

Rekindled

A DIRTY SOULS MC SPIN OFF
UTAH BOOK 3

SOUL



EMMA CREED

REKINDLED SOUL

DIRTY SOULS MC - UTAH

BOOK 3

EMMA CREED

Rekindled Soul

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DEDICATION

To the real-life Lucky and his Lady Leg-Over

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AUTHOR NOTE

*****Warning*****

Rekindled Soul and all books in the Dirty Souls Mc series are a work of fiction and contain adult content. Due to the nature of the series you should expect to come across various subject matter that some readers may find disturbing, and it is intended for readers 18+

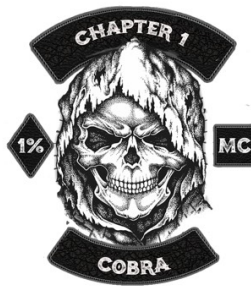
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'Bound not by blood but loyalty.

**We live, we ride,
and we die by our own laws'**



“What the fuck is that?” Jekyll looks at the broken-off, high-shoe heel I accidentally put on the bar while emptying my cut pockets to look for my keys.

“It ain’t nothin’!” Snatching it back up, I quickly tuck it away again.

“I probably left my keys upstairs in my apartment, anyway.” I change the subject, patting down my jeans and cursing myself for being so careless.

“Was that the heel of a woman’s shoe? Whatcha use that for? A weapon?” Bulletproof’s laugh causes more unwanted attention.

“No, I don’t use it as a fuckin’ weapon.” I roll my eyes.

Ain’t no way I’m tellin’ ‘em, where I got it from or why I keep it. They’ll think I’m pathetic.

I *am* pathetic. But as I reach back into my pocket and touch the heel, just to check if it’s still there, I think back to a time I never want to forget...

I hold my grip firm until his body stops struggling, and his pulse stops beating against my palms. Then, finally releasing him, I stare into the eyes of a soulless man.

Ed tried running, but it was impossible for him to hide. Not from us, and not from justice.

No one but us know he’s here. I’ve watched him come and go from the abandoned apartment above the closed-down

pâtisserie. It could be weeks before anyone finds his body, and today, I figured it would be the perfect place for him to meet his end.

I take the burner phone out my pocket and call my Prez back in Utah and when he answers I keep things as brief as possible.

"It's done," I inform him, looking down at Ed's limp, useless body.

"Clean?" Dec checks.

"Ain't it always?" I laugh a little smugly as I check around the room, ensuring I've not left any evidence behind. It looks as though Ed was traveling light, but then, he did have to get outta Utah pretty fast.

"Any chance on gettin' my return flight outta here any sooner?" I've only been in Paris three days and I'm already done with city life. I miss my bike, and I miss the open roads I can ride it on.

"I'll see what we can do. In the meantime, just sit tight and do ya best to stay outta trouble." Dec hangs up the phone, and after I tuck it back in my jeans, I do one last sweep of the place before I pull my hood back up and head out.

The rain's really coming down now, and taking off my leather gloves to avoid looking suspicious, I check the coast is clear before I step out from the passage onto the cobbled street.

Keeping my hood up over my head, I watch the rain splash against the cobbles and decide to make a dash through it and head toward the main street. Squinting through the blanket of rain, I see a petite figure rushing right at me, and the red dress she's wearing strikes bright among the dullness of the sky and the dark, narrow walls surrounding us. She makes me stop on my feet, just so I can appreciate the way her dark, brown hair soaks to her shoulders. I watch her stumble on her matching red heels and, for some reason, my arm instinctively reaches out to catch her.

“Thanks.” Her whisper is only just loud enough for me to hear through the downpour. A loud growl of thunder echoes the buildings around us, and when she stretches up her neck to look up at the sky, I watch how the raindrops slide over her delicate throat. She looks back at me and smiles, her long, thick lashes batting wildly to beat those raindrops away, and I swear I feel something inside me weaken.

“Shit!” She looks down at her shoes and quickly reaches down to pick up the broken heel from the ground. “I’ve only had these a week.” She sighs.

“Real-life problems, huh, Princess?” I snigger back at her before I move to head off. This pretty, little thing has innocence written all over her and I did not travel all this way to get myself into that kinda trouble.

“WAIT!” She calls out a little desperately, her perfectly manicured hand reaching out to my chest for balance, and my hands automatically grip her waist so I can hold her steady. There’s a trace of fear in her eyes when I drag her a little closer, but not the same kind I saw on Ed when I was turning his lights out. No, this is different. This is fear laced with thrill, and it looks damn fuckin’ hot on her.

I can see the girl’s privileged, a million miles apart from the girls we got back home. Despite the fresh smell of the rain, her expensive perfume still lingers in the air surrounding us. She’s not prepared for the downpour, and the dress she’s wearing, which I would bet my life on being designer, is pretty much soaked right through.

“You’re bleeding,” Her eyes glance up at my forehead and when I touch my fingers just above my eyebrow, I realize she’s right.

Fucker must have caught me with that glass he launched at my head. My adrenaline was pumping too much to notice.

“Ain’t nothin’,” I tell her, wiping my hand clean on my jeans.

“It looks pretty deep, did you hit your head?” The girl seems genuinely concerned when she stretches up on her toes

to inspect it closer, and having her that close to my lips makes me want to kiss her. Which is real fuckin' strange because kissing women is something I don't make a habit of.

"No... I mean, I caught it on the door when I was getting out of a cab." I make up some lame-ass excuse, which she seems to accept.

"Listen, my hotel's a five-minute walk from here, I could clean that up for you," she offers, having no idea who I am or what I'm capable of.

"No!" I cut her off far too quickly, and I can't decide if she's just startled or offended when she frowns back at me.

"I mean, it's fine, it don't even hurt."

"You could have a concussion," Her thumb swipes over the gash on my forehead and when her eyes focus on the blood it collects, then flick back up at me again; something about seeing the way it stains her skin turns me feral. Without thought or warning, I reach out and grab the girl's jaw in the arch of my hand, drawing her lips up to mine and kissing the hell out of her. The rain doesn't seem to hit so hard as I back her into the nearest doorway, and I'm surprised when she doesn't do a thing to stop me. This girl's different from anything I've held in my hands before, she feels like the forbidden fuckin' fruit, and as my tongue explores her mouth I decide that she tastes fuckin' spectacular too.

I figure she must have come to her senses when she forces me back, and for a few heartstopping seconds, we stare at each other, catching our breaths, while the rain pelts down against us.

"You still wanna clean it up?" I break the silence. My cock is stretched uncomfortably in my jeans, and when she nods her head back at me submissively, I step aside so she can lead the way. She smiles devilishly as she slips her other shoe off and crouches down to pick it up off the ground; then, taking my hand, she leads me down the cobbled street, running barefoot.

“Cobe,” Bullet slaps my back and brings me back to the present.

“We kinda lost ya for a while there, ya good?” He’s looking border-line worried.

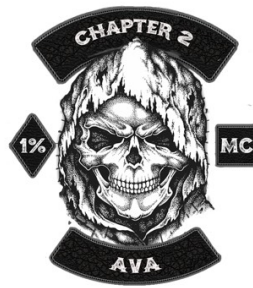
“Yeah, I’m fine. We doin’ this pickup or not?” I growl impatiently.

“Your keys?” Our new prospect, Jekyll, reminds me.

“Yeah. I’ll meet ya out front.” I tell ‘em both, heading to the door behind the bar so I can run upstairs and grab them. When I’m alone, I take the heel back outta my pocket and stare at it for a while. Is it sad that, after nearly a year, I still carry it with me?

Yes.

But it’s my reminder that what happened was real, and for that reason, I ain’t ever gonna part with it.



“Why is no one taking this seriously?” Mom slams the rose stalks on the table in front of me while my stepdad and his pathetic son do nothing.

“So, she pissed off one of her Tinder dates.” Scott gets up and moves toward the breakfast counter so he can help himself to the buffet Martha laid out.

“I don’t know, Scott, this isn’t the first time something like this has happened, and these were left on the doorstep.” Mom sounds more worried than angry now, and it reminds me how serious this is.

“She’s moving to California in a few weeks, anyway,” Scott reminds us all, and when I see the look of distaste on my stepfather’s face, I instantly feel guilty. Jeremy offered me a job at his law firm when I finished university, and although my stepdad is a kick-ass lawyer, and the opportunity to work alongside him is a law student’s dream, it all seemed so suffocating. I’ve lived here in New York since I was born, I’ve done everything my mother and stepfather have ever asked of me. Now that I’ve finished my education, it’s time for a change of scenery.

“How about everyone stops talking about me like I’m not here?” I suggest, tearing some of my croissant off and popping it in my mouth.

“Do you really think it’s safe to move to a new city all by yourself?” Mom reaches across the table to pour herself some juice.

“Yes!” I snap back before anyone here gets any ideas. I’m fed up with the naive, little rich girl treatment. I’m a grown-ass woman, perfectly capable of taking care of myself. Sometimes, I wish the people who are staring back at me like I’m crazy could have seen the girl I became during those few days in Paris. The girl who got fucked on every surface of her hotel suite by the filthy-mouthed, tattoo-covered bad boy I met in the street.

Just thinking of him causes a spark of thrill in the pit of my stomach.

“She’ll be fine, she’s a big girl.” My stepbrother mocks me, ruffling up my hair as he sits beside me.

“Then maybe you should head out there with her for her first month, make sure she gets settled.” What my stepfather suggests is a terrible idea and I instantly shake my head at it.

“No, absolutely not. This is my—”

“I’m not going there with her!” Scott shares my horror.

“Darling, it would just be for a few weeks to get you settled. And you do have a two-bed apartment.” Mom reminds me of the *surprise* going away gift she got me. Paying my rent for the first six months was a sweet gesture, which I translated as her giving me six months to fail.

