



7 TATTOO ARTISTS
and a
Single Mom

A REVERSE HAREM ROMANCE
NICOLE CASEY

Seven Tattoo Artists and a Single Mom

A Reverse Harem Romance

Love by Numbers 2

Book 6

Nicole Casey



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About this book

Who would've thought my life as a single mom could get tangled up with seven rugged tattoo artists?

My focus has always been on raising my daughter, shielding her from the scars of my past.

Love life? Non-existent.

Until my adventurous friend dragged me into Swan and Rose, a tattoo parlor that screamed trouble and temptation.

In a heart beat, I'm thrust into a world of art, redemption, and seven sinfully alluring artists.

Yeah, you read that right—seven.

Each guy's got a past as colorful as their tattoos. And despite their rugged looks, they're hiding something more.

These guys aren't your typical next-door neighbors. They are ex-cons, each with a story that'll have you on the edge of your seat.

Yet, the connection I feel with them is electric.

Just when things couldn't get more complicated, my toxic ex reappears, threatening everything.

Suddenly, those inked bad boys turn into knights in shining armor, ready to protect me and my daughter.

Secrets unravel, desire ignites, and the intensity skyrockets.

Can a single mom like me find her place in this world of ink, attraction, and unexpected surprises?

Chapter 1

Madison

A cloud of flour billowed over the white laminate countertops and matching tile flooring of my small kitchen, followed by an excited shriek.

“Do it again!” my endlessly cheery six-year-old daughter, Chloe, exclaimed as she stood right by my side.

Despite the mess I would have to pick up later, I couldn’t help but smile and look down at her, placing my hand on top of her head over her shoulder-length, chestnut hair that matched mine. She looked so much like me, which I was so grateful for. I couldn’t imagine how hard it would be to look into her little face and see the familiar features of ...well, *him*.

“You’re silly,” I joked with her, making her giggle. I handed her the whisk and helped her step up on her stool so that she could reach the counter. “Whisk together all of the wet ingredients with the dry ingredients, okay?”

Chloe nodded and clumsily mixed everything together, having the time of her life as some of it splattered on the counter. Oh, well. What was one more little mess to clean up, if it made her happy?

I had been a single mom for years, so everything came down to me. Taking care of Chloe. Picking up waitressing shifts at a local sports bar. Cleaning up the house. Shopping for groceries. And anything and everything in between.

However, I’d rather do all of that by myself than be stuck in a relationship with someone who didn’t care about me or Chloe. Because of that fear that someone would have love both of us,

my dating life had been as dry as the desert lately. At least I had some of the best company, though.

“Done!” Chloe said, only having a few splotches of flour on her pink shirt.

“Good job!” I told her as I peered down at the smooth mix. There were actually only a few chunks that needed to be whisked out, but she was a natural.

Honestly, her natural intelligence reminded me a lot of my sister, Leah, who was currently taking Harvard by storm as an incredible hockey player. I couldn’t have been prouder of her for succeeding in not only academia but sports too. Who else could say their sister had the potential to go pro?

Despite the doubt and pushback she received from countless people, including our own father, Leah was chasing her dreams and blowing people away. I never doubted her, no matter how big her dreams were. I wished our father felt the same, as a parent should, but Leah already proved she didn’t need an ounce of his approval or support to be successful.

Then, there was me. Single mom. Waitress. Baking hobbyist.

My hidden jealousy of my sister and my guilt for feeling that way were intertwined. We both had our own strengths and weaknesses, and I tried to pride myself on the fact that I had a happy kid, and I doubled down and fought hard to get away from my ex.

That counted for something, right?

“Tonight, we should FaceTime your Aunt Leah,” I said to Chloe as I showed her how to spoon the mixture into a circular cake pan.

Chloe nodded enthusiastically.

“I want to play hockey too!” she told me.

I laughed softly and placed the cake pan in my preheated oven, the door squeaking loudly as I pushed it shut. Chloe seemed to be determined to try every hobby and activity known to man. If she saw me bake, she wanted to bake. If she saw her

grandmother gardening, she wanted to garden. She loved learning new things.

“Maybe she can show you how to ice skate when she comes home for winter break,” I told her before checking the time on the stove. “It’ll take around thirty minutes, okay? Why don’t you go watch cartoons until it’s done?”

“Okay, Mommy,” Chloe quipped before bounding into the living room, her hair bouncing as she went.

I released a slow breath as I leaned my back against the kitchen counter, taking a moment to close my eyes and rest. My life was so go-go-go, and I was constantly doing things. For once, it would be nice to step back and let someone else do some of the work.

I didn’t get to rest for too long because my phone started ringing. I glanced over at the screen to see my best friend Aisling’s smiling face, and I could only imagine what she was calling me about. She had been texting me all day.

“I know what you’re going to ask, and it’s still a no. I’m not getting a tattoo,” I said once I answered the call.

“Aw, come on! You haven’t even heard me out yet,” Aisling said, and I could picture her pouting over the phone.

I cracked a smile and shook my head.

“The hundreds of texts you’ve sent me today isn’t you trying to convince me?” I asked her.

“Exaggerator. Just think about it. A tattoo can be something special!” Aisling told me.

“What are you getting again?” I teased her. “A pretty flower or a butterfly?”

“You can’t shame me, Madison Carney!” Aisling defended herself before laughing. “I’m actually getting a dagger with vines and roses around the handle.”

My eyebrows lifted out of interest. I honestly didn’t expect something like that. She was the type to cringe at gore or tense up from violence, so a dagger was certainly a surprising element for her to choose.

“Really?” I asked.

Aisling laughed a little before launching into her explanation.

“So, you know how my favorite romance book is *Love Kills*? Well, the main male lead, Jax, uses this awesome obsidian dagger to protect June, the main female lead. The roses are to symbolize their steamy hot romance,” Aisling told me with pure excitement lacing her voice.

Aisling lived and breathed romance books, even attending a weekly book club to discuss whatever they were reading that month. It did sound fun, but I barely had time to even nap, much less read a whole book.

“Okay, that actually sounds really cool. I just don’t really have an obsession or something to get a tattoo of,” I replied. I couldn’t think of anything to get. Plus, the thought of getting something permanent on my body was pretty daunting.

And the *needle*. Maybe I was being a baby at twenty-five, but that was what held me back from committing to Aisling’s request to get tattoos together.

“It doesn’t have to be an obsession. It can be something that means a lot to you. Or someone,” Aisling pointed out.

Someone.

Now, that caught my interest. There were only a handful of people in my life that I was close to, but the one I was closest to was Chloe. My daughter was my world, and if I was going to commemorate any relationship with a tattoo, it would be my love for Chloe.

“I don’t know. Maybe. I’ll think about it,” I replied, not wanting to fully commit to anything yet until I was a hundred percent sure about what I wanted to get. It would be on my body forever after all.

“Well, while you’re thinking about it, I’m going to call and book a time slot for us. You’re free to show up or you can ditch your best friend,” Aisling quipped with a light, playful laugh.

I smirked and shook my head. That was Aisling. She could be persistent, but she was the best friend that I had besides Leah. Throughout the tough years with my ex, Aisling had been there for me, letting me cry into her shoulder or watching Chloe so that I could take a late-night drive to clear my head and get away for a second.

“Hm, that’s a tough choice,” I joked with her.

“Uh huh. I’ll text you the time slot and tattoo shop in case you do change your mind,” Aisling told me.

“Alright,” I agreed, figuring I could at least consider it a little more before making a final decision. I only had one life, so maybe doing something new for a change would be good for me. I could think of it like a mini adventure. “Love you.”

“Love you,” Aisling said before the call ended.

I sighed and checked the time on the stove, seeing that there was still quite a few minutes left until the cake was done. Then, we had to frost it and decorate it however Chloe wanted, and I already knew that she would want to do something wild. Just the thought of all those steps, even if they were fun, created a weight on my shoulders that made me want to lie down.

The days were so long and busy, and I fought to get through each one of them, trying desperately not to fall into the hole of poverty that I grew up in. I wanted Chloe to have a different childhood and to be able to experience more than I did at her age, but it would take a miracle for me to break out of this rut. I couldn’t snap my fingers and have a better job or a nicer house.

I had to work for that, and I planned to do exactly that until we were living the life I had always hoped we would have.

Chapter 2

Marlo

The blue and red, neon ‘OPEN’ sign hanging in the front window of Swan and Rose flickered off on the stroke of eight o’clock at night, bringing an end to yet another busy day for my famed tattoo shop.

After years of hard work, I finally took all of the bad in my life and turned it into something good. Life was a slippery slope, and I dug my heels in by making something of my own.

“And that’s a wrap!” Bryce, one of the six tattoo artists I employed, shouted as he finished cleaning up his station.

His voice echoed throughout the old Victorian building that was updated for modern business, but its charming features were still intact, like its brick exterior and cozy attic. “Did you see that dragon I did earlier? It was so badass.”

“Did you take into account those notes I sent you about getting the wings anatomically correct?” Baker asked from the station next door, giving his twin brother a pointed look. They might’ve been twins, but they looked and acted completely different. While Baker kept his natural short, dark hair, Bryce went a completely different path and had a head full of colorful dreadlocks. At least it was easy to tell them apart.

Bryce chuckled and playfully swung at Baker’s side to nudge him.

“Yeah, yeah. I did,” he replied, absentmindedly tracing the smooth metal of his lip ring with the tip of his tongue as he grinned.

“Are you sure? I could’ve sworn the webbing wasn’t properly attached to the body,” Taj spoke up from across the room as he perched on the edge of his table with a sketchbook in his lap. A smirk played out on his face as Bryce threw up his middle finger in his direction.

“All that matters is if the client loved it,” Ti said as he slung his leather messenger back onto his shoulder, making his white t-shirt pull tight against his slim build. He glanced behind him at the station farther from the door in its own little corner. “Right, Gus?”

Gus merely grunted as he cleaned off his tray, not letting his naturally narrowed eyes stray from his task. He towered over his station with his broad body, casting shadows over anything and anyone below him. He wasn’t much of a talker, but he was damn good at tattooing realistic pieces.

“See? He agrees,” Ti told the others.

“Gus will agree with anything to get you to shut up,” Taj laughed, reaching up to adjust the strap of his loose, black tank top. His fingertips brushed over the highly detailed, colorful peacock tattoo that wrapped around his upper right arm, adding a pop of color among the light brown tone of his skin.

I smirked a little as I stood at the front desk, watching everyone gather their things and double check their stations. Everyone was very organized and particular, which would’ve been surprising to anyone who took a look at me and my crew. We didn’t have that artistic, hipster look like so many tattoo artists around town looked like.

It was safe to say we were a little rougher around the edges.

I didn’t nab any of them from art schools or anything like that. I snagged them right out of prison. They were nervous and unsure about their futures once they were released, and they would face all sorts of stigma and discrimination because they were ex-cons. I wasn’t a saint myself, and I knew how hard it was to keep it together when surrounded by a hostile environment.

I helped them make this tattoo shop a home. We didn't judge each other. We looked after each other. Essentially, we were our own messed up family, and I wouldn't trade these guys for the world.

Marcus, my own cousin, joined me at the front desk and pushed his tablet over to me.

"We've got Friday the 13th coming up. We really need to do a flash sheet sale," he told me.

I grabbed his tablet and looked at some of the sketches he did, which ranged from skulls to intricate spider webs. It sucked seeing my own flesh and blood be dragged through the prison system, but no one here had excuses for what they did. They'd messed up. We all had. So, we paid the consequences and moved forward.

It was obvious that Marcus was interested in helping me run the shop, which I wasn't entirely opposed to. He had a military background, so he was one of the more disciplined and determined people I knew. However, he didn't like being told what to do. If I was going to train him, that could be an issue.

"These look good. I've got something planned for tonight, but let's all talk about it tomorrow," I told him.

Marcus nodded and shut off his tablet, seeming satisfied enough.

I breathed in and ran my hand over my shaved head, preparing myself for an announcement that I had been dying to give all day.

"Before we all head out, I wanted to share something with you guys," I said as I walked out from behind the front desk.

Everyone paused and gave me perplexed looks.

"Are we getting fired?" Bryce chuckled, immediately getting sharply nudged by Baker.

I crossed my arms over my broad chest, making the muscle of my left bicep shift under the large rose tattoo that adorned my skin.

“No, you’re not getting fired. Whether you like it or not, we’re all stuck together,” I said with a small smirk, sparking some laughter among the guys.

I was the oldest at fifty-one, while the twins were the youngest at twenty-nine, but we all shared the same sense of humor. Honestly, all of these guys and their banter and liveliness helped me feel younger than I actually was. I didn’t feel like I was wasting away with other old, miserable men who acted like it was too late to do anything important with their lives. It felt like I was just getting started.

“Hey, at least we have fun,” Taj pointed out with a sly grin on his face.

Fun could mean a lot of things to our group. That could mean hanging out at a bar together or tattooing each other. It could even mean group sex with women we met online or in clubs throughout the city. We were... flexible. And we thrived on the philosophy that we only had one life to live, so we’d better make the most of it.

“Well, we’ll have some extra funds to have more fun because the mortgage for the tattoo shop has been paid off,” I announced.

At first, there was shocked silence as the guys stared at me with wide eyes. I didn’t bring up the finances much around them, letting them focus on shop upkeep and just doing their jobs. The only person I talked to about business stuff was Marcus because he was interested in it, but I kept that secret from him so that I could surprise everyone.

“No shit. Really?” Baker asked. “I thought it would take longer.”

I shrugged before some of the guys came up to me to slap hands with me and pat me on the back. This had been a big goal of mine for a while.

“We’ve been busting our asses. Now, this place is really ours,” I said as I gestured to our golden-lit, vintage-styled tattoo shop that had pieces of each of us interwoven in its warm atmosphere. It certainly differed from the vibe we probably

gave off to others in public, but everyone who walked in here left with a smile on their face.

“We wouldn’t be here without you,” Ti said as he walked up to me, giving me a small nod. He wasn’t the most expressive, coming off more stoic and sophisticated than anything else, but I knew who he was deep down. He had a lot buried underneath that straight-lipped expression, but I could sense his gratitude.

“I wouldn’t be here without all of you,” I pointed out, patting his shoulder before heading toward the glass front door. “Well, what are you guys waiting for? We should go celebrate.”

“Ice House, here we come,” Bryce said before throwing his arm around Marcus’s shoulders, drawing a smirk onto my cousin’s face as he was dragged out the door.

The Ice House was a rough dive bar around the corner from the tattoo shop. Honestly, it was full of criminals who just hadn’t been caught yet, but we didn’t let a shady crowd scare us away from good drinks. When we walked inside, there were a few hard stares, but my guys continued laughing and chatting as they took a seat at the two tables we always sat at in the back.

I headed to the bar, stopping between two burly guys in leather vests who were probably bikers. A lot of them came through here, and I heard of quite a few of them getting mixed up in the local drug trade.

“Six beers and a soda,” I told the bartender, who was a gruff man himself with a goatee and short, greying hair.

“We don’t care for kids up in here,” the bald biker to my right huffed, his words slurring slightly. An almost empty glass of beer sat in front of him.

“Kids?” I questioned him with a steady stare.

“Who the hell is ordering a soda at a bar?” the other biker with dark hair scoffed.

Footsteps sounded behind me just as our drinks were placed on the bar.

“People with more self-control than you drunks,” Baker bit out.

Both bikers jumped to their feet, nearly knocking their stools over as I held my arm out, keeping Baker from getting even closer. He had already sparked their aggression with his smart comment. We were all protective of each other, but sometimes, that got us into even more trouble.

“Alright, alright. Calm down,” I gritted out as I looked between everyone, staring the bikers down until they huffed and sat back down to finish their drinks. I handed four beers over to Baker and motioned for him to go before he started a fight. When I grabbed the other two beers and the soda, I glanced at the dark-haired biker. “Soda is for me.”

I carried the drinks back to my guys and took a seat between Taj and Gus, watching everyone clink their glasses and chug their beers. I steadily drank my soda, enjoying the sugar and the fact that I was no longer a drunk mess who nearly screwed up my life hundreds of times. All I wanted to do was maintain my sobriety and look after my guys.

Well, maybe there was one more thing. Our flings with other women were fun, but they were always so short and impersonal. When we were inevitably left behind after the truth about our criminal backgrounds were revealed, it stung. It hurt everyone. We had become a family with each other, but we wanted more. A loving partner. A child.

It just didn't seem likely for us to get those things. Our mistakes and dark pasts followed us like shadows. We could move forward toward the light, but from our viewpoint, it was miles and miles away.

Chapter 3

Madison

“**A**ctually, I changed my mind. I can’t do this. I really can’t do this. I think I’m going to pass out!”

Aisling stopped us from walking another foot down the sidewalk toward the tattoo shop, grabbing my hands and making me face her.

“Madi, breathe,” she told me with a firm voice.

I sucked in a deep, shaky breath, holding it for a few seconds before releasing it. I still felt my hands tremble slightly as I gave her a nervous look.

“What if I actually pass out and embarrass myself?” I asked her.

I looked up tattoo videos last night after finally cracking and agreeing to attend the appointment, and it only made me more nervous seeing that quick needle hitting the skin over and over again. How did that not hurt?

Aisling gave me a comforting smile.

“You’re not going to pass out and embarrass yourself. You don’t even have to get the tattoo today, but you should talk to one of the artists and get your idea sketched out at least!” she told me.

I nodded as I listened to her. She was right. At the end of the day, it was my decision whether or not I wanted a needle stabbing me in the skin over and over again today.

“Alright, I’m okay. Let’s go,” I said.

I'd already dropped Chloe off at school and cleared my schedule for the day, so I needed to commit to my plans. Plus, I didn't want to be the type to back out or let go of my obligations. I regretted dropping out of high school, but I had to commit to taking care of my daughter instead.

Aisling led me to the front of an old Victorian building where 'Swan and Rose' was carved into a wooden panel above the door. There was some glass shattered on the sidewalk and a spray of graffiti here and there on the corners and sides of the building, which gave me an uneasy feeling. The place was a bit shady looking, but it was too late to back out now. She pulled open the glass front door, making a bell ding overhead.

I followed her closely, my eyes widening as they swept over the busy and surprisingly nice interior of the tattoo shop. There were six artist stations with trays, kits, and tables, and I noticed the walls next to them had shelves with various trinkets or decorations that varied between the artists. The floor was made of sleek wood, old and new pieces of framed art hung on the white walls, and there were plenty of shelves full of vintage vinyl records, figurines, and... spiders?

"Is that a spider?" I whispered as I grabbed Aisling's arm and pointed toward one of the artists' areas where there was a glass tank with a tarantula inside of it.

"Holy shit, he's hot," Aisling muttered as she ignored the spider and looked at the tattoo artist sitting next to the tank and peering into it with a grin on his face.

I took a look at the slender but fit man and felt my heart skip a little. She was right. His light brown hair was cut into a quiff hairstyle, airy and dynamic. He wore a white button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled to his elbows and black pants. He looked like any guy who worked in an office, but I could make out the legs of a spider tattoo on his lower neck just below his collar.

"Woah," I said, sharing an impressed look with her.

Like he could hear us, the man looked up at us, his eyes centering in on me. The side of his mouth curled up slightly as

his eyes swept over me, making my face warm up in surprise. Was he checking me out?

“Ladies, welcome to Swan and Rose! Do you have an appointment or are you just walking in?” a handsome man with dark features greeted us with a playful half-smile on his face, making my eyes dart over to him and away from the other man. He wasn’t dressed up as much as the other artist, but in just jeans and a white t-shirt with a black jacket over it, he still looked good.

“Hi! Yes, we have an appointment. It’s under Aisling. This is my friend, Madison, that I mentioned was coming with me,” Aisling told him as she twisted a lock of her long, blonde hair around her forefinger with a dopey look on her face.

I was mentally twirling a lock of my hair as I smiled at the man.

“Nice to meet you two. I’m Taj. I understand you two have some ideas you want to discuss today. Then, we can move onto the fun part,” he said with an eager look on his face.

“The needle part?” I asked with a wary look on my face.

Taj chuckled and touched my arm briefly in a comforting manner, making goosebumps flare up along the back of my arm as my heart skipped.

“I promise it’s not as scary as it seems. We’ll walk you through everything, and you’ll have a great piece of art on your body at the end of it all,” he replied.

Warmth immediately bloomed through my body just at his touch. Just like that, he made me feel a decent bit better. So far, I really liked this place, and it wasn’t just because of the cool décor and warm atmosphere.

“Aisling, I’m going to have you talk to Ti over there. He’s going to sketch up your idea. Madison, you’ll be with me,” Taj said.

Gladly.

Aisling gave my arm a squeeze as she secretly shot me a wink.

“Have fun,” she told me before heading off to the hot spider man.

“Follow me,” Taj said, leading me over to his area where there were worn notebooks with scribbles on the cover, a small ceramic lotus, and a few packs of both sketching pencils and colored pencils. He hopped up on the black, portable table made of PVC vinyl and patted the spot next to him. “Let’s talk about this tattoo idea of yours.”

A wave of nervousness washed over me as I sat down next to him, accidentally hopping up too close to where our shoulders and thighs touched.

“Oh, sorry,” I apologized, feeling my face burn.

Taj smiled and shook his head.

“It’s totally fine. I need you to get a good look at the sketch anyway,” he replied before shrugging off his jacket and reaching over to grab a sketchbook and a pencil.

My eyes immediately zeroed in on the beautiful peacock tattoo on his arm.

“Wow, that’s really cool,” I told him, refraining from reaching out and touching it. The muscle of his bicep made it even harder to resist, and I couldn’t remember a time when I felt so drawn to someone. Dying to touch them. Wanting to get closer.

Taj looked down at his tattoo.

“Thank you. It means a lot to me,” he said, his vague words leaving me feeling even more curious.

“What do peacocks represent? Boldness? Creativity?” I asked him.

Taj let out a small chuckle as he rubbed the back of his neck, his eyes shifting to his tattoo.

“You’re actually pretty close,” he replied before looking back up at me. When he saw the curiosity written all over my face, he smirked a little, realizing just how much I wanted to know. “It symbolizes my Indian heritage and my love for art.”

My eyebrows popped up in interest.

“That’s amazing,” I said as a smile crossed my face, our eyes locking. He had the most beautiful brown eyes that caught the vintage-styled lights up above just right.

“So, what are *you* wanting, Madison?” he asked as the tip of his pencil hovered above the blank page of his sketchbook.

It was hard for me to put my thoughts into words. I hadn’t ever been good at art, which was why I desperately needed a professional like Taj to help me out.

“I have a daughter. Her name is Chloe, and she’s my world. I want something done for her,” I told him.

A warm look crossed Taj’s face.

“That’s sweet. Tell me more about her. Tell me how you feel about her,” he said.

Where did I even begin?

“She’s the smartest, sweetest kid ever born,” I replied with a laugh that he shared. “She loves trying new things. Like baking, gardening, and painting. Being her mom has been the best thing ever. Without her... I don’t know what I’d do. It’s like she keeps me rooted to the earth and doesn’t let me float away into nothing,” I told him, surprising myself with how much I revealed. That was a bit deeper than I expected to get.

Taj started sketching as I talked, his brow furrowing in concentration.

“She sounds amazing. I bet you and her father are very proud,” he said, almost like he was testing the waters.

“Oh, he’s not in the picture. It’s just me and her,” I told him.

Taj paused for a second to look over at me.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” he said.

I shook my head.

“It’s for the best,” I assured him with a small smile.

“I’m glad you did what’s best for your daughter,” he replied before sketching again. “And I’m going to make sure that she

loves this.”

“She loves everything,” I laughed softly as I watched the light, practised motions of his hand. I couldn’t exactly make out what he was sketching, but he seemed to know exactly what he was doing. I was putting a lot of faith in him, but I hardly felt a speck of worry as we sat close to each other, listening to “Comfortably Numb” by Pink Floyd play over the shop’s speakers.

Taj suddenly drew his hand away from the sketchbook and angled his body where I couldn’t see the page. A coy look spread across his face.

“Ready?” he asked.

I nodded excitedly.

Taj flipped the notebook around, and I couldn’t help the widening of my eyes and the dropping of my jaw. He had taken what I said about Chloe rooting me to the ground seriously and had drawn two figures, a taller one and shorter one, made of thin, delicate roots with their hands joined.

I found myself reaching out to take his sketchbook from him, feeling the crispness of the new pages as I pulled it closer to me.

“Oh... it’s perfect,” I murmured as I gazed down at it, able to picture it being me and Chloe.

Taj smiled and leaned closer, his body coming so close to mine. The air between us seemed to thicken, and I started to notice how good his citrusy cologne smelled. He didn’t even have to get that close to show me his sketch, which made me wonder if he just *wanted* to be that close to me. I certainly didn’t mind.

“What do you think? Good enough to put on your body?” he asked before a cheeky look filled his handsome face. “Not that it needs any improvement in the slightest.”

A bashful laugh broke from me as I lowered my head to hide my face momentarily. What was up with these charming, handsome tattoo artists? My eyes eventually shifted up to meet his over the top edge of the sketchbook.

“Absolutely,” I told him, feeling a lot of my wariness melt away. This was even better than what I pictured in my head.

Taj patted my knee and hopped off the table.

“I’d love to tattoo you myself, but I have another appointment soon. Don’t worry, you’ll be in good hands, though,” he said as he reached his hand out to me.

I took it and let him help me off the table, my skin warming up from his touch and kindness.

“Thank you so much, Taj,” I said sincerely.

Taj grinned in a manner that made heat churn in my lower stomach.

“Trust me, the pleasure was all mine,” he replied, his gaze lingering on mine for a few seconds before he looked across the shop. “Bryce! Come here.”

I turned to see a tall man with colorful dreadlocks and piercings on his nose and lip, wearing black cargo shorts with a chain attached to the right side, a black hoodie, beat up Vans, and white crew socks with slot machine cherries on them. By far, he was the most interesting looking man I had ever seen, but all of the unique details just made his clean-shaven face and green eyes look even better.

“This is Bryce. He’s great at what he does. Maybe not as good as me, but...” Taj joked, being cut off by Bryce giving him a playful push. “Bryce, this is Madison. She’s getting this tattoo to symbolize her relationship with her daughter.”

Bryce held his fist out for me to fist-bump, drawing a laugh from me.

“You have the best laugh,” he told me with a cheeky grin.

My cheeks immediately burned as I looked down, not expecting such a nice compliment. Honestly, they had both been so incredibly sweet to me, and they were both *so* attractive. I must’ve been dreaming.

“Thank you,” I said, fidgeting with the bottom of black, ribbed knit tank top I wore. Now that I knew how hot the tattoo artists

were, I wished I had subbed out the tank top and denim shorts I wore with something nicer.

“I’ll leave you to it. It was nice meeting you, Madison,” Taj told me as his hand rested on the back of my shoulder. Before he walked off, he flashed me a wink that I swore I made up in my head.

“Nice meeting you,” I said, my voice coming out weaker than I intended. These guys took my breath away.

Bryce gestured to his station with an eager look on his face.

“Ready to start?” he asked me.

My heart rate spiked when I realized that this was actually going to happen. I was actually getting a tattoo today. I expected to feel more fear, but Bryce’s encouraging smile calmed me.

“I’m ready.”

Chapter 4

Bryce

I was so glad I had a pretty light schedule today. When Taj introduced me to Madison and I saw that radiant smile of hers, it was like looking at the sun. But in a less painful way.

I could tell Taj wasn't the happiest about directing her over to me, but losers weepers.

As I got my area set up and prepared to make a stencil of Taj's sketch, Madison fidgeted a little as she sat on the edge of my table, crossing and uncrossing her legs as she glanced around.

"Are you okay?" I asked her.

Madison's eyes widened like she didn't realize she was externalizing her emotions as much as she thought she was.

"It's my first time getting a tattoo," she admitted. "I'm just a little nervous."

I walked closer to her and placed my hand on the table a few inches away from her leg, leaning my weight against it a little.

"Don't worry. I get a lot of first timers, and I can promise you they always say it's not as bad as they thought it would be," I assured her. Telling from her smooth, flawless skin that her tank top and shorts exposed, it was easy for me to tell that she hadn't been tattooed before.

I was honored to be her first, and maybe I was a freak, but it made this whole situation pretty hot. No one had touched her or marked her the way I was about to.

Madison smiled a little and nodded, pushing her fingers through the subtle, long waves of her chestnut-colored hair. She had these blue eyes that were intense, but they didn't seem

cold or piercing. They looked inviting like gentle waves out in the ocean.

I got her stencil ready and was on the way back over when I crossed paths with my brother, who seemed to be milling around with a crossword puzzle book in his hand until his next client showed up.

“Hey, look who’s at my station,” I murmured as I subtly nodded in that direction.

Baker followed my gaze, his eyebrows lifting slightly.

“Wow, she’s cute,” he said.

“Yeah, she’s sweet too. Pretty nervous, though,” I replied, hoping that I could get her to relax a little more. The process would only be more uncomfortable if her nerves spiked.

“I could talk to her a little,” Baker offered, the side of his mouth turning up slightly.

I gave him a pointed look, but I didn’t stop him from following me back over to my station.

“Hey, Madison. This is my brother, Baker,” I introduced them.

Baker shook Madison’s hand as she looked back and forth between us.

“Oh, you’re brothers!” she said with slightly narrowed eyes as she observed our basic features. We had the same nose, eyes, and height, while everything else was different.

“Yeah, twins, actually,” I replied with a chuckle, nudging her knee playfully before showing her the stencil. “Now, where are we thinking about putting this?”

A sheepish look filled Madison’s face.

“I’m not sure. I was hoping you guys could give me some suggestions,” she said.

“That’s what we’re here for,” Baker replied before taking the stencil from me. He gestured to the space in front of me. “Let me take a better look at you.”

Madison hopped off the table and stayed still as Baker hovered the stencil over different parts of her body. Her eyes met mine for a brief second, and I couldn't help but admire the pink glow of her cheeks. My gaze shifted away and followed Baker's hands, taking in the sight of her petite figure and the delicate, graceful way she carried herself. Her hips had a slight angle to them as she stood still, putting her notable curves on display.

"You know, I think your forearm would be a good spot. It's one of the least painful spots, and it's a good area for the shape of the tattoo," I spoke up as I gestured for Baker to place the stencil on her inner forearm as she rested her hand on her upper thigh.

Baker nodded in agreement.

"What do you think?" he asked her.

Madison inspected it for a second before nodding.

"I think that'd be nice," she said.

"Alright, you can just lie back on the table, and I'll situate your arm on an armrest," I explained, figuring she would want all the details to put her mind at ease.

"So, what tattoos do you guys have?" Madison asked once she'd laid down and had her arm resting on an armrest I extended from the table. She gazed up at the ceiling, rubbing her scuffed white sneakers together nervously.

I motioned for Baker to take her mind off things while I set up my ink.

"I've got quite a few on my chest, but you can see these small ones on my hand," Baker said as he stood by Madison's side, leaning over her slightly so that he could show her a few symbols that were tattooed near his knuckles and wrist.

Madison reached up and ran her forefinger over the black numbers '0327' that were tattooed along the top of his thumb.

"What's that stand for?" she asked.

Baker's eyes immediately darted to mine as I scooted my rolling stool closer to her arm. I knew what it meant, but was

he actually going to tell her the truth or lie about it like he did to so many other people?

