



REAPER



CALA RILEY

reaper

Lotus MC Book 1

Cala Riley

contents

[Content Warning](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Author Note](#)

[Author Bio](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Also by Author](#)

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content warning

AUTHORS NOTE:

Before you start binge reading Reaper, we wanted to warn you about possible triggers. Or mainly one. Like most of our books this one does contain violence. However, at the beginning of Reaper there is on the page Domestic Abuse against our heroine Natalie (Not by our hero, Reaper). The last thing we want to do is trigger you if you are a survivor. For a more detailed list of TW please check our [website](#).

If you or anyone you know need help, please call the National Domestic Abuse Hotline:

800-799-7233

This one is for those who have been knocked down and gone through hell. We hope you find your Reaper. This one is for you.

prologue

MOST GIRLS DREAM of their happily ever after.

The house with the white picket fence. Their two-point-five children. The doting husband who is successful and supports the family.

I had those dreams too once.

Then reality set in.

Soon the fairy tale turned into a horror story.

How did it change so quickly?

When did my perfectly normal life turn into this nightmare?

As I lie in bed, cold and alone, I try to pinpoint where it all went wrong. Was it the first time he raised his voice at me? Or maybe the time I accidentally stained his favorite shirt, which ended with a red cheek?

All I know is by the time we got here, I lost myself along the way.

I became numb and stopped believing his lies. He didn't love me like he promised and it was never an accident like he said. Most of all, I stopped believing I was to blame.

I have to get out.

The longer I stay here, the higher my chances of not making it out of this alive.

one

REAPER

SOMETHING ISN'T RIGHT.

I don't know how I know it, but my gut is telling me that there's something wrong, and my guts never lead me astray.

"Wrath," I call out.

He heads over to me as I watch the men load the old-school Aerostar van. One of the girls from the club will be in the passenger seat while one of the patched members drives.

The fake baby in the car seat in the back completes the image.

"What's up, Pres?" Wrath asks as soon as he's at my side.

I don't normally come to these runs, but lately we have had a couple hit by a rival MC, the Reno Renegades.

The Medina Cartel aren't the type to allow mistakes though, so the hits have been coming out of our pockets. If it gets out, the cartel may cut their losses moving onto another runner.

Of course our rival will be at the top of the list.

"Do we still have that backup car out back?" I ask.

He nods. "Yeah, why?"

“Pull the van into the warehouse along with the car. Then send the guys on a useless task. Me and you are going to transfer the product over before letting them leave.”

He doesn't question it. He only moves to make it happen. That's why he's my sergeant at arms. He's my yes-man, always jumping to follow my command. I can always count on him to back me on any votes as well.

Colt gives me an odd look from across the yard. He's usually the one in charge of runs as he's my vice president, but I can't shake this feeling that something else is going on. I haven't voiced my concerns yet.

Colt is a transfer from another chapter. He came over about two years after I became fully patched because he wanted out of his hometown. My father groomed him along with me for our positions.

At first, I was angry. I wanted Wrath to be my VP, but then I realized why he couldn't be. He would never oppose me. My second in command needs to be willing to stand up to me. To show me all of the possible options.

I love Wrath to death, but the man would never be that for me.

So I accepted Colt with open arms. Problem is, he's been acting cagey lately. Making me question his loyalty.

Wrath talks to him a moment before heading to the van. Colt heads my way.

“Wrath said you wanted the guys to do one last sweep of the roads before we head out. Anything I should know about?”

I shake my head. “Being extra careful. These hits have been taking money from our pockets. We can't afford to keep bleeding money.”

“You're right. I was thinking maybe we split up this run. Change the route randomly. Send one crew on the anticipated route with guns blazing type of thing. Try to grab one alive and see how they keep finding out routes.”

I rub my hand on my chin. “Do that. Wrath and I have another issue to attend to, but I trust you can handle it.”

He nods. “I’ve got it.”

His phone rings, making me narrow my eyes.

This isn’t the time to be taking random phone calls, families be damned.

He gives me a tight smile. “It’s my ma. She’s been wanting me to come visit. I’m going to take this quickly.”

As he steps away, answering the phone with hushed tones, I wonder if he could have flipped on us. Could he be working against us?

He’s on the phone for nearly ten minutes, arguing with whoever it is. Colt has always had a rough relationship with his mother, but I’ve never seen him this worked up over it. Maybe it’s not his mom on the other end. Maybe it’s someone else.

I don’t have much time to ponder it though. Wrath comes jogging back over to me as the rest of the guys come back.

“Alright.” Colt gets the men’s attention as soon as he hangs up. “Jug, you are in the van with Cheryl. Remember to drive smart. You’re supposed to be a couple with their kid. Don’t attract any unwanted attention. Kicks, Lemon, Poker, and Widow will escort you. Spider, Midnight, Fang, and Cueball, you’re with me. Head out and call if there are any issues.”

I watch as they head out, hanging back to listen to Colt give his speech to the group he kept back with him.

“I had Trigger update their GPS to a new route. We are going to let them head on their way while we ride the original route. Strap up and expect trouble. Any questions?”

When no one speaks up, they head out as well, Colt nodding my way. I dip my chin, waiting for them to leave before I turn to Wrath.

“Let’s get the product to the drop-off. Call Trigger and have him change the GPS again. Have them routed as if they

are on the way, but then get them back here. I don't need them showing up at the drop, making us look incompetent," I say quietly.

Wrath nods as he pulls out his phone, making the call as we head toward the warehouse. I snort when I see the way he loaded the product. The van had plenty of room to carry it all, but the car did not. The back seat is loaded down, blankets thrown over the drugs. He even has some on the floorboard of the passenger seat. He hangs up the phone, leaning against the car.

"Best I could do, boss. Short notice and all."

I shake my head, laughing. "Get in. I don't want any bikes. They draw too much attention. If the Renegades have a look out on our normal routes, they won't notice us this way."

He shrugs as he crams himself into the passenger seat as I climb into the driver's seat.

"This is going to be a fun ride," he says sarcastically, making me chuckle.

I start the car and head out.

We ride in silence. Wrath's eyes never stop taking in the road. I appreciate the vigilance. Once out of Nye County, things get a little trickier. I don't own any cops this far north, but you know who does? The Reno Renegades. Getting stopped up here would be a fucking disaster, especially with just the two of us.

Wrath's phone rings, drawing his attention from the road.

"It's Colt," he tells me, answering on speaker.

"Yeah?" Wrath says.

"Whoever's been fucking with us weren't waiting for us on the original route. They met the van on the new route. You already suspected that would happen though, didn't you?" he asks, sounding pissed off.

I clear my throat. "I had my suspicions. Somehow they are tracking the van. We need to check it over with a fine-tooth comb."

I look at Wrath. His frown tells me he's suspicious too. He doesn't understand why I lied to Colt. He won't question me though.

Truth is, I think Colt may be a problem. One I'm going to have to solve, but with him being my vice president, I can't just off him. There's a process that must be followed. If I killed him now without evidence, I'd lose the trust in my men.

No, I need irrefutable evidence that he's selling us out. He's a legacy like me so it will take hard proof that he is a traitor.

"I don't know, man. How would they have gotten to the van?" Colt asks, sounding perplexed.

"That's the problem. We have no idea. So sweep the van, then torch it. If we find nothing, we will move on from there."

Colt is quiet a moment before he breathes out a sigh. "I know you don't want to believe it, but I think someone ratted us out that the route changed."

No shit.

"Let's not jump the gun. Do as I said, and we will meet you back at the clubhouse for a meeting."

I nod to Wrath. He hangs up without waiting for Colt to respond.

He'll be cursing me, but I don't have the patience to deal with him right now.

"Do you think he's right?" Wrath asks after a moment.

I shrug. "That's a future problem for us to deal with. We need to focus on what we have right here and now. The Medina Cartel have been good partners for a while, but that can change at any moment. I hate that we don't have more backup, but as long as everything goes off without a hitch, we should be fine."

He doesn't say another word, but I know he's thinking about it. About who could be a traitor.

Only time will tell.



NATALIE

“The potatoes are cold, Natalie.”

I flinch as he tosses his fork onto his plate. The sound of metal hitting the ceramic echoes throughout the quiet house.

This is how it always is. It’s never good enough for him. Nothing I do ever is.

If I’m lucky, he will berate me for a while before deciding to go out and fuck someone else as my punishment.

He thinks I care.

I don’t.

I feel bad for whatever poor girl gets sucked into his charming persona. She’s as much a victim as I am.

Even so, I don’t feel that bad. If he’s with her, then he’s not here with me. He’s not using his tongue to reprimand me or his fists to teach me lessons. My body will be safe for a little while at least.

“I’m talking to you. Are you even going to apologize?” he spits from across the table.

“I’m sorry,” I apologize robotically, even though I know it won’t make a difference.

I don’t recognize this meek girl I’ve become. I used to be so full of life. Always laughing. Hanging out with the girls from work.

Then I met the man of my dreams.

Or so I thought.

William Danworth.

An investment banker from Chicago here on business.

I suppose that should have been my first red flag. What does an investment banker even do?

Still, he had a fancy watch and wore nice looking clothes. He took me out to the best restaurants and bought me gifts. He was older, but that was part of the appeal. A man nine years my senior wanting me.

When we were together, it was as if I was the only person in his world.

I wanted to make him happy.

So if he said my skirt was a little too short, I stopped wearing it. Then my top showed off too much cleavage. He wanted a woman who only showed the goods to him. So I bought conservative clothes.

I went from being fresh out of high school working a dead-end waitressing job while I tried to figure out my life to being a kept woman. The perfect trophy girlfriend.

I learned quickly not to speak when he was talking to others. To smile and look pretty, but never offer an opinion.

I became a shell of who I used to be.

He isolated me from everyone I knew.

After three months of dating, he convinced me to move out of my apartment with my roommate and move into his place.

After six months, I was no longer working. He didn't want his woman to be a lowly waitress. He promised he would pay for my schooling so I could do something else.

Now a year in, I see all the lies. The way he manipulated me in a way that made me dependent on him.

He no longer hides who he is from me. He doesn't care if I hear his shady business.

“Are you even listening to me?” William scoffs. “Of course not. Such a fucking ditz. I should have known all that

blonde hair was hiding an empty fucking head.”

The plate crashes against the wall as he rages.

I try to control my breathing. I know what’s coming next.

I got lost in my thoughts and now I’ll pay the price.

William pushes the table until it slams into my stomach. I groan, but try to remain upright. If I fall, he won’t stop. He will use his feet.

His punches hurt less than the point of his shoes.

“You stupid fucking bitch. Do you think I enjoy punishing you? You had such potential. I should make you a whore instead of trying to civilize you. You embarrass me.”

I don’t respond. I never do.

Instead, I watch the spittle fly from his mouth as he screams at me. By the end of his tirade, his throat will hurt, which will be my fault too. That’s when his hands will start to fly.

It doesn’t take long.

First, a fist to my temple. It disorients me enough to miss the next one to my stomach. This one tips my chair over, causing my head to crack against the ground.

I already know I’ll have another concussion. This will be my third.

How many before it causes permanent brain damage?

After the first time, when I went to the hospital, I learned it was better to stay home and pray I don’t die rather than risk the trip to the hospital.

They ask too many questions.

Pain lances through my side as I feel his foot connect. It takes everything in me to choke back the sob that wants to come out because noise only enrages him further.

I’m curled into a ball on the floor, trying to protect myself the best I can. It’s a hard thing to do.

Do I protect my stomach so I don't have internal bleeding? Or my head so I don't lose any more brain cells? What about the back? If he hits me too hard there I could be paralyzed.

Lord only knows what he would do if I was unable to follow his directions exactly as he lays out.

Is tonight the night he will finally go so far and kill me? Surely death would be better than this.

He leans down, yelling in my face, but I'm not here in this moment anymore. With every fist or foot to my body, I'm pretending I'm somewhere else. Anywhere, but here being abused by the man who claimed he would love me.

I have no idea how long passes with him throwing verbal abuse in between the physical.

His phone rings, drawing his attention away from me. I wheeze as I attempt to breathe. Thank God for whoever is on the other end of that line.

"Yeah?" He pauses. "Fucking Kingston. Our Lotus contact doesn't know where it is?" William curses before pacing. After several moments of silence, he huffs out a breath. "Fine. I'll handle it."

He comes over to me, leaning down into my face.

"Clean this shit and yourself up. You're a fucking mess."

I listen to the tapping of his shoes as he walks away and flinch when he slams the door. I let the tears silently fall when I hear the lock click.

He's gone.

I lie on the floor for a long while, trying to will myself to move. Breathing has become harder.

He may have even broken a rib.

One thing is painfully obvious. I can't stay here much longer. If I do, he's going to end up killing me.

I don't want to die. This isn't the life I envisioned for myself. How much more can I take?

I need to leave, but I have nowhere to go.

He controls my entire life.

I know he keeps some cash in his dresser drawer. Emergency cash, he called it. I could take it and run.

Where would I go though? Anywhere I try to run, he would likely find me.

If I stay, I die. If I go, I'll probably end up dead too.

A brief memory plays at the edge of my mind. A name that he spoke that instilled fear in him.

Someone who may be worse than the monster I'm running from.

Could he be my savior?

Finally, I manage to stand. Leaning on the wall, I walk slowly to the bedroom.

Thankfully, he only hit me the once in the face. He doesn't like to leave too many bruises where people can see. It ruins his image. I mean, I can only walk into so many doors.

Once in the bedroom, I change as quickly as I can out of the dress he demanded I wear for dinner. I pull on a pair of his sweats and a T-shirt. Nothing of mine would work for what I need to do. Digging into the back of his closet, I pull out the dark hoodie he keeps.

Then I pull it over my head.

I grab the money from the drawer, taking the entire roll. I contemplated only taking a couple hundred, but I may need money to buy this guy's help. Besides, it's not like my punishment will be any less severe if I get caught with less money. The punishment will be the same no matter what.

I take one last look at the bedroom, praying this is the last time I ever see it.

Then I make my way to the front door. I slip on the pair of flats I keep here to check the mail.

Taking one last deep breath, I place my hand on the door.

I still have a chance to change my mind. Once I open this door, I only have one shot to get away from here. He will be notified that the door opened and probably rush back here. Either that or send someone to get me.

I can't stay though.

So I open the door.

Then I run.

I push away the crippling pain, nausea, and fear and run down the hall of the apartment complex. Down the stairs, not willing to wait for the elevator. All the way down and out the front door.

The doorman looks at me like I'm crazy, but it doesn't matter. I see him pick the phone up. I'm sure to call William.

I don't hesitate.

I run right out into the road to flag down the nearest taxi.

Thankfully, one stops right away, and I jump right in.

"I need to get to the Lotus MC. Do you know where that is?" I ask.

He shakes his head.

"Shit. Can you just drive then? Quickly." I look out the back window.

Is anyone following us? Is he going to pull us over and drag me out of the car by my hair?

"Okay, miss." He pulls away and drives.

My body is aching from the abuse and from running. I feel like I might puke. Hopefully I don't though. This guy was nice enough to stop. I don't want to ruin his taxi by throwing up in it.

After several moments, the driver looks back at me. "Do you need help? You have a large knot on the side of your head."

I reach up, touching my temple, wincing. "That's what I'm doing. Getting help. Do you have a phone? Maybe I can search

for them?”

He considers me a moment. “These guys will help you?”

I can’t tell him I’m not sure if they will or not. If I do, he might not take me. Instead, I nod.

“Of course. They are my only chance of getting out of this.”

He nods. “Okay. I’ll take you.”

“Are you going to look the address up?” I question.

He just said he didn’t know where the MC was. Or did I imagine that?

He shakes his head. “I know where their clubhouse is. They don’t take kindly to strangers though. You better be sure.”

“I am,” I tell him.

Inside, I’m frightened. If even this man doesn’t want to drop me off, then maybe this is a bad idea. I don’t have an option anymore though.

He stays quiet as he drives through the city. Soon the lights give way to the open desert. When he finally comes to the stop, it’s not at a building. It’s at a four-way stop.

“Straight down there about a half a mile. This is as close as I’m willing to go.” He points to the right.

I swallow hard. “Thank you. How much do I owe you?”

He shakes his head. “Don’t worry about it. You look like you could use some help.”

I peel off two hundred-dollar bills and drop them onto the front seat. “I appreciate it, but I might as well pay you. It’s not my money anyway. It belongs to the bastard that did this to me.”

He smiles. “Alright. You take care, miss.”

“Thanks,” I say as I get out of the car.

I watch as he drives away before I start walking. Thankfully it’s the evening, so the sun isn’t beating down on

me. On the flipside, it's also dark with no streetlights. Each time a coyote howls, it only makes me more nervous.

It feels like I'll never make it to the clubhouse, but eventually I see the lights up ahead. There's a large fence surrounding a structure. Several flood lights keep it illuminated in the distance.

As I grow closer, I can hear music.

When I finally spot a figure, I feel tears prick my eyes. One step closer to freedom.

"Stop where you are," the figure calls out.

I do as he asks.

"Turn around. We don't want whatever you have," the man calls.

I clear my throat. "I need help. Please."

He says something I can't hear, then he's quiet for several seconds.

"We can't help you, hun. Keep moving," he finally says.

"Please. I need to speak with Kingston."

Another long pause of silence.

"What's your name?"

"Natalie Fairless. Please tell him it's important. I need to speak with him right away." At this point, the tears are falling.

I can feel my hope slipping away. They aren't going to help me.

I'm truly alone.

two

REAPER

“BOSS, WE HAVE SOME CHICK HERE—”

“So get rid of her. Why are you calling me?” I interrupt him.

“She arrived on foot. She sounds shaken up. She’s asking to speak with Kingston. What do you want me to do?”

My body freezes at the sound of my last name.

“What’s her name?”

“Natalie Fairless,” Larry tells me on the phone.

I rub my forehead. “I don’t know the chick.”

“Want me to turn her away?”

“No. I’ll be out in a second.” I hang up.

Standing, I head back toward the door. Larry is one of the prospects guarding the gate. When he called, I abandoned the sweetbutt I had dancing up on me to take his call. I never anticipated some chick showing up at the gate.

She better not be claiming to be pregnant with my kid. I’ll fucking kill the next bitch that tries that shit on me.

She said Kingston.

No one calls me by that name. Hell, other than law enforcement, I don't think anyone even knows me by Harrison Kingston. It's Reaper to them and has been since I was eighteen years old. Not all of the guys here know our legal names, but some of them do. It's a necessity in case any of us gets locked up.

Still, it bothers me that she used that name.

"Coming back for more," Daniela, the sweetbutt from earlier, calls.

I shake my head. "Business. Wrath and Colt. You're with me."

My sergeant at arms and vice president jump up, ignoring the complaints from the girls.

As soon as we are clear of the clubhouse, Colt whispers to me, "What have we got?"

"A girl claiming to need to see me."

He chuckles. "You want a group thing? Gang bang her?"

I smack his chest. "She used my government name."

His laughter dies.

"Fuck," Wrath mutters.

"Yeah. Stay vigilant. I'm not trusting that this isn't a set up."

Once we are through the gate, Larry walks over to me.

"She's about one hundred yards out. I haven't let her any closer."

I nod. "Tell her to come here. I want to see her in the light."

"Alright, miss. You can walk over here now," Larry hollers.

As she walks closer, I try to place her. It's not until she's in the light that I get a real good look at her.

Her blonde hair is pulled out of her face, showcasing the lump on her temple that is already turning a nasty shade. She

has quite possibly the saddest blue eyes I've ever seen. Her lip is bleeding as well, but I don't think she even notices. Her arms are wrapped around her middle as she limps toward us.

Someone did a number on this girl.

The question is, why did she come here?

"Who sent you?" Wrath asks.

When she looks up, she takes us each in. No recognition hits her face when her eyes pass over me.

Who is she?

"No one. I need help. I need to see Kingston." Her voice is raspy.

There's the proof that she has no idea who I am. So how did she get my name?

"What business do you have with him?" I ask.

She meets my eyes. "Honestly? None. I'm not even sure if he will help me. He's my last hope though."

"Why is that?" I keep my tone light, hoping not to spook the girl.

"He has no reason to, but he's the only person who can keep me safe."

"Safe from who?"

"My ex."

She says ex as if it's a question.

"Are you asking or telling me he's your ex?"

"Telling."

I chuckle. "You want us to keep you safe from some ex-boyfriend? Go to the cops. It's their job to protect the citizens. Not us."

I go to turn, but her next words stop me in my tracks.

"William Danworth owns people on the police payroll. If I go to them, they will hand me back over. If I try to run, he will find me. In the year I've been his prisoner, there has only been

one name that caused him any distress. That name is Kingston with the Lotus MC.” She sobs. “Please. Let me plead my case to him. If you don’t, you may as well put the bullet through my head right now because I’m as good as dead. I have money to give you. It’s not much, but you can have it all. All I’m asking for is a chance.”

I turn back slowly, taking her in once again. The bruised temple. The split lip. The way she is quivering as tears pour down her face.

William Danworth.

The bane of my fucking existence.

The one name she could have said to make me pay attention.

“Come here, sweetheart.” My tone is low, dangerous.

Natalie hesitates for a split second before she limps closer until she’s standing in front of me.

“Why did you come here? What makes you think we would help you?”

“Because the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” She licks her lips. “Please, I just can’t do this anymore. Don’t send me back to that hellhole.”

Reaching out, I grab the bottom of her sweater.

“Show me the proof,” I demand.

Her face and the way she holds herself is more than enough proof, but I need to see how bad her injuries are. How deep they go.

She nods slowly. First she takes the money out of the pocket, attempting to hand it to me. When I don’t take it, she holds it out to Wrath.

He doesn’t move either.

“Please. I don’t want it to fly away.” She sounds so broken.

I nod to Wrath, who collects the money from her. She hisses as she peels up the hoodie and drops it on the ground as

soon as it's off. Her breathing is labored. Then she pulls up the hem of her shirt.

Her entire side is in several different stages of bruising. Some are almost healed while others are obviously fresh.

I can feel my eye twitch as my fists flex. Rage, pure fucking rage overtakes my body. Who the fuck does this to a woman?

She lets the T-shirt fall before going to undo her pants. I shake my head.

I rasp, barely holding back my anger. "No need. Get dressed."

She swallows hard and bends down to grab her sweatshirt. Before she can stand, she wobbles, falling to her knees.

Then she groans before throwing up. She's crashing from the adrenaline rush she got from leaving, and if I had to bet, she's probably just now registering the amount of pain she's in from taking a beating.

Once she stops heaving, she attempts to stand again, but her entire body is shaking.

I grit my teeth. There's no way she's faking this. She's not here because he sent her. I feel like she's telling the truth. She ran to me because she is hoping I can help.

"Fuck," I mutter before bending over to help her up.

She's still shaking, her knees threatening to buckle.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." She's crying against my shoulder with her eyes closed.

"Prospect, clean that up," I demand. "What's your name?"

I already know what she told Larry, but I want confirmation that she's not lying.

"Natalie."

"Natalie, can you walk?"

"I don't know. I feel so weak. I think I have a concussion. When he punched me, I fell. My head hit the tile."

“I’m going to pick you up. Can you handle that?” I whisper, realizing her head has to be killing her.

“Yeah.”

Slipping the hoodie back over her head, I help steady her. Then I turn her to face me.

Carefully, I picked her up bridal style, cradling her in my arms.

Her arms go around my neck as she leans against my chest.

“Do you think Kingston will help me?” she whispers.

I take a deep breath. “I will.”



NATALIE

My head is killing me. Every movement makes me nauseous. Still, there is a relief inside of me.

I don’t know who Kingston is, but this man who has taken me in his arms has said he will help me. Hopefully that will be enough.

As we approach the building, I tuck my head into his neck. The lights from the building make me wince.

When the door opens, my entire body tenses. The music is loud. Too loud.

“Prospect,” the man calls.

I cringe as I bury my face into him. If I could only get some silence, maybe I would feel better.

“Yes, Pres?” a male voice calls from next to me.

“Turn down the music. See this girl in my arms? Get her some water, then watch her. No one is to touch her. Understood?”

The demanding tone in my savior’s voice tells me he’s important. I wonder if his name is Preston. The man called him Pres.

As he slowly sets me down on a couch, I reluctantly let him go.

I get my first real good look at him in the light. He’s tall and muscular with dark eyes, short hair and scruff. He has a skull tattoo with red eyes on his neck. He looks intimidating but the way he touches me is anything but.

He places his hands on my knees. “I need to go to church right now. Sit here. Don’t talk to anyone. The prospect will be here in a second with water. Understood?”

I go to nod, but it only makes me dizzy. Instead, I whisper, “Yes.”

“Good girl. It’ll all be okay.”

Then he stands, leaving me. When he turns his head to the side, I catch an outline of a tattoo on his skull.

“Church. Now,” I hear him call out, and then he’s gone.

I close my eyes, trying to get the dizziness under control.

It takes several minutes of breathing, but when the world stops spinning, I open my eyes.

I notice right away that the music is much lower. The room is dimly lit, almost as if they were aiming for an intimate ambiance. There are pool tables in the corner with several men playing. Women are scattered throughout the room wearing little to no clothing. One stands on a table topless, gyrating her hips while several men sit around watching.

“You must be new.” A female approaches, taking a seat next to me on the couch.

“I guess,” I mumble.

“It’s okay. You’ll figure it out. Being a sweetbutt isn’t all that hard. All you have to do is flaunt your stuff and fuck whoever wants to take a bite.”

I swallow hard. “I’m not sleeping with anyone.”

The woman sneers at me. “Of course not. You look like a bum. You need to change your wardrobe.”

“That’s not why I’m here.”

She chuckles. “You think he wants anything but the piece between your legs? Honey, there is only one of two ways a woman can stay here. You either become a sweetbutt or an old lady. Most of these men aren’t interested in getting locked down, which leaves you with one option.”

“Get out of here, Daniela. Pres doesn’t want anyone messing with her.” The man who my savior called prospect walks up, handing me a glass of water.

“I’m only making sure the fresh meat knows the score. No need to get all testy. How about I relieve some of that stress for you?” Daniela moves toward the prospect, her hands going to his chest.

“Go away, Daniela. You know I’m working. Can’t be seen fucking around with you. Now get.”

She gives me another glare before sauntering off toward another male.

“Sorry about her. She’s always had a thing for Reaper. She likes to pretend to stake her claim.” The man sits down next to me.

“Who is Reaper?” I ask.

“Pres. The guy who brought you in.”

“Oh. He didn’t tell me his name.”

He laughs. “I’m not surprised. He’s not a man who likes to divulge too much.”

I give him a small smile. “What’s your name?”

“Jacob, for now.”

“For now?”

“Yeah. Once I get patched in, I’ll be assigned a road name. Then that’s what I’ll be known as. Until then, it’s prospect, or for you, Jacob.”

“Nice to meet you, Jacob. My name is Natalie.”

“Nice to meet you, darling.” A look of concern passes over his face. “Looks like someone did a number on you. Can I get you anything else? An ice pack? Some painkillers?”

I shrug. “I don’t want to be a burden.”

“No. No burden at all. It’s my job to make sure everyone has what they need. Stay here. I’ll be right back.”

I lean back against the couch as Jacob hurries away. I close my eyes. The pounding in my head isn’t getting any better.

When I feel the couch depress next to me, I open my eyes, expecting to see Jacob.

Instead, an older man with the word *member* on his vest.

“You look like a sweet thing. How about you come take a seat on daddy’s lap?”

I move away from him, attempting to stand. He reaches out, grabbing my hand to pull me back down.

I wince as my entire body throbs.

“Please don’t touch me.”

He laughs. “Oh how naïve. Daniela said you were a bit dense. You are here to serve us. So serve me or get out.”

“No,” I whisper.

“No? You see this patch? You came into our clubhouse. Now get on your knees and suck me dry before I add to that wonderful artwork on your face.”

My body starts to shake.

Is this what I traded my life for? One monster for another.

The man lashes out, reaching to grab my hair.

I cry out, “Stop! Don’t touch me.”

Tears are streaming down my face.

three

REAPER

“DO you want me to call Pinky? He’s home with Sunny,” Wrath asks.

“No. We can fill him in later,” I tell him as the rest of the men fill into the room.

Once everyone sits down, I call the meeting to order.

“Tonight, we have a visitor. I don’t know much, but if what she is saying is true, then we need to keep an eye out. Some of you were here during my prospecting days. You’ll remember there were three of us. Myself, William Danworth, and Jimmy Henderson. Shit went down, and only one of us made it through our prospecting year. William supposedly moved to Chicago while Jimmy, well, he paid the price of William’s mistake.”

I look over at the photo I keep in here for Jimmy. He never made it through prospecting, but he was one of my best friends. He was through the thick of it with Wrath and me. Every day I miss the kid.

“Do you think he’s involved with the hits on our runs?” Colt asks.

I haven’t forgotten the suspicious phone call he got earlier.

“I don’t know, but he hates us. Me specifically. It was my decision to cast him out. William wanted me to lie. To cover his mistake with my father. I refused. He was a danger to everyone around him. The only reason he didn’t end up dead is because he knew very little and what happened was truly an accident. My father ran him out of this town. He’s been banished, yet he came back anyway. We need to know why.”

“I can look into him. See if I can track him. Can I speak with the girl to see if she has more information?” Trigger asks.

I know I should allow it, but just the thought of her bruised and broken face has this protectiveness swelling up inside me.

“Not right now. I’m going to need to get her checked out first. I called Evelyn. She had a shift, but she’s getting someone to cover so she can come check her out,” I tell him.

“What are we going to do with her?” Twinkie speaks up.

I consider him a moment.

“What would you have me do?” I ask him.

He looks around. “We could ask if she’d like to become a sweetbutt. She’d be protected and cared for. Or we could set her up somewhere with some protection until we take care of the issue.”

“Why are we even talking about her like it matters?” Twitch retorts. “We don’t know this girl. For all we know, she’s here for her boyfriend. Can we really trust her? Even if she’s not, she is not our responsibility.”

I let them argue back and forth a moment as I consider their ideas.

Being a sweetbutt is out of the question. She’s not the type, and even if she is, I won’t let her be. The thought of another man touching her has me raging mad. It has to be seeing her so broken. I’ve never enjoyed violence against the innocent. The girl is still a kid. She looks like she’s barely eighteen. Hell, she may be younger than eighteen for all I know.

“Trigger, her name is Natalie Fairless. I want date of birth and her listed address in the next five minutes.”

The men quiet down.

“As for you two, she’s not going to be a sweetbutt. Nor are we casting her away. We put this to a vote. I want to keep her here under my protection until I personally ensure that William Danworth will no longer be an issue. Letting him live is a mistake that I allowed to happen. I let my inexperience and former friendship with the man dictate how I laid out the situation to my father that day. He then made a decision based on that explanation. I was a young kid who made a terrible mistake. If it wasn’t for that, she wouldn’t be broken and bruised in the other room. Say Aye if you approve or Nay if you don’t.”

I watch as each man approves my course of action. Not one hesitates telling me that they trust me. It’s a heady feeling.

“Reap, here’s her file.” Trigger hands over the encrypted tablet he keeps on him.

Natalie Marie Fairless. Date of birth March fifteenth, two thousand three. Current Address, Apartment 102 on Weston. It’s The Plaza on the Strip.

She’s just nineteen to my twenty-eight.

A knock on the door makes me frown. Twitch opens the door, letting in an old timer.

“Hey, you might want to get out here, Pres.”

I jump up, making my way to the door.

“Stop! Don’t touch me.”

Her voice cuts through the bullshit clear as day.

I’m moving before anyone can stop me. I push past the men lingering around the room. That’s when I see her. She’s still on the couch where I left her, but Jug is now next to her, his hand in her hair.

“What the fuck is going on out here?” I bellow.

Jug looks up at me. “Trying out the new merchandise. I could do without the bruising, but she looks like she might be a fun lay.”

I move before he can blink, my hand on his wrist still in her hair. He grunts as I squeeze until he lets his hand loosen.

“She is off limits,” I growl, dropping his arm to pull her up into me.

“You making her your old lady?” he asks.

“She’s club business. That’s all you need to know.”

“Am I not part of the club?” Jug stands, making me push Natalie behind me.

“You’re a member, not an officer. All you need to know is that she’s club business and off-limits. If you don’t like that, then feel free to request an audience with church.”

We stand there in a stare-off for a moment before Jug backs down.

“I’m good. I didn’t realize she was off-limits. She’s all yours,” he spits out with a look of disgust.

As soon as he walks away, I face the rest of the room. “Did everyone hear that? She’s off-limits.”

The men all grumble while the women look at her curiously.

I don’t hesitate. I grab her arm, pulling her along with me.

“I should have never left you out here. That’s my fault. You’ll be safe in my room.”

Once at my door, I pull my key out, unlocking it. Then I usher her in.

“The prospect shouldn’t have left you. I’ll have a talk with him. I’m going to lock you in. I’ll be back shortly. I also called a doctor for you. Will you be okay?”

She wrings her hands in front of her. “Please don’t punish Jacob. He was only getting me medicine and an ice pack. It’s my fault.”

I shake my head. Of course she got the prospect to give up his name.

“Don’t worry about him. I’ll be back.”

“Can I take a shower?” She points to my ensuite.

“Sure. There are towels under the sink.”

I walk out of the room, locking the door behind me. After running my hand down my face, I head back to church. Everyone is chatting but quiets when I enter, shutting the door.

“Is she okay?” Wrath asks.

I shake my head. “She’s a mess. You saw the bruises on her body. They aren’t all from tonight. Who knows what this woman has gone through. To answer your question from earlier, Twitch, we don’t know if we can trust her. He may have her conditioned to do whatever he says which includes infiltrating our club. If that happens, I take full responsibility, but you can’t tell me that seeing her like that doesn’t make you want to murder someone. She’s a nineteen-year-old girl who was charmed by the wrong man. A man who wouldn’t be breathing if I had done what needed to be done back then. So we protect her. Teach her what it means to have people at your back. Show her she doesn’t have to be afraid anymore. Anytime any of you see her, be nice to her. Treat her with respect, like you would your mother or sister. If you see anyone giving her trouble, you step in. Understood?”

A round of affirmatives sound out, making me breathe easier.

“Meeting adjourned. Trigger, do a deep dive, and let me know what you find. Tomorrow at eight in the morning, everyone needs to be here. We will decide what to do next.”

I watch as they all leave.

“I’ll work around here a bit more. Keep an eye on things when you can’t.” Wrath keeps his tone low.

“Please do. I trust our men, but they are still outlaws. I don’t want them getting any ideas.”

“You could make her your old lady. That would give her the ultimate protection,” he advises.

I snort. “I’ll never have an old lady. Besides, the poor girl has had enough choices taken away from her. She doesn’t need

to trade one monster for another.”

He shrugs. “The difference is that your monster would be hers to command. Not the other way around.”

He pats my shoulder, heading out of the room. I take a moment before I follow, turning off the light as I shut the door.

“Hey. They said you needed me. Who got hurt this time?” my sister, Evelyn, asks.

“Thanks for coming. She’s in my room.” I start heading down the hall.

“She?” she calls from down the hall.

I wait for her to catch up before continuing. “I need information from her, but she’s pretty beat up. She may be skittish.”

“Who is she?”

I sigh. “I have no idea, but she’s young. Only nineteen years old. She’s been through some shit.”

At my door, I knock before I unlock and open it. Natalie is sitting on the edge of the bed in nothing but a towel.

She looks up at me. “Sorry. I couldn’t stand the idea of putting his clothes back on.”

I grit my teeth. “No problem. I don’t have much that will fit you, but take what you need.”

Evelyn steps into the room behind me. “Pinky’s old lady is about her size. I bet she has some pants that will fit her.”

Natalie jerks in surprise.

“It’s okay. This is the doctor I told you about,” I try to comfort her.

She looks at me. “Okay.”

“How about you step out while I look her over?” Evelyn advises.

“No. We don’t know anything about her. I’m staying.”

I might be choosing to give this girl some trust, but this is my sister. I don't need her taking a knife to her neck or something crazy. In fact, I should have searched her before bringing her to my room. Not that it matters much. It wouldn't take much snooping to find several weapons.

Jesus, this woman already has me making stupid decisions.

Evelyn glares. "She deserves privacy, Harrison."

Natalie's eyes meet mine. "I thought your name was Reaper."

Evelyn chuckles. "I'm sure he'd prefer that. Nope. He was born Harrison Kingston, much to his dismay."

I grimace. Evelyn is a pain in the ass.

"Kingston? You're who I'm looking for?"

Evelyn looks between us. "What do you mean?"

"Enough. I'll face the door, and you can examine her. Then me and Natalie need to have a talk."

Evelyn looks at Natalie as if asking permission. When she nods, Evelyn indicates that I need to turn around. I wait until she sets down her med bag before I comply.

Facing the door, I listen as my sister begins her exam.

"I'll start at your head. Then we will move down from there. Let me know if you feel any discomfort or need a break."

"Okay."

With every hiss from Natalie, my blood boils higher.

"Can you tell me what happened? Where you're hurt?" I hear Evelyn ask.

"We were having dinner. He started yelling at me. He accused me of not paying attention. He punched me in the face. The chair tipped back, making me hit my head on the floor. Then he started to kick me. I don't know how long it lasted. It hurts to breathe. I threw up outside. My head is pounding. I've been getting dizzy and feel weak."

The more she talks, the deeper the urge builds to wrap my hands around his neck and strangle the life out of him becomes. That would be too easy though. After what he's put her through, he needs to feel half the pain she has.

"You have a cut on the back of your head. It's still bleeding a little, but it's not deep. It won't need stitches. I'm going to shine this light in your eyes for a moment. It's going to hurt."

"That's okay."

For several minutes, they are silent other than Evelyn asking Natalie to move here and there.

Then my sister asks, "Do I have any reason to do a pelvic exam? A rape kit?"

As we wait for Natalie's answer, I can feel the tension in the air.

"He didn't rape me tonight."

Finally my control snaps, and my fist hits the wall, causing both girls to gasp.

Tonight.

She didn't say anything about him never raping her. Only not tonight.

"Harrison. You need to calm down. You're scaring her," Evelyn reprimands me.

I turn, ignoring the fact that she's standing naked. Moving closer to her, I slowly raise my hand until I cup her cheek.

"I'm sorry. I won't hurt you. I promise."

Her eyes are closed tight. Her body shaking.

I let my hand drop, moving to my dresser.

Opening a drawer, I grab a T-shirt. Taking it over to her, I pull it over her head, helping her push her arms through until it falls to her knees. Then I move back, grabbing a pair of boxers. Kneeling, I look up at her.

"Use my shoulders to keep your balance."

She finally opens her eyes, looking down at me. Cautiously, she places her hands on my shoulders. Then she lifts one leg. I push the material onto it before she sets it down. Then she lifts the second. Once the material is pulled up over her hips, I help guide her back to sitting.

“Do you need anything else from her?” I ask Evelyn.

“She has some bruised ribs and a concussion. I know you have some painkillers. She can take one every six hours. Someone should stay with her until the concussion lets up. Wake her up every couple of hours to make sure she doesn’t have a brain bleed. Without machines, I can’t tell.”

“I’ll stay with her.”

Evelyn nods. “Got it. I’ll have Sunny bring some clothes for her.”

“That would be helpful. Thank you.”

Evelyn turns to Natalie. “Are you going to be okay? I can stay if you prefer.”

Natalie looks at me a moment. “I’m okay. He said he won’t hurt me. Might be dumb of me, but I believe him.”

Evelyn snorts. “He better not hurt you. If he does, he will have to deal with me.” She gives me a stern look before smiling at Natalie. “If you need anything at all, Natalie, you have him call me. I will come right back over.”

“Thank you. I’m sorry you had to come all the way out here for me.” Natalie looks down at the floor.

“Nonsense. It’s my job. I’ll come back by tomorrow morning to check on you. Try to rest.”

I walk over to the door, letting Evelyn out. I mouth thank you to her, but she only rolls her eyes at me.

Once the door is shut behind me, I turn back to Natalie.

She’s standing as far away from me as possible with her arms wrapped around herself.

“Please sit down and rest.” I motion toward the bed.

She sits slowly, trying to keep her breathing steady. I can tell it hurts her though.

“I didn’t know you were Kingston. I honestly thought it was a first name. I’ve only ever heard him call you that,” she whispers as she folds in on herself, trying to make herself smaller.

I move to kneel in front of her. She startles for a moment but then relaxes.

“You need to rest, but I need some information. Do you feel up to talking about it?”

She gives me a sad smile before looking away. “I’ll tell you everything I know. I have no loyalty to that man. If he ever catches me, I know he will kill me without a thought. What do you want to know?”

“How long has he been here?”

Her voice shakes. “I met him a year ago. He came into the restaurant I was working at and pursued me. He told me he was into investment banking and had recently moved here to start a new firm.” She pauses, frowning. “I have no clue if that’s the truth, but that’s what he said, and I believed him.”

I consider her words. It would make sense that he hasn’t been here that long. He’s been careful not to cross my radar. Most likely because he knows I will kill him.

“Good. That’s very helpful. I know you said before he spoke about me. What did he say?”

Out of the corner of my eye, I watch her fidget, rubbing her fingertips along her palm. As uncomfortable as she is she keeps talking.

“He never talked to me about you. It was more of what he didn’t say. Sometimes he would take calls and I would hear him say your name. He would talk about shipments and men, but sometimes he would say your name and tell whoever was on the other end of the phone to be careful. That you were dangerous and would kill him if you ever found out what they were doing. Other times he would simply curse while saying

your name. I got the vibe that he didn't like you, but more than that, that he's scared of you." She smiles weakly.

"As he should be."

She lifts her chin. "So after he left tonight, I knew I had one chance to get away, and you were my only option."

I nod. "He led you straight to me. I shouldn't tell you this, but I think you deserve to know. I am going to kill him. You signed his death certificate tonight once you crossed through those gates. He will never be able to hurt you again."

Her eyes well up with tears. "I know that should freak me out, but it doesn't. Thank you."

I nod before standing. Going into my bathroom, I grab my stash of pain pills. Grabbing one, I fill the glass next to the sink with water before going back to her. I hand the medicine to her, watching as she takes it without question. Setting the glass on the nightstand, I move her around until I have her settled into my bed with the blankets covering her.

"Go to sleep now. I'll wake you every couple of hours." I brush a piece of hair from her face.

She doesn't flinch from my touch but freezes, and I hate it.

"Where will you sleep?" she whispers as her brows furrow.

I grab the chair next to my desk, turning it around before settling in it.

"Don't worry about me. I'm going to take care of this for you. Now rest."

She nods slowly before closing her eyes.

After a moment of silence, she whispers, "What am I supposed to call you? Reaper? Kingston?"

I consider her words a moment before I speak just as softly, "Harrison. You can call me Harrison."

She hums but otherwise stays silent.

It takes several minutes, but when I watch her body relax into the mattress, I find a little comfort.

She was living with a monster. A man who hurt her every single day. So she did the only thing she could think of. When facing a monster, the best way to defeat one is with a monster of your own.

She didn't realize what coming here would do, but it's in motion now.

William will die by my hand.

I will never let him hurt her or anyone else again.



NATALIE

Waking up in a strange bed is a weird feeling. Immediately, my heart starts to race while my mind tries to work through what is going on.

For the past year, I haven't done anything without William's approval. So to not be home in his bed where I have been for far too long has my nerves going haywire.

I take a few minutes to calm my breathing before I sit up and look around.

I'm alone.

Harrison stayed with me all night. I know because he woke me every two hours to check on me, then made me take pills once. I'm not sure how long he's been gone, but the sun shining through the window is enough to tell me that it's not early morning.

I look around again, but there's no clock. Last night I was too out of it to take in the room, but now in the daylight, I can see what I didn't notice before.

The room isn't messy like I would have thought. It's actually fairly neat. There are some pictures on the wall. Even a calendar with naked women on motorcycles.

Then there is the smell. I would expect a man's room to smell musty. Sweaty even.

The way William's clothes often smelled if I didn't clean them quick enough.

Not Harrison's room.

Instead it smells of bourbon, wood, and motor oil. It sounds like a unique combination, but it oddly works.

Slowly, I stand from the bed. My ribs still ache, but it doesn't hurt as much as it did last night. My head throbs, but I can handle it. I always do.

After using the bathroom and rinsing my mouth out with water from the sink, I take a long look in the mirror.

I look like one of the posters for domestic violence. My eye is purple and I have a huge knot on my right temple. I move my hands to feel at the back of my head. I can feel the dried blood scabbed over into my hair.

Part of me wants to wash it out, but the other part doesn't want to bleed again.

So instead, I find the hair tie I left in the bathroom the night before and carefully pull my hair back out of my face.

It will have to do for now.

Making my way back into the bedroom, I wonder what I should do next. He didn't tell me to stay in here, but going back out in that main room again doesn't seem very smart. Especially not after last night.

Still, my stomach is growling. I never ate dinner last night. I'd also like some pain reliever, but I didn't see it sitting anywhere.

I wait five minutes before deciding to at least check the hall. Maybe there will be someone who can tell me where to find my host.

When I go to the door, my heart stops. It's locked.

I squeeze my eyes shut as I fight back the panic. I'm not back at William's. My nails dig into my palms as I try to center myself.

It takes me a second to resume breathing. That's when I realize while it is locked, I can unlock it from my side.

I need to thank Harrison for thinking to lock me in. I'm sure he did it to keep anyone from happening upon me. At least, I hope so.

Opening the door, I look both ways down the hall. Everything is quiet.

I look down at my outfit and cringe. I'm wearing an old T-shirt with the MC name on it and a pair of Harrison's boxers. I look like a total groupie.

Still, the smell of bacon lures me down the hall. When I make it to the main room, I glance around.

Unlike the night before, it is empty now. I expected to see men hungover, sleeping off the night before. Maybe even trash all over. They had been pretty rowdy last night.

Instead, I find Jacob sweeping the floor while some of the women from the night before are straightening the furniture and throwing away any trash.

Hesitantly I shift from foot to foot. Do I make myself known, or do I turn back around and hide?

"What are you still doing here?" The woman from the night before frowns.

With her attention on me, I fight the urge to flee. Everything in me is screaming to run and hide.

Jacob startles before looking over at me. "Natalie. Pres told me to make sure you got food when you woke up. Come with me."

Reluctantly I follow him just to get away from the she-devil.

The woman sneers at me as Jacob leads me away from them into another room.

That's when I see it. A plate filled with bacon and eggs.

"I can heat it up for you if you want. I don't cook well, and Honk's old lady had to get to work. She waited as long as she could for you."

I nod. "It's fine as is. Is this all for me?"

"Yep. Pres said you'd be due for another round of painkillers too. Do you want water or juice? I could get you a Coke, but he said to make sure you hydrate."

I quirk a brow. "Orange juice is fine if you have it. Do you always do what he says?"

He smiles as he moves to get the juice. "Of course. He's the boss around here. Keeps all the men in line and takes care of us. If you are going to be part of the club, you have to do as he says."

I swallow hard. "I don't think I'm meant to be part of the club. I'm only a temporary guest."

He shrugs as he pushes the plate and glass across the counter to me.

"Eat up. Pres will be back shortly. He said you're not a prisoner, but he wanted me to ask you to stay inside. At least until he gets back."

"Fair enough."

Jacob stands with me as I eat. At first, he was silent, but then I started asking him questions about himself and before I knew it, I had him chatting away.