“I don’t need a two bed. That was on you.” I stare back at her judgmentally.

Isn’t it sad that I wasn’t even allowed to choose my own damn apartment?

“That’s not the point. We need this creep dealt with before you leave.” Mom speaks sternly.

“Did you call the police?” Scott asks, resting back in his chair and kicking his feet up on the table. It earns him a look from his father that makes him sit up straight again.

“Yes, there’s nothing they can do. Guess they have to wait to find my body before there is,” I bite back sarcastically at him.

“Oh, c’mon, sis. It ain’t that bad. It’s just some loser with a crush on you.”

“Your mother’s right, you shouldn’t be going to California. You should put your trip on hold until all this is dealt with,” Jeremy speaks up, and his words instantly piss me off.

“This isn’t a *trip*, this is me making a *life* for myself. One that *I* choose.”

I get up and storm out of the room, leaving them all to discuss my life and how they think they can manage it. When I get to my room, I close the door and lie on my bed. I close my eyes and try to escape reality by thinking about the man I met in the rain. I remember his dark, alluring eyes and the danger inside them. The way his stubble scratched my skin, and his fingers imprinted into my flesh, and as I let my fingers explore my body, imagining they belong to him, I let my mind replay the day that changed everything.

“This is where you’re staying?” The guy I bumped into in the street pulls us to a stop as I lead him toward the revolving door of the Four Seasons.

“Yeah, this is where I’m staying.” I shrug, wondering what the problem is.

“They even gonna let me in here?” He looks down at himself, reminding me of the fact that this is crazy. I don’t know this guy; he could be a murdering psychopath for all I know. He’s tall and broad, with huge tattooed hands that don’t look work-shy, and despite the danger in his eyes, when I look deep enough, I see kindness too.

“Of course, they will.” I drag him through the door, out of the rain, and into the hotel foyer. Soaked through to his skin, the huge brute of a man almost looks vulnerable as he stares up at the crystal chandeliers and takes in the ornate decor. And luckily, he’s far too intrigued by it all to notice the stares we’re attracting.

“Come on.” I take his hand again, dragging him into the elevator, and before the doors have even closed, I grab the

front of his hoodie and bravely pull him back onto my lips.

His big, strong hands crush into my ass-cheeks as he holds me tight to his body, and as our tongues dance around each other's, I feel the adrenaline pumping around my body. I came to this city looking for adventure. I've been here almost a week and seen every landmark. I've visited the Louvre and admired some of the finest art the world has to offer. But this, right here, is the adventure I never knew I was looking for.

The elevator doors open, and the strange man I'm about to take to my room lifts me off my feet and curls my legs around his hips so he can carry me.

"Room number?" He growls into my mouth as he steps out onto the corridor.

"604," I manage, pressing kisses along his stubbled jaw and loving the element of danger that vibes from him.

"Keycard?" When we reach the door, he slams my body hard against it, and I reach inside my purse and fumble around. I finally locate it and keep one arm anchored around his neck while I reach behind me to put it in the slot.

The guy keeps a firm grip on me as he carries me inside, and I gasp when he throws me onto the mattress and stares down at me. I watch him lift the hoodie he's wearing over his head, and when I lay back, he throws it at the floor with a wet thud, then crawls his huge frame over my body and presses his lips back onto mine.

"Wait." I press my palm into his chest to hold him off. "I don't usually do this. I...I don't know your name, and this is crazy." I contradict myself when I stop talking and kiss him again. "I just don't want you to think I'm—"

"I ain't thinkin' 'bout anything other than bein' inside ya." He tells me in that low, deep voice that hums in my chest, and when his mouth moves over my neck and lowers down my body, I look up at the ceiling and wonder how the hell I got here. I'm not a spontaneous person. I dated the same guy for three years because I was too scared of hurting his feelings to

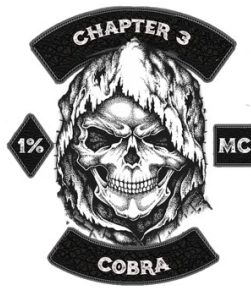
break up with him, and in the end, it turned out he was cheating on me.

I came here to get over that mess, and this hot stranger whose head is now between my thighs seems to be the perfect distraction.

I hear a noise coming from my balcony, and as I turn my head, I see the curtain move. Quickly, I remove my hand from the waistband of my yoga pants and stand up to check it out. There's no one there when I pull back the curtain, and when I crouch down and pick up the piece of paper that's on the floor, I gasp in horror. It's a drawing of a girl with dark hair like mine. She's hanging from a tree branch with a rope around her neck, and there's a black hole where her heart should be. More disturbingly, there's blood dripping from between her legs and a bloody knife on the ground by her feet. I feel my whole body start to shake, and as much as I want to scream, I know Mom can't find out about this. It'll freak her out even more about me leaving. I screw up the drawing and toss it at the wastepaper basket, and when I hear that low, gravelly voice in my head again, I know exactly what I have to do.

“You ever find yourself in trouble, Princess, you come find me in Springdale, Utah.”

It wasn't just the buzz of excitement I felt when I was around him, I remember the way the world shut out, and how safe I felt. Now feels like the right time for me to be spontaneous again, and as I drag the suitcase from under my bed and start to pack, I've only got one destination in mind...Springdale.



“Time to celebrate,” Declan slaps me on the back as we step into the clubhouse. Mia’s squeal deafens us all as she runs for Jekyll, throwing herself at him and anchoring her legs tight around his body.

“Get a room,” Dec utters under his breath as his sister kisses the hell out of our prospect’s face. I shake my head and laugh as I head over to the bar to get a drink.

“How did it go?” Wendy pops the cap on a beer before placing it in front of me.

“About as well as it could,” I keep it brief; Wendy’s still pretty new around here and remains at a need-to-know-only status.

I look across to Levi and Beth, he’s got her pulled onto his lap and is kissing her neck, and I wonder what it might be like to have someone to come home to after a run, the way him and Jekyll do.

We’ve just got back from Colorado, and there, *everyone* seems to be settled down. Some brothers have even started up families.

“You know, I was thinking, when I get off tonight, maybe we could...” Wendy drags her finger up my arm seductively.

“You know what, I’m kinda beat, it’s been a long ride. I should probably just go get some rest.” I let her down gently, last thing I need right now is another meaningless fuck with a whore. Ever since Paris, they’ve all had the same face, but they never come fuckin’ close.

“Offer’s there if ya want it.” Wendy takes my rejection well, shrugging her shoulders and moving down the bar to serve Lucky and Slingshot.

“Who the fuck is that?” Bulletproof slaps me hard on the chest, pointing his head toward the door and getting ready to move in. I see the girl among the crowd that he’s focusing on, and as I watch her looking around the room timidly, I wonder if my imagination is playing tricks on me. Soon as I realize that it ain’t, I reach out my hand and forcefully drag him back.

“Hey, man, I saw her first.” Bullet snarls over his shoulder at me, and when my grip tightens, his eyes drop to my hand in confusion.

“What the fuck’s gotten into you?” he asks.

“I... I know her,” I admit, watching as that girl who lives rent-free in my fuckin’ head speaks to Mia and Jekyll. They both shake their heads at her, and there’s a disappointed look on her face until her eyes finally meet with mine across the room, and those adorable lips curl into a smile that makes me hold my breath.

I don’t know why she’s here, but I do know that the eyes of every one of my brothers will be on her, looking at her hungrily the way Bulletproof just did, and that has me releasing him and marching toward her.

“Hey.” She smiles at me timidly when I get closer, and it hits me in the chest like a fuckin’ sledgehammer all over again. It’s been over a year, and I never forgot the instant connection we made. How could I when I’ve never experienced anything as strong as it in my life? I guess reality, time, and distance just had me forgetting how fuckin’ consuming it was.

“Whatcha doin’ here?” I ask, wondering if this is even real. I keep that fuckin’ heel in my cut pocket to remind myself that I didn’t make her up, and here she is, standing right in front of me.

“I...I don’t know.” She looks bewildered, and completely outta place here, and I just know the eyes of the whole room

will be watching us and waiting on my response. Her eyes flick down to my cut, and when they look back up to mine, they are searching for answers.

“Just come with me.” I quickly reach out and snatch her hand, guiding her through my confused-looking brothers, and leading her upstairs to my room.

“I spent all day looking for you,” she explains when we’re alone, and yet all I can do is stare at her. I’d somehow convinced myself that what happened in Paris was only ever gonna be a memory. One that I locked away and guarded like it was made of fuckin’ gold. Not ever did I imagine standing face to face with her again, especially not here, at my club.

“You said you lived in Springdale, and the place is so small. I figured I’d find you easily, but no one here knows you. This place was my last option.” She glances around my room like it’s some kind of monster’s lair, and I just stare at her in silence, wondering how the fuck I’m gonna let her go a second time.

“People around here don’t really know me by my real name.” I shake my head, still trying to get my head around the fact she’s really here. “And you didn’t answer my question down there, why ya here?” There’s something she ain’t telling me. I may barely know the girl, but that don’t mean I can’t read her. That connection I got to her allows that; it also fucks with all my instincts and gives me a fuckin’ conscience. Right now, those instincts are telling me this ain’t a friendly stop-by-to-say-hey kinda visit.”

“You remember Paris?” She takes a step closer to me, her fingers reaching for the lapels of my cut as if she has no control over them.

“Yeah, I remember.” I nod, recalling the fact that we never left her hotel room for three days straight. We ate, slept, breathed, and fucked in our own perfect little bubble, and I can’t think of a time when I’ve ever been happier.

Shit!

