking room.”

He smiles. “You’re happy here, Jojo. The wedding is your choice and the ancest—“

Teller shows right by him and slaps a hand across his mouth. “He means good morning. Later, Brother, Josephine.” Teller and Mucimi are gone.

My head falls forward. “I’m sorry to say the showing up is normal. He’s never showed so often or talked with a woman but they show when I’m not at work now.”

She smiles with those pretty green eyes dancing. “Did you see the pictures? He’s an amazing man. The one of us cooking with Jacky and an Alpha-Bit I don’t know, was in the same kitchen Aylene showed me.” Aylene showed her pictures too?

“I didn’t get pictures. We’re cooking?” I like cooking. I want to see the pictures.

“It was one right after another until Teller got here. You with the senator, us in a kitchen, us kissing, on your bike, laughing with Cort. It was crazy to see Jacky on the side of us riding. His bike was painted to match his mustang but had Badass on it. His bike is red right now.” She laughs.

“I’m with Kaleb Baxter?” I’ve met him but don’t see him often. I get a look and smile. “Us kissing has happened. I like to cook and look forward to that one.”

“You looked like you were having fun.” There’s my smile.

I kiss it. “Did Mucimi’s pictures of what’s to come help me get what I want?”

“I’m not guessing if that’s what you’re asking. The pictures make it real or something.”

Standing, I lift her ignoring the chair falling over. “That’s what I want. I have to get to work. We’ll talk about us later. I’ll find you.” With a kiss that shows how much I like her knowing we’re happening, she’s breathing heavy when I put her down. “I’ll send HR a heads-up. Call them with specifics. Have a good one, beautiful. I’ll find you.” Lifting the chair quick, I grab my bag and laptop and move.

The job is early today. Remo is at the garage. “Brother. I’m at...”

He smiles. “I got your schedule, Pres. Josephine is good for you.”

I smile getting on my bike. “Yeah.” Hitting my mic on I pull out.

“Morning, Pres. Prospects will have everything moved to the igloos today. The Alpha-Bits are excited.” Finn has the smile staying on my face. He always knows when I click on.

I didn’t see them today and assumed they were sleeping. “It’s safe for them?” A full day off with my girl has me missing shit. I should have checked tracking. I flip my boards on and check as we pull up to the Club.

“Alder has them in the little bunkhouse. The circuit igloo needs three days, Boss. I ordered the sheep, Brother. Haggis, neeps and tatties for dinner tomorrow. I even got the sunflower oil so it’s right.” Shit.

This communal kitchen is going to have me starving. Unless... “I’ll grill for the Brothers that don’t eat sheep gizzards and intestines.”

Finn scoffs in my ear. “They’ll love it. We can eat your grilled leftovers the next day.”

Remo laughs shutting his bike off. “No offense, Finn, but I’ll take the steak.”

“Fuck off, Remo. I should have put your shit on the Protectors compound.”

I laugh going up the stairs. “Let HR know Josephine will be calling for a Brother in business admin for the front of her shop, Finn. Appointments, sales and customer service experience is needed.”

“Roger, Pres. Cort has you blocked for thirty in two.”

Shit. I was heading to Jo’s new place. “Roger.” I need to clear time on my schedule. The new shop is minutes from our gate but I’m short on those minutes.

“Cort’s meetings are short, Brother.” Remo walks beside me to Aero.

“Yeah. I wanted to make sure the bitch that gave Jacky shit yesterday doesn’t give Josephine shit for not giving her the job.”

“If you’re in the building, I’ll go. She was there when they got hurt but only to fall all over the Brothers. She never asked about them when the medic truck left. Jacky said she’s never been friendly to them.”

I'm glad he's pissed, I am too. "No one even called them when their mom died. Not knowing what to say isn't good enough. They lost mom and dad within a year."

He grunts. "What the fuck is wrong with these people? I was at the restaurant with Finn and customers were talking about Josephine and the fire. They get their cars fixed there but talk shit about her finally getting a real job. They think her dad should have taught Jacky the trade. They're both smart and talented with good heads on their shoulders. Fucking people need to get a clue. Finn was pissed but said to hold it. He thinks more is going on."

I stop in my tracks. "More?"

Remo shrugs. "Ask him. I think they're just pissed she's a woman. He said the neighbors north would have seen the smoke even with the wind and cloud cover. It's a nice piece of land that has lake access." Lake rights are big around here.

With a nod I get to aero before I'm late but can't shake the feeling that I'm missing something. Walking in I turn to Remo. "I'm in the building. Get to Josephine's and keep watch. Jacky didn't tell her about the bitch yesterday. I'm missing something so I want everything covered. Let Finn know to cover Josephine so his gut feeling isn't missed."

"Roger, Pres. I'll wait for Enforcers in the hall while I call in to Finn."

"I'm on and he's right, Pres, we're missing something. I've got you covered, Remo. Your third is with you. I'm splitting the Enforcer Team with you." Finn has me shaking my head, but I have shit to do.

“I’m cutting the mic. Send alerts to my watch.” I hit it before Finn answers and throw chin to Remo.

Mars, Nero, Kwan and Mooney turn when I step into the control room. “Brothers.” I throw out at their greetings.

“Maverick, this is with the Joint Space Operation Center watching closely because we’re sending debris by the International Space Station and Mr. Lewis wants to see how we’re cleaning that debris.” Mars points to a board with a suit watching us. She’s not happy.

I nod to Lewis not liking him up on our boards. “Lewis, it’s been a while. We send data for everything we do. You have everything we’ve done until this morning. Why are you here?”

“It was brought to our attention that you’re being paid to clean debris but not how that debris is removed so it’s guaranteed not to create a meteor shower that comes back then into the atmosphere.”

Mars turns my way rolling her eyes. I shake my head. “If it was brought to your attention, you should read the data. You should also know this job is for the collaboration of space agencies and paid to us by NASA to remove the debris that will be close to the ISS. You have no jurisdiction here. Your questions will be answered when you read the data already sent. If you’d asked, I’m sure Mars would have told you. Caspian, close Lewis down and do not let another agency show on my boards without my permission.”

“Roger, Pres.” Caspian has the board black before Lewis thinks of a comeback.

Mars relaxes. “He threatened us with some oversight from the Air Force Space Innovation and Development Center.”

I shake my head. “He wants how we’re getting paid and for what. He’s got a stake in the Texas morons that threw pellets out to make a fake meteor shower for a college football game. Satellites were hit and are trying to get money for damages. If they win, Lewis is screwed because he approved the launch and was found as a backer.”

Mars shakes her head. “How do you know that?”

I smile. “He was our commander. I hate the fuck. Solar on the satellites is a given. I thought moving them regularly should be normal. He shot it down. It wasn’t until I launched the first with more mobility options that it became the normal. Here we have battery storage and collectors giving maximum return that he’d definitely shoot down until his back-room buddies can make a buck off of it. For me, it’s always been about how far we can go. I’m not motivated by the money we generate.”

Mooney smiles my way. “He shut you down then had us building everything with more solar panels. I never gave him anything. I just did what he said. Development was supposed to be about us coming up with new ideas. He never let us.”

I nod. “I lasted for over six fucking months with that asshole. I retired happy to get away from him. I ended up with you and Mars. It wasn’t all bad.”

They both smile with a thanks. Mars nods toward the board. Mooney watches his control console monitor. “Get

Aero IT up from ABSZ.” Mars watches the board with the ISS on the edge.

When she turns, I know what she’s going to ask and nod. “Get with NASA for the call.”

“Roger, Boss.” She smiles right out. “Anton, can you get me NASA? We’d like the reaction from the ISS.”

Anton’s hands stop and eyes look for her on his board. “ISS. I call ISS Astronaut?”

Mars nods. “You speak more languages than I do. Translate for us if it isn’t English.”

He’s going to pass out. Everyone hides their smiles at his face paling to a scary white then the Cheshire grin that’s going to split his face. “Roger, Boss. NASA use Cisco Softphone software. I connect direct to ISS.”

“Holy shit, Anton. Is that legal? He’s hacking software for flight approved laptops.” Caspian turns my way looking nervous.

I shrug. “We sent it up and monitor.”

His eyebrows go up making Mars laugh. Anton stops that. “Badass Aero Technologies calling astronaut International Space Station for aerospace Op removing space debris set to move to you airspace. Head of Operations, Boss Mars connected.”

Russian comes back and Mars answers the debris will hit their airspace in three minutes. The astronaut gets where from Anton then asks about him working. I’m shocked when Anton tells him he was a lab experiment from the CIA. They

go on while the astronaut moves for a better view but I'm pissed.

Mars directs Mooney to shoot. The astronaut laughs talking to Anton like he's his new buddy. The second laser burst moves the satellite frame away from the ISS and we hear a cheer from other astronauts.

Caspian smiles. "I heard English in there."

"Boss Mars, we move second large frame junk?" Anton asks.

Mars nods. "It's set for three. The second will hit a satellite if we move it now."

"Roger, Boss Mars. Commander, second job later. Now make more junk. Satellite in path."

I'm surprised by the southern accented English "We don't need more junk, partner. We'll breathe easier when the second is gone. Space walks aren't easy dodging debris."

"Roger, Commander. Badass Aero Technology out."

"Hold on there, little guy. Will we get a call for the next? The debris had us holding up a mission." The commander must be fucking bored as hell.

Anton looks at me. I shrug. Anton smiles. "NASA you Boss, Commander. I give heads-up to you next junk close. Three mountain time I call."

"Appreciate it, little partner. I'll get with NASA before that."

Anton looks at us with his brows raised and shoulders up. I shrug. We don't need what he's doing. "Roger,

Commander.” Is all he says then types. His monitor goes black.

I shake my head at him. “Good job, Anton, space geeks. Anton, call me from your tablet in five.” Turning toward Mars I point to my office. “I need ten.”

Pulling Web and Alder up I let them know what just happened. Web looks like he’s holding back tears and Alder is pissed. “Experiment word not allowed. Pres Cort fucking pissed he hear Anton say.”

I nod. “I’ll make the point. Did you decide if he’s coming here for Aero?”

Alder looks at Web. “I not decide, here he do good to VP Teller. Lessons to Badass getting through.”

I nod. “Can he do them from here? I can ask Teller. He shows all the time lately.”

Web laughs. Alder nods. “You ol’ lady need help he show. Boss Mucimi show?”

I nod. “All the fucking time.”

“I send Anton to Aero. Ol’ lady, town need help, Boss Mucimi there. He good role model to Anton. VP Teller close.”

I nod then back him up. “Town needs help?”

He rolls his eyes. “Women movement no work there. Talk Pres Cort to crazy plan. I have meet in two.” He swipes me off.

Web laughs. “He’s a busy Brother. Are you sure you can handle Anton? You’ve got nitro all over the fucking place there, Maverick.”

I smile. “You think he’ll make a suit to fly? I have the power pack for the back done. I bet he could run it through a suit.”

His head is shaking. “Don’t blow my kids up, Maverick. *Everyone* will kill you for that one including me.”

I wave it off. “I need to answer him. Later, Brother.” I swipe them off and Anton on. Anton shows in an office with small furniture. “You want to move here and work Aero?” I didn’t know the Alpha-Bits office was done.

He makes a face, “Alder no answer.” The slump shows he thinks that’s going to be no.

I nod. “He let me decide.”

He perks right up. “I do all my work, Pres Maverick. VP Teller teach me lesson to Bible. I—”

My hand stops what looks to be building into a ten minute pitch. “Save it for Mars. If I ever hear the experiment word come out of your mouth again, I’m shipping you back to Web and taking you off anything Aero. Every little Brother that was behind you heard that. You never give them a reason to think they’re *just experiments*. Those are my Brothers too. They’re treated with respect for the fucking phenomenal jobs they do and people they help. *Never* are they thought of by me or my Brothers as experiments. You all carry names, use them. If you’re asked why you’re working, you say because I can. If they need more, Control will deal. Are we clear?”

He looks up with tears rolling down his face. “Roger, Pres Maverick. I apologize to Alpha-Bits. I make you proud to me work Aero.” He normally talks better than that. He’s upset

but I can't take it from him. He needs to learn those words hurt.

“You need to make *you* proud, Anton. I'm always proud of the Alpha-Bits. We have more jobs for today. Let's get back to work.”

He's surprised then salutes me. Shit, he's not going to make being tough with him easy. I think I'm fucked. I love Anton and his antics.



Josephine

Jacky slams the brakes on but my feet are braced and ready. “I need to teach you how to drive. It will save me from building motors, transmissions and replacing brakes on everything you’re in.”

He slams the door. “Dad said I’m a good driver.”

I smile. “You didn’t slam the brakes on, three feet from the shop doors, did you?”

“He’d have fucking killed me.” Jacky looks at me as if I’m off.

The security guys laugh. I nod. “You were a good driver as long as he was in the truck. Now you’re a nut with no fear.”

“You drive like a bat out of hell.” He pushes the door up after scanning his hand.

I nod. “I do. I also give myself plenty of time to brake and slow as soon as I see kids or movement on the sides of roads.”

“I can do that. I only have your box today. I’m getting it finished and I’m out of here before Atilla the Hun shows up.” He’s moving toward the back so I follow.

“What happened yesterday?”

Flipping the box over he rolls it closer to the bench. “Her dad wants to buy the old shop. I said she has to talk to you. Dad’s friend left him that land. She wouldn’t stop, then went off on Perry for working here. I didn’t know his sister was gay. He walked out until you got back. Everything that

happens in town is your fault. If you took better care of Ma, she'd be alive. If you didn't work, I wouldn't be running wild wrecking Mrs. Lima's place. If you weren't a bad influence, Perry's sister wouldn't be gay. They don't know much, but sure know how to make what they do know sound good to the good ol' boy network." He starts sanding.

I unplug the sander from the compressor fitting on the wall. "Why didn't you tell me yesterday?" Their ridiculous opinions aren't new. Perry's sister is to them, I guess, but they have better shit than that to blame me for. I never cared what they say and know Jacky isn't hurt by it.

He looks out to the bays in the center. The mechanics are just getting here. "It wouldn't matter. They're going to say whatever the hell they want. You aren't keeping her anyway. She's only here until she can land a Brother or you sell her dad the old shop dirt cheap. You're not an idiot and the Brothers ignore her. When she made a play for Maverick, he had us all laughing. She was pissed she couldn't land *your* guy."

I walk away. She made a play for Maverick? When did everyone decide he's mine and why didn't they tell me? I like that he's my guy. He's the most honest, direct and compassionate man I ever met.

I shake off the Maverick mooning and go right to Perry at the counter in the store front. "Jacky just told me what happened yesterday. Maddy isn't getting the job. I have a guy from the club that's supposed to be good trying out today. He's business admin and worked in his uncle's garage as a teen. That means he'll do all the shit you don't like and free you up

some. I'm sorry about Maddy's bullshit, Perry. How is Belinda doing?"

He shakes his head keeping his eyes off mine. "She's hurt and sorry they dragged you into her town drama." He turns so he's looking right at me. "She thinks you're going to fire me. I told her you don't give a shit."

I smile. "I don't. They've got new material so they'll leave everyone else alone for a while."

He nods without the smile. "They think you'll leave now that Mrs. Lima kicked Jacky out and you're selling the house."

I shake my head with my arms out to the side. "Mrs. Lima didn't kick Jacky out and was happy the club had a family to rent the house to. They're a little shortsighted, If I'm leaving, why would I open this?"

He shrugs. "I'm just repeating what I heard at the hardware store."

"Whatever. See if you can get Belinda to pick up our lunch order, then order it."

He smiles. "I will. She was off last night so she should be awake. It will calm her down. Someday she's going to go postal on them and they'll blame you for that too."

My eyes burn. "Yeah. Reality was never a prerequisite to live here. I need to get to work." I see two bikes pull in and move to the bays blinking my eyes.

"Jo," Perry calls before I'm through the door.

Looking over my shoulder, I don't answer but let him know I'm listening. "Thanks for keeping us all working. You could have walked away. We're all glad you didn't and are happy you've got Maverick behind you. The town will change because of the club. Some are already seeing it."

Turning my face to the bays I shake my head. "They've never mattered, Perry. I'll keep doing me and live my life my way." Turning back, I smile. "I can't wait for them to hear Jacky is painting for the Indians."

He laughs. "We should eat at the restaurant."

"I don't mind waiting for them to get that. I've got shit to do that doesn't involve gossip." I shake my head letting the door close.

Remo is standing by the open bay door. "Is everything okay?"

I nod. "I don't know. You're here without Maverick. Is he okay?"

He smiles showing his teeth. Why is that funny? "He's in Ops then has a meet. A Brother is showing from HR. I'm making sure it's a good fit."

This was already settled. I just nod. "I need to get to work."

"Go for it."

The cars and motorcycles are a mess. Jacky and Picasso will clean them up when the new detail equipment and supplies come in. My bike was closer to the building and has more damage than the rest. I push it outside the third bay. When Jacky is done, I'll pull it in, get it on one of the

motorcycle lifts and start working on it. Turning back, I'm stopped by Maddy's dad cutting me off from the back. I'm glad Maddy is in the car, but she is glaring at me.

"What do you mean not hiring my girl?" He's here to stand up for 'his girl' that's my age?

"I mean to hire the best person for the job. Since she wasn't happy here, I called and told her it wasn't a good fit. She didn't have a problem when I called. Why do you?"

He's out of the car and pointing his finger in my face faster than I thought he could move. Remo steps in front of me so I step to the side. "I guess you're only disabled some of the time. I'm glad to see you up and walking just fine without your walker. Now that the cameras have that. I have work to do."

"Is that a threat!" His whole head turns red.

I shake my head. "I have no reason to threaten anyone. That's what you do. I'm going to work. Maddy will work better in an office. She doesn't like the mechanics, customers or smell of the shop. Since I got that from her when I called, I don't know why you're here."

"The bikers are taking all the jobs in town!"

Remo puts a hand on Melvin's chest. "Your problem isn't with Josephine it's with me. The jobs the Brothers take are in businesses the Club opened. We have a shit load of civilians working in our businesses."

"Get your hands off me or I'll sue you!" Melvin darts to the side getting stopped by a security guy.

I start walking away but stop when Remo laughs. “Looks like you have no problem walking. Hold him still so IT can get a nice clean shot for face recognition.”

“You can’t take his picture without his permission!” Maddy starts ranting about her rights. I shake my head. Why did they come here?

“You’re on private property and you’re taking pictures of the Brothers with your phone, are you sure you want to use that one?” Jacky has to chime in now. At least it’s a logical question.

Perry and Bobby come out to see the side show. “Melvin, you look so good standing straight. Your buddies are going to fall at your feet when they see the miracle Jo performed right outside her shop. Remo can you get the video sent to me. I can’t wait for Belinda to get here. She’s got all the town social pages on her phone.” Perry makes me smile.

Melvin and Maddy are yelling up a storm when the Deputy car stops behind Melvin’s. My life is really a series of unfortunate events. Mucimi scares the hell out of me but I smile. He can be my bright for the next hour that I’m *not* working. “Hey, Mucimi.”

“Melvin?” Deputy Kramer nods to Remo. “What’s this got to do with the Club?” He looks right at me, of course. Maddy and Melvin are going on about whatever but no one is listening. Deputy Kramer is watching Melvin move so it’s not all for nothing.

I talk as if the nuts aren’t here. “Beats me. I talked to Maddy this morning about not hiring her. She agreed it’s not her kind of job and we were good. Now Melvin is here, I

healed him so he's better and they were just leaving. Remo has the video so he can explain."

Remo and Mucimi laugh. "Josephine is Pres's ol' lady. The dipshits were fucking with her when she has his protection. The feeds are with the sheriff now. Remove them from the premises or I will." Remo is smiling but it's a scary smile.

The deputy nods. "Melvin, get in the car and go home."

"He should go to church and thank God for sending him to Jo today," Perry needs to shut the hell up.

"He wasn't hurt. He needed the money when the Arby's burned down. He's trying to buy Jojo's land with government money for disabled people. Now he doesn't have a job, the government money or a mechanic. His car is overheating." Mucimi makes me smile.

The Brothers are all laughing.

Maddy starts getting loud again. I walk away. They're all crazy.



The back lot is calm and quiet. Two cars are up on lifts. I check in with Bobby and Ken. Bobby is changing a water hose with a pinhole leak and Ken is putting a tire on. I check the computer seeing the van is aligned.

"They need to fix the roads so this isn't costing people a fortune."

Ken nods. “They’re moving from the village to town. She got a new job. She’s moving to the new subdivision. They have a pool and park for the kids.”

This is good. “It looks good, Ken. Does she need anything else done?”

“Nah, she’s all set today. You took care of her last time so I went ahead and put on a new tailpipe. I cut it from what we had.” He didn’t list it on the computer.

“Good job. Add it on our notes.”

He nods. “I did but not her copy.”

“Perfect. I’ll explain it to the new guy if Perry didn’t.” Inside I see Janice. “Ken is almost done, Janice.”

She smiles looking happier than I’ve seen since her husband left her and the kids. “Thanks, Josephine. I’m on in an hour.”

“Ken told me you’re moving. I’m happy for you and the kids. The roads alone will help.”

She beams back at me. “We finished yesterday. My boss got men to move all the big stuff. The kids are excited, I’m excited, I never expected any of this when I took the job.”

“You deserve it. Working shouldn’t be without a life. I heard you took them on a hike and Cammy is going to be a trail runner.” Her eight-year-old daughter is cute.

Perry laughs, “Cammy could. She reminds me of you and Janice.”

That gets another smile out of Janice but Ken comes in so she’s up and moving to the register.

I go to the office to check on the customers for tomorrow. Six is good. We're not completely up but we're closer to being organized in the new space than we were.

"Jojo!" Jacky has me running.

He's at the door to the bays looking toward the back station. "What is it, Jacky?"

"Come see this." He gives a quick look toward me but doesn't connect with my eyes before the door closes and he's walking. Shit.

The new guy is smiling so it can't be bad. "Thanks for dealing with the nut," I say walking by.

He follows me. "No problem. I gave her the old hose for her husband. She left happy."

People are crazy. Her husband called yelling about nothing wrong with the hose. Our new guy shut him up asking, *'Why would you send her to a garage if there was no problem?'*, making Perry smile at me. Numbers is good with customers...and numbers apparently. Perry left him to it and we got the car wash running. It will add income with little expense so I'm pumped. Mucimi has banner flags out. I didn't see him, but Jacky said Mucimi put them by the road.

The mechanics are around the motorcycle lift talking with the security guys, but I don't see Remo. "What's going on, guys?"

Jacky turns, pulling me through the wall of men. "Picasso came by to set up the bay in the metal building for painting. He's got my bike done but won't touch yours. Do you want it painted?"

My eyes are on his bike. A security guy is helping get the front wheel on. The frame is the same blue as the mustang, I hold my hand across my forehead. I'm right here looking at the painted frame that is together in Mucimi's picture. "It's blue like the mustang."

Jacky smiles. "Yeah. I love the color. The red with flames is everywhere."

He picks up the gas tank to show me the Badass in flames on the side of it. I nod like this isn't right out of the Twilight Zone. "That's a nice color, Jacky. My bike has some damage from the building."

Picasso shakes his head. "That wasn't from the building. The gas cap was off. Someone hit it over but there wasn't enough gas to blow it."

For real? "It was close to empty. Jojo was thinking of painting it to match the GTO. Chrome and black, baby." Jacky jumps in.

I keep my eyes on Picasso. He's a couple of years older than Jacky in street smarts. "Gas cap would hold prints."

A security guy nods. "Pres had us bring shit to the surveillance IT guy that was forensics. I think his name is Micro. He works with the sheriff's detective. They only have one in this county."

"Do you ever feel like your life is not really yours?"

They start laughing but stop quick. "I hope that's because you feel it's ours."

I spin fast. "Maverick. I didn't hear anyone pull up."

“Is that a no? I love the clothes, beautiful.” He’s a nut. The guys laugh taking steps back.

“Definitely not a no. This is the bike Mucimi showed me Jacky riding this morning. Picasso painted it for him and they’re just putting it back together.”

He nods like that was a normal thing to say. Jacky says, “Mucimi is fucking scary with the pictures. He showed me you and Maverick with a little boy.” That is less normal. A boy.

My head whips around so fast I hold my neck. “I didn’t see that one.” Oh my God. A boy. I have a baby boy. I reach as if by someone else moving my hand and touch Maverick’s stomach. “I hope you want kids.”

They’re laughing again but Maverick is watching me then bends and lifts me right up. “You’re white as a ghost. I want kids whenever you make that call.” With a kiss to my head, he walks right out the bays to a truck and sits me on the tailgate. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. It’s a lot to know when I’m just getting the crazy bike I saw turning real.”

He kisses my head and keeps my hands in his. At least he doesn’t think I’m crazy. Anyone else on the planet would.



Maverick

Fucking Mucimi and the pictures. “It is, beautiful. A boy.” Shaking my head, I pull her hand to my lips. “Thank you in advance. My heart is ready to jump ship.”

She smiles looking better than a few seconds ago. “Mine too. How the hell does everyone deal with this shit?”

I think about the amazing Justice League. “It just is. I’ve seen some but am learning more just lately. They fly through the Club and appear at any given time. I know that’s crazy but it’s normal for them. Like the Alpha-Bits figuring shit out. It just is. They’ve been living it for so long it’s normal for them.”

“I can see that. Mucimi showed earlier. I didn’t think anything of it. He put out the flags at the road.”

I smile. “He’s a helpful Brother on top of the freaky kid shit.”

“He is.” She agrees quick with more color in her face. I love those eyes.

“Remo said you had some trouble but didn’t let it stress you out.” I wouldn’t mind a day or seven to get her away from all this.

“It was just Melvin being Melvin. He’s got some explaining to the town people to do so I’m safe from his ranting for a while.” She’s unbelievable.

Bending, I take the kiss I want then set her back on the truck bed. “You’re amazing, beautiful. Do you have plans for lunch?”

She nods. “Perry’s sister is bringing it. She’s the woman I turned gay by being a bad influence, according to the GOB network.”

“What the hell is a GOB network?” I know it’s not Global Operation Baseline.

“Good ol’ boys’ network. They make shit up to fit the off the wall reasoning they use to keep reality at bay. My dad would have found me turning Perry’s sister gay funny. I ignore them.”

I don’t find this funny. “That doesn’t work when they show here.”

Shit, she looks away. “I didn’t invite them. Like the freaky and Alpha-Bits, it just is. This is normal for me, Maverick. Are you sure you’re ready for *my* normal?”

It’s not her normal for long. “I’m more than ready and glad you brought it up. I have the Prospects moving you to my new igloo. We’re sleeping there tonight.” As soon as she takes a breath in, I go on. “I’m not saying we’re doing anything but sleeping, but you’re in my bed by my side.” As unlikely as that is, I give her an out.

Pink moves up her face. “Okay.” She’s got my head spinning before my lips are on hers again.

The car speeding around the corner has my lips off hers and gun pointed at the car. The woman raises her hands screeching to a stop.

Josephine pushes my arm down. “That’s Belinda. I’ll talk to Perry. She needs tires before it snows.”

Tires? I holster my gun and put my hand up for Remo and the Security Brothers. “She’s a friend of Josephine’s and has their lunch.”

“Everyone’s lunch.” Jacky goes to the car. “Perry said to pull into the first bay.”

I turn to Josephine. “Your world is a little crazy. You bought lunch for everyone?”

She looks at the car going by. “The restaurant was too busy to take the order. Belinda works at the hospital so she got it from their cafeteria.”

“They weren’t too busy. They haven’t heard about Melvin yet. He goes there every day for breakfast. I bet he told them about Maddy not working for you.” Bobby sounds disgusted.

I shake my head taking a deep breath with my eyes closed. “Get your food from the Club’s businesses. There’s a diner, sandwich shop, pub restaurant and steak place. They won’t turn you away.”

When my eyes open Josephine is watching me. “I will. Belinda handled it. I like the new sandwich shop but wanted a meal. I missed breakfast trying to talk to everyone this morning then make it here on time.”

I nod. “The Club dining room does breakfast to-go. Call before you leave and they’ll get you fed. I should have made you breakfast.”

She laughs pushing me a step back and hopping off the bed. “I’m hungry now. Thanks for the ideas. I’m able to cook when I have the food and time. Breakfast isn’t a

specialty, but I make some mean dinners.” All this is said as she pulls me into the bays. A worktable is papered and food is going on it from the car’s backseat.

Letting Josephine’s hand go so she can help, I look at Nick, the Lead for Security. “Food is from the Brothers businesses.”

He nods. “Roger, Pres. She ordered subs last time. I didn’t know. The people here have a target on your girl. They give her shit for everything that happens here.”

I nod. “I heard. When Cort shows again, I’ll get a plan to stop that.”

Nick smiles. “This will be fun. He held a woman’s movement in the streets of town and had firemen hosing dicks hung on buildings.”

I saw the feed. “Yeah. Ranger was burned by someone reacting to that woman’s movement. Keep your Team focused so your Brothers stay safe.”

He loses the smile and nods. “I will, Pres. Cort and Ranger’s ol’ ladies didn’t take shit either. That dick burnt Seren’s house and went after Freedom. He’s lucky he didn’t find her first.”

Ranger killed him so I’m not sure that’s true, but he remembers and that’s what I wanted. I drop waters in groups around the line of food on the table. Remo has Security eating first while his Team is outside. I always feel a sense of pride when the Brothers stand to relieve another Team member. I don’t know why, it’s not like I do anything but sit and eat.

Remo would have heart failure if I spelled a Brother. I still feel it when they get up.

Remo sits by me with a smile. “It kills you to sit here.”

“Fuck off.”

He laughs pulling a tray toward him. “Nick said they have good food.”

Belinda, who is across from him, answers. “It’s from the hospital the next county over.”

“You should come to the Club. They have good food there too,” Jacky tells her.

Remo shakes his head. “She’d need a card to get food or drinks. Your ID is charged for the food if you let her in as a guest of yours. They don’t sell food out of the Club. The new diner does, it’s the same food, almost.”

Josephine puts her fork down. She ate everything on her tray. “Our sandwiches came in a fabric bag like the deli uses.”

A Security Brother points at the styrofoam trays. “The other places do reusable trays to cut down on trash. No plastic bags or styrofoam in the Club. The Alpha-Bits wouldn’t eat from these.”

I look at Remo seeing he’s watching this. He is and answers before I can. “They wouldn’t. Phoenix and Princes don’t do anything but paper and fabric. The Little Brothers print the trays for the businesses out of recycled plastic. Asa had the printer built for us, but the Little Brothers didn’t have a Lead until now. They just started making their own trays.

Tyson shipped them over when we opened the diner and restaurant. The sub shop needs plates. They'll learn and build them next with the Champion Little Brothers." My supernanny works with the kids when he's not scheduled and knows more than I thought.

Belinda is interested. "The schools use styrofoam. The kids should make trays for them."

I watch Josephine. That small smile she's always wearing makes me want to kiss her. Something about her lips always turned up is sexy to me. She has to work to frown and I like that thought.

"Why are you smiling while you're watching me?" That small smile turns my way waiting for an answer.

I kiss it. "I like that you're always smiling."

She rolls her eyes. "We did that one already."

I shrug. "I still like it. You'll have to get used to it."

"She makes a great clown and elf. Halloween and Christmas are big with Jo." Bobby regularly supplies me with information. I worked with him getting the tool boxes in place yesterday.

"I can't wait to see her in an elf costume." My dick likes the picture of that costume I have in my head. It's her leather and gothic style, that must be fucking hot.

"It's for a good cause. Leave her alone." Belinda has me turning her way. She's got her hand over Bobby's mouth reminding me of the Justice League holding their hands over Mucimi's mouth.

Remo laughs. “The Prospects are elves for us. They hate the costumes.”

“Jo’s is hot.” Ken says getting hit by Jacky.

“Shut the fuck up. That’s my sister.”

“We have a customer coming in. We need to start cleaning up. Belinda, can you drop the extra at the senior center on your way out?” Perry takes charge of the repacking with Numbers and one from the Security Team helping load the car up. My Team finishes moving the table and trash as they’re done.

Josephine looks proud. “The guys fit right in here.”

I nod thinking the same thing. “They do. What are you doing now?”

Shots stop her from answering. Remo moves in front of me fucking fast. I hit my piece on and pull Josephine and Belinda to the back of the bay just as a car comes through the front. Remo’s second moves us out the door of the next bay and stands in front of us with his gun out so I move to his side.

“This fuck again! Get the first bay door up.” Remo doesn’t yell often. I move to see what the fuck is going on.

The door holding the car back doesn’t tell me much. Jo holds my hand walking closer. “Melvin?” She asks.

“It’s the bitch.” Remo is pissed.

I watch and listen. Security gets her out of the car. Jo has Perry get the tow truck ready and Numbers call the sheriff. I don’t know who this woman is until she starts yelling about her dad. It’s the bitch Maddy from yesterday. Josephine is

watching with that little smile. I bet that's what sets people off.

I smile putting my arm around her shoulder and lean down. "The way your lips naturally tip up must make them all crazy. It's got to be a slap in the face as they do stupid shit and you just watch with your little smile."

Belinda laughs putting her arm around Josephine's waist on the other side. "It's her resting bitch face. She just doesn't get why it annoys the crap out of everyone. I love it and have looked at ways to get that look from a plastic surgeon. If I looked like Jo, it would work. With my face, I just look like the joker."

I laugh. Josephine turns so I can't see her face, but I know she's not smiling. "You didn't."

Belinda nods leaning forward so she can see me. "If you're mad, are you going to be happy with her smile always showing?"

I smile. "I love the smile and the chance of her pissing me off are way less than me pissing her off. I love that little smile."

She freezes then Josephine freezes. Oh fuck. I breathe deep. "She's moving in today. I'm not fucking around with games, she wouldn't be moving in if I didn't love her."

Belinda starts yelling louder than Maddy's argument with everyone. Jo jumps me with my smile on her sweet lips. I take them hearing the fucking peanut gallery getting louder. Setting her down I see tears pooling in those bright eyes. She's happy, then mauled by the jumping screeching nut. I shake my

head letting Josephine go so she doesn't get broken by Belinda. "Remo get tape on her fucking mouth."

Confusion stares back at me. "The bitch or the pogo stick screeching?"

I laugh with Jacky and Bobby. "The bitch, Brother."

"Roger, Pres."

Josephine is trying to calm Belinda. The noise is unreal for the amount of people in here. I need a fucking drink but walk closer to Remo as he's taping right around her head. "I like it. Mase said that's how they do it."

He nods. "They all do it. Adrian is teaching it in class. This is a good one to try it on. She gives me a headache." It has quieted down considerably.

I'm glad her hands are cuffed. He'd have another ache by the sound of her muffled scream and twisting shoulders. The bitch is fighting mad. Once he's got the duct tape wrapped around her head twice, he holds her face still. "Cut the shit or I'll go around five more times like we do with men. You're lucky it was only twice."

I don't say it but she's not lucky. That duct tape is going to rip her bleached blonde hair apart. A deputy shows shaking his head. "Stay away from the shop and Josephine wasn't clear?"

Josephine comes out putting her arm around my back. That feels good. Mine goes over her shoulder. "She missed the warning, beautiful."

That small smile makes me smile. Maddy must see it as smug. She tries to jerk away from Remo. "VP, get someone

to snap that pic of Pres and Josephine. The bitch likes that one. Jacky can put it on her Facebook page.”

I laugh watching Jo. Now she’s smiling. “They can do that? I want it. I’ll save it as my screensaver.”

Finn laughs in my ear. “I’ll have Caspian send it to her and post it, we have the bitch’s info up. Tell your girl to sign the police report so she can charge the towing to the car insurance. I’ll send it over to Numbers.”

“Thanks, Finn. He said to sign the statement so you can bill the towing to the car insurance. He’s sending it to Numbers. Finn, I’m hitting the piece off. It’s mayhem here.”

She smiles bigger. “I love you and your Brothers.”

That takes no time to reach every cell in my body. My mouth is on hers and I hear muted screams with Jacky and Belinda in the background. I swing Josephine up watching her brace so I don’t hurt her leg and carry her away. “Write the report and she’ll sign it.” I say to whoever over my shoulder.

In her office, I kick the door closed and let her legs drop, getting my lips back on hers. “Say it without the yelling, screeching and muted scream.”

I love my smile and those bright eyes to match it. “I love you, Maverick. What’s your full name?”

“Maverick Wyatt Marshal. What’s yours?”

“Your first name is Maverick? Did your dad want you to be a policeman?”

I shrug. “I don’t know. He was a pilot. His name was Wyatt Marshall.”

“Those names have some old western ties on them. I love you, Maverick Wyatt Marshal.”

I nod. “What’s your middle name?”

“Bonnie.”

I smile. “You’ve got your own western ties going on. Josephine Bonnie Marshal sounds like someone I’d love.”

She giggles taking me by surprise. “I like that sound. You need to do that more often.” I don’t give her a chance to right now because I’m lifting and kissing her again.

Banging on the door has me growling. I set Josephine Bonnie Marshal down and open the door to a smiling Remo. “It’s you because they know I’ll shoot them?”

He smiles bigger and I’m contemplating breaking in a new supernanny. “Cort’s at the Club. I don’t think you want him down here.”

“Why not?”

“A bunch of yahoos are out there yelling now.”

I nod. “Have someone chopper him over. He’ll have a good plan.”

He laughs. “VP said to turn your piece on, Maverick Marshal.”

I hit my piece on. “I’m still contemplating breaking in a new supernanny. Fuck off, Remo.” I slam the door on him and Finn is in my ear.

“Sorry about the Marshal, Pres. Jacky asked Remo what Josephine’s last name will be. I thought everyone knew.”

“Did you have something for me?” I take Josephine’s hand holding a finger up so she knows I’m talking to Finn.

“Cort’s here. Mars said to get word the next is still at three. Do you need your glasses?”

“Fuck. I have them. I’ll be on before she’s ready at three. Anton needs to be on.”

“He’s with Cort and Ranger. A truck with his shit came through about twenty minutes ago. I sent it to Mabon and Zachon at the compound. Aren’t they supposed to be going back or moving on?”

I shake my head wanting to be done with Finn. “Alder has another crew at the MC right now. Our guys wanted to stay until they’re due at Elan in a week. Anton needs to call the astronauts on the space station. He knows all their languages and the commander likes him.”

“The Brothers are going to like the Alpha-Bits here longer. Tomorrow is racing. Cort’s back on the chopper. Ranger is flying him over. Anton looks like he’s running the halls this way.”

“Roger. Make sure you have someone on him every fucking minute. Call me or hit me on my watch. I’m out.” I hit him off.

“Roger, Pres.” My watch goes off.

I shake my head. “Fucking Brothers. Cort is on his way.”

Josephine laughs. “Your watch is a radio?”

I shake my head. “I’ll explain later. The deputy is going to have a statement ready any second. I have an Aero Op at three. Can I use this office if I’m still here?”

She nods slowly. “You’re using my office to talk to the International Space Station?”

I nod. “The debris isn’t hitting their airspace for a few days, but we have a window to get rid of it today, at three. I’m not talking to them unless they need me. Anton and Mars do that shit. Can I use your office?”

“Of course. Does Cort have his dish? Is that the plan?”

I laugh. “I don’t know. He sent me a dish so I’ll get it here for him if he wants it. Remo used it once. It’s a lot of trouble transporting dicks so we just call for a deputy to pick-up. The one Remo pulled almost went over a cliff. The sheriff should be on this side of the range.”

She smiles. “I really love your world. Thank you.”

I kiss her until the knocking starts. Lifting my head, I hear the chopper lowering. “Brace, beautiful. It’s time for crazy to start.” With a quick kiss I move us.

She giggles holding on to me as I open the door. “I can’t wait.”

The deputy isn’t happy. I don’t give a fuck. “The statement is ready?”

“The sheriff is on his way with help to contain the crowd.”

I hit my mic on. “Finn, get every available Team and trainee here.”

“Roger, Boss.” He’s off fast.

“Next time let Remo know before you’re in over your head.”

The dick gives me a look. “Bikers will only make it worse.”

I smile taking a step forward causing him to scramble back. When he does, I guide Josephine out. “We’ll see in a minute.”

Numbers is up and following us to the bays then right out the front with Security following. Remo’s Team is at the door and around the lot keeping people away from the deputy’s car. Why is he alone? He’s got Maddy in the back of the car.

When he stops at the car I keep going to Remo and ask. “What’s a deputy doing here alone?”

“He was here alone earlier. He let Melvin and the bitch go with a verbal warning.”

I didn’t see the feed. “Finn, I’ll need the feed from earlier and this one sent to the sheriff and me.”

“Roger, Pres. Security is pulling out now. Cort’s Security is with him.”

“Thanks, Brother.”

Angel and Marco are in front of Cort and Ranger when the crowd sees them come through the third bay door with Brothers behind them and quiets down. I smile hearing the muffled bikes getting closer.

“We prepared for crazy. Josephine asked if you are going to use the dish.”

Cort smiles like he’s getting pictures done. Ranger laughs pulling Josephine away to hug her. “I’ll pull it for you.”

Jacky comes running. “I’m in on the dick-in-a-dish. I know everyone that deserves it personally and can make a list.”

I don’t think that’s what Jo had in mind but she’s smiling. Cort looks at me. “What’s happening here?”

“I just came out. The sheriff is on his way with more deputies. This one has been here twice today alone. I didn’t know about the crowd until he said it,” I look at my watch, “four minutes ago.”

His eyes sharpen fucking fast. “What’s with the car in the door?”

I look at Jo but Jacky answers. “Her father came at Jojo this morning. He’s supposed to be disabled but Mucimi said he faked it to get a loan for disabled to buy the old shop. I wouldn’t be surprised if he burnt it down. The land has lake rights. He wants a hotel there or some shit.”

That’s the first I’ve heard of it. Josephine shakes her head. “I don’t listen to the bullshit. His daughter was in the car with him and came back driving into the door. I didn’t want it moved until the deputy showed. He’s friends with her father so I didn’t want to chance another verbal warning with him smoothing over damage.”

Cort nods and looks at the Teams pulling in. Behind them is the sheriff and two deputy cars. “Let’s get this show on

the road. Justice and any reader available. I need some help here.”

Mucimi shows on the side of Josephine making her jump. “The deputy is looking for excuses.” He’s not a fan of the deputy. Justice and Teller show with Axe between them.

Cort throws chin then what he’s looking for. “Brothers, Josephine is a target here, lost the old shop, now they’re starting on this one. What the fuck is going on and who needs the dish?”

Justice, Teller and Mucimi are gone. Axe turns back to the deputy. The townies are quiet enough to hear a pin drop. I smile at the sheriff. This will be cool.



Josephine

The whole ride back I'm thinking of everything that happened. Cort and Ranger are a different kind of crazy. People floated to the center of the lot and were held by the security guys. I leaned against the building and watched like it was a freak show put on just for me. I wish Maverick didn't have a job because he missed the good shit. Mase scared the shit out of anyone that disputed what the readers said by holding fire inches from their body, their whole body, it was crazy.

Ranger taught Jacky how to pull someone in the dish and Cort promised he'd send one for the shop. Justice had people in trees, on top of the building and hanging from the top of a telephone pole. The deputy on the pole had me smiling. The ass never wrote reports for the shit we called with. I'm glad the sheriff got to see the yellow-bellied snake he is.

"Are you nervous, beautiful?" Maverick has me smiling at him. He's just as crazy, shooting people that used me as their excuse for ignorance. I laughed when Maddy's mom blamed me for them going hungry because Melvin is healed. He burnt the Arby's down because it wasn't making money. Maverick shot her.

"No, I want a laser."

He smiles. "I'm glad you're not nervous and will get you a laser if you take the training."

He always does that. "I'll start when you say. I have a license to carry but don't own a gun with a laser. Why would I

be nervous?”

He shrugs turning to the compound road. “New compound, new beginning, new room shared with me. I thought it was a girl thing to be nervous.”

“If it came out of your mouth you mean it. You want me here. You think the town is as crazy as they are and don’t blame me. You want Jacky close and you love me. I don’t need more than that to know this is right.”

Shutting the bike off at a very big garage igloo, he smiles with his hand out. “Mucimi and the pictures helped.”

Taking his hand, I have to give him that. “You never take credit for what you do and show. While the pictures were a help for me to see it was right, you were the one that showed me with your words and actions. One of the first things you said was you’re with the good guys. I don’t know how long this lasts but I trust you’re one of the good guys.”

He pulls me closer and kisses my lips. “It’s forever, beautiful. Thank you. Let’s check it out.”

I like when he moves me where he wants me. I have no idea why. “Okay. Do you want the door open?”

He smiles hitting a button, then picture on the hologram screen that showed above the handlebars. Their technology is amazing. The door goes up and I see why it’s so big. It’s like a show room with a few cars, trucks and open spaces for more bikes. Maverick walks the bike in turning to the right. Jacky’s bike will be here at the end, I can’t help smiling, it will be the blue with Badass on the side that I saw

before I saw it. That only happens when I build because I know what I want it to look like.

