

NOVA

RECKLESS SOULS MC CALIFORNIA BOOK 9

WALL STREET JOURNAL & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

KB WINTERS

NOVA

A MOTORCYCLE CLUB ROMANCE

RECKLESS SOULS MC

BOOK 9

KB WINTERS



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ABOUT NOVA

Maggie's gang wants her head, Nova's MC needs her gone—but first, they must resist their explosive chemistry in this forbidden biker romance.

The demons of PTSD gnaw at me, growing stronger every day. Like I'm stuck in an escape room I can't get out of.

Enter Maggie. Beaten. Broken. Abused. When she stumbles into my clinic looking for help, something shifts inside me. An unexplainable pull I've never felt before.

I know I can help her. But is this fire between us real, or is my magnifying mind playing tricks on me?

Then I uncover the brutal truth—Maggie belongs to the MC's biggest threat. The crew who tried to kill my brothers.

But the streets are cruel, and they're closing in on her.

I'm torn—do I turn my back on my MC for one split second to keep her safe? Every fiber of my being screams to protect her, no matter the cost.

If I fail, the shadows will consume us both.

If I succeed, the passion between us could set her free...or destroy everything I've built.

I've never taken such a risk for anyone. But for a chance with Maggie, I'll put it all on the line.

The clock is ticking and I'm racing to decide—is saving Maggie worth the risk?

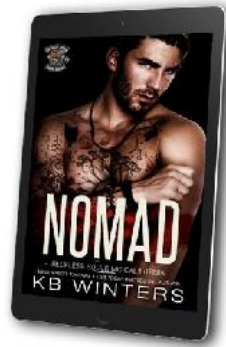
My choice will change everything.

If you love bad boy military veterans and stories of forbidden attraction, then you'll be hooked by former Army medic Nova's undeniable chemistry with a woman tied to his dangerous rival in this intense motorcycle club romance!

Don't wait to see if these star-crossed lovers defy the odds or if tragedy strikes—scroll up and one-click today!

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CHAPTER ONE

MAGGIE

Demon sits proudly behind the steering wheel with that devilish grin of his. “We’re getting these fuckers right now.” His confidence seeps through every word.

“What fuckers?” I don’t need to ask. I know the answer. I just need to hear him say it.

“Those Reckless Souls pendejos. Think they can snatch my boy from me? Fuck that. Viper was mine first.”

I’d do anything for Demon, but this is some bad shit. He’s still reeling over Viper’s betrayal. His anger masked a deep hurt, too damn proud to admit it.

“You sure about this, Demon? It’s been years since your boy crossed over.”

His smile twists into a scowl, pissed at my doubt. “What? You think I can’t handle them?”

“Course you can, Papi. You’re a beast when you want to be. But it’s just you and me. We’re outnumbered.”

He grin’s back. “Ain’t just you and me, Mami. Howler and Malibu been keeping tabs on ‘em. We know where they’re at. Gordo’s rollin’ with them too.”

Damn it. No way out now. “Oh. What’s the plan?”

He parks the shiny red Impala in a half-finished housing development. Gives me the look. “We walk in, beat the fuck

outta him, and his bitch, then two bullets each. Cool with that?"

I shrug. "Yeah, sure. Of course."

We hook up with Malibu and Howler. Moving toward one of the empty show homes. That moron Howler bangs on the window, flashing his piece like he's in some action movie.

Two shots pop off. Howler crumples to the ground.

Demon roars, "Motherfucker!" charging forward, gun leading the way. Bullets start raining down, and I freeze like a damn rookie.

Then Viper steps out. He's different, looks older, handsome in his leather vest with the patches. He don't look like the young gangbanger I remember. He's filled out. Matured.

A shot narrowly misses him. He shoots back, landing three shots in Malibu.

"What the fuck, Maggie?" Gordo bolts past me, his forty caliber in his grip.

I snap out of it, charging into the fray. It's expected. It's what I gotta do. Then my ankle gives way, sending me sprawling to the ground, screaming as I tumble into a ditch. "Demon!" I cry out.

More shots go off. By the time I scrambled out of the ditch, Demon's lying dead on the grass, Viper's sprawled on the cement steps, and Gordo's shoving a screaming blonde into our ride like she's a rag doll.

A WEEK later and the rain pounding the warehouse echoes my fucked-up feelings. Demon's pushing up daisies. My own damn crew, the Bloodthirsty Devils, they want me dead.

I'm lower than low, even worse off than when Moms kicked me out. Got no *dinero* in my pocket. No food and no homies got my back.

Cold seeps into my bones 'cause Southern California decided to pull a fast one and rain non-stop for days. Now I'm on the side of town with the other forgotten people, those no one gives a fuck about, like me the rest of the world has written off, thinks they're dead, or wish they were.

I shiver uncontrollably and pull my jacket around me tight like it will help fight off the cold. I'm so stupid to think I could just roll back into the *barrio*, back to what I thought was *mi familia*. Instead, they say I iced Demon, that I played both sides.

Fuck that.

I'd never do a damn thing to hurt Demon.

Fucking Ghost. That two-faced snake. For years he was Demon's right-hand man, and now he can't wait until the body is cold before calling himself *El Jefe*. His first order of business? Greenlighting me.

I look around the dark warehouse feeling like a pathetic, weak bitch, something I vowed I'd never feel again. And yet, here I am. Scared. Emotional. Alone.

It's been raining for three days straight. It hardly ever rains in California, but this year is different. And that's about how many days of hunger it takes before I start digging into dumpsters for food. At first, I only searched for shit that was still wrapped up, uneaten.

By day five, my standards have hit rock bottom. I'll take anything edible, not rotten or covered with dirty diapers or cigarette butts. The cash in my pocket isn't for food. It's for survival. I need to work out a plan, but I can't do shit until my old crew gets sick of chasing me and starts gunning for the bikers whose bullets actually ended Demon's life.

"Shit, Demon," I hiss into the darkness. We were a team, two peas in a pod. This warehouse was the backdrop of our first time doin' the dirty. I think I was fifteen, maybe sixteen. I thought it all meant something. But I guess that doesn't matter now. He's gone.

Anger flares in my chest. “Goddammit, Demon! Why? Why did you have to die?” I break down in tears, sobbing over the loss. My best friend, my man. My life.

“Stop it,” I say to myself because I’m getting sick of my own damn thoughts. Demon is gone, and he’s not coming back. I need to focus on the here and now, on surviving the shit show my life has become.

It’s hard to focus on anything when I’m so fucking cold and tired and hungry. Not to mention scared shitless. I’m a tough *chica*. I know that. I’ve done more fighting in my life than chilling, but this? This is some next-level shit. From the moment my Moms kicked me out of her place, I haven’t been alone, not like this.

Back in the day, I fell in with a bunch of *chicas* from the east side, trying to survive and make a place for ourselves in the harsh streets of LA. Fierce, scrappy, determined. Together, we formed *Las Sangrientas*, a sisterhood that became our lifeline, our blood.

We raised hell, asserting our dominance, gaining respect and fear equally. Life was brutal, sure, but there was a bond that made life bearable. It was *Las Sangrientas* against the world, and for a while, it felt like we could take on anything. The streets forged us into a force to be reckoned with and we learned to be cunning, relentless, hard. We did some cold-blooded shit and got away with it.

A clap of thunder sounds so loud it vibrates the floor and I jump. Seconds later, a blinding flash of lightning illuminates the warehouse from the vents above. We haven’t had rain like this in forever.

Just as quickly as it comes, the light vanishes, plunging me into darkness once again. It’s fitting, really. But I can’t hole up in here forever. Angel Harbor is too close to the crew in LA. How fucked up is that?

Fuck, Demon, why’d you have to die?

I blink away the tears threatening to break loose again. I’m smarter than that. I know tears don’t change anything. I gotta

keep moving, keep fighting. But the memories keep coming back—the worst day of my life.

Gritting my teeth, I force myself back to the present. It's just another fight, another battle in the war that is my life. I've survived before, and I'll survive now. I've got no other choice. Demon is gone and no one's gonna save my ass but me.

This is my life now. They might think they've cornered me, but they're wrong.

I ain't done. Not by a long shot.

CHAPTER TWO

NOVA

This is straight-up bullshit. Every time I step inside this sterile room and see my brother, Banger, laid out like a rag doll I'm hit with the same thought. It's not right. He shouldn't be here. He shouldn't be strung up on life support with a gut wound that'd make a hardened soldier cry. He should be wide awake, flashing that lopsided smile, talking shit and cracking jokes.

Instead, he's here, hanging on to life by the tips of his fucking fingers while I try my best to save his life.

It's not the first time I've tried—and failed—to save a fellow brother. Still, every morning since we found him lying face down at a new development, I promise myself that I won't lose another brother. Not this time.

And not Banger. Not only that, but Willow is missing. What the fuck is up with that?

“Come on, Banger. Wake up, brother.” It's been over two days, and though his body is healing, he's still in a coma. He hasn't woken up yet. Emphasis on *yet*. But he will. I know it.

He has to.

As a trauma doc, I've seen my share of blood and death, and I've stitched up too many wounds to count. And each time I look at Banger, it's like a grim reality of my tours in the army. The faces of fallen brothers haunt me, men I couldn't save despite my best efforts. Faces like Private Reynolds, another dark-haired kid who bled out under my watch, a promising life cut too short.

Every time I change Banger's bandages, I see Reynolds' face. Each pulse of the monitor is another beat of the war drum, another reminder of those I couldn't save.

But not this time. This time, I'm keeping Banger in the land of the living, come hell or high water.

I ain't just a doctor. I've spent years living on the edge, dealing with life on the streets, and doing what I needed to survive. The MC is my family, and I'm not about to let one of my brothers go down without a fight. Every stitch, every bandage, every damn bead of sweat on my forehead is a promise. I've got you, Banger. And I ain't letting go.

Sitting in this sterile room that's too quiet for comfort is a real mindfuck. I'm not just battling for Banger's life—I'm battling my own demons. But I keep my cool, keep the past from dragging me under.

I've been down that road before, feeling the icy grip of my own personal hell. But right now, I have to be the doctor, the brother that Banger needs me to be. I'll stay strong and try like hell to keep the demons at bay. At least until Banger's back on his feet, throwing around that smart-ass grin like he owns the world.

I sway on the stool, my vision tunneling into a narrow point of blackness like an overplayed film reel stuck on repeat. The monsters, the darkness, the demons—they're back. It's like a nightmare returning after an extended absence.

Somehow, I've managed to suppress them, likely the longest stretch without an episode. But here they are again, uninvited guests stirring up a whirlwind of post-traumatic stress while my brother's life hangs in the balance on the hospital bed.

I grit my teeth. "Not now," I mutter under my breath. "Nova, you got this."

I have to finish tending to Banger's wounds, so I gather every ounce of willpower to push them back.

"Not this time, motherfucker."

I suck in a deep breath through my nose, hold it for a moment, then slowly release it through my mouth. The rhythmic pattern

of breathing exercises the Army psychiatrist had drilled into me becomes my anchor in the shit storm of my mind. With each inhale and exhale, my racing heart slows, and the haunting memories shrink into the shadowy darkness of my psyche.

“Stay with me, brother,” I whisper, my voice barely audible in the sterile room. The words resonate deep within me, echoing with a conviction that’s new to me. This fight isn’t just for Banger—it’s for me, too.

“Dr. Bishop?”

The sound of Sophie’s voice pulls me from the past and drops me squarely here in the present. Her tone tells me this isn’t the first time she’s said my name, and I look over my shoulder at my nurse. “Yes, Sophie?”

Her tense shoulders sag slightly in relief. “His blood pressure’s dropping again,” she says, her words laced with worry. “I’m concerned there may be an infection we haven’t caught yet.”

Nurse Sophie’s never been one to cry wolf. If she’s worried, there’s a good reason for it. “It could be his body adjusting to the blood loss,” I respond, the clinical part of my mind taking over. “But let’s run some more tests. Make sure it’s not some nasty bug.”

“Of course, Dr. Bishop. “Hannah’s already gone, but I’m on the late shift tonight, so I’ll keep an eye on Joaquin.” She smiles, probably remembering how he’d flirt mercilessly with her when he was a prospect. “You’ll be my first call if things head south.”

I grunt an acknowledgment, my eyes going back to Banger. He’s got to pull through. No, fuck that. He will pull through this and come back stronger. I’m going to make damn sure that’s the case. Whatever it takes. I will never let another brother die on my watch. “I appreciate it, Sophie.”

She reaches out and lays a hand on my shoulder, squeezing gently. “Try to get some sleep, Doctor. You can’t help him if you’re exhausted. Tank and Stone are here now. We’ll be safe.”

Tank's a mountain of a man, tough as they come. A touch slower than me, but his brute strength more than makes up for it. And Stone? The kid got mixed up in the wrong crowd. Sent here by his old man, Gunnar, from the Reckless Souls, to wait out some shit storm back in Texas. Not a small fry either.

Both men are loyal as fuck, so I feel okay leaving them here to stand sentry for Banger.

And Sophie knows her stuff. Got a good head on her shoulders. We also pay her a pretty penny to keep her mouth shut.

It's worth it to have that kind of loyalty.

I nod. "Thank you." With one last look at Banger, I turn and leave the room and head down the hall to wash my hands and get out of my scrubs and into my civvies.

"How is he?" I look up from the sink to see Ace standing in the doorway, Shades and Dix flanking him. "Any progress?"

"None yet," I grunt and turn off the water. "He's still unconscious, but he's healing, and that's a good sign. It's better for him to be out of it right now. He'll heal faster." I keep my expression impassive the same way I do with every other family member I've ever spoken to under these circumstances. "His body needs time."

Ace nods, jaw grinding at the unsatisfactory answer, but he knows if I had more to add, I would.

"Any news on Willow?" There's no doubt in our minds the Bloodthirsty Devils have her. The question is whether she's still alive. With Banger still unconscious, we have no idea what happened.

"Fuck no," Dix growls. Banger is like a kid brother to him, and he knows how bad it will hurt him if we don't find Willow before he wakes up. "They kidnapped her without a fucking doubt," he says, his eyes flashing the anger we all feel. "The only issue right now is where they're holding her."

"And if she's still alive," Shades adds with a grim expression.

“Don’t fucking say that,” Dix blurts out, shaking his head as if the thought is just too much to bear.

Shades shrugs. “Either way, those assholes are dead. For Banger’s sake, I hope Willow is alive and pissing those motherfuckers off.”

Dix is taking this harder than any of us expected. “You know what they were doing out there? Looking at houses, man. He’s ready to take it to the next level. Leave the clubhouse and be with his girl.” He lifts his hands in a helpless gesture. “He’ll be okay?”

I give him a grim smile. “I’ll make sure he is.”

Ace gives a sharp nod. “You about done here?”

I acknowledge his signal talk. “What’s up, boss?”

“Get to the clubhouse as soon as you can. We need all hands on deck. You’ll get your marching orders when you get there.”

Fuck, I was hoping to get home and get some shut eye.

“I’m right behind you,” I assure him but give myself a minute to check up on the status of other patients at the clinic before I check out for the night.

It’s an open secret that the clinic belongs to the Reckless Souls. We do a lot of good for the community through this place, and it’s also good for the legit cash flow.

Our clinic may be called ‘free,’ but it’s not exactly without cost. Most of our patients have state-sponsored insurance, and for those who don’t, we don’t turn them away.

Instead, we help them obtain coverage through the state. Sure, it can be a slow process for the government to pay, but eventually, they always come through. It may not be as lucrative as the high-profile doctors in Beverly Hills or L.A. proper, but it’s enough to keep our clinic running and ensure the city stays off our backs when it comes to our other **ahem** businesses.

When I’ve wrapped up business, I give myself a minute in private to get my shit together. I can’t afford to lose my focus right now. Until Banger is on his own two feet, I can *not* lose

my shit. I need to be sharp, and I need to do right by my brother.

When this storm passes, I'll tackle my demons.

When this storm passes. What a joke.

CHAPTER THREE

MAGGIE

“Oye, chica,” *Demon says, his voice dripping with confidence.*

I can hear him as if he were still alive, sitting right next to me. Alone in this abandoned building, it’s inevitable that my thoughts turn back to Demon, not that I can think about anyone else. He was my man, my lover.

My best friend.

And he’s dead.

I recall a moment back in the day. There I was, adjusting my denim overalls, all smudged with dirt and grass at the knees, when Demon—though everyone else still called him Damien back then—strolled up with a big smile on his face. He had that signature barrio swagger even in the fifth grade.

“You wanna rep my kickball team or what?”

I shot him a look, then broke into a grin. “You think you can handle a girl on your team?”

Without waiting for an answer, he grabbed my hand, pulling me toward the kickball diamond. From that day on, we were thick as thieves. Friends, enemies, lovers—we ran the whole playground.

But over time, the cute and cocky boy Damien hardened into the gangster Demon. At fifteen, he was jumped into the Bloodthirsty Devils. His initiation wasn’t just his rite of passage; it marked a turning point for us. His newfound

confidence and swagger in his new gang colors stirred something raw and powerful inside me.

Out of nowhere, he draped an arm around me, that mischievous grin plastered on his face. "Hey, Mami, wanna roll with me for reals? Be my girl?"

My body lit up at his words, at his smile. I stepped back and looked him up and down, feeling my nipples harden at the sight of him in head-to-toe red and black. I rocked my own gang colors, purple and white, and in my mind, we would end up being this power couple like Jay-Z and Beyonce, only more badass. "Yeah, Papi, I think I do."

A hard cough shakes my whole body, and I return to the present for a moment, where I'm huddled under a makeshift bed of folded cardboard boxes and tarps. I readjust things until I'm as comfortable as possible, but now I'm awake and staring at nothing but the grim dark ceiling. To avoid the ravenous animal gnawing in my gut demanding food, I let my thoughts slip back to happier days in the past.

Demon and I kicking it in the car, parked in some hidden alley, blaring old-school jams. He looked at me like he never had before, his eyes tracing every tattoo, every curve. The night was young, and so were we, drenched in beer, smoke, and teenage bravado.

"I'm gonna kiss you, Maggie," he murmured, his voice all gravelly and full of desire.

I looked at him, that tough cholo who would go toe-to-toe with anyone who dared cross us. Back then, it was love. Or so I thought.

We were young, yes. Stupid, sure. But we were alive and on fire.

After he joined the Bloodthirsty Devils, Damien changed. The transformation didn't happen overnight. It was a gradual metamorphosis that I only realized when it was too late. Our connection turned into something more, and before I knew it, I had crossed over to a point of no return.

That kiss turned into a lot more, and then I let him fingerbang me a bunch of times all over L.A. in the car, the bathroom at Tio's Tacos, and even behind the Circle K in Compton. He'd get me off with his fingers, and I return the favor with a blow job. We might have been young, but we knew where babies came from.

One night, after too many Modelos and a couple bumps of coke, we came to this very warehouse to party and stayed out all night. I let him fuck me not because it was time—even though it was time—but because I wanted it. I wanted him.

That night changed everything. We weren't in some cheesy romance movie—this was the streets of L.A., raw and unfiltered. The Damien I thought I knew was ripped away, replaced by the real Demon. A monster. Possessive. Volatile. Unpredictable.

I was blind to it all, a silly girl in love with a gang leader who was now my boss. The Sangrientas were gone, swallowed up by the Bloodthirsty Devils, and I was trapped. Love mixed with jealousy and anger makes bad juju, and it took me too damn long to figure that out.

But don't get me twisted. It wasn't all bad times and nightmares. There were good times, laughter, love. That was what made it so fucked up. Demon wasn't an angel, but he was my friend, my partner, my savior.

I loved Demon with everything in me.

Now he's just gone.

I'm freezing, starving, and solo as fuck.

This is the most peace I've had in years, and if I don't die soon, I'ma remember this feeling and try to get me some more.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOVA

I cut the engine on my ride as I roll up to the clubhouse. I'm exhausted. I need to get some sleep. I guess I'll sleep when I'm dead.

I step off my bike, remove the plain black helmet Banger always gave me shit about, and stroll inside. The place buzzes with an energy I can't explain, the excitement in the air palpable. I pick up the pace as I walk through the clubhouse, smiling at the girls behind the bar and offering a nod to some of the prospects milling around drinking beer and playing pool.

I come to a halt when I spot Kelsey playing with Baby Rocky. I flash her a warm smile, gently ruffling the kid's red hair. "How's the munchkin?"

"Good as gold. Sleeps like a log, but man, she's a handful when she's awake." Her smile fades a little as she gives me the once-over. "You look beat, Nova. You okay?"

I scratch the back of my neck, a lopsided grin on my face. "Just wiped. Where's everyone else?"

She nods in the direction of Wild Man's tech sanctuary. "Something's up. Hopefully, they're closing in on Willow's location."

"Thanks." I ruffle the kid's head again before making my way toward Wild Man's office. My hand rests on the doorknob for a second, my lungs filling with a slow, deliberate breath.

Releasing it, I step inside, meeting the inquiring gazes of my brothers.

“What’s going on?” I ask warily.

Gia looks up first, surprise flashing in her eyes before she waves me over. “We’re listening to those Bloodthirsty assholes. You here to help?”

Behind her is Olly, our new prospect, and Wild Man, also listening with intense focus.

“Yeah, sure,” I say with more enthusiasm than I feel, thinking longingly of my bed.

She pats the seat beside her, pointing to the wireless headphones on the table. “Just plug into one of the devices and listen for anything interesting.”

“And if I hear anything interesting?”

Her smile widens, and she tucks a lock of hot pink hair behind her ear. “Then let us know. We got these recordings from their latest hideout. Wilder hacked into their smart TV, and everything’s been recorded since last week. Cool, huh?”

“Damn. The shit you guys do with electronics is amazing.” I sit in the comfortable leather office chair and slip on the headphones.

Listening to the Bloodthirsty Devils is as eye-opening as it is boring. Before joining the Army, before my life in the MC, I grew up wealthy and privileged. So, what I know about gangs, I only know because of Banger. But listening in to the loose hierarchy and the lack of structure in decision-making just pisses me off. How did these fuckers get the jump on Banger?

“Gordo got an eye on that biker bitch,” someone’s wicked laugh comes through the headphones. *“He says she’s nice to look at but has a smart mouth.”*

A bunch of laughter sounds, and at least four distinct voices chime in. *“I have one guaranteed way to shut the bitch up. Works on my ruca every fucking time.”*

More laughter, and I shake my head at these fools. It’s easy to be a tough guy when your opponent is a woman. *“Ghost says,*

leave her the fuck alone. I'm not touching that skank."

I reach out and tap Gia on the shoulder. "I think they're talking about Willow. Sounds like she's alive."

At my words, Wild Man presses some keys on his keyboard, and Olly leans forward, motioning for me to disconnect the headphones. Gia taps on her tablet, and it cranks up the volume somehow. She rolls her chair closer and nods.

We all listen as the conversation between the gang members picks up.

"I don't even have to touch her to put some fear into that bitch," one of them growls with glee. *"Where's Gordo?"*

"Stash house," another voice answers. *"Gordo got her inside, but the homies are watching outside just in case those shit-for-brains bikers show up."*

"They gotta find out where she is first." Another round of laughter sounds through the speakers. *"We got a lot of stash houses in L.A. Shit, I don't even know 'em all."*

"But Maggie does," one of them says, his voice suddenly darker and serious. *"We have to find that bitch. Make her pay."*

"Fuck yeah," one of them says while the others make sounds of agreement. *"That bitch is the reason Demon is dead. We should fuckin' turn her out. We'd get some good money for that ass."*

Gia turns down the volume and turns to us. "Maggie? Probably the girl who got away."

Wild Man shakes his head. "Shit. Has to be."

"I'll dig into any leads for Maggies, Margarets, Margaritas, or Margots that are associated with the gang or any members of the gang," Gia promises, turning the volume back up before she focuses on the tablet in front of her.

"Don't go scaring that biker bitch too bad, Snake Eyes. Ghost has plans for that bitch."

The air in the room intensifies at his words, and I lean in a little closer as if that will change whatever these assholes say

next.

“Yeah, what plans? I ain’t heard of no plans for her.” We don’t have a name for the fucker, but he grunts and then laughs. *“Hopefully, it includes lettin’ us fuck that bitch before we put her six feet under.”*

Disgusting. I know some gangs and MCs use women in that way, using sex as torture and punishment, but I hate it. Makes me want to fuck these guys up even more. I deal with violence because it’s a way of life inside the MC, but I don’t like it. I avoid it when and where I can.

“You need to get some pussy, Snake Eyes. It’s all you think about.”

Snake Eyes, I assume, laughs. *“Ain’t nothin’ better than strange pussy.”*

“Gross,” Gia says, visibly shuddering.

“Bones says Ghost has plans for her, but first, we have to find Demon’s ruca.”

“What if that bitch is laid up with one of those fucking bikers?”

“What makes you think that? She say something?”

“Naw, homie. Just sayin’”

“Anyway, if she is, it’s better for us,” another guy says, and I can hear the fucking smile in his voice. *“If those pendejos have that bitch, it makes everything easier. We offer a trade, the biker bitch, in exchange for Maggie. They show up for the exchange, Ghost puts a bullet in the biker bitch, takes Maggie, and then we fuck up whoever else shows up for the exchange.”*

“Ghost tell you that?”

“Yeah, man. He’s got this shit handled.”

Ghost sounds crazy and bloodthirsty—their namesake. “We have to put this Ghost motherfucker down.” The room falls silent, and when I look up, three sets of eyes are on me, wearing matching expressions of shock. “What?”

Wild Man barks out a laugh. “Between you and Preacher, I don’t know who’s worse about trying to talk us out of putting the hurt on someone, and now you’re saying we have to put the new dawg down.”

I shrug. “We can’t have bodies dropping all over Angel Harbor. That’s how you get the Feds up your ass.”

“Good point,” Olly adds. “I’ll do it myself for what they did to Banger.” His nostrils flare, and his jaw clenches, a sure sign that our newest prospect has revenge on the brain.

“The good news,” I point out with a sigh, “is that Willow is alive. And we need to tell Ace what we’ve learned.”

It’s time to plan to get Willow back. I’m doing everything I can to keep Banger alive, but helping get his woman back will keep my own demons simmering in the background.

For now, I need sleep.

If they’ll let me.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAGGIE

“Hell, that hit the spot.” I let my body slump down on my makeshift bed of cardboard boxes, the taste of hot, spicy tortilla chips still lingering on my tongue.

Chips that *mysteriously* ended up beneath my worn-out jacket, along with a cola bottle and a cold tuna sandwich. Yeah, I could’ve spent ten bucks on it, but why? I’ve got a knack for lifting what I need, and every dollar I save is a ticket out of this place and away from my past.

I close my eyes, lay back, and try to calm my breathing, but all I see is Demon’s face. The last time I saw him. Lying there dead. The memory makes me sad. But I don’t have time to be sad.

I stare up at the ceiling and try to piece together my life. I’ve got money stashed away in a hole in the wall to my left. No phone, though. Nothing they can trace. Just enough for a bus ticket out of state. But once I buy that, I’m broke. Flat broke.

Unless...

I could hit up one of the Devils’ stash houses. The ones that store stacks upon stacks of drugs and cash and nothing else. Demon preferred to take over flop houses because after the BTD ran the crackheads off, they were too afraid to go back. If I can make it to one of those houses, snatch a stack or two of cash, I could be miles away by tomorrow.

“Are you sure this is the place? This shit is so raggedy it looks like it’ll fall down any fucking second.”

I freeze at the sound of that voice. Snake Eyes. That motherfucker is creepy as hell with a love of violence that borders on psycho.

“Yeah, this is the place, Snake. I’m sure. We used to kick it here all the time.”

I roll my eyes at the Glory Hole’s voice. That bitch was only around because she guzzled jizz like it was a vital fucking nutrient. Every cock in the gang had been down her throat or up her ass at least a dozen times.

“Hell yeah, we used to come here and get faded as fuck when we were younger.”

Familiar voice after familiar voice sounds, and I sit up, scanning the dark room until my eyes focus. There’s no fucking doubt in my mind that they’re here looking for me. My crew, well, *former* crew, is here to kill me in retaliation for some shit I didn’t do.

Crouching down on my knees, I crawl away from my makeshift bed, scattering the boxes and tarp so it doesn’t look like anyone has been here. I make my way to the other side of the room, mentally berating myself for being so fucking stupid. I shouldn’t still be here, not at this warehouse, not at a place my enemies know. “*Sometimes you can be so fucking stupid, Maggie.*” Demon’s voice sounds in my head, and I clench my jaws in frustration.

“Shut up, Demon,” I whisper and find a corner and make myself as small as I can, listening to the voices draw closer and closer.

“Maggie,” Glory singsongs like that bitch has ever been my friend. “Come out, come out wherever you are.” She lets out that cackling laugh that makes me want to bash her stupid fucking face in.

“We know you’re here, Maggie,” Snake Eyes taunts. “You probably shouldn’t be stealing chips from the corner store, dumb shit.”

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I slow my breathing to avoid giving away my position until I can find a way out of this fucking room. I'm not dying in this shit hole.

“What the fuck, Sorceress? Don't make us hunt you down like a fucking dog. You're better than that.” Simone. She used to be my best friend next to Demon.

This shit fucking sucks. It's not just Glory and Simone, and it's not just Snake Eyes. I close my eyes and listen to four more voices, and dread settles in the pit of my stomach because I know this is it.

There's no running from this.

My past, my sins, it's all caught up to me.

“Found her!” Tori, one of the newest females to join the BTB, looms over me with an evil smile on her face. She's a tough bitch and crazy as hell, letting the guys jump her in instead of gangbang her in. Her dimpled smile flashes wide before she lifts her boot and drops it on my face.

Pain explodes across my face as her boot connects, a stark contrast to the chill of the concrete floor. “You son of a bitch,” I growl, twisting onto my side and trying to stand.

“Where do you think you're going, bitch?” Tori grabs my ankle, yanking me backward before she drags me across the floor. “We've got you now, fucking backstabbing whore.” She punctuates each syllable with a kick to my ribcage.

“I didn't,” I begin, but it's useless. They all believe I did something I never would, not even when I should have. I couldn't betray Demon, no matter how many times I thought about it. No matter how much easier it would have made my life.

“Save it.”

Fuck this. If I'm going down, I need to take at least one of these bitches with me. I jump to my feet, ribs stinging like a motherfucker, and I swing on Glory first. Yeah, that shit feels good. Her head snaps back, and she lets out a satisfying cry of pain.

Simone's fist comes flying at me from the side with enough force that it drops me to my fucking knees. "Give up now, and we'll make it easy for you, Sorceress."

Sorceress. I hate hearing that fucking nickname. I'm nobody's sorceress, just young and cute enough to use my looks to get over on unsuspecting fools. "Can't. Do. That."

"Too bad," Tori says before she stomps on my back as I try to get up. "Guess we get to do this the fun way."

Tori's fun way is all six bitches beating the fuck out of me. Fists and feet rain down on me, every inch of my body screaming in pain. I hurt all over. So much fucking pain is coming at me all at once, and every time I try to get to my feet, one of these bitches knocks me down again.

"Whore!" Glory screeches a second before a metal pipe cracks over my back.

"You got him killed," someone else shouts before four or maybe five feet kick the shit out of my sides. "Bitch!"

That last kick knocks the wind out of me, and I'm sure my ribs are broken because I can hardly breathe. Every breath burns like fire. My lip is busted, and blood slides down my throat, but that's the least of my pain.