"Are you talking the poor girl's ear off?" I jump and wince in pain as I spin toward the voice as fast as my aching head will let me.

Then I let out a breath of relief.

Evelyn, the doctor from the night before, stands in front of me.

“I’m sorry, Natalie.” Jacob looks down at his feet.

“No. Don’t be. He was entertaining me. I enjoyed talking with you, Jacob. Please don’t feel bad.”

He gives me a small smile. “I better get back to cleaning. Evelyn will take care of you. If you need me, you know where to find me.”

I watch as he leaves the kitchen. I eat the last piece of bacon before taking my plate to the sink. I’m about to wash it when Evelyn chuckles.

“Leave the dish. That’s the sweetbutts’ job. Let’s go check you out. Plus, I have some clothes for you.”

I give her a grateful smile as I follow her out of the kitchen.

“I thought you said someone else was going to come with you,” I whisper to her, keeping my eye on our surroundings.

“Sunny wanted to come, but the baby was up all night with a cold, so she thought it best to stay home. She will be by eventually to see you.”

“Oh,” I murmur.

As we walk through the main room, the woman from the night before frowns at me, giving me a dirty look.

“Watch it, Daniela. That looks a lot like jealousy. You know what happens to a jealous sweetbutt.”

The woman doesn’t respond but averts her gaze.

As I trail behind Evelyn, I whisper, “What happens?”

She laughs again. “Sweetbutts have one job only. To please the men of this club in any way they see fit. Now they aren’t forced, but it’s in their best interest to do as they are asked. If they don’t, they will be asked to leave. Unless one of the men decides to take them as their old lady. As a sweetbutt, there is no room for jealousy. No claim on any of the men. So if you show the slightest hint of jealousy, you’re booted. Daniela knows that, yet she is still jealous of anyone my brother shows attention to. She has always had it in her mind that he will one

day wake up and decide to make her his old lady. Little does she know, my brother doesn't want an old lady. The club is his main focus."

She gestures for me to enter Harrison's room in front of her. Once inside, I turn to her.

"Old lady, like on the television shows?" I ask, thinking of a popular biker show I've seen advertised.

Evelyn nods. "Basically. A lot of that shit isn't true, but yeah. An old lady is like a wife."

I take a seat on the edge of the bed, gnawing at my bottom lip with my teeth.

"I'm not an old lady. Does that mean I have to be one of them? I don't want anyone to touch me." I stare at the floor.

Evelyn moves to my side, taking my hand. "You don't have to be a sweetbutt. You're under Harrison's protection. He won't let anyone hurt you."

"I want to believe that, but it's hard. It's like I used to be this carefree girl just trying to make it, and now I can't trust my own instincts. What if they are wrong again? What if I made a mistake coming here?"

Evelyn chooses her words carefully. "I can't say for certain that you made the right decisions. No one can. All I can tell you is that I know my brother. He might look a little rough around the edges and run with men who do questionable things, but he would never do the things that have obviously been done to you. He's a good man, even if he doesn't always do good things."

"He's my last hope. If William finds me, I have no doubts that he will kill me."

"We won't let that happen. Now how about I check out your head and then we can get you all changed."

I nod, letting her take over, checking me out. It only takes a few minutes, but she seems happy with what she finds.

"I think you have a concussion, but you are doing better now. There is a nasty scab on the back of your head, so be

careful. Head wounds tend to bleed a lot, so if you nick it before it's healed, it may start bleeding again. I would maybe try to avoid washing your hair for a day or two. Bright side, the knot on your temple has already gone down considerably," Evelyn informs me.

I give her a small smile. I know she means well, but I already knew all of this. After all, this isn't my first dance with the devil.

"I borrowed some clothes from Sunny. She's Pinky's wife, by the way. He's one of Harrison's brothers. She said you can keep anything you like. She also said if they fit, she can go through her things some more and make you a care bag."

She hands me a pair of black leggings and a T-shirt. I take them, undressing right there. No need to go hide in the bathroom when she has already seen it all. The pants are a bit loose, but not too bad. The shirt hangs on my frame. I know I've lost a bit of weight over the past year, but I guess I didn't realize how much.

"I also brought some makeup in case you wanted it. You don't need to use it, but it's here, along with a toothbrush and a hairbrush. I'm going to go get you some underwear when the stores open. "

"This is all so kind of you. You really didn't need to do all of this," I tell her.

She gives me a friendly smile. "Of course I did. You're a guest here. It's what we do. How we show our hospitality. Once everything is settled, I'll even help you get set up with a place to stay and a job. You aren't alone anymore, Natalie. We won't abandon you."

I feel my eyes well up with tears. I've felt alone for so long that I forgot what it was like to have a friend, if that's what Evelyn is.

"Thank you," I whisper. "Do you think you could help me with some makeup? I haven't worn any in a while."

The truth is, William didn't like me to wear makeup. He said it made me look like a slut. The only time he would allow

it was when he made me go to an event with him. Then he would hire a professional. When we would arrive home after the event, he would punish me for letting them make me look like a whore. It was a vicious cycle.

“Of course, honey. Come have a seat.”

I decide right then and there that I like Evelyn. Not because she doesn't make me feel alone, but because there isn't a hint of pity in her voice or gaze. She knows I've been through hell, but she's not walking around on eggshells. I don't know if I could handle it if she did.

“I am safe here, right?” I ask after a moment.

I vaguely remember asking last night, but I can't help but ask again.

Evelyn leans back, looking me in the eye.

“I know the Lotus men seem intimidating. It's all the tattoos, brawn, and facial hair. They have to look fierce to take care of business. At the core though, they are good men. Especially since my brother took over. My father was a decent man, but he was selfish. Harrison is a good guy. He makes decisions with his head and heart. He truly cares about his men and those under his care, which includes you now. There isn't a safer place for you than here. Reaper gave the order. The men listened. You will be protected by each and every member until their dying breath. You can count on that.”

“What about you? How do you fit in?” I ask softly.

She smiles. “I'm the sister of the president, daughter of the former president. I grew up in the clubhouse. Most of the men see me as a little sister or cousin. They treat me as such too. It sucks though. Dating is a pain in the ass.”

I've never been around people like Harrison and Evelyn and it's slightly overwhelming. They live in a completely different world that I don't understand. But for some reason, I want to.

“Would you want to date one of them?”

She snorts. “Maybe a visiting member, but honestly, they are usually either so scared of my brother or all about the easy pussy that I wouldn’t waste my breath.”

“Oh. I see. Jacob seems nice,” I tell her.

“Oh, he is. He’s a prospect though. The gopher of the group. Usually they have several, but Edge got patched in a couple months ago and they haven’t had any new requests for prospecting yet. He and Larry are the only two. Besides, he’s a bit young for me. I like older men. Don’t tell my brother though.” She winks.

“Really? How old are you?”

“Oh I’m twenty-six. Jacob is twenty-one, so not that much younger, but I find older men to have more maturity. Jacob will make some girl a great old man one day, but he has some growing to do.”

I laugh, then freeze. That’s the first time I’ve laughed in a really long time.

“Sorry, that surprised me,” I tell her. “I used to think I wanted an older man too. That’s how I got with William. He was older and well put together. He was kind to me. I didn’t even realize what he was doing until it was too late.”

She hesitates before asking, “What about your family?”

I give her a sad smile. “Not involved in my life. I had some friends, but after blowing them off so many times, they dropped me too. I really let him take over my life.”

Evelyn hugs me. Even with her being mindful of my ribs, it takes my breath away. “You have your life back now. We won’t let that happen again.”

“We?” I ask as I awkwardly pat her back.

She pulls back, cupping my face. Her touch is gentle, but it still hurts. “We are best friends now. I’ll never let you blow me off. If any man tries to fuck with you, you will have me and the full weight of the MC behind you.”

My eyes grow teary. “I’d like that very much.”

four

REAPER

SHIT IS GOING TO HELL.

The more I think about it, the more I know that William is involved somehow. He's stayed under the radar though. While we reside in Nye County, just outside of Las Vegas, we don't pay too close attention to what actually happens in Vegas. There are too many tourists.

Somehow, William was able to use that as a cover.

I have Trigger looking into shit, but this is really bothering me. Why can't we find him?

I've had my men out all day looking for any trace of him.

He's abandoned the condo he shared with Natalie. That was the first place we looked. Natalie was sure he would come after her, but it looks like all he did was pack his things hastily and leave. It makes me wonder about her. Was she really that important to him? Does he have other women scattered throughout the city?

I want to ask Natalie more, but I'm also afraid to trigger her. While she did well last night, she's in a delicate place right now, and I don't want to overwhelm her. She was with my sister earlier. Evelyn called to give me an update. It seems

my sister has adopted Natalie as one of her own. Still, she's not safe as long as William is still on the loose.

My men are out looking for him, but we ran into a dead end. I know the fucker hasn't left yet. He's like a cockroach. He won't die until I see his guts scattered on the floor.

I should be out there with them, but the pretty young thing down the hall has me sitting here in church waiting for news. I don't trust some of the old timers, and I never know when they will make themselves known and show up. They were loyal to my father, but not necessarily me. They didn't take too kindly to me switching things up when I took over after my father's untimely demise. We're still on the wrong side of the law but not on the 1% side anymore. Some have even whispered that I'm the reason he died. It's bullshit, but I knew I would have my work cut out for me when I took over.

A knock at the door draws my attention.

"Reap, I got the footage you asked for."

Trigger, my main tech guy, comes in bringing a laptop.

"What did you find?"

He queues up the footage before placing it in front of me. Then he leans against the wall behind me.

"I spliced them together, cutting out anything that wasn't relevant."

I press play.

The first thing I see is Natalie. She's literally running, her hands holding her middle. She nearly bowls over the doorman. The same doorman who then picks up the phone, dialing.

He's not calling the police.

It only takes five minutes for William to walk through the door. Anger flares inside.

It's not that I didn't believe her, but seeing him makes it all the more real.

I should have killed him a long time ago, but my conscience refused to allow me to. For some reason, I still felt

a smidge of loyalty to him. After all, he was supposed to be my brother one day.

William stops to talk to the doorman, who then leads him to the security desk. He shows him something on it.

I pause it.

“What are they looking at?” I ask Trigger.

He moves forward, clicking open a new file before pressing play.

This one shows the outside of the building. I watch as Natalie rushes to a cab.

“I believe he was getting the information for the cab so he could track her,” Trigger adds.

I nod, clicking back to the first video. William pulls his phone out, calling someone before stalking out of the building.

“Keep watching. I have some other footage to show you, but I thought you’d want to see all of this first.”

I do as he asks, noting the video cuts as if it’s missing a portion. The time stamp now reads hours later. William is rushing back inside, ignoring his doorman. The footage cuts again to show William leaving the building with a large duffel bag.

“He’s not seen again at this building. I believe he knows Natalie is here.” Trigger moves closer, closing the two videos before opening another.

This one shows a collection of videos showing the cab Natalie must be in traveling out of the city toward our compound. After the cab leaves the last camera, it’s gone for a while before it comes back. Soon after, it picks up another fare.

“I believe he traced her this way and saw that she left town our way and assumed she came to us. The other option is that he has a mole inside.”

I run my hand down my face. “You really think he could have an inside man?”

I ask the question, but it confirms my own suspicions.

Colt was on the phone about the same time as William in the video. Did he call him to tell him what we were doing?

Colt wasn't here when William was. He might not know what he did.

Trigger hesitates, "We both know we've been having some issues with shipments coming missing or being short. Now the girl shows up, bringing back a past problem." He shakes his head. "I don't believe in coincidences. I think he's the reason we have been having issues, and how else would he know how to cause us issues than by having someone feeding him information from the inside."

"Could be a sweetbutt," I tell him.

He shakes his head. "Can't be. We don't talk business with them. Nor with the old ladies."

"Some men's lips get loose when their dick is getting sucked."

"Sure, but none of the men who we have on this. My gut says it's an inside man. I've been running tracks on each one. So far nothing."

"I need you to clear Wrath. I trust him, but I need to be sure. Then we bring him in and figure out what the fuck is going on. For now, this stays between us."

He nods. "One more thing. I don't think William is working alone. I ran traces on the numbers he's been calling from his phone. Some of them are burners with a seven-seven-five area code. They may be working with the Reno Renegades."

"Good work, Trigger. Keep following up. I'll figure out what to do about it."

As he leaves, I let out a sigh.

I didn't need this shit on our doorstep right now. Not while we are brokering a new deal with the Medina Cartel.

"Fuck."

A squeak at the door catches my attention.

I look up to find Natalie standing there looking like a scared mouse.

I can never catch a break.



NATALIE

“Fuck.” His voice startles me, making me squeak.

I don’t mean to bother him, but when I walked by to go to the kitchen, I saw him sitting here. I wanted to see if he was okay or if he had any news about when I could leave.

I didn’t expect to find him so angry.

“Natalie, sorry. You shouldn’t be in here. We don’t allow women in church.”

“I never understood why they called it church on those biker shows,” I whisper the first thing that pops into my head.

He chuckles. “It’s where all the important shit happens. Rules are made, judgments handed out, and even blessings for new beginnings. It’s a sacred place.”

“So why don’t you want women in it?” I ask as I lean against the doorframe, making sure not to step inside.

He considers that a moment. “It’s for members. I’ve never actually had a woman come and ask to be a member. Maybe if one did, then she would be allowed inside, but we like to keep business away from our old ladies. The sweetbutts don’t need to know business. Less chance they will talk to the wrong person.”

I frown, scrunching my nose in disgust. “You treat them like they are whores.”

He sighs, standing before coming to my side. I let him lead me out as he shuts the door behind him, locking it with a key.

“They know the score when they come here. They agree to share their bodies with the men. In exchange, we give them food, a place to sleep, alcohol, sometimes drugs. Whatever they want really.”

“Other than respect.”

He growls. “We don’t disrespect women. The sweetbutts have their place here. If they want to leave, they know where the door is. You might not like the way we treat them, but that’s only because you weren’t raised in this lifestyle. Maybe don’t judge the people who are saving your ass.”

I swallow hard and look away. “I suppose you are right. I’ll withhold my judgment on your people. I am grateful that you decided to help me.”

He grunts, not exactly saying anything else as he leads me to the kitchen.

“I assume you were hungry, and that is why you aren’t holed up in my room.” His back is to me as he rummages through the fridge.

I flinch at his tone. He’s pissed. My first instinct is to pacify him.

“I’m sorry. I’ll go back to the room. I don’t need anything.”

My voice is soft, broken even. I turn to leave, but he’s at my side in an instant. His hand on my arm makes me flinch, waiting for the hit.

“Shit.” He drops my arm, stepping back. “I’m not going to hurt you. You are safe here. If anyone dares lay a hand on you, they will deal with me. You understand that, right?”

I give him a small nod, but it’s a lie. How could I know that? William was never supposed to hit me either, but he

changed his ways. These men are more violent on the outside, so wouldn't that make their true colors deadly?

Harrison steps closer, slowly bringing his hand up to cup my face.

"I shouldn't have gotten angry with you. I'm not mad at you. It annoys me you think so poorly of me and my men, but I'm not mad. It only makes me want to show you the truth about us. As for you not needing anything, that's bullshit. I can hear your stomach growling. You will never have to make yourself smaller to make any man feel bigger again. I promise. So if you are hungry, you bring that pretty little ass into this kitchen and you get yourself some food. If anyone says anything to you, tell them to fuck off. You don't bow to any of them. Do you understand me?"

My eyes well up with tears. "I won't be a sweetbutt. I-I can't. Men to-touching me..." I shiver at the thought, my eyes falling closed.

They pop open when I feel his forehead fall to mine.

"No one will touch you except me. I will only touch you when it is absolutely necessary. As for you being a sweetbutt, I wouldn't let you even if you wanted to," he rasps.

"This touch is necessary?" I whisper.

His eyes bore into mine. "This touch is to get my point across. To make you see that not every man who touches you will do so to harm you. This is to help you heal."

The next question is a bit harder to ask, but I still manage.

"Why wouldn't you let me be a sweetbutt?" I refuse to be one, but I don't like that he wouldn't let me if I wanted to.

"Because sweetheart. You aren't sweetbutt material."

I frown, feeling like that's somehow an insult. Am I not pretty enough? Good enough? Is it because I'm broken? Why am I so caught up in his reasoning when it's in my favor?

"Get those thoughts out of your head, Natalie. The reason you aren't sweetbutt material is because I have a feeling you would make an amazing old lady. There is something about

you that screams out, that you are the type of girl you would take home to your family and not the kind you would use for a night of fun. I won't sully your reputation by allowing you to sleep with all the men here when I know, given half a chance one of them would snap you up and make you theirs." A flash of something passes behind his eyes, but he hides it quickly. "Until this is resolved no one will be claiming you. So stay away from my men and I will keep them away from you."

I nod, loving the feel of his hand against my skin.

When the door flies open, I jump forward, pressing myself to Harrison. He grunts at the impact but wraps an arm around me while his other is pointed at the door. When I look over my shoulder, I see he has a gun out and pointed at the person who walked in.

Daniela.

"Jesus, Reaper. Put the gun away," Daniela demands.

"Fuck you, Daniela. What are you doing slamming my doors around like you own the place? You better start treating this place with more respect or else you will find yourself disinvited."

She glares at me. "What are you doing with the little damaged girl? Need me to find her some juice?"

"Daniela, I am only going to say this once, so heed the warning. You will leave Natalie alone and stop talking shit. I will not put up with your shit. You might have grown up here, but you chose the position you did. If you don't like it anymore, you know where the door is."

She scoffs, "Whatever. When you are done playing house, you'll know where to find me."

She stalks out, but my heart is still racing.

I'm not even scared of her, but my body is conditioned to react to loud noises. I hate that I feel this way. I wish I could make it stop.

Harrison slowly lowers his arm, his gun finding its way back to the holster on his hip.

“You okay?” he asks in a low tone.

I step back from him, feeling embarrassed at having clutched to him so quickly.

“I’m sorry.”

The sound from his chest shows his exasperation.

“Stop apologizing. You have nothing to be sorry for. If Daniela causes any problems, let me know. Now how about I make you a sandwich?”

As he sets about his task, not waiting for an answer, I watch him closely.

He makes me feel safe, but can I trust him?

Even if I can, there’s a more important question I need answered.

Am I able to trust myself?

five

REAPER

AFTER MAKING both of us sandwiches, I grabbed a bag of chips and Natalie grabbed us both drinks and followed me to my room.

“Tell me about yourself,” I say as I take a bite of my food.

“What do you want to know?” she asks cautiously as she picks up a chip.

“Anything you want to tell me.”

Natalie tilts her head to the side as she chews, studying me. “You really mean that, don’t you?”

I nod. “I do and I don’t want any of those fake bullshit answers either.”

“Well, I’m nineteen. I graduated last May. Before William, I was a waitress.”

“Any family?”

“No.” She shakes her head.

“What’s your favorite color?”

Natalie looks at me, clearly surprised by the question. As much as I want to jump into the William discussion, I want her

to relax first.

“Light blue. Like the sky.”

“Good taste. Is there anything you want around here? Favorite food? Tampons? Hell, shit to paint your face?”

Natalie looks down as a blush covers her cheeks. “I’m okay. You don’t have to go out of your way for me.”

“That’s not what I asked. I’m offering, so take it.”

“I’m not sure I know how to wear makeup. I wasn’t very good at it before William, but after him...well, he made me feel like wearing it was a sin. Evelyn brought me a little bit though,” she says quietly. “My favorite food is really anything fresh. You probably won’t believe me, but I love those fruit and veggie trays. Salads, sandwiches, honestly, anything that’s not hot.” She frowns. “William hated that.”

“Then it’s a good thing William isn’t around anymore then, isn’t it?” I say as I make a mental grocery list of things to pick up for her. If she wants rabbit food, I’ll stock the entire kitchen so she’s never out of options.

“Would you be up to talking about William?”

“Do I want to?” she sighs. “No. Will I though? Yes. I know it needs to be done. I don’t want to wear out my welcome.”

“You’re not going to wear out your welcome,” I scold.

“What do you want to know about William?”

“You said you met him at the restaurant you worked at. Tell me more about that.”

Natalie shrugs. “Classic story, really. Boy walks into where the girl works, keeps showing up until he convinces her to go out with him on a date. By the fourth date, he convinced me to move in with him. Honestly, I couldn’t say no because his place was nicer, and I really needed to save money. Then it was like I woke up one day and my independence was gone.”

“How so?”

Natalie sets her plate off to the side and wraps her arms around her middle. “He convinced me I didn’t need a job, so I

quit. He didn't like what I wore, so he bought me an entire new wardrobe without asking and threw away what little clothes I brought with me." She bites her lip, looking away. "He decided everything for me. Unfortunately, I went along with it because I was convinced that I loved him and he knew what was best." She laughs sadly.

"You know it's not your fault, right? He preyed on you," I point out. "Did you ever overhear anything that might be helpful? Do you know where he goes or his schedule? Anything."

"He left every morning at eight a.m. to go to work. He always wore a suit. I think that's why I believed him for so long about being an investment banker. He ordered lunch from Vera's every day. He's a creature of habit for the most part. About twice a week, he would come home late, but on the other days, he would come home at six and expect dinner on the table by six fifteen. When need be, he would take me out to dinners with him to make him look good." She shakes her head. "I never understood what they talked about and I never spoke. He was very adamant that I be seen, not heard. If I deviated from that well, I'm sure you could guess what would happen."

"I bet I can," I mumble under my breath. "Keep going."

Natalie's brows furrow as she thinks back. "Honestly, I don't know. He took a lot of private phone calls in his office. Sometimes he would call for me to get him a pen and paper if he happened to answer a call when we were out. I always carried some in my purse after the first time he berated me for not being prepared. During a couple of those is when I heard your name mentioned. Sometimes, like the other night, he would answer the phone and then tear out of the house like the world was ending. When that happened, I would never know if he would be back in five minutes or be gone for five days. Honestly, Harrison, I'm sorry, but I know nothing."

"Did you have access to his bank accounts or a cell phone?"

Natalie shakes her head. “No. He made me use a food delivery service. I would make a list of things, and he would place the order. The only number I had in my phone was his and the building managers in case of emergencies.”

My jaw clenches. William Danworth kept her locked up as if she was a prisoner.

“You know none of what you’ve said is normal, right?”

Natalie smiles weakly but doesn’t say anything.

God, what I would do to go back in time and meet her first. I wish I could have met her before he beat her down into submission.

“I wasn’t allowed in his office,” she says, pulling me out of my thoughts. “But one day he called and asked me to go in there for him. He needed a number he wrote down that was on a sticky note.” She licks her lips. “I don’t know what it was, but it wasn’t a phone number. I remember it if it helps.”

“What was it?”

“It was nine numbers. 123354897.” She shrugs. “I have no idea what it was for, but he asked me to shred the note after I gave it to him.”

I grab a receipt and pen off the dresser and write down the digits. I have no clue what they could be for, but I’ll pass it along to Trigger.

“This could be helpful. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’m sorry I’m not much more help.”

“You’re fine. I promise.” I take in Natalie’s heavy eyes and stand. “How about you take a nap and I’ll check on you later, okay?”

“Sounds good,” she mumbles as she lays down, making herself comfortable.

I force myself to leave the room, even though all I want to do is crawl into bed with her to keep the nightmares away.



NATALIE

I hear a knock on the door and pause the TV. Listening, I wait to see if they knock again. With how many people are coming and going out of here, I really don't want to get up only to find out it's for one of the other rooms.

Knock. Knock.

"Coming," I say as I stand. Opening the door, I can't help but smile. "Hey, what are you doing here?"

"I had some time off, and I decided to stop by and see how you were." Evelyn smiles as she steps into the room.

"You didn't have to do that," I tell her, even though I'm thankful to see her.

I've been here for a little bit. I'm not exactly comfortable. It's like I exchanged one tense situation for another. Don't get me wrong, Harrison and Jacob have made me feel welcome. It's just everyone else. The main room is a little overwhelming with the amount of people coming and going.

Ever since Harrison laid down the law with that one girl, no one's given me a hard time, but then again, I've made myself pretty scarce. I try to stay out of their way.

"I love this show." She smiles at the TV. "Have you seen it all?"

"No, I'm just starting."

"I'm a huge Gilmore Girls fan. Team Jess all the way."

"I have no idea what that means." I laugh.

“You will.” She winks as she holds out a bag. “I didn’t know what you were doing to keep busy, so I brought you a couple of romance and thriller books.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Have you eaten yet?”

“No.” I shake my head.

“Come on, let’s go find something to eat and maybe I can introduce you to some of the members.”

I follow her out of the bedroom and make sure to shut the door behind me.

We make our way into the main room and I see women and club members milling around. Some play pool while others socialize. There’s even a man groping a woman in the corner. I turn my head away.

I can’t imagine doing that for anyone to see. William wouldn’t even hold my hand in public. The most he did was kiss my cheek or place his hand on my lower back.

I bet Harrison would kiss his woman without a care of who would see.

“Hey, you with me?” Evelyn says, pulling me out of my head.

“Yeah, sorry.”

“It’s a little overwhelming out there, right?” she says as we walk into the kitchen.

“Just a little.”

“You’ll get used to it. I promise. Take a seat.”

I do as she says as she moves around the kitchen and starts pulling different things out of the fridge. My breath catches as I take in everything. Cold meats and cheese to go on crackers. Various veggies with dipping sauces.

I can’t believe he did this.

Harrison actually listened to me. I know buying food that I like isn’t anything, but to me it means so much. No one has

ever done anything like this for me.

What does it mean when the bare minimum exceeds my expectations? A little voice whispers in the back of my mind.

Clearing my throat, I push back the tears that want to fall. “This looks great.”

“Doesn’t it? I love shit like this. I’m surprised they even have it here. The men aren’t known for enjoying healthier foods. The girls just eat whatever they can get.”

“I love it too.” My cheeks heat at the knowledge that Harrison really did do it just for me. “So how have you been since I last saw you? How’s work?” I change the subject quickly.

“Ugh,” she groans. “I had this couple come into the ER last night. They decided to randomly spice up their sex life.”

“And that’s a bad thing?”

“It is when you decide to use a miniature Christmas tree decoration as a butt plug, and it slips too far inside because it doesn’t have a base and it gets stuck,” she deadpans, making me choke on a cracker.

Evelyn pounds on my back. “Please don’t make me do CPR before I have to go back in later.”

“I’m good.” I wave her away. “I’m sorry. I can’t believe someone would do that.”

“Oh honey, people use crazy shit all the time as sex toys when they really shouldn’t. If you ask me, you should have to take an IQ test before having sex just to prevent shit like this from happening.”

“I don’t know if that would help. I’ve known some pretty intelligent people who have done some incredibly stupid things.”

“Too true.”

We fall silent and snack. Someone from the main room hits something. It makes such a loud noise that I can’t help but flinch.

“How are you holding up?” she asks, her tone light.

“I’m okay.” I force a smile as I dip a piece of cauliflower into some ranch dressing.

“Can I be blunt?”

“Of course.”

Evelyn wipes her hands off and turns, giving me her complete attention. “I don’t know what all you went through, and honestly, I don’t want to know. I don’t have time to go to jail, and I’m sure it would tempt me if I knew.” She takes a deep breath. “But what I do know is that you went through something really fucking traumatic. Abuse, physical or verbal, is never okay, and tell me if I’m wrong, but I’m guessing it went on for quite a while.”

I nod, unable to speak.

“Now, this is just my opinion, but I think you might want to talk to someone. They would teach you ways to manage your reactions and just learn to live again. You aren’t who you were a year ago and they will give you the tools you need to find your new normal. Therapy is hard but worth it. If you don’t, I’m afraid that the trauma will just eat at you and follow you around. I don’t know about you, but I really don’t want that to happen to you.”

“I don’t either,” I whisper softly as I run my finger over the countertop. “It sounds good and well, but I don’t know if I’m staying around here. I have so many things I have to figure out, like a job and a place to live. I don’t know if I can even afford therapy.”

“We both know you aren’t going anywhere right now. If you want, I can set you up with someone. I know someone who does free therapy to victims of domestic violence. All you have to do is say yes.”

“Can I think about it?”

A look I can’t decipher crosses her face before she smiles. “Of course.”

“Hey, is it okay if I grab a drink, or is it a bad time?”

We both turn and look at a woman standing at the edge of the kitchen. She has on short shorts and a white tank top. Her dark brown hair hits right below her shoulders and she has half of it pulled back with pieces framing her face. Something about her dark hair and tan skin really makes her blue eyes pop. She's beautiful.

"Of course." I smile, thankful for her appearance. I know Evelyn will drop the subject now that it's not just us.

"How are you, Tara?" Evelyn asks.

"I can't complain. You?"

"You know how it is." Evelyn rolls her eyes before pointing at me. "Have you met Natalie yet?"

Tara eyes me as she makes her way to the fridge and pulls out a pitcher of tea. "No, I was actually gone when you showed up, but I've heard about you."

"All good things, I hope," I quip.

Tara smiles. "You could say that. Would you like any sweet tea?"

"No thank you," Evelyn and I say in unison.

Tara smiles at us. "I better get back in there," she nods toward the main room. "It was nice meeting you."

"Same," I say softly as she leaves.

"It will get easier, you know." Evelyn reaches out, grabbing my hand.

"Will it?"

"It will with a little time and therapy." Evelyn smirks, making me roll my eyes.

For some reason, I have a feeling she won't let this go until I give in.

six

NATALIE

“MORNING,” I tell Jacob as I enter the main area.

For the first time since I’ve been here, no one besides him is lingering around.

“Hey, how did you sleep?”

“Not too bad.” I smile. “You?”

“Same. You hungry?”

“Yeah, I was just going to raid the fridge though.” I point toward the kitchen.

Jacob frowns. “Are you sure? I can make you something if you want.”

I shake my head. “It’s fine, really.” I pause. “You could keep me company though if you want. Maybe tell me about this place?”

“Sure.”

I fall into step behind him, and he leads me into the kitchen. He takes a seat on the barstool as I move to the fridge. After taking in my options, I pull out some cheese and meat.

“Plates are in that cabinet, and crackers are in the pantry,” he tells me as I set them on the counter.

“Thanks.” I smile as I grab everything else I need. “So tell me about this place.”

“What do you want to know?”

I look out the window. “Is the property big? It seems to go on for miles.”

Jacob looks out the window before looking back at me. “Yeah, the compound is decently sized. About twenty acres, give or take, if I had to guess. I’m sure Pres has told you, but you are free to roam around here. Just don’t go into church or go outside the gates.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. You all stay here?” I ask, referring to the other bikers.

“Some do, but I think most of the guys have their own places. Especially the married guys.”

“What about Reaper?”

Jacob smirks. “Nah, he doesn’t have a wife waiting at home for him.” He pauses. “Yet.”

I choke on my cracker and start coughing.

“You good?” he laughs.

“I’m sorry. That must have went down the wrong way.”

“Uh-huh.”

“So Reaper has a girlfriend?” I ask, refusing to look at him.

God, I must sound so desperate asking.

“As long as I’ve been around here, Pres hasn’t really paid any lady attention until you.”

“Oh...”

“Want to know what I think?”

“Sure.”

“I think he is going to claim you.”

I laugh awkwardly. “No, you have it wrong. He doesn’t like me like that. Harrison is just helping me out.”

“The Pres don’t help anyone without a reason. Trust me. By the end of the year, you will have his name on your back.”

I shake my head and change the subject. “Do you like being a part of the club? Like the members?”

Jacob hesitates.

“Oh shoot, can we not talk about this? I don’t want to get you into trouble.”

Jacob shakes his head with a smile. “No, it’s fine. I just have to watch what I say.”

“I understand. If I overstep, just tell me.”

“To answer your question, I’m not in yet where I’m only a prospect, but yeah. The guys, for the most part, are awesome.”

“Tell me all about them.”

Jacob starts telling me stories about the different guys.

There’s a man they call Cueball who apparently can’t hit a cue ball to save his life and always launches it off the table when he tries. He’s had to pay to refelt the pool table three times that he knows of.

Lemon is another club member, and he’s not quite sure how he got his name.

Midnight always has a book on him, along with a pocket full of peppermints. Seems weird for a biker, but I won’t judge.

“What about your family? Do they approve?”

Jacob rolls his shoulders back. “My family is pretty indifferent to it. Do they wish I was going to college or something? Probably, yeah, but they just want me to be happy.”

“That’s awesome. Do you have any siblings?”

“I do.” He nods. “I have an older brother who is the classic golden child and a younger sister who is still in high school.”

“Ohh...” I tease.

“Yeah, she keeps threatening to show up here and find herself a real man. Her words, not mine.” He rolls his eyes.

I can't help but laugh as I shake my head. “Teenage girls...”

“Right? Shit, she has us all so wrapped around her finger it's not even funny.”

“That's sweet though. You sound close.”

“We are. She's one of my best friends.”

“Hey prospect. You want some company?” a girl asks, interrupting his story.

“You know the rules, Baby.” He shakes his head.

“Oh come on, I'm sure the girl can take care of herself,” she says without looking my way.

I get up and start cleaning up my mess.

Did I bother Jacob too much? I enjoyed listening to him tell me everything, but maybe he was just entertaining me.

“Hey, you good?” he asks, pulling me out of my head.

I look up and find that Baby must have left.

“Do you want me to go?” I ask after I set my plate down to dry.

“Only if you want to.” He shrugs.

“I'm not bothering you, am I? Or keeping you from something?”

Jacob shakes his head. “Nah, I'm good.”

“Okay,” I say quietly.

“What else do you want to know?”

“I don't know.” I lean back against the counter and wring my hands together.

“Have you met any of the girls that hang out around here?”

“I briefly met Tara, and there was one who was here when I got here.” I cringe. “She left more to be desired.”

He nods. “Tara is good people. I don’t know her story or how she ended up here. Daniela though, yeah she’s something else.”

“Harrison told me they all want to be here.”

“Of course.” His eyebrows furrow. “They can leave at any time.”

“Must be nice,” I say softly.

While I know the situations are completely different, I can’t help but feel a little trapped like I did with William.

Jacob’s eyes soften. “Their situations and yours are completely different. I promise.”

Someone calls his name, and he looks over his shoulder. The indecision plays on his face. Does he stay with me or go?

“I’m going to go take a nap,” I lie.

Considering I just woke up I’m not tired, but it’s an easy excuse that he won’t question.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. I’m pretty tired. Thanks for hanging out with me though.”

“Anytime. Do you want me to walk you back to your room?”

“I think I’m good.”

“Later,” he says, walking away.

“Bye.”

I make my way back to the room I’m staying in and shut the door. After locking the door, I fall onto the bed and sigh. It was nice hanging out with Jacob, but it was almost too much. As messed up as it is I’m not used to that much social interaction. It was like one minute I was fine, and the next I was just done.

“Your job is to be seen, not heard.” William scowls. “Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

I rub my face and try to shake off the memory.

Will I ever get used to being around others for extended amounts of time?



REAPER

Slipping the key inside the lock, I knock on the door as I let myself in.

“Hey,” I say as I step inside my room.

“Hi.”

Natalie is curled up in the corner of my bed with her back against the wall.

“How was your day?” she asks as she shuts the book she was reading.

“It was alright. Yours?”

She shrugs with a little smile.

“I’m sorry I haven’t been around much,” I say honestly as I lean back against the door and cross my ankles and put my hands in my pocket.

I keep meaning to check in on her and make sure she’s okay and has what she needs but something always comes up, stealing my attention. Does she feel as neglected here as she did with Danworth?

“It’s okay. I know you’re busy.”

Natalie looks down at the blanket that’s covering her lap and runs her hand over it.

I hate that she accepts my apology so easily. Almost as if it’s an instinctive response.

“Do you have any plans for the night?”

Natalie raises a brow but doesn’t say anything.

I chuckle. “Yeah, stupid question. What I meant was, would you like to hang out?”

“With you?” she asks, sitting up a little taller.

“If you want.”

She thinks about it for a moment before she hesitantly asks, “What would we do?”

“We could watch a movie or I might have a deck of cards around here somewhere.”

“I think I would like that.”

I push off the door and stand to my full height. “Yeah? Cool. Do you want anything from the kitchen before we get started?”

Before she can even answer, I hear her stomach rumble.

Natalie places her hands on her stomach as a blush covers her cheeks.

I chuckle. “I’ll take that as a yes. I’ll go grab some shit and be back in a minute.”

“Okay.”

Leaving the room, I head toward the kitchen and start rummaging around. I don’t even know what she wants, so I grab a little of everything.

Frowning, I lean against the counter as I try to figure out what I’m feeling. I didn’t expect to spend my evening with Natalie, but I’m glad that I can. Honestly, I didn’t think she would say yes, and as I waited for her answer, I could feel my hands shaking and my heart racing.

Is this what nervousness feels like?

How could a little waif of a woman make me feel nervous?

Shaking my head, I load everything onto a tray that Elenore keeps around for when someone is hurt. Grabbing it, I carefully make my way back down the hall, not wanting anything to fall off or tip over.

Stopping outside the door, I move the tray into one arm and take a deep breath.

She's just one woman.

Opening the door, I step inside. I hide my smile as I look around the room. Looks like while I was out, Natalie took the time to straighten the bedding and tidy up.

She turns and looks over her shoulder. "Do you need help?"

"Nah, I got it," I tell her as I carefully set the tray down on my desk. "So did you decide if you rather play cards or watch a movie?"

"Maybe we could start with cards? Although I should probably warn you, I've never played." She nibbles on her bottom lip.

Stepping forward, I reach out and pull her lip free from between her teeth. Her eyes go wide at my touch as she freezes, but she doesn't flinch. Hell, I'm not even sure she breathes.

If anyone's going to bite that lip, it's me.

Shaking my head, I try to clear my thoughts. She's not ready for that.

"Sure." I clear my throat as I step away. Heading back to my desk, I dig around in the drawers until I find a well-used stack of cards.

"Alright, let's start off easy," I tell her as I toss the box down and start shuffling. "Where do you want to sit?"

"I think we could both fit on the bed?"

“Take a seat.”

After she settles back against the wall, I lay across the bed in front of her. I’m close enough I could reach out and grab her but not close enough to crowd her.

“Okay, I don’t remember the name of the game, but it’s not hard.” I start telling her the rules of the game and how much each card is worth. The goal is to match all your cards before the other person and not score. The winner will score less than the loser.

“That doesn’t sound too hard,” she says as I deal her three cards.

I set the rest of the deck between us.

“Nah, it’s simple fun.”

For the first two hands, we don’t talk. The silence isn’t awkward, and I find that I genuinely enjoy her company. Usually being around others is the last thing I want on a day like today. Earlier, I had to reassure the Medina Cartel that I had everything under control. Being on their bad side isn’t something I want.

After I went to our auto shop, where I dealt with an asshole customer who swore up and down that we scratched his car. Thankfully we take videos of all cars when we take them in and when they leave, proving that the scratch was already on his vehicle when he dropped it off.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

I look up and see Natalie staring at me with her head tilted to the side.

“Tell me about you,” I say, changing the subject. “What’s your favorite movie?”

Natalie sets down her hand. All her cards accounted for, signaling she’s out. “I don’t have one, I don’t think.”

“Fifteen,” I call out my points as I toss down my hand. “Beginner’s luck.” I wink as I grab the cards and start shuffling.

“I’m sure my luck will change.”

“So no favorite movie, huh?”

“No. I didn’t get a lot of time as a kid to watch TV and if I would have tried with William, he would have lost his shit.” Her eyes drop. “Sorry for cursing.”

Reaching forward, I touch her chin, making her look me in the eyes. “As far as I’m concerned, you can say whatever fucking curse word you want as much as you want. Never filter yourself when we’re alone, understood?”

Reluctantly Natalie nods.

“Good girl.”

I bite back a smile when I see her eyes widen, and a blush covers her face.

She liked that.

“You know what I think?”

“What?”

“That we should figure out what you like to watch. Everyone needs to know what their favorite movie is.”

“That sounds nice.”

As we continue to play, I ask her different things. I find myself making jokes just to see if it will make her smile or laugh.

At one point, Natalie tosses her head back and laughs out loud. The sight makes my chest feel tight, and I feel like I’ve accomplished the impossible.

Natalie ran to me for protection and the plan was for her to walk away once that fucker Danworth is no longer a threat. So why does the thought of her leaving give me indigestion?

seven

REAPER

“ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?” Wrath is a vision of anger.

I’m not surprised. Trigger fully vetted him, even going as far as following him around to ensure he is trustworthy.

I didn’t doubt him for a second, but I had to be sure.

Wrath has been my brother since childhood. We grew up together, our fathers both part of the club. He is still alive though. He can’t ride anymore and is a retired member, but a member still nonetheless.

If Wrath had been the mole, I would have rather killed myself than him. He’s like an extension of me. Everyone talks about soulmates all the time, but rarely do you hear about friends who fulfill a similar part of you. A bromate. A brother who compliments you in such a way that your friendship might not make sense, but it somehow works.

That’s me and Wrath.

I’m calm, cool, and collected. I think things through, analyzing the entire situation before I make a decision.

Wrath is more of a fists first, words later type. If you disrespect him, he’s going to knock your teeth out before he

figures out why you would be stupid enough to do it in the first place.

It's a good balance to have. I tend to reign in his fury, but he pushes me to action when I would otherwise sit and consider all the options first.

"Have a seat, asshole," I tell him, pointing at his chair.

He huffs but slams his body down in his chair. "There. Now why the fuck is Trigger following me around and tapping into my phone? Why the fuck are you investigating me?"

"We have a traitor."

His anger morphs. He's still mad at me, but now his rage has a new target.

He cracks his knuckles. "You thought I was a traitor?"

I shake my head. "Not at all. That's why I had him vet you first. There will be no question about who this mole is. We will look into every single member, including Trigger himself, which is your first task. When both of you are clear, we will proceed with the others. I want to know about them, their wives, their children, everything. I don't want a doubt in my mind about who this could be. I want every single stone overturned."

Some of his anger toward me dissipates. He knows as well as I do that trusting the wrong brother can result in an untimely death. My father fell into that hole.

So while Wrath is the person I trust most, he understands the need to be certain.

"I'll get right on it. I know we've been having issues, but what am I missing?"

"Trigger and I reviewed some footage of William. Natalie said she met him about a year ago. He claimed to be an investment banker and charmed his way into her life. She told me that sometimes he would talk on the phone around her. She never knew who he was talking to, but it sounded serious. Sometimes he would mention shipments. She heard our MC name many times. The only time he seemed upset or ruffled

was when he mentioned me by my last name. She said that once or twice whoever he was on the phone with seemed to be giving him info. He'd make her get him paper and a pen. She never pried much. She was too afraid to."

Wrath gives me a look of pure fury. He feels the way I do about women being hurt. His mother left his father because of the violent lifestyle he led, only to end up in the hands of an abuser. Wrath couldn't save her from the brain bleed that ended up killing her, but he made sure the man who caused it suffered a long and painful death.

"How is she?" he asks quietly.

If it were anyone else, I might feel a pinch of jealousy. Especially with the way I've been feeling toward her lately, but as is, I know he's not thinking about her really. He's seeing his mother.

"She's doing okay. Getting better with each day. I'm trying to help her find her voice again. He has her trained to be afraid of every little noise. I want the men to stay away from our hallway. If you could refrain from punching the walls, that would be great too."

"I will. I'll get the word out. So who do you think the rat is?"

I hesitate. "The only one suspicious right now is Colt. He was there at the last run. Right after he suggested a route change, he took a call claiming it was his mom."

Wrath raises his eyebrows in disbelief. "Really? I thought they had a falling out."

"Exactly. It's plausible, so it has me skeptical, but I also know that he is a good liar. This could be his play at the top seat. He's ambitious. He didn't always want to be here. He was angling for his uncle's seat back in Texas before he got sent here."

"You think his last visit home he might have seen him and his mom and reconnected?"

I consider this. He did go back home a few months ago. It was before all this shit went down.

“What if it’s his uncle?” I counter.

“You think his uncle is trying to get him in your seat?”

“It’s possible. It wouldn’t be the first time another chapter tried to dictate the politics of another. There’s too much unknown with Colt. He’s at the top of my list.” I rub my face.

“Who else?”

I shake my head. “One of the members not on the council? I don’t see Pinky, Twitch, or Midnight turning on me.”

“Jug and Ram have been on the runs that were hit. Could be either of them,” Wrath adds.

“Cheryl has been the girl we have been using too. Switch her out and keep an eye on her. I’ll let Trigger know to watch her phone. I also want access to Colt’s phone. Think you can arrange that?”

Wrath smiles. “Oh yeah. I’ll clear Trigger, then together we will get you access to his phone.”

I snort. “I don’t even want to know what you’re planning. You know you look like a serial killer with that look on your face.”

“I know. It’s part of my charm.”

“Sure. That’s why you don’t fuck sweetbutts.”

Wrath touches his chest, pretending to be offended. “Hey, no one is supposed to know that. They can’t handle my depravity.”

“Yeah? Who can?”

“Paid hookers. They know the score and don’t snitch.”

I roll my eyes. “Whatever. Get out of here and find me some information. The longer William is on the loose, the worse this will get.”

He nods, leaving the room.

I lie my head down.

My phone lights up with a call from Colt.

“What’s up?” I ask.

“Eagle landing tonight.”

“Send the information over. I want you and Wrath at the clubhouse tonight. I’ll explain later.”

“Everything okay, Reap?”

“Fine.”

If only that was the truth.



NATALIE

If you had asked me where I saw my life going, I would have never imagined I would end up here. In the room of a notorious MC being protected by the president. I would have never dreamed that he would give up his room for me. That he would place me under his personal protection.

I used to have such a different life before I met William. Then I lived through the worst year of my life.

Now I’m here. I can’t even fathom how I ended up here.

It’s been seven days. A whole week since my life changed drastically.

I’m still scared of loud noises and most of the men, but I’m getting better. At least, I think I am.

Evelyn wants me to see a therapist, but I’m not sure I want to leave the clubhouse yet. Hell, most of the time I don’t leave my room.

Not mine.

Harrison's room.

It's still weird for me to call him that. For so long, he was this faceless hero that was going to save me named Kingston. Even before I escaped, I would have these fantasies of someone coming to rescue me. More often than not, my mind would murmur his name silently. I don't know how to feel about that or him.

It doesn't help that I haven't seen much of him.

Sure, he stayed the first night, waking me every couple hours, and he did hang out with me the other day and played cards, but he's gone more than he's here.

He's a busy man. Busier than the others.

I've seen a couple of the men I met that first night around the compound. At least that's what Jacob tells me they call this piece of land.

Jacob has been a breath of fresh air. He talks to me, giving me information about everyone.

Thankfully, I haven't seen that man from the first night that tried to force himself on me. I don't know what happened to him, but he's been staying away from the main area.

Or maybe he only shows up at night for the parties.

That's been something else I've had to get used to.

Every single night, there is loud music out in the main area. I peeked once, but all I could see were scantily dressed women and the big burly men dancing and having a good time.

Well, I think they were dancing. The one girl was bent over, so I guess they could have been doing more, but I don't want to think about that.

I know I could go out there if I wanted to. Both Jacob and Harrison have told me that I'm free to roam.

I haven't been brave enough to do it yet. I was hoping Evelyn would show up again, but she hasn't yet.

So instead, I stay in this room. Four walls that feel like they are closing in on me every time I think about being stuck in here.

My stomach grumbles at the reminder that I haven't eaten. Jacob is supposed to bring me food, but he hasn't been by yet.

