

FIGHTING TO SURVIVE

MENACE

SHADOW WRAITHS MC

RENE VAN DALEN

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Shadow Wraiths MC

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SHADOW WRAITHS MC BOOK 1

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Warning: This book contains graphic language, violence, abuse and sexual content. Intended for mature audiences, 18 years and older.

DEDICATION

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“Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.”

“The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of.”

-French Proverb

La vie est une fleur don't l'amour est le miel.

C'est la colombe unie à l'aigle dans le ciel,

C'est la grâce tremblante à la force appuyée,

C'est ta main dans ma main doucement oubliée.

Victor Hugo

Life is a flower, of which love is the honey.

It's the dove and the eagle united in the sky.

It's grace trembling at insistent force,

It's your hand sweetly forgotten in mine.

-Victor Hugo

AUTHOR'S NOTE

While I was writing the Iron Dogz MC and the Maingarde crime family books several characters kept making appearances. They would not shut up and kept popping in and out of the books.

It left me with only one option – give them what they so obviously wanted, their own series.

This is it. The start of their own series – let's see how they fare. (Or how I fare...)

This book is set in the USA and includes characters from South Africa.

PLEASE NOTE.....

It was my decision to **NOT** use US English while writing the book but to write the way I always do, in South African English.

I'm not American and I would make so many mistakes the book would be a mess.

I hope you understand my reasoning.

As with my other books I have to issue a content warning.

Warning: This book contains situations that might upset sensitive readers. Please be aware the book contains violence, abuse, torture, and kidnapping, rape off the page, sex, and graphic language.

Thank you for once again going on a ride with me.

As with all my books I take walks on the dark side.

Come and take a walk with me.

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ONE

Joney August

Cape Town, South Africa

Memories are funny things, they invade your thoughts when you least expect it. Making you ache with emotions you'd rather not feel.

It happened every time I remembered the two best nights of my life. Sometimes it happened while I was at work but other times it came to me in my dreams.

That was the worst.

Waking up and finding I was alone. Realising it had been a dream.

I'd never see him again, never hold him again. I would never feel him inside me again.

I had given him my word I wouldn't reach out so all I could do was visit him in my dreams. I cherished our time together and kept it close to my heart. Keeping the memories alive.

Closing my eyes I relived our last moments on the beach.

“Merci boucoup (Many thanks) for the most amazin' night of my life, 'tite chatte (little cat). I'm not just sayin' that. It's the truth.” He was quiet for a beat. “I wish I was a different man, a man who could give you the home and babies you deserve. But I'm not. I'm only half a man, and the half that's left is no good for you. He's a monster. I truly wish I had more to give. I do. If I did I would give it to you, no one else, Jo-Jo.”

I couldn't help the tears that filled my eyes and silently ran down my cheeks. I was so sad for him, and for me.

Shaking his head he wiped them away with his thumbs. "tite chatte, casse pas mon coeur. (Little cat, don't break my heart). What little I have left of it. Je suis désolé (I am sorry)." He whispered.

I don't know what he said but as soon as he did he changed.

He pushed me away and I could see him closing down. It was almost as if a steel wall slid down between us.

Even his accent wasn't as pronounced.

"I won't call or text or answer any calls or texts from you. When I leave it will be the end of what we shared here between us. Do you understand?" He wasn't being nasty at all. He was being honest.

What could I say or do but agree.

"I understand, Monster man." I teased before turning serious.

"I won't call or text, you have my word."

I gave him my word without a second thought.

Opening my eyes I winced at how easily I had done that. As if what we had shared hadn't been life changing for me, and I suspect the same had been true for him.

I shook my head determined to shake the memories off. I had given my word and that was that.

He had given me two nights I would remember for the rest of my life. Nights no other man would ever be able to replicate or erase from my mind.

Not that I had tried to replicate or erase them.

I had changed who I used to be.

My transformation had started because of something my new best friend had said to me. Rider started off not liking me but we became friends, more than just friends, we were best friends.

Shortly before Pixie's wedding I had turned over a new leaf, became a new me. Someone I was learning to respect. I was proudly celibate and I let anyone who asked know about it.

Joney August was no longer available for a quick fuck. The door to my kitty was closed, indefinitely.

And then he happened.

Lucky Boudreaux, mountain of a man and badass biker.

I let him in, spent two magical nights with him, and then he left.

He didn't look back.

About two months after he left there came a time where I was alone and afraid and desperately needed him but couldn't reach out.

I had given my word.

I couldn't break it however much I wanted to.

The fact our time together had brought about the biggest surprise of my life was something I was going to have to handle on my own.

At first I had been afraid, but then the fear turned into wonder, and the wonder turned into love.

I kept the news to myself because to share with Pixie meant sharing it with Remy. And if he knew it would turn into a disaster. He wasn't the kind of man who would keep a secret this big from his family. Not that I would've asked him or Pixie to keep my secret.

This was something I had to do on my own.

Everything had been going well.

I was healthy and thankfully not puking all over the place. My boobs were sensitive and bigger but since I wasn't wearing low cut shirts anymore I could hide it. The little bump I had going on wasn't as easy to hide. It helped that I had started dressing differently before our Christmas break at Nika and Dom's place. Now loose tops hid what I couldn't talk about.

Not yet anyway. I still had time, not a lot, but I had time.

And then my time ran out.

The horror I had escaped years ago reappeared and I knew it was once again time to run. I had no idea where I would go or how I would get away.

All I knew was that I couldn't let them get their hands on me. Never again.

And certainly not when I had my precious surprise on board.

TWO

Joney

Cape Town, South Africa

I swallowed heavily.

My stomach churned and I knew it wasn't caused by the surprise in my belly.

It was because of the man leaning against the wall across from the studio, leisurely smoking. He pretended to be relaxed, but he wasn't, he was a predator and aware of everything around him. To my regret I knew exactly how much of a vicious animal he was.

My heart was racing and my hands were clammy. I swallowed, and swallowed again. I wanted to vomit but I couldn't let it happen. If I gave in to the urge I would have to go to the bathroom. It meant taking my eyes off him. I couldn't take the chance. Couldn't take the chance of him coming inside and hurting my friends.

After my escape I had hoped and prayed I would never see him again.

But there he was. Across the road. Watching the studio.

My family had found me. But how? How had they found me?

I couldn't take my eyes off him. I silently thanked Dom for the heavily tinted windows. Even with the lights on inside the

studio I would be nothing more than an indistinct shadow. He wouldn't be able to identify me.

Clutching a hand over my racing heart I watched as he threw his cigarette to the pavement, stepped on it and ground it out. Not once did he look away from the studio. I knew if he was out the front he had someone watching the back door. He wouldn't take any chances of losing me, not this time.

I had no idea how I was going to get out of the studio with them watching.

Years ago, when I escaped my family I had help. This time there was no one.

I couldn't tell Pixie, she would immediately get involved and she couldn't. Not in her condition. She was pregnant with her and Remy's baby and there was no way I would endanger the two of them.

My revolting family were criminals and wouldn't hesitate to hurt her or anyone they thought was important to me. Pixie's brother, Dom Maingarde, was a big boss in the organised crime underworld but I didn't know if he was more powerful than my father. I've been out of the loop for years and had made no attempt to check up on them.

It was a mistake I now regretted.

When I ran from them I had cut ties completely. Leaving my old life behind.

I had to become someone new. And I did, I became someone they wouldn't recognise.

Someone who had tattoos and piercings and looked very different from the girl I used to be.

But they had found me. I had no idea how they did but they were here and I had to find a way to get out of the studio and to my car. I had my go-bag in the boot and once I got my hands on it I could...what? Do what? I had nothing, no ideas, and no plans. I had become too comfortable in this life and had no plan of escape. I should have made plans.

My shoulders sagged.

He found me and by now he knew everything about me.

Where I lived. The car I drove. My friends.

My gut churned and my heart jumped in my chest.

He would know about my friendship with Pixie and the other artists. Not only them but Dom and Nika, and if he knew about them then he knew about Rider and Delene.

Sweet baby Jesus.

He would know about Rider and my little squirrel.

I had to warn them, all of them. To keep them safe I had to keep the bastard's attention on me.

How the hell was I going to do that? And where was I going to go?

I was still standing behind Zanni staring at the bastard when a small hand slipped into mine. I jerked in surprise then realised who it was. Only one person in the studio had hands that tiny, I turned and smiled down at my boss.

“Hey, boss lady, you need me for anything? I don't have a client coming in until around five. I'm available to help you if you need me.”

She didn't smile just pulled on my hand to follow her. "Come to my office, I have something I want to show you."

She's been designing a chest tattoo for one of the bikers and guarding it like it was a state secret.

I was incredibly curious to see it. Giving a little hop in anticipation I grinned.

"Lead the way."

Letting go of my hand she led the way past the busy artists to the back of the studio and into her tiny office.

I did not expect the office to be crowded.

Dom and a man I had never seen before were waiting for us. Their backs to the wall, arms crossed over their chests.

Looking from one to the other I frowned. "What's going on?"

"That is actually my question, Joney." Dom's cold blue eyes met mine and I had to look away. I couldn't look in his eyes, eyes that felt like they could see deep inside my head and through my lies.

I dropped my head, letting my long hair cover my face. I couldn't look at any of them. I was ashamed to show them the broken pieces that made up who I was. Who I really was.

Dom knew, it only took one look into his cold eyes and I knew he had a good idea what I was hiding.

The only thing I could do was come clean. Tell them everything.

I looked up and opened my mouth to start but didn't get to say a word.

Leaning forward Dom tapped a key on the keyboard and the monitors came to life. He pointed a finger at the screen, at the man who was once again smoking.

“Who is he?”

I didn't hesitate to give him an answer.

“He's my brother, Antonio Salvatore Jr., better known as Tonio Salvatore.”

I couldn't look at them while explaining about my past. Dropping my eyes to the floor, I stared at the tiles as the life I had built for myself imploded.

“My name isn't Joanna August, it's Guiliana Salvatore. My father is Antonio Salvatore Snr, an Italian crime boss in Johannesburg. I ran away from home just before my seventeenth birthday.”

Dom put a finger under my chin, lifting my face and I looked into his eyes. They were no longer cold but filled with something I couldn't read.

“Why did you run? Usually Italian families are protective of their daughters. Why run from them?”

He was wrong, not all of them protected their daughters.

I didn't want to tell them, didn't want to see their opinion of me change. I loved Pixie, my job, my colleagues, I loved Cape Town, and didn't want to lose them.

But there was nothing else to do.

I had to tell.

Breathing shallowly I wrung my hands together steeling myself before exposing the filth and dirt clinging to me.

“I ran because...because my brother was abusing me.”

Telling them somehow made talking about that time in my life easier.

“I was ten when he raped me the first time. I told my mother and she tried to make him stop. My father beat her to death because she dared to go against the men in the house. The rapes continued, with my father’s blessing, and with my mother dead I was alone and living in hell.”

I breathed deep, all I wanted was to get through the next part of my fucked up history. Once it was done I knew they would turn their backs on me. I knew it would happen. I was dirty, and everyone turns their backs on those who were as filthy from the inside out as I was.

“I overheard him, my father, talking about selling me to a man with a monstrous reputation. A reputation worse than that of my brother. I knew if I stayed I was going to die, I didn’t want to die. I took my school backpack, shoved clothes, my identity documents and some keepsakes from my mother in it. I was never given any money but I had a small hoard because I had been taking money from their wallets for a few years. As I was packing our housekeeper, Mrs Vestucci, walked into my room catching me in the act. I thought she was going to tell my father. She didn’t. Instead she hid me in the boot of her car and sneaked me out of the compound. She only let me out once she was sure we were safe. I had no idea what to do next. I wasn’t allowed out except to go to school and even there my father had spies who reported back to him. I made no friends and kept to myself, as a result I was clueless about the outside world.” I licked my lips and swallowed. “Mrs Vestucci took

me to an organisation who helped abused women to disappear. Because I was so young I was sent to live with a nice couple for two years. During that time I was given a new name and they taught me all the things I needed to know to survive on my own. I finished school online and wrote my matric under my new name. There was a tattoo studio in the town and I started working there part time to earn some money. The owner who was a great guy liked my drawings and I did my apprenticeship with him. When I turned nineteen my host family told me it was time to move on. I was warned to never stay in one place too long. I moved around a lot and finally landed in Cape Town. I applied for a position at Mainline Ink and stayed. I shouldn't have stayed.”

Rubbing both hands over my wet cheeks I wiped away the tears. I hated crying, hated it with a passion. Taking my courage in both hands I looked up, and steeled my spine for what was to come.

“I should have moved on years ago. I didn't because I love the studio, Pixie and all the others. They became like my family, a family I didn't want to leave.” I gestured to the outside. “And now it's too late because they have found me.”

Pixie's small body suddenly hit me, hugging me hard.

“You're one of us, Joney. Don't care about the bastard out there, he's not your family, we are. We'll get you out of here and he'll never find you, never, ever, ever, ever.” She growled through tight lips.

I shook my head sadly.

“I can't...” She shoved a hand over my mouth.

“Dom will help us make you disappear.” She snapped while glaring at her brother.

“Actually, I’ll be the one who will help her to disappear.”

The guy who had been silently standing to the side spoke for the first time. He smiled reassuringly at me.

“Hi, my name is Asa Malone, and I’ll be honest, it’s going to be a bit of a mission to get you out of here but we’ll manage. I’m taking you to my compound where you will be safe until we’re able to arrange a safe place for you.” He gave me a shrug as if to say sorry. “Unfortunately I think you might have to leave the country for a while, at least until I’ve sorted out our Salvatore problem. Once they’ve been dealt with you’ll be able to come home again.”

He had scarcely finished his last sentence when Pixie started hopping up and down clapping her hands. Her face alight with glee.

“I know where you can go. I know, I know, I know. It will be perfect, so perfect and you will be as safe as houses.”

“What are you thinking, Pixie?” Dom asked but there was a knowing look in his eyes.

“As you know, I’ve been in negotiations to open a studio in the US. I’ve recently pinned down a location and my new partners cleared the way with their local authorities. I was going to send Zane and Killian to get it up and running because they’re both single. I didn’t think Joney would want to go which is why I didn’t ask, but with this shit happening she’s an obvious choice. No one will dare touch her where I’ll be sending her. No one. She’ll have badass protection.”

I frowned at her.

“You said you wanted a studio in Colorado. Did you get the property in Denver you were talking about? And you went into a partnership? Really? With who?”

She grinned and slowly shook her head from side to side.

I mock glared at her and lifted my hands in question. I might be scared out of my boots right now but I was still me, a cheeky bitch.

She wiggled her eyebrows and smiled knowingly.

“The Denver location didn’t pan out and Remy wanted me to have a place closer to his family. So, you’ll be going to Savannah, Georgia, home of the Shadow Wraiths MC and my new partners. They’ll be guarding your ass until it’s safe to come home.”

Oh shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.

I couldn’t go to Savannah because HE was there. It would be an absolute disaster.

He made it clear, he didn’t want to see me ever again and I gave him my word he wouldn’t.

I couldn’t go back on my word. I just couldn’t.

Asa Malone spoke before I could tell Pixie there was no way on earth I was going to Savannah.

“Sorry Pixie, but she won’t be leaving the country anytime soon. We can’t take the chance. You should stick with the plan to send the other artists. Once she disappears the bastards will be watching your businesses to see if she pops up in any of your other locations. Only once I’m certain they’re no longer

watching your studios will we move her. You can bring back one of the artists and she can take his place.”

He looked at me, compassion in his eyes. “You’re going to have to get used to a new name again. They have your Joanna “Joney” August identity, but don’t worry, we’ll sort something out when we get to Joburg.”

“You’re taking me back to Johannesburg?” I asked fearfully.

He nodded, smiled and patted my arm reassuringly.

Lordy, only then did I notice the man was freaking hot as blazes. Those amazing blue eyes of his had me totally tongue tied for about a second, okay, lies, it was more like two or three.

“I am. We’ll be using Dom’s private plane so you’ll be safe. You’ll be in disguise and we’ll have other girls with us to confuse the issue. They’ll think I’ve collected girls for myself and my men. It’s the way most of those bastards operate, but not me. Before we leave the girls will be sent home. They’ll only be there as a cover for you.”

Everything moved fast from then on. I could hardly keep up with how fast my life in Cape Town ended.

Within minutes of our chat a girl with short black hair with the same body type as mine, only bigger boobs and ass, came sauntering into the studio with a large bag over her shoulder. The bag contained disguises for both of us and several changes of clothes for me.

I had told Asa about my go-bag and he assured me they would try to get it before we left.

He wasn’t sure if it would be possible.

The girl, she didn't tell me her name, got to work on me and when she was done I looked like her. I was wearing a short black wig and was padded and dressed in her clothes. Her feet were a size smaller than mine but I squished my feet into her sandals, making them fit. The padding on my boobs and ass felt weird but I didn't mind as it was a great disguise.

The plan was that Asa and I would leave with Dom while the girl stayed at the studio.

She would leave an hour after us, disguised as a blonde. One of the Road Warriors had been called in to act as her man and he would load her up and take her home. The club would keep an eye on her to ensure no one came after her.

And then it was time.

Time to leave my life behind.

A second time.

The first time had been easy, this time it wasn't. Saying goodbye to Pixie was incredibly difficult because we wouldn't see each other again until it was safe for me to come home. I was going to miss the birth of her baby. And I couldn't take the chance to say goodbye to my friends at the studio and it hurt.

With his arm around me Asa helped me into the back of the black SUV waiting at the back door of the studio. I had the big bag the girl had carried into the studio over my shoulder. One of Dom's men took it from me and placed it in the boot, next to my go-bag, thank heavens.

We were driven directly to the airport.

An hour later we were in the air.

I had escaped my brother but I had another problem now.

Lucky Boudreaux.

I had given him my word and it seemed like pretty soon I was going to be in his city.

Where I wasn't supposed to be.

With my surprise.

Breaking my promise.

What the hell was I going to do?

THREE

Lucky Boudreaux

Savannah, Georgia

He missed her, he essentially missed someone he hardly knew.

At the most inconvenient moments she would pop into his head and his concentration went to hell. His brothers had started to notice he wasn't his usual self.

For some reason he couldn't explain he'd had his hair trimmed, the same with his beard. He usually left both wild, not giving a shit what it looked like, only going to a barber when it became too much even for him. He even agreed to have it styled, so now his hair was shaved short above his ears with the rest left long. Not that he wore it loose a lot, most of the time it was in a braid keeping it out of his way, or in one of those man bun things. His beard was trimmed short, much like the way Remy wore his, and if he was honest it looked a lot better than the bushy mess he'd had going on. With his new look he looked a lot like his brother, almost, but not quite, clean cut. On the barber guy's insistence he had shit for his hair and beard...and he used it. Why? Because it controlled both and smelt good.

It wasn't the only change he'd made.

Comments had been flying because he no longer fucked Candi, the bitch who used to be his favourite club slut.

When he got back from SA he had told her to back off. Her bleached blonde hair, too skinny body and fake tits no longer did it for him. His brothers were quick to tease but he laughed it off and said shit he shouldn't have. Things like no longer wanting sloppy over-used sluts after having grade-A, tight SA pussy on his cock. Even worse, he shared that after fucking a tight pussy on a South African beach it made fucking the club's sluts an impossibility.

Why the fuck had he said that shit?

Made out like Jo-Jo had been nothing but easy pussy. She was the furthest thing from easy pussy there could ever be. She was a forever kind of woman. Perfect old lady material.

It pissed him off because he knew the fuckers in Cape Town wouldn't let her walk around unclaimed for long. Some lucky bastard was going to claim her, make her his old lady and give her his babies.

The thought pissed him off so much he had to go looking for a way to let off steam. Usually he would have gone looking for Candi but it was no longer an option. He couldn't stand the thought of the over-used club slut on his dick.

The alternative was fighting.

Years ago he had found that climbing into the ring and beating the shit out of someone was another sure way of getting rid of the rage. It meant he was a regular at their illegal fights.

It was fucked up because the rage was self-inflicted.

He was fucked up, had been for years. Ever since shit went down shortly after he had been patched into the club. Because

of it he didn't deserve to have an old lady or kids. Not when it was his fault his good girl had died violently. She died because he had been too weak to stand up to her family and protect her from them.

After her he had sworn there would never be another.

By staying away from the good girls and only fucking sluts he ensured it wouldn't happen again. A woman wasn't going to die because of who and what he was.

Not ever again.

Unfortunately he had broken his rules with Jo-Jo. She was a good woman hiding behind her tattoos and piercings, letting people think she was one thing when she was something completely different. Soft hearted and good to the very core, that's who she really was. The way she cared about Rider and his baby girl said it all.

He shouldn't have gone there with her. Should have resisted the burning attraction he had felt for her.

Had felt? Who the fuck was he kidding?

He still felt it, still dreamed about her and the time they had spent together. Something that shouldn't have happened. Not that he regretted the time he spent with her. Not at all. It was the best sex of his life with the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The first time he saw her he had thought she was a model. With her face, hair and body she looked like she belonged in a Victoria's Secret calendar. Instead she was a tattoo artist living quietly in Cape Town.

Maybe the next time he went to visit Remy and she was still single they could hook-up.

No. What the hell was he thinking? He had to stay away from her, for her sake.

He was never going to go there again.

There was no way he would turn her into a target for their many enemies. And definitely not now the cartel was all up in their business. They would use her as a way to get to him. He couldn't do that to her.

Not to his Jo-Jo.

His?

What the fuck was he thinking? She wasn't his, was never going to be his.

The only place she belonged to him was in his dreams.

When he fell asleep at night she appeared in his dreams and sometimes he woke with the feel of her long white blonde hair sweeping across his chest.

Only to open his eyes.

In his room. At the clubhouse.

Alone.

No Jo-Jo warm against his side with her hair across his chest.

It fucking sucked but he'd made a decision and was going to stick to it.

The hollow feeling in his gut would eventually disappear. At least, he fucking hoped it did.

He had tried fucking the hangaround bitches to get her out of his head. It didn't work.

He was hard and ready until he had a bitch on her hands and knees in front of him. Every single time his mind flashed to Jo-Jo on the beach, her hair like molten silver under the moonlight. One look at the slut in front of him and his dick was no longer interested, he had to keep his eyes closed imagining it was her, to finish. Touching them had him feeling dirty and twisted his gut into knots. Not even taking a scalding hot shower had washed the feel of dirt from his skin.

It had never happened to him before. Show him a wet slit and his dick reacted.

But not lately.

Something had to give. He couldn't go around pining after a woman he couldn't have.

He had a high sex drive and had never gone without sex for long. This was the longest he had gone without getting off properly. Even after losing Gloria he hadn't gone without. Sooner or later his dick was going to demand some real action, not the unenthusiastic fucks and what it was getting from his hand.

Merde, (shit) not his dick, it was all on him and his needs.

A thought he didn't like speared through his head.

What about Jo-Jo? What about her needs? Has she fucked someone since he left?

Fuck no! He'll kill the motherfucker.

Talk about double standards, he was the poster child for it.

Grinding his teeth in frustration he forced his thoughts in a new direction.

Club business.

He had more than enough going on at the club. They had a long run coming up and he had a route to plan. He needed to focus, he couldn't give his brothers a less than perfect route to ride.

Shaking off thoughts of the silver haired ice queen he focused on the maps.

Focused on his club.

A meet had been called at their Las Vegas chapter with a couple of allied clubs. He didn't know what the hell it was about because Maniac hadn't let them know yet. All he knew was they were going and he had to prepare a route.

One of the clubs attending was the Grave Robbers MC, and as far as he was concerned they were scum, but he kept his mouth shut. He had a job to do, planning a safe route for his brothers.

It was a long ride from Savannah to Vegas, but he knew they could do it in four days. With safe stops along the route, and an alternative route should shit hit the fan, he was confident he could get them there and back safely.

Along the way brothers from other chapters would join them, increasing their numbers. By the time they reached Vegas their group would be about thirty strong. Maniac and Grave had been given rooms at the clubhouse but the rest of them would have to find a place to crash for the three nights they were going to be there. Sleeping where ever they found a space. He hated sleeping where he had no control over his surroundings. When visiting clubs where there weren't enough rooms they

usually camped in the compound grounds, if it was possible. It meant tents and all the shit that went with it had to be transported to the meet in the club's trucks. Usually, once they got close to the compound, he sent the trucks on ahead to start setting up their camp. A job for the prospects and new patches going on the ride.

He wouldn't be doing his usual thing on this run. He usually found a bitch and stayed with her while they were visiting. Not this time. If he was reading his prez right it was going to be a tense situation and he would be sticking close to watch for trouble.

Looking at the map spread out on his desk Lucky sighed. He loved riding, loved the long roads but the camping bit he did not like. With so many bikes coming and going continuously there would be dust everywhere. He hated the thought of dust coating his shit.

“Hate fucking dust.” He muttered to himself.

There was another option though.

They could book into Suzy's place.

He'd have to ask Maniac, get his go ahead, then reach out to Suzy of Suzy's Boneyard Campground in Vegas. The old lady was a biker babe from way back and they had used her place before. It had everything they would need. Clean bathrooms with hot showers and a large outdoor kitchen area campers could use.

Picking up his notebook and map he left the office he shared with Dive to find his prez.

It was best to get it sorted immediately just in case one of the other clubs had the same idea. It wouldn't do to share accommodations. Fights would break out between clubs.

What was he saying...there were going to be fights anyway. Bikers drinking and partying led to fights. It always did. And between him and Dive they usually took care of it. It used to be fun, it wasn't anymore.

He was getting too old to be dealing with that shit.

Clearing his head with a sharp shake he knocked on his Prez's closed office door. The closed door told him he was either busy with club business or fucking his old lady.

"Door's open." Maniac's rough voice called out.

Opening the door Lucky stepped inside. Grave, their VP, and Ren, their SAA, sat in chairs to the side of Maniac's desk. His prez was behind his desk, leaning back in his chair, slowly swinging from side to side.

"Prez, sorry to interrupt. Do you have time to look at somethin'?"

Maniac didn't say a word just curled his fingers in a come here motion.

Stepping up to the desk he sat down and immediately laid it out.

"I got the route planned and I've been doin' some calculations. We'll be pickin' up brothers as we ride and by the time we hit Vegas there's goin' to be thirty or more in the pack. There's no way Jonno can accommodate everyone. It means we're going to have to crash wherever we find a space. Don't like that shit. Don't like campin' at the compound either,

there's goin' to be a fuckload of dust. Fuckin' hate dust." He grumbled. "Thinkin' we should book Suzy's place like we did last time we were out there."

"That might be a good idea, Prez. I have a feeling we'll be dealing with hot tempers by the time the meet is done." His VP said.

Maniac kept swinging slowly, pulling at his black and silvery grey goatee, deep in thought. Drawing in a deep breath he stopped swinging, sat forward, leaning both forearms on the desk. His eyes drilling into Lucky.

"I'm about to tell you somethin' that we'll be discussin' in church later." Two fingers beat out a rapid beat on the desk before he spoke. "Jonno called for the meet to settle disputes he's been havin' with the Grave Robbers fuckin' around on their turf. Because of our loose alliance with the bastards he's been battlin' to keep them out without resortin' to bloodshed. He wants them gone, like yesterday. After hearin' what they're involved in I agree. They're goin' to drag us all down with their dirty business. We can't have the pigs lookin' at us and our businesses too closely."

"What dirty business is that, Boss?" He frowned trying to remember what business the fuckers were in. Last he heard they were muling drugs and guns. Not too many years ago SWMC used to mule as well so he wasn't sure why his prez was pissed off.

It wasn't his prez who answered him, but his SAA.

"The Grave Robbers have recently started working with the Los Rojos cartel. I don't give a shit if they're sellin' drugs and guns but those fuckers aren't only into drugs and guns; they're

involved in human traffickin'. We can't be seen to have anythin' to do with that shit." Ren said quietly. Too quietly.

Knowing the man the way he did he knew the quiet voice was a forerunner of violence. The brother had a very short fuse. He didn't blame him, not this time, as he felt the same.

Human trafficking was a filthy business only scum got involved in. He, Ren and Dive had been three of the few brothers who had voted against getting involved with the Robbers. They'd had serious reservations about having ties to them. He had classed them as scum then, and they were still scum today. The bastards going into business with the Los Rojos fuckers proved it.

They had been in the minority at the time of the vote. He had to wonder which way the vote would go today if the brothers were given the new info.

"Ren is right," Maniac said. "We can't be tied to them because it puts a target on the club. You can bet your ass the pigs have them under surveillance, and if they are, then we are as well. We need to cut ties, fast. That's why I have to go to Vegas, to formally break our alliance with the motherfuckers. We're not negotiatin' nothin'. It's done. And once it's done we'll let it be known they aren't welcome in our territories. We'll see to it that a little bird whispers in the ears of the pigs about us steppin' away from them. It should get us out from under their surveillance."

He was silent for a beat. "I hope."

"Fuck." It burst from his mouth before he could silence himself.

“Yeah, brother, exactly.” Grave agreed.

“Do we know how many of the fuckers are goin’ to be at the meet?”

Lucky was mentally making a list of the brothers he wanted on the run. He wanted brothers with fighting experience, not the ones who were untried.

“Jonno limited them to 10 members at the meet, includin’ officers. His excuse was limited accommodation. We know the bastards will bring men in from their other chapters and keepin’ them close for support if they need it. Your idea of the campground is solid. Call Suzy and set it up. Book it out. No one else but us, and maybe the Devils, will be allowed entrance. I’ll let Jonno know as soon as you have confirmation.” Maniac ordered.

Dragging out his phone Lucky sent a quick text and almost instantly got an answer back. Shutting his phone down he slid it back into his kutte pocket.

“It’s done. It’s ours for as long as we need it.”

“Good. I’ll reach out to Demon in Portland and let him know it’s been booked and they’re welcome to share with us.” Grave made a note in the little black book he always carried in his pocket.

“It means he can bring more brothers to Vegas.” He said as he wrote.

“Have you decided who’s goin’ on the run, Prez?” Lucky was very interested to hear his selection.

“We’ve just been discussin’ it. Grave and Ren are stayin’. We’ve got too much goin’ on here at the moment and can’t

afford to be caught with our asses in the wind. They'll keep an eye out once I break our alliance with the GR's. You and Dive will take my back durin' the meet and Breaker will be your back up. We'll finalise who's goin' on the run durin' the officers meetin' tomorrow mornin'."

Lucky nodded slowly, his mind already on the preparations he had to make and what they would need if everything went to shit. Something he totally expected to happen. The Robbers were *not* going to be pleased to lose safe passage through territories held by the Wraiths and the Devils. He personally knew how difficult it was to plan a route through territories where you were less than welcome. Or territories where the dominant club refused you safe passage.

The Shadow Wraiths was the dominant club in the southern states while the Devil's Spawn held dominant status on the west coast and in some of the northern states. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for the Grave Robbers to run through their territories.

"We're goin' to have a fight on our hands when you break the alliance, Boss. Those scum suckers won't let it go and with the cartel backin' them we need to be fuckin' careful. Los Rojos love blowin' shit up to get rid of a problem."

"I know, Lucky, believe me I know," His boss shrugged "but we have no other option. We need to scrape 'em off before shit hits the fan. And with the way they're operatin' it's only a matter of time before the whole fuckin' alphabet of pigs comes down on them."

"Yeah, and we don't need their bullshit to spread to us." Ren growled.

“Leave it with me, Prez. I’ll make sure we have everythin’ we need on the trucks. Goin’ to take two with hidden compartments for guns and ammo and send them off before we leave. The pigs will have us on radar when we ride out, we don’t want them comin’ after us. Not when we’ve got shit to hide.” Lucky pushed up out of his chair, grabbing his map and notebook off the desk.

“Give me a run down on what you have tomorrow at church. We’ll talk it through with the brothers.” Maniac ordered, sat back in his chair and started swinging it from side to side again.

Lucky knew it was a sign they were done. With a chin lift to his VP and SAA he left.

He had a lot of work to do.

Preparations to make to assure the safety of his brothers and his prez.

FOUR

Lucky

Las Vegas, Nevada

Lucky and Dive stood next to each other, their backs against the wall, arms crossed over their chests. At the table in front of them their Prez was laying it out for Robber Ross, the prez of the Grave Robbers MC. The bastard wasn't taking it well at all. He and Killer Ross, his brother and VP, were furious.

“Can't fuckin' believe you're turnin' against us, breakin' our alliance as if it means nuthin' to you. We come to you for help and you give us this bullshit. We've had your back, taken care of problems for your club. You owe us, Maniac.” Robber growled, his eyes narrowed and burning with fury.

“That's bullshit, Robber, we don't owe you nothin' and you know it. You're shackled up with the Los Rojos cartel and there's no fuckin' way my club is gettin' involved in their dirty business.” Maniac snapped angrily.

Killer Ross lunged forward.

“Your club is filled with fuckin' pussies. Scared of gettin' dirty are you? That's fuckin' bullshit 'cause everyone here knows how dirty you are. Fuckin' black as coal, same as us.”

Killer looked deranged with spittle on his lips as he leant over the table towards their president and both he and Dive stepped forward. Maniac lifted a hand and they instantly

halted. He hadn't been looking at them but he knew the minute they moved. His prez was just that good.

“My club might be dirty, motherfucker, but *we* don't sell women and children. Never have, never will. Your transports *will not* cross our territory without dire consequences to every single fucker ridin' along with it. This is your only warnin'. Do not cross into our territory with human cargo if you want to stay breathin'.”

Their prez didn't react to the murderous fury coming from the two men sitting opposite him.

“This is fucked up, Maniac.” Robber snarled.

He wasn't the one Lucky kept his eyes on. It was his brother, Killer, who concerned him. The fucker was definitely not taking it well. They would need to watch their backs around him.

“You're goin' to regret this, Maniac. You and your pussy club are goin' to regret double crossin' us. You're fuckin' traitors. Better watch your fuckin' back from now on you fuckin' cunt.” Killer bellowed as he stood, shoving his chair away so hard it fell to the floor with a loud clatter. With one last vicious look around the room he stormed out.

“Fuck.” Dive muttered low enough no one else heard.

“Yeah, brother.” Lucky agreed as he kept his eyes on the man across the table from his boss.

Robber had given his brother's retreating back one look, shook his head, and then got back to business.

“Forget about Killer, he's bein' a dick as usual. We need those routes, Maniac. What if I can guarantee we'll only take

our drug and gun runs through your territories? You know we need the routes for that side of our business. We can't take a hit like this and survive, brother." Robber looked sincere as he pleaded their case.

He was right, they wouldn't survive and that made them exceedingly dangerous to all of them.

Their prez tapped a finger to his lower lip as he stared at Robber. He didn't say anything for several minutes, minutes that had tension rolling through the men in the room.

Maniac sat forward, his voice hard and emotionless.

"Do you remember, three months ago I warned you. Warned you if you continue down this route, my club is goin' to vote to close our territories to you. Not even two weeks ago I called you again, same fuckin' warnin' and you didn't take me seriously. My club voted and here I am. You know I can't go against the vote."

Robber started to answer but Maniac held up a hand to silence him.

"All I can give you is that I'll take your suggested compromise back to the table. I can't do more."

"I'll take it." Robber seemed relieved almost as if he believed he would get what he wanted.

Lucky glanced at Dive from the corner of his eyes. The brother's face was blank, like his own. They wouldn't give Robber and his fuckers the satisfaction of seeing they were pissed at their prez's decision.

There was no way the brothers would vote to give these low life scum suckers safe passage through their territories. If it

had been about running their usual cargo of drugs and guns maybe the vote would pass. Not now that they were into human trafficking with Los Rojos. They couldn't be trusted to stick to the agreement and not sneak restricted cargo through.

He would definitely vote against giving them safe passage.

Lucky walked out of the meet in front of his prez, never once dropping his guard. He didn't trust the fucking Robbers, not even a little bit. Breaker joined him as they walked out of the clubhouse escorting their president to his ride. None of them said a word. The brothers waiting for them straightened as they approached. Eyes narrowed on their faces. They knew shit had gone down with just one look.

Maniac's phone buzzed as they reached the bikes. His prez smiled as he answered and Lucky immediately stepped away, giving him privacy.

He stood with Dive, keeping his eyes on the men not wearing his club's patch. Searching the crowd for Killer but he was nowhere to be seen.

It didn't give him a good feeling. The fucker needed watching.

Maniac had scarcely put his phone away when Jonno walked up. The brother didn't look happy.

"Prez, Saint is requestin' a meet. Right now if possible."

"Fuckin' hell." Maniac grumbled. "Fine, give me a minute and make sure to sweep for bugs. After meetin' with those fucks anythin' is possible."

"You got it, Prez." Jonno didn't hang around but went right back into his clubhouse.

Maniac gestured them closer.

“I have no idea what the Demon Reapers want. Once we’re in there we handle the situation the same way we did the Robbers. We listen to what they have to say and talk about it later.” Not waiting for them to answer he turned and strode back into the clubhouse.

Once again Lucky stood with his back against the wall, watching.

The men sitting across from Maniac were about his age, young for a club president and a VP.

Wilder “Saint” Thompson had been a kid of twenty two when he was voted in as president after his father was gunned down outside a bar. The shooter was never found. There had been rumours it had been an inside job. The Demon Reapers MC didn’t have the best of reps back then.

About ten years ago there had been rumours that Saint and his men had beaten up his old lady.

Not only that, apparently he had let his men rape her before he had her and their son dumped in the desert. No one Lucky spoke to at the time could tell him if it was true or not.

What he did know was that the bastard’s old lady and their baby boy had disappeared from the clubhouse never to be seen or heard from again.

They didn’t know whether there was any truth to the rumours or if it had been manufactured by his enemies.

Saint had a lot of enemies and so did his club.

Some of those enemies were right under his nose. Lucky wondered if the man knew there were brothers in his club working to get rid of him.

Byte had done a deep dive on the chapter in Tucson when they knew they would be at the meet. It had proved to be very interesting.

The chapter has been going through major upheavals since their VP, Ike “Striker” Blake, deserted, taking some of the members and a lot of money with him. They had gone underground and haven’t been found, not yet, but the Reapers were looking. Instead of voting in a new VP their National President had appointed Thomas “Case” Salazar to the position. He was transferred in from their Knoxville, Tennessee chapter. A Southern boy.

Byte hadn’t been able to find anything that would indicate Case was a bad guy. He was married to his high school sweetheart and had three kids with her. He was a family man, no rumours of club sluts or side pieces to be found.

His police record was clean which was amazing seeing as the club was deeply involved in gun running, prostitution and protection. He had the reputation of being a good brother, one who took care of his old lady and his club. The men in Knoxville had nothing but good things to say and had been sad to lose him but happy about his promotion.

Saint’s reputation, however, was spotty. He had a record as a juvenile, but it was mostly petty theft and malicious damage to property charges. Nothing big and nothing since either. The hit to his rep came from the disappearance of his old lady and son, and the whispers of their abuse and murder at his hands. Byte

noted that he hadn't claimed another woman or had relationships since then.

It would be interesting to see what the motherfucker wanted from them.

"Thank you for agreein' to meet with us, Prez." Saint gave their prez the respect he was due.

Maniac gave a small chin lift in acknowledgement.

"I know you're wonderin' why the hell we wanted this meet. I'm not goin' to fuck around. I'm just goin' to come out and say it. The Psycho Raiders MC has withdrawn safe passage through their territory. As you know they don't claim dominance in any of the states but they have one or more clubs in most states. It makes it almost impossible for my club to fulfil our contracts. It started with the PRMC in Phoenix denyin' us passage through their territory about ten years ago. We honoured their decision and found other routes. Unfortunately we now find ourselves unable to use several routes up the West Coast. Where possible we've been handin' cargo over to support clubs but we need to cover parts of the route ourselves. Your club, along with the Devil's Spawn are the dominants on the West Coast, if you grant us safe passage the PRMC *has* to let us ride through. You give us this and we'll not only owe you a marker, we'll give you half the proceeds of our next cargo."

Saint finished his little speech but didn't relax and neither did his VP. They waited for Maniac's reaction.

"Why did the PRMC deny you safe passage?" He asked quietly.

Saint shrugged and shook his head, his eyes stayed level with Maniac's. He didn't do the usual eyes sliding away and back that liars were known for.

"I don't know, Prez. Several calls went unanswered and eventually we were told it was a done deal. Voted on by the club. Our National President reached out to theirs but he was told it was a club issue and nothin' could be done about it."

Stroking his goatee Maniac stared at Saint. "Wasn't that around the time your old lady and son disappeared?"

Saint's face lost all colour as he nodded.

"You find any leads?"

He shook his head. Beside him his VP listened intently.

"I heard you had her raped and beaten to death, beat up your kid, then had the bodies dumped in the desert. Leavin' it to the predators to take care of what was left."

Saint looked shocked and shook his head violently.

"No, no, I did not. I banished her and they were alive when I sent them back to her father."

It hit Lucky in the gut that the fucker hadn't denied she'd been raped. Just that she and her child had been alive.

"Prez." Case interrupted before Saint could say more.

"The disappearance of Saint's old lady and child has nothin' to do with our business here today. All we're askin' for is safe passage through your territory. Passage we will pay for, gladly."

Maniac took his time before replying. "You know I have to take this to the table. I can't say yes without talkin' to my

brothers.”

“We understand and it’s all we ask, that you at least consider our request and offer of payment.” Case replied.

Slapping a hand on the table Maniac stood. “I’ll take your request to the table and let you know the outcome.”

Both men instantly stood and reached hands across the table, shaking with their prez.

“Thank you, Prez. We’ll wait to hear from you.” Saint said before they walked out.

“What do you think, Prez?” Jonno asked quietly.

“Don’t know, brother. I’ll be callin’ the presidents in for a meet and take it from there. We’ll do that shit virtually, not havin’ everyone ride to Savannah for this shit.”

Lucky and Dive looked at each other, this was one time neither one of them could predict the outcome.

It didn’t seem like a big deal, allowing the Reapers to ride through Wraiths territory. Not that it was up to either of them, it would be a decision made at National.

They once again escorted their president to his ride and this time there were no interruptions.

They rode to the campground, keeping a sharp eye out for the Grave Robbers.

In the end they stayed in Vegas for an entire week instead of the three days they had initially planned on spending there.

Maniac held the virtual meet with the other chapter presidents and got the Reapers what they wanted. Safe passage up the West Coast held territories of the Shadow Wraiths MC

and an agreement for the same from the Demon's Spawn MC. Lucky had no idea what this would mean for the club. What would the Psycho Raiders MC reaction be to the decision? And were they now in an alliance with the Reapers or was it business only? Their boss hadn't said. He would most probably discuss it with the club once they got home.

In the end they had been away from home for close to three weeks.

The ride home hadn't been as trouble free as the ride to Vegas. A day out of Vegas Dive had engine trouble and they had to book into a motel for two days while his bike was being repaired. Maniac didn't want to leave anyone behind so they waited for the repair. The next one to have trouble was one of the newer patches, Charmer. Two days after they left the motel he crashed after his rear wheel mysteriously seized. Maniac ordered his bike loaded into one of the trucks to be examined at their garage back in Savannah. The brother broke an arm and had a concussion which kept him in hospital for three days.

Again they waited for him to be discharged, loaded him in the truck, and once again took to the road.

Maniac was certain their bikes were being sabotaged and ordered a watch of four brothers every night.

Everyone was on high alert and the rest of the trip went down without any further incidents. It confirmed Maniac's suspicion. They were being targeted. It was almost certain it was the Grave Robbers.

Lucky was damned glad to finally ride into the compound. They were home, and all he wanted was a beer, a shower and

sleep.

He got the beer and shower but not the sleep.

They were called into church within hours of getting back.

FIVE

Joney / Harper

Johannesburg, South Africa

I sat in my room in Asa's huge house staring at my reflection in the mirror.

My long pale blonde hair was no more. It was shorter and a vibrant pink. I had wanted to shave the sides but Asa vetoed it. He said the regrowth would be too noticeable and he was right.

I've always wanted to shave the sides and do Viking braids... oh well. I could always do it sometime in the future.

If I survived.

Shaking my head to dislodge the crappy thought I ran my fingers through my hair. It actually looked and felt good, really, really good. The stylist had given me a full fringe ending right above my eyebrows and left the rest one length, blunt cut at the ends. To complete the look my eyebrows and eyelashes were tinted light brown. It made my pale blue eyes stand out but it was easily toned down with contact lenses. Marion, the stylist, suggested going deep blue or green as it wouldn't look fake with my skin tone.

I, of course, went for a vibrant amethyst purple that popped with my pink hair. It would be obvious I was wearing coloured contacts but it played right into the persona we were creating.

I was going all out to look like a tattooed Goth chick with heavy make-up to complete the picture.

Almost overnight my bump had popped out and it was impossible to hide that I was pregnant.

I had to tell Asa my story and he was worried about me coming up against Lucky in Savannah if I left before the baby was born. He was solidly on the side of having the baby before leaving.

I reassured him, telling him I would be careful but Asa wasn't budging.

There was no way I could let Asa or the guys see how nervous the thought of going to Savannah made me. So, I shoved it to the back of my mind and concentrated on the here and now.

I focused on clothes and shoes.

Marion and I had gone on an on-line buying spree and every time I wanted to buy from cheaper stores she threatened me with telling Asa. Apparently he had given her strict instructions to only buy the best.

We didn't buy too much as neither one of us knew how big my belly was going to become.

Most days I walked around in my black Docs. And when I told Asa how incredibly comfortable they were to work in he insisted on buying more. I bought a white pair that had roses and a viper curled around them on the sides, a black pair with red splashes all over them, a purple pair, and a bright pink pair. To the haul I added Goth boots with loads of buckles down the sides and chains around the ankles. They had chunky heels and

a bit of a platform and pushed my height from five ten to six foot two. I loved it.

I strutted around the house wearing my new shoes in. My guards grinned every time they saw me and my belly come stomping past.

As a precaution Asa locked my jewellery in a small steel box and kept it in his safe. He replaced it with jewellery he said was more appropriate. It was way more expensive than my own and completely different in style. I liked it though, everything from the skull ring to the little dagger earrings were stunning.

While I had been busy with all of that I had secretly been looking forward to the day I would be getting my new name.

And today was the day.

Asa had been very secretive, saying he would sort it out. Too bad for him. I wanted some input in choosing my name and made a list of favourites. I was relaxing on the couch going over my list when Liam walked into the room.

“Boss wants to see you, girlie.” He said with a wink.

All of them had stopped using my name, calling me girlie instead.

All the guys were in the office with Asa. Pointing to the chair in front of his desk he waited for me to sit before he spoke.

“We have everything in line for your new identity documents. Would you like to know the name we’ve chosen for you?” The sneaky bastard grinned and winked at me.

I glared at him while waving my list in the air.

“But I have a list of names I like.” I complained.

He shook his head with a wide grin while the others sniggered.

The bastards, I just knew I wasn't going to like the name they chose.

“Your new name is...Izelle Marais.”

I pulled a nasty face.

“Are you serious? That's an Afrikaans name and surname. I can't speak the language properly and my accent is terrible. There's no way I can pull it off.”

“No one in Savannah is going to speak Afrikaans to you. What better way to hide you. If the fuckers check they're going to see the name and because they know you don't speak the language they'll ignore it. It's the perfect smokescreen to hide behind.” He explained reasonably.

I didn't like it but I had to admit he was sort of right.

The glint in his eyes let me know he found my reaction funny. The ass.

“Pixie will be putting your fake profile on her Joburg studio's website. When the time is right she'll let it be known you're transferring to the States to work at the studio in Savannah. Dom's guy is already monitoring their systems and will let us know if they attempt to hack it. There was an attempt on the Cape Town studio's servers but it was nothing serious.”

I couldn't stop the shiver running down my spine even if I tried. They were looking for me and I knew they wouldn't stop until they had me back under their control.

“So what are we calling you? Zelly? Izzy? Ellie? Zelly with the Belly?”

Rory’s teasing drew me out of my head.

Those nick names were horrible.

“Those are terrible, I don’t like it. And the name isn’t me, it sounds too fancy. I think I should have a more English sounding name. If you drop the Izelle name I’ll let you pick one of the names on my list.”

Putting my hands together as if praying I pushed out my bottom lip, making a sad face.

“Please, Asa, not that name. It’s awful and it won’t work with my Goth persona.”

He narrowed his beautiful blue eyes, staring at me, most probably trying to see if I was being serious.

I absolutely was.

“Give me your list.”

He held out a hand and I gave it to him.

Putting it on the desk in front of him he picked up a pen and started going through it, scratching out names as he went down the list.

I have to admit it was a bit long. Two pages long.

He circled a name then moved on down the list, turning the paper over and continued scratching out names. Finally he looked up, tapping the pen on the desk.

“I think our girlie has a point. While going through the list I had an idea. Our Goth girl is going to be Irish but obviously

with no connections to me.”

He tapped a circled name.

“You have Delaney here as a name but it’s an Irish surname as well. I think we need a sexy name to go with it. Maybe the name of an old time film star like Harlow.” He tapped the pen a couple of times then wrote something on the paper.

“Harlow Delaney. How does that sound to you?” He asked.

“Harlow Delaney.” I repeated it slowly. “What about Harper Delaney? It seems to fit me better.”

“Harper Delaney, I like the sound of it.” Declan, or Dec as he was called, said. There were nods from the others, even Asa.

The name sounded fantastic.

“I like it. For some reason it feels right, almost as if it should have been the name given to me at birth.” I pulled a face.

“Better than being Izelle, that’s so not me.”

“Girlie, you forget, you can’t be you. You have to be someone completely different.” Liam warned softly.

“I know. I meant the one I am inside my head. The person I’ve been hiding from everyone.”

No one said a word as I drew the paper towards me and traced a finger over my new name.

Picking up the pen I wrote my new name.

Harper.

“I never thought we’d have our very own Harpy.” Rory teased.

The bastards laughed. The assholes.

I hid my grin and carried on practising.

“I think if we shorten it we should stick to Harp. It sounds more affectionate and it sounds more like a tattoo artist’s name.” Asa said.

I had to giggle. “What do you guys know about tattoo artist names?”

He raised his eyebrows and shrugged. “Absolutely nothing, sweetheart, but it sounds better than Harpy. A harpy is a terrible mythological beastie, and you’re no beastie.”

I pulled a disgusted face which made the bastards laugh. After maintaining my disgusted face for a few seconds I caved and joined in the laughter.

While they continued making plans my mind wandered off, something that happened fairly often these days.

Stroking a hand over my tiny bump I wondered how damned big I was going to get. The bump’s daddy was ginormous. It suddenly dawned on me that if my bump grew to gigantic proportions, eventually, when it was done baking, it would have to somehow come out of me.

I almost shoved both hands over my kitty as the thought slammed into my head.

My monster man’s baby would totally wreck the poor thing.

I couldn’t stop the moan even if I tried.

Asa was up out of his chair and around his desk in seconds, crouching in front of me.

“What’s wrong? Do you need a doctor? Talk to me, Harper.” He snapped, using my new name.

Looking down at the gorgeous man crouching at my feet I slowly shook my head from side to side.

“I’m fine. I just scared myself with thoughts of...of when this tiny bump turns into a freaking massive bump and...and... has to come out. This is the first time I’ve thought about that part and now I’m worried about my poor kitty. She’s never going to be the same again.” I lamented on a wail.

Asa had a hand over his mouth and I knew behind it the bastard was trying hard not to laugh.

“Sweetheart, women do this every single day and I’ve never heard a man complaining about his woman’s pussy once the baby was born.” Asa said soothingly.

Dec raised a hand as he slowly shook his head. “Except Robbie Williams, he said watching his woman give birth was like watching his favourite pub burn down.”

“My cousin said sex afterwards was like pushing a sausage into a train tunnel,” Finn said with a sly grin.

All of them laughed uproariously but calmed a bit when they saw my horrified face.

“My kitty is going to be like a...a...a train tunnel?” I asked, totally horrified.

I shook my head rapidly, my lips clamped down.

“Nope, not mine, I refuse, I’ll be doing kegels every single second of every day. No way am I ending up with a train tunnel for a kitty. Not for all the tea in China.”

“What the fuck are kegels?” Brendan muttered.

“No idea, sounds like some kind of fancy exercise routine.”
Rory answered with a shrug.

“Babe, my cousin is a dick.” Finn tried to reassure me. “His baby mamma kicked him to the curb shortly after Sammy was born. He was most probably lying to take the attention away from how much of a dick he was and still is.”

Too late. In my head all I could see was a gaping train tunnel, big, dark and scary.

Narrowing my eyes I concentrated on doing deep kegels, no better time to start than right now.

“What are you thinking?” Aidan asked as he leant over, staring at my face.

“Not thinking, doing. Doing my kegels, right the hell now.” I muttered.

“But you’re not moving.” He looked totally confused as did most of the others.

Not Asa though.

“Fuck, you guys need to get with the times. Kegels are exercises a woman does to keep her vagina tight. It happens inside her body, you can’t see when they do it.” He grinned. “But you will definitely enjoy the results.”

“I need to google that shit.” Aidan pulled out his phone and started tapping away.

And there I sat, surrounded by a group of gorgeous badass men googling kegels. Was it a bit weird? I suppose so, but I wasn’t embarrassed or offended. They were like a bunch of intrusive brothers, always up in your business.

Asa stood, patted my leg and went back to lounging in his chair. Shaking his head at his friends he gave me a grin and a wink. Ever since he smuggled me out of Cape Town we've been growing closer, becoming friends. Friends, because we weren't attracted to each other. I wasn't blind, the man was incredibly gorgeous but we didn't have that spark between us. Without the spark we were good friends and that was more than enough for me.

I have always found it easier to befriend guys, they didn't ask as many questions as women did.

Until Rider.

Unlike most men, he had insisted on being told everything when we became friends. Most women were the same, when they became your friend they wanted to know every single detail of your life.

I didn't trust easily therefore it was something I couldn't give those who had tried to befriend me.

That was why I didn't have any girlfriends.

Pixie was my first.

She had shoved her way past my walls and did the unthinkable, became my friend without asking intrusive questions.

Before her I had always made sure not to get too close to people just in case my family found me.

And now they have.

"Do you think Pixie is safe?" I asked softly.

“Absolutely. There’s no way Dom or Remy will allow anyone to get near her. I can assure you she has protection on her every single second of every day. The same with Dom’s wife and kid.”

Leaning towards me Liam put a hand on top of my clenched ones and squeezed softly.

“Stop worrying, they’re all safe. The fuckers are no longer in Cape Town anyway, they’re back here.”

My body turned into a frozen statue and my eyes snapped up, meeting Asa’s. He lounged in his big chair, totally relaxed.

“We have eyes on them, sweetheart. We’ll know if they become a problem, and I can assure you we won’t allow them to get close. Relax, we don’t want you stressed, it’s bad for the baby.” His voice was a low rumble, soothing my fear.

The man was super potent. He was going to make some woman very happy one day.

Tapping the fingers of one hand on the desk he instantly had the attention of his men.

“Put away your phones and let’s get to business.”

His entire demeanour had changed.

It was the Boss of the Irish mafia sitting in front of me now. Everything about him was different, even the blue of his eyes seemed to have become darker.

“I spoke to Maniac last night and the refurbishing of the studio is going well. He estimates it will be ready to open in about 8 to 10 weeks. It gives us time to get Harper’s new identity ready. I’m not expecting any problems because her

paperwork will be flawless. Pixie is sticking to her original plan to send Zane and Killian out there. We'll re-evaluate as Harper's pregnancy progresses and she won't be flying anywhere during the last two months. It would be too dangerous for both her and the baby. I'd rather she had the baby here where we can control the situation than in Savannah where we have to depend on others."

It felt like a huge block of granite fell from my shoulders. I hadn't realised how worried I'd been about having my baby in the US.

"I'd prefer to have the baby here as well." I said softly. "I don't want to do this alone."

The faces around me showed sympathy and concern.

"You won't be alone, Harp. I'll be there and I'm sure there's no damned way they'll keep Rider out of the room. The brother is going to be right there, holding your hand." Asa grinned. "I, on the other hand, will be outside in the waiting room. Where I will wait on news."

Laughter rang out and I joined in.

"There's something else we need to discuss." Asa said, he no longer grinning.

There was no sign of the laughter now.

"Harper and the baby will need a bodyguard when they go to Savannah. He will need to get to know her, live in the house with us until they leave. It means he has to be someone we trust, one of our own, but I want a deep background check done on him. I'm not leaving any stones unturned, or taking

any chances with her life. I want it done before he's introduced to Harper. We need to be sure he is who he says he is."

They were all frowning, obviously thinking about the bodyguard situation. I was about to tell them I didn't need a bodyguard when Brendan spoke up.

"I'll go."

Heads snapped towards him and he raised his hands to stop the protests.

"Hear me out. I've got the training and hired out as a bodyguard before joining your crew. I'm new, no one knows I work for you. I go with Harper, make sure she's settled and stay as long as needed. We can fabricate a story, saying Pixie wants her to have a bodyguard because she's alone with a baby and hired me through her husband's company. It makes it easier, and safer, than hiring someone we don't know."

"What about reconciling with the family in Ireland?" Rory snapped at him.

Brendan's face went from relaxed to furious in an instant.

"What about our family, Rory? Fuck them, they should have asked *me* what happened before they took Sinead's side, believing the fucked up lies she told them. Why do you think I walked away and joined the fucking Irish mafia? I'll tell you why, it's because I no longer give a shite about my father's so-called plans for me. They turned their backs on me when I needed them to believe in me. I'm done with them and their bullshit elitist crap."

He pointed at Asa then glanced at the men around him.

“That man over there, and all of you, were the only ones who believed me when I said I never fucking touched her. Believed me when I said I’ve never in my life done drugs. Why would I care about a family who takes the word of a slut over mine, Rory?”

Fury burned in his grey-blue eyes.

Rory raised both hands. “Sorry cuz, I was being an ass, testing you to see if you were really ready for this.”

“You’re the only one in the entire O’Connor clan who still speaks to me, the rest are dead to me.” Brendan said as he crossed his arms over his chest. Visibly done with the conversation.

“Okay, I agree with Bren, he’s the best option.” Rory glanced at his cousin as he spoke, worry clear in his eyes.

I slowly raised my hand.

“If I have a say in who goes with me, then I pick Bren. I like him and he’s fun to chat to.” I smiled at the man. “Plus he has virgin skin and I called dibs. I want to be the first to put ink on him so he has to come with me.”

“Jayzuz woman, I told you, I’m no’ gettin’ a tattoo.” Bren growled at me. His Irish accent was suddenly very apparent.

I winked and smiled. “Wait until you see what I’ve designed for you. You’re going to love it.”

Bren hid a smile as he shook his head.

I was so going to put my art on his skin. I so was.

“Right, we have a solution. Bren goes to the States with Harper and little bump while we sort out the situation here.”

Asa said.

“What are you going to do about the Salvatores?”

I didn't call them my family, because they weren't family, hadn't been since they first put their hands on me.

Asa smiled. It wasn't a nice smile; it was the smile of a predator.

“You don't need to know the details, sweetheart. All you need to know is that they will never bother you again.”

“As long as you swear they will suffer before they die.”

“You have it. I swear they will not go easy.”

Asa's eyes were on mine and filled with dark intent. The bastards would not be dying easy and that pleased me. A lot. I never knew I could be so bloodthirsty. I was more used to being afraid. But not anymore, not with Asa and the guys protecting me.

“Thank you.”

There was nothing more I could say to convey my gratitude and for them it seemed to be enough. They didn't want, or expect, more than that.

I was happy at Asa's compound and felt safe.

So incredibly safe that I've been sleeping through the night. Something I haven't done in years. I silently hoped it would continue once we reached Savannah.

I wasn't betting on it though. I would be plenty stressed once we got there.

Just the thought of being in his city made my heart gallop like an out of control horse.

SIX

Lucky

Sitting at his desk Lucky gave a pissed off growl and slapped his laptop closed.

“What’s the matter bro?” Dive looked up, a concerned look on his face.

“I’m so fucked.” Lucky growled. He had to tell someone or he was going to go out of his fucking mind.

Dive pushed his laptop away and leant forward. “What can I do to help?”

Lucky shook his head. There was nothing his brother could do for him, except maybe listen and help him find a solution to his problem.

“There’s nothin’ you can do, brother, absolutely nothin’. Met a woman in Cape Town, laid it out for her, tellin’ her us havin’ sex wasn’t the start of anythin’. Told her once we were done, we were *done*. I wouldn’t be contactin’ her again, there would be no calls, no messages, no visits, nothin’.” He shook his head. “Was so up my own ass, thinkin’ I could fuck her and walk away, like I always do, but fuck, brother, I was so fuckin’ wrong. I’ve got it bad, there’s this constant cravin’ to hear her voice, smell her skin, her hair, to touch her. It’s fucked up. On top of sayin’ all that shit to her I knew she was someone I shouldn’t have touched. She’s special and shouldn’t be dragged into my fucked up life.”

He fell silent, not knowing what else to say.

“And now? You sayin’ you crave her, are you thinkin’ she’s someone you might want to get to know better?” Dive asked.

Lucky’s answer was a slight chin lift.

“If you want her you’re goin’ to have to reach out, brother. You have to know somethin’ about her to be able to find her. Take what you’ve got to Byte and find your woman. Easy.” Dive said with a shrug while watching him intently.

“I don’t need Byte to find her, I know where she’s at. She works for Remy’s woman, one of her tattoo artists.”

Dive widened in shock then he jerked back and pointed a finger at him.

“You tellin’ me you fucked one of Pixie’s people and then dumped her? Jesus, your brother is goin’ to kill you when this comes out. What you goin’ to do?”

“I didn’t fuckin’ dump her. We had an agreement. One night only, but it was so fuckin’ good it turned into two. Two fuckin’ amazin’ nights with a woman who fits me perfectly, and is so fuckin’ beautiful inside and out she blew my mind.” Lucky explained snappily.

Dive suddenly threw up a hand, silencing him.

“Waaaaait a minute. I know who you’re talkin’ about. You tellin’ me you fucked the gorgeous blonde and walked away? Are you fuckin’ crazy? What’s her name again?” He tapped the side of his head as he tried to remember.

“Joney.” Lucky growled.

“Fuck, yeah, that’s the one. You’re right brother, she’s one of the most beautiful women I’ve ever seen. And you got in there? How the fuck did your ugly ass manage that? She turned everyone down the last time we were there. And your dumb ass walked away from her?”

Dive was leaning forward on his desk as he waited for Lucky to explain. Not that he was going to. What happened was between him and Jo-Jo was theirs and only theirs.

“She’s a good woman. Wasn’t goin’ to go there but one thing led to another and...” He shrugged.

“And now you can’t get her outta your head. Right?”

“Yeah. It gets worse. Can’t fuck anyone unless I imagine it’s her, and that’s not fuckin’ easy to do. It has to be dark so I can’t see them and I don’t want them touchin’ me. I also don’t kiss or go down on them. Not many bitches are comfortable takin’ me on with those conditions. I stopped tryin’ a couple of weeks ago.”

His brother’s eyes went wide with shock and he shook his head as if he couldn’t believe what he had heard.

He tilted his head as he stared at Lucky, his mouth hanging open. He snapped it shut and pointed a finger at him.

“Hang on, you tellin’ me this is what you’ve had to do to get off since you got back? That’s like five months, right? Fuuuuuck.”

Lucky had to smile at the look of horror on Dive’s face.

“Not the end of the world, bro. I still have my hand and it works fine.”

Dive pointed a finger down towards his dick. “What about blowjobs? Are you able to keep it up to get one of those?”

Lucky slowly shook his head from side to side.

“To keep it up I have to close my eyes and not look at the bitch or I lose it every time. I’m tellin’ you I’ve not fucked like I used to since I’ve had her. Every time I think I can do it but the minute I see it’s not her...I’m done. It’s not lookin’ good for me, bro.”

Dive’s eyes narrowed as he gave a slow nod, then sat back crossing his arms over his chest.

“That leaves us with only one thing to do. Call your woman and tell her to get her ass over here. Like Ren said to me once, if it knocks on your door do not turn it away. You’ll regret it bitterly.” He shrugged. “It’s knockin’ on your door, brother.”

Lucky frowned in confusion, what the fuck was he talking about?

“What? When what knocks on your door? I don’t get it.”

Dive grinned evilly and winked.

“A word that starts with an L and ends in an E, brother. You know what I’m talkin’ about.”

Lucky snorted through his nose. His brother was being ridiculous.

“I’m not in love motherfucker. I like the woman, a lot, but I don’t know her well enough to say the fuckin’ L word.”

“We’ll see.” Dive grinned as he leaned back in his chair.

Lucky started levering himself out of his chair to smack the grin off his face when both their phones buzzed. He leant

forward and tapped it to see the text.

Church. Now.

Instantly their minds were on business.

“You think it has somethin’ to do with what went down in Vegas?” Dive asked as they walked down to their chapel.

“No idea.”

Two hours later he was wishing he had been prepared for the shit that was being piled on his shoulders. He sat frozen for what felt like several minutes, unable to say a word. He wanted to turn his prez down, but in all honesty, he couldn’t. As far as his club knew he was single, wasn’t involved with anyone in any way. The job he’d been asked to do sucked ass, big time. Before Joney he would’ve done it without thinking twice. Had done it, fucked bitches for information, and when he got what the club needed walked away. Not feeling a thing, with no remorse or second thoughts. But somehow this time he felt different about it.

Getting cozy with a cartel bitch was the last thing he wanted to do.

But Maniac was the president and he trusted Lucky to get the job done. Fuck.

He had to share how far he was prepared to go, which wasn’t far enough with the game they were about to play. Once he laid it out he had to trust his prez and brothers would get where he was coming from.

“Prez, I’m not tryin’ to be difficult but you need to know exactly where I stand with this shit. I’m not fuckin’ her. The bitch is cartel, she’s as dirty as the men in her family. There’s

no way she doesn't know they kidnap and abuse women and children and sell them into sex slavery. No way am I stickin' my dick in that. I do not fuck filthy gash, never have, and I'm not gonna start now."

He glared at his sniggering and laughing brothers.

"Don't give a fuck about us needin' the information, I'm not fuckin' her for it. You need that to happen, you're gonna have to get one of these fuckin' laughin' assholes to do it."

He was pissed at the laughter and he let them all know it. His prez included.

"Calm the fuck down, Lucky." Maniac snapped. "I'm not sayin' you *have* to fuck her. I'm sayin' charm the bitch, lead her around by her fuckin' slit and get us what we want. She's goin' to try to get you to spill our secrets and you know she'll use sex to get what she wants."

Dropping his head back he stared at the ceiling before he once again looked at his president. Maniac was staring at him with those fucking cold eyes of his but this time it didn't make him uncomfortable. It pissed him off.

Before he could answer Dive opened his big fucking mouth.

"He's not goin' to fuck the gash, Boss, not when he's got it bad for another woman." Dive said quietly. "Left her behind in SA, but our man Lucky has fallen hard. He hasn't been fuckin' the club whores since he got back and has only fucked a bit of strange here and there. It's goin' to be difficult for him to do the job you want him to do. When he says he's not fuckin' her I can guaran-damn-tee he's not goin' to fuck her."

Maniac's eyes shot from Dive to him, glaring at him through narrowed eyes.

“What the fuck, Lucky? Why the fuck didn't you say somethin'? I won't ever give a man who has a woman this kind of job. You tryin' to make me look like a fuckin' asshole?”

Lucky shook his head and held up both hands trying to calm his prez down.

“Prez, that's not how it is, she's not mine. Haven't claimed her or been in contact since I got back and it's been months. I've no fuckin' idea what's goin' to happen with her, as far as I'm concerned I'm still single. I can do the job, have done this shit before, only this time I won't be fuckin' the bitch. She's actually worse than gash, dirty as fuck, even if it's just by association.”

Support came from an unexpected quarter.

“I agree with Lucky, Prez.” Ren said quietly. “The bitch is cartel gash, and like he says, dirty as fuck. I for one don't expect my brother to put his dick on the line for the club. Think about it this way, she's goin' to think bikers fuck anythin' that moves and expect to get the same from our brother. She'd think he was an easy mark. Lucky will prove to be different. It will draw the slut in and make her vulnerable. When she falls for our brother she can be manipulated.”

“Ren has a point.” Grave sat pulling on his ear, his eyes sharp as he looked at his sons.

Both had come out in support of Lucky, and he wouldn't forget they had had his back when he needed them.

“So what the fuck do we do? He’s our ace in the hole, always has been with that fuckin’ Cajun charm and accent. Bitches fall all over themselves to get to him. The cartel bitch won’t be any different.” Maniac glared at him.

All Lucky could do was shrug. His president sighed then gave a decisive nod.

“Okay. Seduce the bitch. You don’t have to give her your dick, that’s not a requirement. We need to know what the fuck they’re planning so we’re prepared.”

He suddenly paused, his elbow on the desk, pointer finger waving in the air he gave them an evil smile.

“Actually, now that I’m thinkin’ on it, you need to drag it out. Lead the bitch on, get her well and truly hooked. Take her out, bring her to parties, do your thing around her, but don’t fuck her. She’s goin’ to get desperate to get on your dick. Let’s see how long she lasts before she starts demandin’ that you give it to her. I’m thinkin’ you can get her talkin’ before it gets too uncomfortable for you.”

Fuck.

For a minute there he had thought he wouldn’t have to spend time with the filthy slut. He’s been given a job to do and the quicker he got it done the quicker he could get rid of her.

The next few weeks were going to be fucking awful.

Walking out of church he went straight to the bar and parked his ass on a chair.

“Beer.” He barked at the prospect.

The little bastard ran to put his beer on the bar in front of him. Twisting the cap off, he tipped it up and drank deep. The cold malty goodness flowed down his throat, taking the dryness that had settled in his mouth and throat with it. Running over his prez's orders in his mind he knew he had to ensure his back was covered. He wasn't going to go in blind, was going to put surveillance on the bitch first. No way was he swinging his ass out there for the cartel to target him and his family once he walked away from the bitch.

He'll have to be fucking careful to ensure no attention fell on them.

His parents didn't live in Savannah but Frankie, his sister, did. She would be vulnerable if shit with the bitch and the cartel went sideways. He'd have to arrange for a brother to watch over her. It would have to be someone he trusted, someone strong enough to resist her usual bullshit. She was a tough woman, had survived a vicious marriage and divorce and was finally happy again. He didn't want to fuck with that.

"What you thinkin' about, brother?" Magic asked as he sat down next to him, taking the beer the prospect handed him.

"My sister. She's goin' to need someone to watch her back. Don't want to leave her unprotected with the crap that's goin' to go down."

"I'll do it." Bruiser said as he slapped his back and sat down next to him. "I like Frankie, she's a good woman, a bit of a ball buster, but still a good woman. And she's gorgeous."

Lucky glared at him. "You been checkin' my sister out, fucker?"

“She shot me down, brother. Said I was still wet behind the ears and she ain’t playin’ with little boys. She’s fuckin’ fantastic.” He said with a grin and a half shrug

“*Merde* (shit), she’s goin’ to fuck with your head, Bruiser. You be careful around her, my sister likes playin’ head games. She’ll have you tied in so many fuckin’ knots you’ll never get it undone.” Lucky warned.

The stupid fuck just grinned and wiggled his eyebrows.

Lucky shook his head, if the fucker wanted to go there he had to learn the hard way.

And Frankie was definitely the hard way.

He would keep an eye on the brother and extract the poor fuck when the time came.

“Fine. You’ve got it. I’ll let you know when you start.”

Bruiser grinned wide, like he’d won the fucking lottery.
“Thanks bro.”

Lucky shook his head at the poor fuck and went back to drinking his beer.