A hand grabs a handful of my hair and yanks me back, and I see Simone's wild, dark eyes staring at me with a wicked smile. "You should have died in that field."

"I didn't—" I begin, but again, it doesn't fucking matter. Simone yanks her fist back and unleashes a fury of fists. My nose. My forehead. My jaw. Over and over, she punches me until my vision starts to blur before the hits stop coming.

Just as I start to relax, she grips my hair again, but this time, she pulls out a knife and begins sawing at my hair. "Just to make sure they don't know who the fuck you are." She keeps sawing at my hair and tossing it around until it surrounds me.

"Enough!" Snake Eyes barks his order, and everything stops, going completely silent. "Yeah, we got her."

I can't see anything through my swollen eye, shut tight from blood and pain, but I'm sure he was talking to Ghost. This is it, where it all ends. I don't have the energy to make one last attempt at a getaway, and even if I did, the swollen eye makes success unlikely. I lie completely still and just listen, willing myself to die before they do anything else to me.

"What's up, Snake?"

"Ghost is on his way. He wants to do it himself."

Shit. No need to pretend to be dead when I will be soon enough.

"He'll be here in five," Snake says with a smile in his voice.

I brace myself for another onslaught of punches and kicks, but nothing happens. After a minute or two, Simone stands over me with her dragon-handled blade and sinks it into my side. I try to bite back the pain, but it's un-fucking-bearable, and a loud cry tears from my throat.

"Motherfucker!" Goddamn, that pain rips through my skin, sending fire shooting through my veins, and my breathing becomes shallow. I fall back, hitting my head on the cement floor as unconsciousness starts to take over.

"Where's the traitor?" *Shit.* It's Ghost.

Seconds later, his face is right in front of mine, his cold, dark eyes peering down at me, full of hate. He tries to grab my hair, but Simone doesn't leave much of it for him to handle, and he shoves my head away angrily until it snaps back on the cold cement floor.

"You got Demon killed," he says.

"Like. You. Care." He can act angry and irrational, but I know the truth. He's been itching to become top dog since the day he was jumped into the gang. He's not angry, but the other guys are, and he needs their loyalty to him.

Ghost crouches down, pulling a knife from his belt. I can barely see with one eye, but the blade glistens under the weak light. The air leaves my lungs as he positions the knife on my neck. I think I'll suffocate from my fear, but I refuse to let it

show. I stare him down with the slits that are my eyes, not breaking eye contact. If I'm gonna die right here, I want the look of defiance on my face etched into his brain.

"I don't have to care," he whispers, pressing the tip of the blade into the side of my neck. He shucks his head over his shoulder. "They care enough for all of us."

I'm breathing too fast, but I can't seem to slow down. When Ghost sinks that blade deeper into my neck, I start to hyperventilate.

This is it. I brace myself for the inevitable.

"That's right bitch, say goodnight." He yanks the blade out, and warm blood rushes down my neck as he presses the blade against my cheek, slicing down left to right and then right to left, marking me.

The pain is too much, and I slowly drift into a dark nothingness of peace.

SOMETIME LATER, I regain consciousness, and I'm alone, no sign of the Bloodthirsty Devils. The room is silent, and yes, I'm finally alone again. Alone but not dead. Lightheaded as fuck but not dead. I'm in too much fucking pain to move a muscle, but I'm alive.

I don't know how long I lay here, but it feels like days pass. I'm cold, so damn cold it's like my bones are made of ice, probably from losing too much blood.

But then I smile because you know what? I'm still breathing. Hurts like a mother, but I'm still. Fucking. Breathing.

Life? Death? I don't know which one to root for. Either way, I will need a frigging miracle to get through this. I'm not the type to believe in miracles, but here I am, barely holding on, hoping against hope.

I squeeze my eyes tight, asking God or the Devil or whoever's out there for the strength to keep going. To heal so I can get

my vengeance.

They thought they broke me, but I'm too stubborn to die.

CHAPTER SIX

NOVA

“Hey man, how’s Banger doing?” Coop approaches me as I lock my kickstand in place. We fist bump, a silent exchange of solidarity.

I remove my helmet with a shrug.

“Same shit, different day,” I quip, my voice light even as the truth eats at my conscience. “He’s on the mend, but the stubborn bastard’s still in dreamland.” I rush to add, “But he’s tough as nails, Coop. He’ll bounce back.” I can’t let the MC shoulder the same worry that’s chained itself to my mind. “Just needs a little more time.”

Coop claps me on the back. “I’ll tell Ace I was with you at the clinic and that’s why I’m late.” Then we step inside the clubhouse, the dim lights a relief from the blinding sun, shining like one of my brothers isn’t lying on a bed fighting for his life.

I call up a smile I don’t feel. “I’ll be your alibi.”

“Thanks, brother. Always got your back, man,” I counter, pushing the door to the sanctuary open. “So, how are your girls?”

The guy lights up like a Christmas tree. “Doing great, thanks for asking.”

“Well, well, look who finally showed the fuck up.” Dix flashes a smile as Coop and I saunter into the room and take our seats. “And you didn’t even get all pretty for me.”

“I was at the clinic,” I mumble. “Banger’s getting better, but he’s not awake yet. Any minute, so let’s get on it. I need to get back.”

My words instantly change the atmosphere in the room. Smiles fade, and everyone sobers. “That’s good to hear,” Ace grumbles before calling the meeting to order. “All right, guys, first order of business is Willow. Thanks to the hard work of Gia, Wild Man, Nova, and Olly, we know the BTD’s got her. She’s alive...for now, but we gotta move fast.”

“We have any clue where she is exactly?” That’s Dix, sitting forward as if ready to run out the door the minute he has news of her location.

“Just that she’s in one of their stash houses. Our guys—and girl—are on it.” Wild Man, looking like he’s chewing on nails, shakes his head. “No solid leads yet. Gia’s trying to connect the dots between this Gordo guy, who’s apparently watching Willow, and a real name we can track.”

“That’s good shit, Wild Man. Keep me posted.” Ace flashes a semblance of a smile, but it fades quickly. “We also need to find this Maggie.”

“What?” Shades’ outburst echoes through the sanctuary, bouncing off the walls. “Why the fuck are we looking for her?”

“Because,” Ace begins with an eerie calm, his dark gaze going around the room to land on each of us. “Willow and Maggie’s lives are tied together. If we find Maggie first, there’s a good chance we can save them both. If they find Maggie first, they’ll probably dump her body on our doorstep.”

“Fuck,” I mutter, shaking my head. “How do we even know where to start looking for this chick?” What if she’s already skipped town? Based on what I heard, she’d be smart to get the fuck out of Angel Harbor and California altogether.

“Yeah,” Dix nods. “What do we know about this Maggie chick other than she runs with Devils?”

Wild Man flashes another of his shit-eating grins. “I’m glad you asked, brother. Margaret Rosalia Leon. She grew up in

East L.A. with her single mother. Her father was a gangbanger or is,” he shrugs. “Currently serving life without parole for killing two rival gangbangers. She grew up rough, mostly raised on the streets while her mom worked a few jobs. No supervision.”

“Basic sob story,” Preacher adds, shaking his head.

“Margaret’s been picked up a few times for selling stolen goods and fighting, nothing major despite her LKA’s being *Las Sangrientas* and then the Bloodthirsty Devils.” Wild Man shakes his head before turning back to the tablet in his hand. “Oh, and a few domestic violence calls to the house for run-ins with her stepfather. He was an abusive alcoholic, and now he’s dead.”

The sad backstory leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. “Poor girl never stood a chance.”

“True,” Wild Man adds. “Anyway, we figured out her connection to Demon. They’ve known each other since grade school, so her loyalty to him means she’s not the girl next door. She’s a gangbanger just like he was.”

“She could be dead already,” Coop chimes in. “They blame her for Demon’s death.”

“According to our intel, she’s alive. For now,” Ace grinds out, his jaw clenching.

“Not so fast,” Wild Man begins, “Coop could be right. Last night I couldn’t sleep, so I wandered in here and overheard them saying they found her at some warehouse and fucked her up. Sounds like she’s dead,” Wild Man throws in, his expression tight.

“Fuck. FUCK!” Ace slams his fist on the table, and we all jump a little. “For now, we operate under the assumption that she’s alive. We can’t let on that we know anything. Not until we find Willow.” He runs his hand across his chin and looks at Wild Man. “Any leads on BTB’s properties, Wild Man?”

“Digital trail’s scanty,” he says. “There are properties here and there owned by one member or another, but they don’t operate the way we do. I’m still putting it all together.”

“Well, get it done!” Ace’s eyes look like they’re about to burn a hole in Wild Man.

“Fuck,” Dix grits out. “We need to find them so we can find her. Banger will lose his shit if she’s not here when he wakes up.”

“I’m losin’ my shit now,” Ace replies. “How do we know she’s not at the house you’ve been listening to?”

Wild Man says, “It’s too obvious. She wouldn’t be there.”

He’s right, and the boulder in my gut turns to acid. I’m itching to get back to the clinic to check on Banger, but MC business comes first right now.

“Shit,” Lucky growls. “Banger told me that his old gang didn’t operate the way the MC does. They don’t own shit, not really.”

“Then how the fuck do they keep their products safe?” Shades asks, shaking his head.

Lucky laughs. “They live in the hood and squat in foreclosed homes and abandoned buildings. Cheap real estate in shitty neighborhoods.”

Wild Man taps the screen furiously, his brows furrow as if he’s looking for something.

“Who’s watching Banger at the clinic?” Dix cuts in, masterfully diverting Ace’s brewing wrath.

“Olly and Sophie,” I reply.

“Good,” He nods.

“No, not good,” Ace interjects. “We need intel on Willow’s location, Wild Man. Fuck, we need that shit now, like yesterday.”

“I know,” he nods, his attention still on the tablet. “Lucky’s intel was helpful in narrowing it down. I sent it to Gia, too, so we should have something soon.”

“Go! Now!” Ace’s display of emotion is unusual, a perfect illustration of just how stressed he’s feeling about all of this.

Wild Man gets to his feet, heading toward the door without looking back as Ace officially ends Church. The rest of the brothers disperse but Ace holds me back.

“You’ve got a solid poker face, Nova. I can’t tell if you’re hiding something from us or if Banger is on the mend. Give it to me straight.”

I sigh, grappling with the truth. “Banger’s road to recovery is gonna be tough. But he can do it. His vitals are stable, and he’s healing on schedule. But those bullets did a number on him. And yes, him being out cold is actually good for him.”

Ace scoffs, his gaze on me. “You gonna tell me that shit about being knocked out is best for healing again?”

I snort. “Yeah, because it’s the truth.”

“Yeah, okay. I trust you, brother.” He nods, his gaze intensifying. “You doing okay, Nova?”

I shrug. “I will be, brother. I will be.” Some day. “But right now, I need to get back to the clinic.” Staying away for too long makes me anxious. Now that MC business is complete, I can get back without feeling guilty.

“All right, man. I’ll see you soon.” Ace offers his fist, and a firm bump seals our conversation.

I swing a leg over my bike, sinking down onto the rolled leather seat. I let the engine idle, its low hum a soothing backdrop to the commotion in my head. Banger’s face flashes through my mind, an unwelcome reminder of the grim reality.

And then there’s Ace, his words a powerful blend of trust and expectation. *Yeah, Banger*, I think, tightening my grip on the handlebars. *I’ve got your back, come hell or high water.*

These demons can go to hell, where they belong.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAGGIE

Shit, I don't want to die. I can feel life seeping out of me, but it's been, what, a day? Two days? At this point, I'm not sure.

I've been in and out of consciousness for a long while. I wake up, and it's light out, and I pass out when it's dark, but then it's dark when I come to again. It's difficult to tell anything except that I'm still alive.

And I hurt like a motherfucker.

I refuse to die inside this god-forsaken warehouse. I refuse to become some stinking, rotting corpse that some construction worker finds in a few years, requiring dental records to identify me.

I grunt and try to turn onto my side. "Son of a bitch!" That pain I thought was gone comes roaring back at a thousand miles an hour, and I freeze. I can't move. The pain is too intense, and I feel like I might black out. Again.

My hands are dirty and sticky from the dried blood, but I inhale and let it out. I got this. I put my palm against the floor and push up.

"Fuck," I roar, but I press through the pain until I'm resting on my hip. "Okay, good. Fuck that hurts."

I fall six or seven times when I try to get up. "Finally," I grunt. I've made it to my feet at the cost of sweat dripping down my forehead.

But I'll take it, suddenly invigorated with the desire to live despite the shit fucking circumstances that are now my life. I move toward the sunlight that I can see with my one eye that's barely open. I creep toward the exit.

It takes a while, but I finally feel the heat of the Southern California sun on my skin, and I smile. "Ouch, shit."

The busted lip doesn't like me smiling, but I'm alive, finally outside, and it's not raining. That has to be a good sign, right? Keeping close to the concrete wall to guide my way, and then it takes all of thirty-seven seconds for my hope to fade.

It's early morning, and the streets are empty right now, which is why I chose this warehouse in the first place, but right now, that makes me a target. This part of Angel Harbor has been going to shit for years. Most of the good jobs are gone now that everyone is remote, and foot traffic is nonexistent.

Well, except for the homeless population.

I can barely see, so I can't tell if anyone is following or watching me, which is why I move as quickly as my injuries allow.

I walk and walk, the pain in my side trying to take me out, but I have to get help.

Eventually, the deserted buildings turn into actual civilization, and I spot a liquor store, a check cashing place, and a Taco Hut. It's not impressive, but it's people, and maybe, hopefully, someone can help me get...somewhere.

Block after block, I stumble, stepping around people on the sidewalks, getting high, or sleeping. But no one looks me in the eye.

I probably wouldn't look me in the eye either.

"No fucking way." I stop in the middle of the block, unable to believe my eyes. I see a sign that says ANGEL HARBOR FREE CLINIC.

"Hell yeah," I whisper and walk toward the sign. I don't care if it's an abortion clinic or even a veterinarian; medical help is on the way.

I wrap my fingers around the heavy chrome handle of the door and yank as hard as I can. But the pain is so sharp, so intense, I can't help myself. I cry out.

"Sorry," I whisper, hating how vulnerable I sound. "Hello?" It comes out so softly I'm not sure anyone can hear me.

But then, I hear a shuffle, and a female voice sounds close. "Hi, can I help you?"

"Hey," I grunt. "Is this a real doctor clinic?"

"Yes," she says as she wraps one arm around me, and the other guides me toward a large counter. "This is a free clinic, and it looks like you can use our help."

"A free clinic, no shit?"

"No shit," she shoots back, a smile in her voice. "Let's get you to an exam room. Can you tell me what happened? I'm Sophie, by the way."

"Uhm, I don't have a lot of money, any really." I don't tell her about the money tucked into my bra because it's all I have. It's my escape plan.

"First, let's get you cleaned up and taken care of. What's your name?"

I frown. It's such a basic fucking question, but I can't tell her the truth. I mean, who can I trust right now after what happened with my crew—well, ex-crew? "Uh...Rose," I lie. Okay, it's not really a lie. It's my middle name. Technically, it's Rosalia, but it's close enough.

"Okay, *Rose*." Sophie guides me into an exam room, and I'm too out of it to ask why two big-ass bikers are standing outside one of the rooms. Sophie helps me up onto the exam table without asking any more questions. She gives me a quick scan with her eyes and hands, noting where I'm injured. "I'll get the doctor."

"Leave it open. Please," I ask just before she closes me up in the stark white exam room. "Bitch," I mutter under my breath, angry that it takes me so long to drop from the exam table and open the door just enough to hear what the fuck is going on.

It takes even more effort to get back up on the table without any help, and by the time I feel settled, sweat is dripping down my back, and it's hard to breathe.

I strain to hear what's happening, but all I hear is people walking up and down the corridor outside. And the low rumble of hushed voices. I have a fleeting feeling of hope as I wait for a doctor or nurse to step inside the room. Not hope that I might make it out of this miserable fucking situation alive but hope that these people can fix me up good enough that I stand a chance at making it out of Angel Harbor.

The pain is unbearable, and I can feel myself fading in and out of consciousness, so I lay back on the exam table and close my eyes, inhaling and exhaling deeply, trying to will away the pain. The sounds of the clinic aren't exactly soothing, but it's something to focus on, something to listen to other than my thoughts.

The door swings open, and I sit up too quickly, gasping in pain. "Ouch! Shit. Son of a bitch!"

"Sorry. I'm Dr. Bishop and you are?" He looks down at his tablet. "Rose?"

I frown and shake my head. "I'm Margaret," I say and then realize what I did. "Well, Margaret Rosalia," I add to explain the lie. I don't know why the fuck I'm so tongue-tied. This isn't like me, and I feel out of sorts. Maybe it's the bikers in the hallway.

Or maybe I'm worse off than I think.

"Okay, Margaret, want to tell me what happened?" The doctor asks while he washes his hands and grabs a set of gloves.

I'm torn. I don't want to tell him the truth. What if he has to report it to the cops?

"I'm not asking for details about the altercation but rather a catalog of your injuries."

My head is fuzzy, and I shake it to figure out what the fuck he's asking. "Huh?"

"Your injuries, Margaret. Where does it hurt?"

“Oh. Right. I got stabbed in my side and here in my neck,” I answer without removing my hand from the wound. “And obviously my face. God, I look so ugly. I should have just let them kill me.”

“Hey, calm down. It’ll be okay, Margaret. We’ll get you fixed right up.”

Then he pushes my shoulders back so I’m lying down. “You’ve been through a lot,” he says. He lifts my clothes carefully and examines my wounds before calling out, “Sophie, can you come in here, please?”

The nurse comes back into the room and closes the door. Dr. Bishop turns to her and speaks in a low voice, “I’ll need you to help her change. She needs stitches and X-ray of the stab wound to see if it punctured an organ. It looks superficial, but we can’t be too sure. I’ll be back in a minute.” He walks out and shuts the door.

“Let’s get you cleaned up, honey,” Sophie says softly. She places a gown next to me and then helps me remove my shirt. I stick my arms out so she can slip the hospital gown on and help me lay back.

I flinch as she touches my side, but she’s gentle and patient, explaining everything she’s doing as she cleans my face, my neck, and the blood all over my hands.

As Sophie works, I begin to feel a strange sense of detachment. It’s like I’m watching all of this happen to someone else. Someone who isn’t me. I can see the blood on my skin, the bruises forming on my arms, but it doesn’t feel like it’s me.

“You’re doing great, Rose.”

I wince. “Margaret, sorry, but my name is Margaret. For real.”

“Okay, Margaret,” she says and finishes cleaning my wounds. Dr. Bishop walks back in, pushing a tray with medical supplies on it.

“All right, Margaret. I’m going to give you some local anesthesia before we start stitching you up. It’ll sting a bit, but I’ll be as gentle as possible.”

Dr. Bishop sits on a rolling stool to access my wounds and prepares my skin for the stitches. First, he spreads something he said will prevent infections and then a numbing medication. While he waits for it to take effect, he asks, “Is there anyone we should call?”

I begin to relax because everything begins to hurt less, but his question startles me. “You mean like the cops?”

“No,” he chuckles. “Like family or friends. Someone who might wonder where you are and if you’re all right.”

Man, I’d give any fucking thing to live in this guy’s life for just twenty-four hours. I laugh at the question. “Nobody is worrying about me, Doc. Trust me.”

“I’m worried,” he says.

For a brief moment, I wish I could believe him. Believe that someone might actually worry about a girl like me. But I know better.

Dr. Bishop flashes a sympathetic grin. “I’m sorry about what happened to you, Margaret.”

“Yeah, thanks.” My thoughts go to what happened to me as he begins to stitch up my face. I think Sophie is still in here, but I’m not sure. I don’t really care. I just want to stop hurting. My ribs are still on fire.

“I was jumped,” I finally admit. “A group of girls caught me out by myself.”

His touch is gentle, but so is his overall demeanor. “You’ll be okay, Margaret. No one will hurt you here.”

“I hope not. You got any painkillers? You have a really soft touch.” There’s something about the doc that I find intriguing. I’ve never met an actual nice guy in real life, and he seems so nice that the old version of me would have found him boring. But not today. I want to know why he’s working at a free clinic in this shitty neighborhood instead of a big, fancy hospital. “Why are you working here?”

“You’re full of questions today, Margaret. No one will hurt you. I do have something for the pain. Thank you, I try. Now,

what was the last question? Oh, because I like helping people,” he answers. “And here is where help is needed most.”

Usually, I would have called bullshit on that answer, but I believe him. “You’re the first man I’ve ever met who cares about helping anyone but himself.”

He smells really good, and I’m glad I’m lying down because my legs are tingling at his voice. “Then you need to expand your circle. Doctor’s orders.”

I begin to laugh, but the pain in my side steals my breath. I don’t know if it’s from the beatdown or the knife wound.

“Slow down, Margaret.” Dr. Bishop breathes slowly until my breaths match his. “If you keep going like this, you’ll pass out.”

I nod, and though it takes a few minutes, I finally get myself under control. “Sorry about that. I’m not usually such a wimp about pain.”

“I doubt you’ve ever had these kinds of injuries before.” He slides his rolling stool back and looks at something on the computer.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. That bruising on your midsection and back looks pretty nasty. I’ll feel better about it if we do an X-ray now.”

I can’t get over the unease I feel being here. Do I know this man? Is he a friend or foe of BTD? “Are you sure that’s all it is?”

“Well, that’s what the X-ray will tell us. And I’ll need you to fill out the rest of the form, Margaret.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want to prescribe something that might kill you,” he answers. “I’ll be back for your X-ray. Try to stay still until I return.”

I nod. It’s not like I have anywhere else to be at the moment. I use the time to focus and see if I can hear those bikers talking.

It can’t be good.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NOVA

I rush down the hall to my office, Margaret's file in my hand, past Stone and Diesel standing watch outside Banger's room. I don't stop to chat with my brothers, not when I think a gem has just fallen into my lap.

I shut the door and scan the file and then open my phone to Wild Man's data. Margaret is a fairly common name, and I know Maggie is a nickname for Margaret. Maybe I'm just tilting at windmills because it's eating me up to see Banger in such a sorry fucking state.

Wild Man provided details about Maggie at Church, so I want to see if they match the Margaret I just met. Maggie Leon's date of birth matches my Margaret Rosalia Leon, and the photo on Maggie's driver's license is the same woman lying in one of my exam rooms with cuts, stabs, and bruises all over her body.

It's got to be her.

So, what do I do next? *What the fuck am I thinking?* That's not the question. I'm a doctor, and my first order of business is to finish treating my patient. Once that's done, I'll figure out what to do next. I close her file, shove my phone into the deep pocket of my lab coat, and return to the exam room. "Ready?"

She shrugs as if it's no big deal, but I see the lines pulling tight around her swollen lips. "No choice but to be ready, Doc."

She's a tiny little scrap of a thing, topping out at five-feet-two-inches and weighing about a buck fifteen soaking wet. Her

arms and chest, and even her neck, are inked up, telling the tale of her hard life.

Her eyes, swollen from injuries, barely allow her to see. I don't even bother to ask if she needs help; she clearly does. With gentle but firm hands, I guide her into a wheelchair.

We make our way toward the X-ray room, me pushing the chair and watching her pretend she's not in a world of fucking pain when she is. I know the act. I'd done it myself many times, particularly during the early days of my time in the Army.

Fake it till you make it. That's what my buddy Ricky used to say during Basic Training. It's what I'd done, pretended I belonged until I *did* belong.

When we arrive at the X-ray room, Maggie, Margaret—what do I call her?—squints at the equipment, confusion apparent even through her swollen eyes. “Where's the bed thingy?”

I laugh. “Sorry, this is the ghetto version,” I tell her, then scoop her up in my arms and lay her gently on the X-ray table. Her body tenses at my touch, a fleeting reminder of her vulnerability. I try like hell not to let it affect me.

The image of Reynolds flashes in my mind; his pale face, lifeless eyes, and that gaping hole in his chest. My hands were on him, trying to stop the bleeding, watching the life drain out of him. My breath catches as the memory lingers.

“Yo, Doc,” she says, her tough girl tone holding a hint of concern. “I'm over here. You okay?”

I shake the memory off and focus on the task at hand. The machine sounds a low but intrusive beep to signal the images are ready to view. I must get this shit under control. I can't be an effective doctor if I keep getting yanked back to the past while I need to be firmly in the present.

Something has to give. I can't let this fucking PTSD get in the way, not now. These symptoms are coming more frequently, and they'll only get worse if I ignore them.

If I'm going to be useful to Banger, to Maggie, to the Reckless Souls, then I need to be at my best.

Otherwise, they'll all die, and it'll be all my fucking fault.

CHAPTER NINE

MAGGIE

Something is up with the doctor.

Is he on drugs? “Is anything broken, Doc?”

“It’s just a small crack in a rib, a fracture instead of a full break, so you’ll be fine in a few weeks. You’ll need a pain reliever, ice, and plenty of rest.”

“Does that mean you’ll give me the good drugs?” I ask, and my mind tries to come up with someplace I can heal in peace without worrying about my crew—my *former* crew—finding me and ending my life.

“Yes, Margaret. I will prescribe you some pain medication.”

“Good. Then yeah, it’s okay. Resting’s doable.”

Dr. Bishop looks at me, and he lets out a long, shaky sigh. “Is it?”

“Yeah,” I say. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

“Because, Maggie, you’ll have to rest someplace that the Bloodthirsty Devils won’t find you.”

Maggie? He says it calmly, as if we’re old friends. But I don’t remember telling him my name is Maggie.

It scares the living shit out of me, and I try to get up, but it hurts too bad. “How the fuck do you know about Maggie and BTD?”

Now I’m afraid. What is this fake *Doc* going to do to me?

“Not too difficult to put together with those tattoos, not around these parts.”

My tattoos aren't associated with BTB. They're from my days as a *Las Sangrientas*, long before BTB took us over and put us to work for them. “Who are you? Tell me the truth, or I'll scream.”

“Jesus Christ, woman. Don't start screaming. I'm Nova Bishop. Dr. Bishop to you. I'm also an Army medic and a patched member of the Reckless Souls.”

Shit. Holy shit. Holy fucking shit. “Reckless Souls?”

I'm in trouble, and I know it. I can hardly squeeze a breath out for the panic that rises inside of me.

Demon killed one of his brothers, and just like my crew, the Reckless Souls probably blame me. “I, uhm, need to get the fuck out of here.” I turn and try to lift myself from the X-ray table, hissing as another lightning bolt of pain shoots through me.

“Fuck!” I wheeze and fall back down.

“Maggie,” he growls, wrapping his big hands around my shoulders. “Stop it, Maggie. Please.”

His tone is firm, but his voice is calm, even gentle, through his frustration.

“Maggie, I'm not going to hurt you.”

“Damn right, you're not,” I growl and manage to slide past him off the table. It feels like something is tearing in my neck, and my knees buckle.

Dr. Bishop is right there to catch me, and he picks me up like I weigh nothing and sets me in the wheelchair.

“Stop fighting me, Maggie. I'm not trying to hurt you. I'm going to help you.”

I let go and look into his eyes, well, as much as I can with these slits that barely let the light through. He said he works here because he wants to help people, but how can he be a biker and a doctor? That makes no fucking sense.

“How does that work?”

He smiles as if he can read my thoughts. “I was a doctor in the Army, and I joined a motorcycle club, but I’m still a doctor. It’s not that difficult.”

Maybe not, but how can I trust him? “You want to help me, what? Help me right into some kill trap from your MC?”

“No,” he sighs. “We don’t want you dead, Maggie. Unlike your former friends.”

If he wants me dead, I’m as good as dead anyway, right?

“Yeah, okay, fine. Let’s say I believe you.”

“You believe me,” he answers.

My shoulders sink, and I shake my head in frustration. “My former friends did this to me. Those fucking *pendejas* I grew up with. We learned those streets together, and this is what they do to me. Beat the shit out of me, stick me like a pig, and then leave me for dead.”

It’s pathetic, feeling sad and angry about this, but this is the life I chose.

“I guessed as much. How did they find you?” At my look of confusion, he shrugs. “Angel Harbor isn’t really BTB territory.”

Right. “We used to go to the warehouse where they found me to drink, get faded and fuck back in the day. It was stupid to go there, but I had nowhere else to go. Still don’t.”

The doc opens the door of the X-ray room and pushes me into the hall. I look to the right and see those bikers still standing there. One of them nods at us, and I turn my head. The doctor pushes me left into an office.

“What I don’t get,” he says, locking the wheelchair, “is why they’re after you.”

“Million-dollar question, isn’t it?” I flash a painful smile because it’s embarrassing as fuck to admit that my lifelong friends, people I considered family, turned on me.

“They think I helped you guys kill Demon.” I scoff because that’s the most ridiculous thing in the whole fucking world. “After you bikers booked it out of there, I climbed out of that ditch and found Demon lying there, so I ran as fast as I could with a sprained ankle and finally got an Uber and went back to L.A.”

I cringe at the memory, but somehow, I find myself telling him the whole story. “I was scared and dirty and looking to my crew for help, you know?”

I let out a bitter bark of laughter at how stupid that seems now.

“I heard them blaming me because I screamed. I mean, what the fuck? I fell down the damn ditch. I hurt my ankle. Anyway, I dipped out of there and have been in Angel Harbor ever since.” I look away and swipe a few stray tears angrily. I hate to cry. It makes me feel weak.

“That’s tough,” Nova offers, rubbing a slow hand across my back.

I look up and flash a watery smile full of regret for all the shitty choices I’ve made in my life, all the bad decisions that brought me here, to this clinic.

“I’m a total fucking wreck.”

He smiles at me and grabs something from a cabinet in the hall right outside the door. “Aren’t we all?” he asks and hands me an ice pack.

“For your face,” he says kindly.

I exhale at the cold pack, pleading with the tough bitch I used to be to rise to the surface, but she stays away for now. “Not like this.”

“Maybe not,” he agrees. “But the trick is to find someone whose wreckage matches yours.”

I frown. “Don’t you mean baggage?”

“Nah, fuck that. Baggage is boring. Real warriors leave a wreckage in their path.”

He gives me a smile and, fuck me. I’m in so much trouble.

CHAPTER TEN

NOVA

I must be out of my fucking mind for prolonging my time with Maggie. She is one of the Bloodthirsty Devils, the same fuckers who put Banger in that hospital bed with around-the-clock protection and I have her sitting in my office like we're old friends.

Whether she was directly involved or not, they are her friends. Her family. Still, knowing all that I can't help my desire to protect her.

"So, Maggie, tell me how a beautiful girl like you got mixed up with an asshole like Demon?" Shit, I wince inwardly. "Sorry. Docs shouldn't call their patients beautiful."

"Don't be," she flashes a half-smile. "If I was still beautiful," she points to the gauze covering the nasty wound, "I might have called you out, but since you're just being nice, I'll shrug it off."

I frown. "Scars heal, Maggie. That scar on your face will heal faster than the memories of who did it to you." I rummage through the bottom drawer of my desk until I find what I'm looking for. "But betrayal and helplessness hurt a lot longer than physical pain."

Maggie frowns at the black and white bandana I hand her. "What's this for? I don't exactly need colors anymore, do I?"

I roll my eyes. "Not colors, Maggie. It's for your hair."

She frowns at me before lifting a hand to touch her hair. From the heartbreaking expression skating across her face, I know she's having a flashback. My offer of a bandana made another part of the attack roar back to life.

“Fuck me, I forgot about that.” She measures her hair—or lack of—with her hand, her expression embarrassed as if the shearing was her fault. “How bad is it?”