I wonder if he's forgotten. More than likely, one of the guys sent him on some errand.

I hate that they treat him that way, but he insists it's the way it has to be done. He has to pay his dues, showing his commitment to the cause.

I don't know how unclogging a shit filled toilet does that, but he reassured me that it was his honor to take care of that particular issue.

I scrunch my nose up as I remember the stench coming from the bathroom. It was terrible.

I'm lying back on the bed, staring at the ceiling when I hear it.

The loud voices from down the hall seem to be getting closer.

I can't hear the words, but the tone is coming through loud and clear.

They are angry.

My body tenses as I move closer to the door. I let out a sigh when I saw that I locked it. I know it doesn't mean much because the door could easily be kicked down, but still, it makes me feel better.

My body is coiled tight as the shouts grow closer.

They are coming down the hall. Closer to me.

What if it's him? What if William found me? What if he's out there fighting to get to me?

My breaths grow ragged as the thoughts assault me. The idea that he could have his hands on me again in a few short minutes.

When something slams into the wall right next to the door, I'm on my feet. Logically, I know it's probably a couple of the guys getting rowdy, but my body isn't listening to logic. Instead, it's on the move.

Get to safety. Don't let him hurt you again.

That seems to be the recurring thought flitting through my mind. So instead of fighting it, I let it take me as memories I'd rather forget flood my brain.

"You're such a little slut, aren't you? I saw the way you looked at the waiter at the restaurant. Do you want him?"

"What? No. I was being polite. I love you. I don't want anyone but you," I beg William to listen to me.

He doesn't though. Instead, he moves closer.

He's never laid a hand on me before. He prefers to hurt me with his words. I should be thankful for that.

"You want to whore around on me? Fine. I'll treat you like a whore. Get on your fucking knees."

"Please. Not now. Not while you're angry," I whimper.

He ignores me, reaching out to grip my hair. I scream as he twists his hands in it. Then he pulls it down until I'm on my knees.

"Shut the fuck up, whore. Swallow my dick, and maybe I'll forget about this transgression."

Tears flow freely down my face. "I don't want to."

Then he does it. He crosses that last line. A smack to my face has me landing on the floor.

Before I can get back onto my knees, he's pulling me up, his fingers in my mouth.

"Open wide."

I want to scream. I want to hit him. I can't do anything. I'm locked inside my own mind while he does what he pleases with my body.

God, when will this end?

eight

REAPER

I DIDN'T MEAN to be gone so long, but with the added security measures to our runs, it was unavoidable.

I worry about Natalie being here by herself. She's such a strong woman, but she has her weaknesses as well. I know the men make her uncomfortable. It makes my blood boil thinking of why.

Yet she looks at me like I'm her savior. I have to admit, it's a heady feeling. I never thought I'd want to be someone's hero, but when she looks at me with that worship, it makes my dick hard.

Not that I can act on it. She's too skittish. She deserves better than a dirty biker who lives for violence.

So instead, I'll take care of her while I have her until I can solve her problems.

Maybe I'll find a sweetbutt to play out the fantasy with me once she's gone.

Walking into the clubhouse, I nod to the prospect.

"How's everything?" I ask him.

“Good. Colt and Wrath got a little rowdy earlier, but we were able to contain it. Haven’t seen your girl. Went to check on her for dinner, but she didn’t open the door. Figured she was sleeping or something.”

I want to shake my head at Wrath. I know he started that to grab Colt’s phone. I bet he will find his phone on the ground later.

“Good. I’ll check on her now. Make her a plate.”

“Yes, sir.”

As he heads off to the kitchen, I make my way down the hall, only nodding to the men as I pass. Some of them try to get my attention, but until I see her safe, I can’t be bothered.

When I make it to my door, I let out a breath of relief.

She’s still inside. The only way to lock the door is from the inside or with a key. Since I haven’t given her a key, she must be inside.

Walking in the room, I frown. The bed looks like it has been laid on, but Natalie’s not here. I walk over to the ensuite bathroom, but she’s not there either.

My heart starts to race. I glance at the window, but it’s closed.

How could she have left? Or was she taken?

Storming from the room, I make my way to the main area.

“Who has seen Natalie?” I growl out.

Everyone stops what they are doing to look at me.

“She hasn’t come out of your room,” Honks calls out.

Daniela makes her way over, moving to touch me, but I step back out of her way.

“Don’t fucking touch me.”

She holds her hands up in surrender. “Maybe your little girl ran away. It’s not like this is the place for someone so scared of her own shadow.”

“I didn’t ask your opinion. I want each of you on your bikes in the next three minutes. Divide and conquer. Someone find her. Now,” I bark out.

The men are a flurry of movement as they take off. The prospect comes over to me, frowning.

“I don’t see how she could have left without me seeing her. I’ve been in the main area all day. She hasn’t come out once.”

“Do you think she’s hiding in my room? There isn’t anywhere to fucking hide,” I grunt.

Then I pause.

She couldn’t be, could she?

I storm back down the hall to my room. Then I walk over to my closet. When I open it, the saddest sight greets me.

Natalie is sitting with her knees clutched to her chest. Her eyes are pouring down tears as she stares up at me in fear.

“Natalie, baby. What happened?”

She shakes her head. “Please don’t hurt me. Please.”

I swear I feel my own eyes burn. She needs more help than I can possibly provide her. Still, I try.

“Baby girl, I’m not going to hurt you. Can you come out here for me?”

She sucks in a breath as she tries to stop a sob. It’s almost as if she’s afraid to make a single noise.

I don’t want to scare her, but I need her out too. So I do the only thing I know how to do.

“Natalie, get your ass out here now.” I try to keep my tone dominant but not cruel.

She freezes. Then she blinks twice before she whispers, “Harrison?”

“Yes, baby. It’s me. Come on out,” I tell her in a softer tone as I squat down to her level.

I don’t expect her to come flying at me. One second she’s on the floor, the next, she’s in my arms, my own body falling

back onto the floor. She buries her face in my neck as she sobs.

“Shhh. It’s okay. I’ve got you.”

She lets me hold her, my hands caressing her hair. When Wrath shows up at my door, skidding to a halt, I shake my head.

I fight back the urge to kick his ass. If only he would have listened earlier then this wouldn’t have happened. I asked him to keep things low-key in the hall so she wouldn’t be scared, and yet he picked a fucking fight right outside of my room.

I know I gave him an order, but there is a time and place and that wasn’t it.

“Call off the search. Then close and lock my door. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He nods, following my orders.

After he leaves, I maneuver us until my back is against the bed. The floor is hard on my ass, but I don’t care.

I don’t know how long we sit there, her quietly crying into my neck, but I don’t move. I whisper reassuring words until I feel her grow lax in my arms.

Then I stand and tuck her into bed.

When I go to leave, she reaches out for me. “Please don’t leave me alone.”

I nod before kicking off my shoes. I change from jeans to sweats and then I climb into bed behind her. She immediately turns until her face is buried in my chest.

“I’m going to kill him for what he’s done to you,” I tell her.

“You promise?” I feel her words against my skin.

“I fucking promise.”

She falls asleep shortly after that, but I can’t.

The rage is building up inside me. The knowledge that someone would do something so horrific to someone as

beautiful and sweet as the woman in my arms is enough to have me wanting to hunt the fucker down and torture him until he begs for mercy.

Natalie whimpers in her sleep, making me pull her closer.

“I’ve got you,” I whisper, dropping a kiss on her head.

She settles after that.

I shouldn’t want Natalie as much as I do, but this solidifies it.

I’ll do anything to keep this girl by my side.



NATALIE

I’m a mess.

I know it. Harrison knows it. Hell, the whole clubhouse knows it.

I can tell by the way they watch me with caution as I make my way to the kitchen. They’ve all seen me flinch at sudden loud noises and cower when one of them gets a little too close unintentionally. Harrison didn’t leave my side at all last night. After he found me lost in my memories inside his closet, he held me until I was too exhausted to cry anymore.

For every step forward, you take two steps back, I think to myself.

I thought I was doing better, but that was quickly washed away.

Then Harrison took pity on me and stayed when I practically begged him to.

I half expected him to be gone this morning, but when I woke up with him spooning me, sound asleep, I was startled. After I realized it was him, I let myself bask in the safety I feel in his arms.

I don't know what it is about him that makes me feel the way I do, but I'm grateful for it.

While I was in the shower, I heard him talking to someone on the phone. He was asking about therapy for me. I'm still too scared to leave the clubhouse, so I don't know how he thinks he is going to get me to therapy. Even looking out the window makes me feel like I'm going to see William.

I didn't tell him that though. Nor did I tell him I was listening to his conversation. I wasn't even trying to. It's more of a bad habit I developed from living with William.

"What do you want for breakfast?" Harrison asks me as he leads me into the kitchen.

Today we woke up earlier than I normally do and there is a lot of activity. Many men move from station to station, grabbing food before heading back out. Usually by the time I venture out of Harrison's room everyone is gone for the day.

An older woman with graying hair stands at the stove, stirring something.

"I don't know," I whisper.

Before this week, it's been so long since I've had a choice.

The woman turns at the sound of my voice.

"Natalie, it is so lovely to meet you. I'm Elenore, Honk's old lady. How are you feeling? Don't answer that. That was a dumb question."

The woman is already making a plate, pushing the big, burly men out of her way as she grabs different items. Once she's done, she sets it down in front of me.

"Thank you. This looks delicious." My tone is low, but she smiles at me anyway.

I flinch when one of the men gets a little close as they are leaving the kitchen. Elenore doesn't miss it.

"Alright boys. I need you to move your asses and get out of my kitchen. Miss Natalie needs to eat in some quiet."

I cringe at her words. I don't need them hating me for this, but surprisingly, most of them shoot a smile my way as they get their food and leave.

"You too, Reaper. Let me have some girl talk with our new friend," Elenore tells him before moving back to turn off the burner she had left on.

"Are you okay with that?" Harrison asks, his hand falling to the small of my back.

I study the woman for a moment before nodding. "She seems nice."

Harrison leans in, whispering in my ear, "She's the OG old lady here. She will take good care of you. I'm only a shout away if you need me though."

He presses a quick kiss to my temple.

My stomach feels like a million butterflies have taken flight.

I give him an appreciative smile as he slides off his stool before walking away.

Once the doors close behind him, Elenore starts talking.

"If there is anything you ever want to talk about, I'm here for you. I know Evelyn said you weren't planning to stay long, but that's okay. I'll be here even after you leave. What you did was so incredibly strong. I am so proud of you for having the courage to leave." Elenore's eyes tear up, making my own sting.

"I'm not strong. I couldn't protect myself. I let him lay his hands on me for a long time before I finally left. I'm weak," I whisper.

Elenore moves to my side, wrapping me in a hug. "You're wrong. The bravest thing you ever did was run. I can see the

fear that still lingers in your eyes. Even as afraid as you are, you still got out of there. You walked up to these gates and faced down Reaper himself and somehow got him to protect you. Even taking all of that aside, you are here and you aren't broken. That is the strongest thing of all."

My tears are flowing freely now as I squeeze her to me. "I feel broken. I don't feel like the girl I once was. I'm so lost. How do I even begin to find myself again? When will this fear that has a stranglehold on me finally disappear for good?"

She lets me sob on her shoulder as she rubs my back. "Maybe it never does disappear for good. You will never be that girl you were once before. You have scars. Physical I'm sure, but emotional ones as well. Those will mold you into someone new. Someone stronger who can stand up to the storm. You haven't lost who you were completely. I can still see the kind girl inside, but you will take that and make yourself into someone who has learned lessons to make them a better person."

"I want to be better. I want this to be over," I admit.

She nods. "Have you ever heard the saying once bitten, twice shy?"

I shake my head no.

"It basically means you might get bit the first time around, but that first bite will make you more aware of the consequences so that you might not be so eager to get bit a second time. I think in your case it means you learned how human beings are able to hide their true selves so easily to fool others. You won't be so hasty to take people on the facades they put up now. You'll always be searching for the crack that will show what their true colors are."

I finally pull back, using my napkin to blow my nose. Elenore hands me a few more before using one to blot at my cheeks.

"I like that saying. I might not ever be ready to truly trust a man again, but I am going to be better about choosing one in

the future. I won't make this mistake again. I can't. I wouldn't live through it."

She shakes her head and looks at me with soft eyes. "You're wrong, honey. You are already trusting a man again, but that's not a bad thing. Try to remember that not all men are like your ex. It's good to be cautious, but don't close yourself off completely."

"Harrison and I aren't like that. I trust him because he's the only person who can help me. He's already made it clear that once he solves this issue for me, that's as far as this friendship goes."

Elenore smiles a knowing smile. "I'm sure he did. All I'm saying is that maybe trusting a new man isn't as far off in your future as you think. Now eat up while I tell you all about this place."

I take a stab of eggs as she begins to tell me about all the members of the club and how they got their road names. Jacob told me some of these stories too but I love hearing them from her perspective since she's been around longer than he has.

By the time she gets to her husband, I'm laughing so hard my ribs hurt.

"So they named him Honk because he used to grab women's tits and squeeze them while saying 'Honk Honk?'"

She nods. "When I found that out, I almost left him. I mean, how was I going to be taken seriously when that was why he was named Honk? I didn't leave him though. He gave up honking on random women and dedicated himself to me. Now we've been together for twenty-three years. I wouldn't trade it for the world."

I smile at her. "That's so sweet. A love story for the books."

"It is pretty funny. The kids all groan when we tell it. No one wants to hear about their dad being intimate with women, especially their mom."

"Oh I'm sure."

“Are you still talking her ear off in here?” Harrison appears in the doorway, looking like sin incarnate.

My mind drifts back to what Elenore said earlier about trusting a man. I do trust Harrison to an extent, but could I trust him long term?

“Telling her stories about road names,” Elenore teases.

“Oh god. You told her about Honk, huh?” Harrison has an amused smile on his face.

“She did, but she never told me about yours,” I tell him.

His smile falls a little. “Not much of a story. When I was eighteen, I went on a run with two other prospects. I’m the only one who came back. I was covered in blood, carrying one of my brothers. My father said I looked like the reaper bringing souls to the devil. The name stuck.”

I swallow hard. That’s tragic.

“I’m sorry.”

He shakes his head. “Don’t be. There’s a lot of blood and death in this business. Gotta have tougher skin to deal with it.”

I feel like he’s talking directly to me. My skin isn’t tough. Hell, it’s practically non-existent at this point.

“Come on. I figured we could go for a ride before you hole back up in my room.”

My entire body locks up. My stomach rolls and I instantly feel clammy. Time feels like it slows down as I think about all the worst-case scenarios.

Is he out there waiting for me?

Will he run us off the road? Or pay someone to do it?

I can hear my heart pounding in my ears. I do not want to go outside at all. The thought makes my body feel like it needs to flee.

This is ridiculous. You shouldn’t be scared to go outside. I mentally berate myself.

“Hey, Natalie. You with me?” Reaper asks, pulling me out of my crazy thoughts.

Taking a deep breath, I turn to him. I can do this, can't I?

I frown, ignoring his question. “Is it safe for me to be outside?”

He walks over to me as Elenore begins to clean up, pretending to ignore us. When Harrison cups my cheek, I let out a content sigh. I don't know what it is about his touch, but it calms me in a way I've never had before.

“I'd never do anything to jeopardize you. You know that, right?” His tone is low, meant for my ears only.

“I do.”

He smiles. “Good. Let's go get you dressed.”

With that, he pulls me out of the room without looking back. I'm barely able to shout out a goodbye to Elenore.

nine

REAPER

WHILE NATALIE ATE breakfast with Elenore, I had one of the guys run out and grab her a riding jacket and helmet from one of our businesses. After talking with Evelyn this morning, we agreed that I would try to take Natalie outside. We don't need her being spotted by William. We've heard whispers at the auto shop that he's spread the word that he's looking for her, but staying inside is affecting her mental health. I really want to get her set up with a therapist, but Evelyn said we needed to approach this carefully.

I trust my sister, so I'm taking baby steps even though I'd rather jump right in.

Pulling Natalie down the hall to my room feels familiar. It should feel awkward. I never brought women back to my room, preferring to keep it private, but in the span of a week, Natalie has settled in.

I don't hate it.

Once inside the room, I close the door behind her.

"I need you to change into some jeans and a warm shirt."

"Okay."

I hate how meek her voice sounds. I want to get her to the point where she is confident.

When she steps out of the bathroom dressed, my breath catches.

I gave Evelyn some money to get her some clothes, and damn, she did good. The jeans she's wearing look like they have been painted on her. Then there's the sweater. I don't know much about women's fashion, but it looks soft and fuzzy with the collar hanging off one shoulder showing a bit of her skin.

It makes me want to sink my teeth into her.

"Is this okay?" she asks.

I have to clear my throat before I can answer.

"You look beautiful. Here, put this on." I hold out the jacket to her, sliding it over her arms.

It fits her nicely, making me glad I took a peek at her shirt size before I sent the prospect. Fuck, I'd love to see my property patch on the back. This girl has my head all kinds of twisted.

"I like this." She rubs her hand up and down the leather. "Why is it so heavy though?"

I smile as I pull the front of the jacket together before zipping it up. "It has a skid plate on the back, so if for some reason the bike goes down, you have added protection. Don't worry though. You're safe with me."

"I know."

Those two words do funny things to me. I like that she's depending on me even after all the hell she's been through. That she trusts me.

I always thought I'd want an independent woman, but now I'm thinking I might enjoy one who likes to be pampered.

Taking her hand in mine, I lead her through the clubhouse, ignoring the looks I'm getting from my brothers.

Some men will let anyone jump on the back of their bikes.

I'm not that man. I haven't had a woman on the back of my bike since I was in my teens. Back then, I was a clueless kid. Now I see the purpose of that place.

The other night when I was holding her, I decided I want Natalie there. We aren't even anything, yet I already know I'll fight to keep her here once I solve all her issues. I want it to be her choice, but I'm also not above playing dirty.

When we get to my bike, I grab her helmet, turning to her.

"I'm going to help you put this on."

She nods, letting me place it over her head. I adjust the chin strap until it's tight enough. I smile down at her as I brush the bit of hair caught in her face. Her doe eyes look up at me with trust. It's fucking heady. Has anyone ever looked at me like that before?

"This visor goes down while we ride. The mic is keyed up though, so if you talk, I can hear you, and vice versa. Got it?"

"Got it."

The urge to kiss her is riding me, but it's not the time. I need to keep earning her trust. Show her that life doesn't have to be the way she has been living and that I won't change once she lets me in.

I'm going to show her what it means to be truly free.

I get on my bike before reaching my hand out to Natalie. She takes it, looking at the bike nervously.

"Trust me, sweetheart. I've got you. Throw one leg over and straddle the bike."

She swallows hard, her eyes meeting mine. There's no mistaking the heat that flashes in them.

Then she's on the move. Using my shoulder, she climbs on the bike, settling behind me.

"You're going to have to get closer than that," I growl. My hands reach back, grabbing onto her legs. I pull her flush against my back, leaving no space between us.

She gasps but doesn't pull away. I can feel her heat, making my dick grow in my pants. I swear this woman has put a spell on me. I've never felt more like an adolescent than I do in her presence.

"Keep those pretty little legs wrapped around me, sweetheart." I grab one of her hands, pulling it around to hug my center. Her other hand follows until she's hugging me close. "Good girl. Hold on tight."

I put on my helmet before starting the bike. She jumps a little at the sudden noise, but then I hear her giggle. It's such a beautiful sound.

I want to hear it every day for the rest of my life.

As we pull away from the compound, I smile to myself. She's squeezing me so tight, but I love it. I want her close. Hell, if it were safe, I would have her straddling my lap.

I take the long way around town, showing her the deserts that surround Vegas. Everyone comes here to see the city, but there is so much more to the state than the tourist trap. Sure, it's good for business, but I prefer our little corner of the city.

Opening the throttle, I chuckle when I hear Natalie squeak as she holds me even tighter. Her thighs are squeezing my hips and it makes me imagine what it would be like to have her pinned underneath me with her legs wrapped around my waist as I bring her pleasure. For half a second, I consider pulling over to kiss her senseless. I don't though. Instead, I keep up the pace.

"Oh shit." I hear her breathe.

"What?" I ask.

"There's a cop behind us," she yells.

I laugh at the fact that she thinks she has to raise her voice to be heard.

Reaching down, I squeeze her knee. "I ain't worried 'bout no cops, sweetheart."

"Yeah, but what if he knows William, and he wants to take me back?"

“Don’t worry, I won’t let anything happen to you.”

In the rearview mirror, I watch as she looks over her shoulder once more, which makes me smirk.

She would get pulled over for sure. She is acting so suspiciously. I can’t blame her though. This is the first time she’s left the property since she showed up and she’s petrified she’s going to be taken away from me.

Pulling over to the side of the road, I slow down.

The Nye County Sheriff pulls up next to us, stopping. I turn off the bike so I can hear him.

“Reaper, good to see you, man. You going down to the races this weekend? I hear some crews from Colorado are going to be there,” Sheriff Dennison says as he approaches.

I snort. “Easy money. No one can beat my bike, but nah, I have plans. You’ll have to tell me how the pussies from out-of-town race. Maybe I’ll come next time if they make it worth my time.”

I feel Natalie relax against my back as we continue to talk. Not that I want to talk to this prick, but he is one of the cops on my side. Gotta keep them in my pocket so I chit chat a minute longer.

His radio goes off. “Ah shit, got a call. Better go. See you later.”

We watch as he takes off, sirens blaring.

“You know him?” Natalie asks, flipping up her visor.

I turn a little so I can see her face.

“You’re adorable, you know that, right?” I tell her, changing the subject to see if she will call me on my bullshit.

She frowns. “Adorable is what you call your kid sister or a child. I’m not sure I like that.”

“You’re gorgeous. Is that better?” I quirk an eyebrow, daring her to challenge me.

She shakes her head. “You don’t need to tell me what I want to hear.”

I sigh. “Natalie, I just blew off your question, and you let me. Demand more. You deserve it. You asked me a question. Now demand I respect you enough to answer it. I can’t always tell you everything, but I should at least be able to tell you I can’t talk about it. No one should ever blow you off.”

She clears her throat. “How do you know the officer, Harrison?”

I smile. “Better, baby. I own him along with half of his department.”

“How did you know it was one you knew?” she asks tentatively.

“I didn’t,” I tell her honestly.

“What would have happened if it was one you didn’t own?”

Fuck, I love how curious she is. No other woman would ask the questions that she is asking. They would know better. I like that she doesn’t.

“Nothing. The ones I don’t own either are afraid of me or aren’t worth my time.”

“Interesting,” she hums, thinking over my words.

My hand finds her thigh as I squeeze it.

“Any more questions?” I ask her.

Her eyes meet mine, her breath catching in her throat. She’s quiet for a long moment, lost in my eyes. A car driving by honks, breaking the spell.

“No. Not right now.”

I nod. “Let’s get going then.”

I take her through the desert until we get to my personal home. I don’t come out here much, but I like to have it.

When I turn off the bike, Natalie asks me, “Where are we?”

“This is my house. Most of us have another property outside of the club.”

I hold my hand out, helping her get off before I get off too. She’s staring up at the house in awe, so I step in front of her, pulling her helmet off. After doing the same with mine and setting them both on the bike, I brush her hair away from her face.

“Is this why you haven’t minded giving me your room at the clubhouse?”

“You do realize that other than the first night and again last night, I’ve been sleeping in the room next to yours, right?”

She gasps, her eyes widening. “There was an empty room next to yours?”

“No. It’s Wrath’s. He’s been sleeping in one of the bunk rooms, I think. Either way, he knew I’d want to be close in case you needed me.”

I watch the emotions flash on her face. She’s not sure how to feel.

Trailing my hand down her arm, I wrap her fingers in mine.

“Let me give you the tour.”



NATALIE

I think something has changed.

Harrison is holding my hand. Not only that, but I like it.

It's not the first time he's reached for me, but it's the first time he hasn't let go of my hand immediately.

I was sure I wouldn't ever feel this way again, but between this morning in bed with him and now, I think he's slowly changing my mind.

He took me on the ride of my life. I've never liked motorcycles, but being on one with him is exhilarating.

It's freeing.

Today is the first time I truly have felt like I was able to relax. Other than the brief run-in with the cop, I haven't been looking over my shoulder. I've been living in the moment with him.

Then he brought me here. To his home.

"Why don't you have an old lady?" I blurt out as he unlocks the door.

He snorts, stepping inside to turn off the alarm.

"You are very blunt, aren't you, baby girl?"

"Sorry," I cringe. "That was a bit direct, huh?"

He shuts the door behind me before caging me in against it.

"I like direct. It leaves no room for interpretation. I don't have an old lady because in the past I never wanted one. No woman ever caught my attention long enough to make me take notice."

Of course that's why. He's probably not a one-woman type anyway. At least, that is what I'm going to tell myself to make me feel better.

"I see," I whisper.

He leans in closer, making my breath catch in my chest. For half a second, I wonder if he's going to kiss me.

He doesn't. Instead, he rubs his cheek against mine as he speaks in my ear.

“That was the past though. Seems a lot of things have been changing recently.”

I want to question him. What does that even mean? He couldn't mean me, could he?

He doesn't give me a chance to ask. Instead, he leads me down the hall into a living room.

“Oh wow,” I gasp at the floor-to-ceiling window showcasing the back of the property. It's beautiful. All you can see for miles is desert outlined by the mountains in the far distance.

“What made you choose this house?” I ask him.

He shrugs. “It's not that far from the clubhouse, but still has privacy. There's no way anyone can sneak up with the land all around being open. The mountains are several miles long, but if I need to, I can take my bike to get to them for a quick escape.” He pulls me closer, caging me between his big body and the window. “See that building there?”

I nod at the building set a ways off.

“That's a safe house. It's made from reinforced steel that would take special equipment to blast through. They can set it on fire, but the siding on it would be the only thing to catch fire. The melting point of the metal used is quite high. It's also got an outdoor sprinkler system with flame retardant foam to put out any fires quickly. If anything ever happens, that's where you go.”

I look at him over my shoulder. “That implies I'll be spending time here.”

“That's all up to you. Do you want a drink?”

He walks away, changing the subject abruptly. I follow him into the kitchen,

Oh this kitchen is what dreams are made of. Granite countertops, white cabinets, and a tall stainless-steel fridge. I'm in love with it.

“I have water or beer. Sorry, I haven't been here in a while.”

I slide onto a stool on one side of the island in the kitchen.

“Water is fine.”

He grabs a bottle, opening it before sliding it across to me.

“I could show you the rest of the house. Upstairs are three bedrooms. There’s an entertainment room off the side here and a pool with a hot tub out back.”

I study him a moment. “Evelyn is your only sibling?”

He looks taken aback by my sudden questioning.

“Yes. She’s my half-sister.”

“You have no other family around?” I tilt my head, studying him.

He settles onto a stool. “Nope. My father had a falling out with his family long before I came along. My mother was a sweetbutt. After she had me, she stayed around for a couple of years, but when Evelyn’s mom became pregnant, she couldn’t handle it. Having another woman around who also shared a kid with my father became too much and she went crazy. She was given a choice to stay and let whatever notion she had that my father was hers go or leave. She didn’t even try to take me with her. Evelyn’s mom was different though. She was a sweetbutt as well, but she was sweet. My father never took her on as an old lady but gave her special privileges because she was raising Evelyn. He didn’t want his daughter to be a sweetbutt. She’s still around actually. My father bought Sarah a house about five miles from the clubhouse. Evelyn’s place is around the corner. She still comes to clubhouse events too. She never treated me poorly. Always tried to include me when she could. She’s good people. What about you?”

I think about my own parents. They are more like his mom than Evelyn’s.

“My parents had me young. My mom was sixteen, and Dad was seventeen. They did their best to raise me. I guess my grandparents made them get married and keep me. Forced them to care for me then kicked them out as soon as they were eighteen. I haven’t seen anyone from either side in a long time. When I moved to Vegas, my parents were sure I was selling

myself, so they cut off all contact. Last I heard, they had divorced.”

His cool hand on mine brings me out of the negative thoughts in my head.

“It’s not your fault. You were a baby. They had options. At any time they could have given you to another family. They are sadistic to put you through that.”

I nod, looking down.

“I think it would be good for you to talk to someone. Evelyn said you weren’t wanting to go anywhere, but they have this online therapy program. I can set you up with a computer with Wi-Fi and a cam. You could call in and talk to them about anything you want. It would be confidential. Would you want that?”

I chew on my bottom lip. “I want to say no. I hate talking about myself.”

“You said you want to. Does that mean you are going to?”

I shake my head. “I want to get better. Evelyn says talking to someone who has experience and can help me with tips to manage my reactions would help me do so more quickly.”

“She’s right. I hate watching you flinch or freeze when I reach for you. Watching you cower whenever one of my men come near.”

“I know. I hate it too.”

His phone rings, making him sigh.

He pulls it out, looking at it before answering.

“Yeah? Okay good. No, I’m at my house. No, I’ll come to you. Yep. Bye.”

He looks at me.

“I hate to cut our date short, but I have to get back.”

I look up at him. “This was a date?”

The idea that this was a date makes my heart race. I’ve never been on a date like this, something so laid back. With

William, it was always a production. Honestly, I much prefer this to what I had to do with William.

He stands, holding his hand out to me.

“I’d like for it to be, if you are okay with that.”

I think it over as I slide my hand in his. The butterflies are taking over my stomach.

“I think I’d like that.”

He kisses the back of my hand. “Good.”

ten

REAPER

IT TOOK everything in me not to kiss Natalie at my house. She looked like she belonged there in my space. Somewhere I've never brought anyone but my closest friends. Which means Wrath is the only person who has ever seen the place.

Still, it felt warm with her there. Right.

I know what's happening. I'm letting myself get sucked into Natalie's world. Fuck if I care though.

I want her. I'm going to have her.

Having her wrapped around me on the back of my bike is a whole other experience. Her heat seeps through my jeans, reminding me she's there. Like I could forget with the way her hands are wrapped around my stomach, so close to being on my dick. All I want to do is grab her hand and move it south so she can feel what she does to me. I swear it's a miracle we made it home safely.

I grimace when I see a pack of sweetbutts sitting outside, Daniela being front and center.

As soon as I turn off the bike, I help Natalie off, taking her helmet.

"That was fun. Thank you."

I smile at her. “You’re so pretty. I’m going to walk you inside, but then I need to go meet Wrath and Trigger. You going to be okay?”

“I can walk myself back. I don’t want to keep you.”

I wrap my arm around her, leaning in to kiss her cheek. She tenses briefly but almost instantly relaxes.

“Baby, this was a date. That means I walk you to your door.”

She blushes but lets me lead her away.

I don’t miss the gaping from the peanut gallery hanging around.

“Hey, Reaper,” Daniela calls out.

I ignore her.

I only have eyes for one woman now. The one I didn’t expect, but can’t imagine letting go.

Jacob smiles at Natalie, making me pull her closer.

“Hey Miss Natalie. Hey Pres.”

“Hey Jacob. Did you have a good day?” Natalie asks.

Before he can answer, I glare at him. “Go find Wrath and tell him I’m here.”

Jacob nods, taking off.

Natalie smacks my stomach lightly. “What was that about?”

I take a deep breath. “Sorry. I think he might have a crush on you.”

She slows, leaning against my bedroom door as she looks up at me.

“He doesn’t. In fact, Jacob’s positive you’re going to claim me. I think he’s just being nice to me. You have nothing to be jealous about,” she teases.

I shake my head, laughing. “Baby girl. Have you seen yourself?”

I hold out my hand, making her twirl when she takes it, my eyes roaming her body.

“Fuck, you are a wet dream come true. Trust me, that boy and any other man here would jump on a chance with you. Guess I’m lucky you only came here for me.”

She snorts. “You have your choice of those women out there, and you really want me to believe I’m something special?”

I crowd her into the door until we are sharing the same breath. Dipping my head, I slowly trail my nose up her neck and stop right below her ear.

“None of those women have anything on you. You are beautiful, smart, tenacious, and courageous. Everything I didn’t even know I needed in a woman, so yes, you are something special. I’ll prove it to you every single day until you believe it.”

“Harrison,” she whispers.

“What?”

“If you don’t kiss me, I don’t think I can believe you.”

I laugh, kissing to the right of her lips. When she goes to speak, I kiss the other side.

She lets out a huff, but before she can complain, I press my lips to hers, kissing her lightly. I add pressure until her mouth opens beneath mine. I slip my tongue inside her mouth, kissing her until she’s breathless.

My hands stay firmly planted on the door. If I touch her, I will take her and she’s not ready for that yet.

With that thought in mind, I slow the kiss, pecking her several times before pulling back.

Her eyes are still closed as she smiles, her hand finding her lips.

“Fucking gorgeous. Now go inside and lock the door before I move too fast,” I tell her as I unlock the door, opening it for her.

She giggles, stopping before she shuts the door.

“Maybe I wouldn’t mind you moving a bit fast if it means more of that.”

“Woman.” I lean in, grabbing her neck, pulling her to me for one last kiss.

She gasps, but when I look at her, I don’t see fear. I smile at that. She’s not afraid of me.

She trusts me.

“We do this at your pace. You’ve gone through something traumatic. I’m not here to push you into anything. So you run this. You’re the Queen Bee. Whatever pace you set, I follow. You say no at any time or change your mind, and it stops. I want to help you heal. Understood?”

She gives me a small smile. “I hear you. I think maybe I would like those therapy sessions you mentioned. Whenever you get a chance. I still have that money from William to pay for it too.”

Shaking my head, I caress her cheek. “For all I care, we can burn that money in the pit tonight. We don’t need a single fucking thing from that man. I’ll take care of you until you’re better.”

She starts shaking her head before I even finish my sentence.

“Harrison, I can’t do that. I need a job. I would feel like I’m relying on you too much.”

Taking a deep breath, I withhold the need to shake the girl until she sees what I’m saying. I want her to rely on me.

Instead, I breathe out slowly. “How about we make a deal? You concentrate on getting your mental health in check. Once you feel up to it, I’ll give you a job at the garage. We haven’t had anyone organize the office in a long time. Deal?”

“Deal.”

I chuckle. “You’ll regret that once you see how unorganized that place is.” Leaning in one last time, I press a

soft kiss to her lips. “I’ll see you later, Queen Bee.”

She doesn’t know it, but I’ve just given her a road name.

I did it because I plan to keep her.

I hope she’s ready for that.



NATALIE

Leaning back against the locked bedroom door, my fingers find my lips.

They are tingling. I can’t remember the last time a kiss felt like something more than a duty.

My nerves are still a mess and half the time, I’m not sure I can trust my mind, but in that moment with Harrison, the world fell away. My mind went quiet as my body acted on instinct. For the first time in a long time, it felt right.

I didn’t want it to end.

I understood what he was saying though. We can’t move too fast. Not with me being the hot mess express that I am. I need to figure my life out and get back on the right track. Until I can trust myself again, I can’t give myself to another.

I mean, what if we started getting naked, and I flipped out? I would be more embarrassed than I am now. Not only that, but I might lose the one piece of light in my life right now.

Harrison might not realize it, but he has worked his way past my walls. I never thought that I would want to be with another man, but Harrison isn’t just any man.

He's a good man. He proves it every single day. With the way he cares for me by just being there for me. The way he touches me gently with a bit of hesitation as if he doesn't want to spook me. Or the way he makes sure the others around me are being careful with me. Hell, I know he makes Jacob hang around to be my gopher if I need anything. Neither will admit it, but I have a feeling Jacob didn't spend this much time at the clubhouse before I came here.

I have a long way to go, but I am starting to feel a little bit less like the shell of a girl I was when I got here. I have him to thank for that.

The real question is, can I trust these feelings? What if I am using him as a crutch to get me through this time? Am I using him?

I would rather die than use him. He has been so kind to me.

Then the question becomes if it is real, what happens if he changes his mind? I mean, who would want to settle for damaged goods? I don't think I could handle him being ripped away from me.

At least not now.

We haven't really talked about what happens after he gets William. I assume I'll be on my way, but did that kiss change anything?

Did I want it to?

Pushing off the door, I make my way to the bathroom. This is why I asked for the therapy sessions.

I was afraid at first. Hell, if I'm being honest with myself, I'm still scared, but if I don't work on myself then there's no way I will ever get better.

I want to feel that confidence I once had. I want to be able to make a decision and trust myself with it without wondering if I'm making the biggest mistake of my life.

Maybe I can even become a woman strong enough that Harrison will want to keep me. Granted, that's not my end goal

from doing therapy, but it would be a happy addition to being mentally healthy again.

As I start the shower before stripping, my mind wanders back to Harrison.

Being on the back of his bike with him was an experience I will never forget for the rest of my life. Feeling his body so close to mine while the road flew by us made me feel free in a way I have never felt in my entire life.

In that moment, I wasn't the girl who was abandoned by her parents the moment they could ditch her. I wasn't the woman who was abused by the man who claimed to love her.

I was just...free. All responsibilities, thoughts, and worries melted away with the wind.

The feeling is the second best that I have ever experienced in my life, the first being the moment Harrison's lips touched mine.

Stepping into the warm water, I begin to wash my body. My skin feels alive. Like a live wire has made all my nerves stand to attention.

Sex has been a chore for me for a long time now. It has been something I've dreaded. I prayed for him to find it with another. I gave up on trying to pleasure myself even. My mind just wouldn't relax long enough for me to find a release.

Yet right now, thinking about Harrison and how it felt to kiss him has my core throbbing.

Trailing my hands down my body, I stop at my breasts, massaging them as I imagine Harrison being there with me. It's not my hands on my body anymore. They are his.

He would be gentle with me at first. Testing and teasing to see what I like. Then he would grow bolder. Pinching my nipples, maybe even biting them. He's such a contradiction, looking rough and mean, but his hands on my body would be soft. He would learn every inch of my body.

When his hands slide over my stomach, I would suck in a breath. I would be unable to contain the moan when his fingers

find my needy clit, begging for attention. My head falls back to the wall, loving the feeling of pleasure as I circle my clit the way I imagine Harrison would. My other hand is steadily pulling and tweaking my nipples, keeping them hard and stinging with the pleasurable pain.

When I finally thrust a finger inside me, I moan out his name. I feel like I'm burning from the inside out, but I can't stop. I need to feel it. I need to remember what it feels like to find pleasure in an act that has been tarnished for me. So I thrust harder, my other hand coming down to strum my clit as the water cascades around me. With my mind fully on the object of my desire, I finally crest, falling into the blissful feeling of my orgasm.

It's not until I'm panting against the wall of the shower that I open my eyes.

A smile covers my face as I laugh. Successfully getting myself off is such a small thing, but to me, it means so much more. It's another moment stolen from me in the past given back. I might not be whole, but I'm picking up the pieces one by one.

One day I won't be broken. I'll be remade into something new.

eleven

REAPER

“WHY ARE WE MEETING OUT HERE?” I ask Trigger.

It’s a shithole warehouse on the outskirts of the compound. It had been here when we bought the land, but with it being out on the edge away from where we built our compound, we’ve never felt the need to get rid of it. I’d much rather be back at the clubhouse with Natalie, but instead I’m here with these fuckers.

“It’s the only secure place away from everyone. If we met in church, the guys might get suspicious,” Trigger says as he looks down at his tablet.

“It smells like ass in here,” Wrath jokes as he comes through the door, shutting it behind him.

Trigger rolls his eyes but ignores him.

“Oh come on, Trig. You still mad I peeked in on you and your lady friend? I mean, I didn’t need to know that you like a finger up your ass, but I have to admit, it was pretty hot to watch.”

Trigger tenses, his entire body freezing.

When he looks up, he locks eyes with Wrath.

“If you ever mention that ever again, I will slit your throat in your sleep, then feed your dick to you. Your body will be so mutilated by the time I’m done not one person will recognize you. Then I’ll let the coyotes feed off your flesh.”

His words are jarring enough, but the cold, detached look on his face, along with the deadpan tone of his voice, is eerie. It even makes Wrath nervous, and I’ve never seen that fucker back off of anyone.

“My bad. We are here for a reason, right?” He clears his throat, looking at me.

Trigger goes back to his tablet as if he didn’t just say the most psychotic thing ever.

“I cloned Colt’s phone. He is getting calls from a burner phone in Texas. I pinged the location to confirm they are actually in Texas too. His story is checking out so far.”

“Why would his mom need a burner phone though?” I ask.

Trigger shrugs. “The probability of them sending someone to Texas to throw us off their trail is low. I am still looking into him, but based on that alone, I cannot confirm if he is our mole.”

“Who else down in Texas could he be talking to? Maybe Noche Oscura MC? They are allies of ours. Maybe he wants to swap patches,” Wrath points out.

“You really think he’d want to leave? Why wouldn’t he just come to me with it?” I rub my hand over my head.

“That’s not all we need to discuss. He’s still not off the list, and I’m checking into the others too, but we have an issue with your girl.”

My body is the one doing the tensing now.

“What’s wrong?” I bark out.

Trigger turns the tablet, showing me a recent news briefing out of Vegas.

The nineteen-year-old woman was last seen leaving her apartment building for her nightly walk. She was wearing a

pair of gray sweatpants and a black hoodie. If anyone has seen Natalie, please contact the Clark County Sheriff right away.

“That fucker had her reported missing?” I growl out.

“Yep. Only in Vegas so far. I’ve also noticed more traffic down our roads recently. Based on the fact that we know he tracked the cab this way and the higher traffic from civilians in the area, I believe he’s hiring people to drive by and attempt to catch sight of her. If he does, he may have legal grounds to come and get her.”

I scoff. “Fuck that. I won’t let him touch her. We own the police here. What makes you think he could go around them?”

“If he makes enough noise, the police will have no other choice but to speak with her. We have all seen how she reacts. If he shows up here, Natalie may freeze up. If she does that, they will arrest us until they figure everything out, but in the meantime, she would be released to his care.”

“Wait, why would Natalie be released into his care? She’s a fucking adult. If she wants to hang out with a bunch of bikers she can.”

“Yeah, but who knows what all he has on her. Natalie lived with him for a year. Danworth could claim that she isn’t of sound mind and can’t make decisions on her own. Kind of like what Britney Spears’s family did to her.”

Wrath punches the wall of the warehouse, making the entire thing shake.

“I will die before I let him touch your woman,” he vows, looking right at me.

I nod. “Glad you feel the same, brother. He won’t get her though. She doesn’t go outside much, but I’ll ask her to wear a hood up if she does. I’ll limit any activities outside of the compound. I want at least six men on the front fence. I want license plates on any car that drives by. Hell, stop them if you have to.”

“Already on it.” Trigger types on his tablet a bit more.

“Is that all?” I ask, hesitant to know the answer.

Trigger thins his lips. “One of the drug mules down in Calexico went missing. It’s not related to us per se, but two of our men were meeting there to grab the shipment. Javier is pissed. Wants a meeting with you.”

Calexico, California, is one of the cities we pick shipment up from. It’s the perfect spot on the border of Mexico and California.

I curse. “When it fucking rains, it pours, huh?”

“Amen, brother.” Wrath pats my shoulder.

Shaking my head, I blow out a breath. “I want to know who Colt is talking to in Texas. He has been acting cagey and I want to know why. Then I want you to cross reference everyone who has been on runs that have been attacked. They aren’t going after all of them, only the ones that are for the cartel. There’s a reason for that. Find the mole so I can make them regret living.”

“Yes, sir,” they both echo.

“Good. I’m not announcing it to everyone yet, but I’m claiming Natalie. From now on, she is mine whether she realizes it or not.”

“I think everyone already knows, but good for you, brother.” Wrath smirks as he pats my shoulder.

Trigger nods. “I think it’s a good move. She suits you.”

I shake my head. “I don’t want to make anything official until she’s ready. We need to find that fucker Danworth. I don’t think she will feel safe until he’s taken care of.”

I have this sinking feeling in my gut that says he won’t let her go without a fight. He’s trying to get to her. The question is, will he make a move while I’m not around? I grit my teeth at the thought.

“We will find him, brother,” Wrath promises.

I only hope it won’t be too late.



NATALIE

Harrison has been acting differently around me. Before, he treated me gently, almost as if I'd break.

He still does that occasionally, but he's also started being flirtier with me. The man cracks jokes just to make me laugh. He tickles me even. It's an odd sensation. I've never really had that before even with my high school boyfriends.

Then there's the fact that when he is in a room with me, he is always touching me. He finds some reason to have his hands on me, whether it be him guiding me with his hand on my lower back or pushing hair out of my face.

It's a different experience. While my body reacts every time he touches me, my mind is still unsure. I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop. Is he only treating me this way to lure me in? When will his fists come into play?

I feel like he would never hurt me, but I thought the same thing about William.

Self-doubt is a fickle bitch.

It's the reason I'm still hanging out in his room when he's not here.

He has taken to sleeping with me every night though since things between us have changed. After my breakdown, he always makes sure to be back at some point to crawl into bed with me. When he's curled around me, I finally feel safe enough to sleep. I still wake up with nightmares, but feeling him hold me makes it easier.

“Natalie?”

I look up at him now. He’s standing at the door to the bathroom with nothing but a towel around his waist. His Lotus MC tattoo sits low on his hip and spreads across part of his abs.

I wonder what it would be like to trace it with my tongue.

He’s been showing me more of his body lately too. I’m not sure if he’s trying to acclimate me to him or what, but my issues don’t revolve around him being naked. If he raised a hand, that would be another story.

I shake my head, clearing my dirty thoughts. “Hey. Sorry was in my head.”

He frowns but nods. “Trigger is on his way with your laptop. Do you want me to stay with you?”

I’ve met Trigger before. He sat with me and went over all the information I told Harrison. He told me he’s the resident computer guy. I liked him. He was kind.

“You don’t have to. Do you have other things to do?”

He hesitates.

“Harrison, you can’t babysit me all the time. If you have something to do, go do it. I’ll be fine.”

He takes a deep breath. “Fine. I’m leaving the prospect here though, in case you need me.”

I shake my head and roll my eyes.

He moves closer, leaning down to grab my chin.

I think for a moment he’s going to kiss my mouth. He hasn’t done that since our date night.

He doesn’t though. Instead, he looks in my eyes with a look of pure lust.

“Watch it, Queen Bee. I might be following your pace, but all your sass might get your ass paddled until it’s red.” He winces. “Sorry. I shouldn’t have said that. I would never hit you unless it was in a pleasurable way.”

My body flushes at his words. I'm embarrassed by my reaction. I should be afraid to have him hit me, but after reading a couple of the books Evelyn brought me, I find myself wondering about consensual spanking, among other things.

"No." My face is burning. "I, um, I think I might like that. At least, it sounds interesting."

He smirks at my reaction before pressing a kiss to my cheek.

"Be a good girl."

Then he grabs some clothes before going back into the bathroom.

My heart is racing by the time the door shuts behind him. I never felt this hot for anyone before. It's like something about his rough exterior and pure sexuality speaks to a part of me I never knew I had. Maybe I should be more afraid of it, but I'm not. I'm embracing it.

A knock at the door halts my thoughts. I look down at my outfit. A pair of plain black leggings and one of Harrison's t-shirts. I still feel weird about showing off too much though since I'm not wearing a bra, so I grab Harrison's jacket off the back of the chair and zip it up before answering the door.

Trigger is standing there with a laptop in his hand as he looks down at his phone.

"Hey," I greet him.

"Hey Queen Bee. You ready for this?"

I frown. "Why are you calling me Queen Bee? I thought only Harrison called me that."