He didn’t have the time or the patience to worry about Bruiser right now, he had his own worries to deal with.

SEVEN

Harper / Joney

I stood in front of the bathroom mirror, naked, twisting from side to side. My little bump wasn't so little anymore. I had a week to go to my six month check point. I sighed as I caught sight of my bum. It was definitely spreading. Shrugging I cupped my boobs and grinned. Those babies were getting bigger and bigger. They looked fabulous, even if I had to say so myself. I've noticed the guys sneaking looks when I wore a low cut shirt. Typical male.

My body was changing, changing to accommodate my little travel companion, and getting ready for when he or she was done baking. I had a lot of questions, but not having a mother or a friend I could ask, I kept them for when the doctor came to see me.

I couldn't ask Pixie because I've not spilled the beans about being pregnant, and I couldn't ask Nika because she would tell Pixie who would tell Remy and so on and so on.

I've not stepped foot outside the gates of the compound since I arrived almost three months ago.

Asa was being very careful with my safety.

He allowed me to talk to Pixie but calls only, no video chats. Rider and Miss Squirrel were the only ones he allowed to have video chats. And only because little miss diva insisted on it.

I pushed the two of them from my thought because I didn't want to think about them while I was naked. It would be icky.

I finished putting cream on my body and got dressed. I wasn't so successful at not thinking about them once I was dressed.

My best friend was pissed at me.

So very, very pissed.

Earlier tonight, after chatting and reading a book with my squirrel until she fell asleep, I finally told him everything.

And when I say everything that's exactly what I mean.

Everything.

I told him my real name. Told him about my family being criminals and why I was hiding from them.

He was furious about so many of the things I told him. Furious that my presence in their lives endangered Delene. Furious that I hadn't warned him. Furious that I had suffered at the hands of my own brother. Furious that I hadn't felt safe enough to take him into my confidence. Furious that I was relying on Asa to keep me safe and not him and his club.

Thankfully his fury burnt hard and fast and then burnt out.

Once he got over it and accepted I needed to be safe but at the same time not endanger those I cared about, we talked some more. And then I made the mistake of telling him I was leaving the country to escape from my sick family.

He once again exploded.

I suppose I should have stopped there with the revelations. Stopped and waited for a better time to tell him I was

pregnant.

I didn't. I had felt almost compelled to come clean, to tell him everything.

To say my best friend wasn't pleased was putting it mildly.

"Who the fuck is he and why isn't he with you?" He demanded.

My shrug did not go over well.

"You better tell me who the motherfucker is before I get on my fucking bike, Joney. You know I will." He threatened.

I knew him well, knew he would make good on the threat.

"Rider, please, I can't tell you. Not yet anyway. I swear once I get to where I'm going I'll tell you." I tried to placate him.

"Not happening. You're not doing this shit alone. I'm calling Chris and Scar to come over and watch Delene then I'm on my bike. You tell that Asa fucker I'm on my way and he'd better see to it that they open the gates when I get there. If they don't there will be hell to pay. I'm not joking, Joney, you know me, you know I mean what I say. You're. Not. Doing. This. Alone."

Oh shit. The mood he was in he would do exactly what he was threatening to do. My bestie was not to be crossed when he got a bit rage-y.

"Rider, please, please don't, don't come here. They're watching Asa's compound. If they see you the bastards will start to wonder why you're here, and what you have going on with Asa. It will put you and Delene on their radar and I don't want that to happen."

His answer came almost instantly.

“If you don’t want me there you tell me what I want to know. Who the fuck is he?”

Closing my eyes I drew in a deep breath and whispered his name. Whispered because since he left I have avoided saying his name out loud.

“Lucky.”

If I thought Rider was angry before I was wrong. It was like he turned into a raging animal.

“Motherfucking bastard. Pretending to be my fucking friend so he can get to a woman who means the fucking world to me and my baby girl. When I get my hands on that overgrown gorilla I’m going to kill him. With my bare fucking hands!”

As he raged my eyes widened and my mouth dropped open. Never, in all the time I’ve known him, have I seen Rider loose it. And right now he has definitely lost it. I’ve never heard him swear as much as he was doing right now.

“Rider!” I called out trying to get his attention.

I had to do it more than once before he looked at me. His hard brown eyes met mine through the screen, his nostrils were flared and he was breathing heavily. His cheekbones were tinged red his lips clamped in a thin tight line, his jaw bulging with how he was gritting his teeth.

He looked alive, involved, in the present, something that has been missing since the very first time I met him. His rage made him come alive the way his love for Delene did. In a way it was awesome to see, but in another it was scary as hell.

“Tell me why that motherfucker isn’t here protecting you. Keeping you and your child safe.”

I bit my bottom lip. I had hoped he wouldn’t ask, but I should have known he would. He was an overprotective biker and obviously expected Lucky to be the same.

I tried to make it seem as if I was okay when I really wasn’t.

“When he left he made me swear I wouldn’t contact him. We had two nights, that’s it. He didn’t want more and I agreed to his rules. Uhm...I suppose if I wanted to reach out I could, through his club or through Remy. But I...I’m scared. He was very insistent, didn’t want any contact with me once we were done. Told me that if he was ever in the country he wouldn’t look me up. I’m scared to tell him I got pregnant. It was an accident. I swear I was on birth control, Rider. I didn’t trick him or any of that sick shit some bitches pull. It just happened.”

I watched as the crazy slowly receded out of his eyes, becoming the soft brown I was used to seeing.

“Fuck, sweetheart, this is so damned fucked up. This entire situation is fucked up and you being pregnant just makes it so much worse.” He was silent for a minute or two.

Looking down at his hands then at something that was out of the camera’s view.

When he looked back his face was set in hard lines and there was determination in his eyes.

“I’ll do it. I’ll look after you. You and the baby. Don’t go to the States where you have no one. Stay here, stay with us, with Delene and me. We’ll be a family, your family.”

Sadness filled my heart along with so much love for one of the best humans in the world.

“You’re the best man I’ve ever had the honour to meet. I wish I had fallen in love with you instead of...”

He didn’t let me finish.

“Bullshit. I’m not a good man, but what I am is a man who cares about you and your baby. You’ll be safe here with us. The club will protect...”

This time I was the one who didn’t let him finish.

“No. I’m not bringing my troubles to your door or to the club’s door. I need to know you and Delene are safe, that my brother can’t get to either of you. If I stayed with you he will come for me, and you or Delene could get hurt. I can’t let that happen. I’m leaving the country but I won’t be gone for ever. There are things going on with Asa that I can’t talk about. All I can say is that when it’s safe to do so I’ll come back home.”

He watched me while frowning heavily then slowly nodded. His eyes were intense as he laid it out for me.

“Okay. I get it. I need you to understand something though. Nothing is going to stop me from being with you when Junior arrives. You won’t be alone because I’ll be there holding your hand. Do you get me, Joney?”

I nodded, because I did, get him that is, but I also felt relief that I would have him with me when the time came. I’ve been dreading doing it alone.

“Uhm...there’s something else I need to tell you.”

“What the fuck now.” He snapped in obvious exasperation.

“I had to get a new name. It’s Harper Delaney.”

His head tilted to the side and then he smiled. Such a beautiful warm smile.

Damn, I really wish I loved him the way a woman loved a man, but I didn’t. I loved him the way a sister loved a brother. He was that for me, my best friend and my brother.

“It suits you. Harper Delaney, I like it.” He said, drawing my attention back to him.

“Me too, it sort of feels right, as if it should have been my name all along.”

“It’s a cool name, sweetheart. Don’t worry about your squirrel and the new name. I’ll sort it this side. Now that I know you better keep me in the loop every step of the way. How far along are you?”

Dropping my hand to my little bump I grinned.

“I’ll be six months on the first of July.”

Instantly his eyes narrowed, he gritted his teeth and dropped his head. I waited, holding my breath.

“Okay, okay, fuck, I can handle this.” He muttered before drawing in a deep breath and lifting his head to look at me. He tried to hide it but there were demons in his eyes. I knew where they came from and my heart ached for him.

“I want an update after every single one your doctor’s visits. And I want a copy of the ultrasound pics. Send them to my phone the minute we’re done here. Do you know if it’s a boy or a girl?”

“I’ll send them to you, and no, I don’t know. Maybe next time I have a check-up I’ll ask, I don’t know, I sort of want it to be a surprise but we’ll see.”

On the one hand I wanted to know but on the other I wanted it to be a surprise, just the way his or her arrival inside me had been a surprise.

“Sweetheart, don’t do it if you don’t feel it. Let it be the surprise life laid in your lap. I’ll make sure we have enough shit for either sex. Fuck, Delene is going to be beside herself when she finds out.” He nodded towards where my little bump was hidden.

“Now, *show* me.”

It was an order. He wasn’t asking.

My tablet was sitting in a little stand on my dressing table, so all I had to do was stand and lift the big t-shirt I was wearing. I watched as his hand covered the bottom half of his face and his brown eyes started glistening. Blinking a couple of times he smiled. It was the most beautiful smile.

“That is so fucking beautiful, sweetheart. Thank you for sharing it with me, for letting me see you like this. It’s a fucking honour to be so trusted. When is your due date?”

My own eyes were burning with unshed tears and I had to swallow before I could answer him.

“The twenty fourth of September.” I grinned. “It’s a little funny because it’s Human Rights day.”

The grin faded slowly.

“I’m so blessed to have you and Delene in my life, Rider. Thank you for seeing me, the real me, for being my friend and helping me find my way. Without you I would have been lost and alone. Thank you for everything, but mostly, thank you for accepting me and now my baby as well. I love you from the bottom of my heart.”

He smiled, warm and beautiful.

“I love you too, Harper. Remember my offer, okay? All you need to do is say the word and you and the little one will have a home with Delene and me. And remember, I’ll be there, right beside you, holding your hand, you have my word.” He blew out a breath. “Now I’m going to say bye before this call becomes a snotfest. Love you and talk to you soon.”

“Love you and my squirrel. Talk to you soon.”

And then he was gone and I had to blink and blink and blink not to burst into tears.

Sitting in my bed with the cushions stacked behind my back I once again went over all we had spoken about. I felt so much better now that I’ve let him into all my secrets. It felt like it had strengthened our friendship, made it more somehow, now that I wasn’t hiding a large part of myself from him any longer.

I thought about his offer. An offer that had taken my breath away because of its absolute generosity.

It once again confirmed that Rider De Ridder was a man in a million. If ever he decided to open his heart again I was going to be right there, making sure the woman he let in was worthy

of him and my squirrel. I wasn't going to allow some bitch to take advantage of his good heart. Not on my watch.

My friend was still grieving Penny and their baby even though they had passed away almost three years ago. Not that I knew anything about grief or how long it was supposed to last. In my mind it lasted as long as the heart wanted it to last, and Rider's heart was still broken. But I wonder if he knew how big of a step forward he had taken tonight by offering me what he did. A year ago he would never have made the offer. I prayed he healed enough to let more people in.

He was a good man who deserved a good life.

A life with a woman who would be a mother to Delene and any other children they decided to have.

He was the type of man who raised good humans, and we always needed more of them.

I was just starting to slide down in my bed and reaching for the light when there was a soft knock and my door opened.

Asa walked in without saying a word and sat down on the side of my bed.

"I just had a call from Hawk Walker. He offered you a safe place at their compound."

Dropping my head back against my cushions I groaned.

"By your reaction I take it you're not surprised."

He patted my leg reassuringly.

I sat up with a sigh.

"I took your advice and told Rider the truth. All of it. He offered us a place in his home. I turned him down. I didn't

expect him to go to Hawk.”

Asa smiled and shook his head.

“You don’t speak badass biker I see. Telling Rider was like waving a red flag at a bull. His protective instincts went into overdrive, most probably made worse by the way he lost his wife and baby. According to Hawk the man is prepared to claim you as his old lady. Did he tell you that?”

I suspected but he hadn’t said it outright. Shaking my head I grabbed Asa’s hand and held on tight.

“I love him but not like that, and I’m not putting him and Delene in danger, no matter what. He has no idea what the men in my family are capable of and I don’t want the two of them on their radar. My brother is a dangerous madman and if he ever found out that Rider and Delene are important to me he will hurt them because it will hurt and devastate me. It can’t happen.”

Asa squeezed my hand and nodded.

“I agree. That’s why I told Hawk thanks but no thanks. I explained some of the shit to him, not all of it, but enough that he understood and agreed. But that’s not the only reason I came to see you.”

I waited as he paused to look around my room.

“I’ve spoken to your doctor earlier while we were making arrangements for you to have the baby at the private clinic where she has her practice. She’s aware that your lives are in danger and suggested that we look at an elective C-section. It means we can plan an exact date so there won’t be any last

minute running around when you go into labour. Does it sound like something you'd want to do?"

I've done my research and knew the pros and cons to having the procedure. If it guarantees the safety of my child I was all for it.

"How sure are we the clinic is safe? If we do it this way I'll have to stay there while I recover from the surgery. Will it be safe?"

He winked at me.

"I'll make damned sure the two of you are safe. You'll have guards on your room and the same with the nursery. We're not going to take any chances."

I nodded. "Okay, I trust you. How are you going to get me to the clinic without anyone taking notice?"

He winked and grinned.

"Easy. In the late afternoon the day before your surgery I will head out with a couple of my men, and the fuckers watching the compound will see a convoy of blacked out vehicles leaving. They'll follow us to Lanseria Airport. We'll have them thinking we're going somewhere when in fact we won't be on the plane they see taking off. It will leave the way clear for Bren to get you to the clinic. I don't want you to worry about a thing; I've got it all under control."

I leaned forward and gave him a hug, holding on tight.

"Thank you for keeping me safe and for everything you've done for me. You didn't have to." I whispered while battling tears.

I've cried more lately than I have in years.

“That’s where you’re wrong. Those motherfuckers are going to pay dearly for what they’ve done to you and all the other women we couldn’t save. They’ll soon cease to exist for you. You and little bump will be safe for the rest of your lives. You have my word on it.”

I knew his word was good. There was no doubt in my mind I would soon be an orphan for real.

I could hardly wait for that day to come.

“Get some sleep sweetheart; tomorrow’s going to be here before you know it. You have your appointment with the doc and she’s going to do an ultrasound. Maybe we get a peek at the business end of baby if we’re lucky.”

He grinned and winked. I rolled my eyes and shook my head at him.

Stroking my hand over my bump I smiled. “I’m not worried about the doc, more excited about seeing my surprise package again.”

Asa smiled, leaned forward and kissed my cheek.

“Good. Go to sleep and I’ll see you in the morning.”

“See you in the morning.” I said softly.

I slid down in the bed and watched as he left and quietly closed the door behind him.

I lay there for a couple of minutes, stroking my belly before I rolled to the side and turned the lamp off.

I slept dreamlessly.

EIGHT

Rider

Staring at the black and white ultrasound image had his heart contracting and sorrow speared like a fiery arrow through his body. He might even have jerked physically the sensation was so real. His son had died before his time, along with his mother, the love of his life. Sorrow and hatred mixed in a hard knot in his gut. He had to breathe deep, several times, before he calmed enough to send Joney, no, Harper, she was Harper now, a message.

Your surprise package is beautiful. I'm with you every step of the way. Love you. R.

It didn't take long for her to reply.

Thank you. I'm missing you and my squirrel. This crying bullshit is getting me down! I detest crying. Wish I could hug you right now. Love you. H

Grinning he turned his phone off and slid it back into his pocket.

She was going to be fine. He didn't know anyone who was as soft yet resilient as his best friend. A woman who had survived unimaginable horrors as a child and a teen to become the woman she was today. Sweet and soft to the very core of her being.

The sweet and soft hid a spine of steel.

If the fucker who got her pregnant knew what was good for him he would get a fucking clue and wake his shit up. If he didn't he would be getting a big fucking surprise. A Rider De Ridder type of surprise delivered with a fist.

The man might be as big as a fucking house, but the bigger they are the harder they fall.

And he would fall. He would be making sure of it.

NINE

Lucky

Shadow Wraiths Bar

Sitting at the bar between Dive and Lure he watched the room in the mirror at the bar-back. Watching the bitch he'd been ordered to seduce. He wanted to puke just thinking about putting his hands on the woman sitting in a booth at the back of their bar with her two friends.

Just looking at her made him feel sick to his stomach.

As if on cue his gut churned, taking a big gulp of his beer he swallowed it down, hoping like hell it would settle his stomach.

It wasn't that she wasn't pretty, she was. She was beautiful in actual fact, and in some way reminded him of his Gloria. He shook the thought off, not wanting it in his head. No way could he have the memory of her in his head when he had to do a very unpleasant and dirty job.

The problem he had with the job was that the bitch wasn't the type of woman he usually fucked.

He almost snorted out loud when the thought slid through his mind.

It was utter bullshit, he didn't have a type. He fucked them all, dark, light, thin, curvy, tall, short, tits, no tits, ass, and no ass - it never used to matter.

Until it did.

Until a *'tite chatte* (little cat) shook up his well-ordered life.

Now he definitely had a type. And it was her, his ice queen.

Not that it did him any good, she wasn't here. Her life was in Cape Town while his was in Savannah, with his club and his family.

Watching the cartel slut in the mirror he knew there was no way he was going to fuck her. His dick didn't even stir as he looked her over, it was totally disinterested. In actual fact even though she undeniably had the look of his Gloria he was totally disinterested.

Turning to Dive he tried to explain his problem.

"Fuck brother, I don't know if I can do this. She's beautiful and everythin' but my dick's not interested. All I can think about is how fuckin' dirty she is."

Dive gave him a quick side glance. "Don't think it's goin' to be up to you, bro. She's comin' over."

"Fuck." Lucky picked up his shot and tipped it back. The top shelf vodka burned all the way down. Setting the shot glass back down he glanced in the mirror and there she was, pushing her way between him and Lure to get to the bar. He watched her in the mirror as she gave him a quick up and down beneath her lashes, her eyes lingering on his crotch. The bitch didn't realise he could see her. Or maybe she did and didn't care.

She was short and as she stepped up onto the foot rail she rested her big tits on the bar top. It got Nathan, their bartender's attention instantly.

Lucky and Lure both looked down, checking out her tits.

He was the first to turn away and pick up his beer.

And then he did a slow double take, looked again. He blinked thinking he was imagining shit.

He wasn't. It was still there.

It wasn't his imagination. There was a mole between her tits shaped a bit like a flower.

He knew that fucking mole, knew it very, very well.

Used to kiss it, lick it as he made love to his woman.

A dead woman.

He looked away, met Dive's eyes and tilted his head towards the back of the bar. His brother gave a short nod, got off his chair and called to the bartender.

"Nathan! We're goin' in the back for a minute. Watch our drinks and see to it no one takes our places." He ordered.

Lure followed them to the back office and once the door was closed Lucky immediately laid it out.

"Don't believe I'm goin' to say this, but fuck! I know the bitch, brothers. I know her inside fuckin' out. I have no fuckin' idea how it's possible...but...but she's...she's my dead ex, Gloria. How the fuck is it possible when she was killed in a drive-by just after I was patched in? I can't fuckin' breathe."

He bent over, hands on his knees, gasping for breath.

"Jesus fuckin' Christ. Are you sure, Lucky?" Lure asked, his hand resting reassuringly on Lucky's back.

Lucky nodded, still bent over, his hands on his thighs.

“It’s her, Dive, I recognised the mole between her tits. Her dress is cut so fuckin’ low you can’t miss it. She’s older and she’s had work done to her face and tits to alter her appearance, her hair is a different colour and so are her eyes, they used to be darker. She’s a lot thinner now and her clothes are totally different but I swear to you, it’s her. I’d know that fuckin’ flower shaped mole anywhere. Fuckin’ slut’s been alive all this time while I wasted my fuckin’ life grievin’ her. She’s part of the reason I walked away from my ice queen. Fuckin’ hell, this is so damned fucked up.”

He straightened, dragged his hands over his face, ending with his fingers covering his mouth. Dive patted his upper arm as he texted one handed.

“Okay, I believe you. I’m textin’ prez then we’re goin’ back out there and we’re gonna get a photo of that fuckin’ mole for Byte. You can’t let on that you recognised her, brother. We’ve got to play this close. Let her make her play and you pretend you have no fuckin’ clue who she is. Once she thinks she’s got you hooked we fuckin’ get out of here.” He shook his head frowning at his phone.

“What?” Lure asked.

“I’m wonderin’ how she thought she was goin’ to get away with this. Why is she thinkin’ you won’t recognise the mole?”

Lucky shook his head and shrugged. He had no clue either.

He followed Dive into the bar, Lure at their back. One look at her had his stomach churning. He wanted answers but he knew now wasn’t the time to get them. He would have to wait, play this game until the end. Sliding back onto his chair he raised his hand indicating he wanted a fresh beer. He pushed

the one he had left on the bar away as Nathan brought them their new drinks.

Ignoring the woman beside him he drank while making conversation with his brothers about their bikes. He didn't want to look at her because if he did he might just lose his fucking head.

It didn't take long for her to make her play.

The bitch obviously didn't like that they hadn't made a move while she stood at the bar. He knew from before that she was used to, and liked, getting the attention she wanted when she wanted it. Not this time though.

As he put his beer down a small hand clasped over his forearm. He hid the shudder of revulsion as he slowly turned his head to look down at her, not saying a word.

She smiled brightly, batting her false eyelashes. He stared at her blankly, giving her nothing.

“Hi, I'm Carmella, my friends call me Mella. I know I'm being a bit forward but can I buy you and your friends a shot?”

It took him a while to do what he had to, smile and reply.

“Hi Carmella, I'm Lucky and these are my friends, Dive and Lure. Thanks for the offer, but I'm ridin' and I don't do more than one shot when I'm on my bike, and I've already had one.”

He purposely didn't use the name she wanted them to call her, she wasn't a friend. Dive and Lure played along, giving her nods but not saying a word. Lifting his almost empty beer he shook it and gave a small smile.

“Won’t say no to a beer though.”

A look flashed through her eyes he couldn’t place. It looked like satisfaction but it was gone so fast he couldn’t be sure it was what he had seen.

“I’m here with my girlfriends, and we have a booth at the back. Would you like to join us? We’re new in town and this is our first night out exploring the nightlife.”

She acted all coy and shy but he saw the calculation in her dark eyes and wasn’t taken in.

Lure saved him from answering by butting in.

“We’d be happy to darlin’. Give us a minute to settle up here then we’ll join you.”

Giving his forearm a squeeze she hopped down and sashayed her ass back to her friends, carrying the small tray of drinks Nathan had given her.

“This is a good thing brother. You not makin’ the first move is a good thing. It’s obvious we’ve been targeted, so let’s keep our heads clear. And keep a sharp eye on your fuckin’ drinks.” Dive spoke quietly, ensuring no one overheard him.

“I agree. We’re treatin’ this as a hostile situation, stick to beer, in bottles. We use the fact we’re on our bikes as a reason not to accept any shots.” Lure said as he called Nathan over to settle their tab.

“We’re goin’ to join the ladies at the back booth, Nathan. You don’t send us beers, we’ll come and collect them personally. Understood?” Dive growled at their bartender.

Nathan knew from past experience none of them took drinks that hasn't been under their eyes the entire time. Bad shit has a way of happening when you're not watching.

“Let's fuckin' do this.” Lucky growled as he stood.

Walking across the bar he glanced to the side and saw a table of women giving them the eye. He smiled and winked, giving them a chin lift as he walked past to where the bitches were waiting. They had seen him and his brothers checking out the other women and all three had sour expressions on their faces.

It confirmed it for him.

They were bitches, through and through.

They didn't own him and had no right to feel pissy because he looked at other women. It was none of their fucking business. Remembering why the bitch from his past was here and wondering how she was still alive had his usually friendly Cajun persona deserting him.

Breathing deep he forced a half-smile to his face as he stopped next to their table. They were obviously Latina. Dark hair and eyes with that lovely creamy caramel skin, the type of women he used to spend time with because they reminded him of Gloria. Not that it was going to happen ever again.

She sat there with a new face and body pretending not to know him. Pretending to be someone else. He realised he no longer felt it. No longer felt drawn to her, she was not what he wanted anymore.

He was stunned when he realised he no longer had feelings for her. He felt nothing. Not for the woman sitting in the booth and not for the memory of her either.

It changed things, changed things drastically.

Carmella waved a hand towards the women as she made the introductions, and all the while her fucking eyes never left him.

“Please, join us. These are my friends, Maria and Lucia.”

She scooted her ass over on the bench seat. Lucky knew she wanted him to sit next to her, so he did. The bitch instantly put a claiming hand on him when he rested his forearm on the table. He had to work hard not to shudder with disgust at the feel of her hand on him.

“I saw the vest you’re wearin’ and told Maria and Lucia that you must be bikers. Am I right?”

She fluttered her lashes at him with a sweet little smile.

What utter fucking bullshit.

She knew damned well who they were.

She was fucking good at playing the innocent. If he had met her not knowing who and what she was he most probably would have fallen for her bullshit.

“We are darlin’. We ride with the Shadow Wraiths Motorcycle Club.”

He didn’t want to smile at her but forced a small tip of his lips as he explained shit.

“And before you ask, we’re a club not a gang. We don’t do that shit. Our businesses are legit,” he waved his hand in a circle to indicate the bar “like this one, it belongs to our club.”

She leaned against his side and kept smiling but her eyes were sharp and cold. It hit him that he knew the look, knew it

from before, and knew she was about to start pumping him for information. The bitch should have waited until he had more to drink before going there. Glancing at Dive and Lure he saw the same going down with them. The bitches were pumping them for information.

Dive suddenly stood, looking towards the bar door. “Thanks for the drink ladies, but my girl is here. Have a nice evenin’.”

He watched as his brother grabbed Jamie’s hand and dragged her into his arms, his head dipped beside hers. He was sure the fucker was quickly bringing her up to speed to save his ass from the cartel bitch. Jamie glanced their way, frowned and tossed her hair as if pissed, before allowing Dive to lead her to the club’s booth. There were a couple of their brothers and their women having drinks and they joined them.

The next to abandon him was Lure.

“Fuck. Evie just walked in and she’s pissed, Jamie must have messaged her. Sorry ladies, I need to fix shit with my woman before she cuts my nuts off.”

With that he was out of the booth and striding to where Evie stood watching them with a pissed expression on her face. Lure grabbed her around the waist as he dropped his head to talk to her. She smacked his chest then let him lead her towards the club’s booth to join Dive and Jamie.

He listened without showing he was listening to the three bitches at the table yakking to each other in Spanish. They didn’t know that he was fluent in their language. He had secretly learned it to please Gloria, but she died before he could surprise her. And then of course there was the years Remy had been undercover with the gangs. They used it when

they connected back then, because it kept his brother's ass safe. His knowledge of the language had come in handy, like right now.

'I though you said they were single.' Maria bitched with a bitchy smile on her face as she glanced towards where Jamie sat on Dive's lap.

'My information must be out of date. I was told they were all single and we wouldn't have problems with women getting in the way. I'll be talking to my informant and making my displeasure clear. They obviously have regular women. I'm wondering if this one has a woman, it might be a way of controlling him once I get him to where I want him. He's as stupid now as he was years ago, he doesn't have a clue who I am.' Carmella smiled but it didn't reach her eyes.

'Are you going to take him home with you tonight? Start the treatment?' Lucia smilingly asked as she watched him through her lashes.

What fucking treatment? That shit did not sound good.

'I don't know. I'll play it safe and draw him in slowly. My informant said he's all muscle and no brain. I'm not sure that's right, his eyes are watchful and he sees too much. Be careful what you say around him. He's been in this business a long time, I don't think he's as stupid as the informant thinks he is. He most probably has the information we need, but tonight is not the time to bring him in or start him on the serum. It's a pity I was called home years ago, he would have been firmly under my control if I had stayed.' Carmella said in a whispery voice as she stroked a hand up and down Lucky's arm.

'Do you want us to try for one of the others here tonight?'

Maria asked as she sipped her drink then smiled at him before looking around the bar. Her eyes had a predatory glint to them.

'No, we'll use tonight to get ourselves acquainted with this one and gathering names. Make sure to focus on the faces, we'll get our informant to put names to them.' Carmella giggled softly as if they had exchanged a joke.

Lucky pretended he'd been watching his brothers and not listening.

Fuck.

This was a bigger cluster fuck than they had anticipated. Someone was informing on them, someone who had to be close to the club. The way it sounded the rat was close but not close enough. It had to be investigated and the informant silenced. Permanently.

And the serum shit? He was sure the word serum meant they had a drug they wanted to get him, and some of his brothers, addicted to. A drug that would make him, and them, compliant and giving them everything they wanted. It would put his club and his brothers in life threatening danger. He had to warn his prez, they had to put protection on Jamie and Evie as the girls were now on cartel radar. Not good, not fucking good at all.

And what did she mean by saying if she had stayed he would have been under her control? Had she drugged him back then? Was that why he had been so obsessively in love with her? Was what he had felt for her drug induced or had it been enhanced by some drug? Was that even possible?

He had so many fucking unanswered questions.

And the implied threat to his woman had ice sliding through his veins.

Thank fuck he had left Jo-Jo in Cape Town. If she was here she would have been in so much fucking danger. His heart galloped in his chest and he had to force himself to calm down, to breathe and drink as if he was totally unaware of the fucked up shit that was being planned right in front of him.

He couldn't stay sitting next to the whore for all the fucking gold in Fort Knox.

He had to get out and he had to get out quick. He had to talk to his prez.

Maniac was going to have to make a decision on how to play this. For now all Lucky wanted was to get away from her cloying perfume. Get her red tipped claws off his arm and walk out of the bar with his senses intact.

Touching two fingers to the corner of his eye he gave his brothers the signal to extract him, and fucking fast.

Listening to the bitch planning shit had him raging on the inside. They had a fucking rat in the club. But not only that, every single one of his brothers were in danger of being drugged, taken and forced to spill the club's secrets.

They had a fuckload of those. Secrets.

His phone vibrated in his kutte pocket and he pulled it out, angling away from the much too interested bitch, opened and read the message. Putting it away he picked up his beer and slightly turned towards the bitch.

“Sorry, darlin’, I have to go. Club business.”

He stood and her hand dropped from his arm. Even though it fucking killed he had to go with the next fucking play.

“Gimme your number, darlin’, I’ll call to set up somethin’ later this week. We can do dinner or somethin’.” He forced his lips to tip up in a smile as he waited.

She didn’t disappoint, he programmed her number in as she recited. It was into the burner he had pulled from his pocket. Not the one he had just received a message on, but the spare he had waiting for just this moment. He sent her a quick text.

Will call you.

He gave her a nod when her phone chirped and she read the message. A satisfied little smile curved her lips.

Giving her a small smile he then did the same to the other women.

“Great meetin’ you ladies. Enjoy the rest of your evenin’.” He pointed a finger at the cartel whore. “I’ll be callin’ you soon.”

Turning he strode to where his brothers were waiting for him at the front door. They didn’t fuck about but left immediately. Lucky couldn’t wait to get to the clubhouse and report to his prez. He was so fucking pissed and his gut was churning like he’d fucking swallowed a live baby gator.

Stomping into the clubhouse he looked around the packed common room, wondering who the fuck was selling them out to the cartel. It had to be someone with something to hide, making them vulnerable to an approach by the cartel. Or someone who had money troubles and was hiding it from the club. Or someone with a grudge. Whoever it was they weren’t

going to be anonymous for very long, Byte would find him or her.

And when he did...

Male or female the fucker would be put to ground. They did not allow traitors to keep breathing.

Walking into the office the look on their faces must have clued them in that something was wrong. His prez, VP and SAA silently waited for them to take their seats.

“What do you have for us?” His prez asked with narrowed eyes.

“You won’t fuckin’ believe this, Prez. The cartel slut is none other than Gloria Garcia. Back from the dead with a new face and a new name. The bitch might have a new face and lost the weight she used to carry but it’s her. I recognised her mole, the one between her tits that’s shaped like a flower. I took a photo and sent it to Byte to check against photos we have of her. She’s always liked to show off her big tits so there must be a photo of her in a bikini top or something.”

He drew in a deep breath then continued to lay it out while Dive and Lure stayed silent.

“What they’re doin’ is nothin’ good, Prez. The sluts thought I was a fuckin’ clueless muscle bound asshole. Talked in front of me, usin’ Spanish, not thinkin’ I might understand them. Stupid, or very clever, not sure which yet. We have a big problem. We have a fuckin’ rat, Boss. They have someone on the inside rattin’ on us. He or she is givin’ them information on who has a woman and who doesn’t. The fuckin’ cartel whore said if *I* had a woman they would use her to get me to

talk. Not sure what the fuck they want from me.” Lucky growled.

Swearing and angry growls filled the air until Maniac whistled sharply. Silence instantly fell and all eyes were on their president.

“Fuck, Lucky, I’m sorry, brother. It must feel like you’re losin’ her all over again. I don’t know what else to say other than, I’m sorry brother. Sorry you’re losin’ her once again.”

Lucky slowly shook his head from side to side.

“Nope, that’s not true, Prez. I’m just comin’ to the realisation that I’ve been fixated on a ghost and a lie. I allowed a lie to ruin my fuckin’ life. But no more, it’s done, over. All I want to know is what the fuck she’s doin’ back and what she wants from me.”

“I have a good idea what they want from you, Lucky.” His prez was visibly pissed off. “You’re our Road Captain. You maintain our routes and plan new ones. The information you have in your head on our routes and everything involved with it will be invaluable to the fuckin’ cartel and through them to those motherfuckin’ Grave Robbers. What exactly did they say about the club and about your brothers?”

Lucky drew in a breath and repeated what had been said almost word for word. It was something Remy had taught him, memorising conversations. Only now did he realise how much he had learnt from his little brother without understanding he was being taught a new skill. He had to remember to thank the bastard when he spoke to him again.

“They were talkin’ about taking photos of the brothers and givin’ them to the rat to identify. I don’t like that brothers with ol’ ladies and girlfriends are goin’ to be vulnerable, Prez. And I’m worried about our families. We know how these bastards operate, nothin’ is sacred to them. They will target our women and children to get to us. How do we protect ourselves without lettin’ them know we’re on to them?”

A heavy silence descended as Maniac swung his chair back and forth, back and forth, nothing showing on his face. No emotion what so ever.

Drawing in a deep breath he stopped swinging and leaned forward, his eyes hard and cold.

“I want reports on every single motherfucker and bitch with access to the club. When I say everyone, I fuckin’ mean everyone. We’re diggin’ deep and we’re goin’ to be thorough. We missed somethin’ and that does not make me happy. Not at all. I’ll be reachin’ out to our trusted allies to give them a heads up. If we’re bein’ targeted I’m fuckin’ sure they are as well. We might have a situation developin’ across the board.”

He once again started swinging, a frown between his brows and his finger tapping his bottom lip. He was thinking deep.

“Do we reach out to our South African allies?” Grave asked quietly, a worried frown settling between his brows. He was obviously worried about his daughter, Leo, in South Africa.

Maniac stopped swinging and tilted his head, his eyes narrowing as he thought of something.

“I’ll reach out and have a chat. I wonder...” He didn’t go further, just left the thought hanging.

Nodding to himself he looked up and his eyes narrowed on Lucky. He knew he wasn't going to like what was coming.

“Keep the bitch danglin’, take her to fuckin’ dinner and shit but stay the fuck out of her house and bed. Keep to neutral territory.” He gave Lucky a wink and an evil smile. “She used to get your big Cajun dick regularly, get her cravin’ havin’ it again but give her nothin’, drag it out as long as you can. Give us time to get to the bottom of our rat situation.”

Lucky groaned as if in pain.

And now that he thought about it, he was in pain, mental pain.

“Fuck, Prez. I feel like I can’t be around the bitch and not lose my shit, but I’ll do my job. Club comes first, always. Just so you know, I’m not puttin’ the slut on the back of my bike, so I’ll be usin’ a club cage. Not sure how I’m goin’ to explain why I’m not on my bike. She used to be on the back of my bike back then.”

Lure tapped his shoulder. “That’s easy bro, you have a transmission problem and your bike is in for repairs. We can keep stallin’ on that for fuckin’ ever. If she asks why not get a loaner tell her you refuse to ride someone else’s bike.”

Ren gave Lure a tight smile. “Good idea. We keep your bike in the garage and to make it more believable Lure will start takin’ it apart. Might be a good time to get the re-spray you were talkin’ about.”

Ren’s suggestion was actually a great idea. His prez thought so as well.

“Great idea. Start on it in the mornin’. Let it be known you had problems on your way home and have the prospects take it to the garage on the bike trailer tomorrow mornin’. We need to be sharp, very fuckin’ sharp. Not only are we on the Grave Robbers radar we are now on Los Rojos radar as well. Of the two the fuckin’ cartel is our biggest worry. They’ve sent someone who used to have full access to the club after us plus they have someone on the inside givin’ them information. If I order a lockdown they will know we’re onto them...unless.”

He started swinging again, deep in thought.

Tilting his head to the side he stopped swinging and smiled. Not a good smile at all.

“I might have an idea, give me some time to think on it. I’m sure between us we can come up with a reason to bring the women and children in. Think on it tonight. I’ll share my idea at church tomorrow. Officers only, 10 am.”

They knew they had been dismissed and got up to leave.

“Lucky.”

His VP’s voice had him turning back.

“If you have someone who needs protection do not hesitate to let us know, understood?” He was looking at him with a slight frown between his brows.

Lucky nodded, not willing to let anyone else know about Jo-Jo.

“The only ones I have are my parents and my sister, VP. I don’t think they’ll try shit with Remy and Pixie seein’ as they’re connected to Dominick Maingarde. Everyone knows not to fuck with him after the way he destroyed the Harrisons.

If you give the okay I'll talk to Remy and fill him in." He explained then gave them the rest.

"My sister is a problem. Frankie doesn't like anyone makin' decisions for her, not since she divorced that useless motherfucker. I'll leave it to Bruiser to convince her to accept our protection, he volunteered to watch over her." He grinned and shook his head imagining the hell his brother was going to catch from his sister.

"My parents will be safe where they are, you can't fuckin' move in their neighbourhood without a Fortier knowin' about it. Mama doesn't say much but we all know who her family is, no one will touch her for fear of pissin' her brothers off."

Maniac laughed. "Your Mama is somethin' else brother. An' you're right, they'll be safe, no one is goin' to put a hand on them. I'll make a call. Haven't had a chat with your uncles in a while. And let Bruiser know he's on Frankie, poor bastard."

"Thanks, Prez, appreciate it." Lucky turned and followed his brothers out of the office.

He was suddenly tired as hell. All he wanted was a shower to wash the lying slut from his skin and then hit his bed.

Without saying a word to his brothers he split from them and went up to his room.

If he didn't get the stink of her heavy perfume off him very soon he was liable to puke.

He wanted silence to work through what he had learned tonight.

That he had been duped, for years.

He had mourned someone who actually never existed.

She had been a spy, a rat sent in to weaken him.

And she had succeeded.

He had been a total fool for her.

A sucker who mourned a ghost, a deceitful ghost at that.

In doing so he destroyed the possibility of having his ice queen.

He was a fuckin' asshole.

TEN

Harper

As the weeks flew by my bump grew and grew. I was in my final trimester and starting the countdown to the birth.

I was still confined to Asa's compound but with all the preparations for the birth and the move to the US I didn't feel stifled. I did miss being able to walk or hike as I used to do in Cape Town. I was only allowed out under strict supervision.

I had my check up with my doc today and she had been pleased with both my and the baby's progress. I've picked up weight, as you do when pregnant, but it was in what my doc said was normal parameters. I've been eating healthy even though I wanted to drown myself in juicy burgers, pizza and cake.

Asa's chef, yes the badass crime lord had a chef, kept an eye on what I ate. He spoiled me with my favourite dishes and salads, things I liked eating before I got pregnant. Before I started craving cake.

It was weird to think that I was living with a group of men in a secured compound with a chef cooking my food and ladies coming in to clean every day. I was being spoiled by the five star treatment. I knew once this was over I would be going back to being on my own and it was going to suck.

On the work front there had been a couple of glitches. Pixie had wanted me to leave for Savannah with Zane but Asa had put a stop to it. He had warned her that the Italians still had all

of us under surveillance and that it would be safer for me to stay with him for a few more months. She had backed off but I knew it wouldn't be for long.

Asa, my self-appointed big brother, was making sure I got what I wanted.

I wanted to have my baby here, not in a strange country surrounded by strangers. He was making it happen.

Rider had been adamant about wanting to be with me when the time came and Asa had assured me he would step in if for any reason he wasn't available.

It settled my mind that I wouldn't be going through it alone.

Something I wasn't happy about was that I had no idea what was going on in Lucky's life, he had no social media presence. No Facebook no Instagram, nothing. I checked on the Shadow Wraiths MC's page but there was nothing there. Just a couple of notifications of charity runs and so on. The page was hardly ever updated.

I was totally in the dark about what was going on in his life. If he had a woman.

Just thinking about him made me restless and I paced around my room and the upper floor of the mansion, trying to settle down.

Did I mention that Asa's house was a massive mansion? It was huge and all his men lived here.

Unfortunately I wasn't the only woman living at the mansion at the moment.

I'm not being a bitch but the new addition to the family wasn't working for me.

The woman was a distant relative of one of Asa's men. Sinead Murphy was from Finn's mother's side of the family and apparently came out to South Africa to explore the country. But the worst of it was that she was the bitch who had accused Bren of doing awful things to her and of being a drug addict. Why Asa allowed her to stay was a mystery. Bren was almost never home and I wanted to kick Asa's ass for allowing it to happen.

When I called him on it he explained that her father was a powerful man in their organisation and he couldn't afford to piss him off right now. Stupid excuse as far as I was concerned and I told him so.

I was so mad that his decision made Bren feel unwelcome in his own home I've been giving him the cold shoulder. He didn't like it much but he deserved it.

She's been here two months and has yet to travel outside of Johannesburg. She was constantly trying to get Asa to go places with her. The more he said no the more she insisted on his company. He has yet to take her further than the pool in the back yard.

Aidan told me that Finn was desperate for her to go back to Ireland because he couldn't stand her. According to him she was a slutty bitch no one wanted anything to do with. He said the reason she was in SA was the rumours that Asa was being groomed to take over the Irish Organisation.

Apparently her father sent her here to find a way into his bed and get him to marry her, ensuring her family's place at the

side of a powerful man. They had the crazy idea she would be able to manipulate him the way she did almost everyone else.

Everyone excluding Bren and Finn and the men close to Asa. None of them fell for her bullshit.

I didn't see much of her because I avoided her like the plague. She had made her dislike of me very clear. I suppose it was because of the time Asa and I spent together.

Angie, one of the cleaning ladies warned me she had overheard her on the phone telling someone Asa's pregnant whore was living in the house with them. She was outraged because she was about to become his wife and wanted to get rid of me and my bastard.

I was shocked when she told me. I assured her the baby wasn't Asa's, and that we were friends, nothing else. What worried me more was who the bitch had been speaking to. Who had she told I was living at the compound? Her family in Ireland or someone else?

Asa was so busy with the Salvatore problem and running his businesses that I decided not to bother him with it.

If she became more of a problem I would tell him.

I blamed not talking to him about her on my pregnancy brain and the fact that I was pissed at him.

I was more focussed on my expanding body.

The bigger I got the less of my feet I could see.

Until one day they disappeared completely. Now as I entered my eight month the only time I saw them was when I lay down

on my bed with my feet raised. And I had those puppies raised an awful lot to stop them from swelling.

I enjoyed my days but the highlight was chatting to Rider and Ms Squirrel when it was her bedtime.

The three of us lay in our respective beds while I read to my little squirrel and she chatted to my belly. It was so sweet and funny she had Rider and me biting our lips not to laugh out loud.

Tonight's call was a perfect example of what she called her 'veejoe chats'.

It went something like this.

"Hello little belly brrrudderrr, I went on walks today an' sawded a beegg birrrd. My G tol' me it was a hawke but I don' tink so. Unca Hawke was playing wif de babies, not flying in de sky. He's Hawke, not de birrrd. What ya tink?" She frowned as she stared at my belly almost as if she was listening to an answer.

"When's youse comin out to play wif me? I'se bin waiting an' waiting. I's getting tirrorred of waiting."

She let go of a great big sigh and leant into Rider her eyes battling to stay open.

"I's goin' to sleep now. Chat wif you laterrr little belly brrrudderrr."

I loved how she called the baby her belly brother.

She has done it ever since we found out the baby was a boy. I loved that she claimed him as hers.

Recently she had started saying her r's and over emphasising them which was so damned cute. I just wanted to grab her and hug her and keep her safe from all the bad in the world. I knew Rider felt the same.

After we said goodnight I went downstairs, had dinner with everyone and after spending a bit of time with the guys watching a show went back up to my room.

I slept but woke up somewhere in the night to use the bathroom. Once I did I was wide awake and couldn't go back to sleep. Not even curling around my special pillow helped.

Turning on my light I tried reading to tire myself out. And then I got a craving, one that wouldn't go away no matter how much I tried to banish it.

Muttering to myself I got out of bed, slipped my feet into my slippers and pulled on my robe. For some reason I wanted hot chocolate and to get it I would have to go down to the kitchen.

Quietly opening my door I peeked into the semi-dark passage before slipping out. My room was at the far end and I had to walk past the guys rooms to get to the stairs. I knew the guys were light sleepers so I tried to make as little noise as possible. Of course whoever was on duty in the security room would see me and most probably check on me. But that was okay, I was used to it.

This wasn't my first late night kitchen visit.

I had just put my foot down on the third step down the staircase when it happened.

There was a hard shove in the centre of my back and my feet slipped out from under me. I desperately clutched at the

bannister with both hands, twisting my body to the side. As I started falling I caught a glimpse of Sinead, laughing as she ran off.

My last thought as I my ass hit the hard marble tiles was wondering if she knew she was on camera. Then I had no time to think, I was bumping and sliding down towards the first landing.

I desperately grabbed at the railing and just as I hit the landing and my feet shot over the first stair I hooked a hand around the post, halting my descent abruptly. The sudden jerk on my shoulder joint had me screaming in pain.

I didn't realise that I had already been screaming and crying as I fell. I lay there half on the landing, half off moaning at the pain radiating through my abdomen.

Then I felt it, a gush from between my legs as something burst from me. At the same time Asa and Bren fell to their knees beside me, both looking horrified.

“Something's wrong, I can feel it.” I whispered as I desperately held on to Bren's hand while glaring at Asa. “She killed my baby, Asa. She pushed me and killed my baby.” I sobbed and moaned through the pain.

“Hold on, sweetheart, we're taking you to the clinic. We'll get you there and you and junior are going to be fine. You just need to hold on for me, okay?”

Asa held my hand and glanced up at someone, it was like flames shot from his eyes as he snarled out his orders.

“Dec, call her doctor and tell her we have an emergency and we're bringing her to the clinic. Aidan have the cars ready to

leave. Liam bring me a blanket to wrap around her. Rory and Bren, once we have the blanket settled around her, help me to lift her. Finn, I want the slut in a cell, she's your family therefore your responsibility. She tried to kill someone under my protection and I won't stand for it. Lock her in and meet us at the cars, don't fucking linger or we're leaving you here. I'll deal with the slut later."

I heard it as if from far away, I was focused on the pain in my back and abdomen.

It happened exactly the way Asa ordered it.

At the clinic he carried me in and gently set me down on the waiting gurney. One look at the worried faces around me and all I wanted was Rider.

"I want Rider, please Asa. I need him here, please call him. I need Rider." I begged softly right before I was wheeled away.

"I'll call him, don't worry." He called out as I was pushed into a waiting lift.

I was taken to the maternity ward and quickly checked over and hooked up to monitors. I sighed with relief when I heard my baby's heartbeat. I had been so worried about him.

My doctor arrived in a rush and did an examination. Her face gave nothing away.

"What happened?" She asked from between my spread legs.

"I fell down some stairs."

I couldn't tell her I was pushed because that would involve cops and I couldn't have that.

“I was going downstairs to make hot chocolate and slipped on the tiles.”

She nodded, a small frown between her eyes.

Once she was done she removed her gloves and dropped them in to the biohazards bin the nurse brought over. They had blood on them.

My eyes were riveted on the bin.

“What’s going to happen now?” I whispered fearfully.

“We’re going to do an ultrasound to confirm what I suspect. Once I’ve had a look we can make some decisions. Okay?”

I nodded and breathed through my fear. A commotion outside the door had the doctor and nurse both turning.

He came barrelling through the door, his hair wildly dishevelled fear and worry in his eyes. When he saw me he came straight to the bed, taking my hand in his.

“Damn, baby, I rode like a maniac to get here. All I was told was that you fell and I had to get here as fast as possible. What the fuck happened?” He growled as he leaned down and gave me a soft kiss.

The doctor got to him before I could answer.

“I assume you’re the baby’s father. Your lady took a bad fall and we’re about to do an ultrasound to check on your son.”

Rider just nodded, his full attention on me.

He held my hand as the doc moved the wand over my bump and repeatedly over a spot to the left hand side. She hummed several times before handing the wand to the technician.

“This is what we have. The fall has caused the placenta to partially detach from the wall of the uterus, and that is the cause of the bleeding we’re seeing. If the medications don’t stop the bleeding and baby goes into distress we’re going to have to take him out. He’s a big strong boy and as you’re so close to the due date he will most probably spend minimal time in NICU once he’s born.”

She opened her mouth to say more but Rider interrupted her.

“Was he hurt in anyway by the fall?”

She smiled. “No, not at all. He is very well protected in his amniotic sac.”

“Okay, and Harper? How is this going to impact her?” He asked with a worried look down at me before looking back at the doc.

“Harper is not at risk at this time but we do need to stop the bleeding. I’ve put her on medications for the bleeding. We’ll give them time to do their job and then evaluate. We’ll be monitoring her progress. If I don’t see an improvement we’ll do the surgery.” She smiled at him then patted my free hand. “I want you to try and relax and let the medications do its work. I’ll be back in an hour to check on you.”

With that she left and the technician and the nurse shortly after.

Rider closed the door and came back to the bed, taking my hand in his.

“Tell me, how the fuck did this happen?”

“I was pushed.”

His entire body stilled, he became a statue standing next to the bed.

“What?”

The question seemed to come from deep in his chest coming out in a guttural growl.

“I craved hot chocolate and was on my way down to the kitchen when that slut pushed me down the stairs. I was able to grab onto the railings but only once I had bounced down several stairs. I think I must have screamed blue murder because the next thing I knew all the guys were there. Asa threw out orders like a general and then brought me here.” I finished on a flinch when I tried to move. My hip and back hurt when I moved.

“I see.” He said. Then changed the subject.

“I want you to have the surgery. I don’t want you going through hours of labour with the state your back is in. You will be in excruciating pain.”

I nodded. “You’re right. If the meds don’t do the job I’ll have the surgery. I’m not going to insist on natural birth and put both of us at risk. That would be stupid and we’d already talked about surgery because he’s so big.” I winced as a dull pain moved through my lower back. “I want you with me, I don’t want to be alone.”

“I don’t know if they’ll allow me in the operating room, Harp.”

“We do the epidural thing. I spoke to my doc about it because I wanted you to be there.”

“Okay, we’ll talk to the doc when she comes to check on you.”

Rider sat at the side of my bed, holding my hand and talking to me softly but the minute the door opened and the doc walked in he stood up.

One examination later and the plans were in place for the birth of my boy.

Instead of being born on September 24th he was now going to be born almost six weeks early. My boy was going to come into the world in August, the fifteenth to be exact. For some reason I thought about his star sign.

He was going to be a Leo now instead of a Libra. I wondered if that mattered.

Everything became a blur from then on.

I was given an epidural and they took Rider off to get him ready while the nurses prepped me.

What felt like hours later I found myself on the operating table, a piece of blue cloth strapped across my body in front of me.

The anaesthesiologist was on one side of me and Rider on the other. Both were dressed in blue scrubs with hats and masks on.

My best friend held my hand as stuff went on at my lower end.

And then I heard it.

A loud pissed off howl that had several of the people in the theatre laughing.

“We have a strong angry boy here. Daddy, come over here and hold your boy.”

Rider let go of my hand and I watched as he took the wrapped bundle and held my son against his chest. He traced a gentle finger over his cheek.

“Welcome to the world, little man.” He said softly then pressed a kiss to his head. “Come say hello to your Mamma.”

He brought him to me and gently laid him on my chest. My eyes filled with tears as I looked down at my son, seeing his scrunched up angry face and looking into his dark blue eyes. He was the most beautiful baby I had ever seen. The most precious and wonderful gift.

“Hello sweet boy, Mamma loves you so, so much.” I whispered and kissed his head before the nurses whisked him away to the other side of the theatre.

“Go with him, please, Rider. Stay with our boy.”

I called him ‘our’ boy because that’s what he was.

He was mine but I was sharing him with my best friend. A friend who never got to hold his own son.

Being able to give him this made my heart happy.

Somewhere in the rest of what was happening I either passed out or fell asleep, I don’t know which. I woke up to a room filled with sunshine with Rider on one side of the bed and Asa on the other, both looking tired.

At that moment in time I didn’t care about them.

All I wanted to know was where my baby was.

Once they assured me he was safe in the NICU and being watched over by Declan and Bollywood I went back to sleep.

Why did I sleep?

I slept because I knew my son and I were safe.

No one would get to us while these men watched over us.

ELEVEN

Asa

Asa sat at his desk staring sightlessly out of the window.

It kept churning through his mind.

He had fucked up Harper's protection.

He should never have allowed the Irish slut to enter his compound. Should have insisted she stay in a hotel. But with the shit swirling around them and the Salvatore's he'd caved to her father's insistence and allowed her to stay at the house.

Right from the start it had been obvious she disliked Harper intensely. They had all noticed it.

When he refused to spend time with her and spent time with Harper instead the dislike turned into hatred. His cleaning ladies had come to him to report what they had overheard while cleaning her rooms. He had taken it up with her father who had accused them of lying. Asa let it go because he had better things to do than fight about a stupid slut.

Even Finn had warned him about her, warned him she had obviously come to SA to snag herself a powerful husband. He kept saying they had to keep eyes on her because she had a reputation for causing trouble. That she was always in some way implicated in accidents happening to women who got in her way. There was never any concrete evidence and she got away with it every single time. He implied that it had been happening since she was a teenager.

The crazy fucking slut had obviously thought Harper and the baby was in her way and took steps to remove them.

Permanently.

It was his fault Harper was lying in a hospital bed and her baby boy was in the NICU.

Thank fuck neither one of them was seriously injured or in danger of dying.

If they were he knew he would have been the one whose life was in danger.

Rider De Ridder would have come for him and he wouldn't have blamed the guy.

The reason he was sitting at his desk and not taking care of the problem was because he was waiting for Rider. The man had insisted on being present when the slut was taken care of.

Neither he nor his men had ever killed a woman and he had no idea if they could.

An hour later he stood next to Rider looking at the woman sitting on the small hard bed in the cell. She was crying pitifully and swearing up and down that she didn't do it, that we were accusing her falsely.

Finn was the one who lost his temper first.

“You are on fucking camera pushing her down the stairs, Sinead. How the fuck else do you think we know it was you? There are cameras all over this fucking house, recording twenty four seven. We have you on video pushing her.”

The tears disappeared like magic as she hissed at him. “You altered the tapes. I know it was you, it's because of your

brother, isn't it? I never did what he said I did. He lied about me just like you are now lying. Like Bren had lied about me.”

Finn laughed and shook his head. “That video will be sent to the board. They will review it in the presence of your father and brother and they will see it hasn't been tampered with. You're shit out of luck, bitch.”

She looked shocked for all of a second before the waterworks came back on.

“I...I didn't do it. She...she must have tripped.” She pulled a face. “She's so huge I'm not surprised she fell over.”

Rider lost the hold he had on his temper.

“You tried to kill what belongs to me.” He spoke in a low rough growl. “She was here under the protection of my friend over here and you took it upon yourself to end her and my boy. You shouldn't have done it. Shouldn't have laid hands on what belongs to me.”

The slut looked confused.

“Yours? No, I don't think so. She was always with Asa and he always went to her room at night. If she is yours then she cheated on you with him.”

Rider laughed mirthlessly and slapped Asa on the shoulder. “Seems like the slut doesn't know about triads, brother.” Then the laughter disappeared, as if wiped away. “Listen to me and listen carefully. If you think I won't kill a woman for what you did to mine you're wrong. I've done it before, it won't be a hardship to do it again.”

The bitch wasn't the only one shocked by his statement.

The thought that a man like Rider had killed a woman had them all looking at him with new eyes.

Asa finally saw the merciless killer lurking deep in his dark eyes.

The brother had seen and done things they knew nothing of. It had to have happened after his wife and son was murdered.

The tears started up again but they had heard enough. Asa tilted his head to the door and they left without another word. In his office he poured them all a shot of whisky, he downed his and set his glass down while hissing out a breath.

“Finn, have you and Aidan searched her rooms?”

“Yes, we went through all her shit. She’s been emailing her father almost every day. Photos of the gates and guardhouses, the outside of the compound, the inside of the house and the grounds. We’re fortunate she never got in here or under the house because I’m sure he would have that as well. She’s given them a clear layout of the compound.” He pointed at the desk. “That’s her laptop over there. You can check it yourself.”

“I found something very interesting.” Aidan said as he dropped a suede pouch on the desk. “The slut is a heroin addict. The pouch has all her shit in it. It was hidden inside a make-up canister. The damned lid came off and all her face crap fell out, but it felt too heavy when it was empty and when I shook it, it rattled. This was hidden in a false bottom.”

Moving the pouch with his finger he looked up only to meet Rider’s big smile.

“What?”

“She’s an addict and after what Bren told me about her I know how we’re taking care of our problem. The slut is going to have an overdose. You’re going to pretend you feel sorry for her. Get her back up to her room, showered and nicely washed up. You tell her whatever the fuck you need to tell her. We put her kit back, but, we replace her shit with a hot shot. She’s going to shoot up the minute she’s alone, those jitters we saw aren’t from being scared. It’s the craving for a hit.” He rubbed his hands together like a movie villain as he walked to the door.

“I’ll be back. Don’t take her back to her room before I’m back.” He waved over his shoulder as he left. His two Iron Dogz brothers followed him out.

About two hours later they were back at the gates.

Rider walked into Asa’s office and threw a few baggies on the desk.

“Those are guaranteed to take her out. It looks exactly like her other shit so she won’t even notice.”

“Why so many? We only need one.” Liam asked curiously.

“Only putting one baggie in her kit is like playing Russian roulette. We’re not playing roulette, we’re going for the straight shot. Replacing her baggies with these ensures she takes the one we want her to take. When she’s dead we remove the hot ones and replace them with her own. We set up the scene and tomorrow morning your cleaning staff will find her. Dead of an overdose while all of you were at the clinic with me and my brothers. Alibi’s sorted.” He looked at Bren.

“Especially yours, brother, it’s perfect that you’ve been staying with Declan’s sister while the bitch was here. She’ll be your

alibi because believe me, those fuckers will try to hang it on you like I've heard they've done before. This time you can prove you haven't been around her at all."

Bren shook his head then laughed. "Does your president know what a cold heartless bastard you are?"

Rider shrugged like it was nothing.

"You learn to compartmentalise, brother. It's either that or you fall apart. I have responsibilities, a daughter to raise, a godson to help raise and my best friend to protect. I can't let them down, not ever. They're my family, my world, and I'll do what I have to for them."

Bren nodded. "You can count on me to guard them with my life, Rider."

"Right, now that we have a plan let's set it in motion." Asa said decisively.

It was amazing how quickly it all came together.

After spiking her kit with the hot shots Aidan put it back where he found it and Rider and his brothers left. He was going back to the clinic to check on Harper and her boy.

Asa did his part, letting the bitch out and taking her back up to her room.

Before he left he took her phone and laptop, saying he didn't want her to contact anyone, they would contact the head of the organisation in the morning, but he wanted them to do it together.

Her jitters were even worse than before and when he mentioned the head of the organisation she actually looked

scared. It suited their plans.

After leaving her he joined Finn, Declan and Liam for the ride to the clinic. Rory, Bren and Aidan had left earlier.

As planned they stayed at the clinic very conspicuously camping out in the waiting room.

The call from the cleaning ladies came in at nine thirty.

Asa told them to close the bedroom door and leave. He would take care of it.

Once back at the compound he took a look at Sinead's room then went down to his office to make the call.

A call to the head of the Irish Organisation.

Patrick Mulvaney was in his seventies and had seen a lot of shit in his life. He had caused a lot of that shit as well.

He listened as Asa laid it out for him then watched the forwarded video of Sinead pushing a pregnant woman down the stairs. Asa lied and said she was the woman of a business associate and staying at the compound for her safety while he was away on business.

He maintained he now owed the man because one of theirs tried to take the lives of his woman and child. And this because they had sent a crazed drug addict to him. An addict they had expected him to take as his wife.

He didn't have to pretend he was outraged because he was and he demanded retribution from whoever had come up with such an obviously flawed plan.

Patrick held up his hand to silence him and Asa sat back in his chair and waited.

“This won’t happen again. Her family will be reprimanded severely. I’m aware of what was done to Brendan O’Connor and Gareth Walsh. Unfortunately at the time it was handled by the families and not by me. This time it will be handled by me, personally.”

Asa gave a slow nod, thanking him without saying a word.

“What do I do with the body?”

“I will have my assistant ask if they want it. If they do they can arrange for collection and transport and cover the costs. It’s not your responsibility.”

“I want it out of my house. They have three hours to make it happen. If it’s not gone by then I’ll be disposing of it. I will not be compromised. I don’t trust her family at all. Their reputation for backhanded dealings precede them. I don’t need the police knocking on my door.”

Patrick smiled. “I agree, boyo. Leave it with me. It will be out of your house within the next hour. Now, I have to go because my granddaughter is bringing my great-grandbabies over. Good talking to you, boyo. I’ll be calling you soon for a longer talk.”

The next instant the screen was blank.

It was done.

And would never be spoken of again.

Rider

Seven days later

Riding up to the clinic with Bollywood, Bones and Mamba his mind instantly replayed the reason Harper and her boy was inside the building.

A vicious bitch had tried to kill them but she had died instead. The death of the slut meant nothing to him. He saw the way the men now looked at him but he shrugged it off.

He would do anything he had to for his family's safety.

If that meant killing a woman then so be it.

The bitch had targeted Harper and her boy and he could not let her get away with it only to try again at a later date. There was no way he would allow it to happen.

Walking into Harper's room he smiled at the sight of her with her baby in her arms, feeding him.

Yes, the kid was such a monster of a boy he was already out of the NICU and in her room. He knew Harp was disappointed because she couldn't breastfeed. When the baby hadn't seemed to thrive they tested her milk and it was found to not be nourishing enough and the paediatrician suggested bottle feeding. The little man was right now laying waste to his bottle.

"Hey, sweetheart, how are you and my boy doing today?" He asked as he sat on the side of the bed and ran a finger over the baby's head. "And when are you going to give our boy a name? We can't keep calling him baby boy or little man. Even the nurses keep asking me what his name is. He needs a name."

Harper grinned at him, leaned towards him and kissed his cheek.

“I have a name for him but I need to ask you about something else as well.”

“Me? Okay.” He frowned in confusion. Why would she need to talk to him?

She reached for his hand that was lying on the bed next to her and clasped her fingers over the back of it. Turning his hand under hers he folded his bigger hand around hers.

“I’ve been thinking about it for months and I would love it if you would agree to be my son’s godfather. But before you say anything there’s more. I want to name my boy after one of the best men I know. You. I want to give him your name, your road name. And I want to spell it R-Y-D-E-R. We can call him Ry so there’s no confusion. I’ve noticed no one calls you that, they either call you Rider or Ride.” She stopped talking, giving him a worried look.

While she explained his body had frozen in place, almost without thinking his fingers had tightened around hers, and his eyes had unexpectedly filled with tears. He had to breathe rapidly in and out, almost panting, while blinking several times to get his emotions under control.

When he had himself back together he answered her, slow and sure.

“Sorry, sweetheart, for a moment there I almost lost it, but I’m okay now. I’m stunned and there’s so much I want to say to you but I have no idea how to say it, except to say thank you. Thank you and yes, my answer is yes to both questions. I’m so damned honoured you chose me to be his godfather and to name him after me. I swear to you I will be there for him for as long as I live.”

He had to swallow to clear his throat, blinking and swiping at the tears that pooled in his eyes.

“To know there’s a little boy on this earth who has my name...you have no idea what you have done for me. As far as I was concerned my name died with Penny and my boy, and you’ve found a way to give it back to me, to ease the constant pain. Thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Harper smiled at him through her tears as he clasped both his hands around hers, then bent down and pressed a soft kiss on the back of it and one on the top of little Ryder’s head.

“You’re such an incredible human and the sweetest man I know.” She whispered.

“Don’t tell anyone, it’s a secret.” He whispered trying to make her smile.

She smiled through the tears running down her cheeks. The smile faded as she continued.

“You and Ms Squirrel are my family. You helped me when I was lost and alone by becoming my friend and sharing your baby girl with me. I will forever be grateful that you came into my life. Thank you for agreeing to be Ryder’s godfather, he’s going to need you as he grows up.”

His heart ached for his friend but he said nothing, just leant forward and gently surrounded the two of them with his arms, hugging her gently.

“I’ll always be there for the two of you. You can count on me. Always.”

Little did he know the two of them would be needing him sooner than they both realised.

Harper and Ryder had been back at Asa's compound for about five weeks when the call he'd been dreading came.

"Asa, is everything okay?"

"The fuckers are getting closer, Ride. The Italians have stepped up their surveillance of my compound. We cleaned out a nest of them last night but the fuckers just moved to a new location. They launched drones this morning, we were lucky it wasn't when Harper was out walking with Ry. This time. It's time to move them."

His gut clenched. He didn't want to lose them but he was a realist.

Harper and her boy wasn't safe anymore.

He agreed with Asa, it was time.

"You think it's time for them to go to the States?"

"Yes."

"He's so damned small still, Asa. There's no way he'll be able to make such a long flight without screaming his head off. It will freak out the other passengers and not even thinking about what it will do to Harper. She'll lose her mind."

Asa hummed. "I have a plan, Ride. I'll reach out to Dom and see if we can arrange something with him. If not we'll charter a private jet and get them there in easy stages. I have to go to Dublin towards the end of next month, that can be stage one. They stay over for a couple of days or so then go on to Miami, stay over there for a day or two then fly to Savannah. It should give Ry time to get used to flying."

“Hmm, that sounds like it could work.” Rider agreed reluctantly.

He didn't like the idea of them on a plane for hours but there was no other way.

“I'll call when I have an update.” Asa said.

“Thanks, brother. You keep your eyes open and I'll see what we can do from our side. Those fucking Italians need something else to focus on. Let's see what my prez says about stirring shit up with them. I'll talk to you soon.”

Ending the call he sat behind his desk staring at the photos on it.

Him and Penny, another of the two of them with Delene as a new-born, several of Delene and the new one, him with Harper and Ry.

He touched a finger to Penny's smiling face.

“You would have liked her, Penny, and she would have liked you too. She's a good mother, just like you.”

Withdrawing his finger he stared into the laughing eyes in the photograph.

“I love you, baby. Forever.” He whispered.

TWELVE

Harper

Present Day - Hello USA

It had taken several days to get here. To Miami.

Our plane had hopped from Johannesburg to Dublin where we stayed in a hotel for two days and from there we flew to Miami.

Staring out of my hotel room window I marvelled at the fact that I was actually here, in Miami. I, a girl who had never set foot outside of South Africa, was standing in a fancy hotel room in yet another country. And not just any other country, the United States, a country I had always dreamed of visiting. Every time Pixie had gone to conventions I had found reasons to stay in Cape Town. The biggest reason had been my fear of the authorities picking me up for using a fake passport.

I was still fearful even though Asa had assured me our passports were perfect.

Going through customs in Johannesburg and Dublin had been nerve wracking. I was sure they were going to see mine and Ryder's paperwork was faked. Asa got me through my mini panic attack before we landed in Dublin but he didn't come to the States with us, he had to stay in Ireland for business.

When I again started panicking during the flight Bren and Rory got me calmed down before we landed in Miami.

I shouldn't have worried. It was a total breeze.

Why did I worry?

I'm not even sure because I had sailed through the visa application process in South Africa with our faked passports. If there was ever a time for authorities to realise they were fake that would have been the moment. But we got through it without any problems.

Today we were about to embark on the last leg of our journey, the flight to Savannah once again on Dominick's private plane. Asa had arranged it because neither one of us wanted Ryder on a commercial flight at such a young age and for such a long flight. He was only two months old and even if we had been in first class it would have totally freaked me out. His age was also why our trip had been broken into stages.

But there was something that scared me more than the authorities did.

It was running into Lucky. What if by some strange coincidence he was at the airport and saw me? Saw us?

Would he even recognise me? I looked nothing like the woman he had slept with.

Turning away from the window I sank down on the bed and forced thoughts of him from my mind. He took up enough of it when I slept.

Peeking into the crib set up next to the bed I smiled, Ry was still fast asleep, his mouth pursed and his dark lashes like fans on his cheeks. He was such a good baby and had taken to flying like a superstar. He had only cried when he was hungry or needed a nappy change.

I knew I had to stop worrying about everything but it was difficult.

In my head I knew no one would recognise me. I looked nothing like the person I used to be.

If I was honest with myself, and lately I've tried to be brutally honest, I loved my new look. It felt right, as if the real me had been hidden so deep she never had a chance to appear. I used to do slutty biker babe and then cleaned it up to the girl next door look, but I had never felt at home in either persona. Especially not the clean cut girl next door because it was too close to the one my father had forced on me.

I loved my new dark Goth look with touches of colour.

It was me. I finally knew what I liked and who I wanted to be.

I was Harper Delaney, new baby mama, tattoo artist, and all round badass.

Bending down I slipped my feet into my white docs with red roses and a viper curling around them. It went perfectly with my black leggings and slouchy white top that disguised my still not entirely flat stomach.

“You ready, Harp?” Brendan asked quietly as he walked through the connecting door between our rooms and stopped to peek in at Ry. He needn't have been so quiet because my boy slept through noise which was a blessing.

“Just putting my boots on, almost done. Our bags are packed and ready if you want to take them.” I answered as I leaned down to tie the laces on my boot.

Big hands moved my hands away and tied my laces. I grinned down at him and shook my head.

“You do know you’ve been spoiling me, right? You’re going to be my shoelace tying man for as long as I can get away with it.” I teased.

Bren didn’t say a word, just shook his head as he stood and held out a hand to help me off the bed. As if I couldn’t get myself off the bed. Between him and Asa I didn’t know who was the worst when it came to their over protectiveness.

While I was pregnant they had coddled me and continued doing so even after I had Ry. I let them because arguing with them wasn’t worth it.

“I’ve got a car waiting to take us to the airport.” Rory said as he strolled in looking at his phone. “Let’s move it people.”

I didn’t say a word just let the two badasses take our bags and gently lifted Ry from the crib and strapped him into the baby carrier. Once he was settled I followed them out.

The reason I had minimal luggage was Asa, he had arranged for the majority of our luggage to be shipped and sent directly to the house we were going to be staying at. Bren would be staying with me while Rory would return to SA once we were settled in.

The flight was uneventful and Ry slept through it like a travelling super star.

Arriving in Savannah we were met by a guy dressed in black from top to toe. We followed him to a blacked out SUV and he grinned when he saw my boots. I got why when he introduced himself.

“I like your boots. I’m Viper.” He said with a wink as he shook my hand. I liked him instantly.

After getting Ry’s seat locked in he loaded us up, Bren in the back with Ry and I while Rory took the passenger seat.