“Your car and bike go here. I’ve got the MG coming in tomorrow so it goes on the full lift space.”

“Thank you. How many motorcycles do you own?”

“Three but only two live here, the Ducati is for work. Trucks are behind the building under cover.” He pulls close to his other Harley almost touching wheels. “Watch this.” He’s damn handsome smiling with excitement. His hand palms the keypad and hydraulics engage so I watch the bikes. The floor is a ramp? It lifts the bike while steel rises around the first bike. Steel shelving? When the frame is set, the Harley we were on slides over the shelving frame, stopping right above the bike on the floor. How fucking cool is that?

I laugh at his amazement. I’m amazed too. “All about saving space, all the time.”

He laughs getting the word play. “That was cute. Yeah. Each Officer has a bike lift. All my spaces are lifts. If you get another bike, or work on one here, it will fit.”

I look around. There are no tools here. He fiddles with the keypad and the wall in front of the spaces goes up. “Safe room for my shit. I’d let you use my tools. Finn and Remo have their own. I don’t share with the Brothers because they don’t give anything back or it comes back broken.”

“I’m the same way. Everyone has a toolbox for a reason.”

He nods. “Your mechanics learned it from somewhere. I didn’t see a tool out when we left yesterday.”

I nod ready to move on. “There’s got to be more than a garage to see.” My life has been about garages for too long.

He moves back to the keypad and closes his tool room. “I got a map. Asa said there’s one on the counter for all the igloos.”

Holding hands, we walk the path to the other big buildings then the center yard that has everything to hang out, train and just relax by the pool or grill. This is unbelievable.

Our room is a little more than just a room. The hidden miniature kitchen has me shaking my head. They think of everything. We have a rainforest bathroom that has my body ready to try it out now, but I’m pulled out to see how the computer shows on the wall or right above the tablet. Knowing how much solar is collected is a big deal to my geeky President. I nod watching all the things his new toy can do until I’m bored.

Looking out the window, I ask, “Why is there more space on one side?”

“Future expansion. I wouldn’t let them make it more than I need. I think that’s why Asa had the extra igloos built. The little Brother was not happy with me. Justice and Teller’s ol’ ladies are pregnant with twins. The Bits had to redesign for more Protectors than babies.”

I’m glad he stuck to his guns. Baby rooms would be pressure I don’t need. “It’s not a problem for them to add later?”

He swipes his tablet smiling. Boys and their toys. “When you’re ready they can add anything we need.” The

tablet goes off and he's up. "Are you ready to see the kitchen? It's the only thing we missed and Cort is coming with Seren and Caelan. I wouldn't be surprised if Freedom and the boys show."

"Freedom is the Enforcer?"

"Protector, yeah she's the Krav Maga trainer for Phoenix."

My feet stop. "You're serious?"

"Yeah. Seren trains the Brothers with her. She didn't say?"

My head is shaking in disbelief. "No. That's what I studied in Florida. It beats the hell out of judo."

He nods. "I think so. Knowing the positions is good but putting someone down fast and hard is better. I don't have time to set up every step I'm taking." He's too damn perfect.

We walk the path to the last big building. "There's a driveway around the whole solar system so we can drop shit at whatever building. Mase says the Prospects use it more than the Brothers. It's here if you need it."

I nod thinking it's good to know. I'm not used to calling Prospects.

Two steps into the kitchen I stop, this is the picture Aylen and Mucimi showed me. The picture didn't look like round walls. The cabinets here are set on a flat wall explaining that. "This is the room I saw, Maverick."

He looks back smiling. "They're crazy with that shit. I like this. The Protectors kitchen is like this. There's a

bathroom and pantry behind the cabinet wall. Bathroom is the right side, pantry is the left. This is a lot of cabinets and island space. I like the wood.”

I nod looking at everything. This is the picture. The Alpha-Bits will have stools but stand on the bottom of the table at the island. Flipping what looks like an empty shelf, I laugh. It’s built-in stools. They roll from side to side. How crazy cool.

“Alder added those when the Bits were moving here. They use stools for everything in the Brothers’ space. Their igloo and all their stuff is their size. They all help cook and we have the chef right here so everyone can use him. Their bathroom is the opposite side from the Brothers. It’s small for them. It was a coat closet.” He pulls me a little to the left. “Pegs work for me. Our gear goes on the back of chairs. It’s too heavy for a closet or pegs.”

I nod. “You all take them with you when you leave the room?”

His smile sets an alert in me. I hope he’s not a slob. “Always. Guns are connected to them so they aren’t left lying around. I’d throw the Brothers out for trashing the place.”

“Good to know. It’s not just the shop I need organized. I’m busy and don’t have time to be the maid.”

He laughs. “I knew it couldn’t just be the shop. I’ve been watching. I like my shit organized and don’t want to open a junk drawer for a towel.”

I shake my head. “There is no such thing as a junk drawer. Too-lazy-to-put-shit-away-drawer is what I call it.

Perry tried that at the counter in the shop. I'm glad it isn't going to be a battle at home." I smile. "I did win there but it was by dumping the drawer daily for a week. When he was sick of cleaning the floor he stopped filling the drawer with shit that already had a place to be."

He's got me up and on the island before I know what hit me. I like the Maverick train until the little voices have Maverick pulling those hot lips off of mine. My head falls to his chest.

Mabon sounds like he's going to pop. "Pres Maverick, Boss Jo. Alder bring Alpha-Bit Brothers today!"

"We swim, Anton, Alder, Alpha-Bit Brothers Alder compound!" So Tomas is popping too.

"What time?" Maverick asks drawing my eyes up.

"Six?" Quest shrugs.

Maverick lifts me up and starts walking. "We'll be back at quarter of so we don't miss them."

The little giggles and 'roger' are cute. I don't dare smile. Maverick is on a mission and I want to be that mission.

I hold my breath when he walks right past the sitting room to the bedroom until he gets to the bathroom. That breath comes out with a smile.

"This definitely needs to be christened first."

"I agree. Put me down so I can undress."

He smiles showing me agreement. "Not on your life, Josephine Bonnie Marshal. I'm peeling those funky jeans

down that ass to see what you're hiding that doesn't leave panty lines."

Or that instead of his agreement. Since I like his way, I smile. "Then put me down so you can see what's hidden. I can't stand without the brace so don't move me too fast."

"Your brace is here for the shower. We'll see how it works in the tub later." He sets me down and moves fast. My brace for the shower is in his hand then leaning on the cabinet. A man as handsome as Maverick with that sandy hair, expressive brows, indigo eyes with lashes women would kill for and a razor-lined low-beard stubble that men would kill for, kneeling at my feet has to be what he means by epic. It feels freaking epic to watch him bite on half his lip with his lashes looking longer from this angle.

My boots then brace are off and zipper slides down slowly. Is he kidding? He looks up at my sigh. "I love the steampunk look. It fits everything about you." It surprises me that he'd know what style I wear and he doesn't get the sigh was for him to hurry it up. Smart and man are the answers for that.

"That's good because Jacky showed the Prospect some pictures and I have a closet full of them. It's not all stuff I had before. You don't have to unbuckle the leather part, it's all connected. Just the shirts are two pieces."

His moan sounds damn sexy. "The fucking shirts kill me. Hold the counter so I can get them down without hurting you."

I hold the counter smiling. I'm glad he likes them because it's the only style Jacky showed the Prospect

apparently. He folds my pants setting them on the counter by my hand. “A piece of leather isn’t what I expected. How do they make that look so real?”

I don’t answer because I don’t know, but I don’t think he’s asking me. He gets the brace on relieving me. I don’t need another cast. “Face the mirror. I need to see how these shirts work.” He doesn’t stand to figure shirts out.

I smile at the growled order turning slowly. “Fuck that’s sexy, beautiful. I love the cheeks showing like that.” He bites just below my panties causing a clench so deep that I’m ready to orgasm right now. I’ve never felt that before and hope to feel it again, many times.

Panties, I grasp thinking back to before my brain went for lunch. Now I love them too. I never had underclothes that looked like this. Lace frill that goes across my ass looked a little like baby clothes until I put them on. Before, as long as it was girly, I was good, now I’m spoiled.

His hands squeeze then slide up with a roughness I don’t expect. I hold the counter tighter moaning. His lips on my neck and legs against my ass feel solid. It’s one thing I’ve learned about Maverick. He’s solid to the core in everything he does, says and feels. I love that.

“Where do I start?” Those big hands are on my breasts kneading above the corset vest so the words take a second.

“The leather is a vest.” My head rolls to the side of his chest so I can see him. He’s watching in the mirror as his hands unbuckle the corset-like vest. His eyes widen when he slides it off me. “Fucking beautiful. It’s like gauze.”

I don't correct him. He can think whatever he wants. When my shirt is off, he's completely still except for his eyes. They're following the lines of the leather-looking corset with a ribbon belt sewn on, of course, with the lace frill. The back is nothing but brown lace that's almost like a net. It stretches and keeps me cool so I don't mind it.

“Fuck, you're Christmas all year long. This is so sexy that I want to shop for clothes. I've never even thought it. You keep my head spinning.”

I know how he feels. He's in the mirror I'm looking at. At least he was. I'm up and kissed so hard I don't know we moved until water hits me. “I'll buy you more if I just wrecked them.” When the hell did his pants come off?

Holy cow, I need air. I'm against the wall feeling him lift me then slide in like I was made for him. I'm going to hyperventilate from the feeling, clenching or lack of air because of the feeling and clenching. Solid is in everything. He lifts and flips me around fast. Holy shit.



Maverick

My brain beams back in with the little oxygen I'm getting that I wasn't getting a few seconds ago. "Shit. Is your leg okay?" I lay her against my chest putting her legs down on the floor gently.

"I don't know. What the hell happened?" She sounds drunk.

"We tried everything. I'm not sure we should do that all at once again."

She giggles but it's a groggy kind of giggle. "Or at least not without padding under us."

"Did I hurt you? I've never lost control like that. It was in my head then we were moving."

She smiles. "Relax, Maverick. I'm not complaining, just trying to catch my breath. You're cute when your hair is wet. It's the closest to combed I've ever seen it." She's right.

"I love that about you, beautiful. Nothing is drama. I don't own a comb. I'll wash you up."

"The ol' ladies told me about this. You don't own a comb?"

I don't understand. "How would they know if I have a comb? Did I say I love you? My head was spinning again."

There's my sweet Josephine giggle. "We both did. It was sweet, Maverick. They told me about being washed and letting you do whatever. I was asking about the comb because it's odd."

“That makes sense. They think we’re crazy. Since I want to buy you clothes, they might be right. I had a comb but lost it a couple of years ago. I didn’t use it so I didn’t buy another.”

She laughs. I wash her up getting us standing at some point then dry her. Since I’m crazy tonight, I pick her clothes and put her in them. I love the outfits. I hope it’s cool enough for the jacket. It’s a Badass fucking jacket. With her brace on over the leather design on the black pants, everything matches and she looks fucking hot. I need to get Ren to check me for a tumor or something. I’ve never lost it like that, picked clothes or dressed a woman.

“Did they tell you about claiming?” I ask walking her back to the kitchen.

She nods. “You give me a promise of forever and your name. The rules are basic but you may have some of your own. The Club will protect me and Jacky and you make the law so it will happen. I didn’t get that but Seren said I’ll learn.”

“I’m going to claim you tonight so Cort will stop showing up.” He turns me so this is important.

“Okay. I thought you liked Cort?”

Shit. “I’ve known him for years and love him like a brother. He’s crazy and bored so he’s jumped into matchmaking. He thinks the Clubs run better when Brothers have a passion to keep them safe. He shows every day until the Brother he’s matching up claims his woman. Since I washed, dried then dressed you, I’m in that crazy and don’t need him

adding to it. You were there this afternoon. I don't need more of that.”

She laughs and starts walking away. “Claim me and relax, Maverick. I think you're in love. I'm not as crazy because I'm new here.”

That must be it. It makes me feel better even though I know it's not true. I picked her clothes like a fashion maven. I'm sick or off the deep end. Opening the door, we're named like we're on Cheers. The Officers not working, Cort and family, Mase and family, Kristos and Natalia, Brekan and family, Ranger and family, then Teller and Chenoa are here. I guess it's family night. The Bits are noticeably absent.

I don't have to worry about what to do when Freedom stares me down, takes Josephine's hand and walks her away. “She's a friend most of the time, beautiful. Hi, Freedom, bye, Freedom.”

Josephine smiles at me over her shoulder. I take her all in again. The brace goes perfect with the clothes. I can't believe her closet turns me on.

Teller laughs. “It's the way they look in them, not the clothes. I'm the same way, I picked Chenoa's clothes when the new shit came in from Nancy. She's got a knack for finding the perfect style you never knew about but love.”

I snap pictures of Josephine before she sits. I'm glad Kateri turns her for me so I get front and back.

“Who is Nancy?”

He takes my phone. “She'll send the invoice with the clothes. The Prospects know what to do. Did you get her

ring?”

Cort turns when he hears ring. Fucking shit. “I know what I want, I need a sketch pad, I’ll send it to the jeweler.”

Finn laughs. I peg him a finger. Mucimi shows with a pad and box of charcoal and pencils. I smile when the Brothers laugh. I love Mucimi so I hook his neck and walk him to the end of the island glad the women are at the other end of the table.

I draw out a heart stone in front of a band with a frame that widens enough to hold the heart in front. The back tapers smaller so I frame sections like windows. It needs something. I look at Josephine and smile adding a line of stones around the bottom following the angle for the heart. It reminds me of her panties with the frilly lace on the back forming a wide V.

“That’s good. Here, he needs colors and a wedding band.” Mucimi hands me colored pencils.

I keep drawing with the charcoal. The band should be different but match. I make a tight spring on the top and a frame like the windows on the bottom but keep them all the same dimension. Throwing some gears in the windows on the front, I start coloring it in.

Mucimi hits my shoulder. “I love the blue in there.”

At the wider center window, in three open gear centers, I put circles like Jinx’s eye when it turns to focus in blue. The other windows are color but no gears. It looks like space to me. Coloring the first ring behind the heart, I use that same blue.

“What stone for the heart?” He asks.

I look at the two rings picturing them together. “The bands need to be distressed or old looking. White gold or silver. I don’t know about the stone. What do you think?”

A picture pops in my head of a heart that’s multicolored but see through. It could be a diamond dipped in oil. “Yeah, that would work.”

He nods showing the pages to Cort while I put the pencils away. “You draw?”

I look over at Cort. “I’m an engineer. We all draw.”

Finn goes to check out the rings. “He draws out his tattoos and did one for me.”

Brekan takes the sketch. “This is nice, Maverick. It fits her.”

I nod. I think so. Mucimi is with Josephine and Seren while the Brothers all check out the picture in between prepping food. I finish the shit they started. The Prospect I like comes in with the Bits, Ari, Alder and Tats.

Mucimi shows beside me. “I’ll take them to the Mason. He’s waiting.”

I don’t get to answer. He’s just gone. I shake my head. What if I think of something to add?

‘I’ll have him make other shit. Alder needs to stamp her.’

I get the sketch pad and make a stamp for her ankle or wrist. Teller laughs. Fucking Brothers. I put the heart dipped in oil at the center. Adding the shading, it looks like real leather

with a stone in the center and gear clasp on the back. I like it.

Chapter Four

Two days

Josephine

The beeping phone wakes me up. Groaning, I burrow into Maverick feeling him reach to stop that annoying tone. “Maverick.”

He rolls me tucking the blanket around me. “On my way.” With a kiss to my head, my personal heater is gone making me groan. “What time is it?”

“Five. Sleep, beautiful. I pulled your clothes. I’ll try to be back for breakfast.”

I get a kiss then he’s walking to the door. There’s no way he can dress that fast. Lifting my head, I see he’s pulling his shirt on. The nut had his guns on before his shirt. Who does that? My handsome geek is cute. His hair is sticking up all over the place. His helmet will tame it, I think, as he walks out the door cutting off my view of him.

I flop back smiling. He’s so funny and easy to live with. We’re supposed to get new furniture later. It’s wood to match some pieces my dad made. Maverick had some guys bring over pieces that were in storage. He likes the heavy wood look too.

“Damnit.” I forgot to ask about his aunt again. He got sidetracked with the new Alpha-Bits last night. Anything space draws his attention and he likes teaching them. It’s cute to watch. I’m always drawn in which is why I forgot to ask about his aunt. She didn’t give me a date to visit. He was on

her about it when Oman asked me about the brace so he probably got it.

Since I'm not going back to sleep, I move through my morning routine. Seren and Freedom sent me videos of their training positions. I pull them up and get started.



Maverick

Remo is in the garage when I walk in the back door.
“Pres.”

I throw him chin flipping my bag to my back and get on the Harley. It's on the bottom today and I need quick. We pick up his Team at the gate.

I flip my mic on. “Did you wake up the sheriff?”

Stan is right with me. “Yeah, Pres. He's on his way. Security has coffee waiting for you.”

“Thanks, Brother.” It's a quiet ride to Josephine's garage. A hundred gets us there in four.

Security is standing around the SUV and pickup. I look up and shake my head. Fucking coward bastard. He picked here to fuck with my girl. “Stan, I want better fence around here. Get Jacky and Picasso on something unique so it doesn't look like Fort Knox but works like it.”

“Roger, Boss. Finn had the same idea after yesterday. He said sensors that show hologram feeds of anyone getting close.”

“Do that. The harassment has to stop. Today is the ultimate fuck you.” Yesterday's eggs didn't hit the building but hit cars and left a fucking mess. Security caught the fucking grown men with some fucked up ideas about women being weak enough to listen but not so weak they let their men rear girl-boys.

Shutting the bike off, I get to the pickup and my coffee. “Brothers. Who was first on scene?”

“My Team took the call, Pres. He kicked the ladder away just before we pulled up.”

I nod to the Security Lead. “I’m glad you let him hang. I’m not into giving attention and sympathy to the ignorant bastards.”

He nods looking relieved. I throw chin. “Get breakfast or back to your rotation.”

“We can help with the fence, Pres. We’re off at seven and Stan covered us.”

I nod. “Go drag Jacky out of bed, they’ll need Alpha-Bit help. They need a Team. Anton needs a Team and his handler. You know Flack?”

“I do, Boss. We’ll get this done today. Your girl doesn’t deserve this shit.”

I shake my head watching them walk away. A different Team pressure washed and cleaned dozens of eggs off cars yesterday for the same reason.

The sheriff shows pissed. “You have everything wired and didn’t get here in time or watched him hang?”

Remo hands him a tablet. “Real time. He pulled up, set the ladder, slip-knotted the noose on the pole’s foot peg above him and jumped. Would you have made it? It took us four to get here doing a hundred. Security was on East Street and flew here knowing it was Josephine’s place again. The second Team showed a minute after the first.”

I hand Remo another coffee smiling. “They could have reset the ladder and run up for him, I guess. Maybe he wouldn’t have been dead. Since it’s a guess, it’s not much

help. What isn't a guess is you're pissed at us for a dick that you fired. Look where he is. That finger he's pointing up isn't just for Josephine. She didn't fire the dick for not filing reports. I'm not fighting you and this fucking backwards town. Make a decision, sheriff."

"I needed him to stand trial." He's still pissed but it's at the dick.

I'm so fucking relieved but don't show that. "Not happening. What I need is the PD budget to add more Security. PD needs to close shop. They're not doing the job and collecting a paycheck. Your backing is all I need." I could put more Teams out but I'm not without the towns helping.

He nods without hesitation. "I'll get with the mayor today. They'll get the same deal?"

I shake my head. "No. They get nothing but Security. If this shit keeps up, I'll add more shit to the towns and village we have. We'll make sure they get no community support, benefits or business so they feel that, become the new low-income wasteland and move the fuck out. More jobs, water, heat and solar come when we see they're worth the expense."

He looks at the garage. "The Patton girl didn't see this?"

I shake my head. "No. A reader said they called her mom with being a weak woman attacks for years until she died. They cause this shit then blame their victims. She'll hear this and it will hurt her and Jacky. He found his mom so I don't know how this will play out."

Remo freezes and the sheriff nods. "I'll make the point when I get with the mayor." He looks up at his ex-deputy. "I'll send the coroner."

"No. We'll transport before they open. The fucking guy is a dick. He'll need his breakfast first. You got the feed, saw it for yourself. It's not a mystery and he had no one around him."

"Do whatever you have to. I'll write it up for him." He walks away.

As soon as he pulls out, I tell cleanup to unhook him and transport to the coroner. They let him drop in the truck and leave.

Remo hasn't said a word, so I'm surprised he stops me from starting my bike. "They called her mother?"

I knew that got him. "Mucimi said they did. He wanted Mase to torch the houses. The thing is the towns were a village and two towns. They split them down political lines and caused this riff. I wouldn't mind it going back to two towns and the village or building this town and the village up so much they move the fuck on. I'm not giving these fucks jobs."

"What are we talking?"

"Half of Three, Four and Five is all that's close to us on the east side of the Club. We need this settled before we move west. The dicks are spread through those three but they're all so close. Four and Five are split at the main road. They're fucking crazy."

He nods. “That’s fucking crazy. I’ll ask Finn to talk to Mase about fucking with them. He got the same kind of thing out of Elan.”

“That’s a good idea. Let’s go to breakfast. Josephine’s working out by now.” I smile starting my bike. I can’t wait to see her today.

The Diner already has customers. I smile sitting with Mucimi.

“Pres Maverick, Remo.”

“Brother, were you waiting for us?” Why else would he be here?

“Yeah. I have your jewelry.” He puts a Phoenix bag on the table. “I can fuck with the pussies. I’m getting Melvin’s wife out, she’ll sell the land to the Club to get him out of jail for arson and insurance fraud. She should let him rot. They move in with her sister near Pueblo.”

Remo is interested. “How do you do it?”

I look for the waiter. “Last night I made a sandwich and sat on the couch with her and the daughter to watch TV. They freaked but I finished my sandwich before I left. I showed in the bedroom and closed the window when the wife was just about sleeping. They’re fucking pigs. I tripped and told her to clean up and it was too cold for their new dog.”

I laugh holding a hand up to the Prospect. “Where did the dog come from?”

He shrugs. “It was in the trash by their house. I brought him in and opened the fridge. He was hungry.”

I love my fucking Brothers. “Good job, Brother.”

We order and I look at the jewelry. He bought half a store. He shakes his head. “It’s not for all at once. You give her shit regularly. Since her shit has to be made, you get more than one thing at a time. The Mason liked doing these. He’ll have some in the cases this week.”

I look at him. “How do you know this shit?” He’s not even twenty.

“Experience helping the Brothers out and the lists. Patches is smart.”

I nod. “He is. He was on the circuit here. His ol’ lady helped us get Little Brothers started in this town.”

“Tess is awesome. She’s worried about your girl.”

I look from the bracelet to him. “Why?” I need to cover her from more shit. Fucking great.

Mucimi nods. “You do, but she’s pissed at her mom for being weak when they needed her. Jacky’s pissed she copped out. They don’t know the women here were always on the mom. She wasn’t strong but the town made it bad for years. You have to tell Jojo about the calls.”

Fuck. He’s not here for jewelry so I nod. “She has the stamp now, but I’ll keep her covered and tell her about the calls. If she needed it, why didn’t you tell her?”

“Justice said to tell *you*. She keeps losing more and more. The Brothers are sending the furniture today. It will help. They made everything like the pictures. Tell her tonight.” He’s pushing here.

“I will.” I move the jewelry for the Prospect thinking about her mom’s picture. She was a fragile looking woman. Her daughter died young. That would make anyone fragile. The bitches would have kept her fragile. That’s so fucked up. Torching their places would be faster.

Mucimi points his fork at me. “Let us handle it our way. Mase said you don’t need more fuckin’ fires.” He says it in a way I think there’s more to all this.

“All right, Brother. I want them out, how many are we looking at?”

He shrugs. “It’s about ten families that bully the rest into doing shit. One is already going. We’ll move the rest and watch the others.”

Remo relaxes. “Good deal. Thanks, Brother. I know a new fence isn’t stopping this shit.”

Mucimi smiles. “It’s a Badass fuckin’ fence. I’m helping today.” He takes a drink then is gone.

Remo points to his plate. “He didn’t finish. You think he’s coming back?”

The plate disappears so I nod. “Yeah.”

“Fucking Brother.” Remo has me laughing.



Josephine

At the shop, I drop my coat in the office and bend over braiding my hair real quick. The slap to my ass has me up and turning. “Belinda. What’s up?” Switching the tie from my wrist to hair takes no time. I should have used a clip with the GOBs showing lately.

“Your brother is crazy. He’s making some funky fence out there.”

I nod. “They were putting old pipes in the ground when I pulled in. I’m not asking.” There’s a pile of junk on Roy’s truck out there. I hope it’s not all going in the ground.

I look out my door and smile. I knew he was here. Maverick moves Belinda out by her shoulders. “I have five minutes to check out her outfit and give her some rings.” He closes the door before Belinda can answer.

“So that’s how you do it.”

He smiles starting at the bottom. “That coat must have made this look better.” Turning me he groans. I keep the smile off my face. I didn’t wear the boots he took out because I’m working.

When he turns me back, I put my hand out. He laughs but I don’t move my hand. He drew the rings he wanted me to wear and I can’t wait to see. He loved what I ordered because of the space background behind the Badass logo. Seren is great for getting shit done.

“All right.” He pulls a small box from the cargo pocket under his gun.

I don't know if that's significant but don't ask because the box is open and light flashes out. "It's incredible. Oh, my word. They shine like Chenoa and Kateri's rings. How beautiful, the heart is my stamp."

His finger lifts my chin. "Love you, beautiful. You need jewelry to match."

"No, these really are beautiful. You drew this?"

He answers putting them on me, "Yeah. Mucimi picked the heart stone, but I drew it all out."

I blink trying to see them. "Thank you for doing that. I love them and you so much."

"Love you too, Josephine. This one is more for me." With a kiss to my lips, he pulls another box out. "The equation is the energy of an orbit. I chose the compass rose for you but the stars for me."

It's another beautiful piece with stars behind the compass and the equation going around the outside. "Together we're gravitational pull and kinetic energy."

I'm up and being kissed so fast I drop the necklace. "You're so fucking smart. Yeah, basically that's what I'm saying."

I laugh. He's such a geek. Belinda pokes her head in but Remo pulls her out. "You're an amazing man that will keep me smiling, Maverick. We hit that kinetic energy whenever we're undressed. That was cute. I love you."

He's watching my eyes and I know he's trying to figure me out. I kiss his lips and he sets me down. "I have to

get to work. Kramer hung himself this morning.” He bends for the necklace and puts it on me.

I nod. “Jacky told me. I don’t know what it has to do with me.”

He kisses the compass. “It was a message for the sheriff and Club. I’ll be back later. You’re gorgeous, beautiful. I love the new shine.” He’s a romantic geek President.

“I love it all.”

He’s gone and Belinda is all over me. I walk out with her following while spouting a monologue about keeping Maverick happy.

Numbers stops that for me. “You don’t know much about Pres. He’s Badass all the way. Women get claimed for life. He wouldn’t cheat because it’s not Badass. Everything is up to the Brother. The women show that same consideration to the Brothers because they feel it. Tell her why you’re here and let her get to work.” He looks at me. “Bobby isn’t in yet.”

Belinda stops at the door to the bays. “I’ll ask you. You know more than she told me.”

I walk out. Perry is in the first bay. “No Bobby?”

“His uncle took the car back. He has like six payments left. The guys a jerk. I’ll ask Belinda to go get him.”

I shake my head. “What an asshole.”

His uncle is always messing with him. I look out the back. Dad’s Trans Am is out there. “You want the Trans Am?”

Perry stares at me. “You’re serious?”

“You built it with him. He loved you like a son, Perry. Give your car to Bobby. I’ve got a bike for Ken.”

He moves to hug me and I jump back. “No coveralls!”

He laughs. “Thank you. I was just thinking about asking Roy if he’s got something in the junkyard. Cando is a good mechanic. I was going to ask him if he wants to work some nights with me.”

“I brought up his hours by using him to give days off. We’ll all work better not killing ourselves. We’re two bays booked for two months now.” I wave it away. “I don’t want to sell my dad’s car and letting it rot away isn’t an option. You are. Bobby needs a car and Ken is in love with the Honda. It works all around.”

“Thanks, Jo. I’ll be honored to drive your dad’s car.” His voice breaks so I turn.

“Your car, Perry. I need to get covered. We’ll square it away when it slows down.” Grabbing the clean coveralls, I hide my Maverick picked outfit of the day.

“You can hold your weight on it?” Belinda asks coming into the bays.

I roll my eyes because I’ve asked her a million times not to. “Yeah. Aflen said it’s muscle and tendon I feel without the brace. Mucimi’s been showing and heals it when he’s around.”

“It was broken.” She acts like I didn’t feel that break and forgot.

I nod. “Yeah. You shouldn’t be out here.”

She nods. "I'm going to get Bobby. I'll be back." She walks out.

Perry shakes his head. "She needs a partner so she'll leave us alone."

That would be good. "She should come to the Club. Ren said there were a few women looking for partners. That could mean two but it's worth a shot. I'm itching to use my laser. It may be the next time she walks through the bays."

He laughs. "I'd pay to see that," Ken says smiling our way.

Perry agrees. I get to work. I'd need it *on* me to use it. My knife is in my boot. I can't put anything in the other with the brace on.



Maverick

Jack and Ranger show with furniture. They put her dad's picture under every piece with an in memory of stamp. Everything looks just like the pictures except the tables they made me. One for my meeting room and a smaller one for the sitting room. It's the same Colorado style heavy wood with that fiberglass running through the center. They made the Milky Way under Badass like the ring Josephine got me. I love it all.

“She's going to love it, Brothers.”

Ranger nods. “Anton helped Jack and me with the Milky Way on the big table. Alder and Anton made the smaller. They did a good job matching ours.”

I nod. “Anton is everywhere. He's doing good in space IT.” I bring it up knowing Ranger has been reassigned a second and felt the loss.

His smile says it isn't a problem. “He wants to move here for a while after he learns the lessons.”

Perfect. “I'd take him. He knows Badass and has been working Aero IT for us. Mars loves the Bits.” I hope that while is a long while.

Jack laughs. “Anton isn't easy, Brother. He's tethered to Asa for daily training and Alder for weekly progress. He asked to come here but Alder hasn't decided on whether he can stay.”

I take the warning but want the little Brother for his experience and knowledge. I love his personality and imagination. “I'll talk to Josephine, Alder and Web. She'd love

Anton here, he'd fit with Jacky and his imagination. They'd keep her smiling if nothing else." I watch Ranger for reaction. He's easy with Anton moving around, I guess.

Remo puts her little table by the bed. "She's going to need it tonight. That's the last, Pres. I'm in training. Stan is with you for four."

I nod. "Thanks, Brother."

I turn to pick up the moving blanket, but Ranger's white hand stops me. "Why will she need it tonight?"

I breathe deep shaking my head. "Justice told Mucimi I need to tell her the women of the town were calling with weak woman attacks on her mom for years but worse before she committed suicide. Jo is pissed at her mom but doesn't know she was attacked for years."

"Jesus on a stick. Women did that?" Jack grew up in the same Club as Ranger. They probably didn't see shit like that. They said they never saw anyone steal anything.

"Yeah. Attack is probably not the right word. Bullied is better."

Ranger holds my forearm. "I'm glad we brought it today. I hope it helps give her what she needs. Do you need us to stay?"

I shake my head. "Thanks, Brothers. I think I need to do this alone with her. The Justice League shows whenever we need them."

They both laugh. I shrug. Jack gets serious. "If Justice said it she needs to know. It could be something in the timing. Those Brothers are fucking scary with the shit they see."

Ranger nods. “Even the shit they don’t say is scary.”

I feel that run through me. Mucimi has me on alert, but I don’t know why. “Yeah. I’ll figure out wording and let her know. With everyone attacking her, I don’t get why she’d be pissed at her mom.”

Ranger turns back fast. “Freedom didn’t say they’re still fucking with her.”

I nod. “She doesn’t care and ignores it but it’s constant. Mucimi is fucking with the worst. One is already moving.”

Jack shakes his head. “That kid is everywhere. He’s a good one to fuck with them.”

Mucimi shows up in the air and kisses Jack’s head, “thanks, VP,” then he’s gone. I crack up. I love Mucimi.

Jack braces when Ranger holds his arm to stay standing. “Fucking kids. You sure you don’t need someone here? AJ and Freedom are good with the ol’ ladies.”

“I’ve got it. I was going to bring Jacky in. He needs to know.”

They nod and start walking. At the chopper, Ranger turns. “She’s pissed because she doesn’t know. If she did, she would have protected her mom. This is going to hurt her but show her mom had some strength to her. She never told anyone what was happening, it was her way of protecting them.” He’s a smart Brother.

I nod. “She doesn’t miss shit so she’ll get it. I’ll explain it the way I see it and call if they aren’t getting it. Jacky found his sister too. It may not be as easy with him.”

“Did Justice say to tell him or just your ol’ lady?”
Jack asks.

I think about Mucimi’s words. “Just her.”

“Let her tell him. Being pissed and finding her are two different things. Maybe it’s something she says that he needs. Finding two of the three women in his family isn’t an easy thing to get over, Brother.” Jack makes sense.

“I’ll take the advice. I’m thinking about Josephine and missed that.”

With hugs I thank them again and get back to the igloo. My girl will love the furniture. The bed is king but the same as her old bed. It weighs a ton but is worth it. Her dad had furniture that fits the igloos and our needs. I love all the wood. It screams Colorado and Badass.

The moving blankets are gone and igloo looks perfect. Her charger is on her table with a picture of her parents. That was nice.

Breathing deep, I go get my beautiful girl. Stan picks me up at the gate and rides with me. I’m surprised then laugh when a hologram pops up at the entrance with me and the Team riding in. I stop so we can look at the new fence. It’s Josephine all the way. The chain link is still up except the gate that opens, it’s now a good six foot high. The rest is four to five foot of pipe and metal decorations right up against the four foot chain link that would do nothing to stop anyone from getting in, unless they’re lazy like the egg throwing dicks.

I walk the fence line shaking my head. It’s a work of art with gears and pipe set to show open sections with colored

glass pieces in the center. I never expected this. “What kind of security does this have besides the hologram feeds on sensor?” I ask Stan.

“Guns at the corners set to rise on sensor. They target and shoot laser for six seconds. Drones that are stationed on the roof run by sensor.” He points to a bird like drone circling above us. Fucking cool. “They’re on surveillance still but an alert from the sensors means we’re not depending on Brothers to catch it. During the day, every face is logged. Numbers is sending info as they show. One from today was town four. She was a bitch but Numbers shut her up. Your girl doesn’t talk to the customers unless she’s looking for a need they have. She helps single moms regularly Numbers said.”

I nod needing to ask more about that. I know she fixes cars for them, but she doesn’t talk about the shit she does. “This fits her style.”

Stan smiles. “The Alpha-Bits were here. They’re going to add shit to the building. Quest has some portal windows printing. They’re fucking imaginative with what they come up with.”

“They are.” I need to see my girl so I ride to the back seeing Security holding a yelling dick back. What the fuck is with people yelling at my girl? I shoot the fuck before I stop. “What the fuck now?”

Josephine looks at me with her little smile on and walks closer. “Thanks. He’s mad that Perry gave Bobby a car. He can’t control him or stop him from working here if Bobby has his own ride.”

I get a kiss then she's walking away. I shake my head looking at Nick. "He was yelling about Jo fucking with his family. He said she's only got Jacky left. He needs Security, Pres, Stan."

"Perry gave his car to Bobby and Jacky needs Security?" Stan asks what I'm thinking.

Nick nods. "Yeah, Boss. They're all fucked up."

I look around. Bobby is standing by the door looking nervous. I go right to him. "What can I do to help here, Bobby?"

"He's going to screw with my mom and dad. My dad has cancer. He doesn't need all this shit. I had six payments and he took my car back. Perry was just helping me out. It's not worth all this." He looks like he's ready to be sick.

"Numbers, get him in and some water. I'm calling for a place in the new subdivision for them. He'd be closer to us and Ren can keep an eye on his dad."

Bobby breaks but Numbers has him. I call Finn. "Brother, I got Bobby..."

"I got it, Pres. There's no house in the subdivision but Major's is open. Everyone on that crew needs help, Brother. The bank is pulling the mortgage on Perry's parents. Ken is getting kicked out tonight. One of Security had Numbers send me the feed."

I walk to the store front. "Get their shit moved. I'll talk to the crew."

"Roger, Pres."

I hang up pissed. “Ken, Perry, inside.”

I walk right to Jo’s office glad Numbers has Bobby in here. When they’re all in, I close the door. “Bobby, we’re moving your family to a house on Club grounds. We have a doctor that will see your dad when he needs it. She’ll go to him. Perry your parents mortgage is being pulled and Ken you need a room. I’ve got you all covered. We’ll get the mortgage cleared with the lawyer, Perry. If that’s what’s going on with the rest, we’ll cover them. This is fucking ridiculous.”

Ken raises his hand. “My sister works at the bank. She let my dad know. That’s why I said to kick me out. They could stay if I’m not there.”

I shake my head and pull my phone. “Banks, I’ve got three mechanics being fucked with. The bank is pulling the mortgages on two. One is a cancer patient that isn’t up for the fight. Pay the mortgages for me. Finn has the information. They’ll need to be fully insured. Who knows what else they’ll do here.”

“Roger, Maverick. I’ve got Finn in a chat it’s all three. I’ll get them bought and recorded. Delta Rising?” Banks doesn’t waste time.

“No, me personally. I’m giving the houses back. You’re just making the payments.”

“I’ll handle it.”

I swipe him off. “You’re going to stay on Club grounds until we have sensors and feeds on your houses and this settles. Bobby, your family can stay on the grounds after that so Ren can see your dad. For now, you’re all under

Security. It would be easier in one place. Call your families. They'll need a few days of clothes. Bobby, the medic truck can get your dad transported. Let Stan know what is needed for them to be comfortable and Prospects will bring it."

I turn but Perry stops me. "Thanks, Maverick."

I throw him chin. Numbers takes Bobby out. "I've got this one, Pres."

The kid is a mess, but I think he should be, relief shows different in people, his dad has cancer and is being fucked with by his own family. "Perry, Ken, see Stan."

Josephine is working in Perry's bay when I walk out. "What's going on?"

"The bank is pulling their mortgages."

"Asshole. That's who that is. He owns the bank and lords over everyone. I paid the mortgage off with insurance money. He demanded full payment with a month's notice. My dad was crazy with insurance. He made sure I'd have enough for Jacky to go to school, the house and shop."

He probably knew they'd fuck with her. "Your mom?"

She makes a face. "He had it on her too. We didn't need it with his but the policies were five years old and past the waiting period for suicide. They paid."

That's how she got in here. "You're paying cash for this?"

She nods. "I'm sure as hell not trying for a mortgage."

I smile, smart girl. "Do their families get along?"

She nods. “Yeah, they were all friends of my dad. I know Perry’s family cooks for Bobby’s more than his own. They don’t speak.”

Who would want to? “Pres, VP has us bringing the dick to holding.”

I nod to Nick. “Thanks, Brother.”

“Can we do anything to help here?” I really like this Brother.

“See Stan. He’ll have more than I do.”

He goes by quick. “He’s always helping someone. He reminds me of you.” She’s putting the brake back together.

I smile. “I thought he was like Cooper. Thanks. He’s a good Brother.” I go to the empty bay tables and clear them while she finishes. Ken has labels making it easy. They keep everything in the same places. I bet the labels were a lesson.

Stan comes to the sink as I’m washing my hands. “VP has them all moving. Ren is with Bobby’s parents. Remo is keeping the bank open with trainees until Banks gets there. They’ll set down in the road. All the houses are getting surveillance. Prospects have their shit and vehicles. Did I miss anything, Pres?”

“I don’t think so. I was pissed. I want that bank.”

He nods. “Cort is on his way with one of the freaky crew to help with that. Finn said it wouldn’t be enough until you pull the dick’s mortgage. It’s a mom and pop.”

I nod. “Natalia would know how that works. She owns Kensington.”

“I’ll let Finn know. He’s got it.” He smiles.

I bet he’s trying to figure out how Finn knows everything. “I don’t know either. He’s always a step ahead.”

He laughs. “Your mic is on but piece is off, Pres.”

Fuck. I hit my mic off and find my girl pulling the braid out of her hair. “Thanks for cleaning the shop. The guys are all stressed.”

I nod. “I’ll talk to them at Major’s.”

“You’re a good man, my geek President. How did the job go?”

It was a classified job so I’m not giving details. “Good. No problems is always good.”

She nods. “That it is. I’m ready as soon as everyone leaves. I haven’t seen Jacky’s masterpiece.”

I nod. “Let’s walk.” I should tell her about her mom here. I’m not going to get the chance later and timing seems to be important.

We walk, I hold her while she cries then we walk some more. I don’t think she saw the details of the new fence, but she’s calm when we get back to the garage.

Stan watches her put her coat on. “Is she okay, Pres?”

I nod. “She will be. Bad news she can’t change will keep her quiet but she’s settled.”

‘It’s good.’ Fucking Brothers. I smile at my girl. Mucimi settled me.



Josephine

I bend to his ear. “I’m walking with Jacky. We’re not going off of this compound and will stay to the inside.”

His head turns so he can see my eyes. “I can follow behind in case you need me.”

“No, stay with your friends. We won’t be long and will stay close. I’ll hit the cuff if I need help.” With a kiss, I stop him from offering more then move fast taking Jacky’s arm.

Jacky looks back. “Maverick isn’t coming? I want to thank him for the igloo and helping the guys. He put them in the mini-mansion and paid their houses off. Bobby is wrecked. People have been mean for so long he doesn’t know how to take the nice.”

“You already thanked him. He knows. People have been mean and the bikers have been bastardized for so long it’s hard to accept nice from them. I know I had trouble believing it but they all get it. They’re smart guys. The towns were mean long before the MC bikers showed. It’s just recently their new town is starting to change that. Even dad told us to stay away from them.”

“Yeah. I don’t think he meant all of them. He talked to them in town and a few knew him. That Nova guy from the city asked me how he was. He didn’t know dad died.” He doesn’t say anything about momma.

“I didn’t meet Nova but Mikey is his ol’ lady. She’s from Princes and tough but sweet. I told her about momma.”

He doesn't have anything to say but his arm tenses up. I just spill it. "Mucimi told Maverick to tell me about the calls momma got. I don't know why I never thought about it. They bullied everyone. I assumed she got a pass because she was sick. It never crossed my mind they'd call and cause more shit for her. I should have known."

He stops walking so I close my mouth. He walks to a bench and sits with his elbows on his knees, hands holding his head. "Picasso told me. Jojo, I never helped her. I was mad she let everything fall on you. I took off because I was a fucking bastard thinking she was not a good mom. The whole time she held that shit in. She did that for us. I was..."

My hand goes through his hair. "She did, Jacky. She knew what she was doing and kept us from being more stressed. *I'm fine, dear* is all she'd ever say. Never once did she mention women calling her. The phone never rang when we were home. They knew. I think that's what hurts me the most. They leveled their fucked-up hate at her knowing we would have fought for her. They did it for years, Jacky. I never cared what they thought, but I would have fought every damn one of them for messing with momma."

His face is a mess when he looks at me. The pain I see rips at my heart. He's so young. "I was so mad at her."

I nod. "I was too. I didn't realize it until Maverick talked to me. I didn't want the house and money. I wanted our family. She was dealing with their shit for years, Jacky. If I knew, we could have dealt with it. She never told dad. He would have dealt with it. Maverick thinks it was her way of protecting us. I see it now and have to believe that, but why

wouldn't she tell dad? And why didn't she take the damn pills?"

"I don't know about the pills. Dad would have gone after them. You would have gone with him. Dad wasn't always calm, Jojo. When he was mad, he was scary. You're like that. You had your knife at Magnar's throat. I'm glad you did but that was scary. I tried to play it off but fuck."

My dad was scary when he was mad. Anything that had to do with momma would have made him really scary. He was military and planned things like they were missions. The shop had the whole machine room years before we had machines for it. The storeroom and ramp staging were built while he taught me how to weld and bend metals. He was a weird guy at times but it all fit his plans.

I agree with Jacky. "Yeah. Dad planned everything and had me in judo from when I was little. When I told him about Krav Maga he paid for three classes a week so I wouldn't stress over work. He wanted me to know it."

"He planned for you to take over, didn't he? He taught me all about painting and the front."

I stop him. "You can build a car from the ground up. He taught you everything. He left you where you liked being and planned for you to go to college for art. You liked painting and the front. He knew you weren't staying in the shop, Jacky. That money is sitting there for you to go to school. Use it already and go."

"He didn't know Ma was going to die. He didn't know the women fucked with her. He didn't know you'd be just like him and never quit, Jojo. Dad couldn't know everything, could

he? He always knew everything else, how didn't he know? I never wanted to go to school. He never asked. From the minute he died, all I wanted was to leave these fucked up towns. You'd never leave, Ma wouldn't leave, I couldn't leave you to these assholes. Look what they did to Ma. I begged her to leave and she wouldn't. She said it was her peoples' home. These towns weren't her people."