“It stands for March 27th,” he explained in a slightly cautious voice.

“Oh, okay. Is that someone’s birthday? Or when someone... passed?” Madison asked, looking concerned by her last guess.

Baker rubbed the back of his neck before looking down at his tattoo.

“It’s... when I was released from prison. It’s a reminder to be mindful of what I do and to do what I can to be a better person,” he told her.

I paused with a surprised look on my face, wondering what coaxed him to tell a girl we just met something that was hard to bring up around family and friends.

Madison’s expression wavered a little, switching between shock and confusion and a hint of nervousness.

“Oh, I’ve never known anyone who’s been in prison before,” she admitted, seeming tenser than before as her heels pressed into the table. It was like she was positioning herself to jump up and run.

I could sense the nervousness radiating off her. She seemed like a controlled person, so she wouldn’t hang out with people who messed around and got in trouble. I couldn’t blame her for being wary, but I wanted her to know me for me. Not what I did in the past.

“Actually, we’re all ex-cons here. The owner, Marlo, came from a rough background, improved his life, and wanted to help people like us get integrated back into society doing something good and productive,” I spoke up, hoping that I could get her to relax.

Madison looked between us, her body going tense for a few seconds before relaxing. She glanced over at me.

“You can start,” she told me before looking back up at the ceiling. “Well, I think that’s very good of him. I think it’s great that all of you are here getting to do something you enjoy.”

I could feel Baker's relief coming off him in waves, clashing with my own. I thought she would leave the shop at first, but she was totally cool.

"We like making people leave here with a smile on their face," I replied as I hovered the tattoo machine over the stencil I carefully placed on her right forearm. "Alright, I'm about to start. It'll be a little pinch, and then it'll feel like a hot thumbtack is scraping your skin. That's pretty much all there is to it."

Madison nodded and automatically sucked in a breath.

Baker placed his hand over her wrist.

"Breathe. If you hold your breath, you'll pass out," he warned her.

Madison let out a nervous laugh.

"I told my friend that I was terrified of passing out," she admitted.

I chuckled and started tattooing one of the main lines, going slow and precise but remaining light with the pressure.

Madison gripped Baker's hand and squeezed her eyes shut for a few seconds before slowly opening them.

"Oh... it's... not too bad," she replied before grimacing slightly. "I mean, it kinda stings, but it's bearable."

"See? Not as bad as you thought," I chuckled as I continued my work, resting my free hand on hers and feeling her fingers slightly wrap around mine. I wasn't sure if she meant to do that or not, but it made my heart randomly skip.

Baker looked down at her.

"Bryce has a tattoo of a unicorn on his calf," he said, distracting her from the rapid tapping of the needle against her skin.

Madison gasped a little.

"Really? If I had Chloe pick out a tattoo for me, she would probably choose a unicorn," she said with a laugh.

“She has good taste,” I told her, shooting her a playful grin. Chloe must’ve been her daughter. Madison looked pretty young, so I assumed her daughter was still small.

“Why a unicorn?” Madison asked me.

“I’m a fantasy nerd. A lot of people get serious tattoos, but I wanted something that felt like me. Something crazy and mystical seemed like a good fit,” I explained as I moved onto another line. “You’re doing really good by the way.”

“I am?” Madison asked, sounding unsure. Since this was all new to her, she wouldn’t know the standards at a tattoo shop, and I had dealt with a lot of squirming first timers before. However, she remained perfectly still, only slightly turning her head to look between me and my brother.

“Very good,” Baker praised her, their hands remaining joined.

“I will say you two have been very... comforting,” Madison commented with a light blush on her face.

My eyes shifted to the left to watch her legs press together for a brief moment, making something stir inside of me as I took a second to admire her smooth legs. Her shorts and tank top hugged her petite figure, showing off some curves that were hard to keep my eyes off of.

“Getting a tattoo is supposed to be a fun experience,” I replied once I tore my eyes away and started approaching the halfway mark of getting her tattoo done.

“It’s definitely not what I expected,” Madison said, tightening her grip on Baker’s hand when I started tattooing on a more sensitive area of her forearm.

“You don’t like surprises?” I teased her.

Madison laughed.

“Well, I do. Especially when...” Madison trailed off as she glanced away from either of us.

“When?” Baker coaxed her to finish.

“When... very attractive men are involved,” Madison finished as her eyes shifted back to his.

Baker chuckled and brushed his thumb over the side of his hand as he continued to hold it.

“Well, you’re definitely the most beautiful woman who’s walked in our shop before,” Baker replied, using his casual charm that he always relied on when talking to women. Then again, I couldn’t remember him saying something like that before.

“Your brother is quite the sweet talker,” Madison told me with that glowing, angelic smile of hers on her face.

“He’s also the most honest person I know,” I pointed out as I wiped away some excess ink on her skin. “And he’s right.”

Madison didn’t reply, but her smile remained on her face as Baker asked her about what she did for a living.

It took me another ten minutes to finish up, and once I wiped away the excess ink and checked my lines, I leaned back to fully admire my work. And my canvas.

“You’re done, sweetheart,” I said.

With an excited look on her face, Madison lifted her arm to take a look at her tattoo before I wrapped it up, her jaw dropping.

“It’s amazing!” she told me, turning her arm every which way so that she could admire every bit and angle of her piece.

It always felt good to complete a tattoo that a client loved, but something about seeing her happily freak out made a warm feeling erupt in my chest. Damn, today turned out to be a pretty good day. I shared a small grin with my brother before I stood up and grabbed my phone.

“I’ll post it to the shop’s Instagram page,” I said.

Madison held her arm out so that I could snap a quick picture, her hand shaking slightly.

Something prompted me to reach out and cover her hand with mine, giving it a comforting squeeze.

“You okay?” I asked.

Madison smiled and nodded.

“Yeah, I’m just really excited to show my daughter. You know... it was actually kind of therapeutic,” she admitted.

“Now, you’re going to get tattoo fever,” Baker said as he helped her off the table, both of us hovering close to her.

Madison didn’t seem to mind in the slightest, looking between us with bright eyes.

“Guess I’ll just have to come back and see you guys,” she replied, her eyebrow lifting in a playful manner.

I hoped her joke didn’t stay as just a joke.

I didn’t realize just how much she would affect my day when she first walked into the shop. Now, there was a chance she might walk out of here and never come back.

“I’m sure Marlo wouldn’t mind giving you a discount for your next piece,” I commented before I could even think about my words.

“Oh, that’s too kind,” Madison insisted. “You did such beautiful work. It’s worth the full price.”

A beautiful girl and a perfect client. Yeah, it would be a mistake to let her slip away, but the tattoo was finished. The session was over.

Or was it?

Chapter 5

Madison

With a lingering smile and flushed cheeks, I followed Baker and Bryce over to the front desk to pay for my tattoo and have all aftercare instructions explained to me.

I never expected my tattoo experience to be like this, and I hadn't ever received so much attention and attraction from men before.

I had a guy or two flirt with me at a bar, but this was different.

This was so much more intense, and I was actually drawn to these guys, wanting them to admire me. Touch me. Flirt with me.

On the outside without any insight into who they were, they looked like big, scary, tattooed and pierced guys. Who were also ridiculously hot too. However, just from the three I had spoken to so far, I had come to find out that there were definitely more layers beneath the surface.

When I learned that they were ex-cons, I did feel a tinge of nervousness at first, but when I realized that they had given me no reason to feel scared, I quickly relaxed. Honestly, I felt pretty guilty about judging them so quickly when they had been nothing but kind and respectful to me. There was just such a stigma around people going to prison and wondering if they could truly change or not.

Regardless of whether they had or not, they acted nicer to me than some of the self-proclaimed "nice guys" I had met, including my ex-boyfriend, Michael, who had well-off parents, a great education, and a respectable, well-paying job as a local government employee. He appeared to be a good

guy to people who didn't truly know him, but I knew him deep down. He was a monster who should've been behind bars instead of behind a fancy desk.

Before we reached the front desk, my phone shrilly ringed from the back pocket of my shorts. My hand flew to it to check who was calling out of habit since I was a mom, and sure enough, it was my daughter's school calling.

"Sorry, my daughter's school is calling," I told Bryce and Baker as I stopped walking. I hit the answer button and pressed the phone against my ear. "Hello?"

"Hello, Ms. Carney, this is Andrea from Leeland Elementary. We have Chloe here in the office, and she's running a low fever. Are you able to come pick her up?"

My heart ached just at the thought of Chloe sitting in the office not feeling good. She seemed fine this morning! But I knew how it was with kids. They got sick at the drop of a hat.

"I'm so sorry. My daughter is running a fever, and I have to go pick her up from school," I apologized as I looked between Bryce and Baker. I started digging around in my purse quickly, looking for my cash that I pulled out for my appointment. Meanwhile, my mind was racing with worried thoughts.

What exactly was Chloe's temperature? Did she have any symptoms? Did she catch something from another classmate?

I ended up dropping a tube of lipstick and a few quarters on the floor because I wasn't paying attention, making my face burn from embarrassment as I crouched down to pick up everything.

"I'm sorry," I said again, feeling flustered.

Bryce and Baker were already on the floor grabbing my things.

"It's okay," Bryce assured me as he placed his hand on my back, coaxing me to look over at him. He gave me a comforting look. "I'm sure it's just a little cold. Kids get them all the time."

"Breathe," Baker told me.

I didn't even realize that I had been holding my breath. I sucked in a breath and nodded, telling myself to take it one thing at a time.

"Everything okay over here?"

I looked up from the ground, seeing three tall men looming over me. The one who asked was a man with a shaved head but a full, dark beard with a few streaks of grey. He was the oldest guy I had seen in the shop, but his body still had great muscle tone that I could make out through his white t-shirt and black jeans. A rose tattoo peeked out from under his shirt sleeve as well.

"I... uh... yes," I said, stumbling over my words as my brain became briefly fried.

Another man who had some of the same features as the older man, like his intense, dark eyes and lightly tanned skin, held his hand out to me. My eyes darted up his forearm where there was a tattoo of a lioness and her cubs, making me wonder what that stood for.

"Thank you," I told him before taking my things from Bryce and Baker. "My daughter is sick at school. I just had this amazing piece done, and my ride is still getting her tattoo worked on."

The man who'd helped me up crossed his arms over his broad chest, making the black and grey flannel shirt he had on stretch over his muscular build. He had to be in his early forties, but he looked like he could out-muscle and outrun anyone around my age.

"Do you want a ride? I'm sure all she wants right now is her mom," he offered.

My eyes grew big at his offer.

"Oh, I can't ask that of you," I told him.

The man shook his head dismissively, his light brown eyes holding my surprised gaze.

"It wouldn't be a problem. I have a clear schedule today," he replied before holding his large hand out to me. "I'm Marcus

by the way.”

“Madison. Thank you so much,” I told him sincerely as I shook his hand, noting how strong he was. I then glanced at the older man and the large, gruff-looking man who hadn’t spoken yet. “I can pay real quick, and then we can go.”

The older man held his hand up to stop me.

“We can settle that another time,” he assured me before extending his hand out as well. “I’m Marlo, the shop owner.”

I shook his hand as he towered over me, my stomach flipping. He had a naturally stern look on his face like Marcus, and I wondered if they were related.

“Are you sure?” I asked him.

Marlo nodded as the corner of his mouth curled up a little. It was hard to tell from his beard, but I could make out the crease in his cheek.

“Go get your daughter,” he said, radiating natural authority that even the other tough guys seemed to fall in line with. What was this guy’s story?

I smiled at him gratefully before looking down at my tattoo, which had been carefully wrapped up with a Saniderm bandage.

“When can I take this off?” I asked, realizing I had no idea how to even take care of this amazing tattoo.

The gruff man who looked like one of those intimidating mountain men approached me, wearing a dark green, long sleeve shirt and khakis.

“Keep this on overnight. Tomorrow, carefully remove the bandage and use warm water and antibacterial soap with no fragrances to wash your tattoo. You might see some blood and extra ink, but that’s normal. Pat your tattoo dry with a paper towel. Apply a little bit of Aquaphor or put plastic wrap around it,” he told me, looking me in the eyes the entire time. He looked intimidating as all get out, but his pale green eyes were actually really comforting, along with his deep, rolling voice. “After two to four days, your tattoo will be dry. That’s

when you can stop wrapping your tattoo up or putting Aquaphor on it and put unscented lotion on it instead a few times a day for the next two weeks. No direct sun. No soaking your tattoo. If it peels, it's okay."

It was a lot of information, but he explained it so slowly and thoroughly, that it was all locked in my brain at the end.

"Thank you..." I trailed off, not knowing his name.

"Gus," he said, shaking my hand. "It's a beautiful tattoo. It suits you perfectly."

Was he flirting? It seemed like a lot of chemistry had been circulating throughout this tattoo shop today between me and some of the artists, and I wasn't complaining in the slightest. I couldn't remember the last time I had caught so many handsome men's eyes before.

"I'm sure I'll be back for more," I told him before turning to Marcus. "I'm ready if you still want to take me."

"Of course," Marcus said with a faint smile on his face. He led me out of the tattoo shop, and I swore I felt all of their eyes on me. He led me over to a black Mustang and pulled open the passenger's door for me.

I got inside, feeling his fingertips brush my back as he guided me. A shiver nearly went down my spine, but it melted away at the loss of his touch. With a warm face, I focused on the alluring smell of leather and a black ice fragrance tag that lingered in his clean car. While Marcus rounded the front of the car to get to his side, I quickly gave my hair a quick fluff and checked my makeup in the mirror visor, my heart pounding heavily. Not only was I concerned about my daughter, but I was worried about saying something stupid during the car ride with a kind, hot tattoo artist.

Marcus got inside and backed out of his parking spot, placing his hand on the back of my seat in a manner that made me feel hot all over. He seemed to lean toward me, and when he braked to switch gears, his eyes briefly met mine, the side of his mouth curling up.

"What school?" he asked once he went forward on the road.

“Leeland Elementary,” I told him as I looked over at him, noticing how his movements were sharp and direct. Like he was professionally trained. That was when I noticed the dog tags hanging from his rearview mirror. “You were in the military?”

Marcus glanced over at me, the sunlight hitting his defined jaw covered by dark stubble.

“Marines,” he replied. “I stayed for a while, but my life sort of got off track for a little while.”

“Prison?” I asked in a soft voice, not wanting him to think that I was judging him.

Marcus seemed to tense slightly, but he nodded.

“Yeah, I got into some trouble with some people I shouldn’t have been around in the first place. But Marlo—he’s my cousin—threw me a lifeline and hired me at the shop,” he explained.

So, they were related. My interest piqued even more.

“From what I’ve heard, he seems really nice. He looks kind of intimidating,” I admitted with a light laugh.

Marcus cracked a smile.

“He can look like a hard ass, but he has a good heart. He’s taken in six strays and given us a home,” he told me as he glanced over at me. “I’m sure we weren’t what you were expecting.”

That sounded like a good man to me. All of them seemed to be good deep down, despite whatever trouble they got mixed up with in the past. I didn’t want to pry, though.

“Actually, you all exceeded my expectations,” I replied as we shared a small laugh. “I think that was the most interesting tattoo session I could’ve ever experienced.”

“A bunch of ex-cons fighting over you?” Marcus joked.

“Everyone is a winner,” I replied, flashing him a playful wink before I could even process the move. They all caught my eye

today, and I had a feeling I wouldn't ever forget the experience of getting my first tattoo.

When we arrived at the school, and he pulled up in front of the office, I reached out and placed my hand on his arm.

"Thank you again for bringing me here. I'll be right back," I promised him, not wanting to waste any more of his time.

Marcus shook his head as he reached out to pat my leg.

"No need to thank me. I'll be right here," he told me.

Warmth bloomed in my chest as our eyes locked for a few seconds. He didn't even know me, and he went out of his way for me. I finally broke away from him and hurried into the office, my white sneakers thudding against the white linoleum flooring.

"Mommy!"

I turned and saw Chloe sitting in one of the seats across from the front lady's desk, looking tired and miserable. I crouched down in front of her and placed my hand on her forehead, feeling how warm she was. Her temperature had to have gone up since they called me.

"Come on. Let's go home. I'll fix you some soup," I told her as I picked her up, nodding to the front desk lady before walking outside.

"Where is our car?" Chloe asked as I approached the Mustang.

"Um... I'm with a friend. His name is Marcus," I said as he stepped out of the car to open the door to the backseat. "Say hi, Chloe."

"Hi," Chloe said as she gripped my tank top strap, peering at Marcus with wide eyes.

"Sorry you don't feel good, Chloe. Is there any music you like to listen to?" he asked as he held the door open while I securely buckled Chloe in.

Chloe chewed on her bottom lip for a second.

"Hello, hello, hello," she replied.

Marcus pitched me a confused look.

I laughed a little as I straightened back up and let him close the door.

“She’s talking about Smells Like Teen Spirit by Nirvana,” I explained. “I’ve been playing the Nevermind album in the car on the way to school.”

Marcus gazed at me like he was starstruck.

“No shit. You’ve got great taste,” he said with a chuckle. “And so does she.”

With a raging blush, I got back into my seat, my heart rate doing a sprint as Marcus played Nirvana for Chloe on the ride to my house. During the drive, he glanced over at me, our elbows brushing as we rested them on the center console.

“You’re a good mom,” he told me. “I’m guessing the dad isn’t in the picture?”

I shook my head.

“Just me and her,” I replied before glancing over my shoulder to see that Chloe was dozing off. Whatever she was sick with was wearing her down. “I left her dad a while ago.”

“I grew up with a single mom. There wasn’t anything she wouldn’t do for me, and I know it was the toughest thing in the world for her to raise me alone. But she did. And she never complained,” Marcus told me. “You guys don’t get nearly as much credit as you should.”

My chest ached. His words touched me, especially since they were true. I had quite a few guys turn their nose up at the prospect of being with me because I had a child, which stung, but I would only want to be with someone who also wanted to be a dad to Chloe.

“Do you have kids?” I asked.

Marcus’s mouth turned down a little.

“No, I don’t. I’ve always wanted a daughter, though,” he replied, his eyes shifting to the rearview mirror for a second to peer at Chloe. “I hope she feels better.”

I sighed and nodded, chewing on the inside of my cheek as I started planning what to do first when I got home. She needed food, medicine, and something to drink so that she stayed hydrated. If she was infectious, I had to clean all of the sheets and pillowcases, switch out her toothbrush, and wipe down the counters. Among a million other things.

Once Marcus pulled into the driveway of my small house made of grey vinyl with little windows and a tiny porch, he put his car in park and dug around in his pocket, pulling out a shop business card. He grabbed a pen from his center console and wrote a number down on the back before handing it to me.

“If you need anything at all, call me,” he told me.

I took the card from him, our fingertips brushing and sending a spark through me.

“You’re amazing,” I said sincerely as our eyes met. I realized just how close we were since we were both leaning on the center console, only inches separating us. His smoky-sweet cologne rolled over me, threatening to draw me in closer and closer.

Marcus’s eyes slipped down to my lips, his head starting to tilt slightly.

Any remnant of control or common sense I had evaporated just from that motion. I started to lean forward to close the distance, lost in the trance of his kindness and sexiness, until I heard Chloe stir in the backseat. I pulled back, my heart skipping when I realized I’d almost kissed him.

“Thank you,” I told Marcus again before getting out of the car and grabbing Chloe and her backpack from the backseat. I shut the door behind me and headed up to the porch, holding Chloe with one hand and unlocking the front door with the other.

By the time I got the door open and glanced over my shoulder, Marcus was gone.

Chapter 6

Madison

Despite a week passing, Chloe was still sick with the flu, and I was barely dragging myself through the days.

I had been swamped at work, being thrown on shifts that I wasn't used to working and having to deal with grumpy, rude customers on top of being exhausted and stressed about my sick child and money.

No matter what, I would make sure that my daughter was cared for, even if the medicine she needed cost more than I expected.

As a mother, I had to make things work. Half the time, I felt like some sort of magician, having to beat the odds and play cards from under my sleeve to get by some weeks. I loved Chloe enough to do it over and over again, but I hoped that I could make our lives easier and better. It seemed like an uphill battle, but I was ready for the climb.

"Mom," a groan sounded from Chloe's bedroom.

I stopped wiping down the kitchen counter and quickly headed down the hallway to her bedroom, my socked feet gliding along the hardwood floor.

"What is it, baby?" I asked as I stepped into her bedroom, which was a testament to her love of various hobbies or obsessions. Her bedsheets were white with an array of different colored unicorns spread across it, her desk was full of art supplies, her toy box was overflowing with animal figurines and dolls, and her light pink walls were covered with a range of posters from Powerpuff Girls to a map of the world.

Chloe laid under her sheets with a pitiful pout on her face, which had less color than usual, especially her usually rosy cheeks. She squished her stuffed llama doll against her side as her hair rested on her shoulder in a side braid.

“My throat hurts,” she whined, her voice sounding hoarse.

Seeing her like this and having done all I could for her made my heart ache. There was no worse feeling as a mother than feeling useless.

“I know, baby. I can give you some more medicine in an hour, okay? Do you want some chicken noodle soup?” I asked as I approached her bedside, reaching out to place my hand on her forehead to feel how warm and clammy her skin felt. Last I checked, she was running a temperature of 100.5, and I checked every hour to monitor her.

Thankfully, my mom was able to come over and look after her while I was at work, and she made sure to come in with a mask and gloves on to keep herself from getting sick and spreading it to any of her friends she met up with for coffee or mimosas. There was honestly no telling where Chloe caught the flu from in the first place, but if I had to guess, I would bet it was one of the kids in her class. Kids were cute, but they could be pretty gross too.

Chloe nodded her head before tugging her blanket up to her chin, her eyelids fluttering in a tired manner.

I brushed my fingers through her hair, wanting to bundle her up in my arms and hold her. I hated seeing her like this.

“Get some rest. I’ll come back when the soup is ready,” I told her, hoping that I had at least the bare bone ingredients for soup in the cupboard.

Chloe closed her eyes before breaking into a light cough.

This was torture. I headed to the kitchen to dig around in my pantry and fridge, pulling out whatever I could find to go into the soup. I didn’t have any chicken, but I had chicken broth, which would have to do. Honestly, the healing magic was in the broth with lots of garlic and ginger, which I thankfully had.

As I hunched over the stove to throw all of my ingredients into a pot, a sudden rush of hot tears filled my eyes. All of my stress kept piling onto my shoulders, and my mind slipped to the comfort and happiness I felt around the tattoo artists I had the pleasure of meeting last week. I blinked my eyes rapidly as my eyebrows knitted, surprised that my mind had darted to them.

Granted, they had been on my mind late at night and in brief moments when I wasn't worried about Chloe or work. They were so good at making sure I was relaxed and comfortable, and I couldn't help but wish that they were with me right now, murmuring comforting words to me or even holding me as I took a breather.

I just wanted them here, but that was ridiculous, right? We'd only just met! The tension I felt between them was... fleeting. I didn't even know if I was going to see them again, even if I desperately wanted to. By the time Chloe was better and my life sort of went back to normal, they would've forgotten about me.

The thought of that made my heart ache, the pain echoing throughout my chest. I almost put my hand over my heart, but I kept my hand on my spoon and slowly stirred the steadily boiling chicken broth. Its warm, nurturing smell filled my nose as the steam rose from the pot, allowing me to relax somewhat.

But those rugged yet kind tattoo artists still lingered in the back of my mind.

* * *

Chicken noodle soup was good enough for one evening, but when the next day arrived, I realized that there was really nothing left to cook for Chloe. I had been so busy working and looking after her as she slowly healed that I hadn't found time to go to the grocery store yet. I couldn't put it off any longer.

When my mom arrived to watch Chloe, I nearly threw myself into her arms, burying my face in her shoulder. I didn't even

care if I was twenty-five, I still needed my mom when I sank into these dark, daunting moments.

“Her fever has gone down, but her throat is still sore. She has a light cough,” I blurted to my mom as I held her thin body tightly, able to smell her jasmine-scented shampoo in her shoulder-length, straight hair that was garnering a few white streaks within the dark brown color.

My mom rubbed my back.

“She’ll be just fine, Madison. You’re doing everything you can,” she assured me, already knowing why I basically collapsed in her arms.

I sighed, my body shuddering slightly as I did my best to keep myself together. It was just so tiring doing all of this by myself. Running the house. Raising my daughter. Working to make all of the money. It was so much.

“It never feels like enough,” I told her.

My mom put her hands on my upper arms and pulled back so that she could peer at me. She gave me a small smile.

“That’s just what being a mother feels like. You’d do anything for your babies. Anything,” she replied. “But we’re still human. We can only do so much. Luckily, we’re also pretty durable. She’ll get through this just fine.”

I breathed in deeply and nodded as I listened to her. She was one of the few people who could ground me during moments like these because she had been in my position before raising me and Leah. She understood exactly where I was coming from.

“I know. I just hope she gets better soon. I hate seeing her like this,” I said as my shoulders sagged slightly.

My mom gave my arms a squeeze before giving me a light shake.

“Come on. Take a breath. One thing at a time,” she told me, getting me to straighten up and blink my tears away. “Go get a few groceries. I’ll be here.”

“Thank you,” I told her sincerely, hoping she knew how much it meant to me that she helped me out during these tough moments. It stung to know that she had to go through the same thing while raising and Leah on her own, but I believed things turned out okay in the end.

My mom smiled and headed toward Chloe’s bedroom as I grabbed my things and walked out the front door. Today was an overcast day, light gray clouds crowding the sky and casting a hazy atmosphere over me as I went to my car.

That was when I heard a familiar voice.

“Madison.”

Chills rushed down my spine as I froze in place, hoping that I made that voice up in my head. He couldn’t possibly be here. I told him not to come within a mile of me or Chloe. Swallowing hard, I slowly turned to see Michael walking toward me in a dark blue suit with a small American flag pin stuck to the left lapel. When we were in late high school, he was built slim and had short brown hair and a clean-shaven face. Now, he was built large with slicked back hair and a trimmed beard, playing the part of a respectable, intelligent records management specialist in the local government.

“What do you want?” I asked, my voice coming out sharp and direct despite the nervous tension gripping my body.

Michael didn’t stop his pace, crossing the street in long strides until he was only two feet away from me. He towered over me, the strong, thick smell of his amber and leather cologne rolling off him in waves. It nearly burned my nose.

“We need to talk about Chloe,” he stated.

My eyes immediately narrowed, a rush of fiery anger overtaking any tremor of nervousness that I felt. I didn’t care if he wanted to come after me, but he wouldn’t come anywhere near my daughter. Not after I knew how he treated women.

“No, we won’t. I told you stay away from both of us,” I gritted out as I tightened my fingers into fists.

Air puffed out of Michael’s nose in an amused manner as he shook his head at me.

“Are you still hung up about our last argument?” he scoffed.

My jaw tensed as flashes of memories blinded my mind. His bruising grip on my arm. His loud voice making my ears ring. The taste of metallic blood from a cut on my lip. It all came back to me in a tsunami of emotion that nearly knocked the breath out of my lungs, but I stood my ground and held his dark gaze.

“What are you doing here, Michael?” I asked him.

Michael crossed his arms over his chest, the corner of his mouth curling up ever so slightly.

“I want custody of Chloe,” he said.

It felt like the ground fell out from beneath my feet, nearly making my knees buckle. My chest became so tight that I couldn’t even take a breath, allowing me to only stare at him in shock for a few agonizing seconds.

“What? Absolutely not! You haven’t had anything to do with Chloe since you left six whole years ago!” I snapped at him, finally able to find my voice.

“So? I’m here now!” Michael shouted back as he stepped closer, yelling down into my face like he used to do before.

I didn’t cower this time, feeling too angry that he was trying to take my daughter away to back down. If there was any fear, I couldn’t feel it through my rage.

“I don’t care! You won’t see her. You won’t talk to her. You will never get custody of her!” I yelled at him, my face starting to turn red.

Michael seemed to bare his teeth as he glared down at me.

“I tried to do this the easy way, Madison. But you’re so damn stubborn,” he gritted out as he took a step back. “This isn’t over. I’ll be back, and I’m taking my daughter with me.”

“Over my dead body!” I shouted as he walked back to a black Lexus, my stomach twisting and turning with anger and fear that kept clashing.

When he drove away, I had to lean against my car for support, hardly able to breathe. I thought Michael wouldn't be a problem after our last fight when I told him that we were done for good, but he was back with a vengeance. He was here to hurt me, and he knew my ultimate weak spot.

Chapter 7

Madison

An intense warmth enveloped my body in a pleasurable wave as four hands moved over what felt like every inch of me, caressing and gripping possessively.

My eyelids immediately fluttered shut as I sank into my mattress, arching and writhing to chase those talented hands as they squeezed my thighs, teased my breasts, and settled over my neck.

“Open your eyes, Madison.”

Marlo’s deep, slightly raspy voice sent a thrum of heat right between my thighs as I opened my eyes to look at him. He hovered above me, tracing his fingers up between my breasts to the base of my neck where he rested his hand.

“Keep your eyes on me,” he told me.

I nearly shuddered from the order, more heat rolling through my body as his fingers tightened around my throat.

It was so possessive and sudden, but I reveled in every touch he left on my body. Then, I felt someone grabbing my thighs and pulling them around their waist, making my eyes dart downward just as Marcus lined his cock up with my entrance and pushed inside.

I choked out a shocked moan, my body lighting up with bliss. It wasn’t long before Marlo’s grip tightened, making my wide eyes shift right back up to his.

“What did I say?” Marlo asked as he leaned down closer to me. His tone was serious, but I didn’t miss the slight smirk

playing out on his lips as he watched me nearly rolling my eyes back from the pleasure.

“Eyes on you,” I breathed out, my chest shaking with more moans as Marcus increased his pace.

“God, you feel so good,” Marcus gritted out before smacking the inside of my thigh.

My back arched as the jolt of pain melted right into my pleasure. I gave Marlo a pleading look, feeling myself quickly approaching the edge already. Sex hadn’t ever felt so intense, and it made my head spin from how good it felt.

Marlo chuckled as he watched me, enjoying the show. He was shirtless with his dark jeans still on, which had an evident ridge in them.

“You’re so good,” he praised me before leaning down to briefly press his lips against mine, muffling my moans as Marcus drove into me harder and faster. There was no way I was going to last much longer at this point. “We could all watch you all day long.”

“We?” I asked.

Marlo let go of my throat to press his forefinger against my cheek, turning my head to the right so that I could see through the darkness of the unfamiliar room. Along the wall was a loveseat and a cushioned chair, and it soon became clear to me that there weren’t only three people in the room. The twins were on the loveseat, and Gus was stretched out in the cushioned chair. All of them either had their jeans pushed off their hips or had their hands shoved beneath the material, stroking themselves to the sight of me.

A weak, aroused sound broke from me as I watched them, able to make out faint features as shadows fell upon them. The only way I was drawn out of that trance was feeling fingertips against my clit, a surge of euphoria capturing me.

“Oh... please...” I gasped out as Marlo rubbed circles against my clit, stimulating me even more as Marcus slipped his hand under my back to lift my hips slightly. That change in angle

was the last push I needed, and the beginning crackles of my orgasm just started lighting me up in a blissful surge.

Before I woke up.