Viper was silent at first, but not for long.

“Harper, I want you to know I’ve been made aware of your situation. I have your back, sweetheart, no one is goin’ to get to you or your boy on my watch.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that you’re doing this for me.” I said.

I was going to say more but my nerves kicked back in. Was Viper one of Lucky’s friends? If so would he mention his assignment or would he stay silent? Not that anyone in Savannah knew who the baby’s father was. I wanted the information kept to the few who I had told.

I craned my neck to try and see some of the scenery we were flying past but with the dark tinted windows and my nerves I didn’t really take anything in.

Arriving at our destination I leaned forward and stared through the front windscreen at the house that would be our home for the next few months.

It was gorgeous.

Like one of those houses you see on TV shows about the South.

But it wasn’t perfect.

There wasn’t a wall or a fence at the front of the house, no gates we could lock. It was open to the street and the thought

that anyone could walk up to the front door almost had me hyperventilating. Almost, but not quite, I reached out and took the hand Bren held out.

“Why don’t we have a fence and gates at the front? Anyone can walk up to the house. I don’t like it.” I muttered.

I thought I’d said it quietly, apparently not quietly enough.

Rory looked at me over the back of his seat, a small frown between his brows. Viper undid his seatbelt and turned to look at me as well, smiling reassuringly.

“Don’t worry about that, darlin’. You’re not goin’ to need fences to keep you safe. This house is a club safe house. It has every security feature you can think of and we installed a great alarm system. No one is gettin’ anywhere near you or your boy without us knowin’ about it.”

I slowly shook my head. “The man who wants me will get in. He always does. No matter what you do, he gets in.”

Bren took my hand in both of his and I turned to look at him.

“He’s not going to get to you, Harp. I’ll be with you every single day, and guard you every single night. He’ll have to kill me to get to you and Ry. I’m not easy to kill, sweetheart. Stop worrying and look around you, look at this neighbourhood. This is a family neighbourhood, the sick fuck isn’t going to pass unnoticed around here. In actual fact, we’re not going to pass unnoticed either. So relax and let the worries go. You’re safe here.”

Our driver grinned and tipped his head towards the street.

“What?”

“He’s right, darlin’, this is a family neighbourhood, but it’s also a neighbourhood where a few of my brothers have bought homes and settled their families. You’ll fit right in. There’s a reason why my prez recommended this house. Its right in the middle of the block and you have one of my brothers livin’ across the street from you and there’s another two houses down, with two more in the block behind your house. With you workin’ at a club owned business it makes you a part of our club. We’re not goin’ to let anythin’ happen to you. Not to you and not to your little man either.”

He looked at Ry who had woken up before looking back at me. “Your kid has the bluest eyes I’ve ever seen, babe. He’s fuckin’ beautiful.”

His eyes and voice showed his sincerity and I relaxed, just a tiny bit.

“I think so too, thanks. Okay, show me my new home.” I said, giving him a little smile.

Instantly the tense atmosphere in the car evaporated.

I hadn’t realised the guys had been worried about me accepting the house. I wasn’t completely sold on it but I would give them the benefit of the doubt, for now.

I followed Viper and Rory into the house, carrying Ry, while Bren walked in behind me. To say I was underwhelmed would be an understatement. The lounge furniture consisted of an ugly brown couch, two ugly chairs and a scratched up coffee table. At least the house smelt clean and fresh. The curtains were beige and brown and as ugly as the couch and chairs.

Lordy. I was going to have to redecorate. I couldn't live with such awful furniture around me every day.

“Can I redecorate?”

They all started laughing.

“I have orders to tell you the house is yours, you can throw out what you don't want and we'll get you new stuff. Anything you want.” Viper looked around. “I didn't think it looked too bad when I came to check the house after it was cleaned but now that I've met you...” He grinned and shook his head.

I pulled a face.

“All of this has to go. It's awful, but I'll live with it for now until I find replacements.” I said as I continued my inspection.

The dining room wasn't any better but at least the table and chairs could be polished or painted and the curtains replaced. The kitchen was bright and sunny with white cupboards and pale yellow walls. The appliances were obviously new and so were the crockery and cutlery. I think I read that it's called flatware and silverware in the States. They have a point, plates were flat and most cutlery was silver in colour. It made sense.

“Let me show you your bedroom. We've prepared the biggest one for the two of you. It has a nice big walk-in closet and a bathroom.” Viper motioned me towards the stairs.

My room was at the end of the passage through a set of double doors. It was huge.

There were three narrow windows facing the front of the house and a bigger one facing the back yard. A big bed was against the far wall and was covered with a white comforter and big puffy cushions. The floors were gleaming wood with

an oatmeal coloured rug beneath the bed. A wicker crib stood next to the bed with white and pale blue bumpers and bedding. That was so sweet of whoever had done this for us.

I could work with it, make it my own. All the room needed was a bit of colour.

On the right of the entrance was the walk-in closet, on the left the bathroom. I was glad to see the same wooden flooring as the bedroom in the bathroom, the fittings were white and it had a bath and a separate shower.

Again all it needed was some colour and maybe a plant or two.

Turning I looked at the guys and nodded. “I like it, a lot. I’ll be fixing it up a bit but it’s a great space. And it’s big enough to have Ry in my room until he’s older.”

I almost laughed at the relieved looks on their faces.

My boxes of stuff that Asa had shipped sat waiting in the walk-in closet but today wasn’t the day I would be unpacking them. I would start with Ry’s things and my bags. The rest I would get to later.

The days flew by as I set up a home for Ry and myself.

I could hardly believe we’ve been in Savannah two weeks already.

Zane had gone back to South Africa the day before I arrived. Asa had arranged it like that on purpose. He didn’t want him recognising me and talking to anyone once he was back home.

I didn’t know Killian very well but he was a nice guy, friendlier than Zane at least. He lived in the house with us and

had accepted Ry without any questions. It made me like him even more.

Even though I had been in Savannah for the last two weeks today would be my first time working at the studio.

It's been a hectic two weeks of unpacking and making the house a home.

I had the lounge furniture replaced with two big squashy black leather couches. I chose them because I was living with a bunch of guys and I've seen the couches at the Road Warriors' clubhouse. Leather would be easy to clean if it got messy, which it will. Plus they went well with the deep burnt orange curtains I had found online. Killian had found the perfect rug at a shop close to the studio, it was black with cream and burnt orange woven through in small splashes. We all agreed on the big chrome and glass coffee table. A massive television was fixed to the wall and I bought a refinished black wooden cabinet to put beneath it. It was perfect to store all the crap the guys insisted they needed, game systems and stuff. I wasn't a gamer but apparently they all were.

I hung the same curtains in the dining room as in the lounge and polished the furniture until they shone. The downstairs visitor's bathroom now had a blind covering the window and matching towels and stuff to wash hands with and so on. The guys teased me saying it was girly but I ignored them.

Our house was becoming a home.

I didn't change anything in the kitchen except the coffee machine because Killian and Brendan hated the pod coffee machine. They wanted a drip style machine and now we had two coffee machines. One that took pods and the drip style

one. Viper and I used the pods leaving the other one to the two complainers.

After my first night in my new bed was spent rolling around trying to get comfy I gave in and bought a body pillow. I had to leave the one Asa bought me in SA. It was weird how I had become used to sleeping with one and now couldn't sleep without it.

Killian was out every day working at the studio and not saying much about it. I was incredibly curious but was ordered to take the time and settle us in our new home. No matter how I pouted and argued the guys were adamant. I would not be allowed anywhere near until my boy was back to sleeping the way he had before we arrived. He had been niggly ever since we arrived but over the last week had slowly settled back into his routine. Bren teased that he missed the plane and that's why he was complaining.

That is why today was going to be my first day at the studio. Ry was going in with me because I didn't want to leave him with someone I didn't know.

Today I was going set up my work space and personalise it with some of my drawings and designs. And of course, I was going to meet Ink, my boss, and Pixie's new partner.

I was excited and incredibly nervous about meeting him. Brandon "Ink" Coburn was a member of the Shadow Wraiths MC, and obviously knew Lucky. Not that I would be asking about him, but I had to keep in mind that they were club brothers.

Not only was Ink a biker he was an incredibly talented artist as well. His work was known and praised throughout the

tattooing community. It was daunting thinking that I was going to be working with him.

Pixie had given me a list of my colleagues to make the getting to know you period easier. Asa of course had given Bren the background checks Dom's people had done. Ink was Pixie's partner in the business but to be honest, he was a front. Her actual partner was the club, much the same as the studios in South Africa. There her silent partner was the Road Warriors MC.

Besides Ink, Killian and I, there were two other artists at the studio. Liz Harding and Rob Pringle, according to Pixie's notes they both came highly recommended and were experienced artists. Rob was from the UK but Liz was a local girl. We had a piercer as well, Avery Lane. I was happy about that because I did not like piercing. It freaked me out.

I was licenced to do it but preferred not to. Sticking needles through people's flesh was not for me. And certainly not when they wanted those very private places pierced. I wasn't a prude, not at all, I just didn't want to touch a stranger's privates.

"We're here." Killian said as he pulled into a parking space in front of the studio.

I smiled huge when I saw the signage on the window.

Mainline Ink III - Savannah.

It looked fantastic, I was sure Pixie was over the moon happy with her new location. I moved to open my door but one look from Bren was enough to freeze me in place. He insisted on being the one to open my door because of safety reasons.

I knew it meant he wanted his body covering mine in the event of the worst happening.

Every time he did, it dampened my enthusiasm quite a bit.

I had dressed carefully for today. I was wearing black jeans and a form fitting black camisole with a black lace over shirt. My pink hair was styled in big curls at the ends and hung to below my shoulder blades. I was wearing my Goth boots and my face was made up to match.

I'd gone very natural, a nude lip colour on my lips. My eyes were lined with black liner, long false eye lashes with lots of mascara framed my purple eyes.

Yes. We decided to go crazy on the contact lenses. I had several colours to play with.

My jewellery, courtesy of Asa, was fabulous. I wore an ornate septum ring and diamond studs in both nostrils. Silver studs marched up the sides of my ears connected by tiny silver chains and my dagger earrings were in my lower lobes. My belly ring was silver with a red gem set in an ornate little heart. It only showed when my camisole rode up, which it did constantly. There was a skull ring on my left thumb, a simple silver band on my right and heavy ornate rings on both middle fingers. One had a moonstone the other an onyx, both were very pretty. Asa had such good taste in jewellery.

Because my tattoos were a way to instantly identify me Killian and I had come up with a fix. With him living in the house with us I had insisted that he had to know about the dangers. And that's how the tattoos happened.

We were using fake tattoos, not the cheap stuff, the real expensive shit used by Hollywood. We designed them to fit with my new persona.

They were layered over and around my existing tattoos, giving me full sleeves and a neck tattoo. The tattoo on my neck was totally kickass. A heart surrounded by raptor wings. The tips of the wings ended at the back of my ears. Killian designed it and the wings and the feathers looked so real I kept touching them. The heart was red and made to look like a red gemstone. There were heavy chains connecting my sleeve tattoos to the neck tattoo. They came from the tips of the feathers on the wings and ran in loops along the tops of my shoulders to my upper arms. Another thinner set ran from the sides of the heart to the outline of an ornate heart at the top of my cleavage. Killian, the ass, had put the initials S P in there.

S P as in Surprise Package. He had heard me calling Ry that and thought it was funny. I had only realised what he had done once it was too late. It was on my skin and staying put.

Most of my tops showed off that particular part of my tattoo. Bren and Killian had grinned and winked when I muttered about it being unprofessional showing that much boobage.

Of course they won the argument, claiming I was mistaken.

Giving Brendan my hand I got out of the car. I had my phone out and immediately started taking photos of the outside of the studio to send to Pixie. Killian unclipped Ry's seat, carrying him as he walked into the studio with me. Once inside I stood for maybe a minute just to take it in.

It was a bit like Cape Town, a bit like Joburg but also totally not. It was still in Pixie's preferred black and white theme but

not the same. The floor was done in a black and white chequered pattern, the walls were stark white and the couches were black leather.

There were three black and white photos on the wall of the reception area. One of Cape Town, one of Joburg and the last I had to assume was Savannah. Below them was a photo of Pixie next to a photo of a man I knew had to be Ink.

The reception desk was a vision of black lacquered wood, glass and brushed steel. To the side were glass cases filled with all kinds of jewellery needed for piercing as well as several rings and bracelets. From the reception area you stepped through an arch to the guts of the studio, the area where I would be working. There were six stations, three on either side.

The private piercing room was behind the last station on the left. A door on the right led to a restroom, an office with two desks and a small gleaming stainless steel kitchen. There was a break room furnished with more black leather couches and a long glass and black lacquered wood coffee table.

A heavily secured steel door guarded the back entry.

And lastly, there were cameras everywhere.

When I say everywhere I mean everywhere, even in the restroom, but thankfully not in the stalls.

I don't know where the security office was but I felt sure we were being monitored closely.

Walking back towards the reception I saw the crates labelled with my name (my new name) stacked against the wall in the middle station on the right.

Obviously someone had decided I needed to be in what seemed to be the safest area.

“Harper.”

A deep voice had me turning around and I fought hard not to stare. His photo had not done him justice.

The inked badass standing a few steps away from me was stunningly gorgeous. I was tall but he had several inches on me. His almost waist long straight black hair was brushed back from his forehead and tied in a tail at his neck, leaving his model beautiful face on view. He had gorgeous hazel eyes, and a short dark scruff surrounding full lips covered his jaw. The man was covered in tattoos. From his fingers, up his arms and into his neck. I could see them all because he was wearing a skin tight sleeveless tee. And the muscles. They were fabulous, his shirt was so tight it showcased the abs rippling underneath.

Yowza.

“Hi, you must be Ink.”

I smiled at him and held out a hand. He took it, clasped it and let go.

“That I am darlin’. Great to finally meet you. Did you find everythin’ at the house okay? I understand from Viper you changed some shit, anythin’ else you want done you let me know and I’ll get some prospects on it.”

He glanced at Killian holding Ry in his baby carrier.

“With all the information I was given on you I wasn’t told you had a baby. Did your man come with you?”

I bit my lip, pulled my shoulders up in a slow shrug and shook my head.

“No, and I’m sorry we didn’t let you know. We didn’t want it to get out before I’ve had a chance to inform the father and my friends. The father situation is a bit of a mess actually but I’ll sort it out. I haven’t even told Pixie yet but I’ll tell her soon.”

He grinned, gave my body a once over, winked, then shrugged.

“I don’t have a problem with it, darlin’. As long as we keep you safe and under the radar I’m all good.”

What a relief.

“Thank you for understanding, and I have to tell you, the studio is the shit. It’s so gorgeous, I can’t wait to get started.”

“Good, because we’re fully booked for the next two months.”

I stared at him in shock.

“Really? How did you manage that?”

He grinned. “I hired the best damn receptionist in Savannah away from our opposition and he got busy promotin’ the studio on social media. The way he’s carryin’ on we’re goin’ to have a waitlist as long as my fuckin’ arm.”

“Lovely. I like being busy, less time to think about shit, you know.”

His eyes narrowed a fraction as he watched my face but then he nodded.

“I get it. We’ll keep you busy darlin’ and when you’re not busy we’ll get you a baby sitter and show you the fun stuff in

the city. You're goin' to love it here. I bet once we've got the studio up and runnin' full steam you're not goin' to want to leave."

I grinned. "We'll see about that. There are some very special people back home that I love dearly, don't think I could go long without seeing them."

"That's why there are such things as planes, sweetheart." He joked.

I glanced past him at a frowning Bren. "Did you meet my..."

I didn't really know if I should let it be known he was my bodyguard. He settled it for me.

"I'm Brendan, Harper and Ryder's bodyguard, and her friend. I'll be here with them every day."

The men did that manly thing where they checked each other out then shook hands. Measuring each other up. Suddenly Ink nodded, let go of Bren's hand and stepped back.

"Good to know. My Prez has a man on the studio as well, I'll introduce you when he gets here. He won't be given all the information but he will protect you. We decided havin' an experienced brother here will be better than gettin' a prospect to keep an eye."

"Great, we can't be too careful. The fuckers who are after her have connections and they're damned dangerous." Bren shared.

Ink frowned. "I wasn't told why they want her. Can you give me an idea at least?"

I didn't want him to be caught unprepared so I shared.

“My fucked up family are involved with the Italian mafia and sold me to one of their associates as a wife.” I waved at Ry.

“They have no idea about this, and they can’t find out. If they do...they’ll kill him if they get their hands on us. I’m not worth anything if I have a baby so they’ll make sure I don’t by the time they’re done with me.”

Ink was silent for a beat. “The Italians are your family.”

It was a statement more than a question and I nodded.

He dragged long fingers over his short scruff, his eyes narrowed, then he gave a soft grunt.

“Right. I assume you look nothin’ like you usually do but, to be safe we’ll be keepin’ you under wraps with the local Italian boys. They aren’t a force in the city but the club will keep an eye anyway. We’re not takin’ any chances with you and Junior.”

“It’s not Junior it’s SP.” Killian said with a grin.

“SP?”

“Surprise Package.”

Ink snorted as he tried to not laugh. It was hopeless, he, Killian and Bren whooped it up as if it was the most hilarious thing ever.

“So that’s why she’s got SP on her ti...uhm, breasts. Can you imagine her handin’ the kid to the baby daddy sayin’ ‘this is SP’ and the fucker goes, ‘SP?’ and she goes, ‘Yeah, your Surprise Package’.”

The three of them thought they were being so damned funny.

Turning around I sniffed as if offended and bent to open one of the crates. I was grabbed from behind and gently pushed into the chair.

“You do not bend over like that, remember you’ve had major fucking surgery.” Bren growled as he carried on opening the crate.

With my elbows on my thighs I slapped both hands to my face and groaned. “Oh God, deliver me from over protective males. I’ve healed, Bren. It’s been two months since my surgery.”

“Oh baby doll, these two are goin’ to go all Neanderthal on your ass no matter what you say.”

A chirpy voice said and I twisted to look at the vision standing outside my station. A gorgeous male smiled down at me, his dark eyes twinkling with mirth. He was dressed in black knee high boots, tight black skinny jeans, a white almost sheer pirate shirt with several silver chains around his neck falling on a tanned and muscled chest. He continued talking as I stared at him, mouth hanging slightly open. It was like a modern day pirate had walked into the studio. A much cleaner, taller and much more put together version of Jack Sparrow. He wasn’t wearing Jack’s hat or his coat but I could see him in them. He would look fabulous. Not that he didn’t already look fabulous, he totally did.

“Give it up and let them take care of the boring shit. You and I are going to take your little man back to the break room to have healthy smoothies and get acquainted. I want to know all about you and your little person. I need to know what you

need me to set up to make him comfortable while you're working."

"Before you spirit her away let's do some introductions. Harper, this is Mark "Pretty Boy" Hansen, he handles the reception and all of us. And just a warnin' baby, he's known to nag until you tell him what he wants to know." Ink warned with a grin.

I rolled my eyes as Bren gently pulled me up and pushed me out of the way and towards the break room. Killian handed Ry over and I followed the cleaner version of Captain Jack. And Ink was right about him being a nag. Mark didn't stop until he knew all about me, every little thing. The only thing he didn't get out of me was the name of my baby daddy. There was no way I could share that with anyone. Not yet anyway.

I settled into work almost effortlessly.

Within days my work colleagues became friends.

We were a tight group who spent a lot of hours together, at work but also after work. They not only came to dinner regularly, they showed me Savannah. I loved the city and I had so much fun with my new friends that there were times I forgot. Forgot that I was being hunted. Forgot that my son's father lived in this city.

It pissed Bren and Viper off that I went out because they would rather have locked me in our house than have me traipsing across the city. And forget about getting a baby sitter, they took over that duty, refusing to have a stranger in our house. One watched over me while the other took care of Ry.

The weeks passed slowly without any incidents and Ry grew like a little weed. He was the cutest little baby boy I had ever seen and at three months old was chubby, friendly and lovable.

And I started to relax.

I shouldn't have. I should have stayed vigilant and guarded my stupid heart.

The cracks in it got bigger when I overheard Ink and Viper talking about Lucky and his new woman. How nobody liked her because she was slutty and a raging bitch. And how they didn't know what he saw in her. They both thought she must be spectacular in bed which was why he was still with her.

After overhearing them I scaled down on my outings, pretending I wanted to spend more time at home. The reality was I was scared that while we were out I would run into them. I knew I wouldn't be able to handle seeing him with someone else.

So I stayed home where I felt safe.

I started what Bren called 'nesting'. He was such an ass. I wasn't nesting, I was hiding and making our home pretty at the same time.

Many a night I lay in my bed wishing I had someone to hold me, someone to care about me and Ryder. Someone who would slay my demons for me.

I had my friends who cared about me, and I knew Rider loved me. But it wasn't the same. It was a friend's love, not that of a man for a woman.

Sometimes I wished for the unattainable.

For Lucky to suddenly appear and love me, love our boy.
Obviously it wasn't going to happen, not now that he was with
someone else.

I had to accept it and move on.

Rider's promise to always be there for me helped. I knew he
would keep his word because it was just the kind of man he
was.

A man of his word. A caring and loving friend.

I missed him and my squirrel.

I missed my friends.

I missed home.

THIRTEEN

Lucky

Present Day

Carmella Mendez aka Gloria Garcia was a fucking bitch. How the hell had he not seen it when they had been together years ago? The longer he was around her the more her true colours showed. She tried to control him and bitched incessantly when he didn't drop whatever he was doing to take her where she wanted to go. So far he'd been able to keep her off the back of his bike. She kept asking and he kept making excuses. If this bullshit carried on much longer he had no idea what excuse he would have to use next.

It was difficult enough to touch her, kiss her, make her come but at the same time keep his dick away from her. He had told her straight up he would not be fucking her, that he wasn't a boy who was ruled by his dick. He pretended he respected her too much to treat her like a casual lay.

It grated when he knew she was worse than a club whore. She was a dirty slut through and through.

She was becoming suspicious and they couldn't have that.

Not once in all the weeks he's been around her has he had a hard on. His dick stayed stubbornly flaccid. And he thanked God for that. Knowing how she had played him when he was younger there was no way he would put his dick inside her. It fucking killed that he had to touch her sexually.

“Brother.” He turned to the voice and saw Viper sliding into the chair next to him, resting his forearms on the bar.

“Where the hell did you come from? What the fuck are you doin’ every day, brother? Haven’t seen you around here for weeks.”

If he hadn’t been watching he wouldn’t have seen the way his brother tensed up before he relaxed and smiled.

“I was given a special assignment by prez. Can’t talk about it, brother, sorry.”

By the quick smile on the bastard’s face he knew he must be watching over some piece of ass. Viper always liked those kind of assignments. He was the best at it because he watched but never got involved with the women he was assigned to protect.

“I heard you’ve got a woman.” Viper looked at him with narrowed eyes and Lucky forced a smile, but he knew it didn’t reach his eyes.

Viper wasn’t one of the brothers in the know about what was going on so he had to fucking lie. He hated lying to him.

“Yeah, Carmella. She’s cool, nothin’ permanent though. You know me, she’s just pussy.” He tried to play it off as nothing.

Viper wasn’t buying his bullshit, it was right there in his eyes but all the brother did was nod and finish his beer. Pushing the bottle away from him he stood, slapped Lucky on the back and with a ‘see you later bro’ walked out of the clubhouse.

He was tempted to follow the fucker to see where the hell he was going but his phone rang and he sagged in frustration.

Carmella. Again.

He couldn't ignore the call, had to take it.

“Hi babe, how you doin' today?”

“I want to go to town tomorrow, can you pick me up? My car was making strange noises and I had to send it in. They said it was going to take at least three days to fix it, they need to order parts.”

Lucky frowned, tapping a finger on the bar as he thought it through.

Her car had been in for more repairs and services than any car he had ever known. He had informed the prez of it and they were investigating to see if it was just a way to get him to ferry her around or if there was more to it.

He would bet money on it that it was more.

“I have work I need to do in the mornin' but I'll pick you up at ten thirty.”

“Good. Are you coming over tonight?”

Fuck.

“Sorry, darlin', I have shit to do for my president. We'll get together another night.” He pulled a disgusted face though his voice didn't show it.

“You said you were free tonight and I planned on cooking for you. Can't you at least try and make it for dinner?”

He could hear the pout and calculation in her voice. Up to now they had gone out with her friends and his friends tagged along.

Little did she know they were his fucking back up should shit go side-ways.

“I can’t, Carmella. I have club business to attend to and I’ll be busy all day and most of tonight. We’ll try for another time.”

“You never spend time with me at home. Why not?”

He heard it in her voice. She was pissed and suspicious.

He felt like hitting his head on the bar and groaning out loud in frustration. Again he had to trot out his standard lie.

“Because I’m not goin’ to fuck you before I’m sure this is what we both want. Been fuckin’ pussy for years, you’re not pussy. We’ll wait until the time is right before I put my dick in you.” He could have said more but there was no way he could force the words out of his throat.

She sighed with what sounded a lot like delight.

“I’ve never met a man like you. Any other man would have taken what they wanted by now. But not you. You’re a very special man, Lucky Boudreaux.”

She sounded sincere but not being able to see her face he didn’t know if he could believe her. Being around her and watching her he had noticed her tells, she didn’t have many, but she did have them.

When she lied her eyelids seem to flutter more and when she was nervous her tongue flicked out over her bottom lip, when she was pissed off and hiding it she would constantly run her hand over her hair, patting it into place.

He watched for her tells all the time. It was in his reports to his prez, if something happened to him the club had to have the knowledge. It would prove helpful if they had to send someone else after her.

“I have to go. I’ll see you tomorrow.” He cut the call short, had to before he lost his cool.

She was silent for a beat.

“See you tomorrow, *mi amor*.” She said softly.

Fuck. Calling him her love was not good, not good at all.

He ended the call without saying anything. No way was he sticking his neck out and lying about his feelings. All he felt for the bitch was loathing. He had seen and heard enough around her and her people to know she was exactly the same as her father. A cold hearted user of those she controlled. The bitches were still under the misconception that he didn’t speak Spanish. With the information he had brought in the club had been able to intercept a couple of drug runs and they had anonymously tipped off the pigs. Unfortunately they had to allow most through and that sucked.

Maniac didn’t want to blow Lucky’s cover as he was walking a very thin line.

He finally understood what Remy had been doing as an undercover operative. There was a difference though. He had his brothers watching his back, while his blood brother had no one. His brother had gone after the scum on his own and with minimum backup for fucking years. Until he met Pixie Maingarde. The tiny woman was his brother’s one, like Gloria had supposedly been his.

His one and only. What a joke.

She was a liar and a total fraud.

Nothing like his Joney.

As the thought shot through his head he froze, a pair of glacier blue eyes looking up at him and long white blonde hair spread across his pillow was suddenly front and centre in his mind.

Shaking his head he stood and strode to his president's office. He had shit to report and wasn't going to pay attention to fucking day dreams.

That's all it was, a fucking day dream.

Maniac, Grave and Renegade were waiting for him. Throwing himself into the chair across from his president he scraped his hair back with both hands and heaved a heavy sigh.

“Don't know how long I can keep this up, Prez. The bitch is fuckin' unbelievably evil and puttin' my hands on her has me feelin' like I'm covered in filth. I've no idea how Remy did this undercover bullshit for fuckin' years. Admire the little fuck for stickin' it out as long as he did.”

“Funny you should mention Remy.” His prez gave him a look and nodded at the phone lying on his desk.

“What?” He frowned.

He wasn't left in the dark for long because his brother's enraged voice filled the room.

“What the fuck do you think you're doin' playin' with the fuckin' Los Rojos cartel, Lucky? You're on fuckin' radar, and

it's only because you're my brother that I got a call to warn me they're about to take you down along with the scum you're associatin' with. Fuckin' Carmella Luisa Mendez? For fuck's sake! What the fuck is wrong with you? You walk away from a good girl only to get it on with filth, and now *my* fuckin' name is linked to that filth because you can't keep your fuckin' dick..."

His brother was raving mad and if he let him he would carry on until he ran out of shit to say, which he would never do. It was one thing his little brother was really good at, running off at the mouth.

"REMY!" He shouted and his brother stopped mid rant.

"I know she's fuckin' vile and it gets worse, brother. Remember Gloria, my ex who was killed in a drive-by? Carmella and Gloria is one and the same fuckin' person. And believe me, I'm not fuckin' the bitch, she's a mark, that's all. Los Rojos has targeted the club and I'm doin' what I have to do to get information for my club. Now tell me who is watchin' us."

A shocked growl echoed through the line.

"Fuck, are you serious? She's Gloria? Are you sure? Fuck, you are otherwise you wouldn't tell me. Fuckin' hell."

His brother audibly drew in a breath of air before he continued.

"You're not trained for this shit, Lucky. You're gonna fuck up and blood is gonna flow, yours included. Every fuckin' letter of the alphabet agency is in on this one, brother. They've had a hard on for you and your club for years. The fuckers at

the top are ecstatic they can finally tie your club to shit that's goin' to put you all behind bars for the rest of your lives." He grunted in disgust.

"My ex-boss, Paul Marchand, is goin' to get in touch and I strongly suggest you work with him. If you don't they're goin' to put you away and throw away the key. For fuck's sake Lucky, Los Rojos are trafficking women and children. How the fuck could you get involved with their filth?"

It felt like his head was going to explode he was so pissed off.

"Little brother, why the fuck aren't you listenin' to me? We're not doin' business with the cartel, we're tryin' to fuckin' stop them from gettin' a foothold in Savannah. I've been with that filthy gash for information, that's it, nothin' more. We know they want to use our businesses to bring in shit, and we're not goin' to let them. You tell Paul to call me on this number tonight. I'll put together what we have and give it to him as long as he gets the pigs off my club's back."

Remy groaned.

"Fuck brother, why the fuck is this happenin' when I'm not there to fix this personally? I'll do what I can from this side. Dom said to tell you they will be doin' what they can from their side, he's reachin' out to some connections in the US. Shit's goin' down with the damned mafia over here and if Dom didn't need me on it I would have been on my way to you already. You need someone watchin' your back, someone who knows what the fuck they're doin'."

He sighed as if the world was on his shoulders then started to give Lucky pointers on how to handle the cartel.

“Never go into a situation you haven’t scoped out before you get there. Have more than one weapon on you, always. Use a wire if you can and have a tracker inserted under your skin. Put it underneath your club ring, you never take that shit off and when they wand you they’ll think it’s the rings. Listen carefully to what they’re saying and how they’re saying it, and always be careful of what *you* say. They’ll try to trip you up. Fuck. I wish I was there to walk you through this. There’s so much more you need to know to not get dead. You be careful, Lucky. The next time I see you I don’t want it to be on the cold slab of a morgue.”

Drawing in a deep breath Lucky did what older brothers were supposed to do. Keep their little brothers from worrying.

“Thanks for the tips, brother. I’ve got someone guardin’ my back all the time and I don’t go anywhere that’s not public with the bitch. Her house to pick her up is the most private it’s been. I’ll be careful because I want this shit done as soon as possible. You be careful over there, I don’t want to see you in a morgue either. How’s Pixie and your baby doin’?”

The tension was suddenly gone as his brother laughed.

“They’re both doin’ great, brother. I look at her every day and can’t believe she’s mine. I’m truly blessed.”

Lucky smiled and shook his head. His brother sounded happy and relaxed now that he was talking about his family.

“Happy for you, brother. Give your woman my love and I’ll come see you soon. The folks and Frankie are talkin’ about comin’ out for the birth, so be prepared for madness.”

Remy laughed. “Not worried, we’ve got a big house, there’s always space for visitors. By the way, there’s somethin’ I’ve been wantin’ to tell you. Joney is gone, she no longer works at Maingarde Ink. Pixie said she had to leave because of family troubles but that she will be back once it’s been sorted. My wife is bein’ very cagey and it worries me. I’ve put out a couple of feelers but so far I’ve got nothin’. And Dom isn’t sayin’ anythin’ either and that’s pissin’ me off because it means he knows what’s goin’ on. With my woman I suppose it’s the girl code bullshit, keepin’ a friend’s secrets.”

Hearing her name had his gut clenching and worry followed close behind. He couldn’t ask questions though, not while he had his prez listening in. This wasn’t club business, it was private. He would call Remy back later and get more information on Joney. Or better yet, he’ll call Pixie she’ll tell him what he wanted to know. Then again, maybe not, seeing as she’s not telling Remy anything.

He finished the call with his brother and focused on how the club was going to get out of the mess the cartel had dumped them into.

They had been dancing along a thin line with the law, keeping them out of their business for fucking years and now this. They couldn’t have the pigs looking too closely at them. Plans would have to be made to start a clean-up as soon as possible. It didn’t look like they had a lot of time to get it done. If the pigs were watching there was a lot they might have seen.

It was time to clean house.

“Do I have to carry on seein’ and pretendin’ I have no clue who the fuckin’ bitch is?” He asked his prez.

He was hoping his prez would end his assignment but he should have known it wasn’t going to happen. They needed to keep that avenue of information open.

“Unfortunately that’s a yes. But not for long. With the information Remy gave us we’ll do a clean-up and then cooperate with the fuckin’ FBI. We need to come out smellin’ like a rose once this shit has been dealt with. The cartel and the Grave Robbers have to take the blame for everythin’ goin’ down around here. I don’t want the club tied to any of their bullshit.”

Lucky agreed, they had to be sure none of the cartel’s dirt stuck to them.

“The bitch asked me to take her shoppin’ tomorrow. Once we’re done I’ll drop her off and come back here to help with gettin’ us straight.”

“I know its hell to be around the bitch, Lucky, but we need the information you’ve been getting us. Not long now, brother. I can feel it in my bones; we’re close to settling this shit.” Grave reached out to tap his shoulder and Lucky sighed.

“She’s fuckin’ vile, man. I can hardly stand bein’ around her. And havin’ to touch her kills somethin’ inside me.”

Everyone nodded, agreeing with him, but it didn’t help him much.

He still had to do what he had to do.

And he was going to hate every single fucking minute spent with the slut.

FOURTEEN

Carmella

She hesitated before she picked up her ringing phone. Carlos Mendez wasn't the easiest man to talk to; he was extra difficult when his plans weren't coming together the way he wanted them to. Her orders had been to seduce Lucky Boudreaux, again. He was now the Shadow Wraiths' officer in charge of the club's distribution routes and no longer an impressionable young boy. She was doing as ordered but as yet she'd been unable to give her father more than the basic outlay of their clubhouse. Nothing on their routes. Lucky had taken her to several Friday night parties but she hadn't been allowed further than the main room and the bathrooms. Everything else was behind security doors with cameras everywhere.

And Boudreaux wasn't talking. Not even when he's been drinking and she gently probed for information. It had been so easy to do when he was younger. The man he had become was impossible to read which was absolutely infuriating.

And her father was becoming impatient.

"Papa." She was hoping the softer name would soften him up.

"Carmella. What do you have to report?" He obviously wasn't falling for the soft.

“Unfortunately nothing new. He’s loyal to his club and never talks about what he does for them. I don’t think I’m going to get anything out of him. I’ve been unable to get him drunk or get him in my bed. He’s not the easily manipulated boy he used to be.”

Her father gave a displeased growl before giving her the order she didn’t want to hear.

“You will bring him in and we’ll make him talk. I need the information on their supply routes and stash houses. The Grave Robbers are becoming a problem. They’re insisting on getting involved and it will turn a simple elimination into a bloodbath. Then the feds will take notice and we can’t have that. When will you bring him in?”

She had to breathe deep to stay calm and plan her next words carefully. There was no way she could let him realise she had done the unthinkable. That she had started to develop feelings for her mark, again. She knew if he found out this time he would kill her, for real.

She didn’t want to die but she didn’t want Lucky to die either.

And he would die. Her father would have Pablo do things to him that would make him talk and once they got what they wanted they would kill him.

There were questions she had to answer for herself. To get clarity.

Was she ready to give up her ambitions for a man? A man she wasn’t even sure of?

A man who, years ago, she betrayed and left behind, letting him believe she was dead.

Was she prepared to give up the cartel for him?

No. In all honesty she wasn't.

She had worked too hard to get where she was to lose it because of her feelings. She wasn't going to go out the way her mother and sister had, with a bullet in the head.

Thinking about how they had died was the wake-up call she needed.

Gritting her teeth she closed her eyes and focused on the job, on herself, like she should have from the start. For some reason she had fallen in the trap of his sweet manners, his voice and his amazing body. She had hoped to enjoy his massive dick one more time but he hadn't let her get close.

She was done with him. She had learned the hard way there was only one important person in her life and that was Carmella Luisa Mendez.

She was the only one who mattered, no one else did.

Decision made she locked her stupid soft feelings for the biker in a deep dark box at the back of her head and concentrated on business.

"I'm not sure, I need to plan this carefully and not bring attention to me when he disappears. He's never alone, always has one of their men with him."

Her father was silent for a beat but when he spoke his voice was harsh and cold.

“Since when are you so cautious when it comes to taking care of business? Kill the bastard then bring me the Cajun.”

Gritting her teeth not to snap at her father she nodded even though he couldn't see her.

“I'll get it done. They have another party on Friday, it will be the perfect opportunity to take him. No one will realise he's gone until it's far too late.”

She could almost feel his satisfaction through the phone.

“Good. Bring him to the yacht, we'll take him out to the freighter. No one will find his body once we're done with him. The sea will be his grave.”

Fine tremors were running through her hands when she ended the call.

There were no other options open to her. This was the life she had chosen.

A life that got her mother and sister killed because they were weak.

She wasn't weak. She wasn't going to get shot in the head like them.

And she won't give up her strength for a man. Not like her mother had done. Not ever.

Antoine “Lucky” Boudreaux was going to die. How he died was up to him. If he talked it would be easy, if he didn't...

Carmella shrugged. After Friday he would no longer be her problem.

Any feelings she had for him she had locked away. They weren't as strong as her sense of self-preservation.

In her mind he was already gone.

He was as good as dead. It was only a matter of time.

FIFTEEN

Lucky

Being around the bitch sucked.

He missed hanging out with his brothers and not have her hanging on his arm.

He missed riding his bike.

Damn. He missed everything about his life the way it used to be, before he got this fucking assignment.

Yesterday he once again got a call from Carmella he would rather have ignored but couldn't.

He had kept his voice neutral when he answered.

“Hi darlin’, how are you today?”

He asked but he really couldn't give a shit one way or the other.

“I'm good, I finally got that snippy asshole receptionist at your new tattoo studio to give me an appointment. I had to use your name and our relationship to get it. I'm going to complain about their poor service to club members when I get there. It's not right that I had to wait for an appointment. I'm your woman, I should have been given preference, but enough about that.” She gave a little sniff before continuing. “Here's the good news. I'm getting my nipples pierced. Lucia said once it's healed the sensations are going to be amazing. I can't wait to share it with you.”

Rubbing a tired hand over his face he slumped in his chair. He was going to have to apologise to Ink. Not the first or the last brother he would be apologising to while this shit was happening.

“When is your appointment?”

“Tomorrow at eleven with Avery, can you pick me up?”

“Yeah, sure. I’ll be there around ten fifteen. I’ve got shit to handle tomorrow so I can’t hang out with you. I’ll drop you and pick you up when you’re done.”

He could hear the pout in her voice. “I want you there with me.”

He did not want to see her tits.

“Not goin’ to happen, Carmella. I’ll pick you up tomorrow. I’ve got to go.”

He ended the call abruptly because he couldn’t do fucking small talk with her anymore.

Waking early after a restless night he worked on their routes before he had to leave to cart the slut around.

The minute he picked her up he knew the game was at an end.

Somewhere between last night’s phone call and this morning things changed. It was there in her eyes, his time had run out. She was subtly different, colder, with a look in her eyes he didn’t like. It was the look of a predator sizing up its prey. There was no fucking way he was going to be prey, not now, not ever.

He helped the slut into the passenger seat, closed the door and walked around the front of the truck. He gave Breaker the sign to be vigilant.

She was silent as he backed out of her drive then started her usual probing.

“Did you finish whatever you were doing for you club?” She asked sweetly, too sweetly.

“No, darlin’, I have to go back while you’re gettin’ your piercin’ done. Work is hectic at the moment because we’ve got several cars ready for shippin’ and the same with the bikes. The brothers have been workin’ overtime to get shit done. We’ve had problems with the crates and other shit, but that’s not important. Are you ready for today? You do realise it’s goin’ to be painful as shit.”

She gave him a quick smile before looking back at the road.

“I’ll be fine. I’ve read all the information on the internet and that bitchy receptionist sent me a lot of stuff to read as well. I can’t wait to give the asshole a piece of my mind.”

Lucky glanced at her then back at the road.

“He works for my club, Carmella, don’t cause shit that I’ll need to clean up with my president. He’ll not be happy with either of us and I don’t need problems right now.” He snarled.

Her head snapped his way, her eyes shooting daggers at him.

“He was the one who was rude to me. I will not allow it. I am Carmella Mendez and your woman, I will not allow anyone to talk to me like that and get away with it. If you can’t protect me I will protect myself.”

He couldn't stop the snort even if he tried. She thought she was someone important, when the contrary was true. He had to calm the bitch down before they got to the studio or Ink was going to lose his mind.

The brother didn't allow anyone to treat his staff like shit.

“Darlin’, he’s a receptionist, they’re rude to everybody. You’re nothin’ special to his way of thinkin’, just another client bitchin’ at him. I’ll talk to Ink and get it sorted. Don’t worry about it.”

She huffed out a breath in disgust and Lucky hoped like hell Byte was listening and letting Ink know he had trouble coming. Knowing how busy the brother was he was most probably recording shit and not actively listening.

Pulling up to the studio he almost breathed out in relief but stopped in time. He wanted out of the cage and away from the bitch, badly. It was the first time he was visiting the studio since it opened and he hated that it was with the slut.

He smiled as he looked at the signage on the window.

“What are you smiling at?” Carmella asked bitchily.

Lucky gave a nod towards the window. “My brother’s wife is part owner of the studio. Just likin’ the way her business name looks on the window.”

A frown settled on her face as she looked at the window then at him. “Your brother Remy is married? I thought he was a cop and your family kicked him out.”

Lucky shook his head. Where the hell had she heard that bullshit?

“No, he’s family, we didn’t kick him out and he’s no longer a cop. He married Pixie Maingarde, Dominick Maingarde’s sister, a while back. My brother works with him now. So no, he’s definitely no longer a cop.”

Since she reappeared he hadn’t talked to her about his family. Giving her information on Remy and Pixie was a test, a test to see if she would go ahead with her plans for him. It was obvious the information had thrown her, it also showed him how pathetic the cartel’s information gathering on him had been.

He got out of the cage, not giving her a chance to answer or ask more questions. Slamming the door closed he walked around and opened her door and helped her out. With his hand on the small of her back he ushered her through the door into the reception area of the studio. Once inside she virtually glued herself to his side, wrapping an arm around his waist and the other around his arm, showing anyone watching that he belonged to her. Such fucking bullshit but he had to let it go. There were people waiting on the couches and two women and a man were busy at the reception desk.

The man who was average sized with long hair tied back and a well-kept short beard glanced at them and held up a hand wordlessly asking them to wait. Lucky gave him a chin lift letting him know it was cool. He went back to whatever they were discussing. It sounded like there had been a mix-up with appointments and they were busy sorting it out.

“I don’t mind takin’ the next one, Harp. You take your break and get your feet up before Ink and Bren start breathing fire.”

The woman with the dark blonde hair said with a grin and a wink.

The tall, pink haired woman scooped her hair back and gave a snort as she leaned over the desk to point at something on the tablet in front of them. Lucky's eyes went straight to her luscious peach of an ass. It was fucking spectacular. Her mile long legs were clad in tight black leggings and she wore a strappy loose black top that ended just above the curve of her ass. Her arms and the part of her neck he could see were covered in tattoos, she was obviously one of the artists. She had some kind of pack strapped to her front and he wondered what that was about.

He realised he had been staring when Carmella hit him in the side. Her fucking elbow was sharp as hell.

“What?” He didn't even try to disguise his annoyance.

She gave him a dirty look, and then the crazy fucking bitch started loudly voicing her opinion about the woman leaning over the desk.

“Why would any woman disfigure herself like that? Look at her. All those tattoos look cheap and dirty and she has a fat ass. Pink hair is so over, no one does it anymore. Doesn't she realise how fat and ugly she looks in those pants? And now she's taking up *my* time, wasting it. I have an appointment and I've been waiting here for ages with no one helping me. Their service is disgustingly slow. My review will not be good.” She said loud enough it could be heard over the buzzing of the machines and the music playing in the background.

The pink haired woman slowly straightened then turned.

His heart jerked in his chest and his gut clamped down viciously.

Even with the pink hair, the piercings and the purple contacts in her eyes he would have known her anywhere.

His Jo-Jo, the ice queen he couldn't stop dreaming about.

His eyes got stuck on the carrier against her chest, a baby carrier, with a dark haired baby in it.

What the fuck?

When had that happened and whose fucking kid was that?

Had she been pregnant when they got together?

Did she lie to him?

Was that why she had unprotected sex with him? Or had she lied about being protected?

What the fuck was she doing here? Was she trying to trap him?

Never going to fucking happen, he wasn't that fucking gullible. No way was the kid his, he was obviously too old. He looked to be at least five or six months old. He was saying he because the kid was dressed in a blue outfit.

It took immense effort to keep his mouth shut. He didn't want Carmella to clue in that he knew the woman. It would endanger her and the baby, and even if she was a damned liar she didn't need the cartel on her ass.

And then the way she looked smashed through his silent rant.

The hair, the piercings, the contact lenses, the tattoos...it was a disguise.

The fuck?

His *'tite chatte* (little cat) was in hiding.

While his attention had been wandering Carmella had obviously said shit that had pissed his little cat off along with everyone else in the reception area.

But Joney didn't give her the satisfaction of showing she was pissed off. Her face was expressionless as she pointed at a sign prominently displayed behind the reception desk.

“You see that sign up there? It says ‘Right of Admission Reserved’. It means we reserve the right to serve you or not and to evict you from our premises should you cause a disturbance.”

She waved her finger between Carmella and him.

“The two of you are causing a disturbance. Get your judgemental asses out of our studio. We don't serve people like you.”

He hated being lumped into the same category as the slut but couldn't say a fucking word. He thought being ordered out would have Carmella exploding in rage. She didn't. She was ready with a comeback that would have had most women back down and run for the hills.

Not his ice queen.

“Bitch, I won't be the one leaving. This place belongs to my man's club and his blood family. *You* are the one who will be leaving. I will insist on your dismissal, they don't need someone like you working here. It's disgusting how you are subjecting everyone to your fat ass plus carrying your ugly child around at a place of business. It should be at home with a

nanny. Looking at you I can see a life filled with poor choices. I bet you don't even know who the father of that child is. I will be informing the authorities about you. That child is better off not having someone like you in its life. I'll see to it that they take that ugly thing away from you."

Joney's mouth thinned and her eyes narrowed on Carmella, he knew shit was about to get real. He had to cut it off before she said something that made it worse. It was already fucking bad.

"Carmella, darlin', stop arguin' about this bullshit. Forget about the ink slut, her gross fuckin' kid and her fat ass, let's get your piercin' done. I don't have time to stand here arguin' about crap, I have shit to get done today."

He hated calling her an ink slut and talking trash about her baby, but he had to divert the cartel slut's attention. He wished like hell he didn't have to do it. He despised himself for humiliating Joney in front of all those watching and listening.

Unfortunately as the words left his mouth Ink stormed in and his brother verbally laid him and Carmella out.

"Who the fuck do you think you are bitch? You come into *my* place of business and insult *my* people. I don't need your kind taintin' my business." He turned to Lucky. "And you, take your filthy gash, get in your cage, and get the fuck out. I will be informin' Maniac you and that piece of shit beside you are banned for life. If I see you here ever again you will fuckin' regret it. Now do us all a favour, turn you're your asses around use the door and fuck off."

It was well deserved and he took it, he should have found another way to get Carmella to shut up. He never should have

said the shit he did.

Of course the cartel bitch tried to take on Ink. Bad fucking idea.

“Do you know who I am? I’m Carmella Mendez and I can have you finished with a snap of my fingers. I will...” Lucky shoved a hand over the crazy bitch’s mouth, shutting her up, and forcibly shoved her towards the door.

Stomping her foot she whirled and stormed out of the studio. Outside she started pacing up and down the sidewalk, her phone out and against her ear. Her free arm waving in the air as she went off to whoever she was talking to.

Lucky didn’t follow her out.

He watched as Ink and someone who was very obviously a bodyguard converged on Joney. He watched and listened as they called her a name that wasn’t hers.

“Harper, honey, you okay?” Ink asked, curving an arm around her shoulders, gently moving her away from the reception.

“I’m good, Ink. Glad you threw the toxic bitch out. I’m damned ecstatic not having to breathe the same air as her.”

Her voice was pissed but it softened as she spoke to his brother.

“Harp, babe, you look tired, and it’s time for little man’s bottle. You need to take a break.”

The bastard on her other side said in a concerned voice.

Ink nodded at him as he escorted her away from reception.

She didn’t look at him, ignoring him.

Holding one hand against her back as if it hurt, the bodyguard took her deeper into the studio. He didn't like that she hurt. No he didn't, not at all. He watched them until he couldn't see her anymore.

Ink stalked to him, moved right into his space even though he was several inches shorter.

“What the fuck, Lucky?”

He kept his voice low as he answered.

“Sorry for causin' shit, Ink. I can explain about the gash but only if prez says it's okay. Who is that woman?”

He apologised but everything inside him waited for the answer to his question. And his brother, who was one wide awake motherfucker, noticed.

Ink's eyes narrowed, his head tilting to the side ever so slightly.

“Harper Delaney, and she's under the club's protection. Ask Maniac about her because that's all I can give you. I'm not fuckin' happy with you allowin' gash to talk to one of mine like that, brother. We're goin' to have a conversation about that.”

Lucky gave a nod. Their entire conversation had been done in low voices.

“She's done and won't be comin' back, you have my word. Now I'm gonna have to act like a prick. Can't have the gash realisin' I'm not takin' her side. Need you to go along with me.”

Stepping back he shoved Ink on the shoulder.

“I’ll be seein’ you at the club, motherfucker, and you better be ready to face me.” He snarled.

“Fuck off, Lucky. You’re not the only one who is good with his fists. Get the fuck out of my shop and don’t come back if you know what’s good for you.”

Ink gave as good as he got.

And Lucky took it.

He had to.

The shit with the slut wasn’t done and he still needed to cover his ass.

Not for much longer though.

SIXTEEN

Lucky

Storming out of the studio he overheard some of what Carmella was saying. It was all in Spanish of course. She glanced at him, pulled a pissed off face and carried on talking.

“Papa, don’t worry, I have him right where I want him.”

She listened to whatever her father was saying before carrying on.

“He started a fight with one of the other members of his club, defending me. It will isolate him. It will put him right where we want him, estranged from the club. I’ll bring him in soon. You know I will.”

Nodding as she listened, she glanced at him, gave a little shrug then looked back down at the sidewalk.

“You have my word. I’ll hand him over to Pablo to do what he does best. There’s one other thing. I have found a plaything for Mr White. The bitch is exactly the type he always requests, tattooed, arrogant and pretty. She has a child though, we’ll have to get rid of the parasite before shipping her out. She works at their tattoo shop and I didn’t see any protection. She’ll be easy to snatch.”

Everything inside him froze when he realised what she was saying. She was planning to abduct Joney, kill her baby and then sell her to one of their clients. A client that sounded like he had a thing for breaking strong women.

He had to employ all his skills to appear to be oblivious while he listened and seethed with rage.

“Okay, I’ll do that. In the meantime we need to have her watched, pick up her routine. I agree the parasite is worth money, we could possibly put it up for auction. I’ll move forward with the biker and deliver him to Pablo. Once we have their little club on their knees we’ll not only have their routes we’ll have their women. There’s some money to be made there. Our contact will have the pigs look the other way while we take over. I want to...”

She went silent, listening and nodding while he had to battle to hide his rage.

Leaning against the driver’s door of the truck he pretended to be disinterested, pretending to be playing on his phone. Thank fuck he had put his phone on record before he walked out the studio. He just hoped it was clear enough for Byte to work with. His prez had to hear this, it was important for the club, but even more important for him personally. The bitch was going to abduct Joney and sell her and her child. Even though he was sure the kid wasn’t his he would protect them. What the cartel slut wanted to do was unacceptable.

When she finished her call he ended the recording and tapped to open his messages. Pretending he was reading a message he forwarded the recording to Byte and Maniac. Before sliding it back in his kutte pocket he deleted the recording, he didn’t want it sitting on his phone just in case she got her hands on it. The bitch was digging in her purse when he looked up, when she noticed him watching she smiled, dropped her phone into it, then shook her head and took it out again. Her purse was

unzipped when she came to him. He wondered if she was going to try and lift his phone, she had to know it wouldn't work.

He didn't give her a chance to say a word.

"I've been called into the club. I'll drop you off. I don't know when I'll be able to see you because this shit is gonna cause problems with my president. Best thing for us is to forget about their fuckin' bullshit and move on. I'll call to let you know when I'll be able to come over."

Coming up to him she plastered herself to his front and he glanced to where his brother was watching, gave a tiny chin lift before gently moving her away from him.

The process took minutes from start to finish.

She was smooth, very fucking smooth, he had to give her that.

"As long as you let me know you're okay, *mi amor*."

Again with the fucking endearment, it made him want to puke. She gave him a fake soft look he very badly wanted to slap off her face. It would be a first for him, slapping a woman. But this slut...she made him wish his mama hadn't raised him to be a good man.

Making a big show of dropping her phone in her purse she closed and zipped it up. He helped her into the passenger side got behind the wheel and took her home. He didn't get out when she did, just nodded when she waved at him and with hips swaying walked to her house. He had his burner out, destroyed the sim card then pulled his extra burner from under

the dash before she even reached the steps. He sent a quick message to Byte on his backup phone.

Burner compromised, kill it. Now.

The bitch must think they were fucking morons.

He had felt the way she pressed the phone she had taken from her purse to his chest, right over his phone. It was smooth the way she did it, pressing, releasing and dropping the phone in her purse. All he could do was play it safe, pretend he didn't know what the fuck she was doing. He knew. This wasn't his first rodeo. Hacking his phone would give her nothing. There wasn't sensitive information on it, no passwords, no photos, not even the texts between him and her. The little there was had been saved to the sim card and he'd destroyed it. Byte would do the rest.

His brother was on it and her hacker would find nothing. He could imagine how pissed off she was going to be when she realised the phone was a bust.

He drove like a bat out of hell back to the clubhouse. Constantly checking his rear view to ensure Breaker was still with him. The brother took care of security at the club and had volunteered to take his back today. He was glad it was someone experienced just in case the cartel tried to hit him.

Driving down the long driveway to the clubhouse he breathed easier. Parking the truck on the far side of the garage he called Mouth and another prospect over.

“Clean it, inside and out. Everywhere.”

In case the fucking thing was bugged he put a finger to his ear in warning. The prospect instantly caught on.

“Got you, Lucky. It will be fuckin’ gleamin’ inside and out once we’re done.” Mouth winked as he caught the keys Lucky threw at him.

Fucking mouthy prospect.

If there was a tracking device or a bug they would find it, remove it and give it to Byte to destroy.

He couldn’t be too careful. The cartel whore could have planted all sorts while he had driven her around. It was one of the reasons he never answered calls while he was driving.

A frowning Breaker was waiting for him and they walked into the clubhouse together.

“What was that shit at Ink’s place, brother? Looked like the brother lost his shit with you.”

Lucky nodded with a sigh.

“He did and he’s goin’ to have my ass for it. Bein’ a dick to the woman was the only play I had to fake out the cartel slut. It wasn’t the place to explain shit to him. I don’t know if the slut bought it but I’m hopin’ she did. Shit’s goin’ to get real, brother. You’ll hear when I report to Prez.”

Breaker nodded and stayed silent as they walked to the office.

Like before his prez wasn’t the only one waiting on him.

All the officers plus Lure, Magic and Bruiser were there. They looked pissed. Not good, not good at all. He had to explain, and do it fucking fast, before shit hit the fan.

“Prez, before you start, I fucked up. Tried to divert the slut’s attention, not that it worked. Did you listen to the recording I

sent you?” He shook his head and held up a hand.

“Fuck, I forgot, it’s in Spanish and will need translatin’. I sent it to Byte I’m sure he’s on it already. We have to be ready, Prez, she’s plannin’ a lot of fucked up shit. She was talkin’ about havin’ me picked up and tortured for information, and about sellin’ our women. And I think they have someone high up in government who will keep the pigs off their backs while they destroy the club. We need to be ready for them, they’re goin’ to come at us and it’s goin’ to be soon.”

His prez wordlessly nodded then tipped his head towards a chair in front of his desk. Lucky sank into it, waiting for whatever was coming next.

“We’ll wait on that discussion until Byte sends me the translation. Let’s handle the other shit and get it out of the way. What happened at the studio was fucked up, Lucky. Ink wants to take your fuckin’ head off for disrespectin’ one of his people. There are some apologies due, brother.” His prez growled.

Lucky nodded, closed his eyes, opened them, and looked Maniac straight in the eyes. He had always been brutally honest with his president and he wasn’t about to start lying to him now. There was nothing to do but share with his president and his brothers.

He had been thinking as he drove back to the clubhouse. Thinking about Cape Town and what had happened there. His gut clenched and his heart raced as he relived their time together. Remembered how he had never used a condom with her. He had tried to work out how old the baby was but

couldn't because the kid had looked big to him. It confused him.

Was the baby his, or was it some other motherfucker's child?

He couldn't think about that. He had to focus on her, only her.

It was time for an explanation that might have his president and his brothers giving him some slack.

"You're right, Prez, and I will apologise to Ink and to her. But first there's somethin' I need to tell you and the brothers." He drew a deep breath in through his nose then slowly blew it out to settle his racing heart.

"Fuck, this is goin' to suck." He grumbled before he explained.

"I know her, I know who she is. We met when I was visitin' with Remy and Pixie. We spent time together and I cut ties when I left." He shrugged. "My life is here, hers was there."

Everyone nodded. They understood, his prez and VP didn't nod, they just watched him.

"From the minute she turned around in that studio and I realised who she was I've tried to work it out in my head. And I have more questions than answers. Why is she here? Why has she changed the way she looks? Is she hidin' from someone? And if she is, who is she hidin' from? And then there's the other thing, the thing that makes all my questions almost irrelevant. I can't get past this knowin' feelin' in my gut that she's mine. But then there's the baby. I have no idea if it's mine or not. But there's a possibility that the *bébé* (baby)

might be mine.” He could no longer keep the Cajun from sneaking into his accent.

His eyes never left those of his prez and he saw the minute they narrowed, his stare going arctic cold, his eyes like lasers on him.

“You sayin’ this girl who arrived here a few weeks ago is someone you know? Someone who is important to you? Someone you’re thinkin’ of as yours and who might have had your child?”

“*Oui, c’est vrai* (Yes, that’s true).”

Weeks? She’s been here for weeks? What the fuck was going on?

He needed answers.

But, before he got those answers he had to explain what had happened in Cape Town. And then he was going to find out what the fuck was going on with Joney and fix it.

The only way to explain was to start at the beginning. At Remy’s wedding.

“I met her when I was in South Africa for Remy’s weddin’. I got to know her and she’s a fuckin’ amazin’ woman. We spent time together but eventually I had to come home and she had her life there. I cut ties, walked away. I told myself I didn’t want our enemies noticin’ her, which was a lie. A lie I told myself so I could leave her without lookin’ back. I walked away, came home, but I fuckin’ regretted my decision.”

There were a couple of nods and some grumbles in the room but he ignored them, kept his eyes on his prez.

“And then I walk into Ink’s shop, and there she is, right in front of me. I wasn’t expectin’ her, and seein’ her lookin’ nothin’ like she did before, it shook me. I’m not talkin’ about her havin’ had a baby, Prez. I’m talkin’ about how she’s changed everythin’ about herself, the pink hair, the purple contacts, the fuckin’ tattoos and piercin’s. She didn’t have all of those back then. Even her fuckin’ clothes are different. She changed everythin’ about herself and all I can think is that she’s hidin’, hidin’ from someone.”

He shook his head and dragged both hands over his face and through his hair.

“Why the fuck is my woman hidin’, Prez? And why is she hidin’ here, in my back yard, and I know nothin’ about it? And who do I have to kill to make her safe, to make her baby safe?”

Maniac never looked away from him, it felt like his eyes were burning holes in Lucky’s head.

“What I’m about to tell you stays here, between all of us, in this office. Do you get me?” Lucky nodded.

“When I was approached I agreed not to share with the club unless absolutely necessary. They left who I brought in up to me and I kept the circle small. Grave and I discussed it and kept it at need to know. Grave and I, Ink, Renegade and Viper are the only ones who know she’s hidin’ and who she’s hidin’ from. Ren and Viper were brought in because it was necessary for her safety and that of the club that they be informed. And now all of you know she’s hidin’ but not the why.”

His prez looked around the room and everyone gave him a nod before he continued. He didn’t waste time laying it out for

them.

“Only Grave and I know who she really is. And, no, I’m not talkin’ about the name you know her as, Lucky. Her name, her birth name, is Guiliana Salvatore. Only daughter of Antonio Salvatore, the head of the Salvatore crime family in South Africa. I wasn’t told what she suffered at their hands but I do know that at seventeen she escaped and went into hidin’. She hid from them for ten years. Unfortunately the fuckers found her. She was gettin’ ready to run when Dominick Maingarde and Asa Malone, an associate of his, stepped in and offered to help her disappear. Pixie was already settin’ up shop here with Ink, and with the club’s protection it was thought to be the safest place for her. We all agreed it was the last place they would think to look. If they did they would find a woman with a kid and not the slim blonde they’re lookin’ for. We accepted her protection and have been watchin’ over her since she arrived. If you’re claimin’ her it makes her one of ours, and you all know we take care of what belongs to us.”

Lucky was stunned silent for several seconds before it hit him, hit him really hard.

His little cat had been abused by those she should have been able to trust, her family. No wonder the only people she let in were those who had earned her trust, like Pixie and Rider.

He used to have her trust and now because of the fucking cartel slut he’s lost it.

He blew out a breath and shook his head.

“We have a problem, Prez, by taking the vile slut to the studio I put her on cartel radar. We have to bring her in, put her on lockdown to pro...”

The door crashed open before he could finish.

Ink stormed in, his body radiating rage. With Lucky's brothers standing around him Ink didn't see him at first.

“Where's that motherfucker? Goin' to take his fuckin' head off. He upset a woman who already has enough to handle and I won't let that stand.” He threatened.

Lucky stood with his hands raised, showing his brother he wasn't fighting him.

“Ink, brother, I'm sorry. I wasn't expectin' to see her and had to think fast to get the slut's attention away from her. Not that it fuckin' worked. I'll apologise, I swear on my life everythin' I said was a lie. I was tryin' to keep her safe.”

Ink stood staring at him before he slowly walked closer, stepping right into his personal space. What was with the fucker getting in his space?

“Who is she to you?”

There was no more thinking about who the baby's father was. He didn't care, Joney was his and along with her came the baby, so that made him or her his as well. He didn't fucking hesitate with his answer.

“She's mine.”

Ink snorted. “Yeah? If she's yours, brother, why the fuck isn't she here with you? If she's yours why the fuck is she livin' in a club safe house with Viper, Killian and Bren? Why isn't she under your protection?”

Lucky threw his hands up in exasperation.

“Because I had no fuckin’ idea she was in fuckin’ danger or that she was even fuckin’ here. If I’d known her ass would have been in lockdown to keep her and the baby safe. And not in some fuckin’ house with two men I know nothin’ about.” He snarled in Ink’s face.

Ink’s mouth fell open but it didn’t take him long to recover and keep questioning him.

“You walked away from a pregnant woman? What the fuck brother?”

He was close to completely losing it with his brother.

“Aren’t you fuckin’ listenin’? I didn’t fuckin’ know. And I still don’t know how old the baby is and if it’s mine.”

Lucky was pissed having his business discussed like it was everyone’s concern. When it definitely wasn’t.

“If I had known she was pregnant I would have gone back to SA to fetch her.” He snarled right in his brother’s face.

Ink suddenly grinned looking far too fucking happy.

“Right, I get you. But know this, Harper isn’t a pushover, brother. She’s gonna give you hell before she listens to you.”

Ink was grinning and shaking his head while finding a spot to park his ass. Lucky sat back down as well.

“I assume Harper is the name she’s usin’ now. I don’t even know if the kid is a boy or a girl or what its name is. Can you tell me?” Lucky asked.

Ink nodded. “Yeah. It’s a boy and his name is Ryder, spelt R Y D E R, and she calls him Ry. She goes by Harper Delaney now. What was it before?”

All he could think about was that she had named her boy after her best friend, Rider. A good man and a good friend to her and her boy. Ryder Delaney, not a bad name for a boy.

He focused back on Ink's question.

“Joney August. But that's not her birth name. When I met her it was just a name. And bein' away from home and thinkin' it was just a hook-up I didn't think to have Byte look into her.” He explained.

Dive suddenly leaned forward, pointing a finger at him and the two of them locked eyes.

“Remember when we talked about this. Remember what I said to you?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you need to go get her. It's knockin' on your door, brother. Don't let her walk away. Don't let your chance slip through your fingers, not again.”

“She's not goin' anywhere. Goin' to claim her and put my patch on her back.”

Maniac's next words had ice settling on his soul.

“Before we get carried away there's somethin' we're forgettin'. Harper is now on cartel radar. According to the translation of the recordin' Byte just shared with me the bitch is goin' to have them kidnapped and sell both her and the baby. Harper will be sold to some perverted fucker and the baby will be put up for auction. That's not all, she's goin' to have Lucky snatched and hand him over to Pablo Mendez, their interrogator. His reputation as a psychopath is well

known, we can't allow them to get their hands on Harper or Lucky.”

There were nods and growls of agreement from his brothers while his hands were like claws on the arms of his chair, holding him in place. Breathing in and out slow and easy he calmed enough to carry on listening to his president.

“We might have a bigger problem. If the cartel decide to dig into Mainline Ink they're goin' to uncover Joney's disappearance from Cape Town. Even with all the shit done to throw everyone off her trail sooner or later they're goin' to connect Joney to Harper. If they do being a Salvatore might save her from bein' sold but unfortunately Los Rojos have connections to the Italian mafia both here and in New York. I can almost guarantee they'll let them know she's been found and is under our protection. They in turn will reach out to Salvatore and we'll have both the cartel and the fuckin' Italians on our asses.”

Lucky surged to his feet shaking his head.

“*Non* (No). Not happenin', I'm takin' her and the baby and disappearin' into the bayou. I'll take them to my family; they're not goin' to let anyone get close. If the fuckers come lookin' for them they'll die. My uncles and cousins will keep her and the baby safe. I'll come back to help fight the bastards. They aren't puttin' a hand on my woman or her kid. *C'est la guerre* (This is war).”

His prez watched him silently.

“Will your family be prepared to help with gettin' rid of the garbage targetin' us?”

Lucky shrugged.

“I don’t know, Prez. I’ll talk to my uncles, see what they have to say. It might cost us somethin’ in trade. For me, they’ll do whatever they have to do, because I’m family...for the club? I don’t think so. I will negotiate though.”

Grave laughed and shook his head.

“All the years I’ve been in Savannah this will be the first time the club, the Fortiers and the LeBlancs will be on the same side. Usually we piss them off when we use their waterways to transport our shit. Might be a good time to have a talk, arrange to be allies. Those Cajun bastards are like fucking ghosts on the water and in the bayous, and we could use some of that stealth.”

Lucky nodded in agreement. His mother’s family ran the bayous, the waterways, the swamps, everything along the coast from Georgia to Louisiana. That’s why he knew his woman would be safe. No one looked for shit with the Fortiers and the LeBlancs, you do and you pay the price, becoming food for the gators.

Joney, no, Harper, and her baby will be safe in the hidden fortress deep in the Louisiana bayou where his *Mémé* (grandmother) and aunties will pamper and spoil her and her child. Nodding to himself he settled on it as a plan.

He would be taking her to his family.

Once he knew she was safe he would re-join his club to rain down hell on Los Rojos and the Grave Robbers.

They needed to be exterminated like the cockroaches they were.

And then his president burst his bubble.

“You do know we have to give it time before we send her to your family? She can’t disappear right now, it will let them know we’re aware of their plans. We’re goin’ to have to let it ride for a while.”

“Fuck.” He knew his prez was right. Knew it but could hardly accept it.

His woman was going to be in danger while they dealt with the slut and the cartel.

“Lucky, I swear brother she’ll have brothers on her around the clock.” His prez tried to soften the blow. “We’ve done a background check on her bodyguard and he’s damned good. Brendan O’Connor was a highly decorated officer in the British SAS and retired to take over running their family’s distillery in Ireland after his father became ill. He hadn’t been there long when the daughter of a family friend accused him of rapin’ her. She claimed he was usin’ drugs and drinkin’ heavily. It was never proven but he was still ostracised by his family. His younger brother stepped up and took over. It’s been suggested that the brother planned the entire shit show. Brendan left Ireland and joined Asa Malone’s outfit in South Africa as one of his inner circle. Malone let me know he’s deadly and not to be crossed.”

It didn’t make him feel any better.

“It doesn’t make it any better, Prez. We can’t let the cartel get to her, we just can’t.” He sagged in his chair and glanced at Dive when he patted his shoulder.

His brother's eyes showed his sympathy but it wasn't visible on his face.

“The club will keep her safe, Lucky. We're not goin' to let anythin' happen to her or the baby. We've got this, those cartel bastards don't know that we know. It gives us the edge we need while keepin' an eye on her.” Dive watched him until he nodded in agreement.

He was right.

The cartel fuckers didn't know they knew their game plan. It gave them the edge, like Dive said.

They'll just have to make sure they kept the edge.

If they lost it he knew he would lose Harper and her boy.

And that couldn't happen.

He wasn't losing her and no one would be taking her baby.

Not now, not ever.

He should have known not to make statements like that.

It blew up in your face when you least expected it.

SEVENTEEN

Harper

I was pissed, no, actually, I was more than pissed. I was ready to erupt like Mount Vesuvius and spew lava and burning ash all over the bitch who had been plastered to Lucky's side while insulting me. And just saying his name in my head made my temperature skyrocket. How dare he call me a slut when the only slut was the one hanging on him? And saying my boy was gross and I had a fat ass? Fuck him. Who the hell did he think he was?

Nobody, that's who.

He was nobody, nobody to me and nobody to my boy.

Him calling me a slut hurt, hurt so bad, but I had to shake it off.

Why is it that men can have sex with countless women and no one blinks an eye?

People laugh and call them bad boys, or players or some shit.

But let a woman do it. Instantly she's a slut and a whore.

Why is that?

Lucky Boudreaux was a dumbass and a hypocrite.

His morals were bent to hell and back with the shit his club was involved in. I wasn't stupid, I grew up in a criminal household, and knew the signs. I've been watching Ink and the club brothers who were in and out of the studio since I started

here and it was obvious to me, if not to anyone else, that they weren't clean. The burner phones, the conversations that stopped the minute you approached, and Ink's unexplained absences. It all pointed to one thing and one thing only, criminal activities.

Personally, I didn't care what they were involved in, as long as it didn't impact the studio. And who was I to judge anyway.

Dom was the acknowledged king of the South African underworld and he was a friend, so was Asa, another crime boss. Even the Iron Dogz weren't squeaky clean and Rider was my person. And after defending me I had added Ink and through him his club to my crime friends list.