I hug him. "Thank you for staying with me. We have a chance to make changes here, Jacky. I guess dad didn't know everything. It always felt like it. He was changing people alone. We're not alone anymore and have stronger people than us to help. There are over seven hundred members. I'm not ignoring the jerks anymore. I'm going to help make them pay for what they've done. I'll fight for momma."

He wipes his hand down my face. He hates tears. "I'm with you, Jojo, but you've been helping the women out all along."

I nod. "I'm going to do more than just fix their cars and washers or drop food. More than seven hundred, Jacky. Most are men and most are single. I know the bitchy women."

He laughs. "I'm in. I know some Brothers that would love to meet Janice, Cathy and Mary. I'll introduce them." Those are some good women.

I stand with my hand out. "Mom and dad are either rolling over in their graves or dancing."

He takes my hand smiling. "They're dancing. I loved when they danced."

I pull him down and kiss his cheek. “Yeah, I loved it too.”

He dances me back doing the waltz my parents always did through the house. I love my brother. His smile and excitement over men he’s introducing to townies has me relaxed. He’ll be okay. I know Maverick will help that. The man is already my new world.

I smile seeing his smile as Jacky waltzes us between people right to his chair. “Pres, I believe she belongs to you. I’ve got to plan the Hook-up mission.”

I laugh at the nut taking Maverick’s hand. He stands. “While we dance, you can tell me about this mission and whether or not I should be afraid.” He starts where Jacky left off and I’m whirled around the guys watching with smiles.

“Does Remo have a girlfriend?”

He steps wrong onto the walkway. “Oh fuck.”

I smile for my geeky President and lead him back to his steps. “I hope he meets Jasmine. She’s older than me and threw her ex out last year. The man was always a bully but hit her one night. She stabbed him in the leg and called the cops. Remo would never hit a woman and Jasmine is all about her yoga and zen shit. She teaches classes at the gym in the village.” Jacky mentioned her, I should text him the pairing.

“Her zen shit? She stabbed a man.”

I nod. “I would have shot him. She stabbed him with a knitting needle. It was big for a knitting needle but she does all kinds of crafty things.”

He nods. "I would have shot him too. Remo is single. Maybe if he had a woman, he wouldn't have time for the supernanny hovering. The sheriff called, he's got the PD's budgets transferring to us so the Brothers will be in the outlying towns and on Security more. They're already wired. I like the hologram on sensor so we'll use it in more places."

I kiss my geeky President because he's going to tell Remo and help with Jacky's mission.

Chapter Five

Three days

Maverick

My dick in her mouth is about as good as it gets. With her in ol' lady classes it's not long before I'm waiting for that long slow stroking to get to the end so I can lift her up and gain back some control. Her mouth is going to kill my chances of fucking her hard and fast.

“No. It's payback.”

I kiss her swollen lips. “No payback when I get to taste you, beautiful.”

Rolling to the side, I have her facing down and am over her fast. “Ass up, Josephine. I dreamt this one last night.” Slowing down so we're not blown apart makes everything better. Our first times together were kinetic explosions that kept my head spinning long after.

Her moan has me smiling. “It's still last night. Hard like last time.”

I love those orders. “Yes, ma'am.” With her beautiful curls in my fist holding her shoulder blades down, I slide in slow teasing her.

“Feels good but not hard. That guy said he'd teach our men...fuck. Like that.”

Pounding into her was the plan. Through her, ‘*Oh, ahh, Oh God, Yes and Again,*’ I'm losing control and know this is going to fuck with my head.

“Work that hand, beautiful.” Just seeing her move takes me to the edge. The thought of slowing us down gets thrown out while I move snapping my hips at the end of the stroke.

“Maverick.” The whisper gets me.

“Right here, Josephine. Give it up.” I rasp out moving for my girl.

Her body tells me I’m there. “Thank fuck.” My dick is squeezed tight enough to cause that explosion but I fight through to keep moving. “Fuck.” My throat closes up to a pin hole and body falls to her back. I’m glad I let her hair go. Something in my brain is working.

Getting through a few breaths has me able to string shit together. “I love you, Josephine Bonnie Marshal.”

She grunts so I move rolling her onto my side. “Don’t bring other Brothers to our bed or I’ll spank that very fine ass until it’s past pink.”

Her head moves so I look toward her. “Don’t tease me like it’s fun. I got what I wanted and will keep getting it however I can. Did you not like hard and fast Mister dreamt about it?”

I smile. “I fucking love you. Don’t take my shit. I love hard and fast.”

She kisses my chest and lays her head down. “Good. I need more sleep and knew it would blow my mind. Love you, Maverick.”

She’s smart. I guess overpowering me is out so she’ll do what she has to. I don’t know why I think it’s sexy. My

brain is wired wrong in some places. Kissing her head, I roll out of bed. I need to get her clothes, shower and...fuck. I get a towel warmed and clean her up. She freezes but doesn't open her eyes or talk. When I'm done she rolls to her side.

I smile as I'm showering, I should make it back for breakfast. Dressed and ready, I kiss my girl, leave her a note and run. Finn throws chin waiting on his bike. I throw it back, take the bike on the floor and know my brain is still spinning. Training will help.

Training, the job and breakfast. I've got this.



Hitting my watch, I run down the stairs and slap the keypad on the first-floor door. I stop short almost falling over. "It's a fucking hall."

Ari steps out on the right about six doors up. "Pres, I'm your escort back to the compound."

I nod seeing the hall go all the way down to the front. "It's one hall."

"These are Club rooms. I think yours is going on the third floor." Walking my way, he asks. "Are you okay, Pres?"

Shaking my head, I move. "Yeah. I never saw it without the maze of halls. I hope all the greeting rooms are gone."

"One on this floor by the bar and on the second by the stairs. There's an elevator where one was. Why all the greet rooms?" He points at the elevator as if my brain is still spinning.

“Major doesn’t like everyone congregating in the halls. They started with cells not rooms. He made them wider and put little rooms for the Brothers to hang. Some were claimed for card games, some had a TV or music. Here they weren’t used much. The rooms are bigger and we have the lounge area, dining room and big porch then deck. The halls aren’t where everyone congregates.”

“I like the igloos. Teller has ours the same as the Protector compound. Adrian is moving to his today. He got in late and didn’t know they were done.”

I nod. He was on freaky Ops and stayed at the Protectors. “Isn’t he off for the day?” I throw chin back to the Enforcer Team and Ari’s second.

“Yeah, but he doesn’t need it. He’s going to the races with the new Alpha-Bits today.” He swings his leg over when I do.

At the compound, I go right to the kitchen. Finn has the chef up trying to get his Haggis and tattie thing put in as a recipe. I look to Josephine smiling when she looks up.

“Pres,” the Bits and Brothers say, noticing me as I walk her way.

“Brothers.” I kiss her getting a giggle from the new Bits. I miss the other little Brothers and don’t know these Brothers at all except Anton.

“Pres Maverick, I race flag job?” Oman asks.

I smile. “If you want it, Oman. Anton, are they all off the schedule?”

He stops scooping yogurt to smile at me. “Lance, Chang, Oman. Next week Pax, me. I drive.”

Ari plops in a seat. “You’re driving?” I can see a million things Anton might try but he’s not as crazy as he was.

I get the eggs in the pan and lean into my smiling girl, put an arm around her and watch the Brothers.

Anton goes back to his yogurt scooping. I watch Jacky get in on the car building explanation while he’s cutting fruit. The Bits are all right there to help. I think I’m going to like these Brothers close to him.

I look up when I hear zorbing. “Where are you zorbing?”

Anton turns. “Track, hill good for zorbing. I build trail. Chang, Oman test today.” The last time he tried that it was off a waterfall.

I do not like this. “They’re testing it when you’re not there?”

“I’ll test it. What’s zorbing?” Jacky gets Ari and Stan laughing.

“Pres Maverick. I show I keep my Brothers safe.” Anton has me almost believing him.

I nod dumping eggs in a bowl. “It’s the only way anyone is testing it so you need to.”

Taking the sausage and eggs to the table, I set them down and pull Jo’s seat out for her. “Love the outfit, beautiful.” I lean to kiss her but Anton stands between us. She blows me a kiss.

“Fucking Brothers. Show me what you built.” I sit.

He puts his glasses on and pulls up holograms. “Zorb have water, small to Alpha-Bit, more to Brother. Two layer, shocks for impact. Trail have hills for bounce fun, deceleration ramp to bottom, conveyor lift to top. Alder, Asa test me work. Alder make one to ABSZ. Asa in Honor.”

It looks safe. I like the shocks and little hill mounds they have. “What job are you on today?”

“No job. IT monitor. Pax on IT.”

“See if you can get a Bit from ABSZ to cover you and Pax. If they’re testing, you should be there.”

His smile is why I love this kid. Everything is an adventure and it shows on his face. “Roger, Boss.” He types fast and smiles. “Alder cover to me. Aris cover Pax. Web train Alpha-Bit space no IT Alpha-Bit to cover.”

“Then we’re all going zorbing.”

Everyone yells making me laugh. When Anton moves, I kiss my girl. “You’re off?” I like her having a new mechanic. She won’t be working six days a week anymore.

“Yeah. I’m meeting Banks at the bank after breakfast and zorbing after lunch.”

I smile. “I’m with Banks and Cort then...”

“Maverick?”

I’m up and moving. “Aunt Rain? When did you get here?” Holy fuck, she’s here. We just talked to her two days ago. She said she’d come but didn’t give me a date. I hug her

then turn her to the table. “My Aunt Lorraine. I’ve always called her Rain.”

Mucimi hits my back and sits floating a plate from the island over. I look at my aunt while she’s talking to Josephine. Jo talked to her a few times. Did she know?

Mucimi hits my leg. “No. I went and got her.”

Oh shit. He smiles. “I have a chopper, but Teller flew.” That’s better than the freaky ride all that way. He nods moving bowls and plates to him.

I look back at Aunt Rain. “You’re not surprised by Mucimi.”

She smiles looking just like I remember her, younger. “Nothing those boys do surprises me. Josephine told me about them, but I didn’t expect to meet them. I’m truly blessed having met them.”

Okay. I introduce her to the Officers and Bits and sit her by Josephine. They talk more than I would. I can’t believe she’s here. My uncle would kill us both for this. My smile is real thinking I finally got her without him controlling our every bit of time.

Zorbing and the races are the talk, then Buenos Aires questions start. Jo jumps up. “I need to meet Banks.”

I nod. “I’m there later with Cort, then lunch.”

“I’ll see you for racing and zorbing.” With a kiss she’s gone. Stan is with her to the gate.

I look at Finn. “Where did Mucimi go?”

He looks over and shrugs. The Brothers all help clean telling me to sit with my aunt. “Are you staying here? I can get an igloo for you.” I hardly know this woman.

She laughs. “I’d love to stay for a few days. I told the little boy I’d go zorbing.” She’s zorbing?

“You’ll need clothes. It’s in water.” Alder said it was safe. I trust him.

She’s happy and open, I’m amazed. “I’ll bring a bag.”

“It’s great to have you here. Finn, I need an empty igloo.”

Oman stands between us. “I show. Boss Mucimi say her bag in.”

“Forget it, Finn.” I watch while Oman tags the map of igloos with her name on a star igloo. Boss Aunt Rain is cute so I don’t correct it.

When they leave, I spin back toward Finn. “Mucimi and Teller went and got her.”

He nods seriously. “Are you at the Club?”

“No. I’m here for another hour. What do I do with her while I’m gone?”

He laughs. “She’s not a baby.” He walks to the door hearing the chopper close. “That’s Teller’s.”

I follow him out. I’ll wash the table before I leave. Major and Brekan get off the chopper. This is unreal. I’m using his house.

“I’ll get a pod for Major. He’ll love it.” Mucimi is gone as fast as he showed.

Brekan holds my forearm smiling. “I’m at the Banks meet with you and Cort. Major is here for a couple.”

I nod and hug Major. “Brother, it’s been a while since I’ve seen you in person. Mucimi is setting you up in an igloo. He calls them pods.”

“It’s good to be seen, Maverick. I love the compounds. This one looks like space.”

I smile. I’ve shown him enough of it. I’m glad he recognizes the solar system. “I’m in Earth.”

They laugh. I shrug showing them in. I think it’s cool. They sit while I get coffees out and wash the table. The Bits show with my Aunt just before I’m ready to leave.

“Boss Major stay to Boss Aunt Rain, Alpha-Bits, Pres Maverick?” Lance asks.

Jesus. Mucimi set this up. I nod. “Okay. I have a meet in town then lunch. I’ll be back for the races. You’ll get them there?”

They all nod looking cute. “Thanks, Brothers. Do I need Security for Major?” I ask Brekan.

“They’re outside. Stan has rooms for them.”

“Later, little Brothers, Major.” I kiss my aunt and walk out feeling like I’ve been played. My aunt is here for Major. A car, bikes and truck are in the driveway. I open the garage door.

“This is nice, Maverick. I like the stacks. Asa said he can stack them but I didn’t get it.” Brekan walks to my bikes.

“I always take the one on the floor. I think someone changes them for me.”

He smiles. “I have a BSC bike.”

“You want to ride the Harley?” I offer it because he has one similar.

“Fuck yeah.” It’s always good when he’s smiling. Hitting the control, I drop it down for him. “I never get to ride mine off the grounds. Security procedure has me on the BSC bike.” He’s all about procedure.

“I like these to stow my bag. The Ducati has no storage room.” We ride up to the gate with his Team following. Mine falls in and we’re a parade riding through the Club town, town One and the village. At the end of town Two people are standing along the sidewalk. Something comes at me and I shoot. Brekan is pointing his gun as we stop.

“What did he throw?” I ask Security.

“Tomato, Pres.”

I look around as the Brothers drag the dick out and let him shake where everyone can see him. “Is this what you think is right? We gave you jobs that pay better. We have your trash picked up and recycling working for you. Delta put up a grant for elderly and disabled to get help with insulation, solar and heating so no one freezes this fucking winter. You have clean water, food that costs less and this is your show of appreciation?”

“You stole the bank!”

I turn to see who said that. Brekan points and his Security pulls a guy out. “This is good, for every complaint

you have, I can answer. It beats you spreading lies. The bank is being bought and not by me or Delta Rising. Your money will be insured, no one will have to face a letter telling them to pay the balance or they lose their house. No one will have to take a job the bank manager orders, or they lose their car, even if they have five fucking payments left. The bank is in default and scrambling to make a payment by fucking people out of what they've spent years paying for. I'm making that payment so everyone doesn't lose. Why the fuck is that a problem for you?"

"The bank is fine." The dick smiles like he's got inside information.

I nod and smile back before I wipe that off his face. "Ride down there. A marshal has your buddy in custody for embezzling money from anyone that held money there for years. When he goes to trial, you can keep defending him looking like more of a fool than you do right now. Kensington Bank is going to run oversight, so we get everything running legit."

The dick has nothing left to say. Looking around, I ask. "Anyone else have a complaint?"

"Not a complaint, but I hear them bitch about your men taking jobs from the town people."

I turn and smile at a guy I met last year. He works trash pickup and loves the new trucks. "Since we have more town people working than your town does, I'd say it's a lie spread by people threatened with any good someone else does that they can't make a buck off of." He nods. I throw him chin and look around.

“Solar, recycle, empty buildings have been around for years. Because we’re buying and using them, all of a sudden they’re bad?”

No one answers but they’re all listening. I walk looking into their eyes. “We have solar, heat and recycle everything. Because we’re sharing, not only the knowledge, but teaching you how to make it, through jobs and training we pay for, doesn’t make it bad.” With a woman nodding at me, I turn for the other side.

“Badass is about making it better for more. If someone is bitching about us, it’s because they can’t make a buck off of us. We sure as fuck aren’t letting them make a buck off of scamming you if we can help. The only way we can help is if you tell us. Mr. Tobias didn’t have to die. We have heat, we make insulation from recycled material and we have food to share. Being in a town we protect means you’re ours. Don’t let the bad seeds ruin any good you can find in your lives. Tell us and we’ll help.”

“They’re trying to run good people out of town.”
Perfect.

I nod at the old man that stepped up. “I know of a fire that was set because a woman wanted to run a garage. That was the day after I met Josephine. She’s now my ol’ lady. Her mother was bullied for years until she committed suicide. She protected her kids from the bullies as long as she could hold on. Do not let them do that to you. Tell us. We will help. Our only goal here is to make it better for more. If you open your eyes, you’ll see we’re doing that. Your taxes are lower, criminals are caught and brought to trial and we haven’t asked

you for a dime. Tell us when you see someone in need, we'll help. You know where to find us. Stop a Brother in the street if you have to. We will help."

They clap surprising me. These must be the good ones that baked us cakes. I go to my bike getting a hit on the shoulder from Brekan. "Good job, Brother."

We make the meet on time. It's never good to keep Cort waiting so I'm relieved. Kensington has a lawyer here and Banks has a work crew waiting. They're crazy. I make the payment so the bank doesn't default and the Kensington lawyer takes the signed closing papers from Delta's lawyer with the video. I own the bank for a good five minutes until I sign the papers with Cort and Brekan. BSC West now owns a bank. I didn't want a bank. I just didn't want the customers here to get fucked out of their houses or businesses. If payment wasn't made, the bank holding the note would seize the dumbass's bank and all its holdings. They could legally demand everyone to pay up or find new loans at a higher rate. This dick already screwed them with tons of fees and points on top of terrorizing people to do what he wanted.

We walk out to a cheer in the street. The dick was hauled away before the meet. Brekan hits my arm and points at the banner unrolling. Badass Trust makes me laugh.

I hug Cort then Banks. "Did Josephine get everything settled?" I ask Banks.

"Tomorrow, Brother. She's got too much coming in from everywhere. I'll get it straight, but I know what she wants now. She's a good woman, Brother."

I nod. “She is. Thanks for doing this. I’ll come to Alpha when this shit settles.”

He nods. “Clean this up first, Brother. It makes it easier to breathe.”

I nod and watch Brekan shake his head no to Cort. “I’m riding back to Delta. Major came down with me. I want to see the races and zorbing. I have Harper coming. Teller said the boys will love the zorbing. The bike is Maverick’s. It’s BSC without the exhaust.”

Cort hugs him and throws me chin. I laugh getting on my bike. Teller told Brekan before I knew about zorbing. Jesus.

The ride is good. We stop at the garage and Brekan is impressed with the holograms. While I talk to Perry and Bobby, he calls Asa about holograms for the Club and businesses. Bobby’s dad is happy. I let him know the paperwork will come for their houses tomorrow once the loan registers the payments today. Ken’s sister called with the heads-up that they were clear. Banks brought the cash to her to make final payments. I like that. He’s such a good Brother that doesn’t miss anything.

We missed Ken and the Brother working here because they ran for lunch, but Ken knows so I don’t hang around. Throwing chin to Security we take off. I’m hungry.

Cort is in the dining room with Major and my aunt when we walk in. Brekan laughs sitting down. “Banks head back?”

Cort shakes his head holding two fingers up to the Prospect. “He’s getting the Alpha-Bits and Troy with the boys. Seren is coming with Caelan and Ranger is bringing the boys after his shift. Raid is riding with Ranger.”

“Everyone here for dinner?” Fuck, I start a text for Finn when he nods.

He stops me. “Teller is handling food. They’re coming with Bravo.”

I look at him wondering what this is all about. “I already claimed her.”

He nods smiling. Shit, it’s the picture smile. “They didn’t see it, want to see zorbing and meet your ol’ lady.”

“How long is this going to last?” I need a vacation.

Brekan laughs. Cort smiles at Major then right back at me. “Don’t know.”

I look at Major with his head close to my aunt and shake my head. “I’m never going to take my girl to dinner alone at this rate. Fuck, the Hook-up mission.” I’m up ready to find and stop Jacky then right back down.

Cort’s huge hands are on my shoulders making sure I stay sitting. “Hook-up mission?”

“No fucking way. It’s not mine and I’m not involved.” I stare back at those eyes in sharp overdrive. I’m not doing this for years.

Brekan is laughing again. I hit his side. “Reign him in. You can’t invade Clubs with hundreds of Brothers regularly.”

Brekan stops laughing but is still smiling. “He does it all the time. He even covers the food and Security. I can’t wait until he shows at the MC. I never got a claiming party. They’re fun.”

I look back at Cort with his glaring eyes. “Go to the MC, they obviously need the fun. We have fun all the time. Racing and satellite lasers are always fun.”

They all laugh at me. Brekan tells him about the holograms and I’m ignored. I’m so glad when Remo sits by me.

“I’ve got a date with that chick Jacky set me up with. I don’t know where to take her.” He’s serious? I can’t even get a dinner alone.

“Anton has the zorbing trail. We’re testing it out after the races, or during, I don’t know. There’s water at the bottom so she’ll need to change.”

“That’s a good test. If she’d do that, she’s up for anything. I’ll get her to bring clothes for it. She was dressing for the Club.”

“Is this the Hook-up mission?” Cort asks and I hold my head.

Remo answers. I’m so fucked. Brekan is laughing again.



Josephine

The races get forgotten as soon as Anton texts everyone they're testing the zorbing trail. Maverick hands the flags to a guy waiting like he knew Maverick was skipping out. I pull and kiss him then follow the little guys and security to the end of the pit line. The Prospect at the gate scans our IDs.

“Why are they scanning IDs?”

Maverick smiles. “The money they raise will go to women on the ABSZ. Some want to open a bakery with sugar sweets. It's something they've made but couldn't have. The Bits are building it with state-of-the-art equipment so they learn about computers.”

They're unbelievably sweet. “How much is zorbing?”

“Five bucks for two rides today. Next time is five bucks a ride.” He points. “The kiosks will have drinks and sweets the women make. I donated Prospects to serve. It will only be open four hours at a time. The women and Alpha-Bits will have a day a month to ride for free.”

“Very cool.” As soon as it's out I groan. The cool chant gets picked up by people in front and behind us. “I'll watch that.”

He nods. Standing at the top of the hill, we watch how it all works. A huge clear ball rolls down bouncing off the little three foot mounds like a pinball. It looks like a blast. When it reaches the bottom, a rounded piece of corrugated steel shaped like a wave stops the ball in gentle rolling back and forth motions. This is well thought out. I laugh when I see

Mucimi flow out of the ball with the little water that traveled down with him. They don't waste anything. That water can't be just watering the grass.

I ask but think I know them well. "The water is filtered under the grate?"

"Yeah. Do you want your shower brace?"

I smile at him. "Definitely."

Natalia and Stella find me watching from a bench at the side without the conveyor that rolls the balls back up. That side has a full stairway leading straight up. I like this side.

"This is crazy. I don't say the other word anymore but it would fit." Natalia makes me laugh.

"I said it earlier. There are more Alpha-Bits here so it would be like a concert if they hear it."

"Don't fuckin' say it." Stella drops beside me. "I'm on ABSZ Monday. You're going back to the store another day. I've never been to a steampunk store."

Natalia rolls her eyes. "It's like a museum with a shop attached. We can go when we have a couple of hours. She's giving the mechanics the day off which isn't happening twice."

I nod for Stella making sure my frown is on. She hits my arm. "Don't do that. It looks fuckin' weird on you."

I smile when Natalia laughs. "I'm just waiting for the shower brace."

Stella's brows go down. The woman is like thunder and lightning with the mood changes. "Why aren't you healed

yet?”

“It was broke. Muscle and tendon were stretched. I can stand without the brace, but I have to keep it on until I can walk without it.”

Her face changes and she nods but doesn't say anything. I look at Natalia. I don't know them well but think this isn't normal. Natalia shrugs.

Stella points. “They're using the new ones. I told them I'm not getting wet. I bet women aren't going in the water balloons.”

Natalia smiles at me. “She made them with slime between the bubbles so she's not slimed either.”

They're all crazy. She made zorbs. My brace finally gets here and I switch it out. The Prospect is bringing it to the bottom at the medic hut. I didn't see that but nod. I'll see it when I get there.

With Natalia's arm, I make it back to Maverick and more friends than when I left. He lifts me right up. “You should have called me, beautiful.”

“I made it here fine. Are we ready?” I'm ready. “You're in a Stella zorb so you're not all wet. There aren't zorbs big enough for us.”

“I waited for nothing?”

He shakes his head. “Your metal brace can't go in the zorb.”

Oh. I reach down pulling the knife from my boot then the little dagger in my corset top. “He's smiling when I hand

them to him.

“Anything else that would pop your bubble?” Stella asks.

I nod pulling the clip from my hair and pen from my side pocket. “That’s it.”

Maverick opens the pen seeing the spike. I shrug and he shakes his head taking the gears hanging from my ear. Oops. “Oh, that too. Thanks. Be careful, they’re sharp.”

Everyone is laughing but Cort. “Why are you armed to the teeth? You have Security.”

I give him my best smile knowing it doesn’t come close to his best smile. “A girl can’t be too safe. My dad planned for everything and made sure I was ready for anything.”

He nods. “Was he a Mason?”

I shake my head. “He hated the hypocrisy of the order. A bunch live close but they’re not real Masons. The order closed a few years ago. The Indians did something to help that. Maverick knows the leaders, they could tell you how it all happened.”

Cort looks at Maverick. “Huh, we need to talk.”

Not with me. “I’m zorbing. Have fun.”

I hop-step to Natalia and Kristos. “Help me out of here before I’m dragged into a Cort and Maverick talk.”

Kristos laughs with his cool eyes swirling blue. “Take this one. I’ll get Natalia in the next.”

They hold it and I jump through the stretcher thing. Maverick is right outside. I give him a finger wave getting his shaking head as a response. I'm zorbing now. "My very own geeky President hottie, if you love me, you'll listen. Push hard!"

He laughs pushing me. I don't know if it was hard but it feels like I'm flying down a mountain. Bouncing and rolling from one side to the other, for what feels like an hour, finally ends with my hair covering my face, my throat sore from laughing and completely out of breath. I'm flat on my back still giggling like a teenager in between breaths. That was awesome.

The end opens and my feet are pulled out. Remo is smiling at me. "You're going to drag him here every week, aren't you?"

I nod. "Yep. How did Jasmine like it?"

He puts his arm out. "She's at the medic hut. Something with a posing dog I didn't understand. She didn't have a dog in there."

I laugh to the medic hut. Jasmine sprained her wrist. She's glad I know Remo and will come back next week. Remo shakes his head at me. I shrug. If he breaks up with her, she won't come back. If he doesn't, I have a partner to play with.

Maverick meets me at the stairs built into the hill with benches on the straightaways. "I've got your arsenal."

I get my hair back up first. "That alone is better. I was a mess of hair when Remo pulled me out. I couldn't see a thing for half the ride."

He laughs. “I love your hair. Why do you shave the back?”

“It’s a lot of hair and hot in the summer, it’s too thick for a lot of clips and I like it down. I only wear it up for work and the shaved part is like two inches. It never shows when it’s down.”

He nods. “It’s beautiful like you.”

“I love you too. I need a drink. I laughed the whole way down.”

He pulls water from his cargo’s lower pocket with a smile. He thinks of everything.

“You’re the best.”

“I hope you still think so when I tell you dinner is at the Club. Almost all Rising Clubs are here. Games are going up and the grills are set.”

“We’re not going to dinner tonight. I knew when your aunt walked in. We’ll make a plan when it settles.” They’re crazy. It’s never settling, but I’m okay because they’re fun and happy people. They make this life a good one.

“I love that you’re easy with the quick change of plans. Thank you. I’ll make it up to you.” When his mouth is off mine, I stand.

“I’m not going down again. Did you find Major and Aunt Rain?”

He points to the bottom. “They went down together.”

Brekan and Harper are pulling them out. I laugh. Maverick shakes his head but he’s smiling. “I’m glad she’s

having fun. She deserves it.”

He’s told me his uncle was strict. I think he means abusive. He’ll tell me when he’s ready. I like his aunt. She looks happy hugging and laughing with Major and Harper. “She’s having fun.”

“Yeah, let’s go see what the crazy Brothers are up to. Your shower brace is going back to the igloo.”

My everything geeky President.



Maverick

Josephine is sitting with the ol' ladies and mechanics' moms. My aunt is right with her. It's weird how they've connected so quickly. Turning, I find Jacky with Ratchet and some of his crew talking with the mechanics and their family. Bobby's dad looks tired but happy.

"Who are they?" Major asks.

"The families at your house. They were getting shit in town so I moved them here until it settles. That should be this week coming up."

Banks slides closer. "It will." He goes on to explain what's going on. I watch the Brothers and ol' ladies.

Cort sits with Brekan and Falcon flanking him. "What did her dad do beside mechanics?"

"She didn't say he was anything but a mechanic and built furniture."

He shakes his head. "Brekan talked to the chief here. They have him as Hatchet Law. The guy that took Kateri in was Law, aka Ben T.

My eyes snap to him. "Mason hypocrisy. A sect? His name was Bruce Patton. Hatchet could be Indian or military."

He looks at Brekan. "Of Indian Masons?"

Crow was an Indian Mason. It doesn't seem so farfetched to me. "Wouldn't Beacon or Trask know? They're more detective than I am. I know Crow dealt with Mason shit using Indians and Indian shit using Masons. Badass was only used as erasers. It sounds like a Crow sect."

They look at me then each other and laugh. I don't get it.

"You're fuckin' right, Brother. How do you know how he dealt with shit?" Justice makes me jump. I didn't know he was on the side of me.

"Major and his stories, what I've seen here, at Phoenix and up at Beacon's Mansion. Every time someone says Crow, everyone stops and listens. I watch for that and listen like they do."

"It would explain the money and training his daughter so she'd never be taken. He isn't Badass or Mason if he hated them. She doesn't look Indian." Brekan doesn't see it?

"He was military. He planned everything out according to the mechanics, Jo and Jacky. I bet he was a commander of something. A strike or assault elite team. He had to know a lot of Brothers at the MC. Not all Indians look Indian." I look at Major. "Why'd you buy the land here?"

"I didn't. Crow did and handed me the deed, he never said why. It's a pretty place so I built the house to get away but never used it. The Club started getting hit with bigger battles so I built the overflow Club to stop what we could from hitting civilians on this side. Cort was taking care of anything to the south of us. I had plans to build another on the east. Brekan handled that with the three new Clubs taking the bible from north and east." The man has a story for everything.

I'm right, they're all crazy. "It's six thousand acres, Major." I remind him of the point.

He nods. "I didn't measure it. The Club and house are at the front. Why does the acreage matter?"

I look at Cort. "Where did he get the money for it and who was it supposed to go to?" Cort asks. They're good questions.

"Badass. Crow was a puzzle man. Everything was a puzzle piece to something else. He didn't explain anything." Major isn't mad but frustrated.

Cort smiles. "I loved that when he was alive but hate it now he's gone."

Everyone says that. They all knew Crow personally. "I think you all have puzzle pieces but aren't seeing them together."

They look at me then Justice. I turn to see him nod. Alerts go through me again. "Josephine's dad knew Crow and this land was bought because of that relationship."

He nods. "Jesus fuck. Ask him more, Maverick. He can't lie to a President." Cort has me looking at him.

How do I do that? I barely knew Crow. "I talked to Crow once. He told me to go into the Air Force and keep my eyes pointed up. It was when we put the towers higher. His tribe got signals with the higher towers. I tried to explain but he said to go into the Air Force again then walked away."

Cort rolls his eyes at me. "Ask him shit you picked up."

I get it. "The MC getting hit hard wasn't just the Brothers. Technology was hit by someone against the

government or FBI, right? That card reader shit wasn't bored dicks. It was bored dicks given shit to annoy and distract."

"Yeah." Justice gives me a look that says he can't say more.

"The fights now are just morons trying to show they're more badass than Badass?"

"Yeah. It's not important and the card shit has been cleared with Protector Ops." He's telling me to move on.

"Crow saw a Club here?"

Mucimi bumps my arm. Fucking Brothers. "Crow saw you here, Indians safe and Jojo and Jacky with you. Jojo would remember Crow. Their sister was going to be taken but fell from the tree she tried hiding in. Their dad planned for what's next knowing he was a target." He's gone.

"Sonofabitch." I look at Justice. "The people leaving are old Masons?"

"Not true Mason, but yeah."

Not true Mason but yeah. Not true... "Oh fuck. True Masons and Badass lost kids. Nova, Parker, Kateri was Indian and Mason Indian. Chenoa?"

Justice looks at Cort with his eyes huge. I try again. "Some of that is right. Nova, Parker, Kateri, Chenoa are right?"

Justice nods looking down. I don't stop. "Josephine's sister was going to be taken because her father was helping find the kids. He was Law like the Ben T guy. A sect Crow set up."

Justice nods his head. “You’re going back. Move forward, Brother. Badass is forward.” The nod means I’m right.

Go forward. The fights now are just Club shit. The parents are back not forward. Badass is forward, never alone. Oh. “Crow saw me here, never alone. Mucimi keeps calling her Jojo, it’s a family name.”

“Stop. Jojo is a family name?” Cort asks.

I nod. “That’s what she said.”

Cort’s eyes are razor sharp. “You can go if you want, Justice. We need to get all this shit straight.”

Justice is up. “I’m zorbing with the Protectors.”

I smile when he’s gone. They’re so young. They’ll fit in the zorbs. Anton said six three but I’m too big. I don’t think I’d fit through the stretcher hole.

A hand waves focusing me. “Any other questions you have?”

“Millions. About Crow and puzzle pieces, not really. I don’t know him or all the puzzle pieces everyone else has. Since he had vision, I think he was fixing shit before it happened and trusted you’d do the right thing. He had Kateri sheltered by Masons. Parker and Nova didn’t meet by chance – the timing was chance. Chenoa I don’t know. Her mother and father are missing. I don’t have a piece around her but Badass being close. That’s another timing chance.”

He nods. “She’s related to Aiyana and Brekan.”

Aiyana and Brekan. “That’s how Ben got here. You, Kristos and Brekan. He’s related to Aiyana and the Blackhawks. He’d feel that somewhere.” I look at Brekan.

His hands go up. “He’s more Indian than I am and touched by the ancestors. I was gifted but he’s the Leader.” That must explain it. I don’t know how but don’t ask.

Cort does. “What are you called if he’s the leader?”

“An enforcer. I’m an Enforcer for my tribe. That’s a Warrior that passed the challenges.”

I nod. “Like Mase.”

“Yeah, but he’s not one I’d give an order to. He sees more than I do. In Indian and in Badass. Badass in Brothers does something to them. Black and white, right and wrong. They see things different than Indians. We’ll fight for right and do that fiercely, but it’s always centered around the Earth and carrying the blood lines. Now that seems to be any Native, not tribal based. Mohegan with Cheyenne or Navajo would never be seen. Here that tribal belief was blasted to pieces when the ancestors showed for Teller. It should be said he’s the Leader’s son. A Protector of all people.”

“Holy shit, they have twins on the way.”

Major makes me smile then I look at Cort. “Justice is something in there. Leader of Protectors? Ben is Leader of Indian and Badass. Mase Leader of Warriors? Christian Leader of freaky? Does that make Mucimi Leader of vision shit? Where does Aiyana fit? And Protectors protect each other with military, the Warrior and Badass?”

“That’s a lot of questions and you have a lot of it right. Titles don’t matter to them. They have their purpose and protecting each other so they can protect the rest is the difference you need. That different is from the Native side. Badass is always protect your Brothers. To the Indians that’s in levels. The Protectors will do whatever it takes to save their Protectors over a civilian. They can’t afford to lose their Brothers and know it. They can’t afford to lose the Presidents or people that protect the vision and know that too. Until their numbers grow, they’ll make sure to protect or work until they drop to heal their Protectors. That baby Joey has is protected for the vision. She has a purpose. I don’t know what it is, but Jeremy was glowing when he first held her. The same thing with Mase’s two little ones, when Jeremy holds them, he’s glowing. The other two are Protectors.” Kristos looks from me to Cort.

It makes sense and I get Mikey being healed. Wait, Joey has a baby from here. It can’t be so I drop it and think of everything else he said. “See, that just gives more questions. You all have pieces, if I knew them all, I’d have better questions and would probably have more worked out.”

Brekan smiles but it’s Major that answers me. “You worked out more than we did without Kristos’ puzzle piece.”

Cort nods. “We need a meet with everyone that knew Crow or has that insight to see what we’re missing. Not in an office, maybe just sitting around a fire. We have the Brothers to work it out, but the Brothers don’t have all we do.”

I nod. “Raid is good with details and putting shit together. I bet he knows more but isn’t asked.”

Brekan agrees. “Beacon, Cooper, Jinx, Falcon, Trask, Ranger, Jack, Web, Alexia, Alder and Asa wouldn’t say a word without being asked.”

I nod. “That’s true. Neither would the ol’ ladies. Seren, AJ, Deborah, Solei, hell they all pick shit up and watch everything. I leave the others out because they’re with readers but you can’t disregard someone like Harper. She’s smart as a whip and misses nothing.” I turn fast and stand.

Cort nods. “I’ll work something out. The ol’ ladies are up.”

Everyone moves.



We walk the solar system with a soft glow on the igloos showing topographical differences. I love Earth. It’s the best lit igloo because I don’t count the stars.

“Banks is handling your money,” I throw out looking at Mars.

She slows to study Mars. “Jacky too. My dad had his college money waiting for him to be ready. He was a little insane with money. Art school for out of state at sixty grand a year has interest that just keeps adding to it.”

“A mechanic making that much?” I ask trying to keep it light.

“I thought the same thing. He’d plan and we waited until certain dates to get machines and new stuff for the shop or house. I thought it was for money but now I’m not so sure. The shop updates always worked out to when we were ready

to take the next step. Jacky painted a car with my dad in the back where a compressor was, then within a month we had the paint bay. I'd see his plan, but maybe it was just like a calendar he put things on."

I nod. "Do you still have it?"

"Yeah. It's on the computer. Jacky can get it for you."

"Being straight, your dad knew the Indians, one in particular that has ties to the MC and Cort. His name was Crow."

She stops me. "I know Crow. Well, my dad is who he came to see, but he brought us laptops or Indian souvenirs. The table my dad made for my room had a dream catcher at the end where the blue resin was lighter, that was from Crow. He put little things in everything he made or etched words and quotes with the wood burner. That's why I love the furniture. He made mine special for me."

What the fuck? "Quotes?"

She laughs. "You had to know Crow. He talked in riddles. If you figured it out, he'd give you a quote. My dad looked up to him or worshipped him. He's the one that gave dad the land for the new shop. We were supposed to build houses there for us. I guess like the compound." She laughs. "Anyway, my dad did that for us." Crow gave them land too.

"Quotes like from Lincoln or Hardy?"

"Not always. A lot were Indian proverbs or something. He believed his ancestors were always with him, like Aylen does. He'd always tell us we're never alone. Jacky was young but loved Crow. He'd sit and listen to him talk

about anything. It's funny because he'd say we have people no matter where we are in the world, we just have to open to them. A lot was like your Bible but Indian."

"Fucking hell. Can we look at the furniture you have in storage?"

She nods. "Do I have to go? I'm going to the steampunk store in Denver with Natalia. I can't take more days off work. He built everything in our house, so it isn't just a couple of chairs."

I nod. Quotes and Badass lessons. Wait. "Did you have lessons? Are you Indian?"

She squeezes my hand. "Slow down. My mom was Indian so yes. She's from a different tribe called Naskapi. I never heard of it but Crow showed us on the laptops. Her whole family was wiped out by one thing or another. My dad had Indian in him but he said he was claimed by too many and he was a mutt."

Naskapi? "Aiyana, Ford, Garren and Brekan are Naskapi. Chenoa I think is distant or something."

Her little smile beams. "I love Chenoa. She's got my mom's eyes. Me and Jacky look like my dad."

That explains the shiny thick loose-corkscrew hair. "Your mom didn't strike me as Indian. Did your sister look like you or your mom?"

"Momma. She was the spitting image with those almond shaped eyes. I think they looked Indian. She wanted my hair. While hers was thick, it was straight and pitch black. Her skin was darker than ours. We'd tan a reddish color in the

summer and she'd get darker. Our hair lightens but hers didn't. It was odd to have so many differences in one family."

I nod. "Christian is Mohegan. I'll show you." I scroll my phone. "You met Ben and his boys, this is Christian. 100% Mohegan like his brother Mase and sister Joey. Her hair is lighter than yours but a similar golden brown. Christian's is lighter or glows or something. Next picture is of Joey." I hand her my phone.

"He looks like my dad. He's Mohegan? Joey has curly hair like mine." Millions of women do.

I move so I can see. "Your dad?"

"Green eyes, sandy hair and same jaw. My dad's hair would streak almost white in the sun. Mine doesn't."

Green eyes. Ben has green eyes, Mase and Justice... shit, Mucimi. I take the phone back and text Cort that I have another puzzle piece. He tells me to hold it. I take her hand and start walking until she laughs.

"What?"

"You're an adorable geek. I love it and you. So family history for me is done. Tell me about Maverick Wyatt Marshal and his people."

After I kiss her, we walk while I tell her what I know about Wyatt and the Marshals. My feet stop when I see Major guide my aunt into his igloo. His Security throws chin passing us on the path so I move and start on my mom's family trying to ignore her sister in Major's igloo.

Fucking Brothers.

Chapter Six

Two days

Josephine

“Hey, I just met you and this is crazy

But here’s my number so call me maybe. So bad, so so bad.”

I almost fall down laughing. He’s so damn adorable singing in the shower. When I turn to see why he stopped he’s looking out the door at me and he doesn’t look happy. “It was a challenge. We all had parts.”

I nod. “*Call me Maybe?* It’s a girl song when they get drunk.”

He rolls his eyes. “The army threw a challenge. Our commander made us do it.”

“The army, with the sand and half-dressed guys mimicking the Dolphin Cheerleaders?”

He looks up. “It’s hot in Afghanistan. We had shuttles and techs with hologram dancers on the glass.”

“Oh my god. I want to see that. Did you dance?”

“A little.” He growls backing up with his face turned to the side.

Reaching in, I pull him forward. “No way, I get to see it. Man up and show me that Badass Air Force challenge.”

He shakes his wet hair fast spraying me with drops. “I don’t even remember the words. I only know my part and I

sing it all together.”

“Show me.”

He pulls me in. “I’ll show you a different dance.”

I back up before I’m in the water. “I’m dressed and can’t get this brace wet *and* we just did that dance. Natalia will be here and my hair is still wet.”

He smiles letting me go. “I could get more than your hair wet.”

I laugh at him stepping out the shower door. “Later, baby. I want to see the video. I’m calling Mars.”

“It’s not worth it. Geeks don’t dance. She probably doesn’t remember. It wasn’t posted because we were so bad.” He’s trying too hard.

The sexy geek protests too much, methinks. I smile toweling my hair dry while I sing the words to *Call me Maybe*. He sings different parts with me so low I bet he thinks I can’t hear him. I text Ren about getting me the video.

With the bed made and boots from yesterday back in place, I go look for my sexy geek. “What’s your schedule today?” I kiss his back then hop on the counter to watch him shave under his beard. I love the low beard that looks like bad boy stubble.

“Inner Circle, Security, Innovation and Development for Aero meets. A launch at eleven. Lunch and meet in Phoenix at one. We’re supposed to go to storage and see the furniture. I don’t know when, but it was set for today.”

“I’m glad I’m a mechanic. Your day sucks.”

His hand stops and he smiles. “You’re a hell of a mechanic.”

“That’s why I love you. So you won’t mind if we have dinner in Denver? Natalia said early dinner so she’s back to Honor by six.” I haven’t asked for permission to do what I want in years.

“Have fun. I’ll be here when you get back.”

I let my breath out and move to hop down but he stops me. “You don’t need my approval. Do what you do. I’ll miss my smile but see it when you get back. You leave dressed. Natalia will be. The holster is in the gear safe room at the back of the closet. You’ll both have Security. Don’t lose them.”

I nod since he’s holding my face in his hands and has his eyes on mine with a look that’s a little scary. “I will.”

He kisses my lips and smiles. “Have fun. I’ve never been there but my day is booked.”

The serious scary to a smile sends chills down my back. “Are you worried?”

His head turns. “No. We’d get a warning telling me if I should be.”

I relax. “I’ll buy you a souvenir. Oh, what am I saying to your aunt?”

He makes a face in the mirror. “I’m not saying a fucking word. I don’t really know who she is anymore. What I did know wasn’t her. I love Major.” He shrugs. It’s a hard position but his aunt is sweet and outgoing. An adventurer. Maybe it’s in his blood.

“I’ll leave it alone. They might come with us.” My phone beeps.

“More Security is good. Be safe and have fun, beautiful.”

“I will. Love you, sexy geek.” I kiss the tattoo on his arm and run to get the holster and get to the garage.

Hearing him laugh makes me smile all the way to the garage. Jacky, Picasso, Lance, Oman, Major and Aunt Rain are waiting with a bunch of security guys. “This ought to be fun, Jojo.” Jacky is excited.