What if I got her pregnant? She said she was on the pill when I asked, but I don't know how effective that shit is. And why the hell, looking at her now, am I, Isaac-Cobra-Reid, kinda hoping that this is the reason she's here? At least if it was, I'd have a reason to never let her leave.

"I... I think there's someone after me, and the night you left Paris, you told me that if I was ever in any danger, I should come to Springdale and find you."

"Who?" I instantly go into protective mode, ready to rip the guts outta the asshole that belongs to whoever she thinks is gonna hurt her.

"I don't know. I've been getting some letters; they started off nice, and over time they've gotten really cruel." Her eyes fill with tears, and there ain't a thing I can do to stop myself from stepping closer and using my thumb to brush them away. I've never been an affectionate man; before her, I never thought I could be. But, during those three days I spent with her, I learned a whole lot about myself that I didn't know. Turns out that with her, I can be whatever the hell she needs me to be.

"I'm a little scared," she admits, looking up at me with those soft, brown eyes that stole my heart and drained my soul when I had to leave her.

"You got no reason to be scared, darlin'. You're safe now," I reassure her, knowing that while she's here with me, no one's gonna even come close to touching her.

"I didn't know you were a..." The way she bites her lip awkwardly is painfully cute.

"A Soul." I laugh as I finish the sentence for her. "Would you have spent three days holed up in a hotel room with me if ya did?" I ask, unable to stop my hand from stroking her face. I'd forgotten how perfect her skin felt against mine; I also forgot the strength of that tug we have between us that defeats all fuckin' logic.

I push the soaked dress she's wearing up her body and hold eye contact as I lick her through her panties. Her skin is hot and sticky despite the chill from the rain, and I can feel her body throbbing for more, already. She looks up at the ceiling like she's praying for some kinda mercy when I slide a finger into the side of her panties and hook them to the side. And when my tongue connects with her flesh, and I make a slow trail through her pussy lips, she lets out the sexiest little mewl I've ever heard.

I lick her slowly, having every intention of taking my time. I want this woman to remember me when I'm done. In fact, I don't want her to be able to fuck another man without thinking about me. Her fingers clutch my hair as she tries to ride my face and take more, but instinct tells me I know what's good for her, better than she does herself, and I'm gonna fuckin' prove it. I hold her body firm, keeping it still so I can control the pace. I build her up with slow strokes of my tongue until I sense the tension in her body becomes unbearable, and just as she's ready to let it go, I spit at her tight, little hole and slowly edge two of my fingers inside her.

"Come for me," I command, watching her face turn shocked as she clenches my fingers inside her and soaks them at the same time.

"Good fuckin' girl." My fingers continue to work her as I climb back up her body, gripping her hair in the hand that ain't fuckin' her, and holding her face tight to mine.

"You're gonna do as I say, Princess. Every fuckin' command I give, you see it through, ya hear?"

She nods her head enthusiastically as her body thrashes against my hand, and after I slide my tongue over her jaw, tasting the mascara that the rain has smeared onto her cheek, I sink my teeth into her ear lobe.

"Take it out." I pull her head away from mine and force her to look down toward my belt. "Take it out; I wanna see how it looks in your hand," I whisper, desperate to have her dainty fingers wrapped around me.

The girl sets right to work, fumbling with my belt and pulling down my zipper, and I watch her eyes stretch wide when she sees it for the first time.

“Is that a...?”

“Yeah,” I confirm, admiring the way my huge, hard cock looks in her delicate, little palm and loving the way her fingers feel when they trace over my piercing.

“Will it hurt?” she checks, with a nervous expression on her face.

“Hey,” I grip her face in my hand again and force her to look up at me. “I would never fuckin’ hurt you!” I tell her sternly, feeling my forehead crease when a sting of pain digs at my chest like a fuckin’ thorn.

“Never, ya hear?”

The girl, whose name I’m yet to discover, nods her head again, and when her tongue appears from between her lips to dampen them, I know exactly where it’ll be heading next.

“Put me in your mouth,” I growl into her ear, gripping her hair tighter in my fist and guiding her toward my already glistening tip. She doesn’t resist and automatically shifts her body to face up at me before she takes me in her mouth. The second she focuses her eyes on me, I know this woman’s on my level.

She slowly rolls her lips over my shaft, taking as much of me as she can fit, and then she gags and sputters when she pushes herself too hard.

“Relax.” I guide her head up and down, stroking her cheek in my hand and making sure she doesn’t break that eye contact I just decided I fuckin’ need.

Her eyes bulge and fill with tears as she takes me and I swear, to whatever judges us when we’re gone, that it’s the most perfect thing I’ve ever seen in my life.

“Come here.” I eventually use her hair to pull her back up my body, taking her rosy, red lips with mine. She tastes of me, and the satisfaction that gives makes my cock ache even more

to be inside her. Taking it in my hand, I guide it toward her entrance, keeping our foreheads pressed together and the tension, fuckin' soul-crushing. She slips her panties to the side, and I tease her a little, letting my thick tip slip between her folds and enjoying the sensation of her sensitive flesh against mine. A little more pleasure drips out of me and mixes with her, and I feel her pussy pulsing to the same rhythm as my heartbeat.

"You on anythin', darlin'?" I check before I go in unarmed. I've never even thought about being inside a woman without a rubber before, but whether she's covered or not, I ain't having a barrier between us.

"I'm on the pill." Her whisper turns into a moan when I slowly push inside her, and I steal the sweet sound with my lips as I force her down onto my shaft and fill her in one hard, slow motion.

"That's right, take it. Take it all." I hold myself inside her, feeling her stretch to accommodate me, and as her walls clench tight and pulse, I wonder if this is what fuckin' heaven feels like.

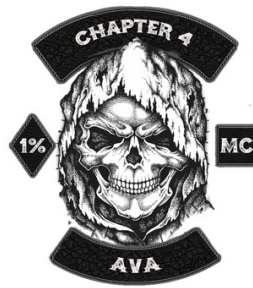
If it is, I'm gonna start praying.

"Isaac?" She says my *real* name. The one no one ever calls me these days.

"I was just... It don't matter." I shake the memory outta my head and focus on what's important.

"Can you help me? Can I stay here with you? Just for a while." Her eyes are hopeful, and there's a slight wobble of her bottom lip that prevents me from saying no. So, despite already knowing the pain of tearing myself away from her, I set myself up for it all over again, and I nod my head.

"Yeah, darlin', you can stay here." I pull her close and press my lips into the top of her head, taking in the scent of her hair like it's a fuckin' drug and wondering if maybe this time, despite all our differences, I might be able to keep her.



I feel my chest sag with relief when he tells me I can stay, and being back in his arms reminds me of how hard it was to say goodbye to him. I shouldn't have come here, I shouldn't have set myself up for pain all over again, but I won't regret it, not with his strong arms engulfing me and that familiar scent of danger lingering in the air between us. I drove for days to get here. I've spent the whole of today knocking on doors like a crazy woman trying to find him, and I can now say it was worth it. For the first time in weeks, I feel safe.

I look up at him through my lashes, and when I feel that urge take over and my mouth automatically moves closer to his, he shocks me by pulling back and holding me at arm's length.

"You gotta be hungry." His eyes dart around us like he's starting to panic, and when he glances at the bed, he takes my hand a little too firmly and quickly drags me in the opposite direction toward the door.

"We can grab something across the street." He doesn't give me a chance to argue as he rushes us down the stairs and just as we're about to step back into the barroom, he turns to look at me.

"Don't speak to anyone, okay?" His voice is stern and commanding, just like I remember it, and I can't help being turned on by his authority, even if I am a little hurt. I know I don't exactly look like a biker's chick, but I don't like the idea of him being ashamed of me.

He takes a deep breath before we step into the barroom, and suddenly everyone goes silent.

“Bulletproof, pleased to meet ya.” One of the bikers holds out his hand to me; he’s a little leaner than Isaac but equally as tall. “Any chance you’re a long-lost cousin?” His eyebrows raise as he glances me over.

“I’m a—”

“She’s off *fuckin’* limits.” Isaac raises his voice so the whole room hears him, and the way he tightens his grip around my hand makes my pussy pulse.

He continues to march me toward the doors that lead outside, where all the bikes are lined up on the side of the road.

“Which is yours?” I ask, trying to make conversation. I was only young when my dad died, but I know he used to collect bikes, so I know a little about them.

“The bobber,” he growls back at me, keeping his head down as he leads me across the street and into the bar opposite. It’s a lot less crowded in this one, and when he sits us in one of the booths and places a menu in my hand, I notice as he watches me intently while I look it over.

“Everything looks good.” I smile up at him enthusiastically, and the stern look he’s giving me back reminds me this isn’t a date. I’m the two-night stand that just showed up at his clubhouse, and I guess that’s got some real stalker vibes about it.

“I’ll take the chicken burger.” I place my menu back on the table when the waitress comes over, and Isaac orders the same, along with two beers.

“So, is this—?”

“Do you know what you’ve done by bringin’ this to me?” he snaps to interrupt me.

“Well, I don’t like to scratch at old wounds but...”

“I’m not talkin’ ‘bout us.” He shakes his head. “I’m talkin’ ‘bout the person who’s scared ya.”

I stare back and wait for him to explain, and when he leans across the table, and his eyes glare deep into mine, I feel that

throbbing between my legs grow stronger.

“I’ll make sure he can never scare ya again. I don’t care who he is or where he’s from. It won’t matter what he’s got to live for. I won’t just hurt him; I’ll kill him.”

I almost choke on my breath when I realize how serious he’s being, then looking down at the table at the huge palm he has clasped over mine; I can’t help wondering if it’s to stop me from running.

“I tried to warn ya about what kind of man I was before I left you. You know for yourself now.” He looks down at the hooded skull patch that’s sewn onto the chest of his cut. “Don’t believe for a second that I won’t take that man’s death on my conscience and sleep like a fuckin’ baby.”