He shrugs. "Some guys heard him call you that. It's stuck. Let's get this set up for you quickly. I already scheduled you an appointment with someone online that is trustworthy. You meet with her in thirty minutes."

I nod, moving to the bed while he sits in the chair at Harrison's desk.

Harrison exits the bathroom then. He glances at Trigger before taking me in. When his eyes linger on his jacket, I swallow hard. I didn't think about the fact that he would probably need it to leave.

He moves to my side before leaning down to press a kiss to the top of my head. "See you later, baby girl."

"Don't you need your jacket?" I whisper, aware that Trigger can hear us.

Trigger is pretending to ignore us as he clicks buttons on the computer.

"Nope. It looks better on you anyway. I have a spare in my truck I'll grab."

"Oh. Okay."

"I'll be back early tonight. Maybe we can go get something to eat together."

I nod. "I'd like that, I think."

He smirks before nodding to Trigger and leaving. I don't miss the fact that he leaves the door open. I almost feel like a teenage girl whose father refuses to let her be behind closed doors with a boy.

"Alright. So right now, I don't have a password on the computer, but I need you to make one. Don't use something generic. It needs to be something you will remember but is hard to guess. Random numbers and symbols are best, but I want you to remember it so just try not to make it too easy."

He stands, indicating I should sit in the chair. I do, trying to think of a good password.

Then a memory pops into my head.

"Eight, nine, oscar, victor, one, four. Got it. What color again? White Ford Aerostar. Got it. Let me know when."

"It can be anything?"

He nods.

So I put in the numbers eight, nine, then the letters o and v before ending with the numbers one four. Then I look up at him.

He quirks an eyebrow.

“What is that?” he asks.

“A license plate number, I think. I don’t know why, but it popped into my head. William said it was for a white Ford Aerostar.”

Trigger stiffens. “You’re sure?”

I nod. “Is that helpful?”

“Very. I’ll look into that later. You’ll need two more characters and one of them has to be special, like an exclamation point.”

I nod, adding two of them at the end. He snorts but leans over to click save. Then it opens to the main screen.

“Alright, so I’ve already hooked this to our internet so you don’t have to worry about that. If you take it outside of this building and over to one of the others, we will have to set up the internet there, but I figured we would start here. I put the link to the online therapy right here on the main screen.” He clicks it, showing it opening to the main page. “You put in your name and appointment time and it will connect you. Since we are trying to keep your location a secret right now, I put you under an alias. Natalie Portman. Your birthday is the same, but I made you a year older. No one should question it.”

I nod. “Thank you.”

“Of course. I’ve disabled social media and email on here. Right now, all you can do is the therapy, but if you want to be able to do something specific, just let me know. It’s as secure as a laptop can be so unless someone hacks your therapist, we are good.”

“I understand. I don’t really know what I would do on it anyway. I don’t have social media or anything.”

He gives me a sad look. “It will get better. Your appointment is at eight thirty. I’ll leave you to it. Come find

me if you have any questions.”

“I will.”

I stand to follow him to the door, shutting it and locking it behind him.

Then I go back to the computer and sit to wait for my appointment.

What will I even talk about? Do I just dive in and admit that I was abused? Do I start off slow? I know I can't say much about the MC. I'm sure there's some patient-doctor confidentiality thing in place, but I don't want to chance it.

Finally, I log onto the system, waiting for the therapist to log on. When she does, I feel weird. I'm staring at a screen, yet I'm sitting alone in a room.

“Hello. I'm Dr. Lenora. Please confirm your name and date of birth for my records. This will be the only time you will have to do this.”

“Natalie Portman March fifteenth, two thousand and two.”

“Very good. Since this is our first session, I want you to feel as comfortable as possible, so we will take this at your pace.”

I nod. “Okay. I'm not really sure where to start or how to do this.”

She gives me a sympathetic smile. “It's not some process you check off different boxes until complete. Therapy is about whatever you need. It can be simply sitting here in silence, or it could be screaming at the top of your lungs. We can talk about deep stuff, or you can keep it light. This is your session, so we talk about whatever you want.”

“Okay. Maybe could you ask me questions? I think that would help.”

“Of course. How about we start with what brought you here?”

“My friends thought it would be best that I speak with someone.”

“That’s good. It sounds like they care about your wellbeing. Would you agree with that assessment?”

I think of Evelyn and Harrison.

“They are newer friends, but they have been helping me a lot. I think they care at least a little bit.”

She writes something down in her journal before asking her next question. “Why did they think you would benefit from therapy?”

“I had an abusive ex that I left. I haven’t been reacting well around other people recently. They believe talking about it will help. Make me better.”

“What do you think?”

I shrug. “I think that I’ve become so used to being scared of every little thing that I can’t see a day when I won’t be this weak.”

“So you view yourself as weak?”

“Yes. I wasn’t strong enough to leave sooner. I didn’t stop him the first time he hit me. I let him do this to me without a fight.”

“You left on your own?”

“Yes.”

“Do you not see that as a brave action?”

“No. I should have left sooner. I only left then because if I didn’t, he was going to end up killing me.”

“So it sounds like you feel you acted out of necessity.”

Wrapping my arms around my stomach as I feel a tremor move through me. I look away from the camera. I open my mouth, but no words come out and when they finally do, it doesn’t sound like they come from me. “Yes. I didn’t have a choice.”

“What do you do for fun?”

I shake my head in confusion. Talk about one hell of a switch in topics.

I shrug my shoulders. "I don't know. Nothing really."

"Since you've left, what brings you joy?"

I think about Harrison. He makes me feel a little bit more normal. I can't say his name though.

"My friends."

"Do you go out and do things with them?"

"Sometimes. At least I have once. I'll be honest, I'm afraid to leave this room most of the time."

"Why is that?"

I lick my lips as I fidget in my seat. "I feel like I'm looking over my shoulder all the time. I'm worried he will find me. If he does, I know it won't be good."

"So you've isolated yourself from the world."

I think on her words. I have isolated myself.

"Yeah. I have."

"How does that make you feel?"

I pause a moment. "Honestly, I feel like I exchanged one prison for another."

"Is there something you can do to make it better? Anything that would help make this new place feel less constricting?"

I think about the nightly parties. I guess I could go join in at least for a little bit. Going out there causes me anxiety, but deep down, I know I'd be safe.

"I could go out more, I guess."

"Don't jump in the deep end. Think of a small change you can make. This isn't an all-or-nothing thing. Let's start by you leaving your room for five minutes. Push yourself out of your comfort zone, but only a smidge."

"I can do that."

"Good. I want you to start keeping a journal of your feelings. Notes of when you notice yourself reacting to something. Write down what made you react and how you

handled it. We can discuss it next time and help come up with ways for you to train yourself to react differently.”

“I think I’d like that.”

“Alright, same time next week?”

I smile. “Yes.”

I make a mental note to ask Harrison for a journal. I feel good about this. Really good.

Maybe I’m starting to heal.

twelve

REAPER

"WE FOUND HIM."

That's the first words I hear when I walk into the clubhouse.

I was looking forward to curling up with Natalie and watching a movie. I was planning to take it old school, convincing her to make out with me until her lips are bruised, but that will have to wait now.

"Where?" I demand as I lead Trigger into church, shutting the door behind us.

"He's in Vegas. Caught him on a camera at the Bellagio."

I frown. "That seems odd. Why would he go into a casino he knows we can monitor instead of sticking with one of the Renegade-owned ones?"

He shrugs. "Honestly, it seems suspicious, but it's all I've got for now. What do you want to do?"

My impulse says to get there now, but I need to be smarter than that. Forcing myself to relax, I release the breath I was holding.

“It’s probably a trap. Get six of our guys together. Not Colt. I want Colt here. I don’t trust him yet.”

“I told you I cleared him, right? The number he is speaking with is from Texas. I couldn’t trace it, but it could have been his mother. With her connection to the chapter down there, she could have burners.”

I start shaking my head before he even finishes. “It doesn’t feel right, Trig. I don’t know what he’s up to, but until he comes clean, he’s at the top of my rat list. Get some men together. We are rolling up there but keeping it civil. We just want to chat. I have a feeling the moment we step in the casino, we are going to be searched so we go in empty-handed.”

“Why would we do that? We will be sitting ducks.”

I shake my head. “He’s at a very public and well-known casino. He’s not armed and even if he is, he would be a fool to attack us there. No, he is hoping that we show up guns blazing so we can be arrested. That leaves Natalie unprotected. I want Colt here with Wrath and whoever else doesn’t go with us. This is a test. One that we are going to pass with flying fucking colors. Show him he won’t get my woman.”

“Alright.”



I watch as the guys trail into the building one by one with Trigger at my side.

“What’s up, Pres?” Midnight asks as he pops a peppermint into his mouth.

“We’re rollin’ out.”

“Sweet,” Kicks says as he rubs his hands together.

Pinky crosses his arms over his chest. “What do we need to know?”

“Trigger got a lead on Danworth, and we’re going to pay him a friendly visit.”

Trigger jumps in, giving them the details on what we know and where we’re going. As he speaks, you can see each of the guys amp up, itching for a fight.

“You should put a bullet in his skull right there, Pres,” Fang tells me.

Widow nods. “Fuckers who hurt women should be put down like rabid animals.”

“That’s exactly what he expects us to do.”

“What’s the game plan then?” Midnight asks.

“We’re just going to go up there and have a friendly chat.” I pause. “We aren’t taking any weapons with us.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Midnight scoffs.

“Do you have a death wish?” Kicks demands.

“Are you sure about that, Pres?” Pinky asks.

The guys make their disapproval known.

“Settle down,” I demand. I wait for them all to fall silent. “Are you questioning if I have the club’s best interests in mind?”

“It’s your call, Pres. If you want to take them out with a fistfight, I’m game. It’s been a minute, but I think I got it in me,” Widow tells me.

“Hopefully it won’t even come to that,” I tell him before addressing everyone else. “We have too much shit going on right now and can’t afford to bring any more attention our way. Do you think I want to walk in there without any protection? No, no, I don’t. But I will to prove a point.”

“We believe that Danworth made himself known to draw us out. It’s safe to assume that we will be greeted with security as soon as we step foot into the building,” Trigger tells them.

“More or less you guys are going with me as backup in case he decides to fight,” I add.

“What about everyone else? Will they be waiting outside?” Pinky asks.

I shake my head. “Nah. They will be staying behind.”

Fang tilts his head to the side. “You think they are watching us?”

“Trigger and I have reason to believe that they are,” I confirm.

“It’s smart. Having people here waiting in case they decide to attack while we’re out.” Midnight nods.

“Exactly. Now let’s show these bastards that we aren’t afraid of them. Let’s roll out.”

We exit the building and make our way toward the bikes.

“You good?” Wrath asks, standing next to my bike.

“You know it.” As I get onto mine, I look at the clubhouse. “Keep an eye on everyone.”

“Nothing will happen to your girl.” He jerks his chin. “Go before you chicken out.”

I scoff. “I’ve never chickened out of shit.”

Wrath chuckles as he walks back to the clubhouse.

Part of me wants to run in there and kiss the hell out of Natalie before I leave. Fuck, maybe even claim her. That way Danworth would be forced to smell her on me. Would he take a swing at me? Or would he not even recognize her essence?

I shake my head at the thought. I’m not into forcing women to do shit and Natalie isn’t ready for all of that yet.

“Ready?” Trigger asks, breaking me out of my thoughts.

I turn on my bike and nod.

The sooner I get this over with, the faster I can get back here to her.

I take off down the drive and something has me looking back in my rearview mirror. I see Colt standing next to Wrath watching us take off.



NATALIE

I've been here for about a month now, yet I'm still jumpy. Sitting in Harrison's room all the time isn't helping. It's like I'm a puppy waiting for him to come home each night to give me a scrap of attention. I hate that I've allowed myself to get to this point. I traded one prison for another only this one is of my own making.

I refuse to sit here today.

So after I get dressed, I head out to the main room. It's empty like it always is this early. The only person around is Jacob. He's stocking the bar. I never realized how rowdy bikers were. Every night ends in a party of sorts. It's hard to deal with in my mental state.

"Hey, Miss Natalie. Do you want me to get you some food?" he asks.

He's a sweet guy. I don't know much about him, but he's always polite and kind to me.

"No thank you, Jacob. Harrison said I could explore the compound. I was thinking of going for a walk."

He smiles. "Want me to keep you company?"

I shake my head. "Don't you have other things to be doing?"

He looks down at the inventory he is stacking. "I can come back."

I laugh. "I'll be okay. I need to get used to this. For the time being, this is my home, and I don't want to feel like I

have to walk on eggshells around it.”

He hesitates. “Okay, but if you need me at all, let me know. I’m supposed to be here for anything you need.”

“Harrison tell you that?” I ask.

He tilts his head. “Pres gave me the order.”

I let out a sigh. I forgot that he doesn’t go by Harrison. I wonder why he lets me call him it.

I just nod, heading out the door without another word.

I walk around for a bit, noting everything I find. There’s a garage of sorts where it looks like they work on their bikes. No one is in there though. Another building is similar to the clubhouse, only it seems to be a bunch of rooms. I didn’t walk too far inside there. A back warehouse catches my attention though because it looks newer than everything else. If I had to guess, it was just put in because of how shiny the siding is, and the land around it isn’t quite settled yet. I make my way to it, pausing as soon as I step in the door.

The sound of grunting has me wanting to flee in fear, but then I hear it. The rhythmic pounding of flesh. Making my way down the hall, I see the warehouse opens into a large room filled with exercise equipment and a large boxing ring. The source of the sound is standing in the corner, beating his fists against a large bag hanging in front of him.

I gasp as the force of his punches hits the bag so hard the chains rattle as it swings.

He swings to face me, his face pouring sweat, his brows furrowed.

“What are you doing in here?”

I jump at the anger in his tone. I don’t know this man. He looks familiar, but he was never introduced to me. He’s one of the men who were with Harrison the night I met him.

“I’m sorry.” I cast my eyes down before turning.

“Wait.”

Instinctively I pause. After the last year, I can't help but listen, my feet refusing to move even though everything in me screams to run.

I hear him sigh before he starts moving. I keep my eyes on the ground until his shoes are in my eyesight.

“Can you look at me?” he asks quietly, his tone no longer angry.

I do as he asks, looking up into his eyes.

“I'm sorry. I'm angry and I lashed out at you. You didn't deserve that. I hate that I made you feel like you had to make yourself feel smaller because of me. You know that you don't have to do that, right?”

He waits for me to nod before he continues.

“You don't have to make yourself any different than who you are. We accept you here. No one will ever hurt you again. If they do, they will have to go through us and trust me, darling, no one wants to deal with us. We are a ferocious bunch.”

I swallow hard. “I think I know that in my head, but sometimes I can't help my reactions.”

He reaches his hand out. “I'm Wrath. Reaper's sergeant at arms. Basically his right-hand man.”

I take his hand gently, letting him shake it.

“Natalie. His charity case,” I whisper.

His eyes turn angry, making me flinch. He lets go of my hand softly though.

“I'd never hurt you. You don't need to flinch with me. You never have been or will be a charity case. I can tell you that Reap doesn't do anything he doesn't want to. He wouldn't take you on as some charity case, so get that out of your head.”

I nod, but I don't believe his words. After everything I've been through, I don't trust myself to make the right judgment call, no matter what they say.

“Do you know self-defense?” Wrath asks suddenly.

I shake my head no.

He smiles. “How about I teach you? Give you some of your power back. Maybe if you know how to stop an attack, you won’t feel so scared all the time. Would you be okay with that?”

I consider his words. Would it make me feel better if I knew how to defend myself from William? I think it might.

“I’d like to try it,” I finally answer him.

He smiles, and it transforms his face. It makes him look less intimidating and part of me wants to tell him he should smile more often, but I won’t because I hate it when men tell women to do that.

“Perfect. How about every day at this time we meet here? No one ever comes at this time because they know I like to work out alone. I can teach you some things, whatever you are comfortable with. If I can’t make it, I’ll make sure to tell you.”

“I don’t want to interrupt your time.”

“Trust me, I wouldn’t have offered if I didn’t want to,” he says sincerely.

“Okay.”

“You aren’t dressed for hand on hand today, so how about I teach you the proper technique for a punch.”

And he does. For the next hour, he watches me as I now punch the bag, critiquing me without touching me as we go. By the time we are done, I feel better. It’s not much, but I feel like I have taken the next step to my recovery. I no longer feel hopeless. I see a light at the end of the tunnel and I’m going to chase it.

thirteen

REAPER

WRATH DIDN'T LIKE BEING LEFT BEHIND, but I feel better knowing he's there with Natalie. He will take care of her as if she was his.

My fingers itch to check in one last time before heading into the casino, but I resist the urge. I need to focus on what's in front of me.

Walking inside the casino, I barely withhold my smirk. There are tons of security around. We continue walking as if we are any other patrons, but the biggest one steps in front of me to stop me.

"We don't allow weapons in here. I am going to have to detain you."

I tilt my head. "I have no weapons on me."

"You won't mind if I check then?"

"Go ahead," I say smugly.

Holding my hands up, I let him run his hands over my body. The fucker goes as far as cupping my junk, making me want to knee him in the face, but I withhold. This is all part of the game Danworth wants to play.

The man reluctantly leaves me to search my men. When he finds nothing, he looks frustrated.

“Can we go now? I believe you have someone here waiting for me. Care to direct me to Mr. Danworth?”

His face clears. “He’s in room thirty-three twenty. Tell him that he needs to pack his things and go. We do not appreciate false reports in this casino.”

Good. He thinks Danworth lied to him. He didn’t mean to. He was sure I’d fly off the handle. I know why. He thinks I’m the kid he left behind. He doesn’t realize I grew up.

“Will do.”

Leaving him in the lobby, we head toward the elevators. It doesn’t take long to find ourselves outside his suite.

He opens on the second knock.

“You came unarmed. I’m surprised. I thought you wanted my head on a platter.”

I push him back, inviting myself into his room.

He’s not alone. He has several Renegade members with him.

“I wouldn’t suggest you touch me again, Kingston. My friends here have orders to shoot first.”

“You are banished. What are you doing back here?”

He lets out a boisterous laugh. “You foolish man. I’m banished from your territory. Last I checked, you don’t own Vegas.”

“I told you if I ever saw your face again I’d kill you. So what are you doing here?”

“I’m home now. Conducting business. Now I hear you have something that belongs to me. I would appreciate it if you would give it back.”

It’s my turn to snort. “Nope. Can’t say I’ve acquired anything that belongs to you so I think you better back off.

Stop sending people by my compound. The last one didn't quite make it back, did they?"

I hint at the prospect the Renegades sent to spy on us. He's living six feet under currently in the middle of the desert.

"Don't play coy. It doesn't fit a man of your stature. Natalie. That bitch is mine and I want her back. She's dumber than a box of rocks, but she's pretty. She's going to birth my children."

My blood is boiling at the way he speaks about her, but I don't fall for his game. He wants me to be impulsive.

"I think that might be a problem. You see, I've been pumping her so full of my cum that she's practically drowning in it. She loves it too. Begs me for it really. She doesn't even remember your name. So you're not going to get her back. I've decided I'm going to keep her," I taunt him.

I hate saying the words. The burn like ash in my throat, but it has the desired effect.

He's pissed now. I can tell by the way he tenses.

"She always was a little whore," he spits out, his fists clenching at his sides.

"Nah, she's more like old lady material. She only creams so good for her man. That never was you, Billy buddy." I use the nickname he hated growing up.

"I'm going to kill you, Kingston."

I shrug. "I'd like to see you try."

"I killed Jimmy easily enough."

I bite my cheek so hard I taste blood at his admission. I always knew something was up with the way that run went. Now I know what it was.

"We were kids. You didn't stay and kill me then. You ran with your tail tucked between your legs. I think you will find I'm much harder to kill now."

"A bullet still stops a heart from beating no matter how invincible the man thinks he is."

“I think you might want to remember that yourself.”

He looks down at his phone when it rings. He frowns.

I felt my own vibrate right before so I am guessing whatever he had planned fell through. I wonder how many holes we will be digging tonight.

“Well it seems like you’re busy. I’ll be seeing you around, William. Count on it.”

He grits his teeth. “Trust me. You will be seeing me sooner than you think.”

“I hope so. I think your head would make the perfect wedding gift for my woman. We could even stuff it and put it on the wall so she can see you every single day and know you will never touch her again.”

I can tell he wants to say something else, but he withholds. It disappoints me.

I turn, leaving the room with my men.

This little meeting has informed me of so much. He’s working with the Renegades, but none of them stepped in to help with this little power play.

It was almost like they were watching him instead of watching out for him.

Nothing is as it seems.

I wait until we are back at our bikes to look at my phone.

Wrath: Six men tried to hit the gate. Took all but two down. No one but us noticed. All good here.

I smirk. He really thought I would be dumb enough to leave her unprotected.

Turning to Trigger, I tell him, “We have a lot more research to do. That wasn’t the meeting with a leader.”

“No it wasn’t. Seemed more like a meeting with a lackey,” he admits.

I nod once. “When we get back, I want to debrief Wrath. We are missing something. Something big I think.”

“I think so too.”

As I climb on my bike, all I can hope is that I can protect the club and Natalie from whatever it is because if it comes down to it, I’m not sure the club is my first priority anymore.



NATALIE

I don’t know where Harrison is, but after leaving Wrath, I head back into the clubhouse. The place is full of men, which makes me uncomfortable. Usually this early, it’s still pretty empty.

I push through it though.

After making the deal with Harrison, I’ve been really concentrating on making myself better. I’m still afraid of William, but I can’t keep putting my life on hold for fear of him. I’m letting him win.

Or that’s what my therapist says. I think I’m starting to believe it myself.

So during today’s session, I broached the subject of being more social.

“I think it’s a great idea for you to meet new people. Right now, your trust has been broken so you are hesitant to get to know anyone. You don’t even trust yourself. So you need to learn to trust yourself before you can truly trust another.”

I nod at the screen. “There are a couple of girls around here that seem nice. I could start with them.”

She nods, and her glasses slip. “I think that’s a good first step, but you’ve never had issues with women. They are your comfort zone. I think it would be good for you to try and make a friend who is male. Remember that you can’t trust your instincts right now. They are in fight or flight mode, so rely on other tells. What are some red flags you can look for?”

“Being too touchy-feely. I don’t think I would trust a man who wanted to have his hands on me all the time. Not if we’ve just met.”

“That’s a good one. Especially if you set the expectation that you would like your space. What’s another?”

“Violence. If they are quick to anger or raise a fist, I don’t think that’s a good thing.”

“With your past, I can see why this would be an immediate red flag. Any others?”

“We talked about gaslighting before. Can you remind me of what to look out for?”

She smiles. “Of course. If they are trying to make you believe your recollection of events is different than you believe. Acting like you are overreacting when you are having an appropriate response to a situation. Trying to convince you that you are wrong. Making you doubt yourself and your ability to see the situation for what it is.”

I take a deep breath. “Okay. I think then I would look for a man to do those things to me. I have to be confident in myself and know that I cannot always take someone at their word. I need to reflect upon myself and see how I feel about it.”

“It’s always a good idea to check in with yourself no matter the situation. Until you can learn to trust your gut again, you have these tools to analyze the situation.”

“I think I am going to try this out. Maybe on a smaller scale. Start with a group of people I already kind of know. Work up to something bigger.”

“Baby steps are still steps. What were you thinking?”

“Where I’m staying, they have some get-togethers sometimes. I could see if my friend would take me. Get to know some of the guys I haven’t met yet in a controlled situation.”

“That sounds like a safe way to explore. Do you think this friend will? Do you trust him to respect your boundaries?”

I nod. “He has been respectful of every boundary I’ve set so far. He’s the one who set all of this up for me. I believe he truly wants me to get better. To be more myself, whoever that is now.”

“Sounds like to me you identified a green flag. Someone who is taking an interest in you in a purely selfless way.”

I want to scoff. Do I believe he is truly selfless? No. I think he has his own reasons for doing what he is doing, but I’ll take it for now.

“There is this other guy here I met. He seemed violent at first, but I think it is because I found him at the gym. He has been kind and offered to teach me self-defense. I think I could learn to trust him too. He hasn’t done anything to make me feel uncomfortable.”

“This is news. Are you saying you didn’t immediately feel the need to run?”

I shake my head. “At first I cowered, but after speaking with him for a few minutes, I relaxed. I feel like he is trustworthy. Something about him screams protector. You know what I mean? He didn’t try to hurt me, but instead offered to teach me skills to protect myself.”

“That sounds promising. Is that something you want?”

I nod. “I want to know how to defend myself should the occasion arise. I never want to feel helpless again.”

“Perfect. These are all steps in the right direction. When do you see him again?”

I rub my lips together. “We train tomorrow morning, but I know he will be at the get-together tonight.”

“Good. If you feel comfortable, you should go. You will have people you know who can be your safety net while expanding your horizons a bit.”

I let out the breath I was holding. “I think I want to try. I’m not sure I’ll like it, but I would like to at least make the effort.”

“I want to hear all about it at our next session. We have a few more minutes. Is there anything else you want to discuss?”

I shake my head no.

“Okay. Same time next week unless you need me sooner.”

“Talk to you next week.”

Closing down the laptop, I resolve myself to leaving my room tonight. I don’t know when Harrison will be back, but Wrath mentioned yesterday that he was looking forward to the party tonight. I think it’s one of the other guys’ birthday or something.

I can do this. I can be social without freaking out.

Giving myself one last pep talk, I get up and start going through the little bit of clothes I have.

If I’m going to do this, I’m going to try and look good at least.

fourteen

REAPER

“NEED HELP?” I ask as I approach.

Wrath looks over his shoulder and wipes his forehead with the back of his hand.

“Help me lift this heavy bastard?”

I grab the guy’s legs as Wrath grabs his arms and we toss him into the shallow grave.

Grunting, I wipe my hands on my jeans. “That asshole was heavier than I thought he was going to be.”

“Dead weight.” He raises his arm and shields his eyes from the sun. “I figured leave the graves open for a few days, let nature do its things.”

“Sounds good. Where is everyone?”

“I sent them back to the clubhouse to clean up. I figured if everyone were to disappear, your girl would get suspicious.”

“Good call.”

Wrath turns toward me with his hands on his hips. “Are you going to keep me waiting or are you going to tell me how it went?”

“When we first walked in, we were met with security.”

“Smart move on his part warning the casino ahead of time.”

While standing under the heat of the sun I fill him in on what happened or what didn't.

“That's interesting.” He rubs his jaw. “He's playing the part, but he is just a middleman.”

“If that.” I nod. “One of the guys who got away texted him right when you messaged me. He didn't seem happy.”

Wrath's lips tilt up. “I wouldn't have been too happy either if I sent guys out and most of them didn't come back. I'm still pissed that two got away though.”

“Next time.”

“Next time.” He nods. “So what next? Are we making a move?”

“Unfortunately we're going to wait and see what he does next. We can't do anything while he's on the strip. Trigger stuck one of the micro cameras on the wall right inside the door with audio. Hopefully we pick something up.”

“By the sounds of it, they are just sloppy enough they will be.” Wrath looks me up and down. “You good?”

“I'm fine.”

“You look a little tense,” he teases.

“I need to go for a ride. Clear my head.”

“I'm pretty sure there's a pretty little thing back at the clubhouse who would like to go on a ride too.”

I shake my head. “Tempting, but not after what just happened. I need her to lay low for now.”

“That's not the kind of ride I was talking about.” He chuckles. “Go. I have shit here covered.”

Turning, we start walking back to the clubhouse side by side. Neither of us says anything until we part ways.

“I'll be back later.”

“Sounds good.” He nods as he breaks off to put the shovels away.

Rounding the clubhouse, I walk toward my bike.

“Hey, man.” Colt jerks his chin up.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“I’m riding out to the Cheekies. They are having an issue with the girls’ private bathroom and the plumber can’t make it out there for a few days. Figured I’d go out there and try my hand at it.”

I shake my head as I rub my jaw. “You know, I never thought we would have so many plumbing issues with the private restrooms when we opened the place.”

Colt chuckles. “Right. Fucking baffling. What are you up to?”

“I was going to go for a ride.”

“Want to go with me?” he asks as he swings his leg, getting onto his bike.

Do I want to go to the strip club when I have the woman of my dreams inside? Hell no. Am I going to go? Yes. Not only do I need to clear my mind before I go back to my woman, but I need to keep an eye on Colt. What better way to do that than go on routine jobs with him. Maybe I can catch him in a lie or overhear one of his many secret conversations.

“Why not?” I tell him.

“Your chick won’t mind?”

Will she? Hell, will she even know?

“I’ll lead, you follow,” I say as I get onto mine.

“Always.”

We take off down the road, but the familiar calm doesn’t wash over me right away. Instead, my mind runs through all the stresses from the day. Could the man next to me really betray our club? I haven’t known Colt as long as Wrath, but

when my dad brought him in, I accepted him with open arms. We learned the ropes of running this place together.

All the good times we had flashed before my eyes. Riding our bikes down the strip like the badasses we thought we were before peeling off so as to not get caught by the cops. Smoking weed behind the shed because Dad never wanted me to get addicted to any substances. Hell, he was there the first time a girl claimed I knocked her up. He's the one who kept a level head and questioned her. Turns out, she was lying as they almost always are.

The hurt settles in my chest at the thought of Colt being our traitor. I'm not sure I'll recover from that hit.

When we finally pull up to the club, Colt turns to me. "You good?"

I nod.

"Word of advice, Pres? Don't let any of them touch you," Colt says as he gets off his bike.

"You know I don't touch the staff."

"Yeah, yeah. Trust me, I've heard them bitch enough."

We walk into the strip club and can instantly feel the vibrations from the music.

Looking around, I see that the place is busier than I thought it would be during the day. One girl is on stage hanging on the pole upside down.

"Hey boss," the bartender says as we walk by.

"Hey," Colt and I say in unison.

I raise a brow. If they are considering him the boss, what else is he doing behind my back?

He shrugs, looking bashful. "She says it every time I drop by."

"Uh-huh. As long as you know I'm the boss."

"Of course." He nods.

We make our way into the back room where the girls are getting ready.

“Hey, Colt, thanks for stopping by,” Nadia says without looking away from what she’s doing.

“Of course. I brought company with me.” He jerks his thumb over his shoulder toward me.

Nadia raises her head, and her eyes widen when she sees me. “Reaper. To what do we owe this pleasure?”

“Just thought I would swing by with this guy. It’s been a while.”

Nadia is the den mother. She handles all the hiring and firing of the girls and makes sure they have everything they need.

“It has. Would you like an update?”

“Sure.” I turn to Colt. “I’ll meet up with you in a minute.”

“Take your time.” He looks toward Nadia. “I’ll try and get the toilets fixed.”

“Thanks.” She smiles at him before turning to me. “Let’s head to my office.”

I follow her back to her office and shut the door behind me.

“Sorry about the mess,” she says as she grabs a box off the chair in front of her desk.

“It’s fine,” I reassure her. “Now tell me, how have things been here?”

Nadia moves around her desk and sits in her chair, and I follow suit. “I don’t want to say it in case I jinx it, but no complaints outside of the restroom.” She rolls her eyes. “I don’t know what the hell they do in there or who it is, but once a month like clockwork.”

I chuckle. “Is it annoying? Yes, I’m sure. But honestly, if that’s the worst of it, I feel like we can’t complain too much.”

“Touché.” She smiles.

“How’s the new bouncer?”

“Awesome. Thank you for sending him my way.”

About a month ago, I met a homeless guy at the gas station. He was built like a motherfucker, and I started chatting him up while I got gas. After hearing his story, I couldn’t walk away without offering him a job.

For the next thirty minutes, Nadia fills me in on all things Cheekie until Colt knocks on the office door.

“Did you get it?” she asks as he steps inside.

“I don’t know exactly what I did, but it’s working now.”

“Good.” Nadia sighs, and her shoulders relax. “I’ll cancel the plumber.”

“No, don’t.” I shake my head as I stand. “Keep the appointment and have him scan the pipes. Maybe he can figure out why we have a monthly issue.”

“Okay, will do.”

I turn and look at Colt. “Ready to head out?”

“Yeah, let’s go.” He looks at Nadia. “You have my number in case you need anything.”

“Thanks, guys.” She waves us away.

We head out the back door of the strip club and see the sun is starting to go down.

“How crazy do you think the clubhouse is tonight? Sex on the pool table? Wet T-shirt contest?”

“I guess we’re about to find out.” I chuckle as I get onto my bike and turn it on.

I hadn’t thought of it until now but I hope this isn’t the night that Natalie decides to venture out of our room. Who the hell knows what she could walk in on.



NATALIE

“Keep your head tucked in. If you keep throwing punches so wildly, there’s no way you can recover quick enough to protect yourself,” Wrath growls.

I am panting from the workout he has been putting me through. This is our fifth training session, and the man has not been taking it easy on me. The last one I thought I was going to have to sacrifice my lung. I don’t understand how I see this man smoking. How can he ruin his lungs in such a way then work this vigorously?

“I’m dying,” I whine.

He smacks me on the head with his punching mitts. It doesn’t hurt, but it does annoy me.

“Of course you’re dying. Right now, you are moving slower than molasses in Antarctica. Jesus, Nat Nat. Are you trying to let yourself get caught?” he eggs me on.

The first time he did this, I burst into tears. After calming me down and muttering about losing his dick to Harrison, he explained that I needed to toughen up. That it sucks that my life has been so hard, but that I should take those emotions and harness them into protecting myself instead of letting them own me.

That whole first session, he poked and prodded me into many tears. I learned though. Now, his words only infuriate me.

Swinging out, I punch him in the head instead of the mat, making him laugh.

“There you go. Give me that fire.”

His praise is few and far between, but it’s the little bit of accelerant I need to go at it harder.

Every single time I’ve thought I couldn’t push any further, Wrath has been there telling me I can give him more. Encouraging me to keep pushing past my mind’s limitations.

“Alright, let’s get some water. I’m scared you might pass out on me the way you’re heaving like a braying donkey.” He snorts.

“Ass.” I breathe out. “Hole.”

He pulls off his glove, grabbing a water bottle before opening it and giving it to me. “You love this asshole.”

I roll my eyes at him. “Whatever you say.”

That only makes him laugh harder.

Truth is, Wrath has been a rock for me. He filled a part in my life I didn’t know I was missing.

Harrison has been giving me support the best way he knows how, but he almost handles me with kid gloves. He asks questions when he needs to but doesn’t push.

Wrath is that wrecking ball who is going to come in, say it like it is, fuck shit up, then leave.

Only with me, he never leaves. He sits in the destruction with me while I work through whatever I’m feeling.

“What is your motivation today?” he asks as he sits on the floor, patting the mat next to him.

This is another thing he does. He doesn’t want me coming in every day using the same motivation. He wants me to continue to find new ones. New reasons why I will never be that girl who barely made it to the gates of this place.

“I want to be able to punch the next person who orders me to do anything for them. I am a human being. I deserve the respect of being asked to do whatever task they want and I have the right to say no. They must respect that right.”

“Good. And if they don’t?”

I side-eye him. “I punch them in the mother fucking throats.”

It still feels weird saying the phrase he has been having me say at the end of all of our sessions, but I like it.

He smirks. “That’s fucking right. Punch every mother fucker who has ever hurt you or thought about hurting you in the fucking throat. Make them choke on their own air until they realize who exactly they fucked with.”

“Can I ask you something?” I look across the gym.

“Sure.” He seems hesitant.

“Why are you so angry? I mean, you have said you are yourself and some of the girls mentioned you have a reputation. I was just curious. You don’t have to answer that.”

“Hey.” He nudges my leg. “Stop second-guessing yourself. You are a boss bitch. You asked if you could ask me something which is respectful. I said yes. So ask the question and leave it at that. You don’t have to follow it up with a reasoning as to why you are asking or to tell me I don’t have to answer. Understood?”

I nod at him.

He lets out a breath. “When I was a kid, I lived with my mom. She dated a lot of losers. They would often hurt her. I don’t want to go into the details, but one of them killed her one day. I don’t think I ever really got over it. Growing up in violence like that? I think it wired me for violence and anger. There’s no changing it.”

My eyes tear up at his admission. He looks resigned to the fact that he feels he is broken. I don’t think he’s broken though. He’s an amazing man.

“I wouldn’t want to change you for the world, Wrath. You are one of the best people I know.”

He gives me a sad smile. “You only say that because you haven’t really seen who I am. I keep the demons at bay around

you. If you saw them, they would scare you. Hell, it would scare anyone.”

It all makes sense to me now. Why he avoids the girls? He’s scared. The rejection he felt with his mom choosing all of those men over him. He doesn’t want to face that with the girls.

“I think if you opened yourself up to others, you’d be surprised. A little demon isn’t so scary when you know that demon is on your side. I would have killed to have someone like you on my side before I came here. Hell, I still would.”

He grows serious. “If I ever get my hands on that man, I will snuff his light out so fucking quick. He won’t even know what hit him. I promise you that. He doesn’t deserve to even breathe the same air as you.”

My eyes start tearing up again. Hearing how vehemently he says the words speaks to the broken part of my soul that has only recently begun to be repaired.

“That means everything to me, Wrath. If you can’t see how good of a person that makes you, you are blind.”

He ducks his head slightly. “Thank you.”

Then he jumps up, shaking off the intimacy of the moment. “Now do you want to go another round or are you done?”

I see what he’s doing and I allow it.

“I’ll never give up.”

fifteen

REAPER

TODAY HAS BEEN A ROUGH ONE. I wanted to stay home all day with Natalie, but being the man in charge means added responsibilities.

Mostly, those are easy, but lately they have been difficult.

Micromanaging was never my way, yet I find myself doing it now because I can't trust most of the men at my back.

Our code has been broken. Until we find the person responsible, we will all be walking on eggshells.

If only we could get a hint as to who it is. Right now we are flying blind with nothing to show for it.

I'm headed back to the clubhouse when the call I've been waiting for finally comes in.

"What's up?" I answer.

"I have something. We need to meet." Trigger's voice comes through.

I curse under my breath. "Do I need to grab Wrath?"

He's training with Natalie right now. I wanted to sneak in and see her in action. Wrath made me promise to leave that

time to them. If I didn't know Wrath the way I do, I would be concerned. I'm not though.

It doesn't change the fact that it drives me crazy not to know what they are up to.

"No. You can give him the information later. I'm in my hideaway."

He hangs up without letting me respond.

Fucker probably already knows where I'm at. Creepy fucker likes to track our phones.

It only takes me ten minutes to pull up to his desert hideaway. It's legit a bunker built into the ground. Unless you know what you're looking for, you would walk right past it.

The door opens before I even get close. I head down the dark stairs, hating the musty smell.

"What couldn't wait?" I ask as I open the door to his lair.

I guess it's more like a computer lab. This part of the bunker is air conditioned with several computers running all at the same time. Lines of code and other shit I could never begin to fathom.

"I have been following the guys. All of them. I have a few suspects, but it's all circumstantial at this point. Each one has been on at least one run. Now more than one of them could be working together, but I think we need to start here."

"Okay, show me."

He types something on his computer and a file pulls up.

"Okay. So number one, we have Colt. You were already worried about him. He has been making a lot of calls to Texas lately, by his own admission. As we have established, it's not on his personal phone. I have yet to be able to figure out his burner phone situation and I've been trying. He's still unknown. Then we have Muscles. He has been getting a deposit into his account recently, but I haven't been able to trace it. Whoever deposits it does so in person at the overnight drop and it's done in cash. It's only a couple hundred here and there."

I look over the deposits. He even has the night camera up from the bank, but it's not Muscles making the deposit. It's a woman.

“Hawk is my third suspect. He has been texting someone off the dark web. Not sure what it's for but seems suspect. Could be William. Last, we have Jug. He hasn't done anything suspicious per se, but he has been talking a lot about you and your girl. Seems he doesn't appreciate your brand of leadership. He's quite butthurt over losing out on Natalie. At least that's what the chatter says.”

I frown. “The hits came before Natalie got here. So that wouldn't be his motivation.”

“Like I said. It's just circumstantial. All of this could be explained away easily. I'm still digging, but those are the ones that we should keep a closer eye on.”

I nod. “I don't want any of them on runs until we have this under control.”

“What are you going to do about Colt? He's going to get suspicious.”

“Fuck him. If he wasn't acting so cagey, it wouldn't be an issue. Until he comes clean about whatever the fuck it is he's doing, he's top of my suspect list. As far as I know, he could be undermining me to take over my position. Lose respect of the brothers, I lose the respect of the club.”

“We won't let that happen.” Trigger is quick to come to my defense.

“I know we won't. We are going to find out who the fuck is selling us out and then we are going to bury them six feet under.”

“Aye aye, captain.” He salutes me.

I shake my head, laughing as the tension breaks.

“Good work, Trigger. Glad to have you on my side.”

“Always.”

As I turn to go, Trigger calls me back, “Reap, what if it’s not anyone I’m watching? What if someone has thrown doubt off of them so far that we never find them?”

I grimace, looking back at him. “Then we burn the whole fucking house to the ground and start anew. If we let this poison live too long, it will take the entire crop out.”

“Agreed. Just wanted to make sure we are on the same track. We should fill the council in on this.”

I shake my head. “Until Colt is clear, this stays between me, you, and Wrath.”

“Understood.”

As I leave, I think about what he said.

What if we never find the mole?

I hate to see all of the work I’ve put into building this club into something sustainable go down in flames, but I meant what I said.

If we don’t find this person soon, we will have to scratch the whole lot of brothers and start fresh. Each man will have to be vetted and prospect again.

It’s going to cause a huge fuss not only within our chapter, but with the other chapters.

I refuse to let us die because of some idiot who thinks he can run off and do what he wants.

I’ll rid us of this disease if it’s the last thing I do.

Not for myself.

For my family.

My brothers.

My home.



NATALIE

I don't know why I thought this was a good idea. This morning, I felt good about it, but standing at the edge of the room while everyone parties makes me feel less confident.

I don't fit in with these people. All around, men are talking loudly while drinking. Some of them have women with them either hanging on their arms or dancing for them. Others are playing pool and darts.

I never went to clubs before William, but I imagine this is what a club or bar would look like.

Jacob notices me standing there as he stands at the bar. He waves me over when I meet his eyes.

“Hey, do you need anything?”

I shake my head. “I was going to hang out for a bit if that's okay.”

He looks surprised. “Of course. Pres isn't here, but you can sit here with me. Do you want a drink?”

I look around the room again, spotting Wrath sitting on a couch talking to a man sitting across from him. No one else is with them leaving the seat to his right open.

“Can you grab me whatever Wrath and that guy is drinking? Maybe one for me too?”

I won't drink it, but it will help me fit in.

“Are you sure?”

I nod. It only takes him a few seconds to push three beers my way.

I grab them, heading across the room to Wrath.

When he notices me approaching, he quirks an eyebrow but doesn't say anything.

I hold out the beers to him.

“I brought you beer.”

Amusement passes his face.

“That you did. Join us.” He takes two beers from me, handing one to the man across from him.

I sit next to him, making sure not to touch him, then hold the beer between my hands. I feel awkward.

“This is Midnight. We were just discussing my next piece.”

I look to the man. I can see why he might be called Midnight. His hair is as dark as his eyes. I remember Jacob mentioning him in passing when he was filling me in on everyone.

“Piece of what?”

Wrath lets his arm rest on the back of the couch behind me. I could have sat further away, but having him close makes me feel better. Since he has been training me, I feel like we’ve become friends. He no longer scares me like the others do.

“I’m a tattoo artist. Wrath loves letting me paint his body.”

Wrath groans. “I really wish you’d stop saying it that way. You already have half the guys in the club thinking I’m into guys.” He looks at me quickly. “Not that I have a problem with guys liking guys, but I am firmly in the pussy category.”

“Um, thanks for the clarification?”

He nods once.

Midnight draws my attention back to him. “Do you have any tattoos?”

I shake my head. William would never let me mark my body in that way.

“Would you like one? I’d do your first one for free.”

Wrath leans forward, kicking the man in the shin. “You do all of ours for free, asshole.”

He shrugs. “True. So what do you say?”

I think about it for a moment. “I’m not sure. What would I even get?”

Midnight ponders the question, but Wrath speaks up instead.

“You choose something that means something to you. It needs to be special or tell a story. Something deeply personal.”

“Are all of yours personal?” I ask, looking over his skin.

He has his shirt on so all I can see are the ones on his arms, but I take in the clock face that looks like it’s melting. The blood splattered across a white flower.

“Every single mark on my body tells my story,” he admits.

“Huh,” I manage to say, thinking about what he said.

I want to ask him what his story is, but I see the same haunting pain behind his eyes that I know is reflected in mine.

Maybe this is why we’ve connected the way we have.

“I’ll think about it,” I promise him before turning to Midnight. “Raincheck?”

Midnight nods. “I’m going to go check in with Honks. He said he wanted to get another tat yesterday.”

Wrath nods too, letting the man go.

Once he’s gone, Wrath and I sit in silence. He keeps his arm behind me but not touching me. I’m not sure if he’s staying silent for me or if this is just who he is.

I watch a few of the girls move around. I can tell who’s a girlfriend and who is just a hang-around.

The girlfriends are under the men’s arms and talking with other women. They also dress more conservatively even if they still are dressed much sexier than I am right now in my jeans and T-shirt. The other women are barely dressed. I’m afraid that I’m going to see parts of them I don’t want to see.

I spot Tara standing next to another man. She looks effortlessly beautiful. Tara must feel me staring because she smiles back at me. I lift my hand and wave.

Could I be any more awkward?

“Who’s that guy?” I ask, pointing across the room at them.

“That’s Chap. He’s our resident chaplain,” Wrath answers quickly.

“Is he nice?” I stare at the man.

Wrath doesn’t answer me right away, but when he does, he eases me. “Chap does what he needs to on behalf of the club, but he is a good man. Believes in the afterlife and all that. He’s here to try and save our souls.”

“Huh...” I murmur.

We fall silent again.

“Can I ask you a question?” I ask Wrath quietly, pushing away my insecurities.

“Sure.”

“Harrison already explained it a little bit, but can you tell me why you have the girls?”

“Reaper,” he starts. “When you are around the guys, call him Reaper. He may let you call him by his given name, but the men know him as Reaper, and being able to use his name is a sign that he trusts you. Respects you.”

I nod, understanding what he is saying.

He continues, “As for the girls, we call them sweetbutts. I’m not sure when they started, but they’ve always been a thing since before I joined up.”

“Do they really have to sleep with every member?”

He frowns. “I mean they don’t have to do anything. They are here by choice.”

“Are they though? Listen, I’m not trying to look down on your lifestyle. I’m trying to understand.”

“You don’t have to apologize to me. You can ask me anything.” He takes a swig of his beer as he takes in the room. “I guess it’s like this. They choose to come here. We have rules in place for them. It’s supposed to keep them safe but

also keep us safe from them. Many of them come here thinking that they are going to change one of us. That they can sink their claws in and we will make them our old lady. That's not what many of us want. We don't like being tied down. So they have three rules. One, they can't be territorial. Two, if they want to live here, they pull their weight. That usually means cleaning or cooking. Getting us drinks and stuff. Finally, three, no drama whatsoever. So do you have to sleep with every man? No. They can say no. Do they? No, but not because we make them. I think it's more like they feel like they can't because they want to be useful."

"What if one of the men was rough with them or they didn't like what they did during sex? Would they be able to say no then?"