Sweat brimmed my forehead as I sat upright in bed, my skin buzzing with warmth and subtle tingles. I raked my fingers through my hair as I took in a deep breath, the memory of my intense dream lingering in the back of my mind as it slowly started to fade away. There was no way that I could forget that I had a sex dream of the tattoo artists, though. No way.

It had been weeks since I last saw them! My cheeks flared up with heat as I shook my head at myself, embarrassment flushing through me. What in the world was my mind doing conjuring up something so dirty and kinky about guys I'd only met once?

"Get it together," I muttered as I hastily dragged myself out of bed to get ready for work, unable to dwell on my intense dream for too long.

Chloe had thankfully recovered from the flu, but bills still had to be paid, which meant shifts had to be picked up. After slipping on my black shorts and fitted, black-collared shirt, I slathered some lotion over my tattoo, which was now fully healed. As expected, it looked incredible.

Chloe often grabbed my wrist and looked at it closely, tracing the lines with her forefinger and even drawing it with crayons on a sheet of paper. She was too young to fully realize how much she meant to me, but at least she knew that she was deeply loved. I hoped she knew that forever, even in the stressful times.

Since Chloe had already been dropped off at school, all I had to do was grab my things and get in the car, but I was wary every single time I left the house now. Where was Michael lurking around now? What was he up to? It had been radio silence so far, but I wasn't naive. He was up to something, but I couldn't hide in my house biting my fingernails. I had to keep going for my daughter, which was dedication that Michael didn't understand.

I went through my shift with quick feet and fake smiles, trying to earn tips where I could, which meant a flirty comment or touch here and there when cocky guys came in. I had been asked out or asked for my number quite a few times, but I managed to dodge around pushy guys without any issues. Until tonight.

On the way home, I couldn't help but notice that a dark car was making every single turn that I was making. As I got closer and closer to my neighborhood, the unsettling weight on my chest got even heavier. It didn't look like any of my neighbors' cars, so why were they following me? Were they following me? Was I being paranoid?

Wanting to get home where I felt safest as soon as possible, I pressed down on the gas and sped down the road to my neighborhood, white-knuckling the steering wheel even as I pulled into my driveway. By the time I reached my house, the car was gone, but that didn't put me at ease. They still knew the general vicinity where I lived, and all I could do was double lock my front door when my mom headed home.

"Just a coincidence," I murmured to myself as I crawled into my bed that night, tension creeping up my spine between my shoulders in an uncontrollable chill. As a mother, I could blow some things out of proportion because I would rather be safe than sorry, so I hoped that this was another one of those instances.

My life was crazy, but it wasn't *that* crazy.

Swallowing hard, I pulled my white sheets up to my chin and tried to settle in, listening to the trill and chirp of frogs and insects outside of my bedroom window. It sounded like any normal night, and slowly, I let that thought comfort me, allowing my body and my eyelids to grow heavier and heavier with each passing minute.

Right before I fell back into the dark throes of sleep, the sound of a thud from the front of my house made me sit straight up in bed. The hammering of my heartbeat throbbed in my head as I stared at the doorway of my bedroom with wide, scared eyes,

listening and hoping that I'd just made up that noise in my head.

But it happened again. I could distinctly hear the squeaking and clicking of someone trying to open my front door as they turned the handle. Someone was trying to break in here, and the only person around to protect me and Chloe was... myself.

As fearsome as I could be for my child, I knew that I wouldn't be much of a match for some huge, armed intruder. I needed help from someone who could face off with whoever was trying to come in here and probably hurt me and Chloe. Only one person came to mind who I could actually reach and who could get here in time.

I scrambled for my phone on my nightstand, snatching it up and scrolling through my contacts until I found the name I was looking for. It was around midnight, but I was desperate at this point. I hit the call button and listened to each ring, my heart racing faster and faster as I faced the possibility that he might not pick up.

Then, he did.

"Hello?" Marcus's sleepy voice sounded over the phone.

"Marcus, it's Madison. I don't know if you remember me, but I came into the tattoo shop a few weeks ago," I said, my words speeding past my lips.

"Of course, I remember you. Everything okay?" Marcus asked, already sounding concerned.

"I think someone is trying to break into my house," I told him in a hushed voice, fearing that whoever was outside might hear me. I didn't hear any other thumps, but what if the person was searching for another way inside?

"I need you to hide. I'll get some of the guys, and we'll be there soon. I promise," Marcus told me in a firm voice, the noise of shuffling sounding in the background.

His words sent a gentle wave of comfort through me, but the sound of another thud made my blood run cold. I managed to breathe out two more words before my throat closed up from fear.

“Please hurry.”

Chapter 8

Marcus

Bright headlights glowed behind my Mustang as I raced down the road to Madison's house, going off memory from the first and only time I went there.

My jaw was tensed so tight that my teeth ached, but I was too focused on getting to Madison and her daughter as fast as I could. Who knew what had happened between the time she hung up and now?

Gus drove close behind me, making every turn and accelerating whenever I did. When I pulled up behind Madison's car, he parked alongside the street, shut his white truck off, and hopped out, his brown boots hitting the asphalt with a loud thump.

I slung myself out of my car and glanced around, peering through the dim area that was only illuminated by a few, orange-hued streetlights. The neighborhood was eerily still and quiet as a half-moon hung up over us in the dark sky. It seemed like whoever was here was gone, but I turned to Gus regardless.

"Check around the house. I'll go find her," I told him, a plan already unfolding in my mind. I was particular and precise about every move I made, especially when it came to Madison's safety.

We'd only had one interaction, but it lingered in the back of my mind like a shadow for the past few weeks. I waited for her to call or walk through the door of the tattoo shop, but she never did. Until now. Until she needed me the most, and I promised her that I'd be there.

Gus nodded curtly and jogged around the side of the house.

I approached the front door and paused, deciding to text her and let her know that I was there instead of knocking and scaring her some more. By the time she answered the door, Gus rounded the house and met me on the front porch, shaking his head. Whoever was here was gone.

Madison unlocked the door and pulled it open by a few inches so that she could peer out at us. Her hands were visibly shaking as she opened the door the rest of the way and stepped back, wrapping her arms around herself as she wore a large, white t-shirt and short, black shorts with fuzzy socks.

My first instinct was to hug her, but I stood rigid as I gazed down at her, wanting to assess the level of threat first.

“Are you okay?” I asked her. “Gus checked around the house and he didn’t see anyone.”

Madison’s eyes started glistening. “I swear someone was trying to get in. I heard them!” she said, her voice cracking as she shook her head fervently.

I immediately reached out and cupped her face, drawing her teary eyes up to mine.

“I believe you. I promise,” I told her. “Even if they’re not around now, we’ll stay here with you.”

Madison released a slow breath as she nodded, seeming to lean into my hold.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

I gazed into her eyes for a few more seconds, my heart rate etching upward just from being so close to her. I couldn’t deny the tremor of anger I felt over the fact that someone tried to break in here, though. If only I could get my hands on them.

“Where’s Chloe?” I asked her as I drew my hands away.

“In her bedroom. The noise woke her up, but I didn’t tell her what it was. I don’t want to scare her,” Madison explained.

Gus moved to stand beside me, his shadow falling over Madison’s smaller figure.

“I’ll stand watch outside,” he offered.

Madison’s eyes widened as she looked between us, shaking her head.

“I... I couldn’t ask you to do that. To stay overnight,” she replied, sounding guilty.

Gus waved his hand dismissively before placing it on her shoulder, making her chest still and not exhale.

“Least we can do. We can call Marlo or any of the other guys to swap out with us in the morning,” he assured her before turning and walking out to the porch, shutting the front door behind him.

Tears formed in Madison’s eyes as her fingertips touched her trembling bottom lip.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know who else to call,” she said.

The last thing I wanted was for her to feel guilty for calling me. I was glad that she had called me because I would kick any ass she needed me to. I wrapped my arms around her in an instant, one hand finding the back of her head and one resting on the small of her back.

Madison buried her face in my black t-shirt beneath the faded red and black flannel shirt that I didn’t even get around to buttoning up before rushing out of my front door. She gripped the soft material, her back rising and falling slowly and shakily as she tried to calm down.

I brushed my fingers through her hair, giving her a few moments to relax before she drew back slightly to gaze at me.

“You did the right thing calling me,” I told her.

When I first saw her name pop up on my phone screen as I lay in bed for another restless night of sleep, I remembered my heart stopping. I didn’t think that I would hear from her again after weeks of her haunting my mind. Hearing her laugh in my head. Seeing her perfect body in my dreams. I didn’t expect our reunion to be anything like this.

“I wanted to call you before all of this, but things have been so busy—” Madison started to explain.

I shook my head and brushed my fingertips over her cheek.

“It’s okay. I’m just glad you’re okay,” I replied.

Madison rested her hands on my biceps, gazing up at me with her big eyes and full lips. She really had no idea the radiating effect she had on me and the others. She was a topic of conversation more than she probably expected, and I didn’t know what to expect now that we would all be together again.

I knew what I wanted, though.

“Want to check on Chloe?” I asked her, figuring that would make her feel a little better. It could at least distract her while Gus kept an eye out for anything or anyone suspicious.

Madison nodded before leaning her head back to peer up at me.

“She’s asked about you a few times,” she said.

There was no way in hell that I could control the small smile that crossed my face. I didn’t expect to hear that at all.

“Really?” I asked, my surprise sounding evident.

Madison smiled a little and nodded before taking my hand and leading me down a hallway into a room on the right. She let go of my hand right before she entered, stepping into a room lit up by a projector night light that cast bright stars on the ceiling. She sat on the edge of a small bed and reached out to stroke her daughter’s brown hair.

“Chloe, remember Mommy’s friend, Marcus?” she asked in a soft voice that was mesmerizing.

Chloe sat up with a surprised look on her face.

“You’re back,” she stated like it was the most shocking thing ever.

I couldn’t help but chuckle as I slowly approached her bedside, my black sneakers lightly thudding against the beige carpeting in her room.

“It’s nice to see you again, Chloe. I’m glad you’re feeling better,” I told her before stopping at her bedside and peering down at her.

Chloe was one of those fearless, endlessly curious kids, and they were definitely the coolest.

“Why are you here?” she asked as she tilted her head.

A nervous look briefly crossed Madison’s face as she rubbed Chloe’s back.

“Honey, it’s time for you to go back to bed. It’s late,” she said.

“I can’t sleep.” Chloe pouted as she crossed her arms over her chest.

“That’s actually why I’m here,” I told Chloe before grabbing the wooden chair at her cluttered desk and dragging it next to her bed. I took a seat and relaxed back in it. “I’m here to tell you a bedtime story.”

Madison’s eyes widened in surprise as Chloe gasped excitedly and snuggled her way under her sheets. She peered up at me with eager eyes, waiting for me to start.

I looked over at Madison and gave her a sure smile.

“I’ll put her to bed. Everything is okay,” I said.

Pure awe filled Madison’s face as she nodded. She lingered for a few seconds, gazing at me like she wanted to say something. Or kiss me. Maybe both. Instead, she got to her feet and brushed her hand along my shoulder before moving to stand in the doorway.

While I told Chloe a story that my mom used to tell me about a magical frog finding his way back home, I could feel Madison’s eyes on me the entire time. Part of it was probably her being protective over her child. At the end of the day, we still only just met, but I could feel the appreciation coming off her in waves.

It felt good doing this for her. For Chloe. If I hadn’t messed up and landed myself in prison, I could’ve already been telling bedtime stories to kids of my own, but at least I had this moment to enjoy now. Granted, I only got halfway through the story before Chloe dozed off, prompting me to chuckle under my breath and get to my feet. Carefully, I brushed away a

loose strand of hair that was on Chloe's forehead before joining Madison out in the hallway.

"Don't worry. Lily finds her way back to her family in the end," I told Madison as she led me to the kitchen.

Madison laughed softly as she fixed me a glass of water, her fingers brushing mine as she handed it to me.

"Thank you for doing that. It means a lot," she said sincerely, leaning her hip against the counter as she faced me.

I shook my head, not wanting her to thank me or worry about bothering me. I could tell she was a good, hard-working person, and I believed those people deserved a break the most, especially during the hard times.

"It was nice," I told her before sipping on my water and then setting the glass down on the kitchen counter.

A knowing smile crossed her lips as she shifted a little closer to me.

"I think Chloe really likes you," she stated. "You know, you'd be a really good dad."

Honestly, that was probably one of the best compliments I could ever receive. All I wanted was to be a good influence or a source of encouragement, whether that was for my friends, people in the prison system that needed some motivation, or kids. I wanted to be better than my past self.

"That's what I strive to be," I replied as I moved my hand on the kitchen counter just a few centimeters away from hers.

Madison glanced at my hand for a second before looking away.

"I really appreciate all you've done for me tonight. I don't know how to even begin to thank you properly," she said as her fingertips slowly brushed over mine.

I turned my hand over to take hers, hearing her breathing stop for a second. She felt so warm and soft to the touch, and it took everything in me not to let my hand trail farther up her body. It would be so easy to pull her closer, to claim her like that dark, possessive side of my mind wanted to. But I let her

go. Protecting her and Chloe came first, and I would have been an asshole to push for more when she had asked for my help.

“You should try to get some sleep. I’m going to check in with Gus,” I told her as I stepped away from the counter.

A faint look of disappointment flashed across Madison’s face, but she gave me a small smile before leaving the kitchen.

My eyes trailed her until she disappeared, finally able to get my heart to stop racing at what felt like a hundred miles per hour. It was hard to explain the hold this woman had on me, but I knew that it was something I hadn’t ever encountered before.

Chapter 9

Madison

Despite the discomfort of last night, I still had to move on like normal the next morning with regards to Chloe.

I didn't want her to know that anything scary was going on and worry her, so Gus and Marcus hid around the side of the house while I brought Chloe to my car to take her to school. With a forced smile on my face, I leaned into the backseat and buckled her in.

"Did you sleep okay when you went back to bed last night?" I asked her.

Chloe smiled and nodded.

"I want Marcus to tell me the frog story again," she said with hopeful eyes.

I felt my heart skip as I thought about watching Marcus murmuring a sweet bedtime story to my daughter. He didn't have to do that. He didn't even have to show up at my house to make me feel safer. But he did. He did so much for me, and evidently, the others were going to come and help too.

I knew that I wanted to see them all again, but I didn't think that such an intense situation would lead to our reunion. I still didn't know who was trying to get into my house. Michael could be aggressive, but I didn't know what breaking into my house would gain him. He wouldn't just steal Chloe or something crazy like that. He was too smart to get caught.

Then again, a big reason why I didn't call the police was because he had friends in the force. I was sure those friends had been informed about our messy break-up, and I doubted

they would rush to help me. Plus, I didn't want them reporting anything back to Michael that could hurt me in the long run. What if he claimed my residence wasn't safe for Chloe?

"Maybe another day," I told her before getting into the driver's seat, blinking away my tears quickly.

The level of stress and pressure on me was crushing, making my body and my heart ache as I forged on like nothing was wrong. I had a bunch of ex-cons protecting me because my ex-boyfriend could've corrupted some of the police force! It was crazy, and I hoped that I made the right move by turning to Marcus and his friends for help.

They hadn't given me any reason to fear them or doubt them, but this situation was too crazy to fully grasp. The lines between right and wrong and smart and reckless were so blurry that it was hard to differentiate between the two. All I could do was go with my gut, and I knew that I felt comforted whenever I saw any of the guys from the tattoo shop.

After dropping Chloe off and getting back home, I found Marlo standing on my front porch. As surprised as I was to see him, I also felt that same wave of comfort overtake me, knowing that he was here to keep me safe. But it also occurred to me that we were probably going to be alone together. I sucked in a shaky breath to steady myself, already feeling my heart start to race.

"Morning," Marlo greeted me as I walked toward the porch. He pushed himself off the side of my house and stepped toward me, his eyebrows furrowing slightly. "Are you okay?"

They all seemed genuinely concerned about me, which made me feel lighter than a cloud, but it also confused me. We all just met. Why was there something so intense being shared between us? Was it just... desire?

"Hanging in," I replied with a weak smile before glancing around. "You're relieving Marcus and Gus?"

Marlo nodded as he came closer, looming over me in a zipped-up black jacket and black pants. I didn't miss the mix of bold

cologne and laundry detergent that rolled off him either. Intoxicating.

“We want to keep an eye on the house for a little while just to be sure,” he told me. “So, you can go about your day and at least one of us will be nearby.”

I found myself reaching out to place my hand on his strong upper arm, able to feel the groove of muscle from his bicep under his jacket sleeve.

“I can’t ask you guys to put your lives on hold for me. What about the tattoo shop? Your families?” I asked.

Marlo shook his head as he took my hand, clasping it between his bigger ones.

“Whoever isn’t watching you is watching the tattoo shop. And we don’t have families to go home to. No wives. We’re our own family here,” he explained to me. “And trust me, you’re our number one priority right now.”

Part of me was sad that none of them were married or had kids because they deserved that happiness, but there was a twisted side of me that reveled in the fact that none of them were taken. Not that I could have all of them because that was insane to think all of those men would want me in return, but at least slates were clean. No cheating. No secrets. No scandals. I didn’t have time in my life for any of that.

“Come in for coffee at least,” I said, needing a cup myself.

Marlo smiled and gave my hand a squeeze before releasing me. Our eyes met and lingered for a second as we stood a few inches apart. I thought he might close the distance until he opened my front door for me and followed me inside.

“You have a nice home,” he remarked as he trailed me into the kitchen.

I laughed a little and shrugged.

“It’s not much,” I assured him. It was one of the smallest houses in the neighborhood and probably one of the oldest too, but it wasn’t falling apart on me yet.

“A home is a home,” Marlo said. “And it feels homey.”

I smiled to myself as I turned on my bargain coffee machine and got it started brewing a pot.

“It’s where I get to raise my daughter and make memories with my family,” I said as I looked over my shoulder at him. “Where my little sister stays during some of her college breaks. Where my mom brings dinner every Wednesday night. I found this place when I needed it the most.”

An interested expression filled Marlo’s face.

“And your father?” he asked.

I turned back forward and grabbed two mugs out of the cabinet above the coffee machine. It didn’t sting all that much thinking about my father now since I had gotten older and realized that I truly didn’t need him in my life to begin with. He missed out on raising an amazing family, so the only person who lost was him.

“He left early on. My mom raised me and Leah,” I told him, hearing his footsteps sound behind me. I didn’t feel tense, though. All I felt was an excited tingle go up my spine. “Now, I’m doing the same thing. Being a single mom.”

Marlo placed his hand on the middle of my back.

“I’m a single parent as well,” he admitted.

With wide eyes, I turned to face him.

“You have kids?” I asked.

Marlo nodded, the expression on his face looking somewhat bittersweet.

“They’re grown and live out in Europe. I see them once a year when they’re not busy with their careers,” he told me. “I’m really proud of them. I always have been. But the death of their mother when they were about to turn teens hurt them. Hurt me. It was hard for all of us, and they both jumped on an exchange student program to get away from here. I couldn’t even blame them, so I let them go to heal.”

An ache gripped my chest as I took his hand, hoping he could feel my sympathy through the hold. I didn’t want to push too hard for more information because I could see the glint of pain

in his eyes, but all they had done was make sure that I was okay. I wanted to do the same for them.

“Did you get a chance to heal too?” I asked.

Marlo’s expression softened.

“It took a while. I fell into my own family’s way of healing and dealing with stuff. Alcohol. Drugs. I saw both my parents go through that, and it took hitting rock bottom for me to get sober. I plan to remain that way for the rest of my life,” he told me.

Despite his past, he was a good man. I could see it in his warm eyes. His actions. He fought to change, and that was more than I could ever say for Michael. He didn’t go to prison, but he deserved to be behind bars for what he had done to me.

“I’m happy for you. I know getting sober is really hard,” I said sincerely as I gave him a little smile.

Marlo nodded in a grateful manner.

“Some days are harder than others, but I just try to stay focused on my goals,” he replied. “Running the shop. Helping people who hit rock bottom like me and just need a chance. Building the life I want. Protecting beautiful women from creeps.”

A warm feeling graced my cheeks and filled my chest at his flirty words but also because I admired him. Deeply. He helped out all of those guys at the tattoo shop, giving them a chance when no one else would. If that didn’t say enough about Marlo’s character, I didn’t know what did.

“I hit rock bottom a while ago,” I admitted as I looked down at our joined hands. “I dated my ex-boyfriend, Chloe’s father, since high school. I thought he was the one, but... he started getting angry. Aggressive. He wanted to control me and my life, and I didn’t feel comfortable with him around Chloe. So, I prepared to move out of the place we were staying at together and find somewhere of my own. When I broke up with him, we had a terrible fight. He...”

Marlo’s eyes narrowed as he put his free hand on my shoulder, drawing my gaze to his.

“Did he put his hands on you?” he asked.

I frowned, feeling my eyes burn slightly as memories flooded back into my mind. The sting of his hand against my face. The taste of blood on my lip. The ringing in my ears.

“During that fight... yes,” I replied. “But I didn’t see him for a long time after that until the other day. He came up to me and told me that he wanted custody of Chloe. I told him no, but I don’t know what he’s going to do next.”

“Do you think he’s the one who tried to get into your house last night?” Marlo asked, still looking angry as he glanced toward the front door.

“I don’t know. Maybe,” I said, unable to answer that question with certainty. Anything was possible. I didn’t want him to be upset, so I placed my hand on his cheek over the thick hair of his dark beard, wanting him to peer at me again. “But he’s not going to touch me again.”

“Damn right he’s not,” Marlo replied, his eyes seeming darker than before as his grip tightened. He was one not to be messed with, and it was because of me.

I forgot how to breathe for a few seconds as our eyes locked, every fiber of my being yearning to get closer to him, to fall into his comfort. I hadn’t been cared for like this before. Felt desire like this before. But no man so rugged and controlled had ever treated me like this before, and maybe part of my yearning was because of his starkly older age and the maturity he showed that put guys my age to shame.

Whenever Marlo walked in a room with his broad shoulders and steady, dark gaze, he controlled the energy. He demanded attention that he didn’t even have to verbally ask for, and I was a goner for that. It was like a warm, foggy haze rolled over me, and the next words left my mouth before I could even process them.

“But you can,” I said as I took his hand and placed it on my side.

Marlo seemed to search my eyes, trying to make sure I meant the desirous tone of my words. When my eyes slid down to his

mouth, he finally let go and pulled my body flush against his, our lips colliding in a kiss that had been yearned for since the day we met.

I slid my hand around to the back of his neck, lifting up on my toes to keep our lips connected. His lips were warm and inviting, heat rolling through me and working its way farther downward as he caressed the small of my back. It felt so good having his lips against mine and his hands on my body.

Marlo's fingertips teased the bare skin above the waist of my jeans as my shirt rode up slightly, nearly sending a shiver through me. His muscular body felt so firm against mine, allowing me to feel the strong plane of his chest and the strength of his arms. When his teeth teasingly grazed my bottom lip, I couldn't stop the soft moan that broke from me, making him grin a little.

My fingers found the zipper of his jacket and worked it downward until I could push the material off his shoulders and down his arms. Every move I made felt so quick, so desperate, racing closer and closer to what I wanted. The heat and desire taking hold of me was nearly dizzying.

Marlo slid one hand up my back beneath my light blue shirt with Chloe's school name written across the front. His other hand grabbed the bottom of my shirt, starting to work it up my body.

Just as the material reached my bra, a jolt of reality struck me like a punch to the stomach. What about the other guys? What about Chloe? What was I really doing kissing this man I just met? How did things go from here?

All of that pent up anxiety dragged me out of the kiss, making me take a step back from Marlo as I caught my breath. The warmth all over my body soon gathered in my face out of embarrassment as a worried look filled Marlo's face.

"I'm sorry. I just... I should stop," I said, unable to form a coherent sentence to explain my actions.

Marlo gave me a comforting smile and nodded.

“I’m going to check around the house,” he told me before leaving the kitchen.

I slumped back against the kitchen counter with a sigh just as the coffee machine shut off, leaving me with a full pot of coffee and more confusing thoughts than I could ever begin to sift through. But I already knew that I regretted stopping things with Marlo.

Chapter 10

Ti

Admittedly, I was a bit wary of getting caught in someone else's spider web of drama, but according to all the guys, this Madison girl was worth it. Very much worth it.

I hadn't met her officially like the others, but I did see her and her friend come into the tattoo shop a few weeks ago.

Petite figure. Long brown hair. Bright smile. Who could've possibly ignored her?

Now, I got to meet her for the first time today so that I could also tap Marlo out and look after her. Evidently, someone was after her and maybe her daughter. If the guys wanted her protected, I would keep her safe. And I was curious about her anyway.

I bumped the side of my fist against Marlo's as we met on Madison's porch.

"Go home, boss. I'll keep an eye on her," I told him as my eyes swept the quiet neighborhood doused in early morning sunlight.

Marlo nodded.

"She just got back from dropping Chloe off at school," he said.

"See anything suspicious?" I asked.

Marlo shook his head.

"Not yet. Probably for the best. Maybe we'll scare this bastard away," he replied.

I cocked my eyebrow slightly, able to hear the anger in his voice. I hadn't heard him sound so aggressive in a while, but it

seemed like this woman had dug her way under his skin. The others too.

“Let’s hope,” I said before heading inside, hearing the sound of a television playing past the kitchen. I reached up and adjusted the collar of my black button-down shirt, a few silver rings adorning my fingers. Even after seeing her once before, I wasn’t sure what to expect when my eyes finally fell upon her again.

It didn’t take me long to find a small living space with a beige, polyester couch, wooden coffee table, and a 32-inch flatscreen on a small entertainment center with a few picture frames on it as well. However, my eyes didn’t focus on the décor too long because the brunette beauty in question was curled up on the couch with a red and white Christmas blanket draped over her smooth legs where her white lounge shorts didn’t cover.

“Madison?” I spoke.

Madison’s head immediately snapped to the side as she sat up straight, her wide eyes finding me.

“Oh, hi! Sorry, I was expecting you, but I zoned out,” she said as she got off the couch to approach me with a sheepish smile on her face.

Since she was only wearing a ribbed, black tank top, it was easy for me to spot the tattoo that she got in all of its healed glory. It suited her.

“Deep in thought?” I asked as I tilted my head at her.

Madison’s face seemed to flush a little as she nodded.

“Yeah, you could say that,” she replied.

I held my hand out to her, prompting her to take it without much hesitation. I pressed my lips against her knuckles before smoothing over my touch with my thumb.

“What’s on your mind, doll?” I asked before leading her back over to the couch. I truly was curious.

Madison sat down next to me, our knees angled toward each other as we huddled close.

“My life is just crazy right now,” she said with a light, pitiful laugh. “My ex wants custody of my daughter. Someone followed me the other night and then might’ve been the same person who tried to break into my house. And...”

I cocked my eyebrow at her.

“And?” I asked.

Madison chewed on her bottom lip for a second in a manner that made fire churn in the pit of my stomach. Her lips were tantalizing. Soft and full. What I would give to see them in action. *Feel* them in action.

“I’ve now met seven guys at a tattoo shop who make me feel more confused and excited than I’ve ever felt before in my life,” she blurted out, glancing away from me as she spoke.

“What’s confusing you?” I replied as I rested my hand on her knee, the cool metal of my rings making her tense slightly.

Out of bashfulness, Madison laughed and shook her head.

“I just... you guys are amazing. I don’t want to scare my mom or my little sister all the way at Yale, so you guys are the only people I’ve been able to turn to. What you’ve all done for me means so much, and you’re also all very... handsome,” she said, looking even pinker than before.

I couldn’t help but chuckle. Damn it, she was cute. I could see what the guys were talking about.

“Oh, you’re a sweet thing,” I told her as my thumb stroked little circles against the outside of her knee. “I’ve just met you and I’m already fond of you. I’m sure the others are hooked as well.”

Madison’s eyes widened slightly like she didn’t expect my forward response.

“Well, it’s nice to know I’m not alone in the feeling,” she replied.

I clicked my tongue at her as I reached out with my other hand to hook a finger under her chin, pulling her eyes to mine.

“You shouldn’t have doubted that for a second,” I said, feeling a strong pulling sensation in my chest. I wanted to get closer. I wanted to smell the sweetness of her shampoo in her soft hair. Feel the warmth of her mouth against mine. “Let me take you out for dinner sometime.”

A surprised look filled her face.

“You want to take me out on a date?” she asked like she wanted to make sure I wasn’t fooling her.

Something told me that idiotic ex-boyfriend diminished some of her self-worth. I was surprised the others hadn’t asked her out yet, but I supposed I could be one of the more impulsive ones of the bunch.

“Of course,” I replied.

Madison smiled.

“I’d love to,” she said.

I hummed under my breath, pleased by her answer. My thumb then brushed over her bottom lip, making her breath hitch. What a sweet sound.

“Good,” I told her. “I’m glad I finally met you, Madison.”

Madison placed her hand on my wrist, wrapping her fingers around until they rested over my pulse point.

“Your heart is racing,” she murmured, looking up at me.

I smirked a little. Tricky little minx. I could keep a cool, calm demeanour all I wanted, but my heart always betrayed me. It got me locked up in the first place because I couldn’t stand hurting people more than I already had.

“Because all I can think about is kissing you,” I told her.

Madison paused for a second before her eyebrows shifted closer in a determined look.

“What’s stopping you?” she asked me.

Oh, I liked her. I liked her a lot. I gripped her chin and drew her forward, my lips finding hers in an instant. Just as expected, she was warm and sweet like she could melt in my

mouth. I soon felt her hand rest on the back of my head, her fingertips brushing over the closely shaved part of my haircut.

Madison didn't push back as I dominated the kiss, my tongue easily breaking past her lips. She seemed to revel in it, letting out a faint moan as her tongue brushed mine. She drifted her fingers up my chest, moving over the buttons of my shirt like she wanted to tear at them.

I wouldn't mind if she did, but there was so much I wanted to do to her that I didn't even know where to begin. I supposed I needed to see where her boundaries were before I continued because I was far from a vanilla guy.

"We should talk first, doll," I told her as I rested my forehead against hers for a second, latching onto what brief sense of control I had left.

A worried look filled her face.

"We're probably moving too fast," she said as she leaned away from me.

I grabbed her hand and shook my head.

"The pace is great," I assured her, not wanting her to think that I was pumping the brakes because I was uncomfortable. Quite the opposite. "But I have some questions for you."

Madison still looked a bit wary, but she nodded.

"How do you feel about having sex with more than one guy at a time?" I asked, getting right to the point because when it came to being with her, I was incredibly impatient.

Madison's eyes grew big and large as a furious blush crossed her cheeks. She most likely wasn't expecting me to ask something so risqué.

"Oh... I..." she trailed off with an embarrassed smile on her face. "I've actually been dreaming about it lately."

I lifted my eyebrows in interest as the corner of my mouth turned upward.

"Really?" I replied.

Madison nodded, her eyes darting down to our joined hands.

“I can’t control them or anything, but they’re pretty... intense,” she said.

I could hear the bashfulness in her voice and feel the tension gripping her body, prompting me to lean back into her couch and put her arm around her shoulders to drag her back with me. I wanted her to relax and feel comfortable around me. Our conversation was about to get pretty intense.

“You’re a beautiful woman, Madison. Anything you want or desire... you could have,” I told her as I gazed down into her eyes. “Would it make you feel better if I admitted something too?”