I pull my hand away from under his when the waitress interrupts us with our beers.

“It was just some letters, a picture, and some rose stems,” I whisper feebly. But Isaac shakes his head back at me.

“Bullshit. It scared you enough to come out here and find me. I won’t have you lookin’ over your shoulder. I’ll find out who it is, and I’ll make sure they don’t trouble you ever again.”

“But how? How will you find them?” I ask, confused.

“The club have their ways of gettin’ information.” He shrugs simply, before taking a swig from his beer.

“I don’t want someone’s death on my conscience,” I say my thoughts out loud.

“Like I just told ya, darlin’, it’ll be on mine, not yours.”

“And have you...?”

“Have I killed before?” He narrows his eyes at me. “Yeah, darlin’, I’ve killed before.” The dark grin on his face suggests he’s proud of the fact, and suddenly I feel like I’m in way over my head. Yet I’m still not running.

“I’ll arrange for you to have a room at the clubhouse while I figure it out,” he assures me.

“No, I want to stay with you. In your room. Together.” I sound so needy, but I traveled all this way, and the thought of not being close to him makes me feel desperate.

“Is that a good idea?” There’s a glint in his eye that reminds me of the time we shared in Paris.

“It kinda feels like our only option,” I admit with a seductive smirk as I fidget on my seat to give myself some friction and hope it’ll ease the ache he puts inside me.

“Then you better eat up, little lady.” He pushes the plate the waitress places on the table, closer to me. “I don’t think you’re gonna be gettin’ much sleep tonight.”

“What ya got there?” He nods his head toward the cocktail in my hand when he comes out of the shower.

“An espresso martini. I ordered room service.” I explain, passing him his glass and when he tries it, he shakes in disgust.

“That tastes like shit.” He screws his nose up at me.

“They taste much better in New York.” I laugh. He’s looking hot as hell with just the hotel’s white towel wrapped around his waist, and when he jumps onto the bed and rests beside me, I can’t help reaching out and running my fingers over the colorful ink on his torso.

“When do you have to leave?” An idea comes to mind and, now it’s there, I can’t get it out of my head.

“I gotta flight booked for Tuesday night.” He props his head up on his elbow and stares at me like he’s trying to read my thoughts.

“I’d like you to stay here with me until then?” I take the plunge and ask, knowing how forward it sounds, but I’m desperate to know how it feels to sleep in his arms. What just happened between us was out of this world, and I’ve got a feeling we haven’t even scratched the surface.

“You want me to stay here?” His eyes stretch open.

“Does that sound so crazy?” I shrug my shoulders, trying my best to be cool.

“Yeah, it sounds fuckin’ crazy. I don’t even know your name and this place...” He looks around my hotel suite and laughs.

“Name’s Ava. This place isn’t a patch on the Plaza.” I hold out my hand for him to shake.

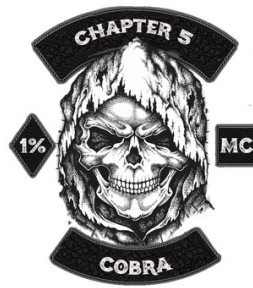
“You’re serious, ain’t ya?” He looks between my eyes and my hand and laughs.

“I’m serious.” I nod my head.

“Isaac.” He takes my hand in his, gripping it hard, then using it to yank my arm and pull my body on top of his.

“Is that a yes?” I check as his huge, callused palm slides up my back and fists at my hair again.

“It’s a yes, Princess.” He forces my lips onto his and kisses me till I’m dizzy.



I barely let the girl finish her last bite before I throw some bills on the table and drag her outta the bar. When we cross the street to the clubhouse, it's a lot busier than it was when we left. The music is turned up, and Wendy's got most of the club members' attention as she dances on the pole that Slingshot insisted we had put up in the corner. It works for me because I manage to sneak Ava through the bar and into the stairwell without attracting any attention. I come to a halt as I'm climbing the stairs and feel a tug on my hand. When I spin around to see what's holding her up, she presses her lips against mine and kisses me like she's been starved. It hits me with a shot of adrenaline, one that has me wanting to fuck her here and now on the fuckin' stairs.

"I missed you. Does that sound crazy?" She looks back at me confused, and it makes me feel unworthy; it also makes me want to kill whoever it is that's making her scared. Slowly, painfully, and without fuckin' mercy.

"It ain't crazy." I shake my head, thinking of the broken heel I've been carrying around in my cut pocket for a year. Then, not wanting to waste any more time, I drag her up the rest of the stairs toward my room, kissing her as we push through the door, and pull each other's clothes off clumsily.

"I'm not lettin' ya go again." I cup her chin in my fingers and force her to look at me. She needs to know what she's letting herself in for.

Before, in Paris, I convinced myself that I was doing the right thing. I thought that getting on that plane and forgetting us would be the best thing for her, and I've regretted it every

day since. Now she's back, staring at me with those wide, brown eyes again. I won't let her slip through my fingers a second time. She looks a little overwhelmed, so I kiss her lips and remind her why her leaving me now ain't a fuckin' option.

I rest my ass on the edge of the bed so Ava can climb on top of me, straddling my lap and pressing delicate but desperate kisses across my neck. The way her fingers tug at my hair and her breath falls into my ear reminds me of all the reasons I haven't been able to forget her. And as I grip her hips tight in my hands and guide her to slip back and forth on my cock, being inside her again feels like the end to all the fuckin' misery I've suffered since.

"*Fuck*, that feels good," she whispers, and hearing her curse in that sweet, little voice has me digging my fingers into her skin a little harder.

I control the pace her hot, petite body makes on me as she pulls her head back from my lips to look down between our bodies and watch me fill her. When she looks back up at me and smiles with satisfaction, I swear I feel my heart leap into my throat and choke me.

I raise one of my hands up her back and grab her hair, forcing her forehead onto mine and keeping our eyes connected.

"I mean it; you're mine," I growl the words at her, continuing to work her body onto mine and bringing us closer.

She nods her head back at me with determination, and I flip our position so she's lying on the mattress and my body is hovering over hers. Taking her wrists in my hands, I pin her down and fuck her the way I know she likes it. Rough, hard, and dirty.

I learned over the few days I spent with her in Paris that too many people treat Ava like a delicate little princess. She doesn't want that from me. She wants me to own her body, to fuck all the pureness outta her soul, and help her unleash all the unholy thoughts in her mind.

I do exactly that. Bruising her skin from how roughly I hold on to it as I thrust inside her, hard and fast, and watch her come apart beneath me. I feel her body tremble when she comes, her eyes opening in shock like she's forgotten how good it feels, and with her dilated pupils fixed on mine and her loud moans echoing around my room, I come right along with her. One of my hands drops from her wrist and arches around her throat as I fill her hot, little pussy. The room becomes almost silent, with only the sound of our gasps for breath between us as we both come back down to earth and when I feel something vibrate under my hand, I stare at her in confusion.

"Sorry." She looks back at me awkwardly before pulling herself free from my grip and making the watch on her wrist stop buzzing.

"It's linked to my phone," she explains, and when I take her wrist in mine and check it out, I see the name Scott flashing on the screen.

"Looks like *Scott* really wants to get hold of ya," I bite sarcastically, tossing her arm away before I bury my head into her neck and nip at her skin.

"Relax, Scott's my stepbrother, and I know why he's calling. I kinda left in a hurry and didn't tell anyone where I was going. I'll bet my mom is having him call me."

"You should let them know you're safe," I tell her, dragging my dick out of her pussy so we can figure out our next plan of action. I almost forgot I got a piece of shit to deal with.

"I will; I just...like I said, I've missed you." She looks embarrassed by her words, and it's so cute that I have to kiss her.

"I missed ya too, a whole fuckin' lot. And I meant what I said. I won't let you go again," I warn her.

"It's not that easy. I just took a job in California and I—"

"We'll figure all that shit out later. Right now, we focus on this bastard that's makin' ya scared. Tell me whatcha know,

who ya suspect. Give me somethin’.” I lay out on the bed and wait for her response.

“That’s just it, I don’t *have* anything. I don’t know why anyone would do this. Since what happened with us, I haven’t really dated anyone. There’s been a few failed Tinder dates, but...”

“Okay, so has there been anyone who you rejected? Or how about your stepdad, he’s a rich guy, has he got any enemies?”

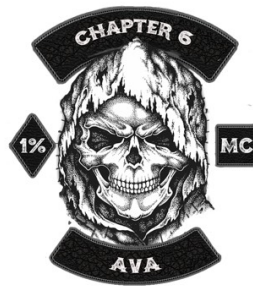
“No, I haven’t rejected anyone. And even if my stepdad did have any enemies, he wouldn’t tell me about them. Our family don’t really talk.”

Her watch starts going off again, and she immediately makes it stop.

“You should answer that. Tell them you’re safe,” I remind her, scratching the back of my head and tryin’ to figure out how to get started on finding this asshole.

“And am I... *safe*?” she asks, biting her lip and blushing back at me. “I mean, this place, the people downstairs... I’ve heard things about the Dirty Souls; *I know you’re not motorcycle enthusiasts.*” The cute little whisper she makes speaks directly to my dick and makes me want to fuck her all over again.

“You’re right there, darlin, we ain’t. But we take care of the people who are important to us, and I can promise you that right now, there ain’t no safer place for you to be.



I eventually give in, dragging myself off the bed and finding my phone so I can answer Scott's call.

"Ava! Where the fuck have you been? Your mother's frantic!" he scolds me, and hearing the tiny bit of relief in his voice shows that he does care about me, despite how hard he tries to hide it.

"I'm fine. I just had to get out of there."

"These threats are really scaring you, aren't they? And don't bullshit me; I saw the drawing in your trash. It was pretty fucked up."