“Stay out of the smoke shops.” I step back when everyone looks at me. “What? I’m his big sister.”

Picasso shakes his head. “We’re not going near a fucking smoke shop. That shit may be legal, but we don’t fuck with it.”

I put my hands up. “All right, all right. You’re officially adopted to the family. You keep him clean and I’ll even feed you.”

Jacky laughs with security. I shrug. Maverick does it all the time. “Since when have I done anything like that?” Jacky isn’t offended.

“I don’t know, the Club probably has guys doing drugs. I don’t want you with those guys. I don’t know them all so I say shit on the fly.”

He nods. “Good job, sis. I stay away from those guys but you’re watching my back.”

I hug him. “Always.”

My phone beeps. “Oh, my God. Maverick did an Air Force challenge to *Call me Maybe*.” I click and turn it up.

Everyone gathers around. “Boss Josephine. Send chat, I open tablet.”

I nod for Lance and copy the link. When I drop it in his chat he sends it to Oman so people are gathered around them. Aunt Rain sticks close and watches from my phone. Poor Maverick is on all the chorus parts with geeky crap before and after. He dances and mimics the cheerleaders he’s copying looking damn hot. Jacky groans when the guy before Maverick tries for sexy.

“Stay on it, Maverick does it right.”

When the hologram cheerleader dances, Maverick is shown from the hips up looking naked. Damn he’s good. It could be because I love him, so I don’t say it. They laugh at parts and groan at others. I watch for my sexy geek smiling. He’s too cute.

“Send that to me, Lance. One of those is a Brother in our IT. Jordan has another, but he was stiff as a board. He may not want to relive that.” Major has us all laughing as the chopper lowers.

As I step into the chopper I wonder if I should stop them from sending the video everywhere. Leaning close when I sit by Aunt Rain I ask, “Should I stop them from sending it? Maverick said it was bad so they never posted it.”

She nods. “It’s not becoming of a military officer to be seen with the other men like that, but Maverick did well. Maybe that’s why they look so bad. He should be proud.

Everyone I've met loves Maverick. They'll soothe any wounded pride he has."

They do love him. I nod. "Sounds right. Even people in town sent cakes and stuff for him and the Club. Thanks." I relax and watch Natalia laughing at the video Oman shows her.

When it's done, she asks, "Maverick is good. Why'd they put him with the other guys?"

I shrug feeling better about the video. "It was a challenge his commander made them take up. He rethought it."

She laughs. "I would too."

Oh boy.



Maverick

My morning of meetings went by fast. The obvious Brothers shown disloyal or with anger toward the Club are out. The readers went back at the end of last week. Ari and Adrian will stay alert and tell me the Protectors will show at the bar and help this week. Thirteen more Brothers are gone. I don't want to lose more, but I want my Brothers safe. I smile running to the dining room. Kristos was right, Badass covers their Brothers.

Less halls means I'm early. I need to adjust my time. Raid, Web and Cort are at the table with Kristos and Falcon.

I throw chin and sit across from a smiling Cort. "Should I be on alert?"

They laugh. Finn sits to my right. "I'm glad I got the second video. That first one sucked."

I look at him. "Video?" Shit.

Raid jumps in. "I'd claim amnesia too."

Cort and Kristos laugh. "Show it, Web, make the second bigger. I like that one." Cort has Web jumping to follow the order. Fuck.

I don't even watch. "It was ordered. The others were only trying to save face. He didn't post it."

Mars sits. "I did. Not his, the second. I was tempted to post the other but the second was the best."

"You fuck. Why didn't you tell me?" I hear the song and close my eyes.

She hits my arm and rolls her eyes. “You got more hits than the army, relax. When he shot the choices down you wouldn’t listen to anything. I had my partner post *Drift Away* and it was a hit. The challenge wasn’t the song, it was a parody. We gave them a parody that is fucking good.”

I nod staying away from Web’s hologram video. Everyone is commenting on the geeks. I’m glad it’s not posted. They tried but were getting barked at and nerves show worse on camera.

I order from a smirking Prospect. “You know a blank look?”

He smiles and I shake my head. “Blank will be how you look on the floor. Wipe the smirk off and put my order in.”

Nerves make blank easy for him. “Yes, Pres.” He runs making Cort and Mars laugh.

I hear the song and turn. The hologram shows big on the wall. Since it’s split, it’s not just me that’s showing. Uncle Kracker shows on the side of me. It’s not bad. Every move he makes, I do. The backgrounds are what’s different and I’m in flight gear with the flag on my shoulder making me smile. I wanted the flag in every shot but it looks powerful on my shoulder against the dark blue. While I mimic the singer, the techs and engineers look more comfortable in the crowd. The hangar is impressive with projects out showing what we do. When the launch shows the dining room blasts off with it.

Kristos hits my shoulder. He smiles and shakes his head. It’s a good thing he doesn’t try talking because it’s impossible right now. Finn turns and hugs me. I laugh pushing him away. “Get the fuck off me, Brother. That was years ago.”

“I’m nay takin’ it as today, Pres. It’s a damn proud feelin’ I got.” His accent is fucking thick.

I throw him chin. “The geeks and engineers were more comfortable than the first one. The idiot shooting was barking like a drill sergeant. Mars did better.”

“Thanks, Boss. I’ve got something to fall back on if this gig doesn’t work out.”

I laugh at her. “I’m not letting you leave, Brother. Get comfortable.”

Finn nods. “She’s got...”

The Officers finish with him... “Nowhere to go but up!”

Cort and Raid laugh. Mars throws me chin. “I’m more comfortable here than I was there, Maverick. This gig is working fine.”

“That’s a relief. You already make more than me, I don’t know what else I can offer.”

She laughs shaking her head. “I’m good. Lukas told us about Cooper kidnapping a woman to be his grandmother. You kidnapped three whole families, Jo and Jacky. You guys are scary with showing love or however you describe that shit.”

They’re all laughing again. My Brothers are fun, even the geeks. I shrug.

We finally get food from a blank faced Prospect. I throw him chin and dig in remembering I’m supposed to be at Phoenix. “Why are you here?” I ask Cort.

“Meet is here. Cooper has FBI Ops after, but Trask will pick up Jordan and Brinks on his way.”

I nod. The others will be on the boards. “You read through what I wrote?”

He nods so I ask, “Is Jojo what Joey is called?”

Cort shakes his head and looks at Kristos to answer. “I got a definite no on that but Mase wasn’t answering anything easy. He blocked me and shrugged when I asked about where their mother was from. He always answers so I took the shrug as he won’t lie about it but knows something. He sent the pictures to someone, but I don’t know the Co name.”

Cort freezes and Raid leans forward. “Co that helped keep Kateri safe?”

Cort nods. “He knew Ben T and Crow. Did she mention other Indians or names?”

I pull my phone shaking my head. “I’ll ask.” I text Josephine.

She met a guy with Crow once. He wasn’t from around here and she was young. He sounded funny and made her laugh. He had blue and aqua on his necklace and gave her a bracelet that had the colors. That’s all she remembers. I show Cort.

“The Protectors are scarce today. I haven’t called to them, but they haven’t shown either. The bracelet may show us the tribe depending on the blue. Let’s see what’s in storage. Maybe it was a theme for Bruce.” Cort makes sense.

“My room is navy and blues. I have pictures from Jacky of her old room furniture. That’s what the Brothers used

to remake it.”

Raid nods. “Jack had AJ send the file for us to pick what we want to make. Do you have the house furniture or just her room?” He doesn’t miss anything.

“Just her room. It may not match the house.” I nod seeing it. “Mucimi not going with them is weird. He’s been here every day and helped the Bits with the fence finding weird shit from somewhere to add centerpieces on it.”

Cort nods. “I have Security meeting the chopper from Brekan. He’s also quiet today but gave me Brothers without question.”

That gets my attention. I look at tracking and see Teams around Jo and the Bits. “Ari is there. He’s a reader. They have a parade of security from here. I don’t have Natalia or MC Teams.”

Web throws a board over the table. “Natalia has a Protector Team. Major’s Team shows on yours, but I have another on him from the MC. Jacky has Enforcers and the Bits have a mixed Team of Enforcer and Protector. With Josephine’s full Team they’re covered by four too many.”

I nod but don’t answer.



Josephine

I show Natalia the US Marshal badge. “I’m getting it. Maverick Wyatt Marshal needs a badge.”

She laughs. “I like how they put Old West and Victorian with Steampunk. I’m getting these goggles for Kristos. The yellow will make his eyes look like a kaleidoscope.”

I nod not sure how that will work but I don’t want to ask. I’ll get a whole lesson on color shit I don’t need. A man goes by with a mask hanging from his belt. I turn my head as if I’m looking at the display but watch him stop at the end section of this aisle. His back is to me, but I see the gun bulge and boots. He’s in black but it isn’t gear.

I turn toward Natalia and move her back up the way we came whispering close to her ear. “Guy had a gas mask clipped to his belt. Pay attention. Text your head guy.”

Surprisingly she doesn’t ask a single question and thumbs a text out. “No answer,” she whispers.

My arm is grabbed and I spin acting off balance, lifting my leg a little so the brace catches his attention. The gas mask guy puts a finger to his mouth then shows his gun. My other hand goes on my head so I can pull the pen I stuffed in the clip when we sat down earlier. With a flourish, I sink the little spike in his throat, then kick up with the brace. I hope I didn’t damage my brace. It worked well as a distraction.

“The mask.” Natalia whispers thumbing another text. The guys were at the ends of aisles and at the doors. Major had the extra outside at the doors. I’m trying to think while

flipping the carabiner off this rolling fool. He's not making noise which is a plus. Finally, I unclip the mask and hand it to Natalia. "Security should have been here," she whispers.

I move to the end of the aisle, bending to look out from low. Monroe is at the end of this aisle but a guy in black with the mask behind him passes close. I text him what aisle we're in and *SOS* with *quiet* in capitals. Natalia hits my shoulder hard.

"What?" As soon as my head turns, I'm raising up slowly. Another guy in black has his gun pointed at us. Making a show of holding on to the shelf and putting the brace out first, I get the dagger from my back. When I straighten fully, I take a step to turn while throwing. Nice, he was looking at my brace so he missed the dagger. He falls with a crack from the dagger hitting the ceramic tile. Damn, they had to use the real shit.

"Mask." Natalia whispers. "There's a reason two have them. I texted Kristos."

I nod and unclip this one pretty quick. There is no way I'm wasting time. "Monroe, a team with gas masks are in! Get everyone out!" I yell causing a shit storm.

Shots are going off everywhere. Natalia drags me to the next aisle. I see right away why. Cogs, gears, pipe and saw blade looking things all work for me. But that means they'll work for someone else and their someone else's are bigger than me. "Grab and let's move back to our aisle. Don't forget you have a gun."

She nods pulling shit fast. I stuff a small blade and gear in my lower pocket and put my knife at my back. While I

wait, I hit my cuff in the sequence Maverick told me for the help alert.

“Jojo, cover up!” Shit. Jacky is going to get one of us killed. “Security is down all over the fucking place.” Maybe not, that was smart.

“Masks.” I put mine on moving my hair clip to my vest. Natalia steps out and a guy grabs her. I swing hard and fast kicking the back of his leg with my heel raised at an angle. When he buckles Natalia hits him with a pipe. The small knife, at the pressure point for his shoulder, stops his hand from squeezing my arm and pulling me down with him. Taking his can, I spray whatever in his face. It’s not labeled so I go to nostrils and his mouth just to be sure.

When the can is almost empty, Natalia hits my shoulder. “Enough. We can’t stay here,” her whisper comes out just before I see stars.

“Nooooo!!!” She yells. With all the noise, I hope no one heard.

I hold my bent knee trying to get the chain off my leg breathing like I’m in labor.

“Jojo!” That’s Jacky. Shaking my head I focus on Natalia.

“Drop it or I’ll shoot her.” My head swings back. The masked guy has a gun pointed at me but he’s looking at Natalia. Rolling to the side, I reach for the gun with a groan that I feel is warranted. My damn leg feels like it’s broke again.

A foot turns me. “Who is she, your security or the President’s wife?” Shots on the other side of the shop have him looking up.

Natalia drops her pipe and falls to her knees, just to the side and back of me. It’s enough. I shoot the fucking jerk that would hit a woman in a brace, in the damn brace.

“Are you okay?” Natalia has got to be kidding.

“Pull me into the aisle. Keep the mask on and get your gun out. We’re not fighting them all. I’m good with shooting them.” People are yelling but I don’t recognize the voices. It doesn’t sound like Badass orders either.

“Okay.” She pulls me over then into the aisle. “You have more clips?”

“One, we’ll share. Stay at my back. They won’t expect us to be sitting facing the ends.”

It’s a good two minutes before fighting stops. It gets quiet and a little scary. Where the hell are all the security guys?

“Jojo? They’re checking to make sure they got them all. Stay put.” Jacky trips at the end of the aisle.

“Okay. Natalia, don’t turn away from that side.”

“Not a chance. You’ve kept me safe this long. Odds are with you.”

Jacky falls on a knee then pushes into our aisle. “Thank God.” He falls but doesn’t move. The mask covers his face, but I see blood.

“Jacky?” I’m trying to stay calm and not scream. They knew both of us. Her security or the President’s wife means they know us both.

“Finally!” Natalia yells.

I look back seeing Ari with a mask on and slide toward Jacky. “He fell.”

Mucimi shows up smiling at me. I point to Jacky. “Please help him.”

He nods holding Jacky’s head.

“Natalia! Josephine!” Major yells.

I’m so relieved, I answer. “Here.”

Monroe runs around the corner of the aisle. “Thank fuck. They’re both here, Pres. She’s hurt, Jacky has a mask on but is laying on the floor. Natalia is up and looks unhurt.” He bends to me. “Keep the mask on.”

Mucimi shakes his head. “It’s clear here.”

I pull the mask off. “Natalia, are you okay?”

I hear her move closer. “Yeah. Thanks for keeping me here in one piece. How is your leg?”

“I think it’s broke again. The band is killing me, but I lost my dagger and small knife.”

She nods. “And pen. Do you have a pocketknife?” She asks Monroe.

She takes charge getting the clip off the brace so it loosens right away, then cuts my pants at the knee to release the band just above my ankle.

“Oh my God, that’s better.” I breathe, lying back further, way too dizzy for this shit.

“Josephine!” A woman yells. I don’t know the voice.

“We need something to hold her leg straight. Your knee is swollen bad, Jo.” Natalia fades away.



Maverick

The chopper lowers and I have the door open. Jumping, I hear them yelling but don't stop. Harper is right in front of me with Security I move out of my way.

"Where is she?" I ask Nick.

"Seven."

Looking up I run past Harper. She calls for Jo. "Seven." I turn seeing her bare leg. "Fuck. She needs surgery."

Harper moves by me. "Deal with this. I've got her. I need the surgeon at Denver Memorial. Someone get Alder there. If the Protectors are done fuckin' hiding, she's going to need their help."

Mucimi smiles. "I'm going. Thanks, Harper."

While Harper plays little general ordering everyone around, I kiss my girl's head. She's out cold. Inside I'm seething, my girl has been through fucking hell for too long. With another kiss on her head, I stand ready to get Josephine some help and kill the dicks that did this.

Harper turns to me. "You know so don't give me shit. They'll be a while. Clean this up so she's not going through this again. I'll be outside the OR." She gives me half of what I want.

I nod and bend by Jacky. Mucimi helps him sit up. "You're going to get checked at the hospital then wait by the OR for Josephine with Harper. I'll get there as soon as I can."

He nods looking nervous, so I try to help that. "It's her leg. Just her leg."

He nods with tears in his eyes. “You’re coming soon?”

I pull him closer touching our foreheads. “I’ll be there soon. You’re not alone, Jacky. Brothers will be there and have your back. I’ll get there as soon as I can.”

Jacky nods against my shoulder. “Yeah, Badass is never alone.”

“That’s right, Brother. I need to clean this up so I can get to the hospital.”

Monroe bends to us. “I’ll stay with Jacky while Jo is in surgery.”

That relieves me so I throw him chin and stand.

Cort has Josephine in his arms. “The chopper will take them over.” He doesn’t look like he’s waiting for me to agree but I nod and he jogs down the aisle. Monroe flips Jacky over his shoulder and follows.

I bend in half and breathe. I’d know those small boots anywhere. They look just like her dad’s. Her hand on my shoulder blade sends heat through me.

“Why the fuck weren’t you here ten minutes ago?”

“We can’t interfere with what’s meant to be. Luckily, Josephine did and killed four of the Mercs.” Aylen’s voice is low but doesn’t waver.

I’m up fast. “She interfered?” From freaky, interfered sounds bad.

“Natalia was taken. That lasted for months. Josephine was left behind shot. She stopped that and will need to wear a

brace. We can't interfere with what's meant to be. I know you don't get it, but it had to play out. That is *not* our choice." She's looking me in the eye telling me to get her words.

I'm calmed by her or the words or knowing there is more than I'm seeing. I replay those words and nod. "Can they use you at the hospital?"

She nods. "I needed to see you first. I'll be with her." She's gone a second later. Her leaving settles me. She's telling me there's more happening than I see.

Kristos brings Natalia my way. "She wants to go to the hospital, but I have Mase on his way to get her."

I nod feeling calmer than I should. "They were taking Natalia. According to Aylene, that was for months. Josephine changed that and will wear a brace, but she didn't get left here shot and Natalia is walking out. Go with her, Brother. There's nothing to do but gather info and wait, she'd be safest close to Mase and Nash at Honor."

He nods pulling me into him. "I'll be at the hospital and leave when I know Josephine's clear. I'm not leaving your side, Brother. Natalia will be safe with Mase."

I nod. "I need Major and my aunt out of here."

He nods. "We'll check on my dad and your aunt. Check the Bits."

Fuck. "Yeah."

I turn and almost hit Cort and Raid. "I need to check the Bits," I tell them.

“They got Ari to put the mask on and helped the downed Brothers get to breathing and awake. Twelve showed for this. Your girl took out four. Raid will get full Teams together and get the Alpha-Bits back to Delta.”

Raid walks away with the order. Cort isn't done. “They were sprayed with something, but the Alpha-Bits made some kind of oxygen masks with shit they found. Both your aunt and Major are fine but Major is pissed. Kristos will get him to Delta or Honor.”

I nod. “The twelve were here to take Natalia. According to Aylen, that lasted for months with Josephine left behind shot. Josephine interfered with that and will wear a brace. They had to let it play out. She was waiting for me to challenge that, but I wanted her at the hospital helping Josephine. Explain play out?”

“Jesus fuck. This was the Natalia threat. Your ol' lady stopped a world of shit at Honor and for Kristos. Play out means they can't change it and that comes down from Christian.”

I nod getting it. “It changes something else. That's why interfere sounded bad when she said it?”

“Yeah. They don't know or see those or see them and get a warning. They could have seen your girl changing it. Justice and Mucimi are slippery with that kind of shit. They don't talk about the why with me. What they see is brutal. I don't question them because I'm not seeing all they do.”

I get it. “I understand. They know what they're doing and we're guessing.”

“Yeah. They’re young but fucking smart, Brother. If they could have warned us, they would have found a way.”

“Since Josephine isn’t shot and Natalia is going home, I say we’re good. They didn’t fuck it up, we got everyone back. Are Security okay?”

“A Brother from MC took a shot to the arm but he’s going to be fine. One from the Mercs is alive. The spray causes headaches so I have Security to transport them back. The Merc is going to Phoenix. Trask is going with him.”

I nod. “I need to get to the hospital. Jacky will need me there and I need to be closer than this to my girl.”

He nods. “A chopper is waiting. Raid will clean this up and pay for damages.”

I nod. “You were holding me here?”

“Making a point and giving you time to get it all before you’re in your head waiting for blue scrubs to show.”

I don’t ask about his point but start walking. Bodies and Brothers are gone. Kristos is standing by Falcon and Raid. They walk out behind Cort and me. I guess this is his point.

I sit thinking about my girl. She’s in surgery. I should have been with her. Kristos takes my forearm. “She never woke up. Twenty minutes less of looking at hospital walls isn’t hurting either of you.”

I guess he’s right so I throw him chin. “Did Major go to Delta or Honor.”

“Honor with Natalia for the night. He’ll go back to Delta tomorrow. Your aunt is with the Bits. Thanks for getting

him out of his room. Jordan was worried he liked virtual a little too much.”

I smile. “Teller and Mucimi did it. I just gave him an igloo.”

He smiles. “No virtual room in it is good, Brother.”

I guess. At the hospital we set down on the roof. Brothers line the way to the elevator then the OR hallway. They’re twenty to thirty feet apart so I know they’re Security. I see Stan with Brekan and thank them both before leaning against the wall. I remember Beacon doing this and close my eyes. I can handle it better with my eyes closed. Beacon’s a smart Brother.

“Maverick, you got here fast.” Jacky has my eyes opening. He looks like shit but has no obvious injuries.

“How are you feeling?” Standing straight I pull him in.

He’s shaking as he holds on. “Harper said she needs surgery on her leg. She didn’t wake up.”

I nod stepping back. “She was in pain, Brother. Did you hold her hand so she knew she wasn’t alone?”

“Yeah, once they put her on the stretcher I did. Mucimi helped her but didn’t wake her up.”

“They’re with her now. Aylen is in with them. She’s like Mucimi with the healing.” Falcon gets Jacky to relax.

Needing to understand, I ask. “What happened to you?”

He leans on the wall beside me. “It was crazy. Picasso was with me then he was on the floor. The guy pointed his can at me and I hit it back at him. He wasn’t expecting it and dropped the can. I ran looking for Security. Nick had a guy down and gave me the mask. He wanted me to go with the Bits and Major. Major and your aunt were laying on the floor and the Bits kept asking me to get them shit. When I found all their shit, they made this fan. They had a pipe pulling from a hole in the wall. They’re fucking smart but crazy. It worked. When Security came back they had masks for all of us. I went to find Jojo and Natalia. Security was down everywhere. A guy was swinging a ball and chain and he caught me in the head. I must have looked dead because he left. It took me a minute to get up. When I found Jojo, I was dizzy and don’t remember anything until Cort took her away.”

I nod looking at Cort. He doesn’t have any information to tell us what happened. “Falcon went to find out. Solei is calling Natalia.” He understands my look.

I close my eyes until Jacky asks, “She’s going to be okay, right, Maverick?”

“She will, Brother, she’s going to need the brace but she’ll be okay. What she did today stopped Natalia from being taken and her from being left behind shot. A brace is a fuck of a lot better than shot, Brother.”

He slides down the wall. Fuck. I bend to him. “I’m relieved she’s going to be okay and I’m not thinking clearly. I shouldn’t have thrown it out like that.”

“It’s not that. My dad’s sister was Jojo and died when he was little. His dad beat her. Dad named Josephine after her.

His mom said they had a Joanne that was taken away so she needed another Jojo. That Jojo died. Mine can't die. She wouldn't let Natalia get taken. She's scary with the weapons but knows how to use them. They aren't getting her as a slave, are they?" A slave? This was Mercs. Natalia is a moneymaker alone, with Josephine, they'd have fucked with me for money, but I can't say that to him here.

I shake my head. "No. There were twelve and she took out four. She'll use everything she has to make it home for you, Brother. She knows what that loss feels like and wouldn't let you relive it again as long as she has breath left in her body."

He nods. "Yeah, it's a good thing she's scary. That's what keeps her with me."

"It is, Brother. She'll keep fighting and come through this. Aylen said she'll have a brace. It hasn't kept her down yet so I don't think it's going to hold her back now."

"Jojo never quits, it's fucking annoying but she'll never quit. Thanks, Maverick."

I nod and lean low on the wall next to him so I'm close if he needs me. I remember needing to feel a part of something. He's only got Josephine left. I change that when Picasso sits by him throwing me chin. Jacky starts explaining about the brace and I stand letting them have a minute to relive their first Op.

Falcon walks our way. Cort moves so I follow. "Right here, Jacky," I say when he whispers I can't leave.

He nods and goes back to Picasso.

Falcon looks at me. “She used her pen on one, threw a dagger at another, knife was in another but that shouldn’t have been fatal, he is dead. A bullet killed the last. Natalia said she was ordering her what to do and when. Her leg was broken so she had Natalia drag her to an aisle so they could each face the ends back to back. Natalia said she was still ordering her not to take her eyes off the end when Jacky started calling her. Natalia thinks she’s here only because of Josephine. Security was down at the aisle ends.”

Jesus, I nod. “The Teams?”

“At the end of the aisles, doors and outside at the doors. The spray knocked almost all of them out. Alpha-Bits, Ari, Nick, Monroe and Cline from Honor knew to get the masks. Ari was pulling Security to the back for the Alpha-Bits to revive. Major had him get the Brothers so they could help the women. Ari’s not happy about that. Nick and Monroe were taking the Mercs down moving from the outside in. Cline took out two Mercs outside in a van. Someone got away with the two in a box van. Eleven dead inside and one at Phoenix are all that were in the building.”

Major ordered Ari. I can see that as a problem. I nod.

He takes a breath. “The last is important. They knew Natalia was there and a President’s ol’ lady was with her. A Merc said Natalia had female Security. Nick picked it up and was starting the search for them.”

“She was a target, or it was just known?” I’m asking Kristos.

He looks at me with his eyes moving like hurricane radar. After a minute he holds my forearm, a few seconds later,

he speaks. “A target. Not Josephine specifically. Stella would work better but they’ll take any.”

Stella would work better. “Money.” Hers must be obvious. No, it’s the Prince background.

Cort nods. “I hate to say it but I’m glad your girl was there.”

Doors open and I’m moving to them. I pull Jacky up on my way. Alder and the doctor from Beacon’s ol’ lady stand together. I bend to Alder.

“Femoral nerves sever. No pain, Boss Josephine no feel thigh to toe.”

Severed. “What about circulation?”

He looks at the surgeon. “If she had feeling and it was painful, I would recommend removing. She has no feeling but full circulation. The built-up pressure is going down so it’s responding normally. She just doesn’t have the nerves to send responses back.”

I look at Alder. “Full circulation, no feeling to pain, hot, cold, muscle, movement. Robotic brace work. She keep it. I make new full foot response. Shower brace to foot. Allen make more to activity.”

“Can he make one with gears and shit she likes,” Jacky asks.

Alder smiles looking like a doctor with every bit of compassion in his body showing in those little pink eyes. “Send picture he see what she like. You draw or give idea. Allen Ford to chat.”

“Thanks, Alder. She might as well wear what she likes. It’s not easy being a woman in our world, at least now she’s Badass and it will show.” Jacky is pissed.

I smile hitting his shoulder. “We can go in?”

The doctor smiles. “Thanks for not pulling the gun. Yeah, the healer people are in there. I’ll tell Cort what we did.”

Alder shows us the way. The doctor is talking to Cort when we turn in the first room.

“Fuck.” Jacky’s knees buckle. I hold him up but Teller gets him to the bed. “Thanks, Brothers.” I’m surprised Hannah is here with Jetti.

“We couldn’t act on the first vision. I didn’t ask about the second. We’re here and I haven’t been blasted.” Justice has me nodding. There’s that slippery.

“I appreciate it.”

“When can she go home?” Jacky asks with tears on his face. Everyone is looking down. I hold his shoulder. Eighteen is a tough age to think everything good is being ripped away from you, especially when it’s happened with the rest of his family.

Alder climbs on something at the other side. “She wake you take her home. No pressure, no chopper.”

“Me and Teller will get her home. We did this one with Natalia,” Justice says.

I nod remembering. Jacky turns with his body rigid. “What does that mean. No pressure is no flying. Does freaky

make pressure? Pressure will fuck with her circulation.” He’s ready to spring at Justice.

Aylen turns him in a hug so I let him go. “Teller will fly low and we’ll all ride back with her so she feels nothing but perfect. She may sleep the whole time but she won’t hurt, Brother.”

He nods. “Thanks. I’m nervous. She won’t care about the brace.”

Mucimi smiles. “Her uncle doesn’t…”

Justice slaps his hand over Mucimi’s mouth so hard I feel it. “Fuck! Let me go or I’m blasting you.” The growl surprises me. His hand drops to Mucimi’s shoulder and he pulls him close. “Sorry, Brother, he’s fuckin’ high strung today.”

Mucimi nods. “He’ll be here soon.” He ducks when Justice swings with a growl.

“Aylen, Teller, help Aiyana hold him down,” Justice growls low with his body shaking. The freaky has battles I’ll never understand going on.

I move closer as Alder checks Josephine’s heart. He points to the monitor. “She fine. Freaky kid shit crazy they blast to each other.”

I nod. Jacky has his shoulder against mine. I guess freaky is freaking him out. “We have an uncle that knows Mucimi and Justice?”

I nod. “At a guess, yeah. His name is Christian Blackhawk. You have an aunt Joey too. Another guess, your dad was told she was Joanne. They’re 100% Mohegan. Older

than your dad by a couple of years and didn't know a fucking thing about his existence. The Indian Crow and another named Co had a lot to do with all that but I don't get how. Since I only know what I told you, you have to wait for Christian to get here so he won't keep harassing the Justice League while they're trying to heal my ol' lady. He can't blast me."

The Justice League laughs. Jacky nods. "Nicely played. So I have an aunt and uncle that didn't know about my dad. How fucking cool is that? Oh, they don't know about Jojo. They won't hurt me if I tell them, right?" Jojo died but he didn't kill her. No one is hurting him for that.

I smile. "I bet they know now. Christian and Justice are as freaky as it gets. You have one hell of a Badass family, Brother."

Justice smiles throwing me chin. "Thanks, Maverick. Christian settled seeing it's not so hard to explain."

I nod. "I bet that looks different from his side." I bend and kiss my girl's forehead.

Josephine's eyes open then close. Alder smiles. "Anesthesia."

I nod. "She's going to need a drink."

He nods. "Nurse, cup water, straw."

"Yes, Doctor." The woman moves fast. I'd run if I were her. This can't be normal in her world.

Aylen laughs. I shrug.



I don't know how she can sleep on the couch. Every fucking Brother is here. My aunt, Aylen and Hannah sit with her. They only move when I need to feel her right here. She wakes but keeps falling asleep.

"The healing does that. All of us here make that heat and healing constant," Teller says from the chair.

"Should I sit in a chair?" I'm feeling calm with them all here when I should be anything but.

His smile relaxes me more. "It wouldn't matter, we heal without touching her. Justice uses the ancestors so he did most while they were operating. Mucimi is crazy with healing skin and tissue. Hannah throws healing energy and Chenoa focuses us and the energy."

I smile taking my girl's hand. "And you?"

"He's our beacon. Chenoa is straight energy but Teller is ours. When he's close, we're more." Aylen makes that easier and not. She laughs.

"We see more, feel more, give more. He clarifies us so we're more focused."

That I get. "Thanks, Jeti."

Teller smiles at Aylen. "That does explain it better."

Aylen rolls her eyes pegging him a finger. I never had family. I'd have loved family like theirs. Hannah laughs. "You'll rethink that once you meet all the Blackhawks. My grandmother, CJ, will want to adopt you."

I feel that deep. They're all Badass and I'd do the same for my Brothers.

“You do, Brother. You did it with Jacky and the mechanics. They’re your family in your head. The Blackhawks are the same.” Teller reads too much.

I nod and look at the new wave of Brothers walking in. Turning, I see Hannah moving my way. Not wanting to leave her, I know I have to or the Brothers will all come right here. I get off the couch letting her hand go and kiss her head. “Thanks, Hannah, Picasso was sprayed today. He didn’t say he was hit.” I move before he walks in my direction.

She smiles. “Go take care of your family. We got this one.”

When I get to Picasso and Mike I ask, “What did Ren say?”

Mike looks at Picasso to answer. “Bad sprain, bruise and bump on the head probably when I fell.”

I look at Mike. He smiles. “Sprained wrist, bruised his ribs and the bump on his head. He’s sore but fine.”

Mucimi pulls Picasso over to the chairs. “He’ll feel better soon.”

Mike nods. “Thanks for calling me. He’s not quite ready for on his own.”

I nod. “He’s getting there. I’m not sure I was ready at his age but I made it.”

“You did, Pres. I’ll stay out of the way here. How is your girl? The mechanics were worried.” He’s been on them since they got to Major’s house.

“She’ll be in the brace but fine. The surgery and healing are keeping her tired.”

“That’s tough. You need them here and want time with her. They helped Bobby’s dad. You’ll get time quicker with them close for a couple of hours.”

I nod. “Sage advice. I’ll take it.”

He moves to the kitchen and clears the island. It’s a good way to pass time. Finn moves Brothers out slowly. I walk out the back with the Officers from the other Clubs seeing Mase and wonder why he’s not with Natalia.

“Christian said she’s safe, so Kristos has Nash and Axe with her. How is Josephine?” Mase asks.

“Sleeping again. They have the Brothers that were hurt today in there. I’m glad they called for them but can’t stay close to Josephine or they’ll all be close. The healers don’t need the distractions.”

He watches me sit keeping my eyes. “We all feel let it play out. This one was bad. Jacky wouldn’t have made it.”

I shake my head raising my hand. “I don’t need it. You all feel it and made the call. I can’t do it. I don’t want to know why or how or what would happen. You’ve had years of learning and doing. I haven’t. I’m not Indian, don’t have your culture and can’t imagine life with it. Do what you do knowing I get all that and trust my Brothers.”

He smiles his Mase smile. “Thanks. Brothers are smarter or more Badass lately. Everyone else loses it with the old ladies.”

I don't answer. I was ready to lose it and would have if it weren't for Aylen showing right away. Those boots keep showing in my head even now. Seeing them still calms me. I'm not alone here and they made sure I knew it.

"We've been sold since Justice showed up. You're easy Brothers to trust." Raid has my head nodding.

"Christian is here with my mom, dad, Jacob and Jeremy." Mase stands.

I move having a job to order but he holds his hand up. "Teller got them in pods here for tonight. The Js will heal so the Brothers can go and Jacky can meet them without the audience."

I nod. "He may be more comfortable with me in there."

Cort stands. "We're in VIP if you need us, Brother."

I throw chin to my Brothers. "Thanks, Cort, Raid, Falcon."

"Jacky's looking for you, Maverick." Mase pulls me away.

I go feeling like I've been on a roller coaster for a week. It's been one thing after another lately, but today takes the cake.

Mase laughs. "You haven't met the Blackhawks yet."

"I've met almost all of them."

"Did you know the only ones at my party were my family and the Officers from here? Rex and Ant Irma were Kateri's family. The rest were mine."

“Oh fuck.” We stop in front of the Blackhawks.

He laughs. “Yeah. So this is Christian, Jeremy and Jacob. My mom and you know my dad.” He points Cloud and CJ out.

I throw chin to them knowing who they are and hold my hand up. “Let me find Jacky.”

“I’m right here, I went to get the pictures.” Jacky comes barreling over. Jacob stops him from face planting into them. “You look like my dad.” He’s staring at Christian.

I take the book from his hand. “Christian can’t be touched. You can hand him the book but don’t touch him.”

Jacky doesn’t get that. It’s all over his face. Jeremy touches Jacky’s arm and he jumps. “You’re a healer too?”

I turn him. “Sit and they can explain better than I can.”

“Yeah.” Jacky sits with his face pale and eyes wide. “You look like my dad.”

I check on Josephine then sit. Hannah and Jeti are smiling. It can’t be bad when the Justice League are smiling.

They all laugh at me. Fucking Brothers.

Chapter Seven

Josephine

The CJ woman comes in again. She's sweet in that take no prisoner kind of way. "You got me again. I'm glad you're up and dressed. The men are friggin crazy with making sure your life is perfect. For some reason, they think women turn into helpless simple-minded creatures that will expire from the insurmountable weight of a hang nail on their mind, body and spirit."

Okay, so I admire this take no shit, speak your mind kind of woman. She's old enough to be my mom and hasn't turned into a dotting whiner with all the men in her life challenging her daily.

I laugh. She's funny too.

With her mom face and finger pointing at me I stop. "You wait. They sent me in to help you dress. They friggin healed you and know you're fine but send me, then all but push me through the door to make sure you're not in here whimpering into your pillow because you can't pull on your friggin pants or something. Those are cool pants by the way. I like the skinny jean look from the knee down and pocket on the side. I hate the jeans you're walking on and would love to get rid of the purse, bag or fanny pack."

I'm laughing again. "Thanks and I'm glad you're not walking me to the toilet. Not feeling my leg and foot is odd but I've been in a brace since it was broken the first time. No

pain this time makes life a little easier. Did Alder say when I'd get the new brace?" I keep tripping on my foot.

"Just that you're in the chair until it's ready."

No fucking way. "Not happening, CJ. I need crutches."

She tilts her head. "Joey uses a hand crutch. I can call..."

"I got it." I call Ren. "Hi, Ren."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm up and hopping. Do you have a hand crutch I could use until the brace is finished?"

"I'll send one over. Swelling is the concern. Keep that down by elevating your leg when it feels thick, full or a weird tingle or burning above your knee. If you do, the chair is as needed. If it gets swollen, you're in a chair for a while so you're not in it permanently." She's worse than CJ.

Holy shit. "You're scarier than Maverick."

She laughs. "He's a big softy until he's pissed. I give him no reason to be pissed at me. I'm sending it over. I need to get to Major's."

"How is Bobby's dad?"

"In remission. I'm meeting a different healer today. Mucimi said his uncle will help more." In remission. Crazy Badass freaky is a good world to live in.

"I'll let you go. Jeremy doesn't talk much. Listen to what he does say." That's what Mase said.

“Got it. The crutch is on its way. The EMT will adjust it to your height. Pimp it out and keep it for when your brace isn’t on.”

“Thanks, Ren. I’ll keep the swelling down.”

“Later, girl.” She’s gone.

I let CJ know. “She’s sending it and said to bling it out and keep it. I could use it to the shower and back.”

CJ is all smiles. “I’m glad you have good people around you. Do you need help to the kitchen?”

“I can use the chair to get there. Ren sent an EMT with it. He’ll be there when I roll in.”

“You’re easy. That’s a good thing with the Brothers. That’s mostly because they aren’t. They’d fight the friggin chair like it’s going to swallow them up.”

I shake my head picturing the pride of sitting in the chair for someone like Maverick or Remo. “It’s a means to an end. No injured pride will keep me starving today.”

She laughs. “Let’s get moving before they storm the place.”

I sit in the chair and we make the kitchen as the EMT comes in the front door. Just in time. The crutch is fitted to my size and comfortable in my hand. I test it, glad I didn’t fall on my face and the EMT leaves.

Now that I’m back to walking, I’m hungry. “It smells good in here.”

“Sit, it will be done in a minute.” Cloud looks scary without the smile, so I sit.

Christian laughs. “That’s his serious look.”

I turn back. “You walk in rooms. I like that better than the appearing and disappearing.”

He nods sitting across from me. “Prez doesn’t put up with that shit from the adults. It’s rude to show without a warning. I suspend to doors and walk in if I can. There are times that doesn’t work so I show up but not always in person.”

“Maverick explained that. Your form shows up but you’re back in Rhode Island.” I don’t get it.

“Yeah. It’s not always with my form showing. I can talk and guide without being seen. It’s great for Ops when the Team needs to see more than they have.”

I have to go over that again. “Not everyone is a seer or has ability.”

“Exactly. Do you have questions for me?”

The guys and CJ laugh at the island and counters. Cloud explains, “Christian doesn’t explain much.”

I nod. Christian glares at them looking more like my dad. “She’s my niece and this isn’t fuckin’ normal. She deserves answers.”

I reach over and tap his hand. “They’re lightening the mood for questions that may not be easy.”

Anger clears from his face and I see my dad in that relieved look too. “Yeah.”

“What happened that Joey uses the crutch?” I point to the one I’m using today.

“My step-dad broke her back beating her. Jeremy healed what he could when he was little. It got her out of the chair and she learned to walk.” Holy shit, he’s not into sugar coating shit.

“Just like Jojo, he beat the girls bad.” What a monster I think but don’t say.

He nods. “My mother dropped us just to have replacements without protecting them either. He wasn’t our biological dad but is your father and aunt’s.”

That’s the difference I see in him. “How did you know my dad is your brother?”

“Mucimi knew you were family and brought me pictures from your memory. Brantley got me his service record and background. Co said he took your dad, my brother, when our sister Jojo died. The fuck killed my mom having no more kids to beat on.”

Justice shows on the side of Christian making me sit back fast. “Put your leg up.” The chair on the side of me moves out.

I turn and put my leg up. Justice nods. “Christian’s father is your grandfather’s brother. I’ve got no fuckin’ clue what that makes you. Teller has the information for Jacky with birth and death records. Christian’s dad died in the military. Jacky will have that too. We looked for anything and everything right down to credit card charges from your dad. He was a good man, Josephine. Your grandfather was not. It’s not important. Move forward and build these new relationships with the good you have.”

He's younger than I am but wise in his advice. "I will, Justice. I don't need to see the proof, I feel it, but I'm glad you have it."

He looks relieved making me smile. "I am relieved. Sometimes people get so caught up in the past they miss living."

"We were taught to keep moving and forward is the best direction to go."

Christian smiles. "You may veer but eventually make it back to forward and learn from the wrong turn."

"Yeah." I'm surprised he said it using the same wording as my mom.

Christian smiles. "Mohegan-Badass isn't easy but Co was good about giving English to make his point." So they were Mohegan Badass words?

"Mohegan Badass as in translating to biker words?" With his nod I ask the next, "Co was the man Crow brought to our house?" I try to remember him hugging my dad and giving me the bracelet.

"Yes, that's Co and Crow. Justice is trying to find what connects them from your memories."

I look at Justice. He's there with his eyes open but he's not there and it wouldn't matter if his eyes are open, he's not seeing me. "Why can't it be they're Indian and that connection was made long before we met. Indians moved and were relocated."

My uncle Christian's smile and green eyes show happiness that has tears in my eyes. He looks like my dad.

“You’re right and I don’t care either. There is more than our new beginning to this story. Kateri, Chenoa, some people from the reservations in Rhode Island and Connecticut have family they’ve never met but could use an anchor to. Like you and Jacky, Maverick, Cort, Cooper, Kristos, Jordan, Nova. I can go on but you get it.”

I nod. “I get it. I didn’t know we needed that until I met Maverick. I’m glad I have it now. I don’t have more questions right now. I’d like to meet and learn about our family and ask when I do have questions.”

He nods with that same look on. “We can do that slowly. It’s a lot all at once, so you’d just be happy to see us leave. Neither of us will learn anything from that.”

I shake my head and wipe the tear. “You look and sound so much like my dad. It’s good to have that back. I’m just a kid trying to make it with advice from memories.”

“Call to me when you need advice or guidance. I’m honored to be part of your family and have you as mine, Josephine.”

I nod with the tears just falling hearing my dad’s words come from him. “So am I. It feels good to have an anchor.”

Mucimi is hugging me from the side making me laugh. “Christian will keep you close. I’m here and will always help. Look.” He drops my dagger, small knife and pen on the table. Everyone laughs.

“Thanks, Mucimi. I thought I’d have to get Maverick to find them for me.”

“Your dad made them in the shop?”

I look at Justice. “You’re really good at the mind reading thing. Yeah, he made everything I have except the guns. I have a bow and other daggers, knives and weapons that fit the clothes as accessories. Jacky makes me hair clips and small knives for Christmas or birthdays.”

He nods. “The hair things and hats.”

I nod and look at Christian. “Maverick asked me about the colors. Did he find what he needed?”

“Yeah, Mohegan and the Cheyenne your dad grew up with in New Mexico and Colorado. His name was never changed when he came here. It fit him. Munhan means island. He learned and taught you how to be that island. Self-sufficient is easy to say but hard to achieve. From you and Jacky’s memories, I see all he did to make sure you go on. I wish he learned of the ancestors, but I didn’t learn all they offer until I was in my twenties and I lived with full knowledge and access to our heritage.”

I smile. “It sounds like an interesting story.”

Food is moved to the table. “One that can wait. I’m not the most observant Brother when it comes to my kids.” Cloud sits CJ smiling. “I can go without years of reliving all that.” He has a lot of kids and CJ runs more houses with kids. With his own job, it’s a wonder he even sees his kids.

I smile. “I wasn’t asking and can wait to hear it.”

Mucimi is back but sitting by Justice this time. “I’ll tell you when he leaves. He doesn’t have much to do with it, but he’s head of the family so...” he shrugs.

It's bugging me so I say it, "My dad's name was Bruce. I never heard Munhan."

Christian nods. "Bruce has meaning behind it. Perseverance is the reason Crow picked Bruce. An island changes with the tides. He saw my brother older. Adapting to change, watching and waiting was something he did young. Crow saw him in vision perfecting that. A true warrior. He passed that down to his kids."

I already love this family. They're like the guys here with compliments for a guy he never knew.

"Brothers for guys, chopper, bike, Brothers." Justice gives me a lesson.

I take it with a smile. "Brothers it is."