Madison smiled a little, already starting to relax against my side.

“I know for a fact that Baker and Bryce are very interested in having some fun with you,” I said as my fingertips grazed her bare outer arm. I then leaned closer to her ear. “And I’d want to join them.”

“All three of you... and me?” Madison asked, her voice sounding full of disbelief.

I nodded, feeling warmth build in my lower stomach just from the thought of that.

“What do you think about that? And you can say no. I’m just curious about what you do and don’t like,” I replied, not wanting her to feel any pressure. Sex was supposed to be fun and enjoyable for everyone, and I wanted it to be mind-blowing for her.

“I’d like that,” Madison told me, answering quicker than I expected. “Honestly, being with multiple people is one of the fantasies I’ve been thinking about lately.”

Dirty girl. That drove me crazy.

“Feels like you’re teasing me, doll,” I chuckled as I leaned closer to her. “You know, me and the guys would be more than happy to check those dirty little fantasies of yours off your list.”

“Well, there’s quite a few,” Madison replied with a small laugh. “I’ve never told anyone about them. Not even my ex.”

I turned to face her better, our eyes locking.

“Tell me,” I told her as I took her hand, giving her enough comfort to smile more boldly.

“So... I want to feel like I lose control. Like I can stop everything, but I don’t have any control. Sorry, it’s hard to describe,” Madison said, sounding a bit flustered.

I gave her hand a squeeze.

“So you can completely let go. I understand,” I assured her, already feeling my cock start to harden just from thinking about pinning her down and having my way with her while she cried out in ecstasy. “What else?”

Madison pressed her teeth into her bottom lip for a second before replying.

“Um... I want to try... anal sex,” she admitted, her cheeks nearly turning cherry red.

I could make her ass look the exact same way with one hand, restlessness gripping me as every fantasy she told me filled my mind with dirty thoughts.

“And?” I coaxed her.

“And I want to see myself in a mirror,” Madison replied. “Those are the ones I’ve been thinking of. And dreaming of.”

I reached up and gently brushed my fingertips along her warm, flushed cheeks.

“And what do you think about me and the twins fulfilling a fantasy or two of yours today at the tattoo shop?” I asked her, knowing that would be the ultimate surprise for Baker and Bryce.

Madison thought for a moment before sitting up straighter, her dark, manicured nails resting on her soft thighs.

“I think I have an idea.”

Chapter 11

Bryce

Today was an off day for the tattoo shop. Usually, a few of us hung around the shop and cleaned up the building or prepared for the next day, and it was just me and Baker today.

Ti was looking after Madison, and the others were resting from their shifts. I had been looking forward to seeing her again after so many weeks, but I was worried for her too.

What asshole would scare someone like her?

I hoped one of us found the guy and scared him back to within an inch of his life. Since Baker and I were taking the next shift, maybe that would be us. I didn't care if my life was put in danger or if I could get hurt. She didn't deserve a single ounce of all this trouble. Not when she was one of the kindest souls I had ever met.

I had done reckless things and hurt people in my past for stupid reasons, but tapping into my take-no-shit attitude was necessary when it came to making sure that she and Chloe would be okay.

As I drew myself out of my thoughts, I lifted my eyes to see my twin brother sitting on the stool at his station with his drawing pad in his hands, probably sketching something up for a client.

"You finish cleaning up the back room?" I called out to him from the front desk as I did a few appointment confirmations.

Baker lifted his middle finger in response, making me smirk and shake my head. That was a yes. Tidying up was definitely the most boring part of the job, but we liked this little art oasis.

We were going to keep it in tip top shape, or Marlo would have our asses.

I put the computer to sleep and wandered over to him, nodding my head to “You Shook Me All Night Long” by AC/DC as it played over the shop’s speakers. I mindlessly fidgeted with my lip ring with the tip of my tongue as I stopped near Baker’s side, peering over his shoulder at this drawing pad to see a sketch of a dragon.

“I’m guessing that’s for that biker dude that came in the other day?” I asked.

Baker parted his lips to answer, but the sound of the front door being opened made our eyes shoot up. The blinds on the front window and the door were closed, and our outdoor neon sign was off, so it was obvious that the store was closed. We tensed and prepared for maybe a robber to come barging in until we saw Ti and Madison walk inside.

“Damn, I was about to start wielding that baseball bat Marlo keeps in the back,” I warned Ti as they approached. My eyes shot to Madison who had her gaze locked on me and my brother. That bubbly demeanour she had before didn’t seem to be as prevalent this time for some reason. “Hey, Madi—”

I didn’t even get to finish her name before she strode right up to me and crashed her lips against mine, knocking the breath right out of my lungs. I nearly stumbled back, but I planted my feet and placed my hand on her cheek.

After a moment, Madison pulled back with a lingering smile on her lips. She glanced back at Ti, who took a seat on Baker’s tattoo table and grinned at her.

“What’s going on?” Baker asked as he remained still on his stool, unsure of what to do or what was happening.

“I finally met this angel, and we had a very compelling conversation,” Ti replied. “Including the fact that she’s particularly interested in having some dirty, submissive fun with multiple partners. I figured you two would be game.”

Ti had to be fucking with us. Come on. Baker and I hadn’t exactly been shy about admitting how attracted we were to

Madison, but we didn't expect this to actually happen. Right now.

"She doesn't sound like much of an innocent angel then," Baker commented, already rolling with this fantasy come to life. His eyes swept over Madison as she stood in front of us with a maroon skater skirt on and a fitted white top tucked into the waist. Simple. Sexy.

Ti clicked his tongue and shook his head.

"I never said anything about innocent," he pointed out before giving Madison a pat on her ass. "Why don't you show Baker how far from innocent you are?"

Madison breathed in deeply through her nose, but the excitement in her eyes was far stronger than her nervousness. She walked over to Baker and grabbed his shoulders, using her grip to pull herself up to straddle his lap.

Baker grabbed her ass under her skirt, dragging her over his lap before burying his face in her neck.

Madison let out a shaky breath as she curled her fingers in his short hair, her eyes fluttering shut. As he kissed her and caressed her, her hips did a slow roll, grinding herself down and drawing a sound from him that bordered on a growl and a groan.

Seeing the swell of her ass under her skirt made my cock start to harden. She sounded so sexy moaning and gasping from each touch, and I swore I was in some sort of wet dream or something.

"Gonna let your brother have all the fun?" Ti asked as he slowly started unbuttoning his shirt.

Hell no. I walked up behind Madison, and Baker moved his hands away to tug on Madison's shirt. I helped him strip it off before unclasping her white bra, letting it fall to the ground with her shirt. Baker's hands went for her breasts, squeezing the soft flesh and twisting her nipples to make her gasp. I wrapped her hair around my fist to move it out of the way, adopting a firm grip before pressing a light kiss between her shoulder blades.

“Oh...” Madison moaned as she tilted her head back, pushing her chest forward just as Baker leaned down to take one of her nipples between his lips.

I let the back of her head fall against my shoulder as my hand trailed down her back, skimming past the back of her skirt before pushing beneath the soft fabric. I squeezed her ass as I turned my head to drag my teeth across her earlobe, making her shudder in bliss.

Madison licked her lips with her eyes closed, reveling in every touch me and Baker placed on her body. When I moved my hand lower and brushed my fingertips over her clothed center, her hips jerked a little in surprise and need.

“You have no idea how badly I want to bury my cock inside of you right now,” I murmured near her ear, my cock throbbing just from being so close to her. She was magic.

“Please,” Madison breathed out.

“I don’t think you deserve that yet,” Ti commented from the table as he rubbed his hand over the hard ridge in the front of his jeans, watching Madison with darkening eyes.

“I don’t think so either,” Baker added before twisting one of her nipples between his fingertips sharply.

Madison nearly yelped in pain, but the sound dissolved into a broken moan. She rocked her hips again, silently begging for the friction and pressure that she desperately needed.

Unable to hold myself back any longer, I pulled her light gray panties to the side and stroked her clit and folds with my fingertips. Just feeling how wet she already was nearly broke any sense of control I had right then and there. I had to fight to keep my composure.

Baker grabbed Madison’s hips to keep her steady as I rubbed light circles against her clit. His lips went right back to her neck, kissing and leaving teasing bites on all of her sensitive places to drive her crazy.

A whimper broke from Madison as she writhed on Baker’s lap, pushing herself down on my fingers and reaching down to pull at the button and zipper of Baker’s jeans. She pushed her

hand inside, slipping her fingers past the band of his black briefs to wrap them around his erection. She started pumping him in time with my fingers, making Baker's jaw tighten.

"Fuck," Baker breathed out as he watched her hand move on his cock.

Madison leaned forward and crashed her lips against his, kissing him deeply as her hand sped up its motions. The faster she got, the closer she was to her own orgasm.

"Close..." she breathed out.

"Already?" I asked with a smirk as I tightened my grip on her hair, making her tilt her head to break the kiss. I wanted to hear her sweet noises. "You can't come yet."

Madison released a shaky exhale.

"It feels too good," she said with a moan.

"Don't care," Baker said in a slightly breathy voice as his hand slid up her chest to rest on her throat. "Don't you do it."

I grinned to myself as I moved two fingers down to her entrance, pushing them inside slowly and drawing a chorus of pleased noises from her. I started thrusting them in and out, working them deep and curling them just right to make her thighs quiver.

"Oh, that's it. You feel so nice and tight, baby," I told her, feeling how she squeezed my fingers.

Baker tightened his grip on her throat.

"Fuck, I'm right there," he gritted out.

I felt Madison's body tense just from his words, which pushed her even closer to orgasm.

"Not you," I warned her.

Madison let out a frustrated noise, but she didn't stop stroking Baker's cock until he came with a faint groan, spilling all over her breasts and the top of her hand.

Baker caught his breath with a small grin. He swept up the white lines on her chest with two fingers before slipping them

past her lips, making her lick them clean.

“Good girl,” he praised her as he gripped her chin. “Next time, I’ll be deep inside of you.”

Before Madison could even moan in response, I grabbed her waist and pulled her off my brother’s lap. Ti was already waiting to help me and stripped off the rest of her clothes before guiding her onto her hands and knees on the tattoo table near one of the ends.

Ti already had his shirt discarded as I started pulling off my clothes. He worked his belt off and grabbed Madison’s arms, pulling them behind her back and making her fall on her cheek on the cushioned table. He tied her arms together by wrapping the belt right above her elbows, immobilizing her for the most part as she lay there folded over her knees.

“What a beautiful sight,” he chuckled before guiding her closer to the edge of the table. He then grabbed her forearm and pulled her up enough for her to come face-to-face with my cock as I stood in front of her. “Open your mouth.”

Madison peered up at me with her big eyes as she parted her lips, sticking her tongue out to drift along the underside of my cock as I pushed into her warm mouth. She took me inch-by-inch, her eyes already starting to tear up.

Ti knelt behind her and nudged her knees farther apart. He kept a strong grip on her right forearm to keep her elevated.

“If you need to tap, squeeze my arm. Otherwise, be good while we use you,” Ti told her before rocking his cock between her folds from behind.

Madison moaned around me at the friction, her eyes shutting.

“Open your eyes,” I said, wanting to watch the tears fall from her eyes as I shoved myself down her throat. I was already going deeper, getting a little choke from her every other thrust. “Relax. Let me in.”

Madison breathed in and out through her nose steadily, letting her jaw relax more as her eyes continued to tear up. When Ti pushed inside of her, she moaned around me again, two tears streaking from her eyes.

“Oh, shit. You feel so fucking good,” Ti murmured as he slowly thrust in and out of her, watching his cock disappear inside of her.

“Yes, she does,” I agreed as I brushed a strand of her hair away from her face. My fingertips grazed her flushed cheek as I grinned down at her. “You’re doing so good.”

Madison hummed around my cock, seeming pleased from the praise. When I pulled out of her mouth to give her a breather and hear her moans, she didn’t disappoint, letting out a string of broken breaths and gasps as Ti started pounding into her from behind. She couldn’t move an inch because of how he’d positioned her, and she was reveling in it.

“Ti... Bryce...” she moaned, her inner thighs already slick from arousal.

Ti’s hand flew down and struck her ass, the sound echoing throughout the tattoo shop and mingling with her surprised gasp. He chuckled and spanked her again, thrusting into her harder.

“Get to work. You can’t come until he does,” he told her.

I smirked and buried my cock in her mouth again, shallowly thrusting past her lips until she was nearly taking me whole. Every little choke and whimper I could hear just drove me on, and a sensation of pure fire and pleasure ramped up more and more with each passing second.

“That’s it,” I said as I watched her, entranced by how beautiful she looked with teary eyes and kiss swollen lips. I couldn’t think of a woman like her. Not any of the women we took back here for some fun had me on the verge of finishing so fast. “Oh, fuck.”

Madison let out a little hum as I spilled into her mouth, her eyes rolling up to mine as she took it all. Her lips slowly slid back up my cock until she released me, her lips glistening with spit and my release.

“You’re like a pretty portrait,” I chuckled as I cupped her chin, watching her tongue drift over her lips to lick everything up.

“Look ahead, Madison,” Ti told her.

I stepped to the side so that Madison could tilt her head up more, staring straight ahead at the large mirror on the wall in front of her. In its reflection, she could see herself getting fucked from behind, her parted lips and bound body on display.

“Keep your eyes on yourself,” Ti ordered, tightening his grip on her forearm before continuing to hammer into her. His thrusts were hard and deep, hardly even giving her a moment to breathe from the previous one, but she drank it all up.

“I can’t... I have to...” Madison babbled as she struggled to even string a sentence together, her mind being blown.

Ti didn’t say anything at first, leaving her hanging for ten torturous seconds until he finally spoke.

“Come for us,” he told her before snapping his hips against her.

Madison threw her head back as much as she could in her contorted position, her entire body shaking and shuddering as she gave in to the pleasure. Only when Ti finished and stilled inside of her did he undo his belt and release her to lay on her stomach normally.

“Woah...” Madison murmured before a bright smile crossed her face, accompanied by a sing-song laugh that made the side of my mouth turn up. “That was amazing!”

“Trust me, baby. You’re amazing,” I assured her as I crouched in front of her to share a warm look with her. She was something else. Something none of us were expecting.

Chapter 12

Madison

It felt like I was floating, suspended in so much warmth and bliss that it was nearly overwhelming.

But I reveled in it.

What just happened... was the best sex I ever had in my life. All of the boring, vanilla sex I had with my ex didn't come close to the pleasure I felt with Ti and the twins. They actually made me finish.

"She's a little walking list of kinks," Ti told Baker and Bryce as they peered at me with intrigued, amused eyes. "Don't worry, doll. We'll get to all of them. Just wanted to break you in first."

The way he talked set me on fire, my skin tingling as I sat upright on the edge of the table with my legs hanging off. It felt good being restrained and ordered around, and seeing myself in the reflection of the mirror with Ti thrusting into me from behind made me a goner. I wanted to do it all over again, prompting me to subtly press my thighs together to try and contain myself.

"Seems like she's pretty insatiable," Baker commented, having noticed the small motion. Damn! I thought I was being subtle.

"Who says we have to stop now? We could get some of the other guys here in minutes. I'm sure they'd be more than happy to get that call," Bryce said.

"I was going to give you two a warning, but this little minx wanted to surprise you," Ti told the twins, who smirked and chuckled.

When I was with them, I was constantly forced to face the edges of my comfort zone. I was hanging out with ex-cons after all. That was risky, but I had grown to trust them. So, when I came across my boundaries, I felt comfortable enough to cross them if they were waiting on the other side. That unlocked so many new possibilities for me that I was excited to try.

“It was fun, though, right?” I asked, hoping it was as good for them as it was for me. According to Ti, they all had slept with women together before. Their experience comforted me, but I also couldn’t help but want to stand out.

Bryce walked over to me, his lip ring glistening in the light as his lips pulled up in a smile.

“It was a blast,” he told me as he placed his hand on the back of my neck as he leaned close. “You’re mind-blowing.”

His words warmed me, seeping all the way between my thighs as he lingered so close to me. I couldn’t believe I was already wanting another round, but they did offer it to me. Chloe would still be at school for a while, so if I wanted to take this opportunity and continue this crazy streak, I had to accept it now.

“Call the others,” I said to Bryce.

Bryce grinned and turned to the others.

“She wants to play,” he told them.

Ti smirked as he took out his phone.

“Let’s see which of the lucky bastards pick up the phone,” he replied before dialing the first number.

While Ti called the others, Baker and Bryce took me to the restroom to help me clean up, gently running a wet cloth over my skin and drying me off until I was ready to go. They stole a few deep, lingering kisses behind that closed door, but they’d had their turn. And it was a hell of a good one.

Three out of the four men left answered Ti’s call, and within twenty minutes, Gus, Marcus, and Marlo steadily walked into

the shop to find me seated on the tattoo table where I was instructed to wait for them.

“Is this really happening?” Marcus chuckled as his eyes swept over me.

I tilted my head at him, my heart already racing as Marcus moved closer to me. His eyes trailed over my bare figure, taking in every inch of skin. Who knew what all he wanted to do to me? That was the exciting part.

Letting them all have their way with me, testing my limits and pushing me to the edge, wasn't what I was used to. Given the circumstances, doing this right now was crazy and reckless, but my heart was racing. The fear that my ex was determined to make me feel had melted into pure adrenaline, and I wanted to do something to my benefit with it. Something that made me feel like I had an ounce of control.

Because choosing to give myself over to them was the most power that I had in a long time.

“What do you want to happen?” I asked, shifting my eyes to see Marlo take a seat on a stool across from me. I felt a hint of disappointment that he wasn't going to join in, but I could already see that he was starting to grow hard. If he wanted to watch with the others, I wouldn't mind the audience. Honestly, I was already getting turned on just thinking about it.

Marcus reached into his back pocket and pulled out a black tube, waving it in front of me in an enticing manner. It didn't take my eyes long to latch onto the white words on the front and realize that it was lube.

“Cross something off your kink list, naughty girl,” he replied.

I suddenly heard heavy footsteps behind me, prompting me to look over my shoulder as Gus approached the other side of the tattoo table. He wore a black gym tank top and army green khakis, showing off an array of traditional style tattoos that adorned his shoulders and arms. The one that caught my eye the most was the heart with a dagger through it on his left forearm.

Gus wordlessly wrapped his arm around me to place his hand on the base of my throat, pulling me into a deep kiss that drew a weak moan from me. The scrape of his dark brown facial hair against my face added to the heat gathering between my thighs.

It wasn't long before Marcus wanted to join in on our fun, but he was far more direct. He reached up and grabbed my ass, pulling me to the edge of the tattoo table as he knelt in front of me. My legs went over his shoulders, and his mouth was on me before I could even register what he was doing.

"Oh..." I gasped as Marcus's tongue drifted up my folds to my clit, a jolt of pleasure striking me.

"You taste so fucking good," Marcus groaned before lapping at me again like he couldn't get enough.

Gus's lips muffled my responding moans as his hand slid down my throat to one of my breasts. His hand was so large that he easily cupped me fully, squeezing and caressing as our mouths stayed melded together.

I was already so sensitive to the touch after being with Ti and the twins, so every kiss, lick, and caress felt incredible. I reached down and threaded my fingers through Marcus's dark hair, subtly rolling my hips to grind against his tongue as he flattened it against my clit. Suddenly, I heard the click of a cap opening, making me break from the kiss briefly to look down.

Marcus showed me the bottle of lube again.

"I'll go slow, angel. Just relax," he encouraged me.

I trusted him. I trusted all of them. So, I busied myself by turning my head and leaning back into a heated kiss with Gus, letting him twist and pinch my nipples to stimulate me even more. It wasn't long before I felt one of Marcus's fingers slowly push into my ass as his tongue kept up its slow, pleasing motions on my clit.

"Relax," Gus murmured when he felt me automatically tense. When I struggled to, he buried his face in the crook of my neck, sucking a mark where my shoulder and neck met.

I gasped in surprise as a hint of pain clashed with the bliss, my mind jolting in a whole other direction as Marcus fit his entire finger inside.

“That’s it,” Marcus praised me before lubing up another finger to add with the first. He moved slowly, pushing them deep and dragging them out. Over and over. Until I started to push myself down on his fingers, enjoying the added pressure along with the friction on my clit. “See? It’s going to feel amazing.”

My eyes shifted past Marcus, sweeping over Ti, the twins, and Marlo, who watched with one hand resting over the erection his pants were doing a poor job of hiding. Knowing that they were enjoying the show just made the knot in my stomach twist even tighter, my entire body humming with heat.

“More,” I breathed out.

Marcus added a third finger, stretching me even more. The sensation was odd and new, but there was a tingle of pleasure that intensified with every rock of his fingers. It was a taste of how good it could be.

“Good,” Gus murmured as he cupped my chin, tilting my head back for another kiss. He was a man of few words, but the ones he spoke made me want this even more.

After another minute of preparing me, I was about to explode, needing Marcus to give me everything. I needed it all.

“I want it, Marcus. Please, fuck me,” I begged him, nearly writhing between the effective work of his tongue and fingers.

Marcus drew away from me and stripped off his white T-shirt, a satisfied grin playing out on his lips.

“Look at you. Sounding like a good little slut,” he teased, sharing a chuckle with the others. “Do you know how badly I’ve been wanting to fuck you? Now, I get to fuck your ass too? Must be my lucky day.”

My face burned a little from how dirty his words were, but I loved every single one of them. I let him lay me on my back across the tattoo table, my head hanging off slightly and my feet planted on the other edge as he moved between my legs.

Gus stepped close to me, having already shed his tank top, and undid his pants to free his thick cock. He was as big as I imagined, making my eyes widen a little as he offered himself to me.

I reached up and ran my hand over his length, my fingers barely able to touch around him. When I felt the head of Marcus's thoroughly lubed-up cock press against my entrance, I automatically tensed as I peered up at Gus, silently asking for him to take my mind off the initial entry.

Gus crouched down so that we were eye-level as I tilted my head back. He brushed a few strands of hair out of my face and stroked my flushed cheeks.

"Breathe," he told me.

Marcus caressed my inner thighs with his free hand before rubbing his thumb in slow circles against my clit, drawing a low moan from me as he slowly started to push his cock inside of me. The feeling was hard to describe, but I could feel the stretch, the burn, and the faint thrum of bliss that was soon to come.

"You're doing so good, baby. You're taking my cock so well," he praised me as he watched his cock start to slowly disappear.

It was all almost overwhelming, but it felt indescribably amazing. I turned my head to watch the others as they kept their eyes on me, admiring how I took Marcus and probably wishing it was them instead. A dull pulse of pleasure throbbed between my thighs at the thought, and I was sure that they would have their turn soon.

"Good girl," Gus murmured as a whimper broke from me.

Before I knew it, Marcus was fully buried in my ass, a confusing mixture of discomfort and pleasure taking hold of me. He started slowly rocking in and out of me, starting with shallow thrusts and gradually going deeper. His thumb continued its motions on my clit, and the pleasure started to intensify.

"Oh... woah..." I moaned as my body started to warm up, a fluttering sensation erupting between my thighs. The more he

moved, the less discomfort I felt, and it started to feel *really* good. Better than I imagined. “Marcus...”

“There you go. Feels good, huh?” Marcus said as he increased his pace.

Once Gus was sure that I was more than okay, he straightened up and pressed the head of his cock against my lips. When I took him into my mouth and started sucking, he groaned and tilted his head back.

“Fuck,” he breathed out, shallowly thrusting past my lips.

I moaned around his cock, already feeling how slick my thighs were as I got wetter and wetter. Feeling Gus’s fingers roll my nipple made another wave of pleasure crash down on me, nudging me closer and closer to my peak.

Pleased sounds poured from the three of us, filling the tattoo shop with obscene noise. I could hear murmurs from the others as they watched the show, commenting on how sexy I looked and how good I took them. I was surprised by my own limits, and I was glad I took risks with them. They blew my mind every single time.

“You’re making it hard to last. Do you know how hot this is?” Marcus told me.

I could only let out a muffled moan in response as Gus rocked into my mouth, thrusting himself deeper and deeper. I knew how dirty the scene looked, but it only turned me on even more, and I found myself digging my nails into the tattoo table as my orgasm started to approach.

“Just a little more,” Gus grunted, managing a few more thrusts before finishing with a groan.

I took in all of him before he pulled out, my lips glistening as they parted in a blissful gasp. I tilted my head up, watching Marcus fuck me without holding back. His toned body flexed with each thrust, and all I had to do was meet his dark eyes before succumbing to the pure euphoria that ravaged me. With a violent shudder, my orgasm struck me like a train, knocking the breath from me and making my eyes squeeze shut.

Marcus grabbed my thighs and pulled me closer as he slammed into me one more time, spilling inside of me with a breathless curse. He let his head hang for a few moments as he pulled out and caught his breath, reeling from the intensity.

“You perfect, perfect woman,” he murmured before running his hands over my thighs. “All used up. Filled up.”

I suddenly sat up with a worried look on my face. My eyes darted to Bryce, remembering that he finished inside of me.

“We didn’t use protection,” I blurted out, not even thinking about that in the heat of the moment. Telling from the lifted eyebrows and wide eyes from the others, they hadn’t thought of it either. We were so focused on what we wanted to do that we forgot what we needed to do. “I can’t raise another child on my own.”

“Woah, woah. It’s okay,” Marcus said as he cupped my face, making me look him in the eyes. “First off, you wouldn’t raise the baby on your own.”

“No way,” Baker spoke up as the others started gravitating toward me, soon surrounding me and reaching out to brush my face, my hair, my back, and my hands in comforting touches.

Marlo placed his hand on my thigh.

“If you ever got pregnant from one of us, we’d all be right there with you to raise the baby and Chloe. We’d never leave you all alone,” he promised me with a serious look on his face.

Gradually, my stress started to melt away as I looked between all of them, seeing that they were all on the same page. I couldn’t remember a time when I felt so much support from so many people, and it was relieving to know that I wasn’t alone. I was more cared for than ever before by men I never saw coming.

Chapter 13

Marlo

A mix of light chatter, friendly laughter, and soft rock music filled the tattoo shop as excited clients had ink permanently put on their bodies.

I stood at the front desk looking over the schedule for the next few days, glancing up every so often to witness the magic of art and trust.

Perhaps, that was one of the most rewarding parts of being a tattoo artist. Our work became a permanent part of these people's lives. It was a huge change and risk, and I was facing that myself.

Despite how happy I felt about having Madison back in me and the other guys' lives, I couldn't shake the wary feeling that lingered in the back of my mind. I hadn't been looking to get seriously involved with someone any time soon as I continued focusing on my sobriety and supporting the guys, who had become part of my family. When it came to Madison, I wasn't a fool. I knew there was something going on between us and her that was more than just lust like it had been with other women.

We did whatever we could to protect her and to show her how beautiful and cared for she was, and I hadn't ever seen such deep, emotional behaviours from the others before. She unlocked a whole other side to us, and it was clear to me that it would be impossible to remain professional and casual with her. Things had gotten too personal.

In the week we had watched over her and Chloe, we had gotten closer to both of them. We took turns telling Chloe

bedtime stories and showed her some of our various hobbies since she had a fascination for trying anything and everything. We learned Madison's and Chloe's routines, and everything worked like a well-oiled machine. Gradually, things started becoming less about just providing security and more about fitting in with each other's lives.

When did that transition happen? How deep would these feelings get? I didn't have any clear answers for myself, which worried me even more. I couldn't prepare for what came next, and I couldn't help but worry that my past mistakes and my struggles with addiction would somehow come back and haunt me. I worried it would ruin the great thing I had going with Madison and her happy daughter.

Madison and Chloe were so innocent and happy and pure, and me and the guys had dark, complicated pasts. We'd committed crimes, hurt other people, and made selfish decisions. We had nearly ruined our own lives, and I didn't want any of us to have any sort of bad influence on the two of them. I could tell I wasn't the only one who felt that way, but when Madison called, we still answered.

"Hey, are you guys busy tonight?" Madison's voice sounded from my phone speaker once I picked up the phone when her call came through, stealing my attention away from the others.

"I don't think so. Why?" I replied, feeling the distinct heavy thump of my heart as I listened to her speak. It was hard to shake this woman. Even if it was probably for the best for her, I couldn't bring myself to get away from her, especially when there might still be a threat after her and Chloe.

"Well, Chloe is going to Aisling's place for dinner because Aisling promised to teach her how to make sushi, so I was thinking about making dinner for you and the guys. As a thank you," Madison said, sounding hopeful.

I lifted an eyebrow out of curiosity.

"A thank you?" I asked.

"For taking care of me the other day. Really good care of me," Madison said with a bashful laugh.

I couldn't help but smile as that very fond memory entered my head. It was mind-blowing watching her with the others, listening to her beautiful moans and watching her body writhe in pleasure. I held myself back that day, but I didn't know if I could do it again.

"It was our pleasure," I assured her.

"And mine," Madison laughed. "So, what do you say? Dinner at my place at seven?"

"We'll be there," I said, knowing that the guys would drop any plans they happened to have if they knew that Madison wanted us to be with her.

"Great! See you soon," Madison told me before hanging up.

As expected, all of the guys were on board to go after work, and we arrived right on time. Madison opened the door, dressed in a flowy, dark blue dress with her hair fixed into a high ponytail.

"Thanks for coming," she told us as she took a few steps back to let us pour into the house.

Really, there was no point in making room because each of us greeted her in some way. An embrace. A kiss on the cheek. A peck on the top of the hand. By the time the seven of us piled up at the oval-shaped dining table right next to the kitchen, she had a light blush on her cheeks.

"Smells awesome," Bryce said as he leaned forward to admire the spread of roasted chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes, and rolls fresh from the oven. It was so fresh that steam was still rolling off the food, filling the house with a delicious, savory scent.

"Looks awesome," Baker added with an eager look on his face.

As Madison went to sit between Taj and Ti, Taj reached out to take Madison's hand, guiding her down into her seat before giving her hand a squeeze.

"You didn't have to do all this for us, princess," he told her with a grateful smile.

Madison smiled back and shook her head before looking between all of us.

“I wanted to. You guys have done so much for me and Chloe, and I’m really grateful,” she expressed sincerely.

“Didn’t you say something about her being in a play soon?” Marcus asked from across the table.

Madison perked up and nodded.

“It’s so cute. It’s about a forest full of animals finding a magical tree, and she’ll play a little mouse,” she gushed.

Chuckles sounded around the table, and a warm sensation filled my chest at the thought of Chloe with whiskers drawn on her face and a set of ears on top of her head. She was so much like her mother in so many ways, and I felt honored that Madison let us interact with her so much. I knew how protective she could be.

“Well, she’ll obviously be the most talented kid up on that stage,” Ti pointed out as he flashed her a wink.

Madison pressed her teeth into her bottom lip shyly before glancing down and shrugging.

“If any of you wanted to come, I know she’d be so excited. She always asks when you guys are coming back over,” she said.

“We’ll come,” I assured her. Maybe I shouldn’t be inserting myself into their lives so much, but I wanted to be there for both of them. There was nothing I wanted more than that. “We’ll cheer the loudest.”

“Oh, I bet,” Madison laughed before gesturing to the food. “Dig in. I baked an apple pie too.”

“Holy shit, you’re the best,” Bryce told her before grabbing a roll from the large wooden bowl full of them.

