



Ruthless

USA TODAY BEST SELLING AUTHOR
HAZEL PARKER

Ruthless

Steel Heretics MC

Book Four

Hazel Parker

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Chapter 1

Rachel

“What a fucking day,” Lucas grumbled, tossing the wad of paper towel into the trash on his way out of the office. “I swear, I don’t know why we do this.”

I glanced over at my partner’s weary face as we headed out into the parking lot. Being a private investigator was no easy task—but it mostly involved catching cheating spouses. And today was no different.

“You’ll just have to email the photos Danya, and then we’ll call this one complete,” I said finally, letting out a sigh. “Maybe the next case won’t be so daunting. There’s nothing like watching some guy solicit prostitutes when he’s married to a Russian model.”

“Yeah, I bet she’s gonna show up and take care of every single one of those women like it’s their fault her husband is a piece of shit,” Lucas continued, shaking his head. “Her father is part of the mob. You know how this is going to end—and you know we have to turn a blind eye to it.”

I’ve been turning a blind eye to crime my entire life.

“It is what it is.” I shrugged, hitting the unlock button on my Mercedes SUV. “Getting involved in that kind of shit is how you get killed—and I have no interest in that.”

“Yeah...” Lucas’s voice trailed off as he opened the door of his car. “Speaking of things that we don’t get involved in... Have you checked up on your brother recently?”

My stomach churned at the mention of Chaz. “No, and I don’t have any intention of doing so. He’s gone from petty drug dealer to drug lord, and I don’t have time to go poking the sleeping dragon. Whatever he gets himself into is his problem.” I loved my brother, but I wasn’t so sure that it was mutual. Chaz only reached out if he needed something—and the last time he wanted my services, I declined.

“You know that as your partner and friend, I keep up with him,” Lucas began, his tone grabbing my attention in the worst way. “I think that we should talk about it. He’s gotten himself into a mess...”

“I’m not bailing him out,” I snapped, ripping at the door handle. “I’m done bailing him out of situations that *he* gets himself into. I haven’t even spoken to him in over five years now. I’m not changing that.”

“Rachel, this isn’t about bailing him out.” The grave expression on his face is titillating. “I think you should watch yourself... No matter how much space you put between yourself and Chaz, you’re *still* his only family. He’s gotten himself involved with some bad, *bad* guys.”

I swallowed the apprehension tightening my throat. “I’m using my mom’s maiden name. It shouldn’t be that easy to trace.”

“Come on, you know as well as I do that if someone wants to find you, they will. That’s what we do for a living. I just think you should let Tyson help out.”

Shaking my head, I clenched my jaw. “I don’t need private security. I can take care of myself just fine.”

Lucas pursed his lips, accepting the defeat. “We’ll talk more about it tomorrow.”

“Fine.” I slid into the driver’s seat of my car and started the engine. Lucas was always overly concerned with what was going on in my brother’s world. Part of me thought my business partner was too curious for his own good—but the other, less dominate part, always reminded myself that he was looking out for me...

And if *he* said that Chaz was involved with bad people, well, that meant it must be getting dangerous.

However, I had done a solid job of covering my tracks, moving nearly six hours from where Chaz lived it up in Oakland. I only called him on a burner phone, and there was no trail between the two of us. Rachel Parsons disappeared

nearly ten years ago at the age of nineteen. I was now Rachel Smith...

And there are a lot of those.

I pulled out of the parking lot, watching as Lucas turned right while I went left. He was the only friend I had in my life, and all the rest were just acquaintances and business associates. None of them knew my real ties, so unless Lucas gave me up, no one would know.

However, the further I drove, the more uneasy I felt. My eyes drifted to the rearview mirror, but the streets were empty heading out of the suburbs. I lived on the outskirts of town, preferring my privacy.

No one is following you.

“You’re being paranoid because of Lucas,” I reassured myself as I turned down the side road that led to my meager cabin. I kept my life simple, even though I had plenty of finances to live in a much more statement worthy house. But I left that to Lucas. He was the showy one of the two of us.

I settled into my seat as the darkness surrounded my vehicle. I was the sole person driving down the road. Even if someone was following from a distance, I would’ve caught on by now. I followed people for a living. I knew how to spot them.

A sigh of relief crested my lips as I turned into the driveway, smashing the automatic gate opener on the visor of my car. I headed straight for the garage, zipping down the driveway. However, as I hit the second remote, the garage door didn’t open.

“What the fuck?” I muttered, shaking my head at the faulty thing. It had been playing up for months. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn’t, depending on the day. After what Lucas said, I might have been suspicious of it not working had it not become the norm for me.

I put the car in park just outside of the garage and made a mental note that I needed to replace the batteries pronto. I should’ve done it when it first started giving out, but I was

lazy. The air was still as I climbed out of my car, slinging my bag over my shoulder. My keys were in my hand as I shut and locked it, heading toward the front porch. I had recently restained it, and it looked like a dream, decorating it with flowing plants and cute cliché signs.

But the snap of a twig behind me pulled my attention from my design skills.

Probably just an animal.

However, the hair standing on my neck told me I was wrong. My brain was already working on a plan of defense—either sprinting to the house or back to the car. Neither of which would be without its cons.

“I wouldn’t run,” A deep, gravelly voice said from behind me. “You’re a smart woman, but I’m good fucking marksman.”

I didn’t recognize the voice, and for that reason, I wasn’t sure I could trust the skills he was claiming to have—but the cock of a steel hammer behind me told me he *might* be right. “Why are you here?” I asked, my voice staying calm and collected as I turned around slowly. I had gone through training for these kinds of situations, though my only method of defense were the keys in my hand.

Damnit.

A tall, broad-shouldered man in a black hoodie and ski mask was staring at me beneath the dim light of the moon. He flashed his pearly whites, his pistol pointed right at me. “For a cop, you sure let me walk right up on you. I could’ve just grabbed you from behind, taking you kicking and screaming, you know...”

“I’m not a cop,” I countered, meeting steely gray eyes, illuminated by the natural light. “But I appreciate the sentiment.”

He chuckled darkly, sending a strange, unfamiliar tingle down my spine. *Am I turned on?* Heat flushed to my cheeks, and I pushed it away. *Gross, Rachel. Gross.*

“So, do you want to go easy or are you going to risk your life and run? I kind of like the idea of chasing a little thing like you through the woods, so I’ll be happy either way.”

My heart picked up in my chest, rattling my rib cage with nerves. I knew the woods around my house like the back of my hand. I could make it to the neighbors—*maybe*. It was a solid half-mile, and I had no idea if they’d even open the door *if* I made it.

But I also wasn’t going to go easy. Lucas would kill me if I did.

“Hard decision, princess?”

I bristled at his mocking nickname, and made my decision, dropping my bag and sprinting into the darkness. A sardonic laugh burst into the night air, but no shots were fired. He was down for the chase.

And that was *terrifying*.

My casual flats pounded through the dead leaves scattered across the dirt floor, and I knew that my five-foot-three frame was no match for his six-foot-something. His legs would outrun mine any day...

But I’ll be damned if I wasn’t going to try.

“I knew you’d run,” his voice called out as I slid behind a large Oak tree to catch my labored breath. “I did my research on you, you know. You’re smart, princess... but I’m smarter. There’s a lot of Smiths in the world, but there’s only *one* who’s the princess sister of a drug king.”

I squeezed my eyes shut, realizing the threat that Lucas worried about was *way* more real than I thought. I considered trying to bargain with the creep chasing me, but that would give away my hiding spot, and, more than likely, they came for revenge on my brother...

Whatever I said wouldn’t be helpful to my case.

The twigs and leaves snapping as he grew closer made my stomach flip. I needed to run, but my calves were still burning.

Fuck leg day.

Taking one more silent gulp of air, I pushed off from the ground and took off, hoping to snake my way to the far property line.

But I never made it.

A firm grip landed on my arm, and I was jerked backward. Whoever this guy was, he was skilled at being fucking *silent* when he moved. He only let me hear him when he wanted me to... And the sound he made was intentional to chase me out.

“You were too easy, princess,” he growled with satisfaction, his hot breath tickling my ear as he clapped a heavy hand over my mouth. The scent of smoke and sandalwood drifted to my nostrils, and I quivered against his grasp. The man wreaked of danger, but my body was on a whole different level of betrayal...

And *that* was beyond embarrassing.

His arms lifted me from the ground, and the motion kicked my weak moment out. My legs swung, desperately striking him anywhere I could get contact. However, he just kept carrying me, unphased in the slightest.

“Got her,” he said in a low voice, and I froze, ceasing to fight. He wasn’t there alone, chasing me in the woods. For all I knew, there was a whole fucking army of people watching this go down.

I breathed through my nose as he carried me out of the woods since his hand was still covering my mouth, and sure enough, a dark van was parked just behind my car.

“Her phone must be in her pocket,” another man in a mask barked as started kicking again. “We need to get that taken care of—and the smartwatch. I’m sure her partner is going to come looking when she doesn’t show up for work tomorrow. There’s no tricking the nosy bastard.”

Shit.

The man who caught me dropped my feet to the ground, his hand slipping from my mouth. I tried to wiggle free, finally letting out a scream for help.

But he just laughed as he slid my phone from my pocket.

“Scream all you want. No one is gonna hear you out here. You made it too easy, princess.”

“Interesting nickname choice,” the other man grunted, his green eyes less frightening than the one who chased me. He took a long look at me, and I swear there was a hint of sympathy in his emerald irises. It distracted me for a split second, just long enough to not see a rag coming for my face.

And then it all went black.

Chapter 2

Axle

“She should be out for the rest of the ride,” Gunner let out a heavy sigh as he pulled his ski mask off his face and met my gaze. “I don’t know why the fuck you had to play with her like that.”

I shrugged, glancing down at Rachel Parsons’ caramel locks, spilling over her face. I’d seen plenty of pictures of the woman while doing my research, but none of the pictures did her any justice whatsoever.

Not that I cared.

This entire endeavor was for the sole purpose of extorting Chaz, the big kingpin in Oakland with a hell of a big debt to us. We needed our money, and like a smart man, Chaz kept nothing of value in arms’ reach. So, we had to dig deep.

“You did take it a little far,” Viper called from the front seat. “She could’ve gotten away—and then we would’ve been fucked.”

“She wasn’t going to get away,” I chuckled, gesturing to her tiny frame. Granted, she *was* strong for her size, but still no match for me. “The chase was fun.”

“You’re a psycho,” Gunner grumbled.

“He knows that,” Viper said with a sigh. “Though I’ve never seen him put on a show like that.”

“She’s some hot shot private investigator,” I reasoned, my eyes stuck on thick, natural eyelashes. “I just wanted to knock her down a few notches.”

“Well, you terrified her, so there’s that.” Gunner was a soft-hearted guy, no matter how many men he had killed because of the club. When it came to women, he just couldn’t harm them.

And well, neither could I, really. I’d never hit a woman, but if I had to wrestle her to get her into a van, so be it. You

can't kidnap someone with *please* and *thank you*.

"We're taking her to your place, right?" Viper met my gaze in the rearview mirror. "I don't think the clubhouse is a good idea."

I nodded, hating the idea of keeping the woman in my basement, but so be it. She was a high-stake case, unlike most of the hostages we had taken over the years—which wasn't many. Steel Heretics MC wasn't the kind that nabbed people up every chance we had. Kidnapping was messy, and quite frankly, I didn't like dabbling in it. If you're gonna make a point, just fucking off them.

"You think she'll be out for another hour?" Gunner eyed me, knowing that I was the expert in this area.

"Yeah, probably another two. Plenty of time to get her situated. We are gonna have to deal with that private investigator partner of hers."

"Not killing him, Axle," Viper warned me. "I don't think he'll run to the cops. After all the surveillance and digging, my guess is he's well aware what's going on. That's why we had to get this done before she went into hiding or some shit. Lucas Gray will come looking for her, and then we'll deal with him. He doesn't exactly walk the straight and narrow."

"And his partner has no idea," I chuckled, glancing back to Rachel. She had no idea how much I already knew about her, and the burner phone we found at her place. She was an intelligent woman though, always keeping it clean and wiped.

Which made me wonder just how much distance she *actually* had from her brother.

She didn't look a thing like her brother though, other than maybe her slender nose. Her hazel eyes matched her hair, and her light complexion was the opposite of her overly tanned brother. At the moment, her neck was craned in what I knew would leave her with soreness. Reaching out, I shifted her head straight, her eyelids fluttering.

"Thought you said she wouldn't wake up?" Gunner's voice sounded distant as my gaze stayed trained on her heart-

shaped face and pouty lips.

“She won’t,” I muttered as I tore myself away from her, sliding up onto the bench seat. There was something about this woman that made me feel unsettled...

I just didn’t know what it was yet.

Standing with my feet shoulder width apart and my arms crossed, I breathed out a sharp exhale as I stood in front of Rachel. She was bound to a chair in my basement, which was soundproof and basically escape proof. It was hard to know, considering I had never kept anyone in my basement before.

It was only soundproof because the previous owner had made it that way, and based on the other things that had been in the basement when I bought the place, I knew why.

A light groan slipped through Rachel’s lips, bringing my thoughts back to the cute little woman sitting in front of me. Viper wanted me to find out just how much she knew about Chaz, so watching the kidnapped woman had now shifted to an interrogation as well. And with this woman, it was bound to be fun.

“Good morning, princess,” I said, a smile on my face as I tugged the mask down, hiding everything but my eyes. “How nice of you to finally wake up.”

She startled, her mouth turning downward and her eyes widening as she peered up at me. “So, *you* are the one who’s going to be doing this.” The grimace was almost laughable, but I found myself a little offended. Who would she have preferred?

“Listen,” I began, pushing away the substantial amount of unwanted jealousy. “As much as I loved chasing you in the woods, I’d prefer that you just answer the questions I have for you—and then you can just hang out here in peace.”

Her head whipped around, her brows furrowing as she looked at the massive basement. I had taken the time to put a queen-sized bed in the room, and there was a bathroom as

well. Honestly, it was more like a hotel room than the torture chamber it had once been.

“Why did you take me?” Rachel’s voice is sheepish, and I’m surprised by the lack of confidence coming from her. I figured she’d be feisty, but maybe the sedative just hadn’t worn off yet.

“I think we already established that your brother got you into this,” I grunted, my tone sharp. I had no desire to play nice with her, but I *would* give her a chance to tell me the truth. It wasn’t fair to just get right to the torture.

I was more of a mind game kind of guy, anyway.

“I *know* that he got me into this,” she spat at me, her voice picking up and her eyes clearing. “He’s a fucking idiot.”

Oof. It was just the sedative.

“That is one thing we can agree on,” I said, running my tongue along my bottom lip. Her white V-neck blouse had shifted in the process of moving her, and I fought not to stare at the eyeful of cleavage she was giving me. I had *never* found sexual satisfaction with the women I kidnapped for the club over the years, and this woman being a bombshell felt like a fucking crime in and of itself.

“Okay, so just tell me what he did, and I’ll try to figure something out. I haven’t talked to him in years, but—”

“No,” I cut her off, my voice growing sharp. “We found the burner phone, Rachel. Don’t play games with me. It’ll just get you hurt.”

Her golden-brown eyes flashed with emotion, but then quickly faded to nothingness. “I have the burner phone in case I need to reach out, but that’s it. Look,” she let out a sigh, like I was wasting her time. “Whatever the fuck you think I did or do with Chaz isn’t true. I don’t want any part in my brother’s life.”

My lips curled into a smile—she was a talkative thing. “As much as I *want* to believe those cute little antics you’re playing up, I don’t believe you. Your partner was doing an

awful lot of research into a man that you claim to have *nothing* to do with.”

Her face contorted with annoyance as she met my gaze, her eyes on fire. “He does whatever the hell he wants, and I have to give it to him, he must’ve known this was coming. I should’ve listened to him. Guess the jokes on me,” she added the last bit with a laugh that threw me for a curve.

Damn, she is gonna be fun.

“You should be scared right now,” I challenged, narrowing my eyes as I leaned closer to her face, so close that my nose nearly brushed hers. Her entire body trembled, and I smiled. “That’s what I thought.”

“Don’t mistake my excitement for fear,” she seethed back, glaring with stormy eyes. “You don’t scare me.”

My crotch tightened and I backed away from her. Whatever the fuck this woman had going on, it was taboo, leaving my mouth like I had just swallowed cotton. I gave her my back, putting my mind back together.

“Did something I say bother you?” Rachel taunted, laughing. “You know this isn’t the first mess I’ve ever gotten myself into.”

Who the fuck is this girl?

I shook my head. “Sad that your shitty brother gets you into messes all the time.”

“Oh, it wasn’t my brother,” she said with a shrug. “And if you think you’re going to get something out of him by taking me, you’re going to be sorely disappointed.”

“And why is that?” I asked, pulling my gun out of my holster.

She eyed it as I twirled it around my finger but gave me nothing in response. “You might want to be careful with that. I’ve seen a man shoot himself trying to play it cool.”

I bit the inside of my cheek, half tempted to take a shot over her head. But even then, I wasn’t sure that it would phase

her. Most of the time women were bawling their eyes out and pleading for mercy.

This woman was seriously mocking me like I was the one in the chair—and it was infuriating.

“You’re pushing me,” I warned her, my voice in a low-pitched growl.

She raised an eyebrow at me, not even flinching. “I’m still not convinced that you’re not all bark and no bite.”

Fuck her.

I put my gun away and lunged at her, my hands slamming down on the edge of the chair, just to the outside of her hips. “You think I’m opposed to slitting that pretty throat of yours and dumping you in the ditch? Think I haven’t done it before?”

Her fiery eyes met my gaze, and for a *brief* second, there was a flash of fear—but had I not been trained to read people, I never would’ve noticed. “You don’t scare me,” she said, a smile creeping across her face. “You can slit my throat and leave my body for the birds, but you won’t break me.”

The words felt like a challenge. The hair on the back of my neck stood as I leaned in closer to her, pushing away every fucking ounce of excitement that ran through my core. “If you want to make this into a dare, then I’ll happily accept it, *princess.*”

She glared at me through slitted eyes. “Well then, Ghost Eyes, I *dare* you.”

Chapter 3

Rachel

My heart pounded with anxiety and anger as he stomped up the steps, though relief rolled through my body as the door slammed shut, leaving me alone. I took in the room again now that I was alone. I knew that I was being held in a basement. It was easy to tell based on the lack of windows and the subfloor above me. However, what was *not* easy was keeping my cool while being absolutely petrified and furious. It was a dangerous combination.

Also, I had *never* been kidnapped before.

At a minimum, I had gotten into some bad situations growing up in the cartel, and they had been enough to harden me, but this was entirely different from my past. Facing the man with ghostly gray eyes was terrifying, infuriating...*and* exhilarating. I knew that last emotion might ensure that I end up in a ditch much quicker than Lucas could find me too. I pushed Ghost Eyes, and while he didn't hurt me, that didn't mean he wouldn't.

I let out a sigh, wishing like hell he would've undone the binding on my wrists and ankles. They ached, and while I wiggled my fingers and toes as much as I could, the circulation was waning. My calves were also cramping from the way the wooden leg of the chair was digging into the muscle, and I bit back a cry when I tried to adjust, worsening the Charlie horse.

Stupid fucking Chaz.

Hadn't talked to my brother in five years, but I was still paying for his crimes. It had always been that way, though not quite to this extent. I had bailed my brother out more times than I could count on all my fingers and toes.

And deep down, I wasn't sure he would do anything at all to save me.

“You gotta ask for double what he owes, because this shit is inconvenient,” a muffled voice above me caught my attention. I tuned my ear into the conversation the best I could, not recognizing the voice.

“He’ll never fucking pay double,” Ghost Eyes growled back. I shivered at the depth of gravel in his voice, and wondered what the rest of his face looked like under the mask he wore. No part of his body—not even his hands—had been revealed, yet based on his eyes and the olive skin around the gray irises, he had to be beautiful.

And evil.

And Lucas would murder me himself if he knew I was thinking like that about my captor. I had to keep reminding myself that Ghost Eyes would probably make good on his word when it came to killing me. Whoever these men were, they were sophisticated, having thoroughly vetted me before taking me, and Lucas had mentioned that Chaz was in bed with some *bad* people.

I was pretty sure these guys were them.

The conversation above me had grown quiet, but the footsteps hadn’t, and I braced as I prepared for the visitor. The door unlocked, and the sound of footsteps headed down the stairs again. Though, before I even saw who it was, I knew that it wasn’t Ghost Eyes. He had a way of trudging, and whoever was coming this time had lighter steps.

“We’ll let you out of those as soon as you tell us where your brother is.” Green eyes met mine, the same ones that held a minor amount of sympathy.

I pursed my lips, intrigued by the notion that they might be playing good cop, bad cop with me. “I don’t know where Chaz is,” I answered honestly. “I haven’t talked to him in about five years.”

He let out a heavy sigh and dragged a chair from the corner of the room. Sitting it right in front of me, he straddled it, resting his arms on the back of it while he stared at me at eye level.

“That’s the truth,” I added, feeling less anxious in front of this one. I wasn’t sure if it was the hint of humanity he was giving me, or just the fact that I didn’t feel the need to clench my thighs around him.

“Why did you have a burner phone then?” Green Eyes asked, his tone staying calm and even. Unlike his partner, he didn’t act like he might blow his top every five fucking seconds.

“Well...,” my voice trailed off, trying to decide just how honest to be. Transparency would either get me killed sooner or save my life, and there was no in between. “I work as a private investigator,” I finally said, opting to stray from the truth.

“So you have to have a burner phone for that?” he mused, letting out a chuckle. “And why do you need that?”

“You’d be surprised the lengths we have to go to sometimes,” I said with a shrug, my body relaxing further into the chair. I liked this man’s interrogation much better. He didn’t get me all worked up.

“I can imagine,” he chuckled like we were just having an everyday kind of conversation. “So, you changed your last name to your mother’s maiden name?”

“Yes.” There was no hiding that fact.

“But you still had contact with your brother after you made that change, so it wasn’t to hide from him.” He glanced down at his gloved hands, and then back up at me, like I was supposed to confirm that.

“Uh... Something like that, I guess.”

“Why?”

“Why, what?”

“Why’d you change your last name if you weren’t trying to hide from him.”

Ugh. Nosy assholes.

“Because at the time, I was running from the life I had lived, and while I hated everything about it and wanted better for myself, Chaz was the only family member that I had left. I lost my parents when I was sixteen—but I’m sure you already know that,” I added, rolling my eyes.

“You are feisty,” he laughed. “But yeah, we know who your parents are. Surprising that you chose a life on the other side of the law.”

Is it, though?

“Much less stressful on this side,” I quipped, taking a deep breath before adding. “Well, right now it’s pretty stressful, actually—and I’m hungry.” My stomach growled as I said the words, not having eaten since breakfast.

Bad day to skip lunch.

“You’re not going to have any comfort until you start talking about your brother,” he grunted, losing some of the kindness in his voice. “There’s no way he’ll let you.”

“He? As in the guy who chased me in the woods?” I held back from using my nickname. That was mine, and I had no clue what they’d try to take from me, so I was keeping it.

“Yeah, he’s your keeper,” the guy said with a sigh. “And as much I’d like to help you out—because I don’t think you deserve this—he’s got his own agenda. No one believes your bullshit story about not talking to your brother.”

Frustration built in my chest, tightening my throat as I shook my head. “I *haven’t* spoken to him. That’s not a fucking lie. I don’t *want* to talk to my brother.”

He didn’t react. “Why was your partner digging into him so hard then?”

“Well, have you ever thought that maybe it was because I *don’t* talk to him?” I countered, spitting fire in my tone. “I don’t want any part of that life. And even if I did, it would ruin my career. I walk a straight line.”

The last few words got a reaction out of him, his head tilting. “Are you sure about that?”

My brows furrowed. “Yeah...,” I mean, sure, there were some gray territories we waded into, but we always stayed on the right side of the law.

“Maybe you should talk to your partner about that,” he said, rising to his feet. “You’re going to make your life harder by lying about your brother, and *if* you happen to actually be telling the truth, then you have some rough nights ahead of you.”

“Wait,” I called after him, causing him to stop at the bottom of the stairs. “Can’t you at least loosen these? I can’t feel my hands or feet.”

“Nah, I don’t think so. He’ll decide that.”

“What about the ransom?” I asked, not wanting him to leave. He was more open than Ghost Eyes, and I might actually be able to get something from him.

His eyes widened. “How do you know about that?”

I swallowed the fear, carefully choosing my words. I didn’t want them to stop having conversations above me. “It’s a good guess, considering I’ve been kidnapped, but not killed yet.”

“Touché. What about it?”

I held back a smile, he *was* going to be useful. “How much is it? There’s a chance I might have enough money to pay to get myself out of here.”

A flash of intrigue invaded his expression. “I highly doubt you have the money to cover the ransom.”

“But I might, and I bet Lucas would be more than happy to help with the bill. We have ways of paying for things.” My words were rushed, my heart quickening with the thought of getting out of here. I would definitely up my security, and maybe even move entirely, but getting out was the answer to all my problems.

And I wouldn’t have to question my sanity with my body’s reactions to Ghost Eyes.

“I’ll discuss it with him,” Green Eyes said before sighing. “The money won’t help us find him though.”

“I don’t know where he is.” My voice came out quietly, the defeat in my tone surprising even me.

“Yeah, and that’s a problem,” he chuckled, causing me to shudder as he ascended the stairs. Maybe the guy had less humanity than I thought.

Where would he be?

Green Eyes hadn’t told me the amount of money needed, but my guess was at least a couple million dollars, maybe even more. It had to be too much for Chaz to pay, and given his status... That had to be a very high amount.

High enough for him to go into hiding.

My brother was beyond an idiot, careless with a lot of his business deals, but he wasn’t flaky. If he was hiding, it was because he felt like the threat was bigger than he could handle—and if *these* men were the reason he was running...

Then I should be terrified.

But still, I sat there, racking my brain on *where* my brother could possibly be. He hadn’t reached out in the middle of the crisis, which either meant that he was past needing my help, or he was actually concerned for my wellbeing. My guess was the first, because Chaz knew I could handle myself.

I continued to wiggle my toes and fingers, the pins and needles growing unbearable. It was tempting to start screaming and fighting, but it wouldn’t do any good—not right now. The way out of this situation was either going to be to pay or to escape. And from where I was, I couldn’t see any method of escaping...

My foot tapped the floor, and I glanced down at it. My shoes had fallen off in the middle of everything, and my skin had gone a purplish color, nearly matching the dark violet nail polish on my toes. I wasn’t much a girly girl, but I never went without painted toenails. I kept my mind busy by focusing on blood circulation, trying different movements that allowed for

relief from the binding. Most of them didn't work, leaving me biting my lip as searing pain shot through my legs...

But the discomfort was better than allowing my mind to wander back to those alluring gray eyes. It was the first time in my entire life that the bad guy had a chance of actually getting under my skin...

So, I would just have to make it my goal to get under his first.

Chapter 4

Axle

I sat in the kitchen chair, unable to think clearly. The woman was toying with me, and as much as it turned me on, it pissed me off.

Which is why I had sent Gunner down to see her.

“I don’t think she’s lying,” Gunner said, his voice low as he peeled his mask off. “I actually don’t think she’s talked to him. It would make sense that her partner was keeping tabs on her.”

My jaw twitched, mulling it over as Viper and Will paced the floor of the kitchen. It was annoying to have so many damn people in my house, even if they were my brothers. I was the enforcer, and it was rare that I invited anyone over. If I wanted to hang out, I went to the clubhouse. A lot of my brothers lived there, but while I spent most of my time there, I had to get away.

“She’s hungry, too,” Gunner added, his eyes shifting to mine. “You need to feed her—and loosen her restraints.”

I laughed, shaking my head at him. “Are you sure you actually murdered someone in cold blood, bud? Because you’re sounding a little soft.”

He shot daggers at me. “She hasn’t done anything to deserve to be where she is, and you know that. She offered to pay her own goddamn ransom.”

That caught Viper’s attention. “How’d she know we were putting a ransom on her?”

I chuckled, glancing down at the thin floors. The basement’s soundproofing wasn’t as solid as I thought.

Gunner shrugged. “She said it was just a guess, but she *is* a private investigator.”

Right, just a guess.

Rachel was smarter than that, and once I was out of her presence and could think clearly, it was easy to pinpoint her methods. She was playing tough, and I fully intended to shatter the façade that she was putting on—and not because I needed information from her. I just wanted to fucking break that wall down.

And the thin floor beneath me might be helpful in that task.

“We need to reach Chaz. Impossible to push for a ransom if we can’t even find the bastard. We need to get a message out that we won’t off him, if he’ll just fucking pay. It’s not like Charlie wants to stop doing business with him,” Viper said, taking a seat in one of the kitchen chairs.

I grimaced at the mention of the underworld boss. Everyone thought he was terrifying, but all I saw was a deranged asshole who wouldn’t take care of his own dirty work. Granted, Chaz owing Charlie money meant that he owed *us* money, but still.

“Where’s that burner phone?” I asked suddenly, my mind hitting me with an idea.

“Uh, right here,” Gunner muttered as he dug through a duffel bag. He pulled it out and tossed it to me. “It’s fully charged.”

“Perfect.” I flipped it open and powered it on, the old school flip phone taking me back to my high school days—a time *long* before I had been corrupted into a ruthless killer. I waited a few tense moments, letting the screen load.

“There’s nothing on it.”

“I know that,” I snapped, rolling my eyes. “We’re going to make her call her brother.”

“She’s just going to say that she doesn’t have his number,” Viper snorted. “This might prove to be useless. We have strict rules about women, so it’s not like you can go cutting off fingers to get information. This might be a fucking waste.”

“Nah, see, here’s the thing,” I began, standing up. “I don’t buy that she has no way of contacting her brother... I just think that she doesn’t *want* to contact him.” I headed for the door, hearing them shuffle in behind me. Everyone was taking this trip to the basement, apparently.

And for some reason, that bothered the shit out of me.

I swung the door open, letting it slam into the wall in hopes of startling her. I wasn’t sure it actually would, but the thought was nice. She looked unimpressed as the four of us made our way into the room, crowding around her. Rachel’s eyes bounced between us with a weary look on her face, but if she was scared, she didn’t show it.

Holding out the phone, I gave her a grin through the mask. “Call your brother.”

She met my gaze, sending a surge of excitement through my body. “No.”

“Ah, you didn’t say that you couldn’t,” I chuckled, letting my voice grow dark. The guys stood behind me in silence, and she shifted uncomfortably, the chair squeaking under her weight. “I think you should call him.”

She swallowed hard, shaking her head. “I don’t have his number.”

I leaned into her, the scent of vanilla and citrus hitting my senses. *Fuck, she smelled like heaven.* “I think you do know his number.”

Rachel bit down on her lip, her eyes burning golden beneath the light. “I wouldn’t call him even if I did know his number.”

There was a frustrated growl behind me, and I recognized Viper’s frustration. He had rules against torturing women, but quick deaths were still an option for those who were not considered innocent.

Ignoring the guys behind me, I reached up, gripping her chin. “You’re going to get yourself in a body bag,” I seethed, my face so close that I could kiss her. “And I swear to god, if

you think this brave façade is going to keep your brother from meeting an end, he'll be next under the knife after you.”

Concern riddled her eyes, though her expression remained blank. “Not if you can't find him.”

I tilted my head, brushing my nose against hers, not missing the sexual way that her breath hitched. She was *excited*—and that was the biggest turn on and by far, the most threatening fucking tactic a woman had ever used on me. My heart thrummed in my chest, and my eyes drifted down for the first time since this started.

Her chest was heaving as my eyes connected with her breasts. I didn't have to see her naked to know they'd be perfect. Everything about this woman's curves were fucking perfect.

“*Focus,*” Viper growled a warning from behind me.

Oops.

I ripped my eyes back to hers, not missing the crimson blush now on her face. It was fucking torture. No woman I had ever come into contact with drove me so fucking *crazy*—but I was starting to believe that it was mutual.

And *that* gave me a leg to stand on.

Leaning into her, my lips nearly brushed her earlobe, her breath nearly coming out in a pant. “*Call him, princess,*” I whispered, dropping the phone right into her lap. A little nearly inaudible whimper slipped from her lips, and I hoped like hell the guys didn't hear it.

“I can't call him with my hands tied,” she panted, her voice uneven as she turned to meet my gaze.

“Fair enough,” I said, clearing my throat and backing away. My erection was throbbing, constrained by my jeans. Her eyes dropped to my thick length, and her lips parted at the sight.

Bloody fucking hell.

However, the moment was fleeting, and she snapped her mouth shut, her expression going cold. “Untie my wrists, and

I'll call him."

I stayed facing her, thinking of anything and everything under the sun that turned me *off*. Viper would rip my ass right out of this room if he knew that I was aroused. It was one thing to play games or for her to try and play games with me—but my reaction was pushing the rules.

No sex with prisoners.

And I had never had the urge to blur the lines until now. Granted, I wouldn't touch her unless she asked me to, but based on her reaction, I don't think it would take much. And *fuck*, that was exciting.

I finished untying her wrists, mentally preparing for her to take a swing, but she didn't. She instantly began to rub her marred wrists, her eyes squeezing shut as a single tear ran down her face.

I should've loosened them.

The guilt was unwanted and unsettling, but enough to drain my body of arousal. I turned to the guys, who were watching me with curious glimmers in their eyes.

"Call him," Will snapped at her. "Or we'll cut those hands right off."

She looked startled but nodded. "I don't know if this number will work." Her tone was distressed, and I actually believed her this time.

"Guess we'll see," Gunner grunted.

"Put it on speaker," Viper snarled as she punched the number into the phone with shaky hands. "We want to hear."

She nodded, and the sound of the line ringing filled the basement. Rachel actually appeared surprised that it was going through, and a flash of relief hit her expression as it connected.

"Hello?" A gruff voice answered. It wasn't Chaz—but she didn't appear bothered.

"It's Rachel," she said in a calm and collected tone.