Crime friends list, that actually made me grin. I had a list of friends who were criminals. I never expected it to happen when I ran from my family. I had thought getting away from them would be the end of me being involved with criminals.

But no, not me, I seemed to be drawn to men who were less than law abiding citizens.

Take Lucky for instance.

From the very first moment we met I had been drawn to him. I had played it cool, putting him in the friend zone.

But one starlit night on a beach changed it all.

And now here we were.

Me with his child, and him, out there somewhere, with that evil bitch.

It hurt so freaking bad that he had moved on, and that he'd moved on with someone so horrible. Someone he had allowed

to disrespect me at my place of work, in front of our clients and my co-workers. And then, adding insult to injury, he went on to disrespect and insult me as well.

If I saw him again I was going to slap him silly.

All over his pretty face.

His so very pretty face. A face I had been able to see because he'd cleaned up his wild beard and hair.

Did he do it for her?

That burned, burned like acid in my stomach.

Or maybe it was just heartburn.

I'm going to go with heartburn. It was heartburn. Definitely heartburn.

"You okay, Harp?" Bren asked as he lowered his big body on to the couch next to me. I shifted Ry to a more comfortable position in my arms as he glugged down his bottle.

"I am, I'm just so pissed off I can spit snakes."

I giggled and bumped his shoulder with mine, sliding sideways while keeping my arms around Ry and my feet on the ottoman.

"Imagine I could do that, spit snakes I mean, I would have spat vipers all over her slutty ass. They would have spat poison and bitten her to hell and back. Skank ass bitch."

Aaand the anger was back.

"Babe, don't let some slut impact who you know yourself to be. She has slut written all over her, not a bit of class to be seen anywhere. I can guarantee she's going to get what's

coming to her. Bitches like her don't last, they're for fucking; it's all they're good for."

Yikes. It seemed Bren was angry as well.

"I just don't get it, Bren. I don't understand why he's with a woman like that, that's not the man I met and spent time with in Cape Town. That man would have avoided her like the plague. I don't like how it's making me feel, knowing he moved on from me to that...that...that *thing!*"

"I don't know the man so I can't even guess at the reasons why he's with her. Why don't we try to put it behind us and focus on something different? Like Ry's visit with the paediatrician tomorrow. I'm very curious to find out how much weight our little Sumo wrestler has gained."

It instantly made me sad. I knew I was being silly, but I would have loved my baby's daddy to be there, holding my hand, as the doctor checked over our boy.

I wondered if he knew Ry was his if he would even want him.

He had been so adamant about ending what we had.

"I can't wait to go home to settle down with my boy and stop all this secrecy."

Bren took my hand in both of his and squeezed. I glanced up at his face and tensed, he was going to tell me something I wasn't going to like.

I braced for whatever was coming.

"Sweetheart, we have to face facts. Asa is fighting a huge battle back home, he's winning but it's slow going and the

threat against you hasn't been eliminated. Not yet anyway. It means we're most probably going to be here for a while. And you should maybe think about letting the baby daddy know so he can be a part of Ry's life, if he wants to be, that is. He's a fucking asshole as far as I'm concerned and I would prefer not having him near you."

I sighed and sank into him, all my strength and bravado gone in an instant.

"The problem is I don't want him to be a part of his life while he's with that vile woman. I won't expose my child to someone like her. Her eyes were filled with an evil so deep and dreadful it sent shivers down my spine because it reminded me of my brother's eyes. She's like him, likes hurting people, likes how it makes her feel. I'm telling you, Bren, she's evil to the core. Lucky being with someone so evil makes me re-think having him in Ry's life."

Letting go of my hand he put an arm around me and held me. We were silent as we sat there, watching Ry.

He finished but kept sucking, I pulled the teat from his pursed little lips with a loud pop and set it to the side. My boy's eyes were on me and I marvelled at how beautiful he was with his dark hair, olive toned skin and ice blue eyes, exactly like mine. I put the burp cloth over my shoulder and set him against it.

I didn't even have to pat his back when he let loose a massive burp.

"Wow, little man that was a huge one." I pulled him from my shoulder and grinned at Bren's surprised face.

My boy just gave a little smile and closed his beautiful eyes, going to sleep.

He was such a great baby.

Bren gently stroked a hand down his leg then met my eyes.

“I want you to forget about what happened, for now anyway. You only had the one appointment for this afternoon and it cancelled. Ink said you’re not taking walk-ins so I’m going to take you guys home and you’re going to rest. Today has been a tough one on you. Let’s get your shit packed up and get out of here.”

It didn’t take long to get my station sorted. Mark stood at the back door holding Ry in his carrier and as he handed him off to Bren he drew me into a hard hug.

“Try not to think about what happened, Harper. Let it slide off you, like a fat seal sliding off an ice flow in the arctic, right into the jaws of a pod of Orcas.” He let me go, stepped back then grinned and winked. “Chomp, chomp, blood in the water, and they’re gone.”

The visual he planted in my head had me snorting with laughter. Trust our Pretty Boy to cut the tension.

Viper had the door open and was waiting on us, his eyes everywhere as he scanned the back alley. Once Bren had Ry settled he came to get me with Viper standing watch. Between him and Bren they made me feel incredibly safe.

Bren was true to his word, when we got home he carried Ry upstairs and watched while I settled him in his cot. Giving me a hug he then left and I changed into comfy yoga pants and a big tee. I lay on my bed staring at my sleeping little boy while

curved around my body pillow and slowly dropped off the edge of the world into deep sleep.

I woke up rested and ravenously hungry. As I stretched my belly made growling noises and I grimaced, my eyes still closed. That's when I realised Ry hadn't woken me up, something else had.

There was a warm weight on me, reaching down I jerked to a stop when I felt something that shouldn't be there.

There was a large, warm, male hand on me.

I instantly froze and my eyes shot open, ready to start screaming for Bren.

My curtains were open and the afternoon sun fell into the room. My eyes instantly when to Ry's cot. He was still sleeping, lying on his back with his arms above his head. My eyes left my boy to stare up at the huge man sitting on the side of my bed, his hand on my stomach.

Lucky Boudreaux.

The bastard was in my room, had his hands on my body.

“What the hell are you doing here?” I hissed. “Get your damned hand off me.”

I jerked away from him and sat up. Grabbing my pillows I stacked them against the headboard, sat back and glared at him. He didn't say a word, just looked at me. His eyes glided over my face then down to the cot at the side of my bed, where they stayed.

He nodded towards it.

“Is he mine?”

The fucker. The nerve of the bastard, implying I had been with other men.

“What do you think, you asshole? Of course he’s yours. I told you I’d been celibate until you. You think after you left I went falling on dicks all over the place? No, I did not.” I wanted to smack his pretty face.

I growled at the look of shock on his face. He had known smiley and easy going Joney, now he was up against pissed off and snarly Harper.

“And after what happened at the studio today we certainly can’t say the same about you, can we? How you can be with that evil bitch I really don’t know.” I shook my head. “But then I don’t really know you, do I?”

His mouth opened as if he was about to say something but I held up my hand to shut him up. All I wanted to know from him was why he was in my room, touching me.

“What are you doing here? Besides wanting to know if the baby is yours? Now that you know it’s yours you can leave. Don’t worry, I won’t tell your bitch you’re the baby daddy. I don’t want her skank ass anywhere near my boy, not that it’s going to be a problem once Bren and I go home. I don’t need or want your support or help. This ink slut with the gross kid and fat ass can look after herself. I don’t need...”

Lucky’s hand covered my mouth stopping the viciousness spewing from me.

“Listen to me, and listen carefully, Harper. You just told me the baby is mine, and even though I want to believe you I’m going to need proof. I want a DNA test. Once we have the

results we'll talk about what's goin' to happen next. If he's mine you have to know I'm goin' to be in his life and in yours. But we'll wait until we have answers before we get into that."

I shook my head from side to side, no way was he getting a DNA test.

My DNA would be flagged and the family will know exactly where I was. Not going to happen.

I opened my mouth to try and interrupt but he didn't give me a chance.

"For now I need you to understand somethin'. Even though we don't have the results yet I will protect the two of you. So until we get the results you and your baby are under my protection. And just to be clear, all that shit at the studio was a lie, a lie to keep the slut from gettin' too interested in you and your boy."

He leaned in close, his face right in mine. His dark eyes narrowed and angry.

"And, babe, stop pissin' me off. I've not had my dick anywhere near that vile bitch's snatch. She's a fuckin' job, that's it. A job my president asked me to do for the club."

I tried to interrupt but he just shook his head and I sank back against the cushions, crossed my arms and listened as he laid it out. And what he told me I didn't like, I didn't like it at all.

"I shouldn't be tellin' you this but you need to know how serious this fuckin' situation is. My club is bein' targeted by a drug cartel. The slut is part of the cartel and we need to know what they're plannin'. My job is to get her to talk."

No way was I going to shut up any longer.

“I know exactly what it means to get information from a mark, a female mark at that. I’ve been around the Road Warriors for years. I’ve seen plenty of shit go down, and you know I’m not clueless. What does all of this have to do with me? I’m not involved with you or your club. I work at the tattoo studio, that’s it. If it becomes a problem I’ll go home, easy.”

He pushed even further into my personal space.

“Denim’s at the studio and Viper’s here, both are watchin’ over you, and that says you have club protection. You’re involved whether you like it or not.” His eyes softened. “Baby, listen to me and take it in, believe what I’m tellin’ you. I didn’t know you were here and took on the fuckin’ job to get the information for my club. I’ve not touched her more than I’ve had to, and believe me, I really don’t want to touch her.” He grimaced. “She wanted me to fuck her but I didn’t.”

Pft. Of course she wanted it.

The way she clung to him like a leech at the studio said it all. She was showing the world he was hers. Putting her owner’s stamp on him.

Of course he didn’t stop talking while I pulled disgusted faces at him.

“Until we get the results of the DNA test I won’t be around. I have a job to do and while I’m doin’ it I need to know you and the baby is safe. My prez is goin’ to put more brothers on you while we take care of this shit.”

Finally it was my turn to talk.

“We’re not getting a DNA test done. It’s not safe for me or Ry.” I crossed my arms over my chest and stared at him defiantly.

At first he looked like he was going to argue but then he relaxed. His big hand cupped my face and he stroked his thumb over my cheek.

“I’m not going to argue with you. Just listen to your guards and be safe, okay? I won’t be back because we can’t have more attention comin’ your way than you’ve already got. Carmella didn’t like that you stood up to her. Stick with the guys and do what they tell you to do. They’re here to keep the two of you safe. Do not go off on your own, ever. Do not set foot outside of this house without them.”

I was getting scared, really scared.

“You’re scaring me. Why would they come after me? I’m nobody.”

He sighed and looked at Ry then out the window.

“You’re a beautiful feisty woman. The cartel abducts beautiful women and sell them. They’ll sell your boy as well. She’s seen you, and you pissed her off, she’s a vindictive bitch who likes to hurt people. She’s not going to come for you, I’m just bein’ careful.”

If he had looked into my eyes as he was telling me I would have believed him. Not looking at me? It made a rock hard lump of fear gather in my gut. It was different from the fear of my family. This fear was for my child. It was worse than anything I have ever felt before.

“Don’t fight me on this, *tite chatte* (little cat), listen to Brendan and the brothers and stay safe. Do as they tell you and do not argue, even if what they tell you to do seems stupid.”

Drawing in a deep breath I gave him what he wanted.

I swore I’d be careful, and stay safe.

In my heart I silently wished he was the one keeping me safe.

It was not to be.

He nodded stood and without another word walked out of my room.

I lay there feeling the way I had felt when I watched him drive away from me.

Lost. Alone. Empty.

Well, not really empty.

Next to my bed sleeping peacefully was the child he had given me. A child I would give my life to protect. A child he hadn’t touched the entire time he had been in my room. He had glanced at him but that was all.

It said loud and clear that he didn’t think Ry was his.

And the slut he was hanging out with for his club?

No filthy bitch was going to get her hands on my boy.

Not in this lifetime.

Or any other lifetime for that matter.

EIGHTEEN

Lucky

He'd done it again. He fuckin' walked away. Again.

He didn't look back, couldn't. If he did he wouldn't have left, he knew it to the bottom of his soul.

It was the most difficult thing he'd ever had to do.

Leaving her and her son upstairs. Unprotected.

Actually that was untrue. She had protection in the form of his brothers and the man waiting on him at the bottom of the stairs.

He gave him a nod. He had done what he had told him he was going to do. Tell Harper the truth, well, a part of the truth.

Now it was done and he had to leave the way he got in, via the tunnel under the house. It was a good thing his prez had rented one of their safe houses to Pixie because without the tunnel it would have been difficult to sneak in. But before he left he wanted to check on their security, just to be sure.

"I know you have shit under control but I want to check anyway." He said and Brendan shrugged.

Viper, who had been drinking coffee in the kitchen leaning against the work top, rinsed his cup then set it on the drainer.

"I have a perimeter check to do. Talk to you later, brother," he said as he walked out.

“Follow me.” Brendan didn’t wait to see if he followed as he headed deeper into the house.

They walked back into the small windowless room that was set in the middle of the house, their security room. There were two desks with laptops and several screens on the walls. On every one of them there were different views of the outside and inside of the house.

“We have cameras around the perimeter, as you can see, and several on the house, the street and the neighbours. They ensure we have the best coverage possible. We have cameras inside as well, the only concession is her bathroom, and before you ask, she knows about them. All windows and doors are connected to the alarm system and we monitor the situation from here. We do constant perimeter checks because we’re not taking any chances with her or with Ry.”

Sitting at one desk he waved Lucky over to the other. Taking a seat he watched the screens, watched Viper slowly walking the perimeter. His eyes flicked to the other screens, checking the street, the neighbours and finally her room. Harper and the baby wasn’t in the room and he was happy to see there were no cameras in her bathroom.

“What do you do if you’re attacked?”

“We get them in here and move them out via the tunnel. This isn’t only the security room it’s a safe room as well. The walls and ceiling are reinforced, the doors are steel. It will take them a while to get in giving us time to call for back up or get them out.”

Lucky nodded. “And once you’re out? Where do you go?”

Bren, as everyone called him, looked at him for a very long time before he answered.

“We load them up and take them to a private airfield where a private jet will be waiting. It will fly us to where ever Asa arranged for us to go. We won’t know the destination until we’re in the air. I suspect he will send us somewhere the Italians, and now the cartel, don’t have a foothold.”

He sighed and shook his head and Lucky didn’t get a good feeling about what was coming next.

“I’m hoping our luck holds, and that Asa kills the motherfucker. I think it’s highly likely that if we have to run from here we’ll be going to Russia.”

Russia? What the fuck?

“Russia? Why the fuck would he send her there?”

Bren was silent for a beat before he answered.

“Dom and Asa are both connected to the new man in charge of the bratva, Sergei Orlov. He has no connections to the Italians which means she’ll be safe with him.”

Lucky slowly shook his head. No way was she leaving the States if the kid was his.

“Not goin’ to happen. If the DNA test says the boy is mine they will not be goin’ to Russia. I will make arrangements for them.” He looked around and shrugged. “They will go somewhere no one can follow without bein’ seen and then swiftly taken care of. Somewhere I know they’ll be safe and looked after.”

Bren frowned and opened his mouth to argue but Viper, who had come in while they had been talking, got there first.

“You’re goin’ to ask your family to look after her, brother?” He asked.

“Yeah, I am.” Lucky’s voice came out with more aggression than he wanted to show.

“Good, she’ll be safe with them. No one’s goin’ to fuck with the Cajun mob.” He said with a grin as he leaned against the doorjamb.

“Who the feck is the Cajun mob?” Bren growled, his Irish coming through strongly.

Viper jumped in to explain.

“The Cajun mob runs the best smugglin’ network in the south. They have control of the water, the swamps, the bayous, and the backwaters from Florida to Louisiana. You don’t do business without dealin’ with them first. And fortunately for us they’re his family. He’s the reason we’ve not been taken down when usin’ their waterways, but I’m thinkin’ we’re goin’ to have negotiations around that issue, soon.”

“How the fuck do you know so much about my family?” Lucky growled at his brother.

Viper laughed softly. “Because *mon ami* (my friend), we’re related, my great-grandmother was a Breaux. So, we’re cousins, a few times removed.”

“Fuck. Can’t spit for hittin’ family out here.” Lucky teased.

“You got that right.” Viper grinned.

Lucky reluctantly stood and after sharing a hug with Viper and shaking Bren's hand left the way he had come in. Through the tunnel.

Magic was waiting for him in the garage when he climbed out of the trapdoor.

"You got it sorted, brother?" He asked, a worried frown on his face.

"Somewhat but not all of it. She's refusin' to do a DNA test. I'll just have to get creative to get it. Didn't like scarin' her but it's done. She now knows about Carmella, that she's a job."

He grinned knowingly. "Bet she didn't like that."

Lucky sighed. "Nope, she didn't. She's connected to the Road Warriors MC in Cape Town so she knew what it meant to be doin' this job. She's pissed at me but at least I know she's safe."

His brother nodded. "How old is her boy?"

It hit him right between the eyes. He hadn't asked, the most important fuckin' question and he hadn't asked it. Hadn't asked her when he had been born.

"Fuck. I forgot to ask."

The fucker laughed and shook his head. "You better call and find out because I bet you a beer it's goin' to be one of the first questions prez is goin' to ask."

He couldn't call because he didn't have her number. He called Viper instead.

"Brother, need you to give the phone to Harper. Got a question I need an answer to."

The fucker didn't immediately give her the phone.

“What you gonna give me if I do this?”

“A fuckin' bloody nose, you bastard. Give her the phone.”

He threatened.

Laughter rang out and then her sweet husky voice spoke in his ear. Goosebumps erupted on his arms.

“Viper says you have a question to ask me.”

“Yeah, when was your boy born?”

He heard her draw in a deep breath before she answered.

“August 15th. He was born prematurely. His due date was the September 24th but I fell down some stairs and there were complications.”

His gut contracted. He had seen babies around the club and this one was damned big to be a premature birth. He found it hard to believe her.

Was she lying about falling? It made the DNA test even more necessary.

He had to know for sure.

Forcing himself to be calm he kept his voice even. But only just.

“Thanks for tellin' me. Listen to your guards.”

It physically hurt to end the call the way he did.

But it was best. Best for her and for him.

He had to concentrate on the job he had to do and trust that his brothers would keep her and her boy safe

Sliding into the passenger seat of the SUV he was silent all the way back to the clubhouse. Magic left him alone, didn't try to start up a conversation and for that he was glad.

At the clubhouse he went directly to his president's office. They were waiting for him.

Again.

"How did it go?" Maniac asked.

"Not great. I explained and apologized for the shit at the studio. At least she talked to me, gave me a couple of ultimatums too. No cartel bitch around her boy. And no DNA test, so I'm goin' to have to get creative because I have to know if he's mine."

There were nods of agreement but not from Grave, he looked pissed. Lucky ignored it.

"She didn't say it outright, but if I fuck Carmella I won't see her or the kid unless I visit them in SA. I'm not worried because no way will I be fuckin' the bitch."

"How are you going to get the DNA test without her knowing?" Grave asked.

Lucky shrugged. "I don't know but I'll think of somethin'"

"Are you sure you want to go down that road, Lucky? It could backfire on you, badly." Grave warned.

"I have to know, VP. She said he was born on August 15th, prematurely. He's so fuckin' big I struggle to believe her. I have to know, one way or the other."

Grave said nothing, just gave a single chin lift.

Was he doing the right thing?

He didn't know, all he knew was that he had to know if the boy was his.

NINETEEN

Carlos

He masked the contempt and disgust he felt for his only child, his daughter. She sat in front of his desk and ran her mouth, like she always did, thinking that their family connection kept her from retribution.

She was wrong.

At this moment in time he needed her.

Once this was done she would no longer be the thorn in his side, his embarrassment, his dead wife's failure. He had come to the conclusion he needed a wife who could give him sons. Sons he would raise, personally. Unlike Carmella who had mostly been raised by her mother.

When she turned twenty he had arranged a marriage between her and Gustavo Fuentes, the son of an associate.

Gustavo found out she had been fucking her way through the men and a couple of their associates. He cancelled the wedding and later married his brother Jorge's youngest daughter, Angela.

Carlos had been pissed but in the end he couldn't blame the man. A man wanted to know the children he claimed was his own, not those of another.

Angela was a sweet girl and according to his brother she was happy, she loved her husband.

The one good thing about Carmella's whoring was the information she gained. It was always spot on. And had saved them money and soldiers.

Unfortunately she was becoming a liability. Her reputation as an irrational bitch had some of the men she targeted avoiding her. Others realised it as they got to know her and backed off.

Like her latest target.

Boudreaux had played it cool, kept her at a distance.

Gave her nothing of importance.

Months, that's how long she tried to get her claws in him and failed. Failed to bring in Lucky Boudreaux as he had ordered her to do. And because she failed they had lost the opportunity to gain a very important source of information.

Jorge had voiced his doubts about her months ago when their problems with the Grave Robbers started. His brother wanted to cut them out, wanted to award distribution to a more reliable group. Carmella had advocated for the Grave Robbers, bringing their plan to take over the territories of the Shadow Wraiths MC to them. On paper it had looked like a good plan and they had given it their support.

What Carmella and the fuckers had not told them was that there was deep enmity between the Grave Robbers and the clubs surrounding them. It became very obvious the Robbers were being watched by more than one club.

He couldn't have that.

Couldn't have their operations compromised by a bunch of unwashed bikers.

One of their options was to continue with the plan to take over the SWMC territory but behind the scenes negotiate a deal with Maniac Flynn, the head of the organisation.

He knew the club was against the product being transported through their territory. He wondered if he could change Flynn's mind by offering him a cut of the profits. It had worked with all the others along the pipeline.

He snorted and discarded the idea. Flynn and the SWMC would not be swayed.

Their best option was one he would have to discuss with Jorge and Pablo before he acted on it.

Maybe it was time to reveal Carmella's previous identity to the biker.

Reveal to him that she was the woman he had supposedly lost in a drive-by shooting many years ago.

Carmella's failure to bring in Boudreaux left him with only one option. Her past.

No one was going to like his plan but in the end they would understand and agree.

Years ago Carmella had done a sensitive job for the family and they had to pull her out before it was done. To keep her identity hidden it had been necessary for her to disappear, permanently.

Her telling the biker she was his love back in the flesh would be a shock and cause confusion.

Exactly what he wanted. The bikers off their game and vulnerable to a take-over.

Lifting his phone he called Jorge and set a time to meet with Pablo.

It was time to bring this mess to a close.

Bring it to a close and use Carmella the way she was always meant to be used.

As a sacrifice for the family business.

TWENTY

Harper

I watched quietly as the doctor examined Ry.

My boy couldn't be bothered, he lay on the examination table happy as a clam. Gurgling and kicking as she did what she had to do. Not even the foreign object in his ears or nose affected his happy baby gurgles.

She smiled at him and tickled him under the chin then stepped back.

“Okay, you can dress him and come into the office once you're done.”

I quickly dressed him, gathered his stuff and went to Doc Ellen's office. I was slightly nervous but only slightly.

She looked at the monitor on her desk and smiled as she looked at me.

“First things first. Ryder is strong and progressing very well and I'm happy. He's development is a bit faster than most premature babies but it's not a worry.” She sat forward and I stiffened at the serious look on her face.

“I want to keep monitoring him just to be on the safe side. I don't want you to worry, it's just a precaution. We like to keep an eye on our premies just in case they develop problems. Your boy eats well, is gaining weight nicely and is bright and aware. Again, please understand this is just a precaution.”

She smiled reassuringly and typed something on her keyboard.

“Okay, I understand and I’m happy to bring him in for a check-up regularly.” I said.

“Good. Janelle will give you the date of your next appointment. I think a month from now would be good.”

Her calm demeanour calmed me as well and I started to relax.

I was out of there in record time once she was done with me. Janelle would send me an email with the details of our next appointment.

Bren kept glancing at me as we drove to the studio, a worried frown on his face. Viper was silent, focused on driving and watching his mirrors.

“Is everything okay with Ry?” Bren finally asked.

“He’s doing great, growing and healthy. She wants to see him in about a months’ time again. She says it’s because he was born premature and because of the fall.” I explained.

Viper gave me a quick glance in the rear view mirror.

“You fell, is that why he was born prematurely?” He asked.

Bren answered with an angry growl. “She didn’t fall, she was pushed.”

Viper looked shocked. “What the fuck? Who pushed her?”

Before I could answer we arrived at the studio and the whole getting Ry and myself safely out of the car started. I waited as I had been ordered to do. I unclipped Ry’s seat and held it as Bren helped me out while Viper stood to the side scanning the

surroundings. I suddenly felt very insecure and wanted to get inside as quick as possible. I breathed easier the minute we were walked through the door. Glancing outside I saw Viper standing next to the car with his phone to his ear, a heavy frown on his face. I wondered what that was all about.

“Hey, it’s the baby mama.” Mark teased with a grin. “What did the doc say? How’s our little man?”

“He’s doing great and we’re both fat and healthy.” I joked.

“You’re not fat.” Ink growled as he threw an arm around me. “You’re luscious and those tits are fuckin’ amazin’.”

“Oh my god, stop looking at my boobs.” I rolled my eyes and shoved my elbow into his side.

He only laughed and dragged me closer. “There’s no way in hell I’m gonna stop lookin’ at those beauties, darlin’. They’re spectacular.”

I snorted and rolled my eyes. “Men, you’re all so bloody easy. Flash some boob and you’re all toast.”

“Typical male.” Avery said and shook her head at the guys who were grinning and nodding.

“How old is Ry now?” Liz, one of the tattoo artists asked.

“He’ll be four months on December 15th.” I said.

She tilted her head back, her eyes narrowed as she counted in a soft mumble. Then looked back at me.

“So he was born on August 15th, right? That makes him a Leo.”

I nodded already knowing where this was going. She had mentioned it before. More than once.

“Cool, have you given a thought to getting the birth tattoo we were talking about?”

I rolled my eyes at her.

“No, not yet, but I’ve been thinking about it and doing research.”

“You decide what you want and we’ll get it done.” She said with a wink and a grin.

She jumped right into her next question not giving me a chance to answer.

“Have you done his nursery yet? If not I’ll help you paint and do any shit you need me to do.” Liz grinned. “You should think about doing a mural, something fun. Maybe like animals from Africa, you know, lions and elephants and shit.”

I couldn’t stop the laugh even if I tried.

“I’ll think about painting lions and elephants and *shit* on the walls.”

Laughter rang out and the jittery feeling I’ve had since we arrived at the studio settled. I left them chatting and made my way to the back to settle Ry down for a nap.

The rest of the day went by quick and I was tired when we got home.

I got Ry bathed and fed and settled in his bed, he was asleep when his head touched the bedding.

I wanted a shower before dinner and had a fairly quick one. Once out I dressed in the bathroom before going into my

bedroom. I was pulling on a fluffy sock when my phone rang. The caller ID showed unknown number. It could be anyone but it was most probably Janelle from the doctor's rooms. So I answered.

“Hello.”

“Baby, what did the doc say?” Lucky's deep voice had me closing my eyes.

How did he know we went to see Ry's doc?

“He's good, no problems at all. Ry is healthy and developing well for a premature baby.” I explained quickly, not wanting a long discussion.

“Good, I just wanted to find out how it went today. I can't talk long. I'll call again, not exactly sure when, but I will call. Look after yourself and your boy. Sleep well.”

He didn't give me a chance to reply and I sat on the side of my bed with the silent phone in my hand suddenly feeling extremely tired and alone. He still called Ry *my* boy, not *our* boy.

I was so damned alone.

Physically shaking myself I stood, grabbed my tablet and the baby monitor and marched my ass downstairs. I wasn't going to sit and mope in my room. I had nursery decorating themes to investigate.

I spent the evening with Bren making a list of all the stuff required to set up a nursery. It boggled my mind that one little baby needed the loads of things I had on my very long list. I had to make a decision on the colours and style I wanted and then I could start ordering most of it online.

I didn't feel comfortable walking around a mall with Ry knowing that bad people were most probably watching me. It gave me the screaming heebie-jeebies.

Later lying in bed I went over my day and what Doc Ellen had said. My boy was doing well and growing like he should. It made me very happy.

I made a mental note to call Rider to give him an update. I actually just wanted to hear his voice and talk to him. Tell him what was happening around here and Lucky's reaction to Ry.

I was lucky to have Rider as a friend, lucky to have Bren and Viper guarding us.

As for the rest, you made your own luck through hard work and perseverance.

Maybe it was because I was thinking about luck that my dreams were filled with lucky pennies and dragons and other weird magical nonsense.

I woke early, for me anyway, the dream staying with me and giving me an idea for Ry's nursery. Magical lions and dragons, it would be so cool.

I went through my morning routine, cleaning Ry up, feeding him and putting him on my bed surrounded by cushions. I then plumped the rest of the cushions and settled against the headboard. I followed the strict rules set up by Asa using a new burner every time I called. Usually that's all it was, a call, not this time though. This time it was going to be a video call.

With the six hour time difference between Savannah and South Africa nine in the morning was the ideal time to call Pixie. It was three in the afternoon at home.

Yes, it would always be home.

“Hey you, how’s it going over there? I spoke to Ink yesterday and he was very pleased with how things are going. He says the studio is very busy, that all of you are fully booked up for the next two months and more.”

“Hey there, it’s going really well and it’s true, we have so many bookings we’re busy from early until late. Mark is an amazing front of house guy, and he’s been getting the word out on social media which has brought in a lot of clients. We haven’t been able to take walk-ins because we’re totally booked up. Ink said if it carries on like this we’ll eventually have to expand.” I wiggled my eyebrows. “It means your brand is growing, soon you’ll be all over the world.”

“I’m not interested in being some big business mogul. I agreed to Savannah because I have clients in the US and having a studio there makes it easier for me when I come over. I thought about setting up in LA or Vegas but when Ink approached me I went with Savannah because of the club connection and Remy’s family. It worked out well for us, didn’t it?”

She had no idea. No time like the present.

“I have something to tell you. Actually, it might be better if I just show you. This is Ryder.”

I didn’t give her a chance to say anything, I just tilted the phone to show her my boy kicking and chewing on his fists. I watched her face as it went from smiling to confused to shocked.

“What the hell? What the hell is that? When did that happen? Those are your eyes! Who’s the daddy?” She shook her head. “I’m...I’m not sure what to say apart from, what the hell?”

I tilted the phone back up. “I’m sorry, I wanted to tell you sooner but I couldn’t. I had to tell the father first and that wasn’t easy. Asa and his guys know and I was only recently able to tell the father and that’s why...”

She threw a hand up.

“Stop. Stop right there.” She pointed at me. “You are a part of my family and that makes your baby my family as well. Would I have liked to find out sooner? For sure, but what’s important is that you’re safe, that your baby is safe. And our babies are going to grow up together, and that makes me so happy. Who is this child’s daddy? Is he in the picture? And if he is, is he helping you financially and is he there to help keep you safe?”

Biting my bottom lip I closed my eyes then opened them and told her.

“Lucky is the father but he doesn’t believe me. He wants a DNA test to confirm paternity.”

Her eyes went huge and her head jerked to the side.

“What the fuck?” Was roared from somewhere off screen.

Remy shoved his face into the screen from the side. To say he was angry was to put it mildly.

“Did I hear you right? Did you say Lucky is the father? Why hasn’t he called to tell me? My folks don’t know either or they would have called. What the fuck is goin’ on, Harper?”

At least he remembered to use my new name.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you guys. When we had our thing I gave him my word that I wouldn’t contact him once he left, not ever. When I found out I was pregnant I didn’t know what to do. And then Ryder was born and we came here and I never saw him. But I’ve since told him and he now knows about him but like I said, he wants a DNA test. He’s got a lot going on at his club and can’t be seen with me.” I tried to explain but by the look on Remy’s face I could see he didn’t like what I was saying.

“Are you tellin’ me that he’s put the club ahead of his own child?” Remy snarled.

Shaking my head I tried to explain.

“Like I told you, he doesn’t think Ry is his. And he said there’re things going on with the club and if their enemies found out about us we’d be in danger. He’s staying away for our safety. His president gave him a job to do and he can’t be seen with me while he’s doing it.”

Remy’s face changed. He went from pissed off to worried almost instantly.

“Fuck.” He looked at Pixie who was glaring at him when she punched his arm.

“I know that look, you know what’s going on, don’t you?” She hissed.

“If it is what I think it is then Lucky is right. Keep your head down and avoid notice. The people they are dealing with are dangerous, very dangerous.”

I nodded then shrugged.

“Lately I’ve been doing that, going to work and coming home and nothing else. But then Lucky came into the studio with his woman and she took an instant dislike to me and to Ry. Not sure why because I acted like I didn’t know him, she was incredibly rude and I refused her service. Afterwards Lucky came to see me. We talked about our shit, he demanded a DNA test that I refused, and then he told me she was a job he has to do for his club.” I shrugged.

I knew they both knew what it meant when both of them groaned.

Waving my hand to stop them from speaking I changed the subject.

“Enough of that bullshit. How’s your baby girl doing?”

Both looked a bit pissy but they allowed me to have my way.

“Her doctor is happy with her progress and thankfully she’s not a giant like her daddy.” She grinned and winked. “Or her cousin.”

Remy laughed. “Show me your boy again.” He ordered.

I did and showed them my boy.

“That boy is a Boudreaux through and through, except for the eyes. Lucky needs a fist in the face for not seein’ it.” Remy growled. “I’ll call the fucker and give him a piece of my mind.”

Oh no. I didn’t want that.

“Please don’t, I don’t want to cause more tension between us than there is already. He’ll come around eventually.” I knew I

had about as much chance as a snowball in hell that he would listen to me.

We kept talking after Remy said goodbye and left. I knew he was going to call Lucky and I didn't care. Lucky could have called his brother to let him know. He didn't. His problem, not mine.

Eventually Pixie and I said goodbye and made arrangements to talk soon.

As I ended the call I felt a bit lost. Seeing the two of them together was a kick in the gut. I wanted what they had. I wanted a man by my side who loved me. A man who considered me the most important person in his life.

I've never had that and I still don't have it.

The man I wanted was a biker and most bikers always put their clubs first. As he did.

I had no idea what was going on in Lucky's life while he knew every move I made because of the men his club had guarding me. It wasn't fair, not by a long shot. But then again for most of my life nothing has ever been fair.

I was used to it.

Used to being treated like garbage and discarded. Used to being hurt. Used to being nobody.

Used to not being someone's number one.

“Stop being such a weeny.”

I muttered to myself as I turned on my side to rest my hand on Ry's belly.

I knew I had to call Rider to let him know how my appointment went but I needed a couple of minutes to just breathe. To pull myself together. I didn't want him to see me looking unhappy.

Breathing in and out slowly I settled my racing thoughts and relaxed.

Pulling my body pillow on to my lap I balanced my phone on it and called.

It rang for a bit before he answered. He didn't even say hello.

“What did the doc say? How's he doing? Is he healthy?”

I grinned. “Hello to you too, Rider, and yes, he's very healthy.”

He gave me a brilliant smile.

“Great news, any other developments I should know about?”

I bit my lip and slowly shook my head from side to side.

He instantly read my expression. “What? What's going on?”

“It's not bad news, not really.” I drew in a breath. “I've told Lucky about Ry but he's insisting on a DNA test. He doesn't believe he's the father.”

He was about to interrupt but I held up my hand and he nodded to let me know to go ahead.

“You know, I don't fault him for not believing Ry is his but he could at least have given me the benefit of the doubt. He didn't. He immediately assumed I was lying about him being his father. It pissed me off. And he's got a woman now, and she's so vile and slutty.”

Rider frowned heavily.

“He did say she was a job he was doing for his club. I told him I don’t want her anywhere near my son. He wasn’t too happy with me. Not that I care one way or the other.”

He laughed, the asshole laughed at me.

“Stop lying to yourself, Harp. It’s not like you.”

I snorted at him then laughed. “Fine. How are you guys doing?”

He smiled. “We’re good, life is pretty busy at the moment.”

I knew what that meant. I was interrupting him in the middle of a something he was doing for his club.

“I’ve got to go and I know you are busy. Call me when you can and we’ll chat.”

He smiled his lovely smile and shook his head.

“Okay, sweetheart, Delly is going to be annoyed she missed your call. I’ll have her with me tomorrow so be prepared for a call around the same time, okay?”

“Okay. Tell her I love her and miss her and I’ll talk to her tomorrow.”

“I will do. Have a good day and we’ll chat some more tomorrow. Love you, Harp.”

It warmed my heart to hear him say he loved me.

“Love you too, Rider.”

Shutting the phone down I dropped it on the bed and looked down at Ry.

“Mama loves you sweetheart. I promise to love and care for you all the days of my life. Now, your daddy is a bit of asshole but he’s not a bad guy. He’s just never had to pick between his club and his family and it makes him nervous as hell. But you’re his family, make no mistake, and he’ll realise it soon. You have a lot of people who love you, like your uncle Rider, he’s loves you so, so much. You’re a very lucky boy.”

My smile was a bit sad when I called him a lucky boy.

If I had a crystal ball and saw what was coming I wouldn’t have been smiling.

I would have run.

TWENTY ONE

Lucky

Walking away and leaving Harper and her child under the protection of other men burned like acid in his gut. It should be him in that house, him watching over them, him taking care of her. Instead here he was getting ready to once again entertain that lying slut Carmella Mendez at the clubhouse.

Tonight's party was a big one, they had several chapters coming in and as usual they would be showing their brothers a good time. And he will be walking around with the bitch on his arm, giving everyone the fucking wrong impression. He hated that, hated deceiving his brothers. He couldn't wait to scrape her off and be done with this bullshit.

Maniac had called for a meet with the presidents of the chapters closest to Savannah and they had been rolling in all afternoon. Tonight was the welcome party and tomorrow they were going into church to talk. They were going to discuss the threat from the cartel and ways to ensure the safety of their people.

He wasn't feeling like a party or the slut he had to entertain.

He would rather be with Harper than here.

Harper. Just thinking about her new name had him gritting his teeth.

It wasn't that he didn't like the name. He did. It was the reason she had to have a new name that pissed him off. If he

could have he would have gone to Johannesburg and taken care of the problem the only way it should be taken care of. Permanently.

Her family needed to burn in the fires of hell. Asa Malone had to get his ass in gear and eliminate the threat to Harper and her child before he got on a plane and sorted it out himself. He wasn't afraid of spilling blood to get what he wanted, the end of her family.

A knock on his door jerked him back to the present.

“Yeah.”

“Lucky, prez wants to see you in his office.” Mouth called through the closed door.

What now.

“I'm on my way.”

Pulling his kutte on over the faded black tee he was wearing he glanced in the mirror and grinned. Marie, one of the nicer club girls, had braided his hair in what she called a Viking braid, it looked badass. It made him look different, more menacing, if that was possible. Meeting his eyes in the mirror he breathed in then out, waiting for all emotion to leach from them before turning and leaving his room, locking the door behind him.

The door to the office stood open and he walked in after a single knock on the door jamb.

Jonno, the president of their Vegas chapter was sitting at the desk with his prez and all the officers and senior patches were in the office, except Viper and Bruiser who were watching

over Harper and Frankie. Giving his prez a chin lift he took his place next to Dive.

His prez didn't beat around the bush. He got right to the point of the meet.

“I called you in to have a word before we welcome the rest of our brothers. Jonno brought some news, listen and once he's done we'll talk.” He turned to the man on his left and gave him a nod.

Jonno cleared his throat loudly. “As you know we've had the Robbers encroachin' on our territory for the last year. It started when they became mules for the Los Rojos cartel. After our meet in Vegas they backed off but as of two weeks ago they're back. They're ridin' through my territory as if belongs to them and we've had several skirmishes that resulted in a few of my brothers gettin' shot. I'm not taking this bullshit a moment longer. I came here to tell my National President that the Las Vegas Chapter of the Shadow Wraiths will be goin' to war with the Grave Robbers MC. I know it's against the rules but I have no other options, I have to do what I have to do to ensure the safety of my people.”

He glanced at Maniac as he continued.

“Let me give you some examples of the dangers we are facing every single day. I didn't ride here with my brothers because it would have left my compound undermanned. I had to fuckin' fly in with only two of my brothers to take my back. There has been two attempts on my life and an attempt to snatch my sister and her little girl. Thank fuck I had put brothers on them and they were able to get them to the safety of the compound. I'm tellin' you this so you can see that none

of us are safe and neither are our women and children. I've put my chapter on lockdown until further notice. It fuckin' pisses me off that we had those fuckers at my compound for the meet. They were most probably taking note of our defences and possible weak spots. It means we're vulnerable, more vulnerable than we've ever been. At the meet tomorrow I'll be asking for volunteers to come to LV to help rid us of the motherfuckers. It's not just my chapter that's at risk, if they wipe us out it makes our club look weak and we'll be fighting a war on all sides. We have enemies who would love a chance to get at us, and if LV falls, pretty soon another and another will fall and Los Rojos, through the fuckin' Grave Robbers, will own our territory. We can't let it happen. We need to hit fast and hard, kill the fuckers before they kill us."

Jonno gritted his teeth and visibly tried to calm himself. Lucky had been watching his brothers and saw several nods in agreement but also some who looked not too sure.

"I agree with Jonno. We need to take them out before they get a foothold," Ren said.

Lucky was in total agreement with his SAA. "I'm with Jonno and Ren, they have to be taken out."

Maniac lifted his hands and the muttering and mumbling instantly stopped.

"As much as I want to go to war with the Grave Robbers now it's not the right time, not yet. The Robbers and the cartel think I don't know they have bitches in my clubhouse, slyly sowing discontent within the ranks. They think they can overthrow the officers by having our brothers rise up against us, they have no fuckin' clue. I'm not sayin' we don't have a

couple of bad apples who might be greedy enough to take their money. It's common knowledge there are some patches who disagree with the way I do business. I don't give a fuck. We voted and the vote is final. They lost. If they go up against me they'll be losin' even more. There will be no quarter given to traitors."

Silence, no one said a word.

"To get back to Jonno's problem. I'll put out a call to all chapters for volunteers to support LV in their fight. I'll be bringin' it to the table durin' tomorrow's meet. We all need to be aware what we're facing. The cartel is goin' to push hard but we're not goin' down. Not now, not ever. They kicked the wrong ants nest this time. Once we're done Los Rojos will no longer be a problem in our territories."

Jonno didn't look happy. He wanted more than what their prez offered. Lucky couldn't blame him. If he was the prez in LV he would be feeling exactly the same.

There was nothing more to say and the meet broke up. Lucky walked out with Dive and the brother gave him a raised eyebrow. He knew what he was saying without saying it. Dive agreed with Jonno. He would vote for war against the Robbers.

Before walking into the common room he steeled his spine for what was coming.

Fucking Carmella Mendez.

He heard her fake laugh and disgust rolled in his gut. Being taller than everyone made it easy to pick her out. She was at the bar, several of his brothers crowded around her. They

looked at her with lust in their eyes and it was obvious she loved the attention.

He stood watching for several minutes.

“What the fuck is that whore doin’ in your clubhouse?”
Jonno’s voice was filled with hate.

“Can’t explain right now, brother, but it’s not what it seems. She thinks I’m a mark but she’s wrong, she’s the mark.” Lucky explained quietly.

Jonno shook his head in disbelief.

“Be very careful, Lucky. She’s poison.”

“I know. I’m stayin’ out of her claws as much as possible.”
He looked around checking that they were alone. “There’s no way I’m puttin’ my dick in her filthy snatch. She’s a job, that’s all.”

Jonno shook his head, worry showing in his eyes.

“You’re playin’ with fire, brother. She’s a Mendez and they’re killers. Be fuckin’ careful.”

With that little bit of advice the brother walked into the party. His two chapter brothers immediately joined him, taking his back.

Fuck. This was seriously fucked up.

Looking around the room he made eye contact with Dive and Magic as he walked over to the bitch. They instantly joined him. Tonight he was going to need the back up.

She saw him coming and gave him a wide welcoming smile. He hated smiling back at her. But did so anyway.

“There you are, *mi amor*, I’ve been waiting for ever. Where have you been?” She plastered herself to his front and he loosely put his arms around her.

“Business.” He looked at the brothers who had been with her, making a note of their names. “I see my brothers have kept you entertained.”

She gave a coquettish little smile and winked. “They did, but I missed you.”

“Mmmmmh.” He didn’t say more.

Looking at the club girl tending bar he held up a hand and she nodded. He watched as she got him a soda, passing the can across the bar. He wouldn’t be drinking tonight.

“What the hell is that?” Carmella gave the poor girl a death stare.

“I’m on duty and she knows it. I’m not drinkin’ tonight.”

Carmella’s hands hit her hips as she squared off in front of him. “You invite me to a party where you have to work? Am I supposed to hang around here waiting on you? That’s not happening, get someone else to do the job. I’m not going to sit at the bar while you’re doing whatever. What do you have to do anyway? It’s a party.”

Lucky tipped his head to the side and just stared at her. She changed tactics. Leaning forward she put her hands on his chest and stroked.

“If you have to work tonight why don’t you take me up to your room so I can make you feel good? Or we can go outside where it’s nice and dark and have some fun. I want you to

think of me as you do what you have to do.” She whispered seductively.

It did nothing for him.

“Sorry, darlin’, no women allowed upstairs tonight. And I can’t leave the clubhouse, I appreciate the offer but can’t take you up on it. I have to be in here tonight.” Lucky kept his face blank, his eyes cold as he looked down at the bitch plastered against his chest.

He saw the fire in her eyes as she lost her temper but swallowed it down.

“I don’t know why you invited me if we can’t spend time together. What is the use of me being here when you aren’t with me?” She tossed her hair back over her shoulder and stepped away from him. “I’m going home. I’m not second best for any man. I’ll think about whether I want to see you again.”

Flinging her hair back over her shoulder she strutted away from him, her hips swaying. He stood with his arms crossed over his chest, watching her leave. His eyes caught those of Magic and his brother silently followed her out, making sure she left without causing any shit on the way out. Unfortunately she was still his responsibility while on SW property.

When Magic walked back in several minutes later and nodded he let out a breath he didn’t even know he’d been holding. He circulated around the room, greeting brothers he hadn’t seen in a while until he ended up at Maniac’s table. There was a reason he had come to his prez.

A very good reason.

Bending down he softly spoke to his prez, ensuring no one overheard him.

“She’s gone. I’m headin’ out.”

His prez nodded, he knew where he was going. “Be careful, Lucky. Make sure you’re not followed. Take a cage and use the back entrance.”

“Thanks, Prez. I’ll be back in time for the meet in the mornin’.”

His prez nodded and Lucky made his way to the security gate at the stairs, unlocked it, locked it behind him, then ran upstairs to his room. After throwing a few things in a small pack he left, taking the quickest way down the garages. Mouth suddenly appeared next to him.

“Prez told me to come with you. He said you would explain once we got out of here.”

Lucky frowned and was about to answer when his phone vibrated against his chest. Pulling it out he looked at the message.

Take Mouth with you.

It was an order, plain as day. An order he couldn’t refuse and wasn’t going to either. He knew he didn’t have to answer his prez’s message because he had been given an order and no answer was necessary.

“Let’s go prospect. What you see tonight goes to the grave with you, do you get me?” He liked the mouthy prospect but he had to let him know if he opened that mouth of his he would not like what happened to him.

“I got you, Lucky.” He gave a short nod and fell in next to him.

They didn’t speak until they were in the cage and driving down the back road.

“I don’t want to offend you, but I have to say this. That woman is fuckin’ awful, Lucky. I hope we’re not on our way to see her.” Mouth threw him an uncomfortable look.

He almost smiled, almost.

“No, Mouth, that’s not where we’re goin’. Like I said earlier, you keep your mouth shut about what you’re goin’ to see. Keep your eyes peeled, I want to know if we’re bein’ followed.”

Mouth did as he was told, watching their backs.

Driving past the house he saw there were still lights on. It wasn’t that late, only about ten thirty, and his woman was still up. He drove around the small suburb until he was sure they hadn’t been followed, only then did he head to his destination. The garage where the escape tunnel exited.

Mouth stayed silent as he texted Viper to let them know he was on his way in. The prospect watched in confusion as he drove into the yard of an empty house and remotely opened the garage, parked and stayed in the truck as it closed behind them. Getting out he motioned Mouth over then waited until the prospect stood next to him before he flipped on the torch, kept the red light down as he moved the tool bench aside to expose the hidden hatch. Pressing his thumb to the lock he listened for the click then opened it and motioned the prospect forward.

“Wow! This is so neat.” He grinned as he took the stairs down into the tunnel ahead of Lucky.

“And a secret, Prospect. A secret that carries a death sentence if you flap your lips.”

Mouth grinned as he looked over his shoulder and made as if zipping his lips.

Fucking prospect.

Bren and Viper were both waiting at the open security room door as he walked up the steps.

“What the fuck, Lucky? What the hell are you two doin’ here? And has he got clearance for this shit?” Viper frowned.

“Prez sent him with me as backup, so I’m thinkin’ that’s a yes. And what I’m doin’ here? I’m done playin’ the asshole around the cartel slut, Viper. I’m just done. I purposely pissed her off and she stormed out, good riddance as far as I’m concerned. Tonight I want to be here with Harper because I have a feelin’ durin’ tomorrow’s meet shit’s gonna hit the fan. If it does I don’t know when I’ll be able to get back here again. We’re lookin’ at some serious shit between us, the Robbers, and the cartel. If that happens...” He shook his head, not saying more because he didn’t have to. Both men knew what it meant.

“Fuck.” Bren growled. “I need to call my boss, this is shit he needs to know.”

Lucky didn’t say anything because he was right, Asa Malone had to be told what was going on. The war against the cartel could impact the studio and put Harper in danger. He’d rather have her safe in Russia than a target for the cartel.

“What’s going on?” Her husky voice interrupted his thoughts. “Did I hear you right? You’re going to war with a cartel? That’s crazy dangerous.”

Turning his heart jerked in his chest as he looked her over.

Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and her face fresh and clean, no make-up. His woman looked beautiful. She was wearing pale blue sleep pants with pink flamingos on them and a pink tee. She wasn’t wearing slippers or socks. And she had Ry in her arms, a wide awake baby boy.

“Baby, why are you walkin’ around with nothin’ on your feet?” He asked, saying the first thing that came to mind.

“Oh please, don’t faff, I’m inside and the floors are clean. Now stop avoiding answering my questions.” She snipped at him.

“Wow, your baby is really big. How old is he?” Mouth asked his eyes on Ry as he moved closer.

“Prospect! What the fuck?”

Lucky was about to smack the back of the little fucker’s head when Harper threw him a look as she answered his question.

“He’s three and half months old.”

“My sister’s boy is five months and he’s not this big. Are you sure he’s only three and half months old?” The prospect’s eyes flipped between Ry and her face.

He was so tempted to hit the little fucker and throw him back down the fucking tunnel. But Harper, Bren and Viper laughed.

Harper pointed at Lucky, a defiant look in her eyes. “The giant over there is the daddy which explains the giant baby.”

Mouth's smile fell, he suddenly realised what he was being trusted with. And what it meant for him if he ran his mouth.

“I know I have a big mouth and talk a lot, Boss, but as far as I'm concerned we never left the compound. I never saw nothin'. I know nothin'.”

Lucky gave a short nod. “You will stay down here and keep your eyes open.”

“You got it, Boss.” Mouth said as he moved to the banks of monitors.

He turned to Bren. “Cameras off in Harper's room.” He ordered as he took her hand and gently pulled her behind him as he walked out the security room and took her upstairs.

She said nothing, laying Ry in his crib and covering him up before turning to look at him.

“What are you doing here, Lucky?” She asked as she sat on the side of the bed, using a wipe to clean the bottoms of her feet. Not that they were dirty.

He dropped his small pack on the bottom of the bed and sat down next to her, taking her hand in both of his. He stroked his thumbs over the soft skin on the back, holding her hand in his for several seconds and just looking at her before he gave it to her.

“To be honest, baby, I'm not supposed to be here but I couldn't stay away. I've always put my club first and handled any business my prez asked of me. Tonight, for the first time ever, I couldn't do it. I couldn't stand next to that slut and let my visiting brothers think she's mine. I scraped her off and here I am. Right where I want to be. Next to you.”

Her worried icy blue eyes met his.

“Are you going to get into trouble? You shouldn’t be here if it’s going to get you on Maniac’s bad side.”

He smiled leant over and kissed her nose. “He wouldn’t have sent the prospect with me if he was pissed at me, Harper. He would have sent Dive or Ren to drag me back. He didn’t.”

Letting go of her hand he curved his arm around her and pulled her into his chest and kissed the top of her head.

“What’s happening here, Lucky? You left and now you’re back and you’re acting like I’m yours. You still don’t believe Ry is yours and I don’t...”

He didn’t let her finish.

“Get into bed, baby. I’m goin’ to have a quick shower before I join you. We’ll talk later.”

Letting her go he grabbed his pack and walked into the bathroom, closing the door behind him.

He showered and brushed his teeth then with a towel wrapped around his waist walked back into the bedroom. His woman was sitting up against the cushions on the wrong side of the bed. No way was he letting her sleep on the side closest to the door.

Walking up to her he pulled the covers down, slid his arms under her and gently moved her over.

“What are you doing?”

“You’re on my side, *bébé* (baby). That’s my place when I’m with you.”

“I like sleeping on that side.” She grumped as she punched the cushions behind her into submission, then pulled the hair tie out and ran her fingers through her hair. Her eyes stayed on him and Lucky hid his grin when they widened as he dropped the towel and slid into bed next her. He pulled her up on his chest, her body tight against his side.

“I don’t remember you wearin’ so many clothes last time we were in bed together.” He whispered against her ear and smiled when she shuddered.

Her hand came up and stroked over his pecs and it was his turn to shudder.

“What’s going on here, Lucky? What are you doing here? We had two nights together that resulted in Ry but it doesn’t mean that you have to...” He didn’t let her finish.

“We might only have spent two fuckin’ fantastic nights together, *tite chatte* (little cat), but you forget, we spent two weeks gettin’ to know each other. Durin’ those two weeks you showed me your heart, showed me who you were behind the mask you’re always wearin’ in front of others. You showed me the woman only Rider and his squirrel has been lucky enough to get to know. A woman who soothed the brother’s broken heart by bein’ there for him when he needed her.” He pressed his lips to hers, kissing her softly.

“Two weeks was more than enough to have me start fallin’ for you, *ma belle* (my beautiful). I tried to deny it and walked away, came home. But nothin’ was the same. I wasn’t the same man who came to Remy’s weddin’. I was changed and I only realised it once I was here and tryin’ to pick up my life where I left off. I couldn’t go back to partyin’ like I used to do.

I'm not proud of it but I want to be honest with you, I fucked a couple of women at first. Thinkin' about you made me hard as fuckin' stone but the minute a bitch touched me I lost it. I had to pretend she was you to even finish. I gave up tryin' and spent more time jackin' off than I think I've ever done in my life. All I could think about was you and our time together. I was goin' to break my own rules and call you. And then all this fuckin' shit went down and I had to back off. But luckily for me the universe stepped in, and there you were, in Ink's studio, in my city. The fates were givin' me a second chance to get it right."

She stiffened when he admitted to fucking other women but he carried on explaining.

A soft growl escaped her beautiful mouth, then she sighed and finally relaxed against him.

She felt so good in his arms he almost moaned at the feeling. Stroking over her back he slipped both hands beneath her top and finally, after a year of not having touched her, he had her skin under his hands. Smooth and warm. Her scent was as he remembered, soft but exotic. He wasn't sure exactly what it was, maybe flowers maybe something else. All he knew was that it was his woman's scent.

"I don't know what to say, except I started falling for you during those two weeks. When I found out I was pregnant I was shocked and scared. I had given you my word and I didn't know if I should break it. So I didn't. I only told one person, Rider. He understood and when the stuff with my family happened he offered me a home, not that I could take him up on it. I didn't want my brother to know about them. He would

hurt them to get to me. So I went with Asa and finally came here, as someone new. And then you walked into the studio with that...that woman. If I had a gun I would have shot both of you. I totally understand club business but I'm telling you, I'm not a push over. You do it again and I *will* get myself a gun."

Her voice had started out soft but ended in a pissed off growl.

Those clever fingers of hers pinched his nipple, hard. Pain shot through his chest.

"Ow! *Bébé* (baby), I explained, she was a job and I said what I did to protect you."

Her growl against his chest said she wasn't impressed.

There was only one thing to do to get her mind off his fuck up.

He hoped like hell it worked.

Sliding his hand into the back of her pants he cupped her ass cheek, squeezed then rolled until she was under him, her legs spread to accommodate his hips. Bracing himself on his forearms he looked down at her and smiled. He loved the fire in her eyes as she glared up at him.

Bracing on one arm he slid a hand into her hair. "I like the pink but I want my ice queen back. When we've dealt with your family and all the other shit surroundin' us I want to see your hair again, baby. I want it long like it was before, love your hair."

Dropping his head he sealed his lips over hers.

His heart raced at the thought of having her again. Of sinking into her warm heat with nothing between them, like before.

Just the two of them.

The way it should always be.

TWENTY TWO

Lucky

She was perfect.

His little cat with her sharp little claws.

His ice queen.

Her eyes were spitting fire at him but her mouth was a soft haven for his.

All he wanted was her naked underneath him and he was going to have it, right now.

Sitting up on his knees he took the bottom of her shirt and pulled it up and over her head. He didn't like that she was wearing a sports bra and got rid of that as well.

And finally there they were, her beautiful tits, on display just for him. He cupped them with both hands and ran his thumbs over her distended nipples, making her shudder.

"I love your tits, baby, so beautiful." He murmured as he nuzzled both, rubbing his beard over her skin.

"Be gentle with them, they're still very sensitive." She warned.

He hummed and licked around first one then the other nipple. Closing his lips around one he licked and sucked, checking constantly until he was satisfied with the bright red colour. He then gave the other the same attention. All through his

ministrations his little cat writhed under him and her little nails dug into his shoulders. He loved it, loved the little bite of pain.

Giving her nipples one last lick each he pressed a kiss between her tits then moved down.

Her belly was still slightly rounded and it called to him but first he had to get rid of the rest of her clothes.

Rearing up he sat back, hooked his fingers in her pants and panties and dragged both down her legs. He lifted one foot, pulled the pants free, kissed her ankle, then did the same to her other leg. Throwing the clothes over his shoulder he started kissing his way up her legs, placing kisses on one then the other. He heard the way her breathing sped up as he got closer to her glistening little pussy.

He didn't go there. He had another target in mind.

Leaning to the side he looked into the crib pulled up close to the bed.

He looked down at the sleeping baby boy. For the first time he really looked at him.

His skin was olive toned and his hair dark. Dark eyelashes lay like thick fans on his chubby cheeks.

“He’s beautiful, sweetheart. I have to admit he looks a lot like Remy and I did as babies.” He sighed softly. “I’m sorry I’m so distrustful but I have to know, have to have the proof in my hands that he’s mine.”

He leaned in deep and pressed a kiss to the boy’s forehead.

“Sleep well little man. I’m about to love on your *Maman* for a bit.” He whispered.

Sitting back up he met his woman's teary eyes. He didn't say anything, just went back to what he was doing.

He laid both hands on the slight rounding of her belly. A belly that had carried a child. Lying down between her spread legs he pressed a ring of kisses around her belly button.

Glancing up he saw his little cat had put cushions behind her back and was watching him with a smile curving her lips.

He slowly kissed along the line of her scar and along the stretchmarks. He licked them and gave them biting little kisses, feeling her shiver under him.

Grinning he looked up at his woman. "I like this little belly you've got goin' on, baby."

He pressed a final kiss to it then crawled up over her as she snorted in disbelief. Caging her body with his he grinned as she wriggled under him.

Looking into her ice blue eyes he dropped a kiss to her luscious mouth.

"I know you don't understand why I'm so cautious about him being mine. I never expected to be a father, didn't want it, to be honest. Thought my time to be a father was taken from me years ago and I was fine with it. Thought I would never have another woman in my life who meant somethin' to me. But now, here we are." He put his hand over her mouth when she tried to speak.

"*Non* (No), don't say anythin' now. We'll talk about it later. I know you remember what I told you on the beach, but things have changed. We'll talk about how it has changed later. Now I want to love my woman. I've not been inside you for months

and I can't wait any longer. I have to have you, *'tite chatte* (little cat), have to feel those nails biting into my back as I go deep inside you."

Reaching a hand down he cupped her pussy, it was hot and wet against his palm. Going onto his knees between her spread legs he looked down and licked his lips. He had forgotten what a beautiful *'tite fleur* (little flower) she had.

"So pretty, blushing and wet for me, waiting for my fingers and my cock." He dragged a finger up her slit, coating it with her juices then smeared it over her hard little clit.

"The last time I had my way with this pretty little flower I left her red, swollen and aching. Not goin' to do the same tonight. Goin' to take it slow, love on her and get her so wet she's goin' to explode for me." As he spoke he played with her clit, rubbing it soft and slow then hard and fast.

His woman's legs shook and she lifted her hips trying to get his fingers where she wanted them. Not going to happen.

"Please, please, Lucky. I need you." She begged softly.

He gave her a little more and she shook as he slipped two fingers inside her. Stretching and pumping at the same time. She was as tight as he remembered.

He couldn't wait to get inside her.

Moving closer he took his aching cock in his hand and swiped the head over her clit, making both of them shudder.

He didn't want to put her on her hands and knees because he wanted to watch her eyes as she came. He wanted to take her while kneeling between her legs. He liked the position because he could see her face and pussy and still reach her tits.

Sliding his cock through the lips of her pussy he got himself nice and wet and ensuring that the pierced head hit her clit on every slide.

“For heaven’s sake, Lucky, stop playing and get the monster inside me. I need you, inside, now.” His woman demanded.

“Protection, baby, we need protection first. I’d love to take you bare but we’re not takin’ the chance.”

Leaning over the side he grabbed the box of condoms he had in the top of his bag, ripped it open, got one out and made quick work of covering his cock.

And then he was ready to give in to her demands. More than ready.

Taking himself in hand he slid the head through her soaking lips one more time then notched it at her entrance. Slowly, so very slowly he started to push inside.

It came at him, the heat of her, the wet, the tightness surrounding his cock and he almost snapped his hips to jam himself inside her.

Almost.

But he didn’t.

He kept it nice and slow. Both of them were groaning as he pulled out slow then pushed back inside, every time a little deeper. He groaned as the tight wet heat of her surrounded more of his cock the deeper he slid inside. And then he was finally as deep as he could go, and his little flower had taken all of him, he was all the way in.

It was something that didn't happen very often because of the size of his dick, but it did with his *'tite chatte* (little cat), every time.

Very few women had been able to take all of him, not even Gloria had taken all of him like his little flower did.

It shook him to his core because he had never had this thought before. Never compared his supposed lost love to any of the women who came after her. It had always been Gloria for him. The woman he had loved and lost and who he thought he would love for the rest of his life.

What a load of bullshit that had proved to be.

After her untimely death he had hardened and women became a way to let off steam, nothing more. He used them and walked away without a hint of regret.

Until her.

Until his *'tite chatte* (little cat). From the first moment he had seen her laughing with Rider and Delene he had wanted her but because she was a friend of his family he hadn't acted on it. He fought his attraction and when he finally gave into his attraction he'd had the best sex of his life.

And once again he had walked away, and made her swear to keep his stupid rules.

Rules he had used to keep Gloria's memory fresh. Those rules were now shattered, gone, never to come back again. The lie that had ruled his life was gone. Never to return.

He felt no sense of loss, no guilt because he was falling in love with another woman. He no longer felt like he was

cheating on a ghost. All he felt was rage at the lies that had ruled his life for so long.

For the first time in years he felt free, free to love someone else.

Free to love his woman, because that's who she was, she was his, had been his since the first time he slid inside her on the beach. He just hadn't realised it.

“Lucky? Are you okay?” Her worried voice drew him back to the present and he smiled as he stroked a hand up her side and cupped her breast.

“I'm so very okay, *bébé* (baby). I just got lost in some memories for a moment there. But I'm back, I'm here, with you, only you.” He pressed a kiss to her raised knee.

“When I left Cape Town I thought I would never see you like this again. Havin' you laid out under me, takin' me so beautifully is incredible. I will never get enough of you.” He whispered as he started moving faster.

Her eyes dilated and her mouth fell open as he flicked his thumb over her nipple while rubbing a finger over her glistening clit.

Faster and faster he powered into her, no longer able to go slow. Her hips met his with every down stroke. Both of them moaning and gasping as they strained towards release.

Grabbing her hips in his hands he lifted her and nearly lost his mind at the sensations sparking through him.

Her walls were fluttering, small contractions squeezing his cock as he pushed through the swollen muscles. She was almost there, almost.

On every down stroke he rubbed his pubic bone over her clit his eyes flicking between her red and stretched wide pussy and her widened eyes. Her mouth was open as she gasped for breath, and then he saw it. Saw her eyes go an almost icy white, her pussy clamping down on him as she started coming.

“Oh my god, Lucky.” She moaned her head thrashing from side to side.

She was incredibly tight, so tight it was a pleasure pain sensation to push through, but he did, chasing his own climax.

He felt it rushing closer and closer and started coming with a loud grunt.

“Fuck, little cat, this is so good, so fuckin’ good.”

Come exploded from the tip of his cock, filling the condom. It felt as if he came over and over again. It was the most incredible feeling. It would have been even more incredible if he could have taken her bare. It would happen, but not yet.

His hands were clamped around her hips, his groin shoved tight against hers, keeping him deep inside.

He knew she was going to have bruises and it made him feel like a fucking caveman.

A thrilled caveman because it marked her as his.

It was fucked up but it also wasn’t.

Her pussy was wet and warm and the best place in the world to be.

Keeping his groin pushed up against her he leaned over and fused their mouths together, kissing her as deep as his cock was inside her. Lifting his head he met her eyes.

“Mine.”

He didn't say more.

That one word let her know he was claiming her. She was his.

His woman, his old lady, and maybe even the mother of his child.

When his cock started to soften he took hold of the condom and slowly slid out of her, pulling it off he knotted it and dropped it on the floor. He would pick it up later. Gently rolling her to her side he lay down next to her. Looking deep into her eyes he saw contentment but he also saw fear.

It would be his job to wipe the fear from her beautiful eyes.

As it was his job to clean her up. Getting out of bed he picked up the used condom went into the bathroom, disposed of it and brought back a warm, wet cloth. He gently cleaned her, took the cloth to the bathroom then got back into bed with his woman.

“Thank you.” She whispered and stroked her hand over the side of his face. He kissed her fingers and smiled.

“Sleep, baby.” He said softly.

With a contented sigh she turned, pushing her back tight against his chest, her delectable ass in his groin. She wriggled until she was comfortable then relaxed.

He pulled the covers over them and held her as she fell asleep.

Falling asleep with his woman in his arms felt right.

Unfortunately he couldn't stay the entire night. He would have loved to wake up next to her in the morning but he had to get back to the clubhouse before he was missed. His brothers would cover for him but he didn't want to push his luck. He had gotten out unseen, and now he had to get back in the same way. Fortunately Byte would guide him once he got close to the clubhouse so he could avoid running into anyone.

They had a very important meet in a couple of hours. He had to be ready to have answers to the questions he knew would be asked.

Kissing her neck he slid out of bed, checked on the sleeping baby then went to the bathroom.

He had a quick shower and dressed in the clothes he had brought with him. He was sitting on the side of the bed pulling on his boots when she stirred and half sat up in bed.

"You're leaving." She whispered sleepily.

Climbing back onto the bed he kissed her softly. "I have a very important meet in a couple of hours and I have to prepare for it. I don't want go, but I have to."

Her arms came around his shoulders and she hugged him tightly.

"Okay, please be careful and stay safe." She whispered against his mouth.

"I will, baby. I'll call you later today. You listen to what Bren and Viper tell you to do and stay inside where it's safe. I'll reach out to Asa when I'm back at the clubhouse to find out how things are goin' with him." He kissed her again. "Go to sleep and take care of your little one. I'll be back before you

know I'm gone. And be prepared, baby, I'm not leavin' you again."

He gave her a last kiss and watched as her eyes fluttered closed.

As he packed his bag he kept glancing at the bed and the crib, at his woman and her child.

If he had known what was coming he wouldn't have left them.

He walked out with a last look back then softly closed the door.

Downstairs he had a quiet talk with Viper before he and Mouth left.

Driving back to the clubhouse his gut kept telling him to turn around, to not leave.

Usually he would follow his gut but right now he couldn't.

He had club business to take care of.

The meet was too important, for the club, for all of them.

TWENTY THREE

Carlos

He watched expressionlessly as his daughter threw her usual tantrum when she didn't get what she wanted. This time it was about her failure to get her hands on the biker. He was so tired of her thinking her violent outbreaks controlled him, made him do as she wanted.

It didn't.

It was time to put his daughter in her place.

“You will calm down, Carmella. We have another plan. You will confront him and reveal who you used to be. You have history and the stupid bastard has been in love with his Gloria for years. He's been grieving your supposed death. It will be the perfect play.

After you left the club our insider gave us a heads up that he was leaving. We had eyes on him and followed him to a house in the suburbs. It's apparently where the tattoo artists are living. We used a drone with heat imaging cameras and got a head count. It gives us an ace to play with.”

He should have known she wouldn't agree. She was so self-centred she was under the impression she could run the operation. She was wrong.

“Why didn't you tell me you had him followed? I could have been with the team last night. We could have taken him, the slut and the parasite and blown their safe house to pieces.”

Sighing he pointed at the screen where the drone footage was still displayed. The heat imaging showed the images of a group of three people while two others patrolled the property. They hadn't been able to hang around the area because the bikers ran patrols in the suburb and they had to pull back. He would have liked to know why the biker came to talk to the woman. Once they had him he knew Pablo would get the information they needed. She had to be someone important if they kept her in a well secured safe house.

“They have cameras everywhere and I won't be surprised if it's monitored at their clubhouse. We would have been seen before we got close enough. We have to bide our time and take him when no one is watching.”

“I want the fat slut.” Carmella snarled. “She's mine.”

“No. The fact that she's being kept in a well secured safe house means she and her kid is important to someone. They are either keeping her safe for an associate or she belongs to one of them. I don't want the bikers riled up and coming after us before we're ready for them. There are too many clubs that would join the Wraiths and come for us if we fuck with one of their women. We're building a strong presence here but we're not there yet and our allies aren't ready either.”

He saw the disbelief in her eyes. He was going to have to watch her to ensure she didn't pull them into something they wouldn't be able to fix or survive.

If they did this right the club will believe the biker chose the bitch, known to them as Gloria, over his club. He was a pathetic loser dragging after the bitch all these years. What a

joke allowing a woman to have control over his life the way he did.

Weak, he was obviously weak.

And that weakness was going to give him what he wanted, no, what he needed.

Not only the club's routes and connections but the location of their stash houses. They had to have thousands of dollars' worth of product stashed and he wanted all of it.

He would have it in his hands as soon as Carmella brought the asshole in and Pablo did his magic.

No way was he allowing his daughter to fuck this up for him, for Los Rojos.

She'll do the job he had assigned her and they would get the information they needed to take the bikers out. Everything they owned would belong to Los Rojos, their product, their shipping company, their routes, and their women. He was looking forward to testing a few of those whores.

Once all his rivals were taken care of he was going to be the king of Savannah.

He smiled at his only child, it wasn't a good smile.

"You will keep your head together and follow Pablo's instructions. He's now in charge of getting us what we need."

Without saying a word she stormed out of his office, throwing him a furious look over her shoulder as she disappeared out of the door.