“Not too bad. A little lopsided. You know, it's that whole rock chick look from back in the day, but the easiest fix of all.” I shrugged and laughed. “Just wait, and it'll grow out.”

Her smile lights up her whole face, even though it's sardonic and says she thinks I'm full of shit. “You're a real glass-half-full type, aren't you?”

“Most days, I have to be, otherwise, why bother patching up wayward gangster girls?”

She laughs, shaking her head as she ties the bandana around her head. “Demon and I grew up together,” she starts, and I realize she's finally going to answer my question. “I knew him way before the Bloodthirsty Devils and *Las Sangrientas*. Back in grade school. You know, the same old boring story. Friends and then more. And then came gang life.”

I frown at how simple she makes it all sound. “You didn't care when he joined the gang? Your parents didn't care?” It seems odd that any parent with a young girl wouldn't keep her far from that life.

Maggie laughs, shaking her head. “I was already in *Las Sangrientas* before he became BTB, so no, I wasn't bothered. It was just what people from the east side did. Joined up in the military like you or joined a gang. We chose the gang life.”

I'm not sure how much choice she had, but I lean forward, curious about her life. About her. “And your parents were cool with that?”

She laughs again. This time the sound is harsh and bitter. “My mom tolerated Demon. Thought he was good for me and could keep me in line. My stepfather hated Demon with a passion that only grew when he caught us fucking.”

She snorted his opinion of the man. “That sorry motherfucker beat me up and kicked me out. And my so-called mother let him. Bitch. Then, I stayed with Demon and his mom for a while, but she was so strung out I’m not sure she even knew I was there.”

I’d heard versions of this story before, but Maggie’s sincerity told me she wasn’t crying poor me to get drugs or game the system.

“That’s rough. So you two were left to your own devices?” I was, too, but I had wealthy parents. My own devices meant nannies, and housekeepers, and other paid help.

“Yeah. It was me and Demon against the world, but when he rose up the ranks inside BTD and started working with the cartels, he became his worst fucking nightmare. A junkie.”

“And you felt obligated to stay with him?”

“I did. After everything we’d been through, I thought I could help him through it. I couldn’t.”

I study her sad and tortured smile, full of so many emotions, it’s hard not to feel for her.

“I’m sad he’s gone,” she says, conflicted emotions in her voice, “but the dude I knew and loved? He’s been gone for years.”

“So you’re not harboring some deep resentment against my MC for killing your soulmate?”

She shakes her head and winces. “No. I told him to forget about Viper, but his ego and paranoia wouldn’t allow it. The minute that cartel dude mentioned Viper’s name, Demon was all wrapped up in it.”

“You don’t want to try to make amends with the Bloodthirsty Devils?”

Maggie scoffs and winces. “You’re kidding, right?” She points to her face and then her side. “Maybe before this, a part of me hoped I could go back and nothing would change, but after this, I’ll never trust them again.”

“I can offer you protection, Maggie.” It’s a foolish offer. I know that just as well as I know that I can’t leave her to fend for herself. “I have to talk to my President first, but it won’t be a problem.” I hope.

Maggie chuckles, even though she can’t move without being in pain. “Thanks for the offer, Doc, but I won’t hold my breath. Pretty sure your MC hates me as much as my crew does.”

“They don’t hate you, Maggie. We’ve actually been looking for you.”

“Me, why?” She puts up a hand to stop me before I can answer. “Let me guess, to kill me? Oh, wait. They have someone of yours, and you want to swap?”

“No,” I say. “And yes. They do have one of ours, but the BTB is looking for you so they can drop both of your bodies at our doorstep. Look, that’s all I can tell you right now but I’m not looking to hurt you, Maggie.”

She nods. “I might believe you, but I don’t trust the Reckless Souls.”

“Then trust me. I could have called them already. Hell, I could have told the two guys outside exactly who you are, but I haven’t. Will you stay here while I go make some calls?”

She hesitates, eyes darting around in search of a quick exit. “Yeah, sure. I need to rest anyway. Doctor’s orders.” She manages what passes for a grin, given the bandage in her face.

I point to the sofa in my office, “You want to stretch out there? I can get you some blankets. Or I can take you back to the exam room. Which do you prefer?”

“Here’s fine. That couch looks more comfortable than that hard-ass bed I was on,” she says, and I walk out to the storage shelf along the wall and pull out a pillow and some blankets. I set up her bed on the couch and then help her to settle down on the cushions, amazed at how fragile she is, like holding fine china.

“Don’t go anywhere. I’ll be back.”

“I’m going to sleep, at least for a little while.” A yawn escapes, and she hands me the ice pack. “Thanks. Where’d you say those good drugs are?”

“I’ll get you something,” I say, but before I can turn around, she’s asleep. Poor girl. She’s had it rough.

I watch her long enough to avoid seeming creepy before I step outside the office. I pull out my phone and press the call button. “Ace, we need to talk,” I say when he answers.

“Nova, what’s up, brother?”

“Maggie is here. They beat the fuck out of her.”

“Bring her to the clubhouse.”

“That’s the plan,” I begin. “But she needs help.” I explain her current condition at the hands of the Bloodthirsty Devils. “Helping her is the right thing to do, brother.”

“Listen, Nova. I know you want to help everyone, but you can’t, especially not her.”

I frown. “Why the hell not? Right now, the BTB is our mutual enemy. She knows all about them, which can not only help us find and rescue Willow but to fuck them over big time. What’s the downside?”

Ace falls silent for a long time, and I assume he’ll tell me to go fuck myself. He lets out a rushed sigh, and I can almost see him pinching the bridge of his nose. Finally, he comes back and says, “You’re on speaker. Dix is here with me.”

“What the fuck are you thinking, Nova? This chick is one of them. She’s responsible for putting Banger in that coma.”

“Maybe she is,” I say. “But she says she tried to talk Demon out of fixating on Viper, and I believe her. Anyway, does it matter when they want her dead too?”

I can tell from their voices that I’m losing them. “Look, the only way she survives is with some help, and maybe if we give her that help—”

“—She’ll give us the help we need,” Ace interrupts.

“Exactly. We can waste time tracking down every place in L.A. searching for Willow, or Maggie can help us narrow down where she might be.”

“What if the Devils guess that we have her?” Dix asks. “Or what if they go searching for her and attack the clubhouse or one of our businesses in the process?”

“You think they’re watching the clinic?” I mull that over. “Because they fucked her up pretty bad. I bet they think she’s dead.”

“Yeah, well, if or when they learn the truth, the MC and our families will have a target on their backs until we turn her over.”

“Well, then we need to get her healed up so she can help us find Willow. Once we have her, we can end this shit. Are you guys gonna help me with her or not?”

Dix laughs. “Who the fuck are you, and what have you done with Nova?”

“Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up all you want. Just tell me we’re going to help this chick.” I don’t want to go behind my MC’s back, but I can’t let another person die on my watch.

“Fine,” Ace answers with a sigh. “We’ll help her.”

“But,” Dix begins. “We have to keep her totally fucking hidden from BTD. I don’t want anyone who’s not patched to even know she’s on MC property. Got it?”

“Got it.”

“And as soon as she’s feeling better, we get to talk to her,” Ace adds.

“Yes. Jesus Christ, you act like I haven’t been in the club for years. I know the rules.”

“Damn, Nova. You’re awfully protective of this Maggie. Can’t wait to see her,” Dix jokes before he ends the call.

“Asshole,” I grumble. “She’s pretty fucked up. They chopped her hair off and stabbed her a few times. Carved the fuck out of her face.”

“Damn. Well, you know we need intel, Nova, and we’ll get it how we can. Just encourage her to cooperate.”

“I will,” I assure him and end the call, knowing I have one more obstacle.

Getting Maggie to agree to snitch on the BTD.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MAGGIE

“Doc, please tell me this is some kind of a joke. I’m not staying in this fucking dungeon.” I gaze around the barren, stone-cold room, taking in the eerie silence. This is like stepping onto a set of a horror movie. “You hosting parties for the Addams Family down here?”

Nova chuckles. “It’s not a dungeon.”

I point to a dark stain on the concrete floor. “You missed a spot with the mop there, Hannibal.”

I’m trying to be funny, but only because I’m scared shitless. And, yeah, it pisses me off that he’s seeing me scared.

The doc runs a hand over his scruffy face, looking at me like I’m a kid throwing a tantrum. “I know it’s not pretty, but it’s for your protection,” he says, the tension between us building. “And it’s not a dungeon.”

A humorless laugh erupts out of me at his quick defense. “If it’s dark as fuck like a dungeon, smells like a dungeon, and is decorated like a dungeon, newsflash. It’s a dungeon!”

I shake my head, sucking in a deep breath to calm down so I don’t bust open my stitches. I let out a low growl, and I’m not even sure if it’s from the pain or the disbelief at the shit hole where Nova expects me to chill while I’m healing. “Nova, I swear to fuck if you don’t get me out of here.”

“Maggie, shut up!”

His words stop me cold, and I snap my mouth closed, eyes wide in shock. “So much for the nice guy I met earlier.”

So, I find my balls again. Yeah, I stand a little taller and fold my arms across my chest, glaring at him, but it falters after a brief moment. The pain is too intense, and I start to sway from a combination of nausea and dizziness.

I reach for the wall to steady me and say, “Okay, so what’s the plan now? You gonna waterboard me or somethin’ until I tell you all my secrets?”

I give him a grim laugh and shake my head. “Sorry to say, Doc, you wasted your time because I don’t have shit to say.”

Considering what the Bloodthirsty Devils did to Viper, who knows what the Reckless Souls have planned for me. They could pump me full of smack and turn me out, sell me to the cartel, or just let me starve to death in this shit hole that’s the most dungeon-y non-dungeon I’ve ever been in.

Nova’s lips purse together in a move that draws my attention to his full lips and his strong, scruffy jawline, the kind that makes me hot.

“First of all, I am a nice guy.” To punctuate his point, he moves a step closer.

I force my legs to remain in place. No fucking way am I gonna back down from a fight. I simply arch a brow at his declaration. A second later, my legs wobble, and Nova grabs my arm to steady me.

“Second, this isn’t to punish or imprison you. It’s to protect you. We can’t risk your old crew seeing you here, knowing you’re alive. If that happens, we lose our advantage, and they’ll try to finish you off. Right now, this is the best place for you.”

Deep down, I know he’s right. Right now, the only thing in this world I have going for me is that the people who want to kill me think I’m dead.

Nova looks at me with genuine concern on his face. “I know it’s not ideal. I get that. But the only way we can protect you

from the people who beat you up is if you're out of sight until we can figure this out."

"Look at the shape you're in. You can't go anywhere like this."

I shake my head, but it's bobbing all around as the pain meds kick in. "Fuck that, I'll take my chances."

"You think you can manage to outrun your old crew when you can't even stand up?" he counters. The concern in his voice makes me angrier, reminding me of my vulnerability. "Where will you go?"

"Anywhere but here," I snap, standing tall despite the dizziness that threatens to knock me off my feet. I'm not about to let him see me weak, see me falter. But my body betrays me, swaying dangerously, and he wraps his strong arms around me before I hit the floor.

He's so close that I can smell his cleanliness. No sweat, no marijuana, just pure man. Something Demon didn't have. That clean smell. I should be disgusted with myself after all I've been through, and I damn sure shouldn't be turned on. My nipples shouldn't harden at his nearness. *Stupid whore-y traitors*. "That place is right here. No one knows you're here, and I can keep you safe."

My gaze narrows. "That's not the reassurance you think it is."

This time, he does laugh, and it's deep and rumbly, kind of rusty as it wraps around me like a guy getting a little too close a little too soon. "I know you have no reason to trust me. But I took an oath to do no harm. You're safe with me."

"We both know when it comes down to loyalty, you'll choose your gang over me. Hell, my gang made the same choice."

He lifts me easily and carries me past the bloodstain and into the darker part of the dungeon. "You're tough and you're stubborn," he declares before he eases me onto a surprisingly comfortable bed.

"I've been called worse," I say, despite the thick fog of pain meds clouding my brain. I'm fighting a losing battle, my body exhausted and throbbing, but my pride won't let me give in.

Nova smiles. "I bet you have," he says, his voice a warm rumble that resonates through me, making me uncomfortably aware of his masculinity.

"You're tough and stubborn and suspicious."

"You said that already."

He hit me with a beaming smile that almost makes me forget that I'm fucked up right now. "I get it, Maggie, I really do. You have no reason to trust me, but there's one thing you should know."

"Yeah?" I cock my head to the side, unconsciously licking my lips at the sight of that devilish fucking smile. "Spit it out."

He leans in, close enough that his chest grazes mine, and his breath tickles my ear. "Your tough, and stubborn side? It's got a rough-and-tumble, street-smart charm to it. I kind of like it."

Fuck. Me.

He pulls back until our eyes lock, and I'm powerless to look away. "I will keep you safe. And help you heal. You can count on that."

Why do I want to believe this man when I don't know him from Adam? Is it the pretty face? The nice guy charm must be working magic on me after more than a decade of putting up with Demon's shit. Whatever it is, it's making it hard to think straight. "Until you get orders to put a bullet in my head," I reply, my voice weaker than I'd like.

"There won't be any orders, Maggie. Not like that." There's conviction in his voice that I want to believe. But trusting him means letting my guard down, and I can't afford to do that. Not now. Not here.

Nova takes a step back but keeps his gaze locked on mine. "You're staying here, Maggie. End of discussion."

"It's not the end of anything," I shoot back, yawning as he removes my shoes and tugs a blanket over me.

"Get some rest," he says, completely ignoring my words. "I'll be back to check on you soon. I promise."

I roll my eyes at the promise he tosses over his shoulder.
“Promises? From you? Cute, Doc.”

“Nova.” He turns, his expression serious. “Call me Nova.”

Nova. What the fuck kind of name is Nova? Sounds like a shooting star that’s about to blow up.

Story of my life.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NOVA

From a corner of the room, I lean against the wall, arms crossed, watching her. There's an air of quiet, but it's the restless kind. She's sprawled across the bed, exhaustion finally winning over her stubbornness. But even in sleep, Maggie doesn't find peace.

Damn, she's a riddle. Tough as they come, with a mouth that could make a sailor blush. But behind those eyes, there's a story filled with pain. Demon, the bastard, must've been a big part of that chapter.

After a few more minutes watching her, I check her vitals and bandages and leave her to rest.

I return the next day, and she's sleeping again, the plate of food on the nightstand still untouched. That worries me. I make a mental note to bring her something she likes. If I can figure out what that is.

Today, I'm determined to get in and out, not soak in her beauty while she's asleep, vulnerable, and quiet. Her pulse is strong, and the stitches are healing exactly as they should. It's progress, and when I finish changing her bandages, I pack everything up and head toward the door.

A guttural moan escapes her. I stiffen. I've heard that sound before—in the dirt-covered battlefields halfway across the world. “No, stop!” she cries out. It's raw, full of anguish.

Every instinct I've got screams to help her, to pull her out of the dream she's trapped in. I cross the room and kneel beside

her. “Maggie, it’s just a bad dream,” I whisper, placing a hand on her shoulder. “You’re safe here.”

But the nightmare’s got a tight grip. She’s sobbing now, tears wetting the pillow. “Asshole,” she mutters. Probably thinking of Demon. Bastard’s gone, but his memory lingers.

“No, stop!” She cries out once again, sitting up with her eyes closed. One hand covers her eyes and the other her mouth as if she can’t bear to see to whatever is haunting her dreams. “Stop, stop, please,” she whimpers and falls back against the bed.

“Maggie,” I whisper, more to myself than to her because she’s lost in her memories.

The shouts and cries become real tears. I understand what she’s going through, but I wonder what exactly is haunting her. Is it the day she lost Demon or waking up to find that all the family she had in the world had turned against her? Is it the trauma of the beating she took?

I don’t know, but eventually, she settles back into a deep sleep, and I leave her, heading home to eat and shower and fight my own demons.

The next day, I return to The Chamber, bringing Maggie food she never eats and water she never drinks. She’s healing well, and that’s all I can ask for.

The nightmares persist. On the fourth day, they return with a fever. The moment I walk inside The Chamber, she’s already thrashing around on the bed as if she’s fighting for her life, shouting and crying in anger. In pain. I lunge forward to stop her from toppling off the bed, and instantly, my hands touch silky soft skin.

She’s almost naked. All except for a skimpy tank top and a pair of low-cut panties that show off her slender waist, a belly button ring, tattoos, and a protruding hip bone.

“Fuck.” I have to swallow hard, pushing away thoughts I shouldn’t have. This ain’t about that. It’s about helping her.

“No!” One arm slices through the air and smacks my face.

With gentle but firm hands, I manage to hold her still. “Easy, Maggie,” I breathe out. “You’re okay. You’re with me. It’s Nova.”

With a final, heart-wrenching sob, she goes limp, breathing heavily. The storm’s passed, for now. I straighten up, feeling a dull ache in my chest. How many nights have I jolted awake like that, cold sweat sticking to my back, gasping for air?

“You’ll be okay,” I whisper before rushing out of The Chamber.

When I get outside, I realize I’ve left my medical bag beside her bed. I don’t dare go back for it. I can’t.

If Maggie wakes up, I might forget that I’m the nice guy she accuses me of and show her the darker side of me.

My bag will be fine until tomorrow.

Me? The jury is still out on that.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MAGGIE

I sit up with a groan that is a clear reminder that I'm alive. The pain in my side is there, but it's nowhere near where it was. *Shit, where it was.* I don't know how much time has passed, but I remember the ass-whooping I took from my own damn crew.

One hand goes to my side, and I feel the scar, but the stitches are mostly gone. There's still gauze on my face and neck, but the pain is minimal. And slowly, the memories come back to me.

The free clinic. The sexy doctor.

“Fuck.”

The sexy biker doctor who also happens to be a member of the Reckless Souls, the biker crew who killed Demon. I fall back against the bed and let out a long sigh. I'm in a fucking dungeon, the windowless area that's supposed to keep me safe and out of view of my own—my *former*—gang.

I sit up again and notice that I'm not tied up, so obviously, I'm not being held captive. So, maybe the sexy doc isn't a total liar. I look around the pitch-black space, unable to see a fucking thing. I reach out beside me, and my hand lands on a lamp.

After a minute of blind touching, I find the switch, and light fills the dungeon. I'm lying on a bed under a sheet. A quick look under the sheet reveals I'm wearing a pair of cotton

shorts and a tank top that doesn't belong to me. "What the actual fuck?"

I go completely still when I hear the heavy metal door swing open and then slam shut, eyes scanning the area for something I can use as a weapon. But the intruder appears before I find anything and holy fucking shit, he's hotter than I remember.

"Nova." He is fine as fuck, tall and lean, with light brown hair, deep blue eyes, and a bearded smile that's full of...affection? No, that can't be right.

"You're awake," he says, his smile bright and relaxed. "How are you feeling?"

"A little out of it," I admit easily, folding my arms to glare at him. "And wondering what happened to my clothes?"

He steps closer to the bed with an unbothered shrug. "Your clothes were pretty bloody."

"That doesn't answer my question," I growl, ignoring the awareness sizzling through my veins.

"I tossed 'em. There are more right here." He points to a leather duffel bag on the floor. "Some of the girls donated some stuff in case you needed it."

"What girls, and who changed my clothes?"

His brows dip in confusion. "I did. No one else knows you're down here other than me, my Prez, and my VP. And they haven't been down here at all."

I don't know how I feel about him seeing me naked and handling me so intimately. "Then how did the girls know to give me some clothes?"

"I just told them it was for a good cause."

I snap, "And they just gave them to you?" People just don't give things away. Not from where I come from."

"These girls do."

"Hope you got a good look at everything."

"The clothes? Yeah, they're nice."

“Not the clothes, Bozo. Me.”

His lips twitch, and his gaze rakes over me as if he’s seeing it all over again. “I did. But I’m a doctor. I’ve seen it all.”

Well, shit. I have no comeback for that. “How long have I been here?”

“A few days. You ran a fever and slept for a few days,” he answers, lifting my tank top to examine the knife wound. “It’s healing perfectly. How’s the pain?”

I shrug. “Not worth mentioning. But I’m starving.”

“There’s a sandwich,” he says, nodding toward the table where I found the lamp. “I brought it this morning. You haven’t eaten in a while. I guess the good drugs knocked you out.”

I look over, and there’s a wrapped sandwich and a bag of chips. Just like the dirty old warehouse, and the memories come back to me.

I fight back a snort-laugh, the irony not lost on me. “Did you steal it?”

“No, I had one of the girls make it,” he says, sitting at the end of the bed, his presence filling the space.

My space.

“Who are these girls? Your maids or something?” I say after a bite of the best turkey sandwich I’ve ever tasted.

“Biker chicks. Ol’ ladies of the patched members.”

“They cool?”

“They must be. They’re feeding and dressing you.” Nova’s smile warms me on the inside in a way I don’t understand. This world, *his* world, is so different than what I’m used to.

He’s right, though. They are taking care of me.

“You know, Maggie, you were having a rough time sleeping. I just want to let you know I’ve been there, so if you need anything...”

I look away, embarrassed. “Nightmares?”

“Yeah.” Nova’s gaze pierces into me, and I feel like a fool for being so vulnerable in front of him.

“Lucky me,” I say bitterly, shoving the last bite of turkey sandwich in my mouth. “Tell your homegirls thank you. This was really good.”

Nova smiles. “I’ll pass it along.”

“You’re here for another reason?”

“No. I came to check on you, but now that you’re awake, we have to talk business.”

I stare blankly and wait to hear what I’ll have to give for all this *good-natured* help. I don’t have long to wait.

“We need info, Maggie. Anything you know about the Bloodthirsty Devils that will help us fight them off would be appreciated.”

Appreciated? As if I have any choice in the matter. I’m locked in a dungeon, and they could keep me here forever if they want. I shake my head. “No. I don’t know you, and I don’t trust you, so I’m not helping with any of your criminal activities.”

“They have Banger’s girlfriend. They took her the day your crew filled him with bullets.”

“Yeah, I saw her.” I shake my head, unwilling to help. “It’s too late for her anyway. She’s probably dead.”

“It’s not too late. We know she’s alive, but your knowledge could help us rescue her.”

“Too bad.” It’s my problem. She isn’t my problem.

“Maggie,” he sighs. “Why won’t you help us?”

I laugh. “You’re kidding, right? As soon as I tell you what I know, you’ll kill me. Might as well skip all the bullshit and just kill me now.”

“Jesus *fuck*, woman! Don’t you get it? Nobody is trying to kill you,” he growls, gripping my arm tight. “At least not me. Not my MC. We helped you and kept you safe, and yet you cling to the BTB like they’re the only family you’ve got.” He

shakes his head as if he's disgusted with me. "I guess the guys were right. You'll be loyal to them until the end."

I pull away from his grasp and scramble off the bed with surprising ease. "So that's your plan, huh? I don't help, and you're gonna kill me, right? Right?" I shout, and Nova's haunting blue eyes meet mine. "You got nothing to say, Doc?"

I expect an immediate reaction, but he stands motionless, a strange expression on his face. I take a cautious step back, but that one movement is enough to break the silence as Nova shakes his head before storming off.

"Yeah, right," I call after him. "Run away from me!" I feel empowered now that he's far away.

Nova pauses and slowly turns around. Like a panther, he stalks across the room until he's right in front of me. His pulse races in his throat, his blue eyes darken, and his nostrils flare. "You drive me fucking insane, you know that?"

Before I can form a smartass response, he cups my face, and his mouth crashes down on mine. For half a second, I'm completely still at this turn of events, but then his tongue sweeps across my lips, back and forth until I open up and when our tongues touch, electricity buzzes through my body.

Fuck. This dude is on fire!

My arms wrap around his broad shoulders, and one hand tangles in the hair at the nape of his neck, and I press against him, wondering what it'll take to make this nice guy snap.

My hands keep wandering down the wide expanse of his back and his slender waist until I find his ass, tight and round, well-muscled. Fucking delicious.

Hungry for more of him while his mouth devours mine, I slip my hands under his t-shirt to feel his hot flesh against my palm. He's hard everywhere, and my pussy clenches at what's underneath. Nova is lean and hard, and suddenly, all I can think about is fucking him.

He pulls away from me, his breaths coming out in short bursts. "Maggie," he growls, gripping my shoulders and pushing me against the wall.

I gasp at the move, the slight pain of the hard wall skating down my spine.

“Sorry,” he says and takes a step back.

I grip his forearms. “I like it.”

His nostrils flare again, and he takes my mouth like he has no choice in the matter, like he’s acting on instinct because he needs this as much as I do.

His mouth is doing wicked things to me, and then his hand slips inside the waistband of my shorts. My panties. Nova growls when his fingers find my pussy soaked. I open my legs a little wider, and two fingers slip inside. Deep inside.

Is this really happening? Am I getting finger banged by a doctor biker who is kinda, sorta holding me hostage? *Fuck yeah, I am.*

His thick, capable fingers thrust deep and fast, drawing my orgasm closer and closer to the surface. My hips join the rhythm, working to make sure I get off before he does.

My pussy clenches around his fingers, so close to coming, I can taste it. Then, he stops. “What the fuck?” If this is some kind of torture, it’s working, and I’m pissed off.

Without a word, Nova turns me toward the bed, bending me over with one hand while the other strips me out of my panties. The telltale sound of his zipper rips through the silence, and then the quiet thud of his pants hitting the ground. My whole fucking body clenches with the need to be fucked.

“Doc,” I moan.

His cock slides up and down the seam of my pussy until his cock is coated with my juices, and then he’s right there pushing the head of his cock inside me.

He lets out a low grunt when his thick cock invades my sorely neglected pussy. I haven’t been fucked good in a long damn time. Hell, I haven’t been fucked at all in weeks, and the feel of his cock is just what I need. He pushes the middle of my back, making me arch even more. Another low growl escapes when he sinks in a little deeper.

“Oh fuck,” I moan at the feel of his big, thick cock filling me up perfectly. “Yes, Nova. Oh fuck!”

He stops the delicious torture, wrapping an arm around my waist and pulling me up so my back is flush against his chest, so close I can feel his heart racing. That arm loosens, and his hand slides down to my clit, rubbing quick circles that make me dizzy while the other hand slowly crawls up my body, gripping the front of my throat deliciously before his hand smacks over my mouth.

My eyes go wide at the move. What the fuck is happening? Is this some weird murder fuck kink?

Before I can think straight, his cock moves within me again while his fingers torture my clit in wicked circles that blur my vision. I’m still ready to freak the fuck out when a low grunt sounds in my ear.

And then another.

And another.

My pussy clenches hard with every thrust of his cock, deeper and harder, and suddenly I get it, the silence and the darkness. It intensifies every fucking stroke. Nova is everywhere and all around me, his warm breath fanning the back of my neck, his pelvis pushing against my ass with every stroke.

I’m moaning against his hand with my eyes closed as I take every inch of him, my greedy pussy begging for more. The sound of our skin, slick and smacking together, echoes in the room. The wet sound of his fingers circling my clit, it’s all louder in the silence. His grunts sound like a growl in the silence.

I arch a little more to take him deeper and smile because I unlocked the level that makes the nice guy snap. His hand leaves my mouth, sliding down to my throat where he holds me just tight enough to make my breath hitch while he pounds his stiff cock hard and fast into me. He’s fucking me like I’m his salvation, and I clench my jaws, keeping silent because if he stops right now, I’ll kill him.

Another grunt sounds, mixing in with his harsh breaths, and when he pinches my clit, it's all over. My body stills completely, every muscle in my body tense before the band snaps, and I'm shaking, convulsing as the orgasm tears through me. A shuddering breath escapes, turning into a grunt as I ride out my orgasm.

Suddenly I'm face down on the bed, two strong hands gripping my hips while his cock pounds mercilessly into me. One hand releases me, and a moment later, a hand lands on my ass cheek in a stinging blow that sends aftershocks ping-ponging through my body. Another smack lands, and then another, all while Nova's cock pounds into me in the midst of a never-ending orgasm.

His moans grow louder, and then one final grunt as he shakes and shivers, the warmth of his cock spilling into me, stealing the last of his energy.

I close my eyes and ride out my pleasure. The hot doctor, the nice biker, has just given me the hardest, the dirtiest, the most satisfying fuck of my life.

And already, I want more.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NOVA

I take a step back, breathing heavily. The taste of Maggie's lips still lingers on mine, and I want more, even though I know it's wrong to feel this way about her. She's been loyal to the Bloodthirsty Devils for years, but something in her troubled soul keeps pulling me in. The urge to hold her is almost impossible to resist.

My hands tremble as I quickly fasten my belt and make my exit without looking back and ignoring the sound of her voice as she calls out to me in confusion.

I climb the stairs and lock the door behind me before I walk across the parking lot to Ace Motors, where I find my President pulling his hair out while staring at the computer screen.

He notices me and looks up with a pleasant enough smile. "Nova, what's up? This fucking paperwork is killing me."

"We need to move Maggie out of The Chamber. She's not a criminal or a fucking animal. She's scared and healing." My chest heaves as the words rush out of me, and I'm not at all surprised by the look on Ace's face.

"Okay. Where is this coming from?"

It's coming from the fact that I can't keep my hands to myself. I can't be in control of looking after her, at least not only me. I need distance.

But I don't tell him any of that. "If we treat her better, I think she'll be more likely to tell us what we need to know to go after the Bloodthirsty Devils."

"What's going on? Tell me the truth."

I inhale deeply and let it out slowly. "Nothing is going on with me," I lie. "I think if she feels normal instead of like a prisoner, she'll be more likely to share intel."

Ace nods as he considers my request. "The goal is to get any intel we can to get Willow back and beat those fuckers into submission, Nova."

I nod. "I'm aware of the mission."

"Good." His jaw is set, and his gaze is gravely serious. "If you think moving her out of The Chamber is the best way to get what we need, do it. But Nova? She is your responsibility. You wanted her here, and that means it's your job to watch her, keep her out of view of BTB, and help us get what we need. Got it?"

Fuck. I want to say, yeah, I got it, but Ace knows he has me over a barrel. "I'm needed at the clinic. I need to watch Banger."

"You're smart as fuck, Nova. So smart, you're a fucking doctor. Figure it out."

My shoulders sag a little, but inside, I know there's really only two roads we can go down. Either I let Maggie stay in The Chamber by herself, and then every time I go check on her we're playing with fire, or I keep her in the clubhouse where the chances of us crossing that line are a hell of a lot slimmer. I sigh, "Yeah, okay."

Ace lets out a knowing laugh. "This is your plan, brother. Make it work."

Make it work. I don't know what the fuck that means in this context, but I know it'll be better for Maggie if she's upstairs with the other girls. She's a tough chick, but like all of us, she needs to be surrounded by people. It'll help her heal, physically if not mentally, and maybe she'll open up. "I'm on it," I growl and leave him to his paperwork.

Standing in the middle of the parking lot between Ace's Motors and the clubhouse, my thoughts wander to Maggie. The pull to her is so fucking strong I can practically feel my legs fighting me to go to her.

I take a step forward, and then another, and my heart pounds against my chest. The first symptoms of an attack start, and I stop myself from moving as I double over and stare at the ground, breathing deeply until the signs of panic dissipate.

I can do this. I can fucking do this.

I'm stronger than this feeling of panic, than the visions of dead brothers and sisters in arms. I am stronger than the dead bodies I can't unsee and the disgusting feeling of failure that starts to pull me under.