Aunt Rain comes in with everything in place and makeup that gives her an ageless look. "How are you doing, Josephine?"

"I'm good, Aunt Rain. You look happy and beautiful today."

She nods. "Thank you. I'm happy that you're back up and getting around. The surgery doesn't seem to be affecting you at all. Maverick must be relieved." She sits by CJ.

I nod. "He is and isn't. I don't think he understands the no nerve means no pain."

"He knows but can't believe yet. It was traumatic. He's never loved anyone so deep their pain is his. Josephine will teach him about love and family. He'll get it." Mucimi has tears in my eyes.

“I’d do anything for him. How do I teach that? I literally got family yesterday.”

They laugh. “Just be you. He’ll get it.” Mucimi is good with advice.

I nod noticing Aunt Rain just looking at her plate. Damn. “Thanks, Mucimi. We can all learn together. Aunt Rain, are you in? I know you didn’t get that chance before. New beginnings are always easier together.”

Her tear-filled eyes find mine. “I’ll do anything to be included too.”

CJ is awesome. “You’re already included. We just got here ourselves. We’ll figure it out. Josephine is right, together is always easier. Batshit crazy is bound to follow so be prepared to stick friggin close.”

I laugh. I love this woman. “I think batshit crazy was yesterday. Maverick said the Alpha-Bits made oxygen masks to revive the g-Brothers.”

They all start talking about the store and Mercs. “So the steampunk look is to hide your weapons?”

I smile at Christian. “I love the look and it fits my personality. I wore boy’s cargos when I was small. My dad found me clothes that worked better and I could wear comfortably as a teen. I was never accepted by the towns, but I’m still just a girl. Dad made sure I always felt that.”

He nods with those green eyes shining. “He did a good job. Tekah had trouble finding her own style in our world of Indian and freaky.”

“As a mechanic, steampunk works for me. I don’t know the Indian styles. I do know that I like my pockets and arsenal.”

He smiles looking at Cloud. “Fuckin’ kids.”

~*~*~

Maverick

I deal with the room assignments in the Club. It's easy, established Brothers, engineers and geeks get first shot. The compounds are sectioned already and it works. My Officers like the set-up. Ari and Adrian are new but they fit right in. Finn and Stan come in and sit. I throw chin to their acknowledgments.

“How is Josephine?” Finn asks.

“Good. She wants the new brace yesterday.”

Stan shakes his head. “She just had the surgery. She couldn't stay awake last night.” He doesn't understand the healers.

“I'm just learning but I'll tell you what I know. They heal sometimes without touching the people. They can send it out. It causes a heat that lulls your mind so you sleep. When they're all together that energy is magnified. Jeti said clarified and focused. If Teller is close to any of them, he can do that by himself. All together means they're all more. Josephine has a surgical scar that looks like surgery was last year. Her leg isn't broken and she isn't feeling it. They have Bobby's dad in remission. Christian said Jeremy and Jacob are going to help today. He'll be fine when they leave.” I smile at the disbelief on Stan's face. “Yeah, I'm serious. See Ren if you don't believe me. She has the blood tests to prove it and she drew the blood herself.”

“Fuck, that feels good and scary all at the same time.” Stan is new to our crazy world.

I nod. “It's weird but true.”

Finn smiles like he got healed. “I’m happy for you, Pres. We came to send you home, but if Josephine is fine, she may kill us for that.”

I laugh. “She’s spending time with her family. They need that time.”

“Mucimi came for her weapons. She’s armed again so we’ll keep you busy.” Stan has me laughing.

“She’s not going to hurt me, Stan. Those weapons are to keep her safe. I’m no threat to that safety. I’m done here. Why aren’t you in Ops?”

“Cort and Nova took our shifts. Raid is dropping Falcon then going home. I think Cort is training Nova, but I don’t know what in. He’s got Ops, is a Protector and trains.” Finn is a little shortsighted.

“He’s going to be a President next year.” I remind him.

They both nod. I shake my head. “I’m done here. The job went well. It’s the last junk we have paid for. I want to make a walking stick for Josephine.” She was hopping this morning. I don’t like that.

Finn shakes his head no. “An EMT brought her a hand crutch.”

“What’s that, a cane?”

He pulls his phone and shows me. It’s definitely not my Josephine. “I could make it in her style.” I can fix that. Mucimi shows up leaning close to see the phone. I shake my head almost hitting his. “Walk into rooms. You want to help?”

“Yeah. I’ll get Jacky.” He’s gone making Finn laugh.

“They do make life fun. Are we going to engineering or maintenance?” Finn isn’t wrong, they’re fun.

“Engineering.” I stand thinking about my girl and her gadget style.



Mucimi and Jacky are great at this shit. Jacky has the hand hold rising and lowering, then folding. The arm bracket widen and close with gears and links from an old bike chain Remo confiscated.

“Telescopic works for the style?” I ask not knowing much about steampunk other than it was an industrial Victorian era trend. I guess it’s still a trend since she went to a museum that had a whole box store attached.

“Yeah. We need to take it apart and dip it in copper or bronze,” Jacky says rolling the toolbox close to him.”

“I have some gold we can do little shit in to accent. I’ll make the bronze but need to know how much. I don’t have clean copper.”

They look at me like I’m crazy. “You’re making bronze we can dip this in right now?” Jacky asks.

“Yeah. We have old copper stuck and eroded on tin. I’ll add some aluminum, phosphorus and silicon to make a bronze.”

Mucimi gets it and nods. “Twenty minutes. We need this apart and a way to cool slow.” I watch him while thinking

about bronze. He hasn't been smiling today.

“Outside. We bring it to sixty and drop it into a freezer.” That should work.

“Yeah. Two coats. A gallon to pour, leaves you with enough for something else.” He nods getting the black silicon cap off the bottom. Mucimi is just ready.

I get the supplies and drop them into the vat remembering the gold. “Are we doing gold accents?”

“A cup,” Mucimi yells over the screw gun noise.

I get the gold heating. It's been a good day in the shop. I miss days of creating whatever the hell I want. Josephine will like this. Backing up, I close the hood and pull the mask off.

“What's getting gold?” I ask getting to the crutch pieces broken down.

Jacky points. “Nick got their basket from the store. Jojo had that marshal star. Mucimi used it to decorate the arm bracket. I got her pocket shit and used the little gear she had. I have a small blade but know she'll want a handle so I'll make it. You can dip it since you'll have the gold.”

I pick up the marshal star. I love it. She was buying me the star. I love my girl. “This is perfect. I'll get these done. Can you get the blade on the crutch somewhere?”

Jacky looks at the pieces. “The hand hold. I'll use the pipe piece and make the handle to snap into the pipe. We didn't bend anything for the hand hold, we just built it up.”

I nod. “That will work. Let me get this done. I can do the handle and blade in gold.”

We get back to work until lunch shows. I want this done so I eat fast and check the temp of the crutch. It's freeze time. While we wait, we get the pieces sanded and buffed down. Nothing takes time with so many of us working. Remo helps with everything in here. He hates the meeting room but loves anything mechanical or even crazy ideas that don't always work out. By four we're almost done putting the crutch back together.

"That blade snaps right in and looks like a decoration, Jacky. You're good at this." I'm impressed with his knowledge of metals and the artistic flare he adds.

He smiles. "My dad showed me all kinds of tricks to conceal weapons. I'm not big on the weapons but Jojo loves them. She likes the hair clips and combs I make. The combs have retracting blades or needles. It makes Christmas easy."

I laugh. He's a weird kid. I think about her hair combs. "You make the combs?"

He nods. "All of them. She likes different so it's easy. She has some for Christmas that have elves or tree scenes on the handles."

"You're a talented artist. Do you pour out your metals?"

"I did but the house sold. I used the pizza oven. It wasn't really a pizza oven but Jojo fixed it back to the 500° so it is now. My dad had molds for shit. They must be in storage."

I nod. "There were a lot of boxes marked tools and what kind. If you tell me what you need, we can make you an

igloo for your paint and whatever else you do.”

He won the lottery today, his smile and excitement make me smile. “Yeah? I need space. I like metalwork and even some wood if it’s the right piece. Room to paint would be nice.”

I nod. “An igloo like mine or yours?”

“Yours. The metalwork is hot.” He’s right.

“Get with Lance and Finn to get it set up. Make sure it’s like in here, we’re following safety standards, state of the art is safer than open flames nowadays. It’s well worth keeping everyone including you safe.”

“Thanks, Maverick. Finn for the machinery?”

I smile. “No, an igloo. We have open igloos but not the Brothers yet. Lance can get you tables and machines or whatever you need.”

“The end igloo is empty, Brother. It’s two rooms with nothing but the bathroom finished.” Finn offers with some interest. He’ll be spending time in Jacky’s shop. He’s a good Brother to keep close to Jacky so I’m all for it.

“That would work. A commercial sink...” Jacky is going to list everything he wants. He can have it all.

I get back to my girl’s tricked out crutch. Once the silicon is back on the bottom, we test all the parts smiling. It looks fucking cool as shit.

“We can give it to her at dinner.” Jacky is excited.

“Take Mucimi and give it to her now. I need to check in with Aero before I leave.”

He hugs me fast then pulls Mucimi's cut. They're both gone a second later. Finn and Stan laugh. Remo shakes his head at me. "Dinner?"

I shrug. "Blackhawks are here, they'll have a plan. I want to check on the families when I leave Aero."

"I'll go to Major's." Stan wants to see Bobby's dad.

I nod. "Yeah. I'll meet you at home."

That sounds weird but nice. Aero doesn't have anything but monitoring and some development going on. I have my own space in Engineering and didn't look at what anyone was working on. Mars and Nero have work stations on the side of mine. They don't work on projects much anymore but help when needed. I like my own space and entrance but miss what everyone else is doing. I'll get with them tomorrow.

Today I'm going home for dinner with my girl and the Blackhawks right after a quick stop at Major's. Bobby's dad looks a hundred times better than he did when he first got here. I hug him with congratulations and throw chin when he can't get words out. He's a good man.

Now for dinner with my girl. Josephine's texts today were cute. She likes her new family and finds them funny. I like that she's happy. Walking in, I get to see that happy. Her big smile and pretty green eyes turn my way.

"Thank you for the crutch that is as Badass as it is functional."

I laugh bending to kiss her. "Badass is always functional, beautiful."

The Blackhawks laugh. Josephine shakes her head with that smile still in place. “I’m getting that. Jacky told me you worked right with him and the Officers.”

I nod. “It was a group project. How do you feel and how was your day?” I guide her into the kitchen glad she’s walking again. Her crutch looks badass.

“Good and very good. When I sit, I’m entertained by stories that are usually funny. I got to talk to Joey and see her baby girl. She’ll be here next week and we’re supposed to keep coffee to a minimum so she stays sitting for more than three minutes. According to her, she’s not freaky. I’m not sure I believe that.” She has me laughing but she’s not done with her happy day. “When I’m up, no one is harping on me to sit. Ren came to check and was happy with no swelling. I’m balancing my time well, according to her.”

“Good job, beautiful.” I give her a kiss then help her with potatoes, looking around. “Where’s Aunt Rain?”

“With CJ and Seren. We’re supposed to go to the Club for a while. They went to get ready. I’m not changing.”

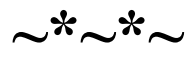
“You look perfect the way you are.”

“That’s why I love you.”

I kiss her lips. “It’s why I love you.” I love her laugh.

The Alpha-Bits come in with Ari and jump right in. Christian and Jacob watch them smiling. Jeremy stares at Pax. It gets weird when Pax sits and stares at Jeremy.

I’m done with potatoes. Jacob and Josephine have Bits helping cut them so I go out to the grill with Cloud.



Josephine

At the club everyone comments on my new walking crutch. It is Badass according to the consensus. I agree thinking I need to tell Joey about all the comments. Christian said she'll want one when she sees it.

Jacky said my geeky President made the bronze and dipped pieces in gold. Since all we ever did was melt metals, it's impressive to us. Maverick acted like it wasn't a big deal, nothing is ever a big deal to him, I love that easy nature he has. The scary geek doesn't show often. I'd hate to be the one that causes scary to come out. Jacky heard he air dropped men in the refuge with a hundred pounds of meat and no weapons or phones. All had shot up feet. That's about as scary as I want to think about. How do you think up crazy shit like that on the fly? With Cort close to him, I guess Maverick's plans are tame.

Christian and Jacob laugh on the side of me. I shake my head. "Go read someone else."

Aunt Rain smiles indulgently. "I would never ask so let's sit with the women. They'll talk without reading your every thought."

I roll my eyes. "Christian asked me about a bully in fourth grade. I don't think it matters where we are or what they're doing."

"The bully was a fuckin' teacher." Christian has me smiling at him.

"That I wasn't thinking about and haven't thought about in years. I got her back loosening the belts on her little

hatchback for a year. It wasn't a good memory until I remembered that."

"She moved with the fake Masons." Jacob informs us.

She moved? "You looked for her?" They're crazy.

He rolls his eyes. I love Jacob. He's the sane in their crazy family, our family. "Christian wanted to make sure she wasn't still teaching. She's a waitress at some truck stop in the mountains." We both look at a laughing Christian.

"He's just as freaky as the rest of us. He just doesn't advertise. The Protector of the Three has to be able to calm our shit."

I walk away shaking my head. "Go read over there."

Now Aunt Rain is laughing. Damn.

Maverick makes it to us pulling chairs out. "Sorry, ladies. I don't know what the fuck is going on. Everyone forgot how to act tonight."

I sit and pull his shirt so I can kiss him. "Don't hurt your hands tonight." He had a plan that I can't wait for.

"I only hit him once. The second was an elbow to the throat. Remo dragged him out." A kiss with promise is good enough for me. It ends too soon because music comes on and people stop talking. Maverick looks away then groans. "Fucking Brothers."

Leaning around him, I laugh. Freaky is playing and singing? Jacob, Mase and Nash are behind Christian who has

the Uncle Kracker and a Maverick video playing as if it's on a screen above them.

Mase moves to the mic with his guitar. "Ranger and Jack always sing and we let them. This is a family thing and our new addition made us proud with his parody. We're going to make that better with some family at his back."

He steps back and Christian sings *Drift Away* with only the Maverick video showing. They're unbelievable. I stand to move closer. Their timing is synced to Maverick's perfectly. How the hell do they do this shit?

Maverick pulls me in front of him and wraps his arms around my middle watching the freaky family make his video better. Christian's eyes stay on us. I know Maverick is feeling that too.

I watch Maverick move to backgrounds I know aren't in Uncle Kracker's video. The hangar shows huge pieces of space crafts and satellites. When the techs show this time in a crowd, they're smiling and dancing looking good. I see Mars for a second and smile. They're all so good. Maverick shows alone walking a snowy path away from the hangar a rocket is outside of. It looks like he's singing every word. I'm so proud knowing he matched Uncle Kracker's every move and word. "You're so good at the hitting every word."

"How do they have every word and beat match my lip syncing?"

I shrug putting my hand over his forearm. "They're freaky and gifted. I'm so proud of you."

My crutch almost falls over but Jeremy catches and holds it. “Freaky is right.” Maverick tightens his arms.

The video’s end shows him turn back toward the hangar. When the rocket launches as Maverick starts walking, the whole club goes wild. I shake my head with a smile then bow it for Christian and the family that just claimed us. He throws me chin.

Every one of them comes down so I move to Maverick’s side. Maverick gets hugged by them all with Cloud, CJ, Aylen, Justice, Phoenix, Teller and Mucimi waiting in line. They really are claiming him or us. They all hug Jacky then me after him. The Brothers are so loud, I don’t hear whatever they say to Maverick and Jacky, but Mucimi welcomes me to the family in my head. I hug him again. Jeremy hands me my folded crutch, kisses my cheek, then is gone. When I turn, I see them hugging Aunt Rain having to blink to clear my eyes. Unbelievable.

Jacky hugs me before walking right out the door. I smile up at Maverick. “Family feels good.”

He laughs at me crushing me to him. “Love you, Josephine. Thanks for that family. It feels fucking epic.”

Epic. I guess that’s one way to describe heart bursting wide open with love for the new people in our lives. As soon as I’m down on my feet, someone moves me to a table with the ol’ ladies. My foot goes up on a chair and crutch is retracted again and put on the table. Maverick watches with a smile. Freaky is going to be annoying if they keep shit like this up. Justice laughs looking right at me. Shit. Shaking my head, I let out a little giggle. Freaky has its moments. He’s making

sure the swelling stays down. I think my permanent smile is permanently bigger, at least tonight. Our family.

“That was amazing to see.” Ren holds my arm.

“It was amazing to feel. My heart burst at some point. I love them all and that was so much better than the first video.”

CJ sits across from me. “I got Jeremy to send it to Joey. She’s ready to burst too. We’ve never seen Christian so happy. We all love you for that and who you are. My kids are friggin talented. I’m glad you felt it. Blackhawks don’t quit. You, Jacky and Maverick fit right in. Jacob went to find Jacky and make sure he’s okay. All that’s left for me is, *Welcome home*, Josephine.”

That’s when I cry.

Chapter Eight

Maverick

The straight halls are a godsend today. Running to training, I hit the stairs going up three at a time until Nick's Team walks out of Security. Fuck. "Move aside."

They split and I take the last flight two at a time. Hitting the keypad and looking at the clock, I'm in Ops within three. "What's happening?"

I get my glasses on and breathe through Finn's explanation. "Marines and Navy engaged at the gates. Four down. Justice and Mag are up. Trucks weren't tagged. Falcon wants you on military working with the Brothers on west and south gates. They closed the fucks in the ABSZ."

"What?" Flipping through locations, I find ABSZ IT's surveillance. "Fuck. Ranger, can I get a chopper pushing the fucks back to the gates?"

Ranger: "Roger, Maverick. Bullseye is three out for west gate, Axel is two out for south."

"I need IT, Finn."

Anton: "I on, Pres Maverick."

"Get me on with the military."

Anton: "ABSZ Military, on with Pres Maverick BSC Ops. Pres Maverick on with Captain Lowery."

Lowery: "Pres Maverick, we just had the four gates breached a total of three down. We need air support."

I shake my head. “You’re getting it. Get your men ready to stop and detain the dicks coming back at them.”

Lowery: “We’ve already taken casualty at north and east.”

I nod. “Then you better not miss this time. Choppers are herding them to you.”

Lowery: “We’re on American soil, President.”

I roll my eyes. “Talk to Alder about lasers after you shoot the fucking dicks that are willing to mow down your troops. Right now, get the fucking dicks dead or detained! You have the right to shoot if sustaining hostile fire.”

Lowery: “Roger, President. They are Americans.”

“Do I have Enforcers and Security, Anton?”

Anton: “Roger, two Enforcer Team, four Security west. Three Enforcer, six Security south. Teams up. South at gate in one. West two.”

“Get tracking up on the Teams and dicks. Finn, take south, make a line and shoot anything tagged yellow. I’ll get the military behind the gate. You’ve got anything going through.”

Finn: “Roger, Boss.”

“Lowery, get those men inside the fucking gate and readied to shoot. Chopper is herding south.”

Lowery: “We don’t pass the gate, President.”

I throw up my hands. “Stand down, Lowery. Do not engage so Badass isn’t hit by any friendly fire in your quest to not defend a fucking thing. Finn, get Badass stopping anyone

tagged yellow before they get out the fucking gate. At a hundred with gates in the middle, the guns on the wall shoot, that middle hundred is clear. Anton, get me on with the Lead on west.” Finn throws me chin talking to his Lead.

Anton: “Roger, Boss. Lead Boss Mikey on with Pres Maverick.”

Mikey? “Mikey, get inside the gate and don’t let them out. The military will stand down. Choppers are herding them back to you.”

Mikey: “Roger, Maverick.” She talks to her Teams.

“She’s a Protector, Anton.”

Anton: “Roger, Boss. Pres Cort make Teams say Enforcer. Protector inside. Military need direction, Enforcer Lead shot north gate, Boss Mikey take Team.”

I nod and watch Mikey’s Teams spread out. “Mikey, the wall will shoot anyone getting within a hundred feet. You’ve got one hundred with the gate at the center clear.”

Mikey: “I’ve got them at fifty. Once the chopper flies over, we’ll move forward and wide.”

That’s smart. “Roger.” I watch the South Gate. The Brothers are pushing the dicks to the outer edges so the wall shoots them. “Good job, Finn.”

Finn: “Thanks, Boss. I like the wall. We need one here.”

We have a few, I think, watching Mikey move her Brothers forward then spread out. She’s going to use the wall to shoot the dicks. Smart Brothers make me proud they’re

mine. I move my boards to see the inside of ABSZ then take the glasses off. Our right board has the main roads up. “What the fuck did they think they’d do?” They’re trying to get in the Green house compound.

Anton: “Find women, Pres Maverick. Women, Alpha-Bit secure. They no have location. Compounds closed.”

I see it. “How many got in?”

Finn: “Cort said close to a hundred. I’m clear on the south.”

“Post two Enforcer, two Security Teams manning the gate.” I look around. Cort and Ranger are battling from Air. Falcon is watching boards. “Hook me to Falcon.”

Anton: “Roger. Pres Falcon to Pres Maverick on.” Falcon turns my way. “Are the extra Teams needed somewhere else?”

Falcon: “Send them to Cooper and Cayden. They have the perimeter. I have Badass Teams on the north and east gates.”

I throw him chin. “Finn, the extra are going to Elan Control for perimeter. Mikey, when you’re clear, two Enforcer, two Security Teams on the gate, the rest go to Elan Control for perimeter.” I get rogers and watch. “Lowery, get your men back to your compound.”

Lowery: “Roger, President. For how long?”

“Until Alder says he wants you back on the gates. It’s not my call.”

Lowery: “Is this for all gates?”

“All gates. Badass is on all gates. Alder is on Ops. He’ll deal with the military when he has his yard clear. I’m out.” I look at Anton getting a nod.

Anton: “Military out, Pres Maverick.”

“Thanks, Brother. They don’t do enough to ask so many questions.”

Anton: He smiles back. “Roger, Boss.”

Mikey: “West gate clear, Maverick. Teams transferring to Elan Control for perimeter.”

I look at Anton giving his spiel to someone at Elan. He nods. “Extra switched. Mikey, who is Lead for your Team if you leave?”

Mikey: “I’m not going anywhere until the Protectors are called in. Lukas is on north gate. Freedom east. Mike on south.”

That’s good to know. “I’m glad they’re manned by Brothers that can make a decision. I walked into the middle of the fight. I’ll pass information along as I get it. A mule is heading toward the gates. Restock and grab drinks, Brother. Your Teams ran smart and quick today.”

Mikey: “Roger, Maverick. Thanks, I’ll pass it on.”

I look at Finn and hold my mic. “Protectors are at all the gates?”

Finn: He nods hitting his mic off. “Cort is pissed. Military let them run through the gates then put the barriers up. Alder is running Ops. Falcon called in for gate support. I

didn't get anything else but you walked in right when he sent choppers to mow them down north and east."

Fuck. I should have done that. Maybe we'll have breathers for some answers. Putting my glasses back on, I watch Phoenix Ops. Falcon, Jinx, Cooper and Kristos are listed as on with me. Alder is a little commander getting reports from his IT Bits.

He looks at his board. "Pres Falcon, military show to gate, shoot. ABSZ ground clear. Teams back to compounds show presence, Brothers, women safe. I get Security to gate shift soon, Pres Cort clear Flight."

Falcon nods. "Have military run perimeter. It's a deterrent that they can handle."

Alder shakes his head. "Useless to my gate. Fucking military watch their brother fall. No shot."

Falcon doesn't agree. "They have to follow orders, Brother. They were told not to shoot. They need better command. I bet we get good Brothers out of their command being a pussy."

I'm shaking my head. They have three that were shot. Alder levels a look at Falcon. "Three injured. Lowery report casualty. He need to go. Two flesh, one shoulder. No gear?" So no casualties.

I see Cort hand his headset in. "Six going to holding from west gate. Two from the south. I have one from the north. Why the fuck do I have breathers when I said they leave in bags?"

Oh fuck. “That would be me, Cort. I joined late and didn’t get that order. I was on west and south with the military. I ordered military to stand down, get out and wait for orders from Alder.”

He looks around his boards. “Amal?”

“Pres Maverick, Boss. I open Delta, right center.”
Amal points to the boards in Phoenix.

I turn toward the front so he sees me. “I don’t get your whole room so I need the glasses.”

He nods. “I didn’t know you were called or even on.”

Falcon straightens. “I called for him to deal with Lowery and secure west and south while I was on east. Another truck dropped more inside the fucking gate.”

Cort shakes his head. “Jinx was on.”

Falcon stops him. “He wanted to shoot the military. Cooper and Alder wanted to shoot them. I can’t be the only one that sees Badass shooting military here as bad. I fucking wanted to shoot them and called for a clearer head.”

Cort looks around his boards. “I wanted to shoot them. We have one injury from the north gate. He covered the Navy dicktwat getting hit with automatic. He’ll need time but nothing got through. He’s better off than the dicktwat that took the hits to his legs with no gear. I’m calling a Saber. We need military trained for fucking Ops leading their men. This is not the place to settle until retirement.”

I hope this isn’t pushing it. “Laser would give them the option not to kill on American soil. These troops were trained to protect Americans.”

Falcon jumps in. “He’s right. We can ask for Ops replacements that will give the bullet order when they’re being fired on but they have rules of engagement they have to follow. Orders aren’t just dismissed. That’s what makes them good Brothers. Laser would get the fire order a hell of a lot faster than a bullet would from command. It would have stopped the trucks before the gate. Military were shot outside the gates when the dicks made the first drop.”

Cort shakes his head. “They were watching the fucking barriers rise. Why didn’t they put the barriers up before the trucks went through? It’s a fucking button!”

Alder stands on his chair. “I have IT control gate barrier. Lowery wait to order then lower barrier. East gate breached again. Military no at my gates, Pres Cort.”

“I’m with you, Brother. This whole cluster fuck was on him. He barricaded the dicks *in* the ABSZ then wouldn’t send his men in to stop them.” Cort looks done.

Falcon doesn’t agree. “Get with Saber about an Ops commander. You need to clarify the rules. You can’t tell military they aren’t allowed through the gate then bitch that they wouldn’t go through the gate. They already questioned the choppers setting down inside the ABSZ for the fire shit and transport jobs.”

Cort stops moving for a few seconds. “You need to command them. I don’t see all their rules as quick as you do.”

Falcon shakes his head. “Not with Lowery. I understand and we’d be better off if they’re taking objectives from us, but I’ll shoot the fuck before I have to talk to him again.” Taking objectives from us.

“Did anyone tell them their job is to protect the Alpha-Bits and ABSZ?” I ask the simplest solution I have. With the objective, they’d follow just what we do.

Cort looks around his boards then at Alder. He shrugs. “I no order military. Boss Kaleb, Saber give order, no tell to me.”

Jinx laughs getting Cort’s eyes on him. “What? We train Brothers. I thought they knew the job. All these rules and shit, when they don’t know why they’re here, are pointless. Add the only rules we did give of not setting foot on the ABSZ.” He shrugs. “I don’t want to shoot them anymore. Maybe Lowery. He’s a dick.”

I smile. He is. Cort relaxes. “We’ll talk to Saber and get them orders they understand. Falcon, you’re something in there. Thanks, Brothers. The ABSZ is clear, one injury and no casualties. The military fucked themselves up. I’m not counting them. Justice, Alder, Falcon, meet in thirty. Thanks for jumping in, Maverick. This was every fucking misfit trying for the supposed hundreds of sex slaves we’re keeping for ourselves. Best guess, traders want easy stock. The women don’t know and aren’t to be told.”

Fucking Magnar’s words come back to me, ‘*hundreds of slaves*,’ Jacky asked.

Everyone rogers. I turn to Anton.

“Wait, Maverick.”

“Hold up, Anton. Get me on with just Falcon.”

“Roger, Boss.” He types and Falcon shows above his console. “You on with Pres Falcon, Pres Maverick.”

“Yeah, Brother.”

“Thanks for jumping in. I know you weren’t Ops, but military get military rules. I figured you’d get that better than an Ops Brother. They all wanted to open fire on military. Protectors were at each gate to stop that.”

I nod. “That was smart. I went off on Lowery but see now his hands are tied. He’s still a dick. Ops commander would have made the call to protect his men from bullets not Americans. Lowery didn’t do that.”

He nods. “I’ll get better orders to them. He fucked up so getting him out should be easy. They need to get you in the virtual room. I didn’t give the bag order knowing Cort would come down on me. One breather isn’t going to give us what we need. Justice threw it to me. I’ll tell Cort in the meet. He’ll calm before then. Thanks for the help, Brother.” He said a lot there.

I throw him chin and his screen blacks out. Falcon’s a smart Brother calling me. I was never Ops but learned, like every officer, the rules military play by.

Shaking my head, I throw Finn chin and a good job. I walk down the stairs thinking about my day so far. Remo is at the bottom all smiles.

“How’d your dad like the car?”

That smile gets bigger. “He loves it. We went for breakfast, a ride for him to gauge performance, which he agrees is perfect. He just dropped me off. Nick said you ran to Ops. Tell me we don’t have more Brothers turned.”

“Nope, it was BSC, Falcon called me in. They’re settled. We need to get word out that there aren’t scores of women on the ABSZ but I’m not sure how. Any mention will have Brothers talking shit.”

He nods. “Yeah. They had the military with them, Security Brothers using them and Officers getting bonuses. With so much shit from who we got rid of, Brothers have a whole sex club playing in their heads.”

Fucking great. I head to lunch wondering how to stop that shit now. Maybe some feeds showing them with the women Security Brothers. I’ll ask Alder. While Remo tells the Brothers about his dad’s car, I text Josephine. Christian and Jacob are bringing her to lunch then the shop. I need a bike for Ben and was headed to the shop to see the clean frames in her stock room. I didn’t spend any time looking but know she had some old frames Jacky cleaned up. I can look today. Maybe they’ll show while I’m there.

I eat fast wanting to get through the errands I had before making the shop. Remo can deal with Little Brothers while I see what the problem is with the job center and food bank. “We have more families now. The kids can run the stock for food.”

Remo looks at me. “Are you talking to Finn? I didn’t get him.”

“You or me. I need to see what’s going on at jobs and food. I was thinking out loud. Little Brothers has a call in.”

He stops me like I knew he would. “They shouldn’t be calling you. I’ll deal with Little Brothers. We do have older in there. A few girls that can start running it. Tyson is stoked

because they're pushing to get the rural schools some help. Jordan and Banks have tablets for the kids in need."

I already gave Mars an okay for the school thing she wants to do. "Mars wants science and math stepped up. Their excuse was budget. Get the girls on that. Mars would love a meet with girls in the lead there. She probably already ordered shit for the classes. It was middle and high school right up front. Next year will be elementary."

He's interested, "I'll set up a meet while I'm there. Tyson wants a Club school. They'll hook up virtual."

I nod. "Tell me where and get me plans. It's time. The engineers aren't happy with the teachers in town."

He nods. "I'll get it. This was all my Inner Circle shit for tomorrow."

I smile. "Now you can tell the Brothers the plans in motion."

He shakes his head and finishes eating. A school, the science program Mars is pushing and help to the rural to our west means I need the towns settled. I text Stan to get me town status and problem areas by dinner.

He's on it. Nine families needed to go. I hope they're gone. I'll need to see Mucimi for that status. He'll find me.

As soon as Remo is finished, I'm up. He laughs but I've got shit to do and I don't want to miss Josephine at the shop. "How's it going with your girl. You take off after dinner."

He hits his mic off getting on his bike. "I'm going to claim her. If you tell Cort, I'm hurting you, Pres."

I laugh. “I’m not saying a fucking word. That’s good. Josephine likes her for standing up to her ex.”

He finds that funny. “She stabbed him, she reminds me of Josephine, Jasmine doesn’t take shit. She said your girl has gotten shit forever. There were a few families the town couldn’t control so they shunned them. All the mechanics, Jasmine and some friends are all in there. Her ex hit her and the PD were going to lock her up. Josephine’s dad had the sheriff there before they could take her away. He was a good guy she said. Blocked the PD cars in so they couldn’t move her.”

“The more I hear, the more I like Bruce Patton. I wonder where he got the name. He came from bad but found his happy and taught his kids well.”

“From what Jasmine said, he taught more than his kids, he’d find work for the kids. That’s how Josephine ended up with the kids at the garage.”

I figured as much. “Finn says we need to get to the bank. Mucimi showed then was gone so he doesn’t know why. Feeds don’t show a problem.”

I hit my mic and piece on. “On our way.”

“Roger, Pres.”

We ride a hundred through towns in close formation. The Brothers don’t have a choice but no one is bitching. I’m surprised cars move aside for us. It’s a novel experience in these towns, or it used to be. I don’t ride through too often. Last time a tomato was thrown at me.

At the bank, Remo has his two and four wait outside. As soon as I walk in I'm smiling. Banks is unbelievable at getting shit done. "It looks a hell of a lot more professional."

"Mr. Marshal."

I look over to the tellers. A girl raises her hand then motions me over. "Clara is trying to get the bank to buy her mortgage. I asked her to wait for you."

I nod not getting it. "Why?"

"That's Melvin's wife. Their kids can't get a loan and she needs the money to get Melvin out of jail. The house isn't worth anything, but the land is on the side of the Patton's."

Now I get it. "I need the numbers."

"She needs a hundred thousand to get Melvin out. He's a flight risk. The judge used to be a friend of his. Faking his disability had all those jerks helping him. They're not into helping now. The women won't talk to Clara. She's stuck."

Good information to know. She shows me a Zillow site on her phone. It's the piece on the side of the old shop. "I saw you owned the other pieces that sold."

"You're a bank teller?"

She smiles. "I'm Ken's sister. I finished school but won't work for Greer. The other realtor doesn't need help right now."

I nod. "You handle it and find me other pieces that would keep the Pattons out of the line of fire from neighbors."

Her eyes go huge. "I can do that. I have my license. Clara owns more on the lake. Offer the hundred for the house

lot and twenty for the lake access parcel. The lots on the side of Jo's new place are for sale."

I nod. "Buy them for a song and I may have a job for you with our investor. He buys everything but has been spread thin lately. Base your commission fairly for what you do for me. Banks is crazy with pay so you'll be paid above fair from him."

Her smile is going to crack her face. "I will and thank you. When can you close with Clara? She has the deed to the right of way with her and power of attorney from Melvin for the house."

I type Banks number in her phone. "Call Banks when I'm done talking to Melvin's wife. I'll give him a heads-up. Melvin's shit is personal. Make sure he knows. The land around the shop is Club. We need to get people to work so we need more businesses." I smile when she writes it down.

She looks up. "Anything else for Banks?"

"No. Let me know if there is other property I could use to jump start the towns. Here's my email." I write on the back of a card.

"I will. I can bring the papers to you to sign. You don't have to sit in a room with her."

I nod. "Get the right of way paperwork ready. You put the total and I'll sign with a check now. Get the paperwork for the land ready and I'll write a check for that, or Banks will transfer it. I'll come here to sign. Call the Club main number. They'll get it to me." I text Banks the basics and Willow's name. "Where's the nut?"

She laughs pointing to a little waiting area. I walk over thinking this isn't going to go well. I had this woman bouncing on the pavement at Josephine's new garage during the Cort fiasco. She's already glaring at me. "You have property to sell?"

With tears I ignore, she nods. "I need to get Melvin out of jail. We're moving in with my sister."

That's how I heard it. "How much do you need?"

"Two hundred fifty thousand."

I smile. "For the run-down house and right of way, I'll give you a hundred and twenty. Twenty in your hands today and the hundred in your account tomorrow once the papers are signed. Those papers are signed by you today."

"I need a hundred to get Melvin out."

I nod. "If he shows at court, you get that hundred back."

She's surprised. "He didn't tell me that."

"You may want to leave him there and take the hundred and twenty without him scamming you." The look she gives me says it's worth some thought.

"He signed everything with help from the bail guy. I can sign here and just get the money?"

I nod. "It may be the first time in your life you're free to do what you want without someone controlling your every move."

She pushes paper at me. "You can have it for a hundred and twenty."

I put my hands up. “Take it to Willow. I’ll sign it.”

The woman just about runs across the bank. I answer Banks walking slow. He loves me for getting him help and will see Willow in a couple of hours. I love my Brothers. I sign papers and hand Clara a check. She’s banking all but a grand in a new account Willow offers to open for her. I walk away smiling. Banks will handle the land when he gets here. I leave singing *Take the Money and Run*.

Remo laughs all the way to the bikes. I’m not the Steve Miller Band but I do alright. “Melvin’s gonna be sitting in jail for a while. The judge used to be a friend that helped him out. Clara is walking with the money a bondsman had him sign for.”

He laughs more. “Karma is a bitch.”

I nod. “To some. See if your dad wants to move to the other side of the lake. He can park his tiny house on the new lake access right away. We can get septic and water to him. He’s got the stove and solar. It beats his lot rent.”

“Are you shitting me?”

I shake my head no. “Get a pad and the road paved. There’s a good hundred-foot parking area on the right. The Brothers need work. The Club will cover it. His log cabin will be stationary.”

“Fuck, Pres. He’ll love no neighbors.”

“That’s good because I bought Melvin’s piece. Right of way is in between the old shop and Melvin. I need a crew at that house. We can fix it up and put a family in it.”

“You’re serious?” Remo isn’t usually slow.

“Yeah, Brother. I need Brothers scattered around the towns. The lake is part of town.”

He takes a few seconds to get what’s in his head out of his mouth. “You’re giving the lake access to my dad.”

I see it and stop. “Your dad made you who you are. You’ve been my Security since I got here, on my Team before that. I’ve always been a part of your family. It’s about time you’re a part of mine.”

His surprise shows on his face. “I am, Pres, we live on the same compound.”

I nod. “Your dad is part of that, Brother. Maybe this year we can invite him to the compound for Thanksgiving. Do Indians celebrate Thanksgiving?”

He hugs me. “I don’t know, but I’m honored, Maverick.”

I smile hitting his back. “We got shit to do. I need it done so I can make it to the new shop and see if Josephine has an old frame I can build for Ben.”

He shakes his head. “You want to see what she’s wearing.”

The Team laughs. I shrug. “Her clothes are fucking Badass. There isn’t a fucking thing I don’t like about Badass. Maybe the supernanny shit, but I love the rest.”

Now the Team is laughing at him. I’m good with that. We ride to our town and I get the thanks for the jobs. A mayor wants to have a ceremony for us. I tell them we have a party coming up and they can join in. I’m not up for socializing with politicians. This mayor is an idiot. The lake would be a good

place for a party. I text Brann about the Drive-in. He said a month. It feels like a month went by.

Getting to the pantry, I see Janice with Nick's second. "Pres, I was just dropping lunch," he says nervously.

"Nick at the shop?"

"Jacky is with the Princes and Jo. They were eating and have Prince Enforcers."

I nod. "Nick say he was covered?"

"Yeah, Pres. We have fifteen minutes. They'll eat when we get back."

I nod glad he's following the partner rule. "I was called here."

Janice steps up but stops for a kiss to the cheek. "I'll see you later. Thanks for lunch." When she turns toward me, she looks embarrassed. "That call was from me. We have extra coming from the market. Can we send it to the elderly? I was told to ask. I have *Meals on Wheels* willing to distribute."

I nod glad it was easy. "Go for it. If they need more, get it from the grocer. I don't want someone complaining they didn't get a cake and Martha did. Everyone gets it or no one." I remember her now, she's one of the first in the new subdivision. Nero said smart, funny and can get people organized fast. She pushed for the elderly and helps with Little Brothers after her shift here.

"Thanks, Maverick. That's it. I asked for your email, but they took a message."

I nod. "The Brother on the pantry is Nero. Your boss should have his number."

She nods. "He went to install a roof. I haven't seen him in two days. He likes helping on the grant crew more than here."

"Do you want to run it?"

She reacts like Willow. "Yes."

I nod. "It's yours. Nero is your Boss. He makes sure you have food. He isn't into managing the pantry. I'll talk to Ridley about helping in the winter and working the grant crew the rest of the year."

She hugs me and my hands go up. "You're taken and so am I. Congratulations and call Nero for questions."

"Thank you, Maverick!" She finds her voice as I'm walking out. Remo is waiting.

"I need Ridley on the grant crew. Do they have a Lead yet?"

"No, Pres. It's picked up by the crews when they don't have a job scheduled. We have more going on now with all these businesses running so Ridley has been keeping it going."

I nod. "Get Ridley on managing the grant jobs and in the winter helping with food. More will need to be delivered. His second is the new Head. I texted Nero her name."

"He's going to like that. He doesn't like the office work. I'll call when we get to the garage." Remo hunts with Ridley so he'd know.

The garage has three bays working. I'm glad they aren't hurt by the dickheads causing trouble. Josephine said they've always been steady. With the fire, they were closed for three days. She's got a good name as a mechanic that their shunning can't afford to ignore.

A Security Team is posted front and back. I throw chin to the Lead. "Have you eaten?"

"Yeah, Pres. We take turns when lunch comes in."

I nod. "Good job." I keep walking to Perry. Numbers is new so he wouldn't know.

"Hey, Brother. I'm looking for an old frame. I saw some in the stock room and Jacky said he cleaned some old frames up."

"We have quite a few. They're on the floor until we have a break this afternoon or tomorrow. Jacky was going to put them up on the second shelf but got caught up with his family." He smiles. "They dragged him away for lunch. I haven't seen him this happy since Jo finished his mustang. He needs family."

I nod. "He's a good kid. Blackhawks are the best kind of family. I'm happy they found each other. Do you need help here while Jo is out?"

"No. We're just unloading the trailers of stock that isn't for the garage. It's frames, specialty parts and motors for Jo to build. I wanted to get the trailers cleaned out before Jeffery comes back for them."

"I need an old frame. I'm going to look before they're up on shelves." I turn.

“I’ll go with you. They’re numbered.”

I stop. “Does Numbers have the part list?”

He nods. “Yeah. That would be easier. I forget he knows how to get everything. He set us up on hologram boards.”

Perfect. “I’ll talk to him. Finish what you’re doing, Brother.”

Numbers hooks me up with the file of *Jo’s Stock List*. It fits since that’s what it is. She’s got to have thirty frames. I pass the newer seeing they’re numbered by year.

“Early Ducati.” Remo stops by me.

“Yeah.” Pulling my phone, I pop the list and click in the number. A sixty-seven. I hand Remo my phone and keep walking. “A Shadow. What’s the next? That’s an Indian.”

“A ‘47 Chief.” He laughs. “An Indian Chief for Ben sounds like a fit, Pres.”

I stop. “A ‘47 was two-tone. That will work with black and aqua. That’s a Mohegan color.” Putting my hand out, he hands me my phone and I pull up the Chief. Sure enough. “That will be Badass. We can even get Badass on the tank with Jacky’s light changing paint.”

I call Teller. “Brother, I brought an Indian to Cort to match the one in the lobby. Your dad took it for a ride. I have the frame for an old Chief.”

He laughs. “He told us all about the Indian. He wanted to ride it to Phoenix.”

“Shit. He didn’t say.”

“You were excited to ride it. He’s always like that. He’ll love a Chief. The aqua and navy or black would work. He’d like navy better.”

I smile. “Thanks.” I swipe him off and pull the hologram board up. “The tank, rakes, forks, oil pan, housing and fenders are here somewhere. 003C0247.”

I hand him my phone and look for parts. He walks the other way. This building is bigger than it looks. They have car parts under the floor of the garage, so this is her specialty shit. It’s a lot of shit. I bet her dad was collecting it for years. Remo is talking to someone when I get back to the frame.

“We’ll look out there.” He swipes off. “In the trailers. Numbers is sending the keys out. He said box 561.”

“They’ve got it all organized. I’m glad I’m not looking through a junk pile.”

He laughs.

Josephine finds us scouring trunk-like crates in the 561 trailer. “Can I help?”

I jump a fucking foot. “How did you get up here?”

She pulls on my shirt. “Christian.”

I kiss her lips. “We’re looking for 003C0247.”

“The ‘47 Chief. I have the motor but no exhaust. It wouldn’t be in the trunks.”

That stops me. “You have the motor?”

“Yeah. These are my dad’s trunks. Mine are in the other trailers. He has parts for a lot of older bikes. I learned how to use the machines building a bunch of this. Jacky did

the newer bikes. They'd be toward the end." I follow her to the front of the trailer with my phone set as our flashlight.

"You made fenders and oil pans?"

She bends to see tags. "Yeah. When I got older, I did the tanks. There may be more in the trunks. Jacky was learning how to tag and store the parts. If he was mad, he'd just throw it in and not log it."

I don't say it, but I hope he was mad. "Here, Pres." Remo shines his light up from the next row. I'm glad there are only three rows.

We hear him slide and drop the trunk. When we get there it's on the floor open. "Yep, this is the Indian fender."

I check the tag. "It has a dash 12 on it."

"There are two trunks. The second will have a dash 22. They should be together. Jeffery worked for my dad for a while. He knows the system." Josephine looks at the trunk on the floor then the next one. "Here."