“You could be a chef,” Taj pointed out.

Madison waved her hands dismissively with a blushing face.

“I’m just a waitress,” she replied.

“How’s that going? No creepy guys are bothering you, right?” Baker asked as he lifted an eyebrow.

Madison laughed softly and shook her head.

“No creepy guys. I’ve been making some good tips lately, so it’s been going well,” she replied, sounding cheerful.

“Because you’re amazing at what you do,” Bryce told her with a wink.

Ti nodded in agreement.

“Waitresses have to deal with a lot. If they’re tipping well, they really like you,” he said before smirking a little. “I don’t blame them.”

Madison smiled in a bashful manner before gesturing to the food.

“Let’s eat before it gets cold. I know you guys are starving,” she encouraged us. She didn’t have to tell us twice.

Between the eight of us, all of the food was quickly claimed, and she was a hell of a cook. The chicken was tender and moist, the sides complemented the main course well, and even the rolls were perfectly baked. I couldn’t remember the last time I had what felt like a family dinner.

A sudden swell of emotion filled my chest as I looked around at everyone, realizing that almost all of the most important people in my life were in this room. I couldn’t imagine living without them, and I wanted more moments like this. I could live the rest of my life immersed in this warm, comfortable atmosphere.

“We should do this more often,” I spoke up. “But we’ll help you out. This is a lot of work for one person.”

“You guys are always welcome here,” Madison reminded us. “Feels more like home with you here.”

“Well, I can’t think of anywhere I like to be more,” Gus commented before biting into his roll, leaning back in his chair like he lived here.

“Good,” Madison said with a joyful expression on her face. She went back to eating, listening to us chat about our days before talking about what she had been up to. She worked a lot and spent most of her time with Chloe, but we all made time for each other. It helped that we still took shifts to watch over her, but instead of standing on the porch, we crashed at the house to keep a close eye on things.

Madison split her sweet apple pie into eight pieces, and it was so warm and sugary that it melted in my mouth. She had a proud look on her face as she watched us thoroughly enjoy her cooking, and I realized that as the days went on, she seemed to glow more and more.

Maybe me and the guys weren't the only ones experiencing growing feelings. Maybe there really was something deep and meaningful happening between us, but could that spark survive? Could we keep the darkness of our pasts from overtaking this good thing we had? As much as I wanted to choose my own answer, I very much knew that life just didn't work that way.

Chapter 14

Madison

With a slow inhale, I reveled in the crisp morning air as Chloe and I roamed down the main street of our neighborhood.

With the sun shining and only a few clouds in the light blue sky, I felt like today was going to be a good day. The last two weeks had been uneventful regarding danger and threats, and I felt safer than ever because of the guys. Only people with a death wish would mess with seven ex-cons.

“I want to paint today,” Chloe told me as she held my hand, her pink sneakers thumping against the sidewalk.

“Oh, yeah? What do you want to paint?” I asked her. I was used to her telling me what activity she wanted to do each day. Sometimes, she did the same activity for a week or two. Other weeks, she did something new each day.

Chloe hummed in wonder before perking up.

“A peacock! Like the one Taj has,” she replied.

I smiled and nodded, warmth blooming in my chest. She seemed pretty fond of all the guys, who never ignored her and always went out of their way to talk to her or compliment her on something she made or did. The fact that they were tattoo artists had inspired her to do a lot of art-driven activities lately like drawing and painting.

“That sounds awesome. I think he’s coming by tomorrow if you want to show him,” I told her. Ti left early this morning, and the next shift of guys would arrive soon.

Chloe nodded enthusiastically as I took her around the corner down a quieter street. It seemed like most people were asleep on this quiet Saturday morning.

“Can Ti bring Shadow?” she asked.

Spiders still sort of freaked me out, but Ti loved his tarantula, Shadow, and Chloe was fearless when it came to animals or insects. As much as I feared having a spider loose in the house, I knew how particular and disciplined Ti was about his beloved creatures. I parted my lips to answer, but the sound of tires squealing to a stop and quick, heavy footsteps behind me made the words die in my throat.

Suddenly, I was grabbed and shoved to the side, my body hitting the street and knocking a pained cry from me. I lifted my head to see a masked man lunge at Chloe, grabbing her arms and trying to yank her close to pick her up.

“No! Chloe!” I screamed as I started pushing myself up to my feet, my adrenaline masking the pain that shot through my body. I didn’t care if I broke bones or put my life on the line against this dangerous person. I was going to get to my daughter one way or another. With gritted teeth and teary, narrowed eyes, I managed to take a few pained steps toward the man. “Let my daughter go!”

“Mommy!” Chloe shouted as she struggled against the man, frightened tears filling her eyes.

The sound of her cry made my stomach twist, nearly making me choke on my tears, but I still pushed myself forward another few steps. My legs threatened to give out under me, but I slammed my palms down on the asphalt to push myself back upright, sheer determination driving me.

The man grunted in exertion and managed to throw Chloe over his shoulder. He started running to a black car with tinted windows parked in the middle of the street, but he didn’t even make it off the sidewalk before he faced off with Marcus and Gus, who were panting from sprinting.

“Put her down, or I swear I’ll make you regret laying a finger on her!” Marcus demanded, seething with anger.

Gus narrowed his eyes, tightening his hands into fists.

The man made the bad move of trying to dart around Marcus and Gus, and he was quickly intercepted.

Marcus wrapped his arms around the man's torso, dragging him to a stop, while Gus pried Chloe out of the man's arms. Gus cradled Chloe against his large chest, her cries muffled against his shirt.

The man swung at Marcus, who easily ducked and dealt a harsh punch to the man's stomach. He advanced to deal even more damage, but the man spun around and raced around to the driver's seat of the car, locking himself in and tearing off down the street.

"Chloe!" I cried as I ran over to Gus, who gently gave Chloe over to me.

"She's okay," Gus promised me, having already checked over Chloe for injuries.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I won't let anyone take you ever again," I told her as tears rolled down my cheeks, a sense of defeat crushing me. She had almost been taken. What if I never saw her again? How could I fail like that? It all happened so fast!

Chloe buried her face in my shoulder, crying and whimpering into my shirt. She grabbed the material in tight handfuls like she was afraid of being torn away from me, but I didn't even care if she ended up stretching or ripping the fabric. I just wanted her to feel safe again.

"Come on. Let's get back to the shop in case he comes back with others," Marcus said as he hurried over to me, wrapping his arm around my back and guiding me to Gus's Ford truck that they both arrived in. He opened the back door for me and helped me buckle Chloe in since my hands were shaking so badly. "It's okay. You're both okay."

I sniffled and shook my head as he buckled me in too.

"He almost took her from me. And I don't even know who he is!" I told him, panic rising in my chest.

Marcus cupped my face.

“We’re going to figure it out. I promise,” he swore to me before kissing me on the forehead and getting into the passenger’s seat. He looked over at Gus, who hit the gas right when Marcus shut the door. “We need to tell the others. We have to figure this out for real.”

Gus nodded.

“Motherf—” Gus cut himself off as he glanced in the rearview mirror at Chloe. “Dude is going down.”

The drive to the tattoo shop felt like it went by in a blink, my head feeling spacey and heavy. My eyes shifted to the rearview mirror to watch Chloe. She was jarringly quiet as tears continued to roll down her cheek, her bottom lip trembling. It was like she was too exhausted to sob, swept up in the traumatic feelings that were probably hitting her now that she had a moment to process what had just happened.

I kept thinking about the moment I watched that man take off running with my crying daughter over his shoulder. I thought it was over. That I wouldn’t ever see her again. That feeling made my stomach twist and my heart sink. I never wanted to experience it again.

When Gus shut off his truck, he and Marcus stayed right by my side, knowing I’d want to keep Chloe in my arms right now. She was visibly exhausted with dried tear trails on her cheeks, being quieter than usual. Her eyelids drooped slightly as she rested her head on my shoulder.

“Hey, look who it is,” Bryce called out from his table as the others either did work at the front desk or tidied up their stations.

The guys started to perk up until they noticed the grave looks on Marcus’s and Gus’s faces and the traumatized look on mine as I held my daughter protectively.

“What happened?” Marlo asked as he strode over, his authoritative presence seeming to take over the entire shop.

“Someone attacked Madison and Chloe and tried to take Chloe,” Marcus said in a quiet voice once everyone gathered around.

“What?” Marlo nearly hissed the word as his eyes narrowed. His jaw visibly tensed, his nose flaring as pure rage filled his face.

“Let me take her,” Taj offered as he stepped closer to me, sensing that things were about to get intense.

I tensed at first, but when I saw Taj’s gentle expression and felt his hand on my arm, I relented and handed Chloe over to him. My eyes trailed them all the way to Taj’s station until Taj set Chloe on his table and pulled some washable markers out of his drawer to entertain her with. I released a shaky breath, trying to relax now that Chloe was extra safe.

“I don’t understand what’s going on. This person... I don’t know why he’s doing this to me and my daughter,” I said as more tears filled my eyes.

Marlo stepped away for a moment, running his hand over his shaved hand. He shook his head, anger still radiating off him. He then took in a breath and walked back over to me, tilting my chin up to press a lingering kiss against my lips that took me by surprise.

However, it didn’t take me long to melt into the comforting touch. When we broke apart, I gave him a grateful look.

“We’re going to get to the bottom of this. You and Chloe will be safe,” he promised me.

With every fiber of my being, I believed him. I nodded and let the other guys come forward and embrace me, telling me comforting things and making promises only lovers would make. I was grateful for every single one of them.

“There’s an attic right above the shop. It’s been cleaned out and renovated as an extra room in case any of us need to crash here. I think you and Chloe should stay there until we figure out who’s after you,” Marlo suggested once I pulled away from Baker.

It would be a big change, but it was temporary, and I could be comforted by the fact that the guys would be around a lot. Chloe would be safer here, and that sold me.

“Thank you,” I said sincerely before looking over at Chloe, my fear clashing with my hope. Maybe we could get this all figured out soon. Hopefully.

While Taj stayed with Chloe, Marlo, Gus, and the twins left the tattoo shop to grab some things at my house, leaving me with Marcus and Ti, who showed me up to the attic.

“Woah,” I gasped once my foot left the last slightly creak step on the stairs leading up to the attic. My eyes swept around the cozy, little haven with its soft, golden lighting, vintage furniture, and quirky art pieces plastered on the light gray walls. A fuzzy, black, circular rug occupied the middle of the room between the queen-sized bed covered with blue-gray sheets, a wooden writing desk, a velvet loveseat, and an old armoire. It felt like I was transported to another time period, separating me from reality for a second. “This is... unexpected.”

“Marlo likes collecting vintage stuff. Furniture, records, you name it. He’ll spend an hour or two at thrift stores or flea markets trying to hunt down this kind of stuff that people just want to get rid of for newer things,” Ti explained.

“Definitely the old soul out of all of us,” Marcus replied with a wry grin.

I couldn’t help but smile a little. I loved all the little unique things about them. Their hobbies. Their interests. Their pasts.

“It’s amazing,” I said as I continued to admire the comforting, dated space.

Silence lingered in the attic for a few seconds before Marcus spoke.

“If you need anything, just let us know,” Marcus told me.

Ti nodded and took my hand, guiding me to sit on the edge of the bed. He stood in front of me, peering down at me with even more intense eyes than usual. His eyebrows furrowed as he thought to himself.

“Do you think you personally know the person coming after you and Chloe?” he asked.

I swallowed hard as I shrugged, wishing I knew a definite answer.

“I don’t know. Maybe,” I said. “But he wears a mask and black clothes. I can’t make out any features.”

“What are you thinking, Ti?” Marcus asked as he walked over to his friend.

Ti crossed his arms and shook his head.

“I just want to get to the bottom of this. I don’t think this is some random stalker. This is something... darker,” he murmured.

Tears started filling my eyes because I believed that he was right. We were really in trouble, and I felt so helpless because I couldn’t protect my daughter myself like I wished I could.

“I’m really scared,” I admitted.

Ti moved forward and crouched in front of me, placing his hands on my knees as he gazed up at me.

“Don’t be. I’m going to get to the bottom of this,” he promised me. They were all smart in their own ways, but Ti was sharp. “I used to dig around for information to hurt other people for money. Before I knew it, I was being charged for white collar crime and being yet another criminal that came out of the foster care system. I don’t want to be that person anymore. I’m going to do what I do best to help instead.”

His genuine honesty touched me, prompting me to nod and press my forehead against his.

“Thank you,” I said, feeling Marcus sit down next to me.

We sat there for a while, thinking quietly to ourselves as we grasped the direness and danger of this situation. This was unlike anything we had ever been through before, and all I hoped was that we made it out on the other side in one piece.

Chapter 15

Ti

The full moon glowed up in the dark sky above me as I walked toward a cement tunnel under a quiet bridge, only hearing the faint thuds of my black boots against the gravel beneath my feet.

I didn't expect to call in a favor from someone from my past, but I was a better man now. And I wanted to make sure I could keep Madison and Chloe safe.

As I entered the tunnel, which was full of dust, stray leaves, and random puddles, I saw a shadow appear at the other end, making me pause as the dark features became familiar ones. Relaxing my shoulders, I approached the tall, lean man that used to be my friend in crime. We hadn't spoken since I'd been arrested, but I could trust him for this.

"Nick," I greeted him with a quick handshake.

"Ti. Thought I'd never hear from you again," Nick said as he tilted his head at me. He had cut his curly, dark hair, his skinny build tucked away in a black trench coat.

"Me either," I replied honestly. "Did you find what I was asking about?"

Nick nodded as he tucked his hands in his pockets, looking up and down the tunnel before turning back to me. Over the past week, I had been doing a lot of digging and research, waking up early and staying up late to do a deep dive in Madison's past and anyone who she ever had problems with. I kept her in the loop the entire time, wanting her to know that I was doing everything in my power to keep her and her daughter safe.

“I looked into that ex-boyfriend of hers. You’re right that he’s up to something,” Nick told me, making my jaw tighten. “He’s planning to run for city councilor.”

My eyebrows lifted in surprise.

“Seriously? He’s about to run a campaign?” I asked, making sure I heard him right. The tricky bastard!

Nick smirked a little and nodded.

“Oh, yeah. I got some info on some of the ads they’re preparing to publish, and he’s painting himself as the typical patriotic family man,” he replied.

“Family man... that son of a bitch. He’s trying to get Chloe back to make him look better!” I bit out, heated anger etching up my neck to my face. I knew that something dark and twisted was going on, but I didn’t expect this. I didn’t expect that Chloe was going to be used as a pawn.

“Whatever you plan on doing, I’d recommend doing it fast. He’s planning on announcing his campaign soon, so you know he’ll push harder to get the kid,” Nick pointed out.

I took in a deep breath to calm myself before nodding and slapping hands with Nick.

“Thank you,” I told him. I would’ve done the close snooping myself, but that was too risky since I was... involved with Madison.

I didn’t know what to call the relationship between me, the other guys, and Madison. It was loving, familial, supportive, and intimate, but there wasn’t a clear title yet. What I did know was that my feelings for her deepened by the day, and there was nothing that I could do to stop that.

Hell, I didn’t want to.

When I got back to the tattoo shop, it was around two in the morning, but I didn’t go to sleep. Gus was asleep on the loveseat upstairs to watch over Chloe and Madison as they slept, so I lay down on my tattoo table, peering up at the dark ceiling with a million thoughts in my mind. I didn’t know what to do next about Madison’s ex.

I knew what I *wanted* to do, but I wasn't a violent man. I refused to stoop that low, especially when a smart, curious little girl watched my every move. Chloe would learn a lot from me and the others, so we were on our best behavior so that she learned right from wrong correctly early on.

It was ironic to me that Chloe would learn more about right from wrong from a bunch of ex-cons rather than from her own father. He was one of the worst types of human beings, using his own child for his political and financial benefit. I had stooped low before during my darkest moments, but I would never even think about going *that* low.

When the sun started to rise, I heard quiet steps from the staircase, prompting me to sit up as Madison walked into the tattoo shop with her hair in a bun. I gave her a hint of a smile, inviting her to come over to me. Once she was close enough, I got off the table and cupped her face, pulling her into a deep kiss.

Madison leaned into me, her fingertips trailing down my neck to brush over the spider tattoo. The touch sent a flare of heat through me, but I had too much on my mind to tease her.

I pulled back and stroked her cheeks with my thumbs.

"I'm going to call the guys. We need to talk, doll," I murmured in a quiet voice.

Worry immediately filled Madison's eyes, but she swallowed hard and nodded. While she went to fix herself a cup of coffee, I reached out to the other five guys, telling them to get to the shop as soon as they could. Luckily, all I had to do was nudge Gus awake and have him join all of us downstairs while Chloe still slept.

"As you guys know, I've been doing some digging around to try to figure out who is threatening Madison and Chloe," I said as I stood in front of them in the middle of the shop, joining my hands together in a serious motion. "And I figured it out. Madison's ex-boyfriend and Chloe's father, Michael Ladnier, is planning on running for city councilor, and he's going to use Chloe to make his image look better to voters."

“That bastard,” Baker gritted out.

“He’s not going to get away with this,” Marcus spoke up next, tensions rising as the guys bit out sharp comments of defiance. There wasn’t a calm soul in the room.

Madison hadn’t said anything yet, only able to stare off in the distance with wide, troubled eyes. She placed her hand over her mouth slowly, taking a tiny step back and nearly stumbling from that as her legs threatened to give out.

Bryce wrapped his arm around her to keep upright.

“It’s okay. We’ve got you,” he assured her.

Madison’s breathing started getting quicker and weaker as she shook her head.

“No, you don’t understand. He has friends in the police force. He has more connections than I can even imagine, and he’ll use them against me!” she said as tears started breaking from her eyes. She pulled away from Bryce abruptly only to crash into Marcus.

Marcus grabbed her upper arms and leaned close to her.

“Madison, look at me,” he said in a firm voice.

Madison sniffled as her gleaming eyes lifted to his.

“Years ago, my sister was with an abusive man. He did everything in her power to break her down,” Marcus told her before his expression darkened. “But I broke him instead. I made sure he never stepped foot near my sister again, and I can promise you that you have me and six other guys who will do the same to your ex if he even thinks about getting too close to you and Chloe.”

Madison peered into Marcus’s eyes for a few seconds in silence before looking around at the rest of us. As if she was looking for confirmation.

“He’s right,” I told her. “We’re not letting you out of our sight.”

Madison looked upward where Chloe was still sleeping.

“I don’t care about me. I care about her. Please, help me protect her,” she begged us.

“No one is going to hurt her or take her,” Marlo assured her as Marcus released her. “In fact, protecting both of you will be easier now that we know what we’re up against. We’re not in the dark anymore.”

Madison still looked wary, but she nodded and took a seat on my stool.

“I wish my ex was just some regular guy with an attitude, but he’s not going to give up. He’s going to throw everything he can at us, especially when he figures out you guys are helping me,” she warned us. “I don’t want anything bad happening to you guys.”

I walked closer to her and shook my head.

“Bad things have already happened to us. Mostly due to our own mistakes. If we can do something good with ourselves, we’ll do it for you and Chloe,” I replied, needing her to let go and let us help her. She worried so much about other people, and her caring nature was admirable, but she had to let us run into the fire with her.

Madison ran her fingers through her hair as her tears dried on her cheeks. She slowly nodded, and her jaw tightened as she clenched her teeth. Now, she looked like a lioness about to kill for her cub.

“Then, it’s war.”

Chapter 16

Madison

It felt like my world was rocked the moment it was confirmed that Michael was the one behind this insane situation that endangered both me and my child.

I had my suspicions, but I didn't think that he would stoop to such a low level of taking an interest in his daughter for the first time in her life just to use her for political gain. That still blew my mind.

He was so different when we first started dating, but he got a taste of power and money, and he became addicted to it. He loved towering above others and abusing his authority, and he was going to do the same thing as city councilor. He had a talent for tricking people into seeing him in a better light.

When we were together, he obviously made more money than I did, and if he could find a way to hold that over my head, he did. He made it clear to me that I couldn't survive without him and that Chloe would suffer if only I was providing for her. It made me wary about leaving for a while, but I knew that I could do it.

I ignored his claims that I wouldn't make it as a single mom. That he was the college-educated one and that I wasn't, so he would always have an advantage. I stopped listening when he shamed me for buying things for myself instead of getting things for him since he worked so long and hard at the office. It was all manipulation.

Despite my worries about him and what he was up to, I tried to go about my life as normally as I could for Chloe's sake. It was already a big adjustment temporarily moving to the attic

of the tattoo shop, but Chloe saw it as an adventure and an excuse to pester the guys as much as she could. I knew it was risky letting her get so attached to the seven of them, but it was hard to keep her away from them when they were doing everything in their power to protect us.

My feelings for them continued to get more and more complicated, especially as our relationship became more romantic and sexual. They made me experience things and feelings that I hadn't experienced before, and when I forgot about my troubles, I was happier than ever with them. With each of them.

Marlo was comforting and level-headed, and he grounded me in a way that made me feel like I had some sort of control over my life. Having him by my side made the world feel easier to face. With Marcus, I knew that no harm would ever come to me and Chloe. He was a protector, disciplined and persistent. He made me feel so safe. And Gus was strong and sweet at the same time, even if he looked pretty intimidating. He always made sure I was okay.

Despite being twins, my relationships with Baker and Bryce were different. Bryce was a master at humor, and he made me laugh to the point of crying. He always lifted my spirits. Baker was honest and smart, and I loved brains in a guy. Watching him work on crossword puzzles or sudoku never failed to put a smile on my face.

Taj brought out creativity in me, helping me see the world in so many hues of color, so many shades of emotion. He was a hard worker with something to prove, and I endlessly admired his work ethic and dedication. Ti, with all of his little critters and cool, calm demeanor, always kept me on my toes. With his sense of fashion and effortless charm, he never failed to make me swoon.

They were all so different, but the strong feeling I had for all of them was the same. It was deep, intense, and serious, and that scared part of me.

How could I have feelings for all of them? How could that work without me messing up the dynamic they had between

them for years now? I didn't want to drive a wedge between them from jealousy, so I didn't say anything about my feelings. I just tried to focus on keeping my life somewhat together for my daughter.

Though, I couldn't stop the fantasies of having a happy life with the seven of them from breaking into my mind from time to time. Leah had ended up with six great guys who loved her and treated her right, so I couldn't help but wonder if I could have something like that with the seven tattoo artists I had feelings for. Even if that still sounded crazy.

While Chloe was at school today, I decided to hang out with Taj at the tattoo shop rather than hide out in my room. Per the guys' request, I took some time off work and told my mom and Aisling that I was sick to lower suspicions.

"What's all this stuff?" I asked Taj as I peered down into one of the open drawers at his station.

Taj spun his stool around to face me, his loose, white tank top hanging off his lean but muscular body.

"My piercing equipment," he replied.

I cocked an eyebrow at him out of interest.

"You do piercings?" I asked.

Taj grinned with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"Sure do. Want to get one?" he replied playfully.

I didn't answer immediately and shrugged before motioning to my ears.

"I've only had my ears done. I haven't really considered getting anything else done," I admitted. It took me forever to get a tattoo!

Taj patted his tattoo table, motioning for me to take a seat as he pushed his stool closer.

"If you could get any piercing, what would you get?" he questioned me with a genuinely curious look on his face.

My face immediately burned red as an embarrassed laugh broke from me.

“Okay, I did have this rebellious thought once when I was like nineteen,” I admitted before looking away from him. “I wanted to get my nipples pierced.”

Taj feigned a shocked look before patting the side of my thigh.

“You naughty girl,” he teased me with a chuckle. “You’d look sexy with nipple piercings, baby. You should get them!”

I smirked and shook my head.

“You’re a bad influence, Taj,” I said.

“A bad influence with the right equipment to make your dreams come true,” Taj pointed out as he lifted his eyebrows.

I couldn’t exactly think of any reasons to say no besides being nervous. They would be hidden. I could take them out if I didn’t like them. Plus, the thought of him piercing my nipples strangely turned me on a little.

“You’re terrible,” I teased him before pulling my T-shirt off and unclasping my bra, leaving myself in jean shorts and sneakers.

Taj let his eyes rest on me for a few moments, shamelessly checking me out.

“I’ll be as terrible as possible if it still leads to you shirtless on my table,” he chuckled as he started taking his supplies out to put on his tray.

I laughed and brushed my hair behind my shoulders.

“Look at me... getting my nipples pierced amidst the pure chaos going on in my life,” I sighed. “And my little sister is winning hockey tournaments around the world and passing her classes at Yale with flying colors.”

“Uh oh. You sound like me with my older brothers,” Taj said as he pulled black, latex gloves on.

“Are you the jealous sibling who thinks you didn’t succeed as much as the others?” I asked.

Taj nodded after a few moments, his energetic glow fading slightly.

“You hit that right on the head. My eldest brother is an accountant. The other is in medical school,” Taj told me as he arranged the piercings on his tray. “And I get arrested for theft in college for stealing a school laptop.”

“A school laptop?” I replied.

“I got plenty of scholarships for tuition, but I didn’t have enough money for a laptop. Nowadays, you need some sort of computer or laptop to do half of your schoolwork. They had these old ones they were switching out for new ones in the business study lounges, and I stole one because I figured they were just going to throw them out,” Taj told me before shaking his head in shame. “I was tired of spending hours in those study lounges using the school-provided ones. Everyone knew I couldn’t afford one, and I just wanted to study with friends or do work wherever I wanted. It was... idiotic.”

I reached out and grabbed his arm, drawing his eyes to mine.

“You just made a bad decision. Everyone makes bad decisions,” I assured him. “You’re not a bad person for wanting a comfortable college experience.”

“My parents pretty much outcasted me after that. We’re second generation, but my family still feels like we have something to prove to belong here,” Taj said. “All I can do is not mess up again. That’s why I focus on art.”

“Well, I’m your canvas today. Specifically my nipples,” I replied as I gave him a smile to cheer him up.

Taj lightened up and chuckled.

“Best canvas,” he said before cleaning my left nipple and marking it with a purple marker. He then positioned the clamp and held the needle on one side between his forefinger and thumb. “Just don’t forget to breathe.”

I subtly nodded and kept my eyes over his head, not wanting to look at the needle. My body automatically wanted to tense up, but I did my best not to be as stiff as a statue.

“I’m ready,” I told him, reminding myself that it was going to be quick.

“One, two, three. Small pinch,” Taj said before pushing the needle through, moving swiftly to pull the barbell through next. “Hell yeah. Took that like a champ.”

I released a shaky breath as he secured the ball on the other end of the barbell, my nipple feeling hot and sore already.

“Ouch,” I squeaked out as I looked down at my pierced nipple, my eyes widening in surprise. I knew that it happened, but woah!

“Piece of cake, baby,” Taj chuckled, looking like he was having the time of his life as he prepared my right nipple.

“For you,” I laughed, heat rolling through me as he touched me. Even if he was being professional, he was still turning me on, especially with him being so close to me. I could smell his citrusy cologne, and I had to keep myself from hooking my legs around his waist and pulling him closer.

“One more,” Taj said as he positioned the clamp again. He counted down again before piercing my right nipple, adjusting the barbell afterward before stepping back to admire his work. “Beautiful.”

I smiled in an amused manner when he kissed the tips of his fingers.

“That was pretty intense,” I told him as I crossed my legs.

Taj cocked an eyebrow at me before grinning in a devilish manner.

“Let me get some ice. It’ll help with the pain,” he replied before walking toward the back room.

While he was gone, I took a moment to turn my body toward the mirror on the wall, admiring the silver barbells that now adorned my hard nipples. Honestly, they suited me, and I felt a jolt of confidence.

Taj walked back toward me with an ice cube between his fingertips. When he reached me, he slipped between my legs and gently swirled the ice cube around my left nipple.

“You did really good,” he murmured as his free hand settled on my upper thigh.

“Maybe I should be rewarded,” I replied as our eyes met.

Taj shot me an amused but intrigued look as his fingers etched up my thigh.

“Oh, really?” he said as he leaned closer. The ice on my nipple started to slowly melt, cold water coursing down my breast and stomach and stimulating me even more. “I think so too.”

I nearly sighed in relief when his lips finally met mine. I could taste the peppermint he had in his mouth earlier, my tongue brushing his. My body started warming up all over as his hand teasingly brushed between my thighs before undoing my jean shorts. I parted my legs more, leaning back to let him slip his hand into my panties.

“Oh...” I moaned as his fingers sought out my clit, rubbing slow circles as he moved the ice cube to the other nipple.

“Already so wet for me,” Taj murmured, sliding his fingers through my wetness before returning to my clit.

I gripped his tank top in two tight handfuls, arching my back and pushing my hips forward needily.

“Feels so good,” I told him. Between his fingers on my clit and the ice on my nipples, I was so sensitive to the touch, on the verge of writhing.

“I bet it does, baby,” Taj said, watching the water from the ice cube glide down my body. “I want you to ride me. How does that sound?”

I nodded eagerly before feeling two of his fingers push inside of me, curling deep to prepare me. I tugged at his tank top until he stripped it off, leaving him in his black jeans.

“I don’t want to wait any longer,” I nearly whined the words, wanting him to replace his fingers with his cock.

Taj drew away once the ice cube had fully melted. He grabbed the waist of my shorts and panties and tugged them off in one smooth motion before undoing his belt and jeans. He sat on his tattoo table and helped me straddle him, positioning my knees on the table.

“Oh, yes. That’s it,” he said as he dragged the head of his cock through my folds. He found my entrance and slowly pushed inside of me.

I tilted my head back in pure pleasure, prompting him to lean forward and kiss my neck. He was careful of my nipples, grabbing my ass and my hips instead of my breasts. Gradually, I started lifting myself before sinking right back down. I repeated the motion over and over, bouncing on his lap as he guided his movements with his hands.

Taj gazed up at me as my fingers roamed over his light brown skin, tracing over his peacock tattoo and the lean muscle of his chest and arms.

“What a fucking masterpiece,” he murmured as he admired me. “I could fuck you all day long.”

Fire ravaged my body as I listened to his dirty words. I moved my hands into his dark hair, drawing him into a deep kiss as I moved faster. A tense feeling intensified in my lower stomach, creating a throbbing sensation between my thighs. I was right *there*.

“Taj... I’m so close,” I told him.

Taj wrapped his arm around my waist and started thrusting up into me, slamming in hard and rough just like I needed.

With an echoing moan, I fell apart on top of him, my body tensing to its max. I sank my nails into his shoulders as he shoved me down on his cock right before spilling inside of me. Another jolt of bliss hit me as I dropped my forehead down to his shoulder, enjoying how full I felt.

“I should’ve known getting my nipples pierced would lead to this,” I laughed.

“They do look sexy,” Taj chuckled as he ran his hands up my back.

I lifted my head and gave him a mischievous look.

“I’d bet the others would like them too,” I commented.

Taj grinned, knowing exactly what I was hinting at.

“Only one way to find out.”

Chapter 17

Madison

Once the other six guys arrived, we finally moved to the attic to have some fun in an actual bed. It was fun messing around in the tattoo shop and giving them some hot memories to look back on while they were working on clients, but a bed would accommodate more of us.

I wasn't even nervous at the thought of being with all seven of them anymore, knowing that everything would be at my pace.