There were a few beats of silence. “This is a forced phone call.”

She looked over at us and Viper nodded, giving her the okay to be honest. “Yes, it is,” she muttered. “And they want to talk to Chaz.”

“Of course they do,” the man laughed. “Nobody calls to just talk to me.”

“But he’s there,” she countered, her voice growing in sharpness. “I know he is. Let me talk to my brother. He got me into this mess.” There was a muffled exchange of voices on the other line, and I almost smiled at the impatient sigh she gave.

“Rachel,” Chaz’s voice came over the line, sounding meeker than I had ever heard from him before. He was a *tough guy* in the way he spoke, but this was new—and based on the exchanges going on between Gunner, Viper, and Will, they all thought so too.

“What the hell did you do?” She demanded, her voice quivering. “You’re going to get me killed.”

“They won’t kill you,” he responded, his tone soft. “You know that, and so do I. The Steel Heretics and Charlie Hughes just want their money.”

Fucker just gave us away, knowingly putting his sister in danger.

A murderous rage simmered deep in my core, wondering just what kind of brother Chaz was. Did he care if his sister got killed? Because if Rachel was anything to me, I’d be burning the whole goddamn town down to save her.

“Hmm,” Rachel’s reply was blank, but the expression on her face wasn’t. She was just as aware as I was of what her brother had done. “And why won’t you just pay them their money?”

“Oh, sweet girl,” he began, chuckling. “You’ve been out of the game too long.”

It hit me then that his *meek* tone was really just condescending. Whatever fucking relationship these two had was either rancid, or they were putting on a show. I wasn't sure which it was.

"I really would just appreciate it if you would get me out of here," she shot back, her tone cold. "I don't have time for this bullshit. You know he'll come looking for me if he can locate me—and you know he'll kill whoever to get me to me first. It'll make a bigger mess for you."

I whipped my head around to my brothers, giving them a questionable look like *who the fuck is she talking about? Her partner?*

"The only way he'll come for you is if I let him off his leash, baby girl, and we both know he'll rip you to shreds more than those biker boys will," Chaz laughed, the tone cruel and demanding of attention. "Tell the fuckers that if they want to talk, to call me themselves. I'd rather my whore of a sister not be the middleman." With that, the line went dead, and Rachel was left staring at it, her eyes unmoving from the white screen.

"What the fuck...," Gunner mumbled, voicing what all of us were thinking.

"She's more of a risk than she's worth," Viper growled. "I'm calling a meeting... *now*."

Her eyes shifted to mine, and my heart skipped a beat as I recognized the emotion.

Defeat.

Chapter 5

Rachel

My heart hammered in my chest as Green Eyes dropped a McDonalds sack of food onto my lap. I should've been thankful, but the conversation with Chaz had left my appetite depleted. After five years, he still threatened to unleash Victor on me. I shuddered at the thought of his dark henchman, who was once obsessed with my every move. Chaz had promised to keep me safe from him—and it was the only promise that he had kept over the years.

I had meant *Lucas* when I was talking, *not* Victor.

But now, based the threat of letting the sadistic psycho off the leash and revealing *who* was holding me, I was certain that whatever meeting they were having would end in my death.

“You can get up,” Green Eyes grumbled as he backed away from me, my ankles free.

I blinked a few times, processing what he said before it registered that he had freed me from the hard, uncomfortable chair. My back was aching from having been sitting there for hours, but I didn't show it. I wasn't sure I could stand at the moment, anyway.

“There's a bathroom through that door,” he pointed to a solid black door. “Figure you might need that by now.”

I nodded, though I had ignored the need to use the restroom for quite some time—long enough that the sensation had dissipated. “Thanks.”

“Don't mention it,” he muttered, spinning around and heading for the stairs. They had left their masks on, and that was the only hope I had that I might make it out alive. However, they hadn't asked me about what Chaz meant on the phone, only mentioned that I wasn't worth the risk.

So maybe they already knew who Victor was.

“Hey, wait,” I called out, stopping him. “Is this it?”

He frowned at the question. “What?”

A heavy sigh filled the room. “Are you going to kill me?” I clarified.

He shrugged. “I don’t know... But if we do, I guarantee it’ll be faster than Victor Sanchez would do to you.”

I gulped, nodding at the answer. They *did* know who he was, and I couldn’t mutter a word as he disappeared up the stairs.

I’m so fucked.

My eyes drifted down to the food in my lap, and as soon as I knew the door was shut, I threw the sack across the room, the bag crunching into the black walls of the basement.

Fucking dark, decrepit basement.

I rolled my ankles, waiting until the full circulation had returned before I shakily stood on my feet. These men might offer me a quicker death, but Lucas offered me safety—if I could just get to him. He knew all about Victor, but the concerns had faded as the years had passed.

My steps were clumsy as I worked out the kinks and soreness. Slowly, I trudged across the concrete floors to the bathroom, the door creaking obnoxiously. My mouth dropped as the natural light hit my face.

A window.

It wasn’t large—and to be honest, most individuals wouldn’t be able to fit through it... But I knew I could. I had shimmied through small spaces like that when Lucas and I had meandered into the gray areas of our work. If I could get it open, I could get out. Now, what lay outside of the house, I wasn’t sure. I had no idea if I was in a neighborhood, brimming with other people, or if I was fifty miles from another person. Either way, the risk was worth it.

If I can just reach it.

The window sat a good ten feet from the floor, and the only thing I had going for me was the fact that the toilet was right underneath. However, even with the boost, I wasn't sure if I could reach it. I slipped back out of the bathroom, looking around and listening for a few beats. I could hear muffled voices above me, and while that meant they were preoccupied, it didn't mean that it was free and clear.

Heart pounding, I grabbed the spare chair and carried it into the bathroom, trying to be as silent as possible. If I could just get out and get a head start...

The chair was wobbly on the toilet, the four legs setting to the outside of the lid, and I knew I risked making a huge ruckus that could easily end my life. I just kept reminding myself that it was worth the risk. I carefully climbed onto the chair, balancing as I gained the height I needed.

Does it even open?

I ran my fingers along the window, searching for a latch... But there wasn't one. I grimaced, knowing I would have to break it to get out—and that was noisy.

But the basement is mostly soundproof.

It was easy to tell. A shoddy job of it had been done, but it would still maybe mute the noise. I couldn't hear anyone in the bathroom... It was worth a shot. Carefully, I removed my blouse, not wanting to wander back out into the room and take anything. If they had cameras, they might have missed me taking the chair, but I didn't want to test my luck twice. Balling my shirt around my hand, I braced, clenching my teeth.

And then I fucking punched the glass as I hard as I could.

It shattered with just two blows, the sound surprisingly quiet. I hesitated, halfway expecting footsteps to come flooding into the basement, but nothing happened. I ignored the blood seeping through my shirt as I swiped the rest of glass from the frame...

And then I hoisted myself up.

I wriggled out of the space, the glass cutting into my black camisole and into my skin. I bit back the pained cry, relief mixed with dread as I landed in soft grass. The easiest part was over, and as I took in the thick woods surrounding the modest cabin, the biggest challenge was still ahead.

My ears tuned into my surroundings, but all was quiet around me. Under normal circumstances, that would've been comforting, knowing that there weren't any shouts. However, knowing the way Ghost Eyes crept around, it didn't mean shit.

The thought got my body buzzing with adrenaline, and I shot forward, heading straight for the woods. It might've been easier to go to the road, but that made it easier to be found. I took in the yard around me, the meadow behind the back porch neatly mowed right up to the first thicket. It was honestly beautiful, and the cabin was nicely maintained. The bastards might be criminals, but they took good care of their property.

My bare feet stung as I crashed into the thicket, and I clenched my teeth as I continued forward, ignoring the thorns, sticks, and stones tearing at me. It was a blind run, but once I got some distance from the house, I could stop and get my bearings. I had no clue where I was, and I'd have to keep moving in a straight line to get away.

"Really, princess," a voice called from behind me, sending a chill down my spine. "Do you seriously think I don't have cameras?"

I nearly choked on the oxygen my lungs so desperately needed. I glanced over my shoulder as I continued forward, but I couldn't see him...

And that was enough to push me forward.

"Damn, you're going to make this hard," he shouted, the sound of footsteps crunching into the ground behind me making him more real.

I don't stand a chance.

But I gulped in the oxygen and pushed myself as hard as I could, my heart pounding hard enough that I wouldn't have

been surprised if it had just gone out.

Dropping dead might be better than Ghost Eyes catching me.

An iron grip came down on my arm, and I let out a cry of terror—and defeat—as I tumbled to the ground. His heavy breath was in my ear as I was pinned to the forest floor, his knees on either side of my waist.

I squirmed beneath him, mud streaking across my face as I fought a battle I knew I couldn't win. "*Let me go,*" I pleaded, desperation breaking through my façade of grit.

He lifted his knees and flipped me over onto my back, his gray eyes boring into mine. I gasped at the sight, stilling. There was no mask hiding his face this time, and while I was pretty sure that meant I was going to die, it also revealed the man who wielded the eyes that set me on fire. My chest heaved and I tried to get ahold of myself, hating the way my body betrayed me beneath him.

"What's wrong, princess?" He taunted me from above. "Does my face scare you?"

I bit my lip, taking in the chiseled square jaw, the small dimple in his chin, and his strong nose. His hair was black as coal, and the stubble on his chin illuminated his masculinity. He was a fucking *god* of a man.

"No," I breathed out, testing the waters of the lust growing in his eyes. If I was going to die at the hands of this guy, there was no point in lying anymore. "You don't scare me." My tone was hot and sultry, and I clenched my thighs beneath him.

The words tipped his lips up into a smile. "You think that'll entice me to let you go? Surely, you don't think I'm that stupid."

I shook my head, trying to breathe steady enough to bring my heart rate down as he leaned into my face. "I don't think you're stupid enough to let me go," I forced out. "But maybe stupid enough to kill me."

He chuckled, leaning into my face so that he was all I could see. “Would that make me stupid?”

Fire burned between my thighs as his nose brushed mine. If he was trying to scare me, it wasn’t working. Moisture pooled in my underwear as my eyes searched his, finding nothing threatening at all in them. He might kill me at some point, but that wasn’t what was on his mind—*this* chemistry was.

“What’re you—”

I cut off his voice with my mouth, crushing it to his before I thought twice. Was it a stupid move? Absolutely. But the groan escaping from his throat reminded me that I had always been the kind of girl to blur the lines. He devoured every inch of my mouth with his tongue, tasting of menthol and whiskey.

Fucking lethal.

He broke his mouth from mine as I squirmed beneath him. “You think playing with me is going to make me weak?” he growled, his voice husky with arousal. He released one of my wrists, wrapping his hand around my throat—not tightly enough to cut off my air supply, but enough to feel pressure. “It’ll only guarantee that I *never* let you go, Rachel.”

I whimpered, hating the way the threat made me even more hungry for his touch. “You can’t keep what’s not yours,” I choked out, challenging him with every ounce I had in my being.

He chuckled, his tone possessively dark. “Oh, princess, I can make you mine.” He shifted his weight, a knee pressing in between my legs. Excitement riddled my core, and before I thought twice, I was moving my legs for him, allowing him to press into me. “You want this, don’t you?” He met my gaze, his gray eyes growing darker, though his face was riddled with confusion.

I ran my tongue along my bottom lip, my arousal stronger than my common sense. “I do.”

Chapter 6

Axle

My head was screaming at me to stop what I was doing as I leaned over Rachel, taking her lips again. Her kiss was fucking *toxic* in the best way, and the tension between us was only amplified by the forbidden edge we were on.

Thank god, there are no cameras out here.

Well, not in *this* spot. I dropped her hands, staying alert to what she might try, but she didn't use them against me. Instead, they drifted across my body, before finally threading through my hair. My fingers went for her jeans as my lips met her neck, and I carefully unbuttoned them, knowing we were at the point of no return...

Or maybe not.

"What the hell..." my voice trailed off as I felt liquid soaking her dark camisole. I sat up, before touching the spot on her shirt. It didn't take much to put it together once I saw the crimson stain on my finger. "You're bleeding."

"It's fine," she choked out, though she winced as I lifted the material up.

"You're not fine," I muttered, seeing multiple abrasions and a couple of cuts deep enough to warrant stitches. *Fuck*. "Come on, let's go."

She blinked a couple of times, like what I was saying was confusing. "But..."

I shook my head at her, hoisting the both of us to our feet. "Blood isn't my kink, princess."

Her face flushed as she looked up at me and then buttoned her jeans. Her expression was difficult to read, and I wasn't sure if it was the arousal lingering or she was just... embarrassed? Maybe ashamed?

Whatever she was feeling, I was just feeling disappointed—and fucking relieved. The injuries were enough

to break the haze that I had fallen into. If the guys knew...

Yikes.

I kept a firm grip on her wrist, but I don't think she would've tried to run. When we made it out into the lighted yard, her defeat and exhaustion were apparent. We hadn't even had a chance to talk about Victor Sanchez before I had caught her on camera dragging the chair to the bathroom.

And I knew there was a window in there.

I just didn't think our captive would be small enough to actually fit through the mouse sized hole. But I guess I was wrong.

"Where are your shoes?" I asked her, my thoughts about her escape breaking as her limp grew worse.

"I don't know."

"Tough woman to run through those woods barefoot... But I can't say that it was a smart decision," I added with a chuckle.

She looked over at me wearily and shrugged. "Better than dying at the hands of bikers. I'd rather be a gimp for the rest of my life than—"

"You can cut the shit talk," I cut her off, rolling my eyes. "It's just annoying."

Her brows furrowed as offense crept into her expression, but she didn't say anything. She only shook her head and continued to limp back to the cabin beside me. We walked around to the back of the house, and she startled beside me at the sight of a masked man at the window she had just escaped through.

Gunner was fastening a steel plate over it from the outside, after already having installed bars from the inside. I didn't want anyone to get in or out. "We're so fucked," he muttered as he finally noticed us standing there. "She can pick you out from a line up now."

I didn't say anything. I had been caught up in catching her, and I didn't have time to put my ski mask back on. Not to

mention, that moment in the woods... Yeah, that was enough to guarantee I'm fucked, anyway.

Because now I don't want to let her go.

"What's wrong with you?" Gunner asked, and at first, I thought he was talking to me, but then I realized he was looking at Rachel, whose face had grown a couple shades lighter.

"We need to get the doc out here," I said, gesturing to the darkening wet spot on her shirt. Her hands were bleeding pretty bad, too, and I'm sure her feet were cut to hell. The woman had taken a beating to escape, and honestly, it was as admirable as it was stupid.

"I'll call her," Gunner grunted, eyeing Rachel one last time before disappearing around the front of the house.

"*Her*," Rachel mumbled under her breath. She clearly didn't know that I had supersonic hearing, but I let it go, leading her in the opposite direction. I wasn't really that worried about her taking in the landscape, because I know she'd already done that. She was an intelligent, cunning woman, and the proof was in the credentials she had as a private investigator.

I ripped open the side door, trying to ignore the chemistry still burning between us as I put my hand on her lower back and guided her into the mud room. It led to the basement door and was the best way for her not to see the rest of the house inside. After all, this was *my* fucking house.

It was under my fake name, which made it even easier to hide, and I intended to keep my private abode out of the underworld... But with us suddenly on Victor Sanchez's radar... Who knew what was going to happen?

She hesitated at the top of the stairs, scrutinizing the lock system. "This is a lot of deadbolts..."

"Yeah," I said with a shrug, ignoring the row of locks. "Come on." I swung the door open and ushered her in. She moved at a snail's pace down the steps, and I realized pretty quickly that she was leaving a trail of bloody footprints.

Jesus, she really fucked herself up.

I reached for her, catching her arm. She let out a surprised breath, but I didn't stop, sweeping her into my arms.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, squirming in my arms. "Put me down."

I shook my head. "You hurt your feet—and also, I don't want to have clean up a bunch of damn footprints." She quit her squirming then, giving in to me carrying her to the bed. I tried my best to ignore the feminine scent of vanilla wafting from her, setting her gently onto the bed. "Doc will be here soon, but you're gonna have to strip down."

"No," Rachel said defiantly. "There's no way in hell I'm doing that."

I rolled my eyes. "But you were good with me taking your pants off in the middle of the woods?"

She hesitated, biting her lower lip. "I wasn't thinking."

"Right," I snorted. "Whatever you say, princess."

"I don't like that nickname," she muttered as I lifted each of her feet, taking in the broken skin mixed with dirt and debris.

"That's too bad," I said, heading toward the bathroom. "I'm not changing it."

She let out some sort of frustrated grunt as I headed for the bathroom to grab some things to clean her up. Linley, Will's lady, would be there soon, but I could still help her out by cleaning the wounds up to the best of my ability.

As I stepped back out of the bathroom, my arms full, Rachel sat with her back to me, her shoulders slumped. She hadn't obeyed me when I told her to strip down, and as much as that annoyed me, I decided not to push it this time. I'd take care of her feet first. She didn't look up at me as I rounded the bed, stopping in front of her. Her eyes were focused on her hands, and the defiant woman that I had faced when I'd first brought her here was slowly breaking...

And I didn't like it.

I couldn't read the look on Rachel's face as I knelt before her, setting the bowl of warm soapy water at her feet. "I'm gonna start with your feet. I don't know what kind of shit you ran through. The last thing we need is an infection."

Rachel nodded as I lifted her left foot, taking in the marred skin. "How bad is it?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Depends on what you define as bad, princess."

She glared at me for the nickname. "Lose my foot, bad."

"Well, then it's not bad," I chuckled, beginning to remove the dirt and debris. She winced as the rag brushed the exposed layers of her wounds. "I'm sure you've had much worse than this."

"Yeah, I—"

Footsteps coming down the stairs cut the conversation short, and I braced for the shit I was about to receive from my brothers.

"So glad to see that you caught the runaway," Viper grunted as he entered the room, dawning his mask. I knew that I should have mine on, but at this point, it didn't matter. She had seen enough of me to probably recognize me anywhere.

"How bad is it?" Gunner peeked around Viper, eyeing me as I worked.

"Her feet aren't that bad," I answered, but then motioned to her abdomen and hands, which were dripping onto the comforter. "But I don't know about all that."

"Yeah, looks rough," Gunner commented, taking a deep breath. "And you know you've really fucked shit up without the mask."

"Guess we can just call this one what it is—*botched*." I shook my head as I dipped the rag back into the bowl.

"What's your partner's name?" Viper asked Rachel, whose eyes hadn't moved from her hands.

Her eyes flickered to mine, holding them for a split second before looking up at Viper. “Lucas, but I know that you already know that.”

“Yeah, but do you have his phone number memorized?” His tone was ice cold, as it always was when dealing with kidnappees, and I usually rivaled that level—but Rachel had my head a wreck.

And now I was cleaning her goddamn feet.

I missed whatever Rachel said, but Viper tossed her the phone—which she didn’t catch, the phone slipping through her grip. It thudded on the floor beside me, blood smeared across it. I picked it up and turned to Viper.

“Why the fuck are you making her call anyone when she hasn’t been treated yet? She’s losing a lot of blood right now.”

Viper chuckled darkly. “Really, Axle? Because you know, you’ve slit someone open and *then* made them call for their ransom—so I don’t want to hear it from you. You’ve apparently not only blown this by running out without your mask, but you’ve also now gone soft.”

“Fuck off,” I growled at him, tossing the rag into the bowl. I knew that he was right, and it only made the humiliation that much worse. However, obviously mentioning that I had slit someone’s throat must’ve been enough to freak out Rachel, who was looking at me with wide eyes.

“We need our money, and at this point, I’m willing to do whatever it takes,” Viper continues, ignoring my comment. “If her partner can pay us off, then we can just nix this entire fucked up operation.”

“He’ll never be able to come up with whatever amount you need,” Rachel suddenly spoke up, her voice quiet and unsteady. “And he’ll go to the cops.”

“I doubt he would,” Viper chuckled. “You clearly don’t know your partner as well as we do. I’d say he operates in the gray area quiet efficiently.”

“No, he doesn’t,” she snapped, her tone growing sharp. “He hates operating in the gray area.”

“And why do you think that?” Viper tilted his head at her. “Because I have information that tells me otherwise.”

Chapter 7

Rachel

What could Lucas possibly be involved in?

I was racking my brain while also trying to process the fact that I had thrown myself at the man who was responsible for kidnapping me—and had apparently stabbed someone too. I really needed to make smarter decisions. But also...

Fuck, this guy is hot.

I stared at Ghost Eyes, wondering what he was thinking in the moment as the other two went back and forth about my business partner. They were trying to figure out if it was a good idea to reach out, and honestly... I hoped they did. That might be my only shot at getting out of this place. Clearly, they're not convinced that Chaz will even call back.

Or maybe it's Victor that has them shifting gears.

I shuddered at the thought of my old stalker. I had worked so hard to forget the psycho's existence, though Ghost Eyes might be able to give him a run for his money... My eyes trailed up his chiseled body, wondering what he looked like beneath that black hoodie. Even the sweatshirt couldn't hide his broad shoulders and thick arms.

"Where is she?" A female voice cut through the men's conversation, and I nearly passed out at the sound—or maybe it was the blood I was losing. I hadn't obeyed Ghost Eyes' order to strip, and once the other men showed up, I was glad I hadn't.

"Right here," Green Eyes called out to her. "No name basis."

"I know," she snapped, appearing at the bottom of the stairs. She didn't have on a ski mask, instead she dawned a creepy white face mask, her dark hair pulled up behind it. She had a duffel bag of sorts, and I assumed it was some kind of medical supply bag. I wasn't sure about her, since I couldn't

see the expression on her face, but she seemed annoyed—or maybe frustrated.

“She’s got cuts on her abdomen. I don’t know how deep they are,” Ghost Eyes said, his voice gruff and strikingly flat. I eyed him as he picked up the supplies he had been using to carefully clean my wounds, but he didn’t look at me. It would’ve been an intimate moment, him tending to me...had his associates not shown up in the middle.

“All of you need to leave,” the woman began, shooing them toward the stairs.

But they didn’t budge, and the guy who had thrown the phone at me—and then taken it back—shook his head at her.

“I don’t think so, doc,” he growled. “We don’t know what she might try. She already ran once.”

She looked over at me and let out a sigh. “You gonna run while I’m trying to help you?”

I raised an eyebrow at her. “No.”

She turned back to the men. “See, there ya go. She isn’t gonna run. She’ll at least let me fix her up.” There was something almost amusing about her talking to the men in that tone. It was like she actually didn’t give a shit about what they thought... and I liked that.

“I’m not leaving,” Ghost Eyes grunted. “I’ll stay here with her.”

“No, you won’t. You’re the reason this fucking happened,” the leader chided, his tone even more sharp than it had been before. There was some animosity growing between the two of them, and I didn’t care, really...as long as it didn’t end my life.

“*Everyone* can leave,” Doc—or whoever she was—said to them, pointing to the stairs. “You all are being absolutely idiotic right now. I’m going to clean her up and make sure she’s okay. You have enough to worry about based on what I’ve been told.”

I could feel the tension rise in the room, but I stayed silent—as did the men. They filed up the stairs and slammed the door behind them, leaving me alone with the woman. She let out a heavy sigh and sat the bag down on the bed beside me. I watched her quietly, observing the massive rock on her left hand...

Maybe she's married to one of these guys.

But it wouldn't be any of the ones that had been in the room. I knew that biker gangs often included powerful women, oftentimes ones that benefited them—and if this woman was a doctor, that was definitely a benefit.

“Let's get this bloody shirt off,” she said in a much softer tone, pointing to my camisole. “Do you think you can lift it over your head?”

“I can pull it over my head,” I said quickly, wincing as I peeled it off the cuts along my torso. I didn't want to see just how bad it was, so I didn't look down after I had removed it. I tossed it to the floor, knowing that it would leave stains on the comforter.

“What caused these?” Doc asked me as she started dabbing at the blood. “You need stitches in this one for sure.”

“Broken glass in the window.” I swear she smiled at my response. “My left hand is pretty bad too.” I held it out for her to see, blood still running down my arm.

“We'll use adhesive on it.”

“Okay.” I took deep breaths as she continued to clean me up, and she worked quickly, much faster than Ghost Eyes had when he was cleaning my feet. He was slow and tender, which was the opposite of the vibe that he gave off... And that intrigued me more than I wanted to admit.

“I'm going to numb this area while I stitch it up,” Doc said, pulling out a large needle. I eyed her wearily, not sure if I should trust her or not—but what choice did I have? “I promise, I'm not trying to hurt you.”

“Okay,” I nearly whispered. I wasn't the kind of woman that bowed down, but to be honest, at this point, I was so

fucking tired, that I wouldn't have minded if she had put me out. I wouldn't have complained.

"You know, you really shouldn't try to run again," she began, working closely enough to me that I caught a whiff of her Jasmine scent. For some reason, it was comforting. "From what I've heard, the guy, uh, Victor, I think they said his name is, is a really bad guy, yeah?" She looked up at me, and I met her eyes, struck by how bright they were.

"Yeah. I spent a good chunk of my life running from him," I admitted, not sure how much I should really let her know. "He's a bad guy."

"And he's worse than these guys, I *promise*."

"They kidnapped me."

"Yeah, and they haven't killed you—they haven't done anything to you. The last I checked *you* were the one who punched out a window and tried to run. And for the record," she breathes out a heavy breath. "I don't blame you at all for it. I'm just saying that...they'll protect you."

She sounded insane to me.

"They'll fucking leave me in a ditch," I said, shaking my head, not even feeling her working the needles through my skin. "I know what happens in cases like this. I'm nothing but a pawn."

"No," she countered, straightening herself as she finished. "That's the thing, you have to make yourself more than that—and that shouldn't take much. I know who you are."

I swallowed, more intimidated by her than before. "You do?"

"Yeah, I do, and I don't know why they had to choose you. I don't ask questions about this kind of shit—I just show up to do whatever it is they need me to—but I know who you are. I know that you can be an asset. And also..." her voice trailed off as she bent over to dab at another spot. "I can tell that one of them has their eye on you."

“Ghost Eyes,” I muttered, sure that she would have no idea what the fuck I was talking about.

“That’s an interesting nickname for him,” she said instead. “I probably shouldn’t be telling you what I’m about to, but he’s the enforcer... And he’s not someone to play around with.”

“Great.”

She chuckled. “That’s not a bad thing. All the guys think that he’s a borderline psycho, and honestly, he might be.”

“What’s his name?” I asked, blurting out the question before I had thought it through. I knew that she couldn’t tell me, but I was so curious about him.

She didn’t answer, but didn’t shut down either. “I think he’s got a soft spot for you. I’ve never seen the man get on his knees for anyone—not even his brothers. He’s the kind of guy that is unphased by death and violence... But that soft spot,” she paused, looking up and meeting my eyes, “might be the way you make yourself an asset if nothing else.”

I swallowed, my mind flashing back to the woods as she started working on my hand. It was as if I already innately knew that. My instincts had taken over when I had kissed him in the woods, and maybe *that* was why I did it. Well, that’s what I would tell myself anyway.

“These will have to be tended to,” she motioned to the stitches on my torso. “And I’ll leave the supplies to take care of it here. Do you have any other aches and pains? I saw your feet, but Neosporin and staying off them should be enough to heal.”

I shook my head, my heart dropping as she continued to gather her things to leave. “Are you close by?”

“Um...,” She hesitated, like she wasn’t sure if she should answer that. “I’m not that far, but to be honest...you’re a *long* way from town.”

My stomach knotted up. I had a feeling I was. “Do you think I could get a shirt?” I wanted to wrap my arms around

myself and hide the black lace bra I had on, but the cuts were too painful.

“I’ll tell them to come up with something,” she assured me, sympathy in her tone. “Maybe something more comfortable than jeans too? What size do you wear? I can tell them to get you some things.”

“I wear a size six in jeans, so like a medium in sweats. I wear a medium in everything—I like my clothes loose,” I add. “How long do you think I’ll have to stay like this?”

“I’m sure they’ll get you a change of clothes as soon as I ask,” she said to me. “But if you mean staying *here*, I don’t have an answer for you.”

I nodded, not sure which I actually meant. “Thanks, and thanks for taking care of all of this.”

“Not a problem,” she said, patting my bare shoulder. “Just remember...make yourself an asset, Rachel. They’ll protect what they think is worth something—not that you’re not.” I had a feeling she was frowning beneath her mask. “I don’t like this shit. Anyway, just keep your grit. I can tell you’ve got a lot of it.” With that, she slung her bag over her shoulder and headed for the stairs. However, she stopped before she ascended.

“Oh, you can shower with those,” she said, pointing to the stitches.

“Okay.”

She nodded and trotted up the steps, knocking on the door at the top. I could hear their muffled voices, and I stood to my feet, wincing at the searing pain on the bottom of my feet. I hadn’t even really noticed it in the moment when I had been running, but now...

Now it was horrible.

I limped toward the bathroom, slipping in and shutting the door behind me. Taking a deep breath, I kept my eyes off the window, focusing on starting the water. My entire body ached for some reason, but I ignored it. I stripped out of my

jeans, seeing the other small cuts from the thorns that had torn into my skin.

Stepping into the shower, I shut my eyes as the warm water poured over my shoulders. Surprisingly, it didn't really sting, however, regardless of the pain, tears slipped from my eyes. I was finally alone, and in a place that I could just let it out. I was giving myself the chance to breakdown. Because after this...

I had to focus on making myself an asset.

Chapter 8

Axle

“We’re not getting in touch with her partner.” My voice was defiant. “The moment we try to extort more than one party for money, we’re going to get ourselves in a fucking mess.”

“We *owe* Charlie a lot of money, and I intend to get that fucking money.” Viper is pissed, and his fist slamming down on my kitchen table is enough to startle Will back a few steps. “We have never been on his bad side, and I don’t want to start now. We’re fucking desperate—and I’ll do whatever it takes.”

I hated what he was saying, not because I didn’t know that he was right, but because it was complicating the kidnapping situation. “We could just let her go and start over.” If we did, I would pledge my fucking allegiance to her to keep her safe from Victor Sanchez. He was a level above me, being just a flat-out sadistic fuck. I might be a cold-blooded killer, but I wasn’t a sadist.

“We’re not letting her go,” Will spoke up. “We have to take advantage of this situation. What’s Victor Sanchez worth?”

“No way,” I growled. “We’re not handing her over to him. I don’t give a shit what he’d pay.”

“Whoa,” Will raised his brows at me. “I didn’t mean hand her over. I just meant there’s gotta be a hit out on him—and we have the perfect bait.”

My stomach felt sick at the idea of putting up Rachel like that. I don’t really know why, considering she was really nothing other than a flight risk and a temptation to break all the rules. But still, I didn’t want her put in anymore danger.

“And the partner is a no?” Viper throws out, his voice a little less cruel but still unemotional. “He’s the fucking son of the mob boss in Vegas. You can’t tell me that he doesn’t have some good fucking connections.”

“Yeah, and like they wouldn’t come in and take us out,” I snorted, rolling my eyes. “You’re just putting a target on us.”

“We already have a target on us,” Viper shot back at me. I was *not* on his good side right now, and I understood, but damn, it was annoying. “We need to *move* this situation as soon as possible.”

“No one knows where this house is,” Gunner finally chimed in. “I mean it’s not even a registered address. It’s the most off the grid you could ask for. Leave Axle here with her, and we’ll throw whoever comes sniffing around off the trail.”

My dick twitched at the idea of being left alone in my house with Rachel, but I pushed it off. “I would be fine with that.”

“By himself?” Viper isn’t convinced.

“Yeah, he’ll be fine. It’s like you’ve forgotten who the hell he is.” Will started laughing, shaking his head. “Axle is the deadliest of all of us. I think he can handle babysitting a woman who might weigh a hundred-thirty pounds.”

“She already got out once,” Viper looked at me.

“That was a mistake on my part. I had no idea that the window was human size. It’s taken care of now. I’ll also move that pile of cinderblocks in front of it. It’ll keep it out of the eye of anyone who happens to snoop around—which won’t happen. But yeah.”

“We need to get all the dead zones in the woods covered with cameras,” Gunner added, letting out a sigh. “When you finally caught up to Rachel, we had no idea what happened. We need a better view.”

Good thing you didn’t have a view.

“I agree. More cameras would be helpful.” Viper nodded, and then ran his hands through his hair. “I just don’t want to see this thing blow up in our faces.”

“I know, I know,” I said. “But she’s already seen my face, and that should make it easier to connect with her. Let’s give her a reason to help us.”

“And what kind of asset can she be?” Viper snorted, rolling his eyes. “She’s a private investigator and the sister of the drug lord that’s ripped us and Charlie off—but he’s not running to set her free. He mentioned sending Victor after her. I thought she was his diamond in the rough. We know based on the history that she was running from a stalker... Looks like we know who it is.”

It made my blood boil, thinking of Victor Sanchez setting his eyes on her. “We have to keep her from him. No one deserves that.”

“Unless it gets us the money,” Viper countered.

I lunged at him, grabbing his shirt and slamming him into the wall. “Who the *fuck* are you? Hannah would be *pissed* if she knew that you were considering handing over an innocent woman to the hands of a fucking serial killer.”

Viper shoved back at me, and I let him go out of respect. “What the fuck is wrong with you, Axle? You’re always first in line to pull the trigger. What’s got you all concerned over her?”

“Nothing,” I sputtered, backing away. “I just hate the guy. He’s the kind of guy that even the criminals hate.”

“Do you hate him though? Or is the fact that you’re hot for her?” Viper spat back, Gunner and Will staying quiet. “Because you know, it’s against the fucking rules. You touch her in any way that can be labeled as sexual, and I will rip those patches off faster than you can lie to my fucking face.”

“Viper,” Gunner cut in, his tone coming out in more of a warning. Gunner and Viper had more history than I had with any of the guys with the Steel Heretics. I had been an outcast my entire life, and even in this band of brothers, I still sometimes was.

“He’s got a thing for her, and you know it, I know it—we all fucking know it.” Viper was seething, his eyes bouncing between us all. “And you know what happens if he acts on that? We get a target on our backs for one more thing.”