Remo pulls it down and opens it. He's on a treasure hunt. A laugh has me turning to Christian. "Brother, I'm glad you came in. I found a Chief frame and thought Ben would like it."

He smiles. "Even I heard about Cort's new bike. He's going to love it. Teller is right, navy and the dark aqua. He needs some modifications but don't do the exhaust. He won't ride it. They did get the motor, boards and suspension on his bikes. The Kevlar skin too. I'll have Jared send you the modifications he'll go along with. Prez is tough."

I nod typing all that out. “I can do all that. It’s what I do with mine. I have technology hidden. If it’s hidden, it’s okay?”

He shrugs. “Ask Jared. I’m not a mechanic. I know Prez’s bikes are all loud in our compound of modified exhausts. He never rides his HS bike. My Harley has the new exhaust.”

I nod. “I’m glad I didn’t pick the Shadow.”

He laughs. “His dad called everyone he trained Shadow. You want these out?”

I look at Josephine. “Can I buy the Chief?”

She looks up smiling. “You can have it. He’s mine too.”

“Thank you. It means something to him.” Turning, I nod for Christian. “Yeah. I have the frame pulled out in the storage building.”

“Where are they going?”

Josephine holds my arm and stands. “The back bays in the garage. One has the bike lifts.”

Remo jumps when the lid closes on the box he was looking in. The boxes float, stack, then float out the door. “The frame is going with them.” Christian is at the end of the trailer.

Josephine laughs. “I love freaky family.” Her crutch extends and the hand hold folds down.

Remo looks at me smiling. “I do too. I want to see the mechanics faces.” He moves fast jumping out of the trailer.

I shake my head. “How has your day been?”

“I can’t wait until tomorrow. It’s been a good day but being here makes me miss the work. Can I help build the bike for Ben?” She floats down making me laugh. Christian isn’t out here.

I jump and put the lock on. “I’d love to build it here. You have all the machines close. Did you buy new?”

“Yeah. Ratchet is working on the old. They’ll go to the tech school as he finishes them. Everything they have is old as dirt.” She donated them. She’s something else.

“I’m glad you have the room here for everything from the old shop.”

“Yeah. The two extra bays work. Paint is in the other building, but it’s feet away and frees up space for the metalwork machines. Jacky said he’s getting a shop to work in. He’s finally getting serious about his art. Thank you.”

“I’m glad he’s excited. I gave him an igloo, the rest is all Jacky. He’s interested in every form of art out there, he should do what he loves. We do.”

“This is why I love you.”

I laugh.



Josephine

Christian is gone but Jacob stays with me. “We all built our first HS bikes. It’s like a rite of passage. The rest are built by Jared. Jax makes some nice bikes that aren’t Ducati and does a good business. Brothers don’t ride the same as work bikes at home.” He cuts tape on a fender and starts unwrapping it.

I can see that. The Ducatis they ride aren’t cruising bikes and have a shit load of modifications. “I have a Harley that’s comfortable and modified to fit me. If I had to ride all day, I’d build another bike for nights and weekends.” I set the bolts for the fenders in a tray by it.

He laughs unwrapping the next piece. “That’s what they do. Aubrey gets a new bike every couple of years. She’s Protector Ops so she’s on her new bike whenever she’s not working. Her first was bubble gum pink. I’ve never seen that color since she made Ops Lead. Thank fuck.”

I laugh. That is just not a Badass color. He holds his hand up. “She does get the pink LEDs but they’re relayed with the Badass blues.”

I put the oil pump on the table with the screws in a tray by it. “I guess that’s something.”

He nods watching my eyes but keeps unwrapping the forks. “Don’t get fuckin’ pink lights.”

My hands go up. “Not in this lifetime. I’m more eggplant or blues.” I get a tray for the spring, bolt and spacers.

“Joey, Sheila and Eliza are like that. Pink is the tiara old ladies.”

I get him to explain tiara old ladies, then old ladies versus ol' ladies and have to agree. I'm good with my eggplant lowlights. Turning, I get the motor brackets and mounting bolts out of my trunk and onto the table.

“Where did Christian go?”

“Dean landed at the mansion. She won't let him drag her around so he's probably on a chopper with her.” He looks past me. “Yeah, Tekah is with them. I bet Keesog is going to the Protector compound with Phoenix and Billy. He misses the kids when they stay here for a while. He'll try to convince Phoenix and Billy to do a month at a time. He'll show sooner or later.” He cuts the foam film off the frame. I watch and see he's done this before. They're talented Brothers.

“Keesog is the healer, Tekah is Ops?” I ask trying to remember all these kids. I roll the film up and fold the paper from the smaller parts.

“They're both healers. Keesog is like Mucimi and does everything but fly. They can take any position and finish shit in minutes to our hours. Tekah likes ground Ops but does everything. All kids do everything, but usually stick with jobs they like, in a pinch it comes in handy.” He has helped with everything so far so I'm not surprised when he takes the paper from me and puts it in the trunk.

“My dad taught us like that. I always thought it was smart.”

He nods. “Now that this is ready for wiring, what's next?”

I look around. “This isn’t my project. Maverick wants to get this done. I’ll help when he’s ready to work on it.”

He smiles. “You’re a good old lady, Josephine. Let’s get back to the compound. Justice said you need to get that leg up.”

Ken comes to move the empty trunks with a pallet jack. “Thanks, Ken. I bet your family will be glad to get back home tomorrow.”

He smiles. “They want to make a compound like yours. Jacky took everyone on a tour with an alphabet kid. The kid said he can get the plans if we tell him how many igloos and what we want in them. Me, Bobby and Bobby’s parents like Jacky’s. Perry’s and my parents like yours with a patio. Willow was working so she didn’t see, but I have pictures for her. She’s coming for dinner tonight with a Banks guy and his family. The Indians have a compound now?”

I nod. “Alpha-*Bit* is what they’re called because they’re small and came in groups by letter. Some are older than us. The igloos are what Jacky and Picasso have been painting.”

“They did a good job on yours. He’s such a good artist I don’t get why he doesn’t go to school.”

I shrug. “He’s such a good artist already and gets to work in every art form he likes. Maybe he just doesn’t want to be stuck in one kind of art.”

He raises the pallet up with that thoughtful look on his face. Of all the mechanics, Ken is the thinker. “Yeah. I can see that.”

I laugh. "I'm locking the boxes unless you're in here."

"My bike is perfect. I don't have anything to do to it. Later, Jo, Jacob." He rolls the trunks out.

"He's a good kid. He's glad you're happy and the towns are getting cleaned up."

I nod at my invasive uncle. "They're all good men. They worked for my dad, now me. We spent a lot of time together."

I give Numbers the keys and say bye to my shop. I miss it. Jacob laughs doing the magician lift for me to get in the truck. I close up my crutch thinking he needs to stop reading me.

"It's not to be invasive or hurt you. You're fascinating to us all. Not knowing you were right here is fuckin' crazy. Christian is not a Brother that loses it and he lost it when Mucimi showed him your dad. His whole life up until Dean has been spent, for the most part, alone, Josephine. He had family connections but it's a vision he never got. Maybe your dad was already gone when he started getting more, but he never saw it. He sees so much of the bad in our world and the one thing that could have made it happy never showed. He feels every minute of that lost time. We read for us and him. He'll be able to get those minutes with you he's missing right now."

That's so sad. "He reads you?"

He nods. "Christian reads everyone. He's the most powerful vision Brother Badass has ever seen. Justice sees the Clubs, Brothers, families, but he's young and the ability is

fairly new to him. Christian sees everything at home and here or wherever Brothers are. I feel he's always had a loss in him and it must be the connection to the family he couldn't see. Christian's visions have never been understood because he's the first seer gifted so much. Being first means no one to understand or relate to on top of brutal visions and lost connections. His life has never been easy."

I bet it hasn't. CJ said he sees what no one ever should. I don't want to know the details but felt a pain in my heart with those words. What no one ever should is a scary sad story to live. I hope finding us helps that story. I know he loves his family, kids and Dean, that's got to be a happier story.

Since Jacob doesn't answer I think it is. "Jacob didn't answer because Christian has seen his family die more times than I can remember. They bring him as much happiness as any family can. He also carries the vision memories of the pain of losing them. He's not going to want this as a thought you have but you know that pain. You understand because of it," Mucimi says sounding much older in the back seat.

Jacob nods. "He's right. What's for dinner, Mucimi?"

"Mase, Nash, Kristos and Mikey are cooking a clam boil and lobster bake."

I look back. "Boiling clams?" People do that? I've had baked lobster.

They laugh. I get pictures of food on platters but it's in net bags. I guess it's boiled.



Maverick swings me up and carries me away.
“They’re fucking crazy.”

I laugh. “They are. I’m glad they’re ours.”

He smiles down. “I am too. Love you, beautiful. I wanted to start the bike tonight. Ben is bound to show up soon. I’d like to have it done.”

“You don’t think he’d like to help?”

He stops fast. “You think he’d want to? He’s Head of Badass Territories, President of the Princes and Badass North. He runs like ten Clubs.”

I nod completely impressed with the movie star looking Indian that flew into the ambulance to heal Jacky and me. “Sounds like he could use a few days off. Ask one of the kids. I bet Cort would like to help. He looked interested in the bike when you told Kristos and Mase.”

“I’m going to ask Christian. He’d know. That would be epic. I have time without Aero jobs running. The Bits are working with design so the engineers are all over them. I can assemble and break it down then have him help reassemble when it’s ready.” He’s bored?

“You have a car and the bike to work on and your aunt is here.” Not to mention he’s sponsoring the mechanics families, Jacky’s new shop and cleaning up the towns, plus running the club and, hello, I just landed in his life. His aunt just landed here too.

He brings me into the garage. “She’s busy with Major. He said they’re going to the mansion tonight.” That doesn’t make him happy.

“Are you mad?”

“Not mad. Your family is here, they took time to come see you. I haven’t seen my aunt for more than meals. I tried to show her Aero, but Major took her to the Delta rocket then left. I didn’t get to show control or the satellites we monitor or anything we do.” When the hell does he have time to play tour guide?

She’d probably be bored out of her mind. I want to see a rocket. “Has Major seen it all?”

He rolls his eyes setting me down gently. “He walks away asking techs questions. He likes his virtual world but doesn’t care how it works.”

I nod. “Your aunt doesn’t use a computer. I bet the rocket is about all she’d understand. She told Jeremy you have a big name in spaceships.”

He laughs. “Maybe she wouldn’t get it.” That’s the man I love.

“No, I don’t think she would. I would like a tour, but I may not understand the tech part. I’d love to see where everything is built and launched. I’d love to see a launch the next time you have one.”

He smiles. “I’ll bring you. Engineering is right past the compounds. We launch from Aero control right here.”

I nod. “I want to see it. You talked to the space station from my office. I want to see that too.” How can the man be bored?

That smile means my geeky President is back to happy. “I should have asked you sooner. The space junk jobs

are done for a few days. I can schedule the next for your day off.”

“I’d love that. Can it be in the morning? Zorbing is open in the afternoon.”

He laughs. “Yeah, it’s a race day. Anton is working on bigger bubbles so I can play.”

I look around not seeing anything new. “I love work and miss it. Is this your way to make me feel better?”

“Not with anything in the tool boxes.” He opens the safe room and puts his arm out for me. As soon as we’re in, he closes the door. “Jacky is showing the igloos again. Someone gave him the code to ours.”

Oh shit. “You should change that with your handy dandy tablet.”

He laughs. “I plan to but not right now. Right now, I want to be buried in you forgetting about the crazy Brothers and freaky family that are having lobster races with dead lobsters.”

That is crazy. The freaky can’t touch the lobsters. Mucimi got a small wheel from somewhere then all the freaky went missing and came back with parts to move the lobsters without touching them. Mase was the smartest with beaming it with fire balls. That poor lobster bounced with every hit. It stunk like hell too. He threatened to incinerate any lobster that passed him. Anton was cute with his little robot carrying the lobster. Pax had a hamster wheel Anton’s robot put the lobster in.

Luckily, we left and I don't have to smell the burning lobster anymore. "I don't feel the need to know who won. The buried in me sounds more interesting."

"You and the sexy clothes are killing me. I love the tiny buckles."

I do too and help him unbuckle starting from the bottom. I don't tell him about the zip..."

"It unzips?" He has to notice everything.

I look up smiling. "Your way is more fun." I don't tell him about the Maverick panties either. CJ had them flown here. They're crazy with clothes and panties.

He peels the vest off slowly and steps back holding the shirt tight against my stomach. "I like the buckles better. Jesus, this is new. This wasn't in the closet."

"CJ had clothes flown down from a friend. She dresses everyone. Oh." My shirt is flung over my head. I just get my arms up in time *not* to get tangled in it.

"She sent bras and panties? I love this one." His finger follows the shell-like line of the bra just barely touching my skin.

My blood flows hot and breath stalls when he cups those shells. "Yeah," comes out breathy. The man only has to touch me for my brain to seize.

He's on his knees yanking at the matching belt on my pants. "Every fucking day is Christmas with you. My mom made Christmas good, you set my head spinning. Fucking women." He laughs.

I look down wondering what could make him laugh and smile. All he's done is unzip my pants. It's enough for him to see the Maverick across the top of my gunslinger panties. I shrug. "I got two pairs of each, they make four of you, don't rip them."

He pulls the front up sending chills through my body. "They send them every couple of months. Nancy said you get a box with Victoria's and Badass." He's serious.

Wading through my foggy brain, I ask. "You know Nancy?"

"I sent an order and she emailed back. Teller said everyone orders their women's clothes from her. She sends the panties regularly. Your scent always has a touch of vanilla."

I shake my head. "Can we do that later. I'm standing here in a bra with my pants unzipped." I want his pants unzipped. His mouth is on my panties as those magical hands scorch the skin on my ass cheeks lowering my pants and giving him more panties to nibble through. Oh, my God. My hands go right to his hair running my fingers in it which causes a growl and my new Maverick panties to be torn off me.

"Lean back." The growl ratchets up the heat running through me.

I'm lifted onto the worktable feeling the cold metal against my bare skin. Another moan for what shouldn't feel so good has his mouth on my bare skin feeling more than good. "Maverick."

He's up. "I'll fix it." Damn.

I put my arm across my eyes. Why me. I thought it was working just fine. I hear cabinets open and close, paper being torn and a satisfied grunt but don't look. I don't move my arm when my boot and pants leave my lower body literally half clothed.

“Hold on, Beautiful.”

I move my arm for that. He's between my one-clothed, one-bare legs and lifts me. his hands move behind me but not on me. “Ready.” He kisses my head and lifts me up and onto a soft blanket. Looking down I smile recognizing the Badass blanket. He's back on his knees and my clothed and braced leg is up on a rolling tool table. The man is determined and a little funny but I'm all for funny and determined so I don't say a word.

When his mouth hits the seam of my leg, the shock stuns my brain again. My elbows give out hitting the table. I'm glad it's covered and moan remembering right where we were before he “fixed” it. A hand in his hair makes that even better.

Moaning is all I give him this time. Stopping is not happening twice.



Maverick

As soon as she's off, I'm kissing up her body. She's so fucking sexy with the Badass everything. Even her fucking lingerie is Badass. I make sure she feels it, kissing around the shells held together with a front clasp under them. That's why it looked like she didn't have a bra on. Women are amazing creatures. Unclipping the shells, my hands move, one holding her so that hard nipple gets attention, the other to my belt. There is no way I can wait. Kinetic energy is high tonight.

Yanking my hair has me moving wherever the fuck she wants me. Her other nipple gets scraped, bitten and sucked hard giving me all those Badass sexy sounds I love. It hits me, she's Badass to the core without living or even knowing what Badass is. No wonder I love everything about her.

My mouth on her neck bites, liking that thought enough to leave my mark on her. Her vanilla scent always has me hard. She's like a Badass witch or something. My dick pushes for more and wins.

“Yes.” She yanks my hair so I'm on her mouth.

“Love you, beautiful Badass witch.” I watch her eyes open lifting my mouth from hers. “Everything about you is Badass. You were made for me, Josephine.” I slam all the way in watching her eyes widen. “Everything is a perfect fit.” I kiss her nose wanting to watch those eyes.

Those eyes smile and I see love in there. “Perfect. Now move, my geeky Badass President.”

I move listening to her directions while watching her face and eyes hit those beautiful moments of wonder, love and

ecstasy. I feel every bit of it with her.

“Maverick!” Her urgent whisper connects right to my dick.

Moving faster has her eyes on mine. “Beautiful Josephine.” I breathe hard watching her jaw clench at the same time her body does. My head spins like a tornado set down in it. “Now, baby.”



Josephine

Maverick gets another pair of panties on me and lifts my pants up. I'm glad he does all this. I would have flopped on the bed. Something happens to us, I can't figure it out, making love isn't through a windstorm.

'The ancestors wish to bless your union,' a woman says in my head.

"You're not Mucimi or Aylen." I look at Maverick. Freaky is making me look crazy.

'Aiyana, shaman for the Connecticut tribe and Protector for the Princes of Prophecy.' She appears floating on the side of me like a ghost.

Maverick stops with my boot and falls on his ass. "Aiyana, glad you let me get her dressed." He shakes his head standing.

"You know the ghost?" I'm glad he sees her too.

"I am at the Prince compound in Rhode Island. You are both dressed so I will welcome you to the tribe as honored new additions. The ancestors wish to bless your union, but I must warn of jumping to them without guidance." The ghost looks clearer making my breath just stop.

"Ancestors want to bless our union?" Maverick asks while I try to breathe. When I can, I hop to the room. "Josephine, it's just her form showing."

I fall on the bed and crawl with one knee to the nightstand.

“Josephine. Holy fuck.” He takes the picture from me. “You’re Josephine’s aunt?” Maverick has the picture facing Aiyana’s ghost.

I turn over and sit up to see better but my mother’s twin disappears. “That was real. That just happened. Oh, my God. She’s not my mother. She looks like my mother.”

He pulls me to the edge and turns me so my leg is on the bed. “Baby, it happened. Teller! Justice! Someone!”

Justice appears behind Maverick. “You’re real?” I ask seeing Mucimi next to him.

Maverick turns. “She’s in shock. Aiyana showed in form.”

Justice sits with his hand on me. “Jesus fuck. Let me see it.”

I don’t understand. “The ghost is gone. She looks like my mother.”

Maverick gives Justice the picture. “No one fuckin’ noticed this?”

“Jacky’s book has only their dad and his sisters. It was mostly from the shop. The furniture pictures don’t have people in them.” When Maverick says it, I wonder if that’s strange.

“Fuckin’ hell.” Justice makes me jump then cry.



Maverick

Aylen kicked us out a good hour ago. Christian is missing. Jeremy put Josephine to sleep and now he's missing. I'm pacing fucking pissed.

"Everyone has been in their heads and didn't see her mom?" It's the one thing I keep coming back to. Why the fuck didn't they warn her? Or me or anyone that could have fucking helped here?

Mase walks in. "Aylen said to take it outside."

"I'm not fucking..." I close my eyes, while my stomach drops, ready to hit him.

"Calm down, Brother. Josephine is awake and scared. Aylen is keeping her calm."

When we stop my hands hit my knees. "Where's Mucimi? He brought Christian pictures of her dad. Why not her mother?" He showed for five seconds then disappeared. Teller shows up. They're fucking crazy with appearing and it pisses me off tonight.

He nods with the understanding in his eyes that calms me. "He's with Brantley and Prez. He's a mess, Maverick. With vision he feels everything. The girl was sent away when she was found raped. She had no ability but reading and wasn't considered important to the tribe. Aiyana's memories are cloaked so she doesn't have memories of any of that. Co was sent to Rhode Island for Aiyana by Nunánuk suspecting her father was abusing her. Aiyana never said. She jumped to the ancestors so she wasn't there. My dad says it was bad. My dad, Christian, Dakota and Nunánuk cloaked those memories

with the ancestors help. Seeing that picture opened the earlier cloak Co did of her sister. Christian called for Justice and Keesog to help Dakota keep that cloak buried. The Protectors here are helping at the reservation.”

They keep memories away? “Cloaked memories is what happened to Kateri? That’s why we don’t mention her past?”

Mase nods. “Yeah, Brother. She can’t move the cloak.”

“Aiyana or Kateri?”

Teller shakes his head. “Both. I didn’t see Josephine’s mom. Justice didn’t see her. You know Aiyana and *you* didn’t see the resemblance?”

I didn’t. What the hell is going on?

Mase is on fire in a nanosecond. “Fuckin’ Mucimi!”

“Calm down, Mase, if he shielded it, he had a reason. Put yourself out. Every fuckin’ Brother is helping with Aiyana or Josephine. I’ve got no one to keep you from losing your shit.” Jacob is a lot closer to Mase than I want to be. I step back glad he appeared and take back the thoughts I had earlier about them appearing.

Teller looks at me. “He won’t hurt you. It’s just anger showing. Now I know why Mucimi is always here. I need to help. Are you staying, Jacob?”

“Yeah. I’ve got Mase and Maverick.”

Teller is gone before my name is out. I shake my head. “Aiyana and a sister. Are they twins?”

“A year apart, Christian said. He’s rattled. So many people here without vision before he’s hit with it has him unsettled. These connections are significant. This isn’t a Brother in IT or working the bakery.”

“Officers in the Princes. Is that why the ancestors came to Teller’s wedding? The connection was made?”

He smiles at me. “It could be or that Chenoa and Carmen were pregnant before everyone knew. Something has them collecting and showing more.”

“Ancestors means Crow is in there, right?” He strikes me as someone that would keep working on what he was fixing even if he’s dead. I bet my girl’s mom and dad are there.

They both look at me, but I know they’re not seeing me. “Yeah, he’s an ancestor,” Jacob says then looks at Mase.

“Christian said it looks like you’re right. Mucimi was warned but didn’t understand. It wasn’t from Nunánuk. Do you have questions?” Mase throws me.

I repeat his words. “Josephine and Jacky are related to Aiyana, Joey and Christian. Her mom was sent here before Co was Shaman of Rhode Island and dad after. Aiyana was excited to have Kateri as family. She felt that like Ben felt it. Is Josephine’s mom someone Kateri wasn’t supposed to meet? Someone from her past?”

Jacob has me on alert. “Holy fuck. Mase! It’s a fuckin’ question. Calm your shit. Kateri met Josephine and Jacky and doesn’t know them.”

I nod. “She doesn’t look like her mom. I mean, do we not mention the connection to Aiyana?” Mase calms and I

think I need a fucking drink somewhere far away.

“No, stay here. You’re seeing shit that could be a problem before it hits. Everyone is fuckin’ busy. Prez said to keep you close.” Jacob has me wondering what he’d do to keep that order.

Mase laughs.

I put my hands up knowing what he would do to keep that order. “I’m not going anywhere. Josephine would understand but Jacky is going to see Aiyana and pass the fuck out. He’s eighteen and not brought up with all your freaky Indian shit.”

Jacob nods. “Good point. I’ll get it to Prez.”

I look at Mase. “Do you know how crazy this is? I like my otherworldly coming from space. Reality there is at least scientifically explained.”

He laughs at me. Fucking freaky-assed Brothers.

Chapter Nine

Maverick

Justice shows in front of me, with Alder on his back, throwing chin. “Brothers. You’re all crazy. Now I know why Falcon built you a compound far away from him. How is Mucimi doing?”

Justice’s smile falls. “He’s still with Dakota at the reservation.”

With better explanations from Jacob and Mase, I understand more than I did. Mucimi can’t hurt people unless he’s saving a life and he thinks the shield he put up hurt everyone. He felt Josephine’s pain. The kid is so smart and does so much with a smile on, I never imagined how much he sees and feels. I love him more knowing how strong he has to be to carry that pain for all of us.

“We all do, Brother. He’s strong and fragile. It has always been and sucks. He’ll come out stronger. That’s always been the same,” Justice says softly falling in place beside me.

“Are you here to check on Josephine?” They’d show at the igloo if they were.

“Alder has her brace. Prez, Aylen and Jeremy have her recent memories of her mom cloaked. Aiyana, Teller and Dakota are working on Jacky’s.”

My feet stop when he lists Aiyana. “The ancestors are cloaking, Aiyana doesn’t see but connects them to Jacky.” He answers before I ask.

I move forward. “What is the union Aiyana showed to warn us about?”

Now he stops. “Aiyana warned you about the ancestors blessing your union? Fuck, she has to. I’ll explain it to both of you. They pull you to the reservation. You can’t just jump there without a guide, or you’d never make it back.”

“Whoa, slow down. I’m not jumping to a reservation. I’m not Indian and I don’t know much about reservations. Trask said it’s like a quantum leap. I’m not leaping anywhere.” Their crazy is getting to be a little too much.

He laughs.

“I don’t think it’s funny, Justice. Until last night, I didn’t understand half the shit I was seeing. Understanding doesn’t make me wish for any fucking part of your life. As a matter of fact, I want to find a way to say I’m sorry you have to live like you do.”

He laughs more. I walk away. Alder catches up to me. “Freaky jump not scary.” His hands wave around his head as we walk out the door where Remo and Tats are waiting. “Jump same to meditate. Calm, relax, re-energize.”

I throw Remo and Tats chin and bend. “You’ve been to the reservation?”

He nods. “Pres Justice take me. Ops to babies hurt all. Protectors bring babies, me. Heal help to heart, mind. VP Teller say soul.”

They do say that. Cort said the ancestors are a place of solace and reward to the Protectors. “I can see that, but I’m not

Indian and I'm not getting stuck there to bless our union. I'd never get the chance to live my life with Josephine if I do."

He sits on the step, so I do. Remo and Tats stand behind us at the door. "Bless union is sex?"

I nod. "Aiyana said they want to bless our union. If we get pulled there, how do we get back?"

His head bobs. "I see aversion to jump, pull is no jump. Pres Justice teach jump you safe?"

I shrug. "I'm not Indian."

"Boss Josephine Indian. Pres Trask no Indian, Boss Hannah Indian. Boss Carmen no Indian, Pres Justice Indian."

That has me nodding. "Maybe they can teach Josephine. I don't see anyone not Indian learning. There wouldn't be a reason for me at the reservation."

"I see you point. Pres Justice, you teach Boss Josephine?"

I look back at Tats, Remo and Justice. I didn't know he reappeared. He smiles at Alder. "I'll bring them both, then teach Josephine and Jacky how to jump. If the ancestors pull them in they'd drop them back."

Alder nods. I shake my head. "That's a lot of faith he's got in ancestors I've never met."

"Ancestor save more than one Alpha-Bit. I learn faith to my Brothers, ancestors, Protectors. You see and no see space mean you have faith launch work, satellite work, universe real. Have faith to Brothers, Protectors, ancestors

real. You know, you see it. VP Mase shoot fire.” He shakes his head.

Remo laughs. I ignore him and nod at the Little President. “Yeah. You make good points. Josephine is Indian. They wouldn’t let her hang in limbo in some quantum realm.”

Alder nods with that angelic smile. “Hold tight, you come back. Anton done big zorb, new trail.” We have a new trail?

Everyone is laughing. Fucking Brothers.

We get to the compound and Remo is still smiling. I peg him a finger and walk away. “You want your bike in, Pres?” The fuck laughs. I ignore him, shooting him the bird, without looking back.

Alder catches up to us. “Boss Remo move bike in. You no answer, walk slow, I no run.”

Justice stops in front of me. Jesus. “Sorry, LP.”

He bends holding his paper bundles out to me. Alder rolls his eyes making me laugh. “Door two feet away.”

Justice smiles. “You’re the one bitching about running. You run everywhere.”

Alder nods. “Good point. I no talk shit. Presidents here, I no run.”

Justice stands. “I didn’t notice that. Thanks, Alder, but I don’t mind giving you a ride.”

Alder hits the pad and opens the door. “Freaky ride, I take.”

I shake my head hitting the pad and walk in, even Alder is crazy. Josephine, CJ and Cloud look our way from the island. Josephine is up and smiling before I make it to her.

“Yes, he has your brace and more.” That vanilla hits my nose and I push all thoughts away for her and the skirt she’s in. Alder opens the packages talking about the different braces he has. I watch Justice talk to Cloud. Something is wrong. Justice looks at me and nods, so I walk closer.

“Christian’s tracking is off. He hasn’t been seen since last night. Dean is on a plane back to Princes worried about Aiyana. She thinks Christian was at the reservation.”

That strikes me as odd. “Wouldn’t his body be here?”

Justice shakes his head no. “He can be anywhere. If I’m my crow I can jump. Mucimi jumps as his wolf or from form.”

My hand goes up. “I don’t want you to explain that. So his body doesn’t have to be here?”

“Not necessarily. I don’t know where form or animals go or what they do. It’s new for me. Aiyana can’t reach him. Dakota said he doesn’t have a connection but feels him.”

I shake my head. “Again, don’t explain that. What you’re saying is Christian and his body are MIA?” Knowing the shit they go through I’m not surprised.

Justice nods. “Yeah. Maybe he needs a minute away from all this crazy shit.”

Cloud shakes his head. “We’d still be able to track him. His tracking is at his house on the Prince compound, not

here. Jumping to the ancestors last night was from here. His body and tracking were here.”

Jacob walks in. “Nothing. Jeremy said he went for Co. I’m telling you he’s fine.”

Cloud shakes his head. “You don’t know that.”

“I know, Dad. Justice knows. If Mucimi were here, he’d say it too. I’m his Protector, I’d know. His mind is settled. Relax. He’ll show somewhere with Co.”

That’s good enough for me. I nod and walk to Josephine. The brace Alder is putting on her looks like Jinx’s armor. “That’s a skeleton?”

Alder nods. “Boss Stella make thigh to toe.” So far, the outside side of her thigh has a shield and her knee has a cap that looks bronzed with her ring designs on it. They’re amazing little Brothers.

Josephine has her skirt up so I see black around her thigh. “The movement sensors are in the band?” I ask.

“Yeah. The strap has to be in the exact same place every day. Alder stamped a compass on me.” She moves the skirt with her finger showing me the tattoo. A compass rose with the heart in the middle. The calf shield looks like a shell just on the sides of her leg similar to Jinx’s arm.

I laugh. “Thanks, Alder.”

He gets shields on her ankles then puts a short sock over her toes. He clips the wire to the toe piece and everything lights up. I shake my head at the ingenuity and imagination they’ve learned. The blue swirls at the cap on her knee at what

has to be pinholes in the bronze. The sides have a moving blue going up the shields.

“Pick color you like here.” He points to a little fingerprint at the thigh. “You sock shoe over plate, toe shield. No submerge to water. Wipe damp cloth to clean.”

“I love the color change option. You want me to put my sock and shoe on?” Josephine asks.

Alder nods. “Yeah, test to plate.”

She’s got the coolest fucking little boots to go with her skirt. I watch her walk without leaning on her crutch then without the crutch. “It feels different than the brace. Lighter but more solid or stronger.”

Alder nods. “Titanium light and strong. Shield go to leg, over pants if no wrinkle to clothes.” He looks at me.

“If the clothes aren’t bunched under it?”

He nods. “What he say. Band on skin. Ankle under sock okay. Sock no bunch okay. Plate, toe on skin, sock over.”

Josephine nods. “Got it. The shields will form to my leg over the pants like now?”

“Yeah. Wire clip to work boot height. Extra wire two inch to short boot, shoe.”

Josephine gets it and he takes everything off her. The brace makes me smile. It’s got pistons on the sides. Josephine likes this one. It has a plate but not the toe thing. Her sock goes right over it. She’s a pro at getting this one on.

“It’s a little higher but the band tightens in the same place. Where does it clip to the brace?”

Alder smiles showing her a stand. “No wire. Band on, brace respond. Charge to here. Alder shows her the holes in the stand. “Plate have button same to shield.”

He pulls the skeleton plate over and hits the arch. Two probes stick out. They’re amazing. “Charge you use. All brace no wire. Allen make spare.” He pulls one that looks like a motorcycle chain that’s wrapped around a small sprocket at her knee. “Over clothes.”

Josephine laughs. “I like the old school look.”

I nod. It’s my favorite. Alder has two more. “Brace to bling junk how you like. This water, no robotic. Shower, swim, keep foot, leg protected always.”

I nod. Feeling no pain doesn’t mean she couldn’t hurt her leg or foot.

“So I need the crutch with the shower brace?”

She’s got Alder shaking his head. “No, ratchet hold up, move no weight, hold weight.”

“Like a sports brace,” I say getting a nod.

“Thank you, Alder. Let your Brothers know I appreciate all they’ve done for me. I’ll thank Stella.”

Alder nods. “Juan, Maddox make water brace you swim robotic. I bring they finish. One, two week. Research.” He shrugs making me smile.

“Allen, Juan, Maddox and you. Anyone else I should send a thanks to?” She’s got a thing about sending thank yous to everyone for everything.

Alder smiles. "Quincy, Odell. Alpha-Bit Brothers be happy you thank."

"I won't forget them. All Fords make it easy. Thank you, Alder." She kisses his cheek. "I'm going to keep this one on."

"You pain, problem to brace, chat to me." He's back to doctor.

"I will."

"I see Anton. Later Bosses, Preses." He runs making Justice laugh.

"He wants to ride. Tats is out there," Justice says watching the door.

Christian comes in with an older Indian.

"Remo, can you get these to my igloo?" My eyes don't leave the Indian. I know him.

"You have seen me with Crow and Major. The boy who got the towers so Crow had phones and computers."

I sit when my knees stop holding me up. "Pres?" Remo moves in front of me.

I shake my head. "I'm here. Go, Brother."

He turns to Justice getting a nod. I look at the Indian. "You're Co. Major said you were an old friend."

"I met Major when he was riding with Crow. He was fascinated by our culture."

I shake my head no. "You're a Mason."

“At one time. No longer. My name and location were wiped from the Masons.”

“You’re not Mohegan. You’re...”

He doesn’t let me finish. “Lakota, one of the Algonquian speaking natives from our north. Most people would refer to me as Sioux without the distinction. East of the mountains and west of the plains is my peoples’ rightful home. Cheyenne were our closest allies before being displaced by the government.”

Justice moves closer. “Algonquian is Mohegan? Shit. I need you, Mase.”

Christian stops Justice. “No, Mase, he’s good. I got it.” Christian sits. “Mohegan is originally part of the Pequot tribe. That’s where most of our ancestors are from. A big part of that tribe had Naskapi in it. Lakota, Cree, Arapaho, Cheyenne and a bunch of others, since they were pushed west, hooked up with quite a few. Co or Geronimo is part of that Sioux-Naskapi tribe. His father had kids in that tribe when they moved south with a Cheyenne-Navajo wife. Kateri’s father is one of those kids, her mother is related to Crow. Crow is a cousin to Co.” Indian isn’t easy.

I get that straight in my head looking at Co. “Crow sent you to Aiyana from your tribe or you have vision?”

He smiles. “Major was right, your mind is brilliant. I have vision but Crow was our Christian. Crow sent me to Connecticut. Kateri Blackhawk trained then sent me to Rhode Island to protect Aiyana Waters. She is a niece I had never met, with a mind like yours, Maverick. Her focus is medicinal and protecting innocents.”

I nod. "Is she okay?"

He looks at Josephine then back to me. "Christian brought me to her before here. Aiyana is happy with her new tribal additions and does not suffer from her past as was expected."

"That's good. No one should live with that. Mucimi?"

Co answers. "He will return to Justice tonight."

"He's settled?" Justice asks Christian.

"Yeah. Co settled him. Crow is fuckin' with how it works. Mucimi got it." Christian makes me smile. He's talking about a dead guy. He looks right at me. "When I die, I'm hiding from the fuckin' ancestors."

Everyone laughs. We needed that. CJ and Cloud hug him quick and step back. Josephine is looking at me. "You remember last night?" I ask.

She nods. "Most of it. I don't speak of family resemblance to anyone. Our ties to Aiyana are vague."

I nod. Co steps closer. "I am a great uncle that will be a vague tie. My position was Prophet until I became a Shaman. Aiyana surpassed me at fifteen. I was never meant to be a Shaman and always used Prophetic abilities."

Josephine nods. "Why did you leave the tribe there?"

"It was never my tribe. I asked Shaman Blackhawk to remove Aiyana from her tribe many times. Aiyana's imprisonment finally broke her feelings of obligation to that tribe. She was a headstrong child that turned into a formidable woman. Stubbornness is a family trait handed down by her

Naskapi ancestors. When I could no longer protect her, I left in shame. This is my first trip back to my tribal home that is no longer and people that do not know of me.” He doesn’t look broken up about it.

“Fuck. The burned reservations?” I ask.

“Moved to New Mexico, yes. The people I speak of have taken a more traditional role that has proven disastrous to Rhode Island Mohegan and goes against our newly combined ancestors’ wishes. Aiyana is not merely a Shaman, but the voice of our ancestral people. They are now ancestral people of inclusion.”

“Holy fuck. Prez said she has greatness written in her story and Rhode Island fucked up.” Justice has me looking at him.

Christian nods. “It’s true. Prez all but laughed at the Chief when he fucked that up.”

“You were there?” Justice has awe in his voice and on his face.

I smile watching him as Christian answers. “I was. Prez told him when Dakota came to Princes. When Aiyana came, Dakota threatened to develop the land around the reservation with an amusement park that would make Disney proud. He went to Connecticut with Aiyana and stopped protecting the fuckin’ morons. He never went back as a member. We had some Ops there early on but nothing lately. Brody and Pamela went to the Water Protectors after a while. They’re in North Dakota now. Nunánuk was ready to stroke out she was so happy getting Aiyana and Dakota.” He smiles. It must be a good memory.

Justice shakes his head smiling. “We’re lucky to have Aiyana and Dakota. I’ve learned to be who I am because of their lessons and guidance. My dad never told me the whole story. Do you have anything you want to ask, Josephine?”

My girl looks up with tears in her eyes. “I never learned anything about who I am. Are you staying, Co?”

He bows his head. “It would be an honor to teach you the ways of our people. I would like to join the tribe here, at the Delta MC Club, as they are in need of a Prophet.”

My girl is up and hugging him. “Thank you. Christian can’t stay forever. Getting family just to lose it again, to distance this time, isn’t really gaining much.”

Justice takes offense. “We’re all family, Josephine. I’m here, Aylen, Teller, Phoenix, Mucimi, Hannah, Chris, Nash. All but Aylen, Teller, Phoenix and me are Blackhawks. I’m LaPonte-James-Lightfoot so you can add almost all the Prince Protectors as family. The craziest part of me are the older Baxters but they don’t leave New England much anymore. Aylen, Teller and Phoenix are Knight. Maverick was right, you have a hell of a family.”

She looks at me. “All the names from the Bible?”

I smile. “Pretty much, beautiful. Your family is huge, they don’t do adopted, they’re just family.”

She reaches for me with tears falling. I take her hand and pull her close. “They already love you. They’re all here and you’ve seen the freaky shit so you know Christian will scare the fuck out of you all the time.”

She laughs. “They are always here. That’s why Mucimi has been here, Aylen, Teller.”

“All of them. You haven’t met half yet. Mase said they’re all crazy so they’re coming in shifts.” I kiss her head. Now they’re all laughing. I peg them a finger behind her back. “Does dinner have a name?”

They move giving Josephine a minute. Jacky, Oman and Pax come in.

“What happened?” Jacky is in brother mode.

I point to Co. “The new Prophet for the tribe came to meet you and Josephine. He’s from your mom’s family somewhere down the line. Josephine is glad he’s staying and will help you learn Indian from your people.”

“Sweet. I’m painting the igloos. What one is yours? Do you have freaky kid shit? Is that what you’re teaching us? How come we didn’t learn with my mom if the tribe is right here?”

Co laughs with Josephine. “Perhaps we can start with a lesson in patience. I do not have the job as a Prophet until I speak to the Chief as he does not know I am here. I will stay with the tribe if they have filled the position. Major has told me I have a home here if that is not suitable.”

“They need you and Maverick would be honored if you stayed here.” Christian says pulling food out of the fridge.

I shake my head and shrug when Co and Jacky look at me. “What he said.”

They all laugh. Fucking Alder gets away with that all the time.

Co turns back to Jacky. “We can go to the Chief together.”

Jacky likes that. “We’ll come back for dinner. Hey wait. Are you a Protector like Mase and Mucimi? They’re ours and will protect Jojo. Mase said I don’t have to...”

Cloud helps. “You have a whole family of Protectors, son. Blackhawks, Lightfoot, Knight, LaPonte-James are all your family. Every Brother in the Club is waiting for the chance to help them.”

Jacky looks at Cloud. “That’s like all the names I know.”

Co pulls Jacky’s arm. “I will explain familial ties as we drive.” Co looks back giving Justice a nod. I hope that was for a warning about saying too much.

Justice laughs. “It was. You’re not a reader but might as well be. You’re quick like Cort and Pres.”

I throw him chin. “I’m honored.”

“You think so, but I don’t see it like that,” Jacob says and they all laugh.

“Go cook something.” They laugh more but now Josephine is laughing.

“You fit right in.” She’s crazy if she thinks so. “Don’t look at me like that, families banter back and forth. When we sit, you’ll still love them all and be glad they’re here making life better.”

Like the Brothers. “Better.” Jeremy walks by us.

I shake my head and see it. “It is better. They’re ours.”

“Always,” Jacob says carrying a tray out the back door.

CJ pulls Josephine away from me and hugs her. “Batshit crazy feels good most of the time. Let’s get a salad made.”

I watch my girl in her new brace with the sexy skirt that goes higher in the front and top I can’t wait to take off her. She laughs at something Cloud says at her ear. Jeremy kisses her cheek walking by with beer in his hands.

Aylen appears at the end of the counter. “What do you need? I love the outfit.”

I watch my girl smile. This is her family. Our family. I had Major and Jordan, but it wasn’t like this. I walk out the front and call Jordan pacing the driveway. He’s excited about his new program. I have no idea what he’s explaining but I smile. He doesn’t get the satellites but understands what I don’t about the program storage and retrieval. I guess this is family too. He asks about Josephine and her new brace. Stella was excited about the skeleton pieces. We talk about Major and my aunt, laughing. Major is hooked. I hope my aunt is. Giving him the news and Jacky’s progress painting, he signs off saying they’ll come to us and he’ll get Kristos and Major to come. I feel that and keep pacing. I wasn’t invited to their family dinners. I’m not family. I’m not sure they know they were mine.

“Walk with me, Brother.” Justice walks down the driveway turning toward Aero. “Brothers don’t usually have a lot of family. Jordan had Major but everyone had Major. Jordan felt like you do. Kristos had a whore that lied to him.

They don't know family any more than you do. Major will claim your aunt making you family to Kristos and Jordan. Teach them family from what you learn. We don't know anything *but* family."

I smile. "You're all family. Am I watching Jordan or Kristos for you?"

He laughs. "Jordan could use a reminder of his close Brothers. He's not as close to Cort as the other Presidents. His loyalty is right there but he doesn't get Raid and Ranger so his time with Brinks' family is spent listening or building shit in his head."

I nod. "He's normally quiet. He grew up alone."

"You're normally quiet and grew up alone. With family, you're talking more than I've seen." He smiles. "Christian too. He's finally smiling for nothing. He's always been so serious. He doesn't like people laughing at him and goes off. He's watching you and smiling. You're teaching us, Maverick. That's what family does. Kristos is getting it. It will get better the more connections they have. You know he just met Spano and latched on?"

I nod. "They were the top Enforcers sent to protect Jordan. Kristos was in school before that. He was the youngest Enforcer on Jordan's Team before I moved. Spano ran with my Team until he got his own. The MC was huge. They could have lived there for years and not known each other."

He nods. "The way they act, I thought they knew each other longer. They need connections. We'll all help. Keep them close, Brother. It gets good fast."

I smile. “It already has. Thanks, Justice.”

“I’m out. Close your eyes. I’ll drop you home.”

I close my eyes then laugh. He dropped me on the driveway. He’s like a hit and run cab ride. Christian laughs. “Carmen is looking for him.”

That reminds me. “Dean make it home okay?”

“Yeah, the runway is inside Princes so it’s like landing here. She’s eating with Lily, Eliza, Sheila and Aiyana at Jess’s. You know the names, so you know all the Brothers they go with. Dinner is done. You still need a minute?”

I smile. “No. I’m good.”

He stops at the door but doesn’t turn. “I didn’t know, Maverick. I would have found them if I did.”

I don’t dare touch his shoulder like I want to. “Maybe that’s why you weren’t told. I’m glad you’re here now that it’s time.”

He nods. “Thanks. Co said that. My family has a ten second rule. I can’t handle more if I’m drained. Carrying Co across the fuckin’ world has me drained. You’re family.” He walks in.

I take a second to breathe through that. His family can touch him for ten seconds. That’s a life that’s got to be hard as hell. I’m glad he can touch his kids and Dean. She was on his lap yesterday. That’s still got to be hard. I’ll keep to his ten seconds. I smile. I’m family.

Chapter Ten

Two days

Josephine

I walk into the kitchen smiling with my new old school brace on. It works, to move what I don't feel, better than the one without the foot piece and it looks badass.