"Yeah, Scott, it was fucked up." I keep my eyes on Isaac as he watches me from the bed with narrow eyes.

"You know this is Josh, right?" He blows out a long breath down the phone as if he doesn't want to admit it,

"That's ridiculous. We broke up over a year ago."

"Yeah, but only because you refused to take him back after he cheated on you," Scott points out, reminding me that I wouldn't have even met Josh if it wasn't for him. He and Josh were friends at college, inseparable, in fact.

"It's not Josh; me and him left things on good terms. I forgave him."

"But you didn't take him back." Scott makes another valid point, but I know it can't be true. Yes, Josh was a cheating asshole, but he isn't a stalker. Whoever this is has a really sick mind, and Josh wouldn't even watch the *Scream* movies with me.

“Look, I appreciate you checking in, and you can tell Mom I’m *safe*.” I smile at Isaac as I say the words, and when he gets up off the bed and comes at me, I sigh in satisfaction when his huge arms wrap around my waist and confirm it.

“Where are you?” Scott asks, with that concern back in his tone.

“I don’t think you’d believe me if I told you.”

“I’ll deal with your mom; let her know you’re safe. It should get you some breathing space, but I can’t hold her off forever,” he warns me, and I have to admit, I’m impressed with how the knucklehead is coming through for me.

“Thanks, *bro*, I appreciate it.”

I hang up the phone and toss it on the bed, allowing Isaac to lift me off my feet and kiss my neck. His beard tickles my skin, and that excitement starts building in the pit of my stomach again when he lays me back on the mattress and trails those kisses lower down my body.

My watch starts to vibrate again, and I roll my eyes as I pat around the bed to try and locate my phone.

“Scott, I told you I’m fine.” I giggle as I answer.

“This isn’t Scott, sweetheart.” The voice that speaks back to me must be scrambled through a machine to make it unrecognizable. And when Isaac sees the horror on my face, he takes it out of my hand, puts it on speakerphone, then nods for me to continue.

“Who is this?” I ask, watching how Isaac’s forehead creases while we wait for a response.

“You’ll find out.” The person on the other end of the line chuckles. “I have every intention of us being together very soon.” Before I can say anything back, Isaac snatches the phone from my hand and presses it to his ear.

“You listen to me, you gutless son-of-a-bitch. You ain’t gonna even get close. I’m gonna find you, and then I’m gonna do the most brutal things you can imagine to your body before I kill ya.”

The line goes dead, and I watch Isaac's nostrils flare as he breathes.

"You really meant that, didn't you?" I swallow thickly when he drops the phone onto the bed beside me.

"Every fuckin' word," he warns. "We better get some clothes on." He stands up and starts pulling on his jeans.

"Why, where are we going?"

"We're taking this to Prez."

I sit awkwardly in the chair opposite the Dirty Souls' president and watch as he listens to Isaac explain. The fact he calls me a *friend* and leaves out the part about how we met in Paris hurts a little, but right now, I have to focus on the matter at hand.

"I need to find him, Dec, I figure we can ask Jessie's old lady to help us. She can trace that call Ava just got, right?" I can tell how worried Isaac is from how desperate he sounds.

"I'll call up Jessie and ask him." Dec nods his head in agreement, then focuses his eyes on me.

"She claimed?" He speaks as if I'm not right here in front of him, and I feel Isaac's hand slide onto my shoulder and squeeze.

"Yeah, she's claimed." I don't know why, but I like the way that sounds.

"You're safe here, just so long as you do what we say. No one's gonna hurt ya." Dec tells me directly. "Gimme ya phone; I'll have it back to ya by the end of the night." When he reaches his hand across the table, I hand it over to him. "And in the meantime, I suggest you take your *old lady* downstairs and introduce her to the others. Jesus Christ, Cobe, this place is gettin' as bad as Colorado." He shakes his head and sniggers as we leave, then when we reach the bottom of the stairs, and Isaac turns to face me, I interrupt before he can say anything.

“What does it mean, being claimed? And what the hell is an old lady?” I shake my head in confusion.

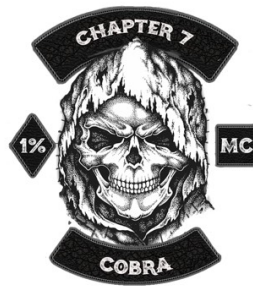
“It means exactly what I told you in my room. That ya mine, and that no one can take you away from me.” His hand feels almost tender as he cups my face in his palm.

“Don’t you think this is all going a little too fast?” I can’t stop the smile from forming on my face, even if I’m trying to be sensible.

“All I know is that I’ve thought about ya for the past 380 days. You came to me when you were scared because you knew I’d protect ya, and I can’t do that if we’re not together. I promised myself that if I ever saw you again, I wouldn’t let ya go a second time. And I won’t.” He’s looking deadly serious, and as much as I just want to kiss him and agree, there are so many things that have to be considered.

“Isaac, I told you I start a new job next month. I need—” He silences me with his lips, and makes me forget any obstacles that are in the way of making us work.

“We’ll figure it out,” he tells me firmly, taking my hand again and leading me into the lion’s den.



I soften the blow by introducing her to Beth and Levi first. Beth's the caring kind, and I know she'll be welcoming. And as I watch Ava look around the room nervously, I point out some of the other brothers to her. "That's Bulletproof; the guy beside him is Lucky," I explain as she takes everything in.

"Do you all have strange names like that?" she asks.

"Not all of us." Levi pulls his arm away from Beth's shoulder to reach forward and crush out his smoke.

"There's gotta be a reason behind it. Bulletproof's been shot at twelve times. He don't dodge bullets; he takes 'em. He'll happily show you the scars." Levi laughs.

"And Lucky? Guess he always falls on his feet, right?" Ava asks with a huge smile on her face as she looks over at them both.

"Not exactly." Levi chuckles back at her. "We call him that 'coz he's *lucky* to ever get anywhere. You got him ridin' up front, ya guaranteed to get lost. He's a lethal fucker, but he got no sense of direction.

"And what about him?" Ava nods her head over toward Slingshot, who looks like he's weighing Wendy's tits in his palms.

"That's Slingshot; he's carried one on him since he was twelve years old. Took a man's eye out with a ball-bearing once, guy's got one hell of an aim."

"Oh." The smile on her face fades to shock as she takes it all in.

“So, what brings you to Springdale, Ava?” Beth quickly changes the subject, giving Levi an elbow shove and when we’re joined by Mia and Jekyll, I pull Ava onto my lap to clear a seat for them. It’s the first signal I’m giving out to everyone that she’s mine, and when I rest my cheek on her shoulder, I don’t miss the amount of shocked looks it attracts.

“Well, I kinda have an issue back home, and when I met Isaac in Paris—”

“*Paris?*” Mia practically spits her beer across the table. “Cobe ain’t ever been to fuckin’ Paris.” She laughs, and Levi shares a look across the table with me that tells me to shut it down.

“It don’t matter how we met. She’s here now, and I’m countin’ on you girls to show her the ropes, make sure she gets the same respect you do from the hangouts.” I look between the two girls, who no brother would dare to even look at, and no whore would dare to question. Mia may only be the old lady of a prospect, but she’s Prez’s little sister, and Beth is Levi’s girl. Ain’t no way anyone with a brain cell would challenge that.

“Is this you tellin’ us ya gotta girl?” Levi raises his eyebrows.

“Sure as fuck is. Spread the word.” I grab Ava’s face and kiss her lips hard, hoping the whole room fuckin’ sees, and when the sound of whoops and wails pick up around us, I can’t stop my lips from smiling against hers.

“Yo, Lover Boy! We need to talk.” Dec’s voice calls out over everyone, and when I see the serious look on his face, I get up and leave a flushed-pink Ava with the girls while I go to him.

“What’s up?” I question as he pulls me into the hall.

“Maddy traced the call; it came from Cali. She also ran a background check and looked into the ex you mentioned. Guess where he is right now?” Dec hands me Ava’s phone back. “I’m assumin’ you ain’t gonna wait around for him to come find her?” Prez rests his shoulder on the door frame and

looks out at the barroom. From here, you could almost believe the girl fits in; here she looks nothing like the privileged girl I fucked in the Four Seasons for three days straight.

“You’re assumin’ right.” I nod my head.

“Look, I don’t know where this girl came from, but I can see what’s got ya tongue hangin’ out ya head, and I can also tell that ya like her. A lot. You go do what ya need to do to protect her. Take Bulletproof with ya, and we’ll take care of her here while you see it through,”

“I appreciate that, Prez.” I shake his hand and head back to the table, pleased to see that Ava is settling in and talking to the others.

“That sounded serious. Is everything okay?” she checks, and I don’t wanna take the smile off her face by telling her she was wrong about her ex.

“Yeah, darlin’, everythin’s fine.” I kiss the top of her head and casually slip myself back into the conversation they’re having about the time Lucky led twenty men on a sixty-mile detour to get to a pick-up point.

Ava’s slightly tipsy when I get her back to my room. I love how she’s relaxed with my friends tonight, any worries she had about the club being dangerous seem to have vanished, and as she flops her body onto my bed and snuggles comfortably onto the pillow, I realize how tired she must be.

“You never told me how you got your name,” she mentions sleepily as I take off my jeans and slide under the covers beside her.

“No, I didn’t.” I don’t even think I want her to know. I didn’t like the way she looked at me in the bar when I warned her I’d kill the man who was doing this or the fear I saw in her eyes when I threatened that mother-fucker down the phone.

“I wanna know.” She rests her hands on my chest and balances her chin on them, looking up at me so fuckin’

innocently my heart could break.

And I decide, here and now, that I want this to work more than I want my next breath, and for that to happen, we can have no secrets.