“I wouldn’t act on anything that wasn’t consensual,” I said, shrugging my shoulders. The comment earned me a nasty glare from all three of them, but whatever. It was what it was. “I’m not gonna fuck her.”

Not right now, anyway.

And not if I can help it.

“It doesn’t matter what he does if we can’t fucking figure out what we’re going to do,” Will kept his tone level. “We need to decide if we’re going to press Chaz harder, bait Sanchez, contact the partner, or just take a breather and *wait*. There’s no need to just jump the gun and do something stupid. Charlie knows these things take time.”

Viper took a deep breath. “You know what, you’re right. Maybe we should wait this out a little longer. Chaz is a paranoid kind of guy anyway, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he calls that phone just to see where we’re at.”

I nodded, glancing over to the silver phone. It had a nasty smear of blood across it, reminding me of the state that Rachel was in. If they left me alone with her, I’d have to be the one taking care of all those wounds...

And testing my self-control the entire time.

My eyes drifted to a sack sitting on a chair in the kitchen, full of clothes for Rachel. Linley had made it her mission to ensure that Rachel didn’t have to wear her bloody clothing, and while I didn’t blame her for doing it, I wondered what all was said between them. I’d yet to go down there since Linley had worked on her, seeing on the cameras that Rachel had taken a shower and crawled into bed...

Naked.

Fuck.

The cameras were pretty grainy, and I was a gentleman, but I swear I would’ve punched the lights out of one of my brothers had they seen it. I wanted to make her *mine*, and had she not been so damn beat up...

I would have.

And that was something Viper could never know—not right now anyway.

“Okay, so we’ll give it, what? A week?” Gunner’s voice brought me back to the conversation. “That should be enough time to get Chaz wondering what the fuck is going on, and then we’ll give him a call... and *then*, we’ll look at our other options. Gotta keep your head, Viper. I know you’re worried about Charlie, but...,” Gunner didn’t finish, only shaking his head. We all knew how attached he was to the underworld leader.

And I just knew it wasn’t healthy.

I saw the guys out the door, making plans for Gunner to come back and install more cameras the following day, and then I finished locking up for the night. Once that was done, I took a long shower, trying to wash off the fuckery and temptation that Rachel brought out of me.

There’s nothing special about her. She’s just another woman.

That’s what I told myself as I grabbed the sack, heading to the basement door. But it didn’t stick, and I knew it wouldn’t. I had done a lot of hard jobs, and watched over a lot more dangerous, threatening people in my lifetime. However, to most men, maybe she would be nothing—she’s not even a fast runner—but to me...

I was almost certain she might be my undoing.

Just don’t fuck her.

My hand pushed open the door, the dim lights barely enough to keep me from falling face first down the steps. I didn’t want to lose my patch, not for something like fucking a woman I kidnapped. I had caused more than enough bloodshed when it came to the club, and it wouldn’t take much to throw me right under the bus.

Because that’s what they did when they ripped your patches.

You were either framed for something and thrown in jail, or you were six feet underground in the middle of the desert. I

had no desire to face either of those, so I would *have* to keep my shit together.

Or at least not get caught.

My footsteps were heavy as I made my way to the bed, where Rachel was sleeping. She heard me coming before I actually made it there, and she shot up, her eyes flying open at the sight of me. Her bandaged hand grabbed for the covers, pulling them around herself.

“I brought you these, princess.” I sat the sack on the bed. “They’re nothing special, so don’t get too excited.”

She eyed me and then the sack. “Clothes?”

“No, a puppy.”

Her eyes flickered with a hint of something, but then she shook her head and snatched it up, peering inside. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, Doc got them for you,” I said carefully. The last thing I needed was for her to think of me as anything other than a fucking beast. She needed to fear me so what happened in the woods wouldn’t happen again.

She looked up at me as I turned to head back for the stairs. “You’re leaving?”

I froze at the words—did she want me to stay? “Yeah, I am.” My tone was gruff, fighting against the pull to her. “I’ll be back when it’s time to check your stitches.”

And then I left her there.

Because I was keeping my fucking patch.

Chapter 9

Rachel

Something shifted in him after he washed my feet, and normally, I wouldn't be worried about some guy going from wanting to fuck me to acting like touching me might make him throw up, but... I had nothing better to do.

Also, it was very difficult to make myself an asset when Ghost Eyes never hung around long enough to do anything other than make sure the wounds were healing the way they should and drop off food. It was annoying, and my mind was running constantly.

Was Chaz going to do anything?

Was Victor going to come after me?

What was Lucas doing? And what was he doing that he shouldn't?

Ugh. I paced the floor of the basement in a pair of gray sweats and a white t-shirt, my arms wrapped around myself. It was strikingly cold in the basement today, and I wasn't sure if Ghost Eyes had messed with the thermostat, or if there was a real ghost living there with me.

Preferably the first option.

I glanced around, wishing that I knew what time it was as my stomach growled. It felt like I'd been awake forever, and not having a clock was wearing on me. I never knew if I had overslept or under slept. Regardless, my mind was my best friend and worst enemy, fantasizing about fucking my kidnapper while trying to come up with new escape routes to get away from him.

The sound of the door opening was enough to stop me in my tracks, and I backed away from the entrance. He hadn't been anything but cold and distance, but there was always a chance his buddies could be coming.

And I wasn't in the mood to make any phone calls.

Thankfully, I was met with those gray eyes, though today, they seemed to be a little extra stormy. He held a plate with a sandwich out.

“Here, princess.” His tone was flat.

I took the plate from him, sinking back in the direction of the bed. I had stopped talking to him, and internally, I debated on whether that was the right thing to do. Staying silent wouldn’t help me gain any ground—unless gaining ground meant becoming invisible—and then in that case, I would be gaining ground...

But I had no idea what my best strategy was.

I had no idea how to be an asset to a man that wouldn’t stay longer than he had to.

“What’s wrong with you today?” I blurted out just as his boot landed on the bottom step. It was time to take a risk.

His jaw clenched, like me asking had annoyed him. “That’s a weird question.”

Okay, well at least he’s responding in some sort of way.

“Yeah,” I admitted. “But you seem off today.”

“You my therapist now?” he chuckled, turning to look at me. I was glad he didn’t wear the mask anymore, giving me an actual human being to look at. Granted, he was like one big walking sex dream, but still. Better than looking like a burglar.

“I just think you seem less happy today than usual.” I kept my tone calm and even, like nothing about talking to him bothered me in the slightest—like every time he lifted my shirt to check on my wounds, my pussy didn’t pulse with need.

I’ll make you mine.

His words echoed in my head, but I pushed them out.

“I don’t think I ever seem any sort of way,” he laughed sardonically, sending a chill down my spine. He turned back to face me, and I took that as a win, even if he was only conversing because I was humoring him.

“I think something changed after you brought me back here,” I said, gaining a little confidence as he took a step in my direction. The woman said it was clear to her he had a soft spot for me—and that he wouldn’t kill me, right? I couldn’t remember if she actually said the last part, but I was just gonna have to bank on that.

“And what do you think changed?”

“You were going to fuck me out there in the woods.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Yeah? Maybe I was just messing with that pretty little head of yours. Didn’t take much to get you in that spot, did it?”

I swallowed hard, feeling my cheeks flush. “I’ve never been easy.”

“That’s not what you showed me,” he chuckled. “If I remember correctly, you were the one who kissed me, princess, not the other way around.” Ghost Eyes was coming closer, closing the space between us faster than I was ready for. I stumbled backward, bumping into the side of the bed.

And he laughed, his eyes alighting with something other than indifference.

“You’re cute when you’re scared.” He stopped a couple inches from me, his body so close—and yet so far. Tension rose between us as his gray eyes held mine, and my breath hitched as I clenched my thighs.

“You don’t scare me,” I countered, though my heart felt like it was beating right out of my chest.

He nodded, a smirk stretching across his face and he swiftly reached out, his hand wrapping around my throat lightly. “So, princess, there’s only two reasons that your heart would be beating as hard and as fast as it is right now.” He leaned down, his nose now brushing mine, his breath tickling my skin. “You’re either fucking terrified of me right now—or you’re excited.”

My head started to spin at his words and his closeness—but I could do this. “Very egotistical to think that it’s you that has me feeling this way,” I countered, forcing a smile of my

own. “For all you know, I was just down her thinking about someone else... before you showed up.”

His tongue ran along his bottom lip as his eyes searched mine, his thumb stroking along my jaw. “Oh? And who would that be? Your partner? Or your sadistic stalker?”

“You know what I think?” I said, knowing I might just push him right over the edge. “I think you’d be jealous, no matter *who* I was thinking of.”

His jaw twitched and I braced, ready for him to squeeze the life right out of me—but he didn’t. He let me go, taking a step away from me. “You have no idea what kind of fire you’re playing with, *Rachel*. Fucking you is the fastest way to guarantee your end.”

“Is it?” I dared him, taking a step toward him. “Because out in the woods, you sure as hell seemed ready to make me yours.”

“It’s dangerous to be mine.” His eyes were darkening, and it felt as though we were doing a dance. “You don’t want to be mine.” Ghost Eyes’ voice was strong as he said the words, but something faltered in his eyes—something that made me think there was more to the beast of a man than he let on. I had been around plenty of cold-blooded killers in my life...

And Ghost Eyes was one—but not the kind that just kill to kill.

“Why’d you change your mind about me?” I pushed him a little harder, both my body and my mind wanting him to come closer again. I wanted to understand him for some godforsaken reason I didn’t understand...

And my pussy? Yeah, well, it was obvious what she wanted.

“It’s none of your fucking business what I do or don’t do—or *who* I do,” he growled, his fist clenching at his sides. I wanted his hands on me again.

And I hated myself for it.

“I just wanted to know why you were having a bad day,” I admitted, finally letting a little of the truth spill out. He was going to be complicated, and while my body wanted to throw myself at his feet, forgetting about all the rest...

I still needed to survive.

Become an asset.

My plan was just not solidified. I was all over the place—and I was feeling it in the moment. I wasn't sure if he picked up on that, or if the silence was just too much.

“Sometimes I have bad days,” he said, grabbing my attention. “Some days are harder than others—everyone goes through that kind of shit.”

I nodded, sitting down on the edge of the bed, letting myself appear to relax in front of him. “I don't buy that your shit is like everyone else's.”

He shifted in his engineer boots, and I wondered if the guy ever wore anything else. He was always clad in black Levis and black boots. The only thing that changed was his shirt—and there weren't many options. White or gray shirt and a hoodie.

“You don't want to know about my past,” he finally said after a few moments. His voice had an edge of fatigue to it, like the thought of discussing it was exhausting to him.

“I'll tell you about mine, if you tell me about yours,” I offered, knowing that I had plenty of fucked up stories to share. Not to mention, it might build him up enough to think of me as capable of being helpful.

“So, what? Now you wanna talk?” He raised an eyebrow at me, but didn't move, leaving plenty of distance between the two of us. “I don't think you talking about your past with your little, squirrely asshole of a brother is going to change anything for your future.”

I folded my arms across my chest, trying to keep my brave face on. “And so that means that you're gonna kill me then?”

“I just might if you keep being nosy.” As much as the words were a threat, it didn’t *feel* like one. It felt like an attempt at banter, and I was gonna take it.

“You know, I get paid to be nosy.”

He chuckled, his upper lip twitching upward. “And do what, exactly? Point out who Jim Dear is fucking on the side? What a job. I bet you have zero trust in the ability of a man to be faithful.”

Damn.

“You’re not wrong,” I said, giving him credit where it was due. “I think most men are incapable of turning down a good piece of ass—I see it every single day. Women always cheat because they want the emotional connection, but men just want to get laid.”

“Loyal men don’t fall for that shit. You don’t want it if you don’t look.”

“Impressive, but I bet a lot of women put it right in your face,” I said, shrugging my shoulders. I don’t even know how we got to this part of the conversation, but I was kind of liking the thoughtful expression on his face like, *yeah, you made a good point.*

“I still wouldn’t. Despite what you think, I have no interest in fucking a bunch of women. You wanna know why?”

“Why?”

“It leads to a lot of fucking problems, and the last thing I need is more problems, when I’ve got the biggest one of all locked in my basement.” He smiled in a way that was more of a sneer, but I only laughed.

“Oh, you have *no* idea what kind of problem I am.”

“Yes, I do,” he growled, leaning within inches of my face. “I’ll tell you exactly what kind of problem you are.”

“And what’s that?” I choked out, my voice sultry and heavy with the moisture pooling between my legs.

“You’re the kind that once I start, I won’t be able to let go of.”

The answer makes my head spin, and before I can stop myself, I blurt out, “Has that ever happened to you before?”

He smiled. “Nope, and I don’t think it’s a risk you wanna take.”

I trembled as he ran his fingers along the base of my jaw, stopping when he made it to my chin, his thumb pressing against my bottom lip. My heart hammered in my chest as he leaned forward, like he might kiss me, and then left me hanging. His eyes bored into mine, and I struggled to breathe, only one thing on my mind.

“But what if I *do* want to take the risk?” I nearly whispered, unable to see or feel anything but him.

He shook his head, ripping himself away from me. “You *don’t* want to.”

And with that, he stormed away, leaving me breathless and more aroused than I had ever been in my entire life.

Chapter 10

Axle

Holy fucking shit.

No woman had ever brought me so close to the verge of just pure insanity. I was pacing the floor, my eyes shifting from the erection in my jeans to the camera monitor sitting on the counter. Everything about her was already so enticing, but then she went telling me that she wanted to take the risk...

Like the woman was either fucking *great* at playing games or she, too, was intoxicated by whatever chemistry was between us.

I'll lose my patch.

That kept echoing in my head as I watched her on the camera, lingering there, watching and waiting like I might come back. It sounded like pure stupidity, but it was like she *wanted* me to come back. Was she just lonely? Was she going to try and fuck her way out? I had so many questions, but I already knew the answer.

I studied Rachel.

She never slept with men she wasn't dating—and based on what we found, that wasn't many. Her whole life was her work, and she wasn't fucking her partner. I was sure of that. We watched who he fucked...

And that was a whole lot of women.

But what kind of woman would want to be with the man that kidnapped her? This wasn't Stockholm syndrome. She hadn't fucking been here long enough for that, right? Fuck, my head was a wreck.

I need her.

I shook my head.

I don't need her.

My fist clenched at my sides, as I glanced back at the camera. Rachel started to strip down, pulling her loose white T-shirt over her head. I caught my breath, taking in the sight of the black lacey bra beneath it.

She never undressed on camera—not once she saw the thing.

I knew that she located it, because I had to fucking watch her all the time. The day her eyes caught the blinking light, they'd gone a mile wide. She never undressed again anywhere other than the bathroom. I was always a gentleman and looked away. My phone buzzed, and I picked it up, ripping my eyes from the sight of her.

You good?

“Duh, asshole.” I rolled my eyes as I sent back a *yeah* and went back to the screen of the camera. Viper was up my ass about her escaping again, like somehow, she was gonna magically teleport to the other side of the basement walls. There was no way out anymore. The window was sealed with straight steel. Only way she was getting out is if we let her out...

And obviously, that wasn't happening.

But what *was* happening was Rachel stripping down to *nothing*, while watching the camera, knowing that I was watching. It had to be a fucking game. It had to be. She was trying to worm her way out of captivity by using my dick.

And you know what?

Two can fucking play that game.

I bit my lip as she stood there, watching the camera. I wasn't going down there, and so, I waited her out. She eventually dropped her shoulders and headed for the bathroom. I turned up the volume, listening closely. It wasn't long before I could hear a slight shift, the sound of the shower filling the air.

There would be no proof of what was about to happen.

But I was going to bring her to her knees for me.

I removed my boots and shirt before heading to the basement. I quietly unlocked the door and crept down the stairs. Silence was my forte, and I could move like a fucking ghost. It was something that was *always* on my side. Some men *thought* they were quiet... But they had nothing on me.

She had no idea I was coming as I made it to the bathroom door, and the woman was comfortable enough to leave the door cracked, rather than shut. I pushed it open, thankful that it finally creaked, catching her attention.

But I was already there.

She had already shut off the shower, her dark blonde hair sticking to her neck and shoulders while water droplets trailed down her naked body. I took in the sight of her, and reaching into the shower, I grabbed her hand, her eyes still wide from my surprise appearance.

I smiled. “What did you think, princess, you could taunt me over the camera and not get punished?”

“Punished?” she asked, her voice thick with lust as she tugged at me, pulling me toward her.

I leaned down, brushing my nose against hers. “Yeah, punished. I’ll make you cum so hard that I’m *all* you fucking think about—but then you’ll *never* have me again.”

Her swallow was audible, and it caused my cock to nearly burst in my jeans, wishing it was my release that she was putting down her throat.

“I dare you.”

And that was all I needed to hear.

Leaning in I brushed my lips to hers, and she went in for a kiss, but I denied her, dropping my hand and running it over her soft, wet hips as my lips collided with her neck. I sucked it into my mouth, careful not to be too rough. The last thing I needed to leave was a mark—somewhere that was visible anyway.

I moved quickly, knowing that the last thing I needed was to be caught. I had no idea when or if someone might

show up—but I couldn't take the risk. My lips and tongue glided over her soft flesh, and a growl slipped from my throat as I made it to her ample breasts, hanging free and perky. I gently slapped them, letting them bounce for my own enjoyment before I sucked her nipple into my mouth, pulling hard at it.

“Oh my god,” she cried, her body trembling against me. Rachel's hands ran along my shoulders, the water from the shower dripping onto my skin.

I didn't linger long before kissing my way down her torso, my hands finally making their way around her hips to her peachy little ass. I gave it a squeeze and slap, just before my kisses landed right above her pussy.

Rachel braced above me, and I could damn near feel the anticipation that she was holding onto. I nudged her legs further apart, before glancing back up to her, meeting her hazel eyes. They were a dark, deep brown now, the gold reflecting in the warm bathroom light.

As I held her gaze, I took two fingers and gently slid them between her folds, her legs shaking as I did. “You're so fucking wet,” I growled, feeling the overload of her natural lubrication. There was a clear difference between water and that, but damn, she was like a waterfall...

She *really* fucking wanted me.

“Tell me how bad you want me,” I demanded, my fingers stilling. “I want you to fucking *beg* for me.”

“I want you *so* bad,” Rachel whimpered, her hips squirming against my hand. “Please.”

I bit my lip, repeating the motion before stopping to drag my thumb over her clit. She let out a loud, heavy moan, and I hoped to god I turned the volume down on the camera system.

“Look at me,” I instructed, pulling my fingers away from her.

Her lips parted lustfully as she watched me suck the fingers into my mouth, tasting her for the first time. It was

sweet and primal, the way she tasted, and I let out a satisfied groan. I couldn't hold back from her any longer.

And so, I fucking buried my face between her legs.

Rahcel let out a startled cry as my tongue replaced my fingers. I covered every inch of her, taking my time to kiss and caress her as I went. Her thighs clenched around my face, but it only drove me to move faster and more desperately.

“Oh fuck, oh *fuck*,” she moaned as she began to grind her pussy into my face. I wanted her slathered all over me, and I drank her like I was parched. My cock throbbing mercilessly in my pants and my jeans were soaked at the knees from kneeling just inside of the shower, but it didn't stop me.

Nothing was going to fucking stop me.

“You taste so good, princess,” I murmured, her body quaking at the praise. She was a good girl, and I had a feeling she *liked* being told that. I gyrated my tongue against her clit as I brought my hand to help, slipping the same two fingers inside of her.

“I just want you to fuck me.” Her voice was sultry, raspy, and oozing with the arousal and sexual pleasure she was getting. I could only imagine how fucking delicious it would sound right in my ear, her hot breath tickling my neck as I drove my cock into her tight little pussy...

But that wasn't happening.

My fingers worked back and forth, falling into a rhythm with my tongue. She ground against me, moisture spilling from her as I brought her closer and closer to the edge.

“You're such a good girl,” I growled, stimulating her deep inside with my hand.

She whimpered in response to me, her pussy pulsing as her leg muscles tensed around me. Her orgasm was right there, and she was on the edge of pure extasy. Rachel's fingers found my damp hair, wetted by the moisture trickling from the shower head above.

“This feels so fucking good,” she whined, tightening her grip. I knew she had to be white knuckling my hair, but it only pushed me forward. “I’m gonna cum. Oh my god, I’m gonna cum.”

Pressing my tongue one last time against her clit, I let her crest the climax, her pussy releasing a new gush of moisture as her cries filled the shower. I groaned as I kept stimulating her through the orgasm, taking her for as long of a ride as I could. Her body shook as I lapped up every ounce of her, swallowing her juices and kissing as much of her as I could. I wanted to savor the moment of being there, between her legs. I had to commit her body, her taste, and the feel of her coming around my fingers to my memory...

Because that was all she could ever be to me.

“I need you inside of me,” she panted, pulling me to a standing position. “Please. Please just fuck me.” I leaned down and kissed her just long enough to give her a good taste of herself, and then pulled away, leaving her whimpering. She tried to bring me back to her lips, but I froze.

“See, here’s the thing, princess,” I began, my voice husky. “Until you can scream my name when your tight little pussy comes, you don’t have the privilege of having this cock inside of you...”

Her brows furrowed as she tried to process what I was getting at—and the moment it hit her, her entire face fell, disappointment and rejection replacing the lust in her eyes.

I grabbed the towel from the rack without ever breaking our eye contact and finished the thought that she had already had.

“And it’s never going to happen.”

Chapter 11

Rachel

Disgust, anger, and regret continued to build in my chest long after Ghost Eyes had left me there feeling hot, bothered, and... *dirty*. I had wanted the man who had kidnapped me to fuck me in the middle of the shower—and that was just... *wrong*.

But *ugh*, it felt right, just like it had in the woods.

There was something about him that I just couldn't get enough of, and part of me wanted to blame the dysfunction in my past. However, that didn't really cut it. Yeah, I had a bad upbringing and lost my parents, but I dealt with it. I went to therapy, and I dated *good* guys after all that. I never went for the bad boy. I dated the guy who was the hero, not the morally gray, yet somehow sexy cold-blooded killer. That just wasn't my type.

I laid in bed in the basement, staring at the ceiling, knowing that he could watch every single move I made, right there on his camera. I had known what I was doing when I undressed... I did it to catch his attention. I *wanted* him to come down those stairs and fuck me silly. I tried to say to myself that was my way of becoming an asset—but that had *never* been my game... I was the prude girl growing up, and I stayed that way.

Well, until I started throwing myself at the man who kidnapped me.

"Gross," I muttered to myself, rolling over onto my side. He probably thought I was insane for how much I talked to myself down here, and somehow, I imagined him sitting up there in a big fancy leather chair, eating popcorn, and laughing at me on the screen. It had been five days since the shower incident had happened, and that was all the entertainment he was getting from me. I had gone cold and distant... I quit being fun for him, I'm pretty sure.

But it didn't seem to bother him at all.

Stupid me.

I blinked back tears that threatened to fall, and thankfully, I knew most camera imaging was too grainy for him to see that part of me. I tried to save my breakdowns for the shower, but tonight it all just felt...*heavy*.

My mind drifted back to my brother—and then Lucas, wondering if he was working as hard as I thought he was to find me. We had always vowed to each other that if anything were to ever happen like this, we wouldn't stop searching. However, that was before one of the men had told me my partner—and best friend—was a gray character.

I racked my brain as I thought about that. How could he be gray? Well, other than the part of his last name. He had a sketchy past... But the more I thought about it, the more I couldn't remember what that was. Had he ever told me? I wasn't sure if he had.

I met Lucas when he was a ten-year veteran on the police force in Oakland. He wasn't the kind of guy that you fucked with—that was apparent. Everyone who knew him respected him, which is always a good thing in my book. I was working a case that led me to him, because he was the active lead detective.

And the rest was history.

So...what could he be doing? He *hated* the gray area. Was that just some kind of front? Surely not. *Ugh*.

There's no way I can sleep like this.

I let out a sigh, flipping the covers back and sitting up in bed. There wasn't much else for me to do in the basement other than read—and while being a total asshole, Ghost Eyes did have a good collection of books. The most surprising one he had brought to me was *Where the Red Fern Grows*. It's almost like he just wanted to gift me with a story much more somber than my own.

My fingers flipped the switch on a small lamp, one that was bolted to the nightstand. I didn't know what he thought I

would do with that thing, but the puny little silver desk lamp wouldn't do much damage to his thick skull.

Though, if given the option, I might try it.

I didn't feel like reading, jitters getting the best of me. So, I began to pace the dank floors, wishing I were somewhere else. And right about the time my mind had started to think of the vacation to Hawaii that I never took...

The basement door opened.

Ugh.

No matter how many times it happened, it always left me on edge when I heard the locks slide and the door creak. Most of the time, it was Ghost Eyes, and for the last almost five days—since the shower incident—that was the only visitor I'd had.

“You know it's two in the morning, right?” His deep voice was strangely comforting in the dim light.

“I have no concept of time anymore,” I muttered, shaking my head at him. I didn't look at him for more than a few seconds, ensuring I didn't admire the tight black T-shirt and light gray sweats he had on. The longer I let my gaze linger, the more I always lost my head.

“I think you do.” He folded his arms across his chest, letting out a long sigh. “This is the second night you've gotten up at this time.”

I rolled my eyes. “Must be the motion sensor on the cameras waking you up.”

“Nope, I just never sleep,” he smirked, the shadow across his jaw line twitching as he smiled.

I ignored him.

“Are you hungry?” Ghost Eyes' gaze followed me as I kept walking. “You're starting to act like a tiger in the zoo, you know. All this pacing and shit.”

“No.”

“No, you’re not hungry? Or no, you’re not like a tiger in the zoo?”

I stopped, turning to face him. “Why are you here?”

He shrugged. “Because I’m the unlucky bastard who has to keep you alive and contained.”

I glared at him. “You know what I mean. You *never* come down here at this time of night.”

“I was up.”

Gritting my teeth, I went toward the stack of books, picking up the dreaded *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

“That one is so depressing. I wouldn’t read it.”

“I have read it before.”

“So why read it again?” He shifted his weight to his left foot, watching me closely. I felt the heat growing in my cheeks but did my best to ignore it.

“Because maybe it’ll get you to leave.”

That made him grin. “You’ve been really cold lately. Must’ve pissed you off with the shower—”

“Please just leave me alone.” I cut him off, the embarrassment of what happened creeping back in.

“Hmm. You have a lot of balls for a woman who’s been kidnapped. Smart mouth like that might get you killed, princess.”

“Even better,” I snapped, refusing to meet his eyes. I knew they were boring into me, and while my body responded in frustrating ways, my mind stayed focused.

Ghost Eyes was the enemy.

But...*if* he was in a friendly mood...

“How long do you think I’m going to be here?” I looked up at him, surprised to see a softness in his eyes that I hadn’t before...

And it did all kinds of things to my heart rate.

He bit his lip, hesitating. “I don’t know.”

“You have no plan?”

He shook his head. “It’s not my job to make a plan.”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “That one guy—the one who said that Lucas is crooked—he’s the boss, isn’t he?”

“You know I’m not gonna answer that.”

“Okay, well... I’ll do a trade then. Info for info.”

He seemed to mull that over, and then nodded. “Okay. You have a deal—and I’ll let you go first.”

This is surprising.

Part of me wondered if I was about to die and that’s why he was being nicer than usual, but I brushed it off. Death was a real possibility regardless. There was no sense in trying to figure that out.

“You gonna ask something or just ogle at me?” He snapped, his gruff tone quickly reminding me of the hard ass inside him.

“Sorry, I just wasn’t expecting you to agree,” I mumbled. “How close am I to the nearest town?”

He rolled his eyes. “Fourteen miles, give or take a little.”

Fourteen miles.

That wasn’t nearly as bad as I thought it might be. It was a trek, but I could easily manage it.

Not that I could escape again.

I ruined that.

“My turn, princess.” He grabbed up a chair, taking a seat across from me as he straddled it backward. I held my breath as he seemed to study my face, and I questioned how honest I would be in return... But his question was unexpected—and not quite a question.

“Tell me about Victor Sanchez—and how he affected *you*. I know who he is. But I never knew he had a connection to you—other than doing your brother’s dirty work.”

“How does that information benefit you?”

“It’s my turn, not yours,” he quipped, giving me an amused smile. “I wanna know, so tell me.”

I took a deep breath, hating what pathetic thing I was about to say. “Please don’t turn me over to him.”

His eyes gave away his true colors in the moment, flashing with a sympathy I thought was impossible for him—but it was fleeting. “Not turning you over to him. I just wanna know. He might come creeping around or something.”

“I don’t think my brother will let him off the leash,” I said, hoping that was the truth. If Chaz wanted to find me, Victor was his best asset... But if he wanted me to come home alive... Yeah, I was better off with the ruthless motorcycle gang.

“And if your brother dies?” Ghost Eyes tilted his head in a way that made a chill run down my spine.

“Then I’m going to have to run like hell, and hope I’m faster than him.” I had thought of it happening. It had crossed my mind Chaz passing and then not being able to protect me... But deep down I had always hoped that Victor would...*move on.*

His jaw twitched. “I can offer you protection.”

“That’s rich coming from someone who fucking kidnapped me,” I snorted, shaking my head. I laid back against my pillow, letting the book drop to the floor.

“You still haven’t told me about your experience with him. Did you date him or something?”

I popped my head up to raise my brow at him. “Are you serious? Who the heck would date a sadistic creep like him? He’s pure evil. I know he is. Everyone knows he is. And if you think he’s not, you’re just like him.”

“Some women have a thing for that serial killer shit.”

“Not me,” I muttered, though the term made me wonder if Ghost Eyes might be one. Maybe that’s why he was asking. I had thrown myself at him more than once now.

“Alright, so spill.”

I laid my head back on the pillow again, letting my eyes stay focused on the ceiling. “There’s not that much to tell. I met him when he came to work for my brother. I always got an off vibe from him, but I knew he was proficient at his job. And anyone who can kill people with little to no remorse—and in his case, none at all—is a psychopath.”

“I’m a psychopath.”

“Maybe,” I shrugged, not buying it, honestly. Ghost Eyes had one thing that Victor didn’t—and that was a conscience. I could tell he had morals...even if there weren’t many of them.

“So then, what happened?”

“He likes to *play* with his victims,” I began slowly, “playing mind games with them—stalking them. Chaz knew that, and so when signs started showing up, he started watching him. Eventually, he found the journals of what Victor wanted to do to me. Chaz put his foot down, and then, yeah.”

“I’d have fucking *murdered* him.”

“My brother is too scared of Victor to try and kill him. He knows he won’t win... He keeps the bluff of money and safekeeping as a way to hold him back. Victor does whatever he wants, and Chaz covers it up.”

“Only thing I’d be covering up is his body with a shovel full of dirt,” Ghost Eyes growled, his eye growing cold. “If he ever sets foot on this property, he’s *dead*.”

And so am I.

Chapter 12

Axle

I hated the thought of him putting his sights on Rachel. I only knew Victor through his killings, having seen his handiwork more than once over the years. I had never met the guy, but I didn't have to meet him to know what kind of monster I was dealing with. No matter what was decided with Rachel, I *would* keep her safe from him.

Sure, he was more sadistic than me, but that didn't make him more deadly.

"You good, man?" Gunner kicked me under the table in my kitchen.

I jerked my eyes from my hands, meeting his gaze. "Yeah, I guess I'm just tired of being stuck in this house. Cabin fever or whatever."

He shrugged. "Why don't you take a break then? I can babysit her." He glanced over at the camera monitor. "She doesn't really seem like she does much of anything."

I knew she was reading, though I hadn't paid much attention as to *what* that was. The screen was too grainy to make out most things, and I was still exhausted from staying in her room until nearly four in the morning.

"Go for a ride or something," Gunner said, his face filling with concern.

I shook my head. "Nope. I'm not doing that. I need to be here to watch over her."

He narrowed his eyes at me. "*Watch over her?* That's an interesting choice of words there, Axle."

My lip twitched. He always had a way of seeing through my bullshit, like I did for him. "I just don't want anything to happen to her."

His eyes went wide as a smile crept across his face. "Oh *shit*, man. You really *do* have feelings for her, don't you?"

“No,” I snapped. “I don’t have *feelings*.”

He burst into laughter. “Cold blooded killer Axle has met his match.”

“Shut the fuck up,” I kicked him under that table. “You know as well as I do that *nothing* can happen between Rachel and me. I’ll lose my damn patch. You heard Viper.”

His laughter faded with that remark. “Yeah, you’re right... But she won’t be here forever.”

“Yeah, Viper might want to hand her to over to Victor Sanchez.” The name sent a chill down my spine and a burst of anger in my chest.

Gunner shook his head. “Nah, he wouldn’t do that. Rachel isn’t the enemy, her stupid brother is. Viper is just hot over the money owed to Charlie. If he can get that, it’ll be grand.”

I bit the inside of my cheek, not stopping until I tasted copper. “I’m worried that’s what it will take to get the money.”

“Damn, you’re *worried*.” Gunner blinked at me, like I was a stranger or something. “That’s something I don’t think I’ve ever heard you say. Normal Axle would just be telling us to off her and go on.”

“I don’t kill women.”

“Not unless you have a reason,” he pointed out. “But yeah, all I’m saying is that whatever is you got going on with Rachel must be strong enough to ward off the logical—or maybe not so logical—side of you. It’s not a bad thing... maybe concerning, though. Of all the fucking women...,” His voice trailed off as he paused to rub his eyes. “But is it mutual or are you just obsessed with her?” The way he said the word *obsessed* made my skin crawl. I wasn’t a fucking stalker, or creep in general.

“It’s mutual,” I said with confidence. “Though,” my confidence started to drain. “She might be playing a game to get favor—or maybe it’s Stockholm syndrome. I don’t know.”

“Kind of hard to know when you’re keeping her locked in your basement,” Gunner cackled, tipping his head back. “Oh man, only you would fall for someone in this situation. Viper will have your head.”

“You’re not gonna fucking tell him.”