Still spent from his orgasm, Taj sat at the desk, leaning back in the wooden chair to watch me as Marlo, Baker, and Marcus knelt on the bed around me. Baker and Marcus were on either side of me, groaning and admiring the view of me naked below them as I stroked their cocks.

"Oh..." I gasped as Marlo buried his head between my legs, sucking on my clit before dragging the flat of his tongue over it.

Ti and Bryce watched me from the loveseat with their hands down their pants, while Gus leaned against the doorway to quietly admire me. The atmosphere felt hot and heavy, my body feeling like a warm blanket was cloaking it. With their eyes on me, I drank in the attention.

"Just like that, beautiful," Baker praised me as he rocked into my fist.

Marcus hummed in pleasure, closing his eyes and leaning his head back.

Marlo explored every inch of me with his tongue, dipping the tip inside of me and flicking against my clit. He then pushed

his thumb inside of me, keeping his tongue on my clit.

“Yes...” I moaned, my eyes fluttering shut.

“Uh uh. Open your eyes,” Baker told me. When my eyes found his, he nodded in satisfaction and started pumping into my fist. “Stick your tongue out.”

I did as he asked, offering the flat of my tongue as he came closer and released. Warmth swirled in my stomach as he coated my tongue, and I felt Marcus push his fingers into my hair to direct me to face him as he did the same thing. A few spots tainted my lips and cheeks, but a blissful smile crossed my face.

Marcus patted my cheek.

“Good girl,” he praised me.

“She’s about to be rewarded,” Marlo replied before replacing his thumb with his cock. He thrust into me, making a pleased cry break from my lips.

I gripped the sheets on either side of me, throwing my head back as he pounded into me. He didn’t hold back in the slightest, and I reveled in every deep, fast thrust that made the pressure in the pit of my stomach intensify. Between all of the teasing, I was already right on the verge of falling off the edge.

“Don’t stop,” I begged Marlo.

Marlo cracked a grin that made me want to melt, shaking his head.

“Not until you come for me,” he replied before pressing his thumb against my clit.

Bliss struck me like lightning, and I nearly writhed beneath him as I got closer and closer to orgasm. My nails dug into his forearms as his free hand gripped my waist, keeping me right where he wanted me. I met his eyes, a whimper breaking from me when I saw how much darker his eyes looked.

“Come on, sweetheart. Fall apart for me,” Marlo told me before snapping his hips hard.

I didn't stand a chance. My orgasm tore through me the next second, making my body tighten and tremble. My cries echoed throughout the attic, my pleasure being drawn out when he finished with a muffled grunt. My skin was hot to the touch, sweat threatening to line the crown of my head.

"Woah," I breathed out with a pleased laugh, feeling like I was glowing.

Marlo leaned down and pressed a lingering kiss against my lips before my ankles were suddenly grabbed, and I was flipped over onto my stomach.

With a gasp, I was pulled onto my hands and knees, my eyes darting around as Gus, Bryce, and Ti moved around me. I let them position me how they wanted me, leading me to straddle Gus as Bryce stood in front of me, and Ti stood behind me. When I felt Ti's hand strike my ass, I already knew what was about to happen.

"Both of you?" I asked as I looked down at Gus.

"If you think you can handle it," Gus replied, the corner of his mouth turning up.

I did mention to them that I was interested. I looked over my shoulder at Ti as he applied some lube to his fingers, a tremor of heat moving between my thighs.

This was going to be fun.

While Ti prepared me, Gus rocked his cock through my folds, teasing my clit as I stroked Bryce's cock.

"I can't believe I ever thought you were innocent," Bryce chuckled as he watched my hand move over his length.

"Can't judge a book by its cover," I pointed out before drawing in a deep breath as Ti worked two fingers inside of my ass. It was a little easier to relax now, but it was certainly a learning curve. Once he could fit three in, I nodded. "I'm ready."

Ti smirked and swatted at my ass again.

"Impatient girl," he said before teasingly pressing the head of his cock against my ass. "You might not even be able to

handle us.”

I didn't have the voice to reply because Gus slowly pushed himself inside of me from below. An unsteady moan droned from me, my eyes briefly fluttering shut as Bryce brushed his fingers through my hair. I then gazed up at him as Ti worked himself inside, making me feel fuller than ever before. My thighs threatened to shake as I screwed my eyes shut.

“You're doing so good. Just breathe,” Bryce told me before leaning closer to capture my lips in a searing kiss.

I focused on the cold metal of his lip ring against my lips as Gus and Ti started to slowly move in and out of me, thrusting at different paces so that I wasn't left without a second of deep pressure and pleasure. I dug my fingernails into Gus's broad shoulders, moaning into Bryce's mouth as the discomfort started to melt into pure bliss.

“There you go,” Bryce said as his lips curled up in a smile. He pressed one more peck against my lips before straightening up and sliding the head of his cock past my lips. His fingers pulled my hair back from my face as he gazed down at me. “Beautiful girl.”

I hummed around him as he slowly rocked into my mouth, pushing himself deeper and deeper with each thrust. The back-and-forth movement from Gus and Ti made me feel so warm that it was nearly dizzying, but I reveled in the pleasure.

“So fucking good,” Ti groaned as he watched his cock disappear inside of me. He gripped each side of my ass, digging his nails in to make me moan. A low chuckle broke from him as he rocked himself deeper. “That's it. Take me.”

Gus moved his big hands up my torso, caressing my breasts and twisting my nipples between his fingertips. He slowly thrust up into me, but my body naturally sank down on his cock as Ti took me from behind. We set up a perfect system, and the room was full of pleased noises and the sound of skin hitting skin.

“Feels good, huh? I love seeing you like this,” Bryce told me as he tightened his grip in my hair, thrusting deeper into my

mouth and making tears form in my eyes.

I moaned around him, making him groan.

“That’s going to make me come. That and watching you take them at the same time,” Bryce murmured as his eyes moved over me, enjoying the show until he couldn’t take it anymore. He released with a grunt, holding me steady with a hand in my hair until I took him all. He moved back and collapsed at the head of the bed, resting his back against the headboard as he caught this breath.

I dropped my head down to Gus’s shoulder, already feeling my own orgasm ramp up. There was so much pressure, friction, and heat that I felt like I was going to explode.

“Please... please...” I breathed out, unable to form another word. I just needed to fall over the edge, to give in.

“You’re so close. I can feel it,” Ti murmured, before grabbing my hips and slamming me back on his cock. He started pounding into me at the same time as Gus, both of them determined to make me fall apart.

Hot tingles started to break across my entire body, the pressure finally shattering. A broken moan burst from me as I collapsed on Gus’s chest, unable to move besides shaking as they finished their last few thrusts before spilling inside of me. When they pulled out of me, I didn’t think that I could move, my head feeling light.

“I don’t think I can get up,” I told them.

Gus wrapped his arms around me and eased himself to the edge of the bed before rising to his feet.

“We’ve got you,” he replied before carrying me toward the bathroom as I heard someone turn the tub on.

With a smile on my face, I relaxed in his hold, knowing that no one else had me like they did.

Chapter 18

Madison

The soft sound of water moving filled the attic's quaint bathroom as I settled deeper into the clawfoot tub, letting the warm water envelop me like a comforting blanket while Taj and Marlo crouched on either side of me to keep me company.

The heat soothed all of my soreness and started making me feel drowsy, but my thoughts were racing.

The dynamic I had with the guys now was so much more intense and deeper than what it was when we first met. Back then, it was raw attraction, nervousness, and excitement.

Now, my heart raced so much around them that it nearly ached because I loved being around them so much. I... I was falling for them.

What else could it be? I missed them when we weren't around each other, which was rare. When I thought about the future, I saw them in it. Trying to think of a future where they weren't in my life made my stomach twist. And not in a good way. I didn't like thinking about that.

I glanced between Taj and Marlo, sharing smiles with them. I wondered if they felt the same way about me. When they thought about their futures, did they see me in it? Did they see Chloe?

I wished that I was brave enough to ask, but my throat tightened when I even thought about asking them.

I supposed I just didn't want to be rejected and heartbroken. I felt so safe with them, and if they broke my heart, it would be

a pain that I didn't know if I could handle.

"Marlo! Taj!" Marcus's voice sounded from down in the tattoo shop.

Taj and Marlo shared a confused look with each other before rising to their feet.

"We'll be right back," Marlo told me as he caressed the back of my head. He leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss against my lips before heading out of the bathroom.

"Probably just someone trying to do a walk-in," Taj assured me before kissing me briefly. He shot me a wink that slightly comforted me before leaving me alone in the tub.

Slowly, my smile melted into a frown as I strained my ears, trying to hear what was going on. I could hear muffled voices downstairs, but I didn't hear anyone unfamiliar. I doubted it was someone trying to get a tattoo without booking an appointment, so I pulled the plug out of the drain and grabbed a white towel hanging on a nearby rack so that I could go see what was going on.

When I reached the tattoo shop, I saw the guys in a huddle, looking at something in Marlo's hands with grave looks on their faces. The atmosphere was completely different down here than it was upstairs. Intense. Angry. Stressed.

"What's going on?" I asked as I approached them.

The guys moved to the side so that I could reach Marlo, who extended his hand out to give me the piece of white paper with scratchy handwriting in black ink on it that I immediately recognized.

My stomach twisted in knots as I looked down at the paper, the sound of my heartbeat thudding in my ears as I read what Michael had written down.

Hand over Madison and Chloe or you'll pay. Ask Madison. She knows I don't bluff. I'll ruin all of you.

“Is he right? Does he not bluff?” Baker asked me with narrowed eyes.

I could feel the protective energy radiating off them, which comforted me, but Michael’s threat hit me like a punch to the stomach. I knew what he was like, and he could get scary when he didn’t get his way. He would absolutely wage war if I didn’t go to him with Chloe.

“He doesn’t bluff,” I said quietly, my eyes sweeping over all of them.

“It doesn’t matter. There are seven of us. I don’t care if we need to have eyes on her and Chloe 24/7. We’ll protect them,” Marcus replied as he shook his head, his jaw tensing in determination.

Taj stepped closer to me and placed his hand on my back.

“He’s right. I know he makes you nervous, but we’re here for you now. You don’t have to face him alone anymore,” he pointed out.

“I just don’t want anything bad to happen to you guys,” I said as my chest grew tight. What if everything fell apart? What if Michael picked away at everything good in my life until there was nothing left?

Ti moved to stand in front of me, his hands resting on my upper arms.

“Don’t worry about us. We’ve faced worse threats,” he replied in a steady voice that made me feel like I could breathe again.

I looked around at the others, who seemed to share Ti’s opinion. They were tough guys who had faced all sorts of demons. If they believed they could help me push back against Michael, I believed them too. There was no one else I wanted to turn to but them.

“Just be careful. He’s capable of more than you think,” I told them, needing them to heed my warning. Michael was sneaky and would hit them in a way they would least expect it, and I was sure he had some cards up his sleeve to play. We had to be ready. We had to be smarter.

“We’ll be careful,” Gus assured me with his arms crossed over his chest.

I let out a long exhale, trying to keep myself from spiraling. Keeping calm and having a clear head would help me out more than overthinking and panicking. I checked the time on my phone and sighed.

“I promised Aisling I’d meet up with her for coffee before picking up Chloe. I’ll be back soon,” I promised them, saying goodbye to each of them with an embrace, a kiss, or a hand squeeze. I could tell they were wary to have me leave, but they knew when to give me some space.

I headed out of the tattoo shop with sharp eyes, checking every corner and behind my back until I got in my car.

I hated living this way, fearing for my life, the men I was falling for, and my daughter. I just wanted this nightmare to be over, but something told me that it had only just begun.

Chapter 19

Marlo

After Madison left, the guys and I busied ourselves with cleaning up the tattoo shop, silence ringing throughout the building besides the scraping of chairs across the floor or the light spraying sound of cleaner.

There was no easy approach to the situation at hand, and I probably mindlessly sorted through my box of old records five times because I kept trying to come up with solutions. I was sure the others were trapped in their own busy minds as well.

We wanted to do everything in our power to protect Madison and Chloe. Within the bounds of the law. We couldn't allow ourselves to stray back into that dangerous territory, but we were also willing to do anything for Madison and Chloe if it came down to it in the moment. That was the issue. We truly didn't know what to expect.

When I heard the door of the tattoo shop swing open, the heavy feeling in my chest lightened as I turned, expecting to see Madison and Chloe walking inside.

But that wasn't the case. At all.

The guys and I had looked up Madison's ex enough to know what he looked like. Every feature.

The cold eyes. The smug smile. The casual posture under his expensive blazer, button-down shirt, and khaki pants. There were also two uniformed officers behind him as they strode into the store.

"You have a lot of nerve coming in here," Baker nearly barked out the words as he let his bottle of cleaner hit the ground.

Me and the others quickly intercepted him, keeping him from getting too close to Michael and the two officers, who had their hands resting on the grips of their handguns. I put my arm out, making the others stand back with a firm look on my face. I turned to face Michael and the officers, feeling anger rattle up my spine.

“What do you want?” I demanded with narrowed eyes. I knew it wasn’t anything good.

“Where is Madison?” Michael asked with an even voice.

I glanced between the two officers, unable to believe that they were in on this twisted scheme. Did they not have any integrity? How could they be corrupted so easily?

“It’s none of your business,” I stated, feeling glad that Madison wasn’t here right now.

“Are you sure you want that to be your answer?” Michael replied as an agitated look filled his face.

I held his gaze, refusing to back down and let this evil son of a bitch intimidate me. I didn’t care what he tried to pull. I was taking him down in the end.

“I’m sure as hell not changing it,” I told him.

Michael laughed in a cold manner.

“Well, that’s unfortunate. You see, there have been some anonymous complaints about your shop and some of your employees. I’m afraid your shop could be shut down for some of the infractions that have been reported,” he stated.

I tightened my fingers into fists, hearing sharp breaths behind me. The guys wanted to argue, but I fixed them with another hard look to make sure they didn’t blow up and cause more trouble.

“What infractions?” I questioned Michael, knowing that he was about to make up a bunch of bullshit.

“Some health code violations. A minor being tattooed. You know, that sort of stuff,” Michael replied with a light smirk.

“None of that is true, and you know it. You can’t just make up claims for your own personal gain,” I bit out as I took a threatening step forward.

The police officers immediately mirrored my motion, stepping in front of Michael to put a barrier between me and him.

“I actually heard a few of your employees have been dabbling in some suspicious, possibly illegal activities. This one was seen sneaking around and talking to a known criminal we’re trying to pin down,” Michael said as he pointed at Ti. He then turned to Gus. “And this one was seen in the vicinity of a stabbing incident, which we haven’t caught the violent criminal for yet. Suspicious. We might have to take them down to the station for questioning.”

“Like hell you will,” Marcus gritted out as he, the twins, and Taj moved in front of Gus and Ti.

“Don’t try it,” I told Michael with a stern glare. “You and me, let’s go outside and talk. Don’t bring them into this.”

Michael cocked an eyebrow at me, obviously interested.

“Let’s talk shop,” he replied as he clasped his hands together. He then patted the officers on the back. “Keep an eye on these delinquents.”

I couldn’t lie. I wanted to strangle the guy, but I breathed in deeply to keep my cool as I walked out of the tattoo shop with him. I didn’t expect to strike some kind of deal with him, but I was trying to buy us some time and keep the other guys safe.

“You don’t have to campaign as some family man. Leave Chloe and Madison out of this, and just move on,” I told him.

Michael chuckled and shook his head at me.

“It’s so much more than the campaign. Madison screwed me over and left with my daughter. And then shackled up with a bunch of criminals. It’s laughable, but she should know that actions have consequences,” he replied.

“Are you that evil? You’re doing this to your own daughter and the mother of your child,” I said, unable to believe that he was such a cold, heartless person.

“Don’t start with me about morals, criminal,” Michael scoffed in a dismissive manner that made me grind my teeth. “I’m going to tell you this once. Hand Madison and Chloe over, or I’ll pull every string I have to throw all of you back behind bars and to shut down your tattoo shop.”

Coldness washed through my entire body, my head filling with a shrill, ringing sound.

He was trying to tear everything down, to strip away my hard work and my family. If he could make cops corrupt, he could make his words reality, which meant that I and everyone else was possibly very, very fucked.

Michael put his fingers in the corners of his mouth and whistled, the sound ringing loud enough for the cops to hear and head outside.

“Good talking to you. Hope I hear from you soon, or you’ll hear from me,” Michael told me before walking down the sidewalk with the police officers trailing him, their eyes repeatedly flickering to me to make sure I didn’t try anything funny.

“Fuck,” I gritted out before storming back into the tattoo shop, immediately being swarmed by questions from the guys.

“What did he say?” Baker asked.

“What are we going to do now? He’s got cops at his beck and call!” Taj joined in.

“That doesn’t change anything. We still need to put this guy down before he fucks everything up!” Marcus argued.

“It changes everything. We’re not dealing with one person. We’re dealing with all of the people he’s paying off,” Ti replied.

“All of you, quiet,” I sighed as I pinched the bridge of my nose, an ache gripping my head. What the hell were we going to do? “He told me that if we don’t hand over Madison and Chloe, he’ll have us all arrested and shut down the tattoo shop.”

At first, silence rang out through the shop as the guys stared at me with shocked looks on their faces. All of our lives were at jeopardy, and the solution wasn't clear in the slightest. We either lost a future with Madison or we let go of the shop we worked so hard to get off the ground. Something would be taken away from us no matter what.

"Well, we can't just give Madison up. We know how dangerous and manipulative this asshole is!" Baker said as he crossed his arms over his chest.

"What if he double crosses us? What if he somehow gets Madison and ruins our lives on top of it all?" Taj pointed out. "How can we trust anything he says?"

"You heard Madison. He isn't the type to bluff. He *will* come after us and rip apart our lives if we don't do what he says," Gus replied as he looked between everyone.

"What the hell do we do?" Bryce asked as he threw up his hands in a frustrated manner, tension starting to rise even more. "If we protect her from him, he'll just have us arrested, and she'll be vulnerable for him to get to her."

"There's no good answer," Ti muttered as he shook his head. "He's trapped us in a corner and hung over our head what we care about the most."

"Well, we can't just sit here and accept defeat," Marcus scoffed. "We promised Madison we would protect her."

"How the hell do we protect anything or anyone from someone like him?" Baker bit out.

"Alright, alright! This isn't getting anywhere," I snapped at all of them, hardly able to hear myself think. "Everyone, go get some air. We'll talk about this later with Madison. She should know what's going on."

Bitter mutters and grumbles surrounded me as the guys steadily filed out of the tattoo shop, leaving me there alone with a huge weight on my chest and shoulders. I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know what to say to them or Madison. How had things gone so wrong?

Chapter 20

Madison

My body went numb as I stared at Marlo and Michael standing outside of the tattoo shop together, talking about who knew what.

I was parked across the street with Chloe in the backseat, reading one of her children's books about dinosaurs. She had no idea that her father was right across the road, plotting the downfall of me and the men who had come to truly care for us. She had no idea how much of a monster he was.

But why were Marlo and Michael having a conversation?

I curled my fingers around my steering wheel tightly, my breath coming out shakily. My skin started burning warm, cold sweat threatening to break out on my forehead.

Michael was a master manipulator, able to back people into corners and get whatever he wanted. He had pulled that move on me so many times, and it was hell getting to a point where I could escape.

What if Michael got to Marlo? What if Michael convinced Marlo to turn against me? Michael could find weak points easily, and there were a number of things that he could hold over Marlo's head. Or he could convince Marlo that I wasn't worth the trouble of protecting.

I knew that Michael would strip everything away from the guys if they didn't hand me and Chloe over. I couldn't possibly ask them to protect me, even if they swore that they would. They worked so hard to get to where they were at, but I cared for them too much to let them go down with me.

I would have to figure something out on my own, even if that terrified me.

My eyes started to glisten as I watched Michael leave with two cops, while Marlo headed back into the tattoo shop. My instinct was to run in there after him and fall into the comfort of all the guys, letting them convince me that everything was going to be fine.

I needed that right now, but my mind kept going back to that tense conversation Marlo and Michael was having and how conflicted Marlo looked.

Michael was hanging something over his head, and whatever it was, I couldn't ask Marlo and the guys to choose me. I wanted to be with them so badly, but I wouldn't jeopardize their lives. Not when this was my problem to begin with. They only let themselves get swept up in it because they cared about me and Chloe, which meant so much to me.

But I had to walk away before their lives were destroyed because of me. They were doing so well before I walked through those doors and got to know them. Before I fell in love with every single one of them.

"I want to go inside," Chloe whispered from the backseat as she set her book down in her lap.

A tear broke from my eye as I sucked in a deep breath, trying to steady myself. I reached up and wiped the tear away, quickly blinking my eyes so that she didn't see that I was upset. She still had nightmares from when she was almost taken away from me, and I didn't want to scare her even more.

"What do you think about spending the night with Aunt Aisling?" I asked her as I looked over my shoulder with a forced smile.

"Okay!" Chloe replied with a toothy grin.

"Awesome. We're going to go back home real quick and pack some things, and then we'll go see her," I told her in the best fake cheery voice that I could muster before turning back forward. My face immediately fell the moment she couldn't

see my expression, a deep-set frown crossing my lips as my mind raced.

I would call Aisling and let her know what was going on while Chloe was packing her backpack. I knew that Aisling would take us in for however long we needed, which I was eternally grateful for because I didn't feel safe staying in the house by myself. How did I feel like I was on the run and trapped in a corner at the same time?

"Can I pack my animals?" Chloe asked in a hopeful voice as she joined her small hands together in a pleading motion, referring to her small animal figurines that she liked to collect.

My eyes shifted up to the rearview mirror to see the puppy dog look on her face, making an ache echo in my chest. I wished overpacking toys was our biggest problem right now.

"Of course. You can take anything you want," I told her with a small smile, wanting her to be as happy and carefree as possible. All I wanted to do was protect the people I cared about, which meant facing off with the worst person I had ever known. I never expected the darkest part of my past to come back and haunt me, but he was too malicious to ever leave me alone. I should've known that.

I pulled back onto the street and drove away from the tattoo shop, my eyes shifting to the rearview mirror just as some of the guys walked out of the front door. My heart ached as I tore my eyes away, knowing that I couldn't go back. If I truly cared for them, I would handle this on my own, even if this was the hardest battle I ever had to fight.

Chapter 21

Gus

I returned to the tattoo shop first. I just didn't feel right walking in circles around the block because it felt like I was running away from the problem. Running away from Madison.

None of this was fair, but life was seldom fair. It was just worse when good people were screwed over by the bad, and Michael was one of the worst people I had ever come across.

How did someone as sweet as Chloe come from a monster like Michael? Thankfully, she was so much like her mother, the woman I had let my guard down for and fallen in love with.

My boots hit the sleek wooden floor of the shop with a loud thump as I headed toward the stairs that led up to the attic. Marlo had already left to get some air, but Madison and Chloe should've been back by now. She didn't say anything about going anywhere else after going to the elementary school.

Strangely, I didn't hear a single bit of noise as I walked through the shop besides the air conditioner running. An unsettling feeling settled on my shoulders like a fifty-pound weight, prompting me to take the steps two at a time until I reached the attic.

Dead silent. Nothing.

With a confused grunt, I grabbed my phone and called Madison, listening to my phone ring over and over again until it went to her voicemail.

Hey, this is Madison! I can't come to the phone right now, so just leave a message!

The sound of her cheery voice warmed me, but that feeling quickly turned cold when I realized that I had no idea where she was. After that tense interaction with her ex and those cops, the last thing I wanted to deal with was not knowing where she was. What if Michael found her and Chloe before me or the guys could?

I called a few more times, but she didn't pick up. Maybe she went back home. Most likely, she took Chloe to a park or got something to eat, but with everything going on, things just didn't feel right to me. I wouldn't be able to relax until I knew she and Chloe were okay, so I grabbed my things and headed out to my truck.

My engine revved as I quickly pulled out of my parking spot and drove to Madison's house, making sure my phone's ringer was turned up all the way so that I could hear in case she called me back. I hoped she did, but as the minutes ticked by and the closer I got to her house, the more worried I felt.

This woman had me wrapped around her finger. Me and the others had fooled around with women before, but Madison stuck in a way none of the others did. Maybe they were nice and fun, but Madison was... everything we ever wanted in a life partner.

I didn't know what our next move was, but I wanted her to be with us when we made the final decision.

When I reached her house, I frowned, seeing that her car wasn't in her driveway. She wasn't even home.

"Damn it," I muttered beneath my breath as my anxiety started to peak. Where the hell was she? I grabbed my phone and called Marlo, my teeth automatically gritting from tension.

"Hey," Marlo answered, his voice bordering on a sigh.

"I can't find Madison," I told him.

"What?" Marlo asked immediately. "What do you mean?"

"She's not at the shop or her house. And she's not answering her phone," I replied. "Michael just left. You don't think he

already got to her, do you?”

Marlo was quiet for a few seconds.

“No, I don’t think so. Do you think... she’s ignoring us?” he asked.

Of course, I didn’t want to think that. All I wanted to do was protect her, and if she pulled away from us, that would make things ten times more difficult. Ten times more devastating.

“I think we all need to talk about this,” I told him, wanting to hear from the others.

“I’ll call them back to the shop. Maybe she’s there,” Marlo said, trying to sound hopeful but failing.

“I’ll meet you there,” I replied before hanging up and driving back to the shop.

Luckily, the others weren’t too far away. None of them felt like going home just yet, so they were either around the corner or at a nearby store or café to blow off some steam. Once we all gathered back in the shop, I crossed my arms and looked around at them.

“I haven’t been able to find Madison. She’s not here or at her house. Have any of you heard from her since she left to pick up Chloe?” I asked them.

They all checked their phones and shook their heads.

“Maybe her phone is dead?” Taj suggested.

“Nah, I doubt it. She checked the time on it before she left,” Bryce replied, silence following his words for a few seconds.

“It wouldn’t make sense for her to be ignoring us on purpose,” Baker spoke up with furrowed eyebrows.

“Yes, it does. You read that note. It probably spooked her because Michael was pissed that we were hiding her and Chloe from him,” Ti said with a shrug. “She’s a wonderful mother, so she’s going to do what she can to protect her child. We may be trying to help her, but we’ve just stirred the pot even more.”

“We can’t just step away. We can keep her safe from him,” Marcus argued with narrowed eyes.

“I think Ti is right,” Marlo said in a quiet, defeated voice. He lowered his eyes, unable to look at any of us. “It makes sense. He’ll punish her even more for turning to us, so she made a decision. We... we have to respect that.”

“And just let her go?” I asked as my arms dropped to my sides. I couldn’t imagine just letting her step out of our lives like that, but it wasn’t like we could force her.

“If she wants us to be in her life, she’ll reach out. If not, we have our answer too,” Marlo told us before running his hand over his head. He cleared his throat and put his back to us. “We’re closing up shop for the day. If she does come back, she has a key.”

The rest of us lingered where we were for a few more seconds, but the sense of finality that was in the air grew heavier. Even if I didn’t want to believe it, Marlo was right. Whatever decision she made, we had to abide by it, even if that felt like my heart was being ripped out. Like I was losing a piece of myself.

Something told me that I wouldn’t ever feel completely whole again.

Chapter 22

Madison

The pale blue bedsheets in Aisling's guest bedroom laid tangled around me as I rolled onto my back and stared at the ceiling, my eyes feeling heavy and achy.

Early morning sunlight filled the minimalistic, pastel-inspired room, falling on the queen-sized bed that Chloe and I had been sharing for the past few nights. Restless nights at that.

All I could think about was the guys and how badly I missed them.

Having to ignore their calls killed me, and I had been feeling sick to my stomach with my guilt and worry ever since the last time I saw them. I even had to tell Chloe that they went out of town on a trip because she kept wondering why we weren't going to the tattoo shop to see them.

They had become so intertwined in my life and tearing them out of it made my heart ache so badly that it nearly brought tears to my eyes. I couldn't even count how many times I had cried since leaving them behind. This wasn't how things were supposed to turn out.

Michael had to barge back into my life and ruin everything, and he wouldn't stop until I had nothing left. Nothing.

I hadn't told Leah or my mom the truth yet because I didn't want them to worry or be dragged into my mess. I already almost ruined the guys' lives by bringing them into my chaotic life, and I didn't want to risk putting anyone else in Michael's sights. There was no telling what he was doing right now, but I was sure that he was still looking for me and Chloe.

He wouldn't ever stop.

A sudden wave of nausea hit me, making me stumble out of bed as quietly as I could to not wake Chloe. I hurried through Aisling's apartment to the small guest bathroom and closed the door behind me with one hand, my other hand clamping over my mouth as the nausea rose up the back of my throat.

I barely dropped down to my knees in front of the toilet in time before everything I ate yesterday came rushing up.

I shuddered afterward as a weak feeling settled over my body, making me slump forward slightly. My stomach churned in an uncomfortable manner as I sat there for a moment, waiting to see if I was going to be sick again. The last thing I needed was to deal with a stomach bug or food poisoning.

After making sure I wasn't going to be sick again, I slowly rose to my feet, feeling a bit dizzy as I walked over to the sink to wash my mouth out. I felt so exhausted and sick to my stomach lately. If I wasn't so stressed about everything, I would've chalked all of that up to me being on my period.

My eyes shot wide open as I remembered my period. When was the last time I had it? I gripped the bathroom counter as I stared down into the sink as the water drained, straining my mind to figure out what week I had my last period. According to my usual cycle, I should've had it last week, but I was already at the end of this week with no sign of it.

"No..." I murmured as I placed my hand over my mouth.

A rush of panic surged through me as I stepped away from the sink.

I couldn't be pregnant!

But I remembered all of those times I slept with the guys. The rush. The heat. The lack of protection from being in the moment.

There was very likely a chance that I was pregnant.

More nausea hit me, but I swallowed hard and headed out of the guest bathroom, down the hallway, and into the main bathroom of Aisling's small but aesthetically decorated

apartment that she put so much work into. I shut the door and pulled open the gray wooden cabinets until I found a few pregnancy tests that she stashed in a small wicker basket. She was the paranoid type who checked every month, but she was certainly smart about that.

As I used one of the tests, my mind spun in circles as I wondered what in the world I was going to do if I was pregnant. It was definitely one of them. It didn't matter which one to me, but something told me that I had to tell Marlo first. He was the one who guided the group, so he would know what to do. He would know how to break the news.

But that meant reaching back out to them after ignoring them for the past few days. What if they were upset and didn't want anything to do with me? I couldn't even blame them if they were bitter with me.

The best case scenario would be that they were happy, and if I was honest, the thought of having a baby with them made my heart flutter. They were already so wonderful with Chloe that I knew they would be wonderful dads. We would be the big, happy family that I always wanted to have, but that reality wasn't guaranteed, especially given the circumstances.

I didn't know what to do!

I couldn't stand still, resorting to pacing back and forth across the bathroom and continually checking the test. My entire future could be changed in an instant depending on what that test said, and I could either end up happier than ever or more broken than I was even before I met the guys. Everything would change.

After one more nervous lap around the bathroom, I finally had the answer to my initial question in just a few minutes when I saw two blue lines on the pregnancy test.

I was pregnant, and I might become a single mother of two.