“They call me Cobra because I strike before you see me comin’.” I look back at her as I explain, and when her cheeks flush pink and her eyes stretch a little wider, I get the desperate urge to crush her in my hands to stop her from running.

“Every club has roles that need to be filled; I’m this club’s Enforcer. Yes, I’ve killed, and I’ve hurt a lot of people, but none of ‘em have been innocent,” I explain, hoping it doesn’t freak her out. “Dec wanted to speak to me earlier because they traced that call ya had. It was your ex; I know that’s not what you want to hear, but—”

“Isaac, it can’t be, you don’t understand. Josh isn’t like that. Yes, he cheated on me, and he hurt me, but he’s not violent, and I don’t think he’d want to do me any harm.

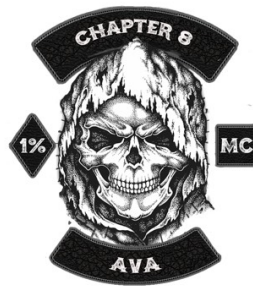
“Yeah, well, you’d be surprised what a man will do for love, darlin,’” I tell her, stroking my thumb over her cheek and appreciating how smooth her skin is.

“And that ex of yours is gonna find out how far I’m prepared to go tomorrow.” I wait for her to argue, to try and convince me I’m wrong again. What I don’t expect is to feel her lips touch mine.

“I think you just told me that you love me.” She cradles my face in her palm and smiles.

“I do.” I frown as I say the words because it suddenly dawns on me that, that is what this is.

“That’s crazy, but it’s true. I love you.” She laughs like a fuckin’ vixen at her own words, and as much as I love the sound of it, I love the taste of her even better, so I silence her by kissing her again.



“I ’m never gonna see you again, am I?” I keep his hand in mine as we stand in the airport. This man standing in front of me has changed my view of the entire world in just three days. I’ve learned that you don’t need material things to make things matter. I’ve tried to imprint every moment of the time we’ve spent together into my memories so I can relive them. Me and Isaac are from different worlds, and I know we won’t cross paths again.

“I doubt it, darlin’, and as much as it pains me to say it, that’s probably for the best.” He looks as sad as I feel, and I can’t help thinking that fate is cruel. It may have only been three days, but the connection between us was instant.

“Now, if ya ever find yourself in trouble, Princess, ya come find me. Springdale, Utah. It’s a small town; you won’t struggle to find me.” He smiles, sliding his rough palm over my jaw and making me close my eyes and absorb the scent of him one last time.

“If you ever wanna get a decent espresso martini, you can come find me at—” His finger presses over my lips to silence me.

“That’s a bad idea, Princess. You tell me where to find ya and chances are, one day I will. Things are better this way.” There’s a sadness in his tone, one that makes me want to cling to him. I don’t want this to be a fling that gets forgotten; every part of me wants to beg him to take me with him, but I can tell from the look on his face that it’s not an option.

“That’s my final call; I gotta go.” He kisses me one last time, and I savor it, trying to hold back my tears. He

eventually pulls away, turning his back and walking away from me, and I wait until he's reached the security gate before I call out his name.

The whole airport seems to silence as he turns around, and as I run toward him, I reach into my bag and take out what I want to give him. I don't care how pathetic it is. I can't have him leave without it.

"I never knew the true value of a moment until it became a memory." I quote Dr. Seuss as I place the broken-off shoe heel in his palm, and when he looks down at it and smiles to himself, all the embarrassment I'm feeling becomes worth it.

"Ain't no way I'm ever forgettin' you, darlin'," he promises, squeezing it tight in his fist and kissing me for what really will be the last time.

"Wake up, Princess." Isaac's low, raspy voice disturbs me from my sleep, and when I open my eyes and see him looming over me, I can't help the dreamy smile that creeps on my face as I stretch.

"I gotta leave. It's a seven-hour ride to Cali, and Dec wants us to make a drop-off in Nevada." His words remind me that this is really happening, and it puts a sick feeling in my stomach.

"I don't know about this, Isaac, it doesn't add up." I think about everything he told me last night. Josh doesn't even live in California, to where the call was traced, and my stalker was in New York just a few days ago. I know that because whoever it was left their artwork on my balcony.

"I know it's hard for you to take in, but it all checked out. Maddy's fuckin' good at what she does. The call was traced to a burner cell that was last used in Cali. She looked into Josh, and his credit card is being used at a motel less than two miles from where your apartment is.

"Wait, how do you know where my apartment is?" I ask. I can't remember giving that information to him.

“Like I told ya, Maddy’s good at what she does.” He looks back at me confidently, and my skin shivers cold when I realize that isn’t what should be disturbing me. How does Josh know, and why is he there now? He really might be responsible for all those letters and that awful picture. I’d lain beside him for three years, planned a future with him. I would never have guessed he could be so dangerous.

“It’s okay; I’m gonna handle it,” Isaac assures me, stroking my hair and putting me at ease. I don’t know what kind of person I’ve suddenly become, but I won’t stop him from protecting me. I believed the threats were real; that’s why I came here. Just because I know who they come from now doesn’t make them any less valid.

“I’ll be back tomorrow night,” he promises, kissing my forehead, and after sliding a duffel over his shoulder he tucks a gun in his jeans and heads out the door.

I lay back on my pillow and absorb everything that’s happened over the past 24 hours. I need to talk to someone about all this, and I’m surprised that when I take my phone off charge, the number I call is Scott’s.

“You were right,” I blurt out as soon as he answers.

“What?” He sounds confused, but then, it is early, I must have woke him up.

“About Josh, you were right, It was him all along.”

“Man, I wish I wasn’t too hungover to gloat.” He groans down the phone. “Where even are you?” I ask.

“At home, the folks went to the Hamptons for a long weekend. I had a few of the boys round for some beers. It got a little out of hand.”

“You better not have trashed the house. Mom will kill you.” I manage a smile, although I can’t help feeling a little upset that Mom and Jeremy haven’t made any attempts to call me.

“I thought you said they were worried about me,” I mention trying to make light of it instead of sounding hurt.

“They are, but Dad’s trying to sweeten up a new client, so he’s taken him and his wife to the lake house. He’s managed to convince your mom that she can worry there just as well as she can worry here. I told them I spoke to you; they know you’re safe,” he assures me.

Maybe them being preoccupied with Jeremy’s new client is just what I need. Mom is gonna want an explanation, and I don’t have one. I also have no clue what I’m going to do next; all I do know is that whatever it is has to include Isaac.

“I gotta go, it looks like Jasper’s taking a piss in the pool. Let me know what you’re gonna do about the Josh situation. *Oi, man! That’s not cool!*” Scott screams as he hangs up the phone, and I feel a little overwhelmed when I realize I can *never* tell him the whole truth about the Josh situation. A loud knock at the door shakes me out of my thoughts, and before I can respond, it bursts open, and Mia dives onto my bed.

“I’ve been tasked with the job of distracting you.” She pulls no punches and smiles.

“And how do you plan on doing that?” I can’t pretend the prospect of being distracted isn’t welcome. I’ll go crazy if I have to think about what Isaac might be doing until tomorrow evening.

“Well, I’ll be honest, there isn’t much happening in Springdale, but I did promise Beth that I’d get fifteen costumes made for her sister’s school play. I was kinda hoping you were a secret seamstress.” Mia grits her teeth at me.

“Well, I’m not, but I used to be a Girl Scout, so I know how to thread a needle.”

“I’ll take that.” Mia smiles. “Get dressed and meet me downstairs in ten.” She reminds me of the fact I’m only wearing one of Isaac’s tees, and when I feel my cheeks start to burn, she laughs.

I do as she says and join her after getting dressed. I actually find the morning we spend together, sewing tiny flowers onto dresses, therapeutic. I wouldn’t say my stitching was perfect,

but we soon figured that Mia was much more useful with the hot glue gun than a needle and thread, so I had to do the best I could.

“You wanna stop for a break?” Mia asks, piling the tenth dress we’ve done into the box of finished costumes.

“Yeah, I’m hungry,” I admit, realizing I skipped breakfast.

“Cool, you can run over to the bar across the street and grab us some lunch while I check in with Jekyll over at the garage.” She smiles as she stands up, and when she goes to take some cash out of her pocket, I shake my head and tell her I got it.

“Do you ever get used to it?” I ask before she heads out the door.

“I mean, here we are making cute costumes for some school production, and Isaac and his friend are riding out to California to fix my psycho-ex problem.”

It seemed easy to forget that while we were sewing flowers on dresses.

“Honey, I was born into this life, and some days I still don’t get it. What I *can* tell you is that these men are loyal, and they got morals. Cobe...Isaac cares about you. He wants to make sure you’re safe; what he has to do in order to do that, is between him and God.” Mia shrugs her shoulders as if that ‘thing’ isn’t killing someone before she leaves me.

I’m sitting waiting in the bar for our subs to be ready when my phone rings, and seeing Mom’s name flashing on the screen makes me really tempted not to answer it. She’s only gonna lecture me about leaving, and I have no idea how to explain where I am or why I’m here. Unlike Scott, who seemed happy enough knowing I was safe, she’s gonna want information.

Eventually, guilt takes over, and I decide I can’t put it off forever and answer the call.

“Hey, how’s the Hamptons?” I do my best to sound chirpy as the woman behind the bar holds up my order, and I silently mouth her a thank you as I take it.

“The Hamptons? What are you talking about? We’ve been going out of our minds with worry.” Mom snaps back at me as I open the door and step out onto the street.

“Scott said you and Jeremy went to the Hamptons for a long weekend.”

“Well, we haven’t; we’ve been here, going out of our heads. Scott told us you didn’t want to talk to us, but darling, you’re my daughter. I need to know you’re okay. I can get a flight out to California, and we can talk properly.”