“We all know you’re sweet on her,” his voice grew serious. “But yeah, I won’t be telling. That’s the fastest way to get your ass into bigger trouble—or panic Viper enough to make a rash decision. He’s freaking the fuck out over this money.”

“It *is* a lot of money,” I admitted, leaning back in the chair. “And I don’t think—”

The sound of a phone ringing on the table cut our conversation short, and we exchanged glances as I swept up the burner phone of Rachel’s. I glanced at the blocked number, holding it out for Gunner to see.

“Answer it,” I said, tossing it to him.

“You answer it.”

I rolled my eyes, hitting the accept button. “Yeah?”

“I wanna talk to my sister,” Chaz’s voice came over the line.

“Hmm,” I began, chuckling. “That’s quite a way to put in a request. You’ve gone silent for days... For all you know, she’s dead.”

“She better not be fucking dead,” he growled on the other end, and I couldn’t help but smile at the reaction—though it was *very* different than the previous one. “I can have half the money to you tomorrow. Tell me the drop and it’ll be there.”

I ignored the hopeful look on Gunner’s face. “And then the remaining half? When you gonna have that, Chaz?”

“I don’t know,” he snapped. “But you can’t fucking keep my sister locked up like this. The whole damn FBI is gonna be out looking for her.”

I let out a sigh, rolling my eyes at the threat. “Yeah, we both know you ain’t reported her missing. That would mean *you* might get in trouble, and you’d rather your sister end up dead than you go to prison again.”

There were a few beats of silence before he replied. “The feds wouldn’t do shit to find her. And that’s just asking for her to die.”

He wasn’t wrong.

“You know half of the money won’t get her released.” I leaned back in my chair, cracking my neck. It was stiff from a shitty night’s worth of sleep.

Gunner was texting like crazy on his phone, his fingers moving a hundred miles an hour, and I knew he was reaching out to Viper. It wouldn’t be long and we’d be having another meeting... And hopefully planning a drop for that cash.

Chaz let out a sharp, irritated breath. “I know it won’t get her released, but can it at least make sure she’s kept alive? Unharmmed?”

“I suppose that’s fair,” I said with a shrug. “We could probably make that work.”

Not that I was gonna let anything happen to her anyway.

“Great, now let me talk to her. You’re not getting shit unless she’s alive and well,” he growled.

I chuckled again. “What’s with the change of heart there, bud? You didn’t seem to give a shit one way or another about her—now you’re worried?” I was mostly toying with him, but I was also trying to figure out what the fuck was going on... And I was hoping that it didn’t involve Victor Sanchez.

“Just let me talk to her.”

“No,” I quipped. “I have to make sure that half the amount is a satisfactory payment for her survival first.”

“Keep asking to speak with her, damnit!”

I froze, hearing the voice in the background for the first time—someone was negotiating this phone call... And I didn’t

recognize the voice.

“Call back tomorrow at noon. I’ll let you know the decision.” With that, I hung up the phone, tossing it onto the table.

“Why’d you cut it short like that? I think Viper was going to go for it. We could’ve set it all up with him. We have no idea if he’ll call back tomorrow or not.” Gunner sounded irritated as he thudded his phone down on the wooden surface.

I shook my head. “Someone is there with him, pushing him to make the deal. I don’t know if it’s the feds or someone else. I heard them in the background pushing him to keep trying to put Rachel on the phone.”

Gunner’s expression shifted. “Aw, shit. Surely, it’s not the feds. I don’t think that would benefit him in any way, and he damn sure doesn’t care enough about her to get himself in trouble to rescue her.”

“Yeah, so who else could it be?” I questioned, already thinking I knew the answer. I couldn’t be sure, but I was *almost* positive.

“Lucas Gray,” Gunner said with a defeated sigh. “I wouldn’t put it past him to do something like this.”

“Rachel has no idea how powerful her partner is,” I grunted, shaking my head.

“Unless she’s just not letting on? She may know who he’s got connections with, and she might know to play dumb until he finds her.”

I nodded, not voicing my disagreement. I think Lucas didn’t tell her about his connections in order to keep her safe in the event it came back to bite him. “No matter what the situation, I don’t think Lucas is going to waste a bunch of time trying to come up with some sort of rescue mission. He knows the answer is to get the money and make the exchange. He grew up in the underworld—he knows the fucking rules of this shit.”

“True. No harm comes to anyone if you just follow the damn rules.” Gunner shifted in the chair, pushing it back from

the table and rising to his feet. “Viper wants to talk about this drop—and the stipulations. Half isn’t going to be enough to make Charlie happy. He wants him throw in drugs.”

Frustration boiled in my chest. “And what the hell are we gonna do with drugs? We *aren’t* drug dealers. That’s not our game—that’s the shit that Charlie’s guys do.”

“He’s thinking it’ll make it even. If Chaz gives us enough drugs to make up for the other half—”

“We’re gonna need a semi-truck to pull that off, and you know it.”

“I didn’t say it was a good idea,” he snapped at me. “But I’m not the president of the club either—and neither are you. We don’t call the shots. We just fucking see them out.”

“He’s losing his mind over this debt,” I seethed, anger boiling. “He’ll get us all locked up in fucking prison.”

“Yeah, and I’m sure the club will vote it down, but there’s no point in voicing the concerns until it’s put before the table.”

“Which I won’t be present for since I have to be here.”

Gunner nodded, his hostility dissipating. “Yeah, that’s kind of a problem, isn’t it? I would say we could have it here... But I don’t think we want a whole trail of bikers headed out here. That’s going to draw attention to us—and I would bet that if Lucas Gray is involved by now...”

“He’s got eyes on us,” I finished the thought, the weight of it hitting me a little harder once I said it out loud. “I figured Chaz would resolve this faster.”

“You’d think, but instead he’s putting everyone under strain. My guess is Lucas is trying to do the same thing you are—keep Victor Sanchez out of the equation.”

Chapter 13

Rachel

I stared at the small dent in the concrete wall, wondering how it got there. I knew no one could *punch* a dent into concrete—but at the same time, my mind had no issue picturing Ghost Eyes doing just that. He could have superhuman strength like the hulk or something...

And I'm really going crazy now.

My mind was so incredibly bored, and the books weren't cutting it anymore. I was growing restless—so restless that I had started working out in the room. I never worked out in front of people, but I had gotten to the point that it didn't even matter that someone was always watching me on the cameras.

I tapped my foot on the floor, which was clad now in plain white socks. I felt like a prison inmate, stuck in sweats and socks all the time. My stitches were healing well, though I wished I could see the doctor again... It was nearing that time of the month for me and having tampons would be really nice.

The familiar sound of the door opening broke my thoughts, and I waited to see Ghost Eyes, who hadn't been present much since our conversation about Victor Sanchez. He had gone back to just doing the bare minimum, but I tried not to concern myself with it. It didn't matter what he did or didn't do... As long as I stayed alive.

"Good afternoon, Rachel," a man greeted me—the leader of the biker gang, I think. "Your brother seems to think that if he pays half of the bill, we'll let you go."

My heart sank in my chest, defeat washing over me. "I...I don't know why he would do that." Two more men appeared from the bottom of the stairs, one of them being Ghost Eyes. He was the only one who didn't wear a mask, and I had grown used to his handsome face, finding some kind of comfort in it.

“Because he’s an idiot,” the guy retorted, shaking his head. “But we *are* willing to take half in exchange for letting you continue to live.”

I bit my lip. *How kind.*

“You think your brother would try and pull something over on us?” he asked, folding his arms across his chest.

I hesitated. Honestly, I had no idea if he would try something or not. “Um...”

He leaned forward, stopping inches from my face—and Ghost Eyes took a step forward. “Listen, if he tries *anything*, you’re fucking dead.”

There was nothing I could say to that, fear ripping through my chest. My eyes bounced between them all, my stomach churning. Would Chaz try to pull something over on them? My gut told me no, but I didn’t trust it anymore.

“He’s supposed to call at noon to discuss the drop, so I guess we’ll see if he actually reaches out,” the leader continued, taking a seat in the chair across from me. “If he doesn’t, I can’t promise your future.”

He’s just toying with me.

There was a scowl on Ghost Eyes’ face in the background, and for some reason, I had the inkling it was not directed at me—in this moment, anyway.

“Two minutes,” one of the men said from behind him. “He’s got two minutes.”

My foot tapped anxiously as I sat on the edge of the bed, my eyes glued to the cell phone sitting in his lap. *Please call, Chaz. Please.*

And just like that, the phone began to ring.

“Huh, one minute to spare,” he chuckled, hitting the answer button and putting it on speaker.

“Have you made your decision?” My brother’s voice came over the phone, sending a startling wave of relief over me. I glanced to Ghost Eyes, seeing the same reflecting in his.

“We have,” the leader said, his voice matter of fact. “You pay half—and we keep her alive...for a while, anyway.”

“I need to know she’s alive before we discuss anything further.” There was something in the tone of his voice that caught me off guard...but I couldn’t put it together.

“She’s alive,” the leader retorted, before nudging me with his foot. “Say something.”

“I’m fine,” I choked out, having to clear my throat as my voice wavered. There was a heavy sigh on the other end of the phone, and muffled voices...

And two of which I recognized.

Lucas and Tyson.

As much as I wanted to be relieved—or even ecstatic—about hearing my partner and my ex-boyfriend security specialist, it also meant there was a chance they might seriously try to pull something over on the bikers...

Or trace that burner phone.

“Happy now?” the leader quipped, rolling his eyes. “Now let’s discuss the drop.”

“I’ll drop the duffel at the bus station at Leo and Martin on the edge of town. You can pick it up under the name of Trevor Webb. It’ll be there by seven tonight.”

Something flashed in Ghost Eyes’ face that concerned me—mostly because *he* seemed concerned. However, it was fleeting, and no one else seemed bothered.

“No one will bother you,” Chaz continued. “If you don’t bother me. We know who you are, and we only have one request beyond that.”

“I don’t think you get to make requests when you’re only paying half,” the leader growled into the phone.

“You’ll get the other half when I have it,” Chaz nearly sounded like he was reading off a script, but only someone who really knew him would know...or someone who recognized the voices of the men with him.

“What’s your request?”

“Send your enforcer.”

“No,” Ghost Eyes immediately answered. “No fucking way. I’m staying right here.”

“You heard him. He’s not going.”

“Then we won’t do the drop,” Chaz barked, though I could tell he was growing irritated—and not with the bikers. Lucas and Tyson probably had something worked out...

And I was starting to think Ghost Eyes picked up on it.

“You have to send him, or it’s a no-go,” Chaz reiterated.

“I guess—”

“*No.*” Ghost Eyes cut off the leader and gained himself a glare from him. “I’m *not* gonna do it.”

The tension began to rise in the room, and the call went silent, though they didn’t hang up. I held my breath, waiting for someone to throw a punch, but surprisingly, they all stayed silent, only exchanging daggers with their eyes.

“Okay.” Chaz’s voice came through again. “Send the president to do it then. Pick up is at seven.” With that, he hung up, the line going dead.

“Well then,” the leader grunted, tossing the phone to Ghost Eyes. “Looks like you’re calling the shots now, aren’t you?”

Oh boy.

He folded his arms across his chest. “Nope, I just know that they’re wanting you to send me for a reason—and I think I know what it is.”

“I’m listening.”

“I think they’re sending someone out here.”

“They wouldn’t know where to send someone,” he retorted, standing to his feet. “And besides, at this point, I don’t think any of this should be discussed in front of her. I

don't trust her. The more time that passes, the more I think this might not end cleanly."

I blew out a sharp breath, my head feeling light. I hoped more than anything that Lucas and Tyson weren't going to try something asinine. They needed to just work to secure the funds—not try to do something heroic.

"We should talk upstairs," another one of them said. He had been silent the entire time, and he sounded more exhausted than anything else. "You're just gonna scare her."

"Who gives a shit?" the leader shot back. "Since when have we ever given a shit about scaring someone that we took on ransom? *Never*. I don't know what the hell is wrong with you dumbasses." He took off up the stairs, his boots thudding heavily.

"He's not wrong," the one that had mentioned scaring me said, letting out a frustrated sigh. "We really need Chaz to get the money together so this can all be over. It should've been simple, and now it's been complicated to hell." He shook his head, and headed for the stairs as well, followed by another who hadn't said a word the entire time.

That left me with Ghost Eyes.

"I know there's other men involved with your brother," he said to me in a low voice as soon as the door closed behind them. "And I saw the look on your face when you heard them. Who are they, princess?"

I stayed quiet.

"*Rachel*," he growled. "Who are the men who are planning this shit with your brother. I *know* you know who they are."

Fuck.

"I don't know for sure," I lied, not sure what he would do with the information. If Lucas and Tyson knew what was good for them, they would let this part of the drop happen effortlessly... But something made me wonder *why* they wanted Ghost Eyes to do the pickup.

“I think they know the location,” he continued, his voice staying so quiet that I was certain no one could hear it over the camera monitor speakers. Well, I guess I wasn’t *certain* of that, but it was a solid guess. “And that’s why they want me gone.”

I chewed the inside of my cheek. “I don’t know how they would.”

“But you know who *they* are?”

“I don’t know,” I said again. “And even if I *did*, I don’t know how they’d know this location. I don’t see them being able to trace the line. That would require federal help... I don’t think they’d get federal help.”

Why the fuck am I telling him this?

“They could’ve been creeping around, followed one of us out here,” he reasoned, taking a long deep breath. “But I hope you’re aware that just because I don’t hate *you*, doesn’t mean that I won’t kill someone who shows up.”

The thought of Lucas or Tyson crossing him made my stomach hurt, and all I could do was nod.

He tilted his head at me, studying my face for a long few seconds while I squirmed uncomfortably. “You’re willing to risk their lives in order to not be a snitch?”

“I guess so,” I admitted, knowing that Lucas would *kill* me if I told them I heard his voice over the phone. Part of me thinks he did it on purpose, taking the risk so I would know he was coming for me—and that he had it figured out. However, the presence of Tyson...*ugh*.

That just made me worry.

Tyson was a smart guy—smarter than most, actually—but he was irrational. His knee-jerk reactions had gotten me into trouble more than my dumbass brother had. He might be a whizz with security cameras and self-defense moves, but he was an idiot when it came to his own self-preservation. He thought he was superman, and by some stroke of luck, he was still alive to tell all the stories.

Ghost Eyes shook his head at me. “You know, this shit is complicated.”

I furrowed my brow, trying to ignore what his eyes did to my body. “Okay...”

“I can’t keep you alive if I don’t know what the fuck I’m up against, Rachel,” he snapped, his voice now in a full-blown whisper. “And if you think that I’ll go against my president, you’re *wrong*.”

I straightened my shoulders, refusing to give into the fear gnawing at me. “Well, that’s a very contradictory statement, considering your *president* seems to have no qualms with killing me. You don’t seem like anyone that I should hand over my trust to.”

He narrowed his eyes but then nodded. “Okay, then. I guess you’ve made your choice, haven’t you?”

I laughed, my mind flickering back to the shower scene. “Last time I checked, you made your decision too. Let’s not forget who rejected who.”

The anger in his eyes flared.

And I forced myself to smile.

Please, Lucas, don’t do something stupid.

Chapter 14

Axle

She knows them.

She knows who was on the other end of the phone with her brother.

That didn't give me much of an answer, considering she had grown up in the drug world. It could've been anyone she had known over the years...*or* her partner.

And that was the one that made me the most nervous.

"Okay, so we're going to keep this simple," Viper said with a weary sigh as he glanced between us. We were keeping most of our members at bay this go round, only involving who we needed to—Gunner, Will, Viper, and well, of course, *me*. "Will, you'll ride with me to the bus station. I think Gunner should stay here with Axle... Just in case he's right about them knowing where she's at."

"That's fine with me," Gunner said, plopping down in the chair. "You two need to be careful though. It could be a trap."

"I don't think it is," Viper said, shrugging.

"Me neither," I admitted, though what was going to happen on *this* end...I wasn't sure. Something about the entire thing had me feeling uneasy—and that name...

That's my fucking name...

And none of these guys knew it.

"All right, well, we'll leave you ladies to it," Will chuckled, heading for the door. "Don't do anything stupid."

"No intentions to," Gunner grunted in reply.

They said their goodbyes and slipped out, shutting the door behind them as they left. Gunner and I sat in silence until the roar of their bikes had faded into the evening air. My eyes

flickered to the screen for the cameras, and there was Rachel, pacing. She was nervous, and wouldn't tell me why...

And it had pissed me the fuck off—but she made a good point.

If I gave into my urges when it came to her, I could lose my patch. I could lose the life I had worked hard to build with my brothers. There was a lot at stake...

But she had a lot at stake too.

She'd given me the chance to have her in every way that I wanted, and I had turned her away for good. Granted, I wasn't sure that I would abide by that...if I could ever get her out of this situation. But once she was out, she might not want anything to do with me anyway.

Fuck.

“What did you stay down there and talk to her about?” Gunner mused, reaching out for his beer sitting on the edge of the table. “That had Viper damn near burning a hole in the floor up here with his pacing.”

I shrugged. “I was trying to get her to tell me who the other voices were on the phone.”

“Other voices?”

“The guys in the background. I think she recognized them based on the look on her face. I could just tell that something shifted when she heard them.”

“Could've just been Chaz's little minions or something?”

“I don't think so... She seemed really fucking put off by hearing them.”

Gunner seemed to mull over the thought for a few moments, sipping on his beer. “What if it was her partner?”

“That's kind of what I was thinking... I just don't know what he would do—but there's also something else...,” My voice trailed off as my stomach churned, making me wish that I didn't have the past I did.

He narrowed his eyes as I shifted in my seat. “What else?”

“You know how all you guys grew up together? Well, mostly, anyway... And I just kind of floated in here a few years ago?”

“Yeah... Your rap sheet is squeaky clean, but you kill people like it’s nothing to you. We’ve always assumed that you worked for the mob bosses in NYC, right? That’s what you said you did, doing the dirty jobs—always thought it was surprising that you never moved up in that world.”

I took a deep breath. “Yeah, that’s not true.”

Gunner’s straight look grew dark. “And so, you lied to the club? That’s grounds for fucking death, Axle.”

I nodded. “I know, but if I tell you what I’m about to fucking tell you, you have to swear—like *swear*—that you will not tell a soul.”

“I’m not swearing on anything.”

Frustration grew in my chest. “No, I don’t think you understand how important this is. I can’t fucking let the truth get out about who I am—and I think that’s the on the edge of happening right now.”

He blew out a sharp breath, setting his beer down with a heavy hand. “Fine. Tell me what you need to tell me, but I’m already keeping your secrets about your fucking feelings for Rachel.”

“Trevor Webb is my real name.”

“I thought Collin Adams was your real name.”

“It is, but *Trevor Webb* was my first name.”

He gave me a funny look but nodded. “Okay, explain.”

“I was born in New York City—that was true—and I *was* connected to the mob... but as a bastard child to Gifford Vitali. I rose pretty fucking fast in the ranks, but his legitimate son, Nick Vitali, felt threatened by me. We got into a pretty big feud. My father wrote me off, sent me packing, and put a hit

on my head. I changed my name and ran like hell to the other side of the country... And here I am.” I felt sick to my stomach at the look on Gunner’s face. “I have a *friend* in high places in with the feds, and he helped me pull off the identity change. It was basically like witness protection, really... And uh, Trevor Webb died in a car accident in upstate New York ten years ago.”

“Holy shit...”

“Yeah, it’s a lot,” I admitted, my head starting to spin as Chaz’s voice echoed in my head, stating my *real* name.

“And someone on the other end of that phone knows who you are.”

“I don’t know.”

“Yeah, you do.” Gunner took a deep breath. “You think they were trying to lure you out to the drop to whack you?”

“I don’t know,” I repeated myself. “It’s either that, or to just fucking toy with me. If her... If Rachel’s conniving partner is in on this... He’s got connections with the Vitalis in New York. It’s *possible* he might know.”

“This is fucking *bad*.”

“Yeah, Viper might kill me,” I chuckled, running my fingers through my dark hair. “I don’t keep in contact with anyone from my old life. My mom passed long before I ever made it out. There was a hit on her made by Gifford’s wife.”

“Makes sense,” Gunner grunted. “Nothing like whacking a mistress.”

“I don’t know. I’ve blocked most of it out.”

“What the hell are you gonna do?” Gunner demanded, folding his arms over his chest. “Because you might be in one hell of a mess if they know who you are—and Viper needs to know so we can prepare for some high-level shit. We might even have to tell Charlie...”

“No way.”

“He could offer you protection,” Gunner reasoned, shrugging his shoulders. “And you might need it if word is getting out. You can’t just keep running.”

Darkness slipped into my brain as I came to realize the cold truth of my intentions. “I’m not going to run.”

“I don’t know what Viper will do, man,” Gunner let out a groan. “He’s gonna be pissed at you. Why the hell did you not just go move to some small little Midwest town and live a quiet life?”

I laughed. “Can you imagine *me* trying to play nice, law-abiding civilian. It would’ve never lasted. And to be honest, I figured if they were looking, *that’s* where they’d be at.”

“But they thought you died in a car accident.”

“Yeah, I thought so, but what are the odds of someone using that name? You think it’s common enough that it’s just some strange coincidence? Because I’m not naïve enough to think that—and I know you’re not either.”

Gunner nodded. “I know, I know. Maybe we should do more digging into Chaz’s associates? See if any of them are connected to the family of yours back in NYC? Maybe he’s got someone on the inside. It would make sense. They *know* us. We were doing business with them.”

“Yeah, but they never saw my face.” And that was the truth. I always wore a half bandana when dealing with outsiders. To catch me without one, you’d have to be at the clubhouse or maybe just at the grocery store? I *had* let my guard down the last few years, growing comfortable in my new life.

And maybe that had come back to bite me.

“Okay, so if it’s not him, and it’s the partner of Rachel’s... How much digging have you done on him?”

“All I know is that he’s in bed with the Las Vegas mob. I don’t know the connection beyond that. He’s covered his tracks, and that’s concerning to me.”

“Me too.” Gunner downed the rest of his beer and tossed it into the trash. “You think they still have the hit out on you?”

I didn’t have an answer for that. “I have no fucking clue, man. I got the hell out of Dodge, and I never looked back. I lived paranoid for a long time, but everything died off once the accident was published in the paper and they ran the story on the news.”

“They made up a crash?”

“Yeah, well, *someone else* crashed, and they used the footage. It was really ingenious, though I don’t know if I still believe that if I’ve been found out.”

“We have to tell Viper as soon as they get back.”

“I know that,” I said, my voice dropping. “And things are already bad enough between the two of us.”

“I don’t think he’ll give you the boot,” Gunner said, though his words lacked confidence. He just might strip you of your position—but I can’t be sure. We can’t be sure that the name was on purpose either.”

“Right,” I grumbled, knowing that he was just trying to destress the situation. That’s what Gunner always did, and sometimes it worked for me. Tonight, it did *not* work for me...

And it *really* didn’t fucking work for me when the motion sensor went off.

He jumped to his feet, racing over to the monitors, which were taking up most of my kitchen cabinets at the moment. “Oh shit...”

“We have company, don’t we?”

“Oh yeah, yeah, we do.” Gunner gestured to the far-left screen, which was the camera angled at the farthest north corner of the place. It was the most densely wooded area, and the motion sensor had gone off for deer and other wildlife... But honestly, my gut instinct hadn’t failed me.

Someone knew where we were.

And *someone* knew who I was.

“I don’t recognize this guy,” Gunner said, his eyes glued to the screen. “That’s not Rachel’s partner.”

“Victor Sanchez?” I offered, standing to my feet to join him. “I don’t know why the hell Chaz would set him loose, but I guess that wouldn’t be that farfetched.”

“No...no, I don’t think so. Isn’t he Hispanic? This guy isn’t.”

I joined him, watching a *very* light skinned man move through the backwoods of my place. He looked to be alone from what I could tell, and he carried a pistol in one of his hands. The guy crept with precision, though I had to admit that it seemed a little hasty.

“Who the hell is he?” Gunner muttered, leaning down and squinting at the screen.

I reached into the kitchen drawer, pulling out my gun. “I don’t know, but we’re about to go find out.”

Chapter 15

Rachel

I didn't have the time, but I knew that it was close to the pick-up time for the money. I felt more nervous than ever before. I had heard some of the men leave, and honestly, I had expected Ghost Eyes to come and visit again after the way he had left so angrily, pissed off at me for telling him how it was.

But nope.

In fact, I hadn't heard *anything* at all above me for the last few hours. It had remained dead silent. Once the guys had left there had been some muffled conversation, some shuffling around, and then silence.

Lots of fucking silence.

"Guess he's sleeping," I muttered to myself, picturing him up there, sleeping away on the couch while all this shit went down at the bus station. I flopped down on the bed, my feet aching from all the pacing I had done.

Maybe I should shower.

The thought always crossed my mind, and then I never had a good reason to do so. Not to mention, I *really* needed to shave, but for obvious reasons, I wasn't given a razor. It was frustrating, and I was starting to feel like a cavewoman...but whatever. It's not like anything was shifting between Ghost Eyes and me anymore. If anything, it was going the other way.

I glanced over at the bathroom door, trying to decide if I should or if I should wait until someone came down and told me that it was time for me to die. However, I never came to a conclusion before I heard shuffling...

And noise.

Lots of fucking noise.

"What the hell?" I mumbled, standing to my feet and wandering to the center of the room. I shut my eyes, tuning my ear into the ruckus happening about me, a deep male voice

shouting profanities... My heart raced in my chest as the basement door was flung open, slamming into the wall.

“You motherfuckers will *pay* for this!”

I froze. *Oh hell, no.* I shuffled backward, preparing for the face I knew was about to come around the corner of the stairwell. My entire body tensed, my heart thrumming in my chest so heavily it felt as though it was rattling my rib cage.

And sure enough, just a few seconds later, my eyes landed on my ex-boyfriend.

“So, who’s this?” Ghost Eyes growled as he shoved Tyson down into the same chair I had been tied to. Tyson’s face was bloodied, and it dripped onto his shirt as Ghost Eyes and his friend—who now was *not* wearing a mask either—were tying him to the chair.

“*Rachel,*” Ghost Eyes turned to me, his eyes so dark I barely recognized them. “Who. Is. This.”

I blinked, swallowing hard as Tyson looked over at me, his eyes raking over my figure. “That’s... Um...”

“Ty Stetson.” My ex-boyfriend rolled his eyes. “And you better believe that I have friends in high places that will be coming to fucking get me.”

“You’re an idiot, *Ty Stetson,*” Ghost Eyes laughed, just before landing a punch right into the side of his skull. His body slumped and I let out a gasp, my hands flying to my mouth. My back hit the cold, hard concrete wall, and as the second man stood to his feet, I recognized his green eyes.

“Why is he here?” the green-eyed man said to me. “Who is he?”

I shook my head. “He’s... He’s one of the men I heard on the other end of the ph-phone,” I stumbled over my words as they both approached me. “I—I don’t know why he’s here... He’s a security specialist—and he’s always doing *very* irrational things,” I added, my voice quivering.

And I hope to God Lucas isn’t out there somewhere with him.

There was no way in hell I could see my partner approving of Tyson doing something like this. It was stupid and reckless.

“He doesn’t have any trackers on him,” Ghost Eyes continued. “He just came out here on his own accord? Because while I might believe that in some ways... I heard a third man’s voice on the other end of that phone—and you better fucking tell me who it is.” He closed the distance between us quickly, suddenly pressing his body against mine. His breath was hot on my face, sending a chill down my spine...

And of course, excitement jolted through my core.

“Who was the man?”

I squeezed my eyes shut, trying not to inhale the intoxicating scent of him. “It was... It was my partner.”

“Fuck!” Ghost Eyes slammed his fist into the wall beside me, not even phased by the bleeding knuckles he pulled away. “We are *fucked!*”

My eyes widened, not quite understanding the overdramatic reaction from him. “I-I-I doubt that Lucas sent him to get me tonight. It was probably a knee-jerk reaction. Tyson is known for that. Lucas thinks things out—like meticulously. He wanted me to hear his voice on the phone—”

“And he wanted you to hear the name,” the green-eyed guy said to Ghost Eyes, letting out a slight sigh. “He knows.”

Ghost Eyes looked like he might throw up—and that was something that completely caught me off guard. “Yeah, he must know. We gotta tell Viper.”

“And pronto.”

“I’m sorry,” I interrupted, my eyes searching Ghost Eyes’ face. “I was hoping they’d just do the drop and finagle the rest of the money. He... He’s too smart to go trying to pull off some stupid stunt like this,” I gestured to Tyson.

Before anyone could say anything, a phone rang out.

The green-eyed man dug out a cell phone and answered it. “Yeah?” His expression shifted to relief just before he

headed to the stairs, his voice too quiet to make out.

“I’m sorry,” I said again, directing it to Ghost Eyes.

He whipped his head around to me, his knuckles dripping blood to the floor. “You’re not fucking sorry and don’t pretend like you are, princess.”

“I had no idea he was coming.”

“Right, but you were, what? Hoping that he was? You think that I don’t *actually* know who this idiot is?” He took a few steps closer to me. “I fucking *studied* you, Rachel. I watched your every move. I know the men you’ve been with—and this guy? Yeah, I know he fucked you more than a few times.”

Anger burned in my chest. “So then why did you even ask me? To *test* me? Test my loyalty? What did you want me to do? Ever since you kidnapped me, I have been cut off from the rest of the world. I have *no* idea what is going on out there!” There was a desperation in my tone that I wasn’t proud of, but it didn’t matter. I didn’t care.

“You got him?” the other guy interrupted the conversation. “I got a sick kid that I need to pick up—and the drop was successful.”

“Yeah, I got this,” Ghost Eyes barked, turning back to him. “He’s going to be out for a long time.”

“Yeah, he is. That sedative has long kicked in now too. He won’t even wake up with a headache from the punch.”

“Nope,” Ghost Eyes quipped. “Hope your kid feels better.”

“Don’t kill him...yet,” he called back to him just before jogging up the steps.

My heart was pounding in my ears as the basement door shut, leaving me alone with Ghost Eyes and a very unconscious Tyson. His entire body was slumped over in the chair—and I wondered just how long of a conversation they’d had with him *before* bringing him down here.

“I mean it when I say that I’m sorry.” I didn’t know why I kept feeling the need to apologize, like I hadn’t withheld the information that I knew Tyson *might* try something. I had really hoped that Lucas wouldn’t let him... But my partner wasn’t the type to try and control anyone. For all I knew, Tyson could’ve snuck off without him knowing.

But regardless, I was sure that Lucas was not coming after him. If he wasn’t with him in the woods, he wouldn’t have come after the fact. He really did think things through—and he knew that the bikers just wanted their money.

“You need to tell me *everything* you know about what might be happening.” His words snapped me out of my thoughts.

“I don’t know anything else. I only know I heard them on the other end of the phone when Chaz called—that’s all I know. I swear.”

He nodded, before coming back to me. However, this time, he left about a foot in between us. “So, do you know who I am?”

That’s a weird, confusing question.

I shook my head. “I know that you’re the enforcer for the Steel Heretics.”

He nodded, narrowing his eyes as he scrutinized my face. “But do you *know* who I am outside of that? Do you know my name? Do you know what I do? Do you know my past?”

Okay, now I was really confused—and I knew it was written all over my face.

“You don’t know.”

I shook my head. “I have no idea who you are. I don’t even know your name.”

He took a deep breath, but he didn’t move, nor did his expression shift. “I’m going to believe you when you say that.”

“Okay,” I said carefully, wishing I didn’t feel the chemistry exploding between us as his eyes flickered over my figure. “I have a question... Well, more of a request...”

He chuckled. “Brave of you making requests when you just almost got me killed.”

I stared at him in disbelief, my gaze rolling over his nearly flawless figure. “He looks like he got a beating—not you. The concrete wall did more damage to you.”

“Had the element of surprise,” he said. “I don’t think he knew we have cameras everywhere, which is surprising, considering he’s a security specialist.”

I rolled my eyes. “He’s great at figuring out the best way to secure your place, but I don’t think he’s great at figuring out what other people have.”

He nodded, his eyes having grown a shade or two lighter. “The cameras out there were new, so they’re not on the same system as the originals.”

“Smart move.” My voice came out sultrier than I intended.

Ghost Eyes tongue ran along his bottom lip. “And what’s this request that you have?”

“I would like a razor,” I said quietly. “I just want to shave. I never let my legs get this bad. It’s uncomfortable.”

He laughed, shaking his head at me. “I think you already know the answer to that, don’t you?”

“You can just stand right outside of the shower while I shave—don’t give me the razor until after I get in. I’m not going to do anything with it. I seriously just don’t know how much longer I’ll be here... I don’t want to die with hair on my legs.” It sounded dramatic, but I didn’t care. It was stressful seeing my ex-boyfriend passed out in a chair in the basement...

And I needed some sort of normalcy to distract me from what I was sure to come...

My death.

“Please,” I added, my voice faltering when he didn’t answer immediately. “I’m not out to hurt you... I mean, I don’t think I could.” My eyes flickered to Tyson’s broken nose and bleeding lip. It didn’t take much to see who had the upper hand. Granted, I would assume it was two against one...but still.

“I can’t let you have a razor,” he sighed, running his hands over his face like I had just asked for a million dollars. “Strange timing too.” He glanced at Tyson and then back to me.

“Not really,” I countered, wrapping my arms around myself and pleading with my eyes. We lingered there for a few more long moments before a smile finally tugged at his lips.

“Okay, I’ll let you. On *one* condition.”

My heart dropped. “Okay, what?”

“I’ll do it for you.”

Chapter 16

Axle

“If you run, you know what’ll happen,” I warned her, glancing over my shoulder as we reached the top of the basement stairs. “And I’ll kill your boyfriend.”

“*Ex-boyfriend*,” she corrected me, rolling her eyes. The gesture was one I hadn’t seen much of from her, and I had to admit the sass really did it for me. I knew that this was going to be torture for me... But I couldn’t trust her with a razor either.