If looks could kill he would be dead. He didn't care. Soon she would no longer be a part of his family.

Carmella was living on borrowed time.

Then again, maybe he should get her out of the way sooner. He could sell her to their client. She was exactly the type he liked.

Nodding to himself he went back to work.

There was time enough to arrange her sale or her death.

Either was acceptable.

TWENTY FOUR

Harper

I woke up feeling better than I had in months. Stretching lazily I winced as muscles I hadn't used in forever protested. Turning on my back I lifted my arms then let them fall out to the side, feeling the emptiness on either side of me.

He wasn't in bed with me and of course I knew he wouldn't be there. I had woken up when he was getting ready to leave. After his kiss goodbye I had fallen asleep almost immediately. But now I was awake and wondering if he had meant what he had said.

I didn't have time to think about it as Ry started moving around and grunting.

My boy was an excellent grunter and I knew exactly what that grunt meant, a dirty nappy.

I sighed, rolled over to peek into the crib and smiled at him.

“Morning sweetheart, how's my big boy on this fine morning? Your daddy was here last night, yes I know, he didn't say hello, he's still getting used to you. He's going to love you so, so much. He's just having a bit of a problem right now, but we're not worried, no we're not. He will be back tonight and then we'll have another chat with him.”

He kicked and gurgled and I laughed.

“Exactly as you say, little man.” I pulled a face at him. “Now let's get you up and clean because you stink.” I tickled his

belly then rolled to the other side of the bed and started our day.

I had a long day waiting on me at the studio and I wanted to be comfortable. I pulled on black leggings with purple Doc boots and a purple baby doll top that fell to mid-thigh. It showed some cleavage but not a lot. The top and leggings and boots were perfect to work in.

The rest of our morning went by without any mishaps. Mark had organised my day giving me time with Ry plus he gave me time to have lunch and relax without pushing too hard and then head home just before five. It was so I could stick to Ry's routine.

I had one text from Lucky at around eleven, checking in.

How are you?

I answered for both of us.

We're fine, all is good.

Good. Can't talk now. Will call later.

That was the last I heard from him.

I sent him little updates of my day along with photos of Ry as it flew past. He never responded and I didn't worry because I knew he had important meetings most of the day.

Checking my phone constantly and hoping for even a one word reply made me feel needy and totally like a stalker chick. It didn't stop me from texting him though.

As I cleaned up my station I checked my phone one more time. Still nothing.

Leaving the studio now. How did it go today? Will I see you later?

Viper and Lure, another biker, came to pick Bren and me up from the studio. All the way home I kept expecting Lucky to text or call. He didn't. I asked Viper if he had heard from him. His answer was a quick negative shake of his head.

I wasn't sure I believed him.

I had dinner alone because the guys were working on the cameras and computers for some reason. Bren, Viper and Lure had been setting up cameras since the moment we got home. When I asked Bren why they were doing it he told me they were just being cautious and covering all the angles. There was this niggling feeling that they were hiding something from me.

At ten I gave up waiting on Lucky and went upstairs to get ready for bed.

Lying in bed I drew in a deep breath, let it out and sent the text I had kept deleting before I finally sent it.

What's going on? Are you okay? Haven't heard from you. Viper says he hasn't heard from you either. Are you having second thoughts?

I waited and waited and waited. Then I waited some more. To pass the time I started planning the nursery in my notebook. I used different coloured pens to differentiate between favourites and likes.

After Ry's last feed for the night I tucked him in then got back on my bed to read.

An hour later I put my book to the side checked my phone and found he had read all my texts. The little blue ticks of death stared me in the face. He just hadn't bothered to reply. Swallowing back the tears I sent my final text.

I wasn't stupid, I could take a hint.

Lucky, I don't know what's going on with you and right now I really don't give a shit. I saw you read all my texts. You're having second thoughts and that's fine. All you need to do is let me know how you want to handle this going forward. I won't be reaching out again. Ball's in your court.

Dropping my phone on the bedside table I turned over, pulled my body pillow close, turned off the light and let the tears I'd been holding back escape.

I sobbed into my pillow but eventually I calmed and with an aching heart fell asleep.

TWENTY FIVE

Lucky

The meet with all the presidents and their chosen officers was going as well as could be expected. No one wanted a war but it seemed like it was inevitable.

Los Rojos wanted their routes, their connections and their businesses and they were hell-bent on taking them.

He had given his report regarding Carmella Mendez and had left nothing out. He made sure to include a warning that she was dangerous.

He had been so busy he'd only been able to send Harper one text. Once they went into the meet he had to leave his phone outside. He had given it to Mouth with orders to keep it with him and if Harper needed him to let him know immediately.

They had broken the meeting for lunch and when he sat down with their visitors, their phones were still locked down. He was pissed he couldn't check on his woman but sucked it up. They had a couple of things to work out before the meet was done, he would call her afterward.

He was sitting with Dive, Iceman, the prez of Tampa chapter, and Gunner, the prez of the Birmingham chapter, and they were just shooting the shit while waiting for the meet to restart when he saw Lure with his prez. They were having an intense but very quiet conversation. Lure left and his prez turned to

talk to Byte who instantly pulled his laptop closer and started tapping away on it.

His attention was drawn back to the conversation with his brothers while the prospects came in to clear up. Once they left the atmosphere changed, everyone was back in work mode. He couldn't wait to get shit done so he could call Harper.

Maniac tapped the gavel on the table to restart the meet. Silence fell but instead of continuing the meet his prez looked at him.

By the look in his president's eyes he knew something was wrong, very fucking wrong.

“Lucky, brother, I need you to be calm and listen. You got me?” His prez looked pissed.

Lucky's gut churned. What the fuck was going on? Did something happen to Harper or his family?

“What's goin' on, Prez? Did something happen with Harper? Or is it my family?” He was half out of his chair when his prez held up a hand.

“Harper is fine, so is your family. This is somethin' else.” He looked at Byte who was furiously typing on his laptop.

“You got anythin' for us yet, Byte?”

Byte shook his head, not looking up.

“I'm lookin', Prez. I've reached out to a connection who is like a fuckin' ghost and if there's anythin' to find she'll find it. Give me few minutes. I'll put some photos up as soon as she sends them to me.” He glanced at their prez. “Until we know

what this is we should treat it as threat and handle it accordingly. We're goin' to have to stall."

Lucky had enough.

"What the fuck is goin' on?"

He knew serious shit had hit the fan when Dive came and sat on one side of him and Ren on the other.

Fucking hell, he was getting a really bad feeling in his gut.

"Tell me." He growled as his hands fisted on the table.

"A bitch arrived at the gate demandin' entrance, claimin' she was family. The brothers on duty ordered her to present them with ID, she did." His prez drew in a deep breath. "I'm going to give it to you straight. The woman at the gate claims to be Gloria Garcia."

Lucky was confused because he knew Carmella was Gloria. So who the fuck was at the gate?

He frowned and shrugged then gave his prez his attention as he laid it out for them.

"Here's the thing. She no longer looks like Carmella. It's as if she has pulled on another fuckin' face. Lure took her into the holdin' room and questioned her. Her story is that years ago she was taken back to Colombia and forced into a marriage with one of her father's associates. They threatened to kill you if she didn't marry the guy. She's been livin' there for the last fifteen years and only recently escaped and made her way here, back to you. She told Lure you claimed her and made her your ol' lady before she was forcibly taken. Is that correct? Did you claim her and is she your ol' lady?"

Lucky was stunned. His heart galloped in his chest as he tried to take it all in.

This shit can't be happening. It just can't be.

"Lucky, brother, is she your ol' lady or not?" His prez asked once again.

Closing his eyes he gritted his teeth and tried to still his racing mind.

Shaking his head from side to side he finally opened his eyes and looked at his prez.

"She supposedly died fifteen fuckin' years ago, Prez. Fifteen fuckin' years. Then she pops up and approaches me as Carmella but didn't get what she wanted. She leaves and now she's back again, but this time as Gloria. Why is she back? Why is she wearing her Gloria persona again? Why is she here? What does she want?" He spat the words out through gritted teeth.

"Lucky, son, we need you to work this through with us. We need your input." Grave, their VP, said his voice quiet and soothing.

"Did you claim her? Is she your ol' lady?" Jonno asked.

The answer came to him instantly. "No, I did not and no she's *not* my fuckin' ol' lady."

"Then why the fuck is she claimin' she is?" Jonno asked angrily.

"Who the fuck is the bitch?" Iceman asked, his voice as angry as Jonno's

He drew in a breath and explained their history to the brothers.

“I was a prospect when I met her. She was older, pretty with big tits and a great ass, wild in bed, or so I in my inexperience thought. She was everythin’ a stupid fuckin’ nineteen year old could want. We were together for about a year and I was sure I had found the fuckin’ love of my life. We made plans to get married as soon as I turned twenty-one because that’s when my trust fund was goin’ to kick in. As a prospect I had to talk to my president before I could claim her and was about to do it when she left. I found a note, sayin’ she had to go to Mexico because her grandmother was on her deathbed. When she wasn’t back when she said she would be I tried to call. Her family told me to forget about her. I found a number for her grandmother and she told me Gloria had been killed in a drive-by soon after she arrived at her home. I was devastated and immediately wanted to go down there. Her father refused to let me attend the funeral, made it clear if I set foot in Mexico I wouldn’t be leavin’ alive.”

Around him his brothers’ reactions were about like his at the time. Anger.

“I was goin’ to go anyway but Prez and VP found out and locked me down. Her grandmother reached out. She sent a program of the funeral and a clipping from a flower she planted on the grave. That’s when I accepted I had lost her.” He looked at Grave and gave him a chin lift. “Without Grave and his old lady I wouldn’t have made it. They helped me through. They showed me my life wasn’t over, that one day when I least expected it I would be happy again. They were right. It took some time but I finally got there.”

Dive reached out and put a hand on his forearm that was resting on the table, tightening his fingers then let go. Blowing out a heavy breath he gave his brothers the truth. However much he didn't want to share, he knew it had to be done.

“It took me a fuckin’ long time to get over that shit. Along the way I’ve been a miserable bastard to a lot of women who didn’t deserve the treatment they got from me. And now, when we have proof that Gloria never existed, that she’s in actual fact Carmella Mendez she suddenly comes back. She’s a liar and if the stories about the bitch is true she’s a killer as well. I can’t let her come back and destroy the life I’m busy buildin’. It’s very possible that I’m the father of a baby boy and I won’t put him and his mother in danger.”

“What the fuck!” There was shock and confusion on most of the brothers’ faces.

But not on all the faces. His inner circle knew.

“Yeah, I know it’s a shock seein’ that it’s me, the man who fucked women and left as soon as he was done.” He shrugged. “But it’s true. My ol’ lady had a boy and he’s almost four months old.”

Stunned looks came from the brothers, some shaking their heads in disbelief.

“You have to be fuckin’ shittin’ me.” Tank, the president of the Jacksonville chapter growled. “Saw you a couple weeks ago and you said nothin’ about claimin’ a woman or getting’ one pregnant. You hidin’ her from us, Lucky?”

And there it was. A question that wasn’t as easy to answer as it seemed. He glanced at Maniac who gave a very slight shake

of his head.

Okay. It seems it wasn't time to share as yet.

“No, brother, I'm not. There's shit goin' on with her I can't talk about yet but believe me, she's mine. I've claimed her and she's accepted my claim. As soon as we've got shit sorted for her she'll be gettin' my patch and wearin' my ring. She's gonna be mine in every way.”

“It sounds like there's more goin' on here with your chapter than Los Rojos and the Grave Robbers. Am I correct in thinkin' that?” Bones, the Knoxville chapter prez aimed his question at Maniac, and Lucky left it to his prez to answer.

While they were talking his head was on Gloria's sudden reappearance. What it meant for him.

After the shit she pulled as Carmella he was wary of what her appearing at their gates as Gloria meant. Was it possible that her sudden appearance was another ploy by Los Rojos to get their hands on him?

And why the fuck were they so intent on him?

He wasn't the most important person at the club, not at all. What was it they wanted from him?

Turning to Ren he spoke softly. “Why does Los Rojos keep comin' for me? What is it they want from me?”

Ren's eyes narrowed and he tilted his head to the side as he thought about it. And then suddenly he jerked up right.

“Fuckin' hell, that's it. That's what this is all about.” He almost shouted.

Maniac and the others instantly stopped talking and looked at Ren.

He didn't hesitate to lay it out.

“This is a play by Los Rojos. They're after what's in our brother's head. Lucky is the Mother Chapter's Road Captain, he has every route, all our contacts, all our stash houses and meeting points locked in his head.” He tapped the side of Lucky's head. “They plan to snatch him and break him to get the information. Unfortunately he now has a huge weak spot, Harper and her little boy. If they find her...” He didn't have to go any further.

Fear unlike any he had ever felt before had his body jerking in place.

“Prez, you have to bring her in. The house is secure but it's not secure enough. I want...”

Maniac held up a hand he fell silent.

“Let's not be hasty, Lucky. Allow Byte to dig up everything he can, once we know what we're facing we'll move forward. I hate tellin' you this because you've already stepped up for this shit. But, brother, you're goin' to have to go out there and play this bitch. Find out what her new game is. Because, my brother, we all know she's got an agenda. Appearin' out of the blue very conveniently right when we're hostin' several of our chapter presidents. I don't like it. I don't like it at all.”

There were nods of agreement all around, even Lucky nodded.

Opening his mouth to answer his prez he never got a word out because Byte waved a hand in the air to silence them.

Lucky's eyes were on the brother's frowning face.

“My friend Ghost has proof that Gloria Garcia doesn't exist, has never existed. She suddenly pops into existence seventeen years ago only to die in Mexico about two years later. It's strange but it seems like we don't have any clear photos of her time here with Lucky.”

There were rumbles around the big table but Lucky was silent, waiting for more. He could see his brother had more to say.

“Ghost has a bad feelin' and wants Lucky to have brothers on him at all times. She's workin' as fast as she can to get more information for us and will get back to me in a few hours.”

Byte looked at Lucky. “Do you have a photo of her, brother? If you have we can speed up the process of trackin' her Gloria persona.”

Rubbing the back of his neck Lucky gave a stiff nod. “There's a photo in the trunk beneath my bed. It's not locked. One of the prospects can get it for you.”

Dive shoved his chair back and held out his hand. “Room keys, brother. Not goin' to have a prospect goin' through your shit.”

Pulling out his keys he put it in his brother's hand. Dive was out of their chapel in seconds.

While he was gone Byte asked him questions about Gloria's eye colour, hair colour, build and age. He answered the questions as best as he could.

Not long after Dive was back and gave the photo to Byte. The brother did his magic and seconds later the photo was on

the big screen against the wall. He hadn't looked at the photo in years and it fucking killed seeing the young boy he used to be.

Because that's what he was at the time. A boy. A boy in love with an older woman.

It was so damned obvious when he looked at her now. Obvious that she was at least five to ten years older than him. By the time she left he had been twenty and she had told him she was three years older, so twenty three.

She had lied. There was more than three years between them. He didn't know why he was surprised, the bitch had lied about everything else.

Byte wasn't done, he enlarged the photo until her face filled the screen. She was smiling into the camera but her eyes were ice cold. The eyes of a predator.

He had seen that very same look in his eyes when looking in a mirror.

How the fuck had he missed it?

“How the fuck did I miss it? That she was usin' me. Look at her eyes, those aren't the eyes of a woman in love with the boy standin' next to her.”

Iceman suddenly stood and walked closer to the screen, he stared at it intently before he turned around.

“Brothers, we have a huge fuckin' problem. I can confirm that this woman and Carmella Mendez is one and the same person. I've had the unfortunate honour of meeting her face to face and believe me it wasn't a good meeting. The problem is her other alias, a much more dangerous persona.”

He spoke directly to Byte and the brother started typing as he spoke.

“She goes by Isabella Estevez Mendez so-called wife of Pablo Mendez. It’s a cover, they’re cousins and not married. Pablo is Jorge Mendez’s son and their interrogator. It is well known that his blood thirsty *wife* likes to join in on his interrogation sessions. I’ve seen her work, seen what she did to one of our prospects. He didn’t make it.”

He turned to Lucky and shook his head. “They’ve sent the big guns after you, my brother. You’re in serious danger. If the fuckers find out about your ol’ lady...”

Iceman didn’t say more, he didn’t have to.

As much as it hurt he knew what he had to do.

He had to cut ties with Harper and he had to do it now before their relationship became known. He fucking hated having to do this to her, to his little cat, but for her and her baby boy’s safety he would do anything and everything.

He needed her safe and off their radar.

The realisation that he wouldn’t be holding or sleeping with his old lady for however long it was going to take to sort this shit out hurt him soul deep.

He prayed that once this shit had been taken care of Harper would forgive him for what he was about to do.

Closing his eyes he drew in a deep breath and when he opened them again he was no longer the man he was with his woman.

He was the killer his club needed to sort their problems.

“Let’s get this shit sorted. I’ll play her as long as you need me to.” He turned to look at Ren and met his brothers’ cold eyes. He didn’t have to say a word.

“I will see to it that they have more protection. You have my word.”

Pushing his chair back Lucky stood. Dive and Breaker pushed their chairs back and stood with him.

“You’re not doin’ this on your own. We go where you go. End of.” Breaker said as he tried to wave them off.

“Stick with your brother, he’s not to be left alone with the slut. I don’t care what he says or does, you stick with him. Even if he decides to fuck her, you stay with him.”

Dive pulled a face. “Really Prez? You’re tellin’ me I have to watch him stick his dick in some old woman’s pussy?” He grimaced and shuddered theatrically. “The shit I do for my brothers. You fuck the slut you’re goin’ to owe me motherfucker, and you’re goin to owe me big. Big, like namin’ your next kid after me, big.”

Lucky didn’t want to find what he was saying funny. But it was. At the same time it wasn’t.

“Not goin’ to fuck the slut, Dive. We’re goin’ to see how much info we can get out of her, that’s it.” He gave his brother a dark look. “And no kid of mine is goin’ to have your name.”

Dive laughed and wiggled his eyebrows at him. “We’ll see about that, bro.”

Breaker’s voice pulled them back to the serious side of their discussion.

“She has to know you’re no longer the lovesick boy she betrayed. She must think because you didn’t fuck her Carmella persona or claimed a woman in the last fifteen years that you’re still hung up on Gloria. That could work in our favour.” Breaker said as he scratched his beard as if his face was itchy.

“We know they’re after him because of what he knows. I’ll be surprised if they aren’t aware that he takes Dive and Ren’s backs when needed.” He smiled and it wasn’t a good smile. “She knows he’s a hardened biker. Her move will be to soften him up, make him remember the good times, make him remember that he loved her. She’s goin’ to use every feminine trick in the book to get to him. We have to be lookin’ out for the unexpected.”

Lucky was done. He wanted this over with so he could straighten shit out with Harper.

“We’re done fuckin’ around. Let’s see what the bitch wants. She’s about to get more than she fuckin’ bargained for.” Lucky said as he stood.

“Wait!” Byte ordered as he read something on his laptop.

“Ghost has hacked into the Los Rojos’s system. This is a lot bigger than we thought. It isn’t just us they’re after. They’re movin’ against all organisations with coastal access. It means they’re goin’ after the Cajun Mob as well. They have one of their operatives undercover in Val Breaux’s crew. Ghost has forwarded the info to Etienne Fortier and set it up to look like it came from us. She doesn’t want to get involved with them.” Byte looked at Maniac. “I think you’ll be getting’ a call very soon, Prez.”

“Is that it?” Lucky bit out, he wanted this shit done as fast as possible.

Byte’s eyes came over the top of his laptop screen, pinning him in place.

“No, it isn’t. They have men waitin’ on her to bring you to them. I’m not sure what it means but the message Ghost intercepted said ‘cattle freight’.”

There was silence as they considered the two words and what it might mean.

“Leave it with us, we’ll figure it out while you see what the slut wants. Be fuckin’ careful, brother.” Maniac said.

Giving his president a chin lift he turned and walked out of their chapel. Mouth was standing right outside the door with his phone in his hand. Lucky took it without saying a word and slipped it into the inside pocket of his kutte and zipped it closed.

Seeing the prospect there he made an instant decision. Right or wrong he had to know.

“I have a job for you.” He said softly as he pulled him aside.

“Sure, anything you need, Boss” Mouth said.

“You tell no one, understood. This stays here, between us. You’re goin’ to the safe house and getting’ the DNA of the kid and the woman. You can’t get caught. Understood?”

Mouth looked worried for a second then nodded. “I can do it. I’ll have it for you by tomorrow.”

Lucky gave him a nod then strode towards where they were holding the slut.

His phone felt like it was burning a hole in his kutte but he didn't touch it.

He couldn't look at it right now.

He had to stay in the zone.

A zone he needed to be in to handle whatever shit she was going to throw at him.

And there would be shit, he could almost guarantee it.

TWENTY SIX

Lucky

Strolling into the holding room his eyes sought out the woman sitting in a chair across the room. She no longer looked anything like Carmella. It was Gloria Garcia sitting in front of him. It was as if she had thrown off the disguise of Carmella to reveal another person beneath it. This new persona showed her true age but it was obvious she had been taking care of herself. Her hair was fashionably styled and cut shoulder length. It was a gleaming brown with golden brown highlights. Her make-up was perfect, making her skin look flawless. Her full lips were a glossed deep red and her dark eyes were lined with black, her eyelashes long and covered in black mascara and much too long to be real.

He had been around club sluts for years and they made use of false eyelashes to accentuate their eyes all the time. The same with the deep red gloss she had on her lips. Plus he had a sister who was a wizard with a make-up brush. The war paint on the slut didn't do a thing for him.

She smiled as he came closer and super white teeth winked through the red lips. Artificially whitened. As he came closer she stood and he let his eyes slide over her body. Her outfit was expensive and obviously planned for the best effect. Tight light tan high waisted trousers hugged her ass and thighs before belling out to her ankles. It was teamed with a sleeveless, collarless top in the same colour. The neckline was

cut in a deep vee and there were buttons down the front where they disappeared into the top of her pants. The lace of her bra peeked out of the neckline of the top, pushing her big tits into an abundant cleavage. A cleavage that almost covered the mole but not all of it, he could still see it.

He took in the rest of her outfit, a thin leather belt with a golden buckle circled her waist. Looking down at her feet he took in the bright red toe nails peeking out of a pair of golden sky high strappy heels.

From top to toe she was a woman who was used to the good life, used to being taken care of. How the fuck did she think she'd be able to convince him she was in trouble?

Nothing about her said she was in trouble. It screamed out 'rich bitch'.

"Lucky." She said in a low breathy voice. "It's so good to see you."

"Gloria." He only said her name, nothing else.

With swaying hips she made her way over to him and put her hands on his chest, dragging her long red talons down over his abs before he grabbed her wrists and pushed them away. Long nails no longer did it for him. He preferred his little cat's short nails.

"Why are you here?" He crossed his arms over his chest and stared emotionlessly down at her.

Looking away from him and then back again she bit her lip, slowly let it go then sighed while blinking her long lashes.

He was sure every single move had been practised in front of a mirror until she got it down. Too bad for her he wasn't

moved or impressed.

“I came to say...to say that I’m sorry. Sorry that I never reached out. Sorry that I kept so much from you. It’s...it’s not what you think. I...I didn’t want to leave. I had no choice.” She put a hand over her mouth and blinked as if trying to hold back tears.

There were no fucking tears.

Fake.

All of it fucking fake.

“Stop wastin’ my time. Say what you came here to say. I’ve got shit to do and don’t have time to hang around here waitin’ on you to open your fuckin’ mouth.”

He was being harsh on purpose. Back when they were together he never swore in front of her, always spoke softly and treated her like she was fucking precious.

Watching her eyes he saw it. Saw the minute she lost her temper but disguised it by lowering her lashes, hiding behind them.

Drawing in a deep breath that made her tits rise up he idly wondered if they were going to overflow her bra and the neckline of her blouse to spill out. When he lifted his eyes to meet hers he saw that she liked that his eyes had been on her tits. Little did the bitch know it did nothing for him.

Not so much as a tingle in his dick.

“For fuck’s sake, out with it. What the fuck do you want?” He snapped.

Her eyelashes fluttered as if she was hurt by his words.

“You never used to speak to me like that. Never.” She said in a broken whisper while shooting hurt looks at him from under her lashes.

All it did was piss him off.

“Bitch, get it through your head, I don’t have time for your bullshit. As far as I’m concerned you’re dead. Tell me what you want, get it done then get gone.” He kept his voice cold and emotionless as he stared down at her.

“I...I didn’t want to do it like this. I...I thought we could sit down and talk. But...but I see it’s not the same for you anymore. You’ve forgotten me, forgotten our love. I have not. I still lo...no, I can’t say it before I tell you the rest. I...I’ve kept something from you, something very important.”

She covered her face with her hands to hide her eyes as she continued in a small voice.

“It’s going to make you angry but please remember I had no choice. Okay? I had no choice.”

She drew in a deep breath then looked up, her brown eyes now reddened and glistening with tears.

Seems like the bitch could cry on demand and he wondered if she used it on him all those years ago. He shrugged it off, he would think on it later.

He didn’t miss the calculation hiding behind the tears.

His years of experience with club sluts trying to pull stunts with tears to get what they want now came in handy.

Not falling for this bullshit.

“I...I need your help, Lucky. I need your help to get our son out of Mexico.”

The breath left his body and he stood there frozen. He couldn't believe what he heard.

“What did you just say?” He hissed through gritted teeth.

“We have a son. A beautiful son.” She held up a hand when he opened his mouth to interrupt.

“No, please, wait, and listen. I was pregnant when my father sent his men to get me. When I told him I was pregnant he sent me to live with my grandmother until the baby was born. I had guards on me every minute of every day. After the birth the baby was given to my grandmother and my aunt to raise. My father used him to get me to do what he wanted.”

He caught her looking at him from beneath her lashes. Checking on his reaction, but he kept his face blank, not giving her anything.

Behind him he heard Dive and Breaker both give soft grunts. They had caught it too.

“When I recovered from the birth my father changed my name to Isabella Fuentes and forced me to marry Pablo Mendez. He's a psychopath but for some reason he loves me, it has kept me safe all these years. I'm guarded around the clock, the only reason I was able to come here is my grandmother. She asked Pablo if I could bring her to a specialist herbalist here in Savannah. He allowed it but I have several guards. With my grandmother's help I was able to give them the slip and come here to ask for your help.”

Lucky pretended to be unfeeling and shrugged at her.

“Why do you need my help?” He waved a hand over her. “You seem to have enough money to hire a team to rescue your son.”

Internally his gut was rolling.

Was it true, did he have a fifteen year old son?

Was she lying? Or was she telling the truth?

“I need your help to get Antonio from my aunt’s house in Mexico. He will be sixteen on his next birthday. All the boys in the Mendez family are introduced into the family business when they turn sixteen. I don’t want that for our son. Please. Please come with me and help me get him out. He’s your son and he should be living here, in the States, free from Los Rojos. We can be together, the three of us, be a family like we had always planned.”

And there it was. The hook to get him to walk out of the front gates with her.

A son. A son with a version of his name. His son. A son who was apparently in danger.

Jesus.

Before he could say anything Dive took over.

“Not so fast, bitch. He’s not goin’ anywhere with you. We want proof the boy is his. Once you give it to us it will be taken to our president and he will decide what comes next. Not you, not Lucky, our president.”

Rage flew through her eyes but she quickly disguised it, looking down for a beat then back up when she had it under control. What she couldn’t disguise was the faint red tinge to

the skin of her neck. It was something he had noticed back when they were together, it happened every time she started to lose her shit. It was something all the make up in the world couldn't hide.

“My brother is right.” Breaker said. “We need proof before anything else happens. Do you have any?”

Her eyes went from one to the other before she nodded and walked back to her big leather purse. She bent over, far deeper than she had to. Her ass was up in the air and twitched from side to side as she pulled a manila envelope from its depths. Her heels clicked on the cement floor as she swayed her way back to him.

It was as if every sound in the room was amplified but he knew it wasn't.

She held the envelope out to him but Dive took it from her hand. Stepping up the steel table in the centre of the room he opened and upended the contents on it.

Glossy photos along with two pieces of paper fell in a jumble on the table.

The photos looked like a set, documenting the growth of a boy. It started off with him as a baby, then a toddler, then a little boy and finally a young teen. He looked a bit like Gloria. They had similar hair colour and similar facial features. The kid's eyes were brown.

What he didn't look like was Lucky.

When he and Remy had been around fifteen they had already shot up to six foot and had shown the potential to grow into big men like their father. They'd had big shoulders even then.

This boy was maybe five eight, at a push five nine, with narrow shoulders and a skinny body.

“He looks nothing like a Boudreaux.” Dive said decisively.

“He takes after his Fortier family.” Gloria spat at him. “He looks just like his maternal great grandfather, Etienne Fortier.”

Dive looked at Lucky and he shrugged. He didn’t know, he would have to ask his mother.

Fuck. What if this was true? What if the boy was his?

What the fuck was he going to do?

Dive took care of that.

“Right, we’ll keep these and be in contact. Give me a number where we can reach you. It’s not safe for you here. Too many of the brothers know you’re connected to Los Rojos and they will not be happy that you’re here. It could get physical for you.”

He was lying through his fucking teeth but it worked.

Taking a card from her purse she wrote a number on the back and put it on the table. Blinking away fake tears she looked at him then shook her head as if she was disappointed in him

“I’m telling the truth, Lucky. You’ll see. Please don’t let bad feelings keep our son from knowing his father and his family. He’s not to blame for my mistakes.”

With that little side swipe at him she left.

Lucky stood staring down at the photos trying to find even one little bit of himself in the boy. Nothing. He found nothing. And his Fortier family? Not sure, not sure at all.

And how the fuck did she know what Granpère Fortier looked like? The only photos of him was in an album his mother had. He wasn't sure but he could swear the old man had dirty blonde hair and very dark almost black eyes.

Most of his Fortier cousins were blonde but there were some with dark hair, and their eyes were blue-green or the same as his, so dark they almost looked black. Like his grandfather's.

He looked at the photo of the kid and saw not one similarity with his Fortier cousins or his mother.

“Fils de putain (Son of a bitch). He swore viciously.

“Lucky, brother, get it together. We've got to sort this shit and if this is indeed your boy we need to find a way to get him home.” Dive said.

Jesus. What if it was his boy?

What about Harper and her boy? How would it affect them?

Who was more important - Harper and her son, who might be his, or a boy who has been left to the mercies of the Los Rojos cartel?

How was he supposed to choose?

Breaker tapped the table and moved the photos until the baby photo lay front and centre.

“If this boy is your son, and I have to say I doubt he is, it means they've had him for the last fifteen years. Years to indoctrinate him, years to make him believe his father and the club is the enemy.”

He tapped on the photo, then tapped each of the others, leading their eyes to the last photo. A photo of an unsmiling

young teen posed against an adobe wall.

“What if we bring him back, bring him into the inner circle of our club and he’s a Trojan horse? A child turned into a tool to help the cartel to destroy us from the inside out? Sixteen year olds have been turned into foot soldiers across the world, but especially with the cartels.”

Lucky found it hard to believe a teenager could take them down.

“He’s a teenager, brother, what could he do to us? We’re not a bunch of civilians who are easy to trick.” Lucky couldn’t peel his eyes off the photos.

Breaker’s next words had his head jerking up in shock.

“Teenagers all over the world have been killing people. They are driven by strong emotions and with the right triggers and indoctrination can and do become killers.”

With his hands on his head, fingers laced tightly, he prowled around the room, trying to regulate his breathing. The idea of children being used as killers chilled him to the bone. Swinging around he dropped his arms and faced his brothers.

“*C’est fou* (this is crazy), thinkin’ about a child bein’ trained to kill, but I do get it. I know this shit happens, I just don’t want to think that a boy that might be mine is one.”

He looked back down at the photos and shook his head.

“He has a resemblance to Gloria but he doesn’t look anythin’ like my family, not that I can see. I want to email the photos to my parents, maybe they can clear this shit up for me.”

Dive stood with a hand over his mouth frowning down at the photos. Looking up he drew in an audible breath and tapped a finger to his chin.

“Isn’t there like a computer program to compare photos of children and parents to spot familial similarities? We need Byte on this shit.”

He scooped up the photos and shoved them back into the envelope, then paused as he picked up the two pieces of paper.

“Fuckin’ bitch. She’s some piece of work, brother.” He waved the papers at Lucky. “These are the boy’s birth certificates, yes, you heard me right, two birth certificates. The one naming Lucky as the father, the other with the father’s name left blank. Gloria Garcia is named as the mother on both. And we know her name is not Gloria Garcia, so these are fuckin’ fakes. To be sure the kid is hers we need to check the birth date with the date she supposedly died. Byte will check it.”

Lucky opened his mouth to speak but Dive waved him silent.

“No, brother, no. We’re not talkin’ about this shit. We need to take it to Maniac and get Byte to do his thing. The longer we fuck around here the longer it takes to get to the bottom of this bullshit.”

With that he shoved the pieces of paper in the envelope and stalked to the door, flung it open and walked out. There was nothing to do but follow him. So he did.

While they had been out of their chapel Maniac had obviously finalised the meet, they were now all waiting on

them. With a sigh he sat down and watched as Dive handed the envelope to his president.

Maniac shook out the contents on the table then used a fingertip to arrange the photos in sequential order. He passed the two birth certificates to Byte without saying a word. The brother scanned both and passed them back to their prez.

After passing the photos to Grave, Maniac sat back and started swinging his chair from side to side. Yes, even here in their chapel he had a chair that he could do that with. It didn't take Grave long to look through the photos. He looked down at them with a pissed look on his face before he passed them back. Maniac made them into a little pile and passed them to Byte, who once again did the scan thing before passing them back. The pile of photos then slowly started to make the rounds of the table.

Iceman broke the silence. "Is this kid supposed to be yours, brother?"

Lucky gave him a single nod.

"That's bullshit. This kid is Latino, that's about all I can say about him. I don't see a thing in his face or build to say he's yours." With that he moved the photos on to the next man.

When they eventually came to him he used one finger to move them along, he didn't want to look at them again. They finally ended up back with his prez who stopped swinging and once again laid them out in front of him. He looked them over with heavy concentration then sat up and lay back in his chair.

"For those who don't know, Lucky started as a hangaround with the club when he was eighteen years old. That means I've

a fuckin' good idea how a boy of his would look. At eighteen our brother was already six five and was weighing in at just under two hundred pounds. And the fucker was still growin'. His younger brother Remy was the same. I know his family, his father is a big fucker as well, I've had dealings with his uncles and I have to agree with Iceman, this boy doesn't look like our brother or his family, both sides of it." He held a hand up when mumbles started. "But, sayin' that, genetics is a strange thing, we'll need DNA to know for sure."

Dive jumped right in before their prez could say more.

"If all she wanted was to let him know he has a kid I would have been there with you, Prez. But that's not what the bitch wants. She wants Lucky to go to Mexico with her to bring the boy back here. And no, she did not give us a location for the kid." He smacked Lucky on the back. "If my brother thinks we're goin' to let him out the gates with that piece of work he's makin' a huge fuckin' mistake."

Breaker picked up from where he left off.

"She came ready to seduce him to follow her out the gates. Standin' there showin' enough tits and ass to turn most men's heads, but not ours. We were onto her the moment we walked into the holdin' room. It started with the fluttery eyelashes and false tears as she tried to manipulate him into doin' what she wanted. The bitch wasn't happy when we told her to leave. Dive got a number we can call to let her know our decision. Made it clear it wasn't up to Lucky, that it would be a club decision. That pissed her off so much she almost showed her hand but she pulled it back and left our brother with words that would hurt if what she was here for was true. Told him not to

let his bad feelin's towards her keep his son from knowin' his father and his family. It was fuckin' low, sayin' that shit to him." He shook his head. "I honestly don't think the kid is Lucky's."

Byte tapped the table and pointed at the screen. He had the photos up, again in chronological order and enlarged. But he had done more. Below the photos he had photos of Lucky when he first came around the club, at parties as a prospect, another of the night he received his patch and a few others as he aged.

God, he had been so fucking young and stupid.

Byte's voice pulled his attention back and he listened as his brother explained.

"When I became a prospect it was well known that computers were a big part of my life. So I was given the job of scanning and uploading all club photos and important club documents to a secure location, so in the event of a disaster we wouldn't lose them." He smiled. "I like order so I created folders for each brother and then uploaded the relevant photos to their folders. It means all I had to do was click on Lucky's folder and it was all there. Grave's old lady took shit loads of photos and documented almost every single event at the club back then. She still does, but with the advent of phone cameras we have so much more. But I'm gettin' off the topic."

He looked at Lucky and gave a small shrug.

"I hope you don't think I'm stickin' my nose in your business brother but I've sent the photos to Ghost to run through a couple of programmes she's developed. She's going to compare his photos to yours and to a couple of your family

photos she was able to access, if there are any facial similarities the program will flag them. As soon as she has somethin' she will get back to me. She did warn me it might take a while, like we'd only have results by tomorrow mornin' at the earliest."

Fuck. Could he wait that long?

What was he thinking? Of course he could, he hadn't known about this shit for sixteen years so a few hours more or less won't make any difference.

Looking at his watch he felt his gut clench.

It was after six already.

By now Harper was going to know he was ghosting her.

Maniac tapped the gavel on the table and silence fell.

"We're goin' to break for dinner and for those of you who need to get your smoke fix in. It's six now, I want us back here at the latest seven thirty. We're sortin' this shit tonight. I want suggestions on ways to extract the kid if it's proven that he's one of us when we get back to the table."

He tapped the gavel on the table and there was general scramble to get out of the room.

He pointed at Lucky when he tried to stand and with a sigh he sat down.

Dive, Breaker, Ren, Grave and Byte also stayed behind.

When the door closed behind the last man Maniac turned to Breaker.

"I want the holdin' room swept for electronics, security stepped up and patrols increased. Make sure the off the grid

cameras are monitored around the clock. Reach out to Viper, let him know the on grid cameras around the house are goin' to go dark. They need to reroute those and link them to the off grid computer. And it has to be done now, I want it done as fast as possible. I will be sendin' Magic to help him set it up and patrol the grounds."

Dive was next.

"You stay on Lucky. The two of you don't leave the compound, not unless it's an emergency and then not without a fuckload of firepower."

Lucky met his president's angry eyes when they turned on him.

"I know you're worried about your ol' lady, brother. But we both know she's safer if you're not seen with her. I know she's goin' to be pissed at you and you've only just started gettin' shit sorted between you, but the safety of her and her boy has to be at the top of our list. The cartel doesn't know she's yours or that the boy might be yours. Let's leave it like that for now." He blew out a breath, looked at Grave then back. "Don't call or text her until we're sure it's safe to do so."

Lucky was about to explain he was already doing it but his prez held up both hands. Obviously he thought he was going to disagree, he was wrong.

"Brother, believe me, I know how hard this is. Both Grave and I know what it's like to have to back off your woman and let her believe you're not interested. It fuckin' kills, but in the end, it means they're safe from our enemies. Harper doesn't need more fuckers wantin' to take down her ass than she already has. Do you get me?"

Unfortunately he did.

He nodded his agreement.

His little cat was going to rip him a new asshole when this was done.

Fuck, he just prayed once it was done she would give him a chance to explain this bullshit.

TWENTY SEVEN

Harper

I woke up with a jerk and for a moment didn't know what had woken me. Then I heard my phone buzzing and I grabbed for it, only to make it skitter away from me before I finally got my hands on it. Thank heavens it hadn't woken Ry. It would have pissed me off as I only got him to sleep about an hour ago. He'd been fussing all night.

My heart dropped when I saw it wasn't Lucky. Three days since I last heard from him. Not that I was waiting or anything. Okay, that's a lie, but whatever.

My early morning caller was Mark.

"Morning." I mumbled sleepily while checking the time. It was seven thirty. What the hell? The studio only opened at ten.

"Morning babe, sorry to wake you but we have a bit of a situation at the studio. Some fuckers spray painted the outside of the shop and Ink has closed the studio for the day."

"What?"

I was instantly wide awake, sat up fast, swinging my legs off the side of the bed. I had to put my hand out to steady myself as I swayed, suddenly incredibly dizzy. It didn't last long but it was enough that I missed some of what Mark was saying.

"...the cameras were sprayed as well so the cops don't have clear pictures of the bastards. Ink is pulling in some favours with the neighbouring shops to see if any of their cameras

caught anything. As I said, we're closed until the mess had been cleaned up. I'm busy contactin' all our clients to let them know and I'm rescheduling all appointments. I'll keep you updated as the day goes along."

"Why would someone target us? We've been open for a while and it's not like we're a threat to a neighbouring store. Why would we get tagged?" I asked.

Mark was silent for a few seconds before he answered. "In between the really terrible graffiti there were some threats but the cops and Ink are on it. I'll be keeping everyone updated and as soon as the cleaning company gets done I'll let you know when we'll reopen."

My head was stuck on the threats.

"What threats?"

Mark snorted. "Some stupid fuckin' shit not even worthy of repeating."

I echoed his snort. "Repeat it, I want to know."

"It was nothing, Harp, nothing to worry about. According to Ink it's jealous fuckers trying to fuck with our shop. The competition in the city is fierce and it's obvious someone is pissy because we're kicking their asses. Don't worry about it."

"The more you tell me not to worry the more I'm worrying. Tell me. What did it say?"

He sighed. "It's stupid actually. It says 'get out or else' and 'go home or else'. Like I said, it's stupid childish threats. They aren't even scary or shit, it's just annoying."

I frowned because it really didn't sound that bad and I told him so.

“It really doesn't sound that bad. Why close the shop? We can just carry on working while the cleaning crew takes care of the shit. Surely our clients would understand.”

Mark snorted. “You obviously don't know Ink's controlling ass very well yet. He's fuckin' livid and wants the shop pristine before bringing the clients back in. We're going to lose today but I'm sure we'll get caught up in no time.” He laughed. “Use your unexpected day off to laze around or to catch up on some drawing. Just have fun spending time with that giant baby of yours.”

I made a scoffing noise. “My baby is not a giant. He's a perfectly normal baby.”

It was his turn for the scoffing noise. “Yeah, and I'm ugly.”

I started laughing and he did as well.

“Lordy, I needed that laugh.” As soon as I said it I realised what I had done.

Damn. I closed my eyes and breathed out slowly, hoping he wouldn't latch on to my slip.

No such luck.

“What's wrong? Are you and Ry okay?”

I rushed to reassure him before this got bigger than I wanted it to be.

“Nothing is wrong, not really. I read until late and my sleep was crappy because Ry was being a little bugger. He kept on waking up and was crying and fussy. I fell asleep about an

hour ago and you woke me up so now I'm grumpy. I hate waking up grumpy because it always seem to last the entire day."

Mark is such a good guy, he rushed to try and make me feel better.

"Tell you what. You go back to bed and I'll have your favourite munchies delivered in about two hours or so. Take a day for yourself and Ry and just relax. Ink, Killian and I have shit in hand this side so don't give it another thought."

Such a good guy.

"Thanks Mark, you're a sweetheart."

"Talk later, Harp."

And then he was gone.

I went to the bathroom used it then washed my face and brushed my teeth. I was wide awake and knew I wouldn't be going back to sleep. Back in my room I checked on Ry then opened my curtains and let the early morning sun flood the room. My boy was a deep sleeper and light and noise didn't wake him.

I wasn't going to remake my bed but I did pull the bedclothes straight, fluffed the pillows and stacked them against the headboard.

Only then did I get back into bed.

Sitting up against the pillows I checked my messages on my phone. It was stupid because I knew there would be nothing from Lucky.

Every single scenario of why he had ghosted me went through my head. From club business to a broken phone to a lost phone to something else prohibiting him from replying to my texts.

And then it hit me.

I was making excuses for him.

No, just no. It had to stop.

I had learned very early in my life not to put my trust in a man. They were not to be trusted with your life or your heart.

With Lucky I had let my guard down, letting him in and now I was suffering because of it. It would have been better to have kept our interactions friendly while letting him get used to the idea that Ry was his.

Damn, I screwed up.

Twirling my phone in my hands I remembered his words when he was with me. He had seemed so sincere with the way he had reacted.

I had believed him but now I had to take his silence as his way of letting me know he didn't believe Ry was his.

It hurt, so badly but angered me at the same time.

As always I talked myself through it, through the anger and the hurt.

“Get real, bitch, you don't know the man at all. Hanging out while he was on holiday doesn't count as it wasn't just the two of you. You had two nights, make that three now, with him. It does not make a relationship. It was a short interlude that led to a baby, that's all. He's not into you. Suck it up and move on.

Accept that you'll be raising Ry on your own." I muttered angrily.

Lying back against the cushions I looked out at the early morning outside my window, then glanced back at my sleeping angel. For the first time since I arrived in Savannah I felt completely alone. I was alone in a strange country with a very young baby.

I had good people around me but they weren't Pixie or Rider. I missed them, so much.

I wanted to go home and I couldn't.

My vile family was to blame for the situation I found myself in. If they had left me alone I would still be in Cape Town, raising my boy and surrounded by friends.

In Savannah I only had Bren although lately Viper has started chatting to me. He's a sweet guy and maybe we were friends, but he was also my biker bodyguard.

I was making friends at work but that's all they were, work friends. My friendship with the girls wasn't the same as what I had with Pixie. Killian and I have always been work friends, nothing more. We've become better friends since I arrived here but I haven't been around long enough for a deeper friendship to develop. I knew he was aware of my reputation but he didn't seem to judge me for it.

Unfortunately the mistakes made in our pasts weren't easily erased. They stayed in the minds of people and they judged you on who you used to be.

Sliding down in my bed I sighed and closed my eyes.

I felt the tears seep through my lashes and run down the sides of my face. I cried silently, letting my loneliness and heartache wash over me.

And then I sniffed, reached out for a tissue, wiped my eyes, blew my nose and sat up.

“Pull up your big girl panties, girl and repeat after me.”

I half smiled as I talked to myself.

“I’m not weak. I’m not easy. And I’m not alone. I have people who love me, people who I love and I will get through this. I’ve had worse and survived. I’m strong, strong enough for me and Ry. We’ll be okay, no, correction, we’ll be more than okay. We’ll be fucking perfect.”

Closing my eyes I relaxed against the pillows and fell asleep.

My phone buzzing once again woke me.

This time it was lying next to me on the bed and I scooped it up and frowned when I saw it was Pixie calling.

“Hey girl, how are you doing?” I greeted with a smile in my voice.

A gruff voice had me surging up in bed.

“Not Pixie. It’s Remy. Just callin’ to let you know she had the baby in the early hours of the morning. A beautiful and healthy baby girl. Mama and baby are both doing well.” His tired and gruff voice had me smiling so wide.

“Oh my God, Remy! Congratulations! It’s wonderful news. Please give her a hug from me and kisses to your baby girl. I’m so happy for you guys. Have you picked a name for her?”

The last time I spoke the Pixie they were disagreeing about the name.

“We have. Her name is Vivienne Maingarde Boudreaux, quite a mouthful for such a little girl. Wild Man and Rooster are already callin’ her Vivi so I’m sure that’s what everyone will end up callin’ her.” He sounded so proud, as he should be.

“I’m so happy for you guys. Who does she look like?”

“She’s totally her Mama’s girl, tiny with black fluff for hair and blue eyes. I know babies’ eye colour changes but hers are so blue I don’t think it has a chance of turning dark like mine.”

He sounded so proud and totally in love with his girls.

“I wish I was there.” I whispered.

He was silent for much too long then cleared his throat uncomfortably before he spoke.

“Not long now, Harp. Have faith in Asa, he’s workin’ on a solution. Hold on just a tiny bit longer, he’ll have you and Ry home soon.”

Icy cold settled in my heart and belly. He knew. He knew about Lucky backing off from me and my boy. And having said what he just did?

Remy’s words confirmed it for me. I was going to be a single parent.

And suddenly it was as if a light went on in my mind.

I knew what I was going to do.

There was no time to fart about, I had to make arrangements and make them right now.

“Thanks for letting me know, Remy. Please give Pixie my love and tell her we’ll talk soon. I have to go but I’m sure we’ll talk again. Congratulations one more time and give your girls hugs from me. Bye Remy.”

I ended the call, not even giving him a chance to say goodbye. I immediately called Rider.

It rang for quite a bit before he answered, out of breath and with a smile in his voice.

“Harper, sweetheart, so glad you called. How are you? How’s my boy?”

He sounded happy and I hated bringing my shit to him. I bit my lip and closed my eyes before I answered.

“I’m okay, Ry is fine. The reason I’m calling...uhm...does your offer still stand?”

I knew he would know what I was talking about.

“What the fuck is going on over there? Last I spoke to the bastard he told me he sorted his shit and you guys were good.”

I gave a teary snort.

“We had a talk, he assured me we had all kinds of forever shit, even though he still doesn’t think Ry is his, and then he left and went radio silent. I tried to call, my calls were declined. I texted, my texts were read but never answered. I tried to get answers from the bikers watching me but they all pretend to know nothing. It’s been three days since I last heard from him”

I drew in a breath and continued explaining.

“Remy just called to let me know their little girl arrived and that Pixie and the baby were doing well. Vivienne, that’s what they’re naming her. But that’s not what I wanted to tell you. When I said I wish I was there he said I have to have faith in Asa and that he would have me home soon. I don’t know if I read him wrong but to me it means he knows what’s going on with Lucky. I got the feeling he was telling me that I should come home, and that Ry and I should get on with our lives. That I should not sit here waiting on the ass until he eventually gets his shit together.”

Rider started swearing but I ignored it and carried on speaking, my voice hardening as I continued.

“So, this is me, planning my life. Fuck him, fuck this country, fuck them all. I want to come home. I don’t care if my family is still looking for me. Fuck them too. If they come for me they’re going to get a huge bloody surprise. I’m not the kid I used to be. I’m a woman who knows what she wants. I want to bring Ry home and raise him in South Africa, with you and my squirrel and Asa. I want to be surrounded by the people who love and like me. I don’t want to be alone anymore. I don’t want to be here anymore.”

I hadn’t realised that I had started crying as I spoke until a drop of water fell on my tightly fisted hand. I used the back of my hand to wipe my cheeks and sniffed loudly.

Rider growled the minute he heard the sniff, he honestly growled.

“Harper, baby, please, listen to me,” he said softly.

“I’m texting with Asa as we speak. We’re coming, we have a few things to arrange but we’ll be in the air later tonight. We’ll

be with you in about twenty seven hours, give or take a few hours. Hold on for me, okay? I have you, sweetheart. I swear to you, I have you and Ry. You're not alone, you and our little man will never be alone, ever. Asa and I, and even my club, we're your family and we're going to see to it that you get home where you belong. And you will be safe, you have my word on it."

It was like a heavy mountain I hadn't even realised was sitting on my shoulders slid from them and fell to the floor. I felt light and filled with hope. My best friend and my protector were coming to get me.

"Thank you, Rider, thank you so much. It's not that I don't like the people here, I do, but they don't know me, the real me. They just know Harper Delaney, the single baby mama and tattoo artist. The only one who knows me even a little bit is Bren and he's a guy, you know. There's stuff a girl wants to talk to her best friend about and you're so far away. Usually I think about stuff in the middle of the night and it's not like I can grab my phone and call you. The time difference is a bitch. I want..."

He didn't let me finish.

"Sweetheart, enough with this bullshit. We're getting you home, back where you belong, with people who love you. You'll be staying with Delly and me, and once you're here we'll talk again. There's a lot to consider but it's not for now. Now is for getting you home and safe. I should never have let you fucking leave."

Rider de Ridder was a magnificent man and not for the first time I wished he was the man I loved. He was such a good

guy.

“You do know you’re the type of man women dream about, right? Forceful, but in a good way, protective, a good father, and the cherry on top, you’re gorgeous and sexy as all hell.”

His snort was filled with male disgust and I couldn’t stop the giggle that broke free.

His next words silenced the giggle instantly.

“Stop talking shit, Harp. I have to go. I need to make arrangements with Suzy and Genna to take care of Delly while I’m gone and I have to talk to Hawk. He needs to know what’s going on and prepare for when we come home. Asa is bringing some of his men and if possible I’ll have brothers with me as well. It all depends on them having valid Visas. You take care of you and our boy and I’ll see you soon. Okay?”

“Okay. Be safe and I love you.” I whispered.

“Love you too, sweetheart.”

And then he was gone and I sat on my bed staring sightlessly out the window.

I don’t know how long I sat like that before I sighed, put my phone down and got up. I had to talk to Bren and let him know we were going home.

But first I had to get into the shower and wash away the evidence of my disturbed night and my tears. I wanted to be ready when Ry woke up.

I showered with the music on then got dressed. I was smiling as I walked back into the room.

My smile disappeared when my bedroom door crashed open and I whirled around. There was no way to stop the soft shriek that burst from my mouth.

Bren with his chest covered in blood stumbled into my room, a gun in his hand, pain and determination on his face.

“You need...to come...with me. We’ve been breached...by the fucking cartel.”

For a second I was frozen in place and then my survival instinct kicked in. I realised we weren’t going to get far with Bren bleeding the way he was. And I needed to strap Ry in his baby pack on my chest to leave my hands free. Thank the pope he wasn’t screaming his head off with fright, he just lay there staring with big eyes. So I left him and focused on Bren.

“You’re bleeding heavily, Bren. We’ve got to sort it out or we’re not going to get very far.”

I ran for the bathroom, grabbed a hand towel and got back to him as fast as I could. Shoving the towel over the bleeding hole in his shirt I pressed down hard. Wincing at his grunt of pain I kept the pressure on. Grabbing the towel from my hand he shoved it up under his shirt. Thank heavens he liked wearing tight tees because it held it in place.

“We’ve...got to...go. Viper and Magic can’t hold...them off...for very much...longer. Get Ry.”

I shoved my feet into a pair of flats and grabbed my phone off the bed. Damn, my leggings didn’t have pockets, with a shrug I shoved it into the back of my pants and panties. Hopefully it would stay there.

Next was Ry's pack, I slipped him in it then strapped him to my chest making sure it was secure if we had to run. What was I thinking? Obviously we were going to have to run. If they breached the house...hang on, how did they do that without Bren, Viper or Magic noticing?

"How the hell did they get in? I thought this place was virtually impenetrable."

"We were...betrayed. One of...the fucking bikers... sold us out.

"Which one?" I asked as I held Ry to my chest with one arm and shoved my shoulder under his arm when I saw him wobbling. I hated the way his breathing sounded and how he had to pause several times as he tried to speak.

"Don't know his...fucking name...he's dead when I...get a hold o' him. Fecker...shot me as he came...through the fucking tunnel...shouldn't have relaxed...me guard around these...motherfucks. Asa's...gonna have...me nuts...for this." He grunted.

That's when I realised I didn't hear gunshots or shouting. All I heard was the music playing in my room.

The house felt heavy with malice.

"I think it's too late to run, Bren." I whispered. "We're going to have to fake them out. If they get in here and you're on your feet they're going to kill you." He started shaking his head because he knew where my plan was heading.

"You have to pretend to be dying. They're here for me, not you. Let them take me." I whispered urgently, my eyes constantly checking the open door.

A daring plan was taking shape in my mind.

“You know you can track me, and Asa and Rider are on their way. I called Rider this morning. No one knows they’re coming and you need to be alive to help them find me when they get here. My boy and I are counting on you. Please Bren, please don’t die for real.”

I ripped my phone out of my pants, silenced it then shoved it back in then pulled the long thigh length top down over it.

Hopefully they wouldn’t look back there.

“Fecking...hell, I don’t...like...this.” Bren muttered as he slowly sank to the floor.

There was no time to lose. I had to set up the scene and do it quickly. Running to my desk I took out the deep red ink I was going to use in a project. Ry, the little angel, stayed silent as he was jostled about. I ran back and dragged the bloody towel from under his shirt, shoving it on his chest then clamped his hand over it. He was battling to stay conscious as he watched me. Opening the bottle of blood red ink I dumped it underneath him, it instantly spread on the carpet, soaking in and looking like blood.

If you didn’t look too closely you would never spot the difference.

I was putting my faith in that. That the bastard who was coming for me wouldn’t check.

Bren might think this was the cartel but I had a feeling this was my brother’s doing. It was the type of thing he was very good at.

Finding a weak link and exploiting it.

I had just disposed of the empty bottle in the bin next to my bed and crouched back next to Bren when he strode into my room.

The horror from my childhood, my brother.

Antonio “Tonio” Salvatore - the monster who destroyed my childhood and who was hell bent on destroying what was left of my life.

“Ah, there she is, my lovely little sister.”

I glared at him over my shoulder, not turning around. Not yet.

“What the hell are you doing here, Antonio?” I gritted out as I pressed the towel to Bren’s chest.

Under my hands I could feel his chest moving, he was still breathing, thank heavens.

“You know what I’m doing here, Guiliana. I’m here to take you home where you will be marrying Claudio. He’s been waiting a long time for you and let me tell you he’s highly pissed you ran from him.” He smirked at the woman standing silently beside him.

My eyes fastened on the bitch.

“What is Carmella doing here with you? Isn’t she Lucky Boudreaux’s woman?”

Tonio’s head snapped to the woman.

“You know my sister?” He asked sharply.

The bitch shrugged.

“Didn’t know she was your sister, thought she was just another whore at the club. One they gave a job at their tattoo studio.”

My brother stiffened as she called me a club whore who had been given a job at the studio. He was about to bitch at her when her next words stopped him in his tracks.

She tilted her head to the side, looking me over from head to toe where I was crouched over Bren, my back to them.

“I’m more interested in finding out who her baby’s father is.” The bitch said with absolute calculation in her voice.

“HER WHAT?”

He shouted, then stormed over, grabbed my arm and jerked me up and away from Bren. It put Ryder front and centre. He stared at him with his mouth hanging open in shock.

“What the fuck have you done, Guiliana?” He gritted through clenched teeth. “This is going to cause so much shit when I get you home. Father’s going to have a fucking aneurysm for sure.”

He let go of my arm and swiped a hand through his hair before shaking his head.

“We don’t have time for this, we need to get out of here. You and I will have a talk once we get to where we’re going. And believe me, sister dear, you do not want to lie to me.” He threatened as he once again grabbed my arm and dragged me towards the door.

“What about him?” Carmella asked as she kicked Bren in the side.

He didn't make a sound, just rolled with the kick then settled back down, his arms falling lifelessly to the sides of his body.

“Leave him, he'll be dead by the time anyone gets here.” My stupid brother growled as he dragged me out of the room.

I threw a last desperate look at Bren and clapped my hand over my mouth when I saw the way he laid there. I didn't have to force the tears. They overflowed and of course that made my sicko of a brother laugh.

At the bottom of the stairs a guy I had seen a few times around the studio waited. He looked scared but tried to hide it behind bravado.

“I see you got the whore. Where to now?” He asked, giving Ry a disgusted look.

We were still descending the stairs and my brother kicked out at him, hitting him in the chest and sending him flying.

“No one calls my sister a whore but me. You do not run your mouth, not ever. You're fucking lucky I have a need for you otherwise you would be dead like the other bastards in this house.”

The loser dropped his eyes and nodded but I saw the look he gave us as we passed him. He was weak and a worm who had betrayed his club, he would do the same to my brother and the bitch behind us if it came to saving his own hide.

I was dragged into the security room then through the open door to the tunnel and down the steps. I didn't say a word. I let him drag me away from the house and shove me into the back of the car waiting for us.

My free arm was clasped around Ry the entire time. I had to keep him safe.

There were several black cars parked in the yard of the empty house and several on the street as well.

Were they so confident that they didn't even hide their presence?

It didn't make any sense.

I was still looking around when I felt a prick in my arm. Jerking around to check my arm I saw the bitch sitting back with a syringe in her hand, smiling at me.

“Night, night, bitch.” She smirked.

As the blackness descended my last thought was for Ry who was still strapped to my chest and I fell sideways to protect him.

And then nothing.

TWENTY EIGHT

Lucky

Three Days Ago

Reading Harper's last text burned his gut and had his heart jerking in his chest. It's only been a day and he missed his little cat. He ached for his woman but he had agreed with his prez that he would give it time. He didn't understand why he had to go radio silent as they had undetectable burner phones and it would have been easy to talk to her on Viper's phone. But his prez had shot his idea down.

Fuck.

He didn't want to do it but he needed her and the baby to be safe, if Gloria, or rather, Carmella found out there was a possibility that Ry was his they would be in terrible danger. He couldn't allow that to happen.

So silence it was.

Trying to carry on with his day as if nothing was wrong was incredibly difficult. Every second of the day he wanted to call her, tell her he was sorry for being a prick and not responding to her texts.

He didn't.

Instead he was here continuing to investigate Gloria's links to the boy in Mexico. Lucky wasn't proud of his reaction to the news but still he hoped and prayed the kid wasn't his.

Walking into Byte's computer dungeon his eyes met those of Dive who was leaning against the wall.

"Anything yet?"

Dive shook his head.

Fuck.

"This isn't somethin' that happens the minute you type shit into a computer like it does in the movies. It takes time." Byte said quietly. "We're workin' as fast as we can, brother. We need to do this right, no mistakes."

Lucky had to agree with him. They couldn't make any mistakes, not with a kid's life on the line.

"I get it, brother, I just need to know if my life as I know it is goin' to go down the fuckin' drain. I have no idea how my ol' lady is goin' to take the news if the kid turns out to be mine, or how she's goin' to handle Carmella bein' in our lives." Lucky shook his head. "If she wasn't lyin' and the kid is mine, we all heard her, she plans to be in a relationship with me and the boy and that's goin' to be a problem for me. I don't want her in my life or in the lives of Harper and her boy. It will be a huge fuckin' mess."

Dive snorted in disgust. "That's not all you'll have to worry about, brother. That slut will be a danger to Harper, maybe not to her kid, but to her? Definitely. She won't like havin' competition for your dick. And I've had the opportunity to be around Harper a few times and I'm tellin' you, the girl is not a push over. She's strong and she won't take shit from anyone. Not even you. She'll be gone the minute your shit impacts her boy."

Lucky immediately thought about the day he and Carmella went to the studio and the look in Harper's eyes when she had thrown them out.

Yeah, Dive was right, for all her soft smiles she was definitely not a pushover.

If Gloria's kid turns out to be his they were going to have problems. His old lady will not take the shit the slut will be dishing out. And eventually, if he didn't sort his shit, Harper will leave him and go back to SA.

If life with him was unbearable because of the slut, could he blame her if she left him?

No, because if he was put in a similar situation he wouldn't hesitate. He would walk away. Save him the aggravation and heartache and make a clean break. Or as clean of a break as one can get when there's a child involved.

Sighing despondently he leant against the wall next to Dive.

"No matter which way I look at it, I'm fucked. If it turns out the kid isn't mine I'm still fucked. I haven't reached out to Harper to explain why I've disappeared on her. She's already texted and told me she's done, the next move is up to me."

He gave a despondent shrug.

"And I can't make a fuckin' move yet. So, here I am, waitin'."

Dive laughed softly. "I have faith in you, brother. You'll talk that firecracker of a woman around when the time's right. We'll get this done and you will finally accept that her boy is yours and play happy families."

Lucky punched him in the arm.

“Ow! What was that for, you fucker?”

“Happy fuckin’ families? What the fuck, bro? We’re bikers, we don’t do that shit.” He growled at his friend.

Dive gave him a look then a grin that he really didn’t trust.

“Have you not been payin’ attention to my parents, brother? That’s a fuckin’ happy families right there. And Ren and Sherri? There’s another case of happy families. And my sister Leo and her man Wolf, they’re another case of a happy family. Who says bikers can’t have happy families? We can and we do, all the damned time.” He shrugged. “Do we have shit swirling around us? Sure, but we don’t let that slow us down. You want to have a family with Harper then you stick with her, brother. You don’t allow her to get away and you convince her she wants it too.”

His brother was right, he had to hold on and once this was done he would convince Harper of his commitment to her and her son.

He just had to get through this bullshit first.

And hopefully the DNA Mouth got for him would tell him if Ry was his or not.

The two of them hung out with Byte for an hour or so before leaving to take care of some club business. The fact his personal life was a mess didn’t mean he could take a break from his club duties.

It was a welcome distraction that lasted the rest of the day and late into the night.

Maniac kept him busy and Dive stayed by his side keeping him steady as they waited.

TWENTY NINE

Lucky

Two Days Ago

Checking his phone for the hundredth time he sighed and shoved it back into his pocket. It wasn't as if she was going to message him. She had told him it was up to him now.

And he couldn't fucking respond.

There was one thing he could do. Dragging out his phone he found the contact then called.

“What you want?” Ink growled.

He didn't beat around the bush.

“How is she?”

Ink sighed.

“Hang on a minute.” He said and muted him.

When he came back there was no more background noise. No music and no voices. Only silence.

“This is fucked up, brother. I really don't fuckin' like doin' this shit to her.” Ink growled at him. “She's a fuckin' new mom and shouldn't be stressin' about your bullshit.”

He totally agreed with his brother.

“I know, Ink, but you heard what prez ordered. No contact until this shit is sorted. Now tell me, how is she?”

His brother sighed. “She’s fine, well as fine as a pissed off woman can be. I’m keepin’ an eye, so don’t worry. I won’t let anythin’ happen to her or to Ry.”

Lucky groaned. “Fuckin’ wish I could be there, takin’ care of her. We’re workin’ as fast as we can but it’s still takin’ too long. I don’t like her bein’ alone at the house. I want her here where we can be sure she’s safe.”

Ink grunted as if in agreement. “I hear you, brother. But prez knows what he’s doin’, he won’t steer you wrong. Just a little more time and then you can fix this shit. Make her smile again.”

That hurt. Knowing his little cat wasn’t smiling.

“Thanks for the update, Ink. Let me know when she goes home, okay?”

“Will do.”

Ink ended the call and he slipped his phone into his pocket with a sigh.

He was about to go see Byte when Mouth knocked and walked in.

What now?

“That woman is back at the gate, Boss. She says she has to speak to you urgently.” The prospect made big eyes at him. “She has a lot of black suited men with her, two blacked out SUV’s actually. What do I tell the gate?”

Closing his eyes he swore silently. Opening them again he looked at the worried prospect.

“Nothing yet. Let me talk to prez and see what he wants to do. Keep them outside, Mouth. They do *not* come inside.”

Lucky almost ran to Maniac’s office and hardly knocked before he pushed open the door.

Maniac looked up with a pissed off frown.

“Did I say you could come in?” He snapped.

“She’s back, Prez.”

He didn’t have to say anything else. His prez knew.

Maniac’s eyes narrowed, he pressed a button on his desk and started swinging his chair from side to side, as he watched the goings on at the gate on the monitor against the wall. The slut stood outside their gate, a hand on her hip the other waving in the air as she bitched at the brother on duty. Behind her a black suited asshole stood next to the open door of one of the blacked out SUVs.

Lucky waited.

Finally the swinging stopped and his prez pointed a finger at him.

“Same procedure as before. She walks in alone, those vehicles aren’t allowed in. You talk to her in the holding room with two brothers present. Today it will be Dive and Byte. He will be takin’ close up photos of the bitch. He’ll do it without her knowin’ he’s doin’ it. Don’t let her fuck with you, Lucky. Keep the meet short then get her out of here.”

“I got you, Prez.” There wasn’t much else he could say.

Ten minutes later he was sitting opposite the woman in the holding room. It was obvious she had yet again dressed with

seduction in mind, but again, it did nothing for him.

“I thought you understood that we would call you when we were ready to continue this conversation, Gloria.” Lucky purposely used the name he knew her as.

The bitch wiped a fake tear from the corner of her eye.

“Time is running out for our son. We need to get Antonio out, Lucky. Pablo and his father are becoming suspicious of my prolonged stay in Savannah. I can’t stay much longer. Please, come with me. He needs us. Please, I beg you, don’t let them get him.” She begged.

She was a slimy piece of work, the way she tried to play on his emotions only made him angry.

Lucky shook his head regretfully.

“It’s not my decision to make. I can’t authorise a group of brothers to go down to Mexico. It’s outside of our territory and calls need to be made by our president to clubs along the way to facilitate us ridin’ through their territory. This isn’t somethin’ that can happen overnight. It takes time to organise.”

She became visibly agitated. “We don’t have time! I’ve been told they are going to send the men out to bring him to Carlos. He’s going to start bringing him into the family. If they get to him before we do he’s lost to us. There’s no way we would ever be able to get him out of the compound. No one gets out without him giving the order to allow them through the gates. And there’s no other way in or out. We have to get him now, while he’s still with my aunt.”

For a second Lucky wondered if she was telling the truth. Before he could say anything Byte sat forward and pushed his tablet towards the bitch.

“This is a satellite image of the compound. I see two entrances, not one as you’ve just told us.” He said evenly.

Her eyes widened then narrowed as she looked down at the image on the tablet.

“The second gate is a fake. It doesn’t open.”

Byte pulled the tablet back and hummed then gave a quick nod. “I see, good to know.”

She immediately turned back to him. “Please, please come with me to get our son, Lucky. I have the men and the cars. If we leave now we’ll have him back here by tomorrow afternoon.”

The bitch was persistent, he’ll give her that.

Lucky shook his head and stood.

“I’m sorry, I can’t leave without my president’s approval and he won’t give it. Go back to your hotel and as soon as he gives me an answer I’ll call you.”

Pushing her chair back she stood then walked up to him and put her hand on his chest.

“No touching.” Dive growled.

She glared at the brother, dropped her hand then looked up at him, fake tears in her eyes.

“Please don’t wait too long, Lucky. A young boy’s life is on the line.” She whispered, turned and walked out the room.

No one said a word as they walked out behind her. Lucky watched as she made her way out of the front doors and down to the gate then through it. She glanced back at the clubhouse before getting into the back of the SUV, moments later it drove away.

Only then did he go to Maniac's office where he knew the officers were waiting.

He wasn't expecting his prez to tell him he could go to Harper, and he was right. They were waiting on more information from Byte and his contact, Ghost.

It was taking damned long.

He sat in his chair and listened as everyone talked around him. He didn't have anything to say, not yet anyway.

"If the bitch comes back, and we all know she's gonna come back, we need to have a play in place. We can't keep tellin' her we're waitin' on Prez to make a decision. She's getting' itchy." Dive said. "We need a plan for when sh..."

He didn't get further because Byte, who has been tapping away on his laptop, suddenly gave a loud yell and shook a fist in the air.

"Yes, muthafuckas!"

Turning to Maniac he grinned. "Sorry, Prez, Ghost just sent through her results. We have conclusive proof the kid is *not* Lucky's. She dug deeper than just the facial comparisons. I have no idea how she got hold of it and she's not sayin' but she got hold of the kid's real birth certificate. He's fourteen and the only child of Pablo Mendez and an unknown woman, his name is Joaquin Mendez."

He looked at Lucky and shrugged. “Sorry, bro, if you were hopin’ he was yours.”

Turning back to their prez he continued while Lucky’s gut slowly unclenched. The kid wasn’t his. There was nothing tying him to Gloria/Carmella Mendez, nothing. It was yet another lie the slut had tried to sell him.

Only this time he had his brothers taking his back and saving him from believing a lie and making a massive mistake. A mistake that would have cost him his life and his club.

Only one thing stood out in his mind.

Harper. His little cat.

“Prez, does this mean I can reach out to my ol’ lady and let her know what’s goin’ on?”

The look on Maniac’s face and on those of his brothers let him know it was not to be.

Not yet anyway.

“We need one more day, brother. We need to shut this down and shut it down permanently. I have a feelin’ she’s goin’ to be back tomorrow and will come at you with guns blazin’. I will be in the meet with you and will tell her that under no circumstances will we be puttin’ our necks out for a kid that’s not even ours. Then we wait to see what she does next.” His prez smiled. “She has a play ready, brother, of that I’m sure. We just need to know what it is.”