Christian laughs. "It is. I need the Alpha-Bits to make me something like that. I'd wear it on the outside." He wears a brace?

I look at his legs thinking it's odd that Joey is in braces too. "I didn't notice. What happened?" They have healers for everything.

He shrugs. "I got hit by a car. I needed surgery to line the bone up but can't have it."

I look at Jacob. "It wasn't a single break and he can't sustain touch. He wouldn't make it out of surgery with people touching him. The kids were all small when it happened. I think Mucimi was three and Aiyana wasn't at Princes yet. No one knew how much she could do then. With technology now, he'd have to have it re-broken to fix it." He always explains in a way that I get.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that. It sucks but the brace makes living with it easy. The second break means I do that without pain so I have no reason to complain."

They smile. "You're definitely one of ours." Jacob has tears in my eyes.

“You know, when Co said he’d be honored to teach us, the word struck all kinds of memories. My dad said it all the time. Mom more so when we were young. I felt that honor for being worth that time to him. I feel it with you. I’m honored you explain and share you and our family.” I stop not sure what else to say and feel a little self-conscious with them all watching me. I shake it off and move since they aren’t. “So what needs to be done?”

“Sit. We’re surprised your parents kept their heritage close and didn’t see that in your memories. Christian was throwing shit at us as it was hitting him. Sit, they’re almost done,” Jacob tells me.

I sit thanking CJ for the coffee. “What were you seeing?” I ask Christian.

“You and Jacky.” He smiles. “You never let the town get to you. Being different meant nothing in your minds. You’re both proud of your family and each other. Your mom was a reader with some vision. Co thinks she saw more as an adult. We’ll never know. I do know she loved you all. There was a time I didn’t know the ancestors.”

“Don’t fuckin’ say it!” Jacob has me jumping. I’ve never seen him angry.

“She needs it and stop scaring her.” Christian looks back at me. “I got so many visions and saw my brothers die. I couldn’t deal with it. Obviously, it didn’t happen, but the visions played all the time. It was fuckin’ relentless. I hid from everything and everyone seeing so much then my brothers,” he shakes his head. “Seeing them die over and over was more than I could handle. I was ready to give up and talked to

Brantley. That day Dakota taught me how to let it all go to the ancestors. It was the day I started living again. I moved closer to my family and started training with Dakota, Co and Prez. Indian isn't easy, visions make it almost impossible to see anyone because you get all their shit on top of what's already getting in. The more people you know, the worse it is. I don't believe in suicide as an out, but I didn't have another way to stop it all until I talked to Brantley. Your mom had no one and no way to stop what she read and saw if she had vision. She stayed in her room a lot from your memories. It may have been because it was easier than seeing whatever you and Jacky brought into the house when you came home."

I wipe my face thinking about the horror of seeing my family die. I've never had to see it. My mom probably did. She always knew everything but never went far from home. My dad never minded her staying in and refused to bring her to a counselor. He knew. He always knew everything too. The plans. He planned by reading or whatever? How would he know so much and how did he get all the money for it? He set up for machines that weren't out yet. Why didn't I notice all that?

I look at Christian. "My dad too?"

He nods. "He was a reader. The plans I see from you tell me he had vision. You have two parents with ability. You're twenty four and have a reputation for fixing anything. You can and have built refrigerators, washers, well pumps, conveyors and chair lifts on stairs and in vans for two elderly women. That's all on top of being a mechanic, running a repair shop and building cars to sell from bare frames. Jacob helped you and saw you building and getting all the parts needed as

you were building the bike in your head. You had the color scheme that Maverick decides on once he's done with it."

My eyes whip to Jacob. He nods seriously. Holy shit, that's weird. "It's how I've always worked. Maverick picks the navy blue? He was leaning toward the black so the stars would show better."

Christian nods. "Jacky is eighteen and paints with a vision I can see right from his head. He built your crutch with Mucimi seeing the parts fit together and work from Jacky's head. You both have vision, Josephine. Can you read?"

I shake my head no. "How we work is vision?"

All but CJ nods. "How do you know to keep armed?" Jacob asks.

How do I know? "My dad."

He shakes his head. "He's been dead for more than a year and you're still armed every day. Not just armed but armed well and it's all concealed."

"Habit?"

Christian smiles. "You feel when you need more and add to what you're carrying."

Oh shit. "Sometimes. Maverick told me to carry my gun the last time. I was armed."

He nods. "You put a small knife in your pocket before that."

"How do you know that?" He's really freaky.

"When Mucimi brought your weapons, I touched them. I see my brother making this table, it wasn't used in

your house, it was for here.”

I thought he made it for the lake house he was planning. He never said. “Please stop.” That’s too much to see, too much to know, I can’t see it now. My hand slides across the tabletop in front of me. He made this for me. I still have him right here.

He nods. “It’s enough. Nothing changes but your knowledge of what was. You have it and are still proud of your family.”

“Always. I’ll always be proud. I don’t care if they had vision or read. They’re mine and made me who I am. We had a good life in a place with so much anger. It wasn’t ours.” I’m up looking for what’s hidden.

“Hidden?” Jacob asks.

Mucimi appears at the end of the table. “Here.”

I move and bend with him. He points up and I cry. “Thank you. He knew.”

“He did. I’m sorry I hurt you. I’m glad you’re happy now.”

I sit and hug him. “You didn’t hurt me. The shock of it all had my head moving faster than I could keep up with. When I think about it, I’m not so surprised. Thank you, Mucimi.”

He kisses my head and is gone. Jacob sits and looks up, then laughs. “Fuckin’ kids. You see it, Christian?”

“Yeah. I saw him put it in.”

CJ swats Jacob to move making me smile. “I didn’t see it.” When she sits I point at the US Marshal badge. “I don’t get it.”

“He’s Maverick Wyatt Marshal. My dad hid little trinkets or quotes on everything he made. I bought the same badge at the steampunk store for Maverick. They put it on my crutch as a decoration, like my dad always did. My dad’s adds for me were always trinkets that meant something.”

Tears fill her eyes. “That’s so friggin sweet.”

The guys grumble but I don’t ask. I pull a wet-eyed CJ up. “Let’s eat. The day looks better and I’m hungry.” My dad knew. “How cool is that?”

Damn! The little guys come running saying their chant. Everyone is smiling.

I sit and yell happy with them. It could be worse. I giggle when Finn pokes his head around the corner. “Is it safe?”

He fits right in.



Maverick

We ride down the road and I'm thinking this isn't going to work for the log cabin. When it opens up, I smile. Fucking Brothers are fast when they get shit in their heads. A backhoe is working on what has to be the septic. Alder is standing with Remo's dad watching. They're both in hard hats.

The lake is a good view to have. It's a good hundred feet away from the cabin. Looking around, I see stakes on the tree side. "What's that for?"

Remo shrugs walking to his dad. They didn't hear the bikes. I wait then hug him. "It looks good here. Let me know if you need anything, River."

"I can't thank you enough. It's crowded and a bit wild at night at the sites. This is how it was meant to be."

I look at Remo. "What's going on at the sites?"

"Possible Brothers. A bunch have apps in. The owner is doubling up on sites. He's a fucking dick."

I pull my phone. "The campsite at the lake is doubling occupancy. Get someone over there before they contaminate the lake. I have a campsite that's cheaper, cleaner and managed. Send the overflow there. Thanks." I hit Willow's number. "I want the campsite at the lake. The owner will be getting fined for occupancy. Make that call then buy it tomorrow." I call Stan. "The Brother on the campgrounds needs to get ready for potential Brothers. I want them noted and watched. He's going to have another site at the lake

tomorrow. Willow will have the details. Thanks.” Swiping off I look at River. “They’ll fix it.”

They laugh at me. “So this is septic, what’re the stakes for?”

His smile has me smiling. I’m glad he likes it here. “Alder said he could make me a glass room that won’t fry me and will have a high enough pitch so the snow slides off. The walls are only four foot then it’s glass.”

“Front wall all glass. Lake view no wall. Wood stove, door open same to house. Free standing.” Alder supplies.

I nod. “Like the igloos that connect but in glass.”

“Yeah. Door to tunnel each side.”

“You’re so good at this, Alder. Thanks for keeping him green. I know he didn’t like the sewage dump.”

Alder shakes his head. “I see site to lake camp. Boss River say pipe leak, no good to lake. Water waste, no good to anyone. Electric cord everywhere, fire hazard.”

“Thanks, Alder. Leave whatever you saw with Stan. We’ll fix it before they do any more damage.”

He nods. “Drive-in finished. Anton obstacle course done. Last compound done. Indian compound next week to second. First done. Club hall done. Brother room sixteen to finish. All interior finish work. Not my job. Plumbing, electric, structure, done. You compound four house add to family. Town houses good to mechanic family?”

I nod. “Thanks for getting it done quick. They were happy and sent thanks. I sent food to your compound. Did you

get it?”

He nods. “Amal say Alpha-Bits happy to cake. No send to me. Women bakery send cookie every day.”

Shit. “Sorry. I’ll send fruit if I get more sweets in.”

“I see Boss Josephine shop I go back to Bravo. Ops shift today.”

I nod. “It’s the next parcel. I can come back.”

River shakes his head. “Go, Maverick. You have more to do. I’ll be here when it slows down.”

I nod. “Can you come to dinner? My girl asked about you.”

“I’ll be there. Remo can get me from the gate.”

I hug him. “Thanks, River.”

He smiles. “Thanks for the homesite, Maverick.”

Alder rides on the side of me to the old shop. We watch him walk through the burnt wood and over roof pieces. Tats moves closer a couple of times but Alder has it.

“Arson.” He looks at me pulling his glasses from his little backpack.

“Yeah. There are no suspects.”

His boards pop on. “Big piece.”

“He was going to build them each a house on it.”

He looks up. “Compound.”

That goes right through me. “Yeah, it looks like it.”

His typing fingers move fast over the picture keyboard. “You own next parcel.”

“All this side. Except this and Remo’s dad’s.” Why I bought it is a mystery. The Drive-in was because I like Trask’s by the river. It’s something to look at and the fishing is good there. That’s all the way on the other side. I bought the rest without giving much thought to what I’d do with it. I like seeing the lake and used to come to clear my head. I haven’t seen much of it lately.

“You make compound here. Pod, square, log, igloo, make what you like.”

“I just built a shit load of compounds behind the Club.”

He nods. “More Brother than rooms. You like view you keep looking to lake. Build compound in front. More land build more room to side close to Club. Road to here go to Town One. Move gate to road.”

I bend to look at his monitor. “This goes right around the lake.”

He touches right before Melvin’s. “Close road. Dead end. Two parcel to camp, buy it, no problem to road. I tell Boss Mucimi, he buy cheap.”

“Can you draw what log would look like? The Bits stay with us so something that would fit them.” Josephine would love that. Her dad liked everything wood.

Remo and Tats laugh. I shrug. It could work. “Don’t tell her.”

They nod still smiling. Alder is done so I walk away from the fucking Brothers.

Alder and Tats' Team pull into the Club when we go by. Stan rides out the gate and moves to my side. "Ken's first?"

I nod. "Yeah, we'll go in order."

The house looks good. "What was done here?"

"Porch on the back. Kitchen remodel and room over the garage for Ken. It's a nice apartment. All the houses were well maintained. We added space for an older family while not touching what worked. The mechanics gave ideas."

I nod and knock. Ken's mom is all smiles. "Maverick, come in, come in."

I step in seeing a nice living room open to a country kitchen. "We just stopped to see if everything is working and works for you. Thanks for the cake. The Brothers didn't want to cut into it."

"You're welcome. It's just a cake. We love the kitchen and porch. Ken must have told you about his room."

I nod. "He called Stan yesterday. I'm glad he's happy. No problems?"

"Not at all."

That's good to hear. "Let me know if you need anything."

"You've done so much already. We have cameras outside?"

I nod and look at Stan. “Surveillance has sensors in the ground. If anyone gets close, we’ll get an alert and send help. That’s the side and back fences. The front is on the poles. Hit your security code on the keypad and we’ll send help.”

She nods. “Thank you. That means more than you know to us. I haven’t felt safe here since Bruce died.” That’s an odd thing to say.

“He helped with Security?”

She waves that away smiling. “No, he had an uncanny ability to show up when he was needed. It was odd but comforting. My husband tends to get angry quickly with his family. Bruce kept him calm and the family was afraid of him.”

I nod looking at Stan. “Thanks for letting us see. I like the kitchen, it fits with your Colorado theme. Let me know if you have problems.”

She’s surprised but nods. “Thank you for all the work and Willow’s new job. She loves it.”

I throw her chin walking out. Bruce scared people is on my mind through Perry’s mom and dad’s thanks. Before we leave I ask. “You were friends with Bruce for a long time?”

“We were in the military together. Salt of the earth that man was. He’s missed by all of us.”

I nod. “Josephine and Jacky think so and miss him and their mom.”

He nods. “They’re just like their dad. The two of them can take on the world and win without it looking like they did a thing. Jacky’s got some growing to do, but that boy is his dad

all the way. He shows before you need him and has the patience of a saint when you know he's got to be rip roaring mad. Kid is strong as an ox to boot. Don't get me started on Josephine. The girl is doing her part for everyone she can. Her mom was like that, behind the scenes she'd tell Bruce who needed what and get it done."

I nod smiling. They have people in their corner here and her mom did more than stay in her house. "Thanks for the time. Let me know if you have problems or need anything."

"You've done more than enough and I'm giving those words back. Call me for anything, Maverick. Anything, anytime."

I throw him chin and get out. Stan is excited for this next one. Bobby's dad is alone and looking good. Stan asks about his doctor appointment. I pay attention. Ren is his doctor.

"I'm cured. The ass said Josephine has been busy. He's a quack that treated Melvin. I'm glad I've got a new doctor, but I don't really need her now. I won't be going back to the quack."

Stan talks about the house but I'm thinking about a new doctor in town. We finish a walk around but not much was done here inside. The solar, heat and little addition for Bobby make them happy so it works for me.

Before we leave, I ask. "How did you meet Bruce?"

He smiles. "I was Air Force out of California. He was classified on mixed teams. I stopped a woman from getting hit a second time from her man and turned my back for a second.

Bruce warned me as he was tackling the gangsta wannabe. The fucking bullet whizzed by my head. We spent time surfing, hiking and shit. He wasn't a drinker and beer with teams got old. A fire on the beach was his thing. It made for good conversation and a lasting friendship. I moved here because he wanted to start his family close to his people. It was a place and I needed to settle."

"He sounds like a great man." He sounds like someone I'd hang out with.

He loses his smile. "Taken too young, but he was. He's got kids doing everything he did and more. He'll never be forgotten. A man like Bruce never is. I swear he's still here getting shit done."

I nod. "He may be. Those kids are making a difference."

He laughs. "So are you. Call if you ever need an extra hand. I'm there."

I hug him walking out.

At the bikes Stan says, "Her dad was good people. He sounds like the Prince Brothers and us. Move in and start changing the towns one at a time."

I smile. "He does, Brother. We'll keep helping him."

"I'm going to get Brothers with these families. I already know Brothers to match with them. We have a lot with no family and they aren't all young." He's making decisions without me saying it.

"I thought you fit with Bobby's dad. Calla would work with Willow and Ken's mom. Ren and Mars have Perry's

sister.”

His look is hopeful. “I like all the families, but Bobby and his dad draw me in.”

I nod. “Next dinner or whatever ask them to come up. They’d like that. He’s better, maybe a job going his way will help them out with the bills.” I start my bike.

“I’m going to ask if he wants to come to the races. Bobby said he was a deputy.”

I give him that but see more from him. “We got trainer positions that will need to be filled. If he works, train him and get him filling that. He’d make a good PD Head.”

He nods then runs back to the house. I know by his smile he got a yes. He tells me then is quiet.

We’re riding before he talks. “PD Head would fit better. Ex-military, the towns know him, he knows the towns, he’s older and has more experience than the Brothers that I have to choose from. We have two to fill. I can get him trained on our procedure fast. He’s already got the law part.”

I knew he’d jump at it. “It’s really one town split in two. One PD Head for all the towns works for me.”

“That makes sense. I’ll ask when he comes for the races.”

We get to the Club and I smile at Anton sitting on the step with Ari standing at the door. I sit with the little Brother throwing chin to Stan. “I need to talk to Anton. I’ll be five minutes late.” Anton looks like he lost his best friend.

He nods messing Anton's hair up. "I'll run background."

"What's up, Brother?"

"Alder say trail is good." That comes out like it's bad.

I nod. "You're not happy it's good?"

"Alder check my work. I send plans, picture. He check today to test."

I nod getting it. "Did he test it with you?"

He smiles. "Yeah, obstacle course fun. Alder laugh."

"That's good. I don't see him laugh often enough. So what's got you down?"

I have to clamp my jaw to keep the smile off my face when he gives me a look. "He come to check my work. I do good work. No problem my work. Alder come to check obstacle course? I make safe, send plan to him!" His arms stop flailing and I smile.

"Alder came to check the work on everything built here for the last month. It was his normal check to close the jobs down. Did he say anything to you about the obstacle course?"

He rolls his eyes. "I do good, Alpha-Bit Brothers be proud to have fun I make. He proud." The disgust in his voice has me hiding my smile again.

"So he showed up after his meet with me, went zorbing while laughing and said he's proud."

He nods with another look aimed at me. "Why is it so hard to see he was having fun with his Brother Anton and is

proud you made something the other Bits will be proud of?”

I watch emotions play across his face. “He no check work?”

I shrug. “He didn’t say he was. He told me it was done at our meet. Did you tell him before?”

He nods. “He tell you before zorbing. He proud. Alpha-Bits be proud.” His tears fall and he stands.

I hook a finger on his backpack. “Pull it together and sit, Brother.”

He sits looking like he’s five. “He’s proud that you’re showing Brotherhood the right way. You need to stop putting your doubts on your Brothers. They’re not the ones that did all your crazy shit. They dealt with the crazy shit and moved on. They’re at proud. You need to put it behind you and move on with them. Be proud with them. It took work and you did that work.”

He nods wiping his hands down his face leaving smudged finger lines. “I will, Pres Maverick. I doubt me. Alder proud.”

“Everyone is proud, Anton. That brings me to what I need. Every President needs a second.”

He pales right in front of me. “Are you alright?”

He nods slow. “Will you be my second? I never had anyone that knew Badass and understood Aero. I need help, Brother. I have a new family and need to see them.”

He jumps on my chest holding on like a little monkey. “I make you proud, Pres Maverick! I tell Alder, Boss Ranger,

Asa, Pres Cort! They be proud!”

He runs. “Security meet in five! Clean your face!” I yell hoping he heard but I don’t care if he calls every Brother he knows.

Mucimi shows when I turn. “Fucking Brother. Can I get ten steps from you? Just ten steps away when you show.”

He laughs. “Anton is ready.”

I roll my eyes. “I did ask if he’d be my second.”

“Just settling your mind.” He’s gone.

Remo laughs. “This is going to be fun. I’m in training.”

I throw chin then smile. I was hoping for fun. I love Anton.



Josephine

I changed the brace for my skeleton getting more comments than the crutch and brace. I love not getting picked apart for everything I do and wear. It's good since I'm in another skirt thing. The little black barely-shorts covering my ass don't show and I knew the Brothers wouldn't say a word, but the races have all kinds of people here. The women love the look and men don't comment at all.

Jacob had to race so we're waiting for his car to hit the line. Laughing has me watching the cars at the line. Teller waves our way. "This one is for Josephine and Jacky. Place those bets, Brothers." People move making me smile.

"What does that mean?"

Natalia shrugs. Stella hits my arm. "He wins suspending the car to the finish line. No one bets on him anymore. Today they'll bet for you."

She shrugs. "Where does the money go today?" Anton said the bakery for ABSZ women is done.

Natalia smiles. "To you and Jacky."

"We don't need it." I don't want them throwing money out.

She shrugs. "Send it to your charity. That's what they do with it."

I nod hoping it isn't too much then smile. "We have three cars to fix from Ratchet. I'll get it to him to buy more cars. There has to be people at other Clubs needing a car."

“I would take one for Leon. He’s got the two boys and walks everywhere. That’s a good one, Jo.” Natalia settles that.

“Jojo!” I turn looking for Jacky. He’s running the pit line.

I walk his way getting pulled back by my coat tails.

“Security goes with you.” Stella isn’t letting me go. Jacky yells again. I put a finger up for him to wait and look back seeing the security that came with her and Natalia. Monroe was called to the Alpha-Bits switching me to Stella’s Team. A tall man moves a Brother over.

“I’ll take her.” He has a cut and looks nice.

I look at Stella. “Go with Spano. He’s a Protector from Sentinel.”

I nod. “The new President. Thanks, Spano.”

He smiles. “You need a top hat with that outfit. Let’s go see what the kid is yelling about.”

“He’s my brother, Jacky. I tried two hats, but I couldn’t fit my hair clip under them and gave up. All this hair isn’t hanging in my face today. The goggles would have worked with the skeleton and that hat matches my coat.”

He shakes his head. “Women are fucking crazy. An elastic would have held it up. The coat is Badass.”

“Thanks. A tie won’t help protect me like my clips.” I stop explaining when Jacky pulls my arm.

“The car isn’t running right. It stalled twice. I know the mix is right but it’s not on.” He moves faster causing the toe of my foot to scrape.

“Slow down before you wreck my damn boots!”

Spano is in front of us pretty damn quick. “Brother, what the fuck? She’s in a skeleton. Treat her right or she won’t be yours for long.”

Jacky stops just as fast to avoid colliding with Spano so, of course, I collide with Jacky’s side. His arm goes around me, pulling me closer, then he steps half in front of me. “I don’t know you and you sure as hell don’t know Jojo. I’m her brother and that’s for life as in we share parents. You’re thinking of the other kind of Brother.”

Spano’s hands go up. “Sorry, Brother. You still need to take care.”

Jacky looks at me. “Who the fuck is this? He’s not from your Team.”

“Team? Why do you have a Team?” Spano is lost. I don’t get the chance to answer. Christian appears and Spano is on the ground.

“Let him go! That’s Spano!” Jacob yells running our way.

Christian looks back at Jacob. “Spano from Honor? Why the fuck is he trying for Josephine? He’s got a death wish.” He shakes his head and takes my hand. “Brothers are fuckin’ crazy. Maverick would kill him for that shit.”

Jacob shakes his head walking back to the car. “He isn’t a reader so he wouldn’t have seen it.”

I look back at Spano. “He doesn’t know who I am. He was asking why I need a Team. He probably didn’t count on freaky.” I hope he’s okay.

Christian stops. “He didn’t know you? How the fuck does Security work here?”

I have no idea. “Isn’t he with Stella’s security?”

“Jordan would shoot him and Brinks would rip him in half.” Christian stops at the car. “It stalls after a few seconds.”

I don’t know Brinks and don’t think I want to so I look at the engine. “How are you mixing it? Do you have gloves?”

Jacob hands me the box of gloves. “Perry said to flip it on at the line.” Jacky points to the windshield. He should have helped with the lines so he knows.

I nod and check the temp of the tank then go back to the engine and open the relay. “You’re all set. When you get to the line, flip the arming switch.”

Jacob laughs. Christian shakes his head. “You didn’t build this.”

I shake my head no. “The relay off causes a vacuum letting less gas in so it stalls.”

“Fuck. I adjusted the flow when we got here. Perry always does that other shit.”

I nod. “It’s all set.”

Arms go around me. I smile up at my geeky President. “What’s wrong?” He asks after he kisses my head. I love that.

“Nothing now. The car is fine. Jacob wins. You need to fix Josephine’s Security. The pussy on her wanted to be *on her*. I blasted the fuck.” Christian isn’t happy with security

today. Guys are guys. Spano didn't know who I was. Jacob starts the car so I'm only half listening to them. It sounds fine.

I feel Maverick's body freeze. "Who? Munroe said Stella's Team was on her."

"Spano. Jacob said he's from Honor or Sentinel not Alpha. The pussy has been in every Club." Christian isn't letting this go.

I move Maverick's arms and step closer to Jacky. He smiles. "It's hitting right."

I nod and pull the gloves off while he closes the hood. Maverick takes the gloves. "What did Spano say to you?"

Jacky tells him about Spano being a sick fuck. I shake my head smiling until he's done.

Looking up I smile. "Men are such drama queens. He thought I was Jacky's and told him to slow down. Since I told him to slow down it wasn't needed. He has no idea who I am and asked why I need a Team then Christian did something and he was on the ground." I lean over looking back at where Spano is sitting. "He's almost up."

Maverick looks at Spano then me with the scary geeky President face on. "He didn't say anything else to you?"

I shrug. "I need a top hat. Women are crazy. Ummm, he liked the coat."

He nods. "A hat would be Badass. The goggle one would work. I like the coat and women are crazy."

I nod thinking men are crazier. "Are we zorbing after this?"

He smiles. “Yeah, beautiful. You’re with me until then. If you didn’t have to take the coat off, I’d put my cut on you.”

I smile. “I rock the cut, but the coat matches my skirt and shirt.”

Christian shakes his head. “Tell me she isn’t in a Princess cut?”

Maverick understands that. “Property of.”

Christian and Jacob look at me. “The hat with Property of?” Jacob asks.

Christian nods. “With a small dagger on the side. The goggles work with the... Yeah. Thanks, Mucimi.”

Turning my head, I don’t see Mucimi. I look up at Maverick with my eyebrow raised. He nods. “It works for me and I get to see the hat,” he says like I’m asking. Men are crazy.

Mucimi is on the side of us with my hat in one hand and a hair tie in the other. Men are definitely crazier than women. His expression changes to angry. “He better get it or I’ll blast him into next week.”

I take the tie and replace the clip then pop the hat on. “Dagger on it?”

“Left side. Handle toward the back. I took it from the crutch.”

I smile. “Thanks, Mucimi. Is everyone settled with this?”

Jacky smiles. "I like it. I'll make you some with the property of badge."

I take the hat off and look. They're too much. It has *Property* on the top, *Of* is a little pin in the center and *Marshal* is on the bottom. Putting it back on I smile up at the demented geeky President that I love. "Very... nice."

He smiles. "Where do you want to be, beautiful?"

"Far away from crazy men that expend too much energy on my clothes."

He looks stricken. "They're Badass."

I walk away hearing the Blackhawks agree. When the hell did men start this?

Stella is glaring at someone behind me. My guess is it's the crazier men. I don't look. When I'm closer, I tell them about the car. "It's fine. Christian said Jacob wins."

"Why did Christian blast Spano?"

I shake my head. "He didn't know who I was and thought something Christian didn't like."

She nods. "The patch will help. You can't miss it. I like the goggles."

I take it off and show them the little dagger. They both look at me like I'm crazy.

I watch the races and don't say another word until Jacob is up at the line. "Men are crazy. Spano is right there with them."

Stella laughs. "I live with Jordan and Brinks. Don't get me started on how fuckin' nuts men are."

I nod. “Is Brinks scary? Christian said he’d rip Spano in half.”

Natalia laughs. “He’s a giant like Cort. He’s quiet and watches everyone as soon as Stella shows. When she’s close to him, they’re laughing and dancing like he wasn’t just planning multiple murders of any Brothers that looked at her. It’s cute.”

I watch the starting line refusing to ask how he can be cute planning multiple murders. Stella doesn’t dispute it. I shake my head seeing Maverick out of the corner of my eye. Anton is standing with him looking toward the starting line. They don’t look happy. The cars move and I focus on Jacob. The mile and a half goes by quick. Seeing the 197 mph I jump yelling with the crowd. That’s impressive. Jacky is yelling and jumping around at the starting line. I look at Maverick smiling. He’s shaking his head watching me.

Walking to him I smile bigger. “He ran it faster than Perry.”

Maverick laughs. “Asa’s car holds the record at 202. I got to 200 with a motor made for the NOS. This track isn’t built for it but Brothers all try for 200.”

I laugh. Jacky probably knows all that. He’s here with Perry for every race. “Perry is going to be proud.”

Maverick shakes his head. “Freaky doesn’t count. Mase had a car with a blown motor and no NOS doing almost 300.”

What? “They use freaky to win?” I look over at the line. That’s why they don’t bet on Teller, shit. New cars are waiting.

“No, he didn’t use freaky. He wanted to race. I told you he’d win.” Christian walks up from behind Maverick.

Maverick laughs. “He did good. He’ll go up on the board.” He doesn’t doubt it?

“He didn’t cheat?”

Christian shakes his head. “No, he wanted to race. Jacob wouldn’t cheat. It’s not Badass. They’ll all tell you or make it obvious if they use abilities.”

I smile at Maverick. “He’ll go on the board!”

He laughs. “Yeah, beautiful. He did good. I love the hat with the coat.”

I roll my eyes. “Now we can go zorbing.”

Anton is all for zorbing. He pulls his tablet out and types. “Ten minute, Boss Josephine.”

I nod getting to Stella and Natalia. It will take time to walk over. We have to wait for everyone in the world to show. With the Alpha-Bits, freaky family, half of Ratchet’s crew, a ton of Brothers, security and Officers from all over, we start the walk.

“I’m glad there aren’t many women. We’ll get to go first.” Natalia has me smiling. I’m glad they never forget to show women that chivalrous side of them.

Aylen appears in front of us with Mikey. That wouldn’t be odd but they’re hovering above the ground going backward toward the zorb trail.

“I love the outfit, but that hat is Badass, Jo. I want one.” Mikey has me shaking my head.

“Christian, Jacob and Mucimi came up with it, made it and delivered it. Maverick approved so I didn’t have to take the coat off to wear his cut.”

Aylen stares at me. “He didn’t know you were Maverick’s.”

I nod. “No one listens to me. I did tell them that.”

She nods. “Maverick knows. He’s not going to shoot him.”

“He stayed away from him but doesn’t look mad anymore. He wouldn’t shoot the Spano guy. He didn’t say anything off color to me.”

Stella laughs. “Maverick is like Jordan. He’d shoot Spano not caring that he’s Spano. Just so you know, Spano is a good Brother. Jordan and Maverick worked with him on their Teams at the MC. He moved to Alpha with Kristos to Protect Jordan.”

And Jordan would shoot him? They really are crazy women. I don’t comment. Maverick takes my hand as we get to the gate. A giant blocks the sun from my side making me look up.

“Are you Brinks?”

He looks down. “Yeah. Love the hat.”

Maverick walks through everyone that moved aside for him. He touches the new keypad a Prospect holds out and waits for me to. We stand aside until Stella and Natalia come through. That’s when I realize he hasn’t let me go. Aylen and Mikey come through and Maverick bends.

“Have fun, beautiful. I need the hat and weapons.”
With a kiss he flips my hat off and holds it upside down for me to fill it.

I drop the spike, my rose and dagger ear piece, the knife from my boot, a half gear that Jacky sharpened and dipped that fits nicely with the corset and the dagger from my back.

He shakes his head. “The little gun.”

I lift the side of my skirt and unsnap the holster. “It’s not going to pop the bubble.”

He nods. Jacob laughs. “He’s making a point. It worked and no one is fuckin’ with you. Good job, Brother.”
He walks away hitting Maverick on the back.

I look at Mikey. “They’re all crazy.”

“It’s a good thing they are. Jacob doesn’t say shit if it’s not needed. Some one here, at some point in time, would have fucked with you. Maverick stopped that.”

Holy shit. I look up. “Thanks.” He smiles.

Stella pulls on me. “Enough of this. We can go down now. No freaky, Aylen. I’m winning.”

Natalia cracks up, then I do. I blow a kiss at Maverick getting another smile. We wait for my freaky family to go down. I can hear them all laughing as they bounce off little mounds and make it over what looks like planks above a creek. A bubble falls in but raises up in the air above the water. I’m surprised it goes back to the beginning of the plank.

“You’re in, Josephine.” Remo has me turning away from my sweet uncles.

“Thanks, Remo. Where’s Jasmine today?”

He shakes his head. “We’re both working. We have the next race day off.”

I nod and jump through the stretcher. “I forgot I’m on medical orders of no work.”

He laughs zipping a flap over the opening. That’s new. “Knock Ren in the water and she’ll let you out of that.”

I look at where he’s pointing. “I will. Thanks, Remo.”

Maverick hits the side of my bubble. “Have fun, baby. I’m right behind you.”

I look to the side seeing more bubbles. We’re going together like my uncles. This is going to be fun. “Love you, Maverick. Push hard!”

He laughs but pushes me when someone yells, “Now!”

A bubble is out in front and I know it’s Stella. Everyone else is laughing and hitting mounds. She’s going around them. I’m hit from behind and fly giggling like I’m being tickled. My bubble raises avoiding the mound before the water.

“Sorry, Jojo.” Aylene yells laughing. She sets me down and I’m rolling again. That was cool.

I can’t stop laughing to answer. Once I’m over the planks I flop on the bottom and wait. Aylene goes by. ‘*You okay?*’

“I’m waiting for Ren. I’m knocking her in the water so she’ll release me to work,” I yell.

She laughs moving away. *‘Two then Ren.’*

Natalia laughs going by me. The next bubble is Mars. “Good plan but she’s stubborn.” She rolls by fast. They’re all helping me. I love my friends.

“Thanks, Mars!”

The bubble coming at me is moving fast. I run right toward her knowing the angle will bounce me back to the grass. Hitting her hard, I’m laughing so hard I’m going to hyperventilate. “Let me work!” Croaks out as I’m flying back.

“Bitch!” She laughs making me laugh harder as I hit the ground.

Finally getting air, I move trying to run and breathe to the mound of tires ahead of me. Going up isn’t easy but rolling down them is. I push to the side and roll up a mound then run down it passing Mars. “Thanks!”

She falls looking over. I’m laughing again.

The end takes forever but I make it falling flat on my stomach. Holy cow that was a workout and a half.

Christian and Jacob get the stretcher on and pull me out. “It’s a good thing you have shorts on. I’m asking Stella for a skeleton. Can you stand up?” Christian has me laughing. My ass is out showing my shorts and he wants a skeleton. “Stand up and cover your ass if you don’t want it showing. The skeleton holds you up. Can you stand?”

I push the bubble off the top of me and stand. “Yeah, my hip is tired, but it doesn’t hurt.”

He floats me to a bench while Jacob yells for Ren. “No! I want to go to work.”

My leg goes straight and I’m turned, with it setting down on the bench gently. “You need to stop with the freaky!”

Christian looks back at me. “Why? It’s not hidden here.”

“It’s not? Is it hidden where you live?”

He shrugs walking to me. “Not really. If we’re out of the yard, we tone it down. Here, we don’t hide anything. Cort doesn’t care if we’re seen.”

“Tone it down means hide it?”

He doesn’t answer right away. “Not for me. I can move without being seen. I guess the kids were hiding it unless someone was in danger of dying. Life is worth more than outing abilities. Prez let it go since Cort isn’t hiding anything. Now the kids do what they do.”

“That’s good. I bet trying to balance life is stressful for kids. Adults are intimidating even if they think they’re being gentle.”

His head turns then nods. “I never thought about it like that.”

I smile. “Your kids are grown. You should for their sake.”

“What’s wrong, Jo?” Ren runs over like I’m dying.

“My hip was tired. I was moved here and my leg raised onto the bench against my will. It’s just tired.”

She unbuckles my boot. “I wondered about this skeleton. You may need it higher. Because you don’t feel the break or muscles lower doesn’t mean they aren’t still healing.”

“Fuckin’ hell. I didn’t think of that. From the hip down would catch the whole thigh before the break. She’s not used to walking in it either. I saw her foot scrape a couple of times. The brace, until she gets the foot movements down, would help.” Stella is like a doctor too?

Ren nods. “That foot robotic raises?”

“Yeah. Those muscles are severed so from the hip would pick up more.”

“I’m not orthopedic but that sounds right.” Ren looks at me. I move my hair so I can see them both. “No running until you can walk and I’m saying that’s in the robotic brace.”

I nod. “Did I screw it up?”

“You have some swelling, but it isn’t enough for me to be worried. I think the higher skeleton will work better to catch the foot movement or however that works. I know the robotic works fine.”

I nod. “I’ve been in the braces, but this is lighter and can go in the bubbles.”

They laugh at me. I roll my eyes. “I’m not used to sitting around.”

Ren bends moving my hair. “Give it one more day. Light duty until the swelling doesn’t show. You not feeling the

pain doesn't mean you're not causing damage that would get your leg amputated. Wear the brace and put it up when it feels heavy, tired or it tingles where you are feeling it."

I don't like the amputated word so I'm nodding. "I will. It's not tingling just feels tired."

Christian shows up on the side of Ren with my Badass brace. "If she wears the brace now, she can walk?"

"If she keeps it up for a few. She needs to rest it regularly so it heals."

He nods. "Can you get that off her, Stella?"

Stella bends. "Your hair is wild. Natalia, do you have a tie?"

"Mine must have fallen out. Can you make the band like the Alpha-Bits? Then I'm not wired up."

Her head turns. Taking the brace and band from Christian, she studies it. "Fuckin' kids. I'll get the code and make it work on the skeleton."

"Thanks. Christian wants a skeleton and Badass brace he can wear outside his uniform."

She nods moving for Aylen. I get a hair tie and her hand on my leg. Collecting my mop, I get it in the tie. It must have been wild. It feels like it's stretching the limits of the tie. "That feels better. Thanks, Aylen."

She nods. "I used it coming down. My hair isn't as curly as yours. I wish I had the banana curls like you and Joey."

I smile. "I need to wet it so it will get back to curls."

Natalia sits moving Stella. “You just wet it?” Her hair is similar to mine if not as thick.

I nod seeing Stella talk to Christian about the skeleton. I’m glad he’s getting it. “Yeah. I wash it with aloe and vanilla shit my mom taught me about. It works without oil or all the other crap people use. I can get you some. I make a few bottles at a time. Don’t use anything but the shampoo. You won’t need conditioner. Wet it and it goes right down.” I make a note to ask Joey what she uses.

She hands me water. I wet my hands and run them through the ponytail three times. When it feels more natural, I take out the tie and wet my scalp then put the tie back in but only so the front is held back.

“It’s back to how you normally look. You don’t use mousse or spray? Coconut oil?” Natalia has her hands in my hair.

“No, I wash it every couple of days and wet it every morning.”

“Unbelievable. I spend a small fortune on shit to tame my hair.”

While she talks, I get the brace on. “Don’t waste your money. I grow the aloe and vanilla is cheap.” I get my sock and boot back on feeling half dressed. Where is Maverick? He has my arsenal.

“They’re coming down now.” Jacob points to the bubbles bouncing into each other.

I wish I knew sooner. I can’t tell which one is Maverick. They’re bouncing everywhere. “He’s in second.”

He laughs. “That was Brinks. Maverick is in first.”

The bubbles hit the grated wave hard and roll with the guys laughing loud. I’m glad I got to see this. Maverick is more of a loner than I am. He likes people around but doesn’t say much to them.

“He’s learning like you are.” Christian sits by me.

Looking around I see Natalia talking to Mikey. “Is Stella going to make you a brace and skeleton?”

He nods. “Yeah, both. She has my avatar so she doesn’t have to measure me.”

The touch thing. “That’s good.”

“What’s the wire she’s not making?”

I smile. “The Alpha-Bits made the brace so it gets read by the band. There’s a transmitter in it somewhere.”

“Fuckin’ kids. She’s going to make you a new one like that. She’ll make everyone new shit with the new technology.”

I smile. “That’s good. It keeps us all different with the same help. I could see the wire being a problem at work. That’s why I’ve been in the brace.”

His head turns. I know it’s him trying to figure it out. “Alder helped make the skeleton and put the extra wire at my ankle. At a desk it would work. A mechanic is bending all day long. That wire would have caught on something, landing me on my ass. I don’t feel anything on that foot.”

“Fuck. I’m glad you asked her.”

I smile at a messy haired Maverick walking my way. “You had fun.”

He's looking at my foot. "What happened?" Without looking at me he turns right around. "Ren!"

I roll my eyes. "I'm okay, Maverick. My leg was tired..." I don't bother finishing. He's asking Ren.

~*~*~

Maverick

I whistle for a Prospect. Two show. “Get Josephine’s hat and weapons from the medic hut and bring back some water,” I tell the first.

“Roger, Pres.”

“I need these wrapped and on the chopper from Alpha. Treat them like gold, it’s probably worth more than gold.”

The second nods. “I’ll get it done, Pres. Is she okay?”

I nod. “She is. Women are fucking crazy. I don’t think she’d say if she wasn’t. Ren said she’ll be okay.”

He nods. “Doc Ren is good. I’ll get them on the Alpha chopper. Who is it going to?”

“Write skeleton, Stella on it.”

His eyes go wide. “Am I going to get killed for that?”

I bet if I said yes, he’d still do it. “No, it’s the skeleton for Stella to remake. She’ll understand.”

He relaxes. “Roger, Pres.” He runs with the skeleton pieces cradled in his shirt like a kangaroo pouch making me laugh.

I get back to my girl as the Prospect runs past me with her hat. They make me smile. Spano turns around and walks the trail up. Shit, I’m going to have to talk to him. Brinks bounced him all over the fucking trail. He landed in the water twice. I can’t blame him for liking Josephine’s clothes. I love them. I’ll make sure she always knows so the Brothers never get the chance to slide in my spot. Just the thought has me wanting to shoot him. I’ll talk to him later.

Brinks walks to the women with me. “What’s wrong?”

“I’ll talk to Spano later. He didn’t say anything to her. Christian made sure he didn’t have a chance.”

He nods. “You’re more calm than I would be, but I get it.”

We stand back watching the women. My girl gets all her shit back on her body. I’m glad the skirt comes with shorts. I’m clenching my jaw when she pulls the gun out of her hat. Aylen stands in front of her smiling at me.

Shaking my head, I look around. Giving the Prospect a swat on the arm gets his eyes on me. “The water?” My growl has him jumping.

“I got it, Pres.” He hands me two bottles from his lower pockets.

“Get back to your position.”

He nods. “I’m here, Pres. VP sent three of us to help down here.”

“Then go find someone to help.”

He runs and Brinks laughs. “I’d have hit him.”

Fucking Prospects.



Oh fuck. This may not end well. “Christian, I hope you can hear me, Brother. Aiyana is here. Where’s Josephine?”

I move through the fucking crowd trying to find my girl before Aiyana does. I'm not seeing this as a successful mission on my part.

'Turn right, I'm with her at the mats.' Jacob is so good at the protect thing.

I jog to the center ducking trees and Brothers. When I see them, I relax. "Josephine, Aiyana is here."

She turns almost falling so I steady her. "As a ghost? Shit, I need to find Jacky."

Mucimi shows with Jacky yelling. "What the fuck, Mucimi. I'm painting."

"Aiyana is here. Clear your head. Nothing about your mom but her eyes are like Aiyana." Jacob tries to help. I shake my head behind Jacky.

Jacky looks at Josephine. "They are? Her eyes were like Jenny, right, Jojo?"

Thank God he doesn't really remember. Jacob nods. "Co is bringing Aiyana here."

"Co was just with me at my shop." Jacky is off tonight.

'I'm clearing his head.' Mucimi says in my head.

I nod seeing Co move toward us. Aiyana gets to us first with a glow around her. Maybe not a glow but something. Her eyes are glowing. "I did not believe we would find you in the crowd. I am honored to meet my newest tribal additions, Maverick, Jacky and Josephine."

“You’re beautiful like an angel. You’re Aiyana the shaman?” Jacky’s face and voice show that wonder of all Aiyana is. I feel it too.

“Excitement prevented me from properly introducing myself. Neither Co nor I have ever met close descendants to us both. I am Aiyana Baxter, Shaman for the Connecticut Mohegan tribe and a Protector for the Princes of Prophecy of Rhode Island.” She’s still got the smile on her face and her eyes are glowing in gold as if to match the shimmering air or whatever it is around her. Jacky’s right, she’s a beautiful Shaman. Her people must be in awe of her.

Christian laughs behind us. “They are, Maverick. I’m glad you’re here, Aiyana. Did Jared bring you?”

“Prez is here with Lily. Your niece and nephew resemble you, Christian. I just introduced myself.”

Christian smiles. “Your eyes are glowing. They’re working through that.” He hugs Aiyana quickly and steps back. “I’m glad you’re here. I’m needed, Aiyana. Jacob is here for a couple more days. We’ve explained the tribe and Co helped with lineage. I’m happy for you too, Aiyana. Josephine could use some help with her leg. The nerves were severed. Swelling is worrisome for their doctor.”

Aiyana nods. “I am also happy for you, Christian, and will be honored to help where I am needed. I will harness our combined ancestors to heal your niece.” Her smile has me smiling.

I’m glad they’re excited for Jacky and Josephine. They haven’t had many people in their corner.

Christian hugs Jacky who is still staring at Aiyana then Josephine. “Call to me for anything. I’m always here and honored to answer.”

My girl has tears in her eyes. “We will. Thank you for staying. I can’t wait to see where you live.”

Christian nods. “That will be soon. Keep you safe. Call if you need me. I’ll call tomorrow.”