He sighs. "That's why I don't sleep with them. The things I enjoy are...particular. They aren't for everyone. I've slept with a sweetbutt or two, but then word got around about what I like and now they are afraid of me. I could ask one back to my room. I'm sure they will go with me, but I don't enjoy forcing women. I need them to enjoy it as much as I do."

"That's what I mean. They are afraid to say no, and they shouldn't be. Most of what you guys do I can overlook, but mistreatment of women I'm not sure about."

He hums a moment. "Have you talked to any of the girls?"

I shake my head. "They don't seem to like me much."

He nods. "Makes sense. You've changed the status quo. Before you, there were only two classifications for women in the club. Either you wore a property badge or you were a piece of ass. You're neither so they don't know what to do with you. They will though. I think you should try talking to a few and seeing how they feel about it. Maybe it will change your perspective."

"That's actually a good idea. I'll think about it. Sorry, I didn't mean to unload on you about it."

He pats my shoulder. "Don't do that. It's obviously been bothering you. You shouldn't bottle your shit up inside. It's not

good for you.”

I snort. “My therapist says the same thing, just more professionally.”

“I bet. Hey, but one piece of advice? Don’t talk to Daniela. She’s been gagging for Reaper’s cock since we were teens. She’s not going to be nice to you.”

“Oh I know. I’ve met her. I don’t get why she’s so threatened by me though.”

Wrath laughs. “I’m not touching that one. Why don’t we go play some darts? Get to know some of the guys.”

I look over at the corner anxiously. There’s about five guys playing a game while chatting.

“They look like they are in the middle of a game.”

Wrath stands, holding his hand out for me. I take it, letting him pull me up.

“Come on. You were brave enough to walk into this room alone. I think you can be brave enough to play some darts with a few bikers. Besides, I’ve seen your punches. You can hold your own.”

I scoff. “Yeah, right. I’ve yet to hurt you.”

“It takes time, my dear student.”

I roll my eyes as he puts his arm around me to pull me to the corner. Once there, all the men look at us as they grow silent.

“Brothers, meet Queen Bee. We are going to teach her the art of darts. Natalie, this is Poker, Spider, Twitch, and Fang.”

I swallow hard but try to put on a brave face.

“Hi,” I say shyly.

They all laugh then, making my face heat.

“Hey darling. Have you ever played darts before?” Spider asks.

I shake my head.

“Well, let’s teach you, then you can swindle some of these other assholes out of money.”

sixteen

REAPER

“IS EVERYTHING OKAY?” Colt asks when we pull up to the clubhouse.

The truth is everything is a fucking mess. I have no proof Colt is our mole. All I have is a gut feeling that he is not being completely honest with me. I hope to fuck I’m wrong. Colt has been a good brother to me up to this point. It would kill me to have to put a bullet between his eyes.

“Fine,” I grumble.

Colt doesn’t say anything else as I walk away from him.

The clubhouse is noisy as always, and for once, it bothers me. I really just want to come home to a quiet house with Natalie waiting for me. Not making me dinner or doing any of that shit Danworth made her do. I just want her there.

I’m truly fucked.

Walking through the door, I stop at the bar to check in with the prospect. I’ve had him watching Natalie for me. He’s been doing a damn good job of it too. I don’t like how close they’ve gotten, but he brings her out of her shell a little bit. As much as I crave her relying on me, I also know it’s not healthy for her to only have me.

So I allow their friendship as long as that's all it is.

I ignore everyone as I head up to the bar.

"Pres, do you need a drink?"

I shake my head. "How was she?"

He nods behind me. "See for yourself. She's playing darts."

I spin quickly, my eyes zeroing in on the area where we keep the darts.

She's standing there laughing as she tosses a dart. She misses the board making the guys burst out laughing, but she's still smiling.

"How long has she been out here?" I ask.

He shrugs. "Two or three hours. Wrath has stayed with her the entire time."

I nod before moving toward them. Before I reach them, I freeze. Wrath has moved next to her, pulling her under his arm as he talks to her. It looks innocent enough, but anger flares inside me.

I move closer, catching his eye before hers. He smirks, letting his arm drop as he steps aside.

"Brother, took you long enough. Queen Bee here is slowly learning how to play darts. By slowly, I mean like a snail's pace."

"Hey," Natalie protests, smacking Wrath on the arm. "Don't be an asshole. It's not as easy as you guys make it look."

Then she peeks at me, giving me a small smile.

"I can help you," I tell her, moving closer.

"I'd like that." Her voice has grown lower, almost husky.

Moving in closer, I wrap my arm around her, pulling her in closely as I press a kiss to her head.

"Reaper, how nice of you to join us." Twitch laughs, throwing his final dart.

“I’ve been working, unlike you bunch. You hustling my girl here?”

He shakes his head. “Nah. Trying to teach her how to hustle the others.”

He gives me a quick nod. I tip my chin back in greeting.

That’s his way of taking back what he said before about her. He’s gotten to know her a little bit, and he sees what I see. I’m glad I put her off limits. I know that any one of these guys would want her as their own if I didn’t call dibs.

“Good.” I lean down, whispering in her ear, “Are you having a good time?”

She peeks up at me. “Actually I am. I was nervous at first, but Wrath hasn’t left my side, so that helped. Plus, these guys have all been really nice to me.”

“As they all will. I told you they won’t hurt you. You’re under my protection.”

She smiles but looks away.

I growl, nuzzling her neck, making her laugh.

“It’s your turn, temptress. Let me show you how to do it. What are you playing?”

“Three hundred one?”

I nod, knowing the game. You have to hit the board until you get down to zero, but if you go over zero, you bust.

“What are you at?”

She snorts. “Like two fifty, I think.”

Spider laughs. “Your girl can barely hit the board.”

I shake my head at him, taking the darts Twitch offers me. Then I move Natalie in front of me.

“Okay, so don’t throw it, but show me what you’ve been doing.”

She stands limply and acts like she’s going to throw. There’s no control in it. No wonder she doesn’t hit the board.

Placing my hands on her hips, I turn her slightly. Then I press into her back until she straightens her spine. I mold myself to her back, running my fingers down her arm until I can thread mine with hers. I can feel her breathing pick up.

I glance down, smiling when I see she's not afraid. I think she's turned on.

"You ready?" I whisper into her ear.

She nods.

"You need to aim your hand. Have control of it."

My other hand trails from her left shoulder down the side of her ribs until it clenches her hip. She gasps but doesn't move.

"Keep your body in place. The only thing that should move is your forearm."

I mimic the movements with her arm a few times.

"Use your fingers to point the dart. From this distance, you don't want to aim right at it, but instead just above your target."

"Like this?" She mimics the way I moved her arm.

"Exactly like that."

I step back then. "Throw it."

She does, and it hits the board. She jumps up and down before turning to me, throwing her arms around my neck.

"I hit it and not by accident. I aimed for the twenty and I got it!"

I laugh, holding her closer. "You just needed the right teacher. Now own these men. Show them how it's done."

We stay out there for hours playing darts with the guys. She never beat them, but the joy on her face said she didn't mind so much.

When she yawns for the seventh time, I finally look at the clock.

Three in the morning.

“We should go to bed, baby girl,” I tell her.

The guys all groan but smile anyway.

The rest of the room has grown quieter. Many of the men have taken their chosen ladies to bed for the evening. Especially after I sent Wrath to tell one of them not to fuck one of the sweetbutts out in the open. I’m sure they aren’t happy with the change, but I would have done anything to keep Natalie out here and happy. This is the first time she’s gone hours without jumping or acting skittish. If it wasn’t for her looking exhausted now, I would have let her stay up all night.

“Fine. I am a bit tired,” she admits.

Shaking my head, I pull her into my chest, hugging her to me. I’ve kept my hands on her all night. I didn’t want to leave her side for a second. Even when she would go to the restroom, I would follow her to the room.

She thinks it’s because of her fears, but really it’s because she’s become my obsession. I don’t like being away from her.

“Good night, guys. Thanks for teaching me to play. I had a good time,” she tells my brothers.

They all return the gesture.

It’s a big deal for them to have chosen to stay with her all night and not find their own pussy. Not only that, but the entire time I was with them, they didn’t even have any sweetbutts around. One of them would leave to grab rounds of drinks. I’m sure the same was true before I arrived.

They are showing her the respect she deserves.

As I lead her down the hall, she stays snuggled into my side.

I wait until we are in the room to ask her what’s been on my mind since I got back.

“What made you decide to go out there?”

She shrugs. “You said it was safe and my therapist is always saying that I need to take baby steps into integrating

myself back into the world. Your world is different than mine, but it's the only one I have so I decided to go for it. I'm not sure I would have lasted long had it not been for Wrath."

I withhold the growl in my throat.

"You two are close, huh?"

She thinks on it a moment. "I think he recognizes my trauma. He's a great friend. More like a brother though. He teases me and makes me want to throttle him more than not. I never had siblings so it's kind of nice."

Any jealousy fades away at her words.

"I told you that we are a family. You're part of that now. Wrath is a great brother, but he doesn't take too many people. Especially females. He tends to avoid them because of some shit in his past. The fact that he's not only looking out for you, which I expect him to do as my sergeant at arms but also laughed and joked with you shows you that he truly cares about you. That's special. He doesn't act that way with everyone, and I've never seen him act that way with a woman before."

"You don't think it's just because of you?"

I shake my head, pulling her back into my arms. "He would take a bullet for anyone if I asked him to, but he would take one for you because you've found a way to become someone on his very short list of people he gives a fuck about. I had nothing to do with that."

"He's teaching me self-defense."

"I know. He told me. I'm glad. You need to know how to defend yourself. I want to take you shooting sometime too. You need to know how to properly use a weapon. I want to give you all the tools so that you never have to feel like a victim again. You are strong as fuck. You just need to believe it."

Leaning up, she presses her lips to mine. I freeze.

We have been sharing a bed, and I've been giving her kisses on her head or shoulder and shit, but this is the first time

we have actually kissed since our date.

I give her a second of pressing her lips to mine before I frame her face with my hands, taking over the kiss. She lets me easily.

When her hands find my chest, rubbing up and down it, I pull back a little.

“I don’t want us to move too fast.”

She sighs. “I’m not fragile. I’m doing better. I’ve been waiting for you to kiss me again since you did the first time. Please don’t treat me like I’m broken.”

I growl. “I don’t want to push you too far too fast or do something to set you back.”

“You won’t. If it makes you feel better, I’ll punch you if you go too far.”

I snort. “How about you say his name? At least for now until we pick a better safe word.”

She frowns. “Fine.”

Leaning back down, I continue to kiss her as I slowly guide her back to the bed. I sit first, pulling her into my lap, her legs on either side of me.

We kiss for several minutes before she hesitantly starts to move her hips over mine. I can tell she’s not sure what she’s doing, so I take the lead.

I don’t let up on my kisses as I use one of my hands on her lower back to guide her into grinding on me. I can already feel her heat through her jeans seeping into my own. She’s turned on, and so am I. I continue to guide her movements, moving my lips from hers to whisper in her ear.

“Is this okay?”

“Harrison,” she moans. “More.”

Grunting, I thrust my hips up into hers, grinding on her through our clothes as I nip and suck my way down her neck. When I reach her tits, I take one in my mouth, sucking it through her clothes. She’s wearing a bra so I use my teeth to

pull it down until her nipple is poking through the fabric of her T-shirt. I latch on to it, sucking and biting it through the fabric.

I'm so close from this little bit of dry humping, but I refuse to come before her. If we are going to act like teens again, I'm going to at least be less selfish than I was back then.

The moment she comes, she moans long and loud, her entire body growing stiff as her head falls back.

I keep thrusting against her until I spill my own release in my pants. Then I hold her, kissing the side of her face as I whisper how beautiful she is in her ear.

When her breathing evens out, I slip her into bed, pulling the covers over her before going to the bathroom to clean up the mess in my pants. I should probably wake her up so she can handle her business but I don't want to disturb her.

Then I climb into bed with my woman because there's no doubting it now.

She's mine.



NATALIE

Last night was more than I could have ever imagined.

I thought being intimate with a man again would be hard, but with Harrison, everything has always been easy. It's almost as if something inside of me recognizes something inside of him, marking him as safe. Or maybe I'm naive.

Either way, he brings me a sense of calm I've never known. Even with everything going on around us, he slows it all down, giving me time to process.

Then there are his brothers. They've scared me since the moment I walked into this place, but last night I saw another side to them.

They are funny and kind. They teased me, but they also teased one another, making me feel part of the group. They didn't have to do that, but they did.

Then Harrison showed up and it only got better. I can see why he thinks so highly of these men. They are a family.

Last night, I felt like I was a part of that too.

Then Harrison took me back to his room and I definitely felt part of him then.

Maybe that's why I'm so chipper this morning. I've showered, dressed, and now I'm ready to face the world.

I think today I'll talk to Harrison about a trip outside the compound. It's a huge step, but I feel like I might be ready.

I head out of my room to the kitchen to make myself something to eat.

Crying from the main bathroom catches my attention as I walk by. I pause outside to listen for a second. I get the confirmation I need.

Knocking softly, I speak through the door. "Are you okay?"

I can hear whoever is behind it muffling their tears.

"Fine," they call out after a moment.

I recognize the voice. Tara. One of the sweetbutts.

"Tara, can I come in?" I ask.

"Why?" she chokes out.

"I want to check on you. Please?"

It's silent so long that I think she will refuse, but then the door opens. She's got bruises on her arms and neck. I hiss at the sight, pushing inside to close the door.

"Who did this to you?"

She shakes her head. “I can’t tell you. It won’t matter anyway. I need this place.”

I let out a small growl. “This is not okay. One of these guys did this to you?”

“Why do you even care?” she asks suddenly.

I sink back against the wall, watching her attempt to cover up the bruises with makeup.

“No one should have to live like this. I get that you are here for a reason and that it’s none of my business, but this is not okay. You shouldn’t be living in fear or pain because you have no other options. I won’t stand for it.”

She looks over at me for a moment. “You mean that, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. I’m going to do something about it too. If you aren’t safe here, then neither am I. I’m not staying here if it’s unsafe.”

“Reaper has put you under his protection. You are the safest person in this place.” She snorts through her tears.

“For now. What happens when he gets tired of having me around or he solves my problem?”

She shakes her head. “You don’t get it. I’ve seen you on the back of his bike. Seen him hold your hand, pull you in close, even kiss you. Reaper didn’t do any of that before you. You’re not some sweetbutt to him. You’re more.”

I scoff at her. “If you say so. Even so, it doesn’t matter. A man who would put his hands on you like that would gladly do the same to me or anyone else. That’s not okay.”

She looks at me thoughtfully for a moment. “None of the other old ladies even acknowledge us. You’ve always smiled or said hi. Why is that?”

“Is there supposed to be a divide between us? You’re a human being like I am. Why would I ignore you? Treat you differently? It would be different if you were a shitty human being or cruel for no reason, but you are a sweet girl. So are most of the others. Do I agree with the way you are handling

your life? No, not really, but it's none of my business. I don't have to live with the decisions you make. Kindness is free. It doesn't cost a thing."

She takes a deep breath. "What do you think you can really do about it? If I tell you, it will get back to him and then he will make my life even worse. I can't say no to him. If I do, I get asked to leave. I have no options. I'm stuck."

Pushing from the wall, I go to her side, brushing her hair off her face.

"If you trust me, I will take care of this. We can do it right now. I just need you to trust me. They won't make you leave and if they try, then I'll leave with you."

I hold out my hand to her. Then I wait.

It takes her several minutes, but then she gives me her hand. I thread our fingers together, pulling her out the door.

Once in the main room, Jacob looks up from whatever he is reading on the counter.

"Whoa, what happened?" he asks, his eyes taking in Tara.

"Leave it. I need to speak with Harr...I mean Reaper. Where is he?"

Jacob shrugs. "They don't tell me stuff like that. Wrath is over at the garage though."

I nod. "Next best option. Thanks."

I pull Tara behind me, but once we are out the door, she pulls back. I look at her, taking in her frightened face.

"Was it Wrath?" I ask, suddenly afraid of her answer.

Wrath has become my closest confidant next to Harrison. It would gut me to find out he is the one who hurt her.

She shakes her head. "No, but he's not much better. The girls talk about him. He's always angry and brooding. He's the most violent. He never actually fucks sweetbutts. He will mess around in front of the others, but he always sends them away telling them that they can't handle his brand of kink. He scares me."

My chest feels lighter at her admission.

I snort. “Wrath is fine. You’ll be with me. I’ll deal with him.”

She hesitates but takes my hand once more as I pull her to the shop. I find him working on his bike listening to angry, metal music.

“Wrath,” I call out.

He doesn’t hear me though. I huff out a breath. Leaving Tara by the door, I walk up to the dock where his phone is, pushing pause on his music.

He turns, his face seething.

“What the fuck.”

I see Tara take a step back. I roll my eyes at Wrath.

“Calm the fuck down. I need to talk to you. Well, Harrison actually. Where is he?”

Wrath’s eyes calm as he realizes it’s me in front of him.

“He’s busy, but I’ll shoot him a text telling him you need him. Anything I can help with?”

I glance at Tara making him take her in. I know the moment he takes in her bruises. His body tenses.

With three strides, he’s in front of her as she’s backed against the door.

“Who did this to you? Give me a name, and I’ll kill him.”

His voice is low and growly. I’ve never seen him so predatory before.

Tara’s eyes are wide, her lower lips trembling.

“Wrath, you’re scaring her. Can you take a step back, please?”

He doesn’t move right away, but his hand does come up to brush one of the bruises at her throat. After a moment, he steps back.

“I love that you’re polite, Nat, but next time, stand your ground. When someone’s doing something you don’t like, they do what you want. Understood?” He reminds me of one of the lessons he’s been teaching me.

I nod as I move closer, taking Tara’s hand once more.

“One of your men did this to her. That’s why I want to talk to Harrison. This isn’t acceptable under any circumstances. If this is how you guys are going to treat the women under your protection then I’m going to do everything I can to keep them from here even if I have to give them the shirt off my back to do so.”

Tara is shaking as she leans closer to me. I keep my eyes on Wrath’s though. He takes in Tara once more.

“I’m going to ask you three questions. I need you to answer them honestly. Understood?”

She nods.

“Was the sex consensual?”

“Yes,” she whispers.

“Did you tell him he could leave marks on you?”

“No. I didn’t want him to hurt me. I begged him not to,” she admits softly.

Wrath’s eyes grow hard.

“Who is it?”

Tara hesitates. She’s so scared I wouldn’t be surprised if she peed her pants.

Wrath doesn’t have patience though. He growls.

“A name, Tara.”

She looks surprised when he says her name. He tries to soften his posture, but it doesn’t help. He’s so angry, I can feel it pouring off of him in waves.

“Tell me his name, Tara. I will take care of it. He will never touch you again. I promise.”

She swallows hard. “Jug.”

The name is barely out of her mouth before Wrath has left the shop, leaving his phone behind.

“He looks angry enough to kill him,” Tara whispers.

“That’s because he is,” I admit.

Rushing back to the counter, I grab his phone. I slide it into my pocket before leading Tara back to the clubhouse.

“I have to admit,” she whispers to me after a moment. “That was hot. Don’t get me wrong, he still scared the fuck out of me, but seeing him so worked up over me. Protective even? If only I could find a man like that who wants to keep me.”

I stop, pulling her into my arms. “You will, honey. I’m sure of it.”

She sighs, hugging me back. “You aren’t what I expected.”

I laugh, pulling back. “I’m not even sure who I am yet, but I’m figuring it out.”

“Well, I like you the way you are.”

“Me too,” I tell her as I push through the door. “Jacob, call Reaper. I need to talk to him ASAP. It’s an emergency.”

Jacob widens his eyes but does as I ask, handing me the phone.

“What is it?” I hear Harrison bark into the phone.

“Um, I think Wrath is going to kill some guy called Jug. Figured you may want to know,” I tell him.

“Natalie? Are you okay? Did he hurt you?” His tone has changed.

I can hear him moving in the background.

“Wrath? No way. He’d never. He’s angry though.”

“Not Wrath. I trust him with your life. Jug. Did he touch you?”

I tilt my head. “I don’t even know who he is.”

“How do you know Wrath is going to kill him then?”

I look over to Tara. “He hurt one of the sweetbutts. You weren’t available, so I took her to Wrath. Before you yell at me about not understanding your way of life, hurting a woman is unacceptable no matter the circumstance.”

He curses. “Of course it is, baby. Especially those under our care. I’m an hour out. I’ll call Wrath.”

“Yeah, well, I have his phone,” I admit.

“Fuck. Give the phone to the prospect. And Natalie, don’t go looking for Wrath.”

I roll my eyes but hand the phone back to Jacob.

He takes it, his eyes widening at whatever Harrison is saying.

I don’t stay to find out.

“Let’s go hang out in my room.”

Tara lets out a little laugh.

“You are exactly what this club needs.”

I shrug, but deep down, I love the compliment.

Now if only I can get Harrison to keep me.

seventeen

REAPER

HEARING Natalie's voice on the other end of the line has my anxiety through the roof. I know she said she wasn't hurt, but she's never had a reason to call me before. For a moment, I thought she was in trouble. I was ready to burn the world to the ground for her.

Thankfully, she's fine. The prospect followed her until she was locked in my room with the sweetbutt she had saved. Then he went and found Wrath.

By the time I made it back to the compound, the prospect had Midnight, Colt, and Widow helping hold Wrath back while Jug is sitting in a chair, bleeding from his head. They are all in front of one of the warehouses the men sometimes hang out in.

"What the fuck is going on here?" I bellow out.

Wrath switches directions as soon as he hears my voice, his focus now on me.

He strides right up into my face. "Call your guard dogs off."

I push him back. "Don't you be getting in my face. You know the rules. You can't attack a member without prior

approval. Where are the rest of the guys?" I ask the prospect.

"In church waiting on you, Pres."

I nod. "I don't think we will make it to church. Ask them to come out here."

He takes off running while I look at Wrath. I cup his neck, pulling his forehead to mine.

"I get it, brother. Take a breath. You will get your shot, but we do this right," I say quietly.

He nods, breathing heavily. "You should see her. She's hurt badly."

"She's not your mom. Natalie has her. She's okay now. You are going to protect her now."

He's shaking as he swallows hard.

"She's off the menu for the next couple weeks. Until she heals," Wrath demands.

"You know we can't make that call alone."

He growls. "Fine. She's mine for the next couple weeks."

I barely cover my reaction from his statement. The thing about Wrath is he never messes with the club girls, especially long term and he never asks for anything.

"We will bring it up to the guys."

He grumbles but straightens when we hear footsteps.

The rest of my council has shown up.

"What is going on?" Pinky asks as they form a circle around us.

"We've had a breach in trust," I say as I pull away from Wrath.

Everyone looks between Wrath and Jug.

"I didn't do anything. He's psychotic. We should have put him down years ago," Jug rants.

Wrath tenses, but I shake my head no.

He gives a slight tilt of his head, acknowledging me.

Be smart, I try to convey to him.

“We’ve received a report that Jug is treating the women poorly. We do not stand abuse of women at all.” I let my voice carry.

The men look wary as they study Jug.

“She wanted it. I didn’t hurt anyone more than they wanted.”

I ground my teeth together. If Wrath is this angry, it wasn’t a little rough play.

I wish I had given Natalie a phone so I could call her. I don’t want her out here, but we need to know what happened. The guys need to hear it from the source.

First thing tomorrow she is getting a cell phone.

For now, I look to the prospect. “Bring them here. Tell Natalie I’m here, and they are safe.”

He nods, taking off again.

“So is this how it’s going to be now that you got a little pussy. You gonna take their word for everything and condemn one of your brothers.”

“I’m not condemning anyone. We will hear what she has to say then take a vote as we do with everything. If you did nothing, then there isn’t any reason to be concerned, right?”

He mutters under his breath, but I can’t make out what he’s saying.

“Care to repeat that?” I challenge.

“No, Pres.” He shakes his head.

It’s silent as we wait for the girls to come. As soon as I see Natalie, my heart races. I know it wasn’t her that was hurt, but my eyes still take in her body, ensuring she is safe and healthy.

Then my eyes land on the girl next to her. She’s covered in bruises.

Wrath stalks toward them, making the girl cower behind Natalie. I don't know what he says to her, but after a moment, she lets him tuck her under his arm as he carefully guides her to the group, her hand still in Natalie's. As soon as she's close enough, I move toward her, taking up her other side, the women protected between me and Wrath.

"We need to hear what happened," I say, looking at Natalie as I say the words.

"Tara, it's okay to tell them."

Tara glances up at Wrath. "He went ballistic the last time I said it."

"He will keep himself in check. He needs to stay by your side. Isn't that right, Wrath?"

He nods, looking down at her, his face softening. "I won't hurt you. Please tell them what happened so I can take care of the waste of space."

Tara swallows hard, looking to the ground.

"Last night, Jug claimed me for the rest of the night. He brought me back to his room and began degrading me. I'm not into that and asked him to stop, but he became physical. The more I cried, the harder he would hit me. Then as he forced himself on me, he used his arm to choke me until my vision blurred. I thought he was going to kill me. When he was finally done, he picked me up and dropped me outside his door." She says the words in a detached way as if she wasn't the one being hurt.

Natalie squeezes my hand as she lays her head on Tara's shoulder. Wrath squeezes the girl closer to him as he meets my eyes.

He's going to kill Jug. Maybe not today, but one day he will.

"Jug, what do you have to say for your actions?" I ask, knowing nothing but lies will fall from his lips.

I have no doubt that this girl is telling the truth. The bruises themselves speak volumes. No one consents to being

used as a punching bag.

“It was consensual. She’s lying now because of how she looks, but last night she liked it.”

I watch Tara as he speaks, her body growing smaller. She reminds me of Natalie when she came to us.

I hate it.

“Does anyone have any questions, or are we ready to vote?” I grit out through my teeth.

“With the women here?” Colt asks.

“With the fucking women here,” I spit out, my own anger close to the surface. “Now, are there any questions?”

No one else speaks up.

“We will have two votes then. Those in favor of excommunicating Jug from the club say ‘yay’.”

Every single man here votes yes. Not a single one says no when asked.

I continue on. “Those in favor of permanently removing Jug from here say ‘yay.’”

This time only four of the men in attendance vote yes. The other five voting no.

“You leave with your life Jug. You have thirty days to remove our branding from your body and never come back here again. If we find you, you will pay with your life. Do you understand?”

He nods, spitting blood on the ground.

“Good. In the meantime, Wrath, teach this man how it feels to be the punching bag.”

Wrath gets this sick smile on his face. He enjoys this shit.

“Tara, honey, you should go inside,” he tells her, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

“No. I want to see it. I need to,” she pleads as she straightens her shoulders, standing tall.

He nods once, handing her over to my girl.

Then we watch as he beats Jug within an inch of his life, leaving him broken and bloody on the ground.

Karma for doing the same to an innocent girl who should have been protected.

After I demand the prospect to clean up the mess and drop Jug in Vegas, I pull Natalie into my side.

Wrath comes back, dropping to his knees in front of Tara.

“He will never touch you again,” he tells her, holding his bloody hands up as if it’s an offering.

Tara hesitantly reaches up to cup his cheek. Then she pulls his head to her stomach hugging him as tears fall down her face.

“Thank you,” she whispers through a sob.

He holds her tighter for a moment before standing, picking her up in his arms.

“You’re with me until you’re healed,” he tells her, taking off toward the clubhouse.

I grimace, looking over at the other guys expecting one to contradict Wrath. They all wisely keep quiet. We will have to discuss him keeping Tara as his own for a couple of weeks, but it can wait.

“That was odd,” Natalie whispers, curling into my side.

“What? The violence or whatever that was?”

She shrugs. “That. Violence I’m used to.”

I pause, turning her so I can see her face. “I didn’t think about that. Are you okay? You shouldn’t have had to witness that.”

“Don’t treat me like glass now, Harrison. I’m getting better every day. I actually think that helped. Seeing an abuser become the abused. I felt like some of the power I lost was given back. I’m glad Wrath did it and I’m glad he’s looking out for Tara now.”

“Me too.”

“I’m glad you are turning out to be a man of your word, Harrison.”

I press a quick kiss to her cheek.

She doesn’t know it, but she makes me want to be a better man.

For her, I’d do anything.



NATALIE

After everything with Tara, my head is still spinning. How can these women feel secure here with no checks and balances? They need to have a safe space. They should never fear speaking up.

I didn’t know that the man who hurt Tara was the same who harassed me the first night I was here. Hell, I could have been her if Harrison hadn’t come out when he did.

I slept on it last night hoping the feeling would go away, but it didn’t. If anything, I felt like I was being called to do more.

It’s such a strong feeling that I can’t lie in bed a moment longer.

I pull on a pair of sweats and one of Harrison’s club shirts before making my way to the main area. I don’t see anyone, so I head toward the room he calls church.

I knock on the door, leaning against the doorjamb.

“Hey. You’re awake early,” he says, looking at his watch.

It's before five. I'm rarely up before eight these days.

"We need to talk."

He frowns, setting his pen down.

"Okay. We can go back to the room."

I shake my head. "I want a notebook and pen and a table."

He tilts his head. "We have an office over at the garage on the property. Let's go there."

I nod, letting him lead me out of the room, watching as he locks it behind us. The walk to the shop is quiet, but he keeps his arm around me the entire time. He seems nervous.

Once inside, he hands me a notebook and pen before sitting next to me.

I shake my head. "Sit across from me." I indicate the side of the desk where a guest might sit.

He chuckles but does as I ask.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of this meeting, Queen Bee?" he asks.

"What happened with Tara was unacceptable. I can't help but think how many of the girls feel that way. I want to make this place better. Safer. I want you to help me make it happen."

He smiles, his face holding a hint of relief. I wonder what he thought this was about.

"What do you propose?"

"I'm not quite sure yet. I think to start, I need to get the girls together and see what their ideas are. Obviously, I will make sure they know this is all just communication at this point, but they would be the ones who know what would help them most. For example, do you offer free condoms to them? STD testing? If not, then that's the first order of business. They should have free medical care through you."

He frowns. "We take care of the girls. If they ask to go to the doctor, we do it."

I shake my head. “I spoke with Tara a little yesterday. She’s afraid to ask for anything because if you are seen as a problem, it’s more likely you will get rid of her. It should be known from the time they step in the door that they get free testing and we need to have a community bowl of condoms or something. We should be offering them contraception as well.”

I write down my thoughts as they come to mind.

He smiles, rubbing his face. “We?”

I swallow hard. I did kind of insert myself there.

“I mean you guys.”

He shakes his head, laughing. “No, you had it right. We. I like that you are taking an active part in the club. Okay, how do you propose we do this? Who would make sure they are getting their appointments?”

I consider his words. “We would need someone to be the point of contact. Someone they are comfortable with. They could be the person to make the appointments too.”

“You.”

“What?” I shake my head, caught off guard.

“You,” he repeats. “You will do it. Like a den mother. You will be that voice for them. You already are.”

“Me? I mean, what if you change your mind and want me to leave? I don’t want these girls getting comfortable just to have the rug pulled out from under them.”

Harrison jumps up, moving to my side of the desk. He turns me in the chair and leans over until my back is against the desk, his face in mine.

“I will never tire of you, Natalie. I want you here with me always. So when I say this will be your job, then it will be your job. You’ve been looking for your purpose. I think this is it. You were sent here to lead at my side. Yesterday proved it. You saw a problem, and you spoke up. You will make this club better for everyone.”

“You’re sure?” I whisper.

“I’m sure.” Leaning in, he kisses me before backing off.
“What else?”

“Um...” I shake my head, trying to remember where I was because he fried my brain. “We need a way to report assault. Obviously I understand that some women make false reports, but we should have a process in place.”

“Fair point. They can’t do so anonymously though. We can’t investigate the allegations if there isn’t a name attached. We will treat each case as its own.”

“I accept those terms. Tara is going to need counseling. I want to sign her up with my therapist.”

“Done. I want these services to be available to all the girls.”

I nod once. “I know the sweetbutts are supposed to be a fun thing for you guys, but they should have the right to say no. I want that known to them. I mean, I get that they can’t live here for free and stuff, but maybe we have a rule book or something for them? I’m not sure how it would work yet, but I don’t want them to be afraid.”

He contemplates my words.

“I think we need to be careful with it otherwise the men will vote against it, but I think we can come up with something. Kinda like the legal brothel here. Let me reach out and get in contact with the madam. Maybe I can set a meeting for you with her so you can ask questions about how it’s run.”

I can feel the smile on my face. “Really?”

I hadn’t even thought about that. That’s a great idea.

“Queen Bee, I would do anything to keep you smiling that way.”

“Can you set up the meeting soon? I want to get to work on this as soon as possible.”

He nods. “I’ll make it happen.”

“Good. I think that’s it until I talk to the girls. Can I call a meeting with them today? Would that be an issue?”

He shakes his head. “You do what you need to do. You can use the office here or maybe the gym. Somewhere big, but away from the guys. Just let me know where, and I’ll tell the guys it’s off-limits.”

Standing, I round the desk, falling into Harrison’s lap. He smiles up at me.

“I love this new confidence you’ve found,” he tells me as he squeezes my thigh.

“I told you I felt like I got some of my power back. I feel like you’re helping me claim it with each day.”

He presses a kiss to my lips before whispering, “I want you to be the most powerful person in the world. I’ll do anything to get you there.”

I chuckle letting him kiss me again.

This kiss is different though. Instead of staying playful, he deepens it, nipping at my lip. I open for him easily. I love the feel of his lips on mine.

When his hands start to rub up and down my thighs, I start to breathe faster. Before Reaper, it had been so long since I’d felt aroused that these feelings I feel with Harrison almost feel new. Like I’m a born-again virgin experiencing my first sexual encounter. God, I feel like such a teen, especially with someone older and more experienced being the one to invoke these feelings inside my body.

I’m burning up. Suddenly, he’s not kissing me fast or hard enough. I need more. I don’t even know what, but he needs to give it to me.

Now.

“Harrison,” I murmur.

“What, Queen Bee? Tell me.” He pants between kisses.

“More.”

“More?” he repeats.

“Yes. I need more. Please, and for the love of God, don’t hold back.”

“You want me to fuck his touch out of memory?”

“Yes, please,” I beg.

“My fucking pleasure.”

Moving to stand, he sets me on the floor, making me pout.

“Enough of that, beautiful. I’m going to strip you bare, then you’re going to sit on that desk and let me take whatever I want.” His fingers reach up, his thumb slipping into my mouth.

I suck on it lightly before biting it. He hisses, but his eyes are pure fire.

“Do you understand me?” he asks.

“Yes. Please,” I admit softly.

I was letting my hormones talk before so now that I’m not in his lap, I feel a little awkward. He doesn’t let me though.

Tipping my chin, he kisses me hard. “You want this to stop, you say the word. Got it. Otherwise, sit back and let me worship you.”

Then he sinks to his knees, taking my pants with him. I’m bare from the waist down, making my cheek heat, but he doesn’t notice.

Of course not, because he’s busy removing my clothes. First, he pulls one leg out, kissing from my foot up my ankle and calf all the way up my thigh until he’s where I need him. He doesn’t stop there though. Instead, he kisses down the opposite leg until he lifts it to remove my pants completely.

A light flickers on from outside the office, making my eyes flicker to the window.

“Someone’s here,” I hiss, trying to pull back, but he doesn’t let me.

“Probably Wrath. He likes to work on the bikes to keep his mind busy. Sit on the desk.” He moves me until my ass is on the edge of the desk.

“What if he comes up here?” My mind is racing, but when he leans in, licking between my lips, I moan.

It’s like an electric shock.

“He won’t,” he whispers, leaning in to suck my clit into his mouth, making me let out a loud squeak.

He chuckles. “Or he might if he hears that. Is that what you want?” he asks, his finger sliding into my pussy, making me clench. “You want him to happen upon us? Watch you getting your pussy eaten out by your man? See the way I possess you like no man ever will?”

“Oh god,” I cry out as he begins to finger fuck me, curling his finger to rub against a spot inside me that feels so good I never want him to stop.

“Not God. More like a reaper. I’m going to make you come all over my face. Can you do that for me?”

I nod my head over and over.

“Words, baby girl.”

“Yes,” I manage to breathe out.

“My good fucking girl.” He curses before diving back in like I’m the best thing he’s ever tasted.

I don’t even know how long he stays between my legs. Between the licking and nibbling, then the fingers circling and thrusting, I’m delirious.

Then I feel it. It’s not something I’ve ever felt before. Not on this level at least. The pleasure builds up inside me until my eyes fall closed, my head rolls back, and I scream. I mean, legitimately scream at the top of my lungs, my body shaking with pleasure.

I vaguely hear Harrison call out, “Don’t come in here.”

Then I’m in his arms and he’s whispering to me. “Such a good girl.”

“You come so beautifully.”

“You taste like the sweetest sin I’ll be devouring for the rest of my life.”

“You’re mine.”

When I finally can breathe again, I pull my head back and look at him. “That was...”

“No need for words. We both felt what that was. That’s good enough for me. Let’s get you dressed and get you back to the clubhouse. You have some tasks to complete.”

I frown. “What about you?”

I wiggle in his arms so I rub against his erection.

“This isn’t about me. It’s about you. Thank you for trusting me with your body like that.”

“You won’t, um, find someone else, will you?” I whisper, hating the feeling inside me right now.

He cups my chin, forcing me to meet his eyes. “Absolutely not. I know you don’t trust words right now, but that’s okay. I’ll prove to you that I’m better than him. Now let’s get you cleaned up.”

As he helps me into my pants, I let myself think about his words. Harrison seems to know what to say to always put me at ease.

I’m not sure if I can trust myself or anyone else, but something inside me really wants me to trust him.

eighteen

REAPER

LEAVING Natalie at the door to the gym for her sparring session with Wrath was a special kind of torture. Especially with his knowing smirk.

I know he heard us this morning. I knew as soon as she mentioned the light that it would be my best friend.

Weird thing is, it was oddly a bit of a turn-on to think about someone catching us.

Don't get me wrong. I will kill any man that sees that side of her. In theory, it was hot, but in reality, fuck that. No one sees my woman but me.

Still, she liked it too. She was practically gushing for me.

Then the sweet innocent way she asked about me. I wanted to take her then and there, but I withheld.

One day I will fuck her against that desk, but that day will not be today. Not when I knew we had to rush.

I swear I can still taste her on my tongue. I should be pouring over these business documents from the strip club. Instead, I'm imagining the way Natalie lit up beneath me. The way she arched into me. I bet if I had her straddle my face, she

would have ground into me. She would ride my face so hard she wouldn't be able to see straight for a week.

Fuck.

Now I'm hard.

I want to go pull her from the gym and have a repeat performance, but I don't.

Instead, I make my way to our room.

Our room.

I don't know why I was fooling myself. Since the second this girl showed up, she's owned me.

I can't wait to move her into our house. Maybe she will finally make the place feel like home.

Moving through the room, I strip my clothes off. I need the coldest shower known to man.

Or maybe I need to jack off.

The decision is made for me when I find the hamper full of our dirty clothes. Sitting right on top is that pretty little sundress she wore yesterday. I bet she didn't even realize how sexy she looked in it.

I had to practically stare down all the guys to keep their eyes off her. I would never tell her what she can and can't wear, but that doesn't mean I'll let other men look at her.

She's mine.

Pulling the dress out, I bring it to my face.

It still smells like her.

God, this is so wicked. I shouldn't, but my dick is already weeping at the idea.

Fuck it.

I'm already going to hell.

Hell, they named me Reaper because I lead the souls into hell.

Might as well earn my name.

Taking her lotion off the sink, I squirt it along my length. Then I start to stroke, keeping the dress up to my face.

I'm imagining her here with me. She'd watch me being so depraved, but she'd love it.

She'd be soaking wet wanting to touch herself, but she wouldn't. She'd be too entranced by watching me stroke my hard dick for her. She'd want to touch it for herself.

"Fuck, Natalie. You are so fucking innocent. I'm going to love to corrupt you," I moan out, fully involved in my fantasy.

She'd come to me then. Begging me to take her. The same moans from this morning filling my ears as I sank to my knees, having to have another taste of her sweet essence. Fuck, I'd want to live there if she'd let me.

She wouldn't let me though. She'd be so desperate for my dick that she'd be climbing me, trying to impale herself on it. I wouldn't torture her for too long.

I never could. Not my girl. I have this desire to give her everything she could ever need or want. To take care of her so good that she'd never dream of wanting to leave me.

Stroking faster, I imagine the way I'd lay her out on my bed. I'd have her spread wide for me. Then I'd hold myself over her, sliding in slow and steady. Watching my dick disappear into her would be the greatest gift. The only greater gift being her love.

"Fuck," I hiss as the thought of her loving me makes me twitch in my hand.

I'm going to fucking blow and soon.

The thought of having her is almost too much for me to handle. I should have fucked her this morning. Maybe this wouldn't be so intense.

Only I know that's a lie.

Things are so intense between us because it's us. She's special.

She's my one.

The only girl for me.

I never thought I would have someone like her by my side. I never imagined I'd find a woman who could be soft and sweet yet also handle the darker side of my life.

Yet here she is.

My angel.

My everything.

I can feel myself about to come when I hear it.

“Harrison?”

Then I make a mess out of that pretty dress as she stands in the doorway, shock on her face.

I'm fucked.



NATALIE

After the morning delight I got from Harrison, I should have been in a better mood. Too bad for Wrath, I'm pissy as fuck.

How could he eat me out like his last meal and then not let me return the favor? I mean, I'm not sure I can give a blow job yet after my trauma, but I could have given him a hand job or he could have fucked me. I wanted him to, in fact.

So why didn't he? Am I not good enough? Is there something wrong with me? Does he still see me as broken?

“Alright, Queen Bee. What's wrong?” Wrath stops my current punch set.

“What makes you think something is wrong?”

“You are getting sloppy. You’re letting your emotions rule you, not the other way around. I’d almost say it’s sexual frustration, but I heard that ‘O’ you had this morning. Hell, I’m sure half the compound heard.”

I growl, my face growing red. “He wouldn’t let me reciprocate.”

What does this fucker do? He bursts out laughing. Like keeling over laughing.

“This isn’t fucking funny. I’m upset. Don’t be a dick.”

He stands up straight but is still laughing. “You’re mad because he pleased you without letting you pleasure him?”

“Yes. I wanted to. Well, I wanted to do something at least.”

He shakes his head, his laughter subsiding. “Listen, men are simple. I can tell you that he wanted you to. Badly probably because that man hasn’t had eyes for anyone but you since the day you walked in here, but he probably is trying to be honorable. You survived something horrific. He’s trying to take things at your pace.”

“That’s just it. It’s my pace. I should be the one setting it so why is he turning me away? I don’t want to be defined by that period in my life. I’m stronger than he thinks.”

“I agree. You are stronger now. You called me a dick and told me to stop laughing at you. The old you would have cowered. You don’t cower anymore. You stand tall and make demands. So what I suggest you do is give up this session for today. We aren’t going to make any progress. You go find my idiot brother, and you tell him that you are setting the pace. Then you set the damn pace, girl. If you want to fuck him, then do it. You want to play with his dick? Do it. Take what you want. Take control. I promise he will follow your lead.”

The insecurity starts to sink in. “You really think he will? He won’t reject me?”

“Absolutely not. Whatever it is you want? He wants that too. Show him you are ready for it.”

Taking a deep breath, I pull the gloves off my hands. Then I hold them out for him to untape. Once done, he pats my head.

“Go get him, girl.”

“Thanks, Wrath.”

I start looking for him in church. That’s where he said he would be. The door is locked, and he doesn’t answer.

Making my way to the main room, I see Jacob.

“You see Reaper?” I ask him.

“Headed back to your room a bit ago.”

I nod, taking off down the hall.

I expected him to be in bed or something, but when I open the door, he’s not there.

I can hear heavy breathing coming from the bathroom.

My stomach tightens. Could Wrath have been wrong? Is he with a sweetbutt?

Unable to stop myself, I open the door.

What I find instead is Harrison standing in the bathroom, my sundress wrapped in his fist as he grunts. Then I see it. Rope after rope of white creamy cum covering my dress.

His face looks pained as he moans. When his dick finally stops twitching, he wipes it off, throwing my dress in the hamper.

“Natalie, this isn’t what it looks like.”

“Oh so you’re not jerking off into my dress?” I ask, leaning against the doorjamb.

He looks a little ashamed as he rubs his hand across his head. “Well, okay it is exactly what it looks like.”

“Fuck me,” I demand.

He freezes, his eyes meeting mine.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. I get that you’re trying to go at my pace. You think I need slow, but I don’t. I want you. I’ve wanted you for a while. I’m getting better each day. I’m not saying I won’t have my moments, but that doesn’t mean I have to stop living so I want you to fuck me.”

“We don’t have to go so fast. We have all the time in the world.”

“Dammit, Harrison, would you listen to me? I want to have sex with you. Right now. I mean, if you can have sex again. What’s the recovery period for men?”

He growls and then charges me. I gasp as he lifts me, walking until we are at the bed.

“Is this what you really want?” he asks.

I nod.

He slowly sets me on my feet before stripping me until I’m standing in front of him naked.

Then he moves toward his drawer and pulls out a condom.

“Lie on the bed. I’m going to warm you up then I’m going to make you feel good. Okay?”

I nod, doing as he asks.

He doesn’t rush things. I wouldn’t expect him to. Harrison has the patience of a saint. Instead, he starts by kissing my lips. Then he kisses each eye. Then my nose and cheeks. He keeps kissing, blazing a path back to my ears and then down to my neck. When he finally reaches my breasts, they are aching for him. I let out a sigh of relief that turns into a moan when he finally sucks a nipple into his mouth, kneading it with his teeth and tongue. Then he moves to the next breast, giving it equal attention.

I giggle as he makes his way down my stomach, his feather-light kisses tickling me.

Then he’s at my pussy, devouring me much like he did this morning. He nips and nibbles, using his fingers to bring me to the edge of an orgasm, but he doesn’t let me fall. He pulls back suddenly.

“Harrison, please.” I look up at him.

He’s not looking at me though. No, he’s putting the condom on, getting ready to give me exactly what I asked for. The excitement builds as I watch him stroke himself.

“Shh, I’m going to take care of you. Always,” he reassures me.

Then he lines himself up before slipping slowly inside me. The stretch is slightly painful yet amazingly pleasurable at the same time. I can feel myself growing wetter with every small thrust he takes to get further inside of me.

“This is even better than I imagined,” he breathes out, his eyes watching his dick slide inside of me.

Then he stills, fully engulfed in my pussy.

“Harrison, I need you to move. Fuck me, please. Make me feel good.”

I don’t even care that I’m begging. I love feeling him inside me, but I want to feel him driving me to that familiar high. The one he only just gave me this morning.

It doesn’t take long. He begins to thrust, whispering words in my ear that mean nothing to me as I feel my body grow taut, ready to hit that blast of pleasure.

Then I lose myself.

I can still hear Harrison grunting, but I’m in a state of euphoria. He could literally be saying anything to me right now, and I couldn’t be bothered by it. All I know is my body feels like it’s on cloud nine. My eyes have fallen closed.

If this is what heaven feels like, I never want to leave.

I have no idea how long I’m in my state of bliss. All I know is when I come back to myself, Harrison is beside me, cuddling me to his chest.

“Such a perfect girl. Fuck, I love you,” I hear him whispering, but I’m already drifting off.