Lucky sighed but nodded. He could do it.

He could go one more night without talking to his girl.

One more night.

THIRTY

Lucky

A Day Ago

Another night spent rolling around and getting hardly any sleep. He had no idea how long he would be able to follow his president's rule. It was getting harder by the minute to stay away from his woman.

It was damned early but he couldn't stand another minute of lying in bed and doing nothing. Getting up he used the bathroom, got ready for the day then went down to the kitchen to get some coffee.

With a mug steaming in his hand he walked out to the garages. Rather than hanging around the clubhouse doing nothing he was going to work on the bike he wanted to restore. He hadn't touched it since he bought it and it was a great way to get his mind on something else.

Busy stripping the bike he didn't pay attention to the rumble of bikes leaving the compound. It was a normal background noise to anyone living here.

He was engaged in what he was doing when his phone gave an insistent buzz from the workbench where he had left it with his kutte. Picking up a rag he wiped his hands as he walked over. He frowned when he saw Ink's name on the screen and checked his watch. Eight in the morning, it was too early for the brother to be up and about.

“Brother, what you doin’ up so early.”

He reached for his coffee and grimaced. Cold.

“I’ve got shit, brother. Some fuckers tagged my shop sometime last night. Got fuckin’ spray paint all over the outside but that’s not why I called you. There’s some threats in between the usual crap the kids spray on the walls, one says ‘go home or else’ the other ‘get out or else’. The cops are sayin’ it might be our competition but that’s bullshit. I’ve closed the shop for the day and called in a cleanin’ company, we should be open for business again tomorrow. Mark and I are the only ones at the shop today. Everyone else is havin’ the day off. Mark already spoke to Harper and she’s goin’ to relax and take it easy. He’s sendin’ her some breakfast a little later, he’s worried about her. Couldn’t share with him why she’s not lookin’ so great the last couple of days.”

All he heard was the threats and his woman not looking great.

“I’ll get onto Byte to see what he can find. And what do you mean my woman’s not been lookin’ so great?”

Ink snorted. “I meant she’s been a bit down and we both know why that is. As soon as this shit with ‘you know who’ is sorted she’ll bounce back. Don’t go lookin’ for shit where there is none, brother. I just thought I’d let you know she won’t be at the studio today.”

He was grateful his brother had thought to let him know. “Thanks, bro, I appreciate you keepin’ me in the loop.”

“No problem, Lucky. Talk to you later.”

Lucky stood there for several seconds with the phone in his hand before he dropped it onto the bench and went back to the bike. He worked for about two hours when Mouth came to find him. His prez was looking for him.

With a sigh he cleaned up, pulled his kutte back on, and went back to the clubhouse.

The brothers from their other chapters hadn't left yet, most of them were heading out in the next hour or so, and most if not all were nursing hangovers after the party last night. A party Lucky had left early.

He was surprised to see all the presidents waiting on him in Maniac's office along with the club's officers.

Maniac didn't wait for him to settle in his chair before he started laying out his plan.

“As I said yesterday, I'll be with you when the bitch comes back today and she has. She's back with her little entourage. I've had her brought into the holding room, she's being guarded by Lure and Denim right now. I wanted to see you before we go in. Make sure we're all on the same page. Are we?”

Lucky nodded. “Absolutely, Prez. She's not gettin' a thing from me.”

“Good. Let's get to it then.”

He followed his president and Dive down to the holding room and let them walk in before him.

She was standing on the other side of the table, dressed entirely in black. Like a fucking widow. If he could've he would have laughed but he wasn't amused, no, he was fucking

pissed as hell. He didn't hide he was pissed off as he sat down next to his president and glared at the woman across the table. She was sitting there looking as if she was hurt by his attitude.

What a load of crap.

“I don't know if you remember me, Gloria.” Maniac said as he smoothed a hand over the top of the table. “I'm Maniac, the president of the Shadow Wraiths MC and the man who makes the decisions around here. I understand you want my Road Captain to accompany you to Mexico to fetch your son. Am I correct?”

She hesitated only for a second before she turned on the charm.

“I do remember you. You were always very nice to me and I'm grateful that you agreed to see me today. Yes, I need Lucky to come with me to Mexico to rescue our son. He's about to turn sixteen and will be forced to become a cartel child soldier. He's an innocent. He shouldn't be forced into becoming a killer just because Carlos Mendez says so. Please, will you help me? Will you give Lucky permission to come to Mexico with me? It will take us two days, maybe three, and then we will be back here, with our son, safely inside your compound.” She swiped at her eyes as if wiping away tears.

But those dark eyes of hers were cold as ice as she looked at them from beneath her lashes. Unlike before where she focused on Lucky she was now entirely focused on Maniac.

His president suddenly pushed his chair back and stood. “I will consider your request. Give me a couple of hours to talk it over with my VP. Lucky will call you with my answer.”

With that he walked out and closed the door behind him.

What the fuck?

What was the plan here? Did Dive know? He looked at his brother who gave a shrug before sliding down in his chair, giving the impression that he was totally relaxed.

He wasn't. He was alert and waiting.

The bitch got up with a huff and charged out the door. She didn't even try to sweet talk him on her way out.

He was grateful to see the back of her and once he grabbed a mug of coffee went back to the garage to work on his bike. As he worked the tension lessened but not by much.

Checking his phone he saw it was close to twelve noon, he had been working for a couple of hours.

He had just put it back down when Ren walked in.

"Lucky, prez wants to see you in his office." He snapped, a dark look on his face.

He instantly knew something was going on.

He followed him without saying a word.

The atmosphere in the room hit him in the face as he walked in. Rage.

What the fuck had happened after they had been in that fucking room with the bitch?

His prez stood in front of his desk, Grave on one side of him, Iceman on the other and they looked at him with a darkness in their eyes and on their faces he had only seen in the direst of situations.

“You need to keep your shit together, brother. The news is not good” His president warned.

Lucky braced for bad news, his heart racing and his hands curling into fists.

“The safe house has been breached and your ol’ lady and her boy was taken. Viper, Magic and Bren were seriously wounded while fightin’ the fuckers, thankfully they’re alive.”

The sound tore out of his throat in a roar. “NO! NO! NO! NOOOOOOO!”

His voice broke becoming a rough whisper. “Fuck no, no, no, no.”

Grave was instantly by his side and so was Ren, they bracketed him on either side and he braced for more bad news.

“We were betrayed by one of our own. The prospect known as Flag sold us out, he’s a fuckin’ traitor. He tricked Bren to let him in then shot him, somehow turned off the alarms and allowed the bastards entry. Bren was able to get to Harper and Ry but he couldn’t get them out, he said Antonio Salvatore and Carmella Mendez took her. The video shows her walkin’ out carryin’ her boy, brother, she wasn’t beaten or hurt.”

His throat felt raw and his voice sounded rough to his own ears.

“I want them, all of them. I’m goin’ to kill them. They have no idea what’s comin’ for them. No fuckin’ idea.”

He was about to rush out of the office when Grave curved an arm around his lower back.

“Think, brother, think, use that brain of yours. We have to do everything we can not to alert them to the fact that she’s yours. She safe and her son is safe as long as they don’t suspect they are yours.”

Ren drew his attention with a tap on his chest.

“What can’t happen is anyone knowin’ that Ry is yours. We need to play this one close, brother, really fuckin’ close to the chest.”

“How do you know he’s mine?” He grated out.

Ren grinned. “Mouth came to me about the test. We liberated their blood samples from the doc’s office and put a rush on the test. Got the email yesterday but I only opened it a few minutes ago. He’s definitely yours.”

Joy and rage fought with each other in his chest.

He had failed his woman and his boy.

It hurt. Hurt to breathe, hurt to think, hurt to feel.

Hurt to remember his woman’s fear of her brother.

The brothers needed to know the danger she was in. This was no time for secrets. Not anymore. It had to come out into the open.

“She’s not safe. That motherfucker terrorised her as a little girl. Started rapin’ her when she was only ten years old and when her mother tried to intervene her father beat the woman to death. She was locked in that house of horror until she escaped at seventeen, she has been free of them for a measly ten years. Now he has her again, and can anyone here tell me he’s not goin’ to put his fuckin’ hands on her. You can’t. You

can't fuckin' give me that assurance. So excuse me if I'm not goin' to play nice with the fuckin' cartel, they've got hell comin' for them."

He snarled viciously when his prez tried to talk.

"If one hair on Harper's head has been harmed I will find Carmella and make her pay. Call Carlos Mendez and tell him, tell him what will happen if Carmella and Antonio Salvatore harm Harper Delaney or her child."

There was deathly silence when he finished and then Iceman stepped up to him.

"Brother, you've got to know we don't do shit like that."

Lucky tipped his head down to meet his eyes. "But I will."

His prez came towards him. "Lucky, brother, I know how you feel but..."

He didn't give him a chance to finish, shaking his head. "No, no you don't, Prez. You've never stood where I am right now. I'm standin' here knowin' that my woman and child are in the hands of killers who wouldn't hesitate to hurt them if it served their purpose. You have no idea what that feels like, how it fuckin' burns the humanity right out of you. Leavin' behind a man willin' to maim and kill those who took them. If they hurt them I will have my vengeance."

Stepping back Lucky drew in a deep breath and closed his eyes, dropping his head and pushing his chin into his chest he tried to get his rage under control. He had to think. Think on how to get his girl and son safely out of their clutches.

"I'm sorry, I have to get out of here. I...I need to think." He mumbled.

Turning he strode out of the office and down the passage to his office. Opening the door he walked over to the window and stood staring out blindly.

What was he going to do? How was he going to get them back?

A glint in the distance had him narrowing his eyes. Water, it was the sun on the water.

He instantly knew who could help him find her. His family. Not his dad and brother, no, his Cajun family. His cousins were some of the best trackers he knew and had contacts everywhere.

He needed them to help him find them.

The very next second his phone was in his hand and he was dialling a number he had memorised a long time ago.

“Yeah?”

“It’s Lucky. I need the family’s help, Uncle Etienne. My woman and son has been taken by Carmella Mendez of the Los Rojos cartel and the Italians, the Salvatore group specifically.”

There was a second or two of stunned silence and then his Uncle replied in a very quiet voice.

“*Fils de putain* (Son of a bitch)! Your cousins will be on their way to you within the hour. You stay strong, Antoine, we’ll get them back. I have some contacts to reach out to. I’ll call when I have more for you. If anythin’ changes your side you let me know, yes?”

“*Oui* (Yes), yeah, I will. One more thing, Uncle Etienne. Remember back when I was a kid and a woman called Gloria Garcia had my nuts in a vice? She came back from the dead and was tryin’ to entice me to go to Mexico with her, sayin’ we had a son. It’s a fuckin’ lie. Turns out the bitch is really Carmella Mendez.”

His uncle grunted, it sounded dangerous.

“Were they lookin’ to extract what you know through torture?” He asked.

“Yeah, they’re after logistical information and it’s all in my head. But that’s not all, we have a rat, he helped them get to my woman. If we have one, you have one too. Be careful who you trust. Our rat has been here for almost a year, it points at long term plannin’ from the cartel.”

His uncle laughed soft and menacingly. “I’ll be sure to investigate.”

Lucky heard movement behind him and glanced over his shoulder. Grave and Ren stood on the other side of the desk, saying nothing, just watching him. He turned back to the window and continued the conversation with his uncle.

“If you can send Bas I’ll be grateful. He’s the best tracker I know. I have no idea where they’ve taken her and I need the best to track them.”

“He’s comin’ to you and bringin’ some help. He’s got those fuckin’ hounds of his loaded and ready to head down the bayou. I’ll head to Baton Rouge to talk to your parents, leave it to me, yes?”

He gave a sigh of relief.

“Thank you, Uncle Etienne; I wasn’t lookin’ forward to callin’ Maman with the news that I have a son with a woman she met in South Africa and liked, a lot. She’s likely to jump in the car and head back here to kick my ass.”

His uncle laughed because they both knew his sister would do exactly that.

“Don’t worry, we’ll keep her here and safe. You and your cousins get your woman back and once they’re safe you come and spend time with us. No excuses, your *Mémé* (Grandmother) and the family need to meet your woman and your boy. And the two of them need to meet your family. *D’accord* (Okay)?”

“*Oui, d’accord* (Yes, okay).”

Ending the call he turned and dropped his phone on his desk.

“I’m not listenin’ to anymore advice or...”

Grave held a hand up and he fell silent.

“I’m not here to tell you what to do, Lucky. I’m here to say I’ve got your back. If her brother is as fucked up as you say then she’s definitely not safe with him, and that slut with him worries me. I say we use whatever we have and everyone we trust to help us find her. They have quite a head start but...” He didn’t finish because Bates, their medic, rapped on the door as he walked in. Interrupting him.

“Viper’s awake. We’re ridin’ to the hospital. Prez wants the three of you with him.”

Having delivered his message he turned and was about to walk out again when Ren called out to him.

“How are the other two doin’, Bates?”

“Still in surgery, we’ll know more when we get to the hospital. Let’s get goin’ brothers.”

Lucky grabbed his phone and followed his brothers out.

There was nothing more he could do for Harper and Ry right now but he could see to Bren for her.

She would want him to do that. Take care of her friend.

There was also the possibility that Bren had more information.

Maybe he had overheard something that could help them find her. Or point the search in the right direction.

He knew he was clutching at straws but it was that or lose his mind.

And right now he could not afford to go crazy.

But once he had those who had taken her in his hands?

Then, and only then, would he allow his crazy out.

They were going to regret taking what was his.

Regret it bitterly.

Walking into Viper’s room and seeing his friend with pipes going in and out of him and monitors beeping had his gut churning with guilt.

It was because he had requested Viper as one of her guards that he was now here. In hospital with fucking holes in him.

Stepping up next to the bed he clasped a hand over Viper’s tattoo covered forearm.

Instantly his eyes snapped open.

“Fucking sorry I let you down, brother.” Viper’s voice was soft but strong. “Fucking son of a bitch, cock-sucking, son of a whore prospect caught us on the wrong foot.”

Lucky tightened his hand. “Not your fault, Viper. We dropped the ball with that little fucker, but rest assured, he’s goin’ to pay. I’ll personally relieve him of his skin once we get our hands on him.”

Viper grinned. “Tell me you’ll wait until I’m out of here. I want to be there when you take it off him. We can pretend we’re makin’ a skin suit or a lampshade or somethin’.”

He winked and nodded as he let go of his brother’s arm, letting him know he would wait.

“Anythin’ you can remember would be useful right now, brother.” Maniac said quietly.

“Not much, Prez.” Viper grimaced. “I was doin’ my rounds when I was hit. Never even heard or saw the fuckers. Did hear Flag, that motherfuckin’ traitor when they dragged me into the brush to hide me from view. He kept urgin’ them to leave me and get goin’ before Magic noticed I wasn’t where I was supposed to be.”

His eyes focused on their prez. “Did they get him? Is he okay?”

Maniac gave it to him straight, no hiding anything.

“They got him. His injuries are more severe and he’s still in surgery. Same with Bren. Flag tricked him to get inside and he shot him at close range. He’s in surgery as well.”

“And Harper and Ry, did they get them?” His eyes focused on Lucky and stayed with him.

“They got them, brother, but we’re getting’ them back, make no mistake.” Lucky said in a voice gritty with worry and rage.

Viper clasped a hand over Lucky’s where it was resting on the bed.

“I’m sorry, brother. Sorry I didn’t kill that little motherfucker.” He frowned. “I’m not sure but I think I heard them talkin’ about a boat. Don’t know what kind of a boat or anythin’ else.”

Lucky’s gut jerked and his entire body went on alert.

It was more than they had known a minute ago.

“We’ll get on it, brother. Anything you remember is valuable and will help us track down the motherfuckers who took my family.” Lucky said.

Meanwhile his mind was racing.

He needed his cousins, now more than ever.

If they were hiding his woman on the water they were the ones who would know where to look. The family controlled everything on the water. No one could move without them knowing about it.

With that bit of news it was as if he could breathe a little easier.

Not much, but a little better.

Magic and Bren came through their surgeries and the surgeons declared them stable but serious. Both were in ICU and none of the brothers were allowed in.

Only family was allowed entrance.

Lucky smiled when Evie barged her way into Magic's room claiming to be his fiancée.

His brother had fucked up so bad with that girl but here she was, when he needed her, right by his side.

He hoped like hell once this was over the two would get their shit sorted. Talk to each other about how things had gone wrong so badly.

Magic had fucked up, and not a little bit either.

Hopefully it wasn't too late for them to put the past behind them and look to the future.

As he walked out of the hospital his mind turned to finding his woman and his boy.

Nothing else mattered.

THIRTY ONE

Lucky

Present Day

Standing at the back of the clubhouse he watched the river slowly sliding past. It looked deceptively calm, but it hid nasty currents that could drag the unwary to their deaths.

If the alligators didn't get to them first.

He hadn't been able to sleep and had wandered around the clubhouse most of the night. When the sun rose he had come out here to breathe in some fresh air. Air free from the stink of alcohol, cigarette smoke, and all the other smells that permeated the common room.

His cousins had arrived in the late afternoon and had left to do what they do after getting an update from him and Maniac.

Bastien, or Bas as they called him, had his dogs with him and he had gone to the safe house to get an item of clothing to give them Harper and Ry's scents. He didn't like that his cousin was going to be digging in her dirty laundry but it was necessary. The dogs needed their scents should they come across it in their search.

Marcel and Valentin, or Val, had assured them they would soon have leads to follow. They were going to work a few of their contacts to see what they could get out of them.

Val had told him the bastards would've had to go through their contacts to be given permission for the use of the

waterways. All they needed to do was ‘persuade’ them that it would be healthier for them to start talking, and the sooner the better.

He hoped like hell his cousin was right because so far they had nothing.

Today Byte was going to let their contacts know she was under club protection because she worked at Ink’s tattoo studio.

He would also let it be known that she belonged to the Maingarde Syndicate. The idea that she belonged to Dominick pissed him off so it was better not to think about it.

With a deep angry growl he went back inside and poured another coffee. The way he’d been chugging it down all night meant he was fucking wired. Making his way back to his office he sat down and sipped his brew. He didn’t really pay attention to the noises in the clubhouse because his mind was occupied with Harper and Ry and how she was holding up. The tap on his door brought him back to the present.

Mouth stood in his open door and the man looked worried.

“Uhm, can I talk to you, Lucky?”

He didn’t say a word, just gestured to the chair in front of his desk. He watched as the young prospect nervously took a seat.

“I...I just wanted to say I’m sorry I didn’t notice. Flag bein’ a traitor, I mean.” He shook his head. “I worked side by side with the fucker, how did I not recognise he was a rat? I should have picked up what he was doing and now I feel responsible, Boss. I should have realised...”

Lucky held up a hand to cut him short.

“There’s no way you could have known he was a rat, Mouth. He played all of us, not just you. He’s been here longer than you and none of us suspected a thing. It’s on us, the brothers, and on his mentor. We should have picked it up, we didn’t, and the bastard played all of us.”

Mouth looked relieved then shook his head.

“I want to be there when we find him, Boss. He needs to hurt for what he did to Viper, Magic and Bren.” He growled viciously.

“And he needs to die in agony for helpin’ them to take Harper and baby Ry. She’s always nice and treats us with respect, unlike some of the women here at the club. Not everyone respects a prospect; she’s one of the few who do.”

It was true there were some of the club women and the sluts who had to be spoken to harshly over their treatment of the prospects. Specifically those who tried to treat them like they were their personal slaves. Forgetting the men were serving a probationary period before a vote that could see them patched in to the club. And once they got their patch, those very same sluts were the first in line to offer up their bodies. Most of them in the hopes of snaring an old lady patch.

Stupid bitches.

“Believe me Mouth, we find the motherfucker alive he’s gonna wish he was dead.”

“Good. He deserves to die in agony.” Mouth growled.

A loud knock had Lucky looking towards the door and meeting Dive’s eyes.

“Byte’s got some footage he wants to show us, brother. You too, Mouth.”

Lucky didn’t ask questions, he got up and followed him to their chapel.

Everyone was there, waiting on him, and apparently on Mouth.

The other prospects were standing against the wall just inside the door and Mouth joined them while Lucky went to his place at the table and sat down.

Byte stood next to the screen against the wall and clicked something as he spoke.

“I’ve been going through the footage we retrieved from some of the cameras at the house. We lost footage from a couple of the cameras but not all of them. I’ve put what we have together and it gives us a clear picture of exactly how it went down.”

Byte went back to his seat, sat down and clicked a button on his laptop.

There were pissed off mumbles and growls as they watched several blacked out SUV’s pull up down the block from the house in broad daylight. Watched as Flag slid out and pointed the way to several black clad men who disappeared into the overgrown brush of a garden. The prospect got into the back of the vehicle at the front of the group and was driven closer to the house. A few feet down the road, where the cameras would be on him, Flag rolled out of the vehicle with blood dripping from his face and started running towards the garage. One of the men gave chase, but not putting any effort in. Flag

frantically waved at the camera as he neared the garage doors, diverting attention to him. It gave those waiting a chance to sneak up to the cameras and disable them. Those they knew about at least.

Lucky watched as Flag ran down the tunnel and hammered on the steel door to be let in. His voice was panicked as he begged to be let in. He had a gun in his hand when the door opened and shot Bren almost point blank. Harper's bodyguard twisted his body at the last minute. It's what saved him, if he hadn't he would have been shot in the heart and killed.

They watched as the seriously wounded man grabbed the steel door and slammed it into the prospect's head, knocking him down, giving him a chance to get away. Before he stumbled out he slammed a hand down on the keyboard, the action alerting the clubhouse they were under attack. It was agony to watch him clutching his chest and stumbling up the stairs.

Instead of staying on Bren the video skips to the outside of the house.

Their brothers never stood a fucking chance. They were up against overwhelming numbers. The two of them against eight or ten men, Lucky wasn't sure exactly how many, but more than Viper and Magic could handle on their own with minimal ammunition.

A collective groan and vicious swearing filled the room when both brothers went down.

“Fuckers!”

“Fucking bastards.”

“Gonna kill those motherfuckers.”

The attackers stepped over their fallen brothers and converged on the house. Then they split up, half went back to the entrance to the tunnel the other half to the back door and into the house. One of the blacked out vehicles drove up and parked across the driveway, essentially blocking it.

Brendan O'Connor hadn't stood a chance in hell of getting Harper and Ry out of the house.

It was what happened in her bedroom that had every single brother looking at Lucky and wordlessly letting him know how much they admired her quick thinking.

Quick thinking that saved a man's life.

Lucky watched with pride as his old lady set the scene to make their attackers believe Bren was bleeding out on her bedroom floor. There were several sniggers when they saw her turn her phone off and slip it into the back of her pants and panties. She was back on her knees next to Bren pushing a towel over his wound, Ry strapped to her chest in his pack, when Carmella and a man walked into the room. His woman didn't move from Bren's side, just glared at them over her shoulder.

He knew the bastard was her brother by the obvious family resemblance. Their eyes were the same colour and shape and he was blonde as well. Lucky didn't look away from the bastard on the screen and wanted to rip his throat out for the way the fucker looked at his old lady. It was right there in his face for all to see. The monster Harper had been subjected to as a child.

He wished the video had sound so he could hear what was being said. Carmella obviously said something that pissed the bastard off because the next moment he stormed over and jerked Harper to her feet.

The change that came over him when he saw Ry against her chest raised the hairs on his arms and on the nape of his neck. Violence boiled in the piece of shit's face and eyes as he glared at the baby.

“Fucking bastard is goin’ to hurt them.” Lucky gritted through a tightly clenched jaw.

He didn't though, he seemed almost calm as he dragged her out of the room.

She glanced back at Bren just as Carmella kicked him in the side. Her eyes were spitting fire at the bitch.

She was obviously not cowed by the situation, which was good. She was going to need her inner strength until they could get to them.

The video skipped to the three of them coming down the stairs, the prospect stood waiting at the bottom. Not only the look he gave Harper but what he said pissed Salvatore off and it earned him a kick in the chest that sent the traitorous little fucker flying.

“Ugly fuck deserved that and more,” Ren growled “and we’ll be givin’ it to him. He’ll be spittin’, shittin and pissin’ blood before we’re even half way done with him.”

Lucky grunted in agreement, his eyes riveted on the screen as his old lady was taken out through the tunnel and loaded into the back of one of the waiting SUV's.

The look on Carmella's face as she looked back at the garage they had emerged from was chilling. They had to get his family back and it had to happen soon.

It's been twenty four hours. They've had them too long already.

He didn't think Carmella would keep her hands off Harper. The bitch was crazy and would ignore any orders given by Salvatore.

They didn't have a single lead and she's been in their hands for hours. Carmella was not to be trusted and he doubted her brother was much better.

A photo of Harper at the studio was up on the screen, she was laughing at whoever had taken the photo. She was so incredibly beautiful.

Why the fuck had he listened to Maniac?

Why had he gone along with his fucked up plan?

Staying away from her was supposed to keep her safe. Look where that shit got them. His woman and child were taken.

And where was his ass?

Sitting safely at the clubhouse while his brothers paid with their blood for his mistake.

There was nothing he could say or do that would excuse the fact that he had fucked up.

She should never have been left with only three men to protect her. She should have been behind high walls, protected and safe from her family.

He had failed her, failed his son.

All he could now do was find them before any harm could be done to them.

Maniac's voice pulled him back to the present, to the room.

“For those of you who don't know her, this is Harper Delaney. She's from South Africa and came to Savannah to help Ink open the tattoo shop. We gave our word she would be safe, that we would protect her and what happened yesterday turned us into liars. But even worse it made us look weak. The only way to turn this cluster fuck around is to find her and her boy and destroy those who took her.”

Maniac looked right at him as he continued laying it out.

“Since the moment she was taken we've had teams out canvassing our contacts and shaking trees to see what we could find. So far all we've got is that a group of Italians arrived by private plane and was met by several members of Los Rojos. Carmella Mendez was one of those who met the plane. The Italians were taken to Carlos Mendez's yacht and stayed there with her. Her cousin Pablo Mendez was on the yacht as well.”

For a moment Maniac looked uncomfortable as he met Lucky's eyes before he continued on.

“We suspect Pablo Mendez is here because his cousin and partner in torture, Carmella Mendez, came here to convince Lucky to go to Mexico to save a boy she maintained was his son. We have rock solid evidence he isn't our brother's son, we also know it was a ploy to get their hands on him. The cartel wants the information locked in his head.”

The silence in the room was absolute, everyone waiting for him to continue.

“Unfortunately after snatching Harper they did not return to the yacht and we lost them. We have people going over the route and I expect to hear from...”

Maniac didn't get any further because the door slammed open. Lucky was stunned when Rider stormed in, his eyes deep dark wells of burning rage.

He jumped up along with the rest of the brothers, but Rider didn't pay any attention to them. His crazed burning eyes were fixed on Lucky.

He had a moment to take in the men streaming into their chapel behind him and then the brother he considered a good friend was right in his face, his hands fisted in his tee.

Even in his rage Rider hadn't touched his kutte, hadn't disrespect him or his club in that way. What he did do was disrespect the sanctity of their chapel and it was a killing offence. He wasn't given time to think about it or anything.

“You fucking asshole! Your motherfucking giant ass was supposed to protect her!” Rider shouted in his face. “Your fucking club was supposed to keep her and Ry safe. Where the fuck were you?”

Rider jerked him closer then shoved him away, making him rock on his feet. Lucky raised his hands to try and calm his friend down, to explain.

But the brother wasn't listening.

The fucker started swinging and all Lucky could do was ward off the blows because he didn't want to fight his friend.

Plus he felt like he deserved it, deserved to be hurt. The bastard landed several hits to his torso and one to his mouth. He felt his lip split and tasted blood in his mouth, and then they were pulled apart.

Rider strained against the arms holding him back.

“I’m not scared of your giant fucking ass, you bastard. If anything happens to her or my boy I will fucking gut you, Lucky Boudreaux. They’re my family, you fucking hear me, my fucking family. And you, you...you fucking left them out there in that fucking house, alone and afraid. I will kill you if I lose them, you hear me? I. Will. Fucking. Kill. You.” Rider threatened through gritted teeth.

One of the brothers who had followed him in tried to calm him down.

“Ride, brother, you need to calm down. You losing it isn’t helping. Lucky isn’t the enemy, that fucker Salvatore is. Remember brother, he lost them too.” He patted Rider on the back. “Breathe through it, brother. Breathe.”

Lucky had no idea who the brother was but he would thank him later for the effective way he calmed his friend down.

An ice cold voice cut through the tense air and he looked away from Rider towards the door. A man radiating power and dressed in a dark suit surrounded by more men in suits stood in the doorway looking around the room. His face was a blank mask, no emotion whatsoever.

“While it’s entertaining to watch Rider having a meltdown we have more important things to discuss.”

He glanced around the room, his dead blue eyes taking them all in then focused on their president.

“Maniac, Grave, my apologies for the abrupt intrusion into your meeting.” He waved a hand towards Rider. “My friend over there was difficult to restrain and the result is as you see.” He shrugged then those cold eyes returned with laser focus to Maniac. “We need to talk once we’re done here.”

Lucky was amazed when all his president did was give a chin lift in agreement.

What the fuck? Who was this fucker? And then he didn’t have to wonder any longer.

“For those of you who don’t know who I am, my name is Asa Malone and Brendan O’Connor is one of mine, so is Harper. We’re here to find her and when we do we will be taking her, Ryder and Bren home where I can be sure of their safety.

Oh hell no.

No way were they leaving Savannah.

He didn’t wait on his president to speak, he did it for him.

“You’re welcome to join in the search and in the retribution handed down after we find them, but you have to realise one thing.” He paused for a second before continuing. “Harper is mine, her boy is mine and once we find them their home will be here, with me.”

Asa Malone gave him a cold smile that didn’t reach his dead eyes.

“We’ll join in hunting down the attackers and those who laid hands on her but the decision whether she stays here or goes home with me is hers, not yours.”

Lucky opened his mouth to tell him he was fucking dreaming when his president’s icy voice had him shutting up.

“Asa, I can’t say it’s a pleasure to see you but because of the current situation I will excuse this gross invasion of our chapel and Rider won’t receive the usual punishment. I will however let his president know I’m not happy with his actions. It will be up to him to decide on his punishment.”

Lucky knew he had to defuse the situation. His president didn’t know about Rider’s past, about the way he had lost his wife and son. It had to be driving him insane that Harper and Ry had been taken and it explained the outburst. Once this was done he would take the time to explain to Maniac.

“Rider, brother, I’m sorry I didn’t lock her down when my gut told me to do so. I will forever regret my decision.”

“*Ja, spyt kom te laat, poephol* (Yes, it’s too late for regrets, asshole). Why the fuck did you shut her out? After Asa made sure your president knew how dangerous her brother was you left her hanging out there with only Bren in the house to protect her. You dropped the fucking ball, motherfucker. I helped her through it you know, after the first time you fucked her over and left. Then she has to hide and Asa sends her here under the so-called protection of your club. And what do you do when you find her? I’ll tell you what you fucking did. You parade your fucking slut in front of her. But then, not only did you deny the boy was yours, you fucked her and fucking

disappeared. Once a-fucking-gain.” He snapped in a pissed off growl.

Lucky didn't answer because there was nothing he could say in his defence that wouldn't piss the brother off even more.

His president stepped in.

“Rider, from what I heard here I take it that's your name.” Maniac snarled and Rider gave him a small tilt of his chin in acknowledgement.

“I don't know how your president operates but here you follow orders. You do as your president orders you to do. Lucky was ordered to stay away. He had no option but to obey my order.”

Rider grinned and Lucky internally flinched, he could almost physically feel his brothers doing the same. The grin wasn't a good one, it showed the contempt the brother was feeling and it came through loud and clear in his words.

“I'm sorry, Prez, but I disagree. My president maybe young but he's a fucking amazing leader. He's the best man to have at your back when things get dark and ugly. Every day he takes the backs of his brothers *and* their women. Let me tell you a story, Prez, a story that will explain exactly what I'm talking about.” He drew a breath through flaring nostrils before he began.

There was absolute silence because no one could believe the man's balls talking back to their president in their own chapel.

“It happened right after I had been patched in. My girlfriend was pregnant, around eight months and having problems, and we were ordered as a club to attend an event. My president

needed the numbers because we had enemies gunning for us everywhere we turned. He needed me at his back.

Unfortunately my girl's pregnancy wasn't going well, not well at all. I had two choices. One, I obey my president, leave her on her own and hope like hell nothing happened while I was away. Or two, I tell him I wasn't going because she needed me. I feared he was going to take my patch and my fucking gut ached with it, but I made my choice. My woman and my unborn child needed me and I chose them over my club."

He tilted his head to the side his eyes burning with remembered pain.

"Know what my prez did? He didn't take my patch or any of the shit I imagined he would do. Instead he ordered me home, told me all my duties were suspended until after the baby was born. He also wanted an update on my girl's condition daily and if anything changed I was to call him immediately. He was there when my daughter was born. He was there when I needed him. A couple of years passed and once again he was there when I needed a guiding hand after my wife and unborn son was murdered. To this day he's still taking my back because he knows what Harper means to me and my daughter. She's become an integral part of our family and so has Ryder. And to safeguard our family he sent me here to bring her home." His head tilted to the side, his eyes narrowing and spearing into all those listening.

"So hear me when I say, Lucky should have known better. He should have said no to your order. Harper and her child should have been his priority, not your club or your club business. And *you* should have allowed him to put her and their child first. I realise you most probably don't know what it

feels like to lose a child. I do, and I don't ever want Lucky to experience such an immense loss and to blame himself for not seeing to his child's safety. I've been there and it's not a good place to be. At least I had my daughter, Harper, and my president, Hawk Walker, pulling me back from the edge."

You could have heard a pin drop in the room. The silence was heavy and absolute as he continued.

"Who does he have if we lose them? You? His brothers? Me? His family?" Rider scoffed. "Not one of us will be able to keep him here, on this earth. He'll be gone before you can blink your fucking eyes. So next time you have to make a choice between a brother's woman or child and business..." He didn't finish the sentence but everyone knew what he was saying.

Fuck.

When he first met the brother he hadn't seen the great depths of the man. He did now. He was the type of brother who would be sitting at the head of the table one day, running his own chapter. A brother tempered in the fires of the hell his family had been submerged in.

A true leader.

He glanced at Asa and found his cold eyes on him. Rider speaking to him had him looking away.

"Lucky, I'm fucking sorry I hit you brother. I've been burning since we got the call about Harper, Ryder and Bren. I just, I just need them to be found, and I need them safe."

Lucky didn't say a word, drawing him into a hug and slapping his back, hard. Rider gave a soft laugh and did the same.

“I want the same thing, brother. I need them home. I was a fuckin’ asshole to her and she doesn’t even know why. I can’t fuckin’ breathe thinkin’ of that fucker near her.”

Rider nodded before he stepped away.

The tension in the room was still high and he knew it had to end if they were going to work together successfully.

“Prez, I’m sorry I put you in the position of havin’ to make that decision.”

Maniac nodded, accepting his apology but his eyes were still pissed off.

“I should have taken care of the Gloria problem and gotten them off our backs. I didn’t and now we’re in this situation we have here. I admit, I allowed Gloria’s, or rather Carmella’s, bullshit to fuck with my head. I was worried the kid might be mine for real and I got played. Thinkin’ about it I realise that was her goal from the start, to have me off my game. All I could think about was the kid and the circumstances he might be living in and what to do if it turns out he was mine.” He sighed. “So, when you made the call to stay away from Harper, I went with it. I went with it because I had no idea how I was goin’ to tell her I might have another kid. And not just any kid, but a kid I had with Gloria, the supposedly dead love of my life.”

Rider groaned and shook his head at him. Lucky shrugged.

“I know, I know, brother, I was a dick. I should have told her the minute Gloria, who turns out to be fucking Carmella, appeared and made her claim. Harper is sharp, she would have seen through the bullshit immediately and maybe all this shit

could have been avoided. She and our boy would have been here with me, and not in the house with only Bren, Viper and Magic as protection.”

Asa stepped forward from where he stood listening and all eyes went to him as he started speaking.

“Nothing you did would have stopped Salvatore from coming for her. He’s obsessed with her and he’s pretending he’s taking her home to marry an associate who also happens to be his best friend.” He smiled coldly. “A best friend who had a rather unfortunate accident a few hours ago and is no longer with us. Salvatore is lying to himself and everyone involved in her abduction. He wants her and he’ll go to any lengths to have her back under his control.”

His cold eyes came to Lucky and he knew he wasn’t going to like what the bastard was going to say next.

“The problem is he didn’t bargain on Harper having a baby. He wants her the way she used to be. He wants the young girl, not the woman who has given birth. I worry that he will do something to Ryder, thinking that with the child gone she will be as she was before. He’s mentally unstable so trying to determine his plans are difficult. I have people tracking Los Rojos and the Salvatores on the dark web. We’re hoping to pin point locations where they might be holding them. Once we have the information we will share with you and I’m hoping we can work together to extract the two of them and rain hell down on the motherfuckers.”

Maniac stood and gestured to the table. “Have a seat, Asa, and let’s talk.”

Lucky immediately pointed at his chair and Asa nodded as he took a seat.

Moving back until his back hit the wall he crossed his arms over his chest and waited.

Rider and his brothers joined him, so did Dive and Lure.

He felt their silent support.

Felt it and appreciated it.

All he needed now was for his cousins to come through for him.

They needed a location.

THIRTY TWO

Harper

Present Day

I woke up alone in a cell. I no longer had Ry strapped to my chest. They took him from me and I prayed they weren't mistreating him. He must be so scared and have they fed him?

My head and body ached but the worst ache came from my heart. It ached for my boy and for my friends. Every time I closed my eyes I saw Bren lying lifelessly on the floor of my bedroom. Even with all the ink I had spilled under him I knew there was a lot of blood mixed in, too much blood. Was he alive? I prayed that he was.

I had no idea how long I had been in the cell or what the time was. The bastards had taken my watch when they dumped me in here. I was lying on a narrow hospital type bed with a scratchy faded grey blanket thrown over my legs. There were two doors in the room, the one keeping me in here and the other opened to a small very basic bathroom. At least the room and bathroom was clean.

I lay on my side keeping my eyes on the door.

I tried desperately to not give in to my fear. My worst fear was that my brother would hurt Ry. I worried about the drugs the bitch had injected me with. It hadn't only knocked me out for what felt like hours, it had given me one hell of a headache and a dry mouth that tasted weirdly of paper. I was thirsty but I

didn't know if the water in the bathroom was safe to drink. I wasn't going to take a chance on it. No way did I want an upset stomach along with all my other problems.

After I woke I explored my prison, hoping for a way out. There wasn't one, the narrow dirty window was barred. Not that I would have been able to squeeze my ass through it anyway and no way would I escape without my boy. The bathroom didn't have a window, only one of those extractor fan things in the roof.

My eyes kept going to the door, the only way out. It was dull grey and made of steel and had one of those small weird windows at the top that you saw in prison movies or in those scary mental hospital movies. There wasn't a door handle, just blank steel and that small window.

I was locked in a cell.

That's all I knew. I had no idea where the cell was.

For all I knew my brother had kept me drugged and flew me back to South Africa. He was crazy enough to do something like that.

The room was cold and I was thankful for the blanket. I pulled it up to my shoulders and tried to relax. Maybe if I wasn't so fearful of Ry's safety the headache would go away and I would be able to think clearly.

There was another reason I was scared. Not only was I scared of what my brother was planning, I was scared that if they had cameras in the room they might have seen me taking the phone from the back of my pants. Under cover of the blanket I had turned over, my back to the door, turned the phone back on but

left it on silent and slipped it under the mattress. I was hoping the club would be able to track it now that I've turned it back on again. If Bren survived I knew he would tell them and help them to find me.

I don't know how long I had been awake and lying there when I heard dull scraping and clanking sound coming from outside the door. Slowly swinging my legs over the side of the bed I sat up. The small window darkened as someone looked in at me before the door swung open.

I had never seen the two men who walked through the door before, they were strangers. My brother followed them into the room but didn't come any closer, he stayed behind them. That was not like him, he liked to be the one in front, the one calling the shots. This was strange. Wasn't he the one in charge here?

For once my brother looked uncertain and nervous. That wasn't good, not good at all.

What was he involved in and how did it involve me?

As far as I knew he and that crazy bitch kidnapped me because he wanted to take me home. So why did they bring me here? When I tried to meet his eyes they slid away. It was a sure sign he was no longer in charge. He was just another lackey to the men standing over me. The same way he had been with our father.

Turning away from my brother I looked up at the two men. One was an older man, the other younger. The older of the two caught my eyes and held them. His eyes were dark and cold but calculating as he looked down at me. He wasn't unattractive and I guessed him to be somewhere between forty

five and fifty five years old. Thick dark hair with silver at the temples was perfectly styled and combed back from his face, a dark moustache with hints of silver curved over his top lip. His suit was dark grey and expensive, and I suspected it might have been made for him. His hands were clasped in front of him, they were well cared for and his nails were manicured.

He exuded wealth and privilege. And power.

The man beside him was younger and there was a marked family resemblance. Maybe his son? He was good looking with dark eyes and hair and a clean shaven face. His hair was short and well kept. His suit was black and as with the older man it looked like it had been made for him. His hands were in his pockets, his stance relaxed but I didn't trust it one bit.

It was his eyes that scared me. They were like dark empty pools, there was nothing there. His face was blank, not a single emotion showed.

Looking from the one to the other fear streaked through me. With my brother I knew what to expect. With these men? I had no clue.

“Who are you? Why am I here? Where is my baby? What have you done with him?” I asked.

They said nothing, just kept looking down at me.

I threw a hand out towards my brother. “He kidnapped us and brought us here, why?”

The older man smiled, a small cold smile. “I see you don't know who I am.”

I shook my head. “No, I don't. Why would I know who you are?”

He was still smiling and it wasn't a good smile. "My name is Carlos Mendez."

He said it as if I should know the name, I didn't. I frowned and slowly shook my head.

The smile disappeared. "I am the head of my family, a very powerful family."

"Okay."

What else was I supposed to say? I still had no clue who the hell he was.

"You work for the bikers." He said as if it explained everything.

Again I shook my head. "No, I don't. I work for Pixie."

He frowned, glanced over his shoulder at my brother before looking back at me and shook his head.

"No, I have it on good authority the tattoo shop belongs to the bikers, you are working for them. Don't try lying to me, you won't like the consequences."

I sighed and glared at my stupid brother. The asshole had obviously lied to these men.

"If *he* told you I work for the bikers, he's the one who's lying. He knows I work for Pixie. The only reason I'm in Savannah is to help with the opening of the studio because my boss is a part owner. I'm supposed to go home soon."

The younger one threw a look over his shoulder at my asshole of a brother and he shrugged.

Bloody kidnapping asshole.

“And who is this Pixie?” Carlos asked with a curl of his top lip.

Bloody criminal fucking assholes. How can they not know who they were dealing with?

“My boss is Pixie Maingarde Boudreaux and she owns Mainline Ink in South Africa. She is part owner of Mainline Ink Savannah.”

The moment I mentioned Pixie’s surnames their attitude changed, became watchful. It was obvious my dick for brains brother hadn’t told them who my boss was. Or if he had, he most probably told them I worked for the Shadow Wraiths.

The younger one said something in a language that sounded like Spanish and the older nodded.

“This Pixie, is her husband Remy Boudreaux?”

I nodded, not bothering to answer.

“Do you know Lucky Boudreaux?” I couldn’t lie, but I had to, I knew I had to keep the lie as close to the truth as possible.

“I can’t say that I know him but we’ve met. He came to Cape Town for the wedding. He stayed at Dominick’s beach house with the family.”

“Who is this Dominick?” The younger one growled the question at me.

I almost rolled my eyes but stopped myself just in time. How had they not picked up on the surname?

“Dominick Maingarde is Pixie’s brother. They’ve been estranged for many years but aren’t anymore. He’s the head of the Maingarde family business. I do know he took over as the

head of the Syndicate after he eliminated the Harrisons. But that's all, I don't know anything else."

The atmosphere in the room went nuclear. Both men twisted to look at Tonio and he lifted his shoulders in a shrug. How the hell did this moron get to the position he held? Oh yes, because my father put him there.

"Who is your child's father? And why would he allow you to come to the States without him?" Carlos asked. "Your brother claims the child is that of your fiancée, Claudio Pucci."

In my head I was swearing at my stupid, stupid brother. He lied to these dangerous people to get them to help him kidnap me.

This was it. This was where I had to lie and lie so convincingly that they believed me. I couldn't tell them Ry was Lucky's because I had a suspicion it would mean the death of my son. I couldn't claim that it was Rider's because these bastards only bowed to power and my best friend didn't have enough power to scare them off.

It only left one man. In my head I crossed my fingers and spun my lie mixed with truths.

"Claudio is nothing to me and definitely not my child's father. I haven't seen him in almost eighteen years. Asa Malone, the new head of the Irish Mafia is his father and he's going to be furious if anything happens to his son. That's why Brendan O'Connor came to Savannah with me. He's our bodyguard and if he's dead..." I slowly shook my head. "He's from a powerful Irish family and they won't let it go. They have connections here and will call for a blood feud."

Carlos crossed his arms over his chest and glared at me.

At me. As if it was my fault they had been taken in by my brother's lies.

“I have some calls to make to verify what you've told me. If I find you have lied...”

He didn't finish his sentence, he left it up to my imagination as he turned away.

The guy with him erupted, angry words spewing from his mouth. I glanced at the stupid ass and saw he had no idea what was being said. Great, neither did I.

Carlos turned back to me a glint in his eyes I didn't like. Not at all.

“While I make my calls my nephew, Pablo, will take you on a little tour of discovery. Try not to anger him by lying.”

With that he marched out the door calling out orders to someone outside the door. The next moment my brother was unceremoniously dragged from the room, protesting vehemently. For a second I revelled in it, that he was being manhandled but then my reality sneaked back in.

I looked up at the guy standing over me. He scared me because he was just blank, like his body was an empty shell. I knew it wasn't true because there had been some emotion in his voice when he had spoken to Carlos.

“You had better give me what I want, *puta* (whore), or you're going to hurt.” His glance went up and down my body before he looked back at my face.

He smiled and my blood turned to ice.

With a jerk of his head he beckoned two men into the room. They were nothing like him. They were bikers, with kuttes, jingling wallet chains and biker boots and wild beards and hair. They looked and smelt dirty, their grins were filled with evil when they looked at me.

“Look at the pretty little mama.” One said, his eyes like lasers on my boobs. I wanted to cover myself up but I resisted the impulse.

“Soon I’m goin’ to shove my dick in you, stretching you so wide it’ll make that man of yours not wantin’ your broken cunt.” The other licked his thick lips and winked at me.

I shuddered in disgust and fear.

“You will not touch her until I give you permission to do so.” Pablo said in a cold and emotionless voice and the two instantly backed down.

He nodded at two men in suits who had come in to the room as well, making the small space feel overcrowded. They had been standing silently behind the two bikers, watching.

“Bring her.”

The bikers tried to come at me but were stopped in their tracks when he glared at them.

“Get the hell out and go back to fucking my cousin. I’m sure by now she’s ready for the second round.” Disdain dripped from his words but the two bikers totally missed it.

My brother suddenly appeared in the open door and he had a look in his eyes I knew very well. Calculation. He was planning something and unfortunately it wouldn’t be to help

me get out of here. It would be something that served his end goal.

I knew the end goal. It was to get me back under his control.

While I had been glaring at my brother the men had stepped up, they gripped my upper arms firmly and hauled me up. Instinctively my hands folded around my middle and I felt the one on my left give a slight flinch. So slight I was the only one who noticed it.

Without another word said I was marched out of the room and down a wide corridor. It was a dull grey with buzzing fluorescent lights and we passed three doors like mine before coming to a stop. It was another door with a guard dressed all in black, he had several weapons strapped to his body. He looked me over before he punched in a code and opened the door, then he said something to the men and they shrugged and shook their heads as we walked through.

I shivered as we left the light of the passage and walked into semi-darkness. The men urged me forward and we descended down heavy black iron stairs through the semi-darkness. There weren't many lights, the ones there were threw round pools of light. I'm sure it was intentional, to scare whoever they brought down here into giving them what they want. I was marched to where a door stood open, bright white light cascading into the passageway.

The minute we reached the door and I saw what was inside I tried to jerk back, to get as far away from it as I possibly could. Nothing in that room said safe, it screamed 'get out of here as fast as you can'.

It was glaringly white, the walls as well as the floor and there was a shiny steel table in the centre. A single black grate was set into the floor under the table. A table that looked similar to a prep table in a chef's kitchen. Only thing is, I don't think a chef has ever prepared a meal on that thing, it was being used for something completely different. Against the wall was another table, there was a narrow white cloth draped down the middle, and there were gleaming silver tools laid out on it. Tools I recognised from hospital shows I used to watch. Unfortunately there were no dreamy or steamy actors down here. Only me, Pablo, and the two guards.

Putting a hand over my wildly racing heart I tried to slow it down.

I knew what this place was.

It was a torture room, a room where he interrogated people. A place where he hurt people.

“You can't do this.” My voice came out in a scared whisper.

For the first time since he walked into my cell Pablo smiled, really smiled. It took him from attractive to handsome. If it wasn't for the dead eyes, that is. Those eyes were the eyes of a monster, a killer.

“I can do whatever I want. Who is going to stop me? You?” He snorted derisively.

As I watched he carefully and precisely took off his suit jacket and draped it over a stand in the corner of the room. His tie was next and then he unbuttoned the top three buttons of his shirt followed by the buttons of his sleeves. He slowly, again carefully and precisely, rolled them up.

I didn't want to look at him but I also didn't want to look at the table or the instruments of torture. So I watched him and shuddered in fear as his dead gaze slid over me.

“Strap her down.”

The order came and I knew what was going to happen and somewhere in my head I started repeating words like a mantra. Over and over.

Please God, keep both of us alive until help comes. Please let them track my phone. Please keep us safe.

I prayed soundlessly as the two men strapped me to the table. Stretching my arms above my head they snapped steel cuffs attached to chains around my wrists. My legs were next and they stretched them wide before snapping the cuffs around my ankles.

When they were done all I could move was my fingers, toes and head.

Lifting my head I look down my body at my feet. Not only was I in danger, my baby, my precious little boy, was in terrible danger and it was because of my brother. No, he's not my brother, hasn't been since the first time he touched me. He and my father were no longer my family, they were my enemies.

If not for them I wouldn't be in this bloody country or this damned city.

It was their fault this was happening. I hate them. Hate them so much.

Closing my eyes so I didn't have to look at the bright lights above me I lay breathing slow and easy, trying to calm my

racing heart.

Trying to stay hopeful that there was a way to get out of this alive.

Something cold and hard was pressed against my cheek and my eyes snapped open. Pablo stood next to me, a knife flashing silver as he lifted it away from my cheek before pressing it against it once again.

I tried to flinch away from the knife. My flinch made him smile.

Then he bent over me, meeting my eyes, the smile gone.

“I ask you a question and you answer. If I believe the answer is the truth I won’t cut. But if I don’t...” He left the sentence hanging.

I wasn’t stupid, I knew no matter what I said he would find a way to hurt me.

“But first we have to get all this out of the way.”

He flicked the knife at my shirt, lifting it away from my body. He didn’t stop there.

Tears filled my eyes and ran down the sides of my face as he cut my clothes from me. He took it all, except my panties. I shivered in fear and because the room was cold, icy cold.

My stretchmarks were plain to see and seemed to fascinate him as he slowly dragged the tip of the knife up and down them. Every single one of them.

“When my son’s mother was carrying him these marks covered all of her lower body, yours don’t. There seems to be not as many.” He muttered as if to himself.

I didn't say a word. There was nothing to say. I had stretchmarks on my lower abdomen.

They weren't long but they were there, there were others on my hips as well.

“What is your name?”

I swallowed before I answered. “Harper Delaney.”

He clicked his tongue and shook his head from side to side.

“Let this be the start of your lesson. You do not lie to me.”

A burning pain shot through my chest as he pressed the knife in and cut into my skin. I wanted to look but there was no way I could look away from him.

“I swear, it's my name. I had it changed legally.” I gasped, trying not to think about the burning pain radiating from my chest.

He just hummed and tilted his head to look at me.

“Who do you work for?”

An easy one.

“Pixie Maingarde Boudreaux.”

He let that one pass. My eyes followed him as he slowly walked around the table. He stopped and slowly traced a line down from my belly button with the knife. I tried to flinch away from it but there was nowhere to go.

His next question was unexpected.

“Why did you change your name?”

I didn't hesitate to answer. I owed them nothing.

“I didn’t want the Salvatores to find me.”

He tapped the knife over my belly button and I shuddered.

My captor and torturer smiled as if it pleased him. It didn’t stop him from continuing his questions while his eyes stayed on my abdomen.

“Why not? They are your family, your father and brother. As a daughter you owe them your loyalty.”

I snorted in disgust and rolled my head from side to side.

“No, I don’t.” I looked at him, right at him, and asked a question of my own.

“Do you have a sister?”

I was surprised when he nodded and answered me.

“I have two sisters. Both good girls who love their family.”

I couldn’t nod but it didn’t matter, not with what I was about to tell him.

“It sounds like you love and protect them. I wasn’t so lucky. My brother started raping me when I was ten. When my mother tried to stop the rapes my father beat her to death. My brother helped him. I escaped when I was seventeen hoping to never see them ever again. But here I am. Once again being hurt because of them.” I finished on an angry hiss.

The silence was long as he slowly stalked around the table. He circled it three times before he spoke.

“No brother should lay his hands on his sisters. If you tell me what I want to know I will put him on this table and let you do what you want to him.”

I rolled my head from side to side. As attractive as the offer sounded I didn't want it.

“No. I don't want that. I just want my baby and go back to the house and find out if Bren is okay. Please, please let me go. I've done nothing to you or your people. Please don't do this.”

He slowly shook his head his eyes looking like black marbles were focused on me.

“Where are they holding my son?”

What? What the hell was he talking about? His son? He's doing this to me because of his son?

“What? Who took your son? And why would I know where he was?” I frowned at him.

Sharp pain lanced down my side and I screamed. I kept screaming as he slowly and meticulously kept making short slices along my hip.

“Where are they holding my son?”

He asked again, holding the knife up, blood dripping from the shiny blade to the floor.

I scream-sobbed my answer.

“I don't know who your son is. I don't know who has him. I don't know where he is. Please, I don't know him, I don't know where he is!”

He slowly walked around the table and stopped on the side he hadn't cut into yet.

“It stops as soon as you tell me where he is. That should be easy enough for you to do. Just tell me what I want to know.”

He kept slicing and I kept screaming and sobbing. Pleading with him to stop. He didn't, it was as if he went into a place where he didn't hear my screams, his face and eyes were blank.

Nothing there.

I screamed and pleaded as he sliced into my abdomen, slicing, slicing, always slicing.

Somewhere during what he was doing to me I must have passed out from the pain. I woke with a gasp as something sharp smelling was shoved beneath my nose. I woke to pain all over my sides and belly, it burned and throbbed. And my head ached and thumped in concert with my body and my heart.

His voice came as if through a long tunnel, cold and insistent.

“Harper, you're not listening to me. I want to know where my son is. He went to visit his grandmother and hasn't returned. I've been told he was captured and taken to the biker compound. I want him back.”

It raced through my mind. I was suffering because of the club. The bloody club.

At that moment in time I hated them. Hated every single biker I had ever known.

“I've never...been...to...to...the clubhouse. I don't...even know...where it is.” I sobbed. “I work at...the tattoo shop. That's all. I don't know...who your son...is. Maybe Carmella knows...where he is...she's...with the...bikers and...she's here, with my...brother. I don't...know...anything.”

He patted my arm. “Now that wasn't so difficult, hmmm?”

I didn't answer. All I knew was pain. It engulfed my entire body with sharp insistence. I couldn't stop crying, and my tears ran and ran and ran. Wetting my hair as it ran from my eyes and down the sides of my face.

I heard his voice as if from very far away.

“Clean the cuts and close them up. I'll be back after I talk to the brother and Carmella.”

I must have been in and out of consciousness while one of the men cleaned me up. Every now and then I surfaced to hear him muttering in Spanish. The other man answered in a low voice. I kept on drifting off on waves of pain.

I woke up still on the table, still strapped down, a space blanket draped over me. My body shook with shivers and I moaned in pain.

“Drink.” A voice said in my ear. “It will help for pain.”

Slowly opening my eyes I saw it was the man who had flinched, he was holding a cup with a straw. His brown eyes were filled with compassion and regret. Opening my mouth I took the straw between my lips and sipped. The liquid was cold and I drank greedily.

“No, slow. Not too much. No want to be sick.” He muttered in broken English.

“Thank you.” My throat hurt and my voice came out sounding scratchy and hoarse.

His soft brown eyes closed slowly then he was looking at me again and shaking his head before putting the straw back to my lips.

I sipped slowly until he pulled the straw from my lips and stepped back.

The room slowly disappeared behind a haze.

Then thankfully the room and the pain disappeared.

THIRTY THREE

Carlos

He looked up from his laptop when his brother Jorge stormed into his study. He looked angry, angry enough that he knew someone was going to suffer for it later. He sat back in his chair and waited for him to tell him what had pissed him off.

“I just had a call from Maniac, the leader of those bikers. He says we attacked and took one of theirs. Apparently we shot their men and took a woman and her son who was under their protection. Someone called Harper Delaney. I told him it wasn't us and that we don't have her. I asked him why they took Joaquin and he was confused. He said they don't have him but they do have information on who took him and where he's being kept.”

Throwing himself into the chair across the desk he pointed a finger at Carlos.

“I was sure if you had planned such an operation you would have let me know. So I denied all knowledge and kept denying until they sent me footage of Carmella and that Salvatore piece of shit dragging a woman and a small baby into one of *our* cars, with *our* men covering their backs. Did you give them permission to do this stupid thing? I thought we were going after Lucky Boudreaux, not some woman who's not even connected to the bikers.”

As his brother vented Carlos went over the things the woman, Harper Delaney, had told him. Unfortunately he had

believed the lies the brother and Carmella told him and therefore thought she was the one who was the liar. That was why he had given Pablo permission to make her talk.

Carmella was fired up to sell the baby at an auction she was already busy organising.

This was going to be a problem.

A big problem.

“You’re right. I did not give permission for the attack. Carmella overstepped and convinced the men I had given her the authority to snatch the woman and her child. When I questioned this Harper Delaney she said she was the woman of the head of the Irish mafia in South Africa, Asa Malone. I didn’t believe her because her brother said she was engaged to one of his associates. He claims she ran away from her responsibility to her family. He came here to retrieve her and take her back home. I gave Pablo permission to make her talk.”

Jorge shook his head and jumped up and started pacing.

“*Dios mio* (My God), what have you done? My son isn’t stable at the best of times and you gave this woman to him? What were you thinking?”

Carlos shrugged. “Carmella and the woman’s brother convinced me she was the whore of one of the bikers. They weren’t sure which one. Her brother insisted he was here to take her home to marry his associate. He claims the child is that of the associate. He gave us permission to hurt her a little to get answers and gave us the kid to sell.”

Jorge paced in front of his desk, his phone in his hand as he typed furiously. Carlos sat back, watching his brother's mind working. He knew he would come up with a way to smooth this over for them. This is why their business worked with the two of them, he was the power behind it and Jorge the brain.

“We have to stall. We can't let them know Pablo hurt her. They will retaliate and we will lose what little foothold we have gained here. We can't let it happen. How the fuck are we going to do this?” He muttered as he paced, waiting for a reply on the long message he had sent.

He was still pacing when Pablo walked in, there was fine blood splatters on his white shirt. His dark eyes glistened the way they always did when he had spent time in his special room.

“She is who she said she is. Harper Delaney. She's the woman of the head of the Irish. She has no idea where Joaquin is.” He said. “What do I do with her, do I kill her?”

Jorge whipped around to face his son.

“You do nothing. I've talked to the bikers and they want the woman and her child handed over unharmed.” Jorge snarled and waved his phone in the air. “You and Carmella are going to bring us down with the way you act without thinking. We needed the bikers to not suspect what we were planning. And what happened? Carmella and her thirst for blood and dick, that's what happened. She's a liability and she's proved it by snatching the woman and son of a mafia boss. A mafia boss with far reaching connections.”

He sighed and threw himself into the chair next to a silently watching Pablo.

Carlos knew he was watching him and Jorge, trying to figure them out. His nephew didn't understand how their power sharing worked. He sighed internally. Neither Pablo nor Carmella were prepared to share power. They both wanted to be in sole control of the business. Los Rojos will be ripped apart by their fighting if they ever took over from him and Jorge.

Meeting his brother's eyes he read the same realisation there. Contrary to what Pablo and Carmella thought he was the man at the head of the cartel, his word was law. No one else. He wasn't scared of Pablo and his rages and he knew what he was about to say would have one of those erupting. And this time Joaquin wasn't here to calm him down. Not that it mattered.

"Maniac, the leader of the bikers, has reached out to Jorge. They have information about Joaquin and won't give us anything until we hand over Harper Delaney. As your father said, they want her back unharmed." Carlos said, watching Pablo closely.

Pablo frowned then laughed and shrugged as if it what he had done to the woman didn't matter.

"Well, she's alive but she's a bit cut up at the moment."

Jorge's phone pinged several times and he ignored the two of them to read through the messages. Once done he closed his eyes, his lips drawn in a thin line.

Opening his eyes he looked at Carlos.

"We have shit, big shit. Asa Malone arrived earlier, on a private plane owned by Dominick Maingarde, and he headed

straight for the SWMC clubhouse. He is there now, with his men.”

Pablo snorted in derision and Jorge’s hand swung out, viciously backhanding his son in the face. Pablo jerked back, rage burning in his eyes but he did nothing, he just licked the tiny bit of blood from his split lip.

“You imbecile. If you paid attention to what I’m trying to teach you then you would understand how important it is that he arrived on a plane owned by Maingarde. The same Maingarde who destroyed the Harrison Organisation and their allies. Letting the Irish use his private plane means he’s allied to them, and if the Irish allies with the bikers, and they will, it means Dominick Maingarde’s eyes are going to turn to us, to Los Rojos. And if Maingarde takes an interest in our business then so will the Irish and the Russians. We can’t afford to have the Russians taking an interest in our business, not right now.”

Carlos sat quietly waiting. Jorge looked at him, shrugged and continued.

“We need to arrange a time and a place to exchange her and the boy for the information Pablo wants. Call in the doctor and let him see to our guest. Once she’s patched up and can walk without obvious pain we do the exchange in a public place.” He glared at Pablo. “In the meantime you keep Carmella, her brother and those bikers she brought with her away from the woman. Make sure nothing happens to the baby, if anything happens to him Malone is going to start a war that we will lose. We aren’t in territory we control, we’re in theirs, which means we’re weak. I will contact the damned bikers and set something up.” He looked at Carlos then at Pablo.

“The two of you need to prepare our defences and clear a way to the yacht. I want us away from here and out at sea where they can’t get to us.”

Pablo snorted. “Papa, if they don’t return Joaquin to me I’m going to kill the bitch. You tell them. You tell Asa Malone I am going to kill his whore and take his son. I don’t care who his allies are. I don’t care who comes for us. All I want is my son and if I don’t get him I will take his.” He shoved the chair back and stood. “You tell him.”

With that he turned and stormed out of the study.

Carlos looked at Jorge and they both sighed.

“We need new heirs who have a brain and aren’t crazy.”
Jorge said softly.

Carlos nodded.

“I know. When we get Joaquin back I will watch him closely, see if he has what it takes to be in our business.”

Jorge shook his head. “He’s lost to us already. His grandmother raised him to be a good boy, to hate everything we are. I’m not going to go against her, she’s too powerful. I pity whoever took Joaquin from her, that witch will burn them in a bonfire and laugh as they burn.”

Carlos smiled. “Well, that means we have to try again, brother. Maybe we’ll be lucky the next time around.”

Jorge laughed. “Maybe, but we’ll have to choose good women, not the bitches we’ve had before. And we’re not getting any younger.”

He snorted and his brother smiled.

“Let’s get this mess cleaned up, brother.” He said. “Then we’ll consider who will have the honour of carrying our new heirs.”

Jorge nodded, sighed, stood and walked out.

Carlos swiped his hands over his face, pushing his hair back. When had it become so damned difficult to keep his business running smoothly?

With everything that was going on he still had to deal with Carmella. He should have her taken care of. She was causing more and more trouble lately.

She was a liability. A liability that could cost them everything they had sacrificed and worked for. He couldn’t allow that to happen.

He had married her mother not because he wanted her but for what she had brought into the marriage, her father’s business in Colombia. Carlos and Jorge had taken over and eliminated those who dared to question the takeover. Maria had been unstable at the best of times and over the years she deteriorated until he had to have her committed to a sanatorium in Mexico.

Far from her father’s people who would have helped her escape.

She died there, a raving lunatic.

Maybe it was time for Carmella to disappear behind those walls as well.

Closing his eyes he made the call that would start the process. Once done he walked over to the small table containing a carafe of brandy and poured a small amount in

the bottom of a crystal glass. He sipped then tipped it up and swallowed the burning liquid. Setting the empty glass down with a sigh he returned to his chair.

He had done what he had to do.

Saved the business he had sacrificed so much for. A bitch wasn't going to ruin it.

He wouldn't allow it.

Pablo

How dare those old men think they could manipulate him?

He was the future of Los Rojos and it was time they showed him some respect, gave him some responsibility. He had plans, big plans. He needed Joaquin here, beside him. He was the only one who made the voices stop, who kept them from taking over.

“Pablo.”

He stopped walking and turned to the weak asshole who had stepped out into the corridor.

“What do you want?”

“I want to make a deal, with you. Your uncle and father aren't taking what I'm saying seriously. I know you're not like them. You will do what has to be done.” He tried to sound forceful but all Pablo heard was the whining of a weak privileged son.

“Speak.”

“I want Guiliana. I will help you rescue your son. Free him from the bikers. In return all I want is for you to kill the monstrous mistake my sister made. It has to die before I take her home. It can't be allowed to live. It is not a Salvatore but an abomination.”

How in the hell had no one noticed the bastard was fixated on his sister. The only reason he wanted the child to die was because it wasn't his.

But then, it wasn't any of Pablo's business.

His business was finding and rescuing his own son.

“How do you think the two of us are going to find and rescue him? The biker compound is almost impenetrable. They have cameras, patrols and alarms everywhere.” He was curious to see what his plan was.

The bastard smiled as if he had all the answers.

“We have a weapon on our side. Carmella can walk into the compound easily. She's done it before and can do it again. Once she's inside she plants the small incendiary devices I'll give her. It creates a distraction and we breach their perimeter and take Joaquin.”

Pablo wanted to laugh. It was fucking unbelievable. The bastard really thought they would get in with his crazy cousin as bait.

“Why would Carmella walk in there? She took the woman and child, they will lock her up and kill her.”

Salvatore gave a sly grin. “They won't because Boudreaux won't let them. She said she has him eating out of the palm of

her hand. She assured me he will do what she wants him to do.”

He shrugged and fussed with his suit, settling it around his shoulders.

“I made a deal with her. She asked for my support when the time comes to make her move to take over the cartel. I will be taking over from my father, and as the head of the Italian organisation I will have some serious clout.”

The asshole winked slyly. “You should think about doing the same, making a deal with me.”

Fucking hell. How stupid was this asshole? He wouldn't survive one second after his father's demise. And how stupid was his cousin? She wouldn't be taking over anything but a hole in the ground.

“I will think about it and get back to you.”

He started walking away when the asshole called out to him.

“Pablo, don't take too long. I'll be ready when you are.”

Shaking his head he kept walking.

He didn't have time for stupidity.

Or a dead man.

THIRTY FOUR

Lucky

Lucky was starting to lose it as the hours ticked by. His cousins hadn't called which meant they didn't have anything to report. And Byte hasn't found a trace of the vehicles or the fuckers who took his old lady. It was as if they had disappeared between one traffic cam and the next. According to the brother that was just not possible. He swore he would find them.

He was going over every single bit of footage they had to find how the bastards had pulled off their disappearing trick.

While he sat in his office waiting, waiting, waiting.

His concentration was shit so working was out of the question. If only he had something to do. Something that would take the feeling of helplessness away.

The thought had him sitting up because there was something he could do.

The bitches Carmella had introduced as her friends the first time she approached him.

They had been tracked down and was presently in their cells. He had no idea if they had been questioned or not.

He didn't care if it had been done. He would do it again.

They might have the answer to where the slut had taken Harper.

“The bitches in the cells might know where Carmella took Harper.” He said quietly and Dive instantly looked up, giving him his attention.

“You know prez ordered us to stay away, bro, and we can’t go against him, not with this shit.”

Lucky opened his mouth to argue but Dive shook his head so he stayed silent, waiting to hear what he had to say.

“What we need is his permission to ask them a couple of questions. I agree with you, they might know where the bitch took your old lady.”

He pushed up out of his chair. “Let’s go. The sooner we ask the sooner we get some answers.”

Following his brother to their presidents’ office he hoped like hell he would agree to their request.

Asa Malone was in the office with Maniac and he looked very interested when Dive explained their thinking to their prez.

“If I may,” Asa smiled, it was the smile of a predator “let me question them. They don’t know me and we can continue with the ruse that Harper is mine. I suspect if they hear that she’s Lucky’s old lady we won’t get a single word out of them. Women like them, they’re always looking for a way to survive, looking out for themselves, and they will give me what I want.”

Maniac nodded. “Good idea. When you ask your questions let them know we are aware of who they work for. Lucky and Dive will go in with you but they will stay silent, even when spoken to directly they don’t answer. I want the bitches to

realise they're staring at a dead end where their lives are concerned."

Lucky's voice vibrated with anger. "Prez, I don't know if I can stay silent if they refuse to give us a location."

"I can understand that, brother, but let's keep cool heads here. Let's play them at their own game. Take Asa to the cells and let's see what he can get out of the bitches." Maniac said.

None of them spoke as they escorted Asa down to the cells.

Their prisoners had been locked in adjoining cells. They were sitting on their beds glaring at them through the bars when he opened the dungeon door. Stepping to the side he let Asa walk in first.

The man walked in as if entering a boardroom, after a brief glance at the bitches he sat down at the table set outside the cells. He started speaking, not looking at either of them, not at first.

"I can see you don't know who I am, so let me introduce myself. I am Asa Malone, head of the Irish mafia. I'm sure you know people like me usually don't deal with people like you. I have men who do it for me. But not this time. This time I'm taking care of it personally because it is a personal matter. I know you are Lucia Fuentes and Maria Cruz and that you work for Los Rojos as whores. Your boss, Carmella Mendez, along with Antonio Salvatore, kidnapped my woman and my son. I want them back, unharmed." His voice was emotionless, his words sounded sharp and clipped.

When Malone revealed that he knew who they were their heads swivelled towards where he and Dive were standing.

Lucky ignored them, not meeting their eyes.

The one called Lucia recovered quickly, her eyes blanking as she got up from the bed, sauntered over to the bars of her cell and stared at Asa.

“You’re not from here. What do you want from us?”

Malone sat back, his face not showing a single emotion as he crossed his arms over his chest.

“Let her out.” He ordered.

Dive unlocked the cell and she slinked over to the table, sat down and crossed her legs, showing of a lot of leg and crotch. Fucking nasty.

Malone ignored the display.

“You’re right, I’m not from here which means I don’t give a shit who I cross or kill. I want you to give me locations of where they might have taken my woman and son.”