And I did love to torture myself occasionally.

I opened the basement door, halfway expecting her to take off at a dead run, but she didn’t. I guided her out and locked it behind me. Honestly, I could’ve just grabbed a razor and used the bathroom there, but with Tyson tied up—unconscious or not—I didn’t want to take the risk. Not to mention, it would leave the door unlocked, making it easier for him to make a run for it if he managed to get loose.

“Wow, this is nice,” Rachel muttered, pulling my attention from my thoughts.

I glanced back, seeing her taking in the kitchen and living room. “It’s not bad.”

“It’s not what I was expecting,” she met my gaze, sending a jolt of excitement through my core.

“What were you expecting?” I chuckled, before guiding her to the last room at the end of the hall, *my* room.

“I don’t know, something messy and unkempt.”

“Hmm, well, I keep it clean,” I said, careful not to divulge too much information. It was risky enough as it was to let her out of the basement, and as we stepped into my room, I let go of her wrist, testing just how much of flight risk she was. I shut and locked the door, even though the chances of someone showing up were slim... for the time being, anyway.

She followed me into the master bath, taking in the stone walk-in shower and jacuzzi tub. I wasn't one to take a bath, but it had been there when I moved in, and I had allowed it to be updated in the process of the remodel.

"Is this *your* house?" Rachel asked, lingering just outside of the shower. Her voice was full of nerves—and maybe a little excitement—but that might've just been my mind conjuring that one up.

"Not answering that," I quipped, taking a step toward her. I reached for the bottom of her T-shirt, tugging it up and over her head. Her hazel blonde hair fell over her bare shoulders, and I had to fight myself to keep from kissing her bare skin. She shimmied out of her sweatpants without my help, leaving her standing on the gray tile in just her underwear and bra.

I leaned forward, nearly smiling as her chest rose and fell dramatically. I knew she was expecting something more from me, but I only reached forward to turn on the water for the shower.

"Excited, princess?" I teased her, smirking.

Her face flushed, though she didn't say anything. My cock was straining in my jeans, but I did my best to ignore it. If she didn't make the first move... I wasn't touching her. And even if she did—and I could help myself—I would try not to give in. As much as I wanted her, the fear of losing my patch was heavy on my mind.

"Finish undressing," I instructed her, backing away to grab a fresh razor from one of the cabinets. I wasn't really the type to shave, but I kept one on hand. I tried to keep my focus on the razor, and not Rachel's now-naked body stepping into the shower.

"Are you going to undress?" she asked, her voice wavering slightly.

I raised a brow at her. "You want me to?"

"I mean... Otherwise you're going to get soaked..." her voice trailed off as her eyes made their way over my body. My

dick throbbed as I recognized the lust in her expression, the same look she gave me in the woods.

“If you want me naked, I’ll get naked,” I chuckled, setting the razor on the counter and ripping my T-shirt over my head. She kept a close eye on me as I tossed my shirt to the ground and slid out of my jeans and boxer briefs. My erection bounced free, and her pretty hazel eyes widened as she took it in.

The water matted her hair to her head, and I had to admit it was a fucking sight for sore eyes. I grabbed the shaving cream and stepped under the hot water.

She gazed up at me as I towered over her, lingering there for a split second before I dropped to my knees. Rachel caught her breath, her legs visibly tensing.

“Please be careful,” she warned me, her voice coming out sultry.

I chuckled. “I’m skilled with a blade, princess. I’ll only cut you if I want to.”

“Please don’t.”

I shook my head, guiding her out of the stream of water. I was eye level with her pussy, and as much as I wanted to lean in and taste every fucking inch of her, I focused on the task at hand. Starting with her legs, I slathered them with shaving cream, my cock throbbing as my fingertips reached her upper thighs.

Rachel trembled at my touch, and I moved a little higher, inches from her pussy. She braced against me, but I pulled away, grabbing the razor.

“I could’ve done this myself,” she muttered, wrapping her arms around herself as I moved steadily with the razor. I moved quickly, knowing the longer I stayed there between her legs, the more likely I was to give in to my dark desires.

“I can’t let you.” I glided the blade over the inside of her calf. I kept my eyes glued to her legs, taunting her as I came dangerously close to her sweet spot. She was still smooth in her bikini area, and my guess was that she waxed.

I finished her legs, guiding her into the stream of water to rinse, and she let out a sigh as the warm water caressed her skin. I stood to my feet, and as I did, my cock brushed her bare stomach, making me shiver in response.

Fuck.

“I still need to shave my armpits...,” she said, giving me an embarrassed smile.

I chuckled, reaching out and grabbing her arm. I lifted it over her head, squinting at the spot. “I don’t even see anything.”

“It’s there,” she urged, reaching for the razor. “Please just let me get rid of it. It drives me *crazy*.” The way Rachel said the words were cute, and I fought my mind off, pushing away the thoughts of being with her like this in *real* life.

“I got it,” I breathed out, using the shaving cream and beginning to shave them.

She eyed me, her breaths coming out uneven. “Thank you,” she murmured as I rinsed her, setting the razor on the black wire shelf hanging on the wall.

“Yeah, you’re welcome,” I muttered, a surge of disappointment hitting me as I knew I had no more reason to be there in the water with her. I reached for a towel, but her hand caught my forearm. I froze, my eyes shifting back to hers, searching them. “You’re playing a dangerous game, princess.”

Her plump lips parted, revealing her stark white teeth. “I know,” she nearly whispered. “But...”

“But what?” I urged, taking a step toward her, my body inches from her erect, pink nipples. “Tell me what you want.”

She swallowed audibly, the water streaming down her body, leaving glistening trails of moisture as her gaze locked with mine. “*You*. I want you.”

That did it.

Fuck. My lips crashed to hers, and she let out a moan as I nipped at her bottom lip. I grabbed her waist, pulling her

against me. Our slick bodies were hot against each other, and the heady lust hung heavy in the air around us as I fucking devoured her mouth. Her hands wrapped around my neck as I pinned her against the back of the shower wall.

Rachel grinded her lower stomach against my cock, and I growled with need as I broke my lips from hers. My kiss trailed down her jaw, neck, collar bones, and then finally made it to her fucking perfect tits. I kissed the ample flesh, making my way to her pretty little nipples.

She cried out as I sucked as much of her breast as I could into my mouth. My fingers trailed down her bare stomach, not stopping until I slipped my fingers through her folds, groaning at the amount of natural lubrication—she fucking wanted me.

“*Ooh,*” Rachel moaned as I rubbed her clit, my mouth still on her breast. Her back arched against the shower wall, and I increased the pressure, sliding two fingers into her tight pussy. My cock throbbed, wanting nothing more than to be buried deep inside of her, but words I had told her lingered in my mind...

That’s never going to happen.

Her body shivered and her cries grew louder as she came undone, climaxing around me. Her pussy clenched my fingers, and I nearly burst at the thought of what that would feel like around my cock.

“Oh my *god,*” she panted as her eyes fluttered open, the golden hue a little darker beneath the warm lights in the shower.

I pulled my mouth away from her breasts. I had to stop myself...

“No,” she grabbed for me, her voice breaking. “*Please.*”

I stopped, my hands still on her waist, my cock brushing against her. “Please, what?” I demanded, my voice husky with the intoxicating need for her.

“Please don’t stop,” she whispered, her hand gliding down chest, abdomen, and then coming to a stop just above

my cock. I held my breath as she went lower, her soft hand landing on my shaft.

Oh shit.

Her stroke was gentle, but I still groaned at her touch, overcome with how bad I wanted *her*. I could have ass anytime I wanted... But ever since laying my eyes on her, I didn't want anyone else. I slammed my fisted hand against the tile above her, warring with myself.

"Why won't you just take me?" she asked, unphased by the motion as she continued to stroke me. "I'm telling you to."

"I just can't," I said through gritted teeth, holding back pertinent information.

"But you want to?" she countered, her eyes dancing across my face. There was a hint of amusement there in her irises. I found it ironic, considering I was supposed to be the bad guy, yet she was the one who was torturing me.

"I do want you," I growled, her stroking growing faster.

"Then take me," she batted her thick, natural eyelashes beneath the water.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Pleasure clouded every ounce of my brain, and reached down, unable to hold back any longer. I lifted her from her the shower floor, not even bothering with going easy. The moment her pussy was aligned, I plunged my cock deep inside of her.

We both cried out, my cock stretching her and her pussy clenching around my shaft. I kept her pinned against the wall as I thrust into her wetness, more than enough lube to glide in and out easily.

"Oh my god," she panted, threading her hands through my hair. She pulled me toward her, and I greedily took her lips in a hot kiss. I had given into the craving and broken *all* the rules.

But it had never felt so damn good.

Chapter 17

Rachel

He was so fucking big, and I couldn't hold back the moans as his cock hit my internal spot, sending my body flying back toward a second orgasm. I dug my fingernails into his skin, unable to hear anything other than the slapping of his body against mine, and his growls in my mouth.

My pussy clenched just as I broke our kiss to take a breath. "I'm gonna cum," I whimpered, my back arching as I shut my eyes.

"Look at me," he growled, his grip directing my face to him. "I want you to fucking look at me while that pussy comes all over my cock." His words sent me climaxing, and I exploded around her, my cry louder than the first. He fucked me through the high, not stopping until I had come down.

His gray eyes went dark as he reached his own climax, pulling out just in time to explode all over my stomach. "*Fuck*," he groaned afterward, his eyes searching mine as we stood there under the hot water of the shower.

I felt my face flush as the realization of what we had just done settled in my mind. It was exactly what I had wanted—and my body thought it needed. However, I never imagined the afterthought...

I just seduced my kidnapper.

The water washed away the remnants of him from my stomach, but my lips and pussy were still swollen from his touch.

"You should probably get cleaned up," he cleared his throat, grabbing for the razor on the shelf and a towel off the rack.

And then he left me.

I blinked a few times as he slammed the bathroom door. He had left the mess of our clothing on the floor, and the smell

of sex still hung heavy in the air. Part of me felt guilty for giving in, and the other part of me was angry at him for leaving me like that... Besides, *why* couldn't he touch me? I knew the kinds of things kidnappers did to their victims, and while Ghost Eyes wasn't that type, I didn't understand him either.

It was consensual.

I washed quickly, recognizing the soap I used as the same scent I always caught from him. Somehow, it was comforting, but his absence made me feel lonely...

But also trusted.

My eyes flickered to the window—one much bigger than the one I had shimmied through in the bathroom of the basement. I ignored it though, knowing that if I wanted to make it out alive, I would have to play by the rules... I was underneath Ghost Eyes' skin—and that was a win.

Well, I hoped it was.

I grabbed a towel and dried off, my smooth legs refreshing as I slid back into my clothes. I would put on something fresh once I made it back to the basement...

Where I was no longer alone.

I scrunched my nose at the thought of Tyson. I had no desire to be stuck in any room with him. He hadn't been a good boyfriend, and I hadn't told many about the toxic power dynamic that he illustrated while we were together. He played on the good side of the law...

But he had a dark side that I wasn't a fan of.

"I see you didn't try to sneak out of the window," Ghost Eyes greeted me as I stepped out of the bathroom and into his bedroom. "Good for you, princess. I was thinking I might get another chase."

I shifted my weight, my pussy already a little sore from his size. "I can't run fast enough. Not worth injuring my feet again." My wounds were healing, and I took care of them myself now, most of the stitches having dissolved.

“Smart woman,” he said flatly as he stood to his feet, already dressed in a fresh pair of black jeans and white T-shirt with some sort of motorcycle logo on it.

“That’s debatable,” I grumbled, approaching him with caution. We had just fucked in the shower, but I felt leery of him now. Between him stepping out and my guilt stepping in, I wasn’t sure what to think of the moment.

“Let’s get you back,” Ghost Eyes grunted, ripping open the door. He didn’t touch me this time, gesturing for me to in front of him. I ducked my head as I passed him, feeling some kind of rejection by the action. I don’t know why it hurt—I shouldn’t have let it—but I kept my eyes down as I made my way back to the basement.

My fingers fumbled with the locks, and he let out a sigh, reaching around to work them open. “Sorry,” I muttered. He didn’t say anything in response, sliding the locks and opening the door. I stepped through, halfway expecting him to join me, but he hovered on the other side of the threshold.

“I’ll bring food later,” he grunted.

“Are you just going to pretend like nothing happened?” I choked out, barely having the courage to meet his eyes.

He let out a sigh, and for the first time since I had known him, he appeared genuinely human in his reaction. Ghost Eyes looked tired, and maybe even a little distraught. What happened between us must’ve had him feeling just as conflicted as it had me.

“You don’t have to say anything,” I said quietly. I turned my back to him and headed down the stairs, leaving him there at the top. It was the closest thing I had to power in the moment—walking away from him.

“Rachel…” his voice trailed off, barely even audible over my footsteps. I almost turned around to look at him, but I didn’t. I was too busy blinking back the unwanted moisture filling my eyes.

My footsteps felt heavy as I made my way to the dresser. I grabbed fresh clothes and headed to the bathroom, stripping

down and changing. Part of me was tempted to take another shower and try to replace the scent of his soap...

But the stronger part of me wasn't quite ready to get rid of it.

"Fuck, my *face*," a voice groaned as I stepped out of the bathroom. Tyson turned his head toward me, blinking his eyes as I wrapped my arms around myself. "Glad to see they're not beating up on you."

"Nope," I said curtly, heading for the bed to pretend I could sleep.

He narrowed his eyes at me as I tugged back the covers. "Where were you?"

I furrowed my brow, gesturing to the door. "In the bathroom?"

"No, before that," he snapped, shaking his head. "I was starting to wake up, and you were nowhere in sight—and then you showed back up. Where did they take you? What'd they do to you?"

"I was here," I lied, hoping to use the sedation as a means to cover up what happened. If I told Tyson what I'd done, he'd either be pissed at me or try to say that it was forced—and I didn't feel like dealing with it.

Tyson was silent for a few beats, and I wasn't sure if he believed me or not. But if he didn't, he didn't show it. "These are some bad guys."

"The bikers?" I asked, my curiosity overcoming my dislike of my ex-boyfriend.

He shrugged. "Yeah, the bikers. Most of them are pretty petty when it comes to actual convictions, except for one with a murder charge. He killed the guy who murdered his father—interesting story, really."

I nodded, wondering if it was mine. Well, not that Ghost Eyes was mine. He walked out right after sex. "That's intriguing, but you know, most of the time guys join the clubs because they don't fit into society."

“Or maybe they’re running from their past,” Tyson countered, letting out a sigh. “And I hate to break it to you, but I don’t have high hopes for us. Lucas had been keeping his eye on the one that goes by *Axle* for quite some time.”

“I don’t know which one that is,” I chuckled, propping my back against a pillow so that I faced Tyson. More than likely, Ghost Eyes was watching, maybe even listening to our conversation... But I didn’t care.

“He’s the one who punched my fucking lights out down here,” he grunted, shaking his head.

My stomach knotted up. “Oh? The one with the gray eyes?”

“Yeah, he’s got gray eyes,” Tyson said with a shrug. “He’s a bad, *bad* dude, Rachel. Lucas has been keeping an eye on him for a while, though he wouldn’t ever tell me why. He’s got a fake name and shit. His current identity is Collin Adams, but his real name is Trevor Webb.”

Something about the name sounded familiar, but I couldn’t piece it together in my mind. It would probably hit me later. “So, who is he?” I tried to keep a serious business tone, but honestly, I was dying to know who Ghost Eyes really was...

And if he might kill me.

“He was the son of one of the big mob bosses in New York City, but he was the child of a mistress, Tisha Webb. I don’t think he was ever supposed to get involved in the mob, but his father played a little bit of favorites. Trevor rose fast in the ranks, and he was a threat to his half-brother, who hated his guts. I know there was some kind of hit involved that was supposed to put Trevor out... But he faked an accident and slipped into the abyss.”

“And Lucas found out his identity, how?” I asked, never having even heard him mention anything close to this. I would’ve remembered something as wild.

“I don’t know,” Tyson replied. “That’s what I’m saying. Lucas didn’t offer up any information on how or why he

knows anything about the guy. He's been keeping an eye on him though. I don't know what it's for."

I shook my head as I tried to come up with some kind of purpose. I knew that Lucas hailed from Las Vegas and had some sketchy roots, but I didn't know anything else. However, I *did* know that that Las Vegas had mob activity... And that the bikers mentioned my partner doing something in the gray area...

Could he be involved with the mob still?

"Look, I just know that the guy is dangerous. He grew up in the mob, and never was charged with *anything*, but his reputation and connections pretty much say everything there is to know about him. It's nothing to him to kill us."

"Right..." my voice trailed off as I tried to picture Ghost Eyes—er, Trevor—as some kind of big mafia guy. My mind created a scene of him in a tight, fitted dark suit, and I had to admit...

He would look lethal in more ways than one.

"I think Lucas is going to come up with the other half of the ransom," Tyson continued, obviously having had enough of talking about Ghost Eyes. "He can't stand the fact that you're caught up in your brother's mess—and neither could I. But you know, I thought Lucas was wasting fucking time by not getting over here and rescuing you. We could've worked together, and you'd be out of here."

I raised an eyebrow at him, his own words confirming what I had assumed. "You should've listened to him."

"He probably has no idea that I'm even here."

"Oh, I bet he can put it all together," I muttered, my eyes dropping to my hands in my lap. I felt overwhelmed at the moment, and I shifted down into the covers, tugging them up around my chin. I could still smell Ghost Eyes on my skin, and feel him between legs, which were growing sorer as the time passed... But I had *no* idea how to feel about it—about the sex or who he *really* was.

“We’ll get out of here, Rachel,” Tyson murmured. “I won’t let *him* hurt you like he hurt all the others.”

I blinked a few times, growing quiet... *What?*

Chapter 18

Axle

“I’m not surprised,” Viper said, his arms folded across his chest as he stared at me across my kitchen table. “I knew there was something about your past that you were hiding from us. I had Charlie dig into you, since you said you had mob ties... But nothing ever popped for you.”

I sat there quietly, thankful that he hadn’t mentioned throwing my body in a ditch since I broke the news. “Yeah, because the name was given to me by a contact in the FBI.”

“Jesus,” Viper grunted, shaking his head. “I can’t believe you had all this under your sleeve, you know. We could’ve been taking advantage of these connections.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I just couldn’t risk putting the truth out there until I knew for sure that you all could be trusted. The Vitali family is a powerful family with far reach. I know they have contacts in Las Vegas...”

Viper pursed his lips. “And now it’s at our doorstep somehow.”

“I don’t know how,” I admitted. “It would’ve taken my contact snitching in order for me to be found. It was a tight plan—and it worked for *years*.”

He nodded. “But here we are.”

“Yeah, here we are.”

“You should call your contact and figure out what’s going on.” Viper’s instructions, while well meaning, grated my nerves. I had a solid five years in age on Viper, but because he was the president, he could boss me around... And while I respected him, this issue wasn’t his to control.

“I’ll consider it. I have to be able to get ahold of him, and that’s not easy to do.”

“You gotta figure it out because it’s affecting our business deal.” His voice was flat. “And I know that you will.”

“Yeah,” I muttered, running my fingers through my dark hair. My mind wandered over to the camera, where Rachel was sleeping, and Tyson was still bound to the chair. We had to take care of him, but that was Viper’s decision. I had intended to keep a close eye on her once I had dropped her off in the basement, but my head had been too messy to sit through whatever she had to say to her ex-boyfriend.

I lost control of myself.

And that was a fucking dangerous thing to do. No woman had ever caused me to break the rules, and now here I was, fixing to admit to the fault that would get me stripped of my patch. I took a deep breath.

“There’s something else you need to know,” I began, my stomach feeling sick. “I, uh... I *might* favor Rachel Smith more than I should.”

Viper met my eyes, and then laughed. “Really? You don’t say, huh?”

“I don’t think I should oversee her anymore,” I forced the words out, no matter how much I hated saying them. “I just think that’s what is best. I can’t control my desires around her.”

His face went dark. “You mean you’re tempted to assault her?”

I shook my head. “Absolutely not. I don’t assault women and you know that. I’ve never struck a woman. She and I... We... We have some sort of chemistry or connection. She kissed me in the woods—”

“She was probably taking advantage of the situation and your apparent attraction. We’ve seen women try to seduce their way out of just about anything. You can’t give into that.”

“That’s why I’m telling you that I can’t t be the one to interact with her anymore,” I reiterated my statement, trying to do the right thing by my club.

Viper narrowed his eyes at me. “It’s already gone too far, hasn’t it? The connection between the two of you is obvious...”

“So then why are you questioning me about assaulting her?” I growled, growing offended at the insult.

He chuckled. “I just had to make sure that your head was in the right place, and that nothing had been manipulated. It’s not ideal, and it breaks the rules.”

“And I’ve lied to you about who I am,” I said with a sigh, pulling my leather vest from where it was draped on the chair behind me. “It’s only fair that you do right by the policies set in place.”

Viper eyed the vest as I tossed it on the table. “I’m not taking your patches, Axle. You’ve defended this club with your life—and you’ve messed up *bad*—but I’m not kicking you out. I understand the need to hide your identity... And while I’m pissed as fuck about the situation in the basement... I’m not surprised.”

I shifted in the chair, not sure how to take the blank face on my president. “You’re gonna at least reprimand me, right?”

“Yeah, you can take care of the problem down there.”

My stomach dropped. “You mean Tyson what’s-his-face?”

“Yep, I was going to be the one to do it, but now I think it’s better if you do.”

“Fuck,” I grumbled, running my hands down my face. “She’s going to hate me if I kill him.”

“Never said you had to kill him. I just said *take care* of him. I don’t give a shit how or what you do, I just want him gone—and no longer a problem.”

“Great,” I muttered. “I’ll come up with something.”

“We need to get everything we can out of him first, and then we’ll go from there. I told Will and Gunner to meet over here in about an hour. I don’t know what good the guy will be for us. Will is supposed to be doing some research on him. If we could get some dirt on him, we might get him to stay quiet and leave.”

I nodded, taking a deep breath. “I’ll take care of it.” Honestly, I had been taught a lot of things when it came to killing and hiding bodies. You could almost say it was a specialty of mine... However, I never killed for the hell of it. I wasn’t a sadist like Victor Sanchez, getting off on the act. It made me sick to take a life most of the time...

But it had been my job.

And I protected the people I was responsible for.

“So, Rachel...,” Viper’s eyes flickered over to the camera and then back to mine. “What’re you gonna do about that? Because I get complication—Hannah and I were complicated... But it wasn’t like this. I’ve never seen this kind of scenario play out well.”

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “I thought you’d pull me away from it and that would be that.”

“You can’t run from a connection that’s there. You break her heart, and she’s a lot more likely to turn against us.”

“So, what do you want me to do?” I questioned, narrowing my eyes at him.

“I want you to forge ahead and make her trust you. Charlie wants his money. You want to fall in love with the kidnappee, go for it. I don’t know what kind of fucked up mess it’ll cause, but knowing who you *really* are, I think you can handle just about anything that could happen.”

Ah, so I’ve gained respect now.

I nodded, wondering if the sole truth about my identity is what saved my ass with the club. “I don’t want her hurt.”

“*We* will not hurt her, but I can’t promise that other people might not try. We know that Victor Sanchez has his sights on her, and I don’t know what that’ll mean for her once she’s free from here.”

“I’ll keep her safe.”

He studied my face for a few long moments and then took a deep breath. “Okay. We’ll help you the best we can. He’s at another level—well, I guess more like *your* level,”

Viper added with a chuckle and wicked smile. “I knew there was something downright dirty about you—I just never knew it was mob boss bad.”

“I don’t want to be treated any differently.” I drummed my fingers on the kitchen table, my past flashing back to my mind. I was almost there, sitting just beneath my father on the totem pole. People respected and feared me...

But I never wanted that status again.

“Okay, I’ll take that into account, Axle,” he said. “And for the record, I do *not* condone a sexual relationship with Rachel. It could come at a high cost, and you know what that is. She could get free and then point the finger at you. You can build the trust and feelings from her without crossing lines.”

“Yeah...,” I trailed off, clearing my throat.

“Yeah, I know you already have probably already crossed that line,” he chuckled. “But I see one big ass cock block down there right now,” he gestured to Tyson, who struggling in his binds, attempting to get loose.

“No fucking kidding,” I grunted, pushing back from the table and standing to my feet as I heard the roar of motorcycles. The guys were early, but that wasn’t surprising. “We do have to consider the fact that they know where she is.”

“I know that, but where else are we gonna go with her?” Viper countered, shrugging his shoulders. “We have cameras all over the place. I just want the money, and then she’s more than welcome to walk right out of here. We’re assholes, but not killers of the innocent—though I don’t think Rachel is all that innocent. You can’t forget that she might just be playing you.”

I nodded, already having it in the back of my mind. “I know, but if she is, that’s her fucking problem.”

“Right,” Viper said, just as the door to the cabin burst open and in walked Gunner and Will. Both of them looked windblown, but something on their faces grabbed my attention—and Viper’s too.”

“What’s up?” Viper demanded.

“We caught eyes on the clubhouse. I don’t know who they are, but...,” Gunner’s voice trailed off as they jumped to mine. “They had a Las Vegas tag on the back of the SUV.”

Shit.

“You catch a good look at any of them?”

“No,” Will quipped. “But someone better fucking tell me what’s going on, because I can tell by the look on you guys’ faces that I’m not in the loop right now—and I don’t like that.”

“Well,” Viper turned to me. “Why don’t you tell him, *Trevor?*”

Will looked even more confused. “Trevor? What?”

I took a deep breath and recalled the story for what felt like the hundredth time. It had been years of keeping it locked away, and assuming the identity of someone completely new... And now I had talked more about who I really was more than I had in the last decade.

And I was starting to feel like my old self again.

“All right, so now we know why you’re so damn cold blooded,” Will said, his face still full of shock after I finished. “And when are we going to tell everyone else?”

“We’re not,” Viper said swiftly. “We need to keep this as secretive as possible—for the sake of *his* safety. Someone already knows, and it looks like they’re tailing him.”

Or something.

“I don’t know the standing of my family,” I said, my voice careful. “I’d have to reach out to my contact to figure it out, and I don’t even know how to get ahold of him anymore.” I thought back to Jeremy Holt, my old high school friend turned FBI agent... He was the one who helped me disappear... And I had no idea where the fuck he was anymore. I had to get lost—and *stay* lost.

But obviously, after the name calling and Vegas plates...

I had been found, and I had no idea what that meant for me.

Chapter 19

Rachel

He's the bastard son of a mob boss. And who are the others?

I laid in bed, staring at the ceiling and going over it all in my head. I knew I was developing feelings for him, and those had only grown since the shower incident...

But now I was a little more terrified of him.

I had done plenty of investigation into the mob related incidents over the years, and I knew the power they had. I knew the cold-blooded killers that made up their ranks too. If Trevor, which felt weird to call him, had been near the top, who knew how many bodies it had taken to get there.

“Good evening,” the leader’s voice filled the basement and the lights flickered on, blinding me.

What the hell?

I grabbed the covers to shield my eyes, trying to adjust to the florescent lights filling the basement. I heard their footsteps and part of me filled with fear, wondering if somehow, this was the end to everything. I knew death could come at any point.

“Fuckers,” Tyson raged at them, and I heard him spit in their direction.

I nearly rolled my eyes, his reaction over the top. I slowly moved the covers back, letting my eyes adjust. Four men were surrounding Tyson—and none of them had on masks. My heart sank. No mask means they don’t plan for Tyson to come out alive.

“You’re all so fucked,” Tyson laughed, shaking his head at them. “You think that keeping me here is going to get you your money faster, Viper?” He addressed the leader, which *finally* gave me a name.

“No one gives a shit about you,” Viper laughed, tipping his head back. “We’re not offering ransom for you. You’re the

one that got yourself into this mess.”

I sat up in the bed, keeping my eyes on the men. Three of them weren't looking in my direction at all, but one pair of gray eyes met mine, sending a shiver down my spine. I looked away from him immediately, my eyes dropping to my hands.

“So, what're you gonna do, kill me?” Tyson kept pushing them, and I sat there, watching with bated breath as I wondered if they would *actually* kill him in front of me.

“Probably,” Ghost Eyes said with a shrug. “You're an inconvenience.”

“Am I?” Tyson laughed. “Is that because you've got your eye on Rachel? Because you should probably know that I've already been inside that tight, wet—” He cut him off with a strike right to his nose, and Tyson wailed out in pain as it had already been broken during the initial altercation. “You fucking mobster piece of shit!”

Ghost Eyes ignored him. “I don't give a shit what pussy you've had. You won't be getting any more of it.”

“Yeah, right,” Tyson chuckled, even as the blood dripped onto his shirt. “The moment I'm not tied to this chair, I'll fuck her while you all watch on camera.”

What the hell is wrong with him?

The comment earned him another strike to nose, and he let out another wail. As much as I hated seeing anyone be tortured, I couldn't understand why Tyson was being so... *dumb*.

Then again, the darkness in Tyson eyes reminded me of the reason I had ended things—and avoided ever using his services again. His irrationality led him to be pushy and borderline psycho sometimes, and I kept my distance after we broke up for that very reason. It never surfaced until about six months into the relationship, and I had bailed the moment I found out...

Which is why, no matter how much I felt about—or was turned on by—Ghost Eyes, I couldn't let myself pursue

anything beyond this situation... I'd only get under his skin to get out...

And then I'd have to cut it off to protect myself and my heart.

"You better quit being a fucking pervert," Viper growled, leaning down in Tyson's face. "There's nothing we hate more than guys like you. You're nothing but a waste of space. You're a security specialist that ignored all the cameras."

"Fuck off," he spat back at him.

Viper chuckled, backing away from him. "We know you have a debt to Chaz for distribution. You were stealing money from him, which is why he can't pay us."

My mouth dropped open. "*What?*"

Everyone looked over at me, including Tyson. Most of them seemed amused by it, but Ghost Eyes' face stayed completely blank, his face unchanged by my reaction. I took a breath and cleared my throat.

"Did you really think that I only served the 'good' guys, Rachel? Do you think I *only* did security?" Tyson laughed, shaking his head at me. The bikers backed up, letting it play out, apparently. "Come on, you're a fucking drug lord's little sister," he continued. "Everyone knew it. You thought you were running, but he was just sending us to keep an eye on you. I duped you *and* your buddy, Lucas. He was just as naïve as you, which is surprising given his roots."

"Chaz sent you to keep an eye on me?" I questioned, still stuck on that fact. My stomach lurched at the amused look on his face.

"Do you really think your *brother* sent me?" Tyson shook his head. "Chaz doesn't give two flying fucks about you, Rachel. He only dished out the money because Lucas is over there with a fucking *knife* to his throat, making him pay to get you out."

"No..."

“Yeah,” Tyson shrugged, like it was no big deal. “You think Lucas is some petty private investigator like you, but it’s not like that at all. He’s cunning and powerful, and you have no idea who your partner really is.”

“What were you doing there then?” Ghost Eyes jumped into the middle of it. “Why didn’t Chaz cut you off right then and there since you owe him so much money?”

“He would let the debt go if I helped rescue her,” Tyson said, his words making me wonder if I ever actually knew him at all. “But he wasn’t the reason that I showed up here in the woods.”

“And why did you?” Ghost Eyes demanded, his gray eyes nearly black.

Tyson smiled a sick, twisted, and downright disturbing grin. “Because Victor Sanchez offered me two million dollars to bring Rachel to his doorstep.”

Bile shot up the back of my throat, and I flung myself off the bed, racing to the bathroom. Vomit spilled over, and I wretched over the side of toilet, completely disgusted and terrified by what I had just heard. Did Chaz know? Surely, he didn’t. My brother had been protecting me from Victor for years...

I heard Tyson wailing on the other side of the door, while I lost everything I had eaten that day. Not only had I allowed an almost mob boss—and my kidnapper—to fuck me in the shower, but now the absolute sadistic psycho who was supposed to be under control, had sent my ex-boyfriend—who was dealing drugs for my brother—to kidnap me...

What the actual fuck.

I wretched one last time over the side of the toilet before getting myself together and wiping my mouth. I got a drink of water from the sink and took in the sight of myself. There was *nothing* to be desired about the dark circles under my eyes, my unkempt hair, and my paling complexion. The makeup had long been washed off, and there was nothing but bare bones there...

But he still fucked me like I was something beautiful.

Because he's probably a psycho too.

I ran my fingers through my hair, and made my way back to the bathroom door, opening it slowly. I peeked out at the scene, not missing the blood now dripping to the floor beneath Tyson's chair...

And he was *still* mouthing off about it.

"I know who you are, *Trevor*."

"Who told you who I am?" Ghost Eyes demanded. "Tell me, and I *might* not cut off your dick before I kill you."

Tyson grunted something, but I couldn't hear his words until he spoke louder. "I'll tell you if you spare my life."

Ghost Eyes laughed. "Nah, we both know that's not going to happen."

"You're killing me over my dirty leftovers, you know," Tyson shot back. "That's all she is—just fucking disgusting leftovers. I don't even know what's so enticing about her to Sanchez. I mean, yeah, he's got an eye for certain women, but he fills the need. He's on a fucking leash when it comes to Chaz. If Chaz didn't have so much fucking power over him, he'd have killed her years ago... But he's getting ballsier. Like I said, I was here to rescue and deliver. He figured he'd pin it on you..."

My stomach still churned nauseously as I listened, peeking through the crack in the door. Did Lucas know the plan? He couldn't know... There was no way my partner could be involved... I was *almost* certain.

"Rachel," Viper, the leader called to me. "Get out here."

I wrapped my arms around myself as I stepped out into the open, everyone but Tyson's eyes shifting to me. "Yes?" I choked out, never really having been addressed by him.

"Do you believe what he's saying?"

"Um..." my voice trailed off as I tried to come to some sort of decision. "I... I guess I don't know why he would lie."

Viper nodded. “That’s what I’m thinking. Would you have gone with him had he asked you to?”