I don’t get the chance to tell him.

I love him too.

nineteen

REAPER

MY PHONE VIBRATES on the nightstand. I start to roll over and reach for it.

“No, ignore it...” Natalie says halfheartedly.

I chuckle and kiss the top of her head. Grabbing my phone, I see the time and see it went off thanks to a reminder in my calendar. For a minute the other day when I was setting today up, I thought about doing it virtually so that way I wouldn't have to risk taking her out, but I knew she would get more out of it if she went in person. The rewards outweigh the risk.

“Come on, Queen Bee. We need to get up.”

Natalie sighs. “Why can't we just stay in bed all day? I'm sure we could find ways to entertain ourselves.”

She wiggles her eyebrows, making me laugh.

“I'm sure we could.” I slap her ass as I get out of bed. I hold out a hand for her. “Come on. We need to get in the shower, I have something planned for us today.”

Natalie sits up and claps her hands together. “Tell me!”

“No way. It's a surprise.” I shake my head.

She grabs my hand and crawls out of bed. “Come on...”

“Sorry,” I say over my shoulder as I pull her into the shower.

Once in the bathroom, I turn on the shower and jump in.

“Don’t you want it to warm up first?” Natalie laughs as she crosses her arms.

“Ideally, yes. Today though, we don’t have time. We’re already behind schedule.”

“We could have just showered together.”

“If we did, then we would be even later than we already are. This way I’ll be out of the shower by the time it heats up and you can jump in when I get out.”

Natalie pouts. “You’re no fun.”

As I clean myself, I laugh. “I’ve never heard that one before.”

A few minutes later, Natalie and I are trading places.

“You know, it’s not fair that it takes you like five seconds to get ready for the day,” she says as she washes her hair.

“So sorry,” I deadpan as I leave the room to get dressed.

Thirty minutes later, Natalie’s hair is dry and braided down her back and she’s on the back of my bike.

“Ready?” I ask as I start moving.

“Let’s go. I’m excited to see where you’re taking me!” she says as she taps my stomach in excitement.

Twenty minutes later, on the outskirts of Vegas, I pull into our location.

“What is this place?” Natalie asks as I shut off the bike.

Ignoring her, I hold out a hand and help her down before getting off the bikes. Once our helmets are removed and resting on the bike, I pull her into my arms.

“You really don’t know what this place is?”

“No idea.” She shakes her head as she looks around.

“This is a classic bordello. Or better known as a brothel.”

Natalie gasps as she looks up at me. “Do I get to meet a madam?”

“You do.”

She squeals as she dances around in my arms.

“Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!” she says as she peppers my face with kisses.

“Sorry it took me so long to get this scheduled.”

Natalie laughs. “We just talked about this a couple days ago. Honestly, I figured it would be a while or it wouldn’t happen.”

I gently touch her chin and make her eyes meet mine. “When I tell you I’m going to do something, I’m going to follow through.”

“I know that, but sometimes it’s going to take me a little bit to remember,” she says softly.

“Good. Now let’s go meet a madam.”



I pull into my driveway and shut off the bike. Natalie jumps off and runs onto the front porch ahead of me. Taking my time, I make my way up to her as she hangs out on one of the front porch rocking chairs I have.

The sight takes my breath away.

She looks so at home, like she’s meant to be here.

Just imagine how much better she would look after a long day of business and coming home to her sitting there, barefoot and waiting for me.

“You okay?” she asks, pulling me out of the thought.

“I’m good.” I shake my head as I walk up the steps.

I head to the door and unlock it. Stepping inside, I shut off the alarm as Natalie comes in behind me.

“What are we doing here?”

Grabbing her, I pick her up and start walking down the hall to the kitchen as she wraps her legs around my waist.

“I thought we could use a break away from the clubhouse. Have a night to ourselves.”

“I’d like that,” she says softly as she squeezes the back of my neck.

“Any dinner requests? We’re going to have to order takeout. I don’t have anything here where I haven’t been coming home lately.”

“You know, if you want, you can start staying here again. I don’t expect for you to stay at the clubhouse with me every night,” she says, not meeting my eyes.

I set her ass on the counter and touch her face.

“I stay at the clubhouse with you because I want to, not because I feel like I need to.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

“I like it when you stay with me too.” Natalie blushes.

“That’s what I like to hear.” I lean down and kiss her hard. When I pull away, I tap her chin. “And just so you know when I move back into this place, you’re going to be with me.”

Natalie’s eyes widen as her mouth pops open in disbelief.

“Now are we going to order some food and watch a movie or what?”

I pull away and grab two glasses and fill them up with water. When I turn around, Natalie still hasn’t moved an inch.

I raise a brow and quirk my lips. “You good, or did I break you?”

She shakes her head, and her eyes clear as she hops off the counter. “I’m good. Now about that movie...what were you

thinking?”

“I was thinking something horror. I could go for you crawling into my lap and burying your face into my chest right about now.”

Natalie scoffs. “Please, I can handle a little horror movie.”

Twenty minutes in, and she was in fact not handling it, and she was right where I wanted her as I laugh at her expense.



NATALIE

I jumped into getting things right for the girls right away. The problem is, they didn't trust me. So while I attempted to meet with them several times, today is the first day they finally agreed to all meet up with me.

I hate to admit it, but I'm nervous. I mean, why will they care what I have to say? I have to make them care. Make them see that this is for them, not me.

I let myself into one of the conference rooms in the building behind the clubhouse. Placing my stuff down at the head of the table. Next, I start bringing in everything I've brought with me. I set out an assortment of beverages and snacks.

Taking a deep breath, I sit down in my chair and rub my hands on my thighs. Closing my eyes, I think back to my meeting with the madam.

“How did you get them to respect you?”

“I didn’t give them an option. There is a fine line between letting them voice their opinions and letting them walk all over you. In the end, it’s your call because you run the show.”

“I’m the new girl though.”

Before I even finish the sentence, Stefanie is shaking her head. “Doesn’t matter. Your man put you in charge because he trusts you. Own it and when you doubt it remember he has enough faith in you for the both of you.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Just remember, I’m only a call away. Hell, I’ve always wanted to see what happens inside a real clubhouse.” She winks, making me laugh.

“There you are,” Harrison says, pulling me out of the past.

“Hi. What are you doing?”

“I was looking for you.” He looks around the room. “I was going to help you set up but it looks like you have it all covered.”

“I got a little excited.” I shrug, fighting back a smile.

“You don’t say,” he teases as he walks up behind me.

He starts massaging my shoulders, making me sigh.

“I thought you were going to make yourself scarce and let me do this.”

“I am, but I’m going to let them know that you have mine and Wrath’s backing. I know once I bring it up to the council, they will back you too.”

My heart warms at his words. To know I have such support. It’s refreshing to be encouraged to do something I want instead of beat down and talked out of it. Harrison set up the meeting for me where I really don’t know any of the girls and honestly, I couldn’t be more thankful.

I reach up and grab his hand, squeezing it. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

The sound of footsteps coming down the hall has me sitting up straight. All at once the club girls file into the room.

“What’s going on?” one asks.

“Sit down, everyone, please.”

Jacob and Wrath step into the room as the last of them sit.

Wrath winks at me, and Jacob tosses me a thumbs-up.

Shaking my head, I smile. “Thank you all for meeting me here today.”

Daniela sneers. “Like we had a choice.”

Harrison tenses. “Listen up. Things are changing around here. Natalie is going to put everything in motion. I want you to sit here and listen to her. I think you’ll like what she has to say. Offer up your opinion when she asks.”

“Come on. What does she know about club life?” Daniela rolls her eyes.

“If you won’t respect my woman, then there’s the door.” He points toward it. “You can leave at any time. Just know if you do, we’ll know.”

Daniela stands. “Whatever, I don’t need this. Come on, Becky.”

As Daniela marches toward the door, Becky scrambles after her, mouthing sorry over her shoulder.

“Anyone else?” Harrison asks.

No one moves to say anything.

“Good.” He leans down and kisses the top of my head. “I’ll let you do your thing, and I’ll see you when you’re done.”

“Bye,” I say quietly as he walks out, taking Wrath with him but leaving Jacob.

I know he’s doing that for me. So I know he has someone watching, but not in the condescending way I’m used to.

He wants me to be watched because he cares about my safety. He cares about me.

Taking a deep breath, I turn back to the group of women who are eyeing me.

“Recently I learned that things are like a free-for-all around her. If the guys say jump, you ask how high even when you don’t want to because you’re worried about the repercussions of what would happen if you said no.”

My eyes find Tara, and she offers me an encouraging smile so I keep going.

“I think it’s kind of fucked up. You are supposed to satisfy these guys sexually, but you aren’t offered any birth control, so that’s going to change.”

“What can you really do about it?” one of the girls asks.

“What’s your name, sweetie?” I ask her.

“I go by Baby here.” She seems shy.

“Well, Baby. I’m going to start by setting each of you up with an appointment with a woman’s health doctor. After that evaluation, we will discuss how to proceed forward. If you want birth control, then we will make sure you get the correct counseling about each option so you can make the best-informed decision. If you don’t, then that’s okay too. It’s your body. You get to make the choice. In the future, if any medical issues arise, you will notify me right away, and we will get you an appointment. Condoms will be freely available and the guys are not the ones who get the option on whether or not they use them. You do.”

“What if we get pregnant?” another of the girls asks.

“You make that decision with the man whose baby you carry. Services will be offered for each option available to you.”

“And if we don’t know who it is?” the same girl asks, looking a little ashamed.

“Then you make the decision, or we figure out who is the father. We work together,” I reassure her.

“I mean, it’s not an issue with me,” she rushes to say. “I’ve just seen another girl get knocked up, and when she told the

guy, she practically disappeared. It makes us nervous that if an accident happens, then we will be forced out too.”

Writing down her concern in my notebook, I nod. “That’s a good point. At no point will you be forced out for something like that unless there is proof you have done so on purpose such as poking holes in condoms or going off your birth control and not telling your partner.”

Some of the girls seem to brighten up at my answer. I feel like I’m finally getting through to them. It’s a heady feeling.

“What about disease checks?” Tara prompts.

“Yes, I will be setting you each up with a monthly test. It’s not a requirement, but I urge you to keep track of your sexual partners so if we do have an incident, we can take care of it swiftly and discreetly.”

“Tell us more.” Baby is practically on the edge of her seat now.

So I do. I tell them everything I had discussed with Harrison and the madam. I asked questions. I took notes.

All in all, I felt like it was productive.

When I finally call the end to a meeting, one of the women hesitantly asks, “Are you serious?”

I frown. “Of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg. I’m sure there are other things that I haven’t thought of too.”

“This is a hell of a start though.” Tara smiles.

“I don’t get it. What’s the catch?” Lola chimes in.

I look around and see all the women look a bit guarded as they look at me.

“I don’t understand,” I tell her.

“You want to become friends with us.” She points around the room. “When you’re an old lady and all the other wives hate us.”

I shake my head before she even finishes the sentences. “I don’t think they hate you. Yeah, I’m sure they may have a

problem with some if you've disrespected them in the past or if they know for a fact you have slept with their man, but overall no, I'm sure they don't hate you just for existing."

"She's right," Tara says. "Honk's wife is nice to everyone when she doesn't have to be." She looks at me. "I really like that you want to bring us all together. Now what do you need from us."

I smile at my friend. "I want to meet with each one of you over the next week and get you scheduled for your exams. That will be step one."

They all nod as they start to chat among themselves.

"Thanks, guys," I say as they walk out of the room.

After the last one leaves, I push back the chair from the table and spin. I squeal in excitement. That went so much better than I thought it would.

"Go well?"

"Ah!" I scream, clutching my chest. "You scared me."

Harrison laughs. "You look happy."

"Because I am. It went so much better than I thought it would."

He touches the corner of my smile. "I love seeing this on you." He leans down and kisses it. "Come on, let's go get you something to eat."

As he pulls me out of the room, a feeling of rightness settles in me, and I can't help but feel like I'm right where I'm supposed to be.

twenty

REAPER

I WOULD MUCH RATHER BE in bed with Natalie, but when Wrath called saying he had a message from William, I called church.

So as I sit here wishing I could be with my girl, instead I'm about to listen to the asshole who hurt her.

“Where did he leave the message?” I ask.

“Delivered it to the shop. Not himself. It came through the mail,” Wrath tells me as he hands the flash drive over to Trigger.

Trigger plugs it into one laptop, doing some shit I'll never understand on it before plugging it into the second laptop. Then he casts to the screen.

“It's a video,” he advises, pressing play.

“Kingston. I always knew we would meet again one day. As fun as it's been to watch your pathetic little search for me, I'm sick of playing games. I want my woman, and I want my club. You see, when you cast me away all those years ago, I never went far. I always knew I would come back and claim my rightful position with the MC. So take this as it is. A warning that I am coming for you. I'll take over as president

after I kill you and then I'll take that little slut and fuck her until she is a broken mess solely because I know that if you were alive, it would kill you. You were always soft like that. Oh and tell my insurgent he's doing a good job. I'll be seeing you soon, old friend."

The video stops.

The room is silent.

My entire body is tense as I stare straight ahead, processing his words. My hands are in fists as I replay his words.

I'll take that little slut and fuck her until she's a broken mess.

I don't even care about the rest of it. Hearing him talk so poorly of the woman that has become the most important thing in my life is what is gutting me. He wants to hurt her. Even more now that he knows who she is to me.

"What does he mean by insurgent?" Midnight asks, a calm fury radiating off of him.

I turn, looking to Colt. He looks as angry as the rest of us. Is he angry because of William's words or because he's the traitor?

I clear my throat. "Obviously we have a traitor in our midst. Could be any one of us. I think we can all agree that it's not me since this seems to be targeted at me. As for everyone else, you're on notice. I hope like hell that none of you men sitting around me are the rat, but until we know for sure, we are keeping groups small. Every run is on a need-to-know basis and will be divided up among only the most trusted men. We will weed through until we find who is betraying us."

Everyone is somber, but no one contradicts me. I know each one wants to proclaim their innocence, but they know as well as I do. Words are meaningless at this point. Whoever this person is has already been lying to us for who knows how long. They have looked each one of us in the face and pretended to be with us. The trust that our club has been built

on is shaken. We haven't crumbled as of yet, but if we don't find this weak link quickly, it will come tumbling down.

"What are we going to do about Danworth?" Wrath's eyes don't meet mine, instead taking in the room.

"We need to lure him out. We have been looking for him since he left the casino. He has obviously found a hole to hide in. We need to give him something he wants and dangle it in front of his face," Twinkie spits out.

"You want to use my girl as bait?" I ask with no expression, trying to hold back my ire.

He loses some of that anger. "I don't want to. Queen Bee is becoming an integral part of this club. She's making small changes that all of us guys like, well maybe not some of the old-school guys but still. Not only that, but she's sweet and kind. The perfect balance to this hard life we lead. Still, we need to do something. We have been playing this game several steps behind him. We need to get ahead."

"Don't ask me to put my old lady at risk," I say coolly, my own mind warring.

As president, I know this is what's best for the club, but she's my girl. I don't want her to be in danger.

The guys aren't surprised by my claiming of her. They all saw it coming a mile away.

"What if we make it a public place? Somewhere we know she will be seen and give him time to make his move, but have plenty of people around us," Trigger asks.

"What are you suggesting?"

"We already know he's in with the Renegades. They will be at the races this weekend. Take your girl out and show her off. Taunt him. See if he takes the bait. We will all be there, and we have friends up there, so we can keep an eye on her. We won't let anything happen to her."

"I don't like it," I grumble.

"She won't be safe until we eliminate him, and at this point, knowing we have someone in our house working for

him, it makes her vulnerable here as well. It's a good idea," Wrath adds.

Colt is quiet.

"What do you think, VP?" I ask him.

He contemplates it a moment. "I don't like the idea of putting her in harm's way. If it were my girl, fuck." He runs his hands down his face. "I wouldn't be able to do it. I can see the merit, but her safety should come first."

I'm surprised at his answer. I figured he'd jump on the bandwagon. Especially if he's working for William. He could tell him all the inside information.

I sigh. "Let me talk to Natalie and see what she thinks. This might be a club decision, but it's her life too. I won't take her if she doesn't want to go."

Usually an old lady wouldn't get a say, but this time is different.

They all agree quickly, with Trigger adding, "She's part of this club too. She's part of you. So of course she should have a say."

I nod to him.

"Meeting adjourned. I'll talk to her now, then we can make a plan."

As everyone leaves, Wrath waits behind.

"You really think this is a good idea?" I whisper to him.

"She's like my kid sister. I won't let anyone hurt her. You stick by her side the entire night. I'll shadow you. Trigger can be on the cameras. I know Ricky will give him access if we ask. If not, you know he will hack it. Then we position our men throughout to keep an eye out. It's risky, but our number one priority will be here. Always."

"Alright then. You get the ball rolling with Trigger. I'll go see if my woman is up for the task."

As I stand, Wrath mutters, "She's stronger than you think. You only need to give her the opportunity to find her

strength.”

I don't respond, letting his words sit in my head as I make my way down the hall to my room. I frown when I find it empty.

Turning around, I make my way back through the building.

What I find in the main area of the clubhouse surprises me.

Natalie is sitting on the floor with several of the sweetbutts around her as they all do each other's makeup and hair.

Leaning against the entry, I stand and watch a moment, a small smile finding its way on my face.

The girls are really learning to love her. She's changed the way we do things, which has been hard on some of the guys, but most of them were willing and ready.

Tara nudges Natalie, nodding her head my way.

The way Natalie lights up makes all of this worth it. She's worth it.

She stands, telling the girls she will be back as she makes her way over to me. She doesn't hesitate to wrap her arms around my neck, hugging me close. Leaning down, I press a kiss to her lips.

“Are you having fun?” I whisper.

She nods. “I think the group time is helping.”

“Good. Can I talk to you for a moment?”

She looks wary. “Aren't we talking now?”

“In church,” I tell her.

The smile falls off her face. “I thought women weren't allowed in church.”

“We're making an exemption today. It's club business.”

“What happened?”

I shake my head, telling her this isn't the place. Then I pull her back into the room we hold our meetings.

I once told her women weren't allowed inside, but she's changed me as much as she has the club. We were surviving before, but with her, we will be full of life.

Taking my seat at the head of the table, I pull her down into my lap. She cuddles into me, resting her head under my chin.

"Can you tell me what's wrong now?"

I sigh. "William contacted us. He knows you're here."

I come clean and tell her that he's known for a while now that she's been with me and that I've seen him.

She tenses in my arms, making me hold her closer.

"Shh. He won't get you. I won't let him."

She nods but doesn't say anything. I let her process the information while I think of how to broach the subject of our plan.

"I want to ask you something, and I need you to be honest with me."

"Okay." Her tone is soft and low.

"We need to get to William. He only seems to want two things. To take me down and get you back. I would never in a million years allow for you to get hurt, but the best opportunity we have to get to him is to put us both in a place that he has the chance to get to us."

She takes a deep breath. "You want to use me as bait."

She doesn't ask it as a question. She makes the statement. She knows what I'm saying.

"I don't want to. I would rather keep you locked up safe here so that I know nothing could get to you. With that being said, there is merit to getting you in the public and giving him his shot. As president, I want to let you do it, but as your man, I don't even want to consider it. At the end of the day though, I can't make decisions for you as much as I want to. You are learning to be yourself again. Finding out who you want to be in the future. So if I kept this from you or made the decision

on your behalf, I would be doing you a disservice. I would be as bad as he is by controlling you, even if my intentions are good. The decision is yours, baby girl. What do you want to do? I will follow your lead.”

She breathes in at my neck, snuggling a little deeper.

“How would it work?”

“There are these races that happen every month in Vegas. It’s neutral ground. There are cops there, but also bodyguards hired by the man who runs it. I would take you there on a date. We would walk around and chat with the people I know. Make sure we are seen. Give him a chance to do something. He might see through it and not do anything or he might make a move.”

“Just me and you?”

I shake my head. “Never. We will have backup. Most of the guys would come with us and filter out in the crowd. Trigger would watch through the cameras. I also have contacts outside the club that I will reach out to and make sure they are there too.”

She’s quiet for a moment. Needing to see her face, I pull back, pulling her chin up.

“I will keep you safe. You know that, right? That I would die before I’d ever let anyone hurt you ever again?”

She nods. “I know. Let’s do it. I’m not going to lie. I’m nervous about it, but I trust you.”

Leaning down, I capture her lips with mine. “I won’t let anything happen to you. Now go back to your girls. I’ll get the ball rolling on this.”

She gives me a small smile before standing from my lap, heading toward the door. Once it’s open, I call out to her.

“Baby girl.”

She turns, looking at me over her shoulder.

I love you.

The words want to slip out, but I can't make myself say them. I might have said them when she was asleep but I don't know if she's ready to hear them yet. Instead, I say, "You're the best part of me."

She smiles. "You're becoming everything to me."



NATALIE

My nerves are shot.

I'm trying to be strong for Harrison but being surrounded by so many people is scary. Especially knowing that William may show up at any moment.

Having Harrison next to me, holding my hand, helps, but he's tense too. He's on high alert, looking for any threat.

We pulled up to the races ten minutes ago, but I feel like I haven't even taken in what it all entails. All I can see are the faces. My eyes scan them looking for a familiar one, hating what it would mean if I find it.

"Want to look at the cars?" Harrison asks, leaning into me.

I give him a small smile. "Sure."

I let him lead me over to the line of cars with their hoods open. He walks slowly, looking at each one.

"The races will start in a bit. Everyone registers when they come in if they want to race. Then once the cut-off has been met, whether it be the number of participants or how late it is, it's sent to each racer's cell phone. They can walk around and find their opponent to size them up. Spectators can also walk around and see the cars as well."

“Do you know much about cars?” I ask.

He chuckles. “We own a mechanic shop, baby girl.”

“I mean, I thought it was just bikes. That’s all I ever see Wrath working on in the shop out back.”

“That’s our personal shop for club shit. We have a shop in town where we take cars, trucks, eighteen wheelers. Whatever really. If it runs, we can fix it.”

“Oh. I mean, I’ve heard you mention it before. I guess I didn’t realize.”

“It’s all good.”

As we walk down the line, he stops and talks to people here and there, but he never leaves my side.

Then I see it. The prettiest car I’ve ever laid my eyes on.

“It’s gorgeous,” I whisper, letting go of Harrison’s hand to walk up to the car.

I don’t know anything about cars, but it looks sexy with its sparkly purple paint. I reach my hand out to touch it before Harrison stops me.

“Baby girl, you don’t touch a man’s car,” he tells me.

“Good thing a man doesn’t own it then.” A female voice comes from the passenger side.

When she walks into view, all I can think is that this woman looks like she could kick my ass. She’s older than me, probably closer to Harrison’s age. Her dark hair falls down her back as she has on a tight tank top that is folded up under her breasts to where it almost looks more like a sports bra. Then there are those cutoff shorts.

She’s hot as fuck.

“My apologies. Still, she shouldn’t touch cars that don’t belong to us. It could cause issues.”

The woman snorts, walking closer to me, grabbing my hand until it smooths down on the paint.

“It’s so pretty,” I whisper.

She laughs. "I thought so. Are you into cars?"

I shake my head. "I don't know anything about them honestly."

"Well this pretty girl is a 1972 Cuda in Tor-red with numbers matching factory 340 and Hurst. It's a four-speed. She's my second baby. I restored her myself. Well, with my man's help."

"That's so cool. I wish I could do something like that."

"You can. Why wouldn't you?"

I shrug. "It seems like a lot."

A man walks up behind her, pulling her into his body, "What are you doing, bab?"

"Talking to my new friend. Name's Roxy, by the way." She holds her hand out to me.

"Natalie, this is Ha...I mean Reaper." I indicate to the man who has stayed silent behind me.

"Roman." The other man reaches out to shake Harrison's hand.

Roman engages Harrison in conversation next to us while Roxy slides closer.

"You know, you can learn anything you want to. I learned about cars when I was really young. I spent the time with the guys and did everything I could to learn about them. It may seem impossible, but it's not. You can even race them. It takes time and patience, but you'll get it if you try. You won't get anywhere if you keep thinking negatively."

"You race this car?" My eyes widen.

She smiles. "I do."

"I think I just fell in love with you. You are seriously the most badass woman I have ever met."

She laughs, throwing her arm around my shoulders. "I wasn't always so badass. I've had my troubles along the way, but you only need three things to truly be happy in life."

“What are they?”

“A good man at your side, people who you consider family regardless if you share blood and a purpose.” She looks over her shoulder at Harrison. “Seems like you have the man.”

I nod. “I think I do. It’s still new, and we didn’t meet under the best of circumstances, but I’m starting to think he might keep me.”

“He’d be an idiot not to.”

“You don’t even know me.”

“No, but I trust my gut and my gut says you are a good one. What about family?”

“I had no one until him. His family is slowly becoming mine, but I’m hesitant.”

She gives me a knowing look. “You’re a little ball of trauma, aren’t you? You’re scared that this is too good to be true. Don’t push him away because you’re afraid. Embrace it. It might end up being the best thing to ever happen to you.”

“You sound like you speak from experience.”

“I do. That man right there, we went through hell together, but we made it out in one piece.”

“I’m glad. Are you racing tonight?”

She nods. “We take turns. Tonight is mine.”

“I’ll root for you then.”

“You could race with me. Roman would let you ride bitch.”

“Absolutely not. She doesn’t leave my sight,” Harrison cuts in.

I frown at him. “It sounds like fun.”

He gives me an apologetic look. “Don’t forget why we are here, baby girl. I’d love to let you, but tonight isn’t a good night.”

“You causing trouble?” Roman asks.

Harrison shakes his head. “Keeping an eye out for it, not causing.”

They study each other before Roman speaks. “Fair enough. Next time. We try to come up every few months.”

“Give me your number,” Roxy says.

I shrug. “I don’t have a cell phone. I don’t really have anyone to call.”

“Shit, I keep meaning to get you your own phone,” Harrison tells me. “Here, you can use mine as your own until I get you one. I promise I’ll get you one as soon as I can.”

He seems so apologetic, but I don’t know why. I don’t even need a phone.

“It’s fine. You’re the only one I would call really.”

Roxy smiles at us. “Here.”

She pulls out an old receipt. Turning it over, she writes her number with a pen her boyfriend somehow produced. Then she hands the receipt over to me.

“Call me anytime. It was great to meet you, Natalie. You are a delight.”

I smile at her. “Thank you. You too.”

As they head off, I let myself sink back into Harrison’s arms.

“I meant what I said. I will get you a phone. I’ve just been busy. I’m not trying to cut you off from anyone.”

I shake my head, laughing. “I love that you are so concerned about it, but I meant what I said. I don’t even need one. Jacob is always at the clubhouse, and I know if I ask him or any of the others, they would let me use theirs. I don’t feel trapped, so you can stop feeling guilty.”

He kisses the side of my neck. “I’m going to feel guilty because you deserve to be treated better. I’m going to do everything I can to live up to what you deserve.”

“You already do.”

twenty-one

REAPER

THE LONGER THE races go on the more tense I become. Nothing has happened outside of the usual drunken fight and hotheaded argument, but nothing aimed our way. Scanning the crowd, I spot Spider making his way through the crowd.

“Look, it’s Roxy.” Natalie taps my chest with the back of her hand.

I look down and see my girl smiling from ear to ear as she bounces on the balls of her feet.

“Do you think she will win?”

“The other car does look nice but I think Roxy will win,” she says adamantly.

“Good because I had Wrath put a grand on the race with her winning for you.”

Natalie whips her head toward me, eyes wide. “I’m sorry, I think I just heard you say you bet one thousand dollars on a race for me.”

“Technically, Wrath did, but I had him do it.”

“Harrison Kingston, that is way too much money. Why would you do something like that?” she scolds.

“What, you don’t think your friend will win?” I tease.

She looks back at the cars and nibbles on her lip before looking back at me. “Of course I think she will win, but that’s a lot of money.”

It hits me all at once that she once told me Danworth didn’t allow her access to money. So the amount I just dropped for shits and giggles probably makes her uncomfortable.

“It’s just money. Is it a lot? Yes, but if, on the off chance, she loses and we don’t win, that’s okay. I will just make more money later.”

“But if she lost, won’t you get mad at me for picking the wrong person?”

I shake my head and touch her chin. “Never, you didn’t ask to bid, I did it to surprise you. If we lose, that’s on me, not you. Understood?”

“Driver ready?” the flag girl yells.

“Okay,” Natalie says softly.

“Okay, now watch your friend kick some ass.”

As soon as the flag drops, Natalie goes wild.

“Go, Roxy, Go!” she cheers.

I can’t help but laugh at her excitement as I hold her close.

Sure enough, Roxy crosses the finish line seconds ahead of the other guy.

Movement out of the corner of my eye catches my attention. I turn and see Roman next to the starting line with his arms crossed and a wide smile on his face. He looks proud as fuck that his woman is such a badass. I know that feeling all too well.

Natalie isn’t the same broken woman I picked up off the ground outside of the gates of the clubhouse. She’s slowly becoming a force of her own and I love it.

Natalie turns in my arms and looks up at me. “What now?”

“Well, let’s go collect your winnings and then we can get out of here. Maybe have someone order food so it’s at the clubhouse when we get there.”

“Hmmm...do you know what sounds really good?”

“What?”

“Sushi.”

I can’t help but cringe and Natalie catches it.

“Or not. We could totally get burritos or tacos or something. That would be good,” she says, quickly changing her tune.

“I think the Mexican would go over better with the guys.”

“Awesome, there we go then.”

“But out of curiosity, what do you like to order when you get sushi?” I ask as we start walking through the crowd.

“Gosh, I’m simple really. I just get some California rolls and some spicy tuna rolls. Oh! If I’m really going all out and I don’t have to worry about it, I like trying one of those mixed sushi platters that are clearly labeled. That way I can try something new and make a mental note if I like something or not.”

“That’s it?” I ask, doing the quick math in my head. Those two rolls aren’t very much.

Natalie opens her mouth but a look of indecision crosses her face.

“Just tell me.”

“William counted my calories. He wanted to make sure I didn’t eat too much and get too fat for my clothes.”

“Asshole,” I murmur under my breath as I squeeze her hip.

“Agreed.”

“Hey, I collected your earnings,” Wrath says, coming up alongside us.

“Thank you for betting for me but please never do that again.” Natalie turns toward him.

While she's distracted, I pull out my phone and shoot a text off to Jacob.

Me: Nat wants sushi. She said she likes California rolls, spicy tuna, and some sort of mixed platter shit? I don't know, get her what you think she would like and a lot. Order Mexican for everyone else.

Jacob: 10-4.

"Ready?" I ask as I slip my phone back into my pocket.

Wrath looks up at me. "What's the plan?"

"Oh, we're heading back to the clubhouse. We were thinking we could order Mexican," Natalie tells him.

"Sounds good. I can eat. Do you want your money now or later?"

Before he even finishes asking, her hair starts flying as she shakes her head. "I'll just let you hold on to that. Besides, I have no way of holding on to that much cash."

"You have pockets." He points out as he falls into step with us.

"Have you ever seen how deep women's pockets are in pants?" she demands. "They can't even hold a tube of ChapStick most of the time!"

As she rants, we make our way across the parking lot.

"Oi, Natalie!"

Wrath and I tense as we look around.

"Did you like the race?" Roxy shouts from where she's leaning against her car and standing next to another man.

"I loved it! You even won me some money," Natalie hollers back.

Roxy tips her head back and laughs. "Next time you ride with me, okay?"

"I'd love that."

“You guys have a great night,” Roxy says before turning back to her friend.

“Who’s your friend Nat?” Wrath asks.

“She’s taken,” Natalie quips.

Wrath hisses. “I think I just felt my heart break.”

Natalie comes to a stop next to our bikes and faces Wrath. “Please, we both know you only have eyes for one person right now.”

Wrath gapes at her while she hurries and puts on her helmet.

“Did you hear that shit?” he asks me, pointing at her.

“What did you say? I can’t hear you,” Natalie lies.

I chuckle at their banter as I get onto my bike.

“Come on, Queen Bee. Let’s head home,” I say as I hold out my hand to help her on.

I don’t know how to feel about tonight. While I’m glad nothing happened, I almost wish something did so that way we could end all of this. I hate this waiting game and constantly being on the lookout.

One by one, the guys come out of nowhere and get onto their bikes.

I can’t help but smile as the guys take up all sides of us, blocking us in.

Protecting their queen without me having to ask.



NATALIE

I'm sitting at the bar with headphones I found in Reaper's room on and listening to music as I work on my project for the sweetbutts.

I fucking hate calling them that, but they don't seem to mind.

Someone comes up behind me and places their hands on my shoulders catching me off guard.

"Ah!" I scream.

I whip off the headphones and toss them on the bar as I turn around.

Evelyn is bent over, laughing with tears running down her cheeks.

"That was fucking fantastic! Oh, I needed that laugh."

I look around the room and see several of the guys shaking their heads at us.

"You should know better than to sneak up on someone," I scold with no heat.

Evelyn dries her cheeks as she rolls her eyes. "Oh come on, even you have to admit that was pretty funny. What are you up to?"

"Oh I was doing some research on different female doctors."

Evelyn's eyebrows fly up. "Are you pregnant?"

"What, no!" I hiss as I look around. "Keep your voice down. I was looking because one, it's good to know, and two, I'm trying to find a doctor who's willing to take on all of the sweetbutts."

"You know a doctor...that you could ask..."

Evelyn leans against the bar next to me.

“I didn’t want to bother you and just because you’re a doctor doesn’t mean you know every doctor in the city.”

Evelyn hums as she picks up my notes, looking them over. “I know all the OBGYNs who deliver at Methodist, which is where you should be looking, it’s the closest hospital.”

I frown. “I hadn’t thought of that. I was just combing their bios and stalking them on social media.”

“Really?”

“I wanted to make sure they weren’t judgy before I reached out. Not everyone would understand this lifestyle,” I say as I snatch the paper back.

“I would go with Christenson. He’s gay, so he won’t hit on the girls and if the guys end up in the room, he won’t cave under their glares.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” She claps her hands. “Now go put your stuff away and grab a jacket. I’ve had one hell of a week, and I could use a little firepit and drink therapy.”

I look outside and see that the time must have gotten away from me. I hadn’t even realized the sun had set.

“Are you sure we can light a fire?”

Evelyn scoffs. “Please, I’ve been lighting shit on fire without permission since I was ten. Harrison won’t mind, promise. Now shoo.”

“I’m going. I’m going,” I mutter as I scoop everything off the counter and head back to our room.

Our room.

It’s so weird to think of it as that, but that’s what the room is, ours. I don’t know when but Reaper moved back in one night and hasn’t left since. Not that I mind. I fall asleep easier at night when he’s with me, and I love seeing his things mixed with what little I have.

After dropping everything on the desk, I head to the closet and take a peek inside. I don't spot a hoodie or a jacket, so I grab a blanket off the corner of the bed. Reaper brought it home for me one day, totally surprising me. It will smell like smoke, but I can always wash it.

Blanket in hand, I leave the room, locking the door behind me.

"She's already out there," Jacob calls from behind the bar. "Take these with you."

"What did you make?" I ask as I grab them. The cups are warm in my hands.

"Spiked apple cider." He makes a weird face. "I don't know how she can drink it, but that's what she asked for."

I look down at the cup and frown. "Oh, I'm not big on drinking."

"Natalie," he says, making me look back up at him. "You don't have to try it if you don't want to. I'll make you something else. But if you want a drink, have one. It won't hurt a thing, and Pres won't be upset. It's your call."

I bite my lip as I stare back down at the cups. "I'll try it but if I don't like it you'll make me something else?"

"Without a peep. Your call, boss lady."

"Alright." I smile as I step back. "Thanks, Jacob."

"You're welcome," he calls out as I head outside.

Instantly I spot Evelyn next to a small fire.

"That was fast," I say as I approach.

"It's small for now, but it will grow. I see that Jacob sent out our drinks with you."

"He did," I say as I set them both down on a little table that's situated between two chairs.

"I think you'll like it," she says as she brushes off her hands and moves to sit.

I wrap the blanket around my shoulders and sit down.

“So tell me how your week has been.”

Evelyn groans after taking a sip. “This is what heaven in a cup tastes like.”

I raise the glass and take a small taste. The best way I can describe it is it tastes like apple juice warmed up with cinnamon, but more. It makes you feel warm and tingly inside, and I can see how it would be perfect on a cold fall night.

Maybe while following kids around a neighborhood while they trick or treat. A voice whispers in the back of my head.

I clear my throat, leaving that thought where it lay. “You never answered my question.”

“Work is work. Saved some lives, lost some, the usual.”

I frown at how blasé she sounds but how tense her body seems.

“I couldn’t do what you do.”

“You get used to it. Birth and death it’s the circle of life. Does it suck? Yeah, but at least I can say I tried.” She brings her glass up to her lips and takes a big drink.

“Hey, what are you guys doing?”

Both Evelyn and I turn, looking over our shoulders and see Tara approaching.

“Just enjoying a drink and the fire. Take a seat,” Evelyn tells her.

“Are you sure?”

I give her an encouraging smile. “Of course.”

“So what were you ladies talking about?” Tara asks as she sits.

“Not much because Nat here was holding out on me. What have I missed this week?”

“Oh...did you hear that Reaper surprised her with sushi the other night?” Tara teases.

Evelyn gasps, placing her hand on her chest. “He ordered her sushi?”

I roll my eyes and lie. “It was nothing.”

It was everything.

“She told him when they were out that she loved sushi, so when they got back, he had a crazy amount waiting for her. There was so much she had to give some of it away.”

“There was no way I could eat it all, and it would have gone bad!” I protest weakly.

“Hmm...sounds like someone’s in love...” Evelyn sings out.

“I think what we should really be talking about is how Wrath has taken Tara under his wing,” I say, tossing my friend under the bus.

“I like what you did there.” Tara mock glares.

“I need more. Tell me everything,” Evelyn begs.

As they chat back and forth, I can’t help but smile. I’ve never had girlfriends like this and I can’t help but hope that they stay in my life, even when this is all over.

twenty-two

REAPER

PINKY, Twitch, Midnight, Twinkie, Colt, Trigger, and Wrath take their spots around the table. I look at Colt on my right then turn toward Wrath on my left.

“Let’s get started,” I tell them. “Who would like to start?”

Twitch rests his forearms on the table. “I need help at the shop. Admin shit.” He cringes. “The office is worse than usual, and no one wants to deal with it. I would, but I’m in the middle of a project that’s taking up all my time.”

“The ‘65 Lincoln Continental restoration project, right?” I ask.

“It’s going to be a beaut when I’m done, but right now, it’s being a cunt.” He shakes his head. “I’ll stop now. Otherwise, I’ll start ranting about it,” he says, making everyone laugh.

“I’ll stop by this week. I need to apologize, I haven’t spent as much time there lately.”

“You’ve been busy,” Midnight says.

“How’s the tattoo shop?” I ask him.

“Good. In the next few months though, I’m going to need to hire another artist.”

“Just give me the resumes and I’ll run checks on them before they even come in,” Trigger offers.

Midnight dips his chin toward Trigger as Pinky speaks.

“Sunny is becoming suspicious why I haven’t brought her around lately. I tried to tell her it was because of a safety concern but...”

“Why don’t you just bring her around?” Colt asks.

“I’d rather not until I know it’s safe. We have a baby at home and things are just different now, you know?”

My jaw tics. I hate that I’m causing issues in his marriage, even if it’s not me directly.

“Let’s plan something.” I look around the table and make eye contact with each man. “Speaking of women, Natalie brought some concerns to me.”

Midnight frowns. “What’s up?”

“Did she see something?” Wrath asks.

I shake my head and look at my friend. “Not in the way you’re thinking,” I address the rest of the table. “She came to me concerned about the sweetbutts.”

Twinkie opens his mouth to cut in but holds himself back when I raise my hand, cutting him off.

“After everything that happened with Tara, she had concerns. She doesn’t think they should go or anything like that but she wants to help them.”

Trigger leans back in his chair and steeples his hands. “What does she have in mind?”

“Well, apparently we failed to think about getting them all on birth control.”

Each man cringes as I continue. “We’ve just always assumed they would handle that, but she thinks the club should foot the bill where they service the club.”

“Makes sense. Hell, I’m surprised we haven’t had any little surprises as it is,” Wrath says.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Colt flinch.

“You good?” I ask him.

“Yeah, sorry. I tweaked my shoulder the other day and now it’s angry if I move just right,” he tells me.

“Get that checked out.” I turn back to everyone else. “Along with the whole birth control thing, she wants to come to some sort of agreement between us and the sweetbutts. She doesn’t like that they feel obligated to sleep with us when they don’t want to in fear of us kicking them out.”

“I’ve always thought we should treat them better,” Wrath mumbles.

“Not all of us have an iron will and avoid them,” Midnight teases before looking at me. “Does she have a plan outlined?”

“She’s working on it. Once it’s complete, I’ll bring it to all of you. I just wanted to give you a heads-up.”

“We won’t take it to a vote?” Twinkie asks.

I raise a brow and look at him. “You want to take treating women decently to a vote? Imagine how your mother or sister would react if they just heard that come out of your mouth.”

He looks away, looking ashamed. “That’s not what I meant.”

“I think it is.” I sigh. “Look, the problem isn’t in this room. I know that those of you who hook up with the sweetbutts treat them with some level of respect. It’s the men like Jug out there that think pussy is owed to them.”

“Fuck, just the thought of one of them not saying no because they feel like I’d retaliate makes me feel dirty. It’s like some fucked up form of rape.” Trigger frowns.

“Exactly.” I point at him.

“It has my vote. I know Sunny will appreciate it,” Pinky says.

Twitch laughs. “Sunny fucking hates the sweetbutts.”

Pinky rolls his eyes. “She doesn’t hate them necessarily. She just hates that some of them have no respect and try and come onto me from time to time.”

“Alright, next order of business,” I say, cutting them off before they can start going back and forth. “Colt, where are we on our next shipment from Medina Cartel?”

“They don’t want to schedule anything until they meet with us and discuss the issues we’ve been having.” As soon as the words leave his mouth, the room tenses.

“Okay, that’s fine. Get it scheduled and tell me when and where. We can ease their concerns,” I tell him as my gut churns.

“Running for the cartel brings us in a lot of money, and getting on the bad side of the cartel is something you never want. Especially when you’re like all of us and know too much.”

“What about Danworth?” I ask, changing the subject.

“It’s too soon to say if anything came out of taking Natalie to the races. Neither he nor the Renegades showed up, but I know he knows that you’re taking her out. Keep taking her out. Let her be seen in controlled situations. Eventually he will snap and make his move,” Trigger tells me.

“He’s playing it cool right now and acting like her being here isn’t bothering him when we all know he hates it,” Wrath adds.

Midnight nods. “No one likes it when their woman moves on.”

“Are we going to patch the prospect in?” Twitch asks, changing the subject.

“What do you guys think?” I look around the table.

“I like him.”

“He’d be good.”

The guys give their approval.

“If it’s alright, I want to wait until all this shit is taken care of. Give him his moment without the cloud of all this bullshit hanging over us,” I tell them.

“Sounds good, Pres,” Twinkie says and the others murmur their agreement.

“Alright, does anyone have anything else to add?”

Everyone shakes their heads. “Then let’s wrap this up. Meeting adjourned,” I say as I slap the table.



NATALIE

I pull off my helmet and look up at the building in front of me. It looks like your typical garage but new and well-kept.

Lotus Auto.

The signage is big and stands out.

Sounds filter out from the garage, letting us know that guys are hard at work.

“Come on. Let me show you around,” Harrison says as he helps me off the bike.

Hand in hand, he shows me around. First he shows me the garage itself. None of it makes sense to me, but I nod along. I smile and wave when I see a familiar face but don’t approach any of them since they are busy.

It’s nice though. Everything is as clean as a garage can be, and the tools seem to be organized. No one is digging around for anything.

“This is the lobby, but no one really uses it. They usually go and eat across the street at the diner,” he says, pointing out the window.

“This is nice.”

The lobby has several uncomfortable-looking chairs, two vending machines, one with snacks and the other with drinks, and last, a counter with a computer where they check people out.

“Just remember you said that.” He chuckles as he opens a door.

Harrison starts to pull me inside, but I freeze, my feet unable to move.

“Harrison, we can’t go in there,” I hiss, pulling on his arm.

He looks back at me and frowns. “Why not?”

I wave my hand at the room. “You were clearly robbed!”

Harrison busts out laughing, head tossed back.

I pull my hand from his and place my hands on my hips. “I’m so glad you think this is funny. Now come on, you have to report this! Who knows what they took. Do you think it was William?”

Harrison calms down and rests his hands on my shoulders. “Queen bee, I can promise you, we weren’t robbed.”

“That’s it. Give me your phone.” I hold out my hand.

“Why?”

“Because clearly I need to find you an eye doctor to get your eyes checked. This place is fucking wrecked.”

“Hey, is everything okay?”

I turn and look over my shoulder and see Twitch hovering in the doorway between the garage and the lobby.

“No, everything is not okay. Reaper thinks it’s okay that you guys were robbed and won’t call the cops.”

Twitch frowns as he steps forward. “We were robbed?”

I motion with my hand telling him to take a look. He peeks into the office. The corner of his mouth twitches as he looks at Reaper before they both start laughing again.

“This isn’t funny!”

“Babe, this is just how the office looks,” Harrison says between gasps.

“Wait, you mean you leave it like this!”

“I told you we needed help and that you were going to regret volunteering.” He shrugs.

“Good luck and thank you.” Twitch taps my shoulder as he walks by.

I step into the room and look around. There are parts lying all over the place with papers scattered around. I can already feel the impending headache coming on.

“You so owe me for this.” I start rubbing my temples.

“I’ll pay you in sexual favors.” Harrison winks.

“Is it really payment though when you get just as much out of it as I do?”

He pulls me into him, his hands going to my ass and squeezing as he kisses me. “Touché. Will you be good in here on your own?”

“I’m good.” Standing up on my tiptoes, I kiss him one more time before pulling out of his hold.

As Harrison walks past me, he slaps my ass, making me yelp. I turn back toward the office and sigh. This is going to take me weeks to organize.

I have no idea how long I’ve been working, but the next thing I know, my back is hurting and I swear I can’t smell anything over the mustiness of the papers that have possibly been in here longer than I’ve been alive. This place is a wreck.

Or at least it was before I took a hammer at it and started fixing it up. It’s starting to look decent now.

I grunt as I drag a bag of trash and place it next to the door. Standing straight, I groan as I look around the room. You can't even tell that I've done much despite filling two bags of trash. I swear these men don't know what an office is and thinks this is just a junk room.

I look over at the couch and cringe. I've placed all the parts I've found so far on it and in front of it. Some of them in boxes and some loose. I don't know if they are broken or what but I figured it was best to save them all and let the guys go through them.

"Hey, how's it going in here?"

I look over my shoulder and watch Harrison step into the room.

"I think it's going?"

His lips quirk. "Are you asking or telling me?"

"Telling," I say as he leans down and kisses me. "How's everything out there?"

"I got a couple of oil changes and tire rotations out of the way for the guys."

"So productive."

"Very." He nods. "Do you need anything in here?"

"I was going to see if one of you guys would take that trash out for me." I point to the two bags full. "And then someone needs to go through those parts and decide if they are keep or trash. Unfortunately though, I haven't had a chance to go through all the paperwork yet. So there's probably more trash in there as well."