Worried tears filled my eyes and spilled down my red cheeks as I sniffled, my back leaning against the edge of the bathroom counter. I stared down at the test for what felt like an eternity, feeling frozen on the spot. I must've been in there for a while

because a knock on the bathroom door drew me out of my thoughts.

“Madison, are you okay?” Aisling asked from the other side of the door.

There was no point in hiding from her. I looked like a wreck with a red face and teary eyes, so I opened the door and held up the pregnancy test.

“I didn’t plan this,” I told her. “But it happened.”

Aisling’s eyes widened in shock as she took a step closer, seeing the two blue lines that were clear as day.

“Oh, honey, it’s okay,” she said, wrapping her arms with me after I set the pregnancy test down.

I hugged her back, burying my face in her shoulder with a light snuffle.

“I don’t know what to do,” I admitted.

Aisling rubbed my back.

“You should tell them. Or at least tell one of them and figure out what to do next,” she said. From the day me and Chloe showed up on her doorstep, I told her everything that had been going on. Being with the guys. The near kidnapping. Michael’s motive and threats. My entire crazy life. She was as supportive as I predicted she would be.

“I was thinking about telling Marlo first, but what if he’s mad that I left? What if he doesn’t hear me out? Michael threatened them, and Marlo might not want anything to do with me anymore,” I told her once I broke away from her to meet her sympathetic gaze.

“You don’t know that. You won’t know until you talk to him,” Aisling pointed out. “All they’ve wanted to do is help you, and they’re part of this pregnancy regardless of what happens with Michael.”

I released a faint sigh, knowing that she was exactly right. It wouldn’t be right to not tell them, which meant casting my fears aside and doing what needed to be done.

“I’m just nervous,” I admitted, feeling my stomach churn again. I wasn’t ready to deal with all of the pregnancy symptoms again, especially alone.

Aisling rested her hands on my shoulders and gave me a comforting smile.

“Because you care about them. You want a happy life with them, and you might get a happy family too,” she pointed out. “I’ll watch Chloe. Go talk to Marlo.”

I managed a small smile out of gratitude and nodded. No matter what, I had to try. A baby was a huge deal, and I needed an answer to know what my future was going to look like. Whether I was ready or not, it would come faster than I could ever be properly prepared for.

Chapter 23

Madison

I arrived at the tattoo shop an hour earlier than opening, my heart pounding heavily as I approached the front door.

I knew that Marlo always arrived the earliest so that he could look over the books and pick what music he wanted to play that day. As I expected, the lights were on, and I could hear the faint muffle of nineties R&B playing from inside.

At first, I couldn't bring myself to reach out for the door handle, my muscles locking up. I hoped for the best, but that was all that I could do. Hope. Because I had no idea what was going to happen when I walked through that door.

I breathed in deeply before pulling open the door and stepping inside of the tattoo shop, hearing the light swishing of papers as Marlo stood at the front desk. I didn't even take two steps forward before he looked up, his eyes widening at the sight of me.

Marlo immediately strode over to me with a straight look on his face. At first, I thought he was going to berate me, but he pulled me into his arms instead, enveloping me in the smell of laundry detergent and intoxicating cologne.

"Where the hell have you been? We've been worried sick," Marlo asked as he kept his arms wrapped around me like he was afraid of letting go.

I sank into his hold for a few seconds, having missed this so damn much. I gripped his black jacket as a surge of emotion hit me, my eyes immediately watering.

"Oh, damn it," I whimpered as the tears started pouring again.

Marlo pulled away with a worried look on his face as I cried on the spot. He cupped my face, his thumbs brushing away my tears.

“What’s wrong? What happened?” he asked.

Between everything going on and my hormones, I was going to be a crying mess for days.

“I’m sorry for disappearing, but there’s something important I have to tell you,” I told him as I gripped his forearms, my eyes meeting his.

Marlo’s eyebrows knitted together in confusion.

“What is it?” he asked.

I parted my lips to speak, but my throat grew so tight that I couldn’t force a single word out. A few more tears spilled down my cheeks as I swallowed hard, knowing that I couldn’t back out now.

“I’m pregnant,” I blurted out before I could chicken out.

Marlo’s hands slipped off my face as a look of pure shock rang across his face, his breath seeming to stop. He didn’t say anything at first, and I couldn’t even breathe.

“And it’s…” he trailed off.

“It’s one of yours,” I told him, trying my best not to break down because I wasn’t even sure what he was thinking right now. “I’m not sure which one.”

Marlo stared at me in silence for a few more seconds before shaking his head as a grin crossed his face.

“It doesn’t matter,” he replied as he took my hands and pulled me closer. “We’re a family. I want to be a part of your life and the baby’s life, and I’m sure the others will want the same thing too.”

I released a shaky breath as more tears broke from my eyes, but they were happy ones this time. I gave his hands a squeeze before he let go to place one hand on my stomach. There wasn’t a bump yet, but I knew that it would be coming soon.

“So, you’re happy about this? Truly happy? Even with the circumstances of everything going on?” I asked him with hope in my eyes.

Marlo nodded as he lifted his eyes to mine.

“Happier than I’ve ever been before,” he told me. “This baby will be loved. I promise you. Nothing that could ever happen will change that.”

That was the best thing that he could’ve said, and I couldn’t help but throw my arms around his neck and press my lips against his.

Marlo smiled into the kiss and placed his hand on the back of my neck, sweetly caressing me as our kiss started to deepen.

I melted into him, letting go of my worries for just a moment as I focused on the good. He was happy about the baby, and he wanted to be with me no matter what. I wanted to hear directly from the other guys about how they felt too, but for now, I reveled in the passion of Marlo’s kiss.

Marlo slipped his hand into my hair, his fingers diving through my brown locks. Our lips parted at the same time, our tongues brushing as my hands moved up his chest.

Desire and need burned through me like fire, and I found myself wanting more. So much more.

“I need you,” I whispered.

“You have me. Always,” Marlo assured me before taking my hand and leading me up the stairs to the attic. He picked me up by the back of my thighs and laid me down on the bed before helping me slip my black, flowy tank top off, followed by my black bra. “You’re so beautiful.”

His sweet words made my face warm up as I smiled up at him. The look in his felt like pure love to me, but I was too nervous to ask him how deep his feelings were for me. All I could do was show how I felt through movement because I was also too nervous to speak on my own emotions.

Our clothes steadily hit the floor, a pile growing until we were both bare under the soft sheets. I wrapped my arms around

Marlo's neck as he hovered above me, his hand disappearing between my thighs to caress me. His fingers rubbed slow circles against my clit as he kissed my jaw.

All of our movements felt so much slower than usual. As great as our kinky sex was, something about going slow and being patient to explore each other's bodies was amazing in its own right. It was surreal.

"I don't want to be without you. Not for a day. A minute," I murmured before my voice was broken up by a moan as two of his fingers pushed inside of me. I lifted my hips, rocking myself against them.

"I'm right here," Marlo promised before capturing my lips in a slow, sweet kiss.

Desire burned through every inch of me, and there was nothing I wanted more than to be with this man and the other guys. To belong to them and have them as mine and only mine. Could that really be my reality?

When Marlo replaced his fingers with his cock, thrusting inside of me deep and slow, I moaned into our kiss, his lips muffling the sound. My nails dug into the back of his shoulders as he rocked into me, focusing on going deep and hitting that spot that made me whimper.

"Marlo," I said, my cheeks flushing as heat kept coursing through me.

"I know, baby," Marlo replied, knowing what I needed. He thrust into me harder, making me hold onto him tightly. I didn't want to let go to begin with. "God, you make it hard to last. You feel perfect."

To me, he was perfect. He was the type of man, selfless and brave, that I wanted in my life, Chloe's life, and our new baby's life.

"Please, I'm so close," I breathed out, feeling pressure thrum between my thighs. I was right on the edge.

Marlo covered my mouth with his and snaked a hand down to press his fingertips against my clit as he continued pounding into me over and over. He didn't stop until I trembled beneath

him, weak cries breaking from me. He clenched his jaw and released inside of me with a groan, his body soon stilling.

I caught my breath and embraced him, letting my eyes flutter shut as I sank into the brief moment of peace where everything felt okay. Everything felt safe and perfect. But that was not my reality, not until Michael was finally taken down.

If that was even possible.

Chapter 24

Marlo

Since Madison had incredible news to share, the guys were called to the shop, and Madison's friend dropped Chloe off so that we could all be together. We were all family, and our family was about to get a little bigger.

I could tell that Madison was nervous as we all stood in the middle of the quiet tattoo shop, so I moved to her side and placed my arm around her waist.

"It's the best news we could ever hear right now," I assured her, not wanting her to be scared of the guys' reactions. They were just as hooked on her as I was, and they all wanted families and children of their own. They just hadn't found the right woman until now.

The fact that Madison was pregnant didn't take away an ounce of love that I had for the children I already had, and I was looking forward to introducing them to Madison, Chloe, and our baby whenever they were born. It would take a lot of explaining since this was far from a conventional relationship situation, but it made me happier than ever.

Me and the guys shared so much together. We kept each other in line and were there for each other when times were dark and when they were amazing. This was one of those amazing moments that I was glad to share with them, and I knew that they would be happy to share Madison among all of us. We all offered her something unique, and as long as she was happy, we would be happy.

"Okay," Madison said before reaching her hand out to take Chloe's, pulling her closer. She breathed in deeply before her

eyes swept over the guys. "I'm pregnant."

The guys only needed a second to process her words. The next second, the shop was full of excited voices as they all came over to her to fawn over her. A look of relief crossed her face as she accepted warm embraces and kisses on her forehead.

"You have no idea how happy this makes me," Marcus told her as he cupped her face.

"Me too," Madison replied as happy tears streamed down her face. "I was so scared at first, but I shouldn't have been. I know you guys."

Marcus smiled and nodded.

"Yes, you do," he said, pressing his forehead to hers for a brief second before stepping away so that Gus could embrace her.

"There's nothing I want more than this," Gus murmured to her as he cupped the back of her head in a protective manner. "This baby will be loved and protected like none other."

Madison visibly relaxed as she listened to his comforting words. She gripped his upper arms as she gave him a grateful look.

"That's all I've ever wanted for my children," she said. "I want them safe and happy."

Bryce scooped Chloe up.

"What do you think, Chloe? How do you feel about having a baby brother or sister?" he asked her.

"Yes! I can't wait!" Chloe exclaimed as she clapped her hands together, her happy laughter ringing throughout the tattoo shop.

"Me either," Bryce chuckled as Baker came over to give Chloe's hand an affectionate squeeze.

I stood back and watched the scene with a proud warmth on my face, my chest feeling squeezed from a surge of happiness. I couldn't believe this was the life I got to have. After struggling for so many years through addiction and then

getting sober, I thought I was doomed to live in a cycle fighting for my life and my sobriety.

But I made something good out of my life. I fought for more, and I couldn't be happier for what I got out of that. A full family. A wonderful woman by my side. A baby on the way.

However, the only thing standing in between me and being able to enjoy that life in peace was Michael. He would still try to strip it all away, to crush everything I had worked so hard to achieve. Somehow, we had to stop him.

Ti put his arm around Madison's shoulders, pulling her close to his side.

"Congratulations, doll. I already know how damn good of a mom you are, so this is quite the lucky baby," he told her with a small grin on his face.

"They're lucky to have all of you too. So am I," Madison pointed out as she smiled up at him, leaning into his side.

Ti gazed at her for a few seconds, and I swore I saw his eyes glisten slightly. Ti was one of the most guarded people I knew, and if that wasn't proof enough that Madison was special to us, I didn't know what was. He chuckled and blinked a few times.

"We'll have to introduce them to my little creatures early on so that they're not petrified of them like Gus," he said as he flashed a smirk at the large man.

"They're creepy," Gus replied as he screwed his face up.

Madison gave Ti a sheepish look.

"They are a little creepy, baby," she admitted, making the others laugh.

Ti clicked his tongue in disappointment and swiped Chloe from Bryce.

"Well, this brave little lady isn't afraid of Shadow," he replied before carrying Chloe off so that she could ogle at his creatures he obsessively cared for. There was no one else I trusted to have Chloe around spiders, little snakes, and other creatures.

“Him and his creatures,” Taj chuckled as he stepped closer to Madison. “We’ll go out and pick up whatever you need to make you comfortable. Weird foods. Fluffy socks. Whatever.”

Madison laughed softly.

“I’m sure I’ll let you know when I start getting cravings. Thank you,” she assured him as she rested her hand on his arm over his peacock tattoo. Her eyes fluttered shut for a second as he kissed her forehead.

It had been a minute since I had seen her look so happy and carefree, and the last thing I wanted to do was ruin this incredible moment that I would treasure forever.

But trouble was coming, and we needed to be prepared, especially since there was a baby on the way.

“Madison,” I said, making her turn and look at me. When she saw the serious look on her face, her smile melted into a frown as she nodded a little, knowing what I wanted to talk about. I looked at the others as they gravitated closer so that Chloe didn’t overhear from Ti’s station. “We need to go after Michael. We can’t wait for him to come to us.”

“What are we going to do?” Madison asked with a worried look on her face, her hand instinctively resting on her stomach.

My gaze followed her hand, and anger started to burn through me when I thought about what all Michael wanted to take away and destroy. He was the one who deserved to go down, which meant me and the guys had to shift our moral stance for the time being. We all tried to be good, kind upstanding citizens, but Michael was forcing our hands.

“I have some ideas, and you guys probably won’t like them.”

Chapter 25

Baker

With my teeth grinding, I hovered over my laptop in the living room of Marlo's house.

I sat on the edge of his leather couch, my eyebrows knitting as my fingers flew over my keyboard. I could hear the guys and Madison laughing in the kitchen as they worked on baking a chocolate cake for Chloe's birthday with green frosting, as requested by the soon-to-be seven-year-old at three o'clock today.

I wanted to be there with them right now, but Marlo enlisted me with a very important task that forced me to tap into some of my past behavior. I graduated college with a computer science major, and I even took extra classes to have a minor in finance.

When it came to numbers and computers, I knew them like the back of my hand, but I was an idiot back then. I used my knowledge to help bad people acquire a range of illegal substances because they jumped on the poor, smart kid who was struggling to find a job after graduation to pay off his student debt.

I regretted the path I took every single day, and I was a bit wary of hacking into Michael's email account to go digging around for dirt. Marlo was right about me not liking this plan, but if it helped Madison, I would do it because I would do anything for my family.

"Let's see what you're hiding," I muttered beneath my breath as I went to Michael's sent emails to see what he had been up to lately.

At first, I didn't find anything that had much value. Political planning. Responses to his assistant. Nothing that we could use.

Until I found an email that contained a list of donors, whether they donated to him in the past or for his present campaign. There were a lot of names, but I skimmed through them anyway just in case something caught my eye. As I reached the middle of the list, I started to lose hope that I'd actually find something, but one name caught my eye.

Armand Deviau.

I shot up straight, my eyes widening at my shocking discovery. Deviau was a known criminal in the city, running drugs and various other criminal enterprises. He was highly connected and hadn't ever been arrested before. There was one time he was almost apprehended by some woman's four bodyguards, but he ended up getting away.

I couldn't believe he was funding Michael!

I kept looking through the list and found the names of a few other shady people, even a few I had personally worked with in the past. Shame started to flood my mind, but I focused on the task at hand, needing this information to get out to someone who had the authority to enforce punishment on Michael. That just left the police.

I worked on an anonymous online report detailing what I found, hoping that the cop who read over this wasn't as corrupt as the rest. Bad money was funding Michael's campaign, and he needed to be shut down quickly before he ripped this city to shreds, starting with me, the guys, and Madison.

I shut off my laptop once I submitted the report and headed into the kitchen to see the guys hovering around Madison and the kitchen counter, trying to take over simple duties for her. Gradually, the tension in my shoulders faded, and I get swept up in the warm, light-hearted atmosphere that filled the kitchen.

I could stay there forever, laughing and joking like all was right in the world. Like danger didn't possibly lurk just outside. This was the kind of life I had always wanted to live.

"You've already measured out all the ingredients. We can mix everything together," Bryce assured her as he took the whisk from her and pecked her on the lips.

Madison smiled in an amused manner and leaned back against Marcus, who wrapped his arms around her waist.

"You're making a mess," Ti chastised Bryce as he stirred together the dry ingredients, flour littering the kitchen counter.

"I'd like to see you do better," Bryce scoffed.

"Give it to me," Taj said, taking the whisk and the bowl. He held the bowl against his side and whisked far more efficiently than Bryce, who had flour all down the front of his black shirt.

I smiled a little as I shuffled closer to Marlo, who was laughing as he watched the scene.

"Deviau is funding Michael's campaign," I murmured to him, not wanting to take anyone else away from the moment. I needed Marlo to know so that we could decide next steps.

"Are you serious?" Marlo asked.

I nodded with a grave look on my face. I should've known this campaign was even dirtier than I initially thought, but Michael kept proving that he was the worst son of a bitch I had ever come across.

"I submitted an anonymous report to the police. Hopefully, they'll do something," I muttered, not having as much faith as I should've been able to.

Marlo scoffed a little.

"Yeah, we'll see how many cops are on his payroll," he replied.

"Everything okay?" Madison asked as she looked over at us.

Marlo grinned and nodded.

“We were thinking about picking up Chloe and meeting you guys at the park. We could make it a surprise party for her,” he suggested.

Madison gasped and nodded as she clasped her hands together.

“Would you? She’d love that!” she said.

“Of course, sweetheart,” Marlo replied as he walked over to her, placing his hand on the small of her back as he leaned in to press a brief kiss to her lips. “We should head out soon anyway to get in line.”

Since it was Chloe’s birthday, I kept my mouth shut about what I found. Tomorrow, we could break the news instead of ruining the birthday magic today. I pecked Madison on the cheek and gave her hand an affectionate squeeze before following Marlo out to his black SUV.

“What do we do if the police ignore my report? I’m only going to give them a few days,” I asked him once we pulled out of the driveway.

“I’ll think of something. We need to get Michael arrested, even if we need to get pushy,” Marlo replied with slightly narrowed eyes. He then released a slow breath. “I want this to be over with. All I want to worry about is making sure Madison is getting enough rest and Chloe is doing good in school.”

“Sounding like a true dad,” I said with a small grin.

Marlo glanced over at me, visibly relaxing.

“Don’t you feel the same way?” he asked.

I didn’t even have to think about my answer. From the first day I saw Madison, I knew that I wanted a woman like her in my life. She was so bright and hopeful, and that made me feel more optimistic about my own life.

“Of course. I think we all do,” I replied.

Marlo smiled a little and nodded.

“Good,” he said.

I looked back forward and tried to remain relaxed on the outside, but my mind was a whirlwind. I couldn’t rely on just

an online report to take Michael down. We would have to do something bigger, but what could that be? Anything we did was risky, but we were all willing to take that risk for the future we all desperately wanted.

After we picked up Chloe, who was happily surprised to see us, we headed to the park, making her think we were just going back to the tattoo shop.

“Did the other kids tell you happy birthday?” I asked as I turned to smile at her, distracting her while Marlo approached the parking lot of the park.

Chloe smiled happily and nodded, wearing a princess tiara on her head and a pin on her white shirt that said “It’s my birthday!” on it.

“They sang to me,” she said.

I put an awed look on my face.

“Really? That’s awesome!” I told her before reaching back to give her a high-five, a warm feeling filling my chest. I had always thought about having kids, but I didn’t think about it so much until I started getting closer to Madison and being around Chloe. This was the life I wanted. Surprise birthday parties. Seeing her smile when I picked her up from school. Sharing special moments with Madison and the guys.

I was going to fight like hell to not have it taken away.

“Alright, we’re here,” Marlo said once he parked the truck.

Chloe’s face contorted in confusion as she peered out of the back windows.

“We’re not at the shop,” she replied.

I chuckled as I looked through the windshield to see the guys and Madison in a gazebo in the middle of the park. I could already see green balloons and streamers to accommodate the magic forest theme that Chloe wanted.

“Let’s see what’s going on,” I told her before Marlo and I hopped out of the SUV and got Chloe out of the car. I held her against my side as I carried her toward the gazebo.

When we got close enough for her to see her mom and the others, Chloe gasped and clung onto me tighter.

“A party!” she exclaimed.

“Just for you,” I said as I stepped into the gazebo, letting her get showered with love from the others. A two-layer cake with trees and a smiling monkey drawn on top with icing occupied the middle of the long picnic table, along with chips, sodas, juice boxes, and a few boxes of pizza. There was also a notable pile of gifts on the left side of the table.

“Happy birthday, baby,” Madison told her as she hugged Chloe close. “I can’t believe you’re already seven!”

Chloe threw her arms around her mom’s neck and squeezed her tightly with a gleeful look on her face.

Madison looked over Chloe’s shoulder at Marlo and me, mouthing a thank you.

“How about we blow out some candles and open some presents?” Taj suggested as Bryce and Ti carefully arranged seven candles on top of the cake.

Chloe nodded eagerly as Madison set her down on the bench in front of the table.

We all crowded around the table and sang happy birthday to Chloe, who smiled with pink cheeks and bright eyes. She blew out the candles with only two tries, beaming happily as everyone clapped for her. I wanted her to be this happy every single day, but I knew what that meant we had to do. We had to take down her dad. One day, when she was older, we would tell her what happened during this time in her life.

Given all the things we had done in our pasts, I just hoped she saw us as heroes rather than villains.

Chapter 26

Taj

My boots thumped against the old steps of the staircase as I headed up to the attic, taking advantage of my downtime after my last client to check on Madison, who stayed upstairs whenever she wasn't picking up waitressing shifts. We encouraged her to take a break and let us help support her during this time since she was carrying our baby and having to deal with all of the physical and hormonal consequences, but she insisted she could still handle a few shifts a week.

So, when she wasn't working, we were adamant about taking care of her, along with helping out with Chloe. Ti and Gus would pick her up today when they were finished with their last clients. The guys and I all rotated duties, forming our own system to keep things running as smoothly as possible.

When I reached the top of the stairs, I frowned when I didn't see her relaxing in bed. I turned toward the bathroom to see that the door was shut, the sound of groans and the sink running coming from inside. I lightly knocked on the door.

"Babe, you okay?" I asked, figuring she had another bout of morning sickness. Despite the name, she felt sick throughout the day, and it sucked seeing her suffer through it so much. All I could do was make sure she stayed hydrated, had something in her stomach to keep her nutrition up, and got some rest.

"No," Madison groaned.

"I'll get you some water, okay?" I told her before bounding down the stairs and to the back room to grab a bottle of cold water out of the fridge. By the time I reached the attic, she shuffled out of the bathroom, looking a bit pale. I gently

placed my hand on her back and handed her the bottle of water. "Let's get back in bed."

"I didn't get sick this much with Chloe," Madison said as she crawled back in bed, letting me pull the covers over her.

"Hopefully, this morning sickness phase won't last too long," I replied as I brushed a few strands of hair out of her face. Despite the light purple crescents beneath her eyes from restless nights and the loss of some of the color in her face, she still looked beautiful.

Madison smiled a little as she took my hand.

"Thank you for being here with me," she said. "You and the guys have been so nice."

I tilted my head at her.

"Of course, we'd be here for you. You're going to be the mother of our child," I replied as I gave her hand a squeeze. "And we care about you a lot. We want to make sure you're okay."

Madison's eyes started glistening with tears. I wondered if I said something wrong, but she warned me that she would have random crying bouts.

"Sorry, it just means a lot. Michael never did any of this for me," she admitted with a light sniffle. "I pretty much went through my pregnancy with Chloe all alone because he was always out of the house for work or whatever else he was up to."

That dude was a major asshole. I hated hearing about him because all he'd done was hurt Madison. Now, he was trying to make her life hell all over again.

"I'm sorry you had to deal with him. I promise that he'll be long gone from your life soon," I assured her as our eyes met. I wished that I could comfort her better with details, but Marlo wanted to talk soon about our next move.

Hopefully, it moved us closer to where we wanted to be because Baker's anonymous police report didn't get us

anywhere. Who knew how many corrupt cops were in the local police station?

Madison smiled and nodded before resting her forehead against mine.

“I just want things to go back to normal. I want a new kind of normal with you guys,” she replied.

That sounded like paradise to me, and we were so close to achieving it. I kissed her on the nose and cupped her cheek, making her laugh softly.

“It’ll be crazy and fun and incredible,” I promised her.

“Talking about our sex lives?” Bryce’s voice came from the top of the staircase.

I smirked as I turned to see Bryce and Baker approaching the bed.

“I guess that’s pretty accurate,” I replied before shooting a wink at Madison that made her cheeks regain some of their flushed color.

“We figured you’d be hungry in about an hour or so. What do you want us to pick up?” Baker asked Madison.

“Basically, what are you craving today?” Bryce chuckled.

A grateful look filled Madison’s face before she shook her head.

“I couldn’t make you guys go out of your way for it,” she replied.

Baker crossed his arms over his chest as he gave her a pointed look.

“I’d go to a different state if it made you happy,” he said.

Madison glanced over at me, prompting me to nod.

“That’s true,” I told her. Baker was as determined and stubborn as a person could possibly be.

“You know that tamale place across town? I can’t stop thinking about their spicy tamale pie. Oh! With extra sour cream,” Madison said with an almost dreamy look on her face.

“Tamales it is,” Bryce said as he clapped his hands together. “Sounds pretty damn good anyway.”

“Oh, Taj, Marlo needs you downstairs,” Baker told me before he and Bryce headed down to the tattoo shop.

My eyebrows furrowed slightly as I wondered what Marlo needed me for. I turned to Madison and kissed her warm cheek.

“I’ll be back later. Marcus was finishing up before I came up here, so I’m sure he’ll be by in a minute,” I said.

Madison nodded and shot me a smile before I met Marlo at the front desk.

“What’s up?” I asked Marlo, keeping my voice lowered since there was still one more customer left in the shop.

“I remembered there’s a cop that always goes to the Ice House. We should go have a chat with him. Maybe escalate that report Marcus left,” Marlo murmured, acting like he was looking at the desktop computer screen.

I kept my eyebrows from lifting, maintaining a nonchalant face. I didn’t even realize a cop went to a rough place like that. He never tried to stop any of the fights that broke out there, but I supposed he was off his shift and stuck by that.

“Ready when you are,” I replied.

Marlo nodded and looked up toward Marcus.

“Shop is yours, Marcus. We’ll be back,” he called out.

Marcus gave a thumbs-up before turning back to his work.

I followed Marlo out of the shop and got in his SUV, my adrenaline starting to spike. Maybe we could finish things tonight by getting that cop to arrest Michael. Or at least look into the report. Any step forward was a win to me, and we really needed a win at this point. Michael could strike at any moment.

“You think this could work?” I asked him.

Marlo glanced over at me and shrugged, a sigh drifting from him.

“We have to try everything. We’re at that point,” he replied.

I nodded and curled my fingers into fists, preparing myself in case things went sideways. Lately, I was more on edge than usual. I had faced off with the law before, but this was different. I was trying to be a good guy, and I hoped I didn’t lose sight of that in the moment.

My old black Converse hit the ground as I got out of the SUV. The Ice House was already packed, and I followed Marlo’s lead as he went inside. I didn’t know what the cop looked like until Marlo pointed him out on the right side of the bar.

Stocky, average height, shaved head, sharp nose. I had seen him around here before, but I had no idea that he was a cop.

“Let’s go,” I said, wanting to get this done with.

Marlo headed over to the cop and tapped his shoulder.

“We need to have a chat with you outside real quick, Officer,” Marlo told him with a firm tone and a serious expression on his face.

The cop narrowed his eyes as he looked between us.

“I think I’ll stay right where I’m at,” he said as he turned himself on the barstool to face us. “What do you want?”

“Do you work with Michael Ladnier?” I demanded as I stepped forward, both me and Marlo looming over him.

The cop didn’t move an inch, merely staring us down.

“I know of the guy,” he said.

His snide tone spoke volumes to me, making me share a knowing look with Marlo.

“He’s being funded by Deviau. You know, the known criminal and owner of a huge drug running business,” I told him.

The cop didn’t even look fazed in the slightest.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

“You’re lying!” Marlo gritted out. “You have a duty to this city and its citizens to protect them. Locking Michael up will help

keep them safe. You know that he's done and will do terrible things!"

"He'll do great things for this city, and I like the thought of having an ally at the top," the cop replied with a smirk before starting to turn around.

Marlo snapped and gripped the front of the cop's collared shirt.

"You're a disgrace to this city! If you don't do this, I'll make sure people know how corrupt all of you are!" he spat.

When the cop swung at Marlo, I slammed my palm against his chest to knock him back against the bar and make him fall off the barstool.

"Stop it! You two, get out!" the bar owner shouted from behind the bar, pointing toward the door.

"Son of a bitch," I gritted out as I grabbed Marlo's arm and led him out of the Ice House before we did any more damage. I sure as hell wanted to. "We'll have to figure something else out. We have to be smarter."

Marlo huffed as he got back into his SUV, his jaw tensing to its max. He shook his head, staring ahead through the windshield.

"I have another idea, but I've been putting it off because it's too risky. We could lose..." he trailed off.

My eyes narrowed slightly. In the back of my mind, I believed I knew what he meant by that, but I needed to hear him say it.

"Lose what?" I asked him.

Marlo stared out of the windshield for a few more seconds, gathering up the courage he needed to turn to me and speak.

"Madison and Chloe."

Chapter 27

Madison

My heart rate doubled as I stood outside of my house with Chloe standing next to me, our hands joined. It had been so long since we had been back home, and it was odd being here again. All I could think about was the worry and danger I experienced here and how I felt so much safer with the guys.

I glanced up and down the street, my body on edge. I was on the verge of danger right now, putting me and Chloe out in the open for anyone to see. For a certain someone to see. Today, either Michael stopped being a problem in our lives, or he would pin us down under his thumb for as long as we lived. I didn't think I could succeed at escaping him all over again.

So, this was all or nothing.

"What are we doing here?" Chloe asked as she looked up at me with a confused look on her face.

I breathed in deeply through my nose before looking down at her.

"We're seeing your father," I told her.

Chloe's eyes widened. She probably didn't have many memories of him at all since I left him early on in her life. That was for the best.

"Really?" she asked.

I nodded and brushed my fingers through her hair.

"We're saying goodbye to him, okay?" I replied as I crouched down to be eye-level with her.

"Why?" Chloe asked, looking a bit sad.

I sighed, wishing I didn't have to do this, but she deserved to know some of the truth. I couldn't hide her from this any longer.

"Because he's not a nice man, baby," I said, my throat growing tight. This wasn't fair. She didn't deserve this.

Chloe frowned.

"What did he do?" she replied.

I couldn't get into the details of that. Michael had done so many terrible things to me. Screamed at me. Put his hands on me. Threatened me.

"He's mean. He doesn't care about us," I told her as I blinked my eyes a few times, trying to stop my tears. "That's why we're saying goodbye. So that we can be with Marlo, Taj, Marcus, Ti, Bryce, Baker, and Gus, okay?"

Chloe's eyes brightened at the mention of the guys.

"We can stay with them?" she asked.

I smiled and nodded. All of the details hadn't been worked out yet, and I still hadn't told them the extent of my feelings, but I would when this was over. When we were safe.

"Let's go into the house and grab some more things to bring to the shop, okay?" I said, trying to distract her from the heaviness of that conversation. I was sure that she would have questions later, but it was time to go inside.