The question was startling, and I felt even more trapped in a corner than before. Ghost Eyes was standing toward the back of the group, and my gaze hung on his for a second, pleading to give me some sort of help—what the fuck *would* I have done? Would I have gone with Tyson?

I don’t know.

That was my answer. I didn’t know what I’d do.

“*Rachel,*” Viper growled. “Answer the question.”

“It’s not a fair question,” Ghost Eyes cut in, surprising me that he was speaking up for me. “And you know it.”

“I wanna know the fucking answer.”

“... I don’t know.”

“He was bad to you, wasn’t he?” Viper asked, his voice softening. “He ever hurt you?”

Ghost Eyes’ entire demeanor darkened, like he was waiting for my reply—and then he might pounce and cut Tyson’s throat.

“He never physically hurt me,” I admitted, choosing my words carefully.

“*Bitch,*” Tyson groaned, his voice gurgled from all the beating.

“Get him the fuck out of here,” Ghost Eyes barked. “*Now.*”

The other two men, who had been silent the entire time, unbound him and dragged his mostly limp body toward the stairs. Together, the strong men began to carry him up the stairs.

“Let me talk with her,” he said to Viper, his voice steady and ice cold. “Then I will sort him.”

Viper merely nodded, which was a move I hadn’t seen from him before. He then joined the other two men at the

stairs, and together, they removed Tyson from the room, leaving me alone with Ghost Eyes... *Trevor... Collin.*

Whoever.

“What do you want me to do with him?”

I blinked a couple of times. “What?”

“I *said*, what do you want me to do with him, Rachel?” He rolled his shoulders as we stood there, six feet apart or so. The tension in the room could nearly convince me that he hadn’t ever been inside of me...

Because I was *scared*.

“I don’t... I don’t know.”

“Did you know any of that shit he spilled?”

I shook my head. “No.”

“Why are you shutting down like this with me?” he demanded, taking a step toward me.

I took a step back from him, bumping into the door of the bathroom. “I-I-I... I don’t know.” My hands began to shake, and I didn’t know why. Was it the fact that I *knew* I was looking into the face of a man who had killed so many? I couldn’t be sure... Even before, I knew he had taken lives... But something about the mafia ties—and the shit that happened with Tyson—made me struggle to push the fear away in the moment.

I’m just overwhelmed right now.

He studied my face for a few long moments. “What did he tell you before we came down here, Rachel?” The use of my actual name versus my nickname he had given me emphasized the seriousness in his tone.

I stayed quiet.

“What did he say to you?”

“Wouldn’t you have heard it over the cameras?” I asked, my voice trembling as I thought of the *others*. All I could think about was someone like Victor Sanchez... And was Ghost

Eyes like him? My gut said no, but Tyson's words lingered—even though he had been planning to hand me over for a couple million dollars.

“I shut them off for a while...,” His voice dropped, and his eyes left mine.

“Right.” I didn't want to know what he was doing during that time.

His attention snapped back to me. “Okay, well, I'll fucking sort him out my own way then,” he grunted, spinning on his heels and heading toward the stairs.

“You're going to kill him, aren't you?” I blurted out the words before I could stop myself.

“Well, I don't usually spill blood over someone else's leftovers,” he began, pulling a gun from his waistband. “But I've killed for less.” With that, he left me there, slamming the basement door shut.

Chapter 20

Axle

Something was wrong with her.

And that was all I could think about as the night wore on, even after the deed had been done. I didn't get my hands dirty, because there was no way that I could kill Tyson and not just let out a murderous rage for all the things he had said about Rachel... Not to mention, he had touched her body in all the ways that I never wanted anyone but *me* to.

I sat on the couch in the living room, staring at my phone in my lap, having sent everyone else home. Rachel wasn't sleeping. She was pacing, but I couldn't go see her—not right now. I was too tempted to be angry with her for being so fucking scared of me. I had no idea the things that Tyson had told her... But if he knew anything about the actual details of my past...

God knows he had a lot of ammo to scare her with.

Just then, my phone rang in my lap, and I glanced down at the unknown number, my heart jumping at the New York area code. I hit the answer button, and put it up to my ear, bracing for who I might hear on the other end.

"Collin," Jeremy's voice came over the line. "I saw the email."

Relief flooded through my body. "Good."

"What happened? I can't bail you out of jail."

"I'm not in jail...obviously."

"Yeah, it was meant as a joke," Jeremy's tone was devoid of humor though. "But anyway. What's the situation?"

"I've been found out," I said, knowing that I was taking a huge risk telling Jeremy. After all, who was to say that he wasn't the one who did the ratting?

"What?" He sounded genuinely surprised. "How the hell is that even possible?"

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m asking you.” I kept my eyes on the outdoor camera monitors, feeling more on edge than ever. If what Tyson had said was true, then there was no doubt that Victor Sanchez could be lurking around... And he was a challenge.

Even for me.

“Trevor, I have no idea who knows who you are,” he said, his tone growing worried. “But that’s a huge red flag. I don’t know what kind of life you’re living out there, but you need to be careful. I haven’t had anything to do with your crime family in some time. I’ve moved departments. I work out of Washington D.C. now.”

“That’s fucking wild,” I commented, trying to imagine my old buddy as an agent working out of Washington D.C.

“Yeah, I don’t know what I can do for you, man. I can maybe get you into a program? WITSEC? Maybe pull some strings?”

It would’ve been the easy way out, and maybe I would’ve taken it if I hadn’t met Rachel... Who needed protection from Victor...

If he got off his leash.

“Trevor?”

“I can’t,” I said. “I got some personal stuff that I can’t run out on.”

“Right, okay. Well, then why the hell are you calling me?”

“I need to know who’s after me,” I snapped. “You have access to those files. Just fucking call down to the unit and figure out what’s going on underground. They always have someone undercover.”

“I... I don’t know.”

“Come on, Jeremy,” I reasoned. “I fucking need to know who I’m up against.”

“I don’t know who you’d be up against,” he finally said with a heavy sigh. “Your half-brother died two years ago. The family damn near dissolved since he had such a shoddy reputation. No one took it over. I don’t know what the status is anymore. You shouldn’t even have anyone searching for you.”

What the fuck?

“He...died?” I wasn’t sure why that was such a shock. Mob bosses died all the time. They all moved with a target on their backs.

“Yeah.”

I couldn’t hold back the question. “Where’s my dad?”

“MIA.”

“Fucking great,” I grunted, running my hands over my face. “He’s probably whacked too.”

“Most definitely, which is why whoever is trailing you is a mystery to me. I’ll give the unit a call in the morning, because that’s the kind of shit I do for you, even though I haven’t heard your voice in years.”

“Thanks, man,” I chuckled. “I’d ask how the family was, but I doubt you got one. You swore you’d be a bachelor forever.”

“I lied,” he answered me, letting out a sigh. “I got a wife and two kids—one on the way. Shit changes, Trevor, and I was sure as hell hoping that’s what would happen to you. I wanted that for you.”

I nodded, ignoring the emotions welling up in my chest. “Yeah, well, I think karma has other ideas for my fate. It’s a miracle I’ve lived this long.”

“You’re not a bad guy, and you never have been. You can’t help how you were raised. You just did the job that you were taught to do, and you did it well.”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“My guess is that you’re still doing that?”

“Something like that,” I admitted, not wanting to go into detail.

“Well... Don’t tell me. I don’t want to ever see your ass in prison—though I know you’re too sly for that. I’ll let you know what I find out.”

“Okay, thanks,” I said, bidding him goodbye and hanging up. I tossed the phone onto the couch cushion beside me, trying to come to terms with the information I had just learned...

The man who had put a hit on me was dead.

My father was probably dead.

And yet, there was *still* someone trying to hunt me down...

And Tyson, the lowly drug dealer knew. As did Lucas Gray, Rachel’s partner.

Who knew first?

I pushed myself up from the couch, wondering if there was any chance that Rachel would have answers. More than likely, she didn’t know shit, considering everything Tyson had told her had been shocking to her. I made my way into the kitchen, glancing over at the clock. It was almost four in the morning, and I was wide awake.

And so was Rachel... Still fucking pacing.

Just as I considered going down to visit her, the burner phone on the table rang. It wasn’t surprising. I knew they’d call at some point, but this was a little earlier than expected. I considered not answering but didn’t want to hear it from Viper.

“Yeah?” I said into the phone.

“Really?” Chaz’s voice came over the phone, sounding disgusted. “You left him on my damn doorstep. Find a fucking ditch next time.”

“Get ahold of your shitty drug dealers.”

“He’s not my drug dealer, he’s one of Rachel’s security guys.”

I rolled my eyes. “Not what he said. He said he owed you money, and you were gonna let it slide if he helped you get Rachel free.”

“Hmm.”

“Yeah, anyway, he showed up on the cameras. Made a big scene. Said a *lot* of shit about your sister that was pretty disgusting.”

“Not surprised. She attracts the dark ones.”

I hesitated, not really able to argue with that. “But he wasn’t here to rescue her.”

Now *he* was the one who was hesitating. “... What?”

“You know about it, don’t you?”

“No, I don’t,” his words came out genuine, and I believed him. “We thought he was just being an irrational dumbass and going to play hero.”

“He was here to take her back to Victor, and collect two million dollars, Chaz.”

He was dead silent, and I pulled the phone away from ear just to make sure he was on the line. “I... I had no idea.”

“You need to get him under control, Chaz.”

“Who the fuck are you to tell me what to do, Axle?” His use of my nickname made me wonder if *he* knew who I was—or if that was some sort of hidden information that only Lucas and Tyson knew. Either way, I had no idea what the fuck was going on.

“She’s your sister, and you need to protect her from that psycho.” I kept my tone even and my wits about myself as I said the words.

“And why the hell are you worried about that? You kidnapped her from her front yard, and you’re keeping her in a basement for what? The debt that I owe to some underworld lord who means *nothing* to you personally. I don’t want to hear that you’re some fucking saint, Axle. I know the blood on your

hands, and I know that if I don't come up with the other half, you'll murder her too."

I shook my head, though I couldn't argue with him entirely. If I hadn't developed some sort of connection to the woman, I wouldn't say no to killing her. I mean, I don't kill women... But if I was ordered to by Viper, I would do what had to be done—or figure out a way around it to solve the problem.

"That's what I thought," Chaz chuckled on the other end of the line. "I'll continue to keep my sister out of the hands of Victor Sanchez, but I'm going to tell you something, Axle... I'll damn sure keep her out of your hands too. You wouldn't be worried about her safety if she hadn't gotten under your skin. That's what she does, and she'll bring you to your knees—and I'll fucking *laugh* as she does."

"Fuck off, Chaz," I growled. Even if he was right about Rachel getting under my skin, he wasn't going to keep me from her.

"Yeah, well, as soon as I have the other half of the money, and your president lets her go, she'll *never* choose someone like you. She *runs* from men like you after she gets to you, and I hope to God that somewhere in your cold killer heart, she fucking *breaks* it... Because assholes who kidnap innocent women deserve that."

"Yeah, okay, says the man who has done much worse." His threats burned, but I wouldn't give it to him.

"You don't know what worse is until you're face to face with Victor—and don't think I won't sic him on you if I find out you've touched her. You saved Tyson from the ruin he deserved. I'll call tomorrow with drop off information."

And then he hung up.

I tossed the phone to the table, working hard to get my head under control. He might be wrong about a lot of what he said about me, but one thing was certain...

If Rachel wanted to go, I would let her.

But I'd never stop protecting her from Victor Sanchez.

Chapter 21

Rachel

They killed Tyson.

I sat there on the edge of the bed, blinking my eyes as I zoned out on a small indentation in the concrete wall. It wasn't a surprise, and even though no one had come right out and said it, I knew that was the fate he was given... But while that wasn't shocking, everything Tyson had been doing behind my back was. Once I got out of here, I had *so* many questions for Lucas...

Did he know Tyson was going to pass me on to Victor?

I shuddered, wrapping my arms around myself. Chaz had always, *always* kept the guy at bay. Why was Victor making a pass now? And was it even behind my brother's back? Did Chaz know?

"*Ugh,*" I muttered under my breath as I laid back on the bed sideways. I ran my hands over my face, letting out a groan. And as I did, the basement door creaked open, and silent footsteps came down the stairs. My heart jumped at the lack of sound, already knowing who it was. I sat up, meeting those ghostly eyes—the ones that I knew now were those of a mafia hitman.

"You hungry?" he asked, his arms folded across his chest.

I shook my head, looking away from him. "No."

"Worried about your ex-boyfriend?" His tone was sharp, and I couldn't tell if he was angry about *him* or angry at *me*.

"Not really, I think I can put two and two together," I said to him, forcing myself to meet his gaze with confidence. The fear of who Ghost Eyes really was, was still there, but I had to admit it had lessened a little...just a little.

"I didn't kill him myself." He shrugged, taking a deep breath and letting out a sharp exhale. "It would've been too

messy.”

I cringed. “Thanks for letting me know.”

“I don’t like what he said about taking you to Victor—I don’t know if I actually believe him, either. I think the guy might be full of shit.”

“I know he’s full of shit ninety-nine percent of the time,” I admitted, leaning my elbows against my knees. “But I don’t know why he would lie about something like that. He knew it would get him killed.”

Ghost Eyes’ jaw tensed. “I think he knew the moment we caught him in those woods that would be it for him. He could’ve said whatever he wanted...”

I hesitated, trying to read his blank expression. “So, you think he was lying?”

“I don’t know, but you don’t have to worry about it while you’re here. We’ll keep you safe.” Something in his tone told me he *did* know, but I didn’t push.

“Thanks.”

“Yeah...,” his voice trailed off as he shifted his weight back to his heels. “So, you wanna tell me why you look at me now like I’m the boogeyman?”

I swallowed hard, surprised by the direct question. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He grabbed the chair that Tyson had sat in and scooted it across from me, swinging his legs over it and taking a seat. Thankfully, one of the bikers had come in and cleaned up the spot of blood on the floor that Tyson had left, but I hadn’t talked to them while they worked.

“You do know, because I watched you back up so fast from me, you ran into the wall, princess. You didn’t seem to have that kind of reaction when I had a razor blade to your skin—or when my cock was buried inside of you.”

Instinctively, my thighs clenched, my body reacting to his words.

He leaned toward me, just enough for me to catch a whiff of his heady cologne. “Why are you scared of me, princess?”

My heart jumped in my chest as I held his gaze. “Because I know who you are now.”

His lips pressed together, and he studied my face for a few beats. “And who you thought I was before wasn’t just as terrifying? I would think *not* knowing would be more frightening... But then again, I don’t know what your old flame told you about me.” There was something close to amusement in his voice and it left me feeling cornered.

But I had to be confident.

“He told me who you are, *Trevor*, the mafia hitman.”

His reaction wasn’t what I expected, seeing a flash of concern in his gray eyes. It was fleeting, but it was definitely there. “And you had no idea of that name *before* you came here?”

I furrowed my brow in confusion. “How would I know that name before I came here?”

“No one should know that fucking name, Rachel,” he growled, his entire body tensing. “Trevor Webb isn’t supposed to exist anymore. He died almost a decade ago.”

“Why?”

“Because my half-brother wanted me dead. He thought I was a threat to him taking over the family once my father died. It wasn’t worth it to me. Had a friend in high places and I split, created a new identity and it’s worked for me... Until now, obviously. Someone knows who I really am.”

“I don’t know anything about that,” I said carefully, wondering if this conversation was really about me being scared of him—or if he was digging for information about what I knew about him.

“So... What about your partner?”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “What about him?”

“What’s his affiliation with the mob? I know he’s got ties to the Las Vegas bunch, but I don’t know what they are.”

“I don’t know,” I answered honestly. “He’s never talked about it. He worked as a cop when we met. I don’t know much about his past. He never went into detail about it, and he *never* mentioned the mafia in New York.”

He nodded before leaning back and running his hands through his hair. “Okay.”

I hesitated. “Okay? You’re not going to keep drilling me about it?”

He made a face. “Why would I? It’s not like you know anything about it. I think we’re past that... Or at least, I thought we were.” His eyes held mine for a few long seconds. “Are we?”

I nodded, forcing a shrug like his gaze wasn’t doing things to my body. “Yeah, sorry. I just never know what to expect.”

“What do you want to know about me?”

I frowned, the question surprising. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” he began, letting out a sigh. “I’ll tell you whatever it is you want to know about me and who I am. I think I owe that to you at this point.”

I narrowed my eyes as fear crept back in. “And you’re not worried about me telling someone?”

He raised a brow. “Who you gonna tell? Your brother? Because I don’t think you’d do that. He’s already made his threats to sic Victor on me. And I’d love for him to do that.”

“Yeah...,” my voice trailed off. “Or maybe you have no problem telling me because I’m going to die anyway.”

“You’re going to die eventually—we all are—but it won’t be me who brings that to you, princess.” His words were almost heavy as he spoke, like it pained him I had even mentioned it.

I chewed the inside of my cheek, trying to read his expression, which always seemed to stay neutral. The shadow of hair on his jaw worked in his favor, and the longer I looked at him, the more I saw the Italian roots in his features.

But his eyes...

“What’d your mom look like?” I asked, catching him by surprise.

“What? My mom? That’s a weird fucking question.”

“You said I could ask anything I wanted to,” I pointed out, shrugging my shoulders. “I wanna know where you got your eyes.”

“Ah,” he chuckled. “Yeah, I got them from my mom. That was about the only thing I got from her, though. Crazy fucking phenomena, really. Should’ve gotten my dad’s dark eyes. Instead, I got her eyes. She was real pretty, blonde hair, blue eyes—classic American sweetheart look.”

“But your eyes are gray,” I said in a soft voice.

“I guess that’s what seeing a bunch of shit does to someone,” he muttered, his eyes shifting away from mine for a moment.

“I know that feeling,” I agreed with him. “I’ve seen more than I let on.”

He looked back to me and then shook his head. “Nah, princess. You might have seen a lot, but you’re still golden inside.”

Heat flushed to my cheeks. “Maybe.”

“No maybes about it. What else do you wanna know about me?” he asked, his eyes going back to searching my face. “I don’t want you to be scared of me,” he added, his large, lean hands running down the black denim covering his thighs. “Whatever *this* is,” he motioned between the two of us. “I don’t want you to leave here regretting it.”

“I don’t regret it, but I’ve struggled with my choices,” I admitted, giving him a dose of sobering truth. “I thought I was

just throwing myself at you to do whatever it took to survive, but I don't think that's the truth."

He nodded, and if he was hurt by my words, he didn't show it. "And what do you think the truth is, princess?"

"I think I'm attracted to bad, *bad* men," I laughed, shaking my head.

His eyes darkened, catching me off guard. "Like Victor Sanchez?"

"Uh, no," I immediately replied. "I was *never* into that guy. He's the kind of dark that you don't make it out of alive. I'll pass on that."

"Probably for the best," he chuckled. "Though some would say that I'm not much better than he is."

"You don't have the sadism in your eyes," I answered, my voice softening. "I've gotten pretty good at picking out creeps."

"Good to know," he held my eyes, my core tightening with excitement. The man got to me in *all* the ways, and the more he opened up, the more I didn't want to run from those feelings. He leaned forward, and I caught my breath, nearly reaching for him.

But I stopped myself, clearing my throat. "What was your family like growing up?"

"Uh... Well..." He let out a sigh. "I guess it was normal as a little kid. I lived with my mom on the upper east side of the city. She got the money from family—she was rich, I guess... But she never brought me around any family on that side. Maybe I was a disgrace. I don't know, but I thought life was normal until he started showing up."

I furrowed my brow, trying to follow. "You mean your dad, right?"

"Yeah, he started showing up when I was probably ten. I kept getting into fights at school, and one day, I got home, and he was there, waiting for me in the living room. He said, '*Son,*

it's time to tell you who you are.' He took me, against my mom's wishes, to a fight club in the Bronx. That was that."

"You were ten..."

"You know how it goes. I grew up fast and started helping him out. I met my half-brother and sister. She never had much to do with me, but it was alright. My brother... He started getting jealous when I hit eighteen. It took me no time to prove my worth, but while he was mean as fuck, he wasn't very bright... And then my mom died." His face took on a distant look as he continued, pain contorting his expression. "Came home one day and found her in her bed, and I knew... I fucking knew why it happened. She was the thorn in my dad's old lady's side."

"I'm so sorry..."

"Had nothing left to fight for after that. I got in deeper and deeper, but I started working side jobs for another family."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to bring my dad's family to their knees for killing my mom," he said, his tone matter of fact as he met my gaze. "But I never did. They put a gnarly hit on me, and I was fair game to anyone—payout of over two million for my head. No one gave a shit about loyalty then."

"And now someone knows who you are..." I thought aloud, the urgency suddenly settling in on me.

"Yeah, but my half-brother is dead. I got word the family dissolved, so I don't know who would want that kind of information."

I nodded, and the realization suddenly hit me—I *can* be an asset. "I'll dig into it for you when I get out."

"I don't think so. It's a dangerous game to get involved in."

Shaking my head, I met his gaze as laughter spilled from my lips. "It's not the first time the mob has come on my radar."

Chapter 22

Axle

“Is that right?” I asked her, tilting my head as I leaned a little closer. “Because I better be the only fucking mobster that’s fucked you.”

She smiled coyly, the gold in her eyes glistening. “I said, they’ve been on my radar, not between my legs, *Ghost Eyes*.”

I chuckled darkly. “Why do you call me that? I get the fact that my eyes are gray-blue, but like a ghost? I don’t think so.”

Rachel scooted to the edge of the bed, her knees brushing mine, sending a jolt of arousal through my body. “I don’t know. I guess because they were maybe a little spooky.” There was a teasing tone to her voice that set my cock on fucking fire for her.

“I can be spooky,” I said in a low tone. “Is that what you want from me?”

She giggled. “That sounds so ridiculous.”

“Yeah, it does,” I laughed, feeling something that I usually didn’t. Maybe it was...*joy*? I wasn’t sure, but that’s what Rachel did to me... And it was fucking addictive. “But are you still scared?” My fingertips landed on her thighs, the sweatpants keeping me from touching her bare skin. I hadn’t had a chance to be with her in a bed, or to hold her...

Not that it was my style... But I found myself wanting to.

“I’m a little scared,” she finally said, her breath catching as my hands made it to her upper thighs. “But you know this is on the camera, right? Anyone could see...”

“It’s almost four in the morning,” I told her. “No one is going to show up.” I moved from the chair, moving toward her and situating myself between her legs. I tipped her head back with her chin, forcing her to look up at me.

“Then what are you going to do?” Rachel dared me with those golden eyes, her tongue running along her bottom lip. “Because the clock is ticking.”

I shook my head at her, a greedy smile tugging at my lips. “You’re such a fucking tease, princess.”

“That’s because I want you to do something about it,” her voice softened.

I ran my thumb where her tongue had just been. “You want me to fuck you on this bed?”

Her breath hitched and she nodded.

“Tell me,” I demanded, gripping the side of her face. “I need you tell me that you want me to fuck you, baby.”

“Baby?” she echoed, her brow furrowing.

I froze, not even realizing that I had said it. “Sorry, princess.”

She didn’t say anything, closing the space between us and pressing her lips to mine. I went for her then, grabbing her by the waist and scooting her back on the bed. I kept myself in between her legs, and grabbed the waistband of her pants, stripping the sweats and her underwear right off of her.

“Oh fuck,” I growled, running my hands down her bare thighs as I took in the sight of her pussy. I pulled her shirt overhead and she unhooked the back of her bra, her tits bouncing free...

And I wanted to kiss every inch of her body.

“I want to see all of you,” she murmured as my lips landed on her neck. “Please.”

I pulled away from her, giving her what she asked of me. It was the least I could do, given that she was stuck here in the basement. I stripped out of my t-shirt, and undid my jeans, slipping everything off. My cock was so fucking hard that it felt like it might explode if I didn’t slip it inside of her, but I ignored it.

Leaning over her, I pressed my lips to her neck, tasting her skin. She smelled of the vanilla soap that I had put in the bathroom, but she was still Rachel. And maybe the Jasmine scent was gone from her hair, but she was still the most intoxicating human being I had ever encountered.

My hands traced her curves as my dick brushed against her entrance, feeling the moisture already there between her legs. I wanted to fucking bury it inside of her, and I let out a growl of need as I kissed my way down her collar bones.

“*Ooh...*,” the moan filled the basement, her voice sultry with lust. My lips caressed her skin as I made it to her chest. I sucked her nipple into my mouth, running my tongue around her areola. She threaded her fingers through my hair, tightening as my fingers dipped through her wet folds. She was fucking everything in the moment.

I gyrated my fingers against her clit, and she squirmed, her moans growing louder as her body moved more in rhythm with my hand. I continued to suck on her breast, stimulating her nipple with my tongue as my fingers finally dipped inside of her.

“*Oh... Oh...*,” the words slipped from her as her entire body tensed around me.

“Cum for me, princess,” I growled into her.

Her cries grew in volume as she closed her eyes. “*Trevor...*,” She panted my name just as her body clenched around fingers, her orgasm bearing down around me. I didn’t even care that she used my old name.

I just wanted it on her fucking lips.

“I want you inside of me,” she panted, her eyes fluttering open as her body finished coming down. She didn’t even have to ask me twice as I lifted my mouth from her chest and leaned back, placing the head of my cock against her pussy.

Shit, condom.

“I’m on birth control,” she forced out, just as her eyes met mine. “Please just fuck me, Trevor.”

She'd have to stop using that name, but I wasn't going to go there right now. I pressed my cock into her, my breath hitching as it stretched her. A guttural groan rattled my chest, the sensation setting off all the fireworks in my body. I locked eyes with her, taking in her parted lips and the pleasure contorting her expression. I committed it to my memory as I pulled out and thrust into her again.

"You're so fucking tight," I groaned, my hands landing on her hips as my eyes rolled down her body. I continued to move slow as the emotional connection began to take hold of me—which was something I had never experienced before.

No woman had ever made me feel anything...

Except this one.

Rachel let out light cries as I fucked her, our bodies intertwined. I leaned over her and took her mouth with mine, and she pulled me tighter, wrapping her arms around me. All I could feel was her, her skin on my skin...

And it was something.

"*Ooh...*," She moaned into my mouth as her pussy clenched around my cock, and as I continued to kiss her, the taste of her mouth hot and heady. I knew she was going to come again, and I was going to ravish her as her pussy came around my cock.

"*Fuck, fuck, fuck,*" I moaned as she let loose, crying out my name another time. As her pussy clenched down on my shaft, I exploded, my usual release feeling like something completely different—like fucking *magic*.

I growled as I filled her, shutting my eyes as I pulled from her lips and buried my face into her neck, hiding all the fucking emotions I knew were raging in my eyes. She panted beneath me, her fingers still threaded in my hair. I breathed in the scent of her, not even knowing what to do now that the moment was over...

Except to tell her what I initially came down here to say.

I pushed off of her, avoiding her eyes as I went for my clothes, sliding on my jeans and boxer briefs and heading to

the bathroom. I grabbed a towel and got it damp, going back to Rachel, who took it from me before I could do anything else.

“What’s wrong?” she demanded, setting the towel to the side and sliding her clothes on. “Something is wrong.”

I shook my head, rolling my shoulders. “Nah, princess. There’s nothing wrong...”

“Then what is it...,” Rachel’s voice trailed off as she folded her arms across her chest. I could see the moisture filling her eyes. “Was it... Was it me?”

Oh shit.

“No, not at all,” I said, shaking my head as I sat down beside her on the bed. “You’re fucking *everything*, Rachel. But this situation is *not* everything,” I added carefully, letting out a sigh. “And that’s why I came down here.”

She eyed me as she wrapped her arms around herself. “So... What is it?”

I shouldn’t have felt so conflicted about it, but I couldn’t help the fact that I hated the idea of her leaving—even though that’s what was right. “Your brother called and got the rest of the money. He’ll call with the drop information, and so yeah. You’ll get out of here soon.”

She was silent, her eyes searching mine. “And then what?”

I swallowed hard, not sure *what* she was talking about—and the last thing I wanted to assume was that she was referring to *us*. “Then you’ll be free, and you won’t have to deal with anymore bikers.”

“Bikers,” she snorted, shaking her head and looking away from me. “I think I have much more to worry about than you bikers.”

Victor Sanchez.

“I can keep you safe from him,” I blurted out, meeting her gaze. “I can fucking protect you, Rachel. I can make sure he never comes near you.”

She shook her head. “I don’t need you to protect me.” The defiance in her voice was damn near insulting as she met my gaze. “I don’t want you to hang around for that.”

I pushed myself off the bed. “I’ll fucking protect you whether you want me to or not. I told you out there in the woods that the moment you let *this* happen,” I gestured in between us, “it’s done. You’re my fucking responsibility.”

“No,” she snapped, her eyes growing fiery. “I don’t belong to anyone—and I definitely don’t belong to you. Just because you *kidnapped* me, doesn’t mean that you suddenly *own* me.”

“You’re being stubborn,” I growled, glaring at her. “It’s not about *owning* you. It’s about keeping that sadistic bastard’s hand off you.”

She met my gaze. “I can handle myself.”

Before I could say anything else about it, I shook my head, knowing the fight wasn’t worth it. She had a point, and she didn’t want this to go past the walls of this basement...

“Fine,” I muttered, heading for the stairs. “This is done then.”

Chapter 23

Rachel

He didn't come back, and I never got the chance to ask him what he meant when he said it was done—but I was pretty sure he was talking about what happened between us...

But that was for the best.

And that's why I had pushed him away.

I didn't need him protecting me from Victor. Chaz was the only one who could seem to keep him on the leash. And besides, I had Lucas. We could handle it. No matter *what* I was feeling for Trevor—or whatever he went by—it was better for me to cut the ties. Besides, he was only looking at me like I was property...

Or something.

I tapped my foot on the concrete floor, part of me anxious to get out of the basement, and part of me wishing that I was still locked up. After all, Ghost Eyes and I had only crossed the line a couple of times...

And I wanted more.

"But it's better to push him away," I muttered to myself, arguing on my own behalf. *Once I get out, my feelings toward him will fade.*

"Good evening," a voice boomed down the staircase, and I recognized it as Viper's. "We have your brother on the line."

Viper and three other men, one of them being Trevor, appeared, none of them having masks on. My heart sank at the sight, and suddenly, I wondered if I was going to die.

"Hey sis," Chaz's voice came over the speaker of the phone. "You good?"

I avoided Trevor's eyes. "Yeah. Great. Grand. Ready to get the fuck out of here."

Viper chuckled. “She’s alive and well.”

“Yeah, sounds like it,” Chaz grunted. “We’ll make the exchange in an hour. The same instructions apply as we discussed moments ago. You’ll know us when you see us. I will give you our money, and you will give me back my sister. That’s the deal. If you try *anything*, I’ll fucking have you all killed. I *know* Axle is privy to my damn sister.”

“What?” Viper snapped at him. “Why the fuck would you even say that?”

“Should’ve heard him on the phone earlier. He was really concerned about Victor—and the deal that he had given Tyson. I think you need to rope in your enforcer. I can handle my shit on my end, and you handle your shit on yours. Victor thought Tyson was stupid enough to try and rescue my sister, and you know how Victor is... He likes to play games.”

I shuddered, knowing good and well how Victor fucked with people—and how one of those people had been me. “Keep him on his leash,” I said, not missing the scowl on Trevor’s face.

Chaz laughed. “Oh, Rach, he *is* on his leash. He was just fucking with Tyson, and he deserved it. You know that as well as I do. The guy treated you like trash. You deserve better than that... And don’t let any of these damn bikers make you think *they* could possibly be good enough for you either.”

“Yeah, well, I’ll see you in an hour.” I wasn’t sure how my brother even *knew* much about my relationship with Tyson, but Tyson lived a double life... So there was no point in trying to figure it out.

“Hate that our reunion has to be under these circumstances, sis. I was hoping that maybe I’d just see you for Thanksgiving this year.”

I rolled my eyes, not even caring that the bikers all gave me a funny look.

“See you in an hour,” Viper snapped into the phone, hanging up. He turned to Trevor, whose face still held a scowl. “So, what the fuck is he talking about, Axle?”

“I told him to keep Victor away from her,” he replied nonchalantly.

“You should’ve kept your fucking mouth shut,” Viper growled. “You wanna be with her on the outside of this shit, fine. But you’re showing a weakness.”

Trevor raised his brows. “Like *all* of you haven’t shown weakness when it comes to your women? Last time I checked, all three of you lost your damn minds over your women—and I haven’t done anything close to that.”

“Because I’m *not* your woman,” I muttered under my breath, catching all of their attention.

“What did you just say?” Viper asked, narrowing his eyes at me, though his voice wasn’t unpleasant.

“I said that I’m not his woman,” I repeated myself, sounding a little more defiant the second time. “I was *kidnapped*.”

Viper’s jaw tensed as his eyes bore into mine. “Get your shit together, and we’ll be back in ten minutes.”

I nodded, my heart jumping in my chest as I thought about my freedom. My gaze flickered to Trevor, but he wasn’t looking at me—and didn’t, even as they exited the room. Had I embarrassed him in front of his club? I had no idea what the rest of them knew when it came to our relationship, but...

It just can’t continue.

I had to keep reminding myself of that, and that’s exactly what I did as I gathered my things... Well, what little I had. The clothes I had been wearing when I was kidnapped were clean, folded and put up in the dresser. I just hadn’t bothered wearing them because the sweats had been much more comfortable. Grabbing them from the dresser, I headed to the bathroom and changed into my jeans.

As I stripped down, I took in the sight of my injuries, which had healed to just ugly marks. More than likely, they would keep fading...

But they would always remind me of this time—of *him*.

I shook it off and pulled on my black camisole, which had holes from the event in the woods. My white blouse still had blood stains, so I tossed it into the bathroom trash and opted to put my sweatshirt back on. I doubted Trevor needed to keep a woman's medium-sized sweatshirt around...

Well, unless they had more women to kidnap for ransom.