“Mom, I’m not in California, and I don’t know what Scott told you, but—”

“If you’re not in California, where are you? Scott called us from there this morning and said you were staying with Josh in some motel.” She sounds worried, and it makes me even more confused.

“Mom, I spoke to Scott this morning, he was at home, and he had a party last night.”

“Darling, Scott hasn’t been here since you left. He insisted on going to look for you.” What she’s saying doesn’t add up.

“Mom, I got to go.” I hang up the phone and run to the garage, hoping to find Mia there with Jekyll. When I get there, he’s got her up on the counter, kissing the soul out of her, and she doesn’t seem the slightest bit embarrassed when I interrupt.

“Either of you have Isaac’s number? I need to speak to him right now.” I can feel my heart beating in my ears.

“Miss him already, huh?” Jekyll laughs, pulling out his cell.

“No, I think he’s about to hurt an innocent man.” All my manners are forgotten when I snatch the phone out his hand and press it to my ear. When Isaac doesn’t pick up, I growl in frustration.

“They never pick up when they’re riding.” Mia shoots Jekyll a sideways snarl. “Listen, the guys are making a drop-off in Nevada; you’ll be able to get hold of him before they ride on. In the meantime, we’re gonna talk this over and figure it out.” Mia places her arm around my shoulder.

“Why would Scott lie to me about being at home?” I say my thoughts out loud.

“Hey, stop panicking; you’re fine. You’re safe here. And we will get hold of Isaac. If you’ve got this Scott guy’s number, we can get his number tracked so we know where he is too.

I’m gonna keep trying Isaac, Jekyll here will try Bulletproof, and there’s plenty of people we can try from the Nevada chapter too.”

“I’m just so confused,” I tell her, starting to feel dizzy.

“Here, take a seat.” Jekyll slides a stool over to me, and I take it.

“You watch her while I go get my brother,” Mia tells him, quickly rushing out the door and heading over to the clubhouse.

“Hey, don’t worry, it’s gonna be okay.” Jekyll taps me on the leg, looking kinda awkward, “You want me to grab you a water or something?” He tries to be helpful.

“Water would be good.” I manage a smile at him before he heads to the office at the back of the garage to get me one.

“You know, I think we may have something a little stronger stowed away back here.” He calls out to me over his shoulder, and when I see the tall, dark figure step in front of the door and block the sun from shining through, the scream I wanna make gets trapped in my mouth, and I start to run.

Scott launches at me, wrapping his strong arm around my body and dragging me close. He looks so different, almost wild, and when he slams his free hand over my mouth, I bite it hard and make him yell.

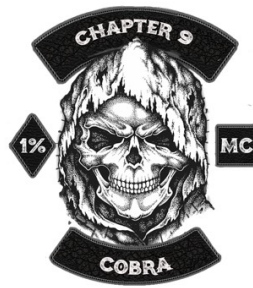
“Feral bitch!” He backhands my face, and when I see Jekyll rush out of the office ready to help me, I panic when his hands go in the air, and I feel something cold press against my temple.

“I wonder if *he*’ll care if I shoot you?” Scott whispers into my ear and laughs.

“Scott, what are you doing here?” I hear my voice tremble.

“You’ll see, sis.” I close my eyes when he fires the gun, and when I realize I’m not in any pain, I open my eyes and see Jekyll on the floor. His hands are covering a wound in his stomach that’s oozing with blood, and he’s got a very shocked look on his face.

I scream for help, but when something sharp digs into my neck and turns my veins cold, I feel myself start to go under. I don’t hear my heartbeat in my ears anymore, and suddenly everything goes black.



“**W**hat do you mean he shot Jekyll and took her?” I yell.
“*Who* fuckin’ took her?!” I almost grab my President by the scruff of his neck to shake the words outta him, but remember to hold off. Last thing I want is a warning from Levi.

“Mia’s at the hospital with Jekyll. Said Ava mentioned some guy called Scott. The girl spoke to her mom and somethin’ didn’t add up.” He tries to explain, and I can feel myself losing my fuckin’ mind.

“She’ll have her phone with her; we’ll track it.” I made the two-and-a-half-hour ride back from Nevada in less than two, and the whole way back, all I thought about is killing the fucker who’s taken my girl and shot Jekyll.

The look Dec gives me back ain’t positive, and when he pulls a cell with a glittery phone case out his back pocket, I realize why.

“Found it on the ground, bro,” he tells me, looking as pissed as I am.

“Then we track fuckin’ Scott.”

“Already did, his phone’s been static in a motel just outta town for the past five hours. The last call made to him was from your girl this mornin’.”

“Fuck!” I kick my boot at the wall and growl in frustration. I wanna tear out my hair and punch the shit outta something, but none of that is gonna do Ava any good. She’s gonna be so scared, and I need to put all my focus into finding her.

“Did anyone see this guy or what he was drivin’?” I look for something, *anything* that might help.

“Only Jekyll, and he’s in surgery right now.” Dec looks pale like he’s worried our prospect won’t pull through.

“We need to go to the motel. He could have her there, and even if he don’t, there might be somethin’—”

“Already done, I sent Lucky and Slingshot there as soon as Maddy got it tracked,” Dec informs me.

“We’re gonna find her,” he assures me, grabbing my shoulders and trying to get me to focus.

“Her watch!” I speak the thought, that springs into my mind, out loud.

“She’s got a watch that’s connected to that phone. We can trace it.” I snatch the phone out of his hand and try to unlock it, but it’s not happening.

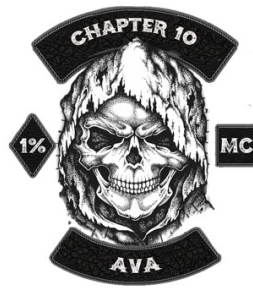
“I can get Mad—”

“Wait.” I try 0423, the date we met, and when the phone screen unlocks, relief and sentiment hits me all at once.

“You know how to figure this shit out?” Dec asks as I open the Find Me app, and when I see the location, fear, and anger make me shake.

“So....where we headin’?” Bullet asks impatiently, already climbing on his saddle.

“Dregan’s Lake,” I tell him, hearing the fear in my voice as I take my own saddle and get ready to head off to try and save my girl.



I wake up with a dry mouth and a sensation of rocking that is making me nauseous. When I open my eyes and see Scott sitting opposite me staring, with the gun in his hand, everything comes flooding back to me.

“We first met on a boat,” he tells me groggily, knocking back the bottle of whiskey he’s got in his other hand.

“Scott, what are you doing?” I look back at him helplessly, trying to make sense of everything that’s happening.

“What am I doing?” He laughs at me. “Well, I sure as fuck ain’t playing with your emotions the way you have mine the last ten years.”

“What... Scott, what are you talking about?” I realize my hands are bound with rope when I reach out. I look down and I see that my ankles are tied together too. The space around us is cramped, and if I had to guess, I’d say we’re in the cabin of a small fishing boat.

“You know exactly what I’m talking about. You must have seen it; you must have known because you used it against me *every fucking day!* You taunted me by fucking my best friend. Did you ever take into consideration how that might have felt for me?” He tilts his head and waits for my answer while his body rocks with the gentle motion of the boat.

“I... I didn’t know.”

“She didn’t know.” Scott looks up and speaks to the ceiling. “Innocent, precious, little Ava didn’t fucking know.”

“Scott, are you saying...?”

“That I have feelings for you? That, ever since the day your mom brought you onto my dad’s boat and I saw you for the first time, that you’ve owned my fucking heart? *Yes*, Ava, I’m saying I’m in love with you, and all you’ve done is throw that back in my *face!*”

“We’ve known each other since we were kids. Our parents are married. Scott, you’re like a *brother* to me.” My words must trigger him because he launches at me, grabbing my throat and squeezing it tight. “*Don’t you fucking say that!* Don’t try to twist it and make it wrong. It’s not wrong; it’s **not!**” He screams at my face, and when I feel his phlegm land on my cheek, I have to remind myself to stay calm.

“I’m not saying it’s wrong; I’m just saying I’ve always looked at you like a brother.” My shaky hands reach up to touch his, hoping to relieve some of the tension in his fingers, and when his lips slam over mine, I feel the bile rise in my throat.

“Wait, how did you find me?” I force him away while keeping eye contact. I read somewhere that that’s important.

“You used your credit card to check into that guesthouse in town. At first, I assumed you’d left for California early, but when I checked your online banking and saw the transaction, I came straight here.” Something must have switched in his head because he’s not angry anymore; he almost seems excited. And his hands feel tender instead of tense.

“Scott, none of this adds up. Are you and Josh in this together?”

“Josh?” He laughs again. “No, baby, Josh ain’t involved. He’s dead.” He strokes my hair affectionately, and I have to let him because, clearly, he’s unhinged.

“What did you do?” I ask cautiously, wondering if I’m even ready to hear the answer.

“I had it all planned out, and you fucked it up by coming here.” That anger starts to form on his face again. “Josh wasn’t much of a friend, he knew how I felt about you, and he took you anyway. Then he cheated on you. He had everything, and

it wasn't enough." Scott shakes his head like he's agitated. "Someone was gonna have to take the blame for all the shit you've been getting, and I thought it was poetic justice that it be him."

"Scott, were you the one sending me those letters? Did you draw that awful picture?" I feel the tears building in my eyes when it starts to become clear.

"Yes, but only to make you understand that you need me." His fingers tremble as they caress my face. "You were moving away. I couldn't let you do that alone. It's a scary world out there, Ava, with scary people in it. You need me to protect you." I don't argue back, he's far too insane to reason with, and he's still got a gun in his other hand. All my thoughts suddenly go to Jekyll. Scott shot him; there was so much blood. What if he's dead? I only knew him and Mia for a few hours, but I could see how in love they were.