"No!" I shout and slam my eyes shut until the visions turn to dust. It takes a few minutes but eventually, the images in my mind go away and my heart rate returns to normal.

I stand and breathe slowly, shaking it off. I head for the clubhouse, more specifically to my bike and back to the clinic where I can do some good.

And it will give me something other than Maggie to obsess about for a few hours.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MAGGIE

“What do *you* want?” I cross my arms and glare at Nova, standing at the foot of the bed looking hot as fuck, and like he’s ready for round two. *Fat fucking chance of that*, I think, but my nipples tighten at the lie. “Well?”

“It’s time to move you out of here.”

“You for real?” I scoff. I mean, really? We’d messed around like rabbits in this godforsaken hole, then he bounced without a word. Couldn’t even manage a cliché “hit it and quit it” before high-tailing it outta here like his ass was on fire. “Go away.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that, Maggie.”

“*Por qué no?* You’re the one who locked me in this dungeon. To protect me. Or is that just a lie? Now you’ve gotten your kicks, so it’s all right for me to be among the living again?”

“You’re healing, and as long as I can trust you not to run off into the sunset, I thought maybe you’d like to be around people again.”

“Bullshit.” I know when someone is lying to me. Had to learn to sniff ‘em out or get hurt, and it’s probably the only thing that’s kept me alive this long. “Try again, Doc.”

“You’d rather stay down here?”

I laugh, the cynical sound bouncing off the dank walls. “Nah, Doc. I’d rather get the hell outta this joint, this state even. Was planning on it before you locked me down here.”

“Jesus Christ, woman. Do you want to stay down here or not?”

I give him a tight smile, hoping it hides the anger boiling up in me. “Why you gotta be so fucking hot and a pain in the ass at the same time? Just tell me where I’m headed, and then leave me alone.”

I can tell he’s pissed from the angry tone in his voice, but he tries to hide it, his face flushing as he shoves his hands in his pockets. “Pack up and then follow me.”

“Okay.” I take my time gathering up the few items of clothing scattered on the bed. There’s no reason to feel butt hurt over this, no reason at all. He’s not the first dude to act like a piece of shit after getting some pussy, and he won’t be the last. That’s not important, but maybe if I’m not trapped in the dungeon, I can find a way out of this fucking town with my head still attached. When I’m holding the bag with my few borrowed items of clothing, I tell him, “All right, take me to my next prison.”

He grumbles under his breath but opens the door and motions me up the stairs.

I shoot him a dirty look but make my way up the steps and follow him down a long hallway and then another. “Where the fuck are we?”

I take two steps ahead of him to get away, but he grabs my arm, pulling me back.

“Over here.” He guides me down a different path toward a door that opens onto a bar. Top shelf liquor, pool tables, a jukebox, the works. People chatting and getting cozy like it’s the most normal thing in the world. “Where the fuck are we?”

“This is the MC clubhouse.” Nova’s voice is low and smooth like honey, so close to my ear it sends a shiver through me. “You’ll be staying here.”

I nod and look around, too aware of the heat of his hand against my back as he guides me down another dimly lit hall and into a room. A bedroom.

“This is it?” It’s not what I expect, but it has a nice full-sized bed and nightstand right in the middle of the room, a desk and

chair in one corner, and a lamp in another corner. “Thanks. This will be fine, Doc.”

He smiles when I call him Doc, but it fades quickly. “The door locks from the inside. For privacy.”

Privacy. Great. “But I’m guessing I still can’t leave?”

He sighs. “You can leave whenever you want. But it’ll be safer for you if you stay here. Until this shit blows over.”

“Yeah, right.” I drop the bag on the floor by the bed and turn to him. “Am I stuck in this room now?”

“No.” He scoffs, gesturing at the door. “I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

“The girls?” I freeze. His words sound less like an invitation and more like a threat. “No need, Doc. Just bring me food and booze, and I’ll sit here and contemplate the sorry state of my life. No intros necessary.”

“You’re not scared, are you?”

“Nah, just not in the mood for small talk,” I reply, refusing to let him get to me. “Tell me something. What happened to Viper, the dude Demon shot?”

His demeanor changes, his jaw tightens. “He’s hanging in there. Still alive.”

I nod. “Then I should definitely get drunk and stay in my room.”

His brows furrow. “Come on, Maggie. You’re tough. You can handle these women. They’re nice.”

“That sounds awful,” I reply and roll my eyes. It really does. I don’t know how to act, how to *be* around nice people if they’re actually nice. In my experience, nice folks are the ones you have to worry about. Well, women in general. “Thanks, but no thanks.”

“Come on.” He flashes a smile that makes my pussy wake up and do a little dance, nodding for me to go ahead of him.

I roll my eyes and sigh dramatically, but I walk ahead of him and into the private biker bar where everyone seems to be

having a good time. “I need a beer. And a shot.”

Nova’s hand rests low on my back as he guides me to the bar, and I hate that I’m really starting to like the feel of his hands on me, even though I’m pissed at him.

He calls to the woman behind the bar, “Hey, Trudy. A couple shots of your finest tequila and two beers.”

Trudy, whoever she is, rolls her eyes and nods. “Sure thing, handsome. What kind of beer?”

“Anything you’ve got on tap,” I tell the woman as she turns to me with a slightly dimmer smile.

Trudy nods and turns away, but I keep an eye on her all the same, making sure she doesn’t try anything funny. I need some liquid courage if I’m going to pretend to not be a stone-cold bitch for the next five minutes.

“Here you go,” she says over the loud hum of conversations all around. “You look like you could use a double,” she says, staring at my face.

My hand instinctively goes to the ugly scar Ghost carved on my face, and I nod.

“Yeah, thank you, Trudy.”

I knock back the shot without a wince and slam the glass down. “One more for medicinal purposes.”

She smiles and refills it, then heads to the other side of the bar to wait on two bikers who just arrived.

“Cheers,” Nova whispers in my ear, and I hold my body stiff to avoid the shiver caused by his nearness and masculine smell.

“Back atcha.” I turn to face him, and we both slam the shots back. Mine gives me a little shudder.

“Okay, I’m ready,” I say and remind myself not to let the swirls of blue and green in his eyes make me forget that I can’t trust him. But he is trying to help me, and he’s really nice to look at.

Really, really nice.

He walks toward a table occupied by three chatting women. Or *were* chatting because the moment we arrive, all conversation stops.

“Ladies,” Nova says with a friendly smile, and each woman returns one in kind, looking at me expectantly.

“This is Maggie,” he says, “and she’s going to be staying in the back room until she’s feeling better.”

A woman with big blue eyes and chestnut brown hair stands and extends her hand. “Hi, Maggie, it’s nice to meet you.” In jeans and a floral blouse, she looks like a suburban mom. “I’m Letty,” she says and turns to her companion. “This is Gia,” she says, indicating a woman with pink hair and perfect eyebrows. “And Miss Preggo here is Kenna.”

Kenna stands with her hand on her belly and says, “Hi,” looking me over. Assessing me. Judging me. “You look like you’ve been through some shit. If there’s anything you need, ask any of us.”

I nod, kinda thrown off by how chill they are. “Yeah, sure. Thanks.”

“I have the perfect cream for that scar,” the lady called Letty says gently. “It’ll keep the skin soft so it heals and fades faster. If you want,” she adds.

I swallow and stare at each of the three women with heavy suspicion. Why are they being so nice to me? It doesn’t make sense, not when I consider they all likely believe I had a hand in what happened to Viper.

“Uhm, sure. Whatever. I mean, thanks.” *Who the hell am I, acting like one of these bitches?* I take a long pull of beer to steel my nerves.

Letty shrugs, “We all have our scars, honey. Some are just more visible than others.”

“We have more clothes if you need them,” Kenna offers with a friendly smile that puts me on edge. “I have a ton of clothes that don’t fit me anymore, but you’re tiny,” she says, rubbing her belly again. “We managed to get a few things together

when Nova asked last week. But we weren't sure of your size."

"Last week?"

I look at Nova, and he shrugs. "You've been out of it for a while."

I shake my head at Kenna. "Thanks. I just need a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, and I'm good."

I don't want to owe anyone anything in case I book it out of here in a hurry. Sure, these bitches are all nice and everything now, but I know it's all to get me to spill my guts, to rat out the Bloodthirsty Devils and help them get revenge.

What they don't know is that I'm nobody's snitch.

Which then begs the question, why the fuck do I care about BTM? They lost my loyalty the minute they beat the fuck out of me and left me for dead. Yeah, but I don't like being used either, and that's what these bikers want; to use me for information and then...what?

No fucking clue, which is why I'm reluctant to open up.

There's a pause in the conversation while we all try to change the subject. I look around the crowded room and ask, "So, who are all these dudes?"

Letty starts counting off names I know I won't remember except for a few. "Ace is our president, Wild Man over there can hack into anything, Coop..."

She drones on and I put my drink down and say, "I'm sorry. Thank you all, but, uhm, I need to go crash." The lie falls from my lips easily. These girls are being nice to me—for now—and I can't take it.

I throw out a fake smile, grab another beer, and go back to my room to figure out what the hell I'm going to do. I can't change the past, but I can try and plan for the future. And that means getting the hell out of here.

But in order to do that, I need money and a way out that doesn't involve getting shot or beaten. I've got one card left to play. I've got information the Reckless Souls want. I just gotta

negotiate the right terms. I may be young and crazy, but I ain't stupid.

I'm interrupted by a knock at the door. I open it to find Nova standing there, his eyes intense, his hands in his pockets. "You okay?"

I shrug. "As okay as I can be, given the circumstances."

He nods, looking thoughtful. "Look, Maggie, I get it. This isn't easy for you. But you've got to trust me. I'm trying to help you."

I raise an eyebrow, not sure if I believe him. "How do I know you're not playing me? I've been played before, Doc."

He runs a hand through his hair. "I can't convince you. All I can do is show you."

I watch him, trying to read him, trying to figure out if he's telling the truth. "Show me how?"

He steps closer, his eyes lock on mine. "Like this." And then he kisses me, all warm and insistent, his hand cradling my chin. And just like that, I forget everything and get lost in him.

When he pulls back, I'm breathless, heart racing. "The fuck was that?"

He grins. "Proof."

I shake my head, not sure if I'm pissed or turned on. "You're playing with fire, Doc."

He grins. "I know. But I'll risk it. Will you?"

I take a deep breath, trying to chill. "Not sure yet. I guess we'll see."

He nods, a satisfied look on his face. "Good. Because I'm not done with you yet." And with that, he turns and walks away, leaving me confused as fuck.

I close the door, leaning against it for support. What the hell just happened? And what do I do now?

One thing's for sure.

My life just got a hell of a lot more complicated.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

NOVA

Sitting inside the makeshift hospital room with Banger, I stare at the monitor that's telling me he should be awake. His eyes should be open, and he should be conscious, but he's not. The longer I sit here torturing myself, the more my mind gets the better of me.

Instead of staring at Banger's dark hair and skin, I see a rainbow of men and women with holes in their head, their arms, their chests. All of them fatal. All of them dead.

Because of me.

"Goddammit, Banger. You're killing me, man." My hands shake and my heart races with the force it takes to will Banger into consciousness in my mind. It's no use. "Come the fuck on, man."

His fingers twitch, and I'm certain my mind has finally snapped. I am absolutely fucking positive that I need to make another appointment with my head shrinker so he can up my meds because I'm clearly hallucinating. A groan sounds, and I freeze, looking down at my brother beginning to stir.

"Banger? Thank fuck, brother." I grip his hand tight, smiling for the first time in days. "Open your eyes."

He groans again, and his eyelids flutter, but they don't open. "The fuck," he growls, pulling on the tube in his throat.

"Hang on, man." I work quickly to remove the tube and get him some ice chips. "You've been out of it for a long time."

Take it easy, brother. Fuck, I never thought I'd be so glad to hear your raggedy-ass voice."

He grunts or maybe he laughs. It's all the same right now. Banger motions for more ice.

It takes a minute for my hands to stop shaking, for my mind to process that Banger is awake. He's alive, not another of my failures. *Breathe in, breathe out.* I repeat the words over and over until I'm in control.

"How long?"

Of course. "Couple of weeks."

His dark brows rise in surprise. His fingers twitch a moment before his hands are on his body, taking stock of his injuries, which are mostly concentrated center mass. Several bullets went through his chest and stomach. "Fuck."

"You were shot up pretty good," I tell him. "I had to put you in a coma to help with healing. You're at the clinic. Do you remember anything from that day?"

Banger's brows knit together, and he shakes his head. "Willow?"

I shake my head and employ a rip-the-bandage approach. "She was gone when we got there. Bloodthirsty Devils have her, but we're working on getting her back."

"Gone? Where?"

"I know, brother. I know. We've done everything we can to find her, but these gangs don't operate the way we do." I sigh, that helpless feeling returning all over again. "We even have Doherty on the case. I promise you we're doing everything we can."

I don't mention Maggie because the last time we spoke, she wasn't in a helping-out kind of mood.

He nods a few times, eyes growing heavy from the painkillers flowing through his veins. "Fucking Demon."

Banger mutters mostly to himself, and, at first, I think the pain meds have knocked him back into sleep, but he's still awake.

“You know, I hate that fucking gang.” He motions for more ice chips. “I was so young.” He shakes his head, disgust written all over his face. “Where’s Willow?”

“We’re lookin’, man. We’re looking.” I stay beside the bed, sitting, listening, watching him closely.

He nods and drifts back to sleep. I sit with him for hours, just waiting and watching. Dude’s been to hell and back. Sophie brings me a sandwich from the deli, and I sit and eat it silently. Thinking about Maggie and what all this means.

“You save any of that for me?” Banger startles me out of my thoughts.

“Fuck man, you scared the shit outta me! How are you feeling?”

“Pretty good, Doc. Can you sit me up?” I push the button on the side of the bed until Banger is about halfway up. “That’s good, man.”

“You want to eat something? I got some pudding right here. Remember, you need to go easy at first.”

I offer him a small spoonful from the cup Sophie brought when he woke up, and he takes it.

Banger takes a small bite, coughing a bit from the respirator and injuries. “You know what’s fucked up?” he says when he finishes swallowing. “That fucking gang.” He takes another bite. “They snatched me off the streets with the lure of money.”

I put my hand on his arm. “Slow down, buddy. Don’t wear yourself out.”

He nods, and I can see he wants to make up for lost time. “Like, do this, and you get paid,” he says, continuing his story. “Well, being a kid, I wanted money. I mean, who doesn’t?” He coughs again and says, “You got anything to drink?”

I push the call button. Hannah, my other nurse, answers. “Yes?”

“Hi, Hannah, it’s Dr. Bishop. Can you bring in some of that electrolyte soda for my brother? Let’s try lemon-lime. Bring a

few. They're small."

"Sure thing, Doctor."

Banger says, "Thanks, man. Anyway, they made me do things no kid should ever do. I killed people, man. Fucking killed 'em. Robbed people and scarred them for life, man."

Hannah comes in and sets four cold sodas on the tray table, and asks, "Anything else?"

"No, thank you." She glances at Banger, probably surprised he's awake, and leaves.

"Fucking Demon was impossible when he got something in his head, like burning down a house because the girl inside didn't want to fuck him. A goddamn kid, and he burnt down her home, which in our neighborhood meant a helluva lot more than some of the rich pricks in Angel Harbor."

He's getting riled up, and I raise a hand to ease him back on the pillow. "I'm glad that mu-fucker is dead."

"You need to calm down, brother. You've come a long way since that life."

He nods, and when Banger turns to me, I'm reminded of how young he really is. Basically, a kid himself, at least compared to some of us.

"Demon's dead, isn't he?"

"Totally fucking dead, brother. It was your bullets that ended him. When we showed up, he was taking his last breath."

"Good," he growls angrily. "I know I'm not a hundred percent right now, Nova, but nothing, and I mean not one thing in this world, will stop me from getting Willow back. She's my heart, my everything. I'll die trying to bring her back to me. If that's what it takes, it's what I'm gonna do."

I respect his words. Hell, the truth is that I'm jealous that he has someone he loves that much. Serving in the military and then the MC, and the only thing I would die for is my brothers in arms. Loving someone so completely is a foreign concept to me, but someday, I want to have that kind of love. *Someday*, I

tell myself and turn my attention back to Banger. “The fuck you are,” I growl.

“Nova,” he starts, but I stop him.

“What I hear you saying is that you don’t trust the MC to get your girl back. You think we don’t all love Willow, or, fuck that, you think we don’t love *you* enough to get her back for you? She’s fucking family, man, and if we have to worry about you stompin’ off to do something stupid, then we’re not worrying about her.”

“Easy for you to say,” he grumbles and opens his mouth for another bite of pudding.

“Fuck you,” I spit the words at him, my anger growing at his insinuation. “I sat by your side this whole fucking time, working on you, cleaning your wounds myself, and willing you to just open your fucking eyes. You started healing almost immediately because you’re young and healthy, but you still wouldn’t wake the fuck up. Nothing I did, no combination could bring you back to us, and that was on me, Banger. Me! So don’t fucking tell me it’s easy for me to say.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Banger says after a long, tense silence. “It’s just, Willow means everything to me, and thinking of what those assholes might be doing to her? It doesn’t matter what happens to me.”

I nod because he’s right. I don’t have anyone I love like that. *Except my brothers and this MC.*

“It matters to me and Ace, Dix, and the rest of the MC. Willow is one of us, and we’ll tear them down to the fucking studs to find her. Believe that. You’ve been around long enough to know that’s the fucking truth.”

Banger nods, “You’re right, man. Now when the fuck can I get out of here?”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MAGGIE

I'm losing my fucking mind in this clubhouse. What the hell kind of biker gang is like a fucking sitcom family? I wake up each morning, hoping to find someone to talk to—other than Nova, but when I come out, it's like Thanksgiving breakfast with too much food, dozens of grumpy bikers, and women with babies chomping on bacon, eggs, pancakes, and sausages, even fresh pastries.

And the pastries Maven creates are heavenly. How have I never stepped foot into *For Goodness Cakes* before?

This family gathering shit is just...*odd*.

I slap some eggs and bacon on toast, grab a Danish, and sit by myself in the corner.

I've been holed up in my room for days, planning and plotting. Now, I need to find that one person who'll lend an ear about my escape plan, so I bounce back to my room.

A few days ago, I grabbed one of the notebooks inside the desk and wrote down everything I remembered about my former crew, where they stash the money and drugs, guns and girls. What houses in what neighborhoods they use, and any security details I can remember.

Club hangouts and favorite restaurants, even what corner stores they've claimed as part of BTB turf. It's all written down, everything I know, and it's all for these bikers.

If they give me what I want.

A hard knock sounds on the door, and I roll my eyes. I know exactly who it is because the good doctor can't take a fucking hint. I march to the door and call out, "Who is it?"

"It's Nova."

I yank open the door with a phony-ass smile. "What's up, Doc?"

He smirks, his gaze locked on mine, but goes on before I can tell him I don't give a shit. "You want to get out of the clubhouse for a few hours?"

Hell yeah, I do. "What's the catch?" I watch him closely, not just because he's so good-looking that it should be illegal, but also because I don't trust him.

"Always suspicious," he says with a playful smile that nearly unravels my resolve to stay distant and unaffected. "Do you want to get out of here or not? Last chance."

Taking a deep breath, I muster my resolve. "Give me ten." Slamming the door with more force than necessary, I rush to change. The black silk headscarf Kelsey gave me a few days ago is perfect for tonight. Slipping into one of the girls' form-fitting black jeans and lace butterfly top, I smirk, picturing Nova's reaction.

I'm not wrong. When I open the door, his eyes make a slow journey from head to toe. "Damn, Maggie." He's clearly in shock. "Uhm...let's go."

I follow him past the bar and straight to the door. "Where exactly are we going?" I should have asked the question before agreeing, but now I need to know. "Nova."

He stops and turns slowly. "Out."

I cross my arms. "That's not good enough."

"Dinner," he says stubbornly.

"Fine, but I'm not getting on the back of your bike."

"Scared?" He's teasing me, but this is no teasing matter.

"You wish," I say. "Just don't want to be your shield on that death trap, especially with the Devils lurking around."

I prepare to keep fighting him on it, but I don't need to. "Fine. Let's take the truck."

I frown and jog to keep up with his long legs as they cross the parking lot. "That was easy." Too fucking easy.

Nova chuckles. "I'm an easy guy."

I pause at the passenger side of a sleek black pickup, looking him up and down. "That cool demeanor you're frontin' might fool others, but I see the fire in those eyes."

For a split second, there's an unspoken tension between us. The raw intensity in his gaze ignites something within me. "Remember that fire, Maggie," he whispers, breaking my trance.

Oh. Fuck. I think my ovaries just exploded. The ache in my lower belly tells me so.

No, no, no. I can't go there!

I'm leaving this place and starting over. Nova isn't part of my plan, not at all. I tell myself this on and off all night, starting at the fancy pizza joint he takes us to for dinner.

"I wasn't expecting this," I tell him when we drive up to a nice restaurant with an awning and valet parking.

"The pizza is incredible and too upscale for most people." He shrugs as he helps me from the truck, and we snag a seat in a dimly lit corner with a prime view of a landscaped park. "You like pizza, don't you?"

"Who doesn't? But I've never had fifty-dollar pizza before. I eat that five-dollar stuff from the hood."

"Then you should enjoy it. I don't buy fifty-dollar pizza for just anybody."

That much, I believe. "I don't imagine you have to buy dinner for most of the women you come across."

He shrugs, but I respect that he nods instead of deflecting the question. "True. That's not what most women I come across want from me."

“Bikers don’t exactly scream long-term relationship, but that whole bad boy thing you got goin’ is enough to set a pair of *chonies* on fire.”

His nostrils flare, and he leans forward. “Are your *chonies* on fire, Maggie?”

Fuck, yes.

“Nope. Not at all. I don’t like it when a man runs away without a word after fucking me.” His eyes widen at the words coming out of my mouth that I can’t seem to stop. “I mean, I’m not expecting you to put a ring on it, or even a stack of hundred-dollar bills, but even a *hey, thanks for letting me bust one in ya*, would have been better than nothing.”

He opens his mouth, probably to give me some bullshit explanation, but the waiter interrupts his excuse, and we place our order.

“I’m sorry, Maggie. I’m not good at the talking part,” he says when we’re alone again.

“You didn’t try very hard,” I say with a dismissive wave. “It doesn’t matter. It was a good and satisfying fuck, no need to get all girly about it. I don’t know why I even brought it up.”

“You want answers,” he says. “You deserve them.”

Damn right, I do, but I’m learning my lessons earlier this time. I’m spotting red flags and dodging them like a ninja. “I’m going to give your MC what you want, but I need something in return.”

Nova’s expression doesn’t change, but his blue eyes stay on my face, studying me silently with so much intensity I grip the table to keep from squirming. After a beat, he says, “I’m sorry I ran away like I did. It wasn’t you.”

“If you give me that stupid fucking line, I’ll keep everything to myself and leave you to find your friend without my help.”

Something flashes in Nova’s eyes, and he nods. “I shouldn’t have attacked you like that. You were still healing, and technically, you were my patient.”

I frown. “You don’t have to make excuses, Nova. You got what you wanted.”

He leans forward, wrapping one hand around my wrist so I can’t lean back or put any distance between us. “If you think that’s what I want, you are sorely fucking mistaken, Maggie. Did I want to fuck you? So bad, I can still smell you when I sleep at night. But I shouldn’t have done it that way, and I shouldn’t have run off.”

Damn, why was it so fucking hot when a guy talked so dirty? And did it just sound sexier coming from a fucking doctor? Mi Abuelita, rest her soul, would be so proud. A real doctor.

“If you say so.” His grip loosens, and I lean back, reaching for the cold beer the moment the waiter sets it down. “Thanks,” I tell him without breaking eye contact with Nova.

“I do say so, and I’ll show you.” His words are confident, almost arrogant. No, scratch that. When he flashes that smile that instantly makes my nipples go hard, it’s not *almost* arrogant. It is full-on cocky-bastard hot.

Yes, please. Wait, what the fuck am I thinking? He won’t have a chance to show me anything because I’m not staying. I can’t.

“Sorry for you, lover boy, that was a one-and-done. I’m going to give you what you want, info on BTM, and you’re going to give me lots of cashola and safe passage out of California.”

He stares at me for a long time, but I can’t figure out what he’s thinking because he doesn’t say anything. When the waiter arrives and serves our pizza, I dig in, and we eat in silence.

The pizza is really good. I’ve never had truffles before, but they live up to the hype. So does the *guanciale* with fresh tomatoes and herbs.

“Damn,” I say, smiling despite myself. “This is some good eating.”

Nova smiles as if he wants to please me, or maybe it’s just the desire to help people rearing its ugly head again. “Glad you like it. Want more?”

“No. Are you going to give me what I asked for?”

“Are you going to tell anyone you’re leaving?”

I shake my head. “No. Who the fuck would I tell? No one cares.”

The words fall from my lips in a flat monotone and serve as the perfect reminder as to why I can’t let the attraction to the biker-slash-doctor affect me. I need to look after myself first.

“I care,” he says so quietly I’m not sure I heard him correctly.

“Only because you want what I know about BTB, and you’ll get it. Then you won’t care either.” I ignore the stab in my chest at the truth of those words.

“I care, Maggie. I don’t want anything to happen to you. You wouldn’t have survived your injuries if I didn’t care.” He gives me a searing gaze, so fucking hot it’s like a live wire between us, and my body begins to spark like a bitch in heat.

And I don’t want to believe his words, but I can’t see any lie in them, and that scares me.

Hell, he’s a biker who also happens to be a doctor, but at the end of the day, I know where his loyalty lies, and it’s not with any woman. It’s just the way things work, and I need to remember that.

“You’re a good man,” I reply because there’s nothing else to say.

“I can be,” he replies, his voice deeper than normal and thick with something that feels a hell of a lot like desire. “I can also be a bad man. A greedy man. A man who wants nothing more than strip you out of that sexy fucking blouse and slide my cock inside you until you’re begging for mercy. But rest assured, sweet Maggie, I won’t stop until my name is branded in your skin and every thrust of my cock takes away a piece of your soul, leaving you completely ruined for any other man.”

Oh. Fuck. “T-t-t-thanks. For dinner.” I practically moan the words.

He fucking smiles. “You are quite welcome. You want anything else? You ready to get out of here?”

“Sure. I think.” I stand and walk toward the door on wobbly legs, the heat between me and Nova the only thing telling me that he’s right behind me.

I’m going to fuck this man again. Oh yes, I am. I will get mine.

I reach the truck and turn just as his body slams against me, and his mouth claims my lips. Oh yes, I am about to do this.

His tongue moves like he’s an Olympic kisser, sliding back and forth across my lips while my body shivers under his roaming hands. Suddenly, my hands join the party, sliding under his t-shirt until I feel a hot, hard man under my palms. My thumbs brush across his nipples, and he pulls back with a hiss, eyes dark and stormy.

“Maggie,” he growls a second before attacking my mouth again.

His hands cup my tits, kneading them before he finds my aching nipples and pinches them so hard my pussy clenches.

I moan into his mouth as he kisses me like a man on a mission. I’m on the edge just from his mouth and hands on me. Another moan escapes and he breaks the kiss. Figures.

I sigh. “Conscience biting again?”

His blue eyes are full of indecision, and I prepare myself for disappointment, for blue lips or whatever the female equivalent of blue balls is.

“Get in the truck,” he growls as he opens the door and lifts me up to settle me on the passenger seat.

I’m confused but my body is ready to pop off. When Nova starts driving I know this ain’t happening now. We’re on the highway back to Angel Harbor before he finally speaks.

“Take off your pants.”

What? I stare at him like he’s lost his mind.

“Take. Them. Off.”

I don’t look away as I unsnap the button and tug on the zipper, shimmying out of my jeans—and boots—before tossing my

thong at his face. “If this is a joke, I need you to know that I’ll finish myself off before those pants go back on.”

He smirks, fucking smirks like this *is* some joke.

“Okay.”

I spread my legs a little wider, finding my pussy soaked and throbbing, needing some dick. “Ah, fuck.”

The car jerks to one side before Nova slams on the brakes, turning to me like his whole body is on fire. His nostrils flare, his gaze bounces between my face and my pussy. “Stop.”

“Make me,” I pant and throw my head back as pleasure skitters over my skin. I hear his zipper, and my eyes fly open.

“Oh fuck,” I groan at the sight of him stroking his cock in long, angry strokes. “Nova,” I groan and reach for his cock.

He growls, snatching my wrist and pulling me over so I’m straddling him, my pussy dripping all over his hard cock.

“Oh, fuck yeah.” I slide back and forth until he’s coated in my juices. Need takes over, and I grip his cock, squeezing tight as I carefully line up our bodies and slide down the hard length of him.

“Fuck, Doc.” I let out a long, shuddering sigh when he’s buried deep inside.

“Maggie,” he growls, gripping my jaw and tugging me down until our lips meet. He’s hot as fuck, and the way he kisses me turns up my desire to a thousand.

I bounce on his dick like a pogo stick, and the more he tongue-fucks my mouth, the harder I ride. There’s not a lot of room in the truck, but I’m small enough so that my body fits in the cramped space, taking every inch of him deeper and deeper until I’m so full I can hardly breathe.

He keeps kissing me hard and deep, and I ride his cock exactly the same. I don’t care that we’re in the cab of a truck. I’m getting mine.

His hands leave my face and slide down my body, grabbing my ass and guiding me up and down so fast that my orgasm

surprises me in both speed and intensity. The pleasure's so real I'm getting lightheaded and start screaming out his name.

"Fuck, Doc! Nova! Fuck that pussy! Yes!"

He hits me so deep that another orgasm explodes out of me, and I grip him so tight it's like I'll never stop.

"Quiet, Maggie," he grits out. His hands keep moving my hips up and down through round after round of aftershocks until I collapse onto him, smiling and giddy from the fuck session we just had.

A cop car flies by, and I hear the ghetto copter right above us, but I ignore it. My body is on fire, shaking with aftershocks. Another police car whizzes by, and then another, and another.

"Damn, I wonder what happened."

Nova stiffens underneath me, and not the good kind of stiff. His hands grip my hips so tight it hurts.

"Nova," I growl and attempt to remove his hands, but his grip tightens. "Nova, stop! Let me go!"

The sirens and the helicopter fade, and slowly, his grip loosens but he's still not here in the truck with me. He's somewhere else. If this was Demon, I'd know he was high, but whatever is haunting Nova is some serious shit.

"Nova, are you all right?" He doesn't answer so, I ease off his cock and fall against the passenger seat with a grunt. "Say something, dammit."

His eyes close, and his hands wrap around the steering wheel in a white-knuckle grip, and I'm starting to freak the fuck out. Sure, he seems like a nice guy, but he could snap and just leave my body here on the side of the road.

"Fine, don't say anything. I don't give a—"

"Shut the fuck up!" His eyes open, slightly wild and more than a little crazed, when he turns to me, gaze black and emotionless. "Just stop fucking talking, Maggie. You talk too much."

So much for the nice guy. “Want to tell me what the fuck I did to piss you off while you’re still dripping down my thighs?”

He doesn’t say a word. Not one stinkin’ word. Nova starts the engine and merges back onto the highway. In such deafening silence, it makes me feel used.

Shitty.

By the time we arrive back at the clubhouse, I’m angry and hurt, which is never a good combination.

“You know what? Fuck you, Nova. I never asked you to put a ring on it or even to fuck me on a goddamn bed. But a little human fucking decency would be nice. So, thanks for the fuck, but next time your dick gets hard, go fuck yourself.”