The bitch smirked, shook her head then mimicked him by crossing her arms over her chest, making her tits bulge up out of the top of her low cut dress. If she expected Malone to react she was wrong. His cold dead eyes stared at her face, not at all interested in her tits.

It was right then that Lucky knew why being in this room with Malone as he questioned the bitches was important.

Gloria, no, Carmella, had trained these two and somehow he could read them. It was like having the original bitch in front of him. Both bitches were nervous, maybe even scared and the one at the table more so than the one in the cell.

“Why should I help you? What will you do for me if I help you find her?” The slut was quick to press for an advantage.

Asa Malone shrugged one shoulder.

“You help me find Harper and my son and I will ensure you get out of here alive.”

She thought about it for about two seconds before she gave a sharp nod.

“We’ll help you, but only if Lucky is the one who takes us where we need to go.”

Her eyes came to him and he looked away, stared at the wall at Malone’s back. He was so angry he wanted to fucking explode.

A cold predatory smile flashed but almost instantly disappeared from Malone’s face.

“I don’t think you understand, Lucia. When I said we know *who* you are, that’s exactly what I mean. We know you work on your backs for Carmella Mendez. We know she pointed you at the club to fuck and drug the men to get information from them. Did you not wonder why no one fucked you? Did you not wonder why no one touched the drinks you made them? Did you not wonder why no one talked?” Malone asked.

The one still in the cell threw out a comment with a smirk.

“Oh, you’re wrong. One of them did fuck me and I got a lot of information from him.” She shook her hair back with a cocky smirk.

Malone's cold eyes pinned her in place and the smirk disappeared.

“We know. The prospect, Flag, who betrayed the club, fucked you. He's on camera taking you to one of the rooms.”

He sat forward, ignoring the bitch across the table from him, focusing on the one in the cell.

“Believe me, we know what he did and he will pay for it. Your part wasn't clear but now we know you're the one who arranged for Carmella and Salvatore to talk to him. It means you're guilty by association.”

His eyes went arctic as he glared at her.

“Hear me and understand what I'm telling you. Anything they do to my woman and my son will be done to you. The difference is though, it will be done times three. Do you know what that means? It means your torture will be three times worse than what they suffered, and believe me, I will keep you alive throughout. You will know pain and suffering that you can't even imagine. The only thing that might persuade me to be merciful is if you tell me what I want to know.”

Both bitches were frozen in fear. The fear was something they could work with.

“That's impossible. How? How do you know about us?” Lucia whispered.

Malone shrugged negligently. “Not impossible at all. Not for someone like me. My organisation has a worldwide reach, your people should have remembered that before taking what belongs to me.”

Lucky watched them from the corners of his eyes, not looking at either of them directly in case he lost his temper.

“So, what is it going to be? Are you going to help me or not?”

The bitch glanced over her shoulder at the one in the cell. They looked at each other wordlessly for several seconds before she nodded, huffed out a breath and shook her hair back with an angry flip.

“Fine, we’ll tell you what we know but we want assurances. We’ll cooperate if you help us to get away, help us to disappear.”

Beside him Dive gave a soft pissed off growl and Lucky silently agreed with his sentiment. He felt the same but didn’t show it outwardly.

“Hmmm. Let me get this straight. You want us to help you disappear, even though you’re deeply involved in the kidnapping of my family.” Malone watched her with his head tilted slightly to the side.

It gave the impression he was confused by her request. Lucky knew he wasn’t, he was playing her at her own game.

She sighed and her shoulders dropped in a show of resignation.

“You don’t understand, they’ll kill us if we talk. Carmella does not forgive and Pablo, well, he likes playing with knives with those who cross them.”

She paused, licking her lips nervously.

“Help us and we’ll help you.”

Asa stared at her then slowly nodded. “You give me credible information and I will see to it that you leave here alive and disappear.”

The bitches didn’t take note that he said they would leave alive only to disappear.

It was the one in the cell, Maria, who gave them the information.

“The only person Pablo gives a damn about is his son, Joaquin. And he’s missing. Carmella told him the bikers kidnapped him. What he doesn’t know is that she’s the one who took him. I know where she’s keeping him. I can give you Joaquin. You can use him to get your woman and child back.” She stopped talking and waited for their reactions.

The bitch at the table snapped angrily. “Tell him everything, Maria.”

Maria didn’t look like she wanted to talk but in the end she did.

“I’ll draw you a map of where he’s being held. I swear he’s the leverage you need to make Pablo do what you want. He’s a monster but he loves his son. Carmella hates the kid because he despises her and shows no fear. But the biggest reason is that Carlos is going to train him to be his heir. She hates her father for choosing the boy over her.”

Maria glanced at Lucky then back at Asa.

“Do we have a deal? I give you Joaquin’s location and where we think they took your woman and child and you help us to get away.”

Lucky was pissed as hell and had to get out of there. They could have had this information sooner, but the bitches kept it to themselves, only using it now as a bargaining tool.

Bargaining for their lives with the lives of two innocents.

Turning he opened the door and left. He stormed down the passage, his destination his president's office.

He couldn't see them taking Pablo Mendez's son, it's not something the club was into. What they could do was free him and send him home.

Where ever fucking home was.

All he was interested in was the location where Harper and Ry was being held and the bitches didn't really know, they had some ideas but not a positive location.

They've been the bastards' hands for too long and he felt in his gut they wouldn't hesitate to hurt Harper.

They could use Pablo's son as a bargaining chip but it felt wrong. The boy has been through enough with his fucked up aunt. Not to mention the family he had the misfortune to be born into. He felt sorry for the kid.

As he knocked on Maniac's door he realised he'd made his decision. He wouldn't agree to the deal. He would trust his cousins like they had asked him to do.

He would wait, even though it was killing him to do so.

He sat across from his Prez and VP explaining the demands the bitches made. Both shook their heads.

"Not fuckin' happenin', brother. They're vipers, we don't know if what they're givin' Asa is the truth. I suspect it might

be a trap. We bring the boy in and we're guilty of taking Pablo's son. Our rules are clear, we do not touch families, ever. What we can do is get the information and pass it on to Carlos Mendez in exchange for Harper and Ry. What he does with the information is up to him. The only thing we want is your family." Maniac explained calmly.

"I agree, we don't touch the boy. We'll put our faith in your cousins. They are the best at what they do and I'm confident we'll be hearing from them soon." Grave said.

Lucky nodded in agreement.

"And of course, it goes without sayin', after we get what we want the bitches will be put outside the gates. What happens to them isn't our concern." Maniac shrugged.

Pushing his hands against his tired eyes he rubbed with the palms of his hands before dropping them to the arms of the chair. Rolling his head to loosen the tense muscles in his neck he breathed out in a harsh grunt.

"I fuckin' hate this. I should have brought them in to keep them safe. I failed her and my son. Every second they're missin' my head makes up scenarios of what's happenin' to them. I can't fuckin' breathe thinkin' those fuckers might be hurtin' Harper. She's suffered so much already it's unfair that she has to suffer through this as well."

A hand clamped down on his shoulder and he turned to see Rider standing beside him.

"We're going to get her back, brother. You need to believe in our girl. Harper is strong, she survived the hell of her youth, and she'll survive this. I believe it with all my heart." He

tightened his hand. “We’ll be ready when the call comes, and it will come. Patience, that’s all we’ve got to have, patience. We’ll get them back.”

It was like Rider’s words were prophetic because of what happened next.

Byte stormed in and slammed his laptop down on the desk. He looked wild but at the same time excited.

“I’ve got them, Prez, took me a bit to unravel but I know how they did it. The bastards had covered trucks waitin’ on them in the parkin’ lot of a derelict shoppin’ centre. They loaded the vehicles and when they drove out the trucks split up, drivin’ in different directions. Two trucks went to the same place, a large estate on the outskirts of the city. I checked the ownership, it’s part of a deceased estate that’s being contested. Apparently it was the home of an organised crime figure but I’ve yet to confirm. Don’t know how legal it is, but the lawyers are rentin’ it out to a company from Texas, Global Incorporated. I checked them out and it’s a front, a shell company. I haven’t dug any deeper into the company because I think it’s them. I think we’ve got them.”

Byte tapped the keys and a map appeared on the screen against the wall, a red dot indicating the location.

Suddenly Lucky’s phone buzzed, and he snatched it from his pocket. It was Bas calling.

It was fucking amazing, it was as if the universe was on their side and making sure everything was coming together at the same time.

“Bas, tell me you found them.”

“*Mais yeah* (But yes), cousin, we found your family. We tracked them to the LaGrange Estate. The bastards are holed up here. There’s a lot of movement goin’ on, looks like they might be packin’ up and gettin’ ready to run. A lot of boxes are bein’ loaded into trucks. Get your ass over here, *mon cousin*. We’ll keep watchin’ and keep you updated.”

He was looking at his president as the call ended.

“They found them. They’re bein’ held at the LaGrange Estate. Is that the one you’ve got, Byte?”

“Yeah, that’s the one. I have the floor plans for the house and the layout for the rest of the property. I’ve looked it over and it’s a massive place with an equally massive basement. According to the floorplan it’s a basement storage area and has a roller shutter door to the outside. The floor above the basement is the kitchens and so on. It uses half of the floor space, the other half consists of about eight rooms of various sizes. There’s a door leading down to the basement located in that area. I suspect the rooms are where they are holding them. The floor above the kitchens are the living spaces.”

He tapped his laptop and the floor plan of the house popped up. It was massive, just like he said.

He pointed at a point on the map.

“This is the roller shutter door to the storage area in the basement. It’s sunken below ground level and has a ramp leading down to it. A small truck will be able to drive right in there.” He tapped another spot inside the storage area. “This door gives you access to the rest of the basement and it’s our access point. As you can see the storage area takes up the major part of the basement but there’s another part that’s not

storage. According to the floor plan there's a big room back there but I don't believe it. Old man LaGrange was into bad shit, I suspect he had cells and a dungeon back there."

Just the thought of a dungeon had his gut on fire.

"Send out the call, Byte, church in twenty minutes." Maniac ordered then looked at Lucky. "We're goin' to bring them home, brother, just a little longer and they will be home safe."

Lucky nodded, he badly wanted to believe it.

Believe that his woman and baby boy were safe.

But, his gut feel said differently.

Something bad was coming.

THIRTY FIVE

Harper

I woke on the cold steel table, shivering violently, making the chains rattle in sync with the shudders running through my body. I tried to control it but it was impossible. My shoulders and arms ached from being unnaturally stretched above my head

But that wasn't the worst of it.

Pain had a vice like hold on my lower body and fear shot through me. What happened while I was out? I forced my eyes open, moving my head painfully to try and see what was wrong. Lifting my head slightly I squinted down a gap where the space blanket didn't meet my body. The bandages on my chest and right side were seeping blood, too much blood. I couldn't see the left side as the blanket was in the way.

The blood wasn't good, not good at all. Dropping my head back on the table I stared up at the ceiling and moaned softly. Hearing the door open I tensed and closed my eyes tightly. I prayed it wasn't Pablo coming back to carry on hurting me.

"I'm going to take the cuffs off." A voice suddenly whispered in my ear.

My eyes snapped open and I rolled my head towards the voice. It was the guard with the soft brown eyes. I tried to nod, licked my dry lips and braced because I knew it was going to hurt.

The chains rattled as he gently lifted my arm, unlocking the cuffs he let them fall to the floor with a loud clang. It sounded overly loud in the silent room. He tried to be gentle as he moved my arm down to my side. I moaned through clenched teeth as my numb arm was engulfed in fiery pain. He vigorously rubbed up and down to help with circulation and the pain became manageable. Moving to the other arm he did the same, unlocking, moving my arm and rubbing it. Both arms ached but at least they were no longer tied down.

Why was he being so nice?

“I’m going to have to redo some of the bandages. There’s too much blood.” He muttered as he moved the space blanket and checked the bandages.

Unlocking the cuffs around my ankles he gently moved my legs together then came back to the head of the table. Leaning over me he dropped his head next to mine and spoke in a whisper.

“I’m goin’ to get you out of here, sweetheart. I just need you to hold on for a little while longer, okay?”

I was confused. Why would he help me and where did his accent disappear to?

“Who..?” He put a hand over my mouth and shook his head, not letting me speak as he looked towards the door.

Straightening he spoke to someone I couldn’t see. “You get clothes?”

The accent was back again.

“Yes.” The other guard walked over and threw a bundle at him. “Pablo’s busy, he’ll come down later.”

This one's English was perfect, no accent.

My guard said nothing, put the clothes on my legs then walked over to the table where the instruments used to be. There was nothing there now. Picking up the first aid bag he came back to the table.

“What are you doing?” The other one snapped.

“Blood, too much, fixing.” My guard muttered as he went to work.

The other snorted as if he was wasting his time.

He not only fixed my bandages he cleaned off the table under me as well.

Once my guard, that's what I called him in my head, was done he gently helped me to sit up, turning me so my legs were hanging off the side. Slipping the sweat pants over my feet he pulled them up until he couldn't go any further. Tapping my leg he made a 'lift up' motion with his hand. Pressing my hands to the table I hissed as I painfully raised my bum, allowing him to slip the pants under me and pull them up. Gently, very gently, he settled waistband around my hips, trying not to hurt me.

Next came the sweat shirt.

I was so grateful to be covered I gave a small sigh of relief.

Not only was I covered but for the first time since I was brought down here I was warm. He slipped thick socks onto my feet, they were too big but I didn't care, they warmed my icy feet.

The other guard had left while he was dressing me. My guard didn't like it because he kept glancing over at the half open door then down at his watch. He was about to help me off the table when the sound of high heels echoed through the door.

“Fucking hell.” He swore pushing me to lie down on the table and put a finger against his lips.

The door was shoved open and Carmella strode in, the two horrible bikers following her. They threw dirty looks at the guard but then ignored him to leer down at me.

“Pablo sent me to get her ready for transport. He wants to see you.” Carmella snapped at the guard.

My guard tilted his head to the side and said something in rapid Spanish.

She frowned, shook her head and pointed to the door. It was obvious she was ordering him to get out. His eyes said he didn't like it, didn't like it at all.

Reluctantly he left, disappearing into the dark outside the door.

Carmella didn't even wait for his footsteps to fade. She came to the table glaring down at me.

“How do you like your new place in life, ink slut?” She hissed nastily.

The bitch was delusional.

“You should let me go. My man will be coming for me.”

I jerked when a hard hand grabbed my boob and squeezed it painfully.

“No one’s comin’ for you, bitch. You belong to us now, to the Grave Robbers. We’re goin’ to show you how we treat club sluts in our club. Nothin’ like the sissy club you’re whorin’ for.” The ugly bastard snarled in my face, his vile breath gusting over my face.

“I’m not a club whore. I work at the tattoo shop and my man will come for me. He was already on his way here when you took me.” I hissed at him.

It earned me a punch in the boob. I moaned in pain. They laughed, like my pain was funny.

“Who is this man of yours? One of those Wraith pussies?” The other ugly bastard asked.

“No, my man is Asa Malone. The boss of the Irish mafia and he’s coming for all of you. You’re going to be sorry you touched me.” I snarled at them.

The ugly one laughed and started yanking my pants down my legs. “While we wait we’re gonna have us some fun. I tol’ you I was gonna break your cunt wide open. I’m ‘bout ready to get started.”

They laughed as I screamed and tried to kick, to no avail. There were two of them and I was already weak from blood loss and pain. Carmella laughed, egging them on as if it was a bloody sporting event.

They had my pants and panties off when the door was flung open, clanging against the wall. I heard two loud bangs and then both of the ugly bastards collapsed with holes in their heads. Red stuff spraying all over the place.

“What have you done?” Carmella screamed. “They’re our allies, I gave her to them. We needed them and you’ve ruined my plans. I’ve had enough of this bitch.”

It happened so quickly I don’t think my guard could have stopped her even if he tried.

She suddenly had a knife in her hand and stabbed me, twice. She was about to stab me again when he lunged at her but somehow she wriggled out of his grip, slipped past him and ran, slamming the door behind her.

Swearing viciously he let her go, coming to me instead.

“Fuck, I fucked up. Sweetheart, I’m gonna do what I can to stop the bleedin’ then I’ll get you out of here.”

I hissed in pain as he pushed a wadded up towel against yet more knife wounds in my body. Grabbing my hand he pressed it over the towel, putting pressure on the wound. Digging in the first aid bag he came back with a handful of wound dressings and a roll of tape. He replaced the towel with more than one dressing, then taped them down. Once satisfied that it was holding he grabbed my panties and the sweatpants from the floor and helped me into them.

“Right, now to get us out of here.” He muttered to himself, his voice tight with tension.

Leaving me sitting on the table he went to the door, slowly opened it and had a quick look up and down the corridor then came back to me.

“Somethin’s goin’ on out there. No idea what but I’m gonna use it to cover our escape. I’m sorry, it’s goin’ to hurt because

I can't carry and protect you at the same time. You're gonna have to walk, babe. Okay?"

Biting my lip I nodded as he helped me off the table.

Pain shot through me. So much pain. I bit down on my lip and tasted blood as I shuffled the few steps towards the door. I was getting blood and things I didn't want to think about on my socks but it couldn't be helped.

"Okay, here's the plan. I'm goin' into the corridor to clear us a path. We're not goin' upstairs, we'll never get out that way. I'm takin' you out through the basement storage to the garage. I'll jack one of the cars and take you to the hospital."

Nodding like puppet I shuffled closer to the door. I was feeling lightheaded and weak.

"Who...who are...you?" I had to know who my rescuer was.

"I'm DEA, babe, workin' with the FBI. Been undercover with this fucked up lot for too fuckin' long." He growled.

DEA and FBI, like Remy used to be. Maybe he knew him.

"You know...Remy Boudreaux?"

His head snapped towards me, a frown between his brows.

"Yeah, why?"

I managed a smile through the pain. "He's...he's married to my...my friend, Pixie."

Shock chased the frown from his face.

"Fuckin' hell. I thought you looked familiar."

He swore softly after he took another peek out the door.

I looked familiar? Where had he seen me before?

“Uhm...what’s your...name?” I couldn’t keep calling him my guard like I have been doing. And maybe if I heard his name I would know where he had seen me.

“Cole, babe, Cole Conrad. I worked the case with Remy in South Africa, that’s how I know him and where I saw you. You were blonde at the time and I definitely noticed you.” He gave me a wink and tiny smile.

“Then...I’m really...safe.” I whispered.

I winced in pain every time I moved.

His smile disappeared and he was instantly beside me, his arm going around my waist.

“I’ll get you out, babe, I swear I will.” He muttered as he half carried me into the corridor.

And that’s when she struck.

She came out of the dark screaming like a vengeful demon. The knife raised high.

Before Cole could block her she stabbed him high in the chest and he grunted in pain. I felt him shudder as the knife sunk into his body. She came at him again and still he shielded me from her, not allowing her to get near me.

A clanging crash sounded from further down the corridor distracting her as light flooded the semi-dark.

Men streamed into the corridor through an open door and I saw him.

Saw Lucky.

Saw him push to the front of the group, the gun in his hand pointing our way.

Carmella looked at them then back at us, screamed with rage and with the knife raised high came at me, at us, again.

She never reached us.

A barrage of shots went off and her body jerked as she was hit. Cole had me up against the wall, his body covering mine. I watched from beneath his arm as she crumpled to the ground, the knife still clutched in her hand, her mouth open, her teeth bared in a snarl. A crazy inhuman growl came from her throat, blood dripping from her mouth as she slowly started crawling towards us.

Cole hissed furiously, pointed his gun at her and fired, a round hole appeared in her forehead, and she jerked back and finally lay still.

“Drop it!” Lucky shouted as he rushed towards us.

Cole instantly dropped his weapon and painfully raised his hand to show he was unarmed.

He raised only one hand because his other arm was around my waist.

It was all that was holding me up.

“Baby, I got you.” I heard Lucky say.

That was the last I heard.

THIRTY SIX

Lucky

Hours earlier

He wanted to get out of the clubhouse and find his woman and child but he knew he couldn't leave without his brothers. Even with his cousins waiting on him they needed the numbers to take the fuckers down. They were good fighters but there weren't enough of them and he wouldn't jeopardise Harper and Ryder's lives by going in half cocked.

He sat at the table in their chapel and explained his part of the extraction plan.

The routes.

He had it meticulously worked out, several routes that would guide them away from cameras. It wasn't possible to avoid all of them but Byte would be taking care of those. They were going out in small groups to not draw the attention of the law. A large group of bikers and cages filled with dangerous looking men, all of them heading out of the city, would definitely have the pigs scrambling to follow.

And then, finally, it was done. They were ready.

Maniac didn't stay sitting in his chair, he stood.

“We ride out as if this is just another day. Stay on the route Lucky planned for your group. We'll meet down the road from the estate as planned and walk in from there. Don't shoot the fuckin' Cajuns, they'll be leadin' us in. Stay sharp and if you

see anythin' suspicious let everyone know. Ride safe, brothers, let's go get our brother's old lady and boy and bring them home."

The men roared and raised fists in the air. Lucky didn't, all he wanted was to get on the road.

Not long after he was riding out the front gate in a group that included Rider, Ren and Dive. He had chosen Bates to ride with them as well. He wanted the brother close in case his old lady or son needed him. There was no doubt in his mind he would find her before the others did. Lure, Bollywood, Mamba and Bones were riding in his group as well.

They rode in a group of eight, two by two, riding easy as if it was just another late afternoon ride with their brothers. Something the pigs was used to and saw every day.

What the bastards didn't know was that their saddlebags were loaded down with guns and ammunition.

There were even a couple of grenades in there.

If by some chance they were pulled over they would be going inside for a very long time.

They were connected via Bluetooth to Byte and the two brothers helping him. They gave the groups updates as they rode. Letting them know if they spotted the law along their routes.

Lucky's route was without hold ups and they arrived at the meeting point in good time. They weren't the first there, Breaker's group was already there, waiting for them.

One after the other the groups pulled in, and finally, when he felt he couldn't stand to wait a second longer it was time to

move in and find his family.

He was about to move into the thick brush when Bas suddenly popped up next to him, making him jerk back in surprise.

“Fuck, Bas. Where the fuck did you come from?” He snapped at his cousin.

Bas grinned and shook his head as if Lucky was a lost cause.

“Been watchin’ you lot make more noise than my niece when I take her fishin’. None of you even noticed me standin’ right here.” He teased.

“That’s because you’re like a fuckin’ ghost.” Lucky grumbled.

His cousin gave a shrug then urged him forward.

“We gotta go, shit’s goin’ down and we don’t have a good feelin’ about it. I saw the fuckin’ Grave Robbers walkin’ around over there. We need to move, cousin, like right now.”

Lucky didn’t hesitate.

“Lead the way, we’ll follow.”

Bas glared at the group of brothers.

“Don’t talk and try not to make too much fuckin’ noise.” He griped before turning and disappearing into the head high brush.

They followed in single file, stepping where he stepped and keeping as quiet as possible. When his cousin stopped Lucky stepped up next to him.

They were at the perimeter fence.

“About an hour ago shit started happenin’. Their patrols are down to four men and they’re patrollin’ closer to the house. They have most of their men takin’ shit from the storage below the house and packin’ it into those trucks.”

He pointed to where six big trucks stood backed up to the side of the house.

Bas smirked. “Them bein’ parked there gives us excellent cover. They’re so focused on loadin’ their shit they’re not payin’ attention to the perimeter. The two patrollin’ this side of the mansion come past every fifteen minutes, more than enough time to get to the trucks, wait out the minutes and silence them.”

Lucky nodded. “We’ll follow you. Take us in.”

Without hesitation Bas took them through the hole cut in the fence. From there he led them from tree to tree, shrub to shrub, and across the overgrown lawn to the trucks. They hid and silently waited.

Bas tapped his arm as the guards walked past the truck. It happened silently, their knives making quick work of the bastards. Hardly making any noise they rolled them out of sight under the front of two of the trucks.

The next step wasn’t going to be as easy.

Judging by the voices coming from inside the building there were several men in there.

They froze where they were crouching when a voice called out from way too close.

“This one is full, Boss!”

“Then close the fuckin’ thing up, lock it and move to the next in line!” A pissed off voice shouted.

The doors at the back of the truck clanged shut and they heard the snick of locks engaging. Taking a peek around the side and into the building Lucky grinned. There were hardly any lights on outside the doorway. The interior, however, was brightly lit where several men were steadily packing square plastic wrapped packages into boxes. Others were wrapping and packing guns and ammunition. This had to have been their distribution centre, or rather it was where they had planned to distribute from.

“Fuckin’ hell, I don’t fuckin’ believe this.”

Bas swore softly and pointed at the far wall.

Whatever he was looking at was shrouded in shadow. Peering into the dark he tried to make sense out of what the hell he was seeing.

Cages, a row of cages, and most of them were filled. Filled with young women, girls and boys.

Lucky slowly pulled back, swallowing down the angry growl before it escaped.

“That there is a problem, it’s goin’ to make getting’ in and out difficult.” He gritted out.

“I counted eighteen of the fuckers.” Bas snarled.

“Same.” Lucky agreed.

Ren was suddenly next to them.

“We take out the four packin’ the trucks first. We do it silent. It cuts the number down to fourteen. We’re all excellent

marksmen and Rider and Bollywood are as well. Two a piece should be easy to do. The moment shootin' starts the game is up so we gotta move fast. Denim and Bates will watch our backs while we take out the trash. We leave the captives where they are until we've got the place secured. They will be safe enough for now."

He looked at Lucky and gave him a slight chin lift.

"Let's do this, brother."

His SAA's eyes glinted with crazy glee as he gestured for the others to join them. He was right. They were some of the best marksmen at the club while Bas was a trained sniper. The bastards didn't stand a chance.

As long as they surprised them.

And they did.

They silently took out the four packing the trucks then crept closer to those inside the building.

It was over before the fuckers even knew what hit them.

Only one of them was fast enough to reach his weapon but Bas eliminated him before he got a single shot off. They quickly checked the bodies, making sure none of them were alive and able to shoot them in the back. It was cold blooded but they were at war. And war was an ugly brutal affair.

Whimpers and soft calls came from the cages, and Ren walked over, holding a finger to his lips, silently telling them to be quiet. They instantly quieted down, watching with fear filled eyes.

Going deeper into the building and towards the far corner where he saw a light over a steel door he silently pointed it out. None of them spoke as they used the stacked boxes for cover while making their way over. There was a camera over the door, pointed not into the building but down. A keypad with thumbprint access was set into the wall next to the door.

“We need the main fucker’s thumb.” Lure whispered, turned and ran back in a crouch.

He wasn’t gone long when he returned with a dripping thumb. “Let’s see if this opens it. Someone take care of the camera.”

Bas took care of it and Lure walked up and pressed the gruesome digit to the keypad. There was a soft click as the door unlocked.

They had no idea what awaited them on the other side. There could be men waiting for them.

Or it could be an empty room.

Lucky wanted to be first through the door but his cousin shook his head and stepped in front of him.

Quietly opening the door a tiny crack, he listened intently.

It was quiet at first.

They froze when they heard it, the enraged screams of a woman.

Even though her voice was distorted by rage he knew who it was.

Carmella Mendez.

On his nod Bas shoved the door open.

Lucky walked into his worst nightmare.

Harper was covered in blood and being held up by a man equally covered in blood, the gun in his hand pointed at the screaming bitch.

It happened as if in slow motion.

Carmella screamed like a deranged freak and charged, a blood covered long bladed knife clenched in her fist and raised high over her head.

Without thinking twice he fired, and in that split second of a moment he saw the man holding Harper move in front of her, shielding her with his body. Carmella went down but she wasn't dead. He was about to fire again when the man holding his woman turned, glared at the bitch crawling towards them, still screaming, and without flinching shot her right between the eyes.

There was a shocked silence for maybe a second and then everyone was shouting at him to lower his weapon.

He immediately dropped it.

Lucky ran, not giving a shit about his brothers or cousin. He had to get to his old lady. She looked ready to pass out.

He took her from the swaying man.

“Baby, I got you.” He said.

“Ry...they've...got....my...baby. Find my...baby.”

She crumpled in his arms, almost taking both of them to the floor.

Rider ran to him, his eyes filled with demons as he supported Lucky, then gently helped to lift her into his arms.

The unknown man leaning heavily against the wall spoke with pain filling his voice.

“You’ve got to get her to a hospital, fast. The dead slut stabbed her and she has several cuts on her hips, abdomen and chest.”

“Who the fuck are you?” Bas snapped, his gun pointed at the guy’s head.

“Cole Conrad, undercover, DEA and workin’ with the FBI taskforce. Stop with the fuckin’ questions. You gotta go.” He bit through clenched teeth. “An’ I need to find her baby.”

“You’re not goin’ anywhere except the hospital. We’ll take it from here.” Bas snapped. “My team and I will go lookin’ for him.”

Lucky didn’t know what to do. Take his woman to the hospital or stay and find his son.

Rider decided for him.

“She’s fading, brother. If we want to save her you’ve got to go. Right now. I will stay here with Bas and your cousins. We will find your boy and bring him home.”

With Dive beside him he started moving towards the door, fast.

Then it suddenly hit him, where he had heard the wounded man’s name before. Turning his head slightly he shouted over his shoulder.

“He’s on Remy’s team, he’s cool, get him to the hospital.”

He was grateful when Bates joined them, looked at Harper then ran in front of them, clearing the way.

His mind was in mad whirl, all he could think about was the woman in his arms, and his missing son. She was so still if not for the fact that he could see her chest moving he would have thought she wasn't breathing.

He had to trust that Rider, the brothers and his cousins would find his son while he ensured his boy's mother stayed alive. So had to stay alive to be there for him when they found him and brought him home.

Bursting through the door into the storage area he ignored everyone and followed Bates out to one of the cages that had been driven into the estate.

“Get those seats folded down!” Bates shouted as he ran and several brothers ran to obey.

Lucky got to the SUV, Bates was already crouched inside, waiting for them, his massive first aid bag open next to him.

Brothers came from all sides to help him and Dive gently load her into the back. Jumping in he went to his knees next to Harper, Dive knelt next to him. The doors closed and they took off, fast.

Lucky gave an anguished growl as Bates lifted her sweat shirt and they finally got to see the extent of her injuries. There was blood all over her abdomen and more on her chest.

He wanted to howl with rage but he bit it back, he knew she needed him to be strong now.

“She's breathing, she's still breathing.” He whispered to himself.

“Your ol' lady is alive, brother. She's going to make it.” Dive said quietly. “Believe it.”

Lucky nodded, moved back and gave Bates space to work.

He held her hand in both of his while the cage rocked and swayed as it raced to the hospital.

He wasn't a praying man but it seemed to be the time to start.

Praying silently he watched as Bates worked on his old lady.

He prayed for her but at the same time he prayed for his son.

Prayed that Rider would find him alive and bring him home.

THIRTY SEVEN

Lucky

Hospital

He hadn't realised the cage carrying Cole had followed them to the hospital. Only saw it when they came to a stop at the front door of the trauma centre. Two teams stood waiting on them. One team rushed to them as soon as they stopped and had the doors open. Bates was talking fast giving them an update on Harper's condition. It was only when he listened to him that he realised how serious her stab wounds were. She had been stabbed twice in the abdomen.

Lucky didn't like the looks on the faces of the waiting doctor and nurses. Not at all. Thankfully they didn't hesitate and quickly had his woman transferred to the gurney. They rushed her through the doors. He ran with them, keeping a hand on Harper's foot, holding on. Dive right by his side.

He was never letting her go again.

"Sir, you can't come with us past this point." A nurse said gently as she put her hand over his. "We'll take good care of her."

Reluctantly he let go and stepped back.

He was surrounded by his brothers when a nurse hesitantly stepped up with a clipboard and held it out to him.

"We need her particulars, if you could please fill in the forms for us." She said as he took it from her.

He stood there, the damned thing held in his bloody hands and stared down at papers that now had his woman's blood on them, the words all running together. A hand reached out and took it out of his slack hands.

"I've got this, I'll fill them in." Asa Malone said then turned to the hovering nurse. "Is there a place where we can wait? There are quite a few of us and more will be coming."

Her eyes widened and she quickly gave them directions.

Harper was already out of the trauma centre and on her way into surgery. Lucky with Dive and Bates sticking close blindly followed Ren to the elevator. They rode up to the surgical floor and went to the waiting room outside the theatres. Asa and one of his men stayed at reception, filling in the forms the hospital required.

The waiting room slowly filled up with his brothers, all coming to show their support.

He felt it, felt the rage surging in the room and looked up. Rider stood in the door with Bollywood, Bones and Mamba. They looked wild and pissed off.

Rider's tee and jeans was covered in blood. The brother was as white as a fucking sheet, his teeth clenched tightly. He looked at Lucky, his eyes burning as he slowly shook his head from side to side.

What did it mean?

Didn't they find his boy?

Or did they find him and he didn't...

He stood. "Tell me."

Rider came to him, he could almost feel the silence in the room as he waited.

“We found where they held him but before we could get to him we were attacked. We fought and almost had him when Pablo Mendez used his men as cover to run out with him. Couldn’t shoot the bastard because he was holding Ry.” He shook his head. “I’m sorry, brother, sorry I couldn’t bring him home. He was unhurt and the fucker took care to handle him gently. I know it doesn’t make it better but at least we know he’s not hurting him.”

Rage and despair battled to take him under, but he couldn’t let it. He had to be strong for his old lady because when she came out of surgery and woke up he would have to tell her. Tell her that Pablo Mendez has their son.

Fuck.

“Bas and your cousins are on their trail. He said to tell you to look after your old lady while they find your son.” Rider said quietly.

If the fucker harmed his son the way they had harmed his mother...

Every time he closed his eyes he saw her crumpling into his arms, those beautiful eyes of hers closing. That’s why he kept his eyes open, wide fucking open. He didn’t want to see it again.

There was a quiet commotion at the door and looking over saw old ladies arriving to be with their men as they waited for news.

He appreciated it but all he wanted was for Harper to get through the surgery and then he would join his cousins and find his son. Nothing else mattered. Nothing.

He sat in the uncomfortable chair, his knee bouncing uncontrollably. Ren and Shelly came to sit on one side of him, Rider with Bollywood and Asa on his other side. Bates sat across from him, Harper's blood all over him. The brother looked worried and that made Lucky's gut clench.

What if he lost his woman?

She had two serious knife wounds and was in surgery to repair internal bleeding.

How the fuck would he go on without her?

Rider sharp elbow punched into his side. "Brother, don't go there," he said quietly "we don't know anything yet. We need to send out positive thoughts to our girl, she needs us to believe in her now. She's a survivor, she'll get through this."

"I can't lose her, brother." Lucky said softly. "Won't survive it."

A vicious punch to his upper arm had him rocking to the side.

"Don't you fucking go there, asshole. No negative shit here, only positive." Rider bit out.

Lucky rubbed his upper arm and growled. "I'm so gettin' you back for that you fucker."

"*Ja, ja* (Yes, yes), I'll be waiting, asshole." He scoffed as if thoroughly bored, making Lucky smile.

Two hours passed, the pigs came by asking questions but Ren kept them away from him. The brother gave them the bare minimum. He explained that Harper had been kidnapped by her crazy brother and that he had hurt her. They rescued her and brought her into the hospital. He promised they would give their statements later. Thank fuck they had some pull with one of the detectives and had time to get their stories straight.

Maybe with the involvement of Cole Conrad things might be smoothed over even quicker.

It was as if thinking his name made the FBI appear.

Lucky recognised the older man walking into the waiting room immediately, and not just because he was wearing an FBI jacket.

He knew him, it was Remy's ex-boss, Paul Marchand.

He came straight to Lucky and he stood to greet him, shaking his hand as his brothers grumbled and mumbled all around him. Not liking the fact that an agent of the FBI was here or that he knew Lucky.

“Lucky, so sorry we're meeting under such dire circumstances. I've spoken to Cole and he gave me a brief report on what went down. I'm sorry your woman got caught up in the mess. I came by to check on Ms Delaney and to thank you for saving one of mine. Thank you.” Paul said.

Lucky shrugged then frowned. “It was nothin', but I thought he was DEA.”

Paul nodded. “He is, but he's currently assigned to a taskforce I'm heading up. He actually took over from Remy, that's how long we've been working this case.”

“Did you get the bastards? They snatched Lucky’s son.”
Rider, who had been listening intently, asked.

By the look on Paul’s face Lucky knew the fuckers got away.

“We arrested several members of Los Rojos but the ones we really wanted escaped. Carlos Mendez, Jorge Mendez and Pablo Mendez managed to get away. We’re not sure how they escaped the net we had around the estate but I’m looking into it. I have several teams out looking for them. If I hear anything about your son I will let you know immediately.”

The fact they escaped the FBI’s net did not sound good, not good at all.

“There’s just one more thing I need clarity on. We found the bodies of two members of the Grave Robbers MC on the premises. They’ve been identified as Franklin “Killer” Ross and Harold “Scurvy” West. Do you have any knowledge of their involvement with Los Rojos?” He watched them closely as he gave them the names.

Lucky knew why the bastards had been there but he wasn’t going to talk to Marchand about it. It was none of his business.

Lucky shrugged and looked at his brothers who did the same. “No idea. The only reason we were there was to get Harper and Ry back.”

Paul Marchand glanced towards Ren then back at Lucky.

“I take it the Grave Robbers MC aren’t friends of your club.”
He said.

The brothers who had been listening to their discussion snorted contemptuously. He did the same before he answered. “No, they’re definitely not friends of ours.”

He was about to say something more when the doors to the operating suite opened and a woman wearing blue scrubs came out, glancing around the room.

“Family of Ms Delaney?” She called out, and instantly everyone stopped talking.

Rider jumped up, his hand clasped around Lucky’s upper arm, taking him with him. He stuck close to his side as they made their way over. Asa joined them when they stopped in front of her.

She looked them over, her eyes going to their kutties and then to Asa in his dark suit.

“You’re Ms Delaney’s family?”

Asa answered for all of them. “Yes we are. Do you have news for us?”

“I do. Ms Delaney’s doctors asked me to deliver an update. She came through the surgery to repair the internal bleeding. They are now concentrating on repairing the lacerations and wounds to her hips and abdomen.”

Lucky felt his legs giving out and Rider and Asa caught him by his upper arms and held him up.

“Ms Delaney’s Doctor will be out to update you on her condition once they complete the surgery.”

“How long do you think before they’re finished?” Rider asked.

“I can’t say. Let me get back to theatre and if there’s a delay I’ll come out to keep you updated.”

It felt like he could breathe for the first time since they arrived when she disappeared back through the doors.

He turned to Paul Marchand. “Agent Marchand, you need to find them, find my boy. When Harper wakes up the first thing she’s going to want to see is her son. I want to be able to tell her he’s safe. Her psycho of a brother is not going to give up, he’s going to come after her. I wouldn’t be surprised if he tries to get to her here. We’ll be providing protection but it would be good if we could count on law enforcement to bring their side.”

Thinking about the bastard coming after her in the hospital made the rage he’d been holding back start boiling back up. His heart was beating like a fucking drum in his chest, his palms were sweaty and he had to keep blinking to keep his eyes clear.

For some reason they kept watering.

He turned to Ren. “We need brothers on the doors and outside the hospital. I want a guard on her the moment she gets out of surgery.”

“Already on it, brother.” He drew in a breath. “I had a call from Maniac, they’re continuing the search. He said he’ll talk to you once Harper is out of surgery.”

“I take it that means they haven’t found my son yet.” Lucky growled.

Ren shook his head. Fuck.

As he turned away the doors to the operating rooms opened and the same nurse now accompanied by a man in scrubs came through the doors.

He didn't waste time but walked over, Rider and Asa on either side of him.

“You're the family of Ms Delaney?”

“Yeah, we are. How is she?” He asked.

Lucky felt nervous and anxious as hell as he waited for the doc to answer him.

“I'm doctor Nesbit, Ms Delaney's surgeon. Ms Delaney came through the surgery well. She lost a lot of blood but she was very lucky, the knife wounds didn't cause lasting damage. Some of the lacerations to her hips and abdomen were deep and we've closed them up. There will be scarring but we were lucky to have Doctor Seifret scrubbing in and she's assured me it will be minimal. Ms Delaney is a strong young lady and I expect her to make a full recovery.”

“When can I see her?”

That is all he wanted, to see her and to be able to touch her to reassure himself that she was still here, was still alive.

“She's in recovery right now and once she's ready they will move her into the ICU. I want to observe her for at least a day or so before we move her into high care. You may see her as soon as she's been settled in ICU. Only two visitors at a time are allowed and family only at this time.”

He could only nod, he didn't care about anything except seeing her.

“Thank you, Doc.” Rider said quietly. “We appreciate what you did for her.”

Belatedly he thanked him as well.

Shortly after the three of them, Lucky, Rider and Asa were standing outside the ICU.

Once again they went through the entire ritual of who they were and how they were Harper's family. The charge nurse didn't seem very happy with him calling Harper his old lady. Obviously she didn't know that in biker culture it meant she was his wife.

She warmed a tiny bit when he explained and called her his wife. Rider and Asa bluntly claimed to be her brothers.

They had to wait until she was settled before they were allowed in.

He and Rider went in first.

His woman looked pale as death with dark rings around her eyes.

Her bruises stood out starkly and he wanted to kill the fuckers who had touched her. Lines came from her body connecting her to the machines around her bed.

He pressed a soft kiss to her forehead.

Her eyes fluttered open and he smiled at her, softly stroking his hand over her head before he took her hand in his.

"Lucky." She whispered hoarsely.

"Yeah, baby, I'm here."

Tears filled her pale blue eyes and ran over.

He quickly swiped them away with his free hand and kissed her mouth softly.

"Hey baby, no tears now. You're safe. I got you."

“Where’s...Ry? And how’s...Bren?”

Fear filled her eyes and her lips trembled.

“What happened...to my baby? Is Bren okay?”

“Hey, hey, *mon coeur* (my heart), there’s nothin’ to fear, our baby is fine.” He reassured her. It was a lie.

It was a lie to keep her calm. The doctor had warned them she was to be kept as calm as possible.

“Is Bren is okay?” Her eyes whipped from him to Rider.

Without saying a word they both avoided answering her questions about Bren. The brother was still in surgery and they hadn’t had any news yet.

Rider leant forward, taking her other hand in both of his.

“Hey, sweetheart, you need to relax. You’ve just had major surgery. You need to rest to get better. We’ll be here when you wake up.”

“No, I want Ry. Where is he?”

She looked around wildly.

“Baby, you’re in ICU and they don’t allow babies in here. There are too many germs floating around.” Lucky quickly evaded her question.

She relaxed. “Oh, I forgot.”

His old lady was fading fast, her eyelids fluttering closed over and over, her words a low mumble.

“Sweetheart, I have to go but I’ll be back. You’re only allowed two visitors at a time and Asa is waiting to see you.”

Rider dropped a kiss on her cheek and left the room, letting Asa in as he left.

Lucky saw the rage in his eyes before he blanked it out. Like him and Rider he was pissed as hell.

“Hello there, sweetheart.” He said softly, picked up her hand and kissed the back of it. “You gave us quite a scare. Glad to see those pretty eyes of yours again.”

“You’re such a charmer.” She whispered with a smile.

His old lady sighed and closed her eyes. Her breathing became deep and even, letting them know she was sleeping naturally.

Looking across her body at Asa he saw the need for vengeance burning in his eyes. He knew it was in his as well.

They were going to find the fuckers who did this and take care of them.

After they find his son.

He wasn’t sure who had put their hands on his old lady but he knew how to find out.

Cole Conrad.

Leaning over he kissed her lips, keeping it soft so she wouldn’t wake.

“Let’s go, brother. We have questions that need answers and I know where to get those answers.” He said softly.

Leaving the room he looked back at his old lady.

She looked pale and battered and someone was going to pay.

All he needed was a name. He had a feeling it was the same person who had his son.

He needed confirmation and then he was going hunting.

Those who had taken his son and hurt and terrified his old lady would pay.

In pain and blood.

THIRTY EIGHT

Carlos

Fury boiled in his blood as he looked at the men standing in front of him. They had lost millions in product, consisting of drugs, guns, ammunition and humans. All taken by the FBI because they'd had a rat in their midst. An agent had infiltrated to the highest level of trust and none of them had suspected a thing. It ate at him that the bastard had escaped without suffering for his deceit.

He wasn't done with him. The rat would be found and he would pay for his treachery.

But it wasn't all the rat's doing.

They had badly miscalculated when they brought the Grave Robbers MC into their business. During the negotiations Robber Ross had assured him they were the strongest club in the southern states. The bastard had lied. As had his bitch of a daughter. She had been confident Ross and his men would handle the Shadow Wraiths. Assured him the club was nothing more than a bunch of lazy bike riding good ole boys.

She lied.

It was most probably her lies that got her killed.

When they made their escape they had found her bullet riddled body along with the bodies of two of their so-called allies. He found it strange that their bodies were in the interrogation room with bullets to the back of their heads,

while hers was outside in the corridor with several bullets to the back and one between the eyes.

At first he wanted to know who killed her. And then let it go because he actually didn't care. Carmella had been a problem and was going to be dealt with anyway. Whoever killed her had done him a favour.

His priority was getting back home and rebuilding.

But first he had to deal with Pablo's latest fixation. The baby he wouldn't let anyone touch. He kept him close, treating him like he was family.

Calling the damned kid Joaquin.

The first time they heard it both he and Jorge knew they had to act fast. He went to his office and called Maniac, offering the boy to them.

It was during the call that the biker revealed how badly he had misjudged his daughter. She had Joaquin, Pablo's son, and his grandmother taken and kept in a secret location. He knew she hated the kid and he would not have survived Carmella's plans.

Maniac had been clear on what they wanted.

The baby in exchange for information on where they could find Joaquin.

They weren't asking for much. The problem was getting the baby away from Pablo.

That wasn't going to be easy. The crazy bastard somehow thought the baby was Joaquin.

It meant he had to negotiate with the damned bikers.

He needed them to bring the boy to them because he knew Pablo wouldn't release the baby unless he got his son back. With Joaquin back Pablo would calm down.

He was getting tired of always having to consider Pablo's psycho personality, maybe it was time to remove him as well. But then there was Jorge, his brother loved his crazy son. And he loved Jorge, he didn't want to hurt him.

If anything happened to Pablo his brother would know he had something to do with it.

Unless...

Unless he could manipulate the bikers into doing the job for him. He would control the exchange, play on Pablo's fears for Joaquin.

His usual reaction was violence and if he focused his mad rage on the bikers they will retaliate to save the baby.

If his plan succeeded it meant he would finally have unhindered access to Joaquin.

The bastard had blocked all access to his son, swearing he was going to keep him out of the family business. The boy was intelligent and wanted to go to college and become a doctor.

Maybe it was a good thing, ensuring he had a good education but at the same time introducing him to the family business.

It was time for the boy to start learning about his family. Not the way Carmella and Pablo had been brought in. No. Pablo's son would be taught the old fashioned way. Starting from the bottom but at his side.

He would talk to the biker again, once he was alone and share his fears for the baby. Warn them that Pablo was a danger to the baby and totally unstable.

If it played out the way he wanted he would no longer have to worry about his nephew. He would have to be very careful. Careful not to alert Jorge to his plans. His reaction would not be good, not good at all.

He hadn't shared with Jorge or Pablo that the grandmother had been taken as well. Had kept it to himself thinking it would be of use to him. A card up his sleeve to control both of them.

It was time to play that card.

“Pablo, call Joaquin's grandmother and find out when she can be at the compound.”

Pablo looked confused for a second as he looked down at the baby. Then his face cleared of all emotion as he lay the baby down on the couch. Pulling his phone from his jacket pocket he walked out onto the back deck to make the call. He didn't turn his back on them as he called, watching them the entire time.

He was back shortly after, his face like a thundercloud. What now?

“She's gone. The guard we left with her said she went to the beach cottage three days ago with the new guard you sent. They were supposed to return this morning, when they didn't he drove down there. He arrived shortly before I called. There's no one there. He says it's locked up. Who is this guard you sent and where is my son's grandmother?”

Carlos shook his head and sighed dramatically. “I never sent a guard. I think Carmella sent him with orders to take her to where she was keeping Joaquin. Your boy was most probably giving them hell and they needed her to control him.”

Pablo stared at him with dead eyes and he didn't like it. Not at all.

“What do we do about the baby?” Jorge asked quietly.

“We do the exchange with the bikers. We give them the baby and they give us Joaquin. And his grandmother it now seems.”

Drawing in a breath he let it out slowly his mind racing ahead, planning for the future.

“We do the exchange and go home. There we regroup and plan our next steps. This has been a setback but it's not the end of Los Rojos. We will return and next time our allies won't be weak.”

He stood, dismissed everyone and walked over to pour himself a drink. He needed one.

Tomorrow he would start rebuilding.

And training Joaquin.

Jorge, his brother, would always be with him.

Unfortunately if Pablo survived the bikers he would be with them as well. It would stall his plans for Joaquin but he had time.

He had a good feeling about his plan.

A very good feeling.

As long as the exchange went down the way he wanted it to happen.

With the death of Pablo, his brother's son.

He felt for his brother but then, Jorge would still have Joaquin.

They would both have Joaquin.

Yes, he definitely had a good feeling.

THIRTY NINE

Lucky

Leaving the ICU Lucky marched down the corridor to the elevators, Rider and Asa keeping up with him. Dive and Lure joined them before the elevator arrived.

“Where’re we goin’?” Dive asked.

“To get some answers.” Lucky said.

“Who we gettin’ those answers from?” Lure asked.

“The bastard who was undercover with Los Rojos, Cole Conrad.” He said as he stabbed at the button once again.

The elevators were too slow as far as he was concerned but he didn’t feel up to tackling the stairs. He was too damned tired but pushing through for his son and old lady.

Stepping out of the elevator he instantly knew which room was Cole’s, he had a guard posted outside his door, a cop judging by the uniform.

Lucky grinned when he saw two of his brothers and one of Asa’s men lounging in chairs further down the corridor.

He knew why they were there, they were watching over Bren, Viper and Magic who, incidentally, were on the same floor as Cole.

Once he was done with Cole he would be visiting them to see how they were getting on. Bren and Magic’s injuries were

worse than Viper's. The brother had been lucky, the other two not so much.

Walking up to Cole's room he ignored the cop who stood as he neared him. "Sorry, sir, no visitors allowed." He said quietly but firmly.

"I'm here to see Cole. He's a friend of my family and a colleague of my brother's, he wants to know how he's doin'." Lucky kept his voice even.

The cop frowned at him then looked at his brothers before meeting his eyes with a hint of smile in his eyes.

"Since when are outlaws friends with law enforcement officers?" He asked.

"My brother is law enforcement, FBI in fact, and Cole is a colleague and a friend. Remy asked me to look in on him to see how he's doin'."

The cop shook his head as if he didn't get it.

To be honest, sometimes Lucky didn't get it either.

Stepping to the side he waved them through.

"He's a bit pissy. His boss was here earlier giving him shit about not doing his job." He dropped his voice. "Sounded like he broke his cover to protect one of the victims and his boss isn't happy with him."

Lucky nodded as he walked in. Cole was asleep but the minute he got close to the bed he woke. His eyes snapped around the room, taking in their positions at a glance. He relaxed when he recognised Lucky.

“How’s your old lady doin’?” He asked as he painfully manoeuvred himself up in the bed.

“She’s in ICU and woke up earlier.” Lucky explained, but not going into detail.

After the chat to the cop outside he knew the fucker was listening to what was being said in the room. For their own, and Cole’s safety, he had to think carefully about what to say.

“Glad to hear she’s doing okay. I was worried about her.” He painfully reached for one of the bottles of water next to the bed and Lucky picked it up to give to him. Then hesitated.

“Why do you have all these bottles of water?”

Cole glanced at the door and dropped his voice. “I trust no one. Marchand brought those to me earlier, I do trust him.”

“Was he the one giving you shit about doing your job?” Asa asked.

“Nope, that would be my boss at the DEA, Paula Carter. She wasn’t happy at all. Expected me to let shit happen to Harper and your son to maintain my cover. Fuck her, and fuck the department. Don’t fuckin’ care what they threaten me with. I did the right thing.” He growled.

Lucky leaned closer and his brothers blocked the door with their backs. “Who?”

He didn’t say more, he didn’t need to.

Cole knew exactly what he was asking.

He hesitated only for a second before he answered so soft there was no way the guard would have overheard.

“The son was given specific orders by the big boss.”

And those words gave him a target for his rage. Actually two targets.

But the one would be dealt with before the other.

“Thanks, brother.” He said.

Cole smiled and shrugged. “I didn’t do a thing, brother. We’re just talking here. How’s Remy doin’?”

Lucky smiled. “He’s doin’ great, he became a dad recently. He and Pixie had a little girl. They named her Vivienne.”

“Damn, that’s good news. The team watched him fall in love with her. He got teased, a lot.” He smiled. “When you talk to him tell him I say congratulations and I’ll be reaching out for a chat soon.”

If he had to guess he thought it meant Cole was done with law enforcement. Remy might be gaining another member for his team soon.

“I’ll tell him, brother. I have to get goin’, I want to see my brothers before the nurses kick us off the floor.” He said with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

“Thanks for coming to see me, I appreciate it.” Cole said as they shook hands.

“We’ll be back, bro.” Rider said suddenly. “Not going to let you lie here with only a guard to keep you company. You’ll lose your fucking mind that way.”

Laughing Lucky gave Cole a last tap on the shoulder before he walked out.

Outside the door he paused next to the guard.

“Thanks for lettin’ me see him.” He said.

He shrugged. “No problem, he doesn’t get any visitors except that uptight boss of his and the FBI guy. I thought he deserved to see normal people.”

Lure snorted. “Us? Normal? You must be smokin’ your socks man, we’re the furthest thing from normal.”

Again the guard shrugged. “In my eyes you’re normal. He needed to have that.”

Lucky smacked a hand on his shoulder. “I’ll see to it that he has visitors, as long as you let them in, and thanks again for this. Keep an eye on him for us, okay?”

The cop narrowed his eyes then nodded. “You got it.”

Walking to where his brothers were standing in the corridor he wondered about the young cop. He hadn’t really noticed his name but he was sure one of their group did. He would ask later.

He, Asa and Rider went into Bren’s room first. The brother was asleep but the frown on his face said he was in pain. They didn’t want to disturb him so they quietly left.

“How’s he doing?”

Asa asked his man who waited for them in the open door.

“He’s getting there, Boss. He’s in a lot of pain but his doc’s happy with his progress. They gave him a shot before you came around so he’ll be out for a while.” He explained.

“Tell him I’ll be back later. We’re sorting some shit but I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Asa said and his man nodded.

Lucky clearly saw the respect he had for his boss.

“Please tell him Harper is awake and doing well.” Lucky added.

“I’ll let him know when he wakes.” He held out a hand to Lucky and they shook. “Doesn’t look like the boss is going to introduce us, I’m Rory, Bren’s cousin.” He said with a grin.

“Fuck off, Rory.” Asa swore without any heat.

As they started to move away he held up a hand. “They gave Magic a jab too. He’s in dreamland as well. Viper is awake though.”

“Thanks man, appreciate you keepin’ an eye with my brothers.”

He gave a chin lift as he turned and went back to his post outside Bren’s room.

Viper was sitting up, the back of his bed raised, and with a remote aimed at the television against the wall. He glanced over as they walked in and dropped the remote.

“Fuckin’ finally I have visitors who will tell me what the fuck’s goin’ on out there.” He griped. “Prez and Grave just keep sayin’ to rest and get better. It’s not fuckin’ helpin’.”

“How you doin’, bro?” Lure asked as he sat on the end of the bed.

“I was lucky, man. So fuckin’ lucky. I had just come from inside and was busy pulling on my vest when they attacked. It saved my life. I got hit in the leg and the bullet meant for my head hit the vest, knockin’ me out, givin’ me a serious concussion. Fuckers thought they’d killed me. But Magic, fuck man, he took three to the chest and abdomen. When I regained consciousness they were long gone. I crawled over to him,

used my shirt to try and stop the bleedin'. Never been so happy to see fuckin' paramedics and pigs in my life. The nurse told me he was in surgery for hours and in ICU. This mornin' they transferred him here because he's doin' well. Apparently we're in a high care unit, so he's in good hands. I was lucky, all I got was a fuckin' flesh wound and got my brain scrambled. They've had me under observation but I'll be movin' to a private room later today and my doc says I should be out of here day after tomorrow. Don't want to leave my brother but I can't take up a bed someone else needs."

"That's a lot, brother." Lucky said quietly.

"Yeah." Viper agreed. "Prez told me Harper was good. Said the fuckers still has your boy."

He wondered when Maniac had been to see him but didn't ask.

"Prez has been busy I see. Yeah, Harper is in ICU recoverin' and the fucking cartel fuckers have my boy. Don't you worry, I'm goin' to get him back. But first I want to say thanks, thanks for protectin' my woman and child."

Viper snorted. "I fuckin' failed. Got a bullet in the leg and a huge lump on my head for my trouble."

Lucky shook his head. "No. You didn't fail. You were betrayed. Flag is a traitor, he sold us out."

His eyes narrowed and he looked about ready to explode. "Prez didn't tell me that. Fuckin' hell. Tell me you've got the little fuck locked down."

Dive put a hand on his shoulder and leant in.

“We do, bro, goin’ to keep him on ice for you and Magic. You can deal with him once the two of you are back to one hundred percent.”

Lucky hadn’t been aware that the prospect had been captured. Not that he cared. They could do whatever the fuck they wanted with him. All he wanted was for the little bastard to suffer before he stopped breathing.

Viper started to look tired and they left the high care unit and were about to go back to the ICU when they were ambushed by Ren, Maniac and Grave.

“You need to come back to the clubhouse and get cleaned up. They’re not goin’ to let you back into ICU lookin’ the way you do. The only reason they let you in the first time was because you looked ready to take the damned hospital apart.” Maniac ordered.

“Prez, I can’t leave her...” He didn’t get to finish.

“She will be safe, brother. You have my word. Go, get cleaned up, your brothers will watch over your old lady.” His prez said as he squeezed his shoulder.

His prez was right. They needed to clean up.

He and Rider rode back to the clubhouse in the middle of a large group of his brothers. And once they had showered and dressed in clean clothes they were escorted into Maniac’s office.

All the officers were there, waiting on them.

That’s when he found out about the exchange Maniac had arranged with Carlos Mendez.

To get his boy back he had to find and rescue fucking Pablo Mendez's son. He fucking hated it.

“Where is he and when do we leave?” He asked instead of losing his temper.

“You're not goin' to believe this, brother.” Ren said quietly.

Lucky tipped his head to the side and narrowed his eyes as he thought about a place the kid could have been stashed.

“The kid is bein' held in your old apartment.” Ren said.

He didn't think there was anything else Carmella Mendez could do that would shock him. He was wrong.

“I sent Smoke and Mouth to check it out. They reported seein' two men at the apartment. Haven't seen the kid but there's an old woman there as well. It must be the grandmother the bitch was talkin' about.”

Maniac's voice was clipped as he laid it out for them.

“We need Lucky to walk up to the apartment as if Carmella had sent him to collect the kid. I don't think they know she's dead. If they did the kid and the old woman would be dead, and they're not.”

He looked around the room.

“While their eyes and attention are on him the rest of the team will gain access to the apartment. We take out the guards, permanently, and bring the kid and the old woman here. Once we have them I'll call Carlos and arrange the exchange.”

“What about Pablo?” Lucky growled. “He tortured my old lady on Carlos's orders. What's goin' to happen to him?”

His prez looked at him for the longest time before he spoke.

“One thing at a time, brother. We get your son back and then we sit down and plan the next step. Believe me, we’re not lettin’ the bastards get away with this. We’ll be takin’ them down. This shit makes us look weak and there’s no fuckin’ way we’re weak. The Grave Robbers are goin’ to find they’re no longer welcome in any of our territories. We’ll show them and anyone one who thinks to come after our club that we don’t fuck around. They come after our families and we’ll wipe them out.”

Maniac sat forward and pointed a finger at all of them.

“Most of you have family here in Savannah, some of you have old ladies and children and after what Los Rojos did we need to ensure their safety. And how do we do that?”

He was silent, not waiting for an answer, just letting it sink in before he continued.

“We ensure their safety by bein’ the most dangerous fuckin’ enemy those who cross us could ever imagine. Los Rojos targeted Lucky’s family. They will find out they should not have touched what belongs to the Shadow Wraiths MC. We will have our vengeance.”

Roars of approval came from the brothers and Lucky nodded.

Shortly after they were in blacked out cages heading towards the neighbourhood where he used to live with Gloria. He hadn’t been back in years and it was no longer a safe neighbourhood.

Drug dealers, pimps and whores were very noticeable on the streets.

They split up two blocks away from the apartment block. Lucky and Dive continued towards the front of the building while the rest approached from the back.

Dive pulled up right in front of the building. Lucky got out and with his brother at his back walked into the building. The smells assaulted their noses, mould, cigarette smoke, piss and just general neglect created an incredibly nauseating smell. Ignoring the elevator they took the stairs and climbed to the third floor.

“This fuckin’ place stinks of piss.” Dive growled.

“Yeah, it’s a fuckin’ dump. Didn’t used to be.” Lucky answered.

There was an asshole waiting for them as they stepped into the passage. He stood outside the open apartment door, watching them as they came closer. He held a gun loosely against his thigh.

“I’ve been expecting you earlier.” He grouched.

“We’ve been busy. I’m here to collect the boy.” Lucky growled.

The bastard smiled then tilted his head towards the open door. “He’s in there, been a bit of a handful so he’s slightly banged up.”

Lucky’s eyes narrowed on the fucker. “You put your hands on the kid?” He snarled.

The fucker shrugged. “He was asking for it.”

The fucker never saw it coming. Lucky hit him on the side of the head and he went down hard.

Not moving. Out like a light.

“Haven’t see that move in a while, brother. Good to know you still have it.” Dive teased.

Not saying anything Lucky stepped over the piece of shit and walked into the apartment.

The old woman was tied to a chair and the young boy was in another next to her. His mouth was taped shut and his face sported an array of dark bruises.

Lucky looked around for the other guard and tipped his head to the side, letting Dive know to check the rest of the apartment. Pulling his knife from the sheath at his back he approached the old lady and silently cut her loose then did the same to the boy.

A thump from deeper in the apartment indicated that Dive had taken care of the other guard.

As soon as the boy was loose he ripped the tape from his mouth. “Who are you?”

Lucky answered him as he gently removed the tape from the old lady’s mouth.

“I’m here to take you back to your father.”

The relief in the kid’s face was immense, the same with the old lady.

“Papa sent you?” He asked.

Lucky shook his head. “No, kid, Carlos did. They took my son and I need to hand you over to get him back.”

The kid and the old woman looked shocked and looked at him with worried eyes.

“Don’t worry, we’re not goin’ to hurt you, all I want is my son. We don’t hurt women and children, that’s not who we are.” He sighed. “Can’t say the same about your family though. My woman is in hospital because of them.”

He looked at the kid and made a snap decision, the kid needed to know he had choices.

“You’re growing up and it’s time to start thinking about your future. If you follow in your father’s footsteps you will end up dead.”

The kid nodded. “I know. My Papa is keeping me out of it, that’s why I live with my grandmother. I’m going to college and I’m going to be a doctor.”

“Good for you, kid. Good luck with that.” Lucky didn’t know what else to say because if he had his way the kid’s father would be dead very soon.

Dive came from the depths of the apartment dragging an unconscious body behind him by the ankle. The rest of the brothers joined them and Lure came in dragging the other motherfucker inside.

“Found this lying out there and as we don’t litter I brought him inside.” He joked. Then he saw the kid.

“Who touched him?” He growled.

“The motherfucker you just dragged in here, brother.” Dive answered.

Lure looked down at the piece of shit and let loose with a kick to the ribs that most probably cracked or broke some of them.

“Asswipe.” He grumbled.

Lucky was done wasting time. He turned to the old woman.

“Ma’am, we’re takin’ you to meet with Carlos Mendez and then handin’ you over so I can get my son back. Will you be safe with them?” He watched her face carefully and saw no fear.

“*Si* (Yes), we’ll be fine. They won’t touch me or Joaquin, they fear my family. It’s only Carmella who is crazy enough to think she could get away with doing this.” She said in a soft accented voice.

He didn’t tell her that she wouldn’t have to worry about Carmella ever again.

“Okay, that’s good enough for me, let’s get out of here.” He helped her up and walked her out of the apartment. Dive bringing up the rear with the kid.

He and Dive were the only ones who left.

His brothers stayed behind to get rid of the trash.

Three hours later he stood in front of one of their cages with Joaquin between him and his grandmother.

His Prez and Ren stood beside him and Asa and Rider stood beside the grandmother.

They waited silently.

Finally two blacked out SUV’s slowly drove towards them.

They didn’t move as the vehicles slowed and stopped. The passenger door opened and a black suited thug stepped out then opened the back door. Carlos Mendez stepped out,

settling his fancy suit with a few tugs he walked to the front of the vehicle.

“Where is my son?” Lucky asked roughly.

The bastard smiled. “He’s here. I just wanted to check...”

He didn’t get any further because a door on the second SUV opened and Pablo, carrying a baby carrier stepped out. He strode towards them, baby carrier in one hand and a bag in the other.

Carlos looked like he wanted to explode but said nothing as his nephew strode past him.

Jorge Mendez joined him at the front of the vehicle and it looked to Lucky as if he was there to ensure his brother didn’t do anything stupid.

Pablo swore viciously when he saw his son’s face.

“Joaquin, did they do this to you?”

“No, Papa, it was Carmella’s men. I think the bikers might have killed them.”

“Good, then I don’t have to kill anyone.”

“Papa, give him his son. It’s not right, this thing you do, it’s not right.”

Lucky listened to their conversation, all in Spanish, his eyes riveted on his boy. He was asleep and looked clean and taken care of.

Walking up to him Pablo stopped and tilted his head to meet Lucky’s eyes. His voice was soft so as not to carry towards those listening.

“You have my gratitude for not hurting my son. He’s the most important person in my life.” He was silent for a beat. “I apologise for not treating your woman with the same care. I follow orders, same as you, but unfortunately I am not as good a man as you are. I know you want my life but I have something better to offer.”

He gave a slight almost imperceptible shake of his head when Lucky opened his mouth to answer.

“No, don’t say anything. I owe you a life debt. As long as I’m alive I will honour it. You and I, we are enemies but maybe, one day, if you need me I can help you.”

Lifting the carrier he handed it to Lucky then gave the bag to Rider.

“I bought him some things and I’d like it if you accept it as a gift from Joaquin and Magdalena, his grandmother. I know you won’t accept it from me.”

Once his hands were free he stepped up to his son, pulling him into a tight, hard hug. Joaquin instantly put his arms around him and it was clear to see he loved his father. Letting the boy go he moved to the old lady and hugged her as well. They murmured to each other then stepped away.

Pablo looked at Lucky and nodded.

“Thank you for saving my son and his grandmother. I will not forget this.”

With that he put an arm around each of their shoulders and walked them to the SUV he had climbed out of.

Carlos and Jorge watched them go then turned to look at Maniac.

There were nods between them

Lucky didn't give a shit. All he wanted was to get his boy home.

Nothing else was important.

Nothing.

FORTY

Harper

When I opened my eyes I found myself being watched by a pair of black eyes and a pair of brown ones.

Lucky and Rider.

They sat on either side of my bed like those statues of male lions you find outside the entrances of palaces. Protecting those inside. These two were my lions, my protectors.

Tired looking protectors.

“Have you two slept at all?” I asked, my voice husky.

Lucky rose, bent over me and kissed my lips softly. “We had shit to do while you slept, sweetheart. We’ll sleep soon, don’t worry.”

Rider grinned, pointed a thumb at Lucky. “What he said.”

My eyes went from one face to the other before returning to Lucky. “Did you find Ry? Where is he?”

He smiled and nodded. “We did, baby, and he’s fine. They didn’t hurt him, in actual fact I think he was spoilt because he now cries if we put him down. He wants to be carried around all the time.”

I blinked tears of relief from my eyes.

“Maybe he just wants his Mama.”

“I think you’re right, babe. Little man has been sniffing at all the females and none of them seems to smell right to him.” Rider teased. “We weren’t allowed to bring him in here so he’s outside in the waiting room with Asa.”

Lucky nodded. “As soon as they transfer you to your room he’ll be allowed in to see you. I spoke to your doctor earlier and he said you’re making good progress, so it will be soon.”

I sighed dejectedly. I wanted out of here so badly.

My protective lions sat in their chairs and watched over me while keeping our conversations to safe topics. Their visit ended the minute my doctor walked in. I didn’t want them to leave but it was time to change bandages and stuff and it was better done without the two of them around.

I didn’t want either of them to see what Pablo had done to me, not yet anyway. I knew they would both lose their shit and this wasn’t a safe place to do so.

I endured the examination and cleaning of my wounds in silence.

I had only one question for the doc.

“When can I get out of here?”

Doctor Nesbit gave a small smile but kept writing on my chart before setting it to the side. His eyes were kind when they met mine.

“Everything looks good so far. If you keep improving you’ll be out of here soon. I’ll be leaving instructions with the charge nurse. Please listen to her.” He patted my foot. “I’ll be back in the morning and then we’ll make a decision on moving you.”

He was gone before I could ask another question or say anything.

Unfortunately by the next morning my wounds had decided to mess with me.

Two days later

After a slight setback that kept me in ICU, this morning I was finally moved to a private room on the surgical floor. According to my nurse I would be able to start walking and strengthening my body.

But the best thing? The best thing was that today Ry would visit with me.

Getting out of the ICU had been my first goal, the second was to see my baby boy.

I had reached my first goal and was about to realise the second.

I was impatiently waiting and if I could have I would have bounced in place but I was too sore to do anything so vigorous. So I kept it to waving my hands in the air.

If anyone looked into my room they would have thought I was deranged. And I was, just a teeny tiny bit.

I was about to see my boy. My little Ryder. Lucky had taken photos of him but it hadn't been enough. Nowhere near enough.

I couldn't wait to see him, to hold him, to smell him, to hug him, to kiss his cheeks and love him.

Lucky had given me updates every day but it had not filled the empty space in my heart.

My badass biker had the nurses at the ICU and the surgical floor eating out of the palm of his hand.

And how did he do that?

Easy, he charmed them with his suddenly broad Cajun accent and sexy smiles. More than one of the nurses, like the charge nurse, had huge crushes on him. I didn't blame them, he was hot, he was funny, and he was a fantastic dad and partner, and he was mine.

According to one of the nurses he was the sweetest dad they had seen in a long time.

While I had been in ICU he had divided his time between the clubhouse and the hospital. He slept on a cot one of the nurses had set up for him in a room outside the ICU. The cot somehow came with me when I was moved and was now set up in the corner of my room. My man was definitely not going anywhere. He trusted no one to guard me, only himself and Rider.

I knew he was tired and not getting enough rest. Between guarding me and trying to keep up with Ry's schedule he was going to crash if he didn't slow down.

My plan was to try and convince him to allow Rider to stay with me some of the time. Maybe even do it in shifts with Asa or one of the other guys, so he could rest and focus on Ry.

So far I've not had any nightmares and I was thankful for it. The experience had been horrid enough, I didn't need to keep seeing it in my dreams.

And then I heard it.

The faint sound of boots coming closer.

He walked in with the baby carrier in one hand and carrying Ry against his chest with the other.

“Hey Mama, look who has come to visit.” He said as he set the carrier down then gently handed my boy to me. He was wrapped in a blue and white finely crocheted blanket and I wondered who had made it for him.