"Scott, where is Josh now?"

"He's in the trunk of the car, sweetheart. Don't worry; we can take this boat and toss him in the middle of the lake. I got the keys." He reaches into his pocket and fishes out a set of keys, rattling them in my face.

"Where did you get those? Whose boat is this?" My chest is getting tighter, I can barely breathe, but I can't panic. I have to keep it together.

"Let's just say Josh isn't the person we're gonna drop off." He laughs callously at me as he tucks the keys back in his pocket.

"None of this makes sense. Josh made that call; the club tracked it. He was staying in a motel near my new apartment. Was all that you?"

Scott drops his head in shame, and when he finds the strength to look back up at me, I see something really scary in his eyes.

"I'm going to be honest with you, precious." He lowers his tone, and I gasp when he uses the gun in his hand to push some of the hair from my face. "When you left, I was real mad

at you. Mad enough to think that I might have to kill you.” There it is again, that crazed laugh that makes my skin crawl. “I’d been setting up Josh anyway, so I figured I’d have to take him with me. I stopped by his place on my way to find you and gave him a little hit of what I gave you. I tied him up in the trunk and took him along for the ride. I used his card to check into the motel. I used it to buy the burner phone I called you from. Everything will point to him,” he tells me as if it’s reassurance, and all I want to do is scream.

“You killed him!” I stare back at the monster in front of me.

“I got frustrated when I realized you weren’t there. Ava, a lot of thought went into this plan. You forced me into rushing it when you left early, and then you threw everything off *fucking* keel when you came here.”

“And what about me? Are you gonna kill me too?” I try not to sound scared but fail. I can see Scott is capable of anything, and that makes me petrified.

“That’s up to you, sweetheart.” He makes it sound so simple as he smiles back at me with affection. “You have no idea how long I’ve waited for this.” His gun trails down my neck, and when he kisses me again, I have to squirm and let him. When he places the gun on the counter and picks up the hunter’s knife, I hold my breath.

“Relax, baby.” He smiles up at me as he slashes the blade through the ropes that are binding my ankles.

“I’m just giving myself better access.”

I try not to scream, and as he nudges my legs apart, they automatically resist him. “Come on, Ava, I know you’re not shy.” He fiddles with his belt to get it loose, and I close my eyes and pray for a miracle as he guides himself toward me.

That miracle seems to come when the boat jerks and knocks Scott off balance. It makes him defensive, and when the cabin door swings open and Isaac thunders in, Scott shoves me in front of his body like a shield, reaches for the gun, and

holds it at my temple again. Isaac looks ready to kill, but when he sees the position I'm in, all that anger morphs into worry.

"I won't let you take her. She's *mine*," Scott tells him, gripping me tight and pressing the gun deeper into my skull.

"It's ok, Princess, just stay calm." All of Isaac's attention is on me as he takes a tiny step closer and lifts his hand back to hold off the men who are behind him.

"Don't call her that! And get the fuck off this boat!" Scott yells, and I feel the tears flow over my cheeks as reality hits. Scott has killed, and he will kill again. I can't have his next victim be Isaac. I shake my head helplessly at the man I've fallen in love with.

"Ava, I want ya to look at me and listen to what I'm sayin', okay?" Isaac may be talking calmly, but the look in his eyes is savage. I nod my head back at him.

"I never knew the true value of a moment until it became a memory." He recites the Dr. Seuss quote I said to him at the airport, and I have no idea why until I notice his eyes glance down at my feet. It clicks into place when I see he's holding three fingers against his thigh, and I smile at him through my tears because I understand.

"What the fuck is this loser talking about?" Scott asks, but I ignore him. Instead, I watch Isaac slowly tuck away each finger into a fist, and as soon as there are none left I lift my knee and slam my heel into Scott's foot. The shock has him loosening his grip enough for me to wriggle free, and as soon as I'm clear Isaac charges his whole body into Scott, grappling him to the ground.

The pair of them struggle in the small space, and I scream as I feel myself being pulled out of the cabin. I look up and see Bulletproof, and his heavy hand presses my face into his chest so I can't see anything. I hear the sounds of the struggle, the crashing, and the groans. When I hear the gun go off, I scream so loud, it pierces my ears.

"It's okay." Bulletproof takes my head between his hands and forces me to focus on him. "It's okay." He stares me in the

eye, and when he raises them over my head and smiles, I spin around and see Isaac's tall body crouched in the cabin doorway.

"*Isaac!*" I run at him and wrap my arms around his waist, and when his sticky fingers lift up my chin, so he can kiss me, I don't care that they're covered in blood.

"I thought he'd shot you." I pull away so I can check him over.

"He did. But he grazed it." Isaac's eyes fall down to his bicep, and I notice the blood seeping through the rip in his shirt.

"Is he dead?" I check.

"Yeah, he's dead," Isaac tells me softly, and relief has me throwing my arms around his neck and squeezing him tight.

"Come on, let's get ya home." He taps my back when he pulls away.

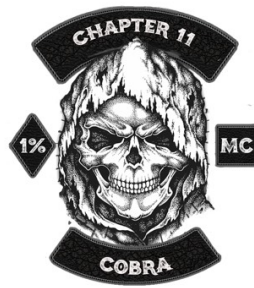
"I'm staying here." The words blurt out, and he stares back at me, confused.

"Darlin', we can't stay here; we're gonna have to clean this, and Scott's mess up too. I need to get ya back to the club."

"I don't mean here. I mean in Springdale. I don't need to go to California. I want to be here with you." I watch the smile lift onto his lips as he bends down and lifts me up over his shoulder.

"What are you doing?" I ask as he steps off the boat and carries me down the wharf.

"I'm puttin' you on my saddle, and I'm takin' ya home." He squeezes my ass cheek in his palm before he slaps it, and I laugh out loud. I laugh despite the fact this man just killed my psycho stepbrother, and my ex is dead in a car trunk somewhere, and that leaves me with no doubt that I belong with these people.



1 Month Later

“**Y**ou’re back.” Ava’s wide smile greets me the second I step through the clubhouse doors, and she runs at me so I can lift her up in my arms.

“Jeez, I’ve only been gone three days.” I place her back on her feet and chuckle.

“Three days too long. Next time, I’m coming with you.” She kisses me and nips at my bottom lip with her teeth.

“Old ladies don’t go on runs.” Mia rolls her eyes.

“Nor do prospects, these days.” Dec laughs. I glance over to Jekyll who’s sitting at the bar with a beer. It won’t be long before he’s back in action, but I can tell from the scowl he’s making that it can’t come soon enough.

“I have some news.” Ava takes a deep breath, and I can tell from the look on her face that she’s excited.

“Oh my god, you’re pregnant!” Beth squeals.

“No. I’m not pregnant.” Ava raises her eyebrows at me and blushes, and it makes me want to bend her over the table and make sure that she is. “But I did get that job I applied for in Hurricane,” she announces proudly. I pick my girl back off her feet and lift her up onto the bar.

“That’s fuckin’ awesome.” I kiss her, not giving a shit that all my brothers are watching. When Ava made the decision to stay in Utah with me, I knew that she’d be giving up a lot. She may have come from money, but she’s worked hard to study to be a lawyer. There was no way I was gonna let her give up on making it. The fact she got a job so quickly only proves that nothing will hold her back.

“Well, it’s a good job you ain’t pregnant, then.” Mia laughs as she places herself on Jekyll’s knee and taps the bar to get Wendy’s attention.

“Shots all round, we’re celebrating.”

“Did ya speak to your mom while I was gone?” I check, knowing Ava’s finding it hard to connect with her family after what happened with Scott. The club let her make the decision about what happened with Josh, and she decided Josh’s family deserved to know the truth. That’s why we went to the police, and we told them everything, except the part where I killed Scott and we tossed him in the lake, of course. Our version of the story had Scott getting away after we found Ava. Of course, the sheriff in Springdale won’t have bought that shit, but the evidence is all there to tie him to Josh’s murder, and there ain’t a single scrap that will tie me to his.

Ava’s parents are feeling bad about not seeing Scott’s obsession before. She hasn’t spoken much about how they feel about her moving here, and if they don’t like it, they’ll have to get used to it. It don’t matter how different the worlds we come from are, now that I got her back, I ain’t ever letting her go again. Nothin’ is gonna stop me from making my girl happy.

I wait until the club are gathered round, and when Dec gives me the nod, I reach over the bar and grab what he needs.

“Since we’re all here and we got a drink in our hand,” Prez gets everyone’s attention.

“I think it’s time we welcome our new member.”

All my brothers are wearing smiles as they look at Jekyll while he cluelessly scans the room.

“Since you came here, you’ve proved your loyalty. You’ve taken a bullet, and there’s no way I can have my sister datin’ a fuckin’ prospect any longer. Jekyll, you’re a brother.” Dec takes the cut outta my hands and passes it to Jekyll, who stands up from his stool, shakes Prez’s hand, and quickly shrugs outta his prospect cut.

He works his way around us with a huge, proud smile on his face, and when he gets to me, I toss his hand away and pull him in.

“I won’t ever forget what ya did,” I speak into his ear.

“What? Laid bleedin’ out on the floor while a psycho got away with your old lady?” He laughs at himself.

“Nah, brother. You’d have stopped him if ya could’ve, and ya paid a price for it. I owe ya for that.”

“Don’t owe me a thing.” He winks before heading over to celebrate with Lucky and Bulletproof.

“You know, I could really get used to this place.” Ava slips her hand into mine and rests her head on my shoulder dreamily.

“We’re a million miles from Paris, darlin’, and this sure as shit ain’t the Four Seasons,” I remind her, lookin’ round the room at the people I call family.

“All that shit’s overrated.” She smiles at me seductively, before stretching on her toes to kiss me.



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