“Yeah, sure, Maggie. That’s exactly what I’ll do,” he growls, his words angry and mean.

“Fuck you,” I shout and jump from the truck, heading inside the clubhouse and straight to my room.

I don’t need this shit. I’m not a fuck toy to be used and then ignored like I’m someone’s trash. If Nova won’t help me get outta here, maybe one of the other bikers will.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

NOVA

Fuck. It's happening again, and I'm helpless to stop it.

Maggie says, "Fuck you," and jumps out of the truck like I'm a complete asshole.

Because I *am* a complete asshole.

Why do I do this? The best night of my life, the most intimate connection, and at the sound of a sound of a siren, I come undone. I freeze. Cold feet, clammy hands, my mind twisted in knots. For a horrible moment, I'm back in battle. And when I come out of it, I'm raining shit on Maggie like she's the enemy.

For what? Why can't I just be like everyone else? Enjoy the moment without being crippled by fear?

And why Maggie, of all people? When I try to understand it, what's there besides the physical connection? I'm a doctor, for God's sake, with a mind trained to heal, to save lives.

But Maggie? She's chaos wrapped in contradictions, like a fucking magnet with a pull on me that terrifies me. She's a gangbanger, fierce and untamed, yet those pain-filled eyes draw me in.

My hands slam the steering wheel as I scream, a raw, guttural cry. "Fuck! F-u-u-u-ck! What have I done?"

I take a deep breath but can't shake the feeling that something isn't right. Maggie is stirring up something within me, and I can't ignore it anymore.

I angrily climb out of the truck and march over to my bike. The familiar hum of the engine is comforting, but it doesn't help me make sense of what happened with Maggie.

I know I have to fix things between us, and that means putting my own fucked up desires on hold for now. The MC needs her help, and she needs ours. That should be my main focus.

Not getting my dick wet.

Whether I like it or not.

I walk into the clinic with two guns pointed at my head. Stone and Olly recognize my face and lower their weapons, "Fuck, man, what are you doing here?" Olly asks.

I say, "I own the place," and smile. "Figured it's time to take our boy home." It's been a few days since Banger woke up, and he's been awake for longer periods each day. I text Ace to let him know the clubhouse should be ready to welcome our brother back. But low-key. He needs to rest.

Stone smiles wide. "He'll be so fucking happy to hear that. He's been a grouchy fuck since he woke up."

"You wake up full of holes and find out your woman is missing, you'd be grouchy as fuck, too," Olly adds with a sympathetic shake of the head.

"No doubt," Stone agrees, nodding thoughtfully. "I'll go get the van," he offers, brushing past me as I step inside Banger's room.

He's lying on top of the blankets, staring at the small TV we put on a cart when he finally came to. "Ready to get the fuck outta here?"

He turns off the TV quickly, head swiveling to meet my gaze.

I laugh. "At least we know your trigger finger still works."

Banger's lips twitch, and then a smile forms as he nods. "So fucking ready, brother."

"All right. Let me check you out." I take my time checking his vitals and looking over his wounds, which healed nicely while he was in the coma.

“Everything looks good,” I say when I’m satisfied, he’s fit to be discharged. “Can you get dressed on your own?”

I bite back a smile at the glare he sends my way.

“Fuck you, Nova.”

“That’s Dr. Bishop to you, asshole.” I laugh, but the fact that he moans as he gets up means he’s got some stiffness and mild pain.

“How long is this shit gonna hurt?”

I shrug. “It’ll get better quicker once you’re up and moving around. The stitches have dissolved, and the sites are all closed up, so it’s just a matter of getting active again.”

He stands on the side of the bed with a grunt. “It’s been a while, but I got this.”

I nod my agreement. “True, but you’ve been laying on your ass for all that time, and now your muscles need to get used to moving again. You gonna complain and make me order you to do PT?”

He chuckles. “You wouldn’t.”

“I would,” I tell him and drop two pills into his hand, nodding to the water jug on the table beside him. “Do what I say, and you’ll be fine. Take those and listen to your fucking body.”

Banger takes the pills and laughs. “Your bedside manner is terrible as fuck.”

“Thanks. I haven’t worked on it at all since med school.” I busy myself updating his chart while Banger takes his time stepping into his jeans and boots. He needs help with his t-shirt, but otherwise, he does it all on his own. “Perfect.”

“I feel like a fucking baby,” he says.

“Good, because you’re acting like a fucking baby.”

He flips me off, and I know he’s fine, just a little sore.

“Just take me home.”

“Take your time, man. The clinic is closed, so it’s just us.” No one but us will see him like this, healed but not quite himself.

Yet. “No one but us and BTD knows this happened, and they’re all dead.”

My mind automatically goes to Maggie, and I know we can’t keep her presence at the clubhouse from Banger for much longer.

“Good.” He nods with gratitude shining in his eyes as he makes his way to the door. Banger walks out to the van, stepping up and sliding into the seat with barely a wince.

“Good boy,” I tease and slam the door before he tries to reach for it.

“Fuck you, Nova. Stone, just fuckin’ take me home.” I get on my bike and fire it up, leading the guys to the clubhouse.

I’m so fucking grateful that Banger is up and well enough to leave the clinic, but I can’t shake the lingering fear that he wouldn’t make it, that his face would be another of the ghosts that haunt me. It’s not, which is damn good, but the feeling doesn’t go away as easily.

We enter the clubhouse, and everyone is here, wearing smiles and holding beers, ready to celebrate the return of our brother.

“That’s right fuckers, I’m back!” He flashes a wide grin that is pure Banger, arms stretched out wide to welcome the love.

Gia gets to him first, wrapping him in a healthy hug. “Damn, son. We missed you so much!”

He laughs and accepts hugs from our brothers, prospects, and the women. All except for Willow, and he’s powerless to hide the disappointment, the anger. “I’m alive,” he grins, his gaze focusing on Ace. “But I need an update on my woman.”

Ace nods toward Wild Man’s high-tech office, and when he puts his arms around Banger in a gentle bro hug, careful of his wounds, he says, “I understand, man. I got you.”

I stay close to Banger and close the door, so he can get his update on Willow in private.

I leave him with Ace and Wild Man, retreating to the loud comfort of the bar.

“Nova!” Shades calls my name, his beer raised high in the air, and a smile on his face. “Get over here, brother. Trudy, more beers!”

I make my way to the table. Lucky says, “Looks like a party.” Dix and Shades clink bottles while rock music blares from the speakers.

Dix leans over and claps me on the back. “You did it, brother. You brought Banger back where he belongs.” He taps the bottleneck to the one Trudy just sat in front of me. “Our very own magic man.”

“I’m not a magician and no fucking hero. I just did my job.” I did what I always do, knowing that it works most of the time, but it’s the times it doesn’t work that I can’t seem to forget.

“Either way, man, Banger is back,” Shades says, grinning. “A little banged up, but he’ll be fine. Better when we get Willow back.”

Willow. Another person I’m failing because I can’t keep my dick in my pants when Maggie is around.

She told me what she needed to help us find Willow, and all I could think about was fucking her. I need to tell the guys her conditions for helping us, but I feel like I can’t, and I know why.

I’m not ready to give her up yet.

But is that the right thing to do? Am I that confused about my priorities?

Maggie deserves better than a man who isn’t in complete control of his mind. Hell, my MC deserves more than that, too. The dreams and panic attacks are coming more frequently than anyone knows, which makes me an even bigger asshole because there’s too much going on for me to sit on the bench.

The Bloodthirsty Devils are a growing threat, and I need to be able to fight them. With my MC. With all my faculties.

I stand abruptly. “I need to get the fuck out of here.”

Dix jokes, “Struck out again, brother?” and playfully smacks my arm.

“No,” I grunt and finish my drink before I say something I’ll regret. “See you guys later.”

I need solitude before my next panic attack spills all my secrets in front of the people I consider family.

“You all right to drive?” Lucky chimes in. “I can follow you.”

“Nah, man. I’m good,” I say, not even turning to look back.

Once outside, the full moon hangs heavy in the sky, almost like it’s watching me, judging me. Everything feels surreal right now and too damn quiet.

Each step I take away from the clubhouse loosens the knot in my stomach. When I reach my bike, I toss my leg over the seat and let the roar of the engine blot out everything in my head.

On the bike, eating up the road, my hands don’t shake, the flashes of memory don’t interrupt my ability to function.

Out here, nothing matters but the next stretch of road.

The thrill runs out as I rev into the parking lot of my swanky high-rise condo with a killer view of the pier. Snagged this place right after I joined the Reckless Souls, just before Mom and Dad kicked me to the curb for opting out of becoming a world-famous surgeon and instead becoming a *filthy biker*.

Funny, really. Their glitzy world was a no-go for me, especially with PTSD breathing down my neck. So I flipped the bird to their expectations, and they axed my trust fund. And you know what? Best bad decision I ever made.

Good fucking riddance.

I plan to do better with my kids when the time comes. First, I have to find a good woman who loves me, a woman who wants to be a good mother and a good partner, not just someone who wants to climb the ladder because she married a doctor and accumulate shit. *Maggie might be that woman*.

Maggie. That girl’s had such a rough life and she deserves better than what I can offer. Right now, I can fuck her senseless and take care of her financially, but can I give her the love she deserves?

Minutes later, standing under the hot spray of the shower, I wonder what Maggie's dream man looks like. It's not Demon, but that doesn't mean it's me, either.

"Dammit." Guilt swamps me for the way I took her, so rough and hard in the truck, using her like she was my own personal fuck toy. *She enjoyed it*, the dirty prick in my head reminds me.

Yes, she did enjoy it. She came twice before riding out several minutes of aftershocks. Then again, fucking has never been my problem. As a biker and a doctor, getting women has never been my issue. I can snap my fingers, and women just come running, but that no longer holds any appeal.

The things I want in life are out of my reach until I do something about these episodes or get to the bottom of what's causing them. Banger is better, and they should be fading, not increasing.

First, fix my mind, and then maybe I can think about making Maggie mine for real.

But that means I have to delay her plans to leave. I need to get her to stay and help us with Willow's rescue. But how?

Two tours in the fucking Army with more medals than I can wear on my uniform, and now I'm stuck trying to figure out how to win the affections of a petite former gangbanger with a huge chip on her shoulder.

And no hair.

Piece of cake, right?

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MAGGIE

There's a party roaring just on the other side of that door, and I'm hiding out in this room like a little bitch. *What the fuck is that?* I don't know what they're celebrating, and an hour ago, I didn't really give a shit. But now? I'm not just curious. I'm pissed off.

Is Nova out there partying it up, letting one of those biker bitches rub up against him when his cock still smells of my pussy juices? "Ugh. Nasty."

I need to get the fuck out of Angel Harbor and away from the Bloodthirsty Devils and the Reckless Souls. I have a plan, but to make sure it's going to work, I need to access the internet because I got no phone. *I need to leave this fucking room*, I tell myself as I stare at the door and listen to the rock music blasting through the building.

It's now or never, Maggie. Fuck that. It's now.

I rush across the room and yank the door open, stepping outside and feeling like a badass. I saunter into the bar where it's loud enough to wash away any second thoughts running through my mind. I grab a beer and lean against the bar, scanning the room and noting all the smiles. I freeze for a second as my gaze lands on Viper, who goes by Banger now. He's alive. And he's staring right at me.

Shit.

I need to expedite my plan because no matter what Nova says, it isn't safe for me here. I spot a familiar face, the sexy hacker

dude Letty pointed out when I first arrived. I slowly make my way over to him, putting what I hope is a flirty smile on my face. “Hey there. Wild Man, right?”

His blue eyes are bright and full of amusement. “Yep, that’s me.” He doesn’t look interested, but it doesn’t matter because neither do I. He’s hot, but he’s not Nova. He is, however, the only person I know who might be willing to give me what I need.

“Need something?”

I lean in close, a slow smile on my mouth. “You have no idea.”

“Is that right?”

I nod. “I’m hoping you can help me with something, handsome.” He has that exotic appeal that most women love, and I probably would too if I wasn’t already hung up on the aloof doctor. But now I’m sure he’s what I need. Nova talked about Wild Man.

“What do you need? Maggie, isn’t it?” His brow arches as if to say *two can play that game*.

I laugh, nodding and playing the game right back. “That’s me. Maggie. But you already know that since you’re the resident hacker who did a deep dive into my sordid past.”

“Guilty.”

I lay a hand on his bicep and give it a squeeze. “Good, because what I need from you is simple.”

He leans forward, getting in my face as if he’s challenging me instead of flirting back. “Yeah? And what is it that you need, Maggie?”

I frown at his tone and pull back to examine his face. My hand goes to my hair but I remember, I’m wearing a bandana, and then my hand goes to the scar on my face.

“What the fuck is going on here?” The voice belongs to a female, and though I’m not completely sure who’s with who around here, the possessive note in her voice tells me that the hacker is her man. Or she wants him to be.

I turn real slow, smirking as I eyeball the baker chick Maven. “What’s happening is we’re having a private convo, so mind your own fucking business.”

The mousy baker slides between me and Wild Man with an ease I might have found impressive if she wasn’t blocking my escape. “He is my *fucking* business, so anything you have to say to him, you can say to me.”

The music stops and it’s like all eyes on me. But I feel alive, most alive since my own crew tried to kill me.

“Nah, we were chill before you brought your crazy ass over here.”

Hate burns in her eyes and she lunges. I lunge back. “Let’s go puta, I’ll fuck you up—”

Some dude yells over the noise “Cut this shit out!” But I’m focused on taking Mousey down.

“Guess fucking all these bikers has perks, huh?” I smile and set her off.

Nostrils flaring, she snaps back. “Fuck you, dirty gangbanging bitch.”

I *meow* at her. “Kitty has claws,” I growl, scratching the air.

“Back off right now before I make you wish your BTD friends had killed you.”

Heavy boots sound behind me before Ace appears, scowling hard. He stares me down, all fiery.

I ignore him and say to Mousey, “Sorry *vieja*, I don’t want your man. But just so you know, I’m fucking Nova.” Gasps sound and I stand taller. “That’s right, a fucking doctor. Not some low-rent hacker. No offense,” I tell Wild Man.

He grins, amused. “None taken.”

Ace snarls, “Shut up!” He’s about to explode. “You’re lucky to be breathing. Get that?”

I shrug.

“If Nova hadn’t gone to bat for you, you’d be on the streets fighting to survive. You get that, right? Tell me you fucking get that.” One thick finger points at me as if I’m supposed to be afraid. I’ve stared down death more than once this month, and I’ve got one concern right now.

Freedom.

“Yeah, and you keeping me hostage until you get what you want is supposed to make me feel what? Grateful?” I bark out a laugh. “All you’re waiting for, all of you,” I point accusing fingers at all the bikers in the room, “is to get the intel you want from me before you put a bullet in my head. You think I don’t know that? You’re no different from the Bloodthirsty Devils.”

Ace shakes his head. “You’re un-fucking-believable, you know that? We give you a safe haven and take care of you, and this is how you repay the favor?”

“Some fucking favor,” I grumble when Ace takes another step forward, stopping when he’s completely in my face. I visibly shrink as he towers over me, taking me back to my daddy and stepdaddy. They were both mean sons of bitches who didn’t think twice about doing whatever it took to get what they wanted. Any means necessary and all that macho bullshit.

Ace leans forward, forcing me to lean back. “You’re here, alive and safe, because I allow it. Because I’m being fucking kind, and you think you’re going to come into my clubhouse and start shit?”

I open my mouth, another smart-ass response on the tip of my tongue, but the Prez ain’t playing.

“I’m talking,” he roars. “I don’t give a fuck about your reasons for bringing chaos to my MC. It stops right fucking now, you feel me?” I don’t say anything because this tirade doesn’t require an answer. “We have enough shit to deal with and don’t need your trashy brand of gangbanger bullshit around here.”

His words have me shrinking into myself, feeling ugly and stupid, and so much like the weak little girl who didn’t have

the grit and killer instinct to give it right back to toxic assholes like him.

“Or what?” I shout in response because suddenly I’m not that weak little girl, not anymore. I learned a few things over the years, and it is always better to stand up for yourself.

“What are you gonna do, Ace? Kill me before you get what you need to save your precious fucking biker bitch?”

I look around the room, my gaze landing on Viper before I turn to another angry biker. “Go ahead. What the fuck do I care when you’re going to kill me anyway? Do. Your. Worst.”

The challenge is there in my words. I wait and lead with my chin for him to punch me or shoot me, anything.

The clubhouse falls silent. I’m fully aware of all the eyes on me, and I don’t care. Fuck Ace for calling me out like that when I was only trying to plan my escape.

“You know what? Fuck you. Fuck every last one of you stupid fucking bikers. All I wanted was a way out of here.”

I shoot a semi-apologetic look at Maven. She’s a nice chick and doesn’t deserve all that bullshit I loaded on her.

“But you were never gonna help me, were you?” I don’t give him a chance to respond. “Yeah, I didn’t think so. Fuck you, your MC, and Nova for making me believe for one fucking second that any of you are different. You’re all just Demon in a different jacket.”

With those words, I look around one last time and jet the fuck out of there, leaving the bikers behind once and for all.

I don’t need them. I don’t need Nova and his lying kisses or his lying eyes. I don’t need their fake protection.

All I need is myself.

And as soon as I pack my one measly fucking bag, I’m outta here. For good.

CHAPTER TWENTY

NOVA

“Fuck me, Doc. God, you’re fucking dick is so big. Yeah, fuck me like that.” Maggie smiles at me, her tits in my face, bouncing on my cock. Taunting me.

“Shut up, Maggie. Just shut up.” I give her long, deep strokes to torture us both as sweat drips down our bodies. . I wrap my hand around her throat, and her eyes go wide with excitement or fear.

“Quiet,” I mumble.

Her hips grind on my cock like a wild animal. Her eyes widen as if telling me to give her more.

She wants more. I grip her throat tighter until her face is flushed and her breathing ragged.

I push deeper, my strokes growing faster. Her cunt squeezes me hard, choking my cock to the point of pain, but I still don’t let up. Maggie’s close, sweat dripping between her tits, but I can’t stop. “Get it, Maggie, come all over me.”

I grunt and grip her tighter, pounding into her so deep, and my balls tighten, and then I let go...and so does Maggie, disappearing into my fantasy world.

“Ahh, fuck,” I roar as my body tightens, and I grab a pizza-soaked napkin to catch my jizz, jerking my cock until every ounce of come leaves my body. I collapse on the sofa with a grunt.

Fuck.

Fuck. *Me*.

Does Maggie even realize how fucking rare it is for two people who just met to have explosive chemistry like we do, both in and out of bed?

She probably doesn't even think anything about it. Just me and my fucked up head.

She's still in survival mode. Fight-or-flight.

Hah! Welcome to my world.

A loud banging on my front door startles me, and I grab my gun on instinct, zipping up my jeans as I go to the door.

The peephole reveals no threat. I open the door to Dix, Ace, and Shades. "Hey, guys. What's up?" I ask, still shaking from the orgasm. I really hope they don't notice.

They all storm in, anger radiating off of them as they pile into my apartment. Dix turns first, his eyes blazing with fury. "What the fuck, man?"

"What the fuck, *what?*"

"You," Dix growls, slamming the door. "You're fucking a goddamn gangbanger. Not just any fucking gangbanger, but the one that nearly killed Banger? Let me ask you again. What? The? Fuck?"

"Oh. That."

"That?" Ace shouts the word, but he keeps his distance. "This isn't just you getting your fucking dick wet, Nova. This is serious fucking shit."

Oh shit, here comes my anxiety. All the signs of an attack intensify as I face down my brothers. A shrill laugh escapes, and I shake my head, pushing Dix away from me.

"And why is she any different?" I ask, getting in my president's face. "Answer me that, *oh wise one*."

"Back it up, Nova." He pushes me back with one hand, not hostile, just a warning.

“Every fucking chick who’s entered the club in the past few years started as a threat. Valentina,” I glare at Dix. “Literally is a cartel princess. She belongs to the enemy that sent those motherfuckers to kill Banger in the first place! So what is the fucking difference?”

“It’s different,” Ace replies.

“Do you even fucking hear yourself, man? She doesn’t fucking belong to anyone,” I tell him. “In case you forgot, the gang she *allegedly* belongs to beat the fuck out of her, stabbed her, and left her for dead.”

“So she says,” Dix adds with a heaping dose of sarcasm.

I shake my head. “Seriously, what the fuck is this? The BTD tried to kill Banger. They left him for dead and stole Willow, and you’re worried about where I’m putting my dick. Why?”

“Why?” Dix lets out a bitter laugh. “Well, for one, she was flirting with Wild Man to get intel from him and then told the whole fucking clubhouse that she’s fucking you!”

“What?”

Ace blows out a breath. “Maggie needs to get on with her life. She’s in danger here, and the longer she stays with us, the more she puts the club and our families in danger.”

“This is bullshit,” I growl, feeling my chest heave as I struggle to suck down oxygen. My vision starts to blur and spin, and the ringing in my ears intensifies by the second. Fucking panic attack, cropping up at the worst fucking time.

“It was okay when you guys were fucking Kenna and Valentina and all the others, but now it’s a problem?” I dig the heels of my palm into my eyes to stop the room from spinning.

This isn’t real. This is just an anxiety attack, I tell myself for a few seconds until my breathing is in check. My anger is still here, but I have it under control. “Do whatever the fuck you want,” I growl and wave them off. “You’re going to anyway.”

It’s bullshit, pure and simple, just like Uncle Sam and my parents all over again. Loyalty isn’t rewarded when it comes to me. I make the same sacrifices for my MC and my brothers

because it's what I do, but it's unsettling as fuck that I don't get anything in return. Not one fucking ounce of loyalty. Every fucking body else gets their happy ending, and what do I get?

Not one goddamn thing.

"Nova," Dix starts, stepping forward.

I hold my hands up to stop him, but the stubborn bastard barges forward. "Don't touch me. Not now."

That brings the VP up short. He nods with his brows dipped into a frown. "Seriously?"

I nod, but my mind isn't on the three men inside my apartment. It's on Maggie. How the fuck am I supposed to tell her that she has to go? That she's no longer welcome at the clubhouse and that we're tossing her to the curb?

"I promised her we would protect her. And now I'm going back on that promise, knowing she'll end up another dead body that I can't forget. Can't unsee. Do you fuckers even think about that?"

Shades, whose been standing there like a dick statue, starts, "Nova—"

"—No, Shades, just shut the fuck up."

Ace looks around the room with a nod. "Grab your gear," he orders abruptly. "We're rescuing Willow. Tonight."

That's it, all he says. Nothing about the promises I made to Maggie, just the plan to rescue Willow.

"You don't need me for that," I assure them.

"You're coming," Ace growls. "Willow might need you."

There's nothing I can say to a direct order. *Story of my fucking life.*

I nod and grab my shit. Maybe rescuing Willow is just what I need to get my mind off Maggie and the fucked up way I feel about her, the way she makes me feel.

Already, the plans swirling in my mind ease my anxiety. The symptoms are fading. Maybe it's my turn to pour my emotions

into fucking shit up, creating chaos, and wrecking a few lives.
Maybe that's what I need to quiet the demons in my head.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MAGGIE

Son of a fucking bitch! I pace the length of the small bedroom, so angry I'm vibrating. I tug on my hair before I remember that all of my dark, thick locks are gone and yank the stupid fucking scarf off my head.

I pack the clothes, which aren't actually mine, into the duffel bag, which isn't mine, either, and zip it up before slinging it over my shoulder.

For a second, I hesitate to take the clothes, but then my gaze lands on the notebook I've been writing over the past few weeks, and I remember that I'm not a fucking charity case. I have something they need, and a few pieces of clothing is the least they can pay me.

I yank on the door and stomp out, fully prepared to make a right through the back door where no one will realize I'm gone until it's too late. But the clubhouse is full of women. *Only* women except for a few prospects, which tells me that something is going down. We used to hole up in a stash house when the crew was out taking care of business. Just like the Reckless Souls are doing now. *Left it is, then.*

"What's going on?" I direct the question to Letty, the nicest one of the bunch, and most likely to give me an answer.

Maven glares at me, the hatred she feels for me radiating off her like those fucking cartoon clouds. "None of your fucking business. What are you still doing here?"

I shrug and turn to see if I can find a more receptive audience.
“Where’s Nova?”

“Not here,” Gia growls.

Shit, even the pink-haired chick is pissed. Maybe I’m not gonna get any answers. “All right.” I look around the room, and I can feel the animosity aimed at me from every last one of these women. “Cool. Thanks.” I head toward the door with my head held high.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Gia calls after me, anger in her tone.

I arch my brows and form a cynical smile. “I need to head to the clinic to see if I can find Nova to give me some more bandages before I take off,” then shoot back, “Not that it’s any of your fucking business. See ya, bitches.”

McKenna lays a hand on my shoulder. “Maggie, wait.”

I push her off me, my gaze warning her to back off. Not that I’d hit a pregnant chick, but she needs to back the fuck off. “No thanks. Your hospitality has been seriously fucking overwhelming, but it’s time I head out.”

“Where are you going?”

“Why do you even give a shit?” The answer to that is simple. They don’t. “I made a deal with your club, and they didn’t hold up their end of the bargain, so I’m getting the fuck out of here.”

Gia gets in my face, pushing my chest until I stumble back. “I don’t fucking think so.”

Fire flashes in my eyes, pulsing through my veins because the last time I was in this situation, surrounded by angry, feral bitches, I was left for dead. I snarl and brace my feet on the floor, shoving her back with as much force I can muster. “I didn’t ask you what you think, goth bitch.”

Gia’s lips quirk into a grin. “Nice. Haven’t heard that one before,” she deadpans. “Just because you’re suckin’ Nova’s dick doesn’t make you an old lady. You have no fucking right to know what is—or isn’t—going on around here.”

She's right, and it's just the reminder I need. "Good point," I say with a phony baloney smile. "See you never, *chicas*." I stroll toward the front door when another hand grips my shoulder.

"Keep your scrawny ass here until the men are back, and chill the fuck out," Gia growls. "Or else."

"Yeah, sure. I'll get right on that," I say sarcastically as I unzip the bag and toss the notebook at Gia's feet before picking up the bag and readjusting it over my shoulder.

I look around one last time, half appreciative of these women who showed me kindness when they didn't have to and half pissed off because they were just furthering the plans of their club. "Thanks for the scarf. I left it on the bed," I tell Kenna and then push through the door that takes me to the parking lot. The street just beyond is my first goal.

And then I'll keep going until this place is in my rearview. Until Nova's just a man I used to know.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

NOVA

“All right,” Wild Man begins, his gaze landing on each of us gathered in the semi-circle around him. “We’ve narrowed Willow’s location down to two houses.” He rattles off the addresses of both places. One is just outside the city limits of Angel Harbor, and the other is in the heart of L.A.

A frown crosses my face, along with a few questions. “How’d you narrow down the houses?”

Maggie was supposed to provide us with this information. “You said it would take weeks to narrow it down.”

Wild Man’s gaze shoots toward Ace, and they have a silent communication that makes me feel as if they’re keeping something from me. “Gia’s been working double duty.”

“Bullshit,” I reply.

“Now’s not the time,” Shades says. “Right now, we save Willow. Got it?”

I nod. “Yep. Got it.” Unease slides through me, but I shake it off because I need to focus on this mission. I promised Banger we would do everything to get his woman back, and that’s exactly what I’m going to do. I’m a patched member of this club, and what Ace says, goes.

So I’ll shut my mouth and take orders like a good little soldier.

Wild Man gives a short nod and reverts back into planning mode. “Preacher and Stone will head to the house on Elk

Grove. Rumor has it this is just a stash house, but it would also be a good place to hold someone hostage.”

“Why?” Ace’s question tells me more than anything else that this is new intel, and it sounds like it came from Maggie.

“Because the house to the east is vacant, and the one to the west is an empty lot. It’s a distressed neighborhood, so it’s quiet.”

Meaning there aren’t a lot of ears to hear Willow screaming. “Why are we just sending two men, then?”

Wild Man smiles. “I’m glad you asked. The house on Harbor Place is a cul-de-sac with only two occupied homes. It’s likely she’s in this location, so we’re sending Preacher and Stone to check out Elk Grove. If she happens to be there, it’s close enough that Diesel and the probies can get there within minutes. If she’s not there, we’ll know she’s at Harbor Place. When we have word from them, we’ll breach Harbor. Got it?”

He looks around to make sure we’re all listening and smiles when he gets confirming head nods.

Ace steps up and does the same routine, focusing on each of us with his steely gaze. “Check your weapons and make sure you have backups and extra ammo. We don’t know what to expect from these assholes other than pure fucking violence. We already know they’ll shoot first and never get around to asking questions.”

We take a few minutes to check and double-check our weapons before we break off. Preacher and Stone are heading to the first house while the rest of us ride to Harbor Place.

We turn onto the quiet cul-de-sac and spot the two-story home. It looks so fucking normal with oversized flowerpots on both sides of the porch, even an American flag blowing in the gentle breeze.

Unlike what we know about their normal *modus operandi*, this house doesn’t look out of place. It doesn’t stick out or look abandoned. “This is it,” I tell my brothers with certainty, explaining my thought process.

Ace looks at Dix, and they both nod. “Agreed.”

We move in closer to get a better look at the house. Ace receives a text message from Preacher.

Nothing but blow and 2 X-BTD

Dix smiles. “Good news, then.”

“Tell them to torch the place,” Ace growls.

I surprise myself when the words come out of my mouth. “To the fucking ground.” My brothers look at me in surprise, and I shrug it off. “Are we going in or what?”

“We’re going in,” Ace declares, motioning with his hands for me and Dix to head around to the back of the house while he and Shades take the front. That leaves Lucky to act as watch from a distance just in case anyone tries to get away.

Ace says, “Ready?” We all nod and fall into place, waiting for the sign to enter.

“Your head in the game?” Dix raises his brows in question at me.

“Yeah, my head is in the fucking game,” I growl. I have my eye on the back door and the windows on either side. “The lights are off, but I think I see movement.” I nod toward the window on the left with the curtain still swinging.

“All right, I got your six.” Dix signals, and we move closer to the door, taking the stairs as quietly as possible despite our motorcycle boots.

As soon as Ace gives the high sign, Dix kicks in the door. One BTD is sitting at the kitchen table with a sandwich in front of him. I squeeze off two rounds before he picks up his gun.

“Good shot,” Dix shouts with a grin.

“Thanks,” I mutter, stepping forward to move the gun away from the dead guy.

Footsteps sound behind me just as two grunts come from the living room. I turn first just as another BTD comes up from the basement, making it to the top of the stairs, a wicked grin on his face, raising both hands in a karate chop.

“Dix, behind you!”

With a shit-eating grin, Dix turns and delivers two vicious jabs to the asshole's face before the guy can land one blow. "Move quieter next time, dickhead."

The BTD smiles at Dix as he wipes the blood dripping from his nose. "Thanks for the tip, *pendejo*." He lunges forward, leading a jab at Dix's chest that sends him stumbling back a step. Just then, a gunshot rings out in the living room.

Dix squats down and leads with his shoulder, slamming that piece of BTD shit into the wall. Finally, I snap out of whatever the fuck is gripping me to the floor. They're both grunting and shouting names at each other as they land blow after blow until they're both panting and bloody.

"Dix," I call out, but he doesn't hear me because they're still beating the shit out of each other. I raise my boot, grunt hard, and land it on the BTD's back with as much force as possible until he's face down on the floor. "Dix," I growl. "Stop playing with this motherfucker and just kill him."