My eyes ate him up. I swear in the time I had been in hospital he had grown. He was so beautiful, the most beautiful baby I had ever seen.

He was perfect, absolutely perfect.

From the top of his head with its black Shadow Wraiths MC beanie to the bottom of his little feet. I opened the blanket and laughed softly when I saw his onesie and that he had little black socks on his feet. The onesie was white with black writing and a skull on it. I shook my head at the words.

BEWARE, MY DADDY IS A BADASS BIKER

I pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“Hey sweet boy, look at you all dressed up like a baby biker. I’m so happy to see you. Mama loves you so, so much.” I whispered as I held him close.

My boy instantly snuggled his head into my neck and gave the sweetest little sigh as he settled against me.

I touched a finger to his hand and his perfect little fingers clenched around mine. I had to blink away the tears as I held him.

Lucky gingerly sat down on the bed, put an arm around my shoulders and held me close.

His other hand was on Ryder's butt, gently holding him in place.

Our boy was the image of his daddy from head to toe, except for his eyes. They were blue, exactly like mine. He had his daddy's olive toned skin and dark hair, and obviously his size.

My boy was big, really big.

My heart was so full of love for my two boys.

So much love, unlike anything I had experienced before.

Lucky was curled around me, holding me and holding our boy. Keeping us safe in his arms.

“You sayin’ hello to your Mama, Ry? She’s the most beautiful Mama ever, yeah?” He whispered against my hair.

Ry’s blue eyes looked right into mine and my heart filled with joy. I looked up at Lucky and gave him a teary eyed smile.

“Thank you, thank you for saving our boy.” I swallowed before I continued. “When I realised I was pregnant I so badly wanted to call you but you know the decisions we made. I had to keep my word because you asked it of me. You could have denied him, instead you’ve accepted him and for that I will always, always love you.”

Looking down at me Lucky Boudreaux, badass biker, visibly relaxed and pulled me closer to his chest. He resettled us so my side nestled into him.

“I have loved him from the moment I first saw him. It was the day I came to the house, I instantly knew he was mine. I had no doubts, none at all. Even though I acted like a damned ass and insisted on a DNA test.” He sighed heavily.

“It was my fault you were found. I was so up into my own fuckin’ head I had a DNA test done and it flagged you. That’s how the fucker found you. It was my fault. I hope you can forgive me for puttin’ your lives in danger.”

He didn’t give me a chance to answer him.

He put a finger under my chin lifting my face until my eyes met his. They looked so dark they were almost black and very intense.

“This might not be the time but I’m holdin’ the two most important people in my life in my arms and it feels right to me. So I’m just goin’ to say it.”

He slipped his hand to the side of my face, sliding his fingers into my hair.

“I want you to think about stayin’ in Savannah, with me. I want us to build a life together, you, me and our boy. I love you, *mon coeur* (my heart), you and our son, and I want you beside me for the rest of my life.”

Sliding one of my hands free from Ry’s little body cuddled against me I cupped Lucky’s face.

“You were an ass and I hope next time I say don’t do something you listen to me.” I said sternly before I relented and gave him a smile.

“I fell in love with you on a beach under the moonlight, stayed in love with you when I thought you had moved on to

someone else. I will miss Rider and Ms Squirrel terribly but you and Ry are my world now. Where you are is where I want to be.”

He groaned dropping his head his lips sealed over mine, kissing me softly but thoroughly. Lifting his lips from mine he smiled and winked.

“The next couple of weeks are gonna be hell on my balls, *bébé* (baby). I want to have you under me, in my bed, and makin’ love for hours. We’ve missed so much time. But, the moment your doc says we’re good to go we’re handin’ our little man over to his *Mémé* (Grandmother) and *Gran-papa* (Grandfather) and takin’ some time for us. Even if it’s just one day.”

I was about to answer when a throat was cleared loudly.

There were three people crowded in the open door. I recognised them instantly.

A big man that was so very obviously Lucky’s dad and two women. His mother and sister.

His family.

I had last seen them when they came to Cape Town for Christmas and now here I was holding their grandchild in my arms. A grandchild they had known nothing about.

Nerves had me shaking and Lucky tightened his arm around me, kissed the top of my head, then got off the bed. His mother launched herself at him, hugging him tight, his sister joined in the huddle and his dad stood to the side grinning.

“Maman, Frankie, come on, let me go.” Lucky rumbled.

In my arms Ry wriggled and complained, I glanced down to see his face scrunched up. I knew that look, it was time for his bottle.

Lucky immediately stepped away from his mum and sister, picked up Ry's bag and set it on the bottom of the bed. He then quickly and very competently assembled his bottle. His family watched him with wide eyes as did I.

Shaking the bottle he handed it to me after testing the heat against his wrist. I settled Ry comfortably then gently pressed the teat against his pursed little lips. The minute he felt it he became a ravenous little animal. His eyes slid half closed as he drank. I couldn't look away from him.

He was so perfect.

I was so lost in feeding my boy I didn't notice that the family had crowded around the bed, watching him and me. I looked up when a hand came out to touch the top of his beanie. Lucky's mum smiled at me.

“Thank you so much for our beautiful grandson. He looks exactly like his daddy when he was born.” She leant over and pressed a soft kiss to my cheek.

“He has his Maman's eyes though.” Lucky was back next to me on the bed, his arm protectively around me.

“Thank you, *chér* (sweetheart), he's perfect.” His dad leaned in and did the same as his mum had, kissed me on the cheek.

“Oh my god, he's so big.” Frankie said as she pushed between her parents to get close. She looked at me and winked. “You must be so happy you didn't have to push him out of your hoohah.”

“Frankie!” Her mother snapped but I giggled.

“You have no idea. If I had carried him to term he was going to be even bigger than he was at birth. My doc insisted on a C-section because of his size.”

Frankie jerked back with wide eyes then looked at her parents and shook her head.

“If I ever decide to have a kid and he’s this big? I’m tellin’ you in advance I’m gettin’ a C-section. No way is a kid that big comin’ out my hoohah.”

Her mum closed her eyes and shook her head while I giggled.

Once Ry finished his bottle I burped him, Lucky changed his diaper then handed him off to his grandmother.

She held him, loving on him before passing him to her husband. Frankie waited impatiently for her turn.

While each held him Lucky and Frankie took photos, lots of photos.

Then he was back in my arms and I held him as he slept through the chatter going on around him.

Somewhere during their visit I fell asleep as well.

When I woke our visitors were gone and Ry was no longer with us. I knew Rider would have come in to pick him up and he was therefore safe at the clubhouse.

Lucky lay next to me on the bed, holding me in his arms, breathing evenly as he slept.

I lay in his arms listening to him breathe.

I had done it before, in my bed at the beach house. Listened to him breathe with the knowledge that I would be losing him soon.

This was an entirely different situation though.

I wasn't losing him. He wasn't leaving me. He was mine now.

My man, my biker, my baby daddy.

I turned my face into his neck, closed my eyes and let sleep take me.

I was safe.

FORTY ONE

Lucky

The buzzing woke him. It took him a second to realise he was lying in a hospital bed with Harper in his arms. He'd fallen asleep with her. Gently so as not to disturb her he moved her from his chest then slid out of bed, pushed his feet into his boots and silently walked out the room. He took the stairs down from the surgical floor and only answered his phone when he stood on the lower landing.

“Yeah?”

“Lucky, brother, we got a situation out here. Need you to come to the parking area at the back of the hospital. We're near the ambulance bay, look for the club van.” Dive sounded pissed.

He instantly knew he wasn't going to like whatever situation he would be walking into.

“On my way.”

Slipping his phone into his kutte pocket he sat on the stairs and did up his laces. He wasn't going into a situation with boots he couldn't run in. Heading back to the surgical floor he took the elevator down to the lobby and from there followed the arrows to the parking area behind the hospital. He could kick his own ass for not taking the time to familiarise himself with the entrances and exits of the damned place. Thankfully

his brothers had his back and were watching over his old lady and son.

It was dark out but floodlights illuminated most of the large parking area. The area around the ambulance bay was brightly lit. That wasn't where their van was parked. It was further away, almost hidden in the shadows thrown by the big trees at the perimeter.

His eyes never stopped moving, taking in every movement, every shadow that might be an enemy. As he got close the driver's door opened and Dive got out, softly closing the door behind him. The interior light hadn't come on when he opened the door. It told Lucky he didn't want the sudden flash of light to alert anyone to their presence.

“What've we got, brother?” He asked as he reached him.

“We caught ourselves a little weasel and his friends. He was tryin' to get into the hospital through the service entrance. Unfortunately for him Lure was inside chattin' up one of the ladies and spotted them. He called, we took out two out here then grabbed the asswipe and his friends before they got to Harper's floor.” He tilted a head towards the back of the van. “We've got them back there.”

Lure appeared around the back of the van.

“I took care of the two fuckers who were waitin' in their cage. They have a fuckin' baby seat in the back, brother.”

He seethed, glaring at the van as if he could see through the panels to the fucker secured in the back.

“He came prepared to take Harper and Ry.” He snarled.

“Yeah, it looks that way.” Lure agreed. “Don’t know how he thought he was goin’ to get into the compound to snatch your boy though.”

Lucky made an instant decision.

“I’ll call for back up. We need them back at the clubhouse and secured in the hole. I don’t have time for the fucker right now, he can wait until I do. The men with him, were they local or Colombian?”

“The two with him are Italian the others are definitely Colombian.”

“It means Carlos Mendez is still helping him. See if you can make his little friends sing. We need to know what the fuck is happenin’ here.” He pulled a hand through his hair in frustration.

“Make sure he can hear his little friends singin’. It might loosen his lips.”

Lure and Dive nodded, both with wicked smiles.

“My ol’ lady won’t be leavin’ for a day or so. I’m gonna have to ask Prez to assign more brothers to watch the hospital. With this shit happenin’ I’ll be stayin’ with her until she’s ready to come home. And that’s another fuckin’ problem.” He grumbled.

“Why? Take her to the safe house or bring her to the clubhouse.” Dive frowned.

“Asa has taken over the safe house and Bren will be taken there once he’s released. It will be over crowded. And the clubhouse is out of the question, it’s too noisy and my ol’ lady

and my boy is not goin' to be in a room where I used to fuck sluts." Lucky growled in frustration.

Dive tapped him on the arm.

"I might have a solution but I have to talk to Leo first. I think her house might not have a tenant at the moment and it will solve your problem. Let me call her and see what's what. I'll get back to you with an answer soon."

Lucky knew Leo's house, had been there before. It had great security and would do until he bought his old lady her own house.

"Okay, you do that. I've got to get back to my ol' lady. Thanks for havin' my back. Take the scum away and I'll talk to you later."

Slapping his brothers on the back he turned and marched back into the hospital.

Back in Harper's room he undid his laces, kicked off his boots and hung his kutte over the back of a chair before going to her bed. He pressed a soft kiss to her temple and smiled when she sighed in her sleep.

Lying down on the fucking uncomfortable cot he lay with his hands behind his head, staring up at the ceiling. He had so many things that needed to be taken care of.

A home was first on the list.

In his mind he could already see it.

The three of them in their own home.

A family. Something he never thought he would have.

Now he did.

He had a family.

An old lady and a son and soon they would have their own home.

Fuck.

He had a family. His very own family.

He fell asleep with a smile on his face.

A smile that didn't disappear when he woke.

Even with the threats that surrounded them life was good.

FORTY TWO

Maniac

“If those cartel sluts demand to speak to Lucky one more time, I swear I’m gonna sew their fuckin’ traps shut with fishin’ line.” Renegade snarled angrily as he stalked into his office. “They don’t give a shit that he’s not interested in talkin’ to them. How long are we goin’ to hang on to them, Prez?”

He threw himself in a chair, kicked his feet out as he sprawled in it, his hands clasped over his belly. He wasn’t finished ranting either.

“If they were all I had to deal with I might have been able to handle my day, but no, I have those snivellin’ fuckers in the dungeon as well.” He rubbed a hand over his short hair. “I swear, Prez, I’d love to shut them all up, permanently.”

Maniac silently listened to Ren rant while he swung his chair from side to side, thinking about how far the brother had come since claiming his old lady. He was calmer, more focussed and did his job as SAA with total dedication. Not that he wasn’t dedicated before he claimed Sherri, not at all, he had always been a brother he could count on. Even as a young prospect and then junior patch he had shown potential to be the man he now was. The man who would one day sit in his chair and lead the club.

His VP was a lucky man. His sons did him proud. All his sons, Reid included. His loss still ate at Grave and Viv, his old lady, and it always will. It had knocked Leo, Renegade and

Dive on their asses for a while. It had been a hard time, for Ren and his old lady especially, with Reid being the biological father of their little girl.

Dragging his wandering mind back to the present he focussed on his SAA.

“What do you suggest we do?” He asked.

Ren tapped his fingers on the arms of his chair, his head tilted to the side as he thought about the question.

“We can’t get rid of the fuckers we’re holdin’ for Lucky but surely we’re done with the cartel sluts? None of the brothers want guard duty outside their cells. I have to threaten their fuckin’ nuts to get them to do it. Even the club whores refuse to take them food so now I’ve got Mouth doin’ it. And he’s not happy about it either.” He threw up a hand in exasperation.

Maniac almost smiled but stopped in time. It actually wasn’t something to smile about. The sluts had definitely overstayed their welcome. They did agree to let them go free and he wanted them gone before Lucky started back with his duties.

The brother had taken a week off to be with his old lady and their boy. Harper was out of hospital and they were busy settling into their new home. A home Lucky’s parents and the old ladies had hastily cleaned and furnished after he had bought it for his old lady. She had apparently seen a photo on a realtor’s site and fell in love and the brother immediately made an offer and bought it for her.

He dragged his attention back to their problem, the cartel sluts.

“We’re not goin’ to do a thing about them.” He said.

Ren sat up and was about to protest but he held up a hand.

“Byte has picked up rumours that the cartel is lookin’ for their missin’ people. We wait. I want to see what the fuckers are goin’ to do.”

“What are you thinkin’, Prez?”

“I’m thinkin’ we might have one or two bargainin’ chips in our dungeon. Might as well hold on to them.”

Maniac could see Ren didn’t like the idea.

“This fixation they have on Lucky...I don’t like it, Prez. I’ve got Dive and Lure on him plus he’s got the Irish and Rider and his club brothers lookin’ out for him until they go back to SA.”

Ren suddenly grinned.

“Still can’t believe the fucker has an ol’ lady and is a daddy, never thought I’d see the day. Last motherfucker I thought would settle down.”

Maniac gave a slow nod his eyes fixed on Ren.

“I know you remember what he went through after the slut supposedly died and how Grave and Viv stepped up for him. Lucky’s family never knew how close they came to losin’ him. How close we all came to losin’ him. We’ll sort this shit for our brother and give him and his ol’ lady the time they need to settle into bein’ a family. He’s not goin’ to deal with the cartel bullshit. Not today, not tomorrow, not fuckin’ ever. As his brothers we’ll be takin’ care of it.”

Ren started laughing softly then nodded.

“Okay, Prez, I got ya. We’ll be takin’ care of business for our brother.”

There was a heavy knock on the door and there he stood, the man they'd been talking about.

“What the fuck are you doin' here, Lucky? I thought I told you to take the time and take care of your family.” Maniac growled.

Lucky strode in and sank into the chair next to Ren, slapping palms with his brother as he settled in.

“That's why I'm here, Prez.” He grumbled.

“What do you mean?” Maniac was confused.

“I can't fuckin' sleep, my ol' lady is havin' fuckin' nightmares because of that piece of shit brother of hers. Knowin' he's here and still breathin' is fuckin' with both our heads. The fucker needs to die. Today.” He snarled.

“You sure about this, bro?” Ren asked.

“Yeah, I am. She's scared he gets loose and comes after our boy. No way in fuck am I allowin' that to happen. He dies today.”

Maniac looked at the determination in his Road Captain's face and eyes and nodded.

“I agree, he needs to die but it doesn't have to be by your hand, Lucky. Let one of your brothers take care of it for you. He's your ol' lady's brother, her family. I don't want it the cause problems between the two of you.”

Lucky laughed and shook his head. “She sent me here, Prez. Told me to get out and get it done and stop overthinkin' shit, said he's a boil on the butt of humanity and it needs to be lanced.”

Ren's eyebrows shot up in surprise and Lucky grinned and shrugged.

"My ol' lady gets pretty heated when the subject of her family comes up."

Maniac nodded. "I get it, brother. How do you want to do this?"

"I would have liked to go down there and just kill the motherfucker but he might know shit about the cartel, and we need everything we can get." He smiled. "I'm lookin' forward to makin' him hurt, he made my ol' lady suffer for years, now it's his turn."

"Ren will be overseeing the interrogation. If he says it's done then it's done and you end the fucker. Am I understood?"

Maniac asked.

"You got it, Prez." Lucky agreed instantly.

"Right, get out of here and get shit done. I've decided I'm done with this bullshit and I'm havin' all the trash taken out tonight." Maniac waved a hand at them and watched as they left.

He had to call Grave to give him an update. They would have some decisions to make later.

Decisions that would decide their way forward.

With what had gone down with the cartel he wanted the bastards to withdraw from Georgia.

It would be a start. The other areas in the country dominated by his club would follow.

He wasn't going to stop until Los Rojos no longer had a foothold in his territories. He wanted them and their poison gone.

Lucky

Following Ren out of their Prez's office he was surprised when instead of getting to business they went to his office. His SAA waved him towards a chair as he sat down behind his desk. Lucky didn't want to waste time but he put his ass in the chair and waited for Ren to tell him why they weren't below the clubhouse. He didn't have to wait.

"I want us both to be clear on how this is goin' to go down. I'm callin' in Breaker and Bates. Bates will monitor the fucker while you and Breaker make him talk." Ren smirked. "He's not lookin' too good, Dive and Lure got a little enthusiastic after they saw Harper. Bates patched him up but the brother wasn't happy about havin' to do it. He specifically asked to be there when we questioned the fucker. You okay with it?"

Lucky smiled coldly and nodded. "I like workin' with Breaker, he doesn't mind havin' to get creative when subjects refuse to talk. And havin' Bates there will keep him alive until we've gotten everything we need, so, I'm good."

Ren's answering smile was equally as cold. Picking up his phone he tapped out a message, sent it then set it back down.

"How's your ol' lady doin'?" He asked.

"She's getting' there, brother, except for the fuckin' nightmares she keeps havin'. Other than that shit she's doin' good. Her injuries are healing and she's up and about every

day. Her doc said she has to walk to strengthen her muscles and that's what she's been doin', walkin' around the garden. She has Rider and Bollywood with her as well as Liam, he's one of Asa's guys. Dangerous fuck that one. He has a look in his eyes that says he's killed before and will do again."

Ren nodded as he rubbed his bottom lip. "I was goin' to ask you about Malone and his men. What do you think, are they trustworthy? Should we go into an alliance with them?"

Lucky immediately nodded. "Oh yeah, they're solid. Asa runs a tight organisation and his guys are loyal to him. We can't go wrong by getting' into business with them. Are we talkin' guns?"

Ren didn't answer immediately, obviously thinking about it before he did.

"We need to diversify our suppliers and the Irish in South Africa have access to what we need. I've looked at the logistics and it looks doable. If we go into business our product will be handled by Malone's people in Johannesburg. Dominick Maingarde will handle some of the sourcing and the Sinners Sons MC will handle the transportation while the Iron Dogz MC will handle Cape Town harbour. We export whatever the fuck and import some shit, and they send us our product in the shipment. If I can hammer out a deal with all the parties we'll be able to cut out the fuckers we're dealin' with now. I don't trust them and if I can get rid of them I will. I have Maniac and Grave's okay to do what I have to do to make this deal work. With you connected to Malone, Maingarde and Rider its perfect."

He held up a hand as Lucky was about to interrupt.

“I’m aware that the IDMC have gone mostly legit and they will stay that way. We won’t be drawin’ them into our shit, not much anyway, I just need their access to the port authorities. I’ve reached out to Kid, the VP in Cape Town, to test the waters and he suggested the Sinners Sons to partner in the deal. He assures me they’re trustworthy, plus they’re his family. Apparently his father is the President of the Sinners in Cape Town, and that means the two clubs are tied up tight.”

“Damn, Ren, that’s fuckin’ intricate shit. So many players in the mix, are you sure we should do this?”

Lucky tried to puzzle out how it would fit together.

Ren grinned. “Oh yeah, bro, it’s intricate but it’s also fuckin’ perfect. We use our import/export company to bring in fuckin’ fruit or whatever the fuck Maingarde wants us to bring in. It will all be done with legit contracts and we won’t be bringin’ in product on every shipment. That would be stupid. It won’t be regular either and it will be kept to a need to know in the club. We can’t have whispers gettin’ to the wrong ears.”

Lucky agreed with him, it would have to be kept to a select group of brothers.

“What happens once the product gets here? Are we sellers or distributors?”

“A bit of both. The club has several agreements in place we can’t get out of right now but we’ll be workin’ on it.”

That sounded odd.

“You sayin’ we’ll be gettin’ out of the guns business? The brothers aren’t goin’ to like hearin’ that, it’s where most of

their money packets come from.” Lucky watched Ren closely, waiting on his reaction.

The brother only smiled and shrugged.

“What’s that shrug about?”

“I’ll be lookin’ at ways to streamline our business, lessening our exposure. I’m tired of visitin’ brothers servin’ time for drug related offenses. We’re never goin’ to be sellin’ or mulin’ drugs again, not on my watch. I want us to be as safe as we can be when handlin’ the businesses we retained and to do that we have to change the way we do business. I’m still workin’ on ways to make it work.” He explained.

“Why are you talkin’ to me about your plans? What does it have to do with me?” Lucky was confused.

Ren sat forward and his blue eyes were hard and intent, his voice soft but firm.

“There will come a day, sometime in the future, when Maniac is goin’ to step down. He’s tapped me as the one he wants to take up the gavel. Until that time comes he’s trainin’ me, teachin’ me how to run not just this chapter but *all* the chapters.”

He was silent for a few seconds, letting it sink in before he continued.

“I’ve chosen my VP and SAA and given our Prez their names.”

This was huge, so fucking huge. It meant Maniac was preparing Renegade to take over the Shadow Wraiths MC as their National President when he stepped down. Everyone

knew Ren was going to be their chapter President one day. But their NP? No one would be expecting that.

He didn't know what to say so he just sat and stared at him.

That is when Ren dropped a bomb on him.

“You're my choice for Vice President.” He stated quietly.

Lucky's eyes widened in shock and he shook his head because that couldn't be right. .

“Me? What? I thought Dive would be sittin' on your right when the time came.”

“No, bro, he doesn't want it. He wants the SAA position and I gave it to him. He agrees with me that you're the best choice as VP.” He smiled. “Not that you have to worry about that shit for the next few years but I wanted you to know so you're aware why Maniac will be callin' on you more often. Like you and Dive takin' his back at the meet, and the shit we're about to handle today, and settin' up the deal with the Irish and the South Africans. We're goin' to be called to be more involved in the runnin' of the club, so be prepared.”

Lucky was stunned but at the same time incredibly honoured.

“When I came in today I was comin' to spill that fucker's blood, not for a single second did I expect this to happen. I'm honoured you chose me, Renegade. I won't let you down, Boss.”

Ren stood and walked around the desk, Lucky met him halfway. They grasped forearms, pulled each other close and delivered two hard slaps on each other's backs.

Lucky was a bit dazed with everything Ren had laid out but what he understood clearly was that from this day forward he would be taking and protecting his future president's back. At the same time he would be Renegade's sounding board, someone he could talk to about his plans and ideas for the club.

It would be up to him to help his future president make the right decisions for the brothers and the club.

It was a big fucking responsibility.

“All of this stays between us. You, me and Dive, that's it. At a later stage we'll pull the rest of my chosen officers in, but not yet.” Ren stated firmly.

“I got you, brother.” Lucky lifted his chin a fraction in acknowledgement.

“Right, now that we got that sorted let's get down to the business of the day. Handling the fuckers in the dungeon.” The brother gave an evil grin and winked as he opened his office door.

The violence about to come had his body buzzing in anticipation as he descended the bricked steps. The deeper he descended the cooler it became, the air slightly damp. There was a smell of fear and bleach hanging in the air.

And then they were there, in their interrogation room.

Bates and Breaker were waiting for them with their prisoner. The fucker was naked and strapped to a chair in the middle of the room. A chair that was situated over the drain in the floor for easy cleaning.

And today there was definitely going to be a need for cleaning.

“Welcome to hell, motherfucker.” Lucky snarled as he walked over and smacked the fucker on the side of the head.

His head whipped to the side almost hitting his shoulder.

“You can’t do this. Why am I here? I’m protected by the Italian families and by the Los Rojos cartel, you can’t touch me without consequences.”

The little fuck’s threats came out in a panicked voice.

Lucky looked at his brothers and shrugged as they started laughing.

Breaker went at him first.

“Fucker, know this, you’ve disappeared during a FBI operation. No one is goin’ to be lookin’ for you. Los Rojos is too busy lickin’ their wounds and the Italians have crawled back into their holes and are hidin’ from law enforcement and the fallout. Fallout *you* caused. They have a ‘kill on sight’ order out for you and not even your daddy wants to save you. Didn’t you learn the lesson never to fuck with business? Business always comes first but you forgot about that, didn’t you?”

Breaker walked around and around the chair and every time he made a round he smacked the bastard on the back of the head. Shaking his head at the snivelling asshole he went back to his place against the wall and Ren took over.

He didn’t walk around the chair, he stood right in front of it, his hands clasped behind his back, glaring down at their prisoner.

Lucky stood behind him, his arms crossed over his chest as he waited his turn.

“You decided to hook up with a killer slut and do what? Kidnap your sister and her baby and hand them over to the cartel. Were you hoping they would kill her child? Was that the plan? Did you even have a plan? I don’t think you did. I think you thought you could walk into our territory and take what belongs to us. You made a big fuckin’ mistake. Harper and her son are property of the club. Both of them are Lucky’s personal property and you fucked with them. You hurt them and he’s here to avenge his family.”

The fucker in the chair was shaking his head violently from side to side.

“I didn’t. I never told them to hurt her. Pablo did it, I wasn’t even there.” He whined.

Ren glanced at Lucky and gave a small almost imperceptible chin lift.

It was his turn.

Ren settled in beside Breaker while Lucky slowly took off his kutte then handed it to him. He didn’t want any of the bastard’s blood to soil it.

He didn’t use a fist to hit him. He did it open handed. First one side of his face then the other. His lips split with the first two slaps. He gave him five on each side then stepped back.

“You started tormentin’ your little sister when she was ten years old.” Lucky shook his head violently. “No, let’s use the proper words here, you started rapin’ her when she was ten and continued doin’ it until the day she ran away.”

The fucker shook his head his voice coming out garbled through the blood, snot and tears.

“No! That’s not true! She wanted it. She asked for it, parading her body in front of me. I gave her...”

Lucky didn’t let him continue.

His fist smashed into his mouth, he felt teeth give way, his next strike broke his nose. He kept the hits strategic, shattering the lowlife’s cheekbones and orbital bones.

“Bullshit. She was ten, a little girl. Isn’t it true your mother tried to stop you and your father beat her to death? Hmmm?”

Lucky waited, when he got nothing but sobs and pleading he placed several hard hits to his torso and abdomen. He knew exactly where to hit to cause the most damage.

“Not...my fault...not...my...fault. Dad...he...he... ordered...me to...to do it. He...he wanted...us to...to... breed.”

It was unbelievable, the evil living in one family.

It’s was time for more.

Going to the table he picked up a long thin bladed knife. Twirling it in his hand before he slammed it down through the fucker’s dick and ball sack, pinning them to the seat of the chair.

“Ouch.” Breaker muttered, Bates and Ren hummed in agreement.

The piece of shit’s screams were high pitched, filled with excruciating pain, but Lucky ignored them. Picking up the heavy sand filled pipe he smashed it into the tops of his thighs

then his shins, shattering his legs. The screams had stopped and when he looked up he saw the bastard had passed out from the pain.

“Are we done, brother?” Bates asked quietly.

“I wanted to break his fuckin’ fingers and hands but I got pissed off. The fucker needed to suffer more but he’s fuckin’ weak.” He looked at Ren. “I’m gonna kill him.”

Ren smiled and gave him a chin lift.

“Go ahead, brother. He’s yours, end the fucker, we have one more to take care of.”

Going back to the table Lucky looked over his options. He chose a razor sharp machete, swinging it through the air as he walked over to stand behind the piece of meat in the chair.

It took only one swing to decapitate the fucker. The head flew off, bounced then rolled towards the grate.

Blood washed the floor and ran down the drain.

“Damned glad I moved out of the way.” Breaker grumbled. “Minute I saw him pick up that damned machete I knew, I just knew, heads were gonna roll.”

Bates started laughing and very soon they all joined in.

Standing in the blood splattered room with his brothers after avenging his woman and his son he felt cleansed. He had taken care of a threat against his old lady and dealt out the justice she rightly deserved and never received.

“Let’s get to the next one. I’m sure by now he’s pissed himself listenin’ to the dead fuck.” Ren opened the door and stalked out. “This one I’ll be takin’ care of.”

Mouth and two other prospects stood in the passage, their eyes wide as they walked out.

“Take care of the trash.” Ren ordered. “See to it that the room is spotless once you’re done.”

“You got it, Boss.” Mouth said as he and the other two pulled on plastic suits to start the clean-up.

Ren and Bates headed down the passage. Lucky and Breaker followed once the brother handed over his kutte and he had pulled it back on.

By the time they reached the cell holding their rat Ren and Bates was already inside. They listened to their SAA asking the one and only question they wanted an answer to. Why?

And of course the weak ass idiot blamed the club and the brothers.

Lucky turned to Breaker. “Who’s his sponsor?” He asked softly.

“Pike.” He murmured.

That didn’t sound right. Pike was one of the older brothers with an old lady and grown up kids. His son, Charmer, was one of their junior patches and his daughter, Rachel, had married her high school sweetheart, a civilian, but a really good guy. They were expecting their first baby. No way would Pike be involved in bullshit like this.

“Did he bring him in?”

Breaker shook his head. “Nope, he was a hangaround who was offered a place as a prospect. When Maniac asked for sponsors Pike stepped up. You know how he’s always willing

to help young brothers to find their feet in the club. This fuck bein' a rat is goin' to upset him. I don't think he's had a prospect failure before. His guys always come through."

Lucky watched the little fuck carefully and turned his back on him to talk to Breaker.

"What are the odds he was planted on us? I know it sounds like I'm paranoid, but, think about it. Why would he go through the hangaround stage, get to be a prospect then fuck it up the ass? It makes no sense. What was he offered to rat on the club?"

"Let's find out." Breaker walked into the cell and tapped Ren on the shoulder then tipped his head towards the door.

Ren joined them in the passage and Lucky shared his suspicions. After listening intently the brother went back into the cell.

"I'm sure you heard Lucky takin' care of our other problem. How about you tell me what I want to know and avoid my brother takin' his rage out on you?" His voice was cold but reasonable voice.

"Fuck you! Fuck all of you. You think you're so fuckin' clever, it was so fuckin' easy gettin' close. Your club is quick to beat up good men because of your slutty bitches, but not at *my* club. We took Gear and his men in and they gave us what we needed, a way to take you down. My club is goin' to take everythin' from you, even your bitches. We're gonna sell them to your enemies and they're gonna wish they were dead like you. Go on, kill me, you pussies. My club is comin' for you. I'm..." Ren shut him up with a fist to the temple.

“You were right, brother. Nice catch. We should have fuckin’ killed Gear and his gang of fuckers when we had the chance.” He turned to look at the stupid fuck slumped in the chair. Suddenly Ren’s eyes narrowed and he grabbed him by the hair, lifting his head. Leaning close he inspected the rat’s face carefully.

“Fuck me, how did we not notice this shit?” He asked softly as he waved them closer.

“Check that nose and chin, reminds me of Killer Ross. This little fucker is a Ross. I would bet on it.”

“Fuckin’ hell.” Breaker swore as he stepped closer, grabbed the bastard’s hair and jerked his head back.

“We had a fuckin’ Grave Robber inside our club.” Bates snarled as he leaned close. “He’s been here long enough he’s added to the information Gear gave them. The changes we made after we kicked those fuckers out, the location of some of our new safe houses, every-fuckin’-thing he’s been trusted with. We can’t kill him, not yet anyway, we need information from him.”

Ren crossed his arms over his chest and stepped back.

“I want him cleaned up and once it’s done I want him moved to the secure cells. No prospects anywhere near him. I’ll assign brothers to watch over him. No junior patches either. Prez is goin’ to want to handle this one himself.”

Lucky stared at the fucker in the chair, wishing he could have just ripped his head off. He was a no good fuckin’ Grave Robber, a bastard who ratted out the brothers and had led the dead motherfucker right to his old lady. He found it hard to let

go, to let the bastard live just because they needed to know what he knows.

“Lucky, brother, I see what you’re wantin’ to do and you can’t. You can’t kill the mangy fuck. He’s too important. Not because of who he is, that’s not it, it’s about what he’s given the motherfuckers. He’s been here long enough to have given them a lot of information. Our defences, our security, our patrols, some of our routes, there are so many fuckin’ things we’re goin’ to have to go over and change. Be ready to be called back sooner than expected. There’re goin’ to be changes startin’ tonight.” Ren stated, gave the fuck in the chair one more look and walked out of the cell, giving orders over his shoulder.

“You’re with me, Lucky. Break, brother, stay with Bates and help him get the fucker situated. Once you’re done meet us in Prez’s office.”

After a last glare at their rat he followed Ren.

It was time to fill Maniac in about what they had found. It was also time to put plans into place to protect their people and their businesses.

They had to ensure those who were vulnerable were protected.

He growled softly. His old lady and son would be counted among the vulnerable. At least he had brothers on them and once he got home he would be reaching out to his Cajun family. He suspected his cousins were still in the area cleaning up Los Rojos stragglers. Not all of them had been killed or arrested.

It was going to be a long process to secure their compound and the brothers' houses. He wasn't sure they had a lot of time in which to get it done.

The rat would have been in contact with the Grave Robbers right up until he was caught. The minute he went silent they would know he had been made.

Maniac was the one who would be dealing with the mangy bastards.

They would most probably blame the club that Killer Ross and Scurvy West, their VP and one of their patch members, had been executed by the FBI. And now they had one of the GR's family members in their cells.

If he was important to their president, Robber Ross, it meant they had a bargaining chip.

Walking to their president's office all he could think about was getting home and securing his family. He had already sent texts to Lure and Rider to be vigilant. He trusted the brothers implicitly.

But he wanted to get home and see to them himself.

His family.

Every time he thought about it or said those words it started a possessive fire in his chest.

He had a family, an old lady and a son.

Even with his knuckles all busted up and blood splatter on his clothes and boots all he wanted was to go home. To be with them, to protect them.

But first they had a report to deliver to their president.

Once it was done he would have a shower and change his clothes.

And then, finally, he would go home.

Home to his old lady and his son.

Home to his family

FORTY THREE

Lucky

Riding up their long drive overhung by trees draped in Spanish moss Lucky made mental notes on how to further secure their property. When his old lady insisted on only looking at properties surrounded by high walls he thought she was being paranoid. Now he was fucking grateful she had. They had the high walls but he would see about heightening it with spikes, plus he would be adding more cameras to eliminate all blind spots. The other thing they needed was a safe room, maybe even two, one upstairs and another downstairs. He'll ask Breaker's advice with that.

His brain was churning with plans as he rode up to find several bikes and three cages parked in front of his garage. He recognised two of the cages, they belonged to Frankie and Asa, but not the third one. Lure and Dive's bikes were parked next to the one he was loaning Rider.

He parked next to them then headed towards the sound of voices coming from the back of the house.

A flash at the corner of his eye had him glancing over and one of Asa's men stepped from behind a tree gave him a chin lift then disappeared back into the shrubbery. His old lady wasn't going to like it but he was going to have the garden cleaned up. She loved the wildness of the garden but there were too many hiding places.

He knew this would be the last time they would be hanging out in the back yard. It wasn't safe. At least until such time as their problems with their enemies had been sorted.

Walking into the back yard his steps faltered at the beauty before him.

A colourful throw was spread out underneath the big old tree in the centre of the lawn. His old lady was lying on it, their son next to her on a large cushion. She was barefoot, dressed in black stretch pants and a dark pink top, her hair almost a match for the damned thing.

He wouldn't say anything but he couldn't wait for her to go back to her natural hair colour.

With her incredibly light blonde hair and pale blue eyes she was his ice queen. And when her eyes flashed as he made her come she was his little cat, hissing and scratching.

Unfortunately he wouldn't be doing that tonight, making her eyes flash.

Her doc had said no sex for a week or so. He was counting the days. They had a few to go before he would be able to make love to his woman, before he would be sliding inside the very best pussy in the world.

His thoughts must have somehow shown on his face because Rider sniggered when he walked up next to him.

"It's going to feel like forever, brother, but before you know it the wait will be over. Patience." He said with a wink.

"Fuck off." Lucky said without any heat.

The shit eating grin on his friend's face spoke volumes.

He ignored it and focused on his cousins, all with beers in their hands, lounging on the grass as Lure cooked steaks and burgers on the grill. A table had been brought out and it was loaded down with sides and crap.

“When did this happen?” He asked with a nod towards the group.

“Your sister arrived right after your cousins and organised the entire thing. She said Harper wasn’t going to run around entertaining the hordes when they could feed themselves.” Rider tilted a head towards the house.

“She’s in the kitchen arguing with one of the men who arrived with your cousins. She wasn’t very happy when she saw him.”

Lucky sighed and shook his head in frustration.

“It must be Louis. They have history and since she divorced the fucknut he’s been makin’ it clear he’s back in her life to stay. They were together and somethin’ happened, don’t know what and not goin’ to ask either. He ended it with her and she went off to college, met the fucknut, and married him. A big mistake that cost her years of her life and money to get out of.”

Lucky smirked as he looked towards the house, making sure she was still inside.

“She doesn’t know but my club brothers and I paid her ex a visit when he wouldn’t sign the divorce papers. He signed damned quick when I stood over him and explained how it was goin’ to go. He signs or he dies. Easy. Fucker signed and my sister got her freedom.”

Rider laughed and smacked him on the back, hard.

“You treat my sister like the treasure she is and we won’t ever have a problem like that.”

Lucky hooked an arm around the shoulders of the shorter man and gave him a side hug.

“She’s my old lady, brother, no way am I goin’ to do shit that would have her leavin’ me. People look at her and all they see is the smiles and laughter but look deep in her eyes and you will see the steel she has for a spine. She’s perfect for me, Rider, absolutely perfect. I’m goin’ to need a strong woman by my side.”

He couldn’t say more but he knew Rider read between the lines because he stiffened under his arm.

“You make sure that whatever happens the two of them are safe and we won’t have problems.” He ordered quietly.

“You have my word, brother.” Lucky answered as quietly.

“Good. Now let’s get over there because your old lady is giving us the eye. She’s been wondering why you were taking so long.”

Lucky didn’t answer, he didn’t need to because Rider understood. It was club business.

Dropping his arm from Rider’s shoulders he walked across the thick lawn to his old lady. She watched him with narrowed eyes and he knew she had noticed that he had changed clothes.

His cousins called out greetings as he walked towards her.

“Lucky, *comment ça va* (how’s it going)?”

“Hey, cousin.”

“Hi, cousin.”

He waved at them, his eyes on his old lady and son. They could wait, he would talk to them later.

Kneeling next to her he leaned over, his arms on either side of her body, and pressed his lips to hers. Kissing her slow and sweet before lifting his head.

“Hi, baby, sorry I was gone so long but...” He shrugged.

She smiled, lifted up and whispered in his ear.

“We’ll talk about that and the clothes later.”

Pulling away her smile was brilliant as she looked down at their son.

“Your son is enjoying the fresh air and his family.”

Moving over he sat down then slid his arms beneath his boy and lifted him into his arms.

“Hey, Ry, have you been good for your Mama?” He looked in his son’s blue eyes, kissed his forehead then settled him against his chest. His big hands almost entirely covered his boy.

It still amazed him that the little human in his hands was his son. For years he had believed he would never have an old lady or children. And now he had both, an old lady and a son.

Rider lay down on the grass next to them, his arms behind his head and gave a relaxed groan.

“I could fall asleep right here.” He muttered.

Harper leaned over and smacked his belly. “No, you can’t. You have so little time left before you guys go home. I want

you awake for most of it. I don't know when we're going to see you again."

"Ouch! I wasn't really going to fall asleep." The bugger lied.

"Such a bloody liar." Harper teased.

Rider rolled his head and grinned at them. "You're so easy, Harp, you and Delly are the..."

His phone rang and he instantly sat up, drawing it from his pocket. He didn't even look at the caller as he answered. He must have assigned whoever it was a ringtone.

"Are you guys okay?" He asked with a frown.

He listened then shook his head and grinned.

"Okay, G, tell her I'll call back in a minute or two. I'm outside and I don't have my tablet with me. Give me a second, okay? Yeah, call you back."

He jumped up and started walking away.

"Hey! Rider, what's goin' on?" Lucky called after him.

"My kid is being a little diva, she wants a video call, right now. I've got to get my tablet from my saddlebag, back in a sec." He threw over his shoulder as he strode away.

His cousin Bas sniggered mockingly. "The brother is totally whipped. Lettin' a kid rule his life like that. He should just tell her to wait for his call."

Lucky opened his mouth but his old lady got there first.

"Just so you know, his pregnant wife was murdered two years ago. His little girl is all he has left of her. He's one of the

best men I know. Giving his little girl his time and love makes him an exceptional man. Not many of those around.”

Bas held his hands up in apology. “Fuck. Sorry, sweetheart, didn’t know the man’s history. Thought it was his old lady callin’. Damn, I feel for him.”

There were nods all around and Lucky jumped into the conversation.

“Do not look at him as if you pity him, he’ll have your fuckin’ nuts. The brother is a badass behind that laid back face he shows the world.”

Again nods all around.

His boy was fast asleep and he lay him back down on the big cushion.

Rider came striding around the house, a small bag in his hand. He sat down next to them, put the bag on his crossed legs and zipped it open, extracting a tablet in a leather cover and a small speaker. Putting the bag to the side he opened the tablet and started it up. He checked his phone then slid it back into his kutte’s inside pocket.

Finally he dialled.

It rang once and his baby girl answered.

Rider had the tablet connected to a small speaker and they could all hear her while he could see and hear his baby.

“Dadda, I’s bin waitin’ an’ waitin’ ta call youse. G ‘splained de...de time fings, we’s not same, same. Ooh! Dadda, we gots a...a...a globe wif de wold on it. We putted rred an’ blue pins innit wherre you arrre.” Rider grinned as she wrinkled her

nose. “It’s farr, farr, farr away, Dadda. Youse too farr away, I want you herrre. We tooked de globe from Unka Hawk’s house. Awnty DeeCee sayed okay.”

“Hello baby girl. What did your Uncle Hawk say about you taking his globe, Delly?” Rider asked.

He tilted the tablet so Lucky and Harper could watch.

His baby girl was sitting crossed legged on top of what was obviously a kitchen table. She was dressed in black jeans and a long sleeved black tee with glittery bright pink angel wings on the front. She wore little biker boots and her hair was pulled up in two high pony tails with black and pink ribbons. She looked so damned cute. Every time she said an r she exaggerated it, dragging it out. The last time he had seen her she’d had trouble saying them.

A little hand was thrown out and she pulled a face then shrugged. “Awnty DeeCee knows we tooked it, Dadda. She sayed its fiiiine.”

She clapped her hands and leaned forward. “Dadda, you know what? I wented to skoowal wif de udderrr kids today. Dey’s gotted a teachurrrr. Unca Hawke gotted dem one. I played and I maked a pass da pot to come see youse. Look!” She picked up a folded and stapled together booklet, pointing at the front. “Dis herrre says Souf Afrrrica, an’ herrre is ma pikturrrre an’ ma name. See, see herrre? Delene De Rrrriderrr.” She grinned huge. “I sayded ma name, Dadda. Did you hearrr?”

“I hear, baby. I’m so proud of my big girl.”

She nodded. “I’s a big gurrll now. I’s gonna come see youse wif ma pass da pot on da airryplane. Unka Scarr tolded me I can’t go to de Vanna wifout a pass da pot. I maded one, so I’s comin’ to youse an’ my Harrrpy and my baby brrro.”

Rider muttered under his breath about killing his brother when he got home.

The little girl suddenly noticed Lucky and aimed a big smile his way.

“Unca Luckeee! I see youse. Youse wif ma Dadda. Wherrre’s ma Harrrpy? An’ ma baby brrro?” She clapped her hands excitedly.

“Unca Lucky, cans you hearr? I can make da rrrrr’s now. G’s bin teachin’ me ta say dem an’ I’ve bin pwac... prrrracting.”

“Hey baby girl, you’re lookin’ good darlin’ and well done with those r’s. Your Harpy’s right here with me and baby Ry is here too. You wanna see them?” Lucky asked.

Harper punched him in the side when he called her Harpy and he sniggered.

“Yeeeeesss!! I’s missin’ dem sooo much. We chats on de tabbet an’ den my Harrrpy wented to de hossipetal ‘cause she gots *eina* (hurt). Dadda sayed ma baby brrro an’ hers comin’ home soon an’ I mus’ wait. I doan like waitin’. I’s comin ta youse wif ma pass da pot.”

Rider shook his head with a sigh and turned the tablet more so Harper was in view. The smile on the little girl’s face was like a light going on. She beamed.

“Harrpy! I see youse! I’s bin missin’ you an’ da belly. You don’t gots no belly no more ‘cause you gots ma baby brrro. Can’s you hearr? I can make da rrrr’s now.”

His old lady leaned against his side and waved at the little sprite. “Hey there Ms Squirrel. I missed you too. I can hear those r’s, baby. I’m so proud of you. Baby Ry is right here, he’s sleeping over here beside me.” She reached over Lucky and Rider handed her the tablet. “See, there he is.”

There was a few seconds of silence then a little giggle.

“Aw, he’s soooo cute an’ he gots soooo beeg! Ma baby brrro is da biggest of all da babies herrre. I’se goin’ ta tell Grrranny Suzy, my baby brrro is da biggest an’ da bestest. We gots a lotta babies now, Harrpy. G says deys a baby makin’ club, not a bikerrr club. Unca Icee was crrross wif herrr. Whassa baby makin’ club, Dadda? Arrre youse gonna make us a baby too? I fink I wants a baby sissie.”

Rider’s shocked face had them all laughing, Harper pressed her face against Lucky’s chest as she shook with laughter, handing the tablet back to Rider.

“Baby girl, we’re not talking about making babies. Okay? That’s for when you’re older, much older.”

His voice dropped and he was suddenly very serious.

“Sweetheart, you can’t come to Savannah, not this time. I’ll bring you with me the next time I visit. I’m not going to be away for long, I’m coming home soon. I promise.”

A put out huff came over the speaker.

“I makeded a pass da pot forrr nothing.” She gave a big sigh. “Okay, Dadda, I miss youse. Lots an’ lots.” She made kissing

noises.

Rider's smile was loving and his eyes soft.

"I miss you too, sweet baby. Before you know it I'll be home and we can read books together and have long chats. Okay?"

"Okay, Dadda, now I gots ta go, 'cause G says I have ta baf. I'll talk ta ya laterrr. Bye-bye Harrppy, baby brrro and Unca Luckeee! Youse mus' come visit me soon. I'se waitin'."

Harper quickly wiped tears from her eyes then waved at the screen.

"Bye-bye Ms Squirrel. Love you."

The cutie wrinkled her nose in disgust.

"I'se notta squirrel! I'se ma Dadda's Delly-belly. An' I loves you too, Harrppy. Byeeee!"

Rider got up and walked away obviously talking to his little girl's care giver. For a second he wondered who she was but then focused on his old lady who was feeling sad.

"Baby, we'll go visit as soon as Ry is old enough to make the flight, okay?" He said softly and she nodded against his chest.

The rest of the afternoon was spent hanging out with his family and friends. It was so peaceful after the turmoil of the recent days.

His sister and Louis were very obviously embroiled in some personal stuff and he would give Frankie time before he approached her about it. She was his little sister and if she needed him to he would step in and warn Louis to back off. The fucker broke her fuckin' heart the first time around, he would not let it happen again.

Right now though, his little family came first. Tonight he would tell Harper everything that went down at the clubhouse. He had given her the option, know nothing or know as much as he could give her. She picked the second option. His old lady was strong, and he had known she wouldn't pick the easier option.

Much later, when everyone was gone and the night was quiet he did a final walk through of his home before sliding into bed next to his woman. His boy was asleep in his room, the baby monitor on the nightstand beside their bed, holding his old lady in his arms he finally relaxed. But not for long, he was about to talk to her about club business.

He kept the talk about the shit that had gone down at the club short. Only telling her that the fucker who had been her brother had been taken care of and was gone, permanently.

She sagged against him and blew out a breath in relief.

No tears, no questions, just acceptance.

He was damned lucky his old lady was so understanding. Not all the old ladies felt the same way. Some preferred not knowing anything about what went down and he felt sorry for those brothers. Not having someone to talk shit through with must be tough. Before Harper he and his closest group of brothers talked about shit and he would still talk to them about things he couldn't or didn't want to talk to her about. They would always be there for him as he would be there for them.

Peace settled over him as he held his woman in his arms.

The alarm was on, he had brothers patrolling the grounds and the cameras were being monitored at the clubhouse. His

family was safe. And he was going to make it even safer for them by adding to their security. Safer than Fort Knox.

“I love you, baby” He whispered against the top of her head where it lay on his chest.

Her hand twitched on his abs, then slowly inched over him, clasping his side she hugged him.

“I love you too.” She whispered sleepily.

“I’ll keep you and Ry safe, my queen.”

“I know you will. You’re our hero, our lucky charm. Without you life would’ve gone on but it would’ve been empty. I’m so blessed to have you as my old man.”

“Thank you, *tite chatte* (little cat).” He pressed a soft kiss on her head.

“One of these days...when I’m not falling asleep...we’re going to talk about...what you’re saying when you speak French to me. It’s very sexy.” She muttered before going limp against him as sleep pulled her under.

Lucky smiled.

“*Je t’aime, mon coeur* (I love you, my heart)” He whispered as his eyes slid closed.

His last thought was how lucky he was.

His name was spot-on.

Lucky.

So fucking lucky.

FORTY FOUR

Harper

Three Days Later

Last night had been a total snotfest.

Rider, Asa, Bren and the guys returned home.

I insisted on going to the airport to see them off.

Lucky had not been happy.

He wasn't happy that I had been crying like my heart was breaking since the moment Rider let us know they were leaving.

At the airport I held on to my best friend for the longest time before I could let him go. The words he whispered made the tears flow faster but it also warmed my heart.

“Harp, sweetheart, stop crying, I promise I'll call when we get home. Delly and I will call you the way we've always done, nothing will change. You and Ry are ours, always will be. You ever need me I'll be here, I'm just a phone call away. And you know that's the truth. I love you, Harp.”

All I could do was cry and tell him I loved him too.

All the way back to the clubhouse I sat with a box of tissues on my lap, using one after the other while next to me sat a very grumpy man mountain.

He wasn't happy that I was out in the open and vulnerable, even with our massive escort of bikers. He had insisted that we

leave Ry at the clubhouse with Viv, Grave's old lady, where he would be safe while we went to the airport.

And why was he so overprotective?

That awful club, the Grave Robbers MC, had issued threats against the club and against Lucky specifically. And if he was being threatened it meant we were as well. If it was any other club, a club that followed the code of not targeting women and children, we would have been fine.

The Grave Robbers were into human trafficking so we weren't safe.

They were under the impression the SWMC executed two of their members when it had been Cole who shot them. The FBI had taken responsibility for their deaths, letting it be known they had been killed by an agent during the operation against the Los Rojos cartel.

Stupid assholes didn't believe them.

I wasn't supposed to know but Lucky told me the club had a family member of the Grave Robbers' president in their cells. He was their bargaining chip. When he told me it was the awful prospect who had betrayed me to my brother I didn't give a shit. He could rot in the cell for all I cared.

I haven't been back to work at the studio since Ry and I had been taken. At first I had been recovering from my wounds but once healed it was my man being his overprotective self that kept me from working. Lucky was driving me nuts with his hovering but it came from a good place so I let it go. Most of the time.

Last night I finally persuaded him to let me go in for three hours today. Of course he appointed himself as my guard.

What he didn't know was that the three hours were allocated to him.

I was going to put my mark on my man. Permanently.

He liked the raptor wings Killian, or Kill as everyone now called him, had designed for me, always clasping his hand around my throat and rubbing his thumb over the red heart between the wings. The tattoo hadn't been fake for a while, it was the real thing. When the fake one started fading I had him do a real one, just the wings and the heart, not all the rest. It had been easy, he had worked on it at night when the only people around had been Bren and Viper.

With Kill's help I've designed a more masculine pair of wings, darker, more ominous, and instead of a red heart it had a cartouche between the wings.

In the cartouche were my initials.

H D.

Front and centre on his throat. No bitch was going to miss that damned claim.

And why was it necessary to claim him so visibly?

The club whores.

There were one or two of them who were playing with their sick leave. Maybe even with the grave. They were under the impression that until he put his patch on my back he was fair game.

Bullshit.

After today they will have visible proof that he was mine.

At least until he makes it official by giving me his property patch.

It was due to happen soon but I wanted a visible mark on him showing the world he was mine.

Hence the throat tattoo.

Arriving at the studio I immediately started setting up my station while Lucky put Ry down in his little bed in the breakroom then went into the office to talk to Ink. It kept him out of my hair while I set up.

It was time to get my man in my chair.

Knocking on Ink's open door I held up the sketch and both men looked at me, one with a grin the other in confusion.

"I'm ready for you, love. Let's get you prepped and get started." I tried hard to look casual but it wasn't working.

Lucky looked at me then at Ink. "Who you callin' love, baby? Me or him?" He growled.

I laughed outright. "You of course."

I tipped my head towards my station. "Come on, let's go, you only gave me three hours so we need to get started so I can get the first part done."

He frowned. "What you talkin' about?"

Stepping into the office I gave him the sketch, he studied it intently then slowly looked up.

"You want to put this on me?" He asked.

I nodded.

“Where?”

I tapped my fingers to my neck.

He rushed up out of the chair. “Fuck, yeah. Let’s do this, *tite chatte* (little cat)”

I was putting my mark on the man I loved, a mark that would declare to the world that he was mine.

Lucky had a very high pain threshold which meant we didn’t have to take a lot of breaks and I got more done than I thought I would.

It took longer than the three hours he had given me to get the first part done but he didn’t complain. While I worked everyone had been popping in to see what I was doing. There had been some teasing from Mark and winking from Liz as I worked. Ink came over, took a look, grinned and winked at me before retreating to his station.

Once I was done Lucky stood in front of the mirror tipping his head from side to side with a pleased smile.

“I fuckin’ love it. Goin’ to have my beard trimmed shorter so everyone can see who owns my ass.”

Turning he pulled me into his arms and pressed a kiss to my lips.

“Wait, let me get it covered before you get all touchy feely.” I teased. “I’ll finish it once you’ve healed. It still needs shading and detail before it’s done.”

Laying his forehead on mine he looked into my eyes. “There’s only one thing more I want. I want my initials in that heart on your throat, my queen.”

He didn't wait for me to say yes or no.

Lifting his head he shouted. "Kill, brother, you busy?"

"No, just cleaning up here, I'll be with you in a sec." He called back.

Not even five minutes later I was in the chair and he was inking an ornate L B inside the heart on my throat. That my man designed. Who knew the man did calligraphy? No one it seems.

Lucky watched over his shoulder looking pleased and possessive.

He was very happy to see his initials on me, as happy as I was seeing mine on him.

Ink popped in as Kill finished up.

"Damn, that's goin' to ruffle some feathers." He teased.

"If it keeps the fuckin' gash off my back until I get my patch on my woman I'll be fuckin' ecstatic." Lucky growled sarcastically.

Ink frowned. "Hmm, I think we need to bring it up in church. The bitches have been gettin' out of hand. They know claimed brothers are off limits. You're not the only one complainin' about their bullshit."

Now that was interesting news, but of course they shut up tight as clams when I tried to find out who else was complaining.

Cleaning my station we packed Ry up and with our entourage of bikers went home. Lucky had 'shit to do' at the

club and left shortly after issuing a million orders. All of them saying the same thing. I was to stay inside where it was safe.

Our house now had two safe rooms, one downstairs and one upstairs. After what had happened at the club's safe house it set my mind at ease.

I knew my brother and Carmella was dead but Carlos and Pablo were still out there and so were the dirty bikers. It was weird but I was more afraid of the bikers than the cartel. My experience with the two dead members of the club had not been good. I felt sure the rest of the club was just like them. Awful.

Shaking my dark thoughts off I did the prep for dinner then lay on the lounge carpet with my boy. Playing with him and catching up on my reading while he slept.

Ry was just starting to move around, not awake yet but getting there, when I heard his bike.

My man was home.

I knew the first thing he would do as he came through the door from the garage was take off his boots. They were added to the rack of boots and shoes in what I now know was called the mud room. We didn't have those back home...oh wait... this was now home. South Africa was no longer home.

My home was here, in Savannah, with Lucky and Ryder.

He padded soundlessly in on his socked feet, through the kitchen into the house. I watched as he came through the open plan space towards us. His big man mountain body moving gracefully and soundlessly towards me.

“There you are, my queen.” His deep voice made things in my body tingle.

Better than the tingle?

Him kneeling next to me, taking my face in his big hands and kissing me. His thumbs under my jaw, rubbing ever so gently up and down my throat on either side of my new tattoo.

His tongue duelled with mine as he took me down to my back. Kissing me deep and thoroughly. My hands went up to his jaw, stroking over his now short scruff of a beard. He’d had it trimmed while he was out. Already showing off his half-finished tattoo.

Next to us our son complained loudly and Lucky laughed against my lips. Lifting his head he turned slightly to look at his son.

“Give your Papa a break, Ry. I’m kissin’ your Mama hello over here.” He joked, pressing a hard closed mouth kiss to my lips he sat up.

Still on his knees he picked up an angrily crying Ry and held him in the air in front of him.

“Hey, why you makin’ all that noise, *cher*? You angry I didn’t say hello to you first? You gotta know your Mama will always get the first kiss, yeah?” As his voice rumbled and Lucky gently swung him in the air his crying stopped and his blue eyes locked on his daddy.

Bringing him close he kissed him on both cheeks then settled him against his big chest. Our boy was big but against his daddy’s chest he looked tiny.

“Am I in time to give him his bath, *bébé* (baby)?”

“Yes, I was waiting for him to wake up.” I grinned when Lucky gave a soft whoop.

“Time to have a bath, Ry. You wanna have a bath with your Papa? Hmm?” He nodded at our boy. “Yeah, I got covered in dust and shit on the bike today and I think a bath with my boy is just what I need.”

Have you ever seen a big masculine man sitting in a bath filled with baby bath bubbles, supporting his baby son on his big thighs while he gently washes his hair?

Instant ovary explosion.

I sat on the bathroom floor watching them as Lucky bonded with his son. It was something I never thought he would do. Something so out of character for the scary and coldly efficient Road Captain of the SWMC. But totally in character for the man he became the minute he walked into our home.

Once he was done bathing him he handed Ry to me then got out of the bath and into the shower. I dried and dressed my baby boy and handed him back to his dad.

Sitting in the big rocking chair in Ry’s room – yes, we had to have one made to fit Lucky’s bulk – he held and fed our boy then put him to bed.

I was downstairs getting dinner ready and listened to him talking to Ry on the baby monitor. Telling him about his day, not the hard stuff, just about riding with his brothers and the way it felt. There was no way our boy wasn’t going to be a biker. He took his dad’s bike stories in with his bottle, wide sparkling blue eyes riveted on the man holding him. It didn’t

bother me at all. He was going to grow up in the brotherhood of the Shadow Wraiths.

And his Papa would keep him safe until he was old enough to do the job himself.

I had the food on the table when he came down dressed in a pair of grey sweat pants and nothing else. I stared at his solid pecs with the sprinkling of chest hair, my eyes following the line of hair leading down past his abs to where it disappeared in his low slung sweat pants.

The bulge behind the grey fabric restarted the tingle and his dirty grin told me he knew what his bare chest and those damned pants did to me.

Evil sexy man.

We had dinner, chatted about the club and a run he was busy working on. Then I boldly told him I was going back to work the coming Monday.

He was silent for a couple of seconds, holding my hand in his. “Okay, baby, I’ll deal with it. At the studio today I could see how much you missed it. As long as you’re okay with how over protective I’m goin’ to be about the two of you, *‘tite chatte* (little cat).”

I instantly agreed. I could live with being protected, even a little too much. I never want to be as vulnerable as I had been before.

We cleared the table together and then he shoed me upstairs to have my shower. I left him cleaning up the kitchen and went upstairs.

I was standing in front of the mirror brushing my once again blonde hair when he appeared in the mirror behind me.

Taking the brush from my hand he gently brushed my hair, drawing a hand down over the brushed strands.

Bending down Lucky kissed the side of my neck.

“I love havin’ my ice queen back. I love your hair. Loved the way it shone like silver under the light of the moon that night we spent on the beach. It’s a night I will remember until the end of my days. And it’s somethin’ I want to do again. I want to make love to you on a beach under the light of the moon. And I want to fuck you under that moon as well. Take you hard and rough, the way you like me to do.” He whispered then licked up the side of my neck, sucked my skin into his mouth and bit down, not hard, just enough to make me shudder.

Reaching behind me I slid my hands up his naked thighs, clasping his hips and drawing him close. His hard cock pushed up against me and I gently rubbed my towel covered butt over it.

The brush clattered as he threw it on the vanity, ripped my towel off then hoisted me up in his arms.

I wasn’t short or a light weight, but he handled me effortlessly.

Laying me on our big bed he slowly crawled up my body, delivering biting kisses and licks along the way.

“What does my ice queen want? Does she want me to make love to her or does she want me to fuck her hard?” His voice was rough and filled with what I knew was lust.

I felt it to my very core. Want. So much want.

“I want your monster of a cock. I want it anyway you want to give it to me.” I gasped as he drew my nipple into his mouth and bit down. Hard, but not too hard. It felt just right.

“You gonna give me your nails, *tite chatte* (little cat)?” He whispered around my nipple lying against his bottom lip. Blowing a soft breath over the wet, making it pebble even more.

“Yeeeesss.” I moaned, arching my back to get his mouth back, my hands going to his broad shoulders.

I shuddered as his hard fingers stroked over my lower lips, dipping into the wet, coating them. I can't help the moan that escapes as I lose his fingers, only to get them back on my nipples, painting my juices over them.

“Mmm, look at those juicy nipples, makes me wanna take a bite.” He rasps.

“Yes, yes, do it.” I urge. “Take a bite.”

I never used to like pain during sex, it's something I have learnt to enjoy with him, only him. He does it right, the way I like it. Delivering a tiny bite of pain with my pleasure.

Exactly the way his monster of a cock does when he pushes it inside me.

“Open your mouth.” He orders and I rush to obey.

Pushing his wet fingers into my mouth I taste myself on them.

“Suck for me, baby. Lick them clean.” He orders as he dips down and swipes his tongue over my nipples, first one then the

other.

When I start sucking he sucks as well, sucking my nipple into his hot mouth. Letting go with a pop he looks up at me, takes the tip of my nipple between his teeth and flicks the tip of his tongue over it. It sends sharp shards of pleasure followed by pain and then pleasure again as he flicks, bites, flicks, bites over and over again.

His fingers leaves my mouth and dips back down between my pussy lips. His mouth stays on my breasts, tormenting me.

He alternates between my breasts while his hand is busy between my legs, his fingers stroking between my lower lips, his thumb rubbing over my clit.

Between the sensations from my breasts and clit I'm writhing and burning up with need.

"Please, please, I need you inside. Fuck me, love." I beg.

"Please, baby, please, give me your monster." I urge, lifting my hips.

Lucky

He loved it when she begged. Sometimes he would have her begging and moaning for a while before he relented and let her have what she needed.

His cock.

But not tonight. Tonight he was as ready as she was.

Her *'tite fleur* (little flower) was so fucking wet and juicy. Testing her with three fingers he knew she would be able to take him.

Setting the head of his cock at her entrance he shoved inside.

Not hard enough to hurt in a bad way, just hard enough to give her the pleasure and pain she needed.

Pleasure as his piercings – he now had more than one – scraped over her sensitive membranes.

A bite of pain as the size of his cock stretched her out.

He kept pushing until he filled her with all of him.

“Ah, my sweet ice queen, I love how wet and hot your little flower gets for my big cock. Love how I stretch you out and make you writhe tryin’ to take all of me. Feelin’ your hot wet little flower surroundin’ my hard as hell cock, best fuckin’ feelin’ in the world.” He whispered to her.

His eyes stayed on her face making sure she was okay with what he was giving to her.

Her eyelids fluttered and her mouth hung open as she arched under him with a soft moan.

“Not...a big cock, it’s a monster cock. And it’s all mine, my biker man.” She gasped with a wicked smile.

How he loved her smiles and her teasing in bed. And out of bed too.

“Yes it is, baby. My monster cock is all yours, only yours, always.” He smiled down at his woman.

Holding her ice blue eyes he started moving.

A slow out and in, over and over.

He knew he wouldn’t be able to keep the slow pace. Knew it by the sensations flooding his body.

“Give me your nails, little cat. I need them now.” He ordered and growled as she dug into his shoulder blades with her short nails.

Fuck, he loved the feel of them in his back, loved her long legs around his hips as he pounded her pussy.

And he did.

He fucking pounded inside her as if he was trying to find the place inside her where they became one.

And she took him, took every inch of him and still demanded more, deeper, harder.

He gave it to her, to his ice queen, his woman, the mother of his child.

And when he finally found it, found the place where they became one, they both detonated, sharing a massive orgasm.

“Oh yes, yes, baby, baby, baby.” His woman moaned beneath him as he jerked and shuddered over her.

He flooded her with his come, liking the fact that they didn't have to use condoms because she was on birth control.

It was too soon to think about getting her pregnant again. Ry was still too young.

But he wasn't going to wait too long between his boy and the next one.

They were going to fill their home with their own tribe. It was what his old lady wanted and anything she wanted he'd give her.

He stayed deep inside until her little flower stopped contracting and fluttering around him while his dick slowly

deflated. As he slipped out of her he rolled and pulled her close to his chest.

“I fuckin’ love you, my queen.” He rasped.

“And I fucking love you, my king.” She panted breathlessly.

Oh yes, he liked that, liked it a hell of a lot.

Liked being the man she saw as her king, her protector, her lover, her biker man.

Actually.

He not only liked it.

He loved it.

Loved being all of that for her.

Gently disengaging from her he rolled off the bed, went to the bathroom and got a warm cloth to clean his woman. Once done he returned the cloth to the bathroom and went back to the bed.

Picking her up he pulled the covers down and gently settled her in their bed, covering her up.

On his side of the bed he checked that he had his weapon on the bedside table, his sweats on the floor next to the bed before he slid in beside her.

Reaching out he pulled her into his arms and settled her head on his chest, his hand going to the back of her head, his fingers spearing into her soft pale blonde hair.

“Thank you, baby.” He murmured against the top of her head. “Thank you for lovin’ me and givin’ me this life. It’s somethin’ I never thought would be mine. You’re the dream I

kept dreamin' and when I finally reached out, there you were, givin' me what I needed. I swear on my life I will always love and protect you and our family."

He had no idea why he felt he had to give her his vow here in their bed.

All he knew was that it felt right.

It became even better when she echoed his vow.

"Thank you for loving me and Ry, thank you for the life you're giving us and for making all my dreams come true. Thank you for being our protector. I give you my vow I will always love you and with you beside me I will love and protect our family. Forever."

"Forever, my queen."

He held her as she fell asleep on his chest. Listened as his son's soft baby breaths sounded through the monitor beside him.

Life was good.

He knew it wouldn't always be good. Knew there were dark times ahead.

But with the woman in his arms beside him he could weather any storms life would throw at them. They would do it together. Always.

Always together.

OTHER BOOKS BY RENÉ VAN DALEN

IRON DOGZ MC

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Including the short story Evil Beautiful

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Savage Beautiful

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SHADOW WRAITHS MC

Menace

SHADOW WRAITHS MC

OFFICERS

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Old Lady - Luciana "Lucy" Ricci

Vice President - Lawrence "Grave" Jordan

Old Lady - Vivienne "Viv" Jordan

Sergeant At Arms - Rhys "Renegade" Jordan

Old Lady - Sheryl "Sherri" Jordan

Enforcer - Raigan "Dive" Jordan

Road Captain - Antoine "Lucky" Boudreaux

IT - Michael "Byte" Flynn

Security - Ward "Breaker" Williams

Treasurer - Robert "Duke" Jones

Secretary - Louis "Dimes" Stoppard

Medic - Levon "Bates" Jonas

Tail Gunner - Brandon "Ink" Coburn

CLUB MEMBERS

Eric "Lure" Johnson

Nicholas "Magic" Monroe

Ryan "Bruiser" Adamson

Kyle "Viper" Rigby

Jason "Denim" Myles

Kevon “Charmer” Jackson

Leroy “Pike” Jackson - Elder

PROSPECTS

David “Mouth” Daniels

Terry “Flag” Jones aka Theo Ross (Traitor/Rat)

PLAYLIST

Pink – Learn to Love Again

Meatloaf – I Won't Do That

Slipknot – Goodbye

Miley Cyrus – Wrecking Ball

Miley Cyrus – Maneater (Hall & Oates cover)

Jesse Clegg – Called To Hear Your Voice

Rihanna – Stay

Harry Styles – Sign Of The Times

Sinead O'Connor – Nothing Compares

Black Eyed Peas – Shut Up

Beth Hart & Joe Bonamassa – I'd Rather Go Blind

Jelly Roll – Save Me

Rolling Stones – Gimme Shelter

Black Sabbath – Paranoid

Black Sabbath – War Pigs

Bishop Briggs – River

Five Finger Death Punch – All I Know

Five Finger Death Punch – Times Like These

Greta Van Fleet – Farewell for Now

The Doors – The Crystal Ship

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every time I get to this part there are so many people I need to thank that I get a bit flustered about how to fit everyone in, and I worry that I'll forget to mention someone.

This time I'm going to keep it short and straightforward.

My 13 1 13 – Huge big love, always.

My family – Love you guys.

Dani, thank you so much for my amazing covers. Love you big time.

To my absolutely amazing girls, Jayne, Mari, Rosa, Ginger and Julie. Thank you for giving my words your time and attention. I value your feedback and sharp eyes.

The pimping guru. Ash. Thank you for spreading the word about my books, I truly appreciate the time you give me.

My Arc team – You guys rock, you really rock. Thank you for all you do for me.

And you, yes, you – Thank you for your support, your messages and questions. Thank you for reading my books. I truly appreciate you. Big love and hugs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

René Van Dalen grew up in a small town in the Transkeian region of South Africa close to the ocean and the mountains. After high school she moved to the city to go to College. She never left and misses the ocean every single day.

Her parents gave her the love of books and music. Haunting the library when she should have been studying helped to satisfy her craving to read more and more books.

Doing what the majority of people do is not for her, she loves who she finally turned out to be.

René likes her music loud and heavy, her coffee with a touch of milk and slightly sweet, and chocolate in all its shapes and forms. She's a voracious reader and a huge fan of J R Ward's Black Dagger Brotherhood. Her three adult children are the loves of her life.

Music is her muse. Her house is never silent. Whether she's writing or reading or just chilling there is always music playing.

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