I’m shocked when he turns and hugs me. “Take care of them for me, Brother.”

I nod. “Always. Until next time. Be safe, Christian.”

He smiles then is gone.

Aiyana touches Josephine and Jacky’s arms. “You have made your uncle very happy. Christian does not smile often.”

Jacob laughs. “He hasn’t stopped smiling. My dad and mom were snapping pictures like crazy to show the family and Preses.”

Josephine is blinking with those tears again, my arm goes to her waist and hand to Jacky’s shoulder. “Life isn’t easy on the Blackhawks but they take their happy and run with it. You’re giving that to them all. Family is everything to them.”

Aiyana’s smile shines brighter somehow. Maybe it’s her eyes. “You are right, Maverick. Christian deserves to be blessed with happiness and we shall celebrate with him knowing what it means to feel the ancestors shine upon us. His journey is no longer for him alone.”

I nod then laugh when she hugs us all together. “For you too, Aiyana. I know that happiness is felt by the whole family. Thank you for coming. Jacky and Josephine need the inclusion to the family.”

“They feel it. The ancestors are already celebrating the joy of tribal additions. We can visit with them later. I will heal Josephine and share Christian’s smile while I am here.”

Josephine laughs. “Thank you, Aiyana.”



Cort hits my arm. “Did Aiyana heal her leg?”

I smile. “Yeah, she said there shouldn’t be any more swelling. She’ll keep healing what she can but hasn’t seen severed nerves before. It bothered me until I thought about all they do.”

He smiles. “*“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”* Viktor Frankl said that. I think it was used as part of the Badass foundation. We all have the adapt and overcome mentality and drive.”

I nod. “Military and Badass work well because of that belief.”

He nods with his politician smile on. “Don’t forget Indian and Mason.” He’s right.

I nod. “Never, but if I do, you’ll find another quote to remind me.”

The table laughs. Someday I'll get to have a quiet dinner alone with my girl at some restaurant that doesn't need or have seating for a hundred.

"Where are the Princes?" Finn asks.

"Went to the reservation with Josephine and Jacky. The Blackhawks are teaching them Indian and to jump but tonight the ancestors are celebrating. Aiyana said they had to jump before the ancestors jump here."

They're laughing again. I shrug. I thought it was smart. Remo comes over with his dad. I'm up and hug him. "How is the log cabin?"

"Perfect. The glass room is finished. It looks better than I imagined it would. My friends came fishing this morning and helped me catch enough to send to the Alpha-Bits. We'll go again next weekend, maybe we'll catch enough for your house. I'm not sure we'd catch enough to feed all your friends."

I shake my head. "We have food, River. Share with those that don't. There were quite a few homeless removed from the RV park. The neighborhood could use a hand feeding them."

I get a hug. "I'll get some fish over there and find a new way to say thanks to my boys."

Remo laughs pointing at Stan sitting with Bobby's dad. They walk away while I think about '*my boys*'. He thinks I'm his? He's always invited me to their table or times. I do the same. That's family. Looking around I smile. It's not just uninvited guests. At least they're happy uninvited guests. I

laugh when the dogs jump in the pool with the Alpha-Bits. They're fun too.

I sit feeling good until we're rained on. Looking to the side I see a white wolf splashing the Bits. They're laughing so it's a game. Getting up I move to a table with a couple of Brothers that isn't in danger of a tidal wave.

The Officers move with me. "Who has the wolf?"

Cort sits. "It's Aiyana's. She should have brought him to jump. That thing is massive. You notice the Bits aren't afraid of it?"

I nod. "Everything is massive to them. It can't be any scarier than you."

He nods. "I heard you had an issue with Spano."

I shake my head. "I'm over it. Brinks knocked the shit out of him zorbing."

Cort is up. "Anton made a zorb to fit Brinks and Spano?"

I nod wondering why he's looking like that.

"Raid, Nova, they got zorbs for us!" They move fast. Kids follow.

I smile. I'm closer to dinner with just my girl. Half the Brothers leave with Cort and the Officers. I smile seeing Anton watching me. "Go and have fun, Anton."

He hops out of the pool and runs with the wolf following him. Flack and his team follow. Sitting at the table, almost alone, has me laughing. Adrian sits. "Are you okay, Pres?" His smile says he knows I am.

“I’m not at a restaurant and don’t have my girl here but there’s less than a hundred for dinner so I’m getting closer.”

Him and Nick fall over laughing. “Fucking Brothers.”

I go check on the grill. I bet they need help since everyone took off. I smile. I’m still closer.

Chapter Eleven

Maverick

My girl is happy to be working or happy to defy Ren's *give it a day* order. Since she said both I smile, I don't listen to Ren either, she's worse than Remo with the mother hen shit. I shake my head walking to my bike. Remo has been busy with Jasmine and River. His dad has been sticking close to the Brothers and helping everywhere. I'm glad he found shit to do with his free days.

Ben smiles. "You're lucky. My elders haunt the fuck out of me. I make up jobs to keep them busy." He makes me laugh.

"All those Clubs and you're making up jobs?" That's hard to believe, with all the Brothers, I'm scrambling to get shit done.

He shrugs waiting to see what I'm going to ride. "You're cleaning the towns. I did that. Maintenance isn't easy, but it's repetitive and the Officers handle shit on their own."

I nod. "Take the one you want. I'm getting to where they're just asking advice or I'm pointing shit out but let them handle it. We're moving to the west side and I want them to make decisions before I'm called for food or homeless. We have plans for everything down to fucking stores and printing solar shit. I shouldn't have to remind them how to feed people."

Hitting the keypad, he brings the top bike down. "I love the stacks. Keesog got them for us at Princes. Jax has

them all over his showroom now. It's impressive to see with the staging mixed in for specialty bikes."

I nod thinking of Josephine's shop. "Maybe Josephine can use it at the shop. She's got car staging that just got repainted, but the stacks would showcase her classics."

He laughs. "Every time we get new from here, you go and make it better. Jess is working on a robotic with a transmitter to the band for Mitch's hand. She wants to surprise her for her birthday."

"It's a good surprise. Stella is doing the skeleton with a transmitter after seeing the brace."

"Fuckin' kids are amazing. Is that what's being blocked from me?" He throws me.

"What's being blocked?"

"Someone has you covered so I'm not able to read you," he explains.

I smile. "It's a surprise. I'm glad they cover me. Let's go see it. Jacky said he finished last night."

He throws chin and we ride. The parade following us is crazy but that crazy started later today because the new gates are up closer to our town road. Remo throws me chin with a big smile. I give it back. The Officers are making decisions and getting shit done.

The shop is three from the gate doing fifty, without an emergency, I like the leisurely pace today. Turning in, Ben laughs when the hologram of the feed shows. I slow us down hearing the Security Brothers laughing. The building is tricked

out looking interesting and innovative, but I know they're laughing at the feeds.

"It's to keep the assholes on their best behavior." I shut the bike off.

He nods pulling his helmet off but the smile stays. "I'm sending that to Geek. He was pissed about shooting by sensor and drone when kids are close."

I nod. "That would work. Cort said he's using it, but I didn't ask what for."

He throws chin to Jacob's, "Prez, Maverick."

Monroe looks out the door and throws chin. Remo goes right to him. I hope to fuck no one is throwing shit at my girl again.

Jacob touches my shoulder. "No, Brother. I wouldn't let them close. It's been good here. Mucimi helped Jacky and Picasso get the wiring finished and clips on. He said Anton will be here later."

They're quick. I'm glad I don't have to bother Josephine. Wait. "Anton was here?" We walk to the back bays without bothering the mechanics.

Jacob's smile sets alerts in me. "Yeah. They had the building done but needed a carpenter for the portal window. He found one."

That doesn't sound so bad. I nod watching Ben. "I was told you wanted to ride the Indian to Phoenix. I didn't give you a shot at that one so I found another. The Chief fits you better." I point to the table of parts. "Or it will when it's all together."

He hugs me and holds on. “Thank you, Brother. The Chief isn’t easy to find. They only made so many and rust on the coast makes them impossible to restore. This is for me?”

I smile. “It’s for you. I’m glad it’s one you know. It’s a ‘47 Chief with the 74 cubic inch 42° V-Twin. We have modifications that are hidden. All the parts, the list and some help to build are on or behind the table.”

He turns fast. “Fuckin’ Brothers. Thanks for coming, Alex and Parker. I could use some help today. I didn’t know you were here.”

He looks at Jacob. “Mucimi, Aiyana and Christian are blocking you. I threw it.”

Ben smiles. “I don’t mind the block when it’s a surprise from my favorite Brothers.”

Alex laughs. “I thought my dad was your favorite Brother.”

Ben and Jacob laugh. “Only when he’s home and I’m not, Alex.” Ben hugs him. “Today that’s you, Parker and Maverick. We’ll leave Jacob out because he blocked me.”

Parker hugs Ben around Alex. “We can get the motor on while you read the list. The painted parts are hiding under the tables until we need them.” His voice drops to a whisper. “It’s a surprise.”

I smile turning to the table. If they’re getting the motor on I have shit to do. “Did you get the rakes, forks and wheel on?”

Jacob nods. “Yeah, and brakes.” He smiles. “They’re drums. The tires line up. I want to put the chain on but need

help. I've never worked on a chain driven bike.”

I smile bending closer. “Jared sent shit so it just spins when the wheels do. The modified engine and transmission are encased in the shells so they look right.”

He nods staring at me.

“You're clearing my head?” It's the only thing I can think of.

“Yeah. Let's get this done. Blocking shit is exhausting.”

We get to building a bike. My girl checks on us and rolls around helping at her lift-leg break times. The Brothers find her funny with her leg on a stool. I'm just glad she's taking the breaks.

When lunch gets here, Remo hangs back with Ben and me and helps get the exhaust on. It fits as easy as the rest of the shit we've done. My girl is an incredible mechanic. I never get shit to fit like this on the reassemble. Everything we've done is quick and easy.

We go to the bay to eat and Parker gets up. “We can get the handlebars on and start on the lights while you eat.”

I smile at him. “That's good thinking, Parker. I'd say test the tank first, but it will fit.”

He nods but Alex answers. “Josephine knows how it works like Jared and me. The handlebars won't hit it. Prez should put that on 'cause it's special, right?”

I nod. “I think you're right, Alex.” They walk away to put on handlebars and lights. They're cute Brothers and so

fucking smart.

Ben nods at me sitting. “Thanks for lunch and letting us commandeer your back bays, Josephine.”

My girl smiles with those green eyes bright. “It’s an honor I won’t forget.”

Ben laughs. “Neither will I. It’s appreciated with that same honor you’re feeling. Christian tells me you’re jumping alone.”

My eyes go right to her. “Yeah. Co, Jacob and/or Justice are always watching but I’ve made it alone for two days now. We have times so I know when to jump with help close. The Bravo Protectors jump every night, but Ari and Adrian aren’t Brothers that carry anyone yet. I’m glad I can get there but was surprised Joey wasn’t there.”

Ben swallows his bite fast. “Joey goes with Sebastian. It’s her journey with her ancestors and she keeps that close. It is not my story to tell. It’s good that you know and avoid the danger, but Christian said it’s not a concern for you. Has Jacky jumped with you?”

“With Jacob and Justice. It’s too new to me.”

Ben nods. “Brothers are fuckin’ heavy. He needs to learn so don’t be a crutch for him. It keeps you both safe and he’ll learn the value of ancestral peace.”

“I agree.” She’s got me smiling.

The reservation was anything but peaceful when I was there. Ben turns fast. “You’ve been?”

I nod. “We were pulled there and dropped back. It was anything but peaceful, but I felt at peace.”

He laughs. “We jump for everything, but the union blessing is crazy.”

It’s definitely that. I’m done with my sandwich and stand. I want to get this done. Josephine smiles at me. “I’m done in an hour and can help.”

Everyone is moving but Ben, he finishes his sandwich standing over the barrel. I smile getting to the back bay. Alex is testing wires for the lights. “Good job, Brothers.”

They smile but keep working.

We work hopping from one thing to the next with Ben amazed with the paint and ease of reassembly. Jacky and Picasso come in as we’re finishing.

Ben hugs them both. “I can’t say I’ve ever seen a paint job like this one. You’ve raised the bar, Brothers. Everyone will want changing colors now.”

They’re beaming. Josephine smiles. “The battery and fluids are all we need.”

I stand with Ben just looking at the bike. It’s a fucking nice bike. Jacky nods and jumps on the battery. Alex handles oil and Parker gets gas in it with help from Jacob.

Jacob and Alex check all the little buttons, lights and gages.

“The tank changed,” Ben says stepping closer.

Jacky smiles. “Light, temperature and moisture will have different colors show. I used red as the background on the

fire.” He holds a shop towel over it to stop the light from shining on the tank. The yellow in the fire gets brighter.

I laugh. “Fucking crazy good, Jacky.”

He smiles. “Look what Picasso did on the back.” The towel moves to the back and we watch Badass come through the stars in straight black with a faint blue neon behind it.

I hook Picasso’s neck. “Brother, that’s amazing.”

“I’m learning, Pres. We’re going to paint yours someday. I need to know this shit. Jacky’s a good teacher.”

“That doesn’t look like you were learning, Picasso. Thank you and good job, Brothers.” Ben hugs them then Alex and Parker.

I smile when he looks at me. “Let’s get it down and test it out.”

He’s ready. It starts right up. I kiss my girl for that. Alex messes with the mix so it sounds like a loud purr. When he nods, Ben backs it out while Security Brothers run for their bikes. I kiss my girl again. “You want to ride?”

“It’s past lift-leg break time. Go with Ben.” She pulls me down for a kiss then pushes me away.

I go with Ben loving my Josephine.



Josephine

Walking into the kitchen, I wonder where everyone is. I know my geeky President is riding but it's weird for no one to be here. The road back was as deserted as the compound feels.

“You are going to dinner alone with Maverick. A wish he has not been able to attain since he met you.” Aiyana has me jumping out of my skin.

Holding my chest, I turn. “Thanks. How did he manage to get everyone to stay home?”

Her smile makes me think this is a good story. “Thinking of a plan is sometimes enough. Prez will stay at Phoenix and requested all Protectors not working to ride with Cort and see his new bike. While Maverick is on a chopper here, Officers and Brothers are going to Phoenix.”

I laugh. “I love every one of you.”

She nods and her eyes glow that gold color. Blue shows in a strip across her eyes making the gold look alive shimmering. She nods. “I am Aiyana Waters Baxter, Shaman of the Paleoamerican and Mohegan tribe. Protector of the Princes of Prophecy, panther, courageous and guardian of my people. Many years ago, Nunánuk spoke of those people with me. I would not have children but protect children of my Waters family. I did not know of children of my Waters family and did not concern myself as the ancestors are all seeing and would present those children at a time of their choosing. It is always as it will be.”

Oh my God. What do I say?

She smiles and the blue is gone. Her eyes aren't as shimmery. "You need not speak. Know I am aware of my family connection. My obligation to protect you and Jacky as my own and my ancestral sister and brother-in-law now help shine light upon you and your brother. I knew before I arrived and have shielded so Kateri is not harmed by this knowledge."

"They cloaked you." I don't know why that's all I can think of.

"I believe they do not understand I am not to be cloaked. My father and mother's actions are no longer under a cloak. While I spend time at the reservation, the Brothers do what they feel to protect me. I let them. I believe it amuses the ancestors."

I laugh. She's too much. "I'm glad you know and can I hug you?"

She hugs me feeling like a blanket wrapping me up. "Thank you, Aunt Aiyana," I whisper.

She squeezes then steps back. "As Jacky is a man, I will not bother him with my response to the male chauvinists in my life."

I smile loving her humor. "He's young and doesn't get reader anything. It's safer right now to leave it alone. He wasn't told of our connection more than it was tribal."

She nods. "Men spend their time plotting ways to deceive without a lie being obvious. I have many jobs and no energy to explain what is meant to be for all of them. They are on their own. Being fuckin' Badass is enough."

I laugh again. “I agree. They’ll figure out we aren’t cowering in a corner. I’ve got too much shit to do. Except right now. What are you doing?”

“I would like to do zorbing. It looks like fun play.”

“I need the other brace.”

She shakes her head. “I will shield you. Remove weapons only.”

“I love your Badass, Aiyana.”

~*~*~

Maverick

“Josephine!”

I pull my phone and bring up tracking. She’s zorbing?

Running the walkway back to the garage, I get on the chopper. “The racetrack.”

I tell the Lead. He clears it with whoever and we move. Watching out the door, I’m smiling at the two zorbs rolling down the trail. “At the gate!” I yell over the noise. I should have gotten cans. I don’t want the wind to blow them around.

Jogging the trail, I get close enough to hear screaming and laughing as they hit each other more than the ground. I move to the side and make it down to the bottom as they roll onto the stop grate.

A Prospect is smiling as he runs onto the grate. “They flew me here with them, Pres. You’re right, women are crazy.”

I laugh, he brought the skeleton to the chopper for me. “They are. I need mine for a dinner date before anyone besides Ops knows I’m here.”

He laughs. “I have the Prince Brother.”

I unzip and pull out my girl. “How did you make it without popping the bubble?”

She smiles pulling me down. “Aiyana.”

I guess that explains it. “We’re going to dinner.”

She nods. “Your wish was Ben’s command. It’s like having genie family.”

I laugh and turn toward the other bubble. “I wish to go again.”

The Prospect looks at me. “She can kill you with a thought. Don’t give her reason and be her zorbing partner.”

He looks terrified. “We need someone to zip and stretch.”

I laugh. “Get another Prospect out here.”

Aiyana shakes her head. “I have help waiting.” She looks at Josephine.

I see weapons fly by and laugh again. Aiyana nods. “You are ready for your date, my new tribal additions. Have fun.” She’s gone and we’re on the chopper.

“She’s scary with ability.” I look from out the door to Josephine.

She nods. “But effective. Where are we going.”

The crew laughs. Fucking Brothers.



Josephine

Dinner in Boulder is perfect. The flight to Denver is minutes away. I can't believe how fast we get everywhere on the choppers. It's dark so there isn't much to see when you're over mountains and woods. A light here and there is all that catches my eye. "Where are we going?"

"My house."

That gets my attention. "You have a house in Denver?"

"A little outside of Denver."

I just nod. My geeky President always surprises me. Wondering what his house looks like only lasts for a minute. We're lowering and I lean over to see the ground in the dark night. "You have a chopper pad."

He smiles. It's a stupid question to him but I don't know other people that have a chopper pad at their house in the middle of the woods. He points to a cabin. It looks like an old cabin that could be a hundred years old or ten. The windows have the soft glow of light that could be dim bulbs or candles. I smile already loving it and I can't even see it well in the dark.

"Perry has you covered tomorrow. We're here for the day. I don't get to sleep here much but know we're not going to be bothered by anyone. Mucimi said he'd keep them all away." As he talks, my belt is unclipped and he walks me to the doors.

I smile at him. I'm not sure he should count on that. The uncles are a little crazy. If it works, we're here for a whole

day without that crazy. The doors open and he jumps down then turns for me.

I slide right down his body thinking my sexy geek knows how to get to me. His smile says he knows he got to me. The quick kiss tells me he's excited. I'm lifted and carried all the way to the door without a word. The man is too cute.

"Welcome to our cabin, Josephine Bonnie Marshal." He pushes through a thick wooden door and kisses me as if he's waited forever to get the chance. I love that about him and make sure he knows I do.

"Thank you." I get that out then take a deep breath looking to the left. "Wow, this is bigger than it looks. It's dark so the look part isn't accurate."

He laughs setting me down. "It's covered by the trees in the back." Flipping the light on I'm amazed. It's rustic in a way that it's picture-perfect mixing old with new. The little I saw of the living room is just the seating around the fire. Snowshoes are hung on the wall by us. Pegs hold coats, scarves and hats with boots under them.

"You come here a lot?"

"Not enough. Twice this last year. It's been hard years for the Club. I get called back so I haven't slept here in a couple of years. This is the living room. The kitchen is this way."

He pulls me through a wide doorway to an old kitchen with a wood cooking stove and chunks of granite for a counter and table. "It's like walking through a magazine picture."

He smiles opening a wooden door over the counter. I hear a motor and smile. The bottom of the cabinets lower with a coffee maker, microwave and on the other side a griddle that's almost the width of the granite in a two foot section. "Unbelievable." I laugh and hug him.

"I bought it from an Indian and love the look but I don't know how to cook with that thing. I only use it to heat the room."

"This is why I love you."

We spend some time making coffee. The supplies aren't many but they're fresh. He planned for us to be here tonight. I love him. He shows me the bathroom, a spare room then the back room that is sectioned off with quarter cut log walls, the worktable is granite with log legs. My dad would love this. Just thinking it I feel that odd heat for a second. It's like hugging Aiyana. With a smile I follow him to his computer. It powers up in seconds, so internet isn't a problem. Videos show in four frames.

"This is outside." He types and the videos show trees and walkways. "That's the shed with toys and an old truck that quit on me. I had a new one brought up but want to fix that one if I ever have time."

I see the old 50's Dodge power wagon and shake my head. "What year is it?"

"Fifty-six."

I'd love to work on that baby. "It won't meet safety or emission standards but could be used through the mountain roads."

“It’s how the Indian built all this. It was just a cabin he added onto pulling the supplies up here. There are pictures through the house showing the truck in the background. He took that thing everywhere. I want to add to those pictures.”

Bending I kiss him. “I’ll help.”

He smiles. “I have the parts in the back of the new truck. I haven’t seen what came in.”

I smile. “Let’s go see.”

“Another day. This is our time without the fucking Brothers crashing our plans.”

“Sounds like the perfect time to get something done. Does your ‘shed’ have blankets and a worktable?”

He smiles and I know I’ve got him. “I’ll get you a change of panties. You’re Christmas every day, Josephine Bonnie Marshal.”

“So are you. Hurry up.”

He laughs jogging through the door. I love my geeky man. “Miss you, momma and daddy. It’s just like you said, he makes my world perfect,” I whisper the words wiping the tear that fell. They always knew.

Epilogue

One week

Maverick

Looking around the table I think we're doing well. Ari and Adrian stepped up and are working with the Brothers to add new to our training while taking our procedures and running with it. I look at Stan. "PD for East?"

"A month, Pres. Adrian took Clark's training. I was easy on him." He smiles taking no offense.

I nod. "I want Teams in west towns starting Monday. We have the Teams, the PD budgets and more choppers. Use everything we have and start building, Brothers. You're okay heading PD there, Adrian?"

"I am and honored, Pres."

They smile but no one adds anything. Anton stops typing. "Homeless not done, Pres Maverick."

I smile. "That's the next meeting."

Finn laughs. I'm usually the one mixing my meets up. "Anything else, Brothers?"

With a no from everyone I dismiss Security. "We have ten, Anton. Get danish and fruit up here. The Prospects know what we like. I need coffee."

"Roger, Pres Maverick." He never stops or looks at me.

I sit with Finn and Stan. "The building crews are strapped again?"

Finn smiles. “For the last week. They’ll get back this week, Pres.”

I nod. “That’s good. The last thing I want is to take over towns without the means to help as we promised. Did we get a new doctor for the eastern towns?”

“We did, Pres. They’ll be in next week. Christian said the quack will be out before that. I think he got Mase and Mucimi on it,” Stan answers.

That’s good. Those people need a real doctor. Ren has enough with the Club and Alpha-Bits. “The party is tonight. Are we ready?”

They both smile making me wonder what’s up. “Food, music and drinks are there. Wood is stacked and waiting. We’re set, Boss. You’re launching tonight?”

I smile. “Yeah, Mars has some satellites to go up. Nine-thirty is launch time.”

“It’s going to be good, Pres. Jack said the Drive-in parties are legendary at Bravo. It’s been a good month for us. We’ve expanded, have everyone working and are done with the senseless wars,” Stan says with that smile.

“Am I missing something?”

“Not yet, Pres. I’ll let you know.” Finn looks at the door as Inner Circle comes in.

Anton giggles sounding cute and a little dastardly. I’m on alert.



All fucking day I've been slammed. At seven I check in with Aero. They're set and all but push me out the door.

Christian shows on the side of me. "It's time. Mase has Josephine."

I don't ask. I close my eyes. Josephine's, "A little warning next time, Mase," has my eyes open.

Mase has his Mase smile on. "Surprise?"

I shake my head and pull Josephine to me. "They don't do notice. Were you done, beautiful?" She's not in coveralls.

"I just finished and was going to call you." Her eyes go wide. "Holy shit. Where are we?"

I look around. "This is where I come to think." What? I look back at Mase smiling. "Alder just built it?"

Christian laughs as I turn Josephine around to see the log cabin compound. "Every fuckin' carpenter around and from New England has been building it, Brother. It's taken more than a week with crews running 24/7."

"They're log cabins?" She looks at Christian. "You didn't leave."

He smiles. "No, I've been here working. You felt me?"

She shakes her head. "I don't know, I thought you were close."

Mase gets tired of the reunion chatter. "Yeah, they're log cabins. Everyone was here helping. The reservation and a bunch of MC had to get back. You know us and you'll meet

the rest. Joey is here with Sebastian and their girl.” He points to a group of people by the lake that we can’t really see from here.

I nod. “You built a compound of log cabins?”

Christian’s arm goes out. “Yeah, VIP is over there, they got the adobes. The one that looks like a long Mexican store is a bunkhouse for VIP Teams. Protectors is next in the igloos. Then your higher Aero people in mixed houses. Mars said she’s never leaving, Ren picked a log cabin.” He makes me smile. Keeping Mars happy is always good.

“The fence is up before the Drive-in. Protectors, Security and training are all split going out further. Your geeks and IT are in the old compound with the rest of split Security Teams on the old compound. Brothers are away from them. They have a compound, campground and bunk houses. Prospects and trainees are in the Club. Your Brothers almost fit, a few like the houses in town so they’re staying. Alder said one more subdivision and you’re covered. The school is done. It fits a hundred easy.”

I nod. They got everyone and everything covered. “You built all this?”

Christian laughs. “Personally, only your compound. The crews worked on everything else. Princes and Officers worked on yours. Uncle Danny wants to show them off. He’s excited about the horseshoes instead of circles, so everyone sees the lake.”

I just nod. Josephine squeezes my hand looking at the compounds. “You’re all crazy. You built compounds in a

week. Log cabins, no less. Oh, my God. The furniture will look great in them.”

Christian laughs. “It’s all in. I closed the storage unit. Come see.”

We’re moving and my eyes close. They’re all fucking crazy.

“Glad you made it.” Has my eyes opening again.

I know that patch. “Danny LaPonte. It’s an honor to meet you. I’ve seen you at MC Colorado.”

He nods. “Glad they got rid of the fuckin’ halls. Steve wanted to run a skid steer loader through the building. He won’t go back. We’re glad we don’t need arrows and signs to make it through Delta. He likes the Milky Way too.”

I shake my head. “You’ve been to the Club and Compound?”

He nods smiling. “Riding with LB and Cort, supervising the other compound crews, moves, then your move today. We even made your fireplace shit playing blacksmiths with Jacky. You’re easy to keep busy. We raced on Saturday when you went up to the MC.”

Josephine laughs. “You’re just as crazy as the kids, aren’t you?”

“They call us the grandrents. That’s always before or right after *the crazy fuckin’*. The kids are easy. The grandkids are too good to do the shit we did. They’re called crazy for jumping cliffs. They’ve got no clue.”

I laugh. “Mase catches fire when he’s pissed. They appear and disappear at will. Aiyana appeared as a ghost from Rhode Island. I think their crazy is just different.”

He nods. “You’ve got a point. So let’s look around. You didn’t get a choice, so you love it. As President, you’re in the middle so you have full lake view. Don’t give me shit because I don’t give a fuck. You love it.”

I smile and nod. “Got it.”

“Good. This one is yours. I liked the tiny house River has and made them similar. You have a bedroom, bathroom, sitting room and the porch out the side. Go look around. You’ll see a doorframe to nowhere. It’s for expansion. Asa said we can’t build for kids yet. He was ready to shoot me, so we didn’t build for kids yet. Alder will handle that.”

Clamping my jaw shut, I nod. Josephine pulls me in. “It’s our furniture.”

I look around amazed they used real wood and it’s our furniture. The porch has a full view of the lake. “Did your dad make this furniture?” This is a big porch. I look up and back. The house goes higher.

She nods. “It was on our porch. The swing seat too.”

I follow her back in. The bathroom isn’t the lagoon but has everything we had in it. I love everything about our cabin.

“Look! The hidden kitchen. They’re talented carpenters.”

I nod looking around. “Here. The corner has an empty shelf. There’s a room up.” Moving closer I see the same shelf

color on the floor. It's shaped just like the shelf.

She puts her foot on what looks like a mini water wheel paddle, looking around the walls close to her. She pulls a little crank arm down and the paddle rises. With a hand holding the paddle above her, she giggles all the way up and through a section of the wall. "Oh, my God, I'm never getting you out of here."

I do what she did glad my head isn't hitting the paddle-shelf above me and rise. The wall is angled up here. That's why it looks like one piece from below. The door opens by itself and I laugh crawling onto the loft platform. My telescope and camera are up here. The ceiling and front wall are glass with an amazing view of the lake. "They're fucking amazing with what we'd like. Danny is right, I love it."

She's looking up at the almost night sky from the mattress. I could...Shit, the launch.

"We need to see the rest." I smile and pull her out hitting the lever on the side. The paddle runs in reverse, I love my Brothers. She doesn't object and has her little smile on. I love that about her.

Pulling her back to the door, I stop and kiss her. "There has to be twenty-five cabins then the big ones. I need to know where the Bits are." I love that she just nods. She's so easy.

Danny is waiting where we left him. "Twenty-Two. Fifteen Officers, one for Major and your aunt. Jacky's work room that only looks like logs and five spare. Some are by the trees, some hidden in the trees. The Alpha-Bits have tree houses with walkways between them and rope stairs to the

kitchen, living room and Ops.” Danny points over to the right. I shake my head. They’re amazing.

“What happens in the winter?” Josephine asks. It doesn’t snow much here but it does snow.

“They have a hidden staircase in the trees, that aren’t real trees, holding their houses up.” Danny thinks of everything. “Jacky had the printers pour so they look like trees then they painted them.”

I nod. That’s good. They have a tiny log cabin village up there. It must have a great view. I’m happy for the little Brothers.

The cabins we see are as impressive as ours. Some are smaller, some the same size but shaped different. I like ours with the big logs. Everything is basically the same but made out of logs and looks impressive. The furniture from storage is everywhere in the community cabins that are made with those big logs.

Turning, I notice the placement of what I can see from here. “It’s the Milky Way from the side. The black hole is the lake.”

Danny laughs. “Asa said you have a thing with space. We followed the old compound plans. Some of the igloos and adobes are painted so they’ll show at night.”

I hug him checking my watch. “Thank you. I love it all. We need to get to the Drive-in.”

He smiles. “I can help, close your eyes.”

I hear the Brothers and open my eyes looking around. Ben and Cort are watching me with smiles. I throw them chin.

Wading through the Brothers, I make it to the staging area in front of the screen with Josephine's hand in mine and that ever present smile in place. The screen really is a screen that rolls down when it's not in use. The hologram board shows well on it. Right now, it's not on.

A Prospect runs up handing me a mic. "Where's Anton?"

He points to the staging area. Anton isn't up there. Walking closer I hear him and smile. Going around the back I bend. "Anton, Pax, glad you made it. Are we ready?"

Anton stands and salutes me, Pax nods and Josephine giggles. I smile. "It's a good thing you're tiny. Any taller and you wouldn't fit, Anton."

He nods. "I perfect height, weight. Training and eat right to keep me fit. I keep training I get big muscle like Asa, Pres Maverick." Asa is a good inch taller than Anton. Height is a bitch for all men.

I nod. "We'll keep you in training, Brother. Ari said you're going to make a good ninja."

He looks proud. "How do you like your new houses?" Josephine asks.

"Nice house, good view. I test jet pack to Alpha-Bits fly home later."

Oh fuck. "You made jet packs?" I bet his are better than mine.

He nods. "Web help. No nitrous oxide he say." He shrugs.

This is good. “If Web helped, they won’t kill me.”

They laugh at me. Fucking kids. “Time?”

“Two minute, ISS, five launch,” Pax answers.

I smile. “Put it on the screen. Is the camera up?”

Pax nods. “Drone up, Pres Maverick. ISS see me screen, you drone.”

“Thanks, Brothers. At 0 make the call, Anton. Pax, use all the words so they understand you.”

“Roger, Boss.”

We move to the stage before Josephine asks, “There’s a launch tonight?”

I smile. “They’re watching from the space station right after you talk to them.”

“I’m talking to astronauts?”

“Yeah. They like answering questions.” I check the time on the screen, less than a minute. “Brothers!”

Whistles go out getting attention and Brothers quiet. I think it’s because Justice shot blue light from his hand while up in the air a good twenty feet off the ground before the whistle.

I shake my head. “Thanks, Justice. Brothers, it’s a good night to celebrate. I’ve been told we’re all in our new houses so don’t drink so much you forget where you live.”

I wait for them to stop laughing. “We’re marking our first Drive-in party with a bang Badass style. Josephine wanted to see the ISS and a launch. Because Mars is fucking

awesome at her job and Anton is the most Badass Alpha-Bit known to us and the astronauts on the ISS, my girl gets her wish and you get to see an incredible night launch to kick off Delta Rising's first Drive-in party."

The Brothers get loud for the nine seconds before the screen lights up at the same time the bonfire is lit.

"Badass Aero Technologies calling astronaut International Space Station for launch feedback. President Delta Rising, Maverick connected, Commander. Three minute to launch."

"Well, howdy, Anton. Who's your friend today?" The commander shows smiling at Pax and Anton. Mars sent them what we're doing earlier so he's not surprised by the crowd, kids or Josephine.

"Pax Ford. He like space."

"Howdy there, Pax. Someday you'll have to come see the ISS for yourself."

Pax nods fast getting some laughs. "I train. Astronaut have height, weight limit?"

The commander nods but never loses his smile. "We do. Five-four and a half to six foot and no less than 38" chest. I don't think that'll be stopping you, little partner. You're amazing little men from what NASA has told us. You keep training and get your Brother Anton on finding a way for you to get here."

Pax is going to pass out if he doesn't breathe. Anton hits him. "I make jet pack to test we fly. Maybe space shuttle. Two minute launch. Pres Maverick connected."

The commander laughs. “Be safe, Anton. I’m coming to see y’all when I get home.”

“Always, Commander.” Anton shuts the camera for them down.

“Commander. My ol’ lady had a question.” I click my piece on and hand her the mic loving her little smile.

“Ah, Miss Josephine, you’re a sight for sore eyes that makes me miss home, little lady. What’s your question?”

Josephine’s little smile tips up as her eyes hit mine. She knows we set it up. She looks back at the commander. “If you have time it’s two questions. What’s the most interesting thing on Earth to see from space? And what do you miss most from the planet you can see but not touch.”

“Those are both good questions. I’ll do easy first. My family is what I miss most and the most interesting thing has to be the barrier reef because we can see it at night and during the day. My personal favorite view is the Kennecott copper mine in Utah or the greenhouses in Spain when the sun is shining on them. My colleagues all have favorites. These are mine.” He turns for a second then is back.

“They’re gathering to see the launch. Anton has us up there so you can see it from our view on your screen. Are we showing there, Maverick?”

We see Earth then it’s focused closer. Mars is in my ear with the countdown. “You’re showing on a split screen, the astronauts and your view of us, Commander.”

Blastoff is loud even from here. The Brothers go crazy, Josephine is squeezing my hand and the sky lights up. I

turn to the screen watching us from space.

“I feel the ground shaking. It’s unbelievable!” Josephine puts her arm around me holding on. The light from the boosters shows onscreen at the space station and we hear the astronauts cheering, getting the Brothers going again.

Mars laughs in my ear. “I am so glad I work for you, Maverick. That’s unbelievable. The astronauts are talking in three languages. I can’t make out the rest.”

I laugh. “It doesn’t matter, Mars. History in any language is history. They’ll get a kick out of the care packages. They’re excited to see Anton hit the box to their catch net” Anton sent them Badass cups with a bunch of shirts and other shit from the different Phoenix Clubs. I love the little Brother. He had them working on the catch saying he’ll deliver, rain, shine or no gravity. The commander got a kick out of it.

“I’m out. The Alpha-Bits are on. I need to work.”

I smile hearing Akai in the background. “Go, Brother. Good job, Mars. I’ll see you when you get here.”

The commander and astronauts are on the board talking to Anton and Pax. When the light from the rocket is out of view, fireworks start over the lake. The astronauts get excited.

I look for the drone and take the mic from Josephine. “Commander, it’s the start of our night and party. Thanks for the answers and making this Badass party one to remember. We’ll plan another party when you come visit.”

He laughs. “I was promised fishing, riding and zorbing on Anton’s new trail if we take up your Drift Away

challenge. Since there's not a chance in hell we're winning, a party sounds like a good consolation prize. Gotta tell ya it feels like a trophy for showing up."

The Brothers and Josephine laugh. "I'll get you fishing and on Anton's trail. If riding is a bike, I've got that covered. I don't do the horses but have a friend that does, so it's not out of the question."

"I'll be there. Thanks for the entertainment and excitement tonight. It gets downright boring at times."

The screen goes black, but I hear Anton still talking. I shut the mic off and throw chin to the Brothers still yelling. I jump down and lift Josephine off the stage. "Thanks, Anton, Pax!"

We're swallowed up in the Brothers. Cort, Brekan and Ben have Security opening free space around us. Cort hugs me. "You know how to start a party with a bang, Brother. That was fucking spectacular."

Brekan and Ben hug me then Josephine. "Good questions. I wouldn't know what to ask," Brekan says to Josephine.

She smiles. "He told me a minute before I was talking to astronauts. I asked what I wanted to know." She shrugs then gets stolen by Seren and Lily.

Lily turns. "She's with my Security. We've got no chance of holding Joey back any longer. Find her at the women's table when your crazy shit is over."

I nod then shake my head looking at Brekan and Ben. "We just found out we moved. The compound is better than I

imagined it could be. Thanks for any part you played in that.”

They all smile. “Are you going to want to leave it to come to Princes?” Ben asks.

“Definitely. Josephine and Jacky want to see the reservation and their families.”

Cort laughs. “You’re taking Jacky?”

I shrug. A whistle has us all turning. Major is by the fire with Aunt Rain. “I claim Rain Christiansen as my ol’ lady.”

“Holy fuck.”

Ben laughs. Cort pulls me by the collar to the Brothers hugging Major and Aunt Rain. I get a hug in and yell over the Brothers, “Congratulations, Major is a good man, good enough for my only family! Be happy, Aunt Rain!” She smiles when I wipe her tears away. “No tears here! Only happy!”

She nods. “I’m happy, Maverick. Your Badass won me over!”

I laugh then let her go fast because Harper is glaring at me. Aunt Rain looks back smiling. I shake my head. That woman is scary.

Brekan laughs hitting my back. “You didn’t say Major was going with you too.”

I look at him. Falcon, Justice, Kristos and Cooper are all smiling. Ben and Cort are laughing. No fucking way.

“What are you talking about?”

Jordan is all smiles when he turns Major our way. I ask him. “You’re going to Princes?”

“I’ve been meaning to get up there and see Ben and this reservation.”

I look at Ben. “He means the other Ben, right? The one in Mass.” I am not taking my girl away with Major and my aunt in tow.

They all laugh. “Pres Maverick! I you second, I go to Princes!” Jesus fuck. I look around but don’t see Anton.

“Where the fuck is he?” Brothers are everywhere.

“Fuckin’ Anton! Justice! How the fuck do I cover him?” That’s definitely Ari but I don’t see him either. The Presidents are all fucking laughing.

Justice rises up in the air as Trask hits my back. “You’re fucking crazy, Brother. I took them to the lagoon. They never stop. Be glad Mucimi isn’t going.” He points up where Justice is laughing as he tries to catch Anton.

“Fuck.”

Web hits my back. “He did it. Good job, Anton!”

I look at him. “What the fuck? How does Security cover him?”

He smiles. “I got him up without nitro, figure out Security. He’s your responsibility.”

I look at Brekan getting a shrug. Cort shakes his head with no help. Ben smiles. “You need amendments.”

“Amendments?”

Christian shows in front of us with Anton held by the collar of his little air-filled space suit. “The jet pack isn’t going to Princes. We have more fuckin’ amendments because of

ability and crazy shit. Keep your crazy contained.” He says it in a way that’s final.

Does that mean Anton is going to Princes? I was saying fuck no to that one. “This is what you see?” I ask hoping for a no.

They all laugh at me. I shake my head. “Fucking Brothers.”

Thanks for reading Maverick and Josephine Marshal’s story. Freaky connections in the most unlikely places. I wonder what they have in store for us next. I hope you do too! I can’t wait!

Leave a review or hit a star button for me. Thanks!

L.

Acknowledgments

Jo-Kat, thank you for always getting me and my crazy. Your encouragement and help (or insight...) make this easier every time. Working through my mind isn't easy for me, I'm amazed and grateful you have the patience and fortitude to wade into batshit crazy regularly. It is always with honor that I show appreciation for who you are and what you do. Today is no different. Thank you both. <3

Betas and readers, your first look and feedback (with corrections) always make me look good. Thank you for that time and effort. I know life isn't easy and the time is sometimes given in sacrifice. I am humbled and honored by that loyalty and sacrifice.

Christine, Mel, through personal changes and challenges, you are still posting me where I can't. I don't have words...revered, recognized, appreciated, celebrated, highly regarded, reputable...honored. I guess I found a few. Thank you for that long-standing feeling that has taken home in my heart for all you do, see and post. <3

My faithful readers, thank you for the email, messages and belief that I, with the help from the women above, have put together another readable version of my Badass world.

L.

About the Author

L. Ann started with the Baxters and followed that with multiple series and genres. While her books feature paranormal, FBI, ex-military and Badass Bikers, L. Ann is writing about the strong women that these men need in their life to help right the world's wrongs and keep their small part of the world safe. The women are extraordinary, strong and determined to make a difference.

The men fight for right in every book. Yes, they kill people. Yes, the MC shoots at the bad guys' feet to cause them pain. Yes, some throw tampons at each other regularly.

That being said, they do these things while stopping human trafficking and experimentation, bringing their world into legitimate businesses, fighting gangs to keep drugs away from their town and kids, keep women sheltered safely while trying to stop domestic abuse. These are men that don't leave a pack, Team member or Brother behind. They don't treat women as possessions and they don't cheat. Respect takes on an honorable meaning. Women and kids are cherished. Everyone is looked out for and everyone is equal.

L. Ann has made amazing worlds, tackled the taboo subjects and made it easy to imagine living in a world where your protection comes from the vampires, shifters, freaky kids, albinos and orientals, military turned FBI and some Badass Bikers.

With readers writing about rereading the series over and over, she feels like she's told her characters' stories in a way that would make them proud.

Every book will make you laugh, every book will make you angry for the wrong that happens in the world. Every book will make you cry for the pain that a character feels. Every book gives you hope that we may just get it right yet.

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Reading Order

It is better to read them in order so you don't miss anything. The *boxed sets* help keep them straight. I answer questions from previous books as I go along (the not easy thing). So, here is the order in which they were written.

She Found Us - Baxters

Our Wife - Baxters

Our Angel - Baxters

Knight - MC

LaPonte - MC

LaPonte-Karr - MC

Pres - MC

Blackhawk - MC

Tailley - MC

Callahan - MC

Jake - Baxters

Brighton - MC

Rayne - Baxters

Moniz - MC

Behind the Scenes - MC

Prophet - Princes of Prophecy

Reader - Princes of Prophecy

Leader - Princes of Prophecy

Enforcer - Princes of Prophecy

Coder - Princes of Prophecy

Sniper - Princes of Prophecy

Christian - The Protectors

Ricky - MC

Aiyana - The Protectors

D.C. Security - Baxters/MC/Princes

Jeremy & Jacob - The Protectors

Saber's Vida - The Providence Series

Saber's Porthos - The Providence Series

Saber's D'Artagnan - The Providence Series

Saber's Sombra - The Providence Series

Saber's Aramis - The Providence Series

Saber's Athos - The Providence Series
Spying Eyes - Standalone
Princes' Reward -The Other World Series
Fated Mates -The Other World Series
Princes' Pack - The Other World Series
Master's Rise - The Phoenix Series
Benga's Rise -The Phoenix Series
Ranger's Rise - The Phoenix Series
Jack: Honor - The Bravo Series
Falcon: Respect - The Bravo Series
Mag: Loyalty - The Bravo Series
Allegory - The Champion Series
Endue - Champion Series
Conform - Champion Series
Justice: Tenacity - Bravo Series
Ford's Rise - Phoenix Series
Driver: Grit - Alpha Series
Christiansen: City Boy - Alpha Series
Nova: Creed - Alpha Series
Blackhawk: Mase - Honor Series
Cooper: Gunslinger - Elan Series
Teller: Connect - Bravo Series
Maverick: Insight - Delta Series