He grins. "But I was having so much fun, Doc." He shrugs and pulls out his gun. He presses the barrel against the dude's head, squeezing the trigger once. He growls at me, snarls, "party pooper," and pulls the trigger again.

We make our way upstairs, but every room is empty, all the walls are bare, and we see no signs that anyone spends any time up here. To be thorough, we check every room and closet for Willow.

"Willow?" I call her name a few times, and we stay still, listening for any muffled sounds of reply.

"Downstairs," Dix murmurs, and we retrace our steps, jumping over the dead Bloodthirsty Devil on our way back to the living room where Ace is beating the shit out of a guy while his fist pounds the ever-loving fuck out of that guy's face. "We're good. Willow?"

"Still looking," Dix updates him just as Shades and another BTD crash into the wall beside the window.

"Keep looking," Ace says just as Shades takes aim at a retreating BTD and, with one shot, turns him into a dead BTD.

“Come on.” I smack Dix’s shoulder and nod for him to follow me down a dark stairwell. It’s quiet down here, and things get quieter with every step we take away from the chaos in the living room.

“You think she’s down here?”

I listen carefully for any signs of life. Or impending death. Testing the doorknob, I give it a sharp turn, and the door opens with the loudest fucking squeak.

“So much for making a quiet entry,” Dix says with a cautious laugh.

“Dix?” Willow lets out a muffled yelp over her gag, and her eyes go wide.

“It’s okay, Willow. You’re all right,” I tell her with a shaky smile as a man comes out from hiding, but I see him before he sees me, and I shoot, hitting him in the face. Willow yelps again.

“Fuck, you a goddamn sharpshooter or what?” Dix says. The awe in his voice puts a smile on my face.

“Or what,” I growl and remove the tape from Willow’s face, yanking the red bandana out of her mouth. “Hey, Willow. How are you?”

She coughs and gags until she can speak, then says, “I’m okay. So fucking glad to see you guys. How’s Joaquin?”

“He’s okay. Back at the clubhouse waiting for you,” I tell her as I loosen the ropes tied around her wrists and help her up off the dirty floor. “I got you,” I tell her when she damn near collapses on her wobbly legs.

“He’s okay? Alive?”

I nod. “I watched over him myself.”

She wraps her arms around me with a sigh. “Thank you, Nova.”

“Thank me later. Right now, we need to get you outta here.” I lift her in my arms and carry her up the stairs while Dix takes the lead, clearing the way of a few more Bloodthirsty Devils

we find lurking in the house. We make it out, and when we're in the front of the house, I realize our oversight.

No cars.

"Willow, can you ride?"

Her gaze is uncertain but she says, "Yeah," and sighs. "I'm good. My muscles are sore as fuck, and I'm thirsty."

I grab a bottle of water from my saddlebag and hand it to her. "Go slowly." She nods quickly and reaches for the bottle, but I hold it back. "Go slowly if you don't want to puke."

Her movements still, and she nods. "Okay."

I turn to find Ace and Shades marching from the house, looking exhausted and a little bruised and bloodied. "All good?"

Shades nods. "Five dead. I count that as a win." He grins wide. "Willow, good to see you."

She nods, still sipping the chilly water, smiling around the bottle.

Ace looks around to make sure we're all accounted for. "All right guys, let's get home before the fucking cops show up."

Dix helps Willow onto my bike, and she wraps her arms around me tight as we haul ass back to the clubhouse. When we get there, she's nervous. "Is he really all right?"

I hold onto her as we enter the clubhouse, and immediately, the women are all over us after waiting impatiently. "He'll be so much fucking better now that you're back," I say.

"Willow!" Banger's voice sounds over the music. He's on his feet, his long legs eating up the distance between him and his woman. "Willow," he growls again, cupping her face and kissing her like she's his whole world. And she is. He's alive, and his woman is back in his arms.

Loud whoops and whistles sound around the bar, and Ace holds up a hand. "We're bloody and tired, but we got Willow back, and there are a few less Bloodthirsty Devils in the world."

He smiles as more whistles and shouts sound. A second later, rock music blasts from the speakers.

Nothing but smiles flash around the room, and it feels good. Fuck that. It feels better than good. But as I look around the room, I notice Maggie's not here. To be fair, if she was out here, she wouldn't have a smile on her face.

Reluctantly, I pull myself from the celebration and head toward Maggie's room, knocking on the door as anticipation zips through me.

The thought of seeing her again excites me in a way that's not entirely sexual. She's got a smart fucking mouth to go with a killer smile, even though her smile is a little dimmer these days since she's so self-conscious about her scar. "Maggie? Open up!"

Letty comes down the hall with Shades and puts her arm on my shoulder. "Sorry, Nova. Maggie's gone. She left a while ago."

"What?" The roar of my voice surprises me and makes Shades frown. "What do you mean *she left*? Where'd she go?"

Letty shrugs. "She said she was looking for you. Something about finding you at the clinic to get more bandages before she left, and it turned into a whole thing. Then, she left."

"Fuck!" My heart is racing thinking about Maggie out there alone, the Bloodthirsty Devils still hunting her. "After what happened tonight? She's a dead woman walking," I say to Shades.

His smirk fades as the truth sinks in. "Shit."

"They'll think she set them up, and this time they'll make sure they finish her off." I close my eyes and immediately wish I hadn't. There it is, right against my lids like a fucking drive-in movie screen, Maggie's beautiful face pale and lifeless, her eyes open, almost accusatory. Blaming me for her death because I promised to protect her, to keep her safe.

And I've failed her.

“Fuck!” The word roars out of me, so raw and intense my whole body vibrates. “Un-fucking-believable,” I groan. “One thing. I ask for one thing, and I can’t even have that.” The words are angry, furious, in fact.

“Chill the fuck out, Nova,” Ace growls. “Stop bitching about it and go find her.”

“Bitching? I’m not bitching,” I growl, shaking off his touch. “I’m fuckin’ pissed.”

“Then stop being pissed and go find your girl.”

I nod, still angry as fuck, as I storm out of the clubhouse and stomp to my bike. *I’ll find you, Maggie. I fucking promise.*

“Nova, wait up!”

I turn to find Olly and Tank jogging toward me. “What’s up?”

“We’re coming with you in the van,” Olly says. “Less conspicuous.”

I nod, appreciative of the backup. “Let’s go.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

MAGGIE

Freedom. That's what hits me the second I step outta the clubhouse. My shoulders feel lighter; my heart is freer, almost airborne. I'm on my own again, and it feels...good.

I'm also full of shit.

The high wears off quick. Truth is, the more distance I put between me and the clubhouse, the more worry creeps into my gut. Pretty soon, it seizes up, making it hard to breathe. My nerves start to take over, and my steps slow down, which is fucking dangerous.

It's late, and I'm a woman, a pretty fucking small one, no matter how scrappy I am. That is its own danger, but then I see a red car roll past. Holy fucking shit. The BTD, I think, and duck behind the nearest bushes, heart racing and hands trembling.

Holy fuck. And what if it is them? What the fuck am I gonna do now?

I risk a look, parting the bushes like a fucking cartoon character, and then feeling like a moron when I see a big ass red minivan roll down the street.

Fuck, I'm seriously freaking the fuck out.

I'm scared out here, and honestly, I'm starting to regret running from the clubhouse like my ass was on fire.

Leaving was a stupid move. Why did I do it? For one thing, I didn't get to say goodbye to Nova. Sure, I'm pissed at him, but

I still like him—more than I want to admit. And now that I'm alone, I realize how much I miss him. Leaving without a goodbye is a dick move, but then again, maybe he doesn't want a goodbye.

Another car goes by, a dark sedan that is most definitely not a red drop top, but still, my heart leaps out of my chest. I'm too jumpy to be out here on my own, and that's a tough fucking pill to swallow.

Hours drag by. My mind's going a mile a minute thinking of all the ways this is gonna blow up in my face. The night's filled with sounds that scares me. The port for one. I hear voices echoing from a distance and that keeps my head on a swivel. I can't tell where the voices are coming from. Is it the port? Behind me? In front of me?

"I'm so stupid," I choke out, hating myself for feeling so lost, so damn weak.

I have no choice but to go back. I'll apologize and do whatever it takes to make amends. Ace and Nova have the notebook—maybe tomorrow I can ask them for help getting out of here.

I have no other choice, so I turn around and take off running toward the clubhouse. I don't worry about cars, Devils or anything. I'm running for my life.

As the building comes into view, I know I better grovel like my life depends on it. Because I think it does.

Fuck my life.

I breathe in and out, deep cleansing breaths as I walk through the parking lot and up to the clubhouse door. I can hear music pumping into the parking lot, but I knock anyway. This isn't my home, and I'm not welcome here. After everything that's happened, just strolling inside might get me shot.

I knock again, and when the door opens, the big blond Viking biker frowns at me. "What are you doing here?"

I swallow my pride. "Groveling. Is Ace around?"

He nods and steps back, motioning for me to come inside. "Don't worry, sugar, we don't bite."

“No,” I respond, my voice dripping with defiance. “You shoot.”

His laugh sounds behind me, but it fades when Ace, face twisted into a scowl, marches over to me with the devil in his eyes. “What the fuck do you want?”

I take a deep breath. Time to grovel. “Ace, I’m really sorry for leaving like I did. It was a mistake. I have nowhere else to go and I’m begging you to let me stay here.”

His face hardens. “That’s all?”

Gotta lay it on thicker. “Please, I’m desperate. I know I fucked up. I need your help or I don’t know what’ll happen to me.”

“Why should I help you?”

Time to appeal to his soft side. If he has one. “Because deep down you’re a good man. And I kept my part of the deal, I told you everything I know.”

“Deal? We had no deal. I don’t owe you shit.”

“I told the Doc I’d tell you everything I know if you’d get me out of here, away from all this bullshit.” I sniffle loudly, wiping my nose on my sleeve.

“Nova never said that. How do I know you ain’t lying?”

“I ain’t lying. I said I was sorry, and you got your girl back. What more do you want from me? I just want some cash so I can bounce.”

Ace doesn’t say a word but grabs me by the arm, practically yanking me across the bar area and down the hall before shoving me into my old room.

“What the fuck?” I stumble into the room, fuck the groveling, now I’m pissed. “What. The. Fuck?”

“Nova is out looking for you right now. If something happens to him or any of my men because of your stupidity, I’ll kill you myself.”

“I held up my end of the deal, and you didn’t. If something happens to your men, it’s on you.”

He glares at me. Mad-dog serious. His voice finally cuts through the silence. “Don’t fuck with me.”

“I’m not,” I whisper, tears stinging my eyes. “I’m just... I don’t know. I’m scared. And I need your help.”

His glare lingers for a moment longer, his face a mask of frustration and anger. Then he turns, stomping out of the room and locking the door behind him.

Asshole.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

NOVA

“She’s not here either,” Olly growls after more than an hour, combing through another park for any sign of Maggie. He rolls his broad shoulders, stiff and full of tension after hours of riding, yet his gaze continues to scan the area. “What are the odds she’d come here?”

“I don’t know,” I admit reluctantly. The truth is that despite my thoughts about Maggie, despite everything that’s happened between us, I don’t really know her. Don’t know where she’d hang out if she went back to L.A. Hell, maybe she got in a taxi and booked it.

“I just don’t fucking know, man.” And that shit pisses me off. Makes me feel like I’m losing someone. Again.

Tank says, “She couldn’t have gotten that far if she’s walkin’,” glaring at me with a no-nonsense expression on his face. He’s as tired of this as Olly is, but I know they’re with me to the end.

Fuck! I don’t want to think about Maggie walking the streets all alone. I’d feel better if I knew she grabbed an Uber or something. “I’m not going back without her,” I growl at Tank, my anger mixing with fear, making me feel like I’m losing my shit.

My phone buzzes, and it’s Wild Man, so I answer it. “What?”

“Yo, Nova. We got a problem.”

I frown. “You hear something about Maggie?” My heart races and the blurring around the edge of my vision intensifies.

“Yeah. She’s here now, and the bitch is causing all kinds of trouble. Get your ass back here now and handle it.”

Relief washes over me. “On my way.”

“Hurry, Ace is fuckin’ pissed, man.” The call ends abruptly and though I feel better, anger still surges through me that she even left in the first place.

“This is our turf.” A masculine voice sounds behind us, and, together we all turn to face the speaker and his sorry band of brothers hovering behind him. “Yeah, you heard me. Our turf.”

By his dirty blond hair, I see right away the guy is young. Old enough to know better, but young compared to me. “And who the fuck are you?” My frustration is disproportionate to what’s happening, but I don’t give a fuck. I step forward, shaking off my tingling arms. “Don’t make me ask again.”

The blond flashes a toothy grin. “And who the fuck is asking?”

“I’m askin’ motherfucker.”

He growls and takes another step forward, flashing brass knuckles as if that’s supposed to scare me.

This young fucker has picked the wrong day to mess with me. Between my anxiety and Maggie’s absence, I need somewhere to channel all this unspent energy.

“Why waste words?” I get in his face, smiling as I pull out my sixteen-inch head-cracking baton and smack it against his head.

“Son of a bitch!” His four friends look on in disbelief before they realize they need to do something about it.

“You want a piece of this?” I smile, feeling wild and maybe a little bit crazy as I stare at the wannabe troublemakers. Fists start flying fast and furious, blood and saliva flying through the air as every hand meets its intended target.

My head snaps back from a well-placed jab, and I stumble back as a different asshole advances, but I'm ready for him. I protect my face as he raises his brass knuckled-fists, and lunges forward.

"You're a dead man," he growls, landing a gut punch.

It's a glancing blow that has no effect on me. "Is this me, dead motherfucker?" I land blow after blow with the steel baton against his back, his ribs, and the back of his head. "Is this your fucking turf? Answer me!" I keep hitting him, taking my frustration out on this violent stranger. "Well, *say* something!"

He stops fighting back, curling into a ball like the fucking bitch boy he is, and finally, I stop, spitting on his limp form before checking on my brothers. To my left, Tank is handling himself fine, but Olly is taking a lot of kicks to the head and back from two assholes.

Armed with my stick, I crack the redheaded one on the back of the knees, watching as he falls to the ground. I smile and put the baton away, and before he can get to his feet, I turn him over and straddle his chest, pounding my fists into his face over and over.

The sting of my knuckles against bones unleashes a relief I haven't felt in a long time. My fists keep flying uncontrollably, blow after blow, as the past and the present blur together, enemies indistinguishable from patients. Countless names I can't remember and faces I'll never forget, and I banish them all with my fists until the man beneath me is a heap of useless skin and bones.

"Stop!"

The other guy with cropped brown hair frowns at me, eyes wide with anger and shock. And yeah, a lot of fucking fear. "What the fuck?"

"Play grownup games, win grownup prizes," I tell him and lunge forward, reaching for my baton. "You want a piece of this, or do you want to live another fucking day?"

He helps his friends get up, and then they take off, running at full speed.

I kneel down to check out Olly. He's a little bloody but responsive. "Talk to me, Olly. Are you okay?"

He grunts, flashing a wide smile. "Got a killer headache, but I'm good."

I nod and look up at Tank. "Good. Let's get the fuck out of here. Back to the clubhouse."

The ride back feels long, but maybe it's because I'm alone on my bike while Olly and Tank are in the van together. Either way, I swear it's never-ending rather than soothing, and by the time we make it back to the clubhouse, I make a beeline to Maggie's room, ignoring the frowns of my brothers and their women.

Maggie is here; she left me, but she came back. That means something, doesn't it? It has to, but on the heels of that thought comes another. *You're not good enough for her.*

The state of those assholes is proof of that. I lost my shit. Again. Got stuck in the past. Again. I notice her door is latched from the outside. Frowning, I unlatch the hook and pound on the door. "Maggie?"

When it swings open and I see it's Maggie, I practically tackle her in a hug, my lips meeting her face in a flurry of desperate kisses. "Nova," she moans, pushing me back.

"I thought you were gone for good," I gasp, my hands roaming her body to confirm she's real, that I'm not spiraling into some delusional state.

"I was, but then I came back."

She came back. For me? For us? "Why?"

"I don't even know." Her tone is annoyed.

"I'm glad you did."

She rolls her eyes. "You're glad your boys locked me in here like a fucking prisoner after I gave them what they needed to get Viper's girl back? Good to know."

"What?" She gave Ace the info on Willow? "What the fuck did you just say?"

“You heard me,” she growls, shoving at my chest until I’m in the hall once again. “I said what I said,” she blurts out before slamming the door in my face.

“We’ll talk later,” I promise through the door and go search for Ace, who’s in the bar sipping a beer with his arm flung around Kenna’s shoulder. “What the fuck, Ace? You locked her in the room?”

He nods unapologetically. “Yes, I locked her in the room until you could get back and control her. Bitch is fuckin’ psycho, and we don’t need any more fucking trouble. Jesus man, my ol’ lady’s gonna have a baby soon.”

“You mean the trouble of her helping us get Willow back? That’s how you fucking repay her? Unbelievable.” My anger bubbles up to the surface. “I’ve always backed the MC. Even when I didn’t agree, I was on board with whatever plan you decided, but the one fucking time I ask for the same, you shit all over it.”

“Dude, get your balls out of her purse. You’re being a little dramatic.”

“Dramatic? You know what’s fucking dramatic? Saving Banger’s life. That’s dramatic. Rescuing Willow? More fucking dramatic!”

My hands begin to shake, and I feel my anxiety start to take over, but this time, there are no dead bodies, just white-hot rage.

“Dude, relax. She came back here for protection. And we’re protecting her.”

“If not for her, Willow would still be chained up in that fucking house, scared and hungry, and that’s not worth a few dollars to leave town? We’re fucking flush with money! It sure as shit has to be worth not locking her in the room like a goddamn criminal.”

Ace stands, Dix and Shades behind him in a silent show of solidarity. “I’m thinking about the MC, and you’re thinking about getting your dick wet.”

“That’s bullshit, and you know it. It’s always been about the MC for me, but for you, Dix, Shades, and the rest of you guys, as soon as some woman came into the picture, all of that flew out the fucking window. Gia was fucking kidnapped by Hector. Still, we helped her. McKenna and Kelsey, too. Even Letty,” I say, letting my gaze land on my brothers. “Nothing to say? That’s what the fuck I thought.”

Olly drops a hand on my shoulder, and Stone does the same on the other, another show of solidarity, but this time with me.

“This isn’t the same,” Dix growls.

“No? You mean how no one said one fucking word about you bringing cartel heat on the MC with your woman? This whole shit show started with the cartel. I am goddamn sure, as sure as I stand here, that Maggie is no longer involved with BTB.”

Dix takes a threatening step forward, but Shades stops him.

“Fuck this,” I growl as my phone rings. “Yeah,” I bark into the phone.

“Kane? This is your mother.” Her stiff, overly formal tone freezes me mid-step. It’s like stepping into a time machine. Everything else fades as I distance myself from my president and my brothers.

Kane. That name feels like it belongs to a stranger.

“Mom,” I say, the word unfamiliar and thick in my mouth.

“We’re worried, Kane. We saw the news about Angel Harbor. You still live there, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do,” I grind out through clenched teeth, the irritation still festering.

“My goodness,” she sighs. “Are you all right? We saw all the chaos over there.” She lets out another sigh, but it’s one I recognize well because it always precedes an order. “It’s time for you to stop this nonsense and come home.”

Fury bubbles up inside me, but I force it down. “I am home, Mom.”

The truth is that the MC is my home, and it's also at a crossroads, but so am I in my personal life. Right now, I'm so angry it all seems like too much to handle, like maybe something has to give.

She scoffs. "That place is not your home. It's where you ran off to when the real world became too much for you to handle, Kane."

I grip my phone so hard it could shatter. "Now's not the time, Mom. Sorry to disappoint you, but I am home."

And just like that, my decision is made. The MC is my life, but so is Maggie. I have to find a way to have them both.

My mother sighs, then shifts her tone. "Kane, we want to see you. It's been too long."

"Okay," I say. "I need to handle some things first, Mom. But I'll make the trip to see you. Soon." The promise feels hollow, like the ones I made when I pulled away from them and their influence, but this time, I mean it. "Promise."

"Oh. Okay. Excellent. See you soon," she says in a tone that tells me if I don't keep my word, we'll be having this conversation again. Soon.

The call ends, and I feel out of fucking sorts, like I've just been yanked between two different worlds. This time, it's not anxiety. It's my thoughts causing the storm brewing inside of me. I look back at my brothers, so happy with their women, and it gnaws at me.

I need some fresh air. And open roads.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

MAGGIE

A loud bang rips through my thoughts, and I snap my head up to see the door slamming open, the force of it enough to send a shiver down my spine. Nova's standing in the doorway, looking like a storm about to burst. His jaw's clenching so tight I think it might snap, and he's shaking his hands like he's getting ready for a fight.

If this were Demon, I would've taken a few steps back, giving him space and preparing to duck out of the way of flying fists or furniture. But this ain't Demon. This is Nova. And even though I see that anger in his eyes, I don't step back. I don't cower. My voice doesn't even shake as I say his name. "Nova."

He barges in, his eyes fixed on me, and then, with a backward kick, he shuts the door behind him. Something's going down, and I can feel it in my bones. But whatever it is, I know I ain't backing down.

Nova paces back and forth on the other side of the bed, the gears in his head spinning so loud they make me anxious. He stops, looks at me, and shakes his head before pacing again.

"You want to talk about it?" It's a dumb question but seeing him like this unsettles me.

Nova stops again, narrows his gaze, and shakes his head in response, then he starts pacing again.

I watch him in wicked fascination, wondering what could make a man like him, so stable and steady, react this way. But

he seems, I don't know, conflicted, and that makes me feel uneasy. I don't like it, and I don't know why so I stand in front of him and put my hands to his chest. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Nova's eyes narrow in my direction. His jaw clenches again when he leans forward, getting in my face in an effort to intimidate me. "I said I don't want to talk."

"Yeah? Well, that is just too damn bad." I shove his chest with all my might.

"Don't push me, Maggie."

"Or what?" I push him again, smiling at that low, growly tone he's using. "What are you going to do, Doc?" I push him again.

"Maggie," he groans, reaching for my wrists to stop the next shove. "Stop."

"Talk to me."

His brows dip into a frown, and his hands tighten on my wrists, yanking me to him until we're chest to chest. "You left," he says, back to an accusatory tone.

I nod. "I did, and then I came back And what did it get me? Locked up in here. Again."

His eyes burn like fire as he looks down at me, and I don't know if I should be aroused or scared. "I don't want to talk, Maggie. Not right now."

"Then what the fuck do you want?" I snap back.

"This." One hand grips me around the back of my neck, and his lips crash against mine. His tongue invades my mouth in quick, hard strokes that leave me breathless. Our tongues play together, but this time, it feels different. Yeah, it's hot, raw, and intense as fuck, but it's also something more.

Something primal. Base needs.

I know I should push him off me, tell him where he can shove his broken promises and his MC's twisted games. But damn if I can make myself do it. His lips on mine feel too good. His

hand rests protectively on my lower back while the other grips my neck like I'm something precious.

Instead, I melt into him, absorbing his kisses all the way down to my soul. My arms wrap around him, and I cling to him while he devours my mouth, scouring every inch until I'm a shivering, aching, wet panties mess.

Nova pulls back, chest heaving as his deep blue eyes stare through to my core. "I really don't fucking want to talk, Maggie."

My heart's racing, but I flash him a small smile. "Then stop fucking talking." I run my tongue along his jaw, slow and deliberate, pulling a hiss from him that sends a thrill through me. I know what he needs, and damn if I don't need it too.

Nova takes my mouth again in a hard, punishing kiss that sets me on fire all the way down to my toes. I push against him while he growls and devours me whole.

My belly clenches with need at how he hungrily eats at my mouth, delving his tongue deeper and deeper until it feels like he's a part of me. His gaze is hazy when he pulls back, brows furrow as if he doesn't even know where the fuck he is. "No talking. Remember?"

Heat flares in his eyes before he pushes me down on the bed, looking his fill even though I'm fully dressed. "Fuck," he growls, yanking off my shoes and socks, my jeans, panties, everything until I'm totally bare. "Fucking beautiful." He crawls onto the bed, fully clothed, pressing against my body, kissing my neck and across my collarbone before he finds my mouth again.

My legs wrap around him and squeeze tight, bringing the long ridge of his cock flush against my hot, bare pussy. I moan into his mouth, grinding against his dick; the rough feel of denim against my pussy tears a low growl from me.

Nova covers my mouth with one hand as he kisses his way down my body, teasing one nipple and then the other with his free hand, squeezing tight until I cry out against his palm.

His tongue teases the crease between my thighs and pussy in a slow, back-and-forth motion that slays me. My hips buck up against his mouth, and I can feel him smile against me. And then his lips and his tongue are right where I need them, torturing my pussy like I've been a bad girl, and this is how I'm going out.

My hips roll, and my hands tangle in his hair. I stay quiet, listening to his tongue lapping at my juicy pussy, two fingers plunging in and out. It's so fucking good, and I can't say a goddamn word, so I grip his hair tighter and pump my hips, fucking his face so he knows just how much I love it.

It's not just the pussy eating I love.

My eyes snap open at the unwelcome but not entirely untrue thought, and my body freezes. *Shit. Holy fuck. No way. I did not just have that thought while Nova tames the beast between my thighs.*

"Ah, fuck." The words slip out and Nova's hand is right there, silencing me, and it's fine by me because I don't want to voice these feelings. I can't, mostly because I'm not sure what they fuck they are.

No one has ever made me feel this way before. The only person I've ever been with is Demon, and he never made me feel like this. Loved. Cherished. Respected.

My heart settles despite the way Nova is eating me out, despite how close my orgasm is, I feel some kinda way I've never felt before.

I'm falling for Nova.

My orgasm snaps my back in half, sending me arching across the bed like I'm possessed. A sharp breath escapes as pleasure rolls through my body, and a long, hitching breath as I collapse back onto the bed.

Before I can take another breath, Nova is naked and sliding his long, fat dick into me. My pussy begging for more. He groans in pleasure because my pussy fits him like a glove, clenching around him, wet and hot, as he pumps into me like a crazy

man. Nova's growling and grunting like a wild beast—no words, just primal sounds as he pounds into me.

Like I hadn't just come seconds ago, my body gets right back into things, my hips grinding against his, working our bodies into a frenzy. He takes my nipple between his teeth, biting to the point that pain and pleasure blend together in a delicious swirl of sensations and emotions. Just when I think I can't take any more, he switches nips and starts the torture all over again.

Then, he pulls back, giving me his blue gaze, dark and intense. I can't think straight, and all I see is Nova with his jaws clenched tight, his biceps and triceps bunching and flexing with every stroke into me. His gaze burns into mine, as my hips match his stroke for stroke. Deeper. Harder. So fucking raw, a tear seeps from the corner of my eye just as orgasm number two explodes out of me.

Nova comes right behind me, his body jerking and pulsing as wave after wave of his heat fills my body. He looks like a god when he lets go.

The only time he's ever in the now is when his cock is buried deep inside me, giving me all his pleasure, and I'm the lucky bitch who gets to see him like this, hot and on fire, gorgeous. His body collapses on top of mine, gasping for air, his heartbeat pounding against mine.

"Nova," I whisper in his ear, nipping the lobe hard enough to pull a grunt from him. My heart is as full as my pussy, and I wrap my arms around him, stroking the hairs on the nape of his neck.

This is it. I don't know where the thought comes from, but a second later, unexpected words fly from my mouth.

"Run away with me. We can go anywhere and start over. Be together." I smile when the words leave my mouth even though my heart galloping like a fucking racehorse, waiting for his answer.

He goes stiff on top of me, and my heart deflates like day-old birthday balloons. "Maggie," he begins, rolling off of me.

I turn away and close my eyes. *Here it comes. It's not you, it's me.*

“Look at me, Maggie.”

“I’m good,” I say quietly, trying to keep my emotions in check. I refuse to cry right now. Refuse to cry in front of him. “Say what you gotta say.”

“I can’t.” The anguish in his voice should make me feel better, but it doesn’t. “I can’t just run away. My MC needs me.”

I need you. A harsh laugh escapes because there’s no fucking way those words are coming out of my mouth. “Then that’s your answer.” I sit up and swing my legs over the side of the bed, finding all my clothes scattered across the room.

“Stay with me.” His fingertips skate down my spine, pulling a deep shiver out of me.

“We both know I can’t stay here in Angel Harbor. And not with the Reckless Souls.” They hate me, probably for good reason, but that ain’t how to start something real. I know what I feel for Nova, what we could have. It’d be real as fuck. “Fuck you, Nova.”

“Maggie.”

I shake my head and shrug off his touch. “Nah, fuck you for being who you are. Fuck you for making me catch feelings when you had no plans to do jack about it. Just...fuck you.”

I turn away, stepping into my clothes even as his come still drips down my thighs.

“I would do anything for you, Maggie. Anything you need, but I can’t leave my MC. You wouldn’t feel the way you do about me if I did.”

He’s probably right, but I don’t acknowledge his words at all. I keep my back to him, listening as he dresses before leaving me alone.

Again.

This time, I know the truth.

Coming back here was a mistake. There's no happy fucking ending for me.

For us.

There's only the future, far away from Angel Harbor.

Far from the damaged doc.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

NOVA

Fuck. That word's like a cyclone in my head, spinning out of control after I left Maggie trying to hide tears she didn't want me to see. I broke her, and that rips me apart. But leaving Angel Harbor? Abandoning the Reckless Souls? Can't do it. Those guys are more than friends—they're my tribe. My fucking club. We brawl, we booze, we've got each other's six. That's family.

I can only tell Maggie the truth, as ugly as it is, and now I feel like a piece of shit. The mix of hurt and fury in her eyes? That's seared into me, unforgettable and haunting. So here I am, throttling down open roads on my bike, trying to outrun my demons, praying that something—anything—finally clicks into place.

Tearing up the road on the 405 doesn't help. When I get a chance to change it, I give the 710 a shot, but riding isn't any better. I can't stop thinking about Maggie or the words I had with my brothers last night.

Worse, I can't stop thinking about losing control last night and the hell I unleashed on those assholes who approached us. It felt good in the moment, but it only felt good for a moment. I need to purge these thoughts. It's the only way I have a chance at the future I want, the future I believe I deserve.

Visions of the future—of Maggie—collide with visions of the past, of all the men and women who died on my tables, the ones I couldn't save. Just like last night, the images blur

together until it's just a mass of unrecognizable, dead faces. "No more," I growl into the wind, looking up just in time to see the exit toward Birchmont Bay.

"Fuck." Birchmont Bay is my hometown. It's where I grew up, where my path was laid out before me. Military, medical school, and then medicine. It's also the place where everything fell apart.

Okay, the truth is that the Middle East is where everything fell apart, but Birchmont Bay is the place where it all came to a head. Where my parents disowned me for not staying on the path they laid out for me, for not understanding what I'd been through, for not acknowledging the truth of my trauma.

I stay on the freeway until the Birchmont Bay exit comes into view. *This is it.* Healing my shit starts right here, and if I can deal with my folks, give them a chance to prove they're better people today than they were back then, maybe there's a chance for us. If they can accept me, there's hope for us.

And if there's hope for me and my folks, shit, that has to mean there's hope for me and Maggie.

Doesn't it?