My fingers drummed on the bathroom counter, the thought of another woman making me feel a mixture of things—one of those being...*jealousy*. How fucked up was that? I grabbed a brush and ran it through my hair before pulling it up in a high ponytail. There was no reason for me to want to *stay* in this situation.

And there was no fucking reason to want to pursue my kidnapper outside of here.

I was mostly sure that once I got my head cleared and back out in the real world, I would be just fine. I didn't need him. As I stepped out of the bathroom, I was startled to see Ghost Eyes standing in the middle of the basement, his arms folded across his chest.

"Let's go," he instructed, his voice cold. "Time for the kingpin princess to get back to her throne."

I glared at him. "Back to being an asshole, I see."

He chuckled, his voice dark. "Only thing I know how to be."

A sigh slipped from my lips as I glanced over to the stack of books, some I hadn't ever gotten to. I don't know why that fact made me sad. I had access to just about any book I could ever want to read outside of the basement.

"You need to watch out for Victor Sanchez," he said to my silence, pulling my attention away from the literature.

"I always have to watch out for him," I said in a flat tone, pursing my lips. "It's nothing new." That was mostly the truth, considering I still wasn't totally convinced that Tyson hadn't been telling the truth about Victor paying him... But then again, maybe he was just out to scare me?

“I don’t trust that your brother has control of him.”

“No one trusts my brother,” I laughed, shaking my head as he took a step toward me. There was something in his hand and took a step back as I recognized it as zip ties. “You don’t have to do that.”

“Just standard protocol, princess,” he grabbed my wrist before I could get any farther away from him. “Don’t want you trying anything.” His touch was warm against my skin, and despite him tightening down the zip ties, all I could feel was him. He tugged me into him, my back against his chest. “We both know you’re walking away from something that you’re going to regret,” he murmured in my ear.

My breath came out shakily, as I shook my head. “No,” I forced out, even though part of me knew he was right. “I don’t need your protection outside of these walls.”

He chuckled, his tone growing sarcastic. “Right, because that’s all this was. You were just using me to protect yourself in here—can’t say I buy that one.” He let go of my arm and stepped away.

I lost my balance, not even realizing that I had been leaning on him. Ignoring the embarrassment, I righted myself and spun around to face him, locking gazes. “I did what I had to do to survive.”

“Oh?” He raised his brow. “You think you’re gonna be a tough girl again? Because last I checked, you fucking *begged* for this cock to be deep inside of you, princess, we *both* know that.”

I folded my arms across my chest, anger burning in my throat at the fact that he was right. “Stockholm Syndrome,” I shot back at him. “Look it up.”

“I *know* what it is,” he growled, clenching his fists at his sides. His eyes had gone dark, boring into mine in a way they hadn’t before. “And you’re gonna fucking regret that you said that to me.”

A bristle of fear replaced the anger, but I didn’t show it. “What’re you gonna do? Become my second psycho stalker?”

“You’re playing with fire, Rachel. You’re gonna wish I was there to protect you when Victor Sanchez comes knocking.”

“I don’t *need* your fucking protection,” I snapped back at him. “The only thing I need protecting from is *you*.”

“What if something happens to your brother? Who’s gonna keep that sadistic fuck on his leash? You know the moment he’s loose, he’s coming for you.” His voice was nothing but a straight up warning, but he was just telling me something I already knew.

“I have protection put in place for that,” I said, though my voice lost some of its confidence.

“Yeah? Same protection that kept you from being kidnapped, huh?” He cackled, giving me a wicked grin. “You were too easy to grab, princess. But you know, maybe you should just try fucking Victor if he gets you? I bet that would really tickle his fancy... But then again, last I checked, it takes a little more *violence* to get him off.”

My stomach knotted up at the thought of letting anyone touch me who wasn’t... *him*. And that was much more terrifying to me than Victor Sanchez. Lucas was there on my side. We would figure something out—*if* Victor got off his leash—which Chaz had always kept tight.

“That’s what I thought,” he mumbled, grabbing my attention.

I looked up at him, meeting his gaze. And for a split second, I saw hurt in his gray irises, but it only lasted a split second before disappearing into the darkness.

“You two lovebirds ready?” A face appeared from the stairwell, a smirk on his face as he took in the two of us.

“Shut the fuck up, Gunner,” Trevor growled. “She’s dead to me after this.”

Chapter 24

Axle

I was so fucking pissed... Pissed because Rachel was lying to my face about what happened between us and pissed because I had to let her go once she got out of the van. I'd changed my mind about keeping an eye on her after everything—that wouldn't be conducive to moving on. Instead of watching her, I'd just watch Victor Sanchez. Whether Rachel was in my life or not, that stupid fucker needed to be stopped.

And I'd make sure he never touched another woman.

"Almost there," Viper said with a sigh as he pulled down a dark road. "I don't know why we couldn't have done this somewhere closer to civilization."

"Maybe they're just going to massacre us once we get there," I joked, leaning back in the front passenger seat. I had opted to ride up front, leaving Gunner and Will with Rachel in the back. I had been given weird looks from everyone... Clearly, they hadn't been listening to Rachel and I's conversation before we left.

"You're a real fucking ray of sunshine," Viper shot back at me from the front seat. "I know you're sad about seeing her leave, but you know, might be a little less toxic to not be keeping her in your basement."

I heard Rachel laugh from the back of the van, and it only grinded my nerves more. She had turned cold, and I had a good feeling it was her way of dealing with her inner conflict over us. The last time we'd had sex, it was something else... For me, at least. Maybe she *was* being truthful. Maybe she used me to stay safe. I knew it was a possibility, and I let things happen anyway.

"So, you gonna let this all go, right?" I heard Will ask her from the back of the van.

"I know how this shit works," she answered him. "I grew up mixed up in the cartel. I know better than to go to the

police. I don't think they'd find me very credible, anyway. A little bit of digging into my past, and they'd toss me out. Rather not die."

"You're a smart woman," Will chuckled. "No wonder Linley liked you so much. I think she was hoping you'd either escape or stick around."

"I have a life to get back to," Rachel's voice was quiet. "I have pending cases that need to be closed. I don't like leaving my clients wondering."

"You know, we could use those services," Gunner mused, his tone full of amusement. "It would save me hours of boring stakeouts."

"Yeah, well, you can make an appointment like everyone else," she laughed, her voice sending a burst of heartbreak through my chest. I hadn't ever been torn up over a woman. To me, they were nothing but trouble—and I saw the pain my mother had gone through when it came to relationships. She had fallen for the wrong guy...

And that's why I would let Rachel go.

If my dad would've left my mom alone, instead of continuing to chase her, she never would've ended up dead. I leaned my head back against the seat, pushing the painful memories from my mind. Being around Rachel made me feel utterly human, instead of cold blooded. She had brought my past to my door in more ways than one.

And maybe it would be better once she was gone.

"Looks like they're already here waiting for us," Viper said, killing the headlights as we approached. There were *two* vehicles, one dark SUV and then a dark colored new Bronco. "You recognize any of these?" Viper turned to Rachel, and she peered through the windshield.

And I swear to God there was a smile in her eyes.

"Yeah, I recognize them both."

And that was the truth, because so did I. The SUV belonged to Chaz, and the Bronco? Yeah, that was Lucas's—

and that's why she was smiling. However, her eyes drained of all relief within seconds, and I whipped my head back around to see *three* men getting out...

One of them being Victor Sanchez.

"What the fuck is he doing here?" Murderous rage exploded in my chest, my hand flying to my pistol tucked away in my belt.

Viper stopped me, his hand on my arm. "He's here to fuck with your head, Axle. It's not about her. Chaz is doing this to *you*."

"Lucas isn't there," Rachel's voice broke through the noise in my head. "I don't understand."

Viper turned to her. "We won't let you go unless—"

"She'll be fine," I cut him off, giving her a smile. "You don't need us, right?"

She didn't say anything to my cruel comment. I felt instantly guilty for it, and I saw the warning glare from Viper. But lashing out was how I was dealing with the rejection she had thrown in my face. I would've been different with her had she admitted to our connection.

I would've been with her—all the way.

But it was all the way or no way now.

"Stay in the van," Viper instructed me. "I don't want you starting anything."

"I'm not fucking staying in the van," I argued, slinging my door open before he could contest it anymore.

He let out a ragged sigh, and turned to Gunner and Will. "Then you two stay in the fucking van just in case."

They both nodded, and Gunner gave me a weary look—that I ignored. I slid out into the cool dry air, appreciating the desert for making the simple act of breathing a little easier... Because I was already struggling for oxygen as I got closer to Victor.

Chaz looked similar to Rachel, but his hair was darker and his frame much larger. His eyes were also nearly black in the night, while Rachel's always stayed more golden. I didn't recognize one of the men, who was equally as beefy and dark... But it was the third, cunning bastard with a big toothy grin on his face that left me feeling sick.

He had piercing eyes, the kind that made you question whether or not it was actually possible to kill someone by just looking at them. His hair was a light blonde, standing out against his dark skin. I assumed that it was natural—it had always been that color ever since I had met the vicious psycho when I moved to California and got more acquainted with the underworld...

But he had a worldwide reputation.

"Oh, *Axle*," he greeted me, his tone as dark as his aura. "How nice to see you again. You know, I always thought we had a lot in common. It's not surprising our taste in women is the same."

Bile shot up the back of my throat, but before I could bark something back, Chaz swatted him on the arm.

"Shut the fuck up or I'll let him drop you right here."

"I'd love to see him try," Victor's eyes shifted back to mine, a sickening glint in them.

I took a step toward him, and he did the same, puffing his chest out like he actually ever fought like a fucking man. We all knew he was the kind to take cheap shots.

"Axle," Viper growled, just as Victor's chest brushed mine.

That was all it fucking took. I shoved him back, and he burst into a fit of laughter, filling the night air.

"He's got it out for me, boys," Victor mused as he skidded across the sand. "Oh, this could be so much fun."

"Let's get this done," Chaz grunted, shaking his head at Victor. "Knock it off. I want my sister away from these assholes."

“You could just entrust her to me,” Victor shot him a wink. “You know I’d take care of her.”

I lunged for him again, intending to tear the fucker to shreds, but Viper clamped down on my arm, stilling me. “Let me go,” I growled to him.

The look of warning in his eyes was enough to make me cease from killing—or trying to kill—Victor right there on the spot. I bit back the anger and stepped back, not missing the hatred in the asshole’s eyes.

“Okay, now that the beasts have settled,” Chaz chuckled, “let’s get this done. Go get my sister and we’ll get your cash.”

Viper nodded, looking back to the van, and then nodding again. I watched carefully as the third man went to the Bronco, rather than the SUV, and retrieved a bag. I saw there was a shadow of a man in the front seat of the Bronco, and I hoped like hell that it was Lucas who would take Rachel to safety—and not the SUV carrying Victor.

“Here she is,” Gunner said from behind me, leading Rachel with her hands behind her back, still bound. Victor’s gaze laser focused behind me, and the lust in his eyes filled me with even more murderous rage.

“Quit looking at her,” Chaz growled at Victor before I could. Victor obeyed, his eyes casting down at his feet. While strange, I appreciated Chaz in that moment, doing what I had wanted to. “Give Viper the money,” he turned to the third, unknown man, who was holding the bag.

Viper stepped out and took the bag from him. He dropped to his knees, beginning to count it right there in front of everyone. My heart pounded in my chest as I kept my eyes trained on Victor, his eyes staying on his feet. I didn’t give a shit what was going on with the cash... I just wanted that psycho to keep his eyes off Rachel.

“All there,” Viper grunted, standing back to his feet and handing the bag of money to me. “Let her go.”

Gunner did as he asked, releasing Rachel. She took a step toward them, stopping right beside me. I couldn’t resist

the temptation, and my eyes made their way to her, taking in the sight of her delicate cheekbones and slender nose.

Fucking beautiful.

And fucking heartbreaking.

That's all I felt as her eyes caught mine for a split second, not even long enough for me to read the emotion in them. I turned back to glare at Victor, but his eyes were still at his feet, staying right there at his feet like Chaz instructed.

Rachel made her way to the far side of the group, opting to stop next to the third man I didn't recognize, but *she* did. They embraced for a split second, and he asked her if she was okay. She nodded, her eyes shifting to the Bronco.

"Rachel," Chaz called out, grabbing her attention.

She turned to him, her chest rising and falling as I watched her eyes momentarily flicker to Victor. They didn't stay there long, though. "Yes?" Her tone was confident and bright, like we were just all there for shits and giggles.

"Did he touch you?" Chaz glanced at me, and then back to her.

She tilted her head, playing it off like she was confused. "Who?"

"Axle," he answered through gritted teeth. "I know whose fucking basement you were in, Rachel. Don't play dumb. I know the others wouldn't bother with you—but him, I know he's taken a liking to you. I can tell... Just like I can tell that you're avoiding looking at him."

Rachel raised an eyebrow and sputtered out a laugh. "You mean Ghost Eyes?" She looked at me, her face completely devoid of any emotion—and I realized just how fucking *powerful* she really was in that moment. "You don't have to worry about him. He's just like all the rest."

Chaz smiled, laughing as he looked back at me. "What did I tell ya, Axle? She attracts the dark kind of guys like you, and then she fucking stomps all over them like they're

nothing. I swear my sister can bring the most powerful men to their knees.”

Victor muttered something under his breath, but I couldn't make it out—and Chaz didn't even acknowledge it. It made my skin crawl, as did the entire conversation...

“So, he didn't touch you?” Chaz looked to Rachel, asking the question again.

She let out a sigh, like she was annoyed, turning back to look me right in the face. “No, he never touched me.”

Chapter 25

Rachel

“Deal is done. You can leave now,” Chaz growled, his eyes still focused on Axle. My brother knew I was a good liar, and I had gotten everyone out of messes time and time again with my ability to shut it all off. I could create whatever narrative I needed to in the moment... But this time, I was lying to the one that I usually was trying to protect.

But I had to keep Trevor out of Victor’s line of sight—if that was even possible.

“You can go,” Chaz reiterated.

“I don’t want her in the same vehicle with him,” Trevor barked, taking a step forward toward Victor.

“Let it go,” I snapped, speaking before my brother could. We were right on the edge of this going very, *very* badly—and that’s why it was better to leave what happened between us in the past. “Let it go,” I said again, and finally, Trevor shifted his gaze to me.

He held my gaze, and I saw a glint of fear.

“*Please*,” I mouthed, showing him a hint of what I was really feeling toward him—which was anything but indifference.

His eyes dropped to the ground before looking back to Chaz, his face hardened again. “Don’t let him touch her.”

Chaz narrowed his eyes. “You don’t have to worry about that. I can handle it. I’ve been handling it for *years*. Nothing happened to her until you all came in and fucked with her life. You should’ve left her alone and only dealt with *me*.”

“Gotta hit you where it hurts,” Viper said with a shrug. “You paid, and that’s all I care about now.” He grabbed the bag of cash from Axle’s arms and headed back to the van. “Come on.”

Trevor nodded, meeting my gaze one last time. It felt like he was pleading with me, his eyes softening while his face stayed stone cold.

I ripped my eyes from his, looking away as a means of communication. I couldn't give my brother any reasons to think or do something—not that he probably didn't already have it figured out to some degree.

“Go,” Chaz growled.

Trevor bowed out, shaking his head as he walked back toward the van. Victor burst into laughter, a sound that made my insides ache with fear. I took a deep breath as they climbed back inside, leaving me alone with my brother and his men...

And whoever was in the Bronco—which happened to be the *only* reason I was okay with being left with my brother.

“That’s that,” Chaz muttered as the van began to back up. “Thank God.”

“Can we go now?” Jacob, one of his men, asked.

“Yeah, let’s get the fuck out of here before that dumbass changes his mind.” Chaz looked at me, his face darkening. “What the hell happened between the two of you?”

“Nothing,” I lied. “I had to make friends.”

“Bet you made more than that,” Victor seethed, his tone sending a shudder through my body. “The fucking things I’d do—”

“*Shut the fuck up,*” Chaz shouted, spinning around and shoving Victor back. “Just because she’s here doesn’t mean you can talk about her again.” Victor chuckled, but Chaz ignored it. “You’re not riding with us. Your ride is over there, and you can fucking thank him when you get in, because he saved all of our asses.”

I knew it.

I held back the tears of relief as I left the three of them, nearly sprinting to Lucas’s Bronco. I ripped the passenger door open to see my partner sitting in the driver’s seat, a look of

relief on his face as well. I climbed inside and pulled on my seatbelt, leaning back against the seat.

“He’s a sick fuck,” Lucas grunted, his eyes focused ahead.

I shifted my gaze to see who I already knew he was talking about, and my eyes locked with Victor’s. Bile shot up the back of my throat and I nearly vomited all over the dash of Lucas’s car. I wrapped my arms around myself and turned to Lucas.

“Get me out of here.”

“You don’t have to ask me twice,” he said, giving me a smile before pulling out and leaving the SUV. I caught sight of the van ahead of us, and I wondered if they could see I was in the Bronco with Lucas, and not with Victor. Maybe that would bring Trevor some peace... Because it had to be over between us.

And it was back to real life for me.

“I didn’t want to get out and muddy the waters,” Lucas said blankly as he turned onto the highway, heading toward home. “I knew you recognized me on the phone, and I have a good feeling they knew I was there, but yeah.”

I nodded, a million questions burning in my mind. “Tyson...”

“Yeah, the asshole deserved it,” Lucas snapped, shaking his head.

My eyes widened, surprised by this side of Lucas. He hated seeing people get the fate some would say they deserved. “So... You knew about his past?”

“Yes, well,” he paused to look over at me. “Not until after you were gone. I always thought something was off with him—but you *never* told me how fucking awful he treated you, Rachel. He used you to start dealing drugs for your brother. He got in with that fucking *sicko* who is obsessed with you.”

“Yeah, it’s bad,” I said with a heavy sigh. “I told you it was bad.”

“I had no idea it was *this* bad,” he groaned, running his fingers through his hair. “I don’t want you living alone.”

“What?” I turned to him, an incredulous look on my face. “Since when do you tell me what to do, Luke?”

“I’ve had to dig into my past to get you out of this mess,” Lucas began, his voice calm. “And those same people will ensure that *nothing* happens to you.”

“What people? What about your past?” I demanded, folding my arms across my chest. “I know that you have ties to the mafia. I *also* know that you know who Axle really is—some mafia guy named Trevor.”

His face tensed and then he turned to me, coming to a stop at a gas station. “Yeah, you don’t know about my past, and I’ve kept it out of my life... But I *had* to help you, Rachel. You’re like a fucking sister to me, and I couldn’t let you suffer because your brother is the scum of the earth.”

He ignored the part about Trevor.

But I had other questions. “So, Tyson made the deal with Victor to come and get me for two million dollars?”

Lucas nodded. “Yeah, I found out the night Tyson took off at the drop. I thought he was just playing hero, but then I went through some of Tyson’s shit. I don’t know. I don’t understand how the hell he got in so deep. He owed Chaz a lot of money, and Victor...”

My stomach flipped at the way his voice trailed off. “What about him?”

“He sent Tyson to his death at the hands of Trevor Webb, and he knew exactly what he was doing. There was no money in it for Tyson. Tyson was an idiot.”

I nodded, letting out a sigh though my heart stuttered over the mention of Trevor. He said the name so easily. “Well, what are we going to do if the police come knocking?”

Lucas laughed. “No police are going to come knocking over Tyson, Rach. I have safeholds put in place. Like I said, I let my fucking family go to move away from that life... And now they’re back.”

“They’re back?” I swallowed hard. “And who are they?”

“The Vitali family...” his voice trailed off again, like it annoyed him to say it. “Trevor Webb is my half-brother.”

I blinked my eyes, trying to figure out if Lucas was the *murderous* half-brother or if I was missing some fucking pieces to the story—and why wouldn’t Axle recognize him? “I’m confused,” I admitted.

He nodded. “I know, and I know you got close to Trevor. I watched the exchange, Rachel. I need you to know that he’s fucking dangerous.”

“So... You share the same dad?”

His jaw tensed. “Yeah, we share the same dad. My mom was another mistress of his. I wasn’t brought into the family until after Trevor was gone. They turned me crooked on the force, and so I left. I took a different job, and that’s when you and I met. I’ve been straight since... And I’ve been looking for him.”

I shifted in my seat. “Why?”

“Because our father is in hiding,” Lucas said. “And if I don’t fucking bring him Trevor, he’s going to take his money back...and hand you over to Victor.”

Nausea rolled through my body. “How long have you known that Axle was your brother?”

“A while. A long while, actually. I got it out of a mutual friend that he was still alive, and I haven’t stopped hunting him since.” He met my gaze. “He’s the reason that I’m not too far away. I didn’t have the intentions of ever doing anything other than just... *knowing* him. I wanted to know him—he’s all the family I have left. Well, the only family I have left I don’t hate, I guess... But...”

“But what?”

“I saw real fucking quick that he’s a bad guy—and I figured he’d whack me the moment I told him who I was. But now, I might get *him* whacked over the money I just had to borrow to free you.”

“Why didn’t you just tell him?”

He narrowed his eyes at me. “You got to know him, didn’t you?”

I chewed the inside of my cheek, avoiding his eyes. “Yeah, something like that. I just don’t understand why you used his real name? He spiraled over that.”

Lucas nodded. “I figured he would, but I also knew that it would ensure your safety. I didn’t know if they’d kill you. I needed to make you worth something... He has no idea who I am, though. I know he doesn’t. He doesn’t see it.”

Nodding, I scrutinized the details of Lucas, the resemblance more startling than ever before. *Holy shit...*

“He’s fond of you,” Lucas said blankly, meeting my gaze. “And we’re going to have to use that to get him to see Gifford Vitali.”

“He’s not fond of me,” I lied. “And I don’t want him to die for me.”

“I don’t want him to die. Our father is weak, and I think there’s more to it than getting revenge. If he wanted revenge, it would be on me. That’s why he’s given me the ultimatum to bring him Trevor or take the money back—and then hand you to Victor.”

My heart sank. “Why would he want revenge on you?”

“I killed my half-brother to protect Trevor. I, uh, I found out that my half-brother knew that Trevor had made it out with the help of an FBI agent, and he had set his sights on finding him. He knew he was in California... I had gotten out, too, by then. Trevor was the reason that I had the balls to get out. Everyone fucking knew he didn’t die in the car crash.”

“So, you killed your brother to protect Trevor—who you never met?”

“Yeah, met him once though...when I was a kid. He’s a solid eight years older than me. He knows I exist, I think. But that’s it.”

“Holy shit,” I groaned, running my hands over my face. “I thought I was going to have the chance to go back to my old life and outrun him.”

Lucas froze and then placed a hand on my shoulder. “Why do you have to outrun him, Rachel?”

I swallowed hard, squeezing my eyes shut. “Because I think I might’ve fallen for him.”

Chapter 26

Axle

She's gone.

My eyes were fixated on a crack in the wall, running from the ceiling to the door frame of the conference room doors. It had been two weeks since Rachel had been exchanged, and I hadn't been keeping tabs on her... Not really, anyway. I had a couple of contacts in her area that I checked in with, but that was the extent. I knew if I showed up, I wouldn't be able to stay away...

And she didn't want that.

But I was keeping a closer eye on her brother and Victor. I didn't trust them. However, the last two weeks had been quiet, and it appeared they'd gone back to their normal dealings, letting Rachel go back to living her life.

"Axle?" Viper's voice cut through my thoughts, and I ripped my gaze from the spot on the wall to my president's face.

"Yeah, sorry," I muttered. "I, uh, zoned out."

"You seem to be doing that a lot..." Bear, an older biker that we had kept out of the entire mess, said. "We're gonna figure out who ratted you out."

"I don't care," I admitted, shrugging my shoulders. Ever since Rachel left, I couldn't bring myself to actually give a shit why someone knew who I was. It didn't appear that it was used for anything other than to just negotiate her freedom anyway... Maybe a scare tactic?

Viper drummed his fingers on the meeting room table. "I think you *should* care, Axle. Maybe they were just using it against us, but there was no need... They paid for her release. It all worked out the way it should—well, mostly, anyway," he added with a grunt, shaking his head.

"I don't think we should stop," Will commented, meeting my gaze. "We need to know *why* her partner knew

your name.”

I nodded, the exhaustion coursing through my veins from not sleeping well. The fatigue kept me from arguing with them, because honestly, I wasn't sure if we'd ever have the answer. Someone who was smart enough to figure out who the hell I was, was more than likely smart enough to cover their trail.

“What about your FBI contact?” Gunner nudged me in the calf under the table when I didn't immediately respond.

“I haven't heard from him,” I admitted, my shoulders dropping as I leaned back in the leather upright chair. “He said he would go digging into it, but that can take him time.”

“Well, hopefully he'll have some answers.” Gunner picked up his water from the table and downed it.

My eyes drifted to the full beer sitting in front of me, probably already warm. I hadn't had the stomach to drink—and there was a party tonight... One that I had no desire to be a part of. Usually, if I didn't want to socialize, I would go back to my own damn house, but I had been avoiding it. I couldn't set foot in the house without feeling the ring of heartbreak...

And it was fucking embarrassing.

“I don't know what we can do to put the pieces together,” Bear said with a grunt. “Maybe we should give it a little more time, see if anything becomes of it. I think Axle has a point when he said that it could've been used as a scare tactic. That partner of Rachel's, he's a smart man. It could've been a way that he felt he could gain some power in the situation—make us sweat.”

“I think we should look into him deeper,” Gunner countered. “I know that we did a lot of digging and some surveillance... But don't you think it's a little strange that he has ties to the mob...”

My stomach churned at that fact. I hadn't been able to push that nagging little piece of information out of my head. “He's involved with the Las Vegas bunch. Not NYC.” The reassurance wasn't much, considering that I knew they were

all interconnected to some degree, but it was the best I could do to relieve my already fried nerves.

“I think it’s time to put away all this business and have a few drinks,” Viper chuckled, running his hands over his face. “I haven’t been able to enjoy my wife in nearly a month. We’ll keep working on Lucas Gray, but beyond that, we’re gonna let this all go for a while.”

Everyone nodded except for me, and then stood to their feet. I stayed seated as they all grabbed their drinks and funneled out of the room to the clubhouse lounge, where a whole truckload of people were already there, ready to party. We threw a fucking hell of a party—not that I socialized at most of them. I usually spent them smoking or drinking and staying to myself.

“You can’t mope forever, man,” Gunner clamped his hand on my shoulder. “I know that it’s shit with everything, but you’re not helping yourself.”

“I don’t give a shit about helping myself,” I grunted, shaking my head. “I need to get some fucking sleep though.”

“Yeah, you do.” He rolled my chair back and offered a hand to help me to my feet. “Come on.”

I took a deep breath, wearily eyeing his hand before taking it and standing to my feet. “I don’t know why the hell I can’t sleep at night.”

“Probably because you’re staying here at the clubhouse. Ever since Hallie and I got a house, there’s been no fucking way I can get a good night’s sleep at this place. I don’t know how Viper and Hannah stay here so much.”

I shrugged, hating the mention of anyone’s wife or girlfriend. “Yeah, I don’t know, but I think I’m gonna crash here tonight.”

“You sure?”

I nodded, patting his shoulder. “I’ll be good. I’m just fuckin’ tired and whatever else over my identity being brought up for the first time in a decade. Brings up a lot of the old shit that I was trying to run from.”

He narrowed his eyes at me. “Don’t lie about it.”

“What?”

“You’re not hung up over that,” he said with a shrug. “You’re hung up over Rachel leaving and not reaching out to you. I think that really burned you, and maybe once you admit to it, you might have a chance of getting over her. It was a bad way to start a relationship anyway,” he added with a laugh.

“Yeah, whatever,” I muttered, heading for the door. “I don’t need a therapist.”

“Well, actually, you probably do. I think we all probably need a damn therapist.”

I chuckled but didn’t feel a bit of amusement as I slipped through the doorway, the music and smell of beer and smoke hitting me like a freight train. I glanced around at the familiar faces, not seeing a single person I didn’t know. I was keeping an eye out for things like that now...

Though someone I knew could be lying about who they are.

Brushing off the thought, I slipped toward the hallway, ignoring some of the looks that people were giving me. Don’t get me wrong, I had never been one to socialize, but I also wasn’t someone who turned down a beer after a long day...

Until recently, that is.

I rubbed my unshaven jaw as I unlocked my room, pushing the door open. Everyone with some kind of status had a bedroom and bathroom of their own in the clubhouse if they wanted it. It had been my security for a while, when I had first gotten involved with the Steel Heretics.

Moving like a sloth, I shed my clothes down to just my boxers, and pulled back the covers on the black quilted bed. I had showered before the stupid meeting, just so I could crawl into bed immediately afterward. I hit the lights and climbed in, plopping my head back on the pillow. Taking a deep breath, I shut my eyes...

And all I saw was *her*.

Her hazel blonde hair, falling loosely past her shoulders.

Her dark eyes with golden specks.

Her petite, but full body beneath mine.

“Fuck,” I grumbled, rolling onto my side and pulling the covers over my head. I was being weak, and I *hated* it. My father had always told me that a man who lets a woman get under his skin becomes a weak man...

And that’s exactly what I was, fucking hiding under the covers as the heartbreak settled in.

I was better than this.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I took deep, even breaths, willing myself to just fall asleep. Once I was asleep, the only memories that came back to my mind were those of my past—and I wasn’t worried about what that might bring. Ever since rediscovering myself, memories that I had blocked out were coming back, and even that was better than being stuck on Rachel.

But apparently, that wasn’t happening tonight.

“Once I do this, you’re mine,” I growled in her ear, running my fingertips down her naked body. “There’s no going back, princess.”

The gold in her eyes burned with lust as she met my gaze. “I don’t want to go back, Trevor.”

“So, you want to be mine?” I planted kisses down her neck and collarbone, working my way toward her full breasts.

“Yes,” she panted, threading her fingers through my hair. “Oh my god, yes.”

I sucked her nipple into my mouth as my fingers slipped between her soaked folds. She let out a cry that made my dick nearly burst, and I slipped two fingers inside of her, her pussy clenching around them.

“I want you inside of me,” Rachel whined, her hips squirming against my hand. “I want you inside of me now.”

“So eager,” I teased her, lifting my head and dropping her breast from my mouth. I leaned up and took her lips with mine, kissing her as I removed my hand. I pressed the top of my cock into her entrance, letting out a sharp breath at just how fucking tight she was.

Her lips parted as she held my gaze, my cock pressing deeper into her body. “Oh, Trevor...”

“I love it when you say my name,” I groaned, slamming my hips into her as I made her take the entire length of my cock. “And now I’m going to make you fucking scream it.”

“Trevor,” she repeated as I pounded into her body. The slapping noise filled the room, but it was nothing in comparison to the moans coming from her throat.

I reached forward and gently placed my hand around her neck, squeezing only enough to feel the vibrations of her voice. “Say my name,” I demanded again, her sultry voice heavy while her eyes bore into mine.

“Trevor,” she whimpered, her pussy clenching a little tighter around my cock. I growled at the sensation, picking up my pace as I neared the edge. Her face contorted with pleasure as she grew closer to her own climax, her eyes growing hazy.

“Trevor...,” She let out a loud moan, her body finally pushing over the edge. Her pussy bared down on my cock, and it pushed me to my own climax.

“I fucking love you,” I groaned out as I stilled above her, my gaze holding hers still. “I love you.”

My eyes flickered open, unable to see much in the dark. “I’m going fucking insane,” I muttered under my breath, running my hands over my face. There was no way in hell that I loved Rachel...

But damn, it always seemed to slip out in my dreams.

Chapter 27

Rachel

“Okay, so what’s on the agenda today?” I asked Lucas, plopping down across from him at the table. “Because I’m beyond tired.”

“Still not sleeping, I see,” he chuckled, shaking his head at me. “You really should go see someone.”

“And tell them what? *Oh, hi, I was kidnapped and fell for the guy who did it.* They’re going to tell me right there and then that I’m batshit crazy—and then commit me to a mental institution.”

“Rightfully so,” Lucas joked before handing a file folder to me. “But seriously, I know I said that I would give you some time to settle in before we dug deeper into Axle/Collin/Trevor, but we don’t have a lot of time to waste. My father called this morning, and he wants to see him... *tomorrow.*”

I let out a sigh, feeling apprehensive as I held the folder on Ghost Eyes. “Your father—his father—is just going to kill him.” I said the heavy words like they meant nothing, but that wasn’t the truth. I felt something every time I discussed anything about Trevor... But I was just starting to grow numb toward it. I didn’t want to admit how deep my feelings ran for him...

Or the fact that they seemed to be strengthening with the absence of him.

“Okay, well, first of all, I’ve come to the conclusion that we don’t *know* that’s his intention. Also,” Lucas let out a sharp breath. “I fully intend to *tell* him what he’s walking into, and why he is. It’s not like we’re sending him in blind. Besides, for all I know, he might try and kill me. That is a possibility.”

I shrugged, having a hard time picturing it. “Maybe.”

“You’re no help,” he grunted, rolling his eyes. “For someone who was fucking him in the basement of his house, you act incredibly unattached.”

I folded my arms across my chest. “Isn’t that what I’m supposed to be? I’m not supposed to feel anything toward him—he *kidnapped* me.”

“And then you fucked him willingly, so just stop,” he snapped, clearly growing frustrated with me. “Stop the bullshit, Rach. We discussed what happened to you in *detail*. You can’t fucking open up one of the files I give you without getting all misty eyed and shit. I know you. I know you have feelings for him.”

“I’m not supposed to.” I avoided his eyes. “I know that.”

“You know,” he began, leaning back in his chair. “That’s thing about our lives, Rachel. They don’t fit into a mold. They don’t make any fucking sense. We work as private investigators, but we should *be* the subject being studied. It’s not cut and dry or black and white... We are what we are—and we’re on the same fucking playing field as my brother.”

I stayed silent for a few beats, thinking about what he said. “I couldn’t get ahold of him even if I wanted to, and there’s no way in hell that I’m showing up to that clubhouse of theirs. He might like me, but that doesn’t mean that all his buddies do too.”