"You don't have to do it all in one day. I'll send someone in here to handle the parts. Now how would you feel about heading out of here and going to grab some food across the street at the diner?"

Right when he mentions food, my stomach rumbles. I place my hand on my stomach and blush. "Food would be good."

Reaper winks. “Worked up an appetite, huh?”

I roll my eyes as I push his shoulder. “Go take that trash out so we can go eat. I’m going to wash up.”

He leans down and kisses me. “Be right back.”

I can’t help but watch him as he picks up both bags with ease and walk away. His forearms are hardly strained from the weight of garbage and his ass is something to be jealous of in those jeans.

Can you really be jealous of what’s yours?

I shake my head as I head into the restroom to wash up. That man drives me crazy but I wouldn’t change him for the world.

twenty-three

REAPER

NATALIE SLIDES into the booth as she looks around.

“What do you think of this place?”

“Well I can’t judge the food yet obviously, but I love the look. It reminds me of an old-school diner you would see on TV.”

I scan the room and try and see it through her eyes.

The floors are black and white in a checkered pattern. There’s an old-school jukebox in the corner and records lining the top of the walls. The red faux leather seats top it off.

“Huh, I never noticed that before.”

Natalie rolls her eyes and teases. “That’s because you’re a man. You don’t pay attention to things like that.”

“Oh yeah? You don’t think I pay attention to the little things?”

“I think it depends on what it is. Do you pay attention to the things around yes? One hundred percent. Do I think you pay attention to things like furnishings that make up a room? No.”

“Hmmm...” I hum as I lean back, resting my arm along the top of the bench. “You might be right. I give absolutely zero fucks about furniture or making a house a home. But I do pay attention to the little things. Like how you nibble on your lip when you’re working on shit to help the sweetbutts, or how I know what you’re feeling when you’re reading because your emotions play across your face.”

I hear her breath catch and keep going.

“I know that in the shower, you wash your hair twice before you put in conditioner. Or that you wash your face before you brush your teeth before bed. If you fall asleep before I come to bed, you always face the door, but as soon as I get into bed, you roll over and face the wall.”

“You’ve noticed all of that?” she asks in awe.

I wink. “I told you, I pay attention to the little things.”

“Hey y’all, I’m Happy, and I’ll be your waitress today,” she says as she slides water in front of both of us. “Have you had a chance to look at the menu?”

I rattle off my order and look at Natalie.

“I’ll have what he’s having...” she mumbles, still looking caught off guard by my declaration.

“If we have kids, we aren’t giving them weird names,” I say as Happy walks away.

Natalie’s so caught off guard some water dribbles out of her mouth from the drink she just took.

“You good over there?” I tease.

Natalie glares as she wipes off her chin with a napkin. “You can’t say shit like that.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know, because I said so? Because it’s too soon?” she sputters.

“So you don’t want kids? Cool, that’s not a dealbreaker for me.”

Natalie huffs. “You’re ridiculous. I didn’t say that I didn’t want kids ever, just not right now at least.”

“Probably a good idea to wait. You need time to heal from dipshit, and I want to take you somewhere and keep you naked the entire time we’re there.”

“I-I don’t even know what to say about that.”

“Just say okay.”

“Okay.” She shakes her head. “Can we talk about something normal, please?”

“Planning our future isn’t normal?” My lips tip up at the glare she sends me. “Fine, I’ll tone it down if it makes you happy. Just know that one day we will circle back to this conversation.”

“Thank you.”

“What did you think of the shop?”

“I thought it was nice until you opened the office door,” she deadpans, making me laugh.

“Your reaction was priceless. I can’t wait to tell the other guys.”

“Have you talked to Evelyn lately?” she asks, changing the subject.

I frown. When was the last time I talked to my sister?

“No, why? Is something wrong?”

“I don’t know.” She nibbles on her lip as she looks out the window. “She stopped by the other night while you guys were in church and just seemed sad.”

“That’s right. She was already in her room asleep by the time we came out and you were in the shower. Did she hint at why she was sad?”

“She talked about life and death but nothing much.”

“Ah.” I nod. “When she loses too many in one week, she falls into a little funk. Now the fire and drinks make sense.”

Natalie swirls her straw around in her glass. “You know what I think she needs?”

“I’m afraid to know.” I sigh. “Lay it on me.”

“To go on a date.”

“The last thing my sister needs is a man in her life.”

“Fine, then she needs to get laid.”

I cringe. “Can we not mention my sister’s sex life right before we eat? I’d like to keep my appetite.”

“Don’t be dramatic.” Natalie rolls her eyes.

“I’ll show you dramatic,” I mumble as the waitress walks up.

“Here you go. Let me know if you need anything else.” The waitress drops off our food and walks away.

Natalie does a little dance in her seat as she eyes her food.

“Excited?”

“Hell yeah, I was worried for a minute. I didn’t know what you ordered, and I was afraid I was going to be stuck eating something gross.”

“I wouldn’t have let the order go through if I thought you wouldn’t like it.” I point out as I pick up a fry, popping it in my mouth.

“Such a knight in shining armor,” she quips as she picks up a chicken tender.

For the next fifteen minutes, we finish our meal before tossing money onto the table and heading back across the street.

Opening the door leading into the lobby, I see a box on the counter from one of the parts companies.

“Weird,” I mutter.

“What is?”

“Usually they would drop the parts in the garage, not in here.”

Natalie shrugs. “Maybe it was a new guy who didn’t know any better.”

“Maybe.”

Stepping forward, I pull my pocket knife out of my pocket and open the package.

“Hey babe, can you go get Twitch in the garage for me, please?”

“Sure. Is everything okay?”

“Yeah.” I offer her a reassuring smile. I don’t let it drop until she’s out of the room.

Looking back down into the box, I pull the note out that was placed in the fruit bouquet.

It looks like you’ve gained weight, darling.

If you know what’s good for you, you will lose it before you come home.

Your trainer is expecting you tomorrow since you clearly can’t take care of yourself.

-William

I crush the note in my hand. This fucking asshole. Has Natalie gained weight since she showed up at our gate? Yeah, but it was weight she needed, and she looks damn good and feels even better.

What pisses me off more is the fact that he got close enough to see her and that he was able to deliver the package without anyone noticing.

This needs to end. Now.



NATALIE

Turning, I stare at myself in the mirror. My jeans and T-shirt combo is basic but classic.

But is it enough?

“No, don’t think like that,” I chastise myself.

I know compared to the sweetbutts I’ll be underdressed but that’s okay. I walk out of the bathroom and see Harrison typing away on his phone.

“Hey.”

His head pops up. His eyes darken as he checks me out, making me squirm.

“Do I look okay?” I ask as I tug on the hem of my shirt.

“You look beautiful as always.” He takes three quick steps and pulls me into his body, kissing me hard. “Come on, let’s get there before I decide to say fuck it and keep you in here.”

“Your sister would come barging in if you tried.” I giggle.

Harrison rolls his eyes. “Fucking sisters.”

“Be nice.”

We head out of the bedroom and into the main living area of the clubhouse. Guys and sweetbutts are scattered around.

“Do you want a drink?”

I change my direction and head to the bar. “That sounds good.”

“Hey Queen Bee. Hey Pres. What can I get you guys tonight?” Jacob asks from his spot behind the bar.

“I’ll just take a beer,” Reaper tells him.

“Could you make one of those apple drinks again, please?”

“Of course.” Jacob nods.

While he works on our drinks, I look around the room. There are some guys I don't recognize but others that I do.

"Is Midnight tattooing someone?"

Harrison looks around the room and nods when he spots him. "Yeah, he does that from time to time. Usually he has guys come to his shop though."

"What does his shop look like?"

Harrison shrugs. "A tattoo shop."

"That's so descriptive," I tease. "I've never been in one."

"I'll take you by there sometime."

Jacob slides our drinks toward us. "Here you go."

"Thanks, Jacob."

"Thanks, Prospect."

Harrison places his hand on my lower back and ushers me away from the bar.

"Can we go see what he's tattooing?"

"Sure," Harrison says as he changes direction.

"Can I watch?" I ask as we approach.

Midnight stops and looks up. "Hey Queen Bee, Pres. Do you want some work tonight?"

"Nah, not tonight." Harrison shakes his head.

"No, thank you. I just wanted to watch you for a second if that's okay."

Midnight's eyes soften as he looks at me. "Of course it's okay. Right, Cueball?"

"Hell yeah!" Cueball winks. "I love having the attention on me."

"What are you working on?" I ask as I take a sip of my drink, ignoring Cueball's flirting.

We watch Midnight for a few minutes as he works before wandering away. Harrison leads me to the couch where Wrath

is sitting.

“Hey, you two,” he says as we sit down.

“How are you tonight, Wrath?”

“Can’t complain.” He smiles.

“Ugh, why did you have to come sit next to him?” Evelyn grumbles as she flops down on my other side.

“Hey, you made it!” I pull her into my side, hugging her.

“Of course I did. If there’s food and drinks, sign me up,” she says as she holds her drink out.

“How’s work, kid?” Harrison asks her.

“It’s work.” She shrugs. “And I’m off the clock, so I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Got it.” He nods.

With his arm over my shoulders and me tucked safely into his side, he starts talking to Wrath.

“Oh look, there’s Elenore.”

Evelyn scans the room and finds her. “Yeah, she’s talking to Sunny, Pinky’s wife. Have you met her yet?”

I shake my head. “No. The only old lady I’ve met is Elenore, but I’ve heard you mention Sunny before. She’s the one who let me borrow some clothes, right?”

Evelyn nods. “Yes. She’s the best. I’ll introduce you once I can convince myself to get off this couch. I saw Tara over by the door. She looks better.”

I nod. “She does. The bruises are healing faster than I thought they would.”

Evelyn looks at me sympathetically. “It’s because you’re so pale that it looks like they stick around longer than they do on someone like her with tan skin.”

“Anything fun happen this week?” I ask, changing the subject.

Evelyn grunts as she takes a drink. “I went on a date from hell.”

“Oh, do tell.”

“This guy thought it would be a good idea to order dinner for me without asking what I wanted. He went on about how they need to make electric cars mandatory and told me all the benefits of his smart car. When I told him I loved being on the back of a motorcycle, he looked at me as if I was gum on the bottom of his shoe. Then at the very end, the icing on the cake was when he expected me to pay for both of us. I’m cool with splitting but when you ask me out, I expect you to pay.”

By the time she’s done ranting, she has both Harrison and Wrath’s attention.

“What was his name again?” Harrison asks.

Evelyn raises a brow at her brother. “I purposely didn’t mention it. I know how you two operate.”

“Come on. We just want to pay him a little visit. Explain to him how you’re supposed to treat a woman,” Wrath says.

I roll my eyes. “You two are ridiculous. If she wanted you to know, she would have told you.”

Wrath points at me. “You’re no fun.”

“Please, we both know you have no issues finding fun on your own.”

Wrath smirks and opens his mouth to say something only to be cut off by Harrison.

“Don’t say it. Whatever you were about to say, don’t say it.”

“Oh come on. Let me tease her!” Wrath pleads.

“Hey, Harrison...” Evelyn says, bringing the attention back to her. “I heard you ordered our girl enough sushi to sink a battleship. What’s up with that? You’ve never ordered me any before.”

I look over my shoulder and watch Harrison roll his eyes.

“You’re my sister, she’s my girl. That’s why. Now how about you be a good girl and go run along before you corrupt my woman any more than you already have,” he says, making us laugh.

I was a little anxious before I left the bathroom about hanging out with everyone tonight but honestly, it isn’t as bad as I thought it would be.

twenty-four

REAPER

NATALIE IS A SIGHT TO BEHOLD. She's not wearing what the other women are. Instead of skimpy clothing begging for attention, she's wearing a T-shirt and jeans that hug her ass like a damn prayer. I've been hard since the moment she stepped out of the bathroom.

I would have rather kept her in the bedroom, but I need to show my face. Besides, she doesn't know it, but tonight is the night I'm going to announce her as mine for good. She's been my old lady for a while now, but by making it official, I'll be securing her spot as the top alpha for the females. She's already good at it.

She's befriended most of the sweetbutts, which is unconventional, but so Natalie. I like that she's earned most of their respect and treats them better. She even demands we treat them better.

Gone are the days of the sweetbutts only being here for our pleasure. She's working on giving them rights. I would like to say it pisses me off that she's changing the way we live, but it would be a lie. I always resented the way some of the men treated the women. They won't be able to do that anymore. Not after her passionate speech to the council.

“You’re getting better,” Fang says as he brings his beer up to his lips.

“Thanks.” Natalie smiles at him before turning back toward the dartboard.

Another dart sails through the air and sticks to the board.

“Have you been practicing in your free time, Queen Bee?” Poker teases.

Natalie laughs. “I won’t confirm or deny it.”

She finishes up her hand and comes to stand between my legs. I slide her fruity drink in front of her for her to take.

“Good job, baby.” I kiss the top of her head.

“Thanks. I think I’m starting to get the hang of this.”

“Once you’ve mastered this, we will teach you how to play pool,” Spider tells her.

“Really?”

“Of course. Unless you don’t want to.” He frowns.

She shakes her head rapidly, hitting me in the face with her hair. “No, no I want to.”

“We’ll make one hell of an old lady out of you yet.” Twitch winks.

Natalie ducks her head down and I can see the flush covering her cheeks and neck already. She probably thinks they are teasing when they aren’t.

Soon. Just a little longer.

“Another game?” Poker asks as he grabs the last of the darts from the board.

“Natalie, come here!” Evelyn hollers from across the room.

I tap her hip. “Go on, baby. I’ll be right behind you.”

“Okay.” She turns and gives me a quick kiss before heading across the room to talk to my sister again.

“She’s a good one. I like her. Make sure you don’t fuck it up,” Fang says.

I roll my eyes as the rest of the guys nod in agreement.

“Thanks for the faith.”

“You ready to claim her?” Twitch asks.

“Yeah, I have her jacket ready and everything.”

Twitch nods. “Good.”

I head across the room toward Natalie. I know she’s safe here but I just want to be close to her. She’s standing in a circle with Evelyn, Elenore, Sunny, and Tara with a couple sweetbutts hanging around the outside, listening in.

“You just can’t stay away from her, can you?” Evelyn teases as I pull Natalie into me.

“Hell no. What were you ladies talking about?”

“I was just telling them about the changes I’ve made so far with the sweetbutts,” Natalie says as she leans her head back onto my chest.

“Seriously, we’re thankful for everything you’ve done so far,” Baby, one of the sweetbutts, says.

“You’re welcome.”

“Honestly, I’m mad at myself for not thinking of it sooner.” Elenore frowns.

Natalie reaches out and touches her arm. “It’s okay. Sometimes we don’t think about changing things when we’re so used to the way they’ve always been. That’s not on you.”

Sunny eyes a couple of the sweetbutts. “I’m just as guilty as you are, Elenore. I never thought to change things either and I’m the one who’s had problems with them in the past.”

“Some of us sweetbutts,” Tara points out. “Not all of us have tried to steal your man away.”

“True,” Sunny says reluctantly.

Baby jumps in. “I think you and Pinky are great. Honestly, I want a man like him or like Pres here with Natalie. The way

he respects you and doesn't even look at another woman." She shakes her head with wide eyes. "It's refreshing."

"Not all of us stray," I point out as I pull Natalie closer.

"Exactly." Baby nods.

"I'm thinking about trying a girls' night between the sweetbutts and old ladies. What do you guys think?" Natalie asks, changing the subject as she moves to my side instead of standing in front of me.

The women voice their approval, making Natalie smile. "Awesome. I'll plan everything and let you all know."

"Sounds good."

"Watch out, slut." Daniela pushes past Natalie to congregate with the rest of the sweetbutts.

She tried to make her comment low, but I heard it. I wait for Natalie to put her in her place, but she doesn't, making me frown. She should know how things work by now.

"You can't let her talk to you like that," I whisper in Natalie's ear as she scowls at Daniela who is across the group being obnoxious.

"I don't want to cause problems," she tells me.

I turn her in my arms, my hands finding her face. "Cause problems. Throw a fucking fit. I don't care. What matters is that you are top of the fucking food chain here, sweetheart. You are mine which means that you need to earn their respect. By letting her talk shit about you behind your back and to your face, you are telling them you are weak. Show me that strength you got, baby. Show that bitch who I belong to. Who is queen of this place."

She takes a deep breath, raising on her toes to press her lips to mine. After a moment, I realize she's not going to back off.

I wrap my arms around her pulling her closer.

I don't know what her plan is, but fuck, I'll follow it.

I'd follow her anywhere.



NATALIE

What Harrison is saying makes sense, but I'm still working on that confidence he wants me to have. I fucking hate confrontation, but this has to stop. Every move I make with the sweetbutts, Daniela is there trying to undermine me, and I'm over it.

Still, I know he's right. I need to do something.

So I kiss him. Then I keep kissing him.

It's not much, but I know he never shows public displays of affection.

At least, not until me.

I'm lost in the kiss, forgetting what the point of it even was when I feel cool liquid pouring down my back.

I gasp, turning to find Daniela behind me, an empty pitcher of beer in her hand.

"Ooops. My bad." She gives the fakest smile.

"Daniela, what the fuck!" Evelyn growls as she steps forward.

I place the back of my hand on her chest, holding her back. "Stop. I got this."

Evelyn reluctantly nods and does as I asked.

The crowd around us grows quiet, giving the rest of the room the cue to hush as well.

I take a deep breath when what I really want to do is punch the bitch.

“Clean this up. Now,” I tell her, pointing at the floor.

She snorts. “No. I have to go get another one for the guys in the corner.”

She goes to turn away, but I grip her arm.

“You are going to clean up this mess right this fucking second. Not only that, but you are going to give me your shirt since you ruined mine,” I demand, keeping my tone hard.

Harrison’s hand on my lower back steadies me. He’s giving me the courage to stand up for myself. Something I haven’t done in so long.

“Don’t touch me,” Daniela snarls.

I know Harrison wants to step in. I can feel the tension in his body. He doesn’t though. He lets me handle it, showing me that I have power if I just take it.

Reaching out, I grip Daniela by the hair and pull until she falls to her knees. She screeches, trying to claw at me, but she can’t get a good grip on me since my arms are covered in beer.

“I’ve let you have your little territorial attitude because I didn’t want to make you an enemy, but it seems you are too stupid to realize that you never had any to begin with. You are nothing but a sweetbutt, not that anything is wrong with that. The problem is you don’t know your place. Now clean up the fucking mess you made and give me your goddamn shirt,” I demand.

She claws out, her nails digging into my jeans. I hiss, kicking out at her in reflex. She falls onto her back but jumps to her feet quickly. When she flings herself at me, I don’t hesitate. I let my body lead me as I punch her in her face. She hisses, trying to throw her own punch. Before she can, Wrath appears behind her, grabbing her.

I try to go at her again, but Harrison grabs me, whispering in my ear.

“You have the whole room’s attention. Claim me, baby.”

I glance around before raising my voice. “Reaper is mine. If I catch a single one of you trying to hit on him or get him to

step out on me, I will make sure no one can recognize your face before I kick you out onto your ass. You don't have to like me, but you will show me respect. In turn, I will show you the same respect. As for you, Daniela, you've overstayed your welcome. I think it's best you head on out and find a new place for your negative energy."

She gets out of Wrath's hold only to tear her shirt off, throwing it at me. I let it hit me and fall to the floor. It's soaked with beer at this point too.

Then she looks up to Harrison.

"You're really going to let this bitch walk in off the street with some sob story about an abusive ex and change the way we do things? You're giving up this for that?" She indicates her tits that are now bare on display for everyone. "You would disrespect my father that way?"

Harrison pushes me behind him as he steps up to her. "You chose to be a sweetbutt. You had offer after offer to be an old lady, but you refused. All because you met me once when you were a kid and dreamed up this whole life that was never going to happen. I've already called your father. He doesn't want you to come back. His exact words were, 'Tell that girl she's her mother's daughter and I have no room for whores who would ruin a happy home in my outfit.' So I suggest you pack up your shit and get to stepping."

Daniela looks shocked. Then her eyes tear as she takes a step forward, attempting to touch Harrison. I'm between them before she can, making her tears dry up quickly.

"Take your trashy style and shitty attitude and go."

"You're going to regret this," she hisses as she takes off.

I scan the room and see respect shining in everyone's eyes.

"Show's over!" I yell out.

"Wait," Harrison calls out. "I want everyone to know that I have claimed Queen Bee as well. She's my old lady. I would say that if you have any complaints, you could bring them to me but honestly, I don't fucking care. Fuck with my old lady and you fuck with me. Understood?"

Some people nod while others whistle and cheer. I can't help but tuck my head into his chest, hating the attention that this entire counter has pointed my way.

“Now let's fucking party!” Harrison yells before ducking down to whisper into my ear. “You're mine now.”

“I think we both know I have been for a while now,” I say quietly into his chest.

Harrison's hand moves to the back of my head and he gently pulls my hair, tilting my head back. The kiss he lays on me is anything but gentle. It's a fucking claiming. It's rough and demanding. I fucking love it.

twenty-five

REAPER

I WATCH as everyone moves around in a frenzy getting ready to move another shipment for the Medina Cartel. We picked a new driver and a new sweetbutt to play the part of the wife and mother. What everyone doesn't know is that, once again, Wrath and I will be moving it ourselves. Not only that, but we have switched around and the members going on this run so that only one on the suspect list is on the run. It's Colt tonight.

"Cars loaded down," Wrath murmurs as he walks up from behind me. "Better than last time too where I had more time."

"You did fine. Everything was hidden well, and we delivered on time with no issues. That's all that matters."

He scoffs. "I had a cramp in my calf for three days after the last time. I can't do that again. Especially not training your girl."

I chuckle, remembering him crammed into the passenger seat with product on the floorboard of the car. It was a tight fit but necessary.

"How's she doing?" I ask.

"Good. She's catching on quickly. I think it's helping her mental shit too."

“Good. I’m glad she has you.”

“She’s a fighter. You picked well.”

I pat him on the shoulder, saying with the action what that means to me.

Clearing my throat, I move on to business. “Anything looking suspicious?”

“Nothing so far, but we both know that doesn’t mean shit.” He looks over to where Colt is. “He looks normal, man. It’s fucking with my head.”

“I know what you mean. I hate that we have to suspect our own brothers, but until we have an answer, we play these cards close to our chest.”

“I know. I wish you’d just let me get him into the boxing ring. I’d beat the answers out of him.”

I chuckle. “Last resort, yeah?”

He grumbles but reluctantly agrees.

We stop talking as Colt walks our way.

“It’s a clear night,” he says as he steps forward.

I look up at the sky and nod. The stars are shining bright and there’s not a cloud in sight.

“Everyone ready?” I ask him.

“Yeah, we’re good.”

Colt opens his mouth to say something but shuts it.

“Spit it out,” Wrath tells him.

Colt glares at him before turning toward me. “Is it just me, or have these runs slowed down?”

“They have, but just until I meet with Javier,” I say, mentioning the leader of the Medina Cartel.

“Are you meeting soon?”

“Soon enough. For now, it’s a need to know,” I say, putting a hard stop to the conversation.

Wrath clenches his jaw but changes the topic slightly. “Are we sticking with the plan or are we changing it again?”

“What do you think?” I ask.

Colt rubs his chin. “I’m not sure. Either way, it’s a fucking gamble.”

“Fact,” Wrath mumbles. “We need to figure out who’s working against us.”

Colt looks at me. “Has Trigger found anything since the last time?”

I shake my head. “Not yet. But he’s working on it. Is Kicks up for driving tonight?”

“Yeah, he should be good. At least we don’t have to listen to Jug bitch anymore.” Colt puts his hands in his pockets.

Wrath grumbles. “That bastard should be dead right now.”

“You know the rules.” I shoot him a pointed glare before looking back at Colt.

“Take the route we planned and have Lemon in the backseat flying a drone ahead, scouting the road. Hopefully if someone’s waiting, we can ambush them before they see us coming.”

Colt tips his chin. “Sounds good. See you on the other side.”

“Stay safe,” I tell him as he walks away.

Wrath and I watch them all roll out before we head toward our car loaded down with the product and head in the opposite direction.



Leaning against my bike, I watch the sunrise across the desert. Last night’s run went smoothly on my end. Colt tried to take

hostages that were waiting for him but claimed they shot themselves. At this point, I don't know what to believe.

All I want is to go back to the clubhouse and crawl into bed with Natalie before she gets up for the day. Maybe lose myself in her sweet body for a little while before passing out.

Car tires on gravel have me moving.

"Look alive," I mutter to Wrath.

He opens his eyes but doesn't move to stand.

The car comes to a stop and the doors open. Three of his men get out first before Javier steps out.

"Reaper, pleasure to see you again," Javier says as he steps forward.

I reach out and shake his hand. "I hope your trip went well."

"As well as could be. How did the delivery go last night?" he asks, getting down to business.

"All the product was delivered in one piece."

"Yes, that's what I heard. What I want to know is why are you moving it yourself and not with your team?"

"Sometimes when you want something done right, you have to do it yourself."

"I like you, Reaper, and I consider us friends."

I hesitate for a split second, not understanding where this could be going. "I consider you a friend as well."

"You and I are alike. We took over after our fathers and cleaned house. We are building our own dynasties and not relying on the backs of our fathers."

"I agree."

Javier hums. "What I don't understand is that if we both respect each other, then why are you playing games? I don't like games."

"Neither do I."

He points at me. “You say that, but I feel like you are playing games with my product. You’ve lost a shipment. What are you going to do to ensure it won’t happen again?”

“I’ve been closing ranks. Few people know when and where.” I nod toward Wrath. “He and I are the only two who know the details.”

“Are you sure about that? You know, I have received an offer from the Renegades. They seem to think they could do a better job than you.”

I shake my head. “I can promise you that they can’t. As a show of good faith and our loyalty to you.”

Wrath steps forward with his saddlebag and mine. “Here is some of the money we owe you for the product we lost.”

Two of his men step forward and grab the bags before stepping away from us. We watch them check the bags and go through the cash. When they nod their approval, Javier looks back at us.

“I appreciate the gesture. I’ll be in touch to set up a payment plan. But if you lose anymore, you’ll have to pay in blood,” Javier tells me.

“Understood.”

A sinister smile crosses Javier’s face. “I hear congratulations are in order. You finally claimed an old lady, yes?”

It takes everything in me not to react or show any emotion. How the hell did he learn that already?

“I did.”

“I’ll send you a wedding gift. That’s the same as a claiming, yes?”

I swallow hard. “I’m sure she would enjoy that.”

Javier steps back. “I’ll be in touch.”

He pauses as he moves to get into the car. “Oh, and Reaper...” He pauses until I look back at him. “I’ll be watching.”

Once they roll out, I turn toward Wrath and kick the sand and pull my hair. “Fuck!”

“I fucking hate that guy,” Wrath says darkly.

“You and me both. We need to figure out who’s ratting us out. This ends now.”

“Agreed.”

We get onto our bikes and head back toward the clubhouse. It’s about time that heads roll.



NATALIE

Harrison moves around the room, getting ready to go out for the evening.

I nibble on my lip, trying to decide if I’m going to bring it up. When he came home this morning, he looked conflicted and tired. I don’t know what happened last night but whatever it was is clearly affecting him.

“Hey, stop doing that. You know I’m the only one who’s allowed to nibble on that lip.”

I roll my eyes. “Are you okay?”

Harrison pauses and looks over at me. “Why wouldn’t I be? I’m the president of an MC with some badass brothers, but most of all, I have you. Trust me, I’m good.”

I sigh as he shrugs off my concern. “This morning, when you came in, you just looked troubled.”

Harrison opens his mouth to say something, but I keep going. “I’m not asking for details. Honestly, I don’t want them.

But if something is bothering you, I want to know. Isn't that part of my role as your old lady?"

Harrison rushes over to me and pins me onto the bed. "Say it again."

"Say what again?" I frown as he moves my hands above my head.

"Say you're my old lady."

"I'm your old lady," I rasp.

Harrison rolls his hips into mine, making me arch into him.

"I'll never get sick of hearing that. I always thought I'd be like my old man and die before experiencing what it was like having a woman on my bike behind me but then you came along and flipped the script." He kisses down my neck. "You came to me bloody and broken, and I knew you were mine to keep."

"I wasn't expecting you either."

Harrison bites my neck, making me hiss.

"I can't get enough of you. All day every day, all I can think about is you naked and willing under me. Claiming you over and over as I fill your pussy with my cum. It's a shame I don't have time to do anything about it."

He moves to get off of me, but I wrap my legs around his hips. Holding him in place.

"If you leave me wet and needy, I'll kill you."

Harrison tosses his head back and laughs.

"Is that so?"

"I need you. The others can wait."

He leans up and rips off his vest, and then pulls off his shirt. "What my old lady wants, she gets. Now get naked."

I have never moved so quick in my life. In seconds I am laid out naked, waiting for him to show me how much he needs me. It's almost as much as I need him.

“Look at this needy little pussy,” he growls, taking off his own clothes.

Then he reaches down and smacks my pussy.

It shocks me.

It also turns me the fuck on.

I can feel my pussy clenching at the sensations.

“Such a dirty girl, but you’re my dirty girl, aren’t you?” he murmurs, leaning over to suck a nipple into his mouth.

I arch up into him.

“I don’t want slow, Harrison. I need you to fuck me. Remind me that I belong to you. Please stop holding back.”

He pauses, pulling back to look at me. Whatever he sees in my eyes must do it for him. He doesn’t hesitate another second. He notches at my opening and then thrusts in all in one go.

I cry out, loving the feel of him stretching me.

“Harrison,” I moan.

“God, you feel so good. I could fuck this pussy for eternity and it still wouldn’t be long enough. Hold on to me, baby. I’m going to fuck a hole in this mattress.”

I do what he asks, wrapping my arms around his neck, letting him set the pace.

It’s a punishing one. He pounds into me with such vigor I can hear the bedframe smacking into the wall with each thrust. There’s no doubt that the whole clubhouse knows what we are doing here.

It feels amazing, but I still need more.

He must be able to sense my restfulness because the next thing I know, he has me flipped, my hair in his hands as he fucks me from behind.

“Fucking scream for me. Let the whole house know who owns this pussy,” he demands.

I don’t hesitate.

“Reaper. Please, fuck me harder,” I say, using his club name in the heat of the moment.

That only makes him grow more feral.

“Fuck yeah. I own this pussy. Only I will be allowed to have this pussy. You are mine, Natalie. My Queen Bee. My old lady. Mine.”

My body gives into the pleasure, my head growing dizzy. I slump onto the bed, feeling as he thrusts even harder, sending me into a second orgasm, making my body light up like the Fourth of July.

Then he stills, his dick twitching inside me as he fills me with his cum.

I’ve never felt more used in my life, but not in the way I have been in the past. No, this is different. Yes, he used my body, but not to give himself pleasure. He used it to own me. To show me my place in his world. To give me the reassurances his words can’t.

As we lay there in the aftermath of this new level of intimacy, I feel myself smile.

For the first time in my life, I feel happy.

twenty-six

REAPER

WE PULL off the road and check out a piece of land that sits behind our property line. It recently came up for sale and it would be a good investment.

The last thing I need is a nosy developer in our backyard.

“This is it?” Colt asks as he gets off his bike.

“Yeah. Extend the fence and call it a day.”

“How many acres is it again?” Wrath asks.

“Twelve.”

Wrath chuckles darkly. “More land to bury bodies.”

Colt grunts as he looks around.

“Spit it out,” I demand as I get off my bike.

“I’m just surprised you’re asking for my opinion when you’ve been freezing me out for months now.”

Wrath and I look at each other and chuckle.

“You think we’re freezing you out?” I ask as I step forward.

“It’s obvious. You two have always understood each other in a way we haven’t. You treat him more like your VP than

you do me.”

“That’s because I don’t keep secrets from him, you dumbass.” Wrath shakes his head.

He steps forward and grabs Colt by the shirt, pulling him into his body.

“Secrets? What secrets? I’m an open fucking book!” He tries to break out of Wrath’s hold.

“You’ve been sketchy for weeks now, Colt. I think it’s time you finally admit that you’re a traitor.”

He stops fighting Wrath. Instead, he looks confused.

“Traitor? Why the fuck would you think that? You think I’m the one hitting the runs?”

“That’s exactly what I think. You are in control of them, so it would be easy enough for you to arrange it. Not only that but when I changed the plan at the last minute that one time, you got a phone call and walked away. We did it again and sent you on a decoy run. I gave you one job, and that was to take someone prisoner but instead they all died, so we couldn’t question them. It all points to you. Tell me, brother. Why do you have a burner phone?”

His face pales a little. “You’ve been watching me.”

“We have. I took your phone, and Trigger went through it. That’s how we figured out you were using a burner phone,” Wrath tells him.

Colt’s eyes narrow. “When you attacked me in the hall. It’d gone missing for a while then I found it on the ground. Seemed odd.”

“Enough. I don’t have time for your bullshit. Confess your sins, old friend, and I’ll make it quick for you,” I bark out.

“Get it over with so I can kill you. I already have your resting place all picked out once the birds are done feasting on you,” Wrath adds.

He swallows hard, looking to the ground. “I’m not a traitor, and I have nothing to do with the hits. I have a burner

because when I went home months ago to see my mom, I met someone. We had a week of fun then I left her behind. Come to find out, the condom broke. She's pregnant with my kid."

"Why would you need a burner for that?"

He curses under his breath. "Her name is Katie. She's Killer's daughter."

My eyes widen. Killer is the leader of Noche Oscura MC. One that works with our chapter in Texas. Colt knocking up his daughter behind his back could ruin that alliance.

"Fuck," Wrath murmurs and lets him go.

"Prove it."

Colt takes out the phone, dialing.

"You never call me first. What's wrong?" a female voice comes over the phone.

"Nothing. I just needed to hear your voice."

"Spence, are you okay?"

Colt ignores her question. "How's the baby?"

"The baby is fine. I told you last week that I wouldn't have another appointment until next week."

"I know. I just needed to hear it. Let me know when you need me down there." He meets my eyes. "Family comes first. I want to be there to see my kid be born."

"Spencer, that's not a great idea. My dad will kill you," she whispers.

I look at him oddly. Spencer is his government name. If he gave her that, it must be serious. Just like things are with Natalie and me.

The weight I felt had been sitting on my chest lifts suddenly. I was acting tough with Wrath to save face, but the idea of killing my VP was haunting me. It doesn't solve our rat issue, but it brings us closer. Allows me to focus on the other guys Trigger mentioned.

“I don’t care. If it means I get to see my kid even once, it’s worth it. I’ll send more money tomorrow.”

“I don’t need your money.”

“It’s the only thing I can do being so far away. Please, take the money.”

She sighs. “Fine.”

“Gotta go. Oh, and I need you to start thinking about moving up here. I’m sick of waiting for your answer.” He hangs up, looking at me. “Satisfied? ”

“Sorry, brother. Had to be sure.” I pat his back. “Congrats on being a dad. We have your back and will figure out the Killer situation. Right now, we need to figure out who the actual traitor is then.”

“You guys have really thought I would betray you?” Colt looks wounded.

I groan, tilting my head back. “I fucked up. I was so set on it being you that I never even thought it could be anyone else,” I confess.

“I was blinded too,” Wrath points out.

“Thanks,” Colt mumbles as he straightens his vest.

“Trigger said he had a couple other guys. Hawk, Muscles, and Jug.”

“Jug,” Colt says suddenly.

“What?” I ask.

“He was the driver. When he wasn’t, he was always on the detail. He had told me he needed more money for his COPD treatments, so I always had him on it. Obviously it stopped when we kicked him out because of Tara. It adds up.”

“Are you telling me I could have killed him when I had the chance, and you fuckers stopped me?” Wrath demands.

“It’s my fault. We were looking at this all wrong,” I say to Wrath before looking back at Colt. “Why? What would his motivation be to betray us like that?”

Colt crosses his arms over his chest and frowns. “If you got a couple drinks into him, he would start ranting. He didn’t like the way things were changing. He liked how they were under your dad.”

“He got the high off of being a one-percenter?”

“Yeah.” Colt nods.

“Do any of the other guys feel like that? Do we need to clean house again?” Wrath questions.

“Trigger just did a scan on everyone since Jug left, and only Hawk and Muscles raised a question for us,” I point out.

Colt shakes his head. “From what I heard, everyone is pretty for the change. So we should be good. We should still talk to those two, but I think Jug is working on his own.”

“I’ll call Trigger and see if he’s still tracking Jug so we can go and end this once and for all.”

I go to pull out my phone, only to find it ringing.

“Trigger, I was just calling you.”

“The clubhouse is under attack.”

“What?”

I hear several gunshots before the line goes dead.

“What’s wrong?” Wrath asks.

“The clubhouse is under attack. Let’s go.”

God, I hope I’m not too late.



NATALIE

Does Harrison trust me?

That's the question that has been plaguing me. He says he wants to help me heal and become the woman I want, but then he keeps things from me. He treats me like I will break.

This morning he never told me what was wrong. Instead, he distracted me with sex. Granted it was fantastic, and I wasn't complaining but still. Now that the sex fog has faded, I can't help but worry. Have I missed something? Did William do something again?

He didn't tell me about the package that arrived at the auto shop until we got back here. The only reason he fessed up is because I overheard one of the guys ask about it. When I asked what he sent, Harrison refused to tell me and told me it wasn't something that I needed to worry about.

Even then, he distracted me from what I wanted from him. Needed from him.

"All you need to know is that I'll take care of you with my life," he reassures me.

I shake my head. "Don't say that. I don't want anything to happen to you."

He crouches down and cups my cheeks in his hands. "Don't worry about me. This will all be over soon and then we can move on, okay?"

"But what if..."

"No, Natalie. He won't get to you. I promise. Say you trust me," he demands.

"Okay." I nod even though I'm not quite sure I believe him. "I trust you."

"Hey, are you okay?" Tara asks, bringing me into the present.

I shake my head. "I'm good. Are you excited?"

"I am."

“You got this.”

“Are you sure this looks good?” Tara asks for the fifth time since I came to her room.

I smile at her. “It’s great.”

“I can’t believe I actually got an interview. I swear you are magical.” She studies herself in the mirror once more.

“You are the one who did the work. I just taught you how to package it.”

The other night when Harrison and the guys went on a run together, I got together with the sweetbutts and old ladies. With Daniela gone, it went smoothly, and I really got to know them. Everyone laughed and had a good time. I really think it was the beginning of a new chapter for all of us but only time will tell. After the old ladies went home is when things really took a turn. The sweetbutts started opening up and relaxing. One thing that became painfully obvious though was the fact most of them found their way to the club because they were never taught how to provide for themselves.

“So wait, you’ve never had a job outside of the club?” I ask in disbelief.

“No,” Baby says as others shake their heads.

“So none of you have resumes?” I ask even though I know the answer.

“I wouldn’t even know how to make one of those.” Tara scoffs.

“Okay, that’s it. We’re doing up resumes for all of you that want them.”

“I don’t think I can put ‘spreading my legs for a biker gang’ as qualifications for a job unless it’s for a strip joint or brothel,” Abby sighs.

I point at her. “Just you wait. I’ll make you sound so good they will have no other option but to hire you. Manifest that shit.”

“You make me sound good. What if I mess up the interview?” she asks, pulling me out of the memory.

I shake my head. “No way. You’ll nail it. By the way, I didn’t see you at the party the other night when shit hit the fan.”

She grins, her cheeks turning red. “Wrath claimed my time for the night. Scared me to death, but he didn’t want to fuck. He said he wanted to give me some time away from that scene. Whatever that means.”

I make a mental note to ask Harrison about it.

“You had a good time though?”

She nods. “I did. We played Rummy in his room. He’s actually a great guy under all the scary stuff. I really like him, but I don’t think it’s mutual.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure. Guys like Wrath are hard to read. Hell, half the time they don’t even know what they want.”

“Isn’t that the truth.” She rolls her eyes.

“Who knows, maybe the next relationship to be gossiped about here will be yours,” I tease.

“I wish.” She sighs wistfully. “I don’t want to get my hopes up though. Right now, he won’t even touch me. Besides, if he hasn’t claimed me yet, that means eventually the other guys will want a turn and as much as I know you say we can say no, I won’t. I need this place.”

“I understand. It’s going to be a transition. You’ll just have to wait it out and wear him down. If anyone can claim Wrath, it will be you.”

“Maybe. I’m sad I left early though.”

“Oh?”

She turns and throws a makeup sponge at me. “Don’t play coy with me. I heard you claimed Reaper, kicked the shit out of Daniela then when it was all over Reaper claimed you back.”

“I didn’t kick her, I just pulled her hair.” I shrug.

“Seriously! Ugh, I’m sad I missed it. It’s been all the sweetbutts have talked about since when no one is around.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t bring it up the other night.”

Tara’s eyes soften. “We both know you hate being the center of attention. I wouldn’t do that to you.”

“Thanks.”

“Who would have thought an old lady would be best friends with one of the club whores,” she muses.

“Stop it. Don’t call yourself a whore,” I scold her.

Tara opens her mouth to say something else.

“Help. Please help!” We hear screams from the main room.

Tara and I ran out of the spare room we were using, only to find Daniela bruised and bloody in the middle of the clubhouse. Jacob’s already at her side. Other than us, no one else is here right now. At least, not that I know of.

“What happened?” I ask as I fall to her side, checking her over.

“I’ll call Wrath,” Tara says as she reaches for her phone.

“Trigger should have gotten the alarm notification. We had the security system set since everyone is gone,” Jacob says as he puts pressure on her side.

“How did she even get in?” I ask.

Jacob shakes his head as he stares at me in the eyes. “I don’t know. I didn’t have time to ask questions. She just fell inside looking like this, and I reacted.”

“That’s okay. We’ll figure it out.”

I feel something funny and look down at my hands. My finger is smeared with what looks like makeup from where one of her bruises lay. I frown.

“What’s on your hand?” Jacob asks.

“Bitch,” she hisses, plunging something into my leg. It burns, making me cry out in pain.

“Get off of her!” Tara cries out.

Tara pushes Daniela off of me while Jacob tries to subdue her, but whatever she’s done to me, it’s working fast.

I’m on the floor watching helplessly as Daniela pulls out a knife, driving it into Tara’s gut before a shot rings out, making Jacob fall to the floor.

Then he’s there.

“No...” I whisper sluggishly as the drugs start to fill my system.

“Time to come home, pet.”

My eyes fall closed as he hauls my unmoving body up. I hear a few more gunshots, but they fade as oblivion takes hold.

twenty-seven

REAPER

“NATALIE!” I roar as I rush inside of the clubhouse.

My feet start to go out from under me and I grab on to Wrath, pulling him down with me.

“Fuck! Tara!” he yells.

We push ourselves up and look down.

“No, no, no...” I start mumbling as I stare at the puddle of blood that we are sitting in and that’s coating my hands.

It’s not hers. It can’t be. My heartbeat is so loud I can hear it whooshing in my ears. My chest feels tight as I gasp for air. Not Natalie. Not my old lady. Anyone else, but not her. A wave of dizziness overtakes me and if I wasn’t already on the floor, I would be now.

Someone slaps me, pulling me out of the downward spiral. “Harrison Kingston, snap the fuck out of it!”

I look up at my baby sister. “When did you get here?”

“Just now. Trigger called to get me out here in case of injuries. Now are you good or do you need me to pull you out of it instead of saving Tara and Jacob?”

“Go,” I demand as I push myself up.

“Tara? Where is she? And who the fuck is that?” Wrath demands as he steps forward, ready to lay a motherfucker out.

“Back the fuck up right now, Wrath. That man is here to help me,” Evelyn snaps.

I watch my sister walk away from us. She grabs the man and pulls him along with her toward the basement.

Trigger rushes through the front door moments later.

“Sorry. I didn’t want to take my eyes off the system. I knew I wouldn’t make it in time.” He looks grim.

“You did the right thing, brother,” I reassure him.

“Reaper.” Trigger grips my shoulder. “We need to head in there.” He nods toward the chapel.

Wordlessly, Wrath, Colt, and I follow him and step inside.

I round the table and take my spot but stay standing.

I lean against the table and hang my head. “Say it.”

“He took her,” Trigger says, voicing my fears.

Everything feels like it’s moving too fast around me, and I can’t process it. It’s like I’m stuck in slow motion while everyone is moving at warped speed as they talk around me.

“Stop!” I demand. Everyone falls silent.

I take a seat and close my eyes. “One at a time, please. Where was everyone?”

“Most of the guys were at the shop, working. The rest of us rolled out because a sensor at the warehouse went off and we needed to check it out.” Trigger pauses. “This is on me, I shouldn’t have left them alone. I thought between Jacob and two guys at the gate, they would be fine. I’m sorry, Pres. I let you down.”

The revert to calling me Pres is not missed. He knows he fucked up and possibly cost me the love of my life. He hates himself more than anyone could possibly hate him right now. Not that I hate him. He made the decision he thought was right.

A shudder sweeps through my body. “This isn’t on you. You couldn’t have known.” I lick my lips, mouth feeling dry. “The two that were at the gate, where are they now?”

“Dead,” Pinky says.

“Tara and Jacob?” Wrath asks.

“With Evelyn and her doctor buddy. Jacob was shot and Tara was stabbed.”

It sounds like Midnight, but I’m not sure because everything sounds fuzzy.

I turn and look at my best friend. “Go. Go be with Tara.”

He starts shaking his head before I even finish speaking. “No, you and Queen Bee need me. Tara’s in good hands.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

“Okay.” Looking away from Wrath, I scan the room. “Do we have a plan? Because right now, I don’t know if I can make one with a clear head,” I confess.

“And we don’t expect you to. If you need to sit this one out, we understand,” Midnight tells me.

“I have to be a part of this.”

“I hate to ask this, but do we think she’s alive?” Twitch raises his hands. “I adore the kid but I have to ask.”

“He’s too fixated on her to kill her.” Or at least I hope so.

Wrath chimes in. “As long as she’s alive, she’ll fight. She’s been putting in her time in the gym with me. If she’s given an opportunity to kill him herself, she will.”

“Are you sure? Outside of bringing Daniela to her knees, I haven’t seen her stand up to anybody,” Twinkie says.

“I’m positive. I-I think she was expecting this,” he confesses.

“Why do you say that? Do you think she was talking to him?” Pinky asks.

“No never.” I shake my head. “She hates that bastard.”

“Nah, that wasn’t it. The thing about Natalie is she’s a planner. After the way Danworth kept her locked up, she would fight tooth and nail to make sure it didn’t happen again.” Wrath tells everyone as his leg bounces with nervous energy. “When she fights, it’s like she’s going to war. She zones out and becomes hyper focused. If she was anyone else, I would say we should put her in the ring and make some cash. She’s that good.”

“Cameras. What did the cameras catch?” I blurt out, my mind finally starting to clear.

Trigger clears his throat as he shifts in his seat. “Are you sure you want to watch?”

Wrath and I nod at the same time.

“Just remember you asked for it,” Trigger mutters as he streams the video from his tablet up onto the screen.

I watch as my girl rushes into danger, Jacob and Tara both trying to protect her from Daniela. Finally he steps into view and smiles into the camera. His mouth moves and I close my eyes.

“What did he say?” Twitch asks.

“He mouthed the word mine right before he picked her up.”

“He dies. Tonight. I’m sick of playing games.”

“How did he get her out of here? It wasn’t on the back of a bike since she was out cold,” Colt asks, speaking up for the first time.