I pull up in front of the house and shut off the engine. I stare at the pretentiousness of it all. Who the fuck needs this much house? I never even noticed it when I was a kid. I get off my bike and set my helmet on the seat. I look down and smile, realizing for the first time that I'm dressed in full MC gear.

My *kutte* hangs from my shoulders, my patches visible for anyone to see. My black jeans hang low on my hips, a black bandana holds my hair back, and my motorcycle boots sound loud and imposing as I make my way up the walk. This is me, and if there's any hope for us, they have to take me as I am.

The door opens, and an older, slightly slimmer version of Ron Bishop greets me.

"Dad." I blink in surprise at just how many years have gone by. For most of my life, he was the biggest, smartest man I knew.

“Kane. It’s really you!” He steps back and motions for me to step inside. I barely take two steps in before he grabs me in a bear hug, the way he did when I was a kid.

My body freezes instinctively at the unfamiliar touch, and I step back.

“Right. Sorry.” Dad’s shoulders fall in disappointment.

“It’s not you, Dad.” I try to explain, but I wonder if it’s even fucking worth it. “It was unexpected, and I still don’t do well with unexpected.”

Understanding about my PTSD flashes in his eyes, those baby blues so similar to my own. He clamps a hand on my shoulder. “How are you doing, son? I mean, really?”

I shrug. “Been better. Been worse. You?”

His lips part into a smile. “Pretty much the same. Retiring in a few years.”

“Wow. I didn’t think you’d ever retire.”

“We all get old at some point, son.” With his hand still on my shoulder, he guides me through the foyer and into the kitchen. “Christie, look who I found.”

My mother looks up with an annoyed expression that turns to shock and then...happiness? “Kane? Is that really my baby?” She drops the cucumber sandwich she was arranging on a silver platter and rushes around the marble island counter, pausing a foot away from me. “Can I hug you?”

I frown at her words, and she shrugs sheepishly.

“What? I’ve read up on your PTSD, which you’d know if you’d bothered to come around. Ever.” A smile softens the admonition, and I hold out my arms, accepting a decade’s worth of hugs in sixty long seconds.

“Last I heard, the freeway runs both ways.”

Mom chuckles against my chest, still squeezing the life out of me. When she pulls back, a small frown darkens her blond brows. “You’re still with those bikers?”

I nod. “I’m not *with* them, Mom. I *am* them.”

“You’re a doctor.” Her lips flatten into a single line, and she crosses her arms against her chest. “You are still a doctor, aren’t you?”

“I am. And I run a clinic that helps the community. Me and *those bikers.*”

“So you’re giving out antibiotics and birth control?”

I roll my eyes. “We help people with medical care, Mom. Whatever they need.”

Her shoulders fall. “At least you’re still a doctor. Are you hungry? Come and have a seat, and I’ll get you something to eat.” She turns over her shoulder. “Ellie, come and fix Kane something to eat.” Ellie’s the cook, and memories of her wonderful meals from my childhood make me smile.

“I’m fine, Mom.”

“I’m glad you came by,” she starts. “I wasn’t sure if you would.”

“Neither was I,” I admit easily. “But I’m here.”

“You are,” she smiles, touching my face like she can’t believe I’m here. “And I’m sorry, Kane. Sorry that I didn’t give you what you needed from a Mom. I regret it. I want you to know that, but I was too stubborn to fix it.”

That doesn’t surprise me, but the apology does. “I came here because I want to work on forgiving you. Both of you.”

“Whatever it takes,” my dad says. “Name it.”

“I don’t know. You abandoned me when I needed you. I was struggling so bad, I wasn’t sure if...well, it doesn’t matter now. The point is that I’m not all right, and trying to forgive you might help me get to ‘all right’.”

“That’s all we can ask of you, son.” My dad smiles, gripping my shoulder gently. “You decide how this goes, okay?”

“Lunch right now is an excellent place to start.” Mom smiles, clapping her hands while Eleanor, aka Ellie, shuffles around at the stove. “Don’t you think?” she adds. Mom is a force of

nature, and it'll kill her to let me lead our reconciliation. That alone might be worth the effort.

"Lunch sounds good," I tell her.

She ushers us into the dining room while Ellie gets our food on the table.

"Are you seeing anyone?" Mom asks if the answer doesn't matter when I know it does.

I think about Maggie, and my heart jumps. "I am. In fact, I'm thinking about marrying her."

"Is this girl a biker, too?" Mom's tone is laced with disdain. "You can't be serious, Kane."

I smile and accept a sandwich from the platter she offers me. "She isn't a biker chick. Not until I make her one." How in the hell I'll convince Maggie to stay with me in Angel Harbor is anybody's guess. "And I am serious. Completely. Totally."

"Well, when you sort out the wrinkles, we can't wait to meet her," Dad offers with a smile. "Isn't that right, Christie?"

Mom sucks in a sharp breath, nostrils flaring as she prepares to make her case against a woman she hasn't even met.

"Isn't that right, Christie?" Dad tries again, his voice firmer this time, his tone telling her to cut the bullshit.

"Yes, of course," she says in clipped tones, pouring iced tea to cover her temper. "We can't wait to meet your future wife." Her smile is tight, but it's a start.

I laugh, and it feels good to laugh at my parents instead of hating and resenting them. "She's pissed at me right now, so I have to convince her first."

"Well, if she has any brains, she'd know she's lucky to have you," Mom says, but I still see the contempt in her eyes.

"I'm the lucky one, or I will be if I can make her see we belong together." And in Angel Harbor. It's an uphill battle, but so is PTSD, and slowly but surely, I'm getting my shit under control. By comparison, Maggie should be easy.

My mom stares at me like she wants to say something. She lets out her breath and sits there poking at her salad.

“What is it, Mom?”

She looks at me, tears brimming in her eyes, and says, “Kane, the real reason we called you here... Your father has cancer.”

The words hit me like a punch in the fucking gut. “What? Dad has cancer?” My chest tightens, and I force myself to take a deep breath, turning to look at my father.

“Son don’t worry about it,” Dad says, his voice soft but firm. “I told your mother not to tell you. Christie, see what you’ve done?”

My mom’s voice quivers as she replies, “Well, he’s your son and a doctor. He needs to know.”

“Yes, I am your son, Dad. I need to know. Mom, I’m not an oncologist. I’m an emergency doctor. A trauma doctor.”

“Well, your father having cancer is an emergency!” she exclaims, tears flowing freely now as she storms off. Her sobs echo down the hallway.

“Jesus, I told her not to say anything. Kane, I’m fine,” Dad says, attempting to reassure me, but I can see the emotion in his eyes. “I found a lump in my neck a while back and went to see the doctor about it.”

“And?” The word catches in my throat.

“They ran some tests, and it turns out it’s thyroid cancer.” Dad takes a deep breath, his voice steady but filled with emotion. “Now, don’t be too alarmed. The doctor says it’s treatable, especially since we caught it early.”

I feel a weight lifting, but the fear is still there. “Thank God for that. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“The best thing you can do for me is to mend your relationship with your mother. She’s driving me a little crazy.” He chuckles, trying to lighten the mood. “Thanks for coming up, son. It means a lot.”

A sigh, long and shaky, wrestles its way out of me. “I’ll do what I can, Dad.” I stand, my hand out for the expected shake, but he’s up, too, pulling me into a bear hug that feels like a vice. I pat his back, lost in a whirlwind of emotions that claw at my insides.

“I love you, son. Take care of yourself and bring your lady up here so we can meet her,” he says, his voice cracking.

“Will do, old man, I love you.” It’s all too damn much. I make for the door, feeling his eyes on me, and I swing it open, only to look back at him, tears in his eyes. “Dad?”

“Yes, son?”

“Tell Mom I said goodbye, and I love her. See you soon.”

“You got it! Be safe out there, Doc.”

The door closes behind me, and I smile. It’s bittersweet. Doc, that’s what Maggie calls me. I wipe the tears angrily from my eyes, the unpleasantness of the moment stinging like salt in a wound. The ride back to Angel Harbor’s gonna be a mind-fuck.

But now, with my sights set on making Maggie my wife, I know what I have to do.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

MAGGIE

Nova hasn't come to see me or talk to me, and honestly, I don't expect him to. What would be the point? We both said what we had to say, and there's nothing more to be said. I'm not all about the big goodbyes anyway. And if a part of me was, well, Nova's cold rejection shot it down. Story of my fucking life. Not good enough.

Same old song, just a different dance.

Nova wants me, but not more than he wants to be with his biker brothers. That's all I need to know, and even now, I'm pissed at myself for getting angry, for getting emotional.

Men don't handle feelings. Oh, they can try, but after dealing with fucked up men my whole life, I've learned a thing or two.

So, what if I've fallen for Nova? It's my problem, not his.

It doesn't matter that he's got my heart, that I handed it to him like a fucking fool. It doesn't matter that thinking about him sets my insides on fire and leaves me aching like I've been punched in the gut.

He made his decision, and I made mine.

A knock sounds on the door, but I don't say anything. Whoever it is will come in or not, no matter what I do. Seconds later, Letty steps inside with a plate in her hand. "Hungry?"

Starving. "Nope, I'm good."

Sadness flashes in her eyes, but she lets it, giving me a look of resignation instead. “You have to eat.”

“I will, as soon as I’m free to go.”

She sets the plate down, her hands on her hips. “No one’s holding you prisoner, Maggie.”

A bitter laugh escapes. “So I can leave?” She sighs, giving her head a small shake. “Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

“You came back on your own,” she says, not that I need another reminder of my stupidity.

“Yeah, I did, and it was a mistake. You got what you wanted, and now all I want is to bounce.”

“It’s not safe, Maggie.”

“Nowhere is safe for me, Letty. At least, out there, I know I can’t trust anyone. Being in here fucks with my head. Nova is fucking with my head. He tells me I can trust him, but I know I can’t. If it comes down to me or the Reckless Souls, he will choose them. So, thank you for the food, but I’m not hungry.”

“I’ll leave it just in case you get hungry.”

“You do you, but I won’t be hungry until Angel Harbor is in my rearview fucking mirror.” Literally and figuratively.

Letty nods, but her eyes fill with pity like maybe she knows that I offered my heart to Nova on a silver platter, and he tossed it against the wall and then shit all over it.

“Suit yourself, *chica*.” She bounces outta the room, locking that door like it’s gonna keep me in, leaving the plate like it’s some kind of peace offering.

How in the hell a woman like that ended up with a biker, I’ll never know, and I won’t be around long enough to learn the answer. Not that I got the time or the care to learn.

The door creaks open again, and I’m ready to give Letty a piece of my mind. Only it isn’t Letty. It’s Nova, wet-haired and looking like a snack, his eyes burning blue and his jaw all rough and rugged. He’s staring at me like I’m the only thing in

his world, and damn, under any other circumstances, this woulda been a jackpot. But this isn't a normal situation.

“Good,” I snap, trying to keep any warmth out of my voice. “‘Bout time you showed up. Now tell your boys—”

“—My turn, Maggie.” His voice cuts through, deep and in charge, and I wanna fight him, but my mouth's got other ideas, just snapping shut.

I throw my arms over my chest, trying to look defensive. But inside, I'm all twisted up. I want him. No doubt. But wanting him isn't enough. Not this time.

“Spill it.”

He lets out a breath like he's been holding onto something heavy. “I've been fucked up since I got back from the war, Maggie. Post-traumatic stress ain't no joke.”

“And?” I say, tapping my foot.

“It's not the shit I saw and heard in the desert that fucked up my head, Maggie. It's what I couldn't do.” He takes a few steps forward, kicking the door shut behind him.

“Shit, so much blood. So many injuries. Men and women I couldn't save in time. I didn't have enough hands or enough tools on site to save them. It eats at me,” his voice cracks, turning into a bitter laugh. “Hell, sometimes it's like they're right here in my head, you know.”

My eyes go wide, and my heart starts dancing in my chest. “Like for real, Nova?”

He looks at me like he's handing over a piece of his soul, and all I want to do is take it. But how can I? There's so much bullshit standing in the way.

“Yeah,” he barks out a laugh, bitter and cold. “I still see ‘em. Every last one. They haunt me, Maggie, every damn day and night.” His face is all twisted up like he's carrying the weight of the world, and I can feel my heart ripping into pieces.

I say, “I'm sorry,” but the words don't feel enough. What can I say to a man who's given so much, who's been through hell?

“No, Maggie, I’m the one who’s sorry.” He shakes his head, dropping down on the bed with his back to me like he can’t even face himself.

“After I got back from deployment, I was wrecked. My parents had a life all planned out for me, but I couldn’t go back to that. Maybe I never wanted it in the first place.”

“It’s your life, Nova. Your choice.”

“Yeah, but that choice cost me everything. My family, money, damn near my life.” His voice breaks, and something inside me aches to take him in my arms and soothe that storm raging in him. But I stay put.

“You’re still here.”

“I am,” he agrees with a slow nod. “I’m here because of Ace and Dix and Shades. My brothers. They took me in and gave me time to get my shit together, or as together as I could.”

I nod even though Nova isn’t looking at me. “They’re your family.” But not in the way the Bloodthirsty Devils were like family to me. No, these men were a real family. Through thick and thin, they have each other’s back. They might fight, but they trust in their bond and the loyalty that it brings.

“For years, they’ve been all I got.”

I swallow hard against the lump in my throat and shake my head as if that will get rid of my thoughts. “I get it.”

He stands slowly, looking at me with a hint of a smile, like he’s trying to find something good in all this mess. “You do?”

I nod. “Completely.”

He steps forward. “Then you understand that I’ve been surviving for years, just dealing with life from one day to the next. Practicing medicine and serving the MC.”

“We all do what we can to survive, Nova.” Isn’t that exactly what I’ve been doing for most of my life, just surviving?

“But I want more, Maggie. I want to be better for myself and for you.”

My eyes go wide. “Me?”

He nods. “Yeah. I want you by my side and in my bed. I want to build a life with you, Maggie.”

My heart flutters in my chest at his words because I’m no different than any other woman who wants someone to love her for real. To see me as I am—potty mouth, scarred face, and bald head—and love me. I want it, but I don’t believe I’ll ever get it.

I spent years waiting for Demon to be that man even though he proved time and again he was incapable of being that person. I want to believe Nova’s words when they curl around my heart and warm my flesh, so I suck in deep breath and let the words rush out on the exhale.

“I want that with you, too, Nova. Come away with me, and we can have it all. Everything.” My breath catches, and I’m waiting for him, just like yesterday, hanging on to his words.

“Maggie,” he starts, and I already know. I know what’s coming, but it’s not what I want to hear.

“I can’t leave the MC, Maggie. I won’t.”

My smile’s there, but it’s all wrong. It’s like it’s breaking with the rest of me. “I know. You say you want me, but you don’t. Not really. You want me on your terms or not at all.”

“That’s not true.” He’s closer, and all I see are those deep blue eyes piercing me. “I want you, Maggie. God, I need you.” His forehead’s against mine, and his hand’s at my neck. At that moment, it’s like I can feel everything he’s feeling.

I close my eyes so I don’t see the pain in him. His voice wraps around me, and I wanna believe his words so bad. I wanna give in. I wanna forget I ain’t safe here, that the Devils will kill me if I stay in Angel Harbor. And I can’t forget that.

My eyes open and I take in his handsome face, committing every line to memory so I’ll never forget this man or this moment.

My lips find his and I kiss him with my whole heart, pouring all the love I feel for him into what’s gonna be our last kiss. Our tongues dance like they know this is it, the final time they’ll meet.

Nova holds me close, devouring my mouth desperately, like his kisses can erase everything and make me forget.

Damn, it almost works.

But his hands are on my head, on the bandana covering where my hair used to be, and it's like a slap to my face, reminding me why I have to leave. I pull back with tears in my eyes. "I can't stay, Nova. Ghost and the Devils won't stop. They'll kill me."

"Maggie." He reaches for me but I step back, shaking my head.

"You know it's true. They won't quit and Ghost will kill you, your brothers, even your ladies just for getting between them and payback. I can't stay and you won't leave."

It's like a fucked up country song, but sadder 'cause this is my shitty life.

"I can't," he insists.

"You won't," I shoot back, understanding 'cause I'm not angry any more. Just so damn sad I can barely breathe.

"*Adios*, Nova."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

NOVA

All these years I thought that nothing in this world could hurt more than the dozens, maybe hundreds, of men and women I lost on my watch. I thought nothing could torture me more than being unable to sleep to focus because of the faces that wouldn't give me a moment of peace. I thought my parents abandoning me, my brain betraying me, was the worst of it for me. It was shit, but if that was the worst of it, I could deal with it.

But nothing prepared me for Maggie.

Having her.

Wanting her.

Losing her.

“Another shot, Trudy!”

I bang my palm against the bar to get her attention as I slide the glass toward the edge of the bar.

Trudy stands on the other side of the bar, hands on her hips, her brows arched. “You haven't had enough?”

“Not nearly enough,” I growl and wiggle the empty glass to remind her of her duty.

“Drinkin' only makes you forget for a little while,” she says as she refills my shot glass with tequila and then pulls me a fresh beer. “The bad shit always comes back,” she says gently

before walking back to the other end of the bar to hang with a few of the club whores talking and drinking.

Everyone around me is so fucking happy and in love, and jealous bastard that I am, I hate it. I envy it. My brothers are all around the room wearing smiles, drinking, and each has an arm wrapped around the woman they love. They're happy. At peace. Living in fucking bliss, and what do I have?

Jack fucking shit, that's what.

Trudy is right. I know that, but right now, the only thing I want to do is drink away my fucking sorrows. I was so close to having it all, just like Ace and Dix, Shades, Lucky and Banger. So fucking close to having a good life with my brothers that allows me to practice medicine, do good for the community, and do it all with my woman by my side.

For one pathetic moment, I even thought I might have a decent relationship with my parents again.

But it's all bullshit.

My mom's still a judgmental bitch, and my dad has cancer.

Fuck. I ignore the pain banging against my chest and knock back the shot, chasing it down with a strong beer until the edges of my vision blur, but in a good way this time. Yeah, the alcohol is finally sinking into my blood, fogging up my mind so it doesn't hurt so fucking much.

Fuck Maggie. She's leaving me. I'm not good enough for her. All the work I've done to help myself. I even thought about making things right with my parents.

Fuck my parents.

"Fuck the whole goddamn world," I growl and finish my beer before stomping out of the clubhouse. The music fades, not that I was listening to it anyway, and I gear up and jump on my bike as anger and alcohol pump through my veins.

That fury fuels me and leads me to L.A., where the Bloodthirsty Devils roam.

These motherfuckers are the reason Maggie is leaving me, and they need to fucking pay. Hell, they're the reason I met her

and fell for her in the first fucking place. If they'd taken care of her, treated her right. If they knew what the fuck loyalty meant, I never would have met her.

I'd be happy with my lot in life, limited though it might be at the moment. I might not have started wishing for more than I have, more than I deserve.

I think about what I'd like to do to those bastards, especially Ghost. He's an opportunistic asshole.

I'd really like to take everything away from him, one person at a time. One stash house, one whore, one gun at a time, make him watch as everything he loves, every fucking thing that matters to him is taken away. And when that is done, I'll take my time with Ghost himself.

Maybe I'll do like the cartels and peel his flesh off in one-inch strips over the course of days or weeks until he can't take the pain and begs me to take his life. Or maybe I'll pay him back for what he did to Maggie, poke his ass full of holes, and watch him die slowly, but not before he watches as I kill every single member of the Bloodthirsty Devils and *Las Sangrientas*.

One by one, the images that flash before my eyes are vivid and so violent my grip on my bike tightens.

I lean into the violence as I take the exit that leads me into the heart of BTM territory. My mouth waters at the thought of fucking shit up, whether it's property or people, or both.

They brought this on themselves, I tell myself as I roll through the city streets on my bike, listening to loud bass-heavy music blasting from backyard parties, kids playing and laughing. If they cared for Maggie, she would never have come into my life.

I never would have gotten a taste of her.

Never would have fallen for her.

Never would have asked her to stay.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

MAGGIE

The door bursts open, and Ace stands there, glaring at me as if that shit is supposed to scare me. “What the fuck did you do?”

I wipe away my tears, not because I worry Ace will give a shit, he won’t, but because I refuse to expose any more weakness to this man. Or any man ever again. “I’ve been locked in here for days, so obviously I didn’t do a goddamn thing.”

Ace’s gaze narrows, and he crosses his arms across his chest. “Why are you crying?”

“I’m not. Did you come here to let me go or what?”

He scoffs. “Now you want to go? What the fuck, lady?” He shakes his head as if I’m the problem here.

“Does it matter? You got the information you needed from me, and now I’m doing what you want, getting the fuck out of town. I fail to see the problem.”

“And what about Nova?”

I shrug and look away. “What about him? He knows I’m leaving.” I ignore the pinch in my chest at the thought of never seeing Nova again, but that’s the way this has to be. His life is here, and my new life is anywhere but here.

Ace holds up the notebook. “We have questions.”

I roll my eyes. “It’s all pretty self-explanatory. I wrote down everything I could remember, every detail that might be

helpful to you. You already got your girl back. What else is there?"

"Nova," he growls. "He stormed out of here like a fuckin' bat outta hell. You wouldn't happen to know anything about that, would you?"

"Why would I know anything about anything? I've been stuck in here, and we said goodbye the last time I saw him."

"I know you're lying, but, right now, I need to know more than what's in here." He swings the notebook back and forth in his hands. "Where would your fuckin' crew be tonight? We need to figure out where they might be so we know where to start looking for Nova."

"Fine," I spit out and step forward to take the notebook but Ace steps back.

"Come with me."

My feet stick to the floor, and my eyes go wide. "What?"

"We need intel, Maggie, which means you need to answer some questions. Let's go." His tone doesn't leave any room for questioning, but not asking questions isn't really my style.

"I tell you what you want to know, and I'm free to go?"

"We'll talk about it," he grumbles, grabbing my arm to yank me out of the room and out to meet up with the rest of the MC.

"Whatever," I growl. I follow Ace down the corridor until we're in the big room where everyone socializes, folding my arms in front of me as I face more than a dozen bikers coming at me with a rapid-fire interrogation, making it clear they still view me as the enemy.

It takes over an hour, but I answer everything that comes my way with as much detail as I can give. But, honestly, after a while, I'm pissed off because it's all in the notebook.

"Ghost is too lazy to cover his tracks," I say for the umpteenth time, "so I'm sure you'll find at least one of the phones activated with his email address."

“Amateur,” Wild Man grumbles, shaking his head with a smile.

“You sure this is where they’ll be?” The dude wearing sunglasses indoors at night scowls at me, doing his best to intimidate me.

“Sure? No. Not sure if you’re aware of this, but they tried to kill me, so I’m not sure of a whole lot these days. But a few months back that’s where they’d be, and Ghost is a creature of habit.”

I let out a huff to let them all know that I’m at my limit, spilling info and blocking any blatant hostility.

“That’s it,” I say finally. “You know everything. Happy?”

Ace pushes off the wall, an unreadable expression on his face. “Let’s gear up and ride out,” he shouts over the hum of multiple conversations. His gaze slides to me as the men get to their feet and head toward the exit. “We’ll talk when I get back.”

“Yeah, sure.” I don’t believe anything he says. “Just make sure Nova is safe.”

“If you fuckin’ care about him so much, then why are you so determined to leave?” some biker with face tattoos asks.

I laugh. “Because the welcome I’ve received has been so over-fucking-whelming that I just can’t take it.” I shake my head and nod toward Dix waiting and watching at the door. “Look, Ace. Don’t worry about me. Worry about Nova. He’s one of you.”

I take a few steps back as the men bolt out of here. Using the distraction, I slip back into my room, grab my bag, and sneak out the back door, waiting until the symphony of motorcycles becomes a dull roar before I make my escape.

Fuck these people. They got what they asked for, and I still have two hundred bucks. Plus, the steak knife Letty left on the tray with my dinner. I’m set.

I don’t let the sounds of the city scare me as I put more and more miles between me and the clubhouse, one step at a time.

Instead of jumping at every noise, I pull the hood over my head to conceal my identity, keep my head down, and head in the direction of the bus station.

The bus is a good way to slip through the cracks and get lost in the crowd. Plus, I can bolt at any stop. Makes me harder to find.

Ideal? No, but when has anything in my life been ideal? Never. That's when. I sure as hell don't expect things to change now, either, so I haul ass, breaking out of sight when a car creeps by a little too slow. I'm making good headway, spotting a sign telling me I'm about a mile from the bus depot.

"Hey, yo! What set you rep?"

I freeze, not just at the question but also the voice, but only for a second before I pick up my speed. There ain't no good response to that question because it's just a pretext to start a fight.

"You heard me, bitch. Where you from?" That heavy East L.A. accent belongs to Simone, my former best fucking friend.

I walk as fast as I can, but my progress is stopped when two *Sangrientas* step out in front of me, Tori, and a new girl. "Going somewhere, bitch?" The new girl asks the question while Tori snatches off my hoodie.

"Well, well, well. Guess who's still alive?" She gives me a hard shove, knocking me to the ground where they have me surrounded.

"Damn, and I thought you'd be dead and stinking up that warehouse by now," Simone says with a gross smile. "Guess those biker motherfuckers got sick of you and booted your ass?"

I don't say shit as I try to get to my feet before Glory steps forward, kicking me right in the stomach until I'm a weak ass ball on the ground. I lay there for a minute to see what's gonna happen next.

"Fuck you and fuck those bikers."

“You fucking liar!” Glory kicks me again, this time with enough force to send me flying onto my back, but the dumb bitch uses too much force and falls beside me. “Traitor,” she spits at me.

My blood boils even though it shouldn't. I know what they think, and I know they're wrong. I also know nothing will change what these bitches think, but still, I rage at the accusation. “Fuck you, Glory Hole.”

“You wish,” she smiles. “I'm Ghost's lady now.”

I laugh at that. “Not for long,” I say and lunge forward with the knife—thank you, Letty—slashing a deep cut across her face.

“You bitch,” she screams at the top of her lungs. “My face! What did you do to my face?”

“Payback's a bitch,” I smile just as Tori's boot smacks against the side of my head, sending me to the ground. I'm still clutching the knife as fists and feet rain down over me so fast it might as well be one continuous strike.

My whole body radiates pain because these rabid bitches won't let up. They punch and kick every inch of me until I'm nothing but a small ball of flesh, trying to protect my head from the blows.

“Stupid fucking bitch,” Tori shouts, punctuating her words with two hard kicks to my back. “Should have just fucking died the last time I kicked your ass.”

“I'll do it,” the new girl says, so full of confidence she could have been me. She yanks my shoulder and pushes me onto my back, mounting my chest, giving me my first real glimpse of her. She can't be more than sixteen or seventeen, so fucking eager to rain fire and hell down on a complete stranger just to be part of the crew.

“You can try,” I tell her, shifting the grip on the knife under my hip.

She lets out a loud cackle that passes for a laugh and wraps both hands around my throat, squeezing hard. “You're dead bitch.”

I squirm, giving her a few seconds to build her confidence before I jam the knife hard into her side before I yank it out, and then do it again. “Not yet, I ain’t.”

The newbie is screaming as she falls over. “She fucking stabbed me,” she screams.

I smile proudly, taking my chance to run the fuck away. I don’t make it far before Simone catches up to me. “It’s not like you to run away, Sorceress.”

“Fuck you, Simone. You know I’d never do anything to hurt Demon.”

“You know how it goes.” She shrugs as if she knows the truth but is happy to go along with what Ghost wants, and I don’t blame her. It’s what I did, too. “Has to be this way,” she says and punches me in the face.

I fall easily because Simone is a big bitch, and she gets on top of me. She wails on me like she’s been watching too much UFC, leaving me powerless to do anything but cover my face.

More footsteps sound, signaling that most, if not all, of my former crew is now here too. “Hold this bitch down,” Simone shouts, standing now to stare down at me.

They grab my limbs and hold me down despite my squirming to break free, which only intensifies when I see Simone preparing a needle, which I’m sure is a hot shot, heroin or fentanyl.

“No!” I yell. I can tell this bitch is crazy when I see the glint in Simone’s eyes.

She’s enjoying this.

“Don’t worry, bitch. You’ll be dead before your body hits the dumpster.” She lets out a wild, maniacal laugh, dropping down to one knee. “Hold her,” she growls when I squirm violently.

Fuck this. I wiggle around with every ounce of fight in me so she can’t get that fucking needle anywhere near me.

“I said, hold her!” I get a leg and an arm out of her grasp when she shouts again, giving me more leverage to break free.

My body is sore all over, my vision is blurry, but I am determined like a motherfucker to survive.

“Hold her down!”

I kick out and Simone drops the needle, and that’s when I take my chance, rolling over and knocking the fat bitch to the ground.

I pick up the shot and jab it into her thigh, shoving the plunger all the way down before someone grabs me from behind, knocking my head against the curb over and over until I pass out.

CHAPTER THIRTY

NOVA

Sitting at a park in Beverly Hills in the middle of the night is a fuck of a lot more peaceful than crashing my bike on Pacific Coast Highway because I'm too fucking drunk to drive. I could have killed myself, and as I sit here in this fancy park, I realize maybe that's what I wanted.

To just fucking die.

Hell, I don't want to die, but do I really care one way or the other?

Also no.

That's where I am in my life at this moment. Too angry and too fucked up to give a shit whether I live or die. Between Maggie leaving and my dad's cancer, my head is all fucked up.

The ride out of Angel Harbor helped, and I don't know if it's the distance from everything and everyone or just the act of cutting through the wind on my bike, but my head is back on straight. It's like the act of doing something so reckless, so utterly fucking stupid, snapped me out of whatever it was that made me get on the bike in the first place.

Either way, sitting here in this park, silent and dark has given me time to think, time to sort shit out in my head. An hour, maybe more, has passed, and the effects of the tequila have finally worn off.

I'm still angry as fuck about Maggie leaving, but I understand why she did. How in the fuck did I think we could possibly

have a life together when all she wants is to get the fuck out of Angel Harbor and L.A., rightfully so?

I can't go with her, and she refuses to stay here, which I also fucking understand. Shit's all fucked up. The girls haven't accepted her, and maybe they never will, which would make her life with me full of misery.

Is that how badly I want her, that it doesn't matter if she's unhappy? "Fuck no, it's not."

I want Maggie to want me enough to stay here, to understand that my life is in Angel Harbor and that she can have a life here, too. And if she can't? Well, then, I have no choice but to respect that.

After I try to change her mind, of course.

I grind out another cigarette with a sigh, the smoke mingling with thoughts of Maggie and getting back to Angel Harbor. If nothing else, I need to tell her that she makes me feel a little less fucked up and gives me hope that I can be a little better every fucking day.

"Who the fuck are you?" A voice sounds behind me, deep and filled with nothing good. He has no idea who he's fucking with.

I hop off the picnic table, spinning to face the guy. "Just a man in a park," I answer, a smirk hiding the sudden rush of adrenaline. I size him up. Fresh kutte, proud badge of The Wrexing Crew. Crazy-as-hell black magic fuckers if rumors are true. "Not here for trouble, pal."

He smiles, all arrogance and youthful bravado. Kind of reminds me of me when I first started riding. "Too bad. Trouble's what you found." He scans the surroundings, eyes glinting. "You're a long way from home, ain't ya?"

I shrug, casual as ever.

He puffs up like a peacock. "This is Wrexing Crew turf."

"Congratulations." I step forward, shifting left. He mirrors me, his eyes narrowing. "Look, man, before you get all—" Too late.

He swings, and I duck, retaliating with a one-two to the ribs. “Just trying to clear my damn head!”