“Well, I happen to have a remedy for that,” Lucas said carefully, reaching into his bag and pulling out a cell phone. He sat it down on the table and slid it across to me. I need you to call him.

“I don’t want to throw him to the wolves,” I nearly whispered, the guilt already slamming into my chest. “I don’t want to lead him right to his death.”

“*Rachel*,” Lucas exasperated. “We have gone over this plan over and over. You *have* to trust me when I tell you he’s not walking into it alone. I just know that if *you* call him, he’ll actually show up. I’m worried that if I do the initial talking, he’s gonna fucking run.”

I chewed my bottom lip. “You have a good point.”

“Okay, so call him. Have him meet us here at the office. It’s fairly secluded, no one is keeping surveillance...”

“Why not meet at my house?” I suggested, thinking about the possibility of clients stumbling in on the meeting. “It’s probably safer. We’ve got all those cameras set up. We can make sure that we’re prepared.”

Lucas mulled it over for a few moments, but then nodded. “Yeah, that’s fine. Have him meet us at your house. That’ll be easier, anyway.”

“Okay.” I picked up the phone and unlocked the screen.

“He’s the only contact in the phone.”

I nodded, hitting the contact button. There was one number saved and it had no name. I swallowed hard, my heart racing as I pressed it and put the phone to my ear...

And then I waited.

“We can meet him tomorrow at your house—at this time.” Lucas tapped his fingers on the table, and for the first time in, I think forever, my partner looked to be sweating bullets. It might have been funny under different circumstances, but this time, I was feeling the same.

But he didn’t answer.

I hung up, putting the phone back down on the table. “No answer.”

“Call him again,” Lucas instructed. “That’s the way things work. Call once, call twice, and call three times. We’ll stop after three. If he’s busy, that will signal him to call us back. If he’s ignoring us for whatever reason, he’s pretty much guaranteed to pick up on the third call.”

“That’s some weird shit,” I muttered, picking the phone back up and hitting the call button. I took a deep breath as it started to ring again, trying to practice in my head what I needed to say to him. I wasn’t sure if I could fake the meeting just being about us catching up... “I don’t think I can do this,”

I said, sitting the phone down again when he didn't answer for the second time.

"Yes, you can," Lucas encouraged me, giving me a reassuring smile. "You *can* do this."

"I don't want to lie to him."

"So don't."

"You want me to tell him about it all?"

Lucas shook his head and then leveled with me. "I want you tell him how you feel, Rachel. Tell him the truth."

I swallowed the lump growing in my throat, my eyes dropping to the phone sitting on the cherry-colored wood. "Okay. Okay, I'll try."

"This is it," Lucas shifted in his seat, his voice breathy.

Nodding, I pressed the call button... And sure enough, two rings in, the line connected.

"Yeah?" His deep voice sent a wave of heartache through my body.

"Um," I began, suddenly at a loss for words. "Hi."

The look on Lucas's face was suddenly nothing but pure amusement as my face went bright red, the silence on the other end of the line startling. But thankfully, it didn't last long.

"Why are you calling me?" His voice sounded weary, like he suddenly didn't trust my motives, and he had every fucking reason not to. Because... *Would* I have called him if I had the chance to otherwise?

"I know that this is probably unexpected, but... Well..." my voice trailed off as I fought for the words that just weren't coming.

Silence.

Lucas's amusement faded to frustration, and he motioned for me to keep talking. "Come on," he mouthed.

I took a deep breath. I had *always* been good at this shit. I never had trouble making up what I needed to on the spot to

survive... But doing it with *him* was completely different.

“Why are you calling me, Rachel?” Trevor’s voice came out strained as he repeated his initial question.

“I thought that when I left—well, when I was released—that I would be able to move past what happened,” I blurted out, the floodgates finally breaking. “But I can’t.”

“So, get some therapy.” His voice was flat. “Calling your kidnapper is probably not the best coping mechanism.”

“I don’t... I don’t see you like that, and I’m not even talking about *that*. I’m talking about *us*. I’m not over you, and it only gets worse as the time passes.”

More silence.

Fuck. Did I say the wrong thing?

Lucas was staring at me, leaning forward slightly, like he was trying to hear what Axle was saying on the other line—which was *nothing*.

“Trevor?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” he snapped. “You chose to fucking cut the ties. That’s what you wanted.”

“Okay, but that’s not fair,” I argued, shaking my head in frustration. “And you *know* that. You couldn’t just expect me to be fucking fine after you kidnapped me. I had shit to process, and I had to sort that all out in my head before I could decide what feelings were real and what ones I was using to cope with my situation.”

“Right,” he grunted. “So, what do you want me to do now, princess? Ride up on a white fucking steed and swoop you up? That ain’t happening.”

My heart sank, hating the cold tone. “I never asked you to be prince charming or anything,” I paused, rejection making my stomach hurt. “I just... I thought that maybe you’d feel the same.” I blinked back the tears as I looked across the table to Lucas, whose face was now contorted with sympathy.

And that just made it worse.

As did more silence on the other end of the phone.

“This is a waste,” I said, mostly to Lucas but also to Trevor. “It meant nothing. I was just something easy to fuck.”

Lucas nodded and signaled for me to hang up. I did as he said, ending the call and tossing the phone onto the table, not even caring that the screen cracked on contact.

“I was *not* expecting that,” I said, wiping my eyes of the unwanted moisture.

“He’s playing you,” Lucas said in a low voice. “You really must’ve burned him.”

“How do you know that?” I demanded. “You have no idea who he is.”

Lucas shrugged. “I *watched* him when you were released. He could barely fucking keep it together. If you meant nothing to him, then he wouldn’t have given you a second glance... But it took all he had not to come unglued right there at the exchange. You’re his weak spot, and he knows that. He’s just fighting it. That’s what we were taught to do—which is why my father killed our mothers for his wife.”

Before I could say anything, the phone rang, his number showing up on the screen. I shook my head. “I’m not answering that.”

“Yes, you are.” Lucas slid the phone to me. “He’s had a moment to get his shit together. Take the call.”

Reluctantly, I did as he said, picking it up and answering it. “Yeah?”

“What do you want from me, Rachel?” His voice came out cold, but there was something else there—beneath the surface.

“You,” I choked out, hating that it was the truth in both matters.

“If you’re playing games with me, know that I will *never* fucking forgive you,” he growled, causing my eyes to widen. “I saw the show you put on, you know, and to be frank,

I don't know that I believe you. I don't know how you got this number—and I don't know why now.”

I swallowed hard, trying to calm my thudding heart. “The way I feel is real, and I think you know that.”

“I think you're playing me,” he repeated himself. “I'm not an idiot, and I can tell when something is off. But you know what? I'm gonna show up wherever you tell me to... And I know there's a chance you're walking me to my funeral. And I guess,” he paused. “You're worth it. You're the only fucking woman I'd die for.”

I fought to hold back the tears. “My house. Seven o'clock tomorrow evening.”

“Okay, see you then, princess.” He then hung up, not even giving me a chance to say goodbye, which was a good thing, since I broke down in tears afterwards.

“He knows,” I said, batting the moisture from my cheeks. “He knows it's not real... and he's gonna show up anyway.”

Lucas nodded, his eyes dropping to his hands. “Well, I guess that's what real love is.”

Chapter 28

Axle

Bad idea.

I knew it was a bad idea, and the Ford Bronco behind me—the same one that was there for the exchange—only reiterated my thoughts on the matter. For all I knew, I was walking right to my death... But that was a chance I was willing to take.

However, as I turned into Rachel's driveway, something felt wrong. I put my truck in park, and slid out, my gut nagging at me. My eyes shifted to the door, where a camera was mounted. With a little digging, I had found that Lucas had installed a wad of fucking cameras around Rachel's place, being nearly as thorough as I would've been. It had given me a sense of security for her...

But that red blinking light on it caused me concern.

"Trevor?" A voice behind me caught my attention, and I spun around to see Lucas, expecting him to be pointing a damn gun at me or something.

But he wasn't.

And for some reason, that left me even more unsettled.

I studied him, never having seen him this close up in person. I had only ever watched him from afar, and there were no pictures of him to be found on the internet. I figured it was because of his mob ties and wanting to keep a low profile.

"Do you recognize me?" Lucas asked, his expression weary as his foot tapped on the gravel drive.

I blinked a couple of times, racking my brain. Something about him was incredibly familiar up close, but I couldn't pinpoint it. He had a razor-sharp jaw line, and a strong nose—much like my...

No way.

It's impossible.

“My brother is dead,” I manage to say, though the longer I looked at him the more familiar he looked. He didn’t have the right color of hair or eyes. His eyes were light green, not dark brown.

“Well, yeah, Ricardo is dead,” Lucas answered, shifting onto his heels. “But that’s because I killed him.”

I took a step back, my hand going to my pistol in the back of my waistband. “Who the fuck are you?”

He ran his fingers through his hair, his eyes gazing past me, up to the porch. “Wait a minute...” his voice trailed off. He suddenly surged past me, careening up the steps to just below the video camera.

Shit, shit, shit.

“Did you do this?” Lucas—or whoever he was—demanded from the top of the stairs. “Please fucking tell me that you were the one who disabled these cameras!”

I shook my head, the realization setting in. “Were you not checking them?”

“I was at the office before this meeting, getting everything ready for tonight—I had just heard from Rachel...” He pulled out his phone and looked down at something. “An *hour* ago. Rachel!” He banged on the door, his strength showing in the moment.

Victor.

I whipped my phone out, scrolling to the number of my contact that was supposed to be keeping an eye on Victor. I hit the call button and put it to my ear.

And it went straight to voicemail.

No, no, no...

I called it three more times, and every time it went to voicemail. I shut my eyes for a moment, taking a breath. He fucking outsmarted me. I had been so consumed with meeting Rachel this evening, that I wasn’t being diligent in my surveillance. I didn’t even realize that my contact missed his six o’clock call.

“I’m coming in,” Lucas shouted, leaning back and giving the door a massive kick. The frame splintered, and the door swung open. He turned to look back at me. “I swear, I was watching these fucking cameras like a hawk.”

I nodded, meeting his gaze—and then the realization hit me like a freight train. “Holy shit, you’re Nate.” My mind flashed to the image of a teenager with the same colored eyes and elongated nose, my half-brother and my father’s second mistress’s son. I had long pushed him from my mind. “I wondered what the hell happened to you. I figured…”

“We can talk later,” he shook his head, surging through the open doorway. “Rachel! Rach—”

I headed into the house, stopping right beside where Lucas was frozen in his steps. My eyes took in the dark red writing on the wall.

Got her.

Anger coursed through my veins, and the noise that I let loose was nothing short of excruciating. “What the fuck! Where is Chaz?”

“I don’t know,” Lucas—Nate—said. He pulled out his phone, did something, and then put it to his ear. “Something is wrong, man. Something is so fucking wrong.”

“No kidding,” I growled as he dropped the phone. “And you can tell me right now why you let this happen to her. You in with him?” I demanded, taking a step toward the man who claimed to be my young half-brother.

“What the fuck are you doing?” he warned, not taking a step back from me. “Why the hell would I go through *everything* just to let that creep get her?”

“Because you wanted to bring me here and do *this*.” I grabbed for his shirt collar, catching him off guard. Slamming him against the wall, I leaned into his face. “You better tell me what the fuck you know about what happened, or I will kill you right here. I don’t give a shit who you claim to be.”

His eyes widened and hands went up. “Trevor, I’m not lying to you. I didn’t have her bring you here because of this. I

hate Victor Sanchez just as much as you do. Why the fuck do you think I installed all these cameras?”

I released him, though my suspicions were still not completely gone. “Okay, okay. I’m going to try and make some calls and get some eyes on him. We need to get ahead of this... Before...you know.” I couldn’t even get the words out. I didn’t want my mind to go there, to think about what the fuck he might do to her.

“I’ll check and see if there’s anything on the cameras...” Lucas inched away from me, heading toward a room right off the main living area. I couldn’t even process the house, because my eyes just kept fucking landing on the writing on the wall.

I worked through my list of contacts, contacting anyone who might be in the underworld in that area of California. Most didn’t know, and the ones who probably did—didn’t answer.

“The cameras are wiped completely clean,” Lucas appeared from the room, his gaze focused on the wall behind me, which I had turned my back to. “And I don’t really know what the answer is... Call the cops?”

I shook my head. “They’ll never find him as fast as we can. I have one more contact that might be able to tell us something.”

“Okay, well, call them,” Lucas said, plopping down on the couch, his head falling into his hands. “I don’t know.”

I pulled up the contact, a guy who went by the name of Ice. He wasn’t a good guy and was not the kind of guy you called unless it was an emergency. I put the phone to my ear and waited, hoping that he’d answer.

“Funny hearing you call,” he answered, his voice just as grating as ever. “If you’re trying to get ahold of the drug king that you usually do business with, he’s a lost cause.”

I swallowed hard. “Chaz is a lost cause?”

“Yep.”

“Gone?”

“Dead.”

“Where’s his pet, Victor?”

“Don’t know. But I have a good feeling his pet finally bit back. Probably tired of being on a goddamn leash.”

“Where is he?”

“Don’t know, Axle. If I did know, I would happily give up the weirdo’s location. No one wants him on the loose. No one wants him alive.”

“You know where his place is?”

“Nope. I don’t know anything about him. I only know what I see, and I don’t like what I see. You’re on your own for this one. Good luck.”

The phone went dead in my ear, and even though he couldn’t give a location, he did give a piece of missing information.

“Chaz is dead,” I said, shoving the phone back into my pocket.

Lucas only shook his head. “I had a feeling that Victor was going to burst at some point, and I knew that him laying eyes on her wasn’t going to be good. I tried everything I could to convince her brother to leave him the fuck at home... But he thought he had a solid bluff in on the guy... And he obviously didn’t.”

“No shit,” I grumbled, rocking from foot to foot. “We have to figure something out, and *fast*.”

Lucas let out a heavy sigh. “I think... I think I know someone who has connections in *all* the places—eyes everywhere.”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “And *who* would that be? Whoever helped you find me?”

He chuckled. “No, he didn’t help me find you at all. *I* found you. The moment you fucking left the way you did, I knew that it wasn’t real. I knew you didn’t die in the car

accident. You were kind of an idol to me, and I just couldn't believe that you were actually gone. A few years later, it turned out that Ricardo didn't think that you were gone for good either. He started putting out feelers for you."

I listened to him, suddenly more intrigued than suspicious. I knew we were on a time clock, but something about the way he was talking made me believe that whatever he had to say must be relevant. "Go on..."

"He was able to pinpoint you as being in California. His obsession with finding you let me slip away unknown. I never made it to your level, though I think that Dad wanted me to, eventually. However, I moved to California, changed my name, and got a job as a cop. I was thinking the resources would help me find you. I knew you'd be somewhere in the underworld... There was no way in hell you were going to just live a civilian life."

"So how long have you known where I am?" I questioned, folding my arms across my chest. "Because something tells me that you've known for a while."

He nodded. "I've known for about five years. I got into business with Rachel, and her brother was in business with your club. I got lucky, but that actually is the reason that I took the job. It gave me a reason to be checking up on you. Rachel is like a sister to me, though, and I care about her... And I did what it took to get her free."

The realization hit me. "Is that why you wanted me to make the drop?"

"Yeah, I thought I could get in touch with you or at least see you in person, I don't know. But now..."

"Now what?" I demanded, seeing the shift in his demeanor.

"I had to do what I had to do to get that last part of the money to free Rachel, and therefore, I now have to do what I have to do to pay it off."

My heart sank. "You gotta kill me?"

He shook his head. “Nah, worse than that. I gotta take you to Dad... Which is who I also think can help us find Victor.”

It felt as though a ton of bricks had crashed down on my shoulders. “He’s alive?”

Lucas nodded. “Yeah, and,” he paused, checking his watch. “He’ll be here in five minutes.”

Chapter 29

Rachel

He snuck up on me in my own damn house... And he won. He fucking won. I was so distracted and consumed by getting ready for Trevor to show up, that I didn't hear the *psycho* creeping around inside of my house... I should've bought a dog.

"You know..." Victor began, pulling up a chair across from me. "I was thinking that this has really been a long time coming, my sweet Rachel."

I swallowed the vomit rising in my throat, looking him straight in his evil eyes. "I think it's been a long time coming for you to die."

He burst into laughter, his eyes raking over my figure. I had opted for a lowcut black blouse, showing off my cleavage, and a pair of tight jeans to go with it. Now, I was really wishing that I would've worn chainmail.

"You're such a gorgeous woman," he growled, running his hand down my thigh. I tried to squirm away, but he had bound me so tightly to the chair that I had lost all feeling in my toes and fingers. "And I can't wait to destroy you."

"My brother will kill you if you touch me," I shot back at him, trying not to show just how terrified I was.

Victor leaned close to me, his hot breath causing me to shudder. "That's the thing, my sweet Rachel," he cooed in an evil voice. "Your brother is no longer a problem for me."

My heart nearly stopped as I jerked my face from his. "And *why* is my brother no longer a problem for you?"

"Because I killed him," he chuckled darkly. "And it was so funny that he thought he had such a bluff on me. He thought that he could control me, using my weaknesses against me, threatening to turn me in to the police. He was foolish for thinking that way."

I bit back the sob building in my chest. Without my brother to stand in the gap between Victor and I, there was nothing I could do. He would consume me—and if he chose not to kill me, it would be worse than death itself.

“Ah, yes,” he continued to rub my leg. “I thought that you might be upset over the death of your brother. But you know, the two of you were never close. He didn’t know you the way that I do.”

I couldn’t swallow the vomit this time, unloading my lunch all over the floor. I squeezed my eyes shut as the tears slipped from eyes—mostly because of the retching—but also because of the fact that my brother was murdered at the hands of the man who was obsessed with me.

“Oh, don’t cry.” He made a fake sad face, reaching out and wiping the tears from my face. “I think I should probably get you to clean that up.” He got up from where he was sitting and disappeared, leaving me to take in the room. I knew that I was in a house of some sort, but I had no idea what else. He had put me out to move me—just like the bikers...

Only different—so different.

My body trembled against the chair, and when Victor returned with a damp towel, I trembled even harder as he walked toward me with a smile on his face. Leaning over me, he tilted his head, before lightly dabbing it around my mouth. I tried not to vomit again, doing my best to breathe.

“You’ve got the perfect mouth to wrap around my cock,” he growled, his voice deep and full of lust. He rolled the towel and pressed it against my lips. I shook my head, leaning away from him.

“No.”

“Oh, you don’t get to tell me no, anymore,” he cackled, shoving my head back. “Well, actually, I kind of like it when you fight me.” Victor pressed his fingers against my locked lips, and I cried out in pain as he forced them open...

And then shoved the towel in my mouth.

“Have to clean out the vomit,” he let out a childlike giggle, making my skin crawl with disgust as I gagged on the towel. I wanted nothing more than to punch him right in the balls for what he was doing, but one, I couldn’t, and two, I had no idea how long it would take for Lucas to find me...*if* he could find me.

“Ah, yeah, taking that towel like a champ,” Victor oozed with something dark as he leaned down and placed a kiss on the top of my head. I shook with repulse as he finally removed the towel from my mouth, and I sucked in a big breath, trying to replenish the oxygen my lungs desperately needed.

“Time to get down to business,” Victor’s eyes were darker than ever as he hovered over me, rolling his shoulders.

And then he went for his jeans.

No, no, no...

My heart began to race as the fear slid over me. I had never been more terrified or disgusted about anything in my entire life. “Please don’t do this,” I choked out, unable to put on a façade any longer. “Please.”

“Oh, I like it when you beg me,” he growled, ripping his belt loose. “You can keep begging me not to. It turns me on so bad. I’ve waited fucking *years* to have you like this. I’m going to bring you down to the level that you belong to. No woman deserves to have such an arrogant, rude aura, and yours... Yours is one of the worst, Rachel.” His voice was deepening and darkening. “And I’m gonna put you where you belong—”

The lights went black before he could finish, and I froze, wondering if it was one of his plans—an attempt to scare me. I stayed frozen... And the sound of footsteps in the pitch black had me holding my breath.

What the fuck is going on?

I wanted to scream, but before I could, a hand clamped down on my mouth. I let out a soft cry, but before I could panic, thinking it was Victor. I drew in a breath—and I recognized it.

Ghost Eyes.

“Who is in my house?” Victor roared from just a few feet away. Trevor was silent behind me, and I had never been more thankful that the man could creep like a ghost. “I know this house like the back of my hand... I’ll find you,” he growled into the dark.

Victor’s heavy footsteps grew distant as he took off through the house, moving like a savage beast.

“We don’t have long,” Trevor whispered into my ear. “He will get the lights back on. We have to *move*.” He quickly cut the zip ties free, and I nearly fell from the chair into his arms. “Can you walk?”

“I think so,” I whispered, trying move my fingers and toes. “I just want out of here.”

He nodded, pulling along behind him. I had no idea how he had gotten into the house. He wrapped my arms around his waist and helped me along. I moved as silently as possible, hanging onto him for dear life.

And then a gunshot rang out.

I froze where I was. “What is he shooting at?” I demanded, my heart dropping into my stomach as I thought of the possible help that Trevor had with him.

“Lucas is fine, come on,” he dragged me toward the door. “Come *on*.”

There was a loud wail, and it sent a shiver down my spine, a primal scream rattling the fucking walls around me. The seconds felt like hours as Trevor led the way through a house that I realized was much bigger than I imagined. Until finally...

We made it to the door.

He ripped it open, floodlights filling the dark yard of the mansion. “Go *straight* for the SUV. I have to go get Nate.”

“Nate?” I muttered in confusion, turning to face Trevor as he let me go, a black SUV only five to six feet away. “Who is Nate?”

“Lucas,” he said to me, before taking off at a sprint back to the house. “Get in the fucking car,” Trevor called to me, just before ripping the door back open and disappearing inside.

I turned back to the car, unsure of what I was getting into. I didn’t recognize it and the thought of climbing into a strange vehicle left me nervous—though staying outside of Victor’s house sounded much, much worse. That thought got me moving, and I sprinted toward the car, ripping it open and climbing inside.

Surprisingly, there was a man in the other captain’s chair in the backseat...

And he looked a hell of a lot like Trevor and Lucas... But much older.

“Hello, Rachel,” he greeted me, an unnerving smile on his face. “You have caused quite the chaos.”

I nodded, swallowing the new dose of fear coursing through my veins. “I’m sorry.”

He chuckled, his tone relaxed. “No need for apologies, I’ve dealt with much, much worse. I’m Gifford Vitali,” he extended his hand. “Trevor and Nate are my sons.”

And you had their mothers killed. Great.

“Nice to meet you,” I took his hand, shaking it.

“Victor is good at flying beneath the radar,” he continued, leaning back in the seat. “But I have eyes everywhere, and that’s why we were able to find you tonight. My son borrowed a lot of money to free you, and I would hate for that to go to waste. You have earned a spot in both of my sons’ lives.”

I nodded, not sure where he was going with it.

“I think Nate was under the impression that I was going to have Trevor murdered, but that’s not the truth. I loved him very much, and I understood the lengths that Nate went to with the intention of keeping Trevor safe. He killed his brother, and I don’t approve of that... But I respect it. I respect them.”

So... He's not going to kill the only men I have left in my life.

“Victor Sanchez is an animal.”

I turned to Gifford, seeing a tinge of concern in his eyes. “He is, but they’re deadly too.”

“Yes, yes they are,” he chuckled. “You are a smart woman for the allies you make, though I believe that Trevor is more than just an ally to you. He has never offered to lay down his life for a woman.”

I furrowed my brows in confusion. “What?”

“He came to me willingly, knowing that I might kill him—and he did it to pay the debt off...for you. And then to ask me to help him save you.”

“I’m grateful.”

“I’m sure you are.”

My eyes went to the window, apprehension building in my chest as I waited for Trevor and Lucas—or Nate—to appear again. I had heard the shot and the wail, and my gut had told me that it was Victor who was on the receiving end.

But I couldn’t be sure.

And the more time that ticked by, the more I started to wonder what was happening in that house. My foot tapped against the floorboard of the SUV, and I peered back at the rearview mirror in the front, not recognizing the man who was driving.

Can't he go and help them?

“That is Frank,” Gifford said as though he was reading my mind. “And he is here solely to drive. He’s a great driver but would be nothing but a thorn in the side of Lucas and Trevor.”

“What is taking them so long?” I muttered, wrapping my arms around myself.

“I can think of a few reasons why they’d take a little longer,” he grunted in response. “But I have a good feeling

that they are just making sure that Victor gets what he deserves. Did he touch you?"

I turned back to Gifford, seeing the anger in his eyes. "No, not like that."

"Good. That is a relief." He made it sound as though it was a nonchalant conversation, but I was sure he had dealt with more than I wanted to imagine. "They'll come out. It was two against one, and they had the upper hand, anyway. He thought that he could buy a mansion under an assumed name and not be found. But as it turns out, you're not the only woman who has been brought to this place."

The thought of other women going through what I had merely gotten a dose of made me sick. I wouldn't wish that kind of torture on anyone. Victor was cruel, and I was sure he had come straight from hell.

"There are bodies in the backyard," Gifford continued. "The police have been notified. They will leave him for the police... But he will be unable to ever rob a woman of anything, ever again."

I didn't press him to know what that consisted of, but relieved that the cops would be getting involved to bring other families justice for what may have happened to their loved ones. I leaned back in the seat, wishing that the time would fly by a little faster...

But it didn't.

Until *finally*, the same door that we had escaped from opened again, and out walked Lucas, covered in blood. I gasped at the sight, but he didn't appear injured otherwise. I headed for the third row of seating behind, still waiting for Trevor to appear.

Lucas swung the door open, letting out a sigh. "That was a fucking mess."

"Appears to be," Gifford grumbled. "Take that shirt off so you don't get blood all over my seats."

"Yeah, okay," Lucas said, pulling his shirt over his head. He tossed it into the floorboard and then peered into the

backseat at me. “He’s coming, Rach. I promise. He’s fine.”

I nodded, unsure of what to even say to him. So... I waited, my eyes transfixed on the door of Victor’s house. I didn’t want to know what was taking him so long, but I wished he would hurry up.

“You okay?” Lucas turned to face me in the seat.

I realized in that moment, that he looked a lot like Trevor—more than I had ever realized before. “I think so. He didn’t get very far with his plans.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m so sorry that I didn’t notice the cameras going dark. I should’ve never let anything happen to you.”

“It’s okay,” I choked out, suddenly seeing Trevor appear from the corner of my eye. My heart jumped as he trotted to the SUV, his face blank. Unlike Luke, he didn’t have much blood on him. But still, he stripped his shirt off before opening the car door.

“It’s done,” he said, nodding as he climbed inside. As soon as he closed the door behind him, Frank took off, stomping the gas.

“So, you’ll send someone to clean up?” Trevor climbed between the seats, plopping down next to me.

“Of course,” Gifford replied. “And I will let you have the night with Rachel. We will drop you off at her house, but then I expect to see you in the morning.”

“Of course,” Trevor answered, glancing over to me. Part of me expected him to touch me or hold my hand, but he did nothing like that. In fact, he put more space between us and avoided my eyes...

The entire hour-long drive.

I was ready to burst when I finally exited the SUV at my house, halfway expecting him not to follow me out. However, surprisingly, he climbed out behind me, and the SUV pulled away.

“We need to talk,” he said in a flat voice. “You were just a pawn to get me to my father.”

I blinked back the tears, shaking my head. “I know, and I’m sorry. I didn’t want to do it...”

“But did you mean your feelings?” He demanded, his voice straining. “Because I might have saved you from Victor and I might fucking *die* for you, Rachel, but I’m not going to be used.”

I studied his face, which was riddled with pain and heartache. “I *do* feel all those things for you, Trevor. I mean, yeah, it was really fucking complicated. I was *kidnapped*. And I don’t know why I fell for you, but it wasn’t just some kind of sick kink or something.”

“I never said that it was. But I know that you used me because you thought that might be the way to survive,” he argued, his tone colder than I expected. “I don’t blame you for it, but I can’t be that for you. I might be some coldblooded killer, but you’re something different than anything or anyone else.

His words brought tears to my eyes, and I wiped them away, my eyes drifting toward the woods around my house. I struggled to even find the words, with only three actually coming to my mind. Taking a deep breath, I met his ghostly eyes, looking warmer than ever beneath the moonlight.

“I love you,” I whispered.

He nodded, his eyes drifting away from mine. “You mean that?”

I stepped toward him, grabbing his hand and squeezing it tight. “Yeah, I mean that. I love you, Ghost Eyes,” I laughed as I said his nickname, feeling silly for saying it outside of the confines of the basement.

“Well,” he let out a chuckle. “I don’t know why the fuck you call me that, but I love you too, princess.” He placed a kiss on the top of my head and pulled me into him. “And I’ll never let anyone fucking hurt you again.”

Epilogue

Trevor

One year later...

“It’s kind of extensive to have a view like this,” Nate glanced out the window of my NYC penthouse. “Are you sure that your biker boys are gonna wanna visit this place?”

“Yeah, they’ve already been here twice.” I glanced out the window, taking in the skyline. “I don’t find it that excessive, really. You’re the one with the excessive luxury over there, you fuckin’ mob boss.”

Nate rolled his eyes. “Well, you’re at the same level as me, so I don’t really give a shit. You just prefer to spend your time in California slumming it with your biker boys.”

“Yep,” I said with a shrug, laughing as I made my way back to the table. “That’s where Rachel likes it the most too. I don’t like the chaos of the city.”

“Yeah, I don’t really either,” Nate nodded, taking a long sip of his beer and following me, taking a seat. “But my wife happens to like it here.”

“Most women in this world do prefer the city, and that’s fine,” I commented, staring down at the steak on my plate. I had no idea what was taking Rachel so long, but it was starting to stress me out. She was quick at getting ready. “I’ll be right back,” I said quickly, setting my drink down and slipping out of the kitchen.

I made my way down the hallway, not stopping until I was inside our bedroom. I glanced over the bed, which had a picture of the two of us at our wedding. We’d gotten married three months after that whole charade with Victor. Some thought it was too fast, but I didn’t think it was fast enough.

Rachel was mine, and I wanted the whole fucking world to know that.

“Babe?” I called for her, seeing the light under the door of the master bathroom. “Are you okay?” Hearing snuffles on

the other side, my heart jumped in my chest.

What the hell?

It had been about a year since Chaz had passed, and I know that had been hard for her—was that what was going on?

“Can I come in?” I asked, knocking on the door. “Please?”

“Yes,” she sniffled, her voice trembling.

I pushed open the door to find her leaning over the sink, dabbing the tears under her eyes with a tissue. “What’s wrong, Rachel?” I rushed to her, putting a hand on her shoulder. “Everything was fine when we set the table...”

She shook her head at me, a smile breaking through the light sobs. “I have something I need to tell you...” Rachel pushed off the edge of the sink, before reaching around me to pick something up. “It’s a big something.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Like how big? You taking drugs or something?”

She burst into laughter, shaking her head. “No, I have no desire to do drugs, Trevor.”

“Okay, so then what is it? You murder someone? Do I need to cover it up? You know I’ll do anything for you,” I shot her a wink, hoping to keep the smile on her face.

It worked, but she shook her head. “It’s way bigger than that.”

“Okay, that’s concerning.” I swallowed hard, my eyes dropping to her hand. “What is that?”

She handed it over to me, pulling her bottom lip into her mouth as she did so. “Just look at it.” Rachel held it out, and I took it from her, my heart jumping to my throat.

Holy shit...

“This is a pregnancy test,” I muttered, taking in the words on the white and blue stick test. I squinted down at the

test results, seeing the word *pregnant* on the little screen. “Oh my god...”

“Are you upset?” she asked, her voice trembling. “I know that we said we were going to wait until the house was built in Cali, but...”

“This is fucking amazing,” I looked back up to her, seeing the tears in her eyes. “This is the best news I’ve gotten in a year.” My chest swelled with so many emotions—all of them being positive. Well, it was terrifying to think about a child and being a father... and would I be a good one?

But fuck, the rest of everything was *incredible*.

“I love you so much,” Rachel sniffled, falling into my chest as I wrapped her up in my arms. “I never thought that this would be where we are today, but I wouldn’t change anything for it.”

“And I think your brother would be so happy for you,” I choked out the words, knowing that it had crossed her mind. “He was an idiot sometimes—like a *huge* idiot—but he loved you, and he did what he thought was best when it came to protecting you.”

She nodded, giving me a smile. “Yeah, I know. I wish that he was still here, but I’m happy for the family that I have now. Nate was always kind of like family, but now he really *is* my family. I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Yeah, I guess things worked out for the best. I don’t have to hide my identity anymore either. We are who we are, and the road isn’t easy—and it never has been—but it’ll be good.”

“As long as I have you, it’ll be good,” Rachel murmured, standing on her tiptoes to plant a kiss on my jaw. “You and your ghost eyes.”

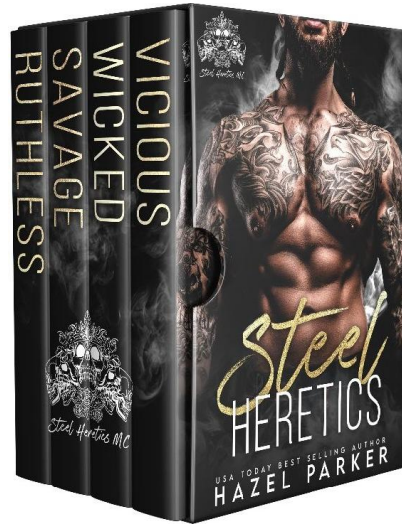
“Right back at ya, princess,” I winked at her, before taking her lips in a full kiss. My tongue pressed through her slightly parted lips, exploring her mouth for a few long moments. However, she pulled away then.

“We have a guest here, remember?” Rachel laughed, grabbing my hand and pulling me toward the door. “We can make up for this later.”

“You better believe that we will,” I said from behind her. “But now, let’s go tell Nate he’s gonna be an uncle.”

THE END

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