“That’s the best part. He drove right up and never even bothered to hide his license plate numbers. I’m already searching through all the cameras to see where they end up but I can already tell you that they were picked up in Vegas.”

“Gear up,” I demand as I stand on shaky legs. “As soon as we have an address, we roll out.”

“You got it, Pres.” Colt slaps my shoulder.

“We’ll bring the Queen home, Pres. We’ve got this.”

Someone tries to reassure me. But the thing is, I’m not sure they’re right.



NATALIE

I wake up to the sounds of moaning and groaning.

Where am I?

Did I fall asleep with the TV on?

Very carefully, I barely open my eyes, looking out from under my eyelashes. It takes a minute for what I’m seeing to register. I watch as Daniela bobs up and down on William’s dick.

For a moment I watch. I kind of feel bad for her having to give him head. Every time he forced me to, he tasted like ass and I’m not talking about when he finished. As she works him over, I slowly move my hand down to my hip.

I have to fight back a giggle when I feel it. Tucked safely inside my jeans and hooked onto my panties is a pocket knife I lifted off Harrison when I first moved in. Hell, I don’t even think he’s noticed that it’s missing. Anytime he’s gone, I can’t help but put it on me, just in case I need it.

William grunts as he finishes, pushing her head back.

“You like that, daddy?” Daniela asks as she wipes her lips.

“You know I did.” His eyes move off of her toward me, and he smiles. “Looks like sleeping beauty is awake. Did you like the show, Natalie?”

Pushing myself up, I lean against the wall and open my eyes. Looking right at Daniela, I ask the one question that's been burning in my mind since I woke up and saw her. "Why?"

I watch as Daniela crawls onto William's lap and straddles his thighs.

"Why what?"

"Why would you betray them after all they have done for you?"

Daniela laughs. "All they've done for me? And what is it they've done besides use me, huh? I wanted one thing, Reaper. I called dibs on him a long time ago and then you came waltzing in and ruined it all. He took one look at you and started ignoring me."

"He was never yours."

Daniela scoffs. "Please, I was waiting him out. He would have been mine if it wasn't for you. Since I couldn't have him, I did the next best thing. I took what once belonged to you."

I look over at William. "And you're okay with her using you?"

"Honey, we are using each other. Don't get it twisted. We're just means to an end for each other," he says as he pushes her off of his lap to stand. "Be a good girl, Daniela, and get my pet cleaned up. I have plans for her, and she needs to look better than that." He waves a hand at me.

When he walks out, she turns toward me with nothing but malice in her eyes. "How mad do you think he would be if I roughed you up a little before I made you pretty?"

"You could try."

She scoffs and turns toward the door. While her back is turned, I grab my knife and flip it open. I hide it next to my side. I want to rush her and get this over with, but I know I need to play this smartly. If I rush, it's a good way to get hurt.

Daniela flips the lock before turning to walk back toward me. Her heels click on the cement floor as she approaches. She

bends down and grabs my hair, pulling my head back just like I did to her the other night.

“You embarrassed me,” she hisses. “You turned my girls against me and convinced them that I was the issue.”

“That’s because you were,” I hiss as I fall back onto the floor.

She reaches out and slaps me so hard my ears ring. She lays blow after blow as she rants and still I wait it out.

“I hate you.”

“You aren’t even pretty.”

“What does he even see in you?”

“You ruined everything!”

“I have nothing now,” she screams.

When she leans down, getting into my face, I strike. I lift my arm and stab her in the neck. Daniela’s eyes widen. She reaches for her neck as she tries to move back, only I hold her in place. I twist the knife deeper as I sit up, overpowering her.

“I didn’t ruin shit. I didn’t take anything from you,” I whisper harshly into her face.

She tries to say something, but nothing comes out. The only thing I can hear is a gurgling sound coming from her throat. As the light fades from her eyes, I pull the knife out and back away from her body.

Oh god.

I just killed someone.

I lift my blood-covered hands and stare at them. I wait for the panic or remorse to set in but it doesn’t. The only thing I can feel is relief. Relief that I’m one enemy down. Relief that I will never have to see her face.

God, what will Harrison think?

I giggle softly as I think about the pride that would cover his and the other guys’ faces. Hell, Wrath would probably buy me a cake to celebrate my first kill.

The sound of footsteps down the hall outside has me sobering back up. This isn't over. Getting up, I drag Daniela's body, leaving a blood-soaked trail and place it behind the door.

Plan.

I need a plan.

Harrison is coming. Just let him handle it.

I push the thought out of my head. I'm sure Harrison knows I'm gone by now, but who knows how long it will take him to find me. They struggled enough with the whereabouts of William before he took me, and I rather not risk it. I need to check her. Crouching down, I check Daniela's body for anything useful and come up empty-handed.

"Okay, I have a knife and some hand-to-hand combat skills. I can do this," I whisper to myself.

He said he would be coming back for me. It would be smart to stay in here and wait for him. Who knows how many guys he has out there waiting for me. It's tempting to risk rushing out of here, but Harrison would beat my ass if I put myself in unnecessary danger. Nah, when I take out William, he will have something on him that will help me. I just have to hold on a little longer.

With that thought in mind, I resolve myself to wait.

twenty-eight

REAPER

“HOW MUCH LONGER DO YOU think until we get an update on them?” Wrath asks as he paces.

“I don’t know, but we can’t barge in there demanding answers. We have to let Ev and her friend work.”

“We need to find out who he is and what it’s going to cost to keep him quiet,” Colt says quietly as he leans against the wall.

I nod. “I already sent Evelyn a text demanding details. She knows they aren’t allowed to leave tonight until we talk to them.”

“Good,” Wrath says as he runs his hands through his hair.

Pounding coming down the stairs has us coming to attention.

Trigger braces his hands on the wall to stop himself from falling the rest of the way down the stairs. “I found her.”

“Where?” I demand.

Colt, Wrath, and I bolt forward and follow Trigger back upstairs.

“She’s south of the city. They have her in an old hotel. No one from the Renegades is around. He only has a few men with him. It should be an easy in and out,” Trigger tells all of us.

“Alright, I want half to roll out with us and half to stay here. We don’t need another surprise attack. Colt, Trigger, Pinky, Twinkie, Lemon, Kicks, and Twitch stay here. Everyone else suit up, and let’s roll.”

Everyone springs into action. I step forward to go grab my bulletproof vest from my room.

Colt grabs my arm, holding me in place. “Hold on a sec. We need to talk.”

“This isn’t the time.”

He scoffs. “It’s now or never. Why the hell aren’t you letting me go with you? Is it because you still don’t trust me?”

I shake out of his hold and step forward, getting into his face. “You staying here and guarding the clubhouse has nothing to do with if I trust you or not. We hashed that all out earlier, and I’m sorry if your feelings are still hurt, but for fuck’s sake, I’m having you stay back because if anything happens to me.” I pound on my chest. “You’re next in line. I’m protecting the fucking club.”

Colt steps back and rubs his face as he nods. “You’re right. I’m sorry.”

“Now are you done throwing a temper tantrum? My woman is currently being held by a madman.”

I don’t wait for his response and take off. Less than ten minutes later, we are strapped down with enough firepower and flying down the road.

Hold on, baby, I’m coming for you.



We pull off the road and hide our bikes. “I want this place surrounded from all angles. Split into four teams. Spider, you come with me and we will take the back of the building. Objective is to get Queen Bee out of there. If you have the chance, you can take out anyone else. I want them all dead.”

“Fang, you come with me.”

Wrath looks at me.

“We’ll take the south side. Just give us twenty minutes to get into place.”

Midnight pulls something out of his saddlebag. “I’ll take the front with Widow. Trigger gave me this drone. I’ll try to get it as close as I can without being caught. See how many heat signatures we pick up. I’ll report over the comms what we have.”

“Cueball and Poker, you two good teaming up together?”

Both men nod.

All of the men are determined. They didn’t just fuck with my woman. They threatened the heart of this club. Every single one of my men has fallen under my girl’s spell. They don’t know what they did trying to take our Queen Bee. We will annihilate them.

“Good, let’s roll out.”

Everyone springs into action and breaks off into their groups. Wrath and Fang follow us until we stop, and they keep going. We spread out as best as we can and keep low to the ground.

“We have two heat signatures inside in the main part of the hotel. The rooms look to be empty. Three guys out front hanging around,” Midnight says over the comms.

“Nothing here on the north,” Cueball tells us.

“No one in the back,” I whisper into the mic.

Wrath checks in. “I got two.”

“Let’s move,” I tell them.

Spider and I rush forward, staying as low as we can, guns drawn. Coming to a stop against the building, I'm on one side of a window and him on the other. He pulls out a window-breaking tool and holds it up. I nod, giving him the go before checking our surroundings.

Seconds later, you hear glass shattering. We work on clearing the bottom seal before jumping inside.

Midnight comes over the comms. "Pres, head right. That's where the heat signatures are coming from."

We do as he says and start clearing the main lobby of the hotel. We check the laundry room, gym, and pool. With one door left, we stop on either side of it. Taking a deep breath, I look at Spider and reach for the knob.

As the door swings forward, he moves to step inside first, only to be attacked.

"Fuck!" he hisses as he grabs on to the person.

"Natalie," I yell her name as I lower my gun.

She stops fighting Spider, her head swinging my way.

"I need you to drop the knife, sweetheart."

She does as I ask and lunges forward, crying. "You came!"

I take her into my arms and hold her tightly. Thank fuck. She's here and safe.

"Hey, Pres..." Spider says.

When I look at him, I see him looking down, and I follow his line of sight. Sure enough, there's a body. It's Daniela. He shakes his head, letting me know that she is gone.

Leaning down, I kiss Natalie, pouring all of my feelings into it.

I love you. I was worried about you.

I pull Natalie away and look at her. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. I had to kill her though."

She moves to look over at Daniela, but I touch her face, keeping her in place.

“Don’t look at her. Let’s just get out of here, okay?”

“Okay.”

I move her behind me, and Spider falls into step, watching our backs.

“You think you’re going somewhere?” a voice stops us right as we step inside the lobby.

Danworth stands there, gun drawn.

“Fuck, guys, you need to get out now. The building is on fire,” Wrath says, coming through the comms.

“That’s going to be a problem,” I hiss back.

Pushing Natalie behind me, I face William.

“I see you came for my pet once again. Tsk tsk, Kingston. You always did have a problem with wanting what I had. Isn’t that why you got me kicked out?” William starts.

“What the fuck are you talking about, you psychopath? You lost your spot in this club due to your own actions. You were supposed to be our brother, but you were selfish. You cost us the life of our brother.”

“Jimmy was always a little punk. I told him to leave me to my business, but he had to be a little brown noser. He refused to let me go off on my own. Had he just stayed put like I ordered him to, he’d be alive, and I’d be running this club.”

I snort. “Really? My father would have never left the club to a spineless prick like you.”

William laughs, rubbing his chin with one hand, his other still holding the gun at my chest. “You know that bullet was meant for you. It wasn’t accidental friendly fire. I was aiming for you, but he got in the way. So really, his loyalty to you got him killed.”

I grit my teeth, wanting to attack him, kill him, but I withhold it. Glancing up, I see the smoke beginning to fill the room. We don’t have much longer to go.

“Give me the girl, and I’ll let you leave here. I won’t lie. I’ve been enjoying this game we have been playing. Tell me,

are the Medina's hungry for your head yet?"

Whispering to Spider, I make my decision. "Protect her at all costs."

Then I spring into action. I rush William, making him fire off an errant shot, but it goes wide right, missing me. For half a second, I wonder if it hit my girl, but I brush it away, focusing on the fight in front of me.

I would have shot him, but William is smarter than that. I saw through his fancy suit. He's obviously wearing a bulletproof vest below it.

So instead, I take him hand on hand. I throw a punch toward his face, landing right on his jaw. He grunts but stays on his feet. What it does do though is make him drop his gun. Good thing too.

Kicking his gun away, I take his responding hit on the side of the head.

I can hear Natalie yelling in the background, spurring me to end this quickly.

Swiping my legs down, I manage to take him to the floor, then I'm on top of him. Then I give him punch after punch. He manages to knee me in the gut, pushing me back. When he stumbles to his feet, I know what I have to do. Taking my gun out, I point it at him.

Without thinking, I shoot. Danworth jerks back as he grabs his chest, eyes widening as he falls back onto the floor.

I want to rush to him and put a bullet in his head, but the smoke is so thick I can barely see. Hearing Natalie cough solidifies my actions.

"Coming out the front," I tell the guys as I grab Natalie's hand and start running. As soon as we step inside, something blows from further down the building. The sound of glass shattering has us ducking.

"Come on! Welcome back, Queen Bee," Wrath yells as he runs by us.

We all rendezvous around the bikes and catch our breaths.

“What the fuck happened?” I ask as I try to catch my breath.

Wrath cringes. “Found Jug and shot him. I didn’t realize he was standing in a puddle of some kind of accelerant while smoking.”

“He went poof.” Fang makes an explosion-hand gesture and smiles. “It was fucking awesome.”

“Did you find Danworth?” Midnight asks.

“Shot him twice in the chest. He was wearing a vest though. When the fire dies out, we should recover his body,” I tell him.

Wrath gives me a look that says what I’m thinking. I should have made sure he was dead.

Natalie comes first though. Always.

“You okay, Natalie? Do we need to get you checked out?” Wrath asks her.

“I think I’m in shock, but I’m okay for now.” She smiles weakly.

“Come on, let’s get you home,” I say as I pull her into my arms.

Thank fuck she’s safe.



NATALIE

As soon as we pull up to the clubhouse, panic sets in.

Oh no. no. no. no.

Daniela stabbing Tara in the stomach.

Jacob being shot.

Not being able to stop it from happening.

Feeling helpless.

“Fuck, come on, Natalie, breathe!” Harrison demands as he shakes me.

“Feel the ground underneath you. Listen to our voices. Come on, Queen Bee, pull out of it,” Wrath coaches.

Everything starts to come into focus. My hands feel the gravel and dirt underneath them.

Weird. I thought I was on the bike? I can smell both Harrison and Wrath around me. Blinking my eyes, I see Wrath frowning in front of me. Looking down, I see Harrison’s arms wrapped around my stomach, and I feel him against my back.

“W-what happened?” I choke out, my tongue feeling heavy.

Wrath looks behind me at Harrison before looking back at me. “You had a panic attack. Want to tell us what that was about?”

I feel tears falling down my cheeks. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t save her. I’m sorry. A-and Jacob.”

A sob rips through my body as I let everything hit me all at once.

My friends are gone. After everything they did for me, making me feel welcome, and I couldn’t save them.

“Shhh...” Harrison murmurs as he crowds me, rocking me back and forth.

“Hey, it’s okay. I don’t blame you for anything,” Wrath says as he rubs my knees. “I think there’s something you need to see. Can you come with me?”

I nod and move to stand, only I find that my balance is shaky and I end up right back on my ass.

“Easy, baby. I got you.” Harrison sweeps me up into his arms and carries me inside.

I squeeze my eyes shut, not wanting to see the blood on the floor.

“Look, Queen Bee,” Wrath says.

Reluctantly I open my eyes and see that the floor has been cleaned. Looking around the room, I see that everything is in order, and hell, possibly cleaner than I’ve ever seen it.

Wrath leads the way as Harrison carries me downstairs. I’ve never been to this part of the clubhouse before and that terrifies me.

What’s down here?

Is this where Wrath takes his anger out on me for losing Tara?

“She’s panicking again,” Harrison murmurs.

Wrath looks over his shoulder and looks at me with nothing but kindness. “Just a few more minutes, okay?”

He rushes down the hall and pounds on a door. By the time we get there, someone steps out.

Evelyn.

She’s covered in blood.

“Oh my god, were you hurt too?” I cry out, covering my hand with my mouth.

“Put her down,” she demands as she steps forward. Before Harrison fully lets me go, Evelyn is pulling me into her arms.

“I’m fine. It’s not mine. Are you okay?” she asks quietly over and over again.

I hear her say something else, but none of it makes sense. My heart is racing so fast black spots overtake my vision, and the next thing I know I’m waking up on a bed in an unfamiliar room.

“Hey, you’re awake.” Evelyn sighs as her shoulders relax. “You had me worried there.”

“Where am I?”

“You’re in the basement in the clubhouse. This is where I do my doctor thing for the club.” She winks. “Now do you want a surprise?”

“I don’t know if I could take much more excitement.”

Evelyn tilts her head back and laughs.

“Oh Natalie, never change.”

She helps me sit up, and the first thing I see is Jacob leaning against a wall, sitting in a chair. His arm is in a sling and his shoulder is bandaged up.

He gives me a dopey smile. “Hey Natalie. Did Ev give you the good drugs too?”

“Wh-How?”

“Definitely drugged. Isn’t it great?” He frowns. “Hey Ev, I think I’m going to be sick again.”

“I got it.” A man I don’t know rushes forward.

“Hey, he’s fine. I brought him with me because I needed help,” Evelyn soothes me. I hadn’t even realized I had tensed up. “Jacob will be fine. He was shot in the shoulder just right. It will take him a while but he will heal up just fine.”

“A-and T-t-tara?”

Evelyn rubs my arms and jerks her chin toward the back of the room. “She’s over there.”

Reluctantly I turn my head and see Wrath standing over her. I watch as he brushes a piece of hair off of her forehead. She doesn’t move.

“I-is she dead?” I whisper, asking my worst fear.

“No. Thankfully when she was stabbed, the knife wasn’t pulled out, so it didn’t do too much damage. We will have to keep an eye on her for a while. Make sure she doesn’t develop an infection or anything like that, but I’m hopeful.”

“This is all my fault.” I cry.

“Hey.” Evelyn moves, making me look right at her. “This isn’t your fault, okay? If anyone is to blame, it’s Dansworth. Not you. You are a victim just as much as they are.”

“They must hate me.” I shake my head as I cry.

“Trust me. They don’t hate you. Let Jacob sober up and Tara wake up and they will tell you the same thing.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because they love you just as much as we do.” She squeezes my hand.

A door opening catches my attention. I watch as Harrison steps inside. As soon as he sees me, he walks right to me. “You ready to go upstairs, baby girl?”

Before I can even respond, he scoops me up into his arms.

“No sex,” Evelyn calls out as carries me away.

Neither of us speaks as we make our way through the clubhouse. Once inside our room, he heads straight into the bathroom. He turns on the shower, and we both strip down without saying anything. After a quick shower, he dries me off and carries me back into our room and sets me down on the bed and crawls in behind me. Holding me so were chest to chest.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper after a few minutes of silence.

“If anyone is sorry, it’s me. I told you, you wouldn’t ever be hurt again when you were with me, and you got hurt.”

“It’s not your fault. You couldn’t have known he would attack.”

“Agree to disagree on that.” He squeezes me tight. “I’m just glad you’re still here with me.”

“Me too.”

My eyes start to feel heavy, and my body begins to relax.

Then sleep overtakes me.

twenty-nine

REAPER

EVER SINCE WE CAME HOME, Natalie hasn't been sleeping well. She's been restless unless I'm lying down with her, holding her.

When we opened that door, I didn't know what to expect. She could have been tied down and violated. She could have not been there at all but instead she came out swinging.

Natalie probably doesn't realize it yet, but she slashed Spider's forearm with the knife. My knife that was in my desk that at some point she decided to start carrying on her. If Spider hadn't raised his arm, she would have got him in the face.

My girl is a fucking fighter.

My phone vibrates, and very carefully, I get it out of my pocket.

Wrath: Are we still doing church in five minutes?

Me: Give me ten.

As soon as the message sends, I put my phone back in my pocket. Looking down at Natalie part of me is tempted to

leave her sleeping, but I know if she wakes up and I'm not here, she will freak out.

"Baby," I say softly as I kiss her forehead. "Time to wake up."

Slowly she stirs and stretches against me. "Hi."

"Hey."

"How long was I asleep?"

"Not that long. I only woke you up because I didn't want you to wake up alone and I have to get to church and talk about what happened."

"Everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything is fine. We just haven't had a chance to talk since shit went down the other day."

Natalie gets these little creases on her forehead as she frowns. I can't help but touch them with my thumb, trying to rub them away.

"What's wrong?"

"A-are you guys going to decide what you're going to do with me?" she asks, not looking at me.

I roll her over onto her back and pin her down with my body, making her look at me. "Do you think they want you gone? That I want you to leave?"

Natalie shrugs.

"Baby girl, we claimed each other. If you leave, then I leave. That's it. Done deal. No take backs. Those guys out there respect that and don't hold shit against you. Understood?"

"You still want me?"

Leaning down, I kiss her. "If I didn't have a chapel full of guys waiting on me, I would show you just how much I want you."

"Maybe you could show me later?"

I watch as life fills those baby blues that's been missing for the last couple of days.

“You can fucking count on it.”

Reluctantly I lift myself off of her. I make a show of adjusting my half-hard cock and can't help but chuckle when she starts to blush.

“Later, baby.” I head out of the room and go right into the chapel.

As soon as I step in, everyone quiets down.

“You guys ready?”

Everyone nods as I take my place at the head of the table. “Who wants to start?”

“How's Queen Bee?” Midnight asks.

I can't help but feel gratitude toward my brothers when their first concern is my woman and her wellbeing.

“She's okay. Right before I came in here, she was worried that you guys would vote to get rid of her.”

Wrath frowns. “Why the hell would we do that? She's your old lady.”

“Guilt.” Trigger nods in understanding. “It will take some time but eventually she will realize that we don't blame her for any of this.”

“Yeah, she was just a victim in Danworth's game.” Pinky shakes his head. “Poor kid.”

“We'll have to play darts or something again so she knows that we're good,” Midnight adds.

“I'd appreciate that. Okay, let's try this again. Who wants to start?”

Colt sits on my right and shifts in his chair. “Medina contacted us. They have another shipment ready to go. Where we are already on rocky ground with them, I don't think it's wise to push it off. No matter what's going on here.”

I shake my head and drum my fingers on the table. “You’re right. We can’t put them off. I trust that you can handle this one?”

“I can,” he confirms with a look of gratitude in his eyes.

“What else?”

“I had Cueball do a sweep of Jug’s place. He found a burner phone with dates and times texted to another number. I think it’s safe to say he was the mole,” Trigger tells me.

“Yeah, he wasn’t shy about making it known he hated the change in the club since you took over either,” Colt adds.

“Well that’s one question answered.” I sigh.

“I owe everyone an apology. We could have ended this bullshit before it went this far if I would have looked into him sooner. But when we kicked his ass out after Tara, I didn’t give him a second thought,” Trigger says.

“That’s not on you,” Colt says, shaking his head. “Out of sight, out of mind.”

“I know he did us dirty, but I hate losing a brother that’s been with us for so long,” Twitch says, shaking his head.

Everyone murmurs in agreement.

“Who’s next?” I ask, breaking the silence.

“We have a problem,” Pinky tells me.

“What?” I ask, feeling dread settle into my bones.

“When the fire was out, and they recovered the bodies...” He hesitates.

“They never recovered Danworth’s body,” Midnight finishes.

Fuck.

“I was worried about that. He was wearing a vest. I was sure of it, but without compromising Natalie, I couldn’t be sure to eliminate the threat,” I admit.

“You made the decision every single one of us would make. Family safety above all else,” Colt reassures me that I

did the right thing.

“Goddammit.” I slam my fist on the table.

“He could be dead. You could have hit him somewhere vital. He could have lived long enough to get out. We just have to wait and see,” Trigger says.

“Okay.” I nod, running a hand over my mouth. “We go on as normal. If shit hits the fan, then it’s safe to say we know it’s him. What about the Renegades? Anything from them?”

“Not a peep. We will have to reach out and see where we stand. None of the guys at the motel were theirs, though,” Midnight tells me.

“We’ll wait for now. Let the dust settle. Keep an eye on them to see if they do anything.”

“Sounds good,” Colt says as everyone nods.

“Wrath, give me an update on Tara and Jacob.”

Wrath shifts next to me. “Tara is in pain but will be fine. She’s already bitching that she’s fucked up some job she got outside of the clubhouse.” He rolls his eyes.

“You can’t keep claiming her as your personal sweetbutt, Wrath,” Twitch goads him.

Wrath grumbles, “Fine, then she’s my old lady. As of right now.”

The entire room goes stock still.

“What did you say?” I ask.

He grimaces at me. “I never planned to have an old lady anyway, and if it offers her protection, then I claim her. She’s mine. She gets a club job and can help run this thing with our Queen Bee.”

“I was kidding, brother. You don’t have to claim her. We will respect your wishes,” Twitch adds.

Wrath shakes his head. “It’s been decided.”

“Does she get a say in it?” Midnight teases.

“No. Now onto Jacob. He is off the pills and regulating his pain with over-the-counter shit. Evelyn says he will make a full recovery and as long as he does his physical therapy, he will regain full motion of his shoulder.”

We all let the Tara thing go, focusing on our prospect.

“Where does everyone stand on promoting him to a brother?”

“He’s been a prospect long enough,” Colt says.

Midnight nods. “He’s paid his dues.”

“He’s a good kid. Will make a good brother,” Pinky adds.

“Then it’s decided as soon as everyone’s ready, we throw a patching party.”

“I’ll talk to Honk and Elenore. I’m sure they would be willing to plan it for us. That way, you and Natalie don’t have to worry about it.”

I nod. “I’ll mention it to Natalie. I’m sure she would like to work with Elenore on it. Give her something to funnel all of her energy into right now. Anything else?”

“Nah, not right now.” Colt shakes his head.

“Alright we’ll meet again in a few days. Everyone stay safe and don’t do anything stupid. Meeting adjourned.”



NATALIE

It’s been a little over a week since everything with William went down. The dust is finally starting to settle around us and everyone is getting back to their lives. Including me by

picking back up with my therapy sessions. I wanted to cancel, but Harrison was adamant that I work it all out with her without giving her too many details.

“The last thing we need is for the therapist to go to the cops,” Harrison tells me.

“I think it’s time,” the therapist says, bringing me back to the present. “You’ve made progress when it comes to your family, but I think there is one last thing you need to do to completely move on.”

“And what’s that?”

“I think you need to confront them. You could visit them in person, or you could call, or even write, but I think you need to lay it all out for them. How you forgive them for being absent and letting you down. Say whatever you want to them.”

“I don’t know.” I frown as I shift in my chair. “I wouldn’t even know where to find them.”

“I think a simple Google search would give you that answer. If you don’t want to do it yourself, ask one of your friends. I truly think this is the only way you will completely move on and let that go.”

“You really think so?”

The therapist smiles as she adjusts her glasses. “I do. You’ve made your peace with them and your ex. I’ve told you what to look for in a healthy relationship and from what you’ve said, you’ve found that. On top of that, you’ve created your own family. It’s truly remarkable. You’ve managed to do something that takes others years in mere months.”

“Are you saying you think I no longer need therapy?”

The therapist laughs. “Everyone needs therapy. Some more than others. I don’t think our time is over yet. Now tell me, will you do it?”

I nod. “I think I will.”

“Alright. Next week I expect you to give me an update on how you feel about it.”

“Okay.” I smile. “Bye.”

As soon as she signs off, I sigh.

I don't even know what I want to say to them, but I know I need to. Not just for me but for Harrison.

Reaching forward, I grab a notebook and find a blank piece of paper. Grabbing a pen, I set it on the paper and I begin to write.

Mom & Dad,

My therapist encouraged me to write to you. Said it was the last thing I needed to do before closing that chapter of my life. I'm only doing this because my partner and the family we've created deserve the very best version of myself. You do that for those you love, but you wouldn't understand that.

All I ever wanted as a child was to be seen and heard by you, but I never got that. You made me feel like an inconvenience. You didn't ask about my day or what I was interested in. If I tried, you told me I talked too much and walked away.

When I first moved away, I was desperate for love. I fell into

the arms of the first man I found only to end up in an abusive relationship. He beat me and demanded I be seen and not heard, just like you. I got myself out though.

I found a man and a family who love me for me. They encourage me to be loud and speak my opinion. They always stop and listen when I talk. I have their complete attention and devotion and they have mine.

I'm happy now. I know what a healthy relationship looks like thanks to some of our friends. My partner shows me every day what love looks and feels like. I hope you know what that feels like and if you don't, well I hope you find it.

I wish you nothing but the best, but please don't reach out.

Goodbye,

Natalie

With a shaky hand, I set down the pen and reread what I just wrote. I'm tempted to go back and rewrite things and add

to it, but these are my thoughts and feelings in that moment. They deserve my raw, unfiltered honesty.

I dig through Harrison's desk and find a blank envelope. After placing it inside and sealing it shut, I sit back in my chair.

The only thing left is to mail it, and I know just the man to ask.



“Hey Trigger, can I talk to you for a second?” I give a small smile to the other men in the group he was chatting with.

“Of course.” He pulls away, letting me lead him out of the main room into a side room no one is using at the moment.

“What can I do for you, Queen Bee?”

“I was wondering if you could look up the information for my parents and then mail this letter for me.”

I hold out the envelope to him. He gives me a small smile.

“Of course. I can do it right now if you need.”

I shake my head. “It can wait. I haven't spoken to them in many years.”

He nods as if he understands. Maybe he does.

Then an idea hits me.

“You're really good at that hacking stuff, right?” I ask.

He snorts, “I do well, yes.”

“Could you erase a person? Make them no longer exist?”

He narrows his eyes. “I can. Why?”

“Could you maybe erase my existence? Make it so no one would be able to find me. Or like change my name or something? I'm not really sure how it works.”

He frowns. “I can do that if you really want me to.”

I smile. “I do. Like do I get new papers or something? A new social or license?”

He nods slowly. “A whole packet of documents to make your identity legitimate. By the time I’m done, it’ll be like you never existed.”

I nibble on my lower lip. “Could I keep my first name?”

He looks confused now. “Yeah.”

“Okay good. Can you do that for me? Whenever you can?”

He nods again. “Sure thing. I’m going to go drop this off in my room.”

He holds up the letter.

“Thank you. Oh and can you mail it out from the post office? Maybe one not around here. I don’t want them to be able to track me.”

He nods once more before leaving.

Heading back to the main room, I smile. It’s as if a weight has been lifted off my chest.

I make my way to the bar, grabbing a stool next to Evelyn and Tara.

“Hey ladies.”

“Hey, how was therapy?” Evelyn asks.

“It was therapy.” I smile and turn toward Tara.

“How are you feeling?”

She smiles softly. “I’m good. Still a little stiff, but I’m getting there.”

Ten minutes later, the door opens. I turn to see who steps inside and can’t help but smile.

Harrison Kingston.

Reaper.

My man.

He stalks toward me, looking angry.

I smile up at him and use his road name since we are with everyone. “Hey Reap.”

He picks me up from my stool, making me gasp as he walks backward until he has me pinned to the wall. Then his lips crash down on mine.

thirty

REAPER

“THE SHIPMENT WAS DELIVERED without an issue. The Medinas are happy with the condition and timeliness. They’ve said they have stopped entertaining the Renegade’s offer. They have solidified their position with us,” Colt informs me.

“Good. Anything else we need to know?” I ask, looking at Wrath.

They both shake their heads.

“Let’s head out then.”

I’m about to get on my bike when my phone rings. Seeing Trigger’s name, I answer.

“What’s up?”

“I don’t want to alarm you, but Natalie came to me with a request.”

“Okay? She knows your family. I’m not mad that she came to you and not me. I’m happy she trusts you.”

He hesitates. “It wasn’t something normal. I think you might need to check in with her.”

“What do you mean? Get to the point.”

He sighs. "I'm not sure why. I didn't ask, but she asked for a whole new identity."

I frown at Trigger's words.

I thought she understood. Guess not. She will understand though.

"I'll take care of it. Keep her there."

I hang up, indicating to the guys that we need to go. They both heard my side of the conversation and know it's something to do with Natalie.

It's not a long ride back to the compound from our warehouse. Wrath is at my side, following me. I know he's just making sure I don't do something I'll regret. Colt is there too, but he seems distracted. I can't get in his shit right now. I need to fix my own first.

I barely have the bike off before I march toward the clubhouse doors.

As soon as I step inside, my eyes find hers. She smiles up at me, only pissing me off more.

"Hey Reap."

The words leave her mouth, but I'm not interested in them right now. Instead, I pick her up and walk her to the closest wall.

Then I seal my lips onto hers.

She answers my kiss right away, letting me lead it. When she feels like putty in my hands, I lean back, resting my forehead on hers.

"What about the word mine do you not get? Do I need to spell it out for you? Spank your ass red until you understand it? Maybe get it tattooed on you?"

She frowns. "What are you talking about?"

"I told you if you leave, I leave. If you want to leave me, you're going to have to kill me because I won't let you go. I don't care if it sounds toxic as fuck. If it's over the top and too

possessive. The only way you leave me is if I'm dead. So make your decision."

I pull my gun out, turning it until it's in her hand, pressed against my chest. She tries to pull away, but I don't let her.

I realize I'm being irrational. Maybe even scaring her, especially with her past, but the thought of her leaving me has driven me past my breaking point. I can't do this without her. I can't live a life without her.

"Jesus, Harrison. What's wrong with you? I'm not trying to leave you. Please put the fucking gun away, you psycho," she hisses at me but keeps her tone low.

She shouldn't bother. Everyone is listening to every single word spoken.

"You asked Trigger for a new identity."

Her eyes widen then soften. "That rat bastard," she mumbles to herself. "I was going to tell you tonight. I've made a decision. I want to leave the old Natalie in the past. I want to be the woman you made me into. So I asked him to erase Natalie Fairless so that she never existed and give me a new last name. I was never going to leave you. This is just something I need to heal."

I swallow hard, finally taking the gun back and holding it out until someone grabs it. "You want a new last name?"

She nods slowly.

"Take my last name and make it yours then."

She gasps, her hand flying to her lips.

"You're already my old lady in the eyes of the club, but be my wife."

"I don't want Natalie Fairless to have ever existed though. I don't want anyone ever to be able to find her," she whispers, looking down.

I nudge her chin up. "So we get rid of her. Say you'll take my last name though. Be mine."

She smiles. "I'm already yours, but yes. I'll take your last name."

I growl, leaning in to kiss her on the lips before pulling back.

"Chap," I holler to our chaplin.

"Right here, Reaper," he tells me.

I glance over at him.

"Marry us right now. Trigger make it legal."

They both agree quickly.

"Can you at least let me stand on my own two feet? Do this semi-traditional?" Natalie teases.

I shake my head. "I don't want you to be anywhere but in my arms."

She smirks. "Whatever you say, caveman."

Chaplin smiles widely as he takes us in.

"Since this wasn't planned, I will keep it quick and to the point. Do you, Reaper," he starts, but I stop him.

"Harrison. Legally, Chap."

He nods. "Do you, Harrison Kingston, take Natalie to be your lawfully wedded wife? To have and to hold from this day forward. Through all the ups and downs that will no doubt come with this life we lead. Will you lay your life on the line for hers and promise to make each day better than the last? Will you love her until your dying breath?"

"I will. I do. I will love her for eternity," I tell him, staring into her eyes.

She's crying, but the smile on her face makes my heart beat faster.

"Do you, Natalie Fairless, take Harrison as your lawfully wedded husband, accepting him for the flawed man he is but knowing he would die for you? Through all the good days, but even more on the harder ones. Will you clean his wounds and

tend to him until he is back to good health? Will you give him your all, knowing that he will always catch you?”

“I do. Always and forever,” she says the words with conviction.

I smile at the strength in her. She came to me as a broken woman, but now she is a queen.

My queen.

“Then I pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride.”

And I do. Over and over again until she is breathless. Until the sounds of our cheering family fades.

I kiss her until my lips are sore and the breath in my lungs has become hers.

I give her my all and accept her in return.

In this moment, I feel we have truly become one entity.

“I love you,” she whispers against my lips when I finally pull back.

“Words cannot describe the way I feel. You own me, Queen Bee.”

“As you do me.”

In that moment, I couldn't be happier.



NATALIE

“Mrs. Kingston, may I introduce you to your new home?”
Harrison says as he carries me over the threshold.

He demanded I let him carry me. We are married after all.

We stayed and partied with the family for a little bit, but then he stole me away. He said he couldn't wait another second to get me alone.

I thought he was taking me back to our room.

I was wrong.

“You are going to let me live here?” I ask him.

He chuckles. “You're my old lady. My wife now. This is your home too. I want us to move in here. I know you still have a lot of stuff going on at the club, but I'll get you a car, or hell, assign you someone to always drive you around. I want you here in our new bed every night. I want you to decorate this place and give it your touches. I want to know every day when I walk into this house that it's a home where we live together. Say you'll move here with me.”

I shake my head at his antics. “You dummy. Of course I'll move in here with you. I loved this place the minute you brought me here months ago. Back then, I hated thinking about you having someone else here. I wanted it to be my place, even if I was scared to admit it. I love that you want to give that to me.”

“I want to take care of you. It might seem silly as hell, but my biggest turn-on with you is when you let me do things for you. Getting you a drink. Cuddling you. Making you food. Tending to your wounds. All of it makes me feel like you need me. It's a kink I never even realized I had until you.”

I snort. “So if I told you to give me a foot rub right now?”

He drops to his knees, pulling my foot up to take off my shoes.

“I was kidding. Stop it.”

He chuckles as I kick him.

“Baby, I need you to get naked now. I want to own you.”

Pulling my bottom lip into my mouth, I look up at him. “Do you think maybe we can try a blow job first? I know it's a

trigger for me, but I want to work past it.”

He nods as he stands. Then he takes my hand, pulling me into the living room. He begins to undress, prompting me to do the same.

When we are both naked, he pulls a pillow from the couch and lies on the floor in front of him.

“This is all about you, so don’t worry about me,” he tells me, pulling me in for a kiss.

I kiss him back before sinking to my knees.

For a brief second, I have a flash of William.

Then I look up and see the man who loves me standing above me.

My life is so different now. He is different.

Slowly, I reach out, grabbing his dick. Then I lick the tip. Taking my time, I suck him into my mouth. I don’t do it for long. I’m not completely healed from my trauma, but the few minutes I manage are enough for me. It’s enough for me to know that I hold all the power. I might not be one hundred percent yet, but I’m getting there a little more each day.

I’m slightly shaking from the attempt, but Harrison holds me through it, letting me calm myself back down. He whispers words of reassurance to me. Telling me how much he loves me. How brave I am.

He is the perfect man.

When I finally feel up to it, he makes love to me. Not fast and rough like I love, but something more intimate.

Slow. Steady. He stares into my eyes, and I stare into his.

When we reach our peak, we do so together, both calling out the other’s name.

It’s exactly what I needed.

Then again, Harrison always gives me what I need.

epilogue

NATALIE

Two Months Later

“PLEASE, HARRISON. STOP TEASING ME,” I moan, trying to arch up into him.

His hand presses down on my stomach. “Patience, Queen Bee.”

My eyes fall closed as he sucks my clit into his mouth. God, he loves to drive me insane.

Everyone keeps saying the honeymoon phase will wear off, but I have yet to see it yet. Harrison is insatiable. He’s constantly trying to find somewhere to fuck me.

I can’t even tell you how many times someone has walked in on us because he forgot to lock a door.

He continues to tongue me, working me up to that familiar high. Only, he doesn’t push me over. Instead, he slows down again, edging me until I’m screaming for it.

It’s his favorite game. See how far he can push me until I threaten to castrate him.

I know how to do it too. Wrath taught me.

“I swear to God, Harrison. I will murder you,” I rasp, my eyes watery from the intense sensations he’s putting my body through.

“Come on. You know the reward is worth it.” He stands, moving closer to me as he undoes his pants.

He’s not wrong. The reason he loves to edge me so much is because I often blackout afterward from the pleasure wreaking havoc on my body.

Usually I wouldn’t mind, but we have things to do today. Hell, we shouldn’t even be fucking around right now. We have a meeting with the club in thirty minutes. This whole room is going to smell like sex.

Not that Harrison cares.

One of the first changes he made after we were married was that married members were allowed to include their old ladies in the meetings if the women chose to do so. So far, no one has, not even me. We respect that this is the men's business, and we shouldn't be involved.

Today is special though. I'll be making a request of the men.

Harrison slides into my wet heat, groaning as he does.

"You always feel so tight for me. Like God made you specifically to fit me."

"He did," I manage to breathe out as he thrusts into me hard.

"I know he did." His finger comes down to brush against my lips. "He made me my very own queen to worship."

Before I can reply, he shoves his thumb into my mouth, thrusting into me even harder.

I don't hesitate. I suck on his thumb, moaning around it as he brings me pleasure. It doesn't take long. After being on the edge for so long, only a few well-timed thrusts send me over, screaming his name.

Spots dance in my vision as I let myself revel in the tingling feeling spreading throughout my body.

When I finally come back to the present, Harrison is there, cleaning my pussy with a wet wipe. I smile at the sight.

He started keeping them in his pocket after the last mess we made on the pool table. He didn't like having to carry me back to the room to clean me up.

"You are gorgeous," he whispers as he tosses the wet wipe into the trash.

Then he helps me stand on wobbly legs, pulling my dress down to cover my bare ass.

"The guys are going to know we fucked."

He shrugs. "I'm sure we've all had fantasies of fucking on this table. I might even let them have their chance to do it if

they settle down.”

I shake my head. “You’re terrible.”

“What? This is our church. Why wouldn’t we wanna worship our goddesses here?”

He presses a quick kiss behind my ear before taking a seat, pulling me into his lap.

“Are you sure about this? It’s forever.”

Turning in his lap, I cup his cheek. “We are forever. I’m sure.”

He tugs my jacket closer around me.

I won’t lie. The first time he gave me his property jacket, I cried. Now I have a cut and a jacket, and I wear them everywhere. I want something more permanent though.

The knock on the door pulls me from my thoughts.

“Come in,” Harrison calls out.

The men filter in. I don’t miss their knowing smirks. None of them seem upset though.

If anything, they look happy.

I smile back at them. They have all accepted me.

“Now that we are all here, Queen Bee has something she would like to propose.”

I attempt to sit up straighter, but Harrison keeps me plastered to him. I shoot him an annoyed look, but he only winks at me.

I sigh. “I love that we do the property jackets and cuts for the old ladies, but I was thinking about another option. Don’t get me wrong, I love wearing my stuff, but I want something that can never be taken away. I would like to get a property of tattoo. One with the club logo like you guys wear on your bodies but with my old man’s name. Since it would be using the club logo, I want to put it to a vote.”

The guys all laugh, looking at me with amusement in their eyes. Midnight is the one who speaks up.

“I can design something for your approval, Queen Bee. If you like it, we can do it tomorrow.”

“Don’t you guys have to vote or something?” I ask.

They all shake their heads, but Wrath’s the one who verbally answers me.

“There’s no point. Not a single guy in this room would say no to you wearing our patch like a badge of honor. We respect that you wanted approval first, but you didn’t need it.”

I shake my head vehemently. “I appreciate that, but this isn’t just about me. I know you guys love and respect me. That you’ve accepted me into your family with wide open arms. This is setting precedence. Just like you patch members in as a group, any old ladies should be done the same way. You should have the option of voicing any concerns. I think it needs to be a unanimous vote as well, like with prospects.”

They all nod slowly.

“Let’s put it to a vote then, brothers,” Colt speaks up. “All in favor say ‘yay.’”

The whole room says it.

“Those against, say ‘nay.’”

Not a single man speaks up.

“There we have it then.” He turns and smiles at me.

“Does anyone else have anything they want to talk about?” Harrison asks from behind me.

They all say no, adjourning the meeting. We follow the men out into the main area.

“Hey, can we talk for a minute?” Midnight asks, stepping at the end of the bar.

I nod.

“Okay, so I want to show you what I’m thinking.”

He pulls a pen and a small notebook from his pocket. As he flips the pages, I can see all the art he has stored there. He is truly talented.

“I’ve got to go.” I hear yelled out from the other side of the room.

“I’ll be back,” Harrison whispers to me as he takes off after Colt.

“So I was thinking our logo like this.”

I watch as he takes their logo of a motorcycle with wings and a lotus in the headlights and softens the edges, making it look almost more feminine. Then he writes “Property of” above it in beautiful script and Lotus MC at the bottom.

“Okay, so this would be the template, but we could add the member’s name like this.”

Then I watch him work magic, intertwining Harrison’s Road name in the feathers of the wings.

My eyes tear up as I watch my vision come to light. It’s better than I could even have imagined.

“It’s perfect.”

He smiles, pride coming over his features. “Nothing you want to change. Seriously, this goes on your body forever. I will make any changes you want.”

I shake my head. “It’s perfect. I think I want mine on my ribcage. Somewhere I can see it anytime I want to. What do you think?”

He frowns. “This is your first tattoo. The ribs is going to hurt.”

I shrug. “A little pain has never stopped me before.”



REAPER

“Colt,” I call out, stopping him before he can get on his bike.

“I need to go,” he repeats, turning to me, his face distraught.

“What happened?”

He starts pacing. “Katie’s in the hospital. Something might be wrong with the baby. I don’t care. I need to get there. Fuck, I hate not driving, but I need to get on a plane.”

“Breathe, brother. Let’s get this situated.” Pulling out my phone, I dial Trigger. “Come outside.”

I watch as Colt continues to keep looking at his phone before looking back up at me.

When Trigger finally walks out, I turn to Colt. “Who do you trust with your bike?”

He shakes his head, not understanding the question.

“Colt, brother. Who do you trust with your bike?” I repeat.

“All of you.”

I nod. “Trigger, get him on the next flight to Texas. I don’t care what it costs. I’ll drop him at the airport. Then I want you to get Poker and Fang to get on the road. Poker can take Colt’s bike. Fang can stay with him down there until things are resolved. I’ll call Rogue,” I say, mentioning our chapter president in that area. “And let them know to expect you.”

Colt looks up at me with wide eyes.

“Come on, Colt. Move.” I gesture toward the truck we use when we can’t take out bikes. “I’ll be right back.”

Running inside, I find Natalie where I left her, talking with Midnight.

“Hey, babe. I have to run and do something. I’ll be back.”

She nods, not asking any questions. “Okay. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Turning to the newest member of our club, I use his road name for the first time in official presidential capacity. “Bullet, Keep an eye on my girl while I’m gone, yeah?”

Natalie rolls her eyes as she looks at him.

“You got it, Pres.” He nods.

“You can call me Reaper now. You’ve earned it.”

I swear the kid looks ready to cry.

Turning from him, I press a hard kiss to Natalie’s lips before jogging back out to the truck.

I’m speeding to the airport, but I don’t care. Trigger sent the plane ticket through a couple minutes ago. He has about thirty minutes before the plane boards. The ride would normally take twenty, but we make it in ten.

As I watch Colt rush into the airport, I rub my face.

I have a feeling this is going to turn into something bigger than any of us could predict.

The End.

Want just a little more Natalie and Reaper? We promise you don’t want to miss this Bonus Epilogue.

Read it [HERE!](#)

author note

Thank you for reading Reaper. We hope you loved this story as much as we do. Want more Lotus MC? Check out, Wrath available now on Amazon and Kindle Unlimited.

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author bio

Author Bio

Cala Riley, better known as Cala and Riley, are a pair of friends with a deep-seated love of books and writing. Both Cala and Riley are happily married and each have children, Cala with the four-legged kind while Riley has a mixture of both two-legged and four. While they live apart, that does not affect their connection. They are the true definition of family. What started as an idea that quickly turned into a full-length book and a bond that will never end.

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