Chloe nodded and let me lead her into the house. She peered around like it was a new place, her fingers brushing along the wall as she headed out of the foyer.

I froze in place when I heard a car stop in front of my house, my blood running ice cold. I knew that he would show up soon.

"Chloe, go to your room," I told her. "Pack up some toys."

Chloe bounded off to her room where she would be safe, leaving me to turn and face the front door as footsteps sounded on my porch.

I swallowed hard as my heart started pounding, my fear clashing with my determination to end this now. I took a few steps back before the door flew open, and Michael stood in the doorway with narrowed eyes and a smirk on his face. Just his expression made my stomach twist nervously.

“I knew you’d come home eventually,” Michael said as he stepped toward me.

I put my hands up in an innocent manner.

“We need to talk,” I told him, tightening every muscle in my body to try to keep my hands from shaking. It only worked a little bit.

Michael eyed me for a moment.

“Oh, you want to talk now? You’ve been running like a scared little girl for weeks!” he bit out, clenching his jaw in annoyance.

I grounded myself, not moving from the spot as I stood between the living room and the kitchen.

“What exactly do you want from us, Michael? You want to show Chloe off for political points? What are you going to do with me?” I questioned him, not even knowing the full extent of his sick plan. Honestly, part of me didn’t want to know.

Michael scoffed.

“You’ll be a good little housewife. You think I’m going to take care of Chloe outside of bringing her to debates and photo ops? I’ve got better things to do than play house with the two of you,” he replied.

I grinded my teeth as I glared at him, hating every cell in his body for what he wanted to do. He didn’t care about anything but himself, and even prison wasn’t good enough for a monster like him. I wanted him to be scared for his life. To have nothing left.

“After all you’ve done to me. Grabbed me. Hit me. Threatened me. You think I’m going to bend to your every will?” I bit out, anger burning through me like wildfire.

Michael stepped closer to me.

“You will bend. You’ll bend, or you’ll break,” he threatened me.

Despite my fear starting to spark, I stood my ground.

“When did you get this way? When we first got together, I thought you were so different,” I told him. “What changed?”

Michael smirked at me like I asked him a stupid question.

“Everything changed. I saw all the money that could be made. All the power I could have. All I had to do was make some contacts and do a few favors,” he replied.

“Contacts like Deviau?” I questioned him.

Michael’s eyes narrowed slightly. He didn’t expect me to know that.

“I couldn’t miss the chance to have a drug lord in my pocket. Do you realize all the favors we could grant each other? Money, power, pardons, connections. It’s all business, baby,” he said in a snide manner.

“And you’re going to lose all of it. Everything,” I told him with narrowed eyes.

A dark look passed over Michael’s face as he towered over me.

“Are you threatening me, bitch?” he snapped. He started to lift his hand to reach for my arm like he used to, pressing his fingers into my skin so hard that they left bruises.

But he didn’t get that far this time. Not when Marlo, Baker, and Marcus stepped out into the foyer from the kitchen, and Taj, Ti, and Gus walked out of the living room from the other side. Bryce remained with Chloe in her bedroom, shielding her from what was about to happen.

“What the hell is this?” Michael snapped as he stepped back, looking between all of the guys as they put themselves between me and him.

“The last time you’ll ever see Madison and Chloe,” Ti said as he waved the audio recording device he had in his hand.

“We’ll be sure to release this to every local news outlet. Hell, we might go regional.”

Michael turned red in the face as he gritted his teeth.

“You can’t do this. You won’t! I’ll shut down your tattoo shop. I’ll throw all of you in jail!” he shouted.

“Here’s what’s going to happen. You’re going to leave town. No, you’re going to leave this side of the United States. We’re going to torch your career and your existence here anyway, so you might as well leave. You will never return. You will never reach out to Madison or Chloe for the rest of your miserable, pathetic life,” Marlo demanded as he moved closer to Michael.

Michael backed up until his back hit the door. His forehead started to glisten as he broke out into a nervous sweat. His eyes met mine as I glared at him from between Baker and Ti.

“Damn you,” he spat before whirling around to try to throw open the door and escape.

The guys were on him in a second, throwing him to the ground and dealing blows that had Michael groaning and crying out in pain.

I wasn’t one for violence, but I didn’t move from the spot as I watched the guys deal to Michael everything he deserved to get. He deserved even worse than this, but I was happy with him being banished. Being left with nothing.

Marcus dealt one more punch to Michael’s cheek, his knuckles already red. He leaned close to Michael, who was on the verge of tears with blood dripping from his nose.

“Run,” he spat before yanking Michael to his feet.

Michael stumbled out of the house, and Gus stepped out on the porch to make sure Michael took off.

I released a heavy breath, my hands reaching out to Taj and Marlo as they hurried over to me.

“Are you okay?” Marlo asked as worry filled his eyes.

I nodded as I collected myself, nearly feeling lightheaded as the adrenaline started to wean. I couldn’t believe that just

happened. He was gone. Finally.

“Better than ever,” I said as a smile crossed my face.

Marlo smiled back and pulled me into his arms, holding me close as a few relieved tears slipped from my eyes.

I felt different hands brush over my back and through my hair, filling me with comfort and hope that everything was going to be okay. It was all over at last.

Chapter 28

Madison

“Guys, look!”

My voice echoed throughout the tattoo shop that had just been closed for the night, followed by the sound of footsteps as the guys left their stations to join me at the front desk.

“What is it?” Gus asked as he reached me first, his breathing sounding a bit heavy from rushing there.

I smiled and placed my hand on his arm, not meaning to worry him.

“This news article,” I told him as I pointed at the computer screen. I stepped to the side to let the guys crowd in front of the computer to read the headline displayed at the top of the screen.

Corrupt Candidate Exposed and Removed from Local Ballot

“No way,” Bryce chuckled as he read through the rest of the article, which cited from the long, detailed blog I posted online with all of the evidence I had about Michael and how he attempted to destroy my life and use Chloe for his own political gain. The recording that Ti took really helped nail Michael down to all of the horrible things that he did because people could hear for themselves what Michael planned to do. There was no way for him to defend himself, especially since he had already fled town without a word or a trace.

Since an investigation was done on Michael, there were extra leads to Deviau and a few other corrupt donors. The police gathered all of that evidence and finally arrested them. Trial hadn't started yet, but I knew that they'd be put away for years.

"Yes way," I said with a bright smile, feeling lighter and safer than ever before. My horrible ex was gone in the wind, and I finally had the opportunity to be happy with the men I loved. The men I was ready to reveal my feelings to in a unique way that I had been planning during the last two weeks.

"This is incredible," Marlo told me before kissing my temple. "I'm glad it worked out. I was worried about putting you in the line of fire."

"It was a good plan," I assured him. "It was nice standing up to him one last time."

Taj put his arms around me from behind, his hands carefully settling on my stomach. I wasn't showing yet, but I expected to in a few weeks.

"You were so brave," he said. "We're proud of you."

His words hit me hard, prompting me to place my hands over his.

"I've been meaning to talk to you guys about something important," I told them as I glanced around at all of them, my heart fluttering slightly in nervousness. I had been planning this for so long, but I was still nervous to execute it.

Taj let go of me so that I could lean against the edge of the desk and face them.

I bit the inside of my cheek for a second as I breathed in deeply to calm myself. I knew these men cared about me, so I had nothing to fear. No matter what, I would have them, and they would have me.

"All of you mean the world to me, and I want to be with you for the rest of my life," I said, seeing them smile. "I haven't told you yet, but I want you to know that I love you. I love you with everything that I have."

My words hung in the air for a few seconds as they processed them, my heart pounding even faster. Had they fallen in love with me too?

Ti looked between all of the guys before smiling at me. Probably the biggest smile I had ever seen on him.

“I can speak for all of us, doll. We’ve been in love with you for a while now,” he said. “Deeply. Intensely. In love with you.”

My breath hitched as he came close to me, his forefinger tilting my chin up.

“There’s one more thing,” I told him.

Ti tilted his head.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“I want all of you to tattoo me,” I replied, making his eyebrows lift in interest as he stepped back so that I could look at the others too. I had been thinking about it a lot lately, and I even talked to my doctor to make sure it was safe to be done. “I want it to be symbolic. Maybe how you guys see me or something like that.”

“Give us, like, ten minutes, baby. I’ve already got an idea,” Bryce said, excitement lacing his voice.

I smiled in amusement before heading to Bryce’s tattoo table, my fingers brushing over the material. I remembered being here for the first time getting my first tattoo done, which I still adored. I was excited to get another one done by all of them.

As promised, the guys came up with a sketch in around ten minutes and joined me at Bryce’s workstation. Taj had his sketchpad in his hand, holding the page against his chest where I couldn’t see.

“So, we came up with a design that we feel represents you,” he told me before flipping the sketchbook around.

My jaw nearly dropped as he presented me with an elegant dagger with vines and beautiful flowers wrapped around the blade and hilt. It was beautiful and bold at the same time, and

it made my heart race. If this was how they saw me, I was touched.

“The dagger represents your strength and how fiercely you protect the ones you love,” Gus said with a glint of admiration in his eyes.

“The flowers represent your beauty and liveliness,” Marlo added.

“Double threat,” Ti said with a little smirk. “There’s so much more to you, but it’s hard to describe. Even with art.”

I didn’t even realize that I was crying tears of awe until I felt them roll down my cheeks.

“I love it so much. Can we do it tonight?” I asked.

Marcus chuckled a little as he wiped my tears away like he had done quite a few times already.

“Hop up, baby,” he replied as he patted the tattoo table.

I let him help me up onto the table, and I got comfortable on my back once I decided to get the dagger and flowers done on my other forearm. I laid my arm on the armrest that Bryce pulled out for me, a shudder of excitement running through me from head to toe.

Marlo carefully applied the stencil to my arm, the smooth drag of his fingertips making the hair on my arms stand up. Even when they were just preparing me for a tattoo, their touches worked me up.

“Restless?” Marlo murmured with a slight smirk.

I tried to hide my smile by pressing my teeth into my bottom lip, but I failed and shrugged in a playful manner.

“We’ll take care of that too,” Marlo assured me, patting my thigh through my jeans before letting Bryce get to his stool to begin.

I subtly rubbed my thighs together, almost forgetting about my tattoo for a second until Bryce rested his gloved hand on my arm.

“Ready?” Bryce asked.

I nodded, my adrenaline ramping up. As the guys surrounded me, occasionally touching me or murmuring something to me, my desire shot up as well. They split up the tattoo in parts so that each of them had a turn, carefully covering my forearm with straight, clear lines and smooth shading. Whenever I grimaced when they started tattooing on a sensitive part of my arm, I felt someone's hand on mine or fingers stroking through my hair. They were there for me every second of the way until Gus wiped off the excess ink one last time.

"Done," he said, having just finished up the shading on the hilt of the dagger.

I immediately popped up in a sitting position so that I could look down at my finished tattoo, my eyes growing wide.

"It's amazing!" I gasped, keeping myself from touching the fresh ink. It looked so beautiful and professionally done that I almost wanted to get more added to it right then and there. However, it was perfect just how it was. "Thank you so much."

"Our pleasure," Ti murmured next to my ear from behind me.

Having them surround me and watch me, even while just getting a tattoo done, turned me on, and it only worked me up even more to know that they were marking me as theirs with each line they tattooed on my body.

"It could be," I replied as I looked over my shoulder at him while Taj wrapped my tattoo up with a Saniderm bandage.

Ti slid his fingers into my hair, adopting a firm grip as he leaned forward to crash his lips against mine. It was easy to tell that he had been pent up his desire while watching me and tattooing one of the flowers on my arm.

I moaned against his lips, feeling Taj release my arm. I held my forearm close to my chest, making sure to keep it safe as my kiss deepened. It wasn't long before I felt two hands slide up my legs toward my inner thighs. When someone put pressure near my clit through my jeans, I released a shaky breath.

"Fuck..." I gasped as Ti broke the kiss.

However, Ti didn't let go of my hair. He guided me down onto my back only for Marcus to grab my hips and pull me closer to the bottom of the tattoo table.

"I was dying to take these clothes off," Marcus said as he undid my jeans and stripped them off with my panties.

"We should've tattooed her naked," Baker replied with a smirk as he carefully helped me out of my shirt and bra, being mindful of my fresh ink. No fun time was worth a messed-up tattoo.

"What do you think about that? I bet you'd like that," Taj asked me as he stood at the head of the tattoo table, leaning over to peer down at me.

I immediately nodded, goosebumps covering my skin as the cool air hit it.

"Yes," I said, desire pulsing through me like a heartbeat.

"Of course, she would." Marcus chuckled before leaning down to drag his tongue through my folds in one quick swipe.

I tilted my head back with a moan, blissful fire raging through me. I then shifted my eyes to the right to see Gus, Marlo, and Bryce either sitting or standing, watching the show with pleased looks on their faces. Being with all of them made me realize just how much I liked being watched.

Baker took a seat on Bryce's stool and pushed himself to the side, a noticeable ridge already showing through his jeans.

Ti grabbed my upper arm on my other arm and pulled me closer to the edge of the tattoo table where he stood. He leaned down and pressed his lips against mine, his hand moving to grip my jaw in a possessive manner.

"Think you can handle all of us for the rest of your life?" he asked after breaking the kiss, keeping his hand on my flushed face.

I didn't even have to think about my answer. I immediately nodded, giving him pleading eyes and letting out a whimper when Marcus's tongue ran over my clit.

“Tell me,” Ti replied, crouching down so that we were eye-to-eye.

“I can handle all of you for the rest of my life,” I told him.

The corner of Ti’s mouth curled up.

“Good. Fucking. Girl,” he praised me, patting my cheek in a manner that nudged me even closer to finishing. He straightened up and undid his belt and his black jeans, freeing his hard cock and cupping the back of my head with his other hand.

I already knew the drill and wrapped my lips around him, breathing in through my nose as he thrust his cock deeper into my mouth. The feeling of Taj’s hand on my breast made my back arch to chase his touch, making him twist my nipple between his fingertips. Between his fingers and Marcus’s tongue, I was already primed for my first orgasm.

Marcus wasn’t letting me get to that point that easily, though. He swiped his tongue over my clit one more time before lining his cock up with my entrance and thrusting into me.

I moaned around Ti’s cock, my body tensing as pleasure crackled through me. Deep and intense. Marcus wasn’t holding back either, and the table rattled from his hard thrusts. A tense feeling grew in the pit of my stomach like a knot being tightened. I was dying for it to snap.

“Oh, no. You can’t come yet,” Marcus told me with a breathless chuckle. “Good things come to those who wait.”

If Ti wasn’t rocking in and out of my mouth, I would’ve whimpered in disappointment. It was hot that he wanted to edge me, but I wanted to orgasm so badly that it could’ve brought me to tears.

Taj continued teasing my nipples, even leaning down and circling the tip of his tongue around them.

I hummed around Ti, writhing a little as I got closer and closer.

“Don’t you dare,” Marcus said as he slammed into me hard. “Wait.”

Ti gripped my hair and shoved his cock even deeper, finishing with a grunt that melted into a shaky exhale.

“Fuck,” he said before pulling away from me.

Moans finally poured from my glistening lips with each deep thrust, my entire body tensing. I was so achingly close, but Marcus knew that.

Marcus suddenly pulled out of me, releasing on my stomach instead of inside me where he knew I wanted him to finish. He chuckled at the pout on my face, stroking himself and catching his breath.

“Sorry, baby. I promise you it’ll be worth it, though,” he replied before nodding to Taj.

I gasped as they grabbed me and flipped me over onto my side, my head nearly spinning. My ass was pulled closer to the edge, my head angled toward the other edge. I almost felt like a doll being played with, but my stomach twisted in desire at the thought. I loved giving myself over to them, and I was already so sensitive and ready for what was to come next.

After stripping off his clothes, Bryce stood behind me, grabbing the underside of my top thigh and lifting it slightly as he positioned his cock at my entrance. He pushed inside slowly, a groan sounding from him.

“Damn, you feel so good,” he told me.

“I won’t last long,” I said, already feeling the bliss start to crest as he slowly rocked in and out of me.

“You’ll last as long as we want you to,” Marlo corrected me as he and Gus stood near my head.

It didn’t matter if I pouted or whined in defiance. I was at their mercy, so I behaved and reached out to stroke their cocks. My body thrummed from sensitivity as Bryce started pounding into me, hitting an angle that nearly made my eyes roll back.

“Oh... fuck...” I breathed out.

“Eyes up here,” Gus said.

I lifted my eyes to his, giving him a pleading look. I just needed one of them to take mercy on me. Just one at least. My breaths started coming out in pants as Bryce's thrusts got rougher, pushing me closer and closer to the edge.

Gus and Marlo started rocking into my grip, thrusting into my hands and wrapping their fingers around mine. Their gaze floated over my body, watching me arch and moan as Bryce fucked me from behind.

"Things might get a little harder for you," Bryce told me.

I looked over my shoulder as Baker handed Bryce a small thing of lube.

"That's not fair," I whimpered, already knowing what was coming next.

Bryce chuckled as he squeezed some on his fingers. As he continued fucking into me, he slowly pushed one lubed finger into my ass, making him groan at the added pressure.

"Holy fuck, that feels good," he said.

If he didn't have such a tight grip on my inner thigh, I would've rubbed my thighs together for some much-needed friction. The pressure felt so good, making me feel like I was about to explode, but I fought off the feeling as much as I could.

Bryce pushed in another finger, breathing out slowly to control himself.

"You're something amazing, you know? You take us so damn well," he told me.

"So well," Gus repeated as he leaned his head back, increasing my strokes on his cock.

Marlo tensed his jaw and closed his eyes, unable to speak as his orgasm struck him hard. He grunted as he spilled on the top of my hand.

Gus tightened his grip on my hand and stilled as he came, a few splashes hitting my cheek. He grabbed the edge of the table to steady himself, releasing a sharp exhale and a breathy curse.

I smiled a little in satisfaction as I gazed up at them, but when Bryce worked in a third finger, I shuddered in pleasure.

“Please. Please let me come. I can’t take it anymore,” I begged, the tense sensation threatening to break. I could already feel the heat starting to build.

“What do you think?” Bryce asked Marlo with a smirk on his face.

Marlo answered by pushing my thighs apart and circling his fingers against my clit.

I gasped in bliss, my head tilting back as the wave of heat and pleasure finally crashed down on me. I came apart with a cry, trembling from the intensity that left me breathless and tingling afterward.

Bryce slammed home one more time before spilling inside of me, keeping his fingers deep inside. He lowered his head for a few seconds before chuckling.

“Can’t get enough of your sexy ass,” he told me as he leaned over me to peck my cheek.

I smiled weakly, reveling in the warmth that settled over me. I knew that I wasn’t done yet, so I took a second to catch my breath before Baker and Taj carefully helped me sit up. I reached out and placed my hands on their upper arms.

“Woah,” I murmured.

“Are you okay?” Taj asked as he tucked my hair behind my ear.

“We can stop,” Baker added before leaning close to my ear to tease me. “We have forever to make you scream for us.”

His words fired me back up in an instant.

“Let’s get back to it now,” I replied as I lifted my eyebrows at them in a flirty manner.

“That’s our girl,” Taj chuckled before grabbing the back of my thighs and picking me up.

My eyes widened when I felt Baker’s chest hit my back as he stood behind me. Baker’s hands grabbed my ass, while Taj’s

hands moved underneath my mid-thigh, keeping me elevated. I parted my lips to ask them how the hell they were going to do this, but my words morphed into a surprised moan when I felt Taj slowly push his cock inside of me.

Baker hoisted me up a little more, keeping me leaned against his chest so that he could free a hand to guide his cock into my ass at a slow, patient pace. He pressed his forehead against the back of my head as he sucked in a deep breath, forcing himself to go slow as he pushed me down on his and Taj's cocks.

I wrapped my arms around Taj's neck since he was in front of me, my head spinning as I got used to the feeling of both of them.

"Breathe," Taj told me.

Oh, right. I forgot to do that. I breathed in deeply, steadying myself before nodding. All of the movement was down to them as they held me up in the air, pinned between their strong bodies.

"Go, please," I said.

Baker tightened his grip on my ass and started lifting me and pulling me down, matching his pace with Taj's. They subtly thrust up into me, going deep and slow at first to set a good rhythm.

All I could do was enjoy the ride, my moans filling the tattoo shop as the others watched me. I reached back with one hand and threaded my fingers through Baker's hair, adopting a tight grip when he thrust into me harder.

"Oh..." I gasped out, digging the nails of my other hand into Taj's shoulder.

"There you go. You're taking us so well," Taj praised me as his eyes swept over me.

"You feel amazing," Baker told me. "I think you deserve to come again."

"Please," I begged, already feeling close again from all of the pressure and friction. I was a goner being fucked by both of them.

“Can’t resist when you beg like that,” Taj chuckled breathlessly before nodding to Baker.

That set them off. They got a better grip on me and started rocking in and out. Harder. Deeper. Faster. I clawed at them and held on for dear life, every muscle of my body tightening until I shattered. My vision went black for a second as I succumbed to pure euphoria, only able to feel their last few thrusts and the heat rolling through me in waves.

“Madison. Madison?”

I blinked a few times and came back to reality, feeling like I was floating. Maybe that was because Baker and Taj were still holding me, but I still felt completely filled with bliss.

“That was... amazing,” I laughed weakly.

Baker kissed the back of my shoulder before he and Taj carefully set me down. My knees immediately tried to buckle, so Baker picked me up bridal style and carried me to the bathroom upstairs.

I leaned my cheek against his bare chest as the others followed. Before I knew it, I was in a warm bath with all of them surrounding me, a blissful smile playing out on my lips.

“I love you. All of you,” I told them as I looked at all of them. I was lucky to have every single one of them in my life, and I was excited to see the life we all built together. I already knew a big, happy family was in store.

Marlo leaned down and cupped the back of my head, his lips pressing against my forehead.

“We love you. Always,” he murmured.

That was a promise I knew would never be broken.

Epilogue: Madison

Seven months later

“Move! We have a baby on the way!”

Despite the deep ache of my contractions, I couldn't help but crack an amused smile as Marlo impatiently waved at the cars in front of us from the driver's seat.

When another contraction gripped me, making me slowly double over, I squeezed Gus's and Taj's hands as they sat on either side of me in the backseat.

“Ouch,” I breathed out, trying to remember the inhale and exhale so that I didn't pass out.

“The contractions are definitely getting closer and closer together,” Baker said from the passenger's seat of Marlo's SUV as he turned to look back at me. His eyebrows furrowed together slightly in worry. “We're going to make it, right?”

“We're going to make it,” Marlo assured him before pulling into the next lane and rushing down the street toward the hospital.

I glanced over my shoulder through the back window, seeing Ti's black sedan speeding behind us with Ti, Bryce, and Marcus piled inside. My water had broken while I was at the front desk of the tattoo shop, and the guys quickly ushered me into the closest car to take me to the hospital. All I had time to do was ask Aisling to pick up Chloe and bring her to the hospital because there was a baby on the way!

“I can't believe this is already happening. I wasn't supposed to give birth for another two days!” I said, shaking my head in

disbelief.

“The baby isn’t waiting,” Taj chuckled before kissing the back of my hand.

“We’re almost there,” Gus told me, threading his fingers with mine.

I breathed in deeply and nodded, listening to their comforting words until Marlo pulled to a stop in front of the hospital’s entrance.

“Let’s go,” I said with pure determination in my voice. They got me here safely. Now, it was my turn to bring our baby into the world, and I was more ready than ever.

With a shared smile, the guys helped me out of the car with gentle but firm hands and assured me inside, flagging down a few nurses who quickly admitted me and took me into a labor and delivery room. So much of it was a blur, but at least one of the guys was with me the entire time, making sure that I was okay.

When the doctor came in, one of the nurses smiled at me.

“Are you ready?” she asked.

I breathed in deeply and nodded, gathering every bit of strength I had. A lot had tested me during the beginning of my pregnancy, and I was stronger than ever before, especially with the men I loved by my side.

“More than ever.”

* * *

The beautiful sound of a baby’s first cries filled the room a little over thirty minutes later, sighs of relief following. The tension lingering in the air finally settled, and I let myself relax for the first time since my water broke. I did it. Our son was here.

“Hello, Nicholas.”

A wide-eyed, brown-haired baby boy gazed up at me as I finally got to hold him against my chest. Giving birth to my second child and only son was exhausting, but the moment the nurse handed him to me, it was like all of my strength flooded back. I smiled down at him and stroked his tiny hand with my finger.

“He’s beautiful,” Marlo told me as he stood next to my bedside, gazing down at his son with gleaming eyes. He held my hand the entire time, murmuring encouraging words to me when I needed to hear them the most.

“You did amazing,” Ti said from the other side as he stroked his fingers through my hair. He kissed me on the top of my head. “He’s perfect.”

I shared a warm look with both of them.

“Can you get the others?” I asked them. Only so many were allowed in the delivery room, so the others stayed with Chloe in the waiting room.

“Of course,” Ti replied, volunteering to go. He smiled down at me as he placed his hand on my shoulder. “I love you.”

“Love you,” I said as a dreamy look filled my face, feeling proud of myself and grateful for their support.

My pregnancy with Nicholas, whose name meant victory and symbolized how me and the guys could overcome any obstacle, was harder than my pregnancy with Chloe. I ended up quitting my waitressing job when I was four months along because the nausea and soreness of my feet and back were difficult to handle while on the job. I didn’t like not doing some sort of work, so the guys offered me the role of “office manager,” where I basically ran the shop’s social media accounts and did some admin stuff.

Honestly, it was way more fun than waitressing, and I got to spend more time with Chloe, the guys, Aisling, and my mom, who was surprised but supportive of my relationship with the guys. She only cared that they treated me right, and she quickly saw how in love they were with me. I was happier than ever before.

When the rest of the guys poured into the room with Chloe and Aisling, I smiled and showed Nicholas off to all of them, feeling surges of happiness when I saw how emotional they all were over their new son.

“Chloe, do you want to hold your baby brother?” I asked her.

Chloe nodded, nearly bouncing out of her skin because she was so excited.

“Yes!” she said as she lifted up on her toes to try to get a better look at Nicholas.

Marcus took her hand and guided her to sit down on one of the padded chairs in the room. He walked over to me, leaning down and pressing a gentle kiss against my lips.

“Missed you,” he told me.

“I missed you,” I said before looking at the others. “I’m glad you’re here now.”

“We’re not going anywhere,” Gus promised me as they all surrounded my bed.

I smiled and carefully handed Nicholas, who was comfortably swaddled in a white hospital blanket, to Marcus. It felt weird at first not having Nicholas pressed to my chest, but I loved and trusted these men. Gradually, I relaxed into my pillows.

“He’s so cute!” Aisling told me as she moved to my side, taking my hand in both of hers and giving it a proud squeeze.

“The cutest,” I agreed with a look of awe on my face as I gazed at the guys and how they fawned over their son. It was one of the most beautiful sights.

Aisling followed my gaze and let out a soft sigh.

“You really scored big, Madi. You’re more loved than most people,” she said.

I gave her hand a squeeze.

“Hey, you’ll get your own happily ever after. Just like one of your romance books,” I told her with a cheeky smile. She dreamed of being swept off her feet and taken on some grand

adventure like she'd read about in her books, and I hoped she felt the love that I did from the guys.

Aisling laughed a little.

"Yeah, let's see if a biker gang full of hot guys shows up and woos me," she replied.

I shrugged and lifted my eyebrows at her.

"Life surprises you in the craziest ways," I pointed out. I never expected the life that I had now, but I was eternally grateful for it.

Aisling smiled and gave me a gentle hug before stepping away to let Taj check on me.

"Is my mom and Leah on the way?" I asked Taj.

Taj checked his phone where he had been giving my mom updates and nodded.

"She just picked up Leah from the airport. On their way now," he said.

I motioned to my phone, excitement glowing in my chest. I finally got to see my sister and have her meet the men who made me happier than I had ever felt before in my life. We had some major catching up to do.

"Can you hand me my phone? I want to call Leah real quick. She's probably freaking out," I laughed softly.

Taj chuckled and placed my phone in my hand.

I looked over at Chloe, my chest warming at the sight of her carefully holding her little brother. She gazed down at him with pure awe written all over her face, and I took a mental picture of that moment. I would treasure this day forever. Surrounded by the people I loved with my new baby finally out in the world.

What an incredible day. What an amazing life.

"Niko will be the most amazing tattoo artist in the world," Bryce cooed to his son as he knelt next to Chloe.

Baker chuckled and gently touched Nicholas's soft head, feeling the gentle wisps of brown hair.

"Yes, he will," he replied, his voice full of awe.

"I'll be an archaeologist!" Chloe quipped.

Gus rubbed her back in an affectionate manner.

"Absolutely, honey," he replied, making her beam from ear to ear.

I could've cried at the scene, but I decided to save my happy crying for later. I tapped on my sister's contact and pressed my phone against my ear, only hearing it ring once before Leah picked up.

"Are you okay? Did everything go okay?" Leah's voice immediately filled my ear.

I smiled and tilted my head away for a second.

"Everything is great. We've got a healthy baby boy," I told her.

"And seven happy dads," Leah laughed.

I joined in on her laughter, shaking my head out how crazy my life was. I couldn't believe my children had seven dads, but they were so loved and cherished. They were going to live very happy lives, and that was all I wanted for them.

"Between your six hockey players and my seven tattoo artists, family holidays are going to be packed," I said.

"We received more love in our lives than we ever expected," Leah pointed out.

I looked over at the guys as they surrounded Chloe and Nicholas, fawning over both of them. My heart throbbed in awe, and I could see the bright, happy future that awaited all of us. We overcame the odds stacked against us, and we came out stronger, more in love, and happier than ever before.

This life was unexpected, but it was better than I ever could've asked for. So, I watched my family laugh and joke while more family was on the way, reveling in the fact that this wasn't a dream. It was my reality.

“I wouldn’t change a single thing.”

THE END

Coming Soon: Eight Bikers' Heir

Hold on tight for a tale that weaves love and thrilling surprises.

Meet Aisling, a spirited woman who unexpectedly meets the Iron Serpents—a group of daring bikers led by the grumpy yet enigmatic Kai.

Their audacious plan? To make Aisling the mother of their child, as she's carrying their unexpected heir.

Amidst the roar of motorcycles and a sense of adventure, Aisling's life takes an electrifying turn. Each biker—like Auden, the charming smooth-talker, and Bradley, the fiercely protective one—leaves a unique mark.

Then there's Kai, strong, mysterious, and adorned with intricate tattoos, with a pull she can't ignore.

But there's more beneath the surface. Aisling feels pulled between her free spirit and the new feelings these bikers spark. Their glances blur the lines between what's known and what's thrilling.

As emotions swirl, Aisling navigates love and loyalty. The open road beckons, but the Iron Serpents tug at her heart. Secrets unravel, and Aisling and the bikers dive into a journey of feelings.

Yet, a shadow looms—a rival gang not pleased with Aisling and the Iron Serpents. Danger could be on the horizon, and Aisling might be right in the middle of it.

“**Eight Bikers' Heir**” is more than a love story; it's a heart-racing adventure. With motorcycle engines revving and heart-

pounding moments, Aisling faces choices that could change everything.

Will she embrace the unknown or stick to her comfort zone?

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