“I can help with that,” he growls, charging like a bull, all muscle and no finesse.

This is gonna be fun.

I jump out of his reach, whip around, and deliver a satisfying kick to his back, sending him sprawling.

“No help needed,” I growl, jumping on his back and losing myself in the rhythm of fists on flesh.

“You sick fuck! Get off me!” he screams, but it’s like music to my ears.

I can feel a wicked shit-eating grin stretch across my face, my hands a frenzy, each punch an exclamation mark. “You wanted a fight, asshole. And you sure as fuck got one.”

Me talking shit gave him a chance to buck me off him. He turns onto his back, glaring at me as I scramble to my feet. “You’re fucking crazy.”

“Heard that before,” I chuckle, my foot finding his face with a satisfying crunch. There’s something inside me, a darkness mixed with joy. Not just survival. Not just rage. Something more primal.

The minute he tries to get up, I’m on him again. “Fucker,” he growls, and I shut him up with a vicious jab. He tries to hit back, to shield his face from my blows, but it doesn’t work. Nothing does because all of my anger—at Maggie, at my folks, hell, at the whole fucking world—is being channeled into this fucking asshole.

I use my knees to keep his hands at his sides and lean my forearm against his throat. “I just want to fucking think! I don’t want your shitty fucking turf, you hear me!”

His eyes go wide with fear, or maybe it’s survival because I’m applying more and more pressure with my forearm, and his words come out more difficult by the syllable. “Hear. You.”

I should stop, but I can’t. This man beneath me is, in this moment, the reason for every goddamn thing that’s fucked up

in my life, and I'm determined to make him pay.

"Stupid."

I apply a little more pressure.

"Motherfucker," I grunt and jerk forward, applying more pressure.

I'm vaguely aware of his legs flailing and his face turning red, but I can't stop.

I should stop.

But I just fucking can't.

"Nova!"

I hear my name, and then I feel hands on my shoulder, yanking me off the asshole. I fight back against the pull.

"Not this time, asshole!" I won't stop, not now, because I don't see the faces anymore. They aren't haunting me. Not right now.

"Goddammit, brother, stop before you kill him!"

"Maybe I want to," I shout at nobody in particular as I fall backward and then quickly get to my feet. I blink to focus my eyes and then frown. "Wild Man?" I look to the biker asshole on the ground and then to my brothers. "What the fuck, man? What are you guys doing here?" I ask Ace because, no doubt, this was all him.

"Been searching the whole goddamn state for your sorry ass. Why'd you turn your phone off?" His smile dims as he searches my face. "You good?"

I shrug. "I don't know what the fuck I am."

Ace steps forward and claps me on the back, giving my shoulder a squeeze. "What you are, brother, is coming home." He glances over his shoulder at the biker still on the ground, enjoying every gulp of oxygen he can suck down his throat. "We gonna have a problem with you?"

He's shaking his head with wide eyes. "He's fucking crazy," he shouts. "That motherfucker is fucking crazy!" before

scrambling to his feet and taking off, probably to get to his club.

“That’s a story,” Wild Man says, stepping on the other side of me.

I walk between my brothers, knowing they’re here because they’re scared as fuck that I’m losing my shit. They’re here because they give a fuck about me. “I just wanted to fucking think and try to look at some stars. That dumb motherfucker interrupted me.”

“You get your shit sorted out?”

“Yes. No. Maybe?”

Ace’s lips twitch into a reluctant grin, and he shakes his head as we get to the parking lot. “Better to do it at home than out here in the fucking wild. Beverly fucking Hills? Seriously?”

I snort-laugh. “It’s where I ended up when I realized I was too fucked up to ride.”

“At least you figured it out before the troopers had to peel you off the highway.”

“A-fucking-men to that,” Wild Man groans. He and Ace share another look, the same look as earlier, like they’re having a secret conversation without me.

“What the fuck is that about?” I point to both of them. “Tell me. Now.”

“Come on, let’s get back to the clubhouse. You okay to ride?”

“Yeah, man. I’m good.”

WE RIDE into the parking lot of the clubhouse, and it really feels good to be home. I even feel bad for that fucking Wizard or Wrexing or whoever the fuck he was.

“Okay, we’re back. Now tell me everything.”

Ace pinches the bridge of his nose with a sigh. “We got the info on Willow’s whereabouts from Maggie.”

“What?”

Ace holds up his hands. “Don’t freak the fuck out. Before we met up earlier to plan to rescue Willow, Gia came to me with a notebook.”

I shake my head because I fucking knew there was something weird about it all. That fucking notebook Maggie has been writing in nonstop was full of details to help us get back at the Bloodthirsty Devils. “So she gave you everything we needed to rescue Willow. Did you help her get out of Angel Harbor?”

Ace and Wild Man look at each other with matching wary expressions.

“What the fuck?”

“She dropped off the notebook, and then she booked it the fuck out of here before anyone could stop her.”

“Bullshit.” I shake my head in disbelief because it doesn’t make sense. “She left without any cash to get her safely the fuck out of here? I don’t believe it.”

Ace gets in my face. “Have I ever lied to you?”

“Other than withholding info about Maggie? No.”

“Fair enough,” he growls and pushes open the clubhouse door. “She’s got a fucking mind of her own, and she left before we made things square between her and the MC.”

I don’t hear another word Ace says because I’m charging across the clubhouse and down the hall to the rooms, specifically to the room where Maggie’s been staying. Even though I know she’s gone, my shoulders fall at the sight of the room, empty except for the silky black scarf and the black bandana lying in the middle of the bed I shared with her plenty of times.

“Fucking Maggie,” I growl.

She’s gone.

She left. Again.

“Goddammit!” She’s gone, and as pissed off as I am—again—I get it.

She deserves the future she wants without me.

That doesn’t stop me from plopping down on the bed that still smells like both of us, but mostly Maggie. The scent of her, of us, invades my nostrils and seeps into the deepest recesses of my mind. I lay there, wondering where she is and what she’s doing.

After a few hours, I fall asleep with images of Maggie invading my dreams. Her smart mouth. Her teasing smile makes it seem like she has an inside joke no one else knows about.

She’s tough as shit, but just underneath is a layer of vulnerability that I find irresistible. Hell, the truth is that I find every fucking thing about her irresistible.

I tell myself that I’ll stop caring about her in time. I’ll stop thinking about her.

I’ll stop wondering what my life could have been if she’d stayed and made a life here with me in Angel Harbor.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

MAGGIE

I grunt and groan in pain as I try to turn to my side, opening my eyes without a direct view of the sun. I try to sit up once, but I can't.

“Shit.” My legs feel trapped beneath something, and I wiggle them loose as boxes and trash bags slowly slide off of me.

I'm in a fucking dumpster. A filthy fucking dumpster.

My legs are sticky and wet from the trash. My head and back have something sticky. Fucking gross. After a few minutes of straining and holding my breath, I manage to grab the edge of the dumpster and pull myself up and over the side, landing on the concrete below with a solid thud. “Ouch.”

I lie there a minute, letting the hot concrete sear into my back to get my bearings and to make sure Simone and the other bitches are long gone. It seems the coast is clear, and I get to my feet, looking around the alley that looks a hell of a lot less menacing in the morning light.

I need to get out of Angel Harbor once and for all, so I turn left out of the alley, remembering that I was headed for the bus station when I got attacked by those fuckin' bitches.

Did the hotshot kill Simone? Shit, am I a murderer now? I struggle to recall the fight, how I ended up in the dumpster, but all I can remember is that new bitch cracking my head against the curb. Fuck, no wonder my head's pounding.

I reach back and feel my head and realize I've got blood all over what's left of my hair. I'm a complete fucking mess. My vision blurs, and I slide down the side of a coffee shop until I'm sitting away from the morning sun.

Shit, my money! I frantically pat my pockets and bra and realize I'm not wearing shoes. They took my fucking money. And my shoes.

Powers that be, just take me now. I can't do this anymore.

The city starts to wake up, and this stupid coffee shop has too many customers. But I'm stuck. I can't get up.

You know what? I don't care anymore. I've lost Nova, my crew, hell, even Demon. I'm a fucking loser. Tears carve a path down my cheeks as I sit here feeling sorry for myself.

Maggie Leon. Demon's ex. Bad bitch extraordinaire.

I bet the cops are looking for me. I don't care. One person I know isn't looking for me is Nova. And he's the only one that matters. A few cars drive by, and I turn my head away from the street to avoid the pity in their faces.

I feel a sudden touch on my shoulder and scream so loud my throat burns. "No!" I shout and wriggle and squirm away from the hand on me. "Stop!"

"Margaret! Stop struggling." A feminine voice stops my panic. I force myself to my feet. I've got to get out of here.

I turn and glare at my attacker "Leave me the fuck alone." Familiar honey-brown eyes hidden behind a pair of expensive red glasses look back at me. She's wearing black slacks and a white blouse, all of it looks like it costs a lot of fucking money, but she also is the most put-together person I've ever seen in my life.

"Sophie? From the clinic?"

She smiles and gives me a short nod. "That's me. Margaret, right?"

I nod and take a suspicious step back. "What are you doing here?"

She sighs, rubbing her forehead in a clear sign of worry. “I was out searching for a patient. She’s fifteen, pregnant, and addicted. And she missed her appointment today.” Her gaze settles over me, and I know I look like fifty shades of shit.

“My stylist is on vacation,” I say in a flippant voice when her gaze pinches into an expression I can’t identify.

“What happened to you?”

“Oh, nothing,” I say easily. “I was trying to leave this fucked up town and ran into my old crew, and those fucking bitches tried to kill me. Again. I really got to bolt. They could be anywhere.”

“Come with me. I’ll get you cleaned up.” Sophie reaches for me, but I take a step back. “What’s wrong? I’m not going to hurt you, Margaret.”

I believe that much. “Yeah, I know, but I don’t want to see Nova.”

She frowns in confusion, and I can see the indecision weighing on her shoulders. “I’m not Dr. Bishop. Let me help you.”

I shake my head and turn away from her. “Never mind. I’ll be fine, Sophie. I’m just a little banged up.”

“There’s blood on your head. You could have a concussion.”

“I’ll sleep it off,” I shoot back, still walking away.

“You could die.”

“If I stay here, I’m dead anyway, but thanks for your concern.” I keep walking when Sophie grabs me again.

“I don’t know what happened between you and Nova, but I can’t let you walk away in this condition.”

“Yeah?” I arch a brow at the prim and proper nurse. “And how are you going to stop me?”

Her red lips curl into a devious smile. “I can just call Dr. Bishop right now and tell him where you are.”

I freeze at her threat and then shrug. “He won’t care.”

“Good.” She grabs my shoulders and turns me back toward the van with the clinic name and logo on the side, giving me a gentle push toward the vehicle. “Then you’ll have no problem letting me get you fixed up.”

“I thought you were nice,” I growl at her.

She laughs. “I thought you were tough. We’re both wrong, aren’t we?”

“Bitch,” I mumble and let her herd me into the van.

She laughs again. “Don’t give me any shit, or I’ll call Dr. Nova.”

“Like I trust you,” I growl, folding my arms and fixing my gaze out the passenger window.

“You don’t have to trust me to let me help you. It’ll be easier for you to run away if you can stand on your own two feet.”

She says the words like she understands, and I turn to Sophie, studying her carefully to see if I can figure her out.

“Don’t tell Nova,” I spit out. “I don’t want to see him.”

No, that’s not true. I do want to see him. Badly. But I can’t.

She hesitates.

“Promise me, or I’ll jump out.” I grip the door handle to let her know I’m not bluffing. “Promise.”

She nods, but she doesn’t say the words. For now, I count that as a win.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

NOVA

“What have you found?” My heart pounds so hard in my chest I can hardly breathe and so loud I can barely even hear my own question.

Gia looks up first, sympathy swimming in her gaze. “No trace of her so far, but I’m not giving up. She’s a pain in the ass but being out there without a safety net has to be fucking terrifying.”

“She doesn’t have any kind of digital footprint, man.” Wild Man stares up at me with sympathy. “We’re doing all we can to track her down. I’ve been hacking street cams all night.”

I know they’re doing everything in their power to find Maggie, but the fact that they haven’t found her scares the shit out of me. I refuse to stop searching until I know she’s safe. Even if *safe* means she’s long gone from Angel Harbor.

“I’ve been searching the bus terminal, and she hasn’t popped up on any of their cameras,” Gia sighs, shaking her head.

“What about the train station?”

“Same. We’re trying, Nova,” Gia says with a look of sympathy. Like, I need that shit right now.

I nod, raking a hand through my hair and another over my tired face. “She has no way of paying other than whatever cash is in her pocket.”

I try really hard not to hold it against my brothers, but they’re the ones who let her leave without any means of living or

surviving. No cash. No weapons. Nothing at all to make sure she could make it out of town safely.

“Thank you. Both of you.”

After a restless night in Maggie’s bed, letting the scent of her sink into my brain, hell, into my fucking soul, all I need at this moment is to know that she’s all right.

She can go on and live her life without me, but I have to know she made it out of Angel Harbor safely.

“We won’t stop,” Gia assures me. “I swear.” Guilt swims in her gaze, and I go to her, gripping her shoulder.

“It’s not your fault, Gia. Thanks for helping.”

“Of course. We’re family. Fucked up as hell, but family all the same. Right?”

A harsh laugh escapes. “Damn straight, we are.” My phone rings a now familiar tune that sends anxiety rushing through me. “Mom. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” she sighs. “I’m glad you’re worried about your father, but he wouldn’t wish that anxiety on you.”

“Nothing I can do about that, Mom. How is he?”

“He’s fine,” she assures me in a confident tone. “The doctor says if he keeps doing what he’s doing, he’ll outlive us all. I’m calling to find out about my soon-to-be future daughter-in-law.”

I bite back a harsh, bitter laugh and scrub a hand down my face. “I’ll let you know, Mom. Soon.”

“Okay, Kane. We love you. Talk soon,” she says confidently before ending the call.

I nod, allowing my mom’s confidence to give me the boost I need to focus on something other than Maggie’s disappearance. “I need to get to the clinic but call me if you find even a hint of Maggie somewhere.”

“Will do,” Wild Man promises.

I take him at his word, leaving the clubhouse to check on patients and inventory. Just because my personal life is shitty doesn't mean I can shirk my responsibility where the clinic is concerned. The drive over clears my head, at least enough to slide into Dr. Bishop mode, even though most visitors to the clinic call me Dr. Nova.

"Hey, Sophie," I call out as I walk in, shrugging off my *kutte* in favor of my white coat that seems to put the patients at ease.

"Hey, Dr. Bishop. I didn't expect you in today." Her voice is the same calm, even tone she always uses, but there's something else in there.

"I need to check up on our patients," I say defensively.

"Of course."

I find her in her tiny office, bent over medical files she's updating on the computer. "Anything I can help you with? Anything I should know about?"

She shakes her head, pushing up her glasses with her index finger. "Nope."

I frown. Sophie isn't a *nope* kind of woman. If anything, she answers with more words than any situation requires. "You sure?"

"Positive," she says and pushes away from her desk, her brown eyes darting around the room as if she's looking for a way to escape. "Absolutely positive."

"Sophie," I growl. "What the fuck is going on? Are you quitting?"

Her eyes go wide. "Me? Quit? Never."

I cross my arms, annoyed at whatever the fuck this is. "Then tell me what's going on. Now."

Her gaze darts around again before she lets out a long exhale. "Let's talk in your office."

Reluctantly, I follow her to my office and sit at my desk, hands folded as I wait for her to spill her secrets. "Sophie, I'm not having the best day."

She nods, swallowing hard. “This morning, I went out to search for Sherry. She missed her appointment, and I’m worried she’s using again.”

It was a common worry among many of our patients, but Sherry is young, pregnant, and addicted, so I understand her concern. “You didn’t find her?”

“No,” she sighs. She removes her glasses and tosses them on my desk. “I found a woman stumbling through the streets in bloody, ripped clothing. I brought her here, and she’s doing better. Healing emotionally and physically.”

I lean forward, resting my chin in my hands. “What aren’t you telling me, Sophie?”

She flashes a smile, shaking her head. “You’re too astute,” she accuses, pushing away from the chair. “Follow me. Please.”

I stand and follow her on wooden legs, sucking in a deep breath as I prepare to take in another of the lost patients we care for before sending them back out into the shit storm that brought them to us.

Sophie pushes open the door to an exam room we never use for anything other than storage and steps inside, revealing a small figure sleeping on the bed sandwiched between boxes and defunct testing equipment. “I know I should have told you, but she made me promise I wouldn’t.”

Maggie. She looks so fucking frail and small that I just want to scoop her in my arms and let her know she’s safe and protected. But I don’t do that. I just stare at her curled up on the bed, her brows dipped in worry, even in a deep sleep. I turn to Sophie, confusion swimming in my eyes. How the hell did Maggie get here, and why didn’t she want me to know she was at my clinic?

Sophie smiles as if she just gets it, gripping my shoulder with a sympathetic smile. “Good luck,” she whispers, leaving me alone to examine Maggie carefully.

I take a seat on a box beside the bed, grabbing Maggie’s hand in mine, holding it close because I’m so goddamn happy to see her alive and safe. Even in sleep she looks scared, and I grip

her hand tighter, holding it against my rapidly beating heart.
Where in the fuck did I go wrong with her?

Why would she rather face the danger in the world on her own than with me at her side? She has bruises all over her face and a cut on her forehead, telling me she encountered some kind of trouble since she left the protection of the MC. *What happened to you?*

I clutch her hand and pull it to my lips. My heart pounds against my chest as anxiety takes hold of me. What had she gone through last night, and why didn't she call me for help?

Because she doesn't want some scarred biker, who refuses to work on himself.

My grip loosens because I know the truth, and it has nothing to do with my PTSD or anything else. I can't force Maggie to stay with me if she doesn't want to. If she's going to stay, it has to be her choice.

Not mine.

Her hand squeezes mine, and I look up at her beautiful, scarred face. "Nova?"

"Maggie," I growl. "It's so fucking good to see you."

Maybe it's not too late after all.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

MAGGIE

I open my eyes to the most beautiful sight in the whole fucking world.

Nova at my side, smiling and looking as if I'm the best thing to ever happen to him. His hand clutches mine against his chest, and something that looks a lot like relief flashes on his handsome face.

"Nova," I whisper, my voice groggy from a deep, healing sleep. I run my hands through his hair and tilt his head back to stare at his beautiful face, the days' worth of stubble on his jaw, and those deep blue eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"I work here." He flashes a relieved smile, removing my hand from the side of his face to kiss my palm. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I did battle with my former friends. Again. But good," I let him know. "Better now that you're here. I missed you." It's sappy as fuck, and normally I'm not sappy, but I'm also tired and injured and really missing my man.

Or the man who would be my man if I let him. If I wasn't such a pussy.

"I've missed you too, Maggie. So fucking much." He grips my hand in both of his and brushes a kiss against my knuckles. "Why did you run? Again?"

"Because..." I sigh, searching for the words to make my actions make sense to a man so grounded roots sprout from his

motorcycle boots.

“Because?” He shakes his head. “That’s not an answer, Maggie.”

“I know. I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry for running, but I did it for you. And for me.”

“No. I want the truth,” he says, his gaze so focused on me I have to resist the urge to squirm.

“I want to stay, Nova. Almost from the moment I met you, I wanted to stay with you and make a life with you, but it’s impossible.”

The look in his eyes gives me hope, and I cup his face. “It is possible. If you want this as much as me, we can make it happen.”

“I was wrong to bounce but I’m a liability for you and your MC. As long as I’m around, you’ll never shake the Devils. That’s the cold hard truth.”

He opens his mouth to argue and I put two fingers to his lips. “But I want you, Nova. I want you more than any other man, more than anyone in this world. I love you and I’m choosing to love over fear.”

“Maggie,” he whispers, leaning into my touch.

“No, I’m serious Nova. I will love you however you need. Patient and kind when you need it. A kick in the ass if necessary. Hot sex whenever you want. I’ll even stay quiet.” I chuckle, thinking about his hand across my mouth. “However you need to be loved, that’s how I’ll give it to you. I swear.”

He laughs, shaking his head and gripping my wrists. “That’s so fucking great to hear. There’s nothing I want more than for you to be mine.” He smiles and kisses my hands, my wrists. “I thought I lost you for good.”

“So it ain’t too late for us?”

“Fuck no. I just wanna be better for you. You deserve it.”

I shake my head. “But you’re already a good man, Nova. Ain’t met many in my life but I know one when I see him.”

“I’m just a man, Mags.”

“Nah, you a good one. You took me in and cared for me ‘cause you’re good. And when you found out who I was you still did right by me. I just didn’t realize ‘til later. I ain’t the woman you deserve but I’m gonna be.”

“You’re the woman I want. Who my heart chose to love and build a life with.”

His words make my heart soar. Never thought I’d hear that from any man, let alone one as good as Nova. Him choosing me does something I can’t explain.

“I’m a lot, I know that. Too tough for my own good with a smart fucking mouth that don’t shut up.”

He chuckles. “I got ways to keep you quiet for a bit.”

Just thinking about that makes me heat up. “I am who I am. Getting better won’t happen quick but I wanna be just Maggie.”

“Well that’s great ‘cause I love Maggie. Just Maggie is perfect for me.”

I laugh a little. “Good ‘cause I love you too, Dr. Bishop.”

He claims my mouth in a harsh kiss that steals my breath. I arch into him, holding on tight. I’ll never let go. Kissing him is incredible, especially thinking I’d lost this.

He kisses me dizzy like the first time. And here I am silently begging for more.

“Maggie,” he growls. “I love you and want a life with you. I’ll love you how you need. We can be fucked up together, imperfectly together.”

His promise wraps around me, sending warmth through my veins to my heart. “Sounds pretty fucking great to me.”

“Thank fuck,” he sighs. “How’s going home sound?”

“Your home?”

He smiles and shakes his head. “Our home.”

My body sags in relief. “Holy fucking shit, who knew that would sound as great as it does?”

Nova laughs, and the sound is music to my ears, and when he brushes another kiss to my lips, I feel like I’m home for the first time in my life. “Then let’s go home. Together.”

“Sounds good to me.” I sit up quickly and smile.

“As soon as I check you out.”

My eyes go wide. “Seriously? You want to play doctor right now?”

“With you? Always.”

Fuck me, I am totally gonna love this man forever.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

NOVA

Having Maggie in my home—our home—and in our bed is even better than I dreamed it would be. With her all laid out, totally naked for me to do whatever I want, I take my time with her, tasting every inch of her skin until I find her pussy wet and glistening, swollen just for me. My tongue slides through her folds, and she releases a strangled moan that makes my cock ache.

Her hands tangle in my hair, gripping it so tight it stings just enough to tighten my balls, so I slip two fingers deep while my tongue laps at her clit, over and over, until her body tenses and her toes curl.

“Nova.” My name falls from her lips in a voice barely above a whisper, her hips grinding, begging for an orgasm.

“Not yet,” I grunt against her pussy, flicking my tongue hard and fast over her clit while my fingers pump in and out of her, a frantic pace that draws harsh breaths from her. I can’t get enough of the sharp breaths, of the little mewls she’s powerless to mute, and when she wraps her legs around me, digging her heels deep in my back, urging me to take her over the edge, I slow down.

“Nova,” she shouts, letting her hips surge up to fuck my mouth. “Don’t. Tease. Me.”

I laugh against her, adding a third finger, grunting as she clenches and squeezes around me. “Fuck, you feel so good babe. But don’t come. Not yet.”

She grunts, but her body sinks into the mattress, and she stops chasing the orgasm. I pump into her in long, slow strokes, loving the sounds she makes and the sounds she tries to hide. Maggie grunts and growls as one hand fists into the sheets, and the other keeps a death grip on my hair. I fucking love it.

I lick her and finger fuck her until she can't hold back, feeling every flutter of her pussy as pleasure takes over. Her body tenses and quivers as her orgasm strikes. "Oh!" It's the only word she says as she comes, her body shaking in convulsions, and I lick her through every aftershock until her gorgeous body sinks into the mattress and a laugh escapes. "Oh fuck, Nova. That was...perfect."

I smile, taking my time to kiss my way up her body. "You're perfect."

Her smile lights up her face, and my heart feels so fucking full that it steals my breath for a second.

"I just wanna be perfect for you."

"I love you, Maggie."

She tossed her head back, laughing as she wraps her legs and arms around me. "Damn right, you do, Doc. Makes it a good thing I love you too. Isn't that right?"

I nod and slowly bury my cock deep inside her. I let out a grunt when Maggie pulses around me, and I slide deeper.

"Oh fuck." She mouths the words to me, her eyes lighting up with love and arousal. Her hips start to move, and everything else but this woman disappears around me. Nothing else matters. Not the Bloodthirsty Devils. Not my dad. Not any other bullshit. Just Maggie.

Just us.

I pump into her, slowly at first, but I can't hold back. She feels so fucking good in my arms. To know she's staying.

Maggie grasps my head and pulls me down, smashing our mouths together while our bodies dance together, hot and slick, frantic and hungry. She's grunting into my mouth, matching me stroke for stroke, harder and faster, deeper. Her

jaws clench tight with the force of her holding back her orgasm, but I can feel her pussy all around me.

I pull back and open my eyes, pushing her thighs so her feet rest on my hips, and then I grip her tits, squeezing them and pinching her nipples while I fuck her with everything I have, everything I am. Sweat beads at her forehead, and the sheen of sweat coats her body in a fine glow that makes my cock harder. Thicker. Longer.

“Oh fuck,” she whispers, and her eyes go wide as if she can feel me growing inside of her. Her eyes roll back, and her muscles go tight. “Nova,” she groans.

“Let go, baby, I got you.”

Her smile turns ravenous as her orgasm explodes out of her, body quaking and shivering with every wave of pleasure that rockets through her. Maggie’s orgasm goes on and on while I pound into her until I find my own release. My hips jerk, and I spill my cock deep inside her, knowing she’s mine. She is my home.

She is my fucking forever.

I collapse on top of Maggie, stealing quick kisses on her neck. Her body shakes beneath me, and she clings to me like there’s no tomorrow.

“Nova,” Maggie murmurs, her voice barely above a whisper. “Is this the real deal?”

“It is,” I assure her, rolling over and wrapping my arms around her. “We’re as real as it gets, babe.”

Her breath catches. “We are, aren’t we?”

We fall into a comfortable silence as we catch our breath. A smile tugs at my lips as I think back on the crazy rollercoaster ride that brought Maggie and me together. I never thought we’d make it here.

“What’s that smile for?” she asks, noticing my expression.

“Just thinking this was one hell of a fucked up journey to get to this moment.” I chuckle.

“Well, we definitely don’t do things the easy way, do we homie?” She says and I smile.

“Easy would be boring.”

She sighs contentedly. “It would.”

I gently touch the scar on her face, a reminder of everything we’ve overcome. “We’re many things, Maggie, but ordinary sure as hell ain’t one of them.”

“Never,” she agrees, pressing a soft kiss over my heart.

I figure there’s something I should share with her. “I went to see my folks the other day.”

She sits up, resting her head in her hand. “You did? How did it go?”

“My dad has cancer. I don’t know how serious it is, but they seemed different than I remember.” I pause, thinking back on the visit. “When my dad opened the door and I saw him, it really hit me how much time has passed. He’s getting old. I want to forgive them, I just don’t know if I can. They said and did some really fucked up shit when I got back from deployment.”

Maggie considers this for a moment. “Well, you gotta forgive them or it’ll eat you up inside.”

I sigh, knowing she’s right but struggling with how to get there. “That’s the problem. How do I do it?”

“You just do it,” she says simply. Then she adds, “I know it ain’t that easy. Parents always want better for their kids. But better doesn’t have to be what they imagine. You gotta find your own better. They don’t have to understand it. They just gotta accept it.”

She gets me. “I told them about you.”

Maggie raises her eyebrows in surprise and rubs a hand over her cropped hair. “Me? With the neck tats and shit?” She points to the scar on her cheek. “Definitely not who they want for you.”

I shrug. “Maybe not. But you’re my better.”

She laughs, and I know I'll never get sick of that sound. "I love you, Doc."

"Good." I stand, smiling, when her gaze goes straight to my semi-erect cock. "Because I'm going to fuck you in the shower, and then we're heading to the clubhouse to get all this shit straightened out."

"I guess we're jumping right into the fire?"

I take her hand and pull her off the bed. "It's what we do."

"You're lucky I love your crazy ass," she says, heading to the shower.

I laugh and join her in the shower, keeping my word and fucking her—twice—in the shower before we dress and make our way to the clubhouse, high on life.

Maggie's resilience is a constant source of strength for me, but we both have things to work out. At least we have each other while we're working them out.

"What the fuck is going on?" Maggie hops off the back of my bike before I kill the engine, and I'm about to yell at her for doing that shit when I see what's caught her eye.

Cop cars. Half a dozen of 'em in the parking lot. I kill the engine and walk toward Ace and Doherty. "What's going on?"

Doherty looks at me, his expression resigned. "Dr. Kane Bishop, I hate to do this, but you're under arrest for the murder of Jake Lilly."

The words hit me like a punch to the gut. My knees threaten to buckle, but I hold my ground. "What? Who the fuck is Jake Lilly, and why do you think I killed him?"

"You got any evidence of that?" Ace does what the Prez does — protects his men.

That's when Tank steps up, his face set in a scowl. His voice is flat, devoid of emotion. "It was me, man."

Doherty turns to Tank, surprise etched across his face. "You're confessing to the murder?"

Tank's face is stone-cold. "We fought. But I didn't kill nobody."

I stare at Tank, grappling with what he's just done. This is no game. He's putting himself on the line for the MC.

I stare at one of my newest brothers as he turns and lets Doherty slap handcuffs on him. "You have the right to remain silent..." Doherty's voice drones on as he cuffs Tank.

"What the fuck, Tank?"

"It's all right, Doc. I'll be fine. Still got the bruises to prove I was just defendin' myself." Behind the false bravado is all the other shit. Fear. Anxiety. Hope.

Been there. Done that. Bought the fucking t-shirt.

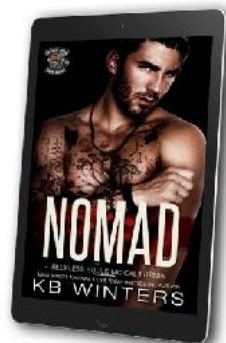
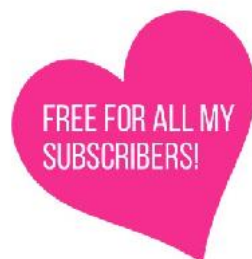
"Don't say shit, man," Ace calls out. "A lawyer will meet you at the cop shop."

As the cop cars pull away, I'm worried. And a little scared.

My fucking stupidity could take the whole club down.

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THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Thank you so much for reading my books! It means the world to me and I appreciate all of you!

If you can leave a review, or even tell your friends, I'd be honored.

Thanks to all of my beta readers, ARC readers and [Facebook](#) fans. Y'all are *THE VERY BEST!*

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I love you all.

Hugs!

KB xoxo



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KB Winters is a Wall Street Journal and USA Today Bestselling Author of steamy hot books about Bikers, Billionaires, Bad Boys and Badass Military Men.

Just the way you like them.

She has an addiction to caffeine, tattoos and hard-bodied alpha males. The men in her books are very sexy, protective and sometimes bossy, her ladies are...well... *bossier!*

Living in sunny southern California, this embarrassingly hopeless romantic writes every chance she gets!

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